

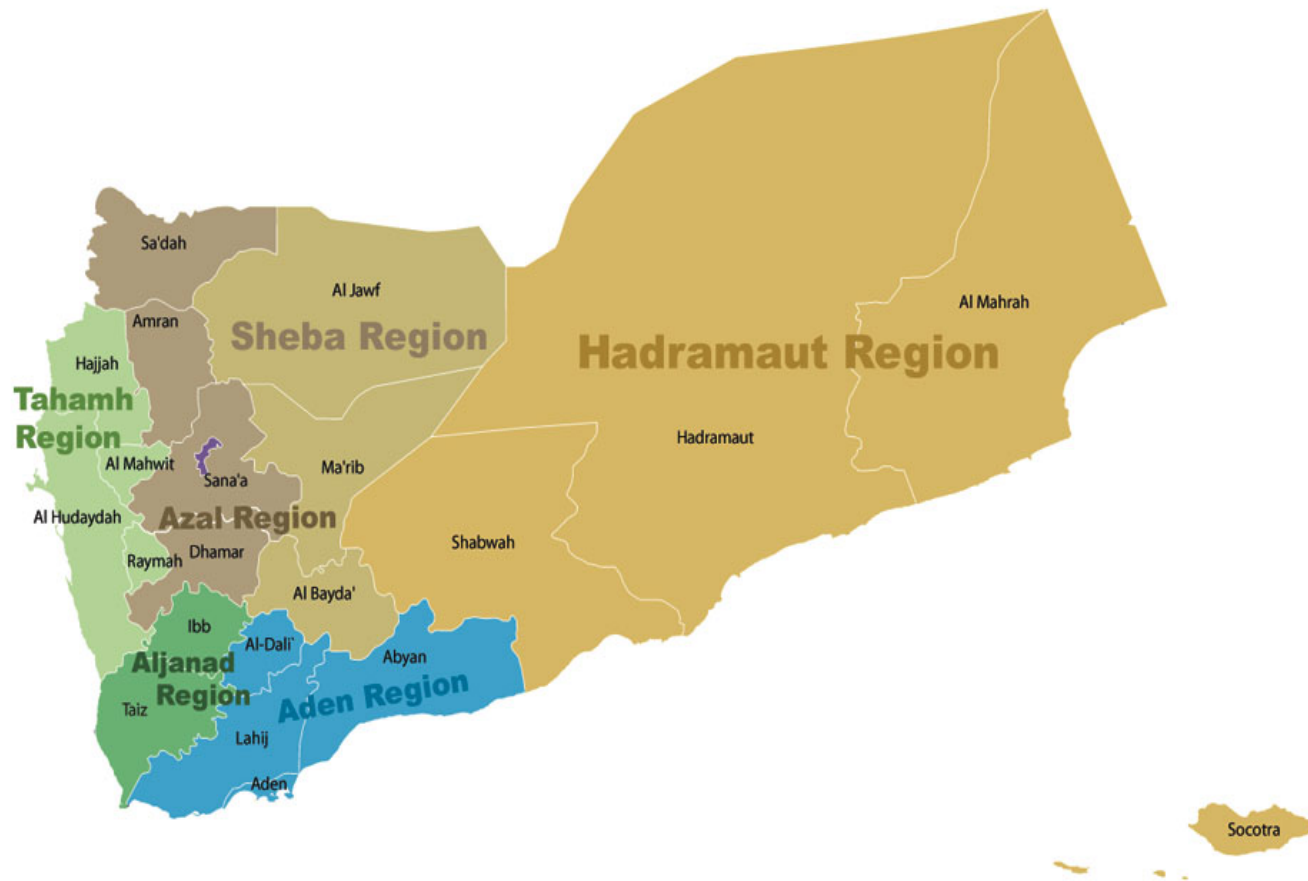
Symposium *Servant-Leadership and Societal Engagement*  
**Serving Communities: Reflections on the Hadhrami and Quaker**  
**Business Leaders** by Prof. Dr. Nabil Sultan 8 May 2017



## Research Study

- Based on a research paper entitled “**Earning Success and Respect: The Hadhrami Business Experience**”.
- Case Study involving three successful Saudi Arabian businessmen (of Hadhrami origin).

## Region of **Hadhramaut** (Map of Yemen)



## Migration

- **Motivation for migration:**
  - Poverty (Hadhramaut is largely an arid land)
  - Political Strife (tribal in-fighting)
- **Target of Hadhrami migration (1750s - 1960s)**
  - South East Asia (India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore)
  - Aden (which boomed due to the opening of the Suez canal in 1869).
  - East Africa
  - Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf (since 1930s)

## History and Traits

- A religiously conservative society.
- Historically a centre of excellence for Islamic teaching.
- Hadhramis are known for being:
  1. Successful businessmen
  2. Thrifty
  3. Patient and hardworking
  4. Trustworthy
  5. Respectful of their elders (and authority)
  6. Charitable

## **Hadhrami Legacy (Singapore - 19<sup>th</sup> century)**

- They owned substantial swathes of land and traded in clothes and a wide range of goods such as spices and tobacco.
- They were well respected among the Malay/Muslim community for their religious piety and social responsibility.
- Gangsters had a code of never bothering Arabs (meaning the Hadhramis).
- The famous Al-Kaf Hadhrami family in Singapore created bequests to support the distribution of food to needy local families every Thursday or Friday.

