FROM COLLECTIVE MEMORY TO NATIONALISM:
HISTORICAL REMEMBRANCE IN ADEN

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By

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Abstract

In Aden, the former capital of the People’s Democratic Republic of South Yemen, a popular nationalist movement has emerged demanding a rescinding of the unification agreement that joined north and south Yemen in 1990. This paper explores the way in which history is being remembered, framed, and utilized to create a sense of coherent national identity rooted in historical understandings in Aden. This study draws upon ethnographic research and interviews conducted in Aden, Yemen and analyzes the social, political, and economic forces that have influenced this nationalist awakening. I focus on the concept of collective memory to explore how southerners are framing their understandings of a national past in light of current everyday realities and how new conceptions of Aden’s colonial and socialist past are invoking new senses of nostalgia for remembered notions of liberal urban lifestyles. Drawing on theoretical works in the fields of collective memory and nationalism, I also examine the power structures that allow for certain narratives to become accepted while others are silenced, both in the context of a unified Yemen and within the south itself. I attempt to build upon the established link between collective memory and nationalism by exploring not just how collective memory can function as a vehicle for historical reimagining but also the diverse vectors that shape Adenis’ national consciousness. I argue that Aden’s remembered history has led to a reimagining of national borders and a sense of belonging in the larger Yemeni nation.
Keywords: nationalism, collective memory, history, Yemen, Aden, colonialism, socialism, South Yemen, invented tradition, colonialism, nostalgia, socialism, anthropology, ethnography
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FLOSY - Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen
GCC - Gulf Cooperation Council
GPC - General Popular Congress
NDC - National Dialogue Conference
NLF - National Liberation Front
PDRY - People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen
UAR - United Arab Republic
YAR - Yemen Arab Republic
YSP - Yemeni Socialist Party
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Collective Memories of Aden

As Edward Said famously stated in his classic 1978 book, Orientalism, “human history is made by human beings. Since the struggle for control over territory is part of that history, so too is the struggle over historical and social meaning.”¹ The current struggle between north and south Yemen is about reclaiming territory, but equally important is the way in which history is being remembered, framed, and utilized to create a sense of coherent national identity rooted in historical understandings. This thesis aims to explore the dynamics of a political situation which has led people to demand secession from the national political and cultural system to which they are subjected. I explicate how the daily dynamics of the perceived Northern occupation influence the way people in Aden situate themselves within different national frameworks (Yemen and South Yemen). More specifically, I analyze how contemporary political dynamics and the discipline that they impose on their subjects effect communal understandings of the past and the historical context that has led them to a trajectory seeking full political independence.

In his 2000 history of Yemen, the most complete academic history of Yemen to date, anthropologist Paul Dresch writes, “For those with the patience to read sources thoroughly, recent nomenclature (“South Yemen”, “the Arab South”) proves anyway more labile than advertised. The shifts may be fun to track but they are not worth a lot of arm-waving. Yemenis know where Yemen is and one must simplify in some degree to

¹ Edward Said, Orientalism (Random House LLC, 1979), 331.
write a history.”² It is to the commonly accepted notion that Yemen is a known and agreed upon concept that my research is responding. Overwhelmingly, scholarly work on Yemen tends to treat the identification of “Yemeni” as a fixed, static conception, despite the wealth of evidence pointing to the contrary.³ Apart from being “fun to track,” these shifts mark critical junctures where self-identification and larger national understandings have been fundamentally altered. This reconceiving of self and community has had concrete effects on the country and the region and has led to civil war, insurgency campaigns, and the redrawing of national borders. Today, nationalist shifts have implications for Yemen’s future, where the existence of the state of Yemen is itself in question. Throughout the south, communities frequently hold rallies, engage in public forums, and participate in days of civil disobedience where they close businesses and block roads that connect north with south. Dresch’s research, largely located in the Yemeni capital of Sana’a and its surrounding areas, may have given him the impression that “Yemenis know where Yemen is,” but leaving that geographic space, the concept of “Yemen” is significant more elastic.

John Willis has argued that "the Yemeni North and South as specific political, cultural and moral geographies were the product of a contingent and multilayered history of interaction and possibility of which the nation was only one possible outcome."⁴ He therefore argues that scholarship may be better served by focusing less on nationalism as a category and more on geographical histories that better nuance that historical

contingencies of specific places rather than assuming the nation as given. While I agree that literature has assumed the inevitability of “Yemen”, I believe that the nation is still the central framework of historical imagination, and ultimately my interlocutors affirmed their demand for a reworking of the nation as category without throwing away the term altogether. Demands for independence hinged on the restoration of a national south and a reinstatement of the services that the nation-state can provide.

Why is it that in certain locations in certain times, “Yemen” has been a largely accepted geographic and national reality where at other times it has been rejected outright? When, where, and why has this conception been challenged and what national configurations are being offered as alternatives? How are Yemenis in different locations conceiving of their own past and histories as “Yemeni”, “Adeni”, or “Southern”? As Dr. Khaled Abdullah Mohammed, a southern intellectual aptly stated in a 2013 manifesto, “to more easily understand the present and its issues as well as to plan for the future, I believe we need to read the past, because reading the past will teach us the reasons for the maladies that we suffer from today.”

The process of shared recollection of the past is what Maurice Halbwachs called “collective memory.” Halbwachs concluded that "it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories." Memories, as social processes, are not static recollection of fixed events. Instead, Halbwachs notes, "society from time to time obligates people not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives, but also to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complete them so that, however convinced we are that our memories are

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exact, we give them a prestige that reality did not possess."\(^8\) By understanding the process of collective memory, we can understand how Adenis are making sense of their own histories.

This thesis explores the context through which collective memories are being recalled, what they reveal about the history of Aden as well as the lived experience of Adenis, and the implications these memories hold for the future. For Liliane Weissberg, past events are only recalled in a collective setting "if they fit within a framework of contemporary interests."\(^9\) I aim to understand the way in which collective memory functions as well as the forces of power which dictate the framework for those narratives and the vectors that influence that process of collective memory.

**Aden as Place**

Aden, the second largest city in Yemen, is located on the southern coast of the country with a long coastline along the Indian Ocean. It is near the strait of Bab al-Mandab, a narrow passage separating the Arabian Peninsula from the horn of Africa. Aden was built on a rocky peninsula formed by a dormant volcano. Its most central district, colloquially known as Crater, was named by the British to reflect its moon-like landscape. The city is divided into small districts, nestled into the rocky crags at the base of the volcano and extending into the mainland. I continually reference these neighborhoods to provide a sense of Aden’s physical spaces.

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\(^8\) Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 51.

After the British conquest of Aden in 1839, Aden became the midway point between England and the Raj, and its significance for the maintenance of the British Empire as well as to global trade increased. Since the opening of the Suez canal in 1869, Aden became accessible to both the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean and was located at “an important intersection of the time and space continuum between the two seas.”\(^{10}\) This prosperity propelled Aden’s importance in world trade, and in the early 1900s, it was the second busiest port in the world. As a result of Aden’s port traffic, the city grew and became home for an increasingly diverse mélange of people, including large numbers of Indians who worked for the British. The demand for food in Aden led to a boom in agriculture in the Hinterlands around the city, and Aden became not only important for global trade, but the main trading center for the population of southern Arabian Peninsula.

In 1967, Aden revolted against the British, forcing them to withdraw from Aden. In the wake of independence from colonial rule, the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) was established with Aden as its capital. The new state became the first communist regime in the region and was fostered by political and financial leadership from the Soviet Union. In 1990 the PDRY joined with the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) in the north with Sana’a as its capital, the first successful unification of two Arab

countries since the rise of Arab Nationalist rhetoric in the 1950s. However, unification was an uneven process, and political tension between disadvantaged southern leaders and entrenched northern leaders led to the Civil War of 1994 in which northern forces were victorious. In the aftermath of the war, Aden, having been a prosperous capital city just a few years earlier, was reduced to a peripheral city in a unified republic. The port declined rapidly in importance and public sector jobs were eliminated or moved to Sana’a.

Beginning in 2007, the Southern Movement (al-ḥirāk al-janūbi)\(^{11}\) was established which organized protests throughout the south demanding independence and a nullification of the unification agreement. Such calls had been emerging since the end of the Civil War. Today, Aden is a city in disrepair. Conflict between al-Hirak and government forces has coincided with economic downturn since 1990. Unemployment is estimated to be above 50% as a result of the closing of numerous factories and the mass dismissal of southern public employees in the wake of unification as well as the more recent impact of the 2008 global financial crisis. Today, most of the southern population supports independence. While views within this sentiment vary considerably, not a single individual out of the many Adenis I spoke with opposed independence. Media reports support my claim and suggest that independence is overwhelmingly supported throughout the south.\(^{12}\)

The rise in calls for independence and expression of southern nationalism has been accompanied by historical narratives which espouse a newfound sense of nostalgia for pre-unification political realities including both socialist times as well as colonial

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\(^{11}\) Henceforth referred to as “al-Hirak.”

times. These nostalgic memories are constructed in Aden’s contemporary context. Despite the long and bloody war for independence that was waged against the British, colonial times have come to represent prosperity and cosmopolitanism, two important aspects of southern nationalism which southerners argue sets them apart from northerners.

Aden, however, is just one location in Yemen’s south. While it was a British colony, the rest of the south was a protectorate, administered by local leaders under the auspices of the British. During the PDRY, it was the capital city and the center of government control and dominating socialist policies. In the rest of the south, such government presence was much more uneven. As such, it is important to distinguish between Aden and the rest of the south. While nearly all southerners now refer to themselves as janūbi (southern), recent events reveal that ideas of nationalism in Aden do not always correspond to other southern areas. One example is Hadramout, where activists are increasingly seeing themselves as a separate entity to the rest of the southern territories, and are rejecting the nationalist narrative emanating from Aden.13

Researching Memory

The primary research for this project was undertaken during the summer of 2013 in Aden. In recent years, Yemen has seen the number of foreign visitors drop dramatically. Political instability, the presence of international extremist groups, and the 2011 uprising have all contributed to the Yemeni government tightening control on the movement of both Yemenis and foreigners alike. Furthermore, an epidemic of

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kidnapping that has been intensifying for over a decade have made things precarious. Because of this, movement outside the capital of Sana’a required a set of permits. For this reason, my research in South Yemen was restricted to the city limits of Aden. Trips to Hadramout in the East of the country as well as any hinterlands in Southern territory were strictly forbidden, and even getting to Aden required jumping through numerous bureaucratic loopholes.

My research focuses heavily on daily recollections and conversation of Adenis who I met. A few were acquaintances of mine before this most recent stay. While I developed lasting relationships with some of the people I met, many more were those I encountered in my daily outings and my observations of political rallies and events. With a few notable exceptions, most of my interlocutors were young males between the ages of approximately 15 and 30. Naturally, most of them tended to be politically active. Many were born and raised in Aden, though some were from the surrounding areas. I did not get the chance to meet more than a couple residents of Aden who considered themselves from northern backgrounds. This is possibly due to a dwindling population of northerners residing in Aden or a fear of public identification as a northerner.

Most of my data comes from these daily interactions and reflects the ways in which Adenis spoke about themselves, others, and their own histories. Importantly, most my interlocutors had only lived through one time period: post-unification Yemen. While they talked at length about the British and the PDRY, these were based on collective memories, rather than personal oral histories. When I probed about where they learned about history, most indicated from friends and family and many others responded with phrases such as “everyone knows this.” Such responses indicate the social nature of
memory and a sense of shared history that exists outside of written records.

My research also relies heavily on both written and unwritten historical sources. I rely on many newspaper articles and written documents from southern leaders reflecting on their own positionality in Yemen’s contemporary context. I also rely on my previous experience in Yemen from 2010-2011 where over the duration of my stay, I learned much about Yemen’s history and people from those I spent time with. While I attempt to ground my discussion in specific references, much of what is known is simply that, known. Much of Yemen’s history does not exist in print form, but is referred to as “common knowledge.” This phenomenon lends further importance to the social nature of history, especially in the sparsely documented south.

While a number of semi-structured interviews provided me with a wealth of details about Aden, the majority of my research was participant-observation. I spent countless time in public squares, on the coastal promenade, and on the busy shopping streets of Crater observing and speaking with Adenis about their hopes and desires as their conceptions of their own histories which inform those aspirations. The almost daily occurrence of nationalist spectacles such as rallies and meetings allowed me access to a vast number of Adenis, and most of my data is a product of these encounters.

Lastly, the data I received was the product of those whom I encountered. While I visited as many neighborhoods as possible to diversify the populations I spoke with, my data reflects important class backgrounds. Adenis, especially in the urban center, tend to be better off financially than the outskirts and the surrounding rural areas. Furthermore, it is likely that those active in political movements and protest activities are of middle to upper class backgrounds, as these positions do not pay. At the same time, because of the
high unemployment rate, I was told that people of diverse backgrounds were attending protests and rallies. Nonetheless, it is important to consider class elements to conceptions of cosmopolitanism and urbanism.

**Memory and the Formation of Nationalism**

Throughout this thesis, I show that collective memories are critical in constructing what Benedict Anderson calls the imagined community.\(^{14}\) In his seminal work *Imagined Communities*, Anderson concluded that the nation is imagined “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members... yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”\(^{15}\) The imagined community is bounded and progresses together through time. Perhaps the most critical aspect of Anderson’s work here is his insistence that nationalisms are based on a historical continuity with the past. Halbwachs acknowledged this as well, stating that "the past is not preserved but reconstructed on the basis of the present."\(^{16}\) Thus, any understanding of the development of nationalism in south Yemen necessitates a critical engagement with the processes of collective memory and situating history as remembered through the analytical lens of the present.

While Anderson's analysis adds much to our understanding of nationalism, his examples attempt to show that nationalism itself is a concept rooted in the Western European experience, which provides models that can be copied and reworked by nationalists in the global south. This understanding is not just historically inaccurate, but


\(^{15}\) Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

\(^{16}\) Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 40.
as Partha Chatterjee argues, “if nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain ‘modular’ forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?”  

Rather, postcolonial nationalisms cannot be understood as mere mimicry of European forms, but imagined communities understood in relation to Europe and the West, thus aiming “to fashion a ‘modern’ national culture that is nevertheless not Western.”  

Nationalism in Aden must be analyzed both situated as a British postcolony as well as a product of a region where nationalisms arose in forms much different from the European experience.

In other words, I view Yemeni nationalism as situated in its specific historical context and analyzed as both a postcolonial process that allowed for the establishment of the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen in 1967, then as part of the unification project which culminated in 1990, and finally as a new struggle for independence beginning after the Civil War of 1994, which is not a process of difference-making with the colonial West, but with the Yemeni north. Collective memories are critically framed to facilitate the imagining of a community that spans all three of these vastly different time periods and which espoused very different conceptions of nationalism altogether.

My work further departs from Anderson in his assertion that the imagined community was made possible by print-capitalism, which allowed linguistic vernacular to spread and create a zone of communication that posited the community as progressing together through time, in constant reference to shared historical dates, events, and developments. Rather, in south Yemen, while print-capitalism as well as television media play a role in forging a sense of boundedness to the community, remembering of southern

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history in the context of community-based secessionist activities and the realities of daily life in Aden is even more critical.

Lastly, nationalism in the southern context must be understood in the absence of a state. South Yemen, as Adenis understand it, no longer exists legally, but remains the product of history. Until 1990, the south was its own state, and as such, the imagined community depends on memories of the past as an exemplary time period. For Adenis, history proves that the south was, is, and can be its own state once more.

Memory, Nationalism and Identity

Collective memories can be seen as the foundations for contemporary understandings of the south Yemeni national community, and therefore provide a basis for Yemenis to understand and present themselves as members of specific groups. In different historical and social contexts these groups have been numerous: Yemeni, Adeni, or southern to name a few. As Rogers Brubaker argues, groups, whether ethnic, racial, religious, or otherwise, are not primordial identifications, but rather loose constructs that take up significant meaning in certain times and contexts.¹⁹ I attempt to illustrate throughout this thesis that identity and identification are fluid processes and continuously framed and understood differently at different times. How is it that people imagine themselves as Yemeni in certain periods, and reject this sense of self just a few years later? What does that say about the fixivity of categories that scholars attach to certain groups?

I use term “Adeni” not necessarily as a category of self-identification, though my

work will show how being “Adeni” is historically grounded and understood. It is based on a geographic positionality that emphasizes Aden’s historical experience as a city. My use of the term should not imply a static category of identification. Instead, most Adenis were most likely to identify as janūbi (southern). Yet I argue that the historical contingencies of Aden as a city have had profound implications on the formation of nationalist narratives, and as such, the story of Aden is a critical part of being “southern” yet cannot be utilized in my analysis as representative of the entirety of the southern experience. Of further importance is how my interlocutors themselves deployed certain categories and definitions of themselves and their communities. Currently, the tendency for identification as “Adeni”, and more largely as “southern” hold more currency than perhaps ever before as those demanding secession present themselves as different from the power centers in the north. Most northerners, by contrast, are likely to self identify as Yemeni. I hope to convey a sense of when, where, and why these categories are formed, deployed, and referenced.

