

THE ISMAILI MINORITY: BETWEEN OPPRESSION AND INTEGRATION

By:

Maysaa Shuja Al-Deen, Salah Ali Salah, Huda Jafar and Ahmed Abu Thar

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COVER PHOTO: The tomb of Hatem Mohi Eldin, one of the figures revered by the Ismaili sect in the Hatib area of Haraz district in western Sana'a governorate on January 16, 2022 // Sana'a Center photo by Asem Al-Posi.



The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies is an independent think-tank that seeks to foster change through knowledge production with a focus on Yemen and the surrounding region. The Center's publications and programs, offered in both Arabic and English, cover political, social, economic and security related developments, aiming to impact policy locally, regionally, and internationally.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ismailis are the second biggest Shia community worldwide after the Twelver Shia, but while in Yemen they are outnumbered by both Sunnis and Zaidi Shia they have deep historical roots in the country going back over 1,000 years. Living mainly in the northern Haraz mountains and Aden in the south, Yemen's Ismaili minority hails from the Tayyibi Musta'li branch of Yemen and India, which is outnumbered globally by the more numerous Nizari Ismailis. Both branches of Ismailism have their origin in disputes over leadership and doctrine during the Fatimid caliphate that ruled from Egypt between 969 and 1171 CE.

Although Ismailis in Yemen flourished during the Fatimid era, they later suffered heavily during the Zaidi Imamate. The 1962 republican revolution was a turning point for Ismailis in the north, ending persecution but not the negative stereotypes surrounding them in Yemeni society. Today they are on good terms with the Houthi authorities in Sana'a but the situation is markedly different in Aden, where many Ismailis of Yemeni origin returned from India to settle during the era of the British colony (1839-1967).

When war erupted in 2015, Salafi groups – whose influence had grown in Yemen since the 1990s – accused the Ismailis of siding with the Houthis as fellow Shia Muslims. After Houthi forces were expelled from Aden, Salafis began to target the Shia community, including Ismailis, destroying a mosque and causing Ismailis to move to other neighborhoods or quit Aden altogether. Despite this, Ismailis are active today in the Yemeni economy, mostly working in the private sector. They have led an initiative to replace qat plantations with coffee, a project that has made great progress in Haraz.

This paper outlines the history of the Ismaili community and its current problems to make a series of recommendations aimed at reintegrating them into society. State education should highlight their distinctive contributions to Yemen's history, culture and economy in an effort to combat historical prejudice and stereotypes. Legal measures could be taken to prevent hate speech and incitement, and Ismailis should be given access to sealed religious manuscripts held at the Great Mosque in Sana'a. The internationally recognized government – which is based in Aden – must guarantee their safety, allowing Ismailis to return to their communities and rebuild their mosques. Finally, the government and its international supporters should view the Ismaili question as a model for the broader issue of how minorities are treated in Yemen when the current conflict is resolved.

INTRODUCTION

The Ismailis are one of the oldest religious groups in Yemen, with a 1,000-year history that has seen many ups and downs. The second-largest Shia group in the country, they are estimated to number 70,000 to 100,000 people, living in the capital Sana'a, as well as the regions of Haraz in eastern Sana'a governorate, Ibb in central Yemen, and Aden in the south. Ismailis ruled Yemen during the medieval period, establishing the Fatimid-allied Sulayhid state (1074-1138). But with the rise of the Zaidi Imamate in the 16th century, a long period of persecution began, and as a result, the Ismaili leadership moved from Haraz to India and Najran, which became part of Saudi Arabia in 1934.

Ismailis in Yemen are divided into the Sulaymani and Dawoodi branches. The Sulaymanis follow Najrani leadership, form the majority of Ismailis in the north, and are better known in Yemen by the name Makarima, after the family that traditionally provides its leaders. The Dawoodis follow the Indian Ismaili religious leadership, currently based in Mumbai. Often known as the Bohra (a Gujarati word referring to traders), they comprise the Ismailis in Aden and a small part of those in the north.

Although long-standing social stigmas continue to impact the community's fortunes, the position of Ismailis in society has improved considerably since the modern Yemeni state was founded in 1962. In the north, they are on good terms with the Houthi authorities, but in Aden, they have suffered from rising Salafi incitement in recent years, in particular during the current war, causing them to leave some districts. The community also resents the failure of successive governments in Sana'a to allow them access to historical manuscripts held in closed archives, an act they view as severing them from their cultural and religious heritage. Ismailis are looking for a full restitution of rights from the Yemeni state after centuries of maltreatment and misrepresentation of their faith.

This paper discusses Ismaili history, doctrine, and contemporary society, including the impact of the current war on the Ismaili community generally and their experiences of persecution in Aden specifically. It argues that Ismailism is an integral part of Yemen's rich cultural heritage that should be protected and celebrated.

METHODOLOGY

Research on Yemeni Ismailism has traditionally focused on the past rather than the present. This paper looks at both, utilizing a range of published studies on Ismaili history and doctrine, as well as interviews with members of the Ismaili community covering a broad range of people in terms of gender, age and region.

The interviews were focused on Ismaili integration in society, negative stereotypes and security threats, particularly in Aden. Different questions were designed for different age groups, who have different historical experiences related to changes in Yemeni society since 1962. The research aimed to draw out how strictly young Ismailis adhere to traditional communal codes of the sect, to establish the roles of Ismaili women and Ismaili commerce, to investigate Ismaili relations with other elements of Yemeni society, and to examine security threats faced by the community. Overall, 30 interviews were conducted – including ten with women – using questions prepared in advance; 16 interviews were held in-person, four interviews by telephone, and ten submitted in writing.

The conservative nature of Ismaili society in the north and security fears in the south made it impractical to hold focus groups. Interviews were primarily conducted by two researchers from within the Ismaili community, one from the Makarimas in the north and one from the Bohras in the south. It was only through their work that the interviews were possible, as many interviewees found it sensitive to open up about the community to non-Ismailis. However, some interviewees did not explicitly identify themselves as Ismailis, preferring to identify simply as Yemeni. Twelve of the 30 interviewees, including two of the 10 women, were from the north; the rest were from the south. Guarantees of anonymity were given to all interviewees, as well as assurances of the apolitical nature of the research.

ISMAILI SECTS AND DYNASTIES

The Ismaili community is the second largest Shia community in the world, with an estimated 12 million followers in 25 countries. The Ismaili sect began in 765 CE (148 AH), when a dispute broke out among the partisans of the Prophet's cousin Ali (known as the Shia) over the successor to the sixth imam, Jaafar al-Sadiq. The majority recognized his son Musa al-Kadhim as new imam, while others favored the lineage of Musa's deceased elder half-brother Ismail. This second group became known as the Ismailis. [2]

For around a century the Ismailis lived in a state of sitr (concealment), until the founding of the Fatimid caliphate, the first non-Sunni dynasty to rule large areas of the Muslim world, dominating North Africa, Egypt, the Levant and Yemen. The Fatimid caliphate lasted for nearly two centuries (909-1171), establishing the city of Cairo in 969. [3] The Fatimid era saw the founding of Al-Azhar Mosque in 972, which became one of the most prominent scholarly centers of the Islamic religion, as well as the Dar al-Hikma Library in 1004.

During this time, the Ismaili Sulayhid state was founded in Yemen (1047-1138) as an extension of the Fatimid caliphate. Ismaili missionaries Ibn Hawshab and Ali ibn al-Fadl first arrived in Yemen in 881, taking advantage of Yemen's geographical distance from the Abbasid center in Baghdad. In 897, a representative of the Zaidi Shia sect, Hadi Yahya Ibn al-Hussein, also arrived in Yemen, establishing himself as a Zaidi imam in the Sa'ada region and ushering in centuries of rivalry between the two sects.

