**University of
Zurich**^{UZH}

**Zurich Open Repository and
Archive**

University of Zurich
University Library
Strickhofstrasse 39
CH-8057 Zurich
www.zora.uzh.ch

Year: 2021

Absence of Violence or Sustainable Peace? Yemen's Road to Peace – Part 1

Manea, Elham

Abstract: Peace is often defined as the absence of violence. But the mere absence of violence may not lead to sustainable peace, especially when the underlying roots of violence are not addressed. This is nowhere relevant than in Yemen, whose civil war is entering its sixth year. Sooner or later the parties in the conflict will resort to negotiation. But will the peace deal be sustainable? This paper argues that to assure a sustainable peace, Yemen must move beyond a pattern of simple conflict resolution, which has so far failed to address the historical roots of Yemen's recurrent crises, along with its intergroup grievances, and the elites' manipulation of ethnic identities.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33196/pm202101005901>

Posted at the Zurich Open Repository and Archive, University of Zurich

ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-212862>

Journal Article

Published Version

Originally published at:

Manea, Elham (2021). Absence of Violence or Sustainable Peace? Yemen's Road to Peace – Part 1. *Perspektive Mediation*, 18(1):59-65.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33196/pm202101005901>

Elham Manea

Überblick: Peace is often defined as the absence of violence. But the mere absence of violence may not lead to sustainable peace, especially when the underlying roots of violence are not addressed. This is nowhere relevant than in Yemen, whose civil war is entering its sixth year. Sooner or later the parties in the conflict will resort to negotiation. But will the peace deal be sustainable? This paper argues that to assure a sustainable peace, Yemen must move beyond a pattern of simple conflict resolution, which has so far failed to address the historical roots of Yemen's recurrent crises, along with its intergroup grievances, and the elites' manipulation of ethnic identities.

Keywords: Arab Spring, consociational democracy, peace-making, reconciliation, sustainable peace, violence.

<https://doi.org/10.33196/pm202101005901>

Absence of Violence or Sustainable Peace?

Yemen's Road to Peace – Part 1

Introduction

"Peace is the absence of violence". That was the general message of a 2018 workshop in Belfast on the conflict in Northern Ireland that this author attended. A sustainable peace there, based on meaningful reconciliation and the end of segregated communities, has yet to occur.

Power sharing has continued since the 1998 Belfast Agreement, but paramilitary violence, social tensions and conflict continue. Even today, members of the two main adversarial groups, Roman Catholics and Protestants, are living in separate communities, with segregated housing, schools, and health facilities.¹ The typical Roman Catholic youth would probably first meet his/her Protestant counterpart only around their 18th birthday, i.e. after they are done with their high school, one speaker at the workshop explained.

The peace there is a cold peace based on the principle of 'crisis-managed containment', where the 'permanent macro-crisis' was replaced with 'recurrent mini-crises'.²

Is this a basis for sustainable peace?

The question is not rhetorical. It has real implications for the peace process in many ethnic conflicts and for the effectiveness of conflict resolution. Most importantly, it has clear consequences for the lives of civilians in conflict zones. These issues are no more daunting and relevant than in Yemen's civil war, which is now entering its sixth year. Its civilians continue to shoulder the grave consequences of years of military hostilities and the harmful behaviours of various armed groups, whether state or non-state. The war is bound to come to an end. Sooner or later the parties in the conflict will resort to negotiation. But the question persists: will this peace deal be sustainable?

Conventional Peace Making and Sustainable Peace

Lack of reconciliation and the persistence of intergroup antagonism are hardly confined to the Northern Ireland

1) Morrow 2016, p. 43; McClements 2018, www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/fifty-years-on-from-civil-rights-ni-segregation-simply-not-tackled-1.3532237 (accessed September 19, 2020).

2) Morrow, p.37.

peace process. In fact some scholars of peace making and conflict resolution will argue that they are a feature of conventional efforts at peace making.