*Ethnography and Historiography, and Writing*

In my attempt to write an ethnography of Aden, I address the uneasy relationship between anthropology and history. Ethnographic accounts of Yemen, for all their scholarly achievements, have tended to focus on the “ethnographic present”, depicting Yemeni life through the lens of the experience of the ethnographer at the time of

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20 They are also likely to self identify as a host of other non-nationalist categories reflecting city, village, religion, tribe, or family.
research. Few provide adequate historical context or situate their research in time and space within larger national, regional, or global contexts. Many fail to grant appropriate attention to local histories. While some recent anthropological accounts have begun to reverse this trend, there still seems a hesitancy to incorporate historical research into ethnographic accounts.

Perhaps one of the reasons for this is exactly the danger of my own account here; that a dependence on present “truths” from a specific population in a specific context provides an entirely biased version of history. But that bias is exactly what I intend to illustrate. This thesis should not be read as a history of Aden, and certainly not a history of Yemen. Rather, it is about a specific remembered history being told from a specific vantage. However, this does not make my account here any less accurate, but it should not be read as history as such. This is simply one collection of narratives in an infinite web of narratives which illustrate Yemen’s diversity and complexity.

Demands for political independence are dependent on a larger national narrative, one that is uniquely southern and in contrast to the narrative that has been projected from the government in Sana’a since the unification of north and south Yemen in 1990. The battleground for that assertion of identity becomes history and culture, the fields that are distinct and autonomous from the political field, which is seen as under occupation. In this sense, I will tell the history of modern South Yemen, but through that history incorporate the multitude of different understandings of that history and the contestations

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22 Enseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean* (University of California Press, 2006) and Brinkley M. Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (University of California, 1993) are good examples of this.
I must also make a distinction between writing history as written and history as remembered. Much of this thesis recounts stories told to me by Adenis and data I collected from my field research. At the same time, I frequently provide basic historical context to fill in gaps of understanding that my data leaves. This background is explicated through the use of secondary sources documenting Yemen’s modern history and also serves to nuance the discussion that specific stories from Aden tell. In this way, I am historicizing remembered history to give a deeper sense of Aden’s past.

Certainly, those in the south who have provided me with their intimate recollections of history will not be satisfied with my incorporation of historical records which at times support and at other times contradict their depictions. I acknowledge that records, like memory, are truth claims. At the same time, many (even most) outside of Aden will reject this history outright as a product of southern secessionist thought which fails to grant enough value to accounts outside Aden. In some ways, this is a danger of research in a politically charged environment. But it also highlights the uneasy tension between historical research which focuses on present accounts and memories rather than a strict adherence to the historical record.

A Question of Culture

This thesis deals extensively with how remembered history frames Adenis’ contemporary understandings of themselves, their culture, and their political roots. Furthermore, it deals with the way in which Adenis understand the “other”, in this case, northerners. The conception Adenis have of a “northerner” is based on an equation of
northerners with the tribal highlands around Sana’a and the cultural ideas that are projected from this geography, where many of the national leaders trace their ancestries. The relationship between geography and power is central to Adenis’ sense of historical injustice, and the image of a tribal, conservative government leadership is a popular depiction in Adeni media and popular imagination.

At the same time, equating northerners with a cohesive specific geographic culture leads to dealing in stereotypes. I aim to understand these modes of representation through a discussion of Aden’s history as remembered in an attempt to contextualize these ideas. Yet such a task runs the risk of reifying these ideas, the very process that Brubaker called attention to. Ultimately, whether or not Adenis are accurate or not in their depiction of northern culture is not the key issue, but where these ideas come from and what they can tell us about the realities of everyday lives in Aden.

In contemporary Aden, collective memories of colonial and socialist times as well as the hardships encountered since unification in 1990 have helped Adenis to identify as “southern”, a category which has existed since the establishment of the PDRY in 1967 but has come to mean something new in the unified state. While “northerners” as a category are viewed as tribal, backwards, and unable to administer a modern and civil state, “southerners” in the context of Aden are viewed as cosmopolitan, urban, and progressive. This self-identification is constructed on the basis of a historical past where Aden symbolized prosperity, diversity, and liberal political values that included a detribalized society in the context of a strong socialist state. This includes public discussion of the role of women, which I will discuss further in Chapter 3.
As a white, male American, I have no ties to Yemen other than personal interest. The contacts that I used to conduct this research were largely made during 2010 when I first visited Aden while studying Arabic. It was then that I first became interested in the south as an object of study. One aspect of my background that I took advantage of was that I was one of only a handful of foreigners in Aden during my period of research. Therefore, I was eagerly approached by residents who assumed I was a journalist, one of the only types of foreigners who visit nowadays. Because of what people perceived as an international media blackout, they relished the opportunity to speak with me and tell me about themselves and their views.

On the other hand, when I wanted to be less visible, my background made this difficult. When speaking to sensitive subjects, I had to take obscure routes and meet in less obvious locations so as not to endanger my subjects or myself. Furthermore, being American subjected me to constant questions related to everything from American drone strikes to the 2003 war in Iraq to September 11th, 2001. Such skepticism towards Americans also led people to suspect me of being a spy or somehow connected to the American government. One person even bluntly asked if I would give my collected data to the government and he would become a drone target. In an environment where people were being targeted in drone attacks, the relationship between American foreign policy and southern nationalism proved to be a major obstacle. I took the time to answer all questions and did my best to convince people that I was in fact a researcher. I often had to reveal my academic interest in the subject as evidence of my sympathetic leanings. This tended to put people at ease and allow me to speak to them more freely. The support
of my contacts was vital for this as well, for they had to constantly vouch for me and often arranged meetings for me.

A further obstacle was the inability of most Yemenis to understand the purpose of my research. I tried to explain my positionality as a university researcher, but the field of anthropology, is widely unknown among most people and despite my best efforts to explain my project and background, I was often labeled as a journalist, or at best a student writing a paper on the south. As such, this leaves me with few local contacts to provide feedback on my work, an inevitable shortcoming.

Chapter Outline

This research also responds to the call to incorporate Yemen into larger discussions of regional and global history. The trend for Yemen-based research has been to treat the country as one of geographical isolation and strict adherence to traditional cultural values. Rather, this thesis is an attempt to incorporate a discussion of Yemen into larger events and show how its interconnectivity functioned in critical ways to influence the development of Yemeni nationalism.

This thesis is divided into two principal chapters. The first outlines the history of Aden from the British era (1839-1967) to the end of the socialist period (1967-1990). It explores how collective memories of these two time periods are situated in Aden’s lived present and how those memories constitute a sense of understanding of what it means to be Adeni. The second chapter continues with the unification of Yemen in 1990 and the following Civil War of 1994. I argue that memories of historical developments created a

new “occupation” of the south and that memories frame the northern occupier as a
cultural “other.” This narrative emerged after the 1994 Civil War and is now the most
commonly expressed narrative in Aden. The memories of the pre-unification south now
serve to create a sense of a bounded national entity that rests on a desire for independence
and a restoration of the previously existing southern state. Finally, I conclude with the
important developments of the past few years and a discussion of my major arguments
and findings.
CHAPTER 2: FROM COLONIALISM TO UNIFICATION: TRACING COLLECTIVE MEMORIES

Understanding how people construct meaning from memories is critical to an interpretation of the present. In the current air of a pro-independence south, Adenis are revisiting their own histories and making sense of past events that can illuminate their own past and future historical trajectories. The act of recalling the past is occurring in the social environment of urban Aden where residents are constructing collective memories that represent new interpretations of history. This chapter explores the transformation of Aden from an outpost in the British imperial project to the capital of a post-independence socialist south through the lens of collective memories that I recorded in Aden. I explore how memories of the past illuminate present discontent and inform how Adenis make meaning of their colonial past and disadvantaged present.

I begin with a historical description of Aden under British rule and a discussion of collective memories that glorify the British era. I then discuss how the British period is remembered as formative period in the making of cosmopolitanism that is shared among Adenis. Next, I explore the anti-colonial struggle for independence, finishing with an exploration of the socialist period and notions of a civil, nontribalized national identity. I argue that divergent historical trajectories are being critically remembered by Adenis to highlight fundamental differences between north and south.

*Prosperity, Decay, and Aden’s Built Environment*
In early July 2013, I was sitting outside of a small restaurant in the center of Tawahi. The heat was nearly unbearable, so I ordered a coffee and sat on the small patio to catch my breath. Tawahi, or Steamer’s Point, is the historic capital of the British colony of Aden. Nearly every building in the vicinity was constructed during the colonial era. Remnants of Tawahi as a global trading center and point of departure for ocean trade networks are everywhere. The building I was sitting on had a large “Rolex” sign on the outer wall. I was told it was once a trading center for merchants coming in from sea from India, East Africa, Southeast Asia, and Europe. In the late 19th century, Tawahi became the main passenger terminal of Aden, replacing Sira Bay on the Eastern side of the peninsula. The area became the site of a construction boom with military barracks for British soldiers, hotels for merchants, and bustling commercial centers. Most of these buildings still exist, but are now used for other purposes or abandoned altogether. Such is the prevalence of colonial architecture in this area of Tawahi, one can be forgiven for thinking they are in the center of colonial Mumbai.

As I sat drinking my coffee, a young man of about sixteen years old came up to me, an occurrence I had become accustomed to during my stay in Aden. As one of the few foreigners there at the time, I attracted a fair amount of attention. He introduced himself as Khaled and asked if he could join me. Khaled was a young student studying architecture at the Aden Technological University and was eager to practice his English with me. Unsurprisingly, as with most conversations, we discussed the topic of recent developments in the south. He was an avid supporter of independence, and his conversations centered on jobs and future prosperity. Khaled expressed deep worries about his economic prospects after graduation. He stated that most of his family and
friends had left Aden to seek jobs or education, either to America, England, or Saudi Arabia. Khaled admitted that it was likely that he, too, would go abroad, not out of desire, but out of necessity. Aden is his love, he said, but he instructed me to look around. What future is there in this city?

As I finished my coffee, Khaled offered to give me a tour of Tawahi. While I was already familiar with the neighborhood, I was intrigued as to what insights Khaled could offer me. Right away, he insisted that I see something. I remembered from a previous visit in 2010 that a vegetable market was located just down street. Walking towards the market, a familiar stench reached us. The foul odor of human waste became more and more overpowering. In my few days in Aden, I had frequently come across such waste in other parts of the city. Dead-end streets and empty lots were often piled high with garbage. At an intersection that used to hold the vegetable market lay at least three inches of sewage. Khaled explained to me that a sewer line had erupted over a week before my arrival, spilling the liquid into the intersection where it had been sitting dormant ever since. Eventually, he said, it would evaporate. In the mean time, the market stands were moved just outside the border of the sewage buildup. There was nowhere available to relocate them, Khaled said. People would just get used to the smell if they needed to buy fruits and vegetables.

I asked him why no one had come to repair the leak or clean up the mess. He explained that one of the buildings next to the lake was a police administration building. Instead of cleaning the mess, the police just moved into a different building down the street, leaving the people of Tawahi to deal with the sewage on their own. Police are part of the northern occupation government, he persisted, and largely composed of
northerners. They therefore have no interest in helping the south. It was punishment for
their protests. “Come back in three weeks,” he says. “I bet you the mess is still there.” A
week later when I left Aden, the sewage remained.

The decaying infrastructure and the erosion of the built environment of Aden was
a constant topic of discussion for the residents I spoke with. The contrast between Aden’s
prosperous past and its current state of disrepair was a constant rallying call for those
demanding a return to a two-state political order. Khaled and many others referred to the
history of the British as a time of prosperity for South Yemen. It was the British who
began to build schools, hospitals, and roads throughout the south, ushering in rapid
development and modernization. A new idealization of the British era was being
constructed in the context of what Khaled was showing me: abandoned schools, roads in
desperate need of repair, and a very visible sense of poverty.

*Aden as Colony*

Compared with this current state of disrepair, Adenis such as Khaled are turning
to the British occupation as a time of prosperity and development. In this section, I
revisit the developments of the port of Aden after the British occupation. Much of Aden’s
prosperity and growth can be attributed to the imperial vision of Stafford Bettsworth
Haines, the director of Aden from 1839-1854. The British advanced on Aden in 1839
primarily due to their need for a coaling station, and it became integrated into the British
Raj in India.\(^{24}\) Aden was governed by direct rule and was deemed a British outpost. For
the British, Aden served a much more important purpose than just a coaling station, for

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\(^{24}\) Willis, *Unmaking North and South*, 17.
“it is not necessary to conquer a piece of territory merely to use it as a port of call and a re-victualing depot.”

It was the midway point between England and India. While the port of Aden was an official outpost, the hinterlands around Aden remained subject to local tribes and the Sultanate of Lahj, and the British maintained control by forging a series of treaties and trade agreements with the tribes. Haines envisioned Aden as more than just a coaling station. He saw the potential to restore Aden to its glory days as a global trading center. This transformation would benefit the British Empire and cement their imperial grasp on Aden.

A British traveller to Aden in the first decade following the British occupation, J.P. Malcomson, describes Aden in the following way; “In January, 1839, when the British took possession of the place, the inhabitants certainly did not exceed one thousand poor squalid half-naked creatures, whose chief food consisted of dates and fish.” While such a description is blunt and likely exaggerated, it projects a sense of decline. Since the increase in ocean traffic around the cape of Africa, Aden had been diminishing in importance. Its prosperity and centrality to world trade such as during the time of the Rasulids was certainly diminished. However, Aden was still a cosmopolitan hub filled with a diverse population. Haines vision for Aden would have a profound effect on the port’s development, but it still retained the character of a global center.

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26 Willis, *Unmaking North and South*, 19.
As part of Haines’ vision to restore Aden’s historical greatness, he signed an 1848 treaty with the Sultanate of Lahj. This treaty removed or reduced duties on products coming from hinterlands for export or for consumption in Aden itself. It also reduced customs on imports and exports from the sea. This move once again made Aden the primary port for the larger south Arabian region. Haine’s next move was to declare Aden a free port in 1853, a logical next step after the 1848-49 treaties.29 The declaration was not just a strategic move. It also had a profound economic effect by revitalizing Aden’s global trading market. In addition to the relocation of merchants and the reoriented trade in coffee, new trading partners also emerged. For example, Americans began to import cotton to Aden. Holland, Spain, the Seychelles, Australia, and China all increased trade with Aden.

In the late 1860’s, Aden’s development was characterized by large infrastructure projects aimed at fortifying Aden and integrating the hinterlands. A lighthouse was constructed near Steamer Point, barracks facilities were built in Tawahi and Ma’ala, and the British devised a “water scheme comprising pumps at the Shaykh ‘Uthman wells, reservoirs at the isthmus and a six-mile aqueduct between the two.”30 In 1869, the French attempted to purchase the settlement of Little Aden, just west of Aden, from the Sultanate of Lahj. This attempt failed after the British outbid them. The attempt also encouraged them to be more active in consolidating their control of the hinterlands and integrating the tribes into the colonial government. This integration was made possible by the groundwork laid by the 1848-49 treaties.

29 Willis, *Unmaking North and South*, 20.
Perhaps one of the most important developments in the revitalization of Aden as a trading center was the opening of the Suez canal in 1869. The trip from India to England now took only six weeks, and sea traffic around the tip of Africa decreased greatly. Aden became the central stopping point for ships headed through the canal, and this increased its importance as a refueling station and a trading hub. It also made Aden a source of provisions for traveling merchants, increasing its agricultural activity with the hinterlands and through sea trade. Aden became symbolic of British colonial interests in the Indian Ocean, and they began projects that would increase fortification in the years leading up to 1900, further consolidating their strategic position.

Aden’s main sources of trade were coffee exported from Yemen and imported from East Africa, cotton imported from USA, Kutch, Veraval, and Porbandar. The late 19th century also witnessed an increase in grain imports from India, East Africa, and Arabia as well as ivory from Zanzibar and Massawa which continued on to Bombay and Europe. From the 1870’s on, Aden’s importance continued to rise. Aden’s total trade accounted to 5-8 million rupees in 1850, increasing dramatically to 22-33 million in the 1870’s. Aden flourished in trading coffee, gum, hides and skins, and also had an abundance of pearl fisheries. It is described as “the true entrepot for the Red Sea and East Africa.”

It was during this time as well that the face of the city transformed into what it is today. Merchants transitioned from Sira bay, the historical point of anchoring, to newly developed Tawahi ports. This infrastructure was developed to accommodate larger vessels and account for the rise of steam powered ships. The district of Ma’alla,

32 Gavin, Aden Under British Rule, 102.
33 Gavin, Aden Under British Rule, 103.
historically a squatter settlement for Bedouins, expanded greatly and large housing developments for foreigners began to appear. Coal increased in importance with the increase of steamships. The numbers of passenger vehicles rose steadily which also led to the construction of Steamer Point at Tawahi which became the passenger terminal. New hotels and restaurants were built around the new terminal. New demand for food and water continued to tie Aden to the agricultural hinterlands. Large quantities of meat were imported from East Africa. Funding for these projects came from British India, which fully supported Aden’s role in facilitating travel and communications between India and England.