Arwa bint Ahmed al-Sulayhi, wife of the second Sulayhid ruler Al-Mukarram Ahmad before she ruled in her own right from around 1097, was one of the earliest female leaders in the Muslim world. As an Ismaili Shia queen, she was given the title hujja; she was the only woman in Islamic history to wield both political and religious authority, which was possible due to the nature of Ismaili doctrine. Many monuments constructed under her rule are still standing today, including irrigation channels in Ibb and Taiz, expansions to the Great Mosque in Sana'a, and the Queen Arwa Mosque in Jiblah city in Ibb governorate, where her mausoleum is also found. One of Yemen's great historical figures, Arwa is commemorated to this day in popular and national songs, and her name is associated with a period of prosperity and success.

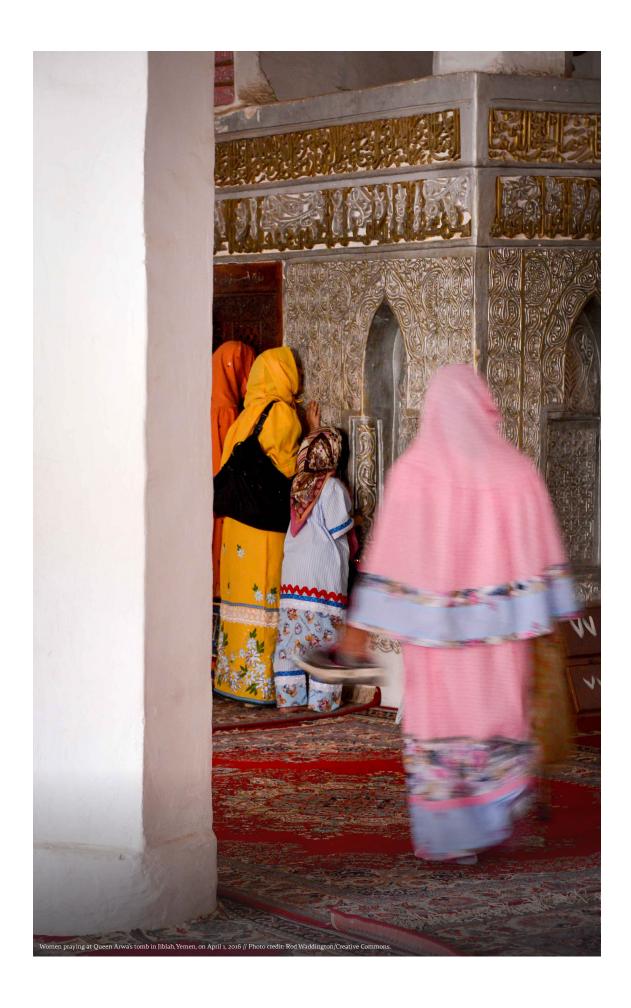
[[]i] Farhad Daftary, The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines [AR] (London: Dar al-Saqi, 2012, 2nd ed.), p. 17.

^[2] Daftary, The Ismailis, p. 170.

^[3] Farhad Daftary and Jiwa Shainol, The Fatimid Caliphate: Diversity of Traditions (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), pp. 1-5.

^[4] Bilal al-Tayyib, "Ismailis in Yemen - 5 [AR]," Bawabati, November 28, 2020; https://bawabatii.net/art229383.html

^[5] Al-Tayyib, "Ismailis in Yemen."



But with her death, the Ismaili sect slowly turned from a ruling group to a minority confined to small geographical locations, and Ismaili numbers gradually declined amid conflict with the rival Zaidis.

During the Sulahyid period, the Ismailis had divided into two main sects following the death of the Fatimid caliph Al-Mustansir in 1094: the Nizaris, followers of the caliph's son Nizar, in the Levant and north Iran; and the Musta'lis, followers of his son al-Musta'li, in Egypt and Yemen. [6] The Musta'li community divided again in a dispute over the legitimate heir of caliph Al-Amir bi-Ahkam Allah (assassinated in 1130) into the Hafizis, who followed Al-Hafiz, the caliph's cousin, and the Tayyibis, who recognized the caliph's two-year-old son, Al-Tayyib Abu al-Qasim.

While the Hafizi Musta'lis disappeared with the fall of the Fatimids, the Tayyibi Musta'li line survived. Queen Arwa accepted Al-Tayyib Abu al-Qasim's claim and became his custodian. The Ismaili community in northern Yemen thus traces its religious authority through the Tayyibi Musta'li line, [7] and was to become its only representative after Ismailis largely disappeared from Egypt and the Levant after the Fatimids. [8] But with the rise of the Zaidi Imamate in the 16th century, the community's religious leaders fled to India and to Najran in modern Saudi Arabia to escape persecution. [9]

An Ismaili community developed in northwestern India after the first missionary arrived in Gujarat in 1067. Hindu king Siddharaj Jaysinh (1094-1133) and an important segment of the local population converted to Ismailism, coming to be known as Bohras, in reference to their status as traders. The 16th century saw an influx of Ismailis and Ismaili religious leaders to Gujarat, fleeing Zaidi persecution in Yemen, but a dispute soon erupted between Yemeni and Indian Ismailis over the successor to Dawood ibn Ajab Shah upon his death in 1591. Most of the Ismaili community in India followed his deputy Dawood Qutb Pasha as imam, or "supreme guide" (da'i mutlaq), ushering in Dawoodi Ismailism, but most of those who remained in Yemen chose to follow his deputy there, Sulayman ibn Hassan al-Hindi. [11]

^{[6] &}quot;The Ismaili Imamat – A Brief History," The Institute of Ismaili Studies, no date cited, https://www.iis.ac.uk/media/5akmvywa/the-ismaili-imamat-brief-history.pdf

[&]quot;The Ismaili Imamat – A Brief History," The Institute of Ismaili Studies.

^[8] Daftary, The Ismailis, pp. 297-307.

^[9] Farhad Daftary (ed.), A Modern History of the Ismailis: Continuity and Change in a Muslim Community [AR] (London: Dar al-Sagi, 2013), pp. 41-42.

^[10] Daftary, A Modern History of the Ismailis, p. 500.

^[11] Daftary, A Modern History of the Ismailis, p. 500.

During the reign of Yemeni Sulaymani leader **Mohammed ibn al-Fahd al-Makrami** (d. 1633), the seat of the Sulaymani Ismailis was moved from Haraz to Najran. Authority remained in Najran, within this family – the Makarima branch of the Yam tribe – until Gholam Hussein arrived from India to take up the Sulaymani leadership position in 1936. Today the Sulaymani branch of the Musta'li Ismailis form the majority of Ismailis in north Yemen, while those in Aden mostly belong to the Dawoodi branch. [12]

The other branch dating from the Fatimid caliphate, the Nizari Ismailis, form the largest Ismaili community in the world, at around 12 million people, with a presence that has expanded to Africa, Europe, and North America since the 19th century. [13] Sultan Mohammad Shah Agha (1877-1957) succeeded in establishing councils that run this sect with hierarchies at local, national and regional levels. He also developed a constitution establishing rules of marriage, divorce, and inheritance, and rules regulating relations between Nizaris and those outside the community. [14]

The second largest group is now the Dawoodi branch of Musta'li Ismailism, with one and a half million people, mainly residing in India and Yemen, with a few followers in the UAE and Egypt. [15] The Dawoodis founded the Saifiyah university in the Gujarati city of Surat in 1798, as an extension of the original mission of Al-Azhar in teaching Fatimid knowledge. [16] Mohammad Burhanuddin, the 52nd Dawoodi leader, opened branches in Karachi, Pakistan in 1983; Nairobi, Kenya in 2011; and Bombay, India in 2013. [17] The Dawoodis have undertaken a number of architectural restorations, such as the Great Mosque in Kufa and the Al-Haim Mosque in Egypt. [18]

The Sulaymani branch of Musta'li Ismailism found in Yemen and Saudi Arabia is the smallest of the Ismaili sects today, numbering around one million people. In Saudi Arabia, they suffer from marginalization in terms of exclusion from government jobs, hate speech in the school curricula, and limits on constructing or expanding mosques.^[19]

^[12] Daftary, A Modern History of the Ismailis, p. Ibid., 500.

