

AL-JABAL AL-AKHḌAR REVOLUTION, 1955-1965:
REDISCOVERING OMAN S ANTI-COLONIAL RESISTANCE

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation provides the first in-depth study in English of the al-Jabal al-Akhdar Revolution of Oman of 1955-1965. This revolution unfolded in the midst of an international wave of anti-colonial resistance as colonial strategies and priorities fundamentally shifted in the Arab Gulf region. As such, it presents a critical moment to understand the histories of anti-colonial revolutionary thought and the nature of colonial control . The revolution emerged as colonial powers increasingly transitioned to dominate oil production in the region. Thus, it embodies a moment of transition for both colonial power and anti-colonial resistance. Yet, the history of this revolution has been hidden beneath layers of colonial narrativization which seeks to legitimize the colonial regime which continues today as the al-Jabal al-Akhdar Revolution marks the beginning of the consolidation and struggle against regime power in the country. This study thus serves as an important inquiry into both the history of twentieth century state formation in Oman and the nature of colonial power in the latter half of the twentieth century. This dissertation is rooted in a social historical understanding of Omani society and builds its findings off a comprehensive analysis of the various social forms that brought about the revolution. The history of the revolution itself is informed by dozens of interviews collected from witnesses and participants of the revolution and thus also serves as an important documentary record of this historical moment. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that the al-Jabal al-Akhdar Revolution marks a critical moment in the continuous revolutionary history of modern Oman that extends from the first arrival of colonial forces to the present.

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INTRODUCTION

" British Empire armies came to invade us in the mountain... We had no choice but to resist and defend our land against the Empire." ¹

Shortly before his death in 2022, Sheikh Said bin Marhoon bin Sallam al-Tobi (Ibn Sallam) recounted his time as a revolutionary leader in the al-Jabal al-Akhḍar (The Green Mountain) Revolution of 1955 to 1959 which unfolded in the northeast interior of Oman at only 19 years old, Ibn Sallam found no alternative but to join in building a native resistance to the British Empire, an entity armed to the teeth with every manifestation of power and military superiority, and possessing overwhelming advantage across economic, political, and diplomatic spheres, honed over the course of two world wars.

Throughout the late colonial period, British colonial authorities obstinately refused to answer a question they knew all too well, and that they had posed in their own internal reports:

Are the people of Oman entitled to have a ruler of their own choosing, as it has been their tradition for centuries, or is it open to Britain to impose a ruler against the will of the people?"² In reality, Omanis resisted the rule of the Al Busaid sultans, whose authority was sustained through collaboration with one of the most pernicious forms of colonial domination: mercenary colonialism.³ This mode of imperial control functioned through a parasitic alliance in which the

¹ Interview with Shaykh Sa'īd bin Marḥūn bin Sallām al-Ṭūbī, a leading revolutionary in al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, conducted shortly before his death, 9 March 2022.

² FO 371/126892, "Telegram from Political Agency, Muscat," 1957, Foreign Office Records, The National Archives, Kew, via Arabian Gulf Digital Archive (AGDA), accessed 19 May 2024, <https://www.agda.ae/en/catalogue/tna/fo/371/126892/n/178>

³ John Newsinger, "The Unknown Wars: Oman and Dhofar," in *British Counterinsurgency*, ed. John Hughes-Wilson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

Fred Halliday, *Mercenaries: Counter-Insurgency in the Gulf* (Nottingham: Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation for Spokesman Books, 1977).

local ruling elite subcontracted the tasks of governance and coercion to foreign mercenaries—agents who extracted wealth, administered repression,⁴ and mediated between the colonial metropole and the subject population without offering even the semblance of public service or accountability.⁵ The mercenary colonialism syndrome” constituted the most debilitating affliction to grip Oman during the modern era, persisting from the aftermath of the revolt of Azzan bin Qais (1867–1871) until the end of the reign of Sultan Said bin Taymur. It is no coincidence that this entire period was punctuated by successive popular uprisings, each articulating a refusal to accept imposed rule and a yearning for self-determination.

The Green Mountain Revolution marks just one period in an over century-long history of anti-colonial revolution in Oman. A history that has been buried under decades of colonial and orientalist knowledge production. This dissertation seeks to trace the contours of a prolonged revolutionary condition—one whose historical sequence has been fractured by erasure, marginalization, and the epistemic dominance of colonial sources aligned with the British Empire and its local agents. It aspires to examine the principal transformations of this revolutionary phenomenon within the broader context of re-narrating Arab revolutions and anti-colonial

⁴ Sultan Sa'id bin Taymur surrounded himself with an intricate network of foreign mercenaries who performed various duties and functions: military and security roles within the Sultan's forces—most of whom were Baloch, Indians, and Pakistanis—or monopolistic commercial functions, such as the category of Hindu merchants known as the Baniyan, or political and military duties carried out by his British advisors. These advisors were either contracted directly by him or were seconded to him by the British Empire to safeguard its interests in Oman, the Gulf region, and the Arabian Peninsula. For further insight into this complex network of mercenaries, see: Bertram Thomas, *The Arab Rule under the Al Bu Sa'id Dynasty of Oman, 1741-1937* (London: H. Milford, 1938); David Smiley and Peter Kemp, *Arabian Assignment* (London: Leo Cooper, 1975); Neil MacLeod Innes, *Minister in Oman: Memoirs of Oman in the 1950s (Arabia Past & Present)* (London: The Oleander Press, 1987); John C. Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*; Neil MacLeod Innes, *Arabia's Frontiers: The Story of Britain's Boundary Drawing in the Desert* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1991); Uzi Rabi, *The Emergence of States in a Tribal Society: Oman under Sa'id bin Taymur, 1932–1970* (Brighton, England: Sussex Academic Press, 2006); Miqdam al-Fayyad, "The Indian Community and the Ibadi Imamate in Oman: A Study of their Interrelationship in Selected Examples from Omani History between 1868–1920," *Arabian Gulf Journal* 41, no. 1-2 (2013).

⁵ Fred Halliday, *Mercenaries*.

struggles across the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula. Moreover, it foregrounds an alternative mode of liberation and resistance—one that unfolds not only on battlefields and in armed confrontations, but also on the pages of historical narratives.

With the nascent dawn of the modern era, Oman emerged as a pivotal commercial and maritime power. Its influence extended from the Indian Ocean to the Horn of Africa, encompassing various seas such as the Arabian/Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea, experiencing phases of geographical expansion and contraction across the ages. With the advent of the colonial epoch, early European imperial powers, namely Portugal, the Netherlands, and Britain, sought to curb and diminish Omani expansion. By the mid-seventeenth century, the Omani people were unified and elected an Imam, Nasir bin Murshid al-Ya'arubi, on the condition of expelling the Portuguese occupiers, whose domination over Oman had persisted for more than 120 years. The election of this Imam revived a system of governance dating back centuries based on the Imamate, an electoral system wherein an Ibadi Imam is chosen as ruler. Ibadism is one of the Islamic schools of thought that advocates a moderate approach in governance and politics, emphasizing the principles of consultation (*shūra*) and justice. It has shaped Oman's political and spiritual identity for centuries.

However, by the late nineteenth century, the British Empire began to intervene directly in Oman's local system of governance under the pretext of protecting the interests of its subjects and agents of the East India Company. This commenced with the first treaty between Britain and the Sultan of Muscat, Sultan bin Ahmad al-Busa'idi, in 1798. This treaty served as the gateway through which the British Empire proceeded to expand its influence in Oman and the Arabian Gulf broadly, by establishing a network of treaties aimed at monopolizing port activities and maritime trade routes between India and Europe. Such an endeavour necessitated the protection and support of an

absolute ruling system entirely subservient to British influence, which was embodied by the rulers of Muscat from the al-Busa'idi family.

With the expansion and extension of British imperial influence across the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Gulf coast, specifically in Muscat, Omani political movements emerged that resisted the British influence and their allies, the rulers of Muscat. The al-Hajar Mountains, which separate the Omani coast from the interior regions, formed a natural barrier that enabled the Omani resistance to rally supporters and fortify themselves when confronting the advanced weaponry of the Empire. The Omani revolution persisted in extended phases against Britain and its political influence in Muscat, from 1868 to 1871, then between 1913 and 1920, until the Treaty of Seeb was signed in 1920.

The colonial geopolitical shift in the early twentieth century, driven by the search for oil, reshaped regional balances. This was particularly true after exploratory campaigns under the supervision of the British Empire confirmed that Omani territories contained significant petroleum resources. This factor became a central point of international competition from the mid-twentieth century onward and redefined the relationship between Oman's interior and its coastal regions. Following the death of the Imam in 1954, the Sultanate made intensive efforts to consolidate its control over the interior regions. Since the post-World Wars period, Britain and its ally in Muscat made a clear decision to subjugate all Omani territories and tighten their control by reshaping a new map of social, political, and economic alliances based on loyalty and oil.



Figure 1: Extent of the Omani empire during 17th – 19th century AD.

Source: Shergold, Peter. *The War in Northern Oman: Muscat and the Sultanate of Oman, 1954–1962*. London: Helion & Company Limited, 2021. 8.

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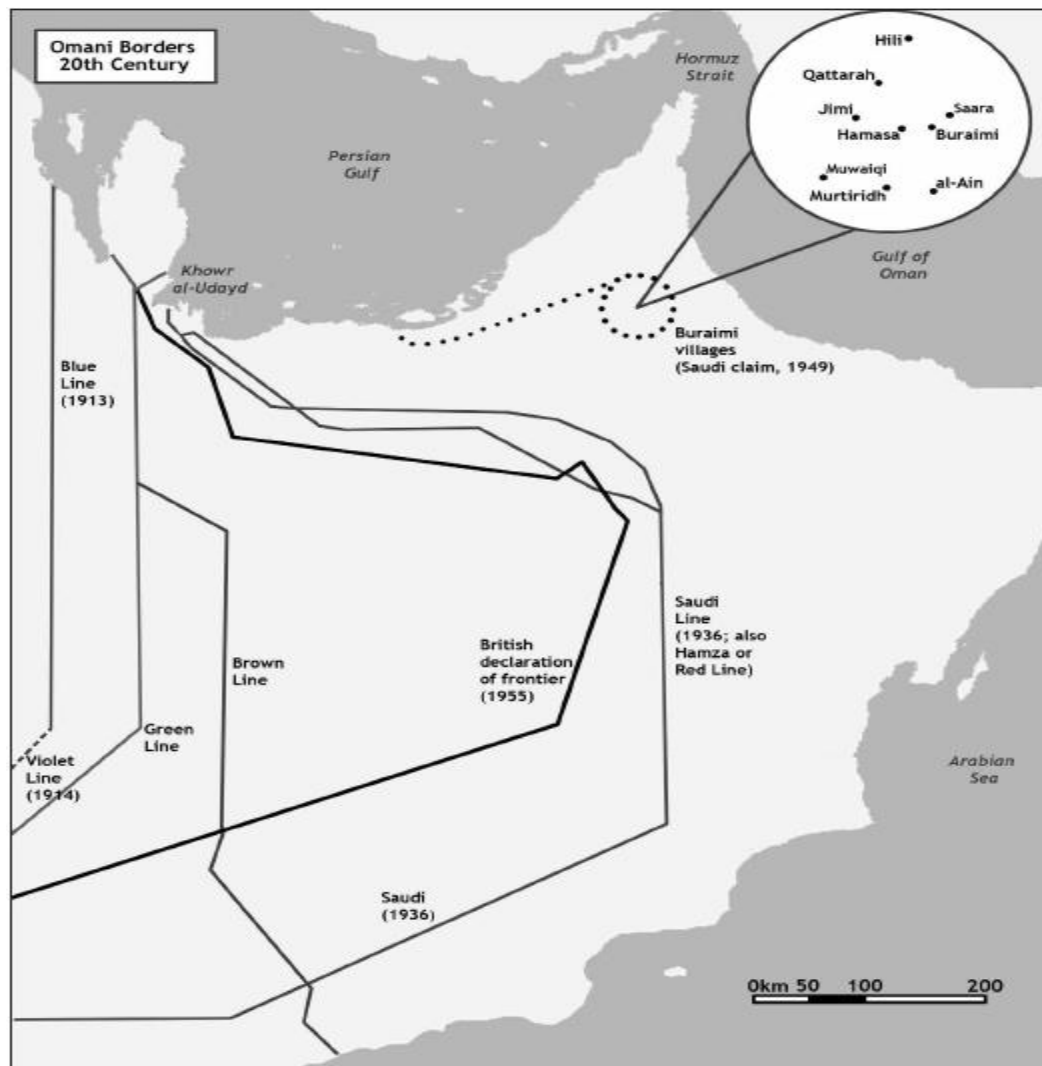


Figure 2: This map reveals the instrumental role that colonial powers assumed in the demarcation and curtailment of Omani territorial limits, a process guided by their oil-related agendas.

Source: Shergold, Peter. *The War in Northern Oman: Muscat and the Sultanate of Oman, 1954–1962*. London: Helion & Company Limited, 2021. 9.

The al-Jabal al-Akhdar Revolution represents a compelling case study of the practices employed by the British Empire to efface, nullify, or, at the very least, distort the early national liberation movements that emerged in the initial post-World War II period. The al-Jabal al-Akhdar

Revolution lies at the crossroads of shifting imperial strategies where Britain's maritime interests are transformed by the dawn of the oil age. The revolt also comes in the global political postwar moment where a wounded by still powerful Britain scrambled to entrench its colonial hold and shore up the flagging pound. Its postwar imperial push was resisted by a network of local and regional revolutionary currents in direct conversation with an internationalist language of liberation. As a result of this multi-layered context, the manufactured historical amnesia surrounding the al-Jabal al-Akhdar Revolution stands as a neocolonial maneuver in and of itself. To begin to understand the al-Jabal al-Akhdar Revolution, this multi-layered political context must be methodically analyzed.

At a local level, the resistance championed the revival of the Ibadi Imamate, a system where the Imam—the head of state—is elected, in direct opposition to an absolute, hereditary Sultanate regime that was, in turn, unequivocally supported by Britain. The British were haunted by the specter of any Omani national awakening emanating from national components, which threatened their hegemony over Oman, a country of paramount strategic importance to their multifaceted and evolving colonial and imperial interests over centuries. In the nineteenth century, these interests centered on international maritime routes. By the mid-twentieth century, colonial interests shifted to oil and the control over it that dictated policy in London and among its new allies.⁶

At the regional level, the Omani revolutionaries swiftly imbued their struggle with an Arab and anti-colonial nationalist dimension by aligning themselves with President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Nasser was a leader within the revolutionary nationalist Free Officer movement that ended British control over Egypt. Nasser emerged as a symbol of anti-colonial Arab nationalism that

⁶ Tore T. Petersen, "Anglo-American Rivalry in the Middle East: The Struggle for the Buraimi Oasis, 1952–1957," *The International History Review* 14, no. 1 (1992): 71–91.

shaped the entire region. Nasser's popular image and commitment to anti-colonial nationalism made him a primary antagonist of British imperialism and the most significant challenge to its interests in the Arab world.⁷

Internationally, the al-Jabal al-Akhdar Revolution represented a period of vibrant anti-colonial internationalism that embodied the spirit of Bandung and the reality of global solidarity among the nations and peoples of the Third World in their collective endeavor to liberate themselves from colonialism and imperialism and to secure their right to self-determination.

Within this context, the al-Jabal al-Akhdar Revolution can be regarded as one of the most significant, yet overlooked, silenced, and forcibly marginalized examples in Omani history specifically, in Arab history more broadly, and within the wider anti-colonial narrative. To date, no monograph-length studies of the revolution have been published in English. This study attempts to be the first comprehensive examination of it in the English language, while its primary aim is to provoke and pose profound questions more so than any previous attempts written in any language.

In pursuit of this historical reconstruction, the present study is guided by four central questions that frame its analytical trajectory. Firstly, was the British presence in Oman an act of colonial domination or a strategic partnership? Secondly, should the events between 1955 and 1965 be understood as a revolution or a tribal insurrection? Thirdly, were these developments shaped primarily by global imperial rivalries or by internal conflicts, or by the interplay between both? Fourthly, and finally, has the Green Mountain Revolution been subjected to systematic erasure or mere neglect?

⁷ Robert McNamara, *Britain, Nasser and the Balance of Power in the Middle East, 1952-1967: From the Egyptian Revolution to the Six Day War* (London: Frank Cass, 2003).

The Green Mountain Revolution in Scholarly Literature

*" British and mercenaries from all over the world came to occupy the mountain. Should we welcome them without resistance?"*⁸

This anti-despotic reform tone directed at the British Empire, used by the young Omani revolutionary Ibn Sallam, was not an anomaly in the context of modern Omani history. Rather, it was part of a continuous Omani tradition of resistance, stretching from the uprising of Azzan bin Qais (1867–1871) to the Dhofar Revolution of 1965-1976 —a near-century of struggle against colonialism and imperialism. The real surprise lies not in the presence of such resistance, but in the lack of sufficient scholarly attention to its character, evolution, and complexity.

There has been a systematic underestimation—or at times, outright neglect—of this deeply rooted and sustained resistance. Much of the colonial literature, and even a significant portion of academic studies written in English, tends to reproduce stark dualisms in the narration of history: the defeated versus the victorious, the backward versus the civilized, the subject versus the imperial center. This has resulted in a glaring omission of the Omani voice, particularly in explaining the reasons for both the victories and defeats of its resistance movements.

This project works in conversation with a growing body of work committed to liberating the historical record from the grip of colonial and official state historiographies—frameworks that have long enshrined the narratives of the victors. These dominant accounts have not only ignored or dismissed the voices of the defeated but have actively demonized them, obscuring the depth and

⁸ Interview No. 1 with a revolutionary from Jabal al-Akhdar, Saiq village, December 16, 2023.

extent of Oman's resistance to colonial occupation. That resistance was systematically recast under the guise of imperial friendship, partnership, and cooperation.⁹

This dissertation also falls into studies of colonialism in the oil age. Oil was a pivotal driver for Britain to extend its hegemony over the entire Omani territory. The chapters of this study will elucidate the extent to which the Empire mobilized its full colonial capabilities to monopolize Oman's oil reserves for its own benefit for as long as possible.¹⁰ To achieve this imperial objective, the two most influential blocs in Omani history were systematically co-opted: the scholars of the Ibadi school and tribal leaders and sheikhs. Britain and its ally, Said bin Taimur, spared no means to dismantle this structure—whether through direct bribery, instigating tribal conflicts, or employing the tactic of territorial division and creating new entities. For the complete protection of the British oil company and to guarantee oil revenues for the imperial treasury. When scholars and

⁹ This scholarly contribution began with a critical examination of the diverse methods employed by British colonial intervention to undermine popular sovereignty and entrench repressive regimes across the colonized world. It highlights the total wars fought, sponsored, and orchestrated by Britain in Oman since the mid-twentieth century. Notable examples of anti-colonial scholarship include Abdel Razzaq Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution: Republicans, Sultans and Empires in Oman, 1965–1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Marcela W. Suárez, *After the Revolution: The Political Journey of Two Omani Brothers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Marc Valeri, *Oman: Politics and Society in the Qaboos State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Alice Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution: Everyday Counterhistories in Southern Oman* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2023). These contributions stand in direct opposition to the colonial narratives that long dominated the historiography of modern Oman. Such colonial literature includes J. E. Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State* (London: Croom Helm, 1978) and *Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy* (London: Saqi Books, 2007); Lawrence G. Potter, "British Foreign Policy towards the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, 1954–1959" (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 1991); and Joseph A. Kechichian, *Oman and the World: The Emergence of an Independent Foreign Policy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1995).

¹⁰ An extensive body of literature has examined the conflict over oil in Oman and the Arabian Peninsula, emphasizing the centrality of oil in shaping new borders and political entities backed by Britain and the United States. These studies also trace the contours of Anglo-American rivalry in the region within the broader context of global imperialism. For example, see Bernard Burrows, *Footnotes in the Sand: The Gulf in Transition, 1953–1958* (Salisbury: Michael Russell, 1990); Nathan J. Citino, *From Arab Nationalism to OPEC: Eisenhower, King Sa'ud, and the Making of U.S.–Saudi Relations*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Frauke Heard-Bey, *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates: A Society in Transition*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1996); Edward Henderson, *Strange Eventful History: Memoirs of Earlier Days in the UAE and Oman* (London: Quartet Books, 1988); John Barrett Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf, and the West* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980); John Barrett Kelly, *Eastern Arabian Frontiers* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964); and 'Abd al-Razzāq Takritī, "Colonial Coups and the War on Popular Sovereignty," *The American Historical Review* 124, no. 3 (June 2019): 878–909.

leaders sought to reclaim the people's rights and forge Arab and international solidarity through a national liberation revolution in the Green Mountain, Britain, in response, marshaled all its resources and allies worldwide, waging a comprehensive counter-revolutionary campaign on military, political, and diplomatic fronts.¹¹

The al-Jabal al-Akhḍar Revolution can also be taken as a paradigmatic episode in the historical repertoire of anti-colonial resistance. Yet before delving into the revolution itself or the direct confrontation between Omani revolutionaries and what Abdel Razzaq Takriti terms the “Anglo-Sultanīc order” the study returns analytically to the deeper historical, cultural, and religious roots of resistance.¹² It highlights the economic, political, and social conditions that impelled Omanis to reject all forms of foreign domination. Variables such as geography, religion, and the Ibādī doctrinal tradition were instrumental in sustaining a uniquely Omani revolutionary consciousness throughout this period. The uniqueness of this revolutionary consciousness was profoundly linked to and influenced by the revolutionary condition of the al-Jabal al-Akhḍar Revolution, within the context of broader global trends.¹³ This thesis aims to uncover the layers of complexity, contradiction, and contestation that shaped the resistance movement in Oman. It does

¹¹ Numerous scholarly works from regional researchers have debated the contentious issue of oil, its ramifications, and Britain's role in demarcating the borders of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula states within the framework of what 'Umar al-Shehābī terms “oil frontiers.” See 'Umar al-Shehābī, *Exporting Wealth and Alienating People: A History of Productive Dislocation in the Arab Gulf States* (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 2018). For example, see 'Alī Khalīfah al-Kuwayrī, *Development for Loss, or the Loss of Development Opportunities? The Outcome of Oil-Related Changes in the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries* (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1996); Muḥammad Ghānim al-Rumayḥī, *The Gulf Is Not Oil: A Study in the Dilemmas of Development and Unity* (Kuwait: Kāzīmāh Publishing, 1983); and 'Umar Hishām al-Shihābī, *Exporting Wealth and Alienating People: A History of the Productive Dislocation in the Arab Gulf States* (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 2018).

¹² Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*, 4.

¹³ The uniqueness of this revolutionary consciousness was linked to, and influenced by, a movement of Arab and international solidarity that supported the Omani revolution in al-Jabal al-Akhḍar. Fathī al-Dīb argues that this revolution was bolstered because it occurred at a moment when the three continents were conscious of the importance of liberating themselves from the yoke of colonial powers and the monopolies of global imperialism. See Fathī al-Dīb, *'Abd al-Nāṣir wa-Taḥrīr al-Mashriq al-'Arabī: Shahādat Fathī al-Dīb* (Cairo: Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Istrāṭījīyah wa-al-Siyāsīyah bi-l-Ahrām, 2000), 204–23.

not treat the resistance as a monolithic or unblemished force, nor does it romanticize it. Rather, it approaches the Green Mountain revolution as a site for critical reflection, historical evaluation, and the extraction of lessons. The aspiration of this work is not triumphalist; it is, at heart, a re-reading of the revolution through interpretive lenses grounded in the lived experiences of ordinary people—their hardships, their journeys, and the ways they inscribed history with their blood, their veins, and their long years of exile.

Sources

This study relies first and foremost on Omani primary sources, followed by British colonial records. Notably, Omani materials—particularly oral testimonies and archival documents—have long suffered from marginalization, even by Omani and Arab scholars, due to the pervasive influence of Western academia on the field of Gulf and Arabian Peninsula studies, especially regarding the historiography of anti-colonial revolutions.¹⁴ Omani archival materials are not available in national archives in the Arab Gulf states and are difficult to obtain from individuals. This dissertation thus draws some individually-obtained primary source material into the scholarly inquiry of the revolution.

This thesis draws primarily on Omani oral histories, local archival material, and Arab regional sources, engaging British colonial records only subsequently, and critically. The empirical foundation of this work consists of nearly fifty original interviews with a range of sources, including participants, eyewitnesses, and academic specialists on the revolution, most of which are previously unpublished in scholarly work. The aim is not to dismiss colonial sources, but rather to interrogate and juxtapose them with alternative narratives. Special emphasis is placed on oral

¹⁴ An unwarranted caution characterizes contemporary Omani scholarship produced within Omani universities when addressing themes related to the Omani–British relationship. See, for example, Jāsim al-Baḥrānī, “al-Azmāt al-Siyāsiyyah wa-al-Mawāqif al-‘Arabiyyah minhā (1952–1975)” [*Political Crises and Arab Stances Towards Them (1952–1975)*] (MA thesis, Sultan Qaboos University, Department of History, 2018).

historiography, including firsthand testimonies gathered by the researcher from surviving veterans of the Green Mountain uprising. The dissertation contends that these voices—scarce, fragile, and historically suppressed—constitute a vital corrective to decades of omission and distortion. Their narratives are the long-overdue contribution that must be brought to the fore, in the face of seventy years of deliberate marginalization and archival silencing.

Following the defeat of the Green Mountain Revolution in 1959 and the exile of its leadership, few sources dared to document the uprising from the perspective of Omanis themselves—particularly from the vantage point of those directly involved in the resistance. Access to such sources remained extremely limited for decades. This study has made a concerted effort to locate, analyze, and critically engage with these rare materials, treating them as foundational texts to be contrasted with the vast colonial archive preserved in the UK's National Archives, the British Library, and private collections housed by imperial military and political elites at institutions such as Oxford University, King's College London, the London School of Economics, and the University of Exeter.

Among the principal sources used is the book *Nahdat al-A'yan bi-Hurriyat Ahl 'Uman* (*The Awakening of Notables in the Liberation of the People of Oman*) by Shaykh al-Shayba Muhammad bin 'Abd Allah al-Salimi, first published in Cairo in 1961.¹⁵ Al-Shayba al-Salimi was a pivotal figure in the Imamate movement. He was the son of Shaykh Nur al-Din al-Salimi, the ideological architect of the first Ibadi Imamate of the twentieth century. He inherited not only his father's intellectual legacy and commitment to the principle of *shūra* (consultation) and the elective

¹⁵ Muḥammad bin 'Abd Allāh (Abū Bashīr) al-Sālimī, *Nahdat al-A'yan bi-Hurriyat 'Umān* (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1961).

nature of the imamate, but also completed his father's foundational historical tome *Tuhfat al-A'yan*. In the realm of armed struggle, al-Salimi played a leading role in the early phases of the revolution, including the 1957 AD uprising of Ibrahim bin 'Isa, which will be examined in detail in Chapters 3 and 4. In exile, he was instrumental in founding and administering the overseas offices of the Imamate in Dammam and Kuwait, serving as a contemporary witness to the political shifts within the leadership and the moral crises that defined its later stages.

Another category of primary source employed in this study includes a number of pamphlets, bulletins, and publications produced by the Omani Imamate offices in Dammam, Cairo, Kuwait, Baghdad, Damascus, and Beirut—most of which were exceedingly difficult to access. The first of these was issued in Cairo in 1956: a small booklet addressed to “The Free Omani,” calling upon the people to resist colonial domination. Its tone was incendiary:

Do you know what [colonialism s] aims are. They are to drain your precious blood above all else—until you become lifeless, broken, without dignity, humiliated and powerless. A slave ruled by a vile and base overseer whose only concern is to enslave you, degrade your honor, violate your dignity, and destroy your independence.”¹⁶

In addition to the pamphlets and communiqués issued by the Imamate's exiled offices, the study draws upon several periodicals that served as vehicles of political messaging and ideological formation. Chief among them is the journal *Sawt 'Uman (Voice of Oman)*, initially founded by members of the Hizb al-Ittihad al-'Umani (Omani Union Party) and later adopted as the principal organ of the Imamate office in Cairo beginning in 1958. Other notable publications include the

¹⁶ Oman Imamate Office, *Oman Imamate Office Publications*, no. 8 (Egypt: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī Press, 1956), 3. Translation by the author.

Nizwa Bulletin, issued by the Omani Representation Office in Beirut between 1963 and 1970, and *al-Kifah (The Struggle)*, published by the Office of the State of Oman in Damascus from 1967 to 1970.

Despite mobilizational purpose and tone, these periodicals constitute an invaluable corpus of raw material for the study of the revolution's discourse and the inconsistent political line adopted by its leadership—torn between religious traditionalism and instrumental Arab nationalism. Accessing these publications from within Oman posed a significant challenge due to the risk of state surveillance and legal prosecution for possession of such materials. For this study, dispersed copies over the course of multiple fieldwork trips and archival visits were obtained, most notably at the American University of Beirut and the American University in Cairo.

Equally vital were privately held collections that the researcher was granted access to. These include the personal archives of Ms. Linda Sadaka (Beirut, Lebanon), Dr. Muhammad Jamal Barut (Aleppo, Syria), Dr. Talal al-Rashoud (Kuwait), Mr. Ahmad bin 'Abd Allah al-Falahi (Muscat, Oman), Mr. 'Ali bin Muhammad bin Nasir al-Riyami (Green Mountain, Oman), and Shaykh 'Abd Allah bin Salih al-Fahdi (Green Mountain, Oman).

During research conducted at the British Library, the study also unearthed a rare, unpublished manuscript largely unknown to scholars of the Green Mountain Revolution. This document, titled *Silk al-Jumān fī Akhbār al-Jabal al-Akhdar wa Tarīkh Ahl 'Uman* (*English translation: The String of Pearls: On the History of the Green Mountain and the People of Oman*),¹⁷ was authored by Mansur bin Hamdan al-Jabiri.¹⁸ The manuscript—comprising

¹⁷ Title translated by the author.

¹⁸ As Wilkinson notes, "*Silk al-Jumān fī akhbār al-Jabal al-Akhdar wa-tārīkh ahl 'Umān* was compiled on the initiative of Captain Eric Rae (who was wālī of al-Sayq after the Sultan's forces took the mountain in 1959), with

approximately fifty handwritten pages—is dated 1959, the year the Green Mountain - al-Jabal al-Akhḍar Revolution formally ended.¹⁹

Al-Jabiri relied on well-known Omani historical chronicles and supplemented them with personal eyewitness accounts of the war and its devastation. However, this source must be approached with caution: it exhibits sweeping generalizations, unequivocal judgments, and evident bias in favor of the recently victorious regime. It extols Sultan Saʿid bin Taymur and his half-brother Tariq, while omitting or distorting alternative perspectives. The preface to the manuscript states explicitly that it was commissioned by the British military governor, who had been entrusted by the colonial administration with overseeing the Green Mountain region and suppressing any revival of revolutionary sentiment.²⁰

Despite its ideological leanings, the document remains a significant primary source. It captures the internal ambivalence many Omanis felt toward the revolution and the occupation. Furthermore, it sheds light—often in surprising and revealing ways—on the early contradictions that plagued the revolutionary movement: the fragility of centralized leadership, the poor training and equipment of the Omani Liberation Army (Jaysh al-Tahrir al-Umani), and the stark asymmetry between the revolutionary forces and the overwhelming might of the British Empire, which waged a campaign of total war against this small and isolated corner of the world.

the help of various Arabs of the region, and presumably set down by its attributed author, Maṣṣūr b. Ḥamdān al-Jābirī. The original appears to be in the British Library. As might be expected, it is highly ingenuous, and tends to present an apologia for the conduct of the Banī Riyām. But it contains extremely interesting material and, used with care, provides useful background to the situation at the time of Ghālib's election." See Wilkinson, *Imamate Tradition*, 362.

¹⁹ Maṣṣūr ibn Ḥamdān al-Jābirī, *Silk al-Jumān fī akhbār al-Jabal al-Akhḍar wa-tārīkh ahl 'Umān* (Arabic manuscript, British Library, Or. 13840, 1959).

²⁰ al-Jābirī, *Silk al-Jumān*

This study also draws upon a selection of scattered articles and press coverage from Gulf newspapers—particularly those published in Kuwait. One notable example is *al-Fajr* (Kuwait), which devoted entire pages to coverage of the Omani struggle.

This study also utilizes early issues of *al-Tali‘a* (Kuwait) from the mid-1960s, which featured sharp criticism of the revolutionary leadership in exile, often holding them responsible for what the newspaper described as the liquidation of the Omani cause.”²¹ Among the most important Omani primary sources documenting the revolution is the book *al-Lu‘lu‘ al-Ratb fi Ibraz Mustawda‘at al-Qalb* (*The Moist Pearl in Unveiling the Heart’s Secrets*)²² by Shaykh Sa‘id bin Hamad al-Harithi. A trusted confidant of Imam Ghalib, al-Harithi had been enlisted during the early days of Ghalib’s imamate due to his social standing and scholarly influence, particularly in mediating tribal disputes in the Eastern Region and Rustaq—an episode further elaborated in later chapters of this study.

In his book, al-Harithi dedicates a substantial section to narrating the events that transpired between the death of Imam al-Khalili and the accession of Sultan Qabus.²³ The first edition of *al-Lu‘lu‘ al-Ratb* appeared in the mid-1980s, self-published by the author at *al-‘Aqida* Press in the Ruwi district of Muscat. The Omani state responded swiftly, confiscating all available copies and convening a special committee—comprising the Ministers of Justice, Interior, Heritage and Media, as well as the Inspector General of Police—to consider prosecuting Shaykh Sa‘id bin Hamad al-

²¹ “*al-Ṭalī‘ah*” (Kuwait), no. 124 (June 1965): 14–15.

²² Title translated by the author.

²³ Sa‘id bin Ḥamīd al-Ḥārithī, *al-Lu‘lu‘ al-Raṭb fi Ibrāz Mustawda‘āt al-Qalb* [*The Moist Pearl in Unveiling the Heart’s Secrets*] (Muscat: n.p., 1986), 295–335.

Harthi. The committee ultimately dismissed him from his official post in 1986 and penalized the printing press and its employees. Possession of the book itself was criminalized.²⁴

This episode is further evidence of the state's anxiety regarding the emergence of any narrative that deviates from its official account of the Green Mountain Revolution—even decades after the final operations of the Omani Liberation Army. Notably, the chapter in *al-Lu'lu' al-Ratb* concerning the Green Mountain Revolution circulated discreetly within Omani circles under a different title: *Dalil al-Hayran fi Ahwal Ahl 'Uman (The Perplexed Guide to the Conditions of the People of Oman)*.²⁵

It is worth noting here—particularly in the context of clandestinely circulated, unpublished manuscripts in Oman—These two documents, which are important to the revolution, are widely circulated among the people, but have not been used in scientific study or critical analysis. The first is the manuscript *al-Haqqiqah (The Truth)* by Shaykh 'Abd Allah bin 'Ali al-Khalili, which details the internal debates that unfolded during the final years of Imam al-Khalili's life. The second is the unpublished memoir of Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Hrithi, one of the principal allies of Sultan Sa'id bin Taymur and a key figure in administering the Eastern Region during this critical juncture in modern Omani history—a role that will be further examined in Chapters Three and Four of this study.

This dissertation does not neglect to consider and analyze these two manuscripts, though it does so with methodological caution, particularly with respect to their underlying tribal

²⁴Sa'id bin Ḥamad al-Ḥārithī, *Zahr al-Rabī' fī al-Sa'y li-Irdā' al-Jamī'*, n.d., accessed April 17, 2025. <https://ibadica.org/s/bibliographie/item/35482>.

²⁵ The researcher obtained a copy of this work in the late 1990s from the private library of Aḥmad bin 'Abd Allāh al-Falāḥī (Muscat, Oman). Chapter title translated by the author.

affiliations, familial loyalties, and the political ambitions that may have influenced the authors. Ahmad al-Harthi and Abdullah al-Khalili had political ambitions with the sultanate and achieved them. Despite their proximity to, and support of, the official state narrative, neither of these works—nor any rights to publish them—had been granted public release by Omani authorities at the time of writing.²⁶ Their suppression underscores the enduring sensitivity of state institutions to alternative historical accounts.

There also exists a category of hybrid literature that cannot be ignored in the study of the Green Mountain Revolution—particularly works that intersect with themes of love, womanhood, pan-Arab solidarity, and humanistic expressions of anti-colonial resistance. A notable example is the literary oeuvre of ‘Abd Allāh al-Ṭa’ī, especially his novel *Mala’ikat al-Jabal al-Akhdar* (*The Angels of the Green Mountain*). Literary critic Muhsin al-Kindi argues that the novel oscillates between two ideological poles: Omani patriotism and Arabism. The narrative situates its protagonists across a wide temporal and spatial arc, moving through Cairo, Baghdad, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the Trucial States. Al-Ṭa’ī began writing the novel in Bahrain in 1958, completed it in Kuwait in 1962, and published it in Beirut in 1963 (al-Wafa’ Press). The geographical range of the characters’ movement mirrors al-Ṭa’ī’s own peripatetic life and reflects the diasporic dimensions of Omani revolutionary experience.²⁷

At the broader Arab academic level, studies touching upon the Green Mountain Revolution appeared sporadically, often embedded within broader themes that did not offer direct engagement

²⁶ Aḥmad bin Muḥammad al-Ḥārithī, *Memoir*, unpublished manuscript; Sa’īd bin Ḥamad al-Ḥārithī, *Dalīl al-Ḥayrān fī Aḥwāl Ahl ‘Umān*, unpublished notes; ‘Abd Allāh bin ‘Alī al-Khalīlī, *al-Ḥaqīqah*, unpublished manuscript.

²⁷ Muḥsin al-Kindī, “‘Abd Allāh al-Ṭa’ī wa-Riyādat al-Kitābah al-Adabiyyah al-‘Umāniyyah al-Ḥadīthah: Qirā’ah Tārīkhiyyah li-Funūnihā al-Adabiyyah,” *Nizwā Magazine* (Muscat), 1 January 1997.

with the revolution's praxis or its internal contradictions. These works include discussions of border politics (ʿAbd Allāh al-Ashʿal, 1987)²⁸, tribal society and state formation (Khalidun al-Naqib, 1989)²⁹, internal conflict (Ibrahim Shahdad, 1989)³⁰, the Al Bu Saʿid state (Jamal Zakariyya Qasim, 2000)³¹, and questions of unity and fragmentation.³²

In 2014, a significant and unprecedented event took place within Oman's academic and cultural landscape: a teacher from the Green Mountain region, ʿAli bin Muhammad bin Nasir al-Riyami, submitted a master's thesis entitled *The Green Mountain War 1957–1959* at the Institute of Arab Research and Studies, affiliated with the League of Arab States in Cairo. This marked the first time that a native of the Green Mountain undertook systematic research into a subject that had remained taboo and largely unspoken for decades. The thesis itself remained unknown until four years later, in 2018, when the researcher succeeded in publishing it in book form under the same title. The book was widely welcomed by scholars and general readers alike, reflecting the intellectual and emotional thirst for knowledge about the story of the revolution and its participants.

What distinguished this publication was its inclusion of rare oral testimonies—many recorded for the first time—from revolutionary leaders, tribal dignitaries, and elders of the Green

²⁸ ʿAbd Allāh al-Ashʿal, *Qaḍiyyat al-Ḥudūd fī al-Khalīj al-ʿArabī* [The Border Issue in the Arabian Gulf] (Cairo: Markaz al-Ahrām li-al-Dirāsāt al-Siyāsiyyah wa-al-Istrāṭijiyah, 1987).

²⁹ Khalidun al-Naqib, *al-Mujtamaʿ wa-al-Dawlah fī al-Khalīj wa-al-Jazīrah al-ʿArabiyyah min Manẓūr Mukhtalif* [Society and State in the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula: From a Different Perspective] (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-ʿArabiyyah, 1989).

³⁰ Ibrāhīm Muḥammad Shahdād, *al-Ṣirāʿ al-Dākhilī fī ʿUmān khilāl al-Qarn al-ʿIshrīn: 1913–1975* [The Internal Conflict in Oman during the Twentieth Century: 1913–1975] (Beirut: Dār al-Awzāʿī, 1989).

³¹ Jamāl Zakariyyā Qāsim, *Dawlat Āl Bū Saʿīd fī ʿUmān wa-Sharq Ifrīqiyyā: min Nashʾatihā ilā Nihāyat Ḥukmihā fī Zanjabār wa-Bidāyat ʿAṣrihā al-Jadīd fī ʿUmān, 1741–1970* (al-ʿAyn: Markaz Zāyid li-al-Turāth wa-al-Tārikh, 2000).

³² Salīm ʿAqīl Muḥaybil, *ʿUmān bayna al-Tajziʾah wa-al-Waḥdah, 1913–1976* [Oman between Fragmentation and Unity, 1913–1976] (Cairo: al-Markaz al-Duwalī, 2007).

Mountain who had previously been unable or unwilling to speak about what remained etched in their memories.³³ This thesis will build upon this corpus and contextualize it within both Arab and global frameworks. It will also endeavor to unearth the narratives of other revolutionaries—women, youth, and workers—whose voices were systematically marginalized within the dominant narrative of the revolution. By juxtaposing these recovered accounts with the colonial narrative, the research aims to elucidate the overt and latent factors that characterized the Green Mountain revolution. This present dissertation builds upon that body of Omani primary sources, while applying a critical methodology that seeks to re-read these narratives in comparison with the dominant colonial historiography that has long overshadowed them. The study privileges the voices of the marginalized: revolutionaries, commanders, and ordinary men and women who lived through the searing moments of the Green Mountain uprising. The researcher was honored to conduct more than fifty in-depth oral interviews over a two-year period, across various locations. All necessary ethical precautions and protective assurances were taken to avoid compromising the safety of interviewees or their families.

If this dissertation contributes anything new to the field of Arab revolutionary historiography, it is the documentation of these invaluable voices—voices that have endured for decades, withstanding historical amnesia and political erasure. As one aging interviewee put it: *If time were reversed, I would once again take up my rifle and resist the British occupier—not only to defend my land, but in vengeance for the martyrs of the revolution.*³⁴

³³ ‘Alī bin Muḥammad al-Riyāmī, *Ḥarb al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, 1957–1959* [*The Green Mountain War, 1957–1959*] (Damascus: Dār al-Farqad, 2018).

³⁴ Interview No. 1 with a revolutionary from Jabal al-Akhḍar, Saiq village, December 16, 2023.

In light of the sensitive nature of the subject matter, and in order to preserve the personal safety of most of the elderly participants—many of whom still live within tightly knit tribal and familial networks in the Green Mountain region—and given the potential for misunderstanding or retribution in a context where many younger residents are now employed in the military, police, or security services, the researcher opted to anonymize all interviews. Each interview is referenced with a unique number, and all interviewee names are listed alphabetically in the sources section, with due respect for confidentiality.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation argues that the Green Mountain Revolution played a pivotal role not only in the modern history of Oman but also in the broader trajectory of anti-colonial resistance against British imperialism in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula. Although the study focuses on the years of direct military struggle between 1955 and 1959, it does not neglect the deeper historical roots from which Oman's national resistance derived its cultural, religious, and political meaning. Nor does it ignore the gradual expansion of British colonial influence, which began in 1798 with a nominal "friendship treaty" and culminated in full political and economic hegemony over a country strategically situated at the convergence of three seas: the Arabian Gulf, the Sea of Oman, and the Arabian Sea.

The dissertation further contends that the revolution's legacy deeply influenced the formation of left-leaning national liberation movements across Oman and the wider region between 1960 and 1975. These movements were shaped by the contradictions that emerged during

the revolution—whether stemming from internal traditionalist leadership or from external dynamics, such as armed confrontation and guerrilla warfare against imperial forces.

Following this introduction, this dissertation will present the theoretical framework. It will elaborate on the aims and conceptual premises of the thesis. It will situate the research within the broader context of Omani historiography and debates surrounding revolution and resistance. It will also experiment with theoretical lenses from different schools of thought to interpret the Green Mountain Revolution (1955–1965) as a paradigmatic episode in Oman's historical engagement with anti-colonial struggle.

Chapter One will explore the geological and geographical features of the Green Mountain (al-Jabal al-Akhdar) and its surrounding regions to explain the strategic importance of this terrain and how it enabled sustained resistance against foreign control. This geographic specificity instilled in the mountain's inhabitants a powerful sense of pride, autonomy, and rebellious independence—not only in opposition to foreign invasion but also in resistance to incorporation into dominant political, social, and economic structures within Oman's turbulent history.

Chapter One will also analyze the region's topography and hydrological characteristics that have shaped its strategic identity to this day, including major wadis (valleys) that functioned as critical ingress and egress points, often used in local resistance against external powers. The chapter will also review patterns of economic production—particularly those linked to water governance systems such as wells, dams, and *aflaj* (sing. *falaj*, a network of underground and surface water channels that have long supported agricultural production and communal water governance in Oman)—and the socio-political structures that managed them. Furthermore, it will

examine the mountain's social fabric by mapping out tribal distributions, alliances, and historical pacts. It will also distinguish between the eastern flank of the mountain, overlooking the Empty Quarter and the Omani interior (al-Ẓahirah and al-Dakhiliyyah governorates), and the western flank, which opens onto the coastal regions (al-Batinah North and South) and the Sea of Oman.

Chapter Two will trace the historical roots of Ibadi political theory, which underpins many of the concepts of sovereignty, elective leadership, and resistance to external domination that characterized Oman's revolutionary consciousness. It will analyze key historiographical debates about the theory of the imamate, especially the distinctions between the Ibadīyya of North Africa and those of Oman, while also contrasting these accounts with English-language scholarship.

The chapter will follow the historical circumstances that gave rise to Ibadi political theology and its evolution into a sociopolitical movement with committed followers. It will focus particularly on the two foundational pillars of Ibadi governance: consultation (*shūra*) and the phases of the imamate. The chapter will test the divergence between theory and practice through historical case studies from Oman's imamate experience.

It will then examine the 1869–1871 AD revolution led by Azzan bin Qays, tracing how its violent suppression—with the aid of British naval and financial support for Turki bin Saʿid of the al-Busaʿid dynasty—shaped future resistance. The consequences of this defeat ignited a popular reaction against both the imposed sultan and his imperial sponsors. The chapter will then connect this legacy to the revival of the imamate in the twentieth century with the election of Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi (1913–1920), emphasizing the critical role played by the Green Mountain's

leaders and tribes in resisting colonial encroachment during World War I—particularly as Britain sought to consolidate its control over the emerging resource of the age: oil.

Chapter Three will examine the question of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist resistance in Oman in the aftermath of World War II, focusing in particular on the Green Mountain Revolution (1955–1959) as a paradigmatic—yet neglected—case that reveals the profound contradictions of this formative period in modern Omani history. The chapter will interrogate several key questions, including: Firstly, what occurred in the lead-up to the revolution? Secondly, what role did British imperialism and its colonial project play in shaping the conditions of conflict? Thirdly, and perhaps most crucially, what were the social, political, and military contradictions among the principal actors—namely, Britain, the Imamate, and Sultan Sa‘id bin Taymur?

The chapter will analyze how both Omani and colonial sources documented these tensions, aiming to trace the evolution of the dominant colonial narrative in contrast to the marginalized Omani account in the period leading up to the outbreak of revolution in June 1957.

Chapter Four turns to the question of the total war waged by British imperial forces against Oman’s interior—a campaign known in historical literature as the “Green Mountain War.” Colonial sources often refer to these events using ambiguous or sanitized terms such as “Operations in Oman” or “The Oman Rebellion,” carefully avoiding language that might confer legitimacy—either popular or international—on the act of resistance waged by Omanis against foreign intervention.³⁵

³⁵ Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*, 5–9.

By contrast, Omani sources and oral memory preserve alternative designations such as “The Green Mountain Revolution,” “The Mountain War,” and “The Revolution of Imam Ghalib bin ‘Ali Against British Colonialism.” The chapter will pose two, *inter alia*, key questions: Firstly, how did the British Empire marshal its full colonial apparatus to uproot the imamate and suppress the revolution? Secondly, what social, political, and military contradictions emerged during the height of the conflict among the three principal actors: Britain, the Imamate, and Sultan Sa‘id bin Taymur?

Drawing extensively on oral history interviews conducted by the researcher, along with primary sources such as revolutionary newspapers and Imamate publications, this chapter foregrounds the suppressed Omani narrative of the conflict. The thesis contends that this native narrative has been deliberately excluded from the historiography of the revolution, in part to prolong the psychological and political effects of defeat. Accordingly, this chapter undertakes a comparative reading of colonial and Omani sources, illuminating the inconsistencies and strategic silences of the dominant historical record.

It argues that the crimes committed by British forces during this war—their deep incursion into Omani territory and their brazen defiance of both national sentiment and international norms in order to entrench an absolutist regime under imperial protection—ignited a revolutionary consciousness that endured for more than two decades. Contrary to reductionist and orientalist accounts that portray the uprising as a minor tribal revolt swiftly and decisively suppressed, this chapter positions it as a transformative episode in the genealogy of Omani resistance.

Chapter Five is the final chapter. It traces the trajectory and transformation of the Omani revolution in the aftermath of military defeat. It focuses on the competing influences of Egypt and

Saudi Arabia in shaping the direction of the revolutionary leadership—both in the international arena, where they promoted the Omani cause, and within the Omani exile community and domestic networks.

Through a critical reading of archival documents and personal interviews, the chapter analyzes the experiences of individuals who transitioned from supporting the Imamate-led revolution under Imam Ghalib to joining the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG). It examines the local, regional, and global factors that contributed to this ideological shift, particularly the frustrations of a younger generation disillusioned with the conservative leadership of the Imamate.

These disaffected youth went on to form the core of a revolutionary leftist movement that revived the struggle under a different ideological banner throughout the 1960s AD. The chapter explores how this ideological reorientation preserved the revolutionary spirit while fundamentally reimagining its political goals and alliances.

The concluding Chapter synthesizes the thesis's findings by reexamining the Green Mountain Revolution through a dual historical lens: as a moment of revolutionary ignition (1955–1959) and as a lingering revolutionary condition (1960–1965). Drawing extensively on rare oral testimonies collected from surviving participants, the chapter elevates deferent voices that have long been excluded from both colonial and official nationalist historiography. It critically revisits the four central research questions—Was the British presence in Oman a form of colonialism or strategic partnership? Was the Green Mountain uprising a revolution or a tribal revolt? Were international imperial dynamics or internal contradictions more decisive? And, why has this

episode been marginalized in collective memory?—demonstrating that each question reveals deep inconsistencies in the dominant historical record.

The conclusion argues that the Green Mountain Revolution, often dismissed in colonial archives as a “rebellion,” was in fact a sustained anti-colonial struggle rooted in indigenous political theology, regional grievances, and strategic resistance as well as regional and global anti-colonial discourses, practices, solidarities and material support. It shows that the failure to acknowledge this history is not mere neglect but a form of archival silencing—perpetuated by both imperial and postcolonial state apparatuses. By contrasting archival materials with oral histories, the chapter makes a methodological case for history “from below” and advocates for a renewed engagement with Omani revolutionary memory as a site of scholarly and civic responsibility. Ultimately, the chapter calls for a decolonization of the historical narrative and proposes a more inclusive historiography grounded in the lived experiences and suppressed testimonies of those who resisted.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Approaching the question of *how and why Omanis resisted colonialism* is no straightforward task, given the historical, social, and revolutionary complexities embedded within a land long enveloped in its own isolation, such as Oman. This dissertation critically engages with Omani historical writing on the Green Mountain Revolution and draws on various intellectual traditions and theoretical schools to frame this event as a paradigmatic episode in the *longue durée* of anti-colonial resistance in the Arabian Peninsula.

The theoretical orientations employed in this study include a hybrid set of historiographical frameworks: classical Marxism, along with its later evolutions in Gramsci's theory of hegemony, the history-from-below tradition, and the Subaltern Studies school. These are read alongside both colonial historiography and its critical counterpoint, postcolonial theory. The use of this eclectic methodological palette reflects the inherent complexity of Omani historiography, which cannot be sufficiently understood through any single framework. Indeed, it is not reasonable to suggest that theoretical traditions developed in distinct historical contexts—primarily in Europe and often within the very ideological milieu of empire—can claim analytical neutrality in their reading of a phenomenon like the Green Mountain Revolution. This dissertation, therefore, intentionally expands its methodological scope to test whether any of these frameworks can adequately capture the layered realities of the Omani case. It also poses a critical meta-historical question: *Is there an emergent or latent Omani historical school of thought*—one that has engaged systematically with the themes of revolution, resistance, and anti-colonial struggle?

To navigate the interpretive and historiographical challenges posed by the Green Mountain Revolution, this dissertation employs a multi-theoretical lens grounded in both global and regionally inflected schools of thought. However, theoretical exploration alone is insufficient without conceptual clarity. The complexity of the questions posed—regarding colonial domination, revolutionary legitimacy, imperial entanglements, and historical erasure—requires a careful unpacking of the core terms that frame this inquiry. The following section, therefore, defines and contextualizes the key concepts that recur throughout the study. These terms—colonialism, resistance, and revolution—are not merely descriptive; they are analytically charged categories whose meanings shift across historical contexts and ideological positions. Clarifying them at the outset is essential to situating this thesis within both Omani historiography and broader debates in postcolonial and critical historical scholarship.

Colonialism

The term *colonialism*, as employed in this dissertation—despite its ambiguities and historical entanglements—refers to a comprehensive system of domination imposed by an invading power upon a land not its own. Many scholars would argue that there are forms of economic colonialism (sometimes referred to as “neo-colonialism”) that do not rely on territorial control.³⁶

This system effectively strips the sovereignty of the native population and asserts control over their resources. At its core, colonialism is a totalizing structure of hegemony—political,

³⁶Among the most significant contributions analyzing the nature of neo-colonialism are the seminal works of Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965); Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London and Dar es Salaam: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications and Tanzania Publishing House, 1972); and Samir Amin, who analyzed this model most coherently, particularly through his theories of unequal development and the core-periphery structure, as elaborated in works such as *Accumulation on a World Scale: A Critique of the Theory of Underdevelopment*, trans. Brian Pearce (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), and *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism*, trans. Brian Pearce (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976).

economic, military, and cultural—applied in varying combinations according to the specific context of imperial control.³⁷ Colonialism, in this sense, constitutes the practical extension of imperialism.³⁸

Jürgen Osterhammel, in *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, describes colonialism as "a hierarchical relationship that entrenches racial and cultural superiority and sustains itself through the systematic extraction of wealth."³⁹ Edward Said, in both *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, exposed the discursive mechanisms through which Western cultural production reproduced the figure of the Eastern "Other" in ways that naturalized domination.⁴⁰ Similarly, Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* offered a searing psycho-social anatomy of the colonial condition, laying bare the deep wounds inflicted on the colonized body and mind.⁴¹

Resistance

Anti-colonial resistance, as conceptualized in this dissertation, encompasses all forms of protest and defiance—verbal or physical, individual or collective—aimed at delegitimizing and dismantling colonial authority and reclaiming native control of national resources and both national sovereignty and individual rights. From the root of resistance, this study also derives its

³⁷ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875–1914* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 56. Hobsbawm argues that the global economy of this era, propelled by industrialized capitalist nations, inherently fostered a hierarchy in which "advanced" societies dominated "backward" ones, thereby reinforcing imperial structures. He designates 1875–1914 as the "Age of Empire" not only because of modern imperial expansion but also because it marked the historical peak in the number of monarchs formally styled as—or diplomatically acknowledged to be—emperors.

³⁸ Although British colonial involvement in Oman, which originated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, preceded the specific stage of imperialism analysed by Lenin, Lenin's broader theoretical framework concerning the intrinsic relationship between colonialism and imperialism offers a valuable lens for examining British hegemony in Oman during this period. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), accessed 17 April 2025, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/>.

³⁹ Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, trans. Shelley L. Frisch (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

⁴⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); ———, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

⁴¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

reading of *revolution* as both a concept and a phenomenon marked by immense complexity. Resistance may take the form of armed struggle, as with the Algerian and Omani revolutions, or as political organization, such as the Indian National Congress or the African National Congress in South Africa. It may also manifest symbolically through civil disobedience, labor strikes, or school protests—as seen in the 1936–1939 Great Palestinian Revolt,⁴² the agrarian resistance in India, or the student uprisings in apartheid South Africa. Cultural resistance also plays a central role, expressed through literature, theatre, music, and film—as exemplified by the works of Ghassan Kanafani, Mahmoud Darwish, Zakaria Mohammad, and other architects of Palestinian resistance literature.⁴³

Revolution

Despite its conceptual complexity, *revolution* can be broadly defined as a transformative process that reconfigures the political, social, and economic structures of a given society. It seeks to remake power, identity, and legitimacy—through peaceful or violent means—by restructuring political authority and redistributing power.⁴⁴ Revolutions are not to be evaluated through rigid

⁴² Ghassan Kanafani, “The 1936–39 Revolt in Palestine,” originally published 1972, accessed 17 April 2025, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kanafani/1972/revolt.htm>.

⁴³ Ghassan Kanafani, *Palestine’s Children: Returning to Haifa and Other Stories*, trans. Barbara Harlow and Karen E. Riley (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000); Mahmoud Darwish, *The Butterfly’s Burden*, trans. Fady Joudah (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2007). For further details on Palestinian resistance literature—or literature as resistance—see Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed., *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); and Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987).

⁴⁴ This definition seeks to synthesize approaches from diverse intellectual schools engaged in analysing revolutions. These include: (1) the Marxist school, which frames revolution as an inevitable outcome of class struggle and capitalist contradictions, as articulated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Communist League, 1848), and by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in *The State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution* (London: Penguin Classics, 1992), accessed 17 April 2025, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/>; (2) the structural school, emphasizing state crises—economic, military, and bureaucratic—and institutional collapse, as theorized by Theda Skocpol in *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), and Jack A. Goldstone in *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); (3) the political-process/social-movements school, which highlights interactions between political opportunities, organizational structures, and resource mobilization, as examined by Charles Tilly in *European Revolutions, 1492–1992* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), and Sidney Tarrow in *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); (4) the cultural/ideological school, focusing

binaries of success and failure; they unfold across horizontal and vertical axes of social change, leaving long-term imprints on institutions and memory.⁴⁵

This dissertation posits that the sequence of uprisings spanning from Azzan bin Qais's revolution (1867–1871), through the imamate of Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi (1913), the Green Mountain Revolution (1955–1959), and culminating in the defeat of the Dhofar Revolution (1975), constitutes a continuous revolutionary situation in modern Omani history. The use of the term *revolutionary situation* is borrowed from Charles Tilly, who distinguishes between “revolutionary situations” and “revolutionary outcomes.” For Tilly, a “revolutionary situation” emerges when multiple, competing claims to state sovereignty exist—when two or more actors assert contradictory authority over the state. A “revolutionary outcome,” by contrast, occurs only when the state's authority is transferred from the old regime to a new ruling coalition—though this new coalition may still contain elements of the former governing elite.⁴⁶

on symbolic struggles and the delegitimization of regimes, as discussed by Hannah Arendt in *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), and Eric Hoffer in *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951); (5) the postcolonial school, interpreting revolutions through anti-colonial resistance, as advanced by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (Paris: François Maspero, 1961), and Edward W. Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993); and (6) the historical/comparative school, identifying patterns through cross-temporal analysis, as demonstrated by Crane Brinton in *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1938), and Jeff Goodwin in *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Later scholars further integrated these perspectives, such as John Foran in *Theories of Revolution: The Search for Generality* (London: Routledge, 1997), and Asef Bayat in *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

⁴⁵ Both Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*, 6, and Fawwāz Ṭarābulṣī in *Ḍufār: Shahādah min Zaman al-Thawrah [Dhofar: A Testimony from the Time of the Revolution]* (Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes Books, 2004), 33, examine this point extensively.

⁴⁶ Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492–1992*, 10–14.

I would suggest the use of *Revolutionary Continuum* instead of the term *revolutionary situation*. The term "Revolutionary Continuum" suggests a few stratified layers of significance, as follows: It infers historical continuity across decades without implying uniformity. It allows for shifts in ideology, leadership, and strategy while maintaining thematic coherence (e.g. resistance to imperialism and absolutism). It challenges colonial historiographies that isolate each uprising as a discrete, reactionary event rather than part of a broader political narrative.

The concept of "Revolutionary Continuum" facilitates a more profound and complex engagement with al-Jabal al-Akhdar Revolution than the conventional colonial narrative permits. Peterson, for instance, engages in an excessive reductionism when narrating the complexities of the al-Jabal al-Akhdar Revolution, condensing them into a brief paragraph that lacks any substantial consideration of the multifaceted social, political, and economic fabric which constituted its context. This abstraction is evident in the following quotation: The insurrection was brief and its denouement unspectacular. The rebels retreated to the vastness of the Jabal al-Akhdar, while the British troops were withdrawn ... Internally, the situation had reached stalemate, with the rebels mining roads used by the Sultanate's military and And PDO Oil Company."⁴⁷ Thus, Peterson positions Britain as the "implicit actor" within the colonial narrative, whereby its intervention and constitutive power are portrayed as unproblematic givens, thereby obscuring the actual authoritarian dynamics that governed the landscape.

Omani Historiography

The term Omani historiography refers to the body of writing that addresses Oman and its people—whether authored by Omanis themselves and Arabs concerning their defeats, victories,

⁴⁷ Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century*, 184.

contradictions, and interactions with personal and collective life in the modern era, which, for the purposes of this study, extends from the mid-seventeenth century to the present. This period, I argue—supported by numerous historical events—witnessed fierce struggles: between invading and occupying forces often disguised as merchants, generals, thieves, and mercenaries, and a diverse national resistance composed of ordinary people, scholars, and political leaders who, at the very least, preserved their cultural identity and social cohesion.

However, Omani sources in particular have been subject to a form of erasure—a suppression enacted by colonial historiography. This is the central historiographical claim of the present work. The erasure to which I refer includes all practices that dismiss, marginalize, ignore, or arrogantly deny the significance of Omani voices, testimonies, and textual records—especially those produced by the communities who lived, resisted, and remembered.

The Revolution and Omani Modern Historiography

History, as an independent field of inquiry, has not traditionally occupied a central place in the intellectual priorities of Omani scholarship, despite a clear preoccupation with historical events, biographical accounts, and the documentation of prominent figures and their achievements. This is not surprising, as much of Omani historical writing is scattered across other disciplines—particularly Islamic jurisprudence, religious scholarship, and classical Arabic literature, especially poetry. One may reasonably argue that the dominant concerns of Omani historiography in the modern and contemporary periods have revolved around three principal themes: religion, genealogy, and leadership—particularly that of imams and sultans.

Many historians have paid relatively little attention—or perhaps have overlooked entirely—the lived contributions of ordinary people acting independently of dynastic, religious, or political elites. Farmers, maritime and agrarian laborers, artisans, and even ordinary men and

women from tribal societies have been largely excluded from historical accounts, which seldom engaged with their experiences, social mobility, or cultural transformations. In sum, the major thematic domains of Omani historiographical focus may be categorized into religion and sectarian identity, genealogy, and studies of imams and sultans.

Religion and Sectarian Identity

It is only fair to acknowledge the richness of Omani sources that document religious life in detail, particularly in defense of the Ibadi school of thought and the affirmation of its doctrinal legitimacy since the first and second Islamic centuries (seventh and eighth centuries). A distinctive genre of historical writing emerged early in this context: the *siyar* and *jawabāt* (legal-epistolary texts), which narrate the lives of pious predecessors, often as morally exemplary—either to emulate or to avoid.⁴⁸ One early example is the *Sirat of the Prophet* attributed to al-‘Ala’ ibn al-Hadrami.⁴⁹ Among the central political-religious controversies addressed in this genre is the case of the dismissal of Imam al-Salt ibn Malik (d. 275 AH / circa 888 AD),⁵⁰ a dispute that divided Omani scholars into two camps⁵¹: the *Rustaqi school*, which supported his removal due to old age,

⁴⁸ Aḥmad al-‘Ubaydilī, “al-Siyar al-‘Umāniyyah ka-Maṣḍar li-Tārīkh ‘Umān: Sīrat Muḥammad bin Maḥbūb,” *Nizwā Magazine*, no. 2 (January 1995): 26.