By the turn of the 20th century, Aden was firmly in the control of the British and had become an integral part of their global empire. Its use as a coaling station became increasingly important, but the British also vowed to retain their control of Aden for larger military and political purposes. Furthermore, as Aden’s significance as a global commercial center increased, its importance to the British empire increased as well. In the words of J.P. Malcomson, “Aden as a naval and military station will, at no remote period, be one of the most important posts belonging to the British, appearances now indicating that there is every chance of part, at least, of the Indian trade being restored to its ancient channel.”34

Infrastructural as Memory

For many of the southerners I spoke with, the British occupation was symbolic of modernization and prosperity. The importance of Haine’s revitalization project that

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continued long after his tenure had profound effects on the physical landscape of the city. When examining the physical decay of the urban center, the importance of infrastructure becomes clearer. Decay here refers to deterioration over time, damage done to buildings by graffiti or in times of violence, as well as the lack of public maintenance resulting in dysfunctional services and waste accumulation. The visual impact of driving around Aden even after my first visit in 2010 was dramatic. It looked as though a war had occurred. While there had been some violent conflict in recent years centered on confrontations between pro-independence protesters and central government forces resulting in bombed buildings and bullet holes scattered on walls, the scale of the decay was difficult to comprehend. Garbage was piled on what seemed like every dead end street. When I arrived at my friend Amar’s house and asked him about the reasons behind this, he was vague. However, he immediately began discussing the British. He talked about the current situation as an occupation by the north, but “at least the British built something,” he said. “The current occupation doesn’t do anything well.” The British period became associated with infrastructure projects, construction, and prosperity.

Infrastructure and the built environment of Aden embody what Jan Assmann calls
“cultural memory.” Cultural memory is institutionalized memory that is recalled through present day situations. For Assmann,

cultural memory transforms factual into remembered history, thus turning it into myth. Myth is foundational history that is narrated in order to illuminate the present from the standpoint of its origins.... Through memory, history becomes myth. This does not make it unreal- on the contrary, this is what makes it real, in the sense that it becomes a lasting, normative, and formative power.

Understanding the visual characteristics of British infrastructure can help conceptualize why Adenis are heralding the British era as a prosperous. One can look around Tawahi today and see the British structural achievements and contrast it to contemporary decay, such as the sewage scene depicts. Thus, collective memories of Aden as a British colony are reinforced by their visual representations in the structural environs of the city. Such elements of cultural memory constantly remind Adenis of what once was.

Since the near complete withdrawal of central security forces from everyday life in Aden in 2011, the visible landscape of Aden has gone through another transformation. Nearly every wall or edifice is painted with pro-independence graffiti. The most prominent display is the official flag of the PDRY, a symbol of a free south Yemen. Flags are also hoisted from every roundabout, large building, and town square. Such displays, while failing to distract from the decaying infrastructure, are indicative of the sense of resistance that has come to define the center of Aden. The efforts to reassert a southern claim over the physical landscape are helping Adenis to reassert control over their former capital, which had been run so prominently by northerners since unification.

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36 Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 38.
The Materiality of Memory

During my first day in Aden, I struck up conversation with the front desk employee of the hotel I was checking into. When he discovered my interest in the south, he immediately began to take out a small collection of photos from his wallet. The photos were of the British colony of Aden. He explained to me that he helped run a website that collected these old photos, and that many people he knew carried them around.\textsuperscript{37} When I inquired about the reason for this, he explained that it was so they could document Aden’s history. Colonial-era photographs were widely available at local shops selling pro-independence memorabilia. As I encountered more people discussing similar photographs, I learned that they helped to construct a visual narrative of Aden over the last century. The old photographs showed the clean streets, the big ships, and the bustling trading centers that so characterized what can be understood as a once prosperous of Aden: the British occupation. It was not merely the visible architecture of the city that served as cultural memory, but historical artifacts that could be kept in one’s pocket.

One particular photograph that had been circulated at rallies as well as through social media was a picture of Aden in the 1950’s compared with a picture of the city today. The two extremes were easily visible, with the older picture showing a bustling ocean ship terminal, well-dressed businessmen from diverse origins, and large colonial era hotels. The contemporary picture depicted an Aden that was falling apart, with collapsed buildings, broken vehicles, and ragged-looking Adenis begging on the streets. Below this contrasting set of images were pictures of Dubai from the same time period. In the 1950’s, Dubai was almost non-existent, just a few small buildings and a large,\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{37} The website can be found at \texttt{http://alamree.net/alboums\_main.htm}. Much of the media was no longer working at the time of writing but most pictures can still be found.
empty desert. The contemporary showed the iconic skylines of a modern, urban Dubai, complete with skyscrapers and massive development projects financed by the flows of oil that had been discovered in Dubai and neighboring Abu Dhabi. Why had Dubai gone through such a transformation where Aden has simply decayed into a state of disrepair?
The specifics of the development projects in Dubai are beyond the scope of this paper, and surely any study investigating the massively disparate histories as well as the political and economic contexts will find little valid for comparison between the two. However, in the popular imagination of Adenis, the contrast highlights the track that Aden was remembered to be on and the reality of the contemporary context. Many activists who I met with kept photographs in their wallets and proudly displayed them to me. It was also common for people to carry around colonial currency, complete with pictures of Queen Elizabeth. Much of the currency that had been sold in antique stores was authentic and remained in the hands of collectors after the evacuation of the British, originally intended to be sold to European tourists visiting Aden. Other currency that was sold in pro-independence shops, I suspect, was fake and served only as a souvenir.

Historic souvenirs such as currency and photographs are indicative of the materiality of memory and seemed to serve as physical reminders of what Aden had been. The constant presence of unused administrative buildings, the decaying port, empty

Figure 3 Young protesters in Aden holding southern flags and currency from the PDRY. Photo courtesy of Facebook,
factories, and grand avenues built by the British are signifiers and reminders of what Aden once was. The reality was that little was built outside the confines of Aden and the subjected colonial population was so disenchanted with their European masters that they took up arms to fight against them. In fact, there exist parallels between the current anti-occupation movement with the former independence movement. Both take on similar themes and motifs to garner cultural resonance. However, the lived realities of the present lead to a remembrance that focuses on the positive, and is validated by the remnants of that once glorious past.

*Conceptualizing a Cosmopolitanism Past*

Historical remembrance was not only focused on large-scale administrative projects and economic prosperity, but by a sense of cosmopolitanism and urbanism that is felt by many Adenis. As mentioned before, the port has been an integral part of Aden’s history. Its popularity within Indian Ocean trade, predating the British by many centuries, was part of the appeal for British conquest. Haines, in his ambitions to rejuvenate the port and by extension the city, helped cement the sentiment of cosmopolitanism into Aden’s modern history. 38

The term *cosmopolitanism* is multifaceted and denotes more than an urban existence. It is also my own terminology for my observations in Aden. 39 As Asef Bayat

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38 Willis, *Unmaking North and South*, 20.
39 In fact, the term “cosmopolitanism” was only ever used in English. When discussing such themes in Arabic, Adenis were more likely to use the terms *thiqāfa hurra* (free/open culture), *medanī* (civilian/civil/urban), or *mutagaddam* (advanced). The term ‘*alamī* (cosmopolitan) is not widely used in Adeni Arabic and possibly has connotations of globalization of Westernization that would be less likely to be emphasized.
states, “cosmopolitanism refers to both a social condition and an ethical project.” As population figures show for the period of British rule, Aden was cosmopolitan in its social makeup of diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups. As a product of collective memory, cosmopolitanism is an ethical ideal implicated in the process of cultural difference making. The southern vision of cosmopolitanism rejects and “confronts cultural superiority and ethnocentrism” as associated with the larger northern occupation project. The idea of cosmopolitanism rather espouses diversity and multiculturalism as achievements of a southern collective mentality. It is only under the current occupation that historical notions of cosmopolitanism are suppressed in dominating narratives in favor of hegemonic northern culture and power.

Cosmopolitanism is further documented by the historical record and Aden’s placement in the larger scheme of the British empire and specifically its relation with India. I intervene here with a short description of the Aden colony in terms of cosmopolitanism. In fact, at the time of the British conquest, existing trade connections faced a dilemma. The historical flow of people and goods between Aden and the rest of the Indian Ocean placed Aden between the Middle East and Asia. Its cosmopolitan nature posed a question for the British, "did Hadramawt - and the Aden protectorate more generally - belong in the Middle East or India?" By retaining Aden’s status as an outpost of the Raj, the British acknowledged that even in a state of decline, Aden was not just an Arab city but also a global one.

As John Willis notes, at this time, “India referred to a particular cultural

Asef Bayat, Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East (Stanford University Press, 2010), 186.
Bayat, Life as Politics.
geography” that was greater than the subcontinent itself and had profound effects on the way the British dealt with their acquisitions on other continents, perhaps none as much as in Aden.\textsuperscript{43} It also coincided with a need to control Hadrami and other merchants travelling freely between Aden and the rest of the Indian Ocean. Aden was a symbol of mobility, but the British also needed to increase control over their empire. With the coming of British colonialism, Aden became even more central to the hinterlands as the sole port of departure. In this way, we can interpret British restructuring of the trade system of Aden as both disruptive and productive. It necessarily redefined and sought to administer Aden’s deep connections with India, as well as reinforce those connections for the growth of the port. This binary of mobility and security would affect the way in which Haines embarked to develop Aden in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century.

Haine’s scheme was also part of a larger goal of reducing the position of the port of Makha as dominant in the global coffee trade and to redirect the flow of goods to Aden. At the time of the British conquest in 1839, Makha was a small port on the Red Sea coast of northern Yemen. When the British took over, he saw them as a threat and banned all trade with the colony. As a result, coffee, which was already favored in Makha markets, became the exclusive realm of Makha. Hussein also gave America preferential treatment in the trade, hoping that this would counter the prominence of the British in the region. When the Ottomans ousted Hussein in 1849, the British made their move. They forged an agreement, based on the previous 1848 agreement with Lahj, which abolished all taxes and levies on trade coming into Aden. This strategic move helped to redirect the coffee industry back to Aden and away from Makha.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{43} Willis, \textit{Unmaking North and South}.
\textsuperscript{44} These two treaties are further elaborated in Kour, \textit{The History of Aden}, 66.
The 1853 declaration of Aden as a free port signaled the end of Makha’s importance and weakened the Ottoman’s influence in Arabia.\textsuperscript{45} Global merchants who had settled in Makha relocated to Aden. In the words of John Willis, “Land in the town was given to wealthy merchants who agreed to build houses and shops in stone. The development of the port as a settlement, commercial center, and military base encouraged the growth of a cosmopolitan population of Europeans, East Africans, Arabs, Jews, and South Asians.”\textsuperscript{46} Development also weakened tribal control in the hinterlands because merchants used Aden instead of tribally controlled ports such as Mukalla. It reoriented the Hadrami diaspora towards Aden rather than Mukalla.\textsuperscript{47} By the end of the 19th century, Aden had retained its place as one of the world’s busiest ports and was fully integrated both into the Indian Ocean trade system but also the global system propagated by the British empire, and the diverse of population of Aden represented that.

\textsuperscript{45} Willis, \textit{Unmaking North and South}, 20.
\textsuperscript{46} Willis, “Making Yemen Indian,” 23-38.
\textsuperscript{47} Ho, \textit{The Graves of Tarim}. 

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Collective memories centered on the concept of cosmopolitanism reflect a worldly and diverse society of Aden. As Scott S. Reese asserts in his historical study of an Adeni neighborhood in the mid 1900s, “the Muslim community of Aden... in 1931, was one of the most ethnically and socially cosmopolitan in the British Empire.”

Cosmopolitan history is still reflected in Aden’s geography, boasting a number of churches of various faiths, ruins of Parsi religious temples, a Hindu temple, and of course a skyline dotted with mosque minarets.

The downtown district of Crater is still overlooked by a British clock tower nicknamed “Little Ben” and a large stone church. Certain neighborhoods and districts are still known for their association with different populations: Ma’alla was the home of settled northern Yemenis and Somalis, Crater had its own Jewish quarter and Indian quarter, and Tawahi was the center of European traders.

As an integral part of the global economic system, Aden in the early 20th century was something of a “melting pot.”

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49 Further exploration of local colonial geography can be found in, Suzanne Dahlgren, Contesting Realities: The Public Sphere and Morality in Southern Yemen (Syracuse University Press, 2010), 38-39.
Today, little remains of that diverse history. The port, while still functioning, is second to other ports in the region such as Dubai, Muscat, and Sharjah and suffers from a lack of public or private investment. As a result, the diverse ethnic groups making a living off Aden’s trade capacities have long since left. First after independence and then further after unification, minority communities left Aden as economic opportunities diminished. Today, the city is mostly Arab and of southern roots, with a significant number of Somali refugees.

However, the sense of cosmopolitanism extends beyond ethnic diversity. Cosmopolitanism encompasses a worldview that is heavily influenced by Western consumption of pleasure. As Susanne Dahlgren states, “before unification... the city was full of bars, restaurants, and nightclubs, where music, alcohol, and dancing attracted those who desired it.” The cosmopolitan ethic of the urban population allowed for leisure activities that at the time, were becoming less and less common in the region due to larger socio-religious trends such as Wahhabism, especially profound in the 1980s in North Yemen. After unification, such trends dominated the social norms of Yemen, and that historic cosmopolitanism was suppressed in favor of a more conservative northern culture. For many Adenis, cosmopolitan history further adds to a sense that Aden’s prosperity was realized by the British, and only fragments of that past remain today.

*The End of the British Era*

The British presence in Aden was not to last. By the 1950’s, anti-British sentiment in the colony was beginning to gain momentum. Inspired by global anti-
colonial movements and new calls for Arab nationalism emanating from Gamal Abdul Nasser’s Egypt, various movements began to surface. One major grievance was that either Europeans or Indians occupied most administrative posts in the colony.\textsuperscript{52} One of the first groups to protest foreign control was “Aden for the Adenis” which launched a series of protests and armed campaigns against the British from 1949-50.\textsuperscript{53}

With the unrest in the south, Imam Ahmed of the north invoked the first rhetoric of a unified Yemeni state since the creation of national borders on the Arabian Peninsula in the 1800s. He claimed that Greater Yemen, that historical geographic entity, was his legitimate claim and he began encouraging and arming southern resistance groups to fight against the British. This was also influenced by the large numbers of northerners who had begun to move to Aden for economic reasons, fleeing the then impoverished north. The border between north and south was very porous, which made economic and social exchanges commonplace. The border also allowed the Imam to send weapons to southerners.

In 1952, British Petroleum built an oil refinery in Little Aden, a small town just outside Aden. This marked the beginning of oil exploration in the south. The ability to control this potentially vast resource also influenced anti-colonial sentiment. Aden was also an image of a vibrant civil society, and much of the rallies and protests against the British stemmed from union strikes. Ironically, these unions were fostered by the British

\textsuperscript{52} In fact, many Indians were attracted to the British Overseas Program in hopes of being stationed in places like Aden. As Susanne Dahlgren explains, unlike in India, Indians in Aden “were no longer colonial subjects but were offered white-collar positions” (42).
\textsuperscript{53} “Aden for the Adenis” was significant at the time because it highlighted a segment of the population that was focused on Aden as a city, rather than the south as a political unit. Despite British attempts to incorporate the hinterlands into the colony in the later years of colonialism, there was still a sense that the entirety of the colony was not unified. Today, a new group under the same title has appeared and their slogans can be seen throughout the city. It is an indication that even those in the south have differing ideas of what an independent state would look like and what role Aden plays in the larger southern narrative.
who thought that their organization would make southerners more easily co-opted. This also led to tensions between rulers in the hinterlands who were working with the British and the Adeni middle and upper class, who were often heading unions and anti-imperialist organizations. However, anti-British sentiment was spreading to the hinterlands as well. In 1958, the Sultanate of Lahj, previously under British control, declared its independence and attempted to join the newly established United Arab Republic which had seen Egypt and Syria become a single state.\textsuperscript{54} The British quickly moved in to overthrow the sultan and appointed their own governor.

In the north, Imam Ahmed also decided to join the United Arab Republic, and became a member of the UAR confederation from 1958-1961.\textsuperscript{55} After disagreements between himself and Nasser, Ahmed declared that socialism was anti-Islamic and removed himself from the confederation. Shortly after, in 1962 Ahmed died from natural causes and was succeeded by Muhammad al-Badr. Just a week later the September 26th revolution, backed by Egypt, overthrew the Imamate. The Yemen Arab Republic was subsequently declared.

At the same time, the British declared the Federation of South Arabia (FSA) which encompassed Aden, the hinterlands, and Hadramout. This was an important step for the British in asserting control over the entire territory in an effort to neutralize anti-imperialist aggression. South Arabia is now how many people refer to the south\textsuperscript{56}, for this was the first time the territory had been delineated as a single political entity. Some even call for the return of the FSA flag, only used until independence. This privileging of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item [54] Dresch, A History of Modern Yemen, 77.
\item [55] Dresch, A History of Modern Yemen, 82.
\item [56] Many southern politicians, members of al-Hirak, and Adenis whom I spoke to now prefer to use “al-\textsuperscript{‘}Arabīyā al-Janūbiā” (South Arabia) rather than “al-Yemen al-Janūbi” (South Yemen) as a means of emphasizing a further sense of disconnect from the geography of “Yemen.”
\end{footnotes}
British era, under which the south was first united as a legal territory and given a state flag, illustrates the current resonance that colonial development possesses in Adeni society.

