

Framing Threat, Mobilizing Violence

Micro-Mechanisms of Conflict Escalation in Yemen

Dissertation

zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades

der Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Fakultät

der Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

vorgelegt von

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Tübingen

2015

Tag der mündlichen Prüfung:

31.05.2016

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TRANSLITERATION

For Arabic terms and citations this dissertation uses the system developed by the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) with slight modifications.*

Arabic	Transliteration	Arabic	Transliteration
ء	'	ط	ṭ
ب	b	ظ	ẓ
ت	t	ع	'
ث	th	غ	gh
ج	j	ف	f
ح	ḥ	ق	q
خ	kh	ك	k
د	d	ل	l
ذ	dh	م	m
ر	r	ن	n
ز	z	ه	h
س	s	و	w
ش	sh	ي	y
ص	ṣ	ة	a [†]
ض	ḍ	ل	- [‡]

Vowels are transliterated as follows:

Arabic	Transliteration	Arabic	Transliteration
Long ا	ā	Diphthongs و	aw
ي	ū	ئ	ay
إ	ī	Short ا	a
و	ū	و	u
Doubled ي	iyy (final form ī)	ي	i

Names of individuals and place names are spelled in accordance with English norms. English capitalization rules are followed. When in doubt, the simplest transliteration version is given preference.

* For the complete guidelines, transcription chart and word list see the IJMES website, accessed February 17, 2015, <http://www.ijmes.chass.ncsu.edu/submissions.htm>.

[†] In construct state: at.

[‡] For the article, al- and -l-.

1. INTRODUCTION

Among the large number of identity groups engaged in contentious politics against perceived marginalization or repression today, some use violent tactics to reach their aims, whereas others employ nonviolent means despite very similar conditions. Existing theories in civil war studies can neither account for this variance nor adequately explain the micro-processes of conflict escalation from nonviolent to violent. So far, they have predominantly focused on macro-level structural factors, neglecting both meso- and micro-level, in order to explicate the outbreak of violent intra-state conflict. Theoretical models can be grouped around those arguing for the decisive impact of political opportunity, economic incentives, resource mobilization, exclusive identities, grievances, and state failure respectively for the mobilization of armed fighters. Methodologically, quantitative approaches dominated throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, with qualitative studies existing merely on the margins. Only recently has there been a shift in focus towards placing a stronger emphasis on individual agency and on an increased interest in micro-level processes. Hence, the puzzle so far remains unsolved.

In this dissertation, I argue that a more ideational perspective works to overcome the deficits of established approaches, helping to identify and elucidate factors that lead to the choice of a violent or nonviolent path.

The discipline of social movement studies has developed the so-called ‘framing approach’ in order to account for collective action. The framing approach emphasizes the role of cognitive schemata of interpretation (i.e. frames). It argues that strategic movement leaders rhetorically create persuasive frames which mobilize certain people among the audience to join the movement and engage in collective action (such as e.g. rallies, strikes, fighting etc.). Since both protests and civil wars are forms of contentious politics – merely on different levels – this theoretical approach with its methodological ‘tool kit’ appears promising in regard to resolving the research puzzle.

By means of two detailed case studies – the violent Houthi rebellion in Northern Yemen and the nonviolent Southern Yemeni secessionist movement – the role of specific frames and framing processes shall be explicated and their impact evaluated. In adopting such a perspective, the dissertation does not seek to render the more structuralist theoretical approaches obsolete; rather, it intends to propose an integrated model that combines and complements both structural factors and framing processes.

Case 1: The “Houthi Rebellion”

After the end of the Shi‘a Zaydi imamate in Northern Yemen in 1962, the Zaydi population,¹ particularly the elites, the Hashemites or *sādah*, suffered a massive loss in status.² Not only were they deprived of their former privileged access to social and political power; anti-Zaydi resentment among the Sunni population, grounded in their prior status benefits, unfolded more openly. This was bolstered by the post-revolution nationalist narrative, which sought to increase regime legitimacy via fostering a negative picture of the imamate, strengthening tribalism, and emphasizing the ‘otherness’ of the *sādah*.³ Additionally, a political and economic marginalization of the Northern region, where the majority of the Zaydi population lived, and a growing influence of Sunni Islam in Zaydi heartland, continually mounting since the 1970s,⁴ exacerbated Zaydi grievances. In particular the spread of Wahhabi Sunni religious institutions was perceived as a threat to Zaydi identity.⁵

Badr al-Din al-Houthi, a distinguished Zaydi scholar and *sādah*, had already started campaigning for a revitalization of faith and a mode of “cultural self-defense”⁶ as early as the late 1970s. Legitimized by his social and symbolic capital, he mainly employed religious sermons and statements to invigorate Zaydi messages. After the Yemeni unification and the connected extension of political freedom and opportunities for activism, a number of al-Houthi family members entered official politics. However, these members soon felt that the new founded al-Haqq party and its role could not live up to their expectations in representing Zaydi interests, causing disenfranchisement.⁷ Parallel to the political activism, younger members of the Houthi family had engaged in more popular mobilization activities. They initiated the ‘*Shabab al-Mu’imin*’, ‘Believing Youth’, who actively organized Zaydi religious and cultural activities through mediums such as youth camps, and had a significant impact on a cohort of young men. Since 1997, Hussein al-Houthi, one of Badr al-Din’s sons, led the

¹ Yemen is divided into a majority of approximately 55% Sunni Muslims, mainly of the Shafi‘i school, and a ‘minority’ of about 35–45% Zaydi Shi‘a Muslims. These are estimates because of a lack of available data concerning religious affiliation. Some authors (e.g. Sarah Philipps, “Cracks in the Yemeni System”, *Middle East Report Online* (July 28, 2005) speak of a lower percentage of only 20–25%, however, most sources cite accounts ranging from 35–45%.

² Christopher Boucek, “War in Saada: From Local Insurrection to National Challenge”, *Carnegie Papers* 110 (April 2010); International Crisis Group (ICG), “Yemen: Defusing the Saada Time Bomb”, *Middle East Report* 86 (May 27, 2009).

³ Andrew Dumm, “Understanding the Houthi Conflict in Northern Yemen: A Social Movement Approach” (master’s thesis, American University, Washington D.C., 2010).

⁴ Sheila Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen: The Political Economy of Activism in Modern Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Lisa Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁵ Barak A. Salmoni, Bryce Loidolt, and Madeleine Wells, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2010).

⁶ Dumm, “Houthi Conflict”.

⁷ Salmoni et al., *Regime*.

group which at its height allegedly reached 15,000 young men with its camps – participation in which had become a question of prestige among many families of social standing.

Because the Zaydi shared in the general criticism voiced by Muslims worldwide against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, they were further alienated when President Saleh sought a closer relationship with the United States after September 11, 2001. They furthermore considered this action an indirect means of strengthening the US-ally Saudi Arabia, their enemy. The al-Houthis thus began denouncing the Saleh regime as an ally of the US and Israel (known to be an archenemy according to sentiments within the Arab world, having interests regarded as congruent with the US). They continued to state that the regime was an illegitimate representative of the Yemeni people. In one notable case, the Believing Youth initiated protests purporting anti-US and anti-Israel slogans after Friday prayers.⁸ In 2002, the charismatic Hussein al-Houthi coined the one slogan which would become the distinctive mark of the developing Houthi movement: “God is great, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse upon the Jews, Victory to Islam”.

The message initially appears only to connect with the predominant anti-US and anti-Israel discourse and does not present anything new or exceptional. However, an additional significance emanates from the specific context and mode in which the slogan was employed, that is, in the way it connected to meaning-laden narratives and gained symbolic value when the Saleh regime tried to suppress movement followers from chanting it. It is here that the spiral of escalation began. When both sides found themselves irreconcilable despite mediation attempts, Saleh, in June 2004, officially announced the commencement of conflict. Hussein al-Houthi’s subsequent death during an attempt to arrest him in September the same year led to a significant expansion of the movement⁹ (leadership shifted to his brother and cousins). Soon thereafter, a frame shift occurred and hostilities openly broke out between the group who was later on labeled “Houthi rebels” and government troops.

Six rounds of armed conflict between 2004 and 2010¹⁰ turned the North, especially the Sa’ada region, into a humanitarian emergency with large numbers of internally displaced people¹¹ and destruction of which the area has not yet recovered. A truce was reached in February 2010, but skirmishes continued. Reliable casualty numbers are not available; rough

⁸ Boucek, “War in Saada”.

⁹ Iris Glosemeyer, “Local Conflict, Global Spin: An Uprising in the Yemeni Highlands”, *Middle East Report* 232 (Fall 2004).

¹⁰ International Crisis Group (ICG), “Breaking Point? Yemen’s Southern Question”, *Middle East Report* 114 (October 20, 2011); Salmoni et al., *Regime*; Boucek, “War in Saada”; Marieke Brandt, “Shifting the Power Structures: Political Developments in Sa’da after the End of the 6th Houthi-War” (paper presented at the DAVO Congress, Berlin, October 6, 2011).

¹¹ Numbers range between 200,000 and 350,000 IDPs depending on the sources.

and very conservative estimates count 4,705 immediate casualties¹² between June 2004 and July 2008, thus excluding the last interim phase and the sixth war. Despite its extensive and well-elaborated communication apparatus, the group has never clearly stated its aims. Government accusations always held that they were striving to restore the Zaydi imamate, which the Houthis repudiated until November 2012, when Abdul Malik explicitly called for a restoration of the imamate in a speech, but never repeated.¹³

Since the end of the last war, the Houthis have gradually become more included as a political force. Nevertheless, their repeatedly proven capacity to mobilize tens of thousands for public celebrations was reemployed for a coup in late 2014.

Case 2: The Peaceful Southern Movement

When compared to the ‘Houthi Rebellion’ – as it is referred to in politics and media – a second major conflict in the country shares a number of traits but has taken a significantly different course: the so-called ‘Southern issue’ contested by the Peaceful Southern Movement.

Tens of thousands¹⁴ of protesters from various regions of Southern Yemen took to the streets in Aden on April 27, 2013, marking the nineteenth anniversary of the commencement of the civil war between the former Northern and Southern Yemeni state in 1994. Across the Southern governorates, demonstrations and marches complemented the by then well-established civil disobedience campaign, in which all businesses and facilities close for half a day on Wednesdays and Saturdays. There was an outright shut down of public life.¹⁵ It was the sixth time within few months and it would not be the last.

Ihtilāl – occupation – by a Northern-dominated regime is the situation description unequivocally provided by activists of the Yemeni “Peaceful Southern Movement” when asked about the circumstances of life in the South and the reasons for their engagement in long-term protest against the government. The list of their grievances is long. It goes back to

¹² See Salmoni et al., *Regime*.

¹³ The speech was held on November 3, 2012, al-Ghadeer Day, an important Shi‘a holiday on which Ali Ibn Abi Talib was installed as successor to the Prophet. A transcription can be found on the Houthi website: <http://www.ansaruallah.com/news/4533> (accessed May 11, 2013).

¹⁴ Southern Yemeni sources speak of ‘one million’ which has become a symbolic number many times referred to when speaking about protest participation during the Arab Spring. This paper, however, will be using conservative estimates when reliable numbers are unavailable and will only refer to the numbers stated by movement actors when the discrepancy highlights a specific aspect.

¹⁵ “Large Protest in Southern Yemen to Mark Anniversary of Start of Civil War Demand Secession,” *Washington Post*, April 27, 2013, accessed May 7, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/5-soldiers-2-al-qaida-militants-killed-in-central-yemen-intelligence-officer-assassinated/2013/04/27/135a4320-af3c-11e2-b59e-adb43da03a8a_story.html. “Disobedience and Demonstrations in Southern Yemen on the Anniversary of the Civil War,” *Al Jazeera*, April 27, 2013 [Arabic], accessed May 7, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/pages/bd004702-bae9-48ba-86e8-cb00e236d470>.

the unification of the formerly independent states of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) in the North and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in the South in 1990. What had been longed for – unity – was soon after its realization perceived as having paved the way for a relationship based on Northern domination rather than equality and successive harmonization of the two systems and societies. The marginalization of Southern civil servants in the state apparatus, centralization in the North, inefficiency, high inflation, impoverishment, corruption, clientelism, and the removal of women from their earlier visible roles in public life, all based on spreading “hardline religious moralizing”¹⁶ created significant disillusionment among the former citizens of the PDRY. A brief civil war ensued in April 1994, which ultimately the South lost on July 7 the same year. From this date on, the beginning of the perceived ‘occupation’ was set and the disenfranchisement of Southerners was aggravated: Military personnel were discharged in great numbers, as were civil servants; property (including houses, but also factories, commercial buildings, fisheries, and else) was seized through opaque processes by Northerners – in many cases army officers – and never returned; infrastructure and public facilities suffered from neglect and continuously deteriorated. Unemployment rose to before-unknown levels. “[A]fter 1994 Southerners have almost lost their citizenship to their own homeland”, said a Southern Movement supporter in the UK, expressing widespread sentiments.¹⁷

A number of Southern protest groups with different constituents and strategies emerged among exiles and the diaspora in Yemen over the years.¹⁸ Yet despite their efforts, none of them gained momentum. This changed when in 2006/2007 three grassroots movements coalesced to unitedly strive towards calling attention to their grievances: an association of retired army officers calling for the reinstatement of their pension payments and the reemployment of Southern civil servants, unemployed youths, and retired diplomats protesting against hostilities. Since this spark, the Peaceful Southern Movement or ‘Hirak’¹⁹ – as it is commonly referred to in Arabic – has developed into a sweeping popular movement supported by and, consequently able to mobilize wide strata of society. Concurring that the South exists ‘under Northern occupation,’ adherents are hence united by the same shared perception of injustice characterized by threats of further discrimination, dispossession, and

¹⁶ Susanne Dahlgren, “The Southern Movement in Yemen”, *ISIM Review* 22 (Autumn 2008): 50f.

¹⁷ Interview with a Hirak supporter living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁸ Information on the movements stems from the Yemeni-American blogger Sama'a Al-Hamdani: <http://www.yemeniaty.com> (accessed March 15, 2013) and was cross-checked in interviews with UK-based Southern activists in April 2013.

¹⁹ The full name is ‘*Al-hirak al-janoubi al-silmi*’, ‘the Peaceful Southern Movement(s)’. While in Arabic the short name is ‘*Hirak*’, foreign media and academics tend to shorten its name to ‘Southern Movement’; I will in the following predominantly adopt this practice for the sake of improved legibility.

repression of their legitimate demands. Beyond these grievances, reference to cultural distinctiveness and identity plays a prominent role in fostering the division line²⁰ between the perceived tribal – read: backwards – Northern Other and the “civilized”²¹ Southern Self. Similarly conspicuous is the framing of identity as ‘South Arabian’, not Yemeni.

Concerning its goals, the messages spread by the movement became less unequivocal and developed over time. At first the demands were made within a discourse concerning both national equality and a change in the relations between the North and the South within the unified state. Over time and in the face of mounting government repression, protests and demands intensified. Calls for secession grew louder and more popular since their original voicing in 2009. ‘Self-determination’ constitutes the most prominent demand,²² yet the interpretation of its implication varies. “*Al-qarār qarārna*”, “the decision is ours”, proclaims a central slogan in the marches and demonstrations, bridging the positions by stating that, whichever approach is taken, it must be the Southern population who decide on it.

The magnitude and long-term persistence of the protest actions demonstrate a mobilization capacity that needs to be taken seriously by the regime. They represent a challenge to its position, as well as a threat to overall security all the more so since Yemen has one of the most heavily armed populations in the world. Notwithstanding this potential for armed escalation, all initial civilian actions remained peaceful in face of severe repression by government forces, which resulted in 969 dead and injured activists in 2012 alone according to a Southern-based human rights organization.²² Even in light of accumulating frustration and repeated attempts by prominent individuals to call for a more militant stance, the Hirak has continued its nonviolent path to date and keeps emphasizing it as *sine qua non* characteristic of the movement.

Comparing the Cases

The two movements feature multiple similarities. Both emanate from specific identity groups with their own narratives of distinctiveness and past grandeur. While for the Zaydi Houthis this is grounded in one thousand years of prevailing imamate rule, for Southern Yemenis it originates from a perceived well-functioning (socialist) civil state with comprehensive social service provision for all. Additionally, there exists a self-perception of being more “civilized”

²⁰ ICG, “Breaking Point”.

²¹ Mentioned numerous times in interviews with Southern activists in the UK in April 2013.

²² Stephen Day, “Updating Yemeni National Unity: Could Lingering Regional Divisions Bring Down the Regime?”, *Middle East Journal* 62, no.3 (2008): 417–436.

²² Southern Observatory for Human Rights, Annual Report for 2012. *The People of the South: Between the Authorities’ Hammer and Al-Qaeda’s Anvil* (Bern, Switzerland, April 26, 2013).

than the tribal north²³ of the country, due to a stronger inclusion into international trade relations and the British colonial influence. At the respective times of movement formation, both identity groups suffered from relative deprivation in terms of basic services, infrastructure, employment, equal opportunities, and social status as compared to the preceding periods, which their respective narratives refer to. In the South, these grievances apply even more comprehensively to the whole population and the loss they feel has occurred more recently. The economic situation of the average Yemeni citizen was, and continues to be, dire with more than one third of the population not being able to fulfill their basic food and non-food needs in 2005/06 and with 12.5% of the population living even below the food poverty line.²⁴ Apart from the urban-rural divide on poverty, with the urban areas performing better than rural areas, there is no clearly identifiable part of the country in which poverty is prevalent. Protests or rebellion, respectively, are directed against the government, which have been identified as the immediate originator of the grievances. They have lasted for a number of years during the recent decades and can still be considered ongoing despite the calming of large-scale hostilities in the North. With 54.8 arms per 100 persons, the rate of private gun ownership in Yemen is the second largest worldwide, according to a survey in 2007,²⁵ signifying a high degree of access to means of fighting. Moreover, the large proportion of young males within the population (median age 18.5 years²⁶) emphasizes the potentially available number of combatants.²⁷

In regard to political inclusion and socioeconomic inclusion, there is slight evidence that the South is disadvantaged since the systems' fusion after 1990 and the war in 1994. The comparatively larger administrative apparatus of the former socialist state was shrunk and jobs were lost; structural adjustment programs and privatization efforts saw the capital of Sana'a profit more than the Southern regions; military and security positions were filled by Northerners; and regime supporters were not only given priority to acquire Southern property at low cost after 1994, but in general were better included into the regime's patronage system,

²³ The differences in the importance of tribal structures in the North and South will be elaborated at a later point. Here shall only be noted that Southerners generally attribute Northerners to be determined by their tribal affiliations and 'tribal culture'.

²⁴ Government of Yemen/World Bank/United Nations Development Program, *Yemen Poverty Assessment* (November 2007). Due to a lack of reliable statistics on Yemen, the year 2005/06 has been selected to account for the socio-economic conditions at the time when both movements became openly active (the Houthis commenced armed struggle in 2004, the Hiraq started protests in 2007).

²⁵ Aaron Karp, "Completing the Count: Civilian Firearms – Annexe Online", *Small Arms Survey 2007: Guns and the City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, August 27, 2007), Chapter 2 (Annexe 4).

²⁶ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *The World Factbook*, accessed May 23, 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html>; 2013 estimates.

²⁷ For detailed numbers on the male population of the 16–44 years range in 2004 in the various Yemeni governorates see: Salmoni et al., *Regime*, Annex A, Table A.1, "Estimated Population of Yemen Governorates by Age Groups and Gender", 282.

be they Northerners or Southerners, but the former constituting a majority. The loss of positions and the new ‘mechanisms of resource allocation’ were felt more disproportionately by the population used to a socialist system providing welfare and employment. Even though there exists a plurality of parties, Southern citizens do not feel well represented by the Yemeni Socialist Party, which constitutes the remains of the former Southern ruling party, due to it being divided and of little importance and appeal. Many former leaders live in exile. Government positions filled by Southerners are considered to be more of symbolic value than of de facto importance.²⁸ The fact that Hadi, a Southerner, is president is being dismissed as negligible since he is not considered to be a ‘true Southerner’. The Zaydi population is, by comparison, significantly better included and represented, also due to the crosscutting relations in Northern tribal loyalties and alliances. Major repression against both groups started when their activism became visible in larger numbers. For the Houthis, this quickly led to the first round of fighting in 2004, whereas in the South it resulted in larger-scale detention, civil victims of various incidents during early protests, and ever-increasing numbers of victims at later points. In December 2009, Human Rights Watch reported “Unlawful Use of Deadly Force against Peaceful Protesters”, “Arbitrary Detentions and Unfair Trials”, “Press Censorship and Attacks against Journalists and Newspapers”, and “Detention of Academics and Other Opinion-makers”.²⁹ Before the outbreak of the conflicts and large-scale repression, there were already reports of brutal mistreatment of oppositional figures in the South such as scholars, writers, journalists, or intellectuals voicing protest against discrimination since the mid-1990s.³⁰ Equally, the Houthis repeatedly claimed arbitrary detention and crackdowns on youth meetings in the early 2000s.

The Puzzle: Why is There Variance in Movement Action Under Most Similar Conditions?

Despite all the similarities between the two protest movements – not the least of which is the state’s failure to provide services and repression – the Houthis and the Hirak have taken different paths: violent insurgency³¹ on the side of the Zaydi group versus nonviolent protest actions on the side of the Southerners. So far, there is no conclusive answer as to why we observe this variance.

²⁸ ICG, “Breaking Point”.

²⁹ Human Rights Watch (HRW), “In the Name of Unity: The Yemeni Government’s Brutal Response to Southern Movement Protest” (December 2009).

³⁰ Day, “Updating”, 423.

³¹ The terms ‘rebellion’ and ‘insurgency’ are used interchangeably in this dissertation. Moreover, I will not distinguish between ‘armed (intra-state) conflict’ and ‘civil war’ due to reasons of practicality and style.

In order to account for the outbreak of violent intra-state conflict, existing approaches in civil war studies have hitherto predominantly focused on structural factors on the macro-level.³² They claim that structural factors (of various kinds and possibly in varying combinations) causally relate to violent collective action:



Figure 1.1.: Causal Model of Established Theoretical Approaches in Civil War Research

The most widely established theoretical models³³ within this realm focus on opportunity, grievances, and identity as key factors leading to violent collective action:

According to the opportunity approach³⁴, the decisive factor for the outbreak of intra-state armed conflict is merely “conditions that favor insurgency”³⁵; grievances do not play any role. Such conditions are realized when we can observe: state weakness (proxied by low per capita income and recent regime change), rough terrain (where rebels are able to hide), a large population (expands the recruitment pool of young men), a low level of education, and external assistance.³⁶ The well-established ‘greed thesis’ is related to the opportunity argument but places its emphasis more specifically on the motivational aspect: It holds that intra-state armed conflict is the result of economic motivation among rebels. Rebel leaders are aiming to seize control of lootable resources (e.g. diamonds, oil etc.) in the absence of more lucrative modes of income in a context of poverty and lack of perspectives for potential adherents.³⁷

In the logic of the grievances approach, political violence is the result of frustration due to feelings of injustice within a social group³⁸. The experience of socioeconomic

³² Recently there has been a shift in focus towards a stronger emphasis of individual agency and an increased interest in micro-level processes. However, these studies have not been able to provide answers to the research question, either.

³³ Other models will be included in the discussion in 2.1.

³⁴ Most prominently represented by James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War”, *The American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003): 75–90; Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler and Dominic Rohner, “Beyond Greed and Grievance: Feasibility and Civil War”, *Oxford Economic Papers* 61, no. 1 (2009): 1–27; Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis, *Understanding Civil War: Evidence and Analysis, Vol. 1, Africa* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2005).

³⁵ Fearon/Laitin, “Ethnicity”, 75.

³⁶ The mentioned proxies cover only the most widely used; there are numerous others. For more details see 2.1.1.

³⁷ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War”, *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4 (2004): 563–595; Michael L. Ross, “How Do Natural Resources Influence Civil War? Evidence from Thirteen Cases”, *International Organization* 58, no.1 (Winter 2004): 35–67.

³⁸ Within social movement studies, David Snow further highlights the importance of a distinction between individual and collective ‘mobilizing’ grievances for the analysis of social movement emergence. According to him, only the later qualify to generate collective action. David A. Snow, “Grievances, Individual and

marginalization, political discrimination and exclusion, limited freedom, and repression causes frustration, then anger, and lastly aggressive behavior and violence against the perceived source of these grievances in order to overcome injustice. Proxies used for the measurement of grievances are: GDP/capita, education level, life expectancy, political and cultural discrimination, loss of power due to recent regime change, repression, and oil production. All of these increase grievances among the affected population and thus, in the logic of the theory, increase the probability of collective action.

A variation of the grievances theory is the horizontal inequalities hypothesis put forward by Frances Stewart.³⁹ Horizontal inequalities refer to inequalities between identity groups⁴⁰ in the areas of political participation, economy, social aspects, and cultural status. If such inequalities are severe and consistent, they can result in large-scale group mobilization and potentially in violence.⁴¹

Proponents of identity approaches emphasize the importance of cultural differences based on ethnic or religious affiliation for the legitimization and mobilization of violence against the out-group. Within the wide range of identity-based models, which generally argue along feelings of superiority or discrimination of one group versus ‘the other’ or multiple others, three variations are frequently highlighted separately. According to the primordialist argument⁴², some identity groups are inherently prone to violence and thus constitute ‘natural rebels’. A very similar essentialist perspective is taken by those arguing along the concept of “ancient hatreds”⁴³ between groups: These long-standing hostile feelings are assumed to erupt in violence if an opportunity presents itself. A third line of argumentation stresses the importance of myths, symbols, and narratives in *creating* antagonism between collectives with strongly held identities; they either directly express hostile opposition, or are reinterpreted in such a manner, in both cases posing an imminent threat towards the respective

Mobilizing”, in *Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, ed. David A. Snow et al. (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 540f.

³⁹ Frances Stewart, “Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: An Introduction and Some Hypotheses”, in *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic Societies*, ed. Frances Stewart (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 3–24. See also: Gudrun Østby, “Polarization, Horizontal Inequalities and Violent Civil Conflict”, *Journal of Peace Research* 45, no. 2 (2008): 143–162; Andreas Wimmer, Lars-Erik Cederman and Brian Min, “Ethnic Politics and Armed Conflict: A Configurational Analysis of a New Global Data Set”, *American Sociological Review* 72, no. 2 (2009): 316–337.

⁴⁰ This distinguishes them from vertical inequalities that exist between individuals.

⁴¹ Importantly, Stewart extends the argument after the analysis of a number of cases, in that already the “perceptions of horizontal inequalities affect the likelihood of conflict”. Frances Stewart, Graham K. Brown, and Arnim Langer, “Major Findings and Conclusions on the Relationship between Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict”, in *Horizontal Inequalities*, 285–300, here: 293.

⁴² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

⁴³ Robert Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* (London: Papermac, 1994).

group.⁴⁴ All three perspectives rely on the analysis of variously conceptualized ‘cultural components,’ the depth of which ranges from clustering societies into religious categories varying in a presupposed ‘violent’ nature to a more detailed look into symbolic complexes.

While all of these theoretical models have made important contributions to the analysis of civil war onset by highlighting different dimensions of conflict, identifying relevant factors for its intensification, and illuminating correlations between these factors and social action in many cases, they cannot account for all variance in collective action we observe. Additionally, based on the presence of certain structural factors, they many times incorrectly predict violent escalation for cases in which either non-violent action prevails or there is no collective action at all. In sum, they lack empirical validity. The comparison of the Houthi rebellion and the Southern Movement protests serves as an excellent example in this regard: Under most similar structural conditions,⁴⁵ which feature elements of most proxies used in the presented theories, the former employs violent means in pursuing their goals while the latter remains non-violent in its protest. In the logic of the existing approaches, this variance should not exist, i.e. they fail with their explanation. Their deficit is that they only provide a black box explanation, which leaves out the mechanisms of *how* structural factors translate to violent collective action, e.g. what happens between the opening up of political opportunities and protest or even rebellion.⁴⁶ This is mainly due to their mere focus on the macro-level. Although structural approaches adumbrate that factors on the meso- (organizational) and micro- (individual) level are present and in some way “connect” the independent and dependent variable, they neither explicitly specify them nor do they consider them in their explanations. However, it would be of crucial importance to do so in order to understand *why* collective actors change their behavior.⁴⁷ This desideratum shall be tackled in the following.

⁴⁴ Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Elizabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Marc Howard Ross, *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁴⁵ On John Stuart Mill’s ‘method of difference’ in theory building see: Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 23.

⁴⁶ Karl-Dieter Opp, *Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements. A Multidisciplinary Introduction, Critique, and Synthesis* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 323.

⁴⁷ Opp, *Theories*, 352.

The Argument: The Role of Framing for the Mobilization of Collective Action and the Choice of Strategy

As I already stated in the beginning, I argue that the inclusion of a more ideational perspective into models of conflict escalation helps to overcome the deficits of established approaches and to identify and elucidate factors that lead to the choice of a violent or non-violent path. This will be done by adopting a ‘framing perspective’ as it was developed within social movement studies. Framing processes and the agency involved mediate between structural conditions and actual collective action. Their specification illuminates the ‘black box’, emphasizes the significance of the meso- and micro-level, and thus constitutes a significant contribution to the explanation of protest behavior.

From a framing perspective *meaning* is pivotal, for it is assumed to be prefatory for (collective) action.⁴⁸ Based on the constructivist and symbolic interactionist premise that meaning is never intrinsically given but can only arise “through interpretive processes mediated by culture”⁴⁹ and is socially negotiated, the framing approach aims to illuminate these processes for the study of social movements. More precisely, it asks how signifying work or meaning construction employed by social movement actors translates into the mobilization of collective action and how the content of the ‘meaning packages’ conveyed influences the choice of means and strategies to reach the movement’s goals. The process in which meaning is strategically articulated, negotiated, contested, modified, and rearticulated⁵⁰ is thereby referred to as ‘framing’, the product as a ‘collective action frame’ (hereafter: frame).

The concept of ‘frame’ is borrowed from Erving Goffman;⁵¹ it is defined as a cognitive schema of interpretation which fulfills the function of guiding the perception and representation of reality by focusing attention on certain aspects and not others, tying elements together to packages or sets of meaning, and possibly reconstituting the way in which some elements are understood and related to each other or to the actor.⁵² In other words: “Frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit

⁴⁸ Robert D. Benford, “An Insider’s Critique of the Social Movement Framing Perspective”, in *Sociological Inquiry* 67, no. 4 (1997): 409–430, here: 410.

⁴⁹ David A. Snow, “Framing and Social Movements”, in *Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, 470–474, here: 470.

⁵⁰ Benford, “Insider’s Critique”, 410.

⁵¹ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York et al.: Harper & Row, 1974).

⁵² Snow, “Framing and Social Movements”.

theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters.”⁵³ Primary frames are present in all each life situation to enable individual action; they are not consciously manufactured but unconsciously adopted through socialization and applied in context. In distinction to such ‘natural’ frames, strategic frames can be intentionally created by certain actors in order to influence the individual’s perception and resulting action. ‘Collective action frames’ belong to this category of strategic frames; they fulfill the same principal tasks of selecting and increasing salience as everyday life frames, but differ in their primary mobilization function: mobilizing consensus, mobilizing action, and demobilizing counter-mobilization of adversaries.⁵⁴ To successfully attain these mobilization aims, strategic social movement actors need to attend to the three core framing tasks of ‘diagnostic framing’, i.e. the interpretation of the (problematic and pressing) status quo, including the question of who is to be blamed for it; ‘prognostic framing’ in form of a proposed solution to the predicament and the way to reach it; and, lastly, ‘motivational framing’ by accenting and highlighting the urgency, severity, and benefits of action while overcoming associated risks and fears.⁵⁵ As a subsequent criterion for successful mobilization, the resulting frames need to resonate with the targeted audiences: They need to be coherent and to be in line with structural and ideational conditions, and the frame articulators themselves must be perceived as credible.⁵⁶

It becomes obvious that frames do not exist isolated from structural conditions; rather, they are based on them, yet not determined by them. Movement actors, on the other hand, are assumed to possess agency in their strategic frame development and alignment efforts.⁵⁷ Depending on their goals and the respective opportunities and constraints provided by the structural conditions, they “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text”⁵⁸. For example, as has already been argued, grievances alone cannot explain the outbreak of violence. Nevertheless, they play an important role in the mobilization process: Without – at least perceived – grievances, there is no psychosocial reason for individuals to react to attempts for mobilization. They thus constitute an essential element in the overall course of mobilization, which can sufficiently be explained only by

⁵³ Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 1980), 6.

⁵⁴ Snow, “Framing and Social Movements”, 471.

⁵⁵ David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, “Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization”, in *From Structure to Action: Social Movement Participation Across Cultures*, ed. Bert Klendermans, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Sidney Tarrow (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1988), 197–217.

⁵⁶ Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment”, *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (August 2000): 611–639.

⁵⁷ William A. Gamson, *Talking Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁵⁸ Robert M. Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm”, *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (December 1993): 51–58, here: 52.

attribution to framing processes. In these, they are made salient in a diagnostic way (including the attribution of responsibility or blame), and transformed into something “sufficiently serious to warrant not only collective complaint but also some kind of corrective, collective action”⁵⁹. In the concrete cases under analysis, the framing actors would have to convince the members of the respective identity groups that they as a group suffer from social exclusion (in form of discrimination and else), that they are existentially threatened by state failure and/or repression, and that the remedial action the framing actors call for is not only necessary, but will also be effective in resolving the situation.⁶⁰ Which form exactly the action is to take (inter alia, if it will take a violent or non-violent path) thereby depends on what is (and can be, depending on the context) specified in the prognostic frame.

The interrelations can accordingly be visualized in the following way:



Figure 1.2.: Integrated Model for the Explanation of Collective Action

The mechanism is constituted by (a) the given structural conditions, which affect the (primary framework of) (b) strategic actors, who, based on their own perceptions and strategic interests and goals, elaborate and promote (c) a collective action frame, which influences (or at least seeks to influence) (d) the audience to take (e) collective action in the form delineated by the frame. In this, it is important to point out that through the successful resonance of the frame among the audience, or lack thereof, the audience in turn impacts the frame or, more precisely, it affects the way in which the strategic actors modify and re-adapt the frame in the dynamic process of frame alignment in order to achieve greater resonance.⁶¹

In comparison to the established approaches, the suggested model shifts the analytical focus from the structural context on the macro-level to the relevant actors and processes which – I claim – are decisive for concrete developments and outcomes of contentious political action located on the meso- and micro-level. It emphasizes not only the cognitive/ideational component, but at the same time the agency of actors, the dynamic and

⁵⁹ Snow, “Grievances, Individual and Mobilizing”, 541.

⁶⁰ On efficacy belief see: Opp, *Theories*, 341.

⁶¹ See also: Francesca Polletta and M. Kai Ho, “Frames and Their Consequences”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, ed. Robert E. Goodwin and Charles Tilly (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 187–209.

interactive character of the processes involved in frame development and resonance, and, lastly, the aspect of contingency entailed in all of this. In doing so, it does not intend to completely break with existing perspectives but to provide an extension, “to investigate and illuminate what these other perspectives glossed over, namely the matter of the production of mobilizing and countermobilizing meanings and ideas.”⁶²

The Analysis

The analysis of the cases will be guided by two questions: Firstly, why (and how) strategic movement actors construct particular frames rather than others; and secondly, why constituents take corresponding action or not. Both questions thereby involve the dimensions of frame content as well as framing processes.

As has been elaborated, to be successful in mobilizing collective action within identity groups, frames need to appeal to these respective identities, group values, and beliefs to tap into existing group discourses and need to be verified by empirically observable events. These are main criteria in frame development and need to be taken up by the framing actors. For both identity groups under analysis, I will therefore highlight relevant details of their history, the geographical, social, religious, economic, and political conditions they live in, as well as values, beliefs, and narratives that shape their group identity. Certain aspects of importance such as tribalism, colonial legacies, and neopatrimonialism will be highlighted.⁶³ Taken together, these constitute the ‘background layer’ of context to which the ever more limited ‘focal lens’ of discourses frames ultimately refer to, and which they selectively accentuate.

Concerning the ‘intermediate layer’, the location and depiction of significant discourses will be included, in addition to the recounting of meaningful events. A perceived threat to the identity group on this level would present a good discursive foundation for corresponding threat frames and thus be of special importance.

Finally, as ‘front layer’, relevant frames (in regard to the research questions) will be identified and set out in detail. Through the dissection into layers not only do the specific elements of each layer become explicit. Furthermore, the interrelatedness and interdependence of background conditions, discourses, and frames surface clearly.⁶⁴ On a

⁶² Snow, “Framing and Social Movements”, 474.

⁶³ What must not be forgotten is that – allegiance to the ideational perspective taken – in any case we deal not with ‘given facts’ with an inherent truth-claim, but always with perceptions. This will be reflected in the presentation as in the appraisal of all material.

⁶⁴ See also: Marie-Eve Desrosiers, “Reframing Frame Analysis: Key Contributions to Conflict Studies”, *Ethnopolitics* 11, no. 1 (2012): 1–23.

general level, the dissection traces the necessary ‘anchoring’ frames needed in order to be convincing, and hence enables us to assess their quality in this regard, e.g. the number of identity-relevant components a frame includes, if it draws on myths or symbols of great importance, if it relates to prominent discourses, etc.

Robert Benford and David Snow have conceptualized these considerations in depth in their discussion of frame resonance,⁶⁵ which will also be the analytical criteria employed for the analysis and evaluation of frame contents.

Two categories of actors are under analysis, namely the strategic movement actors (mainly elites), who construct and articulate frames – I will refer to them as ‘framers’ – and the audience, consisting of those who already participate in the movement, the general public who shall be persuaded to join, opponents who shall be demobilized, and potential external observers. The categories thus refer to individual as well as collective actors, in other words, they bridge the micro- with the meso-level. How they connect and what this implies for the framing process will be taken up in the respective chapter. On the empirical level, I will, based on a detailed description of each of the movements under analysis, determine who are the respective framing actors and introduce them in regard to their biography, their social, political, and movement roles, as well as important personal connections and networks. Their main tasks as framers lie in frame development, i.e. the transformation of an issue or grievance into something that needs urgent change and their participation therein.⁶⁶ These related processes will be identified and contextualized, as will be the actors, topics, and events of the contested processes, points of high overall significance for they mirror the most critical and crucial aspects in regard to resonance. Counterframing by the government, the movements’ arch opponent, has elevated prominence here since it poses the axis conflict within the act of political contestation. At the same time, the government is also among those groups subsumed under the general category of audience (from a movement framer perspective). Its characteristics as a potential target group or incidental audience will be elaborated, as will be those of the others listed above. The larger and more inclusive actors are – the general public, for example – the less specific the delineation of ‘characteristics’ is; it will more so refer to general cultural traits instead.

Subsequent to frame development follows the dissemination to and (in case of success) adoption of frames among the targeted group. As has been stated before, both processes are interdependent in that unsuccessful frame resonance leads to constant reformulation and

⁶⁵ Snow/Benford, “Ideology”; Benford/Snow, “Overview”.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

adaptation of frames.⁶⁷ At the end of the process we see either collective action or no action. If there is no action at all, the frame failed. If, on the other hand, we can observe collective action, it can again adapt two specifications: It can either be the action that was called for in the frame, or any other. For either of the two options I will attempt to clarify their grounds: What has been called for in the frame? Which were the circumstances in which the action took place? Have there been other incentives? Can we rule out that coercion played a role in “mobilization”? Who exactly are the actors? Which role did timing and setting play? Did the alternative action have any anticipating articulation? How did the action in turn change the situational context for successive frames? Can we identify any evidence during the action itself that relates back to the frame and helps to establish a connection?

Successful resonance, however, cannot and must not be inferred from collective action alone. Observable collective action and a corresponding frame only establish correlation; a frame can be resonant without immediately visible collective action, due to e.g. massive repression, lack of resources or else. Therefore, resonance will be deduced from the audience’s articulation of their perceptions. Since the perceptions themselves cannot be reached by any method, the closest we can get towards proving resonance is by critically assessing the actions and statements of the individuals and collectives we are interested in. The audience’s articulation of their perceptions will thus be captured directly through inquiry and indirectly through the analysis of their statements in other contexts (discussions, forums, written form, etc.). Key questions would be: Which aspects are most prominent, i.e. resonated best? Is there a consensus regarding the perception of the situation even if the population has not been mobilized (for violence)? These would imply a partial success of the framing, namely the diagnostic component.⁶⁸ The same also holds for the prognosis. In conclusion, a high degree of congruence between the frame and their perceptions accordingly provides evidence for successful resonance and makes a strong case for the overall argumentation.

The analysis is based on sources stemming from the movements (members and elites), non-movement Yemeni nationals, the Yemeni government, national and international media, national and international non-governmental organizations, and researchers. Observations during interviews and data collection further complement these sources. The assessed scope of media covers written, audio, and visual spectra as well as spatial arrangements. In addition to the interviews and group discussions I conducted, it ranges from reports, to articles, printed

⁶⁷ Polletta/Ho, “Frames”.

⁶⁸ Cf. Desrosiers, “Reframing”.

movements material, media and otherwise published interviews, printed speeches and lectures, books, newspapers and magazines, tokens, artifacts, photographs, graffiti, paintings, slogans, chants, banners, statements, audio recordings with speeches or lectures, and else (cassette tapes, MP3, podcasts, streamings and other online formats), videos (mainly published on YouTube), websites, web forums, blogs, to various social media sites (Facebook, Twitter and else).

The method chosen to analyze the core data is ‘qualitative content analysis’ as developed by Philipp Mayring.⁶⁹ It refers to a systematic, rule- and theory-guided qualitative text analysis that uses coding and categorizing to condense the meaning of texts/communication and thus allows the deduction of certain aspects like possible intentions of the speaker, etc. It is based on a model of communication that includes many dimensions of the context; hence, it provides a guideline for the analysis of the embeddedness of the communication and possibly even the strategies used to attain a certain resonance. The aim is to be able to identify clear themes and categories that fall into one or more dimensions of frames, and to assign them to strategic framing (like e.g. frame alignment). This will be conducted for the identified core corpus of sources. The remaining sources will be analyzed on the bases of the inferred frames.

Structure of the Dissertation

In Chapter Two, I discuss the theoretical backgrounds, first on explanations for violence in civil war studies,⁷⁰ and second on collective action in social movement studies. Both disciplines share certain ideas that have influenced their respective theory development at a certain point during their evolution. To these belong the assumptions that collective grievances, resource availability and mobilization, as well as a (political) opportunity for action, play a role in the escalation of violence or collective action. While the research on armed insurgencies has added considerations along the lines of ‘identity’ and the impact of ‘neopatrimonialism’ to its core theoretical approaches, those studying collective action have turned toward ‘framing’ (which will be dealt with in detail in Chapter Three) and ‘organization’ to explain the trajectory of collective action. The respective strengths and shortcomings of each approach is highlighted, and their explanatory power will later be tested for the two case studies (Chapter Six).

Chapter Three introduces the framing approach. It traces the origins of the concept of frame in the works of the sociologist Erving Goffman and its further evolution and integration

⁶⁹ Philipp Mayring, *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Grundlagen und Techniken* (Weinheim/Basel: Beltz, 2010).

⁷⁰ I use the terms ‘civil war’, ‘armed (intrastate) conflict’, ‘insurgency’, and ‘rebellion’ interchangeably.

into a wide range of disciplines, e.g. communication science. How framing has become a popular concept in social movement studies will be treated in a second step. ‘Collective action frames’ are attributed with a high potential for mobilization – *if* they are constructed in a culturally appropriate, credible, and convincing way, they are effectively distributed to the appropriate audience; they can prevail over competing frames. I present the seminal framing model established by David Snow and Robert Benford, discuss competing models and disputed aspects, and on this basis lastly develop a personal integrated model of framing for the explanation of movement strategies (violent vs. nonviolent) in the realm of conflict studies.

A background on Yemen – its history, sociology, politics, and economy – is provided in Chapter Four. Beyond mere facts and figures, the focus therein is on deconstructing certain dominant assumptions about the country’s territorial cohesion and essentialist social groups in one part, and on delineating important narratives (‘unity’) and discourses (‘Saudi dominance’) as an ideational setting from which the movement frames emanate and to which they are tied in the other.

Chapter Five is dedicated to a detailed introduction into the two movements. Each of them is introduced and its characteristics and evolution are depicted. For the Houthi case, I define two phases – prior and after the killing of Hussein al-Houthi and the subsequent escalation from nonviolence to violence – which are then analyzed in regard to the frame shift that has taken place. Since there is no such drastic shift for the Hirak, I identify phases based on smaller, yet potentially consequential changes and on these grounds examine shifts in its framing.

Chapter Six tests the explanatory power of the established theoretical approaches for the cases and concludes by stating which factors are significant and will be entered into the integrated framing model.

Chapter Seven comprises the framing analysis. All framing dimensions will be successively elucidated, and the coherence of the frames will be assessed and correlated with the resonance they generate, including the perceivable collective action. I am thus able to trace the impact of frame shifts for both cases, supporting my argument that it is the frames which make the difference.

Finally, Chapters Eight and Nine conclude the dissertation. They provide a comparative interpretation of the findings and once more broach central issues such as the significance and explanatory power of correlations between frame content and protest events, and the impact of movement structure on movement actions. A final discussion and assessment of my

findings is followed by a brief summary and outlook on potential consecutive research questions resulting from my study.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The theoretical framework of the dissertation sets out to integrate theoretical concepts stemming from both civil war studies and social movement research. The following chapter will present the necessary background by introducing the main theoretical strands from each of the disciplines.

2.1. *Explaining Violence in Civil War Studies*

The study of intra-state armed conflict evolved in the context of decolonization and the related increase of such conflicts (in comparison to the earlier dominance of inter-state war). Early explanations for the outbreak of violence were rooted in social-psychology. Ted Gurr in his seminal work “Why Men Rebel” (1970) posed that relative deprivation led to frustration, which ultimately triggered aggression and hostilities.⁷¹ He considered intra-societal cleavages along identity lines as a significant dimension to elucidate in this context. In addition, Gurr stressed the importance of people’s beliefs about the utility of their actions, the interactions between contentious acts and the government’s capacity for repression and appeasement, and the role of the media for spreading ideas. While these aspects have regained attention in later decades and generally have not lost their timeliness in current research, his work has nevertheless received rigorous critique in a number of regards. First and foremost, Gurr based his model on the presupposition that political violence was non-rational. While this assumption had been contested numerous times before, at the latest Mark Irving Lichbach demonstrated how the sequence of “anger-grievance-rebellion” could be explained within a rational choice framework.⁷² In addition, prominent scholars of social movements engaged with Gurr’s model and each suggested a different mechanism: Theda Skocpol stressed the decisive impact of social and political structures, Charles Tilly positioned the processes of political mobilization at the center of his extensive work, while Sidney Tarrow focused on mass social movements.⁷³ The fruitfulness of an integrative perspective that takes up elements

⁷¹ Ted R. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970). He defines relative deprivation as “actors’ perception of discrepancy between their value expectations and their value capabilities. Value expectations are the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled. Value capabilities are the goods and conditions they think they are capable of getting and keeping” (p. 24).

⁷² Mark Irving Lichbach, *The Rebel’s Dilemma* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995). For a positioning and discussion of “Why Men Rebel” 40 years after its first publication see: Ted R. Gurr, “Why Men Rebel Redux: How Valid Are Its Arguments 40 Years On?”, *E-International Relations*, November 17, 2011, accessed July 14, 2015, http://www.e-ir.info/2011/11/17/why-men-rebel-redux-how-valid-are-its-arguments-40-years-on/#_ftn6.

⁷³ *Ibid.* Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading: Addison Wesley, 1978); Sidney Tarrow, *Power*

from both disciplines – civil war research and social movement studies – and from a range of theoretical models is the main argument of this thesis and will be elaborated in detail; serious engagement and discussion between influential scholars on the topic, however, can be traced back to this early period.

After a declining interest in – and, resultingly, the studies of – civil wars during the height of the Cold War, in which research on inter-state (proxy) wars dominated, the 1990s saw a renaissance of the discipline. The high death toll of civil wars during that decade, which were often referred to as ‘ethnic wars’, reignited the question about why they broke out in the first place. Besides approaches focusing on (ethnic) identity as explanatory factor, economic perspectives became increasingly popular and, from the late 1990s onwards, played a dominant, though far from unchallenged, role in the field. This fact strongly impacted on the ‘methodological suitcase’ of the discipline.

In regard to methodology, conflict research as a discipline has been shaped by its ascent during the height of behaviorism in the late 1950s; positivism dominated and pushed more interpretist assumptions into the background. With this, it introduced a divide between “quantitative-systematic-generalising” and “qualitative-humanistic-discursive”⁷⁴ approaches, which for a long time were perceived as mutually exclusive and led to heated discussions between proponents of the respective research traditions. Only in recent years has the divide been bridged and the mutual gain of complementary or integrative research become accepted and valued. Moreover, as approaches from other disciplines (such as history, anthropology, sociology)⁷⁵ gradually enter the field, so do more disaggregated data sets⁷⁶ (assisted e.g. by GIS-technology), and an overall a stronger inclusion of the micro- and meso-levels⁷⁷. All these are fertile developments, to which this dissertation seeks to contribute.

Established theoretical approaches can be grouped into three predominant strands: those focusing on opportunities, grievances, or identity as explanatory (meta)variable.⁷⁸ In the

in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁷⁴ Govinda Clayton, “Quantitative and Econometric Methodologies”, in *Routledge Handbook of Civil Wars*, ed. Edward Newman and Karl DeRouen, Jr. (London/New York: Routledge, 2014), 28–40, here: 29.

⁷⁵ See: Newman/DeRouen (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Civil Wars*.

⁷⁶ Lars-Erik Cederman and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, “Introduction to Special Issue ‘Disaggregating Civil War’”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 4 (August 2009): 487–495.

⁷⁷ Nils B. Weidmann, “Micro-Level Studies”, in *Routledge Handbook of Civil War*, 67–78.

⁷⁸ Alternative divisions include e.g. ‘opportunity vs. motive’ (identity should be added) or the triad of ‘identity, institutions, and economy’. For the former: Päivi Lujala, “Valuable Natural Resources”, in *Routledge Handbook of Civil War*, 119–130; Gudrun Østby and Henrik Urdal warn of overemphasizing the divide; they instead underline that many measures equally well describe opportunity *and* motivation. Gudrun Østby and Henrik Urdal, “Demographic Factors and Civil War”, in *Routledge Handbook of Civil War*, 131–144, here: 142. For the latter: Margit Bussmann, Andreas Hasenclever and Gerald Schneider, “Identität, Institutionen und Ökonomie: Ursachen und Scheinursachen innenpolitischer Gewalt”, in *Identität, Institutionen und Ökonomie: Ursachen*

following, I will present each of these strands and the most important theories subsumed under them. First, I will introduce their respective perspectives and core assumptions, subsequently their measurement and the critique they received. In the context of the case studies, I will later test their comparative explanatory power and lay open their limitations before I then conduct the frame analysis as suggested in my model.

2.1.1. Opportunity

Opportunity approaches can be subdivided into two major strands: one focusing on economic arguments, i.e. opportunity *costs*, the other one taking an institutional perspective, i.e. arguing with opportunity *structures* enabling political violence. Both assume the rationality of actors and neglect or even deny the role of grievances⁷⁹, which had been at the heart of the earlier relative deprivation argument.

Economy – Opportunity Costs

The economic opportunity approach is closely tied to the names of Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler. In their much-debated 2004 publication “Greed and Grievance in Civil War”⁸⁰ they put forward the argument that rebels are inherently motivated by financial gains. Recruitment for armed groups will thus be successful when fighting provides a more profitable source of income than alternatives. This will be the case especially in countries where regular sources of income provide merely low financial return, i.e. poor countries, and where the exploitation natural resources on the other hand promise high and quick profits. In the literature, the argument has become popular as the ‘greed hypothesis’.⁸¹

innenpolitischer Gewalt, Politische Vierteljahresschrift, Special Issue 43/2009, ed. Margit Bussmann, Andreas Hasenclever and Gerald Schneider (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2009), 9–38.

⁷⁹ Grievances are associated with “a deprivation of basic needs of some sort, claims of rights based on identity, react to discrimination”. I. William Zartman, “Need, Creed, and Greed in Intrastate Conflict”, in *Rethinking the economics of war: The intersection of need, creed, and greed*, ed. Cynthia J Arnson and I. William Zartman (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2005), 256–284, here: 262.

⁸⁰ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War”, *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4 (2004): 563–595.

⁸¹ A similar proposition has been made by Georg Elwert, who poses that the exploitation of natural resources, trade in drugs, narcotics, and arms, human trafficking, and kidnapping in the context of armed conflicts creates a war economy which becomes perpetual, significantly prolongs wars, and makes their settlement much more difficult. Georg Elwert, “Gewaltmärkte. Beobachtungen zur Zweckrationalität von Gewalt”, in *Soziologie der Gewalt*, Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, Special Issue 37/1997, ed. Trutz von Trotha (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1997), 86–101.

Following intense debate about the theoretical assumptions and the research design,⁸² they both advanced over the subsequent years and, in 2009, published the results in form of the ‘feasibility hypothesis’. It holds that rebellion will occur wherever it is financially and militarily feasible (specifying that these would be “relatively rare circumstances”).⁸³

Key issues raised in the discussion of both hypotheses concern the theoretical presumptions as well as the operationalization: Critics challenged the complete denial of the role of grievances;⁸⁴ the mere focus on the rebels while the state is disregarded;⁸⁵ the validity of the proxies used;⁸⁶ underspecified causal mechanisms;⁸⁷ and low levels of significance for several indicators.

Collier himself together with Nicholas Sambanis in 2005 published the two-volume work “Understanding Civil War” in which they discussed the weaknesses inherent in the greed-based model and moreover argued in favor of a rapprochement of their own quantitative model and qualitative approaches. Presenting a wide range of case studies from Africa and Asia, they demonstrate how these can enrich the theoretical assumptions and economic model, for the identified limitations and challenges are numerous. First, the quantitative literature does not agree on one clear definition of civil war, which creates difficulties not only in comparing research designs and finding, but even more significantly in regard to coding civil war onset and determination.⁸⁸ Furthermore, the most important proxies are critically evaluated.⁸⁹ The Collier/Hoeffler model uses ‘GDP/capita’ as a proxy for the opportunity costs of rebel recruitment: The lower the GDP/capita, the lower the recruitment costs for rebels (for the less attractive are other income opportunities). James Fearon and David Laitin, however, in their prominent study in 2003 use GDP/capita as a proxy for state weakness, which they hold to be causally related to opportunity structures enabling rebellion

⁸² See among others: James D. Fearon, “Primary Commodity Exports and Civil War”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 4 (2005): 483–507; David Keen, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War”, *International Affairs* 88, no. 4 (2012): 757–777.

⁸³ Collier/Hoeffler/Rohner, “Beyond Greed and Grievance”, 3. As the authors note, the hypothesis is a refinement off the so-called ‘Machiavelli Theorem’ advanced by Jack Hirshleifer. Jack Hirshleifer, *The Dark Side of the Force: Economic Foundations of Conflict Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁸⁴ E.g. Keen, “Greed and Grievance”; Jeffrey Dixon, “What Causes Civil Wars? Integrating Quantitative Research Findings”, *International Studies Review* 11 (2009): 707–735.

⁸⁵ James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War”, *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003): 75–90.

⁸⁶ Nicholas Sambanis, “Conclusion: Using Case Studies to Refine and Expand the Theory of Civil War”, *Understanding Civil War. Evidence and Analysis*, Vol. 1: Africa, ed. Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis (Washington: World Bank, 2005), 303–334. In 2009 Collier/Hoeffler themselves explicitly recognized the challenge to gather appropriate data and proxies for their model. Collier/Hoeffler/Rohner, “Beyond Greed and Grievance”.

⁸⁷ Sambanis, “Conclusion”.

⁸⁸ Ibid. Nicholas Sambanis, “What Is a Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 6 (2004): 814–858.

⁸⁹ For the following discussion of proxies: Sambanis, “Conclusion”.

(see below).⁹⁰ Sambanis thus questions what exactly it is that GDP/capita is supposed to measure, given that these competing (and many other) hypotheses use it as a proxy.⁹¹

‘Male secondary school enrollment’ is employed as a proxy by Collier/Hoeffler; low rates are claimed to indicate lower recruitment costs as well. The mechanism remains unclear; alternative approaches, for instance, suggest that secondary schooling could equally well be used to further certain (e.g. nationalist) educational content, thus catalyzing conflict and recruitment.⁹² Or, alternatively, some studies find a connection between higher education and subsequent unemployment, which fosters frustration and increases the number of youth willing to join armed groups.

The same problem of inconsistency or underspecificity, respectively, concerns ‘economic growth’ and ‘natural resources’: Would not preceding low level violence (potentially triggered by something else) already decrease economic growth,⁹³ implying that there is an issue of endogeneity in the causal mechanism? Does natural resource wealth serve to motivate civil war onset or is its looting rather a means to sustain it?⁹⁴ Besides, are all resources significant?⁹⁵ How does grievance come in here, i.e. unequal distribution of natural resource income?⁹⁶ What about its location⁹⁷ and the state’s economic dependence?

⁹⁰ Fearon/Laitin, “Ethnicity”.

⁹¹ Other critics e.g. additionally underline that while economic misery and decline tends to be widespread, the outbreak of armed conflict is much more limited; hence, any explanation which to a large degree builds on such a proxy necessarily misses out significant dimensions. Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman (eds.), *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict: Beyond Greed and Grievance* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2003).

⁹² Keith Darden, “The Scholastic Revolution”, Mimeo (New Haven: Yale University, 2002).

⁹³ Sambanis, “Conclusion”.

⁹⁴ Philippe Le Billon, for example, finds that “contraband goods such as gemstones, drugs, and narcotics” prolong conflicts, but do not increase their likelihood. Philippe Le Billon, *Wars of Plunder: Conflicts, Profits and the Politics of Resources* (London: Hurst, 2012), 15f.

⁹⁵ As Lujala points out, there is wider agreement about the impact of oil and secondary diamonds, while findings on timber and narcotics remain inconclusive. Lujala, “Valuable Natural Resources”. For studies on the role of oil and diamonds see: Fearon, “Primary Commodity Exports”; Marccartan Humphreys, “Natural Resources and Conflict Resolution: Uncovering the Mechanisms”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 4 (2005): 508–537; Philippe Le Billon, “Diamond Wars? Conflict Diamonds and Geographies of Resource Wars”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 98, no. 2 (2008), 345–372; Michael L. Ross, “A Closer Look at Oil, Diamonds, and Civil War”, *Annual Review of Political Science* 9 (2006): 265–300. For timber see: Le Billon, *Wars of Plunder*; Siri Aas Rustad et al., “Foliage and Fighting: Forest Resources and the Onset, Duration, and Location of Civil War”, *Political Geography* 27, no. 7 (2008): 761–782. For narcotics see: Joshua Angrist and Adriana Kugler, “Rural Windfall or Resource Curse? Coca, Income, and Civil Conflict in Colombia”, *Review of Economics and Statistics* 90, no. 2 (2008): 191–215; Päivi Lujala, “The Spoils of Nature: Armed Civil Conflict and Rebel Access to Natural Resources”, *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 1 (2010): 15–28.

⁹⁶ This leads to the aspect of ‘horizontal inequalities’ as put forward by Frances Stewart; see 2.1.2. Frances Stewart, *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict. Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic Societies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); see also: Gudrun Østby, Ragnhild Nordås and Jan Ketil Rød, “Regional Inequalities and Civil Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa”, *International Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2009): 301–324.

⁹⁷ It appears that only when the resources are located in the region of conflict do they increase duration and severity of hostilities. Halvard Buhaug and Päivi Lujala, “Accounting for Scale: Measuring Geography in Quantitative Studies of Civil War”, *Political Geography* 24, no. 4 (2005): 399–418; Päivi Lujala, “Deadly Combat over Natural Resources: Gems, Petroleum, Drugs, and the Severity of Armed Civil Conflict”, *Journal of*

‘Rough terrain’, so Collier/Hoeffler argue, provides rebel hideouts and the percentage of territory of a state which consists of either mountains or forested area is resultingly assumed to increase risks. Besides the argument that sanctuaries might equally be located across borders and else, Sambanis underlines that such refuge would rather serve conflict duration rather than onset.

Among the demographic factors ‘population size’, ‘diasporas’, and ‘ethnicity/social fragmentation/polarization’, each raises more questions than the preceding one. While population size was found very robust over a range of studies (based on the presumption that the higher, the easier it is to find challengers to the regime), the factors related to population growth, like population density, dispersion, and urbanization, were similarly discussed. Most remained inconclusive, with the effect of density being predominantly refuted.⁹⁸ Diasporas are assumed to support groups financially, with human resources mobilized through kin networks, and through influencing the governments in their host countries; Sambanis, however, points out that not only are such diaspora collectives no unified entities; furthermore, could any other network in theory replace their suggested roles. Of the ‘ethnicity/social fragmentation/polarization’ triad, merely the last component proved robust over a number of publications.⁹⁹ A main point of critique is the neglect of the function of institutions for the inclusion or exclusion of groups; this cannot be proxied in the suggested model.

The last proxy that Sambanis treats in some detail is ‘political institutions’. While Collier/Hoeffler consider e.g. the regime type as insignificant (it would represent a grievance), others come to different conclusions (see below). Gurr¹⁰⁰ moreover accentuates the need to distinguish between new and established democracies for it impacts on the credibility and legitimacy of the government – both factors which cannot be easily coded.

Numerous other aspects like regional variation, the role of elites and leadership, transitions from one kind of violence to another, and the historical dimension of conflicts remain

Conflict Resolution 53, no. 1 (2009): 50–71; Lujala, “Spoils of Nature”. If oil is located offshore, it has no impact on conflict onset. Lujala, “Spoils of Nature”; Michael L. Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁹⁸ For an overview and discussion see: Østby/Urdal, “Demographic Factors and Civil War”, especially Table 11.1. They furthermore discuss migration, differential sex ratio, and differential ethnic growth.

⁹⁹ The Ethnolinguistic Fractionalization Index (ELF) is frequently criticized as an inappropriate measure; it neither reflects any real categories of fractionalization, nor the salience of such potentially fractionalizing categories. Sambanis, “Conclusion”, 319f. On the index and the measurement of fractionalization in general: Alberto Alesina et al., “Fractionalization”, *Journal of Economic Growth* 8 (June 2003): 155–194; James D. Fearon, “Ethnic structure and cultural diversity by country”, *Journal of Economic Growth* 8 (June 2003): 195–222.

¹⁰⁰ Ted R. Gurr, *Peoples Versus States: Minorities at Risk in the New Century* (Washington: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2000).

undisclosed from this perspective. Gains from a complementary integration of qualitative studies can help not only to improve the data and its depth, but moreover to better elucidate processes, and assist the development of an improved operationalization by revealing potentially omitted variables and mechanisms.¹⁰¹

Institutions – Opportunity Structures

Another major strand of opportunity approaches does not merely focus on the rebels' side, but bring the state back in. Several perspectives share the same core argument: That state-capacity should be at the center of interest. The grounds for why this should be so then expand to include 'weak-state' arguments, claiming that a lack of state capacity leads to an opportunity for rebellion, a security dilemma, or – in relation with regime type of regime change – to instability. Neopatrimonialism and its consequences (in both directions) form another variant of institution-based explanations.¹⁰²

James Fearon and David Laitin (2003) relate “conditions that favor insurgency” to weak states, which lack the political, bureaucratic, and military capabilities to effectively control their territory and are thus more volatile to challengers due to “fear and opportunities”.¹⁰³ They proxy state capacity with GDP/capita, suggesting that the higher the income, the stronger the state.¹⁰⁴ Besides a lack of consideration of motives, critics have attempted to disprove the assumed correlation (and posed causal mechanism) between strong military (proxied by military spending) and risk of insurgency. Margit Bussmann's study provides evidence for this counterclaim, while Hanne Fjelde and Indra de Soysa demonstrate the superiority of good governance over both cooptation and coercion as regime mechanisms to spark compliance.¹⁰⁵ Both these and a later study of Fearon (2010) provide convincing evidence for the significance of state institutions, yet rather in regard to the factors of trust

¹⁰¹ Collier/Hoeffler/Rohner, “Beyond Greed and Grievance”; Sambanis, “Conclusion”.

¹⁰² In line with these is furthermore Gurr, who claims that “[s]trong states have the capacity to either accommodate or suppress demands for self-determination at low cost.” (*Peoples versus States*, 82). Sambanis, however, poses the legitimate questions under what conditions we can assume such accommodative behavior and what contributes to its credibility and effectiveness? Sambanis, “Conclusion”.

¹⁰³ The argument is rooted in a Hobbesian worldview. Fearon/Laitin, “Ethnicity”.

¹⁰⁴ Other indicators they find significant are population size, new statehood, oil export, instability (years since regime change), and mountainous terrain. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Margit Bussmann, “Peitsche oder Zuckerbrot? Staatskapazität und Bürgerkriege”, in *Identität, Institutionen und Ökonomie*, 258–282; Hanne Fjelde and Indra De Soysa, “Coercion, Co-optation, or Cooperation? State Capacity and the Risk of Civil War, 1961–2004”, *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 26 (February 2009): 5–25. Robert Bates on the other hand argues in the opposite direction: He accuses predatory governments of creating insecurity among the population, which then breeds discontent and conditions for insurgency. His model, however, was criticized as presuming undercomplex causal mechanisms. Robert H. Bates, *When Things Fell Apart: State Failure in Late-Century Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Klaus Schlichte, “With the State against the State? The Formation of Armed Groups”, *Contemporary Security Policy* 30, no. 2 (August 2009): 246–264.

and legitimacy than suppressive means.¹⁰⁶ Edward Newman supports these findings and furthermore highlights the nexus between state building measures¹⁰⁷ and armed conflict. State building necessarily involves centralization and regulation measures, so the argument, and hence “threaten[s] territorially outlying power centres”, specifically those in more peripheral and autonomous areas. The resulting tensions and opposition can then lead to mobilization for insurgency.¹⁰⁸ Unfortunately, his theoretical model remains without empirical support.

The development of a security dilemma for groups who no longer see themselves protected by the state was an argument stemming from theories originally employed to explain inter-state conflict.¹⁰⁹ In the wake of the huge transformations triggered by the collapse of the Cold War state system after 1990 and the resulting regime changes, it was also applied to intra-state conflicts.¹¹⁰ It argues that in a security vacuum due to weak statehood, distrust between collectives with diverging identities increases and othering intensifies; each collective subsequently creates a protective (and potentially offensive) enclave and the ensuing overall situation is one in which small incidents can spark the outbreak of open hostilities.¹¹¹ What they propose is a simplistic mechanism based on quasi-primordialist traits. It leaves no room for ambiguities in between the groups (for the role of perceptions and misperceptions), does not explain how the exclusive group-building occurs (who mobilizes? how?), and remains equally vague concerning deterrence. In sum, although certain assumptions about the

¹⁰⁶ James D. Fearon, “Governance and Civil War Onset”, *World Development Report 2011*, Background Paper, World Bank, August 31, 2010. The indicators he uses are based on expert opinion due to a lack of alternative measures. See also: Håvard Hegre and Håvard Mokleiv Nygård, “Governance and Conflict Relapse”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (February 2014): 1–33.

¹⁰⁷ The relationship between processes of state formation and revolutions and wars, respectively, has already been elucidated by Charles Tilly; he emphasizes the role of the coercive apparatus at the top of the state: the stronger internal cohesion here (which in his model is fostered by inter-state war), the smaller the risk for civil war. Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978); Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime”, in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschenmeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 169–191; Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). For a discussion of Tilly’s work and the works of Michael Mann, who argues in a similar vein, see: Siniša Malešević and Niall Ó Dochartaigh, “Sociological Approaches”, in *Routledge Handbook of Civil War*, 54–66.

¹⁰⁸ Edward Newman, “Statebuilding, Upheaval, and Civil War”, in *Routledge Handbook of Civil War*, 173–185.

¹⁰⁹ John H. Herz, “Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma”, *World Politics* 2, no. 2 (1950): 157–180; Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

¹¹⁰ Erik Melander, *Anarchy Within: The Security Dilemma between Ethnic Groups in Emerging Anarchy*, Report No. 52 (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 1999); Erik Melander, “The Geography of Fear: Regional Ethnic Diversity, the Security Dilemma, and Ethnic War”, *European Journal of International Relations* 15, no. 1 (2009): 95–124; Peter Wallensteen, *Understanding Conflict Resolution: War, Peace, and the Global System*, 3rd ed. (London: Sage 2012). Paul Roe, “The Intrastate Security Dilemma: Ethnic Conflict as a ‘Tragedy’?”, *Journal of Peace Research* 36, no. 2 (1999): 183–202.

¹¹¹ Barry Posen, “The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict”, *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 35, no. 1 (1993): 27–47; David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, “Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict”, *International Security* 21, no. 2 (1996): 41–75. Note that these authors make the argument merely in regard to ethnic groups.

processes of collective hostility development are worth taking into account, it on the whole cannot provide a satisfying approach due to the inherent limitations.

The question to what extent regime type and regime change influence the risk of civil war onset has led to intense debates.¹¹² In line with the ‘democratic peace’ paradigm, Håvard Hegre (2001) has suggested the so-called ‘inverted-U’ relation between regime type and the outbreak of armed conflict: While the two poles of the democracy-autocracy spectrum are both relatively stable (yet, risk is slightly higher for autocracies), anocratic regimes in between suffer from increased risks.¹¹³ Although there were attempts to refute this relation by laying open endogeneity issues,¹¹⁴ Kristian Gleditsch and Andrea Ruggeri could show how democracy *does* have a negative effect on risk and how the risk for escalation is linked to the type of leadership entry and his or her respective time in office: During the initial period of irregular entry into office of the head of state, the risk for conflict outbreak is about three times as high as in case of a regular entry; over time, however, it approaches the regular level.¹¹⁵ Recent research furthermore argues that the first democratic elections after regime change open a specifically vulnerable phase,¹¹⁶ other pose that regime change generally generates a dangerous constellation and opens up a window of opportunity for contention.¹¹⁷ Yet, micro-mechanisms and ‘soft factors’ (such as credibility, legitimacy, trust etc.) once more remain underspecified and hence explanations based merely on regime type and regime change can only be found lacking.¹¹⁸

¹¹² For a brief overview see: Kristian Skrede Gleditsch and Håvard Hegre, “Regime Type and Political Transition in Civil War”, in *Routledge Handbook of Civil War*, 145–156.

¹¹³ Håvard Hegre, Tanja Ellingsen, Scott Gates, and Nils Petter Gleditsch, “Toward A Democratic Civil Peace? Democracy, Political Change, and Civil War 1816–1992”, *American Political Science Review* 95, no. 1 (2001): 16–33.

¹¹⁴ James R. Vreeland, “The Effect of Political Regime on Civil War: Unpacking Anocracy”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52, no. 3 (June 2008): 401–425.

¹¹⁵ Kristian Skrede Gleditsch and Andrea Ruggeri, “Political opportunity structures, democracy, and civil war”, *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 3 (2010): 299–310.

¹¹⁶ Jack L. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: Norton, 2000); Dawn Brancati and Jack L. Snyder, “Rushing to the Polls: The Causes of Premature Postconflict Elections”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, no. 3 (2011): 469–492; Paul Collier, *Wars, Guns, and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places* (London: Bodley Head, 2009); Håvard Strand, “Reassessing the Civil Democratic Peace”, PhD thesis, University of Oslo, 2007. Cederman et al. specify that the relation is graver in young democracies with a history of ethnic tensions and strife. Lars-Erik Cederman, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Simon Hug, “Elections and Ethnic Civil War”, *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no. 3 (2013): 387–417.

¹¹⁷ Adam Przeworski, Michael A. Alvarez, José Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950–1990*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). For quantitative evidence see: Ibrahim Elbadawi and Nicholas Sambanis, “How Much War Will we see? Explaining the Prevalence of Civil War”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46 (June 2002): 307–334; Fearon/Laitin, “Ethnicity”.

¹¹⁸ Gleditsch and Hegre, for instance, criticize the use of democracy as a proxy for a variety of characteristics, and a so far deficient understanding of the nexus between autocracies and repression. Gleditsch/Hegre, “Regime Type”, 148. Fjelde on the other hand considers autocratic regimes to be underspecified: Hanne Fjelde, “Generals, Dictators and Kings: Authoritarian Regimes and Civil Conflict 1973–2004”, *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 27, no. 3 (2010): 195–218.

A final variable worthwhile to look at in the context of state-capacity is neopatrimonialism. Neopatrimonialism is understood as a complex system of patrimonial (i.e. personalized and subordinate to one ‘patron’) and legal-rational bureaucratic domination,¹¹⁹ in which close networks of power control resources access and allocation. Two different mechanisms are suggested to be active in states with neopatrimonial character: First, as William Reno claims,¹²⁰ armed groups can be rooted in patronage-based politics. Those striving for the ruling power set up militias to foster their claims and to later on assist in securing their position against contenders and in keeping open channels of resources influx (through all means possible), so the presupposition. This constellation is vulnerable to catalyzing the spread of violence once the patron is no longer able to tie his subjects reliably to his authority or if he loses control over local strongmen, who in turn manage to challenge him and his militia with own gangs, and a spiral ensues. In conclusion: Strong neopatrimonial regimes can prevent armed conflict, while weakness (or regime change resulting in a change of the patron and his network) heightens the risk of escalation.

A second perspective, pushed forward by Fjelde (2010),¹²¹ on the other hand does not see the structural conditions of neopatrimonialism as such responsible for the origin of armed groups; it rather proposes that neopatrimonial authoritarian regimes are able to coopt potential challengers and thus neutralize their opposition.¹²² Again, a strong authoritarian regime is considered preventive to the outbreak of intra-state violence. Based on her findings, Fjelde moreover suggests that conditions under regime change depend upon the kind of regime that assumes power; she distinguishes between military regimes, monarchies, single-party regimes, and multi-party electoral autocracies, concluding and concludes that “a takeover by a military regime does not seem to be accompanied by the same immediate increase in political risk as the introduction of multi-party electoral autocracy”.¹²³ While this last aspect should be

¹¹⁹ For a detailed conceptual elaboration see: Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel, “Neopatrimonialism Reconsidered: Critical Review and Elaboration of an Elusive Concept”, *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 45, no. 1 (2007): 95–119, here: 105.

¹²⁰ William Reno, “Patronage Politics and the Behavior of Armed Groups”, *Civil Wars* 9, no. 4 (2007): 324–342.

¹²¹ Fjelde, “Generals, Dictators, and Kings”.

¹²² The role of cooptation in regard to horizontal inequalities between groups (without the regime type distinction) has also been discussed by Frances Stewart, Graham K. Brown, and Arnim Langer. They find that “the political cooption of the leadership of disadvantaged minorities by the dominant group is often sufficient to prevent conflict without the necessity of undertaking policies to improve the socioeconomic position of these groups.” Frances Stewart, Graham K. Brown, and Arnim Langer, “Major Findings and Conclusions on the Relationship between Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict”, in *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic Societies*, ed. Frances Stewart (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 285–300, here: 291.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 216. This claim is based on the ‘cooptation capacity’ she ascribes to the various regime types: Due to a lack of political institutions such as parties, military regimes lack organizational reach into society and hence need to employ force/sanctions; since these create and catalyze the opposition they seek to suppress, they are the regime type most at risk. Monarchies share the lack of organizational outreach, yet, they usually possess

valued as it opens the discussion within institutional approaches for a further investigation of the impacts of different *kinds* of regime types, it at the same time does not provide solutions to the specific challenges related with research about neopatrimonialism: Given the complex and obscure nature of neopatrimonial relations and networks, the collection of data poses a major obstacle. Besides, the exact mechanisms are theoretical still underspecified – and, building on the former problem, prone to remain so.

Despite these and potential further limitations, it is nevertheless worthwhile to at least tentatively or theoretically incorporate considerations about neopatrimonialism into models of conflict escalation: Not only do such structures pervade an extensive number of states to one degree or another; moreover, they equally connect the economic with the institutional dimension, bring in individual actors, their grievances and strategic choices, and – in positive distinction from other perspectives – allow for dynamic processes over short periods of time.

2.1.2. *Grievances*

Grievance-based approaches advance the importance of elucidating the motives of actors to explain the onset of violence. Two major strands can be distinguished: one emphasizing the role of (horizontal) inequalities, the other focusing on repression as catalyst. While especially the former builds on Gurr's theory of relative deprivation, there are significant differences, the most important of which is the acknowledgement that actors' behavior is rational.¹²⁴

Inequalities

Social inequality has predominantly been measured based in income inequality between individuals (i.e. vertical inequality) in which the Gini coefficient was used as a proxy. However, studies investigating inequality in this mode have found no consistent evidence for a causal relationship between inequality and armed conflict onset.¹²⁵ Attention has thus shifted towards horizontal inequalities, i.e. inequalities between collectives. A seminal publication in this regard is a volume edited by Frances Stewart in 2008.¹²⁶ Together with her

religious or other legitimation and lack the expertise in regard to the employment of force, thus being weaker at it; still, they have an increased risk. Multi-party electoral autocracies on the one side possess parties through which an autocratic ruler can aim to bind people to him, yet, there is also a legitimate way of opposition. Hence, along the spectrum, single-party regimes can best institutionalize cooptation and by doing so limit the risk of violent opposition.

¹²⁴ The fact was eventually also acknowledged by Gurr, "Why Men Rebel Redux".

¹²⁵ Juha Auvinen and E. Wayne Nafziger, "The Sources of Humanitarian Emergencies", *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 43, no. 3 (1999): 267–290; Paul Collier "On the Economic Consequences of Civil War", *Oxford Economic Papers* 51, no. 1 (1999): 168–183; Fearon/Laitin, "Ethnicity".

¹²⁶ Stewart, *Horizontal Inequalities*.

co-authors, she not only develops the category of horizontal inequalities and tests a number of hypotheses; she also provides empirical testing and evidence for the existence of a relationship between such differences between groups and the outbreak of violence.

Horizontal inequalities (HIs) can be distinguished into economic, social, political and cultural status HIs. Economic HIs refer to inequalities in income, employment opportunities, and assets of all kinds (financial, natural resource-based, social, human). Social HIs subsume disparities in access to social services such as housing, education, and health. Political HIs include inequalities in political freedoms and access to political offices and power (e.g. seats in parliament, positions in the army, the cabinet, local government etc.).¹²⁷ And, lastly, cultural status HIs “refer to differences in recognition and (de facto) hierarchical status of different groups’ cultural norms, customs and practices”.¹²⁸

Two aspects are moreover crucial for an understanding of the interrelation between these HIs and conflict onset: First, different dimensions of HIs mutually reinforce each other, hence potentiating risks.¹²⁹ Second, not merely do *factual* HIs increase perils, but a *perception* of HIs is already sufficient to evoke corresponding reactions.¹³⁰ The latter observation is extremely significant in regard to the overall research question of this dissertation: As Langer and Stewart point out, if people act upon perceptions and not objective measures (of which they might not be aware), those with the ability to influence these perceptions have the power to impact on mobilization. This assumption is part of my core argumentation, which, however, goes beyond this isolated relation to elucidate the complex processes at work in shaping perceptions. In reverse, it is also my main critique or, rather, a major deficit of the HI approach so far: It has sharply identified the role of perceptions and successfully substantiated

¹²⁷ Comparative research has found credible evidence that political exclusion of groups poses a risk, and that this risk additionally increases with the co-presence of socio-economic HIs. For the former: Andreas Wimmer, Lars-Erik Cederman and Brian Min, “Ethnic Politics and Armed Conflict: A Configurational Analysis of a New Data Set”, *American Sociological Review* 74, no. 2 (2009): 316–337. For the latter: Lars-Erik Cederman, Nils B. Weidmann, and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, “Horizontal Inequalities and Ethno-Nationalist Civil War: A Global Comparison”, *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 3 (2011): 478–495. Relevant in this regard is moreover what Matthew Gibney refers to as “stunted citizenship”, i.e. limitations to the exercise of rights and freedoms due to informal structures such as racism, sexism, economic deprivation, and similar factors. Matthew J. Gibney, “Who Should Be Included? Noncitizens, Conflict and the Constitution of the Citizenry”, in *Horizontal Inequalities*, 25–40, here: 27.

¹²⁸ For the above distinction: Arnim Langer and Frances Stewart, “Horizontal Inequalities and Violent Conflict. Conceptual and Empirical Linkages”, in *Routledge Handbook of Civil War*, 104–118, here: 105. Langer and Brown specifically explicate three dimensions of cultural status HIs: (1) the recognition of religion and religious observances, (2) language rights and language recognition, and (3) the recognition of ethnocultural practices such as rituals, dress, customary law, holidays etc. Arnim Langer and Graham K. Brown, “Cultural Status Inequalities: An Important Dimension of Group Mobilization”, in *Horizontal Inequalities*, 41–53.

¹²⁹ Langer/Stewart, “Horizontal Inequalities”, 105f.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 112.

the claim with empirical evidence from case studies,¹³¹ yet, so far not delved further into the mechanisms at play. How can actors influence perceptions? Alternatively, how do they change over time and with varying circumstances? When are statements credible? Which conditions need to be fulfilled so that people cross the threshold between perceiving a grievance and taking action? These and further questions remain unanswered.

What is acknowledged in regard to the presumed but still underspecified mechanisms, however, are three further specifications: That not only those who are disadvantaged perceive HIs and mobilize, but that the advantaged might do the same out of fear of “losing out”;¹³² that different strata of groups may be motivated by varying HIs (e.g. leaders rather by political HIs, ordinary people rather by socio-economic and/or cultural status HIs);¹³³ and that HIs between collectives make group boundaries more salient and consequently enable mobilization along the perceived identity boundaries (reversely, minimizing these disparities reduces this salience).¹³⁴

All these are productive findings, also in regard to the framing model, I will develop in 3.2.; they will correspondingly be accounted for in both the model and the empirical analysis in the case studies.

Besides the noted virtues of the HI perspective in regard to integration into a model based on framing, the challenges it faces when approached the way it commonly is, i.e. at least partially by quantitative measurement, are mainly threefold according to Langer and Stewart: how to define group boundaries, a lack of data about HIs, and how to conduct comparisons.¹³⁵ Although they are certainly correct concerning group boundaries and comparisons, it somewhat surprises that while they explicitly highlight the role of perceptions (taking a constructivist perspective), they still cling to mourning the lack of quantifiable data (in a quite positivist manner). While this remains unfortunate, the approach overall provides valuable impulses.

¹³¹ Arnim Langer and Ukoha Ukiwo, “Ethnicity, Religion and the State in Ghana and Nigeria: Perceptions From the Street”, in *Horizontal Inequalities*, 205–226; Arnim Langer and Satoru Mikami, “Relationship Between Objective and Subjective Horizontal Inequalities: Evidence From Five African Countries”, in *Preventing Violent Conflicts in Africa*, ed. Yoichi Mine, Frances Stewart, Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, and Thandika Mkandawire (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 208–251; Arnim Langer and Kristien Smedts, “Seeing is Not Believing: Perceptions of Horizontal Inequalities in Africa”, *CRPD Working Paper* 16, KU Leuven: Centre for Research on Peace and Development (CRPD), 2013.

¹³² Frances Stewart, Graham K. Brown, and Arnim Langer, “Policies Towards Horizontal Inequalities”, in *Horizontal Inequalities*, 301–325, here: 302.

¹³³ Langer/Stewart, “Horizontal Inequalities”, 106; Arnim Langer, “Horizontal Inequalities and Violent Group Mobilisation in Côte d’Ivoire”, *Oxford Development Studies* 33, no. 1 (2005): 25–45.

¹³⁴ The authors stress their constructivist conception of identity in this regard. Langer/Stewart, “Horizontal Inequalities”, 106f. See also: Ted R. Gurr, *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts* (Washington: Institute of Peace Press, 1993), 3.

¹³⁵ Langer/Stewart, “Horizontal Inequalities”, 106–109.

Repression

Repression can be defined as the “actual or threatened use of physical sanctions against an individual or organization (...) for the purpose of imposing a cost on the target as well as deterring specific activities and/or beliefs perceived to be challenging (...) to [the] government”.¹³⁶ Which form exactly it takes is usually specific to the situation and the repertoire of the respective regime; it can reach from restriction on the freedom of speech and assembly all the way to torture and mass killings.¹³⁷ Moreover, its effect on challengers is equally ambiguous:¹³⁸ There is evidence that it depends upon when repression is used, how strong it is, and against whom it is employed. In consequence, it can escalate, deescalate, or remain without any effect. When used preemptively against leaders, it can help to restrain escalation; when employed reactively and indiscriminately against movement followers and others, it spurs escalation.¹³⁹ Furthermore, the legality of repressive actions matters. If opposition members/challengers are pursued by legal means, it helps to deescalate opposition, while illegal actions such as arbitrary killings and detention tends to further escalate.¹⁴⁰ Lastly, the strength and extent of repression has an immediate effect on opposition. Overwhelming repression (exercized by a strong state) can simply eliminate challengers, while anything less (i.e. significant but not completely annihilating force) can lead to further escalation.

Using the Philippines since the 1970s as an example, Klaus Schlichte attempts to specify a mechanism of repression.¹⁴¹ It holds that rapid social change can lead to an overloading of the regime; the subsequent political exclusion of parts of society then provokes organized opposition, which in turn is countered by repression. As a result, we see a radicalization of that opposition and ensuing armed conflict. Notwithstanding, the merits of having a model mechanism, it remains too ideal typical to be of wider explanatory reach, for it cannot account

¹³⁶ Christian Davenport and Molly Inman, “The State of State Repression Research since the 1990s”, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24 (2012): 619–634, here: 620.

¹³⁷ Ibid. Autocratic regimes usually use more severe repression in order to make dissent and resistance more difficult and costly. Gleditsch/Hegre, “Regime Type”, 147.

¹³⁸ Scott S. Gartner and Patrick M. Regan, “Threat and Repression: The Non-Linear Relationship between Government and Opposition Violence”, *Journal of Peace Research* 33, no. 3 (1996): 273–287; Mark I. Lichbach, “Deterrence or Escalation? The Puzzle of Aggregate Studies of Repression and Dissent”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 31, no. 2 (1987): 266–297.

¹³⁹ Mohammed M. Hafez and Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Violence as Contention in the Egyptian Islamic Movement”, in *Islamic Activism*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 61–88.

¹⁴⁰ Audrey Kurth Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends. Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 14–34. She makes the same argument for terrorism.

¹⁴¹ Klaus Schlichte, „Mit dem Staat gegen den Staat? Die Formierung bewaffneter Gruppen”, in *Identität, Institutionen und Ökonomie*, 283–306.

for numerous contingencies involved, specifically for the range of possible detours through interactions between central actors.

As has been noted before, in order to exercise intense repression, leaders need not only to secure sufficient resources, but furthermore rely on a compliant security apparatus to execute their orders.¹⁴² If these forces refuse or defect, the leader's intentions for repression will be idle.¹⁴³ Consequently, in order to carry out repression, a regime needs internal strength as well as resources, or, from the opposite perspective, a weak regime will have difficulties in regard to successful repression, which will serve the challengers.¹⁴⁴

These aspects and the inconclusive effects suggested above indicate the challenges involved in any attempt to consider repression in models of conflict escalation: Since it is necessary to take into account the precise context, state capacity, interactions between those involved, timing, target, extent of repressive measures, and other contingencies (e.g. media coverage which can amplify the impact of repression in either direction), repression and its repercussions can merely be explicated in case studies; any attempt at 'measurement' appears idle. Hence, it will remain a 'soft' factor in grievance approaches, due to its interdependence with other (equally 'soft') factors.

2.1.3. Identity

Proponents of identity approaches emphasize the importance of inter-group cleavages for the legitimization of violence by an ingroup against an outgroup. Distinction based on 'ethnic'¹⁴⁵ or religious collective identity rank most prominently among the explanatory variables.

¹⁴² Neil J. Mitchell, *Agents of Atrocity: Leaders, Followers, and the Violation of Human Rights in Civil War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

¹⁴³ For a recent discussion of the directions repression can take and trigger, particularly in regard to the limitations it faces, see: Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 68ff.

¹⁴⁴ An additional aspect is highlighted by Erica Frantz and Andrea Kendall-Taylor, who explicate how from the leader's perspective cooptation limits the need for repression. Erica Frantz/Andrea Kendall-Taylor, "A Dictator's Toolkit: Understanding How Co-Optation Affects Repression in Autocracies", *Journal of Peace Research* (2014): 1–14.

¹⁴⁵ From a constructivist point of view, I regard the category "ethnic" as highly problematic. Among my main concerns is the explicitly or implicitly ascribed essentialism that overwhelmingly comes with its definition and use. This critical positioning consequently extends to any attempts to quantify and map presumed ethnic affiliation in projects like 'Minorities at Risk' (MAR) located at the University of Maryland or in indices such as the Ethno-Linguistic Fractionalization Index (ELF) and comparable ones. I categorically dispute that they can depict anything but (at best) crude, momentous reifications of fluent, context-specific, and mostly external attributions. In view of the limited space available here, I shall not go into further discussion but do so on another occasion. On the ELF see: Alberto Alesina et al., "Fractionalization", *Journal of Economic Growth* 8 (2003): 155–194; James Fearon, "Ethnic and Cultural Diversity by Country", *Journal of Economic Growth* 8 (2003): 195–222.

There are, however, significant disagreements not solely about a definition of collective identity, but moreover about its ontological status: Primordialists assume an essentialist quality of (collective) identity, whereas constructivists conceive it as “molded, and mobilized in accord with reigning cultural scripts and centers of power”¹⁴⁶, or, using the prominent term of Benedict Anderson, as “imagined”.¹⁴⁷ The copious literature dealing with issues of identity can for the most part be subsumed under one of these two strands.

This cannot be the place for a detailed discussion of the variety of definitions of identity; for civil war studies, the following definition by Fearon, based on an ordinary language analysis, has proven viable and sufficient for practical operationalization. According to him, identity is “(a) a social category, defined by membership rules and (alleged) characteristic attributes or expected behaviors, or (b) socially distinguished features that a person takes a special pride in or views as unchangeable but socially consequential (or [a] and [b] at once).”¹⁴⁸ What it is, that is common among a group with a collective identity, is explicated by Donahoe et al. as “shared traits, material and symbolic resources, situations, interests, attitudes, and practices” which are regarded as “signs of affiliation with others, based on ties of nationality, ethnicity, “race” [understood as in anglophone discourse], kinship, language, religion, local or regional origins, historical experience, social class, generation, gender, or participation in a social movement”.¹⁴⁹

Although much has been written about the specific, allegedly “perilous” role of religion as a catalyst of conflicts, I agree with what has been indicated above and convincingly explicated by Andreas Hasenclever: That ‘religious identity’ is functionally equivalent to all other specifications of collective identities, i.e. is can serve as much as a means for mobilization for armed conflict (and conflict settlement, for that matter) as any other category.¹⁵⁰ In regard to

¹⁴⁶ Karen A. Cerulo, “Identity Construction: New Issues, New Direction”, *Annual Review of Sociology* 23, no. 1 (1997): 385–409, here: 387.

¹⁴⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991). For a critique of the distinction between primordialism, constructivism, and variously defined instrumentalism see: Brian Donahoe et al., “The Formation and Mobilization of Collective Identities in Situations of Conflict and Integration”, Working Paper 116, *Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Working Papers*, Halle/Saale, 2009.

¹⁴⁸ James D. Fearon, “What Is Identity (as We Now Use the Word)?”, unpublished manuscript, Stanford University, 1999.

¹⁴⁹ Donahoe, “Formation”, 2.

¹⁵⁰ Andreas Hasenclever and Volker Rittberger, “Does Religion Make a Difference? Theoretical Approaches to the Impact of Faith on Political Conflict”, *Millennium* 29, no. 3 (2000): 641–674; Andreas Hasenclever and Alexander De Juan, “Grasping the Impact of Religious Traditions on Political Conflicts: Empirical Findings and Theoretical Perspectives”, *Die Friedenswarte*, Special Issue “Religion, Krieg und Frieden” 82, no. 2–3 (2007) 19–47; Andreas Hasenclever and Alexander De Juan, “Die Ambivalenz religiöser Integration: Zur erzeugten Relevanz von Glaubensunterschieden in bewaffneten Konflikten”, in *Bürgerkriege erzählen. Zum Verlauf unziviler Konflikte*, ed. Sabina Ferhadbegović and Brigitte Weiffen (Paderborn: Konstanz University Press, 2011), 225–248. See also: R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and*

the case study on the Peaceful Southern Movement, I would like to specifically point out the inclusion of local/regional origins and historical experience.

In the following I will present the three predominant perspectives on the role of identities for the onset of armed intra-state violence: primordialism, a variant of which is the ‘ancient hatred’ hypothesis, and finally what has been termed ‘symbolic politics’.

Primordialism

The primordialist argument that some identity groups are inherently prone to violence is only marginally made since it is a very broad and general assumption.¹⁵¹ Identity in the primordial understanding is rooted in the biological nature of humans; it ascribes ethnic identity as unchangeable, mostly physical, traits. Non-physical, cultural characteristics are suggested to exist merely to strengthen ethnic identity cohesion. Membership of ethnic identity groups is resultingly inherited and – with an assumed preference for endogamy – remains consistent over generations.¹⁵² Exclusion of non-member forms the complementary process. On a political level, these fixed identities are considered to lead to group-specific demands¹⁵³ and, so the assumption, ultimately include the quest for self-determination in a nation-state.¹⁵⁴

The most vocal criticism against primordialism denounces its static understanding of identity: Not only does the origin of identity groups remain unaccounted for, but also change over time (which is not supposed to exist), and dissolution.¹⁵⁵ In addition, (ethnic) groups are reified “as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed”.¹⁵⁶ If that was so, how comes that the relations between groups vary over time? And what about intra-group conflict, fractionalization, and cooperation with other groups against one’s own?

When giving it a constructivist turn, one assumption of the primordialist stance might be salvaged: Its emphasis on harsh ingroup-outgroup distinction and the related engagement to foster one’s groups’ position and demands. As Turton poses, the power of ethnicity or “its very effectiveness as a means of advancing group interests depends upon its being seen as

Reconciliation (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000); Alexander De Juan, *Innerstaatliche Gewaltkonflikte unter dem Banner der Religion – die Rolle politischer und religiöser Eliten* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010).

¹⁵¹ Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*.

¹⁵² J. Milton Esman, *An Introduction to Ethnic Conflict* (Malden: Polity Press, 2004).

¹⁵³ Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Walker Connor, *Ethno-Nationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹⁵⁴ Neal G. Jesse, “Ethnicity and Identity Conflict”, in *Routledge Handbook of Civil War*, 93–103.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁵⁶ Rogers Brubaker, “Ethnicity Without Groups”, *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* XLIII.2 (2002): 163–189, here: 164.

‘primordial’ by those who make claims in its name.”¹⁵⁷ Other scholars have termed the tendency of ‘ordinary social actors’ to make sense of their or others’ belonging in racial or ethnic categories as “participants’ primordialism”¹⁵⁸ or ‘psychological essentialism’¹⁵⁹; yet, as they have simultaneously stressed, this can never be an analytic point of view¹⁶⁰ – plus, it leads us ever deeper into constructivism which will be treated below.

‘Ancient Hatred’

The ‘ancient hatred’ hypothesis is merely a variation of primordialism. Long-standing animosities, hatred,¹⁶¹ between groups finally lead to deadly conflict. While few scholars pursue this line of argument, it is prominent among journalists and frequently also among politicians, for it provides an apparent explanation for ‘sudden’ outbreaks of intense violence. The Balkan wars in the 1990s are a notable example,¹⁶² as are current newspaper headlines referring to ancient hatred between Sunnis and Shi’i in the Middle East or between Russians and Ukrainians.

The same criticism applies here as it had already been articulated towards primordialism generally.

Before I turn to ‘symbolic politics’ as predominant representative of constructivist approaches to explain civil war onset, I would like to briefly mention rationalist approaches, which range somewhere between (neo-)primordialist and constructivist approaches for they contain both

¹⁵⁷ David Turton, “War and Ethnicity: Global Connections and Local Violence in North East Africa and Former Yugoslavia”, *Oxford Development Studies* 25 (1997): 77–94.

¹⁵⁸ Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nation and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 158.

¹⁵⁹ Douglas L. Medin, “Concepts and Conceptual Structure”, *The American Psychologist* 44 (1989): 1469–1481.

¹⁶⁰ Brubaker, “Ethnicity”.

¹⁶¹ To a certain degree, Roger Petersen pursues this road in his prominent work on the role of emotions in civil war. About hatred, he states: “[H]atred prepared the individual to act on historical grievances”. Roger D. Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For the link between individual and collective emotion see *ibid.*, p. 20, n. 13. In a recent book he delves deeper into the issue of hatred and explicitly elaborates in how far his concept of hatred as a “cultural schema” is different from the concept of ‘ancient hatred’: He argues that hatred between identity groups exists over time as one among the elements of a cultural repertoire, yet, it is only seldom activated as such; when it is, it aims at the extinction of the adversary, however. Besides, Petersen holds that this kind of hatred is not ‘ancient’, but rooted in not so historically distant collective memories of violence and suffering at the hand of the ‘other’; the ‘cultural schema of hatred’ contains a ‘script’ of the action to follow and can become activated in certain contexts or by certain events. The justification for violence equally follows established patterns. Elites are potentially able to instrumentalize the schemata for their own interests. Roger D. Petersen, *Western Intervention in the Balkans: The Strategic Use of Emotion in Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 43–47. This conceptualization of a ‘cultural schema’ (which Petersen adapts from Shelle B. Ortner) reminds of a frame.

¹⁶² David Campbell, on the contrary, distangles the constructedness of ethnic enmity by a detailed description of the steps of construction: David Campbell, *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity and Justice in Bosnia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

elements of ethnic essentialism as well as an instrumental use of identity by strategic political actors (though merely to a limited degree).

Two positions can be distinguished, based on the reasons for conflict they provide: First, there are those following David Lake and Donald Rothchild in their core assumption that fear in the sense of a security dilemma escalated ethnic conflict. Second, there are those in line with Lars-Erik Cederman and Andreas Wimmer, who argue along the lines of political exclusion of ethnic identity groups (stemming on data retrieved from the ELF; on my view on its reliability see my comment in one of the annotations above). Without going into any further detail about their specific designs or else, I simply want to underscore that they do not differ significantly from opportunity approaches as describes in 2.1.1.; they merely point out the role of identity therein, which is why I do not conceive of them as needing renewed discussion beyond this point.

Constructivist perspectives overcome the static of primordialism with their emphasis on the moldedness and resulting formability of identities over time; they leave room for the development of new identities as well as the disappearance of others, hence creating a dynamic and ever-changing field. On the question of who or what influences the emergence, salience, and decline of identities, two markedly different emphases have been set: one stressing the instrumentalist employment by political and intellectual elites, whereas the other one considers “‘discursive formations’ or cultural systems”¹⁶³ as agents of construction.¹⁶⁴ In other words, the pivotal distinction lies in the presumed intentionality involved.

Criticism¹⁶⁵ has been voiced against constructivist perspectives mainly on the grounds of it being too ‘liberal’ in regard to the changeability of identities. Especially against instrumentalists, critics hold that their assumptions about identity activation appear to make it feasible too easily, too quickly; limitations to instrumental use and an inherent ‘reluctance’ of identities are not accounted for. Some therefore advocate for a holistic view, i.e. combining certain elements of a primordialist view (particularly the endurance of identity over time) with constructivist elements about its moldability;¹⁶⁶ an example in this direction has been provided in the short section above.

¹⁶³ James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity”, *International Organization* 54, no. 4 (Autumn 2000): 845–877. Through their analysis of several qualitative works on conflict escalation they find proof for the assumption of the role of elites instrumentalizing identity construction, yet less and merely ambiguous evidence for a role of discourse (p. 857).

¹⁶⁴ See Jesse, “Ethnicity”.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Barbara Harff and Ted R. Gurr, *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics*, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2004).

Symbolic Politics

Among constructivist approaches, the ‘symbolic politics theory’ as it was developed by Kaufman,¹⁶⁷ deserves special consideration: According to this approach, identity groups¹⁶⁸ are defined by long-standing myth-symbol complexes. The outbreak of inter-group violence is more likely the stronger a given myth positions one group in opposition to another and thus justifies hostility, and the more prevalent a perceived fear of extinction – in other words: a security dilemma – becomes. If an opportunity exists and leaders (elite-led mobilization) or decentralized actors (grassroots mobilization) adopt hostile programs, manipulate symbols to back them, and successfully stir emotional support, violent conflict can be triggered. Kaufman, however, holds that it is “unlikely if alternate (and less risky) avenues are available for addressing group fears and desires.”¹⁶⁹

He himself notes the proximity of the arguments made in framing theory and of his own theoretical explanations, but he asserts that “[t]he value of symbolic theory is that it offers both an overarching framework that brings together most of the above insights [from framing and opportunity approaches, T.G.], while the focus on myth, symbols, and emotions explains what the others cannot.”¹⁷⁰ While I agree that opportunity (or feasibility) is an important precondition without which (violent) rebellion cannot be feasible, and a highlighting of the emotional dimension has definitely been desirable and can provide a significant contribution, I do not consider them to be as decisive as Kaufman suggests.

Instead, I want to argue in favor of a different emphasis when combining the strengths of the approaches: The existence of strong symbols or myths of hostility or opposition against another collective in a situation in which a group suffers from (intense) grievances can facilitate framing processes aiming at violence, especially in regard to salience; the evocation of emotions like fear is implicit in these framing processes. And again, without an opportunity there will be no resulting collective action. The main question, hence, is not the existence of the myth-symbol-complexes, but how they are employed to mobilize constituents. In my reading of Kaufman and in his naming of the theory as “symbolic *politics*”, he actually highlights the momentousness of processes.¹⁷¹ With these processes being understood as

¹⁶⁷ Stuart J. Kaufman “Symbolic Politics or Rational Choice? Testing Theories of Extreme Ethnic Violence”, *International Security* 30, no. 4 (Spring 2006): 45–86.

¹⁶⁸ In fact, Kaufman builds his theory around ethnic identities. Since in my understanding he makes a more comprehensive argument that reaches beyond only ethnic conflict, I interpret his approach to include other kinds of identity groups as well.

¹⁶⁹ Stuart J. Kaufman, “Symbols, Frames, and Violence: Studying Ethnic War in the Philippines”, *International Studies Quarterly* 55 (2011): 937–958, here: 946.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 955.

¹⁷¹ He also explicitly mentions that “myths enabled group elites to manipulate emotive symbols to justify mobilization against the other group” (*ibid.*, 937), but he does not give it the centrality I want to stress.

communication processes, we again arrive at framing, whose strength it is to elaborately explain the communicative mechanisms through which mobilization is achieved.

Rogers Brubaker has hinted in the direction of framing and cognitive approaches more generally to be applied for a better understanding of identity construction: “Instead of simply asserting *that* ethnicity, race and nationhood are constructed, they can help specify *how* they are constructed.”¹⁷² He starts off with ‘groupness’ as the smallest collective entity concept, on which he concentrates his critique (holding that it is reified), yet perceives it as immediately tied to more complex identity definitions. ‘Ethnic identity’ to him is merely one among a variety of potential categories; it has been especially salient during the recent decades due to prominent conflicts in which identities were framed along ethnicity (i.e. there seems to have been a high feasibility to do so). Brubaker’s framing-concept is based on the ‘classics’ (Bateson, Goffman, Snow and Benford, Gamson et al.)¹⁷³ when he states: “Framing may be the key mechanism through which groupness is constructed.” Under the section on “Ethnicity as cognition” he then explicates his thoughts:

Ethnicity, race and nationhood exist only in and through our perceptions, interpretations, representations, categorizations and identifications. They are not things *in* the world, but perspectives *on* the world. (...) They include ethnically oriented frames, schemas and narratives and the situational cues that activate them, such as the ubiquitous televised images that have played such an important role in the latest intifada. They include systems of classification, categorization and identification, formal and informal. And they include the tacit, taken-for-granted background knowledge, embodied in persons and embedded in institutionalized routines and practices, through which people recognize and experience objects, places, persons, actions or situations ethnically, racially or nationally marked or meaningful.¹⁷⁴

Beyond the adoption of ‘framing’ for identity, Brubaker explicitly underscores the role of media for their spread and even takes a practice-theoretical view in regard to the embodiment and embeddedness of frames. While I strongly agree with this extended definition, it poses numerous methodological challenges and will be discussed further.

2.1.4. Critique

The preceding subsections have presented three predominant strands in the research on armed conflict: opportunity approaches (mostly connected to quantitative research), grievances approaches, and identity approaches (both of which rather employ qualitative study designs).

¹⁷² Brubaker, “Ethnicity”, 175.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 173. For a detailed discussion see chapter 3.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 174f.

For each strand, I pinpointed the major shortcomings in regard to theory, operationalization¹⁷⁵, methods, and data. Overall, the most striking deficiencies in view of a satisfying theory of armed conflict onset are too strong a reliance on structural factors; an unfortunate tendency towards a predominance of quantitative studies in the field (which involve even more problematic factors than qualitative studies) to the detriment of alternative enhancement of qualitative study designs; unclear and underspecified operationalization (i.e. poor proxies); and finally oftentimes ill-conditioned data sources (which is partly related to the focus on the macro-level, where reliable data is often not available for certain/continuous time spans). Results are consequentially frequently ambiguous, contradictory, or – at worst – dubious. Additionally, models tend to be fairly static.

In recent years, however, the deficiencies and challenges have been noted by an increasing number of scholars, and promising tendencies can be observed, especially in regard to a turn to the meso- and micro-level. Part of these are a disaggregation of data (supported partly by GIS technology) to account for sub-national levels¹⁷⁶ and an unassertive, yet advancing recognition of the potential of sociology, cultural anthropology, and ethnography for the field.¹⁷⁷ The best option in my view – and this dissertation is part of that endeavor – is to focus much more on qualitative research on a limited number of cases in order to elucidate more clearly the mechanisms involved in processes of conflict escalation (and conduct)¹⁷⁸ and merely then to transform the identified independent variables into a measurable form for qualitative large-N formats. This procedure would combine the respective strengths of both methodologies.¹⁷⁹ The presumptive result on the other hand would with great likelihood present a model consisting of both structural and ideational factors on the micro-, meso-, and

¹⁷⁵ See among others: Wimmer/Cederman/Min, “Ethnic Politics”.

¹⁷⁶ Lars-Erik Cederman and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, “Introduction to Special Issue on ‘Disaggregating Civil War’”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 4 (August 2009): 487–495.

¹⁷⁷ Paul Richards, “Anthropological and Ethnographic Approaches”, in *Routledge Handbook of Civil War*, 41–53; Malešević/Ó Dochartaigh, “Sociological Approaches”; Nils B. Weidmann, “Micro-Level Studies”, in *Routledge Handbook of Civil War*, 67–78. Into this direction aim three recent qualitative studies; although they are not specifically rooted in any of the above disciplines, their works focus on investigating micro-mechanisms at play during armed conflict. Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Jeremy Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Klaus Schlichte, *In the Shadow of Violence: The Politics of Armed Groups* (Frankfurt a.M./Chicago: Campus/Chicago University Press, 2009). Unfortunately, they center around conflict conduct and else, not on its onset.

¹⁷⁸ Weidmann correctly notes the challenge inherent in gathering anthropological/ethnographic data under conditions of conflict; notwithstanding, he at the same time provides a range of options on how to deal with various circumstances and makes a convincing point for the feasibility of studies in spite of such conditions. Weidmann, “Micro-Level Studies”, 73ff.

¹⁷⁹ There is prominent opposition against this point of view. Collier rejects ethnographic data, claiming that it was not reliable but gathered from people with a great interest in making up facts and overall merely anecdotal. He wants to exclusively rely on quantitative data (posing that it cannot lie – an assumption I in turn reject). Paul Collier, “Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for Policy”, Washington, *World Bank*, 2000. For a further discussion of Collier’s critique see: Richards, “Anthropological and Ethnographic Approaches”.

macro-level; it would rather not pass as parsimonious, but – so my claim – provide much better, more detailed, and more reliable results.

While they are still not sufficiently implemented, existing research does already include numerous presuppositions in this direction. For instance, the ‘horizontal inequalities’ approach inherently contains the idea of ‘mere’ perception triggering and shaping the course of people’s actions; however, it has so far not been taken seriously enough and is not yet sufficiently reflected in a systematic research methodology.¹⁸⁰ The framing approach can close this gap. In fact, it has already been employed in this fashion,¹⁸¹ but nevertheless has so far not inspired the development of a systematic model.

Ohlson,¹⁸² on the other hand, has developed a model to explain the outbreak, conduct, and resolution of armed conflict. He refers to his framework as the ‘Triple-R Triangle’; it includes reasons, resources, and resolve as motives for the engagement in violent conflict. The questions which potential combatants have to ask themselves, so Ohlson, are: “Do we want to [go to war]? Can we [go to war]? Do we dare to [go to war]?”¹⁸³ When translated into the language of the presented theoretical strands, the first question relates to grievances, the second to resources (i.e. opportunities), and the third, as he explains, to beliefs and decisions, which would be anchored in the question of ‘who are we?’ or ‘who do we want to be?’, hence, identity.¹⁸⁴ With these three questions, he investigates the pivotal aspects of motivation, includes them in a model, and bridges the noted approaches. While it still lacks sophistication and methodological explication, it can serve as a solid basis to start the investigation of the proposed research topic. Framing then again closes the gap from these general assumptions on mobilization to the concrete mobilization for A or B, respectively.

The concept of framing has been developed into the idea of ‘collective action frames’ in the discipline of social movement studies. In 3.1. I will introduce the central approaches of this discipline and subsequently present the framing approach in detail and develop my respective

¹⁸⁰ To some degree, a mechanism has been hinted at in regard to cultural status inequalities and their effects on the salience of political and socioeconomic HIs. Besides, the emphasis on ‘salience’ also contributes to an advancement of a model, for it provides an idea about what makes the difference between various existing identity dimensions etc. Langer/Brown, “Cultural Status Inequalities”, 51ff.

¹⁸¹ Alexander De Juan/Andreas Hasenclever, “Das Framing religiöser Konflikte – die Rolle von Eliten in religiös konnotierten Bürgerkriegen”, in *Identität, Institutionen und Ökonomie*, 178–208; Kaufman, “Symbols”.

¹⁸² Thomas Ohlson, “Understanding Causes of War and Peace”, *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 1 (2008): 133–160.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁸⁴ Ohlson actually mentions leadership and decision-making processes as variables behind the ‘resolve’ question; I, however, equally see the identity dimension as closely connected. *Ibid.*, 134.

integrated framing model to explain the onset of armed conflict or its absence in favor of nonviolent protest.

Before, however, I will briefly delineate my design for testing the explanatory reach of the presented established approaches in the case studies. The actual testing will then occur after the case introduction in Chapter Six.

2.1.5. Test Design

In order to account for opportunity approaches, I will test 13 indicators. They have been selected based on the works of Håvard Hegre/Nicholas Sambanis¹⁸⁵ and Jeffrey Dixon¹⁸⁶, who each – with varying schemes – review numerous quantitative studies, compare/streamline/integrate their designs, and evaluate the degree of congruence in regard to the identified indicators and proposed mechanisms. The indicators I use have resulted from an integration of their respective findings and from additional small choices I have made.¹⁸⁷ Although other indicators frequently appear in quantitative designs, I thus cover a solid, yet manageable range of the supposedly most significant indicators; concerning the variables they are posed to proxy and the mechanisms behind them, I will introduce the most frequently or convincingly¹⁸⁸ mentioned ones.

(1) Population size: size increases risk

population size increases risk for it is easier to find challengers¹⁸⁹

(2) GDP/capita: the higher, the lesser the risk

a. measure of the economy opportunity costs of war;¹⁹⁰ b. proxy for state capacity¹⁹¹

(3) economic growth: the higher, the less risk (disputed)

annual change in GDP in percent¹⁹²

¹⁸⁵ Håvard Hegre and Nicholas Sambanis, “Sensitivity Analysis of Empirical Results on Civil War Onset”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 4 (August 2006): 508–535.

¹⁸⁶ Jeffrey Dixon, “What Causes Civil Wars? Integrating Quantitative Research Findings”, *International Studies Review* 11 (2009): 707–735.

¹⁸⁷ I chose to integrate mountains/rough terrain, male secondary school education, and soil degradation although the confidence level was merely medium. The first two are very frequently included in models and might make a difference for Yemen; the latter is seldom included, yet, again in Yemen environmental factors might be an issue (water is but it was not found significant) and I hence chose to test for it as well.

¹⁸⁸ This strongly correlates with renowned studies and scholars.

¹⁸⁹ Collier/Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance”; Fearon/Laitin, “Ethnicity”.

¹⁹⁰ Collier/Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance”.

¹⁹¹ Fearon/Laitin, “Ethnicity”.

¹⁹² Collier/Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance”; Håvard Hegre, “Disentangling Democracy and Development as Determinants of Armed Conflict”, Paper Presented at the 44th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, February 26–March 1, Portland.

(4) *political instability: instability increases risk*

years of the current regime; change = min. 3 points change in Polity IV¹⁹³

(5) *military strength: size lowers risk*

governments with strong military can more effectively deter or repress insurgency before it rises to higher level;¹⁹⁴ military expenditure, size of army

(6) *rough terrain: the more, the higher the risk*

mountains as rebel sanctuaries;¹⁹⁵ percent of state territory

(7) *war-prone neighbors: the more, the higher the risk*

spatial contagion of violent conflict; neighbor at war/number of neighbors at war in given year¹⁹⁶

(8) *level of democracy of neighbors: the more democratic, the lesser the risk*

poor/autocratic neighbors = 'bad neighborhood': make democratic transition in individual country harder and creates prolonged instability risks;¹⁹⁷ Polity IV

(9) *oil exports: the larger, the higher the risk*

income generated by oil export provides government with rents independent of legitimacy;¹⁹⁸ fuel/oil exports of goods/services as percent/GDP

(10) *peace years: the more, the lower the risk*

the longer a country is at peace, the lower the risk of another (civil) war because the conflict-specific capital remains unused and peace-specific capital is accumulated¹⁹⁹

¹⁹³ Hegre et al., "Toward a Democratic Civil Peace?"; Fearon/Laitin, "Ethnicity"; Elbadawi/Sambanis, "How Much War Will We See?"; Nicolas Sambanis, "Do Ethnic and Non-Ethnic Civil Wars have the Same Causes?," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45 no. 3 (2001): 259–282; Adam Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950–1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

¹⁹⁴ Nicholas Sambanis, "Partition as a Solution to Ethnic War: An Empirical Critique of the Theoretical Literature", *World Politics* 52 (2000): 437–483; Hegre et al., "Toward a Democratic Civil Peace?".

¹⁹⁵ Fearon/Laitin, "Ethnicity"; Hegre, "Disentangling Democracy"; Buhaug and Rød, however, have shown that the actual mountainous areas are not the locations of armed conflict. Halvard Buhaug and Jan Ketil Rød, "Local determinants of African civil wars, 1970–2001", *Political Geography* 25 (2006): 315–335. Moreover, the argument is made that rough/mountainous terrain rather aids the duration of armed conflict than its onset. In addition, it is held that sanctuaries could equally be found elsewhere, e.g. across borders.

¹⁹⁶ Exact mechanisms remain unclear. Hegre/Sambanis, "Sensitivity Analysis", 532f.; Sambanis "What Is a Civil War?"; Sambanis, "Ethnic and Non-Ethnic Civil Wars"; James C. Murdoch and Tod Sandler, "Economic Growth, Civil Wars, and Spatial Spillovers", *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 1 (2002): 91–110; Buhaug/Rød, "Local Determinants"; Idean Salehyan and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, "Refugee Flows and the Spread of Civil War", *International Organization* 60, no. 2 (2006): 335–366.

¹⁹⁷ Sambanis, "Ethnic and Non-Ethnic Civil Wars"; Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, *All International Politics is Local: The Diffusion of Conflict, Integration, and Democratization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

¹⁹⁸ Michael L. Ross, "How Do Natural Resources Influence Civil War? Evidence From Thirteen Cases", *International Organization* 58, no. 1 (2004): 35–67; Michael L. Ross, "A Closer Look at Oil, Diamonds, and Civil War", *Annual Review of Political Science* 9 (2006): 265–300; Volker Krause and Susumu Suzuki, "Causes of Civil War in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa: A Comparison", *Social Science Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (2005): 160–177; Halvard Buhaug, "Relative Capability and Rebel Objective in Civil War", *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no. 6 (2006): 691–708.

(11) *males secondary school education: the more, the lower or higher (!) the risk*

a. higher education = to better income changes and decreases risk to be attracted to rebel income; b. high education + unemployment = high frustration, which can make rebel income attractive; same for well-educated but politically excluded

(12) *soil degradation: the more, the high the risk*

complex! high levels increase risk, moderate do not; in politically stable countries increases risk, in instable do not²⁰⁰

(13) *consistency of democratic institutions: the higher, the lower the risk*

democracy/anocracy/autocracy: a. the higher the level of democracy, the lower the risk; b. anocracies have higher risk;²⁰¹ c. new democratic regime in first years higher risks²⁰²

Measures for grievances include the various dimensions of horizontal equalities (see 2.1.2.) plus repression, i.e.: inequalities in income, employment opportunities, and assets; disparities in access to social services; inequalities in political freedoms and access political offices and power.²⁰³ Moreover, cultural discrimination²⁰⁴, life expectancy, loss of power due to recent regime change, and the distribution of resource wealth. Repression is assessed in regard to form, intensity, and duration.

Identity-related factors can merely be approached by investigating the rights given to different identity groups, their inclusion, and everyday discrimination on the one hand, and

¹⁹⁹ Collier/Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance”; Hegre et al., “Toward a Democratic Civil Peace?”; Fearon/Laitin, “Ethnicity”.

²⁰⁰ Clionadh Raleigh and Hendrik Urdal, “Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and Armed Conflict”, *Political Geography* 26 (2007): 674–694.

²⁰¹ Hegre et al., “Toward a Democratic Civil Peace?”.

²⁰² Gurr, “Peoples Versus States”.

²⁰³ Comparative research has found credible evidence that political exclusion of groups poses a risk, and that this risk additionally increases with the co-presence of socio-economic HIs. For the former: Andreas Wimmer, Lars-Erik Cederman, and Brian Min, “Ethnic Politics and Armed Conflict: A Configurational Analysis of a New Data Set”, *American Sociological Review* 74, no. 2 (2009): 316–337. For the latter: Lars-Erik Cederman, Nils B. Weidmann, and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, “Horizontal Inequalities and Ethno-Nationalist Civil War: A Global Comparison”, *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 3 (2011): 478–495. Relevant in this regard is moreover what Matthew Gibney refers to as “stunted citizenship”, i.e. limitations to the exercise of rights and freedoms due to informal structures such as racism, sexism, economic deprivation, and similar factors. Matthew J. Gibney, “Who Should be Included? Noncitizens, Conflict and the Constitution of the Citizenry”, in *Horizontal Inequalities*, 25–40, here: 27.

²⁰⁴ For the above distinction: Arnim Langer and Frances Stewart, “Horizontal Inequalities and Violent Conflict. Conceptual and Empirical Linkages”, in *Routledge Handbook of Civil War*, 104–118, here: 105. Langer and Brown specifically explicate three dimensions of cultural status HIs: (1) the recognition of religion and religious observances, (2) language rights and language recognition, and (3) the recognition of ethnocultural practices such as rituals, dress, customary law, holidays etc. Arnim Langer and Graham K. Brown, “Cultural Status Inequalities: An Important Dimension of Group Mobilization”, in *Horizontal Inequalities*, 41–53.

hostile myths and symbols etc. on the other. Assessment here relies more strongly on ‘soft’ factors, discourse analysis, and qualified evaluation.

2.2. *Studying Social Movements and Collective Action*

The discipline of social movement studies (as a subdiscipline of sociology) investigates the development, dynamics, and decline of collectivities who with various strategies aim at the acceleration, forestallment, or reversion of social change. Based on shared norms and values, movement adherents organize themselves in networks and act with the goal to influence situations which they perceive as problematic and/or threatening by articulating them publicly and pressing relevant authorities to attend to the associated claims and demands.²⁰⁵

Although researchers highlight different aspects, all social movements share a number of traits: They are change-orientated (to varying degrees); they have the character of challengers or defenders of existing institutional structures; they are collective endeavors; they act outside of existing institutional or organizational arrangements or sometimes mix those with channels within these structures; they are organized; and they display a certain degree of temporal continuity.²⁰⁶ Typologies of movements can be developed along these criteria, taking into account, for example, the degree of change a movement is striving for (reform vs. revolution) or strategic/tactical variations (violent vs. non-violent).²⁰⁷

Key analytical issues which guide research on social movements are, first, their emergence: Main associated questions concern the roles that grievances and a sense of efficacy play for the mobilization of adherents, and how certain sets of contextual conditions influence the emergence and the development of movements. Second, their recruitment and participation processes: Who participates, in which way, and why do some individuals participate while others with similar characteristics do not? Third, their dynamics: Who are relevant actors and leaders, how are they organized, and what are their relationships? How does a movement operate, according to which processes and mechanisms, and how are strategies developed and followed? And fourth, their consequences and outcomes: For whom

²⁰⁵Thomas Kern, *Soziale Bewegungen. Ursachen, Wirkungen, Mechanismen*, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2008; Charles Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768–2004* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2005). He also includes the aspect of “public representations of the cause’s worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment” (p.7); David A. Snow, Social Movements, in *Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, 2013, 1200–1204, here: 1200.

²⁰⁶Snow, “Social Movements”, 1201.

²⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 1201–1203.

do they make which kind of difference? Do they in fact challenge authorities and bring about social change? To which extent do they fulfill other functions or play other roles?²⁰⁸

In the following, I will present a brief overview of theoretical approaches in the study of social movements.²⁰⁹ They do not always follow each other chronologically or build on each other, but oftentimes exist in parallel.

As noted earlier, there are striking equivalents in the theoretical developments of civil war studies and social movement research: Key terms and variables such as grievances²¹⁰, resources, opportunities, identities, and frames can be found in both, and it seems only natural to merge insights from both fields in regard to the impact of these factors.

2.2.1. *Grievances*

Early Approaches: Studying 'the Masses'

Initial research on collective behavior occurred in the late 19th century under the impression of the century's revolutions and social protests and was influenced by the emerging discipline of psychology. The basic assumption was that masses acted irrationally and absorbed and obscured individual judgement in favor of some 'group mind'.²¹¹ The reasons for this exceptional behavior were supposed to be found in the failure of society to provide appropriate inclusion and opportunities for people; due to this, frustration and aggression caused deviant behavior and led to social breakdown. In other words, collective *behavior*, understood as emotional outbursts, not rational *action*, was pathologized.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 1203.

²⁰⁹ Since the focus lies on the framing approach, the presentation of former approaches will not be exhaustive but merely limited to major contributions in the field.

²¹⁰ While social movement theory predominantly does not employ the term 'grievances' (with the exception Jacqueliën van Stekelenburg and Bert Klandermans), the content of what is subsumed under 'structural strains' is usually congruent with civil war studies' definition of grievances, which is why I am referring to it. Crucially, however, this does not imply any assumption of irrationality, but merely refers to the causes for action, not the mechanisms: 'Classical theory' proposes that people participate in protest to express their grievances stemming from relative deprivation, frustration, or perceived injustice. Cf. Steven M. Buechler, "Strain and Breakdown Theories", in *Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, 1253–1259; Jacqueliën van Stekelenburg and Bert Klandermans, "The Social Psychology of Protest", *Current Sociology* 0, no. 0 [sic!] (2013): 1–20.

²¹¹ Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd. A Study of the Popular Mind* (Atlanta: Cherokee, 1982 [1895]). Other authors at that time similarly referred to 'crowd psychology' or 'crowd mentality'. James B. Rule, *Theories of Civil Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

Breakdown Theories – The ‘Classical Model’

These basic ideas were taken up by American sociologists in the mid-20th century,²¹² most notably by the prominent representative of Chicago School symbolic interactionism Herbert Blumer²¹³. As indicated in the name, the focus of that school was on interaction between individuals. Blumer considered a disruption of social life to cause equally disruptive psychological states in people, who then aggregate into collectives and finally crowds and groups with a shared identity and common demands. These processes are held to occur spontaneously, unregulatedly, and unstructuredly.²¹⁴

Structural functionalists likewise provided a theory in the line of breakdown approaches. Neil Smelser, a student of Talcott Parsons, proposed his “Theory of Collective Behavior” in 1962.²¹⁵ Instead of interactions, structural conditions constituted the independent variable, particularly structural conduciveness, structural strain, and social control. Individuals had to react to these structures²¹⁶ and collective behavior was regarded as one facilitated by these structures; they channeled individuals into collectives (often referred to as ‘crazes’ – again “representing [...] collective behavior as non-normative, exceptional, and destabilizing”).

Lastly, relative deprivation as put forward by Ted Gurr²¹⁷ (see 2.1.) closed the chapter of breakdown theories. Although the assumption that a discrepancy between expectations of prosperity and reality should lead to frustration and aggression appeared to have empirical commensurability at first glance, critics soon mounted macroeconomic evidence that presumably contradicted it²¹⁸; besides, psychological measures were solely applicable to a limited degree due to the inherent challenges involved.

²¹² Robert Park and Ernest Burgess, *An Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1969 [1921]).

²¹³ Herbert Blumer, “Collective Behavior”, in *An Outline of the Principles of Sociology*, ed. Robert E. Park (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1939), 219–280.

²¹⁴ See also: Ralph H. Turner and Lewis M. Killian, *Collective Behavior*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972). For a discussion see: Hank Johnston, *What is a Social Movement* (Cambridge/Malden: Polity Press, 2014), 28–33; Buechler, “Strain and Breakdown Theories”.

²¹⁵ Neil Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior* (New York: Free Press, 1963).

²¹⁶ A similar argument was made by William Kornhauser who draws a connection between alienation of the individual in modern society and the search to overcome it through participation in collective behavior. This approach, based on the sociology of Durkheim, is referred to as ‘mass society theory’. William Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society* (New York: Free Press, 1959).

²¹⁷ Ted Gurr, “Psychological Factors in Civil Violence”, *World Politics* 20, no. 2 (January 1968): 245–278; Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*.

²¹⁸ Clark McPhail, *The Myth of the Madding Crowd* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1991).

Criticism of the classical model stresses three main weaknesses: First and foremost, the irrationality assumption it roots in. Second, the inherent determinism common to all models except for Gurr's²¹⁹. And third, the individualistic, almost atomistic, focus it adopts. Yet, it at the same time made important contributions, some of which would lie dormant in subsequent theories, namely the focus on individuals, their perceptions, and emotions.

The Emergence of Social Movement Studies

The social protests of the 1960s, especially the civil rights movement, created new interest in the study of this phenomenon and resulted in the final establishment of social movement studies as a dynamic new field of social science. Scholars sought to understand how mobilization actually occurred.

A first decisive step they took was to abandon the prior axiom of irrationality as a motor for the association of people in groups posing demands;²²⁰ on the contrary, they perceived social movements as a continuation of politics with the aim of getting grievances addressed and achieving desired change.²²¹ Moreover, grievances were found insufficient to explain protest; grievances abound, so the argument, whereas collective action – strategic *action*, no longer *behavior* – does not.

So why do some aggrieved people engage in protests and other actions while others do not? Three theoretical strands of answers were provided to this question, with one focusing on economy (resource mobilization), one taking a political perspective (political opportunities), and one arguing along social psychology (efficacy).²²²

2.2.2. Resource Mobilization

Proponents of resources mobilization theory (RMT) argue that the availability of resources makes the difference between mobilization and its failure. Merely sufficient resources, primarily understood as financial resources, provide a movement with the means to reach out to people, spread their messages, hold events, and mobilize – this was the presupposition

²¹⁹ Gurr likewise modifies basic assumptions to give space to resistance, emphasizes the organizational character of movements (instead a presumed character), and takes a step in shifting the implicit value bias from the negative (breakdown) to the positive (opportunity to act against deprivation).

²²⁰ Mancur Olson's book *The Logic of Collective Action. Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965) was seminal for this step. He theorized that people carefully weighed the costs and benefits of participation in collective action; incentives were thus the key for mobilization. Critics found his approach too individualistic.

²²¹ Bob Edwards and Patrick F. Gillham, "Resource Mobilization Theory", in *Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, 1096–1101.

²²² See Stekelenburg/Klandermans, "Social Psychology".

made by John McCarthy and Mayer Zald²²³ based on the observations of the numerous movements springing up in the 1960s and 1970s. Movements are understood to function similar to businesses and the language used in the approach mirrors this:

[M]ovement mobilization is linked to organizational structure, material resources, cost reduction, strategic planning, and the professionalization of movement activists, especially among the upper-level strategists in large movement organizations whom they call *social movement entrepreneurs*.²²⁴

Social movement organizations (SMOs) compete for participant mobilization; those with similar goals form social movement industries (SMI), which again are integrated into social movement sectors (SMS). Strength or potential could accordingly be measured in ‘hard data’, i.e. financial capacity and flows, organizational structures (e.g. numbers of staff, level of organization etc.), members, contributions and else.