^[13] "His Highness Aga Khan," Institute of Ismaili Studies website, accessed July 25, 2022, https://www.iis.ac.uk/his-highness-aga-khan/

[&]quot;His Highness Aga Khan," Institute of Ismaili Studies website, accessed July 25, 2022, https://www.iis.ac.uk/his-highness-aga-khan/

^[15] Mustafa Abdulhussein, "Bohrās," in The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World, ed. John Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0120

^[16] Tahera Qutbuddin, "The Da'udi Bohra Tayyibis: Ideology, Literature, Learning and Social Practice," in A Modern History of the Ismailis: Continuity and Change in a Muslim Community, ed. Farhad Daftary (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), pp. 331-354.

^[17] "Welcome to Aljamea-tus-Saifiyah," Aljamea-tus-Saifiyah website, accessed July 25, 2022, <mark>https://jameasaifiyah.edu/</mark>

^{[18] &}quot;A brief history of Aljamea-tus-Saifiyah," Aljamea-tus-Saifiyah website, accessed July 25, 2022, https://jameasaifiyah.edu/philosophy-history/brief-history/

^{[19] &}quot;Ismailis in Najran: Second-class Saudi citizens," Human Rights Watch, September 22, 2008, https://www.hrw.org/ar/report/2008/09/22/223144

Today the Dawoodi da'i in India has a deputy in Yemen,^[20] and the Sulaymani da'i in Najran has an appointee in every area where the Ismailis are found in the country.^[21] Ismailis remain Yemen's second largest Shia community after the Zaidis and are scattered in Sana'a, the village of Taiba in Hamdan, Haraz, Aras and Al-Odin in Ibb, and in Aden.^[22] There are no accurate figures on the number of Ismailis in Yemen, but estimates put the total at 70,000 to 100,000.^[23]

^[20] Qutbuddin, "The Da'udi Bohra Tayyibis."

^[21] Interview via Zoom with an Ismaili researcher, December 1, 2021.

Dominique Harre, "Exchanges and mobility in the Western Indian Ocean: Indians between Yemen and Ethiopia, 19th–20th centuries," Chroniques du Manuscrit au Yémen, Special Issue 1 (2017), pp. 42-69.

The group claims at least one million, see: "Who are the Ismailis?" Insaf, March 27, 2020, https://insaf-ye.org/ar/archives/1242

ISMAILI THOUGHT

Ismaili law and theology was largely formulated during the Fatimid period by scholars such as Al-Qadi Al-Numan (d. 974) in his book, Da'a'im al-Islam (The Pillars of Islam). Like Zaidi theology, it places less emphasis on imams as a referential authority than mainstream Jaafari (or Twelver) Shia. [24] The Fatimid caliph Al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah added the pillars of loyalty (wilaya) and purity (tahara) to the five established pillars of Ismaili Muslim practice – prayer (salah), alms (zakah), fasting (sawm), pilgrimage (hajj) and struggle (jihad). But perhaps the most distinctive element of the Ismaili mission (da'wa) is its stress on discovering an esoteric meaning (batin) to the Quran alongside its exoteric meaning (zahir). Ismailis believe that Quranic exegesis should only be carried out by the Ismaili da'i and his deputies. [25]

At the beginning of his induction, an Ismaili pupil receives the exoteric concepts and rites and is then asked to swear an oath to abide by the exoteric and esoteric, and not reveal these beliefs and practices to the uninitiated. During the time of Al-Qadi Al-Numan, Ismaili jurisprudence was considered knowledge for the public sphere but not exegetical knowledge of the Quran, which was restricted to the elite of the faith. Ismaili thought was also impacted by a philosophical trend in Basra, in modern-day Iraq, during the 900s CE known as the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwan al-Safa), covering mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, natural sciences and theology. [26] Ismailis are unique among Muslims in using an astronomical calendar developed by the Brethren to determine the beginning of the Islamic lunar months. [27]

The hierarchy of religious authority varies among the Ismaili sects. For the Sulaymanis, it starts with the rank of a responsive (mustajib), who then becomes a believer (mu'min), rising to the rank of restricted authorization (ma'dhun), in which an Ismaili individual can carry out some religious duties within the boundaries of a specific locality. This is followed by the rank of the fully authorized (ma'dhun mutlaq) whose duties are wider, until a follower reaches the rank of absolute da 'i (da 'i mutlaq), with full authority to grant religious ranks to others. [28] In the case of Dawoodis, there are nine ranks, starting with the responsive (al-mulla), who performs religious rituals such as prayers and marriage contracts, while the highest rank is absolute da ', who is not known to the general Ismaili community

^[24] Ismail Poonawala, Medieval Ismaili History and Thought. Chapter: Al-Qadi al-Numan and Ismaili Jurisprudence (Damascus: Dar al-Mada, 2003).

^[25] Qutbuddin, "The Da'udi Bohra Tayyibis."

^[26] Daftary, The Ismailis, pp. 297-307

^[27] Tahera Qutbuddin, "The Da'udi Bohra Tayyibis."

^[28] Interview via Facebook Messenger with a 42-year-old Ismaili man, January 6, 2022.

due to the concealment of the seventh imam.^[29] The transfer of leadership from one daï to another is usually carried out according to an appointment text written by the sitting daï, though disputes over succession have continued into recent times.^[30]

^[59] Interview via Zoom with Amr ibn Maad Ibn Yekrib al-Hamdani, December 16, 2021; see also: Tahera Qutbuddin, "The Da'udi Bohra Tayyibis."

[🚾] Interview via Facebook Messenger with a 42-year-old Ismaili man, January 6, 2022. For example, a dispute emerged in Najran in 2011 but was resolved.

ISMAILI CULTURAL HERITAGE IN YEMEN

The Ismailis of Yemen are the custodians of the Fatimid cultural heritage and its classical works. Manuscripts were preserved in what was called the hidden safe (al-mahraza), which was moved from Yemen to Surat in India after the 16th century for fear of its destruction in conflicts with the Zaidi Imamate. [31] In recent years, some of these manuscripts have been made available to academic institutions in Britain, Italy and elsewhere, as have manuscripts held by some Ismaili families. [32]

However, one of the main complaints of Yemen's Ismailis today is the continued lack of access to manuscripts confiscated during the Imamate. These include texts on Ismaili jurisprudence, language and philosophy, [33] and responses to Zaidism. [34] Ismaili manuscripts found in the roof of the Great Mosque in Sana'a during the reign of Imam Yahya Hamid al-Din (1918-1948) were transferred after the 1962 revolution to the state-run Manuscripts House in Sana'a, where they remain inaccessible to the public. [35] During the National Dialogue Conference of 2013-2014, the Ismaili community demanded access to these manuscripts and an apology for historical persecution. [36] Some Ismaili manuscripts are accessible to the public, including non-Ismaili researchers, at the Yemeni Center for Studies and Research in Sana'a, the Central Library of Sana'a University, and the Al-Hamdani Cultural Foundation in Sana'a, which has made some materials available online. [37]

Though many Ismaili monuments, dating as far back as the era of Queen Arwa, are now protected as Islamic waqf – non-taxable Islamic foundations – many other shrines have been destroyed. Much of this has been deliberate, due to the Salafi belief that visiting graves to seek the intercession of the dead is a superstitious non-Islamic practice. Salafi groups have targeted both Ismaili and Zaidi shrines, such as the mausoleum of the Ismaili da'i Ibrahim Ibn Hussein al-Hamidi in Sana'a, which was destroyed in 2004.