⁴⁹ Khamīs bin Sa‘īd al-Shaqṣī, *Manhaj al-Ṭalībīn wa-Balāgh al-Rāghibīn*, vol. 1, ed. Salīm bin Ḥamad al-Ḥārithī (Muscat: Ministry of Heritage and Culture, n.d.).

⁵⁰ For further exploration of the bibliography of Omani historical studies, see ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sālimī, “al-Siyar al-‘Umāniyyah ka-Jins Adabī,” *Nizwā Magazine*, no. 19 (July 1999): 62; and Muḥannā al-Sa‘dī, “Tatawwur Maḥmūd al-Kitābah al-Tārīkhiyyah ‘inda al-‘Umāniyyīn min al-Siyar ilā al-Tārīkh al-Shāmil: Dirāsah Bibliyūghrāfiyyah,” *Nizwā Magazine*, no. 57 (January 2009): 8–24.

⁵¹ Among the prominent Omani scholars who engaged in the discourse surrounding the deposition of Imām al-Salt ibn Mālīk al-Kharūsī were two key figures representing distinct intellectual traditions. From the Rustāqiyyah school, Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh bin Barakah (d. 10th century) is noted for his contributions to Ibādī jurisprudence; his seminal work, *al-Taḥyīd* (MS 160), is preserved in the manuscript collection of the Sayyid Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Būsa‘īdī Library in al-Sīb, Oman. Conversely, the Nizwāniyyah school is represented by Abū Sa‘īd al-Kudamī (d. 10th century), whose treatise *al-Mu‘tabar* (3 vols.; Muscat: Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, 1984) remains a critical reference for theological and legal debates within the Omani scholarly tradition. These works reflect the intellectual rigor and doctrinal nuances that characterized the discourse on political and religious authority during this period.

and the *Nizwani school*, which insisted on retaining the imam until his death⁵². This issue is further analyzed in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

By the 11th century AH / 17th century AD, a new form of historiographical writing had emerged, exemplified by the *Sirat of Imam Nasir ibn Murshid* by ‘Abd Allah ibn Khalfan ibn Qaysar al-Sahari. Ibn Qaysar introduced a notable historiographical shift by focusing on a single individual and era, documenting them as an eyewitness to their unfolding. His account covers a pivotal period in Omani history that witnessed the unification of the interior and the mobilization of national efforts to expel Portuguese colonial forces.⁵³

Thus, Omani historiography was born out of religious textual traditions, particularly the *siyar*, *jawabat*, and expansive jurisprudential compendia specific to the Ibadi jurisprudence.⁵⁴ Key examples include:

- *Bayān al-Shar‘*, the monumental seventy-one-volume work of Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Kindī (d. 508 AH / 1115 AD).
- *al-Muṣannaf*, a forty-two volume compendium by Shaykh Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Kindī (d. 557 AH / 1162 AD),
- *Manhaj al-Ṭālibīn*, a twenty-volume jurisprudential work by Shaykh Khamīs ibn Sa‘īd al-Shaqṣī (lived in the eleventh century AH / seventeenth century AD),

⁵² For further discussion of this difference and its historical context, see Sa‘īd bin Muḥammad al-Hāshimī, *Ba‘ḍ al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-‘Umaniyyah fī al-Maktabāt al-‘Urūbiyyah*, 1st ed. (Muscat: al-Muntadā al-Adabī, Ministry of Heritage and Culture, 1427 AH / 2006).

⁵³ See ‘Abd Allāh bin Khalafān ibn Qaysar, *Sīrat al-Imām Nāṣir bin Murshid*, ed. ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Qaysī (London: Dār al-Ḥikmah, 2002).

⁵⁴ Among the most significant sources documenting the bibliography of Omani historical writing, see Fārūq ‘Umar Fawzī, *Muqaddima fī al-Maṣādir al-Tārīkhiyyah al-‘Umaniyyah*, 2nd ed. (UAE: Zayed Center for Heritage and History, 2004); and Sa‘īd bin Muḥammad al-Hāshimī, *Maṣādir al-Tārīkh al-Ḥadīth wa-al-Mu‘āṣir: Dirāsah Mashīyah Waṣfīyah* (Damascus: Dār al-Farqad, 2017).

- *Qāmūs al-Sharī‘ah*, a ninety-volume encyclopaedia of Ibādī law by Shaykh Jamīl ibn Khamīs al-Sa‘dī (circa thirteenth century AH / nineteenth century AD).

These works constitute a formidable archive of legal, theological, and historical knowledge that shaped not only doctrinal orthodoxy but also the structure and memory of Omani society itself.

Genealogy

The second dominant domain in Omani historiography is genealogy, a field to which Omanis devoted substantial scholarly attention. Much ink was spilled in the documentation of tribal lineages, the Arab origins of clans, and the mapping of the social structure of tribal alliances. This form of historical writing responded to a perceived cultural and political threat: the growing Persian influence across the Gulf during the fourth AH/tenth century, which prompted Arab populations in Oman to reinforce their identity. Al-Maqdisi chronicles this moment by remarking, “The people of this region—Oman—speak Arabic, except in Suhar, where their calls and speech are in Persian”.⁵⁵

One of the most prominent works within this genealogical tradition is *al-Ansab* by Salamah bin Muslim al-‘Awtabi al-Ṣahāri, a 6th century AH (circa 12th century AD) historian from the port city of Suhar—the very city noted by al-Maqdisi.⁵⁶ Numerous scholars, jurists, and chroniclers competed in this field, often using genealogical writing as a means of tribal assertion and rivalry, celebrating the virtues and accomplishments of either their collective tribal ancestry or

⁵⁵ Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Maqdisī, *Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm fī Ma‘rifat al-Aqālīm*, composed 988 AD, ed. Muḥammad Makḥzūm (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1987), 96.

⁵⁶ Salamah ibn Muslim al-‘Awtabī, *al-Ansab*, vols. 1–2, ed. Muḥammad Iḥsān al-Naṣṣ, 4th ed. (Muscat: Ministry of Heritage and Culture, 1427 AH / 2006).

distinguished individuals—whether scholars, political leaders, or religious figures—who belonged to their lineage.

This intellectual competition was especially pronounced between the Nazarite (nizariyya) and Yamani (yamaniyya) factions in Oman. A striking example of this is the poetic and historiographical exchange between Muhammad bin Saʿid al-Qalhati, who composed *al-Qaṣīda al-Hilwāniyya* glorifying his Yamani ancestry, and Ibn Ruzayq, who responded with *al-Ṣahīfa al-ʿAdnaniyya* in defense of the Nazarite lineage.⁵⁷ However, Ibn Ruzayq did not merely enumerate genealogies; he expanded the work into a broader historical account, highlighting the prominent figures, leaders, and scholars of Nazarite descent from the pre-Islamic era to the 13th AH/ circa 19th century, during which he himself lived.

The publication of *al-Ṣahīfa al-ʿAdnāniyya* placed Ibn Ruzayq in a delicate position, as he was closely associated with the ruling al-Busaʿid dynasty, which traced its lineage to the Yamani tradition. To mitigate the political discomfort and balance his loyalties, Ibn Ruzayq composed a companion work: *al-Ṣahīfa al-ʿAdnāniyya*.⁵⁸ Genealogically, the Al Busaidi dynasty traces its origins to the southern Arab tribes of Qahtanite (Yemeni) descent, as documented in the Qahtanite Manuscript.

Imams and Sultans

The third major domain of Omani historiography centers on the lives and reigns of imams and sultans. In the eighteenth century, Omani historical writing began to adopt what Faruq ʿUmar

⁵⁷ Ḥumayd bin Muḥammad Ibn Ruzayq, *al-Muʿtaman fi Dhikr Manāqib Nazār wa-al-Yaman: al-Sifr al-Awwal – al-Ṣahīfa al-ʿAdnāniyya*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥabīb Salih and Maḥmūd bin Mubarak al-Sulaymi (Muscat: Ministry of Heritage and Culture [formerly], 2021).

⁵⁸ Nāṣir bin Saif al-Saʿdī, *Masarāt al-Kitāba al-Tarīkhiyya fi ʿUman: min al-ʿittijāh al-Taqlidī ilā al-ʿittijāh al-ʿakādimī* (paper presented at the astur Periodic Symposium: Historical Writing in the Gulf States”, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Doha, December 4, 2023).

Fawzi has termed a “comprehensive historiographical turn.”⁵⁹ This approach involved not merely recording events, but also expanding upon their causes, developments, and consequences. However, this “comprehensive” history remained chronologically anchored to the reigns of political and religious leaders, with events segmented according to the rule of successive imams and political authorities.

The clearest exemplar of this trend is *Kashf al-Ghumma al-Jami‘ li-Akhbar al-Ummah* by Sarhan bin Sa‘id al-Azkawi, who attempted to produce an integrated political, social, and religious history of Oman from the advent of Islam in the seventh century through to the early eighteenth century, concluding in the year 1728 AD. His work is structured into forty chapters, beginning with pre-Islamic Arabia and progressing through the caliphates, dynasties, and key political and sectarian conflicts that shaped the region, with particular emphasis on the development of the Ibadi school and its scholarly and political leadership in both North Africa and Oman.⁶⁰

This model—organizing historical narrative around political-religious leadership—was replicated by most subsequent historians. The imams and sultans became the organizing framework through which modern Omani history was recorded. Notable among these historians is Ḥumayd bin Muḥammad Ibn Ruzayq (d. 1290 AH, circa 1873 AD), whose key works include: *al-shu‘ā‘ al-shā‘i‘ bi-l-Lama‘ān fi dhikr a’immat ‘Uman*, *al-fath al-mubīn fi sīrat al-ssāda al-Bu Sa‘idiyyīn*, and *al-sīra al-jaliyya: sa‘d al-su‘ūd al-Bu Sa‘idiyya*.

⁵⁹ Farūq ‘Umar Fawzī, *Muqaddima fi al-Maṣādir al-Tarikhiyya al-‘Umaniyya* [Introduction to Omani Historical Sources], 2nd ed. (Al-‘Ayn, UAE: Zayed Center for Heritage and History, 2004).

The idea is also discussed in Muhana al-Sa‘di, *taṭawwur mafhūm al-kitābah al-tarikhiyyah ‘inda al-‘Umaniyyīn min al-siyar ila al-ta’rīkh al-shamil: dirāsa bibliyūgrāfiyya*,” *Majallat Nizwa*, no. 57 (January 2009), 8-24.

⁶⁰ Fawzī, *Muqaddima fi al-Maṣādir al-Tarikhiyya al-‘Umaniyya*.

In the early fourteenth century AH (circa twentieth century AD), a significant contribution was made by the scholar and historian Nur al-Din ‘Abd Allah bin Hamid al-Salimi (d. 1332 AH, circa 1913 AD), who advanced Omani historiography by incorporating primary sources—letters, testimonies, and oral accounts from eyewitnesses—into his landmark work *tuhfat al-‘ayān bi-sīrat ahl ‘Uman*. His approach marked a methodological shift toward evidence-based narrative and inspired a new generation of historians.

Among those who continued in al-Salimi’s methodological footsteps were his son, Muhammad bin ‘Abd Allah al-Salimi (al-Shaybah), in *Nahdat al-A‘yan bi-Hurriyyat Ahl ‘Uman*; Shaykh Salim bin Hamud al-Siyabi (d. 1412 AH / 1991 AD) in *al-‘Unwan fi Tarikh ‘Uman*; Shaykh Muhammad bin Rashid bin ‘Aziz al-Khusaybi in *Shaqa’iq al-Nu‘man ‘ala Sumut al-Juman fi Asma’ Shu‘ara’ ‘Uman*; and Shaykh Salim bin Hamud al-Batashi (d. 1420 AH / 1999 AD), whose encyclopedic *Ittihaf al-A‘yan fi Tarikh Ba’d ‘Ulama’ ‘Uman* is distinguished by its use of new empirical sources, including grave inscriptions of imams and scholars, as well as the documentation of rock inscriptions and epigraphy across various towns and villages in Oman.

While recent contributions to Omani historiography have begun to reframe revolution as a meaningful category of analysis—particularly within the broader context of social transformation and anti-colonial resistance—these efforts remain in dialogue with, and often in tension against, a longer-standing body of knowledge shaped by external perspectives.⁶¹ The emergence of an Omani-centered historiographical current, attentive to indigenous sources and oral testimonies,

⁶¹ A nascent body of scholarship has begun to accumulate new approaches to the subject from diverse perspectives, albeit in a fragmented and sporadic manner and exclusively in the Arabic language. See, for example: Nāṣir bin Saif al-Sa‘di, ‘British Colonial Knowledge of the Omani Situation: Approaches and Political Utilization, 1798–1970,’ *Journal of Astur* 19 (2023); Saif bin Adi Al-Maskari, ‘The Imamate and the Struggle for Power in Oman at the End of the Ya‘ariba State (1719–1749 AD / 1131–1162 AH): A Study in Political History’ (Muscat: Dar Al-Ghasham, 2015); and Ali bin Muhammad Al-Riyami, *The Green Mountain War, 1957–1959* (Damascus: Dar Al-Farqad, 2018).

invites a necessary reappraisal of earlier interpretive models that dominated the study of Oman for much of the twentieth century. To understand the stakes of this historiographical shift, it is essential to examine the enduring influence of the colonial knowledge systems that first codified Oman's modern historical narrative. The following section turns to the intellectual foundations and epistemological assumptions of the British colonial school, whose archival, administrative, and ethnographic texts not only informed imperial policy but also structured the way Oman and its past were conceptualized—often in ways that obscured or diminished the significance of indigenous resistance. This legacy continues to shape both scholarly literature and institutional memory, warranting critical scrutiny.

The Colonial School and the "Cunning of History"⁶²

From the moment of their arrival in Muscat in the early nineteenth century, the British were intent on investigating Oman's historical legacy through primary sources in order to better

⁶² Hegel defines the "cunning of history" (*List der Geschichte*) as a mechanism operating on two distinct levels: the first superficial and apparent, the second profound and concealed. This concept—purely Hegelian in nature—serves as an interpretative framework through which human disorientation is transformed into historical agency, revealing reason's capacity to organize human nature and humanity's teleological trajectory via the dominance of a comprehensive rational system that permeates all manifestations of human existence. Hegel emphasizes that history is not shaped by the will of individuals or their direct actions; rather, it directs and subjugates individuals, rendering the notion of an independent, self-determining historical agent illusory. For Hegel, history itself is the true active entity, reconstituting reality by employing humans as instruments to achieve its transcendent ends, which culminate in progress toward the "Absolute" (*das Absolute*) as the ultimate telos and integration into a harmoniously unified totality of being.

See: G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (trans. J. Sibree, 1956), 37-35: The "cunning of reason" (*List der Vernunft*) is discussed in the introduction where Hegel elaborates on history as the rational unfolding of Spirit (*Geist*) through human actions, often contrary to individual intentions. Taylor, Charles. Hegel (Cambridge University Press, 1975), 388-392: Analyzes the "cunning of history" as part of Hegel's teleological dialectic, emphasizing its role in reconciling subjective freedom and objective rationality.

Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 142-148: Explores how the "cunning" mechanism mediates individual agency and historical necessity. Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Northwestern University Press, 1974), 537-543. Hyppolite

understand and exploit the contradictions within Omani social fabric. This knowledge was strategically mobilized to facilitate control and diversify instruments of imperial domination. The British colonial school remained faithful to its method of reading Omani historiography through the intersecting lenses of religion, tribal structures, and politics. While it introduced a new analytical mode of engaging with Omani history, its purpose was ultimately to confer legitimacy upon the colonial project. Omani historical knowledge, in this framework, was treated as instrumental knowledge—a utilitarian archive to be mined in service of imperial interests and strategic governance.

A prominent example of this approach is Samuel Barrett Miles (1838–1914), a British imperial army officer, political agent, and consul in Muscat beginning in 1872—a pivotal period following the suppression of ‘Azzan bin Qays’s revolution. Miles dedicated nearly fifteen years of his life in Oman to excavating its historical corpus. He obtained a personal copy of the original manuscript of *Kashf al-Ghumma al-Jami‘ li-Akhbar al-Umma* by Sarhan al-Azkawi, and used it—alongside his travels from Aden in the south to Iraq in the north—to construct a comprehensive understanding of Oman’s political, economic, and social contradictions. In his distinctly Orientalist fashion, he documented the lives of the people and their subsistence practices in agriculture and fishing.⁶³

discusses the historical dialectic’s “cunning” as a means by which Spirit transcends contradictions. Allen W. Wood, *Hegel’s Ethical Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 212–218: Examines the interplay between individual actions and historical rationality in Hegel’s system.

⁶³ Sa‘id bin Muhammad al-Hashimi, *Ba‘d al-Makhtutat al-‘Umaniyya fi al-Maktabat al-Urubiiyya* (Muscat: al-Muntadaal-Adabi, Ministry of Heritage and Culture, 2006), 70–87.

Miles's writings, published in the *Royal Geographical Society Journal* and other colonial periodicals in India, culminated in a book posthumously published by his widow in 1919.⁶⁴ This work became a foundational source for subsequent colonial reports, policy briefs, and the memoranda of British political agents in Muscat. It was widely cited in correspondence from imperial military and political officials in Whitehall and the Colonial Office in London and India, and relayed to consuls and political agents stationed in Muscat and Bahrain. Few texts rival Miles's work in terms of credibility and utility within the colonial knowledge archive—except perhaps the *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf* compiled by John Lorimer.⁶⁵

Most British colonial sources portrayed any uprising in Oman during the era of imperial dominance not as a revolution, but as a “crisis.” For instance, what was essentially an anti-colonial resistance in 1866 AD was reduced to “*The crisis at Masqat in 1866.*”⁶⁶ These same sources, however, had no hesitation in granting full legitimacy and analytical depth to European revolutions or even to Safavid uprisings in Persia—detailing their causes, trajectories, and geopolitical significance, especially in relation to the Persian Gulf.⁶⁷

Samuel Barrett Miles, for example, depicted his journey into the interior of Oman—particularly his visit to the Green Mountain—as a terrifying expedition into a land inhabited by a

⁶⁴ Miles, Samuel Barrett. *The countries and tribes of the Persian Gulf*. London, Harrison and sons, 1919. Pdf. <https://www.loc.gov/item/19015476/>.

⁶⁵ *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*. Vol I. Historical. Part IA & IB. J G Lorimer. 1915' [88] (231/1782), British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/20/C91/1, in *Qatar Digital Library* https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100023575942.0x000020.

⁶⁶ *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*. Vol I. Historical. Part IA & IB. J G Lorimer. 1915' [249] (392/1782), British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/20/C91/1, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100023575942.0x0000c1> [accessed 20 April 2025].

⁶⁷ Miles, *The Countries and Tribes*, 30, 43, 78, 125, 138, 255.

band of money-hungry thieves.⁶⁸ In all his writings, he was relentless in denying Omani civilizational achievements in architecture, hydraulic engineering, and urban planning. Instead, he attributed all such developments to Persian influence, arguing that they were imposed during periods of occupation. This amounted to a crude legitimization of colonial conquest by stripping Omanis of historical agency and cultural accomplishment.⁶⁹

The colonial school did not outgrow these distortions, even in its later generations. Into the second half of the twentieth century, its scholarship remained tethered to a pragmatic, instrumentalist model of knowledge that served imperial interests. A representative figure of this second generation of what might be called *musta‘minun*⁷⁰ which refer to non-Omani researchers, scholars, and specialists who engage with Omani history and society. The term is coined analogously to al-Mustashriqun (Orientalists”) and is intended to signal a critical awareness of the positionality and interpretive authority of external voices in the historiography of Oman. At the forefront of the *musta‘minun*

is John Craven Wilkinson (b. 1934), who dedicated much of his academic career to the study of Ibadism—its history, doctrinal developments, and theological distinctions within Islam.

Yet, Wilkinson approached British colonial involvement in Oman with excessive neutrality, portraying it as a de facto reality rather than a coercive, strategic occupation. Despite

⁶⁸ Samuel Barrett Miles, “Across the Green Mountains of Oman,” *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 5 (Nov., 1901), 465-498.

⁶⁹ Miles, “Across the Green Mountains,” 465-498.

⁷⁰ The term al-Musta‘minun, singular: al-Musta‘min, is used in this study to refer to non-Omani researchers, scholars, and specialists who engage with Omani history and society. The term is coined analogously to al-Mustashriqun (Orientalists”) and is intended to signal a critical awareness of the positionality and interpretive authority of external voices in the historiography of Oman. It does not imply hostility or bad faith, but rather underscores the historically unequal power dynamics in the production of knowledge about Oman, particularly during and after the colonial era.

his previous employment at Shell Petroleum and his access to Ibadi primary sources in both North Africa and Oman, Wilkinson largely evaded the subversive and anti-centralist roots of Ibadī thought, which historically positioned itself in opposition to the authority of the caliphate from the Umayyad period onwards.

Instead, Wilkinson focused his research on tribal disputes, territorial boundaries, oil politics, urban planning, village structures, ports, inter-tribal alliances, personal ambitions of tribal leaders, and the ethnic and social composition of Omani society. He examined agriculture and irrigation and their role in internal struggles over land and water. He was more engaged in history concerned with the study of hydraulic societies, and his account is engaged in a debate with theories akin to those of Wittfogel, who had Marxist echoes owing to his earlier communism but who is mainly known today for an outdated account of oriental despotism.⁷¹ Wilkinson, through studying the aflaj, rejected the idea of water management as leading to the rise of a centralized imperial model. All of these themes, while analytically rich, reduced Oman's social and political life to an object of anthropological curiosity, stripped of anti-colonial urgency. These dynamics were treated as apolitical material, ready for observation, theorization, and categorization—rather than as consequences of imperial dominance. Britain, in this framing, was not an occupying force or a monopolizer of resources, but merely a friend and treaty partner—a position that conveniently

⁷¹ Despite the significance of his book *Oriental Despotism*, Wittfogel excessively generalizes his hydraulic theory to Eastern societies, constructing it on the dichotomy of the "despotic East" versus the "free West." This simplistic binary fails to withstand historical, sociological, and anthropological critiques and reflects intellectual biases prevalent during the Cold War era. The notion that Europe was always a cradle of freedom is an idea that historical events and human experience have demonstrated to be inaccurate. In the case of Oman, for instance, there are villages in the remote mountains whose social system, based on water management, remains largely indifferent to the struggles of central authority.

For an examination of Wittfogel's theory, see his work: Karl A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).

ignored the very military and geopolitical weight it exercised on Omani soil since the early nineteenth century.⁷²

While Omani sources—especially those discussed in Chapters One, Two, and Three of this dissertation—emphatically framed anti-colonial struggle as a revolution against foreign occupation (i.e., British imperialism), they also deployed a full range of religious, social, political, cultural, and linguistic symbols to mobilize popular sentiment. This is evident, for example, in the titles and themes of the two foundational works *Tuhfat al-A'yan* (‘The Precious Gift to the Notables’) and *Nahdat al-A'yan* (‘The Uprising of the Notables’) by Nur al-Din al-Salimi and his son Muhammad (known as al-Shaybah), respectively.

The term *tuhfa* (precious gift) alludes to a long-sought historical treasure, one which al-Salimi unearthed from the deep lineage of Omani history in order to inspire resistance, specifically,

⁷² John C. Wilkinson, *Arabia's Frontiers: The Story of Britain's Blue and Violet Lines* (London: I.B. Tauris; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991). John C. Wilkinson, *Ibadism: Origins and Early Development in Oman*, *Oriental Monographs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). John C. Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, John C. Wilkinson, *The Organisation of the Falaj Irrigation System in Oman*, Research Papers, no. 10 (Oxford: University of Oxford, School of Geography, 1974). John C. Wilkinson, *Water and Tribal Settlement in South-East Arabia*, *Aflaj study of the Aflaj of Oman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977). John C. Wilkinson, ‘Al-Bahrain and Oman,’ *al-Wathiqah*, no. 5 (July 1984): 42–55, and no. 7 (July 1985): 231–251. John C. Wilkinson, ‘Borders and Territoriality in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula During the Twentieth Century,’ in *Territorial Foundations of the Gulf States*, ed. Richard Schofield, SOAS/GRC Geopolitics Series, no. 1 (London: University College of London Press, 1994), 94–108. John C. Wilkinson, ‘Britain's Role in Boundary Drawing in Arabia: A Synopsis,’ in *Territorial Foundations of the Gulf States*, ed. Richard Schofield, SOAS/GRC Geopolitics Series, no. 1 (London: University College of London Press, 1994), 94–108. John C. Wilkinson, ‘Changes in the Structure of Village Life in Oman,’ in *Social and Economic Development in the Arab Gulf*, ed. Tim Niblock (London: Croom Helm for the University of Exeter Centre for Arab Gulf Studies, 1980), 122–135. John C. Wilkinson, ‘Islamic Water Law with Special Reference to Oasis Settlement,’ *Journal of Arid Environments* 1 (1978): 87–96. John C. Wilkinson, ‘The Julanda of Oman,’ *Journal of Oman Studies* 1 (1975): 97–108. John C. Wilkinson, ‘Maskat,’ in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), fasc. 109–10, 734–36.

John Wilkinson, ‘Nomadic Territory as a Factor in Defining Arabia's Boundaries,’ in *The Transformation of Nomadic Society in The Arab East*, ed. Martha Mundy and Basim Musallam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 44–62. John Wilkinson, ‘Baysirah and Bayadir,’ *Arabian Studies* 1 (1974): 75–85.

the 1913 revolution and the revival of the Imamate under Salim bin Rashid al-Kharuṣi (1913–1920), which al-Salimi himself encouraged and helped organize.⁷³ His son, Muhammad al-Salimi, extended this intellectual project with *Nahdat al-A‘yan*, a work whose title (*nahḍa*) connotes awakening, power, resistance, and armed confrontation—and is also semantically linked to notions of flourishing, progress, and renewal.⁷⁴ This work documented the leadership of Imams Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi and Muhammad bin ‘Abd Allah al-Khalili, serving as a historical foundation for the national awakening that culminated in the Green Mountain Revolution of 1955–1959 against British occupation.

It is therefore not an exaggeration to assert the existence of a distinct Omani school of anti-colonial historiography, one deeply rooted in its own epistemological traditions of resistance to Persian, Portuguese, and British imperialism.⁷⁵ Yet this school has been systematically marginalized by the dominance of European historical methodologies applied to the study of modern Omani history—even by those historiographical schools that positioned themselves in critique of capitalism and imperialism, such as Marxism, the 1960s “history from below” movement, and the 1980s Subaltern Studies school.⁷⁶

⁷³ Chapters one and two will discuss the revolution of Imam Azzan bin Qais in 1868 and Imam Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi in 1913, and how the British Empire suppressed these two revolutions.

⁷⁴ Ibn Manẓur. *Lisan al-‘Arab*, vol. 7, p. 245. Entry: *Nahada*.” Electronic edition, al-Maktaba al-Shamela. <https://shamela.ws/book/1687/3628> (accessed April 20, 2025).

⁷⁵ It is important to note here that the Omanis resisted both Persian and Portuguese imperial expansion into their land. The rejection of foreign rule and intervention in their territory was a marked characteristic of theirs, supported by historical evidence documented in various studies. However, this anti-colonial stance is challenged by the expansion of the maritime sovereignty that the Omanis built during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries along the Indian Ocean coasts. Whether what the Omanis practiced on the East African coast constitutes colonialism is a question worthy of research and comparison, which cannot be adequately addressed within the scope of this thesis.

⁷⁶ Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 1 (2000): 9-32.

This dissertation seeks to challenge such historiographical reductionism by tracing the continuous thread of Omani resistance across the modern period, and in doing so, refute what some early 20th-century AD Marxist historiographies characterized as “primitive rebellion” or pre-political uprisings—terms famously used by Eric Hobsbawm.⁷⁷ Such frameworks often dismissed revolts rooted in kinship, religious identity, or sectarian affiliation as lacking political maturity.

By contrast, Ranajit Guha, a founding figure of the Subaltern Studies collective, explicitly rejects the notion that peasant revolts were “pre-political.”⁷⁸ Guha argues that such analysis is grounded in bourgeois frameworks and elite vocabularies—conceptual tools that emerged within a European historical context deeply implicated in colonialism and complicit with imperial power. As such, these frameworks cannot be assumed to mirror the trajectory of political consciousness among Indian peasants, who often found in discourses of kinship, caste, religion, and ethnicity the motivational force to resist British colonial domination.⁷⁹

Guha’s framework—alongside the broader methodological tools of Subaltern Studies—may, in fact, prove analytically useful for understanding the Omani case, especially given the structural and economic similarities between rural India and Oman’s agrarian interior, both of which featured artisanal, agricultural, and small-scale trading economies.⁸⁰ However, an important

⁷⁷ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 2.

⁷⁸ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986, 5-6.

⁷⁹ Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, Chapters 1& 2.

⁸⁰ It is noteworthy here to reference Guha’s argument that Oman did not possess a caste system analogous to the pervasive and dominant one prevalent in the Subaltern studies of India. Furthermore, Omani agricultural production was neither large-scale nor commercially significant in volume, unlike Indian cotton, spices, and tea. Consequently, imperialism never sought to subjugate the entire Omani territory for the exploitation of agricultural resources. This

distinction must be emphasized: British imperialism never succeeded in fully subjugating Oman's interior.

Since the arrival of British naval power in the early nineteenth century, vast inland territories—especially agricultural communities—remained largely autonomous and resistant to foreign influence. This incomplete colonization nurtured among Omanis a heightened sensitivity to independence and a moral imperative to liberate their coastal compatriots from imperial domination. This point resonates with E.P. Thompson's insistence that emotional and cognitive responses to oppression are shaped not abstractly, but through lived experience. People's resistance cannot be divorced from the particularities of their own political formation and social structure.⁸¹

In this context, the work of the Palestinian historian Hanna Batatu provides a significant contribution to the study of colonial dynamics and their social consequences in Arab societies, through his detailed analyses grounded in oral testimonies, archival sources, administrative records, and legal documentation. His work laid a critical foundation for understanding the social and political transformations of a neighboring Arab country, Iraq, whose colonial experience under British rule bore structural similarities to that of Oman.⁸²

Although British interests in Iraq pre-oil differed substantially. Likewise, the social structure in the Iraqi countryside was very different, especially after the onset of new Ottoman

situation, however, changed fundamentally following the discovery of oil, which necessitated that imperialism alter its methods to establish absolute control over all Omani regions.

⁸¹ E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1999).

⁸² Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and Its Communists, Ba'thists, and Free Officers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) and *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

land laws in the mid-nineteenth century. Lastly, the maritime empire dimension in Oman also occasioned the rise of different social relations, including those based on the movement of Omani merchants in East Africa, including those hailing from interior tribal origins.

Batatu's methodological rigor opened the door for subsequent scholarship to focus on peasants, workers, and ordinary people across the Levant and Arabian Peninsula—those who form the enduring backbone of daily resistance and constitute the most resilient reservoir of anti-colonial struggle. While his core research focused on land tenure, social contradictions, and colonial legal systems—particularly in Iraq from 1917 to 1958, and later in Syria during the same period—his contributions extended far beyond agrarian studies. Batatu illuminated the complexities of tribal and clan structures, modes of land exploitation, and the role of sociohistorical inquiry in deconstructing the formation of political identity and social consciousness. His work demonstrated how these factors shaped revolutionary movements, political organizations, and national liberation struggles throughout the modern Arab world.

A new generation of contemporary Arab academic historians has begun to contribute meaningfully to the methodological revitalization and epistemological deepening of modern Omani historiography, placing themes of resistance and revolution at the center of their scholarly inquiry. This trend is marked by a turn toward phenomenological approaches and critical methodologies, with a strong emphasis on primary documents and manuscript sources. Notable among these contributions is the work of Amal Ghazal, whose research (2010–2017) explores the

themes of reform and revival within the Ibadi intellectual tradition, and their impact on transformations in social and authority structures.⁸³

Equally significant is the contribution of Abdel Razzaq Takriti, whose *Monsoon Revolution* offers a major intervention in the field by developing a critical historiographical lens for studying revolution in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula. His work exemplifies a departure from conventional narratives, foregrounding alternative frameworks rooted in both archival research and theoretical critique.⁸⁴

This dissertation does not aspire to more than the task of re-examining the theme of revolution and national liberation movements in modern Omani historiography, beyond the prevailing apprehension toward "revolution" as a historical and conceptual crisis—a fear that has long shaped the approach of absolute rule in Oman throughout the twentieth century. Instead, it seeks to re-read episodes of political upheaval through alternative interpretive lenses, marked by a degree of analytical distance from colonial-era scholarship and an engagement with the questions raised by postcolonial theory. At the same time, it remains attentive to the methodological

⁸³ See: Amal Ghazal, "Tarikh al-ʿArab al-hadith: Bayna al-Taqsīm al-Iqlīmī wa al-Tahmīsh al-Madhhabī wa al-Ithnī—al-Ibadiyya Mithalan," in *al-Taʾrīkh al-ʿArabī wa Tarīkh al-ʿArab: Kayfa Kutiba wa Kayfa Yuktab? al-Ijabat al-Mumkina* (Doha: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2017), 331–347. Amal Ghazal, "al-Nukhba al-ʿUmaniyya fi Zanjibar: Qiraʾa fi Masadir wa Utur al-Fikr al-Qawmī," in *al-Dawr al-ʿUmani fi al-Sharq al-Afriqi*, 11–13 December 2012. Amal Ghazal, *Buhuth al-Muʿtamar* (Muscat: Center for Omani Studies at Sultan Qaboos University and National Records and Archives Authority, 2013), 50–70; and Amal Ghazal, *Islamic Reform and Arab Nationalism: expanding the crescent from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean (1880s-1930s)*. Routledge, 2010. 102, 2010. Amal Ghazal, "Omani Fatwas and Zanzibari Cosmopolitanism: Modernity and Religious Authority in the Indian Ocean," *The Muslim World*, Vol. 105.2(2015), 236-250. Amal Ghazal, "Seeking Common Ground: Salafism and Islamic Reform in Modern Ibadī Thought," *The Bulletin for the Royal Institute of Inter-Faith Studies* 7, no.1 (Spring/Summer 2005): 119-141. Amal Ghazal, "The Other Frontiers of Arab Nationalism: Berbers, Ibadis and the Arabist-Salafis of the Interwar Period," *The International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 (February 2010): 105-122.

⁸⁴ Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*. Abdel Razzaq Takriti, "Colonial Coups and the War on Popular Sovereignty," *The American Historical Review* 124, no. 3 (June 2019): 878-909.

distinctions developed by Marxist historiography—The focus is thus directed more towards class analysis and modes of production.

and the working class in history from below”—and it draws selectively from the conceptual tools of Subaltern Studies, while maintaining sensitivity to the specific social and historical contradictions of Omani society within its broader Arab and Islamic context.

Revolution, as a normative event and analytical entry point, remains one of the most effective ways to excavate the silences, tensions, and submerged layers of society and state. It constitutes not only a moment of rupture but also a deconstructive process, capable of generating alternative approaches to understanding marginalized groups, critiquing authoritarian structures, and exposing the alliances between absolute power and colonial interests. In essence, this dissertation advocates for the development of a new school of thought dedicated to the study, analysis, and critical evaluation of revolution and resistance in Omani history—a school grounded in rigorous critical inquiry and deep engagement with the foundational sources of Oman's rich and underutilized historiographical tradition. These primary materials, still largely unexamined, demand a sustained intellectual commitment and patient methodological attention.

The colonial school's interpretive authority did not remain confined to textual production or academic discourse. Its epistemological reach extended into the operational logics of the imperial project itself—shaping not only how Oman was represented, but also how it was governed, surveilled, and militarily engaged. The abstraction of Omani resistance into categories such as “tribal unrest” or “localized crisis” served to delegitimize the political content of revolutionary activity and justified increasingly interventionist policies. Yet, beneath these

narratives, a very different dynamic was unfolding on the ground: the organized mobilization of Omani actors, particularly through armed resistance, who challenged both colonial presence and its local alliances. To better understand the confrontation between empire and insurgency, the next section turns to the formation and evolution of the Omani Liberation Army, situating it within the broader landscape of anti-colonial struggle and exploring how the language of liberation emerged in direct opposition to the imperial frame.

The Empire and the Liberation Army

Empires ... [were built] with blood and iron. They were imposed by stronger on weaker peoples, often after prolonged resistance; and when the conquered strove to regain their independence their foreign rulers often fought tooth and nail to keep them in subjection.”⁸⁵

In May of 1957, the Oman Liberation Army (OLA) of the Omani Imamate, the political ruler of the Omani interior, launched an armed struggle against the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman's forces to prevent the latter from expanding its territorial domain into the Interior in what came to be known as Thawrat al-Jabal al-Akhdar (the Green Mountain revolt).⁸⁶ The backdrop to this revolt can be traced back a few years to the death of Imam Mohammad al-Khalili on May 3, 1954, which gave Sultan Said bin Taimur the pretext for undermining the political authority of the Imamate by exerting control over the interior.⁸⁷ Beyond the political motivations of demarking

⁸⁵ V.G. Kiernan, *Colonial Empires and Armies, 1815-1960* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1998), p. xi.

⁸⁶ Until 1970, the territory known today as Oman was officially Muscat and Oman.”

⁸⁷ The 1920 Sib Treaty gave the Imamate authority to govern the interior of Oman.

territorial domains and monopolizing violence, the material basis for this expansion lay in the region's vast oil reserves. With the expansion of capitalist development into the most remote corners of the periphery, the conditions for occupying the Omani interior were ripe. As one commentator remarked, "whereas previously there had been no need to define boundaries too precisely in the Arabian interior, the development of oil-wells made it essential; and territorial disputes became inevitable."⁸⁸

What had initially begun as a political feud between the forces of two rulers in 1954 had developed into a full-scale revolt by 1957 with concrete demands centered around the liberation of the interior from Sultanic despotism and the expulsion of British colonial forces and agents from the entirety of Oman.⁸⁹ In the end, the al-Jabal al-Akhdar revolt was extinguished by January 1959 after direct British colonial intervention was brought in to crush the revolution. Through the deployment of special forces and indiscriminate aerial bombardments across the mountainous interior, the use British colonial forces were instrumental in the domestication of the Omani interior as well as securing Sultanic authority beyond coastal Oman for the first time.⁹⁰ Despite the revolt lasting less than two years, what occurred in al-Jabal al-Akhdar will go on to play a crucial role in the social and political development of modern Oman.

Colonialism or Friendship?

The Omani resistance to British colonialism did not emerge in a historical vacuum. Omanis had already developed a deep-seated experience in confronting foreign occupation, most notably

⁸⁸ Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans* 292.

⁸⁹ Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans.*, 295.

⁹⁰ Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*, 24.

through their sustained resistance to Portuguese imperial expansion in the second half of the seventeenth century. Under the leadership of Imam Nasir bin Murshid al-Ya‘rubi, they successfully challenged Portuguese control, eventually expelling them not only from Omani territory but from the wider Indian Ocean sphere.⁹¹ This legacy of anti-colonial struggle formed a crucial foundation upon which later generations would respond to the British imperial presence, not merely as an external intervention, but as a historically resonant challenge to national sovereignty and political autonomy.

The empire of Muscat and Oman arose as a thalassocratic powerhouse in the late seventeenth century, when at its zenith, it dominated the waves of the Indian Ocean from the Arabian Sea all the way down the Swahili Coast. The Al Bu Said dynasty, who remain the rulers of contemporary Oman, amassed their wealth from trading spices and enslaved people, as well as extracting rent and extortion along the Eastern coasts of Africa—with Zanzibar being the empire’s gem and hub of maritime trade.⁹² With its strategic location as a link between the Persian and Ottoman empires to the north, and India, the Far East and Europe,”⁹³ it becomes clear that the ruling Al Bu Said dynasty that was situated in Muscat and Zanzibar was heavily integrated into the global capitalist economy for centuries before Oman even exported its first barrels of oil in 1967.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Lockhart, Laurence. “The Menace of Muscat and Its Consequences in the Late and Early Eighteenth Centuries.” *The Asiatic Review* 42 (1946): 363–69.

⁹² See M. Reda Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar: The Roots of British Domination* (London: Routledge, 1994), 75.

⁹³ Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, 279.

⁹⁴ Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770–1873* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987).

British colonial interest in the Arabian Peninsula first arose in the context of the French Revolutionary Wars, when hegemony over maritime routes to India was seen as paramount to British imperial policy.⁹⁵ To curtail the French and maintain their dominance over the Indian Ocean, representatives of the British East India Company (BEIC) were dispatched to the Gulf to sign the first of many treaties in the region. The Treaty of Friendship,” as it was called, was the first Anglo-Omani treaty between the British Empire and the Sultan when it was signed in 1798. Two years later, BEIC coerced the sultan into an amendment of the treaty to include the stationing of a British agent” in the coastal capital of Muscat.⁹⁶

From the moment that a treaty was signed, local rulers across the Arabian Gulf and Peninsula would become locked into an uneven arrangement that would make them increasingly dependent on the tutelage of British colonial rule for material and political support—a process that ultimately alienated them from their local power bases as the new relationship with a colonial power allowed for rulers to practice tyranny with little fear of being overthrown.⁹⁷ Furthermore, Oman’s ever increasing colonial dependency was designed by Britain to dismantle the former’s naval hegemony in the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean, replacing it with the behemoth of the British navy. What was once a hegemonic thalassocracy imploded as it came to be dominated by the world’s largest empire. As will be demonstrated later in the study, the long-term implications

⁹⁵ See Alexander Mikaberidze, *The Napoleonic Wars: A Global History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 91-94.

⁹⁶ See J.B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 65-67.

⁹⁷ An interesting discussion of this relationship between tribal rulers and Sheikhs in South Arabia can be found in Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael, *The People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen: Politics, Economics and Society: The Politics of Socialist Transformation* (London: Frances Pinter, 1986), 5-11.

of this decline would create widespread resentment toward the despotic ruler who was now entirely dependent on a foreign power for survival.

‘Abd al-Fattah Ibrahim, in his book *‘Ala Tariq al-Hind* (trans. On the Road to India), argues that from the very outset of the 1798 treaty between the British Empire and Sultan bin Ahmad bin Sa‘id al-Busa‘idi, Britain exerted pressure on Muscat by threatening to block Omani ships from accessing Indian ports and obstructing its maritime trade. This coercive leverage enabled Britain to extract greater concessions from the Omani side, laying the groundwork for its economic, political, and strategic entrenchment in the region. Through the establishment of an imperial network of intelligence and telegraph communication linking India—the jewel of the British crown—to London, Oman, along with the ports and cities of the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula, served as a critical colonial bridge through which British capitalism was able to realize its highest levels of profit, return, and wealth accumulation throughout the nineteenth century AD and the first half of the twentieth.⁹⁸

Throughout the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, British colonial influence played a significant role in shaping the political and economic structures of Oman. The legacy of this influence remained embedded within the Omani state for decades. In a broader geopolitical context marked by shifting imperial strategies, Britain continued to support Sultan Sa‘id bin Taymur's rule well beyond the al-Jabal al-Akhdar conflict, despite growing internal opposition and governance challenges. His eventual removal from power in 1970 AD, and the installation of his son, Qabus bin Sa‘id, occurred in the context of a British-backed transition, framed by concerns over regional instability and the rise of revolutionary movements, particularly

⁹⁸ ‘Abd al-Fattah Ibrahim, *‘Ala Tariq al-Hind* (Baghdad: Matba‘at al-Ahali, 1932), 32–65

in Dhofar, where state control had significantly eroded.⁹⁹ Furthermore, in V.G. Kiernan study on colonial armies, he alludes to how British officers went on being lent to the sultan, as a species of official mercenaries, and found Oman a useful training-ground for experiments in counter-insurgency.”¹⁰⁰ Individuals such as John Watts, who led Special Air Service (SAS) units deployed in 1959 AD to suppress the al-Jabal al-Akhdar uprising, continued to serve under the Omani Sultan as military advisers. During the Dhufar conflict, Watts commanded a regiment and subsequently rose to the position of Chief of Staff of the Sultan s Armed Forces (SAF)—a role he held until the position was formally Omanized in 1987.¹⁰¹

While scholars sympathetic to the Sultan attribute Britain s involvement to suppress the revolt in the interior describe the long-standing friendship between the two countries,”¹⁰² a more plausible explanation can be found in the Sultan s dependency on the British Empire. Even official Omani historiography acknowledges that the extension of sultanic authority over the interior could not have been achieved without direct British colonial intervention.¹⁰³ From financial and political backing to the establishment of military forces and the structuring of the Sultan s Armed Forces (SAF), the institution of the Sultanate became increasingly reliant on British support for its continuity, a dependency that, as this study has shown, originated with the first treaty signed in

⁹⁹ For a broader discussion on colonial coups in the Arabian Gulf, see Takriti, “Colonial Coups and the War on Popular Sovereignty,” for the colonial coup in Oman, see Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*, 160-164.

¹⁰⁰ V.G. Kiernan, *Colonial Empires and Armies*, 211.

¹⁰¹ See Skeet, *Oman*, 37, 45, 99.

¹⁰² Majid al-Khalili, “Oman s Foreign Policy: Foundations and Practice,” PhD diss., (Florida International University, 2005), 62.

¹⁰³ Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century*, 180.

1798 AD. It follows that the suppression of the al-Jabal al-Akhdar uprising was less a reflection of the Sultan's internal capabilities and more a function of Britain's strategic decision to intervene militarily. Absent this intervention, the outcome of the revolt may have taken a markedly different course.

As Takriti and others have argued, the regime's survival was inextricably linked to its integration within the broader architecture of British imperialism.¹⁰⁴ This study further demonstrates that the al-Jabal al-Akhdar uprising had a formative impact on the development of the Omani left, particularly in its early articulations of anti-colonial liberation and its limited experimentation with guerrilla warfare. Indeed, scholars such as Behbehani have identified this revolt as the first "political phase" in the eventual emergence of the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG), which would later lead the Dhofar rebellion and sustain the longest anti-imperial armed struggle in the modern history of the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁰⁵

Having traced the structural entanglements between British imperial power and the Omani sultanate—from the 1798 treaty through the military and economic dependencies that culminated in the suppression of popular revolts—it becomes necessary to interrogate how these historical dynamics have been represented in the dominant historiographical record. In particular, the framing of revolutionary movements in Oman has often been shaped by colonial narratives that sought to minimize the political agency of local actors. This becomes especially apparent in

¹⁰⁴ Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*, 312.

¹⁰⁵ Hashim S.H. Behbehani, *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World, 1955-1975: Three Case Studies* (London: KPI Limited, 1985), 134. For PFLOAG and the Dhofari revolution, see Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution* and Traboulsi, *Dhofar*.

the classification of organized anti-colonial struggles as mere tribal rebellions.” The following section critically examines this reductive label, exploring its methodological limitations and contrasting it with both indigenous political traditions and the documented participation of broad-based coalitions in resisting foreign domination. By doing so, it aims to clarify the historiographical stakes of interpreting these events as revolutions rather than as fragmented or parochial uprisings.

Revolution or Tribal Rebellion?

Colonial sources often fall into methodological contradictions when insisting on characterizing Omani revolutions as tribal rebellions.” The designation of a tribal rebellion” presupposes, at its core, that a specific tribe or broad tribal alliance has risen against a single, centralized authority governing the country. This condition, however, does not apply in the Omani context. While it is true that tribal structures have historically constituted the primary social fabric in Oman, historical events indicate that no single tribe or exclusive tribal coalition instigated rebellion against a centralized authority with universally accepted legitimacy.

Rather, the revolutions examined in this study were rooted in contested notions of political legitimacy—between a leadership structure based on the elective imamate, chosen by a council of *ahl al-ḥal wa al-‘aqd* (people of binding and decision), and an absolute hereditary monarchy that allied with external imperial powers to suppress its rivals and ensure dynastic continuity. Historical records further show that most tribal groups participated in these revolutions, and that even historically rival tribal confederations, such as the Hinawi and Ghafiri alliances¹⁰⁶, were united in

¹⁰⁶ **The Ghafiri and Hinawi Alliances:** The two principal tribal confederations in Oman.

resisting foreign domination, as was the case during the Imamate of Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi (1913) and later under Imam Ghalib bin ‘Ali al-Hina’i (1954).

Colonial sources consistently depicted the Jabal al-Akhdar War as a necessary intervention by the British Empire on behalf of its ally, the Sultan of Muscat. In his work on the subject, J.E. Peterson characterizes the events as a mere insurgency¹⁰⁷ while John Kelly offers a broader justification for imperial hegemony in Oman, suggesting that Britain simply responded to the needs of its compliant ally from the Al Bu Said dynasty.¹⁰⁸ Even American historian Calvin Allen, who otherwise sheds light on the distortions of modernization under British influence over the last

Origins of Conflict: The intense and bloody polarization between these two alliances emerged from the divisions among religious scholars and leaders during the decline of the Ya'aruba dynasty in the first half of the 18th century, particularly following the dispute over the succession of Imam Sultan bin Saif II (d. 1733). Oman descended into open civil war between two tribal leaders: Muhammad bin Nasser al-Ghafiri of the Ghafiri and Khalf bin Mubarak al-Qasir of the Hinawi. Each leader sought to install a puppet imam or seize power outright, as seen in Muhammad bin Nasser al-Ghafiri's rise. The two alliances engaged in prolonged, devastating wars marked by cycles of revenge, looting, roadblocking, and instability. Omanis across the country—coastal and interior regions, mountains and deserts—suffered under this protracted conflict. Consequences of the Civil War: The Ghafiri-Hinawi rivalry plunged Oman into underdevelopment, poverty, disease, and insecurity. This vulnerability invited foreign invasions, such as Nader Shah's campaigns to control Oman (1737–1744) and British encroachment beginning in 1798. Historian Nur al-Din al-Salmi attributes the division to the abandonment of Oman's foundational principle: the election of the imam by a council of scholars (*ahl al-ḥal wa al-'aqd*). In contrast, historian Salim bin Hamood al-Siyabi describes the conflict as unfolding "without divine guidance." The primary drivers of the strife were tribal factionalism and short-term political gains. Tribal and Ethnic Dimensions: The conflict reignited the ancient North-South Arab divide. Tribes of northern (Adnani or Nizari) descent aligned with the Ghafiri, while southern (Yamani or Qahtani) tribes formed the Hinawi alliance. Notably, these alliances were not sectarian; both included Sunni and Ibaḍi communities. Long-Term Impact: Over two centuries, the Ghafiri-Hinawi rivalry shaped Oman's political, military, and socioeconomic landscape, influencing state formation, wealth distribution, and territorial control. The alliances evolved beyond tribal origins to reflect shifting power dynamics, economic interests, security concerns, and competition over resources like water and grazing lands. Their entrenched divisions also determined the success or failure of modern Omani revolutions. See for further information: Al-Salmi, Nur al-Din. *Tuhfat al-A'yan [The Masterpiece of the Notables]*, vol. 2, p. 121; Al-Siyabi, Salim bin Hamood. *Oman Through History* (in Arabic), vol. 4, p. 39; Al-Maskari, Saif. *Imamate and the Struggle for Power in Oman: Late Ya'aruba State 1719–1749* (A Study in Political History). Muscat: Dar al-Ghasham for Publishing and Translation, 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century*; _____, "Oman's Diverse Society: Southern Oman," *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 32–51; _____, *Oman's Insurgencies*.

¹⁰⁸ J.B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf 1795–1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

150 years, ultimately refers to the episode as a rebellion carried out by a conservative faction within Oman against the Sultan's authority.¹⁰⁹

Few of these historians appear to engage seriously with the perspectives of Omanis themselves, those upon whom the multifaceted structure of British hegemony was imposed. This is despite the availability of critical Omani primary sources that predate or parallel their analyses. One such example is *Nahdat al-A'yan*, authored by Shaykh al-Shayba Muhammad bin 'Abd Allah al-Salimi and published in its first edition in 1961—shortly after the events.¹¹⁰ Al-Salimi had himself played a key role in the early stages of the revolution. Oral testimonies from key revolutionary figures and leaders, available at the time in Cairo, Dammam, Kuwait, and Beirut—if not accessible within Oman due to the severe restrictions imposed by Sultan Sa'īd bin Taymur—could also have been drawn upon.

This study draws on direct engagement with Omani primary sources, archival records, and multiple research visits to British colonial archives. Key materials consulted include holdings at the British Library, the UK National Archives in Kew Gardens, and the private papers of British military commanders involved in the campaigns against Omani rebels in al-Jabal al-Akhdar. Notable among these are Colonel David Smiley's collection and the Oman Archive collections at the Middle East Centre Archive, University of Oxford, as well as the Lt. Colonel Deane-Drummond collection housed at the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives and King's College London Archives. It has become evident that many of the imperial historians who wrote on Oman

¹⁰⁹ R.G. Landen, *Oman Since 1856: Disruptive Modernization in a Traditional Arab Society* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), 422-425.

¹¹⁰ Al-Salimi, Mohammad bin Abdullah (Abu Bashir), *Nahdat al-A'yan Bi-Hurriyat Oman*, Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, 1961.

and its revolutions had relied primarily on military dispatches authored by British commanders, written from a colonial military perspective and archived in Whitehall. Their work, in many cases, did little more than reproduce the assumptions and priorities embedded in these official records.

Given the historic significance of the Jabal al-Akhdar revolt, it is quite revealing that this small yet crucial episode in the modern history of Oman has either been significantly downplayed or almost outright erased from the English historiography on the country.¹¹¹ For those who have written about this highly consequential episode, al-Jabal al-Akhdar is either reduced to a tribal squabble or mired in paradigms of counterinsurgency and conflict studies, limiting the analytical potential for critical scholarship on the event and its aftermath.¹¹² This is particularly striking considering that the al-Jabal al-Akhdar revolt was not limited to an internal political crisis, but was rather fought out in the context of a globalizing Cold War, with countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Britain, and even the United States all involved in the struggle for Oman's interior. These misrepresentations are emblematic of both Omani and Gulf Studies as a whole, for most of the

¹¹¹ The most notable example is Steffen Wippel, ed., *Regionalizing Oman: Political, Economic and Social Dynamics* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013). This edited volume, which features contributions from a range of established scholars of Oman, contains no discussion of the revolt. Also see, Ian Skeet, *Oman: Politics and Development* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992) and John Townsend, *Oman: The Making of a Modern State* (London: Croom Helm, 1977).

¹¹² Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century*; _____ *Oman's Insurgencies*; Lawrence G. Timpe, "British Foreign Policy Towards the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, 1954-1959," PhD diss., (University of Exeter, 1991); and Joseph A. Kechichian, *Oman and the World: The Emergence of an Independent Foreign Policy* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1995). The exception to this is Fred Halliday's *Mercenaries: Counter-Insurgency in the Gulf* (Nottingham: Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation for Spokesman Books, 1977), whose critical exposé on how British colonial intervention was used to undermine popular sovereignty maintain and/install repressive regimes across the colonized world was written with the intention of shedding light on a war waged by Britain in Oman that was being covering up in the media.

historiography on Oman is imprisoned in colonial accounts, counterinsurgency studies, [and] official histories,” and mired in paradigms of tradition/modernity, tribalism, and religiosity.¹¹³

And even amongst the critical Omani scholarship that has challenged the dominant paradigms emblematic of Gulf Studies, their analysis on the legacies and continuities that the al-Jabal al-Akhdar revolt had on the formation of the Omani left and the rise of a revolutionary socialist movement in Dhufar does not receive adequate attention.¹¹⁴ The exceptions here are Takriti's *Monsoon Revolution* and Behbehani's *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World, 1955-1975: Three Case Studies*—though the latter's study charts the progression of the Omani left insofar as it corresponds to foreign policy development of China. Given how underlooked this moment is in the literature on Oman, new studies are beginning to develop that situate the revolt within Arab nationalist, leftist, and Third Worldist ideas ... forming part of the Pan-Arab awakening led by Nasserist Egypt, and a broader Afro-Asian struggle for independence.”¹¹⁵

According to Fawwaz Traboulsi, the decisive factor in the success or derailment of any revolution or process of transformation lies with those who hold political and economic power, and how they respond to demands for change.¹¹⁶ When these elites reject the demands of a social

¹¹³ Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*, 2. Some examples of this literature include Mandana E. Limbert, *In the Time of Oil: Piety, Memory, and Social Life in an Omani Town* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Linda Pappas Funsch, *Oman Reborn: Balancing Tradition and Modernization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); and Calvin H Allen, Jr., *Oman: The Modernization of the Sultanate* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987).

¹¹⁴ See Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*; Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, Fawwaz Traboulsi, *Dhufar: Shahada min Zaman al-Thawra* (Beirut: Riad el-Rayyes Books, 2004); Abdel Nabi al-Ikri, *al-Tanzimat al-Yasariyya fi al-Jazira wal-Khalij al-Arabi* (Beirut: Dar Faradees, 2014); and Muhammad Said al-Umari, *Dhufar: al-Thawra fi Tarikh al-Umani al-Mu'asir, 1964-1975* (Beirut: Riad el-Rayyes Books, 2004).

¹¹⁵ Talal al-Rashoud, “The Historical Roots of the Omani Left,” Presentation, The Middle East Centre, LSE, September 28, 2020.

¹¹⁶ Fawwaz Traboulsi, *Dhufar: Shahada min Zaman al-Thawra* (Beirut: Riad el-Rayyes Books), 33-34.

movement and refuse to concede any portion of their authority, such obstinacy becomes a certified prelude to escalation—pushing the movement toward entrenched violence as the only available path to transformation. This transformation, importantly, does not necessarily lead to improved or desirable outcomes. By contrast, when ruling elites choose to engage, respond, and negotiate with such movements, they create a protective buffer that shields societies from the open-ended trajectories and unpredictable outcomes of revolutions.

It is also essential to note that revolutions do not offer final solutions, and their success or failure cannot be measured simply by their origins or by the moment when the crowds retreat from the public squares. The impact of revolutions tends to be profound and enduring, manifesting vertically in the restructuring of political and economic institutions, and horizontally in shifts in social and cultural behaviors.¹¹⁷ Therefore, the success of a revolution should not be judged solely by whether it takes power or implements its political program during the revolutionary period. Its deeper success lies in the complex transformations that reshape society and the open-ended outcomes generated by revolutionary action.

Revolutionary Continuum

In this sense, it is reasonable to argue that the events that unfolded in al-Jabal al-Akhdar between 1955 and 1959 can be more accurately understood as a “revolutionary situation”, to use Charles Tilly’s terminology. Tilly draws a critical distinction between a revolutionary situation and a revolutionary outcome, noting that “a revolutionary situation . . . entails multiple sovereignty: two or more blocks make effective, incompatible claims to control the state, or to be

¹¹⁷ Fawwaz Traboulsi, *Dhufar*, 33.

the state.” As for a revolutionary outcome, it occurs with transfer of state power from those who held it before the start of multiple sovereignty to a new coalition—which may, of course, include some elements of the old ruling coalition.”¹¹⁸

This study adopts the notion of a revolutionary continuum to interpret the political transformations in Oman between 1955 and 1975. Rather than treating the al-Jabal al-Akhdar and Dhofar uprisings as discrete or disconnected events, the dissertation draws on Charles Tilly’s concept of a “revolutionary situation” and related approaches in subaltern and postcolonial theory to argue that these episodes form a historically and ideologically linked trajectory of anti-colonial resistance. In this sense, the Dhofar Revolution (1965–1975) emerges not as an isolated rebellion but as an organic extension of the earlier Omani revolutionary experience, sustained through evolving ideological frameworks and tactical adaptations.

When asked to reflect on the limitations of the al-Jabal al-Akhdar Revolt, a Dhofari revolutionary observed:

The most important thing to say about Imam Ghalib's movement is that it represented a clash within the imperialist camp. It was a conflict between the Imam and Said bin Taimur, i.e. a conflict between an absolutist regime and a caricature of that obsolete regime, represented by the Imam himself. When we say that it is a conflict within the imperialist camp, we mean that behind Said bin Taimur and Imam Ghalib were Britain on the one hand and America and Saudi Arabia on the other. However, although the Imam's movement represented a clash within the

¹¹⁸ Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492–1992*, 10–14 .

imperialist camp, it did have sizeable mass support; the masses who supported the Imam supported him mainly as a patriotic reaction to the British occupation of the interior of Oman in 1954.¹¹⁹

As this candid retrospective illustrates, the al-Jabal al-Akhdar revolt played a formative role popularizing mass opposition to the Sultan. This held especially true for Dhofaris, whose similar geography and compounding resentment against their oppressor made the notion of revolutionary armed struggle and its conditions favorable for a region like Dhofar. Behbehani correctly points to the lack of political development in central Oman and the Imamate's reactionary positions as an impediment to real substantive political transformation,¹²⁰ significantly inhibiting the potential of sustained anti-colonial national liberation movement centered around the notion of a people's war to emerge from within the interior.¹²¹ Moreover, the shared lived experiences of brutal sultanic despotism coupled with systemic underdevelopment throughout Oman significantly contributed to the growth of an organized and highly militant oppositional movement to the Sultan and his colonial guarantors.¹²² In an era where anticolonial national liberation struggles across the globe were ascendant, the desire Omanis held to overthrow the Sultan gradually became an attainable aspiration.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, 296-297.

¹²⁰ See Jeremy Jones and Nicholas Ridout. *A History of Modern Oman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 31.

¹²¹ See Behbehani, *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World*, 137.

¹²² Examples of this in the context of Jabal al-Akhdar can be found in Valeri, *Oman*, 55.

¹²³ See Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*. 54, 60.

International Imperialist Struggle or Civil War?

Sultan Sa‘id bin Taymur (Sa id), who ascended to power in 1932, adopted policies that significantly curtailed social, educational, and political development within Oman. His rule was marked by a systematic suppression of modern infrastructure and cultural practices: regulations reportedly prohibited the use of air conditioning, bicycles, radios, trousers, sunglasses, football, tobacco, and foreign travel. Educational access was severely limited, with only three schools allowed to operate across the country, each admitting a small number of students, reportedly no more than 100 in total, personally selected by the Sultan.¹²⁴ These restrictive measures, arbitrary and anachronistic in nature, created conditions that some observers described as reflecting “ the crudest kind of Sultanic plunder.”¹²⁵

Despite the well-documented regressive nature of Sa‘id s regime, British support for the Sultan remained steadfast, particularly under the Labour government of the 1960s, even as reports of chattel slavery within the al-Bu Sa‘id ruling class circulated.¹²⁶ Such conditions intensified popular discontent and contributed to widespread opposition to the Sultan s rule across Oman.

Seeing the potential for oil exploitation, British officials instructed the Sultan—whose rule was historically confined to coastal Oman—to expand into the northern interior of Oman, which was governed by the Imamate.¹²⁷ This supra-tribal institution controlled the Omani hinterlands for around 1000 years.¹²⁸ With oil factored into the equation, Britain sought to impose Sultanic

¹²⁴ Dawn Chatty, “Negotiating Authenticity and Translocality in Oman: The Desertscape of the Harasiis Tribe,” in *Regionalizing Oman: Political, Economic and Social Dynamics*, ed. Steffen Wippel (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 134.

¹²⁵ Traboulsi, “The Struggle for Liberation in Oman,” 12.

¹²⁶ Ian Cobain, “Britain’s Secret Wars,” *The Guardian*, September 8, 2016.

¹²⁷ See Valeri, *Oman*, 51-52.