While this scheme provides supposedly ‘clear’ orientation in a field, which had up to then suffered from the bias of being involved with all-too obscure and deviant phenomena, and notwithstanding the pivotal contributions RMT made by its highlighting of rationality, economic considerations, collective (vs. individual) action, strategies, and organization, it nevertheless comprises a number of significant downsides: In turning away from irrationality, its overtly rational and economic scheme it had gone too far, critics said. By overemphasizing these elements – without even providing a precise definition of resources²²⁵ – RMT did not account for the role of grievances and the ideational sphere of participants anymore, thus drawing a very one-dimensional picture.²²⁶ Additionally, only formal organizational structures were acknowledged, while the multiple networks of which people are part and which serve as important channels of resources of all kinds, did not get any theoretical recognition.²²⁷ On this basis, it was not possible to convincingly explain why some topics,

²²³ James D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, *The Trends fo Social Movemnets in America: Professionalization and Resource Mobilization* (Morristown: General Learning Press, 1973); James D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory”, *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (1977): 1212–1241.

²²⁴ Johnston, *What is a Social Movement*, 40.

²²⁵ Karl-Dieter Opp, “Explaining Contentious Politics: A Case Study of a Failed Theory Development and a Proposal for a Rationale Choice Alternative”, *Raymond Boudon: A Life in Sociology*, vol. 2, ed. Mohamed Cherkaoui and Peter Hamilton (Oxford: Bardwell Press, 2008), 303–317.

²²⁶ Bert Klandermans, “Mobilization and Participation: Social Psychological Expansions of Resource Mobilization Theory”, *American Sociological Review* 49 (1984): 583–600.

²²⁷ Networks were an aspect that was widely discussed and in regard to which numerous points were made. These include (1) the explicit note that networks are social settings that are relatively free of state control and thus a prime structure and space for the distribution of critique of authorities – contrary to formalized SMOs; Doug McAdam, “Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer”, *American Journal of Sociology* 92, no. 1 (July 1986): 64–90; Roger V. Gould, “Collective Action and Network Structure”, *American Sociological Review* 58 (1993): 182–196; Pamela Paxton, “Social Capital and Democracy: An Interdependent Relationship”, *American Sociological Review* 67 (2002): 254–277. (2) Membership in networks increases the probability to be reached by messages circulated within this network, and it creates commitments to stick to

grievances, and demands resulted in protests whereas others did not.²²⁸ Besides, its hypotheses could not explain which form of movement would evolve or how a protest would develop.²²⁹

These points of critique were articulated mainly by scholars who came from or were becoming interested in the recent theoretical turn in social sciences that reached social movement studies in the early 1980s: the linguistic or cognitive turn.²³⁰ Its main manifestation, the framing approach, will be discussed in detail chapter 3; I do not want to foreclose it at this point. Rather, I will present the second direction, which the quest to understand mobilization on rational grounds took in the 1970s: political opportunity structures (POSS).

2.2.3. Political Opportunity

Scholars in the POS tradition consider protest as a continuation of normal political processes. Hence, they answer the question of why some aggrieved people become mobilized for protest while others do not with a reference to the presence of POSS.²³¹ These are defined as “features of the political environment that increase the chances of success in political action”.²³² Since

given promises of participation – a step which otherwise often leads to drop-outs. Bert Klandermans and Dirk Oegema, “Potentials, Networks, Motivations, Barriers: Steps Toward Participation in Social Movements”, *American Sociological Review* 52 (1987): 519–531. (3) At the same time, informal networks have their own hierarchies, status, and context, all of which need to be taken into account when investigating them. Pointed out by: Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel, “Introduction: The Middle East and North Africa. Beyond Classical Social Movement Theory”, in *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 1–23, here: 11; see as an example: Diane Singerman, *Avenues of Participation. Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

²²⁸ Paolo R. Donati, “Political Discourse Analysis”, in *Studying Collective Action*, ed. Mario Diani and Ron Eyerman (London: Sage, 1992), 136–168.

²²⁹ Opp, “Explaining Contentious Politics”.

²³⁰ Lasse Lindekilde, “Discourse and Frame Analysis. In-Depth Analysis of Qualitative Data in Social Movement Research”, in *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research*, ed. Donatella Della Porta (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 195–227, here: 195.

²³¹ Seminal for the POS perspective: Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

²³² Opp, “Explaining Contentious Politics”, 305. Political opportunity structures as an approach is closely linked to the name of Peter Eisinger. When studying protest behavior in 43 American cities, he in 1973 used the term “structure of political opportunities” to help account for the variation he detected. According to him, “the incidence of protest is mildly related to the nature of a city’s political opportunity structure”, that is, “the degree to which groups are likely to be able to gain access to power and to manipulate the political system.” Peter Eisinger, “The Conditions of Protest Behavior in American Cities”, in: *American Political Science Review* 67, 11–28, here: 25. Within a decade after Eisinger’s publication, the concept has found extensive adoption in numerous studies and an ample range of topics and has been attributed with the role of dependent, independent, and intervening variable. For example: J. Craig Jenkins and Charles Perrow, “Insurgency of the Powerless: Farm Worker Movements (1946–1972)”, in: *American Sociological Review* 42 (1977): 249–268; David S. Meyer, *A Winter of Discontent: The Nuclear Freeze and American Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1990); Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1978); William A. Gamson and David S. Meyer, “Framing Political

there is no ultimate limit to the kind of opportunity one could think of,²³³ the term absconds from further definition. Yet, as Opp critically notes, what does not become clear in McAdam's conceptualization is the difference between a 'political' and a 'non-political' opportunity structure.²³⁴

While McAdam had conceptualized his original model of 'political process' around three elements, namely 'expanding political opportunities', 'established organizations', and 'cognitive liberation'²³⁵, and he specifically emphasized the function of the latter as most important catalyst of mobilization, all but POSs got pushed into the background. Its reduced form was employed in a wide range of research and found praise for its apparent applicability to partly dispersed topics. At the same time, however, this raised serious concern about conceptual overstretching and resulting arbitrariness: "Political opportunity may be discerned along so many directions and in so many ways that it is less a variable than a cluster of variables – some more readily observable than others."²³⁶

In addition to this quite fundamental questioning of the plausibility of employing the approach all too widely, other critique stressed its structural bias, its rational bias, its neglect of the role of emotions, and the allegedly "narrow focus on states as targets and neglect of non-political movements"²³⁷.

From the discussion of the theory arose a number of extensions to it. Jake Goldstone and Charles Tilly, for instance, consider threats to be the opposite, yet functional equivalent to opportunities in the model.²³⁸ When movements are facing threats, so the presupposition, they can be prompted to act in order to counter them; a frequent example are e.g. right-wing movements that strive to prevent change. Generally, opportunities and threats come mixed – or are perceived as either/or, i.e. what some might perceive as an opportunity, others might perceive as threat.²³⁹

Opportunity", in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, ed. Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 275f.

²³³ McAdam himself did provide a list of factors containing: levels of governance, judicial administration, political parties, state centralization vs. decentralization. Johnston, *What is a Social Movement?*, 52f.

²³⁴ Opp, "Explaining Contentious Politics".

²³⁵ He filled the term with the condition that "some critical mass of people came to (...) define their situation as unjust and subject to change through group action". McAdam, *Political Process*, 51. There are significant parallels to the concept of framing that should be noted.

²³⁶ Sidney Tarrow, "National Politics and Collective Action: Recent Theory and Research in Western Europe and the United States", *Annual Review of Sociology* 14 (1988): 421–440, here: 430.

²³⁷ Doug McAdam, "Political Process Theory", in *Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, 961–965, here: 963f.

²³⁸ Jack Goldstone and Charles Tilly, "Threat (and opportunity): Popular action and state response in the dynamics of contentious action", in *Silence and voice in the study of contentious politics*, ed. Ronald Aminzade et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 179–194.

²³⁹ Debra Minkoff and David Meyer, "Conceptualizing Political Opportunity", *Social Forces* 82 (2004): 1457–1492; discussed in: Johnston, *What is a Social Movement?*, 62f. In addition to the factors mentioned by

The criticism expressed by Jeff Goodwin and James Jasper aims at the alleged reductionist, rigid, and objectivist understanding of the contexts in which movements operate. Instead, they highlight the inherent contingency of any specific situation:

[A]n extraordinarily large number of processes and events, political and otherwise, potentially influence movement mobilization, and they do so in historically complex combinations and sequences. (...) Such opportunities, when they are important, do not result from some invariant menu of factors, but from situationally specific combinations and sequences of political processes – none of which, in the abstract, has determinate consequences.²⁴⁰

Along the same lines, i.e. contingency and the wider socio-cultural and historical context, others have furthermore pointed out both “discursive opportunities”²⁴¹ (understood as “conducive cultural trends, ideas, and language”²⁴²) next to mere political ones and the possibility that movements might create opportunities themselves as a result of becoming (pro)active²⁴³; the latter option specifically will be treated below in the section on the more interactive model of ‘dynamics of contention’.

While the aspects of criticism noted above already create a more complex picture than the reductionist variant of McAdam’s original approach, the last major point of critique does the same, yet merely reintroduces what he had previously accounted for (and even stresses) in his model: perception (in McAdam’s term: ‘cognitive liberation’).

Based on his study of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Charles Kurzman became a vocal proponent of a more social-constructivist perspective. He found that opportunities were not a simply given condition or not, but that even in the absence of “opening opportunities” or when they are highly restricted or uncertain, mobilization emerged – and movements could succeed, as his example demonstrated.²⁴⁴ The pivotal factor, he was convinced, was hence to be found in the perception of actors. Their appraisal, based on emotions and the meanings

McAdam, Johnston lists a further number of factors to be considered: prevailing strategies of social control, changes in elite access, elite divisions and elite allies, changes in media openness, and variable enforcement of policies. These elements are frequently conceived of as threats as well as opportunities by social movements; most of them form a continuum along which the particular parameter value varies.

²⁴⁰ Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, “Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine: The Structural Bias of Political Process Theory”, *Sociological Forum* 14 (1999): 27–54, here: 36, 39.

²⁴¹ Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham, “Political Claims Analysis”, in *Methods of Social Movement Research*, ed. Bert Klandermans and Susan Staggenborg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 231–259.

²⁴² Johnston, *What is a Social Movement?*, 69.

²⁴³ Jesus Casquette, “The Sociopolitical Context of Mobilization: The Case of the Antimilitary Movement in the Basque Country”, *Mobilization* 1 (1996): 203–220; Howard Ramos, “Opportunity for Whom? Political Opportunity and Critical Events in Canadian Aboriginal Mobilization 1951–2000”, *Social Forces* 87 (2008): 795–823.

²⁴⁴ Charles Kurzman, „Structural Opportunity and Perceived Opportunity in Social Movement Theory: The Iranian Revolution of 1979“, *American Sociological Review* 61, no. 1 (1996): 153–170.

they attributed to the situation, made the difference between action and non-action. Kurzman thus made it his credo to “[t]ake protesters’ beliefs seriously”.²⁴⁵

He wrote at a time when the framing approach had already entered into social movements studies, yet, had merely found unassertive recognition. During the second half of the 1990s, however, the discipline gradually disbanded its predominant rationalist bias and the role of ‘meaning-making’ came to the fore. Beliefs, collective identity, moral judgement, and narrative structures became topics of investigation, or, as in some cases, earlier research on the margins of social movement studies now gained wider attention and inclusion into mainstream models. The social psychological perspective is an example of the latter; even before the constructivist turn, scholars had investigated the role of efficacy and collective identity for mobilization.

Efficacy beliefs in this context are defined as an individual’s expectation that it is possible to alter conditions or policies through collective action²⁴⁶: the stronger the efficacy beliefs, the higher the probability that an individual will participate in protest. It has thus a clear agency component. However, beyond individual efficacy belief, it is crucial that both group efficacy beliefs²⁴⁷ and political efficacy beliefs²⁴⁸ are existent.²⁴⁹

This perspective brought up the issue of collective identity. Collective identity refers to a salient common social identity of a group of people, on behalf of which they think, feel, and act, and which involves a conscious distinction from others.²⁵⁰ Which role does it play? Is it a mere precondition for mobilization via group efficacy? Or is there a need to acknowledge the influential role of collective identity among the factors that decisively contribute to the overall outcome as a resource for and outcome of activism? It was the latter hypothesis to be confirmed in a number of studies.²⁵¹ Efficacy alone was criticized as too instrumental a view;

²⁴⁵ Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 115. See also: Charles Kurzman, “Introduction: Meaning-Making in Social Movements”, in *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 5–15.

²⁴⁶ William Gamson, *Talking Politics*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 6.

²⁴⁷ Albert Bandura, *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control* (New York: Freeman, 1997).

²⁴⁸ Angus Campbell, Gerald Gurin, and Warren E. Miller, *The Voter Decides* (Evanston, Row/Peterson, 1954).

²⁴⁹ Stekelenburg/Klandermans, “Social Psychology”, 4. See also: Bert Klandermans, “Mobilization and Participation: Social-Psychological Expansions of Resource Mobilization Theory”, *American Sociological Review* 49 (1984): 583–600.

²⁵⁰ Individuals are assumed to have both a personal identity (i.e. a self-definition in terms of personal attributes) and a number of social identities (i.e. self-definitions in terms of social category memberships). Henri Tajfel and John Turner, “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict”, in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. Stephen Worchel and William G. Austin (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979), 33–47. For a brief discussion of alternative definitions in regards to collective identity and mobilization see: Johnston, *What Is a Social Movement?*, 87ff.

²⁵¹ Terre Satterfield, *Anatomy of a Conflict: Identity, Knowledge, and Emotion in Oldgrowth Forests* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002); James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Kevin McDonald, “From Solidarity to Fluidarity: Social Movements Beyond ‘Collective Identity’: The Case of Globalization Conflicts”, *Social*

rather, identification with a group was found to be a catalyst for people to contribute in communal protest.²⁵² It is interwoven with the processes of ‘consensus mobilization’ and – building on it – ‘action mobilization’.²⁵³ A whole chain of steps is involved, as Bert Klandermans suggests, ultimately leading to a selective process which leaves merely a small number of those, who in principle agree sufficiently with the causes and demands of a social movement to actually participate in action.²⁵⁴ Again we see contingencies and complexities involved.

This wide field of aspects supposed to be involved in the mobilization for social movements ultimately led to the acknowledgement that simple, linear models do not suffice to explain the processes under investigation. There was a need for a more interactive, dynamic perspective that was able to reconcile the logics of structure or context and the logics of agency or action. Tilly has dedicated much of his academic career to the historical comparison of revolutions and social upheaval. One of the central concepts – or maybe *the* central concept – which emanated from these extensive studies is the concept of ‘repertoire of contention’. A repertoire is defined as the entirety of available forms of contentious action among a collective based on experience and knowledge, or, in Tilly’s words: “claims making routines”²⁵⁵ that comprise the “whole set of means [a group] has for making claims of different types on different individuals”.²⁵⁶ Examples comprise, for instance, the founding of associations and coalitions, public meetings, solemn processions, vigils, rallies, demonstrations, petition drives, statements to and in public media, and pamphleteering.²⁵⁷ Repertoires are not static but become constantly reinvented, modified, extended, and scaled down; “they are learned, shared and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of

Movement Studies 1, no. 3 (2002): 109–128; Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper, “Collective Identity and Social Movements”, *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 283–305.

²⁵² Stephen D. Reicher, “The St. Paul’s Riot: An Explanation of the Limits of Crowd Action in Terms of a Social Identity Model”, *European Journal of Social Psychology* 14 (1984): 1–21; Sheldon Stryker, Timothy J. Owens, and Robert W. White (ed.), *Self, Identity, and Social Movements* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Marga De Weerd and Bert Klandermans, “Group Identification and Political Protest: Farmers’ Protest in the Netherlands”, *European Journal of Social Psychology* 29 (1999): 1073–1095.

²⁵³ Klandermans, “Mobilization”.

²⁵⁴ There are four steps involved: (1) People need to sympathize with the case (which equals consensus mobilization). (2) They need to know about the upcoming event, i.e. they need to be targeted by those spreading information. (3) They must want to participate, i.e. be motivated. (4) They need to be able to participate. Each step involved drop-outs, which reduce the number which ultimately become participants. Klandermans/Oegema, “Potentials”; Stekelenburg/Klandermans, “Social Psychology”, 10f.; Bert Klandermans, “Consensus and Action Mobilization”, *Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, 251–253.

²⁵⁵ Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 16.

²⁵⁶ Charles Tilly, *The Contentious French* (Minnesota: University of Michigan, 1986), 2.

²⁵⁷ Charles Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768–2004* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2005): 53.

choice” and they are disputed.²⁵⁸ They are built upon resources as well as ideational components²⁵⁹, and provide insights into both internal processes and a movement’s reaction *to* and interaction *with* authorities and their measures of confronting the challengers. The sum of these actions and interactions form ‘contentious practices’ within ‘contentious politics’.

Contentious politics brings together contention, collective action, and politics. It “involves interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else’s interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties”.²⁶⁰

The research program stemming from this concept has two important implications: First, it looks at mechanisms and therein makes use of the synergies of previous approaches, i.e. it manages to overcome pitfalls due to reductionist views by integrating the core aspects.²⁶¹ Second, it provides a framework for the futile integration of social movement studies and civil war studies:²⁶² In their conception, social movements, civil wars, and revolutions can all be characterized as form of contentious politics; they merely differ in regard to dynamics, their respective combination of performances (i.e. the sum of collective actions), and the level of violence they produce. If that is the case – and I agree with the assumption – these varying forms of contentious politics can be assumed to involve the same mechanisms. For instance, in regard to mobilization:

Mobilization involves interaction between challenging actors and their targets, based on combinations of well-known and innovative forms of contention, around claims that are framed in ways that both attract support and communicate messages to both targets and significant others. As long as the same mechanisms and processes can be identified in different forms of contention, *they can be studied together irrespective of the boundaries that scholars have established between these forms* [highlighted T.G.].²⁶³

²⁵⁸ Tilly, *Contentious French*, 26.

²⁵⁹ The ideational component of repertoires has found great recognition and appreciation among scholars who elucidated various dimensions: Johanna Siméant has stressed how the concept “also assumes a universe of shared meaning prior to mobilization”. Johanna Siméant, “La violence d'un répertoire. Les sanspapiers en grève de la faim”, *Culture et Conflits* 9/10 (1993): 315–338; Ann Swidler understands it to represent a “‘tool kit’ of symbols, stories, rituals, and world-views, which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems”. Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies”, *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2. (April 1986): 273–286, here: 273; and Beinin/Vairel praise how “[a]nalyzing repertoire allows us to examine anticipations, perceptions, and self-definitions of contentious actors and how they take up a position in the political field. (...) [A]nd vocabulary of motives people use: elitist or populist, oppositional or radical. Contentious practices are strongly related to how actors define the political situation.” Beinin/Vairel, “Introduction”, 13f.

²⁶⁰ Tilly/Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 4.

²⁶¹ It has not been accepted without contention, particularly from rationalists. Opp, a strong advocate of rational choice theory, provocatively calls the approach a “giving up [of] theory”, Opp, “Explaining Contentious Politics”, 312.

²⁶² For the following see: Sidney Tarrow, “Contentious Politics”, *Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements* 266–270.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 267.

I advocate that indeed the same mechanisms and processes can be found active in two different cases which ultimately took diverging forms of contention: the Houthis took the road to civil war, while the HIRAK kept its character as a (nonviolent) social movement. Two movements, same mechanisms.

While the remaining – central – approach of social movement studies, i.e. framing, has found wide application in social movement studies (and other disciplines), this has not been the case in civil war studies. The following chapter seeks to close this gap by providing a theoretical model which combines the strengths of approaches from both disciplines, but particularly elucidates the role of framing.

Before I proceed, however, I briefly want to present one more recent perspective on escalation processes which emphasizes the internal organization of movements, i.e. the meso-level beyond networks and resource mobilization. While my findings refute the central hypotheses, I nevertheless consider it to be a potentially fertile contribution to a better understanding of movement dynamics.

2.2.4. *Organization*

Wendy Pearlman refers to her approach as ‘organizational mediation theory of protest’.²⁶⁴ She holds that the organizational structure mediates between structural factors and violent and nonviolent movement action, respectively. According to her, what needs explanation is less the question why movements use violence, but rather, why they do not use nonviolence to reach their aims. She reasons – taking a very Hobbesian perspective – that it is because of the challenges involved in keeping a movement peaceful: Movement cohesion (defined as “the cooperation among individuals that enables unified action” and proxied by leadership, institutions, and the “population’s sense of collective purpose”)²⁶⁵ is a necessary condition for nonviolent action for it facilitates indispensable mass mobilisation, discipline, and strategic coherence. Fragmented movements, on the other hand, are held to be more likely to employ violence because fragmentation weakens constraints on escalation, generates incentives for violent means, and impedes efforts to end hostilities.²⁶⁶

Her claims rest on the inherent assumption of incoherence and instability in a movement: “[N]onstate groups face some of the same burdens as states, such as creating social order and

²⁶⁴ Wendy Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). The approach would also have fit into 2.1., but since its focus is on internal movement mechanisms, I considered it more appropriately included in 2.2.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 2, 18.

centralizing decision making.”²⁶⁷ Failing to recognize this and instead presuming the opposite, i.e. coherent and stable movement units, is her main point of criticism of predominant approaches, which she accuses of oversimplification in the wake of factionalization, infighting, and other forms of aggressive competition and conflict. Besides, the state may have an interest in fueling such divisions (e.g. through repression) in order to trigger its fission into smaller, more manageable units. The downside of such meddling might, however, be an actual encouragement of violence, or, rather, the stabbing of its capacity to preclude violence.²⁶⁸

Sources of cohesion are supposedly education, urbanization, and mass media, which are presumed to “facilitate compatible value orientations, correspondence in communication codes and culture, and a dense web of social and economic transactions”.²⁶⁹

With her theoretical suggestions, Pearlman makes a number of valuable points: she highlights processes on the meso-level, which are often neglected by other approaches; her perspective takes into account sub-units of a movement; it stresses the interaction between the state and these sub-units; and overall emphasizes the *permanent* fluidity and contention that occurs within collectives. On the positive side of the scale, she thus adds a dynamic perception of intra- and extra-movement interaction, which I find very conducive concerning a better, more detailed, understanding of these processes. Future research should take them into account. On the negative side, however, she puts the previously noted, highly Hobbesian presumption of ever-present and untamable violence. Based on my own empirical findings I disagree with this disquieting axiom, and – from this basis – would ask for wider evidence for her claims. While Pearlman provides a rich case study of the Palestinian movement over time, she merely touches upon Northern Ireland and South Africa as comparative cases; additional cases might well serve to assert her theoretical argument.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 8.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 26.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 21.

3. THE FRAMING APPROACH

“There are many political movements that try in vain to activate people who, in terms of some allegedly objective interests, ought to be up in arms.”²⁷⁰ The framing approach has been developed as an ideational alternative to structural approaches in social movement studies. By focusing perceptions instead of allegedly ‘real facts’, it helps to elucidate three dimensions of (social) interpretive processes: First, it offers a model of consensus building in collectives; Second and related, it specifies and illuminates the specific roles and interaction between individuals and collectives in negotiating meaning; and third, it demonstrates the interrelation with persuasion and strategic action. This chapter first introduces the framing approach as such and subsequently presents the integrated framing model this dissertation puts forward.

3.1. Framing in Social Movement Studies

In the early 1980s, the field of social movement studies began to absorb linguistic and cognitive approaches. Mere POSs were found to be insufficient to explain movement mobilization and action, and scholars increasingly turned back to social psychological ideas. It was no longer structures (alone) that needed to be analyzed, but rather the meaning people attributed to them. Constructivist ideas were thus embraced.

“If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.”²⁷¹ The famous ‘Thomas theorem’ of the sociologist William I. Thomas is commonly cited as one of the early points of reference for a phenomenologically anchored constructivism as it was developed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann in their influential “The Social Construction of Reality” (1966).²⁷² Its central assumption is that human action is based on socially constructed, subject-dependent reality rather than any kind of objective reality. It develops in interaction and is transmitted by signs, with a special role attributed to language. This reality, however, is neither homogenous, nor static; on the contrary, it is complex, dynamic, multivocal (and disputed), as well as multilayered. The only way to approach it is therefore via the actors’ interpretation, resulting in interpretism as the epistemological-methodological position of choice.

²⁷⁰ William Gamson, *Talking Politics*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 6.

²⁷¹ William I. Thomas and Dorothy S. Thomas, *The Child in America. Behavior Problems and Programs* (New York: Knopf, 1928). Similarly stated by George Herbert Mead in 1936: “If a thing is not recognized as true, then it does not function as true in the community.” George Herbert Mead, *Kant. The philosopher of the Revolution, in Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Merritt H. Moore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936), 25–50.

²⁷² Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966).

3.1.1. *The Roots of Framing as a Concept*

A concept to approach the ‘actor’s interpretation’ or perception was found in Erving Goffman’s understanding of a ‘frame’ as a ‘schema of interpretation’.²⁷³ Goffman, coming from symbolic interactionism, was interested in the cognitive organization of individual and social experience.²⁷⁴ His claim was that at any given moment, humans interpret their surroundings in order to make sense of them and guide their actions. To master this cognitive challenge, they unconsciously employ interpretive schemata to “to locate, perceive, identify and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large”.²⁷⁵ This process necessarily includes filtering and condensing information, which led him to the metaphor of a frame.

A frame fulfills three core tasks:²⁷⁶ First, quite literally like a picture frame, a cognitive frame *focuses attention* to a certain piece of reality and brackets the rest. Second, it ties together what is contained within the frame, and by doing so constructs an *interpretation* of it at the exclusion of alternative interpretations, which would have been possible with a slightly different section of reality.²⁷⁷ And third, it opens up the option of a *transformation* of how a certain aspect of reality is perceived (in the sense of interpreted) in regard to the actor or in regard to other elements within or outside the frame.

Each individual continually employs an infinite number of everyday life frames (he also refers to them as “primary frameworks”) and adapts them depending on the situation, i.e. generates and modifies cognitive structures to produce meaning of context; this meaning attribution then guides individual action.

Building on this fundamental model, three aspects deserve special attention: First, primary frameworks do not evolve spontaneously, but are deeply rooted in culture and socialization. Second, although they are always specific to the individual, since they are the product of culture and social life, their basic content is usually shared among a collective; frames hence qualify as ‘collective schemata of interpretation’. Third, frames are not static, but are constantly modified in what Goffman calls “keying processes” (and what was later referred to

²⁷³ Goffman, *Frame Analysis*. He adapted the concept from the cultural anthropologist Gregory Bateson. Bateson had used the term ‘frame’ first in 1954 to denote the delineation of a situation of ‘play’ (in which certain social rules applied, according to him) from other situations. Gregory Bateson, “A Theory of Play and Fantasy”, first read publicly in 1954; published in: Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1972).

²⁷⁴ His well-established publications center around questions of everyday interactions and communicative acts therein.

²⁷⁵ Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 21.

²⁷⁶ For the following: David A. Snow, “Framing and Social Movements”, in *Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, 470–475, here: 470.

²⁷⁷ Snow calls this the “articulation mechanism”.

as ‘framing’); again, these occur in social settings and are thus open to the possibility of being influenced, intentionally or unintentionally.

It is these qualities which made the concept attractive for social movement scholars,²⁷⁸ since it helps to address the crucial question of how a shared interpretation of a given situation can be reached (as a precondition for collective action²⁷⁹). Looking back to the initial period of framing in social movement studies, David Snow formulated its added value and the rationale for integrating it as follows: “The framing perspective emerged not as an alternative to other perspectives on social movements, but to investigate and illuminate what these other perspectives glossed over, namely the matter of the production of mobilizing and countermobilizing meanings and ideas.”²⁸⁰ How this was operationalized in a model will be the topic of the next section.

3.1.2. *Collective Action Frames*

The birth of framing in social movement research can be dated back to 1982, when William Gamson, Bruce Fireman, and Stevan Rytina published “Encounters with Unjust Authority”.²⁸¹ Therein, they aimed to shed light on how people questioned the interpretation of circumstances under unjust rule by rejecting authoritative media representations in favor of

²⁷⁸ The concept of a cognitive frame and the process of framing have found wide resonance in numerous academic disciplines, particularly in communication and media research (see e.g. the works of Robert Entman, Shanto Iyengar, Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, and Dietram Scheufele) organizational psychology and economics (Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman), political discourse analysis (George Lakoff), rhetorical criticism (Jim A. Kuypers) and others. It would lead too far to discuss each strand; instead, I will include relevant aspects merely where they provide additional insights. One of these would be Robert Entman’s attempt to bring together the varying definitions of what he refers to as a “fractured paradigm”; although this attempt was made at an early stage of framing research, it adds a dimension I consider worth acknowledging besides Goffman’s and later Snow’s and Benford’s conceptualizations: moral evaluation. According to Entman “[f]raming essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. Typically frames diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe (...)”. Robert Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm”, *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (Autumn 1993): 51–58, here: 52. An alternative definition – which essentially is not too far from the above – understands a frame to be “a general, standardized, predefined structure (in the sense that it already belongs to the receiver’s knowledge of the world) which allows recognition of the world, and guides perception [...] allowing him/her to build defined expectations about what is to happen, that is to make sense of his/her reality”. What it adds is a stronger emphasis on the preexistence of the activated interpretation which I consider very relevant. Paolo Donati, “Political Discourse Analysis”, in *Studying Collective Action*, ed. Mario Diani and R. Eyerman (London: Sage, 1992), 136–167; Hank Johnston, “A Methodology for Frame Analysis: From Discourse to Cognitive Schemata”, in *Social Movements and Culture*, ed. Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 217–246.

²⁷⁹ Cf. Klandermans’ differentiation between ‘consensus mobilization’ and ‘action mobilization’ as two steps in the mobilization process.

²⁸⁰ David A. Snow, “Framing and Social Movements”, in *Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, 470–474, here: 474.

²⁸¹ William Gamson, Bruce Fireman, and Steven Rytina, *Encounters with Unjust Authority* (Homewood: Dorsey Press, 1982).

their own, socially mediated interpretation. One of the hypotheses was that a collective would more likely be able to ‘break the frame’ provided than an individual, based on careful weighing of a misrepresentation and subsequent ‘reframing’ as intermediate step towards collective action; they found it supported, although the precise mechanisms remained obscure.

On the basis of these findings about reframing with its active distancing and denouncing of the misrepresentation, Gamson in the following years developed his model of collective action frames.²⁸² His focus thereby lay on “how people negotiate meaning”, i.e. the social-psychological processes of how individuals become active participants in collective action from the point of view of potential movement members.²⁸³ As basic components of collective action frames he identifies three elements: injustice, agency, and identity.²⁸⁴

Injustice frames contain the grievances people are holding and give them sense through moral indignation. Moreover, it creates a “politicized consciousness” to challenge those who inflict harm or suffering on them; the ‘we’ hence counters the ‘them’.²⁸⁵ *Agency frames* foster people’s efficacy beliefs. They “empower people by defining them as potential agents of their own history. They suggest not merely that something can be done but that ‘we’ can do something”²⁸⁶ that leads to positive change. Lastly, *identity frames* or the identity component (which is already inherent in the other two frames or components²⁸⁷) constitute the collective that is affected by the grievances as the ‘we’ and sets it into opposition to a defined ‘they’ with allegedly different values and interests. Gamson specifically emphasizes the role of a clear adversary to blame; in case of its absence, “the potential target of collective action is

²⁸² William A. Gamson, “Political Discourse and Collective Action”, *International Journal of Social Movements, Conflict, and Change* 1 (1988): 219–244; Gamson, *Talking Politics*; William A. Gamson, “The Social Psychology of Collective Action”, in *Frontiers of Social Movement Theory*, ed. Aldon Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 53–76; William A. Gamson and Andre Modigliani, “Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach”, *American Journal of Sociology* 95 (1989): 1–37. Snow pointedly summarizes the differences between a simple “‘everyday frame’ and a collective action frame as follows: Collective actions frames differ “in terms of their primary mobilization functions: to mobilize or activate movement adherents so that they move, metaphorically, from the balcony to the barricades (action mobilization); to convert bystanders into adherents, thus broadening the movement’s base (consensus mobilization); and to neutralize or demobilize adversaries (counter-mobilization).” Snow, “Framing and Social Movements”, 471.

²⁸³ Hank Johnston and John A. Noakes, “Frames of Protest: A Road Map to a Perspective”, in *Frames of Protest: Social Movements and the Framing Perspective*, ed. Hank Johnston and John A. Noakes (Lanham: Rowman/Littlefield, 2005), 1–29.

²⁸⁴ Gamson, *Talking Politics*, 7. From here on I use simply ‘frame’ instead of ‘collective action frame’ for reasons of legibility and simplicity; yet, I refer to the concept of collective actions frames.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.; Fredrick C. Harris, “Specifying the Mechanism Linking Dissent to Action”, *Boston University Law Review* 89, no. 2 (April 2009):605–608; for more general considerations see: *Oppositional Consciousness: The Subjective Roots of Social Protest*, ed. Jane Mansbridge and Aldon Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Johnston/Noakes, “Frames of Protest”, 6.

²⁸⁶ Gamson, *Talking Politics*, 7.

²⁸⁷ As Dietrich Busse points out, frames “are recursive structures: they contain frames and are part of superordinate frames” [translated T.G.]. Dietrich Busse, *Frame-Semantik: Ein Kompendium* (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 819. Hence, a distinction between frames and frame components is contingent.

likely to remain an abstraction”²⁸⁸ which in turn leads to various challenges in regard to organizing and motivating this action.

For Gamson, injustice frames are what count to bring people to the streets, what ultimately triggers protest. And again, the perspective is stemming from the actors.

The second and even more influential early scholar of collective actions frames is David Snow, who developed his concept to a large extent together with his colleague Robert Benford. With a similar understanding of framing generally, they set off with the explicit aim to shed light on social movement recruiting and participation processes by developing an appropriate conceptual apparatus and theoretical orientation, something they had found lacking within the field at that point in time.²⁸⁹ Consequently, their focus lies on the interaction between social movement ‘entrepreneurs’ or leadership and those they sought to recruit.²⁹⁰

From this perspective, they conceive of collective action frames as an instrument²⁹¹ used by strategic actors (movement leaders) to a number of ends: to explain, condense, and connect situations and events, mobilize followers, gain the support of formerly neutral persons, and demobilize potential adversaries. In order to reach these aims, frames need to fulfill three main functions: *diagnostic frames* identify a situation as a social problem and point at those responsible for it; *prognostic frames* articulate a possible solution and strategies; and *motivational frames* serve as a “call to arms” and provide the necessary vocabulary of motive.²⁹² The quality of the frames regarding their mobilizing capacities thereby depends on how “clearly specified, richly developed, and well integrated” all three components are.²⁹³

²⁸⁸ Gamson, *Talking Politics*, 7.

²⁸⁹ David A. Snow, Robert D. Benford, Holly J. McCammon, Lyndi Hewitt, and Scott Fitzgerald, “The Emergence, Development, and Future of the Framing Perspective: 25+ Years since ‘Frame Alignment’”, *Mobilization* 19, no. 1 (2014): 23–45, here: 26.

²⁹⁰ Johnston/Noakes, “Frames of Protest”, 5.

²⁹¹ For a critique on the instrumentalist perspective see Desrosiers, “Reframing”; In an eye-opening passage of the reflective article by Snow, Benford and others 25 years after the initial publication, Benford states that they on purpose emphasized the strategic, instrumentalist aspect in that initial article in order to ‘align’ it with the predominant resources mobilizationa and structuralist approaches in the field and thus gain acceptance. Only in their later development of the approach did they highlight an interactionist, constructivist, and discursive interpretation of it. Snow et al., “Emergence”, 29f.

²⁹² Benford/Snow, “Framing Processes”. The term ‘vocabularies of motive’ refers to four impulses for action whose evocation Benford considers to be the core task of motivational framing, namely: severity, urgency, efficacy, and propriety. Robert D. Benford, “‘You Could Be the Hundredth Monkey’: Collective Action Frames and Vocabularies of Motive within the Nuclear Disarmament Movement”, *Sociological Quarterly* 34 (1993): 195–216. Motivational frames moreover need to create enough motivation too overcome fears as well as the ‘free-rider problem’ conceptualized by Olson, i.e. the question why the individual should participate in costly action since he/she will benefit of the goal in any case (for it poses a public good and is thus indivisible and nonexcludable). Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

²⁹³ Polletta/Ho, “Frames”.

This touches upon the two essential processes they see involved in mobilization: successful *frame development* and the successful dissemination to and adoption of frames among the targeted group (*frame resonance*). Both processes are interdependent in that unsuccessful frame resonance leads to constant reformulation and adaptation of frames. Moreover, *frame contestation* may occur at all stages, either internally or externally or both.²⁹⁴

Ultimately, the components of their model are not so different from Gamson's: The creation of a collective identity occurs in the 'Snow model' as well as in Gamson's,²⁹⁵ part of the motivational framing and, potentially, the prognostic framing as well is the invocation of agency; and, moreover, the diagnosis more often than not comprises an injustice component²⁹⁶. This notwithstanding, the vast majority of studies have employed Snow's model, given its superior operationalization. I, too, will follow this path to a high degree, yet include some additions in my own proposition; hence, Snow and Benford's concepts deserve a more detailed presentation and discussion. I will proceed along the three steps introduced above: frame development, frame resonance, and frame contestation.

Frame Development

As has been noted, framing collective action in the context of social movements is understood as a strategic²⁹⁷ and instrumental act. It is "signifying work or meaning construction", more precisely

An active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction. It is active in the sense that something is being done, and processual in the sense of a dynamic, evolving process. It entails agency in the sense that what is evolving is the work of social movement organizations or movement activists. And it is

²⁹⁴ Benford/Snow, "Framing Processes".

²⁹⁵ See also: Scott A. Hunt, Robert D. Benford, and David A. Snow, "Identity Fields: Framing Processes and the Social Construction of Movement Identities", in *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*, ed. Enrique Larana, Hank Johnston, and Joseph Gusfield (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1994), 185–208; David A. Snow and Peter B. Owens, "Social Movements and Social Inequality: Toward a More Balanced Assessment of the Relationship", in *Handbook of the Social Psychology of Inequality*, ed. Jane McLeod, Edward Lawler, and Michael Schwalbe (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 657–681, here: 667–671. Here Snow notes that collective identity as a result of the identity work rendered by individuals and groups in a social movement, is both constitutive of a successful collective action frame and itself functions like a frame; it is an "open subject of collective contestation and change over time".

²⁹⁶ Snow and Benford acknowledge that basically all political and economic movements contain an injustice frame, yet point out that others such as religious and self-help movement not necessarily do so. Benford/Snow, "Framing Processes"; Noakes/Johnston, "Frames of Protest", 6.

²⁹⁷ For a detailed discussion of the role of strategy and choices in social movements see: James M. Jaspers, "A Strategic Approach to Collective Action: Looking for Agency in Social-Movement Choices", *Mobilization* 9, no. 1 (1997): 1–16.

contentious in the sense that it involves the generation of interpretive frames that not only differ from existing ones but that may also challenge them.²⁹⁸

The agency of ‘framers’, however, not only is challenged by contesters from within the movement as well as external ones (as will be treated below); it is furthermore dependent on and constrained by the cultural and discursive background they act in.²⁹⁹ This fact has two sides to it: First, it sets limits to the cognitive range of the framers. As Marie Desrosiers puts it: “Frames are never produced *ex nihilo*. Framers have social [and cultural] backgrounds that shape their reasoning and limit their ability to think ‘outside the box’ when developing frames.”³⁰⁰ Second, even more importantly, since the frames they construct need to resonate with the audience they target, they must be well-connected or aligned to their “cultural tool kit”³⁰¹ of “meanings, beliefs, ideologies, practices, values, myths, narratives, and the like”. Not only is it the “resource base” new frames are created from; they are moreover “the lens through which [they] are interpreted and evaluated”.³⁰²

Hence, a proper ‘fit’ is essential for the success of the first step³⁰³ in the process, i.e. frame development.

How to achieve this fit through *frame alignment* was the first issue Snow et al. extensively discussed in a paper (1986).³⁰⁴ With the aim of communicating their frames to an audience of potential constituents, framers need to choose from the available cultural tool kit and bind together elements (objects, events, situations, experiences, and sequences of action)³⁰⁵ in a manner that provides a new perspective on them.³⁰⁶ Moreover, they need to amplify the

²⁹⁸ Benford/Snow, “Framing Processes”, 614.

²⁹⁹ And, in turn, they impact on and change that cultural background. Ibid., 629. On the dependence on the cultural and (discourse) structural background see also: Snow, “Framing and Social Movements”, 474. Highlighted in: Goodwin/Jasper, “Caught in a winding, snarling vine”; they furthermore criticize what they perceive as ‘reification’ of culture in framing theory (p. 48); James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

³⁰⁰ Desrosiers, “Reframing”, 4.

³⁰¹ Swidler, “Culture in Action”, cited in: Benford/Snow, “Framing Processes”, 629.

³⁰² Ibid. Kurzman similarly holds that “meaning-making refers to collective contest over interpretation. Institutions, repertoires, and rituals offer a set of ready-made – though always contradictory – interpretations that allow people to assimilate information into established categories of understanding.” Again, the point of the inherent contradiction highlights the contentiousness and dynamic of the process. Kurzman, “Meaning-Making”, 6.

³⁰³ The term ‘step’ shall not indicate linearity in the process. Rather than a sequence of framing tasks, all elements constitute constantly fluid and adaptable elements in relation to changing circumstances and framers’ strategies.

³⁰⁴ Snow et al., “Frame Alignment”. The criteria for evaluating the fit (linked to assessing frame resonance) have been at the core of their second core publication two years later: David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, “Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization”, *International Social Movement Research* 1 (1988): 197–217.

³⁰⁵ See also: Snow/Benford, “Ideology”.

³⁰⁶ Benford/Snow, “Framing Processes”, 614. Though discourses do not appear in this model explicitly, they should be seen as intermediate between culture and frames, for they are located in between. A further discussion of discourses in this regard follows below.

frames, i.e. specifically accentuate certain core elements of their interpretive scheme; this refers especially to values as well as beliefs³⁰⁷ of their audience and is in practice often done in captive formulations or visuals, e.g. through slogans, symbols, images or else.

The ultimate aim of these discursive and strategic processes is frame transformation (what Goffman termed ('keying'))³⁰⁸: a redefinition of primary frameworks or prior frames "in terms of another framework, such that they are now 'seen by the participants to be something quite else'"³⁰⁹, involving a change in urgency and seriousness of the issue "such that what was previously seen as an unfortunate but tolerable situation is now defined as inexcusable, unjust, or immoral, thus connoting the adoption of an injustice frame or variation thereof."³¹⁰

The content of the frames needs to comprise a clear diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational component. Their formulation is the second important step.

Two aspects that impact the development of these dimensions require attention in this regard: First, competition with other movements in the field, and second, change over time. As Benford/Snow note, all framing actions take place in a "multi-organizational field"³¹¹, in which the various movements need to distinguish themselves to attract adherents. While diagnostic frames are frequently similar, the prognoses (i.e. the answer to the question: what shall we do?) usually vary, not only in regard to the precise measures and the extent to which they are employed, but also concerning the radicalness they exhibit. This directly connects to the second consideration of change over time. Social movements are in constant interaction with the context they operate in and dynamically adapt to it through the modification of their strategies and – within limitations – their frames. In doing so, framers need to maneuver in between intentions, contextual opportunities and constraints, and the resonance they create

³⁰⁷ They subsume: beliefs about the seriousness of the grievance or issue; whom to blame; the probability of change and efficacy of collective action; the necessity and propriety of action; and stereotypes about the antagonists. Snow et al., "Alignment Processes", 470. See also for numerous references on these issues. The assumption is that a share of the audience already shares these values and beliefs, yet has so far not been mobilized; once they are, they furthermore bring in their own networks and thus expand the potentially mobilizable target group.

³⁰⁸ Frame transformation can be understood as the sum of frame bridging, i.e. connecting previously unconnected elements, frame amplification (as described), and frame extension, i.e. the extension of a movement's boundaries to encompass incidental elements, which are highly salient to the target audience, so that they get attracted (for instance music styles). Snow et al., "Alignment Processes", 472ff. Noakes/Johnston even note a lack of analytical benefit from a distinction of neither frame bridging/frame amplification/frame transformation nor (in regard to resonance) empirical credibility/experiential commensurability; empirical research has found no support for it. Noakes/Johnston, "Frames of Protest", 12; with reference to: Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, "Introduction: Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Framing Processes – Toward a Synthetic, Comparative Perspective on Social Movements", in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, ed. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1–20.

³⁰⁹ Snow et al., "Alignment Processes", 474, with reference to Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 45.

³¹⁰ Snow et al., "Alignment Processes", 474, with reference to Gamson/Fireman/Rytina, *Encounters*.

³¹¹ Benford/Snow, "Framing Processes", 617.

among their constituents (see below). The radicalization of movements provides a telling example. While in the beginning a movement might rather activate existing narratives and its frame merely be marginally different from widespread frames in the field, it can – through more or less notable modifications – transform them and over time evolve into highly distinct, radical, and potentially violent movement. This may even include a distinct kind of language or ‘jargon’ which fosters internal cohesion the more it distances itself from others and from its environment (a consequence of radicalization). Donatella Della Porta, for instance, provides such an example for violent leftist groups in Italy in the 1970s.³¹² She proposes the existence of recursive processes between language and action which spiral ever further into violence.

These considerations lead to the next dimension of successful framing: the question of when frames resonate with the target audience.

Frame Resonance

The success of any framing crucially depends on whether or not it is able to create resonance among its (potential and already active) adherents. Besides an adequate distribution (including reach, accessibility, duration, and cultural appropriateness), the ‘quality’ of frames is decisive.

For Snow and Benford, the overarching criteria for successful frame resonance are the production of credibility and salience. Both of these evaluation criteria are again subdivided into three dimensions. Credibility thereby consists of: (a) the *consistency* of articulated values, demands, and actions; (b) *empirical credibility*, i.e. apparent correspondence between the frame and real events; and (c) the *perceived credibility of frame articulators*, often based on prestige, knowledge, and traditional legitimacy. *Salience* on the other hand is created by: (a) the *centrality* of the issues, values, and norms articulated in the frame within the life of the target group; (b) *experiential commensurability*, meaning the closeness to everyday experiences of the target group; and (c) *narrative fidelity/cultural resonance* to myths in an appropriate language.

Noakes and Johnston have – considering the partially low degree of distinction between the categories in empirical research as noted above – collapsed these criteria into three core qualities they consider most relevant: *cultural compatibility* between frames and the cultural ‘tool kit’; “internal *consistency* of the movement’s beliefs, ideology, claims, and actions”; and *relevance* “in the lives of the targeted audience”.³¹³

³¹² Donatella Della Porta, “Clandestine Political Violence: A Global Comparison”, presentation within the Collaborative Research Centre 923 “Threatened Order. Societies under Stress”, Tuebingen (Germany), May 17, 2013.

³¹³ Noakes/Johnston, “Frames of Protest”, 15.

While I completely agree with this assessment, I will in my own analysis seek to highlight Snow and Benford's distinctions as far as possible in order to provide a higher degree of differentiation; if this should not be feasible due to the data, I will refer to these more general terms.

Similar to what has been acknowledged in regard to change over time and radicalization, the dimension of 'cultural compatibility' requires attention as to the degree of variation it contains. Tarrow³¹⁴ convincingly argues that – notwithstanding the need for this kind of compatibility – movement frames still have to contain new interpretations in order to have any effect, “[s]ince popular culture mostly contains interpretations of situations synchronized to support the status quo”³¹⁵. Hence, frames must differ in order to push followers over the edge and advance oppositional action.

One specific version of frame deserves mentioning, with considerations for both frame development and resonance: the so-called '*master frame*'. Empirical research has identified periods in which certain overarching frames are very successfully employed by a variety of movements and diffuse to others, thereby expanding their range of implication. These 'overarching frames', characterized by a wider scope and influence than regular frames, are referred to as 'master frames'.³¹⁶ Examples are, for instance, the equal rights and opportunities frame during the civil rights movement which was subsequently adopted by a variety of marginalized sectors of society; Gamson's injustice frames can be categorized as master frames, as can justice, oppositional, hegemonic, imperial, anti-imperial, and market choice frames.³¹⁷

Not only do strategic framers take into consideration the existence of master frames and decide on connecting to them or not;³¹⁸ moreover, the existence of master frames has an influence on the audience: Individuals might already have a clear stance towards a predominant master frame and might resultingly be more or less likely to open up to a new

³¹⁴ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

³¹⁵ Noakes/Johnston, "Frames of Protest", 9.

³¹⁶ David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest", in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 133–155. See also: William J. Swart, "The League of Nations and the Irish Question: Master Frames, Cycles of Protest, and 'Master Frame Alignment'", *Sociology Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (1995) 465–481.

³¹⁷ Robert D. Benford, "Master Frame", in *Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, 723f. He underlines that the concept was developed as an alternative explanation to the issue of 'cycles of protest'. The later have been defined by Sidney Tarrow as "a phase of heightened conflict across the social system with rapid diffusion of collective action" and a rapid pace of innovation therein. Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 199.

³¹⁸ They will in consequence encounter either opportunities or constraints or both on this basis.

movement's frames.³¹⁹ These are significant contextual conditions which require active calculation.

Frame Contestation

Contestation has appeared repeatedly in the passing³²⁰ and finally receives its share in coherent treatment. Frame contestation refers to the assertion of frames against internal and external resistance and competition or a possible incoherence or contradiction between frames and events. Hence, the 'arena of contestation' (a term accounting for its dynamic multidimensional character) consists of three levels, each with its particular challenges.

Internal contestation challenges the cohesion of a movement. Although these are common issues, since framing claims (diagnosis, prognosis, motivation) "are rarely unanimous within a movement"³²¹, members and leaders need to take care of differences in opinion in order to prevent a drifting apart and factionalization – which ultimately leads to a weakening of the movement which can be ruinous.

External resistance and competition predominantly points to other, similar or oppositional movements, the state, and the media apparatus³²² with whom a movement might intentionally, or out of necessity and pressure, engage in contestation for its survival and position. Each party involved thereby employs its own framing in competition to, or directly targeting, its adversary. The media partly forms a personal force and can partly be utilized by parties, especially the state (the more so in authoritarian regimes).³²³

Lastly, incoherence or contradiction between frames and events. Since this aspect is necessarily contingent, movements can merely react to them, particularly to changes, and adapt their framing as far as possible to (re)create credibility and salience. Alterations in political and discursive opportunity structures likewise fall into this category.³²⁴

³¹⁹ Contingencies include membership in other movements with close demands (i.e. increased competition for adherents); prior memberships with bad experiences (i.e. increased hurdles to recruitment); or, on the positive side, existing networks to other movements in the field, which might lower the cost of recruitment.

³²⁰ Two brief quotes by Kurzman highlight the ubiquity and constitutive character of contestation in the realm of social movements. He states that: "All action involves meaning-making, just as all action involves contention." And much in the same vein: "Social movement activists make meaning, challenging established meanings." Kurzman, "Meaning-Making", 6.

³²¹ Snow/Owens, "Social Movements and Social Inequality", 662; see also: Robert D. Benford, "Frame Disputes within the Nuclear Disarmament Movement", *Social Forces* 71, no. 3 (1993): 677–701.

³²² The works of Entman are insightful as to the role of the media.

³²³ For a pointed discussion of the role of the media see: Noakes/Johnston, "Frames of Protest", 19. Moreover: Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 119.

³²⁴ See Noakes/Johnston, "Frames of Protest", 20; among others they propose that framing and opportunity structure recursively influence each other.

3.1.3. Critique and Extensions

Snow and Benford's approach has received extensive praise, critical discussion, and demands for further elaboration. Critique aims at different directions. To name but the most important:³²⁵ (1) There were repeated calls to further clarify the distinction between frames and other forms of discursive structures such as discourses, ideologies, and narratives. (2) A number of scholars conceive of the approach as too static and elite-centered and propose a more decentered perspective, which leaves room for multivocality. (3) Critical voices from within demand more diachronic research with multiple cases, the inclusion of 'failed framing', stronger causal claims instead of mere description, and lastly, a better integration of framing with other theoretical perspectives, namely resources mobilization, political opportunity, and cultural perspectives. (4) The critical observation that "resonance is often still conflated with (successful) outcomes" is paired with calls for improved operationalization of resonance.

Distinguishing Discourse, Ideology, Narrative, and Framing

Social movement theory has dealt with the question of how frames and discourses relate in a variety of ways and from a variety of perspectives – at times without a clear definition about what they understand by the multi-layered and difficult to grasp concept of discourse (and its contentious brother 'discourses'). Results often comprise of very general delineations: "Whereas a *frame* can be seen as a delimited ideational package, *discourse* is the sum total of talk produced by an organization, institution, or society at a given point in time."³²⁶ "Discourses have a greater diversity of idea elements, more conflict, and more inconsistencies than frames."³²⁷

A more fruitful perspective has been offered recently by Baumgarten and Ullrich³²⁸, who draw on Foucault's concepts of power, discourse, and governmentality to explore the interrelatedness of frames/framing within a social movement and discourse.

³²⁵ Given the inherent meta-epistemological implications whose discussion would lead too far, I do not treat obvious critiques from proponents of structural approaches who criticize the approach on the basis of not being structural enough.

³²⁶ Hank Johnston, "Verification and Proof in Frame and Discourse Analysis", in *Methods of Social Movement Research*, ed. Bert Klandermans and Suzanne Staggenborg, 62–91; see also: Hank Johnston, "A Methodology for Frame Analysis: From Discourse to Cognitive Schemata", in: *Social Movements and Culture*, ed. Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 217–246.

³²⁷ Myra Ferree and David Merrill, "Hot Movements, Cold Cognition: Thinking about Social Movements in Gendered Frames", in *Contemporary Sociology* 29 (2000): 454–462.

³²⁸ Britta Baumgarten and Peter Ullrich, "Discourse, Power and Governmentality. Social Movement Research with and beyond Foucault", Discussion Paper, *Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB)*, April 2012.

(1) Framing occurs *within* a discourse: Discourses regulate knowledge production and by doing so they define the boundaries of what can be communicated (and even thought of) within a society at a given time. It thus shapes the context in which all framing occurs and at the same time enables and restricts it.

(2) Frames *contribute* to discourses and *influence* them: Frame resonance not only depends on the context, but also on the arena and role of the framers. Using their agency, framers can either contribute to the discourse by reinforcing the existing issues and concepts, or influence its boundaries by shifting its focus, contesting certain areas or bringing up new issues and concepts.

(3) Social movements *contain* their own discourses that enable and restrict framing: Over time, social “movements develop their own specific discursive mechanisms that enable, but also restrict, framing of actors *within* the movement” [emphasis TG]. The product – frames – are thus not only the expression of strategic instrumental action, but also of the identity and internal system of knowledge of the movements’ members.

(4) Actors (framers as well as targeted individuals) are *shaped by* discourses: Discourses (and other practices of power regulation) shape the subjectivity of the individual. They thus affect the mobilizational potential of social movements.

(5) Social movements are the *products* of discourse: Resulting from 3 and 4: By enabling framing as the offspring of a given social situation that is itself shaped by power relations and the related discourses³²⁹, those discourses indirectly produce the social movements through its members and favorable circumstances.

This perspective provides a few new aspects in regard to framing and frame analysis: Where the framing approach is often understood to emphasize the strategic rational actor and his agency, Foucault’s discourse theory brings in the “cultural context” in a theoretical way: as structure. This structure, however, is not deterministic, but constructed and shapeable. The existence of structure in this sense is also implicated within the framing approach by the need for frame alignment and cultural resonance.³³⁰ Both processes reach beyond the autonomous actor and make it necessary for him to relate to existing structures.³³¹ I thus consider it helpful to include the outlined aspects as a fruitful contribution to approaching frame alignment and cultural resonance.

³²⁹ According to Foucault, discourses are based on power relations and produce power relations.

³³⁰ It is quite explicit in those two processes. One could also argue that it is a precondition or context to most of the other points as well.

³³¹ Desrosiers (2012) makes a similar argument: “Framing theory, as I adopt it, is therefore a perspective that succeeds in bridging the instrumentalist and social-psychological divide on the issue of communication. Framing proposes to account for a purposeful agent located amidst, yet engaging with, social structures. In other words, framing captures the middle ground between strategic and interpretive considerations.”

The delineation between frames and ideology unfortunately has not yet reached this level of sophistication. There is agreement about the fact that ideology refers to a more “encompassing systems of belief” and are “more complex and less specific” than frames.³³² However, according to the well-established definition put forward by Swidler, it shares a number of traits with its ‘cousin’: “a highly articulated, self-conscious belief and ritual system, aspiring to offer a unified answer to problems of social action”.³³³ From the perspective of an analysis of research employing the concept, a more practice-oriented view potentially even better grasps the distinction: ideology is a more static and descriptive system of beliefs etc. opposed to the highly agentic frames (as Snow et al. want them to be conceived) and it is usually used in too monolithic a mode.³³⁴ For now, this shall suffice as a working definition.

In regard to an understanding of narrative I am in this specific context following Polletta³³⁵ in plainly using it interchangeably with ‘story’ and ‘cultural myth’, and locating it within the cultural background of a society or identity group. In distinction to the above presented discursive forms, its core definition does not contain any (implicit or explicit) calls to action, i.e. its function differs. Yet, it is widely employed in alignment processes and hence comes to play a notable role in recruitment due to the strong cultural resonance which can be achieved through it.

Decenteredness and Multivocality

Several critics have elaborated on what they perceive as (a) too static an understanding of frames, (b) too unified and homogenous a treatment of movements, and (c) too strong an elite-focus concerning framing processes. Ultimately, these critical points are all related.

Marc Steinberg, one of the early proponents of a more discursive perspective, thus criticizes what he considers an understanding of frames as relatively stable systems of meaning, building on a coherent “belief system”:

The representation of a frame as a discrete text, however, is a reification of disparate and discontinuous discourse processes. Often such work depicts a particular configuration of

³³² Lorenzo Bosi, Chares Demetriou, and Stefan Malthaner, “A Contentious Politics Approach to the Explanation of Radicalization”, in *Dynamics of Political Violence: A Process-Oriented Perspective on Radicalization and the Escalation of Political Conflict* (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 14.

³³³ Swidler, “Culture in Action”, 279.

³³⁴ Snow and Byrd moreover denounce that the treatment of ideology in the literature “tends not only to ignore ideological variation, but also glosses over the kind of discursive work required to articulate and elaborate the array of possible links between ideas, events, and action.” Snow/Byrd, “Ideology”. See also: Colin J. Beck, “Ideology”, *Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, 586–590.

³³⁵ Francesca Polletta, “Contending Stories: Narrative in Social Movements”, *Qualitative Sociology* 21, no. 4 (December 1998): 419–446.

statements, symbols, and meanings as emblematic of underlying and enduring collective understandings produced in protracted ideological struggles.³³⁶

He counters this by suggesting the importance of what he calls “discursive repertoires” for the analysis of framing processes. According to Steinberg, the social production of meaning “is essentially dialectic, dynamic, and riven with contradictions [...] within specific historical situations”.³³⁷ In opposition to a “belief system”, he emphasizes disorderliness or fuzziness because the process of meaning structuration is done in use, interactionally, creating “action-specific discursive repertoires”³³⁸ on which all kinds of actors can draw, regardless of any kind of elite status or not.

Similar to Steinberg’s dialogic approach, Marek Payerhin, and Cyrus Ernesto Zirakzadeh³³⁹ reckon movements to be built around internal discord, multivocality, and decentralization. Despite this, however, they also acknowledge that the classical framing approach with its emphasis on movement elites and shared perceptions contain a kernel of truth considering that leaders would always strive to contain disparate voices and opinions. They are seeking for a middle ground between what they call a sole framing approach – accentuating coherence and stability – versus a sole negotiation approach perspective, stressing fragmentation and flux.

In their critique, Dorothy Holland, Gretchen Fox, and Vinci Daro focus on the process of movement identity formation, which they conceive as difficult and contentious “amidst multiple discourses and practices”³⁴⁰. Against a concentration on leaders and their strategies, which they consider as untenable assignment of ontological coherence, as reification, they make a case for the situatedness of movement actors as well as the identities, discourses and practices they cultivate. Movement identity formation, according to them, is a continuous, fundamentally dialogic and contentious process. “A decentered approach to social movements”, they argue, “clarifies some of this complexity by recognizing that versions of the collective identity of a movement are being formed in multiple sites (e.g., at protests, in the building of alliances, through media work) and places (e.g., different locales, different communities, any headquarters that the movement may have).”³⁴¹ Cultural artifacts have a special importance in the production of collective identity, as they among others can show

³³⁶ Marc Steinberg, “Tilting the Frame: Considerations on Collective Action Framing from a Discursive Turn”, *Theory and Society* 27: 845–872, 1998, here: 848.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 851f.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 856.

³³⁹ Marek Payerhin and Cyrus Ernesto Zirakzadeh, “On Movement Frames and Negotiated Identities: The Case of Poland’s First Solidarity Congress”, *Social Movement Studies* 5, no. 2 (September 2006): 91–115.

³⁴⁰ Dorothy Holland, Gretchen Fox and Vinci Daro, “Social Movement and Collective Identity: A Decentered, Dialogic View”, *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (2008): 95–126, here: 95.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 98f.

through three ethnographic case studies. With Francesca Polletta³⁴² they caution against too strong an emphasis of strategic options and a perception of identity solely as easily mobilized resources and rather put forward how (cultural) practices and artifacts influence movement formation and re-formation processes.

I agree with the various points these critiques³⁴³ make and strive to illustrate the aspects they raise – especially multivocality, contentiousness, decenteredness, and situatedness – in detail in the case studies.

In regard to the critical points under (3) and (4), I hope to provide a minor contribution myself. My cases contain not only ‘failed framing’; the model I propose moreover aims to combine theoretical elements from both different disciplines (civil war studies and social movement research) and from structural approaches besides framing alone. In addition, I aim to trace resonance among the audience and suggest a conceptualization for it. In the following I seek to introduce my model to this effect.

3.2. Developing a Framing Model for the Mobilization for Violence

Until now, armed conflict research and civil war studies have each constituted distinct areas of specialization and theory development, and have barely influenced each other despite a number of parallels. Admittedly, foci differ: While social movement studies overwhelmingly deal with political contention in industrialized countries, which rarely involves continued intense outbreak of violence, this violence is the main depended variable for scholars of armed conflict, which in turn tends to occur in non-industrialized countries. The few cases in which the theoretical viewpoints of the two disciplines *were* brought together, this occurred under the auspices of structural approaches, i.e. resource mobilization or political opportunity structures.³⁴⁴ The framing approach has so far not found systematic entry into civil war studies.³⁴⁵

³⁴² Francesca Polletta, “Culture In and Outside Institutions”, *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change* 25, 2004, 161–183.

³⁴³ Similar points are also raised by: Charles Kurzman, “The Poststructuralist Consensus in Social Movement Theory”, in *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Meaning, and Emotion*, ed. Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper (Lanham, MD: Roman and Littlefield, 2004), 111–120; M. Hakan Yavuz, “Opportunity Spaces, Identity, and Islamic Meaning in Turkey”, in: *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 270–288; Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

³⁴⁴ E.g. Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism*; Mohammed M. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World* (Boulder et al.: Lynne Rienner, 2003). Notable exceptions are: De Juan/Hasenclever,

With the following model, I present a suggestion on how to integrate the analytical strengths of both disciplines in order to increase our understanding of the (micro-)mechanisms of conflict escalation.

3.2.1. Core Assumptions

First, both social movement protest and civil war are forms of contentious politics; they form a continuum. Therefore, they can (and should) be scrutinized with the same conceptual and analytical instrumentarium.

Second, as I have presented, both disciplines look back on comparable conceptual and theoretical trajectories and have highlighted similar structural factors, i.e. grievances, resources, and opportunities, in addition to the dimension of identity. Extensive empirical research has demonstrated the explanatory value of structural approaches; on the other hand, however, it has likewise shed light on existent deficits they exhibit. Acknowledging both, I argue that the most fertile development should be an exploration of an integrative approach bridging the disciplines and exploiting their respective theoretical insights. Therein, structural factors should be complemented by ideational – framing – processes.

Third, a qualitative research design is indispensable within this framework.

Fourth, the approach and the model will be incongruous with a demand for strict parsimony, for they include a multiplicity of factors to account for. The benefit of increased comprehension of the mechanisms involved, however, clearly outweighs this slight deficit. After all, armed conflict is complex.

3.2.2. Operationalization

Whatever their aims or goals, the grievances, beliefs, and motivations that mobilize individuals to engage in collective action on the basis of perceived inequality are never mechanistically derived from existing social conditions. Inequality does not exist apart from the comparison processes that create an apprehension of it and the claims-making and framing processes that construct injustice frames around these perceptions. Moreover, perceptions of inequality are much more widespread than the mobilizing grievances that impel individuals to engage in collective action. Because of this, collective actors must engage in various forms of meaning and identity work, and the

“Framing religiöser Konflikte”; Emmanuel Karagiannis, “Hizballah as a Social Movement Organization: A Framing Approach”, *Mediterranean Politics* 14, no. 3 (November 2009): 365–383.

³⁴⁵ See: Tanja Granzow, Andreas Hasenclever, and Jan Sändig, “Introduction: Framing Political Violence – A Micro-Approach to Civil War Studies”, *Civil Wars* 17 (3) [forthcoming]. Another recent theoretical exploration stems from Desrosiers, “Reframing”.

generation of incentives for action, in order for social movement mobilization to become possible.³⁴⁶

In this passage, Snow and Owens broach the core of the research question about how frames mediate between structural and identity factors and the mobilization for collective action – whichever form the latter takes. Moreover, they highlight the numerous elements involved, whose relation to each other needs specification: goals, grievances, beliefs, motivation, mobilization, collective action, perception, inequality, social conditions, claims-making, framing processes, injustice frames, construction, meaning and identity work, incentives, social movement (mobilization). To systematize them and additional relevant components in a sound model is the ultimate aim of this dissertation.

In line with what I presented in the introduction and the previous chapters, I assume that framing processes, consisting of strategic actors, (a) collective action frame(s), and an audience, mediate between structural factors and collective action. The relationship between the elements is thereby reciprocal.



Figure 3.1.: *Integrated Framing Model*

In other words, I propose that the mechanism is constituted by (a) the given structural conditions, which affect the (primary framework of) (b) strategic actors, who, based on their own perceptions and strategic interests and goals, elaborate and promote (c) a collective action frame which influences (or at least seeks to influence) (d) the audience to take (e) collective action in the form delineated by the frame. In this, it is important to point out that through the successful resonance of the frame among the audience, or the lack thereof, the audience in turn impacts on the frame or, more precisely, it affects the way in which the strategic actors modify and re-adapt the frame in the dynamic process of frame alignment in order to achieve greater resonance.

For the purpose of elucidating the ‘black box’ in between structural factors and collective action, i.e. gather evidence to support my model, I will employ a comparative case study research design with two most-similar cases; under most similar structural conditions they

³⁴⁶ David A. Snow and Peter B. Owens, “Social Movements and Social Inequality: Toward a More Balanced Assessment of the Relationship”, in *Handbook of the Social Psychology of Inequality*, ed. Jane McLeod, Edward Lawler, and Michael Schwalbe (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 657–681, here: 677f.

vary in their collective action: in one case we see armed conflict while in the other merely nonviolent protest. I claim that the variation lies in the framing processes.

To demonstrate this, I will successively present and analyze each of the involved factors.

In lieu of the specified drawing of frames on the cultural and discursive background, I will in a first step provide the relevant details. These include the general setting and social groups as well as an outline of recent history, because frames resort to discourses, narratives, and myths, and these are historically embedded; besides, historical experiences have shaped the (collective) identity of all parties involved.³⁴⁷ Additionally, I will draw attention to discourses, which play a role within the respective movements' framing.

The second step comprises the introduction of the social movement actors, i.e. movements, origins, leadership (until disproven, I take an elite-centered perspective on framing), and collective action over time. This forms the foundation for the explication of the 'strategic actors' element of the model as well as the interdependent elements of audience and collective action. Together with the background, this moreover characterizes the range of opportunities and constraints the movement and its leadership (i.e. the prime framers) face.

Step three consists of the testing of the explanatory power of the presented structural approaches. It will be conducted in an absolute, as well as in a comparative mode to uncover (a) if there is a risk for the escalation of violence or not according to the logic employed, and (b) in how far these risks vary between the two cases. The results will reveal two things: First, the deficits of existing approaches in explaining what we observe. And second, they identify those structural factors, which do have an impact in each case and thus form part of the model.

The fourth step is dedicated to the framing analysis according to Snow and Benford's model: On the basis of my sources (see 3.2.4.) I will identify the framing elements in the movements' communication, explore the resonance among constituents as well as the general audience (i.e. non-followers within the respective identity groups and the wider Yemeni population including potential opponents), and shed light on processes of contestation. The time span under investigation thereby includes the period from the emergence of organized opposition (i.e. movement formation) until March 2015, however, with limited attention to the post-conflict phase for the violent case. This diachronic perspective enables the identification of phases of and shifts in framing over time, as requested by critics of a static model.

³⁴⁷ See Fernand Braudel's seminal elaborations in this regard. Fernand Braudel, "La longue durée", *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 13, no. 4 (October–December 1958): 725–753.

However, due to the dependency of analyzed data on availability, such a periodization can merely be tentative; nevertheless, it to a certain degree brings to the open the dynamics of continuous frame adaption in response to feedback and interaction with both audience and contesters and to changing context.

I conceptualize the frame dimensions according to Snow and Benford, whereby – as previously noted – a clear distinction between very close concepts is not feasible in all cases. This specifically applies in regard to a strict delineation of the motivational component; it is frequently implicit in the other two dimensions, yet will be noted twice in its double function.

From a core framing corpus, which will be identified in the basis of its prominence (i.e. reach) and comprehensive positioning/treatment of the core issues (problem/solution/path to solution), the main issues (frame elements) and lines of argument will be identified through qualitative text analysis (see 3.2.5.). They will be assigned to the diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational component. All other sources are subsequently analyzed in terms of these elements: In which mode are they distributed? How are they embedded into varying contexts? How are they taken up, referred to, appraised? Who does so? With which frequency? In which contexts? How are articulators judged? How do these processes vary over time? Are there discrepancies and contradictions? On the basis of these overarching questions, other notable aspects will be adopted inductively.

Frame distribution is traced through various kinds of media (print, audio, video, images). Limitations persist due the impossibility of tracing immediate interpersonal communication and new media. There is evidence that, particularly, messenger services played a significant role in distribution and mobilization, yet it remains untraceable.

Contestation is incorporated in two ways: Internal contestation is present by highlighting apparent intra-movement tensions or conflicts and presenting alternative framing attempts, if applicable. They may contain either a diverging diagnosis or prognosis or both. The same in principle applies to external contestation; contesting frames and framing are treated in the identical mode as movement frames. Yet, they oftentimes exhibit specifically offensive and defaming language against the respective movement, which will be particularly noted. Additionally, false accusations are often rampant in this context. Consistent with constructivist premises, I will not – neither for movement frames nor for contesting ones – assess or judge the validity of claims as such; in highly obvious cases of inconsistency or stark discrepancy with reality, however, it will be a criterion as to the credibility of a frame.

The analytical conceptualization and analysis of resonance is the greatest challenge in frame analysis. Since frames are cognitive schemata, i.e. occurring as mental processes in

individuals, they cannot be recorded. Their existence and shape can merely be deduced by other means. It would be tautological to infer resonance phenomenologically from movement participation. The best alternative hence consists in the analysis of people's statements about their thoughts and feelings on the contested issue.

With this come a number of inevitable biases: What people say with a high probability does not accord with what they think. Disparity may be the result of mere articulation (i.e. how to express thoughts); strategic decisions in regard to social acceptability in their context or by the interviewer or else; employed instrumentally with a hidden agency; or influenced by regular processes of ex-post interpretation and memory (a factor which tends to amplify with temporal distance to the period of reference). These biases need to be acknowledged and are met with a critical stance towards all sources and their assessment. Non-resonance even raises the predicament for the necessity to establish that a person was either not exposed to a frame or exposed it, but without resonance. The first is highly difficult to substantiate, the latter functions as described for resonance but accounts for opposition.

Contingency is a prevalent condition in all these processes. This fact can merely be noted, but not be analytically approached in any satisfying mode.

Step five involves the case comparison³⁴⁸ in order to clarify findings according to the research questions: First, why and how do strategic movement actors construct particular frames rather than others? And second, why do constituents take corresponding action or not? The comparison treats the issues of structural factors, framers, frames, audience, framing context, contestation, and collective action based on the preceding chapters. The findings will disclose their relation, particularly trajectories, frame shifts, and the correlation (or lack thereof) between frames and actions.

Finally, the sixth and last step presents the discussion of the theoretical implications, the review of the proposed model and its value, and an outlook on possible areas of further investigation.

3.2.3. Criteria for Case Selection

The search for cases aimed at 'identity groups living under comparable conditions of state repression, marginalization or state collapse and perceiving a threat against their collective'. Cases have been selected with a foremost focus on their suitability for a two-case most-similar case design. Regional preference was thereby given to the Middle East due to the

³⁴⁸ For the guiding principles on which the comparison draws see: Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), particularly 67–72.

author's regional and language specialization and, besides, a lack of empirical studies on movements and armed conflict on the region at the time of selection.³⁴⁹

Further criteria for the two cases were: Approximately same scope of movement (size, duration), situated in recent history (criterion concerning data availability), synchronic and diachronic variation in reaction to the perceived threat under otherwise comparable structural conditions of strain.

The Zaydi Houthi rebels and the Peaceful Southern Movement in Yemen qualified as best and virtually exclusive cases within this framework. While intra-state comparison was not among the original criteria, it assisted the stabilization of comparable structural conditions.

The fact that the Houthis constitute a religious identity group does not affect the study; as I elaborated earlier, I do not consider religion as a mobilizational category *sui generis* with specific dimensions or mechanisms, and hence do not distinguish between groups on these grounds. Zaydism is treated as a common cultural background with a variety of specific discourses; Houthi framing heavily utilizes religious language as another group might use a different kind of language. The analytical framework remains the same.

The Peaceful Southern Movement, on the other hand, demands independence and thereby qualifies as a self-determination movement. The literature on conflicts over self-determination holds that this group of conflicts is particularly likely to trigger an escalation of violence leading to civil war.³⁵⁰ This is not the case in Yemen, which thus makes for an interesting case. As for the Houthis and religion, I again hold that self-determination merely marks the discursive field to which framers connect but does not constitute a category of movement *sui generis*.³⁵¹

Although the characters of the two movements appear to differ in that the Houthis appear to more like an organization while the Hirak is an umbrella for numerous organization, a comparison is nevertheless justified: As will be elucidated, the Houthis are hardly a coherent and unified actor, but likewise comprise a number of loose branches; they are thus different only in degree, not in quality.

³⁴⁹ This situation evidently changed in the wake of the so-called 'Arab Spring' of 2011.

³⁵⁰ For an overview see: Monica Duffy Toft, "Self-Determination, Secession, and Civil War", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, no. 4 (2012), Special Issue: Theoretical and Empirical Progress in Research on Political Violence, 581–600.

³⁵¹ Beáta Huszka recently published a comparative study of framing in secessionist movements. Unfortunately, it does not include an analysis of resonance. Beáta Huszka, *Secessionist Movements and Ethnic Conflict. Debate-Framing and Rhetoric in Independence Campaigns* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2014).

3.2.4. Data Selection and Acquisition

Data collection aimed at a relevant sample of sources on the movement's framing attempts, resonance among the audience, and contestation over the time of movement activity (which in both cases was merely slightly (i.e. months) longer than the period of collective action. Previous times were predominantly considered through the lens of secondary literature. Specifically phases of heightened activity and changes in action were sought to be covered with as wide a range of high quality sources as possible. While this was not always feasible, the overall collection contains a significant and sufficient number of sources.

These encompass: interviews with movement leaders, activists, and other audience (personal and published), speeches of movement leaders and political actors, a variety of movement print publications, newspaper articles, governmental and non-governmental reports, focus groups, website/blog/web forum content, social media content (written, audio, visual), opinion pieces, poems, TV broadcasts, documentaries, photographs, exhibition content, cartoons, tokens, flyers, and else.

Kind and specific scope of sources vary between Houthis and HIRAK, which are in part related to their different modes of communicating. I want to merely highlight the respective specificities: For the Zaydi group I draw on an extensive corpus of Hussein al-Houthi's lectures given between late 2001 and mid-2003 (a total of 91 lectures with each between 15–25 print pages)³⁵². It is programmatic for it lays out the frame basis for the movement; even after the frame shift and escalation it remains the central point of reference. Hence, it is the core corpus for the Houthi frames before 2005. With 'Al-Haqiqa' ('The Truth'), the movement issued its own magazine from 2007 onwards, which will be analyzed; and in the wake of increased Internet availability and use from about the same time onwards, it not only set up various websites, but was extensively posting video clips on platforms such as YouTube. A selection of about 400 of these will likewise be evaluated. In late 2012 and 2013, the movement created an exhibition to present the civil war from their perspective. Extensive photo documentation made it possible to take the exhibits into account as sources. Unfortunately, sources regarding resonance are more limited for the case, since direct interviews proved impossible; while I was assured that many Houthi followers were open to talk about their views, attempts for contact with specific persons over and over again failed. Hence, I mainly draw on quotes in media articles and commentaries in print and digital movement communication.

³⁵² I thank the American Institute for Yemeni Studies (AIYS) in Sana'a, specifically Stephen J. Steinbeiser, for their kind assistance in the acquisition of these and other sources.

Sources for the Hirak include email, telephone, and social media communication and discussion with 41 activists and a total of 15 semi-structured interviews and three group discussions with activists living in the UK, the Netherlands, and Germany. Moreover, there is plentiful public discussion through opinion pieces and various kinds of self-promoted movement publications that aim to raise awareness about their struggle which Southerners conceive of as neglected. Contrary to the other case, direct interaction with activists provided ample data on resonance.

Government counterframes were treated by investigating official speeches, documents, articles from state and non-state media, and policies.

For both movements I, to a limited extent, scraped together social media data, mainly from Facebook. A systematic analysis proved difficult due to fluidity, not solely of the type of medium, but furthermore due to the tendency of both movements (but even more so the Houthis) to frequently create new movement sites and profiles, use a number of them at the same time, close some fast – in short, due to a lack of persistence in spite of presence.³⁵³ Use of the sources acquired on such platforms is hence limited as a complementation to the other sources and treated like comments on websites and else.³⁵⁴

Potential biases beyond what has already been brought up comprise the selective compilation of sources, aggravated by the lack of presence in the field due to the strained security situation at the time of the research. Most contacts could thus merely be established mediately or through the Internet. Strategic concealment and the impossibility to enter into all relevant fields of movement interaction have been mentioned before.

Assumptions about the reach of the Internet need to be reflected in the face of its merely slowly expanding reach in Yemen.³⁵⁵

³⁵³ An additional challenge is the still very young and dynamic field of methodological exploration about the adequate use and analysis of what has been labelled ‘big data’.

³⁵⁴ I thereby consciously neglect the specific character of the medium; however, since my use is merely complementary I hold this to be permissible.

³⁵⁵ The World Bank (WB), World Data Bank, accessed June 26, 2014, <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/views/reports/tableview.aspx>.

<i>Year</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013</i>
<i>Internet users (per 100 people)³⁵⁶</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>20</i>

Table 3.1.: Internet Users in Yemen

These low numbers notwithstanding, one has to note a few relativizing factors: According to my conversations with Hirak activists, the use of the internet in Yemen hardly ever occurs individually, but overwhelmingly in small groups, i.e. has a wider outreach. Activists – often technically affine youths but also intellectuals and long-term oppositionals³⁵⁷ – moreover very consciously make use of the medium to interact with other movement members, sympathizers, and supporters, many of who are living abroad.³⁵⁸ In conclusion: While it would be a pitfall to assume too high an impact for online framing, the opposite holds equally true. Despite a low penetration rate, the internet is used in a highly effective manner by the movements.

To conclude: While the general scope of data for both movements is about equal, the balance thus varies. What this implies for the analysis will be discussed in the following.

3.2.5. Data Analysis

The research employs mixed-methods;³⁵⁹ moreover, it triangulates by combining both a combination of data sources and methods of analysis.³⁶⁰ Disregarding critical voices, it is the

³⁵⁶ Indicator definition: “Internet users are individuals who have used the Internet (from any location) in the last 12 months. Internet can be used via a computer, mobile phone, personal digital assistant, games machine, digital TV etc.”. Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Some data on the most popular social network Facebook: Total Facebook users (April 2013): 610,780; penetration of population: 2.6%; penetration of online population: 20.56%; user age distribution: 18-24yrs. = 45%, 25-34% = 30%. Socialbakers: <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/yemen> (accessed April 12, 2013).

³⁵⁸ Contacts with family and friends in the diaspora were very close in all cases I encountered and exchange was reported to be daily or even more frequent. Messenger services and social media platforms play an important role here, but regular telephone contact was likewise reported to be very prevalent.

³⁵⁹ For a recent compilation of methodological practices in social movement research see: Donatella Della Porta (ed.), *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

³⁶⁰ Phillip M. Ayoub, Sophia J. Wallace, and Chris Zepeda-Millán, “Triangulation in Social Movement Research”, in *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research*, ed. Donatella Della Porta (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 67–96, here: 67.

best practice “of verification that increases validity by incorporating several viewpoints and methods”.³⁶¹

For essential texts, I employed qualitative text analysis. First, I coded the respective core corpora for each of the movements, i.e. excerpts of Hussein al-Houthi’s lectures and programmatic HIRAK texts (such as their political program, a petition to the EU in which they depict their issue, slogans etc.) with the help of ATLAS.ti. I developed codes inductively with the criterion of capturing the main themes of these texts.³⁶² Through clustering and lastly subsuming similar codes under meta-categories, I came up with a limited number of core themes – or frame elements. Guided by these, yet open for extension or modification, I then scanned the remaining textual sources stemming from the movement. The result was a list of frames for each of the three dimensions (see 7.1.1. and 7.2.3.), in sum: the central movement frames.

In the interview transcripts and other sources for resonance I checked for correspondence, discrepancy, and opposition. Along comparable lines, I proceeded to counterframing. Online sources were in principle treated in the same way, yet it was marked that attribution of origin might potentially be questioned.

In the presentation of the cases and my argument I cite extensively. I do so not merely to support my claims, but rather to provide an impression of the tone and nuances of the sources and the interwovenness of the three levels (frame, discourse, cultural background) I delineated. I am convinced that ‘letting the sources speak’ is a method far more capable of conveying these complexities and interconnections than a higher degree of abstraction.³⁶³ In addition, the reader has a better chance to assess my propositions and come to own conclusions.

Audio sources were treated like text and partly transcribed to facilitate evaluation; musical elements were interpreted in regard to text, if applicable, and in their quality as musical pieces. Visual sources (cartoons, photos, images, graffiti, installations etc.) were similarly analyzed in regard to text/script, content, emphasis, overall composition, context, and mode of

³⁶¹ Sabina Yeasmin and Khan Ferdousour Rahman, “Triangulation Research Method as the Tool of Social Science Research”, *BUP Journal* 1, no. 1 (2012): 154–163, here: 156.

³⁶² See Lasse Lindekilde for an outline on how to conduct frame analysis and a delineation from discourse analysis: Lasse Lindekilde, “Discourse and Frame”.

³⁶³ For a comparable mode of presentation in a similar case study see: Jeroen Gunning and Ilan Zvi Baron, *Why Occupy A Square? People, Protests and Movements in the Egyptian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

distribution, if applicable.³⁶⁴ In this, the distinct quality and function of images was borne in mind.

Images are powerful instruments for movements, for they “are associated with a complex stock of cultural knowledge and experiences, frames and identifications”³⁶⁵; this means that they can tap a pool of shared meaning in other and more efficient modes than language.³⁶⁶ Due to their usually high degree of credibility, visuals not only disguise their quality as a frame, but also unfold a specifically high impact.³⁶⁷ Images attract preferred attention and transmit concentrated packages of meaning; moreover, they “implicitly diffuse political arguments outside of a context of cognitive linguistic discourse, often with unnoticed and powerful emotional consequences”.³⁶⁸ Besides, they can reach out to an even wider audience such as the illiterate, those not speaking the language, or children.

On a strategic and instrumental level, images – especially photos of injustices³⁶⁹ – make problems visible,³⁷⁰ as protest (and the transmission of images thereof) does with the opposition and its claims. Pictures of large crowds thus challenge the regime, spread its visibility, and strengthen the opposition by demonstrating that their numbers, i.e. the power

³⁶⁴ Challenging to answer but worth reflecting is furthermore the question of what is absent in an image. Axel Philipps, “Visual Protest Material as Empirical Data”, *Visual Communication* 11, no. 3 (2012): 3–21, here: 8.

³⁶⁵ Nicole Doerr, Alice Mattoni, and Simon Teune, “Toward a Visual Analysis of Social Movements, Conflict, and Political Mobilization”, *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change: An Annual Compilation of Research*, vol. 35, ed. Patrick G. Coy (Bingley: Emerald, 2013), xi–xxvi, here: xii.

³⁶⁶ Slogans are distinct in this regard in that they exhibit an equally multi-layered, persuasive, and arousing quality. For a discussion of their impact especially in the Southern Yemeni case see: Anne-Linda Amira Augustin, “Tawra Tawra Ya Ganub”. Slogans as Means of Expression of the South Arabian Independence Struggle, in *Graffiti, Writing and Street Art in the Arab World*, Romano-Arabica XV (Bucharest: Center for Arab Studies, 2015), 39–57, here: 39.

³⁶⁷ Catherine Corrigan-Brown, “The Power of Pictures: Images of Politics and Protest”, *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 2 (2012): 131–134, here: 132; in reference to: Paul M. Messaris and Linus Abraham, “The Role of Image in Framing News Stories”, *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*, ed. Stephen D. Reese, Oscar Gandy, Jr., and August E. Grant (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2001), 215–226.

³⁶⁸ Doerr/Mattoni/Teune, *Visual Analysis*, xix. The spontaneous emotional impact is almost impossible to access as an observer. The art historian Erwin Panofsky made an intriguing suggestion for a conceptualization of the persuasive impact of images on the individual. He differentiated between a dimension of *iconography* (which describes images and gives meaning to the objects and scenes represented) and *iconology* (an intuitive interpretation of the intrinsic meaning based on comparing ‘formal arrangement and technical procedures’ in different pictures. Erwin Panofsky, “Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art”, in *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History*, ed. Erwin Panofsky (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1955): 26–54, here: 38.

³⁶⁹ Images are powerful symbols of injustice and make for social outrage, as for instance pictures from Abu Ghraib have demonstrated. Yet, they can also situate the ‘we’ in slightly more moderate contexts than immediate prison torture. Thomas Olesen has traced the impact of the case of the young Egyptian blogger Khaled Said who was beaten to death by Egyptian police in 2010. Activists juxtaposed pictures of his wrecked body post-mortem with a portrait of the lively young, urban middle class man. It was a symbol of injustice which resonated widely with existing injustice frames in Egyptian society. Doerr/Mattoni/Teune, *Visual Analysis*, xvii, in reference to: Thomas Olesen, “‘We Are All Khaled Said’: Visual Injustice Symbols in the Egyptian Revolution, 2010-2011”, in *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, 3–26.

³⁷⁰ John A. Guidry, “The Struggle to Be Seen: Social Movements and the Public Sphere in Brazil”, *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 16, no. 4 (2003): 493–524.

and solidarity of a collective.³⁷¹ The Internet and especially social media carried this to another level by ousting official media from its privileged position of reporting, institutionalizing rapid and far-reach horizontal communication and information distribution instead.³⁷²

Audio, visual, and performance elements bear a number of similarities in this regard. They have found explicit recognition in the analysis; while details for each source would have led too far, significant or outstanding aspects will be mentioned. Specifically videos stemming from the Houthis are intriguing in this respect, for they combine the power of visuals (exponentiated in part by the fact that it is moving pictures) with the emotionally capturing impact of music and culturally highly resonant forms of poetry.

³⁷¹ Emanuela Guano, “Ruining the President’s Spectacle: Theatricality and Telepolitics in the Buenos Aires Public Sphere”, *Journal of Visual Culture* 1, no. 3 (2002): 303–323.

³⁷² Yet, the fact that “[p]rotests are not perceived as what they are on the ground but what they look like in press photos and television news images” (Doerr/Mattoni/Teune, *Visual Analysis*, xiv) is not without problems since it opens the door to manipulation and abuse – a fact of which an increasing number of people are aware and which influences the degree to which they question what they see, potentially backfiring at movements.

4. YEMEN – CONTINGENCY AND NEGOTIATION

Taking an interpretist and agency-centered perspective anchored on the meso- and micro-level makes it necessary to first deconstruct popular presumptions about the nature of the Yemeni state and society, and in their stead open up a wider, less deterministic arena of action. In doing so, I follow the articulate call by Isa Blumi to abandon the dominant generic and often ‘orientalist’³⁷³ categories subsuming Yemeni subjects in favor of a more complex, disaggregated understanding of individual and collective actors and motives.³⁷⁴

The first section is dedicated to the ‘deconstruction’³⁷⁵ of a coherent geographical space. It serves to locate the state’s historical predecessors and the embeddedness of current geographical and identity disputes therein. Historical figures and events are a point of reference in which numerous recent discourses and frames are anchored or linked to. In analogy to the deconstruction of geographical space, the second section does the same for presumably essentialist collective actors, such as ‘tribes’, which are all too often attributed with primordialist characteristics detached from any context and devoid of an admission of individual agency. Against this background, I then present two important narratives or discourses, respectively, in regard to the two movements under analysis: the narrative of ‘Yemeni unity’ (whose reality is a grievance of the Southern Movement) and the discourses surrounding Saudi and US interference in Yemeni affairs (a grievance of the Houthis). A description of the political situation (with special consideration of the two Yemeni states and their unification) as well as the economic conditions completes the chapter. As far as possible, I strive to distinguish between the central actors and themes in the North for the Houthis, and in the South for the Hirak. This will, however, not always be possible since many are interrelated and/or relevant for both.

4.1. Deconstructing Presumptions I: Coherent Geographical Space

What is it that (supposedly) constitutes ‘Yemen’ as a country and state?

Similar to the situation of most countries at one point or another, attempts to replace spatial ambiguity with clear territorial attributions and boundaries in modern ‘Yemen’ are rooted in colonial endeavors. As Paul Dresch has pointed out in his seminal work on Yemen’s history,

³⁷³ See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

³⁷⁴ Isa Blumi, *Chaos in Yemen. Societal collapse and the new authoritarianism* (Abington: Routledge, 2010)

³⁷⁵ ‘Deconstruction’ is a great word for a very modest step I can take within this framework. It should be comprehended as stating my intention (hinting at my perception of these dimensions) rather than making a claim about a program I am able to satisfyingly unfold.

written and unwritten evocation of a natural unit of Yemen goes back to the rise of Islam, while reference to the region's grandeur is even pre-Islamic.³⁷⁶ Identity ascriptions as 'Yemeni' are equally present in literary accounts over the centuries. The need for a durable fixation of what this unit was meant to be exactly, however, was imported only with the Ottoman and British imperial interventions in the 19th century and their resulting administrative needs. Mapping was the first step in establishing knowledge, thereby a certain power over the newly taken territory, and also the entry point into the arena of contestation for space and authority over it. John Willis illustrates this process; in his excellent deconstruction of Yemen's historical geography, he provides detailed accounts on how the British Empire sent out its cartographers and administrators in order to establish Imperial Arabia.³⁷⁷

4.1.1. The British Protectorate in South Arabia

After establishing themselves in the port town of Aden in 1839, the British slowly deepened and expanded their sphere of influence. The colonial model they strived to reproduce was taken from their experience in administrating colonial India: a mixture of direct and indirect rule. Aden, initially supposed to be only a coaling station, was soon developed into a free port in 1850 and prospered as settlement, commercial center, and military base. The core and heart of British South Arabia, it was the seat of the 'Aden Residency' and thereby under direct rule. The hinterlands, on the other hand, were to be administered through indirect rule. The mission of exploring and drawing maps was therefore not limited solely to territories, but simultaneously included the population inhabiting these territories. These ordering processes with the final aim to "exterminate ambivalence",³⁷⁸ subsequently invented the 'nine tribes of the Aden hinterland' as they were called in an 1873 memorandum.³⁷⁹

Eager to secure the hinterlands and convinced to do so through 'natural local authorities', they designated those they perceived as 'native chiefs' and from there on engaged with them on the basis of this historical and genealogical imagination.³⁸⁰ The British aimed to empower

³⁷⁶ Paul Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1; see also: Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 25.

³⁷⁷ Here and in the following: John Willis, *Unmaking North and South. Cartographies of the Yemeni Past, 1857–1934* (London: Hurst & Company, 2012).

³⁷⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), cited in: Willis, *Unmaking*, 71; as numerous critiques of colonial anthropology, Blumi (*Chaos*, 20) notes how (later on) the works of functionalist anthropologists assisted in cementing these attributions.

³⁷⁹ Willis, *Unmaking*, 23–24.

³⁸⁰ For more on the technique of rule which Nicholas Dirks coined the British "ethnographic state" see: Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

these ‘chiefs’ with a threefold objective: to guard free trade in the hinterland, to exert a civilizing influence upon the ‘martial tribal’ population, and to form a “bulwark” against the Ottomans in the North.³⁸¹ A closer look into who really were their allies discloses the disputability of the inherent logic of this policy goal.

These ‘tribes’³⁸² consisted of a de facto group of notable families of the respective areas, whose common marker was their opposition to the Northern Zaydi imamate’s interventionist pursuits in the 18th century. They were most of the time based on shared lineage, contrary to what the British opted to discern, however, their influence over local collectives was anything but given, exclusive, or absolute. Quite the opposite: It had to be continuously negotiated, loyalties were context-specific and partial (divided between e.g. religious, traditional, and economic authorities, all entailing different rights and responsibilities), and the legitimacy of authority had to be constantly renewed. Conflict was pre-determined, for “rather than adjust their understanding of local social and political forms, the British attempted to create a master for those who had none”.³⁸³ And those people clearly and vehemently rejected such pursuits. Ultimately, the British succumbed.

The mountainous region of Dhaleh, for instance, frontier with the Northern Mutawakkilite Kingdom of the Imam Yahya and traditional central node in important trade routes, presented such a case of ambiguity. Its hybrid form of local authority remained illegible to the colonizer – as, in fact, did the geography of the rather remote area. The undeclared border war between Imam Yahya and the British (1918–1934) brought into the open the conflicting, often overlapping orders: Actors maneuvered between the Imam’s forces attacking from the North in the name of Islamic unification, the protectorate forces, who acted only reluctantly according to their obligation to actually protect their subjects, and their own genuine interests. When aerial photography came to their support, the British were finally able to master the geographical details and, through bombardments, discipline those who rejected allegiance. In 1934, the Anglo-Yemeni Treaty reinforced what had already been agreed on as the border between North and South in 1905.

Dhaleh as a central location along the North-South border remained faithful to its legacy as will be seen later; it is still a region of heightened resistance against perceived intruders.

³⁸¹ Willis, *Unmaking*, 42–43.

³⁸² The following sections deals with the deconstruction of essentialist understandings of ‘tribal’ and ‘sectarian’ groups. I chose to hyphenate these concepts until I have clarified my specific understanding of their implication.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 71.

Today, it is an area of more militant struggle of Southern Movement affiliates against government military units.

4.1.2. *The Ottoman Occupation*

After the first occupational period in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Ottoman Empire returned to Yemen and established an initial foothold on the coast of the Red Sea in 1849. They pushed for Sana'a at a time of political vacuum due to factional fighting and continuous decline of the Zaydi imamic state³⁸⁴, consolidated their presence in 1872 and consequently increased colonial competition with the British in this sphere.³⁸⁵ In the South they expanded their reign up to the town of Ta'izz, close to the frontier of the British-controlled areas, while the highlands just a little North of Sana'a remained under the rule of the Zaydi imam. Overall, they were met with little enthusiasm. Quite to the contrary, Ottoman rule met opposition and resistance by highland and coastal 'tribes' throughout the 1870s and 1880s. Moreover, following the old imam's death and the transition of rule to Imam al-Mansour in 1890, they faced a new, articulate, and actively mobilizing adversary who led the North into a general uprising in the late 1890s. His claims to authority rested on religious (descent from the "pure line of the Prophet"³⁸⁶) as well as historical legitimacy (stemming from the Qasimi dynasty) and bolstered his call for a restoration of just Islamic rule in face of Ottoman (religious and profane) corruption.

In his evaluation of the Ottoman occupation of Yemen, Thomas Kühn considers the result as a primary example of Ottoman state orientalism, guided by their conception of insurmountable differences between Sunni (themselves and a majority of the population in the Empire) and Shi'a (the Zaydis).³⁸⁷ Essentializing the 'other' was their path of choice, just as the British did, for they, too, had failed to comprehend the moral and social order of whom they encountered.³⁸⁸ And whom they encountered had proven more resourceful at opposing them

³⁸⁴ Steven C. Caton, "History", in *Middle East in Focus: Yemen*, 29–87, here: 66.

³⁸⁵ Caton, "History", 65.

³⁸⁶ Quoted in: *Ibid.*, 113, with reference to: Sayyid Muhammad Al-Hariri al-Hamawi to Imam al-Mansur, November 2, 1891, as quoted in: Ali b. Abdullah al-Iryani, *Sinat al-Imam Muhammad bin Yahya Hamid al-Din*, ed. Muhammad Isa al-Salihyya (Amman: Dar al-Bashir, 1996), 373. Those who descent from the family of the Prophet through the line of Ali are referred to as 'Hashemites' in a larger context or 'sayyid' (pl. *sadah*) specifically in Yemen. More see chapter 4.1.2.1.

³⁸⁷ Thomas Kühn, "Shaping and Reshaping Colonial Ottomanism: Contesting Boundaries of Difference and Integration in Ottoman Yemen, 1872–1919", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 2 (2007): 27–29.

³⁸⁸ Willis, *Unmaking*, 113.

than they had presumed. This would be another recurring experience made by outsiders in the region.

4.1.3. The Zaydi Imamate

Zaydi imams had ruled the North of Yemen since the late 9th century. Imam Yahya was a self-conscious successor to this line and convinced of re-strengthening the imamate after the decline of the 19th century. Being designated imam – an office by appointment based on descent and merit³⁸⁹ – was no guarantee to unlimited following and loyalty by one's subjects. Rather, it positioned him as the protector of *shari'ah* law and Zaydi scholarship and traditions within the sociopolitical setup of Upper Yemen. He was the principal mediator “in an intricate and delicate balance with tribal custom (*'urf qaba'ilī*)”;³⁹⁰ he had to constantly build alliances with the ‘tribes’ and often faced contestants to the imamate as well as opposition to his rule.³⁹¹ The areas he claimed sovereignty over were populated not solely by Zaydis but also Shafi'i Sunnis and few Ismailis, which presented an additional aspect to be considered.

Yahya held his ground in this field, and after the Ottomans withdrew in 1918/19 he commenced his project of state-building in line with a Western understanding of territorial rule. This included *expanding* the territories under his control, like prominently the Tihama region on the Red Sea coast in 1926, a strong bastion to which his opponents had withdrawn over time, and *restructuring* the ways in which he governed them. Some reforms were clearly taken from the Ottoman administration, for example the establishment of a standing army (admittedly of poor quality, as many authors underline,³⁹² but still a development) and modern means of communication over distance – which revolutionized his command over space.³⁹³ The rhetoric he employed for the implementation of a more centralized statehood was thereby closely linked to deeply-rooted Islamic discourses of reform (*islah*), revival (*iḥyā'*), and renewal (*tajdīd*), which take as their guiding principle the reassessment of the current state of religious piety and practice with what is demanded by the Qur'an and

³⁸⁹ He was chosen based on his fulfillment of the traditional criteria: the imam had to be of the Prophet's kin, learned, i.e. capable of independent judgment in matters of law (*mujtahid*), and a warrior in the name of Islam (*mujāhid*) in order to comply with his duty of *khurūj*, ‘coming out’ against oppression. Furthermore, he had to formally summon for allegiance (*da'wah*). Willis, *Unmaking*, 113; Dresch, *History*, 5; Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 33; Gabriele von Bruck, “Regimes of Piety Revisited: Zaydi Political Moralities in Republican Yemen”, *Die Welt des Islam* 50 (2010), 185–223, here: 186.

³⁹⁰ James Robin King, “Zaydi Revival in a Hostile Republic: Competing Identities, Loyalties and Visions of State in Republican Yemen”, *Arabica* 59 (2012): 404–445, here: 405.

³⁹¹ Exemplary for his maneuvering along different lines of power and of bargaining his own position in the face of strong *shuyukh* are the descriptions of concrete events provided by Blumi (*Chaos*, 84ff.).

³⁹² So e.g. Caton, “History”, 67.

³⁹³ Here and for further details on these reforms see: Willis, *Unmaking*, 120ff.; Dresch, *History*, 28ff.

Ḥadīth.³⁹⁴ His style of rule was very personalized. He took care of things the way he saw fit or – in interaction with outsiders, for example – he deemed necessary.³⁹⁵ The loyalty of families of influence was secured through the so-called ‘*kaf īl*’ system: son(s) of these families were kept as ‘guests’ (read: hostages) of the Imam and treated according to the quality of the relation.³⁹⁶ Also in other aspects, his reign was focused on the internal and on the preservation of his control. Over time and with increased engagement of the elites with reform-oriented Arab writers like Mohamed Abduh or Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, criticism grew. Critics saw the country in a state of disclosure to modernity, both on the level of basic infrastructure, health, and education, as well as necessary social and political reforms.³⁹⁷ When he declared his son Ahmad Crown Prince and referred to the state as the Mutawakkilite Kingdom in the mid-1920s, he furthermore weakened his stance, for the installment of dynastic rule was the anathema to the Zaydi traditions of the imamate and awakened very negative remembrances of the (ultimately declining and decried) Qasimi dynasty of earlier centuries. Ultimately in 1948, his unpopularity led to him being assassinated. Nevertheless, his son Ahmad took over the imamate until he died of natural causes in 1962.

His successor, Imam al-Badr, finally did not manage to overcome the massive resentment which had built up. He was ousted by the Revolution of September 26, 1962; the imamate state was turned into the Yemen Arab Republic, and from there on Zaydis (and especially Zaydi elites, the Hashemites) were subjected to social and political marginalization and despise.³⁹⁸ As the Republicans saw it, the prior social order that, on the grounds of religious belonging based the Hashemites on top of the social hierarchy, had to be surmounted in favor of a Republican state ideology. The road toward this goal led through the systematic exclusion of Zaydis from state offices and, more fundamentally, through dismantling the Zaydi religious identity by converging them under Sunni schools (*madhāhib*, *sg. madhab*).³⁹⁹ In the long run, the massive frustration and grievances stemming from these experiences would lead to revivalism and opposition, with the Houthis being considered its most militant manifestation.

³⁹⁴ Willis, *Unmaking*, 141.

³⁹⁵ For the latter, a situation in which Yahya had to accept the limits of his power in interaction with the Ottomans, see Blumi, *Chaos*, 84ff. Wedeen underlines the importance of physical presence for his sovereignty to be visible for his people and to be executed, similar to medieval European potentates (*Peripheral Visions*, 33–34).

³⁹⁶ Caton, “History”, 67.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁸ For well-grounded elaborations on this marginalization and its manifestation in everyday life and interactions with non-Zaydis see: Gabriele vom Bruck, *Islam, Memory, and Morality in Yemen. Ruling Families in Transition* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005). On discrimination and denigration in the political field see: King, “Zaydi Revival”.

³⁹⁹ Vom Bruck, *Islam*; vom Bruck, “Regimes”; King, “Zaydi Revival”.

The expansion of the House of Sa'ud in what was to become Saudi Arabia, and its impact on Yemen serve as the historical root of the current topic of the northern border of Yemen.⁴⁰⁰ From 1902 throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, the wake of Ottoman decline and lastly withdrawal, Prince Abdul Aziz Al Sa'ud ('Ibn Sa'ud') started his military and diplomatic conquest of the interior Arabian Peninsula and the holy cities. In 1926 he declared himself sultan, six years later king. The 'Asir and Najran regions, traditionally considered part of Yemen, were among the areas he fought for and finally secured control over in the Treaty of Ta'if in 1934.⁴⁰¹ The already highlighted characteristic of these regions, especially 'Asir, as centers of trade routes and commercial exchange, however, persisted. Since family and commercial relations disregarded formal territorial ascriptions, the zone continued to be permeable (e.g. for smuggling, human traffic, as well as animal pasture), with borders being more than porous and repeatedly disputed until the 2000s.⁴⁰² The role this plays in the Sa'dah conflict, and how it interrelates with the Houthis, will be taken up again in the elaboration of the regional context of the Houthi movement and the grounds for frame resonance. At this point, I merely want to direct attention to the principle issue of these borderlands.

The objective of this section was to briefly touch upon the various spaces and geographies bound together under the name of 'Yemen', and sketch the actors and processes involved in their construction in recent (formative and still influential) history. I aimed to show how external actors have always had their difficulties in reading local structures and seeing beyond primordial ascriptions they – as in the case of the British – had invented themselves. Yemen's geographies abide in permanent construction, through contestation, fluid alliances, and networks based on collective imaginaries as well as down-to-earth interests. Rather than being essentialist and static or dominated by outsiders, locals with a good sense for fine-grained contextual particularities adjust to multifold contingencies – paired with fierce resistance where considered necessary.

⁴⁰⁰ Dresch (*History*, 33) present a very illustrative map of Saudi expansion in the early 20th century and 'classical' Yemen. Its central strength is the vagueness of territorial extension it conveys.

⁴⁰¹ Caton, "History", 67.

⁴⁰² Blumi, *Chaos*, 104ff. He also briefly mentions the fact that the Treaty of Ta'if explicitly allows for some identity groups to move across the borders freely, and how these groups are partly constructed around primordial notions of 'tribe' as this concept had been conceptualized by the British (p.107). For more on these border issues with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) see chapter 4.1.5.1. on Yemen-KSA relations.

In this context I also introduced the areas which remain most highly contested and with strong collective imaginaries: most crucially the North-South divide and its frontier and the northern border region, and, besides, the Tihama coast and the eastern Hadhramawt, for they are still relevant for understanding the current conflicts in the North and the South of Yemen.

4.2. *Deconstructing Presumptions II: Essentialist Collective Actors*

“Categories are not groups, but they do make groups thinkable and legible, and indeed help constitute groups as objects available for self-identification.”⁴⁰³ The following section seeks to make social actors in Yemen and the Yemeni context ‘legible’ for the subsequent case studies. It thereby adheres to the same critical guiding principles as the previous section. Additionally, central discourses will be presented as well as a basis for the well-founded interpretation of both movements’ framing.

4.2.1. *Tribes*

Yemen is a country seductive to orientalism. In particular its ‘tribal’ traditions foster this trend: ‘primordial’, ‘martial’, ‘backwards’, and ‘unrulable’ are just some of the most common characterizations provided.⁴⁰⁴

In line with the works of a number of well-known anthropologists working on Yemeni societies, I want to counter this image with a more complex, more dynamic, and above all, less deficit-based one.⁴⁰⁵ The first issue to note is that Yemeni society is not solely comprised of ‘tribes’.⁴⁰⁶ They do play a prominent role. However, other social categories or status groups exist alongside them. Marieke Brandt, who works on Upper Yemen, distinguishes four traditional social categories (from higher to lower social prestige): the religious aristocracy of

⁴⁰³ Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 170.

⁴⁰⁴ For some ambiguous example from an academic background see: Khaled Fattah, “Yemen: Sectarianism and the Politics of Regime Survival”, in *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, ed. Lawrence G. Potter (London: Hurst & Co., 2013), 207–228, here: 220f.

⁴⁰⁵ Blumi (*Chaos*, 19) makes a similar point when he argues that “[t]he application of [generic categories of tribe, sectarianism] obfuscates local dynamics and (...) denies us access to the micro-politics that shape the manner in which people in various parts of Yemen calculate their respective interests, concerns and ambitions vis-à-vis each other and the larger region.”

⁴⁰⁶ Charles Schmitz sets the range of estimates of the prevalence of tribes to as wide as 20–80% (James McCune, “Tribes and Tribalism in Yemen. A Joint FCO Research Analysts and Stabilisation Unit Workshop, April 26, 2012 – Workshop Report”, published online June 18, 2012, accessed June 6, 2014, <http://www.sclr.stabilisationunit.gov.uk/geographic/middle-east-north-africa/yemen/410-tribes-and-tribalism-in-yemen-a-joint-fco-research-analysts-and-stabilisation-unit-workshop.html>).

the *sādah* (sg. *sayyid*);⁴⁰⁷ the [formerly] hereditary “jurist administrators” of the *quḍāh* (sg. *qāḍī*);⁴⁰⁸ the *qabā’il* (sg. *qabili*), i.e. members of the tribes; and, lastly, the “weak people” or *du’afā’* (sg. *da’if*).⁴⁰⁹ The *sādah* have already been briefly introduced and their status will be elaborated further in the case study introduction on the Houthis. Their privileged role in society was based on central religious and legal functions for a long time, like the application of *shari‘ah* (religious) law. Furthermore, they established and inhabited numerous so-called *hijrah* settlements; these places were sanctuaries in which violence was strictly prohibited and they were thus used as safe havens and for mediation in feuds and other conflicts.⁴¹⁰ The *qabā’il*, on the other hand, were supposed to ‘protect’ the other groups. Like education constituted and continues to constitute an important feature for the self-conception of the *sādah*, the capacity to resolve conflict (and thus ‘protect’) carries a comparable value for the wide social (moreover: sociopolitical) category of *qabā’il*.

Yemen’s *qabā’il* share a common claim of descent based on which they subdivide into confederations (the greatest and most influential of which are the Hashid and the Bakil) which again consist of numerous *qabā’il* and their respective subsegments.⁴¹¹ Since the *qabā’il* of Yemen are sedentary with their livelihoods based on agriculture and fishing, they are associated with bounded territories over which they exert sovereignty.

This model, however, is not only abstract; it is likewise idealized to a high degree, as anthropological as well as more theoretical literature tells us. First, the perception of shared ancestry and thus shared identity is hardly understood literally by the members of the *qabā’il*; they are well aware of its construction and only apprehend it as a “statement of identification following the general Middle Eastern practice in conceptualizing groups as kin”.⁴¹² Second, *qabili* belonging is not static or essentialist; rather, affiliations are changeable and their

⁴⁰⁷ Johann Heiss presents the historical changes the term underwent in: Johann Heiss, “Ein šayh ist ein šayh, aber was für ein Ding ist ein sayyid?”, in *Veränderung und Stabilität. Normen und Werte in islamischen Gesellschaften*, ed. Johann Heiss (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2005), 121–136.

⁴⁰⁸ I will abstain from dealing with them in detail for they no longer exist in this function.

⁴⁰⁹ Marieke Brandt, “Inhabiting Tribal Structures: Leadership Hierarchies in Tribal Upper Yemen (Hamdan & Khawlan b. ‘Amir)”, in *Southwest Arabia across History. Essays to the Memory of Walter Dostal*, ed. Andre Gingrich and Siegfried Haas (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2014). Steven Caton on the other hand equally refers to four status groups, but mentions “tribes”, “*sadah*”, “*khaddam*” or “servants thought to be of Arab ethnicity”, and “*akhdam*” or “servants thought to be of African descent” (Steven C. Caton, “Social Groups and Ethnicity”, in *Middle East in Focus: Yemen*, 165–187, here: 165). I follow Brandt in her distinction, which from my view more comprehensively covers the whole population, for the “*du’afā’*” are in my understanding comprised of more than just “*khaddam*” and “*akhdam*”.

⁴¹⁰ Caton, “Social Groups”, 178. He also states that many were also centers of religious learning.

⁴¹¹ For a detailed case study of *qabila* moieties as well as inter-tribal relations see Shelagh Weir, *A Tribal Order. Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 121ff. Note that, however, on p. 307 she distinguishes her findings from what Dresch has described (Dresch, *Tribes*).

⁴¹² Brandt, “Inhabiting”, 4.

meaning is context-specific.⁴¹³ Such changes have frequently been documented by observers of the political and social changes of the last decades.⁴¹⁴ They oftentimes serve strategic (political) interests and have been a relevant factor in the Sa'ada conflict in which both the regime and the Houthis have mobilized tribal networks and tried to motivate people to change allegiances.⁴¹⁵ Third, more fundamentally and in line with my main aim to deconstruct essentialist assumptions about collective actors, I want to argue that the whole attempt to grasp the meaning and significance of such categories is idle insofar as that there cannot be a valid outcome resulting from this. I follow Lisa Wedeen's interpretivist stance that "there is no such thing as a self prior to social interaction: selves are produced and continually reproduced in relation to others".⁴¹⁶ Identity is hence a fluid concept evoked in historically contingent, performative processes. She explicates these presuppositions for various groups in Yemen, and carves out the relationship between discourses, resulting group solidarity, and subsequent political actions. Organizations as mobilizing actors contribute to these processes as do specific events which can trigger or exacerbate actions and/or the salience of group belonging.⁴¹⁷ In sum, Wedeen's elaborations demonstrate the importance of a wider contextual knowledge in order to approach the question of social categories. There are obvious practical limitations to such a proceeding; however, I will strive to provide the necessary width and depth to properly embed my assumed identity groups.

With these demurs articulated, it is still very worthwhile to turn to the emic definition of social categories in general to outline the discursive horizon of self-ascription and to be able to discern the connecting points and narrative strands which strategic actors take up and use to their ends.

Again: What does it mean to belong to the *qabā'il* of Yemen? Beyond ascriptions of tribal belonging based on genealogical and territorial position, Caton emphasizes the emic definition of what constitutes a *qabili* on the individual level. According to his local

⁴¹³ For an example of changing tribal affiliation, see: Paul Dresch, "Imams and Tribes: The Writing and Acting of History in Upper Yemen", in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, ed. Philipp S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 255; Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 173.

⁴¹⁴ Weir describes how defecting from one's tribe to another is an institutionalized form of protest for individuals as well as collectives in the northern highlands: Weir, *Tribal Order*, 113.

⁴¹⁵ Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 171

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 182. See also her reference to Hannah Arendt "in understanding identities as what results from public speech and action; through public words and deeds, actions 'make their appearance' in the world" (16). Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 179.

⁴¹⁷ Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 178.

informant, it comprises of: piety, the possession of weapons and the ability to use them properly, knowledge of tribal law (*'urf*), the aptitude to compose poetry, and dancing skills.⁴¹⁸

Three of these five criteria – weapons, customary law, and poetry – immediately serve as instruments of conflict resolution in line with the social duties of the *qabā'il* noted above; piety and dancing skills do so only mediately, for they provide social and cultural capital and thus enhance individual prestige, i.e. one's position within a dispute. Honor (*sharaf*) and autonomy are the core values on which *qabili* self-conceptualization rests.⁴¹⁹ The fulfillment of his social duties falls into this realm and thereby receives its great significance. Thus, in order to serve as protector of his family and the presumably 'weak' non-tribal populace in the territories of his tribe, a *qabili* can employ force;⁴²⁰ the plentitude of accounts of tribal feuds⁴²¹ bears witness of this as does very openly the huge presence of weapons among the *qabā'il*⁴²² and rituals⁴²³ surrounding them. As to the rationale for ostentative weapon display (and use) in recent times, Heinze convincingly argues for an interpretation of the survey data she presents to reflect a desire for security provision through state institutions, while at the same time as these are felt lacking or corrupted.⁴²⁴ In consequence, *qabā'il* prefer to take over security issues by themselves on a smaller, thus harder to regulate, scale. Ideally, however,

⁴¹⁸ Caton, "Social Group", 165ff.; Steven C. Caton, "*Peaks of Yemen I Summon*". *Poetry as Cultural Practice in a North Yemeni Tribe* (Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 1990), 26.

⁴¹⁹ For detailed accounts on *qabila* values (*qabyala*) and honor see: Paul Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen* (Oxford: Clarendon 1989); Nawja Adra, *Qabyala: The Tribal Concept in the Central Highlands of the Yemen Arab Republic* (Philadelphia: Temple University, PhD dissertation, 1982).

⁴²⁰ Robert B. Serjeant has compared their social function to that of an "arms bearing aristocracy". Robert B. Serjeant, "South Arabia", in *Commoners, Climbers and Notables: A Sampler of Studies on Social Ranking in the Middle East*, ed. Christoffel A.O. van Nieuwenhuijze (Leiden: Brill 1977), 226–247, here: 227.

⁴²¹ Exemplary: Caton, *Peaks*; Dresch, *Tribes*; Weir, *Tribal Order*. Such feuds can result in circles of 'blood revenge' (*zahirat ath-tha'r*) which sometimes last for decades without anyone remembering the original conflict details.

⁴²² The availability and presence of weapons will be discussed in chapter 4.2.1. Cf. also Marie-Christine Heinze, "On 'Gun Culture' and 'Civil Statehood' in Yemen," *Journal of Arabian Studies: Arabia, the Gulf, and the Red Sea* 4, no. 1 (2014): 70–95, note 4: Graduate Institute of International Studies, *Small Arms Survey 2007: Guns and the City*, (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2007), Annexe 5. "The Small Arms Survey bases its numbers for Yemen on a study conducted by Miller, which came to the conclusion that 'Yemen has between 6–9 million small arms, most of which are from the former Eastern Bloc countries or China, with fewer numbers of various makes and models from other countries, some dating back to the early nineteenth century' [Derek B. Miller, *Demand, Stockpiles, and Social Controls: Small Arms in Yemen* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2003), vii]. While still a large number in relation to its population of approximately twenty-four million people, Miller's results thus significantly reduce the general estimate of sixty million small arms in the hands of Yemenis, which continues to circulate in the country." For more information see also the Yemen Armed Violence Assessment (YAVA), accessed September 15, 2014, <http://www.yemen-ava.org/>.

⁴²³ Most prominently the *bar'a*, a ritual performance many times including weapons; according to the most recent anthropological study by Ulrike Stohrer, it serves as a *rite de passage* as conceptualized by Arnold van Gennep for the "neutralization and integration of potentially dangerous strangers" when they encounter each other, i.e. as a preventive measure to avoid possible tensions. Ulrike Stohrer, *Bar'a. Rituelle Performance, Identität und Kulturpolitik im Jemen* (Berlin: Schwarz 2009; cited also in Heinze, "Gun Culture", 84f.); Arnold van Gennep, *Les rites de passage* (Paris: Emile Nourry, 1909); Caton, *Peaks*.

⁴²⁴ Heinze, "Gun Culture", 77; 92.

protection should be provided through the mitigation of tension and, in case of open conflict, through mediation (*ṣulḥ*) and arbitration (*taḥkīm*). This is the task of the sheikhs and an important source of their authority.

Beyond mediation and arbitration, sheikhs are responsible for administrative, jurisdictional, and representational issues, in short: for securing the social and economic well-being of their respective *qabila*.⁴²⁵ Furthermore, they lead their constituents in armed conflict in the case that all prior attempts for peaceful settlement of disputes have failed. It is important to note that they do not possess coercive power over their *co-qabā'il*, nor do they automatically inherit their office. Rather, their assumption of office partly rests on descent from a family in which there have been prior sheikhs as well as on election out of a number of qualified candidates. Hereditary and social prestige plays a role here, as does knowledge (especially of tribal law), skills, and their position within social and political networks, i.e. the patronage system. Their power is temporary; it fluctuates and needs to be asserted through 'good performance' and strategic/diplomatic comportment. Accordingly, their behavior is far more practical and adopted to specific contexts than primordially determined in any way. The civil war in Upper Yemen that followed the end of the Imamate era (1962–1970) provides a good example. It forced many sheikhly families to take a stance and join either the royalist, that is pro-Imam, or republican camp. These choices affected their political, and with that social, position for a long time. Due to their capabilities in mobilizing their constituents for one side or the other, sheikhs were sought-after subjects for clientelist networks.⁴²⁶ Accordingly, while in the 1960s ambitious sheikhs would already receive various resources and could employ them to secure or expand their role in their respective community, the 1970s – following the victory of the Republicans – were the heyday of sheikhly inclusion into the newly developing state patronage system⁴²⁷ (financed to large extent by the first oil boom in the Gulf) as well as political offices. The family of prominent Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ahmar of the Hashid tribal confederation, for instance, lives on the social, political, and economic capital he had been able to build during this period beyond his death in 2007.⁴²⁸

The described processes which rearranged the social order of Upper Yemen during this

⁴²⁵ The subsequent paragraphs build on the detailed and very illustrative elaborations on the social position and role of tribal sheikhs by Brandt ("Inhabiting"). For a more historical account see also: Serjeant, "South Arabia".

⁴²⁶ Brandt, "Inhabiting", 29; cf. her reference to Dresch and Burrowes (Paul Dresch, "The Position of Shaykhs Among the Northern Tribes of Yemen", *Man* 19, no. 1 (1984): 31–49; Robert Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic. The Politics of Development, 1962–1986* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1987).

⁴²⁷ Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 175. One facet of many was their role in the implementation of development projects in the 1970s, a task which the government was incapable of fulfilling itself and handed over to local 'brokers'. Weir, *Tribal Order*, 289ff.

⁴²⁸ Cf. Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 174–175; Brandt, "Inhabiting", 18.

period were far from conflict-free; struggles for power between various involved parties, among them the respective regimes, were the order of the day.⁴²⁹ In parallel to the ascension of some sheikhs, however, the losers can easily be identified: What we observe clearly reflects a replacement of the formerly dominant *sādah* elite. But also the sheikhs had to pay a price for the wealth they accumulated. While in the beginning the ability to gear resources towards their communities also strengthened their position in these communities, the more they got pulled into the regime's neopatrimonial grip (especially since Saleh's ascent to power in 1978), the less attention they paid to their traditional duties and the looser their bond with their people became. Regime co-optation often involved political offices or business opportunities which required them or at least induced them to spend extended periods in the capital Sana'a. Not being present, then, they could not appropriately attend to local concerns and were thus soon critically perceived as distant, as "absentee sheikhs",⁴³⁰ an oxymoron that should have consequences (to be explicated below) when considering that their main task supposedly consisted in mediating social affairs.⁴³¹

Based on his studies of poetry among the *qabila* of Upper Yemen,⁴³² Caton convincingly positions mediation in its sociopolitical context: "Mediation implies 'controlling' society's members through persuasion; hence *persuasion*, and not the exercise of force, becomes the basis of power."⁴³³ This notion of power is closely linked to the core of *qabili* self-conceptualization around honor and autonomy⁴³⁴ as noted earlier: Through the creation of (highly complex, as Caton demonstrates) poetry, honor is displayed as well as the ability to think independently and position oneself politically; besides, it reflects the autonomy of the poet. On the one hand, it also conserves the autonomy and honor of the audience who need to be persuaded and cannot be forced. It thus opens up a space for negotiation and a symbolic exchange of blows (of a rhetorical kind, which, however, can actually lead up to the symbolic

⁴²⁹ For a detailed micro-study of such disputes see Weir, *Tribal Order*, 284ff.; Charles F. Swagman, "Tribe and Politics: An Example from Highland Yemen", *Journal of Anthropological Research* 44, no. 3 (1988): 251–261; also: Brandt, "Inhabiting".

⁴³⁰ Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, "The Yemeni *hijrah* Concept of Tribal Protection", in *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East*, ed. Tarif Khalidi (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1984), 483–494, here: 489 (cited in: Brandt, 'Inhabiting', 31).

⁴³¹ Dresch, *History*, 160; Sarah Phillips, *Yemen and the Politics of Permanent Crisis* (New York: Routledge, 2011): 53f.; Brandt, "Inhabiting", 29ff.

⁴³² Caton, *Peaks*.

⁴³³ Steven C. Caton, "Power, Persuasion, and Language: A Critique of the Segmentary Model in the Middle East", in *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 19 (1987): 77–102, here: 80. For more on the role of oratory in the political field from an anthropological perspective see: Maurice Bloch (ed.), *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society* (London/New York: Academic Press, 1975).

⁴³⁴ Caton, *Peaks*, 22; 109ff.; 164. Steven C. Caton, "The Poetic Construction of Self", in *Anthropological Quarterly* 58, no.4 (1985): 141–151.

use of violence as well).⁴³⁵ Poetry as a means of communication is employed in various social contexts; in mediation and arbitration it has a vital role. It is embedded in a complex system of rules, at the core of which lies the obligation to accept mediation and arbitration as superior to forceful action in dispute.⁴³⁶

Besides the sheikhly role, the topic of mediation elucidates another weighty point: Not only sheikhs, but all *qabila* should be able to master the art of oral persuasion which lies at the basis of composing poetry; correspondingly, such symbolic communication will always be understood and thus needs to be considered when looking at and analyzing political communication processes in Yemen.⁴³⁷ It pervades all levels of (political) communication up to the state level;⁴³⁸ extensive distribution and correspondingly a great impact of single pieces due to technological advances in recording since the 1970s make it a prime medium for influencing public opinion.⁴³⁹ What Caton holds to be the key for understanding “the exercise of power (...) through persuasion” should therefore also specifically be taken into account in order to understand frame development, resonance, and competition, since they equally involve negotiation for interpretational sovereignty.⁴⁴⁰

All these deeply rooted, intricate practices which could only be hinted at give proof of the high value attributed to nonviolent conflict resolution in Yemeni (*qabili*) society.⁴⁴¹ It thus poses a contrast to connotations the light-blooded, inherently martial tribesmen so often depicted. Certainly, the ideal of smooth mediation in real life remains insurmountable. The numbers of homicides related to social violence are increasing, for Heinze,⁴⁴² this is a signifier that the mechanisms for prevention are failing. She attributes this failure to three factors: failure or evasion of *qabili* conflict resolution, due to its negligence of individual

⁴³⁵ Steven C. Caton, *Yemen Chronicle. An Anthropology of War and Mediation* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005).

⁴³⁶ Persuasion in the form of poetry is a “constitutive social practice” which creates social and political reality. A sheikh’s withdrawal from this field therefore equals a withdrawal from communal life altogether, at least in his social role. Even sporadic absence can be harmful since matters are seldom simple and clearly demarcated in duration. On the contrary: How tedious, overflowing, and at times incomprehensible to the outside observer these maneuvers can turn out to be is captured by Caton’s meticulous description in his 2005 monograph, in which he contextualizes a two-decade-long dispute between a village and a sanctuary. Steven C. Caton, *Yemen Chronicle*.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 56ff.

⁴³⁸ In a study of the use of poetry to influence the imam, Lucine Taminian for example distinguishes between an “advice genre” shaped by traditional religious jurisprudential (*fiqh*) language and discourse and an “eulogy genre” with more emotional metaphors/tropes. Therein we can see how the discursive anchoring differs depending on the function. Lucine Taminian, ‘Persuading the Monarchs: Poetry and Politics in Yemen, (1920–1950), in *Le Yémen Contemporain*, ed. Rémy Leveau, Franck Mermier, and Udo Steinbach (Paris: Édition Karthala, 1999), 203–219.

⁴³⁹ Cf. Flagg Miller, *The Moral Resonance of Arab Media. Audiocassette Poetry and Culture in Yemen* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁴⁴⁰ Caton, “Power”, 82.

⁴⁴¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 89; Caton, *Peaks*, 108.

⁴⁴² Heinze, “Gun Culture”, 87f.

justice in favor of keeping up social harmony and honor; the weakness of these mechanisms in dealing with conflict once it has erupted and between socially unequal parties; and, lastly, the described erosion of sheikhly legitimacy due to their inclusion into regime patronage in combination with a general weakening of customary law under conditions of social change.⁴⁴³ “(A)lternative normative systems (religious beliefs, codified law)”, she concludes, “have so far been unable to fill the void, particularly as these are not framed in the language of honor, moral equality and collective responsibility that informs practices of social violence.”⁴⁴⁴ All of this, however, provides a differentiated picture of the relation between *qabili* society and violence. I also noted that sheikhs (as one group among many) are included in the intricate patronage network the regime – specifically Ali Abdullah Saleh – has knit over the last decades. Acknowledging that, it still needs to be viewed as more than just static; rather, it has and has always had to be flexible enough to adapt to shifting situations – I will elaborate further on that at a later point. Individuals have always had options and acted strategically according to context, their objectives, and their means at hand, while the perception of all of these plays a greater role than any kind of ‘given facts’. Alliances are temporary and shifting; they are stimulated by (monetary) incentives as well as persuasion.⁴⁴⁵ *Qabila* are not homogenous within their groups; nor are they primordial. And while *qabili* affiliation still plays an important role in self-identification towards others, it is always situational and can be superseded by other categories such as region, profession, or else.⁴⁴⁶ In sum: A deficit-based view on *qabili* belonging is inadequate; on the contrary, among the different *qabā’il* there exist highly sophisticated systems of interaction which are all but static.⁴⁴⁷

Similar arguments against primordial conceptualizations as have been presented can be made for other groups in Yemen, especially the various Islamist actors. Two out of these I want to highlight for their undeniable relevance to Zaydi as well as to Southern grievances: the Muslim Brothers and the Salafis.