Nasia Hadjigeorgiou, for example, argues that in conventional peace making the two most common elements used to indicate a 'sustainable' and 'successful' peace are a drop in the level of violence, and the organization of 'free and fair elections'.³ In other words, as UN peace missions define a 'sustainable peace' they point to "the capacity of conflict parties to move political or economic struggles from the battlefield and into an institutional framework where disputes can be resolved".⁴

This definition is sound but it is insufficient, for two reasons. First, the institutional setting that is designed to bring a 'sustainable peace' in ethnic civil wars often cements group identities rather than dissolving them and thus lays the ground for future conflicts. Yet again, the absence of violence is merely a prelude to more 'mini-crises'.

For example, the 'consociational democracy'⁵ that was reinstated in Lebanon after its civil war (1975–1990) allowed power to be shared formally among the different religious communities, and on a more informal basis among families and clans within these communities. Power, although decentralised and inclusive, only reinforced the group identities that caused the war in the first place; it also hindered any citizen-oriented peacebuilding, and fostered a patron-client political dynamic. In fact, it has kept the state weak – as an arena of political contestation for the decentralised distribution of state resources – and has created an incentive for sectarian communities to protect and expand their own institutional autonomy.⁶

What was most striking about the peace deal in Lebanon was the absence of any reconciliation process that would address the war itself, or its historical roots, or what happened during its 15 years. Why would the parties deliberately ignore the possibility of any meaningful reconciliation – and act as if the war never happened? It was their fear of 'waking sleeping monsters'.⁷ This utter lack of reconciliation has come to haunt Lebanon today; anyone can see it in the nation's current political deadlock.

Second, to have institutions establish 'free and fair elections' is no guarantee of peace. In fact, introducing

elections prematurely may contribute to further escalation of violence.

Consider the Columbian experience. Abbey Steele and Livia Schubiger examined what happens when negotiators use policy choices to address grievances and end a conflict by deepening and enhancing democratic institutions. They found that this approach can in fact lead to the escalation of violence during the war and allow armed groups and their allies to effectively co-opt democratic institutions, undermining the meaningful participation and representation of ordinary citizens. In other words, if decentralisation is implemented under the wrong conditions, it can facilitate the capture of democratic institutions by political and criminal armed groups.⁸

Thus, as these examples show, conventional peace-making measures have yet to produce sustainable peace.

Stuart J. Kaufman goes so far as to say that the existing approaches to *ethnic civil* wars usually fail because they are based on "an inadequate understanding of how ethnic identities work, why group members mobilize for war, and how they can be mobilized for peace".⁹

» Too often diplomats and analysts assume that the parties in conflict are rational actors, who recognize the cost of war and would therefore prefer peace.

Following this assumption, they attribute the violence solely to a struggle over tangible interests and to the breakdown of institutional order. So they tend to focus on interests and institutions, and thus fail to address the 'emotion-laden symbolic politics' involved in

3) Hadjigeorgiou 2020, p. 18.

4) McAuliffe 2017, quoted in Hadjigeorgiou, *ibid.*

5) Consociationalism as a system is a "democratic system in deeply divided societies that is based on power sharing between elites from different social groups", first conceptualized in the 1960s, in particular by Arend Lijphart. See Saurugger, S. "consociationalism", *Encyclopædia Britannica*, January 7, 2016, www.britannica.com/topic/consociationalism, (accessed October 12, 2020).

6) Kingston 2012, pp. 334–336.

7) Author's trip to Lebanon, July 2005.

8) Steele / Schubiger 2018, pp. 587–589.

9) Kaufmann 2006, pp. 202–203.

defining, pursuing and discussing those interests and institutions.¹⁰

But a middle ground is possible, as we see in the third volume of *International Review of Peace Initiatives*. Those authors recognize the complex dimensions and phases of peace making and suggest an approach that creates *bridges between peacebuilding and state building*. Too often, Graeme Simpson argues, reconciliation – defined as the process of building or rebuilding relationships damaged by violent conflict – is seen as supplementary or peripheral, as an exotic distraction or utopian aspiration.¹¹

However, reconciliation has great pragmatic value as it stands at that crucial intersection between efforts at peacebuilding and at state building. Seen from this perspective, Simpson argues,

» peace-making should go beyond technocratic efforts to build the capacity of 'strong' rather than 'fragile' states;

what's needed instead is larger political endeavours to transform tainted relationships between state and society – which he calls the cultivation of 'civic trust'.¹²

Types of Violence in the MENA Region since the Arab Spring

The discussion above may seem abstract and theoretical. Yet it has significant real-life implications for the MENA regional order since the Arab Spring and for the sustainability of peace in Yemen and beyond.