¹²⁸ Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*.

rule over the region to maximize oil concessions now that Imam Muhammad al-Khalili had passed away. The interior, however, was not a desolate part of Oman, for it was estimated that it contained half of the total population of Oman ... in the 1950s.”¹²⁹ This sultanic expansionism violated the 1920 Sib Treaty, which recognized the Imam's sovereignty over the Omani interior. As Marc Valeri points out, this treaty was consummated with British imperial practices in Africa, which were used to fragment a given territory and weaken its political authority through division.¹³⁰ Through the Sib Treaty, Britain ensured that neither the Imam nor Sultan on their own were powerful enough on their own to overcome colonial domination.

It is asserted by some scholars that the Sultan's territorial ambitions of controlling the interior necessitated a significant limitation, or even eradication of the Imamate as a political entity.”¹³¹ And while these ambitions to exert control over the interior were set in motion immediately after the passing of Imam Muhammad al Khalili, the material driving force for this expansionism was the potential for oil exploitation. In classic colonial fashion, it was a foreign corporation, the Iraqi Petroleum Company (IPC), rather than a traditional army, that amassed and financed a 500-man military unit that was commanded by British colonial mercenaries to escort the expedition force of its subsidiary company, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), to violate the Imamate's sovereignty and conduct oil exploration for the benefit of the Sultan.¹³²

¹²⁹ Jeremy Jones and Nicholas Ridout, *A History of Modern Oman*, 114. The authors point out on the same page that there was no central collection of data until the 1970s.”

¹³⁰ See Valeri, *Oman*, 30-34.

¹³¹ Jones and Ridout, *A History of Modern Oman*, 115.

¹³² Jones and Ridout, *A History of Modern Oman*, 119; Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, 58; and Valeri, *Oman*, 51.

As John Hart argues in his seminal study of the Mexican Revolution, in situations where multiclass upheavals” that are crushed by an overwhelming foreign economic and political presence” lead excluded provincial elites” to realize that there is no peaceful means to enter the national political arena.”¹³³ Thus, in response to the Sultan’s violation of Imamate sovereignty in 1954, the newly elected Imam Ghalib bin Ali waged a brief and limited armed struggle against Sultanate encroachment into the Omani interior. Though unsuccessful, the plight of the Imamate in the struggle against the Sultan and British imperialism drew sympathy and received direct support from both ends of the political spectrum in the Arab World, with each supporting the cause to advance opposing and incompatible geopolitical outcomes in Oman. On the one hand stood Saudi Arabia, whose monarchy held grievances over the Sultan for the political losses of the al-Bura’imi in 1954-55, subsequently sought to undermine the Sultan’s rule in Oman and welcomed armed struggle so long as it had purely localized ambitions.”¹³⁴ On the other hand, the Republic of Egypt, which had only just abolished the monarchy through the July Revolution of 1952, extended its support and solidarity to the Imamate in its larger commitment to an anti-colonial liberatory project across the Middle East, Africa, and the colonized Third World. Both Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and then Kuwait granted the Imamate the space to establish political offices in their respective

¹³³ John Mason Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 11.

¹³⁴ Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*. 63.

countries, allowing the for the Imam to internationalize the plight against Sultanic despotism and British imperialism.¹³⁵

The struggle for the Omani interior also gained sympathy amongst socialist states. The first political involvement of China in the Arabian Gulf and Peninsula came about in 1955 when it extended solidarity to the Imamate against the forces of the Sultan British imperialism.¹³⁶ With the opening of the Imamate s office in Cairo in 1955, China s embassy established formal contacts with the Imam. It is worth mentioning here that, unlike Egyptian and Saudi financial and military support, China only managed to extend political solidarity with the Imamate s plight. Besides neither [having] a regular nor irregular army,” no material aid was accepted by the Imamate, rejecting Chinese offers to provide support out of the latter s reservations about dealing directly with a Communist state.”¹³⁷ After the Imamate was defeated, a representative based in Damascus went on to praise China for its lofty stand of giving support to ... the Omani people s struggle for independence and freedom,” while also stressing that Chairman Mao s speeches and articles on military thinking had greatly inspired the Omani leaders and fighters.”¹³⁸ Even the USSR expressed its support to the Imamate through its fierce criticisms of British imperial aggression in Oman.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Fathi al-Deeb, *Abdel Nasser wa Tahrir al-Mashriq al- Arabi: Shahadat Fathi al-Deeb* (Cairo: Markaz al-Dirasat al-Istratijiyya wal-Siyasiyya bil-Ahram, 2000). 204-223; Behbehani, *China s Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. 137, 164-69; Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*. 23-24; and Valeri, *Oman*. 55-57.

¹³⁶ Behbehani, *China s Foreign Policy in the Arab World*, 164.

¹³⁷ Behbehani, *China s Foreign Policy in the Arab World*, 169, 165.

¹³⁸ Quoted in Behbehani, *China s Foreign Policy in the Arab World*, 172.

¹³⁹ Hashim S.H. Behbehani, *The USSR and Arab Nationalism, 1917-1966* (London: Routledge, 2016), 161-162.

Britain, who had suffered the first moment of clear colonial defeat in the modern period [of the Middle East]” after successive humiliations as a result of the partial decolonization of Jordan and the defeat of the tripartite invasion of Sinai and the Suez Canal in 1956 AD, now paid particular attention to the events that were unfolding in the interior to ensure that its empire would not be dealt a third successive major blow in the Middle East.¹⁴⁰ Iraq’s anti-monarchic revolution in 1958 was the most serious rebuke of British imperialism in the region since the abolition of the Egyptian monarchy in 1952,¹⁴¹ and with two active revolutions against British colonial rule in Cyprus and Kenya, as well as the major anti-colonial revolution in Algeria, the fate of British imperialism now turned to the Gulf. Fearing that the situation in the Omani interior could threaten the empire’s crown jewel in the neighboring Aden, containing revolution and defending the reactionary Sultan’s rule in Oman became Britain’s top priority in the region.¹⁴²

With the revolt gaining serious momentum and popularity within the interior, the Sultan was quick to send his forces to crush the Imamate. For the first time in their history,” Takriti writes, the Sultan’s forces had acquired the function of suppressing a major organized revolt.”¹⁴³ Yet it is crucial to note that up until this point in time, the Sultan relied on mercenaries to protect

¹⁴⁰ Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 190. For the anti-colonial struggle in Jordan, see Jamie Allinson, *The Struggle for the State in Jordan: The Social Origins of Alliances in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 94-138. For the tripartite invasion of Suez, see Roger Owen and Wm. Roger Louis, eds., *Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) and Robert McNamara, *Britain, Nasser and the Balance of Power in the Middle East, 1952-1967: From the Egyptian Revolution to the Six Day War* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 40-91.

¹⁴¹ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 764-807. A more critical account of the Iraqi revolution from the left can be found in Samira Haj, *The Making of Iraq, 1900-1963: Capital, Power, and Ideology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 111-139.

¹⁴² See Halliday, *Mercenaries*, 27-29.

¹⁴³ Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*, 24.

the throne and did not have a permanent military force. It was only in 1958 AD that the British allocated the resources and personnel to establish the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), and the beginnings of a traditional army was formed to suppress opposition and maintain a docile population.¹⁴⁴ The following year, an air force was founded in the aftermath of the suppression of the Jabal al-Akhdar revolt.¹⁴⁵ In this context, it can be argued that the progression from hiring mercenary forces to forming the military as an institution was designed to be a counterrevolutionary force in Omani life. As it has been demonstrated by Takriti, the very formation of the Omani state in 1970 AD was constructed around the notion of counterrevolution with the aim of pacifying the revolution in Dhofar.¹⁴⁶

The high altitude and rugged terrain of al-Jabal al-Akhdar made it an effective landscape to conduct guerrilla warfare. High up in the mountains, the Oman Liberation Army and the Imamate's forces were spared from the unforgiving heat of the desert below and were sustained by the cultivation of fruit (including pomegranates, peaches, and apricots) and the rearing of livestock, mainly goats, with extensive ... terrace agriculture.¹⁴⁷ While this gave the Imam's forces an initial advantage over the Sultan's limited mercenary forces, the fate of the revolt shifted in favor of the Sultan once direct British intervention was brought in during the later months of 1958 AD. However, the aforementioned defeat at Suez in 1956 AD made direct intervention highly

¹⁴⁴ For an excellent analysis of the role that military institutions play in the construction of a colonial state, see Joseph Massad, *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2001).

¹⁴⁵ Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*, 134.

¹⁴⁶ Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*, 196-231.

¹⁴⁷ Jones and Ridout, *A History of Modern Oman*. 125-126.

unpopular in the international community.¹⁴⁸ To avoid the extremely hostile atmosphere and diplomatic resistance to colonial intervention, Britain had to resort to using clandestine and covert methods to suppress the revolt.

With the white flag of the Imamate flying over the recaptured territory of the mountainous interior¹⁴⁹ and the position of the Sultan growing increasingly uncertain, the Special Air Service (SAS) were flown into Oman at the request of David Smiley, the commander of the SAF, to crush the revolt.¹⁵⁰ An SAS division was brought into the interior, having just decimated the Malaysian revolutionaries, highlighting the sheer extent of global, sustained challenges and resistance to British and European colonial rule across the Third World.¹⁵¹ In what would amount to war crimes in today's context, the SAS conducted scorched earth tactics from the land and the skies to crush the revolt and terrorize the interior's population. "Operation Black Magic" was the code name given for the SAS's destruction of the Omani interior. David Benest notes how imperial forces would classify entire villages as enemy "forts" in order to justify its wholesale bombardment and wreak havoc onto the local population. Not only did these aerial campaigns crush the revolutionaries high up in the mountains—they also destroyed the entire economy of al-Jabal al-Akhdar.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 127.

¹⁴⁹ Behbehani, *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World*, 136.

¹⁵⁰ Valeri, Oman. 55. Also see David Smiley's memoir with Peter Kemp. *Arabian Assignment* (Barnsley: Cooper, 1975).

¹⁵¹ Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*, 24.

¹⁵² David Benest, "Atrocities in Britain's Counter-Insurgencies," *The RUSI Journal* 156, no. 3 (June 2011), 82, 86.

Deliberate Erasure or Neglect?

From a distance, the al-Jabal al-Akhdar Revolution may appear as a forgotten episode; yet for many Omanis, it remains deeply etched in the collective memory. This form of historical memory, as Jacques Le Goff reminds us, is often “mythical by nature,” and it is the role of history to illuminate memory and help correct its distortions.¹⁵³ Wajih Kawtharani similarly argues that memory often penetrates historical discourse, no matter how methodologically fortified it may be.¹⁵⁴ Within Arab-Islamic historiography, he asserts, the basic unit of history writing is the experience and expression of the people—under various terms such as *umma*, generation, clan, or tribe.¹⁵⁵

Despite being subjected to systematic erasure, both by the ruling authorities—Sultan Sa‘id bin Taymur and his successor Sultan Qaboos—and by the revolutionary leadership itself (many of whom returned to Oman and were integrated into the post-1970 state), the memory of this revolt endures. Following the 1970 British-backed palace coup that installed Qaboos, many second-generation members of the revolutionary leadership—particularly those affiliated with the Imamate’s offices abroad—returned and assumed positions within the new political and administrative order. Nonetheless, the lived experiences of ordinary combatants and citizens—many of whom endured the full violence of British colonial suppression—remain alive in personal memory, even if absent from official narratives.

The mechanisms of erasure include the criminalization of public discussion about the revolution in media outlets such as newspapers, radio, and television; the exclusion of references

¹⁵³Wajih Kawtharani, *al-Dhakira wa-l-Tarīkh fī al-Qarn al-‘Ishrīn al-Tawīl*. Beirut: Dar al-Talī‘a, 2000, 26.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldun: An Essay in Reinterpretation* (London: Frank Cass, 1982), 17.

to the events or figures of the revolution from history curricula in Omani schools and universities; and an atmosphere of fear and surveillance, particularly from the 1980s onward. Notable cases include that of Shaykh Sa‘id bin Hamad al-Harithi, author of *al-Lu‘lu‘ al-Ratb*, who was penalized for publishing his account, while many others refrained from sharing their experiences due to fears of prosecution, loss of employment, or state surveillance.

Over time, many former revolutionaries fell into prolonged silence. Those who returned to Oman were often absorbed into networks of patronage and political-economic interests, carefully managed by the state. During the research for this dissertation, the author attempted to contact members of the families of Imam Ghalib al-Hina‘i, Shaykh Talib al-Hina‘i, and Shaykh Sulayman bin Hamir al-Nabhani, but all inquiries were met with polite deferral or non-response.¹⁵⁶

Access to the official Omani archives also remains highly restricted, especially regarding materials from this period. Researchers are often discouraged—either explicitly or through institutional pressures—from pursuing topics related to the revolution, as doing so may affect their employment prospects in public institutions or draw unwelcome attention from authorities. The Omani government has justified these constraints as a necessary means to preserve national unity

¹⁵⁶ Imam Ghalib bin ‘Ali al-Hina‘i never returned to Oman after leaving the country following the defeat of the revolution in January 1959. He remained in exile in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, for nearly fifty years (1959–2009), where he died and was buried. His brother and close confidant, Shaykh Talib bin ‘Ali al-Hina‘i, commander of the Omani Liberation Army, died under unclear circumstances in Cairo on 7 August 1981, and was buried there. However, his remains were repatriated and reburied in his home village of Bilad Sayt, Bahla, Oman, on 3 June 2022, due to the redevelopment of the burial site in Cairo (see *Al-Roya*, Muscat, Oman, 3 June 2022, <https://alroya.om/p/301865>). By contrast, Shaykh Sulayman bin hamyar al-Nabhani voluntarily returned to Oman in 1996, where he died two years later on 7 May 1998. Despite the exile or death of the revolutionary leadership abroad, many of their descendants returned to Oman earlier and later assumed significant roles in public and private life. For instance, Shaykh Dr. al-Khitab bin Ghalib al-Hina‘i served as Deputy Chairman of the State Council and Chair of the Education Committee (2011–2023). Shaykh Dr. al-Yaqzan bin Talib al-Hina‘i held the post of Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce (1992–1997), was a member of the Higher Education Council, President of the Cultural Club (1998–2001), and served as Economic Advisor at the Royal Court until his death in 2001. Shaykh Dr. ‘Ali bin Talib al-Hina‘i served as Chair of the Social Committee and Member of the State Council Bureau (2007–2011), and later as Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning Affairs (2011–2020). Shaykh Su‘ud bin Sulayman bin hamyar al-Nabhani was Undersecretary of the Ministry of Posts, Telegraph, and Telephones (1997–2008), and later a State Advisor (2008–2020). Shaykha Zahra bint Sulayman bin hamyar al-Nabhaniyah served as a member of the State Council (2007–2015).

and to avoid reopening historical tribal rivalries or old grievances. This logic reinforces the state's longstanding narrative that the al-Jabal al-Akhdar events were merely a tribal conflict, rather than a national revolutionary episode.

This institutionalized suppression, carried out through a range of legal, administrative, and disciplinary measures, generated a deep climate of fear among Omanis—especially those who lived through the period from the 1960s to the 1990s. As a result, public discourse around the revolution remained limited to closed, trusted circles where individuals could cautiously reconstruct collective memory. Paradoxically, this absence has amplified curiosity among younger generations, particularly in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab uprisings, as they seek inspirational historical models for their own aspirations for reform. In this context, history—and the history of revolutions in particular—serves as a critical resource for envisioning the future.

CHAPTER ONE: AL-JABAL AL-AKH DAR; THE WHY AND HOW

With its strategic location guarding the eastern gateway to the Arabian Peninsula, al-Jabal al-Akhdar, or the Green Mountain interchangeably, became the focus of every colonial power seeking to control the maritime routes in the Indian Ocean and the oil reserves that the world needs from the Arabian Peninsula. Additionally, its high altitude made it one of the most critical control points for air traffic between the world's four corners. The location of this mountain, its height, its mineral wealth, and geological, geographical, and historical features make it a cornerstone of any imperialist colonial project that aspires to expand and dominate this strategic region.

This chapter aims to expound the most salient geological and geographical features of al-Jabal al-Akhdar and its surrounding area in order to demonstrate the significance of this mountain, i.e. the why and how, vis-à-vis the persistent revolting against foreign and external attempts of control. The aforementioned significance of this mountain instilled in its inhabitants a sense of pride, strength, and defiant independence not only against foreign invasion but also from the rest of the political, social, and economic systems that have ruled Oman throughout its conflict-ridden history.

The examination will entail topographic and hydrological aspects that provided the al-Jabal al-Akhdar with the spatial significance that it has maintained to date. Several key valleys have been identified by the mountain inhabitants as the main entry and exit points of the mountain. These valleys have played an essential role in the inhabitants' encounters with foreign or external opponents seeking to seize or control the mountain. This chapter will also explain economic

production patterns adopted by the mountain inhabitants and highlight challenges related to the water economy that underpinned the lives of those inhabitants, such as wells, dams, and *aflaj* (plural of *falaj*: traditional water canal that is part of a traditional distribution system) and associated governance structures

This chapter will also examine the social fabric of al-Jabal al-Akhdar by tracking the tribes that populated the mountain in terms of their distribution and tribal pacts and alliances, with special attention paid to the differences between the eastern part of the mountain, which overlooks the Empty Quarter desert and the interior of Oman (al-Dhahira and al-Dakhiliyyah governorates), and the western side of the mountain, which overlooks Oman's coastal areas (north and south al Batinah governorates) and the Sea of Oman. The mountain is close to the Samail Valley, also known as Samail Gap, which acts as the natural and strategic divider between the western Hajar and eastern Hajar ranges, both of which form the mountainous backbone of Oman. The western Hajar starts from the Strait of Hormuz in the north, while the eastern Hajar ends in Qalhat, part of the ancient city of Sur, the easternmost point of Oman. Wadi Samail is the strategic gap between coastal Oman and interior of Oman.

Spatial Significance

Spatial significance is a concept that emphasizes the significance of a specific place or region. It involves examining the interplay between its geographical location and physical features, as well as analyzing the distinct relationships between the natural and human environments within that area.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Henri Lefebvre theorized that social space is not a passive container nor a mere mental abstraction, but a complex social construct. He posits that space is dynamically constituted through a dialectical triad of spatial practices, representations of space, and representational spaces, which collectively mediate the reproduction of social relations.

The mountain has shaped the lives of its inhabitants. Despite its rugged terrain, giant rock plates, steep valleys, and lack of flat areas that are suitable for farming, ploughing, and housing, the people of the al Jabal managed to adapt to these difficulties. Such a hardship coupled with gleaned knowledge and experience, and a residual attachment, had in a way created resilience within the mountain inhabitants that allowed them to utilise the difficult mountainous terrain to their advantage when they needed to protect themselves from invaders or power-contenders who wanted to control this vital location.¹⁵⁸

Oman's most prominent and longest valleys descend from the mountain. For example, on the eastern side, overlooking the strategically pivotal and historically significant city of Nizwa, the capital of the Imamate,¹⁵⁹ three valleys (known locally as *wadi*) spring from the mountain, namely: Wadi Kamah, Wadi Tanuf, and Wadi Smait. In addition, the largest valley in Oman, Wadi al Mo aydin springs from the mountain and passes through Birket al Muz (Arabic for Banana Pool or Banana Blessing), which is a small town at the foot of the mountain. Similarly, the longest Omani valley, Wadi Halfayn, passes through Izki on its final destination in the Empty Quarter desert.

On the western side, overlooking the Sea of Oman, four of the most famous and deepest valleys descend from the Green Mountain, namely: Wadi Bani Kharus, Wad Ban Awf, Wadi al

Consequently, the social production of social space is fundamentally intertwined with the political economy, rendering it a central arena for class struggle. See: Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991).

¹⁵⁸ Wendell Phillips, *Oman: A History* (London: William Morrow and Company, 1962): 24–27. See also R.J. Gavin, *Aden under British Rule* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1996): 11.

¹⁵⁹ The imamate system in Oman is a unique socio-political and religious governance structure deeply rooted in the country's history, particularly within the Ibadhi school of Islam.

Ma awil, and Wadi Mastal. These valleys bear the names of large and ancient tribes that settled on the banks of these valleys and planted them with various crops such as dates, citrus, mangoes, and bananas.

The inhabitants of the mountain established a group of villages and residential communities on top of the mountain, with the population of each village ranging between 100-500 people. Some of these villages have been abandoned, while the population has concentrated in places with abundant water, open land, and pastures. The villages are Siq, al Shurayjah, Sih Qatnah, Wadi Bani Habib, and al Manakhir are the most populated villages. Other less populated villages include al ain, Hail al Yemen, al Qasha , al Aqr, Sallut, Masirat al Shariqiyyin, Masirat a-Jawamid, Masirat al Rawajih, al Halilat, Tawi Sa dah, al Rus, Hail Lao, and al Qala . The most famous mountain heads, which the inhabitants of the mountain used as guides to the four directions, are Ras al Sheikh, Ras al Hosn, Ras al Houz, Ras Senin, Ras al Suwaidiya, Ras al Muhtajalah, Ras al Duwaikhla, and Ras Imti.

Moreover, small narrow mountain gaps were the only bridging points between the mountain's inhabitants and the flat plains on both sides of the mountain. They played a strategic role in protecting the inhabitants of the highlands from invasions ascending from below. They served as gates through which people and rebels traversed up and down the mountain. The people of the mountain call them maqabiḍ, meaning handles, which a metaphor for gates handles or openings. There are nine gaps: Wadi Kamah, Wadi Tanuf, Aqbat al Dhafar, Dar Tha lab, al Ttawil, al Arqub, al Bad ah, al Masnnaqah, and Talhat.

Water and Resources

Water is a massive challenge for the residents of Green Mountain. Paradoxically, the mountain itself is the principal supplier of the largest valleys in Oman, such as Wadi al-Muaydin, Wadi Halafayn, al-Nakher, Wadi Gul, Wadi Mustal, and Bani Ouf, Bani Kharous, and al-Ma'awal. However, this water is wasted in the sea or the desert.

Residents of the high mountain have been facing constant difficulties obtaining water for their crops and daily uses. However, they did not give in to this challenge, and over the years, they managed to build small cisterns that helped them with the necessities of life: farming, drinking, and watering their flocks of goats and sheep. The ancient Omanis were able to build an efficient and durable integrated irrigation system. They tracked water springs and reservoirs from the interior of the Hajar Mountains. Then they poured the water into water channels called *falaj*, which run from the top of the mountains to water their palm groves on the banks of the valleys and in the flat plains below the majestic mountain range according to a timetable linked to the moon and its phases throughout the nights of the month. Each village member has a quota of water from the *falaj*, which arrives on a specific night. He has to buy quotas from other villagers or trade with them if he misses them.

The mountain people built about ten *aflaj*, barely enough to water their flocks. They also found the sources of more than 18 natural springs, all of which stem from the mountain's enormous interior. These springs were the only source of life during the revolution, and after British planes bombed the springs to starve and thirst the population, they pressured them into surrendering.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Interview No. 1 with a fighter from Jabal al-Akhdar, Saiq village, December 16, 2023.

Another way they solved the water crisis was to create small dams before the rainwater reached the edges of the cliffs. These are more like traps that trap rainwater for periods when the inhabitants have taken their water needs until the next rainy season—up to five of these primitive barriers. Water was the most precious element for the inhabitants of the mountain, so they were good at preserving it and managing it in the best ways.

The other precious elements are items that colonial powers waged wars to obtain and monopolize. The Western Hajar Mountain Range, where Green Mountain is located, is one of the world's richest and most diverse areas of natural mineral wealth. Precious minerals such as gold, chromite, lead, copper, manganese, iron, permafrost, and limestone are found around the mountain and along the western and eastern Hajar chain.

The area contains the largest exposed ophiolite complex in the world, with a typical rock assemblage of peridotite, gabbro, and basalt. Nowhere on the planet can one walk over such vast expanses of riches in one place. The mountain and the surrounding area contain countless mines of copper- and gold-bearing Cyprus-type massive sulfide ore elements of volcanic origin. The Hajar mountain range is also surrounded by steep mountains extensively mined for their dense polishable marble-like limestone, marketed as Omani marble.

Social Structure

The geological and geographical nature of al-Jabal al-Akhdar had the most significant impact on shaping the social structure of its residents and the inhabitants of the surrounding areas, the valleys, slopes, and plains adjacent to the waterfalls that descend from it. The difficulty of living in such conditions did not encourage many people to live at the top of the mountain. Studies by archaeological expeditions indicate that the earliest settlements in the western Hajar Mountain

Range date back to the third millennium BCE. Nur al-Din al-Salmi chronicles the arrival of the first Arab migrations to Oman after the collapse of the Marib Dam in Yemen circa 450. The first to arrive was Malik ibn Fahm from the Qahtani tribe of Azad.¹⁶¹

Before its current name, al-Jabal al-Akhdar, the mountain was referred to by several names, including Radwa, Jabal Aal Yahmad, and Jabal Bani Riyam. The Bani Riyam was preceded in the settling and urbanizing of the Green Mountain by the Bani Kharus tribe, who trace their roots back to the Aal Yahmad.¹⁶² The Aal Yahmad tribe is most prominent tribe from which imams were elected in Oman. From the eighth to the late sixteenth century AD, all imams were elected from the Aal Yahmad/Bani Kharus tribe except for eight imams.¹⁶³ It is worth noting that the Aal Yahmads were a tribal alliance of more than one tribe. Therefore, the fact that the Imamate remained in the Aal Yahmad line for nearly eight centuries does not necessarily mean that it was hereditary. This was the case until the mid-seventeenth century when sons started inheriting the position of Imama from their fathers.¹⁶⁴

The Bani Kharus established canals and orchards in villages such as al Shurayjah, Siq, and Sih Qatnaa. However, with the passage of time and water scarcity, they preferred to descend to the villages in the western plain of the Green Mountain. They established waterways and canals that

¹⁶¹ al-‘Awtabī, *al-Ansāb*, Part 2, 514-527, and 707-762.

¹⁶² Mansur bin Hamdan al-Jabri, “Silk al-Juman in Akhbar al-Jabal al-Akhdar and the People of Oman,” (Arabic manuscript, British Library, File No. OR 13840).

¹⁶³ Sulaiman bin Khalaf al-Kharusi, *‘Dawlat al-Yahmad fi ‘Umān: The Aal Yahmad State in Oman, 175–967 AH / 791–1560 AD’*, Symposium on Omani Studies, vol. 1 (Muscat: Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, 1980), 305.

¹⁶⁴ See for more details: Saif bin Adi al-Maskari, *‘Al-Imāmah wa-al-Širā’ ‘alā al-Sulṭah fi ‘Umān Awākhir al-Dawlah al-Ya ‘rubīyah (The Imamate and the Struggle for Power in Oman at the End of the Yaruba State, 1131 AH/1719 AD–1162 AH/1749 AD): A Study in Omani History’* (Muscat: Al-Ghasham House for Publishing and Translation, 2014), 40.

remain to this day around which villages and cities such as al Oliya, Nakhal, and al Awabi were established, where the weather is milder, water is more abundant, and closer to the ports on the al Batinah coast. Only the tribe of Bani Riyam remained at the top of the mountain. Over the years they had subdivided into several branches.¹⁶⁵

The Bani Riyam are descendants of Hamyar ibn Qamar ibn Riyam ibn Qiyam ibn Quda'ah, who is kin of Al Harith ibn al Atik ibn al Assad ibn Amr ibn Aamer ibn Ma'a al Sama ibn haritha ibn Amr al Qays ibn Ya rub ibn Qahtan from the south of the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁶⁶ They settled on the mountain during the Great Migration from Yemen after the collapse of the Marib Dam. There are four branches (tribes): Mus'ab, Fahd, Tuba, and Amr. The Bani Amr (Omari) and Tuba (Tubi) inhabited the eastern part of the mountain. The western part was inhabited by Bani Mus ab (Awlad Rashid), Bani Mayyah (Mayyahi), Bani Hadram(Hadrami), and Bani Fahd (Fahdi). As time passed, al Riyami became closer to being a large alliance than a single tribe. This alliance includes Yemeni or Hemyarian tribes mainly from Quda'a: Al Nabhani, Al Shuraiqi, Al Omeri, Al Rajhi, Al Jamoudi, Al Zakwani, and Awlad Thani.

The Atik tribes to whom the Bani Nabhan or Nabahinah belonged were a dynasty that ruled Oman for five centuries from the twelfth century A.D. until the beginning of the seventeenth

¹⁶⁵ Abdull, Al-Salimi., *Tuḥfat al A'yan bi-Sirat Ahl 'Uman* , Part 1,Cairo: Al-Matba'a al-Salafi ya, 1928.Pp 33-40. Also: al-'awtabi, *al-Ansāb*], 514-527 and 707-761.

¹⁶⁶ al-'awtabi, *al-Ansāb*, 622-24.

century (1154-1617 AD). They controlled all the resources of the western and eastern Hajar chains, including water, land, crops, and the management of people's affairs.

According to Ibn Ruzayq's description, the Nabahinah were kings characterized by prestige, generosity, and courage.¹⁶⁷ They were able to repel the Persian invasion of Oman more than once. The Persians tried to reach the summit of al-Jabal al-Akhdar after establishing a narrow road for donkeys from the direction of Wadi Bani Kharus upwards, known to this day as the Persian Road.¹⁶⁸ However, they could not reach the summit and take control of the mountain's impregnable fortresses. The famous Arab traveler Ibn Battuta passed through Oman during this period on his way to India, describing the Nabhani king Abu Muhammad bin Nabhan: His custom is to sit outside the door of his house in a council without an attendant or minister, and he does not prevent anyone from entering him, whether a stranger or others, and he honors the guest according to the Arab custom, appoints his hospitality, and gives him according to his ability. He has good manners.”¹⁶⁹ The capitals and centers of the Nabhani state varied according to the king who ruled, but the most prominent were Bahla, Nizwa, Rustaq, Samail, Izki, Muqniyat, and Nakhl. These cities and villages arose on the banks of large valleys descending from the Green Mountain and the Hajar Mountain range.

The seventeenth century was the century of the Yarubi state, which ruled Oman following the election of Imam Nasir bin Murshid al Yarubi, who traced his lineage back to Malik bin Abi

¹⁶⁷ Ḥumayd bin Muḥammad Ibn Ruzayq, *Al-Ṣahīfah al-Qaḥṭānīyah* (Eng. *The Qahtani Gazette*) (1198-1291 AH/ circa 1783-1874 AD), ed. Ṣaleh, Al-Sulaimi (Muscat: Ministry of Heritage and Culture, 2009), 5:153-68.

¹⁶⁸ Interview No. 2 Jabal al-Akhdar, Wadi bni Habib village, January 1, 2024.

¹⁶⁹ Ibn Battuta, *Tahfat al-Nawzar, Fi Gharib al-Amsar*, Part I, Cairo: Amiriya Press, 1933, 214.

al Arab, the ruler of Rustaq. Ibn Murshid revived the Imamate after a long absence following his election in 1724. Imam Nasir bin Murshid had two main tasks: The first was to unify Oman, which was divided into tribes fighting each other internally, which affected the Omani people's social peace and economic stability.¹⁷⁰ The second task was to expel the Portuguese colonialists who arrived on the coast of Oman in 1515 and colonized all the coastal cities for more than a century, controlling trade, strangling the country, and committing more than one genocide and systematic ethnic cleansing of the population of cities such as Qalhat, Qurayyat, Barka, Sohar, and Jalfar along the Omani coast.

The Atik tribes, including the Bani Riyam, residents of the Green Mountain, united under the banner of Imam Nasir bin Murshid and provided the bravest fighters in the Imam's army that united the two sides of the Hajar mountain range. The two major cities of Nizwa and Rustaq then he proceeded with his flowing army to Rustaq with honorable men from Bani Riyam” as historian Ibn Ruzayq pointed out in the *Qahtaniya Gazette*.¹⁷¹ The people of the mountain were the most prominent people on whom Imam Nasir bin Murshid relied when Saif bin Muhammad al Hinai rebelled and tried to overthrow him in the area of al Aqr in his capital Nizwa.¹⁷² It is worth noting that the commander of Imam Nasir bin Murshid's army that launched the battles of national liberation with the battle of Mutrah was the son of Bani Nabhan.¹⁷³ The commander and jurist Masud bin Ramadan, whose lineage is related to the Nabhani notables Umar bin Nabhan bin

¹⁷⁰ Sarhan ibn Sa'id al-Azkawi (d. 1755) *Kashf al-Ghumma al-Jami'ah al-Akhbar al-Ummah*. Realization: Hassan Muhammad al-Nabudah, Part 2, Dar al-Baroudi: Beirut: 2006. 945-946.

¹⁷¹ Ibn Ruzayq, *Al-Şahīfah al-Qahtāniyah*.196.

¹⁷² Ibid. 206.

¹⁷³ Ibid. 212-214.

Muzaffar al Nabhani.¹⁷⁴ Battles took place in northern Oman, in Liwa, Dibba, and Jalfar (now Ras al Khaimah), between the Portuguese and Persians on the one hand and the Omanis on the other. One of the leaders of these armies was Muhammad bin al Salt al Nabhani, nicknamed "Garthuma Bani Reyam" (the germ of Bani Reyam).¹⁷⁵

In the first half of the eighteenth century, as the Al Yarubiyah state weakened, Oman entered a fierce tribal conflict and a bloody civil war.¹⁷⁶ The Bani Riyam were historically associated with the Al Ghafri Alliance. This large tribal alliance, most of whose tribes are of Qahtani Yamani origin, opposes the Hanawi alliance, which includes the Nizari or Adnani tribes. However, the two leaders associated with this conflict had the opposite origins of the two alliances. According to historian al Salmi, Muhammad ibn Nasser al Ghafri was of Nizari Adnani origin (Samah ibn Lu ai). Khalaf ibn Mubarak al Hinai, nicknamed "al Qusayyir," was from Hana'ah ibn Malik ibn Fahm al Azdi.¹⁷⁷ The Al Ghafri-Hanaawi conflict spanned the length and breadth of the country. No tribe in Oman escaped polarization to one side or the other. The tribes of the West of the country overlooking the Arabian Gulf to the tribes of the east overlooking the Arabian Sea, and from the tribes of the mountainous north to the tribes of the Empty Quarter. Fortresses and houses were destroyed, crops were wiped out, especially palm trees, the primary source of livelihood for the population, canals and wells were destroyed, and ships and harbors were burned. The primary motivation for this civil war was Muhammad bin Nasser al Ghafri's desire for leadership and

¹⁷⁴ See Saif ibn Hamud ibn Hamid al-Batashi, *Itḥaf al- 'Ayān*, part 3, 489-491.

¹⁷⁵ Ibn Ruzayq, 222.

¹⁷⁶ Bathurst, R.D. The Yarubi Dynasty of Oman. PH.D. Thesis unpublished University of Oxford. (Oxford, 1967).

¹⁷⁷ al-Outbi. *Al Ansab (Genealogy)*, 775.

hegemony over the Imamate system in the late Yaruba era.¹⁷⁸ Once it became hereditary and abandoned the principle of election, it weakened and corrupted. In 1717 AD, Mohammed bin Nasser al Ghafri entered into a bloody conflict with those who aspired to usurp power from the young Ya rubi imams, Saif bin Sultan (the little boy).¹⁷⁹ This gelatinous division did not end with the death of both leaders in the Battle of Sohar in 1727 AD—the consequences of that ten-year struggle extended for more than three hundred years into the mid-twentieth century.¹⁸⁰

Specifically with the Green Mountain Revolution, where the two great tribal alliances united to confront British colonialism with the election of the Hinai Imam Ghalib bin Ali. Furthermore, the Green Mountain people's relationship with Muscat's aal bu-Said rulers was characterized by complexity and suspicion throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Especially when this dynasty moved away from the spirit of the Omani theory of governance based on the election, accountability, and removal of the Imam. Chapter 2 will discuss the history and details of the theory of governance in Oman more extensively.

The path that Omanis had followed for a thousand years of their history changed with the arrival of the Al Busaid dynasty to power. The family shifted the mechanism of the transition from

¹⁷⁸ Al-Salimi, *Tuhfat al A'yan* .125-133.

¹⁷⁹ Bathurst argues that one of the main reasons for the collapse of the Yarubi state was the decline in the prestige and influence of the Ibadi scholars and the dominance of the merchant imams, which led to the disintegration and weakening of the state. In Bathurst, R.D. *The Yarubi Dynasty of Oman*. PH.D. Thesis unpublished University of Oxford. (Oxford,1967), 190.

¹⁸⁰ For further analysis: Izkawi. *Annals of Oman to 1728*. [By] Sirhan Ibn Sa'id Ibn Sirhan. Translated and annotated by E.C. Ross. *Outlines of the History of Oman, 1728-1883*, [by] E.C. Ross. Notes on the Tribes of Oman, [by] S.B. Miles. Notes on the Sect of Ibadhiyah of Oman, [by] E.C. Ross. Tenets of the Ibadhi Sect, [by] Sirhan ibn Sa'id ibn Sirhan. Newly introduced by Philip Ward. (Arabia Past and Present. 16.) x, (2), iv, 119, (1) Frontis. Cloth. D.j. Reprint of the Calcutta 1874 edition. Cambridge/London (The Oleander Press), 1984..86.

election to direct succession from father to son, even though their founding grandfather Ahmed bin Said al Busaidi was elected as Imam in 1749.¹⁸¹ Omanis supported Ahmed bin Said, the governor of Sohar, before electing him as Imam and lined up with him to expel Persian colonization from the first campaigns of Nader Shah (1737-1740). Nader Shah coveted the country, taking advantage of the state of civil wars between the Hanawi/Ghafri alliances and the weakness and disintegration of the Yarubiyah dynasty.¹⁸² From the time of Sultan bin Ahmed bin Said and his son Said bin Sultan, the Busaidi dynasty became increasingly dependent on a new colonizer that began to dominate international shipping routes in the Indian Ocean: British colonialism. Britain took control of the ports of Muscat and Muttrah, the two main outlets for exporting simple goods outside Oman. It subjected the Omani coast to its control and surveillance, which extended from the Strait of Hormuz in the north to Ras al Hadd in the east, with the justification of protecting the Sultan's subjects from any internal rebellions such as that which occurred during the revolt of Imam Azzan bin Qais (1868-1871). This revolution aimed at unifying the Omani interior with the coastline, which Britain had dominated with its agreements with Sultan bin Ahmed in 1797, then with his son Said bin Sultan in 1820, and the 1839 agreement.

It is worth mentioning here that the Bani Rayam and the inhabitants of al-Jabal al-Akhdar had different attitudes towards the Imamate of Azzan bin Qais. Their leader at the time, Sheikh Saif bin Sulaiman al Nabhani, feared that the influence of the Ghafiri alliance, which had prevailed since the late Ya'rubiya state, would be affected. His fears were confirmed when the Hanawi

¹⁸¹ Sarhan zkawi. The history of Oman is quoted from the book *Kashf al-Ghumma al-Jami'ah* for the News of the Nation, annotated by Abdul Majid Hasib al-Qaisi, 4th edition, Ministry of Heritage and Culture, Muscat: 2005, 153. Also, Saif bin Adi al-Maskari, The Imamate and the Struggle for Power in Oman at the End of the Yaruba State (1131 AH/1719 AD - 1162 AH/1749 AD), 161-163.

¹⁸² Lockhart, L.A. *Nadir Shah*, United States: ProQuest L.L.C. (2018). 265–270.

alliance rallied in support of the Imamate of Azzan bin Qais, led by the al Hurth tribal leader Saleh bin Ali al Harithi, who led the Imam's armies to Muscat to defeat Salim bin Thuwaini bin Said bin Sultan al Busaidi's army. Imam Azzan's army defeated the al Ghafri alliance army in the battle of Nafaa, a village in Wadi Samail. The army then headed to Nizwa, under the control of the Bani Riyam leader Saif bin Sulayman. The people of Nizwa surrendered without a war to the Imam, and the Riyami leader was imprisoned until his death.¹⁸³

The year 1868 AD and the short period of Azzan bin Qais's Imamate, only two years and four months,¹⁸⁴ can be considered a milestone in the history of Omani anti-colonialism. Their concept of revolution, methods of mobilization, and persuasion in the face of a foreign colonizer that had encroached on their country, controlled their economy, and humiliated their rulers with further concessions. Azzan ibn Qais and behind him the great Ibadhi scholar and Sheikh Said ibn Khalfan al Khalili tried to mobilize the Omani people and direct their energies to a specific point: the revival of the Imamate to expel the British colonizer: Reviving the Imamate to expel the British colonialists. It was a stage similar to the one that preceded the election of Imam Nasir bin Murshid to expel another European colonizer, the Portuguese colonizer, 230 years earlier. However, the tribal factor in this period in the mid-nineteenth century had become entrenched and linked to blood feuds which were contested by tribal alliances and short-sighted loyalties according to the ambitions of the leaders and civil warlords. All of this was perpetuated by the weak centralized state of the Busaidi dynasty, which was entirely dependent on the British Raj. Said bin Khalfan al Khalili and a group of Ibadi scholars tried to capitalize on all these factors to revive the idea of the

¹⁸³ Al-Salimi, *Tuhfat al A'yan*. Part 2, 265.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 282.

Imamate, which remained absent in its original form for ninety years, that is, since the election of Imam Ahmad bin Said and before the Imamate and rule became a hereditary practice in his sons and grandsons rather than the election of Imam Ahmad bin Said and his descendants and not an election and allegiance as is customary in the history of the Imamate and according to its main traditions. Britain's addiction to the game of hegemony and control over the rulers of Muscat, calling them sultans, and distancing them from their roots and popular legitimacy as it did with Salim bin Thuwaini bin Said bin Sultan, "The Price of Intervention," according to Kelly.¹⁸⁵ With its keenness to bankrupt the Omani state of its resources derived from regional trade, its monopolization of all the ports of the Gulf on both the Arab and Persian sides, and the structural transformation of the East India Company into the "empire of the company" with all the fleets and institutions of the Raj empire at its service. These and other factors were enough to ignite the revolution in Oman. However, the difference in military capabilities between traditional Omani methods of warfare and modern ones backed by the treasures of India and the resources of the sunless empire led to the crushing of the nascent revolution, the killing of Imam Azzan, and the execution of Sheikh Said bin Khalfan al Khalili and his son Muhammad by dropping him from the highest tower in the Mirani Fort. Britain then concluded the scenario by bringing Turki bin Said from India, one of the sons of Said bin Sultan, their old ally, and installing him as the new Sultan of Oman with pledges of loyalty and obedience to Her Majesty's Government. One of the clearest examples of this is the humiliating Treaty concluded by his son Faisal bin Turki in 1891, in which he pledged to himself, his heirs, and successors that he would never leave, sell, mortgage, or give

¹⁸⁵ Kelly, J.B. *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880*. Oxford: Claredon Press, 1968. 638.

to dispose of any of the kingdoms of Muscat, Oman, or any of his belongings except to the British state." ¹⁸⁶ This Treaty justified Britain's absolute military and financial dominance over the resources of the Omani territories.¹⁸⁷

Table 1 shows the number of British military interventions in Oman and the reasons for them according to British documents from the early nineteenth century to just before the mid-twentieth century. In less than one hundred and twenty years, imperial fleets and forces violated Omani sovereignty more than 27 times. The language in the table, taken from colonial primary sources, reflects imperialist arrogance unchanged in words such as: "punitive," "recovered," "inflicts punishment," and "internal disturbances."

Table 1: British Military Interventions in Oman

Year	Event/Reason
1809	British troops recapture Shinas from the Wahabis.
1820	British and Sultan forces were defeated by the Bani Bu Ali tribes in the Jaalan province.

¹⁸⁶ 'File 35/84 I A. 5. Muscat Treaty of 1891; lease of Bandar Jissah by the Sultan of Muscat to the French for a coaling station', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/1/400, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000193.0x000175> [accessed June 9 2024]

¹⁸⁷ The correspondence between Sultan Turki bin Faisal and the British in file IOR/L/PS/10/425 reveals the depth of the crisis of power in Muscat. The ruler of Muscat tries to convince the British Consul and the British Political Resident of the importance of establishing an Omani army to protect the city. Nevertheless, the colonial officials reminded him of the political and financial cost of this goal. They should remind him that this task, i.e., protection, is carried out by His Majesty's Government and its fleets!

1821	British troops participate in a retaliatory expedition against the Beni Bu Ali tribes in the Jaalan.	
1830	British Naval demonstration of support for the Sultan at Muscat.	
1833	British Naval demonstration of support for the Sultan at Muscat.	
1834	British Political Resident threatens Aal Humuda.	
1845	Wahabis gather tribes to threaten Muscat. British ships patrol the Batinah coast and on Resident's protests the Wahabi Amir withdraws.	
1862	British Naval patrols along the Batinah coast and Muscat.	
1865	British supported the Sultan with arms against Wahhabis and prevented Trucial Shaikhs from intervening. Resident sends ultimatum to Wahabi Amir in Nejd and on expiry bombards his ports in Qatif and Dammam. H.M. ships take action against rebellious Janabah tribesmen.	
1867	R.N. ships protect Matrah. The Resident threatens Turku, a rebel against the Sultan.	
1873	British ship captures rebel leader at sea and interns him.	
1874	British ships shelled forces of the rebel Ibrahim bin Qais at Masna'ah and recovered Suwaiq for the Sultan.	
1877	H.M.S. Teazer uses shell fire to protect Muscat against rebel forces.	
1886	British authorities in Aden frustrated attempted descent on Dhofar.	

1895	The Making of Muscat a Protectorate considered.	
1896	Naval assistance offered to Sultan for recovery of Dhofar.	
1897	Dhofar recovered with naval assistance.	
1913	British Government repeated their guarantees of 1895.	
1914	British forces repel rebels from Barkah.	
1915	British Indian troops defeat rebel attacks at Bait al Falaj.	
1916	British troops defeat rebels under Imam at Ruwi.	
1920	British warship proceeds to Musna'a and Sur and inflicts punishment for defiance of Sultan.	
1922	Royal Navy bombarded Khadra to help the Sultan's forces reduce rebellious Yal Sa'ad.	
1928	Muscat gunboat escorted by Royal Naval ship bombards Sur. Royal Naval ship later bombards Sur again.	
1930	Royal Navy ships and Muscat gunboat bombard Khassab and Musandam peninsula.	
1932	Royal Air Force and Royal Naval operations compel Bani Bu Ali to obey the Sultan.	

1939	Sultan granted facilities to H.M. Forces for the war period, and Her Majesty's Government promised to protect his territories against external aggression and give such assistance as might be possible in the event of internal disturbances.	

Then came the Seeb Agreement of 1920, which Britain rushed to sign with Sheikh Isa bin Saleh al Harthi representing the Imamate, one of the reasons that stifled the Omani interior. It was a long-term war of attrition that lasted more than 35 years, during which Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah al Khalili held the reins of the Imamate. This agreement came after the first Imamate in the twentieth century lost the three main pillars on which it was based nearby and under mysterious circumstances that cannot be proven or denied that colonialist schemes were involved. The absence of key figures: Nur al Din al Salimi, who resurrected the Imamate at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Imam himself Salim bin Rashid al Kharus i, and Emir al Jabal Himyar bin Nasser al Nabhani, protector of the Imamate and maintainer of the principal tribal balance supporting the state. Salimi died in a freak accident after falling off his horse in the Hamra al Abriyin area in 1913. As for Emir al Jabal Himyar bin Nasser, he died in November 1919.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Mohammad bin Abdullah (Abu Bashir), Al -Salimi. *Nahdat al-A'yan Bi-'Hurriyat 'Oman* , Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1961. 82-84.

This critical period in the History of Oman and the Ibadi state ended with the assassination of Imam Salim bin Rashid al Kharus i in his sleep by a stranger from the Wahiba tribe on a hot July night in 1920.¹⁸⁹ In parallel, British pressure on the Imamate did not stop, and negotiations continued between Sheikh Isa bin Saleh al Harthi, the representative of the Imamate, and the British Consul and political agent Wingate.¹⁹⁰ The author of the famous phrase "A few thousand British soldiers are enough to occupy all of Oman."¹⁹¹

The period of Imam Salim bin Rashid Al Kharus i was difficult, and he faced enormous challenges. However, the most prominent of these challenges was the ferocity of British colonialism against Oman and its people. In addition to the ravages of World War I and its impact on international shipping, Britain added to the pain of the Omani people by raising taxes on basic commodities coming from inside Oman from 5% to 25% on dates and 50% on pomegranates, an essential commodity in the economy of the Green Mountain. These were means of pressuring the Imamate to accept the British negotiation terms. It also fired the final bullet on the Omani interior by instructing Sultan Timur bin Faisal to prevent money from leaving the country, specifically from the areas under the administration of the Imamate, thus nullifying the monetary value of the people's savings. All these circumstances forced Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah al Khalili, who succeeded the assassinated Imam, to accept the Seeb Treaty to avoid a major famine and an internal

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. 235.

¹⁹⁰ Wingate, Sir Ronald E. L. (1889-1978) was a 20th-century Indian government political official in the Gulf and the son of the one-time governor of Sudan, Sir Reginald Wingate. After earning his degree from Oxford University, he entered the Indian political service in 1912. He posted to the Punjab and Mesopotamia before being transferred to Muscat as a political agent in 1919. He played the most prominent role in the final negotiations leading to the Treaty of Sib (1920). He later served in Balochistan and the Foreign and Political Ministry of the Government of India.

¹⁹¹ In a letter dated May 13, 1919, from Major L. Haworth, the British Consul and Political Agent in Muscat, to Sheikh Issa Ben Saleh al Harthi, the Deputy of the Imam of Oman. <https://www.agda.ae/en/catalogue/tna/fo/371/126892/n/184>

rebellion that would plunge the Omanis into an endless bloodbath. The British political agent succeeded in his scheme:

"It seemed to me that there was only one way to bring the Omanis to their senses. They were forced to export their dates to survive. If it could be made almost impossible - or at least very expensive - to export their dates and they could not retaliate, their attitude would change, and they would be open to discussing a reasonable settlement."¹⁹²

Despite Britain's keenness through its political agent in Muscat not to recognize the Imam as a person and the Imamate as an independent system of Government in the Treaty of Seeb, the preamble of the agreement states "This is the agreed reconciliation between the government of Sultan Timur bin Faisal and the Omanis" as if the agreement were between the British-backed Sultan and the Omanis to avoid any legal claims in the future.¹⁹³

Aside from the British colonial establishment consciously avoiding any legal obligations arising from this Treaty, the Omani society and people have been denigrated as a worthless tribal group, as James Morris wrote three decades after the Treaty:

"So the legalities of the case are confused and indeed in a more full-blooded world might best be disregarded altogether. It can be well argued that the Sultan under the terms of the Treaty of Seeb had no right to sign away oil rights for the whole of Muscat and Oman as he has done. On the other

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ When the military, logistical, media, and diplomatic support was discussed, the Al-Jabal Al-Akhdar revolution triggered a legal debate in the House of Commons and the House of Lords. British archival documents No. FO 371/126882, dated August 14, 1957, shows that it is not in Britain's interest to release the translation of the Sib Agreement to the British public to distinguish Britain's interests in Oman. This secret memorandum also acknowledges the following:

- i. the then Sultan's complete powerlessness and total dependence on us, and his "unparalleled degree of ineptitude";
- ii. from 1856 onwards, "the Sultans' power over the interior became more nominal than ever."

hand, it seems probable that when the Treaty of Seeb was drawn up, its sponsors did not envisage total Omani secession but simply a sort of home-rule system for the signatory tribes. However, the whole edifice of Arab tribal allegiance is so complex. The meanings of Arab loyalty and suzerainty are so diffuse and contradictory that by the time you have finished arguing the case, the whole tumbled affair may be over. The Omani tribes will have subsided again as they have over the generations into one of their periods of grumpy obscurity”.¹⁹⁴

Nevertheless, Imam al Khalili ratified this Treaty in order to save the blood of the Omanis and in an attempt to focus on the interior and rebuild the state and its economy, which had been strangled by the British and the sultanate regime they supported in Muscat. The agreement worked at the time; all parties were without alternatives: Britain was exhausted from World War I and wanted to reposition itself in its colonies to compensate for its heavy losses. Especially since a new commodity began to take a prominent place in the global imperialist project: oil, which had been discovered in Iran and Iraq in worthwhile quantities. In Oman, the first mention of oil reserves was in 1923. As for Imam al Khalili, he inherited a country on the brink of collapse. Signs of tribal conflicts, mass starvation, and new leaders whose loyalties were uncertain began to lean toward the Sultan's side and await his gifts and bribes. Sultan Timur bin Faisal and his son Said were the leading gainers from all this, as the agreement provided them with a golden opportunity to catch their breath because the Muscat government at the time was too weak to face the Omanis and their pressure without direct and permanent support from Britain.

¹⁹⁴ James Morris, LEGAL POSITION CONFUSED: Room for prolonged argument, *Manchester Guardian*, August 7, 1957.

By the time Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah al Khalili died in 1954,¹⁹⁵ The Seeb treaty had achieved its economic, social, and political goals.¹⁹⁶

The Imamate was reeling and drowning in darkness, illiteracy, poverty, and diseases that most people suffer from. It was completely isolated from the world as it had no relations with any country. A group of people trapped between the huge Hajar chain and the Empty Quarter desert. In contrast, Said bin Taimur inherited power from his father,¹⁹⁷ who abdicated the rule of Muscat and Oman and went into self-imposed exile in India.¹⁹⁸ Said came up with his own vision of governing the country based on two main axes. The first was to end the Imamate and annex its oil-rich territories according to his consultations with the oil companies active in the region: the British Iraq Oil Company and some American companies. The second axis was to benefit as much as possible from the British and the superiority of their military machine to achieve the first goal.¹⁹⁹ This is especially true since Britain has accumulated tremendous combat experience after fighting two world wars and has developed military and intelligence devices and equipment that exceed the needs of the British island itself.

¹⁹⁵ FO 1016/353 Extract of Letter from the Sultan of Muscat & Oman to major F.C.L. Chauncy May 6, 1954.

¹⁹⁶ Four years before the death of Imam Mohammed bin Abdullah al-Khalili, British intelligence reports discussed the state of the Imam's health, predicted his death at any time, and reviewed the names of candidates to succeed him and how to deal with them, especially from the perspective of securing oil exploration. See Confidential document No.FO 371/82166 The succession to the Imamate of Oman July 31, 1950.

¹⁹⁷ IOR/L/PS/12/2952. 'Accession of new Sultan of Muscat' July 8, 1932.

¹⁹⁸ The memorandum entitled "Muscat Subsidies," dated September 21, 1932, explains Britain's pledges to the new ruler of Muscat to continue granting him the two central subsidies, the "Zanzibar Subsidy" and the "Arms Traffic Subsidy," estimated at 100,000 riyals per annum. Although the former was personal to former Sultan Timur, H.M.G. will continue to provide it to His Highness Said bin Taimur." See file IOR/L/PS/12/2952.

¹⁹⁹ FO 371/126879

Since coming to power in 1932, Said bin Taimur has worked to disrupt and redesign the tribal system in a way that serves him personally and prevents the election of an imam to succeed al Khalili Imam.²⁰⁰ The most important part of his project was to penetrate the Hanawi and Ghafri alliances and install sheikhs other than the sheikhs on whom the imamate system relied, who owed him loyalty and expected money, gifts, and prizes from him, and most importantly, his ability to empower them to manage the affairs of their lands and subjects.²⁰¹ The most prominent beginning of his reign was to build strong bridges of friendship based on material interests with the main tribes that surround the Imamate and derive its strength and continuity: Aal Yahmad (the Khalilis), Al hurth, Bani Riam, and Bani Hana'a; for instance, his direct friendships with Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Isa al Harthi and before him, his grandfather, the leader of al Harth, Isa bin Saleh, the children of Zahir bin Ghosn al Hinai, the nephews of Imam al Khalili, Saud bin Ali and Hilal bin Ali, Sheikh Ali bin Abdullah Aal hamuda, Sheikh of the Bani Buwali tribes in the eastern province, and the sheikhs of the tribes of Aal Na im and Bu Shams in al Buraimi. Said bin Taimur also befriended the Emir of the Green Mountain in his time and the young leader of the Ghafri alliance, Sulaiman bin Himyar al Nabhani, as early as 1939. All these interest-based relationships were the nail in the coffin of the isolated, impoverished, and out-of-touch Imamate. In addition to dismantling the Ibadi ulama system, considered the first cradle of the Hall and Oqd, which has the

²⁰⁰ Sultan Timur's abdication to his son Said sparked a political and legal debate in the corridors of the colonial administration in India and London. The most prominent constant in this debate was the British concern that the governance issue in Muscat and Oman should not be left to elections. This would strengthen the control of the (elected) Imamate over Muscat. This would not serve British interests. This concession had to be supported financially and militarily. See Memorandum to Under Secretary of State, January 2, 1932. In the file

IOR/L/PS/12/2952.

²⁰¹ FO 371/82166' The succession to the Imamate of Oman' July 31, 1950. Also, Wilkinson, J.C., *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. 284.

main task of electing, removing, monitoring, and holding the Imam accountable, he also dismantled the Ibadi ulama system. In the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, Said bin Taimur looked at the most respected names of the Ibadis and began to correspond with them, consult them, hire them in the judiciary, provide them with cash and in-kind money, and receive them in the ruling palace in Muscat with great warmth and generosity. He did this with Sheikh Ibrahim bin Saeed al Abri, Sheikh Khalfan bin Jamil al Siyabi, Abdullah bin Muhammad al Kharusi, and others.

Economic Segmentation

The main productive forces in the mountain are based on two main pillars: agriculture and pastoralism. The people of the mountain developed these two activities throughout history due to the mild weather that characterizes the mountain from the rest of the dry and hot regions of Oman. Residents rely on essential seasonal crops: pomegranates, apricots, olives, walnuts, almonds, figs, grapes, and roses. Palm trees are not cultivated in the mountain due to its lack of heat, so residents rely on exchanging their rare mountain crops in the Omani market in exchange for dates from the villages surrounding the mountain, which have grown into palm, lemon, and banana oases on the banks of the central valleys descending from the mountain's peaks. Some villages are Barakat al Mooz, Tanouf, Kamah, Imti, and others, in addition to imported crops such as rice, coffee, and oil, which are only available in major markets in the cities of Nizwa, Bahla, Samail, and Izki.²⁰²

As for the shepherds, they have developed a simple production pattern based on grazing their sheep in valleys, reefs, and small valleys. As they adapted to a subsistence life, they supplemented their

²⁰² Interview No. 1 City of Izki, Imti village, Oman, November 25, 2023.

livelihood by searching for honey deposits and industries related to spinning and weaving from the wool of their sheep and lambs.

The consequences of World War II had a profound impact on Oman's economy. Essential commodities from India and other Asian and African ports such as rice, coffee, and oil became scarce. The exchange of goods and the (already limited) crops produced by the population in Oman was stifled. The suffering of the people of the Green Mountain had accumulated and intensified since the beginning of the twentieth century when Britain tightened its control over the ports of Muscat and Mutrah, the two main outlets for the export of simple goods outside Oman, and subjected the Omani coastline from the Strait of Hormuz in the north to Ras al Hadd in the east with the justification of protecting the Sultan's subjects from any internal rebellions.

The suffering of the inhabitants of al-Jabal al-Akhdar compared to the rest of Oman during this period was compounded by the difficulty of getting food supplies to them due to the difficult ascent of this mountain fortified by nature due to the small population of al-Jabal al-Akhdar, which in the first half of the twentieth century was at most one thousand people.²⁰³ Since they had never experienced a political system other than the Imamate throughout their history, they were firmly loyal to their political, economic, and social system, which was simple in its composition and ancient in its practices. They overcame all meanings of class oppression and political isolation with social awareness and solidarity in the face of natural dangers and invasion from the lower plains, whether those plains faced the sea and were under the control of the Sultan or the Omani interior. In the last thousand years, they have not witnessed any external colonization other than some minor tribal quarrels, which are usually resolved and absorbed quickly due to the unity of

²⁰³ Interview No. 8 .al-Jabal al Akhdar, Wadi bani Habib village, Oman, December 16, 2023.

blood and kinship that unites them on the one hand and the limited resources and satisfaction with what is available on the other hand.

Taking the above into consideration, the Green Mountain's inhabitants are categorised into three main categories: feudalists, petty bourgeoisie, and workers. The petty bourgeoisie category is further divided into four subcategories and the workers category is further divided into two subcategories. The following paragraphs expound these categories and subcategories accordingly.

The first category is feudalists. They are limited in number and are often the main sheikhs of the mountain and valley notables. Their number is at most five. Mostly the sheikhs of the four Bani Riyam's clans (Arabic *Fakhaith*).²⁰⁴ In the 1940s and 1950s, Sheikh Suleiman bin Himyar al Nabhani was the most prominent name who inherited this status, money, and land from his father Himyar bin Nasser, the Emir of the Green Mountain, who was the supporter of the first Omani Imamate in the 20th century, Imam Nasser bin Rashid al Kharusi (1913-1920 AD). Sheikh Himyar bin Nasser al Nabhani established a special status for himself in al-Jabal al-Akhdar, and his tribe of Bani Riyam not only among other Omani tribes but also among the Ghafri Alliance, whose historical leadership was in the Bani Ghafir Valley and its villages surrounding the old capital of the Imamate, the city of Rustaq.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ ***Fakhaith***, singular (***Fakhithah***): A branch of a more prominent tribe. It is common in the Omani tribal system for there to be a Sheikh of the ***Tamimah***, the paramount chief, who is the head of the tribe and possibly the head of the tribal alliance, such as al-Jabal al-Akhdar, the Tamimah of Bani Ghafir. The *Fakhaith* refers to the branches of the main tribe. Each branch is headed by a sheikh responsible for his group to the Sheikh of the Tamimah. Also, To trace the colonial perspective on Omani tribes, their branches and census, Tamimah sheiks, and the Tamimah circulation system, see the secret document in FO 1016/353. 'Note on the Tribes of the Sultanate of Muscat & Oman' from the British Consulate in Muscat to the British Residence in Bahrain, telegram No. 122/2/54. February 2, 1954.

²⁰⁵ Al-Salimi, (Abu Bashir), *Nahdat al-A'yan*.84.

The second category is the Petty Bourgeoisie . It is a small group in number and limited in influence. Members of this category are further subdivided into four groups as follows. The first is the small shopkeepers, who are individuals with rudimentary shops in which they sell only basic needs such as coffee, oil, rice, sugar, salt, and some tools such as ropes and nails. The second group is the Imam's wali or representative. While in other parts of Oman the Imam had a representative or a wali, that was not the case in the Green Mountain. The Emir of the al Jabal was in charge of this task, and no one interfered in his rulings over the people of the mountain.

The third group is the qāḍī (or judge). There were no specific names of Omani jurists who took over the judiciary in the Green Mountain. This is due to the proximity of the mountain to the capital of the Imamate, Nizwa, and in this city, many scholars and sheikhs of the Ibadi school gather. Their meetings and homes are open to people wishing to consult them on religion, transactions, or personal status. However, on a few occasions, the people of the mountain present their claims and cases to Judge Abu Zaid al Riyami, the governor of the city of Bahla during the era of Imam al Khalili and one of the most prominent scholars of Bani Riyam at the beginning of the twentieth century, or Judge Zahir bin Saif al Fahdi, the Imam's judge in Tanuf,²⁰⁶ . Moreover, if one of them needs to go to the mountain, he does so; otherwise, most fatwas and consultations are obtained by the residents of Green Mountain if they visit the capital, Nizwa, Bahla, or Tanuf.²⁰⁷ In many cases, the governor and judge are performed by one person to minimize the cost to the House of Money. With him is the collector of zakat.

²⁰⁶ Interview No. 9, Jabal al Akhdar, al Shereja village, Oman, December 17, 2023.

²⁰⁷ Interview No. 3 Nizwa, Tanuf village, November 26, 2023.

