# CHAPTER 9. Forging a National Identity in Yemen's South:

## Social Change between Foreign Interference and a Fragmented Nation

> "[Only about] a hundred years ago, the divisions of Arabia were expressed in loosely defined geographical terms – al-Sham, 'the North,' al-Yaman, 'the South,' [...] and in terms of ancestral origin. A particular region might have developed a cohesive cultural identity, as Yemen did early on, but there were no fixed borders. 'Territory equaled sphere of influence'; boundaries were as mobile as people."[1]
>
> Tim Mackintosh-Smith, British Author living in Sana'a, Yemen

## 1. On the Relevance of Identities for this Study

This chapter grapples with a regularly ignored aspect of foreign policy – the "receiving" side of the external actors' efforts, the host state. The analysis of South Yemen's society at this pivotal political turning-point of Yemen's modern history aims to overcome the tendency of similar case studies that often degrade the "host country" to a static structural element or passive "pawn" of the international "game." Only by taking into account the specifics of the "receiving side of foreign policy" and by including the "host" into the analysis as an autonomous actor, is assessment of the impact by internal and external influences on these societies, actors, actions and ideas possible. In turn, only then can the "limits of foreign policy" in theory and praxis be explored and understood comprehensively.

The political analysis of this chapter focuses on the struggle for independence in South Yemen in the late 1950s and early 1960s – a time when new external actors expressed their interest in the British Crown Colony, most prominently the GDR and the Soviet Union. The radical National Liberation Front's main goal was

**1** | Mackintosh-Smith, 2007 (1997), 30.

consolidate the socio-politico preconditions needed to seize power and establish *their* idea of a Marxist state in accordance with the concept of socialist state- and nation-building. How and why did a revolutionary Arab regime adopt Marxism-Leninism as their state ideology, even though there did not exist any other Marxist state in the region? The answer to this question is first detected in the emergence of a new political identity in South Yemen's urban center Aden, a highly dynamic social environment, and second in the changes of identities among the rural population of the "tribal space" in South Yemen. The following depiction of Yemeni society at the beginning of the GDR's involvement in the country is based on an approach to identities defined in terms of "spheres of influence" and "ancestral origin"[2] and focuses on the overlapping, sometimes conflicting, sometimes mutually enhancing identities and how they stifled or enhanced social change by supporting or resisting internal and external forces. Thus, instead of merely describing the society "on the other end" of the GDR's international activities, the analysis interprets the findings in the light of the correlation between the "responsiveness of identities" and social change, as introduced in Chapter 3's "Analytical Approach."

To use "identity" as an analytical category in International Relations has become quite common over the last two decades and has even been integrated into a recent analysis of Yemen itself. Unfortunately, this analysis by Stephen W. Day "Regionalism and Rebellion in Yemen" approaches "identity" on the national level similarly to how Samuel Huntington applied the concept to the international level.[3] For Day, "identity" is something static, resilient to internally or externally induced change. Based on his hypothesis of "Yemeni Regionalism," Day defines regional divisions as the decisive determinants of people's (political) identity[4] in Yemen, as they are "far more significant than the relatively superficial north-south boundary drawn by the British and Ottoman empires in the early 1900s."[5] This approach has to be rejected as oversimplified.[6] First, even though Day rightly denies the north-south divide to be the major source of identification, the divide remains one of the most relevant sources of positive and negative political and social identification to this day. As Brehony has clarified in his narrative of the PDRY's history, before unification, the leaders of both Yemens always considered the North and the South as *shaṭrayn*, as two halves of one country that were supposed to unite one day.[7] Today, two decades later, only time will tell

**2** | Mackintosh-Smith, 2007 (1997), 30. On the role of "origin" (Arabic: aṣl) with regard to tribal identities, also see: Dahlgren, 2000, 6.

**3** | Huntington, 1993; 1996. For a critical account on Huntington's conceptualization of identity see: Salter, 2002.

**4** | Lapid/Kratochwil (ed.), 1996.

**5** | Day, 2013, 7.

**6** | On the oversimplified nature of Stephen W. Day's approach see: Petouris, 2013.

**7** | Brehony, 2013, Introduction.

whether the recently re-emerged distinct southern identity can be reconciled with what some southerners today consider "northern occupation,"[8] or finally be integrated in a unified Yemeni identity. Thus, the "north-south divide" clearly has to be considered equally relevant as other codes of Yemeni identification. As shown in the sub-chapter "Identity, Nation-Building and Social Change" of this study, identities may not be perceived as unchanging constants that feed from only one source. Even artificially created social divides, like census categories or borderlines, may develop a meaning of their own, due to people adapting their to the reality of day-to-day circumstances, as shown by many studies concerned with "identity politics."[9] Thus, regional ties are an important determinant, but neither the only nor the decisive factor for a people's political identification. All in all, Day's understanding of "identity" simply appears to be to too rigid to include the multi-layered character of Yemeni loyalties.

The following chapter first offers an overview of the historic external influences relevant to modern Yemen's history and depicts the modern Yemeni nation-state as a consequence of both external intervention and internal Yemeni strife. Second, Yemeni tribal identities are contrasted with the emerging urban identity in the city of Aden, while illuminating the role of British presence during the change. Collective identities are characterized along three ideal types of collective identity coding as introduced by Eder et alia: "primordial, traditional and universalistic/cultural."[10] With regard to this approach, the major focus rests on the ambiguity between the overlapping "primordial-traditional" identity coding of the tribes on the one hand, and "universalistic/cultural" coding of an evolving urban population on the other. This division is identified as one of the major reasons for the emergence of a distinct identity of "*the* urban Adeni" in South Yemen as opposed to Yemeni tribal-regional identities. Accordingly, it is expected to produce an effective framework for interpreting the emergence of the only Marxist state in Arabia. The chapter lastly explores the impact of two supposedly contradictory ideological concepts, Arab nationalism and socialism, on the decisive political actors in South Yemen and how these concepts finally merged into, or rather were consumed by, Marxism-Leninism and its most fervent advocate in the Arab world, the National Liberation Front and future Yemeni Socialist Party.

**8** | Dresch, 2000, 150.

**9** | Nobles, in: Eisenberg/Kymlicka, 2011, 31-51.

**10** | Eder et al., 2003, 25-34.

## 2. From Tribal Lands to a Divided Yemen: A History of Foreign Interference

Before its unification in the early 1990s, Yemen had never been a "nation-state" in the modern sense. However, and as opposed to much of the Arab world, the concept of the "state" is not new or alien to Yemen, neither today nor in its ancient past.[11] Landmarks such as the Marib Dam, which was built about 2500 years ago by the Sabateans, have served as sources of identification for

> "those Arabs who trace their ancestry back beyond the time when nationalities were invented, to Qahtan, son of the Prophet Hud, great-great-grandson of Sam and progenitor of all southern tribes."[12]

The political separation of Yemen's traditionally tribal society between 1962-63 and 1990-94, however, appended a new, artificial source of identification for Yemenis, induced by external interference in the region. The following section connects the geostrategic characteristics of modern Yemen to the motivations of the two powers that dominated the region in the past and, more or less, created this divide in Yemen: the Ottoman and the British empires. South Yemen's geographic position was the major reason that determined Ottoman and British interest and among the priority interests of the Soviet Union as well. Thus, this chapter begins with the "geopolitical" relevance of South Yemen and its "geographic identity."

### 2.1 The Shared History of "Geopolitics" and International Relations

Even though the term "geopolitics" has been radically redefined and reframed since the end of the Cold War, the idea that geographic factors determine power distribution in international relations remains a focal point in international politics. Introduced by Rudolf Kjellén in 1899, the term "geopolitics" swiftly became a trendy concept in international politics at the time. During and after WWI, "geopolitics" was established as the basic pattern of foreign policy strategy in theory and praxis, as it was regarded as one of the most comprehensive approaches to explain power politics. In its most radical interpretation, it was used to justify dominance and subjugation of peoples in the Global South by colonial powers and later emerged as a decisive analytical tool of foreign policy analysts under the German National Socialist regime. As a consequence, Atkinson and Dodds speak of a "shameful category"[13] in the field of geography. Nonetheless, the interrelation of human geography and politics cannot be denied outright: A nation-state's endowment with regard to its geographic position, natural resources

**11** | Ayubi, 1995, 4.

**12** | Mackintosh-Smith, 2007 (1997), 30.

**13** | Atkinson/Dodds, 2002, 1.

and level of education does determine its scope of action in the international realm to a significant extent. The division between "hard" and "soft facts" of a country's availability of resources remains part of any analysis of foreign policy today, even without the explicit label of "geostrategic" factors. After the end of the Cold War, constructivists finally began to critically reframe a concept they regarded as overly static. Following Ó Tuathail, this study agrees that geopolitics "cannot be abstracted from the textuality of its use,"[14] and thus includes geopolitical factors only in relation to their historical context and political relevance, interpreting them as a tool of foreign policy representations and justifications.

## 2.2 Yemen's Geostrategic Relevance: Past and Present

Throughout history very different external actors have shown an interest in the remote place that is Yemen. Over the past decade, the unified state has gained a reputation as a "safe harbor" for terrorism: Al-Qaeda seized the opportunity of increasing internal turmoil in the country and chose to establish a new foothold for itself in the Middle East. When the Saudi and Yemeni branches of al-Qaeda[15] merged to form "al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula" (AQAP) in 2009,[16] public opinion and the media tended to interpret the rise of the terrorist network in light of Osama bin Laden's family ties to Wadī Hadramaut.[17] Despite the symbolic meaning, the expansion of Al-Qaeda rather is in large part due to Yemen's geostrategic determinants. Al-Shishanī, a researcher of the "Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research" points out the worth of Yemen for al-Qaeda in 2007[18] by referring to Syrian Abu Musa'ab al-Surī'' s[19] book, "The Responsibility of Yemenī People toward Muslim Holy Shrines and Wealth" of 1999. Apart from rugged, mountainous terrain, as well the seemingly infinte plains and deserts combined with weak infrastructure, for al-Surī the rebellious and martial spirit of the Yemenī people as well as their poverty is what distinguishes Yemen as "a

**14** | Toal (Ó Tuathail) 1996, 65.

**15** | Transcription: al-Qā'eda; English: The Basis.

**16** | Masters/Laub, 2013.

**17** | Arabic: Wadī Ḥaḍramaut. Bin Laden's father Muhammad bin Awad bin Laden was born in "Wadi Douan in the Hadhramawt [sic!]" and moved to Saudi Arabia in the 1950s, in: Bin Ladin [sic!] family and Usama bin Laden, in: Burrowes, 2010, 56.

**18** | Al-Shishani, 17th of January 2013, in: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research.

**19** | Abu Musa'ab al-Surī' writes under the pseudonym of Omar Abdul Hakeem. Al-Surī was released from Syrian prison in February 2012. He is known to be one of the main advocates of "leaderless jihad" that demands the formation of cells without linking up with al-Qaeda's global network. He currently is considered one of the most influential ideologists of al-Qaeda and other jihadist movements, see: Flade, in: Die Welt, 14th of February 2013; On al-Surī's background also see: Said, 2015, 35-44.

strong natural bastion for the people of Arab Peninsula, if not for the whole of Middle East."[20] A fellow-traveller of bin Laden since the 1980s, al-Surī currently is considered one of the most influential ideologues of the network. The impact of his comments on Yemen's potential as a long-term base of operation for al-Qaeda must not be underestimated.

While the "soft facts" of Yemen's geostrategic position play an equally important role for al-Qaeda today as the "hard facts," earlier power actors were almost exclusively interested in Yemen's geographic position between Europe, Africa, and Asia. Both before and after the dawn of aviation, the southern tip of the Arab Peninsula provred to be a key economic and military outpost due to its strategic location near the Bab al-Mandab, the gate to the Red Sea on the western coast of the former YAR. In addition, it boasted, in a perfect location, a natural port in the south – Aden.[21] Once called the "eye of Yemen"[22] and to this day the major urban center in the south, Aden presents itself as "a magnificent natural fortress:"[23] The town center is nestled within the crest of an inactive volcano, almost fully surrounded by a semi-circle of mountain slope and rock-face which gave the downtown its name, "Crater." From the ocean, the entry to the port is guarded by a second volcanic peninsula, home of "Little Aden," and the rocky Sirah Island,[24] almost blocking the settlement from view when approached by sea.