The countries that experienced popular uprisings in the 2011 Arab Spring had a range of outcomes. Some countries, like Tunisia and Egypt, had a long tradition of centralised state apparatus and a strong national identity. Their outcomes were, respectively, a fragile democratisation process and a reversion to military authoritarianism.

Other countries, such as Yemen, Syria and Libya, are newer states that lack a solid national identity, and society is divided along tribal, religious sectarian, linguistic, and/or regional lines. There the outcome has been a meltdown of the political order, along with civil war and fragmentation.¹³

Why did that happen?

This author argues that, in these three countries, understanding their history of state formation is crucial to understanding their instability and civil wars. Indeed, the interaction between different types of state formation and regional context can explain several phenomena: the disintegration of countries such as Yemen, Syria and Libya; and the preservation of the Bahraini system, despite its ethnic sectarian nature. Egypt and Tunisia provide useful contrasts, given their long-established statehood (despite the shocks they are withstanding lately) and sense of national identity.¹⁴

The history of the state and its formation is key to peace making and conflict resolution for one simple reason: *we cannot understand today's conflicts without knowing the history of these conflicts and the roots of their groups' grievances.* Too often, peace processes tackling the current wars and crises in the region are stuck because they focus only on the *present*. That is, they seek to find solutions to the *current crises in their present forms, and they do not look to history*. This approach is like trying to treat the symptoms of an illness without considering its causes.

A recent paper on peace building in the MENA region accurately points out why the conflicts prevalent in the region have erupted: the key is an accumulation of many unaddressed grievances, including injustice, inequality, and the exclusion of some segments of the population. These conflicts are of a "fluid type"; they "have no easily defined front lines", or "clear beginning or end". They are "refracted across space and time; and engage multiple state and nonstate actors, domestically, regionally, and often globally".¹⁵

The paper describes the "conflict traps" in these cycles of violence. Those traps "cannot be escaped until their underlying dynamics are addressed", but a look at "the track record of previous reconstruction and peacebuilding efforts shows that they have rarely managed to permanently break conflict traps, particularly in MENA".¹⁶

10) Ibid.

11) Salter / Yousuf ibid., p. 5.

12) Ibid.

13) For more information on these states' different contexts see Manea 2015, pp. 164–165.

14) Manea, forthcoming 2022.

15) N.N., "Building for Peace: Reconstruction for Security, Equity, and Sustainable Peace in MENA", World Bank Group and German Cooperation, 2020, p. xiii; pp. 9–10.

16) Ibid, p. xiii.

Yemeni Instability and Sustainable Peace

To understand the current conflicts in the MENA region, and hence design a suitable peace process, we must consider *each context*.

The conflicts in Yemen, Syria, and Libya have one thing in common: they are ethnic in nature. That is, the historical exclusion of certain groups is based on religious, sectarian, regional or/and tribal lines. But what differs between these cases is the setting of these exclusions and the regional actors involved. Each case is individual and should be understood within its specific context.

Consider Yemen. This author conducted thirty-six online interviews between 11 June and 14 September of 2020 with a variety of Yemeni stakeholders and parties to the conflict. The interviews were conducted as a prelude to field work and archival research for a book on the Yemeni civil war. The interviewees include representatives of the Ansar Allah militia (known colloquially as the Houthis); the Southern Transitional Council; former Yemeni ministers; and representatives of Yemeni civil society and women's activists, in addition to scholars and journalists (from both Yemen and the Gulf) with expertise on the conflict and its regional setting. Two former ambassadors to Yemen, one American and one British, were interviewed for their knowledge of the transitional period that followed the Arab Spring. A variety of online tools were used, including Zoom, Skype, WhatsApp, and Imo. Some of the dimensions mentioned in this portrayal of the current conflict are shaped by these interviews.

Describing the Yemeni conflict is a difficult task, especially as its landscape and actors are changing constantly. Shifting sands: that is how the conflict looks from afar.

