The early 1920s was by any account a bad time to belong to a spirit possession cult in the British Settlement of Aden located in modern Yemen. Zar and Tambura were fixtures of public spiritual space from the earliest days of the British occupation if not before. By the 1920s, however, elements of the
Settlement’s more ‘respectable’ Muslim population, spurred on by advocates of scripturalist religious reform, found these groups to be at best a public nuisance and at worst serious moral dangers. As a result, they spared no effort to see such practices banished from the community. Part of a larger book project on Muslim community and imperial rule titled *Imperial Muslims* this presentation is an examination of the place of Zar and Tambura in Aden’s religious public sphere. In particular, it unpacks the strategies employed by these socially disadvantaged practitioners to defend their traditions and communal standing in the face of nascent scripturalist reform during the period between the two World Wars.