## Hadhrami Legacy (Malaysia and Indonesia – 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century)

- In Malaysia they played a prominent role in ending the Thai occupation of the sultanate of Kedah.
- In Indonesia (Jakarta) a group of wealthy Hadhrami businessmen and property owners established in 1901 *Jamiyyat Al-Khayr* (**Benevolent Society**).
- A similar group (in the same city) established the **Arab Society for Reform and Guidance** (*Jamiyyat Al-Islah wa Al-Irshad Al-Arabiyya*) which exists to this day.

## Hadhrami Legacy (Hadhramaut)

**Sayyid Abubakr Al-Kaf** (a successful entrepreneur and philanthropist who returned from Singapore to Hadhramut in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century)

- Made donations to the poor
- Improved city slums
- Constructed roads
- Introduced small English automobiles (transported by camel across the plateau and assembled in the valley),
- Built elaborate guesthouses equipped with modern furniture, food and servants



## Hadhrami Legacy (Hadhramaut)

### His greatest achievement

- Established peace among the two most powerful (and warring) tribal factions (Al-Katheri الكثيري and Al-Kaeti القعيطي) which lasted for generations.
- According to Pike (1940), this event was “**the greatest humanitarian achievement in the modernisation program of Hadhramaut**”.

## Sayyid Abubakr Al-Kaf (Knighted in 1954 in Aden)



## The Three Hadhrami Businessmen (**Case Study**)

1. Dr. Ghazi Binzagr (employs 7,000 – 10,000 people)
2. Dr. Abdulla Marei Binmahfouz (US\$ 1.6 bn)
3. Dr. Yasin Bin Abdulrahman Al-Jefri (Insurance and Re-insurance business)

## Interview Questions

1. Hadhramis are renowned for being successful people. Do you share this view? Explain why.
2. Hadhramis are often described as thrifty (sometimes even miserly) people. Yet many successful Hadhrami businessmen are also altruistic and charitable. How can both (seemingly opposing) qualities exist in the Hadhrami character?
3. Hadhramis are renowned for their ability to integrate in the communities they migrate to and settle in (as happened in countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia). Does this integration have an impact on the Hadhrami's character and way of life?
4. Do young Hadhramis differ from old Hadhramis? If so, why?

## Summary of Responses (from Case Study)

- Success depended on Hadhrami's way of life and religious upbringing
- Humility
- Social fabric
- Attachment to the "land of opportunity"
- Hard work
- Assimilation into the host country
- Discipline (*iltizam* التزام)
- Thrift
- Love for benevolence (*Khayr* خير)
- Young generation of Hadhramis (not like their forefathers!)

## **British Quakers (Religious Society of Friends)**

- Religious community
- Successful businessmen
- Renown for their honesty
- Helped their own community (built schools, colleges, apprenticeships)
- **George Cadbury**
- **Joseph Rowntree**

## Rowntree

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Rowntree employed over **four thousand workers**.

The Company provided its workers them with a **library, free education, a works magazine, a social welfare officer, a doctor, a dentist and a pension fund**, and built a **model village** called New Earswick)

When **Joseph Rowntree** died in 1926 he left **three trusts** (to become four later) that survived until the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They were devoted to social change, political reform, peace and social justice (King, 2014)

## Connection between commercial success and religious faith

**Weber** (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*) and **Tawney** (*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*) “the origins of capitalism or the success of the Industrial Revolution lie in the religious doctrines of Protestantism” **King** (2014).

**Miller** and **Ewest** (2010) contend that there exists a relationship between religious beliefs and economic agents and their activities..

This is because **religious values continue to have an impact on the economy and in the workplace**, as was suggested early on by Weber and Tawney.



**The Story of Leo (set in a religious context!)**

**Journey to the East (Hermann Hesse)**



## Eastern Perspective

In their book “**Servant-leadership across cultures**”, **Trompenaars and Voerman** (2009) state:

“An Eastern perspective ...tells you that a (servant) leader needs to...**work as part of the community** instead of putting focus only on individuals”.

## Serving Others and Faith

The idea of “**servant**”, according to Greenleaf, is deep in **Judeo-Christian heritage**. The concordance (i.e., index) to the Standard Revised Version of the Bible lists over 1,300 references to nouns and verbs such as “**servant**”, “**serve**” and “**service**” (**Greenleaf, 1998**).

The notion of helping and serving others is also manifested in other religions as well, e.g., Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism (**Trompenaars and Voerman, 2009**).

## Servant Leaders

“Servant-leaders are functionally superior because they are closer to the ground – they hear things, see things and their intuitive insight is exceptional. Because of this they are **dependable** and **trusted**” (**Greenleaf, 1977**).

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**Thank you.**

## Questions for Debate

Do you have to belong to a religious faith to engage with and serve society?

Do you have to be a servant leader first before you can engage with or serve society?

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