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[31] Daftary, The Ismailis, p. 421.
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^[53] Ismail K. Poonawala, "Ismaili Manuscripts from Yemen," Journal of Islamic Manuscripts 5 (2014), https://www.dawoodi-bohras.com/pdfs/ismailiMSSfromYemen.pdf

[&]quot;Ismaili Special Collections Unit," Institute of Ismaili Studies, https://www.iis.ac.uk/library-and-special-collections

^{[54] &}quot;Ismaili Special Collections Unit," Institute of Ismaili Studies; see also: interview via Zoom with an Ismaili researcher, December 1, 2021.

lisi Interview via Zoom with Amr ibn Maad Ibn Yekrib al-Hamdani, December 16, 2021; interview via Facebook Messenger with an Ismaili man, January 7, 2022.

^[36] Interview via Zoom with Olfat al-Duba'i, March 14, 2022.

ipi "Achievements of the Foundation [AR]," Al-Hamdani Cultural Foundation, accessed July 25, 2022, https://dmhsr.blogspot.com/p/blog-page_16.html

^[38] Ahmed Amin, "Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab," Leaders of Reform in the Modern Era [AR] (Cairo: Hindawi, 2010).

^[39] Interview via Zoom with Amr ibn Maad Ibn Yekrib al-Hamdani, December 16, 2021.

There are Ismaili mosques still in use in Sana'a and other cities, but their most prominent places of gathering include the Al-Fayed al-Hatmi Foundation in Sana'a, where Dawoodis meet for religious occasions, and its branches in Zabid and Jiblah. The Aden branch has been closed since the war started in 2015 due to the security situation.^[40]

Well-known Yemeni religious scholar Hussein Faizullah al-Hamdani gifted part of his grandfather's personal library, including Ismaili manuscripts from Yemen and India, to universities in Bombay, Germany and London. His son Abbas also gifted a large number of manuscripts to the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London after he took a position there in 2006. [41] A legal conflict ensued when Abbas's nephew Amr ibn Ma'ad ibn Yekrib al-Hamdani, founder and chairman of the Al-Hamdani Cultural Foundation, demanded that the institute grant at least be granted electronic access to the manuscripts. [42] Though the institute says that Abbas al-Hamdani's donation ensures that the manuscripts are protected and digitized, access is still only granted by permission. [43]

^[40] Interview via Zoom with Amr ibn Maad Ibn Yekrib al-Hamdani, December 16, 2021.

^[41] Interview via Zoom with Amr ibn Maad Ibn Yekrib al-Hamdani, December 16, 2021.

[🕬] He only received 18 of the hundreds held by the Institute, see: Interview via Zoom with Amr ibn Maad Ibn Yekrib al-Hamdani, December 16, 2021.

^[43] Email exchange with Dr. Wafi Momin, Head of the Ismaili Special Collections Unit, Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, February 2022.

THE ISMAILI COMMUNITY IN YEMEN

Dawoodi Ismailis celebrate their festivals, such as Eid al-Ghadeer, and commemorate the death of their dais and icons, most notably Queen Arwa. These occasions are marked by ten days of preaching sessions (majalis) at the beginning of the Islamic months of Muharram and Ramadan.[44] Ismailis have gathering places, most notably Al-Fayd al-Hatmi on Haddah Street in Sana'a and Al-Burhani Mosque in Nogum near Sana'a. [45] Sulaymanis have fewer rituals and occasions. The worldwide Dawoodi Bohra community has a particularly welldefined organizational hierarchy, managed by the movement's headquarters in Mumbai. [46] Dawoodis pay the Islamic alms of khums and zakah to the da'i mutlag, which is an important source of funding for a number of organizations, such as the Saifiyah University, and various restoration projects.[47] Dawoodis are also characterized by their traditional white dress, reflecting the official color of the Fatimid state. [48] At age 15, community members give an oath of loyalty to the da'i mutlaq called the mithaq, [49] after which they receive an electronic ID card for accessing privileges in housing, loans and healthcare. [50] Yemeni Dawoodis who do not obtain the card miss out on these benefits if they travel abroad. [51] Although this system of social solidarity is less organized among Yemeni Sulaymanis, when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out Ismaili doctors dealt with community infections rather than rely on poor government services. [52]

In 2011, the Sulaymani da'i died without appointing a successor. Coming during the uprising in the country against then-President Ali Abdullah Saleh, some younger Ismailis were disappointed when senior figures in the community appointed the oldest among them to take over. [53] Except for this incident, few generational gaps were observed in the interviews conducted. Although many interviewees spoke of social and religious obligations imposed on them by virtue of being Ismailis, they expressed appreciation for the privileges they enjoy. [54]

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[44] Tahera Qutbuddin, "The Da'udi Bohra Tayyibis."
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^[45] Interview via Zoom with Amr ibn Maad Ibn Yekrib al-Hamdani, December 16, 2021.

^[46] Saifiyah Qutbuddin, "History the Da'udi Bohra Tayyibis in Modern Times: the Da'is, the Da'wat and the Community," in Daftary, A Modern History of the Ismailis, pp. 297-330.

^[47] Daftary, The Ismailis, p. 494

^[48] Saifiyah Qutbuddin, "History of the Da'udi Bohra Tayyibis."

[🕼] Tahera Qutbuddin, "The Da'udi Bohra Tayyibis." Interview via Facebook Messenger with a 40-year-old Ismaili woman, January 17, 2022

Interview via Zoom with Amr ibn Maad Ibn Yekrib al-Hamdani, November 23, 2021. Tahera Qutbuddin, "The Da'udi Bohra Tayyibis."

^[51] Interview via Zoom with an Ismaili woman, January 13, 2022.

^[52] Interview via Facebook Messenger with a 42-year-old Ismaili man, January 6, 2022.

^[53] Interview via Facebook Messenger with a 42-year-old Ismaili man, January 6, 2022.

^[54] Interview via Facebook Messenger with a 37-year-old Ismaili man, November 14, 2021.

The generation gap is sharper in the north in terms of the higher level of education among Ismaili youth and their complaints about the high cost of marriage, though these features apply throughout Yemeni society. Sheikh Safi al-Kahili, who heads the Ismaili Sulaymani community's marriage committee, has made efforts to shorten the number of days over which marriage ceremonies are held in order to lower costs for families. [55]

^[55] Interview via Zoom with an Ismaili researcher, November 25, 2021.