This section has highlighted the final years of the British era and shows that, while Adenis today are reflecting on the British period with nostalgia, the very creation of the southern state was born through an anti-colonial struggle. It also documents the birth of north Yemen just before southern independence and shows that even at this time, the two states were intertwined and unification rhetoric from the north, while having no tangible effects on political realities between the two states, was always on the minds of political leaders.

Old Colonialism, New Occupation

I return briefly to my interaction with Khaled, the young Adeni student. He continued to show me around Tawahi, and was eager to show me what has become of his beloved Aden. Twice, we were passed by military trucks carrying northern soldiers. Khaled taunted them playfully, telling me that he has no fear of them. He referenced an image being shared on Facebook that shows two pictures side by side: an image of British military trucks in Tawahi during the 1950’s and a recent picture of Yemeni military trucks on that same street. The caption on the two juxtaposed pictures reads “Occupation.” This image is helping to promote the image of a current northern occupation, understood as a foreign power illegally controlling southern lands.

While we discuss how Khaled’s association with the British was of prosperity, I ask him about the war of independence. “It was still a foreign occupation, so we fought
against them” he replied. Ironically, we walked past resistance graffiti that spelled out “FLOSY,” the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen, one of two main anti-colonial organizations that coordinated the armed struggle against the British. This represents the dialectical relationship between a newfound appreciation for the role of the British in developing a modern state apparatus and a view of the anti-colonial struggle as a source of inspiration for the current anti-occupation movement. It is necessary here to give a brief overview of that war.

*Independence and the Making of a New State*

On October 14th, 1963, a violent rebellion took place in the Radfan region in the province of Lahj, just north of Aden. Locals were enraged at the British appointed Amir of Dali, the largest city in Radfan. The Amir took the place of a widely respected local leader whom the British suspected of treachery against the crown. In response to the appointment, locals fired on a British police patrol, prompting a scorched earth reaction from the British who feared the attack might inspire further resistance in the colony. Dali was razed and scores of citizens were killed in the ensuing violence. In fact, the Radfan Rebellion marked the beginning of South Yemen’s war of independence. The violent response by the British triggered more violent resistance across the colony and inspired the violent resistance of two Aden-based groups, the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY) and the National Liberation Front (NLF). The decision by these groups to declare war on the British resulted in what is now called the Aden Emergency. The Radfan Rebellion marked the beginning of South Yemen’s war of independence.

The war of independence was inspired by rhetoric of Nasser’s Voice of the Arabs
and his support of the anti-imperialist struggle as well as other anti-imperialist struggles in the region.\textsuperscript{57} By 1966, three years after the fighting began, violence had increased and the British were under pressure at home for the costs of the occupation. They announced that they would leave Aden after a transitional period of two years. In fact, in 1967 they withdrew prematurely and the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen was established, the only communist regime in the Arab world. In 1969, the Corrective Move was initiated, where NLF leaders took control of the government and initiated sweeping reforms.\textsuperscript{58}

The new NLF-led government was quick to reject its colonial past. The main focus was symbolic, and aimed to rid the south of the lax morals of the European colonizers. Bars and clubs were closed, social gathering places were walled off, prostitutes were sent off to work in factories, fishing became illegal because it was theft of public property, and massive land reforms made previously British controlled land state owned.\textsuperscript{59} This crackdown on European vices would ease in the years following independence, and many accounts of Aden by the 1980s recall the prevalence of alcohol, bars, and nightlife.\textsuperscript{60} As the government formed more of a socialist character, there were profound effects on society and the economy. By the 1970’s, rent control schemes in Aden combined with the surplus of British-built housing units now under state control allowed a boom in the population of Aden. The discovery of limited oil fields provided state income, though it was dependent on remittances from nearby Gulf states as well as

\textsuperscript{57} Flagg Miller, \textit{The Moral Resonance of Arab Media: Audiocassette Poetry and Culture in Yemen} (Harvard CMES, 2007)
\textsuperscript{58} Miller notes this as the beginning of economic reforms, and Dahlgren marks this as the beginning of “women’s emancipation” in the PDRY. See Miller, \textit{The Moral Resonance of Arab Media} and Dahlgren, \textit{Contesting Realities}, 63.
\textsuperscript{59} Dresch, \textit{A History of Modern Yemen}.
\textsuperscript{60} Dahlgren, \textit{Contesting Realities}. 
the Soviet Union. Aden Airways, a state airline was established. The state income
distribution system was considered one of the most equal in the world.\textsuperscript{61} The schooling
system was expanded, and the south attained twice the percentage of children in school
compared to the north. It also had twice the literacy rate as the north.\textsuperscript{62} These
advancements led to the identification of the North as “backwards”, an idea propagated
by state literature. Islam was discouraged and the government was secular in nature.

The post-independence transition further highlights widespread disdain for the
British at the time of independence, and image that has shifted considerably today. After
long struggles throughout the region against colonialism, nationalist leaders were able to
assert their own control over their own nation-states. However, the post-independence
state encountered many problems as well. It became indebted to the Soviet Union and
was far from self-sufficient. Fluctuations in remittance flows affected the whole
economy. Economic development in Aden led to a disparity between the capital and the
countryside. Corruption was rampant and infighting between government party factions
was widespread, leading to many small conflicts.

\textit{Tribalism and the Modern Citizen}

Stemming from collective memories that posit the south as a zone of
cosmopolitanism, new interpretations of historical developments contribute to redefined
notions of a distinct southern culture. As noted by Susanne Dahlgren, in contrast to the
colonial era, “changes in the socialist period were not manifested in road building or
construction of fancy villas, as in North Yemen. Instead, in Aden development meant

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{61} Dresch, \textit{A History of Modern Yemen},
\textsuperscript{62} Miller, \textit{The Moral Resonance of Arab Media}, 191.
\end{flushleft}
educational, political, health care, and job opportunities for women and previously disfavored social groups.”

In this sense, collective memories of the socialist period are less focused on the physical environment and more focused on government programs and services. This section explores how southerners discuss their own distinct identities in relation to the socialist project of the PDRY.

Throughout my fieldwork, residents of Aden frequently described northerners to me with terms such as ẓālim (unjust) and khalif (backwards). Growing demands for independence in the south have come with increasing efforts to depict the northerners as different and inferior. These characterizations hinged on the theme of tribalism. As Roberto Gonzales rightly notes that “few anthropologists today would consider using the term ‘tribe’ as an analytical category, or even as a concept for practical conception.” I would agree that the term, especially in reference to Yemen, has been overused and under nuanced. My aim here is not to provide a more adequate working definition but to illustrate the vastly different historical and regional manifestations of tribal structure and specifically to illuminate the way in which the concept is understood by urban Adenis.

The NLF socialist leaders that came to power in the wake of independence were eager to assert a national identity that distanced them from the colonization that had taken place. It is useful to differentiate between two aspects of the nation into what Partha Chatterjee calls the material and spiritual realms. In the material realm, the British

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63 Dahlgren, *Contesting Realities*, 67.
65 Chatterjee refers to these two as the “inner” and “outer” domains of nationalism. The outer was where the process of modernization would occur, and required an acknowledgement that British technological innovation reigned superior to indigenous capabilities. The inner realm contains the cultural element of nationalism, the space where a national identity was be framed and held as superior to a deviant Western culture. This separation allowed nationalists to assert their own conceptions of tradition and an indigenous modernization project. Partha, Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton), 1993.
possessed superior technology and development capabilities. They built the infrastructure that modernized the nation, from factories to oil refineries to universities. South Yemeni nationalists realized their inability to compete with Western technology. On the other hand, the spiritual realm allowed a space for an assertion of a national identity that was both different from and superior to what the British could offer.

Where Chatterjee describes the further reinforcing by nationalists of traditions deemed essential by the British colonialists in India, the process was different in South Yemen. Rather than deepen the notions of tribalism espoused by the British as a means of asserting control over the hinterlands, the new nationalist project envisioned a de-tribalized society, seeing tribal structures as a threat to the modernist, socialist project.66 The new Southern citizen would not be tribal, like its counterpart in the north, but a citizen of a secular, egalitarian society.

Social programs put forward by the new state altered tribal structures throughout the province, and the results were most visible in Aden, where tribalism was already weaker than the hinterlands. Media campaigns fought hard against tribalist notions. As Elham Manea states, “in Aden the tribal role was virtually non existent.”67 However, tribalism as a category still persisted in various forms in the hinterlands and began to take on new meanings rather than be eradicated. Flagg Miller’s exploration of cassette tape poetry in Yafi’i, just north of Aden, shows that where tribal structures were suppressed during the Socialist period rather than be eliminated, they took on less political forms and were reasserted in new ways after unification as a means of forming a new relationship

66 Flagg Miller provides a useful discussion on the impacts of anti-tribalism “ideological fervor” on the residents of Yafi’i, just north of Aden. See Miller, The Moral Resonance of Arab Media, 47.
67 Elham M. Manea, Yemen, the Tribe and the State, (International Colloquium on Islam and Social Change at the University of Lausanne, 1996).
Nationalist discourse often centers on the characteristics of the cultural realm of southern identity. Cosmopolitanism was inherited from the British period, manifested in a bustling diverse population engaged in economic activity centered on Aden’s port. A detribalized society was inherited from the PDRY, espoused as part of the political project to create the modern citizen. These two periods are remembered today and constructed in opposition to what characterizes the north. Cultural characteristics of southerners are embodied in the popular term dabashi, used to describe northerners. The derogatory term means tribal leaders from the north. The term originates from the aftermath of unification when northern leaders seized large swaths of land. Adenis frame tribalism in terms of traditional, ancient social structures. This contrasts with their own sense of cosmopolitanism and, by extension, modernity.

A number of studies refer to the complicated relationship between northern tribal structures and the central government of Sana’a. Southerners today often lament this relationship as symbolic of northern oppression and exclusion of southerners from the political process. One of the most discussed aspects of differences between tribal north and modernist south is the parallel justice systems that have arisen from the prevalence of tribes. As Amar explained to me, tribes in the north have their own justice systems and processes. Sometimes with the oversight of the central government, whose elite

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68 Miller, *The Moral Resonance of Arab Media*.
69 Paul Dresch contends that the root of this was a northern television cartoon in which a character named Dhabash was “an uncivilized thug with a Northern accent.” Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 190.
71 For a detailed example of tribal mediation, see Caton, *Yemen Chronicle* for a discussion of a suspected kidnapping in Khawlan, a rural region northeast of Sana’a. This was also a case where Ali Abdullah Saleh,
members are nearly all powerful tribal leaders themselves, crimes committed between tribal members and communities are resolved outside of any formal legislative framework, though they do operate within a system of norms and rules. For citizens without tribal affiliations, as in much of the population of the south, legal justice is carried out by the government judiciary. As a result, a murder committed by a tribal member in Sana’a could result in a monetary transaction negotiated by tribes. The same crime committed by a citizen of Aden, for example, would be subject to corrupt government criminal courts and would likely see a lifetime in prison.

The story of Ali, a journalist from Aden, is indicative of this sense of injustice. Ali was a former editor of al-Ayyam, a daily newspaper headquartered in Aden that had been in print since the British era. In early 1998, Ali was awoken in the middle of the night. Plain-clothes police officers appeared at his front door and demanded that he come with them. He claimed that they never told him what he was being arrested for. He was taken to Sana’a for trial, found guilty of supporting separatism, and sentenced to one year in Sana’a's Central Prison. He noted that he knew many other people in jail with him, all active members of the southern journalist field. Ali also swore about what he called “terrorists” in jail with him, members of the Houthi Movement or Al-Qaeda. He said that such criminals were guilty like him, but were northern. Therefore, they were able to stay in the upstairs prison with windows while the southerners were kept in the basement below. He claims he saw many terrorists held for only weeks or months for crimes much more egregious than his, but the full extent of the legal justice system was spent on

former president of north Yemen and himself a member of a powerful tribal organization, was involved in the mediation process.
suppressing separatism. *Al-Ayyam* was officially shut down by the government in 2009.\footnote{The shutdown of al-Ayyam and other newspapers is documented by Reporters Without Borders, \url{http://en.rsf.org/yemen-major-crackdown-on-independent-05-05-2009,32909}.}

The suggestion by Ali here is that criminals of northern descent, whether they are members of political or terrorist organizations, are given preferential treatment even when they are subjected to the state legal system. Most have tribal ties, and negotiations can be made to have them relieved of their sentences prematurely. Even when these tribal connections do not exist, or fail to bring a reduction in one's sentence, northern prisoners are treated more fairly. As Ali talked about his prison experience, he dwelled on the existence of this dual legal system. He described the north as tribal and lawless, a common description. Southerners like himself were subject to the corrupt legal system in Sana’a that tirelessly targeted southerners while tribal northerners were treated favorably or subject only to local tribal rulings, immune from the criminal justice system altogether.

The reality that tribalism as a social formation does exist in the south does little to dissuade self-perceptions of a non-tribal south. Because of the southern history of socialism, a state ideology that profoundly altered the structure of tribes and their relation to the government, southerners are likely to see themselves as favoring the rule of law, in contrast to the image of a tribal, lawless north. While Paul Dresch reduces such ideas to “false exoticism,” the persistence of these ideas since unification is a testament to their currency.\footnote{Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 198.} Recalling the socialist period and the effective legal system evokes a fondness of the past as formative periods of southern identity.

Other scholars of the Middle East have documented the use of tribalism and identity in other contexts. Linda Layne points out that segments of Jordanian society
associate tribalism as antithetical to loyalty to the state.\textsuperscript{74} This image of an “archaic custom” is spread in local news media. At the same time, the state uses Jordan’s tribal image to attract foreign visitors. In the Jordanian context, “the tribalism debate is at the heart of Jordan’s struggle to maintain and nurture a national identity,” in that the nation can “distinguish itself from the Palestinian nation” in the face of Israel’s attempts to characterize Jordan as the Palestinian homeland.\textsuperscript{75} She concludes, in an Andersonian fashion, that the root of the problem lies in the fact that “the nation-state is being imagined in more than one style.”\textsuperscript{76}

Adenis are engaged in a similar process where tribalism as a social category that signifies a “pre-modern” structure is attached to an identification with the north. As Layne concludes, such understandings of tribalism create “an analytic dissonance when confronted with the realities of tribes made up of living members who are participating in every aspect of national life.”\textsuperscript{77} This includes tribal members in the south of Yemen. The imagining of the state by Adenis reflects the previous manifestation of a southern state, and specifically the southern capital of Aden, where tribalism as a social category was limited and did not interfere with the daily actions of the state.

\textit{Locating and Transmitting Collective Memories}

If memory is a social event, in what spaces are histories being remembered and transmitted? Since the Civil War of 1993-94, conceptions of cosmopolitanism and modernity have become relatively accepted in the community of Aden. The main space

\textsuperscript{75} Layne, \textit{Tribalism}, 190.
\textsuperscript{76} Layne, \textit{Tribalism}, 190.
\textsuperscript{77} Layne, \textit{Tribalism}, 196.
for this remembrance and dissemination of historical narrative has been the frequent 
protests that have been occurring for over a decade. At the time of writing, large-scale 
organized protests were being held every week in various locations throughout the south, 
though commonly in Aden itself. The smallest of protests frequently draw numbers in the 
hundreds, and the more rare “million man marches” often draw hundreds of thousands of 
protesters.78

As mentioned in my Introduction, studies of nationalism have too often focused 
on official channels of nationalist formation, such as print-media, government spectacles, 
and state propaganda.79 Rather, in Aden, there is no state to disseminate such group 
cohesion, though some elites do play that role.80 My discussion of protest spaces is closer 
to what Michael Billig coined “banal nationalism,” or embodiment of nationalism as an 
“endemic condition.”81 While Billig’s discussion was framing well-established nations, 
his concept is also useful for distinguishing between elite formation and everyday 
embodiment. In Aden, protests and civil disobedience (‘asyan medeni) have become part 
of the everyday, rather than spectacular events.

These frequent social settings provide spaces for the expression of dissatisfaction 
with the current situation in Aden. Protests often involve lectures by prominent figures, 
including politicians, journalists, and intellectuals. They also frequently host panel 
debates between community leaders who discuss a variety of topics. Arenas such as these 
allow public discussion of national character, celebrations of historical events, and

78 Despite their being named “Million Man Marches,” the largest have been estimated to have drawn 
hundreds of thousands of protesters. Exact figures are unknown due to the almost complete absence of 
journalists from the events.
79 Wedeen, Peripheral Visions and Anderson, Imagined Communities.
80 See my following discussion of Aden Live, the closest thing to state media that exists in Aden.
proposals on future directions for the south. Civil disobedience campaigns, conducted at least once a week, involve closing stores and blocking roads with the north as an attempt to cut Sana’a off from the economic benefits of the south. Road closures, especially, are highly contentious and often result in violent encounters between protesters and military forces.

Here I provide a short excerpt from my fieldnotes of one protest which I attended in the center of Crater, Aden on June 28th, 2013:

1:00 pm: I arrive to the bus (dabab) station in the center of Crater where I was told the previous day that a pro-independence rally would be staged. These are held every Thursday in this location, though other squares in other neighborhoods also host such events. It is well over 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and I am told by a shopkeeper in the square that the event will start around 5 or 6 when it cools off. I decide to grab some lunch and wait.