⁴⁴³ How there is a demand for conflict mediation but a lack of arbitrators is highlighted in: *Small Arms Survey*, ‘Under Pressure. Social Violence Over Land and Water in Yemen’, no. 2 (October 2010): n. 79; n. 80.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁴⁴⁵ One could argue that incentives also persuade. By persuasion I understand only rhetorical persuasion as I have described above.

⁴⁴⁶ Heinze, “Gun Culture”, 78ff.

⁴⁴⁷ What I have presented here on *qabyala* is in most cases based on research in the North of Yemen. The position and role of *qaba’il* in the South is different most prominently due to historical reasons: the socialist regime during the PDRY strove to eliminate their social specificity. However, the South also remains connected to *qabila* values and norms. Brandt, “Inhabiting”, 3 (note 2); for a more contested view on the role of former tribal leaders in the Southern state see the comments by Elham Manea in: McCune, *Tribes and Tribalism*, 8.

4.2.2. Islamist actors

Laurent Bonnefoy identifies five ideal-types of Islamists in Yemen, which he distinguishes along the criteria of their “participation in party politics, loyalty to the ruler, significant episodes of confrontation with the state, and overt stigmatization of other religious and political identities”⁴⁴⁸. The variations shown by the groups provide evidence further necessitating a closer examination of groups’ positions and roles in the complex setup of Yemenis society and politics.

	<i>Main leaders or organizations</i>	<i>Direct and overt participation in party politics</i>	<i>Automatic loyalty to the republican ruler</i>	<i>Significant episodes of violent confrontation with the state</i>	<i>Participation in interreligious violence and stigmatization</i>
<i>Muslim Brotherhood</i>	Al-Islah Party	Yes	no	no	yes
<i>Violent 'Jihadi' Fringes</i>	Al-Qaeda affiliates	No	no	yes	yes
<i>Salafis</i> ⁴⁴⁹	Muqbil al- Wadi'i (died 2001)	No	yes	no	yes
<i>Sufis</i>	Dar al- Mustafa	No	yes	no	no
<i>Zaydi Revivalists</i>	Hizb al-Haqq; Hussein al- Houthi (died 2004)	Yes	no	yes	yes

Table 4.1.: Main Islamist actors and their interactions with the state and other religious groups⁴⁵⁰

The Muslim Brothers

Historically, the first Islamist group that established itself in Yemen was the Muslim Brotherhood.⁴⁵¹ The anti-Imamate opposition since the 1940s, closely connected with the name of the political reformer Qa'id Muhammad Mahmoud al-Zubayri (d. 1965), was

⁴⁴⁸ Laurent Bonnefoy, “Varieties of Islamism in Yemen: The Logic of Integration Under Pressure”, *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 13, no. 1 (2009): 2.

⁴⁴⁹ Bonnefoy uses the term “Salafists” here, while at other times referring to “Salafis”, specifically in his book on the topic. I consider ‘Salafis’ to be slightly less negatively connotated and thus preferable.

⁴⁵⁰ Taken from: Bonnefoy, “Varieties”, 2; spelling slightly abridged, highlighted TG.

⁴⁵¹ For the following paragraph see *ibid.*, 3f.

inspired by the writings of Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. After the 1962 revolution, al-Zubayri quickly became disillusioned with the new regime due to its manifold disagreements and perceived lack of legitimacy. He initiated a campaign of reconciliation and integration of the different segments of society, which would become his legacy (he was assassinated in 1965) and one of the founding principles of the republic. During this configurational phase in the setting up of the state, the Muslim Brothers acquired positions in many institutions, namely in the educational sector and throughout security forces, and since then presented an influential parameter in politics. Special significance, also in regard to Zaydi grievances,⁴⁵² must be attributed to the parallel school system they had helped to create since the 1970s, the so-called ‘Scientific Institutes’ (*ma‘āhid ‘ilmyāh*). Designed to counter feared expansion of socialist thought in the border regions with the Southern Yemeni state, financed for that purpose to a large extent by Saudi Arabia, these religious colleges were only integrated into the public school system in 2002 – and only against broad opposition.⁴⁵³ By then they had impacted on consecutive cohorts of pupils.⁴⁵⁴ With the opening up of the political field and increasing opportunities for formal political participation in 1990, the Muslim Brothers (or those Islamists generally believed to be close to them and thus conflated under the umbrella term) convened a variety of actors from not only Islamist, but also tribal and professional backgrounds, and formed Al-Islah Party (Reform Party).⁴⁵⁵ Led by prominent Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar, head of the Hashid tribal confederation and speaker of parliament, until his death in 2007, the party regularly participated in the democratic process and can be said to have been an integral part of the regime and governing bodies all over the country with a fair share of votes in elections. In the 1994 civil war, Islah⁴⁵⁶ supported the government militarily with militias – in great part formed of so-called ‘Arab Afghans’ returning from fighting in Afghanistan – as well as

⁴⁵² Cf. among others: vom Bruck, *Islam*.

⁴⁵³ Bonnefoy, “Varieties”, 8. The debate reaches back to 1982 and is mirrored in repeated aggressive oral and written statements by Islah representatives: Laurent Bonnefoy, *Salafism in Yemen: Transnationalism and Religious Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 155–157.

⁴⁵⁴ Bonnefoy cites sources that estimate the number of pupils between 326,000 in 1994–1995 (attending 1,381 scientific institutes) and around 600,000 in 2001 (*Salafism*, 156).

⁴⁵⁵ The full name is ‘*Al-Tajammu al-yamani lil-islam*’ (‘Yemeni Congregation for Reform’). Jillian Schwedler provides deeper insights into Islah’s evolution: “The Yemeni Islah Party: Political Opportunities and Coalition Building in a Transitional Polity”, in *Islamist Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 205–229; Jillian Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). On an attempt to distinguish three dominant groups of influence among Islah (1. Islamist, 2. Tribal, 3. “Patrimonialistic” Wing), see: Ludwig Stiffl, “The Yemeni Islamists in the Process of Democratization”, in *Le Yémen Contemporain*, ed. Remy Leveau, Franck Mermier, and Udo Steinbach (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1999), 248–266.

⁴⁵⁶ For more on Islah in the context of the 1994 war see: Paul Dresch and Bernard Haykel, “Stereotypes and Political Styles: Islamists and Tribesfolk in Yemen”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27 (1995): 405–431.

ideologically with anti-socialist (i.e. anti-secessionist) *fatāwa* by its (in)famous radical ideologist Abd al-Majid al-Zindani (born 1942). Both of these facts show another, less ‘democratic’ or clear-cut, political face of Islah’s activities: Until today, Southerners incriminate these militias of looting and extensive violence against civilians and hold a bitter grudge against al-Zindani for his incentive *fatāwa*, which aimed at setting people against each other in the name of religion.⁴⁵⁷ Al-Zindani, who has spent a considerable period in Saudi Arabia, has allegedly been some kind of “spiritual mentor” to Osama bin Laden.⁴⁵⁸ During the 1980s he arranged for Yemeni fighters to join the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan and subsequently never managed to alleviate allegations of openly training jihadists, even less so, for in 1993 he founded, and from then onward headed, the religious Al-Iman University in Sana’a, on whose structure and curriculum it was and still is highly difficult to get reliable information.⁴⁵⁹ Al-Zindani’s relationship with Saleh was sufficiently good for him to be appointed to his five-man presidential council from 1993–1997 and to secure himself and his university Saleh’s protection against US and other accusations of unacceptable militancy.⁴⁶⁰ Overall, at this point there is little to add to Bonnefoy, who closes his presentation of al-Zindani by emphasizing his “ambiguous role, acting both as a mainstream popular figure (his criticism of American foreign policy is commonly accepted by Yemenis) and a marginal one, as he represents a bridge to a type of violent militancy that does not appeal to many”.⁴⁶¹

The Salafis

Salafism⁴⁶² is a strand of Sunni reformism which goes back to the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya in the 14th century CE and whose central aim, to reestablish religious practice in the form observed by the first Muslims, was taken up and further developed by thinkers from the 18th century CE onwards.⁴⁶³ The term ‘Salafism’ or ‘Salafi’ is often time conflated to include all, partly very different, strands of the movement. The well-known strive to return to an Islam as

⁴⁵⁷ Along the same lines, Al-Zindani’s *fatwas* are claimed to be linked with the murder of Southern YSP politician Jarallah Omar in 2002 and other murders. Gregory Johnsen, “Profile of Sheikh Abd al-Majid al-Zindani”, *Terrorism Monitor* 4, no. 7 (2006).

⁴⁵⁸ He later on (before 9/11) distanced himself from Bin Laden and denied to have received any funding for his religious Al-Iman University. Johnsen, “Profile”. In February 2004, al-Zindani was listed “specially designated global terrorist” by the USA and as “individual belonging to or associated with al-Qaeda” by the UN Security Council Resolution 1267. Gregory Johnsen, “Yemen’s Al-Iman University: A Pipeline for Fundamentalists?” *Terrorism Monitor* 4, no. 22 (2006).

⁴⁵⁹ The number of students enrolled in 2006 ranged around 4,600. Johnsen, “Al-Iman University”.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶¹ Bonnefoy, “Varieties”, 4.

⁴⁶² For this paragraph see Bonnefoy, *Salafism*, 39ff.

⁴⁶³ Bonnefoy, *Salafism*, 42–43; Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

practiced by the pious ancestors (*al-salaf al-salih*), a certain literalism in reading the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions (*Hadīth* and *tawhid*), and – in reverse – a rejection of all innovation (*bid'a*) or local particularity. This includes what separated them from mainstream Sunnis, namely the refutation of the four legal schools (*madhhab*) of Sunni Islam⁴⁶⁴, the Maliki, Hanafi, Hanbali, and Shafi'i school, the latter being predominant in Yemen. The main accusation Salafis hold against them is their distance to the pure original Islam by the jurisprudential practices of imitation (*taqlid*) and analogical reasoning (*qiyas*) as well as decision-making based on the consensus of the 'ulamā' (*ijma*). In their stead, they put emphasis on establishing the authenticity of tradition (in the sense of passing down) over the generations of the first Muslims and strict observance of these models. As with tribalism, there is a tendency to view Salafism in Yemen as essentialist as well; furthermore, is it often claimed to be 'imported' from or even strategically exported by Saudi Arabia and equaled with the Saudi Wahhabi tradition. The latter can be attributed to the prospering and rapid spread of Salafism at a time when the Wahhabi kingdom was considered to strongly influence Northern Yemen after the revolution and the establishment of socialist South Yemen. Zaydism was being marginalized and (strict) Sunni education held high in the scientific institutes, plus there were large numbers of Yemeni migrants working in Saudi Arabia who returned and brought with them religious practices that resembled much more the literal interpretations of Saudi Wahhabism than the local traditions of the Shafi'i school; furthermore, there were financial flows from Saudi Arabia (by Saudis or successful Yemenis) in favor of Sunni/Salafi institutions such as mosques etc. All this seemed to fit into the picture of deliberate proselytizing efforts by the problematic northern neighbor – a supposed interference, which is even today very much alive in various discourses and keeps being fed (out of conviction) by those critical of Saudi involvement. Bonnefoy, however, presents a detailed account on the specificities of Yemeni Salafism and the ambiguity of its relations with Saudi Arabia. His main arguments build on the concept of translocality, i.e. the assumption "that concepts and ideas adapt to their new context and face resistance when they travel".⁴⁶⁵ Rather than being important and part of a(n attempted) "Saudisation"⁴⁶⁶ of Yemeni society, he elaborates on the role of transnational interactions on all levels, especially the migratory experience, the de facto impact of Saudi support and simply the availability of higher quality religious material (audiocassettes, books, television) and scholarships for study,

⁴⁶⁴ These thinkers include for instance Muhammad Bin Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792), Muhammad al-Shawkani (1759–1834), Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897), Muhammad Abdu (1849–1905) or Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949).

⁴⁶⁵ Bonnefoy, *Salafism*, 17.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

but also the inconsistencies, compromises, and adaptations of everyday practice and everyday politics,⁴⁶⁷ the influence of syncretism, nationalism, and tribalism on the figuration of a specifically endogenous Yemeni Salafism (he calls it the “Yemenisation” of Salafism).⁴⁶⁸ The situatedness of actors and the historical context are simultaneously underlined by the relevance of the individual experiences of leaders. Muqbil Bin Hadi al-Wadi’i can be said to have been the most influential person in shaping and promoting Salafism in Yemen. Born into a humble existence as a Zaydi *qabili* in the late 1920s or early 1930s, al-Wadi’i early in his life developed a feeling of discrimination by social and religious hierarchies: His origins and the attitude of those socially superior to him allegedly barred him from access to higher religious education. Instead, he pursued theological studies in Saudi Arabia throughout the 1960s and 1970s, where he slowly turned his back on his native denomination⁴⁶⁹ in favor of Sunni Islam. After his expulsion from the kingdom in 1979 (on the grounds of anti-monarchy contacts) he returned to Yemen and soon founded the Dar al-Ḥadīth study center in the small town of Dammaj in the Sa’ada Governorate – where he had prior felt so disgraced by the Zaydi elites and still faced a hostile environment.⁴⁷⁰ The institute quickly prospered, partly due to support by rich businessmen and remaining contacts from his time in Saudi Arabia. It attracted students first from the region, then from Muslim countries all over the world. Around the Dar al-Ḥadīth developed a whole network of bookstores, stalls selling his recordings and other material, and al-Wadi’i made it his mission to speak and teach in even the remotest places. In the 1990s al-Wadi’i’s former students began to establish their own institutions or mosques in other regions of Yemen and the mother institute alone housed more than 1,000 resident students.⁴⁷¹ One of the most distinct features was political quietism, formulated in strict repudiation of the core Zaydi principle of *khurūj*.

We do not accept revolt (*khurūj*) against leaders of Muslims, even if they are not perfect. We do not believe that coups d’état can be the source of reforms, rather they bring corruption into society. In return we accept the combat against the leaders of Aden, as long as they continue in atheism and socialism, and call people to worship Lenin, Marx, and other impious leaders.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁷ An excellent example for such everyday politics is given by Diane Singerman for a Cairene community. Comparable processes can be assumed for Yemen as well. Singerman, *Avenues*.

⁴⁶⁸ Bonnefoy, *Salafism*, 237.

⁴⁶⁹ The term ‘denomination’ is used in preference over ‘sect’ for its more neutral connotation. Besides, I consider Zaydism to be distinct and large enough a religious subgroup to deserve the naming as denomination.

⁴⁷⁰ Bonnefoy, *Salafism*, 57.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴⁷² Muqbil al-Wadi’i, ed., *Tarjamat Abi Abd al-Rahman Muqbil Bin Hadi al-Wadi’i* [Biography of Abi Abd al-Rahman Muqbil Bin Hadi al-Wadi’i] (Sana’a: Maktabat al-Athariyya, 1999), 136 (cited in: Bonnefoy, *Salafism*, 90).

In the eyes of Salafism, all other denominations were dividing Muslims and creating *fitna*, chaos, which is why they reject them.

What plays into this rejection of other Muslim groups cannot solely be explained on theological grounds; it should also be understood as a conscious move of distinction on the competitive field for religious allegiance. The last group Muqbilian Salafism opposed (next to, of course, US and Western influence) were the ‘erring Southern infidel communists’ – on the grounds of lacking true faith and in addition for allegedly receiving support by treacherous Saudi Arabia. The claim to refrain from politics must therefore be critically evaluated: Salafists did play a very political role in their offensive position against so many other groups (they participated in operations against Zaydis and against Sufi shrines and took a very vocal stance against the Houthis from 2004 onwards)⁴⁷³ and acted as a convenient tool for regime politics, for their abstention from official politics and critique of the ruler indirectly, but notably, supported the ruling regime. Thus, they could count on “benevolent tolerance”⁴⁷⁴ in return. Al-Wadi’i died in 2001. Salafism remains very strong to date, and the Dar al-Ḥadīth still prospers and defends its existence in the antagonistic Zaydi/Houthi environment of Dammaj. Since mid-2013, open fighting between Houthi supporters and Salafis in the area has made the news and can be interpreted in the context of the renewed mobilization of the Houthis and their political claims from 2014 onwards.

I do not wish to delve deeper into the other branches of Islamism in Yemen. The ‘violent jihadi fringes’,⁴⁷⁵ namely represented by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), has gained extensive scholarly⁴⁷⁶ and media coverage in recent years due to increased activity and attacks, the short-lived 2011 territorial conquest in Abyan Governorate, and the subsequent expansion of US-drone attacks in the South. Although it represents a factor of high relevance to national and international politics, AQAP does not play a significant role in the argument of the dissertation and will thus only be marginally mentioned. Similarly, although Sufism constitutes an influential societal actor of political importance in the eastern parts of the South (preeminently Hadhramawt) and as such plays a role in regime politics as well, it will not be discussed, either.⁴⁷⁷ Zaydi revivalism on the other hand will be dealt with in detail in the

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 273 ff.

⁴⁷⁴ Bonnefoy, “Varieties”, 5.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁷⁶ As a commendable example see: Gregory Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, al-Qaeda, and the Battle for Arabia* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2013); furthermore interesting is the brief comparison between Houthi and AQAP narratives in: Lucas Winter, “The Ansar of Yemen: The Huthis and al-Qaeda”, *Small Wars Journal*, May 1, 2013.

⁴⁷⁷ For some core insights on Sufism in Yemen see: Alexander Knysh, “The Tariqa on a Landcruiser: The Resurgence of Sufism in Yemen”, *Middle East Journal* 55, no. 3 (2001): 399–414.

section on the background and history of the Houthi rebellion.

At this point, the specific differences between the various Islamist groups, however, remain significant. They partly constitute, as well as reflect, the genuine and deep-rooted (theological) differences and related conflict lines between them, they are partly the result of more conscious, strategic distinction and delineation (as laid out for the Salafi-Zaydi divide in regard to *khurūj* which was actively promoted by al-Wadi'i). The antipodal stances Salafis and Zaydi revivalists take on issues of political participation and loyalty to the religious leader, along with the general tendency towards interreligious violence and stigmatization among all groups (except for the Sufis), speak in this regard. It is crucial to understand these critical points in order to properly evaluate the disputes and fighting. I seek to explain and the frames that relate to the specific 'other' in each case, above all the Zaydi-Salafi fighting and the conflict between Islah and the Peaceful Southern Movement (and prior to its establishment Southern socialists more generally).

4.3. A United Yemen?

When in 1990 the Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen were unified, the step was met with euphoria⁴⁷⁸ by some and deep skepticism by others.⁴⁷⁹ Scholars, too, were divided in their outlook on a unified state: while some highlighted the commonality between the two peoples and cultures, which had never before lived together under united rule, others pointed out the many obstacles the process was to face, the divides between different groups of actors, and the unpreparedness with which everything took place.⁴⁸⁰ A closer look at the concepts of unity and nation in the Yemeni context provides not only illuminating insights into the historical process of the genesis of nationalism and the unification, but, more importantly, it paves the way for understanding the recent struggle of the Southern secessionist movement as well as being able to provide an ample example of framing, frame contestation, and lastly the failing of a frame in a different, albeit related, context to the research question.

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. Noel Brehony, *Yemen Divided: The Story of a Failed State in South Arabia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 183; Brian Whitaker, *The Birth of Modern Yemen*, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://al-bab.com/birth-modern-yemen-introduction>, 5ff.

⁴⁷⁹ Whitaker, *Birth*, 26ff.

⁴⁸⁰ For a good example see the varied discussions of different aspects of unity, its genesis, and problems in: Michel Tuchscherer, "Le Yémen, passé et présent de l'unité", *La Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 67 (1994).

It is thereby important to note the different reference systems that the terms ‘nation’ and ‘unity’ belong to: ‘nation’ refers to identity, to ‘Yemeni-ness’ (however that term is filled), whereas ‘unity’ in this context denotes the political concept of a unified (nation)state. A nation is not a phenomenon *sui generis*. Rather, a nation is a persuasive strand or, in the famous term coined by Benedict Anderson, an ‘imagined community’ based on the assumption of shared traits and a sense of belonging together. It “is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may peril in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible (...) not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.”⁴⁸¹ Differently put: a ‘nation’ is a frame.⁴⁸² So, how did it come to be in the Yemeni context? And how did it achieve precedence over other forms of solidarity? Or, did it even take precedence over other forms of solidarity? And what is its relation to the ‘unity frame’?

The name ‘*Yamanah*’ dates back to even pre-Islamic times and roughly indicates a part of contemporary Yemen;⁴⁸³ the Qur’an speaks of ‘*Yaman*’ as the entire territory south of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.⁴⁸⁴ Despite this common reference (with multiple connotations, though!) and despite the belief in shared genealogical roots in the mythical figure of Qahtan, there was no conceptualization equaling a ‘nation’ until well into the 20th century. While Imam Yahya repeatedly lay claims to ‘Greater Yemen’ (*al-yaman al-kubra*), it cannot be reconstructed in detail what *exactly* he meant by this. He, as before the Ottomans, decidedly claimed to rule over Muslims, i.e. over a religiously defined collective. When referring to his subjects, the imam used the term ‘*ahl*’, which connotes kin, and not the more political and nationalist term ‘*sha’b*’ (‘people’).⁴⁸⁵ The latter would be more affiliated with the British-ruled South. As I have elaborated earlier, the British structured and ordered the South according to their administrative needs and thereby imprinted their own categorization on the territories they ruled. New forms of community were created (e.g. the ‘Nine Tribes’)

⁴⁸¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London/New York: Verso, 2nd edition, 1991), 7.

⁴⁸² In a similar direction stirs Homi Bhabha with his semiotic or discursive approach: “The nation’s ‘coming into being’ as a system of cultural signification, as the representation of social life rather than the discipline of social polity, emphasizes th[e] instability of knowledge (...) The emergence of the political ‘rationality’ of the nation as a form of narrative – textual strategies, metaphoric elements, sub-texts and figurative strategems – has its own history.” Such a narrative perspective on nationalism fits very well into the Yemeni context with its powerful oral traditions (as has been argued in the section on poetry). Homi K. Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1990), 1f; for more on Arab Nationalism in general and a narrative perspective on it more specifically see: Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, ed., *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

⁴⁸³ Whitaker, *Birth*, 5.

⁴⁸⁴ Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 25; Dresch, *History*.

⁴⁸⁵ Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 35f.

where formerly there had been quite different “practices of belonging”.⁴⁸⁶ The division lines were created relating to administrative practices separating towns (namely Aden) from the countryside;⁴⁸⁷ furthermore, the (at least urban) population got acquainted with distant bureaucratic administration, in opposition to the personalized imamic rule. Thus, the colonial setup had a weighty impact not only upon the later border delineation of the two Yemeni states, but also upon the respective outlook of citizens on and their relationship to the state.

Since the late 1920s or early 1930s, nationalist ideas began to spread. They originated in general Arab nationalism and were imported by intellectuals travelling to Cairo and other regional centers. Beyond travel and economic ties, media played a vital role for the dissemination of nationalist thought too. Nationalist newspapers were founded from the 1940s onward and other print material circulated. However, among the overwhelmingly illiterate population, it took different means to succeed. Radio and poetry, especially the latter, would provide the optimal instruments to reach them and to create a large audience.⁴⁸⁸ *Sawt al-Arab* (Voice of the Arabs) radio in Cairo commenced its Pan-Arab broadcasting in 1953 and with the widening availability of transistor radios quickly expanded its coverage area. Yemeni nationalists appeared on stage and connected the idea of Pan-Arabism with nationalism, however, a downside was inherent as well: the need to bridge the likely competition between the grand idea of the Arab nation – a strong frame as well, due in part to the charismatic figure of Gamal Abdel Nasser – with the more parochial Yemeni nationalist frame.⁴⁸⁹

Poetry was even better suited, for it was genuinely anchored in Yemeni culture, widely used on many occasions, circulated orally, in written form, through the radio, and later on as

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁸⁷ It is worth noting that the inhabitants of Aden – based on the experience of colonial importance and centrality – developed a sense of distinct Adeni identity, reflected in campaigns with the call “Aden for the Adenis” in the 1960s as well as today by a small faction of the Hirak. Something very similar can be said about the people living in Hadhramawt, who were never really integrated into the British protectorate for reasons of distance. Hadhramis constantly felt close to the communities of early migrants and traders in places along the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia – closer, some argue, than to their fellow Yemeni or even Southern Yemeni countrymen. This emphasis of Hadhrami identity is still an issue among Southerners and a challenge for the unity of the Southern Movement. Susanne Dahlgren, *Contesting Realities: The Public Sphere and Morality in Southern Yemen* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 268f; Kevin Alexander Davis, “From Collective Memory to Nationalism: Historical Remembrance in Aden” (M.A. thesis, Georgetown University Washington D.C. April 2014); Linda Boxberger, *On the Edge of Empire: Hadhramawt, Emigration, and the Indian Ocean, 1880s–1930s* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002); Ulrike Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants and State Formation in Hadhramaut: Reforming the Homeland* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Engseung Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

⁴⁸⁸ For detailed elaborations and descriptive examples see Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 42ff.

⁴⁸⁹ See Fred Halliday on this problem within the National Liberation Front (NLF) in the South: “The Formation of Yemeni Nationalism: Initial Reflections”, in *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, ed. Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 26–41. He also underlines the contingency inherent in the development of Yemeni nationalism.

audiocassettes (in the latter form surmounting even the border between the YAR and PDRY), and predestined to connect references to the local with the nation. As Wedeen brings it to the point, “poetry worked as a performative, summoning into being nationalists by evincing the commonalities that could create them”.⁴⁹⁰

Interestingly, the revolutions of the 1960s and the precedent anti-colonial struggle in the South did not come up with a powerful unity frame that could have been well-aligned and built on the by then established nationalist frame. Nevertheless, few examples exist, such as this poem that was spread in the aftermath of the 1962 revolution:

The homeland will never surrender or submit.
Spirit in revolt, she fills her breast with pure air.
See how she lifts her head and moves forward,
Trampling with disdain these foolish idols....

What is North? And what the South?
Two hearts whose joy and pain are joined
Were united by hate and suffering,
By history and by God.
Shamsan [mountain near Aden] will soon meet its brother Nuqum [mountain near Sana'a].⁴⁹¹

The optimism voiced by the poet was soon to be shattered by the overwhelming historical developments: the civil war between royalist (i.e. imamist) and republican forces and their respective allies in the North would last until 1970, meanwhile the anti-colonial struggle in the South led to the formation of a socialist state. Hence, despite the existence of a unity frame, the political realities (often related to internal power struggles) and continuing instabilities of the two Yemeni states hindered unification for almost three decades.⁴⁹² At the same time the vision of unity lived on, officially and unofficially. As Brehony notes, it is difficult to find any speech of either a Southern or Northern leader that does not refer to the aspiration for unification.⁴⁹³ That it was employed in wake of legitimizing strategies allows guesses about the resonance it was (at least assumed) to have among the populations. In fact, allusions to unity pervaded YAR and PDRY documents, institutions, and practices alike: both constitutions, anthems, more than one draft for a unification agreement (specifically after

⁴⁹⁰ Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 48. A look at the ‘micro-mechanisms on the ground’ also avoids the trap of too strong a focus “on grand narratives constructed by and about elites”, as formulated by Philip S. Khoury, “The Paradoxical in Arab Nationalism. Interwar Syria Revisited,” in *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, ed. James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 273.

⁴⁹¹ Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 45.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, 50ff.

⁴⁹³ Noel Brehony, “The Role of the PDRY in Forming a South Yemeni Identity”, in *Why Yemen Matters. A Society in Transition*, ed. Helen Lackner (London: Saqi Books, 2014), 123–141, here: 130.

short border wars in 1972⁴⁹⁴ and 1979) speak of, long for, and plan for a united Yemen;⁴⁹⁵ the existence of “Unity Ministers” as de facto envoys in the capitals (there were no official embassies, though)⁴⁹⁶ equally highlights the salience of the issue, even if they were considered to be merely symbolical.⁴⁹⁷

Notwithstanding all this, little progress was made towards unification, and there are good reasons to believe that the interest to take serious steps was limited at best among the elites in both systems, for the fear to lose power was constantly present. The historical opportunity came in the wake of serious intra-elite fighting in the PDRY in 1986, which left between 5,000-10,000 regime members dead.⁴⁹⁸ The destabilizing effect this had on the system and the citizen’s trust in it, in addition to economic problems and dwindling support by the Soviet partner, led to the search for other options of economic and political stability. The YAR equally needed some political successes, which is why the idea to approach the issue anew appeared attractive to Saleh.⁴⁹⁹ 1989 saw a number of meetings between Ali Salim Al-Beidh, then Secretary General of the ruling Yemeni Socialist Party, and Saleh. The propositions changed several times, from closer cooperation to a transitional period until further steps would be taken and a referendum prepared, to federalism – and back.⁵⁰⁰

Retrospectively, what happened exactly and why the rationales of both leaders changed back and forth can merely be speculated upon. The de facto developments were highly contingent and took on their own dynamic. While Saleh was hoping for small steps to his favor, Al Beidh in early December (without consulting his party) suddenly pressed ahead for unification after a phase in which he had seemed quite reserved and even seemed to be pulling back. Quite suddenly, they agreed on unification following a preparatory period of one year with a subsequent referendum. This schedule was even shortened by half and the referendum dropped when opposition started to organize in spring. Eventually, unity was declared on May

⁴⁹⁴ For the complete document see: Fred Halliday, *Revolution and Foreign Policy. The Case of South Yemen 1967–1987* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Appendix 1, 233–236; see also for other examples of such documents and for a detailed dealing with the (discursive and factual) steps towards unification in the PDRY. Among others, he describes the shifts in official language from Pan-Arab unity towards Yemeni unity (pointed out also by Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 235, n. 72).

⁴⁹⁵ According to Whitaker, some sources even speak of ‘re-unification’, specifically using the word ‘*shatr*’ that signifies not just parts of something but rather something which naturally is one but broken into fragments. Whitaker, *Birth*, 11.

⁴⁹⁶ Personal communication with Mohammed Albasha, Press and Public Relations Officer at Embassy of the Republic of Yemen Washington D.C., April 13, 2014.

⁴⁹⁷ Whitaker, *Birth*, 13f.

⁴⁹⁸ Fred Halliday, “Catastrophe in South Yemen. A Preliminary Assessment”, *Middle East Report* 139, no. 16 (March/April 1986).

⁴⁹⁹ Blumi equally elaborates on the historical preconditions which made unification an attractive strategic move for both leaderships; he argues that they assumed it to strengthen their “respective authoritarian capacities”. Blumi, *Chaos*, 117–145, here: 119.

⁵⁰⁰ For the following cf. Brehony, *Yemen Divided*; Whitaker, *Birth*; Halliday, *Revolution*.

22, 1990;⁵⁰¹ detailed concepts on how to unify delicate aspects such as the legal system (especially in regard to the role of the *shari'a*), the civil service, the two armies, and the currency were postponed, as was the creation of a unified legislative body, elections for which should take place after 30 months. The majority of the population was enthusiastic immediately after the act; what had been discursively aimed at (according to framing theory: the prognostic frame) had been realized, the dialectic between the semiotic and the factual world had finally provided the desired result – so the assumption.⁵⁰² The realities of failing integration⁵⁰³ soon turned the dreams and promises that were formerly connected with the unity frame into disappointment at best and a nightmare at worst, the latter concerning the Southerners in light of the massive losses, political murders, and discrimination they perceived themselves faced with. The unity frame and what it stood for quickly lost its persuasive strength and disintegrated in the South. With the civil war of 1994 in which the South sought secession (and lost), even the nation frame crumbled. For many it was replaced with a ‘South Arabian’ or ‘Southerner’ frame, emphasizing a distinct and non-Yemeni identity, in the sense that it was separate from and incommensurable with the Northern Yemenis⁵⁰⁴ now depicted as ‘backward, uncivilized *Dahbashes*’⁵⁰⁵. This distinctive identity was to be cultivated ever further,⁵⁰⁶ and was later on integrated into the frames constructed by the Hirak.⁵⁰⁷ Both nation frame and unity frame had failed.

⁵⁰¹ The parallel world historical context with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union should be noted in regards to the dates.

⁵⁰² Even the established Yemen expert Paul Dresch was still overly convinced in 1993 (based on research conducted between 1990 and 1992) that nationalism had succeeded – alas, there remained a slightly careful addendum based exactly on his deep knowledge of the country: “Whatever criticism may be made of government, the nation it claims to represent is not in question. To an extent unusual in the Middle East Yemenis remain convinced nationalists. In religious, tribal and regionalist discourse alike the national idea is prominent. Something must sustain this. Yemen is a complex country.” However, his positive interpretation of a perceived unity despite all odds takes precedence in his description. Paul Dresch, “A Daily Plebiscite: Nation and State in Yemen”, *La Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 67 (1994): 67–77, here: 67.

⁵⁰³ Floor Beuming, “The Merger of the Dagger and the Rifle. Failing integration of former South Yemen into the unified Republic of Yemen” (M.A. thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2004).

⁵⁰⁴ Brehony, “Role of the PDRY”, 127; 136.

⁵⁰⁵ The term ‘*Dahbashi*’ refers to a popular TV character of the early 1990s, a ‘stupid and lazy’ Highland Yemeni. The view of Northern backwardness had existed before, but now it was more proactively propagated and became dominant. Stephen W. Day, *Regionalism and Rebellion in Yemen. A Troubled National Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 151–153.

⁵⁰⁶ At the same time, more regional identities began to flourish again as well, such as the Hadhrami to name only one. The proposal for a six-state federal solution as the outcome of the 2013/14 National Dialogue Conference tries to make allowance for these regionalisms.

⁵⁰⁷ Brehony cites a telling tweet by a British-raised Yemeni Hirak supporter (@AliElbuka) that states: “Before unification, we were one people in two states, but after unification we became two people in one state”. (“Role of the PDRY”, 140.) It brings to the point the core of what I heard in many discussions with activists.

4.4. *A Tale of Two States: YAR and PDRY*

When Imam Ahmad died in 1962, a military group called the “Free Officers” (inspired and supported by Nasser’s ideology and success) seized the opportunity for a coup. On September 26, they overthrew the imamate and founded the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) with one of their leaders, Abd Allah al-Sallal, becoming president of the Northern Yemeni state.⁵⁰⁸ The ensuing opening of the country to external influences, however, in combination with the quick fragmentation of the young revolutionaries and the struggle of the ‘dethroned’ successor Imam Mohamed al-Badr to regain his rule sparked a civil war between pro-imamate (‘royalist’) forces and republicans. Both sides were backed by external powers, the Saudis on the side of the royalists and Nasserist Egypt on the side of the republicans.⁵⁰⁹ Since both parties were trying to win the support of the *qabila*, providing them with weapons among other services, they severely strengthened *qabili* autonomy (see elaborations on the *qabila* above) at the expense of the young state.⁵¹⁰ In an attempt to secure the victory of the Republic, the Egyptians finally occupied the country and imposed an Egyptian-style bureaucracy whose lasting imprint (in a negative sense, for there was nobody to fill the resulting need for qualified and suitably experienced staff) was to outlive their withdrawal in 1967. The same year saw al-Sallal ousted and Abd al-Rahman al-Iryani inaugurated as the new leader of the country. With him, a period of reconciliation commenced. A constitution was adopted in 1970 and the civil war finally officially ended.⁵¹¹ Nevertheless, the state was facing a multitude of challenges, the high degree of autonomy on its peripheries being a major one that constantly threatened the central government.⁵¹² The regime remained unstable; two presidents were murdered between 1975 and 1978 until a young and little-known military officer was maneuvered into office: Ali Abdullah Saleh (b. 1942). Few gave him a chance to last long – he would prove them wrong. He created a complex network of patronage links with which he succeeded in balancing the numerous competing actors and interests,

⁵⁰⁸ Beuming, “Merger”.

⁵⁰⁹ Robert D. Burrowes, *Yemen Arab Republic*.

⁵¹⁰ Robert D. Burrowes, “Prelude to Unification: The Yemen Arab Republic, 1962–1990”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23, no. 4 (1991): 483–506; Robert W. Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1978); Paul Dresch, “Tribal Relations and Political History in Upper Yemen”, in *Contemporary Yemen: Politics and Historical Background*, ed. B.R. Pridham (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984).

⁵¹¹ Some sources set the end of the civil war already in 1967 with the departure of the Egyptians. See for instance: Marie-Christine Heinze, “Die Grenzproblematik zwischen dem Jemen und Saudi-Arabien“, in *Die Grenzen Asiens zwischen Globalisierung und staatlicher Fragmentierung*, ed. Conrad Schetter, Stephan Conermann and Bernd Kuzmits (Hamburg: EBV, 2009), 137–178, here: 153.

⁵¹² Blumi, *Chaos*, 118.

frequently playing one against the other, and thus in stabilizing his regime.⁵¹³ He employed family, *qabili*, regional, military, and Islamist connections (who strongly supported him against socialist actors) among others, and in the General People’s Congress (GPC) as the only legal ‘party’, he furthermore established a useful tool for the extension of his patronage network.⁵¹⁴

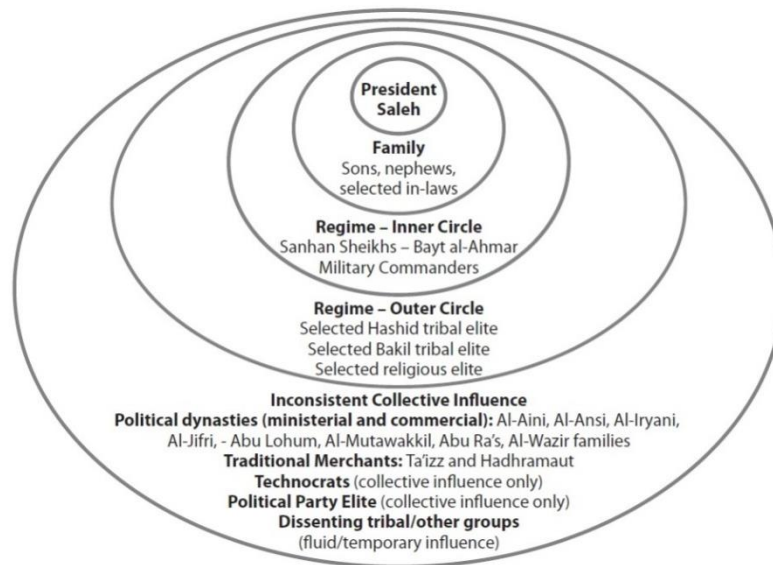


Figure 4.1.: The ‘regime Saleh’: circles of power and patronage⁵¹⁵; Sanhan is Saleh’s *qabila* and “Bayt al-Ahmar” refers to the sheikhly extended family of the al-Ahmars (at the core of which was Abdullah al-Ahmar)

Two men played the most prominent roles in Saleh’s network: Sheikh Abdullah Bin Hussein al-Ahmar (1933–2007) and Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar (born 1945, not related to the al-Ahmar sheikhly family). Abdullah al-Ahmar was the “sheikh of sheikhs” of the important Hashid tribal confederation, a successful businessman, head of the Islamist Islah party, and from 1993 until his death in 2007, the speaker of the Yemeni parliament. His influence was undisputed, as was his importance for Saleh, who somewhat depended on him from the 1980s onwards, since he single-handedly bridged the three spheres of *qabila*, economy, and Islamists.⁵¹⁶ Although the relation was generally harmonious, Saleh was well aware of his heavy reliance upon al-Ahmar, something he was hoping to decrease in the wake of unification based on

⁵¹³ Ibid., 117. In this regard scholars like to cite a quote by Saleh himself, which vividly captures this aspect and his perception of it: He characterizes ruling Yemen as “dancing on the heads of snakes”. Victoria Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

⁵¹⁴ It was created in 1982. ICG, “Breaking Point”, 2; see also: Dresch/Haykel, “Stereotypes”, 407.

⁵¹⁵ Sarah Phillips, *Yemen and the Politics of Permanent Crisis* (London/New York: Routledge 2011), 88. See also for a more detailed description and contextualization.

⁵¹⁶ Schwedler, “Islah Party”, 205–229.

prospectively large oil finds in the South which would provide him a higher degree of economic independence.⁵¹⁷ When in 2007 Abdullah al-Ahmar died, he left a significant power vacuum. Although his sons Hameed and Hussein each strove for their own advantages and were certainly influential in certain spheres,⁵¹⁸ they did not fill the void their father's death had created.

General Ali Mohsen,⁵¹⁹ a distant cousin of Saleh and among the founders of Islah, was for decades commander of the northwest military district and of the 1st Armored Division (until he was discharged by President Hadi in December 2012). Based in the so-called "Sanhan covenant", i.e. the bargain the small Sanhan *qabila* made when they b(r)ought Saleh into presidency in 1978, Ali Mohsen was supposed to be the second man in the republic and the possible replacement of Saleh in case of assassination or else.⁵²⁰ Relations between him and his long-time ally Saleh had soured even before the latter made attempts to pass on office to his son in the early to mid-2000s, and Phillips argues that Saleh on purpose made Ali Mohsen's deployment in the Sa'ada wars difficult by not providing him with the necessary equipment.⁵²¹ Still, Ali Mohsen had and continues to have a strong support base among the military and at the same time possesses considerable economic assets which make him highly influential. Among the population, his forces were responsible for a high degree of destruction especially in the North, and thus he is as feared and hated as he is respected.

The clientelist system Saleh had created was highly sophisticated, which at the same time made it extremely responsive to even minor changes. His allies were of great influence themselves and he needed to ensure at all times that they would not alter their loyalties or become seriously engaged in rivaling him.

The armed struggle against the British in the South commenced with the start of fighting in the town of Radfan on October 14, 1963. It ended with the departure of the last British troops on November 29, 1967. The period in between was characterized not only by the casualties resulting from armed clashes between Southern Yemenis and British, but also by complex contentions and skirmishes amongst various groups involved in the anti-colonial struggle, most prominently the National Liberation Front (NLF) and the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY).⁵²² Intra-elite disputes and the struggle for rule were

⁵¹⁷ Blumi, *Chaos*, 124.

⁵¹⁸ Phillips, *Politics*, 101ff.

⁵¹⁹ The short forms of the names conform to their employment in Yemeni everyday and media use.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 89ff.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵²² For details see Dresch, *History*, 89–150; Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, 14–49. According to Brehony, Ali Salim al-Beidh belonged to the most radical left of the NLF (p. 28).

supposed to continue between various factions well after the proclamation of the independent People's Republic of South Yemen (PRSY) on November 30, 1967. Leaders were young and full of confidence and tried to set up a 'new society' and state according to their ideological orientations, often paying little attention to the dire financial situation of the country they had inherited. Rather than a cohesive group with one coherent ideology and political goal, the then-leadership consisted of "a collection of powerful personalities"⁵²³ – a feature that remains prominent today among the leadership of the Hirak. Turbulent years followed⁵²⁴ which on the positive side of the scale saw a takeover of the civil service the British had left behind; on the negative, there were massive cuts not only in staff (many of which had formerly been British senior officers) but also in salaries; the abolishment of 'feudal rule' by sultans and emirs – a majority of whom went into exile – and the confiscation of their property; several measures to eliminate the influence of *qabila* in the South such as the abolishment of names, disputes etc.; and a clear limitation of religion to the private realm in favor of public secularism.⁵²⁵ Eventually, the Marxist left succeeded and pushed through with their model for the state and society.⁵²⁶ The renamed People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (since November 30, 1970) set up a highly centralized, bureaucratic government modeled after the Soviet Union,⁵²⁷ with a leading Politburo and a Central Committee, the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP, founded 1978) as single party organ of the regime, and mass organizations for the different spectra of society.⁵²⁸ Correspondingly, Marxist social policies were implemented, including free medical care, subsidized housing, women's rights, and a strong focus on education and spreading literacy. Furthermore, *qāt* consumption was strictly limited to weekends and holidays (which set agricultural lands as well as water sources free for other use), and corruption as well as workplace absenteeism were successfully impeded. Notwithstanding these advances, the young state was not to be taken for a utopia: Contrary to the successes and highly positive perception of the social goals, which Brehony judges as

⁵²³ Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, 53.

⁵²⁴ For more details see: Halliday, *Revolution*, 9–33; on the relationship with the YAR 110–136; Helen Lackner, *People's Democratic Republic of Yemen: Outpost of Socialist Development in Arabia* (London: Ithaca, 1985), 51–60.

⁵²⁵ Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, 34f.

⁵²⁶ Whitaker, *Birth*, 36ff.

⁵²⁷ Blumi, *Chaos*, 119–125.

⁵²⁸ Carapico (*Civil Society*) provides interesting insights into formal and informal civil society activism before, during, and after the PDRY era. The current state of CSOs is presented in: The World Bank, "Yemen Civil Society Organizations in Transition: A Mapping and Capacity Assessment of Development-Oriented Civil Society Organizations in Five Governorates" (Washington, D.C., 2013), accessed November 10, 2014, <https://www.openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/16638>.

“progressive and well-intentioned”,⁵²⁹ both the economic and the civil-rights situation looked dire. The main criticism of a World Bank report in 1978 which classified the PDRY as one of the ‘least developed countries’ was the poor economic management and resulting low productivity of the centrally planned economy.⁵³⁰ As regards the human rights record, there were high numbers of political prisoners, disappearances, a strict security apparatus, and practically no freedom of speech and movement.⁵³¹ Another destabilizing feature of the Southern regime was its continuous internal conflict, which culminated in a very brief but highly destructive and traumatizing civil war between two factions in 1986. It resulted in up to 10,000 casualties (mentioned above), among which were large parts of the Politburo; furthermore, around 30,000 of the followers of Ali Nasser Muhammad, then-President and originator of the Politburo massacre, as well as other influential figures left the South to the North or abroad.⁵³² These events would weaken the PDRY government for the subsequent years.

The post-unification period brought many changes. What persisted, however, were two societies with two independent patronage systems and political cultures. Contrary to the highly personalized clientelist system of Saleh, the YSP’s power base consisted of trade unions; together they formed the core of the patronage network for the urban elite, mainly of Aden and Mukalla. Both systems continued to exist separately from each other, and formed the backbone of the traditional support networks people turned to when unification turned sour and the economy tumbled after the expulsion of Yemeni workers from the Gulf states in 1991. Regarding political, cultural, and economic values, they differed mainly along the idealistic lines of autonomy and self-sufficiency in the North, combined with more conservative and traditionalist social values (both aspects of which were mirrored in the rather ‘ad-hoc’ character of political parties) and the very bureaucratic, institutionalized and formal, state order of the South, with its organized participation (especially of women,⁵³³ which necessarily collided with northern views) and at the same time its distinct urban-rural division line.⁵³⁴ Where Northerners were suspicious of secular approaches and the high degree of state involvement in citizen’s lives, Southerners were equally distrustful towards the very ‘rural’

⁵²⁹ Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, 69; cf. also the positive assessment of the social and infrastructural situation by Carapico, *Civil Society*, 42.

⁵³⁰ Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, 67f.; The World Bank, “People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen: A Review of Economic and Social Development” (Washington, D.C., 1979).

⁵³¹ ICG, “Breaking Point”, 1f.; Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, 63; Carapico, *Civil Society*, 39.

⁵³² ICG, “Breaking Point”, 2.

⁵³³ Cf. Carapico, *Civil Society*; Janine A. Clark, *Islam, Charity, and Activism: Middle-Class Networks and Social Welfare in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

⁵³⁴ Blumi, *Chaos*, 127.

traditions they had so actively combated and which now found their ways into society at large again, in a mode that made observers like critics refer to as ‘re-tribalization’.⁵³⁵ Understandably, integration hardly thrived.⁵³⁶

Ultimately, Saleh proved more adept at asserting his rule. Where, prior to unification, his rule certainly fit the conventional definition of ‘authoritarian’, Blumi argues that since the 1990s Saleh “has actually taken authoritarianism to a new level”.⁵³⁷ Based on a reductionist international perception of Yemen as primordially tribal and Islamist and in the wake of the post-9/11 War on Terror policies, which equally sought measures of low complexity, Saleh strategically employed these same stereotypes in order to push through with his politics of “controlled demolition”: He purposefully instigated violence against numerous groups and actors whom he depicted as opposed to ‘security’ and ‘state stability’ and thus eliminated potential rivals or inconvenient allies he formerly needed to integrate into his political calculations. He could rely on tolerance at least and periodically even on support for these practices by external powers such as the US, the GCC states, the EU etc.⁵³⁸ This perspective makes various moves of Saleh intelligible, among them his breach of traditional modes of mediation in favor of repression in the case of Hussein al-Houthi which led to the outbreak of the armed conflict in Sa’ada. I will take it up in both the analyses and show its explanatory value in regard to the cases.

4.5. Central Discourses Surrounding External Actors

External actors feature prominently in the frames of the Houthis and in discourses of resistance generally. The two most relevant references are made towards the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United States (US). Their respective role in regard to Yemeni politics and society shall be elucidated in order to contextualize these references and thus lay a basis for their interpretation.

⁵³⁵ Beuming lists some related policies, their impact, and the perception among Southerners. Beuming, “Merger”, 94–100.

⁵³⁶ For a discussion of factors conducive or impeding to integration, respectively, see: Beuming, “Merger”.

⁵³⁷ Blumi, *Chaos*, 156.

⁵³⁸ A similar argument in regards to ‘crisis as a tool for rule’ is made by Phillips, *Politics*. And how disorder ultimately profits the regime is pointed at by Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 151.

4.5.1. *The Kingdom of Saudi-Arabia (KSA)*

Yemen and its northern neighbor have historically had a difficult relationship. With the expansion of the House of Sa'ud in the 1920s and its subsequent establishment of the Saudi monarchy, several issues emerged that were to bedevil relations ever since. One was territory: Both 'states' had been struggling for dominance in the regions of 'Asir, Najran, and Sa'ada from the early 20th century onwards. The Treaty of Ta'if in 1934 created a major point of reference in regard to the continuously debated border line, however, it remained vague on many aspects and the contractually fixed need for renewal every twenty lunar years generated insecurities for it produced a means to apply pressure on the respective opponent by threatening to terminate the regulations.⁵³⁹ The region was and is at stake, pervaded by trade routes and a prosperous (legal and illegal) border economy based on a constant flow of crops (including *qāt*), drugs, arms, and humans (cheap labor, increasing numbers of refugees from the Horn of Africa, political activists). Besides, the area is home to communities like the Wa'ilah, mostly Zaydis, whose subsistence relies on the free grazing of their livestock all over the territory. The latter, who at that time vehemently rejected the treaty specifically and state-rule more generally, were granted special privileges of free movement around the border as a means of placation – an issue which would be raised again much later.

Another issue concerned the dominance of the Saudis on the Arabian Peninsula. Although the economically and politically weak Yemen would at a first glance pose no obvious threat to the oil-rich KSA, at a closer look, there are some justified concerns from the Saudi perspective: The Sa'ud dynasty established its state through the conquest of the territory ruled by King (formerly Sharif) Hussein bin Ali of the Hejaz (of Hashemite descent); that their legitimacy is hence based on sole power and that they deposed a Hashemite ruler was to remain their Achilles' heel. Zaydi Hashemites or *sada*, on the other hand, possess a lot of traditional legitimacy based on their descent from the Prophet's family – a legitimacy which is still very highly regarded among Muslim communities worldwide.⁵⁴⁰ This fact made the KSA's rulers wary of any hints that their legitimacy might be threatened by pro-Hashemite actors, more so since the Hejaz to this day continues to be resentful towards the historical intruders from Najd.⁵⁴¹ In addition, the two Yemens after the 1960s revolutions formed the only republican states on the Arabian Peninsula and might thus well have posed a challenge to

⁵³⁹ For details on the development of the issue over time see: Heinze, "Grenzproblematik".

⁵⁴⁰ Jordan's royal family is of Hashemite origin as is the Moroccan ruling house. Hashemites today are spread among others in Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, Qatar, the Levant, Egypt, Somalia, Djibouti, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Northern Sudan, Turkey, and Southeast Asia.

⁵⁴¹ Blumi, *Chaos*, 32.

the monarchies. The KSA accordingly took every opportunity to weaken the northern and southern republic by supporting their opponents, be it the royalists in the aftermath of 1962, the exiled sultans, emirs, and *qabili* leaders from the South,⁵⁴² or other dissidents and exiles. Along the same lines, it sought to impede unification and did not refrain from indirectly supporting secessionist forces in the 1994 war.⁵⁴³ On the economic side, relations were coined by the extensive absorption of labor migrants from the YAR to the KSA⁵⁴⁴ and the resulting high dependence of large parts of Yemeni society on remittances,⁵⁴⁵ and by extensive aid provision.⁵⁴⁶ The high vulnerability this created became very clear in 1990. At the time of the Gulf War, Yemen was a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council when in August it voted first on trade sanctions against Iraq, then on a military enforcement of the blockade, and lastly for military engagement to regain Kuwait. Yemen faced a dilemma, for it had good relations with Iraq, which it did not want to destroy, but at the same time feared for the remittances from the Gulf. It chose a middle path that would prove very costly: It abstained from the first two votes and voted ‘no’ on the last, favoring a regional solution. The KSA reacted more than disgruntled and immediately expelled an estimated 750,000⁵⁴⁷ migrant workers and cut all economic assistance,⁵⁴⁸ thereby causing a severe economic downfall in Yemen. Beyond the substantial loss of remittances, an increase of 7% in population within only three months and an additional 15% in total workforce overwhelmed the absorbing capacity of the economy, infrastructure, and social services, and led to a stark exacerbation of unemployment. In addition, (re)integration proved socially difficult for many who had in part spent long periods of their lives abroad and did not have many roots in their home country.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴² Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, 78; for a more detailed diachronic perspective on PDRY–KSA relations see: Halliday, *Revolution*, 157–165.

⁵⁴³ Sheila Carapico, “From Ballot Box to Battlefield. The War of the Two Alis”, *Middle East Report* 190, (September/October 1994).

⁵⁴⁴ There existed an unofficial ‘special status’ of both Northern and Southern Yemenis who did not need a Saudi national to sponsor their stay in the KSA (*kafil*), and they were also allowed to own businesses without the otherwise obligatory Saudi partner. This was based on a certain reading of the Treaty of Ta’if. Whitaker, *Birth*, 89.

⁵⁴⁵ Among the consequences of this labor migration in Yemen were inflation, a decline in agriculture and related soil erosion, and increased income disparity among the population. Whitaker, *Birth*, 90.

⁵⁴⁶ Beyond these official payments there are significant flows of funds to a wide variety of Yemeni state and non-state actors by the KSA government and related actors which serve to protect Saudi political interests. Phillips, *Politics*, 75–83.

⁵⁴⁷ According to Whitaker, *Birth*, 95, based on Yemeni government statistics. Heinze remains vague by referring to 500,000–800,000 returnees (Heinze, “Grenzproblematik”, 156) while Van Hear includes those expelled from Kuwait and possibly other Gulf states and cites 800,000. Nicholas Van Hear, “The Socio-Economic Impact of the Involuntary Mass Return to Yemen in 1990”, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 7, no. 1 (1994): 18–38.

⁵⁴⁸ As did the US, making it “the most expensive no in history”, as Whitaker cites (*Birth*, 95).

⁵⁴⁹ Van Hear provides a detailed study of the effect of the expulsion: Van Hear, “Socio-Economic Impact”. Whitaker (*Birth*, 97) points out that in fact the resulting bitterness voiced on Yemeni streets was directed for the largest part against the KSA, while the US were judged wrong but did not receive the same emotional blame as

In the following years, the relations remained strained enough for the KSA to block Yemen's application to join the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1996 and 1999, and it also interfered in the exploration of oil reserves by foreign companies close to the prospective border line by 'warning' these companies against pursuing their work.⁵⁵⁰ Yemen perceived this as a highly offensive act intended to block its economic ascension and related gain in independence. Despite all these drawbacks and repeated military incidents, tensions eased (due in part to international mediation) and in 1998 the KSA allowed a return of Yemeni workers. Based on a prior agreement in 1997, the two states signed the 'Treaty of Jeddah' on June 12, 2000, a de facto confirmation of the Treaty of Ta'if that regulated points the former had left open and finally fixed the cession of Yemen's territorial claims to the disputed regions. Relatedly, the Saleh regime had since the mid-1990s allowed the KSA to tighten its border management regime. Population movement was restricted, and formerly privileged groups now needed a visa to cross the border area. Livelihoods of farmers, who could no longer care for their land and livestock as before, were threatened, as were the revenues of trade and smuggling. With the Treaty of Jeddah, border fortification progressed as did its enforcement. Local opposition formed, led by the charismatic Sheikh bin Shaj'i, who headed a 3,000-man militia. For about over two years they regularly clashed with Saudi forces and destroyed border demarcations while bin Shaj'i was able to mobilize wide support among the local population and officials alike, invoking honor and local autonomy. In a mode very similar to Hussein al-Houthi a few years later, bin Shaj'i mobilized against the unacceptable behavior of President Saleh who had conceded the territory to the KSA "something even Imam Yahya could not do".⁵⁵¹ The fact that in early 2004, the Saudis started to construct a complete border fence, and that they not only supported the Yemeni government (through the Hashid confederation) against the Houthis during the Sa'ada wars, but also actively entered combat themselves in late 2009, which aggravated the negative sentiments held against the monarchy.

In sum, constant KSA interference in and mingling with Yemeni politics over decades constituted a permanent source of resentment among the population, despite the many ties connecting Yemenis with the monarchy based on the huge number of migrant workers and the related personal experiences of life there. This accumulated resentment could be tapped into

did the Saudis. Though equally considered in the wrong, Saddam Hussein was still admired for standing up against the US 'like a man'.

⁵⁵⁰ Whitaker, *Birth*, 91f.; Heinze, "Grenzproblematik", 157.

⁵⁵¹ Blumi, *Chaos*, 110.

rhetorically when creating frames, and since the KSA is a close ally of the US, there was a ‘connection of discontent’ drawn between the two.

4.5.2. *The United States (US)*

Yemen was marginal to US foreign policy interests until it became a threat to its security interests.⁵⁵² Prior to 1990, the YAR was just one among the numerous recipients of US aid and considered of interest rather for its closeness and relevance to the US ally KSA, with whom it was also generally associated from within. Yemen’s performance in the UN Security Council vote at the beginning of the Gulf War led to a freezing of support and relations.

The country once again entered the stage of US foreign policy considerations after the bombing of the USS Cole in Aden Harbor on October 12, 2000, in which 17 American servicemen were killed and 39 injured. This and the ‘war on terror’ in the wake of 9/11 shortly afterwards made Yemen a main theater of US counterterrorism operations.⁵⁵³ Few days after the attacks, Saleh aimed to assure acquiescence of the main political actors in the country in regard to an articulation of anti-US sentiments.⁵⁵⁴ He travelled to Washington in November 2001 and assured President Bush of Yemen’s cooperation in fighting Al-Qaeda in his country; in a second visit to Washington and the subsequent G-8 Summit in Georgia in June 2004 he affirmed his stance and strengthened his ties with the US government.⁵⁵⁵

Cooperation began at the same time as his first visit, in November 2001, when the US opened a training facility for CIA and Special Operations forces. In 2002 the US conducted its first direct military operations in the country, among other air strikes the operation of the later infamous drones to kill terrorism suspects.⁵⁵⁶ When the 2009 attempted airplane bombing over Detroit could be connected back to Yemen, US involvement and interventions in the country again increased.⁵⁵⁷ Funding – large parts of which was tied to counterterrorism

⁵⁵² Sheila Carapico, “No Quick Fix: Foreign Aid and State Performance in Yemen”, in *Short of the Goal: U.S. Policy and Poorly Performing States*, ed. Nancy Birdsall, Milan Vaishnav, and Robert L. Ayers (Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development, 2006).

⁵⁵³ Jeremy M. Sharp, “Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations”, *Congressional Research Service Report*, January 13, 2010.

⁵⁵⁴ Samy Dorlian, “The Sa’da War in Yemen: Between Politics and Sectarianism”, *The Muslim World* 101 no. 2 (April 2011): 182–201, here: 193.

⁵⁵⁵ Cf. Interview with the U.S. Ambassador to Yemen (mid-2001–mid-2004), Edmund James Hull, in: Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, ‘Yemen Country Reader’, accessed March 24, 2015, <http://www.adst.org/oral-history/country-reader-series/>, 197–217.

⁵⁵⁶ Neta C. Crawford, “Civilians Killed in US Operations in Yemen”, report published on the website of the Costs of War Project: http://www.costsofwar.org/sites/default/files/articles/13/attachments/Yemen11_30.pdf (accessed November 13, 2014).

⁵⁵⁷ The new strategy towards Yemen was now referred to as the “National Security Council’s Yemen Strategic Plan” and aims at combatting AQAP, increased development assistance, and a maximizing of concerted

measures – reached an all-time high in 2010 and since then continues on a level above the pre-2010 allocations.⁵⁵⁸ For example, in 2010 Yemen with US-\$252.6 million was the largest recipient of funds from the US Defense Department’s ‘1206 Train and Equip Fund’ designated for “equipment, supplies, or training of foreign national military forces engaged in counterterrorism operations” – it even surpassed Pakistan.⁵⁵⁹

Saleh’s rationale to allow US involvement in the country can most convincingly be attributed to his fear that Yemen might be next on the list of states to be punished for supporting terrorism if he refused to side with the US, as well as strategic considerations on the usefulness of US backing for his own dealing with opposition on the periphery.⁵⁶⁰ While he had not dared to lean towards the US during the 1990s due to his close involvement with Islamist actors and their clientelist integration into his patronage network, he now might have felt strong enough politically to face any possible consequences in this regard.

Among large parts of the population, however, a strongly negative perception of US political involvement in the Middle East dominated the post-2001 period, this feeling particularly resonating in Yemen. The highly unpopular wars in Afghanistan and Iraq triggered protests, as did the continued incarceration of Yemeni detainees at Guantanamo Bay⁵⁶¹ and the initiation of drone strikes against alleged Al-Qaeda affiliates in the country.⁵⁶² In addition, a connection was drawn to Israeli military suppression of the Second Intifada and resulting Palestinian suffering and oppression; Israeli policies were generally perceived as proxy of US policies and thus added to popular indignation.

Saleh’s stance towards the US consequently resulted in high unpopularity.

international efforts for the stabilization of Yemen. Jeremy M. Sharp, “Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations”, *Congressional Research Service Report*, April 10, 2012, 9.

⁵⁵⁸ Jeremy M. Sharp, “Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations”, *Congressional Research Service Report*, February 6, 2014, 11.

⁵⁵⁹ Sharp, “Background”, 2012, 10.

⁵⁶⁰ Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 124–127.

⁵⁶¹ Sharp, “Background”, 2014, 9.

⁵⁶² The first strikes in late 2002, however, were isolated cases. The U.S. dramatically increased the number of drone strikes starting in 2011, with a reported death toll of 424, including large numbers of civilians, until January 2015, according to the independent British NGO ‘Bureau of Investigative Journalism’, accessed March 24, 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/12/17/usyemen-investigate-civilian-deaths-airstrikes>. Cf. related HRW: ‘US/Yemen: Investigate Civilian Deaths from Airstrikes’, December 17, 2013, accessed March 24, 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/12/17/usyemen-investigate-civilian-deaths-airstrikes>.

4.6. *The ‘Sick Man’ on the Arabian Peninsula: Yemen’s Economic Struggle*

Yemen’s economic performance is a story of dependence upon contingent factors: From the 1970s onward,⁵⁶³ the economy of both states strongly depended on the remittances of workers and aid provision by international donors.⁵⁶⁴ The oil boom period in the Gulf states between around 1973-1983 led to massive labor migration of overwhelmingly unskilled labor from the YAR (and to a much smaller extent⁵⁶⁵ also the PDRY) to the KSA, Kuwait, and other countries. What resulted from this was, on the positive side, a massive flow of remittances which significantly bolstered private consumption and the subsequent introduction of modern consumer goods such as refrigerators, television sets etc. into the country, while contacts with the outer world introduced new ideas and opportunities to a young generation; on the other side, however, there was a long list of negative effects. Besides the social divide created between those with relatives abroad and those without, emigration disrupted the national economy in multiple ways: The lack of labor led to a decline in agricultural production, a shortage of workers for industrial development, and wage increase which ever more inhibited investment in the productive sector but bore incentives for import as well as the set-up of small, individually owned businesses in the service sector – for which there was no correlating demand. At the bottom-line, remittances only benefited individuals and families, not the whole society and state,⁵⁶⁶ while the mounting costs of missed development opportunities were later to be paid by all.⁵⁶⁷

Maybe surprisingly considering the difference in the two systems during the Cold War period, both Yemeni states received high aid payments from very similar donors, the most generous among whom were the USSR, China, Eastern European states (for the PDRY), the World Bank, and the OPEC states. The US played only a marginal role and only in regard to the YAR and should be evaluated in light of its ties with the KSA. The payments were considerable, due to superpower competition at this strategically important location as well as

⁵⁶³ The socioeconomic struggles faced by the population in the early years of the PDRY are well depicted in: Fred Halliday, “Yemen’s Unfinished Revolution: Socialism in the South”, in *MERIP Reports* 81 (1979), 3–20.

⁵⁶⁴ For a brief comparison of specific aspects of the YAR’s and the PDRY’s economy see: Sheila Carapico, “The Economic Dimension of Yemeni Unity”, in *Middle East Report* 184, no. 23 (1993).

⁵⁶⁵ This was due to the fact that citizens of the PDRY were not exempt from the need for visa and work permits as were those of the YAR (see chapter 4.1.5.1.), and that the Southern government prohibited this kind of labor migration from 1973 onwards and thus reduced – but not stopped – the flow of laborers. Cf. Nora Ann Colton, “Yemen: A Collapsed Economy”, in *Middle East Journal* 64, no. 3 (2010): 410–426, here: 412.

⁵⁶⁶ While she lays emphasis on the KSA, Kiren Chaudhry richly describes the impact of the remittances on the YAR: Kiren Chaudhry, *The Price of Wealth. Economies and Institutions in the Middle East* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁵⁶⁷ For more details and some quantitative estimates see: Colton, “Collapsed Economy”, 411–414.

the extraordinary wealth of the Arab oil-producers.⁵⁶⁸ Major projects which were implemented concerned infrastructure, including roads, ports, energy plants, and irrigation; agricultural development, oil exploration, education, and training. Large parts of the funds, however, went to arms or were immediately provided in the form of arms.

Since the mid-1980s, conditions changed. The construction boom in the Gulf States tapered, and the afore-welcomed migrant workers began to turn into a nuisance. Some workers returned to Yemen, also in the light of wages that had adapted to the level of surrounding countries. As before, however, they did not invest but rather added to the expanding number of small businesses and to the informal sector.⁵⁶⁹ At the same time, aid payments from socialist countries declined significantly toward the end of the Cold War,⁵⁷⁰ adding to the economic constraints now faced by the regimes. On a rather prosperous decade from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s followed years of austerity.⁵⁷¹ Hope turned towards oil. In 1984, commercially viable finds were made in the Ma'rib area in the southeast of the YAR, followed by other finds close to or south of the border with the PDRY. This made unification more attractive and contributed to Saleh's considerations in this direction. In spite of great anticipations, it quickly became clear that the deposits were modest in regional comparison and would suffice merely for moderate and medium-term extraction. Many estimates see the oil expire towards the end of the current decade.⁵⁷²

With the above situation and development in mind, 1990 was a year of catastrophe for Yemen's economy. Firstly, with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of socialist economies, these former donors and funds completely vanished. Secondly, the return of around 750,000 migrant workers after their expulsion from the Gulf by far overwhelmed Yemen's capacity for absorption – in economic as well as in social terms. Thirdly, after their veto in the UN Security Council vote on measures against Iraq, the US cancelled their aid provisions as well, as did the KSA, further aggravating the lack of resources available to the state. Fourthly, oil prices fell markedly in that period, additionally reducing the modest revenues. Fifthly and lastly, unification posed enormous challenges in regard to the payment

⁵⁶⁸ Carapico, "No Quick Fix", 191f.

⁵⁶⁹ Colton, "Collapsed Economy", 414; Nora Ann Colton, "Homeward Bound: Yemeni Return Migrants", in *International Migration Review* 27, no. 4 (1993): 870–882.

⁵⁷⁰ In the late 1980s, payments toward the PDRY from Arab countries exceeded those from socialist countries. Carapico, "No Quick Fix", 192.

⁵⁷¹ What this meant on the micro-level for the population is graphically described for two households in: Sheila Carapico and Cynthia Myntti, "A Tale of Two Families. Change in North Yemen, 1977–1989", *Middle East Report* 170 (1991).

⁵⁷² The World Bank, "Facing the Hard Facts in Yemen", accessed November 11, 2014, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2012/09/26/yemen-talking-points>.

of wages to civil service employees, army personnel, the costs of infrastructure etc. and furthermore demanded complex measures in response to the transition from a socialist to a market economy – challenges which would not be adequately met. The overall results were devastating. On the economic side, the numbers were alarming: The balance of payments deficit rose from 12% of the GDP (1990) to 16% (1994); inflation from 33% (1991) to 120%⁵⁷³ (1994); debt percentage of GNP from 100.1% (1990) to 189% (1994), and the deficit of the national budget from 11% (1991) to 22.5% of GDP. At the same time, official exchange rates remained inflated, the government increased the money supply, and debt overhang was at 200% (1993) among the highest in the world. What fell was GNP per capita, from US \$570 in the YAR in 1984 to a low of US \$217 in the Republic of Yemen (ROY) in 1995.⁵⁷⁴ The social consequences are graphically captured by Carapico:

The poverty rate doubled during the 1990s (...) Once rather rare, malnutrition now plagued nearly half of young children, a serious deterioration of nutritional standards from a generation earlier, when indigenous grains, vegetables, and dairy products were dietary staples. Whereas 1990s' parents had experienced great gains in literacy in their school years, their children were crammed into crowded, crumbling classrooms. Households that secured water and electricity hookups not long before now found themselves unable to pay for these services. New fees made hospitals inaccessible to the burgeoning poor. Cities, which had seemed to offer a better life, had become crowded, messy, anomic places. High aspirations were dashed, prompting people to take to the streets on numerous occasions.⁵⁷⁵

On top of all that came the civil war in 1994 and the resulting costs, so that in 1995 the government had to strike the flag and turn to multilateral donor agencies for help.⁵⁷⁶ The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank aided the country, under the condition of reforms along the lines of prescribed structural adjustment. Many of the measures taken to address the economic misery according to the principles laid out in the Washington Consensus⁵⁷⁷ placed a heavy burden upon the already struggling population, such as the discharging of thousands of civil servants, the cutting of subsidies on wheat, the lowering of the official exchange rate, and the implementation of a rigorous privatization

⁵⁷³ The inflation for food alone was 70% in 1994. Colton, "Collapsed Economy", 420.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 417; Carapico, "No Quick Fix", 195; Holger Albrecht, "The Political Economy of Reform in Yemen: Privatisation, Investment, and the Yemen Business Climate", *Asien, Afrika, Lateinamerika* 30, no. 2 (2002): 131–150.

⁵⁷⁵ Carapico, "No Quick Fix", 189.

⁵⁷⁶ Loans and credits had de facto been barred to Yemen since 1992 due to its high debt burden. Albrecht, "Political Economy", 135.

⁵⁷⁷ John Williamson, "What Washington Means by Policy Reform", in *Latin American Adjustment: How Much Has Happened?* ed. John Williamson (Washington: Institute for International Economics, 1990).

program.⁵⁷⁸ There is little clarity about the exact effects of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP); the literature, however, generally agrees that while GDP growth could be stimulated from 1995 onwards (due in part to high oil prices which fell again in 1998, creating new constrain), the social costs were high.⁵⁷⁹ Poverty rates continued to increase,⁵⁸⁰ as did unemployment; inflation remained high and increasing food prices were strongly felt by Yemen's poor every time; similarly, the lifting of subsidies quickly turns existential.⁵⁸¹ In total, the World Bank states that the reform program was poorly or not at all implemented and thus could not attain the planned long-time goals for the economy as a whole and for the poor specifically, while at the same time subsidies were not properly administered, either.⁵⁸² As Colton points out, what happened during the 1990s was that the gap between the increasing poverty of the many and the accumulation of riches of the few widened. Where in previous decades limited prosperity was channeled to families through remittances, the profits of the novel main pillar of the economy – oil – did not trickle down to the general population but remained with government affiliates⁵⁸³ (often connected to grand elite families like the al-Ahmars) and a newly emerging military and upper bureaucratic elite.⁵⁸⁴ Since the oil peak in 2001, however, oil rents steadily have declined, and attacks by various discontent elements and groups do their share to aggravate the pressure that the lacking funds create.⁵⁸⁵

Besides oil, Yemen also possesses natural gas reserves. In 2009 the country opened its first LNG (liquefied natural gas) facility and commenced exportation. While LNG revenues will never come close to those generated by crude oil export, they aid the compensation of the decline of those returns. In addition, gas shall also be more widely used for energy production

⁵⁷⁸ Colton, "Collapsed Economy", 418. The resulting grievances mixed with the grievances Southerners felt due to the perceived 'looting' of their country by Northerners, making it difficult to detangle the root causes in each case.

⁵⁷⁹ Wedeen sees a need for a regionally and locally disaggregated analysis of the effects of the reform program. Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 193ff.

⁵⁸⁰ Marta Colburn, *The Republic of Yemen. Development Challenges in the 21st Century* (London: Stacey International, 2002), 54; Dresch, *History*, 186.

⁵⁸¹ The timeliness and urgency of the issue of subsidy lifts manifested itself clearly in the recent rise of the Houthis in Sana'a which ultimately led to the overthrow of the government in summer/fall 2014. The Houthis were able to mobilize the masses opposing the lifting of subsidies on fuel for budgetary reasons (gasoline increased by 60%, diesel by 95% within one day); estimates speak of around 500,000 people who consequently fell under the poverty line. Considered to be crucial for keeping down the prices of water, food, and transportation by the population. It is worth noting, though, that scholars have repeatedly pointed out that the major benefactors of these subsidies are elites able to illegally sell subsidized fuel abroad. Cf. IRIN Humanitarian News and Analysis, "Yemen Fuel Subsidy Cuts Hit Poor Hardest", accessed November 12, 2014, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/100535/yemen-fuel-subsidy-cuts-hit-poor-hardest>.

⁵⁸² Colton, "Collapsed Economy", 421; Charles Schmitz, "Economy", in *Middle East in Focus: Yemen*, ed. Steven C. Caton (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2013), 113–140.

⁵⁸³ Colton, "Collapsed Economy", 410f.

⁵⁸⁴ Albrecht, "Political Economy", 144.

⁵⁸⁵ Petroleum revenues make up more than 60% (63% in 2013) of total government revenues. CIA, *Factbook*, accessed November 13, 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html>.

in Yemen, in order to bolster the massive lack of power supplies. In all cases, however, infrastructure is the bottleneck. Attacks as well as insufficient facilities result in frequent electricity shortages and blackouts – a problem for the general population (only 40% of which have access to electricity at all)⁵⁸⁶ but even more so for industry and other businesses. It is one of the factors discouraging investment.

Additional systemic vulnerabilities⁵⁸⁷ that weigh heavily on both the populations as the investment climates are the already noted deteriorating security conditions, currency depreciation, pervading (elite) corruption, and lack of legal certainty and protection. The overall political instability created by the six wars against the Houthis in the North (2004-2010), the 2011 Arab Spring events in Yemen and the subsequent regime change and power vacuum, the continuous climate of opposition in the South (since at least 2007), the threats emanating from Al Qa'eda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), as well as the recent Houthi takeover of the capital and ousting of the government features prominently among outside analyses and depictions of the situation in Yemen. With a sole focus on the economy, a brief look on the impacts of these conditions in a nutshell hints at some alarming facts: In the northern regions, the long-term armed conflict bred a kind of 'war economy' in the already porous border region with neighboring Saudi Arabia, in which the smuggle of *qāt*⁵⁸⁸ and weapons – which has existed for a long time prior to the wars – was of elevated importance. The 'Yemeni Revolution' of 2011 caused the GDP to nosedive with a shrinkage of 12.7%; though it recovered significantly in the following years, it still remains on a very low level. Average citizens feel these macro-developments most severely in form of the ever-rising unemployment and commodity prices, as well as pressing water⁵⁸⁹ and power scarcity. Without going into further details, the conclusion of the above elaborations makes very clear that the current socioeconomic state of Yemen as well as its perspectives are more than gloomy.

⁵⁸⁶ U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), "Yemen' Country Statistic", accessed November 11, 2014, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=ym>.

⁵⁸⁷ For the following: Peter Salisbury, "Yemen's Economy: Oil, Imports and Elites", *Chatham House Programme Paper*, October 2011; Peter Salisbury, "Yemen Corruption, Capital Flight, and Global Drivers of Conflict", *Chatham House Report*, September 2013.

⁵⁸⁸ For a rich and all-encompassing study of *qāt* in Yemen see: Gatter, *Politics of Qāt*.

⁵⁸⁹ Yemen ranks among the top five countries most water scarce countries in the world. Water scarcity results from limited and naturally declining resources due to draught etc., population growth, as well as massive overusage for irrigation – often to grow *qāt*. Cf. Gerhard Lichtenthäler, *Political Ecology and the Role of Water: Environment, Society and Economy in Northern Yemen* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); The World Bank, "Yemen's Water Sector Reform Program – A Poverty and Social Impact Analysis" (PSIA) (Washington, D.C., 2007); Nicole Glass, "The Water Crisis in Yemen: Causes, Consequences and Solutions", *Global Majority EJournal* 1, no. 1 (2010): 17–30.

5. CASE STUDY INTRODUCTIONS

This chapter presents the first of the two case studies. Its structure reflects the consecutive steps that are necessary to tackle the research question: The dissertation poses that in order to mobilize constituents through framing, actors (generally assumed to be the elites) need to convince the members of their respective identity groups that (a) they as a group suffer from social exclusion (in form of discrimination and else), that (b) they are existentially threatened by state failure and/or repression, and that (c) the remedial action the framing actors call for is not only necessary, but will also be effective in resolving the situation.⁵⁹⁰ Which form exactly the action is to take (inter alia if it will take a violent or non-violent path) thereby depends on what is (and can be, depending on the context) specified in the prognostic frame.

Accordingly, the chapter will seek answers to the following questions: What makes Zaydis an identity group? Who are the respective elites with influence? How do they develop a frame that fulfills the criteria of exclusion, threat, and feasibility of violence? Or do they construct something different? How do they distribute this frame? How successful are they therein? And can we assume a wide enough resonance to support the argument that it was the frames that ultimately led to the use of violence?

5.1. The 'Houthi-Rebels' in Northern Yemen

While I have previously emphasized the difficulty of defining identity categories, it is important to grasp the layers of Zaydi identity as a precondition to understand (a) the massive grievances stemming from the discrimination of the group suffering in the wake of the revolution, and (b) the prestige it still carries or at least the intense emotions involved in dealing with Zaydis and particularly *sādah*, which are a factor in mobilizational efforts. Moreover, the theological background is relevant for a later understanding of Hussein al-Houthi's framing, which is deeply rooted in doctrinal matters. The presentation of the case is partly thematic, partly chronological: Following the introduction of the identity group I proceed chronologically towards the actual conflict. In the section on the organization of opposition I present the name-giving family as the central framers, followed by the Zaydi revivalist organizations they engaged in and shaped, respectively. After the conflict description I first of all test the established theoretical approaches and elucidate their shortcomings in explaining the escalation. Against this background I then conduct a detailed frame analysis. The section on frame development is thereby divided into a non-violent phase

⁵⁹⁰ On efficacy belief see: Ott, *Theories*, 341.

(Hussein al-Houthi's extensive framing that served as the solid foundation of the Houthi movement) and the post-escalation phase of violence after his death, hence tracing the escalatory shift. The subsequent parts on frame distribution, resonance, and contestation contain this differentiation within their respective subchapters. Lastly, the brief summary recapitulates the main characteristics and findings for the later comparison with the Southern Movement.

5.1.1. Zaydis as an Identity Group

'Being a Zaydi' in Yemen contains a religious, political, social, economic, and physical dimension, all of which are inherently ambiguous. The reason for this lies in the character of Zaydism as in its protracted historical presence in northern Yemen, which fundamentally shaped the social, political, economic, and, lastly, geographical order along with the practices which occur therein. While 'Zaydi' always described a composite identity, it became even more versatile – both on a collective and on an individual level – in the context of discrimination and contestation after the Yemeni Revolution in 1962 that had brought Zaydi imamite rule to an end.⁵⁹¹ This section will briefly outline the various dimensions of 'Zaydi identity'; based on these general facets. The following section will then seek to trace the attempts Zaydis and specifically Zaydi elites made to cope with their experiences in the newly created, inherently anti-Zaydi state, i.e. how they strove to reconcile their Zaydiness with (or relinquish it under) the given circumstances.

Zaydism is a doctrinal school within Shi'i Islam. Shi'a consider the Prophet's son-in-law and cousin Ali ibn Ali Talib as legitimate successor to the caliphate (i.e. the religious and political leadership of the Muslim *ummah*) and are thus opposed to the de facto succession by Abu Bakr, a close companion of Muhammad, which should constitute the legitimate caliph in view of Sunni Islam.⁵⁹² The crucial point of disagreement among the early followers lay in the question of the heredity of elective succession: Those in favor of Ali argued that the Prophet designated Ali as his successor and that all ensuing leadership has to stem from the bloodline of the Prophet's family through Fatima and Ali, the '*ahl al-bayt*' ('people of the house' of the Prophet). Their argumentation is based on the '*Hadīth of the pond of Khumm*', in which Muhammad is said to have proclaimed: "Of whomsoever I had been master, Ali is to be his master. O God, be a supporter of whoever supports him (Ali) and an enemy of whoever opposes him and divert the truth to Ali" Sunnis acknowledge this *Hadīth*, however, they

⁵⁹¹ Cf. vom Bruck, *Regimes*, 221f.

⁵⁹² The name 'Shi'a' springs from '*Shi'a t Ali*', the 'Party of Ali'.

interpret it solely as the obligation to particularly honor Ali and his descendants. They advocate in favor of elective succession based on religious and spiritual merit (which historically repeatedly resulted in the establishment of dynasties). For the immediate succession of the Prophet, those promoting election succeeded and the proponents of Ali acquiesced. Beyond succession, another central distinction between Shi'a and Sunna concerns their respective (non)acknowledgement of the Prophetic tradition as recorded in the *Ḥadīth*. While an extended corpus of *Ḥadīth* is at the core of Sunni belief, only few are recognized by the Shi'a. The term 'Sunna' or 'Sunni', as they refer to themselves, is a short form of '*ahl as-sunnah wa l-jamā'ah*', the 'people of the Prophetic custom and the community (i.e. consensus)'.

The various branches of Shi'ism again differ in regard to the later succession of the 'imamate', as they call the religious, spiritual, and political leadership. Based on their respective acknowledgement of subsequent imams, the most prominent branches are referred to as: 'Twelvers' or 'Imamis', the largest group dominant in contemporary Iran; 'Seveners' or 'Ismailis'; and 'Fivers' or 'Zaydis'.⁵⁹³ Zaydism became rooted in Yemen in the 9th century with the entrance of Yahya bin al-Hussein (d. 911). He founded the first Zaydi state in 893 and adopted the title '*Hadi ila al-Haqq*', the 'Guide to the Truth'; the doctrinal school that relies on his teachings is hence referred to as 'Hadawi'.⁵⁹⁴ From this first state onwards, the north of Yemen would, with only short periods of intermittence, be ruled by a Zaydi imam until 1962.

Zaydism as a religious doctrine, and also in its function as a theory of state, requires a potential candidate for imamate rule to meet fourteen qualities, the most important of which are descendants of the *ahl al-bayt*, scholarly expertise in the field of religion, and the capacity to pronounce an independent judgment in legal cases (*ijtihad*), the ability to fight, justice and generosity, and the willingness to oppose tyranny and injustice.⁵⁹⁵ His primary duty is implementing Islamic law, in line with the Qur'anic obligation for all believers but particularly for the imam to "command what is right and forbid what is wrong" ("*al-amr bi'l-ma'ruf wa'n-nahy 'ani'l-munkar*", sura 3, verse 104). Furthermore, his right and duty is to step up against illegitimate or unjust claimants to the imamate or unjust imams ('*zalim*' or 'oppressor') as more legitimate claimant. The principle is referred to as '*khurūj*' or 'coming

⁵⁹³ 'Twelvers' take their alternative name 'Imami' or 'Imamates' from the fact that they still expect the return of the Twelfth Imam of 'Mahdi' who went into occlusion. 'Ismailis' and 'Zaydis' are denominated after their respective acknowledged imams Isma'il ibn Jafar and Zayd ibn Ali, the great-grandson of Ali.

⁵⁹⁴ On the early history of Zaydism, see: Wilferd Madelung, *Der Imam al-Qasim ibn Ibrahim und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1965).

⁵⁹⁵ Vom Bruck, *Islam*, 33. See her work also for more details.

out/rising against'. Its inherently revolutionary potential will be a core aspect to be discussed in relation to the Houthis' mobilization, i.e. their prognostic framing.⁵⁹⁶ There always must be an *ahl al-bayt* who qualifies as imam. However, as vom Bruck points out, people need not follow him automatically unless he makes a call for allegiance (*da'wah*) and is recognized by the '*ulamā*' and other notables who then pay homage to him (*bay'ah*).⁵⁹⁷ Multiple claimants and self-acclaimed or contestingly proclaimed imams have historically been as existent as periods of interregnum without imam.⁵⁹⁸ In addition, dynasties were – albeit undue according to Zaydi doctrine – established, namely the Qasimi dynasty (1598–1853) considered to have spun an age of Zaydi flourishing in the 17th century and the Hamid al-Din dynasty (1904–1962), which was less positively remembered as a period of despotic rule.⁵⁹⁹

Apart from the aforementioned differences in regard to succession, *khurūj*, and *Ḥadīth*, differences between Zaydism and Sunni theological doctrine are modest; they relate to specific legal rulings, certain practices like praying and the call to prayer (*adhan*), as well as holidays.⁶⁰⁰ It was under Qasimi imams in the late 18th and early 19th century that attempts were made by a Zaydi scholar and longtime chief judge to further transcend the differences between the denominations, specifically in regard to dynastic rule (which he regarded legitimate), the *Ḥadīth* (large parts of which he acknowledged), and most importantly *khurūj* (which he repudiated). Considering the potential for acquiescence towards the ruler inherent in the latter and for the legitimization of dynastic rule specifically, Muhammad al-Shawkani (1759–1834)⁶⁰¹ was held in high esteem by four succeeding Qasimi imams. Leading scholars

⁵⁹⁶ Similar points are made by Michael Cook in his extensive study of the principle of 'commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong': He holds that political activism is characteristic of the sect (i.e. Zaydism; p. 231); that in the Zaydi exegesis of this duty, the taxes collected by a *zalim* are illegal (p. 239; this point is relevant in regards to the accusation that the Houthis called upon the population to stop paying zakat [religious tax] to the government; and furthermore that recourse to arms in *khurūj* is the duty of the imam, not the individual believer (p. 248). The latter underlines once more the strict hierarchy centered on a scholarly leader (potentially with a claim to the imamate) to lead the upsurge against an unjust ruler – an interesting angle to evaluate the strict hierarchy prevalent among the Houthis. Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵⁹⁸ Wilferd Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran* (Albany: The Persian Heritage Foundation, 1988), 86, and as cited in vom Bruck, *Islam*, 33.

⁵⁹⁹ See Dresch, *History*, 43ff.

⁶⁰⁰ The position of the arms during prayer differs. Also a practice not followed by Zaydis but Sunnis is the uttering of '*amin*' at the end of prayer. Despite this, Zaydis are allowed to pray together with Sunnis and have historically done so in Yemen. Beyond the general Muslim holidays shared by both denominations such as Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, Eid Adha, etc., Zaydis celebrate Eid al-Ghadeer, on which they commemorate the designation of Ali as Muhammad's successor; the highly meaningful event in regard to Zaydi identity was prohibited after 1962, became legalized again in 1990, and was again suppressed between 2004 and 2008. Zaydis celebrate the Prophet's Birthday as do mainstream Sunnis (while Salafis and Wahhabis denounce it). Lastly, while Zaydi doctrine does not support the celebration of Ashura (the martyrdom of Hussein in Karbala), Hussein al-Houthi has given lectures on the occasion. Cf. Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 288–290.

⁶⁰¹ On Shawkani's work and its impact see: Bernard Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam. The Legacy of Muhammad al-Shawkani* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); vom Bruck, *Regimes*, 192.

consider the impact of his work as a ‘Sunnification’ of Zaydism. What was attractive to Qasimi rulers, then, would also be attractive to post-imamate republican rulers: The decades after the revolution were the heyday of government attempts to erase the legacy of a millennium of Zaydi rule and of renewed ‘Sunnification’ in line with and referring to Shawkani⁶⁰² – to the chagrin of staunch Zaydis.⁶⁰³

Zaydism’s imprinting on the social order⁶⁰⁴ was in its constitution of the *ahl al-bayt* or *sādah* as hereditary elites on top of the descent-based social pyramid. They were the first among the Zaydis as the Zaydis were the first among the social groups in general. Endogamy was self-evident. While *sādah* could be found in a variety of occupational groups from religious scholarship, administrative positions, long-distance trade and crafts to agriculture (working in petty-trade in the *suq*, however, would have been reckoned shameful and was thus avoided), they first and foremost considered themselves as the preservers of religious knowledge, tradition, and – owing the high significance of descent – genealogy. In other words, in their view they were the custodians of Zaydi collective memory. Besides education, appropriate moral comportment was quintessential. As the introductory citation of a Yemeni proverb illustrates: Although one is born into a *sādah* family, *sādah* identity is acquired by merit. The ideal point of reference in this regard was the family of the Prophet itself, i.e. members of the elite families oriented their moral comportment to equal the tradition of the *ahl al-bayt*, once more emphasizing the importance of their genealogical connection, as Pottek stresses.⁶⁰⁵ In line with what has been delineated before, vom Bruck holds that “‘being Zaydi’ is usually understood as involving critical examination of forms of domination and action against abuses of power”,⁶⁰⁶ thus highlighting the practical implications of the principle of *khurūj*. On the outside, *sādah* status was expressed in reverence by non-*sādah* and non-Zaydis, the respectful address ‘*sayyid*’ or ‘*sharifa*’ (for females), and possibly the *imamah*, a male headgear predominantly worn by religious scholars.⁶⁰⁷ It is worthwhile to note that learning and morals were employed as “markers of social distinction” not only in distinction to non-*sādah* of all shades, but even among *sādah*, making those with fewer prestige the object of condescension.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰² Salmoni et al. note how reference to Shawkani served the regime as evidence for a uniform, pan-Islamic identity devoid of a specifically Zaydi role. Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 72.

⁶⁰³ Salafis and Wahhabis on the other hand consider him as their intellectual precursor.

⁶⁰⁴ The following paragraph is based on: vom Bruck, *Islam*.

⁶⁰⁵ Damaris Pottek, “Am Anfang des Krieges stehen die Worte” (Magisterarbeit, Universität Hamburg, 2010), 23.

⁶⁰⁶ Vom Bruck, *Regimes*, 191.

⁶⁰⁷ Vom Bruck, *Islam*, 334.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

Finally, Zaydism has likewise inscribed itself into the spatial order of north Yemen. As I have previously mentioned, the region is pervaded by a sacred geography of sanctuaries or *'hujar'* (sg. *'hijrah'*).⁶⁰⁹ They are protected spaces associated with *sādah* religious learning and teaching as well as mediation. According to their protective relation in regard to *sādah*, *qabili* are responsible for safeguarding their inviolacy, with detrimental loss of honor striking the person who either violates its sanctity or fails to protect it.⁶¹⁰ *Hujar* turned into notable locations of Zaydi revival from the late 1980s onwards; similarly, they serve(d) as refuge for members of the Houthi family during the armed conflict with the government. Both aspects will be tackled below. Shrines of prominent Zaydi scholars or imams and prestigious mosques (such as the tombs of Imam al-Hadi, al-Hadi mosque etc.) likewise belong to the sacred geography, albeit in another fashion. Although the visitation of shrines is not anchored in Zaydism, believers do visit and pray at these locations;⁶¹¹ since this contradicts Sunni doctrine, they have become prime targets of Salafī attack.

5.1.2. Zaydi Discrimination and Marginalization

It was less the religious doctrine of Zaydism that would lead to its ultimate fate, but its specific political and social configuration that would lead to the overthrow of the imamate. Forces of opposition against the monarch had formed from the 1930s onwards, mainly among intellectuals exposed to the regional and international environment which in their view had shone a bad light upon the developmental status of their country.⁶¹² While the assassination of Imam Yahya in 1948 did not succeed in terminating the imamate as such, a coup in September 1962 led by the subsequent first President of the YAR, Brigadier General Abdullah al-Sallal, did. In the immediate aftermath, he proclaimed: “The corrupt monarchy which ruled for a thousand years was a disgrace to the Arab nation and to all humanity. Anyone who tries to restore it is an enemy of God and man!”⁶¹³ He directly referred to the

⁶⁰⁹ For an attempt to identify and map the location of these *hujar* and relate them to Houthis areas of influence, see Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 69f.

⁶¹⁰ See Caton, *Yemen Chronicle*, for an extensive contextualization of his anthropological research in a *hijra*.

⁶¹¹ Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 290.

⁶¹² On the “Free Yemeni Movement” see: J. Leigh Douglas, *The Free Yemeni Movement, 1935–1962* (Beirut: The American University of Beirut, 1987). See Willis, *Unmaking*, 382f. for a discussion of other forces/positions involved.

⁶¹³ “Yemen: Arabia Felix”, *Time Magazine*, October 26, 1962, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,874526,00.html>. Brinkley Messick similarly cites the First Proclamation of the Republic: The politics of the republican state will reinstitute “the correct Islamic shari’a, after its death had been caused by tyrannical and wicked rulers” and that it will strive to achieve the “elimination of hatreds and envies, and divisions of descent and madhab”, Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State. Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 1993), 53.

danger of a reestablishment of the imamate by Muhammad al-Badr,⁶¹⁴ the fugitive deposed imam who had fled to Saudi-Arabia and gathered support against the republicans. The war between ‘royalist’ forces supporting al-Badr (beyond Zaydi and *qabili* loyalists he received support from Jordan, the KSA, and Britain) and the ‘republicans’ (backed by 70,000 Egyptian troops⁶¹⁵ and alleged weapon supplies by the Soviet Union) lasted until 1970, when the external powers had disengaged and the YAR had been officially recognized by the KSA. The royalists, who had territorially dominated the northern areas of Ma’rib, Amran, Al-Jawf, and Sa’ada, were defeated.⁶¹⁶

Lacking a profound and ‘powerful founding ideology’, as vom Bruck claims,⁶¹⁷ the republican state established persistent dissociation from the imamate’s political and social order as a core trait of its self-conception. It has perpetually – until today – repeated the accusation of “Zaydi-inspired activism [which] inevitably aims to reassert the exclusive rights of the *ahl al-bayt*”.⁶¹⁸ The legitimacy of the Republic stemmed from the abolishment of descent-based rule and privilege; accordingly, and all the more so considering the first decade of being in a war with pro-imamate forces, the republican regime sought to extinguish the representations of what it opposed and what it subsumed under the spawns of ‘Zaydism as such’.⁶¹⁹ Next to the physical elimination of royalist enemies in the outward war it waged was the removal of Zaydis from political, religious, and civil service positions and the seizure of certain Zaydi property; both were done in an unsystematic and far from exhaustive, but nevertheless observable, way. The now vacant positions in state administration were increasingly awarded to *qabili sheikhs*⁶²⁰ in an attempt to secure their loyalty in the war and beyond. Besides political positions, they furthermore received monetary and material incentives, reaching even the level of road and other infrastructure construction in the 1970s; Zaydi areas on the other hand were systematically excluded from such development activities and intensified inclusion into physical state building. Slowly but steadily, these coopted groups replaced the old elites, i.e. the regime succeeded in transforming a social order in

⁶¹⁴ He died in London in 1996.

⁶¹⁵ These troops, who had been perceived by some as almost an ‘occupation army’ withdrew after the Egyptian defeat in the 1967 Six Day War. The war in Yemen is often evaluated as ‘Egypt’s Vietnam’ due to the high losses suffered.

⁶¹⁶ For more on the war see Dresch, *History*.

⁶¹⁷ Vom Bruck, “Regimes”, 203.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ King elucidates how the regime’s master narrative was directed against Zaydi rule by linking Zaydism as a whole to imamate oppression and backwardness while portraying the republic in terms of ‘freedom’ and ‘progress’. King, “Zaydi Revival”, 432.

⁶²⁰ And other groups and influential personalities assumed to be of use to the regime. Two of those who established their privileged positions within the state system in this period were Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ahmar and Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar.

which status was attributed based on descent into one in which it was based on economic success and inclusion into the system of state patronage (*maḥsūbyā*).⁶²¹

Far more perceivable and painful than this grand social reordering was, for *sādah* as well as non-*sādah* Zaydis, the immediate structural and particularly ideational discrimination they suffered. Zaydi learning had become suppressed in schools, *hujar*, and other places of learning while – as Zaydis claim – the official school curricula had begun discriminating against Zaydis and supporting hate speech. The confiscation of material from institutes, book stores, and private collections adds to these attempts of intercepting the transmission of Zaydi tradition,⁶²² as does the fear of symbolic and physical assault due to one’s visible or simply known affiliation with the religious community. In her elaborate anthropological study of the Zaydi elite’s management of their (spoiled) identity,⁶²³ vom Bruck tells the stories of how numerous individuals of various age cohorts and from different social backgrounds experienced the “cataclysmic events” of the post-revolutionary period.⁶²⁴ Therein, those at school age recount how they were called names and excluded by schoolmates and exposed as ‘bad examples’ by teachers alike; respected scholars remember how they were publicly humiliated by those throwing off their *imamah* in the street; how the respectful address ‘*sayyid*’ became a nickname to be teased with; of public belittling; and how interactions among each other and with other social groups increasingly turned into minefields.⁶²⁵ She describes the accompanying emotions of confusion, sadness, shame, anxiety, a feeling of betrayal and estrangement – in short: of stigmatization and trauma.⁶²⁶ Evidently, memories differ, depending on the social position of the individual person and the intensity of the particular event or series of events. Especially for those who supported the revolution, the turn of the events that did not take into account the side they were on or even fought on was bitter.⁶²⁷

Zaydis and especially *sādah* had three options for how to reformulate their identity in reaction to these experiences: first, renounce their *sādah* identity; second, find a way to

⁶²¹ Pottek, “Anfang”, 20f.; Sarah Philipps, *Yemen’s Democratic Experiment in Regional Perspective: Patronized and Pluralized Authoritarianism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). She holds that the regime’s inclusion of some *qabili* and other groups served also to neutralize non-coopted *qabili* elements (p. 95).

⁶²² Cf. Samy Dorlian, *La mouvance zaydite dans le Yémen contemporain. Une modernisation avortée* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2013), 24.

⁶²³ Cf. Erving Goffman, *Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

⁶²⁴ Vom Bruck, *Islam*; here: 252.

⁶²⁵ Vom Bruck provides examples of royalist and republican traditional poems (*zamil*) employed in denigrating the respective other in a ‘battle of words’. This once more emphasizes the importance of poetry in identity contestation and symbolic conflict behavior. Vom Bruck, *Islam*, 61f.

⁶²⁶ Gabriele vom Bruck, “Evacuating Memory in Postrevolutionary Yemen”, in *Counter-Narratives. History, Contemporary Society, and Politics in Saudi-Arabia and Yemen*, ed. Madawi al-Rasheed and Robert Vitalis (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 229–245; vom Bruck, *Islam*.

⁶²⁷ Vom Bruck, *Islam*, 249f.

redefine and reconcile their heritage with the new republican state order; and third, to revive their religious tradition in face of its suppression. Vom Bruck traces all three directions and suggests that they partly occurred in chronological succession and that the majority for a long time chose the middle ground. Some stuck to renouncement, few commenced revival early. She detects what she terms “self-willed amnesia”⁶²⁸: parents refrain from telling their children about their descent, families drop the parts of their names that identify them as *sādah*, ancestors and spiritual leaders are no longer commemorated, nor are rituals observed, there is no more striving to follow the Prophet’s family, occupational choices shift towards formerly less acceptable domains (such as petty trade), and importantly, endogamy is given up in favor of increased intermarriage with other social strata such as *qabili* from the 1970s onwards. Especially the latter caught wide attention, for it was formerly regarded as one of the most exclusive aspects of the social order that caused resentment among those barred from the eligible circle.⁶²⁹ By these measures, they were thus giving up the ‘historical depth’ (genealogy, memory) that has been constitutive for their self-conception.⁶³⁰

While the above describes the reaction of Zaydis/*sādah* to a threat predominantly to their *social* identity, a second major challenge entering the stage – this time foremost to their *religious* identity – contributed to changing the rules of the game: the rise of the Salafi and Wahhabi movements in the north of Yemen. In line with their policy of obliterating the Zaydi legacy, the regime supported the influx of asserters of the Sunni reform movement and the institutionalization of their places of worship and teaching.⁶³¹ On the doctrinal level, Salafi/Wahhabi clerics in the KSA repeatedly declared Zaydis ‘unbelievers’ (*‘kuffār’*), by a speech act excluding them from the Muslim *‘ummah*. This act of *‘takfīr’* is commonly associated with fundamentalist Sunni strands, the originators of which are reviled as *‘mukaffirin’*, which is prevalent among the defamed in Yemen in reference to their defamers. Speaking out against *‘takfīr’* was one of the first steps to counter discrimination on a doctrinal level (see next chapter).⁶³²

⁶²⁸ Vom Bruck, “Evacuating”, 239.

⁶²⁹ On this, Shelagh Weir provides a telling illustration: The marriage of a *sharifa* with a *qabili* was accompanied by the following song: “Oh sayyids, you tricked us/With your turbans, remedies and charms/Whenever we proposed marriage, you said/‘With a sharifa, a sayyid’s daughter? It’s not allowed./God only knows whose book you studied!” Shelagh Weir, “A Clash of Fundamentalisms”, *Middle East Report 27* (Fall 1997).

⁶³⁰ As a reverse effect of the defamation which they took as a “personal affront”, vom Bruck notes an increased awareness among Zaydis of their “distinctness”. Vom Bruck, “Evacuating”, 72.

⁶³¹ See also: Gabriele vom Bruck, “Being a Zaydi in the Absence of the Imam. Doctrinal revisions, religious instruction, and the (re-) invention of ritual”, in *Le Yémen Contemporain*, ed. Remy Leveau, Franck Mermier and Udo Steinbach (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1999), 169-192.

⁶³² See Pottek, “Anfang”, 83–86, for an elaboration by Yahya al-Houthi on the Salafi/Wahhabi threat towards Zaydis generally and what he call the “*takfiri*-movement” in particular.

Two points can be added in regard to Salafi/Wahhabi success in proselytizing and in regard to an accompanying trend: What made their doctrines so attractive for Yemenis under the given circumstances is their emphasis on the equality of all believers, thus taking the same line as the republican policy of erasing privilege through birthright. In addition, the regime propagated Shawkani's work again, thereby popularizing his convergence of Zaydi and Sunni doctrine (or rather, the conflation of Zaydi to Sunni doctrine).⁶³³

These processes, however, unfolded under circumstances different from the war-dominated 1960s, and it was these circumstances which induced more active Zaydi responses to their marginalization and discrimination.

5.1.3. *Organizing Opposition and Revival*

The post-war period not only brought a consolidation of state-building efforts, but also significant social change. The oil-boom in the Gulf states attracted huge numbers of (young) Yemeni migrant workers with a number of effects, some of which were previously noted: a tremendous influx of remittances that led to new consumption patterns and formed a main pillar of the YAR's state income; cross-border trade of agrarian products as well as arms and *qāt* smuggling from the Sa'ada governorate into the KSA resulted in an additional economic ascent of the North, surpassing that of other regions; labor shortage in agriculture and land acquisition by *sheikhs* for cash crop production impacted rural livelihood patterns; in combination, these phenomena as signs of prosperity and employment opportunities also attracted internal migration to the North. Infrastructure expansion (roads, telephone lines, schools etc.) made for a better opening up of and access to the region. What lagged behind, however, was government representation: A permanent representation through officials in some areas was only established in 1980, once more emphasizing the fact that the North has historically remained peripheral to state control.

In sum, these changes brought with them an increased exposition to the outside world for both those who remained in the North, but much more so for those young males in their 20s and 30s, who left the country to seek their fortunes abroad. And, as Salmoni et al. stress, it changed the way in which people related to their environment, their *qabila* or *qabili* culture respectively, and their religious identity.⁶³⁴ The increased intermixing with others, be they

⁶³³ Cf. Laurent Bonnefoy, "Les identités religieuses contemporaines au Yémen. Convergence, résistances et instrumentalisations", *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, No. 121–122 (2008), pp. 201–215. It is worth noting that this policy of supporting Salafi/Wahhabi expansion not only concerned areas in which Zaydis formed the majority, but also Shafi'i regions. Vom Bruck, "Regimes", 187.

⁶³⁴ For the above paragraph see Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 81–84; here: 81.

foreigners, from other regions, social strata, or otherwise strangers, on the one hand created a stronger awareness of, or at least attention to, one's own identity; besides, as noted above, social hierarchies were slowly penetrated by more and more mixed marriages. A similar effect was created due to the heightened economic competition with the resulting economic rise or downfall of individuals and families, dissociated from their traditional social position based on descent – remains of descent-based hierarchies became even more despised by many non-Zaydis/non-*sādah* in this context. The generation of young Zaydis was exposed to different experiences: Better educated than preceding generations, yet frequently ignorant of their religious background, they were partly victims to discrimination by vehement forfeiters of Wahhabi/Salafi strands of Sunni Islam in the KSA, partly they were exposed to it and found it appalling⁶³⁵ (the latter, in fact, applied to many Shafi'i Yemeni migrants). In any case: Their religious identity became a central topic to many young Zaydis. Some deliberately commenced investigating their denominational legacy, and they were able to do so with less ballast than those who had living memories of the imamate period; some even developed a kind of nostalgia for the era in which the Zaydi creed had been the respected basis of their state. The Islamic revival that gripped the Muslim world in the wake of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 certainly contributed its share to this inert awakening, for it stirred religious activities generally and Wahhabi/Salafi expansion in particular. During the 1980s, a number of Zaydi revivalist scholars like the non-*sādah* scholar Muhammad Izzan⁶³⁶ and Al-Murtada al-Mahatwari,⁶³⁷ prayer leader at the famous al-Badr Mosque in Sanaa, began to teach traditional Zaydi texts again. They also reproduced them in printed and audio media (cassette recordings) and developed curricula to be taught.⁶³⁸ Nevertheless, Zaydi-revivalism remained faint-hearted for another decade⁶³⁹ until perceived pressures had increased to a degree that made inactivity apparently intolerable. The family that was to play the leading role in the following revivalism was the one to give the later rebellion its name: the al-Houthi. It

⁶³⁵ Ibid., 89.

⁶³⁶ For details on Izzan and his changing position during the conflict see: Dorlian, *Mouvance*, 200ff., Bernard Haykel, "Rebellion, Migration or Consultative Democracy? The Zaydis and Their Detractors in Yemen", in *Le Yémen Contemporain*, ed. Remy Leveau, Franck Mermier and Udo Steinbach (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1999), 193–201, here: 200.200.

⁶³⁷ Killed in a suicide attack during Friday Prayer in al-Badr Mosque in Sana'a on March 20, 2015.

⁶³⁸ Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 97. In the early 1990s they also spread pamphlets denouncing Wahhabi/Salafi intrusion supported by the KSA in the Zaydi heartland. Amin Abu Zayd, *Al-wahabiyya wa khataruha ala mustaqbal al-Yaman al-siyasi* [The Wahabiyya and its Danger for the Political Future of Yemen] (Beirut, 1991), cited in: ICG, "Defusing", 9.

⁶³⁹ In fact, another Zaydi group had been active since the 1960s (with a long period of inactivity between the 1970s and 1990). It is connected to the family of al-Wazir and the group's name of *'Itihad al-Qiwa al-Sha'biyya'* ('Union of Popular Forces'). Its aims were rather intellectual. Today the main activities revolve around a Zaydi cultural research center. Cf. Dorlian, *Mouvance*, 52–60.

shall now be introduced in greater detail and with a special emphasis on how the family's background and its structure were conducive to its enduring success.

5.1.3.1. *The al-Houthi Family*

From the 1970s onward, Wahhabi religious scholars in the KSA repeatedly attacked Zaydism in *fatawa* (sg. *fatwah*) they issued.⁶⁴⁰ Badr al-Din al-Houthi (ca. 1924–2010) was one Zaydi scholar who countered these religious rulings.⁶⁴¹ Son and nephew of renowned Zaydi religious scholars, he himself studied among others alongside the famous cleric and member of the *marji'yāh* (Zaydi religious authority) Majd al-Din al-Mu'ayyidi and became a prominent and respected scholar in the late imamate period. From the late 1970s onwards, he took a stance against anti-Zaydi sermons and *fatawa* in speaking and writing. In 1979 for example, he published a text in response to a defamation by the prominent Saudi Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bin Baz in which he refutes the allegations he raised about allegedly inappropriate Zaydi religious practices. He specifically defends the issue of common prayer of Zaydis and Sunnis, emphasizing the legitimacy both ways: Zaydis can pray behind Sunnis and vice versa.⁶⁴² This text would be reprinted more than a decade later and reach wide prominence among revivalists.⁶⁴³ Another famous example stems from a later period: In 1994 he countered popular anti-Zaydi writings by Muqbil al-Wadi'i among others, accusing him of being corrupted by the KSA.⁶⁴⁴

Badr al-Din set up an extended, multi-generational family: He married four times between the 1950s and 1980s – both daughters of prominent *sādah* as well as *qabili* families, which created a large kinship network. From these marriages resulted numerous offspring, who – themselves members of the generation of young Zaydis with growing interest in their creed – again assumed multiple roles in regard to revivalist activities and further enlarged their

⁶⁴⁰ One of the even wider examples (in the sense that it refers to all Shi'a) was the ruling of Abdallah bin Jirbin in 1991 who declared that “Shi'a might be lawfully killed by Muslims” (note the contradictoriness therein). Guido Steinberg, “Jihadi-Salafism and the Shi'is: remarks about the intellectual roots of anti-Shi'ism”, in: Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (London: Hurst, 2009), 115; vom Bruck, “Regimes”, 205.

⁶⁴¹ Birthdates are difficult to verify for the al-Houthi family. In case of doubt about the exact year, I add a “ca.”. Dorlian (*Mouvance*, 162), for example, provides 1926 as the year of birth of Badr al-Din. However, I found the more widely stated 1922 more convincing.

⁶⁴² Badr al-Din ibn Amir al-Din ibn al-Hussein al-Houthi, *al-Ijaz fi al-Radd 'ala Fatawa al-Hijaz* [The Concise Response to the Fatwas from the Hijaz] (Sana'a: Maktabat al-Yaman al-Kubra, 1979).

⁶⁴³ Salmoni et al., *Regime*, Appendix C, 297.

⁶⁴⁴ The 1994 text was published as: Badr al-Din al-Houthi, *Tahrir al-afkar an taqlid al-ashrar* [Liberating the Thoughts of the Imitation of Evil] (Sana'a: Mu'assasat ahl al-bayt li-l-ri'aya al-ijtima'iyya, 1994). See Dorlian, *Mouvance*, 164ff. for a description of the lines of argumentation used by Badr al-Din in both this as well as the 1979 writing cited above.

kinship as well as associational network through their own pattern of marriage as well as the skillful employment of their social and religious capital.⁶⁴⁵ These extensive networks would prove significant for mobilization as well as for the impact that regime repression (and attempts at cooptation) would have, for it many times affected or involved a much larger, more complex group than anticipated.⁶⁴⁶

The first age cohort, consisting of Hussein (b. 1959), Yahya (b. 1965), Ahmad, Abdul Qadir, Muhammad, Hamid, Ibrahim, and Amir al-Din attended state schools and the newer schools with an increasingly revivalist curriculum; the second cohort had then already been exposed to the activities of the ‘Believing Youth’ group (see below 5.1.3.3.) and their summer camps: Abdul Malik (b. 1980), Abdul Khaliq, Najm al-Din, Abdul Salam, and Ali; equally Abdullah Hussein, son of Hussein, and – thought the same age – a member of the subsequent generation.⁶⁴⁷ While all family members enjoyed a thorough religious education and were introduced to their Zaydi legacy and family networks early on, Salmoni et al. tried to assign the individuals to specific fields of activity, an attempt, which despite its potential limits, highlights some interesting aspects:

Field of Activity	Houthi Family Member
Zaydi <i>marji`yāh</i> (religious authority)	Badr al-Din
Zaydi revivalism	Badr al-Din*, Muhammad, Hamid, Hussein, Yahya* and others
Politics	Badr al-Din* (<i>Hizb al-Haqq</i>), Hussein (<i>Hizb al-Haqq</i>), Yahya (GPC)
Armed Action	Hussein, Badr al-Din*, Yahya, Abdul Malik

Table 5.1.: Adapted from: Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 104; I added Badr al-Din and Yahya, respectively, and are marked with an *

The fields of action have been constructed on the basis of the development which the process of Zaydi opposition and revivalism took: From the humble beginnings of Badr al-Din’s speaking (and writing) out against defamation and discrimination, revivalism in form of teaching and ‘ideational awakening’ were the next steps, followed by and interwoven with political engagement, and finally, the escalation into armed action. The most prominent faces

⁶⁴⁵ Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 102ff.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 103f.

of the later movement would reflect this development; it would be Badr al-Din, Hussein, and Abdul Malik, each representing one of the phases and each adding another dimension of legitimacy the movement could rely on: legitimacy based on revered religious scholarship and the ‘wisdom of old age’; legitimacy based on religious scholarship that would be transformed into charismatic sociopolitical activism to tackle worldly problems and grievances, strengthened at a later point by martyrdom for the cause; and again religious scholarship, but this time in combination with youthful energy and strong leadership in the face of armed confrontation with the state.



Figure 5.1.: Popular depiction of Badr al-Din al-Houthi (middle) with his sons Hussein (left, martyred in 2004) and Abdul Malik⁶⁴⁸

How this core of protagonists shaped the course of institutionalization and mobilization shall be elucidated along the lines of the two organizations often mentioned as related in one way or the other to the later ‘Houthis’: the *al-Haqq* Party and the *Shabab al-Mu’imeen* or Believing Youth (BY).

⁶⁴⁸ Benjamin Wiacek, “In pictures: The Scars of North Yemen’s Wars”, *Al Jazeera*, July 2, 2012, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/2012/06/2012630195727807952.html>. The iconography of this image fits well the typical depiction of religious and political leaders in the Middle East, be it e.g. figures like Gamal Abdel Nasser, Hosni Mubarak, the kings of the Gulf monarchies, Yassir Arafat, Ayatollah Khomeini, Hassan Nasrallah, or, equally in family trinity, Hafez al-Assad, Bassel al-Assad, and Bashar al-Assad. Reproductions of such images of personalized rule/leadership typically decorate homes, stores, public buildings, and the public space (in the form of large posters or else). Ali Abdullah Saleh had himself portrayed in the same fashion and as of spring 2015 the reproduction of images of his son Ahmed – who was rumored to have been some kind of designated successor long before 2011 – sees a dramatic increase. First (potentially staged) rallies to push for his candidacy for Presidency have taken place in early March 2015. “Supporters of Ahmed Saleh Call on Him to Run for President”, *Yemen Times*, March 11, 2015, accessed March 12, 2015, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1867/photoessay/4958/Supporters-of-Ahmed-Saleh-call-on-him-to-run-for-president.htm>.

5.1.3.2. *Hizb al-Haqq* ('Truth Party')

1990 saw not only Yemeni unification, but in its wake also a major opening of the political sphere. The floor was now opened for a competitive party system – a signal that quickly led to the founding of numerous parties. Prior to the establishment of the Republic of Yemen, the YAR had been dominated by the General People's Congress (GPC), while the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) formed its equivalent in the equally one-party rule of the PDRY. Among the newly founded parties⁶⁴⁹ was the successful Sunni Islamist '*Islah*' ('Reform') Party under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar (introduced in chapter 4.1.2.2.). In order to counter their adversaries' move and in taking the next step towards a stronger (political) representation, Zaydi grandees likewise founded a party, the *Hizb al-Haqq* ('Truth Party'). Among the founders were Majd al-Din al-Mu'ayyidi (Badr al-Din's mentor), Badr al-Din al-Houthi himself, Hassan Zayd, Saleh Falita, Muhammad al-Mansour, and Muhammad al-Maqalih, a noted *qāḍī*.⁶⁵⁰

A few statements in regard to the party's rationale, as well as its goals, can serve to illustrate the appraisal of central actors. The party's general secretary, for example, *sayyid* Ahmad al-Shami, emphasized its defensive stance against the threat of Wahhabi intrusion:

Wahhabism is a child of imperialism and it is spear-head in our country. Both are one and the same thing. How do we stand up to an enemy we don't see? We are seeing imperialism in our country in its Islamic guise... Wahhabism is readying conditions in order to colonize us indirectly for [the] imperialist [cause].⁶⁵¹

Saudi Arabia is pouring lots and lots of money into Yemen to promote its own version of Wahhabi Islam. This is actually an irrational and uncompromising version of our religion, which we can do without. So, we need to counter these efforts... and to fight intellectual advances by Wahhabism into Yemen.⁶⁵²

Muhammad Izzan, also one of the founding members, explained the following in regard to the aims of al-Haqq:⁶⁵³

⁶⁴⁹ Parties are negligible in regard to the research question and are consequently not treated as separate actors (except for al-Haqq and *Islah*). Worth noting is the coalition of leading opposition parties in the "Joint Meeting Parties (JMP)" in 2005 as a counterforce to Saleh's ruling GPC. Founding members of the JMP included: *Islah*, the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), the Nasserite Unionist Party (NUP), the Socialist Arab Baath Party, al-Haqq Party, and the Public Forces Union. Worth noting on a different note: March 2012 saw the emergence of the first Yemeni Salafi party, the "Rashad Union Party". On the role of political parties and the respective political space they were able to act in (in the face of increasingly authoritarian rule since the mid-1990s) see: Gamal Gasim, "Explaining Political Activism in Yemen", in *Taking to the Streets. The Transformation of Arab Activism*, ed. Lina Khatib and Ellen Lust (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014), 109–135.

⁶⁵⁰ Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 94f.

⁶⁵¹ Muhammad Izzan (ed.), *Al-'Allama al-Shami: Ara' wa mawaqif* (Amman: Matabi' Sharikat al-Mawrid al-Sina'iyya al-Urduniyya, 1994) 89, cited in: Haykel, "Rebellion", here: 198.

⁶⁵² *Yemen Times*, July 1, 1992, cited in: Dresch/Haykel, "Stereotypes", 412.

⁶⁵³ The way he put it, those aims are also applicable to his understanding of the later 'Believing Youth'.

We wanted a political movement that respects the past [i.e. Zaydi tradition] rather than to return to it [the imamate]. The past is gone and all with it... The idea was that the party would work within the new political establishment such as democracy, pluralism and freedom of expression. We wanted to develop the Zaydi ideology so it would be compatible with the current era. We did not insist that the leader be an *'alim* (scholar) but was to be educated in *shari'a* law and knowledge of political affairs.⁶⁵⁴

Based on an interview with Yahya al-Houthi in 2009, Pottek seeks to situate the founding of the party in a more general picture. In line with Yahya's narration, she asserts that it should be interpreted as an affirmative move of traditional *sādah* leadership responsibilities. Yahya describes it as the duty of the *sādah* and of his family to disclose the Wahhabis'⁶⁵⁵ 'true intentions' to the population. Referring to the perceived threat by Salafi/Wahhabi scientific institutes, he stated:

We [the *sādah*] were there from the beginning, because we understand the *Wahhabiyya*, we studied it (...) The ordinary people do not understand. We are the authority for the *Zaydiyya*. We are '*ulamā*' and a family of scholars, we know what they strive for. We told the people that they should not believe them and that it was a conspiracy.⁶⁵⁶

The founding of al-Haqq, which he portrays as having resulted from the intellectual and political efforts of his family specifically, was a liberal-democratic act; its success quickly threatened the regime, Islah, and Saudis (all equalized with 'the Wahhabis' or their supporters, respectively) and allegedly resulted in attempts of intimidation through officially sanctioned propaganda and physical assaults (ascribed to Islah) against the property of members before the elections in 1993. In short, their legitimate, democratic engagement – which could be termed a 'freedom and justice frame' – was under attack by those adversaries whose influence, or rather dominance, they sought to counter. I agree with Pottek in her evaluation of Yahya's account as another 'defensive narrative', akin to those affirmations of defensiveness in response to experienced aggression, which were later on so perpetually emphasized by the Houthi movement.⁶⁵⁷

One major concern that plagued the party from the beginning was the latent suspicions confronting a reentry of Zaydi actors onto the political floor. While Ayman Hamidi holds that exactly this fact was another rationale for founding al-Haqq to begin with, namely with the purpose of avoiding accusations of "clandestine anti-regime activities" they had so often

⁶⁵⁴ Cited in: Vom Bruck, "Regimes", 202.

⁶⁵⁵ Zaydis tend to subsume all strands of Salafism and similar Sunni fundamentalist strands under the term of "Wahhabism". My presentation follows this practice, on the one hand due to my attempt to let the actors speak, while on the other hand it is almost impossible to reconstruct who exactly (a) was referred to and (b) to which strand this person or subgroup is to be counted.

⁶⁵⁶ Adapted and translated from: Pottek, "Anfang", 86.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., 89ff.

faced since 1962,⁶⁵⁸ the issue was not resolved that easily. The party's leadership needed to take more active means in order to dissolve such suspicion.⁶⁵⁹ First, they underlined the fact that they were *not* an exclusively Zaydi party, but pursued political goals which were also attractive to a range of Sunni and Sufi members and leaders.⁶⁶⁰ Second, they affirmed their distancing from any claims for a restoration of the imamate in the party's founding manifesto, wherein they stated that although the imamate forms an ideal for government, it can no longer be appropriate under current social and political conditions.⁶⁶¹ Instead, they asserted democratic elective principles and the programmatic goals of reinvigorating *shari'a* law and the moral principle of 'commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong'.⁶⁶² 25,000 members registered with al-Haqq soon after its establishment; its resonance among younger people, however, is put into doubt by Salmoni et al., who argue that it rather represented an elite and much less so those who strived for genuine political participation and change. There were no grassroots organizations connected to it that would have provided a more thorough pervasion of society.⁶⁶³ Despite this, they started with two of eight seats in Sa'ada governorate during the 1993 parliamentary elections. Those seats were allocated to younger representatives, namely Hussein al-Houthi and Abdullah al-Razzami – both of whom would later become leaders in the Believing Youth and be at the forefront of the conflict escalation in 2004. This brief height, however, was shortly thereafter followed by a number of drawbacks for the party. In 1994, it already had to close its party magazine '*Al-Ummah*' due to financial problems; in the elections of 1997 it did not win any seats, it was, however, awarded the Ministry of Religious Endowments by the decision of Saleh, who wanted to balance Islah's influence by taking the post from it;⁶⁶⁴ plus, the rather cordial relations al-Haqq held with the YSP were considered inappropriate and the declaration of neutrality during the civil war was taken with suspicion as to which side they were supporting.⁶⁶⁵

⁶⁵⁸ Ayman Hamidi, "Inscriptions of Violence in Northern Yemen: Haunting Histories, Unstable Moral Spaces", *Middle Eastern Studies* 45(2), March 2009, 165–187, here: 166.

⁶⁵⁹ On the necessity for holders of political offices to divert a permanent distrust in this regard see an interview citation with a Zaydi scholar in: ICG, "Defusing", 8, n. 41.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 167; Vom Bruck, "Regimes", 201.

⁶⁶¹ Haykel referred to the step of declaring the imamate a "defunct institution" as a "rupture with Zaydi tradition". Haykel, "Rebellion", 193. See also: Pottek, "Anfang", 87ff.; Dorlian, *Mouvance*, 29ff.

⁶⁶² Muhammad al-Mansour, one of the '*ulama* signatories of the manifesto, in an interview with Dorlian stated that: "The imamate was a means, not an end." Cited in: Samy Dorlian, "Zaydisme et modernisation: émergence d'un nouvel universel politique?", *Chronique Yéménites* 13 (2006): 1–22, here: 12 (translated by the author).

⁶⁶³ Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 94.

⁶⁶⁴ Vom Bruck, "Being a Zaydi", 182.

⁶⁶⁵ The anti-Houthi counterframing since the mid- to late-2000s held that the Houthis secretly supported the South in its secessionist strive. The actions of Al-Haqq – which was always considered in affiliation with the Houthis as some kind of 'predecessor organization' although it had more than once vehemently distanced itself from the movement – were therein used as evidence. Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 96.

Due to the above compromises on Zaydi traditions and the inclination of the party leadership to further give up on core issues of Zaydism in return for political inclusion, eminent scholars such as al-Mu'ayyidi and Badr al-Din over time distanced themselves from al-Haqq⁶⁶⁶ and finally left the party. The same applies for Hussein al-Houthi, who quit his affiliation even before ending his term in parliament in 1997. This was the moment in which he turned towards another mode of revivalist engagement: the 'Believing Youth'.⁶⁶⁷

5.1.3.3. *The 'Believing Youth'*

Despite the previously presented attempts at teaching the young generation about their creed individual scholars had initiated in the 1980s, the Zaydis overall lacked an educational infrastructure that could come anywhere near the offensive and institutionalized Salafi instructional activities. After the liberalization in 1990, Muhammad Izzan took a chance and established 'scientific schools' (*'madāris 'ilmyāh'*) in Sa'ada, al-Jawf, and Sana'a, mirroring the Salafi 'scientific institutes' in design and (almost) in name.⁶⁶⁸ In Sa'ada, he moreover opened a teacher training institute in order to qualify multipliers. Symbolically, it bore the name of a prominent 19th century Zaydi martyr and opponent to the 'Sunnification' attempts of Shawkani: Muhammad bin Saleh al-Samawi (executed 1825).⁶⁶⁹

One of those who received training at the teachers' training institute in the early to mid-1990s was Muhammad al-Houthi; first a student under Izzan, he soon opened his own institution in the *hijra* of Dahyan in Majz, the ancestral home of his family. The demand for Zaydi education was undeniably existent and students came from various regions to study and live in the schools. In how far they emerged organically or were initiated on purpose is beyond tracking, but after-school groups soon arose which were dedicated to cultural activities, sports, field trips to the vicinity etc. These activities were a source for strong bonding and the development of a collective identity, i.e. a positively perceived shared Zaydi identity. To enhance this reassuring trend, the teachers supported a slow formalization of the groups. From some time in the mid-decade onwards, they convened under the common name

⁶⁶⁶ In my opinion, Haykel's ("Rebellion", 199) interpretation of the distancing of al-Mu'ayyidi and Badr al-Din al-Houthi along the lines of 'emigration from injustice' according to Zaydi doctrine goes too far; the fact remains, however, that they even put a great geographical distance between themselves and party proceedings.

⁶⁶⁷ ICG, "Defusing", 6.

⁶⁶⁸ Their curricula were also used by pro-traditionalist Zaydi teachers in local government schools. Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 97.

⁶⁶⁹ Haykel, "Rebellion", here: 200. Muhammad Izzan stated that in the beginning they wanted to name the institute after the founder of the Zaydiyya, Zayd bin Ali. After the ministry in charge prohibited this name due to its 'political character', they chose Samawi – a choice that could be considered to be even more political, however, the official in charge occurs to have been unfamiliar with the historical personality and context. Dorlian, *Mouvance*, 110. See his work for more on the symbolic pitting of Samawi against Shawkani (pp. 109–112).

of “Muntada al-Shabab al-Mu’imeen” (‘Assembly of the Believing Youth’).⁶⁷⁰ They issued membership cards and sought to strengthen internal solidarity by any means possible, always in presumed “competition with Salafis for support from disgruntled youth and tribal members of Yemen’s periphery”⁶⁷¹.

Based on the popularity of these activities and their potential for expansion beyond the immediate precincts of the schools and their pupils, the coordinators initiated summer camps around 1994: With a similar curriculum as the regular schools, they offered Qur’anic and Zaydi religious teaching in the mornings, while the afternoons were dedicated to sports, cultural activities, and generally activities which reaffirmed internal solidarity and common Zaydi identity (like commemoration, rituals). The first camp was conducted in the well-known *hijra* of Hamazat not far from Sa’ada. Word spread and soon it became prestigious among *sādah* and respected *qabili* families alike to send their children there, hence attracting more and more participants. Estimates speak of 10,000–15,000 students in 1994 and 1995 alone. Given this demand, similar camps were set up in numerous other locations, reaching as far south as Ta’izz and Ibb. Not only the numbers of participants increased dramatically in comparison to those students reached only through schools; at the same time, the age cohorts expanded and, most importantly, barriers based on social strata were overcome: Sons of *sādah*, non-*sādah*, *qabili*, merchant- and other families were all sharing the same experiences. Besides, the camps served as sites for revivalist literature, records etc.,⁶⁷² thus reaching out even beyond the audience present to their respective families and social networks.⁶⁷³

For some time, those instructional and youth activities were mainly the domain of Muhammad al-Houthi and some others who saw their field of action primarily in teaching.⁶⁷⁴ With the BY steadily growing, however, a number of the ‘old guards’ and (frustrated) al-Haqq members became interested and started to get engaged as well. Among

⁶⁷⁰ Some sources contend that the origin of the later Believing Youth (BY) lay in study groups in the 1980s that studied the Iranian Revolution (Abdullah Lux, “Yemen’s Last Zaydī Imām: The *shabāb al-mu’min*, the *Malāzim*, and ‘*hizb allāh*’ in the Thought of Ḥusayn Badr al-Dīn al-Ḥūthī”, *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 2:3, 2009, 369–434, here: 376) or, according to a GoY official’s allegation, were even trained in Iran in order to spread the revolution (ICG, “Defusing”, 11). While it appears possible that the BY built on a prior study group, and it might even be the case that they at a certain point in time studied the events in Iran (it was a popular theme among all Islamic revivalist strands), the regime’s suspicions seem far fetched and rather fit into the familiar pattern of counterframing by portraying those related to the later movement as ‘closet Iranian proxies’.