ABUSE AND PERSECUTION



During the Zaidi Imamate, Ismaili communities suffered pogroms and forced conversions to Zaidism. [56] Society began to stigmatize the group as a secretive minority characterized by immorality and blasphemy, and these prejudices continue to impact Ismailis today, particularly in northern tribal society. [57] A common belief is that Ismailis cut off the left hand of their dead so that on the Day of Judgment they can only receive the book of their deeds with the right hand, which religious tradition views as necessary for entering paradise. [58] The social stereotype of sexual promiscuity was twice cited explicitly during interviews, by a girl and an older man, while others referred to offensive prejudices regarding their morals and honor. [59]

Following unification of the northern and southern Yemeni states in 1990, prejudices prevalent in the north began to spread in the south, where they were not previously found.^[60]

^[56] Saifiyah Qutbuddin, "History of the Da'udi Bohra Tayyibis."

^[57] "Features of the History of sexual promiscuity in Shi'ite communities [AR]," entry on the Sunna Defense Network web forum, accessed April 1, 2022, https://dd-sunnah.net/forum/showthread.php?t=104097

^[58] Interview via Zoom with 37-year-old Ismaili, November 17, 2021.

^[59] Interview via Zoom with an elderly Ismaili man, November 10, 2021; interview via Zoom with a 34-year-old Ismaili woman, November 11, 2021; interview via Zoom with a 58-year-old Ismaili man, February 5, 2021.

^[60] Interview via Facebook Messenger with a 40-year-old Ismaili woman, January 17, 2022; see also: Ali al-Bukhiti, "When Are We Going to Apologize to the Ismailis? [AR]" Shabwa Press, May 31, 2014; https://shabwaah-press.info/news/17354

Interviewees talked of incessant insinuations about their morals from coworkers and schoolmates, or negative reactions when interlocutors learned they were Ismaili. One girl said a friend exclaimed, "Oh, mother!" on finding out, expressing her surprise and dismay. One young woman talked of the sensitive personal questions she faced from a schoolmate in front of the class. A young man said that when he became romantically attached to a non-Ismaili girl, he was rejected by her family for fear of social stigma. But some interviewees — mostly younger Ismailis from the north — said they had not encountered any of these reactions, and that traditional stereotypical images of Ismailis were changing.

A new factor in recent decades has been anti-Ismaili rhetoric from Salafis and the Muslim Brotherhood, which Ismailis accuse the regime of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh of encouraging, particularly after the 1994 war. In Aden, this has marked a shift away from earlier discrimination based in Arab nationalist ideology, which focused on the Indian origins of Dawoodi Ismailism.

Salafi incitement has increased during the current war, with the charge that Dawoodi Bohras are sympathetic to, or collaborate with, the Zaidi Houthis as Shia brethren. [69] Elderly women have even been accused of working for the Houthis as snipers from inside their homes. [70] In November 2015, the 130-year-old Shia Al-Khoja mosque in Aden was destroyed, reportedly by members of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula as part of a spree of attacks on Shia sites, and possibly after it was first damaged in Saudi-led coalition airstrikes. [71]

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[61] Interview via Zoom with a young Ismaili, November 20, 2021.
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^[62] Interview via Zoom with a 40-year-old Ismaili woman, November 13, 2021

^[63] Interview via Zoom with a 42-year-old Ismaili woman, January 13, 2022.

^[64] Interview via Facebook Messenger with a 42-year-old Ismaili man, January 5, 2021.

[🖾] Interview via Zoom with a 26-year-old Ismaili man, November 14, 2021; interview via Zoom with a 23-year-old Ismaili man, November 12, 2021.

[&]quot;Who are the Bohras? What are their beliefs? And what is the Islamic view on marriage from or to them?" Islam Q&As, https://islamqa.info/ar/ answers/107544/ منهم-البهرة-وما-هي-عقادهم-وما-حكم-تزويجهم-والتزوج-منهم

^[67] Interview via Zoom with an Ismaili religious authority, November 10, 2021.

^[68] Interview via Zoom with an Ismaili religious authority, November 10, 2021.

^[69] Interview via Zoom with a 32-year-old Ismaili woman, November 12, 2021.

Interview via Zoom with a 42-year-old Ismaili woman, January 13, 2022; interview via Zoom with a 32-year-old Ismaili woman, November 12, 2021; interview via Zoom with an elderly Ismaili man, November 10, 2021.

Walid al-Omari, "In pictures: Extremists destroy the Husseini mosque, the oldest mosque in Aden [AR]," Khabar Agency, November 30, 2015, https://khabaragency.net/news44383.html and "Mercenaries of the aggression falsify the name of the historical Husayni 'al-Khoja' mosque after destroying it in Aden [AR]," YemeniPress.net, November 16, 2019, https://www.yemenipress.net/archives/173202; and interview via Zoom with an elderly Ismaili man, November 10, 2021. On destruction of historical sites during the war see Amida Sholan, "Treasures of humanity under threat," Qantara.de, June 7, 2015, https://en.qantara.de/content/the-destruction-of-yemens-cultural-heritage-treasures-of-humanity-under-threat

The mosque was sometimes used by Ismailis, though the main Bohra mosque in Aden remained untouched. But the harassment led most Ismaili families to leave their homes in the Crater neighborhood, where Dawoodis have long-lived, and many of their shops were closed. The owner of Reemy restaurant, one of Crater's most famous eateries, moved to another district of the city after threats of kidnapping and extortion following the abduction and ransoming of his brother. Some Ismailis have quit Aden completely, leaving for Sana'a and other cities. Since the war erupted in 2015, they no longer wear the traditional white robes that distinguished them as members of the Ismaili community.

^[72] Interview via Zoom with a 32-year-old Ismaili woman, November 12, 2021.

[&]quot;Closure of one of Aden's oldest restaurants due to threats by armed gang [AR]," Aden Press, March 15, 2021. http://www.adenpress.news/news/5510; see also, "Who are the Ismailis? [AR]," Insaf, https://insaf-ye.org/ar/archives/1242; interview via Zoom with an elderly Ismaili woman, November 17, 2021.

^[74] Interview via Zoom with an elderly Ismaili man, November 10, 2021.

INTEGRATION AND IDENTITY

Ismailis in the north consider the republican revolution in 1962 to have been a great moment of emancipation from oppression. One interviewee recounted how his father was imprisoned and killed during the reign of Imam Yahya Hamid al-Din. An elderly Ismaili woman said that Ismailis would often have stones thrown at them outside their mosques. So when the Imamate fell in 1962, and Abdullah al-Sallal took over as president of the Yemen Arab Republic with backing from Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser, for the first time we were allowed to sing... As long as Al-Sallal and Nasser were in power, I'd sing and say everything as I pleased.

Social and educational changes instituted by the republic precipitated a degree of marriage across class, sect and regional lines, [77] but the conservative nature of the Ismaili community limited the extent of intermarriage in both the north and south. One Ismaili girl said that marriage outside the sect has always been relatively acceptable for men but not for women. Within her own family, a cousin was able to break this tradition in the 1990s with the support of her father, a member of the Socialist Party from Aden. [78]

In Aden, the Ismaili community is largely a product of British colonial rule. The imperial port city received immigrants from around the world, including Ismailis from India who settled in the Crater area, some of whom were of Yemeni origin. ^[79] Elderly Dawoodis in Aden voiced nostalgia for those times, recalling that different communities were able to celebrate each other's religious festivals. ^[80] Despite this, Dawoodis prefer to marry inside their group and value religiosity; in interviews, they often referred to other Yemenis as "Arabs," reflecting a complex sense of identity as Indians of Yemeni origin who had returned to Yemen. ^[81]

Dawoodis in Aden today, including those who describe themselves as non-religious, value social solidarity among their community and social customs such as cleanliness, punctuality and respect for elders as necessary to survive in an environment that has turned more hostile in recent years.^[82]

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<sup>[75]</sup> Interview via Zoom with an Ismaili religious authority, Sana'a, May 15, 2021
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^[76] Interview via Zoom with an elderly Ismaili woman, Sana'a, May 15, 2021

^[77] Sheila Carapico, "Gender and Status Inequalities in Yemen: Honour, Economics, and Politics," in Patriarchy and Development: Women's Positions at the End of the Twentieth Century, ed. Valentine M. Moghadam (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 80-98.