The eye of the Ottoman Turks eventually fell on the green and humid coastline south of the holy sites of Mecca and Medina,[25] from which coffee, the "black gold" of the highlands, was shipped to Europe. After landing in Moch by the Red Sea in 1526,[26] the Ottomans were able to fight their way east until the Yemeni imam's son halted their expansion at the mountain stronghold Thula. From that point on, the northern Yemeni highlands remained a continuous nuisance for the Ottoman Empire. The costs of upholding Ottoman rule near the Yemeni tribes almost exceeded the benefits of access. Nonetheless, Yemen's produce and its coastline appeared to be too valuable for the Ottomans to give up – even after the

**20** | Al-Shishani, January 17 2013, in: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research.

**21** | Shaharam, Adelphi Paper No.157, 1980, in: The Int. Institute for Strategic Studies (Ed.), 301; Linde, 1987, 1.

**22** | Burrowes, 2010, 10.

**23** | Gavin, 1975, 2.

**24** | Aden, Aden Colony and the Port of Aden, in: Burrowes, 2010, 10.

**25** | Ottoman expansion to the holy sites of Islam under Selim I, in: Houarani, 2003, 283f; Karpat, 2000, 241ff; Peri, 2001, 45.

**26** | Masters, Bruce, "Yemen and the Ottoman Empire," in: Ágoston/Masters, 2009, in: Modern World History Online.

British decided to secure the port of Aden for the Crown and thus limit Ottoman expansion to the south.[27]

> "My British colleague asked me why Aden was important for the GDR. According to him, there was not much to gain apart from stones. I answered with yet another question: What had Great Britain hoped to gain there for over 130 years [of their occupation]?"
> (Günther Scharfenberg, East German ambassador to the PDRY from 1972 to 1978)

The English East India Company was the first to set foot on future British soil, long before any troops were to arrive. In 1609 the Company landed in Ottoman Mocha[28] and about two centuries later, London officially expressed its interest in the Crater and the surrounding hinterland: "As early as 1825 the British Consul-General [...] had begun warning Muhammad Ali Pasha[29] against interfering with Aden."[30] Gavin, who published one of the most detailed works on the British presence in southern Arabia prior to 1959, suggests that the Ottoman expansion to the Bab al-Mandab probably had not been of great concern to the British, "[b]ut the establishment of a first-rate power so near to India as Aden"[31] would have posed a major threat to British trade routes. Furthermore, a refueling station between Suez and Bombay at the time was desperately needed and thus British economic interests coincided with regional power politics. In January 1839, "[t]he British flag was hoisted and Aden became the first colonial acquisition of Queen Victoria's reign."[32] The British had arrived at the Bab al-Mandab.

The expansion of the Ottoman sphere of influence in the northern part of Yemen in 1872 was followed by an agreement with the British on separate spheres of influence that was set at the "Anglo-Ottoman line" of 1904, the future demarcation between North and South Yemen.[33] Clearly, the Crown had no interest in the allowing the Ottomans, the other major foreign power in the region, too establish themselves too close to Aden - not least due to the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. However,

**27** | Kuehn, 2011, 9; 46.

**28** | In 1728 the Sultan of Lahj separated his territory including Aden from Zaidi influence in the north, and about a century later the British East India Company was able to establish intense economic relations. Blumi, FN 8, in: Al-Rasheed/Vitalis, 2004, 115; Faroughy, 1947, 50; Mackintosh-Smith, 2007 (1997), 31; Willis: in: Al-Rasheed, 2004, 121.

**29** | Muḥammad Alī Pasha had been Wāli (Governor) and self-declared Khedive (Eng. Viceroy) of Egypt and is considered the "founding father" of modern Egypt. See: Fahmy, 2000 (1998), esp.179 and Dresch, 2000, 9.

**30** | Gavin, 1975, 26.

**31** | Ibid., 26.

**32** | Ibid., 1.

**33** | Burrowes, 2010, 275; Ismail/Ismail, 1986, 11; Koszinowski, Thomas, Jemen, in: Nohlen/Nuscheler (ed.), 2003, 366f; Mackintosh-Smith, 2007 (1997), 31.

London did not have to worry about the Ottoman Empire's influence in the region for long. The Ottoman reign in Yemen never fully penetrated the country to begin with[34] and early in the 20th century the Ottoman Empire gradually disintegrated due to power struggles within. Muhammad Ali Pasha and his successors in Egypt ascended from a mere nuisance to serious competition for the central power of the Ottoman Turks. Over time Egypt gained relative autonomy from Ottoman central rule and in combination with secessionist movements motivated by ethnic, religious, and political differences between rulers and ruled all over the Ottoman territory, the Ottoman Empire gradually fell apart.

In the Empire's weakest hour, Zaidi Imam Yahia gained independence for his Mutawakilite Kingdom of Yemen[35] and in doing so, definitively laid down the boundaries between north and south in 1934. The Zaidi teachings legitimized Yahia's reign based on his ancestry to the Prophet Muhammad[36] and depictions of him as "the embodiment of Prophetic authority by means of erudition and symbolic acts centering on prayer, generosity, and the banishment of evil."[37] As a consequence, Yahia, the religious leader of one of the oldest Shiite dynasties, was able to fight the foreign invaders with the support of the legend of the rightful ruler defending against illegitimate occupation.[38] To secure the status quo, Yahia then followed a path of extreme conservatism. The King's authoritarian style of leadership left little room for any social change in his realm. Over the decades Yahia had thoroughly prepared his son Ahmad as his successor[39] - even though Zaidi rule traditionally had not been legitimized through direct lineage, but through the combination of political merit and noble ancestry from the family of the Prophet.

After Yahia was assassinated in old age, people hoped for a leader more open to the outside world. Ahmad, however, followed his father's well-trodden paths: the father had tried to seal off his realm from outside influences while simultaneously upholding a *Schaukelpolitik* between Washington and Moscow. The son followed the same strategy. After Ahmad had renewed the trade agreement of 1928 with the Kremlin in 1955[40], the Yemeni Kingdom received substantial financial aid and

**34** | Faroughy, 1947, 51; Ismail/Ismail, 1986, 11.

**35** | Arabic: zayīdī; Imām al-Ḥādī Yahiā 'ibn al-Ḥusein; al-mamlaka al-mutawwakilīya al-yamanīya.

**36** | Arabic: Muḥammad.

**37** | Vom Bruck, 2005, 1.

**38** | For more details about the back and forth between the Ottomans the British, and the various rulers between the coast and mountain area during WWI and after see: Dresch, 2010, 11 and 28

**39** | Arabic: Aḥmad. Dresch, 2000, 44.

**40** | Braun, 1981, 35.

probed possible relations with the GDR.[41] After a short intermezzo as a member of Egyptian Nasser's United Arab Republic (UAR), Ahmad feared he would be overpowered by Cairo's new strength and again put out feelers to the "West."[42] In doing so, the Kingdom managed to maintain the necessary distance from both sides of the Cold War while keeping the social changes in Aden at bay. In the meantime, Ahmad tentatively initiated minor structural reforms to soothe public opinion while upholding the country's isolation. But he clearly underestimated the political changes taking place in the region and their impact on the Yemeni people. Baby steps seemed to accelerate political events by adding to the pressure within the tight limits of Ahmad's control. Numerous murder attempts demonstrate the widespread dissatisfaction with his reign and monarchy.

When Imam Ahmad finally died of natural causes in September 1962, his son al-Badr was not able to prevent the "Free Officers" under Abdallah al-Sallāl from seizing power through a military "coup d'état." The short-lived imam fled the scene and mobilized supporters of the Zaidi lineage. What followed were five years of civil war between republicans and royalists backed by Nasser's Egypt and the Saudi kingdom until Cairo's defeat in the Six-Day War of 1967 forced Egypt to agree to a mutual withdrawal. Naturally, the years of ongoing war in the north had a significant impact on developments in the south: In fall 1963, violent resistance against British occupation erupted and in the end forced a British pullout four years later.

## 3. Determining a Yemeni identity in the South

In their introductory chapter on South Yemen's social structure, Ismail and Ismail emphasize its complexity and the diversity of its origins and rulers in a land that had always attracted external interest, but upheld its isolation due to the "rugged nature" of both the terrain and its people. However, the two authors also identify "a common denominator running through the complex social history of South Yemen [...] – the network of kinship, clan ties and social identity known as tribalism."[43] The following chapter aims to identify the major characteristics of

**41** | Besuch des Kronprinzen des Königreichs Jemen 1956 in Ost-Berlin, in: Kronprinz des Königreichs Jemen, Emir Seif el-Islam Mohammed el-Badr, vom 25. Juni bis 2. Juli 1956 in Berlin, in: DzAP der Reg der DDR III, 1956, 687; Besuch des Ministers für Post-, Telegrafen- und Telefonwesen des Königreiches Jemen, Qadi Abdulla Ben Ahmed el Hagri, 1961, in: Chronik, in: DzAP der Reg der DDR IX, 1962, 452.

**42** | Hare (Kairo) an State Department, 19.3.1959: FRUS 1958-1960, XII, Nr. 368, in: Berggötz, 1998, 311.

**43** | Ismail/Ismail, 1986, 5. The authors describe three social strata: the tribal units, the "religious sheikhs and town-dwelling tribesmen," and the "masakin," the poor. Ismail/Ismail, 1986, 7f.

this "common denominator" while keeping in mind the problematic nature of the term "tribalism." [44]

## 3.1 On the Significance of Tribalism in a "Modernizing" Society

The gradual separation between north and south that began in the mid-19th century[45] and culminated in the founding of two separate states in the 1960s did little to separate the tribes[46] and tribal federations from their political affiliations. Nor did it affect the tribes' status as sources of identity. Even during the late years of President Saleh's presidency in unified Yemen, the Yemeni media coded national identity in tribal terms with state officials wearing traditional tribal dress or embroidering their political campaigns with their tribal affiliations. Today, tribal identity tends to blur and mix under urban influences such as TV programs, lifestyles, and the latest fashions. Nevertheless, the use of tribal esthetic markers[47] has intensified in towns and cities even by those who were not formerly defined as tribal. [48] Notwithstanding today's conflicts between the competing political groups, they seem to agree on the ideal of a self-determined Yemeni state, while tribal identity serves as the main point of reference in creating contextual cohesion. Before the founding of the two nation-states, approximately ninety percent of the Yemeni population were considered tribal and with some exceptions most urban Yemenis still cherish their tribal affiliations. However, this inclusion of supposedly "traditional" markers and values into more modern ways of living by no means has to be an irreconcilable contradiction. This study rejects a conceptualization of "tradition" and "modernity" not as opposites or a dichotomy to be found in their pure form, but rather understands them as "complementarities." "Tradition" and "modernity" are perceived as sources of identification that feed a continuous and "intense struggle between various ideas of modern and tradition." Thus, a diversity of many "moderns" and "traditions" in society is imaginable, just as Dahlgren describes Aden in the early 1990s as a "fusion of traditional and modern." [49]

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**44** | On the emergence of a "modern Yemeni identity" also see: Weeden, 2004, in: Al-Rasheed/Vitalis, 2004, 275.

**45** | For a brief introduction to the division of the country between the Ottoman Empire in the North and Great Britain in the South see: Dresch, 2000, 11.

**46** | Arabic: qabā'il.

**47** | Also compare Adra, 2012, 66.

**48** | Adra, 2010, 55.

**49** | Dahlgren, 2000, 2. Dahlgren refers to Eickelman and Piscatori's argument of 1996 that "a sharp division between tradition and modern oversimplifies a complex process of interaction in a society where religion and tradition coexist with economic development and elements of modern culture."

Tribal identities somewhat "miraculously" survived military nationalism in the north and social nationalism in the south. They are currently experiencing a political revival in the insecure milieu of the post-Saleh era. Ayubi clearly agrees with Gellner:

> "The importance of studying tribalism in Arabia and the Gulf is not only warranted by the significant demographic and economic weight nomads [and sedentary tribes] still represent in some of these countries, but because of its at once surviving, but changing, social and political significance." [50]

Ayubi rejects the anthropologic depiction of tribes as "isolated" units, sealed off from modernization and thus from social change by external impact and introduces two counter-arguments: First, Arab tribes rely on strong social interconnectedness due to the wider "socio-economic activities [...] of the surrounding social space." Second, "tribalism as a 'state of mind,' as a set of values, and as a pattern of social organisation" may of course be influenced by modernization, but can have an impact on "new and presumably 'modern' structures" in return. [51] Ayubi's arguments support the "responsiveness-of-collective-identities hypothesis" introduced in Chapter 3 of this book. He depicts tribal identities as mutable under external influences, while claiming a meaningful social impact of their own. The following section discusses the "boundaries," "codes," and values constructing qabyalah, the conceptualization of tribal identity in Yemen, and how British colonial rule became the decisive source for identity change in the country's modern south.