⁶⁷¹ Winter, “Ansar of Yemen”.

⁶⁷² There have been new writings as well as typed and printed reproductions of formerly only handwritten copies of Zaydi texts. Vom Bruck, “Being a Zaydi”, 182.

⁶⁷³ For the paragraph see: Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 98ff.

⁶⁷⁴ Like e.g. Al-Murtada al-Mahatwari. Haykel claims that in 1995 and 1998 the camps run by him were attacked and he was jailed twice. This is evidence of the ambivalent and contested context the camps took place in: Competing Salafis as well as the government must be considered in potential opposition towards their conduct. Haykel does not further specify the originator of the attacks, though. Bernard Haykel, “A Zaydi Revival?”, *Yemen Update* 36 (1995): 20, cited in: vom Bruck, “Being a Zaydi”, 182, n. 43.

those were Badr al-Din and Hussein al-Houthi (since 1997), and moreover Majd al-Din al-Mu'ayyidi, Muhammad Izzan, Yahya al-Houthi, Abdullah al-Razzami, Abdul Karim Jadhban, and Salih Habra as guest lecturers.⁶⁷⁵ Particularly Hussein was revered by the students for his charismatic teaching.⁶⁷⁶ This popularity and reverence, and the associational networks that were created in general, would serve as a basis for mobilization after 2001; many of the above stated names – except for al-Mu'ayyidi and Izzan – would constitute significant nodes in these networks. An illustrative example for the high prestige in which Badr al-Din was held among those young Zaydis is provided by Hamidi⁶⁷⁷ who cites a *zamil* poem, which was recited in his honor during a summer camp in 2004 (i.e. after the height of the BY and already during the period of conflict escalation):

Welcome to the full moon (*badr*) whose light has risen and dispelled the darkness of the impostors. They have narrated too many fake religious statements most of which were created by Juha⁶⁷⁸. And they ascribe those statements to the holy prophet and blaspheme his progeny. Oh deceived one, take off your nightclothes and wake up, the forenoon sun has already risen. And you, history, shout loudly, the millstone spun around you. And the Zaydi school restored its grandeur.

While both al-Haqq and the BY should be viewed as institutions under the framework of Zaydi revivalism, the party and the youth movement differed profoundly in their constitution (formal, legal, national, political vs. informal, voluntary, regional, social), target groups (older elites vs. young generation), aims (political representation vs. sociocultural revivalism and identity affirmation), and emphasis on religious components (weak vs. strong). The overall goals were shared, as becomes clear in Yahya al-Houthi's statement on the rationale for the initiation of the BY:

Our main reason for action is to fight Wahhabism. There has been a cultural and intellectual war between Zaydism and Wahhabism since the revolution in the 1960s. The Yemeni government is looking for financial help from Saudi Arabia and so in exchange it has favoured the spread of Wahhabism.⁶⁷⁹

The reasons he gave fit well for the establishment of al-Haqq (see above). In a similar vein to the party before, the Saleh regime in considered it useful, for some time, to support the BY in

⁶⁷⁵ Further personal overlapping between al-Haqq and BY concerned among others Ahmad al-Shami, Salah Falita, and Muhammad Izzan. Vom Bruck, "Regimes", 202; Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 99; ICG, "Defusing", 8, n. 46.

⁶⁷⁶ Hamidi, "Inscriptions", 167.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., 171.

⁶⁷⁸ Pseudohistorical character and most prominent protagonist of Islamic jocular prose narratives. Ulrich Malzorph, "Juha", in *Medieval Islamic Civilization. An Encyclopedia, Vol. 1: A–K*, ed. Joseph W. Meri (New York: Routledge, 2006), 426.

⁶⁷⁹ Cited in: ICG, "Defusing", 9. For additional statements by Yahya on the solely cultural role of the BY see: Pottek, "Anfang", 100f.

an attempt to counterbalance Salafi/Wahhabi powers.⁶⁸⁰ Apart from the fact that it nurtured a movement it would have to struggle with later on, another effect resulting from this playing off of Salafi against Zaydi groups was a strengthening of latent tensions in the region and an additional loss of credibility, which its (Zaydi) critics could exploit.⁶⁸¹

The overwhelming success of the BY ebbed after 1997. In 1999, Hussein left to Sudan to pursue further Qur'anic studies; he returned in 2001. Around that time, a split occurred among the leadership of the BY: One group followed Muhammad Izzan while another sided with Hussein al-Houthi in what appears to have been a dispute on the prospective direction of the movement. Discussions on the extent to which activism should remain religious or in how far it should engage politically had been generally common among revivalists.⁶⁸² While it cannot be established precisely what led to the division, according to Izzan it was due to a departure of Hussein towards a more radical "traditional" direction whereas he and those following him sought to continue with their "moderate academic" pathway.⁶⁸³ Izzan would later on become coopted by the regime⁶⁸⁴ and actively voice sharp criticism about the 'Houthi movement'.

The BY can be said to have formed at the right time and under the right sociopolitical circumstances: With a pool of (mostly literate!) youths eagerly trying to (re)establish a collective identity, an older generation of eminent scholars engaged in teaching, technologies at their hands that made a dissemination of ideas easier (like cassettes), and enough political freedom to pursue their initiatives, they managed to overcome the obstacles prior generations had faced in the 1970s and early 1980s. In addition, the regional trend of Islamic revival and Salafi/Wahhabi encroachment provided models as well as enough pressure, respectively, for action.⁶⁸⁵ How the way they would lead from their cultural revivalist activities to the 'Houthis'' armed struggle and in how far there were overlaps or ruptures in the composition of the former and the latter movement will be treated in 7.1. In a nutshell, a speaker for the Houthi movement in 2013 summarized the development as follows:

The precursor to the Huthi movement, the Believing Youth, was originally focused on correct religious practice. Hussein (...) shifted the focus to politics. Hussein argued that Zaydism is a revolutionary ideology that advocates removing an unjust ruler. For him, the main challenge in the Muslim world was not religious differences among Muslims but

⁶⁸⁰ Hamidi, "Inscriptions", 167, n. 8. Next to sources confirming these claims of GoY support, the ICG also cite an interview with Yahya al-Houthi in which he denies any such support. When considering various evidence, however, it seems appropriate to dismiss his denial. Cf. ICG, "Defusing", 6, n. 30.

⁶⁸¹ Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 101.

⁶⁸² Vom Bruck, "Regimes", 206ff.

⁶⁸³ Lux, *Last Imam*, 377.

⁶⁸⁴ After Izzan's return from a trip to Iran and Lebanon in 2004 (before armed conflict commenced), he was imprisoned for nine months. Thereafter, he received a government position as the head of Saada radio station in 2007. Ibid.; Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 108; Hamidi, "Inscriptions", 181.

⁶⁸⁵ For an evaluation along similar lines: Ibid., 100f.

rather submission to foreign powers, especially the U.S. It was under Hussein that the movement began to use the slogan, ‘God is great! Death to America! Death to Israel! Curse upon the Jews! Victory to Islam!’ Some of the original founders of the Believing Youth disagreed with Hussein’s political focus.⁶⁸⁶

Note that the BY was a “precursor” to the Houthis, not the same group.

5.1.4. A Chronology of Escalation

The following conflict description focuses on the events and developments relevant to the Houthis-regime conflict.⁶⁸⁷ It provides the essential information about the respective conflict item, the parties involved, and the violence involved; therein it neglects small skirmishes for the sake of focus, given that skirmishes are very frequent in the local context.

The chronology is divided into ten phases extending from the late 1970s until March 2015. The first and second phase provide brief summaries of the above sections, followed by the third or interim phase; the fourth to seventh phase are those of crucial relevance for the escalation from non-violent to violent conflict with the regime and will thus be depicted in detail to enable analysis; phases eight to ten, then, provide an overview on the events since the ‘Sa’ada wars’, adding certain features to it, and shedding some different light on several aspects. This is significant insofar as some of the sources in regard to frame resonance stem from later periods and need contextualization for an adequate source critique; besides, a number of framing patterns still persist, highlighting their centrality to the movement over time.

(1) Zaydi Revivalist Phase I: Late 1970s – 1990

Characterized by slowly growing interest in reviving their creed by young generation of Zaydis and by the re-initiation of religious teaching by some prominent older scholars. These efforts in effect led to an initial establishment of small study groups but without a permanent institutionalization. Tensions existed in regard to the increasing presence and expansion of Salafi/Wahhabi mosques and scientific institutes. Badr al-Din al-Houthi spoke out and published against defaming and ‘*takfirī*’ *fatawa* issued by prominent Saudi clerics against Zaydism. There is no manifest conflict with the regime.

⁶⁸⁶ Interview by ICG with Ali al-Bukhaiti, member of the Huthi delegation at the National Dialogue Conference in 2013/14, conducted in October 2013, cited in: ICG, “The Huthis: From Saada to Sanaa”, *Middle East Report* 154 (June 2014): 1. The retrospect perspective certainly raises the issue of idealization or later construction; nevertheless, it illustrates the official ‘story of political awakening’ from the perspective of the movement.

⁶⁸⁷ It does not, however, include other conflicts and developments related to the South or else.

(2) *Zaydi Revivalist Phase II: 1990 – 1997*

This phase was marked first by the attempt to achieve more representation and inclusion of Zaydi interests on a political level through the Hizb al-Haqq; Badr al-Din and Hussein al-Houthi were among the protagonists here. The party split due to internal disagreements over the compromise of traditional Zaydi contents of faith in return for political inclusion/cooptation; after the 1997 parliamentary elections it lost its relevance.

In parallel, the younger generation around Muhammad Izzan and Muhammad al-Houthi establishes scientific schools. Beyond an intensification of Zaydi religious education, they institutionalize the ‘Believing Youth’ with a more recreational and cultural focus, thereby strengthening the positive identification with a Zaydi collective. The group comes to shape a number of subsequent cohorts of Zaydi youth, creating durable social networks, which would remain active and serve as a mobilizational base even after the demise of the original BY.

As a result of increased activities of both Salafi/Wahhabi and Zaydi religious activists, the early 1990s saw open conflict around their respective centers. Salafi firebrands like Muqbil al-Wadi’i (see chapter on Islamists) called for the destruction of Zaydi shrines, instigating violent responses from Zaydi activists. Additionally, the reinstatement in 1990⁶⁸⁸ of the prominent Zaydi celebration of ‘Eid al-Ghadīr’ – the commemoration of the Prophet’s appointment of Ali as his successor – witnessed attacks by adversaries.⁶⁸⁹ Salmoni et al. hold that this period in general saw more outbreaks of violence in the North,⁶⁹⁰ which they partly attribute to the economic pressures unleashed by the return of great numbers of migrant workers from the KSA. Furthermore, such fighting over resources might have coincided with or triggered skirmishes between *qabila*, creating multi-layered tensions with incidental outbreaks of fighting. Sources sympathetic to the Houthis also claim repeated incidents of intimidation and aggression during the 1993 electoral campaign as well as attacks on summer camps in 1995 and 1998. By the middle of the decade, the heightened level of violence had normalized again.

Saleh periodically provided limited financial support and occasional backing to both al-Haqq and the BY, based on his rationale of playing out potentially strong oppositional forces (increasingly potent Islah or Salafi/Wahhabi respectively versus Zaydi political and religious/cultural organizations) against each other. For Zaydi activism, this ‘support’ was

⁶⁸⁸ The highly meaningful holiday had been prohibited between 1963 and 1989 and would again be prohibited from 2004 until 2008. Even in the very first years of its reinstatement, large crowds participated. Other Zaydi rituals were revived as well. See vom Bruck, “Being”, 186ff.

⁶⁸⁹ For the description of escalations on this occasion in 1991 and 1992 in the Razih mountains see: Weir, “Clash”.

⁶⁹⁰ Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 108.

insignificant. Overall, Saleh exacerbates his authoritarian rule, increasingly so in the second half of the decade. There is still no manifest conflict between Zaydi activists and the regime.

(3) Interim: 1997 – 2001

The period around the turn of the millennium saw a lot less activism. However, the situation in the northern governorates could not have been called stable; rather, it was still facing manifold challenges and home to competing interest groups that lay dormant.⁶⁹¹ Two prominent figures from earlier years, Badr al-Din al-Houthi and Hussein, were absent for certain periods; the former spent a number of years in the KSA, Jordan, and Iran until 1999, the latter then left for study in Sudan from where he returned only in late 2000. He re-initiated educational activities and furthermore engaged in collecting funds for public services and welfare, again increasing his social prestige. The ‘Treaty of Jeddah’, signed in June 2000, strengthened KSA border enforcement and triggered a small uprising; beyond its ending, resentment in the region remained high. In 2001, Muqbil al-Wadi’i’s death led to a split of his movement, thus temporarily weakening it.⁶⁹² There are no manifest conflicts.

(4) Houthi-Regime Conflict Phase I: September 2001 – June 2004

September 11, 2001 and the subsequent heralding of the US-led ‘global war on terrorism’ (WoT) also acted as a game changer in Yemen. Seriously concerned about being added to the ‘states supporting terrorism’, Saleh quickly affirmed Yemen’s allegiance to the US and declared combat against potential terrorists and terrorist havens. At a meeting with central political actors only a few days after 9/11, he urged them “to maintain a low profile with respect to American policy in the region”.⁶⁹³ All except Hussein al-Houthi agreed. The consequence of Saleh’s decision was political, financial, and for material support, as well as facilitating the opening of a military training center in November 2001. The following year then saw the first US military operation on Yemeni soil in the WoT. The Yemeni President saw himself strengthened.

Hussein al-Houthi, on the other hand, was offended by the regime’s perceived submission to the US and commenced to openly and offensively speak out against his government’s stance. Between late 2001 and late 2003, he intensified his regular preaching and lecturing activities. Beyond the immediate audience present during the events (Friday sermons and

⁶⁹¹ Cf. Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 179f.

⁶⁹² Wedeen contends that this weakening of the Salafi militants relieved the regime of the need to counter them by supporting or at least tolerating Zaydi activities, thus gaining room for maneuver against Zaydi opposition. *Ibid.*, 166.

⁶⁹³ Dorlian, “Sa’da War”, here: 193.

other occasions), his ‘lectures’ (*malazim*)⁶⁹⁴ were first recorded and distributed as cassette tapes and digital recordings – a widespread practice for many religious as well as poetic oral presentations in Yemen – and later on transcribed and distributed as printed texts.⁶⁹⁵ Thus, they reached, and continue to reach, a wide audience beyond those originally present. In these lectures, he states a serious threat towards Muslim and Arab societies, emanating from US and Israeli cultural and military aggression; along the same line, he denounces Arab and particularly Yemeni regime complicity with these foreign aggressors, hence accusing them of ruling without legitimacy. Moreover, this argumentation is interwoven with reprehension of Zaydi discrimination and repression. A detailed analysis of the *malazim* as the core of Houthi framing is the content of chapter 7.1.

Given his prominence and prestige among certain sections of the Zaydi population in Yemen’s north and the existing networks from the height of the BY era, he soon gathered followers in droves. In a January 2002 lecture,⁶⁹⁶ he coined the one slogan that would become the distinctive mark of the developing Houthi movement. He called on his followers to shout: ‘God is great! Death to America! Death to Israel! Curse upon the Jews! Victory to Islam!’ Soon this slogan was regularly shouted by adherents to the nascent ‘Houthi movement’ after Friday prayers as well as on other significant religious and cultural occasions.

The message initially simply connects to the predominant anti-US and (corresponding) anti-Israel discourse. Its particular significance, however, emanates from the specific context and mode in which it was employed, the way it connected to meaning-laden narratives, and the symbolic value it gained when the Saleh regime tried to suppress movement followers from chanting it. Political events and developments that fell within this period, and potentially fostered the success of the oppositional movement, were the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (both of which had triggered massive outrage among Muslims), Palestinian oppression in the West Bank and Gaza during the Second Intifada, and the publication of the massive human rights abuses by US soldiers in Abu Ghraib prison.⁶⁹⁷ They were fertile ground for anti-US sentiments.

In the meantime, the regime took notice of the movement and carried out some isolated repressive actions.⁶⁹⁸ However, it wasn’t until the American Ambassador Edmund Hull

⁶⁹⁴ The literal translation would be ‘lecture notes’ as noted by Lux (*Last Imam*, 377).

⁶⁹⁵ Quite a number of those printed texts are available online for download on servers like <http://www.4shared-china.com> (accessed January 9, 2015).

⁶⁹⁶ Hussein al-Houthi, *Al-Sarkhah fi Wajh al-Mustakbirin* [A Scream/Slogan in the Face of the Arrogants], Sa’dah, January 17, 2002.

⁶⁹⁷ Iris Glosemeyer, “Local Conflict, Global Spin. An Uprising in the Yemeni Highlands”, *Middle East Report* 232, no. 34 (Fall 2004).

⁶⁹⁸ Students who were chanting the slogan in public were arrested starting in 2002. Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 132.

complained to the government about the slogan being shouted in his presence at a mosque in Sa'ada city, ⁶⁹⁹ combined with a similar incident having occurred to Saleh himself, did attention to the matter increase. In January 2003 he was visiting a mosque in Sa'ada, a visit that was televised. When Saleh was about to give a brief speech, the slogan was emanated from a crowd of Houthi followers. He was outraged. ⁷⁰⁰ On the one hand, he seemed to have gotten the impression that the vociferous opposition began to be levelled against his person more directly, departing from his original interpretation of it being a peripheral concern. On the other hand, his position towards the US became more and more vulnerable as more incidents occurred – and they did in the following months. First, protests against the US invasion of Iraq in March were held outside the US embassy and were put down violently;⁷⁰¹ shortly thereafter, in early April, ten of the suspects arrested in relation to the 2000 USS Cole bombing escaped from a prison in Sanaa, equally leaving US officials disgruntled.⁷⁰² Saleh needed to act.

As a reaction to the events at the mosque, around 600 people were arrested. During the following months, small incidents transpired against state representatives, government installations, or of similar institutions and, as these incidents were allegedly tied to Houthi followers, were retributed with an iron hand, many times indiscriminately. Resentment among the predominantly Zaydi population grew. Hussein al-Houthi meanwhile continued his preaching/lecturing activities, which fell on fertile ground, among other facts because he was able to rhetorically connect his denouncing of discrimination of the northern (Zaydi) population by the regime and its complicity with US agendas to their immediate experiences. Notwithstanding the increasing repression, he further encouraged people to keep shouting the slogan, defending it as their constitutional right to voice their opinion and – in his lectures – as their religious duty to denounce an illegitimate leadership (see analysis below).

The number of his supporters grew. While the core still certainly consisted of former BY members, many other aggrieved joined in. Among them were youth, but, on the whole, they formed a cross-cut of northern society (in analogy to the different strata the BY had already reached). The names they gave themselves and that were given to them differ and it is de facto impossible to trace back when each was initially introduced. Self-ascriptions include for example: *'Al-Sha' b al-Shi'a r'* ('people of the slogan'), *'Ansar al-Haqq'* ('Supporters of the

⁶⁹⁹ Hamidi, "Inscriptions", 169. Hull was a very controversial and unpopular figure among many Yemenis, "whose influence allegedly far exceeded the powers of his office," as Glosemeyer ("Local Conflict") notes.

⁷⁰⁰ Dorlian, *Mouvance*, 134.

⁷⁰¹ CNN World, "Antiwar Demonstrations Turn Deadly", March 22, 2003, accessed March 24, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/03/21/sprj.iq.protests/index.html?iref=mpstoryview>.

⁷⁰² Lucas Winter, "Conflict in Yemen. Simple People, Complicated Circumstances", *Middle East Policy* 18 (1), 2011, 102–120, here: 107.

Truth') or '*Ansar Allah*' ('Supporters/Partisans of God'); ascriptions by others are e.g. '*Haraka al-Huthiyya*' ('Houthi movement'), '*Ansar al-Huthi*' ('Houthi Supporters') or '*Huthiyyun*' ('Houthis').⁷⁰³ In later years, their preference would be '*Ansar Allah*'.

The situation continued in this mode until early 2004. By then, shouting of the slogan was endemic in more than one northern governorate. The GoY allegedly even suspended 60 teachers for their participation in its spread.⁷⁰⁴ Hussein had been called upon a number of times to explain himself in front of officials and even Saleh, but had not appeared.⁷⁰⁵ The accusations against him held not only that he incited the offensive slogan shouting; furthermore, the regime held that he and his family were running private schools and prisons, naming their own mosque preachers, and collecting religious tax (*zakāh*) destined for the provincial government.⁷⁰⁶ Most probably they are accurate; what is interesting about the allegations, however, is less their exact content, but rather the fact *that they were* brought forward. In the peripheral northern areas of Yemen, it is common that *qabili sheikhs* and other local figures with high reputation 'substitute' the lacking government presence⁷⁰⁷ – to the great dislike of Sanaa, certainly, but there was for a long time little that could be done about it in view of the regime other than aim at cooptation and thus bind those individuals to its interests. That it now condemned the Houthis so vehemently for these practices indicates that Saleh considered himself in an optimum position to counter the 'recalcitrant elements' and at the same time reassert his claim to undisputed power in front of other potential contestants.⁷⁰⁸

(5) *Houthi-Regime Conflict Phase II: June 2004 – September 2004*

In June 2004 the situation escalated. On June 18, another 640 Houthis were arrested for shouting the slogan outside the Great Mosque in Sanaa. In addition, a warrant was issued for the arrest of Hussein. At that time, he was most probably in the Marran Mountains southwest of Sa'ada. When the governor of Sa'ada tried to visit the area on June 20, he found the roads blocked and himself denied entry. The *qabila* involved were reported to be Houthi followers. The same was said to be the case when government buildings in Sa'ada were occupied, police checkpoints in the Marran area were attacked, and strategic posts on mountain-tops were

⁷⁰³ Cf. Dorlian, *Mouvance*, 136. Throughout the dissertation, I refer to the group interchangeably with a variety of these terms; my preference for 'Houthis' or 'Houthi movement', respectively, does not implicate a positioning along the lines of external ascriptions, but it is rather on account of convenience.

⁷⁰⁴ Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 123.

⁷⁰⁵ He gave different excuses, some related to his personal security. Winter, "Conflict", 103.

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁷⁰⁷ Cf. Hamidi, "Inscriptions", n. 17; Ludmila du Bouchet, "The State, Political Islam and Violence: The Reconfiguration of Yemeni Politics since 9/11", in *The Enigma of Islamist Violence*, ed. Amélie Blom, Laetitia Bucaille, and Luis Martinez (London: Hurst, 2007), 137–191, here: 149.

⁷⁰⁸ Cf. Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 180.

taken by force. In how far these events were directly linked to the repression against the Houthis two days earlier or in how far they were related to independent tensions between locals and the regional government cannot be established with any certainty. The retribution by the government, however, was the deployment of several army units to fight the armed disturbants.⁷⁰⁹

Fighting in the area ensued the same day. Within six days, the death toll according to GoY speakers accounted to nine soldiers and allegedly 46 Houthi supporters, with dozens wounded on each side, plus an additional 50 arrests.⁷¹⁰

Parallel to that, mediation efforts were ongoing.⁷¹¹ The government had set up a mediation committee consisting among others of figures close to Hussein, such as his brother Yahya, Abdul Karim Jadhban, a co-founder of the BY, and Muhammad Mansour, member of al-Haqq.⁷¹² Members of this committee, though, claim that their prearranged meeting with Hussein on June 26 could not take place due to army intervention. When they were about to leave by helicopter, army forces started bombing Houthi positions, with the result that the mediation was cancelled. The committee members and others closely involved in repeated mediation attempts considered their disruption as caused by disagreements between the president and army commanders. While the above incident seems to back the assumption that the army intentionally sought to obstruct endeavors for mediation, the fact that numerous Zaydi intellectuals, journalists, and mediators were detained and faced unfair trials with long sentences on the opposite indicates insincere motives on the president's side as well.⁷¹³ The core argument is that the regime's position was not unified and that different interests came to interfere in the evolving process of manifest conflict action. Similar interferences and conflicts of interest of central parties and stakeholders will become visible during other phases as well. I will strive to integrate them into explanations as conclusively as possible, however, in some cases they can only merely be speculated for lack of further evidence.

The government spread numerous accusations against the Houthis, whom it refers to as "outlaws", extremists", and "trouble-makers". Allegedly, Hussein had declared himself the "Amir al-Mu'mineen" ("Leader of the Believers") and summoned an oath of allegiance; he had adopted his own flag, stockpiled "huge quantities of arms, ammunition, and anti-

⁷⁰⁹ Glosemeyer, "Local Conflict"; Dumm, "Understanding", 27f.

⁷¹⁰ Hammoud Mounasser, "Mediators Try to Persuade Yemeni Dissident Scholar to Surrender", *AFP*, June 27, 2004, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://www.arabnews.com/node/251643>.

⁷¹¹ Since the beginning of that year (at the latest) there is mention of local mediation efforts as well, in line with traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. ICG, "Defusing", 19.

⁷¹² *Ibid.*

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*, 20f.

personnel mines”, and mobilized the Jewish community of Yemen⁷¹⁴ to support him – among others by sabotaging water projects, hence depriving civilians and the army of necessary water supplies.⁷¹⁵ Especially the last point was very far-fetched and illustrates how far the GoY was prepared to go in order to delegitimize Hussein: In the face of massive anti-Jewish sentiment among the population they hoped to discredit him by connecting him to Jewish sabotage and alleged collaboration. However, its ephemerality as well as comments by journalists and analysts on the ground indicate that it did not attain the expected response among the target group.⁷¹⁶

Hussein on the other hand made an opposite move: He wrote a letter to Saleh (published in translation in the Yemen Times on June 28) in which he appeals to him in a very polite and peace-seeking mode:

To His Excellency, President of the Republic, Brother Ali Abdullah Saleh (...) I have met with [the mediation committee] and we talked about many issues, including your displeasure with me. This has astonished me since I am certain that I have done nothing that would have led to such a feeling. I do not work against you, I appreciate you and what you do tremendously, but what I do is my solemn national duty against the enemy of Islam and the community [*ummah*] ... America and Israel. I am by your side, so do not listen to hypocrites and provocateurs, and trust that I am more sincere and honest to you than they are. When we meet, if God is willing, I will talk to you about matters that are of great concern to you all. The brothers will explain to you about the details of my meeting with them.⁷¹⁷

This at a first glance surprising statement of loyalty needs to be interpreted in the context of mediation, which was officially still ongoing. He personally seeks to establish a contact with the other conflict party and assures his openness to settle the situation. It is thus not as unusual and contradictory as it appears at first, considering the prior onset of fighting. Disregardingly, he does not fail to assert his stance: That “hypocrites and provocateurs” are actively working to disunite them and equally repeats his main claim of defending the nation (i.e. political category) against the external enemies the US and Israel. Overall, he seeks to externalize the conflict from the two of them personally to other forces while emphasizing a threat to the religious community (on the comprehensive level of the Muslim *ummah*, not the Zaydis). The letter therefore mirrors his lectures, albeit in a very reduced form and without the blaming of rulers as illegitimate (see the detailed analysis of the lectures below).

⁷¹⁴ After large emigration to Israel in the 1950s, around 1,000 members of the Jewish community, that had for centuries existed in the country, remained in (the north of) Yemen.

⁷¹⁵ Mounasser, “Mediators”.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid.

⁷¹⁷ Cited in: Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 155.

Saleh did not halt fighting. In fact, by the continuation of military aggression he broke *qabili* law, committing an outright offence against traditions. That could and would be held against him from the perspective of the local *qabila*, whose honor was equally at stake as their territorial sovereignty was undermined.⁷¹⁸ Moreover, the president would repeatedly act in this mode, which indicated a permanent defiance of the existent rules of regime-periphery interaction. Externally, he declared the extended military campaign part of the WoT, which according to Yemeni media reports earned him praise by George W. Bush.⁷¹⁹

Hussein was killed on September 10, 2004. In July, the GoY had offered a bounty of 10 million Yemeni riyal (equal to US\$ 55,000) on him;⁷²⁰ however, after more than two months of intense fighting with casualties reaching at least 480⁷²¹, a huge army deployment of 3,000 men⁷²² tracked him and his family down in ‘Jurf Salman’, a cave in the Marran Mountains where he was hiding. While accounts of the events differ depending on the source,⁷²³ three aspects are confirmed: The cave was set on fire. Hussein was shot at close range. His family, too, came to death in this place. Today ‘Jurf Salman’ serves as a modest mausoleum of Hussein’s ‘martyrdom’.⁷²⁴

After Hussein’s death, the government published pictures of his corpse being dragged through the streets in state-affiliated newspapers; it furthermore hung posters with this graphic depiction all over Sa’ada in order to demonstrate its alleged defeat of the movement and to symbolically tear down any claim to *sādah* superiority by tearing down a potential claimant to imamate succession.⁷²⁵ His body was refused to be handed to his family but brought to Sana’a. In addition to these symbolic actions, followers reported a ‘campaign of harassment’ against them in the wake of the killing, which retrospectively marked the end of the first round of fighting or the ‘First Sa’ada War’.

⁷¹⁸ Glosemeyer (“Local Conflict”) notes that despite of this, up to that point local *qabila* supported the government troops. It can be speculated, however, that this breaking of the tradition showed long-term effects.

⁷¹⁹ *Al-Shura*, June 30, 2004, cited in: Hamidi, “Inscriptions”, 170.

⁷²⁰ Boucek, “War in Saada”, 50.

⁷²¹ Here and for the other rounds I will cite casualty numbers as provided by Salmoni et al., *Regime*. They are very conservative estimates and relate only to *immediate* casualties. Other sources state up to 1,000 casualties for this early period.

⁷²² *Ibid.*, n. 32.

⁷²³ In regard to intense fighting generally, GoY sources hold that they had attempted to prevent military escalation in all possible modes and only reacted when Hussein had refused to surrender, while the Houthis claim that the regime from the beginning aimed at eliminating Hussein and his followers and therefore acted aggressively and with the intention to kill. Cf. Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 132.

⁷²⁴ *BBC World News*, Documentary “The Rise of the Huthis”, screened March 15, 2015, accessed March 24, 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/n3csxmk9>.

⁷²⁵ Hamidi, “Inscriptions”, 176. He underlines the point that “[t]he display of photographic images of the dead man would have been regarded as both sacrilegious and a social insult in the eyes of his relatives and disciples.”

(6) Houthi-Regime Conflict Phase III: September 2004 – March 2005

Although major fighting ceased, skirmishes never completely stopped. After the death of his son, Badr al-Din al-Houthi took over the leadership of the movement, together with Abdullah al-Razzami, who had become a leading pillar of the group.

At the invitation of Saleh, Badr al-Din went to Sana'a in early 2005 in order to enter into talks about the release of prisoners and for conflict settlement. When by mid-March Saleh had not yet received him, he left the capital, not without voicing his indignation in an incendiary interview with Al-Wasat newspaper. In this interview he denounced Saleh's intentions and left his own and the one of the movement in the dark.

Since the first round of armed conflict commenced with the Houthis in a rather defensive position, it is only the initiation of the second round of war which forms the tipping point to a violent *strategy* of the Houthis. The shift, initiated by Badr al-Din, occurred in response to his ostentatious breaching of core cultural rules – a massive insult against the respected scholar. In his eyes, Saleh was now illegitimate; how he was blamed, in which regard the framing shifted, and how the situation escalated will be elucidated in detail in 7.1.

(7) Houthi-Regime Conflict Phase 4: March 2005 – February 2010⁷²⁶

The following description of the five subsequent rounds of armed conflict/war merely highlights the respective central characteristics or new developments of each phase. Note that all interim phases saw isolated incidents as well as casualties.

03/2005–04/2005: Second Sa'ada War (casualties: 500)

Fighting commences soon after Badr al-Din's return to the North, this time initiated by the Houthis. The army concentrates on those areas in which it suspected the Houthi leadership. After (falsely) declaring the death of Abdullah al-Razzami, the GoY unilaterally declares the end of hostilities in mid-April.

– Interim 2 –

In May, Saleh pardons Badr al-Din, who in turn rejects the pardon. Clashes occur with followers of prominent *qabili*. In September Saleh announces amnesty for Houthi prisoners and supporters. Houthis target officials.

⁷²⁶ Based on: Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 134ff. See also for a more detailed description.

12/2005–02/2006: Third Sa'ada War (casualties: 270+)

Abdul Malik al-Houthi takes over the leadership from the third war onwards. The group is in conflict with the governor of Sa'ada and assassinates government officials. Fighting dies down when a new governor is appointed in February.

– *Interim 3* –

The conflict sees an increasing overlapping with *qabili* issues and conflict lines.

02/2007–01/2008: Fourth Sa'ada War (casualties: 3,035)

When the deadline for Houthi disarmament expires, fighting recommences. More and more *qabila* militias get involved, many of which are siding with the GoY. Destruction reaches a new height, which seriously affects local sentiments towards the regime in a negative way. A government-imposed media blackout severely limits the coverage of the war. The internet comes to play an increasing role in the communication of both the Houthis and the GoY. As the result of months of Qatari mediation, the ‘Doha Agreement’⁷²⁷ signed in February 1, 2008 ends this round of conflict.⁷²⁸

– *Interim 4* –

Qabili affiliations begin to shift away from the government, partly as a result of elaborate Houthi interventions. They capitalize on long-standing *qabili* feuds to strategically gain mounting support among moieties.⁷²⁹

05/2008–07/2008: Fifth Sa'ada War (casualties: 200+)

A new war ensues after a bomb explosion in front of a prominent mosque in Sa'ada city. *Qabili* fighters are strongly involved from now on. The GoY unilaterally declares the end of hostilities.

– *Interim 5* –

Mutual accusations of undermining peace efforts shaped the first half of 2009; in March, Saleh unilaterally announced the official breakdown of the Doha Agreement. Interactions became more offensive, with the GoY sentencing seven Houthi followers to death. When nine

⁷²⁷ Salmoni et al., *Regime*, Appendix F, 315f.

⁷²⁸ For a critical evaluation see: ICG, “Defusing”, 21f.

⁷²⁹ For an excellent, detailed presentation of these processes see: Marieke Brandt, “Sufyan’s ‘Hybrid’ War: Tribal Politics during the Huthi Conflict”, *Journal of Arabian Studies: Arabia, the Gulf, and the Red Sea* 3, no. 1 (2013): 120–138. She furthermore elucidates the geographical relevance of the region in the wars.

Europeans were taken hostage, three of which were soon found dead, both parties blamed the other. The Houthis even held large rallies in which they refute any responsibility.

08/2009–02/2010: Sixth Sa'ada War (casualties: unknown)

In August 2009, Yemen's High Security Council announced "Operation Scorched Earth" with the aim to finally defeat the Houthis.⁷³⁰ In November, the KSA entered the war after the Houthis had allegedly transgressed the border. Air bombardments caused severe destruction to Sa'ada city and other settlements. The group on the other hand claimed that it had warned the KSA to allow GoY troops to enter its territory and attack the Houthis from the North; they say they reacted solely to this situation. On ideational grounds, Saudi participation provided further support to the claim of a 'Wahhabi attack against Zaydism'. The Houthis specifically videotaped their seizure of Saudi equipment and prisoners to demonstrate their capacity to counter KSA forces. In January 2010, Abdel Malik once more signaled his openness to negotiations. When the conditions had been met, a ceasefire agreement was signed on February 11, 2010. Neither side could claim victory.

The six rounds of war caused between 20,000 and 30,000 casualties.⁷³¹ Around 300,000 people were displaced in the North and more than 3,000 detained.⁷³² Severe damage to infrastructure and livelihoods in the already poor areas impeded the prospects for a quick recovery.

(8) Post-Conflict Mobilization Phase: 2010 – 2012

Even after the end of the wars, the Houthis dominated the governorates of Sa'ada, Hajjah, and parts of al-Jawf and Amran, i.e. government control remained low. During the spring 2011 anti-regime protests, Ansar Allah – as the group propagated its address – early on joined the protesters. They erected tents on 'Change Square' in front of the University of Sana'a and were the main protest camp remained for months to come.⁷³³ With this presence, they aimed

⁷³⁰ Allegedly both sides were joined by additional fighters: The regime by Islamists, the Houthis by "a lot of people from different regions of Yemen and not just from Saada (...) supporters from several provinces (...) not necessarily convinced of their ideas, but [in] rejection of the regime at that time". Nabila al-Zubayr, representative in the working group on Saada in the NDC, personal communication, April 2014.

⁷³¹ Barak Salmoni, "Yemen's Forever War: The Huthi Rebellion", *The Washington Institute, Policy Watch 1681*, July 20, 2010, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/yemens-forever-war-the-houthi-rebellion>.

⁷³² *IRIN News*, "How To: Source and Deliver the Right Food to 300,000 IDPs in Northern Yemen", July 29, 2010, accessed March 31, 2015, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/90007/how-to-source-and-deliver-the-right-food-to-300-000-idps-in-northern-yemen>.

⁷³³ Note that other, competing, groups and parties acted in a similar manner, e.g. Islah.

to position themselves among other anti-regime forces and boost their popularity in the capital. On March 18, 2011 a regime crackdown on protesters left 50 dead and more than 200 wounded; it became known as the ‘Day of Dignity Massacre’. This regime brutality led to the defection of former regime allies such as the al-Ahmars, Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, the Islamist al-Zindani, and others. Furthermore, the US distanced itself from its prior support of Saleh. Increasing anti-regime pressure and subsequent GCC mediation led to the signing of the so-called ‘GCC Agreement’ in November 2011 (the whole process is known as the ‘GCC Initiative’) and the stepdown of Saleh in February 2012. Former Vice President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi followed him in office and the transitional process, as laid out in the agreement, was initiated. It had specified the roadmap and mechanisms for the formation of a government of national unity, a committee on military affairs, the National Dialogue Conference, a constitution commission, the settlement of disputes, and early elections among others.⁷³⁴

Within this phase, the Houthis consolidated their presence in the capital. From September 2012 onwards – in the wake of Muslim anger over the controversial movie “Innocence of the Muslims” – their slogan was spread all over Sana’a: Followers sprayed it on houses, walls, and other public infrastructure, posters and banners appeared; hence, they symbolically laid claim to the city. Moreover, they initiated what they called the “Outcry Week”, in which they propagated intensive shouting of the slogan. Reactions differed, and some isolated incidents indicate that they also saw open opposition.⁷³⁵

(9) Phase of Political Participation: 2013 – 07/2014

During the National Dialogue Conference, which was held from March 18, 2013 to January 25, 2014, the ‘Sa’ada Issue’ was given a high priority. Ansar Allah was represented with 35 members out of a total of 565. As a result of the Sa’ada Working Group, the closing document decreed religious freedom in thought and practice, and prohibited any official or unofficial discrimination on these grounds. It also takes steps towards conflict resolution, among them the demand for a complete disarmament of non-state actors.⁷³⁶ While they took

⁷³⁴ *Agreement on the Implementation Mechanism for the Transition in Yemen Pursuant to the GCC Initiative, 21 November 2011*, accessed March 31, 2015, http://www.lcil.cam.ac.uk/sites/default/files/LCIL/documents/arabspring/yemen/Yemen_29_Agreement_Implementation_Mechanism.pdf. On this phase cf. also: ICG, “Yemen: Enduring Conflicts, Threatened Transition”, July 3, 2012.

⁷³⁵ *Yemen Times*, “Houthi Slogan Sweeps Sana’a”, September 20, 2012, accessed March 31, 2015, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1609/news/1412/Houthi-slogans-sweep-Sana%E2%80%99a.htm>.

⁷³⁶ “Outcomes of Yemen’s National Dialogue Conference: A Step toward Conflict Resolution and State Building?”, *Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies*, Doha, February 27, 2014, accessed March 31, 2015, <http://english.dohainstitute.org/release/c5b3a33b-644d-47f8-9e03-85fcb852c899>; ICG, “The Huthis: From Saada to Sanaa”, *Middle East Report* 154, June 10, 2014, 2.

part in the NDC, the group at the same time rejected the immunity that was granted to Saleh as well as the interim government of national unity or ‘consensus government’. As an ICG report asserts, “[t]heir continued opposition to the consensus government resonates with large parts of the population frustrated by the slow pace of change, entrenched corruption and the lack of security.”⁷³⁷ The assassination of two of their representatives⁷³⁸ during the conference period (the second of which was murdered on January 21, 2014, shortly before the end of the NDC) led to their withdrawal on one of the last days.

In parallel to the NDC, the Houthis’⁷³⁹ tensions with Salafis in the North rose. Around the originally set end of the NDC in mid-September 2013, violence broke out. It heightened in October, when fighting commenced around the prominent Salafi Dar al-Ḥadīth Institute in Dammaj. The Houthis accused the Salafis of recruiting foreign fighters in preparation for a war against them/the Zaydis, whereas Salafis denounced unprovoked and unjustified attacks by the Houthis against their students.⁷⁴⁰ The battle intensified to a peak in January 2014. Overall, the Houthis emerged victorious, and the period throughout spring 2014 again saw measures of conflict resolution. It is worth noting that the Houthis and their *qabili* allies defeated their adversaries, which consisted of an alliance of Salafis as well as others loyal to the al-Ahmar family, Islah, and Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar.⁷⁴¹ This was very significant for the signal it sent: Until then, the latter were considered the most powerful and influential actors (apart from Saleh). The Houthis had thus demonstrated substantial strength within the political vacuum that was still left to be filled after Saleh’s deposition.

(10) Phase of Military Expansion and Coup: 08/2014 – 03/2015

When in July 2014 the government decided to significantly cut fuel subsidies in an attempt to tackle its financial misery, the group was able to capitalize on the resulting public anger. It organized large protests against the measure, thus mobilizing crowds in their favor. Camps were erected in and around Sana’a in August and thousands of supporters streamed into the city from other regions.⁷⁴² Throughout fall, they exerted increasing pressure onto the

⁷³⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁷³⁸ The first victim was Abdul Karim Jadhban in November 2013.

⁷³⁹ At this point I specifically distinguish between the political wing under the self-attributed name of ‘Ansar Allah’ and the militant wing under the term of the ‘Houthis’.

⁷⁴⁰ ICG, “Huthis”, 3. Another aspect which added momentum to the conflict was the fact that Islah “had gained a large number of portfolios and governships, especially in the northern region.” Gabriele vom Bruck, “The Houthi Advance on Yemen’s Capital”, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October 23, 2014.

⁷⁴¹ ICG, “Huthis”, 3.

⁷⁴² Peter Salisbury, “What Do the Protesting Houthis Really Want in Yemen?”, *VICE News*, September 11, 2014, accessed September 15, 2014, http://www.news.vice.com/article/what-do-the-houthis-really-want-in-yemen?utm_source=vicenewstwitter.

government. Besides the reimplementation of fuel subsidies, they demanded the identification of aberrations from the NDC agreement and the formation of a new government based on “a national partnership”.⁷⁴³ In September, the Houthis virtually seized the capital. The first places they looted were the al-Iman University, the houses of the al-Ahmar family and of Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, as well as a military complex under the latter’s command. On September 21, the so-called “Peace and National Partnership Agreement” was signed by Hadi, Ansar Allah, and other major political players. It stipulated an end of all violence, the formation of a new technocratic government, and economic and military reforms, all based on the prior NDC agreement. For a short period, the group enjoyed a positive reputation among the population, due to improvements in basic services like electricity and in security;⁷⁴⁴ moreover, the group had promised a crackdown on corruption, and its rigorous measures of control appeared effective, which in turn increased its credibility. Over time, however, repressive actions also triggered significant opposition and fear. The Houthis replaced many positions in media, certain government institutions, mosques and other religious institutions with their supporters; intimidation and attacks against opposition occurred as did reports of coercion⁷⁴⁵ to enforce compliance. At the same time, the Houthis themselves were faced with smaller attacks, killings, and bombings.⁷⁴⁶

In January 2015 tensions escalated once more when on the 17th the Houthis abducted Hadi’s chief of staff who had pushed forward with a draft constitution the Houthis rejected. Fighting between the army and the group ensued. Four days later, a settlement seemed close; on the 22nd, however, Hadi and his government resigned. It was the end of what had been perceived as a very slow coup. The Houthis were reluctant to take over ruling and rejected the resignation. After a few indeterminate weeks, Hadi escaped to Aden, withdrew his resignation, and positioned himself to fight. He called upon the international community, especially the GCC to support him in his struggle to restore his rule, and found support in the UN, which subsequently issued two resolutions.⁷⁴⁷ On March 26, the KSA, in alliance with nine other Arab states, commenced airstrikes against Houthi positions, among other locations in central Sana’a. As of April 1, the highly controversial intervention has caused numerous

⁷⁴³ Ibid.; vom Bruck, “Houthi Advance”.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁵ Houthi spokespersons admit their occurrence but emphasize that they were isolated cases and not sanctioned by the leadership. Salisbury, “Protesting Houthis”.

⁷⁴⁶ At least 47 people were killed and hundreds injured by a bombing at a demonstration on October 9, 2014 for which AQAP claims responsibility. Another suicide bombing on March 20, 2015 at the prominent Zaydi Badr Mosque in Sana’a left 137 dead and many more injured. The emerging Yemeni affiliate of the Islamic State (IS) lays claim to this incident.

⁷⁴⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 2201 and 2205. Further statements condemning violence followed.

civilian casualties and is being regarded as the straw that broke the camel's back, i.e. the ultimate push of the country into (civil) war.⁷⁴⁸

5.2. *The Peaceful Southern Movement*

The Yemeni 'nation frame' had failed sometime between 1990 and 1994. With the end of the war, the bitter defeat, and the subsequent period having been perceived by Northerners as a time of 'looting', Southerners reminisced about their independent state and over time formed more than one opposition group until finally, in 2006, the Peaceful Southern Movement emerged.

This section will – in analogy to the introduction of the Houthi case – present the history and background of the movement, as well as the chronology of protest over time.

5.2.1. *Southerners as Identity Group*

'Southern identity' is the product of British colonialism and shared experiences and memories of the PDRY.⁷⁴⁹ As has been noted, the British, through various means, aimed to construct 'South Arabia'. In fact, it was the British who originally named as one coherent territory. Notwithstanding, we could also observe how the strategic port city of Aden, where the colonial subjects lived, was a completely different life than that of the hinterlands, let alone the remote areas of Hadhramawt. Despite this ample variance, the colonial period has led to overarching collective memories⁷⁵⁰ not only of that period, but also about what it meant to be a citizen of South Arabia. Today, many remember with nostalgia a period attributed as liberal, progressive, offering upward mobility and prosperity, and – importantly – as cosmopolitan.⁷⁵¹ Aden port had been a hub of international trade routes and related infrastructural projects. Job opportunities attracted workers from a wide variety of nations and backgrounds, who, during the prosperous years, were well integrated into society. Even those who had not been part of it, living far away, adopted these collective memories to a certain degree,⁷⁵² and they are recalled today as a contrast to the negatively perceived presence –

⁷⁴⁸ This appraisal must be seen in connection with the events all over Yemen. See: ICG, "Yemen At War", *Middle East Briefing* 45, March 27, 2015.

⁷⁴⁹ Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, 203.

⁷⁵⁰ For his seminal conceptualization of collective memories see: Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). [First published as: Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950.)]

⁷⁵¹ Davis, "Collective Memory".

⁷⁵² Based on my interviews and correspondence with Southerners from Hadhramawt, Shabwa, Abyan, Dhaleh, and Yafa'e.

disregarding or at least downplaying the fact that the anti-colonial movement of the 1960s had voiced similar discontents as such put forth by activists nowadays. Memorabilia of the colonial period, among them photographs of Aden and other places, postal stamps, banknotes etc. are valued and shared again in hardcopy⁷⁵³ but equally on social media platforms.⁷⁵⁴ The physical appearance of places, saliently featuring a colonial style associated with prosperity, order, and structure, is very much appreciated therein; it is a style contraposed with the decaying port, buildings, and infrastructure today, the then-and-now sometimes put in direct comparison. For sure, many of these memories are highly romanticized and overemphasize dichotomies with the present, but nevertheless they are part of the shared identity attributes.⁷⁵⁵

The PDRY era is remembered with less nostalgia but contributed notable components to the feeling of a shared national identity. Pride in their own independent state, mixed with the memories of the struggle and the common (economic) sacrifices of the first decade of state building are collectively remembered, as are the living conditions (see 4.4.) – from varying perspectives, as Brehony poses:

To those south Yemenis who remember the PDRY before 1986, these can seem like halcyon days compared with their current lives.⁷⁵⁶ Others remember the more brutal state of the 1970s and the fighting and instability of the 1980s.⁷⁵⁷

Be it positive or negative memories, they form the basis for a shared identity. And even many of those who hold the latter still participate in the othering or exoticizing of Northerners as ‘tribal’ and ‘backwards’, i.e. share the generalized we-they divide between the two former states as a cultural/identity-based we-they divide. Thereby they, too, affirm their belonging to ‘the South’.

Symbols of the national identity are national achievements such as the successful airline Al-Yemda, the educational level, the status of women, the reverence for Aden as a cosmopolitan city (despite the massive decline of Aden port) and others (elaborated on in 7.2.).

⁷⁵³ Observed by Davis, “Collective Memory”, 30. According to him, shops sell them, and old photographs are even carried around by many. He interprets this as an indicator of how constitutive they are for Southern identity.

⁷⁵⁴ There are e.g. facebook groups where even former British colonial officers and Southerners exchange their memories of colonial Aden. See exemplarily: <https://www.facebook.com/Www.AdenHistoryinphotos?fref=ts> (accessed May 30, 2015).

⁷⁵⁵ Cf. Dahlgren, *Contesting Realities*, 268f.

⁷⁵⁶ This perception is frequently mirrored in my interviews with Hiraki activists/Southerners. While most admit the problematic aspects of political infighting, they tend to downplay it in favor of glorified depictions of everyday life.

⁷⁵⁷ Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, 204.

Regional identity affiliations have their place, too. Aden, the ever-resistant regions of Dhaleh/Lahj/Radfan/Yafa'e (see 4.1.1.), and Hadhramawt are the most distinctive 'subunits' of the South, which cultivate their own respective regional identities.⁷⁵⁸ Adenis have repeatedly made efforts to declare a special status for their city; there has even been an initiative by one of the early Hirak members. These attempts have met little resonance among the population, though, and died away. The large eastern territory of Hadhramawt, with its long history of emigration and, based thereon, commercial ties to the Gulf countries, India, and Southeast Asia, is probably the most distinct unit, and has similarly voiced a desire for independence more than once. Until now, however, there has been little effort to realize such a step. Notwithstanding, there is an awareness in Sana'a and Aden of the need to approach potential secessionist endeavors of the economically strong region, either by cooptation or dialogue.

How their 'Southern' or 'South Arabian' identity is invoked by Southerners is reflected in numerous statements, interviews, and depictions/recordings of events and situations and will be extensively elucidated in the framing analysis. Before that, the following sections trace the steps towards a conscious dissociation from a unified Yemeni state and finally opposition.

5.2.2. *Post-Unification Discontent*

Yemen's unification was badly managed, with bureaucratic gridlock, economic crisis, rising social tensions, and increasing incidents of political violence mainly against members of the ruling southern Socialist Party.⁷⁵⁹

Stephen Day's assessment of the unification process is, at the bottom-line, shared by many observers and analysts.⁷⁶⁰ The whole proceeding had been much hastier than anticipated and desired by many Southern leaders, and it had taken another form – immediate merger – than had been repeatedly discussed in the preceding decades, which tended towards federation with subsequent referendum and unification in steps.⁷⁶¹ Despite the initial euphoria on side of the population, specifically Southerners, and the opening of democratic and civil society areas of participation, relations on the political level went sour within the first year. The fundamental problem was that both sides had fundamentally different agendas, held wrong expectations,

⁷⁵⁸ Among other cultural activities and social identification, *qāt* chews, for instance, are organized in groups based on regional affiliation, also in diaspora communities as the one in the UK where I conducted interviews and group discussions (the latter at exactly such *qāt* chews). Since these gatherings form optimal conditions for political discussions, the organization along regionalist lines might equally lead to intensified discussions about regional political topics and interests.

⁷⁵⁹ Day, "Updating", 421.

⁷⁶⁰ See Carapico, *Civil Society*, 172; Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, 183–198; Beuming, "Merger", 47ff.

⁷⁶¹ Cf. ICG, "Breaking Point", 3.

and miscalculated: Both Saleh and the old YSP leadership at that point in time suffered from political and financial weaknesses they hoped to overcome through merging. However, while Saleh regarded unification as a means to stabilize and expand his regime through the pretense of democratic steps, the YSP leaders saw it as a step to regain their legitimacy (having suffered immensely through the continuous infighting) and to imprint their ideas of ‘law and order’ on the Northern system, which they perceived as *‘fawdah’*, ‘chaos’.⁷⁶² To their detriment, the YSP overestimated its power to influence, lest restructure, the Northern political regime, while at the same time underestimating Saleh’s will to power, his power position, and his skills of managing the complex patrimonial regime in the North.⁷⁶³

Two interrelated aspects formed the core of the practical obstacles responsible for hindering a more equal, and hence potentially more successful, unification: power sharing and the integration of sectors and institutions.

Initially, before the parliamentary elections in 1993, the two sides had agreed on a 50/50 power sharing between the GPC and the YSP in spite of the 80/20 relation (N-S) in population. The most powerful body, the presidential council with its five members, however, was still aligned in favor of Saleh. Although the cabinet was balanced, its procedures were partly obscure due to a lack of decision in favor of best practices, not to mention a rigorous implementation. An integration of the military and security forces did not transcend a mutual stationing of troops on the territory of the formerly other state; the command remained in the hands of each partner. In the civil service, more officials took over positions in the South than vice versa.⁷⁶⁴ A sector that was centralized was finance: All revenues flowed to Sana’a and the GPC held the Ministry of Finance. This was a factor that significantly strengthened Saleh’s power position (he could easily allocate funds for his patronage system) and additionally, as Day points out, insulted Southern pride in its autonomy and self-rule.⁷⁶⁵

While the above aspects by 1991 had resulted in disillusionment among Southern politicians, the massive economic downfall that hit the ROY would be the force to successfully disenchant the population. It spawned from the combined effects of remittance drops after the Gulf War, returning migrants, meagre oil revenues (which were often pocketed by Northern businessmen), lacking donor support after the end of the Cold War, suspended subsidies, spreading corruption, and a drought in 1990/91.⁷⁶⁶ In the South specifically, land

⁷⁶² Beuming, “Merger”, 54.

⁷⁶³ Brehony (a longtime diplomat in the PDRY) uses much harsher expressions to describe this fact. He speaks of the “strength, cunning and ruthlessness of Ali Abdullah Salih”. Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, 198.

⁷⁶⁴ Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, 187.

⁷⁶⁵ Day, *Regionalism and Rebellion*, 112.

⁷⁶⁶ Carapico, *Civil Society*, 171f.

disputes made things worse. The reversal of the nationalization of the 1960s led to an intricate situation in which multiple parties frequently made claims; tensions, costly disputes, and political exploitation were but few of the consequences.⁷⁶⁷ Unemployment and inflation reached heights and from 1991 onwards, people – middle-class, as Carapico stresses – took to the streets. In December the following year, after the Yemeni currency had collapsed, accumulated frustrations even caused riots which left 60 dead and hundreds injured.⁷⁶⁸

Insult and threats entered the political stage in late 1991 when Southern discontent became visible. Within two years, between 100 and 150 (numbers differ depending on the source) members of the YSP or related southern political cadre fell victim to assassinations. Suspicions were quickly voiced against Northern tribal soldiers, i.e. implicitly against Saleh and his followers. Though not fully proven, most evidence hints at the role of hundreds of Afghan Arab *mujāhidīn*, who, after their return, had been absorbed into the Yemeni Islamist scene (close to Islah, Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar and others). Having fought against ‘Soviet socialist unbelievers’ they saw their fight against ‘Southern socialist unbelievers’ as a continuation of their mission, so the assumption made in the literature. In this situation, many Southern politicians and officials returned to the South out of fear for their safety. Ali Salim al-Beidh did so as well, however, he returned to the capital.

The parliamentary elections in April 1993 were the last blow to the misconceptions the YSP had held. While they had hoped to expand their share or at least hold the 50/50 division under more advantageous conditions, and then be able to play a strengthened role in the government, election results cemented their role as an underdog. Of the 301 seats in parliament, the GPC won a total of 122 seats (41%), in comparison to a mere 56 seats (19%) won by the YSP. The great winner of the elections was the Islah Party with 63 seats (21%) – more than the YSP. What had happened in the highly competitive, winner-take-all elections, was that the North had voted overall for Northern candidates, the South for Southern candidates. What is less discernible from the sole numbers is that the GPC had won only slight majorities, while the YSP had sweeping victories in the South, i.e. the socialist party had much more backing in the population than its Northern competitor. Islah garnered majorities mainly in the western midlands, which neither the rather weak performance of the GPC was able to gain, nor the YSP managed to convince for its program. The religious party thus became a new strong player – and allied with the GPC, consolidating its dominating position to the great disadvantage of the YSP. A central question remained unsolved over

⁷⁶⁷ Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, 186.

⁷⁶⁸ Carapico, *Civil Society*, 172; see also: Day, *Regionalism and Rebellion*, 111.

time and led to escalating tensions between the two opponents is the distribution of seats in the presidential council: While the GPC insisted on a 3-1-1 apportionment with itself in the leading position, the YSP equally insisted on a 2-2-1 distribution, with Islah in the minor position. A stalemate ensued.⁷⁶⁹ In this situation, al-Beidh furthermore aggravated the tensions when he returned to Aden and issued an 18-point list of his demands.⁷⁷⁰ Negotiations took place but were shattered after an attack on al-Beidh's relatives led to his refusal to take his oath of office.⁷⁷¹

Attempts to solve the dispute and save unity were made on a number of levels,⁷⁷² the most prominent of these was an independent committee of mediators that worked out a 'Document of Pledge and Accord'. It contained a comprehensive reform plan with the guiding aims of an improved merger and administrative and financial decentralization. Under pressure, Saleh and al-Beidh finally signed the agreement on February 20, 1994 in Amman in the presence of King Hussein, who hosted the signing ceremony. Tellingly, the same day skirmishes escalated between Northern and Southern army brigades on Southern territory and tensions continued to heighten. Southerner politician were by then accused of being secessionists by high Northern officials, including Saleh and Abdullah al-Ahmar.⁷⁷³ This can be interpreted as the crossing of an ideational threshold with little room to step back. And so it was. Despite numerous mediation attempts from various sides, including international actors,⁷⁷⁴ none succeeded. On April 27, 1994, Saleh finally de facto declared the state of war.⁷⁷⁵

It was a brief war. The Northern army, in cooperation with Ali Nasser Muhamed's followers, and Islamist Afghan Arab fighters within a short period got the upper hand. They seized Shabwa and Abyan, while the Southern troops stationed in the North had been neutralized immediately.⁷⁷⁶ On May 21 Ali Salim al-Beidh proclaimed the creation of the Democratic Republic of Yemen (DRY) in the former South, with the capital Aden. It was not meant to be an act of secession, but rather the "nucleus for a unified Yemen" on the basis of

⁷⁶⁹ For the whole paragraph: Day, *Regionalism and Rebellion*, 117–128; see also: Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, 190ff.; Beuming, "Merger", 51 (she uses a seat distribution that deviates by one seat).

⁷⁷⁰ Before he went to Aden he had paid a visit to Washington and met with Al Gore. For its lack of coordination and announcement with the GPC, the Northern party suspected that al-Beidh was trying to rally US-support for what they suspected to be "conspirational maneuvering". Michael C. Hudson, "Bipolarity, Rational Calculation and War in Yemen", in: *The Yemeni War of 1994. Causes and Consequences*, ed. Jamal S. al-Suwaidi (Abu Dhabi: Saqi Books, 1995), 19–32, here: 27. See *ibid.* 27ff. for more on the Northern perspective during the transitional phase.

⁷⁷¹ Carapico, "From Ballot Box to Battlefield. The War of the Two 'Alis'", *Middle East Report* 190 (Sep/Oct 1994), accessed April 28, 2014, <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer190/ballot-box-battlefield/>.

⁷⁷² Worth noting is that civil society played a large role in these. *Ibid.*

⁷⁷³ Day, "Updating", 421.

⁷⁷⁴ Carapico, "Ballot Box".

⁷⁷⁵ For details on the many initiatives and actors involved see: Carapico, *Civil Society*, 173–186.

⁷⁷⁶ ICG, "Breaking Point?", 4.

the Document of Pledge and Accord.⁷⁷⁷ After the fall of Mukalla and Aden, however, the South was defeated, and the war officially ended on July 7, 1994.

The death toll of these two months of fighting ranged between 5,000-10,000⁷⁷⁸ and the physical damage to Aden alone was estimated to reach US\$200 million.⁷⁷⁹ Much worse than this immediate material damage, however, were the *mediate* material and the *immaterial* damages caused by the war. After their victory, Aden was looted by the Northern forces, notably tribal and Islamist groups, for ten days.⁷⁸⁰ Carapico provides a vivid description of what would become a central part of Adeni collective memory later recalled by activists:

Water stations outside the city were deliberately disabled by close-range gunfire. Establishments from the infamous Sira Beer factory [the only one in the country] to the nationalized colonial-legacy domestic trading corporation were torched. Files from the former PDRY ministries of planning, housing, and justice, the YSP, and dozens of other agencies were deliberately destroyed. Employment rolls were shredded. Foreign consulates, UN and Red Cross facilities, oil company offices, hotels, museums, prisons, factories, port warehouses, NGO offices, and selected private homes were looted extensively and then occupied by the Northern army and its allies, including the faction of the YSP ousted in 1986.⁷⁸¹

When the smoke of war had settled, private and commercial property was (re)privatized in obscure procedures in which Northern army officers and Northern businessmen profited of highly deflated prices. In the overdue merging of the armies, the regime in Sana'a took its chance to disarm extensive parts of the former Southern army: tens of thousands of Southern military were forced into 'early retirement' (sometimes only shortly after graduation). Army, police, and security in the South was to large parts taken over by Northern forces, which not only gave Southerners the impression of being occupied, but which also caused repeated incidents of mistreatment and rape of women, disrespectfully alleged of 'loose morals' for not veiling as their Northern counterparts.⁷⁸² The role of women who in the (urban) PDRY not only had much wider freedoms, but had had positions in academia, as journalists, pilots, and judges, was severely and painfully cut; In line with Northern gender roles, which are strongly influenced by tribal and – increasingly – Islamist norms, they were ousted from their

⁷⁷⁷ Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, 196.

⁷⁷⁸ Both sides exaggerated numbers: Saleh lowered them, Southern sources held much higher ones. The stated 5,000–10,000, though dissatisfying for its lack of inaccuracy, appear most likely. For a smaller range of 5,000–7,000 see: Hudson, "Bipolarity", 21; a higher range is presented by AFP: "Saleh downplays Yemeni war death toll", *AFP*, July 12, 1994.

⁷⁷⁹ UN estimate. ICG, "Breaking Point", 4.

⁷⁸⁰ Especially the Islamists raged against what they considered "symbols of secularism and idolatry", which besides alcohol included e.g. the tombs of saints etc. Beuming, "Merger", 66.

⁷⁸¹ Carapico, *Civil Society*, 188. Ali Nasser Mohamed and his followers, whose forces had supported the north, were subsequently rewarded with high government positions (e.g. ministries) until Saleh managed to replace his former ally in the early 2000s. Cf. Beuming, "Merger", 59–101.

⁷⁸² *Ibid.*, 61–63. She furthermore highlights the considerable and lasting power of the military (p.64). The tight grip they had on the South was only loosened after the 2011 Arab Spring protests.

positions, pressured to veil, and their movements became more limited.⁷⁸³ The 1990 constitution underwent comprehensive alteration in favor of centralization and a strengthening of the position of the president; a highly contested amendment concerned the change of the shari'a from "the main source of law" to "the source of law" – clearly a concession to Saleh's Islamist supporters. The freedoms that had briefly existed between 1990 and 1994 were limited again. On the political level, Saleh successfully found ways to dominate the cabinet and parliament ever further without excluding Southern representatives; he employed his old strategy of cooptation and allotted offices to candidates who posed little danger and/or were given little power. He furthermore connected with Southern sheikhs, whose positions were bolstered again,⁷⁸⁴ and aimed to integrate them, too, into his patronage apparatus. His GPC yielded a landslide victory in the 1997 elections, which the YSP boycotted, and in the early 2000s expanded the term of parliament from four to six years and the term of presidency from five to seven.

When in the late 1990s the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank formulated decentralization and other structural adjustments – among them the elimination of massive overemployment in the state sector – as clear conditions for its assistance, the regime grudgingly implemented the long-planned decentralization (which had been a demand of Southern representatives since 1990), however, shaped it in a way that de facto allocated only very little power to the local and regional level. The second condition resulted in a very painful cut of civil service employment in the South: Where Saleh had already 'cleared' the civil service of 'secessionists', i.e. those who wanted to remain members of the YSP after 1994, now immensely large numbers of civil service employees lost their jobs, with little perspectives for alternative employment. While Beuming makes the crucial point of showing that the South was not excluded from development and investment, as framed by the Southern opposition, but received rather more than its 'fair share' in relation to its population,⁷⁸⁵ she also underscores how this did not account for job distribution.⁷⁸⁶ Numerous Northerners had taken over administrative positions in the South, supported by the regime, which sought control over Southern matters. Besides, many institutions had been relocated to the capital Sana'a, decreasing Aden and the South per se of government jobs. The same accounted for industrial and third sector employment, which both offered significantly lower employment.

⁷⁸³ For an insightful presentation of the change in gender roles and family law mainly in Aden see the ethnographic work of Susanne Dahlgren: Dahlgren, *Contesting Realities*.H

⁷⁸⁴ There had been a comprehensive detribalization project in the socialist South; however, as Beuming claims, from the early 1980s onwards they had regained large parts of their social prestige at least, thus exerting indirect influence. See Beuming, "Merger", 94ff.

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 85ff.

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 89ff.

Adding to that, Southerners *were* discriminated in public job allocation. Unemployment was felt even more intensely in comparison to the former socialist state who had supposedly created employment for all (realities, of course, differed). Another deterioration, which very much affected Southerners, concerned the health and educational services where the PDRY had ranked much better than the YAR. These two domains, in addition to a system of free public services, could no longer be supported by the government. Hence, the related infrastructure declined drastically.

Lastly, 16 of the leaders of 1994, who had sought exile, were convicted in absentia; five of them, among them al-Beidh, received the death penalty. For all others an amnesty was declared soon after the end of fighting.⁷⁸⁷

The early 2000s failed to bring significant positive change, rather the contrary.

Some aspects of the above situation are similar to the situation of many formerly socialist countries that go through a transitional period. Southerners were used to expecting a wide range of services from the state they were not receiving from the newly created entity. The economic crises of the 1990s and 2000s then did their rest. This is the core of the dominant Northern narrative, that is, holding that the problem is economic, that Southerners are merely suffering the same conditions as in the North, and that a more prosperous economy and development will solve the problem. While parts of this argument are certainly accurate, the Southern narrative equally has its justification and reasons for when it describes the perception of Southerners as marginalized, discriminated, and under ‘occupation’.⁷⁸⁸ Their self-conception and pride had a prominent part therein. The latter perspective will be discussed in detail in the analysis of Southern frames; the former should not be completely forgotten.

5.2.3. Southern Opposition

Opposition against the perceived occupation set in immediately after the war and continued almost unintermittently in form of various groups and organizations. Leadership, goals, and strategies varied as well; what they had in common was that none gained momentum before the Hirak entered upon the stage. The following section briefly introduces the precursor organizations in order to sketch the development of opposition over time, note changes in strategies, failures, and – for subsequent elaborations – introduce prior engagements of later

⁷⁸⁷ For the overall section on the post-war consequences see: Beuming, “Merger”, 59–101.

⁷⁸⁸ ICG, “Breaking Point”, 5f.

Hirak leaders, if applicable. Their legacy, not only during the PDRY and post-unification period between 1990 and 1994 but also in organizations during the following decade, contribute to how they are perceived by the population, i.e. the credibility attributed to them.

Section 5.2.5. reconstructs the founding phase of the Hirak and presents its early development until the accession of former leaders in spring 2009. It is what I consider as the first two of eight phases within the existence of the movement (until March 2015). I therein give extensive room to the account of a prominent Hirak member who describes the early events from his point of view, a narration which throws an interesting light on a number of aspects, among them, for instance, is the importance of networks, of historical continuities, and of contingent events. They are taken up in detail following the narration and are integrated into first analytical steps. Two consecutive subsections then introduce in detail the widespread ‘leadership’ of the Hirak – which, as I will argue, poses a major obstacle to the success of the movement’s development – and its broad-based membership. The issue of movement structures will be tackled in relation to this.

At the end of this section, the basis for a critical analysis of the pathways and repertoires of factions and actors in subsequent sections will have been laid.

5.2.4. Early Opposition Movements⁷⁸⁹

The first opposition movement was founded only a few months after the end of the war, in October 1994: The ‘National Front for Southern Opposition’ or ‘MOWJ’ (alternatively spelled ‘MOJ’).⁷⁹⁰ Its base was in abroad, in London, and it was mainly financed by the KSA, where exiled former leaders had been rallying for support, at the forefront Abdulrahman al-Jifri. Other names related to MOWJ were Ali Salim al-Beidh, Haydar al-Attas, Salem Saleh, and Abdullah al-Asnaj. The stated goal of the movement was to reestablish the Southern state as it had existed before 1990 by peaceful means. It did not last long, hardly more than a year or two at a maximum. The supportive base inside the country was weak and after the KSA suspended funding, it could not continue its operations.⁷⁹¹ As a Hirak member explains:

⁷⁸⁹ For a rough orientation cf. “Introduction to the Southern Movement and its Development Stages”, April 16, 2014, accessed April 16, 2014, <http://www.adenlivetv.tv/articles-13278.html>.

⁷⁹⁰ Cf. Hamdani, “Threatened Unity”.

⁷⁹¹ This information has been cross-checked in interviews with Hirak activists in the UK (April 27–28, 2013), Germany (March 10, 2014), and the Netherlands (March 11, 2014).

It was too early. (...) The Southern population haven't (sic!) become convinced then that the only way was separation. There was still the feeling that there may be a way around it, may be a way of putting things right under the unity state.⁷⁹²

1997 then saw the emergence of HATAM, the 'Ḥarakat Taqrīr al-Maṣīr' or 'Self-Determination Movement'. It was a secretive movement based in the mountains of Dhaleh and probably consisted mainly of former military personnel who had been forcefully retired. Their allegiance was reported to be with al-Beidh.⁷⁹³ The group carried out a number of attacks and called for armed resistance, however, like MOWJ, they were never able to mobilize a more extensive range of followers and died down after few years. Again, in retrospective they were evaluated as having failed to match their potential audience:

(...) it was too militant, and I don't think Southerners were ready for another way or for another bloodshed of their life (sic!). Again, the time wasn't right, the people weren't ready for such a radical move and, again it died away really. But they played a part in raising awareness and getting people to think as Southerners and kept the issue alive if you like, and that's the big role I think they played.⁷⁹⁴

Some voices speak of remains of HATAM which are supposedly still active in Dhaleh and northern Lahj or that they today have become part of the militant HIRAK factions there.⁷⁹⁵ This information cannot reliably be confirmed, however, the area does harbor armed groups.

From within the YSP stemmed the attempt to mend the relationship between North and South.⁷⁹⁶ For this purpose, Hassan Ba'oum and others in 1998 founded the so-called 'Movement of Reforming the Course of Unity'.⁷⁹⁷ It was unsuccessful and even more short-lived than the other groups.

At around the same time, individuals and some Southern media (e.g. Al-Ayyam newspaper) started to take up the 'Southern cause' again. The very first websites were set up and deliberate exchange and reporting began. A few people's committees were set up in mid-1999 along the same path. Overall, however, nothing really set off a sustainable movement.⁷⁹⁸

In 2004,⁷⁹⁹ the 'Southern Democratic Assembly', better known as 'TAJ', was launched. According to one of its leaders in the UK, they had first striven to found a party inside

⁷⁹² Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

⁷⁹³ Hamdani, "Threatened Unity".

⁷⁹⁴ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013. Similar statements by two other activists, UK, April 26+28, 2013.

⁷⁹⁵ Another name mentioned in relation to HATAM is Qassim Askar Jubran, a former ambassador, and important figure among the early organizers of the Southern Movement. He is considered to be close to al-Beidh.

⁷⁹⁶ Interview with HIRAK activist and former MP of the YSP living in the UK, April 28, 2013.

⁷⁹⁷ Hamdani, "Threatened Unity".

⁷⁹⁸ "Introduction to the Southern Movement and its Development Stages."

⁷⁹⁹ For completeness: In 2002, the so-called "Forum of the People of the Southern and Eastern Provinces" was initiated inside the country. Among its leaders was Faisal Bin Shamlan, who ran for president in 2006. Its goals of overcoming marginalization and restoring Southern rights remained unfulfilled. Hamdani, "Threatened

Yemen, then popular committees to deal with the very practical aspect of public service provision (water, electricity), which was insufficient. When they found themselves blocked by the government over and over again, they decided to engage from abroad.⁸⁰⁰ They established themselves in the UK where a large diaspora community of Yemenis existed, and approached the media to spread criticism of the situation in the South and make themselves heard. Their position was very critical of the treatment of the South by the North, they highlighted the alleged differences in identity that existed between ‘Yemenis’ and ‘Southern Arabians’, and they openly demanded secession. TAJ aimed to bring together an audience from as wide a spectrum as possible:

They called the staff a democratic assembly as an assembly to get as many people as possible from different political and professional backgrounds etc. to get together in order to raise the cause of South Yemen. (...) They had their members here [in the UK], and also in the US, Yemen, South Yemen, Saudi-Arabia (...)⁸⁰¹

The group approached various governments, international organizations, and the ‘international community’⁸⁰² as a whole with letters, petitions, and calls for support and intervention in Yemen: the British government,⁸⁰³ the G8 summit,⁸⁰⁴ the KSA,⁸⁰⁵ Kuwait,⁸⁰⁶ the Arab League⁸⁰⁷ and others. Demonstrations were held as were gatherings.

Notwithstanding some success in awareness rising abroad, a significant impact on the ground in the South failed to appear. Its headquarters in England was far from the South and its population, communication was thus necessarily limited as were resources, and after a while, leadership⁸⁰⁸ disputes fragmented the group.

After the establishment of the Hirak, TAJ continued its activities under the umbrella of the Peaceful Southern Movement.

Unity”. She furthermore claims the founding of TAJ the same year, however, according to its website, TAJ was only launched on the anniversary of the end of the war in 1994, i.e. on July 7, 2004. <http://www.tajaden.org/abouttaj.html> (accessed May 25, 2015).

⁸⁰⁰ Interview with TAJ leader in the UK, April 29, 2013.

⁸⁰¹ Interview with a Hirak activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

⁸⁰² See: www.soutalgnoub.com/data29.htm (accessed May 25, 2015).

⁸⁰³ See: www.soutalgnoub.com/data10.htm (accessed May 25, 2015).

⁸⁰⁴ See: www.soutalgnoub.com/data19.htm (accessed May 25, 2015).

⁸⁰⁵ See: www.soutalgnoub.com/data23.htm (accessed May 25, 2015).

⁸⁰⁶ See: www.soutalgnoub.com/data34.htm (accessed May 25, 2015).

⁸⁰⁷ See: www.soutalgnoub.com/data40.htm (accessed May 25, 2015).

⁸⁰⁸ Central leaders were: Ahmed Abdullah al-Hassani, Mohamed al-Obadi, Abdo Naqeeb, and Awad Karama Hamdani, “Threatened Unity”; interviews conducted with Hirak activists and TAJ members living in the UK, April 26–29, 2013.

5.2.5. *The Roots of al-Hirak*

In an interview, Ahmed Bin Fareed, a prominent activist and former communication director of al-Beidh, recounts the events around the founding of the Southern Peaceful Movement in early 2006.⁸⁰⁹

Around 2005/06 things went up and people began talking only about that [the situation in the South]. Then there was an incident in Radfan: There was a land issue. The farmer concerned went on his land because he expected soldiers. They came and killed his 17-year old son. Their names were known but nothing happened. The Charitable Association of Radfan in Mansoura [a district of Aden] discussed the event and someone wrote about it in Al-Ayyam newspaper. Nasser al-Nouba [a prominent retired military officer] called me and told me to come to the Association. The father of the killed had said: 'It is not my case. It is your case.' He meant to say that it is not a case of Radfan, but a case of the Southern people. These were the events on January 12, 2006.

On the next day, Friday January 13, 2006 [the anniversary of the 1986 Politburo massacre and subsequent civil war], people met at the Association for the initiation of the '*Tasāmuḥ wa Tasāluḥ*' ['Tolerance and Reconciliation'], the planned reconciliation between the two factions who had fought each other in 1986. When I arrived, the building was already crowded; shows went up from the 2nd to the 4th floor. There were many speeches, among them Nasser al-Nouba and the popular Ahmed Abdullah Al-Hasani (now in TAJ). People listened eagerly.

In reporting about what had happened, Al-Mustaḡala channel three or four times talked about 'occupation'. This was received as something astonishing!

The authorities then closed the Association. I started writing for Al-Ayyam; Hisham Basharaheel, the editor, received my pieces in the 'Opinion' section. However, the authorities also tried to buy Basharaheel's silence. They offered to pay him the same sum as he made from the whole newspaper in return for him not writing about the Hirak. He refused. You have to understand the importance of the newspaper for the movement: Al-Ayyam cost 20 riyal; in Radfan, however, it sometimes sold for 200 riyal!

Although the authorities continued to disturb the process of *tasāmuḥ wa tasāluḥ*, we continued over and again. We also started meeting with the aim to identify the lootings during the war in the house of Qassim Askar Jubran (member of HATAM). Among others Tamah, Saadi, Jubran participated. Our plan was to gather proof for everything that had happened. So Qassim Askar Jubran gathered the information. In regard to the solution we strove for, it was too hard to see at that time that it was separation. Nasser al-Nouba and Ali Mohamed al-Saadi were in favor of independence; the rest was for a federal solution between the North and the South. The conclusion was that the decision must be with the people.

The crucial thing now was to go to the street. The question was how. For us, the most important strategy was to *use* the Association of Retired Military for that purpose. They were 80.000 people, they were disciplined, and they knew each other. There was no opposition to that. In 2007, they started meetings outside of government buildings in Al-Mualla [Aden]. They asked for their rights; there were no political demands made. 50-70 people met about six to seven times for around 30 minutes each time. A Northern army officer passing by started laughing when he saw the group; when they entered the building to talk to the authorities, the officers just left. Since the government officials did not want to listen, as a consequence they needed to go to the EU in Khormaksar [other district of Aden] to voice their demands. They went twice, in uniform [the retired military].

⁸⁰⁹ Interview conducted by the author, Bonn (Germany), March 10, 2014. In as far as possible, I cross-checked the information provided with other reports for verification.

For July 7, 2007 [the anniversary of the end of the 1994 war and for Southerners the begin of the perceived ‘occupation’] we started to use the internet. We contacted TAJ [UK], the US, the KSA...everyone was very eager, and the phones did not stop ringing. We started to occupy the square [in Aden] at 4am. There were so many *civilians*, many from Radfan – we had expected only soldiers! The square was surrounded by the military each 10meters. I was stopped by a soldier. ‘Are you Bin Fareed?’, he asked me. ‘Yes.’ He looked at me. ‘I am from Abyan [the Bin Fareed family home]. You can go.’ Al-Nouba had been arrested before that but was released at 11am. He immediately went and gave a speech; however, he did not declare the aim to be independence. It would have been too early. The journalists started to call it ‘*Al-hirak al-ganoubi*’ and people started to gather.

On October 14, 2007 [the anniversary of the commencement of the independence struggle against the British] we planned an event in Radfan. I asked Ali Haitham ‘How many will come?’ He did not know. With some others I was on the way to Radfan on October 13th when we heard that 7 had been killed and 9 others injured. We were told to better return, but we decided to go on. There was a lot of blood. On the 14th then it was unbelievable: There were around 70.000 people! After that we felt for the first time that we were strong.

This extensive account not only traces the early steps towards the Southern Movement; in doing so, it furthermore discloses numerous important aspects that play significant roles in the trajectory of the movement and its analysis.

Bin Fareed speaks of how Southern discontent began to smolder more intensely starting around 2005/06 and from there on continues his narration to the founding of Hirak. Fact is that in 2005 there was a civil service reform in Yemen, in the course of which salaries were raised for active civil servants. Those retired were left out or had to pass through complicated procedures of being re-hired in order to then be re-retired again to be eligible. This raised the resentment of those forcibly retired even higher than before, which might contribute to the explanation of timing.⁸¹⁰ Furthermore, the strong support during the presidential elections for the Southern candidate Faisal Bin Shamlan was interpreted as a sign of encouragement that change was widely aspired and that its realization would generate communal backing.⁸¹¹

The incident of the shot boy is only one of the many incidents movement members tell about that period, however, it further fueled anger and had some impact on the importance of the meeting at the Radfan Association in particular, thus providing a starting point at that specific place and that specific timing. It moreover serves as an illustration of how individual grievances were discussed within a wider social range and how also those involved (here: the father) handed over their concerns to ‘society’. That they were land claims in this precise case is accidental, yet representative for one of the core grievances: loss of territory/land/their homeland.

⁸¹⁰ ICG, “Breaking Point”, 7, n. 38. It is unclear how many of those retired were able to go through the process of becoming eligible ex post as described. Probably very few; it appears to be more of a theoretically thinkable than a practice and practiced legal loophole.

⁸¹¹ Day, *Regionalism and Rebellion*, 228.

Radfan, an area in the north of the governorate of Lahj, until today is a critical area in the Southern struggle, together with the governorate of Dhaleh. Both mountainous regions have a historical legacy of being difficult to control and potential centers of upheaval. Located at the main route from the North to the South, however, and – at least Dhaleh⁸¹² – positioned in the border region highly staffed with military,⁸¹³ they pose a clear focal point. In the anti-colonial armed struggle against the British, this zone had already played a significant role.⁸¹⁴

By the mid-2000s, the weakness of Southern factionalization had become obvious, and – as we learn from the above account and various other sources – intensive efforts have been made to overcome the division lines between the two factions of the 1986 civil war: The so-called ‘Zumrah’ around former PDRY president Ali Nasser Mohamed and the opposing ‘Tughmah’, who had supported the group of the Politburo whom he had assassinated.⁸¹⁵ At the danger of a reductionist perspective one can say that the Zumrah originated/s in Abyan (Ali Nasser Mohamed’s home district) and Shabwa governorates, whereas the Tughmah were/are based in Dhaleh and Lahj. There are differing accounts on how much the respective belonging still has an impact today. The point I want to stress here, however, is the awareness that existed for this weakness and the active attempts to overcome it. In fact, the *tasāmuḥ wa tasāluḥ* of 2006⁸¹⁶ is considered a success by the Hirak. This notwithstanding, factionalization would become the number one challenge for the movement, as will be elaborated below.

Regime reaction to the forming opposition consisted of the closing-down their assembly place, disregard, attempts at cooptation and media blackout, interference, arrests⁸¹⁷, and lastly violent repression. To a certain extent, opposition was permitted by the regime; only from a certain degree onwards did stronger repression set in. Furthermore, it was not coherent and destructive to the degree that it would have crushed the emerging movement, but rather

⁸¹² The governorate of Dhaleh was newly created after unification. The northern part had formerly been part of the YAR, while the southern part had belonged to the PDRY.

⁸¹³ In part due to the high military presence (specifically the unfamous 33rd Armored Brigade and its commander), clashes erupted time in again in that area between adherents of the Hirak and the army. A height was the attack of a funeral tent in December 2013 which sparked ‘self-defensive’ violence by the local population.

⁸¹⁴ Cf. Dresch, *History*; Brehony, *Yemen Divided*.

⁸¹⁵ The later was the faction around his predecessor Abdul Fattah Ismail, who was killed during the events. After his defeat, Ali Nasser Muhamed and some tens of thousands of his supporters fled to the North and allied with Saleh. In 1994 he fought with the North.

⁸¹⁶ The initiative could not have appeared as suddenly as it does in Bin Fareed’s narrative. An article by the faction of Al-Beidh, which gives an own account of the steps towards the Southern Movement, mentions the foundation of a number of smaller “reconciliation and tolerance forums” for that purpose in the southern governorates since July 2004. This period of prepatation seems reasonable, especially when compared to later events and the periods of planning and preparation they needed. “Introduction to the Southern Movement and its Development Stages”.

⁸¹⁷ In summer 2007, for instance, al-Noubah and Ba’oum were detained. They were apparently perceived by the regime as powerful symbolic heads of the new movement and thus as a threat. Day, *Regionalism and Rebellion*, 229.

punctual and unable to inhibit its advance. Intermittent repression, also violent repression with numerous victims, would remain the pattern of state intervention over time, however, it would ultimately neither result in a defeat of the Hirak nor in triggering strategic counterviolence. It did time and again lead to isolated violent responses, but not in a policy change of the movement – the central puzzle and it shows as early as 2007.

What is revealing furthermore, are the small steps⁸¹⁸ in which the movement articulated its demands and pushed them further: As Bin Fareed describes the process, after a primary gathering to overcome longstanding frictions and for the sake of gathering people in the first place, the group-to-be-a-movement first sought to collect sound proof of their material grievances, i.e. the material loss encountered after the war. The documentation's purpose for those presented remains obscure to us, but we can suspect that it first served to clarify the situation for those involved, and then, much more importantly, provide quantified data to those at whom the protests were to be directed, i.e. the government, representatives of foreign states etc. Damage and loss developed a legal, enforceable dimension.

On the goal, though, the organizers of the protests could not agree: whether to seek independence or two-state federalism was an unresolved issue right from the beginning. In the account, Bin Fareed presents a very smooth, consensual agreement to leave it “up to the people”; which appears hardly credible considering the controversial character of this prognostic dimension within the movement at later stages, nor does it do justice to the weight and the range of the implication each pathway has. Overall, however, we can hold that there was no clearly developed goal at this point in time. Early protests accordingly remained within a limited, rights-based domain (i.e. the goal was restricted to compensation and equality within the unity state and a lot less rigorous than any of the two suggestions made above) and were directed to the government and then – possibly for reasons of spatial proximity of the representation – the European Union as an international body who might support them.

We also learn about the people involved and their way of connecting with each other. The first aspect is that those who got together had partly been involved in earlier or parallel oppositional endeavors or organizations, i.e. there were (and are) personnel overlaps and resulting networks which could be drawn on to mobilize early followers. Through various figures, the international TAJ network could be connected to, as well as the one of HATAM, and, most importantly, the huge bulk of retired officers, whose grievances were at the core of the developing movement. Besides, regional ties built reliable connections: the Radfan

⁸¹⁸ Mirrored also in the speeches as Bin Fareed describes them.

Charitable Association provided a gathering space, and with this, consequently, a certain core constituency. But regional solidarity potentially even transcends the sides people are on, as is shown by the incident of Bin Fareed being let pass by a soldier from his region. Additionally, international networks of the large Southern diaspora communities in the Gulf countries, Europe, the US etc. multiplied the communication effects, i.e. the numbers of people reached and the density of the network. All of these diverse and overlapping networks are a continuous characteristic of the Hirak and are employed in its mobilizational efforts and actions. It also contributes to the explanation of how the seemingly ‘spontaneous’ massive expansion occurred.

The role of Al-Ayyam newspaper, a traditional Southern news outlet with a high reputation for objective reporting (which in this was clearly perceived as pro-South), equally becomes evident. In addition to developments of the outlet having been reported upon by Bin Fareed and other relevant parties, the outlet’s impact is more so exemplified by regime’s attempts to silence its operations having acknowledged the outlet’s oppositional potential. At a later point, the newspaper (together with others) would be closed down by the government.

Furthermore noteworthy is the conscious usage of symbolic historical dates from the first day onwards. This practice ties the current contention closely with perceived historical precursors. Thereby it creates legitimacy and narrative fidelity, hence strengthening the movement in its claim of being the continuation of an identity group’s established struggle against hostile intruders (the British and Northerners) and internal threats (factionalization and the resulting conflicts). The latter also serves as a constant warning and impact on the movement’s strategic choices as I will show below. These notable anniversaries comprise of the following dates:

January 13	Politburo Massacre 1986
February 21	Day of Dignity 2013
April 27	Initiation of Civil War 1994
May 21	Call for Secession by Al-Beidh 1994
July 7	End of Civil War 1994 (Southern Defeat) ⁸¹⁹

⁸¹⁹ What the ROY celebrates as the day of national unity – and forces the South to celebrate – activists have renamed the “day of rage”. Dahlgren, “Snake with a Thousand Heads”.

October 14	Initiation of Anti-Colonial Struggle 1963
November 30	Independence Day South 1967

Table 5.2: Commemoration Days invoked by the Hirak

Lastly, the sense of agency and empowerment Bin Fareed expresses in his final words concerning the October 14 event hint at the emotions involved and at the notion of the ‘power of the many’, which in turn can attract others to join in.

Where Bin Fareed leaves us in the dark is at detailing the steps taken between early 2006 and fall 2007. Without a doubt, this period encompassed not only some fact gathering about the post-1994 looting, but rather also certain formation and mobilization activities on the side of the core organizers. And ‘organizers’ they were, not leaders; this point is vital to note. The early movement did not have figures that could account as strong leading personalities but was much more genuinely grassroots. Certainly, Nasser al-Nouba was a respected personality with social prestige as a merited army veteran, however, his person was not in the focus and his influence and stance were more symbolical than directing.

Despite a lack of concrete information, it can be assumed that 2006 served to consolidate, to a certain degree, the reconciliation process for bringing together potential opponents, and creating some consensus among them. ‘Injustice’, ‘occupation’, and ‘discrimination’ were the core frames summing up Southern grievances as perceived by the activists, which should be overcome, so their demands. State jobs and benefits, increased local autonomy, a stronger enforcement of law and order, land rights, and a just share in natural resource income were on the list, at this stage still within the framework of more equality for the South within the existing state.⁸²⁰ Over time, various social groups began to join, few at first, but slowly increasing numbers: civil servants, retired diplomats, academics, students, teachers, lawyers, (unemployed) youths from all regions.⁸²¹ March 2007 allegedly saw the founding of associations based on specific social groups, while in July the same year councils were formed which served the coordination of “political events”.⁸²² Hence, steps towards an

⁸²⁰ ICG, “Breaking Point”, 6.

⁸²¹ Ibid.

⁸²² “Introduction to the Southern Movement and its Development Stages”. In regards to the foundation of the associations I am in doubt if they had not existed before for the grievances of forced retirement etc. which were shared by the social groups had existed since 1994; a foundation of sectoral associations only in 2007 thus appears unlikely. It might be that either their numbers increased or their degree of formalization, or that certain social groups followed only then.

organizational formalization were taken; however, they were not directed towards one overarching social movement organization, but rather numerous small organizations of varying kinds: professional, regional, etc. This initial decentralization could be regarded as contributing to the root causes of the later challenging state of factionalization: Without one organization and one leader (or one distinct group of leaders), cohesion was more difficult to achieve; at the same time, the fact that already many organizations existed made it appear more self-evident to split in case of differing opinions or varying ascriptions of belonging/social identity. In other words, the threshold for doing so was low and many followed the existing examples, ultimately to the disadvantage of the movement as a whole, as we shall see.

Regime response during this early stage, beyond the mentioned repression and cooptation attempts, furthermore included some concessions, albeit limited, selective, and often misplaced, so that the overall impact was rather fueling than appeasing. Some retired officers, for instance, were taken back on the payroll for them to benefit from increases, however, they were few, these measures were late, and many individuals felt excluded. Even those who profited felt it was too little too late. An overall strategic effort on the side of the government with a dedicated, convincing plan and intention to realize genuine improvement and inclusion of the South was felt lacking. As with the above measures, this initiative likewise failed.⁸²³

The October 2007 Radfan event was the one that kicked off the movement. Participant numbers skyrocketed from a few hundred to thousands and from a strong retired military base to an overarching one.⁸²⁴ Smaller protests and demonstrations continued thereafter as did the slow process of movement development. The regime's interventions on the other hand continued to make the perceived situation worse. In March 2008 the government invited a couple of hundred Southern youth to an army recruiting event, implicitly signaling assistance in the search of employment opportunities. At this event, however, the Southern participants found themselves offended and insulted: They were labelled as lacking the "strength and loyalty necessary to serve in the Yemeni Armed Service".⁸²⁵ Many of the youth were from Dhaleh and Lahj, regions in which forced military retirement had already taken a high toll in

⁸²³ ICG, "Breaking Point", 7.

⁸²⁴ The families of those killed in Radfan demanded an investigation into the case to prove that it had been the military who killed their relatives. They did not succeed, but when the burial finally took place in December (it had been postponed for the bodies to serve as evidence), an estimated hundreds of thousands of people streamed to attend in solidarity. Al Jazeera broadcasted powerful images, giving proof of the strength of people's discontent and rage. Day, *Regionalism and Rebellion*, 231.

⁸²⁵ Stephen Day, "Updating Yemeni National Unity".

1994 and where related grievances were high. This further affront resulted in strong feelings of indignation and ensuing riots.⁸²⁶

In October 2008,⁸²⁷ a number of supposedly more encompassing social movement organizations were formed under the umbrella of the Hirak:⁸²⁸ the ‘Supreme National Council for the Liberation and Independence of the South and the Restoration of the State’, the ‘National Body for the Liberation of the South’, and the ‘National Body for Peaceful Struggle’; in May 2009 they were joined also by the ‘Southern Peaceful Struggle’ or ‘*Najāh*’. Soon thereafter, efforts for a stronger centralization and for the establishment of a central leadership (as spurred especially by some of those who saw themselves fit for it) resulted of the unification of the above groups to form the ‘Peaceful Revolution Leadership Council for the Liberation of the South’. It can be accounted to the supporters of Ali Salim al-Beidh and led by Hassan Ba’oum.

In January 2010 it was renamed again to the ‘Supreme Council for the Southern Peaceful Movement’ and remained one of the largest and most influential movement organizations within the Hirak.⁸²⁹

2009 was the year in which a number of former leaders (partly living in exile) jumped on the bandwagon of the Southern Movement. Until then, it had been rather acephalous and there are reasons to argue that those trying to install themselves at the head of the Hirak – while successful among certain parts – never *fully* succeeded in doing so but that horizontal, decentralized networks and ties remained pivotal. However, it is worth introducing a number

⁸²⁶ ICG, “Breaking Point”, 7, n. 41.

⁸²⁷ According to the YOHR, 623 protests had taken place between January and mid-November 2008 alone – a telling proof of widespread engagement. “Facts about the Peaceful Rallies” (in Arabic), YOHR, November 2008, cited in: “Facts about the Peaceful Rallies” (in Arabic), YOHR, November 2008, cited in: Day, *Regionalism and Rebellion*, 238.

⁸²⁸ There is a confusing number of ever splitting and fusing, sometimes also short-lived groups. Nicole Stracke and Saif Haidar e.g. identified seven main groups in their research, which provide a snapshot of early 2010. They list: ‘The Higher National Forum for the Independence of the South’ (leader: Nasser al-Noubah); ‘The Higher National Council for the Liberation of the South’ (leaders: Hassan Ba’oum/Mohamed Saleh Tammah); ‘Movement of the Southern Peaceful Struggle – Success’ (leaders: Salah al-Shanfara/Nasser al-Khubaji); ‘Union of the Southern Youth’ (leader: Fadi Ba’oum); ‘The National Forum for the Southern Peaceful Struggle’ (leader: Saleh Yahya Said); ‘Council for Leading the Peaceful Revolution’ (leader: Tariq al-Fadhli); and ‘Council of the Peaceful Movement to Liberate the South’ (umbrella). [Note: Some are mentioned in the running text above, however, translations vary.] Nicole Stracke/Mohammed Saif Haidar, “The Southern Movement in Yemen”, *Gulf Research Center/Sheba Center for Strategic Studies*, April 2010, 2f. In order to reduce unnecessary confusion which is sometimes aggravated in sources by mistranslation, I will not introduce all the separate organizations, but rather mention their names in the specific cases if relevant. Notable among the plentitude of similar names is the emphasis on ‘peaceful’.

⁸²⁹ In fact, it claimed to be “the legitimate representative of the Southern People”. “Introduction to the Southern Movement and its Development Stages”.

of the wide range of leading or presumably leading figures in order to understand the process of contestation within the movement and in regard to its external networks.

5.2.5.1. Leadership

Brigadier Nasser al-Noubah (b. ?) from Shabwa, one of those former military suffering from early retirement, was among the early organizers and initiators of the movement. The respect that was shown to him based on his military background, age, and his dedicated engagement for the developing movement: More than once he was arrested for his activism and detained over periods of time. Soon after the expansion of the Hiraq in fall 2007, however, Noubah's position became strained by evolving conflicts within the council of the Association of Retired Military and he was removed as their chairman. From then onwards, he slowly isolated himself and – though still respected and a symbolical figure – lost de facto influence.⁸³⁰ His stance was pro-independence and anti-NDC.⁸³¹

Equally among the highly prominent leaders from the very beginning was Hassan Ahmed Ba'oum (b. 1943) from Hadhramawt. Ba'oum, a leading YSP member associated with the 'Zumrah',⁸³² had before been active in the Movement of Reforming the Course of Unity in the late 1990s⁸³³. With the Hiraq he took a pro-independence position and became a symbol of continued peaceful resistance due to his frequent detentions; some even referred to him as 'the Yemeni Mandela'. His prominence inside the country brought him into an antagonist role towards Ali Salim al-Beidh,⁸³⁴ who for years became the most visible and prominent leader abroad. Allegiance to the one or the other created factions within the movement which resulted in internal conflict in fall 2013; throughout 2014, however, efforts to unite central figures outwardly proved successful and open conflict was subdued.

Where Ba'oum's leadership is based on being "on the ground" and "with the people", Ali Salim al-Beidh (b. 1939) gained his reputation from his status of having been president of the

⁸³⁰ Some interviewees regard his advanced age as one of the factors conducive to a slow withdrawal from intensive activism; Amnesty International, however, in 2007 set his age at merely "in his 50s". http://www.amnestyinternational.be/doc/IMG/article_PDF/article11505.pdf (accessed May 22, 2015).

⁸³¹ Information based on interviews with Hiraq activists living in the UK, April 2013, and verified with media reports from a variety of sources.

⁸³² Peter Salisbury, "Yemen's Southern Intifada", *Foreign Policy*, March 13, 2013, accessed May 22, 2015, <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/2013/03/13/yemens-southern-intifada/>.

⁸³³ Sama'a al-Hamdani, "Threatened Unity: Understanding the Southern Hiraq, Part 1", Table: Southern Hiraq 1994–2006, February 25, 2013, accessed May 22, 2015, <http://www.yemeniaty.com/threatened-unity-the-southern-hirak/>.

⁸³⁴ Ba'oum's sons Fadi and Fawaz are also very active in the Hiraq; Fadi e.g. is a leading figure in the youth movement. Conflicts between them and Ahmed Ba'muallim, for instance, led to further factionalization or – as in that specific case – for changes on allegiance (Ba'muallim, who was first aligned with Ba'oum, then joined al-Beidh). Based on interviews with Hiraq activists in UK, April 2013.

South. He is still frequently referred to as “President” and personally prefers this title to be used, he has, however, more than once emphasized that he was not aiming to regain his earlier status. Despite the fact that his role in the unification was a ‘black mark’ criticized by many, al-Beidh succeeded in convincing the majority of followers that he had intended well and the later abuse was the fault of the Northern regime. His picture is widely depicted during rallies and demonstrations, though it needs elucidation to what extent it has turned into a symbol for independence and thereby transcended factual support for his person. Al-Beidh’s visibility and his presence first in Germany and then in Lebanon (Beirut),⁸³⁵ which made him more easily accessible, have both guided international media attention towards him as a central representative and spokesperson for the movement, thus strengthening his influence and international standing. Much more significant for his position inside the Hirak and his mobilizational capacity, however, is the fact that he dominates the movement-affiliated TV channel ‘Aden Live TV’. As this satellite channel is received by almost every household in the South and – according to interviewees and other activists – frequently (albeit critically) watched by activists, the reach of his messages appears extensive. Although he overwhelmingly took a non-violent position, there is evidence that he was not coherent therein: Aden Live repeatedly broadcasted calls for armed struggle, some of which, however, were not one hundred per cent explicit; furthermore, al-Beidh has documented contacts to more militant factions in Dhaleh and Lahj/Radfan. He also has a history of pro-secessionist activism. Immediately after the lost 1994 war, he was a member of MOWJ and in 1997 allegedly led the pro-violence movement HATAM.⁸³⁶ I will argue that al-Beidh aimed to test the resonance of a call for armed struggle and when he found it lacking again resorted to his prior, non-violent stance.

Al-Beidh’s rivalry with Ba’oum has been highlighted above; besides, there was a genuine and hostile animosity between him and another exiled leader, who was to become popular among the Southern Movement: Mohamed Ali Ahmed (b. ca. 1941). Their conflict originated in the brief 1986 Southern civil war in which they were on opposing sides.⁸³⁷ Ali Ahmed returned from exile in London in 2012 and joined the controversial NDC as a representative for the Southern issue. His position is ostensibly more moderate than al-Beidh’s and open to a federalist solution. While his person is highly contentious (one interviewee referred to him as “murderer” of 1986, others as “very confrontational”), he is still able to gather followers

⁸³⁵ After 1994, we first spent many years in exile in Oman. In 2008, he left for Germany and after the 2011 uprising set himself up in the Lebanese capital.

⁸³⁶ Hamdani, “Threatened Unity”.

⁸³⁷ Both Ali Ahmed and Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi had been working under then-PDRY president Ali Nasser Mohamed.

around him and represents another influential personality. His advantage in comparison to al-Beidh is that he can be inside the country and thus much closer to the protesters and relevant networks; on the other hand, however, he is being described as a rather seclusive personality and certainly lacks the successful appearance of his adversary. Though without proof, the number of a rough 70% to 30% split between the two figures around 2012/2013 circulated among analysts,⁸³⁸ based on intimate albeit unsystematic knowledge of and contacts with the movement. Regional allegiance of activists in Ali Ahmed's home province of Abyan play one role in here (al-Beidh is from Hadhramawt). In any case, Ali Ahmed is another player to be accounted for in the framing arena of the Hirak. Concerning the question of the adoption of violence, he, on the one hand, claims non-violent protest to be the strategy of choice for the movement, however – in the words of the interviewing journalist – “did not forswear returning to violence to achieve his goals”: The conditions would tell if violence was necessary when non-violence fails.⁸³⁹

Haidar Abu Bakr al-Attas (b. 1939) had held ministerial positions in the PDRY from 1971–1986, been president from 1986–1990, and the first prime minister in the united Republic of Yemen between 1990 and 1994. Stemming from a prestigious *sayyid* family in Hadhramawt, he is repeatedly described as a technocrat with a good sense for politics.⁸⁴⁰ According to one interviewee, this holds equally true for his activism within the Hirak, where he could be highly valuable to the movement, however, he gambles away the trust people could have in him by negotiating and acting in secret, which discredits him.⁸⁴¹ After 1994, he has been a member of MOWJ together with al-Beidh, Abdullah al-Asnaj, and Abdulrahman al-Jifri, among others. The latter, a longtime member of the ‘Rābiṭat Abnā’ al-Yaman’ [‘League of the Sons of Yemen’] or simply ‘Rabata’ opposition party, has remained much more in the background, however, he has been named as a prospective future leader in the South by interviewees and other activists. In early November 2014 he returned to Aden in the context of the declared deadline to Northern engagement in the South⁸⁴² and was among the most prominent heads mediating between the various organizations under the umbrella of Hirak in the committees set up. He is regarded as a moderate.

⁸³⁸ Cf. Salisbury, “Yemen’s Southern Intifada”.

⁸³⁹ Farea al-Muslimi, “Returned South Yemen Leader: ‘Peaceful Struggle’ May Yet Win”, *Al-Monitor*, September 11, 2012, accessed May 23, 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/mohammed-ali-ahmed-former-south.html#>.

⁸⁴⁰ “Al-Attas, Haidar Abu Bakr”, in *Historical Dictionary of Yemen*, ed. Robert D. Burrowes (Lanham et al.: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 42; articulated as well in my interviews with Hirak activists in the UK, April 2013.

⁸⁴¹ Interview with Hirak activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

⁸⁴² He had returned to Yemen from his KSA exile on other occasions since 2006.

From the same age cohort as the above leaders, Ali Nasser Mohamed (b. 1939 in Abyan) served as president (or, more correctly: General Secretary of the YSP) of the South from 1980–1986 and then fled north. He is currently living in exile in Cairo. His influence today partly still feeds on his prestige as former head of state. In regard to the goals of the movement he advocates for a two-state federal solution with a subsequent referendum, as he and al-Attas suggested during the November 2011 Cairo Conference in which they strove to unite Southerners on that. In a June 2014 interview, he still articulated his strong belief in the power of conferences to overcome Southern friction, which he regards as their major weakness:

For decades, we have tried and are still trying to hold a unified southern conference that would produce a unified strategic vision and single reference that reflects the hopes and aspirations of the people in the south, out of our conviction that the strength of the southerners lies in their unity, and their weakness in their division and fragmentation.⁸⁴³

So far, despite some underlying dissonances, the dominant stance has been non-violent. There are, however, more militant voices as well. The most vocal, though certainly not most influential, was Tariq al-Fadhli (b. 1967), a sheikh from Abyan with a history of fighting as a *mujāhid* in Afghanistan. After his return to Yemen, he was coopted by Saleh to fight (with the other ‘Arab Afghan’ veteran *mujāhideen*) against the South in the 1994 war – an important role they took over with great enthusiasm and ‘resounding success’. When al-Fadhli grew frustrated with Saleh’s trade-off for his loyalty, which did not meet his expectations,⁸⁴⁴ he declared his joining of – and even leadership role in – the Southern Movement in 2009 and called for a violent pathway.⁸⁴⁵ Neither his person nor his call to arms met with approval and resonance within the movement; he was regarded with suspicion or outright despise for his perceived opportunist change of sides, his jihadist stance and connections, and his historical role in fighting the South. Some activists openly called him a “terrorist”⁸⁴⁶. Armed struggle as proposed solution did not resonate, either, as will be shown in more detail below. Overall, al-

⁸⁴³ Mustafa Amara, “Former South Yemen president Says Situation Worsening Every Day”, *Al-Monitor*, June 13, 2014, accessed May 23, 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2014/06/south-yemen-former-president-independence-calls-frustration.html#ixzz3azKl6SHs>.

⁸⁴⁴ Tariq al-Fadhli is a son of the last Sultan of al-Fadhli who has been exiled in 1967. He strove for a full return of his family’s former holding, which covered large parts of the governorate of Abyan. The dispossession by the socialist Southern regime and his related deep-seated enmity towards the Southern state significantly reduced his credibility when joining the Hirak.

⁸⁴⁵ Rafid Fadhil Ali, “The Jihadis and the Cause of South Yemen: A Profile of Tariq al-Fadhli”, *Terrorism Monitor* 7(35), November 19, 2009, accessed May 24, 2015, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35757&no_cache=1#.VWGg0UYxASQ](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35757&no_cache=1#.VWGg0UYxASQ).

⁸⁴⁶ Exemplarily, interview with Hirak activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

Fadhli could not take over the role he had striven for and after a while abandoned the HIRAK again.⁸⁴⁷

Of a stronger impact on the ground are less conspicuous figures. Taher Tamah and his cousin (retired) General Mohamed Saleh Tamah from the area of Yafa'e⁸⁴⁸ joined the HIRAK early on and have openly advocated armed struggle. Around 2010 they set up a small militia under the name of the 'Himyar Brigades'⁸⁴⁹; it never gained a foothold within the movement as a whole, though, and many activists have never heard of it. The two men, however, are known and respected. To what extent there are congruencies with the militant groups in Dhaleh and Radfan is impossible to say; it might be well possible for reasons of common strategies and geographical proximity.

Shallal Ali Shaia (b. ca. 1972) is the most influential leader in the mountains of Dhaleh. Shaia has a lot of prestige, partly inherited from his father, Ali Shaia, who had been a member of the Politburo and had been killed in 1986. He had been an active military officer for only a few years when he was forcefully retired and thus stands for the generation of young pensioners without perspective after 1994; many stem from Dhaleh, for not only has it a strong military tradition; besides, it has been "a key battleground" during the war.⁸⁵⁰ Rumors hold that among the militants in the area, who have basically taken over control of the mountains since around 2012, are the remains of the earlier armed movement HATAM, which has equally had its stronghold in Dhaleh in the last 1990s. In an interview, Shaia explains the reasons for the location as follows:

We started here, in Dhale and in Radfan, because we were safe here. Here, all the people are active with HIRAK. Most of our army who were kicked out of their jobs came from here. Most of the military forces who were retired came from here. Here, the community helped us to start our activities. They were ready. The occupation forces were here – there was action and there was reaction.⁸⁵¹

For the last years this militant HIRAK faction frequently clashed with nearby stationed Northern military units and controls the territory; this is marked not least by the overwhelming presence of the former Southern flag in the area and the checkpoints, which

⁸⁴⁷ In mid-2014 he declared to have joined AQAP and taken up arms to fight against the government in Sana'a – a fact which supports evidence for his alleged opportunist actions. *News Yemen*, June 17, 2014, accessed May 24, 2015, <http://www.newsyemen.net/news7298.html>.

⁸⁴⁸ East of resistive Dhaleh and Radfan.

⁸⁴⁹ Hamdani, "Threatened Unity". "Himyar" refers to an ancient Yemeni kingdom in conflict with its northern neighbor, i.e. a conflict mirroring the current situation.

⁸⁵⁰ Salisbury, "Yemen's Southern Intifada".

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Northerners fear not to be allowed to pass. “The free South”⁸⁵² is loyal to al-Beidh.⁸⁵³ What they did not, however, is expand their militant activities beyond their heartland; I will discuss this aspect below. In regard to Lahj, which to a large extent is also under the control of Hirakis, the local leader Nasser al-Khubaji (b. unknown) insists that the provision of a working administration, in parallel to dysfunctional state structures and the delivery of public services, was the reason for the movement’s success – not force.⁸⁵⁴

The list of (partly self-proclaimed) ‘leaders’ could be expanded to include many more names; those selected above, however, include the most visible and influential on the one hand, and those with the highest potential for violent escalation on the other. Partly those two criteria overlap, partly they do not. What should have become clear is the sheer number of figures involved on a strategic level or struggling to be involved – to the detriment of a clear and unified stance of the movement as a whole. One major obstacle, which has also been identified by the Hirak itself, is the lack of communication and coordination between the various leaders, some of who are involved in long-standing personal conflicts and distrust.

The ‘ordinary’ members, on the other hand, have proven open and integrative to a wide spectrum of followers from all strata of society and regions,⁸⁵⁵ pointing out the potential usefulness of taking a more decentralized perspective on framing processes instead of focusing on elites, as Steinberg has suggested earlier.⁸⁵⁶

How this constitutes a strength of the movement is well expressed in the words of one Adeni: “It is a snake with a thousand heads. The authorities cannot stop it, as when local leaders are detained or go undercover, new ones replace them. It is the strength of the movement that it does not have a national leadership that can be liquidated.”⁸⁵⁷

⁸⁵² The “free South” is also invoked in graffiti around Aden which state: “The free South lives”. Adam Baron, “In some Parts of Yemen ‘The Free South Lives’”, *Christian Science Monitor*, March 6, 2013, accessed March 6, 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2013/0306/In-some-parts-of-Yemen-the-free-south-lives>.

⁸⁵³ Salisbury, “Yemen’s Southern Intifada”.

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid. Another name associated with him and often related also to Shaia is Salah al-Shanfara. He is located in Dhaleh and used to be a follower of Ba’oum.

⁸⁵⁵ The movement is built on the idea of fairly autonomous local units, each of whose leaders arises organically.

⁸⁵⁶ Steinberg, “Tilting the Frame”.

⁸⁵⁷ Susanne Dahlgren, “A Snake with A Thousand Heads. The Southern Cause in Yemen”, *Middle East Report* 256 (Fall 2010), accessed April 28, 2014, <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer256/snake-thousand-heads>.

5.2.6. A Chronology of Protest

Corresponding to the chronology presented for the Houthis, this section provides a brief chronology of the conflict. There are eight distinguishable phases between the origins of the Hirak in January 2006 until mid-March 2015, when the Houthi takeover and subsequent open fighting led to a halt of movement activities and the observation period ends. The first two phases, the founding phase and early movement period, have for the most part already been covered. Only minor details will be added to this picture. The third phase is characterized by movement expansion, the accession of old leaders, and the adoption of secession/independence as movement goal, followed by phase four in which the Hirak's activities overlap with the Arab Spring or 'Youth Revolution' protests in spring 2011. After its rapid disillusionment and estrangement with what is conceived of as Northern protest movement, the fifth, post-Arab Spring period is impacted by a larger space for action due to regime weakness and, hence, a more visible taking over of the 'Southern street'. The period of the NDC, the sixth phase, continues to give space to Southern activism as a sign of goodwill during the negotiations, despite the overwhelming rejection of the dialogue by activists; however, at the same time tensions within the alleged leadership increase and two unrelated incidents of military violence led to increased unrest and a stronger involvement of Hadhramis in the struggle. The post-NDC period, phase seven, saw both increased repression and aims to unify the movement leadership. With the commemoration of the anti-colonial struggle, the Hirak issued a deadline for the withdrawal of all Northern 'occupying forces' until November 30, 2014; however, the date came and passed without any occurrence. The eighth and last phase covers the period of and after the Houthi takeover in Sana'a and Hadi's escape to Aden in February 2015. It saw the positioning of the Hirak in favor of Hadi and ends shortly before the commencement of Saudi air strikes in operation 'Decisive Storm'.

(1) Founding Phase January 2006–July 2007

In addition to the prior description of events, it can be noted that in the initial period there was little regime attention and repression. This space was used by activists to gather some founding members, mainly from preexisting networks of earlier opponents and the large pool of discontent retired military.

(2) Early Phase August 2007–April 2009

The declaration of the Southern Peaceful Movement triggered some regime repression beyond the incident in Habilain on October 14. Prominent figures, for instance, such as Ba'oum,

Ahmed Bin Fareed and others are repeatedly arrested and released. Parliamentary elections, which were scheduled for April 2009, are postponed for two years. During this period the movement is a genuine grassroots movement without prominent leadership.

(3) Expansionist Phase/Secessionist Phase May 2009–February 2011

May 2009 sees a number of changes: First, increased regime repression against the media. On May 4, the regime suspends eight independent newspapers from publication, charging them with violations of press law by publicizing articles “against national unity and the country’s highest interests”. Furthermore, they are accused of “inciting violations of law and order, spreading hatred and enmity among the united people of Yemen”. Among them is the well-known ‘Al-Ayyam’ newspaper, founded under the British, which has regularly reported in Hirak activities.⁸⁵⁸ In a speech on May 6, Saleh relates to this:

If there is room to talk in the press then you have to publish kindness, love, and brotherhood. If there were mistakes in development or security or the judiciary, criticize those mistakes and there would be no objection, there is room for that. But the unity, freedom, democracy, revolution, the republic, and the constitution are national constants that cannot be crossed.⁸⁵⁹

He frames the independent media as transgressors of democratic values and national harmony while implying that state institutions were open to democratic criticism. Along these lines, only a few days later a new court is created solely to try journalists.⁸⁶⁰

Second, the accession of former Southern leaders. The most renowned figure of the old guard who jumps on the bandwagon of the Hirak in May is Ali Salim al-Beidh. On the anniversary of his declaration of secession in 1994, May 21, he broadcasts a speech from his exile in Germany in which he apologizes to the Southern population and declares himself a major proponent of the new movement. Another, yet, highly ambiguous figure to announce his allegiance to the Hirak is Tariq al-Fadhli, the (former) jihadi. And, lastly, the leader of AQAP at that time equally declares the group’s support, however, he emphasizes their rejection of Marxism and underlines the importance of jihad.⁸⁶¹ As a response, the Southern Movement emphatically distances itself from the terrorist group; some voices even hold that the AQAP declaration was influenced by the government in a conspiracy to discredit them.

⁸⁵⁸ The others are: Al-Masadar, Al-Watani, Al-Diyar, Al-Mustaqilla, Al-Nida, Al-Shari’a, and Al-Ahali. HRW, “In the Name of Unity. The Yemeni Government’s Brutal Response to Southern Movement Protests”, December 2009, 3f.

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid., 56f.

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid., 51.

⁸⁶¹ Andrew W. Terrill, *The Conflicts in Yemen and U.S. National Security* (Carlisle: PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2011), 32; HRW, “In the Name of Unity”, 24.

Third, increased repression against protesters in form of arbitrary arrests, mistreatment, and unfair trials, especially in relation to the July 7 protests that year.⁸⁶² Furthermore, the regime created pro-unity militias, the so-called ‘Committees to Protect Unity’ (CPU), who became infamous among activists who called them the “janjawīd”.⁸⁶³ On numerous occasions they acted like vigilante groups and provoked isolated violent clashes.

Lastly, there are two specific occasions on which Southerners attacked Northern shopkeepers; during one of the incidents, two Northerners were killed.⁸⁶⁴ I agree with the assessment of HRW, which argues that with these attacks and the CPUs, there was a clear potential for an outbreak of violence at that time – which, however, did not occur.

Generally, this phase is characterized by an expansion of the movement into all strata of society and by a change of demands: Prior to mid-2009 and the accession of the old leadership, demands were made within the unity framework and were based on equal rights and compensation. Now it changed to secession or independence, respectively.⁸⁶⁵

One last notable incident before the Arab Spring protests occurred in January 2011: In response to hostilities, troops deploy to the area of Radfan, block access roads, prevent the delivery of oil, and cut the telephone lines. This was perceived as a provocation by locals and might have triggered most intense clashes; however, Hassan Ba’oum, who had just been released from detention, travelled to the region and used his influence to calm down the atmosphere. He called for the unity of the movement – i.e. against a splintering into violent and non-violent branches – and in the spirit of ‘Reconciliation and Tolerance’ encouraged an overcoming of old differences.⁸⁶⁶ Again, one might speculate about the potential for further escalation which could have emanated from this situation without his calming impact.

⁸⁶² Ibid., 42ff.

⁸⁶³ Ibid., 36f. Some activists emphasize that these thugs dominantly belong to the low social class (almost a caste) of ‘*khaddam*’ (‘servants’/‘slaves’), believed to be of African origin. Interview with Hiraq activist living in Germany, July 22, 2014.

⁸⁶⁴ HRW, “In the Name of Unity”, 2. Nasser al-Khubaji in the name of the movement distanced himself from what he called “heinous crimes”. Ibid., 23.

⁸⁶⁵ Some Southern activists clearly distinguish between ‘secession’ as ‘act of separation from a legitimate state’ and ‘independence’ as ‘gaining political freedom from outside control’. The latter contains an element of delegitimization of the unified state in its current form. The vast majority of adherents, however, does not make this fine, almost legal distinction, and I will correspondingly use the terms interchangeably with the exception of cases in which the speakers are making this distinct delineation.

⁸⁶⁶ “Army Deploys to Radfan to Face Southern Militants”, *National Yemen*, January 17, 2011, accessed May 7, 2015, <http://www.nationalyemen.com/2011/01/17/army-deploys-to-radfan-to-face-southern-militants/>. Besides, calls for regular civil disobedience to occur on every first Monday of the month are issued by the Hiraq; reports state that this was mainly implemented in Dhaleh, Radfan, and Habilain. “Civil Disobedience Paralyzes Life in Some Southern Cities”, *Yemen Post*, January 4, 2011, accessed June 27, 2012, <http://www.yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=2948&MainCat=3>.

(4) Overlap with Arab Spring February–April 2011

Soon after the initiation of anti-regime protests in Sana'a in February 2011, the Hirak decided to lay down their own protest campaigns and join the Northern protesters.⁸⁶⁷ After a few weeks, however, they found their own issues and grievances underrepresented and disregarded by Northern activists – now a wide spectrum of groups ranging from independent youth via Islah to the Houthis. They disassociated again and continued to pursue their pathway independently. What came to their favor was the withdrawal of most of the security forces to the North to contain the protests. This provided them with far more space for actions, which, among others, activists used to symbolically reclaim territory by raising and/or painting the former Southern/PDRY flag and graffiti.

(5) Post-Arab Spring May 2011–March 2013

The Southern flag continues to be a dominant motive. 2011 sees three conferences of Southern activists in Cairo (May, July, November), which aim at the unification of the movement and its leadership and try to develop a clear vision and roadmap. Ali Nasser Mohamed and Haydar al-Attas are the main drivers here, al-Beidh and others do not attend. The November Cairo Conference lays out a roadmap for two-state federalism with subsequent referendum.

In the midst of the power vacuum resulting from the Arab Spring, AQAP (or 'Ansar al-Sharia', how they rebranded themselves for popular appeal) takes control of large parts of Abyan and declares an emirate. They are driven out in mid-2012, after they have left marks of horrifying rule on much of the local population.

In November 2011, Saleh finally steps down as a result of the GCC Initiative and the initiation of the transitional phase. Part of this phase is the NDC as an attempt to comprehensively settle the major contentious issues and conflicts in the country. It is agreed that Saleh shall hand his power to the Vice President Hadi, who is elected President in a single-candidate election on February 21, 2012. The Hirak opposes this election for its transfer of power merely within the dominant regime circle. 2012 is defined by extensive protests and campaigns of civil disobedience in the South and on a national level by the preparations for the NDC. In March 2012, Mohamed Ali Ahmed returns from exile and declares his participation as a Southern representative to the NDC. A participation of al-Attas

⁸⁶⁷ On February 19, 2011, Ali Nasser Mohamed called on the Hirak to unite with the Northern protesters. "Exiled Politicians Urge People to Unite against the Regime", *Yemen Post*, February 19, 2011, accessed June 27, 2012, <http://www.yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=3159&MainCat=3>. Regime repression followed suit; see: HRW, "Days of Bloodshed in Aden", March 2011.

appears probable for quite some time as well. The overwhelming majority of the Southern movement and population, however, reject the dealing with the so-called ‘Southern Issue’ within the framework of the NDC. They hold that the issue is the most important for the country, by far outweighing the others to be dealt with. On this basis, they demand an immediate, prioritized negotiation with the Northern government with a 50/50 parity. This demand remains disregarded.

(6) NDC-Phase March 2013–January 2014

On March 18, 2013, the anniversary of the Arab Spring ‘Day of Dignity’, the NDC is inaugurated. The Hiraq still predominantly denies its legitimacy; only few known figures take part and they lack the legitimacy of being acknowledged representatives.⁸⁶⁸ Correspondingly, the Southern Issue Working Group has a tough position and lacks support from Southern organizations. The non-implementation of a 20-point-list of conditions that had been developed by a preparatory technical committee causes a further loss of confidence during the process in the eyes of many Southerners and leads to a withdrawal of more acknowledged participants. Mohamed Ali Ahmed, too, finally withdraws in November 2013, claiming that the condition for his participation, the discussion of secession, was not brought up either. By then, the NDC, which should have ended mid-September, had already been prolonged for a lack of solutions. As a consequence, in the fall a subcommittee is formed to discuss the issue in a smaller, more efficient circle. It consists of 16 representatives in a 50/50 share from the North and the South, but the lack of legitimacy remains. The final NDC document signed on January 24, 2014 contains the so-called ‘Just Solution’ proposition which had been presented by the committee earlier that month: It advances a six-state federal model for Yemen, with the North containing four and the South containing two federal states. The ‘Aden Region’ shall comprise Aden, Lahj, Dhaleh, and Abyan, and the ‘Hadhramaut Region’ shall consist of

⁸⁶⁸ The regulations on seat distribution were complex. 85 of the 565 seats were officially dedicated to Hiraq representatives – whose legitimacy, however, was highly contested from within. Furthermore, the roughly 40% of seats allocated for parties had to be filled with 50% of Southerners; yet, the definition of whom that included precisely was contested as well. The movement criticized that this regulation was covering up the fact that many of those who were counted as Southerners were actually well integrated in the Northern regime and thus illegitimate in their eyes. On the challenges for the Southern Issue Working Group and the general setup of the NDC see: Ali Saif Hassan, “Yemen. National Dialogue Conference: Managing Peaceful Change?”, *Accord* 25 (2014): 50–54. On the structure see: *ibid.* 52. On seat distribution regulations, including youth and women’s shares therein: Sama’a al-Hamdani, “Yemen’s National Dialogue: The Country’s Critical Test for Stability”, January 17, 2013, accessed March 2, 2013, <http://www.yemeniaty.com/2013/01/yemens-national-dialogue-country.html>.

Shabwa, Hadhramaut, and al-Mahra.⁸⁶⁹ Following their stance of rejecting a continued unity state, the proposal is not accepted by the Hirak leadership and the movement.⁸⁷⁰

As a sign of goodwill, and in combination with an apology for the 1994 war damage, the government in September 2013 created 800 new jobs for those Southerners who had lost their jobs in the aftermath of the war. This gesture, however, missed its purpose for it was taken as merely a drop in the ocean; furthermore, al-Beidh announced his rejection of the apology. Considering the massive financial burden and the corresponding budget hole of the state, it is clear that a restatement of tens of thousands into government positions is impossible. This plus the fact that in Yemen many decrees are made, yet never implemented, leaves people without faith in the provision.⁸⁷¹ It is too little, too late to placate grievances.

During the course of the year, the rift between al-Beidh and Ba'oum supporters widens and among other incidences⁸⁷² clashes occur between two groups when Ba'oum speaks on a commemoration event on October 14. The movement perceives the danger of increased internal tensions and leads to mediation and appeasement attempts in early 2014.

Other violent incidents with the involvement of Northern army forces catalyze events in December. When a prominent local Hadhrami sheikh is killed in a clash at an army checkpoint on December 2, the outrage leads the 'Hadramaout Tribes Confederacy' (HTC) to issue an ultimatum on December 10: December 20 is to be the deadline for the withdrawal of all security forces; in addition they demand that only tribes provide security for oil companies in the area, thus regain the control over security on 'their' territory (plus jobs).⁸⁷³ They gain the support of the Hirak and join hands with the movement. At the bottom line, the incident triggers what had been lying dormant for a long time: The population of Hadhramawt seeks more autonomy or even independence for the region, based on its shared identity. The

⁸⁶⁹ "Yemen Celebrates New Map of Six Regions", *Yemen Times*, February 11, 2014, accessed June 12, 2015, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1754/news/3462/Yemen-celebrates-new-map-of-six-regions.htm>.

⁸⁷⁰ Katherine Zimmerman, "Yemen's Pivotal Moment", *American Enterprise Institute*, Critical Threats Project, February 2014, 7. Qassim Askar Jubran, for instance, proclaimed: "The people of the south will thwart this attempt to divide the south and [the new structure] will not be implemented no matter the price." Nasser al-Taweel similarly affirmed his continued support for a two-state (N-S) federal solution. "Federal Region Defining Committee: Yemen Will Have Six Regions", *Yemen Times*, February 4, 2014, accessed February 9, 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1752/news/3426/Federal-region-defining-committee-Yemen-will-have-six-regions.htm>. On the (negative) perception of the NDC generally see the poll results of a Yemeni polling center Percent: "People in Southern Provinces Not Satisfied with National Dialogue Conference", May 30, 2013, accessed June 27, 2015, http://percent-yemen.com/py.mits-ye.com/index4d46.html?it_id=51. About two-thirds of Southerners were found to hold a "negative perception".

⁸⁷¹ Cf. interview with the journalist Iona Craig in *Mafraj Radio*, Episode 8, November 10, 2013, accessed June 12, 2015, <http://www.yemenpeaceproject.org/podcast/episode-8/>.

⁸⁷² Other incidents have been reported already for early July that year. "Warning of an Armed Conflict in Southern Yemen", *Al Jazeera*, July 5, 2013, accessed August 12, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/pages/bf4a5d95-3b43-4e90-8028-e9359688fcb4>.

⁸⁷³ The fact that a number of Yemeni generals have made fortunes from oil companies resulted in an increase of violence in the region since 2012 and a shuffle of leading military positions by Hadi's regime.

following months see a sequence of clashes with the military⁸⁷⁴— it is even labelled as a ‘tribal uprising’. Since that time, Hadhramawt is much more strongly integrated into the activities of the Hirak, whose center has for a long time been in Aden and the surrounding regions. The developments help to overcome tensions between the Aden and Hadramawt factions, which reflect the historical factionalism of former socialist regime.