However, three key elements stand at the heart of the conflict. They are a power struggle within core elites, regional exclusions coupled with group grievances, and the collapse of a fragile state. If we add the regional dimension to the picture, we have a civil war between competing factions of Yemeni social and political forces, each of which is allying itself with competing regional/sectarian/tribal/Islamist groups.

There is a tendency to portray the conflict as binary: a Houthi militia¹⁷ versus an internationally recognized government operating from Riyadh; and a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The reality is anything but binary. A multiplicity of actors are involved. The regional actors are Saudi Arabia and the UAE on the one hand and Iran, Qatar and Turkey on the other. The local actors include the exiled Yemeni government, the Houthi militia, the Southern Transitional Council,¹⁸ the Sunni Islamist Islah Party and its militia, troops loyal to the assassinated former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and strong military and tribal men.

Complicating the picture is the fact that each of these actors, local and regional, are also divided amongst themselves. For example, the Yemeni Congregation for Reform (the Sunni Islamist Islah party), which is part of the Yemeni government, is divided into factions with conflicting regional loyalties: Saudi, Qatari and Turkish,

17) The Houthi militia has its roots in the rebellion that started in 2002 in the northern region of Sadaa and led to four civil wars. It takes its name from its Zaydi leader, Hussein Badraddin al-Houthi, who was killed in September 2004 and was succeeded by his brother, the current leader, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi. Historically, the Zaydi imams, who established shaky political authority in small political pockets, claimed to be the descendants of Ali Ibn Talib, the cousin of Prophet Mohammad. Translated into tribal terminology, they were members of the Adnani tribe, dominant in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula; the Quraysh, the tribe from which Mohammad descended, belonged to the Adnanis. They established themselves as a higher and closed 'class' called the Hashemite. The Al Huthi family, which led the rebellion in Sada'a, a governorate some 240 kilometers northwest of the capital Sana'a, belongs to this Hashemite tribal category. Equally significant, the northern Yemeni tribes, who also embraced Zaydism, were members of the Qahtani lineage, called arab-ariba, or the real Arabs. They claim to be descendants of Qahtan, a son of Noah, and were dominant in the southern parts of the Arabian Peninsula. Among themselves they were divided into different tribal groups, most prominent among them being the Hashid and Bakil confederations. Former president Saleh belongs to Sanhan, a clan of the Hashid. On the Adnani and Qahtani tribal groups see Manea 2005, p. 16. On Saleh's tribal affiliation see Manea 2011, pp. 94–96.

18) A southern separatist body, created in 2017 and backed by the United Arab Emirates. It has been challenging the authority of the internationally recognised government in the southern regions. For more information on the STC see Susanne Dahlgren, "The Southern Transitional Council and the War in Yemen: Consolidating Power in the Unified Southern Territories", Middle East Research and Information Project, April, 26, 2018, www.merip.org/mero/mero042618 (accessed September, 25, 2020).

although sometimes these loyalties overlap (Turkish and Qatari for example). And one can see three divisions or wings within the Ansar Allah (Houthi) militia: a military revolutionary wing, akin to the Iranian revolutionary guard; a radical religious wing; and a 'moderate wing' of young educated Zaydis.¹⁹

Saudi Arabia and its ally the UAE do not always see eye to eye on their strategy towards Yemen. One example is the UAE's partial troop withdrawal from the South in 2019 and its support for the Southern Transitional Council, which aspires to a separate Southern state.²⁰

Even Saudi Arabia does not consistently support its own Yemeni allies. For example, in the latest military confrontation between the Houthi militia and Yemeni government troops in the northeastern Maareb governorate, observers noticed that Saudi Arabia was not keen on helping its governmental allies. The governmental troops in Maareb are predominantly controlled by the Islah Party's militia, which is affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and increasingly sympathetic towards Turkey's growing regional role. Given these interests, the Kingdom would rather weaken its ally and watch it struggle than support a group sympathetic to a regional rival.²¹

Roots of the Current Yemeni Civil War

It is a messy picture. Peter Salisbury describes it as a 'chaos state', "a place where the central government has either collapsed or lost control of large segments of the territory over which it is nominally sovereign..."²²

Roots of the Current Yemeni Civil War

If we are to pin down the reasons behind Yemen's *recent* disintegration into civil war, we must consider several factors repeated by different interviewees. They all alluded to the transitional period that followed the signing of the Gulf Initiative on November 23, 2011.