## 3.2 Politics and Qabyalah: The Tribe as a Political Unit

> "[T]ribes may or may not be cultural units, [...[ they certainly are political ones."[52]

Any definition of the tribe as a social entity, be it among anthropologists, historians or sociologists, is sure to be challenged. [53] As the category of the "tribe" has been used for a wide range of social entities in place and time, this disagreement won't be solved in the near future. Nonetheless, the term offers classification of the basis of social structures in Yemen like no other, especially in relation to "modern state formation" there. This analysis understands a tribe first and foremost as a "social unit" and a "pattern of social organization"[54] complemented by a political and

**50** | Ayubi, 1995 (2006), 124.
**51** | Ibid., 125.
**52** | Ibid., 125.
**53** | Tapper, 1990, 50; Lewis, 2014, 15.
**54** | Ayubi, 1995. (2006), 125.

a military dimension. [55] For the tribes in South Yemen a territorial reference is added, as the regions have become closely connected with certain families.

However, the tribe as a social entity in Yemen goes beyond this basic approach. Yemeni tribal identifications are embedded in complex historically grown dependencies and as the dominant form of social organization, the "tribe" encompasses all spheres of social life. All over Yemen tribal customary law regulated – and still regulates – rights and obligations of the tribe as well as their relation to the city dwellers. [56] Without doubt there do exist profound differences of certain customs and rules between the Yemeni tribes, most of all between those of the north and those of the south. But as Ayubi points out, "tribalism" can be regarded "as a 'state of mind', as a set of values, and as a pattern of social organization"[57] that suggests the hypothesis that – despite change over place and time – major identity markers that the various Yemeni tribal identities had and have in common do exist. [58]

Today's rules of political conduct in Yemen remain strongly influenced by "tribal ways."[59] For the most part, tribal identities have mostly been shaped positively, as the coding relied on what a certain tribe had in common as a community. These shared codes also constructed tribal identity negatively by forming the boundaries against the neighbouring tribes. To operationalize tribal identities in Yemen, this analysis follows Eder's three ideal types of collective identity coding. [60] First and foremost, Yemeni tribal identity is coded "primordially": A tribe dates back its lineage to one or several shared ancestors. In the case of the tribes and clans in the south of Yemen, this ancestor is Qahtan,[61] who is regarded as the ancestor of the southern Arabs or oftentimes referred to as the "true Arabs."[62] The concept of the "true Arabs" serves as a unifying construct for "southern Arabia" to this day. The Qahtanis[63] traditionally reject religious or ethnic supremacy of the Hashimis, [64] who are part of the Adnani tribe, which can be found in the north and a few towns in the south. However, the distinct tribes in the south cannot be considered closed social or religious classes. Intermarriage between tribes has always been allowed.

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**55** | Adra, 2010, 86

**56** | Arabic: ʿurf and adah, see for example: Dahlgren, 2000, 6; Lewis, 2014, 21.

**57** | Ayubi, 1995. (2006), 125.

**58** | Al-Dawsari, 2013.

**59** | For a current analysis on the relationship between state and Yemeni tribes, see: Lewis, 2014.

**60** | This analysis will elaborate on the different characteristics of the typology in more depth.

**61** | Arabic: Qaḥtān.

**62** | As opposed to Adnan who is believed to have fathered many of the tribes in the north. The Adnanī tribe is regarded as the origin of the Quraīš, the tribe of the Prophet Muḥammad to whom the Zayīdīs trace their ancestry, in: Stookey, 1982, 3. Also See: Ismail/Ismail, 1986, 7f; Manea, 2010, 4.

**63** | Arabic: Qaḥtānīs

**64** | Arabic: Hašīmīs.

There clearly is more to tribal membership than just kinship: the abstract "blood relationships"[65] of the tribe are regularly confirmed and contextualized by concrete "local traditions and civic practices"[66] that allow them to take over political roles.

The south today is still dominated by tribal confederations relying on the fertility of tribal land, most of them peasants who boast an ancient history of agricultural civilization. Private land ownership regularly was and is restricted to cultivated land: "pasture land is shared by residents of a village, and water for domestic use is accessible to all." [67] Tribal territory is the basis for the tribes' social status[68] in accordance with the Arab proverb "Your land is your honor."[69] The status of the southern tribes traditionally was defined in contrast to the city dwellers, the religious elite, merchants, and craftsmen. This status rested on their two prominent abilities derived from the territorial character of these tribes: farming and warfare.

For these tribes, warfare and agriculture depend on each other. Every large stretch of cultivated land is well-fortified with guard towers, and tribe members have a responsibility for not only the lot but all tribal land. [70] Warfare is still considered a part of daily life in Yemen. There is no generation that did not experience war on a larger scale, not to mention the countless local feuds that can be dated back decades, sometimes centuries, erupting in some regions as street fighting or spontaneous shootings on a regular basis. Nonetheless, these occurrences bring to light the most decisive feature of tribal identity: personal and tribal honor. Tribal customary law, which refers to pre-Islamic practice, traditionally obliges the tribes to protect the urban population of those cities within their domain as well as the connecting pathways.[71] This obligation has survived to this day, as shown during the upheavals in 2011-12. [72]

> "The notions of a single place called "al-Yaman" and of one Yemeni people are old ones. [...] In addition, Yemenis have a sense of a shared history and are inclined to define themselves in terms of a vaguely recollected past greatness. [...] At the same time, most Yemenis equate being Yemeni with being Muslim.

**65** | Eder et al., 2003, 36.

**66** | Eder et al., 2003, 36.

**67** | Adra, 2010, 71.

**68** | Whereas water rights regularly define the actual property rights over land, in: Lichtenthäler, 2000, 144ff.

**69** | Arabic: ārḍaka ¿arḍak.

**70** | Dresch, 1993, 334.

**71** | Oftentimes cities were declared "designated sanctuaries (hijrahs) where violence was prohibited. Tribes still tend to avoid warfare within dwellings, in: Adra, 2010, 85; Also See: Ismail/Ismail, 1986, 5.

**72** | Al-Dawsari on the role of "Tribal Governance," in: Al-Dawsari, 2012; Lewis, 2014, 4.

> The Islamic nature of Yemen and Yemenis is implicit and is assumed to be in the nature of things." [73]
>
> (Robert D. Burrowes, Historical Dictionary of Yemen)

Despite the differentiation between tribes and tribal federations, all tribes north and south share a mutual feeling of being Yemeni. As Burrows rightly summarizes: "The notions of a single place called 'al-Yaman' and of one Yemeni people are old ones."[74] Historic references and cultural commonalities are connected by belief and language. In terms of Eder's categories of identity coding, the belief system of Islam adds a "universalistic" dimension to Yemeni identity, shifting the ultimate source of identity to the transcendent realm. Overlapping with what can be considered the "traditional coding" of identity, the religious practices of Islam are shared by all tribes and, at least in the south, these are not crossed by sectariaan divides. [75] In addition to that, the tribal and local dialects are very close to classic Qur'anic Arabic and thus Yemeni tribes share an understanding of "high Arabic," the basis for written standard Arabic. [76] In conclusion, common ancestry, tribal structures, and the similarity of customs and codes have provided the often competing Yemeni tribes of both north and south with a shared social framework, a "lowest common denominator" valid all over Yemen until modern times.

## 3.3 Defining against the "British Other": Who is "the Urban Adeni"?

> "A visitor to Aden in that period [of the 1950s] had the impression that Aden was an alien city in Arab country." [77]

After depicting the tribe as the central reference of identity formation in both Yemens, the following section takes a closer look at the impact of British colonial interference on the socio-politico milieu in Aden and its hinterland, especially the Western Aden Protectorate. The major focus is on the evolution of a specific urban identity in Aden that is considered a decisive prerequisite for the independence movement against colonial occupation and thus for the emergence of an Arab version of Marxism in South Yemen.

The British Crown settled for a strategy to maximize political influence outside the city of Aden at a minimum cost by using what they considered to be the existing power structures and binding the majority of sultans to advisory

**73** | National identity, traditional, in: Burrowes, 2010, 254.

**74** | Burrowes, 2010, 254; Also see. Lewis, 2014, 32.

**75** | As opposed to the political north, Yemen's south does not suffer from sectarian divisions as the prevailing majority considers itself scha'āfī Sunnī, Manea, 2010, 4.

**76** | Stookey, 1982, 3.

**77** | Muheirez, Abdallah Ahmad, 1985, in: Dahlgren, 2000, 8.

treaties.[78] This approach at the time appeared to be the most practical to secure the port of Aden from the threat posed by often uncooperative tribes from the hinterland. As a consequence, the intensity of British rule decreased in accordance with growing distance from the city that led to a socio-political dissolution between Aden and the hinterland, including a "buffer" or "transitional zone" surrounding it. [79] Current research even suggests two distinct strategies of British colonial rule toward the port of Aden and its "hinterland," defining spaces as "city" and "tribe," to ensure the safety of Aden's port and its trade routes over land and sea. [80] According to Willis, the British had defined a "tribal space" in Aden's hinterland. There, the occupational policy was to exert a type of indirect rule by preserving "traditional, social, and political forms." In contrast to this policy, Aden society was to be recreated as a "colonial civil society" based on a strong "commercial class." [81]

Regardless of British intent, British rule in any case had established the preconditions for the emergence of a distinct identity of "the urban Adeni" in a metropolitan society alien to the Yemeni context. Even though still connected to the hinterland by tribal and economic ties, the "Protectorate of Aden" introduced a new way of life in a place that its contemporaries considered "the most politically sophisticated territory in Arabia."[82] Aden emerged as a cosmopolitan island which had grown beyond its socio-politico surroundings. Based on Benedict Anderson's concept of "official nationalism," the following section shows how British occupation policy actually facilitated the emergence of this distinct identity with some national connotations among the population of Aden.

## On the Way to a True Cosmopolitan: The Creation of an Adeni Public

The Crown Colony at the Gulf of Aden had been intended to emerge as the main shipping center of the British-Indian trade route, a "new Singapore,"[83] and at that time was considered geopolitically invaluable in connecting the continents of Europe, Africa, and Asia.[84] With the Suez Canal still open, the decades before and after World War II caused an economic and societal boom in Aden.[85] From 1931 to

**78** | Arabic: ṣulṭān; Before colonization "the power of the sultan was [...] contingent upon support given him by the tribes and townspeople" and had to rely on the power of sheikhs who themselves were "subject to some degree of scrutiny by those who selected them." in: Ismail/Ismail, 1986, 9f; Also see: Willis, in: Al-Rasheed, 2004, 122.

**79** | Manea, 2010, 5.

**80** | Willis, in: Al-Rasheed, 2004, 120.

**81** | Willis, in: Al-Rasheed, 2004, 121f.

**82** | Holden, 1966, 25.

**83** | Willis, in: Al-Rasheed, 2004, 120.

**84** | Gavin, 1975, 22ff.

**85** | Brehony, 2011, 5.

1946 the city population increased by more than seventy percent[86] and employment opportunities drew workers from the whole country and even Yemen's neighbors.[87] Aden lived through the establishment of the Western capitalist system based on industrialized production in less than two decades. This included the detachment of the city from the traditional Yemeni social system of dependency between the rural tribes and the "townsfolk." During this rapid transformation, Aden's industrializing society saw the formation of classes with a growing crowd of wage-workers.[88] This political incubation was supplemented by the founding of several newspapers, political clubs, and blue-collar unions: in 1956 twenty-five of these unions organized in the Aden Trade Union Congress (ATUC).[89] Without doubt, these were the beginnings of a modern public in the city of Aden.