The fourth group is the artisans. There are a few of them. They are weavers, gold and silversmiths, dagger and sword smiths, owners of cane sugar presses, and owners of rose water distilleries. Mountain people used to buy their simple weapons such as daggers and swords from the central market in the nearby capital Nizwa. Cane sugar presses and rose water distilleries are family industries practiced by some families and passed down throughout history.

The third and final category is the workers. Workers can be divided into two groups: peasants and shepherds, as follows. The first group is the peasants, who are the backbone of economic life in the Green Mountain and the rest of the Omani interior. They work in difficult climatic conditions. Their main task is to create sustainable agricultural landscapes on steep rocky slopes. They do this by transporting arable soil from the plains surrounding the Green Mountain and transporting it on donkeys to the top of the mountain. Their task continues. They have the more difficult task of improving the soil quality by cultivating crops that suit the mountain's environment and short seasons, as well as ensuring that these flats do not wash away when it rains. They must drain the water in safe and efficient ways that enable them to reuse it for irrigation in seasons with less rainfall due to the nature of the mountain and its slopes. Due to the scarcity of irrigation water, the system of owning agricultural land differs from the rest of the Omani lands. A Green Mountain farmer owns a small plot of land in his village, builds a simple stone house on the flat part of the mountain, and in the back develops a garden usually on the slope to grow food for his family.²⁰⁸

The more enormous terraces called "Amwal" are lands leased from the Sheikh or Emir of the mountain in exchange for a percentage that does not exceed 3-5% of the crop proceeds. In many seasons, peasants receive little more than their daily bread.

²⁰⁸ Interview No. 8 Jabal al Akhdar, Wadi bni Habib village, Oman, December 16, 2023.

The second group is the shepherds or herdsman. Along with farmers, herders form the other pillar of the mountain's economic structure. They are scattered in the valleys of the mountain and on its slopes. Men and women share the tasks of herding and caring for the sheep. They do not live in houses built of stone or permanent materials. They do not live in villages. They often live under trees—giant trees such as juniper trees (locally known as *al alalan*²⁰⁹, —or in the various caves scattered around Green Mountain. The number of sheep owned by each shepherd ranges from 10 to 100. Grazing is usually done collectively by each group that inhabits the valley and the area. It is a pattern of solidarity practiced by mountain herders for hundreds of years. This pattern ensures that the labor force is distributed efficiently. While one team goes to graze the herds, another team is there to guard the herds from wolves, tigers, and sheep thieves. Another team stays behind to guard the small settlement, prepare food, and care for the shepherds' children and young sheep. These tasks are regularly rotated among the villagers who practice and depend on herding. Everyone has a job, and age is no barrier in this small community. Older people work efficiently until they die, and only total disability or death can stop them from working. So do children, who start contributing from as early as six years old in simple tasks such as collecting firewood for cooking and heating, milking sheep, churning milk, preparing milk and ghee, and searching for honey.²¹⁰

They played vital roles in the revolution. Due to their expertise in knowing the entrances, exits, and fortified roads, they supplied the rebels and the population with ammunition and supplies

²⁰⁹ ***alalan***: *Juniperus seraphschanica* is an evergreen tree belonging to the genus *Juniperus* and the family "Cupressaceae," which are large trees that prefer cool climates and are relatively slow to grow, but they are considered perennial trees that live for hundreds of years, used by the inal-Jabal al-Akhdar! Jabal al Akhdar in many of their life activities: construction, medicine, and perfumes

²¹⁰ Interview No. 42. al-Jabal al-Akhdar, Masirat al Jawameed village, Oman, February 18, 2024.

during the difficult times of the siege imposed on the mountain. On the other hand, some members of this group had a negative role in cooperating with the British colonial forces and their allies from the Sultan's forces. These individuals were the keys that opened the impenetrable locks that prevented the occupation forces from achieving their goals and caused the defeat and fall of the mountain to the British troops in 1959.²¹¹

Political Structure

Like the economic structure of Oman in general and the Green Mountain in particular, the political structure in which the population was managed in the mountain is characterized by simplicity and lack of complexity, firstly due to the small population and secondly due to the proximity of the mountain to the capitals of the Imamate, whether the old city of Rustaq or the modern city of Nizwa, both of which are located in the valleys that descend from the mountain. However, the political and administrative structure that prevailed for the most extended period before the revolution was as follows.

First is the Imam. The Imam is the head of authority, elected and limited in his authority by the advice of the scholars."²¹² As for legislation, it is his duty not to monopolize this task but to refer to the *al hal wa al aqd*, which usually consists of the most knowledgeable, oldest, and most experienced scholars of the Ibadi school along with the most influential tribal elders, especially the leaders of the two major alliances, Ghafiriya and Hanawiya, to facilitate mobilization in war

²¹¹Interview No. 7. a-Jabal al Akhdar, Saih qatanh village, Oman, December 16, 2023.

²¹² Al-Salimi, *Nahdat al-A'yan*.136.

and the management of local affairs in times of peace. The Imamate's equivalent to the treasury or ministry of finance is called Bayt al Mal,”.²¹³ Those who irrigate their crops using the *aflaj* must pay 10% of their annual harvest to the Bayt al Mal, while peasants who farm on wells or by extracting water with the help of oxen must pay 5% because of the difficulties and costs they incur to irrigate their crops. The Imam cannot regulate and determine salaries independently; he must always refer to the people of solution and contract, including senior jurists, judges, and elders. Even his salary is not determined by himself but by the Qadhi al Qudha (Chief Justice), and he must abide by this decision.²¹⁴ Omani historical records do not record that any of the Imams of Oman ascended al-Jabal al-Akhḍar despite the mountain's proximity to the Imamate's capital Nizwa. Given the stability of the population in Jabal Akhḍar, there was no need for this step. Therefore, the last Imam, Ghalib bin Ali al Hinai, may have been the only Imam who took refuge in the mountain as a strategic option to reclaim the Imamate from Sultan Said bin Taimur, and because al Hinai was convinced of the geographical advantages and the loyalty and devotion of the people of the Green Mountain to achieve his goal and confront the military and field superiority of the British colonial machine supporting its ally, the ruler of Muscat.

²¹³ **Bayt al Mal** in Arabic means house of wealth and is traditionally applied to the public treasury of the Islamic state. Funds for the treasury were raised primarily from the land tax (*kharāj*) and a poll tax on non-Muslims (*jizyah*) and were used to pay salaries, raise armies, and improve community property.” see more in John Duke Anthony, J. E. Peterson, Donald S. Abelson. *Historical and cultural dictionary of the Sultanate of Oman and the Emirates of eastern Arabia*. Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, N.J., 1976.18.

²¹⁴ Khamis ibn Said ibn Ali al-Shaqsi. (Died: 11th century A.H. / 17th century A.D.). *Minhaj al-Talibin wa al-Balagh al-Raghybyen*. Annotated by: Sheikh Salem bin Hamad al-Harithi, Volume 8,, Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, Muscat: 1981. 40-83. Also see Ahmad bin Abdullah al-Kindi (Died: 557 AH / 1162). *Al Musanuff* (Classifier). annotated by: Mustafa Bajo, 1st edition, Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, Muscat: 2016, Part 7. 342-532. Also, Salim bin Abdullah al-Hamsaeedi. *Minhaj al-Salāmah fi aḥkām al Imāmah*. Annotated by: M. Nasir & Y. Nasir. Revised by: Khamis bin Rashid Al-Adawi. Bahla: Al-Nadwa Library. 2019.

Second is the Emir al Jabal (The Lord of al Jabal). Sulaiman bin Himyar²¹⁵, derives his power from the reputation of his father, Himyar bin Nasser, the host of the Imamate revival in the 20th century. Himyar was the most important supporter of the pledge of allegiance to Imam Salim bin Rashid al Kharusi (1913-1920), hosting the pledge of allegiance conference at his headquarters in the village of Tanuf. However, this support was conditional on practical conditions. Himyar bin Nasser stipulated to the Imam that the Imam should not attack the strongholds in his hands, namely the House of Tanuf, the House of Saiq in the Green Mountain, and the Bait Al Mal that he has."²¹⁶ In return, the Emir of the Green Mountain pledged to the Imam to equip 1000 fighters at his expense to support the Imam whenever needed.²¹⁷

Third is the *qaḍi* (or judge). This position is one of the Imam's prerogatives after referring to the most prominent Ibadi scholars of his time. The Imam may not unilaterally issue a fatwa or appoint a judge in a city, region, or group of villages without consulting this body, which usually consists of between 3-7 of the most famous names known to the people who come to him for fatwa and advice on rulings, inheritance, and personal status regulations, and to hold war brigades against tribes that rebel against the Imam's authority or to repel an external invasion. In addition to the above, this body, the Commission of Solution and Contract, has the most critical and dangerous

²¹⁵ Al-Salimī, *Nahdat al-A'yan*. 84.

²¹⁶ Ibid. 125.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

task of installing or removing the head of state, the Imam, after he is criticized for his mistakes through a system called *Istetaba*.²¹⁸

Fourth is the *shurah* (soldiers, singular *shari*). The Ibadis do not have a separate institution called soldiers or police. "The whole people are warlike by nature, and no one reaches the age of puberty without having mastered from his father how to carry weapons and fight with them. This is due to the seditions and wars the Imamate experienced throughout its history. This is because of the strife and wars the Imamate experienced throughout its history. Except for an old man, a blind man, or who has a disability." This is precisely the active force that the imams rely on, the so-called *shira*. A word that has its roots in the Arabic word "purchase," meaning that each of these fighters has bought paradise and sold their souls and everything they own to achieve martyrdom and death for the sake of the idea of establishing the rule of the Imamate.²¹⁹ This large popular army is paid for by endowments dedicated solely to the *shira*. Omani lands abound with many orchards and real estate properties that have been designated as endowments (*Waqf*) to support this important pillar on which the Imamate in Oman relies.

²¹⁸ ***Istetaba*:** The Ibadis practice criticizing the Imam for his personal and public mistakes through the same entity *al-hal wa al-aqd* that elected him or brought him in through the *bay'ah*. It is a trial-like system. The *Ulamh* confront the Imam with his actions, and the Imam must respond with convincing answers that include historical and theological evidence. He is removed if he is not convincing; otherwise, he continues as head of state. Ahmad bin Abdullah al-Kindi, (Died: 557 AH / 1162). *Al Musanuff* (Classifier). Annotated by: Mustafa Bajo, 1st edition, Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, Muscat: 2016, Part 7. 342-532.

²¹⁹ Adam Gaiser argues that "the concept of *shira*' does share a variety of characteristics with specifically Eastern Christian concepts of monastic renunciation as premature death whereby the ascetic became "the successor to the martyr." Accordingly, the *shari*, like the Christian ascetic, could be said to reject the material world in favor of ascetic praxis" in Gaiser, Adam R. *Shurat Legends Ibadi Identities: Martyrdom, Asceticism, and the making of an Early Islamic Community*, The University of South Carolina Press, 2016.10. See also his thesis about Ibadi Imamate Tradition in Gaiser. *Muslims, Scholar, Soldiers: The Origin and Elaboration of the Ibadi Imamate Traditions*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2010.

The next paragraph introduces oil as a new socio-economic that disturbed the balance of interests and power in the power dynamics in Oman at large and the interior in particular.

Oil: The Gateway to Economic Penetration

The discovery of oil in the southeastern Arabian Peninsula after World War I led to fundamental changes that altered the rules of social coexistence that had prevailed among the population for thousands of years. At the same time, the abundance of water in the plains and mountains and the vitality of the harbors on the coasts were the main elements for forming human societies in this place. Manual labor and personal and professional skills determined the value of goods and social and economic relations patterns. This all changed faster than people realize once outsiders discovered black ore underground. These outsiders controlled everything: the distribution of wealth, the drawing of new boundaries between tribe and tribe, and the status of each tribe based on the coincidence of oil under their land. The system of loyalties and alliances also changed.²²⁰

Britain controlled rules of the oil game in the region. Sir Maurice Hankey, the Secretary of the War Cabinet, wrote to Foreign Office Secretary Arthur Balfour that "oil in the next war will occupy the place of coal or at least a parallel place to coal." Balfour agreed with Hankey's vision: "Control over these oil supplies becomes a first-class British war aim."²²¹ Therefore, the British Empire redrew new maps of the Arabian Peninsula based on one factor: loyalty and obedience to the

²²⁰ As Adam Hanieh argues in *Crude Capitalism*, the modern world market is fundamentally a product of the oil industry and the specific form of capitalism it engendered. See: Adam Hanieh, *Crude Capitalism: Oil, Corporate Power, and the Making of the World Market* (London: Verso, 2024).

²²¹ D. Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power*. (London: Simon and Schuster.199)185–188.

interests of the British colonial administration. This was the basis on which political borders were formed for entities that did not exist.

In Oman, the first sign of oil came in 1923. Continuing and demonstrating British dominance, the Sultan of Muscat, Taimur bin Faisal, pledged: on behalf of himself and his successors to grant to the company (D Arcy) the further exclusive licenses and privileges "to search for natural gas, petroleum, asphalt, and ozokerite throughout the whole extent of the territories under his control." However, the final decision on any attempt to enter an area lay with the Political Agent Muscat."²²²

The British Colonial Office in London worked with the Raj in India to solidify a series of agreements with Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the sheikhs of the Trucial Omani coast between 1913 and 1922. As usual, the deal boiled down to this: British protection in exchange for a monopoly on wealth. Only then did people know these riches' nature, size, and impact except for the British oil companies. In 1925, the D'Arcy Exploration Company received a two-year exploration license from Sultan Timur. D'Arcy was a significant subsidiary of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, which in 1947 became British Petroleum. Bertram Thomas, Muscat's finance minister, accompanied the geological team guarded by Muscat Levies, who surveyed the coastal Batinah and Dhahra region after the team surreptitiously crossed the Western Hajar Range. However, they were unable to

²²² File 2794/1921 Pt 5A 'PERSIAN GULF OIL MUSCAT' [268r] (7/142), British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/10/994/2, in Qatar Digital Library <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100077133677.0x00008f> [accessed June 14 2024]

continue their mission due to the deployment of the Imam's forces to repel the Saudi attack on Buraimi in the 1920s.²²³

In 1937, Sultan Said bin Taimur partnered with the Iraq Petroleum Company (I.P.C.) to create the Oman Petroleum Development Company (OPDC).²²⁴ Sultan Said bin Taimur tried to put pressure on the British to give him more shares in the company by playing the card of the American competitor, Standard Oil of California (the company that would later become Saudi Aramco), which he succeeded in as the I.O.C. gave him more shares in exchange for securing and ensuring the introduction of more geologists from the company and enabling them to study and survey the largest possible area of Oman's interior, which was not within his territory but was under the administration of the Imam. Said bin Taimur offered some bribes and gifts to the sheikhs of the region to allow the geological expedition to cross from the Batinah coast through Wadi al Hawasna towards Ibri after crossing the complex paths of the Western Hajar Range. The

²²³ Bertram Thomas was born in Easton-in-Gordano, near Bristol, on June 13, 1892. He was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, PhD. He worked in the Civil Service from 1908-14. He served with the North Somerset Yeomanry in Belgium, 1914-15, and the Somerset Light Infantry in Mesopotamia (Iraq), 1916-18. He was an Assistant Political Officer in Mesopotamia, 1918-22, and an Assistant British Representative in Trans-Jordan (Jordan), 1922-4. He was appointed Finance Minister and Wazir to the Sultan of Muscat and Oman (Oman), 1925-32. During this time, he made several expeditions into the desert, becoming the first European to cross the Rub Al Khali (Empty Quarter), 1930-1. He was an Information Officer in Bahrain, 1942-3; Director of the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies, Palestine, 1943-6, and Lebanon, 1947-8; and an adviser to Shell Group, 1948-9.

²²⁴ I.P.C. is an Iraq Petroleum Company. The following companies held shares of 23.5 % in this Company: The Anglo-Persian Oil Company; Royal Dutch Shell; C.F.P.; and the Near East Development Corporation (a consortium of five large U.S. oil companies, among them Standard Oil of New York (Socony) and Standard Oil New Jersey (which became Exxon). Calouste Gulbenkian held a 5 per cent share. I.P.C.'s assets in Iraq were fully nationalized in 1971. I.P.C. created subsidiary companies to develop oil concessions outside Iraq.

expedition encountered armed resistance from residents. They were not welcomed, which led to the failure of the mission.²²⁵

In 1939, on the eve of World War II, Said bin Taimur succeeded in extracting more British military and financial support in exchange for opening Omani land and territorial waters to British ships to dominate and control the details of trade and navigation.²²⁶

Meanwhile, the political agent in Muscat, Colonel A.C. Galloway, tried to 1944 visit al-Jabal al-Akhdar by penetrating the interior regions of Oman to confirm the rumors that reached him about the health of the Imam and to meet some influential figures such as Suleiman bin Himyar and the sheikhs of Bani Rawaha, who knew the rough roads through the Samail valley. However, the Imam refused to meet him, and he could not climb the Green Mountain. He was content to meet some sheiks on his way back to Muscat.²²⁷

Although the British oil companies' geological survey activity ceased during World War II, Said bin Taimur did not stop building alliances with tribal sheikhs in Oman's interior.²²⁸ Interestingly, he used the lean war years to help the Omanis grow and multiply his wealth by

²²⁵ On the eve of the Second World War, Said bin Taimur did not let anyone breathe a sigh of relief and became even more insistent in asking for more military support, especially from the British Air Force. He desired to annex all Omani territories, especially those rich in oil.

He leveraged Britain's desire to control the most significant areas of oil resources to achieve common interests between himself and the colonial aspirations. See IOR/L/PS/12/2999. Telgaram No c/828, September 1946.

²²⁶ See the letter dated November 30, 1939. No. c/514, from Sd./-T. Hickinbotham, Majesty's Consul, Muscat. In File: FO 371/126879

²²⁷ IOR/L/PS/12/2999. Political agent 'Muscat visit to Jabal Akhdar.' Ext.1914/45, December 12, 1944.

²²⁸ The Ministry of Fuel and Energy is concerned by Sultan Said bin Taimur's request that the British Ministry make payments to the tribes before reasonable and convincing reserves have been confirmed. IOR/L/PS/12/2999, Memorandum PD.899/4/2. August 15, 1946.

accepting British cash subsidies. He added fixed payments to them after he signed civil and military aviation agreements for the use of Omani airspace by British aircraft in 1947;²²⁹ He also capitalized on currency speculation and the depreciation of the silver Maria Theresa rupee.²³⁰ In addition to his speculation on commodities such as wheat, rice, sugar, and spices from India. Because he was the main monopolist of the entry of all these goods through the only Omani port, Muttrah, he could grow his wealth from speculating on currency, weapons, and gold with ease, unchecked by anyone. In 1948, Sultan Said bin Taimur sent invitations to the largest Omani tribes to visit him in Muscat. He gave each tribal leader 750 rupees when the Omanis suffered the consequences of the World War on their trade and agricultural goods. The Sultan made sure to recognize Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah al Khalili's two greatest allies, Saleh bin Isa al Harthi, the Emir of the East, and Sulaiman bin Himyar al Nabhani, the Emir of the Green Mountain, if they each received exceptional Sultanic hospitality.²³¹

²²⁹ National Records and Archives Authority, Muscat, Document No.: A.2.1.10.55.

²³⁰ “**MARIA THERESA THALER** (Dollar). A large silver coin (ca. 1 1/2" in diameter) is often called a RIYAL (after the Spanish real de plata). Once universally used throughout Arabia, it survived as a currency in Yemen and OMAN until recently. The original thalers were Spanish and Dutch. German and Austrian origins, but few are in existence today. Most thalers found nowadays are copies of the Austrian thaler (Maria Theresa was Impress of Austria) minted mainly in Great Britain and Germany: regardless of their origin, these thalers bear the date of 1780.” in: Anthony, Peterson, and Abelson, *Historical and Cultural Dictionary of the Sultanate of Oman and the Emirates of Eastern Arabia*, 61.

²³¹ Wilkinson, J.C. *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987. 284–286.

Moreover, Said bin Taimur secured the loyalty of two important tribes spread across Central Oman, al Janabah.²³², and the Drua²³³ Tribes. The British Petroleum Company's geological surveys confirmed that oil was more promising between the Empty Quarter and the Arabian Sea than in the rest of Oman.²³⁴ The area includes the areas of Fahoud and Ibri²³⁵ to the coastal area of Duqm.

In 1950, a crucial decision was made based on much of the information gathered by researchers funded by the colonial establishment in London, such as Wilfred Thesiger. Thesiger spent the 1940s traveling the Arabian desert in the southeastern part of the peninsula. He documented and studied the complexities of tribal alliances in Oman's interior. He emphasized that tribal loyalties within Oman to the Imam remained firmly entrenched because of the integrity and symbolism of the Imam's person representing Oman's independence from any external influences. Even if some

²³² **JANABAH** (singular: Junaybi) is one of the largest Bedouin tribes in Oman. Together with the Drua and Al Wahiba, they are the three largest tribes controlling the central regions of Oman, where oil is concentrated. Al-Janiba is part of the Al-Ghafri alliance and has strong alliance ties with Sulayman bin Humayr. Their center is Izz, the oasis halfway between Nizwa and Adam. The tribe is distributed over a wide strip of Omani territory stretching from south of Nizwa in the West to Sur, the famous seaport in the far east of Oman. They also inhabit most of the southeastern coastal areas and the coasts of the northern Dhofar region. After World War II, however, Said bin Taimur was able to co-opt some of their sheikhs who were ambitious for more influence and rewards.

²³³ **Drua** (singular: al-Dura'i) is a Bedouin tribe based in the belt around Ibri. They are distributed between the Empty Quarter and central Oman. One of the most critical areas of the tribe is Fahud, the point where the first oil well appeared. The tribe is part of the Al-Ghafari alliance. Their center is the oasis of Tanim. The tribe is known for its pastoralism and a lesser-known occupation among the Bedouins: salt extraction. The areas they control are mostly salt marshes, so much so that the shield areas are called the salt continent.

²³⁴ The colonial administration suggested to Said bin Taimur through the British political agent to wait until the Imam's death. In its view, there was no need to make any agreements with the tribes to explore for oil, so any agreements would not bind British companies. These proposals were made in 1946, eight years before the Imam's death. See IOR/L/PS/12/2999. No.c/525. July 14, 1946.

²³⁵ **Ibri**, one of the most important cities in the Dhahirah region, connects Omani cities in the Arabian Gulf and the interior of Oman. It is located halfway between Buraimi and Nizwa. It was a center for trade and caravans. Most of the city's inhabitants belonged to al Ya'aqib, al Manadhara, and al Drua tribes. It was one of the cities under the control of the Imamate until 1953. Its control by British forces opened the gateway to penetrate Oman's interior

of the tribal sheikhs surrounding the Imam have their aspirations for leadership, this will not encourage Omanis towards any national unity.

Colonial primary sources argue that in terms of securing Britain's oil needs, the need for Said bin Taimur is questionable; "The British see themselves as accepted by the Omani tribes. The British are liked and respected by almost all the tribes ready to deal with Her Majesty's Government in any matter. If political necessity did not demand that approach be made through the Sultan, whose position as ruler of Oman as well as Muscat, it is H.M. government's declared policy to support many a British problem, particularly that affecting oil exploration, would be capable of a much more ready solution."²³⁶

However, despite all this, Said bin Taimur has increased his insistence on Britain to expand its military support, especially since the prize this time is worth the gamble. The oil reserves in the areas under the Imam's administration adjacent to Rub al Khali are worth it, especially since American oil companies allied to Abdul Aziz bin Saud had already begun to control and expand in the region after they occupied the Buraimi oases in 1952. Al Buraimi is an important strategic area with crossroads of roads and caravans between the cities and ports of the Arabian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean. The features of the imperialist hegemonic project became clear. Her Majesty's Government decided to establish two military forces: one in the north called the Oman Coast Scout Force based in Sharjah and the second the Muscat and Oman Field Force under the control of Sultan Said bin Taimur. The main task of these two forces was to protect the surveys, exploration, and oil extraction carried out by the British oil companies, whatever their

²³⁶ FO 1016/353. 'Note on the tribes of the Sultanate of Muscat & Oman.' from the British Consulate in Muscat to the British Residency in Bahrain, Telegram No. 122/2/54. February 2, 1954.3.

names.²³⁷ In return, these companies paid to establish these military forces, which consisted of mercenaries from India and Baluchistan under the command of English officers seconded from the British Armed Forces. With this step, imperialist hegemony moved to a new stage of using the institutions of the colonial state as active tools in the field to secure its interests and resolve conflicts in order to monopolize oil.

Accordingly, in late 1952, the Petroleum Development Oman Company (P.D.O.), in which Shell & B.P. holds stakes, was given the task of forming the Muscat and Oman Field Force under the direct responsibility of Sultan Said bin Taimur, who entrusted the search for a commander to his British Jewish minister Neil Innes.²³⁸ Ennis recruited a retired British ground forces major named Pat Waterfield and codenamed the operation D.E.F. This military contingent of Indian and Baluchistan mercenaries' first task was to establish a naval military base near Duqm on the Arabian Sea.²³⁹ From this base, the Omani interior and the areas under the administration of the Imam were penetrated. Said bin Taimur also summoned the sheikhs of the Janaba tribes to provide tribal protection for the contingent and the company's employees. He gave cash prizes to the sheikhs of

²³⁷ Despite widespread resistance, Eickelman argues that Britain forced a culture of loyalty and obedience in the Omani military and intelligence services but successfully imposed this culture through money, training, and intelligence advantage. See Eickelman, Dale F., and Dennison, M. G. (1994), "Arabizing the Omani intelligence services: Clash of Cultures?", *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, Vol. 7, No. 1.

For more on the challenges faced by imperialism on the road to military hegemony over multiculturalism, see Lee, Wayne E. (ed.) *Empires and Indigenes: Intercultural Alliance, Imperial Expansion, and Warfare in the Early Modern World* (New et al., 2011).

²³⁸ **Neil MacLeod Innes** was born in London in 1903. He was educated at the Royal Naval College, Osborne, Isle of Wight, England. A Trinity Hall, Cambridge University graduate, Between 1926 and 1952, he served in the Sudanese political service. He was Minister of Foreign Affairs to Sultan Said bin Taimur from 1953 to 1958. He wrote a book about this particular experience, *Minister in Oman: Memoirs of Oman in the 1950s* (Arabia Past & Present) London: The Oleander Press.1987.

²³⁹ FO 1016/353. Telgram no 122/19/54, June 14, 1954.

the Shields tribe to receive the company in the Fahud area. As the British Consul in Muscat, Major Leslie Chauncey, all weapons, equipment, and military vehicles were transported and secured under the cover of protecting the geological mission to discover oil.²⁴⁰ Wrote to the Imam; in 1954, this division reached the city of Ibri, the main center of the oil companies' target areas in Fahud, Yibal, and the surrounding areas to the Buraimi oases.²⁴¹ By the end of 1954, Said bin Taimur took advantage of Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah al Khalili's death and, with the help of the

²⁴⁰ **Frederick Charles Leslie Chauncey.** Born in London in 1904. Served in the King's Regiment 1924-1928. Later transferred to India as a captain in the 45th Sikh Rattray Regiment. From 1930, he served as a civil servant/political affairs officer in Gujarat, India. This paved the way for him to serve as British Vice-Consul in Mahmara, Persia, and then in Baluchistan during World War II. He wrote a military manual entitled "Conditions of Service of Personnel Serving in the Persian Gulf, August 5, 1947 to October 29, 1947". He was then appointed British Consul General for Muscat and Oman from October 27, 1956, to September 1, 1957. His appointment was extended for a further year until October 30, 1958. After his retirement, Major Chauncey returned to Oman to be the closest British advisor to Said bin Taimur from 1960 until 1970.

²⁴¹ Much ink has been spilled analyzing and tracing the Anglo-American rivalry for oil in the southeastern Arabian Peninsula. The Buraimi case is one of the most prominent examples. This rivalry did not become a conflict but rather a strategic partnership between an old colonialism that has ended and a new colonialism coming under the umbrella of international imperialism. Many historians have approached this question from colonial perspectives, like Kelly, J. B. *A prevalence of Furies: Tribes, Politics, and Religion in Oman and Trucial Oman* in Derek Hopwood (ed) *The Arabian Peninsula* (London, 1972). Also see Landen, R. G. *Oman Since 1856: Disruptive Modernization in a Traditional Arab Society* (Princeton University, 1967) and Philips, Wendel, *Oman: A History* (London 1967). Hurewitz, J.C. 1979: *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics* (Volume 2): British-French Supremacy 1914 - 1945. London: Yale University Press. Wilkinson, John C. *Arabia, 's Frontiers: The Story of Britain's Boundary Drawing in The Desert*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1991. Petersen, T. T. *Anglo-American Rivalry in the Middle East: The Struggle for the Buraimi Oasis, 1952-1957*, *The International History Review*, 14:1, (1992): 71-91.

On the other hand, some historians have argued that anti-colonial approaches, British or American colonialism, are worth reading, such as Nathan, Citino, *From Arab Nationalism to OPEC: Eisenhower, King Saud, and the Making of U.S.-Saudi Relations*. 2nd ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.

For secondary sources written in Arabic that are worth reading in analyzing the Buraimi case, see:

Waleed Khadouri, *'Abdulla al-Tariki: al-A'mal al-Kamila* (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2005); Salem Oman. *between fragmentation and unity 1913-1976*, (Cairo, International Centre, 2007).147- 176. Also see Jamal Zakaria Qassem, *Al Busaid State in Oman and East Africa: From its Founding to the End of Its Rule in Zanzibar and the Beginning of its New Era in Oman, 1741-1970*, (Al Ain: Zayed Center for Heritage and History, 2000). 399-401.

British, achieved the most significant breakthrough for him and his dynasty since 1886.²⁴² An Omani scout troop from Sharjah to the north met Muscat's 126-strong field force led by Edward Henderson in Ibri. The city surrendered without a fight, and the Imam's governor withdrew. The Doves Fighter Company reinforced the British forces. Thus, after one year of preparations, British military forces swooped down on the Imamate's capital, Nizwa, and Said bin Taimur entered the fortified city for the first time in his life at Christmas 1955.²⁴³ The ruler of Muscat wanted this historical scene to be wholly British-directed and produced. The troops, planners, executors, and even historians of this journey from southern Oman, from Salalah to Nizwa, were British. He took James Morris, who documented the details of this journey with unrivaled colonial admiration and published them in his book *Sultan in Oman*.²⁴⁴

In conclusion, this chapter provides an analysis of the spatial significance of the al-Jabal al-Akhdar in terms of why and how it and its people became central to Oman's resistance against colonial powers. The mountain's historical value and strategic location made it a key point for controlling trade routes and air traffic, particularly with the advent of oil discoveries in the region. The chapter highlights the mountain's legacy of independence and resistance, demonstrating how its inhabitants consistently rejected external colonization and upheld the principles of Ibadism.

²⁴² Wilkinson, J.C. *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987. 296–298.

²⁴³ American newspapers and Journals were interested in the issue of oil in Oman and the British struggle for it in the 1950s; see, for example, The New York Times: Oman Dispute Stirs British Fears on Oil (New York and Times, July 23, '57 Oman, Gateway to Oil (New York Herald Tribune, July 23, 1957) Oil Rivalries Seen in Oman Uprising (New York Journal American, July 23, 1957).

²⁴⁴ In the mid-1950s, Said bin Taimur intensified his efforts to hire more British officers to expand his military operations throughout Oman. See "Sultan of Muscat Hires British Officers. With 3-year renewable contracts, he offered generous salaries." *Al-Ahram*, Cairo, August 2, 1957. 3.

The profound belief in Ibadism, characterized by *shūra* (consultation) and the election of leaders, provided a robust socio-political framework that sustained the mountain's inhabitants through various historical challenges. The chapter underscores the pivotal role of al-Jabal al-Akhdar's leaders in reviving and supporting the Imamate system, which played a crucial part in Oman's history of resistance against colonialism.

Ultimately, the chapter portrays al-Jabal al-Akhdar not only as a geographical landmark but as a symbol of Omani resilience, independence, and the enduring spirit of its people in the face of external domination. The strategic, economic, and ideological significance of the Al Jabal

This chapter outlines the long history and legacy of rejection and resistance against all types of colonization and domination that characterized the people of al-Jabal al-Akhdar in the face of colonialism. There is no evidence, traces, or documented evidence that any of the invaders who invaded Omani lands, whether coastal or inland, ever reached the top of the mountain and took control of it. Neither the armies of the Umayyad state (al Hajjaj ibn Yusuf) nor the Abbasid state (Muhammad ibn Pur). Nor the Persian invasion, which varied and multiplied, the last of which was in the mid-eighteenth century. Nor the Portuguese invasion and colonization. Some argue that this bright record in the face of colonialism would have survived had it not been for the different balance of power and Britain's use of air combat with aeroplanes and airborne bombs.

Throughout the history of their presence in this place, the inhabitants of the Green Mountain have proven their deep belief in the principles of Ibadism, not only as a system of Government based on *shūra* and the election of the president (Imam) but also as an integrated system of life economically and socially. As shown in this chapter, all the tribes that inhabited the mountain, whether the Aal Yahmad or later the Bani Riyam, were the political, social, and military bases for most Imams in the past thousand years. The leaders of al-Jabal al-Akhdar played a pivotal role in

reviving the Imamate whenever it faded and disappeared, which happened with the Imamate of Nasser bin Murshid al Yarubi and his army commanders Masoud bin Ramadan al Riyami and Muhammad bin al Salt al Nabhani. We also saw the pivotal role played by the leader Himyar bin Nasser in reviving the first Imamate of the twentieth century, Salim bin Rashid al Kharus i, despite the change in the international balance of power and the political, social, and military weapons used by the British Empire to abort the birth of this Imamate. They did not hesitate for a moment to support the election of Imam Ghalib bin Ali al Hinai, who led the Green Mountain revolution and resistance in the face of Said bin Taimur's forces, which were supported and prepared by the British Empire.

Both parties, the Imamate on the one hand, and Said bin Taimur and his ally, Britain, on the other, realize the centrality of the Green Mountain in Omani history, and the importance of controlling this place increased with the discovery of oil in the Omani interior. In addition, Britain needed a central point to monitor and control air traffic, which began to take a central position in the networks of commercial and capitalist exchange worldwide. Since the mountain is the highest point in West Asia, Britain saw another military advantage in controlling it. It is not surprising that once Britain dominated the mountain, it installed the most extensive surveillance and espionage radar that revealed most of the central regions of the Asian continent. The range of this radar reaches China and North Korea.

al-Jabal al-Akhdar underscores its central role in shaping Oman's historical narrative and its struggle for sovereignty.

CHAPTER TWO: THE IBADISM IN OMAN; THE PARADOX BETWEEN IBADI THEORIES AND PRACTICES WITH ANTI-COLONIALISM

Between the first Ibadi imam in 749 and the last imam in 1959, a long and storied history unfolds, characterized by both triumphs and setbacks. The era of the Omani Ibadi imamate (the Imamate”) began with clandestine ideas and secretive debates challenging the Umayyad s absolute authority. It evolved into an independent governance system under the Abbasid caliphate, enduring numerous falls and resurgences, which became a defining mechanism in its history. Rather than interpreting this established cyclical pattern of the Imamate as a result or de facto outcomes, its followers believed that such cyclical behaviour provided a *modus operandi* for its survival and return.

Drawing upon primary sources of Ibadi history in general and Omani history in particular, this chapter aims to explicate the foundational roots of the Imamate through addressing some key aspects including the theory of the Imamate, what distinguishes it from other ruling theories prevailing in Islamic history, such as those of Shiites and Sunnis, and the extent to which geographical factors have had a role in shaping this Imamate in terms of its principal ideas and their practice.

The Chapter is, hence, divided into 5 parts. In the first part, the chapter will attempt to trace the most prominent events and reasons that led to the emergence of this school of thought and how it became a political movement that has its followers and supporters. The second part focuses on the most prominent features of the theory of governance within Ibadism and the two most important pillars on which Ibadism is based: the *shūra* and Imamate (including its four phases). In the third part, the Chapter will examine the difference between theory and practice by highlighting some examples from the history of Ibadi Imamate, which is the history of rule in Oman at the same

time. The fourth and fifth parts of this chapter, respectively, will demonstrate the pivotal role of the Ibadi scholars (the *ulama*) and elected imams in confronting colonialism and absolute rule represented by a monarchy of sultans who ruled the Omani coast with the military and financial support of the British Empire.

Roots and Origins

The Ibadi movement is predominantly classified within the historical Islamic literature as an offshoot of the Kharijites. The Kharijites were the faction that seceded and dissented from the fourth Caliph, Ali ibn Abi Talib, rejecting his acceptance of arbitration between himself and the army of Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan. Many studies consider that the *Khawārij* were the first political/religious party in Islam," which would become an explicit revolutionary party" and the first experience of organized political opposition in the history of Islamic statehood. The beginning was at the end of the reign of the third Caliph' Uthman bin' Affan, who angered many of his contemporaries because of his favoritism towards the Umayyads, a clan to whom he belonged. He favored them in two distinct manners: appointment to high public offices and access to state funds and public wealth.²⁴⁵ The city of Kufa formed the center of opposition to Uthman's style of governance.²⁴⁶ The vast majority of its inhabitants were the warriors who participated in the wars of conquest of Iraq since the first campaigns in 2 A.H. (around 625).²⁴⁷ They have also included

²⁴⁵ Latifa al-Bakkai, *Harakat al-Khawārij: Nash'atuha wa-Tatawuruha ila Nihayat al-'Ahd al-Umawi [Al Khawārij Movement: Its Origin and Development to the End of the Umayyad Era.]* Beirut: Dar al-Tanwir, 2001, 11.

²⁴⁶ al-Bakkā'ī, *Harakat al-Khawārij*, 12-13.

²⁴⁷ Anno Hegirae /'ænoʊ 'hɛdʒɪri:/, 'in the year of the Hijra,' also known as the Islamic or Muslim calendar. It is commonly accepted to have started around 623 AD.

large numbers of tribes that came to it from the Arabian Peninsula and, more particularly, southern Arabia. Among those tribes was the Azd tribe (or the Azdites), who migrated from Oman. Those warriors stood for some original values espoused by the early statehood in Medina. Thus, the alleged behavior and practices of Uthman brought to life some of the political discussions that immediately followed the death of the Prophet Muhammad vis-à-vis the right to rule and sovereignty of the umma or community. This will be akin to the people's right to self-determination and sovereignty in modern political discourse.

In the city of Kufa, a group devoted itself to reciting the Quran in mosques, forming discussion panels, interpreting what they read of texts, and comparing them to the reality of their lives. It was called jama at al qurra , the group of readers. This group formed the first nucleus of the *Khawārij*, comprised of what would be known as the Ibadis or Ibadites, in addition to other sects that branched off from the *Khawārij*. These groups were preoccupied with discussing the concept of political opposition, rejecting the monopoly of power and discrimination on the one hand and calling for a return to *shūra*-based rule and the right of people to choose their ruler, ideally through some form of competition. The group of readers clarified their bias towards the separation between the kingdom's authority and the ruler's authority. They wanted to choose their rulers themselves, and for the Caliph to be nothing but a symbol, whose role is limited...”²⁴⁸.

The *Khawārij* movement, which later split into groups and further sub-movements, including the Ibadi movement, arose in a turbulent political climate and a cycle of intense struggle over the legitimacy of rule within an Islamic or a Muslim state. The movement rejected the two

²⁴⁸ See Hisham Djait, *Al-Fitna: Jadaliyat al-Din wa-al-Siyasa fi al-Islam al-Mubakkir* (Al-Fitna: Dialectic of Religion and Politics in Early Islam) (Beirut: Dar al-Tali a, 2015), 138. See also Abdel-Gawad, *Al-Sulta fi al-Islam: Naqd al-Nazariyya al-Siyasiyya* (Power in Islam: Criticism of Political Theory) (Beirut: Dar al-Tanweer, 2012)..

competing authorities for power: the reference of the Prophet's house and their Shiites, represented by Ali bin Abi Talib, and the other authority, Quraysh, represented by the Umayyads. The *Khawārij* movement challenged all of this and declared that their only reference was the Quran, which did not confer the right to rule exclusively upon descendants of the Prophet or members of the Quraysh clan. The *Khawārij* launched their slogan *lahukma illalillah*," meaning that there is no rule except for the sake of and according to God, denoting the egalitarian essence of the fundamental concept of vicegerency. Such a rule must be conducted using the principle of *shūra* as articulated in the Quran. This gave rise to their second slogan, "Governance is by *shūra* only."²⁴⁹

This latter slogan was used to mobilize a call for the election of the caliph of the Muslims through the *shūra* council, without regard to tribal descent or ethnic origin. Al-Shahristani points out in his book *al-Mill wa al-Nhal* that the *Khawārij* were the first to call for the Imamate to be in someone other than Quraysh, and whoever they chose to establish justice and fight injustice is an imam for them, and this Imam can be a slave, freeman, Nabatian or Qurayshi. the point, this to Up ²⁵⁰

choice of caliphs was confined to members of the Quraysh tribe, the tribe of the Prophet Muhammad.

²⁴⁹ Muhammad ibn Jarir, Al-tabari. *Tarikh al-rusul wa-al-muluk (History of the Messengers and Kings)* Beirut: Dar al-Turath, 1967. Volume 4,63.

²⁵⁰ Al-Shahristani defines the *Khawārij*: that everyone who revolted against Imam Ali bin Abi Talib, it was agreed that any one did that will be named as *Khawārijū*, whether it was during the days of the *Al Sahabah* or after them. It also details the names of their leaders, the most famous scholars, the groups that were divided among them, and their most prominent ideas and arguments with the scholars of authority. See Al-Shahristani, Abu al-Fath Muhammad Abd al-Karim. *Al-Milal wa Al-Nahl*, (Cairo: Al-Halabi Publishing, 1968), 114–139.

This was the most significant departure from the political status quo. By electing Abdallah bin Wahb al-Rasbi as its Imam, the *Khawārij* movement was the first group to challenge the authority of Quraysh openly. This happened during the reign of Ali bin Abi Talib, the fourth rightly guided caliph.²⁵¹

The Ibadi movement spent most of the duration of the Umayyad dynasty in hiding, working covertly in Basra, Kufa, and Baghdad. What assisted the movement to grow and spread was the increasing feeling of injustices and marginalization that spread among lower social strata in Basra, which led to grudging sentiments of dissatisfaction with the Umayyad rule exercised by a central authority in Damascus. Those above lower social strata found in the teachings of the Ibadis values that were common to their cause and advocacy for justice and social equality. The political agenda of the movement represented an expression of their dreams of liberation and emancipation from the problematic and chafing situations that surrounded them.

The Idea and Basis Of the Theory Of Governance in Ibadism

The majority of Ibadi historiography confirmed that the principle of *shūra* is the basis of political systems and governance in Islam. Governance systems that are not based on *shūra* are considered null and void.²⁵² Ibadi sources refuse to limit the rotation of power or the caliphate

²⁵¹ Ahmed bin Saeed al-Shammakhi, *Kitab al-Siyar* [The Book of Biography] (Muscat: Ministry of Heritage and Culture, 1987), 1:51.

²⁵² Most of the Major Ibadi books have devoted a separate chapter to discussing the issue of the Imamate, its ruling, and the evidence for it from the biography of the Prophet Muhammad. See for further dissections: Al-Kindi, Ahmed bin Abdullah, *Al-Musannaf*, (Muscat: Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, 2016. Also, Al-Saadi, Jamil bin Khamis, *Qamus al-Shari'ah*, (Muscat: Algeel Alwaeed Library, 2015). And, Al-Kindi, Muhammad bin Ibrahim, *Bayan Al-Shara*, (Muscat: Ministry of Heritage and Culture, 1984).

within Quraysh, rejecting monopolizing the right to rule the Muslim community or Ummah by one particular tribe. They insisted that the choice of the ruler remained open through consultation, which is the path that the Ibadis considered the way of justice," which will certainly lead to the election of a just *imam*." The Ibadis stood fast by their doctrines. They considered that the Imam could not be elected based on his social status but according to key criteria such as demonstration of faith, daily and social practices, and morality.²⁵³

Once they refined their political thoughts and ideology and moved back more solidly to Oman, the Omani Ibadis implemented the core principles of *shūra*. They institutionalized the office of the Imam independently of the Islamic Caliphate in Damascus. Aided by the geographic isolation of Oman, an independent political culture and system emerged when Ibadis elected Imam al-Julanda bin Mas'oud circa 749-751 and thus announced the establishment of the first Ibadi State. This *imam* was elected by a *shūra* body composed of the most prominent scholars of the Ibadi movement in that period: Hajib al-Ta'i and al-Rabi' bin Habib—these two scholars were in Basra. In addition to Abdullah bin al-Qasim, Hilal bin Attia, Khalaf bin Ziyad, Musa bin Abi Jaber, Bashir

²⁵³ Some contemporary studies attempt to compare the ideas of the Ibadi school with certain modern discourses through the lens of Western theology. While this effort is highly commendable, it is crucial to avoid falling into Orientalist and colonial approaches that perceive such discourses solely through the framework of European religion," within which they were historically shaped. See, for example, "Ibadi-Omani Creeds and the Construction of Omani Religious Discourse," in *Oman, Ibadism and Modernity*, ed. Abdulrahman Al-Salimi and Reinhard Eisener, Studies on Ibadism and Oman (Hildesheim; Zürich; New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2018), 197–208; and "Refuting the Vision of God in Ibadi Theology," in *Ibadi Theology: Rereading Sources and Scholarly Works*, ed. Ersilia Francesca, Studies in Ibadism and Oman, ed. Abdulrahman Al-Salimi and Heinz Gaube (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2015), 245–253.

bin al-Mundhir, and Munir bin al-Nair, these were the most prominent scholars in Oman during that period.²⁵⁴

Historical sources argue about the circumstances, factors, and process of the evolution of the theory of governance in the Ibadism. Wilkinson considers that this theory came to codify the reality that the political conditions dictated to a small faction with non-Qurayshi leaders outside the Sunni government and at the same time rejecting the Shiite opposition.”²⁵⁵ Drawing on Wilkinson's reference to reality, several factors contributed to the evolution of the movement's political thought and form of government. First, the doctrine of concealment forms that fourth political pillar and one of the four phases of the development of lawful statehood and the struggle against tyranny and injustices. Second, the naturally isolated location of Oman at the tip of the Arabian Peninsula provided an environment conducive to an independent thought trajectory. Third, the presence of strong tribal support and determination to break away from the dominant center of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates. Instead, it became an Ibadi State, a political reality with a presence in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula and a clear challenge to the center of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad.

As for Abed al-Jawad Yassin in his book *al-Nazariyya al-Siyasiyya (Authority in Islam)* he believes that the Ibadi do not present a theory of the state but rather a theory of the ruler or the Imam.²⁵⁶ While Farhat al-Ja abiri believes that the uniqueness of the ruling experience of the Ibadis

²⁵⁴ Al-Salimi, Abdullah Ibn Humaid, *Tuhfat al A yan bi-Sirat Ahl Oman* , Part 1,

Cairo: Al-Matba a al-Salafi ya, 192,. 60. For further discussion on the circumstances of the first Imamate's birth, see Abdul Rahman Abdul Karim, Al-Ani, , *Tarikh Uman fi al- Usur al-Islamiyah al-Ula* [The History of Oman in the Early Islamic Ages] (London: Dar Al-Hikma, 1999).

²⁵⁵ Wilkinson, J.C. *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987.

²⁵⁶ Abdel-Gawad Yassin, *Al-Sulta fi al-Islam: Naqd al-Nazariyya al-Siyasiyya* (Power in Islam: Criticism of Political Theory) (Beirut: Dar al-Tanweer, 2012).339

lies in their refusal to back down.²⁵⁷ Moreover, when a situation leading to surrendering or backing down occurred, it was not by the will of the Imam or his desire. It was a choice made by the *Majlis al-hal wa al Aqd*, which was the Ibadi version of modern-day national assemblies (the Majlis).

This assembly was composed of scholars who were authorized to select, instate, or impeach an *imam*. Salem al-Kharusi asserts that the principle of *shūra* is the most important political principle of Ibadis because it is an invitation to free choice according to competence.²⁵⁸

Ibadi jurisprudence did not only stress the necessity of *shūra* and its essential role in the process of choosing the Imam but also obliged the *imam* to practice it throughout his administration of government, especially about declaring war or jihad or when thinking of retiring. Moreover, if he does not adhere to the *shūra*, then his Imamate is at risk, and people are not obligated to obey him, and, according to some scholars, he must be killed.

The condition of the contract or pledge of allegiance between the *imam* and the people, through the Majlis and the consultation process in the history of the rule of the Ibadi Imamate in Oman, makes the *imam* primarily responsible for the affairs of the state to the extent he has no immunity from error. He is held accountable and responsible to the highest degree for his decisions.

Throughout their long experience and continuous struggle with the central authority in Baghdad and earlier in Damascus, Ibadis formulated or produced their course and stages of what they called the phases of the Imamate.”²⁵⁹ These are stages in the political work practiced by the

²⁵⁷ Farhat al-Jaabiri, *al-Tajribah al-siyasiyah ‘ind al-Ibadiyah* [The Political Experience of the Ibadis] (Muscat: Al-Dhamri Library for Publishing, 2015), 15.

²⁵⁸ Salem bin Hilal Al-Kharousi. *Al-Fikr al-Siyasi lil-Ibadhiyah* [The Political Thought of the Ibadis]. Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 2006), 38.

²⁵⁹ al-Kharūṣī, *al-Fikr al-Siyāsī li-l-Ibādiyyah*, 95.

movement's founding fathers in different circumstances in which they preserved the principles of the movement. Al-Ja abiri sees these phases as political pragmatism, which provided for every problem a solution in the historical course of the Ibadi movement.²⁶⁰

These phases are *al-Zuhur* (appearance), *al-Kitman* (concealment), *al-Difa* (defense), and *shurat* (martyred struggle)²⁶¹ These phases do not necessarily come in a single, fixed, or successive arrangement. However, their arrangement varies according to the political reality and the status of the Ibadi community in it. The goal of these phases is to achieve the Great Imamate or the Imamate of Appearance *Imam al-Zuhur* , that is, access to power and the establishment of the state, which the Ibadi considers a duty of the religion.²⁶²

Some believe the matter begins with the *Imam al-Zuhur*, *Imam* of Reappearance, which is the origin. When injustice intensifies, and the tyranny of the rulers grows, it moves to the *Imam al-Difa* , the *Imam* of Defense, where the Muslims declare their rejection and work to change the situation under the leadership of an elected *Imam*. If fighting is difficult or impossible, then the Ibadi community enters the stage of the *Imam al-Kitman*, the *Imam* of Concealment, during which the community is organized, and work is done to preserve the Ibadi group. In each of these stages, an *imam* must be elected, and it is not permissible for a group to have an imam, no matter the

²⁶⁰ Farhat al-Jaabiri. 16.

²⁶¹ Adam Gaiser argues that the concept of shira' does share a variety of characteristics with specifically Eastern Christian concepts of monastic renunciation as premature death whereby the ascetic became the successor to the martyr." Accordingly, the shari, like the Christian ascetic, could be said to reject the material world in favor of ascetic praxis" in Gaissuradam R. *Shurat Legends Ibadi Identities: Martyrdom, Asceticism, and the making of an Early Islamic Community*, The University of South Carolina Press, 2016 10. See also his thesis about Ibadi Imamate Tradition in Gaiser. Muslims, *Scholar, Soldiers: The Origin and Elaboration of the Ibadi Imamate Traditions*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2010.

²⁶² See for further dissections about the Imamte phases: Al-Kindi, Ahmed bin Abdullah, *Al-Musannaf*, v7, part 10, Also, Al-Saadi, Jamil bin Khamis, *Dictionary of Sharia*, V86.

circumstances. In Ibadi literature, terms such as: "Muslim Community" or "People of Righteousness" are used, meaning Ibadi. Yassin sees that the concept of the group is present in the Ibadi jurisprudence, *fiqh*, just as it is not present in the Sunni and Shiite jurisprudence *fiqh*.²⁶³

The practice and the struggle for power

The basis of the Ibadi political theory is *shūra* (mutual consultation) and the election of an *imam* based on knowledge, faith, and morality, not based on race and tribe. The history of the ruling system in Oman, which is also the history of the Ibadi experience, is full of conflicts, tribal interventions, and attempts to settle and perpetuate power in a particular dynasty or tribe. The historical context of this experience from the late ninth century to the present era clearly shows the vast difference between theory and practice.

The first test of the Ibadi theory of governance in Oman was the election of the first imam of the Omani State: al-Julanda bin Mas'oud. His election presented an explicit statement that the theory is far from the application. al-Julanda, since he belonged to the same family (the al-Julanda Bani Ma'wala bin Shams) that ruled Oman for centuries during the pre-Islamic era. This contradicts the movement's founding principles, which were based on opposing succession and tribalism. Ibadi historiography mentions that the election of the first *imam* came as a reward for him after he became a prominent face of the Ibadi movement within Oman in the face of the other side of the family that opposed Ibadi advocacy. Therefore, the Majlis that chose al-Julanda, in cooperation with the leaders of the movement in Basra, were trying to invest and build upon an

²⁶³ Yassin, Abdel-Gawad, *Power in Islam: Criticism of Political Theory*, (Beirut: Dar al-Tanweer, 2012).

existing dynasty. Imam al-Julanda was killed in 751 in a battle with the forces sent by the Abbasid Caliph abu Ja afar al-Mansur.²⁶⁴ Then the Ibadi community entered the stage of concealment *Al-Kitman*, after the fall of the Imamate of al-Julanda bin Mas oud, and worked to strengthen its ranks to restore the rule of those whom Ibadi historiography describe as despots. The movement regained control by declaring an imam to appear by electing Muhammad bin Abi Affan in 793.²⁶⁵

Then they returned and deposed Imam bin Abi Affan and elected a replacement for him, al-Warith bin Kaab al-Kharusi, who ruled Oman until he died in a drowning accident after trying to rescue prisoners who were imprisoned by the torrent. After him, a group of imams succeeded: Ghassan bin Abdullah, Abdul Malik bin Hamid, al-Muhanna bin Jafir al-Kharusi, and Imam al-Salt bin Malik al-Kharusi. For Imam al-Salt, the scholars, because he could no longer run the affairs of the state due to his advanced age, while the other party, which is the team of his tribe, insisted that he remain until his death. This incident established an intellectual, political, and social division and conflict that shaped Omani history into the present era. The Omanis were divided intellectually and socially because of him.²⁶⁶ Intellectually, and as a result of intellectual debates between Ibadi scholars, two schools of thought emerged: al-Nazwaniyah School (relative to the

²⁶⁴ Al-Salimi. *Tuhfat al A yan bi-Sirat Ahl Oman* , 63.

²⁶⁵ Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, 235.

²⁶⁶ Among the prominent Omani scholars who engaged in the discourse surrounding the deposition of Imam al-Salt ibn Malik al-Kharusi were two key figures representing distinct intellectual traditions. From the **Rustaqiyya School**, **Abu Muhammad ‘Abdullah ibn Barakah** (d. tenth century) is noted for his contributions to Ibadi jurisprudence. His seminal work, *al-Taqqid* (MS 160), is preserved in the manuscript collection of the Sayyid Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Busa’idi Library in Al-Sib, Oman. Conversely, the **Nizwaniyya School** is represented by **Abu Sa’id al-Kudami** (d. tenth century), whose treatise *al-Mu’tabar* (3 vols.; Muscat: Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, 1984) remains a critical reference for theological and legal debates within the Omani scholarly tradition. These works reflect the intellectual rigor and doctrinal nuances that characterized the discourse on political and religious authority during this period.

city of Nizwa) and al-Rustaqi School (relative to the city of al-Rustaq).²⁶⁷ Socially and tribally, the Omanis were divided between Yamaniya and Nizari. Yamaniya, the tribes whose origins go back to the Qahtanis, or the Arabs of the south, and the Nizaris,²⁶⁸ who are the tribes whose origins go back to the Adnanites, or the Arabs of the north. In the opinion of certain contemporary Ibadis, the former was essentially fundamentalist'...On the other hand, the Nazwa school tended towards moderation, appealed to people to leave the past behind and restore the unified Imama," according to Wilkinson.²⁶⁹

Because of this conflict between the group of scholars and tribal leaders, the state weakened politically, the position of the Imam began to shrink, and the tribe's role increased, which paved the way for the emergence of the Nabahina State. This state ruled Oman for nearly five hundred years, with a comprehensive hereditary system of rule until their state collapsed with the Portuguese invasion of the Omani coasts in 1506, where they eliminated the state of Bani Nabhan and occupied Oman for nearly one hundred and twenty years.

The country entered into a civil war between 1576 and 1610 as a result of the weakness of the central state and the struggle of tribal leaders over resources and lands, which was increased by colonial occupation, plundering wealth, and controlling the movement of ports, trade, agriculture and quarries, chaos and corruption spread, but the team of scholars retook the initiative

²⁶⁷ For consideration of the consequences of this intellectual and doctrinal dispute, see: Ali bin Saeed Al-Riyami, *The Issue of Deposing Imam Salt bin Malik al-Kharusi* (Muscat: Dar Al-Ghasham for Publishing and Translation, 2015), 182–217.

²⁶⁸ al-Riyāmī, Qaḍīyyat 'Azl al-Imām al-Salt.

²⁶⁹ See J.C. Wilkinson., Bio-bibliographical background to the crisis period in the Ibadhite Imama of Oman (end of 9th to end of 14th century) , *Arabian studies*, vol. III, London, 1976, 139.

in 1624 by electing a powerful *imam*, Nasir bin Murshid al-Ya'rubi,²⁷⁰ who unified the country and led the first anti-colonial national liberation movement in that part of the world.

Wilkinson describes this defining moment in Omani history: Who would have believed in 1624 that everything that happened was a great cycle that lasted exactly eight hundred years and reached its trough, that a quarter of a century later foreigners would be expelled, and that Oman, under the leadership of the Imam, would be on its way to becoming a maritime power Big again?"²⁷¹ Saber Arab believes that the issue of resurrecting the Imamate remained a religious and national goal that the vast majority of people aspired to, and they saw their country as small states, their kings fighting and their role regressing."²⁷²

After achieving the most prominent goal of liberating the country from the Portuguese colonizer and the death of Nasser bin Murshid, his cousin Sultan bin Saif was chosen by Al Baia through *al-hal wa al- Aqd*, and the country entered again during the era of inheriting power in one tribe, the Yaariba.²⁷³

As the institution of the Ibadi scholars declined, the influence of the commercial classes increased.²⁷⁴ The country recovered from the money flow from maritime trade and the spoils of war against the Portuguese. Nour al-Din al-Salmi points out that Oman's wealth has reached the

²⁷⁰ Saif Al-Maskari, *al-Imamah wa-al-Şira' 'alá al-Sultah fi akhir al-Dawlah al-Ya 'rubiyah* (The Imamate and the Struggle for Power in the Late Ya'aribi State) (Muscat: Al-Ghasham Publishing House, 2015).

²⁷¹ Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, 309.

²⁷² Saber Arab, *Al-Dawla fi al-Fikr al-Ibadi* [The State in Ibadi Thought] (Cairo: Dar al-Shorouk, 2014), 178.

²⁷³ To trace the roots of the Ibadi state and society in the early Al-Yarubiyah state, see; J.C. Wilkinson, "The Origin of the Omani State" in *The Arabian Peninsula: Society and Politics*, ed. Derek Hopwood. *Studies in Modern Asia and Africa*, 8 (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1972), 67 - 83.

²⁷⁴ For more details about the impact of commercial classes and foreign traders in Meqdam Abdul- Hasan Al- Fayadh. The Indian Community In Oman and the Relations with Ibadi Imamate: A Sample Study from the Omani History 1868 – 1920," *Journal of Arabian Gulf*, (Al Basrah: University of Basrah and Arabian Gulf Studies, June 2013, Volume (41), issue (2-1).

point where gold and silver have overflowed from people's hands. However, this rosy picture depicted by historians of that period ignores the bloody struggle for power in which the heirs of the ruling, who are supposed to be elected, were involved. Saif bin Sultan turned against his brother Belarab. He seized power by force, after which internal disputes and conflicts erupted until the state fell under a new occupation, this time from Oman's neighbors on the opposite side of the Gulf: Persians. Furthermore, there was a sharp dispute between Ibadi scholars and tribal leaders who advocated that the rule continue hereditary to ensure their commercial and social interests, according to Bathurst.²⁷⁵

Hussain Ghubash believes that the development that the Yarubi State on the social, economic, and military level, specifically since the era of Imam Saif bin Sultan the first, was not accompanied by a similar development on the spiritual level.²⁷⁶ The country entered into another civil war that extended for twenty years, during which the Persian occupation from 1735-1745, until a new leader, Ahmed bin Said al-Busaidi, emerged, unified the country, and expelled the Persians from the most crucial city in the north of Oman, the city of Sohar. The Ibadi Scholars saw in him a historic opportunity to return to the fore and revive the idea of the Imamate, so he was elected as Imam through al-Baia and with him began another hereditary phase, monopolizing the rule in the Al Bu Said dynasty to this day.²⁷⁷ Yet, the Ibadi scholars tried to revive the idea of Imamate and installed Imam Azzan bin Qais in 1868,²⁷⁸ but the British forces, which had been

²⁷⁵ Bathurst, R.D. *Maritime Trade and Imamate Government: Two Principal Themes in the History of Oman to 1728*, in Hopwood, Derek (EDT) *The Arabian Peninsula: Society and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2016), 102.

²⁷⁶ Ghubash, Hussein, *Oman – The Islamic Democratic Tradition*, (London: Routledge, 2006).

²⁷⁷ Jamal Zakaria Qassem. *Al Busaid State in Oman and East Africa: From its Founding to the End of Its Rule in Zanzibar and the Beginning of its New Era in Oman, 1741-1970* (Al Ain: Zayed Center for Heritage and History, 2000).

²⁷⁸ For a more detailed analysis of the conflict between the two systems of governance in Oman, see Tariq al-Sarai al-Alawi, 'Al-Alaqah bayn al-Imamah wa al-Saltanah fi Sultanat Uman, 1868-1913' [The Relationship between the Imamate and the Sultanate in Oman, 1868–1913] (Damascus: Dar al-Farqad, 2014).

linked to the rulers of the Al Bu Said State with covenants and protection treaties²⁷⁹ since 1798,²⁸⁰ intervened and settled the conflict by killing Imam Azzan in 1871. Then, the British influence increased in control of Oman and enabled the rulers of the Al Bu Said family to submit the country entirely to British intervention, and Britain became the most prominent player in determining who rules the country and who is expelled from its rule.²⁸¹

The year 1868 was a pivotal moment in Oman's history, as it witnessed a significant revolt against the hegemony of the British Empire. This revolution was fueled by several factors, including:

1. Economic hardships: Oman's economy depended heavily on regional trade. However, British imperialist practices, such as monopolizing the ports on both sides of the Gulf, severely hindered Oman's economic prosperity. These economic hardships created fertile ground for discontent and resistance.
2. Weak leadership: The then Sultan, Salim bin Thuwaini, who killed his father, was perceived as weak and ineffective. His inability to confront British influence and protect Oman's interests fueled anti-colonial sentiment.
3. Revival of the Ibadi Imamate: Towards the end of Said bin Sultan's rule, the Omanis tried to revive the Imamate as an idea and practice to improve a system of governance that was mired in economic benefits and commercial partnership with the British across the Indian Ocean. They saw it as a legitimate and effective way to resist foreign domination and re-establish social justice.

²⁷⁹ See A historical overview of the Sultanate of Muscat, and the agreements made between Britain and Muscat Treaties and conventions, agreed between 1798 ..., including excluding the French from the Sultan of Muscat s territories (1798). https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100000000884.0x0003bd

²⁸⁰ J.B Kelly. *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1968). Also, V.G. Kiernan, *Colonial Empires and Armies, 1815-1960* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1998).