The second consequential incident occurs on December 27, when the infamous 33rd Armored Brigade shells a funeral tent of a Southern Movement martyr in al-Dhale, killing at least 19 mourners. Massive protests against the “massacre” take place the following day, when again the army fires into the crowd, killing two. An escalation with this specific unit had been predictable since it had already been responsible for violence against civilians in Taiz in 2011.⁸⁷⁵ As a reaction, al-Beidh condemns the action and calls on international community:

We appeal to all international organizations concerned with human rights and all the international community around the world to raise their voice against the ongoing genocide against the people of the occupied south.⁸⁷⁶

As will become clear with the detailed frame analysis, his statement contains some typical elements of Hirak framing: a drastic description of the Southerners victimization, the allegation of ‘occupation’, a rights-rhetoric, and a call for support by international actors.

(7) Post-NDC Phase January 2014–November 30, 2014

The NDC officially ends on January 24 with the signing of the final document. With the conclusion of the event, which has marked some kind of emphatic ‘peace phase’, repression in the South increases again. Specifically the governor of Aden makes it his mission to eradicate the spatial claim-making of the Southern Movement in his city by rigorous and partly violent elimination of their symbols, especially the flags, from public space. Interference with movement-affiliated media increases in a similar vein. In February, for instance, the government stops the printing of Aden al-Ghad, a popular newspaper at a public printing press.⁸⁷⁷

On the other side, some Hadhrami faction equally pushes for further escalation in what should be understood as a continuation of the December agitation. On February 15, 2014, a

⁸⁷⁴ Zimmerman, “Pivotal Moment”, 9.

⁸⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸⁷⁶ “President Ali Salem Al-Beidh Released a Statement”, *Aden Live TV*, December 28, 2013, accessed February 24, 2014, <http://www.adenlivetv.tv/articles-9761.html>.

⁸⁷⁷ “Government Stops Printing Aden Al-Ghad Southern Opposition Newspaper”, *National Yemen*, February 23, 2014, accessed February 24, 2014, <http://nationalyemen.com/2014/02/23/government-stops-printing-aden-al-ghad-southern-opposition-newspaper/>.

prior unknown militant organization with the name of ‘Liberation Brigades of the South’ (LBS) issues a statement claiming some attacks at government installations. It warns that all checkpoints, barracks, and camps of the “Yemeni enemy in Hadhramaut” were now strategic targets for attacks by its fighters and that it “believes in the right of the Southern people for liberation and independence and to adopt all options to attain their freedom and independence”.⁸⁷⁸ The founding of another militant organization, the ‘National Front for Liberation and Independence of the South’, is announced in Aden the same day. Among its interim leadership is Ahmed Ba’muallim, a close ally of al-Beidh. While this fact hints at al-Beidh’s support for a more militant approach, he at the same time openly advocates for a continuation of the peaceful struggle: Also in mid-February, briefly before the Southern ‘Karama Day’ on the 21st of the month, Ba’oum, al-Beidh and some minor figures met in Beirut in an attempt to overcome internal cleavages.⁸⁷⁹ They ostentatively spread pictures of their talks, suggesting their harmonic and united stance. In statements they refer to the NDC six-state federal solution as “division project”.⁸⁸⁰ They proclaim their aim to hold a conference in the South and to establish a unified ‘revolutionary command’. The struggle shall remain peaceful, yet at the same time they explicitly call on activists to “defend their revolution” and protect themselves through self-defense.⁸⁸¹

This contradictory picture between isolated escalation and an overall continuation of peaceful means pervades other spheres as well. The Karama Day demonstrations in Aden remain peaceful on the side of the protesters, yet the security forces kill two. In Shabwa, however, the Southern Resistance launches a military campaign against the army in retaliation for the execution of three of its members a few days before.⁸⁸² The focus of the ‘great name’ leadership meanwhile officially continues to lie on unification of the movement and on international attention. The extensive international coverage of the February 21 protests, for

⁸⁷⁸ Haykal Bayfana, “Hadhramaut: Rebellion, Federalism, or Independence in Yemen?”, April 22, 2014, accessed April 28, 2014, <http://www.muftah.org/hadhramaut-rebellion-federalism-independence/#.U14PK3dpeTU>.

⁸⁷⁹ “President Ali Salem Al-Beidh Received at his Office in the Lebanese Capital Beirut Leader Hassan Ahmad Ba’oom”, *Aden Live TV*, February 20, 2014, accessed February 24, 2014, <http://www.adenlivetv.tv/articles-11574.html>.

⁸⁸⁰ “The Head of the Supreme Council for the Southern Peaceful Movement Leader Hassan Ba’oum”, *Aden Live TV*, February 19, 2014, accessed February 24, 2014, <http://www.adenlivetv.tv/articles-11531.html>.

⁸⁸¹ “President Ali Salem al-Baid and Leader Hassan Ahmad Ba’oom Issued a Political Statement”, *Aden Live TV*, February 23, 2014, accessed February 24, 2014, <http://www.adenlivetv.tv/articles-11684.html>.

⁸⁸² “The Southern Resistance Launched a Military Campaign on the Occupation Forces”, *Aden Live TV*, February 21, 2014, accessed February 24, 2014, <http://www.adenlivetv.tv/articles-11612.html>. ⁸⁸² “Yemeni Occupation Forces Executed Three Members of the Southern Resistance”, *Aden Live TV*, February 19, 2014, accessed February 24, 2014, <http://www.adenlivetv.tv/articles-11534.html>.

example, are evaluated as a success.⁸⁸³ The same accounts for the first large mass demonstration (*milyūnyīah*) in Hadhramawt's Mukalla; it further strengthened the integration of the Hirak into an all-Southern movement by a stronger activism in this large region in the wake of increased involvement after uprising of HTC and rapprochement between the two Hadhramis Ba'oum and al-Beidh.⁸⁸⁴

After these events, the summer passes with little progress, yet continuous street activism. This can partly be related to leaders' concern about the UN Security Council Resolution 2140, adopted in late February. Its aim was to deter or, if necessary, take action against potential spoilers of the transition process. It was understood to be directed against Saleh, al-Beidh, and possibly Houthi figures. The resolution furthermore reaffirmed its pro-unity stance.⁸⁸⁵

In June, the defection of some prominent figures, including Nasser al-Noubah, takes a toll on the movement. The defectors denounce their calls for independence and instead publicly announce their support for Hadi.⁸⁸⁶ Furthermore, the July 7 commemoration remains unrecognized in many areas.⁸⁸⁷

In fall, then, mass activism reaches a new climax: In the wake of the October 14 commemoration, a permanent protest camp is set up on Al-Arood Square in Aden with the protesters demanding the complete withdrawal of all Northern forces and civil servants until November 30 (anniversary of independence from Britain). Otherwise, an 'escalation' would occur – with the concrete meaning of 'escalation' being left obscure, but commonly understood as a declaration of secession. The weeks up to the set deadline see numerous events and extensive writing and communication activity. Besides, some prominent figures such as Abdulrahman al-Jifri and Yahya Ghalib al-Shuaibi (head of al-Beidh's office in Beirut) return to Aden and join talks and debates. Notwithstanding the general mood of

⁸⁸³ "Regional and International Media Outlets Covered the Events of the Twentieth and Twenty-First of February", *Aden Live TV*, February 23, 2014, accessed February 24, 2014, <http://www.adenlivetv.tv/articles-11682.html>.

⁸⁸⁴ Popular activists, however, begin to voice scepticism about the de facto impact of large mass demonstrations. Huda al-Attas, for instance, asked: "Will such gatherings solve the problem of world indifference to southerners' rightful demands?" Susanne Dahlgren, "Southern Yemeni Activists Prepare for Nationwide Rally", April 24, 2014, accessed April 28, 2014, http://www.merip.org/southern-yemeni-activists-prepare-nationwide-rally?ip_login_no_cache=6feb7e54abaf997a862ba60cd178cec.

⁸⁸⁵ The incitement of violence through media is moreover denounced as threatening the transition; it responds to the intense frame distribution via the respective faction-affiliated media. <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2014/sc11296.doc.htm>. My own research was hindered by the fear of potential interviewees (Hirak leadership) to be targeted on the basis of this resolution; they refrained from talking to me.

⁸⁸⁶ "Divided South Yemen Separatists Vow to Achieve Independence", *Middle East Eye*, September 30, 2014, accessed October 6, 2014, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/divided-south-yemen-separatists-vow-achieve-independence-830553601>.

⁸⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

advancement and the high expectations of large numbers of movement members,⁸⁸⁸ the date comes and passes without anything happening. Apparently, the division lines between al-Beidh and Ba'oum have inhibited the Hiraq's leadership from taking the step of declaring independence. The movement has lacked a 'united front' to push forward on November 30,⁸⁸⁹ a point in time when the regime in Sana'a is occupied with attempts to counter the threat posed by the Houthi's seizing of the capital. A missed opportunity?

(8) Phase of Houthi-Takeover December 1, 2014–March 15, 2015

Similar to the period of the Arab Spring, when security forces concentrated on the capital and other areas of high protest, the situation in Sana'a at the end of 2014 and beginning of 2015 open up space for the Hiraq.⁸⁹⁰ In addition, chances are that the calculus of the Gulf states would change in the face of the 'Houthi threat': For the KSA, for instance, seeing the Houthis rise is considered equivalent to seeing their archenemy Iran rise and thus of high urgency to be inhibited. Southerners are therefore hopeful to eventually receive support from the kingdom. Remaining obstacles, however, are again the lacking unified leadership as a serious counterpart for negotiations and certain fears that the Southern leadership might be supported by Iran after all – an aspect which has been strengthened by al-Beidh's obscure comments in this regard.⁸⁹¹

⁸⁸⁸ Ordinary Northerners living in the South were rather concerned for their security during this period, despite official statements by the Hiraq that they should not worry for they were not the target, but merely government representatives were. "Nov. 30 Deadline Looms Over Northerners in the South", *Yemen Times*, November 6, 2014, accessed November 7, 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1831/report/4550>.

⁸⁸⁹ "Divisions Within Yemen's Al-Hiraq Delay Announcement of Southern Independence: Sources", *Asharq Al-Awsat*, December 1, 2014, accessed December 4, 2014, http://www.aawsat.net/2014/12/article_55339051. Some spokespersons on the ground, however, proceed with what they say they consider the "escalation" at a point in time when many feel insecure and rumors prevail: A peaceful, albeit intensified campaign of civil disobedience with more demonstrations, more frequent closing down of public life, a blockade of port and oil facilities, and the closing of the border with the North for long hours. "Tensions Soar at Southern Yemen Protest Camp", November 29, 2014, accessed December 1, 2014, *Al Jazeera*, <http://www.en-maktoob.news.yahoo.com/tensions-soar-southern-yemen-protest-camp-151251483.html>; see similarly: "Strike in Hadramout Meant to Expand Secessionist Pressure", *Yemen Times*, December 4, 2014, accessed December 4, 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1839/news/4646/Strike-in-Hadramout-meant-to-expand-secessionist-pressure.htm>.

⁸⁹⁰ "Tensions Soar". One major exception is the brutal killing of the prominent activist Khaled al-Junaydi in custody of the Special Security Forces on December 15, 2014. See: HRW, "Yemen: No Action in Southern Activist's Killing", January 11, 2015, accessed June 15, 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2015/01/10/yemen-no-action-southern-activist-s-killing>.

⁸⁹¹ Others try to dismiss such fear, e.g. Saleh bin Farid al-Awlaki, who instead emphasizes the importance Southerners attribute to the Gulf and European powers: "We in the south are Sunnis, there is noch chance for us to be connected with Iran. Our future is with the European countries and our neighbours." Ibid.

Hadi's resignation in late January⁸⁹² and escape to Aden a month later act as a gamechanger. Despite their prior rejection of Hadi, the movement welcomes him to the South and refrains from general critique, giving him the opportunity to act and uncover his intentions. He calls on the youth to sign up for an army of 20,000 that he aims to create within a week to counter the Houthis, a call which is enthusiastically met by many fighters-to-be.

The spokesperson of the youth in the protest camp on Al-Arood Square, Radfan al-Dubais, gives a more differentiated outlook on the situation:

Civil disobedience works when there is a government, but it doesn't make sense to continue our campaign at the moment. The situation is turning violent and large numbers of arms are pouring in from surrounding governorates and there are armed men all over the streets. (...) all disputes and tensions have also moved from Sana'a to Aden, which is what brought Aden governorate into violence and removed it from its peaceful course.⁸⁹³

Another protester holds that there were two options: "We either keep silent and see what Hadi does or we go to war. We preferred to wait and see what will happen."⁸⁹⁴ There are still hopes that both the international community and Hadi might change their thoughts and support the cause of Southern independence, given the choice between Houthi violence and Southern peacefulness as option for the South of Yemen.⁸⁹⁵

As a result, the Hirak stepped into the back in March 2015, when the struggle between the Houthis and the South more generally entered a more intensive stage; the period under analysis correspondingly ends at this point.

⁸⁹² During the following night amidst widespread anxiety about the developments, Nasser al-Noubah in an Al Jazeera interview actually announced independence of the South, an act that, however, remained without impact. "Southern Yemen separatist leaders call for secession as clashes reported in Aden", *Middle East Eye*, January 22, 2015, accessed June 15, 2015, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/southern-yemen-government-orders-officials-ignore-orders-capital-1348555751>.

⁸⁹³ "Southern Movement Suspends Protests Amid Growing Turmoil", *Yemen Times*, March 11, 2015.

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁵ Cf. Susanne Dahlgren, "Four Weddings and a Funeral in Yemen", *MERIP*, March 20, 2015, accessed March 22, 2015, http://www.merip.org/mero/mero032015?ip_login_no_cache=d60a30d7b10c3f1b907946989cff0ffb.

6. TESTING EXISTING EXPLANATIONS FOR ARMED CONFLICT

In this chapter I test the explanatory power of established approaches for the two cases. The theoretical model I propose acknowledges the role of structural factors; therefore, I will investigate to what extent each structural factor impacts escalation, and later connect the framing back to these factors.

The testing proceeds according to the test design developed in 3.2. and is comparative: It will both seek to explain each case individually and, subsequently, the relative probability of escalation in comparison between the Houthis and the HIRAK, for numerous telling insights merely result from the variations here. My reference years (if data is available) are 2004 for the Houthi conflict and 2007 for the HIRAK; if data is lacking for the respective years, I take the closest year available. Spikes and outliers will be noted. In addition, under ‘opportunity’ I will briefly consider political opportunity structures (according to social movement studies), the availability of arms, and external support, all factors which I believe to be highly relevant.

6.1. Opportunity

(1) Population size: size increases risk

Yemen had a population of ca. 20 million in 2004.⁸⁹⁶ With a conservative estimate of 35% of the population being Zaydi, their number should be around seven million. Southerners on the contrary make up about four million; in addition, it needs to be taken into account that Hadhramis are included in this number and their self-ascription as Southerners remained volatile until recently.

In absolute terms there is a risk due to population size; in comparison, however, it should be greater for the Zaydi case than for the South. Yet, population size alone tells us solely very little.

(2) GDP/capita: the higher, the lesser the risk

Yemen is a low income country with a GDP/capita in current US\$ in 2004 of only US\$ 707, in 2007 of 1.210 US\$.

High risk, despite the increase between 2004 and 2007.

⁸⁹⁶ Unless noted otherwise: World Bank data.

(3) economic growth: the higher, the less risk (disputed)

The annual GDP/capita growth rate in 2004 was 1%, the same as in 2006 and 2007, with only 2005 seeing a 3% growth rate.

High risk.

(4) political instability: instability increases risk

Both the YAR and the PDRY were ruled as autocracies according to Polity IV, with the YAR crossing the threshold to anocratic rule in 1988 while the PDRY remaining on a -7 score, i.e. autocratic, until unification. After a transitional period until the first elections in 1993, the ROY entered 'stable anocracy' at a constant -2 score.

Though anocratic (see below), the regime was stable over the period under analysis.

(5) military strength: size lowers risk

Military expenditure in 2005 reached 5% of the GDP, in 2007 slightly below with 4%. With around the same percentage in 2012, Yemen ranks 12th worldwide in military spending/GDP.

The level is thus high and provides evidence for a strong military which should lower the risk of armed conflict.

(6) rough terrain: the more, the higher the risk

There are no precise numbers, yet the Zaydi heartland is located in the midst of the Yemeni highlands with very rough mountain landscape. Parts of the South, namely Lahj, Dhaleh, Radfan etc. are equally located in the mountains; additionally, there are the vast stretches of desert in the South, which currently serve as hideouts for AQAP.

Rough terrain increased risks in both cases; while the North is even more strongly dominated by mountains, the South equally offers mountain as well as desert sanctuaries.

(7) war-prone neighbors: the more, the higher the risk

Yemen is bordered by Oman in the East and the KSA in the North. The last (internal) war Oman witnessed ended in 1975. The last (international) war the KSA participated in was the Second Gulf War in 1991.

Neither of the state qualifies as war-prone.

(8) level of democracy of neighbors: the more democratic, the lesser the risk

Oman is an absolute monarchy. The authoritarian regime is frequently criticized for human rights violations. The same applies to the KSA to even graver effect.

Both states qualify as ‘bad neighbors’ in regard to their level of democracy.

(9) oil exports: the larger, the higher the risk

Yemen belongs to the category of low income countries. It highly depends on its declining oil resources for revenue. Oil and gas revenues account for roughly 25% of the GDP and 65% of total government revenue.

Despite moderate amounts of oil exports, there is a high dependency (which is also related to risk, even closer than exports generally by some authors), i.e. increased overall risk.

(10) peace years: the more, the lower the risk

The last war specifically involving the Zaydi population ended in 1970, while the South suffered from the civil war in 1994.

The risk is hence higher in the South.

(11) males’ secondary school education: the more, the lower or higher (!) the risk

47% secondary school enrollment (with 62% completion quota) in 2005, with a girl to boy ratio of 65%. In comparison, for the MENA region it was 74% enrollment and a 93% girl to boy ratio.) What should be added here, though, is that schooling rates are higher in the South, where education has traditionally been given high value since it was introduced under British rule, and where it had been among the priorities of socialist rule. Hence, the level of education is still higher in the South.

The indicator is low and the risk high(er), with a cleavage between the North, where this is more rampant, and the South, where this is less so, i.e. risk is comparatively higher in the North.⁸⁹⁷

(12) soil degradation: the more, the higher the risk

According to Yemeni officials,⁸⁹⁸ around 95% of the country’s agricultural land was at risk of deterioration in 2007 due to water shortages, partly caused by water-intensive qāt cultivation

⁸⁹⁷ Despite the disputed indicator direction, I pose that an enrollment as low as this cannot possibly lower the risk for the limits it sets to many kinds of employment, thus excluding the option.

⁸⁹⁸ “YEMEN: Land degradation threatening farmers, says senior official”, *IRIN*, October 18, 2007, accessed July 22, 2015, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/74843/yemen-land-degradation-threatening-farmers-says-senior->

and desertification. Since merely 13.6% of all Yemeni land is fertile and of that as little as 20% (1.2–1.6 million hectares) is used for agricultural purposes, food sovereignty cannot be reached and the 80% of Yemenis living in rural areas (with 54.1% working in agriculture), the numbers of those affected are very high and conflicts involving land rights are frequent and oftentimes turn violent.

While the severity of soil degradation increases risk, the instability of the country on the other hand contradicts this assertion.

(13) consistency of democratic institutions: the higher, the lower the risk

As has been noted under ‘political instability’, Yemen has been stable at an anocratic level, thus heightening the risk. From 2012 onward (i.e. in the wake of the GCC Initiative and the NDC) it reached +3, yet the Houthi coup and subsequent war eliminated this positive scale change.

Risk is high.

When assessing merely the above indicators, the overall risk for armed conflict onset in Yemen as a whole is high: Of 13 indicators total, nine indicate (high) risk, three indicate no risk, and one (soil degradation) remains inconclusive. Population size and male secondary school enrollment predict a higher probability for the North, whereas peace years do so for the South.

Political opportunity structures, availability of arms, and external support provide a mixed picture as well. When the Houthis started to intensify their shouting and protests, Saleh perceived himself at a height of power, the more so as he was supported by the US. Nevertheless, the group equally believed itself to be at a height and capable of challenging the regime – at least verbally. With the great outrage also in Yemen against the US after the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, they must have perceived their mobilization successful and the general timing as an opportunity. The killing of Hussein lent them additional credibility. What is important to point out, however, is that they did not use what might be interpreted as an opportunity. As I pointed out earlier, only the later frame change had effect in escalation.

For the Hirak, the power vacuum after the downfall of Saleh might have posed an opportunity, but while the movement still might have been too dispersed to confront the army,

official. See also: “Desertification a threat to millions of Yemenis”, *Yemen Times*, July 1, 2014, accessed July 22, 2015, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1794/health/4049/Desertification-a-threat-to-millions-of-Yemenis.htm>.

the situation in fall 2014, i.e. with Sana'a seized by the Houthis and the government in a volatile position, certainly presented an opportunity to declare secession. It was either not perceived as such – against which interview statements of both leading and regular activists speak (see framing analysis) – or opted not to use them in that direction.

As for the availability of arms: Arms of all sizes are widely available in Yemen and to both groups, with an advantage for the Houthis since the infamous Souq al-Talh, a huge arms market, is located in their area and cross-border smuggling enables additional flows.⁸⁹⁹ Notwithstanding, Southerners are a highly armed population, too, and great amounts of arms were left in the South after the 1994 war. While large weapons such as tanks etc. would be unlikely to find, the general availability of arms to start an insurgency is more than guaranteed.

There is no proven external support for the Houthis, neither assistance (such as training or else), nor financial resources. Southerners generate modest sums from the diaspora, yet, neither is there any proven strong external support.

In sum, considering the presumed high risks, the Houthi rebellion seems to match the expectations of the model, while nonviolence in the South is rather contradicting it.

6.2. Grievances

Inequalities

As has been introduced before, horizontal inequalities (HIs) can be distinguished into economic, social, political and cultural status HIs. Any measurement⁹⁰⁰ of HIs is complicated by the fact that mere perceptions of HIs have been found to be equally effective. In consequence, while I concentrate on factual HIs, I nevertheless include perceptions in the assessment when they are articulated in a mode that indicates a great relevance.

Economic HIs subsume inequalities in income, employment opportunities, and assets of all kinds (financial, natural resource-based, social, human).

⁸⁹⁹ After years of fighting, a foreign military expert in Sana'a made the following statement about the Houthis' arms supplies: "While other non-state actors are well-armed, the Huthis possess greater stockpiles of heavy armaments, especially tanks." ICG, "Huthis", 20.

⁹⁰⁰ Quantitative measurement as suggested by Mancini, Stewart, and Brown appears to be not feasible due to a lack of reliable disaggregated data. As has been pointed out in the literature, especially in state in which regions or other groups might perceive marginalization, states are often reluctant to publish disaggregated data. Luca Mancini, Frances Stewart, and Graham K. Brown, "Approaches to the Measurement of Horizontal Inequalities", in *Horizontal Inequalities*, 85–105.

While the economic situation is tense in the whole of Yemen and specifically so in regard to land and natural resource access, there is no evidence that Zaydis are suffering from economic HIs based on their identity. Their territorial heartland has accommodated much of the influx of returning migrants in the 1990s, which has worsened the situation, yet, this was based on geographical proximity to the KSA and a history of migration from the region. Apart from this, the region's economy tends to be de facto remote and, hence, semi-independent economically as it is geographically and politically. It offers sources of income due to the flourishing cross border trade and smuggling activities, an opportunity other regions lack.

In the South we need to distinguish between the Western parts, around Aden and the adjacent governorates, and Hadhramawt. In the latter, trade has traditionally been strong and extensive global networks offer opportunities which the South generally lacks. However, in regard to the Hirak, its heartland, and the self-ascription as 'Southerners' I concentrate on the Western part of the former PDRY territory as reference. The widespread early retirement of former state employees and army personnel in the South still has significant impact on incomes. Retirement benefits are small, paid irregularly, and lack appropriate adaptation to rises (as in 2005). Employment opportunities show the same pattern, with Southern youth having a hard time being accepted e.g. into military or civil service. Privatization in the wake of unification and after 1994 has released many former state employees in state-owned industries, port facilities and else. Few productive industries remained, and many large businesses are owned by Northern entrepreneurs and companies. The distribution of resource wealth, i.e. oil and gas resources mostly located in the South, is another major grievance. Employment in the facilities is often given to Northerners⁹⁰¹ and partnerships with foreign companies are dominated by Northern businesses as well, further accentuating HIs. Besides their real extent, Southerners moreover perceive great economic HIs and feel very strongly about them.

In conclusion, economic HIs indicate a higher risk in the South.

Social HIs refer to disparities in access to social services such as housing, education, and health, as well as life expectancy.

Measurements of life expectancy at birth from 2005 onwards is ranged at a low 62 years.⁹⁰² Access to all the noted social services is limited in remote rural areas, to which much of the

⁹⁰¹ Foreign companies are obligated to hire a certain percentage of local staff. Since the majority, however, has their central representation in Sana'a, Northerners are given preference, particularly when influential patrons use these employment opportunities for their clients.

⁹⁰² World Bank data.

Zaydi heartland outside of Sa'ada and several towns belongs. In the South, Aden, Mukalla and few other cities provide relatively better access, yet, since Southerners tend to compare specifically social service provision with the former socialist state provision, the relative deprivation since that era creates strong grievances. Particularly, access to sufficient water and power supplies in urban areas has become an issue over the last decade, with parts of major cities and towns lacking permanent and/or reliable services. Subsidies for basic commodities (like flour, gas/petrol etc.) weigh heavy on the government budget, yet any attempts to cut them trigger intensive protests for large parts of the population rely on them.

Risk is higher in the South, particularly when perceptions are taken into consideration.

Political HIs include inequalities in political freedoms and access to political offices and power (e.g. seats in parliament, positions in the army, the cabinet, local government etc.) and loss of power due to recent regime change.

Political HIs are rather rooted in perceptions than in facts. There are no official limitations to political offices. However, both identity groups regularly voice their discontent about and resistance against local/regional offices which shall be filled with regime-close/'Northern' figures. On the national level, many offices that are filled with Southerners are equally *perceived* to be held by Southerners who are close to the regime or who have 'turned into Northerners'. Positions in the military have already been treated under economic HIs. Loss of power due to regime change plays a role for both groups, yet in different regards and to varying degrees. In the North, the loss of power for Zaydis occurred through violent means and against extensive resistance, yet, a long time ago in 1962 (to 1970). In the South, on the other hand, it at first happened consensually in 1990, but then created violent resistance a few years later, i.e. relatively recently.

At the bottom line, risk again should be higher for the South.

Cultural status HIs take the dimensions of the recognition of religion and religious observances, language rights and language recognition, and the recognition of ethnocultural practices⁹⁰³; furthermore, discrimination in these spheres must be acknowledged as well. It is the one dimension of HIs in which perception probably plays the strongest role, for it is challenging to pin down many of the aspects involved.

Language is no issue in either of the cases. Religion, on the other hand, is: For Zaydis, the marginalization and discrimination of their religion, the defamation by Salafi religious

⁹⁰³ Langer/Brown, "Cultural Status Inequalities", 50.

authorities, the suppression of religious dress markers, religious holidays like 'Eid al-Ghadīr, the decline of religious teaching institutions, and other measures of denegation serve as primary grievances. Southerners on the contrary deplore what they perceive as overtly religious influence after 1994, which manifests itself in religious dress rules (unofficial, yet markable), the exclusion of women from professional life and the public etc. While this is no HI in a strict sense – for the same applies for the rest of the country – it again poses a relative 'decline' to the more liberal religious life they led before.

Regarding cultural 'practices', what is notable is mostly the non-recognition of each of the identity group's specific history and achievements. Southerners are e.g. forced to celebrate the date of their defeat in 1994 as a holiday commemorating the 'victory of unity', which they perceive to be humiliating. For traditional Zaydis the renunciation of imamic rule, equally political as religious and cultural (with all the cultural and religious context it involves), is a cut into their self-determination about the kind of rule they prefer; yet, many Zaydis today articulate their support for a democratic republican state.

In regard to cultural status HIs, both identity groups have significant risks.

Repression

Repression needs to be assessed in respect to form, intensity, and duration. Long-term marginalization of Zaydis has already been treated in detail; it can serve as a background against which to interpret the more recent repressive measures. Between 2002 and 2004, the group which should become 'the Houthis' suffered from large numbers of arrests and arbitrary detention in response to their public protests and repression against Zaydi teaching institutions; the months before the unilateral declaration of hostilities by the regime saw a range of these measures. The commencement of aggression can equally be interpreted in line with them: as an offensive initiative against Hussein al-Houthi, the charismatic head of the group. Regime calculations apparently held that once he was deposed from leadership, the opposition would collapse or at least suffer significant decline. However, the brutal killing and subsequent public display and humiliation increase this dimension of grievances; nevertheless, merely after the renewed insult by Saleh against Badr al-Din al-Houthi in spring did the framing change.

Southern opposition suffered from detention and arrests since the mid-1990s. However, the early phase of the Hirak saw merely restricted repression: detention and attempted cooptation of prominent figures were among these measures. From 2009 onwards, however, repression increased to a crackdown on newspapers, more widespread detention, and regular violent

interventions during protests. The situation improved due to the power vacuum after the fall of Saleh and because during the NDC the regime also refrained from demonstrative counteraction against protesters and activists. Yet, in a number of events security force violence escalated, causing numerous civil victims. With the end of the NDC, repression increased again, e.g. in form of the ‘cleaning’ of Aden from depictions of the Southern flag.

It is challenging to weigh repressive measures against each other. Both identity groups suffered from regime repression; due to the high numbers of civil deaths, however, the strength and perdurance of repression against Southerners seem more intensive and consequential. Yet, the HIRAK still refrains from violent escalation.

6.3. Identity

Cultural status HIs have already touched upon some identity issues, such as the rights given to different identity groups, their inclusion, and everyday discrimination.

The axiom of primordialism can be refuted in both cases, based on the fact that the Yemeni government does not constitute an identity group. The HIRAK claims that it is Northern-dominated, and Southerners have already fought a secessionist war in 1994. However, the decisive point is that this is their *claim*, making the interpretation, not identity per se pivotal.

The same holds true for ‘ancient hatreds’, which are assumed to erupt if an opportunity presents itself. For it to be put forward, time periods of only half a decade would also prove far too recent.⁹⁰⁴

This leaves us with symbolic politics. A good example from the cases would be the understanding of the Houthi slogan as a strong symbol. It combines a threatened identity, which necessarily evokes fears, with a hostile symbol/symbolic message and its strategic usage for mobilization. The opportunity was given, and alternate non-violent avenues linked to sociocultural revivalism and political participation had by then been exhausted – all conditions in line with Kaufman’s propositions. Without the distinct and continuous framing efforts, however, the symbol would not have been significant, i.e. merely framing makes it decisive in that regard.⁹⁰⁵ Symbols of the independent PDRY in parallel have become

⁹⁰⁴ If ever the argument would be put forward despite these counter arguments, it also rather hinted at a probability that Southerners (“South Arabians”) violently fought the historical Northern “Other” – but hate or, less severe, resentment has only substantiated in recent times.

⁹⁰⁵ One more, if weaker, line of argument along the identity approach suggests that the mobilization capacity of insurgent movements varies on the basis of its “costs”; the costs again vary depending on the strength of group identity, its cohesion, and demographical factors (Ted R. Gurr and Barbara Harff, *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics* [Boulder: Westview Press, 1994]). In the Houthi case, we can identify a rather strong group identity, which could be reactivated by the movement. Southern Yemeni identity on the other hand was based on a common history, but loose and cut by other identity lines; it was thus more complex to generate. It could hence

powerful in the South after 2011, especially the flag. This has not been the fact from the beginning of the movement, though, but only after the demands have more strongly turned towards secession/independence, i.e. the prognostic framing had changed. Then the symbols were employed in manifold ways to spread the demand, pose the demand, claim territory and else (see framing analysis).

Identity factors are certainly involved and lay at the basis of collective demands. However, they are neither primordial nor ancient, nor does the simple existence of hostile myths and symbols explain them. Collective identity needs to be made salient, and in order to trigger collective action, the salience of identity becomes one part in the framing process aiming at collective action, namely the part of ‘who are we’, ‘who is it that is threatened?’, and, based on that, ‘who needs to act?’.

6.4. Summary

The assessed indicators provide ample evidence for a heightened risk of escalation for both Zaydis and Southerners. Opportunity indicators generally point to increased risk for all of Yemen; population size and male secondary school enrollment allude to a higher risk in the North, whereas peace years imply the same for the South. Under the category of grievances, economic, social, and political HIs weigh towards a higher risk for the South (while also the North is not without positive results here), and cultural status HIs impact on both groups. In a much similar vein, repression affects both, yet is graver for Southerners. Symbols are available for both identity groups, however, as I highlighted jointly, they need to be embedded into frames in order to develop mobilizational effects.

At this point we can deliberately contend that established approaches would predict a heightened risk for the escalation of armed conflict for both the Zaydis as well as Southerners. Whereas this proves correct retrospectively for the Houthis, it makes a false prediction for Southerners, who never took the escalatory step into violence. Besides, certain questions remain unacknowledged for the Houthi case as well: Most indicators are not time-bound, they remained stable over a period. Why did the group escalate when it did? Why not before or later? Furthermore, how exactly did the relevant indicators work in the cases? Which mechanisms operated? The approaches do not provide satisfying answers to these questions.

be argued that the relating argument supports the observation of variation among the cases; nevertheless, I want to make the point that Zaydi cohesion suffered a lot along the status division between Hashemites and non-Hashemites, for the latter of which tribal affiliation or even conversion were possible alternatives which had to be overcome by movement recruiting processes. It might have positively contributed but will never have been a central factor.

However, once we consider the identified indicators as part of the structural context within which then framing processes occur – as suggested in the model – we can approach the overall mechanisms much better: If we perceive, for instance, cultural status HIs as one structural component that both identity groups suffer from, but react on differently, elucidating how each collective perceives them and if/how they counter them, then we can use this understanding to bring us closer to the ultimate answer of why we see variation in action in spite of very similar structural conditions. Chapter Seven will serve this purpose.

7. FRAME ANALYSIS IN THE CASES

7.1. Houthi Frame Development

Since we see a shift in Houthi framing from an earlier, nonviolent framing prior to spring 2005 and the opposite, violent framing, thereafter, the analysis of the framing is subdivided into these two periods.

7.1.1. Framing Prior to Violent Escalation

In line with the central hypothesis of the thesis, the pivotal questions to ask on the basis of this text corpus are: Does Hussein al-Houthi construct the Zaydis as an identity group under threat? If yes, how does he do so? Which are the discourses and myths he taps, the rhetoric he uses, and the scenarios he creates? To whom does he attribute the responsibility for the situation? Which consequences, i.e. which actions, does he call for to avert the threat scenarios? How does he convince his audience of the feasibility of his proposed solutions? How does he motivate them to join the endeavor of collective action to counter the threat?

Based on the model of collective action as developed by framing theory, the analysis is structured according to the diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational components of Hussein's framing.⁹⁰⁶ Beyond that, I will highlight the various corresponding steps of action he himself takes in the direction of fulfilling the demands he raises for they provide further backing for the frames. Since it is not adjuvant to reduce citation to isolated sentences and thereby destroy the logical contextualization of the sources, the following excerpts will be cited in units which often reach beyond the immediate focus; the further implications will subsequently be taken up in upcoming paragraphs and steps of analysis.

7.1.1.1. Diagnostic Framing

Hussein states a problem of collective weakness and related external threat to groups on various levels: to the Muslim *ummah*, Arabs, Yemenis, and Zaydis.

In one of the earlier lectures in January 2002, he generally takes *Muslims* as the reference group he regards under pressure by the other Abrahamic religious groups. The weakness of the *ummah* is causally related to a lack of religious knowledge, closeness to God and religion

⁹⁰⁶ For all these points it is important to keep in mind that we cannot know if Hussein himself was convinced of what he propagated or if he was not but employed it strategically. It is merely possible to state what he said, contextualize it, and point at possible advantages and disadvantages of his proceeding from the one or another perspective.

in the sense of value orientation, and social cohesion as a group. The antagonists, Jews,⁹⁰⁷ and Christians, are intentionally contributing to an intensification of this situation by “penetrating”, “strik[ing]” and “infiltrat[ing]”⁹⁰⁸ them in a comprehensive manner with ideologically and morally corrupt thought. The threat is directed towards Islamic culture, morals, economy, environment, and “all areas of life”⁹⁰⁹. It is thus comprehensive, though with an emphasis on the ideational dimension, which takes chronological precedence over more economic and physical areas. The suggested counteraction aims at the ideational as well; this aspect will be elaborated on in more detail below. The imminence and intensity of the threat is expressed by the degree of intrusion it has reached “into your insides and the deepest parts of your houses and the deepest depths of yourselves”⁹¹⁰.

1 They [the Jews and Christians] are at a stage where they strike the *ummah* and infiltrate by their various despicable means ‘and they endeavor to spread corruption in the earth’ (*surat al-ma’idah*, 5:33): cultural corruption, moral corruption, economic corruption, corruption of the environment and in all areas of life. If so, then it is imperative that *you* (...) at the level of this *ummah* or a society within it – move in the sphere of commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong in all the areas of life and calling for what is good, as if not, then what?⁹¹¹

This intrusion becomes of even graver significance considering the stark separation of private/family spaces (“houses”) and public space in Arab culture and Muslim societies more generally: the protected space ‘home’, associated mainly with the women (who do not cover) and children of a family, is the target of the ingression.⁹¹²

While the above passage refers to the Muslim *ummah* without constraints, another seems to address only Shi‘a Muslims, for it refers to the events of Karbala⁹¹³ and compares the

⁹⁰⁷ Dorlian underlines that Hussein was not only anti-Zionist (in denouncing Israel), but also taking a very strict, essentialist anti-Jewish position. For him, Jews in Yemen are not Yemeni but always merely part of the Jewish community. He backs this claim by analyzing the lecture “Neither the Jews Nor the Christians Will Be Satisfied with You” (p.1). Dorlian, “Sa’da War”, here: 197f.

⁹⁰⁸ The *malazim* (‘Lectures’) will be cited in reference to the complete list in the appendices A and B; the letter in the reference thereby refers to either appendix A (A) or B (B). – Lecture A6, January 14, 2002, 5 [translated and cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 389; some citations of the *malazim* taken from Lux have been abridged and/or some additional mentions of specific Arabic terms have been omitted if they did not seem relevant].

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁹¹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹¹ Ibid.

⁹¹² An anecdote of one of my interviews (with a HIRAK activist living in the Netherlands, March 2014) illustrates this special significance of ‘home’: One interview partner asked me whether another, more prestigious one had invited me to his home for the interview (as he himself had done). When I negated, he critically, almost derogatorily commented that this person never did. The way he put it made it apparent that the situation – the honor of hosting a scholar for an interview or even of hosting another activist with the same goal – culturally demanded the opening of one’s home (read: protected space for trusted individuals) to that person.

⁹¹³ Karbala in Iraq is the holiest city of Shi‘a Muslims. It is the site of martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the son of Ali Ibn Abi Talib, son-in-law of the Prophet Mohamed. This martyrdom is commemorated with mourning rituals on the day of Ashura, the tenth day in the Islamic month of Muharram, the occasion on which this lecture was given.

described contemporary situation with the historical situation that led to the downfall of the first Shi‘ia imams:

2 We – the Muslim *ummah* – (...) experience the [same] state, the psychological state and the identical causes that led to the conditions that would bring down the like of Imam Ali, Imam Hasan, Imam Husayn, Imam Zayd, Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Nafs al-Zakiyah, and others among the greats of the *ahl al-bayt*. (...) If you are not concerned, then some day you will find yourself not only a victim of your neglect, but you will find yourself in a worse position than that; you will find yourself in the ranks of what is false standing against the truth, driven towards the position of all that is false. (...) We, I believe, if we do not go forward to confront all that is false in this day and age, then we will see ourselves driven to become soldiers for America in the battlefields of falsehood against what is true. (...) You blame them [the people of Kufah] for killing Imam Husayn, but why did they do it? What led them to kill him? You live the same psychological state that led them to go out and confront Husayn, so blame yourself when you blame them for their neglect (...) and take care to not be of those who are negligent. (...) Isn't the Qur'an still alive among us? Don't we read it? Don't we evaluate all events according to the noble Qur'an in order that we might draw from the Qur'an what is the position which is demanded of us – in order that we might attain to consciousness and insight and so that we might understand what is going on around us? Whoever turns away, whoever is negligent, whoever is unconcerned and does not care lives state of mind identical to those of the people he castigates who lived more than a thousand years ago.⁹¹⁴

Again, Hussein emphasizes the distance of the current *ummah* (implying the community of Shi‘a Muslims) from religious truth with the consequence of weakness and (ideational) suffering. Here, however, he blames the Shi‘a Muslims themselves for neglect – although they might know better for the truth and guidance could be found in the Qur'an – and hands over the responsibility to act to them. As antagonist he implicitly identifies Sunnis and draws a connection line from them (who represent “all that is false”, i.e. a deviation from ‘true’ Islamic/Qur’anic teaching) and the US, which leads to the creation of an ‘alliance of evil’ directed against the audience.

In line with the occasion on which this lecture or speech was given, Ashura Day, Hussein’s frames are culturally embedded in the highly traumatic and resonant historical narrative of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and his companions in Karbala which is commemorated on that day. It is thus aligned with this highly identity forming, painful narrative providing a solid ground for cultural resonance of the frame and strengthens its vigor against the designated opponents.⁹¹⁵ The fact that he blames the Shi‘a themselves and hands over to them the

⁹¹⁴ Lecture A66, March 23, 2002, 7f. [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 423f.].

⁹¹⁵ On the significance of Ashura in Shi‘a Islam cf. Farhang Mehrvash, and Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “‘Āshūrā’”, *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, ed. Wilferd Madelung and Farhad Daftary (Brill Online, 2015), accessed January 20, 2015, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-islamica/a-shu-ra-COM_0306. According to the article, the outrageousness of the death stemmed from what the perceived “desecrating the inviolability of the Ahl al-bayt”, the family of the Prophet – to whom the Zaydis ascribe their lineage, which highlights the imminent connection between the historical events and their personal closeness to it. “The injustice done to [Imam Hussein] was compounded by the fact that his killers rejoiced in the act, claiming divine

responsibility to act carries with it urgency and facilitates an increase in motivation to act, in other words, it works as a push-factor. Although he predominantly argues along these push-factors in this specific lecture, he simultaneously employs a more pull-factor rhetoric:

The responsibility they have also contains power, the power to break through (negative) lines of continuity, to change the bad condition, and to prevent the occurrence of an even greater (moral and potentially physical) disaster. Feasibility is secure, for the Qur'an serves as central and all-encompassing, thus, sufficient guidance for right conduct, thereby precluding a lack of orientation. How Hussein employs push- and (psychologically more effective) pull strategies in detail will be further elaborated in the sections on prognostic and motivational framing where more explicit examples will be provided.

In a much sharper tone and very explicit mode, another passage denounces (concealed) US aggression directed against Shi'a, implying that the attacks of September 11, 2001 might have been a conspiracy. In this prime example of frame alignment, he takes up a widespread conspiracy theory in the Muslim world and ties it to his threat frame:

3 Osama and the Taliban are not the ones being targeted. The event that occurred in New York is not what motivated America. Who knows, the American intelligence could be the ones who carried out that event, to create justifications and clear the air for them to strike those who really form a danger to them, and they are the Shi'a, they are the Shi'a.⁹¹⁶

On a more reconciliatory stance and referring again to the Muslim *ummah* as a whole, he diagnoses its weakness as the result of inner fragmentation and the mutual endeavors to convert the respective other. These attempts, however, were wrong. They are the consequence of an evolving distancing from the Qur'an and its teachings, only the return to which can resolve this dire state of denominational animosity:

4 The Muslims themselves have come to have internal issues, isn't that so? The Sunni wants to convert the Shi'ite into a Sunni and vice versa; and on the inside, the Shafi'i wants to convert the Hanafi and vice versa; and the Twelver Shi'ite wants to convert the Zaydi, isn't this happening? These endeavors are *not* correct. (...) In our view, we must go back to the noble Qur'an and inculcate ourselves with its values. All of us, we all have mistakes, there are mistakes with every one of us, all of us are mistaken – the Shi'a, the

sanction for it." In practice, the rituals of Ashura among others consist of the "remembrance of the other members of the Ahl al-bayt; [and] the cursing of Husayn's murderers and disassociation of oneself from their actions". The importance is highlighted as well by vom Bruck when contextualizing the memories (and their interpretation) of a *sayyid* in the 1940s. She shows how a personal trauma connects to a collective trauma. Vom Bruck, *Islam*, 90.

⁹¹⁶ Lecture A62, January 17, 2002 [cited in: Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 118].

Zaydis, the Twelver Shi'ites, the Sunnis in all their sects – all of us have mistakes originating in the fact that we have become distanced from the Qur'an, and we must return to it.⁹¹⁷

Hussein anchors his appeal in the established and salient discourse of religious competition and alleged proselytizing intentions by Salafi groups in the Zaydi heartlands, what can be called the “Salafization” or “Wahhabization discourse”. He strongly advocates the need to overcome division lines between the different denominations in favor of a return to the Qur'an – by which he does not mean a return to a literal exegesis (which would go along the lines of Salafi intentions), but a return to its values and – as can be inferred from other passages – a return to a presumably ‘correct’ interpretation.⁹¹⁸

While the topic of a ‘return to the Qur'an’ is ever present in basically all of his lectures and he repeatedly creates urgency and threat scenarios in case of non-action (“we will be victims”), the fact that he seems to contradict himself in his attribution of blame, sometimes openly against Sunni/Salafi/Wahhabi, at other times not, shall be explained below, following the analysis of his addressing of other audience groups.

The danger to *Arabs* equally emanates from America (which naturally includes Israel⁹¹⁹):

5 The distressing thing is that the Arab psychological state – or the Arabs altogether do not take into account the imminent danger to them. (...) Don't we hear about the threats of America? They might hit Saudi Arabia or take over the two holy mosques as they did with Jerusalem. Are we going to wait until they do their work and only then proffer advice or say something?⁹²⁰

The threat scenario – despite its at first glance far-fetched picture of the US attacking the KSA – gains significant credibility from its historical context: The lecture was given in March 2002, five months after the commencement of the US-led war in Afghanistan, which was very unpopular in Yemen (as in the whole Arab world) and which took place in a climate of suspicion and aggression in which Muslim rulers of more than one country feared they might be the next state the US could enter war with. As already noted for prior passages, Hussein sees the problem on an internal and ideational level; he depicts the potential aggression as geared towards a ‘sacred’ part of religion and links it with the historical ‘loss’ of Jerusalem,

⁹¹⁷ Lecture A3, January 11, 2002, 12–13 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 426]. The sura ‘*al-Imran*’ is of specific importance for Muslims generally and Zaydis specifically for it is in this sura, verse 104, where the instruction to “command what is right and forbid what is wrong” is formulated. It is mentioned in this phrasing in seven further suras, underlining its centrality. For a comprehensive interpretation, contextualization, and historical account of its exegesis in all major Islamic schools and denominations see: Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁹¹⁸ Lecture A32, August 4, 2002, 20 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 415].

⁹¹⁹ The connection is drawn one sentence later, however, since it is in a very explicit passage on what shall be done against this threat, the text will be cited and analyzed in the section on ‘prognostic framing’.

⁹²⁰ Lectures A35 and A36, February 1–2, 2002, 11f. [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 390; he misdates them March 9].

something Muslims mourn even today. He thereby rhetorically creates a line of continuity of continuous threat by non-Muslim intruders and of harsh losses for Muslims.

6 What freedom remains for the Arabs in circumstances like these? Who is the Arab – whether leader or ordinary citizen – who is able to say that the Arabs enjoy an atom of freedom? What particle of freedom remains for any Arab, whether leader or ordinary citizen, when they are under the feet of everyone, under the feet of those who heap upon them humiliation and despair and who court the wrath of Allah? Is there freedom? Freedom does not come through expressions, freedom is represented in our absolute devotion to Allah (...) freedom which makes us strike America and Israel with an iron hand.⁹²¹

Lack of freedom, humiliation, despair – the state of all Arabs is miserable in comparison to all others. The sole solution to overcome this situation is “absolute devotion” to God and offensive action against the identified antagonists – Hussein emphasizes it again and again.

The following passage of the influential lecture “Yawm al-Quds al-Alami” (“International Jerusalem Day”) well illustrates the deep rooting and the great dimensions of the threat he identifies, as well as the significant linkages of his diagnosis, prognosis, and motivational component; it shall therefore be cited more extensively:

7 The Jews know well those who pose a danger to them. (...) Now, as for Yemenis themselves (...) is it possible for them to withstand one week of a war with Israel? No. I say that Yemenis could not withstand even one week because all foodstuffs, all of our food, all of our clothes, all of our staples, everything among necessities and accoutrements is subject to the hegemony of America, and through a decision from America, it is possible for it to cut off everything so Yemenis will surrender. (...) The Arabs are absolutely not able to stand up before the Jews unless they reconstitute their life anew; but, they will not be able to reconstitute their life anew under the leadership that rules them now because they are the ones who have neglected all the agricultural lands. You will find that the ministry of agriculture in any Arab country is the lowest in status, and the ministry with the least activity. In Yemen itself, how many lands are there suitable for agriculture? Yet, we import even lentils, even *fusuliyah* beans, flour and corn from Australia, China and others. Yemen is sufficient to its needs and those of others if only things were *planted*. Why does Yemen import everything from that which is subject to the hegemony of America and Israel? Is it possible for the Arabs to fight when their leaders have brought them to humiliation and to this deplorable state? The military confrontation was fifty years ago. As for now, it has become a civilizational confrontation, it has become the confrontation of civilizations.⁹²²

Hussein here ties together groups of actors in a ‘we-they-divide’ and – in a Huntington-like manner – claims a “civilizational struggle”. The threat generally emanates from “Westerners”, more specifically from the hegemonic powers “America and Israel” or “the Jews” respectively. It is on the other hand generally directed against Muslims (including Iran), Arabs, and Yemenis. Rather than making it blurry and too unspecific, this wide range

⁹²¹ Lecture A66, March 23, 2002, 15 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 422].

⁹²² Lecture A61, December 14, 2001, 19 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 416f.; he misdates it December 13].

increases the weight of the menace: Yes, it is an enormous “civilizational confrontation”, It has a strong economic component which can ultimately endanger survival in case of a negative decision by the enemies, at the moment there is no capacity to withstand this peril, plus the blame is to be attributed to Arab leaders themselves. This desolate state, however, needs to lead to desperation, paralysis, or resignation. The threat scenario can be inferred: Arabs are able to “reconstitute their life anew” and thereby gain the strength to counter America and Israel, the physical basis for economic stability in Yemen is existent needing only to be used, the clearly developed strategy is available only needing to be employed, and, lastly, there is a prominent and successful example of all that Hussein describes and proposes: the Iran of Ayatollah Khomeini.⁹²³

The distinction between a threat to the Arabs and to *Yemenis* is merely weak. This rather harshly toned paragraph⁹²⁴ inflicts the impression that while Hussein never explicitly mentions Saleh, it is him whom he means to criticize and to blame for allying with the US in its counterterrorism schemes:

8 Hasn't the *ummah* suffered up to this day from these types of rulers, which we see before us far and wide in the Islamic countries? (...) There is no value in the state that rules in the name of Islam where its ruler rides on the necks of Muslims and sits on the throne in an Islamic country if it does not promote the truth and do away with what is false. (...) When we hear, dear brothers, that the leaders of the Arabs and the Muslims are all rushing to agree that America should form an alliance for the war against what it calls 'terrorism'; then when we all see them standing with America in the fight against what they call terrorism because they all covet power, they all are vigilant about staying in their positions whatever the cost. Of course, they will never admit this so they say this is for the sake of preserving security and stability – preserving the welfare of the nation, or they say they are 'afraid of the stick' – this new expression that we hear from some of them – 'afraid of the stick'; but what 'stick' is more harsh than that of Allah or the hellfire or humiliation in the life of this world? Is there any 'stick' harsher than that?⁹²⁵

Imam Ali is the ideal leader figure to which Arab and Muslim rulers are contrasted for their (willful) ignorance of their religious duties, their “selling out” of their people to keep their own position, their lies to their people, and finally for being more afraid of the US than of God. In short: They fail, and thus their rule is illegitimate. What feeds the assumption that Hussein alludes to Saleh are the detailed descriptions of the precise steps taken and the argumentation given for these steps; they are congruent with Saleh's actions to a degree that

⁹²³ In an earlier paragraph Hussein highlights how “Imam Khomeini (...) revived the correct view, realized that this ummah had come to be, in its struggle with the Jews, involved in a cultural civilizational struggle” and that self-sufficiency was a necessary ingredient for this confrontation. Ibid.

⁹²⁴ Taken from the lecture given on Ashura 2002, which as a whole uses quite an aggressive language.

⁹²⁵ Lecture A66, March 23, 2002, 3 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 422].

leaves little space to plead otherwise: He joined the US War on Terrorism and allowed the US to enter Yemeni territory and to conduct missions.

The most sensitive aspect in regard to Zaydi interpretation can be deduced from the accusation that the accused “do not engage in the truth and extirpate what is false”. According to Zaydi doctrine this means that they do not fulfill their duty as rulers and hence lose their legitimacy; on the side of his subjects this implies their right or even duty to *khurūj*, i.e. to rise and oust this ruler. Forestalling the section on the prognostic frame, I want to highlight here that although he does not explicitly call for *khurūj* in any of his speeches, Hussein very clearly *does* refer to it and – being the well-educated Zaydi scholar, experienced politician, and capable rhetorician – he chose and constructed his speech very carefully and purposefully. It was not accidental and the fact that Northern Yemenis are very well acquainted with deciphering and interpreting the meaning of highly complex and metaphorical tribal poetry leaves no doubt that he was understood.

In regard to *Yemeni* weakness specifically, he adds a material, economic dimension to the ideational one:

9 Whenever they put forth an initiative for growth for particular years, see how much they will demand in loans from other countries. And for these loans, see how much they will add to them in usurious interest (*riba*)⁹²⁶; then, see what will happen in the end. *Nothing*. Growth is not undertaken except on a basis of the guidance of Allah. (...) We hear the term ‘growth’ every year, every week, every day – ‘growth...growth’, but what we see is the growth of *prices*, isn’t that so? What is happening? Is there growth in what pertains to economic infrastructure? Or is there growth in costs? Isn’t there inflation? Isn’t there depression in both people and value? There is no growth in the reality of people of the reality of life. And moreover, if there is ‘growth’ then it is exchange for bearing heavy burdens that render us slaves to others and colonizers who are much more fierce than the colonizers and colonialism from which people suffered in decades past. ‘Growth’ in the view of these others is nothing more than the transformation of us into a driving force for their products and in their factories, a transformation of the *ummah* into a consumer market for their products so that no one among the people sees himself as being able to do without them: his power, his clothes, all his needs are in their hands. Is this ‘growth’?⁹²⁷

The dependency on a capitalist doctrine of growth Hussein diagnoses is first denounced as un-Islamic and immoral, then as ineffective or even counterproductive and costly in terms of pressure on the population, and subsequently as a form of neocolonialism, i.e. as a form of being subdued by the external other (which again is the US as the representative of capitalist market economy). Given the volatile Yemeni economy, he rhetorically skillfully asks his audience about their daily experience of the economic situation, which accounts for one of the

⁹²⁶ The Qur’an forbids earning from money only (i.e. interest rates based on lending). So-called ‘Islamic banks’ circumvent this prohibition by obtaining an equity, a non-monetary asset.

⁹²⁷ Lecture A63, January 24, 2002, 8 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 388].

central grievances: lack of infrastructure and inflation. When evaluated in terms of framing terminology, he thereby harnesses the experiential commensurability of this already very central topic in the lives of ordinary Northerners⁹²⁸. Who, then, is responsible? First, Saleh:

10 We see that, in the end, it is nothing more than fish bait; not a single promise has been kept as Ali Abdullah Salih said when he visited: ‘God willing, in 1986 Sa’dah will be on a single power grid’; then came 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991 and nothing happened – we remained applying for electricity for seven years for a single region.⁹²⁹

Saleh did not keep his promises and the North remained very weak infrastructurally, lacking such basic provisions as electricity. The term “fish bait” alludes to Saleh’s behavior not as incapacity or just accidental ‘bad luck’ for the project, but as *intentional* duping of the people. Saleh is presented as a liar.

Second, more widely, political and social elites. The topic of agricultural self-sufficiency is very central in a number of Hussein’s lectures⁹³⁰ and he relates it to the (mis)behavior of elites. His stance is one of an agrarian reformer,⁹³¹ and his analysis of the opportunities inherent in agricultural lands and the loss of those opportunities in a society, which is still predominantly rural, must be considered adequate. Especially, but not exclusively, to those who returned from the KSA since 1991 and could not be absorbed into the agricultural sector anymore – many of whom belong to the age cohort as Hussein himself – the issue can be assumed to have been very salient. The political elites are portrayed as corrupt, opportunistic, and misleading to their voters; they are securing their own profits whereas there is no improvement on the issues they claim to pursue for their constituents. In regard to the farming population on the other hand Hussein repeatedly relates to “dignity” and “pride”, core values in *qabalyāh*. What he suggests to counter these circumstances is (very limited) political action: That the people seize an active role as voters and demand a sincere engagement of their candidates instead of the prevalent corruption and opportunism. Remaining passive must not be an option for it is overshadowed by the threat a thinkable embargo declared by the US (and potentially followed by numerous other states) poses on this very local level he addresses. It would result in a further decline of agriculture and possibly immediate hunger. The danger is imminent.

Third, he binds together the issues of lacking development and blaming the US and Israel in a very open and unspecific accusation:

⁹²⁸ Note that it refers to all Northerners, not only Zaydis. The targeted audience is regionally specified.

⁹²⁹ Lecture A6, January 14, 2002, 12 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 389].

⁹³⁰ Exemplarily see: Lecture A65, February 7, 2002, 7f. [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 389].

⁹³¹ Cf. Lux, *Last Imam*, 387ff.

11 Why did America come to Yemen? Under the pretext of spreading democracy and fighting terror? Did they come to be briefed on the situation in Yemen, and then decide what kinds of projects were needed for Yemen's development? Or did they come to plough and sow the lands or make beehives? Did they come to work with us or for something else? America is the greatest devil and lies behind every evil in the world. The ones who rule America are Jews and they are described in our Quran as those who mislead people.⁹³²

This excerpt complements the framing of Yemen's economic dependency with the accusation that the US and Israel never intended to assist Yemen in its development, but only intervened with malignant intentions. Although he begins with a focus on the economy, Hussein once more emphasizes the Qur'anic stance on this issue and thus assures his statement with religious legitimacy.

The discourse of terrorism allegations and the complicit role of the regime in joining in to the war on terrorism are taken up in depth.⁹³³ Terrorism, according to Hussein, is the excuse given by the US to destroy and rebuild the world according to its own interests. He, on the other hand, doubts the existence of terrorism cells in Yemen, hence, the factual basis of their legitimization for pressuring the country. In his eyes, "America" has great might: It is able to steer the Yemenis' "attention", implying 'perception'. This is very dangerous for – as he has elaborated in other lectures – the threat Muslims/Arabs/Yemenis/Zaydis face is partly ideational. Consequently, this influence is to be taken very seriously as it is part of the 'arena of contestation'. Guilty of treason in the sense of cooperation with, or at least of buckling to the adversary, is the regime, which is "selling out" the nation, religion, and future generations. Guilty for not opposing this, however, is also the *'ulamā'*, i.e. the religious elites who remain passive. They are hence complicit with the regime which positions them on the 'they' side of the 'we-they-divide'.

How the regime is doing wrong is furthermore explicated in the last, yet, in regard to the argument, the most important group of text excerpts under analysis here: those diagnosing the weakness of the *Zaydis*.

12 We used to say that we hope the State will just leave us to [deal with] the Wahhabis when they first entered into Yemen. But then, we saw that they were paving the way for these Wahhabis to enter and ensconcing them in the Ministry of Education and the Ministries of Awqaf (charitable endowments) and mosques and other places. They put them into positions and then if anyone says anything against them, if a *khatib* gives a *khutbah* (sermon) against them, or if there is a disturbance in a mosque, they go out and arrest the Zaydis and let the Wahhabis go free. The Wahhabi can call [governor of the

⁹³² Lecture A29, February 3, 2002 (cited in: *Yemen Times*, "Who was Hussein al-Houthi?", June 17, 2013, accessed January 29, 2015, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1686/report/2495/Who-was-Hussein-Al-Houthi.htm>).

⁹³³ Lecture A63, January 24, 2002, 6f. [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 407f.].

province of al-Muhwayt] Ali Muhsin⁹³⁴ directly, but the Zaydi can't call anybody and nobody answers, not even the provincial office. Then after they filled the population with these people and made us stand there helpless in front of them, they started calling them terrorists so they could take them out and bring in an even better type – bring in the Americans. They took out the Wahhabis, and they brought in the Americans. So, we say again, let the people of Yemen deal with America and the Americans – it will not reflect badly upon you – but to impose upon the people of Yemen, that you should impose upon others among the people of Saudi Arabia and Egypt or of any people your positions and your weakness, this is the worst crime of all in the view of Allah, and the greatest deception of people, religion and the *ummah*.⁹³⁵

The initial threat emanates from the influx of Wahhabis (the generalized term used widely to denote Salafi streams of Islam), since the 1970s the well-established religious adversaries. Blame lies with the regime, for it assisted them, placed them in high-ranking political positions with lots of influence on education and religion (i.e. a great impact on the ideational sphere), supports them, and protects them when necessary. Zaydis, on the other hand, get the short end of the stick: When tensions between them and Wahhabis lead to incidents (what Hussein downplays to “disturbances”), they lack such protection due – that this is due to active discrimination can be presumed from the implicit subtext – but instead face repression and are “helpless”. When pointing to incidents and arrests, Hussein most probably alludes to concrete, salient events; unfortunately, I was not able to establish this connection but still consider it relevant to note the point for it once more emphasizes the anchoring of his framing in the immediate experiences and discourses of his audience. When the regime changed its strategy, allied with the US, and exposed the formerly supported Wahhabis to terrorism allegations, the situation became equal to the first one: Zaydis wanted to deal with the adversary (as the US is understood), but the regime would not let them. Hence, there is a historical continuity of deception of the people and religion by the regime, the regime is guilty, the more so in the eyes of God – i.e. their guilt is religiously framed which further augments it. It remains open what “deal with” implies in this context.

Indirectly, Hussein furthermore delegitimizes Saleh's rule by accusing those who follow him of *shirk*, idolatry, the worst sin there is in Islam:

13 When we accord the *hakimiyah* of Allah to someone not operating on the basis of the guidance of Allah, then we are like those who orient their worship towards other than Allah; and in fact, I remember some of the ‘*ulamā*’ believe that this is actually *shirk* – that we should believe in a *hakimiyah* of other than that of Allah – who does not possess the legitimacy which persists on this basis; in that case you have committed *shirk* with your god, committed idolatry against Allah.⁹³⁶

⁹³⁴ The second most important figure in the state at that time (see chapter 4.1.4.).

⁹³⁵ Lecture A66, 2002, 16 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 403f.].

⁹³⁶ Lecture A13, January 22, 2002, 15 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 384].

Pleading allegiance to Saleh is thus turned into a more than existential threat: condemnation by God in the afterlife for this unforgivable sin.⁹³⁷

The frame of the wronged *Zaydis* is very clearly explicated in the following passage, which he introduces with hinting at the acuteness of the matter:

14 We Zaydis have kept silent for centuries – not just for generations – and among later Zaydis were those who saw it possible to stop and remain silent about the matter of Abu Bakr and Umar in order to preserve unity with the others and to mind the feelings of others. (...) [T]he silence on this matter was not on the basis of attributing legitimacy to their *khilafah* or these two (...) but it was for the sake of creating an atmosphere of unity for the Muslims together with one another, and to respect the feelings of others among the Sunnis, whether they were inside Yemen or outside of it. We were silent despite our belief that they – that is the two sheikhs, Abu Bakr and Umar, were in error, rebellious and astray (...) We were silent out of respect (...) but they mobilized with the change of the times and when the state became theirs, they presented them to us with big names: ‘al-Sadiq’ and ‘al-Faruq’. We were silent about them (...) and then they began foisting Mu’awiyah and Yazid upon us as well (...) the Shi‘a h throughout history have been the sect most vigilant about attempting to provide an atmosphere for unity with the others, but the others don’t have a single atom of concern to unite with the Shi‘a h or to bear an atom of respect for them. (...) When the Imams of the Zaydiyyah were the ones who ruled Yemen they did not impose upon them a *muadhin* or a *khatib* or an imam of a mosque or a *qāḍī* or a mufti; they appointed *qāḍīs* and muftis from among the Shafa’is for them, and even when some of these were Zaydis they gave fatāwa for the Shafa’is in accordance with their *madhab*, and they made the call to prayer in their regions according to their *adhan*, and prayed according to their style of prayer. They did not oppose them. What happened when the situation changed? They worked for what one of them termed ‘conquests’ (*fatuhāt*) – one of them actually termed it ‘conquests’ (...)⁹³⁸

In the beginning, he creates acuteness (“at a stage”, “imperative”) and claims factuality of his depiction. He also speaks in the inclusive first person plural, “we Zaydis”, thus creating an immediate bond aiming to enhance the community feeling and affectional connection. The roots of the weakness of and injustice or wrongdoing against Zaydis are centuries old;⁹³⁹ they go back to the founding era of Islam and the original question of succession of the Prophet Mohamed. Although they were aware that Sunnis “were in error, rebellious and astray”, they remained silent. They remained silent because they are peace-loving, respectful, and considerate towards the feelings of the Sunnis; they acted “for the sake (...) of unity”. Sunnis on the other hand are characterized as the opposite, as inconsiderate and aggressive. Hussein asserts that during the Imamate Sunnis were given all religious freedom they might have wanted. After the revolution in 1962, however, Zaydis did not get any of this freedom.

⁹³⁷ On shirk see: Daniel Gimaret, “Shirk”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. (Brill Online, 2015). accessed January 21, 2015, http://www.referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/s-h-irk-SIM_6965.

⁹³⁸ Lecture A66, March 23, 2002, 1f. [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 403].

⁹³⁹ Similarly pointed out by vom Bruck in regard to the traumatic experiences of 1962 for *sadah* and their interpretation/remembrances against the background of “harassment suffered by the *ahl al-bayt* since the days of Umayyad rule”. Vom Bruck, *Islam*, 90.

Instead, they were confronted with open aggression, termed “conquests” as Hussein cites his source. Beyond these bad intentions and character flaws, he furthermore accuses them for their allegedly wrong interpretation of the Qur’an and the resulting contemporary political consequences.⁹⁴⁰ The central theme of his speeches is the question of preordainment by God. Sunni and Shi’a exegesis differ here. Without specifying the range of variation between diverse groups, the very general difference is that Sunnis *madhabs* assume some degree of divine preordainment while Shi’a denominations reject it and emphasize the free human will and agency in shaping one’s life and social conditions.⁹⁴¹ Hussein is vehemently arguing against the assumption of preordination. Even further, he does not contend the issue in sole theological terms, but denounces the Sunni interpretation as a “lie”,⁹⁴² thus framing it as an active action (in contrast to a mere misunderstanding or mistake). Its intentionality can hence be blamed. The ‘lie’ holds that God is the source of injustice as well. In the eyes of Hussein this is a vicious revilement of God, and on the level of social order it carries the seed of the justification of unjust rule in it. The submission of the ‘*ulamā*’ to such rulers is identified as a cause of the weakness of the *ummah* in the face of “the most despicable creatures of Allah”. What results from this dire state is far-reaching: If the ruler is unjust and religiously in the wrong and the ‘*ulamā*’ is acquiescent to this and legitimizes such acquiescence for all believers/citizens, then the situation will continue of erroneous belief and resulting religious erroneous behavior – the most condemnable of all. The solution he proposes to the problem of misguided leadership will be discussed below.

Lastly, Hussein criticizes material excesses and related ostentatively religious behavior he regards as false: In the beginning he points out how the need to confront the enemies of Islam cannot be ignored in favor of sole supplicating to God. “If this were the case, then all we would need to do is to say – like those Wahhabis and Sunnis when they are so pious in their

⁹⁴⁰ Lecture A61, December 14, 2001, 22, 26 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 381–382; he misdates it December 13]; Lecture A6, January 14, 2002, 14 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 396].

⁹⁴¹ The Shi’a concept that takes the place of the ‘*qada wa qadr*’ (predestination) is ‘*bada*’.

⁹⁴² What needs to be considered at this point is that this is no unique allegation; rather, it is an established discursive tool, as Gerald Hawting points out: “The typical allusiveness of the qur’ānic style (...) combines with its use of polemic to make identification of the groups concerned, specification of their characteristics and even confirmation of their existence, difficult. Polemic involves distortion and exaggeration of the opponents’ positions and standard polemical accusations, such as idolatry, following error, distortion of scripture (...), and inventing lies about God (...), are transferable between different opponents.” Thus, Hussein’s allegations should be evaluated once more in light of their high narrative fidelity. Gerald R. Hawting, “Parties and Factions”, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Washington D.C.: Brill Online, 2015), accessed January 20, 2015, http://www.referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/parties-and-factions-EQSIM_00316.

prayers at noon, afternoon, evening, night and dawn (...).⁹⁴³ Instead of acting along the religious commands, many Muslims stick to mere ostentation:

15 Rather we go back to supplications (*du'a*). The *mutawwa* gets out of the luxury car at the Masjid al-Haram (in Mecca) with soldiers on the right and the left of him, and they make supplications – just as in any other country where this is the modus operandi – then he gets back into the luxury car, goes back to the apartment or the huge air-conditioned estate equipped with every type of amenity, and the mission is over.⁹⁴⁴

According to Lux, the term “*mutawwa*” is used derisively for a religiously observant person who ‘follows’ the laws – but, according to the subtext, remains empty spiritually. It is used predominantly for Saudis, i.e. it alludes to Wahhabis.⁹⁴⁵ The overly generous donations of those Yemenis who made their fortunes abroad in the Gulf States are evaluated along the same lines of acts empty of significant impact:

16 We saw a mosque in San'a built through donations by a merchant, and the minaret alone cost seven million riyals – I have no idea how much the mosque itself cost, but the minaret was seven million! That amount could do a lot of good work in the area of orienting people towards the religion of Allah, towards the noble Qur'an and in educating them according to it, or in confronting the enemy or providing the means to do so. We see that even a small contribution in the area in which we are working can go a long way; how would it be if there were a contribution of seven million riyals? This minaret, what will it do? (...) however, when you build a human being on the basis of the Qur'an, isn't he someone who is capable of shooting at America? Is it possible for the minaret to some day turn into a rocket that will be launched and destroy a city among the cities of unbelief? No (...) you did not build a human being, you did not build ‘minarets’ – the true minaret is the human being whom you build on the basis of the Qur'an and who builds and constructs himself according to the guidance of Allah where his success is on the basis of the Qur'an.⁹⁴⁶

In addition to his criticism, the passage also mirrors once more his conviction that the Qur'an is the source of guidance for all action, his ideational orientation, – “build a human being” – and his offensive stance against the US, which here is articulated in a more militant tone than on other occasions cited about.

This subchapter had the purpose of presenting the diagnostic framing of the later Houthi movement as it was developed in the text corpus of Hussein al-Houthi's lectures. A number of notable aspects could be observed: First, Hussein did not restrict his diagnosis of collective weakness and related external threat to merely one group; instead, he switches between the Muslim *ummah*, Arabs, Yemenis, and Zaydis. This openness or inclusiveness in regard to his audience has the advantage that it allowed for a wider recruitment base beyond an exclusively

⁹⁴³ Lecture A2, January 9, 2002, 4 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 386].

⁹⁴⁴ Lecture A2, January 9, 2002, 5 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 386].

⁹⁴⁵ Lux, *Last Imam*, 386, n. 17.

⁹⁴⁶ Lecture B5, November 1, 2003, 4 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 420].

Zaydi constituency, e.g. *qabā'il* and the general non-Zaydi population in the North. While they certainly would not have been responsive to *exclusively* Zaydi address, up to this point some other frame elements (such as, for example, the agrarian neglect or the related neocolonialist critique) might resonate with them, too. This should specifically become important at later stages of the conflict, when these other groups entered into the armed conflict as well and had to choose their sides.⁹⁴⁷ In addition, it abrogated the counterframe spread by the regime to a certain degree, which claimed that the Houthis were striving to reestablish the imamate. This would have implied a Hashemite exclusivism, a potentially inciting issue for non-Hashemites given the negative discourse surrounding the imamate era, which could be thwarted by these inclusive components. Second, I consider Hussein's reasoned argumentation and elaborate rhetoric worth noting. Far from being blatantly inflaming, he rather leads his audience through a complex, multi-layered line of argumentation that connects theological debates, Qur'an quotations, the audience's life environment, social discourses, current events, political developments, and appeals for personal and collective engagement in an intricate yet accessible manner. He succeeds in creating coherence, irrespective of the numerous strands he takes up, and his speech does not drift into scholarly spheres but remains grounded and apprehensible. His extensive experience – and talent – in teaching, preaching, and political debate becomes obvious. In framing terminology, he masters the establishment of both credibility and salience.⁹⁴⁸

Beyond their multifaceted diagnostic framing, some of the passages already contain indications of the measures Hussein suggests in order to deal with the problems he identifies. At the core of his prescriptions, as they have been presented so far, lies a *return to the Qur'an* as sole source of belief and acceptable action and the initiation of some kind of *counteraction against the perceived antagonist US*. That is, some kind of intervention is required in regard to the dominance of *unjust rule*, which form this ought to take precisely requires additional elucidation. A detailed analysis of his prognostic framing will be the content of the following subchapter.

⁹⁴⁷ To prevent misapprehension: At these stages Hussein had already been dead. The framing authority passed over to his successors, from 2005/06 on mainly his younger brother Abdul Malik, who could then employ the already established 'direction of impact'.

⁹⁴⁸ Strictly taken, these are measures for resonance. However, the degree to which they – theoretically – have been realized already in frame development can serve as a measure for the quality of the frame and the rhetoric quality which supports its distribution.

7.1.1.2. Prognostic Framing

Hussein al-Houthi's thought should not be treated in isolation, but as deeply embedded in theological discourse and tradition. Especially in regard to his prognostic framing, it proves consequential and helps to further contextualize his argumentation thereby making it more intelligible. Lux, who explicitly analyzes the *malazim* from this angle, cogently reveals the significant traces of Mu'tazilite influence to be detected in them.⁹⁴⁹ From the 8th to the 10th century, the Mu'tazila⁹⁵⁰ was one of the most important schools of Islamic theology in contemporary Iraq⁹⁵¹. It was subsequently suppressed and only pockets survived in Zaydi and Twelver Shi'a theology as well as some schools of Jewish theology.⁹⁵² Its main characteristic is its strong emphasis on reason and rational thought, rooted, among other sources, in Greek philosophy. It developed as a reaction to political tyranny and sought to provide answers to pressing political questions – one aspect that could be viewed as an albeit distant parallel to Hussein's diagnosis to a degree, since he considers Yemen's ruler(s) as unjust. Five principles form the core of Mu'tazilite theology: (1) The absolute unity of God (*tawhid*). Mu'tazilites deduce from this principle that nothing can be co-eternal with God, not even the Qur'an. For them, the holy book is therefore created – a belief that sets them in opposition to modern mainstream Islam and is one of the reasons why the Mu'tazila is often viewed as heretical. (2) Divine justice (*al-'adl*). In order to explain the existence of evil, Mu'tazilites highlight the free will of human beings, which can lead to errors and hence evil. Again, this stands in contrast to the belief in divine predestination in mainstream interpretation⁹⁵³ (as has already been stated in regard to Hussein's diagnostic framing). (3) The (divine) promise and threat (*al-wa'ad wa al wa'id*). For one's innate submission to God, knowledge of God, truth, and corresponding choices, He promises His followers compensation; a lack thereof, on the other hand, leads to punishment. (4) The intermediate position (*al-manzilah bayna al-manzilatayn*)

⁹⁴⁹ Lux, *Last Imam*, 379ff. At the same time, however, he emphasizes how vehemently Hussein himself distanced himself from their procedure, the *ilm al-kalam*, equivalent to a 'science of discourse' on which theological questions were debated rationally (ibid., 380–381). Nevertheless, Hussein was well-versed in their theology and the influence on his argumentation and core assumptions can hardly be refuted.

⁹⁵⁰ An excellent overview of the Mu'tazila is provided by Sabine Schmidtke, "Mu'tazila", *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Washington D.C.: Brill Online), 2015, accessed January 20, 2015, http://www.referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/mu-tazila-EQCOM_00127. For more details see the extensive work of Schmidtke on the topic of Medieval Islamic theology generally and the Mu'tazila in Yemen specifically.

⁹⁵¹ In the cities of Basra and Baghdad, to be precise.

⁹⁵² Concerning the relation between Mu'tazila and Zaydiyya see: "Zaydiyya", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, accessed January 20, 2015, http://www.referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/zaydiyya-COM_1385.

⁹⁵³ Cf. Dmitry V. Frolov, "Freedom and Predestination", *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Washington D.C.: Brill Online), 2015, accessed January 21, 2015, http://www.referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/freedom-and-predestination-EQSIM_00163.

of Muslims who commit sins and die without repentance. They are positioned in between believers and non-believers. (5) Commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong (*al-amr bi-‘l ma‘ruf wa an-nahy ‘an al-munkar*).⁹⁵⁴ This last point specifically appears repeatedly in Hussein’s lectures. It connects well with the Zaydi command of *al-khurūj ‘alā l-ḥākīm* (shortened to: *khurūj*), rebellion against an unjust ruler.⁹⁵⁵ One of the crucial questions in analyzing the *malazim* is if Hussein called for *khurūj*, i.e. if he called for rebellion.

Three interlinked aspects of Hussein’s basis of argumentation in – or, rather, the preconditions he creates with – his prognostic framing relegates to Mu’tazilite thought: the relevance of this world (i.e. before the afterlife), the free will of human beings, and individual responsibility.

17 [W]e are ignorant of the fact that there is a threat for every [evil] deed that we commit, for every insufficiently fulfilled obligation, for every obligation we neglect and for every divine command that we do not answer – that there is a *threat* (...) We must know that this of which we are now in the midst is a *punishment* for neglect that transpired from us, for a neglect that is ours in what pertains to the commands of Allah.⁹⁵⁶

What emerges from this text passage is the urgent need to overcome the prevalent neglect of the audience in fulfilling God’s commands. In the wake of worldly retribution, there can be no delay in action. As a framing strategy, Hussein thus creates urgency for action by highlighting the threat of continuing the bad situation in addition to punishing the negligent individuals in the afterlife (a punishment which might seem far-fetched and thus do little to motivate). His stance against predestination and concomitant affirmation of human free will has already been treated.⁹⁵⁷ Lastly, the issue of individual responsibility is added. After an accusation of Sunnis for the dire state of the Muslim *ummah*, Hussein continues:

18 ‘You are the best *ummah* brought forth for people, you command what is just and you forbid what is wrong and you believe in Allah’ (*surat al-‘Imran*, 3:100), isn’t this the *responsibility* that was placed upon them?

⁹⁵⁴ Cf. Ahmad Pakatchi and Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “al-Amr bi al-ma‘rūf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munkar”, *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, accessed January 21, 2015, http://www.referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-islamica/al-amr-bi-al-ma-ru-f-wa-al-nahy-an-al-munkar-COM_0278; Cook, *Commanding*, on the importance and exegesis of this obligation in both the Mu’tazila and Zaydiyya, including the parallels and connections between the two (p. 237).

⁹⁵⁵ On the legitimacy of rebellion against a ruler, “*khurūj*”, see: Khaled Abou El Fadl, “Rebellion”, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur‘ān*, accessed January 20, 2015, http://www.referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/rebellion-EQSIM_00352.

⁹⁵⁶ Lecture A17, January 28, 2002, 9 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 383]. For a very similar line of argument see also: Lecture A39, March 3, 2002, 1–4 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 382].

⁹⁵⁷ See also: Lecture B15, November 12, 2003, 2f. [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 384f.].

19 Did not Allah say to Muhammad: ‘Fight in the way of Allah, no other is charged [with responsibility] other than you’ (*surat al-nisa*, 4:84)? In the end, if *you* do not find anyone to fight in the way of Allah, then you – yourself – fight.⁹⁵⁸

20 The Zaydiyyah (...) ought to be the most concerned Muslims, the first to go out in confrontation of the enemies, and to be the most conscious and faithful because their beliefs are very dangerous to them; and it is not something that they borrowed or imposed upon themselves, but it is simply the logic of the Qur’an itself that threatens with eternity in hellfire if they transgress its bounds.⁹⁵⁹

Sunnis have failed to uphold the command of “command[ing] what is right and (...) forbid[ding] what is wrong”. The Zaydis, on the other hand, have a special status and hence a special responsibility; i.e. the honor such a special status brings comes with a burden – carrot and stick are rhetorically combined in this assertion. By handing them the responsibility, Hussein first of all creates the *precondition*, or at least a *solid basis*, for his subsequent prognostic framing: He emphasizes, possibly strengthens, agency by invoking religious duty and thereby establishing a certain pressure to take action. It is close to the ‘common identity frame’ of ‘being Zaydi’: ‘We are Zaydi, Zaydis have received from God the responsibility to secure proper social and religious conditions, thus, we have received it, thus, we need to act accordingly.’ In combination with free will, they have at the same time the freedom and the duty to do so. But what is there that they can do? Here, Hussein’s prognostic frame enters the picture.

The differentiation we have seen in the diagnostic framing between the weakness of the Muslim *ummah*, Arabs, Yemenis, and finally Zaydis is dissolved in the prognostic framing. Where in the former it could serve to extend the audience and thus the circle of potentially mobilizable people, in the latter it would solely diminish the coherence of the plan of action, thereby lead to confusion, and ultimately (in the case of successful mobilization and action) to reduced impact. Hence, Hussein does well in transmitting less differentiated messages. Some of which, however, do set restrictions in regard to the audience that can be reached (e.g. calls to follow an imam, which would only target Shi‘a /Zaydis).

The ‘Qur’anic guidance frame’ forms the core. “We depend on the Qur’an”⁹⁶⁰ and “The readily apparent meaning (*zahir*) of the Qur’an suffices you”⁹⁶¹ are complemented by the assignation to study and internalize the holy book:

21 The Qur’an is strength entirely, entirely correct views and correct solutions; it confers upon everyone who proceeds according its *method* the capability of attaining to a

⁹⁵⁸ Lecture A33, December 21, 2002, 11 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 387; he misdates it March 5].

⁹⁵⁹ Lectures A35 and A36, February 1–2, 2002, 2 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 424; he misdates them March 9].

⁹⁶⁰ Lecture B15, November 12, 2003, 15 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 418].

⁹⁶¹ Lecture A32, August 4, 2002, 16 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 418].

requisite level to strike the enemies of Allah, whoever they are and *whatever their strength may be*. The one who is ignorant of the noble Qur'an and who is not educated according to its culture – even if he recites verses night and day – he will be, in reality, among those who thrust the Book of Allah behind their backs; (...) At the time when the noble Qur'an encourages people in *jihad*; urges them towards unity and brotherhood and spending in the way of Allah, to pledge themselves completely to Allah and to command what is just and forbid what is wrong; it commands them to fight the enemies of Allah – at the same time you find someone saying – with prayer beads in his hand: 'We don't have any need of this, and it's better for people if they are silent. It might make people go crazy.' Talk of this sort cannot possibly be compatible with the Qur'an. We will become victims in great number of those who [supposedly] have knowledge if we do not avail ourselves – as students seeking knowledge, as Muslim people – of Qur'anic criteria by which we are able to know what the correct positions are and as well as the person positions and actions are considered to be correct according to the Qur'an. (...) We must return to the Qur'an and we will benefit by knowing how to be wise in our opinions and in evaluating ourselves first, and then in evaluating others around us, and in our knowledge about what it mentions of our enemies, and in knowing the solution for confronting them. Whenever did the noble Qur'an ever commend absolute silence as a wise position in the confrontation of the enemies of Allah? (...) Those who go forth as commentators on the Qur'an do not present it in a correct fashion (...) they are completely oblivious and forget to talk about certain pivotal verses which we are most in need of understanding today as they are connected to the reality of people, connected to the life of people.⁹⁶²

In this passage, he does a number of things: He emphasizes the exclusive correctness of the Qur'an and his function in guiding the *ummah*, he summons his audience to educate themselves according to its principles the Believing Youth saw as its core task among others, urges for a united stance that he equally attempts through his lectures, pushes them to confront the “enemies of Allah”, delegitimizes those who are acquiescent and do not follow the right Islamic/Qur'anic path, and lastly asserts the relevance of the holy book for the audience's daily life. In sum, he ties together his diagnostic and prognostic frames. For the latter, he/the group he coined along his ideas already provides the means to take action with a very low threshold: Listening to him or joining other educational activities is a first step to overcome the diagnosed status quo. Thus, the audience *is* already ensuing the solutions Hussein suggests to a certain degree. This comports the message that it is feasible for all of them and that they already form a collective of ‘those on the correct path’. In regard to a leadership for the rightly guided, he mentions the Iranian example as a model and stresses:

22 We find these verses bearing witness that it is not possible for the *ummah*, or any other group, to be guided except at the hands of the learned in order to attain the level where they can be *hizb Allah* (...) ⁹⁶³

⁹⁶² Ibid., 8 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 419].

⁹⁶³ The *hizb Allah* (party of God) finds its adversary in the *hizb al-shaytan* (party of the Devil). The former refers to the religiously rightly-guided, whereas the latter to the religiously misguided. Cf. Hawting, “Parties and Factions”.

From the ‘Qur’anic guidance frame’ as described above, Hussein proceeds to the question of leadership by reference to an acknowledged religious authority, Imam Hadi. He asserted the leadership of Ali and the learned who follow in his line, i.e. the learned *ahl al-bayt*. The passage is thus worth noting: Although Hussein nowhere in his *malazim* explicitly calls for a restoration of the imamate, his statements and line of argumentation throughout the whole corpus provides the option for such a reading and interpretation. The opposite assumption and reading, on the other hand, would solely emphasize that the criterion of perfection is requested for the imam – in an exclusively theological disputation without any reference and relevance for the prognostic framing. This seems, however, an all-too anemic reading of an otherwise clearly politically and action-oriented corpus and speaker. He even states it himself: “No, you find faith in Allah in practice (*‘amaliyan*) (...) the matter in Islam is not only *da‘wah*, it is an active method of operation – a method of movement (*manhaj haraki*).”⁹⁶⁴

As a whole, I suggest to call this aspect the ‘Hashemite leadership frame’, with an implicit ‘learned Hashemite’ specification.

Based on the two dimensions of normative guidance and leadership, which answer does Hussein provide to the central question of ‘what exactly is it that shall be done?’ What does the already highlighted duty to ‘command what is right and forbid what is wrong’ imply in his interpretation? Another citation lays open his line of argumentation in regard to *jihad*. After giving the example of the Prophet, who didn’t merely pray when he arrived in Medina, but “built [a] mosque as a military base, a base for *jihad*” he continues:

23 Did not Allah say to His Prophet: ‘Fight in the way of Allah’ (*surat al-nisa*, 4:84)? What does ‘fight’ (*qatil*)⁹⁶⁵ mean? Isn’t the word explicit? Even more explicit than the word ‘*jihad*’⁹⁶⁶ which our era explains as ‘*jihad* of the word’ or ‘*jihad* of the pen’ or ‘*jihadal-nafs*’ [the struggle against the self and its base desires through self-discipline]. We describe ourselves as *mujāhidun* but we mean by the pen as this is easy. Isn’t it easy?

⁹⁶⁴ Lecture B9, November 5, 2003, 14 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 383; he misdates it November 11].

⁹⁶⁵ On the meaning and Qur’anic use of the root q-t-l cf.: Elsaid M. Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, “ق/ت/ل q-t-l”, *Dictionary of Qur’anic Usage*, ed. Elsaid M. Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem (Brill Online, 2015), accessed January 28, 2015, http://www.referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/dictionary-of-quranic-usage/q-t-l-SIM_001340. They list the following connotations: to kill, killing, slaughter; to fight; to put into hardship; to curse; to inquire, to look deeply; to quench a thirst; to be experienced; (of an animal) to be trained; to be worldly wise; to work very hard.

⁹⁶⁶ For a detailed elaboration of the concept of ‘*jihad*’ in the Qur’an cf.: Ella Landau-Tasseron, “*Jihād*”, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, accessed January 28, 2015, http://www.referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/jiha-d-EQCOM_00101. The author provides a definition of *jihad* as: “Struggle, or striving, but often understood both within the Muslim tradition and beyond it as warfare against infidels (...). The term *jihād* derives from the root *j-h-d*, denoting effort, exhaustion, exertion, strain.” Among other aspects, Landau-Tasseron stresses that the concept of ‘greater *jihad*’ (as opposed to the ‘lesser *jihad*’, i.e. military struggle) in the sense of becoming a better Muslim by struggling with one’s self and with the Devil has no immediate reference in the Qur’an.

The pen, however, is considered a form of *jihad* when what it produces are lines that lead people to fight – then it is *jihad*. If it produces lines that cause the *ummah* to remain frozen and to stagnate, if it deceives the *ummah* then what is it considered? It negates *jihad* and is considered a war against everything that the word *jihad* implies... it is not permissible for mosques to be transformed into minibars that freeze up the Muslims as they used to be centers for mobilization and military bases – the voice from the *minbar*⁹⁶⁷ used to cause unbelief and idolatrous excess and injustice to tremble (...) we clever people, however, in the Islamic world both far and wide, don't do that. (...) We call upon Allah and then behave like Bani Israel did when they said [to Moses]: 'You and your Lord go fight; we will sit here' (*al-ma'idah* 5:24).⁹⁶⁸

This lecture excerpt contains a call for action in form of (military) *jihad* – what I want to call the '*jihad* frame'. The responsible believers are supposed to follow the Prophet Mohamed in fighting “injustice” and “idolatrous excess”, in line with the duty of ‘commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong’. He again emphasizes that the Sunnis and Wahhabis are too passive and thus in the wrong, and are even supporting the enemies US and Israel. On the basis of the ‘Qur’anic guidance’ the audience (i.e. Zaydis) is provided with its identity and values, and it is summoned to “Fight in the way of Allah”. Importantly, Hussein then explicitly elaborates how this does not imply peaceful means and self-improvement in the sense of ‘greater jihad’⁹⁶⁹, but military fighting. The mosques are to be used as “centers for mobilization and military bases”; considering his intensive religious lecturing and preaching, this might hint at the fact that he was consciously acting according to his demands. In the end, he warns against non-action by comparing those who do not act as he has delineated to the “Bani Israel”, i.e. the Jews, the enemies with whom nobody would want to be equated. In another passage he inverts the argument: From a push (‘do not be as our enemies’), he turns it into a pull-argument by connecting *jihad* not only with a necessary and God-commanded act, but also with wisdom and honor, thus tying it to the culturally prevalent complex of honor:

24 Notice, we almost do not trust Allah when He addresses the Muslims (...) about *jihad*, when He guides them to *jihad* and that it is a trade that will save them from a painful torment and so forth when He says: ‘That is best for you if you but knew’ (*surat al-tawbah*, 9:41). How is this good – that which leads you to throw yourself in the path of a bullet? Is this wisdom? Yes, this is wisdom, the wisdom of wise commands in which there is mercy and goodness and honor unto you.⁹⁷⁰

The concrete steps he prescribes, then, are more contained again:

⁹⁶⁷ The raised structure or pulpit from which solemn announcements to the Muslim community were made and from which sermons were preached. “Minbar”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, accessed January 28, 2015, http://www.referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/minbar-COM_0744.

⁹⁶⁸ Lecture A2, January 9, 2002, 4f. [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 385f.].

⁹⁶⁹ Cf. Landau-Tasserou, “Jihād”.

⁹⁷⁰ Lectures A14–16, January 23+25–26, 2002, 7 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 424; he misdates it January 28].

25 Perhaps, if Muslims about from now (...) raise slogans of indignation, which will convey their anger to America and Israel, then America and Israel will stop carrying out the plans that they want whether they are against the two holy mosques or against any other people. This shout itself which we want to raise and spread in every other region – it, by itself, expresses profound outrage – and whoever raises it is able to strike America and to strike it economically before you strike it militarily. This is because the American economy is crucial, and they make a thousand calculations for every single dollar. It is possible for people to boycott American products or the products of companies that have a relation to America and the Jews or to the American government itself; and it is at that time that they will know how much they stand to lose because whoever becomes filled with rage against America and against Israel is someone who will respond to an economic boycott and an economic embargo. It is within our ability, for example, to find an alternative for these cigarettes and to replace them with locally-produced tobacco (...) or to quit smoking altogether. And how much will they lose if people just quit smoking? Calculate, yourselves, how much the people of this region spend of their money on smoking in a single month and you'll realize how much their losses would be for a single region. (...) They make a thousand calculations so if people raise this cry in every land, then America and Israel will, in fact, stop doing what they want to do.⁹⁷¹

Raising a slogan of outrage, spreading it, boycotting US and Israeli products and thereby exerting economic pressure on these states to make them stop their policies (of intervention in Arab/Muslim states) – the measures Hussein formulates in this lecture, the ‘slogan frame’ or ‘*sarkhah* frame’⁹⁷², are the most concrete of his prognostic framing. The logic connects to his diagnosis of economic dependency on the two adversaries laid out above; it once more demonstrates his strong focus on economic factors, and, in addition, the topic can very well be connected to the everyday lives of his audience. Everyone can act; the threshold for action remains low. To present a metaphor, he is not asking to quit smoking, but simply to change brands of tobacco. As shouting slogans is as easily feasible, there is an increased probability that his audience follows him. Nevertheless, military action remains present among the suggested repertoire as well.

Hussein had actually coined the slogan he wanted to hear two months before, on January 17, 2002, in his lecture ‘A Scream/Slogan in the Face of the Arrogants’. Therein, he asks his audience:

26 For how long more should we keep doing nothing in response to the American arrogance? I say to you, my brothers, shout! Don't you have the ability to shout: God is the Greatest... Death to America and Israel... Victory for Islam and Muslims? Don't you think that it is possible for every one of you to make this shout? This shout is a great honor for us to have, right here in this school [al-Imam al-Hadi school in Marran, Sa'dah province] (...) By making this shout now, we will be the first who made this shout, which, that is sure, will be made not only in this hall but also in other places. With God's will,

⁹⁷¹ Lectures A35 and A 36, February 1–2, 2002, 11 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 390f.; he misdates it March 9].

⁹⁷² ‘*sarkha*’ means ‘slogan’, ‘*sarkhat al-harb*’ means ‘battle-cry’.

you shall find those who will make the shout with you in other places. Make this shout with me: Death to America and Israel!⁹⁷³

‘God is Great, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse Upon the Jews, Victory to Islam’ – from thereon this slogan has become iconographic for the movement.



Figure 7.1.: The Houthi slogan at a stall selling Houthi memorabilia. This graphic depiction – in green, the color of Islam, and red, here used for the aggressive lines – has gained iconographic value over time. Photo: Luke Somers, January 2013.

The creation and use of such a slogan mirrors Hussein’s orientation on the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as a role model or, rather, his method as guiding principle.⁹⁷⁴ The Iranian revolutionary leader was convinced of the power of (religious) slogans and their shouting:

27 Our armed forces, police, army and our Revolutionary Guards, are equipped with the force of Providence, and their weapon is ‘*Allahu akbar!*’ and there is no weapon in the world which can match this weapon.⁹⁷⁵

The parallels in rhetoric are noticeable, and both leaders speak of the expansion of the number of people shouting the respective slogan or invocation. Hussein describes as one of his goals

⁹⁷³ Lecture A62, January 17, 2002, 8, [cited in: Khaled Fattah, “One slogan and six wars”, *Asia Times*, October 9, 2009, accessed December 12, 2014, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/KJ09Ak03.html].

⁹⁷⁴ On his procedural thinking and epistemology cf. Hussein himself in one of his lectures: “A particular plan springs from a particular concept; when you know the concept and the orientation, you will know the relation between mode and idea.” Lecture A3, January 11, 2002, 15 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 381].

⁹⁷⁵ Ruhollah Al-Khomeini, *Mukhtarat min Awqal al-Imam al-Khomeini* (Tehran: Wizarat al-Irshad al-Islamiyah, 1982), 184; see also: *Ibid.*, 106 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 391].

the creation of consciousness among the Zaydis in the way Iran and Hizbullah have done so by making use of various media. During his lifetime he had focused his attention on tapping locally appropriate media early (e.g. cassette tape recordings), which were available at low cost to spread his frames; later on, the movement largely expanded the range of media they employed (the Houthi's media use will be discussed in the chapter on frame distribution). He thus actively broached the importance of media use for the distribution of his ideas/the creation of consciousness, while at the same time acting accordingly – a move which certainly served his credibility and the apparent coherence of his message and actions.

28 Iran and Hizb Allah are the strongest enemies of America and Israel, and they have the best media apparatuses and these create consciousness among the Muslims. We Zaydi Shi'a h should be more conscious than the Iranian and more conscious than Hizb Allah.⁹⁷⁶

The emphasis he places on this topic justifies a separate notion as 'media use frame'. In regard to a prognostic prescription it contains the message of expansion among Muslims. Although all frames need distribution and it is in any case important to achieve a high degree of dissemination, Hussein aims at a continuous and lasting creation of consciousness, a permanent 'return to the correct path' that goes beyond sole mobilization and thus warrants a frame status.

So far, when his audience follows the pathway of action Hussein develops in his prognostic framing – 'common identity frame', 'Qur'anic guidance frame', 'Hashemite leadership frame', '*jihad* frame', '*ṣarkhah* frame', and 'media use frame' – they become a member of a group with 'guidelines' and a leadership and aim at spreading a message and military *jihad* against a foreign threat. Yet in his diagnostic frame, Hussein not only depicts a foreign threat, but moreover a genuinely national one: the regime. What, then, is to be done in order to counter this threat? With the research question in mind: Does he or does he not call for an uprising against Saleh? In the *malazim*, the closest Hussein gets to such a call for an uprising is the following passage that talks about the Zaydi duty of *khurūj* and which I therefore want to refer to as the '*khurūj* frame':

29 In the long history of the *ahl al-bayt* there was always a precedent for the imam who was governing and the necessity of a revolution against him if he were to be unjust or if he deviated from proceeding according to justice. Imam al-Hadi (the peace of Allah be upon him) said when he asked the allegiance of the people: 'Follow me if I obey Allah, but if I rebel against Allah, then you are not obliged to follow me; but rather, you are obligated to fight [to kill] me (*tuqatiluni*).'⁹⁷⁷ The well-known source principle of the Zaydi *madhab* is 'going out against the wrongdoer'.⁹⁷⁷

⁹⁷⁶ Lecture A61, December 14, 2001 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 396; he misdates it December 13].

⁹⁷⁷ Lecture A1, January 8, 2002, 3 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 400].

How is this frame to be judged? In a first step, Hussein establishes a long tradition for that which he refers to, a rhetorical strategy he frequently employs. By pointing out the “necessity” he stresses that there is no other solution; and with “revolution” he calls for a complete overthrow of the political entity. In his diagnosis, he has already framed the regime as “unjust”, which supports the argument that he is hinting at. Then he bases his message on a great religious authority, Imam al-Hadi, thereby providing it with even more legitimacy and prestige than if he himself would have interpreted the Zaydi religious principle: When a leader “rebels[s] against Allah”, a Zaydi is “obligated” to (fight and) kill him. With this prominently supported statement alone, Hussein merely asserts the principle of *khurūj* once more. There is no *explicit* reference to the Yemeni president. However, this would have been a very bold move. When we consider the diagnostic frames, though, there is convincing evidence that he *implicitly* referred to Saleh in a very clear way: Hussein has invested quite extensive parts of his lectures into establishing Saleh’s rule as unjust. Now he is stressing the obligation to (and not just permission of) *khurūj* – the connection to rise against Saleh’s rule on this basis appears undeniable and was certainly apparent to his audience. As I argued before: Yemenis are generally well versed in the interpretation of political speech and poetry. At the bottom line and in response to the question raised at the beginning of this subchapter: The above prognostic ‘*khurūj* frame’ *does* contain a call to rise up against Saleh; however, it does so with a low intensity and without urgency, which contains its impact for the time being.

7.1.1.3. Motivational Framing

The last dimension of Hussein’s frame development, the motivational framing, has in part already been adumbrated in the sources on the diagnostic and prognostic dimension; in many instances, the motivational framing is so inherently connected to these other dimensions in the following ways that it cannot stand alone: Push-factors, which thrust the audience towards action, are included in the diagnostic frames, namely the imminent threat specifically directed towards their ‘homes’; that Zaydis are to be blamed; the humiliation they suffer or the threat to their dignity and pride; and divine condemnation in the afterlife; pull-factors in the prognostic frames include a feeling of a ‘Zaydi community’ and the connected endeavor to act in accordance and together with this community; responsibility; free human will with the option to choose which side to belong to: the good side of God or the ‘bad’ side; the power to

act; the connection to everyday life, which means that the impacts of action will be noticeable on a personal level; and immediate calls to ‘fight in the way of Allah’ and to shout the slogan. While these already contain a strong call for action, Hussein furthermore devotes specific attention to the feasibility and effectiveness of his plan of action. On the one hand, he repeatedly makes the point that the Qur’an provides all needed guidance; therefore, the movement, or rather all Zaydis/Muslims, cannot go astray as long as they follow its message (in a correct interpretation). Another aspect he stresses over and over again is the example of the Ayatollah Khomeini⁹⁷⁸ in the Iranian Revolution and of Hassan Nasrallah and Hizbullah.⁹⁷⁹ They are an example for strong Shi’a leaders, they got their followers to shout anti-US and anti-Israel slogans, created an Islamic ‘consciousness’, Iran became a (successful) Islamic state, and both established highly effective media apparatus for a continuous spread of their ideas and messages.⁹⁸⁰

Both Nasrallah and Khomeini have found effective means to confront Israel, the ever-present enemy.⁹⁸¹ The power of shouting Khomeini believes in has already been referred to. Hussein takes the same line when he discusses the relationship with the US:

30 Notice that when people go out with these slogans, which appear to be an easy task, it irritates them [i.e. the Americans] greatly because it is religious work in the path of Allah. The American ambassador said his country ‘does not want enemies among the Arab people to be transformed into religious enemies’. What are religious enemies? What he is saying is that they don’t want you to be transformed in your confrontation with us under the rubric of ‘in the path of Allah’ because they know that they will be defeated in the end if this is the case. (...) Muslims are in a state of perpetual confrontation (...) they know that no other mottos can ever liberate their nations unless they go out ‘in the path of Allah’. (...) Is there a country which has been liberated [of colonialism] in the sense of all that the term implies and become independent? No. After the original colonialism the occupiers left, but their presence remained – their agents remained – and after that? Then came American pressure and an American occupation and execution of plans in every sphere and those governing the people who represent people working with the American ambassador. What I mean is that during this entire period, people have never been liberated from the occupier because they have not raised up this important slogan and have not oriented their confrontation ‘in the path of Allah’. (...) What I mean is that they *understand*. It is very easy to curse them. Notice, if you start cursing them in the mosque, they won’t say anything; religious slogans, however, are dangerous and in the mosque

⁹⁷⁸ In regards to the function of Khomeini as an example, but also as someone from whom Hussein’s seeks to distance himself see: Pottek, “Anfang”, 111.

⁹⁷⁹ Hussein also states how he studied the books of other leaders affiliated with these Shi’a groups, for example Mohamed Hussein Fadhlallah: “I was flipping through the pages of a book by Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah and I greatly benefited from his important insight into this matter.” Lecture A6, January 14, 2002, 9 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 425].

⁹⁸⁰ For an excellent presentation of the trajectory of Hizbullah’s public communication see: Lina Khatib, Dina Matar, and Atef Alashaer, *The Hizbullah Phenomenon. Politics and Communication* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁹⁸¹ Lecture A61, December 14, 2001, 19 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 416f.; he misdates it December 13].

they have an effect even more than in the street because it is a *religious* act. (...) Do you want to raise other slogans? To curse them? Go ahead. Aren't there people who curse them in demonstrations – Bush and Sharon? They don't care about this. Or, if you raise a nationalist slogan they won't be bothered by you either – it doesn't irritate them when you shout nationalist slogans such as 'such and such a movement for the liberation of the nation' or 'for the defense of the nation'. These they know will fail and they consider them failures.⁹⁸²

In Hussein's view, the power of slogans (and therefore the rationale to use them) lies in their significance as "religious act[s]": He considers religion as more powerful than nationalist discourses in what he describes as the continuation of an anti-colonial struggle against the US, the de facto successors of earlier colonial rulers. In the "state of perpetual confrontation" of Muslims against colonizers, religion is a dangerous weapon – and the opponent is aware of this and thus fears it; proof can be found in the statements of the American ambassador. This attribution of power to (public) religious acts, which crystalizes in shouting the religiously connoted slogan he proposed, hence forms the most effective means for the struggle for liberation. Motivation can thus be gained from knowledge of these facts: That they have not only the just legitimation for their struggle, but also the most effective instrument, and that their enemies are in fear.

31 Imam Khomeini paid attention (...) [and] filled Iran with initiatives in diverse fields to the point where Iran was on the verge of becoming an industrial producer-nation, manufacturing many products for various countries including cars; you see that the streets of Tehran are all filled with locally-manufactured cars; you only see Japanese or Korean cars rarely (...) [N]otice that when the leadership is of this type, they know how to build the *ummah* to be strong in reality. But, what happens in the Arab countries? (...) We do not find in our reality anything that will educate us in order to be a strong *ummah* in the confrontation of others. That is, we do not find one who will build us up strong that we might be *hizb allah* because (...) the members of the *hizb* of Satan cannot possibly build up members in *hizb allah*, none builds *hizb allah* except those who hold the first numbers in the cards of *hizb allah*.⁹⁸³

Here again the central topic is the exemplary and effective provisions implemented by Khomeini in Iran, which led to a strong and independent Muslim nation in the face of US-Israeli domination of the region – the victims of which are still the Arab countries that do not have such strong leaders. Being strong and focusing on building the economy, education, and the *ummah* thus constitutes a feasible path to the same ideal state. The only element that is lacking for Yemenis/Arabs are equally good leaders. To change this, the audience can and should take action. Once more, the fact that it has been done and the goal has been reached by others serves to support the empirical credibility and feasibility of taking the proposed action, thereby pulling the audience to do so, i.e. making an implicit call to action.

⁹⁸² Lecture B8, November 4, 2003, 16f. [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 391f.].

⁹⁸³ Lecture A6, January 14, 2002, 14 [cited in: Lux, *Last Imam*, 395].

In a nutshell, Hussein's motivational framing consists of both push- and pull-factors: Necessity for action due to threats is combined with feasibility claims and supporting examples. His most immediate and strongest call for action remains the famous lecture in which he established the *ṣarkhah*: "For how long more should we keep doing nothing in response to the American arrogance? I say to you, my brothers, shout! Don't you have the ability to shout: God is the Greatest... Death to America and Israel... Victory for Islam and Muslims?"

Beyond the frame content and his rhetorically skilled way of presenting it to his audience, it can be assumed that his charismatic personality and high social, religious, and cultural prestige further enhanced the impact of his framing, specifically the motivational component. This aspect, while worth noting here, will be explicated in more detail in the section of frame resonance. Lastly, the fact that his lectures were presented in a regular mode and with a high temporal density increased the effect they had on the audience, for the central messages were emphasized over and over again.

The three tables below summarize the respective content of Hussein al-Houthi's frames as he developed them in his *malazim*, i.e. prior to the escalation of the tensions between the Houthi movement and the regime in 2004. These frames form a solid basis for all later frame shifts and are frequently referred to up to the point of writing (2015). The content of the prognostic and motivational frame dimensions has been arranged according to a 'main frame' and its 'sub-frames', whereas this systematization has not been necessary and feasible for the less differentiated prognostic dimension.

DIAGNOSTIC FRAMES
What is the problem/the issue at stake? Who is responsible for it?

MAIN FRAME	SUB-FRAME	CORE CONTENT
WEAKNESS FRAME		a specific identity group is suffering from internal weakness
	Muslim Weakness	Muslims are internally too weak to confront the external antagonists (Jews and Christians); part of the problem are fragmentation and mutual attempts to convert other denominations/schools
	Shi'a Weakness	Shi'a are distant from religious truth and therefore suffer ideationally
	Arab Weakness	weakness in the face of American and Israeli aggression; due to corrupt and weak leadership and distance from religion
	Yemeni Weakness	corrupt leadership and (related) economic weakness leads to a state in which Yemen could not defend itself against US or Israeli attacks
	Zaydi Weakness	distant from Qur'anic teachings; facing Wahhabi intrusion and aggression and being left without protection or freedom by the regime
NEOCOLONIALISM FRAME		Arab countries are/Yemen is in a state of neocolonial suppression and dependency
	Economic Dependency	dependency on capitalist doctrine of growth instead of genuine development of Yemen's agriculture; reasons linked to opportunistic leaders
	Political Dependency	regime is dependent on US (and Israeli) goodwill and therefore serves as ally in US War on Terrorism; Yemen might become the next target of US terrorism allegations and military aggression if the regime does not follow US wishes
INJUSTICE FRAME		defined group suffers from unjust actions directed against them
	Zaydi Marginalization	Zaydis have been wronged by Sunnis since the origins of Islam despite their own good will and striving for harmony and unity; marginalized in Northern Yemen since 1962, as can be seen e.g. in infrastructure projects; regime supported influx of Wahhabi adversaries in the North and protected them

	Zaydi Repression	since the end of the Imamate, Zaydis lack freedom and are confronted with open aggression by Sunnis who term it ‘conquest’; they furthermore lack protection against Wahhabi aggression
THREAT FRAME		there is an existential (cultural and/or military) threat emanating from a specific ‘other’
	Wahhabization/ Salafization	Wahhabis/Salafis have intruded Northern Yemen; they try to convert Zaydis to their wrong interpretation of Islam; there spread has been supported by the Yemeni regime
	US/Israel Ideational, Cultural, and Military Infiltration and Aggression	all spheres of Islamic life (culture, morals, economy, environment, politics) are threatened by these enemies in a civilizational confrontation; these threats are political, economic, and ideational
ATTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY		responsibility must be attributed for the various diagnoses on various levels: ingroup, religious outgroup, leadership, and external
	Own Neglect	Muslims/Shi’a /Zaydis have distanced themselves from Qur’anic guidance and religious truths
	Sunnis	they represent ‘all that is false’ religiously and have continuously been suppressing Shi’a since early Muslim times
	Illegitimate Political Leaders	Arab/Muslim/Yemeni leaders are ignoring their religious duties, corrupt, opportunistically ‘selling out’ their people, and afraid of the US; they ‘fail’ and are thus illegitimate
	Illegitimate Religious Leaders	lack of opposition against and complicity of ‘ <i>ulamā</i> ’ with corrupt and illegitimate rulers
	US/Israel	‘civilizational others’; they pose terrorism allegations in order to act aggressively against Muslims/ Arab countries; continue to dominate the region in neocolonial fashion; threaten Muslims with ‘crusader intentions’

Table 7.1.: Summary of Hussein al-Houthi’s diagnostic frames

	MAIN FRAME	CORE CONTENT
PROGNOSTIC FRAMES What is the solution to the problem? How are we going to achieve it?	QUR'ANIC GUIDANCE FRAME	the Qur'an provides guidance on all relevant questions; when you follow the Qur'an you cannot go wrong; there is a need for everyone to overcome his/her individual neglect and educate himself/herself according to its teachings
	HASHEMITE LEADERSHIP FRAME	the learned <i>ahl al-bayt</i> who have understood and are able to convey the correct interpretation of the Qur'an are the only ones who can lead the <i>ummah</i> along the right path, therefore they form the natural leadership (for Zaydis)
	JIHAD FRAME	there is a need to use military jihad against injustice and idolatrous excesses, in line with the Zaydi duty to 'command what is right and forbid what is wrong'; <i>jihad</i> is not only necessary and God-commanded, but furthermore is a sign of wisdom and brings honor
	MEDIA USE FRAME	media shall be used to spread the ideas articulated in the frames, to create consciousness among Muslims and expand the range of the audience reached by them
	SLOGAN FRAME	raising the slogan 'God is the Greatest, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse Upon the Jews, Victory to Islam' and spreading it is an effective means to act against the US and Israel because they fear religious acts; this and a parallel boycott of their products will hurt them and make them stop their policies of intervention in Arab/Muslim states
	KHURŪJ FRAME	Zaydis have a religious duty to rise against an unjust ruler; since Saleh has been framed as unjust ruler, it implicitly calls for <i>khurūj</i> against him, however, with low intensity and without urgency

Table 7.2.: Summary of Hussein al-Houthi's prognostic frames

MOTIVATIONAL FRAMES
Why is it necessary and promising to join collective action?

MAIN FRAME	SUB-FRAME	CORE CONTENT
WEAKNESS FRAME		act against Zaydi weakness!
	Overcoming	there is a need to overcome the current state of weakness to prevent it from getting worse
	Humiliation	Zaydis are humiliated by and in the situation; in order to protect their honor it is thus necessary to act
THREAT FRAME		counter the threat!
	Necessity for Action	without action the (culturally) existential threat will continue and intensify
RELIGIOUS DUTY FRAME		it is your religious duty to act!
	Blame	Zaydis are to blame for their own neglect and passivity
	Divine Condemnation	in case of non-action there will be divine punishment in the afterlife for the neglect and passivity described
	Responsibility	Muslims/Zaydis bear the responsibility to act for they have been provided with Qur'anic guidance according to which to act and they have not obliged
FEASIBILITY FRAME		it is feasible to act in the prescribed way and be successful!
	Free Will	humans have a free will to act (independent of divine predestination); it is thus possible for everybody to choose one's actions
	Power	free will and responsibility to act at the same time bring with them the power to change the situation, i.e. agency
	Slogan	the slogan is a powerful and effective means to counter the US and Israeli threats
	Example	Khomeini and Hizbullah have already successfully employed the same means against the US and Israel; with his strategy Khomeini has formed Iran into a strong and independent Islamic state; <i>khurūj</i> has repeatedly been necessary and occurred in the past and has been successful

Effectiveness	the means are appropriate and will show their effects on the level of everyday life – for everyone to enjoy them
‘ZAYDI COMMUNITY’ FRAME	unite! together we are strong!
Right path	Zaydi doctrine is the correct one and united we will thus be successful because God is with us

Table 7.3.: Summary of Hussein al-Houthi’s motivational frames

7.1.2. Framing Shifts During and After Violent Escalation

There are no sources for the framing that occurred during the first war and in the interim until March 2005. The next important source is an interview of the Yemeni newspaper *Al-Wasat* with Badr al-Din al-Houthi in mid-March. It was published under the heading: “The President was afraid that (Hussein) would take the state [rule] from him and the imamate is particular for [belongs to] the *ahl al-bayt*”.⁹⁸⁴ At the beginning of that year, Saleh had asked Hussein’s father, who had officially taken over leadership after the death of his son, to meet him in Sana’a in order to negotiate the settlement of the conflict. Specifically, the issue of the large numbers of still arrested members and the question of the return of Hussein’s corpse were to be discussed. Badr al-Din went to Sana’a, however, although he remained there for more than two months, Saleh did not receive him – a treatment he vocally denounces in the interview and a cultural breach of the traditional rules of good conduct in mediation.

Over large parts, the interviews mirror Hussein’s frames: He decries US and Israeli actions, particularly interventionism after 9/11, and considers it in line with the general accusation of aiming to suppress Muslims. He emphasizes that “to protect Islam is more important than everything” and calls on Muslims to “unite against the infidels, against the enemies of religion”. Hussein was only fulfilling this duty and the crying of the slogan was part of it. He denies that he called for the imamate, but immediately adds that it would be the duty of the president “to protect Islam and thwart the wiles of American and Israel”. Rule should be based upon the constitution, but this needs to contain justice. A few lines on the links it back to the principle of ‘commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong’.

⁹⁸⁴ Republished on the occasion of Badr al-Din’s death in *Al-Wasat*, 8 December 2010, accessed 16 September 2013, http://www.alwasat-ye.net/index.php?ac=3&no=32290&d_f=21&t_f=0&t=5&lang_in=. Badr al-Din furthermore asserts that they do not receive any support from Iran.

When asked about his opinion on proper rule, he acknowledges democracy as one way but points out that the imamate is superior to it. “We are with justice, we do not know this democracy”, Badr al-Din states, then again referring to the misbehavior of Saleh in not receiving him and blaming him for the events in Sa’ada (i.e. the war). Hussein has become a martyr for a just cause, which he sets in opposition to the “nepotism of the state” that “did not give us any demand from what was promised before”. Besides, in regard to the point of arms among the followers, he underlines that all the people have weapons and that “these men are strong and heroes”. On the question if they intended to normalize the situation in Sa’ada and return to peace and security, he replies that it was “something not on our side, they are the ones who attacked us.”

The interview was conducted one day after Badr al-Din’s return to the North. Shortly thereafter, fighting recommenced when Houthi supporters allegedly attempted to assassinate a leading member of a local council and when other followers were seeking to buy weapons in the Suq al-Talh⁹⁸⁵, the largest arms market in the country with huge supplies of weapons of all calibers and sizes.⁹⁸⁶ These steps can be considered an offensive re-initiation of combat or as strong evidence for the preparation of such, respectively: Targeting a member of a local council implies a targeting of a representative of the system of government, which would provoke a response and thus an occasion to commence battle with the army. That – despite their already extensive supplies of weapons that had been used in the first war – that Houthis now strove to purchase even more or larger arms allows speculation that either they had mobilized new adherents who needed fighting equipment beyond what was available (implying larger numbers) and/or the group was re-equipping, possibly with heavier weapons. In any case: It alludes to intentions to fight.

Government retaliation and offensive followed suit. Attacks in this second round of war again concentrated on Houthi leadership, namely on Badr al-Din, Abdullah al-Razzami and Yusuf al-Madani; raids centered around their alleged whereabouts. The army offensive, and with it the war, was concluded in mid-April when – incorrectly – they believed to have killed Abdullah al-Razzami.⁹⁸⁷

We are now facing the central questions in regard to the case study: To what extent does the interview with Badr al-Din elucidate a shift in the framing of the movement, which would

⁹⁸⁵ The GoY tried to close the Suq al-Talh (located in the northwest of Saada city) after the first round of war, which limited success since arms trade subsequently evaded the official market in favor of unofficial channels. *Small Arms Survey*, “Under Pressure. Social Violence Over Land and Water in Yemen”, Issue Brief, no. 22 (2010): 6.

⁹⁸⁶ Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 134ff.

⁹⁸⁷ An official moreover deplored that they had not been able to arrest or kill Badr al-Din. *Ibid.*, 136.

support the relevance of framing for the initiation of violence? How can we without further information about the internal processes that occurred reconstruct possible dynamics in the shift from defense in the first war to an, albeit restrained, initiation of violence in the second round?

Badr al Din does one important thing: He delegitimizes Saleh. As I previously pointed out, Hussein had not directly criticized Saleh; he had merely denounced ‘Arab leaders’. Badr al-Din now openly blames Saleh for illegitimate behavior, unjust rule, and for failing to counter the US and Israeli threat (on the contrary he supported their plans). As Dorlian holds, on this basis “the government interpreted the elderly scholar’s return to Sa’ada as the first step in carrying out the supposed Zaydi principle of necessary revolt against an unjust and corrupt government (*khurūj*).”⁹⁸⁸ Certainly, Badr al-Din was by then 81 years of age and was not the one to take up arms himself. But based on his high religious, cultural, and social prestige, (plus it was his son who was martyred) his words weighed heavy. The fact that he shifted the focus must not be underestimated; it was programmatic: Saleh was now among those to blame, and from there on it was just a small step towards violent opposition.

The figure to take up this shift and transform it into an immediate appeal to the fighters was probably Abdullah al-Razzami, at that time member of the innermost operational leadership. There have been repeated reports that he took a more militant stance (than e.g. Abdul Malik,⁹⁸⁹ who would nevertheless take over leadership from the third war onwards, i.e. in the long run was not an opponent to violence, either).⁹⁹⁰ A foreigner living in Sa’ada at that time professed: “We trusted Hussein al-Houthi and knew that he would not attack foreigners, but we now feel less confident with the new, more ideological militants.”⁹⁹¹ While I would like to underline the fact that division lines existed and continue to exist between more and less militant factions of the group.

Apart from this major shift in the attribution of responsibility, other shifts occurred in all three dimensions (diagnostic, prognostic, motivational). In the following, I will present the main shifts I identified within each dimension. Due to the imbalance of sources (with the

⁹⁸⁸ Dorlian, “Saada War”, 186.

⁹⁸⁹ “Abdul Malik al-Houthi’s response to his father’s interview and his letter to the President”, *Al-Wasat*, December 15, 2010, accessed April 8, 2015. The original response stems from mid-October 2005. Therein Abdul Malik aims to soften his father’s message and affirms his personal allegiance to the republic and to Saleh. He comments that “if the power continues to adopt the military option as we imagine, it does not solve the problem but deepens the wounds of the nation” and asserts his willingness for dialogue. At this point in time, his stance can thus be considered moderate, at least officially – which will change over time.

⁹⁹⁰ Cf. an Al Jazeera talk cited in: Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 193; a civil society activist interviewed by the ICG in January 2009 made a similar statement: He asserted that “Hussein al-Houthi’s death in September 2004 reportedly led to the ascent of a less compromising generation of rebel leaders and militants” (ICG, “Defusing”, 13).

⁹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 14. Interview conducted on January 18, 2009.

majority stemming from the period after 2007, when the Houthis significantly enlarged their communication), I divided the periods of analysis along the phases of conflict escalation that were distinguished in chapter 5.1.4.: I begin with and mainly focus on the phase of the second to sixth war (corresponding to *Houthi-Regime Conflict Phase 4*) and continue with pointed summaries for each through the *Post-Conflict Mobilization Phase 2010–2012*, the *Phase of Political Participation 2013–07/2014*, and lastly the *Phase of Military Expansion and Coup 08/2014–03/2015*. Sources stem from personal correspondence, printed interviews and citations as well as general reference in reports, research, newspapers, and movement as well as government material in form of leaflets, posters, banners etc.; the analysis of selected movement and government-related websites, social media profiles in Facebook, around 400+ videos posted on the platform YouTube;⁹⁹² the analysis of the Houthi magazine ‘*Al-Haqiqa*’ (‘The Truth’),⁹⁹³ of political cartoons published in various of these media, and of the art exhibition ‘*Jerāh ‘Amīqah*’ (‘Deep Wounds’) by Houthi-affiliated youth as documented in 244 photos⁹⁹⁴. Since the tone of the framing is adapted to different audiences, with a much more moderate stance for instance in interviews with international media than in internal media, I will seek to provide enough context to situate the source along the spectrum.

7.1.2.1. Diagnostic Framing

Hussein’s *malazim* had contained five main diagnostic frames: the ‘weakness frame’, the neocolonialism frame’, ‘the injustice frame’ the ‘threat frame’, and the ‘attribution of responsibility’. The first two now took a backseat. Highlighting one’s weakness would seem an odd strategy when in combat, and the dependency component of the neocolonialism frame became somewhat fused with the denunciation of regime complicity with the US and Israel as we shall see. The other three frames, however, became much more central and focused and complemented by a new one: the ‘honorable leadership frame’.

Houthi-Regime Conflict Phase 4: March 2005–February 2010

The following citations have been taken from an interview with Yahya al-Houthi with a German magazine in early 2010.⁹⁹⁵ After the first war and Yahya’s exile in Germany, he had

⁹⁹² Many of these are cross-referencing.

⁹⁹³ Issues 1–22, 24–27, 31–32, 50, 76, 82–86, 88–123 (69 issues total). Issue 1 was published late November/early December 2007, issue 123 on March 12, 2014.

⁹⁹⁴ These photos have been retrieved from the exhibition’s Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/jerah.amygh?fref=ts> (accessed May 5, 2015).

⁹⁹⁵ Maximilian Felsch, “Die Quelle des Terrors”, *Zenith Online*, April 30, 2010, accessed May 5, 2015, <http://www.zenithonline.de/deutsch/politik/a/artikel/die-quelle-des-terrors-001150/>.

become the international spokesperson of the group. In the interview he provides his interpretation of the conflict, which elucidates the shift on the moderate side of the spectrum:

Me and my family have been fighting for the preservation of our faith, our identity, our history, our heritage, our rights, and our home for 30 years. (...) We defend ourselves against oppression and hope that our people will be able to live equally in freedom, peace, and security.(...) We accuse Saleh and his aides of aiming to destroy the Zaydi as well as the Shafi'i *madhab* in favor of the Salafi-Wahhabi one. They have been working on this since he came into office. All this is happening according to the wishes of the Saudis who finance this mission with billions of riyals. They have built hundreds of religious schools and filled them with radical Wahhabi curricula. (...) and the army [is] full of criminals and *takfirīs*. (...) I believe that the wars against us are at the root Saudi wars whose aim is to extinguish Zaydism which has been in the way of Wahhabi mission for years. This is the truth about the conflict. It all happened to convert Yemen to Wahhabism and make it a base for terror and mission.

He highlights the role that family has played over a long period (implying legitimacy), points out that they are acting in defense, and formulates a clear existential threat emanating from Salafis/Wahhabis/the KSA – and Saleh.⁹⁹⁶ Since he is talking to an international (Western) audience, he refrains from the anti-US/anti-Israel stance.

There is no conflict between us and something you might call “state”. In Yemen there is a conflict between us and an authoritarian dictator who follows Saudi princes and Wahhabi agents and who collaborates with terrorists in order to realize their plans against the Yemeni people – in the social, religious and cultural field. (...) Saleh cooperated with Saudi Arabia and agreed to bomb our people and occupy a part of our homeland. (...) Because of this aggression our brothers were forced to defend themselves. We demand to be able to live in equal freedom and security. (...) We aim at just rule with justice for the oppressed and care for the people. (...) The resistance of my brothers for six years full of war and sieges is clear proof that the people are with us.

Here his tone turns fiercer. Saleh is portrayed as illegitimate ruler who acts in the interest of a foreign power, therefore attacking his own people and country.⁹⁹⁷ Saleh himself is thus equaled with a foreigner. The Houthis on the other hand aim at justice and defend land and people, with the result of being the actual legitimate representatives.

In response to the continuous accusations by the regime that the Houthis are supported by Iran and hence represent a foreign proxy (in fact, the reverse allegation to the ‘being foreign’ charge against Saleh above), Yahya replied:

⁹⁹⁶ Yahya had made similar statements in earlier interviews. He claimed, for instance, that Saleh had received US-\$25 billion from the KSA to fight the Zaydis. “The kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which used to occupy our country, is paying a lot of money to the state in order to eradicate our doctrine from schools, institutes and mosques.” *Al-Quda Press*, July 10, 2008, cited in: Hamidi, “Inscriptions”, n. 39.

⁹⁹⁷ Cf. Pottek, “Anfang”, 104ff. She also notes that starting from the second war onwards, army actions were described as *‘ibada’* (‘extermination’, ‘genocide’).

First, with this allegation they cover the Saudi interference in Yemeni affairs and their participation in the war against our people, they do it to justify the Saudi intervention.⁹⁹⁸ Second, they want to incite the fire of sectarianism. Third, they want to request Western support against the Houthis.⁹⁹⁹ (...) Our supporters have not repeated Iranian slogans; they have created similar slogans.

All three points he makes are consistent with the messages that have been spread over time and appear credible under the given circumstances of longstanding Saudi-Iranian enmity and struggle for regional hegemony; Saleh's often-used strategy of outplaying different groups against each other; and his alliance with the US, another adversary of Iran.¹⁰⁰⁰

And, again, he makes the point of aggression by Saleh who aims at depicting the 'righteous Houthis' in a bad light:

Before each war Saleh created occasions to justify his attacks. Before the fourth war it was the issue of the Jews. He used the secret service for [their] intimidation: They had their faces covered and nobody could recognize them. They threatened the Jewish family and claimed to be Houthi members. So Saleh had a justification for the fourth war and could hope for American and Israeli support. Before the fifth war a motorbike exploded in front of a mosque in Saada in which were army members, Wahhabis and other terrorist groups. Saleh accused the Houthis as culprits and commenced the fifth war, ignoring the Doha agreement. (...) And what was said now about the enmity with the Jews is rumors and political provocations in order to pull the friends of the Jews on Saleh's side and against us.

According to this narration, the initiation of the wars has to be blamed on Saleh, who is keen on reigniting armed conflict.¹⁰⁰¹ He is the one ignoring even the praised Doha agreement and construct justifications to render his actions legitimate in the eyes of his foreign allies. The Houthis on the contrary are falsely vilified.