"Official nationalism" encompasses the effort to merge the "nation" with the dynastic power into a congruent whole - a venture which Anderson debunks as the attempt of the colonial power to conceal the discrepancy between the evolving national consciousness of the ruled and the dissonant nationality of the rulers. While all characteristics of "official nationalism" described by Anderson emerged within British colonial rule in Aden, [90] one of them has to be considered the most decisive in terms of creating the Adeni society and catalyzing the emergence of a distinct "Adeni identity": compulsory standardized education based on the model of British public schools:

> "An educational system was set up based on the public-school ethos with Arab-Islamic overlay.[...]The British brought boys from Sayyid and other influential families into a milieu where free thought was encouraged."[91]

Paradoxically, it was British education that created several of the preconditions for the identity of the "urban Adenis" and thus for the future revolutionaries to emerge: Access to political writings, room to discuss new ideas, and sufficient literacy to publish them. In addition to that, British rule established a modern economy that offered jobs for qualified workers and employers, thereby providing for another space of political engagement. In Anderson's words economy and education

**86** | Dresch, 2000, 58.

**87** | Dresch, 2000, 71ff; Stookey, 1978, 31-57.

**88** | Slaughter, 1985, 24.

**89** | Ismail/Ismail, 1986, 23. On the political clubs see: ibid, 15.

**90** | Anderson points out five characteristics of "official nationalism": state education, propaganda, rewriting history, militarism and affirmation of the dynasty, in: Anderson: 1983, 101.

**91** | Mackintosh-Smith, 1997, 164.

> "constituted simultaneously a colonial community and an upper class. [This class was] economically subjected and exploited, but [was] essential to the stability of the empire."[92]

Willis builds on and reformulates Gidden's interpretation with regard to the Aden case: According to Willis, the British had actively sought to transform "the social and political and social identities of the colonized with the constitution of society and economy as objects of rule, and more specifically, urban commercial society."[93] The "urban Adenis" were mobilized by the hope of transforming from political subjects, in this case second-class subjects to the Crown, to equal citizens of an independent state in which the rulers and the ruled belonged to the same nation.[94]

## Defining the "Urban Adeni": Why the Former Yemeni "Ruling Class" Joined Forces with the Poor

The question remains how and why the better-educated and all in all better-off Sayyid sons came to join the poor and multi-ethnic wage-workers and unemployed for the same cause. At that time, "discontents of the very poor and complaints of the more privileged coincided only in anti-colonial rhetoric."[95] While the "privileged" were involved in riots caused by English opposition to employing Egyptian and thus Arabic teachers in 1958, the reasons for the workers' "discontent" were of a very different nature, as they suffered from unemployment and hunger. What united these quite different worlds was an anti-colonial "resentment"[96] that in Gellner's words regularly stems from the fact that "the rulers of the political unit belong to a nation other than that of the majority of the ruled."[97] This "resentment" was caused by the shared experience of objectification through British policies. In addition to that, unlike in India, the British never transferred any power to the new and educated indigenous class the Empire had created among the colonized population of Aden. Until 1937, the British exercised Aden's official business from Bombay and the Bombay Presidency.[98] As a consequence, the overpowering presence of Indian and thus alien culture appeared to "dominate the country."[99] All this diminished, or maybe veiled, the differences which might have otherwise surfaced between the "educated" and the "working class" Adeni.

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**92** | Anderson, 1983, 58.

**93** | Willis, in: Al-Rasheed, 2004.

**94** | Gellner, 1983, 1.

**95** | Dresch, 2000, 85.

**96** | Fanon, 2004, 89.

**97** | Gellner, 1983, 1.

**98** | Under its executive, the Governor General of India in Delhi; Blumi, in: Al-Rasheed/Vitalis, 2004, 122; Burrowes, 2010, 73.

**99** | Muheirez, Abdallah Ahmed, 1985, in: Dahlgren 2000, 6.

All in all, the general character of British colonial rule helped to the Yemenis and Arabs in Aden overcome their differences by shifting the focus on the even bigger differences between the Arab "Adenis" and the foreigners. This further unity was further forged through policy tools, like the British census, that defined the distinction between rulers and ruled in the multi-ethnic society. In Aden, census categorization constructed individual and group identities "directly through its activities of counting and classifying," but also "indirectly through the vigorous responses provoked among those counted and classified."[100] The categories of "Arab," "European," "Indian," and "Jewish"[101] created a coherent Arab identity, distinct from the identities of the minorities. These minorities were associated with British rule and embodied the "other" against which Adenis defined themselves. About two-thirds of Aden's population were of Arabic decent, but not even half of them were "Adeni-born": British records simply did not distinguish between Adenis, Yemeni Arabs and Arabs of other origin.[102] Even though the Arab population would not forget its national origins at first, this categorization allowed all of the urban population in Aden to identify with the city, no matter where they came from. In the colony, the Empire ruled through European and Indian clerks and officials. This practice exposed "the imperium as a protracted, almost metaphysical obligation to rule subordinate, inferiors, or less advanced peoples."[103] While Indian clerks and tradespeople governed the "Adenis" through administration and employment, these administrative and political acts created the category of the "Adeni" and with it the identity of the "urban Adeni."

However, the British census categorizations did not only unify the Arab melting-pot of Aden and add to the construction of the urban Adeni identity. They also furthered the establishment of Arab nationalism as the notion that allowed the Adenis to identify as cosmopolitan and Arabic, while still maintaining their religious identification. "The urban Adeni" could have been a religious blue-collar worker, one of the first teachers of Yemeni origin teaching in Arabic and English, or an atheist intellectual who brought home new ideas from his studies in Cairo or Damascus. And even though Aden's society and economic system fostered the emergence of class, it did not seem to matter much at the time, as every "Arab" shared the same relationship to the occupying power. The collective identity of the urban Adenis was coded "primordially" by a shared feeling of "Arabness" based on origin, promoted by the "universalistic" code of Arab nationalism and framed by a vague, but powerful nationalist idea of being "Yemeni." Both dimensions formed the boundary toward the "other" represented by British occupation. Simultaneously, "the urban Adeni" adapted new practices established by the British, such as the daily walk to the workplace, reading the newspaper or listening

**100** | Berman, in: Eisenberg/Kymlicka, 2011, 54

**101** | Aden Population 1839 to 1955, Appendix B, in Gavin, 1975, 445.

**102** | Gavin, 1975, 445.

**103** | Said, 1993, 10.

to the radio, and attending political meetings. These practices can be considered the fragile beginning of a shared tradition among "the urban Adenis."

## 3.4 A "Tribal Identity" under British Rule?

> "[The Western Aden Protectorate] was a mosaic of principalities governed by emirs, sultans, sheikhs, each jealous of his nominal sovereignty, and peopled by tribes so resistant to outside influence that even the most doctrinaire of London theoreticians could not seriously contemplate direct rule by British officials."[104]

The intensity of British rule decreased the further away one was from Aden. While this very modest form of British rule beyond Aden had served the Empire's interest for a long time, it became clear that London would not consider giving up its strategic and economic pivot between Europe and India any time soon. Thus, as a reaction to the fear of losing authority over the port of Aden, the Crown transformed its indirect rule to a proper Crown Colony in 1937, in part due to the unrest in India and the resulting increased importance of Aden to the British economy.[105] However, Yemeni resistance became more and more pressing. Thus, the Crown devoted significant resources to a campaign in the 1950s to ensure the support of the more powerful sheikhs in their Protectorates and to unify South Yemen as the Federation of South Arabia (FSA).

### Final Throes of British Occupation: The Failure of the Federation of South Arabia

Based on the initiative of the Governor of Aden Sir Tom Hickinbotham, the Empire's last attempt to unify the South under its rule was the "Federation of South Arabia."[106] Hickinbotham had developed the idea of a unified "south Arabia" as the nationalist counterpart to pan-Yemeni nationalism. His successor, Sir William Luce, continued this policy and created the Federation of Arab Emirates of the South (FAAS) by unifying six major players. In combination with "Britain's only claim to presence in the area defensible before world opinion [...], her treaties with the twenty-five relatively major ruling houses,"[107] the next governor, Sir Charles H. Johnson, aimed to finally merge the FAAS and the Western Aden Protectorate into the Federation of South Arabia (FSA). However, this foray, which tried to mobilize tribal support by relying on what the British considered to be tribal hierarchies, turned out to be a disaster. In the end, former south Yemeni allies turned their backs on the Crown and denied it their signature.[108] Despite several

**104** | Stookey, 1982, 51.

**105** | Ismail/Ismail, 1986, 13.

**106** | Sir Tom Hickinbotham, Aden Governor from 1951 to 1956. Burrowes, 2010, 74.

**107** | Stookey, 1982, 51.

**108** | Kopp, 2005, 158.

other participating leaders, the Federation never came into force. Two days after the British had gathered all their signatures, Imam Ahmad, ruler of the north, died in his sleep and in so doing freed the way for the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR).

While the country had expected Aden to be the first "liberated place" in Yemen and thus the birthplace of Yemeni unity, the establishment of a republic in the north came as a surprise. The fire of violent resistance in Aden was fed with new inspiration, and started to smolder within the tribes far away from the city as well. Obviously, the Empire's officials had mistaken the lordly demeanor of the sheikhs as the ruling power of absolute monarchs. But apart from some exceptions for imams, [109] the tribes traditionally relied on the quality of their leadership with regard to "qabyalah," the shared values of tribal identity in Yemen. Unfortunately for the British policy, not all members of the tribes seemed to agree with the decision of their sheikhs to collaborate with the British. Clearly, the British administration had no ideas to offer the "rifle-carrying tribesmen" that could compete with Cairo's resounding appeals to Arab brotherhood and denunciations of colonialism."[110] It came as a big surprise for the British when, pressured by their tribesmen, many of the leaders broke their alliance with the colonial power.

## British Perceptions of the "Yemeni Character"

One may speculate about the British (male) perspective on Yemeni political behavior by piecing together some attitudes and opinions of the time. Hamilton, a British officer who served in the Crown Colony before and during the Second World War, suggested that tribal political life followed very different rules than the British had assumed. Hamilton noted a difference from the Western tradition of hierarchical rule:[111] "Yemeni tribesmen didn't seem to understand the word 'rule.' They were in fact shy of ruling."[112] With this statement, though expressed in colonial language, Hamilton might not to be too far off from characterizing Yemeni societal organization. According to the tribal ideal, tribal customary law is based on egalitarian principles. Honor and tribal virtues are considered universal for every member of the tribes and thus neither wealth nor power of the individual or the tribe should have any implications for the validity or application of tribal law.[113] The power of tribal leaders is supposed to rely on the quality of their leadership, while the relation to the clan members is comparable to the concept "primus inter pares."[114] Tribal self-definition crystallizes around the ideal of the tribesman as a

**109** | In this case polit. authority is hierarchical and derived from a relig. leader, an Imām.

**110** | Gavin, 1975, 333.

**111** | On the origins of "Feudalism," see: Onuf, 2013 (1989), 216; Spruyt, 1996 (1994), 36ff.

**112** | For a more thorough assessment of Hamilton's and other British officals' views on Yemen of the time, see: Dresch, 2000, 37f, Willis, FN 57, in: Al-Rasheed/Vitalis, 2004, 148.

**113** | In general, this also applies to women. However, female honor and virtue are upheld by their male relatives, as women don't enjoy autonomy as a political person within the tribe.

**114** | English: "First among equals."

"man of his word," courageous, generous, independent, and dutiful with respect to kinship and his wards. Thus, not violence and coercion, but rather persuasion through argumentation, reparations, and intercession are considered the desirable and honorable solutions for social conflict. This interdependence of tribal honor, virtue, and the traditional customary rules is summarized by the Arabic term "qabyalah." Regardless of the actual realization of these virtues in social life, the Yemeni approach to the distribution of political power was alien to the processes of generating and perpetuating Western political hierarchies.

## The Impact of Modernization on Traditional Tribal Lifestyle

In the late 19th century, much of the so-called Middle East had entered the "modern world [while the] centralization of imperial administrations and military modernization went hand in hand."[115] Whereas the larger part of the Arab world embraced "modernization," the impact on Yemeni tribes, even from the bigger Yemeni cities themselves, had been minimal. As a consequence, the "ways of modernity" reached the remote tribes much later than more populated parts of Yemen. When the tribes finally had to deal with "modernization," they regularly refused any involvement beyond what their traditional lifestyle could easily incorporate. This can be explained by tribal identities' extremely low degree of "responsiveness," as described above. The ideas promoting individualism, but also bureaucratic authority, simply did not resonate well with tribal identity.