^[78] Interview via Facebook Messenger with 40-year-old Ismaili woman, January 17, 2022

^[79] Harre, "Exchanges and mobility," pp. 42-69

[📴] Interview via Zoom with an elderly Ismaili man, November 10, 2021; interview via Zoom with an elderly Ismaili woman based in Aden, May 15, 2021.

^[81] Interview via Zoom with an elderly Ismaili man, November 10, 2021.

^[83] Interview via Zoom with an elderly Ismaili man, November 10, 2021; interview via Zoom with an elderly Ismaili woman, November 17, 2021; interview via Zoom with a 34-year-old Ismaili woman, November 11, 2021; interview via Zoom with a 34-year-old Ismaili woman, November 11, 2021; interview via Facebook Messenger with a 40-year-old Ismaili woman, January 17, 2022.

Only a few interviewees complained about these obligations interfering with personal choice or encouraging insularity. [83] Most expressed pride in their unique characteristics as a community and in their historical heritage, including the Sulayhid state and Queen Arwa. [84]

Generally, many Ismailis do not publicly broadcast their identity in social contexts such as schools and the workplace; however, some younger Ismailis in the north indicated a desire to publicly embrace it. One Ismaili girl said the community had shown itself to be a peaceful and neutral element of Yemeni society, without Yemeni blood on its hands, since it has played no part in the current conflict, and that this has caused her to rethink the issue of publicizing her identity. [85] The girl said she grew up in a Salafi Sunni milieu that inculcated the idea at school that the faith of the Ismailis and other Shia was invalid. She was surprised to discover as an adolescent that her family background was Ismaili. Though she still feels closer to Sunnis in social terms, she said she feels proud to belong to the Ismaili community. [86]

Another Ismaili girl, who grew up in Saudi Arabia, said anti-Shia discourse caused her brothers to convert to Sunni Islam. [87] In Aden, Dawoodi customs and rituals, such as the manner of celebrating Ashoura, have become closer to Sunni practices in recent decades under the influence of the surrounding culture, which has in turn led to a renewed emphasis on Dawoodi Bohra ethnic identity as a group marker. [88]

Ismailis interviewed in Aden said they considered themselves primarily as residents of the city. [89]

Some said Dawoodi Bohras are quintessential Adenites in their open and tolerant attitude toward coexistence, [90] despite others questioning their identity over issues of doctrine and ethnicity. [91] Integration is easier for those who are less religious, [92]

^[83] Interview via Zoom with a 47-year-old Ismaili man, November 15, 2021; online interview with a 33-year-old Ismaili woman, November 20, 2021.

^[84] Interview via Zoom with a 32-year-old Ismaili woman, November 12, 2021; interview via Zoom with a 40-year-old Ismaili woman, November 13, 2021; interview via Facebook Messenger with 42-year-old Ismaili man, January 5, 2021.

^[85] Interview via Facebook Messenger with 40-year-old Ismaili man, January 17, 2022; see also: "Ismailis in Yemen: Reject conflicts and coexist peacefully [AR]," Sawt al-Amal, May 28, 2021, https://sawt-alamal.net/2021/05/28/الإسماعيليون-في-اليمن-ينبذون-الصراعا

^[86] Interviews via Facebook Messenger with 40-year-old Ismaili man based in Yemen and Ismaili woman based in Jordan, January 6, 2022.

^[87] Interview via Zoom with 42-year-old Ismaili woman, October 30, 2021.

^[88] Observation of researcher Huda Jaafar, who hails from the Dawoodi Bohra community in Aden.

^[89] Interview via Zoom with an elderly Ismaili man, November 10, 2021.

^[90] Interview via Zoom with an elderly Ismaili woman, November 17, 2021.

^[91] Interview via Zoom with an elderly Ismaili man, November 10, 2021; interview via Zoom with a 42-year-old Ismaili woman, January 13, 2022.

^[92] Interview via Zoom with 42-year-old Ismaili woman, October 30, 2021; interview via Zoom with a 42-year-old Ismaili woman, January 13, 2022.

while both old and younger Ismailis in Aden say there is still a general feeling that marriage within the sect is easier. [93] Communication between the two Ismaili sects in Yemen is also limited, [94] though the communities visit the same shrines and celebrate together at the same festivals. The authority of the Dawoodi deputy da'i in Yemen, currently Sayyid Ahmed al-Najjar, covers all Dawoodi Bohras in both the north and south of the country. [95]

^[93] Interview via Zoom with a 29-year-old man, November 15, 2021; interview via Zoom with a 23-year-old man, November 12, 2021.

^[94] Interview via Zoom with Amr ibn Maad Ibn Yekrib al-Hamdani, December 16, 2021.

^[95] Interview via Zoom with Amr ibn Maad Ibn Yekrib al-Hamdani, December 16, 2021.

ISMAILI WOMEN

Although Queen Arwa enjoys an exceptional status among the Ismailis as a historical figure who reached the rank of hujja, her example of agency and leadership is not reflected in the position of Ismaili women today. Most work as homemakers; few study to become doctors or engineers. [96] Some Dawoodi Ismailis in Aden consider their community to be more conservative than other social groups with regard to women. [97] While most of the young men interviewed did not complain of any restrictions imposed on them by the community, several girls complained about interference in their choices. One echoed the complaints of Ismaili women interviewed in the north and south: "More restrictions are imposed upon us, since the group decides our dress and time to go out, in addition to personal matters such as work, marriage and travel."[98]

Many of those interviewed said family support can make a big difference to a woman's life and liberty. [99] Given the negative social stereotypes, it is easier for women to marry a non-Yemeni man. [100] One said these restrictions were driven by excessive concern within Ismaili society over maintaining moral probity, as a reaction to stereotypical tropes about the group, such as its alleged blasphemy and promiscuity. [101] Despite Ismaili activity in various trades and in the private sector generally, only one of the interviewees could be classified as a businesswoman, and she lives primarily in a European country. [102]

Most men and women in the north said that Ismaili women today have attained a new level of autonomy in education and work.^[103] Several noted that the war had made women more independent, since their families were now dependent upon their incomes.^[104] At the same time, some said this had placed more responsibilities on women's shoulders.^[105]

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[96] Interview via Zoom with Amr ibn Maad Ibn Yekrib al-Hamdani, December 16, 2021.
[97] Interview via Zoom with a 32-year-old Ismaili woman, November 12, 2021.
[98] Interview via Zoom with a 32-year-old Ismaili woman, November 12, 2021.
[99] Interview via Zoom with a 34-year-old Ismaili woman, November 11, 2021.
[100] Interview via Zoom with a 34-year-old Ismaili woman, November 11, 2021.
[101] Interview via Zoom with a 42-year-old Ismaili woman, January 13, 2022.
[102] Interview via Zoom with a 34-year-old Ismaili woman, November 11, 2021.
[103] Interview via Zoom with a 33-year-old woman, November 20, 2021; interview via Zoom with a 58-year-old Ismaili man, November 13, 2021.
[104] Interview via Zoom with a 40-year-old Ismaili woman, November 13, 2021.
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ISMAILIS AND POLITICS

In general, there is a tendency among Ismailis to avoid politics. Dawoodis in particular consider themselves to be a class of businessmen that overtly abstains from political activity. [106] Rejection by political groups has only deepened these attitudes. Salafis and followers of the Islamist Islah party tried to prevent Ismaili participation in the National Dialogue Conference held in 2013-2014.