3:30: People slowly start to gather at the station, most of them carrying southern flags and banners with the picture of Ali Salim al-Beid (the former president of the PDRY). Volunteers have set up a stage under the station awning with a PA system and carpets are laid out in front of it where people are sitting down and chewing qat.82

5:00: The internet and electricity have been cut off, and protesters say that this is common whenever protests happen. They claim the government does this to limit communication. Shortly after, a military truck drives by but does not stop and does not seem overly interested in the gathering crowds. There are now at least 100 people around the stage area. Organizers enter nearby shops and restaurants and grab chairs to bring to the stage for important representatives to sit. The atmosphere is festive and it seems as though even local businesses are happy to participate in the occasion. Music has started playing from the PA system. The song is repeating “Where is the Arab army? Where?” This popular protest song is criticizing the Arab community for their silence on the injustice against southerners.

82 Qat is a mild stimulant chewed in social situations known scientifically as catha edulis.
5:30: The protest is well underway now, and a panel of activists is discussing the National Dialogue and the prospects for a federal system. The event seems to be televised, and when I ask, cameramen say that the footage will be aired on *Aden Live*, the opposition television station. On the right side of the stage is a small row of 6 chairs occupied by women draped in southern flags. I begin to speak with them and they say they are protest organizers in charge of bringing women to the gatherings. I would guess around 30% of the protesters are women.

6:30: After a series of talks, speeches, and debates, music begins playing again and the station turns into something of a party. People of all ages, male and female, are dancing in front of the stage. Slowly the crowd departs and organizers begin cleaning up.

This excerpt describes an average small protest gathering. These events are not just political spectacles, but community forums where local residents can come and receive news and opinions from local activists as well as participate in open discussions. This particular event is representative of many of the gatherings I attended, and it was here that people shared with me their stories, their memories, and their hopes for the future.

While international media presence at these protests situations is usually nonexistent, videos are recorded and transmitted by pro-independence organizations to
the south’s main television station, Aden Live. Owned by former southern president Ali Salim al-Beid and operated out of Beirut, Aden Live is the only television station providing news and programming from Aden. Images, videos, and discussions of protests are televised on a daily basis. Common programming includes documentaries of historical events in the south, nationalist music and accompanying videos, news bulletins, debate shows, and educational programs such as nature documentaries. Such programs serve to project an idealized history and culture of the south. One example is a music video broadcast on Aden Live by young singer Mohammad Hany titled “Bilādī Ila al-Majd” (My Country to Glory) which juxtaposes patriotic lyrics to video images of Aden during the British era.83

In every private home I entered in Aden, the family living space was showing Aden Live. Because most other stations are either run by the government or prominent businessmen with strong government connections, Aden Live is the sole domestic source of information for Adenis.84 Aden Live also makes an effort to air daily news roundups on the south in English, the only Yemeni news station, to my knowledge, which features broadcasts in foreign languages.85 The use of English is not only an attempt to reach a foreign audience, but reflects Adenis own sense of self which is derived from their colonial history. Today, many British schools still exist in Aden, and English use is a

83 Full video at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lKX1hjEEPZw.
84 This is not to say that Aden Live is the only watched news station, though it is likely the most popular. Other international channels such as BBC, Al-Jazeera, and al-Arabiya are generally accepted news channels.
85 The channel also uploads these along with other broadcasts to YouTube which can be accessed if the station is cut off by the central government, a relatively frequent occurrence. Videos can be accessed at http://www.youtube.com/user/Adentvlive.
performative manifestation of cosmopolitan conceptions. In fact, many Adenis I met, including memorably a *dabab* driver, spoke English.

Collective memories shared in public settings and through nationalist television forge a sense of coherence to historical narratives. Consumption and reproduction of history has become part of everyday life in Aden. While cultivated through political spectacle, they are further reinforced in daily conversations and embodied in the flags and slogans that adorn the visible city.

**Conclusion**

Contemporary collective memories focus on Aden as a prosperous, cosmopolitan, and urban space. Such memories are reinforced by new understandings of the period of British rule and that of the PDRY. These conceptions are clear and widely held. Collective memories are summarized well in this 2014 passage from an editorial column in *Aden Al-Ghad*, a southern newspaper,

> The Sultanates began to form their modern administrations under the framework of modern state power. These features appeared from the 40’s and 50’s of the last century. With the spread of education and enlightenment came the appearance of features of civilian rule that joined with modernity and enlightenment. The consolidation of a national identity and its compatibility with authentic character, customs, and traditions, where its joining came with religious authority and sectarianism that completely resolved urgent differences in this community.

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86 Though many less English schools exist today than before unification as well as before independence. English was more stigmatized in the period after independence as a cultural remnant of the British occupation. Now it can be seen as a marker of difference with the north.

87 The *dabab* driver lamented his education in English and engineering at a British school and the necessity of his current work as a bus driver. He complained of the lack of financial return and that his wife, who he claimed spoke better English than him, was unable to find a job at all.

This quote highlights the end of the British period and the formation of the PDRY as the formative years of southern modernity, where a distinct national character was developed. This national enlightenment paved the way for understandings of the southern citizen as cosmopolitan and non-tribal. Civilian rule, rather than tribal, was emblematic of the south.

At the same time, little emphasis today is made on the socialist nature of the previous state, despite the implications of development projects in the larger socialist, modernist visions and overall positive interpretations of the socialist period. While the local manifestations of socialist rule such as administrative and development schemes dominate the popular imaginary, this was only loosely associated with the larger Soviet-inspired socialist political project. As one male protester in his late 20’s told me, while he supported independence, he was not a supporter of any current independence leaders, nearly all of whom drew legitimacy from their roles in the socialist government. He claimed that such an ideology was reminiscent of Soviet Russia and was a “thing of the past.” He desired a new form of government that was more evolved than the socialism of the PDRY political project. His source of inspiration was Germany, where he had a brother working. What he deemed “European socialism” was more suitable for a new south.

This anecdote reveals two things. First, support for independence did not necessarily translate to support for a return of the south’s socialist leaders. Second, for this protest, collective memories of the PDRY era harkened more to the concept of cosmopolitanism and non-tribalism than of socialism, as reflected in his model of a progressive Europe rather than an antiquated Soviet-style Marxism. This reveals a tension
between popular imaginaries drawing upon Aden’s cosmopolitan past and the fact that most independence organizations were run by former southern leaders ascribing to the larger socialist project. Perhaps this tension can be partly explained by the collapse of the PDRY and the legacy that socialist leaders left on the south. This history is explored in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3: FROM UNIFICATION TO THE PRESENT: REIMAGINING NORTH AND SOUTH

Chapter 1 examined the modern history of Aden and how that history is remembered to cultivate a sense of cultural difference embodied in a sense of cosmopolitanism and cultural modernity that is characteristic of Aden and, by extension, a southern state. This chapter looks at the history of both north and south, specifically analyzing the unification of 1990 and the resulting political, economic, and cultural landscape. I look at how the previously discussed collective memories are contributing to rising nationalist sentiments in the south by critically examining nationalism in theory and in practice. I argue that socially remembered history provides the foundation for national identity, especially in the case of south Yemen which is characterized by Adenis as under occupation.

Yemen: Ancient Origins, Modern Manifestations

The Prophet Muhammad said: “The people of Yemen have come to you. They are tenderhearted and more delicate of soul. The capacity to understand is of the Yemenis and wisdom is that of the Yemenis.”
- Sahih al-Bukhari no. 4129

The very conception of what constitutes Yemen has shifted over time and continues to be contested by Yemenis themselves. It can be elaborated first as a geographical entity and second as part of a contemporary national conception. As a geographical construction, Yemen dates back to ancient times. The concept of “Greater Yemen” has been interpreted to be as large as everything south of Mecca extending as far
east as Dhofar in modern day Oman. In fact, modern border disputes with Saudi Arabia often hinge on historical connections and shared identity on both sides of the border. However, the political unification project of 1990 was most active in portraying the idea of Greater Yemen as a natural and historic entity comprising of a single ethnic group. In this sense, unification was the first step to reuniting the fragments of this nation of people. Political leaders had a vested interest in the notion of a historic people with shared culture, and this narrative in its popular consumption made the idea of unification palatable. In his exploration of geographical notions of Yemeni north and south, John Willis attested to "the power of a nationalist narrative that posed Yemeni unification... as an inevitable and logical historical development." The affirmation of the historical inevitability of Greater Yemen and the natural progression of the two states into a unified reality by the current government is an indication that "geographical imagination is just as important as the historical imagination." Yet for those in the south, this geographic imagination is a project of northern power and dominance.

What is included in this historic geographical definition is highly contested, especially in the present south. In terms of a modern nation-state, Yemen has only existed since unification in 1990. Since the 18th century, Imamates, empires, colonies, and local tribes have dominated the political landscape. Then of course, there were two Yemeni states: the Yemen Arab Republic in the north, founded in 1962 and the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen in the south, founded in 1967. Modern borders, constructed as part of larger colonial projects, have disrupted the historical conception, and as such, nationalisms have developed locally while also occasionally addressing the

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89 Willis, *Remaking North and South*, 3.
90 Willis, *Remaking North and South*, 4.
larger Yemen. While some today espouse the concept of Yemen as a bounded entity, the only modern manifestation of a single Yemeni state encompassing anything like its modern boundaries is the result of the 1990 unification agreement that lasts until the present. Previous borders reflected British, Ottoman, and local claims to territory. Many in the south now reject any version of history that references Greater Yemen. As one Adeni told me, there was always a “Yemen” and there was always a “South Arabia”, but the two were never one on the same.

Attempts in the past had been made to reunite Yemen and make it a single political entity. After the departure of the Ottomans in the north in 1918, unification was seen in the by political leaders as a way to erase external colonial legacies, whose presence led to the demarcation of a border between north and south. Imam Yahya, the head of the Zaydi Imamate in the north from 1904 to 1948, had long expressed a desire to reclaim lands incorporated into Saudi Arabia as well as merge with the south after resisting the British. Unification was one motivation for supplying arms to southern anti-occupation forces during the 1950’s and 1960’s. In 1972, after a war long the border between north and south, the Cairo Agreement was signed, stating that, “Unity will be established between the two states of the Yemen Arab Republic and the Popular Democratic Republic of Yemen in which the international personality of both of them will be merged in one international personality and the existence of a unified Yemeni state.” However, tensions in the months after the agreement was signed led to a disintegration of the terms, and not until the late 1980s was the idea of unification

91 Whitaker holds that these “artificial borders” did not reflect the sociocultural realities of the land on each side of the border, and the erasure of these artificial lines was one way nationalists conceived of to break with their colonial pasts. Stephen Whitaker, *The Birth of Modern Yemen* (Al-Bab, 2009), http://www.al-bab.com/yemen/birthofmodernyemen/.
discussed again.

A Unified Yemen: From Dream to Reality

“Between the Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen there will be total unity and amalgamation under which the national identity of both will be dissolved into a single national identity known as the Republic of Yemen”
- 1990 Unification Agreement

This section documents the final years before unification and the context of the 1990 unification agreement. Such a basis can help explain current attitudes towards and memories of this massive development in Yemeni history. After the attempted unification in 1972, the northern and southern states remained preoccupied with their own domestic governance, and unification was put aside by political leaders. In 1978 The Yemen Socialist Party (YSP) was formed, absorbing other parties to become the single state party.93 A new constitution was written with unification as a goal in its preamble, stating “we should, by all possible means, regain Yemeni unity in order to withstand any foreign influences aimed at blocking or fragmenting such unity.”94 However, the opposing characters of the two states were perpetuated by the role of the two Yemens in the Cold War. The south became a bastion for communism in the region and the recipient of increased Soviet support. The north became a bulwark against the communist threat, and therefore the recipient of huge sums of American financial support. Foreign interference made unification a difficult task. It was not until the late 1980s that the international and domestic landscapes began to transform, making unification once again a political reality.

In 1986, a military coup led by factions from within the YSP forced President Ali

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Nasser Muhammad out of office. In a party meeting, Ali Nasser had tens of YSP leaders killed as a response. This led to more infighting which spread to the streets of Aden and killed more than 1,000 people. Fearing for his life, Ali Nasser and his immediate supporters fled to Sana’a for protection. Ali Salim al-Beid became the new president. This development would be an impetus for unification talks. Renewed calls for unification were largely the result of local and global economic and political realities in the late 1980s. While unification had long been a rallying call for both northern and southern political leaders, it was never truly a viable political option for various reasons, such as lack of public support or international pressures. Furthermore, the Cold War context in which the south was hugely indebted to the Soviet Union and the north to the United States and Saudi Arabia made unification an unlikely outcome.

Throughout the 1980s in the north, Ali Abdullah Saleh, president of the YAR, was confronting dissatisfaction among rival prominent tribal leaders. Unification would be a likely distraction from these struggles and also alter Yemen’s population makeup, thus decreasing the influence of certain tribes. Furthermore, the north had received promises of oil exploration from foreign companies and had been led to believe that large amounts of oil wealth were on the horizon. Unfortunately, those claims turned out to be unfounded, and only minimal amounts of oil in the Ma’rib region were discovered. This led to further political pressure on the president as well as economic concerns.

In the South in the 1980s, political and economic realities were also increasing popular support for unification. Aside from the Sira Brewery, which was the most profitable industry, the south lacked real economic viability. All industries were state run

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95 Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, 151.
96 Whitaker, *The Birth of Modern Yemen*. 
and inefficient and suffered from massive overemployment. One example was the oil refinery, which “had almost 3,000 employees when [an oil refinery] of similar capacity would normally have between 400 and 500”. The port was in decline due to the rise of rival ports on the peninsula which all saw significantly higher levels of investment than Aden. Lack of investment had led the oil refinery to decay and it was no longer an important source of income. Like the north, promises of new oil exploration had yielded no real results, despite the government opening up exploration to foreign companies. Furthermore, political instability detracted foreign investment and contributed to feelings of uncertainty. The post-coup government lacked popular legitimacy and was unable to promote an image of stability. Importantly, the end of the 1980’s marked the beginning of the end of the Cold War, and the Soviet Union, long the main financial support of the PDRY, was on the verge of collapse. Southern leaders had no other foreign support that was capable of financing their socialist state the way that the USSR was able to, and unification became an increasingly tantalizing political maneuver.

In 1987, a border dispute broke out between Ma’rib in the north and Shabwa in the south, incited by accusations of oil exploration activity in neighboring territory. As a result, a peace summit was held between Saleh and al-Beid, mediated by Muammar al-Gaddafi of Libya and Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. During the summit, Saleh made a public call for unification, further adding to the current political rhetoric. The summit resulted in the demilitarization of the border and the creation of a Joint Investment Zone in the disputed territory. This new relaxation of the borders allowed for a new flow of people and goods, including large numbers of

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97 Whitaker, *The Birth of Modern Yemen.*
98 Brehony, *Yemen Divided,* 169.
99 Brehony, *Yemen Divided,* 143.
southerners heading to Sana’a in search of economic prosperity, further increasing pressure on al-Beid to consider unification.

Al-Beid and the YSP were more hesitant to accept any further unification deals than the northern government. The population of the north was over twice the size of the south, and many YSP leaders feared losing the political character of the south if unification was to progress. The socialist policies that were viewed as bringing benefits to the people were largely opposed by the conservative north, and such policies would surely end. They viewed the tribal structure of the north as politically and culturally backwards, and feared the prospect of northern hegemony. Al-Beid was therefore cautious in his approach, and demanded that any agreement would include and transition period before unification, where issues of state character could be discussed before any permanent agreement was reached.  

At the dawn of unification in 1990, Yemen was in a state of elation. Being “Yemeni” was increasingly popular on both sides of the border and unification became a powerful narrative that convinced Yemenis in both north and south that such a development would be not just the beginning of a state of political prosperity, but something of a manifest destiny for the Yemeni people to break down the colonial borders that separated the two halves of the Yemeni nation. The project of a socialist south had faltered, and the north itself was economically impoverished and developmentally lacking. Unification was a tantalizing solution for both sides of the old borders.

On November 30th, 1989, Saleh came to Aden for high level talks with al-Beid.

100 Whitaker, The Birth of Modern Yemen, Chapter 2.
101 Whitaker, The Birth of Modern Yemen, Chapter 2.
Before he came, he gave a number of public speeches giving momentum to unification. Saleh’s arrival in Aden was greeted with crowds of pro-unification southerners all expecting results from the coming meeting. With massive public pressure, the Aden Agreement was signed agreeing to unification with a one-year wait period before coming into effect. During this one year, al-Beid was likely hoping that international forces opposing unification, likely Saudi Arabia, would come forward with a financial package for the south that would replace the previous aid of the Soviet Union and allow al-Beid to nullify the deal.\footnote{Whitaker, \textit{The Birth of Modern Yemen}.} However, no such support materialized and unification continued to gain momentum.

The final month of 1989 was characterized by polarization in the south between those who supported unification and those who did not. Rallies were held in large number and many voiced concern over a feared tribal and Islamic rule that would replace the socialist, secular character of the south.\footnote{Whitaker, \textit{The Birth of Modern Yemen}.} Further strife within the YSP led to a renewed fear from al-Beid that his life was under threat, both from local leaders and from supporters of Ali Nasser, and his hesitancy about unification was undermining his legitimacy as president. When Ali Abdullah Saleh returned in May to Aden for further unification discussions, they agreed to end the wait period immediately and declare unification.