Tribal lifestyle blocked the British from accessing the social tribal sphere. If there was any at all, contact with the British colonial power was kept highly official and restricted to the political realm. Cooperation with the colonial power was one option among others for the tribes, typically reserved for when political necessity demanded it and it would not transform into long-term arrangements with the occupying power. Even though the tribes "lacked the conveniences associated with industrial society, they maintained a pride in their own heritage and civilization that contrasted radically with the attitude of colonized peoples. Not well-informed about modern industrial and technological capabilities, rural Yemenis had very little reason to question the validity of their own civilization that once controlled the coffee trade, commerce in silk and spices from Asia, and the legendary incense route."[116] Not surprisingly, the tribes usually considered themselves as an equal, if not superior partner to the British. The tribal leaders and fighters outside Aden and its closer hinterland had no reason to consider themselves inferior and it can be doubted whether they actually felt oppressed by the British presence before British air strikes reached their homes.

Not all of the tribes had regular exposure to the British and even fewer considered them a dominating colonial power. But eventually contact with modernization

**115** | Choueiri, 2002, 650.

**116** | Adra, 2010, 65. On Yemeni consciousness of its pre-Islamic history also see: Dahlgren, 2000, .

did have an impact, as soon as some notions were translated into a language more fitting to the social context. Technical advancement remedied the gap in knowledge on the "modern ways." Radio broadcasts from Cairo, and after 1962 also from Sana'a, delivered colonial occupation as well as the solution to "a mass audience among the poor and the remote"[117] in the Yemeni hinterland. The radio broadcasts coincided with the British expansion of infrastructure. By building roads and rail tracks, the British often disrupted the supplementary incomes of many tribes from "levying tolls or transporting goods by camel."[118] All of a sudden, the southern tribes suffered from hardships that they could link directly to the British presence.

Arab nationalism, in conjunction with Nasser's Arab version of socialism,[119] translated "Western" ideas like the nation and the state into concepts closer to Arab social development.[120] The ideas of Arab nationalism assumed a strong national identification within the Arab countries based on "distinct ethnic rights and histories"[121] shared by all Arab people. It formulated "anti-colonial" notions and – in its extremist guise – called for violent resistance against domination. Thus Arab nationalism both raised awareness of the foreign power, but also offered a framework for the southern tribes to comprehend their negative experiences with the colonial power. Arab socialism as a political concept, on the other hand, not only explicitly included religion but derived its constitutive political values from Islam. As a consequence, nationalism was transformed into something more attractive for people whose identity was strongly connected to their ethnic history and Islam. Thus it can be coded "universalistic" and "traditional." Both the construct of Arab nationalism and the moderate ideas of Arab socialism resonated well with the tribal codes of independence, autonomy, and warfare. Even among tribes hostile to each other could now express a common history and culture with their neighbors. Thus, the British Empire paradoxically served as a unifying force: without disturbing the coherence of "qabyalah" among the tribes in the process, the British served as the invading, foreign power that promoted the construction of a Yemeni nation.

**117** | Gavin, 1975, 333.

**118** | Gavin, 1975, 334.

**119** | Arabic: al-ishtirākīyah al-'arabīyah. For further exploration on the mingled ideologies of Arab nationalism and socialism see subchapter 4 "Ideological Blueprints" of this study.

**120** | Hanna/Gardner, 1966, 77f.

**121** | Kayali, Hasan, in: Choueiri, 2002, 653.

## 4. Ideological Templates: Political Influences from the Middle East and Europe

> "It was not until after the Second World War that an ideology arose that was capable of binding together and organizing South Yemeni opposition to colonial rule: Arab nationalism."[122]

This study considers the creation and establishment of South Yemen as an independent state a process of "nation- and state-building" that was actively pursued from the inside by South Yemen's political leaders, but also from the outside, by East Germany and its delegates on behalf of Moscow. Based on the findings of the preceding subchapter, "Determining a Yemeni Identity in the South," the following section focuses on the milieu of the political epicenter Aden during the last two decades before independence. What are the reasons that the ideology of Marxism-Leninism finally prevailed against competing ideological concepts available and promoted at the time?

Two major concepts are identified as the dominant sources of inspiration and direction for the political actors in South Yemen: Arab nationalism and socialism/Marxism. While the former originated in the region of the wider Middle East itself, the latter was a concept alien to the region. Though the two concepts commingled all over the Arab world, they emerged in very different shapes, by including various local nationalisms. How was it possible for two locally distinct and, content-wise, very different ideologies to coexist and even mix? What actor or actors made this connection in South Yemen? To understand the role of ideology in South Yemen's early years of nation-building, and thus to be able to assess the impact of external ideological involvement by the GDR and Soviet Union on this process, the origins of the NLF/NF's vague, mixed, and multi-layered ideological presumptions need a thorough exploration.

### 4.1 "Awake, O Arabs, and Arise!:"[123] "Arab Nationalism" as yet another Ideological Golem[124]

The origins of a specific Arab nationalism can be traced back to the Ottoman Empire. Universal demands for a unified Arab independence had not yet been made and opposition to Ottoman rule had not yet envisioned a post-Ottoman order. With the "Arab Revolt" against British rule and Jewish settlement in Palestine in 1920, the first notions of the Arab nation mutated gradually into an

**122** | Ismail/Ismail, 1986, 13.

**123** | Al-Yazijī, Ibrahim, 1868. Even though the poem was not being printed at that time it became one of the most powerful slogans of the self-declared movements of Arab nationalism, Kramer, 1996, 2ff and 19.

**124** | On the creature in Jewish mythology, see: Schwarz, 2004, 280.

overarching concept and party that degenerated into what Mann considers the "perversion" of the idea of the nation: a legitimization for "aggressive action against other nations."[125] What followed was the "anti-imperialistic" phase of Arab nationalism. "Imperialism" was defined as the aftermath of colonialism and as "a form of indirect domination" which supposedly "serv[ed] no other purpose but to perpetuate the underdevelopment of newly independent states."[126]

However, the shared attitude of "anti-imperialism" among the Arab states only lasted until they lost the war against the new Israeli state in 1948. After this defeat, it became more and more difficult to blame "imperialism" alone for the discord within the Arab world. Nonetheless, some advocates of Arab nationalism tried to reform the concept by incorporating socialist ideas. The anti-imperialist perspective of Arab nationalism and the political attitudes it generated among the urban population have to be considered one of Marxism-Leninism's advantages in establishing itself as a political alternative. Arab nationalism grew into something revolutionary and somewhat international in a Marxist sense.[127] In the following section, Arab nationalism is defined in such a way to distinguish its transformation toward Arab versions of socialism in Egypt and the Yemeni version of Marxism-Leninism, and also to emphasize its role in "preparing the ground" for Marxism-Leninism to eventually prevail in the traditional society of South Yemen.

## Arabia – The Impossible Nation?

"No European nationalism has claimed a potential constituency as large, as far flung, or as fragmented."[128] This observation gets to the heart of analytical difficulties when approaching the notion of Arab nationalism, but also hints at the reasons for the concept's durability. The demise of Arab nationalism has been proclaimed again and again in academia,[129] and with a few exceptions, the concept vanished from the academic agenda about two decades ago.[130] Nonetheless, it has persistently resurfaced from time to time in references to the Arab world as a political entity. During the Arab uprisings of 2011, analysts were surprised of its absence from slogans, while the uprisings themselves nonetheless had Arab connotations.[131] More importantly, its core ideas have been kept alive in movements like Arab socialism/Nasserism, Ba'athism, and even Islamic fundamentalism.[132] With Anderson's conception of the nation in mind,[133] this relevance becomes

**125** | Mann, in: Periwal, 1995, 44.
**126** | Choueiri, 2000, 196.
**127** | Kramer, 1993, 184f.
**128** | Kramer, 1993, 173.
**129** | Wilson, in: Khalidi (et al.), 1991, 204.
**130** | Choueri, 2009 and 2000; Kramer, 1996a and 1996b; Tibi, 1997; Wien, 2011.
**131** | Al-Azm, 2011; Temlali, 2011.
**132** | Kramer, 1996b.
**133** | Anderson, 1983, 6.

evident. According to Anderson's approach, nations have to be imagined as a "community," as "sovereign," and as "limited," with other nations lying outside these boundaries. The latter prerequisite is closely linked to "membership": Who is part of the nation, and who is not? Answering this question with regard to the "Arab nation" turns out to be an almost impossible task: Cultural, religious and even communicative characteristics of the Arab nation overlap and dissolve within societies one might at first identify as Arab. This is mainly due to two historic phenomena: First, the spread of Islam from the Muslim sanctuaries of Mecca and Medina in the late the 7th century had in fact been a military conquest.[134] Supported by the migration of Arab people to the conquered regions and their mixing with local populations, the conquest included vast territories in North and West Africa as well as Asia, spanning from Andalucía in the West to Pakistan in the East.[135] Second, large parts of this former Arab realm had fallen under foreign rule at one time or the other, both Muslim and Christian. The dynasty of the Turco-Mongolian ruler Timor in the 14th century, the Ottomans a century later, and finally European colonial rule[136] had brought their people to the conquered territories, but also displaced the local populations by force and attracted the conquered population to their own home lands. Hence, Arab nationalism can be described by Anderson's "imagined community" in the literal sense of the word. Its "community" could not rely on a homogenous constituency and thus had to explicitly create, that is to imagine, its boundaries. Only after inventing and constructing this community, did it become possible to formulate the demands for Arab "sovereignty," meaning external sovereignty delineating against outside interference.

Mostly due to the heterogeneity of its members, the "[v]ariations of Arab nationalism multiplied"[137] right after the notion was created: the results of the concept's impact on the different regions and countries of the Arab world differed widely. Hence, generalizations are difficult to make and usually oversimplified. Thus, the following analysis offers a means to substantiate "Arab nationalism" as a collective identity constructed based on the dimension of "membership." "Membership" is created on the inside by "internal self-identification," including a shared history, geography, and values, but also from the outside by "categorization" of an external agent. Colonial rule is considered the adversary on both the in- and outside against which the Arab community defined itself. The analysis relies on several major theorems of three authors: Anderson's concept of "official nationalism,"[138] Said's

**134** | Hourani, 2003, 44-50.

**135** | Map 1: The rise of Islam and the Arab conquests, in: Lockman, 2010, xiv and Hourani, 2003, 60f, 128f.

**136** | Halm/Haarmann, 2004.

**137** | Kramer, 1993, 173.

**138** | Anderson, 1983, 101.

notion of "resistance,"[139] and lastly Gellner's basic definition of nationalism as political congruence.[140]

## Occupation and Colonialism as Midwives of Arabian Identity

The Ottoman Empire had been damaged severely by its Christian subjects' demands for self-determination and finally independence.[141] The Ottomans struggled hard to prevent its Arab subjects from following suit. One of the major turning points was Sultan Abdulhamid II's attempt to cast a new Ottoman identity during the last third of the 19th century.[142] Following the integrative state reforms of his predecessors,[143] Abdulhamid's efforts significantly intensified in scope and penetration. Anderson's concept of "official nationalism"[144] offers an explanation for the correlation between the Sultan's policy and the rise of Arab nationalism: The major integrative factor among the Turkish and the Arab population had always been the shared belief of Islam. Thus Abdulhamid utilized the notion of "pan-Islamism" for his own ends to affirm the identity of his dynasty and the nation. He invented a "political imagery of the Sultanate and the Caliphate, turning his personage in the process into a holy symbol of Islamic power and Ottoman invincibility."[145] Not much later, he complemented this notion by introducing Turkish as the official language of state at the expense of Arabic and other languages "to give the polyglot Empire more of the character of a European nation-state."[146] Before, the Empire had relied heavily on Arabic as its second lingua franca in administration as well as standardized primary education.[147]

Both of Abdulhamid's policy measures triggered attempts to save the "Arab heritage" within the Ottoman Empire and to renew cultural Arab consciousness. The movement radiated from an "Arab literary revival" in Beirut at its center to Egypt, Greater Syria and Tunisia.[148] "Cultural Arabism"[149] became the intellectual home for the Arab-speaking elite of the Empire's administration and military, but soon turned against the Empire's structures that had promoted and accommodated this cultural identity: While the Ottoman army had played a highly integrative role among the various groups within the Empire for centuries, it could not withstand the separate nationalisms seeping into its ranks. Apart from unveiled competition