²⁸¹ Ahmed, Obaidli. Al-Imam 'Azzan bin Qays: *Jawanib min al-Tarikh al-'Arabi al-Islami fi Zill al-Haymana al-urubbiyya* [Imam Azzan bin Qays: Aspects of Arab-Islamic History Under European Hegemony] (1868-1871)(Beirut: Dar al-Hadathah, 1984).4).

4. Mobilization and persuasion: Revolutionary leaders used various strategies to mobilize the population and rally support for their cause. These strategies included poetry and recreating images from the past. They reinforced economic arguments and revitalized tribal alliances.

Although the revolution of Imam Azzan was eventually crushed by the British, it sowed the seeds of a long struggle that stretched into the mid-20th century and became a historical reference for confronting the same adversary.

Persistent Resistance and New Coloniser

Abdulfattah Ibrahim argues in his book, *Ala Tariq al-Hind* [On the Road to India] that from the moment the British Empire signed the 1798 agreement with Sultan bin Ahmad bin Said Al Busaidi, it threatened to close Indian ports to Omani ships and stifle Muscat's trade. This coercion forced the Sultan to concede further privileges, enabling Britain to consolidate its hegemony over the region. Through this strategy, Britain entrenched its political, economic, and social influence by integrating Oman and the Gulf into an imperial intelligence network and telegraphic communication system that connected the "jewel in the British crown" (India) to London. Oman's ports, along with other Gulf and Arabian Peninsula cities, functioned as a critical colonial bridge. This infrastructure allowed British capitalism to maximize profits, secure financial advantages, and accumulate vast wealth throughout the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.²⁸²

The gruesome end of the Imamate of Azzan bin Qais at the hands of the British, who supported Turki bin Said bin Sultan al-Busaidi with money and military vessels that besieged

²⁸² Abdulfattah Ibrahim, *Ala Tariq al-Hind* [On the Road to India] (Baghdad: Al-Ahali Press, 1932), 32–65.

Muscat from 1870-1871, inspired Omanis to resist Turki's regime and the Empire that supported him.²⁸³ Imam Azzan was killed after a betrayal by his men and left unburied in the open for three days. Then, some of his companions sneaked in and buried him near the city wall in the area of Jabrouh.²⁸⁴ He is the only Imam in Omani history to be buried in Muscat.²⁸⁵ Britain then turned to Sheikh Sa'id bin Khalfan al-Khalili, the reviver of the Imamate of Azzan bin Qais, and arrested him and his son Muhammad.²⁸⁶ Britain also employed its naval fleet to serve Turki bin Said, patrolling the Sea of Oman from north to East, threatening to bombard the ports of Musnaa, Sohar, Suwayq, and Sur whenever the people of these cities refused to comply with the Sultan of Muscat's demands to raise taxes.²⁸⁷ As soon as Turki fell ill and died in 1888, the Raj government in India hastened the installation of his son Faisal as Sultan of Oman.

In the 1891 agreement, the British forced Faisal bin Turki to sign an agreement that does pledge and bind himself, his heirs and successors never to cede, to sell, to mortgage or otherwise give for occupation save to the British government, the dominions of Muscat and Oman or any of

²⁸³ For more on the conflict between the Sultans and Imams of the Busaid dynasty, Ibn Ruzayq is the most prominent Omani historian who worked on this controversial phase of Omani history. See; Ibn Ruzayq, *History of the Imams and Seyyids of Oman from 661 to 1856 A.D.*, translated by George Percy Badger (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1872)

²⁸⁴ Abdullah bin Ali al-Khalili, *Al-Haqiqah* [The Truth], manuscript, unpublished, 47.

²⁸⁵ Abdullah bin Humaid Al-Salimi, *Tuhfat al A yan bi-Sirat Ahl Oman* , Part 2, 282.

²⁸⁶ Sa'id bin Khalfan al-Khalili: Oman's most prominent Ibadi scholar in the mid-nineteenth century. He revived the Imamate with the election of Azzan bin Qais. In the management of state affairs, he was his closest advisor. At this time, Oman was plagued by internal conflicts and fierce tribal warfare following the death of Sayyid Sa'id bin Sultan and the division of Oman between his two sons: Thuwaini to rule Muscat and the Arab part and Majid to rule Zanzibar and the African part. Sa'id bin Khalfan was sentenced to death by being thrown alive from the top of a mountain fort in Muscat after being captured by the British during the siege of Muscat in 1871. His grandson Muhammad bin Abdullah bin Sa'id al-Khalili will be elected Imam of Oman 1920-1954.

²⁸⁷ Ibid, 287-290.

their dependencies.”²⁸⁸ This treaty justified Britain's absolute military and financial dominance over the resources of the Omani territories.²⁸⁹

This agreement was the definitive proof of Britain's full-fledged colonization of Oman. Neither political nor economic decision-making, nor navigation and trade were available to the Omanis without permission from Britain, making Oman in fact "a de facto British colony" in Halliday's words.²⁹⁰ The Omanis tried to retake Muscat, overthrow the rule of Sultan Faisal bin Turki, and expel the British in 1895. Britain stood by as a spectator at the beginning of the battles. It did not provide any military or financial assistance to Sultan Turki, as if it wanted to teach him another lesson after the 1891 treaty. The short version of this lesson: He is worthless without the protection of the Empire's armies. The priority of the British political agent in Muscat, Hayes Sadler, was to protect British subjects, most of whom were Indian traders. The main demands of the 1895 revolt were that Oman, including the African part of Zanzibar, be united under the rule of one of the sons of Azzan bin Qais or the ruler of Zanzibar, Hamad bin Thuwaini bin Said al-Busaidi.²⁹¹ However, the British political resident in the Gulf, F.A. Wilson, categorically rejected any proposal to unify Oman as it was during the reign of Sultan Said bin Sultan. Britain forced Sultan Faisal to pay 12,000 Indian rupees to the commander of the rebel army, Sheikh Isa bin Saleh al-Harthi, in exchange for withdrawing from Muscat. Indian merchants were compensated for the damage to their trade during the siege. Britain pushed Sultan Faisal to complete bankruptcy. He

²⁸⁸ Briton C. Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894–1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 20.

²⁸⁹ 'File 35/84 I A. 5. Muscat Treaty of 1891; lease of Bandar Jissah by the Sultan of Muscat to the French for a coaling station', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/1/400, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000193.0x000175> [accessed June 14 2024]

²⁹⁰ Fred Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*.

²⁹¹ For more details on the Omani state's controversy, which ended with the division of the state into African (Zanzibar) and Asian (Muscat) parts at the end of Sultan Said bin Sultan al-Busaidi's reign, and the role of Britain, see Robert Geran Landen, *Oman since 1856: Disruptive Modernization in a Traditional Arab Society* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), 71–75.

felt doubly humiliated. Neither Omanis nor the British Empire were satisfied with him. Moreover, this colonization fueled tribal conflicts between tribal sheikhs whose only goal was more money and land. It also continued to stifle maritime traffic, which was the only outlet for Omanis to export their products.

One of the pillars of that revolution, Sheikh Saleh bin Ali al-Harthi, continued his attempts to besiege Muscat, but he was killed in the Battle of Al-Jaylah in Samail and buried there in 1896.²⁹² His son Issa bin Saleh continued to lead the armies fighting the Sultan's army.²⁹³ Faisal bin Turki aimed to control the tribes of Oman's interior through multiple battles in Samail and Rustaq. During this period, the British tried to monopolize the use of coal and secure it for their warships and merchant ships, which they ascertained to be abundant in the Eastern Mountains between Ja'alan and Sur. Issa bin Saleh al-Harthi wrote to Sultan Faisal to prevent the British from accessing this source, but Faisal did not have the power to prevent anything. In 1902, the Omani army, led by al-Harthi and several Hajarien and Musharifa tribes, gathered in the Umm al-Lukhm area; the Sultan's contingent was led by his son Timur, who came to protect the British Counselor and the expedition to the Coal Mountains.²⁹⁴ The envoy's horse was hit by a bullet from a member of the Omani army, and the division immediately withdrew, and the English explorer did not approach the area again.²⁹⁵

Oman entered the twentieth century suffering from a greedy and multifaceted British colonialism: On the one hand, it relished in humiliating its local ally, the ruler of Muscat, and on

²⁹² Al-Salimi, Mohammad bin Abdullah (Abu Bashir), *Nahdat al-A'yan Bi-'Hurriyat 'Oman*. 62-65.

²⁹³ For further analysis of socio-political contradictions during this critical phase of Omani anti-British history, see: Said bin Mohammed al-Hashimi. Sheikh Saleh bin Ali al-Harthi, "His Social and Political Role," *Majallat Dirasat al-Khalij wa-al-Jazirah al-'Arabiyyah* [Journal of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies], no. 125 (2007): 177–227.

²⁹⁴ 'File 35/64 III Minerals in Oman. Madrasai geologists' researches', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/1/397, in *Qatar Digital Library* <<https://www.qdl.qa/node/406>>

²⁹⁵ Al-Salimi, *Tuhfat al A'yan*, Part 2, 310-312.

the other, it crushed a legitimate elected imamate. Although Sultan Faisal bin Turki showed absolute loyalty to the British from day one of his 25-year reign (1888-1913), more was needed to satisfy Her Majesty's government.²⁹⁶ No sooner had he promised France a consulate in Muscat and leased the area of Bur al-Jassa to the French for use as a coal storage depot than Britain's anger against the young ruler exploded, sending the Viceroy, the Governor General of India and the Foreign Secretary aboard a British warship in 1903.²⁹⁷

During a 1903 tour of the Gulf ports by George Curzon,²⁹⁸ Viceroy and Governor-General of India, he reminded the regional rulers with whom the British Empire had signed protection treaties that without the British Navy in the Gulf, they would have been wiped out at the hands of their enemies.²⁹⁹

In furtherance of colonial arrogance, to discipline the ruler of Muscat, Curzon did not descend into Omani territory but asked the Sultan of Muscat to come to meet him by boat and sign the treaty known as the Omani-British Agreement of Friendship, Navigation and Commerce, following which another agreement was added, more dependent on the British Empire, in addition to the two previous agreements concluded with his ancestors in 1798 with Sultan bin Ahmed, and

²⁹⁶ J.B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf, & the West* (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson Limited, 1980), 110. Kelly argues that Faisal was not good at communicating with the Arab tribes, and even his ability to speak Arabic was questionable since the language he was most comfortable speaking was Gujarati.

²⁹⁷ 'MUSCAT,,' British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, Mss Eur F112/412, in *Qatar Digital Library*, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000001452.0x000331.

²⁹⁸ George Nathaniel Curzon, also known as the Marquess of Curzon or Lord Curzon, was born on January 11, 1859, in Derbyshire, England, and died on March 20, 1925, in London. He served as British Viceroy of India from 1898 to 1905 and as Foreign Secretary from 1919 to 1924. Curzon was educated at Oxford and began his political career in Parliament in 1886. His decision to partition Bengal was one of the worst decisions in British history on the Indian subcontinent. Curzon later served in the governments of H.H. Asquith and David Lloyd George. He is considered one of the most influential figures in the history of the British Empire in India and the Arabian Peninsula at the turn of the 20th century.

²⁹⁹ Notes Prepared for Reference during Curzon's Tour of the Persian Gulf, and Other Papers on Persia and the Persian Gulf, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, Mss Eur F111/358, in *Qatar Digital Library*, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000001452.0x0003c2.

See also: Kristopher Radford, 'Curzon's Cruise: The Pomp and Circumstances of Indian Indirect Rule of the Persian Gulf,' *The International History Review*, 35 (2013), 884-904.

1839 with Said bin Sultan. The political agent reported to the foreign secretary, Sultan Faisal bin Turki is anxious to make a short address to His Excellency at the commencement of Durbar on Man-of-war, in which he will publicly testify the obligations of self and ancestors to the British Government, and express determination of self and children to be ever mindful of the obligations and loyalty to the strong and ancient ties which bind them to us.”³⁰⁰ The reply of the Viceroy to the Secretary of State assured, "I received from the Sultan a pledge that he would place himself unreservedly in my hands in respect of his future.”³⁰¹

However, Ibadi scholars did not stop their attempts to revive the Imamate. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Nur al-Din al-Salmi's efforts and moves to persuade the tribes and unite ranks to reject the British occupation and its control over the decision of the ruling establishment in Muscat resulted in the election of Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi as an imam in 1913, but he was assassinated in 1920,³⁰² Moreover, Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Khalili was elected until he died in 1954. After his death, Ghalib bin Ali al-Hinai was chosen as Imam. However, through direct British intervention, the struggle for power in Oman has been changed dramatically,³⁰³ especially after they confirmed the existence of large oil reserves in the Arabian Peninsula.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁰ 'MUSCAT,' British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, Mss Eur F112/412, in *Qatar Digital Library*. https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000001452. Political agent to the foreign secretary, Telegram, Muscat, November 7, 1903, 3.

³⁰¹ Ibid, Viceroy to Secretary of State, Telegram, Camp, November 23, 1903. 3.

³⁰² Abdullah bin Muhammad Al-Taai, *Oman's Political History* (Kuwait: Al-Rubaian Library, 2008).

³⁰³ Marc Valeri, *Oman: Politics and Society in the Qaboos State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). 48–50.

³⁰⁴ Limbert Mandana E. *In the Time of Oil: Piety, Memory, and Social Life in an Omani Town*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.

Twentieth-Century Imamate and Anticolonialism

In 1906, Sheikh Nur al-Din al-Salimi, the most prominent Ibaḍī scholar in Oman at the turn of the 20th century, met with Sultan Faisal on his way to the Hajj; he ended his book *Tuhfat al A yan*. Al-Salimi tried to convince Faisal to unify the Omani front. However, Faisal distrusted this initiative and feared that he would be replaced by his uncle Abdulaziz bin Said bin Sultan.³⁰⁵ After returning from Mecca, he witnessed Faisal's resumption of his wars with the tribes of the interior with the help of the British. Al-Salimi was determined to revive the Imamate with all his influence and power over religious and tribal leaders. He used his practical position to convince the sheikhs of the Ghafiri and Hanawiya tribal alliances of the need to revive the Imamate to confront the ruling Al Bu Said dynasty, which they no longer suspected of being corrupt, authoritarian, silent, and in need of the British colonialism that was perched on Omani lives. Most of the most influential scholars of this period were graduates of the al-Salimi school he founded in eastern Oman between al-Qabel and Badiya. Among these names are Amer bin Khamis al-Maliki, Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi, who would be elected Imam, Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Khalili, Abu Zayd al-Riyami, and others.³⁰⁶ Amal Ghazal argues that the influence of the revivalist and reformist movement led by Sheikh Nur al-Din al-Salimi in the early 20th century—aimed at countering imperialism and colonialism—reached Omanis in Zanzibar. This intellectual awakening reportedly emboldened them to demand greater reforms within Zanzibar's political structure, which remained under British hegemony. Arab and Omani scholars in the East African littoral did not confine their activism to local appeals; instead, they forged transnational connections with the anti-colonial

³⁰⁵ Al-Salimi, *Tuhfat al A'yan*, Part 2, 310-312.

³⁰⁶ Al-Salimi, Mohammad bin Abdullah (Abu Bashir), *Nahdat al-A'yan Bi-'Hurriyat 'Oman*, 89-135.

struggle in Oman, particularly the revolution led by Imam Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi (r. 1913–1920).³⁰⁷ Their support extended beyond ideological solidarity to include financial contributions to the armed resistance in Oman, as well as symbolic advocacy through literary channels. For instance, the renowned poet Abu Muslim Nasser bin Adim al-Bahlani (d. 1920) composed his epic *Nuniyyat Abu Muslim* (or *Nuniyyat bin Adim*), a politically charged ode that galvanized anti-colonial sentiments by invoking themes of national unity, historical glory, and collective resistance. Such works, disseminated through newspapers and oral recitations, served as cultural catalysts for mobilizing diasporic Omani communities against imperial domination.³⁰⁸

al-Jabal al-Akhdar is Resurrected

The first Imam of the 20th century, in 1913, rested on the shoulders of two figures of great scholarly and tribal weight: Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamid al-Salimi, the most prominent Ibadi scholar, and Sheikh Himyar bin Nasser al-Nabhani, Emir of the Green Mountain and leader of the Ghafari Alliance. Salem bin Rashid al-Kharusi, one of the most prominent names from the Al-Ghafri alliance and from the Al-Yahmid dynasty, the tribe that provided the longest line of imams

³⁰⁷ Amal Ghazal, *Islamic Reform and Arab Nationalism: expanding the crescent from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean (1880s-1930s)*. Routledge, 2010. 102, 2010. 28-36.

³⁰⁸ Ghazal, *Islamic Reform and Arab Nationalism*, 66–90. For further details on Abu Muslim's *Nuniyya*, his persona, and his literary anti-colonial activism, see: Muhammad bin Naṣir al-Mahruqi, *Al-Shi'r al-'Umani al-Hadith: Abu Muslim al-Bahlani Ra'idan 1860–1920* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, 1999); Valerie J. Hoffman, *The Essentials of Ibadi Islam* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2012); Valerie J. Hoffman, "Ibadism: History, Doctrines and Recent Scholarship," *Religion Compass* 9, no. 9 (2015): 297–307; Valerie J. Hoffman, "Ibadi Scholars on Association and Dissociation, from the Tenth to the Twenty-First Century," in *Ibadi Jurisprudence: Origins, Developments and Cases*, ed. Barbara Michalak-Pikulska and Reinhard Eisener (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2015), 185–194; Kimberly T. Wortmann, *Omani Religious Networks in Contemporary Tanzania and Beyond* (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2018); Ahmad bin 'Abdullah al-Falahi, "Nuniyyat Abi Muslim al-Bahlani," *Jaridat 'Uman*, May 18, 2025, <https://www.omandaily.om/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%A9/%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%91%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%8F%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%87%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A> (a

in Oman's history.³⁰⁹ Himyar bin Nasser hosted the pledge of allegiance to the new Imam in his capital, Tanuf, and, as we explained in Chapter 1, provided all logistical and financial support to the Imam in exchange for retaining his interests and influence in the areas he controlled.³¹⁰ This event did not reassure the rival alliance, the Hanawi alliance, but Imam Salim bin Rashid's personality and his good reputation among the scholars and leaders of the Hanawi alliance soon melted the barriers and the Hurth, with their famous political leader Isa bin Saleh al-Harthi, the sons of Hilal bin Zahir al-Hinai, the Abrians and other tribes of Oman, pledged allegiance to him.

Imam Salem bin Rashid was a conscious and intelligent young man. He understood the profound relationship between the British and the Sultan. Therefore, he tried his best to separate them and reassure the British that the battle was internal between the Omanis, a legitimate imam and an illegitimate ruler. He pledged to protect British subjects and not harm their commercial interests. This is what his first correspondence made clear after he assumed power:

What is required of Your Government is to cease interference in this grave matter [between the Omani nation and its rulers] and to adhere to the principle of neutrality, as is recognized in international law between independent states and their despotic sultans—just as France has done with us. You have from us the full respect due to friendship and mutual ties. Far be it from Great Britain to stand in the way of reform in our land and to become the sole cause of destruction, ruin, and estrangement. Britain is a rational power, one that has historically striven to uphold human rights among nations. Do not think, Your Government, that the people of Oman are fools, ignorant Bedouins, unfamiliar with law or incapable of expression. They are a wise people, seasoned by time, who have tasted both its sweetness

³⁰⁹ Al-Salimi, *Nahdat al-A'yan Bi- Hurriyat Oman*, 135-154. Also, Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987. 249-260.

³¹⁰ Al-Salimi, *Nahdat al-A'yan*. 82-85; Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, 259-261.

and its bitterness, and who understand the causes of progress and the politics of empires and their dangers. And do not assume that our movement is one of plunder, pillage, and bloodshed—God forbid. It is a movement of reform... what we ask is the withdrawal of your troops... [to avoid] the shedding of innocent blood on this land...”.

In another letter, he explains to the British Consul:

To Major Nax, the British Consul in Muscat, we inform you that the people of Oman have agreed to depose their Sultan as a result of his actions and behaviors contrary to the teachings of Islam. The Sultan has seduced people into conflicts between them, corruption has increased, order has been disrupted, blood has been shed, money has been plundered, and rights have been lost... We have been informed that your military is protecting the Sultan in Muscat and its surroundings, and we feared that a battle would take place between them and the tribes... I have ordered the tribes not to harm your military, and we guarantee not to harm the interests and money of your subjects. We hope your soldiers will not interfere with us and the Sultan, and I will give you my word.”

Britain did not pay any attention to the correspondence of Imam Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi. The opposite happened. Britain dispatched Major Murphy of the Intelligence Department to Muscat in July 1913 to assess the political and military situation of the Sultan of Muscat and to estimate the British support required to protect the port of Muscat and Muttrah and the urgent logistics to repel the Imamate's armies. Meanwhile, Sultan Faisal had died and was succeeded by his 27-year-old son Timur, a man who "was the victim of his time," according to Bertram Thomas.³¹¹ Britain did

³¹¹ Bertram Thomas, *Arab Rule under the al Bu Sa'id Dynasty of Oman, 1741-1937*. The Raleigh Lecture on History, 1938 (London: British Academy, 1938), 25. A printed copy is held as No. OMA 953.504 THO in the Middle East Collections at the University of Exeter.

not trust the new young man, and treated him just as it had treated his father at the beginning of his reign. The British Empire feared the demise of its interests in Oman, especially as the harbingers of the Great War loomed internationally. Domestically, Imam Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi succeeded in convincing most of the Omani tribal leaders to join the Imamate. The young Timur bin Faisal inherited a bankrupt, heavily indebted country whose biggest creditors were Britain and the Hindu merchants, subjects of the British Empire.³¹²

The creation of the Muscat Levy Corps (M.L.C.) by the British was part of a restructuring of Sultan Taimur bin Faisal's regime to strengthen it against the rising power of the Imamate,³¹³ Which was increasingly armed and emboldened to besiege the ruler of Muscat.³¹⁴ The Imamate's forces besieged Muscat in 1913 and approached towns around Muscat, such as Sib, Barka, and Qurayyat, in 1915 and 1916. An initial proposal for this levy was made by P.A.M. L.B.H. Haworth in 1917 for a force of one thousand Baluchi men commanded by British officers. This force would be able to carry the attack into the interior.³¹⁵

The biggest challenge was that the Sultan's soldiers were unpaid, and their numbers were dwindling due to a lack of resources and confidence in financial and political management. The

³¹² Major L. Haworth (Political Agent, Muscat) to the Deputy Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, Bushire, Telegram No. 15-0 of 1919, 28 January 1919, India Office Records (IOR), L/P&S/10/426. The telegram highlights British administrative control over customs at the Omani ports of Sur and Mutrah, outlines the nature of Anglo-Indian relations in the region, and notes deteriorating economic conditions that weakened Sultan Taimur bin Faisal's political standing among Omanis.

³¹³ Thomas, "Arab Rule under the al Bu Sa'īd Dynasty of 'Uman," 27.

³¹⁴ The Muscat Levy Corps (M.L.C.) was established with the arrival of Captain A.V. McCarthy in 1921 and was commanded by a succession of British officers:

- R.G.E.W. Alban 1923-1924
- G.J Eccles 1924- 1926
- R.W. Stephens 1926-1928
- A.R. Walker 1928- 1931
- Fateh Khan 1931-1932.

³¹⁵ Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century*, 90-92.

British established the first nucleus of a special Sultanate force, made up of a few willing young men from the cities of Muscat and Muttrah, and reinforced them with individuals brought in from India and Baluchistan. With the protection of British cruisers on the Omani coasts, this small, uncoordinated force was able to make some gains in cities such as Qurayyat and Barka, south and north of Muscat, respectively.³¹⁶

In January 1915, Muscat almost fell under the control of the Imam's 3,000-strong army, which the three leaders led: Imam Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi, the leader of the Ghafiri and Jabal al-Akhdar tribal alliance, himyar bin Nasser al-Nabhani, and the leader of the Hanawiya tribal alliance, Issa bin Saleh al-Harthi. However, the British mobilized more than a thousand fighters with military vehicles and guns on ships and on the high towers of the Muscat Mountains. The British/Indian garrison comprised the 102nd King Edward's Battalion and the 95th Rachel's Infantry.

Britain realized that the Sultan's loss of his rule was imminent because Sultan Timur himself had neither the desire nor the leadership abilities to convince the Omani tribes on the one hand, and because of the strength of Imam Salim bin Rashid and the widespread consensus he was able to achieve in less than two years on the other hand. World War I had broken out, and Britain did not want to provide further military support to its local agent in Muscat as it fought a fierce war in Europe. Lord Harding, the Viceroy in India, ordered Sultan Taimur and Colonel Benn, the political agent in Muscat, to begin negotiations with the Imam and his intermediaries in 1915.³¹⁷

³¹⁶ The correspondence between Faisal bin Turki and the British and the former's desire to establish an army to protect Muscat reflects the controversy over British dominance in such a sovereign matter, see IOR/L/PS/10/425; also, the History of the Formation of the Oman Trucial Corps and the British Objectives for the Force in W.O. 32/16787.

³¹⁷ For further information on the British reasons for engaging the Imamate in protracted negotiations, please refer to: 'File XXIX/5 the Imam's Rising 1913 to 1920 Negotiations for Peace between the Sultan and the Imam.', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/6/46, in *Qatar Digital Library* https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000831.0x0002.

Negotiations between Sheikh Isa bin Saleh al-Harthi, representing the Imam, and the British for Taimur bin Faisal lasted nearly four years throughout the First World War. The two sides did not reach any agreement, as each gained time to cope with the difficult economic conditions caused by the war.³¹⁸ The exchange value of the rupee (the currency circulating among Omanis in this period) fell sharply, causing a massive loss in the exchange value of Omani goods for foreign goods. In 1919, Major L. Haworth, the British Consul and Political Agent in Muscat, threatened the Imam's representative, Sheikh Issa bin Saleh.³¹⁹ "We have five hundred thousand war-trained soldiers in Iraq; they have finished their war work, and we have no need for them there, and a few thousand of them are enough to take over the whole of Oman."³²⁰ as well as an economic blockade against the Imamate if the Imamate did not recognize Britain's conditions, namely recognizing the rule of Sultan Timur and raising customs taxes on Oman's internal products to 50% on pomegranates and 25% on dates. In the meantime, Imam Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi was assassinated for mysterious reasons, and the Green Mountain leader himyar bin Nasser died a few months earlier and was buried next to Sheikh Nur al-Din al-Salimi in Tanuf. This raises the question of Britain's involvement in these two incidents after it was unable to subdue the young Imam (he died at the age of 36) and the Himyari leader, who was able to mobilize the largest number of tribes to confront Britain and its armies despite the economic blockade and the deteriorating living conditions.³²¹ Immediately after the removal of the three main pillars of the

³¹⁸ Wingate, r. Not in the Limelight, London, Hutchinson, 1959. 81–89.

³¹⁹ Faisal Ali Faisal, *Al-Qadiyya al-'Umaniyya* [The Omani Case], n.p., n.d., 23–24.

³²⁰ FO 371/126892. Letter dated May 13, 1919, From Major L. Haworth, the British Consul and Political Agent in Muscat, to Sheikh Issa Ben Saleh Al Harthi, the Deputy of the Imam of Oman. 184 in : <https://www.agda.ae/en/catalogue/tna/fo/371/126892/n/184>.

³²¹ Correspondence between Percy Cox, the political resident in the Gulf, and Major Penn, the British agent in Muscat, analyzing Imam al-Kharusi's letter to the agent four years before the Imam's assassination, makes it clear that "a plan of action was drawn up in anticipation of the Imam's premature death." See Letter from Imam Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi to the British Agent, Muscat, September 19, 1915. File I.O.R: R/15/6/45

first Omani Imamate in the twentieth century, Britain succeeded in reaching an agreement with the new Imam, Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Khalili, in 1920, known as the Sib Treaty.³²²

Imam al-Khalili was a peaceful and calm personality with a focus on moral discipline and a preoccupation with educating the soul by learning more about the teachings of Islam and the rules of the Ibaḍī school of thought. He was not an *imam* with combat capabilities, nor was his enthusiasm and courage in confrontation comparable to the former Imam Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi, whose sudden assassination dealt the Imamate a fatal blow that was reflected in the events that followed throughout the twentieth century.

The Sib Treaty was in line with the requirements and transformations of the imperialist colonial project sponsored by Britain in Oman and the Arabian Peninsula region since the early 20th century. This is evidenced by the words of the architect of the Sib' deal , R.E.L. Wingate, the British political agent:

Our interest has been entirely self-interested, has paid no regard to the peculiar political and social conditions of the country and its rulers, and by bribing Sultans to enforce unpalatable measures which benefitted none but ourselves and permitting them to misrule without protest has done more to alienate the interior and to prevent the Sultans from re-establishing their authority than all the rest put together.³²³

It is worth noting here that Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Khalili, according to some of his correspondence to the leaders around him, sensed that his internal front had been breached. Specifically, the seriousness of the betrayal of the leaders of the Hanawi and Ghafri alliances,

³²² Al-Salimi, *Nahdat al-A'yan*, 308-314; Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, 251..

³²³ Report No. 2052 from Wingate," British Library, IO L/P & S/10/427.

namely Issa bin Saleh al-Harthi and Suleiman bin Himyar al-Nabhani, respectively, in 1938. He repeatedly expressed his polite reproach to them for their frequent and uninterrupted visits to Muscat. Specifically, their constant visits to Sultan Said bin Taimur's palace, their acceptance of his gifts, and the rift these behaviors caused in the ranks of the Imamate as it faced all these challenges, external from Britain and internal from Said bin Taimur. ... The opening of the door alone is from the East... Moreover, know, O people, that these people do not give you anything from their world without taking something from your religion.”³²⁴

The British colonial administration reproduced its experience of the Irish liberation struggle to undermine the Omani resistance that had exhausted Britain in the interwar period. Bertram Thomas, Taimur bin Faisal's finance minister, explained this in the abstract of his 1938 lecture to the British Academy:

The settlement whereby a kind of Irish Free State exists in interior Oman enjoying autonomy within the Sultan's territories yet paying him indirect customs taxation does not, in reality, constitute a new and radical experiment: still less is it a settlement based on some alien political formula and imposed from without. Rather, is it a working arrangement that gives formal recognition to a situation that, in varying degrees, has virtually existed for decades at the same time as one that needs to live no longer than its usefulness?”³²⁵

The Sib treaty was ostensibly in the interest of both parties, the Imam and the Sultan. However, a deep analysis of the treaty's preamble and clauses shows that Britain was the biggest

³²⁴ Al-Salimi, *Nahdat al-A'yan*. 71-72.

³²⁵ Bertram Thomas (Finance Minister and Wazir to H.H. the Sultan of Muscat and Oman, 1925-32), *Arab rule under the Al Bu Said dynasty of Oman, 1741-1937*, British Academy, The Raleigh Lecture on History, 1938, 28. A printed copy No. OMA 953.504 THO, Middle East Collections at the University of Exeter.

beneficiary. Britain neutralized the Imamate's armies, always ready to unite Oman under one state. Britain did not recognize the Imam or the Imamate in the preamble of the agreement and did not even mention it. The agreement mentions this reconciliation between the Sultan and the Omanis.”

On the other side, on the side consecrating the Sultan's rule, the name of the Sultan, Mr. Timur bin Faisal, the Deputy Minister, Mr. Mohammed bin Ahmed, Mr. Wingate, the Sultan's representative, and the British Political Consul are mentioned. The agreement did not specify the geographical boundaries of each party.

Moreover, it trapped the Imamate within a suffocating economic framework based on paying unfair taxes that did not consider the simple mode of production that characterized Oman's agricultural economy. This economy continued suffering from compelling natural factors such as water scarcity, drought, and repeating traditional production methods. The British also perpetuated the isolation of the Imamate between the Stone and Desert chain, and this imprisoned state was unable to establish any relations or friendships, even with its Arab and Islamic surroundings.

In the three decades following the Sib Treaty, Britain needed to be more content to observe Oman's interior. During this period, Oman was a living example of the controversy surrounding using science and knowledge to serve the Empire's goals and projects.³²⁶

The travelers of the British Empire and its explorers roamed the region under the protection of the Imam's men. Indeed, although most of these reports and studies by British explorers

³²⁶ For further discussion of the Empire's use of science as a tool of colonial domination, see Joseph M. Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007); Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870–1950* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011); William Beinart, Karen Brown and Daniel Gilfoyle, *Experts and expertise in colonial Africa reconsidered: science and the interpenetration of knowledge*, *African Affairs* (2009) 108, pp. 413–33; Brett Bennett and Joseph M. Hodge (eds.), *Science and Empire: Knowledge and Networks of Science across the British Empire, 1800–1970* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Sabine Clarke, *Science at the End of Empire: Experts and the Development of the British Caribbean, 1940–1965* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).

confirmed the stability and loyalty of the population to the Imam, the imperialist project continued to achieve its goals. Thesiger, who entered the interior of Oman in 1950, argues that Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Khalili is held in high esteem by his people: "We were now entering territory which is effectively administered by the Imam, Muhammad Ben Abdullah, who is recognized as ruler of inner Oman by all the settled tribes, both Ghafari and Hanawi, between Ibri and the Bani Bu Hassan villages in Ja'alan and by the Badu tribes of Duru', the western Junuba, the "Wahiba and Harasis ... His representatives are to be found in every group of villages, where they administer justice and collect taxes ... The Badu do ... recognize the Imam as their overlord, and the expression 'God lengthens the life of the Imam' is frequently heard amongst them and sincerely meant, since by affording them a tribunal and by composing their differences, he has brought to them security and justice. Here, a man can walk unarmed and leave his camels unattended without fear that he will be robbed."³²⁷

Yet, for 34 years, the Imamate has fallen into a black hole. No one knows about it except for a few. Tribes and ordinary individuals either moved to the more resource-rich coastal areas after changing their names and tribes or migrated to Zanzibar in search of work and wealth. The population in Oman's interior declined, and agricultural land and palm and lemon groves were abandoned. Women, children, and the elderly stayed behind to care for the land superficially. The skilled Omani labor force either migrated to other Gulf countries such as Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, which began to witness more economic activity with the discovery of oil and the vitality of their ports and markets or began to cooperate with the Muscat authority by

³²⁷ Wilfred Thesiger, "Desert Borderlands of Oman," *Geographical Journal*, October-December 1950, 151-2.

working in the military or intelligence and reporting on the daily transactions, interactions, and rivalries between the tribes and individuals of Oman in the interior.³²⁸

The country has been emptied of its people and power, and its political system has been emptied of its meaning, which is based on election and governance according to a system of cultural and social laws and traditions with Islamic, Arab, and Omani origins. Omani youth grew increasingly resentful of the Imamate system. They saw in it backwardness, retrogression, and adherence to outdated traditions. Omani youth compared the objective reality of their country with the economic and social changes that took place in the world during and after two major world wars. An entire Omani generation witnessed the system of injustice and diminishing wealth while losing their parents to disease and malnutrition. Most serious of all, Omani youth were not allowed to receive a modern formal education. The imamate system did not allow for any modern methods of education other than those that have prevailed for a thousand years, where young people learn how to read and memorize the Quran in mosques and memorization circles conducted by individuals appointed by the Imamate.

The situation was no better in the coastal part of Oman under the rule of Said bin Taimur and the British and even more miserable. In the interior or on the coast, Omanis had two different regimes, but their living conditions were identical. Said bin Taimur (1932-1970), who succeeded his father, Taimur bin Faisal, closed all access to freedom of movement and travel for Omanis living in the areas under his control.³²⁹ People lived in hardship, plagued by epidemics, hunger, and illiteracy. He was not as concerned with the people as he was with consolidating his influence

³²⁸ Population statistics from Bahrain – the sole Gulf state maintaining such demographic records – indicate that approximately 7,314 Omani nationals worked in the country during the 1950s, comprising 6,146 males and 1,168 females. Source: Bahrain Government, *Population Census*, 1959.

³²⁹ On the deteriorating financial situation in the late reign of Timur bin Faisal, the inability of the state to pay its debts, and the British hegemony over financial, administrative, and military affairs, see John Townsend, *Oman: The Making of a Modern State* (London: Croom Helm, 1977).

and gaining more military and financial support from the British Empire to extend his influence over all Omani territories, coveting their apparent and promising riches.

With the death of Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Khalili in 1954 and his succession to Imam Ghalib bin Ali al-Hinai, the curtain closed on the second Imamate of the twentieth century. This is a century in which the Imamate was unable to adapt to its rapid changes on all levels: economic, political, social, military and cultural levels. The scales of conflict were tilted in favor of the British Empire, which was reveling in two significant victories in two world wars.

Imam Ghalib bin Ali al-Hinai faced three main challenges from the very first moments of his rule: First, the fragility of the internal front. The weakness of the tribal leaders and their surrender to the British temptation to grant them some oil concessions, the restlessness of most of the Ibaḍī scholars, and their inclination towards the money of Said bin Taymur. This was reflected in the form of doubts about the legitimacy of his Imamate, as presented by Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Isa al-Harṭhi in his diary, in which he documents his meeting with the tribes of the Hanawiya Alliance and his assurance to them, 'We gathered you when we saw the dispersion among the people of Oman, first on supporting Imam al-Khalili while he is still alive, and not to pledge allegiance to an imam after him, and that our imam and leader is Sultan Said bin Timur ...'³³⁰ The second challenge is the clarity of Said bin Taimur's goal and the availability of open British support for his desires. Thirdly, Britain's ambitions for the oil wealth that has been confirmed to be available in Oman's interior as the world market's need for oil grows.

Under the truce created by the Sib treaty, Britain did not waste these three decades [1920-1950] in vain. It sent its scientific expeditions, scouts, travellers, and researchers to study and

³³⁰ Ahmad bin Muhammad bin 'isá al-harṭhi, *Mudhakkirat al-Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-harithi* [The Memoirs of Sheikh Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Isa al-Harṭhi] (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), 6–9.

survey everything that moved over Oman's interior, and explore all the riches that lay beneath. During this period, many British and European travelers intensified their crossings and visits to areas inside Oman, from its south in Dhofar to the waters and harbors of the Arabian Gulf in the north of the Arabian Peninsula. The purpose was to document and capture everything that could help the imperialist colonial apparatus in London understand and analyze the tribal social fabric, patterns of production, alliance relations, and the popularity of the Imam among Omanis. However, the most crucial element behind this active travel was to secure access to oil deposits and build new tribal alliances and political regimes linked to Britain's oil interests.

In the same period, Said bin Taimur established his absolute rule over Muscat, Dhofar, and the rest of the Omani coast, cajoling the interior tribes and their leaders and scholars with gifts, bribes, and promises of empowerment if everyone obeyed him as the sole ruler of the Omani lands.³³¹ Said bin Taimur had two main goals: First, to end the Imamate's rule and influence over Oman's interior, and second, to entice Britain with more interests and empowerment inside Oman to gain military, financial, administrative, and diplomatic support to achieve the first goal. Said bin Taimur, with the help of the British, worked by all possible means to end the Imamate as a system of government. He ensured that it would not return in the foreseeable future.³³²

Said bin Taimur used all means of pressure on Britain to double its financial and military support to achieve the common goal: Ending the Imamate and installing himself as absolute ruler of the country. In 1939, Said bin Taimur made clear to the British political agent in Muscat his

³³¹ For an opposing narrative of Ahmad al-Harthi, see Said bin Hamid al-Harthi, *al-Lu'lu' al-Ratb fi Ibraiz Mustawda'at al-Qalb* (The Moist Pearl in Unveiling the Heart's Secrets) (Muscat: n.p., 1986), 301-303..

³³² Debate on Said bin Taimur's support in return for the facilities he provided to Britain in World War II. Text of the agreement between the British and Said bin Taimur to support him in the war/financial grants/debts/weapons, military support, and air bases on Omani territory. Facilities in Muscat 1939-46," November 30, 1939. File: FO 371/126879.

intention to regain control of the Omani interior.³³³ However, financial difficulties and modest military capabilities prevented him from achieving this goal. Therefore, if Britain did not provide support, he was prepared to abdicate like his father Timur and let Britain sort things out with the Imamate. The world was on the verge of a second world war, so Said bin Taimur chose a critical time to press Britain for military and financial support. Otherwise, rivals such as Hitler's Germany or Japan and its Asian ambitions were ready to fill the vacuum.

The 'ulama' vs. the Prizes of Colonialism

The *ulama* formed the backbone of Ibadi thought. Through them, the Imamate and the presidency of the Ummah are held. They are the ones who form the body that elects the Imam. They are the ones on whom the Imam relies to administer justice, eliminate injustice, administer the state through the judiciary, and collect money for *Bayt al-Mal* (the state's general treasury). Moreover, the most dangerous task of the *ulama* in the history of the Ibadis is to revolt against the Imam and depose him or mobilize support for him. In addition to mobilizing the Omani nation to confront foreign interference and colonialism.³³⁴ All this was evident in the stability of the relationship between the *ulama* and the imams during the reigns of Imams Ahmad bin Said 1749-

³³³ See the letter dated November 30, 1939. No. c/514, from Sd./-T. Hickinbotham, Majesty's Consul, Muscat. In File: FO 371/126879

³³⁴ Nasser Al-Saadi, in his book *Scholars and Authority in Oman: 1749–1913*, examines the dialectical political relationship between religious scholars (*ulama*) and political power in Omani history. The study analyzes four pivotal historical figures whose roles were central to Oman's modern history: Ja'id bin Khamis al-Kharusi, Said bin Khalfan al-Khalili, Salih bin Ali al-Harthi, and Abdullah bin Humaid al-Salmi. Through these case studies, al-Saadi explores how these scholars navigated, influenced, and occasionally contested political authority, shedding light on the interplay of religious legitimacy and governance in Oman. For further reading, see: Nasir bin Sayf al-Sa'di, *al-'Ulama' wa-al-Sultah fi 'Uman: 1749–1913 [Scholars and Authority in Oman: 1749–1913]* (Beirut and Doha: al-Markaz al-'Arabi lil-Abhath wa-Dirasat al-Siyasat, 2022).

1783 and Azzan bin Qais 1868-1871, because these two figures were elected according to the Ibadi tradition of *bai'a*. The other side of the relationship between the *ulama* and the sultans, who were not elected according to the principles of Ibadī thought and came to power through heredity or usurpation of power, was also evident, such as the revolts led by the *ulama* against Said bin Sultan al-Busaidi 1850, his grandson Salim bin Thuwaini bin Said 1866, his son Sultan Turki bin Said 1871-1888 and the latter's son Faisal bin Turki 1888-1913, Timur bin Faisal 1913-1932, and finally Said bin Timur 1932-1970.

Ulama have resisted British domination of Oman since the mid-19th century by revolting against sultans supported by the Empire. *ulama*, such as Sheikh Said bin Khalfan al-Khalili, in the revolt of Azzan bin Qais.³³⁵ He was followed by his student Sheikh Saleh bin Ali al-Harthi, who besieged Muscat in 1895. Then, Sheikh Nur al-Din Abdullah bin Humaid al-Salimi played the most prominent role in the revolt against Sultan Faisal bin Turki and the revival of the Imamate in 1913.³³⁶

Therefore, the relationship between the Al Bu Said sultans and the *ulama* was turbulent, as the sultans knew the status of the *ulama*. The *ulama* always raised the question of legitimacy,

³³⁵ The reader of al-Khalili's opinions and poems finds in them the mobilization of the people to protect their country from the foreign occupier, see al-Khalili, *Diwan al-Khalili*, 135-125; al-Salimi, *Nahdat al-Ayyan*, 295-294. For more on political issues and opinions, see Al-Khalili, *Tamhid al-Qawa'id al-Iman*, 9, 266-217 and 12, 374-305. However, the most prominent book by Shaykh Sa'id ibn Khalfan al-Khalili, in which he explained the reasons for the revolt of Azzan ibn Qays, is his book " *Ighiathat al-Mulhuf be al-Sif al-Muthakar fi al-'Amr al-Ma'ruf wa al-Nahy an al-Munkar*" [*Relief for the afflicted with the remained sword in the command to command the good and to forbid the evil*], 73-169.

³³⁶ See al-Salmi's texts in which he warns of the British danger to Oman:

Al-Salimi, *Al-Jawabat*, 4, 419; Al-Salimi, *Nahdat al-Ayyan*, 101; Al-Harithi, *Ain al-Masalah*, 61; Nur al-Din al-Salimi Al-Salimi, *Bodhel le arad ala al- Nassara wa al- yahood* [*The Effort to Reply to the Christians and Jews*] (Nur al-Din al-Salimi Library, Bididiya, 1995).

mobilized the masses, and mobilized efforts to resist the British occupation. All of the previous factors - legitimacy, social status, and Britain - were factors of contention and conflict between the Omani people and the rulers throughout the rule of the Sultans, from Turki bin Said in 1871 to Said bin Taimur in 1932. Most of the *ulama* who resisted the sultans throughout this period were assassinated, either by poison, imprisonment, or outright murder. In the case of Sheikh Said bin Khalfan al-Khalili, narratives about his assassination differ. His grandson Abdullah bin Ali al-Khalili points out in his manuscript "The Truth" that Sheikh Said bin Khalfan (then 51 years old) was imprisoned along with his son Muhammad (12 years old) in a room without food or water until they died.³³⁷ British reports indicate that he died the night of his execution as a result of severe diarrhea after eating a suspected meal.³³⁸ As for Sheikh Saleh bin Ali al-Harthi, he died after receiving a bullet in a battle near Smail in 1896. Finally, the mysterious death of Sheikh Nur al-Din al-Salmi in 1914 is explained in the first chapter.

Britain took notice of this critical factor in mobilizing the Omani popular conscience, especially with the discovery of oil and its need for it during and after the First World War. Therefore, new approaches and modern tactics were used in dealing with the *ulama* factor, especially after 1915.

The signs of this different approach to this influential and decisive bloc in the theory of politics and governance for Omanis at the interior appeared with the negotiations that Britain managed with the Imamate from 1915 until the Sib Treaty in 1920, then the truce period that lasted until the death of Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Khalili in 1954.³³⁹

³³⁷ al-Khalili, *Al-Haqiqah [The Truth]*, 48.

³³⁸ Report on the Affairs of Muscat during the Period October 1869– March 1872,” R/15/6/36, India Office Records, British Library, London.

³³⁹ Further correspondence threatening the Imam unless he abandoned his negotiating position in IOR/L/PS/10/426.

Imam Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi explained to the British Consul in Muscat in 1915 the position of the *ulama* in the Omani political architecture. They are the holders of *al-hal wa al aqd* (solution and contract) from the election of the ruler to his removal from his position:

To Major Knox ... You know that the matter of Oman has been in the hands of its scholars from time immemorial and that anyone who disagrees with the scholars is a deputy from the state, an outcast from the group of Muslims; he has no action in their state, nor is his rule enforced, and that the scholars repeatedly raised Faisal to depose him and remove him. He refused to retire, and he sat for this past period due to Overwhelming oppression... You [Britain] should stop harming us by supporting him and not attacking us.”³⁴⁰

Therefore, Britain wanted to dismantle the *ulama* front and work to weaken it with carrots and sticks.³⁴¹ This was reflected in the subsequent correspondence between the Imam's representative, Sheikh Isa bin Saleh al-Harthi, and the British agent, which was characterized by much flattery and courtesy, to the point of suggesting the need to get rid of the Imam himself. The letter from the political agent in Muscat, R.A.E. Benn, to the British political resident in Basra, P.Z. Cox, dated September 28, 1915: "...and that the Imam's days are numbered. There is only one possible way out of the present situation, and that is not to raise the question of surrendering the forts while the present Imam is alive ... i.e., to wait for the death of the Imam”.³⁴² This period was

³⁴⁰ Imam Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi's letter to the British Consul in Muscat. National Records and Archives Authority, Muscat, Document No: A.3.1.3.

³⁴¹ "...if we wish...it is easy for us to send only one plane, which is more than enough for you, to smash your cities and destroy your fortresses..." In a letter dated May 13, 1919, from Major L. Haworth, the British Consul and Political Agent in Muscat, to Sheikh Issa Ben Saleh al Harthi, the Deputy of the Imam of Oman. <https://www.agda.ae/en/catalogue/tna/fo/371/126892/n/184>

³⁴² Document No. 189/1915, British Agency and His Majesty's Consulate, Muscat, September 28, 1915: File XXIX/4 THE IMAM S RISING 1913-1920. RISING of IMAM of NIZWA JAN. 1915 & ATTACK ON BAIT-al-

followed by the rise to power of Said bin Taymur, the most prominent feature of which, as we explained in Chapter 1, was the recruitment of most of the Ibadi scholars in the interior of Oman by attracting them to the judiciary and paying them higher salaries and more privileges than the imamate system, which was based on the collection of zakat by the people. Given the deteriorating economic situation in the interior of Oman during the two world wars and the migration of most of the young labor force either to the cities and ports of the Omani coast or to the coasts of the Arabian Gulf, the judiciary as a career was no exception. For the first time, the number of *Ulamh* who placed their knowledge under the guidance of the Sultan outnumbered those who remained around the Imam as a symbolic figure of governance and independence.³⁴³ The second team had to be ascetic and free from the temptations of money and social recognition promised by Said bin Taymur and the British oil companies. Some *ulama* masked their inclination to favor Said bin Taymur over Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah with political disagreements and jurisprudential controversies. When the Imam died in 1954 and a new Imam was chosen, all fronts exploded against Imam Ghalib bin Ali al-Hinai: the front of the *ulama* and the front of the tribal sheiks, in addition to the political changes that the post-World War II world was undergoing.³⁴⁴

To sum up, Britain has suffered from Omani resistance since its fleets first arrived on Omani shores to interrupt Napoleon's imperial dreams from 1790 to 1959. For more than 170 years, Britain has conflicted with the Omanis to exploit the bounty of their seas and the riches of

FALAJ JAN. 1915 , British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/6/45, in Qatar Digital Library, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000831.0x000285.

³⁴³ Said bin Hamad al-Harthi argues that there was a change in the scholars of Imam al-Khalili's time, and that they could not resist the temptations of the livelihood promised by Said bin Taimur, in: Said Bin Hamad Al-Harthi, *Dalil Al-Hiran fi ahoal ahel Oman*, unpublished notes, 310.

³⁴⁴ Telegram No130, August 9, 1957, 'A note on Imam s administration in the interior of Oman.' FO 1016/108.

their lands. The Imamate has been a thorn in Britain's side since the beginning. Imams, scholars, and tribal leaders tried to unite in a single front to confront the multidimensional British colonization: political, economic, and social. Imam Azzan bin Qais, Imam Salim bin Rashid, and Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Khalili. Each according to his understanding and abilities. In parallel, scholars such as Said bin Khalfan al-Khalili and Nur al-Din al-Salimi and tribal leaders such as Saleh bin Ali al-Harthi and Hamir bin Nasser al-Nabhani mobilized all human and material energies. All of them mobilized all the human and natural energies at their disposal to stand up to the Empire by spreading the revolution to all regions of Oman on the coast and interior and raising national awareness to resist and not surrender. However, the practical scales, the superiority of global imperialism with its markets and alliances, and the disparity in the use of war tactics and modern weapons, physiological, psychological, and social, were not in their favor. The British Empire, with all its colonial tools, militarily, politically, and economically, intervened and overthrew the rule of the Imamate in 1959,³⁴⁵ following its suppression of the Green Mountain Revolution, which is the last attempt to revive an open Imamate according to Ibadi principles.³⁴⁶ Moreover, Gubash argues in these stages that Great Britain was to succeed in breaking down Omani unity and putting an end to the unified Islamic State. For a century and a half, she would apply herself to destroying its political culture so as to re-fashion the country and its history to meet the demands of colonialism. She separated the coastal region from its roots and confined the imamate system to the interior. However, it was impossible completely to uproot Omani culture with its spiritual foundation.”³⁴⁷ This chapter concludes with expounding a set of features that

³⁴⁵ Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*.

³⁴⁶ Ali al-Riyami. ‘Harb al-Jabal al-Akhdar’ (The Green Mountain War, 1957-1959) (Damascus: Dar al-Farqad, 2018).

³⁴⁷ Hussein Ghubash, ‘*Uman al-dimuqratiyah al-Islamiyah: Taqalid al-imamah wa-al-tarikh al-siyasi al-hadith 1500-1970*’ (Oman: The Islamic Democratic Tradition: The Traditions of the Imamate and Modern Political History 1500-1970) (Beirut: Dar al-Jadid, 1997), 202.

characterize the Imamate system and its key role in Oman's political, social, intellectual, and cultural history as follows.

Radicalization of Omani liberation and resistance. Since the second century AH/7 AD, the idea and practices of the Imamate have enshrined a sense of independence from the hegemony of the centralized authority. Revolt against the dominant understanding of the politics and governance of the Islamic state from the beginning of its formation was the most essential characteristic of Ibadithought. Criticism of the hegemonic authority created a political, intellectual, and cultural legacy at the level of texts and practice. This legacy, as it accumulated over the centuries, gave Omanis the tendency to liberate themselves from any external colonization and resist any internal tyranny. This was evident in their resistance to the campaigns of the Umayyad state led by al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf and then the Abbasid state led by Muhammad ibn Pur. It was even more evident in the wars of liberation against the Persian, Portuguese, and, finally, British invaders. Examples of revolt against the tyranny of unelected sultans are too numerous to count in Omani history.

The firmness of the theory of governance and the diversity of its applications. Ibadi scholars have paid particular attention to the Imamate as one of the two pillars on which Muslim society's entire political, social, intellectual, and economic architecture is based. They are the first: The guiding prophet, from whom the knowledge of religion is not infected except by him. And the other is the just governor, at whose hands the world is not reformed...". Ibadi jurisprudence details all the details of the Imamate: Its conditions, types, qualities of the Imam, types of Imams (weak Imam, knowledgeable Imam, strong Imam), stages of Imamate (concealment, defense, emergence), how to install the Imam, reasons to remove him from his position, conditions of the Allegiance

Commission, qualities of the *ahl al-ḥal wa al-‘aql* (people of the solution and contract). The qualities of the *Shura’ah* are the soldiers on whom the structure of the Imamate depends—ways and means of holding the Imam accountable and monitoring the Imam. The long experience and the many mistakes made by the Imams over 1300 years were enough to refine the theory and make it flexible according to time changes.

The centrality of the tribal social dimension in applying the Imamate concepts: Tribes played the leading role in practicing the governance theory in Oman. Omani history has witnessed the impact of tribal origins on triggering conflicts and directing the fate of the country and its people. Nothing drained Omani blood more than the tribal factor. Omanis have categorized themselves into two groups since the first Arabs migrated to Omani lands: Arabs of the north and the south, Arabized and Arabized Arabs, Adnanis and Qahtanis, Nizaris and Yemenis. The weight of this categorization has accumulated over time, and eternal cracks have been reflected in the architecture of Omani cities and villages, the people of Alalaya, and the people of Safala. It exploded in the late Al-Ya’rubīyya state in the form of a fierce civil war between two tribal alliances that drew their conflict from the same roots, namely the Hanawi and Ghafari conflict.

Moreover, the tribe as a practice and the authority of the Imamate as an idea and theory penetrated the tribe and used it to its advantage for long periods. The imams from the Al-Yahmid/Banu Kharus tribe are a prime example of how the tribal dimension dominated Ibaḍī principles for more than a thousand years.

The curse and bounty of geography and nature at the same time: As generous as geography was to the Omanis, with a strategic location open to the active ocean, the Indian Ocean, vast and fertile

lands, and mountains that were open treasure troves of natural minerals, it also brought envy from the region (the Persians in Iran and the people of Najd from the desert of the Arabian Peninsula) and greed from outside the region through the greedy invaders from the high seas, the Portuguese and the British. The complex and remote nature of the region helped the Ibaḍī scholars formulate their theory of governance, which corresponded to the harshness and surprises of life. The diverse nature also gives Omani character traits. The inhabitants of the mountains are not the same as those who settled in the desert or the plains. The inhabitants of the Omani coasts were not the same as those who lived in the desert. As much as this difference created diversity, it also created prolonged conflicts over pastures and scarce resources on the earth's surface. Most were unaware of the riches beneath the surface, such as oil, which was a game changer once it appeared.

A deep-rooted local imamate in the face of an expanding imperial colonial empire: Omanis were not used to an adversary that penetrated their social fabric and hit their economic nerve center as the British did. The Portuguese were unconcerned with the details of the Omani interior. All they cared about were the ports and maritime trade. Before them, the Persians lasted only intermittent periods of 50-80 years each. The imperial government of India dealt with Oman and its rulers in unprecedented ways. Imperial Britain spared neither its local proxies, the rulers of Muscat and the Omani coast, nor their rivals, the Omani imams and the interior. The imperial and colonial machine did not forgive the Omanis for their resistance and defiance, not during the Qawasim's refusal to comply with the orders and interests of the East India Company in 1820, nor the power, influence, and wealth of their ally Said bin Sultan al-Busaidi in 1839, nor the revolt of Azzan bin Qais in 1871, Faisal bin Turki in 1895, Timur bin Faisal's concessions in 1923, and Said bin Timur's empowerment in oil, trade, navigation or governance until the Green Mountain Revolt in 1959.

One of the most notable outcomes of the strategic partnership between colonial imperialism and the aspirations of absolutism in Oman was the ending of the third Imam of the 20th century, the Imamate of Ghalib bin Ali al-Hinai 1954-1959. This Imamate did not end easily. Britain had to fight field, diplomatic, political, and economic battles on more than one front, regional and international. It was a fierce fight in which the Omanis did not give up easily and fought to the last breath. Despite all the shifts the world witnessed regarding the balance of power, This will be explained in more detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: ANTI-COLONIALISM ON THE EVE OF AL-JABAL AL-AKHDAR REVOLUTION

By December 1955, nearly half a century had passed since the Omanis had been peacefully attempting to persuade the al-Busaid rulers of Muscat to sever their ties with British colonialism. In 1905, a delegation of Omani scholars, including the prominent scholar Nour al-Din al-Salmi, convened to advise Sayyid Faisal bin Turki on the dangers of colonialism.” They offered their support, conditional upon his willingness to remove British influence from the country. This pivotal moment is corroborated by one of the most prominent historians of the 1950s and 1960s, Al-Shaiba al-Salmi, who was also a key figure in the Green Mountain Revolution:

...Scholars and people of insight offered scientific and practical advice to Sultan Faisal urging him to show justice, spread security and peace of mind,... warning him of the dangers of colonialism, and asking him to abandon the British treaty... and the strife it caused among the Omanis through divide and rule.³⁴⁸

However, the opposite happened. All of Sultan Faisal's successors enabled the British to rule the country and monopolize its natural resources.

On December 24, 1955, Sultan Said bin Taimur entered the city of Nizwa, marking the first time a ruler from the Al Busaid family had done so since Britain suppressed the Azzan bin Qais revolt in 1871. This moment was made possible through the support of British forces, which paved the way for his entry. With this, Britain extended its hegemony over the entire territory of

³⁴⁸ Abu Bashir Al-Salimi, *Nahdat al-A 'yan* ' (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al Arabi', 1961) 114. Similarly, one might consider Sheikh Nur al-Din al-Salimi's encounter with Sayyed Faisal bin Turki prior to al-Salimi's Hajj pilgrimage, as documented by the latter in his own writings .

Oman, reaping the benefits of the comprehensive monopoly agreements it had negotiated and expanded over the previous century and a half with the Al Busaid family.

These agreements granted Britain monopolistic control over Oman's oil concessions, exclusive rights to the use of ports along the Omani coast, and, in the post-World War II era, the monopoly of military bases and Omani airspace. This included privileges for the British Royal Air Force and Imperial Civil Aviation, further solidifying British dominance in the region.

This chapter critically examines the intertwined dynamics of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism in Oman during the post-World War II period, with particular focus on the Green Mountain Revolt of 1955-1959—a significant but often marginalized episode in Omani history. Through the lens of subaltern historiography, the chapter addresses pivotal questions: What occurred on the eve of the revolution, and how did the colonial project shape the political landscape of that period? What social, political, and military contradictions emerged between the major actors—Britain, the Imamate, and Said bin Taimur—and how did these contradictions reflect the broader hegemonic struggles? The analysis will also explore how both colonial and Omani primary sources have portrayed these tensions, with particular attention to the ways in which the dominant colonial narrative sought to suppress the voices and agency of the subaltern.

The goal is to trace how the colonial narrative, steeped in hegemonic power, constructed a history that marginalizes the Omani experience, particularly in the lead-up to the revolution's outbreak in June 1957. By contrasting this with the subaltern narratives—voices often silenced or obscured—the chapter aims to recover a fuller, more nuanced account of the Green Mountain Revolt, which continued into the early 1960s, and the resistance that defined this critical period.

Britain in the Arabian Peninsula

British colonial interest in the Arabian Peninsula became eminently visible in response to the French Revolutionary Wars, as hegemony over maritime routes to India was paramount to British imperial policy.³⁴⁹ To curb the French influence and maintain their dominance over the Indian Ocean, the British East India Company (BEIC) representatives were dispatched to the Gulf to sign the first of several regional treaties. The Treaty of Friendship,” as it was called, was the first Anglo-Omani Treaty. It was signed in 1798. Two years later, BEIC coerced the Sultan to amend the Treaty to include the stationing of a British “agent” in the coastal capital of Muscat.³⁵⁰

From the moment a treaty was signed, local rulers across the Arabian Gulf and Peninsula became locked into an uneven arrangement that would make them increasingly dependent on the tutelage of British colonial rule for material and political support. This process ultimately alienated them from their local power bases as the new relationship with a colonial power allowed rulers to practice autocracy with little fear of being overthrown.³⁵¹

Omani tribes, peasants, and workers were marginalized both socially and economically by British colonial forces and the Sultanate. These groups, historically autonomous, were increasingly disempowered through economic policies that favored British control over Oman's resources,

³⁴⁹ See Alexander Mikaberidze, *The Napoleonic Wars: A Global History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 91-94.

³⁵⁰ See J. B. Kelly, *Britain, and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 65-67.

³⁵¹ An interesting discussion of this relationship between tribal rulers and Sheikhs in South Arabia can be found in Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael, *The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen: Politics, Economics, and Society: The Politics of Socialist Transformation* (London: Frances Pinter, 1986), 5-11.

particularly oil. This marginalization not only created economic hardship but also fueled discontent, leading to active resistance against the colonial state.

The British-Sultanate alliance further disrupted tribal governance structures, eroding the traditional autonomy that tribes had previously enjoyed. The Sultanate's role as a colonial intermediary deepened the divide, alienating local communities from meaningful participation in governance. These subaltern groups, deprived of political representation, are the focal point of the resistance discussed in this chapter, challenging the legitimacy of British rule and its local proxies.

Harvey argues that the imperial state is dealing with its internal contradictions with further colonial expansion, "a contradictory fusion of "the politics of state and empire" (imperialism as a distinctively political project on the part of actors whose power is based in command of a territory and a capacity to mobilize its human and natural resources towards political, economic, and military ends) and "the molecular processes of capital accumulation in space and time" (imperialism as a diffuse political-economic process in space and time in which command over and use of capital takes primacy)." ³⁵²

Antonio Gramsci provides a useful framework for understanding the alliance of interests among the dominant classes within the ruling institution, specifically the imperial center—London in this case. He clearly defines a coalition of ruling classes capable of seizing power from a state."

