Yemen and the world beyond insecurity is a book of two main parts, of three chapters each. The first section is dedicated to detailing the complexities of Yemen’s trajectory towards globalization (chapter one), to State pluralism of expressions (chapter two) and to violent and armed Islamist groups (chapter three). This first section is the most well-informed, stimulating and accomplished piece of this work. It discusses, in detail, specific domestic challenges, alongside significant linkages to international relations issues, thanks to a rich use of recognised literature, and the author’s intimate knowledge of the local terrain.

The four years Laurent Bonnefoy spent in Yemen during the mid-2000s, until his expulsion in 2009, has given him the capacity to accurately reveal Yemeni social habitus, and the intricacy of its local political framework. Since 2009, he has devoted most of his time to closely observing and following international challenges related to Yemeni, and regional, security, allowing him to provide a rare and comprehensive understanding of the multiple challenges this complex nation is facing.

The author’s approach makes this book a valuable academic contribution for students and for a larger public interested in understanding the complexity of the Yemeni millenary nation. Yemen has always roused deep fascination across the world, from Herodotus’s tales, or those of the Romans referring to Yemen as “Arabia Felix” right up to the outputs of travellers, archaeologists, researchers and innumerable writers and reporters from the 19th to the early 21st centuries. However, Yemen has remained side-lined, despite its ideal strategic position, located between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Sea, and as gateway to the Red sea.

Yemen is characterized by two divided entities, the North and the South, separated by a hinterland largely unknown to European powers. Socotra Island, located off Somalia’s coast was kept out of world politics until UNESCO designated the island part of its World Heritage Centre. Between the age of antiquity and the contemporary
era, Yemen was fragmented by colonialism with two states facing each other, before their unification on 22 May 1990.

This country became unable to impose itself as an active autonomist player in the field of International relations. Instead it became the theatre of external intrusions that fed internal divisions, especially with the emergence of armed jihadi groups and the implacable US war on terror since the early 2000s.

On 26 March 2015 an Arab Saudi-led coalition launched a war against Houthi rebels, after they successfully expelled the central government from the capital Sanaa; this only worsened an already weakened state and society. However as the author argues, this war has been largely ignored by international media and the world, including the Arab world, despite more than 10 000 deaths and a disastrous humanitarian situation. This vicious circle, of external violence exacerbating the fragmentation of central authority and society, fed into the problem of finding an end to a conflict that has, for the last three and a half years, engendered multiple, secondary conflicts.

The author’s linguistic and empirical knowledge, coupled with his familiarity with theoretical international relations work, provides us an insightful and comprehensive analysis of interactions inside Yemeni society and with the external world. Therefore, this book is a useful tool for academics interested in Middle East studies, and more broadly in International relations research. Its fluid language and pedagogical conception also makes the work accessible to a larger public. The interactions of history, culture, and mechanisms of the local political framework with multiple religious, tribal and regional identities are well expressed with the analysis of international and Yemeni security risks, from its colonial period to waging of the current devastating war.

The second part of the book is, for us, less convincing even if it robustly outlines the author’s conviction that Yemen remains an active player in the globalization process despite its obvious downgrading. This section deals with migration flows (chapters 4 and 5), and also stresses cultural circulation throughout war, specifically in the context of externally exiled groups (chapter 6). Chapters 4 and 5 are particularly informative on Yemeni migrants’ interactions between the outside world and their original local provinces. These detailed descriptions are useful to understand the dynamics of how transnational relations are built between groups of Yemeni exiles settled in the Arabian Peninsula (especially the dominant communities in Saudi Arabia and in the United Arab emirates-UAE), in Eastern Africa (mainly Djibouti and Ethiopia), South-East Asia (Indonesia), more marginally in the US and the UK and recently, Egypt and Jordan.

Our frustration with this part of the book is related to the desperate efforts of the author to convince us (without success) that, despite the ongoing war, widely ignored by the world, Yemen remains an active player in the globalization process through its migrant flows, and its cultural activity. This argument could have been made more effective through references to political economy literature; but as a French scholar Bonnefoy suffers from the lack of a solid political economy background in French social sciences. Indeed, this field constitutes a critical academic basis from which to analyse the significance of any region or country in the globalization process. This aspect could have been enhanced with more references to the well-established American and British political economy literature.
Bonnefoy describes, with details and precision, Saudi Arabia’s influence and role in Yemeni domestic politics since the era of Ibn Saud, the founder of the modern Kingdom. It is therefore quite surprising to notice that nothing substantial can be seen on the UAE’s role, especially since the war on Yemen was launched in March 2015. The strong man of the Federation, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan (MBZ), is also a mentor to the young Saudi crown prince, Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS) who is too inexperienced to lead the Yemen war alone. MBZ appears to be the main driver of this war, even if he follows his own agenda with massive financial and logistical investment in security facilities. The UAE has deployed this in southern Yemen ports and Socotra Island, in order to project and affirm its strategic depth in the Arabian Sea, to find an alternative to the Straights of Hormuz that is under Iranian and Omani control. However this objective, largely contested in South Yemen and probably seen with high suspicion by Riyadh, cannot be fulfilled with full cooperation and entente with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). This could explain the zealous efforts of Abu Dhabi in helping its Saudi ally in defeating the Houthis in al-Hodeïda port and city. Indeed, the (KSA) is concentrating much more on trying to defeat or significantly weaken Houthi rebels, as they have directly threatened Saudi territory through hundreds of missile strikes. Saudi authorities consider this war as an existential one: their own national security is challenged by Houthis that they consider as a militia under Iranian control.