On May 2, 1990, at an underpass in Gold Mohr, a waterfront district next to Tawahi, in a car carrying Ali Abdullah Saleh and Ali Salim al-Beid, a document agreeing on the unification of the two Yemens was signed. Al-Beid would become Vice President and Saleh would retain his title as President of the Republic. Celebrations and parades
occurred throughout the now unified country, and people from all over celebrated the agreement. On May 26, 1990, Yemen officially became a single state.\textsuperscript{104}

Today, many Adenis refer not to unification, but the “failed unification.” This is aptly summarized in a comment made to me by a shopkeeper down the street from where I was residing in 2013. “The unification agreement was less than one page,” he declared. “The rental agreement I signed to run this store was more than that.” Some even take the agreement to be part of a larger conspiracy to control the south’s natural resources, and others believe that Ali Salim al-Beid was forced into signing the document.

Such is the disenchantment with the outcome of unification. At the same time, nearly every political speech or official news report from Sana’a reaffirms the government’s position in protecting the unity of Yemen. To better understand the aftermath of unification, I continue here with post-unification developments in Yemen.

\begin{center}
\textit{Post-Unification Realities and the Beginnings of a New Southern Nationalism}
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“Dear brothers, unity is a crown on the heads of all Yemenis, men and women, and exceeds all the achievements that have been made in various fields, whether in the development, cultural, economic, or infrastructure fields, or in the field of extracting oil

\textsuperscript{104} Whitaker, \textit{The Birth of Modern Yemen}, Chapter 2.
After unification, there was no plan in place on how to join the two vastly differing state apparatuses, no plan for elections, and no plan for how the new state was to be administered. Two currencies remained in existence and minimal effort was made to integrate the two militaries. Therefore, the two years following the agreement were marked by political chaos and a lack of political development to match the unification ideals espoused by leaders and desired by the population. The two major political parties, the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) from the south and the General People’s Congress (GPC) from the north, struck deals with other parties to negotiate their own monopolies on power. As a result of these political maneuvers, assassinations became widespread as party leaders aimed to take control of the new government.¹⁰⁵ As southern leaders moved to Sana’a, the new unity capital, they found themselves at risk of physical harm.

Assassinations stemming from a heavily armed population with a disregard for federal law in the north were perceived as indicative of cultural difference between the north and south. Before unification, southern politicians had a fear of losing their political character. Once unification became a reality, these fears intensified. For many in the south, assassinations were made possible by the number of arms in the north, a contrast to the previously socialist south that had limited arms. The southern socialist regime had also been secular and had done much to detribalize the south.¹⁰⁶ Upon unification, a government based on tribal allegiances was the dominant political force in the country, further fueling a sense of disadvantage. But perceived differences extended to more than

¹⁰⁶ Miller, *The Moral Resonance of Arab Media.*
just tribalization. It was the four guns for every citizen in the north that were most often in the hands of tribes as well as the parallel legal system that tribal rule created. Larger tribes had their own rules and norms of justice and means of mediation, and some even had (and still have) their own prisons.107 For citizens from the south without those allegiances and systems, they were subject to state legal code. As discussed in the previous chapter, where a murder could easily result in a life sentence in state courts, it may end in a financial settlement and no individual punishment in tribal mediation.

The transition period also saw economic changes that proved catastrophic for southerners. As part of a socialist system, southerners were accustomed to heavy state subsidies.108 When those began to be withdrawn, price fluctuations led to riots in 1992 across the southern provinces. Since independence the south had benefitted from comprehensive education and health systems that were largely absent in the north. With unification, these two began to erode. Basic securities were no longer guaranteed, and discontent mounted.

Political chaos also characterized the years after 1990. Old and new political parties struggled to assert their influence in a system with a changed population base, and secret deals were happening both within parties and between parties. Assassinations continued, but were at times seemingly random with the perpetrator and motives often remaining unknown. The only similarity between them was that most of the victims were southern politicians. Many Adenis I spoke to referenced assassinations as the beginning of the historic violence that northerners have committed against them. Assassinations led

107 For an example of northern tribal mediation practices, see Caton’s discussion of an inter-tribal conflict in Khawlan, East of Sana’a. Caton, Yemen Chronicle.
to an air of political uncertainty, especially on the part of the YSP which was the most heavily targeted party. At the same time, a regional rise in Islamist groups was especially present in Yemen, where hundreds of “Afghan mujahideen” of Yemeni origin were returning from the war in Afghanistan and making new homes in Yemen. Influenced by Sheikh Abdul Majeed al-Zindani, many of these organizations declared war on apostate socialists from the south, contributing to violence against southerners. In 1993, Ali Salim al-Beid fled Sana’a out of fear, remaining in Mukallah in Hadramout.

Perhaps one of the most costly problems of this transition was the failure to integrate the armed forces. Southern forces were largely under the influence of the YSP, composed of southern citizens, and located in the south. The opposite held true for northern forces, further complicated by tribal influence or control over entire units of soldiers. When fighting broke out in February 1993 in Abyan in the south, fear of escalation grew. Al-Beid and Saleh met in Amman and signed the Amman Accord which attempted to address some of the ongoing issues. However, the air of mistrust between the two leaders led to few of the outcomes being implemented.

As the fighting that began in Abyan intensified and spread to neighboring provinces, al-Beid decided that unification was a lost cause. On May 21 1994 he declared the independence of the Democratic Republic of Yemen, hoping that international community would recognize the growing conflict as between two states and find a solution that guaranteed the independence of the south. In fact, this worsened the conflict and marked the beginning of the Civil War of 1994.

This history reveals the southern transition from a strong socialist state to the post-unification political order. The divergent histories of the two Yemens before

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109 Dahlgren, “The Snake with a Thousand Heads.”
unification made the 1990 agreement difficult to implement, and poor planning, corruption, and political instability added to this difficulty. 1990 also marks the end of the historical periods reflected upon today with nostalgia. Collective memories of the post-unification period become increasingly negative. I continue in the next section with the Civil War and its aftermath, which further engrained negative sentiment of Adenis towards the central government and the post-unification realities.

The Failure of Unification: Yemen's Civil War

The Civil War lasted only months, as the military prowess of the north was enough to dominate southern armies. Northern troops won easily and took control of Aden. As much as unification left a sour taste in the mouths of most southerners, the Civil War and the military occupation of Aden cemented this sentiment. Northern troops seized the city and began a campaign of looting and possession of southern buildings.110 But the targeted destruction of people’s livelihoods extended further; most governors and state employees in southern regions were replaced with northern citizens. Thousands of southern state employees were forced into retirement, including members of the armed forces. Financial restitution from Sana’s was either minimal or nonexistent. Aden, the southern capital, was most affected.

The post-civil war land grab is one aspect of southern history that is especially difficult to write about. There are few sources for this information, few documents, and few official accounts. While previous sections documented Aden’s history from the perspective of historiographical work followed by analysis of current memories, this

110 Dresch gives a brief account of the sacking of Aden in Dresch, History of Modern Yemen, 197.
section is almost entirely based on the popular history told by southerners I talked to and remembered through the lens of the current political situation there. As part of the sacking of Aden, military, political, and tribal leaders from the north took control of large sums of land and buildings. Land was seized by northern troops upon entry into the city and sold or given away as gifts. In fact, today it is estimated that at least half of Aden is owned by northerners, and southerners are forced to pay rent in buildings that were mostly state-owned before unification. The previous socialist government’s land scheme was completely different than the new order, which contributed to what southerners began to call the ‘northern occupation’. The land issue is probably the most discussed issue in the south and the most controversial, worsened by absence of evidence to document what happened.

The results of the civil war cemented anti-unification sentiment throughout the south. One constant motif of expressed sentiment by Adenis was the employment situation that arose in post-war Aden. One activist explained to me that southern employees were subject to discrimination after the war. Not only was land stolen, but many businesses were closed after owners were accused of being socialists. These closings happened with impunity. Aden, the former capital of the PDRY and home to a large state administrative complex, witnessed nearly all services moved to Sana’a. Residents complained to me that they now had to travel to Sana’a to get any official business done. In order to get a passport, a driver's license, or even make a complaint against one’s boss if they were a public employee, one must travel the distance to Sana’a. One Adeni described this to me as part of a “punishment” scheme. Another exclaimed,

111 Dahlgren, "The Southern Movement in Yemen."
“the government was telling us ‘stay at home.’ There were 30-year-old employees being offered $100 a year to stay at home so their job could be give to someone else. Everything went to Sana’a, there was nothing left for Aden.”

Another example of this is the story of General Asef. One evening I was sitting in Crater with an acquaintance named Yahya drinking coffee. A man known as General Asef walked by with a wheelbarrow selling kegs of petrol. He had been a member of the socialist army before unification and a well respected member of the Aden community. After the war, Yahya explained, thousands of public officials including Asef were “retired” from their positions which were filled with members of the northern political community. Because of the high unemployment rate in Aden, he was unable to find work and had been working odd jobs ever since, leading to his current job selling petrol. This work was especially demeaning for a man of his elite stature, as the work required heavy labor.

Some of this forced retirement happened with the centralization of the armed forces in 1994. As one Adeni recalled, it was not until after the Civil War that the northern and southern armies were integrated. And yet, rather than form a newly structured armed forces that was representative of the new geographical reality of Yemen, military leaders simply “retired” hundreds of southern soldiers, leaving the army in the hands of northern elites. The retirement scheme also occurred as part of an unspoken plan to replace many southern governors and public employees with northern ones. Further loss of employment resulted from a desire from northern leaders to weed out remnants of the south’s socialist past. Furthermore, the PDRY’s public employment scheme was comprehensive, if financially impossible to maintain. Most businesses were

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112 Stories such as this are also documented in Dresch, *History of Yemen.*
under the umbrella of the state, and these were closed en masse.

Another symbolic change was the forced closure of the national airline, Al-Yemda. It was merged with the northern airline and became Yemenia Air. The new company was 51% private and 49% public. Al-Yemda’s restructuring not only resulted in large job losses for the previous airline operators, but as an entirely public enterprise, was a significant source of income for the previous government. As Yahya explained to me, “Aden used to be connected all over the world from its airport. After the new deal, flights were redirected to Sana’a. Now, to get to Aden, you almost always have to fly through Sana’a first.” This new development was particularly symbolic of Adenis’ new loss of a sense of cosmopolitanism; they were now shut off from the international community.

Privatization and centralization are two processes that are central to understanding anti-unification sentiment, and were the crux of sudden and extreme disruption to the south’s politico-economic status quo. The relative prosperity of Aden before unification further emphasizes both the socialist and British eras as historic ideals and is contrasted with the contemporary political context of government exclusion. Both previous periods were marked by highly structured, active government in many aspects of daily life. Adenis had to transition suddenly from being in the capital of a socialist state to being in a peripheral city of a weak state.

*Strong State vs. Weak State*

For years, Western journalists have referred to Yemen as “on the brink of failure.” Some have even gone as far as to call it a “failed state.”\(^{113}\) This is largely due to the

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\(^{113}\) Christopher Boucek and Marina Ottaway, eds. *Yemen on the Brink* (Carnegie Endowment for...
central government’s inability to exert a monopoly on violence outside of Sana’a and the recent rise in transnational organizations such as al-Qaeda. Lisa Wedeen’s semi-ethnographic study calls into question these dramatic versions of Yemen’s political realities, and shows how rather than being a failed state, Yemen is more aptly characterized as a weak state. While the state fails to administer large sections of the rural landscape, Yemeni nationalism is still conceptualized by Yemenis in the absence of a strong central government presence. In fact, according to Wedeen, it is the absence of government that unites Yemenis in demanding basic securities, thus forming a cohesive imagined community.

However, Wedeen’s thesis has less currency in Aden, where current government neglect has been understood in relation to the pre-unification government which was omnipresent in the lives of its citizens, especially in the urban capital. Flagg Miller mentions the transformation period that occurred after socialists came to power in 1969 and shows how the reach of the state extended far beyond the confines of Aden, when “foreign economic institutions were nationalized, popular youth leagues were organized, and a sweeping agrarian reform law was passed.”

In northern regions without that history, state absence may still result in powerful nationalist imaginings, but the transition from a strong socialist state to the post-1990 political system have rendered Yemeni nationalism in Aden as emblematic of weak governance, deficient leadership, and neglect of basic human needs. The accompanying unemployment epidemic and the redaction of state services has been met with a new appreciation for the comprehensive political projects of the past.

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114 Miller, The Moral Resonance of Arab Media, 47.
Collective Memories as National Founding Myth

The collective memories detailed in the previous chapter provide the foundation for the current nationalist movement. As Benedict Anderson claims, nations are in fact modern inventions in that they that have only arisen because of the ability of people to imagine a community where they have membership. They do not exist as primordial or natural conceptions. His critical argument is that nationalisms are dependent on a continuity with the past. In south Yemen, this continuity is what gives the nation its national character and identity. At the same time, unification and its aftermath are seen as events that disrupted that same continuity of a southern history.

Aden as a cosmopolitan and civil space, in contrast to northern lawlessness, is central to what Adenis proclaim their national identification to be. That identification is based in the present post-unification reality that depends on collective notions of a southern past. Thus, as a nation subject to what is deemed an illegal occupation by a foreign power, the north, southern identification is in opposition to that identity of the unified nation and the historical narrative that “unity” proclaims. In the context of the political present and the results of unification and the civil war, collective memories present the past as a time of prosperity and freedom. The rise of southern nationalism cannot be separated from the daily experience of Adenis and the sense of injustice they are experiencing as a result of unification and their refusal to imagine a community that justifies the dominant northern narrative.

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115 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. 

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The Modern Counter-Nationalist Movement

In 2007, the organization known as the Southern Movement (*al-hirak al-janoubi*), or al-Hirak, was formed which would become the umbrella organization for most southern political organizations. It was not the first time that any group had called for outright independence from the North since unification in 1990. However, it was the coming together of many organizations that had begun to call for independence since the end of the 1994 civil war. Al-Hirak’s formation came at the Assembly of the People of Radfan, a meeting held to attempt to consolidate rival groups that were increasingly calling for outright independence. Radfan, an area of the Lahj governorate, just north of Aden, is itself a reference point to the 1957 Radfan Rebellion, the starting point for the struggle against the British occupation. Al-Hirak’s claim was that the South had been neglected and marginalized since unification and that they would be better off as a separate state. They symbolically nullified the unification document and claimed that the North was an occupational force.\(^{116}\)

The significance of Al-Hirak is their ability to actively organize protests, galvanize support, and produce literature supporting independence. While some of the people I spoke to were affiliated with al-Hirak, some were not.\(^{117}\) As mentioned before, many Adenis are still disenchanted from the final years of the PDRY, where political leaders were constantly fighting with one another. Many are also skeptical of the Soviet-style socialist system that many leaders of al-Hirak still hold firm. Furthermore, al-Hirak itself should not be treated as a coherent analytical category, as the group is fractured and


\(^{117}\) Even among those who were not affiliated with any organization, the vast majority supported independence.
divided with allegiances to different PDRY leaders or separate regional affiliations. This is not to say that each group wants something entirely different; they are all in agreement that independence is the only viable solution for the restoration of the south’s dignity. Nor is it to say that al-Hirak is an insignificant actor in this history. Instead, I view the organization as just one of many elements involved in the larger southern movement. Therefore, while I continue to highlight al-Hirak and their involvement in the pro-independence struggle, my focus is on my interlocutors in Aden.

The emergence of an organized southern nationalist movement represents what Eley and Suny refer to as “forms of contestation inside nationalism's dominant frame.”\(^{118}\) Al-Hirak is the organizational vehicle for the formation of southern nationalism and a rejection of a Yemeni national narrative. Homi Bhabha moves the conversation of nationalism past single, discrete occurrences of nationalism to how populations on the margins of nationalism create counter-narratives that “disturb those ideological maneuvers through which ‘imagined communities’ are given essentialist identities.”\(^{119}\) Thus, al-Hirak is symbolic of the refusal to imagine the nation in terms of post-unification Yemen and a new imagining that frames an independent southern state. What distinguishes this case is the dependence upon memories of pre-unification when south Yemen was an existing nation-state. In sum, the new nationalist movement is a re-imagining of a historical entity.

Women and the Movement

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The role of women has been a part of nearly all recent studies of nationalism, and for good reason. My argument here borrows heavily again from Partha Chatterjee, who eloquently revealed nationalist discourse in postcolonial India as deeply gendered. As Farha Ghannam argues, ethnographies of the Middle East have tended to “overembody” women, where they are “equated with body, nature, passion, secrecy, shame, and the private domain.” This is epitomized by the intense focus on the *hijab* and body appearances. Many discussions of women and nationalism have continued this pattern by relegating any discussion of women to the private realm. The following discussion runs the risk of scholars before me of reducing women to conversations about the body. Crucially, I am also capturing local discourses around women in the nationalist movement, which has the same overembodying tendency.

The story of Umm Sahar is particularly illustrative of the gendered nature of the nationalist movement. About a week into my stay in Aden, I was invited to speak with Umm Sahar, a contact of Amar, in her home in the center of Crater. Amar took me by car, taking an unusual route to make sure we were not being followed. We waited in the car outside the apartment for a number of minutes before Umm Sahar’s son came down to escort me in. The attention to security was indicative of the prominence of Umm Sahar’s position within al-Hirak.