The Gulf Initiative, designed by the Gulf Cooperation Council, was meant to provide Yemen a safe exit from an explosive situation. What started as a youth uprising in February 2011, calling for reform and an end to corruption, was hijacked by a core of strong military and tribal men, who saw in it a chance to get back at President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Fearing that Yemen would collapse, the initiative sought to give Yemen and Saleh a safe exit that would not rock the boat. Instead, it reproduced a government with the same core elites and

dynamics that were responsible for and benefiting from the conflict.

It called for Yemen's President Saleh to delegate his authority to his vice president Abed Rabbo Mansur Hadi and to set a 90-day period within which Hadi would call for presidential elections. And it ensured only one candidate would run for this presidential election: Hadi. It also ensured that after the vice president would be elected a president, he would be responsible for overseeing a transitional period.²³

The opposition, mainly made up of members of the old guard and parties that were part of the previous political system, would name its candidate for the position of prime minister. This would create a "national consensus government", divided on a 50/50 basis between the government and the opposition. The government would have the authority to disengage the armed forces and their rival military forces and send them back to their camps. The Government and the President would call for a national dialogue conference, which would discuss a road map for Yemen's future institutional setting, and address the country's major conflicts (including the Sadaa and Southern question), while preserving Yemeni unity.²⁴

19) Zaydism is a current of the Shiite denomination, although it was considered historically closer to the Sunni denomination. It is named after its founder Zayd Ibn Ali (died 740 A.D.). The northern region, Sadaa, is considered the power house of Zaydism. For several reasons, including the encroachment of Salafi Islam, imported from Saudi Arabia and supported by the late former president's regime, and persistent Iranian cultural expansion since the late eighties, Zaydism experienced a form of radicalization.

20) For more information on this withdrawal and its implications, see Ibrahim Jalal, "The UAE may have withdrawn from Yemen, but its influence remains strong", The Middle East Institute, February 25, 2020, www.mei.edu/publications/uae-may-have-withdrawn-yemen-its-influence-remains-strong (accessed September, 30, 2020).

21) Nagi, 2020, carnegie-mec.org/diwan/82805 (accessed September, 30, 2020).

22) For more detailed information on how the war developed see Salisbury 2017, pp. 9–11.

23) For an English translation of the text see OSESGY (Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Yemen), "Text of Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative" osesgy.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/gcc_initiative_yemen_english.pdf, (accessed October 9, 2020).

24) Ibid.

Hadi became president, a government was created, and an inclusive national dialogue took place and issued its recommendations. And yet, what happened during the period between 2012 and 2015 derailed the whole process.