Houthi authorities have tried to promote Ismailis as fellow Shia. Sheikh Safi al-Kahili rose to become a member of the General Secretariat of the Sana'a-based General People's Congress party and was appointed to the upper house of parliament, the Shura Council, as was Amr al-Hamdani, another prominent figure in the Sana'a Ismaili community. Saleh Shaaban became the first Ismaili minister when he served as minister of finance under the Houthi authorities, from 2016 to 2018, and a number of others have been promoted as under-secretaries and managers in the bureaucracy. [107]

An earlier case is that of the former president of North Yemen Ahmad al-Ghashmi, who held office for eight months until his assassination in June 1978. He appears to have been an Ismaili, though this was not widely known at the time. Ismaili religious scholars have affirmed that he was a Dawoodi Ismaili, and a close associate said he once saw him receive the Dawoodi leader during a visit from India by kneeling down as a mark of reverence. Al-Ghashmi was from the village of Taiba in Hamdan, near Sana'a, an area whose Ismailis had largely left for Najran during the era of the Zaidi Imam Yahya Hamid al-Din (1918-1948). Al-Ghashmi's origins in a repressed community would explain the hiding of his identity. None of the interviewees were aware of Al-Ghashmi's background, and some held a negative view of him, as he was implicated in the assassination of his predecessor, President Ibrahim al-Hamdi. Ismailis did not assume any senior government positions during the era of the South Yemen state, partly one interviewee suggested of due to the ascendancy of people from rural areas over residents of Aden.

^[106] Interview via Zoom with Amr ibn Maad Ibn Yekrib al-Hamdani, December 16, 2021.

^[107] Interview via Zoom with an Ismaili researcher, December 10, 2021.

^[108] Interview via WhatsApp text with Amr ibn Maad Ibn Yekrib al-Hamdani, January 8, 2022.

^[109] Interview via WhatsApp text with Yemeni politician, January 16, 2022.

^[110] Qutbuddin, "History of the Da'udi Bohra Tayyibis," p. 384.

[💴] Interview via Zoom with a 58-year-old Ismaili man, November 11, 2021; interview via Zoom with elderly Ismaili woman, Sana'a, May 15, 2021.

^[112] Interview via Zoom with elderly Ismaili woman, November 17, 2021.

Ismaili views of the current war tend to differ in the north and the south. Those in Aden stress their rejection of Houthi rule as well as accusations that they are sympathetic to the movement for reasons of doctrinal affinity. One said he lost a family member who fought in the Aden Resistance. [113] "We reject the Houthis even if they share the same Shia faith as us," said another woman. [114]

In the north, however, opinion on the Houthi movement was divided. The majority of those interviewed see them as a de facto authority trying its best to govern under the difficult conditions of war. [115] Some praised them as the best authority to rule Yemen, and said they had empowered the Ismailis. [116] These interviewees considered the war to be primarily the responsibility of external aggressors. [117] The women were more critical. "They want to control everything, like an occupying force," said one. [118] Another said they had taken Yemen backward. [119] One Ismaili man labeled them "gangs and bandits" who had returned Yemen to the Middle Ages. [120]

For the most part, those interviewed did not see the Houthi movement as an extension of the Zaidi Imamate, citing positive treatment of Ismailis by the Houthi authorities. "The Houthis are trying to present themselves as Shia, and Ismailis are part of the Shia community," said one interviewee. [121] Another said the Houthi movement are different from the Zaidi imams since they are influenced by nationalist and leftist ideology. [122] One noted that during a private meeting with Ismaili religious authorities, Houthi leader Abdelmalik al-Houthi expressed regret for the injustices suffered by Ismailis at the hands of his ancestors. [123]

On the impact of the war, those interviewed from the north said that like other Yemenis, they were affected by the current state of insecurity and economic deterioration. Since Ismailis mainly work in the private sector as independent traders, they have not been as directly impacted as other Yemenis by government cuts to public sector salaries, [124] but Ismaili-run businesses have been affected by

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Interview via Zoom with a 32-year-old Ismaili woman, November 12, 2021.

Interview via Zoom with a 35-year-old Ismaili man, November 13, 2021; interview via Zoom with a 37-year-old Ismaili man, November 13, 2021
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^{113]} Interview via Zoom with an elderly Ismaili man, November 10, 2021.

^[116] Interview with an Ismaili researcher, November 25, 2021; interview via Zoom with Amr ibn Maad Ibn Yekrib al-Hamdani, December 16, 2021.

Interview via Zoom with a 35-year-old Ismaili man, November 13, 2021.

^[118] Interview via Zoom with a 28-year-old Ismaili young woman, November 10, 2021

^[119] Interview via Zoom with a 33-year-old woman, November 20, 2021.

^[120] Interview via Zoom with a 35-year-old Ismaili man, November 13, 2021

^[121] Interview via Facebook Messenger with 42-year-old Ismaili man, January 5, 2021.

^[122] Interview via Zoom with Amr ibn Maad Ibn Yekrib al-Hamdani, December 16, 2021.

^[123] Interview via WhatsApp voice message with Ismaili religious authority, October 30, 2021.

^[124] Interview via Zoom with a 33-year-old woman, November 20, 2021.

people's declining purchasing power and the country's economic deterioration. [125] The war is having a greater impact on Ismailis in Aden due to the poor security situation there. [126] A majority across the country expressed hope that a system of government that separates politics from religion can be established after the war. [127]

^[125] Interview via Zoom with a 54-year-old man, November 22, 2021.

^[126] Interview via Zoom with a 29-year-old man, November 15, 2021.

Interview via Facebook Messenger with a 42-year-old Ismaili man, January 5, 2021; interview via Zoom with a 23-year-old man, November 12, 2021.

ISMAILI ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

In contrast to politics, Ismailis are heavily involved in agriculture and trade in Haraz, Sana'a, Aden and other regions. One of their most important agricultural initiatives was to remove qat plants in Haraz to reduce the pressure on water consumption. At least half of the water drawn from depleting and depleted aquifers in Yemen is used in the cultivation of qat. Ismailis first began uprooting qat trees in the Haraz area – where there are some Dawoodis although Sulaymanis are the majority – after the Dawoodi Bohra leader Mohamad Burhanuddin made a call to replace qat with coffee during a visit in 1993. One coffee tree can be irrigated with 20 to 30 liters of water, while a qat tree needs some 400 liters. His son Mufaddal Saifuddin, who became the 53rd leader of Dawoodi Bohras in 2014, launched a wider project of uprooting qat trees in the Haraz mountains in 1999. Some one million trees in total have been removed from Haraz villages, and there are thought to be only around 15,000 left. High-quality Haraz coffee is sold today in America, Britain, Japan and South Korea, bringing high returns to the farmers, and there are now plans to turn Haraz's coffee plantations into a nature reserve.