The image of the defamed Houthis keeps appearing in the communication with official and international representatives. A US-embassy report of late 2009 mentions a letter of Houthi spokesman Mohamed Abdulsalam to President Saleh in which he writes: "We hope that you do not (believe) the propaganda presented to you that we want to restore the imamate or that we have anything against the republican system." He furthermore attributes a claimed 'misunderstanding and marginalization of the Houthis' to "the persistence of the official

⁹⁹⁸ Abdul Malik al-Houthi claimed in an interview that the government's "repeated talk about our foreign affiliations with the Iranians is aimed at provoking the fears of the Saudis in order to gain generous Saudi support against us." *Al Akhbar*, July 4, 2008, cited in: Hamidi, 'Inscriptions', 172.

⁹⁹⁹ "Accusing us of having relations with Iran aims at diverting the attention of the West away from the human rights violations in Sa'da. The Yemeni government is exploiting Western and Saudi fears to get their support." *Al-Quda Press*, July 10, 2008, cited in: Hamidi, "Inscriptions", n. 39.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Muhammad al-Houthi adds a doctrinal argument to it, based in the differences between Zaydis and Twelver Shi'a. Muhammad al-Houthi, "Who are the Houthis? And Other Questions", *Yemen Press*, September 6, 2007, accessed April 7, 2015, <http://www.yemen-press.com/news1053.html>.

¹⁰⁰¹ In another interview Yahya extended his accusations against the regime even further in stating that "we have, actually, been in an undeclared war ever since we formed the al-Haqq party in 1991" (he implies being attacked by the government). Pottek, "Anfang", 108f.

media to deal with us as if we are from another planet.”¹⁰⁰² The report goes on citing Hassan Zayd, the chair of al-Haqq:

[He] told [an] US official on November 21, 2009, that the Houthis are fighting in self-defense and will stop as soon as the ROYG [Republic of Yemen Government] ceases to attack them. He explained that the Houthis’ political goal is to ‘benefit from the protection of the Constitution and the laws’, including equal citizenship and freedom of expression and religion.¹⁰⁰³

Beyond the emphasis of their defensive stance, the mentioning of the Houthis adherence to the constitution¹⁰⁰⁴ serves to repudiate the charge of wanting to reestablish the imamate – the great bogey the regime created. Taking the same line, Hamidi cites a TV interview with Yahya on *Al-Arabiyya* in 2006 in which he “argued that their fight was against ‘corruption’ rather than against either the republic or democracy”, “A rhetoric”, as Hamidi poses, “which rendered more difficult the government’s attempt to denounce them as adherents of the imamate”.¹⁰⁰⁵ I want to add that it goes beyond that in that it furthermore depicts the Houthis as righteous and law-observing – when they took Sana’a in fall 2014, one of the facts that made them popular concerned what was perceived as their rigorous actions against corruption. Despite or because of its rampant prevalence on all levels of life, Yemenis overwhelmingly state their opposition to corruption, which they consider among the greatest evils hindering the development of their country. It therefore makes a good theme to argue with in order to gain support for one’s cause. The image of righteousness, on the internal level is part of the ‘honorable leadership frame’ mentioned earlier, is conveyed once more in a letter to Human Rights Watch (i.e. communication to the international public) by Abdul Malik in June 2009:

[W]e are very careful with the treatment of civilians, and we treat them humanely in a manner that protects their rights mentioned in international humanitarian law and international human rights law.... We also confirm being keen to keep civilians neutral

¹⁰⁰² Wikileaks, “Yemen – Who are the Houthis?”, posted May 9, 2011: Cable from US Embassy Sanaa, December 12, 2009, <http://www.crethiplethi.com/wikileaks-yemen-who-are-the-houthis/islamic-countries/yemen-islamic-countries/2011/>, accessed December 12, 2014. The letter arrived on November 22, 2009.

¹⁰⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Similar Abdul Malik after the ceasefire was implemented after the Qatari mediation: “[W]e commit ourselves to the republican system, constitution, and laws of the country. This is in addition to the implementation of the conditions we agreed to with the state of Qatar.” *Al-Ahram*, <http://www.weekly.ahram.org.eg/print/2007/850/re11.htm>, cited in: Hamidi, “Inscriptions”, 179 (without publication date).

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ibid., 178.

and spare them conflict. We also work laboriously towards supporting their protection and saving their lives, possessions, and dignity.¹⁰⁰⁶

This assertion should be evaluated against the background of the heavy toll the wars have taken on the region's population and infrastructure. The Houthis have been eager to distribute pictures of civilian victims (in very drastic pictures) and destruction in their various media channels,¹⁰⁰⁷ proclaiming it was the government which was causing them. Muhammad al-Houthi vividly described the situation from the perspective of the returnees after detention to a Yemeni media outlet:

For detainees who were released were heading from prison directly to brother Abdul Malik, and stayed two or three days during which [he] urged them to return to their areas, and to remain calm and avoid what would stir up trouble with authority. But a lot of them went to their areas even longer and disappointment was visible on their faces. They were complaining about the situation in their areas which robbed them of all hope of a decent living in security and stability. Homes were destroyed, and farmland and property looted, and in the way of compensation were thousand barriers. And the Wahhabis controlled the mosques and spread their ideas by force, supported by the authorities there, and the military in villages and between farms was acting with brutality and repression (...) [This and] the occupation of a number of houses in many of those areas pushed them to go to the mountains forcibly (...) This dominates the life (...) of the returnees, they have no choice but to return to the mountains (...) and wasteland, neighboring scorpions and snakes (...)¹⁰⁰⁸

This depiction stresses the reputation of Abdul Malik, his promotion of peace, the transgressions of the 'Wahhabis' and government forces, and above all the displacement of Houthi supporters from their lands – making for a pool of angry followers that can in all probability be persuaded more easily to take up arms. 'Land' is culturally important for the self-definition of the people living on it; its value is often presented as under threat in Houthi framing as well. They also held that the government had no will to end the wars, rather they claimed during the first half of 2009 that it had been preparing for a sixth round.¹⁰⁰⁹ In March, for instance, during the large celebration they held on the occasion of the Prophet's birthday,

¹⁰⁰⁶ HRW, "All Quiet on the Northern Front. Uninvestigated Laws of War Violations in Yemen's War with Houthi Rebels", March 2010, 34. As HRW asserts, "however, Houthis appear to have committed serious violations of the laws of war during the sixth round of fighting: summary executions, using non-combatants as 'human shields', and recruiting children as combatants". The issue of child soldiers has repeatedly been raised in regard to all parties involved in the conflict. It is a rampant problem in Yemen, aggravated by the fact that in many cases the age of children cannot be determined with any certainty.

¹⁰⁰⁷ My own findings are supported by the HRW report "Invisible Civilians". The ICG furthermore reported that Abdul Malik and Salih Habra in 2009 (at the latest) sent assessments and casualty reports to journalists in Sana'a, thus circumventing the news blackout by the government. ICG, "Defusing", 25.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Muhammad al-Houthi, "Who are the Houthis?". Own translation. I tried to preserve his mode of expression.

¹⁰⁰⁹ See interviews with Yahya, February 3, 2009; with an opposition figure on January 9, 2009; and the statement published by rebel spokesman Salih Habra in March 2009 on the website of the YSP (ishtiraki.net): ICG, "Defusing", 24f.

Abdul Malik in front of tens of thousands supporters again denounced the government's alliance with the US and warned "it would lose if it were to launch an attack".¹⁰¹⁰

Muhammad moreover speaks out against the US and Israel: "Our problem is not with the power (...) but with America and Israel." They manifest themselves, however, in the actions of the regime. Drawing a line of continuity from early Muslim times in which the Shi'a already faced "injustice and oppression" until today, he holds that:

[T]he crimes against the *ahl al-bayt* and the Shiites (...) was among the motives and reasons to ignite sedition (*fitna*) and fan the flames of war in Saada province (...) in addition to those of other hidden motives, which emerged from the growing relations with the US administration, which are all reasons that fall under the colonial scheme implemented by the US administration and its allies under the label of 'anti-terrorism'.¹⁰¹¹

He carries on against Saleh, saying: "This deception (...) Is it not enough to say that the President of the Republic, a Zaydi, slaughtered Zaydis in Saada?! (...) this president errors (...)".¹⁰¹² There could hardly be a clearer way of delegitimizing the president.

Mohammad answers the question of the incendiary slogan by making three interrelated points:

1 –The atmosphere was ready to accept the idea after the events of September 11 and the resulting US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. [Hussein] saw (...) the brutality and injustice, crime and tragedies and massacres carried out by the Americans, which generated significant disturbance among all Muslims (...).

2–The idea was created a safe outlet to express their rejection and resentment towards what was happening [and] not to depart from the right of expression constitutionally guaranteed to all citizens.

3 –The power position in the beginning, the strong rejection of the US occupation and its actions in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the speeches of the President of the Republic on the issue inflamed the youth.¹⁰¹³

In brief: The Houthis – or rather: Hussein – tried to canalize the rage of Muslims/the youth in the wake of the post-September 11 wars in Afghanistan and Iraq into a safe and constitutionally legitimized mode.

Notwithstanding, verbal escalation took its course and even towards international audience Yahya in 2008 stated as their goal "to demise Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime".¹⁰¹⁴

¹⁰¹⁰ *Marib Press*, March 10, 2009, cited in: *ibid.*, 25.

¹⁰¹¹ Muhammad al-Houthi, "Who are the Houthis?".

¹⁰¹² *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹⁴ Interview with Yahya, February 3, 2009, cited in: ICG, "Defusing", 5. Pottek, "Anfang", mentions an online reference on a Houthi-website where they allegedly called for *khurūj* against Saleh. She does not provide a concise reference for that, however.

A 'moderate' constituency or those sympathetic to the group, yet not actively following it were reached out to with more offensive, but not radical messages. The main media here were the recorded and transcribed *malazim* spread as audiocassettes, CDs, MP3, or in print, respectively; the Al-Haqiqa magazine, and the Al-Masirah TV channel.¹⁰¹⁵ The following figures stem from the magazine:

¹⁰¹⁵ It is well possible that there were others.

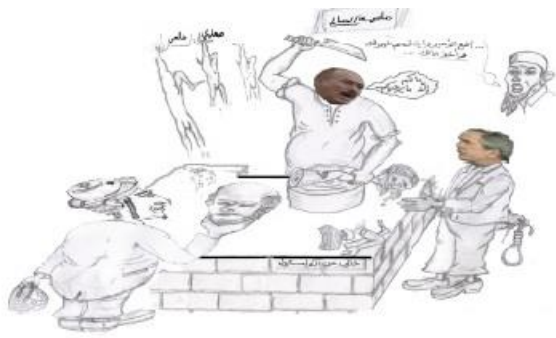


Fig. 7.2. Issue 1 – Saleh butchering his people, aided by George W. Bush and ‘the Jews’



Fig. 7.3.: Issue 2 – ‘Two-faced leader’ is enslaved by US and battering his people



Fig. 7.4.: Issue 5 – Bush and King Abdullah are killing children



Fig. 7.5.: Issue 1 – Saleh and Bush shaking hands (popular picture also in videos)



Fig. 7.6.: Issue 7 – Saleh sacrificing his people to US idol



Fig. 7.7.: Issue 31 – King Abdullah and Saleh watching US and Israeli theater

All of the cartoons highlight the connection between the regime and the alleged foreign enemies US, Israel, and KSA, as well as the (existential) aggression against the people that emanates from this axis. Saleh features prominently in all of them, again stressing the blame attributed to him, combining the before independent threats posed by the US/Israel and the KSA/Wahhabis. The threat has become manifest in his person; it is at the same time stronger and closer, which, however, also implies that it can be countered more directly – by fighting the regime.

The injustice frame in Hussein's *malazim* before consisted of the two sub-frames of Zaydi marginalization and repression. Now, it is extended and becomes more central. The wars against the population come into focus, the destruction, and civil victims; suffering is framed as the result of regime aggression against its own populace. Equally, regime corruption is linked to the poverty of the majority of the people, while few, profit; among them are the foreign enemies. Saleh is portrayed as deceptive and treacherous; he has, so the image presents, over and over again broken his word in mediation and peace negotiations (with Hussein and with Badr al-Din in regard to the Doha agreement). His actions are presented as dishonorable, his rule consequentially unjust and illegitimate. In this image, having to live under his 'dictatorship' is hence the injustice people have to suffer.

Hussein's *malazim* are recontextualized and perpetually referred to. Overall, they are distributed in order to reach an extended audience. Short citations are published in the magazine,¹⁰¹⁶ on TV, on posters, leaflets etc. Video recordings are shown on TV, at gatherings, and are posted online.¹⁰¹⁷ The publications are either standalone or rather inserted into more complex messages to support their legitimacy. Hussein himself is likewise venerated: He is the religious and spiritual leader, the first and greatest martyr of the group, the wise scholar, the ideal, and the proof of his own claims. His framing claims that he was right and therefore he was killed by the regime. His death is connected to the killing of Imam Husayn in Karbala, thereby providing even more religious legitimacy. The Houthis created a documentary on the last days of Hussein, which they prominently broadcasted on Al-Masirah.¹⁰¹⁸ Posters with his portrait and the designation "the martyr leader" ("*al-shahīd al-qā'id*") have been erected in the landscape of the Marran Mountains, in Sa'ada city, and in other towns. The place of his death has been converted into a mausoleum. Pictures show how

¹⁰¹⁶ Each newer issue of Al-Haqiqa e.g. shows the picture of Hussein with a citation from one of the *malazim* immediately below the heading. In addition, there is advertisement for CDs with the *malazim*, video CDs etc.

¹⁰¹⁷ See: Digital Appendix B, #67–68, 110–112, 114–115.

¹⁰¹⁸ Video "The last moments of the martyrdom of the martyr leader Hussein Badr Eddin al-Huthi", posted on YouTube June 9, 2013, accessed April 3, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FetPFWinULg>. When accessed, the video had been viewed 25,119 times.

on special occasions long queues of visitors have come. His Facebook profile, albeit only having had existed from 2011 to the time of writing, contains photos of his life, showing him with his family and during study, making him appear very approachable. The printed *malazim* can be downloaded and videos from his lectures are available. His slogan is repeatedly highlighted, even in a logo that was created solely for this purpose. In sum, Hussein and ‘his mission’ blur into one.

The ‘honorable leadership frame’ consists of affirmations about the Zaydis’ righteous intentions (as previously underlined), their honorable conduct, and the religious, social, and cultural prestige, continuity of which is asserted and invoked over multiple generations. Badr al-Din, Hussein, and Abdul Malik are often depicted together, while the *malazim* and the picture of Hussein frequently precede speeches of Abdul Malik, thereby affirming their likeness. A documentary about Badr al-Din has been produced and broadcasted in a similar fashion as Hussein’s.¹⁰¹⁹ Instead of his martyrdom, however, Badr al-Din’s scholarly virtues and the eminence of wisdom and age are conveyed. The reverence this creates is passed on to Abdul Malik by the described linkage of the generations. The younger son is hence equipped and legitimized by the prestige of both his predecessors in leadership. This frame is new and serves the needs of the movement-turned-rebel group for a designated leadership.

The threat frame and the attribution of responsibility frame both play a more prominent role in the framing for the more militant audience. The main channels here are videos and audio, the latter often in form of recited *zamil* or *qasida* poetry or *anashid* (‘anthems’, sg. *nashid*).

The injustice frame is extended into a more violent dimension. It has been noted for its moderate audience and picks out the killing of children, as well as mistreatment/torture committed by the armed forces, as central themes. Attacks against ‘*al-ard al-yamani*’ (‘Yemeni soil’) become powerful symbolical images, as do pictures of American aircraft carriers and other military allegedly approaching the Yemeni coast with the approval of the Yemeni government.

This element already links to the threat frame. While it connects to the narrative of persecution since earlier Muslim times, the main emphasis of the threat frame is, in turn, on the US and Israel: They aim to control Yemen and destroy it, as they do with other Arab countries and people. The aggression against Gaza is conceived as an example.¹⁰²⁰ AQAP is

¹⁰¹⁹ See: Digital Appendix B, #159–163.

¹⁰²⁰ The issue of the Israel-Palestine conflict and the suffering of the Palestinian people – presumably among the original triggers of Hussein’s strong emotions against Israel – was again incorporated into the Houthis’ framing during the Gaza War in January 2009. They organized large pro-Gazan demonstrations and used the opportunity

an US invention and 9/11 a US conspiracy, all employed to enter the Middle East in the name of anti-terrorism. In the months before the outbreak of the sixth war, Saleh is moreover depicted as supreme commander of the armed forces with his troops in training, interpreted by the Houthis as the preparation for a new round of war that will be initiated by the regime. The threat frame is complemented by warnings of the lies spread by enemies and hidden opportunists, as well as those within their own ranks.

Even stronger, though, is the blame attribution. What is in focus particularly is the connection between Saleh and the US and Israel. Saleh is portrayed as evil. He is depicted to be ‘drinking the blood of his people’ and linked (through cuts) to dead children. The sequence of him shaking hands with George W. Bush is repeated many times, as are similar pictures with him and Barack Obama, him and Benjamin Netanyahu, and him and King Abdullah. Saleh, according to the frame, is implementing the US/Israeli agenda in the region, which is financed by the KSA. The KSA itself is also performing the US order in the region. It is attacking the Houthis (in 2009) and allegedly fighting with superior yet internationally banished and cruel weapons, namely phosphorus bombs, against civilians. The Saudis, then, will also be a party against which the Houthis fight in the sixth war.

Post-Conflict Mobilization Phase 2010–2012

During the Arab Spring protests, the Houthis joined in and connected some of their prior frames with those of the protesters. They stuck to blaming Saleh, however, adapting the frame more strongly along corruption, adding both a rights/freedoms frame (freedom of speech etc.) and an injustice frame, picking up the brutal repression of the regime against protesters in the so-called ‘Day of Dignity’ (*‘Youm Al-Karāmah’*) massacre on March 18, 2011. The frames were furthermore connected to those of other Arab states seeing protests and the parallels between the states were highlighted. Other opponents were the external powers that supported the unjust Arab regimes, while these regimes themselves – Saleh at the forefront – were considered in complicity with foreign interference.

In fall 2012, the protests against the defamation of Muslims by the West reached another height in the wake of the movie ‘Innocence of Muslims’¹⁰²¹ in which the Prophet Muhammad was, among others, denigrated as a pedophile. The Houthis used the occasion for a concerted

to again denounce Israel and the US. The narrative link established between ‘Gazans suffering from Israeli aggression’ and themselves was the equation of the formers state under siege with a perceived blockade of the Northern population by their own government (“which adheres to the same evil foreign powers”). *Al-Diyar*, January 18, 2009, cited in: ICG, “Defusing”, 13, n. 82.

¹⁰²¹ Two 14-minute movie trailers were posted on YouTube in July 2012, an Arabic version in early September 2012. It has caused massive outrage of Muslims worldwide and led to large demonstration and violent protests. YouTube was ordered to remove the trailer from its platform by a US court ruling in February 2014.

spreading of their slogan all over the capital Sana'a,¹⁰²² thus emphasizing their anti-Western stance in a highly visible, yet not undisputed, manner.

Phase of Political Participation 2013–07/2014

During the period of the NDC, the Houthis vested their position in 'rights rhetoric'. Representatives of the group, which now officially adopted the name 'Ansar Allah',¹⁰²³ emphasized the destruction and victims the wars brought about as main concerns. As Nabila al-Zubayr put it after referring to displacement, the slow reconstruction process, lack of resources, and the consequences for the educational system, "[t]he barbarism of the war did not target Houthi elements alone but all the inhabitants, leaving the problems of security between the citizen and the state."¹⁰²⁴ Ahlaq al-Shami, another representative, moreover stressed that

[t]he war did not stop (...) [It] was caused by the corruption and the political process (...) it randomly created crises and conflicts, not only in Saada but in all of Yemen (...) [W]hatever comes, we will continue towards peaceful and political solutions until our last chance.¹⁰²⁵

Along the lines of "we have been wronged by others" and the rights rhetoric, he also externalizes the conflict. Negating tensions between Zaydis and Sunnis in the North, he claims that, "the conflict is between the people of Saada and a group of extremists who were brought from all countries to the area, called the Salafis".¹⁰²⁶ The core strife was thereby deflected from within the population to 'population versus unjust regime' (at that moment referring to the past regime of Saleh) and 'population versus foreign extremists'.

The second aspect that was strongly accentuated throughout this phase was the injustice frame/suffering of the population during the wars. They issued and distributed two issues of a magazine called 'Fingerprints of Aggression' (*Bismat al-Aduan*) with very drastic pictures of victims and destruction;¹⁰²⁷ and, similarly, a youth branch organized a large 'art exhibition'

¹⁰²² See digital appendix D.

¹⁰²³ Nabila al-Zubayr, representative in the working group on Saada at the NDC (not a Houthi member herself), considered the official adaption and "synchronization" of the name a "step in the 'evolutionary' path of the Houthis in the direction of forming a political entity". Personal correspondence with Nabila al-Zubayr, April 2014.

¹⁰²⁴ Ibid. Similar statements were made by another representative in the working group, Ahlaq al-Shami, personal correspondence, January 2014.

¹⁰²⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰²⁶ The above citations: ibid. He also refers to these 'extremists' as '*takfiris*'.

¹⁰²⁷ 'Fingerprints of Aggression', Volume 1 [*Bismat al-Aduan*], Ansar Allah, September 25, 2012; 'Fingerprints of Aggression', Volume 2 [*Bismat al-Aduan*], Ansar Allah, September 25, 2013. Both were available for download on the ansaruallah.net website (currently unavailable after it has been hacked in summer 2014). Name and logo of the magazine (a fingerprint) suggest criminological elucidation of events, in line with

which was first shown in Sa'ada in the fall of 2013 for a few weeks on the central Tahrir Square in Sana'a. It was entitled 'Deep Wounds' (*Jerāḥ 'Amīqah*).¹⁰²⁸ Drawings, photos, sculptures and other installations, video and audio documents, cartoons, texts, official documents,¹⁰²⁹ and other exhibits gave a comprehensive account of government aggression, illegitimate intimidation and practices like torture, civil victims (and the high numbers of children among them), and the violation of constitutionally guaranteed rights, as well as the complex of the posed 9/11 conspiracy and regime complicity with foreign agendas. In this, statistics are presented as 'proof' or support, and connections are drawn between the terrorism allegations against Palestine, Lebanon, Syria etc. and the killings by US troops in Afghanistan, Iraq – and Yemen. Citations of Hussein are interspersed. In sum, the exhibition serves to reclaim sovereignty over the story that, when originally was told by the officially televised images, had obliterated items central to the events in the North from the perspective of the Houthis.

During this phase the Houthis also joined the general protest against US drone strikes in the country, help voiced by victims in public discourse and by human rights activists up to the level of the US senate.¹⁰³⁰ It fit well into the frame of threats by the US.

In parallel to all the repudiations and accusations, the corpse of Hussein was finally released by the authorities and the Houthis took the opportunity to host a spectacular funeral celebration on June 5, 2013. The event resembled a state funeral with a large parade and was attended by hundreds of thousands of people, according to an observing journalist.¹⁰³¹ Two citations¹⁰³² bring the purpose of the funeral to the point: First, a younger Houthi leader notes: "They thought that people would forget Hussein al-Houthi because there was no body. Imagine if we buried him nine years ago. Maybe 100 people would have attended." The second, Abdulkareem Jadhban, reminisces the 'martyr leader': "Hussein al-Houthi had a leadership personality. Everyone that knew him loved him. He urged people to face the American hegemony after 9/11." Hussein's legacy is meant to shine far beyond his grave.

the Houthis' assertion of bringing to light crimes against them. Advertisements for the magazine have been posted e.g. in Al-Haqiqa (issue 94).

¹⁰²⁸ The exhibition was accompanied by a Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/jerah.amygh> (accessed April 14, 2015). The analysis is based on 244 photos of the Sana'a exhibition, downloaded from the Facebook page. See digital appendix E.

¹⁰²⁹ Among these documents is for instance the written guarantee by Saleh to release those attested in return for an end of shouting the slogan (in the very beginning). It shall serve as proof of agreements broken by Saleh. Digital appendix E, photo 64.

¹⁰³⁰ "Drone Strikes Turn Allies into Enemies, Yemeni Says", *New York Times*, April 23, 2013, accessed April 14, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/24/world/middleeast/judiciary-panel-hears-testimony-on-use-of-drones.html?r=0>.

¹⁰³¹ Tik Root, "Yemen's Houthi Rebels Defy Years of War and Repression", *BBC World News*, June 18, 2013, accessed April 14, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-22933234>.

¹⁰³² Both adapted from: *ibid*.

Phase of Military Expansion and Coup 08/2014–03/2015

When the Houthis had positioned themselves as ‘leaders’ of the protests in the summer of 2014 and taken Sana’a in the fall, they raised three demands: First, they demanded the establishment of a new government and their share in national decision-making; second, they wanted to “carve out a local sphere of influence that is economically and politically viable”; third, while they accepted federalism in principle, they rejected the six-state solution in the form it had been passed.¹⁰³³ The first demand again circled around an alleged lack of legitimacy and was aligned with their anti-corruption stance and actions against it. The other two were more embedded into the anti-injustice strand. Fadhl Abu Talib, the speaker of the political council of Ansar Allah, declared in a 2015 interview: “It is not a coup. It is the result of the blockage of the political process.”¹⁰³⁴

What can already be made noticeable are the appearance of a harsher tone and a fiercer action against Hadi’s government, which both led to his (surprising) resignation in late January and the following disturbances that, in turn, led to KSA and others’ military intervention. Hence, the legitimacy of the regime has been disputed. Both this chain of events and the attacks by the KSA, which have been asked for by Hadi and are supported by the US, fit all too well into the established threat and regime complicity frames.

7.1.2.2. Prognostic Framing

As with the prognostic dimension in Hussein’s framing, it is much more limited in comparison to the diagnostic dimension. And once more this seems appropriate in order to focus action and not weaken it with too many instructions. Hussein’s *malazim* contained six prognostic frames, namely the ‘Qur’anic guidance frame’, the ‘Hashemite leadership frame’, the ‘jihad frame’, the ‘media use frame’, the ‘slogan frame’, and the ‘*khurūj* frame’. The ‘Hashemite leadership frame’ and the ‘media use frame’ lose their prominence, for both have been ‘realized’ by the leadership. The heads of the al-Houthi family are the de facto leaders of the group and thus manifest what has before been prognostic. A complex use of media is their main mobilizational tool, it taking a central role and allowing for a more instrumental use by the leadership. ‘Qur’anic guidance’ remains at the basis, asserted by the ubiquity of (excerpts of) Hussein’s *malazim* and the general emphasis of religious legitimacy. ‘*Khurūj*’ continues to be a problematic frame under the given circumstances. Since the regime, in its

¹⁰³³ Saada governorate should be tied together with poor and landlocked Dhamar; they strove to be fused with Hajja and al-Jawf instead. See: ICG, “Huthis”, 14f.

¹⁰³⁴ “We Strive to Achieve a Reform of Muslims in the Face of Their Enemies”, *The.What? 2015, no. 4*, Mouminoun without Borders Association (Morocco), 62ff.

counterframing, accuses the Houthis to strive for a reinstatement of the hated imamate, the use of concepts, which are tightly bound to Zaydi concepts of rule, could serve to strengthen this counterframe. Probably as a consequence, the use of the term '*khurūj*' is generally omitted. Nevertheless, I pose that subliminally it resonates all the same.¹⁰³⁵

The two core prognostic frames are the 'slogan frame' and the 'jihad frame'. The former, however, differs from its specification in the *malazim* in that it is no longer substantiated by its deterring impact on the US and Israel, but by the insistence on the freedom of speech (perceived as violated by the regime). It is thus defined as an act of opposition. The 'jihad frame' is basically a specification of a more general 'defense frame'. Except for a cursory notion of 'educate ourselves to match the enemy' there is no other specification of defense. Military jihad is thus the instruction provided to the militant adherents, while the moderates are rather advised to hold high the slogan and the Qur'an.

Central sources for the prognostic frames are videos, *anashid* (anthems; sg. *nashid*), printed interviews, and some printed material.

Houthi-Regime Conflict Phase 4: March 2005–February 2010

Tunes from the intro of *Star Wars* while a Qur'an sura flies in. A brief Qur'an recitation. A sequence of a historical portrayal of Arabs fighting foreign (non-Muslim) intruders in early Muslim times, accompanied by the heroic (Western) sounds of 'Conquest of Paradise' by Vangelis. A videotaped passage of Hussein's *malazim* ("we are under the Jews") with a cut and subsequent speech(es) of Abdul Malik, who occasionally imitates the gestures of his martyred brother. Mistreatment of Arabs by US soldiers and of Yemenis by the Yemeni army. Then (Houthi) fighters depicted with divine legitimation (sun imagery) who pray and fight. Successes in battle. Testimonials of fighters. Martyrs, who are extensively celebrated and honored by their society and families. Fighters preparing for battle, heavy weapons, fighters on tanks commandeered from the army. Large numbers of fighters in full gear in parade. Crowds of Houthi supporters, large demonstrations, all shouting the slogan, the flag with its depiction flying in the wind.¹⁰³⁶ This, in a nutshell, is the core content of the many videos posted by the Houthis in one or another form on Internet platforms, mainly YouTube.¹⁰³⁷

¹⁰³⁵ Pottek makes a similar argument in regard to the omission of reference to their status as *sadah* by the Houthi leadership. Instead they highlight their responsibility on the basis of constitutional rights, democracy, and religious freedom, circumventing the accusation of propagating an elitist social order. Pottek, "Anfang", 103.

¹⁰³⁶ The slogan is repeated in all forms, many times as last image at the end of videos.

¹⁰³⁷ This exact sequence stems from: Digital Appendix B, #45. This specific video with more than 34 minutes is rather long. The majority have less than 10 minutes, with the notable exception of speeches and Houthi documentaries. The contents existed in this form and variety from early videos onwards (see examples in the

The overwhelming majority of the videos focuses on only one or a few of the elements noted above, however, the compilation makes the mechanisms more visible:

Emotional music, sometimes Western, many times Arab/Yemeni, aims to move the audience. Concerning recited/sung poems that are compiled with similar images, the graphic designer and freelance film editor for many Houthi videos Malik al-Shami states, “they are “carefully chosen to evoke feelings of pride, anger, and commitment to the movement’s struggle”.¹⁰³⁸ Qur’an citations provide religious justifications and legitimacy, as does the portrayal of fighters with the sun (i.e. the divine) in the background, a typical *jihadi* iconograph.¹⁰³⁹ Taking the same line, the fighters praying and reading the Qur’an also stress how agreeable they are to God. The depiction of early Muslim fighters connects the rebels of today to a glorious tradition,¹⁰⁴⁰ providing them, too, with honor and glory. While this is more for their own self-esteem and pride, the honor of martyrs is divine (i.e. esteemed by god), eternal (the martyr will enter paradise), and social (in that the families and communities are proud of their martyred members and grateful for their sacrifice for the common good). Hussein, Abdul Malik and the pictures of mistreatment and else re-evoked the necessity for ‘defense’, while the positive, heroic, and successful fighter motivates to join his ranks. Successes in battle are depicted either in form of exploding targets,¹⁰⁴¹ captured enemies (who are sometimes forced to give testimonials about their strategies¹⁰⁴²) or captured vehicles and weapons¹⁰⁴³. The large numbers of fighters and supporters of the cause generate a feeling of being part of a strong community with common goal, manifested in the shouting and the flag of the slogan, which has become *the* symbol of collective identity. In sum, the framing conveys: You need to fight, to defend your community. It is legitimate. It is honorable. It is feasible.¹⁰⁴⁴

digital appendix); the fact that this one (potentially a compilation) was only posted in 2011 can hence be dismissed.

¹⁰³⁸ “Houthi Poetry and Songs: Propaganda, Art or Both?”, *Yemen Times*, December 4, 2014, accessed December 4, 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1839/report/4657>.

¹⁰³⁹ Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 225.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Alternatively, the movie ‘Lion of the Desert’ (1981) is used as a mine for fighting scenes. It shows the life of a Libyan jihadist who fought Italian occupation in the 1930s. See ‘Houthi Poetry and Songs’.

¹⁰⁴¹ See exemplarily: Digital Appendix B, #3.

¹⁰⁴² Likewise presented was the strategic military information they carried with them: Digital Appendix B, #23.

¹⁰⁴³ See exemplarily: Digital Appendix B, #26. The video was viewed 11.898 times. Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 226, provide the picture of a pamphlet which was distributed by the Houthis, depicting destroyed and conquered GoY tanks and trucks.

¹⁰⁴⁴ For a praise of Jihad see also *Al-Haqiqa*, issue 32 (April 19, 2009). It holds that: “A person should take responsibility for his religion. He should care and exert efforts to protect it and defend it anywhere and against anybody.”



Figure 7.8.: Photo collage taken from a Houthi video, a rare image of Hussein in connection with a weapon, visually providing legitimacy to armed struggle (through his prestige and Qur'anic legitimacy); the writing is a part of the slogan ('Death to America, Death to Israel, Victory to Islam')¹⁰⁴⁵

Some videos are positioned more directly against Saleh.¹⁰⁴⁶ One example, posted in November 2009, shows civil victims, mainly children, followed by accusations and mourning of locals in interviews. Guilt is attributed, and anger is voiced against the US, Obama, and Ali Abdullah Saleh, followed by one man's utterance: "*Al-jihad al-wajib*" ("jihad is the duty").¹⁰⁴⁷

Anthems or *anashid* are another widely employed genre for prognostic framing.¹⁰⁴⁸ In an interview with a Yemeni newspaper, one of the members of the not so old '*Firqa Ansar Allah*' ('Band Ansar Allah'), the Houthis' official musical group, emphasizes how his poetry was his way of supporting the rebels during the six wars. He claims to have written the following poem-turned-anthem after he had visited the mausoleum of Hussein:¹⁰⁴⁹

Oh Master of the weak, you have surrounded them [the enemy],
Smugness and arrogance reign no more,
If they attack you, your arms are like lightning bolts,
Shedding their blood, turning it into rain for the soil,

¹⁰⁴⁵ Digital Appendix B, #4.

¹⁰⁴⁶ See exemplarily: Digital Appendix B, #1. It depicts Saleh repeatedly with Bush (with inciting writings in the color of fire) and with Abdul Majid al-Zindani. His guilt and his evilness are strongly emphasized. It ends with the images of Houthi fighters inserting grenades into their mortars.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Digital Appendix B, #18.

¹⁰⁴⁸ They have been studied mainly in the context of (Salafi) jihadist culture; however, I found the results to accord in large parts with what I found for the *anashid* I screened. Behnam Said, for instance, distinguishes four major categories: battle hymns (by far the majority), martyr hymns, mourning hymns, and praising hymns. Behnam Said, "Hymns (*Nasheeds*): A Contribution to the Study of the *Jihadist Culture*", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 35 (2012): 863–879.

¹⁰⁴⁹ "Houthi Poetry and Songs".

You[r] grandeur is too complex for them to understand.

The image given of Hussein is – while defensive – one of a fighter for his country (watering “the soil”) and people (the “weak”). Another of his anthems has become very popular. It is called “Ma Nabali” (“We don’t care”):¹⁰⁵⁰

We don’t care
We don’t mind launching a new world war
We ask for rifles
It’s a shame to continue living like this
Struggling in the path of God, we’ve experienced the taste of bittersweet [sic!]
We welcome death
Hello, oh demise¹⁰⁵¹

The text is self-explaining, however, the mentioning of “shame” is worth noting, connecting the otherwise religious theme with the issue of honor.

Lines of other poetry recited in videos contain the term *‘junud allah’* (‘soldiers of God’) and *‘harb jihadi’* (‘jihadi war’).¹⁰⁵² The content ranges between praise of Hussein and Abdul Malik via threats uttered by Saleh against Abdul Malik¹⁰⁵³, to rebels running with large mortar grenades who are (through a scene cut) paralleled with Arab horsemen with sabers riding into battle, to US troops in combat, and burning US and Israeli flags. In sum, the ‘jihad frame’ could not be any clearer.

Post-Conflict Mobilization Phase 2010–2012

Saleh, a US aircraft carrier (probably close to the Yemeni coast), a (Yemeni) oil refinery, the Israeli President, Saudi attacks in Sa’ada, destruction, an attack on a mosque, Saleh (shaking hands) with Bush (repeated), dead children, Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, hunger, corpses, the army, Saleh shaking hands with Netanyahu, Saleh with Gaddhafi and Mubarak, Houthi banner, Houthi protesters among Arab spring protesters – banner: *‘irhal!’* (‘leave!’)¹⁰⁵⁴

The highly offensive tone remains, nevertheless, for the wider audience now including potentially new adherents or the circle of anti-regime Arab Spring protesters, the openly jihadi imagery is softened towards militant calls for protests and the fall of the regime. Firqa Ansar’s *anashid* join in along these lines:

¹⁰⁵⁰ Its popularity has led to numerous remixes and videos with it sung in the background, e.g. one in the ‘classical’ manner of pictures of Hussein, Abdul Malik, fighting etc., with the remixed *nashid* accompanying the video: Digital Appendix B, #82.

¹⁰⁵¹ “Houthi Poetry and Songs”.

¹⁰⁵² See exemplarily: Digital Appendix B, #78.

¹⁰⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Digital Appendix B, # 51. *Irhal!*’ was the famous imperative protesters confronted their respective authoritarian leaders with during the Arab Spring protests.

They are a few young men, who held a sit-in to support the uprising,
 They are a few young men who believed in God and so they united,
 They're no longer cave men. They've awakened from their slumber...
 Shocked by what they saw in caves filled with silence....
 Oh, how long have they been asleep!!
 ...We have wasted years being silent in the face of injustice...we were lost...our country
 was lost
 But they woke up!! Rejecting submission, they flounced, and launched an uprising
 supported by God...¹⁰⁵⁵

Throughout their presence in the 2011 protests, the Houthis took care to display the slogan as their identity marker in any way possible. For instance, it was glorified by the *Anashid*, and was posed to be a 'Qur'anic duty'. In one video, 'conversion' to the Houthi cause gets its own storyline centered around the slogan: When the slogan is painted on a rock by an adherent, the protagonist – at that point still an opponent – paints it over. At home, he on TV sees the US and Israeli crimes against Yemenis and other Arabs (Gaza), which emotionally upset him and trigger his 'conversion'. He goes back to the rock and repaints the slogan, during which divine blessing the form of the sun blazes down on him.¹⁰⁵⁶

Besides, a return to the Qur'an is propagated (and vaguely linked to jihad), the call is to not believe in rumors and news spread by the regime or opposing sources, but to inform oneself properly, and furthermore to educate oneself to match the enemy. After the ousting of Saleh, the enemy image is again shifted back to the US and Israel. A boycott of their products – a demand already raised by Hussein – is called for because they are reasoned to be a co-financer US drone attacks on Yemeni ground.¹⁰⁵⁷ Against Jews, they held the general points of Palestine – Gaza in particular (early 2012 war) – and the 'occupation' of the holy sites (among them the Al-Aqsa Mosque) in Jerusalem.¹⁰⁵⁸ For the above, see also the Al-Haqiqa issues of that period.¹⁰⁵⁹

Cultural components, with a revival of northern traditions such as dances and songs, took more space in videos after the immediate Arab Spring events as well.¹⁰⁶⁰ Similarly, they invoke the beauty of Sa'ada, having been damaged by destruction, and the will towards reconstruction is underlined.¹⁰⁶¹

¹⁰⁵⁵ "Houthi Poetry and Songs". The motive of the young men sleeping in a cave alludes to the Qur'anic story of the seven sleepers (Sura 'Al Kahf' ['The Cave']).

¹⁰⁵⁶ Digital Appendix B, #143.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Digital Appendix B, #157. The word '*al-muqataa*' ['boycott'] in the video has the same writing as the 'Death to America....' lines in the slogan, thus providing a visual linkage to the well-established prognostic framing.

¹⁰⁵⁸ See exemplarily: Digital Appendix B, #152.

¹⁰⁵⁹ See digital appendix C.

¹⁰⁶⁰ See exemplarily: Digital Appendix B, #177.

¹⁰⁶¹ Digital Appendix B, #108.

Phase of Political Participation 2013–07/2014

The moderate strands from before are continued. In addition, political demands and plans are presented. Ali al-Bukhaiti, spokesman of the group throughout the NDC, for instance, forestalled (or potentially responded to) doubts about the guarantee of religious freedoms that a stronger position of the Houthis might raise by underlining:

We understand that the majority of Yemenis are not Zaydi and that religious ideas cannot be forced on them. We are dealing with reality. Elections and a civil state are sufficient for us because we believe that religious groups will have greater freedom under a civil rather than a religious state. Many say that this is not really our goal, but it is.¹⁰⁶²

On the political level they hence assert their distance from the demand of a religious state. They had rarely (and then only internally) articulated the idea, however, their strong religious rhetoric and the historical legacy had to be countervailed to appease their political counterparts.

On another level, i.e. in videos targeting their followers, they continue a more militant – yet non-jihadi – path. Imam Husayn’s death in Karbala (with a depiction of the battle) is equaled with current protests. The enemies now are Netanyahu and Obama, and action against them is demanded (in order not to continue the passive stance that from early times on has been so devastating for the Shi‘a).¹⁰⁶³

Phase of Military Expansion and Coup 08/2014–03/2015

From summer 2014 onwards, main motives have been the provision of security by the Houthis after their seizure of Sana’a and a continuation of the previously commenced claims about the defense and re-conquest of Jerusalem.¹⁰⁶⁴ *Anashid*, with their typical content¹⁰⁶⁵ and cultural elements, remain highly popular.

Regarding the current goals, Fadhl Abu Talib says:

We want a civil modern state as laid out in the NDC. We believe that we do God’s will in protecting people and property. We aim at rights, stability, fighting corruption, the result of the youth revolution 2011, and a share in natural resource wealth. We need a leader

¹⁰⁶² ICG, “Huthis”, 12. The interview is dated November 11, 2013.

¹⁰⁶³ Digital Appendix B, #224.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Digital Appendix B, #128.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Aoud Al-Qisi analyzed more Houthi *anashid*, namely the titles: ‘We don’t care’, ‘Alive due to his death’, ‘Alive due to jihad’, ‘I caught fire’, ‘God did not pause’, ‘But, oh God, oh world, in which state [are you?]’, ‘Increase Zayd[iyya]’, ‘Takfiri’, ‘Oh God kept saying’, ‘War drum’, ‘Medal of honor’, ‘Invasion of infidels, fight for God’s sake’, ‘For God’s sake death is welcome’, ‘Soldiers of God’, and ‘We are the weapon of Ibn Badr al Din [i.e. Hussein] and we are the trigger’. He holds that on the whole they are expansionist, express a strong loyalty to Abdul Malik (whose status as member of the ahl al-bayt is emphasized!), and assert their loyalty and obedience to God. Aoud Al-Qisi, “Houthi Political Messages in Tactical Anthems”, *The What*, 32ff.

with a systematic mind, which reflects in policies, positions, and orientations, [qualities which] are absolutely given in Sayyid Abdulmalik al-Houthi.¹⁰⁶⁶

It is to be seen how this framing – Abdul Malik as (national?) leader – evolves over time.

7.1.2.3. *Motivational Framing*

The motivational framing revolves around four main themes: the necessity for defense in the face of threat, own strength (or, more abstract, ‘feasibility’), legitimacy, and the glory of martyrdom. It therewith differs from Hussein’s motivational framing in a number of aspects that all circle around agency: Hussein’s frames (‘weakness frame’, ‘threat frame’, ‘religious duty frame’, ‘feasibility frame’, ‘Zaydi community frame’) contain a lot more attributions of guilt and duty towards the audience, while the modified framing emphasizes positive components like righteousness and fortitude. The latter support the feeling of agency, a necessary or at least expedient component for a jihadi warrior. Overall, the shift appears rational and constructive when related to the shift of the prognosis to violence. There are no significant variations between 2005 and 2015, apart from a lack of ‘success stories in battle’ during the non-violent period, which is why I do not differentiate phases.

The ‘threat frame’ and corresponding ‘defense frame’ or ‘jihad frame’ have been discussed in detail. They contain the same call for action as the (potentially less pressing) threat frame formulated by Hussein before and form the only push-factor within the motivational framing.

Strength in the face of the enemies is obviously a central motivational frame. It is conveyed in the forms of ‘we are strong’ and ‘we are stronger than our enemies’, which both articulate important components of self-perception and self-efficacy. ‘We are many’ is another stressed aspect. These messages are predominantly mediated by more emotional channels, i.e. through music/audio, videos, and physically, for instance at gatherings. The pictures show victorious fighters, arms, destroyed/captured aircrafts, vehicles, general equipment,¹⁰⁶⁷ captive enemies, and, above all, masses of followers¹⁰⁶⁸ and fighters at protests, gatherings, celebrations,¹⁰⁶⁹ and military training. Masculinity, status, and virtue are

¹⁰⁶⁶ Muhammad Murshid al-Kamim, “We Strive to Achieve a Reform of Muslims in the Face of Their Enemies”, *The What*, 62ff.

¹⁰⁶⁷ See exemplarily: Digital Appendix B, #32. Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 217, 225, furthermore note the existence of a “battle report series” under the name of ‘Basha’ir al-Nasr’ (‘Prophecies of Victory’) with such depictions.

¹⁰⁶⁸ See also the (recent) claims about the large numbers of followers “everywhere” by Fadhl Abu Talib, “Reform of Muslims”.

¹⁰⁶⁹ See digital appendix: D.

categories that feature prominently in these scenes.¹⁰⁷⁰ Lastly, their fighters' preparedness for new combat and wars is highlighted.

Legitimacy is overwhelmingly realized through religion, e.g. through Qur'an citations, sun symbolism, the slogan (to a limited degree), and through statements about practicing and representing 'true Islam'. Besides, social and traditional legitimacy are framed by drawing connections with historical figures, the continuity of social values and of social order.

A similar reasoning reflects in the portrayal of martyrdom: It is honorable on a religious as well as a social level. The martyr follows in the steps of Hussein al-Houthi, who again followed Imam Husayn, and they are incentivized by the Qur'an's promised immediate ascent into paradise. Families (especially manifest in the images of children) are proud of their martyred relatives, and communities; people revere and commemorate them. The Houthis have introduced grand commemorative celebrations for martyrs with e.g. a week-long event in 2009. The leadership visits the families of martyrs, photos are taken, and support is given. Crowds visit tombs and a decorated hall, each name is mentioned, each picture displayed, similarly on Al-Masirah TV and during other large gatherings.¹⁰⁷¹ Music is composed specifically to honor the martyrs and to motivate others to join the ranks of these glorious fighters.¹⁰⁷² Hussein is constantly invoked as the 'original Houthi martyr' and together with his father lends additional credibility and prestige to Abdul Malik, who is (though only in restricted contexts) equally portrayed as a warrior.¹⁰⁷³ The message clearly is: We take care of your families. This targets especially potential new recruits.

In sum, the dominant pull-factors are based on an idealized vision of 'the glorious and just fighter in the name of Islam and in the defense of his family and people'. It is worth noting that in none of the three framing dimensions Zaydism plays a significant role.

7.1.3. Frame Distribution

In the Yemeni context, there are two 'natural' settings in communicating a message to a certain collective: Friday sermons (*khutab*) and *Qāt* chews, which provide an ideal and institutionalized occasion for political discussion. Furthermore, statements by religious and social personalities of prestige have a high local impact. All these can be assumed to have played a role in spreading first Zaydi revivalist ideas (as initiated by Badr al-Din al-Houthi) and later on the Houthis' frames. Music and poetry (with its specific persuasive function) as

¹⁰⁷⁰ Mohamed Faid Albakri, "The Houthis in Their Media – Focus: Al-Masirah TV", *The.What*, 40ff.

¹⁰⁷¹ See exemplarily: Digital Appendix B, #94.

¹⁰⁷² See exemplarily: Digital Appendix B, #247.

¹⁰⁷³ Digital Appendix B, #41.

central cultural techniques in the North are also omnipresent and statements confirm their vital role in Houthi framing from the beginning.

Period	1970s–1990	1990–1997	1997–2001	2001–06/2004	06/2004–09/2004	09/2004–03/2005	03/2005–04/2005	04/2005–12/2005	12/2005–02/2006	02/2006–02/2007	02/2007–01/2008	01/2008–05/2008	05/2008–07/2008	07/2008–08/2009	08/2009–02/2010	2010–2012	2013–07/2014	08/2014–03/2015
Mode ¹⁰⁷⁴																		
Book/Text ¹⁰⁷⁵	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Sermon	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Talk/Discussion ¹⁰⁷⁶	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Music		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Poetry		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Teaching		x	x	x												x	x	x
Speech		x	x	x	?	?	?	?	?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Holiday/Memorial		x	x	x										x	x	x	x	x
Lectures ¹⁰⁷⁷				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Slogan				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Body Practice				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Audio Recording				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Poster/Banner				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Rally				x												x	x	x
Interview					x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

¹⁰⁷⁴ ‘Mode’ encompasses ‘medium’, ‘genre’, and ‘practice’. A strict separation and differentiation between them provides no additional insight in regard to Houthi frame distribution and has thus been omitted.

¹⁰⁷⁵ This category refers to early publications of Badr al-Din as well as later print material of various kinds, including the printed transcriptions of the *malazim*, and leaflets distributed during the wars. Besides, Salmoni et al. mention the battle report series ‘*Nashirat al-Haqiqa*’; they are equally subsumed here. Cf. Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 217.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Typically in the setting of a *qāt* chew.

¹⁰⁷⁷ The *malazim* are a special category due to their great importance: In this line I refer to their contents, which spread ever since Hussein actually gave the lectures. They also, however, fall under the categories of ‘Text’ and ‘Audio Recording’, though each of those contain a lot of other material beyond the *malazim*.

Graffiti						x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Photo/Image							x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Website										x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Film/Video											x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Magazine											x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Cartoon											x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Testimonial											x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Radio											?	?	?	?	?	?	x	x	x
Badge/Token ¹⁰⁷⁸														x	x	x	x	x	x
Sites														x	x	x	x	x	x
Web forum															x	x	x	x	x
Documentary															x	x	x	x	x
Social Media																x	x	x	x
TV																x	x	x	x
Exhibition ¹⁰⁷⁹																?	x	x	x

Table 7.4.: Media of Houthi frame distribution throughout the previously defined periods (see 5.1.4.), including early activities of the al-Houthi family; conservative marking, only in case of evidence or probability close to evidence (like e.g. use of sermons or talk, i.e. qat chews); question marks imply the strong assumption of use without evidence

To the extent that teaching occurred during the periods of armed conflict and the respective interim phases cannot be validated. While I assume it did, I left it open on the table and only marked the post-conflict period, in which teaching institutions are confirmed open. Speeches as prime medium to address followers will most probably have constituted a continuous mean for the Houthis. There is strong evidence that they were employed solely by al-Houthi family members, as they were the central leadership. This medium, and its use by the group, thus represents the pure form of a hierarchical frame distribution. Similar to varying degrees are books/texts, sermons and teaching (when conducted by family members), the *malazim*, and audio recordings (again when the spoken word stems from al-Houthis). Music and poetry, for

¹⁰⁷⁸ The category includes all kind of tokens or ‘merchandise’, such as stickers (popular on rifles), clothing etc.

¹⁰⁷⁹ The ‘Deep Wounds’ Art Exhibition. I was not able to ascertain if the exhibition in Saada was also in 2013 or already in 2012.

instance, would originate with other persons and tend to be more democratic or multivocal. Talks and discussions during *qat* chews, but also web forums, and social media finally are based on interaction, thereby positioning them on the other end of the stratum from strongly and centrally controlled to less controlled, decentralized frame distribution. Overall, Houthi frame distribution is characterized by a high degree of centralization and control, as well as a high degree of intertextuality¹⁰⁸⁰. At the distribution's core lies Hussein's *malazim*, the – in itself complex – condensations of the sociocultural and political identities, as well as the positioning of the Zaydi revivalist movement the group claims to be. The pervasive 'citation' of *malazim* passages, and the ubiquitousness of the slogan as the symbolic abstraction of their message, provides clear evidence thereof. At the same time, it asserts the cohesion of the various frames' content, hence posing a criterion of the overall framing's quality.

The celebrations of Zaydi holidays such as 'Eid al-Ghadīr, including the introduction of their own holidays such as 'Martyrs' Week' have been harnessed for gathering up to tens of thousands (some sources even speak of hundreds of thousands) of followers and others. With their strong collective character, the option to evoke intense emotions, and convey frames in a number of ways, they feature an excellent occasion and method of frame distribution.¹⁰⁸¹ In a similar vein, this applies to rallies, though they are more focused on performing adherence, less on the absorption of messages. 'Body techniques' such as the raising of a fist when chanting the slogan, support the performance element while engraining the slogan (as identity marker) physically in the body of the follower.

Audio recordings have a large market in Yemen, specifically in the North, as has been previously noted. While the formats change with technical advances, they remain highly popular and have a number of advantages from the perspective of frame distributors: They are easy to produce and distribute due to the existing markets and distribution mechanisms; they reach remote locations without extra efforts; listeners can be individuals or groups, thus potentially reaching a multitude of people who may previously have been completely ignorant of the group and might turn towards it by chance; audio content is emotional and potentially reaches the audience more intensely and in a longer lasting mode; and most importantly, audio recordings (as all audio and purely visual content) reach the large numbers of illiterate audiences in Yemen. This consideration is of utmost importance for the frame distribution in this setting and principally explains the high prevalence of audio and visual media. The level

¹⁰⁸⁰ While the concept of 'intertextuality' refers to the uses of allusion, citation, loan translation, translation, plagiarism, *pastiche* (imitation of another's style), and parody in literature, I use it in regard to the output of Houthi communication. Therein it is rather reduced to the use of citation.

¹⁰⁸¹ The recreational activities in Zaydi revivalist schools and BY youth camps had similar effects, with the additional component of a teacher-student relationship, potentially adding even more authority to the teachers.

of education generally needs to be of concern when targeting a specific audience. Core themes are kept simple and are highly repetitive (also between various media and modes of transmission) in order to be easily comprehensible to everybody. On another level contrary to that are e.g. religious scholarly texts (as published by Badr al-Din) or interviews with international newspapers, when more complex messages are conveyed, and a distinct educational background is necessary for comprehension and contextualization.

Posters, banners, graffiti, and transient or permanent ‘sites’ such as the physical presence of Houthi tents on Tahrir Square 2011 or the mausoleum of Hussein, claim public space and speak of the presence of the group at certain locations. They symbolically lay claim to territory and create a physical perceptibility as structures.

With the advance of technology and infrastructure, an increased awareness for the centrality of communication, and the media blackout issued by the government during the fourth war in Sa’ada in 2007, the Houthis expanded their means of communication to new media. Their first website was almenpar.net (mid-2007), later on followed by sadaonline.net (mid-2009), ansaruallah.net (late 2010, including a forum) and ansaruallah.com (late 2011, equally including a forum).¹⁰⁸² The websites served the “information office”¹⁰⁸³ to spread information on the wars, articles, photos, audio and video files of the *malazim*, speeches, official statements, opinion pieces, and digital versions of the Al-Haqiqa magazine and other print publications. While it might have helped to reach out to new groups,¹⁰⁸⁴ and it certainly did support the dispersion of news during blockades (as did mobile phones and satellite phones through which the Houthi leadership communicated with international media)¹⁰⁸⁵, the limitations need to be acknowledged: limited availability of internet connections, (again) illiteracy, and frequent blocking of sites by the regime, at least during phases of open conflict. Notwithstanding, they continued to cultivate their web presence¹⁰⁸⁶ to the displeasure of the regime, which took note of alleged support the Houthis were able to rally this way.¹⁰⁸⁷

¹⁰⁸² almenpar.net went offline when its successor was launched. The subsequent two existed in parallel for quite some time. They were hacked some time in the second half of 2014 and since then can no longer be reached.

¹⁰⁸³ See Hamidi, “Inscriptions”, n. 76 for the earliest mentioning of this still existing Houthi institution.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Lucas Winter makes the argument in regard to remote areas. Winter, “Ansar of Yemen”.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Ibid., 178.

¹⁰⁸⁶ The ICG holds in their 2009 report that with the availability of the internet people in the Marran mountains changed from situating their grievances against the government in terms of the religious “commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong” to a terminology based on human rights discourse, democracy and else. In how far this is simple correlation or causally due to exposition to external discourses through internet access remains open. ICG, “Defusing”, 5. For a similar argument on how locals use information obtained from the internet in their portrayal of their situation to officials and activists see Hamidi, “Inscriptions”, 178.

¹⁰⁸⁷ See Saleh in an interview with the New York Times, explaining the checkpoints he had set up: “As for the checkpoints you see around Sana, they are there because of elements supporting rebels in Saada – (...) with money, media, internet statements etc.” “An Interview with President Ali Abdullah Saleh”, *New York Times*, June 28, 2008.

From the last war onwards at least, the group set up their own social media profiles, namely on Facebook and YouTube; Twitter¹⁰⁸⁸ played a minor role and was rather operated at a later point and in a decentralized fashion by spokespeople with their personal accounts (e.g. Ali al-Bukhaiti). They did not concentrate on one profile for each platform but created a number in succession and in parallel.¹⁰⁸⁹ On YouTube, this was partly due to various subgroups/organs stemming from the movement.¹⁰⁹⁰ For Facebook, however, it appears unnecessary and rather counterproductive. A couple of thousand users joined groups and liked content on Facebook, while view-numbers for the videos posted on YouTube range from a few hundred to six-figure sums¹⁰⁹¹; thousands to tens of thousands are most common. YouTube can thus be assumed to reach a much larger audience, unless the vast majority of visitors on Facebook pages do not leave any observable traces. The former assumption seems much more likely, especially when considering the permitted accessibility without a personal profile and its sole focus on video/audio.

With the utilization of the Internet, cross-referencing between the various media greatly increased: photos, recordings, texts etc. were now also posted online, linked with other material, shared and else. Even when excluding genuine productions for online presentation, ‘the net’ vigorously catalyzed frame distribution.

Films/Videos, as previously highlighted, were very popular among the media used by the Houthis; numerous examples have been cited above. Within the category, testimonials and documentaries as special genres rank among the most popular. The wide distribution of the Al-Haqiqa magazine is probably due to its digital version.¹⁰⁹² As with the professionalization of the other media, the magazine became ever more complex and extensive over time. While the earlier volumes contained rather bold cartoons and related texts, it over time commenced integrating topics of general interest such as health, computer tips, and the like, as well as the standard issues of Arab mainstream media such as the Israel-Palestine conflict. The moderate strand of Houthi framing, however, was preserved. Besides, the magazine served to advertise CDs, DVDs, and publications stemming from the movement (in addition to commercial advertisement underlining my claim to its characteristic as ‘mainstream’).

¹⁰⁸⁸ The official account is: www.twitter.com/ansaruallah. They signed up in November 2011, however, there was no activity after September 2014 (accessed March 6, 2015).

¹⁰⁸⁹ For instance, for Hussein (at least two subsequent accounts), for Abdul Malik, the group under the name of the Houthis, for the group under the name of Ansar Allah and else.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Videos about Houthi battles and the situation in the war region have been posted earlier by individual members of the movement and others. The earliest posts I found stemmed from early 2007; isolated older uploads can be presumed.

¹⁰⁹¹ Particularly prominent with more than 100,000 views are selected videos of Saudi attacks or victories over Saudi units and video tributes to Badr al-Din after his death.

¹⁰⁹² Its introduction in late 2007 falls together with the early ‘online era’ of Houthi communication.

I have not been able to trace the appearance of Houthi-centered radio broadcasting.¹⁰⁹³ Reliable evidence refers back only to recent years, however, I strongly assume that it has been established quite some time earlier, at least in the wake of internet presence. Radio is a favorite means for the distribution of the music by Firqa Ansar Allah. It admittedly appeals to some otherwise unaffiliated audience solely for aesthetic reasons.¹⁰⁹⁴

The most costly and laborious channel to run is the Houthi-owned TV channel Al-Masirah ('The March') that went on air on March 23, 2012.¹⁰⁹⁵ It is carried on the Egyptian satellite Nile Sat and can thus be received throughout the region. Among its program (which can also be streamed online) are news broadcasts, political talk shows, religious programs,¹⁰⁹⁶ documentaries, cultural programs and else – in any case no Houthi-critical voices. Like the radio station, it makes the reception of Houthi programming low-threshold, hence reaches out to the so-far ambivalent audience and occupies a space in between other interest groups (such as Islah¹⁰⁹⁷, the regime, and others) with their respective framing.

One more dimension of frame distribution is worth noting: the aspect of frequency and duration of distribution to the audience.¹⁰⁹⁸ The frequency can vary between once, repeatedly, and permanent; duration ranges from short-term to long-term (while it has to be specified how this is defined for each mode). The Houthis have opted to reach out to their audience in manifold ways and varying duration. While it is possible that a single, short-term exposure already mobilizes a dedicated movement member, I generally hold that most adherents were probably exposed to various media/channels over time.

The overall strategy, for the diversification it offers in regard to potential audience tastes and channels (audio/visual/physical), for the development in quality and openness to innovation, as well as for the employment of emotional vs. 'rational' address, deserves acknowledgement as highly (culturally and technically) appropriate in the given context and as coherently employed (despite certain gaps and contradictions in the frames themselves).

¹⁰⁹³ The frequency is 99.1 Sam FM, "a local station affiliated with the movement". "Houthi Poetry and Songs".

¹⁰⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁵ The flanking Facebook Page <https://www.facebook.com/AlmasirahTV> (accessed April 26, 2014) has received 217,544 likes since its initiation in late 2013.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Winter, "Ansar of Yemen".

¹⁰⁹⁷ The TV channel 'Al-Suhail' is affiliated with Islah.

¹⁰⁹⁸ 'Occasion' could be added, for instance in a celebratory context, in everyday life, in highly emotional contexts or else. However, while it exerts an influence upon frequency and duration, I assume it to be less important than these two aspects and thus exclude it from immediate consideration.

After the detailed presentation of the actors, their background, the conflict development, framing, and frame distribution it is time to come to the heart of the matter: How did the frames resonate among the audience?

7.1.4. Frame Resonance

Houthi Leadership

It doesn't matter if he is alive or dead. What matters is that he is the leader. That is, in terms of ideology and the Houthis' philosophy, Hussein is the leader (...) Even Abd al-Malik says this. He says "everything we have comes from my brother, Hussein".¹⁰⁹⁹

Hussein was revered among followers and his leadership role survived his death. His Facebook page¹¹⁰⁰ contains numerous blessings and hundreds of 'likes' when photos of him, citations, or blessings are posted. His father was praised among others in the *zamil* and videos about his life and scholarly work reach six-figure sums on YouTube, equally with blessings in the comments. Abdul Malik was able to profit from his descent and the legitimacy stemming from it, in addition to the resonance of his position. Among the 43 comments on an interview he gave to the newspaper *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* in September 2009, during the early phase of the sixth war, his denunciation of government aggression and defence of Houthi actions along the well-known lines received several praises for his "logical and reasonable words"¹¹⁰¹. Another one stated:

Victory to you, our Lord Abdulmalik. (...) Your victory is divine and so is your grandfather Ali Ibn Abi Talib. Confidence in God above everything. We are the sons waiting for your order to open [up] the front. Our destination is at issuance [of] your orders. (...) They will be held accountable for their crimes in history. (...) Victory to God and death to the enemies!¹¹⁰²

The commentator refers to the status of Abdul Malik as a *sayyid*, which provides him with religious legitimacy. His leadership is acknowledged and support for battle assured. Additionally, historical crimes (by the regime) are given as a reason for the situation. On the whole, the comment reflects that the diagnostic frame of injustice (by the regime), the

¹⁰⁹⁹ A Houthi supporter on Hussein's leadership role. "Yemeni Shi'ite Cleric and Houthi Disciple 'Issam Al-'Imad: Our Leader Houthi is Close to Khamenei; We Are Influenced Religiously and ideologically By Iran", *Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI)*, Special Dispatch No. 2627, 2009, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/print3757.htm>, accessed August 19, 2013.

¹¹⁰⁰ See: <https://www.facebook.com/hualsayeed> (accessed April 21, 2015). The page received 7,340 'likes' as page itself, implying that at utmost minimum that number of people visited the page at least once, potentially regularly, and receives automatic updates on new posts, i.e. some kind of information flow occurs.

¹¹⁰¹ "Abdul Malik Al-Houthi: Do Not Bet on Any Regional Power", *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, September 20, 2009, accessed May 5, 2015, <http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=536701&issueno=11254#.VUjQO5MxASQ>, comments 1, 5, 8, 19 on the article.

¹¹⁰² *Ibid.*, comment 3.

prognostic frame calling for armed struggle, the religiously based ‘honorable leadership frame’ (linked with high credibility of the framers), and the motivational component resonated – with this individual. Others assert that they “are with [the] Huthis”¹¹⁰³ as well. However, there are also neutral (questioning), critical, and hostile voices among the commentators. Questions take up issues like “why did Yahya Huthi visit Iran in Ramadan?”¹¹⁰⁴ and the interaction of the Houthis with the local inhabitants of the areas in which they operate¹¹⁰⁵. A critical commentator, a sheikh from Sanhan tribe, remarks that “we are not satisfied with the government’s actions against the Houthis. [They] are brothers of the people. But we (...) wonder [if] they did not exacerbate the situation. (...)”. Later, though, his positive perception of the group seems to get the upper hand over his criticism of their strategy when he accuses “the state [who] authorized to kill Muslims who are only defenders (...)”.¹¹⁰⁶ The hostile voices defame the Houthis as, “the devil in Saada”¹¹⁰⁷, aiming at “*fitna*” (sedition)¹¹⁰⁸, ignorant¹¹⁰⁹, liars¹¹¹⁰, “infidels”¹¹¹¹, and “magi”¹¹¹². Defamation is thus phrased in religious terms and in an accusation of their motives and morals, i.e. it contains an element of general repudiation. Allegations of an Iranian agenda behind the Houthis are furthermore prominent, expressed e.g. in another comment which calls the group “traitors to the nation and agents of Iran”¹¹¹³. On the whole, slightly more than half of the comments are positive, some are neutral, maybe 35–40% are negative.

While in this example I also specifically draw attention to contesting voices, I will now continue with a focus on the positive resonance and return to negative perceptions in the following chapter on counterframing.

¹¹⁰³ Ibid., comment 17, 35.

¹¹⁰⁴ Ibid., comment 18. Yahya’s visit to Iran remains an unconfirmed accusation.

¹¹⁰⁵ Ibid., comment 6.

¹¹⁰⁶ Ibid., comment 21.

¹¹⁰⁷ Ibid., comment 31.

¹¹⁰⁸ Ibid., comments 36, 41.

¹¹⁰⁹ Ibid., comment 36.

¹¹¹⁰ Ibid., comment 20.

¹¹¹¹ Ibid., comment 39.

¹¹¹² Ibid., comments 32, 34, 41. The term ‘*magi*’ alludes to the ancient labelling of Zoroastrians. Later it was used to denote ‘magicians’ in the sense of practitioners of alchemy, astrology, and similar esoteric arts. The current use in Yemen implies a denigrating allusion to religious connections to Iran.

¹¹¹³ Ibid., comment 9. It also insults them as “dogs of Iran” (dogs are considered impure animals in Islam) and claims they strove for the imamate. Dogs are considered impure animals in Islam.

The threat: Systematic oppression of Zaydis

According to the perception of a Zaydi scholar in 2009,

[a]s people, as a community, as a tradition, we¹¹¹⁴ have been targeted in a very violent way. We have been prevented from exercising our rights. We have been deprived of jobs and education. Our schools and institutes were shut down. Such oppression has convinced many to defend themselves.¹¹¹⁵

The statement reflects a strongly felt collective identity. The threat towards this identity group emanates from the state who deposed it from its rights in a violent and oppressive, i.e. ‘unjust’ way and thereby triggers (legitimate) defense. Again the perception mirrors the Houthis’ frames.

Interviews conducted by the ICG uncover how even those (Zaydis) who are critical of the Houthis and their violent path nevertheless generally share the threat perception towards Zaydis as an identity group. Hassan Zayd, for instance, stated his view that “the Houthis are just a label. The government’s true targets are Zaydis.”¹¹¹⁶ How strong the ties are on which the group partly relies is emphasized by Ali al-Bukhaiti (from the perspective of the Houthis): “It is easy for Ansar Allah to spread in traditionally Zaydi areas because our religious ideas appeal to the population. The culture of Zaydism is longstanding and deep.”¹¹¹⁷ His opinion is backed by a Zaydi scholarly family supporting them:

The Huthis have support from Hashemites who do not believe in the group’s religious ideas, but who sympathise with them because of ethnic¹¹¹⁸ affiliation. The movement also enjoys support from a wider subset of Zaydis, who, like the Hashemites, do not believe in all of the ideas or actions of the Huthis. But they sympathise because Huthis are Zaydi and because, as a group, Zaydis feel marginalised by the state and Islah.¹¹¹⁹

The statement throws an ambivalent light on the importance of identity versus the impact of framing: According to the interviewee, solidarity with the identity group to a certain extent trumps the consensus with the Houthis’ strategies and religious interpretation. This view is shared by others, among them a sheikh from Jawf, who is “sympathetic to the Huthis”¹¹²⁰: “[I]f the Huthis turn their back on Zaydism, they will die in Yemen. If they announce that they are Twelver, all of the Zaydis will turn against them. But if they hold on to Zaydi ideas,

¹¹¹⁴ Here, ICG adds “[Zaydi Hashemites]” to make clear the presumed reference. Unless there is specific reference at another point of the interview that supports the claim that it only refers to the Hashemites, I disagree with this limitation for as I read the quote, he refers to Zaydis in general, not only Hashemites, when he refers to schools and jobs, as well as defense – schools to take just one example were open to all so consequently all would have suffered from discrimination resulting from their closure.

¹¹¹⁵ ICG, “Defusing”, 12.

¹¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹¹⁷ ICG, “Huthis”, 10.

¹¹¹⁸ By the term ‘ethnic’ they mean to refer to the identity group of *sadah*/Zaydi Hashemites.

¹¹¹⁹ ICG, “Huthis”, 10.

¹¹²⁰ Ibid.

the road will be long for them.”¹¹²¹ The bond of a very salient shared identity certainly needs to be acknowledged; it also provides an adjuvant perspective to evaluate the regime’s attempts to delegitimize exactly this connection, the authenticity of the Houthis as Zaydis (see the following chapter on counterframing). However, other variants of the link between Zaydi identity and political stance in the conflict are equally present, as are different and much more frame-based explications of why people follow or support the Houthis. All of these add further pieces to the picture. The story of a Zaydi human rights activist, for example, describes how it was only due to the political situation and the available frame in the background that his personal identity as a Hashemite became salient:

I am secular but the political situation has led me to take a closer look at my origins, which are Zaydi and Hashemite. Once, when I handed my passport to an immigration officer at the airport, he asked me whether I was a Hashemite, as if it was legal to question my origins, as if the law demanded it and favored such discrimination.¹¹²²

It shows how the criterion of ‘experiential commensurability’ essentially contributes to successful frame resonance: The interviewee states how in a situation under stress or pressure the ‘injustice frame’ made him more attentive to how he was treated by non-Zaydis. In an average situation, that is one assumed to have occurred on a regular basis, he then perceives the frame as correct, ‘confirmed’ by his personal experience.

Stories of enforced disappearances and (arbitrary) detentions affirm the perceived connection between Zaydi identity and the injustice frame, which is more or less explicitly (rather the latter) causally attributed to the regime. HRW documented the following case, told by the wife of a detainee in the summer of 2008:

His father went to the local police. There, the officer asked him, “how does your son pray, with his arms by his side [in the fashion of Shi’a Muslims], or with his arms crossed [in fashion of Sunni Muslims]?” His father replied that Yasir is a Zaidi Muslim and a preacher in a Zaidi mosque. The officer said, “Aha, then I think I know where he is. Go to Political Security.”¹¹²³

The depiction of the political situation for *sādah* during the wars sounds similar in the words of another wife of an arrested Hashemite: “[O]nly non-Hashemites are allowed to criticise the war in Saada. If you are a Hashemite and a Zaydi and you are against it, you face immediate arrest.”¹¹²⁴

¹¹²¹ Ibid.

¹¹²² ICG, “Defusing”, 12, n. 79.

¹¹²³ HRW, “Disappearances and Arbitrary Arrests in the Armed Conflict with Huthi Rebels in Yemen”, October 2008, 19.

¹¹²⁴ ICG, “Defusing”, 9.

Turning from identity towards the actual content of Houthi framing, we again find different opinions. A young journalist and Houthi adherent described the internal debate between Hussein and established *'ulamā'* and the consequences they drew from their respective positions as follows:

Husayn tried to break the monotony of *fiqh*, *usul al-fiqh*, and mechanical memorization. For example, he believed that to look ten years on the centuries old Kitab al-Azhar is a waste of time. The American enemy is upon us and our scientists spend their time studying and teaching the memories of Imam al-Hadi. Husayn said that these memories are valid in their context, which obviously does not correspond to ours. He was not dogmatic and the renewal he tried to introduce in the Zaydi landscape has not been received as a good thing by our scholars. (...) Some students of Husayn went to Sanaa and dared to face our old *'ulamā'* saying: You are the *'ulamā'* regarding menstruation and childbirth, a way to mock the lack of renewal in their teachings.¹¹²⁵

This tells us a number of things: First, he and the students of Hussein he mentions strove for a modern, pragmatic interpretation of Zaydism, which Hussein's approach satisfied. This, however, led to tensions with a circle of older established religious scholars. A generational cleavage can be assumed to be part of these tensions; Hussein was part of the younger generation and it was thus easier for him and his brothers to get in touch with the younger Zaydis. We find this hypothesis supported. Second, the desire for action was successfully connected to the perception of "the American enemy" and an implicit drive to act against him, i.e. the anti-US framing resonated. And third, related yet worth noting separately, it resonated with an educated person. While the same accounts for some of the earlier citations as well and can partly be ascribed to a distortive accessibility of sources by educated followers to the disfavor of the many unheard uneducated members, it is crucial to acknowledge the simultaneous resonance among different social strata. It helps to substantiate the resonance of the various components of the frames, here e.g. its religious basis for the call for action as developed by Hussein in the *malazim*.

By another member of the post-revolution generation of Zaydis, however, the reaction was quite the opposite. Muhammad Sharaf al-Din, a *sayyid* who has always had a distanced relationship towards his creed and supposed status, actively distanced himself from activism as well:

This is no time for activism. Many people got killed [since the conflict began in 2004] and all Hashemites are paying the price for it. My brother was a police officer. It is well-known that he is the son of a revolutionary. Seven months ago he was dismissed from his job because of his name. Now he is doing minor clerical work. My cousin's sons got killed in the war. [As a result] their father his lost job, too. Issues related to the [Zaydi] *madhab* should not have been brought up again. They belong to the past. Besides, not

¹¹²⁵ Dorlian, *Mouvance*, 148. Interview conducted in April 2007. Personal translation.

everybody is a Zaydi. They [the activists] should talk about government corruption rather than the *madhab*. My cousin did some research on the medieval imamate. There were three or four imams at a time and each one came up with a different interpretation of the Qur'an. We do not need that sort of thing.¹¹²⁶

He is deterred by the consequences of the war and the repression faced by the regime that punishes *sādah* collectively or as soon as they perceive any connection to the Houthis. In addition, he would prefer the issue of Zaydism to remain in the depth of history rather than to be activated again as a distinct identity with its own model of a social order – one which he, based on rather superficial information, holds to be inadequate. What he does believe to be true in spite of his renunciation of Zaydism, however, is the grievance of regime corruption. His view, as it were, is the reverse of the previously stated solidarity and adherence based of collective identity despite different opinion: Muhammad agrees with at least part of the diagnosis but denies the salience and significance of Zaydi collective identity. Yet, on the basis of the existing sources I want to argue that his position appears to be a minority perspective, at least among his generation and the successive ones.

Blaming external powers: Anti-US, anti-Israel, and anti-KSA positions

A female student interviewed in 2007 reproduces matter-of-factly the frame of American and Israeli dominance in her assertion of Hussein's call for an active stance of believers: "Sayyid Husayn is right to say that at the time when America and Israel dominate the Arabs and Muslims it is not proper to retreat into perfect Zionist circles of knowledge."¹¹²⁷

Visitors of the 'Jerāh 'Amīqah' exhibition reflect upon their perception with the following reactions:

I have seen photos and examples and it was a noticed effort from the youth people. However, I believe the reality is greater, bigger, harder and more disastrous. The Zio-American plan is performed with Arabic and Islamic hands and ignorance is one of the most important reason.¹¹²⁸

Really deep injuries. And what happened in Saada because of the wars and violation is only a clear sign of hatred of the Zionist on the Yemeni people and the Islamic people in general. But God is not unmindful of what the wrongdoers do.¹¹²⁹

While the first commentator regards the Arab/Islamic regimes as guilty of executing the "Zio-American plan" – as Hussein had framed and as was picked up in the exhibition – the second

¹¹²⁶ Vom Bruck, "Regimes", 218f. She describes his difficult relationship with his faith and heritage over time.

¹¹²⁷ Dorlian, *Mouvance*, 148. Personal translation.

¹¹²⁸ See: 'Jerah Amiqah' exhibition, photo186, digital appendix E.

¹¹²⁹ Ibid., digital appendix E. The commentator identified himself as "judge", i.e. well-educated.

somewhat unconnectedly holds “the Zionist” immediately responsible (maybe in an unreflected response to the just seen exhibits).

A comment on one of the Facebook pages by Ansar Allah becomes more explicit in the accusations:

Our enemy the United States and Israel (...) you move the intelligence in Sanaa and other Yemeni provinces and the work of explosions and assassinations here and there as it happens these days to disturb people and throw the security and safety in [disorder] to prove that the Yemeni army and security are unable to bring security to the country so it will ask the US government. (...) First we accuse America and Israel [of] all what is happening in Yemen. America is the head of evil (...) ¹¹³⁰

Besides this more elaborate position, the page furthermore hosts numerous written ‘exclamations’ of the slogan with its inherently anti-US and anti-Jewish stance, the prediction that “[u]nless we insist on Ansarallah we [will become] clients [of] the Jews and Christians”¹¹³¹, as well as countless abusive revilements against Israelis/Jews/Zionists.

More enlightening, however, than a long list of anti-US/anti-Israel statements are the most precise specifications of frame resonance. In regard to the KSA’s involvement in Yemen, for example, a Zaydi scholar declared: “Saudi Arabia is scared of the Hashemites. They are the only group that could directly compete with the Saudi royal family.”¹¹³² This threat towards the KSA to him explains their strong anti-*sādah* and anti-Zaydi engagement – financially and ideologically with their offensive export of Wahhabism. Saudi financial resources are considered as prolonging the war(s) (or even facilitating them in the first place): “If there is a will to stop the war, there will be a solution. But the government wants the war to continue in order to continue receiving financial support from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.”¹¹³³ As with anti-US and anti-Jewish sentiments, the negative perceptions of the KSA and Salafis/Wahhabis find one channel of expression in verbal abuse online. Calls to “destroy the Wahhabi criminal”¹¹³⁴ and accusations that “Saudi assassinated Al-Houthi”¹¹³⁵ are among the more moderate statements. Nevertheless, the regime remains the central recipient of guilt attributions.

¹¹³⁰ Facebook page ‘Maukaa Ansar Allah’ [‘Ansar Allah site’], comment on February 2, 2014, accessed February 4, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/ansarallahweb?fref=ts>.

¹¹³¹ Ibid., comment on January 31, 2014. Other comments from the period (i.e. late 2013/early 2014) also refer to the then-focus of Houthi framing with the goal of the ‘liberation of Jerusalem’ among others.

¹¹³² ICG, “Defusing”, 13. Interview conducted on January 11, 2009.

¹¹³³ Ibid. Same date of interview, but with a different scholar.

¹¹³⁴ Facebook page ‘Maukaa Ansar Allah’ [‘Ansar Allah site’], comment on January 23, 2014, accessed February 4, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/ansarallahweb?fref=ts>.

¹¹³⁵ Ibid. Comment on January 21, 2014.

Responsibility for Injustice and Violence: Anti-Regime Sentiments

A Yemeni youth on his blog wrote the following summary about his perception of the ‘Jerāh ‘Amīqah’ exhibition:

Phosphorus bombs; bombardment of families in their houses; siege lasting for months; torture and abductions; the disappearances of children; all those are few of the inhuman crimes that happened in a trail of six wars that were fumed by continuous religious provocation and government campaigns. No wonder the Youth Cultural Forum called their art forum (...) deep wounds. Up to this day, even though a number of countries including the USA, Saudi Arabia, and several others participated and funded those six wars, these wounds remain unheard by the people of the world.

The six wars launched on Sada’a beginning in 2004 through 2010 left severe destruction. Even though the Government of Yemen recently apologized for the unnecessary wars that were meant to silence a people who were obliged to shout out against the American occupations, this apology has not been displayed in complete honesty. The truth about what happened needs to be told. Not only that these people’s practices are peaceful in using non-violent expression, the first two years before the attacks started over Sada’a there were already thousands of illegally imprisoned youth who were unarmed and some for only being sympathetic with Ansaruallah (Houthis). The art gallery brought together a summary of what women, men, and children had to endure in defending their lives and values.¹¹³⁶

The fronts are clear: The GoY has committed crimes against its peaceful population. It illegally and aggressively arrested youth who were part of the people who – legitimately – protested non-violently and pushed the region into war. Enemies are labelled, victims created; no mention is made, however, of specific Zaydi discrimination (it was downplayed in the exhibition). The language is strongly shaped by a rights discourse and the aim of the people merely defense. In a nutshell, it’s an exact reproduction of Houthi frames by an arbitrary, yet vocal member of the audience, who himself functions as a potential multiplier to a wider public (beyond his immediate circle of personal acquaintances).

Other voices support the argument that the injustice frame resonated. One Zaydi states about the Houthis in late 2009: “Their demands for justice are within the demands of the Yemeni nations as a whole”¹¹³⁷, thereby aiming to overcome the special role attributed to Zaydis for the sake of a more inclusive, national unit of reference.¹¹³⁸ Commentators on the exhibition emphasize it over and again: “What we have seen left in our souls deep injuries about the crimes which the regime made against Saada’s people and their supporters.”¹¹³⁹

¹¹³⁶ See: <http://www.globalrevolts.blogspot.de/2013/10/jerah-amygh-where-did-we-go-wrong-with.html> (accessed October 31, 2013).

¹¹³⁷ King, “Zaydi Revival”, 441.

¹¹³⁸ HRW quotes a Yemeni judge in voicing a critical comment about the state of justice in regard to the Houthi wars: “Our problem is that justice is not working. All arrests are politicized and the course of justice is blocked.” HRW, “Disappearances and Arbitrary Arrests”, 23.

¹¹³⁹ ‘Jerah Amiqah’, comment in guestbook, photo 185, comment 1, see digital appendix E.

“[W]hat happened in Saada is one of the most awful war crimes. There is no power but from God.”¹¹⁴⁰ The ‘foreign enemies’ role is perceived as framed as well:

I have seen photos and examples (...). However, I believe the reality is greater, bigger, harder and more disastrous.¹¹⁴¹ The Zio-American plan is performed with Arabic and Islamic hands and ignorance is one of the most important reason.¹¹⁴²

Really deep injuries. And what happened in Saada because of the wars and violation is only a clear sign of hatred of the Zionist on the Yemeni people and the Islamic people in general. But God is not unmindful of what the wrongdoers do.¹¹⁴³

God as source of justice sides with the people of Sa’ada, who are suffering from oppression, and there is a greater purpose involved: “In spite of what happened to them, I am sure God will not let all what they suffered be in vain. God is with the oppressed people.”¹¹⁴⁴ It becomes specified in this comment: The ‘greater purpose’ is the end of oppression and a peaceful future – which will be reached through the actions of the Houthis:

The exhibition embodies the amount of destruction that happened to the Yemeni people and their souls. It is also a proof of a period full of oppression and the absence of democracy. I am sure by the revolution of the youth of Saada [the Houthis] peace and prosperity will start soon and the end of all the oppression will be revealed and published.¹¹⁴⁵

In this particular case, however, a critical view is necessary as to how far the democratic involvement of the Houthis at that time might have influenced the perception of their democratic disposition. Nevertheless, the constitutive positive tenor remains.

Interviews from early 2014 substantiate that the Houthis were able to uphold people’s respect. Despite their temporal distance to the wars, these statements (in a similar way as the one above) provide evidence of the general perception the interviewed have of the group and the direction it takes. A *qabili* from the governorate al-Jawf, for instance, declared:

The Huthis have been able to spread in Jawf because of the injustice that exists there. Huthis provide security where none existed before. They work honestly with the people and focus on fulfilling the people’s needs, like ending revenge killings. The Huthis also implement the judgements of local courts. In the north of Yemen, the most important thing is to solve problems between people, like revenge killings, and to provide security. These are the two things people want most and the Huthis are providing it.¹¹⁴⁶

¹¹⁴⁰ Ibid., photo 185, comment 2.

¹¹⁴¹ In fact, a *sharifa* commented on the overwhelming reality in regard to the depiction: “In spite of all that they were not told as I experienced them. My injuries are very deeply buried.” Ibid., photo 220, see digital appendix E.

¹¹⁴² Ibid., photo 186, see digital appendix E.

¹¹⁴³ Ibid., photo 189, see digital appendix E.

¹¹⁴⁴ Ibid., photo 199, see digital appendix E.

¹¹⁴⁵ Ibid., photo 207, see digital appendix E.

¹¹⁴⁶ ICG, “Huthis”, 6. Interview conducted in February 2014.

The Houthis are evaluated in light of perceived prior injustice and their performance in the provision of security and judicial services, i.e. pragmatic criteria. Another *qabili* puts it quite similarly when he says:

The Huthis went to the squares and spoke for the oppressed. The traditional parties joined the revolution too, but now they are in the government and corruption has just shifted to their hands. Huthis are not part of this. They are not corrupt.¹¹⁴⁷

Their stance and de facto action against corruption were promoted by the Houthis, especially from fall 2014 onwards. Their lack of inclusion into the government fostered the image of their genuine incorruptibility and created approval; the more so when – as described in the above citation – new office holders were allegedly quickly absorbed into the existing patronage system. Some ideational valuation stems from a sheikh who holds that:

Ansar Allah is a Yemeni movement for freedom and dignity. The Yemeni people are against the entire corrupt old regime, not just one person [Saleh]. But thus far the GCC initiative has preserved the same pattern of corruption. The transition has been a time of dividing the spoils between traditional forces.¹¹⁴⁸

Throughout the ‘revolution’ the group has managed to hold up their image as (a) close to the people, (b) connected with the central revolutionary values of freedom and dignity, and (c) incorruptible as mentioned above. *If* there had been serious objection to their actions during the wars, I doubt there would be such a positive image only shortly thereafter. A drastic change from the positive, no negative, perception of a movement is likely because major expectations are disappointed. The opposite appears less likely, for it would be much more problematic to overcome an existing rejection of a group’s behavior and create enough trust and credibility in its future consistency of action. Thus, I consider the linking of the Houthis with the positive values as an indicator of a principally positive perception during earlier years.

Houthi Defensive Use of Violence

In line with the general resonance of Houthi frames as described above is also their ‘defense frame’ as a legitimization strategy resonated among different audiences. A “Zaydi intellectual and founder of a Sanaa research institute” is quoted saying that “(...) the Houthis have no agenda whatsoever. They never articulated any conditions for peace other than to be left in

¹¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 7. Interview conducted in February 2014.

¹¹⁴⁸ Ibid. Interview conducted in February 2014.

peace – not to be attacked and not to have their villages bombed.”¹¹⁴⁹ A (non-Zaydi) journalist affiliated with the YSP expressed a similar opinion:

Whenever the state declared an end to the fighting, the Huthis immediately stopped. They respected the decision and only responded when the army attacked them. Husein al-Huthi had no plans of any kind. It is the government and the army which, through their mistakes, wrongdoing and violence, gave rise to the rebellion.¹¹⁵⁰

As put here, legitimacy is attributed to the actions of the Houthis on the basis that rebellion against aggressive violence is justified and that the Houthis are solely in a defensive position in the conflict. Blame is attributed solely to the GoY’s actions.

Furthermore, Houthi violence is described as selective: “The Huthis have never exercised violence against neutral people; they have only attacked people who were supporting the government and collaborating with the army.”¹¹⁵¹ The use of violence against non-immediate army members again is legitimized by anti-Houthi actions of the targeted individuals and groups, i.e. by declaring it defensive.

There is evidence suggesting that the more fighting took place, the more destruction of the region resulted, and that the more civilians got killed, the more people joined into the fighting on the side of the Houthis. Although, this was not necessarily due to religious reasons or their stance as a whole but to the intensification of grievances and repression, the source of which was the government. In the words of a GPC member of the governments Consultative Council:

The Houthis seem to have a lot of followers, not for religious reasons but because the population feels discriminated against and excluded from development policies. Unfortunately, the destruction of villages has not helped fight that impression.¹¹⁵²

Since these experiences fit well the Houthi frames of attributing aggression to the GoY and of portraying Zaydis (i.e. the majority of Northerners) as victims, it confirmed and fortified its ‘empirical credibility’.

The Necessity to Fight

Proving the resonance of immediate calls for violence is difficult. The main reason lies in the prolonged inaccessibility of the war region to journalists and scholars and the resulting lack of contact to Houthi fighters. Fighters themselves did not produce written reactions like other

¹¹⁴⁹ ICG, “Defusing”, 12. Interview conducted on January 14, 2009.

¹¹⁵⁰ Ibid. Interview conducted on January 17, 2009.

¹¹⁵¹ Ibid., 14. Interview conducted on January 11, 2009.

¹¹⁵² Ibid., 13.

segments of the population cited above, due to lack of alphabetization, access to media, and potential lack of interest in external communication.

The slogan, however, deserves reflection in this regard; its meaning needs distinction. While it has one level of meaning on which it merely serves as an icon of common identity, abstracted from its content,¹¹⁵³ two more should not be overlooked: On a second level, it voices deep discontent with foreign intermeddling in Yemen and implies the need and impetus of those chanting or otherwise citing it to act; it does not imply, however, immediate, severely violent action. Lastly, a third level expresses the will to use violence to attack an enemy that is in some way or another tied to the decried US/Israeli adversary (i.e. the allied GoY, the KSA, and – related to the latter – the Wahhabis); it is a war cry.

Manifestations of the first type include for example ‘digital chanting’: During April 2014, I witnessed on a number of occasions how apparent Houthi adherents opened group chats on Facebook and exchanged little more than the slogan. Group size varied between less than ten to more than 25 chat members; all of them had previously joined Houthi-affiliated Facebook pages/groups such as ‘*Mawqaa Ansar Allah*’ (‘Ansar Allah Site’)¹¹⁵⁴, ‘*Jeish Ansar Allah al-Iliktrouni*’ (‘Electronic Soldiers of Ansar Allah’)¹¹⁵⁵, or ‘*Ṣarkhah fi wajh al-mustakirīn*’ (‘A Scream in the Face of the Arrogants’)¹¹⁵⁶. The few other components of these seemingly regular practices included blessings of the Houthi leadership. Chats were short, for in a few minutes at maximum everyone had once or repeatedly ‘chanted’ (i.e. written) the slogan in the chat; after that, it was closed. The limited character of the encounter, the mere focus on reciprocal assurance of presence, and a shared background and view assert the argument of the irrelevance of the slogan’s content; commonality is the main theme.

Exemplary for the second type are rallies organized by the group. The participants are united by their general grievances, blame for which they attribute among others to foreign interference. Chanting the slogan is thus an expression of discontent, yet general in nature. Since a wide array of grievances can be attributed in that way, the hurdles to chanting are low. Besides, when a crowd shouts, social pressures potentially push more ambivalent individuals to join in anyways.

In the context of martyrs’ celebrations, the meaning is more difficult to decipher and can only be speculated about. The chanting is embedded in emotional speech and in statements of

¹¹⁵³ For a convincing elaboration of the slogan as identity component see: Pottek, “Anfang”, 112–119. Salmoni et al., *Regime*, and the US Embassy in their cables (see *Wikileaks*, “Who are the Houthis?”).

¹¹⁵⁴ See Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/ansarallahweb?fref=ts> (accessed May 5, 2015). Refounded in 2015.

¹¹⁵⁵ See Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/ansarallaharmy> (accessed May 5, 2015). Refounded in 2015 after first foundation in February 2014.

¹¹⁵⁶ See Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/alsrkah/?fref=ts> (accessed May 5, 2015).

pride in the martyrdom of individuals, which are heroicized and to whom succession is promised. In the laden atmosphere created at such events, the chanting becomes equally laden with emotions and transmits again an emotional, hostile message.

The slogan as genuine war cry is de facto related to the fighters and/or the battlefields. Video capture from the seizure of war booty displays emotional fighters enthusiastically shouting the slogan. More interesting and relevant, however, are recordings by individuals who are watching scenes like Saudi attacks or Houthi-initiated explosions and chanting the slogan in the background. Those scenes are less posed and more likely to convey spontaneous support for armed action. Nevertheless, these interpretations unfortunately remain unflanked by explicit immediate statements due to a lack of sources.

Social media comments during a later stage (early 2014) mirror praise for *ihadists* and militant statements much clearer: “Peace upon the *mujāhid* Mr. Abdulmalik Badr al-Din. May God protect him and a tribute to all the *mujāhidīn* who were victorious for the vulnerable against extremist groups.”¹¹⁵⁷ “May God kill the Jews!”¹¹⁵⁸ “Death to America and its [Yemeni] allies!”¹¹⁵⁹ “May God fasten Ansar Allah and provide them with soldiers!”¹¹⁶⁰ “Down with the government of hypocrisy and corruption!”¹¹⁶¹ “Bless the *mujāhidīn*! God is great!”¹¹⁶² “Oh God, destroy targets of our security and our stability and allied with the Americans and the Jews!”¹¹⁶³ It might be discussed if they are to be attributed rather in the middle or on the openly pro-violence end of the spectrum, however, support for militant action is at least verbally provided *over time*.

7.1.5. Frame Contestation

There was no internal frame contestation we know about. The dominant contestator was the regime. Beside it, solely two more parties are worth mentioning:¹¹⁶⁴ First, some prominent Zaydi ‘*ulamā*’, who in the beginning warned of Hussein as erring and distanced themselves from him in a manifesto, but who quickly revoked their statement after GoY attacks against

¹¹⁵⁷ Facebook page ‘Maukaa Ansar Allah’ [‘Ansar Allah site’], comment on February 2, 2014, accessed February 4, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/ansarallahweb?fref=ts>.

¹¹⁵⁸ Ibid. Comment on January 26, 2014.

¹¹⁵⁹ Ibid. Comment on January 30, 2014.

¹¹⁶⁰ Ibid. Comment on January 29, 2014.

¹¹⁶¹ Ibid. Comment on January 23, 2014.

¹¹⁶² Ibid. Comment on February 1, 2014.

¹¹⁶³ Ibid. Comment on February 2, 2014.

¹¹⁶⁴ Salafi counterframing is not considered separately for it either consists of a simple continuation of prior contestation of Zaydism and its revivalist activities, or coincides with regime framing to such a degree that attunement appears probable. Its distinctness emanates rather from its natural audience and the additional modes of distribution along religious channels available to Salafis (but not to the regime).

Hussein and the region. They did so not merely on the basis of army aggression, but more so since they had been used to legitimize these acts. After the manifesto had appeared approximately two weeks before the violent escalation in June 2004, the government had quickly taken on. It claimed the manifesto to be an “equivalent to religious approval for the military campaign in Saada”¹¹⁶⁵ and had it republished in regime press shortly after the commencement of fighting. The coopted scholars reacted with two further publications in which they opposed the GoY’s violent incursion and underlined that it had been a doctrinal dispute with Hussein and nothing more.¹¹⁶⁶ After this incident there were no more equally public contestations despite a continuation of tensions or disagreements between the Houthis and Zaydi *‘ulamā’*. The impact of the brief counterframing episode can thus be said to be marginal and limited to that one specific context.

Second is Mohammad Izzan, the prior companion of Hussein and the other revivalists during the 1990s and BY. Izzan was arrested by the regime after a return from Lebanon in July 2004 and kept in detention until April 2005. Thereafter, he distinctly and vocally distanced himself from the Houthis and repeatedly denounced them, among others, in the ‘26 September’ newspaper of the armed forces.¹¹⁶⁷ In 2007 he became head of a radio station in Sa’ada city and inter alia responsible for anti-Houthi programs.¹¹⁶⁸ Hence, his (probably forced) co-optation is evident and his Houthi frame contestation can be classified as an expansion of GoY frame contestation, i.e. not as stemming from an independent actor.

His framing is directed against Hussein as a person, blames the Houthis for the violence in the North, and relativizes Zaydi oppression and discrimination:

Husayn wanted to end the curricula of Youth Believer so we had enough of him. He had an oversized ego, [he] was a visionary. I was against it, but when the war began in Saada, the state did not distinguish between supporters and detractors of Husayn in the Believer Youth. And so it was that I was [imprisoned]. This indiscriminate answer of the state that the majority of those that were against Husayn became solidarity with him, but I opted for abstention.¹¹⁶⁹

Beyond the personal critique of Hussein, the citation furthermore stresses the alleged impact of government repression on Houthi group solidarity, which intensified as a result. This might partly explain the limited contestation from within. Hussein’s legitimacy was moreover disputed on a doctrinal level:

¹¹⁶⁵ Dorlian, “Saada War”, 196.

¹¹⁶⁶ For the whole account see *ibid.*, 195f.

¹¹⁶⁷ Article by Muhammad Izzan: “We disagree with Hussein Badr al-Din because he wanted to give up on our goals and change our curricula”, *26 September*, March 15, 2007, accessed April 7, 2015, http://www.26sep.net/news_details.php?lng=arabic&sid=24535.

¹¹⁶⁸ Dorlian, *Mouvance*, 200ff., Haykel, “Rebellion”, 200.

¹¹⁶⁹ Interview Muhammad Izzan with Samy Dorlian on January 28, 2007. Cited in: Dorlian, *Mouvance*, 201.

We took a look at these *Malazim* and found in them much which we had never read and with which we did not agree which impelled us to issue a communiqué and to attempt to block and isolate him as he did not represent us and we did not support him or bear responsibility for him or his followers. Others besides us among the *'ulamā'* did the same and we entered into disputes with them... up until the beginning of hostilities in 2004.¹¹⁷⁰

By using the plural “we”, Izzan presents himself as speaking for a group of opponents of Hussein and likewise mentions *'ulamā'* siding with them, thus supporting his stance through the reputation of religious authorities. His accusations included *'fitna'*, i.e. the creation of strife or sedition among Muslims.¹¹⁷¹ Such religious division is among the gravest possible denunciations and was among the same lines that were taken by the regime (as will be described below). The ideological battle that was being fought was therefore about religious truth or ‘true Zaydism’¹¹⁷² in a republic in which Zaydi identity as a whole was still contested and marginalized. The counterframing thus fits well into the prior politics of accepting the existence of Zaydism generally (by including Izzan and his moderate, co-opted position) while simultaneously upholding wide-ranging suspicion against the creed and its potentially destructive impact on the Islamic community.

The range and resonance of Izzan’s counterframing are hard to estimate; there are no separate sources and since it was closely linked to GoY counterframing it cannot be reliably distinguished from the overall resonance towards the ideas spread therein. Its significance rather emanates from his role and prestige as a Zaydi revivalist, which was employed by the regime to catalyze anti-Houthi sentiment among an audience naturally uninclined to react positively to mere GoY framing. The same strategy was employed with Abdullah al-Houthi, the son of Hussein. After imprisonment, he, in a much similar fashion to Izzan’s, took position against armed struggle and Houthi frames.¹¹⁷³ Overall though, he was less vocal than Izzan.

Government counterframing had five leading dimensions: an identity dimension according to which the Houthis were ‘alien’ and ‘colonialist’; a political dimension rendering them ‘anti-republican’ and ‘separatist’; a religious dimension that accused them of ‘sectarianism’, *'fitna'* and ‘erring’; a social dimension portraying them as ‘anti-people’; and a legal dimension that vilified them as ‘criminals’ and ‘terrorists’. Many times the framing combines two or more aspects, thus making it difficult to exclusively assign it to merely one dimension.

¹¹⁷⁰ Lux, “Last Imam”, 377.

¹¹⁷¹ Izzan, “We disagree”. The implication is “schism (...) in which the purity of a believer’s faith is in grave danger”. Gardet, L., “Fitna.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, 2015. <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/fitna-SIM_2389, accessed May 2, 2015.

¹¹⁷² Cf. Dorlian, *Mouvance*, 201.

¹¹⁷³ Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 309.

Such combination not only aligns the various strands of the counterframing, but also aims to foster the impact beyond single-stranded attributions by mutually increasing resonance. Additionally, quite a number of more or less far-fetched claims were brought up, however, they by and large quickly vanished.

‘Alien’¹¹⁷⁴ and ‘colonialist’ ascriptions tackle the two separate but linked lines of identity defamation of the Houthis: They were on the one hand depicted as Iranian proxies in a Sunni-Shi’a conflict and on the other as foreign colonizers equal to the British in the South. A government representative in early 2009 described the alleged role Iran played in Houthi armament:

Despite their denial and the fact they say that they are against foreign intervention, the Iranians fund the Huthis, for example through *hawzas* (prestigious Shiite religious seminaries) and charities. Furthermore, presenters on Iranian radio and television programs call for support for the Huthis and refer to them as Twelver Shiites. (...) Iranians are not arming the Huthis. The weapons they use are Yemeni. Most actually come from fighters [government soldiers and allied militia members] who fought against the socialists during the 1994 war and then sold them.¹¹⁷⁵

He is trying to make the point of mediate financing by Iran, contradictory to numerous earlier, and some later, insinuations that Iran was immediately supplying the Houthis with weapons. In any case, the alleged Iranian support is financial as well as ideological, whereby the ideological component is rhetorically linked with the claim of the rebels being Twelver Shiites as the Iranians, thus adding a religious dimension of negatively attributed otherness.¹¹⁷⁶ Salafi media took up a related strand when they charged them with “secret plans to spread the Iranian revolution”¹¹⁷⁷ imputing ideas of a radical religious overthrow to their adversaries. In accordance with the religious tensions at the core of their enmity, the counterframing of the Salafis defines them as ‘religious other’. A more political version around a very similar core narrative was made by the Vice Minister for Security and Defense in regard to the BY:

The Believing Youth started their activities under different names in the 1980s in the context of the Iranian revolution. They were trained in Iran during the Ayatollah

¹¹⁷⁴ Cf. Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 169ff. See also the quote of the former editor of the pro-government newspaper ‘*Al-Mithaq*’ who called the Houthis a “foreign conspiracy” against the “patriotic flesh”. *Al-Gumhur*, April 18, 2009, cited in: Pottek, “Anfang”, 25.

¹¹⁷⁵ Ali al-Anissi, head of Bureau of National Security, in an interview with the ICG on January 14, 2009. ICG, “Defusing”, 12.

¹¹⁷⁶ The mausoleum for Hussein, for example, was also compared to that of Khomeini in Tehran. *Al-Shumu’a*, May 9, 2009, cited in: Pottek, “Anfang”, 74.

¹¹⁷⁷ Title of an article in the Salafist monthly magazine *Al-Muntada* in April 2005, cited in: ICG, “Defusing”, 9.

Khomeini's era with the objective of spreading the revolution. Between that time and 2004, the Houthis prepared themselves to launch operations against the state.¹¹⁷⁸

It stresses the long hand and long-term planning of the alleged conspiracy of Iran against the Yemeni state: About 20 years before the actual outbreak of armed conflict is purported as the cradle of Iranian involvement in Yemen through proxies – an argument which potentially emphasizes the cunning of the enemy.

A heterogeneous accusation linking religious and national aspects can be found in the '26 *September*' newspaper in regard to the Houthis' celebration of 'Eid al-Ghadīr. It is referred to as "alien to the Islamic creed and the Yemeni people" and to "engender mischief and break national unity".¹¹⁷⁹

Based on an analysis of late 2010 speeches and editorials, King finds the imamate to be "consistently, almost formulaically, equalized with British colonialism in the South".¹¹⁸⁰ He for example cites a congratulatory phone call by Saleh to high officials on Independence Day in which the president referred to "the legacies of the loathsome imamate and oppressive colonialism".¹¹⁸¹ In a very similar fashion, the defense minister praised the revolutionary martyrs "liberating our people from the bygone system of the clerical and racist imamate and the loathsome colonialism".¹¹⁸² This shows how versions of the 'colonialism frame' as the ascription of 'being foreign' are used on both sides – the Houthis' and the GoY's – to discredit the respective other. It suggests that attributions of colonialism and foreignness have been perceived by both parties as powerful categories to influence sentiments; they are presumed to be salient enough among the audience to reach them and impact them.

In the political dimension the republic and unity are the central values the regime resorts to in its contestation of Houthi frames. The group is portrayed as confronting both the republic,¹¹⁸³ which an earlier generation of Yemenis had fought hard to establish as well as national unity, that was equally hard-won and lies at the basis of the nation. It thus questions or rather threatens the state and the nation in their essence: The goal of the Houthis, according to the counterframes, is to reinstate the imamate with its attributes of "ugliness of this horrible backwardness, total ignorance, lethal isolation and abominable authority, as well as injustice

¹¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 11. The interview was conducted on January 11, 2009. The ICG annotates how "the accusations are not adequately sourced and often come from unidentified institutions [and how] overall, evidence appeared incomplete and biased."

¹¹⁷⁹ Cited in: Winter, "Ansar", 108; see also: Pottek, "Anfang", 74.

¹¹⁸⁰ King, "Zaydi Revival", 420.

¹¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹¹⁸² Ibid.

¹¹⁸³ Cf. Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 176ff.

and misery”¹¹⁸⁴. Government media and officials accordingly refer to the Houthis as ‘*mutamaridūn*’ (‘rebels’)¹¹⁸⁵, ‘*imamyūn*’ (‘imamists’)¹¹⁸⁶, “remnants of the past royalist imamic regime disguised as Shi’i”¹¹⁸⁷, ‘*raj’yūn*’ (‘reactionaries’)¹¹⁸⁸, and adherents of ‘*unṣuryā*’ (‘racism’)¹¹⁸⁹ and ‘*sulalāyah*’ (‘dynastic rule’)¹¹⁹⁰. Their actions are described as *khurūj*,¹¹⁹¹ as “hanker[ing] for personal dictatorship and the racist imamic regime”¹¹⁹². The dichotomy¹¹⁹³ that is created consists of backward, elitist¹¹⁹⁴, exclusive, and anti-democratic¹¹⁹⁵ Houthis versus the progressive, revolutionary, inclusive, and democratic regime.¹¹⁹⁶ Houthi practices and Hussein himself are equally portrayed as breeding problems for the state and nation (employed interchangeably in an attempt to make them co-constitutive, hence inextricable in their current form): Saleh e.g. in a speech in July 2004 declared the slogan unacceptable not on the basis that it was anti-US and anti-Israel, but on the grounds that “it harmed national interests”. At the same time he emphasized how he himself frequently criticized US and Israeli politics, in an attempt to gain reputation for doing so (a popular sentiment which – he apparently felt – needed an outlet) while vilifying the method the Houthis had chosen based on the harm to the nation (i.e. everyone).¹¹⁹⁷ Hussein

¹¹⁸⁴ *Al-Thawra Daily*, September 25, 2010, cited in: King, “Zaydi Revival”, 420.

¹¹⁸⁵ *26 September*, July 15, 2005, cited in: Pottek, “Anfang”, 25. The speaking title of the article was: “*Al-tamarrud al-imami fi Saada: Istihdaf li-l-nizam al-gumhuri wa li-munjazat al-thawra wa-l-wahda*” [“The imamic rebellion in Saada: Targeting the republican regime and the gains of the revolution and unity”].

¹¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸⁷ *Akhbar al-Yawm*, April 11, 2005, cited in: vom Bruck, “Regimes”, 203.

¹¹⁸⁸ Hamidi, “Inscriptions”, 174.

¹¹⁸⁹ ‘Racism’ here implies the adherence to a social order dominated by Hashemites to the disadvantages and discrimination of other social strata. The ‘racism’ therein is privilege due to birthright. *Al-Gumhuriyya*, May 5, 2009, cited in: Pottek, “Anfang”, 25f.

¹¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹¹ A former minister and member of the Consultative Council e.g. is quoted saying: “At one point, the Huthis felt they had enough power to rise up (*khurūj*) against the central state and declare the president unfit for power.” ICG, “Defusing”, 10. Interview conducted on January 12, 2009.

¹¹⁹² Saleh in a speech on the “Day of Victory for Unity” on July 7, 2004, *Akhbar al-Yawm*, July 8, 2004, cited in: Hamidi, “Inscriptions”, 174.

¹¹⁹³ Similar King, “Zaydi Revival”, 421; Pottek, “Anfang”, 24f.

¹¹⁹⁴ Hamidi holds that official statements and media recommenced an anti-Hashemite rhetoric “reminiscent of the 1960s” which vilified them as elitist monarchist strata of society. Before 2004, this kind of stance would have been considered inappropriate for it undermined the narrative of republican unity. Hamidi, “Inscriptions”, 175, n. 62. As an example, he cites a member of the political intelligence who in a newspaper (*Al-Balagh*, May 3, 2006) threatened to “annihilate all Hashemites”. *Ibid.*, 175.

¹¹⁹⁵ Cf. ICG, “Defusing”, 10; *Al-Thawra*, March 29, 2005, cited in: Hamidi, “Inscriptions”, 175. King poses that Saleh tried to “remove any separation between his person, the Republic and a unified Yemen” in order to stabilize his rule over time. This direction is subtly present in the undertone of the framing attempts as well. King, “Zaydi Revival”, 441.

¹¹⁹⁶ Pottek cites an article in which a leading member of the GPC elaborated in the backwardness and ignorance Yemenis suffered from before the revolution and the achievements thereafter, among which are armament, knowledge due to universities and institutes of art, science, and schools. The pluralist political system created all this and is at the root of the people’s emancipation. Therefore “it is impossible to return to an imamic system or the era of abhorrent separation”. *Al-Gumhuriyya*, May 5, 2009, cited in: Pottek, “Anfang”, 35, n. 141.

¹¹⁹⁷ *26 September*, July 15, 2004, cited in: ICG, “Defusing”, 3.

was accused of lowering the Yemeni flag in exchange for his own¹¹⁹⁸ or the Hizbullah flag¹¹⁹⁹ and as having made the *da'wah*, i.e. the call for allegiance in *khurūj* with the aim to become imam, making him a 'pretender' (*'da'i'*)¹²⁰⁰.

This direction of framing has proven constant over time; it was still found during the more recent phases of Houthi political participation in 2013 and 2014. ICG interviews provide strong citations by leading figures that highlight the above profile of the group even in light of Houthi participation in the NDC. Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, for instance, holds that:

[T]he outcomes of the dialogue – building a civil state – are dangerous for the Huthis, so they will want it to fail. This is why they are fighting in the north now. Their real goal is to have a state that is ruled by the Imam. (...) The deal is that the Huthis will rule the north and the southern movement will rule the south.¹²⁰¹

He still propagates the negative impact of the Houthis, their striving for an imamate state, and their actions against unity. Similar voices could be heard from “sceptics from across the spectrum” (GPC, Islah, independents etc.); among others they hold that they are “by nature discriminatory against non-Hashemites” and pose an “existential challenge to the state that must be faced with force” – an opinion articulated during Houthi political inclusion!¹²⁰² The same rigorous perception is shared by the presidential adviser Abdulkarim al-Eryani:

[T]he Huthis are not really reinventing themselves. They are living with the legacy of the past [the Hashemites' privileged position under the imamate] and only trying to coexist in the present. Their current politics is still too much guided by a past that is not compatible with modern Yemen.¹²⁰³

The same ‘incompatibility’ is also constructed in the religious dimension of the counterframing.

A conversion from Zaydism to Twelver Shi'a is among the dominant accusations¹²⁰⁴ targeting Houthi legitimacy in the eyes of the Zaydi population. Others pose a distancing from Zaydism in other regards, e.g. that “Hussein al-Houthi hijacked Zaydism just like Osama bin Laden hijacked Islam”¹²⁰⁵ or that they were “unbelievers” and “polytheists”¹²⁰⁶. Hatred of Sunnis is another theme:

¹¹⁹⁸ Mounasser, “Mediators”.

¹¹⁹⁹ Hamidi, “Inscriptions”, 175; Winter, “Conflict”, 107.

¹²⁰⁰ 26 September, April 23, 2009, cited in: Pottek, “Anfang”, 32.

¹²⁰¹ ICG, “Huthis”, 13. Interview conducted on November 7, 2013. The reference to fighting refers to the Houthi-Salafi clashes in Dammaj and surroundings in fall 2013.

¹²⁰² Ibid. Cf. Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 171ff.

¹²⁰³ Ibid., 14. Interview conducted on April 14, 2014.

¹²⁰⁴ Ibid., ii, 13; ICG, “Defusing”, 9f.

¹²⁰⁵ Ibid., 11. Interview conducted on January 13, 2009.

¹²⁰⁶ Stated by Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar. He also referred to the Houthis as “forces of darkness”. See Hamidi, “Inscriptions”, 174.

We cannot allow Shi'i teaching in the country because it will teach hatred [of the Sunnis]. We do not want a divided society; we need to be unified. We no longer need debates about the legitimacy of rule [in the earlier centuries of Islam] and about what happened over a millennium ago. We do not need people who curse Mu'awiya. My grandfather used to curse Mu'awiya twenty times a day.¹²⁰⁷

A similar statement was made by 22 Saudi *'ulamā'* in 2008 who labelled the Houthis *'rāfiḍah'* ('rejectionists') and warned Sunnis not to trust Shi'ites because they created enmity among Muslims and denied Sunnis their rights (as could be seen in Iran and Iraq, where they were ruling).¹²⁰⁸ Fighting them was justified by the KSA as jihad against "*mulḥidūn*" ('heretics').¹²⁰⁹ Saleh used the term 'jihad' during a speech the same month; the Houthis were "idolaters who drift away from the community of Muslims".¹²¹⁰ Even harsher, Saudis and Salafis moreover indicted them of having "abandoned religion" altogether. A Salafist pamphlet for instance held that there was a multitude of theological errors in Zaydi doctrine generally¹²¹¹, another magazine that "[i]f the armed forces have a great role to play in eradicating the Huthi sedition, the intellectual forces must eradicate its roots"¹²¹². In sum, this dimension of counterframing was intended to outlaw the Houthis in religious terms, the most value-laden dimension, to mobilize strong emotions and opinions against them. It was a rather drastic measure by the GoY for it had the consequence of fostering sectarian sentiments among the population, which were previously inexistent, and which carried the danger of leading to long-term unrest. However, considering Saleh's standard practice of posing various actors and groups against each other to his own advantage, it was a gamble typical for his politics.

The social dimensions were essentially aiming to vilify the group as anti-people in that they were blamed for the wars and the resulting destruction and other consequences.¹²¹³ A senior official sanctified the military actions by saying:

No government wants war and ours, like any other, wants its citizens to live in peace. Since 2004, there have been various efforts and as many as seven or eight mediation committees, but these all failed. Military action was the last resort.¹²¹⁴

¹²⁰⁷ Senior government official in reference to educational policies with the goal of equalizing *madhahib*. Vom Bruck, "Regimes", 197, personal communication 2005.

¹²⁰⁸ Hamidi, "Inscriptions", 172.

¹²⁰⁹ *Al-Ahram*, November 19, 2009, cited in: vom Bruck, "Regimes", 204.

¹²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 218. Rumors also held that Hussein had a Qur'an "different from everybody else's". Hamidi, "Inscriptions", 175.

¹²¹¹ "Zaydism in Yemen: An Open Discussion", published by the Al-Kalima al-Tayyiba Center (2008), cited in: ICG, "Defusing", 9.

¹²¹² *Al-Muntada*, April 2005, cited in: *ibid.*

¹²¹³ Cf. Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 174ff.

¹²¹⁴ ICG, "Defusing", 10. Interview with Rashad al-Alimi, conducted on January 11, 2009. Parallel to that, the GoY sought to present itself as pro-people. See Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 178ff.

The Houthis are recurrently presented as those responsible for the failure of mediation and peace efforts, due to their “war rage”¹²¹⁵, the repeated incitement of the insurgency by Badr al-Din and Abdullah al-Razzami¹²¹⁶, their “oppressing communities and households”¹²¹⁷, and the violence they employ against the people. “Waylaying”, “assassination”, and “destruction and looting of public and private property” are among the specifications of their anti-social acts.¹²¹⁸ Their violent intentions are moreover responsible for the delay in government-sponsored reconstruction and for the fact that thousands are still homeless, die, or losing everything they have.¹²¹⁹ Overall, the group is claimed to be responsible for the misery of the people living in the war zones.¹²²⁰

The legal dimension ties in with these allegations. Accusations against the BY were still moderate, but already carried the label of illegality:

The Believing Youth came into the picture as an anti-Salafi group. Gradually, it deepened its political involvement and took advantage of the international situation to mobilise support. The government intervened to stop some demonstrations because they were illegal. The conflict escalated when the Believing Youth asked people in Saada to stop paying taxes and started interfering in government affairs.¹²²¹

According to its own statements, the GoY had at a certain point asked the UN to declare the BY a terrorist organization (this was dismissed).¹²²² Extending its allegations to the Houthis, the regime held them to be “terrorists” preparing “attacks against Western interests, (...) [and] to kidnap foreign diplomats” as well as the internal acts of “spraying acid on unveiled women, poisoning water reserves, murdering officials and bombing public places”¹²²³. These claims obviously aimed at international support and at furthermore defaming the group. Immediate

¹²¹⁵ 26 September, July 6, 2009, cited in: Pottek, “Anfang”, 34.

¹²¹⁶ ICG, “Defusing”, 3 (in regard to 2005), 22 (interview with senior GoY official, conducted on January 7, 2009).

¹²¹⁷ 26 September, April 2, 2009, cited in: *ibid.*, 25. HRW has documented statements according to which the Houthis demanded pledges from the population. HRW, “Invisible Civilians”, 24.

¹²¹⁸ 26 September, June 20, 2009, cited in: Pottek, “Anfang”, 34.

¹²¹⁹ *Al-Gumhur*, April 18, 2009, cited in: *ibid.*, 37.

¹²²⁰ One issue that was not taken up by the GoY in its counterframing was the kind of ‘rule’ the Houthis exerted in the areas they dominated. The image presented by international observers is ambiguous: One director of an international NGO holds that they imposed very strict rules such as prohibiting male teachers for girls (with the consequence of preventing them from attending school), he simultaneously emphasizes how their involvement in local conflict solving make them appear in a positive light to the population and “gain the community’s trust” (ICG, “Defusing”, 11; interview conducted on January 13, 2009). Another humanitarian worker on the contrary states that his organization has “been experiencing problems in some of the areas controlled by the rebels as well. The Houthis are seen by the population as very brutal. They intimidate people they consider neutral including through kidnapping.” (*Ibid.*, 14; interview conducted on January 5, 2009). It remains obscure why the regime did not attempt to exploit the fact of the apparently overtly strict ‘Houthi regime’ to its own favor.

¹²²¹ Senior government official. *Ibid.*, 10. Interview conducted on January 7, 2009. For claims about the more recent phase of 2013/2014 cf. ICG, “Huthis”, 6. Here the emphasis is on illegal detention of and attacks on political enemies.

¹²²² Senior government official. ICG, “Defusing”, 11. Interview conducted on January 11, 2009.

¹²²³ *Ibid.* Also 3; 25.

Western backing failed to appear;¹²²⁴ Yemeni sources on the other hand likewise lack evidence of resonance of this specific frame.

Lastly, there were some claims of little credibility, such as ‘the Houthis as agents of international freemasonry’¹²²⁵ and else. Additionally, rumors were widespread. However, both did not seriously affect the population’s position towards the group in a noticeable manner.

Counterframe Distribution

In comparison to Houthi frame distribution which could rely on numerous traditional, culturally embedded means of communication as well as more professional media channels, regime frame distribution was in a clear disadvantage: It could merely access official media and institutions but was to a large extent excluded from the highly effective unofficial channels such as *qat* chews, audio recordings, networks based on kinship, *qabila*, religious groups, age cohorts and else. Accordingly, the counterframing was spread through state media (print, radio, TV, later websites), through the curricula of teaching institutions, loyal religious scholars (others were replaced)¹²²⁶, the distribution of special leaflets in certain areas in the North¹²²⁷, and in the form of speeches and interviews of government officials and Saleh himself. Complementary to these measures, the GoY furthermore sought to limit pro-Houthi stances as related frame distribution by repression towards journalists and other potentially detrimental actors, media blockage, and ostentatious trials of Houthi members and sympathizers.¹²²⁸ Overall, however, the regime could not keep up with the complex spectrum of distributary mechanisms of its adversary.

Countering the Counterframing

How, then, did the Houthis react towards the regime’s counterframing? Regarding the most common and acknowledged allegation of support from Iran and a close ideological linkage based on common Shi‘a belief, Yahya al-Houthi in an interview in 2009 said that:

¹²²⁴ A US intelligence report notes that despite the militant slogan there were no cases of immediate anti-US action taken by the Houthis. Based on that they were evaluated to pose no threat at that point in time. *Wikileaks*, “Who are the Houthis?”.

¹²²⁵ This and other implausible assertions were spread by a newspaper close to army officers. *Al-Shumu‘a*, April 21, 2005, cited in: ICG, “Defusing”, 26.

¹²²⁶ For example, a leaflet in which prominent (Sunni) *ulama* denounce the Houthis as ‘*rafida*’, their ‘*fitna*’, and the danger they pose to the *umma*, and legitimize violent action against them. See Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 175.

¹²²⁷ Salmoni et al. present a leaflet proclaiming that the Houthis dressed as women to cover up assassinations – a culturally unacceptable behavior, the allegation of which is meant to delegitimize the rebels as dishonorable. *Ibid.*, 177.

¹²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 168ff., 181.

Iran plays no role whatsoever. It is only Westerners, Saudis and the Yemeni government that accuse it of involvement. In fact, we do not need the Iranians in any way, as Zaydis have their own symbols, references and reasons to fight, and these are sufficient to wage the rebellion.¹²²⁹

This was the line they took throughout the whole conflict up to late 2014 when an approach towards Iran occurred in the wake of taking over ever more government duties.

In a similar manner they denied any intentions of reestablishing the imamate. On their website they declared: “The authority’s accusations about the imamate are just a media war (...) We are not asking for positions, we are asking for rights and justice. The essence of the crisis is political.”¹²³⁰ And Yahya highlighted in an interview that they adapted to the will of the people: Since the people wanted democracy “we do democracy”.¹²³¹ Furthermore, they were responsive to allegations of buying weapons from the army and having received support from the government in the times of the BY; they denied both, at least to a large degree. In regard to weapon acquisition Yahya admitted few buys from the army, whereas the major part stemmed from stealing and seizure in battle.¹²³² They attempted to refute any contacts between themselves and the GoY that could in any way be interpreted as cooptation in order to undermine any allegations in that direction. By doing so, they strengthened their credibility, a component of their framing they held in high esteem; rightly so, as we have seen in the resonance: quotes from their audience show that their credibility was high and based to significant parts on their incorruptibility.

The remaining aspects were seldom responded to directly; they were, however, countered independently in Houthi framing as described.

Zaydi ‘*ulamā*’ voiced some reaction towards the GoY counterframing attempts. Since the following were neither members of the Houthi movement nor coopted by the regime, their position takes a middle ground, but still deserves some distinction from an uninvolved audience. A year into the armed phase, a number of those who had accidentally provided legitimacy to the government’s military campaign in the very beginning due to their positioning against Hussein, published another statement in which they condemned “the military campaign ‘against the citizens and the weak’”¹²³³:

We assure the president (may God protect him) that the situation would not have reached this point had it not been for the intriguers and individuals out for their own ends [i.e. the

¹²²⁹ Quote from an interview with ICG (ICG, “Defusing”, 12, n. 75).

¹²³⁰ Cited in: *Wikileaks*, “Who are the Houthis?”.

¹²³¹ Interview with Pottek, February 3, 2009. Pottek, “Anfang”, 118.

¹²³² ICG, “Defusing”, 16. Interview conducted on February 3, 2009.

¹²³³ *Al-Balagh*, June 23, 2005, cited in: Hamidi, “Inscriptions”, 174, n. 53.

Salafis, T.G.] who are trying to turn people away from [their loyalty to] the president and [thus] prejudice him against them. What these individuals want is to spread dissension and hate. One hopes that the president (may God protect him) will not support them or be pleased by them.¹²³⁴

The blame is attributed to a third party, the Salafis, thereby diplomatically clearing the Houthis as well as the GoY. The reverence towards the president enables them to take this position and makes it easier to reach out to an audience that does not wish to offend the state. Another prominent Zaydi scholar who took an intermediate position, Yahya al-Daylami, denied that Houthi actions had anything to do with *khurūj*:

It wasn't announced as *hurug*. Rather, [the Houthis] said with total clarity that the President of the Republic is Ali Abd Allah Salih and that our Constitution is the Yemeni Constitution. They didn't undertake the *hurug*. If it were the *hurug*, then they would have denied the presidency and regime.¹²³⁵

The Resonance of Regime Counterframes

Among the Yemeni population some regime counterframes resonated very well while others appear to have dissolved. Iranian support for the Houthis and their doctrinal closeness was the component that resonated best and was hardly disputed.¹²³⁶ On social media sites, the group is regularly reviled as Iranian proxy¹²³⁷, Twelver Shiites/Jaafari, or magi.¹²³⁸ The *khurūj* allegations are less present in this context, however, they were still a dominant theme in describing the Houthis; the same accounts for the reinstatement of the imamate. Even in 2014, for instance, a Yemeni academic summed up the goals of the Houthis as perceived by him in the following manner:

The Huthis are an ethnically based [Hashemite], armed movement that strives to bring back the rule they lost after the 1962 revolution. The new element of the movement is the hidden Iranian agenda. They want to bring back the rule of the Hashemites, but not through Zaydi principles. They say they are Zaydi, but their hidden agenda is a Twelver coup.¹²³⁹

The exclusiveness of the *sādah* is explicitly stressed; the counterframes that highlight this aspect fell on fertile ground among those who were discontent with traditional endogamous

¹²³⁴ Ibid.

¹²³⁵ King, "Zaydi Revival", 427, n. 71. Al-Daylami was exposed to massive repression due to his criticism of the GoY. Cf. HRW, "Detention and Arbitrary Arrests".

¹²³⁶ For a similar evaluation see Pottek, "Anfang", 117.

¹²³⁷ The American Ambassador Edmund Hull was strongly convinced of this aspect. See: Interview with the U.S. Ambassador to Yemen (mid-2001–mid-2004), Edmund James Hull, in Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, "Yemen Country Reader", accessed March 24, 2015, <http://www.adst.org/oral-history/country-reader-series/>, 197–217.

¹²³⁸ See exemplarily: Facebook page "Maukaa Ansar Allah" ['Ansar Allah site'], accessed February 4, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/ansarallahweb?fref=ts>.

¹²³⁹ ICG, "Huthis", 13. Interview conducted in February 2014.

Hashemite marriage patterns.¹²⁴⁰ On a practical level, many people distanced themselves from those closely associated with the Houthis due to voluntary affiliation or incidental family relatedness: They refused services or else in places as far from the combat zone as Sanaa.¹²⁴¹ It can be interpreted both as a distancing in regard to their position or as a reaction out of fear in a climate of repression against anyone suspected of sympathizing with the rebels.

In sum, those counterframes, which took up prior suspicions in regard to the Zaydis, can be traced in reactions of the targeted audience, while those that strove to bring up new allegations (e.g. criminals, terrorists) cannot. This backs the supposition that the GoY could only intensify to a certain degree what had been salient before; original frames could not be established widely in contestation with Houthi frames despite superior resources. Reasons for this might be a lack of both credibility and salience of the counterframes.¹²⁴² While the credibility of the government might be acknowledged, the Houthis probably reached a higher degree at least among Zaydis, based on their manifold local prestige and traditional legitimacy (in contrast to official, political legitimacy in a perceived distant capital). The GoY equally scores poorly (overall, and in comparison to the rebels) regarding the consistency of their framing, the centrality and experiential commensurability of it for the audience, and moreover concerning the narrative fidelity. The terrorism allegation, for instance, is taken from a global, post-9/11 discourse that has little resonance (at least not in the intended direction) among Yemenis; the Houthi framing is much more ‘tuned to’ the targeted audience in this regard. ‘Imamate restoration’ on the contrary qualifies well in this regard, as I have demonstrated. Regime counterframing, according to the conclusion, is deficient in more than one respect and could thus not trump Houthi framing among the audience in the North.¹²⁴³

7.2. *Al-Hirak’s Frame Development*

In comparison to Houthi frame development, the Hiraak’s frame development is different in two aspects. First, where Houthi framing is centralized at the immediate leadership circle, the Southern Movement’s framing is much more decentralized and multivocal. This aspect is

¹²⁴⁰ Frequent among social media comments. See exemplarily: Muhammad al-Houthi, “Who are the Houthis? And Other Questions”, *Yemen Press*, September 6, 2007, accessed April 7, 2015, <http://www.yemen-press.com/news1053.html>, comment 3.