Literatur

- Abdi, D.A. / Mason, S. J. A. (2019) *Mediation and Governance in Fragile Contexts: Small Steps to Peace*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, p. 2.
- Al-Ahssab, A. A. (2019) *Power Identity in Yemen: The Controversy of Politics and History*, in Arabic, Beirut: Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, p. 114.
- Carment, D. / Landry, J. / Samy Y. / Shaw, S. (2015), "Towards a theory of fragile state transitions: Evidence from Yemen, Bangladesh and Laos", *Third World Quarterly*, 36:7, p. 1317,
- Hadjigeorgiou, N. (2020) *Protecting Human rights and Building Peace in Post-Violence Societies*, Oxford: Hart p. 18.
- Kaufmann, S. J. (March 2006) "Escaping the Symbolic Politics Trap: Reconciliation Initiatives and Conflict Resolutions in Ethnic Wars", *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 202–203
- Kingston, P. "The Pitfalls of Peacebuilding from below: Governance Promotion and Local Political Processes in Postconflict Lebanon." *International Journal*, vol. 67, no. 2, 2012, pp. 334–336.
- Manea, E. (Forthcoming, 2022) *Yemeni Civil War: The Arab Spring, State Formation and Regional Rivalry*, UK: University Press of Exeter.
- Manea, E. (2015) "Yemen's Arab Spring: Outsmarting the Cunning State?", in Larbi Sadiki (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of the Arab Spring*, London: Routledge Studies on Middle Eastern Politics, pp. 164–165.
- Manea, E. (2011) *The Arab State and Women's Rights: The Trap of Authoritarian Governance*, London: Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Politics, pp. 94–96.
- Manea, E. (2005) *Regional Politics in the Gulf: Saudi Arabia, Oman and Yemen*, London: Saqi Books, p. 16.
- Manea, E. (2001), *Regional Politics in the Developing World: The Case of the Arabian Peninsula*, PhD Thesis, Zurich, p. 110.
- McAuliffe, P. (2017) *Transforming Transitional Justice and the Malleability of Post-Conflict States*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar.
- McClements, F. (June 15, 2018) "Fifty Years on From Civil Rights, North Ireland Segregation 'simply not tackled', *Irish Times*.
- Morrow, D. (August 2016) "From enemies to partners? Reconciliation in Northern Ireland", in Salter, M. / Yousuf, Z. (eds), "Transforming broken relationships: Making peace with the past", *Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives*, p. 43.
- Nagi, A. (September 2020) "The Shifting Sands of the War", *Diwan: Carnegie Middle East Center*.
- O'Neill, B. (February 2012) "Into Nations and Tribes: Yemen and AQAP", Carnegie Endowment: Sada.
- Salisbury, P. (2017) *Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order*, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House, December, pp. 9–11.
- Steele, A. / Schubiger, L. (2018) "Democracy and civil war: The case of Colombia", *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 35:6, pp. 587–589.

Kontakt

PD Dr. Elham Manea is a Privatdozentin (equivalent to associate professor) at the Political Science Institute, University of Zurich, a writer and human rights advocate. Her research focuses on countries of the Arabian Peninsula (especially Yemen), gender and women under Muslim laws, and Islamism.
manea@pw.uzh.ch

Journal: Alle bisherigen Ausgaben und Einzelartikel der pm finden Sie online unter
<https://elibrary.verlagoesterreich.at/journal/pm>

Zusammenfassung deutsch – Wolfgang Wörnhard

„Frieden ist die Abwesenheit von Gewalt“. Das war die Botschaft eines Workshops 2018, an dem die Autorin teilnahm. Aber noch heute leben die Mitglieder der beiden wichtigsten verfeindeten Gruppen, der römisch-katholischen und der protestantischen, in getrennten Gemeinschaften. Die typischen Jugendlichen lernen ihre Gegenüber der anderen Religion wahrscheinlich erst kennen, wenn sie 18 Jahre alt sind.

Es ist ein kalter Friede, denn die Versöhnung und das Ende der getrennten Gemeinschaften steht noch aus. Die „permanente Makrokrise“ wurde durch die Machtteilung im Abkommen von Belfast 1998 durch „wiederkehrende Minikrisen“ ersetzt. Ein nachhaltiger Friede ist nur zu erreichen, wenn die Wurzeln angegangen werden, die der Gewalt zugrunde liegen. Dies gilt besonders für Jemen, in dem der Bürgerkrieg

in sein sechstes Jahr geht. Irgendwann wird der Krieg zu Ende kommen und die Konfliktparteien werden auf Verhandlungen zurückgreifen. UNO-Friedensmissionen definieren einen „nachhaltigen Frieden“, wenn sich politische oder wirtschaftliche Kämpfe vom Schlachtfeld in einen institutionellen Rahmen verlagern, in dem Streitigkeiten gelöst werden können. Diese Definition ist gut, aber unzureichend, denn damit werden oft Gruppenidentitäten zementiert, anstatt sie aufzulösen. So fehlte auch im Libanon ein Versöhnungsprozess, als der Bürgerkrieg (1975–1990) mit der Wiedereinführung der „Konkordanzdemokratie“ beendet wurde. Die formelle Teilung der Macht zwischen Religionsgemeinschaften und die informelle Aufteilung der Macht zwischen Familien und Clans stärkte die Gruppenidentitäten, die den Krieg erst verursacht hatten. Der Mangel an Versöhnung sucht Libanon heute heim, das Land ist in einer politischen Sackgasse.