Umm Sahar was the mother of three children and the coordinator of the women’s chapter of al-Hirak in Aden under the leadership of Ali Salim al-Beid. Not only was she

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122 Chatterjee himself is perhaps guilty of this by only discussing women in terms of his “inner” or spiritual realm or nationalism, equating women with “mothers” of the nation. These characterizations, while, ascribe an emotional, bodily embodiment of women, while ignoring discussions of gender, including men and women, in discussions of the material world.
active in organizing women and participating in protests and other community-based action, she was a self-appointed historian of the struggle for independence. She kindly invited me inside and into her living room, a dimly lit room with pink cushions lining the walls. *Aden Live*, the main southern television channel was playing. After quick introductions, Amar left and I was seated with Umm Sahar and her daughter, an English teacher in her early 20’s, and her son, a high school student.

After discussing the history of al-Hirak and the failure of unification, Umm Sahar invited me to look through a few of the binders full of records that she kept. These binders not only included hundreds of newspaper articles documenting protests since the early 2000’s, mainly from *al-Ayyam*, they also contained photographs and newspaper articles for every single person martyred in the movement. All the events were organized chronologically and were extremely detailed.

Umm Sahar offered me a *Nescafé* and left the room to prepare it. All of a sudden, her daughter turned to me and asked in English, “are you a spy?” This was not the first time I was asked this question, but this time it made me realize the sensitivity of the information Umm Sahar was sharing with me. Collections from underground, illegal newspapers and photographic evidence that documented the crimes committed against southerners revealed the trust that this family was putting in me by allowing me access to this.

Umm Sahar returned with the coffee and continued showing me binders. She pointed to a newspaper clipping from 2007, approximately the same time al-Hirak was officially formed. The article documented a large protest in Khor Maksar, a neighborhood of Aden, where tens of protesters had been killed after a violent response from central
government forces. After going through pages and pages of martyrs, she asked her son to get a USB drive. The drive contained digital records of the martyrs as well as videos. The disturbing collection of photos contained both images of the martyrs in life as well as photographic evidence of their deaths. The vast majority of the victims were males between 12 and 25. However, there were also pictures of infants and children. Her son gave special attention to a video of one of his friends who is shot down by government snipers during a protest. Umm Sahar indicated the martyrs she knew and indicated specific rallies that had high death tolls.

The next day, Amar referred to Umm Sahar as the “mother” of the movement. Her own endeavor to document the martyrs and her own role as mother, both of her own family and as one of the most prominent women in the movement, gave her a position of duality that connected to her womanhood. Umm Sahar’s prominent position in the movement was also indicative of the way that southern nationalists are making a concerted effort to frame their demands for independence in terms of an international human rights discourse by highlighting the status of women. Words such as madanīa (civil), ḥadītha (modern), and taqadumīa (progressive), visible in protest spectacles and in Umm Sahar’s own language, indicate not only an appeal to the international community, but a national image that incorporates the cosmopolitan ideal of the southern past. Adenis at protests were explicit in their desire to reach the international community and spoke of publishing human rights documents and spreading images and video of atrocities committed against southerners on the internet. However, I failed to find any such documents reaching international audiences and internet media also seemed to be overlooked by its target audience.
Within this human rights discourse, the role of women is often highlighted by Adenis as indicative of southern identity. Before unification, women often did not veil, and rarely did one dress in the *abāya* and *niqāb*, as is common today. Photographs of the British and socialist eras often depict scenes of uncovered women, serving as reminders of the previous social norms. Most southerners lament developments that altered the status of women as part of the cultural homogenization project of the north, where such customs of dress, at least in Sana’a, are more typical. This discourse both serves to resonate with international rights groups as well as to typify the southern identity as distinct and more progressive than the north.

Such discourses are taking place in public protests like the one outlined in Chapter 1. In that example, women were given a special row of seating next to the stage, in optimal view of the video camera which was broadcasting the event. At one point, a group of four women took the stage to hold a panel where they discussed women’s participation in the movement, emphasizing the importance of the image of women. These discussions are also prominent on the internet, especially Facebook pages which are common forums for discussing the issue of the south. Pictures of unveiled women in the PDRY government or enjoying leisure time at a café are accompanied by comments recounting stories told by my young southerners’ parents and grandparents testifying to Aden’s liberal space.

The prominence of women in nationalist discourses is seemingly an inherent feature of movements around the globe. Taking from the Bengali example, Partha

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123 The *abāya* is a long-sleeved black dress that covers oneself down to the shoes.
124 The *niqāb* is a face veil that leaves only the eyes visible, worn with the *abāya*. Where the *abāya* was become standard in the south since unification, the *niqāb* is less socially mandatory, at least in Aden. In the north, it is the norm.
Chatterjee argues that “the European criticism of Indian ‘tradition’ as barbaric had focused to a large extent on religious beliefs and practices, especially those relating to the treatment of women.”125 This essentialization of Indian culture lead to those beliefs and practices being labeled as “Indian tradition.” The nationalist project, in response, espoused that same “tradition” as a way of reasserting agency and sovereignty into the spiritual realm of the nation, made apparent in Chatterjee’s discussion of Bengali women under British rule and how nationalists used women as symbolic protectors of tradition to assert a national identity.

In the context of south Yemen, the prominence of discussion surrounding women’s dress is indicative of discourse centers on the spiritual realm of south Yemeni nationalism. Rather than reasserting the cultural norms imposed on them from the northern occupation, nationalists are rejecting those traditions as foreign and focusing on women as signs of their progressiveness. Within this discourse, women and their involvement in the struggle are being utilized, a role partly supported by women themselves, who are central in many rallies and forums. At the same time, they are symbolic in the struggle to assert a symbolic southern identity in opposition to the north. This includes gendered discussions by male and female nationalists where women are symbolic of the nation, but also where women’s emancipation is showcased as distinctly southern. This discourse emphasizes northern women as voiceless, powerless, and subject to northern patriarchal structures such as tribalism. It also highlights the south’s socialist past where women were educated and active in political life, a sharp contrast to their

125 Chatterjee, The Nation and its Fragments, 9.
subjugated position since unification.\textsuperscript{126}

However, this discourse of women’s emancipation is taking place in a social environment where unification is the reality, and often women are caught between their symbolic role in nationalist discourse and their lived realities vis-a-vis the current, northern dominated government. Despite the assertion that improving the material conditions in which women live and their legal status was considered part of the anti-colonial and nationalist struggle, the social contemporary reality is dominated by northern social norms. Furthermore, despite ideals of femininity in the south, which characterize women as liberated and active in both public and private enterprises, women are still beholden to behavior, dress, and public activity reflecting the more conservative north.\textsuperscript{127} One example of this was the 	extit{dabab} driver I mentioned in chapter one. He himself had a degree in engineering and English but was unable to find any other work. His wife, he claimed, spoke even better English than himself, and was a university English teacher before she was relieved of her job after unification. He complained at the difficulty women had finding jobs, even highly educated ones like his wife. While she held a high-standing job before unification, she now stayed at home, unable to find work in a male-dominated world.

\textit{Death and Martyrdom}

Umm Sahar’s story also raises the critical issue of death, martyrdom, and the

\textsuperscript{126} Susanne Dahlgren’s work highlights the extent to which women’s experiences transformed from the colonial to socialist to unification eras and confirms how colonial law reified women as inferior and of lower social status than men and how these notions were reproduced through the struggle for independence. Dahlgren, \textit{Contested Realities}.


\textsuperscript{127} Würth, “Stalled Reform.”
relationship between pro-independence activists and the central government. Her impeccable records of the southern martyrs led not only to her role as “mother” of the movement, but were critical documentation of the crimes committed against citizens of the south. Most in Aden are vocal about what they perceive as an international media blackout on the southern issue. Records of deaths are a way to preserve southern injustice as a fact in the absence of international scrutiny.

My focus on death here depends on the notion that “death is not just a biological event but also a social fact that is culturally and religiously elaborated and interpreted within specific structures and systems of meaning.”128 While many Adenis I spoke with continually referenced the post-unification period and the assassinations that accompanied it as the beginning of the violent injustice committed against them, this era was not well documented. My own re-telling of it depends heavily on collective memories of Adenis. As such, Adenis find it hard to present those years as compelling evidence of a northern occupation. Umm Sahar’s documentation of the deaths of protesters since the mid-1990s can be seen as a turn to rely less on memory and narrative, and more on empirical evidence to present the southern issue to the international community. Like the discussion of women, discussions of death are also framed within international human rights discourses, further entrenching conceptions of civil and modern southerners being oppressed by tribal and violent northerners.

While the exact numbers of deaths due to pro-independence activity are unknown, recent Western estimates are somewhere around 1,300 since 2006.129 Such figures

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128 Ghannam, *Live and Die Like a Man*, 144
129 *Time Magazine* Staff, “Is South Yemen Preparing to Declare Independence?” *Time Magazine*, July 8, 2011.
roughly represent those collected by Umm Sahar as well. In its 2009 report, Human Rights Watch described the response of government forces to southern protests as including “unlawful killings, arbitrary detentions, beatings, crackdowns on freedom of assembly and speech, arrests of journalists, and others. These abuses have created a climate of fear, but have also increased bitterness and alienation among southerners, who say the north economically exploits and politically marginalizes them.”¹³⁰ The report does not estimate the total number of deaths resulting from the government crackdown, but it documents individual incidents where tens of people died.

In the context of Aden, discourse around death centers on two central ideas. The first is that deaths and the documentation of atrocities can help present the southern cause to the international community by drawing heavily upon the language of human rights. Such language reinforces popular notions of southerners as modern civilians sensitive to international rights discourse. At the same time, it also reinforces notions of a lawless violent northern regime that embodies the oppressive “Other.”

The second idea posits death within the religious context of martyrdom (shahāda) and frames the deaths as both evidence of northern oppression as well as rallying calls for continued protests. Martyrdom has cemented anti-northern sentiment and fueled secessionist activity. In his discussion of martyrdom in the context of Palestine, Nasser Abufarha states that “the concept of shahīd [martyr], the victim who falls at the hands of oppressive occupation, was in line with the political dynamics of the time, when efforts were made to lobby the international community for support of Palestinians’ quest for

¹³⁰ Human Rights Watch, “In the Name of Unity.”
freedom.” Palestine, as the most symbolic example of anti-imperialist struggle in the Arab world, has become an example for Adenis. Many were eager to compare themselves to the Palestinians and equated al-Hirak with the Palestinian Liberation Organization, opposing an oppressive and foreign regime. Beyond such comparisons, Adenis have also share many semantic similarities with Palestine. Documented by Abufarha, in Palestine, the notion of martyrdom “implies victimization” and refers to “anyone who dies fighting in defense of nation or the homeland” Umm Sahar’s documentation of the martyrs (shuhadā’) is also complemented with posters and billboards around Aden with pictures of the martyrs. Such public celebration of martyrdom both attests to the oppression of southerners and serves as a call for continued protests so that previous deaths were not in vain.

Abdul Hakim, a prominent Imam in the Khor Maksar neighborhood of Aden, told me that despite southerner’s commitment to nonviolence, they were prepared to answer the threats of the north. A common saying by northern leaders aiming to preserve Yemen’s unity is “al-Waḥda au al-Maut” (Unity or Death). This is understood by Adenis to be a vocal threat of physical violence. The use of violence against protesters and the continued use of this slogan have helped ferment nationalist sentiment in the south and increase a desire for a return to a separate state and the knowledge that constant engagement in protest activity can result in martyrdom.

In a well-circulated pro-independence manifesto released in early 2014, a southern activist summarized, “the sad thing is that the Arabs are either delusional or

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132 Abufarha also explores the more recent development of the term *istishhad* in the Palestinian context as implying an active effort to become a martyr, but as of yet I did not encounter this terminology in my own research. Abufarha, *The Making of a Human Bomb*, 8-9.
evade responsibility towards the people of the south. When they declare that they support
the unity of Yemen, because such statements justify the Northern slogan of ‘unity or
death’, they justify their use of excessive force against the people of the south and this is
what is happening today.”133 In this perspective, shared by many Adenis I spoke with, by
failing to acknowledge the human cost of the antioccupation struggle, the international
community (and the Arab community particularly) is a silent witness to the violent
oppression of the southern people.

**Southern Culture as Invented Tradition**

“From a static thing then, identity of self or of ‘other’ is a much-worked over historical,
social, intellectual, and political process that takes place as a contest involving
individuals and institutions in all societies.”


Beyond the utilization of women into the “spiritual domain” of the southern
nation, current nationalist discourse incorporates historical ideas of Aden as cosmopolitan
by asserting a distinct national culture and set of traditions that differentiates south from
north. In this sense, we can understand interpretations of southern culture as based in a
present understanding of the south/north dichotomy, despite their roots in remembered
historical realities. As one southern leader writes, “it is true that after half a century of
conspiracy and twenty years of occupation, southerners have come to know the deceitful
northerners, but unfortunately culture and ideas remain that were planted (by
northerners), and this will not die except by offering new ideas and a culturally-based
Southern identity.”134 New collective memories of culture and society before unification

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134 Mohammed, *Ikhtilāf al-Qaum*. 
have become the basis for an active nationalist project of defining southern culture.

Eric Hobsbawm explains the process of national imagining and the espousing of a national “tradition” by using the term “invented tradition”.\(^{135}\) He defines this as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past."\(^{136}\) This continuity with the past is what makes them legitimate and allows them to be asserted as part of a nation’s inner sovereignty. Yet their legitimate antiquity is not necessarily one of historical fact, but rather "they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations."\(^{137}\) For Chatterjee, they are responses to colonial subjugation.\(^{138}\) For south Yemen today, they are responses to post-unification realities and the framing of a northern occupation.

Susanne Dahlgren paints the following picture of Aden before unification,

In the late 1980s Aden was a tolerant place... people tended to look back at that time with nostalgia... among the world’s most egalitarian countries in distribution of domestically earned income. Men and women enjoyed equal pay... In the evenings in the 1980s, one could choose whether to go see an anti-Communist film in the nearby cinema or listen to a Socialist Party lecture. Men could choose between going to the mosque to pray and drinking beer in the street outside a bar. Patronizing discourses were absent in the public sphere... When going out, women did not face problems in mingling with men... Some women complained about the lack of public activities in the late 1990s: there was nothing else to do except chew qat in somebody’s home, it was explained to me.\(^{139}\)

This passage is illustrative of collective memories that posit the pre-unification era as more free and progressive. Popular conceptions of a cosmopolitan past are further embodied in ideas of traditions of the south, or rather the absence of imposed traditions of

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\(^{136}\) Hobsbawm, "The Invention of Tradition," 1, emphasis my own.

\(^{137}\) Hobsbawm, "The Invention of Tradition," 2.

\(^{138}\) Chatterjee, The Nation and Its Fragments.

\(^{139}\) Dahlgren, Contesting Realities, 81.
the north. This passage, documenting the historical record, evidences these traditions as not *real*, but rather *reworked* to fit the pro-independence narrative that glosses over different interpretations of those traditions.

In my conversation with Khaled, the student and resident of Tawahi, he remarked that the youth have nothing to do in Aden. He asked me about life in America and what American youth do for leisure. He complained that here in Aden, there is nothing. There were no youth clubs and no cinemas to go to. “People just chew *qat* because they are bored,” he explained. “Before unity, *qat* was only for weekends and holidays. The North sent us drugs to distract us and keep us in poverty.” In the socialist era, *qat* was officially banned except for weekends and national holidays. Since unification, *qat* became more widespread as a result of northern influence. Despite its now widespread use in the south, many claim that *qat* represents a northern cultural imperialism. Conceptions of *qat* as part of northern tradition and of a historical past that incorporated *qat* into society in different ways, southerners can continue to self-identify as more progressive than their northern counterparts.

The value of such traditions is their ability to situate southern culture as historically rooted. For Hobsbawm, invented traditions “use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion.”\(^{140}\) Incorporated into anti-occupation slogans and chants, nationalists can utilize these traditions as evidence of a unified southern culture, whose existence depends on a northern “other.” Traditions both signify a bounded national entity and serve to link that entity to historical eras that were pivotal in the formation of such traditions.

\(^{140}\) Hobsbawm, "The Invention of Tradition," 12.
The Silencing Power of Nationalism

The modern, unified Yemeni state continues to be asserted by the government as the natural model for the nation-state. Nearly every speech or press release produced by the government includes the phrase “preserving unity.” This concept has been given little attention in much of the existing scholarly work in Yemen, which tends to treat “Yemen” as a given unit of the nation-state, rather than questioning and analyzing the historical instances where “Yemen” was the product of the dominant political imagination and when the concept faltered.\textsuperscript{141} This section reaffirms that truth itself is a “production” which is “thoroughly imbued with relations of power.”\textsuperscript{142}

The incorporation of Yemen into the global “War on Terror” constituted a unified Yemen as in the interest of the international community.\textsuperscript{143} A nationalist conception of unified Yemen has been reproduced by the international community, which has an interest in a stable Yemen. Michel-Rolph Trouillot expands on this notion and states two ways in which historical production is embedded in notions of power: "First, facts are never meaningless: indeed, they become facts only because they matter in some sense, however minimal. Second, facts are not created equal: the production of traces is always also the creation of silences."\textsuperscript{144} Choosing which “facts” to include and omit in a narrative are by their very nature acts of power. In a larger context, a unified Yemeni nationalist narrative necessarily highlights historical “facts” that show times where

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{141} Wedeen, \textit{Peripheral Visions} and Dresch, \textit{A History of Modern Yemen}.
  \item \textsuperscript{142} Michel Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality, Volume 1} (Random House, 1978), 60.
  \item \textsuperscript{143} Since September 11, 2001, the United States Government has considered Yemen as central to counterterrorism efforts, especially since the formation of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in 2009 based in southern Yemen. Such efforts, including the drone strike program, have been executed with the cooperation of Ali Abdullah Saleh and, since 2011, Abd Rabuh Mansour Hadi. Thus, the United States and its allies by extension are dependent on the unified state and current government for continued support in their efforts.
  \item \textsuperscript{144} Michel-Rolph Trouillot, \textit{Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History} (Beacon Press, 1995), 29.
\end{itemize}
Yemen was governed as a single entity, and necessarily omit or minimize other aspects of marginalization.