¹²⁴¹ Hamidi, “Inscriptions”, 175, n. 62.

¹²⁴² The fact that the army allegedly looted in the areas they controlled, and that the GoY recruited ill famed jihadists (‘Afghan Arabs’) and asked the KSA and Salafist al-Zindani to fund the militia certainly did not improve the regime’s standing among the population. HRW, “Invisible Civilians”; ICG, “Defusing”, 16.

¹²⁴³ The relevant audience is dominantly the one in the North, among which the Houthis mainly mobilized and whom the GoY sought to prevent from supporting the rebels, not the Yemeni population as a whole. Thus, the assessment tackles only that section.

closely related to the lack of a genuine leadership or rather the multitude of leadership claims, in addition to highly active and vocal followers, who themselves are more involved in framing than Houthi followers. Second, there is no shift from the call for nonviolent to the calls for violent action. Rather, there is (a) a variance over time in calls for equality within unity to secession; both, however, proceed nonviolently; (b) there are ‘branches’ in the prognostic framing depending on which central framer/faction frames; some aim at federalism, others at secession; notwithstanding, all keep promoting peaceful strategies; and (c) there are some call for armed struggle that fail to yield resonance; they, too, will be dealt with as branches but receive special attention in order to explain their lack of success.

The basic structure of the section is the same as in the corresponding section of the Houthi case study, it merely lacks the additional distinction in a pre- and post-escalation phase.

7.2.1. Diagnostic Framing

The following quote from a 2013 document published on the website of Aden Live TV, in which the comprehensive demands and history of the Hirak up to that point was presented from the perspective of al-Beidh.¹²⁴⁴ It summarizes the core of the Southern issue as commonly perceived:

The Southern Movement defines the southern cause as a cause of a homeland, a people and a fate. It describes the southern situation as being occupied by Yemen and that the occupation started in the year 1994, considering this is obvious through seizing a whole homeland by security and military forces, as a way chosen by the Yemen Arab Republic regarding the Southern Society. Therefore, it looted the South property, wiping out its identity, legacy, and history. This occupation replaced the southern people by another one that was transported to the South and found a political entity other than southern in the Democratic Republic of Yemen (Arab South). The Southern Movement says that unless some factors like: popular rejection, peaceful resistance, demonstrations, straightforward authors, and visible media, the people would have lost its identity, national affiliation and societal virtues, as it has lost its state which was built across tens of years.¹²⁴⁵

Three central diagnostic frames are noted therein: the ‘occupation frame’, the ‘threat frame’, and the ‘attribution of responsibility’. The ‘occupation frame’ as a main frame here subsumes the sub-frames of ‘looting’ and ‘militarization’, which are both attributed to ‘Yemeni’ forces; the ‘threat frame’ contains the sub-frames of ‘threatened identity’ and ‘physical threats’; and the ‘attribution of responsibility frame’ in this extract highlights the YAR regime, so far without rendering it more precisely.

¹²⁴⁴ It also lets begin the history of the Hirak with the accession of al-Beidh in May 2009, without pointing out its prior existence for two to three years. “Introduction to the Southern Movement and its Development Stages”, April 16, 2014, accessed April 16, 2014, <http://www.adenlivetv.tv/articles-13278.html>.

¹²⁴⁵ Ibid.

What is missing in this description (though not the document) is the preconditional or antecedent diagnosis of ‘failed unity’, possibly because of implied obviousness (the document was published in 2014, two decades after the first opposition and years after the initiation of structured protest). This ‘failed unity frame’ and two more main frames (the ‘injustice frame’ and the ‘civil state frame’) are added elaborately in other sources. They will be analyzed in the following.

For the Aden Live TV document, the fact that in the 1993 parliamentary elections each population voted merely for its own representatives is already interpreted as a proof that unity had failed.¹²⁴⁶ Others pose that it was the war that had this effect:

The southern elite and leaders considered that this war abolished the consensus united state by military means and converted unification into occupation by using legislations as a coup to repeal the legal bases of the unified state and to take over the resources of the south by eliminating its state.¹²⁴⁷

Whichever the exact point in time that is invoked as the final stroke, the common message is that the end to unity was final without the option of ever returning to it:

If the invading war of the south eradicated the legitimacy of the unity politically and legally, the attitude of Sana’a regime in the south after the war towards the southern people and their land, history, culture, and identity, has destroyed all the noble values and concepts of the unity as a national dream for them to a nightmare in their lives. In the name of the unity, the rights were confiscated, wealth was plundered, freedoms were violated, and dignities were trampled on the thresholds of the Northern regime and its prisons, until the pain and moan of the southerners became a betrayal to the unity, which only exists in the pockets and accounts of the northern leaders and their followers.¹²⁴⁸

Unity is framed in ethical terms, and the actions of the Northern regime has betrayed, trampled upon, and ‘killed’ the values inherent therein. It was instead transformed into their material benefit. We can only speculate about the impact of such a materialist turn on an audience which partly grew up in a socialist state and was exposed to anti-capitalist ideology on a daily basis; it might play a role in the frame’s resonance as well.

This list of grievances contains seven major aspects: violence and repression, disadvantageous laws, the looting of property and resources, the destruction of Southern

¹²⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁴⁷ Mohammed Alsaqqaf, “Internal Dynamics of the Southern Movement in Yemen”, paper presented at a workshop on the “Impact of Political Change on Yemen’s relations with the United States”, no date (post-March 2011), 6.

¹²⁴⁸ “A Brief Introductory on the Southern Issue ’To every fact-researcher and whoever is keen on justice and freedom’”, published online by Correspondence and southern informative action team (Wasel), May 21, 2011, accessed May 10, 2015, http://www.roosana.ps/store/9/11_05_21-23_48_46-4nQ1@0.pdf, 13.

history and identity,¹²⁴⁹ lacking social services, lacking/blocked job opportunities, and – interesting regarding symbols of Southern identity – the ‘closing’ of Al-Yemda and the degradation of Aden. In other words, grievances are physical (as directed against humans), material (resources), legal, and ideational.¹²⁵⁰ They are articulated over and again, with little modification; phrasing and tone of the language change depending on the audience that shall be reached, but the message remains consistent.¹²⁵¹ The three following depictions of the situation by movement followers constitute an example of this. The first is an excerpt from a submission to the UN, prepared by HIRAK activists living in the UK (one of which is a lawyer):

The 1994 war effectively began the occupation of the South, whilst after the war and under the rule of the unified state dominated by the victorious North, Southern people were unrepresented and discriminated against. Repeated attempts by southerners to secure justice and equality through legitimate demands within the unity state have been ignored. When Southerners resorted to peaceful protest rallies, they were subjected to excessive use of force, arbitrary detention, torture and indiscriminate and targeted killings of protestors and activists. Southerners sought a remedy to their grievances within the unity state. The failure to address their grievances and to cease its discriminatory practice and breaches of human rights give South Yemen the justification to demand secession and the re-establishment of the southern independent state.¹²⁵²

The language is (human) rights-based¹²⁵³ and on this basis builds a logical line of argumentation for the steps taken by the Southern Movement. In this, it seeks to employ the appropriate language for the UN, an international institution based on legal regulations.

A flyer on ‘The Southern Issue’ equally distributed by activists in the UK, i.e. targeting the Yemeni diaspora but even more an international audience, uses a much more aggressive and emotional tone:

Unity was revoked on the 7th of July 1994 war (...) It was declared collectively by Saleh, Islamists, Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar & the tribal leaders. The South have [sic!] been looted & the nation has been discriminated by all four players. (...) Shortly following unification, an apparently hidden Northern agenda to take over control of the South began with a campaign of assassinations against Southern leaders. The ruling Northern establishments,

¹²⁴⁹ The HIRAK’s program (2014) or ‘manifesto’, as movement adherents refer to it, frames the grievances in a very similar way as “looting of property and identity and heritage and history of the South”. This phrasing makes obvious how the damage affects the past, present, and future (property = used to build a future). See also: Hassan Muthanna Al-Aqeel, *Summary of Book ‘The Cause of the South’. And Facts of the Robbery of Properties of the state of People’s Republic of South Yemen*, digital copy received from a HIRAK activist, 2012, 23;

¹²⁵⁰ Another movement document precisely lists “a historical, identity, legal, social, political, military and security, economic, cultural, religious, and geographical dimension of grievances”. “Roots of the Southern Issue”.

¹²⁵¹ Unlike the wide variation in Hussein al-Houthi’s diagnostic framing, with which he aimed to include a wide range of audience. Cf. 5.6.1.1.

¹²⁵² “The Southern Issue”, 14.

¹²⁵³ Legal discrimination is also listed by the Aden Live TV document as one of the aims why “[t]he occupation regime replaced the South institutions with southern individuals belonging to the occupation regime itself in order to act according to its will and interests to (...) 5. Deprive them from rights and duties.” See: “Introduction to the Southern Movement”.

including the tribe, the military and the extreme Islamist groups conspired to affect the complete takeover of the South. (...) Following the occupation, tens of thousands of Southerners were dismissed from their jobs in the military, the police and the civil service. Southern resources were divided up between the war victors and vast areas of land were gifted to corrupt tribal chiefs, military figures and extremist groups. An increase in discriminatory practices and oppression coupled with a deliberate attack on the Southern identity resorted in a rise in Southern anti-Northern sentiments. Southerners demanded equality and an end to the corruption taking place but such demands were ignored. Faced with this rejection, Southerners began their peaceful movement known as Al-Hirak. The movement represented the desire of the Southern people to break away from the unity agreement and the re-establishment of the independent Southern state, as the only way left to regain the dignity and freedom of Southerners.¹²⁵⁴

Beyond its language, or rather, in combination with it, this depiction adds the dimensions of blame and identity. In fact, it highlights it within the we-they divide. ‘They’ – attributed as “corrupt”, “extremist” and “discriminatory” – are “Saleh, Islamists, Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar & the tribal leaders”, who *on purpose* acted in a very hostile and violent way. ‘We’, the Southerners, are depicted as the victims of these bad intentions and connected to “equality”, “peaceful[ness]”, “dignity”, and “freedom”, i.e. positive ethical criteria.¹²⁵⁵ ‘We’ are forced by ‘them’ to (re)act as we do. Before the identity dimension will be elucidated in detail, it is interesting to look at the third depiction.¹²⁵⁶

While it is still intended to inform outsiders about the movement, as the authors claim, it stems from the heart of the movement in the South, and its language is much less well-tuned to an international (i.e. Western) audience, but resembles much more the language used in local, internal communication.¹²⁵⁷

Aden was shocked on 7/7/1994 by the barbarian invasion of the northern forces and tribes (...) It was exposed to a moral and humanitarian disaster which it has never witnessed in its history, and only happened in the defining moments of human history, which has been handled by the memory of generations as the most hideous form in which human beings stripped of their humanity and values. The day of invading Aden brought to human mind the Mongol Tatar invasion of Baghdad (...) The Sana’a invading hordes brought that dark image back on 7/7/1994, when they destroyed and looted all the physical and cultural elements of modern city, in a Hooligan scene that can never be forgotten by its people (...)¹²⁵⁸

¹²⁵⁴ “The Southern Question”.

¹²⁵⁵ In a similar vein, Southerners proudly declare how their movement was a predecessor for the Arab Spring protests: “This civilized style became a new form setting an example for the Arab Spring revolutions, and an international occurrence in a region with peculiar politically and socially complicated characteristic. But the civilized fight which ran contradicting to the type of the tribal structure of Sanaa authority was faced with its repressive and police instruments and army units, the intelligence and the allied Alqaedah elements.” Muthanna Al-Aqeel, *Summary*, 23.

¹²⁵⁶ With its emphasis on the seizure of Aden it has a slightly different focus, however, the style of description of the situation is the main point of interest. In the end, the grievances are related back to the ‘barbarian invasion’.

¹²⁵⁷ This claim is based on my comparison with the numerous documents, observations on social media platforms, personal written communication, interviews, and conversations I analyzed or conducted, respectively.

¹²⁵⁸ “Brief Introductory”, 12.

[T]he Situation imposed by tyranny regime of Sana'a to South since 7/7/1994, by using oppression tools, tribal heritage cultural that practice booty and cheating, and use 'Divide and Rule' etc., inevitably lead to revolution of [the] South, to [the] current situation imposed by [the] Sana'a regime where South[ern] people's feel that they are out of contemporary life and backward to earlier centuries with no hopes and aspirations, due to suffering and pain (...)¹²⁵⁹

It is expressed in a drastic, emotional way¹²⁶⁰ with a graphic comparison to 'invading barbarian hordes'. And, again, blame and identity are closely linked, with the latter following a dichotomous black-and-white logic. Contrasting identity claims, be they moderate or radical, serve multiple purposes for the Hiraq: First, they frame their collective identity; second, they frame the 'evil other'; and third, they build the foundation on which the legitimacy of and need for two (nation) state foots. Hence, there is a strong effort to make this point unmistakably. The declared position of the Southern Movement is that North and South "have been historically independent geographically and politically, and totally different in the social and cultural dimensions with the absence of the administrative, historical, or political alleged links".¹²⁶¹ The Northern regime is "a barbarian and sectarian occupier that does not pay attention to any noble humanitarian virtues"¹²⁶², a "pastoralist tribal system"¹²⁶³, a "tyranny regime"¹²⁶⁴ which supports armed terrorist groups and, "reviv[es] the culture of tribal conflicts, retaliation and religious extremism"¹²⁶⁵ and in itself "lack[ing] the infrastructure of a modern state and (...) any rule of law"¹²⁶⁶. The Northern population shares the characteristics of tribal backwardness, religious extremism, and racism, and the relations between regime and population are those of "tribal society that was existing before the state".¹²⁶⁷

The Southern state, in contrast, is described in bright terms:

On the other hand, notwithstanding the economic poverty it was suffering from, The South, benefiting from the positive elements of British colonisation and subsequently socialist rule, was able to develop into a society far more civilised and developed than its northern counterpart. An effective infrastructure of state institutions existed, corruption in

¹²⁵⁹ Ibid., 17f.

¹²⁶⁰ Slightly less drastic, but equally categorical is the following situation description: Al-Aqeel, *Summary*, 9.

¹²⁶¹ "Introduction to the Southern Movement". The point of historical distinctness without common history is similarly made here: "The uniqueness of land and people between South and North just a fake emotional slogan, disapproved by facts and history of South Arabian Peninsula, it is sufficient prove that South was region of units Sultanates and Emirates and didn't mention name of Yemen to South through ages." "Brief Introductory", 22.

¹²⁶² "Introduction to the Southern Movement".

¹²⁶³ "Roots of the Southern Issue".

¹²⁶⁴ "Brief Introductory", 17f.

¹²⁶⁵ "Introduction to the Southern Movement".

¹²⁶⁶ "The Southern Issue".

¹²⁶⁷ "Introduction to the Southern Movement".

all aspects of society was non-existent and, most importantly, rule of law was upheld throughout the country.¹²⁶⁸

The Southern state has a ‘civil state’ and a ‘civilized society’, the North lack either of the two. The achievements of that civil state are generally ascribed to British rather than to socialist rule; they are listed as “concepts of state, administration, rule of law, civil society, political and partisan pluralism, parliamentary life and diverse newspapers”.¹²⁶⁹ It is even noted how those who fought the British in the anticolonial revolution today glorify the period of “British occupation as it did not confiscate any of the lands of the state or citizens and ruled in a state of law”.¹²⁷⁰

Besides these achievements, the “vast opportunities” in the South are listed as “wide territory”, “huge wealth”, “important strategic location”, “economic and trade structures”, and “southerners’ conscience and culture”.¹²⁷¹ Emanating from this historical legacy and the resources and opportunities in the South is a “nation”¹²⁷² with a “civilian and civilized identity” and with a “noble history and values”.¹²⁷³ The Hirak, who consists only of Southerners¹²⁷⁴ and is part of the project of overcoming earlier civil conflict¹²⁷⁵, has “proved its ability to continue and maintain its peaceful, civilized, and liberating character in spite of persistent attempts to drag it to the cycle of violence”¹²⁷⁶. In opposition to the Northerners, it is therein driven by “Islamic instructions, International conventions, and humanitarian culture as the basic and fixed references”, all of which are considered acknowledged civilizational achievements and values.

The war is interpreted as the result of “irreconcilable differences between the two social and political cultures”¹²⁷⁷ and of priorly held bad intentions and undermining policies by the

¹²⁶⁸ Adel Mutlak Abdulla Hassan, Saleh Ali Alnoud, and Abdulrazaq Saleh, “The Southern Issue (Yemen). The past, present and the fragile future” (October 2011), 9. Prepared as a submission to the UN.

¹²⁶⁹ Alsaqqaf, “Internal Dynamic”, 4.

¹²⁷⁰ Ibid., 7.

¹²⁷¹ “Introduction to the Southern Movement”.

¹²⁷² Interestingly, the title of the flyer “The Southern Question” was “The Southern Question. Not a Rights Movement But a Nation’s Struggle for Independence”. The rights’ aspect certainly is still present and the initial emphasis of the movement were rights. However, I received the flyer in January 2013 and it was printed not long before (given the facts it contained); thus, it very well reflects the change towards a stronger identity-based focus over time.

¹²⁷³ Al-Aqeel, *Summary*, 22.

¹²⁷⁴ Alsaqqaf, “Internal Dynamics”, 3.

¹²⁷⁵ I.e. the ‘*Tasamuh wa Tasaluh*’. “Introduction to the Southern Movement”.

¹²⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷⁷ “The Southern Issue”, 9. They also argue that the war in 1994 was “an armed war between two armies, two systems, and two states” and as support cite the Security Council Resolution 924, which takes that view. “South Solution Hirak”, 6.

Northern regime.¹²⁷⁸ Although Southerners did everything to mend the relations with the North and international outsiders were involved, they failed.¹²⁷⁹

Attempts for national mediation and comprehensive conflict settlement through the NDC are disregarded as merely reproducing the conditions of occupation and repression:

Southerners now believe that the National Dialogue is no more than a process by which the old ruling establishments that occupied the South can achieve renewed legitimacy to continue to rule in the way they did over the years and to continue their occupation of the South.¹²⁸⁰

The accusation of providing the old establishment with renewed legitimacy indirectly refers to the international community, for the NDC was part of the internationally supported GCC Initiative.

Beyond this point, the aspect of international involvement generally deserves further attention. On the one hand, international involvement has not led to significant changes in 1994, neither the mediation and the supported Document of Pledge and Accord, nor the UN Security Council Resolutions 924 and 931. The regime simply ignored “its commitments to the international community” as it “didn’t pay any attention neither to the calls of the international community nor to the pleas of the rights and humanitarian organizations and bodies”.¹²⁸¹ Rather than being bound to shared norms, standards, and laws, it currently rather makes use of the fear and wary of neighboring countries and the international community of AQAP in order to legitimize the forceful suppression of the Hirak.¹²⁸² Notwithstanding the disillusion that has come with the lack of results of international involvement in 1994 for Southerners, the movement nevertheless calls on the international community again to support its claims and assists its struggle for self-determination and – as has been shown above – orients its appeals accordingly.¹²⁸³ There is critique of the UN,¹²⁸⁴ e.g. in the set-up of the NDC¹²⁸⁵ and its lack of concern in regard to the integration of the Southern Issue, which was

¹²⁷⁸ Ibid., 13; “Brief Introductory”, 2, 6; “Together to decide on the Southern people’s destiny”, Conference publication, ‘Cairo Conference’ of wing of the Hirak, November 20–22, 2011. Copy received by a Hirak activist and conference participant living in the UK, April 2013. Personal translation.

¹²⁷⁹ “Brief Introductory”, 8.

¹²⁸⁰ “The Southern Question”.

¹²⁸¹ “Introduction to the Southern Movement”.

¹²⁸² “Brief Introductory”, 19.

¹²⁸³ Another claim is the uniqueness of their position: “South Issue’s totally differ from other conflicts and issues existing in the World such (South Sudan, Somalia, North Iraq and Sahara in Morocco), because it is issue between two countries recognized by united Nation and World.” Ibid., 22.

¹²⁸⁴ Al-Beidh, for instance, in the Aden Live TV document in three of the nine points his anniversary speech in fall 2012 refers to the UN: He voices his opposition against the regime’s and UN’s preference for unity over the will of the people, praises himself for sending a letter with demands to the UN, and asks the UN to provide security. “Introduction to the Southern Movement”.

¹²⁸⁵ The divergent perspectives in regard to the NDC will be discussed in 6.6.2., for they are immediately related to the proposed solutions.

directed immediately against the General Secretary Ban Ki Moon after his speech on the first anniversary of the signing of the GCC Initiative.¹²⁸⁶ But at the same time the movement is exertedly trying to diffuse potential international concerns about its alleged connections to AQAP and a destabilization of the region in case Southern demands were met¹²⁸⁷; it emphasizes how its aims are “fully in contradiction” with those of AQAP, that the South is capable of confining the terrorist group, that they intend to continue good, peaceful relations with the North, and that “[t]he United States and European countries will find an ally in the southern state for protecting international routes and combating the elements of religious radicalism.”¹²⁸⁸

The term ‘religious radicalism’ leads over well to the last dimension of the diagnostic framing, the religiously based defamation of and calls for violence against Southerners:

[The] Sana’a regime considered this as a holy war and religious war against the enemies of Allah from infidels, atheists and communists, as they claimed. So, their scholars issued a fatwah, permits killing of Southerners, their women and children (...)¹²⁸⁹

This refers to the fact that during the 1994 war, famous Islamist scholars such as al-Zindani issued *fatawa* with the described content. Southerners not only felt betrayed and insulted by the allegations of lacking faith, they furthermore feared the incendiary power of such *fatawa*. Thus, they were alerted when the constitutional changes after the war led to a precedence of religion of the state, as they interpreted it:

Among the articles abolished from the 1994 constitution was the article provided for in the Global Declaration for Human Rights stating ‘there shall be no discrimination between citizens based on sex, color...or faith’. An article from the 1970 constitution of the north was reinserted in the new constitution (...) stating that ‘defending religion and the country is a holy duty’ so it mentions religion before the country.¹²⁹⁰

The practice of issuing *fatawa* has continued. The HIRAK condemns it, for it

(...) considers that the fatwah of the so-called Yemen clerics, especially that issued on Thursday 22 November 2012, was a new expiatory fatwah that renewed the Fatwah of the war issued in the summer of 1994 (...) [It portrays] defending the Yemeni unity as a

¹²⁸⁶ “Introduction to the Southern Movement”.

¹²⁸⁷ Contrarily, they argue that a continuation of the situation in the current state, which is “worse than foreign occupation”, would lead to “a threat to regional security and stability, and even threat to unity of Arab nations and integration of Islamic nations”. “Brief Introductory”, 23.

¹²⁸⁸ Alsaqqaf, “Internal Dynamics”, 8, 10; see also the reference to a speech of Ba’oum in which he expresses his wish that the EU ambassadors would attend the event to listen to the “clear message from the southern people to the world”. “Introduction to the Southern Movement”.

¹²⁸⁹ “Brief Introductory”, 9f.

¹²⁹⁰ Alsaqqaf, “Internal Dynamics”.

religious duty (...) the statement is nothing but an unjust bias against the South under the name of religion.¹²⁹¹

Southern activists¹²⁹² regard these practices as an expression of extremism and a threat towards a civil culture based on human rights. Religious expression thus forms another division line between the North and the South, with the majority of Southerners taking a moderate position and mourning the loss of former freedoms like, for instance, the situation for women as described above.¹²⁹³ It contributes to the ‘threatened identity frame’. On a practical level, this perspective, which is linked with the collective memories of Islamist forces looting Aden and other cities in the war, leads to permanent tensions with the Islah party in the South.

Based on this problem description, the next section examines the suggested solutions and strategies. As has already been noted, the prognostic dimension shows a wider variation between different groups or factions under the umbrella of the Hirak. The presentation will be structured according to these variations.

7.2.2. Prognostic Framing

As has been presented in the above section, unity is no longer a feasible option for the Hirak, for none of the factions. Instead, the goals range on a spectrum of more or less autonomy in relation to the centralized unity state: Immediate secession and independence of the South is on the one end of that spectrum, a two-state federal solution (‘confederation’) with a subsequent referendum on independence in the middle, and a federal state with the South as one or two (NDC proposal) states within the federal state as a whole forms the most moderate demand. The two contrasting positions on how to solve the framed problems, i.e. the strategies, are ‘through peaceful means’ versus ‘through armed struggle’. Armed struggle thereby logically aims at secession without considering alternatives. Other components of the suggested strategy include the unification of the movement and calling on foreign countries and/or the international community for support.

I begin with the presentation of the peaceful secessionist stance and proceed towards the more moderate aims. The calls for armed struggle will be introduced last. Subordinate strategies will be integrated within this greater systematization.

¹²⁹¹ “Introduction to the Southern Movement”.

¹²⁹² Of course this cannot be generalized for all Southerners, numerous of who view a stronger role of religion in society as a positive development. There are even some Islamist voices within the larger Hirak, one of them is al-Salami. The claim should thus be comprehended as a majority view.

¹²⁹³ See also: “Yemen’s southern rebels emerge from the shadows”, *The Guardian*, November 11, 2011, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/11/yemen-southern-rebels-hirak-secession>.

Federal State

The most notable figure open to the discussion of a federal state solution is Mohamed Ali Ahmed. He joined the NDC, albeit under the precondition of serious discussion of the option of independence for the South. When this was not met, he finally pulled out in November 2013.¹²⁹⁴ Ahmed has not been very vocal on his goals and lacks both the popularity as well as eloquence of al-Beidh; neither does he possess a symbolic status like Ba'oum. Besides, his position is viewed critically by many for his role in 1986, as has been noted in 6.3.2.1. Nevertheless, he is well connected in Abyan and can still build on a certain allegiance due to his former political office.¹²⁹⁵

In a rare interview in mid-July 2012, when he had not yet announced his participation in the NDC, Ahmed insisted that while peaceful struggle was the way for Southerners to regain their rights, violence might be a last resort. “We don’t believe in violence, but if doors are closed on our peaceful paths, no one can keep us away from our cause.”¹²⁹⁶ In the following, he elaborates further on how non-violence is a conscious choice of the people, whom he suggests to be following (i.e. not leading them):

Actually, peaceful struggle is our principal goal and we think it is the best tool by which to gain our independence. It is the tool our people have chosen for the southern movement. However, revolution has two types of goals: strategic and tactical. The strategic goal is to gain independence using different means: peaceful struggle, protests, demonstrations, etc. If it is necessary, it will turn into armed movement. This is only if we cannot achieve our goals through peaceful means. But southerners have chosen peacefulness up to now. However, if the nonviolent strategy fails, that will be something we cannot control. The reality and our people will make new choices.

Violence is presented as a feasible option; there is no reference to inherent practical challenges, but the option is available if necessary and chosen by “our people”. Overall, the picture he draws is one of democratic choice of the affected population with the ultimate goal of independence. Even before the NDC and his contested role therein, he ostentatively pays respect to the masses. It seems as if he was trying to cajole them and potentially increase resonance – a notable step especially later, when considering the difficult role of participating in the NDC without wider appeal.¹²⁹⁷ Other Southern NDC participants equally paid respect

¹²⁹⁴ “Divided South Yemen Separatists Vow to Achieve Independence”, *Middle East Eye*, September 30, 2014, accessed October 6, 2014, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/divided-south-yemen-separatists-vow-achieve-independence-830553601>.

¹²⁹⁵ In the context of his interview with Ahmed, Farea al-Muslimi describes the situation in his house as “packed with southerners from different social levels and groups”, i.e. he is respected and it is considered worthwhile seeking his support/patronage. Al-Muslimi, “Returned South Yemen Leader”.

¹²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹⁷ Cf. interview with the journalist Iona Craig in *Mafraj Radio*, Episode 8, November 10, 2013, accessed June 12, 2015, <http://www.yemenpeaceproject.org/podcast/episode-8/>.

to the people's opinion and suffering in what appears to be a similar vein of modesty and maneuvering of their volatile position as hardly acknowledged 'representatives'.¹²⁹⁸

Confederation

The most prominent event organized by the faction around Ali Nasser Mohamed and Haydar al-Attas, who aim at a two-state federal solution,¹²⁹⁹ was the so-called 'Cairo Conference' held from November 20–22, 2011.¹³⁰⁰ It was entitled "United to Decide the Southern People's Destiny".¹³⁰¹ The aim of the conference according to the program was "to gather all Southern people and to unify their aims in order to stand as a whole and to resist the continuous attempts of the North and foreign countries to exploit Southern resources". Chairman of the conference was Ali Nasser Mohamed, who in his introductory speech explicitly sought to dispel fears – raising from his history as leader of the PDRY government – that he might seek to gain any power of positions from his engagement in the conference by underlining that he "merely dreamed of a stable country that was based on fairness, democracy, and a happy, dignified life for the people". The conference overarchingly emphasized its conviction that "[t]he peaceful struggle (...) is the only way to the successful revolution" and that the South was seeking to keep peace with the North. The major goal of the proponents was "self-determination" in form of the establishment of a two-state federalism between the North and South (within the borders of May 21, 1990) with a referendum on Southern independence after a span of a few years (unspecified). Steps of state building include the formation of a new country with a new name, a new constitution that guarantees the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh must not return into power, a two-chamber parliamentary system (with each a 50/50 share in allocated seats for each partner), two federal governments and parliaments, percental access to natural resource wealth for every region, and a rearrangement of the security forces on a federal basis.¹³⁰² In addition, they ask for comprehensive "removal of the [1994] war

¹²⁹⁸ For example Abdulkawi Mohamed Rashad al-Shabei, head of the Coordination Council for Southern Revolutionary Groups. In an interview he made the following statements: "Thus, like the land, the Southern man was lost and fragmented too." "We even lost the army we built. We thought our army as invincible. It sustained significant damages. It was a huge tragedy." "The 1994 war defeated people's souls." "Abdulkawi Mohammed Rashad Al-Shabei to the Yemen Times: The Southern Movement was the First One to Reject Injustice and Humiliation", *Yemen Times*, January 21, 2013, accessed February 17, 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1644/intreview/1878/Abdulkawi-Mohammed-Rashad-Al-Shabei-to-the-Yemen-Times-The-Southern-Movement-was-the-first-to-reject-injustice-and-humiliation.html/>.

¹²⁹⁹ Al-Attas had officially pushed for a four-year interim federalism with subsequent option for secession in the framework of a referendum already in May 2010. "Al-Beidh Calls for U.N. Fact Finding Committee over South Yemen", *Yemen Post*, May 22, 2010, accessed June 27, 2012, <http://www.yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=2208&MainCat=3>.

¹³⁰⁰ There had been two precursor conferences in Cairo in May and July 2011 by the same main actors.

¹³⁰¹ Based on: *Programm of the Cairo Conference*, see: Digital Appendix G.

¹³⁰² It is explicated that the projected state will have an "Arab Islamic identity".

effects”, i.e. a return of property, reinstatement of those retired into their position, and appropriate compensation schemes. All shall be prepared for and initiated within a 12–18 months pre-transitional period under international and regional supervision. In the section on political system reforms, three of the nine specified points highlight good relations with neighboring countries and the international community, adherence to international human rights standards, and charters of international organizations.¹³⁰³ Furthermore, fighting terrorism plays a prominent role. Lastly, the immediate steps are specified as setting up an initiative to collect funding for the “Southern revolution and its peaceful Hirak”, whose peaceful activities shall be continued (no further specifications), and for “putting a plan to implement the output of the conference”.

This faction is the single one with an explicated roadmap, albeit limited in its detailedness: It is quite procedural, with a strong belief in conferences and dialogue (between the regions and subsequently directly between North and South) and written with a legalistic turn to it, reminding one of socialist planning documents. Furthermore, the repeated reference to international bodies becomes highly evident. At the same time, it alludes to emotional terms like “destiny”, “happ[iness]”, and “dignity”, appealing to the audience on a more personal, human level – the same on which the feeling of injustice would be located, which cannot be grasped by legal terms. Nevertheless, on the downside, it needs to be taken into account that the conference and its content remain an elite-centered endeavor; those attending stemmed merely from the political, intellectual, and international (diaspora) circles,¹³⁰⁴ and only few efforts have been made to widely promulgate aims, roadmap, and means in a generally accessible manner to reach out also to less elaborate masses. In addition, Ali Nasser Mohamed has a credibility problem, which might diminish the resonance of his framing; he was a member of the ‘Zumrah’, as was Hadi (and Mohamed Ali Ahmed). This connection is still held against him and he is being accused by some of trying to keep the country united for Hadi and thus viewed with suspicion.¹³⁰⁵

¹³⁰³ The diagnosis already makes extensive reference to the UNSC Resolutions 924 and 931 and the Northern regime’s nonobservance. Reference to international institutions and involvement is frequent within the document, especially in central passages.

¹³⁰⁴ Based on interviews (April 2013) with Southerners living in the UK who participated in the Cairo Conference.

¹³⁰⁵ Although suggesting itself, the same accusation is not articulated against Mohamed Ali Ahmed in the same explicitness. It can be speculated that in Ahmed’s case it is not necessary to criticize him on that level for other arguments better suit that purpose (one might be that he delegitimizes himself by attending the NDC).

Independence

The ‘independence camp’ is split into two major factions worth treating separately: Those following Ali Salim al-Beidh and those supporting Hassan Ba’oum.

Al-Beidh has lived in exile in Oman and later Germany since the war. While he had never ceased to be involved in Southern opposition, he remained quiet in regard to the Hirak until May 2009, when he entered the stage – and aimed to stay there. In his speech on the anniversary of his declaration of secession in 1994, May 21, he aimed to set himself at the forefront, to “lead [the] peaceful struggle” to reclaim “the occupied south”.¹³⁰⁶

Dear Southerners inside our country and outside it...we are calling upon you today to stand united in the epic of our peaceful struggle and hang on to it and to not deviate away from it by any way that could serve the occupier or prolong the occupation period... it is in my personal capacity and on behalf of my colleagues in the pro-unification authority, who stand today by their people, to offer my apology to the great people of the South for all the harm that have been inflicted upon them in the past periods due to circumstances and global political factors beyond our wills and wishes.¹³⁰⁷

Mobilization, unity, nonviolence – these are the dominating messages sent by al-Beidh. Mobilization therein targets those inside the country as well as the diaspora, certainly a significant aspect when considering the large numbers of (wealthy) Southerners abroad. Unity has always been a pervading theme for the Southerners and more than once posed an obstacle to collective action; the salience is hence equally high as for mobilization or, in other words, the urge to act against the perceived injustice and ‘occupation’. Lastly, he strongly emphasizes the need to remain peaceful for strategic reasons: in order not to provide any excuse for the regime to take action against the movement.

His apology and emotional language, specifically in the beginning, serves as a means to smooth ruffled feathers. Many were and are still distrustful or even hostile towards him for his role in the unification process; some might have become more open by his words. Taking the same line, he denied any interest to revive his former role and any return to Cold War politics: “I’m not in a party, and will not join any party, but after liberation I may like to be an advisor.”¹³⁰⁸

In addition to encouraging Southerners, al-Beidh also calls on international actors for support: On the one hand, he poses that “[i]t is very important to make a brotherly and honest

¹³⁰⁶ Translation posted by Jane Novak on: <http://www.armiesofliberation.com/archives/2009/06/01/al-beidh-speech-52109-official-translation/>.

¹³⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁰⁸ Cited in: Ginny Hill, “Economic Crisis Underpins Southern Separatism”, *Arab Reform Bulletin*, June 2009, accessed June 10, 2015, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa=show&article=23191>. Similarly see: “Former South Yemen President to Continue to Call for Secession”, *Al-Monitor*, May 27, 2013, accessed August 12, 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/05/ali-salim-beidh-president-south-yemen-secession.html>.

plea to all the Arab leaders, their majesties and highnesses in the Arab world and the friends all over the world and brothers in Sanaa” to be as wise as Nasser when he disengaged the unity with Syria, i.e. he calls for good will. On the other, he calls on human rights organizations and international bodies to act against “dictatorship of Sana’a”,¹³⁰⁹ hence using a rougher language to denounce the regime. Finally, he equally denounces attempts by Sana’a to connect Hirak with terrorism and acknowledges and honors those who suffer and die for the struggle, ending on this note¹³¹⁰, which connects him with his audience.

As has been elaborated before, al-Beidh has been the most visible and articulate figure over time. Plus, he modified his stance a few times, or rather, he more than once was not clear or even inconsistent in his framing – noted by his audience as well and perceived as reducing his credibility.¹³¹¹

In an interview half a year after this initial speech, al-Beidh overall affirmed his earlier stance: “The only way out of this conflict is political. We said this from the beginning. I think the Arab League can and should play a leading role in extinguishing the fire before it rages in other areas.” International support,¹³¹² a positioning against sectarianism, and continued attempts to unify the movement are reproduced. A specific emphasis is furthermore on distancing the Hirak from the Houthis – employed as negative example for a violent path to illustrate how violence does not solve political problems – and AQAP, who in May had declared their support for the movement (see 6.4.).¹³¹³ Merely a few months later however, in early 2010, al-Beidh declared that the peaceful character of the Southern Movement was not without its limits,¹³¹⁴ hence weakening his nonviolence stance.¹³¹⁵

The positioning and framing by others, who also count to his faction, should not be disregarded, specifically, the more militant section in Dhaleh/Radfan. In the midst of the negotiations surrounding Saleh’s stepdown in November 2011, General Nasser al-Taweel, for

¹³⁰⁹ Translation posted by Jane Novak on: <http://www.armiesofliberation.com/archives/2009/06/01/al-beidh-speech-52109-official-translation/>.

¹³¹⁰ Rhetorically he connects “martyrs”, “homeland”, and “nation” in a way that lingers on.

¹³¹¹ Based on interviews with Hirak activists living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹³¹² In early June 2010, for instance, al-Beidh called on the international community to protect civilians in the South after clashes had occurred in Dhaleh. “Exiled Leader Appeals for South Yemen Protection”, *AFP*, June 8, 2010, accessed June 27, 2012, <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALegM5hX4NsKRiNhh3GWWghOjh1jDmlfNg>.

¹³¹³ “Yemeni Top Brass Dragged Saudis into Conflict’. Regime Is Causing Serious Crises in Sa’da and South of the Country, Yemen’s Sectarian Leader Says”, *Gulf News*, November 29, 2009, accessed April 2, 2012, <http://www.gulfnews.com/news/gulf/yemen/...ct-39-1.533543>.

¹³¹⁴ *Al-Jarida*, January 25, 2010, cited in: Lutz Rogler, “Jemen versus Südarabien? Zur Entwicklung der ‘Bewegung des Südens’”, *inamo – Informationsprojekt Naher und Mittlerer Osten* 16 (Sommer 2010), 24–29, here: 29.

¹³¹⁵ On August 2, 2010, he then again emphasized his dedication to non-violent struggle until self-determination was granted. “Yemen’s Ex-President Vows to Keep up Fight”, *Yemen Post*, August 1, 2010, accessed June 27, 2012, <http://www.yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=2460&MainCat=3>.

instance, found more than clear words towards Sana'a: "We give the regime this ultimatum: either you acknowledge our legitimate demands to self-determination or you will soon find Yemen split once again into two countries."¹³¹⁶ With a strategic political opportunity in mind and prompting tone, Mohamed Omar Ahmed Jubran draw the attention of youth activists to the regime's weakness at that point: "The regime is expending all its firepower on the north. We must seize this opportunity to regain our rights."¹³¹⁷ These statements demonstrate how the same faction varies between the more political, defensive tone of the leading figure and the more action-oriented perspective on the ground; the perceptions and actions of movement members, then, can take yet another specification.¹³¹⁸

In the run-up to the NDC, al-Beidh in December 2012 re-emphasized the position he had started with: Southern ownership of their future and the shape it is going to have.

I won't take a position because of the international community's demands. What's important are the demands of my people. To say 'the international community wants this', great, that's the international community. But we are the owners of the issue – we, the sons of the south.¹³¹⁹

He thereby counters what has become problematic in regard to international involvement in the Southern issue: The Hirak has since its initiation called for international involvement and support for their issue. Now, in the face of international involvement pro-unity, a differentiated dealing with the 'international support frame' is indispensable. Al-Beidh re-adjusts and re-prioritizes the relation between 'international support' and 'self-determination' by giving the latter clear precedence – a move that should also account for resonance among adherents.

Another statement on the same occasion, however, was much more problematic and costly for him. There has been constant (regime-supported) suspicions that al-Beidh was secretly supported by Iran,¹³²⁰ an allegation he denied for years. Yet in the interview he declared: "If I have received money from Iran, I was (doing so) to help our people."¹³²¹ This step, i.e. opening the floor for further doubts in regard to his contacts to Iran, was very damaging to his

¹³¹⁶ "Yemen's southern rebels emerge from the shadows", *The Guardian*, November 11, 2011, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/11/yemen-southern-rebels-hirak-secession>.

¹³¹⁷ Ibid.

¹³¹⁸ Nasser al-Noubah in October 2012 furthermore warned that some small groups, not necessarily of the Hirak, might pursue armed struggle for their own ends. He called on Northern politicians and international forces to take this into account in their considerations. "Movement for South Yemen Secession Braves the Odds", *Al Akhbar English*, October 15, 2012, accessed April 3, 2013, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/12972>.

¹³¹⁹ "Long-Exiled South Yemen Leader Beidh Defends His Call for Secession", *McClatchy Newspaper*, December 5, 2012, accessed March 13, 2013, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2012/12/05/176491/long-exiled-south-yemen-leader.html#storylink=cpy>.

¹³²⁰ That he eventually moved to Beirut and operated Aden Live TV there was among the points held against him as was the fact that his daughter married a (Lebanese) Shi'a.

¹³²¹ "Long-Exiled South Yemen Leader".

credibility and reputation. Even those who assumed distant contact at most were confounded by his inconsistency.¹³²²

Overall and despite this ‘faux pas’, al-Beidh’s consistent rejection of the NDC upheld his popularity. Over time, he made a number of points. First, rejection of the GCC initiative: “The GCC initiative does not have anything concerning our Southern issue, therefore it does not concern us – it is designed to solve the issues of those fighting for power in Sana’a.”¹³²³ Second, denunciation of Southerners participating therein: “Southerners participating in the National Dialogue only represent themselves.”¹³²⁴ Third, denial of the legitimacy of the NDC processes: “We (...) know that this dialogue is directed in a certain way, and overseen by certain parties, that want to use it to reach what they want, which does not agree with what our people want and aspire to in the south (...)”.¹³²⁵ Instead al-Beidh demands an immediate North-South dialogue:

We are calling for a dialogue between the north and the south based on the dialogues that were carried out between us and them after we announced secession in 1994. At the time, there were two delegations, one from the north and one from the south, holding a dialogue in Geneva. The Security Council issued two resolutions at the time, Resolution 924 and Resolution 931 (...) in June 1994, they said that unity cannot be achieved through force.¹³²⁶

The international legalistic basis he gives his demand are once more in line with the remaining frames. Fourth, rejection of the NDC outcomes: “We reject everything that comes from this dialogue (...)”.¹³²⁷ Among others, this encompasses the apology that was issued by the Yemeni government for the 1994 Civil War on behalf of past governments: “We reject this apology and we consider that they need to apologise for this apology.”¹³²⁸ And furthermore rigorously the six-state federal solution:

No, we do not agree to the proposal of establishing a federal region. Our people take to the streets daily to demand the restoration of their identity and their state. We demand that a referendum be held in the south. The people of the south have three choices: unity, a federal region or secession.¹³²⁹ Let the people decide their own fate. You see how the

¹³²² Based on interview with Hiraq activists living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹³²³ “A Tale of Three Presidents”, <http://www.alshamahi.com/2013/09/03/a-tale-of-three-presidents/>. Concerning his own position, he denies any contacts with Hadi, whom he criticizes for being a ‘token Southerner’, as well as Saleh. Similarly: “Former South Yemen President”.

¹³²⁴ “A Tale of Three Presidents”.

¹³²⁵ Ibid.

¹³²⁶ “Former South Yemen President”.

¹³²⁷ “A Tale of Three Presidents”.

¹³²⁸ Ibid.

¹³²⁹ Another inconsistency: In December 2012 he had still emphasized that “[i]t’s not about secession. We’re demanding the restoration of our state and the end of northern occupation.” Thereby he had underlined the fine difference between a very first separation and the reinstatement of a prior condition, which for many is an important facet. “Long-Exiled South Leader”.

people today are taking to the streets, what do these people want? Are they being paid money or do they support a cause? You saw the recent million-man rally. What do we consider this? Don't these people have rights to their lands and their identity? We support them but we cannot impose anything upon them. We walk with them and stay behind them. We all want secession, and we'll let the coming generations decide for the future if they want unification or not.¹³³⁰

He employs the well-established elements of self-determination, rights, identity, and (notwithstanding his use of the majestic plural for himself) emphatic modesty concerning his own role. New from his side is the call for a referendum as an option; so far he has concentrated on immediate independence. This renewed modification might be problematic. Fifth, insistence on nonviolent struggle as (favored) pathway: “We hope that our brothers in Sana’a, if there is someone with sense amongst them, listen to what is happening in the South, we’re looking for a peaceful solution.”¹³³¹ He underlines that they can restore the state via the Peaceful Southern Movement, yet: “[I]f they don’t respond to our demands or listen to us, the people will be forced to adopt other methods in their struggle.”¹³³² Sixth, a vehement distancing from AQAP and simultaneous linking of the terrorist group to the returned Afghan Arabs. By this, he implies an involvement of Saleh and Ali Mohsen – i.e. Northern core leaders – with AQAP,¹³³³ and signals to Western powers that their security concerns were better off with Southern independence, which would exterminate any acceptance or even support for terrorists. Seventh, a positioning towards international actors, between the expression of frustration and hope:

For a long time, we have been sending messages to the Security Council, the US administration, major states and the Gulf countries to explain our cause. However, the international position, including that of the Gulf, supports the Gulf Initiative. We are not included in this initiative and it ignores the issue of the south.¹³³⁴

To the role of the US in Yemen he held: “What should I say to the US ambassador? The US ambassador has transformed into a tribal sheikh...He has become an Islahi sheikh.”¹³³⁵ By this, he sets the US ambassador in the position of an adversary (or worse: enemy) of the Hirak, for the Islah is one and the equalization of the ambassador with an Islahi sheikh makes him one, too. Concerning the US as a whole, however, he softens:

We know that US foreign policy works for an (...) unstable Middle East, what goes on in many Arab countries is related to this – that there is no stable Arab country. (...) We feel

¹³³⁰ “Former South Yemen President”.

¹³³¹ “A Tale of Three Presidents”.

¹³³² “Former South Yemen President”.

¹³³³ “A Tale of Three Presidents”.

¹³³⁴ “Former South Yemen President”.

¹³³⁵ “A Tale of Three Presidents”.

that the US doesn't understand our situation (...) I hope that with time they will understand.¹³³⁶

He speaks of hope for understanding, something that was lacking internationally so far, as has serious attention: "There is total international silence when it comes to the suffering of the people of the south, who have persisted in their struggle."¹³³⁷

In 2014, al-Beidh (though not immediately but in clear association with his faction) gave slightly more developed guidelines for movement action. One focus was on internal unity:

(...) since [the movement] considers the war it is fighting as a conflict of existence and that southerners must not give the enemy the opportunity to find internal divisions (...) [tasks are]: 1. Resisting the authority projects, notably the sectarian, religious, and provincial ones. 2. Uniting the southern forces rejecting the Sana'a authority. 3. Contacting Arab, Islamic, and foreign countries to stand by the independence demand.¹³³⁸

The very explicitness with which he refers to it as "a conflict of existence" is mirrored in other passages of the long document. Five years after his accession to the movement, that is, years into regular demonstrations and campaigns without results, the tone becomes more direct. So, too, does the addressing of risks being faced by the Hirak (de facto touch upon the issue of weaknesses, mistakes, and self-criticism, all delicate aspects to tackle publicly in this context). As "internal risks", he identifies the emergence of extremist positions, the emergence of the term 'armed struggle' (implying that it might then be realized), mobilization over all sectors (which accounts rather as a challenge for the movement), the need to set up rules for the security and military sectors "for the peaceful Movement not to be detracted" (to violence), and a lack of, or delay, in centralization/unification of the movement. As "external risks" he lists: containment/repression, a lack of reaction of international organizations (contains the danger of violent escalation), movement fragmentation as a result of external pressure, and separatist regional tendencies with the danger of violent escalation.¹³³⁹ At the bottom line, these points – though no further specified – form the recommendation for action. They do not significantly deviate from prior advice: moderation to avoid extremist positions; sticking to nonviolence and containment of those sectors involved in security and unification etc. That al-Beidh returned to this set serves as evidence that it is the most promising in regard to resonance, which will subsequently be shown in 7.2.6.

The last point to consider concerning al-Beidh's prognostic framing is his positioning in

¹³³⁶ Ibid.

¹³³⁷ "Former South Yemen President".

¹³³⁸ "Introduction to the Southern Movement and its Development Stages", *Aden Live TV*, April 16, 2014, accessed April 16, 2014, <http://www.adenlivetv.tv/articles-13278.html>. In addition, he calls for an integration of all Southern movement organizations and groups, and caution towards leadership and parties located in Sana'a, whom he denounces as "serv[ing] as a cover for [the] legitimacy" of the regime.

¹³³⁹ "Introduction to the Southern Movement and its Development Stages".

regard to other leaders. How his relation with Ba'oum was for years shaped by tensions has been noted before. His attempts at unifying dialogue with Ali Nasser Mohamed, al-Attas, and al-Jifri since 2009, however, are equally critically assessed by him in May 2013 (i.e. at a time of heightened attention to the NDC and increasing tensions between at least the Ba'oum and al-Beidh factions; this might be reflected as well in the relations between other leading figures):

These leaders have rejected our calls for secession and agree to remaining unified and propose establishing a federal region. They justify this stance by saying that we are unable to restore the state, after the armed forces were dissolved. Yet, we cannot accept maintaining unity with Sanaa, even for a single day, after 1994. If we accept this, we will never be able to secede in the future. But the people have taken to the streets with the slogan 'No to unity...no to a federal region'.¹³⁴⁰

Again, he raises himself above the others whom he describes as pessimistic and allusively unregenerate; he, on the other hand, presents himself as assertor of the will of the people, a role he has been striving to convey from the beginning of his involvement – apparently it has been to his advantage, specifically when noting that his is the dominant picture raised in demonstrations. The 'why' will be further discussed in 7.2.6. as well.

In comparison to al-Beidh, the appeal of Hassan Ba'oum lies less in his rhetorical competence and political background than in his long-term dedication to opposition and protest on the ground. Frequent detention has fortified his credibility and symbolic character. His position, however, is more difficult to grasp for he concentrates much less on public frame distribution through speeches and interviews than al-Beidh. As far as can be reconstructed, he has not changed his stance over time. He is a proponent of complete independence (he does not speak of secession) for the South and places emphasis on its specific identity: "The south has never been part of the north. We have had our own identity since the dawn of history."¹³⁴¹ In this framing, Aden has a special place: "Aden, capital of the South and the historic capital, which embodies the unity of all Southerners (...) humane wonderful coexistence, openness, and tolerance (...) [All] must recognize the specificity of Aden."¹³⁴² Ba'oum consequently calls for a peaceful struggle for self-determination.¹³⁴³ "We're waging a just struggle. And the whole

¹³⁴⁰ "Former South Yemen President".

¹³⁴¹ Craig, "Trouble".

¹³⁴² "National Congress for the People of the South", held in Aden, December 16–18, 2012 (final document), received from Hirak activist, December 16, 2012.

¹³⁴³ Already in mid-2010, for instance, Ba'oum had accused al-Beidh of sabotaging peaceful efforts by allegedly financing violent attacks. "Rift in Southern Movement Leadership after Recent Unrest", *Yemen Times*, June 24, 2010, accessed June 27, 2012, http://www.yementimes.com/defaultdet.aspx?SUB_ID=34277.

of the world must comprehend that we'll continue, peacefully, until victory."¹³⁴⁴ In 2013, he admitted to not having a roadmap (implying that the whole movement had none).¹³⁴⁵ At the first mass-demonstration in Mukalla in April 2014 (note that Ba'oum is from Hadhramawt), he again called on Southerners to unite, underlined that violence of the regime will not deter them, and held that federalism conceived as a "plot".¹³⁴⁶ Despite his alleged closeness to the KSA, he did not categorically rule out future support from Iran, stating that: "We are calling all the world to support us and would welcome any party that would support our revolution."¹³⁴⁷

As indicated at the beginning of the paragraph: Ba'oum is a figure who captivates more through his actions than his talk. His statements are few and not far from others' standpoints. Nevertheless, his example of continued peaceful struggle can be assumed to have had a strong non-verbal impact in regard to delineating how to protest.

Calls for Armed Struggle

Ba'oum's peaceful stance is diametrically opposed to a number of calls for armed struggle, which have been made over time. Four will be analyzed. While it can reasonably be assumed that these have not been the only ones, they were the most widespread, i.e. those targeting the most general audience.

The first call for armed resistance was made during the phase of accession of leaders in mid-2009 by Tariq al-Fadhli. In an interview he recounted:

My brothers in the Southern Movement are not listening to me, but this regime doesn't understand what political dialogue is, they only understand force. I am in favor of [armed] resistance and instituting a military movement. (...) Frankly, I do not find any of our allies in favor of my opinion. All are unanimously in favor of [limited] self-defense and the peaceful option.¹³⁴⁸

It has not been possible to reconstruct how exactly he attempted to convince his audience to take up arms, however, it seems that resonance has failed to appear. There are a number of arguments that theoretically both catalyze and inhibit resonance. What might tip the scales for al-Fadhli is his prominence, social prestige, and well-established networks in Abyan, Sana'a, and among Islamists. What can be held against him, on the other hand, partly coincides with

¹³⁴⁴ Adam Baron, "The South (of Yemen) Will Rise Again", *Vice*, March 5, 2013, accessed March 5, 2013, <http://www.vice.com/read/the-south-of-yemen-will-rise-again>.

¹³⁴⁵ Iona Craig on *Mafraj Radio*, November 10, 2013.

¹³⁴⁶ "AFP: Demonstration in Southern Yemen to Demand Independence from North", April 28, 2014, accessed April 28, 2014, <http://www.honahadramaut.com/2014/139557.html>.

¹³⁴⁷ Craig, "Trouble".

¹³⁴⁸ Cited in: HRW, "In the Name of Unity", telephone interview conducted August 27, 2009, 21.

these strengths: Hirakis are overwhelmingly religious moderates, in whose view al-Fadhli's Islamist connections and jihadist past are rather discrediting, i.e. lowering his credibility and scaring off moderates. Moreover, his (prior) good contacts to the regime are suspicious, and his rapid changing of sides from the regime to the protesters makes him look opportunistic, again taking a toll on his credibility. And mainly, as Southerners themselves hold, the majority does not appeal to violent action or, as interviewees have interpreted, at least were not appealing at that early stage. As a consequence, also of not creating resonance among other leaders, as al-Fadhli himself admits, his framing failed.

That he did reach at least a group (potentially of his immediate personal followers and clients) is, according to HRW, backed by a video. It shows clashes between a large secessionist crowd waving the southern flag and government troops at an event of al-Fadhli's festival on July 23 in his compound. A number of the secessionists were visibly armed, which suggests that they might have been an intended core for the militia al-Fadhli had stated he wanted to create.¹³⁴⁹ Government repression and the lack of resonance, however, limited his further options in that direction.¹³⁵⁰ He instead took a more moderate stance after some time, integrating himself in the midst of the Hirak, until rumors held it that he drifted more towards Islamist circles again.

The second call for armed struggle was published anonymously (in the name of the Hirak, as reports claim) in the Aden Post on February 23, 2013. It followed immediately after the killing of protesters during the demonstration on February 21.

What our South faces right now, the looting of its resources, wiles of its sons, killing, distortion, vandalizing, and the schemes that target our leaders, give us no option than to defend our South and ourselves. Even if we have limited possibilities and resources, our brave sons have already proven that they are able to save the South and the best evidence are those who gave their souls for its sake. The sons of the South are out of patience and all the possible doors are closed in front of them and even the foreign aids are getting useless in helping them reclaim their own rights and saving their people from killing, torture, chase, and prison. Now they have nothing to do except defend themselves. That is why we have decided to start the armed struggle because it is a legal right that is guaranteed by all the international conventions for those people who live under occupation. Therefore we have decided to move to another stage of the struggle of liberating our South. Especially after what we find by the end of the first stage our peaceful people's Hirak with that great success and fruitful results. We now declare – with the support of God – the beginning of our armed struggle with a civil disobedience

¹³⁴⁹ Ibid., 21f.

¹³⁵⁰ When Al-Fadhli's home was under military siege again in March 2010 following a shooting, al-Beidh called on Southerners to help him. "Yemen Separatist Shot Dead, Southern Tensions Rise", *Reuters*, March 4, 2010, accessed June 27, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6233B220100304>. This should be interpreted as a statement of support for al-Fadhli's ambiguous yet clearly militant position, for only on February 17 al-Fadhli had called for a secessionist '*intifada*' ('uprising'). "Amid Persistent Violence in South, Hirak Says Will Launch 'Stone Uprising'", *Yemen Post*, February 17, 2010, accessed June 27, 2012, <http://www.yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=1885>.

in all the Southern provinces that will paralyze the occupier's steps and confuses his plans. It will be the first warning in starting the armed revolution, which will be formed of the popular forces. In addition, it will sign the end of the peaceful struggle that has already given the all-occupying organizations and the foreign forces the sufficient chance to solve the case politically.¹³⁵¹

Despite its core message of proclaiming the commencement of armed struggle, the text uses a very moderate language and rather argues than motivates to fight: It portrays the step as the last option after all other (nonviolent) means have been exhausted, speaks of armed struggle as defense, and remains within a rights framing; besides, the change is the 'next stage' (i.e. logical continuation) of the prior, honorable efforts of the martyrs. The regime, on the other hand, has had its chances and must now accept the consequences; yet, even those proceed slowly, with a first, non-violent step as a warning.

According to reports, "al-Beidh called from Beirut (...) for the armed struggle to begin stressing Sana'a was never serious in its efforts to address southerners' grievances – stolen lands, discrimination, stolen benefits and unfair repartition of resources."¹³⁵² This accounts for one more inconsistency in al-Beidh's behavior and it must be questioned in how far it was supporting or rather detrimentally affecting the resonance of the call. The inherent tension between message and tone can be seen as an attempt not to scare off the followers that the prior moderate and legalistic framing had resonated well amongst, while at the same time prescribing a massive change in strategy, i.e. the prognostic component. Although the approach of 'meeting' the audience in an established frame anchoring generally appears well reflected and sensible, the implementation is lacking in a number of regards: First, notwithstanding its proclamation in the wake of a major event of repression (strengthening the empirical credibility), the change comes very abrupt. The nonviolence frame is too well established to uproot it so rapidly. Second, an anonymous announcement in a newspaper has both a very limited credibility and a limited reach; relatedly, an article initially reaches out to the single individuum and hence does not generate catalyzing effects in collectives. Third, the call stands isolated without on the ground events, i.e. what it is calling for is not visible in any form but remains in the abstract, a fact that makes it more challenging to evoke resonance. Fourth, and lastly, as has been noted above: Al-Beidh's involvement – and sudden change of position – further complicates the issue. In conclusion, while the frame development is coherent, the noted deficiencies inhibited a success of this prognostic framing.

¹³⁵¹ See Digital Annex F.

¹³⁵² "Southern Movement Declares Armed Struggle", *Yemen Post*, February 24, 2013, accessed February 25, 2013, <http://www.yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=6604>. It also mentions that the Hirak was about to "set up a revolutionary committee which will be charged with overseeing the popular liberation movement".

A third announcement of armed struggle was made by the so-called ‘Southern Resistance’ on January 18, 2014. It took the form of a broadcast on Aden Live TV, where their statement was read out. Therein they announce that the Southern Resistance had attacked the 33rd Armored Brigade stationed in Dhaleh channeling strong popular anger and responding to the killing of Sheikh Saleh, as well as invoking retribution for the crimes that the enemy (the Yemeni army) performed against Southern people, specifically in al-Dhaleh. After a reporting of gains and small victories, they assert that their armed struggle and their actions will continue until the Yemeni occupation was defeated, the last meter of Southern soil was liberated, and Southerners had reclaimed freedom on all levels: politically, economically, and militarily. Once more in reference to international law, the group announces that all captured Yemeni soldiers would be handed over to the International Red Cross and, lastly, they warn the Yemeni army that any violent action against Southern citizens would be spontaneously replied and retributed by the Southern Resistance.¹³⁵³

Anew, the announcement can be linked to al-Beidh due to the fact that it was launched on ‘his’ TV channel.¹³⁵⁴ He does not position himself publicly in this case, though. According to observers and in concordance with my own findings, this was the first time that a wing of the Southern Movement admitted to attacks against the military and referred to it as “the army of the enemies”.¹³⁵⁵ As was the case with the second call for arms above, there had been a severe case of repression shortly before the declaration: the shelling of the funeral tent in Dhaleh in late December. This time, the character is more of a statement rather than an immediate call to arms, although this certainly is implied in the subtext. Yet, another more moderate measure called for is a sit-in at the quasi concluding NDC with the aim to demand a removal of the notorious 33rd Armored Brigade (the one the group was fighting) from Dhaleh, an ousting of its general Abdullah Dhaba’an, and holding him accountable for the crimes he committed in the area.¹³⁵⁶

Especially in comparison with the prior call for armed struggle in 2013, this one has some strengths: It was spread via a popular medium and transmitted orally, which lets it reach a wider audience; it has a named frame distributor; the outrage after the shelling was much more fundamental and the audience could thus be reached more easily on an emotional level;

¹³⁵³ See Digital Annex F.

¹³⁵⁴ Rumors in the Hiraq connect the Southern Resistance with Shallal Ali Shaie and a soldier named Al-Jamajim fighting with him; another aspect of these rumors moreover stresses the connection between this violent cell and al-Beidh. Interview with Hiraq activist living in Germany, July 22, 2014.

¹³⁵⁵ Mohamed al-Kibsi, “Lead [sic!] by al-Beidh Southern National Resistance Declares War Against Army Forces”, January 19, 2014, accessed January 19, 2014, <http://www.mohammedalkibsi.blogspot.de/2014/01/lead-by-al-beidh-southern-national.html>.

¹³⁵⁶ Ibid.

it was not an immediate call to get involved in armed struggle, with the mediacy potentially acting in favor for it rather pulls than tries to push the audience; the enemy is clearly named and personally known (at least to those local to Dhaleh), with a notorious record of violence; the group is building a record of ‘achievements’ to back their position and to add to their credibility; and, lastly, the prime arena is an area with already established, though small, cells of armed resistance, hence softening the step towards it, as does the observance of international law explicitly pointed out. Among the weaknesses are: possibly the noted mediacy of calling to join the group; the lack of a prominent figure with social prestige and a network; and the short-term nature of the call without (at that point) a permanent campaign and comprehensive framing.

The Southern Resistance generated some reports related to attacks as well as losses from clashes in early 2014, yet, this soon declined. In 2015, however, they were able to mobilize followers to fight against the Houthis and regime troops, i.e. in the face of immediate invasive militia/military threat towards the South.¹³⁵⁷ Section 7.2.6. will further elucidate the resonance of its announcement and actions (for the group probably impacted more through action than words).



Figure 7.9.: The logo of the Southern Resistance as distributed on social media platforms etc. in early 2014. It shows the PDRY's coat of arms – in which the official name of the state has been replaced by 'Al-muqāwamah al-janūbyāh' – with two rifles in the back.

The fourth and last official step towards a violent strategy was the declaration of the Hirak's Military Council on September 23, 2014 by a group of retired military.¹³⁵⁸ This occurred at a time of instability in the North in the wake of the Houthi seizing of Sana'a, which increased overall insecurity and created a political opportunity. This council proclaimed that starting from the commemoration date of October 14, they would follow the Houthi model of toppling

¹³⁵⁷ Susanne Dahlgren, Anne-Linda Amira Augustin, “The Multiple Wars in Yemen”, *MERIP*, June 18, 2015, accessed June 19, 2015, <http://www.merip.org/multiple-wars-yemen>.

¹³⁵⁸ Here and in the following: “Divided South Yemen Separatists Vow to Achieve Independence”, *Middle East Eye*, September 30, 2014, accessed October 6, 2014, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/divided-south-yemen-separatists-vow-achieve-independence-830553601>.

the government. They called for mass demonstrations and extensive campaigns of civil disobedience with the aim of taking control of cities and ultimately declaring an independent state. Saleh Tammah, known for his involvement in HATAM and one of the founding members of the council, said in an interview: “We think the time is ripe for declaring our state. (...) The south is totally controlled by its people. Most army generals, governors of provinces and directors of districts are southerners.”¹³⁵⁹ As an incentive to join, the council promised all army personnel a permanent position. Tammah justified this on the basis of optimal human resource use: “Those army officers have military know-how, since they graduated from prestigious Russian schools. They want to share their expertise with the young southerners.”¹³⁶⁰

Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of this announcement and call is less unequivocal than in the prior cases. The Houthi’s seizure of the capital was observed with caution by Southerners, thus potentially making them more open for a more militant solution. In addition, the great number of retired military enjoys a high reputation among the general population; for them, the suggested role and the promised perspective of permanent employment must sound seductive. If all of them joined, larger parts of the population would probably follow. Furthermore, the procedure of first creating a council and then slowly and reflectedly escalating measures appears appropriate in the cultural (political) setting. Yet, the nonviolence frame is well-established and the impact of a Tammah calling for a drastic shift when more well-known leaders are still in favor of sticking to the prior strategy would make a more comprehensive campaign either of systematically convincing the retired officers or – regarding the whole population – of spreading the frame necessary.

Which role exactly the Military Council played in the mobilization for the post-October 14 protest camp on Al-Arood Square and the accompanying campaigns in the run-up to the November 30 ultimatum is equally difficult to assess for lack of definite affiliation of protesters with the group. It was present among the protesters, that much is assured. The absence of action after November 30, however, is a clear sign that no sufficient numbers joined the quest of simply declaring independence as a consequence of de facto territorial control as delineated by Tammah.

This section has presented the various directions the prognostic framing of different groups and individual actors has taken. They differ in strategy and goal or simply in that they are

¹³⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁶⁰ Ibid.

propagated by one ‘leader’ or the other. I have furthermore pointed out the respective strengths and weaknesses of each framing from a theoretical point (in regard to credibility, consistency, reach, timing, etc.). The analysis of the resonance they factually evoked will be conducted in 7.2.6.

7.2.3. Motivational Framing

“We call on the people of the south to actively participate in this event [commemorating the withdrawal of the last British troops]... while holding dear their civil values and civilized manners and peaceful means in changing opinion.”¹³⁶¹ This early call of Nasser al-Noubah to all Southerners on November 21, 2008 is representative for the vast majority of those to come in the subsequent years. The core invocations are always: Participate in the struggle and stay peaceful for you are civilized. The latter two are, as a rule, combined in a causal connection between identity (civilized) and consequential action (nonviolence). Through the linking of demonstrations and mass events to dates of commemoration and through the strong emphasis on the British legacy, identity is permanently (re)invoked and (re)created. Interestingly, despite the violent character of these commemorative events (especially the Politburo massacre and the commencement of armed resistance against the British), they are interpreted as evidence for ‘civilized nonviolence’.¹³⁶²

Some calls to join the struggle aim at specific groups. In his speech in May 2009, al-Beidh, for instance, explicitly mentioned ‘collaborators’: “I call upon all Southerners who are working with the occupying authorities, to put the interest of the South above their own interests and to join the caravan of liberation of the South.”¹³⁶³ Other specifically targeted collectives include Southerners in the diaspora, especially those in the Gulf States who might provide financial support and approach their respective host governments to acknowledge the Southern issue, and Hadhramis, to better integrate the movement in all of the South and counter potential Hadhrami secessionism. All of these addressed, however, were faint in comparison to regular mass mobilization attempts.

Another strand of motivational framing aims at unity of the movement (particularly since 2014) and therefore at closing the ranks and overcoming differences. It is logically rooted in

¹³⁶¹ Cited in: HRW, “In the Name of Unity”, 17, n. 28.

¹³⁶² When twisting the argument, one might also reason that they intentionally put such a strong emphasis on nonviolence to overcome the danger of previous escalation and that the linking to commemoration dates should serve as a reminder of the past doom of violence. However, it was never explicated that way.

¹³⁶³ “Introduction to the Southern Movement”. He also explicitly calls on the youth.

the core challenge of overcoming fragmentation and factionalization, and it formed the very first step in 2006 ('Reconciliation and Tolerance').

'We have suffered wrong and demand compensation and our rights.' This, in short, is a strong motivational frame (or, rather, a combination of three elements), and it immediately relates to the diagnostic frames. In addition, it relates to the call on international actors for support – albeit mainly for those in favor of peaceful struggle. Their logic holds that once Southerners get the attention of the international community, they can prove how they have and are continuously suffering from injustice, and then gain the restoring of their internationally guaranteed rights. Therefore, the aim must be to get attention and present themselves as worthy members of the international community – of which they are aware. To do so, they (a) collect evidence on what they have lost during and after the war of 1994 (see the respective documents in which this has been done), (b) document human rights violations by the regime, (c) present the Hirak as a democratic people's movement, (d) argue in legal terms (e.g. demand for self-determination), (e) advocate the advantages for international actors' interests (e.g. containment of terrorism), and (f) remain nonviolent in their repertoire of contention (i.e. demonstrations, rallies, civil disobedience campaigns, etc.).

Since activists as well as uninvolved persons are becoming victims of repression and regime violence, the movement is pursuing a balancing act in its call for an 'adequate' response, i.e. a response that gives victims the feeling of acknowledgement and worth, yet restraining them from violent escalation. This is also the part in which proponents of nonviolence and armed struggle, respectively, differ the most. The former put the main emphasis on 'being civilized', having a glorious past as a 'civil state' with numerous achievements, and 'rightfully deserving' justice. They allow for 'self-defense' but underline the 'civilizational superiority of a peaceful struggle'. The latter, on the other hand, consider their ability to expel the 'Northern occupier' as part of the 'glorious Southern past' that successfully expelled the British. The 'success' of the resistance cells in Dhaleh are presented in that light, underlining Southerners strength and preparedness for defense and battle. Accordingly, the 'doves' motivate along the lines: 'defend yourself but let's show them our superiority by remaining peaceful', whereas the 'hawks' frame it as 'let's end victimization and show them our strength (in fighting)'. Apart from the diametrical difference between the 'doves' and the 'hawks', the motivational elements are combined in a modular manner by the various actors, often reassembled to distinct packages. As a rule, they often contain an element of 'follow my leadership'.

As for the Houthis, the table below summarizes the analysis of the Hirak's frame dimensions.

DIAGNOSTIC FRAMES

What is the problem/the issue at stake? Who is responsible for it?

MAIN FRAME	SUB-FRAME	CORE CONTENT
FAILED UNITY FRAME		unity between the North and the South has failed
OCCUPATION FRAME		Southern state is illegally occupied by Northern regime forces
	Looting	Northerners have been looting Southern property and resources since 1994
	Militarization	militarization of the South by Northern forces and repression of Southerners
	Violence/ Physical Harm	violence, killings, and a dire humanitarian situation as a result of Northern presence and violent policies
THREAT FRAME		there is an existential (cultural and/or physical) threat emanating from a specific 'other'
	Threatened Identity	Southern history is manipulated and heritage is destroyed in order to eliminate Southern identity
	Physical Threats	violence, "genocide", and demographic threats are directed against Southerners
INJUSTICE FRAME		defined group suffers from injustice directed against it
	Southern Marginalization	South is/Southerners are systematically marginalized in regard to infrastructure, (government) jobs, natural resource income, political representation and inclusion, and the condition and status of Aden, which has been marginalized, neglected, and degraded
	Legal Discrimination	Southerners are deprived of their rights
	Lack of Dignity	lack of justice, equality, and freedom for Southerners; relative deprivation; religious defamation through Islamist clerics close to the regime
CIVIL STATE FRAME		only a civil state is a good state
	Civilized Southerners	in their own state Southerners had a good, civil, progressive constitution and administration, partly as a legacy of the British era

	Lack of State & State Services	Northern-dominated state lacks genuine state capacities; it is characterized by a corrupt and despotic system
ATTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY		responsibility must be attributed for the various diagnoses on various levels: national and international
	Northern Cultural 'Other'	Northerners are tribal barbarians
	Tyranny Regime	regime had malevolent intentions from the beginning and engages in brutal willful destruction
	International Community	international community fails to live up to its own declarations and resolutions and support Southerners

Table 7.5.: Summary of the HIRAK's diagnostic frames

	MAIN FRAME	CORE CONTENT
PROGNOSTIC FRAMES What is the solution to the problem? How are we going to achieve it?	NONVIOLENCE FRAME	everything we do must be peaceful; nonviolence is superior to violence and a sign of us being civilized
	FEDERALISM FRAME	there is a way to resolve the problems within unity; the NDC provides a framework within which we can potentially develop solutions through internationally supported negotiations
	CONFEDERATION FRAME	a two-state federal solution should be established for an interim period, followed by a referendum in the South
	INDEPENDENCE FRAME	after unity has comprehensively failed and in the face of the massive injustice and crimes committed by the North against the South, immediate independence is the only option; it is not an issue of secession for unity was merely a contract between two independent states; thus, independence is simply a restoration of the status quo ante
	ARMED STRUGGLE FRAME	we have exhausted all other options and now need to take up armed struggle in order to fight injustice and regain our independent state; if we do not fight, we will in the long run be defeated and our identity extinguished
	SELF-DETERMINATION FRAME	Southerners have a right to self-determination; the people must be able to decide about their political and social future in a referendum
	RIGHTS FRAME	international law guarantees Southerners numerous rights they are deprived of; these rights need to be regained; all we demand is legally justified
	LIBERATION FRAME	end occupation and ‘colonialism’ by Northerners
	SOUTH ARABIA FRAME	regain our own South Arabian identity, which is unlike Yemeni identity that has been imposed upon us; underlying axiom: South Arabia has never been part of Yemen
	INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FRAME	we will win back our state when the international community pays attention and acknowledges our struggle as justified and legal

Table 7.6.: Summary of the Hirak’s prognostic frames

MOTIVATIONAL FRAMES
Why is it necessary and promising to join collective action?

MAIN FRAME	SUB-FRAME	CORE CONTENT
THREAT FRAME		counter the threat!
	Necessity for Action	without action the (culturally & to a lesser degree physically) existential threat will continue and intensify
COMPREHENSIVE MOBILIZATION FRAME		participate in the struggle!
	Mass mobilization	all strata of society need to be mobilized, among others to gain the attention of the international community
	Specific Groups	every Southerner is needed; diaspora can help by financial support and by approaching host governments to acknowledge Southern issue; Hadhramis are Southerners as well and need to unite with the movement
NON-COOPERATION FRAME		demonstrate your opposition through non-cooperation with the regime!
	End of Cooperation	stop any cooperation with the Northern regime, especially those still working for it
	Civil Disobedience	block the system by laying down your work on a regular basis (twice a week)
MOVEMENT UNITY FRAME		unite the movement (to be more effective)!
	Reconcile Past Divisions	overcome the divisions of the 1986 political infighting through 'Reconciliation and Tolerance'
	Overcome Leadership Factionalization	overcome factionalization between old leaders in order to avoid internal fighting and concentrate energies on the struggle
INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FRAME		gain the support of the international community (sometimes added: it is indispensable for movement success)!
	Civilized Member of International Community	the South is a civilized member of the international community and suffering from severe injustice; this can be proven by evidence about dispossession, documentation about human rights abuses,

		on a legal basis, and through our democratic and nonviolent character
	Advantages	Southern independence has advantages for the interests of international actors, e.g. containment of terrorist groups on its territory
	RESPONSE TO REPRESSION FRAME	we need to respond to the repression we are suffering from!
	Nonviolence	only peaceful struggle will lead to success (specifically with the need to get international support and acknowledgement); stay peaceful!
	Self-Defense	self-defense is legitimate
	Armed Struggle	peaceful means have been exhausted; it is time to fight for our liberation
	FEASIBILITY FRAME	it is feasible to act in the prescribed way and be successful!
	Historical Example	we have succeeded in the anticolonial struggle and can and will succeed again

Table 7.7.: Summary of the Hirak's motivational frames

7.2.4. Decentralized Framing

So far, the framing emanating from leadership circles (including events with prominent figures) has been focused on. Of significant importance for the Hirak, however, is moreover the decentralized framing by movement members themselves. As has been noted, the movement has set off initially without the participation of a strong and coherent leadership and the overwhelming number of events and communication still function without leadership involvement. Rather than leaders steering movement adherents, the initial impulse and core frame content has originated with those who early on got together and with those who followed suit. As Bin Fareed had recounted, the original issues centered around socioeconomic grievances and rights, and they were directed peacefully at the government and – when there was no reaction and out of reasons of spatial closeness of the representation – to the EU. Without going into details (for which there is a lack of sources), a basic structure of a collective action frame had been set by that time: The diagnostic framing held that the South had been looted by Northern regime forces and elites, and that Southerners were marginalized and discriminated against. In regard to prognosis, the initial demand was to gain an equal status within the unity state and a compensation for and/or restoration of losses (property and positions) since 1994; both were backed by ‘facts’ which had been compiled, i.e. the demands were made within a rational, rights-based mode. The way to attain these goals was peaceful protest to achieve acknowledgement of the articulated grievances and (pragmatic) solutions. Motivation seems to have been generated through example: The first small group (most of who had been active in opposition before) went to the streets to protest and through this action spread their frames. They had a strong empirical commensurability, particularly in the wake of acts of regime repression in the immediate context of protest events; consequently, they successfully catalyzed participation in the events as well as permanent mobilization.

When the old leadership began to join in mid-2009, they sought to align their own framing with what they found already present; the movement by then had been active for roughly two years and the frames had fortified to a certain degree. To be ‘heard’ and accepted, Al-Beidh and others had to align their frames with the frames of their audience. In a first step, their framing needed to be compatible with what they found, i.e. the core content of the respective frame dimensions had to have sufficient overlap. Only in a second step, after having established themselves as privileged members and then ‘leaders’ of the Southern Movement, could they begin to influence and shift the frame content. Their perspective, their interests, as well as external developments they and the movement needed to react to shaped the trajectory

of the framing, and then it still entered into the (re)adaptation process in interplay with the resonance it is able to create among the audience: No resonance leads to a modification of the framing in order to generate resonance; this feedback loop is repeated as long as it takes to reach a high level of resonance. Once resonance is established, the need is to uphold it by a wider distribution, intensification, or advancement.

These are the basic processes and mechanisms of elite framing in the Hirak. In parallel to these, however, decentralized framing never lost its role; it merely changed its character. With the entry of the old leaders, their framing – when it was able to assert itself – took over some kind of ‘guiding role’: It was not able to dominate, yet the movement groups and members geared their own decentralized framing to the leadership frames. In other words, the decentralized framing took up the main frames’ ideas, but sometimes deviated slightly from them. This interlocking between the two levels contained within it the great potential of catalyzed frame distribution through manifold actors, who all participated in the decentralized framing (i.e. square leaders, organizers of decentralized smaller events, youth leaders, etc.), and simultaneously of highly audience-specific adaptations of the core messages. Having said that, these advantages came at the risk of loss of control and unregulated modification, which might contradict the original framer’s intentions. Despite there being little control and even less predictable reaction in any event, these risks were still more than acceptable in return for the noted benefits.¹³⁶⁴

From the point of frame analysis, decentralized framing generally, and the described interlocking with what I call ‘elite framing’ particularly, poses methodological as well as practical challenges: First, the delineation between decentralized framing, (to a lesser extent) frame distribution, and frame resonance is ambiguous. Especially between the first and the last option, it can be merely a question of degree (to what extent is the frame different from the elite frame?¹³⁶⁵) and weighing (is the actor/the group spreading the frame influential enough to be considered framers themselves?¹³⁶⁶). Second, accessing decentralized framing is much more complex than accessing elite framing, for it is less well documented and straightforward, but rather loosely connected.

For these reasons, I do not present a separate section with solely the content of decentralized framing but confine myself to indicating the mechanisms and to selectively

¹³⁶⁴ It is highly questionable in how far there can ever be any control in framing.

¹³⁶⁵ This aims at the question of originality: To what extent is a frame merely being distributed or does the (re)action solely pose resonance and not an independent act of framing?

¹³⁶⁶ In order to be considered a genuinely own framing act, the framer needs to possess the agency and capacity not only develop (at least a new variant of) a frame, but also to distribute it. As the above criterion, the answer can merely be approached by estimation.

presenting one medium I believe to be pivotal in this regard: cartoons. They are drawn once by a single actor who usually invests a lot of thought into them, transport pointed, often emotionally laden messages (frames), are understood also by an illiterate audience, more easily memorized than the written or spoken word, and can be distributed with relatively low effort by print or digitally through social media. These qualities make them a prime medium for framing endeavors. In addition to the below exemplary presentation of selected cartoons,¹³⁶⁷ I will in the subsequent sections on frame distribution and resonance furthermore highlight aspects that might alternatively be classified as decentralized framing (pursuant to the noted challenge of delineation).

¹³⁶⁷ All cartoons have been collected from HIRAK-affiliated Facebook groups between February 23 and March 7, 2013. They have been widely circulated, i.e. they appeared in at least three different groups and have been liked and shared more than 100 times each.

Diagnostic Framing



Fig. 7.10.: The North is killing the South while pleading friendship



Fig. 7.11.: “April 27. The day when the war began and unity was killed” – The North is stabbing the South with a dagger



Fig. 7.12.: The South is being hanged by Islamists



Fig. 7.13.: Saleh and the army butchering the South in the name of unity

Prognostic Framing



Fig. 7.14.: UN is turning its back to the masses of Southern protesters and their demands



Fig.7.15.: Arab media looking solely to Syria while Southerners are being killed by Northerners



Fig.7.16.: Aden, February 21, 2013: Peaceful Southern protester has been killed by Islah representative and his thugs: “Mission accomplished and the celebration is set, Sheikh.” Repainting the ROY flag and the slogan “Unity or Death”¹³⁶⁸ with blood



Fig. 7.17.: March 18 (2013, NDC start): South Arabia being led to execution by GCC initiative and UN; writing on the wall: “Unity of Death”. Spectators are US Hunt Oil, French Total Oil, a Canadian (oil) company, and a Gulf company

Motivational Framing



Figure 7.18.: “My brother is a Southerner and my sister is a Southerner. Your contribution in publishing photos, videos, and news of the mass rally on April 27: like and share Southern news = publish/spread the Southern issue across the world



Fig. 7.19.: Graffiti in Aden: Southern flag, English call for mobilization, Arabic “Yes to the South, yes to freedom, no to occupation.”¹³⁶⁹

¹³⁶⁸ The frame of “Unity of Death” was vehemently spread by Saleh. In spring 2010, for instance, Heinze has documented a large billboard with his picture and the slogan in ROY national colors. Marie-Christine Heinze, “Für Einheit und Sezession wider die Erinnerung und das Vergessen. Eine rezente Geschichte des politischen Kampfes mit visuellen Mitteln im Jemen”, *Jemen-Report* 45 (2014): 19–26, here: 20.

¹³⁶⁹ Although this is no cartoon, it is included for its relevance and good illustrative capacity.

7.2.5. *Frame Distribution*

The Southern Movement very early on engaged in a wide range of frame distribution activities. As Bin Fareed vividly described, the initial event(s) were characterized by gathering, engaged and emotional discussion, and speeches. Those who spoke were figures with social standing and often a prior history of engagement in opposition, yet no established ‘leadership circle’; they would enter the stage in 2009. Settings for such gatherings were often either commemoration days of Southern history, on which Southern identity was affirmed, or within the realm of regional assemblies (possibly in connection with a qat chew), where regional identities were affirmed. These special contexts served as fertile ground for movement frames, since the ‘non-Northern/non-Yemeni identity’ element was already salient.

Demonstrations with banners and soon slogans, first very limited, then with ever growing numbers of participants partly reaching the hundreds of thousands, who travelled far distances,¹³⁷⁰ were complemented by petitions addressed to national and – mostly – international actors. Notable about many banners and slogans (also in form of graffiti) is that they frequently not only in Arabic, but in English too, or even only in English. This illustrates the conscious attempt to gain international attention and subsequently support: These slogans are less directed towards the local population and the regime than to the ‘international community’ in whom activists set such high hopes. If English slogans are employed depends on the content. It is those slogans that contain very clear demands or core positions of the movement, which are translated for instance:¹³⁷¹ “South peaceful mobility to restore the country & identity of Southern people (lead of Arab spring revolution)”, “Freedom for South”, “Dear UN, can u [sic] see us?”, “We reconciled”, “With no independence we will not accept”, “The decision is ours”, “Unity is dead”, “No more occupation”, “Stop Genocide against the people of the South”, “We demand the international Security Council and the United Nation[s] to practice the laws 931-924 [sic!]”, “People want to restore the state of the South”, “Independence is our aim”, and “The Peaceful Struggle is our choice”.

Slogans in Arabic tackle a wider range of topics. Anne-Linda Amira Augustin has conducted extensive research on the Hiraq’s slogans, graffiti, and chants. She distinguishes between six groups of slogans, depending on their content: (1) Slogans of Southern History, (2) Slogans of anti-North rhetoric, (3) Slogans of Independence, (4) Slogans of Social Questions (Demanding Dignity and Justice), (5) Slogans of the Arab Spring, and (6) the

¹³⁷⁰ For a video documenting the journey of activists from somewhere in Hadhramawt to the mass rally in Mukalla see: Digital Appendix I.

¹³⁷¹ For the following slogans see: Digital Appendix J.

Southern Flag.¹³⁷² What becomes apparent through the examples is the pervading presence of identity invocation (besides the demands, which are congruent with the English versions). The terms *'sha'b'* ('people'), *'hawyīah'* ('identity'), *'ard'* ('land, territory'), and *'tārīkh'* ('history') are frequently used or alluded to, as are 'South Arabian identity' and 'love for Aden' – all with emotional appeal. Moreover, martyrs are praised and movement members vow to continue the struggle and follow in their footsteps until liberation will be realized.¹³⁷³ Chants and songs are often abridged versions of old unity songs changed into nationalist South Arabian versions, or equally abridged versions of Arab Spring chants adapted to the context.¹³⁷⁴ They again stress common identity and furthermore position 'South Arabia' among the 'revolutionary nations of the Arab Spring'.

Graffiti are widely spread; besides slogans they frequently depict the Southern flag, faces of prominent figures (e.g. Ba'oum), and else. These graffiti and the dominant presence of the flag on private and public buildings, squares, homes etc. should be interpreted as territorial claims and as the creation of facts; specifically the replacement of the ROY flag with the Southern flag poses a performative act of transformation. The same applies for the changing of names of streets, squares, and schools from symbolic names of the unity state into symbolic names of Southern identity; in a similar vein, placards were installed welcoming visitors to the 'Capital of Aden'. This dominance and claim-making in the public sphere is moreover complemented by a variety of token objects such as umbrellas, clothing, hats, etc. with the flag¹³⁷⁵ and the demonstrative depiction and exhibition of PDRY memorabilia such as passports¹³⁷⁶ and uniforms.¹³⁷⁷ 'Body practices' such as painting oneself with the flag or communal performances¹³⁷⁸ additionally enrich the repertoire of action during these events.

The extent of these modes of distribution at least in Aden is impressive: As Augustin has documented for spring 2014, the movement had established a precise schedule of daily demonstrations, rotating through all quarters of the city. This was supposed to set the threshold for participation at a low level by eliminating the need for transportation. In

¹³⁷² Augustin, "Tawra Tawra Ya Ganub".

¹³⁷³ Ibid.

¹³⁷⁴ Anne-Linda Amira Augustin, "Erhebe deinen Kopf, du bist ein freier Südaraber, – Gesungene Slogans und Sprechgesänge der Bewegung des Südens", *Jemen-Report* 46 (2015): 49–54; Anne-Linda Amira Augustin, "Chanting for Southern Independence", *Middle East Report* 273 (Winter 2014): 11–13.

¹³⁷⁵ Especially children are often dressed in clothing made out of or showing the flag and garnished with tokens.

¹³⁷⁶ ROY passports are on the contrary occasionally publicly burned.

¹³⁷⁷ See digital appendix K. Augustin describes that Southern policemen in 2013 began to wear their old PDRY uniforms when controlling traffic. Anne-Linda Amira Augustin, "Bewegung des Südens, im Jemen. Aden probt die Unabhängigkeit im Stillen", *Zenith Online*, July 16, 2013, accessed July 18, 2013, <http://www.zenithonline.de/deutsch/politik/artikel/aden-probt-die-unabhaengigkeit-im-stillen-003726/>.

¹³⁷⁸ For example the creation of commemoration dates by positioning people, see digital appendix L.

addition, these demonstrations were filmed and broadcasted on Aden Live TV, thereby further multiplying their impact.¹³⁷⁹

Mode	Period							
	01/2006–07/2007	08/2007–04/2009	05/2009–02/2011	02/2011–04/2011	05/2011–03/2013	03/2013–01/2014	01/2014–11/2014	12/2014–03/2015
Assembly/Discussion	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Speech	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Newspaper Article/Opinion Piece ¹³⁸⁰	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Demonstration/Rally	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Commemoration	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Poster/Banner	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Petition	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Website	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Photo/Image	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Funeral ¹³⁸¹	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Newspaper ¹³⁸²	x	x					x	x
Text/Brochure/Book ¹³⁸³	?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Slogan	?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Film/Video	?	?	x	x	x	x	x	x

¹³⁷⁹ Augustin, “Erhebe deinen Kopf”. The channel also mixes sequences from the 1960s with those of today’s conditions and clashes, thus drawing another close connection. Susanne Dahlgren, “A Poor People’s Revolution. The Southern Movement Heads Toward Independence from Yemen”, *Middle East Report* 273 (2014).

¹³⁸⁰ Notable here are Al-Ayyam and – especially also for regular and frequent opinion pieces by a number of authors (among them Bin Fareed) – Aden al-Ghad and Shibam News online. See: <http://www.adenalghad.net> and <http://www.shibamnews.com>.

¹³⁸¹ Funerals of movement members killed during protest or through repression, celebrated as ‘martyrs for the cause’. I define a funeral as a medium in that it – as a very distinct act – carries a unique message.

¹³⁸² Newspaper here refers to the (symbolic) significance of an independent Southern newspaper as manifest in Al-Ayyam; it does not imply its content as such.

¹³⁸³ Albeit Southern literature takes up the topic of Southern grievances, (until mid-2013 at least) it has not tackled the movement as such. Personal communication with two Southern authors in favor of the Hirak, March–April 2013.

Cartoon	?	?	x	x	x	x	x	x
Interview			x	x	x	x	x	x
TV ¹³⁸⁴			x	x	x	x	x	x
Token ¹³⁸⁵			x	x	x	x	x	x
Flag			x	x	x	x	x	x
Memorabilia ¹³⁸⁶			x	x	x	x	x	x
Conference			x	x	x	x	x	
Social Media				x	x	x	x	x
Web forum				x	x	x	x	x
Graffiti				x	x	x	x	x
Civil Disobedience ¹³⁸⁷				x	x	x	x	x
Protest Camp				x			x	
Poetry	?	?	?	?	x	x	x	x
Radio	?	?	?	?	x	x	x	x
Music	?	?	?	?	x	x	x	x
Sites ¹³⁸⁸				?	x	x	x	x
Body Practice ¹³⁸⁹					x	x	x	x

Table 7.8.: Media of HIRAK frame distribution throughout the previously defined periods

¹³⁸⁴ The most relevant channel is Aden Live TV. Early broadcasting started on February 11, 2009, yet it was merely intermittent due to frequent change of satellite and scare resources. The station was finally set up with its studio in Beirut on February 11, 2012. "About Us", *Aden Live TV*, accessed February 24, 2014, <http://www.adenlivetv.tv/about.html>.

¹³⁸⁵ This refers particularly to objects with the PDRY flag on them, e.g. umbrellas, hats, badges etc.

¹³⁸⁶ Memorabilia of the former independent Southern state in form of stamps, banknotes, passports, other IDs, uniforms, photos of the era, and other state insignia.

¹³⁸⁷ While there have been isolated days of civil disobedience and strikes before, more frequent and later regular campaigns commenced only in the wake of the Arab Spring protests.

¹³⁸⁸ Sites can be distinguished into two categories: First, sites like checkpoints in which the opposition manifests itself in confrontation with the adversary (i.e. state power); second, sites of the HIRAK's own organization, e.g. smaller squares in which regular or even permanent gatherings occur, where teaching and mobilizing activities take place, and on which identity claims are made and demonstrated (for instance in form of decoration with flags etc.).

¹³⁸⁹ E.g. painting faces with the Southern flag.

Photos and videos of demonstrations are moreover extensively shared on websites and social media; they document the events and at the same time circulate the respective frames. The movement early on set up websites, web forums, and social media sites despite the low prevalence of internet access in the country;¹³⁹⁰ these sites are not only partly run by Southerners in the diaspora, but also specifically target diaspora as an audience and an intermediate distributor.¹³⁹¹ Sometimes, photos are sent by mobile phone or else and then uploaded abroad (with higher speed and a more reliable internet connection). Furthermore, there is an active community of bloggers who spread reports on movement events and repression, which would otherwise suffer from restrictions.¹³⁹² Telephone contacts and messenger services (Yahoo messenger, WhatsApp) have been emphasized by various activists as core means for communication¹³⁹³ and also for sharing photos, audio files, and short videos.¹³⁹⁴ There are numerous permanent groups, e.g. in WhatsApp, in which these files and discussions are shared between those on the ground and activists all over the world. As one activist put it: “No matter *how* big a march you make, if you don’t spread it, it doesn’t pump up. You know, and [if you don’t] broadcast [it], then there’s no point in doing it.”¹³⁹⁵

While hardly anyone seems to perceive an active radio channel (though there are), TV – especially Aden Live TV – plays an important, yet, contested role. The channel is associated with al-Beidh and broadcasts the views of his faction. A number of interviewees doubted its credibility (see 6.8.), yet, at the same time they and analysts certify its immense reach ‘into almost every household’. Particularly before the rise of Aden Live and partly thereafter, phone calls during shows on other channels such as BBC were made by activists, for instance to pose critical questions to representatives of the GoY or to inform about and comment on the situation in the South. The aim was once again to gain international attention.¹³⁹⁶

Material such as texts, flyers, brochures, and books self-evidently belong to the media used by the Southern Movement. The documents listing the allegedly looted property, reports of

¹³⁹⁰ A main argument made in this regard is that the internet plays such a pivotal role for “the diaspora as well as Southerners cannot depend on media information for there is ‘zero credibility’”. Personal communication with HIRAK activist in KSA, February 26, 2014.

¹³⁹¹ According to activists, to catalyze mobilization is an important function of the diaspora: “[T]he revolution of the south [is] fueled by a large overseas [sic!] to help people to attend the rally as large as millions.” Personal communication with HIRAK activist in KSA, February 26, 2014.

¹³⁹² HRW, “In the Name of Unity”, 61f. They list Sawt al-Janub, Shamsham News, Al-Khalif Aden Network, Al-Dhali Forums, Al-Ayyam Newspaper, Mukalla Press, and armiesofliberation.com (run by Jane Novak) as examples.

¹³⁹³ They were always accompanied by traditional media such as posters announcing events etc. as well.

¹³⁹⁴ Based on interviews conducted with activists living in the UK, April 26–27, 2013

¹³⁹⁵ Interview with activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013. Similarly: “[T]he ‘issue of the south’ is made of people from large groups through Facebook and Twitter and WhatsApp, forums etc. Then that information is quick in the net and became the new media is the master of the situation, especially for us southerners.” Personal communication with HIRAK activist in KSA, February 26, 2014.

¹³⁹⁶ Interview with activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

human rights violations¹³⁹⁷, the booklet of the Cairo Conference¹³⁹⁸, and the flyer distributed in the UK¹³⁹⁹ are merely examples for a wide range of similar texts. Interviews with the old leaders and with figures of regional influence are common, as is extensive use of political cartoons and satire. Poetry, in contrast, is used only restrictedly. Music, as has been mentioned before, is employed in demonstrations and rallies;¹⁴⁰⁰ besides abridged texts, genuine pieces are created for the struggle, and other music is played too.

As has become explicit in the chronology, conferences enjoy a high reputation as a democratic instrument for discussion, negotiation, and decision-making. They play a prominent role in the attempts to unify the leadership and – including wider strata of participants – to come up with a unified roadmap for a durable solution. Numerous ‘conferences’ have occurred on more than one level, i.e. from the elite to smaller units. The output, however, was mostly meager. Despite the intention to use them for inclusion, de facto they were not able to prevent ever greater factionalization. On the contrary, there is evidence that these numerous extensive gatherings even furthered differences of opinion with the consequence of the founding of an increasing number of sub-groups and organizations.

The civil disobedience campaign began with single half days and since around late 2013 escalated into whole days twice a week (Wednesday and Saturday). They were intended to send a strong and visible signal and to pressure the government into meeting Southerners’ demands. From October 14, 2014 onwards, a protest camp on Al-Arood Square¹⁴⁰¹ posed a kind of climax of this instrument of refusal, visibly inspired by the repertoire of the Arab Spring. Protesters camped on the square for weeks and established a personal administration with spokespersons, councils etc. Remotely comparable, yet much smaller sites had been in place for a while: Small squares all over the city served as central spaces for movement

¹³⁹⁷ See the reports of the Southern Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), <http://www.sohr-aden.org>, and the Yemeni Observatory for Human Rights (YOHR), <http://www.yohr.org>.

¹³⁹⁸ See digital appendix G.

¹³⁹⁹ See digital appendix M.

¹⁴⁰⁰ One popular song, for example, is a well-established song (in the context of Palestinian struggle) with the text “Where are the Arab People?” A Southern singer performs the song in a much viewed video posted on YouTube on February 24, 2013, i.e. three days after the Karama Day (the subtitle lays the blame for the event on the occupation forces and Islah). The video shows sequences of the protest march, the violent acts committed by the armed forces, and the victims. The song asks: “Where are the Arab people? Where are our Muslim neighbors? Where is the Arab community? (...) We are asking for freedom, we are asking for liberation (...) it is the Southern revolution (...) Where is the Arab League? Where are the UN? (...) They are killing the Southern people. (...) Where are the US, France, Berlin, Moscow, London, Rome, China, Doha, Muscat, Bahrein, Morocco, the Land of the Two Holy Mosques [KSA], Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Kuwait?” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4s-Te_Ubuo&feature=youtu.be (accessed June 24, 2015). Other parallels drawn with the Palestinian struggle include e.g. posters with photographs of Yassir Arafat and al-Beidh in juxtaposition.

¹⁴⁰¹ The square in Aden has been a significant place for protests since 2007.

members to meet, exchange, discuss, mobilize, prepare activities, teach, socialize, for cultural activities etc.¹⁴⁰²

As has become evident, the Hirak's frame distribution was diverse and provided ample space for decentralized framing, for instance within the setting of squares where minor 'leaders' or eloquent activists had the opportunity to develop their own variants of movement frames.

The following section will now elucidate the crucial aspect of frame resonance: Which frames resonated among the audience? Which failed? And why? The presentation is structured along topics, not chronologically, due to the imbalance of sources; most stem from a more recent period and thus make it difficult to adequately represent the earlier phases. It will, however, seek to portray the widest variation in opinions possible, and moreover give an appraisal of the extent of their pervasiveness.

7.2.6. Frame Resonance

Resonance can be subdivided into the 'answers' to nine main questions; they are partly corresponding to the framing dimensions, yet go beyond them in tackling certain additional aspects:¹⁴⁰³ (1) Who are we? (2) What is the state of unity? (3) What are we suffering from? What is threatening us? (4) Who is to blame? (5) What is the solution? (6) How are we going to get there? (7) Who can and shall lead us? (8) Which role shall/must the international community have? (9) What are our prospects? While there is variation regarding the solution to be aspired, the leadership (in fact connected issues), and – in parts – the prospects, the perception of all other issues is surprisingly similar and coherent. Quotations have hence been selected on the basis of their illustrative quality and/or conciseness and represent the dominant shared perspective as emanating from my sources.

¹⁴⁰² Susanne Dahlgren, "Rebels without Shoes: A Visit to South Yemen's Revolution Squares", April 22, 2014, accessed April 28, 2014, <http://www.muftah.org/rebels-without-shoes-visit-south-yemens-revolution-squares/#.U14gkndpeTU>. She also makes the point that in these squares there is relaxed gender intermingling, which makes them attractive and is reminiscent of the open culture in the PDRY. Urban poor women take over major roles in demanding socioeconomic improvement, and large numbers of those gathering in the squares and attending lectures are equally poor. Here, the youth learn about life in the PDRY, "when there were no power and water cuts and every graduate got a job". Dahlgren, "A Poor People's Revolution".

¹⁴⁰³ Some issues are overlapping more than one topic; they are presented were thought fittest.

(1) Who are we? – Identity & ‘Civil State’

“It’s not about looting. It’s a war about identity, culture, knowledge. We have been suppressed. Unity (with the north) is internal colonisation worse than the British.”¹⁴⁰⁴ This statement by a former Southern minister is echoed and amended by a young HIRAK activist: “The Southern issue is not only an issue of separation of one state into two, but it is an issue of regaining identity, restoring dignity, and demising occupation.”¹⁴⁰⁵ The need to preserve a distinct Southern identity is strongly emphasized over and over again when talking to movement members and even non-followers of all shades. Identity therein is simultaneously an emotional, a social, a cultural, an ethical, and a political category:

As for the Houthis, it’s quite different than the south[ern] issue. The Houthis’ issue is an ethnic religious strife. (...) While the south[ern] issue is an identity, home issue. Restoring our state means there was a government with a complete independence different from the north in Sana’a. The people in the south are entirely different from people in the north; there are variations in customs, costume, even in dialect. (...) Before the unity, we had a flag, we had a coin different from the north and we had a perfect membership in the UN. We have a known ancient history and heritage. Nobody could deny it.¹⁴⁰⁶

The emotional category is most clearly captured by the (itself highly ambiguous) concept of ‘home’. It speaks of attachment, memories, and a sense of belonging, and it arouses intense immediate and long-term feelings. The transformation into action this can lead to should not be underestimated, specifically since the emotion in this context is a ‘social emotion’, i.e. it is not individually felt but socially constructed and commonly invoked. “South Arabia is not the home in which we live, but the home which exists in us.”¹⁴⁰⁷ This invocation is triggered among others through the social revivalism of memories, for instance by sharing photos or memorabilia. One activist describes the effect in regard specifically to Aden: “For us, Aden is a holy city. Like Mecca for Muslims. (...) When you show people old photos of Aden they start to cry. This is no longer our Aden.”¹⁴⁰⁸

The social category moreover underlines the shared characteristics of all Southerners; these traits are constantly accentuated in a positive manner, for example strength and courage: “The patience that the Yemeni people showed the ability of sacrifice and facing the guns with uncovered chests are the characteristics of a very strong people who will not accept any

¹⁴⁰⁴ Iona Craig, “Trouble with the South”, October 18, 2013, accessed October 31, 2013, <http://www.beaconreader.com/iona-craig/trouble-with-the-south?ref=profile>.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Personal communication with HIRAK activist living in the KSA, January 31, 2014.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, June 6, 2013; also: Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Augustin, “Chanting”.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Interview with HIRAK youth activist living in Germany, February 26, 2014. The specificity of Hadhramis, who insist on their own identity, is downplayed in the general, Aden-centered HIRAK.

threats of fears. ”¹⁴⁰⁹ What is shared is also culture and virtues, i.e. 'good' ethics. These were and are threatened and already partly destroyed:

Occupation did not aim only at the money and resources, but it aimed more at destroying the Southern character. To destroy people’s conception of dignity, democracy, fair[ness], and – what is more critical – morality.¹⁴¹⁰

In 1990, what the south presented to the unity was the mentality. We've lost the mentality of the people, the culture of law abiding citizens, people respecting the state, respecting the law, equality, justice, all these fundamental sort of beliefs have been completely eroded from the south. And the south has been corrupted with corruption, injustice, discrimination... So we have a problem and I think the most difficult challenge is to reestablish the old southern mentality (...).¹⁴¹¹

Through the destruction of these inner values and the political system that rested on these values and ethics, their self-conception as ‘civilized’ was severely affected. “We were developed before, and they were tribes. But now it is like we are the other way around. We are the tribes and they are the developed people.”¹⁴¹² In this and the above quotes, Southern identity is affirmed in contrasting it with the ‘Northern other’; this other is the source of the imminent threat of further and irrevocable loss of identity. Since this threat is created intentionally, Northerners – at least certain ones, as the following quote holds – can and must be blamed (hence answering aspects of questions 3 and 4). “The conflict in Yemen is not between the South and the North but with a group of corrupt people in authority who plunder the North and when it turned empty, they started to think of the South to do the same!”¹⁴¹³ In order to counter the threats, Southern identity must be reconstructed, revived, and affirmed. To this purpose “[n]ationalism now is the strongest weapon as in the current situation circumstances are not likely to improve to a better state at all because of the psychological factor.”¹⁴¹⁴ The political concept of the ‘nation’ is hence complementary to the social concept of ‘community’ broached above. The two are closely linked and an interdependence is posed as is the case with ‘culture’ and ‘civil state’, i.e. the cultural, essentialist quality of Southerners and its political manifestation: “The culture of the people in the South will ensure that it will be a civil state, not as Yemen today.”¹⁴¹⁵ According to Southern voices, this “new South” is characterized by the rule of law, honest administration, industrial development,

¹⁴⁰⁹ Group discussion during qāt chew of Yafa’e community in the UK, April 28, 2013.

¹⁴¹⁰ Interview with former diplomat and prominent Hirak member living in the UK, April 29, 2013. [Awad Karama]

¹⁴¹¹ Group discussion during qāt chew of Yafa’e community in the UK, April 28, 2013.

¹⁴¹² Salisbury, “Analysis”.

¹⁴¹³ Group discussion during qāt chew of Yafa’e community in the UK, April 28, 2013.

¹⁴¹⁴ Interview with leading TAJ member and Hirak activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013. [Abdo Naqeeb]

¹⁴¹⁵ Personal communication with Hirak activist, June 2013. [Faisal Abdalugbar]

dignity, rights, safety, and economic and political stability. It is the memories of the alleged qualities of life in the PDRY which shape this vision:

I know the good the good aspects of that era and they were unbelievable. Things you would hope for: the law and order, no corruption, access to health care, these are things that we took for granted those days. Today people will die on the doorstep of a hospital and nobody would care about it.¹⁴¹⁶

Notwithstanding the continuous emphasis of the creation of a capitalist country (in order to prevent fears by other states who might view socialism critically), other elaborations still contain strong elements of state-subsidized social services reminiscent of the PDRY era:

We look forward as Southerner after independence to build a democratic federal civil state based on political pluralism and partisan women have an active role as an essential partner to her brother. (...) Separation of three powers legislative, executive and judicial. Based on the rule of parliamentary power, and the peaceful transfer depend on the rule of the parliamentary majority. Work to establish an economic system based on market economy and individual initiative. Southern citizens' right to [receive] free education and health and social care, residential and freedom of expression.¹⁴¹⁷

The vision of the desired Southern state comprises numerous unrealistic features when the economic situation is taken into account. Social services to the extent noted, however, are (despite or even because of their utopian character) highly attractive to the poor strata of society, who are strongly motivated to participate in the HIRAK to improve their economic prospects. While the more prosperous, more intellectual activists likewise seek socioeconomic improvement, they focus more strongly on liberal political values and good governance. Again, they do this in contrast to the North, ascribing them primordial tribalism:

The North before the unity in 1990 was not a real country of organizations. It was only named a country but it has no content. It was a mixture of different military brigades and tribes...¹⁴¹⁸

In the North, there are some poor people of course, but they are used to their habit (...) it's a free market. It's feudal society almost, it's still tribalistic. They did not rely on the government and the government belonged to the strongest sheikh and that's how it is. If you go to Sana'a you will struggle to find proper institutions working, it's very difficult. You find a sheikh of a tribe putting someone in prison outside the law. You'll find Ali Abdullah Saleh or Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar or Hamid al-Ahmar above the constitution because he is who he is: sheikh. He's a leader of the tribe, they've got their own prison, they've got their armies, they've got their own gangs, they've got their own businesses, they don't pay taxes...a lot of awful things. And if there is anything good, they'll take it over. Nobody can oppose them or can stop them. They will just take it by force or by other means.¹⁴¹⁹

¹⁴¹⁶ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹⁴¹⁷ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, May 31, 2013.

¹⁴¹⁸ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹⁴¹⁹ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

In a nutshell, the we-they divide is over and again described in the essentialist opposites ‘civil’–‘tribal’, ‘civilized’–‘backwards’, ‘peaceful’–‘violent’.¹⁴²⁰ The perception among HIRAK activists is hence in line with the frames.

(2) *What is the state of unity?*

As with the vision of the “new South”, statements concerning the state of unity again differ in regard to emphasis between those more focused on basic material needs¹⁴²¹ and those that highlight political conditions:

Unification...it was a dream in the 1990s, that's why Ali Salim Al Beidh signed it. It was a dream all of a sudden turned into a nightmare (...) Otherwise, who would oppose unification if there is a proper state, proper rule of law, institutions, equality, respect of human rights and a government that would be elected by the people, a government that would come to address the needs of people, and try to resolve their issues, day-to-day issues I mean, like schooling, employment, health, electricity, roads. This is what people want, they're not fighting oppositions, they're fighting for survival. And we are supporting them to *establish* a state that will take care of everybody and the rule of law and *true* democracy, not the false they've got.¹⁴²²

The prominent activist Huda al-Attas considers it less an issue of unity generally as a problem with the regime (whom she once more attributes essentialist qualities inhibiting the creation of a ‘civil state’):

The problem is that unification was a mistake. Unification did not emerge on an honest basis. From the first day on, the south was ruled by the north. Southerners understood from the beginning that unification was a mistake. There were many bad signs, such as the assassination of Socialist cadres, regressive amendments to laws, and enforcement of the northern mentality and culture. The war in 1994 cemented all these developments. (...) [However, t]he problem is not unity with the north. The problem is the power center in Sanaa, which will not be able to build a civil state in Yemen, not even in a hundred years.¹⁴²³

There is wide agreement on a definitive and irrevocable termination of unity; reasons are generally credited to Northern actions and the resulting destruction of trust between North and South. While some consider the ultimate break to have occurred already with the war in 1994, others rather perceive it as a (comprehensive) deterioration over time:

Everything between the South and North is over. There are things that can never be fixed. After 25 years of power abuse that erased people's identity, left victims, created new

¹⁴²⁰ Laconically formulated by one activist: “Tribes are greedy, corrupt people who never change but their techniques do.” Personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 14, 2013.

¹⁴²¹ This would particularly be the poor. Cf. Dahlgren, ‘Poor People's Revolution’.

¹⁴²² Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁴²³ Anne-Linda Amira Augustin, “An Interview with Huda al-Attas”.

social classes, refugees, poor, hat, discrimination etc., things can't be the same again even within the federal state (...) ¹⁴²⁴

“Because the other side did not keep the covenant and agreement document in Amman in January 1994, and chose the military option to solve the problem, it is impossible to trust the same people in different time.” ¹⁴²⁵ Or, similarly, “their motto is ‘Unity or Death’ (...) in the south they say the opposite: The unity ended in the year 94 AD!” ¹⁴²⁶

Some voices particularly of young Southerners, who have grown up in unified Yemen and who have been told many stories about an allegedly much better life in the PDRY according to their own statements, hold more differentiated views, for instance: “Unity is not a sin alone, nor the separation itself a virtue.” ¹⁴²⁷ In a similar vein a young Southern woman positions herself in a 'neither-nor' mode, yet does not account herself to some third collective: “I don't support Hirak, I am not a Hiraki. But I no longer support unity either.” ¹⁴²⁸ These statements are an example either for merely partial frame resonance ¹⁴²⁹ or for the fact that the diagnosis is shared by many independently of the movement's framing.

Solutions are searched for example in the study of other cases of secession. ¹⁴³⁰

I have read about many similar cases like the case of the Czech, Slovakia, Sudan and South Africa and many others. I, as many of the political elites, see that the trial of unity has failed and we have to end it up as soon as possible in order to keep the coexistence and cooperation between the two people. In addition, it is very important to realize that every delayed day in taking this step will cost the both sides more than anyone can imagine. ¹⁴³¹

In the subtext of this call for a constructive solution is a perceivable fear of violent escalation; i.e. despite the very definite position of failed unity – the core answer to the section's guiding question – the wish for a peaceful solution remains strong.

(3) What are we suffering from? What is threatening us?

The diagnostic dimension circles around the topics of injustice, occupation, threat, and repression; often they are overlapping. The following interview excerpt summarizes the typical responses to the question about grievances:

¹⁴²⁴ Personal communication with Hirak activist, February 28, 2014.

¹⁴²⁵ Personal communication with Hirak activist, September 6, 2013.

¹⁴²⁶ Personal communication with Hirak activist in KSA, February 26, 2014.

¹⁴²⁷ Personal communication with Hirak activist, March 2, 2014.

¹⁴²⁸ Salisbury, “Yemen's Southern Intifada”.

¹⁴²⁹ She shares the diagnosis of failed unity.

¹⁴³⁰ As a German, I was specifically asked by a number of interviewees about the experiences with German unification. It was considered as an example of 'fair' treatment between states and of a successful case.

¹⁴³¹ Personal communication with Hirak activist, September 7, 2013.

[I]t's very well known now internationally that after 1994 Southerners have almost lost their citizenship to their own homeland. (...) Since July 1994 we have always viewed the South as under occupation by the Northern regime that aligns itself with the Jihadist. (...) We have witnessed many people suffering from poverty, from all sorts of illnesses as well psychological illnesses, mental illnesses, all the physical treatable illnesses because Southerners used to rely on the government. It was a socialist government and the state used to provide these social services like health in particular, education, free education for all, employment (...) They used to create employment for people, the government used to take care of it etc. And all of a sudden all of that has been lost (...) They have lost everything, so they complained and complained and tried to seek support from the international community, from neighbouring countries, but nobody listened to them. And every time they tried to protest they would be faced with harsh treatment by the regime. People were killed and imprisoned and that's the reason why they staged to call for independence, for their own country.¹⁴³²

Occupation – poverty – suffering – loss – repression. They are at the root of Southern grievances and are elaborated on in variations by HIRAK members and other Southerners. Besides the attribution to the regime and particularly “Jihadist[s]”, what is notable is the underlying frustration with the international community who did not respond. Merely thereafter and, moreover, in response to repression has the movement initiated their calls for independence – because, according to the prior account, when they still had their state the situation was much more favorable. What they want is the return of what they had, with the exception of internationally ostracized socialism. This is the message behind the next quote:

We want there to be the basis for a future Southern state. We want equality, we want justice, we want law and order. We don't want corruption, we want access to health care, we want people to be equal. (...) But people are worried (...) we don't want the Socialist Party to come back because we want freedom, we want democracy, we don't want one party rule (...) It's a struggle between those two ideas but whatever it is, I think people have gotten to a stage where they just want the Southern state and they will sort it out. Status quo is no longer acceptable.¹⁴³³

The last sentence is at the core of the definition of a diagnostic frame: The respective collective is suffering from an intolerable situation that needs to be changed. The goal then, i.e. the prognostic dimension, echoes the rights framing. It mentions freedom, democracy, equality, law and order, and justice, all components of the movement's framing. “[South] Yemeni people *deserve* to have their full rights”¹⁴³⁴ as another respondent posed. Dignity is closely tied to rights: “The youth wants to regain their dignity and their country.”¹⁴³⁵

¹⁴³² Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁴³³ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹⁴³⁴ Group discussion during qāt chew of Yafa'e community in the UK, April 28, 2013.

¹⁴³⁵ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, June 1, 2013. Along similar ethical lines a participant of a qāt chew affirmed the high moral standards in terms of purity: “The people on the street is the purest HIRAK, the cleanest aspect of the revolution is the people experiencing their pains, the suffering of being occupied.” Group discussion during qāt chew of Yafa'e community in the UK, April 28, 2013.

On the other side of the moral divide, anger and rage against an essentialized category of Northerners lays open: “One view that is shared by all factions is that Yemenis destroyed South Arabia. The backward, illiterate, Zaydi savages plundered our country.”¹⁴³⁶ Slogans are even more offensive: “Death for Hamid al-Ahmar”, “Death for the dog Hamid and Ali Muhsin”, and “Get out Dahbasi” can be read in Aden¹⁴³⁷, the “deliberately neglected, badly neglected”¹⁴³⁸ ‘capital of the South’. Old photographs tell the story of how Southerners won their independence from a world power, how in the past things were better, and how the situation keeps deteriorating. They are defining the abyss between ‘what we had and could’ and ‘what they did to us’, i.e. injustice, as diachronical, essentialist, reified. It serves as the basic diagnosis whose further elaboration and differentiation forms the ground in which all prognostic frames are rooted.¹⁴³⁹

‘Occupation’ is such a differentiation of injustice. When in early May 2009 an armed group (not associated with the HIRAK) clashed with the army in HABILAYN, one of their members justified their actions as follows:

We are fighting the thieves, the occupiers. Today, we ask, what unity – the unity of tanks above our homes? They have started the shooting. They have pillaged our land, consumed our wealth. We have no more patience for these oppressors, death is preferable.¹⁴⁴⁰

When I questioned an activist living in the KSA about the emergence of the ‘Southern Resistance’, a comment he made discernibly showed how this perception unites the violent and non-violent opposition. He explained that in his view the group was announced on Aden Live TV due to the persistence of the occupier, their mistreatment of people, and the “massacre” of December 27, 2013. Resistance was equivalent to the right of self-defense “as guaranteed by the documents and international laws”. Nevertheless, he simultaneously stressed that “the struggle of the ‘Southern Movement’ will remain peaceful until the liberation of the south, but the occupier is forcing people to confrontation because it deals with arrogance and hatred.”¹⁴⁴¹ Opposition against “the occupier” is thus the common denominator.

¹⁴³⁶ Comment made on July 3, 2013 on the article ‘Challenges Faced by the Southern Movement’, *La Voix du Yémen. The Voice of Yemen*, June 30, 2013, accessed June 26, 2015, <http://www.lavoixduyemen.com/en/2013/06/30/challenges-faced-by-the-southern-movement/4048/>.

¹⁴³⁷ Augustin, “Chanting”.

¹⁴³⁸ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁴³⁹ Interview with former diplomat and prominent HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 29, 2013.

¹⁴⁴⁰ Cited in: HRW, “In the Name of Unity”, 19.

¹⁴⁴¹ Personal communication with HIRAK activist in KSA, February 26, 2014.

Yet, who *exactly* belongs to ‘the occupier’ is contested: While leaders speak out against a discrimination of ordinary Northerners living in the South, harsh words and occasionally also assaults are common on Southern streets.¹⁴⁴² In the words of a prominent activist and former MP:

I always repeat, our conflict is not with the Northern people, it is not North vs. South. The struggle is between oppressors and oppressed, executioner and victim. It is a struggle for reclaiming robbed rights and resources. (...) [T]he critical challenge is to convince people that the struggle and conflict is not between the people, but against the corrupt authority that harms them both.¹⁴⁴³

Despite the fact that the authorities have not shown any significant reaction on the comprehensive and long-term civil disobedience campaigns¹⁴⁴⁴, protesters hold that they “will remain steadfast regardless of how much we have to suffer”.¹⁴⁴⁵ Accordingly, an old female activist cautioned one of the ‘occupying’ Northern officials: “Do not think we cannot throw you out of our country. We did that to the British, who had a much bigger army than you do.”¹⁴⁴⁶

The perceived threats are twofold: One is directed against Southern identity, the other allegedly aims at the physical extinction of Southerners. The former is considered to be realized in a great number of measures:

After unification, everything was changed, even the historical names were changed to Northern ones; the names of the schools, streets, and even the name of the TV channel, it was Aden Channel, they changed it into The Yemeni Channel. They aimed at making the Southern people forget their identity and forget that they had a real country one day. They even claimed that the people from the South were Somalis to impose the impression that they came from outside of Yemen. They insisted on oppressing people in the cities, especially Aden, to force them to leave the country. They did not offer them jobs and they became not able to live in Aden and had to leave. They planned to offer them jobs in, for example, Sana’a, and tried to cut any connections between the different Southern cities like Aden and Hadhramaut, and Aden and other cities. I mean that they tried – by all means – to destroy the South in order not to see it a standing country once more.¹⁴⁴⁷

The physical threat is described in regard to the violence and killing suffered by Northern military forces¹⁴⁴⁸, in terms such as ‘crimes against humanity’ and ‘genocide’, and in form of fierce images. Dahlgren refers to a video posted by Southern activists on YouTube in 2008 in which Saleh is depicted between mutilated bodies. The accompanying text states that: “In this

¹⁴⁴² Dahlgren, “Poor People’s Revolution”.

¹⁴⁴³ Interview with former MP and prominent HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 29, 2013.

¹⁴⁴⁴ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁴⁴⁵ “Southern Movement Youth Coalition Spokesperson”.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Dahlgren, “Snake with A Thousand Heads”.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Personal communication with HIRAK activist living in the KSA, March 4, 2014.

image he is swearing, swearing to clean the land from the owners...us!!!”¹⁴⁴⁹ Drone attacks and a large relocation campaign are mentioned as among his means. Allegedly, Saleh and his cronies Ali Muhsin and al-Zindani construct a terrorist threat and hold that Southerners are terrorists; resultingly, US drone attacks are targeting them, killing many civilians.¹⁴⁵⁰ As regards the demographic argument, it holds that five million Northerners shall be moved to the South in order to effect in demographic change: Southerners would be the minority on their own territory, which “is how they can extinguish the concept of the South from Yemen in general”.¹⁴⁵¹

Lastly, repression is considered to be a favored regime strategy for dealing with opposition. It serves as a catalyzer of conflict, as an intended provocation,¹⁴⁵² and as an attempt to defame the Hirak through deception. Protesters hold that had the regime taken serious steps towards equality after the initial demonstrations, it would have been sufficient. “But they left it and then dealt with it by cracking down and started to kill people, started to imprison people and that was (...) no return.”¹⁴⁵³ Provocations are seen in the repression of Southern media or independent reporting about the Hirak, respectively; the suppression against Al-Ayyam is probably the most prominent example.¹⁴⁵⁴ Moreover, undisguised attacks against peaceful protesters such as the Southern ‘Karama Day massacre’ in February 2013 are counted into the category of intended provocation. At that time, calls for armed struggle were spread by militants in Seyoun and Mukalla who vowed “to revenge their fallen brothers and South Yemen’s honor”. A local Hiraki official held:

The Southern Movement does not want to draw first blood at this point. That being said, many feel Thursdays attack was the last straw. I don’t see how we can walk from this. As many people pointed out last Thursday, South Yemen revolution already started.¹⁴⁵⁵

Interviewees pose that triggering a violent reaction was the ultimate goal of the regime to legitimize more severe repression against the movement. Targeted killings of prominent activists, such as Khaled Junaydi,¹⁴⁵⁶ too, add to this category. Defamation is achieved by

¹⁴⁴⁹ Susanne Dahlgren, “The Southern Movement in Yemen”, *ISIM Review* 22 (Autumn 2008), 50f., here: 50.

¹⁴⁵⁰ Interview with Hirak activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁴⁵¹ Interview with former MP and prominent Hirak activist living in the UK, April 29, 2013.

¹⁴⁵² Personal communication with Hirak activist, February 28, 2014. Personal communication with Hirak activist in KSA, February 26, 2014.

¹⁴⁵³ Interview with Hirak activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹⁴⁵⁴ Personal communication with Hirak activist in KSA, February 26, 2014.

¹⁴⁵⁵ “Violence grips south provinces – point of no return say separatists”, *Yemen Post*, February 25, 2013, accessed February 26, 2013, <http://www.yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=6606>.

¹⁴⁵⁶ He died on December 15, 2014. After the killing, an activist posted on Facebook: “It is better once to die a martyr than to have a long life as the living dead!” Cited in: Susanne Dahlgren, “Killing the Ambulance Man”, *MERIP*, December 17, 2014, accessed January 7, 2015, <http://www.merip.org/killing-ambulance-man>.

regime-staged violence, which should be attributed to the HIRAK. Simultaneous to one of my interviews, the following occurred and was reported in (at least Southern) media:

Today, 27 April 2013, armed groups have gathered and joined the demonstrations in Krater, Aden. They are armed, they kept cutting the streets and raise al-Beidh's pictures and the Southern flags. They claim to be of the HIRAK members but, in fact, they belong to the North and are funded directly from the Northern Yemeni police. The direct responsible person for them is a member of the National Security in addition to a Northern intelligence agency. They give them money, weapons and we are aware of this, (...) They prevent people from joining the HIRAK, so how can they be part of us. It is a matter that cannot be realized. It is known that the retarded regimes in the Third World uses retarded ways and methods that debunk their intentions. They follow some methods like hiring people to spoil the demonstrations and prevent people from joining in the events.¹⁴⁵⁷

According to activists' perception, these spoilers have been sent with the immediate endorsement of or even by order of Hadi, whose personal reputation is low among the movement. His military background and past actions are held against the Southerner: "Abdul Rab al-Mansour [Hadi] himself is a violent person. He's a military person, he participated in the 1986 war, he participated in the 1994 war, he continued with Ali Abdullah Saleh until February, until he was put in his place."¹⁴⁵⁸

Looking at these grievances – injustice, occupation, threats, repression – the resulting question must be: Who is responsible?

(4) *Who is to blame?*

This question can be answered on more than one level: First, who is responsible for the overall situation? Second, who is responsible for its permanence, i.e. who is profiting? And third, which share does the HIRAK have in that, or, in other words, what impedes improvement, i.e. the movement's success?

The first question was answered to the point by one interviewee: "It's all due to a dictator who neglected them [i.e. Southerners] and abused them, humiliated them, oppressed them all the years, and stifled the whole process of development and democracy."¹⁴⁵⁹ A removal of the dictator Saleh alone, however, was by a majority of respondents found insufficient to solve the problem, for the whole regime was considered to inhibit any positive change. This structural component accordingly provides the response to the second question:

See how many people have suffered! Made redundant. There is no income for the government. Who's *gaining* from that? It's just the few families, the rulers. Because they

¹⁴⁵⁷ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹⁴⁵⁸ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

normally sign these contracts with big companies. The oil, if you look at the oil: Who are the agencies with these big oil international oil companies corporations? It's just Ali Abdullah Saleh's family and Ali Muhsin Al-Ahmar and Hamid Al-Ahmar. It's just *families* who are ruling. The people have nothing (...).¹⁴⁶⁰

The patronage system and oligarchy lead to a strong interest of those in control to maintain the system's core mechanisms, since they are to their profit. Change, especially a change that could risk their control over resources such as the oil resources located in the South, must be prevented at all cost. Resultingly, these mechanisms were kept up even after the fall of Saleh. As one activist put it, the “failure of the political forces and parties in the management of public affairs after the revolution of 2011 contributed to the growing discontent, and provided a favorable climate for the expansion of the Southern Movement and Houthi group”.¹⁴⁶¹ To what extent this “failure” was in fact a ‘failure’ or rather the intentional stabilization of favorable conditions for these actors can merely be speculated about; the latter assumption is the dominant one among the movement.

Beyond mere criticism of external factors, however, HIRAK members are also sensitive to internal problems that pose obstacles to positive change. The main point of weakness frequently mentioned was factionalism. Ordinary activists are frustrated by the “lack of any real consensus” and the striving for personal interests they perceived to reign among a “multiplicity of tribal and political factions”. Therefore, “[t]he people of the South and the fans in all areas of the South no longer trust most of these factions who lack credibility in the fight for the interest of the southern state whether it is peaceful or even armed struggle.”¹⁴⁶² How this plays into the recognition of leaders and the impact of their respective framing will be discussed under question (7).

Finally, external actors are considered to negatively impact on the South: “The most important problem is direct and indirect outside intervention from countries such as the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia (...) especially the religious groups and terrorists.”¹⁴⁶³

While this picture attributes responsibility to a multitude of actors, it is important to emphasize that the HIRAK generally considers the main blame to be with the Northern regime; internal challenges and external involvement are taken into account and as far as possible the movement tries to positively influence these factors (e.g. through mediation between factions or petitions to various governments in the Gulf states), however, they do not form the central concern.

¹⁴⁶⁰ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁴⁶¹ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, February 28, 2014.

¹⁴⁶² Personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 4, 2014.

¹⁴⁶³ Ibid.

(5) What is the solution?

The Hiraq's framing proposes three different solutions: federalism, confederation, and independence. Since there is no reliable data on the support quotas for each goal,¹⁴⁶⁴ the resonance of each prognostic frame can (again) only be tackled by approximation. The result of this, however, shows an overwhelming majority for independence, while both federalism and confederation find merely few supporters but many critical voices.