Commercial activities involving qat have become a religiously frowned upon practice among Ismailis, alongside usury, and the use of alcohol, shisha and cigarettes. One Ismaili businessman from Haraz said, "We combat qat like any other substances forbidden by Islamic law, under the guidance of the Bohra leader. We prefer to work with cash, away from debts and loans from banks and insurance, for fear of falling into usury, especially during the war – again, as per the guidance of the Bohra leader. We only deal with banks on a limited scale." [132] Ismailis are also active in real estate, industrial investment, money exchange and the retail trade in medicines, clothing, perfumes, and other consumer goods. Only a small number work in the government bureaucracy or the military and security sector. [133]

[&]quot;With the help of the Bohra leader: A popular revolt against qat in Haraz and the uprooting of hundreds of millions worth of trees [AR]," Shabwa Press, July 16, 2018, https://shabwaah-press.info/news/52781

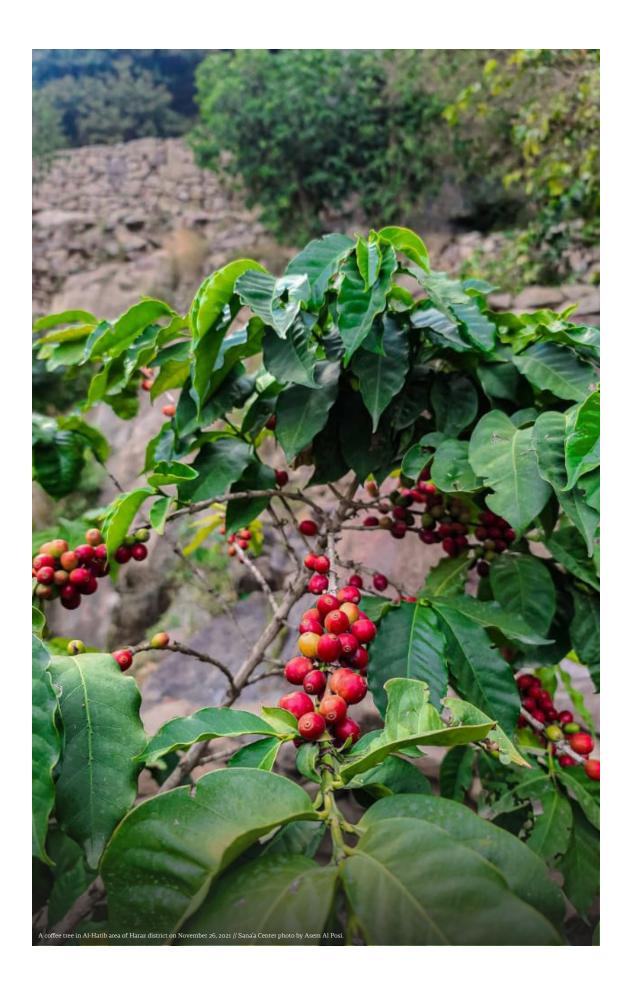
^[123] Bohras combat the khat tree on international qat day [AR]," Al-Mushahid, July 17, 2018. https://almushahid.net/32277/

^[130] Peer Gatter, Qahtan Abdul Malik and Khaled Muhammad Sa'id, "Investigation of Qat-Tree Uprooting among the Isma'ili Community of Haraz – A Field Survey," Report for the Ministry of Planning & Development and the World Bank, November 26, 1999, https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/901631468169459587/text/599930ESWoWhit1TreeoUprooting01PDF1.txt

^[132] Gatter et al., "Investigation of Qat-Tree Uprooting among the Isma'ili Community of Haraz."

^[132] Gatter et al., "Investigation of Qat-Tree Uprooting among the Isma'ili Community of Haraz."

[&]quot;Ismailis in Yemen: Reject conflicts and coexist peacefully, [AR]," Sawt al-Amal, May 28, 2021, https://sawt-alamal.net/2021/05/28/ الإسماعيليون-في-اليمن-/الصراعا /ينبذون-الصراعا



Political and economic instability in the country has caused many Ismailis to leave, especially in recent years. Seif al-Din Jaafar, the owner of a perfume shop in Aden, said: "Because the majority of the people of the community left to other Yemeni governorates and other countries to improve their standard of living, our trade was diminished in Aden. There are less than nine shops left, though we continue to do business as usual." [134] Extortion threats have pushed many Dawoodi traders to settle in other neighborhoods of Aden or in other governorates, or even to leave the country. [135] According to one Ismaili resident, "Most of the Bohras are in Aden, but those who recently left did so because of the terrible threat they faced. The worst time in their history in Aden is happening now, the worst time in more than 150 years." [136]

^{[134] &}quot;Ismailis in Yemen: Reject conflicts and coexist peacefully, [AR]," Sawt al-Amal.

^[135] Interview via Zoom with a Dawoodi Bohra girl, December 17, 2021.

^[136] Telephone interview with a 75-year-old Dawoodi Bohra man living in Aden, November 28, 2021.

CONCLUSION

As a religious minority in Yemen, Ismaili Shia faced centuries of persecution in the north at the hands of the dominant Zaidi Shia. With the republican revolution in 1962, their situation improved and they began the long process of integration, despite the continuing prejudice against them in wider society based on long-standing negative stereotypes. Still largely excluded from the government bureaucracy, they became active in the private sector and have been at the forefront of efforts in recent years to replace qat trees with coffee.

Their situation in the north has improved somewhat under Houthi rule, which has tried to win Ismaili support with apologies for injustice at the hands of the Zaidi Imamate. But, like previous governments, the Houthi authorities continue to conceal historical Ismaili manuscripts in the Great Mosque in Sana'a, refusing to open them to the public despite repeated Ismaili requests.

A large Ismaili community grew in Aden during the British colonial period, when Indian Ismailis of Yemeni origin settled in the port city. Well-integrated in society for decades, their position dramatically deteriorated with the rise of Salafi groups and weakening of the state during the 2011 uprising, followed by the Houthi seizure of power in 2014 then war. Al-Qaeda militants destroyed their main mosque there in late 2015 and many moved to other neighborhoods or left the city altogether. Concealing their identity has become the new norm.

The priority now must be for education to reflect the deep contribution of Ismaili Islam to Yemen's history, culture, architecture, and thought, replacing marginalization and scorn with appreciation. The critical situation of the Ismaili community in Aden must be addressed immediately by the government, which has largely established security in the city – rebuilding damaged sites, and allowing Ismailis to return to their historical neighborhoods and reopen their businesses. The authorities in both Aden and Sana'a should take measures to preserve the Ismaili cultural heritage as an integral part of Yemen's historical and contemporary social fabric, including unsealing Ismaili religious manuscripts for Ismaili scholars and researchers to access. A final resolution to the current conflict must guarantee freedom of belief not only to Ismailis but to all minority communities in Yemen.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Yemeni parties should ensure constitutional and legal provisions in any future political settlement that guarantee the rights of minorities, including freedom of opinion and belief.
- The Yemeni government should provide protection to Ismaili communities, especially in Aden, and the government should rebuild their damaged mosque and encourage the return of those who were forced to leave.
- Hate speech against Ismailis and other minorities in Yemen should be criminalized.
- Government efforts should be made in education and media to challenge traditional stereotypes about Ismailis and to promote acceptance of different religious and other groups in Yemeni society.
- Measures should be taken to preserve Ismaili cultural heritage, such as buildings and manuscripts, as part of the country's national heritage.
- Ismaili manuscripts held at the Great Mosque in Sana'a should be opened up to Ismailis and researchers.
- The international community should intensify its efforts to protect minorities in Yemen, particularly during this period of insecurity in the country's history, and put pressure on parties violating the rights of Ismailis and other minorities and punish the perpetrators.
- The UN Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to Yemen and other elements of the international community should emphasize minority rights in future negotiations to end the war and create a new political settlement.
- A legal framework and administration should be established outside current ministries – to protect minorities, take care of their interests and help them integrate and coexist with society.

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