As these dominant classes consolidate power, they simultaneously reorganise subordinated or subaltern classes. However, these dominant and subaltern classes are not solely formed on a political basis; rather, they emerge as a result of shifts in the system of production. In other words,

³⁵²David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 26.

the formation of these classes is fundamentally rooted in an economic structure that defines their positions and roles within society.³⁵³

The first geological exploration expeditions in the Arabian Peninsula to search for coal, sent by the British government to Oman in 1901. The mission included several mineral specialists intending to identify the mineral wealth contained in the Omani Mountains, in preparation for their use in supplying the ships of the British Empire that were cruising the Indian Ocean. This mission came to conduct proactive surveys of the region, before the arrival of the French in light of the imperialist competition between Britain and France to control these raw materials. The mission concluded that there are quantities of coal in the mountains of Dhofar and Sur, in addition to reserves of other minerals such as lead and manganese. The team of scientists documented details of their discoveries in detailed and precise maps. They have also suggested the export of coal through the port of Sur, in the far east of Oman.³⁵⁴

In the decade leading up to World War I, colonists began to see the region as a blank canvas with abundant mineral resources. In 1901, William Knox D'Arcy, an English industrialist, struck a deal with the Persian government to hunt for oil on their soil. The company's prospectus for investors predicted a nearly endless market would be created for fuel oil for maritime applications, most notably on warships, in anticipation of Britain's ambitions to switch its naval fleet from coal to oil power.³⁵⁵

³⁵³ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 95–104.

³⁵⁴ File 35/64 III Minerals in Oman. Madrasai geologists' researches', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/1/397, in *Qatar Digital Library* .
https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100000000193.0x000172

³⁵⁵ File 1421/1908 Pt 3-5 'Persia: Oil', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/10/144, in *Qatar Digital Library*,
https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100000000419.0x000025

British geologists fulfilled their imperial mandate by surveying and identifying the vast reserves of oil and other minerals across the Arabian Peninsula, under the protection of significant military force. The maps were prepared, and the extent of the wealth hidden beneath the ground was revealed to the imperial authorities. While the question of the region's resource wealth had been answered, the challenge remained: how to extract and maximize its use with minimal costs or losses. This is where another layer of accumulated knowledge came into play, serving a crucial role in completing the cycle of resource exploitation.

British interest in the region increased once the British suppressed the 1920 revolution in Iraq, and now it began to engage the highest levels of the Empire in London. This is evident in the escalation and intertwining of relations between the class of owners of British oil companies and politicians in the imperial government. In May 1921, the managing director of the Anglo-Persian oil company APOC sent Winston Churchill, the colonial state minister, a letter regarding his company's desire to obtain exclusive concessions with the region's governors.³⁵⁶ In addition to Cox, Churchill extensively consulted India's office and petroleum department. The geographical extent and bureaucratic structures of the imperial oil administration in the Gulf have grown increasingly.³⁵⁷ Several draft potential concession agreements have been written and circulated between the parties, with extensive and detailed discussions on royalties and the size and duration of the concession.³⁵⁸ Eventually, Churchill decided that instead of long-term concessions, the company should proceed with the negotiation of fixed-term exploration licenses with the rulers of

³⁵⁶ IOR/R/15/1/618, Garrow to Churchill, 12/05/1921.

http://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100023547231.0x00000a?utm_source=testpdfdownload&utm_medium=pdf&utm_campaign=PDFdownload

³⁵⁷ For further analysis of the colonial framework reshaped by Britain in the Gulf region to serve its oil interests, see: Omar Al-Shehabi, *ReProducing the Gulf* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming), chap. 1.

³⁵⁸ See, eg, IOR/R/15/1/618, Clarke to Churchill, 03/08/1922.

https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100023547231.0x00007e.

the Arabian Peninsula and stressed that the political agent needed to start any negotiations.³⁵⁹ He highlighted how the political apparatus of the Empire overlapped with the interests of oil companies and the need for the British Imperial organs to intervene to prevent any other party wishing to benefit from the Arabian Peninsula's oil wealth. The Empire, its organs, and its capitalist companies had become one thing.³⁶⁰

Beyond the political motivations of demarking territorial domains and monopolizing violence—which Max Weber identifies as two main characteristics of the State³⁶¹—the material basis for this expansion lay in the region's vast oil reserves. With the expansion of capitalist development into the most remote corners of the periphery, the conditions for occupying the area were ripe. As Fred Halliday noted, “Whereas previously there had been no need to define boundaries too precisely in the Arabian interior, the development of oil wells made it essential; and territorial disputes became inevitable.”³⁶²

Halliday's analysis suggests that the Arabian Peninsula remained a buffer zone for British imperialism, primarily to safeguard India—the “Crown of the Empire”—until the early twentieth century, when the growing global demand for oil, particularly after World War I, reshaped the region's strategic importance. However, this argument was contested by Abdel Razzaq Takriti, who, in his groundbreaking study *Monsoon Revolution*, challenges much of the scholarship that chronicles the region's history.

³⁵⁹ IOR/R/15/1/618, Churchill to APOC, 29/03/1922.

https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100023547231.0x000082

³⁶⁰ Al-Shehabi. *Reproducing the Gulf*.

³⁶¹ Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 77-128.

³⁶² Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, 292.

Takriti argues that “Sultanlic autonomy” was, in fact, merely an extension of imperial autonomy.” This concept has been used in various contexts to explain themes such as spatial history, geographies of domination, and the complex dynamics of imperial networks. Yet, Takriti deploys the concept in a more specific political sense, defining it as a situation where a dominant foreign power invests local authority in an indigenous body of its choosing while maintaining a significant degree of control over that body.³⁶³ Nevertheless, the voice of anti-colonial historiography has yet to reach the same level of strength, dissemination, and depth as the prevailing colonial literature.

International imperialism had arrived at a fundamental turning point in the Arabian Peninsula. The inauguration of a new phase of a global economy was based on the accumulation of capital from the monopoly of a new and necessary commodity for the twentieth century, oil. Britain realized, as a result of its colonial experience in the region since the early nineteenth century, that it had to change its pattern of control in the region to focus on a single task, which was to ensure a monopoly on this resource and the perpetuation of the flow of surplus value to the imperial treasury for the longest possible period.

It is not an overstatement to claim that Lenin's theory of imperialism remains relevant and useful in explaining these transformations, particularly in the context of international capitalism and its evolving colonial strategies. The objective conditions experienced by the countries of the region demonstrate that the imperialist-capitalist alliance has consistently obstructed societal progress. Imperial capitalism, by leveraging its control over capital, has restructured and re-engineered political and economic systems to maintain its monopoly on resources, effectively

³⁶³Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*, 17.

delaying or nullifying the independence of these nations from the dominant financial and economic system.

Driven by the concentration of production and capital, the British Empire sought to create the monopolies necessary to maintain its superiority in global markets at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. In India and Egypt, and increasingly in the Arabian Peninsula, especially with the rise in the importance of oil in the global economy, as the nerve of maritime and air transport, indispensable in transporting goods and human beings.

The British Colonial Administration decided early to form the capital monopolies of British companies and their allies, to control oil reserves in the subsoil of the desert and deep seawater. The most prominent manifestation of these monopolies was the signing of an enormous number of agreements with Gulf Coast tribal elders and the Najd and Shah regions of Iran to cut off any other empire and colonial attempts to participate in the benefits of this wealth.

Even the exception that took place by allowing the American imperial model to benefit from the oil reserves of the Arabian Peninsula, and in a region of Najed precisely, came with understanding and cooperation with British imperialism and its companies that had begun to establish long-term partnerships with the other side of the Atlantic, especially after the intervention of the United States of America in World War I, which opened the door to American capital to finance British and European companies' projects to complement their imperialist aspirations.

The "empire of capital" according to Wood, is the most current version of international imperialism that inaugurated the twentieth century.³⁶⁴ This new form of economic hegemony is supported by military force, rather than territorial occupation. International imperialism has

³⁶⁴ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital* (London: Verso, 2003), 11.

benefited from the globalization of trade, production, and investments to break out of national borders. Even imperialist competition has been leveraged by expanding cross-border and continental partnerships. As Marx predicted early on in the idea of a "capitalist empire" in the *Communist Manifesto*, the bourgeoisie, under the pretext of needing new markets, internationalizes its power.

Colonization of Resources before Colonization of the Land

The al-Jebel al-Akhdar War represented the apex of British imperialist ambitions in the mid-1950s. At a time when the British economy was faltering in the wake of two world wars, the oil companies, eager to exploit the Empire's colonial legacy in the region, sought to maximize the benefits for both the companies and the Empire. Colonial sources from this period reflect the intensity of these imperialist aspirations through various lenses. Among the multiple perspectives that shaped the colonial narrative surrounding Oman and its socio-political and economic contradictions, four stand out as particularly influential.

First Perspective: Imperial Officials

The perspective of imperial officials served as the foundational lens for all subsequent narratives. This viewpoint became the primary frame of reference for researchers, decision-makers in London, and officials across the empire's colonies. These writings remained resistant to criticism and deconstruction for extended periods, with some even acquiring an almost mythological status regarding Omani society and the riches of the Arabian Peninsula. Two

characteristics of this perspective are immediately apparent: the first is the relentless effort to justify the imperial project, and the second is the denigration of the local population.

Such sources spared no effort to demean and belittle the Omanis who inhabited the oil-rich regions. For instance, Miles wrote in 1910: The tribes occupying it are one and all thieving, treacherous, and turbulent. The quantity of available rascaldom is pretty considerable, and the quality of ruffianism is quite in keeping.” This type of rhetoric reflects the colonial tendency to dehumanize the local population, reinforcing the imperial agenda by portraying Omanis as backward and unruly.³⁶⁵

Percy Cox made similar judgments about the land and its people during his 1905 journey through Oman. Upon arriving in the city of Ibri, which he dismissively referred to as a "city of thieves," Cox displayed a stark contrast between his negative characterization of the region and the warm hospitality and generosity he received from its inhabitants. Despite being treated as a high-ranking guest throughout his tour, Cox's perceptions remained influenced by the colonial tendency to view local populations through a lens of condescension and suspicion, reflecting the broader imperialist narrative that belittled and dehumanized Omani society.³⁶⁶

Applying Spivak's critique of elite historiography, we can see how colonial records deliberately framed the Green Mountain resistance as irrational, downplaying the legitimate grievances of the subaltern by depicting the subaltern groups as uneducated or backward and

³⁶⁵Jan Morris, *Sultan in Oman*, The First UK printing published by Faber and Faber, London in 1957. In this study, the researcher employs the complimentary edition accessible within the Apple Books application.³⁵

³⁶⁶ Percy Cox, "SOME EXCURSIONS IN OMAN," *The Geographical Journal* Vol. LXVI No. 3 September 1925, 193-288.

unable to govern themselves.³⁶⁷ Reports frequently portrayed the local population as “lawless” and in need of British control. This narrative, constructed by colonial authorities, sought to suppress subaltern voices and present imperial power as a force for stability.

However, oral histories and local accounts offer a stark contrast, portraying the resistance as a deeply rational response to the economic and cultural domination imposed by the British and Sultanate. These local narratives expose the gaps in colonial reports, emphasizing the resilience and agency of the subaltern.

To further elucidate this point, Jean Morris’s book *A Sultan in Oman* holds particular significance as a colonial primary source. Morris, the only eyewitness to Sultan Said bin Taimur’s historic journey into inner Oman, served as the resident correspondent for *The Times* of London and was entrusted by the British colonial administration with documenting the event. Said bin Taimur’s journey, starting from his southern capital of Salalah and culminating in Nizwa—the capital of the Imamate, which his ancestors had not entered since 1872—was a momentous occasion. However, the Sultan only felt secure enough to undertake this expedition after British forces had secured the area, taken control of Nizwa, and paved the way for his entry on 25 December 1955.³⁶⁸

Morris was deeply influenced by the colonial school of thought that constructed its own vision of the Orient through the lens of Orientalism. This worldview saw the Orient and its people as little more than savage, primitive, and backward groups. Morris’s account reflects this attitude,

³⁶⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 198–201.

³⁶⁸ Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century*, 29.

as he wrote: The people were very funny. Their behavior was ever so queer. You never knew what they would do next. Very ignorant they were, and very dirty, and the sanitation was ever so bad. It s awful, really.”³⁶⁹ Morris goes even further in his portrayal of the Omanis, particularly the people of Nizwa, using highly offensive descriptions that reflect the deep-seated condescension and denigration characteristic of Orientalist perspectives.

Morris's description of the Omanis he encountered is steeped in dehumanizing language: Their faces were poor, pinched and pocked with diseases and their bodies were bent and wizened. Many were hunchbacks. Some were dwarfs. One blind man was helped to a position on his crutches. The children around the perimeter of this assembly (some of them, indeed, sitting unabashed in the middle of it) were characterized by such receding chins and foreheads, such pitifully thin bodies, such big protruding goggle eyes, that they reminded me irresistibly of those little creatures, only just removed from inanimation, that you find in the middle of cuckoo-spit.”³⁷⁰

This representation of a key moment in modern Omani history, and of its people, is critical, as some interpret this moment as a turning point when the country was unified for the first time in at least a century.³⁷¹ However, the colonial narrative framed this event in a way that sought to degrade the local population, a tactic aimed at subjugating and controlling them more effectively.

³⁶⁹Morris, *Sultan in Oman*, 206.

³⁷⁰ Ibid, 159.

³⁷¹The ongoing debate between the concepts of "unity" and "sovereignty" at this pivotal moment in Oman's history remains a contentious one. A substantial number of Omani historians maintain that Said bin Taimur's actions were undertaken with the noble intention of achieving territorial unification in Oman. In contrast, other historians contend that the concept of "sovereignty" espoused by the Imamate during its revolution is fundamentally rooted in the commitments made by Britain and its ally Taimur bin Faisal in the 1920 Sib Agreement. Otherwise, the Omani territories were unified and governed by a single Imam, elected by the Omanis through the representation of scholars or the people of *al-hal wa al- Aqd*. This system prevailed for eight continuous centuries. However, British interference in Oman's affairs ultimately undermined this system.

This verbal violence is an intrinsic part of the colonizer's strategy, one that mirrors the physical violence enacted on the battlefield and the violence embedded in historical memory. As Frantz Fanon eloquently articulated in *The Wretched of the Earth*, written during the same period (1955-1961) while he fought in the Algerian revolution, this violence—whether physical or verbal—serves to dehumanize the colonized, reinforcing the colonizer's dominance and control.³⁷²

We can see how colonial historians frequently diminish and dehumanize the people they observe, magnifying the moments in which these privileged Englishmen passed through and cast their gaze upon the colonized. Their works often perpetuate a nostalgia for a past in which they played no part, but which they were largely responsible for destroying. Jean Morris, for instance, writes: Nizwa, once the center of thriving textile and ironworking industries, the prosperous capital of Oman, had clearly gone down in the world. So dwarfish, diseased, and simian were its inhabitants, so fly-ridden its suk.”³⁷³ This distortion of reality reflects what Edward Said referred to as the "invention of history" for the West—a deliberate process undertaken by the colonial historian to impose their hegemony over the historical past of the colonized.³⁷⁴ In this framework, any history that predates the arrival of the colonizer is rendered meaningless. Only the empire, with its armies and historians is seen as capable of giving significance to the place and its people.

This contempt for the people of Oman is matched by an exaltation of the actions and aspirations of the British Empire in the region. Morris, for example, views British domination in the Gulf as nothing more than the logical continuation of a long line of imperial powers. As he states: All the great empires of the world had recognized the importance of the Persian Gulf.

³⁷²Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

³⁷³Morris, *Sultan in Oman*, .172.

³⁷⁴Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 55.

Alexander had sent his fleets into it. French, British, and Dutch had vied for supremacy over it. Peter the Great, in his alleged will, urged his successors to dominate it. Imperial Germany pressed towards it. The early Russian Communists saw it as a principal prize of their power drive.”³⁷⁵

Morris goes further by lamenting the decline of the British Empire, reflecting a sense of disappointment not only in the empire's fading influence but also in the Arabs themselves, whom he holds in low regard. His narrative mirrors the broader colonial discourse that seeks to glorify imperial conquest while disparaging the people and cultures subjugated under its rule.

Morris nostalgically laments the fading of the British Empire, portraying the decline of opportunities for "soldierly adventures" abroad as a loss to both the Empire and the world:

It was a sad concomitant of fading empire that such openings for soldierly adventures abroad were getting fewer every year, for, by a happy paradox, nothing had done more to increase amity among peoples. Gone now was the old Indian Army, and all those brave gallivantings in the Indian hills. Gone were the African wars, and the gunboats on the Yangtze, and the forced marches in the Sudan. Gone, almost everywhere, were the long starlit nights beneath Bedouin tents, in which the Englishman pleasantly deluded himself that his friendship with the Arabs was something special, mutual and indestructible, and that there existed some affinity of spirit between the desert and the shires.³⁷⁶

In his book, Morris perpetuates the same Orientalist discourse that is steeped in Western colonial fantasies about the East. He classifies the British as superior and positions them as necessary leaders for any Arab revolutionary movement, suggesting that without British guidance

³⁷⁵ Morris, *Sultan in Oman*, 237.

³⁷⁶ Morris, *Sultan in Oman*. 247-248.

and leadership, failure is the inevitable outcome. As he writes: Two British officers ran this little army, and I enjoyed talking to them as some of the last of the British mercenaries among the Arabs. It had been many a long year since the Arab Revolt, when the British military connection with the Arabs had been so dashinglly founded.”³⁷⁷

Morris does not merely express his colonial mindset and superiority complex, but he also feeds into the imaginations of his readers by portraying his “victorious” journey through a lens that reinforces stereotypical images of the Arab as a pirate, a robber of land and sea, and a threat to imperial trade—even though he is describing an event over two hundred miles away from the Omani coast. He writes:

The men waved as we passed; the children scampered after us; and a multitude of savage dogs barked and bared their teeth and chased us along the sand. This had once been the pirate coast par excellence ('They are murderers and brigands every one,' said Sir John Malcolm of the Gulf Arabs in 1786. 'They are monsters...') and it still had a piratical flavour.³⁷⁸

Here, Morris attempts to craft a fictionalized perspective, weaving an Orientalist narrative that aligns with the Western imperial vision. In doing so, he portrays the simple people lining up spontaneously to greet Said bin Taimur as though their actions were part of a coherent and deliberate demonstration of loyalty, echoing the broader imperialist view of the East as both backward and in need of colonial control.

³⁷⁷ Ibid. 246.

³⁷⁸ Morris, *Sultan in Oman*. 254-254.

Occasionally, some urchin performed a different wave; and sometimes an old zealot with a white beard, summoning a spark of defiance, managed a gesture of distaste—a spit or an unfriendly movement of his hands—upon realizing there were Christians in the convoy. 'Why should we help you?' some of the Omani Bedouin had asked Wilfred Thesiger during one of his remarkable journeys a few years earlier. 'If we help you, other Christians will come in motor cars, looking for oil, and they will take our land away from us.' No doubt, similar suspicions passed through the minds of these fierce old men as they gathered their saliva.³⁷⁹

Morris here encapsulates the deep-seated mistrust that many Omanis harbored toward the encroaching imperial presence. His account, however, reflects the broader colonial lens, portraying the gestures of defiance as mere antiquated superstition or stubborn resistance to progress. Such descriptions, laden with Orientalist undertones, emphasize the supposed primitiveness of the local population, while downplaying the legitimacy of their concerns—concerns that, as history shows, were rooted in the very real threat of land dispossession and the exploitation of resources by foreign powers.

Morris is eager to invert the colonial narrative, portraying the local population as invaders while suggesting that the colonizer retains the right to punish them. He writes:

Most of the inhabitants hung about their windows and gateways uncertainly, rarely venturing into the highway, as if, like citizens of a rebellious colony, they expected some form of collective punishment.”³⁸⁰

³⁷⁹ Ibid. 153-154.

³⁸⁰ Morris, *Sultan in Oman*. 164.

Morris recognizes that this moment marks a critical turning point not only in the history of the Omanis but also in the history of the British Empire and its dominance over the Arabian Peninsula. Consequently, he employs all his linguistic and imaginative tools to depict the East—in this case, Oman and the Omanis—as inhuman, inferior, and degraded. As Edward Said has pointed out, texts like *Sultan in Oman* are instrumental in constructing historical narratives, entering into history through the grand "door" of Western discourse.³⁸¹ This conflict, therefore, was not only about territorial control but also about the struggle over the meaning of history. History, as it is created by the historian, shapes the narrative of events, and the battle for land becomes intertwined with the battle for historical and social meaning. Consequently, the Western—particularly British—narrative emerged as the dominant perspective in recounting the events that unfolded in the Green Mountain between 1955 and 1965.

Once again, applying Spivak's critique of elite historiography, we can see how colonial records deliberately framed the Omani people as irrational, downplaying the legitimate grievances of the subaltern. Reports and records, such as Morris', frequently portrayed the local population as 'lawless' and in need of British control. This narrative, constructed by colonial authorities, sought to suppress subaltern voices and present imperial power as a force for stability. Spivak's critique is a cross-cutting feature in all the four perspectives addressed in this chapter.³⁸²

³⁸¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*. Ibid.

³⁸² Gayatri Spivak, Ibid.

Second Perspective: Loyalists to the British Empire

The lens of the loyalists of the empire extends beyond the previous group, as it not only sought to warn the British Empire and its agents about the local Omani population but also cautioned Britain's local allies, including the sultans of Muscat and tribal sheikhs loyal to British interests in the region.

Colonial sources consistently express contempt toward Oman and its people—not only toward the resistance that opposed British rule but also toward their local allies. While the first instance of disdain is perhaps expected, as a colonizer is not obliged to show admiration for those they subjugate, one might assume that the ally, who has rendered great services to the empire, would at least receive a basic level of courtesy or recognition. However, this was rarely the case. These sources reflect a clear Orientalist disdain, even for the empire's most significant allies. A prime example is Said bin Taimur, Britain's greatest ally in its colonial projects in Oman. According to Wilkinson, Said bin Taimur is portrayed as nothing more than a despotic, intolerant, inactive, and cruel ruler. His father, Taimur bin Faisal, received a similar assessment from the British Political Agent, who described him in 1919:³⁸³

His [Taymur's] natural vanity is inherited from his father... he states he wishes to rule so as to please the people and benefit them. Without our pressure, this would soon lapse... our objective would be to surround him with a staff of advisors which would make it difficult for him to lapse as long as he remains dependent upon us... He is, notwithstanding his

³⁸³ Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, 316.

position, still too proud and requires a definite statement that we shall withdraw our support for him unless the whole system is put in order.³⁸⁴

This contempt extended even to significant figures within the Omani resistance. For instance, in January 1949, the British Political Agent in Muscat described his first encounter with the Sheikh of Jabal Akhdar, Sulayman bin Himyar al-Nabhani, as follows: He is an eagle-eyed, eagle-nosed old brigand.”³⁸⁵ Morris went even further, crafting a criminal image of Sulayman, at times comparing him to a great Sicilian bandit,”³⁸⁶ and even suggesting execution: My own instinct told me that this fine scoundrel should be instantly decapitated, for the good of the Sultan and the sterling area, if so ill-matched a pair of might causes be placed in partnership; but I was rather glad, all the same, when he reappeared from the interview intact, and drove away into his mountains with only minor (and I am sure temporary) modifications of his manner.”³⁸⁷

Despite such disparaging portrayals, Sulayman bin Himyar was one of the few Imamate leaders who dared to come to Nizwa to greet Said bin Taimur. Far from deteriorating, their relationship at this time held many opportunities for cooperation. The meeting between Sulayman and Said was the culmination of courtesies exchanged since the late 1930s—a relationship that had been met with criticism by Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah Al-Khalili, who warned of its

³⁸⁴ 'File XXXIII/11-A Affairs of the Ruling Family Sultan's Abdication Oct. 1919 to Nov. 1929.' [177v] (354/482), British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/6/52, in Qatar Digital Library, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100048155604.0x00009b. Also, Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, 316.

³⁸⁵ 'File 8/62 II PRINCIPAL SHAIKHS & TRIBES OF OMAN' [2r] (3/6), British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/6/243, in Qatar Digital Library <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100057249098.0x000004> [accessed 16 September 2024] .

³⁸⁶ Morris, *Sultan in Oman*, 188.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 190.

consequences: "...The door now is opening from the East... Moreover, know, O people, that these people do not give you anything from their world without taking something from your religion."³⁸⁸

The rapprochement between the ruler of Muscat, Said bin Taimur, and the Emir of Jabal Al Akhdar, Sulayman bin Himyar, was driven by the distinct interests of each party. For the ruler of Muscat, the primary goal was to weaken the Imamate by penetrating its front and separating the Ghafiri alliance from it, thereby preparing the ground for the eventual dismantling of the Imamate's power. On the other hand, the Emir of Jabal Al Akhdar harbored ambitions of securing generous shares of the oil reserves in areas he considered under the Imamate's influence, such as Ibri, Fahud, and Buraimi. He even addressed the British Political Resident in Bahrain multiple times, seeking official recognition from Her Majesty's Government for his independence, as confirmed by secret correspondence between the Political Resident and the British Foreign Office.³⁸⁹

The colonial narrative spares no objectivity when recounting the resistance it faced, neither in conveying events nor in describing the central figures and leaders involved. This approach is in line with its broader intent to wage a psychological war—not only on the battlefield but also beyond it, targeting the realm of memory and the writing of history. The colonial discourse sought to discredit and diminish the figures of the Omani resistance, long after the physical confrontations had ceased.

For example, the following description of Imam Ghalib offers a telling insight into the colonial mindset:

The Imam Ghalib... had had the reputation of being weak and vacillating, as well as traitorous, and in Bahrain I had asked whether there was any eminence grise, apart from

³⁸⁸ Abu Bashir Al-Salimi, *Nahdat al-A'yan*. Ibid. 71-72.

³⁸⁹ FO 37/104296 . Telegram No 734, September 13, 1953.

the evil genius Talib, who stood strong behind the Imamate in the Oman highlands. Yes, they said, there was: Suleiman, Sheikh of the Bani Riyam and undisputed ruler of the Jebel Akhdar. This formidable old warrior lived in the heart of the mountains and could, if he wished, offer the Sultan a stout resistance.³⁹⁰

This language reflects the colonial tendency to frame resistance figures in derogatory terms, thereby reinforcing the narrative of the colonizer's moral and strategic superiority.

Gramsci's concept of counter-hegemony is useful for understanding how the local tribes resisted not only militarily but culturally. The preservation of oral traditions, local governance systems, and religious practices acted as covert forms of defiance, resisting the cultural imposition of British colonial rule.³⁹¹ Despite efforts by the colonial state to suppress these practices, local communities maintained their cultural identities, ensuring that the subaltern resistance was not only about land but also about the survival of their social structures.

Despite the colonial narrative's consistent disdain for the Omani resistance, there were moments when the courage of those resisting British forces was acknowledged, even if veiled in criticism. The withdrawal of the Omani forces was sometimes interpreted as nothing more than a tactical move, reflecting a grudging admiration for their resilience.

Morris writes:

³⁹⁰ Morris, *Sultan in Oman*, 184.

³⁹¹ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 52–55.

The Imam was now known to have returned to his own village, deeper in the mountains, where he had been allowed to remain unmolested; but his brother Talib, whom the wazir liked to call the 'evil genius' of the case, was still at large. There was a Buchanesque touch to this man's activities which warmed me to him. He had himself directed the fight on the other side of the mountains, I learned, and when his chief fort there had fallen, he had made a successful getaway, allegedly taking with him a number of boxes of gold. Anyone who caught him, the Sultan's government had announced, would be handsomely rewarded by the state and would also take possession of this treasure (a declaration which, I must confess, made me wonder whether the bit about the boxes had not a slight touch of the mythical to it).³⁹²

This passage reflects a certain romanticization of Talib's resistance, describing him in almost mythical terms, while simultaneously maintaining the colonial narrative's condescending tone. The portrayal of Talib as a cunning and elusive figure, combined with the suspicion surrounding the "boxes of gold," underscores the imperial tendency to both demonize and mythologize leaders of resistance.

³⁹²Morris, *Sultan in Oman*, 162.

Third Perspective: Historians, Researchers, and Travelers of the British Empire.

The lens of historians, researchers, and travelers of the British Empire reflected two primary features: first, a deep understanding of the contradictions inherent in the people and places of Oman; and second, a keen intent to leverage this knowledge for the empire's benefit, ensuring the exploitation of the region's natural resources with minimal resistance.

During the 35 years following the Sib Treaty (1920-1955), the British Empire successfully isolated the Imamate between the Hajar Mountains and the desert, effectively imprisoning it and preventing the Imamate from establishing any meaningful relationships with its Arab or Islamic neighbors. Meanwhile, the Empire maintained total control over Oman's coasts. For three decades, Britain contentedly observed Oman's interior, applying science and knowledge to advance its imperial goals.³⁹³

Travelers and explorers of the British Empire roamed the region under the protection of the Imam's men. Despite numerous reports from British explorers indicating that the population remained loyal to the Imam, the imperialist project steadily advanced. For instance, Wilfred Thesiger, who entered the interior of Oman in 1950, observed that Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Khalili was held in high esteem by his people:

³⁹³For further discussion of the Empire's use of science as a tool of colonial domination, see Joseph M. Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007; Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870–1950*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011; William Beinart, Karen Brown and Daniel Gilfoyle, 'Experts and expertise in colonial Africa reconsidered: science and the interpenetration of knowledge', *African Affairs* (2009) 108, 413–33; Brett Bennett and Joseph M. Hodge (eds.), *Science and Empire: Knowledge and Networks of Science across the British Empire, 1800–1970*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011; Sabine Clarke, *Science at the End of Empire: Experts and the Development of the British Caribbean, 1940–1965*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018.

We were now entering territory which is effectively administered by the Imam, Muhammad bin Abdullah, who is recognized as ruler of inner Oman by all the settled tribes, both Ghafari and Hanawi, between Ibri and the Bani Bu Hassan villages in Ja'alan, and by the Badu tribes of Duru', the western Junuba, the Wahiba and Harasis... His Representatives are to be found in every group of villages, where they administer justice and collect taxes... The Badu do... recognize the Imam as their overlord, and the expression God lengthens the life of the Imam is frequently heard among them and sincerely meant, since by affording them a tribunal and by composing their differences, he has brought them security and justice. Here, a man can walk unarmed and leave his camels unattended without fear that he will be robbed.³⁹⁴

John Wilkinson, in his book *The Traditions of the Imamate in Oman*, detailed that the oil game,” which had dominated the region since the 1920s, reached its inevitable conclusion in the mid-1950s: the overthrow of the Imamate and the fulfillment of Said bin Taimur's long-cherished ambition to rule all of Omani territory, thereby simplifying negotiations for oil companies by consolidating power in a single ruler.³⁹⁵ The British Empire, during the interwar period, increasingly prioritized air and air freight routes between its colonies—from India in the east to Egypt in the west, and from Cyprus in the north to Kenya in the south. Said bin Taimur capitalized on this strategic shift by signing a series of civil and military aviation agreements with Britain,

³⁹⁴ Wilfred Thesiger, “Desert Borderlands of Oman,” *Geographical Journal*, October-December 1950, 151-2.

³⁹⁵ Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*. Also Wilkinson, *Water and tribal settlement in south-east Arabia* *A study of the Aflaj of Oman*. Oxford Research Studies in Geography. Oxford University Press, 1977). Also “Baysirah and Bayadir,” *Arabian Studies* 1 (1974): 75-85 . 9.

which allowed for the establishment of military bases on Masirah Island and Salalah, as well as logistical support airports at Ras al-Hadd.

Since leaving his post at Imperial Shell, Wilkinson has made significant scholarly contributions to understanding the complexities of Oman's social and cultural fabric, including in-depth studies on tribes, ethnicity, the aflaj irrigation system, and the Imamate as both a historical and governing institution that has shaped the lives of the Omani people.³⁹⁶

The loyalists of the British Empire, meanwhile, played their part as expected, their role aptly summarized by the adage: Their service was their loyalty, and their reward was their obedience.”³⁹⁷

In 1919, Major L. Haworth, the British Consul and Political Agent in Muscat, expressed the imperial view on governance in Oman: While then the country under the Imam is better ruled in many respects than that of the Sultan, it is not so safe, and there is no doubt that its conditions would hardly satisfy us. Undiluted Mohammadanism has not anywhere in the world shown itself capable of efficient rule...”³⁹⁸ This statement encapsulates the colonial mindset, dismissing the Imamate's governance in favor of a narrative that aligned with British imperial interests.

In his analysis of the Green Mountain Revolt of the 1950s, Peterson frames the conflict as a natural and predictable response from the Imamate regime, which sought to defend its

³⁹⁶ Wilkinson, J.C. *Water and tribal settlement in South-East Arabia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ IOR R/15/6/337, Haworth to PRPG of 5 March 1919. See Also, Wilkinson, *Water and Tribal Settlement in South-eastern Arabia*, 4. For further information see File 8/20: MUSCAT STATE AFFAIRS: RISE OF OMANIS, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/6/204, in *Qatar Digital Library*, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000831.0x0003d3.

sovereignty against the encroachment of Said bin Taimur's regime. However, Peterson downplays the role of British imperialism, characterizing it as mere assistance to Britain's ally, Said bin Taimur: The northern Oman war of the 1950s would seem to fall into the reformist or secessionist category. The temptation to add 'reactionary' to the description would probably be inaccurate. The goal of the Imamate movement was not to recreate the golden age of the Ibadi Imamate in Oman per se, as sought by more recent Islamist extremists. Rather, its minimal intention was to retain autonomy and semi-independence for the interior of northern Oman, under the nominal leadership of a traditional Imam and with strong control by prominent tribal shaykhs."³⁹⁹

Peterson's interpretation reflects a classic, self-contradictory colonial typology, stripping the revolutionary character from the Omani national liberation movement against colonial domination. According to Peterson, the revolt is framed as a mere tribal rebellion against the authority of the resolute ruler, Said bin Taimur.⁴⁰⁰ However, this claim is contradicted in later passages, where Peterson acknowledges that British forces, financially supported by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), initiated the conflict by encircling Oman's interior and occupying the city of Ibri.⁴⁰¹ Peterson justifies British intervention, stating: Sultan Sa'id was left with no choice but to call for British assistance."⁴⁰²

The British Empire, intent on securing its imperial interests, deemed the promises of the oil companies worth the effort to crush the sovereignty of the Omani people. Despite growing

³⁹⁹Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, 31-32.

⁴⁰⁰Peterson, J.E. (1986), *Defending Arabia* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 85.

⁴⁰¹ Peterson, *Defending Arabia* . 86.

⁴⁰²Peterson, *Defending Arabia* .

international condemnation of Britain's colonial activities, particularly from Third World countries and in forums such as the United Nations, British military operations in Oman persisted into the early 1970s.⁴⁰³ The global campaign against colonialism, especially from the Global South, remained a powerful force in challenging British hegemony during this period.

Fourth Perspective: War Sources

War sources consistently downplayed the significance of the Omani revolution and resistance, reducing the conflict to two main points: First, the framing of the conflict as a Saudi-Omani dispute over oil, more specifically between Said bin Taimur and King Saud bin Abdulaziz. Second, the British presence—militarily, politically, and in the media—was depicted as a necessary force for preserving Omani unity.

The reports of the British Political Consul in Muscat, Chauncey, focused heavily on the movements of Omani tribal sheikhs and their visits to Ibn Saud.⁴⁰⁴ Chauncey emphasized the bribes and gifts these sheikhs received, whether from Said bin Taimur or from the Saudi king.⁴⁰⁵ As a trusted advisor to Said bin Taimur—having had his contract renewed twice—Chauncey diligently documented information from local spies about the movements of American oil

⁴⁰³ Peterson, *Defending Arabia* . 86.

⁴⁰⁴ Frederick Charles Leslie Chauncey was born in London in 1904. He served in the King's Regiment 1924-1928. Later, he transferred to India as a captain in the 45th Sikh Rattray Regiment. From 1930, he served as a civil servant/political affairs officer in Gujarat, India. This paved the way for him to serve as British Vice-Consul in Mahmara, Persia, and then in Baluchistan during World War II. He wrote a military manual entitled "Conditions of Service of Personnel Serving in the Persian Gulf, August 5, 1947 to October 29, 1947". He was then appointed British Consul General for Muscat and Oman from October 27, 1956, to September 1, 1957. His appointment was extended for a further year until October 30, 1958. After his retirement, Major Chauncey returned to Oman to be the British closest advisor to Said bin Taimur from 1960 until 1970.

⁴⁰⁵ FO 371/82166. Confidential 1/8/62/50 'From major FCL Chauncey to Foreign Office' July 12, 1950.

companies and their attempts to penetrate Oman's interior, all from his humid office in Muscat.⁴⁰⁶

The British closely followed Aramco's attempts to reach the Imam through missionary doctor Dr Thomas during his medical tours in Oman, treating those who could be reached among the ravaged population.⁴⁰⁷

As the revolution loomed, British colonial forces placed significant emphasis on perpetuating tribal divisions. One British officer noted: 'I think that the Sultan is exploiting the tribal situation, and that is what we must do.'⁴⁰⁸ These sources consistently relied on the exploitation of tribal conflicts, particularly the rivalry between the al-Hanawi and al-Ghafri alliances, and the ambitions of individuals vying for leadership within the tribe or across broader tribal alliances. British colonial strategies paid little attention to factors of unity or solidarity among the tribes or between the two major alliances.⁴⁰⁹ The top priority was to manipulate the tribes in service of the British Oil Company, ensuring the facilitation of its goals.

As noted in one report:

One further point to note affecting these tribes is that they all have long-established inter-tribal or sectional feuds and alliances. To tip the scale, they are apt to seek the aid of some outsider. While British support has invariably been looked upon as decisive, the British themselves are liked and respected by almost all the tribes, who are ready to deal with Her

⁴⁰⁶ FO 37/104290. Telegram No. 78. Chauncey to Foreign Office' May 29, 1953.

⁴⁰⁷ For further insight into the functions of the Arab Mission in Muscat from the early 1900s to the 1950s, see the following sources: Zwemer, Samuel and Amy E., *Zigzag Journey in the Camel Country* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1911). Most issues of the Mission's Journal *Neglected Arabia* can be accessed via the following link: <https://ia801302.us.archive.org/16/items/neglectedarabia54refo/neglectedarabia54refo.pdf>. Also, Donald, Eloise, Bosch. *The Doctor and the Teacher*. Muscat: Apex Publishing, 2000. _____. 'Al-Mustašfa al-Amrikiyya fi 'Uman: 1893–1974' [The American Mission Hospitals in Oman: 1893–1974]. N.p., n.d. For a recent contribution, see Scudder, Lewis R., III. *The Arabian Mission's Story: In Search of Abraham's Other Son*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.

⁴⁰⁸ FO. 1016/353. Confidential 122/24/54' From major FCL Chauncey to Foreign Office' June 28, 1954.

⁴⁰⁹ FO 1016/353 'Extract of Letter from the Sultan of Muscat & Oman to major FCL Chauncey' May 6, 1954.

Majesty's Government in any matter. If political necessity did not demand that approaches be made through the Sultan, whose position as ruler of Oman and Muscat it is Her Majesty Government's declared policy to support, many a British problem, particularly that affecting oil exploration would be capable of a lot more ready solution."⁴¹⁰

In December 1955, one British officer who entered Nizwa at the head of the British force expressed disappointment that the situation had been resolved without confrontation. He had anticipated a battle, driven by colonial expectations of violence and bloodshed:

Stretched out in a broad expanse of green acres and waving palms and backed by the sombre mass of the Jebel Akhdar, its jagged edge etched by the early morning sun, Nizwa lay below, a peaceful panorama. Here and there tall buildings and towers reached up through the trees. In the centre, dominating the town, the squat sinister shape of the fort reared, brooding heavily over the scene and conveying an impression of immense strength. It was therefore something of an anticlimax to observe the red flag of Muscat fluttering idly from the battlements. Thus, our journey's end was to be accomplished in peace...⁴¹¹

This passage illustrates the colonial officer's internal conflict—his disappointment that the anticipated violence never materialized, highlighting the deeply entrenched expectations of confrontation within the colonial imagination.

⁴¹⁰FO.1016/353. 'Notes on The Tribes of the Sultanate Of Muscat & Oman'.122/24/54. February 2, 1954. 3.

⁴¹¹Major WO Little. The Cheshire Regiment. *Army Quarterly*. April 1956. "Oman Redivivus".

On the Eve of the Revolution: Contradictions and Imprints of Empire

The occupation of Ibri by British forces under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Coriat on October 27, 1954, marked the beginning of a new chapter in Oman's history.⁴¹² The decision to occupy Ibri had been jointly made by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and the British government, driven by the perception that the people of the region were "backward" and indifferent to the unfolding events. As one colonial report stated:

It would be a wise investment on our part; it is the only solution to these backward areas, and it might lead to the opening up of an extremely favorably placed oil field with a terminal on the Arabian Ocean as opposed to the Persian Gulf or the Gulf of Oman... and it would very likely pay handsome dividends."⁴¹³

As compensation for the occupation, PDO promised Sultan Said bin Taimur a payment of £143,000—£55,000 directly and £88,000 through the Sultan—along with £100,000 for any successive year.⁴¹⁴

The occupation of Ibri occurred just five and a half months after the death of Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Khalili on May 2, 1954.⁴¹⁵ In accordance with diplomatic protocols,

⁴¹² Some colonial sources assert that the British intervention was precipitated by claims from the al Duru'a tribe, who alleged that Imam forces had expelled them from their village of Tan' am. Omani sources do not verify the arrival of the Imam's forces in Tan'am, situated approximately 8 miles from Ibri. This stratagem was devised by Edward Henderson of the IPC, the oil-company representative and certain sheikhs with the intention of justifying the movement of British forces from Duqm on the southeastern coast of the Arabian Sea towards Ibri and circumventing the Imamate's territories in preparation for seizing control of them. See: Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, 81-87

⁴¹³ Thomas, Bierschenk. "Oil Interests and the Formation of Centralized Government in Oman, 1920–1970."

Orient, Vol. 30, No. 2 (1989), pp. 205–219.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁴¹⁵ Al-Salimi, *Nahdat al-A'yan*, 390.

the newly elected Imam, Ghalib bin Ali al-Hana i, sent a letter to the British Consul in Muscat informing him of Imam Al-Khalili s death and his own election as Imam by the Omani people.⁴¹⁶

Three days later, Sheikh Issa bin Saleh al-Harthi also wrote to the consul, confirming Imam al-Khalili s appointment of Ghalib bin Ali al-Hana i as his successor and noting that the Muslims pledged allegiance to him as Imam, committed to what God had commanded them to do. Among those who pledged allegiance was Sheikh Sulayman bin Himyar.”⁴¹⁷

Barely a month after Imam Al-Khalili s death and Imam Ghalib s ascension, the new Imam warned the British Consul of the need to withdraw British forces that had landed on the coast of Duqm (southeast Oman). Imam Ghalib emphasized that denying our rights, freedom, and sovereignty” would have serious consequences.⁴¹⁸

The first breach of the Seeb Agreement of 1920 came from the British, who decided to remove the Imamate system—an electoral religious system tested for centuries by the Omanis that had the power to mobilize and unite them against external aggression.⁴¹⁹ The British Empire, along with its ally, Sultan Said bin Taimur, did not conceal its intentions to eliminate the Imamate and dominate the oil concession areas within Oman.⁴²⁰ This move was consistent with the

⁴¹⁶For further information regarding the controversy surrounding the issue of Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Khalili's succession to Imam Ghalib bin Ali, please refer to: Said Muhammad al-Hashimi. "The Document of the Succession of Imam Ghalib bin Ali al-Hinai and the Conflict between the Ulema and the Chiefs: A Comparative Analytical Study," *Al-Khalil Journal*, University of Nizwa, Year 3/2018, Issue 4, 229-257.

⁴¹⁷ FO 1016/353, From Salih bin Isa to the British Consul in Muscat. 6th of Ramdhan (May 10/1954).

⁴¹⁸ FO 1016/353, From the Imam of Muslims Ghalib bin Ali To, The Representative of the British Government, Muscat, June7, 1954, In Arabic and English.

⁴¹⁹ Abdel Moneim Ghazali, *The British Aggression Against Oman and Yemen* (al-‘Udwan al-Baritani ‘ala ‘Uman wa al-Yaman) (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr, 1957), 29.

⁴²⁰ Francis Owtram, *A Modern History of the Sultanate of Oman: The Formation of the State since 1920* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 93, posits that Britain's dominance in Oman can be divided into three distinct phases: first, the

transitional phase Britain was undergoing, shifting from an empire of rule to an empire of influence.”⁴²¹

On the other hand, the Imamate faced significant internal contradictions—both objective and subjective—that weakened its foundation and made it more vulnerable. These contradictions culminated in a pivotal moment that revealed the fragility of the Imamate’s structure.

The Character of Imam Ghalib

The personality of Imam Ghalib played a crucial role in the eventual dissolution of the Imamate in the 1950s. Described as kind and gentle, Imam Ghalib’s temperament was more suited to that of a scholar than a political leader. His lack of severity and reluctance to engage in confrontations and battles stood in stark contrast to the persona of Said bin Taimur, whose decisive and authoritarian nature differed entirely. Despite the late Imam Muhammad Al-Khalili’s confidence in his successor, stating in the succession document, “I saw that Ghalib bin Ali is strong in his religion and just in his trustworthiness,” Imam Ghalib’s personal qualities—such as his

perpetuation of the Al Bu Sa‘id Sultans (late nineteenth century); second, the isolation of the Imamate in the interior (1920); and third, the occupation of the interior and overturning of the Imamate.

⁴²¹ John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830–1970* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 611. See also, in the same context, a more in-depth look at this shift and its implications for the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula regimes and Britain’s role in it: Takriti, “Colonial Coups and the War on Popular Sovereignty.”

modesty, piety, and trust in both the common people and his advisors—were insufficient to counterbalance the challenges posed by the political climate of the time.⁴²²

From the outset, Imam Ghalib sensed a lack of consensus between the two key factions supporting the Imamate: the scholars and the tribal leaders. Without the moral support of Sheikh Saleh bin Issa Al Harthi, the leader of the eastern Hanawi faction, and the personal backing of his brother Talib bin Ali al-Hinai, Ghalib may have declined the position of Imam, recognizing the precarious nature of leading the Omanis during this delicate period—a period marked by the intersecting interests of oil and political conflict. British and American oil companies were competing for control of the region's vast oil wealth, a situation that Imam Ghalib inherited from his predecessor, Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Khalili.

Imam Ghalib, despite his best efforts, struggled to preserve the Imamate, facing betrayal from tribal sheikhs whose ambitions aligned them with either Ibn Saud, representing American oil interests, or Said bin Taimur, the agent of the British Empire and its oil companies.⁴²³

The Imamate of Ghalib bin Ali can be divided into three distinct periods, each reflecting aspects of his personality and the challenges he faced:

1. The First Period (May 1954–December 1955): This period lasted twenty months, during which Imam Ghalib focused on mobilizing forces to reclaim Ibri from

⁴²² The manuscript of allegiance from the *ulama* to Imam Ghalib bin Ali al-Hinai, Center for Omani Studies, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman. Also Said Bin Hamad al-Harthi, *Dalil Al-Hiran fi ahoal Ahil Oman*, unpublished notes. 297.

⁴²³ In his unpublished memoirs, Sheikh Ahmed bin Muhammad al-Harthi portrays the state of division among Omanis during that period, delineating three distinct groups: Saudi, Sa'idi, and Imamah. If there is no virtue in Sa'idi, there is no virtue in Saudi, if there is no virtue in Ibadi, there is no virtue in Sunni, and if there is no virtue in Sa'id bin Taimur, there is no virtue in Saud bin Abdulaziz." In Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al-Harthi's Memoir, unpublished manuscript. 6.

British occupation. He also worked to secure the loyalty of his closest allies, including Sulayman bin Himyar al-Nabhani.

2. The Second Period (December 1955–June 1957): Over the course of eighteen months, Imam Ghalib abdicated the Imamate following the failure of scholars from the interior and the tribal sheikhs to provide support against the combined forces of British military power and Said bin Taimur. After the British and Sultan's forces attacked Nizwa in late 1955, Ghalib withdrew from public life and secluded himself in his home in Bilad Sayt.
3. The Third Period (June 1957–July 1959): This period marked the return of Ghalib's brother, Talib, with logistical and financial support from Saudi Arabia. During this time, Sulayman bin Himyar aligned with the Imam, leading to renewed resistance against British and Sultanate forces. However, this phase culminated in the fall of Jabal al-Akhdar, following the intervention of British Special Forces, supported by the Air Force, infantry, and advanced intelligence operations.

The Role of Scholars in the Decline of the Imamate

The challenging economic conditions of the 1930s and 1940s placed a heavy burden on the Omani population, and scholars were no exception to the widespread famine that affected the country. Scholars, who relied solely on financial support from the Imamate's treasury in exchange for holding positions such as governorships and judicial appointments, were particularly vulnerable. Throughout its history, the Ibadi Imamate regarded its scholars as essential pillars of support, deriving its religious legitimacy, cultural authority, and popular strength from their

leadership. Scholars played a crucial role from the moment of allegiance to a new Imam, through the management of state affairs, to ensuring a peaceful transfer of power following the death of an Imam.

Said bin Taimur, with his cunning ambition to expand his hegemony, recognized the strategic importance of the scholars in bolstering the strength of the Imamate. Understanding the limited financial resources and external relations of the Imamate, Said sought to attract scholars to his side by offering them judicial positions, governorships, and roles as personal religious advisors. As the sole figure controlling Oman's financial resources—including revenues from ports, customs, and airspace leased to British aviation—Said was able to offer economic incentives that the Imamate could not match. In addition, the promising prospects of oil discoveries further strengthened his influence.

Said bin Taimur strategically used these advantages to penetrate the Imamate's inner circle surrounding Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Khalili. His aim was to ensure that, when the time came for the "demise of the Imamate", scholars would either support him or remain neutral, thus preventing sedition among the general population.⁴²⁴ He openly stated to visiting scholars, who came to negotiate the withdrawal of British troops from Ibri, that he "does not recognize an Imam after Al-Khalili" and would not allow Oman to be ruled by anyone other than himself.⁴²⁵

Said successfully attracted key scholars to his side, including Sheikh Ibrahim bin Saeed Al-Abri, the former governor under Imam Muhammad al-Khalili, who relocated to Ibri, and Sheikh Malik Al-Abri, one of those who had pledged allegiance to Imam Ghalib, who was brought

⁴²⁴ Said al-Harthi, *Dalil Al-Hiran fi ahoal Ahil Oman*, 302.

⁴²⁵ Ibid. 309.

to Muscat. Meanwhile, Sheikh Khalfan bin Jameel al-Siyabi issued a fatwa in Samayil calling for the rejection of the Imam, even through armed resistance.⁴²⁶ Similarly, Sheikh Hamad bin Obaid Al Sulaimi and other scholars were also co-opted. Their rationale was that the Imam could not defeat the British forces, which had been summoned by Sultan Said bin Taimur.

The positions of these scholars during this critical phase of the conflict played a decisive role in weakening the Imamate. Their actions contributed to dividing the ranks and psychologically undermining the Imamate's resistance. Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah Al-Khalili had foreseen this division, warning on his deathbed: "I see sedition at the mouths of the alleys."⁴²⁷ This moment marked a significant turning point in the struggle, as "the matter of Oman was no longer in the hands of its scholars," according to the famous statement of Imam Salim bin Rashid Al Kharousi to the British Consul in Muscat in 1913.⁴²⁸

Tribal Sheikhs: Fragmentation and Betrayal

While Said bin Taimur effectively weakened the scholars' front, Britain focused on fragmenting the tribal sheikhs' front, exploiting the contradictions of poverty, greed, and the economic blockade imposed on the inhabitants of Oman's interior since the Seeb Agreement of 1920. The central leadership of the Imamate was also weak, further compounding the situation.⁴²⁹ After years of deprivation, the promises of the oil companies began to lure Omani tribal leaders

⁴²⁶ Ibid.334.

⁴²⁷ al-Khalili, *Al-Haqiqah (The Truth)*,114.

⁴²⁸ Imam Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi's letter to the British Consul in Muscat, 1913. National Records and Archives Authority, Muscat, Document No.: A.2.1.10.55.

⁴²⁹ Ial-Jabal al-Akhdar| Jabal al Akhdar, al Shereja village, Oman, December 16, 2023.

with the prospect of wealth, which, as one account describes, brought hypocrisy among the leaders to the surface, revealing hidden ambitions... they worked hard to align themselves with the victor over the vanquished.”⁴³⁰ Some tribal leaders, driven by hatred and envy, distanced themselves from the Imam, despite having once pledged allegiance to him. As tensions mounted, conspiracies began to hatch, creating rifts in the solid walls of the Imamate’s edifice, threatening its collapse from the very foundation.”⁴³¹

Sheikh Suleiman bin Himyar al-Nabhani, the self-proclaimed Emir of Jabal al-Akhdar, was a prominent example of the contradictions that defined this period, as he navigated between personal ambitions, imperial promises, and colonial traps designed to divide tribal allies and maintain control over the oil fields. Sheikh Suleiman’s internal conflicts can be summarized as follows:

1. Legacy and Expectations: Sheikh Suleiman saw himself as the rightful heir to the legacy of his father, Himyar bin Nasser, a prominent leader who played a crucial role in establishing the first Imamate of the 20th century under Imam Salim bin Rashid Al Kharousi (1913-1920). As such, he believed he deserved special treatment from the Imamate. Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah Al-Khalili respected this legacy, granting Suleiman significant autonomy over the revenues from Jabal al-Akhdar, a privilege that had been maintained since Himyar bin Nasser’s allegiance to the Imamate in 1913.⁴³²

⁴³⁰ al-Harhi, *Dalil Al-Hiran fi ahoal Ahil Oman*, 314.

⁴³¹ al-Khalili, *Al-Haqiqah (The Truth)*, .124

⁴³² al-Salimi, *Nahdat al-A 'yan*, 82-85 and Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*. 259-261.

2. Temptations from Said bin Taimur: From the 1930s onward, Sheikh Suleiman was drawn into Said bin Taimur's orbit, accepting various benefits, gifts, and grants that shifted his loyalties away from the Imamate and toward Said.⁴³³
3. Resentment over Imam Ghalib's Succession: Sheikh Suleiman felt marginalized when Ghalib bin Ali succeeded Imam Muhammad bin Abdullah Al-Khalili, as this shifted the balance of power away from the Ghafiri alliance, of which Suleiman was a leader, toward the rival Hanawi alliance.⁴³⁴ This transfer of the Imamate, which concentrated power and wealth in the hands of the Hanawis, frustrated Suleiman's ambitions to preserve his influence.⁴³⁵
4. Oil and Independence: As news of oil exploration spread, especially in regions inhabited predominantly by Ghafiri tribes, the British sought to cultivate secret relations with Sheikh Suleiman, offering promises of wealth. This further fueled Suleiman's aspirations for independence from the Imamate.⁴³⁶ He famously declared, "I will be independent in my region from the Green Mountain to Masirah."⁴³⁷ Colonial records document his visits to the British Political Resident in Bahrain and the American Consul in Kuwait in August 1953, as well as his earlier

⁴³³ FO 371/82166, "The succession to the Imamate of Oman," July 31, 1950. Also, Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, 284.

⁴³⁴ al-Jabal al-Akhdar! Jabal al Akhdar, al Shereja village, Oman, December 16, 2023.

⁴³⁵ For further information, please refer to the portrait al-Jabal al-Akhdar! Jabal Al Akhdar from the early 1950s, as published by Aramco in the book *Oman and the South Coast of the Persian Gulf* (Egypt Press, Cairo, 1952). The portrait can be found on pages 111-115 of the aforementioned publication.

⁴³⁶ IOR 15/6/242 Letter from Sulaiman bin Hamayar HBM, Counsel, Muscat, 7 Nov. 1944.

⁴³⁷ Telegram No. 979, August 4, 1953. Records of Oman Vol 8. 401.460.

trip to Saudi Arabia in June 1953, during which he encouraged American oil companies to explore in areas he considered under his influence, from Izki to Ibri.⁴³⁸

5. Rift with Imam Ghalib: The divide between Sheikh Suleiman and Imam Ghalib widened when the Imam began making decisions without consulting Suleiman, who saw himself as the strongest foundation stone of this solid building,” according to Sheikh Abdullah bin Ali Al-Khalili.⁴³⁹ Instead, Imam Ghalib placed his trust in his brother, Talib bin Ali, as his closest and most important advisor. Two significant incidents during the first year of Imam Ghalib’s rule illustrate the differences between him and Suleiman. The first was Sheikh Suleiman’s prominent role in facilitating the fall of Ibri into the hands of the Sultan. The second was Talib bin Ali’s travels to Egypt and the Arab League, signaling a divergence in political priorities between Ghalib and Suleiman.

In the case of Ibri, Sheikh Suleiman bin Himyar exerted his influence as the leader of the Ghafiriya alliance. When the Imam’s forces entered the nearby town of Al-Iraqi without resistance, the garrison commander, Sheikh Hafez Al Abri, sought protection and safety from Sheikh Suleiman bin Himyar. The Emir of Jabal al-Akhdar granted his request in exchange for his surrender. However, upon the surrender of the Fortress of Al Ainain, Sheikh Talib bin Ali, the Imam’s brother, ordered Sheikh Hafez to be bound and imprisoned. When Sheikh Suleiman

⁴³⁸ Muscat Telegram No.84 to Foreign Office, June 1,1953. FO 37/104296.

⁴³⁹ Abdullah al-Khalili, *all-Haqqah (The Truth)*, 116.

complained to the Imam about this breach of his word, the Imam took no action. This perceived insult deeply affected Sheikh Suleiman, as his promise had not been honored, undermining his authority and credibility.⁴⁴⁰

Sheikh Suleiman's response was swift and consequential, fundamentally altering the balance of power. Preceding the Imam's forces, he traveled to the city of Ibri, where he met with key tribal sheikhs from the Ghafiriya alliance, including Muhammad bin Abdullah Al Ya'aqoubi of the Ya'aqib tribe and Hamad bin Saif Al Kalbani of the Bani Kalban tribe. In a surprising move, motivated by revenge and a desire to fracture the Imamate's ranks, he made a striking request: while urging other sheikhs in Ibri to show loyalty and obedience to the Imam, he secretly instructed Al Ya'aqoubi and Al Kalbani to leave Ibri immediately and travel to Salalah. There, they were to deliver a message from Suleiman bin Himyar to Sultan Said bin Taimur, informing him that the conditions were ripe to seize Ibri from the Imamate. Suleiman pledged that he and the two sheikhs would aid Said's forces in entering the city without resistance.⁴⁴¹

Moreover, Suleiman promised Sultan Said bin Taimur that Nizwa, the capital of the Imamate, could be taken in the same manner—without fighting—and that he, Suleiman, would side with the Sultan against Imam Ghalib. This betrayal was decisive, leading to a split in the ranks of the Imamate.⁴⁴² It enabled Said bin Taimur and the British forces to penetrate the Omani interior with well-equipped armies and secure control over the three most important cities: Nizwa, the

⁴⁴⁰ al-Jabal al-Akhdar/ Jabal al Akhdar, al Shereja village, Oman, December 17, 2023.

⁴⁴¹ Interview No. 2. Izki, Imti village, Oman, November 26, 2023.

⁴⁴² al-Jabal al-Akhdar/ Jabal al Akhdar, al Shereja village, Oman, December 17, 2023.

capital, Ibri, and Al-Buraimi—key gateways to Oman's oil-rich interior, known as Al-Jawf by early Omanis.⁴⁴³

The second pivotal event was the unilateral decision by Imam Ghalib's brother, Talib bin Ali, to travel to Cairo after the battle of Ibri. Talib's intention was to secure financial and military support from the Arab League, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt to bolster the Imamate against Said bin Taimur and the British. However, this decision caused significant discord within the Imamate's leadership. Two key documents from this period explicitly highlight the discontent among the ranks. One document states: "He left without consulting the pillars of his state, and they did not know until after his departure, which caused resentment in their hearts."⁴⁴⁴ The leadership, which had been the decision-makers during the reign of the previous Imam, felt sidelined, perceiving that they no longer had a voice or influence.

Sheikh Abdullah bin Ali Al-Khalili captured this sentiment in his detailed account, reflecting the grievances of key figures such as Sheikh Suleiman bin Himyar and Sheikh Muhammad bin Salem Al-Ruqaishi, who felt marginalized by Talib's unilateral actions. This discord further weakened the Imamate at a critical juncture in its struggle for survival against the encroaching forces of Sultan Said bin Taimur and the British.

⁴⁴³The Dhahra region encompasses a number of cities, including Ibri, Buraimi, Yanqul, and Dhank. In ancient Omani records and orations, it is referred to as "al-Jawf," which translates to "depth." This region plays a significant role in the broader geographical context.

⁴⁴⁴Said al-Harthi, *Dalil al-Hiran fi ahoal Ahil Oman*, 306.

Internal Divisions and the Imamate's Decline

We retreated together, adhering to the principle on which the matter was built, which is good faith. We would return to the Imam repeatedly, discussing with him, reproaching him, and telling him, We heard that men went to the Arab League, and men went to seek aid from our Arab brothers... Yet he would obscure the path ahead of us and divert us from our goal, as though his inner voice was expressing something hidden in his heart that we could neither comprehend nor imagine clearly.”⁴⁴⁵

However, the documents of the Arab League clarify that the mission of Talib bin Ali, the brother of Imam Ghalib, was to submit a request for Oman to join the organization.⁴⁴⁶ The League Council approved the Political Committee's recommendation on October 8, 1954:

In the desire of the Council of the League to facilitate the means for independent Arab countries to join the League's membership, it was decided to invite representatives of the Arab member states to take a decision regarding the Imamate's joining the Arab League.⁴⁴⁷

This reveals the growing misunderstanding and differing priorities between the new Imam, his brother, and the traditional components of the Imamate—namely, the scholars and tribal leaders—during the early days of Imam Ghalib bin Ali al-Hinai's rule. Imam Ghalib appeared to

⁴⁴⁵ Abdullah al-Khalili. Ibid.117.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ League of Arab States: Memorandum of the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, Portfolio No. 520, File 140/31/ December 6, 1954.

be betting on breaking the isolation that had weakened Oman during the previous Imam's reign. His strategy was to gain strength against the colonizer, Britain, and its ally, Said bin Taimur, by aligning with the wider Arab world, particularly in light of the Arab nationalist revival spearheaded by Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser and the anti-colonial sentiments spreading after the July 23, 1952 revolution.

The Ibri incident and the subsequent reactions of Sheikh Suleiman bin Hamir Al-Nabhani created a deep wound within the ranks of the Imamate. Trust seemed to be lost, and Imam Ghalib's brother, Sheikh Talib, perhaps sensing British and Said bin Taimur's infiltration of the Imamate, advised against sharing all decisions with the scholars and tribal leaders.

The contradictions within the composition of the tribal sheikhs and the leadership of the Imamate were not only evident in the figure of Sheikh Suleiman bin Hamir of the Ghafiri alliance. These divisions were also present within the rival Hanawi alliance, particularly among the leadership of the Al-Harith tribe. Following the death of their prominent leader, Isa bin Saleh, the internal competition for leadership further weakened the Hanawi alliance, destabilizing the Imamate during the final years of Imam al-Khalili and the early period of Imam Ghalib Al-Hana'i's leadership.

Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed Isa al-Harthi, a young and ambitious leader, sought to seize control of the tribe from his uncle, Saleh bin Isa, son of the former leader. Unable to achieve this goal through traditional means, Sheikh Ahmed formed an alliance with the opponents of the Imamate—Britain and Said bin Taimur. According to Sheikh Saeed bin Hamad, a historian of this

critical moment, Sheikh Ahmed received Said bin Taimur's recognition of his leadership over the al-Harith tribe in exchange for his conspiracy to destroy the Imamate."⁴⁴⁸

The British effectively exploited the competition for leadership within the Al-Harith tribe, opening channels of communication between Ahmed and Saleh Al-Harithi. However, it soon became evident that imperial officials favored Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed, who was largely unaware of the events and meetings taking place in the Eastern Region. Colonial sources reveal that, about a year before Imam Al-Khalili's death, Sheikh Ahmed sought permission from the British Consul to entice the Imam into allowing oil companies to operate in the interior of Oman, without the knowledge of Sultan Said bin Taimur. In return, the British promised to support Ahmed's influence in controlling the Eastern Region. Nevertheless, the British were careful to extract all available information from the ambitious Sheikh Al-Harithi—especially his assessments of Suleiman bin Himyar's ambitions and movements among the tribes—without providing Sheikh Ahmed any guarantees that might jeopardize their relationship with their most important ally, Sultan Said bin Taimur.

Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al-Harithi was a staunch opponent of Imam Ghalib bin Ali Al-Hinai.⁴⁴⁹ He made significant efforts to dissuade Imam al-Khalili, near the end of his life, from appointing Sheikh Ghalib as his successor. In May 1953, he convened a meeting of the Hanawi tribes—comprising Al-Awamer, Bani Wahiba, Al-Habus, Al-Shoroj, Al-Hijriyun, Bani Rawaha,

⁴⁴⁸ Said al-Harthi, *Dalil al-Hiran fi ahoal Ahil Oman*, 301.

⁴⁴⁹ Muscat Telegram No.84 to Foreign Office, June 1,1953. FO 37/104296 .

Bani Hassan, and others—in the city of Sanaw, in the Eastern Province. According to his unpublished memoirs, Sheikh Ahmed declared:

We gathered you when we saw the dispersion among the people of Oman. First, to support Imam Al-Khalili as long as he is alive, and not to pledge allegiance to any imam after him, for our imam and leader will be Sultan Said bin Taimur.⁴⁵⁰

Meanwhile, Sheikh Saleh bin Issa Al-Harithi, whom Imam Al-Khalili held in high regard due to his family's significant role in Omani history—his father being a key figure in the Seeb Agreement of 1920, and his grandfather, a supporter of the Imamate of Azzan bin Qais (1869-1871)⁴⁵¹—was also in contact with the British. He sought to compete with his nephew Ahmed bin Mohammed Al-Harithi for leadership of the Al-Harith tribe and the Hanawi alliance. In March 1953, Sheikh Saleh visited the British Political Resident in Bahrain, Brocas Burrows, and assured him that “Sultan Said is responsible for Oman abroad, while the Imam is concerned with the internal affairs of the Omanis.” He further requested that Sultan Said bin Taimur grant him absolute authority in domestic matters, whether the Imam was alive or not.⁴⁵²

Britain masterfully maximized its gains by exploiting the ambitions of these “leaders” who sought greater social power and personal wealth. Through a delicate balancing act of open promises and flattery, British officials, alongside oil company representatives, skillfully

⁴⁵⁰ Ahmed Al-Harithi, *Dalil al-Hiran fi ahoal Ahil Oman*, 6.

⁴⁵¹ More details about Amir al-Sharqiya Sheikh Salih bin Isa and his status among his people from the perspective of Aramco in the early 1950s in Oman and the southern coast of the Persian Gulf: 10.

⁴⁵² Muhammad Abdullah al-Harithi, *Mawsu'at 'Uman: al-Watha'iq al-Sirriyya* [Encyclopedia of Oman: Secret Documents], vol. 3 (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wahda al-'Arabiyya, 2007), 263-267.

maneuvered between the various tribal factions, ensuring that each leader believed in their own importance. Simultaneously, Sultan Said bin Taimur deepened the divisions among the scholars—who desired stability and a peaceful life—by providing them with minimal jobs and gifts, while subtly suggesting that their future lay with the empire, not with its opponents. The British Empire, with its economic, military, and intellectual superiority, presented itself as the inevitable force with which to align.

In sum, these internal contradictions—both subjective and objective—plagued the Imamate before any direct military confrontation with the Anglo-Sultanate forces. The ambitions of Sultan Said bin Taimur to consolidate control over all Omani territories, both coastal and inland, combined with the imperial drive to monopolize Oman's oil resources, suffocated the state and its people. The population, already weakened by decades of hunger, drought, and disease (1920-1954), found themselves without the support of two of the Imamate's most vital pillars: the scholars (the people of solution and contract) and the tribal leaders. This rift between the two historical alliances—the Ghafiriya and the Hanawiya—further fractured the unity of the Imamate.

However, despite these challenges, the Omani spirit of resistance did not falter. In the second half of the 1950s (1955-1960), the people of Oman fought with all their might to resist the empire and its expanding ambitions.

The Fall of Nizwa: The Beginning of the End

Following the British forces' capture of Ibri, Imam Ghalib sent Sheikh Saleh bin Issa al-Harthi as an envoy to Sultan Said bin Taimur, who was in Dhofar at the time. The Imam's request

was clear and direct: to order the withdrawal of the forces attacking Omani sovereignty, in accordance with the Seeb Agreement that had maintained the status quo for over four decades. However, Sultan Said bin Taimur's response to al-Harthi was equally clear and uncompromising, as reported by an eyewitness to the meeting: "We do not recognize an Imam after Al-Khalili, and if you wish to cause discord among us, we do not care about you."⁴⁵³ After Ibri, the focus shifted to the historical capital of the Imamate, Nizwa. Preparations were underway to dismantle the Imamate from both within and without.

Internal Betrayal. Sheikh Suleiman bin Himyar al-Nabhani, the Emir of Jabal al-Akhdar, played a pivotal role in undermining the Imamate from within. His cooperation with Sultan Said bin Taimur and his incitement of the Ghafiriya tribes against the Imam in Ibri, Rustaq, and Wadi Bani Ghafir significantly weakened the Imamate. Before the occupation of Nizwa, Ibn Himyar visited the Sultan in Muscat on July 13, 1955—five months prior to Said bin Taimur's entry into Nizwa. According to the testimony of the sheikhs of al-Jabal al-Akhdar, Sheikh Suleiman extended an invitation to the Sultan to visit al-Jabal al-Akhdar, a move that signaled either supreme self-confidence or a complete disregard for the covenants and agreements he had previously made with the Imam.⁴⁵⁴ This invitation marked the inauguration of his new alliance with the Sultan, signaling his departure from his "close" alliance with the Imam at a critical moment, following the fall of Ibri and the occupation of Buraimi by British forces.

⁴⁵³ Said al-Harthi, *Dalil al-Hiran fi ahoal Ahil Oman*, 309.

⁴⁵⁴ al-Jabal al-Akhdar, al Shereja village, Oman, December 17, 2023. Also see, Ali bin Mohammed al-Riyami, *The Green Mountain War 1957-1959*, 43.

Sheikh Suleiman's actions in recent years had already confirmed his decision to abandon the Imamate's cause. His tours of the Gulf, meetings with the British Political Resident in Bahrain and the American Consul in Riyadh, correspondence with the British Political Consul in Muscat, and his meeting with Wilfred Thesiger in Al-Maamour—despite the Imam's prohibition of such meetings—demonstrated his willingness to negotiate with British and American officials for his personal share of oil revenues.⁴⁵⁵ His duplicity was further evidenced by his role in dividing the tribes in Ibri, paving the way for British forces to seize control. He even convinced Sheikh Saleh bin Issa Al-Harithi of the futility of establishing a regular army for the Imamate, further weakening its defenses.

During this critical period, most of those surrounding Imam Ghalib were described as waiting, anticipating events, rushing to the Sultan, taking advantage of the situation for personal gain, deceiving and betraying—except for a few loyal individuals.”⁴⁵⁶ This betrayal from within marked the beginning of the Imamate's end, making it easier for Said bin Taimur and the British to tighten their grip on Oman's interior.⁴⁵⁷

External Pressures. From the outside, Britain intensified its control over the Imamate. After securing Ibri, and toward the end of 1954, the British made significant changes to the Muscat and Oman Field Force (MOFF). Colonel Bill Cheeseman replaced Coriat as commander, and the

⁴⁵⁵ *Oman and the South Coast of the Persian Gulf*, Aramco (Egypt Press, Cairo, 1952), 111-115.

⁴⁵⁶ Muhammad Abdullah al-Harithi. *Mawsu'at 'Uman: al-Watha'iq al-Sirriyya* [Encyclopedia of Oman: Secret Documents], vol. 4, 518.

⁴⁵⁷ Said Al-Harithi. *Dalil al-Hiran fi ahoal Ahil Oman*,. 310.

force was reinforced with three British officers, including an armor specialist. The force, now comprising over 400 officers, was placed under the direct command of Lieutenant Colonel Cheeseman, alongside Major Haugh, Major O'Kelly, and Captains Barron and Anderson.⁴⁵⁸

The Imperial Defense Committee in the Persian Gulf also approved a proposal to provide enhanced financial and logistical support to Sultan Said bin Taimur. This decision was strategically aimed at ensuring that Said bin Taimur did not align with American oil companies, as he was already executing British plans to dominate the cities of the Imamate. The total cost of this expansion—including equipment, supplies, transportation, and wages—was estimated at £248,700 for the first year, followed by £105,700 annually thereafter.⁴⁵⁹

In January 1955, the Political Agent in Muscat and British Consul General, Leslie Chauncey, visited the British forces stationed in Duqm, Fahud, and Ibri to assess their readiness for the next phase of operations. Meanwhile, Sultan Said bin Taimur visited Iraq and, on his return, stopped in Bahrain to hold meetings with British officials at the Political Residency. The two parties agreed to resolve the issue of the Imamate swiftly, to prevent American companies, through their association with Ibn Saud, from establishing any relations with the Imamate or with tribal leaders loyal to the Imam in the interior of Oman.⁴⁶⁰

Around the same time, a shipment of weapons, sent from Egypt via Saudi Arabia, arrived on the coast of Seeb—about 20 miles north of Muscat—in June 1955. This shipment was likely the result of Talib bin Ali's diplomatic efforts in Egypt. The Egyptian leadership, convinced that Sultan Said was under colonial control, saw this as an opportunity to support the Omanis in their

⁴⁵⁸Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, 85.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ FO 371 -114 578, Letter from the Residency in Bahrein to the Foreign Office, April 5, 1955.

resistance against the Sultan.⁴⁶¹ The shipment, consisting of 1,000 rifles and approximately 1,000 boxes of ammunition, was received by the sons of Sheikh Khalfan bin Mohammed Al-Haddabi on behalf of Sheikh Talib bin Ali, the brother of Imam Ghalib. The arms were taken to the village of Al-Khoudh, but British and Sultanate intelligence soon learned of the shipment. Tensions escalated between the Wali of Said bin Taimur in al-Khoudh and the representative of the Imam, scholar Muhammad bin Salim al-Ruqaishi. Sheikh Hilal bin Ali al-Khalili mediated the dispute by splitting the shipment, with 400 rifles handed over to the Wali of Said bin Taimur by Sheikh Mubarak bin Omair, bringing a temporary resolution to the issue.⁴⁶²

In July 1955, approximately 50 men in the MOFF went on strike⁴⁶³, protesting against broken supply contracts, reduced rations, and delayed loan payments for British officers.⁴⁶⁴ The strike, which affected the detachments in Fahud and Ibri, was quickly contained by rotating personnel and officers. Several British companies, based in London, held contracts to supply British forces in the Gulf. Among them was Charles Kendall's company, which had secured a monopoly on all purchases made by the Omani government under Sultan Said bin Taimur. The contract stipulated that all goods were to be imported from Britain, with a profit margin of five percent on all purchases.⁴⁶⁵

The unprecedented strike among British forces stationed in Oman was not merely a result of logistical issues such as broken supply contracts or reduced rations. Brigadier Baird, the military advisor to the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf (PRPG) in Bahrain,⁴⁶⁶ had to visit the strike

⁴⁶¹ Said al-Harthi..*Dalil al-Hiran fi ahwal Ahil Oman*., 311.

⁴⁶² Ibid.310.

⁴⁶³ MOFF: Muscat and Oman Field Force (later Oman Regiment).

⁴⁶⁴ Peterson, 2007. 88.

⁴⁶⁵ Faisal bin Ali, *Sultan and colonization* (Dar Al-Kitab Al-Arabi Press, Egypt. No year of publication), 42-45.

⁴⁶⁶ PRPG: Political Resident in the Persian Gulf (British).

sites in Ibri and Fahud to address the root cause: the low morale of the troops. The primary issue was the lack of a unifying purpose or noble cause. Most of the troops were from Baluchistan, and some had previously served in the Imperial Army in Sudan and Aden. These soldiers, under the command of British officers who lacked quality leadership, were driven primarily by mercenary motivations. The strikers were acutely aware of the disparity between their earnings and those of their British counterparts working in the oil fields they were guarding. Compounding their frustration was their isolation from the local society, an inability to communicate in Arabic, fear of the local Bedouin population, and the extreme heat of the region.

Although the oil company proposed increasing payments to the troops by 10,000 rupees, Sultan Said bin Taimur rejected the offer to avoid appearing to capitulate to the demands of the strikers. Instead, the Sultan ordered Colonel Waterfield, his British commander, to transfer the striking troops to northern border posts to prevent them from influencing the rest of the forces.⁴⁶⁷

The deeper question remains: how could such a disorganized and poorly motivated force—comprising no more than 500 men with no unifying doctrine, cohesion, or significant military capabilities—have succeeded in occupying Nizwa, the capital of the Omani Imamate, within just four months? The answer lies not in the strength of this force but in the severe internal disintegration and weakness that plagued the Imamate at that time.

By late October, the Trucial Oman Levies (later known as the Trucial Oman Scouts) had taken control of Buraimi. The weak Saudi garrison had fled, relying on tribal divisions and bribes paid by Saudi Arabia to some of the sheikhs in the disputed Buraimi oases. These oases had long been contested by American and British oil companies. With the resolution of this northern frontier crisis, Sultan Said bin Taimur's focus shifted toward seizing Nizwa. The MOFF forces roamed the

⁴⁶⁷ Peterson, *Oman 's Insurgencies*,. 88.

cities, villages, and deserts of interior Oman—Ibri, Buraimi, Fahud, and others—without encountering significant resistance. News of their movements spread terror among the common people, while the tribal leaders, as previously discussed, rushed to pledge their loyalty to Sultan Said bin Taimur. The plan to occupy Nizwa was straightforward: two squadrons of the MOFF, consisting of about 300 men, equipped with four 3-inch mortars and supported by an artillery detachment of four guns, were to divide eastern Oman from Nizwa by deploying two platoons to Sinaw. The remaining forces continued preparations at Ibri and Awayfi. A week later, the two detachments were to converge at Adam and then advance on Nizwa to capture the town.⁴⁶⁸

When these forces reached Adam, the Imam's judge and governor, Sheikh al-Mahrouqi, notified Imam Ghalib of their movements. As the army encamped on the outskirts of Nizwa, the Imam summoned the tribal leaders who were still present with him: Suleiman bin Himyar Al-Nabhani, Abdullah bin Ali Al-Khalili, and Abdullah bin Saeed Al-Siyabi.⁴⁶⁹ He asked for their support, requesting that Sheikh al-Himyari mobilize his people for us, and al-Khalili rally the people of lower Nizwa.”⁴⁷⁰ However, these leaders left without returning with any answer.⁴⁷¹ As Abdullah bin Ali al-Khalili later recounted in his memoirs: “We no longer felt obliged to obey the Imam, and we were the first to extend our hand to the Sultan.”⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁸Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, 92.

⁴⁶⁹ Said Al-Harthi. *Dalīl al-Hayrān fī ahwāl 'ahli 'Uman*. 319.

⁴⁷⁰ Abdullah bin Ali al-Khalili. *The Truth*. 127.

⁴⁷¹ Sheikh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Harthi notes in his memoirs that Sheikh ‘Abdallah al-Siyabi was an ally of both him and Sultan Sa‘ud: “As for Sheikh ‘Abdallah bin Sa‘id al-Siyabi, we are in complete agreement with him from the outset. See Ahmad bin Muhammad al-harthi, *Mudhakkirat al-Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-harithi* (The Memoirs of Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Harthi). 28.

⁴⁷² Abdullah bin Ali al-Khalili. *The Truth*. Ibid. 127.

On the night of December 14, 1955, realizing that he had been abandoned, Imam Ghalib fled Nizwa in disguise, riding a camel to his village of Bilad Sayt. He sent a famous letter to his brother Talib bin Ali, the governor of Rustaq, and to Sheikh Saeed bin Hamad Al-Harthi. The letter read:

From Ghalib bin Ali (he did not refer to himself as the Imam of the Muslims). May the peace, mercy, and blessings of God be upon you. The Christians—may God disgrace them—have descended with their enormous forces and armored vehicles into the town of Farq. I had with me the sheikhs: Suleiman bin Himyar, Abdullah bin Ali Al-Khalili, and Abdullah bin Saeed Al-Siyabi. I sought their help, but they did not assist me. I presented my case to them, but they abandoned me. The army in the fortress left, and I remained alone. I held fast to one of the sayings of the Muslims and withdrew from the Imamate. I have left. Take care of yourselves. Peace.⁴⁷³

On December 15, 1955, a brief statement was issued from Muscat declaring, *the Sultan's forces entered Nizwa without resistance.*⁴⁷⁴ The following day, Sheikh Mohammed bin Ahmed Al-Harthi, appointed by Sultan Said bin Taimur as Wali of Nizwa, arrived in the city. This appointment served as a reward for Sheikh Al-Harthi's significant role in undermining the Hanawi alliance, especially the eastern Hanawi tribes, through the use of money and promises.⁴⁷⁵

Meanwhile, on the western flank of Jabal Al-Akhdar, Sheikh Talib bin Ali, the Imam's brother, fiercely resisted the British forces known as the Batinah Force. This force had advanced

⁴⁷³ Said Al-Harthi. *Dalil al-Hiran fi ahoal Ahil Oman*. 320.

⁴⁷⁴ Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*. 93.

⁴⁷⁵ *Mudhakkirat al-Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-harithi* (The Memoirs of Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Harthi). 23.

from Sohar under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Colin Maxwell, supported by tribal fighters from the Bani Ghafir tribe.⁴⁷⁶ Reinforcements soon arrived from Muscat, led by Sayyid Tariq bin Taimur, half-brother of Sultan Said, and the combined forces laid siege to Rustaq for four days. Six men from Talib's army were killed and eight were wounded, while the Sultan's forces suffered no losses due to the clear disparity in weaponry.

With the fall of Rustaq and the Imam's departure from Nizwa, the governors and judges of the Imamate began to resign and shift their support to Sultan Said bin Taimur.⁴⁷⁷ Seeing the weakening of the Imamate's front, Sheikh Talib realized that it would be wise to leave Oman and continue the work he had begun a year earlier—mobilizing Arab public opinion and securing support from revolutionary Arab leaders who shared his deep resentment of British colonialism. The colonial presence in Oman, increasingly tied to the interests of oil companies, was growing more aggressive.

As for Sheikh Saleh bin Issa Al-Harthi, he was on his way back to Al Qabil from his farm in the Al Dhahir area when he received news of the occupation of Nizwa. He witnessed British planes dropping leaflets over the city of Al Qabil, informing his rival and nephew, Ahmed bin Mohammed Al-Harthi, of the developments.⁴⁷⁸ Sheikh Ahmed had agreed with Sultan Said bin Taimur to use this tactic of leaflet drops to spread fear among the people of the eastern region, discouraging any resistance or support for their brothers in Nizwa.⁴⁷⁹ The British planes, a symbol of imperial power, made resistance seem futile.

⁴⁷⁶Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*. 93.

⁴⁷⁷Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ *Mudhakkirat al-Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-harithi* (The Memoirs of Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Harthi). 27.

⁴⁷⁹ Said Al-Harthi. *Dalil al-Hiran fi ahoal Ahil Oman*. 321.

Following this, and after some hesitation between leaving Oman or attempting one last mediation with Sultan Said, Sheikh Saleh decided to approach the Sultan in Dhofar. He sought assistance from Sheikh Saleh bin Nasser Al-Hashar, a prominent dignitary from the city of Sur, to reach Salalah quickly.⁴⁸⁰ Sheikh Al-Hashar owned a wooden ship, *Voice of the Arabs*, named after the famous Egyptian radio station that broadcast the speeches of President Gamal Abdel Nasser, which were avidly listened to by Omanis.⁴⁸¹ However, upon arriving in Salalah, Sheikh Saleh was met with orders from Sultan Said bin Taimur: *If Saleh bin Issa is at sea, do not let him land, and if he is on land, expel him.*⁴⁸² This directive clearly signaled the Sultan's intent to exile the Sheikh. Some speculate that this telegram was sent by the British military commander without the Sultan's knowledge, intending to widen the rift between the Sultan and Sheikh Saleh.⁴⁸³ Sheikh Saleh left Oman on the same ship and headed to Saudi Arabia, where he found that Sheikh Talib, the Imam's brother, had arrived just days earlier.

With the occupation of Nizwa, Sultan Said bin Taimur had finally achieved one of his most important goals: establishing himself as the sole ruler of all Omani lands. He had failed to convince the Omanis of the interior to elect him according to the principles and traditions of the Imamate, and thus had to resort to force, expelling, exiling, and neutralizing all the key figures of the

⁴⁸⁰ Sheikh Salih bin Nasser bin Ali al-Hashar Al-Araimi is one of the most prominent figures in the Jebel in Sur. From an early age, he espoused progressive positions against British colonialism. Subsequently, he became involved in the establishment of the most important revolutionary movements in the East of Oman, namely the National Democratic Front. Sentenced to death in 1973, the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment after a period of time. He was released from prison in the mid-1980s and died immediately thereafter in 1988.

⁴⁸¹ Interview with a crew member of the ship, Sur City, Oman, 20 July 2021.

⁴⁸² An unpublished interview of Ahmad bin Abdullah Al-Falahi with Sheikh Sulaiman bin Hamad bin Sulaiman Al Harthi, personal assistant and close confidant of Sheikh Salih bin Issa for most of his tours. The researcher obtained an exclusive copy of it with the farmer's permission. We will refer later as Al-Falahi's interview with al-Harthi SH for al-Harthi Salih bin Isa. Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

Imamate with the generous backing of the British Empire. This support was not freely given; it aligned with Britain's imperial interests in monopolizing the promising oil reserves of Oman's interior.

Sultan Said bin Taimur was deeply fixated on the Imamate, to the point of obsession. Upon entering Nizwa on December 24, 1955, he made a point of wearing a white turban, imitating the traditional turban worn by Omani Imams and scholars. The historian of his journey notes this moment, linking it to his ancestor, Imam Ahmed bin Said Al-Busaidi, presenting it as a restoration of family glory. However, no mention is made of the stark difference in legitimacy between the two figures: Imam Ahmed bin Said was elected by the will of the Omani people, while Sultan Said bin Taimur imposed himself by force, supported by an external colonial power.

In a grand announcement, it was declared:

Sultan Said bin Taimur bin Feisal bin Turki,..., eighth Sultan of Muscat and Oman since the establishment of the Al Bu Said dynasty by the great Said bin Sultan bin Ahmed el Imam some two hundred years ago, and the eleventh successive Ruler of Oman from the Al Bu Said family, arrived in Nizwa on 9 Jomada el Ula 1375 and 24 December 1955 to receive the homage of his loyal subjects and the submission of those who had conspired against him.⁴⁸⁴

Eager to assume the role of Imam, Sultan Said bin Taimur followed the traditions of previous Omani Imams when they were pledged allegiance. He addressed the people of Nizwa in

⁴⁸⁴Morris, *Sultan in Oman*, 194.

a sermon that echoed the values of the Imamate, stating that *he loves justice, defends Oman, and ensures that scholars are the ones who give orders and prohibitions. His path is the path of Imam Al-Khalili.*” This speech was intended to affirm his legitimacy as both Sultan and, in his mind, as a successor to the Imamate.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of Said bin Taimur’s obsession with the Imamate is found in the memoirs of his co-conspirator in the overthrow of the Imamate, Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed Al-Harthi.⁴⁸⁵ During their discussion of the plan to seize Nizwa, Said reportedly confided: *I had a vision last night. I saw Sheikh Ghalib bin Ali come to me and hand me the sword of the Imamate. He said to me: I have not obtained anything from this state except this sword, and now I place it in your hands. So I took it from him.*”⁴⁸⁶

On the Eve of Revolution and the Emergence of the Omani Liberation Army

The story of the Imamate did not end with Imam Ghalib’s seclusion in his home, nor with the departure of two key figures of his regime—his brother Sheikh Talib and the leader of the Hanawi alliance, Sheikh Saleh bin Issa Al-Harthi—to Dammam in Saudi Arabia. On the contrary, this marked the beginning of a new chapter: the preparation for a popular revolution against British colonialism in Oman and the challenge to Sultan Said bin Taimur’s rule over the country.

⁴⁸⁵ Said Al-Harthi. *Dalil al-Hiran fi ahoal Ahil Oman*. 322.

⁴⁸⁶ Ahmed Bin Mohammed Al-Harthi. *Ibid.* 24-25.

The Omani people's commitment to national independence remained steadfast, deeply embedded in the political consciousness of many religious, political, and tribal leaders. This commitment had been nurtured over a continuous revolutionary culture spanning at least a century, dating back to the revolution of Imam Azzan (1869–1871).⁴⁸⁷ As one Omani leader recalled: The occupation of Nizwa by British forces ignited in our hearts the fires of revolution and revenge against the British, who desecrated our land for the first time. Our ancestors, with their limited resources, resisted the Portuguese colonizers and never allowed them to enter Oman. How could we allow this now?"⁴⁸⁸ Karl Marx's reflection on historical moments sheds light on this pivotal period in Omani history:

[People] make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language."⁴⁸⁹

The general populace felt a profound sense of betrayal, recognizing how Imam Ghalib had been abandoned by the two main pillars of the Imamate: the scholars and the tribal leaders. As

⁴⁸⁷ Hussein Ghubash,, *Oman - The Islamic Democratic Tradition*, (London: Rutledge, 2006) 198.

⁴⁸⁸ al-Jabal al-Akhdar/ Jabal al Akhdar, Wadi bani Habib village, Oman, December 17, 2023.

⁴⁸⁹ Karl Marx, " The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," MECW, 11, 1979),103-4.

Walter Benjamin famously noted: Even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins, and this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.”⁴⁹⁰ Defeat, however, became the catalyst for revival. At this moment, a new component of the resistance emerged—the Omani youth, especially those living abroad. The cities of the Arabian Gulf, including Kuwait, Bahrain, and Dubai, and Arab capitals like Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, and Cairo, became meeting points for Omani youth who had emigrated for education and work. These young Omanis encountered the ideas of national liberation and anti-colonial revolution that were spreading among both the intellectual elite and the broader Arab youth.

The Palestinian cause, particularly the revolution beginning in the 1930s and the 1948 Nakba, served as a major influence, solidifying a revolutionary consciousness against colonialism, particularly British colonialism, which was responsible for facilitating the Zionist project in Palestine and the imperialist dominance over the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula.

Despite the efforts of Sultan Said bin Taimur and the British to suppress the rise of anti-colonial sentiment, including securing additional British support in 1951⁴⁹¹, Omani citizens both at home and abroad remained closely connected to the most significant Arab revolutions of the time—in Palestine, and later in Egypt, Algeria, and other Arab countries.⁴⁹² The success of Egypt's July 23, 1952, revolution, which expelled the British from Egypt, and the outbreak of the Algerian

⁴⁹⁰ Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History" in: <https://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/CONCEPT2.html>

⁴⁹¹ "The British government resolved to establish a wireless broadcasting station in Muscat with the objective of neutralizing the influence of propaganda in the Arab countries." Youth Newspaper, Issue 119, Year 2, Cairo, October 19, 1938), 3.

⁴⁹² Further details on the 1951 agreement between Said bin Taimur and the British, as well as an analysis of its differences from the 1939 treaty, can be found in the following colonial documents :

IOR 15/6/389, Treaty with Sultan of Muscat, 1951.

IOR 15/6/261, Muscat Treaty Negotiation, September 1951.

IOR 15/6/262, Letter from FO To PA 1951.

Revolution in November 1954, along with the broader Bandung movement supporting the right of peoples to self-determination, inspired Omani youth.⁴⁹³ These global developments kindled hope for change and rejuvenation, awakening Omanis from decades of isolation and colonial domination.

Against the backdrop of British colonial disasters in Aden, Iraq, Palestine, and Egypt, the ideas and dreams broadcast by Gamal Abdel Nasser through various media outlets and intellectual platforms further stirred the resolve of Arab youth, particularly Omanis, to resist colonialism and its local collaborators. Nasser's message encouraged them not to succumb to the propaganda of imperial invincibility or the global reach of its interconnected imperial networks.⁴⁹⁴

Sheikh Talib bin Ali Al-Hinai, brother of Imam Ghalib, seized upon the supportive geopolitical environment, continuing the mobilization and advocacy efforts he had begun during his initial visits to Riyadh and Cairo in 1954. The British military intervention in Nizwa, which had provided the political and legal justification for revolutionary regimes—such as Egypt's—to intervene, further legitimized his cause.

Despite the uncertainty surrounding Imam Ghalib's fate, particularly with discussions about whether to eliminate him to extinguish the Imamate once and for all, he chose to remain in Bilad Sayt. Some argued for his assassination to ensure the final eradication of the Imamate, while others cautioned against such a move, fearing it would fuel further resistance. As one Jabal Al-Akhdar resident remarked, He did not want to leave Oman and leave the Omanis under the

⁴⁹³'Omanis donate to Palestine and its revolution' *Al-Shabab Newspaper*, Issue 128, Year 2, Cairo, December 28, 1938, 5. Also: Rosemarie Said Zahlan, 'The Gulf States and the Palestine Problem, 1936-48,' *Arab Studies Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Winter 1981), 15.

⁴⁹⁴For further analysis of the influence of Nasser's ideas on Arab youth, see: Tsourapas, Gerasimos, 'Nasser's Educators and Agitators across *al-Watan al-'Arabi*: Tracing the Foreign Policy Importance of Egyptian Regional Migration, 1952-1967', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 43, 3 (2016): 324-41.

humiliation of colonialism. The Omanis pledged allegiance to him for such times, not for times of peace.”⁴⁹⁵

In contrast, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Said had a more decisive opinion. He advised British colonial authorities to arrest or eliminate Imam Ghalib to prevent the emergence of a resistance similar to that led by the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, or the former Iraqi Prime Minister, Rashid Ali al-Kilani:

He hoped that Muscat would arrest the Imam, and that we should then be finished with him. I took this to mean that he fears if the Imam is allowed to make good his escape to Saudi Arabia, he will be a continual thorn in our flesh, just like Rashid Ali and the Mufti of Jerusalem in the past.”⁴⁹⁶

Sultan Said bin Taimur's ally in the overthrow of the Imamate, Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed Al-Harthi, preferred a different approach, hoping that Ghalib would come to the Sultan, meet him, and accept the position of Mufti of the Sultanate.”⁴⁹⁷ Ultimately, however, Sultan Said agreed to a compromise, mediated by Sheikh Zahir bin Ghusn Al-Hinai. This agreement allowed Imam Ghalib to remain in his home in Bilad Sayt under strict security and surveillance,⁴⁹⁸ following the advice of British Armed Forces Commander Pat Waterfield, who opposed Ghalib's assassination, fearing the international repercussions on Britain's reputation at that sensitive moment in history.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁵ al-Jabal al-Akhdar Jabal al Akhdar, Wadi bni Habib village, Oman, December 17, 2023.

⁴⁹⁶ FO 371 -114 585, Secret telegram from Baghdad to Foreign Office, December 16, 1955.

⁴⁹⁷ *Mudhakkirat al-Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-harithi*. Ibid. 32-33.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Al-Riyami, 2018. 56.

Shortly after, Sheikh Saleh bin Issa and Sheikh Talib bin Ali met with King Saud bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who promised his support for their resistance efforts.⁵⁰⁰ The priority was military assistance, and the two sheikhs successfully rallied 700 young Omanis working in the oilfields of Al-Ahsa, Dammam, and Kuwait. These young recruits formed the nucleus of the Omani Liberation Army.”⁵⁰¹

The initial training camp for the Omani Liberation Army was located between Dammam and Al-Khobar in Saudi Arabia, in collaboration with Sheikh Talib bin Ali. This location ensured proximity to both leadership and Oman, facilitating their eventual return. However, Saudi leadership later decided to relocate the camp to military facilities in Taif, providing financial support, supplies, and modest allowances to the recruits. Training continued for several months, and the army's numbers grew to around 400 to 500 men. After completing their training, the recruits were armed with available weapons and divided into three groups. The first group, led by Abdullah bin Suleim Al-Ghaithi, joined Ibrahim bin Issa Al-Harithi's uprising in the Eastern Province. The second group, led by Sheikh Talib bin Ali, accompanied him on his return to Oman. The third group, under the command of Sheikh Salem bin Abdullah Al-Harithi, joined the Jabal Al-Akhdar revolution. Subsequent groups followed, continuing to bolster the resistance.⁵⁰²

In parallel with military efforts, the Omani Imamate established a political and diplomatic strategy by opening representative offices in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, and Cairo, Egypt. These

⁵⁰⁰Al-Falahi's interview with al-Harithi SH for al-Harithi Salih bin Isa. Ibid.

⁵⁰¹There is a discrepancy between the various accounts of the number of members of the Omani Liberation Army. Said bin Hamad al-Harithi asserts that there were 700 fighters, whereas Muhammad bin Hamad al-Harithi suggests a figure of between 500-400. See: Said Al-Harithi. *Dalil al-Hiran fi ahoal Ahil Oman*. 323.

⁵⁰²Al-Falahi's interview with al-Harithi SH for al-Harithi Salih bin Isa. Ibid.

offices focused on three primary objectives: First, they facilitated the issuance of passports to Omani citizens, helping them leave the isolated territories of Oman in search of job opportunities across Arab capitals, especially given the increasing difficulties in obtaining passports from the government of Sultan Said bin Taimur. The second objective was the recruitment of Omani youth to join the Omani Liberation Army, verifying their commitment to participating in the armed struggle. Finally, the third mission of the Imamate offices was to raise awareness about the Omani cause through educational and media initiatives, directed at both Arab and global audiences.

Responsibility for these activities was divided between Sheikh Talib bin Ali Al-Hinai, who managed military and army affairs, and Sheikh Saleh bin Issa Al-Harhi, who handled diplomatic, political, and foreign relations.

The Imamate of Oman issued its first publication from Cairo in 1956. This was a booklet containing a statement signed by Saleh bin Issa Al-Harhi, addressed to the "Free Omanis," urging them to resist colonialism. In this statement, Al-Harhi outlined the predatory nature of colonialism:

Do you know what its [colonialism s] goals are? Above all else, to drain your precious resources until you are left as a wasteland, humiliated and without pride. You will be ruled by an inferior person whose only concern is to enslave you, insult your dignity, defile your honor, and eliminate your independence.’’⁵⁰³

⁵⁰³Oman. *Manshurat Maktab Imamat 'Uman* [Oman Imamate Office Publications]. No. 8. Egypt: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi Press, 1956.

The publications from the Imamate's offices focused on two major goals. The first was to instill enthusiasm and a sense of duty in Omani youth, encouraging them to join the resistance against the colonizer and participate in the revolution:

Are you content to be governed by a colonial partner, sharing control over your country and its resources? Are you content to be deprived of the treasures of your land, carried away to London's coffers and those who serve its interests?"⁵⁰⁴

The second goal was to raise awareness about the Omani struggle, connecting it with other national liberation movements fighting colonialism across the region:

Our Arab brothers in their various countries are still ignorant of many facts about the internal situation in Oman, and about the conditions of its people and their serious problems. It is a painful fact that British colonialism succeeded in amputating this part of the Arab homeland, completely isolating it from the rest of our Arab peoples who are today awash with liberation movements, national leaps and social victories. We have no doubt that the isolation of Oman by colonialism was not in the interest of its people at all."⁵⁰⁵

The Imamate's outreach efforts, inspired by the spirit of Bandung, sought to mobilize Arab and international support to revive the revolution within Oman. Both Talib bin Ali Al-Hinai and Saleh bin Issa Al-Harhi issued statements underscoring the importance of this global and regional solidarity.

⁵⁰⁴Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵Ibid.8.

The year 1956 was pivotal not only for the Omani resistance but for the wider Arab region. The National Liberation Army of Algeria escalated its struggle against French colonialism, moving from the countryside to Algiers, which significantly boosted the morale of Arab revolutionaries. One member of the Omani resistance recalled:

When we heard news of the Battle of Algiers, we were training in Saudi Arabia. We said to one another, We are no less than our Algerian brothers. Look at their sacrifices for their country. This gave us hope and strengthened our belief that victory was near.”⁵⁰⁶

In June 1955, Egypt's Revolutionary Command Council made the decision to respond to the call for assistance from the Imam of Oman, reflecting the increasing pan-Arab support for the Omani struggle.⁵⁰⁷ The decision to provide Egyptian support to the Omani revolution was influenced by the efforts of Lieutenant Colonel Ali Khashaba, the Egyptian military attaché in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. In coordination with Talib bin Ali Al-Hinai, Khashaba managed to clandestinely travel from the port of Muttrah near Muscat into Oman's interior in the spring of 1955, disguised as an Omani. This journey, which he referred to as "the journey of suffering" due to contracting malaria, brought him to Nizwa, where he met with Imam Ghalib. During this meeting, Khashaba personally observed the geographical, social, and economic challenges faced by the Imam. According to Khashaba, Imam Ghalib bin Ali and his associates expressed their complete reliance on Egypt's support for their cause, placing great hope in the provision of

⁵⁰⁶ Interview with a fighter from the Omani Liberation Army. al-Jabal al-Akhdar/ Jabal al Akhdar, al Shereja village, Oman, December 16 , 2023.

⁵⁰⁷ Fathi al-Deeb, *Abdel Nasser wa Tahrir al-Mashriq al-'Arabi: Shahadat Fathi al-Deeb* (Cairo: Markaz al-Dirasat al-Istratijiyya wal-Siyasiyya bil-Ahram, 2000), 223.

weapons and equipment. Their confidence in President Gamal Abdel Nasser was profound, as they believed he would not abandon them in their time of need.”⁵⁰⁸ His report also emphasized the absolute dominance of British colonial power over Oman's ports and coastal cities.⁵⁰⁹

Egypt's comprehensive support plan for the Omani revolution was outlined in four key areas:

1. Political Support: Egypt committed to providing full political backing for the Omani cause, including advocating for the issue of British aggression against Oman at the Arab League. Additionally, Egypt sought to assist in presenting the Omani struggle at international organizations such as the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement. The Omani representatives were also to establish networks with organizations from the Global South working towards national liberation.
2. Military Assistance: Egypt pledged to supply the Omani revolutionaries with the necessary weapons, training, and equipment to confront British forces. This effort was to be carried out with complete secrecy in coordination with the Imam's representatives, while avoiding the British intelligence network along Oman's coast, from Dubai in the north to Salalah in the south. Efforts were also made to identify Omani youth capable and willing to engage in armed struggle, with specialized training provided in guerrilla tactics, anti-aircraft operations, mine warfare, and psychological warfare. Initial plans aimed to coordinate with Saudi Arabia to use its Gulf ports for smuggling weapons, but tensions over Saudi

⁵⁰⁸Ibid. 218.

⁵⁰⁹Ibid. 207-219.

ambitions for Omani oil led Egypt to shift to a sea route.⁵¹⁰ Commercial vessels would transport weapons from the Suez Canal via the Bab al-Mandab Strait to the Omani coast, where trained members of the Omani Liberation Army would be responsible for unloading and delivering the arms and fighters inland.⁵¹¹

3. Media Campaign: Egypt's "Voice of the Arabs" radio launched a sustained propaganda campaign to inform the Arab world about the Omani cause, expose British colonial intentions, and reveal the imperialist plans to exploit Oman's oil resources.
4. Educational Support: Egypt intensified its educational outreach by offering Omani youth the opportunity to study in Egyptian universities and other Arab institutions, providing them with access to modern sciences and training. For those seeking further studies abroad, support was offered to continue their education in international universities.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid. 232-233.

⁵¹¹ The paradox of the Saudi role in the Omani revolution was not only addressed by Egyptian primary sources. Rather, Omani primary sources were quick to notice it from the moment it happened. Said bin Hamad al-Harthi points out that Salih bin Isa "smelled the smell of the Saudi government's greed" from his first meetings with King Saud and his crown prince, Faisal bin Abdulaziz, in Al-Harthi, SH *Dalil Al-Hiran in his homeland Oman*, Ibid. p324. Many sources have argued this point, see for example: Kelly, J.B. *A predominance of Furies: Tribes, Politics and Religion in Oman and Trucial Oman* in Derek Hopwood (ed) *The Arab Peninsula* (London, 1972). Also see, Landen, R. G. *Oman Since 1856: Disruptive Modernization in a Traditional Arab Society* (Princeton University, 1967) and Philips, Wendel, *Oman: A History* (London 1967). Also Michael Quentin Morton, *Buraimi: the struggle for power, influence, and oil in Arabia* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014). Petersen, T. T. *Anglo-American Rivalry in the Middle East: The Struggle for the Buraimi Oasis, 1952–1957*, *The International History Review*, 14:1, (1992): 71-91. For an analysis of the Anglo-American rivalry for oil, see the noteworthy contribution by Nathan, Citino, *From Arab Nationalism to OPEC: Eisenhower, King Sa'ud, and the Making of US-Saudi Relations*. 2nd ed Indiana University Press, 2010.

Military training camps for the Omani Liberation Army began operating in Saudi Arabia throughout 1956, under the supervision of Egyptian officers. These camps employed the latest methods in confronting contemporary military forces. We studied the tactics of the Vietnamese resistance against French colonialism in Indochina, but we were most inspired by the methods of the Algerian revolutionaries. We felt their struggle was closer to our own beliefs and experiences, even if the colonizer was different. Several Egyptian officers with experience in supporting the Algerian revolution also guided us.”⁵¹²

However, Egypt's plan to support the Omani revolution was temporarily halted by the Tripartite Aggression, also known as the Suez Crisis, which began on October 29, 1956. All the struggling Arab brothers in Algeria, Oman, and other parts of the Arab world understood the situation with full awareness.”⁵¹³

By March 1957, the first wave of fighters from the Omani Liberation Army had arrived in the Eastern Region, led by Sheikh Ibrahim, brother of Saleh bin Issa Al-Harthi, and Shaiba Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Salmi⁵¹⁴, son of the scholar Noor Al Din Al-Salmi, who had been instrumental in establishing the first Imamate in the twentieth century under Imam Salim bin Rashid Al Kharousi (1913-1920).

⁵¹²Interview with a fighter from the Omani Liberation Army. al-Jabal al-Akhdar/ Jabal al Akhdar, al Shereja village, Oman, December 16 , 2023.

⁵¹³ Fathi al-Deeb. Ibid. 239.

⁵¹⁴ Ahmed Al-Harthi. Ibid. 35.

Despite British intelligence monitoring the movements of these fighters, they entered in small groups.⁵¹⁵ The orders from Talib bin Ali Al-Hinai, Commander of the Omani Liberation Army, to Al-Salmi and Ibrahim Al-Harthi were clear: secure support from the Hanawi tribes in the eastern region, including the Al-Hajriyyin, Bani Bu Hassan, and Bani Wahiba, through covert communication. They were to wait for Talib to arrive with additional fighters. The plan, crafted in the Dammam training camp, aimed to gather between 500 and 700 fighters before initiating full-scale operations.⁵¹⁶

However, unforeseen circumstances disrupted the plan. The entry of Talib bin Ali with the second group of fighters was delayed due to a malfunction in the ship carrying their military equipment off the coast of Bahrain.⁵¹⁷ This delay caused initial confusion but was quickly overcome, despite the constant surveillance by colonial intelligence across the cities of the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula.

In conclusion, this chapter has examined the critical manifestations of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism in Oman during the post-World War II period. The social, political, and military contradictions that emerged on the eve of the Green Mountain Revolution (1955-1959) played a pivotal role in igniting the revolution in June 1957, which persisted until the early 1960s.

A clear distinction can be observed between the primary sources that documented this delicate phase of modern Omani history. Omani sources prioritized the voices of the people, emphasizing their commitment to resist British colonialism and its imperial ambitions to monopolize the region's natural resources—particularly oil and minerals—along with its strategic location and control of airspace. In contrast, dominant colonial sources focused on fragmenting

⁵¹⁵FO 371/126892, Outward Telegram from Commonwealth Relations Office, W. No. 951, Oman, 1957.

⁵¹⁶Interview with a fighter from the Omani Liberation Army. al-Jabal al-Akhdar/ Jabal al Akhdar, al Shereja village, Oman, December 16 , 2023.

⁵¹⁷FO 371/126892, Outward Telegram from Commonwealth Relations Office, W. No. 951, Oman, 1957.

the narrative, framing it within narrow contexts such as the Saudi-Omani competition over oil, primitive tribal conflicts, and British support for a long-standing ally. These accounts often depicted the military operations as interventions in backward regions, thereby obscuring the broader context and the true nature of the conflict in Oman.

The foundational theories of Antonio Gramsci, Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Spivak, and Edward Thompson provide a framework that emphasizes the need to reclaim and amplify the voices of those who have been silenced or marginalized in dominant historical narratives: subaltern historiographical analysis framework. This framework has provided us with ways of amplifying the voices of subaltern resistance in Oman.

Applying the framework mentioned above to understand the perspective of marginalized and oppressed groups within the context of the al Jabal al Khdhar revolt, it has become evident that British colonial rule in Oman fundamentally reshaped the socioeconomic landscape, directly affecting the lives of the local tribes, peasants, and workers. Colonial policies were designed not merely to extend British influence over the region but also to subjugate and control the indigenous population systematically, thus creating an enduring context of marginalization. The British administration worked in conjunction with the Al Bu Said ruling dynasty, reinforcing a hierarchy that preserved elite dominance while pushing the subaltern groups to the fringes of power and economic opportunity.

In addition, British economic policies were geared towards maximizing their strategic and economic interests in the Arabian Peninsula. Through a series of treaties and agreements with the Sultanate, the British established, through their elite allies, control over trade, taxation, and land usage. These policies had immediate and profound effects on the local population. For the tribal communities, the introduction of new taxes and restrictions on traditional land rights disrupted

their economic base. Tribes that had historically managed their own land found themselves subject to regulations that prioritized colonial commercial interests, including the extraction of natural resources, over local uses and practices.

In line with Gramsci's theory of subaltern groups, Omani tribes, peasants, and workers were socially and economically marginalised by British colonial forces and the Sultanate. These groups, historically autonomous, were increasingly disempowered through economic policies that favored British control over Oman's resources, particularly oil. This marginalization not only created economic hardship but also fueled discontent, leading to active resistance against the colonial state.

The British-Al Bu Said Dynasty (the Sultanate) alliance further disrupted tribal governance structures, eroding the traditional autonomy that tribes had previously enjoyed. The Sultanate's role as a colonial intermediary deepened the divide, alienating local communities from meaningful participation in governance. These subaltern groups, deprived of political representation, are the focal point of the resistance discussed in this chapter, challenging the legitimacy of British rule and its local proxies.

In contrast, oral histories from the Al Jabal al Akhdhar resistance reveal a counter-narrative, one that highlights the experiences of ordinary Omanis facing British bombardment and military aggression. These oral traditions and local accounts challenge the official records, emphasizing the cultural and social ties that motivated resistance. These voices, excluded from elite histories, show that resistance was not just political but deeply rooted in the defense of cultural identity and way of life.

Applying Spivak's critique of elite historiography, we can see how colonial records deliberately framed the Al Jabal al Akhdhar resistance as irrational, downplaying the legitimate grievances of the subaltern. Reports frequently portrayed the local population as 'lawless' and in need of British control. This narrative, constructed by colonial authorities, sought to suppress subaltern voices and present imperial power as a force for stability.

However, oral histories and local accounts offer a stark contrast, portraying the resistance as a deeply rational response to the economic and cultural domination imposed by the British and Al Bu Saidi Sultanate. These local narratives expose the gaps in colonial reports, emphasizing the resilience and agency of the subaltern.

Gramsci's concept of counter-hegemony is useful for understanding how the local tribes and peasants resisted not only militarily but culturally. The preservation of oral traditions, local governance systems, and religious practices acted as covert forms of defiance, resisting the cultural imposition of British colonial rule. Despite efforts by the colonial state to suppress these practices, local communities maintained their cultural identities, ensuring that the subaltern resistance was not only about land but also about the survival of their social structures.

Subaltern historiography reshapes our understanding of the Al Jabal al Akhdhar resistance by prioritizing the voices of the marginalized. By recovering these voices, we gain a fuller and more accurate picture of this historical period, challenging the elite-driven narratives of British colonial authorities and the Sultanate. Engaging with the works of Gramsci, Guha, and Thompson demonstrates the value of 'history from below' in reconstructing a comprehensive historical

narrative that recognizes the agency and experiences of the subaltern.⁵¹⁸ The resilience of the subaltern during the Al Jabal al Akhdhar resistance was not solely evident in military confrontations; it was also reflected in cultural resistance. Local communities actively preserved their oral traditions, songs, and religious practices as a form of defiance against British and Sultanate attempts to impose foreign governance and cultural hegemony. Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony highlights how dominant powers seek to control not just political structures but also cultural expressions.

Even under the threat of bombardment and forced relocation, the local tribes continued to maintain their cultural practices. These covert forms of defiance were as critical to the resistance as overt military actions. Oral histories recorded from elders decades after the conflict highlight the significance of cultural preservation. This cultural continuity was a critical aspect of the subaltern's counter-hegemonic resistance.

Colonial accounts of the Al Jabal al Akhdhar conflict, such as the reports published by the British military and officials, portrayed the resistance as a primitive uprising, led by disorganized tribal factions. These accounts, laden with Orientalist stereotypes, depicted the Omani subaltern as incapable of rational governance and in need of British control to 'restore order.' This framing was part of a broader colonial strategy to justify military intervention.

In contrast, subaltern narratives present a different picture, one of organized resistance based on deep-seated grievances over land dispossession, economic exploitation, and cultural

⁵¹⁸ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 4. Also, ___ *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

erasure. Oral histories and local testimonies tell a story of a people fighting for their autonomy and survival. A common theme in these accounts is the moral and spiritual dimension of the resistance.

These contrasting narratives reflect the power dynamics of colonial historiography. By privileging the voices of the elite, colonial records erased the subaltern perspective and marginalized their struggle. However, by reconstructing the events through the lens of subaltern historiography, we reveal the complexity and legitimacy of the resistance.

Beyond military resistance, the Al Jabal al Akhdhar conflict represented a broader struggle for cultural autonomy. The subaltern groups—tribes, peasants, and local communities—fought not only to defend their land but also to preserve their cultural practices, traditions, and social structures. This covert resistance was an assertion of their cultural identity in the face of colonial attempts to impose foreign rule.

Local practices, such as religious ceremonies, communal gatherings, and the continuation of oral storytelling, became acts of resistance. These cultural practices were not just expressions of heritage but also tools for resisting colonial hegemony. By maintaining their social structures, the subaltern groups resisted the erasure of their cultural identity, challenging British and Sultanate attempts to reshape the region in their image.

The strength of the Al Jabal al Akhdhar resistance lay in the alliances formed among various tribal groups. These alliances were rooted in shared histories, oral traditions, and a collective sense of identity. Oral histories from tribal leaders describe the ways in which these alliances were strengthened through ceremonies, marriages, and shared resources, helping to unite the disparate tribes against a common enemy. This reliance on oral traditions not only served to reinforce the alliances but also acted as a form of resistance to the colonial narrative, which sought to fragment and weaken tribal solidarity.

British colonial authorities, recognizing the strength of these tribal alliances, employed a range of strategies to suppress the subaltern resistance. These included targeted bombings of villages suspected of harboring resistance fighters, forced relocations of entire communities, and the destruction of crops and livestock to disrupt the local economy. The colonial state's use of collective punishment aimed to break the spirit of the resistance and weaken tribal solidarity.

However, these efforts were met with continued defiance. Oral histories from displaced communities reveal that even in exile, the subaltern maintained their cultural practices and continued to resist. This resilience demonstrates the limits of colonial power and the enduring strength of subaltern resistance.

The aftermath of the Al Jabal al Akhdhar conflict saw the British and Sultanate forces claim victory, but the subaltern narrative tells a different story. While the resistance may have been defeated militarily, the cultural and social autonomy of the subaltern groups remained intact. Oral histories and local traditions continued to preserve the memory of the resistance, ensuring that the stories of those who fought were passed down through generations.

In recent years, there has been a growing effort to reclaim these subaltern voices and to challenge the colonial narrative that has dominated the historiography of the Al Jabal al Akhdhar conflict. By recovering oral histories, folk songs, and local traditions, historians are beginning to reconstruct a more complete picture of the resistance—one that recognizes the agency and resilience of the subaltern. The British won the battles, but the subaltern won the war of memory.

The application of subaltern historiography to the Al Jabal al Akhdhar conflict not only reshapes our understanding of the past but also serves as a form of historical justice. By recovering

the voices of those who were silenced by colonial authorities, we are able to reconstruct a more accurate and inclusive history.

The subaltern approach allows us to see the Al Jabal al Akhdhar conflict as part of a broader struggle for autonomy, cultural preservation, and self-determination. Gramsci's theory of counter-hegemony helps explain how the subaltern resisted not only through military action but also through cultural practices, oral traditions, and the preservation of identity. By doing so, we challenge the historiographical dominance of colonial accounts and provide a more comprehensive and inclusive narrative of Oman's anti-colonial resistance.

Subaltern historiography, as articulated by Guha and Spivak, demands that we continue to recover these marginalized voices in all historical contexts. This method not only reshapes our understanding of the Al Jabal al Akhdhar conflict but also serves as a vital corrective to the broader exclusion of subaltern groups from history. In the case of the Al Jabal al Akhdhar conflict, subaltern historiography allows us to see the resistance not as a failed rebellion but as a legitimate struggle for autonomy, cultural preservation, and justice. This approach shifts the focus from the actions of colonial elites to the lived experiences of ordinary Omanis, offering a more democratic and comprehensive account of this pivotal moment in history.

CHAPTER FOUR: A MOUNTAIN RESISTS AN EMPIRE

The full-scale military operations that unfolded between March 1957 and March 1959 embodied the intensity of British colonial domination over Oman. The al Jabal al-Akhdar became the highest and most expansive battlefield on Earth where Her Majesty's Armed Forces waged a comprehensive war, deploying every branch of the British military to enact a campaign of destruction and near-genocidal violence against the mountain's inhabitants and surrounding villages—east and west. Continuous and coordinated assaults by land, sea, and air targeted people, homes, crops, water sources, livestock, and even trees. For two relentless years, the British Empire unleashed the full extent of its wartime machinery and tactics, refined over two world wars.

The term *comprehensive* here reflects the scale of imperial mobilization across two parallel fronts. Firstly, the internal front—within Omani territory—where the War Office at Whitehall, along with its generals, concentrated expertise and resources into intense, all-out conflict using advanced weaponry, funds, and intelligence networks. Secondly, the external front was led by the Colonial Office in London, which spearheaded an international campaign through global media outlets and within the corridors of the United Nations and other international bodies, seeking to deflect attention from the atrocities committed by colonial forces in this small corner of Oman.

This chapter investigates the full-scale war launched by the British imperial forces against Oman's interior, known in historical literature as the "al-Jabal al-Akhdar War." While colonial sources refer to the campaign using depoliticized language such as "operations in Oman" or "the Oman rebellion," deliberately stripping the uprising of popular and legal legitimacy, Omani

sources—both textual and oral—refer to the event as the “Green Mountain Revolution,” “the Mountain War,” or “Imam Ghalib bin Ali’s Revolution against British Colonialism.” This chapter examines key questions such as: How did the British Empire mobilize its colonial arsenal to dismantle the Imamate and crush the revolution? What social, political, and military contradictions emerged in the triangular conflict between Britain, the Imamate, and Sultan Sa‘id bin Taymur?

The chapter foregrounds the Omani revolutionary narrative, drawing from oral histories and testimonies of the few surviving veterans who fought in the war, as well as primary sources such as the press and publications of the Imamate. It assumes that this Omani narrative has been forcibly marginalized within dominant historiographies, suppressed in order to deepen the sense of defeat and prolong its effects. At the same time, the chapter critically compares this indigenous narrative with the contradictions embedded in the colonial discourse that has dominated academic literature on this pivotal moment in modern Omani history.

It further posits that the crimes committed by British colonial forces in this war—their incursion into the Omani interior, their defiance of both the people’s will and international norms, and their effort to entrench an absolutist regime under British imperial protection (as argued by Abdel Razzaq Takriti)—did not extinguish resistance.⁵¹⁹ On the contrary, they ignited a revolutionary spirit that endured for over two decades. This was not a brief or isolated tribal rebellion, as many historical accounts portray it, but rather the beginning of a prolonged and deeply rooted anti-colonial struggle.

⁵¹⁹ Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*.5-7.

As outlined in the theoretical framework, colonial historiography often framed indigenous uprisings through the lens of imperial necessity or security. In the case of the al-Jabal al-Akhdar war, colonial sources consistently portrayed Britain's intervention as a necessary action on behalf of its ally, the Sultan of Muscat. As previously argued, this framing erases the political agency of those subjected to imperial domination. These were Omanis whose voices—despite the availability of critical primary sources—were systematically sidelined.

This chapter approaches the al-Jabal al-Akhdar War as a pivotal stage in the broader arc of the Omani revolutionary movement. It juxtaposes two primary interpretive perspectives: the colonial account, and the Omani narrative, as reflected in both primary sources and oral testimonies. The chapter also divides the analysis of the war and revolution into two distinct phases: the pre-Jabal al-Akhdar phase, and the mountain resistance phase.

In the first phase, it surveys key episodes of Omani resistance against British colonial intervention, framing them as revelatory attempts to reclaim sovereignty over national territory following the British seizure of Nizwa in December 1955. Among the events analyzed are the uprising led by Ibrahim al-harithi, the Battle of Ghamr, the Battle of Nizwa, and the strategic decision by imperial generals to eliminate the Imamate as a political institution.

The second phase focuses on the al-Jabal al-Akhdar War itself, reconstructing the forcibly suppressed Omani narrative by tracing the trajectory of resistance. This resistance, while materially outmatched, was driven by a deeply rooted commitment to defending land and dignity, and relied on rudimentary weaponry and communal resolve in the face of overwhelming imperial firepower. The British forces, equipped with heavy artillery, advanced intelligence networks, and sophisticated communications, undertook a systematic military campaign to subdue the revolution.

This section follows key military and political turning points, including the dual-pronged encirclement of the mountain from its eastern and western axes, the Battle of Izki, and the final escalation involving the arrival of Colonel David Smiley and Lieutenant Colonel Deane-Drummond, accompanied by the British Royal Air Force's elite Special Air Service (SAS) units.

Pre-Jabal al-Akhdar Phase

The Uprising of Ibrahim bin 'Uṣa

In March 1957, the first detachments of the Omani Liberation Army arrived in al-Sharqiyyah (the Eastern region of Oman). They were received by Shaykh Ibrahim, the brother of Ṣalih bin 'Isa al-Harithi, who had just received a message from his sibling via al-Shayba Muhammad bin 'Abd Allah al-Salimi⁵²⁰—the son of the renowned reformer Nur al-Din al-Salimi and an early advocate of the twentieth-century Imamate that culminated in the election of Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi as Imam (1913–1920).

Following orders from Talib bin 'Ali al-Hina'i, Commander in Chief of the Omani Liberation Army, both al-Salimi and al-Harithi were instructed to discreetly mobilize support from the Hinawi alliance tribes in the Eastern region. This included the tribes of al-Harth, al-Mawalik, al-Hijriyyin, Bani Bu Hasan, and Bani Wuhiba. The strategy was to activate resistance on two fronts: waiting for Talib's arrival with the second group of fighters entering from the North, while the first contingent would begin organizing in the East. According to the operational plan

⁵²⁰ *Mudhakkirat al-Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-harhi* . 35.

developed during training in Dammam, the two fronts were to converge only once a critical mass of 500–700 fighters had been assembled, at which point the revolutionary campaign would commence in earnest.⁵²¹

However, several unforeseen circumstances disrupted this plan. Most notably, the arrival of Shaykh Talib and his unit was delayed due to mechanical problems with the ship transporting their personnel, weapons, and logistical supplies, which had broken down off the coast of Bahrain.⁵²²

It is important to note that the difficulty of maintaining secure lines of communication between the Eastern and Western fronts of the planned uprising played a critical role in undermining the Omani Liberation Army's cohesion. The absence of coordination compromised the element of surprise—a vital advantage in guerrilla warfare—especially when facing a better-organized and heavily equipped colonial force. The British, in contrast, were equipped with advanced wireless communications and reconnaissance aircraft that conducted regular patrols across Oman from British military bases in Aden, Bahrain, Sharjah, and Muscat (Bayt al-Falaj Camp).

During this same period, the Sultan of Muscat appointed Colonel Waterfield—a British officer—to lead his armed forces. According to colonial British records, Waterfield was “an officer of great authority and influence in the Sultanate of Muscat... known for his firm resolve in suppressing any nationalist movement led by the population.” British documents also confirm that a number of British officers were stationed in military camps across Oman out of concern for an

⁵²¹ Interview with a fighter from the Omani Liberation Army. al-Jabal al-Akhdar/ Jabal al Akhdar, al Sharaija village, Oman, December 16, 2023.

⁵²² FO 371/126892, Outward Telegram from Commonwealth Relations Office, W. No. 951, Oman, 1957.

impending uprising against the Sultan and his administration, especially after the Sultan granted new oil exploration concessions to British companies and allowed them to establish camps for their operations in Salalah, Ras al-hadd, and Masirah Island.⁵²³

Shaykh Ibrahim ibn 'Isa al-Harithi was able to form a detachment of fighters from among the members of the Oman Liberation Army who had succeeded in entering the al-Sharqiyyah region (eastern Oman) via the port of Sur, arriving from Dammam in eastern Saudi Arabia. They were joined by a number of tribesmen from al-Sharqiyyah. Some sources suggest they did not exceed seventy fighters, while other argue that they their number reached 200.⁵²⁴

Shaykh Ibrahim waited for a signal from the Commander in Chief of the Omani Liberation Army, Shaykh Talib ibn 'Ali al-Hina'i, but that signal was long delayed. In fact, no reassurances were received from the western region of Oman concerning the fate of the ship that was carrying Shaykh Talib and the contingent of Oman Liberation Army fighters under his command.

The initial plan for launching the revolution was as follows. On the northwestern front, Shaykh Talib was to enter from the al-Batinah region and penetrate into the al-Dakhiliyyah (interior region) via the valleys of al-Rustaq—which he knew well and where he had loyal allies—until reaching the stronghold of his brother, the Imam, in Bilad Sayt, and secure Jabal al-Kawr, the second most important natural strategic stronghold for controlling the al-Dakhiliyyah and al-Zahirah regions.

On the southeastern front, Shaykhs Ibrahim ibn 'Isa and Muhammad al-Salimi (al-Shaybah) were to distract and mislead the Muscat forces from reinforcing the scattered British

⁵²³ FO 371/126874, Oman, 1957. See also al-harithi, Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah (trans.). *Mawsu'at 'Uman: al-watha'iq al-sirriyyah, watha'iq fatrat ghazw 'Uman wa-iqtala' judhur al-Imamah* (1955–1960) (*English: Encyclopedia of Oman: The Secret Documents, Volume 4 – Documents from the Period of the Invasion of Oman and the Uprooting of the Imamate*) (1955–1960), 113–116.

⁵²⁴ FO 371/126874, Telegram from Bahrain to Commonwealth Relations Office. No. 525, Oman, May 7, 1957.

units stationed in small camps in Farq, ‘Ibri, Fahud, and al-Buraymi, all surrounding the city of Nizwa, which had been under occupation since late 1955.