The view on federalism can be divided into three stands: (1) Federalism in interest of some, but not in the interest of the people;¹⁴⁶⁵ (2) Federalism is theoretically good, but practically not applied correctly;¹⁴⁶⁶ (3) Federalism is imposed¹⁴⁶⁷ and will not have any positive effects. One movement follower – yet the only one of my respondents – argued in favor of federalism on the grounds of a just and “equitable distribution of resources” within an “acceptable system” of a united Yemen.¹⁴⁶⁸ Exactly the aspect of a 'just distribution' within a federal system is generally doubted. Representative in this regard was the statement: “An initial impression I have got from the people around me, friends, and people in the transportation etc., [is that] there is a satisfaction to a certain extent with the decision of a six-region federal state”. Then he added the ‘but’: There were concerns about details, such as the scope of authority, the distribution of natural resources etc. Hopes on the other hand aimed at the elimination of excessive centralization, investment in the South, a restoration of cultural freedom and lost identity, and an improvement in the standard of living.¹⁴⁶⁹ Overall, so his conclusion, people were doubtful about the process. These doubts can be overwhelming. Numerous respondents mentioned tribalism as the major obstacle to federalism; according to the, Northern tribalism could never be overcome and in its essence was not conducive to a federal cohabitation with ‘civilized Southerners’.¹⁴⁷⁰ This assumption is simultaneously assigned to the regime:

The people now realize that [the] federal system means the continuity of Saleh’s brutality and his tribal domination in Yemen. Even if another person holds the position of the president, he will not be better than Saleh. They all have the same mentality and goals, so they will follow the same route one after another.¹⁴⁷¹

¹⁴⁶⁴ Personal communication with Hiraq activist, February 28, 2014.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶⁶ Personal communication with Hiraq activist in Dhaleh, March 2, 2014.

¹⁴⁶⁷ Personal communication with Hiraq activist, March 2, 2014.

¹⁴⁶⁸ Personal communication with Hiraq activist, February 28, 2014.

¹⁴⁶⁹ Personal communication with Hiraq activist, March 3, 2014.

¹⁴⁷⁰ Personal communication with Hiraq activist, March 4, 2014. Personal communication with Hiraq activist in KSA, February 26, 2014.

¹⁴⁷¹ Interview with prominent TAJ member and Hiraq activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

Lack of trust extends to the NDC, i.e. the institution in which the six-state federalist solution was developed as well. “Southern people do not trust this dialogue because it includes the reasons of the conflicts and they will never be a part of the solution.”¹⁴⁷² In addition, protesters denounce a lack of Southern representation for they hold that those participating do not represent the 'true position' of the population but have been brought in externally by international powers. As a result, the Southern issue is not appropriately dealt with but “circumnavigated”.¹⁴⁷³

In spite of these severe doubts or even outright rejection by the Southern public,¹⁴⁷⁴ those responsible for the negotiations signed the decision about the six-state federalism. When I asked more than two dozen HIRAK members a few days thereafter, however, the responses were all either reneging the so-called ‘just solution’ (as it was called by its proponents) and instead advocating for a referendum or independence, or those I asked had not even heard of the just solution, yet, and when informed reacted deprecative.¹⁴⁷⁵ The large protest marches on February 21, 2014, roughly a month later, were interpreted as a clear sign of popular rejection by the movement.¹⁴⁷⁶ One person uttered his concern in regard to a voting on the new constitution (at that point still to be charted); he held that when trying to pass a constitution containing the federalist clause through a referendum, things would get worse, clashes and violence would increase.¹⁴⁷⁷

As should have become explicit, federalism lacks notable support by movement members, notwithstanding the NDC provisions for representation and its allegedly participatory design. Neither the framing by the interim government and by international actors such as the UN envoy in the wake of the NDC nor the (limited) framing emanating from NDC participants supposedly representing the South managed to generate significant resonance among the population.

With confederation the situation is similar because of the telling difference that there was generally little perception of the option at all. Although it was occasionally dropped in talks, it was hardly ever judged; in many cases it was merely considered a possible intermediate step

¹⁴⁷² Personal communication with HIRAK activist, September 16, 2013.

¹⁴⁷³ Craig, “Trouble”.

¹⁴⁷⁴ See exemplarily: “The six-regional federation is expected to turn catastrophic for the whole Yemen. It is a problem rather than a solution. A federal state of two regions (South & North according to the borders of 21st May 1990) could have been of effect. So that neither the outcome of the NDC nor the SC resolution 2140 [issued against spoilers] is to bear anything good for the South or – even – the North.” Personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 2, 2014.

¹⁴⁷⁵ I contacted the respective HIRAK members through Facebook between January 22 and 24, 2014.

¹⁴⁷⁶ Personal communication with HIRAK activist in KSA, February 26, 2014.

¹⁴⁷⁷ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, February 28, 2014.

towards full independence.¹⁴⁷⁸ A former Southern MP commented in regard to the Cairo Conference, the most serious attempt towards a unified Southern stand for confederation: “The documents that came out of this Conference were fantastic, but unfortunately they were not activated (...) because people’s mood in the South demanded a higher level of demands, they do need separation and insist on it.”¹⁴⁷⁹

In short: Confederation has no resonance.

Reactions on the announcement of six-state federalism illustrate how independence for many has become the *sine qua non* goal. One comment on a Yemen Times article elaborates:

That is the choice of people who participated in the NDC not the choice of people who carry their hearts in hands to get freedom [and] are asking for our country. [They are] not asking to make a business deal. All the people in the south will not accept any solution [that] does not carry their free[dom] for all the south without sharing it with the north.¹⁴⁸⁰

Another comment simply states what I have heard from all sides, from the vast share of my respondents inside and outside the country: “We in the south want full independence.”¹⁴⁸¹ The option of independence has been prominent since 2009, yet, a few years later (as we have seen above in the lack of resonance of the alternatives) it was almost uncontested. Responses over time exemplify this:

Now, by mid-2009, all of the southern factions demand secession from the north. The government in San’a only looks at how to stop these groups, not at how to solve the problems that have created them. There are elites in south Yemen who feel marginalized, but the groups they head represent real grievances of the people. The people want lower prices, better services, and more employment. That is the reason they line up behind the secessionist slogans.¹⁴⁸²

This appraisal stems from shortly after the accession of the old leaders, which means that their respective framing was still recent at that time. While the socioeconomic reason given for people’s support of “secessionist slogans” certainly holds true to some extent – especially for poor movement adherents – it turned into a more ideational issue the more time passed. Since 2010/11, identity differences were much stronger framed, which is equally reflected in statements. The longer the independence frame was spread, the more important it became, and the less significance was attributed to socioeconomic grievances.

¹⁴⁷⁸ There was one single person among my respondents who admitted that “federalism is the best solution for Yemen in these circumstances”. However, he did so rather reluctantly, holding that in any ‘better’ circumstances he would certainly favor independence; he just did not believe it to be realistic with a lack of external support. Personal communication with Hiraq activist, March 5, 2014.

¹⁴⁷⁹ Interview with former MP and prominent Hiraq activist living in the UK, April 29, 2013.

¹⁴⁸⁰ “Federal Region Defining Committee: Yemen Will Have Six Regions”, *Yemen Times*, February 4, 2014, accessed February 9, 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1752/news/3426/Federal-region-defining-committee-Yemen-will-have-six-regions.htm>, commentary on February 4, 2014.

¹⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸² HRW interview with human rights activist, July 8, 2009, cited in: HRW, “In the Name of Unity”, 16.

A poll conducted by the Yemeni Center for Civil Rights in 2010 found that around 70% of Southerners supported independence; for the period after the Arab Spring protests, analysts assume that more than 90% shared this stance.¹⁴⁸³ As has been noted before, the mere removal of Saleh did not suffice those who seek a restoration of the Southern state: “After that [i.e. the stepdown of Saleh], many voices in the North said that Abdullah Saleh has gone so what is the reason for keeping a call for separation! But the Southern people did not agree with this idea.”¹⁴⁸⁴

At the height of leadership competition, critical voices pointed out the challenges related with “separation” (another term for independence) due to factionalization, yet despite that they still kept it on the table. In fact, during the long interview from which this quote is taken, no other options were mentioned.

Separation is still a political option that is not bad or harmful; it is an option. If the separation was undertaken, the greatest challenge comes afterwards. The South was united before the 1990s, but now, as you see, it is no longer united. Consequently, the greatest challenge if this happened is uniting the South once more and organizing the differences between different groups.¹⁴⁸⁵

Catalyzed by the rejected outcomes of the NDC and apparent (at least ostentatious) rapprochement between the factionalized old guard leadership, 2014 was less plagued with doubts and articulated challenges, but with focus on and optimism about the aim of independence. Respondents now unequivocally stressed their common goal: “Restoring the Southern state is the only option for the people of the South.”¹⁴⁸⁶ Others held that up to 90% of Southerners shared the same goal: liberation and independence. The sole difference was their idea on ‘how’ to reach it, in which they were influenced by various actors. Influences from outside, however, were referred to with suspicion.¹⁴⁸⁷ Huda al-Attas argues with the people on the streets: “There is not a single milyūnyīah that has called for federation!”¹⁴⁸⁸

The relation to the framing can be seen even more explicitly in the stated perception of youth. A 17-year old, for instance, who has never personally experienced the PDRY is convinced that pre-unity “life was better”. He compares it to his current life and draws his conclusion: “The government gave me nothing. I want independence.”¹⁴⁸⁹ It is a clear connection between the stated loss (i.e. grievance), blame, and the goal. One day before the

¹⁴⁸³ Augustin, “Bewegung des Südens”; affirmed by many activists, exemplarily cf.: Personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 4, 2014.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁴⁸⁵ Interview with former MP and prominent HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 29, 2013.

¹⁴⁸⁶ Personal communication with HIRAK activist living in the KSA, March 4, 2014.

¹⁴⁸⁷ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 4, 2014.

¹⁴⁸⁸ Augustin, “Interview with Huda al-Attas”.

¹⁴⁸⁹ Salisbury, “Analysis”.

proclaimed end of the deadline set by the Hirak for Northern officials to leave, on November 29, 2014, the following statements were made on occupied Al-Arood Square: “Those [exploitative] people in the north, they don’t care about us, and Hadi is just a puppet for [them].” “Tomorrow is the anniversary of our independence from the British, and, *inshallah*, it will also be the anniversary of our independence from the north.”¹⁴⁹⁰ The framing in the run-up to November 30th, intensified moreover by the return of prominent figures from exile, clearly created strong resonance and great expectations.¹⁴⁹¹ It surprises even more that after what has been called “another missed opportunity”¹⁴⁹² public frustration remained without violent consequences.

Since the al-Beidh-affiliated Aden Live TV channel played a notable role in frame distribution for independence, its perception shall be briefly elucidated. Overall, the channel gets a mixed response. Despite its high degree of outreach, its credibility gets critical reviews.

The channel is doing a great job to promote the cause of South Arabia and it plays an important role to raise awareness about what is going on in the South. However, I think it needs to professionalize its work and operate as a channel for the people of the South, not one faction.¹⁴⁹³

The media is important and in fact we depended on it in our first calls for the revolution. We used it – mainly Aden Live channel – to crowd people in the streets. Sadly, this channel has been taken out of our hands. Al-Beidh bought it and literally spoiled it. He tried to use it as a tool to perform his plans.¹⁴⁹⁴

The critical evaluation notably stems from the strongly perceived partisanship of the channel.¹⁴⁹⁵ While even al-Beidh's supporters and those with a highly positive opinion about the channel concede its partiality, others openly articulate their defiance about his domination of one of the most important and influential Southern media. In regard to al-Beidh's accentuated role still others take a pragmatic position:

Even if al-Beidh is not so popular in most of the people’s opinion, they raise his picture because they need a model and figure. The most probable model has to be the last

¹⁴⁹⁰ “Tensions Soar at Southern Yemen Protest Camp”, November 29, 2014, accessed December 1, 2014, *Al Jazeera*, <http://www.en-maktoob.news.yahoo.com/tensions-soar-southern-yemen-protest-camp-151251483.html>.

¹⁴⁹¹ Dahlgren, however, insinuates that Adeni intellectuals might not have been as keen on definitive steps as “the streets”. According to her, they fear a repetition of the situation after the British withdrawal in 1967, when the “country was left behind (...) with almost no resources”. Dahlgren, “Poor People’s Revolution”.

¹⁴⁹² “Tensions Soar”.

¹⁴⁹³ Personal communication with Hirak activist living in the UK, April 13, 2014.

¹⁴⁹⁴ Interview with leading TAJ member and Hirak activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁴⁹⁵ An activist living in Germany gave the example of his family living in Aden: “My grandmother always asks from where I got my information. Does it come from Aden Live? Then forget 80% of it and believe 20%.” Interview conducted March 24, 2014.

president. People search for a code, even if they do not like him so much, but they feel that he represents the South as he was the last president of their independent country.¹⁴⁹⁶

This interpretation of al-Beidh's role as a functional one has been given by a number of respondents and appears as logical consequence of the Southern symbolical stylization of the former state and its representations: Despite all what can be criticized in him, he is turned into the same 'category' as the flag, anthem, commemoration dates, banknotes, Al-Yemda airline, songs, names etc. He was the president and his picture is thus rather iconic than a sign of support for his person.

This being said and with the above interim judgement of al-Beidh's role in mind, it can nevertheless be concluded that the goal of independence has by far the greatest resonance of all three options.

(6) How are we going to get there?

Option 1: By means of nonviolence.

"It is well-known that the Southern people are peaceful by nature."¹⁴⁹⁷ This overtly optimistic self-image is not shared by a majority; yet, despite the admittance that the Southern past has been all but peaceful and that there would be the option to take up arms again, the movement's peaceful stance is considered essential. From the beginning it has been inscribed even in its name: The Southern Peaceful Movement. In line with central framing attempts, emphasis is hence on having changed in comparison to earlier times, in having chosen nonviolence based on the fact of being civilized.

I think that, if people tried the dialogue as a way of solving problems and the elections in taking important decisions will not repeat wars and fighting. 20 years of occupation taught the Southern people many lessons. Now we are very different from the past but we do not fight! [This] peacefulness distinguishes HIRAK from its predecessor organizations¹⁴⁹⁸

[W]e have faced a lot of violence from the state...Whenever there is a [major] rally, people are killed. But people in the movement are peaceful – and this is a historical development in a tribal society where everyone is armed. Most of the protesters have legal weapons at home, and they know how to use them, but we prefer to be peaceful.¹⁴⁹⁹

Interviewees repeatedly stressed the challenges involved in remaining peaceful and in keeping the great number of followers to do so. These challenges include regime repression and provocation, the widespread availability of arms and the equally widespread capacity to use

¹⁴⁹⁶ Interview with former MP and prominent HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 29, 2013.

¹⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹⁸ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹⁴⁹⁹ HRW interview with Southern activist politician, July 10, 2009, cited in: HRW, "In the Name of Unity", 17.

them, recent historical examples of armed struggle, increasing frustration over time due to a lack of visible improvement, and internal calls for violence. All these are legitimate concerns and have partly been discussed in chapter 6. They can hence be considered imminent questions under the given conditions. Notwithstanding, HIRAK members insisted that they had so far managed to overcome these challenges. Since this tackles the core argument of the dissertation, it is worth looking at some more statements:

[I]t happens that every now and then some voices reveal that they are fed up with peacefulness and that they should find other ways to reach their aims. Sometimes, even leaders state that if peacefulness is not that fruitful they may reconsider other means. (...) So, the biggest challenge is to keep the peacefulness of the movement although most of our leaders are excluded army men, which means that they can use all the kinds of weapons from the gun to the plane, but they do not because they are *convinced* [emphasis added, T.G.] that peace is the best way to reclaim the stolen rights.¹⁵⁰⁰

To be honest, my biggest fear is that people lose hope. As this may lead people to adopt any regional or extremist agenda that will not be fruitful for any side, the regional or international community. (...) However, all their actions remain peaceful. (...) I consider it a miracle of the HIRAK. It is a miracle that the HIRAK has *convinced* [emphasis added, T.G.] those people who live in tribes to participate in peaceful demonstrations without their weapons as it is seen as a shame on them.¹⁵⁰¹

Regarding to the case of HIRAK, people *agreed* [emphasis added, T.G.] on the peaceful struggle. (...) Some people insist on spoiling the idea about HIRAK and keep repeating that we adopt violent struggle. However, we do not think about this at all, as in case we did, our state had an army we could use to defend our country and ourselves, but we did not.¹⁵⁰²

Definitely, even if the peaceful HIRAK did not succeed, we will not ever turn to an armed one. The Southern people *refuse* [emphasis added, T.G.] it, as since the English colonialism we were insisting on the peaceful resistance to return our rights. I mean, we will keep resisting until we regain our democratic nation that was stolen out of our hands. They do their best to force us to be violent; they even adopted the policy of hunger. They keep tightening the situation in the South, our revolution now is called a revolution of hungry.¹⁵⁰³

The reasons people give for this sustained peacefulness range from identity (and related values), conviction, ‘traumatic memories’ of violence, to effectiveness. After more than seven years of nonviolent protest, the spokesperson of the Southern Movement Youth Coalition proudly declared in December 2014: “We are a peaceful people and do not have a tendency towards violence.”¹⁵⁰⁴

¹⁵⁰⁰ Interview with former MP and prominent HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 29, 2013.

¹⁵⁰¹ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁵⁰² Group discussion during qāt chew of Yafa’e community in the UK, April 28, 2013.

¹⁵⁰³ Group discussion during qāt chew of Yafa’e community in the UK, April 28, 2013.

¹⁵⁰⁴ “Southern Movement Youth Coalition Spokesperson”.

The good thing is, people are still ambitious, they still have hope to chance things for the better. They have the courage to stand for their rights and *peaceful* means, which is a quite a good indicator towards showing who these people are. Will they be trusted to govern themselves again?¹⁵⁰⁵

We do not want to take the opportunity just to take advantage of the current situation. We will keep struggling until the Yemeni people in the north and the international community believe in our demand. We are not so low that we would exploit the security vacuum and announce separation.”¹⁵⁰⁶

Especially the last quote is telling: According to this representative of the Hirak youth movement, their values and the integrity towards peacefulness even outperform a potential opportunity for secession. They want to convince, not merely reach their goal. Despite the fact that this idealistic position needs to be relativized (particularly when considering other statements that highlighted leadership disagreements about how to proceed after November 30, 2014), it still speaks of a strong dedication to the chosen path. This conviction or choice has a clearly rationalist core as becomes explicit in the following comments: “Southerners prefer dialogue and peaceful struggle based on reason and logic (...) particularly the intellectuals do not prefer the way of violence.”¹⁵⁰⁷

The struggle by southerners is a civilized and peaceful one. Everyone knows that Yemeni citizens have enough weapons to enable them to resist. However, we *realize* [emphasis added, T.G.] that violence, fighting and chaos will not allow us to reach our goal peacefully. We hope we will not resort to such means.¹⁵⁰⁸

Another notable aspect of numerous claims is that activists hold that armed struggle is not only possible, but even likely; the danger that – despite better knowledge and will – violence might erupt is frequently present. A TAJ member actually recollects accusations from within the movement for not taking a more militant stance: “We hold our *principle* [emphasis added, T.G.] of the peaceful Hirak although we faced many criticisms, as we are the ‘keyboard opposition’ and that we are not courageous enough to perform a real opposition.”¹⁵⁰⁹

These voices pushing for more militancy are ascribed to those who have demonstrated their violent character before, among them always al-Beidh: “[A]rmed resistance is causing all the problems of violence in the South (...) Ali Salem is the leader of this trend”¹⁵¹⁰ Among the effects of this path, Hirak members claim to have learnt to abstain from violence. “20

¹⁵⁰⁵ Interview with Hirak activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁵⁰⁶ “Southern Movement Youth Coalition Spokesperson”.

¹⁵⁰⁷ Personal communication with Hirak activist, March 5, 2014.

¹⁵⁰⁸ “Al-Arood Square Spokesperson to the Yemen Times: ‘We Are Telling the Entire World That the Southern People Want to Regain Their State’”, *Yemen Times*, February 5, 2015, accessed February 13, 2015, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1857/interview/4868/Al-Arood-Square-spokesperson-to-the-Yemen-Times--%E3%80%9CWe-are-telling-the-entire-world-that-the-southern-people-want--to-regain-their-state>.

¹⁵⁰⁹ Interview with leading TAJ member and Hirak activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁵¹⁰ Personal communication with Hirak activist, March 5, 2014.

years of occupation taught the Southern people many lessons. Now we are very different from the past but we do not fight!”¹⁵¹¹ Memories of violent episodes in the past (1986, 1994) are laden with suffering and traumatic memories, which are no less mentioned among the reasons given against armed struggle: “I think we’ve had enough bloodshed in the South.”¹⁵¹²

And, lastly, peaceful protest is considered superior in its effectiveness to pressure the regime. The specific example of the Houthis is taken, from whom the Hirak actively distance themselves: “The Houthis did not succeed to this extent, they lost seven armed rounds in different places. They secured themselves, but they did not gain any benefits as well. Their using all these weapons did not harm the country as we did with our peaceful movement.”¹⁵¹³

Yet, the pressures and suffering does not remain without effect, despite the pride of the movement in its stance and despite its self-affirmation about their inherent superiority and efficacy. “[T]he South street is tired”¹⁵¹⁴, as it was put by one respondent. He was referring to the many victims over the years. Consequently, self-defense is regarded legitimate even by stringent advocates of peaceful struggle. Huda al-Attas, for instance, declared: “Our revolution will remain a peaceful revolution. But it is impossible for us to accept the daily killings by the Sanaa regime without a response.”¹⁵¹⁵ It was also voiced publicly in an interview with the Yemen Times: “[T]he peaceful revolution has a limit if violations against the southern people continue. There is nothing that prevents us from defending ourselves and the south. We will defend the south as much as we can.”¹⁵¹⁶ According to the definition provided by another respondent, self-defense still counts as a peaceful strategy:

Peace has many definitions. The Yemeni perspective on peacefulness is a bit different. For example, when we go out in a peaceful demonstration and in return we are killed and injured and no one stands for us, no authority to defend us, no one punishes the murderer, that time I think defending ourselves with all means is considered peacefulness.¹⁵¹⁷

What, then, is the way forward for the proponents of nonviolence? The trajectory of the Southern Movement has become as fragile as the state itself since the Houthi expansion and subsequent initiation of ‘Operation Decisive Storm’ by the KSA. The most recent unaffected

¹⁵¹¹ Interview with Hirak activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013. This statement is representative especially for statements made by activists who consciously lived through these violent episodes, i.e. not by the younger generation.

¹⁵¹² Interview with Hirak activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹⁵¹³ Interview with leading TAJ member and Hirak activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁵¹⁴ Personal communication with Hirak activist in KSA, February 26, 2014.

¹⁵¹⁵ Augustin, “Interview with Huda al-Attas”. Similarly: “Hirak wants to stay peaceful which it has been for years. Yemenis are weaponry individuals, the average individual to gun ratio is for every 1 person there is 4 guns. Any type of weapon you want you can find in Yemen. The government has killed many south Yemenis in mass graves.” Personal communication with Hirak activist with very active family, June 12, 2013.

¹⁵¹⁶ “Al-Arood Square Spokesperson”.

¹⁵¹⁷ Interview with leading TAJ member and Hirak activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

statements by movement members are accordingly those that surrounded the November 30th deadline and those made during the weeks following that date. The first quote was still made before the expiration of the deadline, however, it was made by the spokesperson of a youth organization and provides a glance on the overall intentions:

We are referring to military leaders and influential individuals who still live in the south and are accused of looting lands and starting business at the expense of southern people. (...) We called on military officers and those with influence to leave the south. We will form popular committees to protect both public and private institutions and maintain the security.¹⁵¹⁸

“Popular committees” were supposed to take over security in a very first move. For the subsequent period, plans had been made to establish what one of my interview partners had delineated already in 2013, at that time as his vision:

I think the best way to go forward is to have a southern national conference where they could elect a trusted leadership and work according to some rules, policies, and also to be clear of their vision for the future. So they could tell people ‘this is who we are, this is what we want for you, and this is how we’re gonna do it’. The mechanism should be consulted open within the public people.¹⁵¹⁹

Similar demands had been made for a long time, but the return of certain figures in November 2014 opened up some additional options, and the moves of fall 2014 had for a brief period brought in new energy. A first step in the above direction was the set-up of a 72-member council led by Abdulrahman al-Jifri and Mohamed Ali Ahmed, whose quality according to respondents lay in their connectedness with the street.¹⁵²⁰ From this council onwards, this ‘steering group’ allegedly wanted to expand into a larger and better-established representative institution, yet, the overall escalation in the country gave the situation a new direction. But still, nonviolence of the movement had been the continued aim.

Option 2: By means of violence.

The resonance to this option attracts attention through (almost) complete absence. In my research, I asked people about three different aspects: their perception of a violent option generally, their perception of that option after the funeral attack in Dhaleh in December 2013, and their perception of the ‘Southern Resistance’ as declared in January 2014. These questions were also asked at different points in time; the first in April 2013, the second and third in early 2014. Nevertheless, answers differed only slightly. To foreclose the

¹⁵¹⁸ “Southern Movement Youth Coalition Spokesperson”.

¹⁵¹⁹ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁵²⁰ Interview with HIRAK activist living in Germany, February 1, 2015.

overwhelming response: While respondents admit that increased repression and killings cause ever more frustration among activists and violence cannot be completely ignored as something people resort to in the last instance, the central conviction is that the HIRAK is so inherently nonviolent that it will never become the dominant pathway of the movement. Exceptional cases of violent reactions, however, are exactly that: existent, but exceptional.

A policy of armed struggle is rejected even in retrospect: “HATAM wasn’t welcome a lot, like I said, because it was violent from day one.”¹⁵²¹ Yet, activists do acknowledge that grievances are building up and becoming ever more severe, and that the fact that peaceful actions have so far (until 2013) remained without any sizable success have created frustration: “I would be naïve if I was to say to you ‘No, this will continue to be peaceful’.”¹⁵²² As with the peaceful stance, however, self-defense is conceded to be legitimate to a certain extent – albeit such developments are attributed to some non-controllable dynamics, i.e. responsibility is attributed away from acting subjects:

I would never see that the HIRAK will adopt violence as their way forward, but I think it may come from the ground and force everybody in a direction which they're not willing to follow but they'll be forced upon... And that will again depend on how the others act. The more violent they are, then people will think, this is our right to defend ourselves (...).¹⁵²³

The same argument is made by another HIRAK member, and he does so with the same stress on (bad) memories of the past as noted above:

What I know for a fact is that people had enough, enough of violence, they don't want it anymore. But who knows, if people don't listen to them and people came to a conclusion or to a stage where they cannot differentiate between life or death, then there might a recourse to violence. (...) If they continue their oppressive practices to Southerners, then I will not be surprised if people start to recourse to violence, even though it's against their will, they don't want it.¹⁵²⁴

‘Not wanting violence’ is leading back to essentialist peacefulness and conviction of peacefulness – the case made by those explaining the HIRAK’s nonviolent character. In fact, the difference between this section and the preceding one is in degree only: The last held that the movement is peaceful in any case except self-defense; this one holds that if people resort to violence they do it reluctantly and out of self-defense. The theme is the same, it is merely elucidated under different preconditions.

Already the intention to summon people to take up arms is judged negatively:

¹⁵²¹ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁵²² Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹⁵²³ Ibid.

¹⁵²⁴ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

Who would call for violence? Only fool ones and nutters or terrorists. Nobody wants violence at all. I haven't heard or seen anybody talking about carrying a weapon against Northerners and they don't want it, they want to keep that good relationship. What they want [is] a peaceful, a right to self-determination to be given to them (...).¹⁵²⁵

Who this refers to particularly is Tareq al-Fadhli, who in 2009 called for an armed uprising. The interviewee held him as well as all others following his path to be “terrorists”, thus excluding them from having any significance or legitimacy to represent Southerners.

In between this rigorous rejection of any kind of violence emanating from Southerners in an offensive manner and the events of gross repression in Dhaleh in December 2013, a respondent in September that year held at least calls for strategic violence imaginable: “The lack of united leadership and – consequently – discipline may cause scattered minor groups of Hirak to turn to such acts. However, that is not to make any real change. The calls for armed struggle are not expected to have concrete influence or response.”¹⁵²⁶

The killing of 15 people in a funeral tent on December 27, 2013 had the potential to change things in a way that resonance of calls for armed struggle might become more probable. Yet, respondents still insisted that reactions were isolated cases and due solely to the gravity of the ‘crime’ committed by the regime forces; the event had not changed the Hirak’s general stance. While the perception was that situation in Dhaleh was “extremely dangerous”¹⁵²⁷, many insisted that there was no organized resistance organization (i.e. the later announced Southern Resistance), but that escalations were solely “natural” reactions under the given circumstances. The media was biased, for the real crimes were massive human rights violations still uninvestigated. The NDC, still active at that time, had “no legitimacy at all” but the responsables were still old rulers, tribes, families etc.¹⁵²⁸ When I asked 24 Hirak members on the appraisal of the situation (Would there be a violent escalation or no?), 15 of them expected one, while only nine were convinced that nonviolence would dominate. One of the latter assured me that “every hour the number of dead rises, but we counter peaceful[ly]. Every one of us is ready to sacrifice all he has for the restoration of freedom, security and safety in the south (...).”¹⁵²⁹ Other voices, however, were less rigorous. They admitted to ‘defense’¹⁵³⁰, to “some armed groups [...with] no public support”¹⁵³¹, to “a contribution to the

¹⁵²⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵²⁶ Personal communication with Hirak activist, September 17, 2013.

¹⁵²⁷ Personal communication with Hirak activist in KSA, February 26, 2014.

¹⁵²⁸ Personal communication with Hirak activist, March 4, 2014.

¹⁵²⁹ Personal communication on Facebook, Januar 24, 2014.

¹⁵³⁰ Augustin, “Interview with Huda al-Attas”.

¹⁵³¹ Personal communication with Hirak activist, March 3, 2014.

breadth of feelings of hatred”¹⁵³², and to ‘limited support among the relatives of those killed’¹⁵³³.

Armed resistance is not supported by our people. Nor does it represent any real tendency within the HIRAK whose strategic choice is to regain the Southern independent state through – and solely through – peaceful movement. Self-defending is different. The so-called ‘Southern Resistance’ is thought to be a radical reaction to the extreme violence practiced by the authorities over civilians, particular in Dhali’. My information about its leading individuals is too vague to be useful.¹⁵³⁴ However, it has no future. I think that the irrational minority – secretly backed by al-Beidh himself – is responsible for many disorders in our peaceful struggle, including this fragmentation.¹⁵³⁵

The language of this quote is one of extremes and it is creating a stark dichotomy between ‘*the HIRAK*’ and ‘*the irrational minority*’. The existence of the Southern Resistance is here accepted, yet it is downplayed as small and without future.¹⁵³⁶ Besides an extreme reaction to repression, other reasons are given to explain why Dhaleh saw violence despite the movement’s insistent distancing from it. First, Dhaleh is said to be special for its position immediately at the border with the North; there is more military presence and more repression originating from the troops.¹⁵³⁷ Second, many former army members are living in the area, which – according to interviewees – made an escalation more likely for they are “very well trained in the use of weapons” and suffer from a high degree of frustration enabling a quicker resort to arms when they or their families experience renewed humiliation or repression.¹⁵³⁸ Third, the staff of Aden Live TV to a large extent comes from that area, and by giving special attention to the events and making more militant statements (something the channel is known for), it further catalyzes escalation.¹⁵³⁹ And fourth and last, intentional instigation of violent acts against the population by the regime that knows about the above special characteristics of the area: “The regime in Sana’a knows it well and is now trying to do whatever possible suppression of the power of the voice of Dhaleh in the belief that it will lead to the

¹⁵³² Personal communication with HIRAK activist, February 28, 2014.

¹⁵³³ Ibid

¹⁵³⁴ Others speculate that Shallal Ali Shaia and/or Taher Tamah (the head of the Military Council) might be the leaders. They had been calling for armed struggle before and headed those groups already involved in clashes and repeated fighting with army units in Dhaleh before. Beyond an immediate reaction to the events it could thus also be considered a further escalation of an existing strive to instigate armed struggle. Personal communication with HIRAK activist, February 28, 2014. [Hadrami Ana] Tamah is a contested personally; allegedly he had been calling for the assassination of Southern politicians as well, potentially those who were considered as ‘aligning’ with the North. Interview with former MP and prominent HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 29, 2013.

¹⁵³⁵ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 2, 2014.

¹⁵³⁶ Similarly: Personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 2, 2014.

¹⁵³⁷ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 5, 2014; Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹⁵³⁸ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹⁵³⁹ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, February 28, 2014; personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 5, 2014.

suppression of the southern secession demands.”¹⁵⁴⁰ The one fact to which the vast majority agrees, however, is that “it is not an attitude, it happens individually”.¹⁵⁴¹

Besides this claim, the role of the international community is brought into the question of violence as well. It is simultaneously attributed with co-responsibility for potential escalation due to its negligence of the situation¹⁵⁴² and considered as positive intervening force and reference point for peacefulness. Which argument is made depends on a degree of weighing: Complete lack of involvement or just enough to have a mildly positive effect? The two following quotes each represent one side of the spectrum:

In the future if they feel disillusioned with all these false promises, if they are humiliated more than what they have been or deprived from their basic human rights, then they might do... against their will of course because nobody is hungry to go and take arms to fight. (...) They've tried in the south and that's why they hate it. Even in 1994 the vast majority refused to take arms against the north (...) Only few took up arms and they expected an intervention by the neighbouring countries and the international community to stop this regime from invading the south. But nobody *intervened* basically, they just stood with the strongest, with the winner. And we found that to be very cruel, very very cruel.¹⁵⁴³

The last sentence specifically bespeaks the blaming of the internationally community.

There are calls for the adoption of the armed option in the south, but this is not all the factions. It is the faction of Ali Salem [al-Beidh], which threatened (...) to resort to this option as a last resort in case of non-response to their demands. But in my belief this will not happen and the reason therefore is the rejection of the international community of violence in the south and the lack of support for separatism. In case of the use of weapons the Security Council will impose sanctions on leaders who stand behind this option and freeze their financial assets and prevent them from travelling. And for this reason the southern leaders will not adopt arms because they realize the seriousness of the option of adopting arms and that it will to international isolation (...)¹⁵⁴⁴

In addition to the belief of the international community's role, the quote once more exposes al-Beidh as the source of calls for armed struggle.¹⁵⁴⁵ “He owns the Aden Live channel. It is

¹⁵⁴⁰ To these additionally count the following: “What is going on in Dhaleh is a complex case of liquidation of feuds in the South (...) Dhaleh after the war in 1994 represented the spearhead in the process of rejection in the South of the results of this war and has resulted in the launch of the Southern Movement in Dhaleh in March 2007. And before that, Dhaleh was the only county that did not vote overwhelmingly for the former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and his ruling party in the 2006 elections.” Personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 5, 2014.

¹⁵⁴¹ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹⁵⁴² Another statement equally voiced in regard to lacking international involvement that if people's demands continued to be unheard, there would be “civil war”. Personal communication with HIRAK activist with very active family, June 12, 2013.

¹⁵⁴³ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁵⁴⁴ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, September 10, 2013. The same respondent affirmed this view on February 28, 2014.

¹⁵⁴⁵ Claims that the Southern Resistance equals earlier armed actors who just strategically changed names in order to get support similarly imply a connection with al-Beidh, who had been involved in such earlier militant groups. Personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 4, 2014.

easy to notice that this channel encourages Southern people to adopt the violence as their last option.”¹⁵⁴⁶ As has been noted, many set little trust in the channel and its reporting, i.e. the resonance that these calls generate is to be considered low.

Unofficial channels of communication and mobilization might be more effective, as Southern youth perceive: “In public, leaders say that we are peaceful, but behind closed doors they tell us to do what we want, to fight. For young men with nothing, this is an attractive proposition, but it will be the youth who risk the bullets.”¹⁵⁴⁷ Although some hold that small groups had managed to recruit youth, there have been no corresponding actions of a notable scale. And, still, the groups are supposedly responsible merely for protection, i.e. defense.

The Sanaa authorities don’t differentiate between civilians and armed resistance, they are shelling the city randomly. The resistance should deter and do their duty. But in fact they are still small groups dispersing all over the southern provinces without one identified leader. In every province there is a leader unfortunately. But with the same aims to protect civilians. And of course they are spreading gradually and there are more adult youths joining every day.¹⁵⁴⁸

I would like to conclude the section with three statements that well summarize the positions and the unresolved issues. They form a climax, yet it should be remembered that there was no observable systematic shift in movement behavior until the end of the period under observation (nor beyond).

First: Calls for armed struggle and some reasons for non-resonance.

Yes, there are calls for armed struggle, but this is not in the welfare of the south and we do not have enough weapons (...) or the necessary support. We had wars enough, enough killing and destruction... Our country is exhausted and our people poor... It’s time for dialogue to resolve our cause.¹⁵⁴⁹

Second: Repression and international silence catalyzed escalation.

With deliberate disregard by the assembled regional and international levels to the demands of southerners in the restoration of their state and the silence on the crimes that were practiced and practiced against southerners (...) which contrast the peaceful struggle (...) and which culminated in the recent massacre of Dali and the absence of any international condemnation of her, I think that this will pay off armed struggle inevitably.¹⁵⁵⁰

¹⁵⁴⁶ Personal communication with Hirak activist, February 28, 2014.

¹⁵⁴⁷ Affirmed by a female youth who insisted that “[t]he leaders are very hidden in what they really want.” Salisbury, “Analysis”.

¹⁵⁴⁸ Personal communication with Hirak activist in Dhaleh, March 2, 2014.

¹⁵⁴⁹ Personal communication with Hirak activist, June 3, 2013.

¹⁵⁵⁰ Personal communication with Hirak activist via Facebook, January 24, 2014.

Third: Exhaustion of peaceful means. “I think that patience was carried out seven years of peaceful struggle. [There] must be the fight because the use of force can only be detracted by force.”¹⁵⁵¹

(7) *Who can and shall lead us?*

The HIRAK suffers from a lack of credible and legitimate leaders¹⁵⁵² – this is the dominant opinion held by many activists. Not only has fragmentation has been a problem since 1967¹⁵⁵³ and decreased belief in the respective factions; the main argument held against the various old leaders striving to set themselves at the forefront of the movement is their absence during the initial phase.

We must understand that HIRAK began without these. They weren't anywhere to be seen. Some of them joined years after that, while the HIRAK has begun its own initiative, the people's initiative. These leaders have joined the HIRAK and joined the people, and the people can easily continue without these leaders, you know, the people don't depend on the leadership to create momentum (...).¹⁵⁵⁴

This absence of leaders and reliance on the ‘people's power’ is often viewed not as a weakness, but as a strength of the HIRAK; it emphasizes the agency and capacity of the people: “No one Southern leader can say ‘I began’. (...) it's a very genuine movement, very genuine revolution cause it started from the bottom. It started with people *feeling* unwell, if you like, and it builds up.”¹⁵⁵⁵ “The main player is the HIRAK, which is the people.”¹⁵⁵⁶

It is from this starting point that their legitimacy, i.e. the legitimacy of all those old guards who claim to be leaders, is denied by large parts especially of the middle-class and intellectual strata of the movement.¹⁵⁵⁷ They are deemed “helpless” or “harmful”¹⁵⁵⁸ or even identified as the “main obstacle”¹⁵⁵⁹ to movement success. The accusations revolve around their perceived

¹⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵² Personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 2, 2014.

¹⁵⁵³ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013. [Abdulrazaq] It has furthermore been severely aggravated in 1986: Personal communication with HIRAK activist, February 28, 2014. A milder opinion is held by certain spokespersons who are trying to emphasize that despite “minor differences” all believe in the same cause and that the fragmentation is negligible in comparison to Northern disunity. Cf. “Southern Movement Youth Coalition Spokesperson”.

¹⁵⁵⁴ Group discussion during qāt chew Yafa'e community in the UK, April 28, 2013.

¹⁵⁵⁵ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵⁷ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁵⁵⁸ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 2, 2014; Baron, “The South (of Yemen) Will Rise again”.

¹⁵⁵⁹ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, June 6, 2013. [Saleh Hydarah] The same contact even went so far to claim that they were the “only” great obstacle to the goals inside a few months later. Personal communication with HIRAK activist in Dhaleh, March 2, 2014.

lack of actions despite great words¹⁵⁶⁰; the allegation that they acted more in their individual interests than for the common good¹⁵⁶¹; their lack of unity and apparent unwillingness or incapacity to overcome this problem¹⁵⁶²; their character traits (especially al-Beidh is described as highly “unbalanced”, “moody”, and “suspicious”¹⁵⁶³); and the assumption that because of their ‘entrapment’ in old, socialist thought the international community refused to cooperate with the movement¹⁵⁶⁴. When the central figures finally attempted to unify in Beirut in early 2014, resonance was restrained: Despite prior wishes for a unified leadership, the dominant judgement now was “unimportant”.¹⁵⁶⁵

Even the support by the Southern diaspora, which is usually highly welcomed and supported, is seen in a negative light because “they lead to internal conflict due to leadership rivalry”.¹⁵⁶⁶

Notwithstanding all these negative perceptions, it needs to be acknowledged there is, at the same time, a large share of the populace that does support these leaders for various reasons. On the one hand there are pragmatic reasons held mainly by the middle-class and intellectuals. They are rooted in the assumption that (1) these leaders with experience are to be preferred over a volatile attempt for democracy under the given circumstances; they have the ability to unify Southerners.¹⁵⁶⁷ Moreover, (2) the international community demands a united Southern leadership with a clear vision to deal with:

The world wants to see to how the southern people deal with one another, deal with regional countries, and our stance on terrorism and human rights issues. Therefore, there should be one united leadership (...) to send a clear message to the world at a time when Houthi militants are controlling Sana’a.¹⁵⁶⁸

¹⁵⁶⁰ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013; Baron, “The South (of Yemen) Will Rise Again”.

¹⁵⁶¹ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, June 6, 2013.

¹⁵⁶² Personal communication with HIRAK activist in the KSA, February 26, 2014; Iona Craig, “Trouble With The South”, October 18, 2013, accessed October 31, 2013, <http://www.beaconreader.com/iona-craig/trouble-with-the-south?ref=profile>. Not without sarcasm, one respondent said: “Those three guys [al-Beidh, Ahmed, al-Attas] are part of our problem, not part of the solution, because all three of them are presidents. If we have one president there are problems. How do you think we [can] have three presidents, not one???” Interview with former diplomat and prominent HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 29, 2013.

¹⁵⁶³ Interview with leading TAJ member and HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁵⁶⁴ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, June 6, 2013; personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 2, 2014.

¹⁵⁶⁵ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 4, 2014; personal communication with HIRAK activist, February 28, 2014. Personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 5, 2014.

¹⁵⁶⁶ Interview with former MP and prominent HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 29, 2013. Besides petitions etc. the diaspora groups furthermore organized demonstrations, try to inform about the Southern issue, or simply strengthen morals and the feeling of presence in the world by posing with flags in front of international sights (e.g. the Eiffel Tower).

¹⁵⁶⁷ The comment also holds that the South had failed to do without them. Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹⁵⁶⁸ “Al-Arood Square Spokesperson”.

A second group, on the other hand, either believes in the experience of the old or, rather, is attracted by its symbolic capital. A blunt example of the first group – interestingly a female activist in her twenties – said: “The elders are wiser and they have been through much more than the youth. They would have much more insight than the younger generation. They have been through it all, separation and unity and now they call for separation again.”¹⁵⁶⁹ As for the second consideration, al-Beidh is conceived symbolically as the last president and as “the first one to announce the secession before the civil war broke out in 1994”¹⁵⁷⁰. In addition, his person is associated with the socialist state and thus he “seems popular among urban poor who long for steady prices, jobs and access to education of the socialist era”.¹⁵⁷¹ And lastly, he made the desire of the majority of movement members for independence his own and is associated with it, thus securing him the greatest loyalty of the street.¹⁵⁷² Huda al-Attas, however, stresses the need to differentiate between genuine support for his person and for what he has become symbolic for – the wish of the people:

The people are not with Ali Salim al-Bayd – that is for sure. The Hirak emerged in 2007, two years before he joined it. People flash his picture at demonstrations because he shares their point of view as regards the liberation and independence of the south. He is the only politician of his prominence who is for liberation and independence.¹⁵⁷³

Ba'oum, too, has significant symbolic capital and is mentioned numerous times as a legitimate leader. Nevertheless, his age is held against him: “[P]eople like him. But he's very *old* now, he can't even think straight. He's the one who has always been fighting for the South since 1994. He was put in prison, he was humiliated, he was beaten up, but he was firm, he's still (...)”¹⁵⁷⁴

When it comes to the personal impact of individual figures, opinions differ more widely, which is similarly identified as a problem by the movement but for which there has not yet been a solution.¹⁵⁷⁵ Al-Beidh's strengths have already been mentioned. Banners, posters, and slogan's tell their audience: “The legal president is Ali Salim” and (with his picture) “Leader of the Liberation and Independence”.¹⁵⁷⁶ But the list of aspects that damage his reputation and that of his framing is similarly notable: His “difficult character”¹⁵⁷⁷, his repeated changes between calls for nonviolence and violence, the perceived abuse of the large influence ‘his’

¹⁵⁶⁹ Personal communication with Hirak activist from very active family, June 12, 2013.

¹⁵⁷⁰ “Southern Movement Youth Coalition Spokesperson”. This seems quite surprising since he was the one who had entered unity first of all, yet, many keep up their respect for they consider him to have done so with the best intentions. Interview with Hirak activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁵⁷¹ Dahlgren, “A Poor People’s Revolution”.

¹⁵⁷² Interview with Hirak activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹⁵⁷³ Augustin, “Interview with Huda al-Attas”.

¹⁵⁷⁴ Interview with Hirak activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷⁶ Augustin, “Tawra Tawra Ya Ganub”.

¹⁵⁷⁷ Interview with Hirak activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

channel Aden Live TV has – all these factors negatively impact on his credibility. What makes the issues even graver is that they throw a negative light on the Hirak and thus seriously threaten the cause:

In terms of whether peaceful, whether violence he has contradicted himself on a number of occasions where he would say ‘This is a peaceful movement, we’re peaceful’, but there would be a time when he would say: ‘but if this doesn't work then we will look for alternative means’, giving the indication that he's altered. And that creates unease amongst a lot of Southerners because we need to portray ourselves and it's true, we need to be telling the truth. (...) And that's the criticism of Ali Salim Al Beidh: Why should we bring negative attention to it when it's not merited because it is peaceful?¹⁵⁷⁸

The same applies to his utterances about the role of Iran. He more than once differed in his statements between a denial of Iranian support and saying that whoever would help the cause was welcome and if he had taken money, it was for Southerners. Activists were enraged about his wanton negligence, since it provided backing for the regime's counterframing that they posed a threat to the state by allying with hostile foreign powers; the KSA – a potential and decisive supporter – was equally scared off. Plus, it was of little internal use for nobody would have viewed support from Iran as positive. Al-Beidh “causes many troubles for his people.”¹⁵⁷⁹

The perception of Aden Live TV's role changed over time: While in April 2013 its influence was reckoned to be very high – the framing allegedly generated great resonance – a year later its credibility was found to be low and its program deteriorating with repetition.

I don't like the course that the channel is taking. In terms of how influential it is, I think it's very influential at the moment. It's the only channel that speaks the mind of the people and that is now widespread in Aden. It's almost in every home now, everybody has Aden Live because it tells the people what they want to hear, and it is shared experience. It has shaped people's minds, it's playing a big part in that.¹⁵⁸⁰

Aden Live is not a credible source of information that we take or rely on information from, even in Aden people know that. The channel has no accountability. It causes more damage to the southern cause than good.¹⁵⁸¹

Since the channel was immediately linked to al-Beidh, his impact and credibility were simultaneously negatively affected; its partiality was deemed less acceptable as well:

Had it not been for the channel, for Aden Live, I don't think Ali Salim al-Beidh would have been as popular as he is. I think it's clearly a pro-Ali Salim al Beidh channel and it goes out of its way to make that obvious to the extent that whenever there is another leader al-Attas or al-Jifri or anybody else that comes and says something *really* pro-South

¹⁵⁷⁸ Interview with Hirak activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹⁵⁷⁹ Interview with leading TAJ member and Hirak activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁵⁸⁰ Interview with Hirak activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹⁵⁸¹ Personal communication with Hirak activist, March 2, 2014.

and it's something credible and worth of broadcasting they would go out of their way to not to broadcast it (...)¹⁵⁸²

As has been noted above, the reason for Ba'oum's popularity was foremost his personality and symbolic capital as an activist for the (independent) South since the British. He had no media apparatus to mediate that, but relied on his presence and reputation:

Whilst Al-Beidh got his popularity through the channel and through speeches, Ba'oum has got it on the ground. He has been imprisoned, released and reimprisoned, released and been back to prison. So he suffered and I think a lot of people appreciate it a lot, they appreciate that this man is willing to put himself in danger repeatedly. That's the ultimate sacrifice, that's what people say, and that's where he's getting his popularity from. I think he's still popular, but the rift between him and Al-Beidh has divided the people that followed him at one time. It's been very unhealthy for the southern cause.¹⁵⁸³

The mentioned rift occurred between 2012 and 2013 and, in spite of the rapprochement between the two in February 2014, which has been very clearly geared towards the media, it could not be mended successfully under the given conditions of their decreasing health and the Houthi takeover later that year.

“Leader Ba’oum, at your service”, “Good day, leader Ba’oum”¹⁵⁸⁴, his image as huge graffiti on a wall – Ba'oum's popularity is similarly tangible as al-Beidh's. In that, his reputation never got scratched as al-Beidh's did, and it is more strongly tied to his person as well (and not to a former office and its fame). At least until 2014, his influence and credibility can thus be considered relatively high even in comparison to al-Beidh's media presence in Aden Live TV and international media (whose coverage usually included the former president and figurehead but less the famous, often imprisoned activist – among others for reasons of accessibility¹⁵⁸⁵).

Mohamed Ali Ahmed evokes rather extreme reactions; hated by some for his past actions, he can still build on strong loyalties in his home province of Abyan. “Mohamed Ali Ahmed, he's a killer. (...) In 1986 he murdered tens of thousands (...) if *he's in power* he will do it again and again. I think people should avoid him. And he is participating the National Dialogue because Abd Rabbo Mansour used to work under him.”¹⁵⁸⁶ While his participation in the NDC was rejected, his withdrawal regained him some respect. From fall 2014 onwards, he was furthermore involved in the setup of the so-called ‘People’s Committees’ in the South as a kind of vigilante force against the army and later on the Houthis. An estimated 8,000

¹⁵⁸² Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹⁵⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸⁴ Augustin, “‘Tawra Tawra Ya Ganub’”.

¹⁵⁸⁵ Al-Beidh in Beirut was easier to meet than Ba'oum in Hadhramawt.

¹⁵⁸⁶ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

members of these group took the control over security in Abyan with the majority following Ahmed, who later on sent higher numbers to Aden as a support.¹⁵⁸⁷ This responsibility aided his credibility, yet at a time when the active role of the movement decreased due to the general deterioration of stability and security, he could not have any strong leading influence. Overall his role appears more effective as a military leader than as a political leader of the Hirak, among which his views were hardly supported.

Al-Attas was similarly rarely mentioned, usually solely when inquired about. As one interviewee held, he was a good politician but acted rather in the background and often in secret, so that people did not know what to think and tended to be skeptical.¹⁵⁸⁸ In consequence, his position did not generate much resonance.

Ali Nasser Mohamed has remained abroad as has al-Beidh. In addition to not being in the streets, which decreases frame resonance, he has no media. His framing is thus far less widely perceived than al-Beidh's. He can build on his prestige as former offices as president and prime minister, and although he is better included into meetings etc. of other leaders. The popular resonance of his framing attempts pale when compared to others.

To these 'others' belong some less high-ranking figures, who, however, demonstrate great presence among activists and at events having thereby gained respect and followers.

Salah al-Shanfarah is this one. The people who really started the Hirak, it's this one Shallal [Ali Shaie]. He's a nutter, but he started the Hirak and he was tough. And Salah Qais Shanfarah, and Ba'muallam, Ba'oum, Askar [Jubran], Aidaroos al-Naqeeb (...) They are inside the country and they are leading big factions, the biggest, in Dhaleh (...).¹⁵⁸⁹

Al-Shanfarah and Shaie are the names affiliated with the armed cells in Dhaleh; Ba'muallim is a religious sheikh and sanctions the Hirak's actions on religious grounds;¹⁵⁹⁰ Qassim Askar Jubran was among the founding members; and Aidaroos al-Naqeeb was a well-known MP and even in exile still is a vocal writer of opinion pieces with great outreach. Each has supporters, and since individual activists always back more than one figure, there is a complex web of loyalties and resonance. Although it is too complex to be elucidated here, these 'second row leaders' deserve to be acknowledged for there is evidence that the resonance they are able to generate locally leads to significant mobilization independent of the great names. It should rather be considered as a notable part of the decentralized framing.

Abdulrahman al-Jifri was for a long time associated with al-Beidh and Aden Live TV for which he worked. In the wake of the fall 2014 protests, however, he took over a more

¹⁵⁸⁷ Interview with Hirak activist and son of a Southern general living in Germany, February 1, 2015.

¹⁵⁸⁸ Interview with Hirak activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹⁵⁸⁹ Interview with Hirak activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁵⁹⁰ Interview with Hirak activist living in Germany, February 1, 2015.

prominent, more independent role. He returned to Aden in early November and soon became head of the 72-member group of movement representatives that was referred to as “parliament” and the aim of which it was to establish a democratic body of a united Hirak.¹⁵⁹¹ Allegedly he argued that it was time for the leadership to enter the street instead of merely acting in the back. While there are hints that he is well-respected in the council, I have no further data on his stance and its resonance other than that he was part of those aiming for independence.

Finally, two actors remain: the YSP and the youth. The former has played a neglectable role; its stance has been unclear and far from what 'the street' sought for. One comment aptly summarizes the dominant opinion among movement members: “Acutely the Yemen Socialist Party abandoned the southern issue by participating in what is called ‘the National Dialogue’, which means neglecting and ignoring the millions of people in the south who demand their country back.”¹⁵⁹²

The youth on the other hand forms a very visible (yet not dominant!) group among protesters. They have grown increasingly frustrated with the old leaders, the ballast of the past, and the slow progress they see resulting from it. In the words of activists in their twenties: “In the South we have a lot of leaders, but about 90% with the minds of old fossils who reject modern youths’ thought (...).”¹⁵⁹³ “No one talks to the youth about what they want. It is like they only exist in social media, in Twitter.”¹⁵⁹⁴ Especially the November 30th deadline, the surrounding events in which youth organizations were very active, and the absence of change increased impatience – of everyone.¹⁵⁹⁵ “The people want something new, something more this time. They keep hearing November 30th, November 30th, and now they want something to show for it.”¹⁵⁹⁶ Tamam Basharaheel, the editor of *Al-Ayyam*, stated: “It really seems that the people have exceeded the leaders: people have grown hopeless and angry and no one has control.”¹⁵⁹⁷ While there has always been great hesitance to pass over the old leadership, in the wake of this 'failure' to come up with a next step, more voices have begun to articulate the readiness and willingness to take over at least partial responsibility (intended to soften the break): “We have youth leaders from the south who are qualified to

¹⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹² Personal communication with Hirak activist, September 6, 2013.

¹⁵⁹³ Personal communication with Hirak activist, June 3, 2013.

¹⁵⁹⁴ Salisbury, “Analysis”.

¹⁵⁹⁵ Personal communication with Hirak activist, February 28, 2014.

¹⁵⁹⁶ “Yemen Secessionists Face Leadership Crisis”, *Al Jazeera*, December 1, 2014, accessed December 1, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/12/yemen-secessionists-face-leadership-crisis-20141216356662352.html>.

¹⁵⁹⁷ Baron, “The South (of Yemen) Will Rise Again”.

take responsibility for ruling the southern state in collaboration with the former southern leaders.”¹⁵⁹⁸ But, again, this development was brought to a hold by the dominant security situation in early 2015.

(8) Which role shall/must the international community have?

Reference to the international community is great on all levels. It is shaped by various characteristics, though. First, there is the grievance of being left alone and even betrayed by the international community. Statements in this direction are often related to frustrated demands and violence suffered by the regime. In March 2013, for instance, after the Karama Day massacre, an activist rhetorically asks:

Where is the international community in all of this? Where are our rights? In the north, they fought for one year, people were killed, and the international community gave them their peace. The northerners have dominated us, killed us, stolen from us since unity. Where is our dialogue with the north? We have been fighting for 20 years, but still they ignore us.¹⁵⁹⁹

The same half accusing, half desperate tone is chosen by another one:

International actors do not look for our suffering, to the justice of our demands, to what we are exposed from exclusion and marginalization. [They] help the Yemeni government to abuse us. [The] United Nations is only concerned with how to maintain the interests of America and great countries, it is not interested in the kill[ing] and dying. They are unfair with us, as well as the League of Arab States (...).¹⁶⁰⁰

These quotes clearly reflect central frames: justice, democracy, suffering, exclusion, marginalization, regime violence, and, above all, rights feature prominently. People insist on their perceived right to international support in the face of human rights abuses. After the events in Dhaleh in December 2013, the lack of international action was denounced as a

¹⁵⁹⁸ “Southern Movement Youth Coalition Spokesperson’. They are supported therein by the intellectuals: “[T]he Academic Group suggested a paper that discusses the possibilities of uniting all sides of the Southern Hiraq, discusses the problems they face, and finally suggests a list of solutions. Now in the South a new youth people movement appears. A movement that will present new leaders who will have the authority to speak officially in the near future about their own new political ideas and aims. They have already proved [sic!] their abilities and that cannot be denied in dealing with civil society organizations, organizing the civil disobedience and organizing the events of the Southern Hiraq etc. Therefore, the International community and especially the civil society organizations should support this movement by training those youth leaders as they did with other emerging countries.” Personal communication with Hiraq activist, September 7, 2013.

¹⁵⁹⁹ Salisbury, “Yemen’s Southern Intifada”. It should be added that petitions requesting intervention had been handed to the UN, the Islamic Conference, Arab League, and GCC by the Hiraq after Karama Day and had shown no effect; a fact, which had been widely publicized in the South. “Southern Revolutionary Forces and Components Send Urgent Letter to United Nations, the Islamic Conference, the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council”, *Aden Live TV*, February 25, 2013, accessed February 26, 2013, <http://www.aden-tv-live.tv/articles-638.html>.

¹⁶⁰⁰ Personal communication with Hiraq activist, June 3, 2013.

“conniving betrayal of the international community” in failing to protect civilians.¹⁶⁰¹ Similarly, the grandmother of a killed youth asks: “Where is the United Nations? Where are our human rights?”¹⁶⁰² Along the same lines of victimization also runs the judgement about state¹⁶⁰³ and international media (particularly Al Jazeera and BBC), which are found to be “misleading” and trying “to ruin our peaceful resistance claiming that HIRAK is armed.”¹⁶⁰⁴

A second perspective is more demanding: It strains that “the international community has to understand that [the] region has strategic significance”¹⁶⁰⁵ and that there is a need to stabilize Yemen.¹⁶⁰⁶ The base for these demands is partly following a realist logic, partly arguing with rights – both in varying tones.

One realist perspective is that in order to get international support, Southerners need to demonstrate¹⁶⁰⁷ why it is in the interest of other states to stand with them. Once this succeeds, so the assumption, support will be provided:

We've shown in the past that we can be a civil state, we can be a state that will not harbor terrorists – contrary to what the Republic of Yemen has been for the last 20 years and prior to that. So we need to convince the West. The West have their own agendas, we need to go and find out what those agendas are and try and deal with them rather than expect that the West will feel sorry for us. I think that it's something that we must get away from. Human rights, the United Nations and their role... We can read articles that are sympathetic towards us, but at the end of the day if we don't have the political power, the political ability to convince the West that *we can offer you*, we can *serve* your interests, if we don't do that then we're gonna struggle (...).¹⁶⁰⁸

The need is to overcome the assumption of international actors that “their interests are safer with the traditional powers in Yemen”¹⁶⁰⁹; arguments are with the common exploitation of oil and gas resources¹⁶¹⁰, stability in the region¹⁶¹¹, and – relatedly – the successful containment of terrorism¹⁶¹² and Houthi expansionism¹⁶¹³. Instead of allowing an escalation towards civil

¹⁶⁰¹ Personal communication with HIRAK activist in Dhaleh, March 2, 2014. The “betrayal” is furthermore felt to originate specifically with “the governments of countries represented by the Security Council and the Arab League” Personal communication with HIRAK activist in KSA, February 26, 2014. [Adnan Halboob]

¹⁶⁰² Dahlgren, “Poor People’s Revolution”.

¹⁶⁰³ Group discussion during qāt chew of Yafa’e community in the UK, April 28, 2013.

¹⁶⁰⁴ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, September 16, 2013.

¹⁶⁰⁵ Augustin, “Interview with Huda al-Attas”.

¹⁶⁰⁶ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 5, 2014.

¹⁶⁰⁷ At this point there are numerous comments seeing the duty of Southerners to provide the necessary data and spreading it in the media etc. Group discussion during qāt chew of Yafa’e community in the UK, April 28, 2013; Interview with former diplomat and prominent HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 29, 2013; “Southern Movement Youth Coalition Spokesperson”.

¹⁶⁰⁸ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 27, 2013.

¹⁶⁰⁹ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 2, 2014.

¹⁶¹⁰ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁶¹¹ Personal communication with HIRAK activist with very active family, June 12, 2013.

¹⁶¹² Personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 5, 2014.

¹⁶¹³ “Al-Arood Square Spokesperson”.

war as in 1994,¹⁶¹⁴ Southerners must “raise our voices” and force the UN to act, so a former colonel of the PDRY army.¹⁶¹⁵

Such action is rendered an “entitlement”, specifically in reference and comparison to the negotiation with the Houthis.¹⁶¹⁶

There are clearly provisions in international law that would support the right of the southern people towards self-determination. Obviously, this can be interpreted differently, but there are clearly provisions there that support the cause and although international law is always secondary to the political will of the superpowers I still think it is something important to consider and try and put into the scenario (...).¹⁶¹⁷

In these regards, the key arguments are the right to self-determination, previous examples of internationally guaranteed self-determination for the Falklands and Kosovo (both of which are found very small and hence theoretically less entitled to that right)¹⁶¹⁸, the legal difference between separation/secession and “the break away from a unity from a contract that was [entered] voluntarily”¹⁶¹⁹, and the content of the already adopted SC Resolutions 924 and 931¹⁶²⁰.

In sum, the HIRAK very closely observes international reactions and holds international support to be crucial. Despite frustration with a lack thereof so far, hopes are kept up as are attempts to influence international opinion in their interests.

Though they do not publicly support the southern issue, we feel they are understanding the southern issue and will one day openly declare their support for the southern people and their right to regain their state. Stability in the south reflects on stability in the region.¹⁶²¹

(9) What are our prospects?

Opinions of youth depict very well the wide range of perceptions of the HIRAK's prospects.¹⁶²² One young Southerner, for instance, is irritated about the extensive civil disobedience campaigns: “It is affecting people’s daily lives; it is a mess. You cannot go anywhere or do

¹⁶¹⁴ A threat scenario painted is state collapse as in Iraq and Afghanistan, clearly aiming at international fears surrounding these countries. Comment made on al-Beidh's speech on May 21, 2009, posted June 2, 2009 in reference to the translation posted by Jane Novak on: <http://www.armiesofliberation.com/archives/2009/06/01/al-beidh-speech-52109-official-translation/>.

¹⁶¹⁵ “Tensions Soar at Southern Yemen Protest Camp”, November 29, 2014, accessed December 1, 2014, *Al Jazeera*, <http://www.en-maktoob.news.yahoo.com/tensions-soar-southern-yemen-protest-camp-151251483.html>.

¹⁶¹⁶ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁶¹⁷ Group discussion during qāt chew of Yafa’e community in the UK, April 28, 2013.

¹⁶¹⁸ Interview with HIRAK activist living in the UK, April 26, 2013.

¹⁶¹⁹ Group discussion during qāt chew of Yafa’e community in the UK, April 28, 2013.

¹⁶²⁰ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, May 31, 2013.

¹⁶²¹ “Al-Arood Square Spokesperson”.

¹⁶²² Salisbury, “Analysis”.

anything in this situation.” Another is convinced of victory (in the sense of gaining independence); he simply states: “We will win.” A third one is pessimistic about the developments: “There will be a civil war.” And still another one, a young woman, raises concerns about the effectiveness of the proposed solution; she is rather doubtful: “If we separate, the question is would things be better? We see a lot of problems, but separation is not necessarily the solution to these problems.” Furthermore, besides the aim she doubts the leaders: “The people who are leading us are not trustworthy.”

The mood within the HIRAK suffered from ups and downs; the second half of 2014 was characterized by both: exhaustion after eight years of struggle¹⁶²³; refrained optimism regarding a unifying old leadership; worries concerning the Houthis; hope for change before November 30th; disappointment afterwards; and lastly anxiety and ambiguity after the Houthi takeover and in the new year with Hadi's resignation¹⁶²⁴.

The events would have been highly challenging for most groups. A specific aggravation results from the divide between (unrealistically) great expectations and assumptions held by Southerners and the complexities of the actual situations, in addition to the apparent lack of a comprehensive roadmap for the sought after post-independence period. The expectations mainly concern the economy; the assumption is that the South would have had the potential of prosperous Gulf cities like Dubai were it not unified with the North.¹⁶²⁵ After unity, many hope for a sudden cure of economic woes based on the income from oil, gas, and the recreated port of Aden. Better governance and administration shall guarantee a stable and prosperous social market economy. Even those who might anticipate the huge economic challenges coming with independence hardly discuss them openly. Some dreams, however, reach high:

I would love the south to be able to offer an outstanding education for the citizens. I would first start with a closed economy and once the country has become stable I would open the market. More modern streets and bridges. Less power outages and cutting off the water supply. The Corniche needs to be reconstructed and planned out with coffee shops, ice cream shops, playgrounds for children to play instead of playing on the streets. Qāt needs to be banned gradually. Encourage qat farms to produce other types of crops and give them incentives for the first ten years. Paved roads. Zone areas and have standards and building codes because right now people are building anywhere and anyway they want which causes the country to look messed up.¹⁶²⁶

This example stems from a young female activist, the daughter of an active HIRAK member in Aden. Particularly social services and infrastructure generally have a high priority. It often

¹⁶²³ Personal communication with HIRAK activist, March 5, 2014.

¹⁶²⁴ “Hadi and the South: Brothers in Arms or a Marriage of Convenience?”, *Yemen Times*, March 30, 2015, accessed April 4, 2015, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1872/report/5012/Hadi-and-the-south-Brothers-in-arms-or-a-marriage-of-convenience.htm>.

¹⁶²⁵ Anne-Linda Amira Augustin, “Wir werden wie Dubai sein”, *Zenith* 6 (März 2014): 66–70.

¹⁶²⁶ Personal communication with HIRAK activist from very active family, June 12, 2013.

includes expectations about recreating the Aden port to its former glory. Other voices equally want to return to past conditions, yet, in regard to people:

Beside the mentioned obstacles that the South will face while establishing the new state, the most important and critical challenge is the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the humans themselves. Without having good humans who are aware of their responsibility towards their nation, we will not be able to conquer the corruption, which is spreading in all the organizations.¹⁶²⁷

Again, the statement stresses the components of identity and nation and distances itself from what is perceived as 'Northern vices'. These elements are pervading all fields.

At the bottom line, there is no clear picture when looking at the question of prospects; instead, there is a changing prism of chances and challenges, each of which dominate at certain times and from certain angles.

7.2.7. Frame Contestation

Internal frame contestation between the different factions has been discussed in the preceding sections. External frame contestation has its main source in the regime, yet, it is much more restricted than the counterframing against the Houthis. The main – and interrelated – elements of the counterframing are (1) a threat to unity, (2) support by Iran, (3) non-Yemeni, non-Muslim elements.

In April 2009, for instance, Saleh warned:

If anything happens to unity, God forbid: The country won't be divided into two parts, as some might think, but into many (...) People would fight from house to house, and from window to window (...) They have to learn a lesson from what had happened in Iraq and Somalia.¹⁶²⁸

In the following weeks and months, i.e. around the time that the old leaders joined the Hirak and made first speeches, he and other official sources intensified along that line: On May 21, Saleh marked them as “outlaws aiming to hit at the nation and its safety and to stir unrest”¹⁶²⁹, while the governor of Aden spoke of armed persons who were part of “chaotic elements” who had “conducted unrest and sabotage acts” and were responsible for the death of protesters.¹⁶³⁰ Two months later, the Ministry of Defense website labelled them “anti-unity activists”.¹⁶³¹ Pro-government militias were created, the so-called 'Committees to Protect Unity' (CPU) and

¹⁶²⁷ Group discussion during qāt chew Yafa'e community in the UK, April 28, 2013.

¹⁶²⁸ HRW, “In the Name of Unity”, 17.

¹⁶²⁹ AFP, May 21, 2009, cited in: *ibid.*

¹⁶³⁰ *Saba News*, May 21, 2009, cited in: *ibid.*

¹⁶³¹ *Ibid.*

the regime attempted to coopt local sheikhs in the South, among others, by promising military training. Activists of the Hiraq, however, referred to the CPU as “janjawīd”.¹⁶³²

In addition to the danger of violence that emanated from these vigilante groups, HRW documented the mistreatment of activists in detention; it comprises physical and verbal abuse. Testimonials of the latter uncover perceptions and allegations against Southern activists at that point in time, which revolved around identity defamation: “They asked me who supports our movement, and they insulted me, saying we aren’t true Muslims, that we are traitors, insects, dogs.”; “Why are you trying to spread hatred between the people?”; “You are an Indian. You are Somali. You are not Yemeni.”¹⁶³³ The line of argument remained the same even under Hadi, who in 2013 called on the Hiraq/Aden Live TV:

Stop this talk on satellite channels. We are Yemenis, we must live together, we must forgive. We must close the file against the past. Stop with this stuff on Facebook and the internet, inciting the Yemeni people against each other. 50 years we’ve been fighting against each other.¹⁶³⁴

Although his message on the outward is to overcome this issue,¹⁶³⁵ the underlying accusation of a threat remains. Even Saleh found new fodder for such allegations at that time, based on the fact that the president and the prime minister were Southerners; furthermore, he argued along the lines of Arab nationalism (once the basis for the ‘dream of Yemeni unity’):

And now these people criticising (...) unification – it was put to a referendum, a national referendum (...) the Herak etc., these are all remnants of the past. They want to bring back the Southern state, you now rule North and South. How can you return the Southern state when you now rule in Sana’a, ruling the North and the South, and you’re a Southerner? What’s the problem? You’re a Yemeni.¹⁶³⁶

That these thoughts still resonated among the population will be shown below.

Accusations in regard to receiving support from Iran were made particularly against al-Baidh – in whose case even Hiraq members had their doubts, as has been elaborated earlier. Linkages were posed to exist between the movement and AQAP, yet, theirs resulted in

¹⁶³² HRW, “In the Name of Unity”, 36f.

¹⁶³³ Ibid., 42ff.

¹⁶³⁴ “A Tale of Three Presidents”, <http://www.alshamahi.com/2013/09/03/a-tale-of-three-presidents/>. Hadi did not further his popularity when on January 19, 2015, he made a phone call in which he spoke dismissively about the Hiraq, insisting that he was more important than the movement as a representative of the South. Despite this and despite Hadi’s insistence that his moving to Aden did not mean any compromise on his pro-unity stance, the movement affirmed its stand behind him in the situation of open conflict with the Houthis. Personal communication with Hiraq activist, March 2, 2014.

¹⁶³⁵ This was part of the campaigns during the NDC, as were other outreach activities during that period who aimed among others at gaining backing for the federalist solution. Cf. Erica Gaston, “Process Lessons Learned in Yemens National Dialogue”, United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 342, February 2014, accessed July 7, 2015, http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR342_Process-Lessons-Learned-in-Yemens-National-Dialogue.pdf

¹⁶³⁶ “A Tale of Three Presidents”, <http://www.alshamahi.com/2013/09/03/a-tale-of-three-presidents/>.

reverse accusations: Huda al-Attas, for instance, stated that AQAP had been a regime conspiracy to begin with¹⁶³⁷, hinting at the regime's complicity with Islamists.

The distribution of this counterframing was mainly done in TV programs, official speeches, through the setup of the CPU, state media, and public posters/placards and else (like the slogan 'Unity or Death').

The Resonance of Regime Counterframes

The resonance of regime counterframes was directed less towards Southerners (at the most they affirmed certain concerns in regard to al-Beidh's involvement with Iran) than towards the Northern population. Here, it can be called successful in respect to reactivating the original unity frame, in blocking the Hirak's rights framing, and to a certain degree in raising suspicions about foreign involvement. Some quotes gathered by the Yemen Times a few days before the November 30th deadline ended illustrates a few of these aspects:

The southern people do not have the right to be independent, and this will never happen. The south and north became one country after the Yemeni people gave huge sacrifices to realize this national achievement. They have every right to express their grievances and they can refer to the government to address their issues. The government is the mother of all [Yemeni] people. Secession will destroy the economy, divide the people, and undermine the state. It is not sane to allow this to take place.¹⁶³⁸

Rights, sacrifices, nationalism, economic, and political concerns – the response of this traffic policemen well reflects the regime's main counterframing points.

Fears of external intervention motivate this businesswoman from Ta'izz who moreover also refers to historical precedents:

I do not uphold the secessionist demands because seceding means further divisions in the country. We cry out to unite our efforts and be one hand at this particular point in Yemen's political history. I think secession will only serve the purpose of foreign countries that are interested in dividing Yemen. I am still optimistic the Yemeni people are aware of this critical stage and will not allow Yemen to slide into such a dangerous situation.¹⁶³⁹

Two female students of Sana'a University equally argue with rights, unity, history, the security and freedom of Northerners, and economic aspects – again very much along the counterframing:

¹⁶³⁷ Augustin, "Interview with Huda al-Attas".

¹⁶³⁸ "Sana'a residents give their view on southern independence", *Yemen Times*, November 27, 2014, accessed July 7, 2015, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1837/report/4634/Sana%E2%80%99a-residents-give-their-view-on-southern-independence.htm>.

¹⁶³⁹ Ibid.

We think the Southern Movement does not have the right to call for secession. Unity is the right of all Yemenis, not only the south. At the same time, the government should listen to the southern demands and fairly take their voices into account. The Southern Movement should not adhere to their calls for separation because separation will return us to the dark past. If the south secedes, we will not be able to go to the south freely as we do today given the fact that Yemen will be two separate countries. This is not for the good of Yemen. Also, lots of northerners are living in the south. How could they be evacuated? This is really difficult. Separation will also have negative consequences for the economy and tourism, among other things.¹⁶⁴⁰

The position of a Houthi member, however, differs in regard to the question of rights and instead highlights the ‘injustice frame’ the Houthis share with the Hirak (in that they both hold the regime to treat them unjustly):

The southern people have the right to secede so long as the government does not fulfill their demands. We do not accept injustice. So, I hope the government will take heed of their demands and give them the rights they deserve. Those who say they will sacrifice themselves for the sake of unity are liars – they only want to provoke the southern people. We are with the southern people, and they will have their own rights and resources even if they secede. Injustice is always unacceptable.¹⁶⁴¹

A comment on Facebook about what Hadi had said (see above) on the contrary argues with patriotism and how the Hirak lacks it, providing an inaccurate and eventually counterproductive stance:

When people from the Gulf states, and tourists, come to visit, they are surprised, and say that Yemen isn’t like what we read on Facebook, on the Internet, in the press – Yemen is ok. You don’t know how to write anything but Yemen’s negatives. They don’t know about the positives... A person should write what’s important to his nation, and what affects his nation...not just go on the Internet and write anything. He should know that Internet sites go around the world – what company will come and invest when it sees the situation like that, what country will give you aid? They should have an ounce, not a ton even, an ounce of patriotism.¹⁶⁴²

These few examples provide just a glimpse on Northerners’ opinion. As far as comments on social media, articles, and else show, however, they are representative for larger numbers.

¹⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴² “A Tale of Three Presidents”, <http://www.alshamahi.com/2013/09/03/a-tale-of-three-presidents/>.

8. COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This chapter provides a comparative interpretation and discussion of the results of the framing analysis. The points of comparison are structured thematically and roughly follow the chronologically succession of the framing process; their complex interdependence thereby allows for alternative options.

(1) Grievances

Both identity groups have been holding a mixture of cultural, socioeconomic, and political grievances for an extended period prior to the founding of the respective movements. These have found expression in other modes of contention in the case of the Zaydis (revivalism, teaching, party) and a war, adding the formation of preceding oppositional groups in the case of Southerners; i.e. Zaydis have escalated their measures over time while Southerners relatively soon initiated drastic means, the failure of which not only significantly intensified their grievances, but moreover constituted an obstacle for a successful reorganization of opposition.

While individual members' perceptions might have distinct emphases, either movement framed the intolerable status quo explicitly as a threat towards the *cultural* dimension of their identity group: It was their cultural identity which should be extinguished by the regime. In order for this frame to succeed, there was a need to create salience for a common identity.

(2) Structural Factors

The issue of grievances leads over to considering the remaining structural factors as well. The testing of established theoretical approaches has shed light on a number of factors impacting the risk for escalation. Results indicate a heightened overall risk, yet the propositions are ambiguous: *If* the overall risks are sufficient for armed conflict, then we would see it in both cases because the level of risks is comparable. Since this is not the case – we get a false positive for the HIRAK – we can merely conclude that the explanations are not sufficient.

This notwithstanding, the identified structural factors that *did* indicate increased risks lie at the basis of the integrated model I propose. In addition, opportunity windows opened and closed repeatedly over the course of movement activism; this factor will appear over and over again, yet in more limited a scope and with a less far-reaching implication than structuralists claim: it merely facilitates framing dynamics.

(3) Identity Work

There are numerous overlapping and rivalling identity categories in both parts of Yemen, the most outstanding of which are *qabili*, regional, factional, and the urban/rural divide. Since individuals associate with more than one identity at a time, movement leadership needs to invest in ‘identity work’ in order to make the one category on which they build more salient than others. Merely then can a collective identity become the basis for collective action.

The (later)¹⁶⁴³ Houthis engaged in Zaydi revivalist activities, hence supporting the salience and positive assessment of Zaydi identity among the younger generation. Additionally, they sought to consciously reach out beyond this core base and attract other denominations and *qabila* with their diagnosis, which was complex and multi-layered for this purpose. Yet, this did not include the prognostic dimension, it having remained more restricted. In the absence of clear evidence, we can solely suspect that the effect might have been the creation of sympathies and a basic consensus mobilization among non-Zaydis.

Southern opposition was facing the challenges of overcoming stark division lines between (a) Adenis and non-Adenis; (b) strong regional ties; and (c) the lasting rift between the Zumrah and Tughmah factions of 1986. The rift was the most severe of the three and the opposition overcoming the precondition for everything that was to come thereafter. This is well illustrated by the fact that the founding of the Hirak occurred in the wake of the reconciliation process initiated by oppositionals. The Adeni-non-Adeni rapprochement was aided by active outreach towards the hinterland (planned commemoration activities in Radfan in October 2007) and contingency (repression in repetition of anti-colonial struggle). In combination, this triggered an inclusive trend that overcame the differences: Once the core of the movement was no longer perceived as highly Adeni, ever more other, more rural identity groups joined in; via networks, this turned into a snowball effect. The remaining hurdle, i.e. the inclusion of Hadhramis, merely occurred at the much later stage of when the status quo’s unacceptability became more salient in the wake of repression-related deaths.

Either group hence invested in identity work and ultimately succeeded. For both movements, but even more so for Southerners, the invocation of shared memories embracing lost grandeur formed an important instrument therein.

¹⁶⁴³ Hereafter I will omit this indicator of distinction between pre-movement foundation period and post-foundation period for reasons of legibility.

(4) Mobilization

Once a collective identity was established (and it overlapped with the process of its creation), the actual mobilization through framing could occur. The content of each dimension has been specified in detail, as have the means of distribution. Worth acknowledging is the skill with which both movement framers aligned their frames with the predominant cultural and discursive backgrounds and adapted to changing circumstances.

The sources provide some anecdotic evidence that consensus mobilization was rather rapidly successful in the Southern case, whereas the Houthis invested over an extensive period; and at a later point many, who in principle shared their diagnosis, were still unwilling to join the movement. Due to a lack of data, a further exploration of this dimension remains obscured. The threshold for participation in the HIRAK's activities, however, appears to have lowered once there was widespread consensus on the diagnosis, empirical credibility/experiential commensurability due to obvious repression, and the more so after some famous figures joined the movement. Given the more moderate repertoire of HIRAK contention in comparison to the Houthis, however, this tendency is comprehensible (or, rather the other way around: the reluctance to pay much higher participation costs in more militant Houthi activities is).

The scope of mobilization at each movement's height is impressive: Participant numbers in protests reached six-digit for both (more precise estimates are difficult to make); the number of combatants with the Houthis during the wars are equally stated as reaching around 10,000+. Considering the total population for each identity group, these numbers attest their mobilizational success.

The location of events varied, but typically Houthi mobilization occurred in smaller towns or even rural areas (accounting for the setting they were most popular in), whereas the HIRAK is much more associated with city-based (specifically Aden-based) events. Occasions comprised both protests and representational and identity-asserting contexts such as commemoration days or religious holidays. While both kinds exhibit elements of internal and external impact (contestation vs. identity-assurance), they do so with inverted priority: protests *primarily* serve contestation, other gatherings *primarily* serve representation and identity-related aspects.

Once a critical number of participants were reached and mobilization had occurred for some time, it became routinized. Socialization within this framework likewise acted as a motivational factor. In a potentized form, this accounts for the encampments during the Arab Spring protests and the fall 2014 Al-Arood Square protest.

(5) *Frame Alignment*

Houthi frame alignment managed to successfully bridge and tie together three separate elements: the regional ‘anti-US’ protest frame, the domestic ‘Zaydi marginalization’ frame, and the overarching Islamism discourse.¹⁶⁴⁴ All three were highly salient at that time and – besides the skilled composition of the movement frames as well as their distribution – Hussein al-Houthi’s charismatic personality further stimulated their successful resonance.

The Houthi slogan pointedly connects the anti-US and Islamist elements, while the *malazim* establish the linking between these two and the audience’s everyday life shaped by marginalization and discrimination. The overall conceptualization is hence well concatenated and coherent.

Hirak frame alignment is more straightforward: The cause of their grievances is attributed to the regime; it is framed in legal terms and aligned to human rights and international law discourses. It is thus quite procedural, yet manages to resonate among Southerners who experienced the procedural and bureaucratic socialist state; the young generation, too, was socialized in reference to the value of procedure and ‘law and order’, and solely after years of futile activism did discontent began to rise and people begin to lose patience with the repetitive attempts for conferences and international appeals.

The specific and continuous reference to self-determination is intriguing in the light of continued insistence on nonviolence. ‘Self-determination’ might well have the quality of a master frame with which more than one secessionist movement aligns and which – given its legalistic and normative emphasis – inhibits the option of violence. One aspect in this respect is the need for international recognition in order to accomplish the desired status. Repeatedly mentioned in the sources was the conviction that international actors, notwithstanding their respective strategic interests, reject violent struggle by principle. As a consequence, appealing to the UN demands strict abstinence from violence.

Language and repertoire of the Hirak reflect this rationale: The language is interspersed with legal terms, rights terms, and references. Demands and core statements are frequently made in English, and there is immediate addressing of the UN and other international actors by banners (including other peripheral communications). During rallies, movement representatives, along with regular activists in the diaspora, have repeatedly appealed to international governments and institutions for support. Even in cases of gross repression, the

¹⁶⁴⁴ Hussein’s framing fits well into the general criteria for Islamist discourse and framing that Wiktorowicz delineates. See: Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism*.

tactic was to publicize and appeal, not to confront – all in line with the struggle for positive acknowledgement.

(6) Repertoires of Action

Repertoires of action have already arisen in the above sections. Either of the two movements employed a wide range of diverging activities based on the available cultural tool kit, cross-fertilization and diffusion with other movements at a time of prominent protests in the region,¹⁶⁴⁵ and role models (e.g. Iran and Hizbullah for the Houthis).

The cultural tool kit offers a longstanding tradition of complex mechanisms of mediation (contention is likewise an element), an elaborate ‘system’ of poetry and persuasion, qāt chews as ideal setting for extensive political discussion, and, in the South, extensive experience with labour unionism, protest etc. Knowledge and techniques could easily be transferred and utilization in the service of the movements.

Main differences in the repertoires consist in the characteristic extensive shouting of the slogan, huge religious celebrations, very prominent and intricate celebration of a martyr’s cult in the case of the Houthis, routinized civil disobedience campaigns, discussion circles in squares, and legal/political international appeals by the Hirak. Obviously too, the employment of violence as a means of contention.

(7) Violence

The Houthis always justified violence as a defensive measure, but apparently its legitimization proved challenging in the face of the wars’ destructive power unleashed in the region. As I have demonstrated, the shift from nonviolence to violence solely occurred after a severe breach of the mediation tradition on top of numerous earlier offensive acts by Saleh in relation to the movement. Hence, despite the rooting of legitimate violence against unjust rule in the *malazim*, the initiation of armed conflict against the regime appears to have been in need of strong ideational support – which it received from the prestige of Badr al-Din al-Houthi.

Rather intriguing is the capacity of Houthi framers to revoke the violence frame in early 2010 and later on to reactivate it against the Salafis and the ‘new’ regime. This might be an interesting question to explore in another study.

¹⁶⁴⁵ Not part of the repertoire but of language is the adoption of demands for ‘dignity’ which pervaded not only the Arab movements during this period, but likewise ‘Occupy’ and related movements.

From the very beginning, the Hirak strictly distanced itself from a violent path; reasons consisted of needs for internal and leadership unification, an anticipation of rejection among the population who vividly remembered the defeat and its consequences in 1994, an honest rejection of violence as a solution, and strategic considerations in respect to international perception.

The calls for violence that were articulated all failed, and even the opportunity to take the initiative for secession during the Houthi takeover passed unused. Widely distributed movement publications and public discussions regarded an escalation towards violence as a threat that was to be inhibited; the sole exception that was admitted was defence in the face of life-threatening repression. Popular resistance against the Houthi invasion in early 2015, which partly related to the stepping up of militia units under the command of those former PDRY army officers who had been among the first Hirak supporters, demonstrates what before could solely be suspected: That the capacities to fight and the sufficient stock of arms are present. In conclusion, merely the will to fight was absent previously bearing witness to the decisive impact of the nonviolence frame.

(8) Organizational Structure

A comparison of the respective organizational structures juxtaposes the hierarchical structure of the Houthis with the much more decentralized organizations under the Hirak. Even though the Houthis, too, exhibit a number of branches, as I have argued before, the framing is centralized and lies with the al-Houthi family; family succession of leadership additionally strengthens continuity. The focus of their efforts is directed to internal cohesion and expansion among other Zaydis, i.e. self-referential.

On the contrary, the Southern movement simultaneously targets an international audience in the pursuit of support and recognition. To this end, their decentralization is both helpful and counterproductive: On the one hand it provides flexibility in the interaction with different counterparts, on the other hand it is criticized by international actors for the lack of a coherent program and legitimate representation.

Movement members achieved some degree of cohesion over time through regular participation in activities and resulting social interaction and bonding. The established leadership, however, failed to unite; instead ever more sub-organizations emerged, partly supported by prominent figures, and competed for constituents. What attracted people to join new factions remains in the dark; potentially they were unrelated issues like local competition

or else (this is what interview partners suggested). In any case: Leadership fractionalization and disunity proved a major handicap.

This is the appropriate point to assess the explanatory power of Pearlman's argument that movement cohesion is a necessary condition for nonviolent protest:

Notwithstanding the theoretical appeal of integrating organisational aspects, the case studies refute her assumptions: Similar to what I have just stressed for the framing, Houthi field commanders enjoy a relatively high degree of independence, but the group is nevertheless characterized by a discerned hierarchy at whose top are leaders from the al-Houthi family and their immediate proxies.¹⁶⁴⁶ According to Pearlman, they might have chosen nonviolence instead. Nevertheless, this does not yet disprove the theory.

The HIRAK, contrariwise, adheres to nonviolent protest despite internal fragmentation and contestation for leadership, and moreover meddling of the regime with potential leaders (such as Mohamed Ali Ahmed's invitation to the NDC), thus likewise contradicting – and hence refuting – the theory.

(9) Leadership

In regard to leadership what remains to be added is merely a question of emphasis. Leadership credibility is one major evaluation criterion for the quality of frames. An apparent tendency that is not reflected in the model is the perseverance of 'old guards' in spite of doubts about their credibility. Ali Salim al-Beidh poses as a good example: Notwithstanding his inconsistency and even expressed irritation of activists by that fact, he was nevertheless held high as the official leader; while one could argue that his symbolic role as last president plays into this, similar albeit less pronounced, claims can be made for Mohamed Ali Ahmed and others, too. Why do they not lose their position to other, more credible candidates?

While patronage networks might constitute an obvious reply, it does not apply in the present case. Certainly do the various personalities have a range of clients, yet this cannot explain the scope of followers of all kinds and from all regions; this transcends the extension of the (rather regional) clientelist networks by far. The most probable explanation is a lack of alternatives, in addition to the hesitation towards instituting a new, younger candidate. While critical voices admit to the disliked dominance of the old and ineffective leadership, none has brought up a serious alternative. This is a point where the lack of transregional support might

¹⁶⁴⁶ Salmoni et al., *Regime*, 189–197; despite their claim that the group is more an 'organism' than an 'organization' they clearly delineate a hierarchy leading to Abdul Malik al-Houthi, Abdullah al-Razzami etc.

be felt; post-socialist Southerners never had the chance to utilize effective, centralized all-Southern political and social structures to establish networks equivalent to the old, though absent, figures. But even then, the absence of any name surprises and tells a lot about the restraints the young generation is facing – not merely in respect to economic opportunities but also regarding recognition and trust within their own society.

(10) Contestation

Enough has been said about internal contestation, an issue predominant among the Hirak. Regime counterframing has succeeded in establishing serious doubts and suspicions about the intentions and connections of the Houthis to Iran. Allegations about their intentions to reinstate the imamate and their role as a proxy for Iran resonated, disregarding a lack of supporting evidence. This could be aligned with both the memories and/or public commemoration of alleged ‘tyranny’ by the imam and the regional Sunni discourse of distrust in Shi’i Iran. The underdeveloped Houthi prognostic framing moreover fostered suspicions about their goals and gave additional backing to these denunciations. Notably, some rather far-fetched and highly unlikely regime attempts for delegitimization of the group failed, yet did not permanently affect its overall credibility as a framer.

Undermining the success of the Hirak through counterframing proved more challenging and ultimately failed. Claims of links with AQAP and/or Iran could not be established; they lacked credibility, especially the former. In regard to the later it might be held that al-Beidh’s ambiguous statements gave support to them, however, this did not suffice to undermine widespread internal support and tendentially positive international views on the movement.

(11) Repression

Repression targeted both groups and fluctuated over time. Neither did the attempt at crushing the Houthis in summer 2004 succeed nor did the intermittent, comparatively small-scale, repression in the South. While it is unclear how exactly it impacted on the Houthis, for the Hirak we can state that it affected them, yet at the same time it rather catalyzed indignation and increased participation ratios. Injustice frames were given added credibility, particular so for the South in regard to international actors, who viewed repression against nonviolent protesters critically.

(12) International Actors

The Houthi case de facto did not involve international actors except for the KSA for whom, however, a lot was at stake ideologically. Its self-given Wahhabi identity was questioned by the success of a Shi'a movement in a permeable border region where, moreover, it had invested extensively for proselytizing. The US, while remotely concerned, was much more occupied with AQAP and the overall positioning of the Yemeni government in the WoT. With the KSA, the Houthis hence had a hostile antagonist by principle, into whom they did not need to invest any framing energy; it was, in fact, the contrary. The KSA made for a perfect enemy and could be framed that way without any restrictions.

In contrast, international actors played a crucial role for the HIRAK, as previously elaborated. Since for them gaining international recognition was crucial, it required significant attention at the framing level and in the containment of the too obviously challenging voices calling for escalation (like, e.g. ex-jihadi Tariq al-Fadhli). With this rationale they were limited or at least preoccupied.

(13) Internet

Increased Internet availability has proven beneficial for both groups. It provided a medium in which frames could be disseminated without immediate repression and in new modes. The Houthis entered this sphere of activity around 2007 and rapidly expanded the concrete formats in which they communicated. What should not be underestimated either is how contentious actors learned from others via the Internet: how to strategically utilize formats, how to design, options for various actions, language – these and other aspects smoothly diffused online. YouTube videos evolved into a format in which they became remarkably adept: Their media unit produced ever more professional videos of varying genre and content, which sometimes reached six-digit access numbers. Supplementary to their other media, the Internet proved invaluable.

The HIRAK concentrated more on the dissemination of news-style information like the documentation of events or repression. This lay in their interest of winning over international audience through convincing them of the injustice they suffered from. Moreover, opinion pieces were popular and received numerous comments and frequently very engaged discussions.

Social media use has been discussed before. It should be perceived as another means of (international) networking, social interaction, and frame distribution with some specifics, yet in the Yemeni context it would not consider it as revolutionary.

(14) Weaknesses in Framing

Weaknesses in the overall framing process include the lack of an unambiguous prognostic frame for the Houthis and of a unified leadership for the Hirak. The fact that Houthi mobilization succeeded despite this major deficit can be explained with the very strong diagnostic and motivational components; they were able to compensate for a weak or ambiguous prognosis. The factionalized leadership of the Southern Movement on the contrary posed a heavy burden. A lot of effort and energy went into attempts for reconciliation and were wasted for internal competition. At the same time, the situation affected international perceptions, which were of the highest importance for the movement. In conclusion: it posed a major obstacle to their goals.

(15) Alternative Explanations for Mobilization

Alternative explanations beyond the structural factors that were discussed before could have been coercion and selective incentives (such as money or other assets, offices or else). There was no convincing evidence for either of the two; one single source mentioned testimony by a family whose head claimed to have been pressured to join the rebels and that they threatened those who opposed them. While it seems conclusive that the Houthis shall have exerted pressure, including threats against local opposition, there is no further reporting of coercion for active participation. Hence, the hypothesis can be discarded.

9. CONCLUSION

Why do some opposition movements take up arms and enter armed conflict with the state while others persist non-violently under very similar conditions? The study has sought to answer this question by employing the previously introduced integrative model to a comparative case study of the Houthi rebellion in Northern Yemen and the Peaceful Southern Movement in the South of the country. The results have confirmed the explanatory power of the model for the cases.

The Houthis, who over time have shifted their prognostic framing from a nonviolence frame to a violence frame, subsequently turned into an insurgency. No alternative explanations could be found and the available evidence confirms the hypothesis of the frames as cause for the change in strategy.

The Hirak on the other hand has persistently remained nonviolent in its framing and collective action despite the capability to take up arms and challengers who called for armed struggle, but whose framing did not generate resonance. This case, too, confirms the hypothesized relevance of framing as a mediator between structural factors and collective action.

While there is a need for further testing in a greater number of cases, these first results are encouraging. In these cases, the hypothesized mechanisms have proven their superior explanatory power over mere structural approaches that overwhelmingly focus on the macro-level and frequently employ quantitative methods.

The model shifts the focus to the meso- and micro-level and makes case study designs indispensable, for frame analysis requires intimate cultural knowledge and in-depth engagement with a wide variety of sources. Research along these lines hence poses several practical challenges: (1) The use of multiple methods requires appropriate training. (2) Respective research ideally comprises field research in the countries under investigation. This is oftentimes difficult or even impossible in the context of volatile security situations, which naturally come with cases of armed conflict. In some cases it will be feasible to find alternative pathways to source collection, in other cases it might not. (3) Research will be time and resource intensive. (4) The collection of sufficiently rich data might not always be possible, specifically in historically distant cases.

A potential pitfall on the theoretical level includes the danger of drifting into an all-too-holistic perspective that lacks a clear focus.¹⁶⁴⁷ It is the consequence of giving up strict parsimony for a more complex, yet stronger model, and can be prevented by continuous reflexivity. Besides, the methodological tool kit so far is still rather based on experience and intuition than stringent and well-tested procedures. Many – especially in the field of digital data and social media analysis – are still in an exploratory or early stage. Contributions are thus welcome, however, researchers need to be open to contingency. This being said, the research field is highly dynamic and has received intensive attention in recent years; new findings and suggestions continuously emerge and steady the ground.

There are a number of promising dimensions to be further explored in regard to the research question and model development beyond the scope of this dissertation. They relate to a more detailed tracing of frame changes over time; a better understanding of decentralized framing and its effects; an investigation of the role of emotions; and the possibility of including practice-theoretical concepts into the framing approach.

In regard to the first aspect, Hank Johnston has already provided a clear proposition:¹⁶⁴⁸ In reference to Roberto Franzosi's 'story grammar analysis'¹⁶⁴⁹, he has pointed out that frames can generally be described in form of a subject (S) – verb (V) – object (O) syntax. Therein the subject specifies who the collective actor is; the verb articulates what shall be done, which action shall be taken; and the object refers to the who or what regarding which the action shall be taken. Changes in the content of these elements, as they are voiced by movement leaders or within the groups themselves, signify such processes of (de)escalation. In a hypothetical example, the S-V-O structure 'Southern Yemenis object to the National Dialogue Conference' might escalate to 'Southerners reject Northern rule', and further to 'Southerners need to struggle for independence' and 'Southerners need to fight for independence'. By tracing such changes in frame content and relating them to observable changes in protest behavior, it is thus possible to explicate in a more systematic way the transgression from non-violent to violent collective action. Exploring a case in detail with this method suggests to be highly rewarding.

¹⁶⁴⁷ Thanks to Andreas Mehler for pointing this out during a related discussion in the Collaborative Research Centre 923 "Threatened Order. Societies under Stress" at the University of Tuebingen, December 7, 2012.

¹⁶⁴⁸ Hank Johnston, "Theory, Method, and the Robust Framing Mechanism: Reflections on the Syrian and Palestinian Insurgencies", Special Issue, *Civil Wars* 17, no. 3 (2015) [forthcoming].

¹⁶⁴⁹ Roberto Franzosi, "Narrative Analysis: Why (and How) Sociologists Should Be Interested in Narrative", *Annual Review of Sociology* (1998): 517–554.

The role of decentralized framing has flashed up in the analysis; while it has been discussed by a limited number of scholars, a comprehensive conceptualization and operationalization are still lacking. The case of the HIRAK has highlighted the empirical relevance of decentralized framing and the potential benefit of a better understanding.

Emotions likewise remain underspecified. In spite of general agreement about the role of emotions for mobilization and collective action and, notwithstanding, some very insightful works on the topic,¹⁶⁵⁰ satisfying conceptualization and sound methodology for research in the social science is – again – outstanding. Promising emotions in this regard are fear, shame, indignation, and the feeling of threat, but also humor and empathy.

And, lastly, practice-theoretical considerations, particularly in respect to embodiment and sensory perceptions, appear highly promising.¹⁶⁵¹ Collective action is a very physical experience; yet, even before potential movement adherents have sensory encounters with frames. Framing, so the argument, should not be reduced to a linguistic dimension, but should encompass all senses. Theoretically intriguing, this idea might prove methodologically even more challenging than the ‘regular’ framing approach; we should advance the latter first.

¹⁶⁵⁰ Helena Flam and Debra King (ed.), *Emotions and Social Movements* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005); Helena Flam and Jochen Kleres (ed.), *Methods of Exploring Emotions* (London/New York: Routledge, 2015); James M. Jasper, “Emotions and Social Movements: Twenty Years of Theory and Research”, *Annual Review of Sociology* (2011): 285–303.

¹⁶⁵¹ For an exemplary case study see: Chandra Russo, “Allies Forging Collective Identity: Embodiment and Emotions on the Migrant Trail”, *Mobilization* 19, no. 1 (2014): 67–82.

APPENDIX

Appendix A:

List of Hussein al-Houthi's transcribed and published lectures (given ca. December 14, 2001–August 29, 2003 according to the published versions). Together with these texts and in the same layout etc. is available another lecture, which is, however, not included in the original list and not consecutively numbered: “With the Call (*da‘wah*) to God” (15 pages).¹⁶⁵²

<i>First Series – Verses of the Surah Ahl ‘Imran (The Family of ‘Imran)</i>		
1	08.01.2002	<i>Ahl ‘Imran</i> – First Lecture
2	09.01.2002	<i>Ahl ‘Imran</i> – Second Lecture
3	11.01.2002	<i>Ahl ‘Imran</i> – Third Lecture
4	12.01.2002	<i>Ahl ‘Imran</i> – Fourth Lecture
<i>Second Series – Verses of the Surah Al Ma‘idah (The Table Spread With Food)</i>		
5	13.01.2002	<i>Al Ma‘idah</i> – First Lecture
6	14.01.2002	<i>Al Ma‘idah</i> – Second Lecture
7	15.01.2002	<i>Al Ma‘idah</i> – Third Lecture
8	16.01.2002	<i>Al Ma‘idah</i> – Fourth Lecture
<i>Third Series – Knowing God</i>		
9	18.01.2002	Knowing God – First Lecture
<i>Knowing God – Yes (to) God</i>		
10	19.01.2002	Yes (to) God – Second Lecture
11	20.01.2002	Yes (to) God – Third Lecture
12	21.01.2002	Yes (to) God – Fourth Lecture
13	22.01.2002	Yes (to) God – Fifth Lecture
<i>Knowing God – Greatness of God</i>		
14	23.01.2002	Greatness of God – Sixth Lecture
15	25.01.2002	Greatness of God – Seventh Lecture
16	26.01.2002	Greatness of God – Eighth Lecture
<i>Knowing God – And More and Ever More</i>		
17	28.01.2002	And More and Ever More – Ninth Lecture
18*	29.01.2002	And More and Ever More – Tenth Lecture
19	30.01.2002	And More and Ever More – Eleventh Lecture
20	04.02.2002	And More and Ever More – Twelfth Lecture
21	05.02.2002	And More and Ever More – Thirteenth Lecture
22	06.02.2002	And More and Ever More – Fourteenth Lecture
23	08.02.2002	And More and Ever More – Fifteenth Lecture

¹⁶⁵² The printed versions of the published lectures were collected for the author by a research assistant of the American Institute for Yemeni Studies (AIYS) in Sana’a in early 2014. Titles were translated by the author. All documents (with the exception of those which could not be retrieved, marked with an *) can be found in the Digital Annex A. The total number of pages of the available texts amounts to 980.

<i>Fourth Series – Miscellaneous</i>		
24	11.02.2002	“When We Directed to You a Few of the Jinn”
25	10.02.2002	Neither the Jews nor the Christians Will Be Satisfied with You
26	n.d.	The Meaning of Praising the Prophet Mohamed and His Family and Companions
27	09.02.2002	The Meaning of Glorifying God
28	08.03.2002	Terrorism and Peace
29	03.02.2002	The Dangers of Americas Entering into Yemen
30		The Responsibility of the <i>Ahl Al-Bayt</i>
31	09.03.2002	The Responsibility of Students of Religious Sciences
32	04.08.2002	Qur’anic Culture
33	21.12.2002	There are No Excuses for Mankind in Front of God
34	26.07.2002	My Life and Death for the Sake of God
35*	01.02.2002	In Shades of The Call for the Good Ethics (1)
36	02.02.2002	In Shades of The Call for the Good Ethics (2)
37	24.11.2002	A Remembrance of the Death of Imam Ali
38	20.02.2003	The Call of Guardianship
39	03.03.2002	The Demand of Guardianship
40	02.09.2002	“And Spend in the Way of God“
41	n.d.	“Those who have said ‘Our Lord is God and Then Remained on a Right Course“
42	16.03.2002	The Criticality of the Stage
43	2nd half February/ 1st half March 2002	Lessons Gained from Battle of Uhud
44	02.09.2002	Islam and the Culture of Following
45	15.11.2002	Verses of the Surah <i>Al Waqi’ah</i> (The Event)
46	29.08.2003	Verses of the Surah <i>Al Kahf</i> (The Cave)
47	1423h	“Establish Prayer for My Remembrance“
48	1422h (26.04.2001– 14.02.2002)	The Continuance and the Jaundice
49	n.d.	From Us and From Them
50	n.d.	“And If there Should Come to You Guidance from Me“
51	n.d.	The Faithful Unity
52	n.d.	“And Hasten to Forgiveness from Your Lord“
53	16.11.2002	The Slogan Is A Weapon and State
54		A Praise of the Qur’an (1)
55		A Praise of the Qur’an (2)
56	28.05.–03.06.2003	A Praise of the Qur’an (3)
57		A Praise of the Qur’an (4)
58		A Praise of the Qur’an (5)
59		A Praise of the Qur’an (6)
60		A Praise of the Qur’an (7)
<i>Fifth Series – School Lectures</i>		
61	14.12.2001	International Al-Quds (Jerusalem) Day

62	17.01.2002	A Scream ¹⁶⁵³ in the Face of the Arrogants
63	24.01.2002	“They Have Exchanged the Signs of God for a Small Price“
64	31.01.2002	The Faithful Identity
65	07.02.2002	To Follow the Children of Israel
66*	23.03.2002	Lectures Inspired by Ashoura

¹⁶⁵³‘*sarkha*’, alternative translation as ‘slogan’. For all future translations of the word ‘*sarkha*’ ‘slogan’ will be used for it refers to the Houthi slogan or ‘battle-cry’ (*sarkhat al-harb*). Here, however, ‘scream’ fits better.

Appendix B:

List of Hussein al-Houthi's transcribed and published lectures given during Ramadan 2003 (October 27 – November 23, 2003)¹⁶⁵⁴

1*	27.10.2003	3. Lecture	<i>Al Baqarah</i> (The Cow)	21–39
2	28.10.2003	4. Lecture	<i>Al Baqarah</i> (The Cow)	40–66
3	29.10.2003	5. Lecture	<i>Al Baqarah</i> (The Cow)	66–103
4	30.10.2003	6. Lecture	<i>Al Baqarah</i> (The Cow)	104–114
5	01.11.2003	7. Lecture	<i>Al Baqarah</i> (The Cow)	115–145
6	02.11.2003	8. Lecture	<i>Al Baqarah</i> (The Cow)	146–186
7	03.11.2003	9. Lecture	<i>Al Baqarah</i> (The Cow)	185–214
8	04.11.2003	10. Lecture	<i>Al Baqarah</i> (The Cow)	215–252
9	05.11.2003	11. Lecture	<i>Al Baqarah</i> (The Cow)	252–274
10	06.11.2003	12. Lecture	<i>Al Baqarah</i> (The Cow)/ <i>Ahl 'Imran</i> (The Family of 'Imran)	275 of <i>Baqarah</i> – 32 of <i>'Imran</i>
11	07.11.2003	13. Lecture	<i>Ahl 'Imran</i> (The Family of 'Imran)	33–91
12	08.11.2003	14. Lecture	<i>Ahl 'Imran</i> (The Family of 'Imran)	92–116
13	10.11.2003	16. Lecture	<i>Ahl 'Imran</i> (The Family of 'Imran)	161 (or 116?)–end
14	11.11.2003	17. Lecture	<i>An Nisa</i> (The Women)	1–42
15	12.11.2003	18. Lecture	<i>An Nisa</i> (The Women)	42–116
16	14.11.2003	20. Lecture	<i>An Nisa</i> (The Women)	135–end
17	15.11.2003	21. Lecture	<i>Al Ma'idah</i> (The Table Spread With Food)	1–26
18	16.11.2003	22. Lecture	<i>Al Ma'idah</i> (The Table Spread With Food)	27–57
19	17.11.2003	23. Lecture	<i>Al Ma'idah</i> (The Table Spread With Food)	55–end
20	18.11.2003	24. Lecture	<i>Al An'am</i> (The Cattle)	1–39
21	19.11.2003	25. Lecture	<i>Al An'am</i> (The Cattle)	39–102
22	20.11.2003	26. Lecture	<i>Al An'am</i> (The Cattle)	103–end
23	21.11.2003	27. Lecture	<i>Al A'raf</i> (The Heights)	1–137
24	22.11.2003	28. Lecture	<i>Al A'raf</i> (The Heights)	138–162
25	23.11.2003	29. Lecture	<i>Al A'raf</i> (The Heights)	163–end

¹⁶⁵⁴ See annotation for table above. The total number of pages of the available texts amounts to 687.

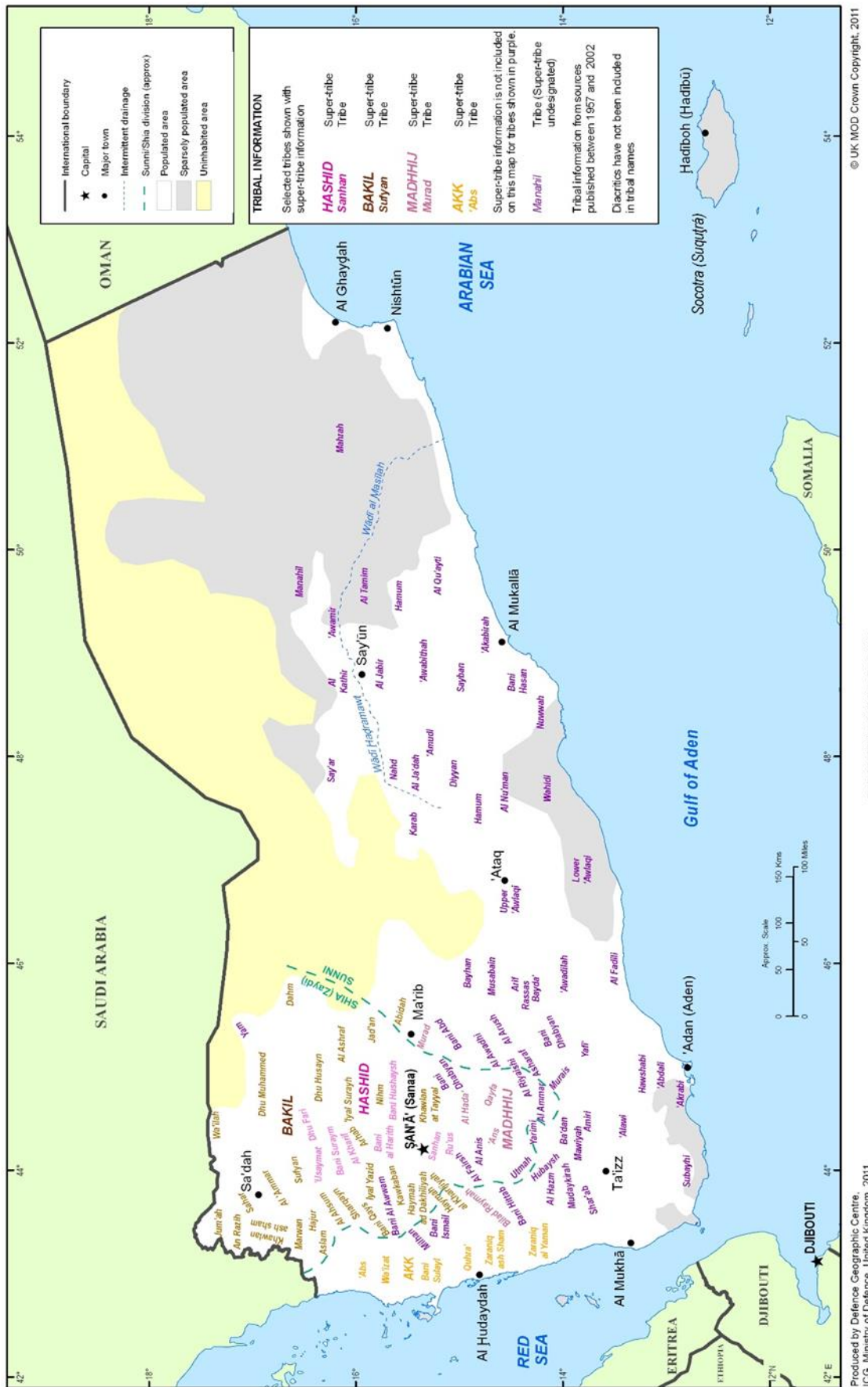
Appendix D:

Brief chronology of Yemen's modern history (colonial period – unification)¹⁶⁵⁵

Year/Period	Events
1839 (–1967)	British seize Aden and establish a colony
1872 (–1918)	Ottoman occupation of (Northern) Yemen
1904 (–1948)	Reign of Yahya Mohamed Hamid al-Din (North)
1905	Border between North and South established
1911	Treaty between Ottomans and Imam Yahya
1927–29	(Later Imam) Ahmad conquers the Tihama
1934	Treaty of Sana'a: Yahya and Britain agree on administrative frontier War between Saudi Arabia and Imam Yahya Treaty of Ta'if: Saudis and Yahya agree on a frontier; Yemen loses Najran and 'Asir
1948 (–1962)	Assassination of Imam Yahya Reign of Imam Ahmad
1962	Revolution in the North (September 26): end of Imamate Establishment of Yemen Arab Republic (YAR)
1962-1970	Civil War between royalists and republicans in the YAR
1963	Federation of South Arabia: Aden and several hinterland states united Beginning of anti-colonial fighting against British in Radfan (October 14)
1967	British leave Aden (November 29) Establishment of the People's Republic of South Yemen with Aden as capital (changed into People's Democratic Republic of Yemen [PDRY] in 1970)
1972	First war between YAR and PDRY
1974	Rise in oil prices with subsequent remittance boom
1978 (–2011)	Rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh (until 1990 YAR, then Republic of Yemen)
1979	Second war between YAR and PDRY
1983 + 1985	Balance of payment crises YAR
1986	Coup and civil war in PDRY
1990	Unification of YAR and PDRY into Republic of Yemen (ROY) (May 22) Beginning of Gulf War: Expulsion of Yemeni workers from Saudi Arabia

¹⁶⁵⁵ Based on: Dresch, *History*, 219–222; Caton, “History”, 31.

Appendix E: Map of Yemen's *qabila*



Produced by Defence Geographic Centre, ICG, Ministry of Defence, United Kingdom, 2011. © UK MOD Crown Copyright, 2011.

Mapping Yemen's Tribes (Martin Jerrett, Nicholas Hutchings and Craig Coates, Defense Geographic Centre)

Appendix F: Human Development Data for Yemen, 2014 UNDP; Yemen ranks 154 of 187¹⁶⁵⁶

Population total (millions)	24.41
Population growth (%) ¹⁶⁵⁷	2.72
Life expectancy at birth (years)	63.11
Under five mortality rate (per 1000 under five children)	60
Median age (years)	19.66
Urban (% of population)	33.48
Adult literacy rate (% ages 15+)	65.3
male (2011 est.)	81.1
female (2011 est.)	48.5
Mean years of schooling	2.51
Internet users (% of population)	17.45
Gender inequality index	0.733
GDP per capita (2011 PPP\$)	3,996.39
Gini coefficient	37.69
Unemployment rate (% aged 15+) ¹⁶⁵⁸	16.2
Youth unemployment (% of ages 15-24)	33.7
Child labor (% of ages 5-14)	22.7
Share of working poor, below US \$2/day	33.5
Population in multidimensional poverty (%) ¹⁶⁵⁹	37.46
Population near multidimensional poverty (%)	16.72
Population in severe multidimensional poverty (%)	18.38
Population living below US \$1.25/day	17.53
Consumer Price Index	227.65
Domestic food price level index	1.63
Price level volatility index	49.6
Population living on degraded land (%)	32.4
External debt stock (% of GDP)	20.48
International trade (% of GDP)	65.07
Foreign direct investment, net inflows (% of GDP)	-2.25
Private capital flows (% of GDP)	1.89
Net official development assistance received (% of GNI)	1.52
Remittances, inflows (% of GDP)	4.43
Total reserves minus gold (% of GDP)	5.41

¹⁶⁵⁶ Unless otherwise specified: United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2014, Yemen Country Profile*, accessed November 12, 2014, <http://www.hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/YEM>. The report is based on the data available on November 15, 2013.

¹⁶⁵⁷ CIA, *Factbook*, accessed November 12, 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html>.

¹⁶⁵⁸ This refers only to the official unemployment rate. Unofficial estimates commonly refer to 40% or more.

¹⁶⁵⁹ All numbers related to multidimensional poverty are based on 2006 data.

Appendix G: Oil and Gas Resources in Yemen

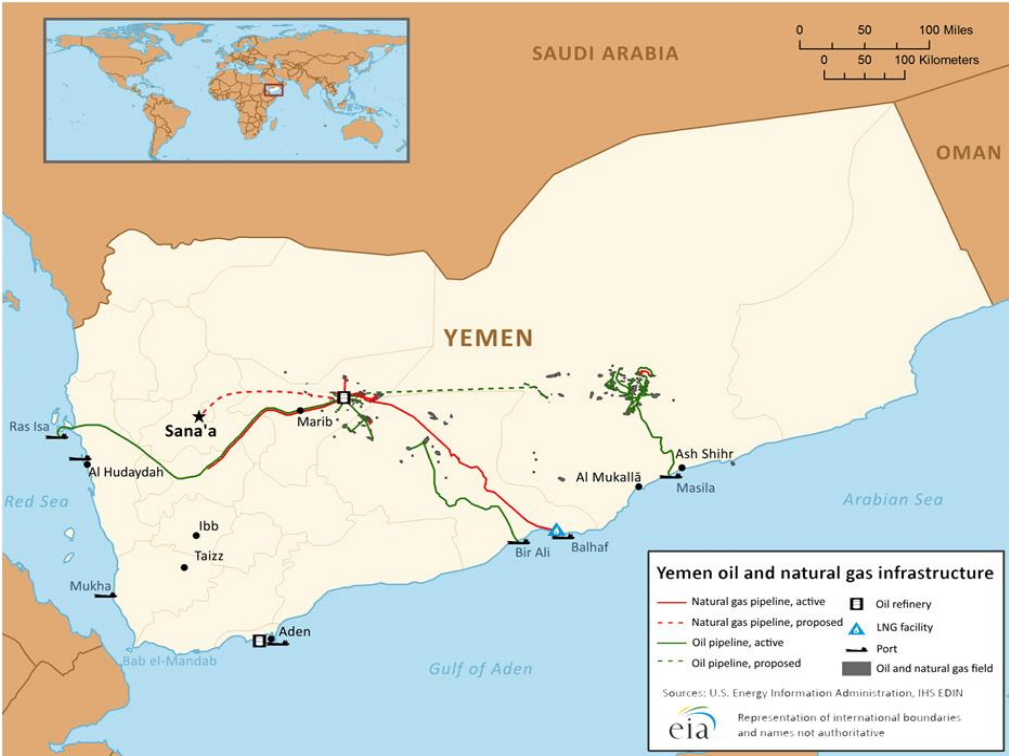


Figure 1: Yemen’s oil and gas infrastructure (2013)

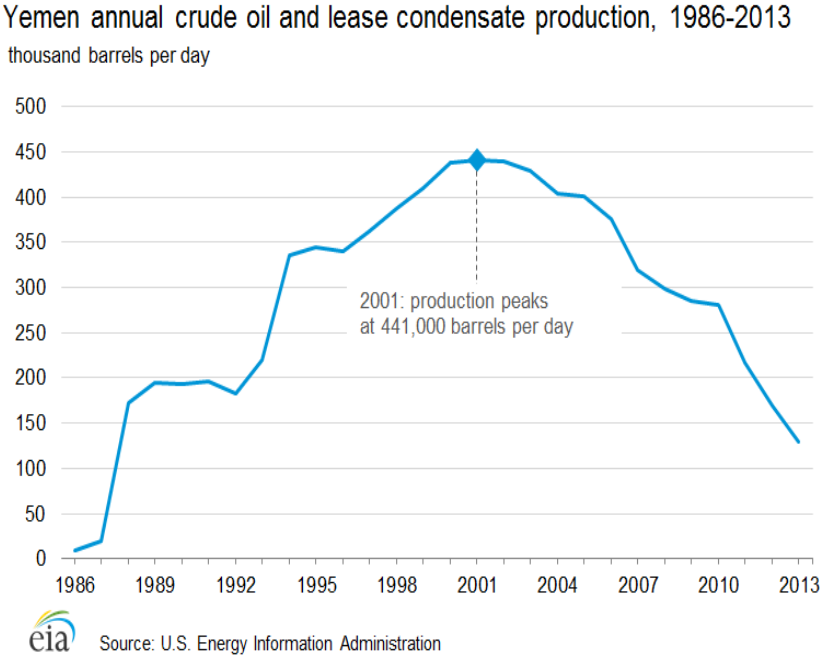


Figure 2: Yemen’s oil production (1986–2013); the decline is due to natural decline of the well in addition to frequent attacks on the infrastructure¹⁶⁶⁰

¹⁶⁶⁰ Saudi Arabia in comparison produced 9,156.64 thousand barrels/day in 2001, while peaking at more than 11,700.00 thousand barrels/day in 2012. According to the EIA, there were 15 attacks in 2012 only. For this and more details and numbers see: EIA, “Yemen’ Country Statistic”.

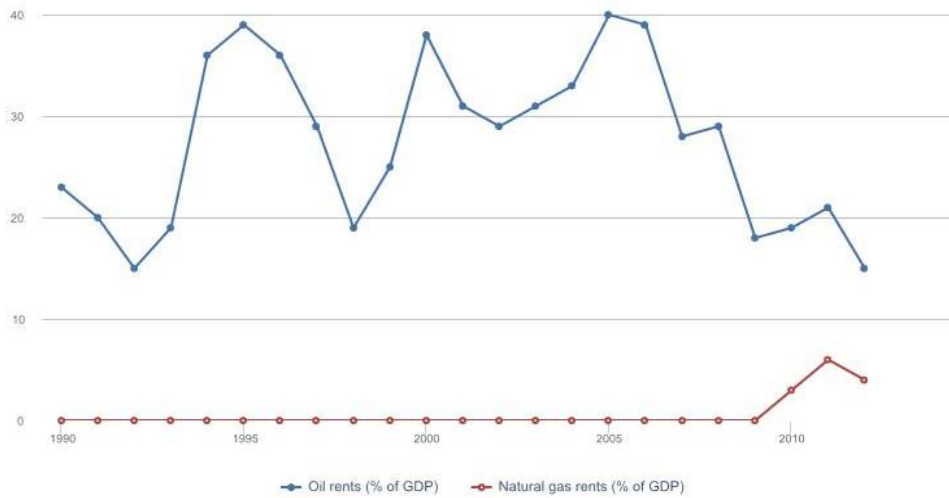


Figure 3: Oil and natural gas rents in % of GDP¹⁶⁶¹

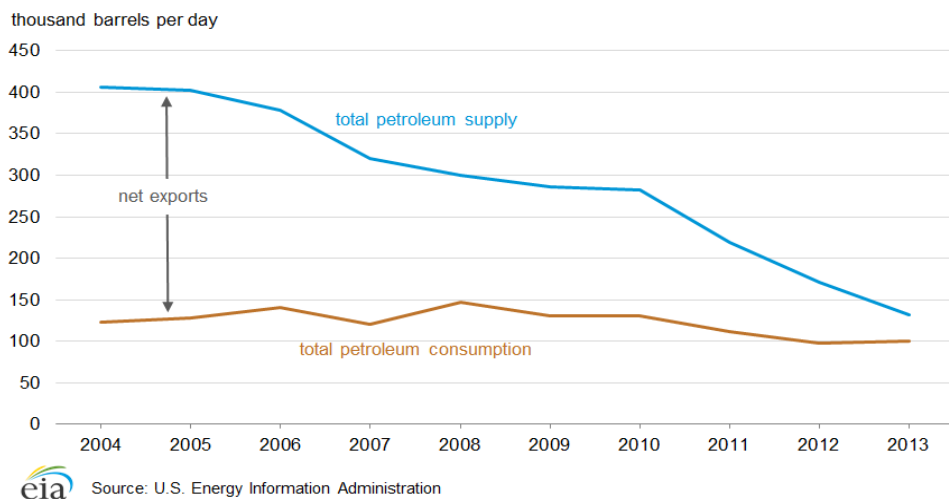
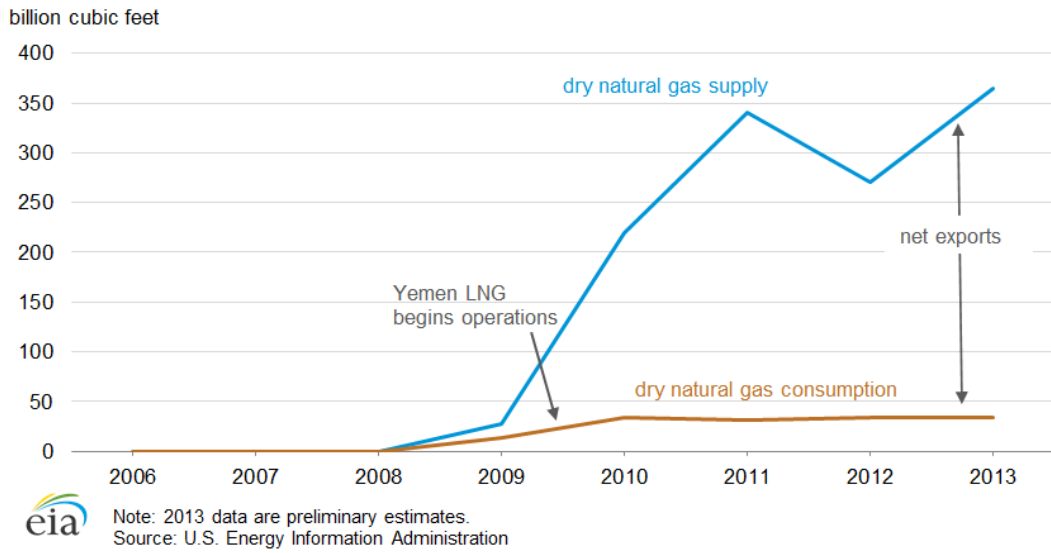


Figure 4: Yemen's consumption and production of petroleum (2004–2013)¹⁶⁶²

¹⁶⁶¹ The World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, accessed November 12, 2014, <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/views/reports/chart.aspx#>.

¹⁶⁶² EIA, "Yemen' Country Statistic".



Yemen's dry natural gas consumption and production (2006–2013)¹⁶⁶³

¹⁶⁶³ Ibid.

Appendix H:

A List of Southern Grievances

In regard to the grievances of Southerners, the Aden Live TV document provides a comprehensive 27-point list of all the “[h]ostile practices against the South from the Movement perspective”, i.e. on the consequences of the perceived occupation.

It contains:

1. Bloody invasion, aggression and Genocides; 2. Issuing fatwah against the people of the South; 3. Racism and Inferiority; 4. Military campaigns on cities and villages; 5. Oppressing peaceful events; 6. Arresting and kidnapping campaigns; 7. Physical liquidation; 8. Voiding the constitution of the unity state and adopting the laws of the Yemen Arab Republic; 9. Wiping the history and the political legacy of the southern people; 10. Promoting the term ‘the return of the branch to the origin and the daughter revolution to the mother revolution’;¹⁶⁶⁴ 11. Encouraging the culture of corruption (...); 12. Destroying the archaeological monuments (...); 13. Hiding the South archive and falsifying documents and distorting them; 14. Manipulating history, geography, culture and political realities in books, educational booklets, seminars and media means;¹⁶⁶⁵ 15. Destroying the Southern military and its security institutions, facilities, and financial bases; 16. Destroying the industrial, trading, hospitality, service institutions of the public and mixed sectors (...); 17. Giving ownership of governmental facilities, buildings, and real estate (...) to the northern influential persons and permitting them to seize land; 18. Looting the oil, gas, and metal wealth and giving the ownership (...) to the governing family and northern tribal and military figures (...); 19. Putting an end to the essential services for citizens such as health, educational, electricity and environmental services; 20. Looting the monetary reserve of the Southern currency ‘Dinar’ (...); 21. Closing the airline company ‘Al Yemda’ which was owned by the State of the South (...) This comes within the policy of wiping all what is southern; 22. Promoting demographic changing, impoverishing, and systematic starving and displacing; 23. Excluding southerners from public jobs or referring them forcibly to retirement; 24. Depriving them from affiliating to the military and security establishments as well as sovereign and diplomatic institutions and excluding them from obtaining scholarships abroad; 25. Weakening southerners, especially their representation by elections; 26. Marginalizing the capital of South, regarding its historical role in regional and international trades through impeding the projects of the port and Aden duty free (...) [and] cancelling most of the internal flights between Aden and the southern provinces; 27. Altering Aden from a political and trading city and capital having an international recognized stature to an unknown big village.¹⁶⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶⁴ This phrasing and the subordinate position allocated to the South therein has caused intensive defensive demeanor among Southerners, as becomes clear in another excerpt which refers to the naming of the unified state as ‘Yemen Arab Republic’: “This name strengthens the racist ideology of the leaders of the northern part of the country and implies that the south (the branch) returned back to the north (the origin) based on incorrect historical claims that Yemen was one country.” Alsaqqaf, “Internal Dynamics”, 1.

¹⁶⁶⁵ See also: “Roots of the Southern Issue. Presentation of the Conference of the People of the South”, digital copy received from a leading Hirak activist, June 2014.

¹⁶⁶⁶ “Introduction to the Southern Movement”. It furthermore speaks of the “[a]rrogance of Sana’a regime in the crisis and was as seen by the Southern Movement.”

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