**139** | Said, 1993, xii.

**140** | Gellner, 1983, 1.

**141** | Kramer, 1993, 175 and Choueiri, 2000, 60f.

**142** | Arabic: "Abdulḥamīd II, short Abdulhamid. Deringil, Selim, 1998, in: Choueiri, 2002, 651.

**143** | For Ottoman reformist policies of the early 18th century see Choueiri, 2000, 62f.

**144** | Anderson, 1983, 101f.

**145** | Deringil, Selim, 1998, in: Choueiri, 2002, 651.

**146** | Kramer, 1993, 176.

**147** | Anderson, 1983, 101f.

**148** | Kramer, 1993, 175.

**149** | Choueiri, 2000, 66.

between Christians and Muslims within the state apparatus, "grievances of those [Arabs] passed over"[150] during replacement periods for administrative positions furthered general dissatisfaction. Then, the final decades of the Empire saw an "Arab Revolt" against Ottoman rule, led by a local potentate of Mecca: Sharif Husayn.[151]

Initially, "cultural Arabism" created an "Arab community" under the "political umbrella"[152] of the Ottoman Empire. But the change in Ottoman policies turned out to be a catalyst for the simmering discord within the state institutions, creating a new awareness of Arab identity in contrast to the "Ottoman Other."[153] Naturally, the dynastic realms, when confronted by the "decline of automatic legitimacy"[154] derived from divinity, felt increasingly threatened by the emerging national consciousness of its subjects. This is what Anderson considers the crucial moment of "official nationalism." As a pre-emptive strike, the dynasties tried to "rewrite history" and establish their own "top-down" version of nationalism as a substitute for the popular "bottom-up" nationalisms[155] that endangered their rule. But despite the propagandistic efforts of the Ottoman Sultan and his entourage, their occupation policy did not grow into a viable nationalism with the Sultan at its center. Rather, it facilitated the emergence of an Arab national identity among the population. "[W]hile the Ottoman Empire lasted, [...] Arabism did not develop into full-fledged nationalism."[156] Kramer reasons that the image of the "Arab nation," the ultimate goal of this nationalism, at the time was merely a belief of the supporters of the "Arab revolt." To forge it into a mass ideology, it would have needed another theoretical basis, lending the "Arab nation" a legitimacy that could transcend people's mundane existence. The solution was to abandon the French notion of the nation, which considered it a voluntary contract. Instead, the "Arab nation" was interpreted as a "sleeping-Beauty," a destined community, "bound by the mystery of language and lore"[157] that mingled with the growing militarism in the Empire.

### George Antonius: Father of Arab Nationalism?

The transformation of Arab nationalism from a specific phenomenon within the Ottoman realm to a universalistic notion valid for all Arabs is associated with

**150** | Kramer, 1993, 175.

**151** | Husayn, however, was less motivated by Arab emancipation than by his "dynastic ambitions," such as a significant expansion of his sphere of influence. Kramer, 1993, 176.

**152** | Choueiri, 2000, 66.

**153** | For the role of the "other" with regard to self-identification also see: Taylor, 1994, 47.

**154** | Anderson, 1983, 19.

**155** | Mann, 1995, 46f.

**156** | Kramer, 1993, 177.

**157** | Kramer, 1993, 181.

one particular author. Born into a Christian Orthodox family in Lebanon, George Antonius, a Cambridge graduate, served in the British Mandate of Palestine.[158] The fact that he "adopt[ed] a secular form of Arab nationalism, rather than Pan-Islamism"[159] is usually explained by his liberal Western education. However, his concerns were initially purely political. His monograph "The Arab Awakening" of 1938[160] criticized the British policy in Palestine mostly in political terms.

"[T]he British government, seeking to retain its empire, declined to acknowledge openly, or act upon, his findings."[161] But Antonius was not very popular among other Arab patriots either, who criticized his "affinity with the West and loyalty to Great Britain."[162] Regardless, his work became one of the most influential translations of the Western conceptualization of nationalism in the Arab world. As Hobsbawm has pointed out for "traditions" in general, there had to exist some connection between the nation and the social structures preceding it to make its claim of being "pre-historic" plausible. Nationalism "sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures,"[163] as Gellner summarizes. By borrowing from what had been there before, the new nation appeared more familiar to its new members.

This is exactly what Antonius did. He dated the first call for Arab self-determination back to the publication of Ibrahim Al-Yaziji's ode in 1868: "Awake, O Arabs, and arise!" and declared the following developments up to his own time as the "awakening" of the Arab nation. In so doing, he successfully connected the person of Al-Yaziji and other political authors and poets of the previous centuries with himself and the current political situation. Al-Yaziji's poem already implies that there had existed a collective of the "Arabs" which could be addressed by it. Antonius sketches the Arab nation as a "sleeping beauty" that had to be awakened. Thus he successfully built his narrative of the Arab people on the "style by which one is defined by the nation, which in turn derives its authority from a supposedly unbroken tradition."[164] Antonius successfully created what Said called the "guiding imagination"[165] for the independence movements promoted by Arab scholars, a

**158** | Antonius to Walter Rogers on 28 May 1937, New York, in: Kramer, 1996, 112.

**159** | Silsby, 1986, 81.

**160** | Antonius, (1938), 2000.

**161** | Great Britain, Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, 23 February, R.O., F.O. 371/23226, in: Silsby, 1986, 94.

**162** | Silsby, 1986, 81.

**163** | Gellner, 1983, 48f.

**164** | Said, 1993, xxv.

**165** | Said, 1993, 212.

"cultural Arabism"[166] based on a common language and the (re-)construction of a shared heritage.

Nationalism in the Arab world not only relied on revived Arab literature, but also on an even more significant element of the Arab culture. Even though Antonius' thoughts had been explicitly secular, his concepts were flexible enough to transcend the religious divide. The shared codes and customs of Islam were transferred from the "pre-existing"[167] to the new culture of nationalism. Arab nationalism in the beginning first and foremost had been a political concept that had emerged as a "critique of the state of the Ottoman Empire."[168] And even though Antonius' secular notion of "Arab nationalism" was detached from Islamic thought, it did not question or diminish religion. Thus it was able to integrate Islam as a unifying factor and source of legitimacy. As a consequence, the role of religion in the formation of Arab nationalism has to be considered supportive in some cases and restrictive in others.[169] When the main identity markers offered by this new nation resonated with people's collective identities, they were incorporated into the identity of the Arab nation.

## 4.2 Arab Nationalism absorbs Soviet and Maoist Thought: A South Arabian Version of Marxism-Leninism

### Nasser's Socialism: The Link between Arab Nationalism and Marxism?

Political setbacks and military debacles deprived Arab nationalism of its velocity as a universal ideology. Nonetheless, Arab nationalism as an idea evolved and was able to survive by mingling with other ideologies, notably socialism and Marxism-Leninism. The most prominent and likely most influential case of reshaping Arab nationalism through socialism was Nasser's construct of Arab socialism.[170] Increasing commercial, political, and cultural interconnectedness of governments and governed all over the world brought the ideas of "the Bolshevik revolution" and the "American notions of the right of self-determination" to the Near and Middle East where they fed indigenous national movements. As Said puts it, "a new global

**166** | Choueiri, 2000, 66.

**167** | Gellner, 1983, 48f.

**168** | Kramer, 1993, 174.

**169** | "Arab Nationalism" has to be distinguished from conservative "Pan-Islamism." The ultimate objective of the latter in the early 19th century was the "realization of the Islamic ideal, the unity of the world in Islam, the central direction under a leader (Imam) of the world community," or in other words the global expansion of the Muslim Umma (English: the global community of all Muslims) and its transformation into a political entity based on religious legitimacy, a global theocracy. As Lee rightly points out, "the basic concept [of Pan-Islamism] from which thought and action sprang was religious rather than racial or national." Lee, 1942, 279; Also see: Burrowes, 2000, 171.

**170** | Arabic: Ǧamāl 'Abd al-Naṣīr and al-ishtirākīyah al-'arabīyah. Hanna/Gardner, 1966, 77f.

consciousness connect[ed] all the various local arenas of anti-imperial contest."[171] Nasser's Arab socialism "turned Arab nationalism [sic!] into an ideology based on a radical programme,"[172] as written in his National Charter of 1962.

The Charter declared socialism the "inevitable result of a new revolutionary age of social change" realized by "popular progressive forces." It painted Arab unity as the long-term goal preconditioned by socialism. It also named the adversaries of the Arab world in unmistakably leftist fashion: imperialism and local reactionaries. Nasser's concept was able to trigger the feelings of "Arabism" which had hatched from "anti-Turkish opposition" and had been simmering all over the region since the first upheavals against Ottoman rule. Arab socialism explicitly included religion and derived its constitutive political values from Islam. It had transformed the Arab nationalism into something more attractive for people whose identity was mostly coded "universalistic" but still strongly connected to religion. And while the Middle East soon saw a considerable decline of Arab Socialism, the aftermath of both concepts, Arab nationalism and socialism, thrived in radicalized milieus of second-wave decolonizing countries.

So what is the link between these concepts and the future YSP-regime? A "mood of nationalism [was] sweeping the Arab world."[173] But in Yemen this mood not only took root in the two major cities of Aden and Sana'a. The idea of the Yemeni nation was beginning to spread all over the country, and by the 1950s these ideas had found a foothold even in the mountainous northwest of South Yemen.[174] The major impact of "revolutionary writing" can be dated back to several copies of "The Nature of Oppression" by al-Qawakibi. [175] In 1944 they were smuggled into Sana'a and passed on to the south. Tribal affiliations of returning intellectuals who "trans-coded" the writings to their kinsmen skirted official channels, ignoring regulations and borders. The social structure of tribal Yemen, mostly considered a stumbling block for change, facilitated the distribution of ideas like no other. In the tribal hinterland, Yemen's major threshold to social change, illiteracy, was bypassed by the new medium of radio broadcast[176] and the strong family ties of intellectuals.

Countless political movements began to form across the country, most of them inspired by Nasser's Arab socialism. Nasserism already used socialist

**171** | Said, 1993, xxiv.

**172** | Choueri, 2000, 193.

**173** | Brehony, 2011, 30.

**174** | Kostiner, 1990, 16.

**175** | Arabic: Al-Qawakībī ; Pridham, 1984, 245 and Dresch, 2000, 45.

**176** | Gavin, 1975, 333; Ismail/Ismail, 1986, 15. On the role of communication, technology, and transport in community formation in Michael Mann's and Anthony Gidden's approach also see: Joas, 2011, 422.

ideals as a possible "ideological core of nationalism and its true identity"[177] for the newly independent states. According to Choueiri, this included "a socialist plan of [economic and political] reconstruction and regeneration"[178] in each country, meaning a socialist plan of nation- and thus state-building. In the long run, all socialist Arab countries were to unite as one Arab nation under Egyptian leadership. Based on a network of personal and tribal allegiances,[179] all movements in Yemen were either connected to Sana'a or the city of Aden, the future center of the South Yemeni liberation movement. Several of the early leading figures of the NLF, like Muhammad Saleh Yafa'I, had committed themselves to this version of Arab socialism.[180] Among the many sympathizers was the forerunner of the future South Yemeni regime, the highly active Aden branch of the Movement of Arab Nationalists.[181]

### South Yemen and the Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN)

Founded in Beirut by Palestinian students under George Habash's leadership[182] in the early 1950s, the MAN's first cell was established in Aden at the end of the decade. Burrowes comments on the importance of these early years for the future South Yemeni regime:

> "The fact that the regime in the PDRY was the only one in the Arab world that could trace its ideological roots directly to the old [MAN], as well as to the Marxism-Leninism of the PFLP, helps explain the special relationship and sense of kinship that existed between [Habash] and the leaders of the YSP in the PDRY through the 1980s."[183]

Over the coming years, both Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the NLF, formerly South Yemeni MAN, not only oriented itself toward but kept drawing from the development of Nasserism. It also cultivated an extreme approach to "revenge" against the "usurpation of Palestine by Zionism."[184] Nasser had included the ideas of Arab nationalism and Arab unity in his political

**177** | Choueri, 2000, 193.

**178** | Choueri, 2000, 193.

**179** | Dresch, 2000, 55ff; Halliday, in: Jankowski/Gershoni 1997, 32.

**180** | Yafa'i had been South Yemen's Minister of Interior from June 1969 onwards. After a half-year-long visit in Cairo he returned as a self-declared "Nasserist." Einschätzung über Mohammed Saleh Yafai, Minister des Innern der Volkrepublik Südjemen, in: BStU MfS Abt.X Nr.234 Teil 1 von 2, 331.