At the same time, an Aden-based nationalism itself has silencing capabilities. Aden’s rise came at the expense of other geographical locations, such as Makha. As mentioned in chapter 1, the revitalization project of the port of Aden, headed by Stafford Haines in the mid-1800s, was a successful effort to redirect the coffee trade. Makha, famous for its coffee, was under the control of Sharif Hussein at the time, and was a prosperous port. Aden’s historical rise necessitated it being the primary port in the region, and the very structural realities that fostered contemporary understandings of Aden as cosmopolitan arose at the expense of other locations, including rival centers in the southern territories. The same is true of Mukalla, the main port city of Hadramout. As documented by Enseng Ho, Mukalla was the point of departure for Hadrami tradesmen until the 1800s, when Aden became the more prosperous hub.\footnote{Ho, \textit{The Graves of Tarim}.} Today, Mukalla is still a lively city, though significantly smaller and with less economic power than Aden. Makha is nearly a ruin, and is barely notable on the Yemeni register of place-names.

Furthermore, Aden-based conceptions of cosmopolitanism as representative of the south are also problematic, in that they are an urban understanding, leaving little room for existing tribal structures in the rural south and alternative histories of places like Hadramout. While nationalist slogans and poems make mention of all southern provinces such as Shabwa, Hadramout, and Lahj, Adeni voices are the most prominent, and are backed by the al-Hirak organization that seeks to cultivate a cohesive southern
Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the historical roots of the Yemeni nation, suggesting that before unification, the concept of Greater Yemen had currency only as a geographic entity, and only since 1990 has Yemen existed in its current state form. Thus, despite widespread support for unification in north and south leading up to the unification agreement, the south’s historical development prior to unification and the general mishandling of the transitional period left Adenis disenchanted with their promised results. Thus, the unification of 1990 marks the end of the nostalgic eras and marks a shift in attitudes towards notions of Yemen, state, and history.

As Susanne Dahlgren summarizes, “whereas the unification of 22 May 1990 was at first enthusiastically welcomed by everybody in Yemen, years that followed crushed the illusions in the South. High inflation, inefficiency in running the state fiscals, centralization of the state bureaucracy and the accompanied marginalization of Southern administrative centres formed the basis of dissatisfaction”. Results of unification and the everyday struggles of Adenis today have shifted popular sentiment from that of privileging the concept of Greater Yemen and support for a Yemeni nation to a disdain for the very fabric of governmentality and the social and economic realities that unification has ushered.

Building on my argument from Chapter 1, I have showed how new understandings of past eras have helped to define southern political culture. The modern,

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146 An example of this is http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0sVdQwqJALs, a revolutionary music video making references to multiple regions juxtaposed with pictures of those places, though still emphasizing Aden as the capital. Many music videos especially call attention to provinces outside Aden.

147 Dahlgren, Contesting Realities, 50.
progressive southern society sees itself as quite compatible with international human rights discourses, and therefore draws heavily on language of women and human rights abuses as well as discourse about death and martyrdom. These cultural characteristics have been framed as continuous from previous pre-unification eras, disrupted by unification and the illegal occupation which followed, and this counter-nationalist narrative forms the basis of the current secessionist movement.
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

Whatever unity of the nation, a dream of years
And O’ kiss of love for two lovers
Overlooked on the horizon a sun for us,
Light the path and move us,
To turn distances across time.
For whom? For whom?
For the sake of Yemen.

-From *Liman Kul Hadhahi al-Qanādīl?* by Ahmed Ghaled al-Jabri, Yemeni Poet (1936-present), performed by Ayoub Tarish

The above excerpt from Yemeni poet Ahmed Ghaled al-Jabri is one of the most celebrated poems of the contemporary south. For Adenis, it represents the ideal that unification was meant to offer for all of the people of the Greater Yemen. Yet, as al-Jabri indicates, the dream faltered. It reinforces popular conceptions of unity as a dream and historical ideal that was unable to be realized. The poem is often cited in political gatherings and pro-independence literature. At the same time, Ahmed Ghaled al-Jabri’s poem is heralded by many northerners as a testament to the connections between the two Yemens and the project of unification that destined the two disparate parts to merge together as one. It signifies the continued dream that all those of Greater Yemen hold to.

A famous performance of the poem by Yemeni singer Ayoub Tarish is played on both government affiliated television channels and is commonly uploaded on southern media websites.

That both southerners and northerners interpret al-Jabri’s poem in such opposing fashions is illustrative of the disconnect between the political discussions in both Aden and Sana’a. As recent history suggests, the southern version of history that I have presented in this thesis remains conspicuously absent from popular discourse in Sana’a,
despite its social capital in Aden. In this final chapter, I first provide a summary of the major events in Yemen that have shaped and influenced the rise of secessionist activity in Aden and the making of a space for a nationalist counter-narrative. I then summarize the main points of my argument in this thesis.

Recent Events and the Making of a Space for Resistance

After full scale uprisings in Tunisia in late 2010 and Egypt in early 2011, Yemenis were inspired by their Arab neighbors to protest against the nearly 30-year rule of Ali Abdullah Saleh. On the night of January 25th, the same night that Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak stepped down, Yemenis en masse flocked to Sana’a’s Tahrir Square, though the government had occupied the square with large tents and protesters were forced to relocate just outside the city center to Change Square, just outside the main entrance to Sana’a University. Further protests would take place largely in Taiz, considered Yemen’s intellectual and cultural capital. The now well-known chants of “Bread, Freedom, and Justice” were common, and the protests became permanent camps in Sana’a’s Change Square. Finally, in December 2011 for Ali Abdullah Saleh resigned as president after his presidential compound was bombed and he was forced to flee to Saudi Arabia to seek medical treatment. In what is now considered the “war” by Yemenis, months of street fighting, negotiated tribal alliances, and international interference finally forced Saleh to Saudi Arabia after his complex was bombed in an attack. Estimates are that between 2,000 and 3,000 Yemenis died in the fighting, which resulted in heavy damage to certain neighborhoods of the capital.

In the South, while large protests took place in Aden and other southern cities
during the uprising, southerners claim that their demands were the same demands since
the formation of al-Hirak years prior to the protests in the north. In fact, the scale of the
fighting and the significant role of northern tribal leaders in negotiating Saleh’s ouster
was further evidence for southerners of the North’s inability to run a competent
government and the continued importance of northern tribes in state governance. For the
people of Aden, the uprising was a northern affair.

At the same time, the uprising had notable effects in the south and in Aden
specifically. Military units stationed in the south to monitor separatist activities were
moved to Sana’a and Taiz in the north to contain protests. This led to a nearly complete
withdrawal of northern forces from the south. Within months, the entirety of Aden as
well as other southern cities were covered in southern flags and graffiti. Separatist
elements took over certain government buildings. Government retreat meant further
neglect of the south, and most of the land outside Aden continues to be run by local
militias and al-Hirak affiliated organizations. The space for protest activity was largely
open, in contrast to rallies before the uprising that had been met with government military
force. It is within this space that Adenis have taken advantage of their ability to organize
frequent public displays of independence.

As part of the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative that organized Saleh’s
resignation, a National Dialogue Conference was held.\textsuperscript{148} This conference was composed
of committees tasked with finding solutions to Yemen’s challenges, particularly what is
now referred to both internally and in the international media as the ‘southern question.’
A further aspect to the transition would be presidential elections which took place in
February 2012. Due to technicalities, Saleh’s Vice President Abd Rabbuh Mansour al-

\textsuperscript{148} For more information, see the National Dialogue website, http://ndc.ye/.
Hadi was the only candidate on the ballot and swept the election. As a result of this and a preconceived notion that the entire NDC process was simply a political performance of northern politicians legitimacy, most members of al-Hirak and southerners in general boycotted the process.\(^{149}\) The NDC went on as planned, and managed to convince enough southern leaders (though they were mostly unknown names who had resided in Sana’a for years) to occupy the Dialogue seats to portray a facade of equal representation to the international community.

The NDC process, which ended up lasting for ten months and concluded on January 24\(^{th}\) 2014, was marked by political violence throughout the country, mass protests in the south, and the beginning of calls for the use of arms by southern leaders in order to protect the citizens of the south. As the Dialogue reached its conclusion and plans were made to divide Yemen into five semi-autonomous regions. This decision was met with further protests in Aden, largely due to the proposed federal system which would divide the southern territories into two parts: Hadramout in the east and Aden in the west.\(^{150}\) A contact in Aden referred to the decision as the formation of “new colonial borders.”

Conclusion

This essay has outlined the processes by which Adenis have come to think of themselves and their own urban history. I have argued that southern nationalism in Aden hinges on the construction of a historical narrative that depends on collective memories.


These memories are products of the present, informed by contemporary issues and understood by a historical narrative that tries to make sense of why such realities exist. This history is rooted in the urban context of Aden and reinforced by the remnants of colonial infrastructure, symbolizing an age of prosperity. Despite this urban context, attempts are being made to include the entirety of the southern provinces into a cohesive national narrative. Furthermore, nationalist sentiment in Aden is a response to a perceived occupation by the north, and therefore subsumes collective memories to forge a process of self-identification that asserts Adenis as distinct from the perpetrators of the northern domination. In sum, collective memories enable a historical continuity for the urban community which understands itself as cosmopolitan, progressive, modern, and a host of other markers of identity that frame Aden as culturally distinct and a product of their colonial and socialist past. While rooted in historical narratives, these conceptions are only understood in the context of contemporary Aden, a decaying city removed from its glorious past.

In 1989, sociologist Stuart Hall wrote that, “there is no way, it seems to me, in which people of the world can act, can speak, can create, can come in from the margins and talk, can begin to reflect on their own experiences unless they come from some place, they come from some history, they inherit certain cultural traditions.”\footnote{Stuart Hall, "Ethnicity: Identity and Difference," In \textit{Becoming National: A Reader}, ed. Geoff Eley et al. (Oxford University Press, 1996), 347.} That sense of place, that sense of a bounded identity, is embodied in a historical narrative that posits Aden as an entity which is in all senses marginalized by the unification narrative that has dominated national understandings since 1990. Yemeni unification and the aftermath of the Civil War created the context in which all that was celebrated as part of Aden’s urban
culture was subsumed in the hegemonic culture that dominates the whole of Yemen, despite patterns of difference within that unified context. The loss of these cosmopolitan values and lifestyles gives a sense of urgency to Adenis, especially when coupled with the economic and political realities that have transformed Aden from one of the world’s busiest port cities to a decaying periphery in the unified Yemeni state.

The unification narrative was an attempt to distance itself from colonial legacies and erase the border that was drawn between the two halves. The rejection of this narrative can be seen not only as a means to assert Adenis own identity in light of their specific historical experience, but perhaps the newfound nostalgia for the colonial era is an acceptance of reality created by colonial borders. As such, colonialism and identification with Western modernity have shifted from being rejected in the post-independence nationalist project to being celebrated as traditions of a new southern nationalism. This is evidenced by the propagation of discourses around the roles of women international human rights and new forms of historical remembrance that highlight the achievements of the colonial and socialist eras and indicate a nostalgic desire to return to the cosmopolitan lifestyles that characterized those time periods.

As Aden situates itself as an ethically differentiated and unique locale from its northern occupier, it is necessarily responding to the daily injustices imposed on the south by the perceived occupation by the north. In this sense, identification as Adeni and all that accompanies that label is a refusal to identify with Yemen as a unified reality. Stuart Hall noted that “identity... is partly a relationship between you and the Other. Only when there is an Other can you know who you are.” It can be argued that any national identification is also a marker of difference, and the case of Aden is a telling example of

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What is perhaps surprising is just how quickly a southern national narrative has been constructed and reconstructed and how quickly the unification narrative was deconstructed. At the dawn of unification, Adenis may have still strongly identified as Adenis, yet the literature of the time shows an eagerness to identify as Yemeni. Unification was the final step in distancing Aden from its colonial history and marked the end of the socialist project. Just a few short years later, the unification narrative was supplanted by a new southern nationalism, which has become the overwhelmingly popular narrative of Aden, which has reframed the two previous eras as constituting the south’s proud historical trajectory. If anything, this demonstrates both the fickleness of national identification and the velocity at which these identifications can break down and be reconstructed. This is not to say that these identifications are not powerful. They are based on a historical and contemporary reality and have encouraged not just Adenis but people across the southern territories to risk their lives to the independence struggle. Yet these identifications are temporal and reflect historical remembrance that is rooted in the context of the moment.

While the Adeni narrative actively cultivates stories of locales outside the urban center, and I would argue has been quite effective in presenting a united southern face to the separatist narrative, it is still based on the historical experiences of Aden itself, constructed and reconstructed in contemporary collective memories that illustrate a prosperous past. The historical development of Aden, which marginalized other locales outside the previous capital, accompanies the Adeni narrative which silences competing southern historical understandings outside the urban center.
As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, scholars have been quick to incorporate the unification narrative categorically, yet some recent works are beginning to acknowledge the diversity of Yemen’s population and the various ways they imagine their own nationalisms. Stephen Day focuses on regionalism as the most prominent identity marker in Yemen and a useful framework from which to view the current situation. He claims that “Yemen remains a fragmented country, where politics is largely defined by the competing interests of groups in multiple regions across a topographically complex landscape.” This approach accounts for Yemen’s complex history, by analyzing how different government regimes have approached these regions and implemented policy based on such differences, providing important historical context. Day states that “Yemen’s population is filled with lesser ethnic distinctions that correspond to identifiable regions of the country.” This approach is also most critical when analyzing political demands of the post-uprising landscape, which hinge largely on ideas of federalism, state centralization, and resource distribution.

While I agree with Day that regions play an important role in Yemen’s political and geographic landscape, the recent decision to impose a federal system in Yemen, that would seemingly ease regional tensions and provide more autonomy and control to neglected regions, has been met with disdain from many segments of the Yemeni population, suggesting that divisions run much deeper than individual regions. It is still the subject of north and south that dominates Yemen’s contemporary political landscape.

Scholars focusing in the south of Yemen have further begun to acknowledge the

prevalence of the southern question and the currency of counter-nationalisms. Susanne Dahlgren writes,

“Despite early hope that the two Yemens will slowly come together in terms of customs and psychology, Southerners now think that it is impossible to live with ‘those people’ since their culture is entirely different from that of the South. This attitude is visible in the manner in which the ‘South’ is symbolically constructed in the popular dissent. Bad governance and corruption is thought to be characteristic of the Northern culture at large. According to this constellation, the North is imagined as a community of tribes and tribal thinking while people in the South are adherent of a nation state ruled by state law.”

While Dahlgren asserts that “the new Southern state is not designed to replicate the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen but to be built according to principles of equal citizenship,” I argue that these very values of “good governance” are a result of the south’s remembered history. Thus, although it is not a call to return to the PDRY’s specific government and state ideology, and the British era is even less a model for the government, but the roadmap for the future is designed on the historical difference between north and south as constructed by popular imaginings of these two eras.

This thesis has focused on history as remembered, and has aimed to situate collective memories in the ethnographic present. At the same time, history is not just a contemporary understanding of the past, but a reference point to the future. In his discussion of representations of Belle Époque Algeria through images and postcards, Ed McAllister noted,

“what matters most about these portrayals of past-present disjuncture is perhaps not the object or period that triggers or embodies feelings of nostalgia, but the reference to an individual’s memory of past desire for a version of the future or alternative present, along with the awareness that this desire cannot be relived. As such, nostalgia has less to do with the past itself, than with the fantasies that structured the past; with people’s past emotional investments about present and future—a kind of imagined future located in the past.”

156 Dahlgren, Contesting Realities.
157 Dahlgren, Contesting Realities.
It is not history for history's sake that is so powerful, but the emotions and ideals that a remembered past holds and the desire for a future that can replicate that past. Aden, a city that has undergone such dramatic transformation over the past 200 years, is perhaps now in its most perilous state. The realities of everyday life are making it more and more difficult for Adenis to make a living, access basic necessities, and construct a future for themselves and their families. Yet this struggle is not happening in a vacuum. The difficulties of the present are compared to a remembered past, where Aden was a cosmopolitan space and one of the world’s busiest ports. Administrative buildings from Aden’s days as a capital, colonial buildings with international brand signs, and cultural edifices such as churches and temples, constantly invoke senses of nostalgia. This historical framework provides hope for Adenis that a new state is the first step to recreating that past, and returning Adenis to their remembered sense of glory and prosperity.
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