Eine verfrühte Einführung von Wahlen kann sogar zu einer weiteren Eskalation der Gewalt beitragen, wie sich in Kolumbien gezeigt hat. Sie kann die Vereinnahmung demokratischer Institutionen durch politische und kriminelle bewaffnete Gruppen erleichtern.

Konventionelle friedensschaffende Massnahmen hätten also noch keinen nachhaltigen Frieden gebracht. Denn es genüge nicht sich auf Interessen und Institutionen zu konzentrieren und dabei zu versäumen die „emotionsgeladene symbolische Politik“ anzusprechen, die mit der Definition, Verfolgung und Diskussion dieser Interessen und Institutionen verbunden ist. Die Versöhnung – der Prozess des Auf- oder Wiederaufbaus von Beziehung, die durch gewaltsame Konflikte beschädigt wurden – dürfe nicht nur ergänzend angestrebt werden. Sie habe einen grossen pragmatischen Wert, da sie an der entscheidenden Schnittstelle zwischen den Bemühungen um Friedens- und Staatsaufbau stehe.

Nach dieser Argumentation, in der die Autorin in ihrem englischen Originaltext zahlreiche Quellen zitiert, beschreibt sie die verschiedenen Ergebnisse, zu denen die Volksaufstände im Arabischen Frühling 2011 geführt haben. Ägypten fiel zurück in den Autoritarismus. Tunesien ist das einzige Land in der Region, das einen Übergangsprozess der Demokratisierung eingeleitet hat (noch fragil, aber als einzige Erfolgsgeschichte der

arabischen Aufstände). Andere Länder, wie Jemen, Syrien und Libyen, die neuere Staaten sind, hätten keine solide nationale Identität und die Gesellschaft sei entlang von Stammes-, religiösen, sprachlichen und/oder regionalen Grenzen gespalten. Dort sei das Ergebnis ein Zusammenbruch der politischen Ordnung und Bürgerkrieg.

Ohne das Verständnis der Geschichte der Staatenbildung in diesen Ländern, seien ihre Instabilität und Bürgerkriege nicht zu verstehen.

Die Friedensprozesse, die sich mit den gegenwärtigen Kriegen in der Region befassen, blieben zu oft stecken, weil sie versuchten, Lösungen für die gegenwärtigen Krisen in ihren gegenwärtigen Formen zu finden. Die heutigen Konflikte seien nicht zu verstehen, ohne die Geschichte dieser Konflikte und ihre ethnische Natur zu kennen, das heisst die historische Ausgrenzung bestimmter Gruppen und die Spaltung der Gesellschaft. Dabei sei jeder Fall individuell und sollte in seinem spezifischen Kontext verstanden werden.

Als Auftakt zur Arbeit an einem Buch über den jemenitischen Bürgerkrieg führte die Autorin im Sommer 2020 sechsenddreissig Interviews mit verschiedenen Akteuren und Konfliktparteien. Den Konflikt zu beschreiben, sieht sie als schwierige Aufgabe, denn seine Landschaft und seine Akteure veränderten sich ständig. Aus der Ferne sehe der Konflikt wie wandernder Sand aus.

Es ist ein Bürgerkrieg zwischen konkurrierenden Fraktionen der jemenitischen sozialen und politischen Kräfte, die sich jeweils mit konkurrierenden regionalen/ sektiererischen/tribalen/islamistischen Gruppen verbünden. Eine Vielzahl von AkteurenInnen ist involviert und diese sind, lokal und regional, auch untereinander gespalten. Es zeigt sich das Bild eines „Chaosstaates“.

Die Gründe für das jüngste Auseinanderbrechen des Jemen liegen in der Übergangszeit nach der Unterzeichnung der Golfinitiative am 23. November 2011. Was in der Zeit zwischen 2012 und 2015 geschah und was daraus zu lernen ist, um erfolgreicher als bisher auf einen dauerhaften Frieden hinarbeiten, beschreibt die Autorin im zweiten Teil, der in einer der nächsten Ausgaben veröffentlicht wird.