**181** | Also: Arab Nationalist Movement; Arabic: Ḥarakat al-Qawmiyyīn al-ʿArab.

**182** | Arabic: Jūrj Ḥabash. Later on Habash became Secretary-General of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PLFP), Also see: Mattar, 2004, 961.

**183** | Burrowes, 2010, 33f.

**184** | Choueri, 2000, 205.

ideology to appeal to everyone identifying as "Arab." Hence, the failure of political experiments in the name of Arab nationalism, namely the United Arab Republic,[185] and especially Nasser's defeat in the Six-Day War, deprived Nasserism of its universalist appeal and left the Arab world disillusioned. Clearly, Nasser's star was on the wane: Just like many other movements inspired by Nasser, the MAN turned away from his approach,[186] gradually radicalized and disaggregated into Marxist cells, among them the notorious terrorist group of Wadī Haddad.[187] And while the majority of the MAN's branches sank into insignificance, the Yemeni MAN not only survived, but reinvented itself as a revolutionary movement. In 1963, the South Yemeni MAN had reformed itself as a merger of six groups under the new name National Liberation Front (NLF). The members of the NLF preferred "Guerrilla warfare, as developed in North Vietnam and Cuba"[188] over Nasserist reform and thus adopted violence as a major tool to achieve their agenda. In the very same year, the NLF launched the Radfan Rebellion, the decisive spark toward revolutionary struggle against the British. The NLF and its successor, the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), would evoke images of these "heroic" years of struggle for political purposes on a regular basis.

## Ideology and the Singularity of the South Yemeni Case

In his comprehensive overview "The Communist Movement in the Arab World," Ismael explores "the Communists' inability to adapt Marxist-Leninist ideology to Arab societies and to traditional Arab cultural norms and traditions."[189] How was it possible for the NLF to overcome this apparent threshold of "traditional Arab cultural norms," when no other regime in the Arab world had been willing and able to do so? The next section takes a closer look at Ismael's arguments. Both concepts, Arab nationalism and Marxism-Leninism, in the long-run aimed to overcome national boundaries, while the revolutionaries of the liberation movements instead aspired to establish a nation-state:

> "As fervent Yemeni nationalists, though, few of these young men were captive to the pan-Arabism of these ideologies. Instead, most of them were drawn to these ideologies by their goals of national strength and development, and by the strong state to achieve those goals. In short, they were statist ideologies,

**185** | Founded in 1958 under Egyptian Leadership, its other members, Syria and Yemen, left the Union in 1961. Choueri, 2000, 193.

**186** | Kostiner, for example, refers to the Beirut-based MAN groups that adopted Marxism in the mid-1960s, Kostiner, 1990, 17; Also see: Burrowes, 2010, 251; Dresch, 2000, 67; Mackintosh-Smith, 1997, 165.

**187** | Mackintosh-Smith, 1997, 165; Linde, 1987, 3.

**188** | Kostiner, 1990, 17.

**189** | This quote relates to the 1920s. Ismael, 2005, 2.

> and most of the young Yemenis became statists."[190] Thus, any ideology able to capture the support of the majority of young politicized Yemeni men at the time had to include the idea of a nation-state based on the image of "one Yemeni homeland."[191]

How was the nation brought back into ideologies that had emphasized the international as the ultimate goal of their struggle, then? While Arab nationalism had already tried and failed to move beyond the stage of the nation-state,[192] Marxism-Leninism offered a feasible solution for this dilemma based on Lenin's writings and his theory of imperialism: The nation-state was redefined as the transitional stage on the way to "Internationalism" and declared the installation of an elitist national vanguard party was to lead the masses to acquire first socialism and then Marxism as the sine qua non for this transition. This vanguard party was supposed to induce the establishment of a socialist state as a remedy to "imperialism as the final stage of capitalism." Here, Lenin introduced the notion of "neo-colonialism," which included the idea of continued domination even "after a colonial nation had attained independence."[193] This notion of "neo-colonialism," and its implicit critique of imperialism, is what the otherwise contradictory projects of Arab nationalism and Marxism-Leninism had in common: The opposition to external and hostile forces. As a consequence, postcolonial liberation movements who full-heartedly had embraced the notion of "Arab nationalism" were now able to shift their allegiance to the Marxist-Leninist idea of "anti-imperialism."

In his argument Ismael also lists the lack of "objective conditions of industrialization"[194] in the Arab world as a reason for the minimal penetration of Marxist-Leninist notions there. This clearly was not the case for industrialized Aden in the 1940s and 1950s, thriving as it was on the mechanisms of capitalism. However, the creation of modern public space that accompanied the emergence of capitalism in Aden has to be considered the pivotal factor in connecting ideology to reality. It was the possibility to discuss the new reality of modern, industrialized life under capitalism that opened Adeni society for Marxist critiques of capitalism. In addition to that, British policy indirectly facilitated the spread of these notions

**190** | Burrowes, 2005, 171.

**191** | Halliday, 2002 (1990), 99-139.

**192** | "On February 1 1958, the unification of Syria and Egypt was heralded as the first step in the revival of the Arab nation. Less than four years later the union was torn asunder." in: Palmer, 1966, 50. Also see: Seale, 1961.

**193** | Ismael, 2005, 4f. Also see: On the notion of "neo-colonialism"; also see: Chapter 17. Moscow, East Berlin and the "Hawks of Hadramaut."

**194** | Ismael, 2005, 2.

in written form. Anderson considers the combination of the capitalist system with the technology of print the main catalyst for the development of nations.

According to Anderson, "print-capitalism" facilitates the transformation from a local community to what he describes as the abstract "imagined community,"[195] the nation. For Anderson, the written word is the basis for national consciousness, which has to unify members of the future nation who have never met and possibly will never meet. Only in combination with mass reproduction and a certain degree of literacy can it have any impact. In Aden all these conditions came together. Both literacy and "print-capitalism" were rendered possible by the British. Their schooling system granted the Adenis access to alternative ways of political organization and enabled them to share their opinions. Not surprisingly, it was a newspaper that initially reformulated "south Arabia" "as culturally a single entity," the Yemen.[196]

Apart from the prevalence of a vanguard party, other reasons for the emergence of the only Marxist state in Arabia can be found in the mutual enhancement of and reconciliation between the diverse ideological convictions of these leaders: Arab nationalism, socialism and Marxism-Leninism. In conclusion, three unique features of the Yemeni case relevant to this ideological merger can be detected. First, the South Yemeni emerged from the industrialized, cosmopolitan island of Aden, created by the colonial approach of the British that led to a distinct identity of "the urban Adeni." The milieu of the "urban Adeni" appeared to be significantly more receptive to the Marxist critique of capitalism and imperialism than other urban centers of the Arab world, as both phenomena were part of the daily lives of the Adeni population and not just abstract ideas. Second, the forerunner of the revolutionary Yemeni party NLF, the MAN, considered itself first and foremost an academic elite – one of many possible reasons that its most radical members turned toward Lenin's idea of the vanguard as "leader of the masses." Third, change in what the British had defined as "tribal space" had begun. Far away in time and place from the urban center of Aden, the notion of "Arab nationalism" had considerable impact on peoples' thinking there. This notion drew on the pre-existing image of the "Yemeni homeland" stemming from pre-Islamic times.[197] This effect transformed into the modern idea of the "Yemeni nation" as one of the "finest Arab societies." The internalization of nationalist notions has to be considered a necessary condition for the tribes' interest in the developments in the "city space" of Aden and furthermore prepared the ground for the reconnection of the "cosmopolitan island" with the South Yemeni hinterland in the joint "struggle for independence" that was to follow.

**195** | Anderson, 1983, 6.

**196** | Dresch, 2000, 56.

**197** | Dahlgren, 2000, 6.

## 5. Synthetic Politics in Yemen's South: A Marxist State from Scratch

> "The early leaders of the NLF planned not simply to bring about the withdrawal of the British presence, but to break down the entire tribal structure of the protectorates, destroy the Sultan system on which the South Arabian Federation was being constructed and create a classless, disciplined society out of the ashes. [...] What they lacked in sophistication they made up for in ruthlessness and willingness to fight long, hard and if necessary dirty."[198]

The liberation movement in South Yemen was highly fragmented. Countless groups would fight together one day and against each other on the next. In the late 1950s, two groups had taken the lead as the two major political movements,[199] the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY) and the successor to the Aden MAN, the National Liberation Front (NLF). Outside Yemen, FLOSY had been considered the most influential and organized of the various movements – not only by the British, but also by Egypt and the Soviet Union. Not even by November 1967 had Moscow decided which fraction to support, FLOSY or NLF, and was holding back its support until the "winner" emerged.[200]

How and why did this most extremist group among the South Yemeni prevail in the internal struggle for political leadership and establish itself in one of the most traditional societies of the Arab world? Scholars of Yemen's modern history present structural as well as descriptive approaches to this puzzle. While they agree on a complex set of reasons for the NLF's successful seizure of power, the scholars apply different focuses in their analyses. Whereas Brehony emphasizes the failure of the British to modernize Aden's hinterland and the NLF's close ties to the tribes there,[201] Gavin describes the military victories of the NLF against both the British and the FLOSY in minute detail.[202] Dresch focuses on the loss of power of the local sheikhs.[203] According to him, this was the main reason that

**198** | Muqbil, A.S., Uktubar, in: Brehoni, 2011, 20.

**199** | Even though the NLF was only established in 1963, earlier, more radical generations had been active within other associations years before. Gavin, 1975, 345.

**200** | Notes of GDR's diplomat Seidel on consultation with Soviet Foreign Ministry embassy counsellor Serjogin, in: PAAA MfAA C 1224/71, 18; Egypt and the Egyptians, in: Burrowes, 2010, 109; Gespräch von Freimut Seidel am 15.November 1967 mit Rat in der Abteilung Naher Osten des MID (Außenministerium der Russischen Föderation), Serjogin Aufzeichnungen von Freimut Seidel, Konsul am Generalkonsulat der DDR in Kairo 1966/67, Ende der 1980er Jahre Botschafter der DDR im Südjemen.

**201** | Brehony, 2011, 30.

**202** | Gavin, 1975, 345-351.

**203** | Dresch, 2000, 108ff.

the NLF was able to link "country and city" by infiltrating all relevant political and tribal groups. Stookey complements these observations with the "enormous appeal of the principle of armed action [...] among the masses."[204] The following analysis includes all of these explanatory factors, but centers them on the role of identity with regard to social change, an area that has been widely neglected by all authors.[205]

## 5.1 The NLF between the Escalation of Violence and Ideological Restraint

The two dominant groups of the South Yemeni "liberation struggle," FLOSY and NLF, used very different strategies to realize their own political vision for a future South Yemeni state. On the one hand, FLOSY and its intellectual leaders seemed willing to make concessions with regard to the British Empire's withdrawal and thus could focus on their fight against the NLF. The NLF on the other hand refused to cooperate with the colonial power and decided to fight not only the more moderate FLOSY, but any other competitor suspected of "collaboration" with the occupying force. Clearly, the NLF seemed to have opted for the less promising path: Strictly following their policy of "zero tolerance" on their way to power, the NLF and its leaders more or less eliminated their competitors for political leadership by force within only a few years. Among the most powerful social groups were the trade unions. Even though some of their leaders politically prevailed, their organization did not survive the NLF's crusade: The most powerful union, the Aden Trade Union Congress (ATUC), was accused of being "an agent of the British."[206] Finally, ATUC literally was decapitated when NLF fighter and chief ideologue Abd Al-Fattah Ismail killed the ATUC leader in February 1966. Ali Husayn al-Qadi had been the major integrative figure between the working unions, Ba'athist and nationalist circles and his death erased any influence these groups might have had.[207] In the same year, NLF and FLOSY were pushed by Cairo to merge. But due to their huge ideological and political differences, the NLF quickly left the joint venture and its new leader Abdullah al-Asnag behind, opting instead to fight them in the hills of the countryside and the streets of Aden. [208]

However, the NLF had never been a homogeneous movement, either. In the late 1960s the NLF was dominated by two major camps and it hadn't been decided yet which political direction would prevail within movement. Until 1965, the leader of

**204** | Stookey, 1982, 62.

**205** | When mentioned, this determinant is merely described in vague terms of "grown structures" or "mentalities," see for example: Braun, 1981, 46.