This missing aspect of Bonnefoy’s work, and the absence of perspectives of the post-war period, is also a matter of frustration even if this prudent attitude seems to be wise. Nevertheless, even if Saudis have in the past intervened in Yemen, current levels of intervention are unprecedented, especially in the case of UAE, a smaller GGC State (Gulf Cooperation Council). This is a clear sign of a dramatic turning point in geopolitics of the sub-region. The GCC was the most close-knit and secure in the Arab world but is becoming more uncertain than ever.

This spectacular transformation of a resilient sub-region aligned with the US international policy agenda into an active, interventionist, regional and more independent player has had a parallel effect to the trauma of the Arab spring on the conservative dynastical Arab Gulf monarchies, as shown with the intervention in Bahrein to counter the popular uprising in March 2011; however, the war launched in March 2015 in Yemen was the most obvious mark of this new aggressive interventionism. This was also confirmed with the Qatari crisis on 5th June 2017 when a boycott was imposed on Qatar, mainly by Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, with the support of Egypt and Bahrein, which is under Saudi tutelage since March 2011. This dimension, which prevails in the regional power balance in the Arabian Peninsula, also deserved a more substantial development.

These remarks do not diminish the undisputable quality of this remarkable academic work which is a major contribution to the already rich Middle East studies area literature.

It also explores critical challenges and issues of any relegated state in a globalized world. The author is particularly conclusive when he strongly focuses on the alarming deprivation of the Yemeni eco-system, with water shortages aggravated by collateral war damages, and an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe with the worst wide-

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2 Abu Dhabi is the leading and richest Emirate of the Federation that comprises seven emirates among them Dubai, the second pillar of the federal state.
spread cholera epidemics and malnutrition since last century. He shows how Yemen became a classic case-study that embodies the perils in reducing it to poverty and isolation in a globalized world, especially since this country crosses the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The other strongly convincing argument of this book relates on the over exploitation by the international community of the Yemeni terrorist threat that highly endangers world security. The author considers that the only matter that kept Yemen a topic of interest in International relations was the context of the US led anti-terror war. It became a leitmotiv from the time that the destroyer USS Cole was attacked in Aden port on 2000 resulting in the death of 17 US soldiers. Then, 9/11terrorists attacks in the US under the command of the Saudi Usama Ben Laden, of Yemeni origin, leader of Al Qaida, and the reforming in Yemen of Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in January 2009 (after being defeated in Saudi Arabia on 2007) pushed the US to give priority to the war on terror. It resurfaced with the Charlie Hebdo terror attacks in Paris in January 2015 led by the Kouachi brothers under AQAP command.

In parallel, the US became more interventionist in Yemen domestic policy, trying to reshape the defence and security apparatus under the Obama administration, although failing to achieve it. Washington’s misunderstanding of local politics and social traditions contributed to worsen the progressive deterioration of the security apparatus.

In this context of advanced fragmentation of the security apparatus, the Yemeni revolutionary process came in early March 2011. The process towards democratization and national dialogue during 2013 failed and gave an opportunity to the Houthi rebels that already capitalized their legitimacy as serious opponents to the corrupt and ill-governed Central state through their wars against it between 2004 and 2010. However Houthi ascendency during the revolution became only possible with its strategic alliance with its previous worst enemy, the former president Ali Abdallah Saleh, who finally agreed to resign in November 2011 but maintained his immunity, and political and military influence.

The duality between North and South Yemen and the weakness of national institutions due to the polymorphic dimension of the State also reverberates on Yemen diplomacy. This is especially true since the Houthis built a parallel council of government to that of President Hadi, who settled his government in exile between Aden and Riyadh, as the Houthis had occupied the capital Sanaa (September 2014). Fragmentations inside the legitimate government worsened when southern secessionists helped by Abu Dhabi attacked their position in Aden.

These many dimensions of the conflict exacerbate confusion and complicate any solution to find an exit-ending to this stalemate. This reality gives credit to the author when he strongly opposes the idea of presenting the Yemen conflict as a simple sectarian division between Zaydi Shiites and Sunnites or a rivalry between KSA and Iran.