**206** | Dresch, 2000, 99.

**207** | Dresch, 2000, 110.

**208** | Burrowes, 2010, 132.

the more pragmatic wing, Qahtan al-Sha'abi, had been the movement's politically experienced father-figure who boasted a strong tribal background and pretty much shaped the public face of the NLF. He was opposed by a smaller group of utopian Marxists inspired by their main ideologue Abd al-Fattah Ismail. [209] As a consequence, any statement made by an NLF functionary at the time had to meet the lowest common denominator of the two fractions. Thus, the radical approach displayed in the NLF's writings was not what dominated the NLF's public image during the crucial years of power struggle. Instead, the movement relied heavily on nationalist and anti-colonial rhetoric which appealed to a significantly larger constituency. Marxist rhetoric was reduced to moderate clichés congruent with general notions of Arab Socialism of the time. Especially within the tribal realm, the NLF's activities were undertaken with little to no communist influence and generally avoided interfering with tribal social structures.[210] It seems unlikely that the NLF consciously opted for a pragmatic strategy with regard to their true political intentions so that they could appeal to a broader audience. Rather political restraint has to be regarded as a side effect of the small proportion of intellectuals within the NLF and the necessity to include the opposing factions within the movement. Nonetheless, this pragmatic restraint allowed for tribal and moderate forces to join the NLF's fight.

From the very beginning it had been the explicit goal of the extreme fraction within the NLF to "transform [...] existing social relations"[211] by abolishing all pre-existing social structures and replacing them with a new, classless society. Thus, it may be assumed that illiteracy of the tribes accidentally had helped the NLF: Their radical documents were not accessible to most of their tribal supporters. Calls for a united Yemen that was free from British rule were widely accepted by tribal Yemen – the abolishment of society as it had existed for centuries certainly was not. Indeed, the reason for the NLF's prevalence may be found in their ability to include quite solid and thus low-responsive tribal identities. For this, in the following section three major reasons are identified: Ideological restraint in the early years, the appeal of the NLF's violence to the tribes, and tribal affiliations among the NLF's leading figures.

## 5.2 Tribal Affiliations: On Yemeni Pride and Independent Thinking

> "The poor region of high, jagged mountain peaks and deep, steep-sided, rock-strewn ravines in South Yemen is where the [NLF] translated tribal dissidence into the start of its guerrilla war against Great Britain in October 1963."[212]

**209** | Arabic: "Abd Al-Fattah Ismā"Īl.

**210** | Halliday, in: Braun, 1981, 44.

**211** | NLF statement in Mukallā, in: Dresch, 2000, 120.

**212** | Burrowes, 2010, 301.

Mainly due to the first closure of the Suez Canal in 1956-57 and its resulting economic hardships, the late 1950s were characterized by upheaval and general political unrest in Aden and the hinterland. This is where resistance finally turned into violence. In October 1963 fighting broke out in the mountains of Radfan north of Aden against the local emir who was invested in and backed by the British. To this day, October 14 1963 is commemorated as the "Day of Independence."[213] However, as Dresch rightly notes, the "Rebellion of Radfan" may neither easily be interpreted as a "class struggle," nor as a fight against "colonialism." The eruption of violence of 1963 and the following years was the result of crisscrossing political, economic, and also personal motivations of groups and individuals. However, while "fighting in the countryside [...] could be taken for tribalism [by the British], events in Aden could not."[214] When fighting reached Aden and grew into an urban guerilla-war, the city became the focal point at which the simmering discontent of decades flowed into a political revolution – a revolution driven by a diffuse Adeni/Yemeni identity with the common goal of national independence.

Arab nationalism and socialism had taken root among the workers and actors from the "provincial lower middle-class" emerged as their political leaders who tried to channel the city's movement into the hinterland. But while no "translation" was necessary for the workers of Aden, modern ideas only took root among the tribes after being trans-coded by Arab nationalism and a moderate Arab socialism. And while print had brought the new concepts to the urban Adeni intellectuals, it was not before radio broadcast reached the tribal lands that a modern national consciousness began to emerge. The new technology did not rely on written but spoken standardized Arabic which was comparably close to the Arabic spoken by the Yemeni tribes. It was radio that linked the illiterate majority of the Yemeni population, including the tribes, with the cosmopolitan, intellectual leaders of the independence movement in Aden[215] - by making the Yemeni people "aware of one's self"[216] as belonging to the same people. This was the common ground necessary to establish the shared national consciousness of a Yemeni identity and to bridge the very different identities of the two different worlds in the "city" and the "tribal space."

## Of Tribal Pride and Independence: Why Follow Marxist Leaders?

Yemen's tribal identity had turned out to be rather insusceptible to external influence at the time, while also refusing to internalize the "picture of their own inferiority" as the dominance and "misrecognition"[217] of British colonial rule had suggested. Tribal communities are among the strongest forms of political

**213** | Dresch, 2000, 96; Also see: Radfan and the Radfan Rebellion, in: Burrowes, 2000, 301ff.

**214** | Dresch, 2000, 99.

**215** | Gavin, 1975, 333.

**216** | Said, 1993, 214.

**217** | Taylor, 1994, 25.

organization with regard to identification while characterized by a low "degree of responsiveness" to change. Maybe tribal identities in Yemen can even be considered immune to what Fanon describes as "resentment"[218] caused by colonial oppression. As Adra convincingly observes, Yemenis

> "maintained a pride in their own heritage and civilization that contrasted radically with the attitudes of colonized peoples. Not well informed about modern industrial and technological capabilities, rural Yemenis had very little reason to question the validity of their own civilization."[219]

Nonetheless, British presence had intensified, especially after World War I, with the aim of securing Aden's trade routes over land and thus had given up its policy of "non-intervention" in the hinterland. The new ideas of Arab and Yemeni empowerment were communicated at a time when the British occupation started to be perceived as a potential threat to tribal lifestyle. Thus, while anti-colonial notions with socialist accents inspired the Adenis, nationalism united the tribes. The NLF profited from both the impact of Arab nationalism on tribal identities and the awakening resistance against the colonial power.

During the "revolutionary years," the NLF's ideology as a mobilizing force for political support had focused on the evolving national consciousness of the people to "integrate society" while keeping any extremist rhetoric out of the public eye. Yemeni society probably was ignorant of the looming ramifications of a future NLF regime. The NLF's reluctance to any compromise with regard to the British pullout distracted attention away from their extremist political stance. Prone to violence but at the same time victorious, the NLF enjoyed tribal acknowledgment and respect due to their regional ties:

> "The term "regionalism" means that a given regime, however ideologically uniform and institutionally centralized, nevertheless operates according to primordial, regional-tribal inclinations that govern both its main political groups and their leaders. [...] [I]t was a combination of regional perceptions mingled with outlooks they developed on the job that shaped the revolutionary concepts of Aden's leaders."[220]

With this, Kostiner nicely sums up the revolutionary leader's political identity in the NLF as an unlikely combination of Marxism-Leninist ideology and tribal regionalism. Tribal support and acceptance for the NLF's version of Yemeni identity were carried by its nationalist aspect, which resonated well with some of

**218** | Fanon, 2004, 89.

**219** | Adra, 2010, 65.

**220** | Kostiner, 1990, 14 and 16.

the core markers of tribal identity: Independence from foreign interference and the shared values of qabyalah.

## 5.3 Conclusion: How the Radical NLF and Its Ideology Prevailed

Without doubt the British Federation's proposal of January 1954 finally "marked the turning of the tide in the Aden Protectorate"[221] for the British colonial presence. However, this also became the turning point in the power struggle within the independence movement. The international esteem of FLOSY caused many observers to overlook the standing and power position of the NLF. FLOSY had recruited mostly from the new "provincial middle-class" with their leaders being drawn from what has been described as the highly educated "urban Adeni." In contrast to this, only a few of the NLF's leaders "had received a higher education."[222] As a result, FLOSY's supporters within the city exceeded the NLF's followers by far. But what constituted FLOSY's source of strength around the "Crater"[223] turned out to be their major weakness in the hinterland and beyond. FLOSY "and its associates lacked both the NLF's organization outside Aden and its ability to mount military and terrorist attacks."[224] And while FLOSY missed the opportunity to connect with the tribes, the NLF's leaders enjoyed strong tribal affiliations.

In the end, FLOSY was neither able to benefit from the mobilizing effects of resistance nor the shared national consciousness. Their moderate approach to violence did nothing to improve their relationship with the tribes, who regularly preferred a quick and violent policy toward the British. Favoured by the international players and the occupational power itself, FLOSY lost standing and credibility among the radicalized masses in the city in the end. The NLF on the other hand successfully adopted the opposite strategy by rejecting any compromises with regard to the British pull-out. As soon as the British forces had withdrawn in the summer of 1967, the NLF overthrew those it considered to be "enemies" of the revolution, the supposedly "co-opted" sultans, sheikhs, and FLOSY.[225] To the surprise of many at the time, the NLF was more than a lose assembly of fierce fighters: It was well-organized internally and able to draw from a widely interconnected network of supporters all over the Arab world who only revealed themselves during the independence negotiations with the British.

**221** | Kostiner, 1990, 333.

**222** | However, some of its later leading figures, among them Abd al-Fattah Ismail and Ali Nasir Mohammed, were well-educated. Brehony, 2011, 31.

**223** | What is Aden downtown today used to be the main commercial area of the city. It is located in the crater of a dead volcano. See: Aden, Aden Colony and the Port of Aden, Burrowes, 2000, 10ff.

**224** | Brehony, 2011, 20 and 25.

**225** | Brehony, 2011, 27.

All in all British presence had had a decisive impact on national Yemeni identity both in negative as well as in positive terms. The negative impact refers to the creation of boundaries against the British as "the other," while the positive focuses on the establishment of new identity markers provided by British occupation policy. And while the British dual policy toward the "city" and the "tribal space" had affected the respective identities in very different ways, it had fostered the unification of an otherwise highly fragmented Yemeni society. Facing a common external threat, the tribal glorification of warfare in Yemen was used and politicized by political groups in a way that can be described by Said's concept of "resistance."[226] As the shared reaction to dominance among people identifying themselves with the same "nation," "resistance" became the unifying factor of otherwise fragmented and even competing revolutionary factions in Aden. Thus, and paradoxically, without British colonial rule there would not have been any identities in Yemen receptive to the rather intellectually extremist ideas promoted by the NLF.

At first, British colonial policy had prevented the emergence of a "national consciousness or a national opposition to the colonial rule,"[227] as it fully controlled access to the city and even attempted to use existing conflicts and competition between sultans and hinterland sheikhs for its own ends. The British Crown had not reckoned with any significant resistance to their policy, as the British had won the allegiance of what they considered the major tribal rulers. The British had realized "Arab nationalism to be the most effective instrument of wrestling the eastern Arab world from Ottoman control."[228] When they tried to use this powerful notion for their own ends in Yemen's south, Yemeni nationalism had already begun to engulf all of Yemeni territory under British control. Afterward, the Empire was not able to adapt its strategy and had to consider Aden a lost cause.

When British occupation was nearing its end, Yemenis began to incorporate traditional images of al-Yaman, its ancient pre-Islamic history, and also its role in the Arab world after the expansion of Islam, with new conceptualizations of the modern nation. As Said points out, the shared feeling of belonging to a "nation" usually is caused by the wish "to see the community's history whole, coherently, integrally."[229] Regularly this includes a strong ideology that gives the community new meaning. Thus, it seems reasonable that the political group that appeared most likely to provide Yemeni society with an ideology capable of transporting this meaning while simultaneously being compatible with existing identity markers of the majority would be the most likely to succeed. Eder acknowledges the "steering

**226** | Said, 1993, xii.

**227** | Ismail/Ismail, 1986, 13f.

**228** | Choueiri, 2002, 654.

**229** | Said, 1993, 215.

effect,"[230] that is, the speeches and actions of political leaders, might have helped the construction of collective identities. With regard to the masses in Aden on the one hand and the very different audience in the tribal areas on the other, this suggests the ability of the NLF's political leaders to "translate" their vision of a Yemeni nation-state in a way that responded to the identities of both, the "urban Adeni" and the tribal fighters envisioning a Yemeni nation-state. However, it must be assumed that this was only possible due to the lack of clear communication of the NLF's true intentions: The radical left of the NLF intended to create not only a new state and nation but also a brand new society, a vision of their very own interpretation of a Marxist state.

**230** | Eder et al., 2003, 105.