In parallel, the Emir (*English: Prince*) of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar (the most crucial stronghold in the Omani territories), Shaykh Sulayman ibn Himayr al-Nabhani, was to rally fighters from his Bani Riyam tribe and other trusted tribes from the Bani Ghafir alliance, awaiting the convergence of the eastern and western contingents of the Omani Liberation Army, and internal fighters in order to retake the city of Nizwa—the capital—from Sultan Sa‘id ibn Taymur and the British forces.

That was the plan in the revolutionaries’ camp. On the opposing side, with the British forces and Sultan Sa‘id ibn Taymur, facts and intelligence prevailed. News of the fighters’ movements and the arrival of the Liberation Army members was exposed through a local informants network that spanned wide segments of Omani society—from some tribal shaykhs to many unknown individuals spread across coastal towns and villages, including craftsmen, attendees of public majalis (*English: public gatherings*), and eavesdroppers on popular gossip and circulating news among the general population.⁵²⁵

Since early 1957, British intelligence had been sweeping across the country, monitoring for any unusual movements—among them, the arrival of fighters in small, scattered groups.⁵²⁶ The British Political Agent in Muscat, Chauncey, cabled the Foreign Office in London reporting that several Omanis had been arrested at the border carrying letters addressed to Shaykh ‘Abd Allah

⁵²⁵ No two Omanis meet—whether on the road, in a public gathering, or in the marketplace—without exchanging inquiries about al-‘ulum, a colloquial term for news, reports, or information one has heard or come to know. Over time, this practice evolved into a foundational element of the country’s social etiquette and communal tradition. It became so entrenched in everyday life that it now constitutes a core component of customary greetings and interpersonal introductions throughout the land.

⁵²⁶ FO 371/126892, Outward Telegram from Commonwealth Relations Office, W. No. 951, Oman, 1957.

bin ‘Ali al-Khalili and Shaykh Ibrahim bin ‘isaal-harithi from his brother Shaykh Salih bin ‘Isa, the subject of which was the planned uprising against the Sultan’s rule and British presence.⁵²⁷

Meanwhile, Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Harithi, an ally of Sultan Sa‘id in the Sharqiyyah region, sent a message indicating that soldiers had landed in Şur and were received by Uncle Ibrahim,⁵²⁸ and that embers beneath the ash were about to spark a fire.⁵²⁹

On 7 May 1957, the British Political Agent in Bahrain sent a telegram to the Foreign Office in London confirming reliable intelligence that Ibrahim bin ‘Isa had gathered around 150 men and was openly defying Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Harithi, the Sultan’s representative in the Sharqiyyah region. The cable reported that an exchange of gunfire had taken place between the two sides in the town of al-Zahir. According to the British account, the cause of Ibrahim’s rebellion was framed merely as a tribal dispute over the leadership of the al-Harth tribe. It noted that Ibrahim had written to Sultan Sa‘id expressing his—and the eastern tribes’—dissatisfaction with the unilateral appointment of Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad as their leader, without any consultation.

⁵²⁷ FO 371/126874, from Muscat to Foreign Office, Top secret, Oman, January 20, 1957.

⁵²⁸ *Mudhakkirat al-Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-harithi*. 35.

⁵²⁹ Ibid. Al-harithi drew upon poetic lines attributed to the Umayyad-era poet Naṣr ibn Sayyar, originally composed to exhort Marwan ibn Muhammad—the last caliph of the Umayyad dynasty—on the eve of its collapse and the rise of the ‘Abbasid state:

Ara tahta al-ramadi wamiḍa jamrin
[fa-akhsa] an yakuna lahu diram
[wa-]inna al-nara bi-l-‘udaini [tadku]
wa-inna al-sharra [awwalu-hu] kalam
fa-in lam [tutfi’u-ha] tajin harban
[mu’ajjajatan] yashibu laha al-ghulam.

The verses have been reproduced here as they appear in al-harithi’s manuscript, with the words he modified from the original version enclosed in square brackets to reflect his linguistic adaptations.

However, the Sultan dismissed this claim as a weak pretext aimed at buying time until a larger group of fighters could be assembled.⁵³⁰

Two months prior, in March 1957, the British Political Agency in Bahrain attempted to alert the Colonial Office in London that “Egyptian propaganda via Radio Cairo” had begun to intensify its focus on the deteriorating situation in Oman. This propaganda highlighted that “Her Majesty’s Government occupies this land.” In light of “the Sultan’s apparent disinterest in mounting a broad response,” the Agency recommended that “we wait for a minor incident in Masqat” that would allow the BBC to counter the Egyptian narrative and replace it with one affirming that “Oman is an independent, self-governing state, and that Britain maintains nothing more than friendly relations with it.”⁵³¹ Moreover, British Intelligence Department 201 had, by early March, provided colonial officers in the region with physical materials to rebut Cairo Radio’s messaging. This influential department also warned against engaging in any historical debates—debates that were already “decided in favor of the Arabs and Muslims of the region”—and advised sticking to the simpler line that “the Sultan, as an independent ruler, is free to choose his friends.”⁵³²

Between March and May 1957, the fighters stationed in eastern Oman became increasingly weary and anxious due to the delayed decision to launch the uprising. The burdens of waiting—alongside mounting logistical costs related to food, water, weapons maintenance, ammunition, and the

⁵³⁰ FO 371/126874, Telegram from Bahrain to Sir. B. Burrows, No. 525, Oman, May 7, 1957.

⁵³¹ FO 371/126874, Telegram from Bahrain to C.J. Treadwell, No. 57/18/1437, Oman, March 28, 1957.

⁵³² FO 371/126874, Telegram from Foreign Office to Bahrain, from C.J. Treadwell to F.B Richards, No. HA/3/1015, Mars First, 1957.

constant need to hide among homes, mountains, and valleys—pushed both Shaykh Ibrahim bin ‘isaal-harithi and al-Shayba Muhammad bin ‘Abd Allah al-Salimi to write to leaders in the western region (Nizwa, al Jabal al-Akhdar, Bilad Sit, and al-Ghafat), seeking their counsel on the next course of action. When no communication arrived from the Commander in Chief of the Oman Liberation Army, Shaykh Talib bin ‘Ali al-Hana’i, Shaykh Ibrahim persisted in writing to Imam Ghalib, who by then had stepped down from the Imamate due to what he perceived as a lack of support from tribal shaykhs in Nizwa and the interior. Yet the eastern front received no reassuring signals. One indication of this came when Ibrahim addressed a letter to Shaykh Sulayman bin himayr stating his intent to join him, only to receive a response urging patience and advising against coming to Nizwa. Shaykh Sulayman explained he was heading to Masqat in response to repeated invitations from the Sultan, and that he would seek a suitable resolution and inform Ibrahim upon his return. However, once in Masqat, Shaykh Sulayman was unable to leave, as the Sultan refused to grant him permission to return.⁵³³

When no confirmation came from the central leadership of the Imamate, Shaykh Ibrahim bin ‘isaal-Harthi exhausted his efforts and acted on his own judgment, considering the contradictions of the moment. On 7 May 1957, he declared the revolution in the town of al-Zahir, located between the oases of Bidiyya and al-Qabil.⁵³⁴ In response, Sultan Sa‘id bin Taymur pressured his ally, Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Harthi, to engage in armed confrontation with the fighters led by his uncle, Ibrahim bin ‘Isa, in order to prove his competence as amir over the Sharqiyya. This

⁵³³ An unpublished interview conducted by Ahmad bin ‘Abd Allah al-Falahi with Shaykh Sulayman bin hamad bin Sulayman al-harithi—who served as the personal assistant and close confidant of Shaykh Salih bin ‘Isa s during the latter s numerous tours—was made available exclusively to the researcher with al-Falahi s permission. This source will henceforth be cited as al-Falahi s interview with al-Harthi S.H. when referring to testimonies related to Shaykh Ṣalih bin ‘Isa al-harthi.

⁵³⁴ FO 371/126874, Telegram from Bahrain to C.J. Treadwell, No. 57/18/1437, Oman, March 28, 1957.

was to be his first serious test after being appointed as shaykh of the harth tribe—an appointment intended to sideline the leadership of his uncle, Shaykh Salih bin Isa, and restructure the broader tribal leadership in eastern Oman, particularly within the Harth and the Hinawi alliance.

From the outset, Ibrahim bin ‘Isa al-Harithi’s uprising exposed the imbalance in power and planning between the two camps. Even in terms of tactics such as diversion and deception, the operation failed to meet even the minimum threshold of its objectives. The rebel camp was neither united nor prepared to manage even minor tribal skirmishes or the sociopolitical complexities involved. Sultan Sa‘id bin Taymur dispatched his half-brother Tariq to lead a detachment of Masqat forces—comprised mostly of Baluchis and Pakistanis—under the cover of British reconnaissance aircraft. These planes surveyed the area and dropped leaflets warning tribal groups against joining Ibrahim bin ‘Isa’s army.⁵³⁵ Two Pembroke aircraft belonging to the Royal Air Force scouted the region and returned to Bahrain, prepared to redeploy to Masqat for the anticipated operation set for 19 May. Meanwhile, a Shackleton aircraft, also under active service, had conducted several aerial reconnaissance missions over the eastern region, capturing topographical imagery and monitoring coastal zones believed to be entry points for men and arms.⁵³⁶

Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Harthi played a decisive role in neutralizing the threat posed by tribal fighters—such as Banu Bu Hasan, Banu Wahiba, and the harth subgroups (al-Mawalik and al-Duwaykiyyin)—who had recently joined Ibrahim’s forces. He employed a

⁵³⁵ FO 371/126874, Telegram from Bahrain to Foreign Office, No. 586, Oman, May 17, 1957.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

combination of financial inducements, tribal loyalties, and intimidation—warning of British retribution and imprisonment under Sa‘id bin Taymur’s regime.⁵³⁷

As the number of men in Ibrahim’s camp dwindled and his fear grew of sparking a “tribal sedition” that could claim innocent lives without clear purpose—an outcome the elders and wise men of the eastern region warned against⁵³⁸—he withdrew with the remaining elements of the Oman Liberation Army to Sifalat Ibra, in search of new recruits. He also publicly declared his willingness to negotiate with Sultan Sa‘id bin Taymur. Yet, the people of this area did not welcome him, and he moved on to the area of Samad al-Shan. All of Ibrahim’s efforts during this time seemed aimed at prolonging the confrontation, employing maneuvers and diversions to delay a clash with the sultan’s forces that had already redeployed some of their troops and equipment from the interior front (the western axis). Ibrahim continued to wait—at least for a signal—that Talib bin ‘Ali al-Hana’i and his army would enter and recapture Nizwa. None of this materialized. Instead, the same tribal hesitation and lack of resolve prevailed, coupled with the voluntary withdrawal of the ex-imam and the absence of a clear strategic plan or defined roles across the vast geography of Oman, compounded by poor communication between the regions.

Sultan Sa‘id did not miss the signs of disarray and visible weakness on the eastern front—a vulnerability that encouraged him to begin testing the plans he had drawn up with the British to reassert full control over the country. His primary concern was to prevent Ibrahim and his troops

⁵³⁷ *Mudhakkirat al-Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-harhi*. 36-38.

⁵³⁸ Omani sources mention several figures by name, including Shaykh hamad bin Sulayman al-harhi, along with other notables such as Ṣalih bin Ahmad al-harhi, Khalifah bin ‘Ali al-harhi, Salim bin Muhammad al-harhi, Muhammad bin Su‘ud bin hamad, and Muhammad bin hamad bin Dughmal al-Ghufayli. See: al-harhi, Sa‘id bin hamad, *al-Lu‘lu‘ al-ratb fi ibraz mustawda‘at al-qalb*. 326. See also: *Mudhakkirat al-Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-harhi*. 36-37

from reaching Nizwa. To the tribal elders, Saʿid bin Taymur spread a message of national unity; to the general populace, he portrayed the rebels as agents of division and sedition. He also deployed one of his most effective weapons: manipulating the two foundational pillars of the Imamate—its tribal leaders and its scholars—against itself. Thus, he summoned Shaykh Sulayman bin himayr al-Nabhani to Masqat to preempt any surprise actions from the Emir of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar.

The army Saʿid dispatched to the eastern region was composed as follows: the scholar Muhammad bin Salim al-Raqaishi (one of Imam al-Khalili's former judges), who had been appointed by Sultan Saʿid as wali of Izki after the fall of Nizwa; Ahmad bin Naṣir al-Busaʿidi, the wali of Nakhl; Muhammad bin ʿAli, nephew of Imam al-Khalili, accompanied by fighters from the Bani Rawaha tribe; Saʿid's half-brother tariq bin Taymur; and the British officer Cheesman, alongside the Masqat military forces.⁵³⁹ This composition reveals the complex mindset of Sultan Saʿid bin Taymur, who saw in such a mixture the most effective formula for dismantling the very idea of the Imamate—militarily, through deterrence, and politically, through manipulation.

On the negotiation front, Saʿid bin Taymur instructed the sons of ʿAli al-Khalili his wali in Bawshar—ʿAbdullah, Hilal, and Suʿud - - to convince Ibrahim that Saʿid was open to negotiations, but that he insisted Ibrahim come to Masqat to meet him in al-Sib in person. This ploy played on Ibrahim's imagination and sense of prestige—especially given the historical role played by his father, ʿisabin Ṣalih, in brokering the 1920 al-Sib Treaty. The suggestion struck a chord with Ibrahim, and he accepted it immediately.

⁵³⁹ FO 371/126874, Telegram from Muscat to Foreign Office, No. 37, June 11, 1957.

This unilateral decision led to the final rupture within his army. The core issue—namely, Ibrahim negotiating directly with the Sultan—had not been part of the original agreement with the other members of the Oman Liberation Army who had entered the country two months earlier. Their shared understanding was that all forces would regroup in Nizwato liberate it—not divert to Masqat. This agreement had been sealed at the training camp in Saudi Arabia, under the supervision of the army's commander, Shaykh talib bin 'Ali al-Hana'i. Consequently, that group immediately withdrew from Ibrahim's army and continued their journey toward Nizwa, sneaking through Wadi hilfin. Another contingent returned to the east after losing confidence in Ibrahim's leadership and decision-making. Only a group from the al Wuhiba tribe remained with him and accompanied him to al-Sib.

Upon arrival in al-Sib, Ibrahim found that the Sultan was not there to receive him. Instead, two envoys—Sayyid Hilal bin Badr al-Busa'idi and Shaykh Sultan bin Saif al-hawsani—greeted him and separated him from his remaining troops.⁵⁴⁰ A military vehicle transported him to Masqat, and upon entering the city, he was immediately imprisoned in al-Jalali Fort. Some of his fighters received modest gifts and were asked to return to their homes quietly.⁵⁴¹

⁵⁴⁰ The letter sent by Ibrahim bin 'isato Sultan Sa'id reveals either a deep wavering in trust or an exaggerated confidence combined with a lack of understanding of the character of the Sultan of Muscat. It reads: "...We are on our way to you, and we now place ourselves at your disposal, confident in your good conduct and great justice. I have decided with all my heart to come, given your command and our own desire to meet with you." For more, see: Muhammad bin 'Abd Allah, al Harthi (trans.). Mawsu'at 'Uman: al-watha'iq al-sirriyya, Vol. 4, Watha'iq fatrat ghazw 'Uman wa-iqtilla' judhur al-imama (1955–1960), (*English: Encyclopedia of Oman: The Secret Documents, Volume 4 – Documents from the Period of the Invasion of Oman and the Uprooting of the Imamate*), 139–140.

⁵⁴¹ FO 371/126874, Telegram from Muscat to Foreign Office, No. 39, June 14, 1957.

Thus ended the uprising of Ibrahim bin ‘isa with his sentencing to life imprisonment on 14 June 1957⁵⁴², and the subsequent dispersal of the fighters who had rallied around him. The Sultan of Masqat and his British allies gained significant moral and political advantage from the event, which bolstered their confidence and reinforced their standing. As the British Political Agent in Bahrain, C.A. Gault, remarked in a report to Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd dated 20 June 1957, [The Sultan of Masqat] played his cards with cunning, deceit, and fox-like guile” in summary of the rebellion.⁵⁴³

In stark contrast, the camp of the revolutionaries appeared weak, shaken, and fragmented, lacking a unified strategy or coherent social, military, or political project. This brief uprising laid bare the fragility of the two main components of the Imamate—the tribal leaders and the religious scholars—and their withdrawal from their historic roles, which had traditionally been the decisive factors in any revolution. This episode revealed how easily both elements could be infiltrated and co-opted by the Sultan and the British.

The British, for their part, used the incident to reinforce their own narrative: that everything unfolding thus far confirmed that Saudi Arabia and Egypt were waging propaganda campaigns falsely claiming that the British were engaged in repression and occupation against the people of Oman ,” and that these two states were supporting Omani rebels with arms to attack the Sultan s forces, whom they described as collaborators with colonial power.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴² Shaykh Ibrahim bin ‘isa al-harithi remained imprisoned in the infamous Jalali Fort throughout the reign of Sa‘id bin Taymur—approximately fourteen years. He was released at the beginning of the reign of Sultan Qabus bin Sa‘id, by which time he was in a mentally unstable condition.

⁵⁴³ FO 371/126874, Telegram from Bahrain to Foreign Office, No. 83 (57/1092), June 20, 1957.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

British political reports from the Gulf escalated their warnings to the Colonial Office in London, claiming that “an imminent invasion by Egyptian and Saudi forces into Omani territory was being prepared, with significant, well-equipped central forces.” The Saudis, the reports alleged, had already sent a number of Omani dissidents back to their homeland with instructions for some to lie low—as sleeper cells—awaiting the arrival of Saudi and Egyptian forces.⁵⁴⁵

The colonial administration in the Gulf seized the opportunity to request additional support from the central imperial authorities in London, especially in terms of military reinforcements, specialized training, and expanded operational reach of the Royal Air Force across remote areas of the country.⁵⁴⁶ Measures such as these, the reports argued, were the only viable means to ensure continued control over oil resources and to safeguard their flow in support of Britain’s fiscal balance.

The Return of talib bin ‘Ali and the Battle of Ghamr

In the very days during which Ibrahim bin ‘isawas imprisoned, British intelligence recorded, between 14 and 16 June 1957, the arrival of a wooden cargo vessel on the al-Batinah coast. Onboard were approximately seventy fighters, equipped with automatic weapons, several boxes of ammunition, and landmines. Leading this contingent was Shaykh talib bin ‘Ali al-Hana’i, the Commander in Chief of the Omani Liberation Army.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ FO 371/126875, Telegram from Bahrain to Muscat, No. 170, July 3, 1957.

With the arrival of talib bin ‘Ali on Omani soil, a new chapter in the revolution commenced. The principal objective of the return of the Imam’s brother was to revive the Imamate and to reclaim all territories that had fallen under the control of Sultan Sa‘id’s forces, bolstered by British support. Particular emphasis was placed on retaking the major towns: Nizwa, al-Rustaq, Bahla’, and ‘Ibri. The returning fighters were divided into smaller groups. They relied on pack donkeys to transport arms and ammunition and were guided by trusted clandestine agents to ensure secure passage to the final staging points.⁵⁴⁸ Shaykh talib succeeded in reaching Wadi al-‘Ayn and his native town of Bilad Sayt, penetrating the rugged al-hajar al-Gharbi mountain range from the al-Batinah plain, passing through the valleys and villages of al-Rustaq and the lands of the Banu Ghafir. These latter had by then declared their allegiance to Sultan Sa‘id, having been persuaded by the Sultan’s narrative that their confederational leader, Sulayman bin himayr al-Nabhani, had allied himself with the Sultan in the war against the Imamate—a narrative reinforced by Sulayman’s continued stay as a guest in Masqat.

The conflicting and accelerating events deeply unsettled the thinking of Sulayman bin himayr, the Emir of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar. He had witnessed with his own eyes the fate of Shaykh Ibrahim bin ‘isa, and how Sa‘id bin Taymur had cunningly lured him into Masqat, only to imprison him without anyone daring to demand his release. Both Sulayman and Ibrahim had been

⁵⁴⁸ al-Jabal al-Akhḍar: Jabal al Akhdar, al Sharija village, Oman, December 17, 2023. Also: FO 371/126875, Telegram from Bahrain to Muscat, No. 170, July 3, 1957.

summoned by the Sultan at the same time, though al-Nabhani had arrived in Masqat before al-harithi and was generously received with gifts and fine hospitality.⁵⁴⁹

Yet the instincts of leadership, political acumen in reading contradictions, and personal ambition all combined to drive the Emir of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar toward a decisive choice, especially after hearing reports of talib bin ‘Ali’s return to the country and his reunion with his brother Imam Ghalib, with whom he was preparing to revive the Imamate. It may also have stemmed from a fear of losing control over his traditional stronghold—al-Jabal al-Akhḍar—and its deep tribal and social base among the Banu Riyam, particularly to the Hinawi alliance on one side, and from a lack of trust in Sa‘id bin Taymur on the other, as both men had personalities inherently averse to power-sharing. In that moment, Shaykh al-himayri resolved not to relinquish his ancestral legacy, embodied in the heights of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, and concluded that he could benefit more by rising against Sa‘id bin Taymur than by allying with him. This decision must be read in light of the Emir’s political activities over the past two decades, including his personal negotiations with the British and the Saudis for independence from the Imamate and a share in oil revenues, as detailed in previous chapters.⁵⁵⁰

Events accelerated rapidly following the arrival of the Commander in Chief of the Omani Liberation Army, Shaykh talib bin ‘Ali. With strategic acumen, revolutionary conviction, and enhanced leadership skills honed through Arab support and training, he succeeded in rallying numerous tribes to stand behind the Imam. Even before that, he had persuaded Imam Ghalib

⁵⁴⁹ Colonial sources indicate that the Sultan kept Sulayman, whom he distrusted, close under the pretext of seeking his counsel and advice—a mere pretext to neutralize him by keeping him away from his power base in Nizwa and the Jebel Akhdar. See: FO 371/126875, Telegram from Muscat to Foreign Office, No. 205, July 4, 1957.

⁵⁵⁰ Mansur bin Hamdan al-Jabri, *Silk al-Juman fi Akhbar al-Jabal al-Akhḍar wa Ahl Uman* (Arabic manuscript, British Library, OR 13840), 39, notes that “Sulayman flatters the Sultan while corresponding with envoys and sending letters from his side to Talib, urging him to leave the Kingdom [of Saudi Arabia] to wage war against the Sultan...”

himself to rescind his decision to abdicate the Imamate and to assume the responsibilities of revolutionary leadership. Upon the renewal of the bay‘ah (oath of allegiance) to Ghalib—this time as a defensive Imam until the revolution's objectives were achieved, namely the restoration of sovereignty over the territories occupied by Britain and the Sultan's forces since 1955—a new phase of revolutionary mobilization began.

Sultan Sa‘id bin Taymur sought to replicate the same scenario he had relied on to suppress the uprising of Ibrahim bin ‘isain the Sharqiyyah: fomenting intertribal conflict on the ground while unleashing the Royal Air Force above to terrify the population.⁵⁵¹ He instructed the ‘Abriyyin and the Banu Shakil tribes to occupy Bilad Sit—the stronghold of Imam Ghalib, his brother talib, and the broader Banu Hana’ah tribe—exploiting the longstanding animosity between the ‘Abriyyin and the Banu Hana’ah, dating back to the Ya‘rubī era. The ‘Abriyyin, based in al-hamraon the banks of Wadi Ghul, occupied a strategic buffer zone between two major tribal blocs: Banu Riyam (al-Jabal al-Akhḍar) and Banu Hana’ah (Jabal al-Kawr). From this vulnerable flank, the Sultan succeeded in driving wedges and fueling recurring conflicts.

Sultan Sa‘id scheduled the attack on Bilad Sit (the land of Banu Hana’ah) for 2–3 July 1957, authorizing his half-brother tariq bin Taymur to lead the regular army forces stationed in Firq and arriving from ‘Ibri to support the retaliatory assault if necessary. Elders from Bilad Sit appealed to Sa‘id bin Taymur, arguing that the common people had no part in this conflict and that it would be unjust to unleash the ‘Abriyyin to plunder the wealth, lands, and honor of Banu Hana’ah. Nevertheless, the Sultan had resolved to lure talib bin ‘Ali into a direct confrontation in order to capture or eliminate him.⁵⁵²

⁵⁵¹ John Newsinger, "Jebel Akhdar and Dhofar: Footnote to Empire," *Race and Class* 39, no. 3 (1998).

⁵⁵² FO 371/126875, Telegram from Muscat to Foreign Office, No. 205, July 4, 1957.

But Ṭalib had carefully prepared to counter this trap. Since landing on the coast, he had kept the regular army and the Oman Scouts patrols preoccupied by laying a series of American-made landmines along the military routes—from Shinaṣ and several areas along the al-Batinah coast through the wadis leading to the hajar al-Gharbi range. He also mined the paths surrounding Nizwa and Bahla, stationing trusted snipers with intimate knowledge of the terrain. He instructed his men to focus their firepower on British officers and mercenary soldiers, who constituted the majority of the forces in the four British-led military camps: Firq (at the entrance to Nizwa), Fahud (to protect the British oil company), ‘Ibri, and Sharjah (the Oman Scouts), the latter tasked with securing the Trucial States from any threats emanating from Oman.

At the same time, talib maintained covert correspondence with Sulayman bin himayr, then under de facto house arrest in Masqat. Sulayman managed to deceive the Sultan by feeding him false information that talib was preparing for a large-scale assault from Wadi Sama’il. Then, on the night of 13 July 1957, Shaykh Sulayman escaped Masqat through the Ruwi Gate, having arranged with certain guards to leave it unlocked in exchange for a bribe. Upon reaching Wadi Bani Rawahah, near Izki, he encountered a British Petroleum vehicle carrying three soldiers. He killed two and instructed the third to inform the Sultan and the British that the war has begun—and I await you in my homeland.”⁵⁵³

This dramatic escape by Shaykh Sulayman bin himayr, his killing of soldiers, and his direct targeting of oil company interests marked a critical inflection point in the colonial administration’s handling of the crisis. Until that moment, Britain had tried to treat the matter as no more than a

⁵⁵³ Ial-Jabal al-Akhdar! Jabal al Akhdar, Bani Rayam Revolutionary Leader and Tribal Chief, Wadi bani Habib village, Oman, June 15, 2022.

series of local tribal skirmishes that Sultan Sa‘id could contain with his characteristic cunning and manipulation of social and economic divisions. Yet the empire was suddenly confronted with three major shocks.

Firstly, the evolution of resistance tactics and the growing number of Omanis joining the cause. The insurgents increasingly adopted guerrilla warfare techniques—methods gaining traction at the time in both the Algerian and Vietnamese revolutions. As noted in previous chapters, members of the Omani Liberation Army had received specialized training in such engagements. By early July 1957, explosive mines had been planted along strategic routes used by Sultan Sa‘id’s regular forces, resulting in casualties and property damage across multiple locations: al-hamra’, the Banu Hana’ah territories (Bilad Sit and Ghamr), the al-Batinah coast, and the wadis of Rustaq, Nakhl, al-Ma‘awil, and al-‘Awabi. The outcomes included the downing of two aircraft during coastal landings, the destruction of two Land Rover vehicles belonging to the Sultan’s forces due to landmines, and a total of three deaths, two serious injuries, and two minor wounds—all within the first week of July 1957.⁵⁵⁴

The revolutionaries would launch swift attacks and then vanish into the caves and crags of the mountains, terrain they knew intimately. Support for the revolution also broadened as traditional wooden dhow owners in Şur and along the al-Batinah coast began covertly transporting arms and ammunition from eastern Saudi Arabia to northern Oman. This clandestine supply route stretched from the Strait of Hormuz to the city of Şur. In response, the British dispatched the imperial frigate *HMS Modeste* and several Royal Navy coast guard vessels to carry out random

⁵⁵⁴ FO 371/126875, Telegram from Muscat to Bahrain, No. 57/34/1/514, July 8, 1957.

and unannounced inspections of wooden ships arriving from the Baṣrah–Masqat–Ṣur shipping line.⁵⁵⁵

Secondly, the emergence of unified coordination among the three principal revolutionary leaders: talib bin ‘Ali al-Hana’i, Sulayman bin himayr al-Nabhani, and Ṣalih bin ‘isaal-harithi, all rallying around Imam Ghalib bin ‘Ali. Sultan Sa‘id believed he had already succeeded in breaking up this leadership triad back in December 1955, when he captured Nizwa. At the time, he lavished Sulayman bin himayr with rewards, condemned talib and Ṣalih as fugitives and traitors, and framed their departure into exile as an act of national betrayal. Yet those efforts now appeared to have backfired. talib bin ‘Ali had found covert channels to communicate with Sulayman even during the latter’s forced stay in Masqat, and a growing number of tribes were joining him in open rebellion.

Meanwhile, Ṣalih bin ‘isaintensified his diplomatic efforts abroad. Imam Ghalib had formally appointed him as his external envoy, empowering him to alert Arab leaders and the Secretary-General of the Arab League to the “Western onslaught” against Oman. In one of his statements, Ṣalih declared:

Oman is under threat of annihilation by the rockets, bombs, and cannons of treacherous Britain, which has slaughtered the innocent and the infirm... Our homeland suffers immeasurable hardship and devastation at the hands of a ferocious war waged upon it by the colonial powers.”⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁵ WO 337/9, Operations in Muscat and Oman 1952-1959, Ministry of Defence, Whitehall, S.W.1. July 1964. p13.

⁵⁵⁶ Al-Harhi, Muhammad bin ‘Abdallah. *Musu‘at ‘Uman: al-Watha’iq al-Sirriyya* [Encyclopedia of Oman: The Secret Documents]. Vol. 4, ‘Watha’iq Fatrat Ghazw ‘Uman wa-Iqtala’ Judhur al-Imama (1955–1960)’ [Documents on

Thirdly, the intensity of Arab media and diplomatic coverage. The British colonial administration exerted significant effort to suppress news of the escalating confrontations in Oman. Officials in Masqat and al-Bahrayn were consistently instructed to minimize Britain's direct involvement, with explicit warnings that: Any overt and unambiguous British intervention would expose both Britain and the Sultan to extensive negative propaganda, particularly at the United Nations, should Saudi Arabia, Egypt, or any other Arab state choose to raise the matter before the General Assembly.⁵⁵⁷

Despite these efforts at obfuscation, Arab media outlets in Kuwait, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt remained steadfast in their support from the very first day of the revolution. As early as July 1956, the revolution in Oman had crystallized into a distinctly Arab liberation struggle—portrayed in regional discourse as a purgation of British colonial defilement from part of the Omani land. It was also during this period that the Dulles–Lloyd conspiracies were exposed,⁵⁵⁸ and what the press increasingly referred to as “a war of extermination launched by the British army in Oman” had begun.⁵⁵⁹

From 1957 to 1960, reports on the Oman revolution became a daily fixture in *Ṣawt al-ʿArab* radio broadcasts and in the front pages of Egypt's *al-Ahram* newspaper, with sensational

the Period of the Invasion of Oman and the Uprooting of the Imamate (1955–1960)], 38. Additionally, see the appendix of the same work, which contains the correspondence of Shaykh Ṣalih bin ʿisaal-Harithi with rulers and leaders in the Arab Gulf states, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Morocco, as well as his presentation of the revolution in Oman. See pages 855–82.

⁵⁵⁷ FO 371/126875, Telegram from Foreign Office to Muscat, No. 39, July 16, 1957.

⁵⁵⁸ In a meeting between the US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, and the British Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, the situation in the Gulf and Oman, and the prospect of military intervention, were discussed.” See: *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Near East Region; Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula*, vol. XII, doc. 23, accessed January 9, 2025, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d23>.

⁵⁵⁹ *Al-Ahram*, Egypt, no. 25792, year 82, 22 July 1957, . 1.

headlines such as: Britain Fears the Outcome of the Revolution Against the Sultan of Masqat”⁵⁶⁰, New Victories for the Revolutionaries Against the Sultan of Masqat”, The Imam of Oman Rejects Reconciliation and Appeals to the Arabs for Support Against Colonialism”, Britain Refuses American Mediation on the Masqat Rebellion”, and The United States Denies Arming the Rebels or Competing with Britain Over Oil Interests”.⁵⁶¹

The depth of influence exerted by Arab media on British colonial calculations became unmistakable. British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd himself conveyed this concern in a briefing to his American counterpart, stating: Lloyd seemed sincerely worried that divisive efforts in press and political groups would put great pressure on the US either to support the UK action or to declare for the right of the warring groups to have it out without HMG interference.”⁵⁶²

This sense of frustration must be contextualized within a broader constellation of structural constraints and objective conditions that plagued the colonial apparatus and the forces of the Sultan—factors that, particularly in the initial phase, enabled the revolutionaries to gain momentum and secure a series of rapid and significant victories. Among these enabling factors were, but not limited to, the following factors.

⁵⁶⁰ *Al-Ahram* (Cairo, Egypt), no. 25792, Year 82, 22 July 1957, 1.

⁵⁶¹ *Al-Ahram*, Egypt, no. 25794, year 82, 24 July 1957, . 4.

⁵⁶² Telegram from the Embassy in the United Kingdom to the Department of State, July 23, 1957, in 'Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957, Near East: Jordan-Yemen , vol. XIII, doc. 149, Department of State, Central Files, 786E.00/7–2357 (Secret; Niact), accessed January 9, 2025, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v13/d149>.

The first factor was the fragility of the Sultan's Armed Forces. Most correspondence between the British Political Agent and the Residency in Bahrain, as well as with the Colonial Office in London, highlights a deep lack of confidence in the regular forces established by the Sultan of Muscat under British supervision. These forces were neither professionally trained nor subject to rigorous standards of organization.⁵⁶³ Moreover, the British officers seconded to oversee these units were often deemed ill-equipped to confront a popular national uprising led by people intimately familiar with their land and social fabric. As one report noted, The forces in Muscat and Oman are ineffective, and some of the British officers are not first-rate; they require support to avoid confusion.⁵⁶⁴ British officials also expressed concern that the increasing number of Indian and Baluch soldiers in the Sultan's service would alienate local tribes and civilians, potentially driving them to side with the revolutionaries.⁵⁶⁵

The second factor was the hesitation of the colonial administration to support Sultan Sa'īd, particularly regarding the use of the Royal Air Force. From the outset of revolutionary operations, Sultan Sa'īd sought to capitalize on the unrest by pressing Britain for intensified aerial support to decisively crush the uprising.⁵⁶⁶ Among the more telling examples was the colonial administration's astonishment at the Sultan's request to destroy the towers of Bilad Sit and Rayhanah in the Bani Hina'ah region using the Royal Air Force.⁵⁶⁷ This hesitation was further reinforced by concerns within the Colonial Office in London that such direct military involvement

⁵⁶³ FO 371/126875, The British Foreign Office memorandum on the utilisation of air forces in Oman. From D.M.Riches. July 11, 1957.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ FO 371/126875, Telegram from Bahrain to Foreign Office, No.743, July 15, 1957.

⁵⁶⁶ FO 371/126875, Telegram from Bahrain to Foreign Office, No.743, July 15, 1957.

⁵⁶⁷ FO 371/126875, Telegram from Muscat to Foreign Office, No. 53, July 10, 1957.

would offer clear proof to the Egyptian media, and could even serve as evidence against us at the United Nations.”⁵⁶⁸

Major Chauncey, the British Political Agent, was especially keen to steer the Sultan toward employing tribal means instead. He urged the use of the ‘Abriyin and Bani Shukayl tribes to raze farms and huts, focusing in particular on destroying the aflaj (irrigation canals) in order to deprive humans and livestock of water, and to devastate the palm groves—inflicting collective punishment on the communities of Ghamr and Bilad Sit for sheltering Imam Ghalib and his brother talib. The aim was to set a deterrent example for other Omani regions, framing the conflict as merely an internal tribal feud, igniting a cycle of vendettas, and—most crucially—keeping Britain and its forces from appearing overtly on the battlefield.⁵⁶⁹

The third factor was the escalating concern within the British Petroleum Company over the loss of its interests. In its search for a justifiable rationale to counter the Arab anti-colonial narrative surrounding the suppression of the Omani revolution, the British colonial administration in the Gulf sought to present British intervention as necessary for safeguarding the interests of British and American oil companies engaged in exploration activities in Oman—particularly in areas believed to contain commercially viable reserves.⁵⁷⁰

Correspondence from the British Residency in the Gulf underscores this argument, portraying Britain’s actions as motivated by the need to protect vital energy assets. The British Political Agent in Muscat confirmed that the Petroleum Development (PDO) company operating in the Fahud oilfields expressed its full readiness to provide aircraft or cover the costs of leasing

⁵⁶⁸ FO 371/126875, Telegram from Bahrain to Foreign Office, No.735, July 11, 1957.

⁵⁶⁹ FO 371/126875, Telegram from Muscat to Foreign Office, No.60, July 13, 1957.

⁵⁷⁰ FO 371/126874, Telegram from Bahrain to C.J. Treadwell, No. 57/18/1437, Oman, March 28, 1957.

planes for the purpose of bombing rebellious Omani towns and villages—demonstrating the extent to which corporate interests aligned themselves with colonial military objectives to ensure the suppression of the uprising.⁵⁷¹

These overlapping contradictions ultimately trapped Sultan Sa‘id bin Taymur’s forces in a strategic siege imposed by the revolutionaries. From the north, the insurgents—led by Shaykh Mahmud bin Zahir al-Hina’i (uncle of Imam Ghalib and talib)—along with fighters from the Omani Liberation Army, members of the Banu Hina’ah tribe, and their allies, encircled the plains of Bilad Sayt and Ghamr at the base of Jabal al-Kawr. From the south, forces loyal to Shaykh Sulayman bin himayr al-Nabhani, supported by Banu Riyam tribesmen and their allies, maintained pressure from the foothills of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, particularly around Barkat al-Mawz and Tanuf.

The period from 14 to 18 July 1957 marked a significant battlefield setback for British-backed forces and the Oman Regiment. British advisors to the Sultan—namely Innes and Chanuncy—issued orders for the immediate withdrawal of troops stationed at the Firq camp under the command of tariq bin Taymur due to the deteriorating situation. The revolutionaries had succeeded in cutting communication lines between the British-formed military detachments operating from Wadi Sama’il through Fahud and ‘Ibri.⁵⁷² The revolutionaries launched relentless attacks with heavy gunfire and strategically placed landmines, causing significant damage to military vehicles and troop transports.⁵⁷³

⁵⁷¹ FO 371/126875, Telegram from Muscat to Foreign Office, No. 61, July 13, 1957.

⁵⁷² FO 371/126875, Telegram from Muscat to Foreign Office, No.HA/29/1015, July 14, 1957.

⁵⁷³ WO 337/9, Operations in Muscat and Oman 1952-1959, Ministry of Defence, Whitehall, S.W.1. July 1964. p13.

The resulting collapse in morale rendered the Oman Regiment largely ineffective.⁵⁷⁴ This revolutionary success prompted the British Political Agent in Muscat to make an urgent appeal to the Colonial Office in London, pleading for immediate intervention by Her Majesty's Government to rescue Sultan Sa'īd, whose grip on Oman was at serious risk. The plea was framed in terms of protecting British lives, corporate interests, and oil company assets operating in the region.⁵⁷⁵

During this critical juncture, the Commander of the British Trucial Oman Levies was reluctant to deploy his units in support of the besieged forces near Nizwa. He feared that any engagement would expose the vulnerability of the Sultan's collapsing army and negatively affect the morale of the Trucial Oman Levies, whose primary mission had been to protect oil installations and British personnel, not to uphold the Sultan's political ambitions. Consequently, he restricted his forces to securing British oil interests in al-Buraymi, 'Ibri, and Fahud.⁵⁷⁶

Nizwa Returns to Rebel Control

The rebels regained their capital on 18 July 1957, after most of the Sultan's forces fled and dispersed across the deserts of Oman. Some died of thirst, having become lost and unfamiliar with the region's terrain and paths.

⁵⁷⁴ FO 371/126875, Telegram from Muscat to Foreign Office, No.70, July 16, 1957. For further information, please refer to the British Political Agent in Muscat's telegram to the Foreign Office, in which he stated that, in the absence of urgent British military assistance, the Sultan's troops would attempt to desert under cover of darkness.

FO 371/126875, Telegram from Muscat to Foreign Office, No. 71, July 16, 1957.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ FO 371/126875, Foreign Office memorandum on the situation in Muscat and Oman, July, 17, 1957.

*As for the Sultan's soldiers at that time: the space narrowed around them, the battle weighed heavily upon them, and anguish overtook them. The troops began seeking escape and flight; calamities encircled them, afflictions intensified upon them, and flames engulfed their vehicles. It was during the peak of the searing heat, and their souls nearly perished from thirst. Blood poured from the [vehicles] as if from basins filled with water. The soldiers fell from the trucks and fled—some were taken prisoner, while others died from the burning heat and thirst... A great many were killed, and it was a calamitous defeat... ”.*⁵⁷⁷

Sayyid tariq bin Taymur ordered the withdrawal of the remnants of his forces, abandoning behind them significant quantities of weapons, vehicles, and ammunition, which the rebels would later use in their subsequent confrontations with the British forces.

Sayyid Tāriq was at the height of his fury over this major collapse and *wanted to prosecute the people of Oman and show them the consequences of their betrayal”.*⁵⁷⁸ Yet the moment proved too immense for Britain and the Sultan's forces to fully absorb. In less than a week, the rebels managed to recapture all the main towns that had been seized two years earlier: Bahla', Nizwa, Birkat al-Mawz, Izki, and 'Ibri.

Elements such as guerrilla warfare tactics and high-impact operations—including the planting of landmines and the strategic positioning of snipers at critical junctures on hills, mountains, and valley bends—revealed the fragility of the British military equipment supporting the Sultan of Masqat. These developments also highlighted the vast difference between what motivated the mercenary forces—British, Indian, Pakistani—employed by Britain, and the

⁵⁷⁷ Mansur bin Hamdan al-Jabri, “*Silk al-Juman in Akhbar al-Jabal al-Akhdar and the People of Oman*,” British Library, File No. OR 13840), 31.

⁵⁷⁸ Ial-Jabal al-Akhdarl Jabal al Akhdar, Wadi bani Habib village, Oman, January 20 , 2024.

doctrine that animated the local population to take up arms. *They came to steal the land and plunder its resources. This land is alien to them—they do not know it, and it does not know them the way its own people do*”.⁵⁷⁹

This victory emboldened Imam Ghalib bin ‘Ali and his military commander talib bin ‘Ali to advance toward Wadi Sama’il in order to consolidate their hold over the strategic throat of Oman and to seize control of the principal and sole corridor connecting Masqat and the coastal cities on one side, and the entirety of the interior towns on the other. Such control would grant them command over the vital artery through which the vehicles of the British oil company moved, along with its service convoys, logistical supply lines, food provisions, and technical support for workers. However, rebel progress was halted by the armed resistance of the Bani Rawahah tribe, who were aligned with the Sultan and reinforced by intensified British aerial sorties across the region. This compelled the rebels to fall back to their entrenched positions in Izki, al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, Tanuf, Nizwa, and Jabal al-Kawr.

A decisive internal factor also contributed to the rebels’ failure to capture Sama’il. Shaykh Khalfan bin Jamil al-Siyabi—then serving as a judge under the Sultan—issued a fatwa to the people of Sama’il urging them to *repel the Imam from their land, even by force*,⁵⁸⁰ on the grounds that *the Imam is unable to protect it and would subject it to the corruption and mischief of the Sultan’s troops*.” He added that *among the conditions of the Imamate [under such circumstances, i.e., in the case of a defensive Imam according to the Ibadi tradition] is that the Imam’s forces must be at*

⁵⁷⁹ al-Jabal al-Akhḍar! Jabal al Akhdar, Wadi bani Habib village, Oman, December 16 , 2023.

⁵⁸⁰ For further elaboration, see: Sa‘id ibn hamd Al- Harthi, *Al-Lu’lu’ al-Ratib fi Ibrāz Mustawda‘at al-Qalb*. 334.

*least half the strength of the enemy in both equipment and numbers... otherwise, the effort is futile and leads only to bloodshed and the destruction of property.*⁵⁸¹ ” This fatwa—and the rupture it precipitated—echoed the events of 1955, when the Imam was similarly abandoned by the community of scholars and left to face his fate in isolation.⁵⁸²

A major controversy erupted within the corridors of the colonial administration in London following the resounding collapse of the Sultan's forces in the city of Nizwa. The faction opposed to offering any assistance to the Sultan of Masqat based its argument on the following justifications: there existed no formal treaty or written agreement obligating Her Majesty's Government to support a ruler who had so spectacularly failed to establish a force capable of defending himself or his territories—despite an annual subsidy of one hundred and fifty thousand Sterling Pounds (GBP150,000) provided by the British oil company to sustain his military. Moreover, his administrative and political incompetence was evidenced by his inability to persuade the tribal populations of Oman's interior to remain under his allegiance and authority. In contrast, the faction advocating for British intervention was primarily driven by the imperative to safeguard the interests of the British oil company and to preserve a longstanding strategic alliance with the al Bu Sa'īd dynasty—a relationship that had endured for over one hundred and fifty (150) years. Added to this was the perceived necessity of containing the growing influence of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, as the “Omani question” had, according to colonial sources, ceased to be merely a local matter.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² See the preceding chapter.

⁵⁸³ WO 337/9, Operations in Muscat and Oman 1952-1959, Ministry of Defence, Whitehall, S.W.1. July 1964. p13.

Nonetheless, both factions agreed that above all, British interests had to be protected without attracting regional or international scrutiny. The legal and diplomatic basis invoked to justify continued support was the 1932 agreement on British military assistance to the Sultan of Masqat—albeit interpreted in light of the shifting international and regional context at the close of the 1940s and the rise of anti-colonial liberation movements across the globe.⁵⁸⁴

Generals of the Empire in Whitehall Decide on War

Her Majesty's Government issued orders to intervene militarily in Oman and to support Sultan Sa'īd bin Taymur—on the condition that he pursue a shrewd and intelligent political strategy. The primary objective was to safeguard British interests, which centered on two critical concerns: ensuring the uninterrupted flow of oil by the British Petroleum company, and reinforcing a strategic military presence by capitalizing on Oman's geographic location for imperial naval and aerial navigation.⁵⁸⁵

As Paolo Virilio has argued, warfare has long been positioned at the core of Western civilization.⁵⁸⁶ In line with this view, the British Empire structured its war strategy in Oman around three foundational pillars. Firstly, a comprehensive blockade—by sea, air, and land—to prevent the entry of weapons and ammunition from external sources. Secondly, the systematic destruction

⁵⁸⁴ FO 371/126875, Foreign Office memorandum on the situation in Muscat and Oman, D.M.H. Riches. July, 17, 1957.

⁵⁸⁵ FO 371/126875, Telegram from Foreign Office to Bahrain, No.1109, July 18, 1957.

⁵⁸⁶ Virilio's (1975) seminal work *Bunker Archaeology*, translated by George Collins and published by Les éditions du Demi-Cercle in Paris, posits that the accumulation of material wealth and military prowess in the West has engendered a perpetual appetite for conflict, with the aim of expanding one's territorial dominion. This theory, which is intricately interwoven with notions of technology, velocity and imperialist colonialism, is a seminal contribution to the field.

of all visible fortifications, including castles, forts, and watchtowers, to dismantle the infrastructure of resistance, coupled with aerial leaflet campaigns warning the population against cooperating with the rebels.⁵⁸⁷ Thirdly, the construction of a localized intelligence network loyal to the Sultan and the British forces, with the aim of infiltrating the rebel ranks and sowing discord among the tribes.⁵⁸⁸

Concurrently, the colonial administration in London took care to inform the United States of the timing of aerial operations” so that Washington could not later claim it had not been warned.⁵⁸⁹ The British military intervention was decisive and heavy-handed, exemplifying what ‘Abdel Razzaq Takriti describes as the fusion of imperial imperatives with colonial ambitions and oil-driven geopolitical strategy.⁵⁹⁰ The British Chiefs of Staff entrusted Air Vice-Marshal M. L. Heath, Commander of British Forces in the Arabian Peninsula (CBFAP), with operational command. He was authorized to assess the strategic needs and mobilize reinforcements from any unit of the imperial military apparatus—naval or aerial—stretching from the Mediterranean Sea in the north to the southern reaches of the Indian Ocean. As for the ground forces, operational orders were issued on 19 July to the First Battalion of The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles), then stationed in Bahrain in the Arabian Gulf with an additional detachment in Kenya. The deployment plan was multifaceted: Company A was to be relocated from Bahrain to ‘Ibri, while Company B—already positioned in Sharjah—would send platoons to al-Buraymi and Barka’, both situated north of the

⁵⁸⁷ The commander of the British forces in the Aden Protectorate proposed that the identical plan that had been implemented in Aden should be adopted, namely the identification of resistance zones and the imposition of a curfew on daytime movements. See: FO 371/126875, Telegram from Bahrain to Foreign Office. No.758, July 18, 1957.

⁵⁸⁸ FO 371/126875, Telegram from the Commonwealth Relations Office to all British Commissioners in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan, Rhodesia, Ceylon and Ghana.. No.625, July 22, 1957.

⁵⁸⁹ FO 371/126875, Memorandum on Cabinet approval of operations in Muscat and Oman from the Foreign Office's Arab Affairs Department. July 21, 1957.

⁵⁹⁰ Takriti. 24.

capital Masqat, in order to reinforce the existing Oman Scouts units assigned to secure the northern border. A support company based in Kenya was instructed to transit through Sharjah en route to the Fahud region, where it was tasked specifically with the protection of the oil fields. Concurrently, Company D would be airlifted from Kenya to Fahud via Bahrain, completing the layered and geographically dispersed deployment of British ground forces across strategic points in northern and interior Oman. The British Royal Navy was to deploy three frigates to conduct continuous patrols in the Sea of Oman, stretching from the city of Şur in the south to the Strait of Hormuz in the north. Their mission was to inspect sailing vessels in search of weapons and combatants.⁵⁹¹

The British aerial assault commenced following the transfer of four *Venom* aircraft from No. 8 Squadron in Aden to Sharjah, accompanied shortly thereafter by their ground crews. These were soon joined by an entire unit of *Venoms* from the Royal Air Force's No. 249 Squadron based in Nairobi. Meanwhile, in Bahrain, *Shackleton* maritime patrol aircraft arrived from Malta, supported by *Beverley* transports from No. 47 and No. 53 Squadrons stationed in Abingdon, as well as *Valetta* aircraft from No. 84 Squadron based in Aden. Additionally, *Pembroke* reconnaissance planes from No. 1417 Flight in Bahrain were deployed to conduct detailed aerial surveys aimed at mapping Omani villages, tracking population movements, and documenting the number and locations of forts, towers, and defensive structures, as well as the mountain and valley routes traditionally used by Omanis.⁵⁹²

⁵⁹¹ WO 337/9. Ibid.

⁵⁹² For further information, please refer to the previous telegram concerning the recapture of Nizwa by the revolutionaries and the urgency expressed by British residency of the Gulf. As this issue is of urgent necessity, the Defence Committee requests that it be prioritised in: FO 371/126875, Telegram from Bahrain to Foreign Office, No.744, July 15, 1957.

The Venom strike aircraft launched their first attacks on 24 July 1957, carrying out between ten to twelve sorties per target using air-to-ground rockets. The initial rocket assault on the fort of Izki marked the first major British aerial strike, inflicting significant damage. The next day, on 25 July, *Venoms* targeted the historic fort of Nizwa, though the attack failed to penetrate the formidable structure built by the Ya‘rubi Imam Sultan bin Sayf in the mid-seventeenth century. Air raids then followed in quick succession: Tanuf Fort on 27 July, Birkat al-Mawz Fort on 29 July, Farq Fort on 30 July, and finally the large Bahla’ Castle on 31 July. Operational directives were explicit: to bomb anything that moved—vehicles, individuals, and even herds of livestock. The warplanes took off from multiple imperial bases, including Khawr al-Mukhaşşar in Yemen, as well as from British bases in Sharjah, Bahrain, Cyprus, and Nairobi.⁵⁹³

⁵⁹³ WO 337/9, Operations in Muscat and Oman 1952-1959, Ministry of Defence, Whitehall, S.W.1. July 1964. pp13-16. Peterson's argument is that, in the absence of the RAF's aircraft, the ground forces would not have been capable of achieving any significant progress on the ground. (See: Peterson, *Oman 's Insurgencies*, 102-108).

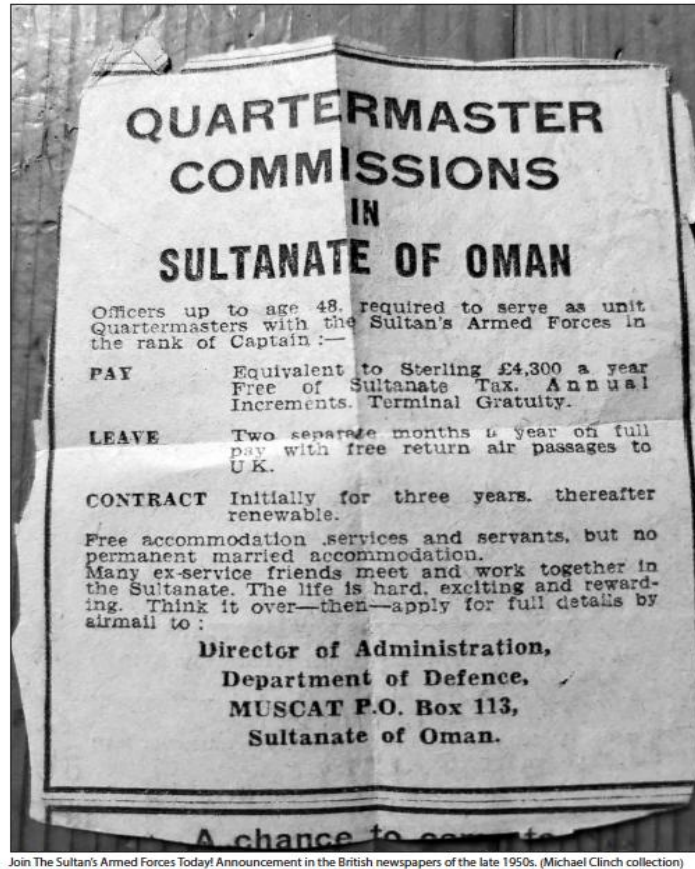


Figure 3: Announcement in British newspapers recruiting mercenaries to fight in the al-Jabal al-Akhdar

These wartime practices employed by the British Empire are part of a deeply rooted martial tradition, as articulated by Karma al-Nabulsi in her seminal work. She describes how:

*The martialists... claimed war's absoluteness. There was a repudiation of military conflict in anything less than its unadulterated form. Any attempts to set limits (whether moral, prudential, or even political) to this natural phenomenon were to be rejected.*⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹⁴ Karma, Nabulsi Karma, *Traditions of War: Occupation, Resistance and the Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 93.

In an act of what Ranajit Guha terms the "*proliferation of insult*",⁵⁹⁵ Sultan Sa'īd bin Taymur proposed to Mr. Gault—the British Political Resident in Bahrain—during the latter's visit to Masqat to discuss the most effective means of crushing the revolution, that the air campaign should target three principal objectives: date palm groves, water channels and aflaj, and fortresses. The Royal Air Force would also be tasked with dropping propaganda leaflets, disseminating messages in support of the Sultan and against the rebels.

The British Empire's "loyal" ally argued that bombing trees, incinerating palm plantations,⁵⁹⁶ and destroying the aflaj irrigation systems would prove highly effective against the tribes supporting the revolution—especially given that the harvest season had just begun and was expected to continue for the next six weeks, up to mid-September 1957. The result would be dual devastation: the loss of life and the destruction of livelihoods. It would deprive ordinary people of their staple winter crop—dates—and cause widespread thirst by burning orchards and disabling irrigation, while simultaneously terrifying and punishing as many civilians as possible. The intent was to disrupt village life across the fertile plains adjacent to al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, many of which had declared allegiance to the revolution. The cumulative social pressure, it was believed, would weigh heavily on the revolutionaries.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁵ Guha, Ranajit, *The Prose of Counter-Insurgency*, in *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983) 80-78.

⁵⁹⁶ In a speech delivered to the House of Commons on 22 July 1957, British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd contended that British military intervention was not in accordance with any treaty. Britain has no treaty that allows it to deal with internal issues within the borders of Muscat, and while the country may perform some external duties for the ruler of Muscat, it has nothing to do with internal matters. 'We are providing the full support that we think one of our loyal allies needs.' Further details can be found in the House of Commons debates.

FO 371/126876 & FO 371/126879, 22 July 1957.

⁵⁹⁷ FO 371/126875, Telegram from Muscat to Foreign Office, No. 774, July 21, 1957.

This policy decision by Her Majesty's Government provoked a storm of criticism within Britain itself. In the House of Commons, it failed to garner consensus, with numerous Members of Parliament describing the operation as a full-fledged invasion: *At the request of a ruler, we launched an aerial invasion of Oman.*” This raised critical legal and ethical questions, such as: *Does the government consider it lawful under international law to dispatch an invading force—at the request of the ruler of an ostensibly independent country—to suppress a rebellion?*”⁵⁹⁸

As a result, the British Cabinet was compelled to draft a legal memorandum addressing the legitimacy of the intervention in Oman. The document, authored by legal adviser F. A. Vallat, concluded that the Empire had the right to offer assistance and technical cooperation—including military support—to any of its allies worldwide. The memorandum cited historical precedents and examples intended to justify such acts of colonial intervention under the guise of legal international conduct.⁵⁹⁹

The colonial war machine paid little heed to the debates unfolding in the British Parliament, nor did it wait for their conclusions. Instead, it preempted the political process by executing its pre-planned military operation to crush the revolution. Two British armored columns advanced simultaneously—one from Fahud, where the oil fields were located, and the other from Masqat, moving through the Sama'il Gap. The objective of both forces was to penetrate Nizwa and reestablish control over the city.⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁸ FO 371/126876 & FO 371/126879, 23 July 1957.

⁵⁹⁹ A memorandum was issued by the British Foreign Office at the behest of the Prime Minister, addressing the legitimacy under which the United Kingdom provided military assistance to the Sultan of Muscat to quell an uprising. FO/371/126877, EA 1015/89, 23 July 1957.

⁶⁰⁰ For a personal account by the Commander of the SAF at the time see David Smiley (with Peter Kemp), *Arabian Assignment* (Barnsley: Cooper, 1975)

The first column, known as the Carter Force, was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Stewart Carter. It consisted of British ground troops including two rifle companies and a support company from the Cameronians, elements of the 15/19th Hussars equipped with *Ferret* armored reconnaissance vehicles, later replaced by the 13/18th Hussars, and subsequently by units from the Life Guards. British commando units also participated in this force. The Cameronians were the first to arrive among the British troops. Notably, Sayyid tariq bin Taymur was part of this column—having narrowly escaped Nizwa with a small contingent of his men only weeks prior.

The second column, referred to as the Huff Force, was led by Lieutenant Colonel F. N. Waugh. It advanced from Masqat after being reinforced by the al-Batinah Battalion—later renamed the Northern Oman Battalion—which included 300 Indian and Baluchi soldiers, along with nearly 1,000 tribal fighters drawn from the hawasinah, Bani ‘Umar, Bani Ghafir, Bani Jabir, al-Siyabiyyin, al-Rahabiyyin, al-Nadabiyyin, Bani harraṣ, and Bani Rawahah. This tribal force was led by Sayyid Ahmad bin Ibrahim al Bu Sa‘id. Both forces operated under the unified command of Brigadier J. A. R. Robertson of the British Army. The offensive commenced on 5 August 1957 AD, under the cover of heavy aerial bombardment by the Royal Air Force.⁶⁰¹

The revolutionaries responded to the twin-pronged British assault with determined resistance. The first column was confronted by Shaykh talib bin ‘Ali, who led over 300 fighters from the Omani Liberation Army in the town of Farq, on the outskirts of Nizwa.⁶⁰² Fierce clashes broke out between the revolutionaries and advancing British ground forces, reinforced from the air. On 8 August, Sayyid tariq bin Taymur moved to Tanuf, where he personally oversaw the aerial destruction of Tanuf Fort. The residential quarters and supply stores were encircled with

⁶⁰¹ WO 337/9, Operations in Muscat and Oman 1952-1959, Ministry of Defence, Whitehall, S.W.1. July 1964:14-1; Peterson, *Oman 's Insurgencies*, 104-108.

⁶⁰² Interview with Shaykh Sa‘id bin Marḥūn bin Sallām al-Ṭūbī, a leading revolutionary in al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, conducted shortly before his death, 9 March 2022.

explosives, and tariq himself is reported to have pressed the central detonation trigger. The town—the seat of Shaykh Sulayman bin himyar—was razed to the ground. Farms were torched, the aflaj water channels were obliterated, and homes were looted by British troops.

Tāriq took ruthless vengeance on Sulayman, but his retribution fell upon the innocent—those who had no part in the personal feud between Shaykh Sulayman and the Sultan of Masqat or the British. The entire area was annihilated. Collective punishment was inflicted. The inhabitants were expelled from their homes, and their possessions were plundered. The men fled to al-Jabal al-Akhḍar. Women, children, and the elderly were left behind—living in tents, in fear and deprivation, on the outskirts of Nizwa, as refugees. It was exactly what Israeli colonialism had done—and continues to do—in Palestine.”⁶⁰³

On this front, Sultan bin Sulayman bin himyar, the former wali of Bahla’, was captured after surrendering to British forces and was immediately transferred to al-Jalali prison. Meanwhile, the Carter Force—reinforced by units from the British Trucial Oman Scouts based in Sharjah, along with Cameronians and close air support from *Venom* fighter aircraft—secured Jabal al-hawarah, the high ground overlooking Nizwa. This position was referred to in British military documents as Crown Hill. On the morning of 12 August, Carter’s forces entered Nizwa. talib bin ‘Ali, along with a few remaining snipers, managed to retreat to al-Jabal al-Akhḍar via Wadi Kamah.⁶⁰⁴

As for the second British column, which advanced through the Sama’il Gap, it was met by rebels led by Imam Ghalib himself, alongside Shaykh Sulayman, and supported largely by members of the Bani Tubah and Bani Sulaymah tribes. The confrontation occurred in the village

⁶⁰³ Interview No. 3. With a survivor of the Tanouf massacre. Nizwa city, Tanuf village, Oman, November 25, 2023.

⁶⁰⁴ Said Al-Harhi, *Al-Lu’lu’ al-Ratib fi Ibraz Mustawda ‘at al-Qalb*) 334.

of al-Sahamah, near the entrance to Imti and the wider Izki region.⁶⁰⁵ There, a massacre unfolded. The village of al-Sahamah was annihilated by airstrikes. Its elderly shaykh, Zahran bin Khamis al-Sulaymi, was killed alongside women and children after offering fierce resistance with his family in defense of their land, property, and community.⁶⁰⁶

In Izki, the defensive tower of Qarut was destroyed. Yet the rebels succeeded in liberating more than 40 prisoners of the Sultan's forces, including a Pakistani doctor who had been captured when the revolutionaries regained temporary control of the area. Despite these localized gains, the balance of power was overwhelmingly skewed. The British forces had overwhelming technological superiority—aircraft burning villages from above and armored vehicles bombarding anything that moved on the ground. Among the most prominent rebel fighters in these engagements were Sa'ud 'Ali bin hamad wad Jaridah al-Tubi, Sa'id bin Sulayman al-Qaşayyir, the wali of Izki, and the town's leading jurist, Shaykh Muhammad bin Salim bin Zahir al-Ruqayshi, along with his son Ibrahim. Shaykh al-Ruqayshi was nearly ninety years old and had become frail in both sight and hearing.⁶⁰⁷ All of these dignitaries were captured, subjected to torture, and transferred to al-Jalali prison, where they would remain for the rest of their lives.⁶⁰⁸

As for Imam Ghalib and Shaykh Sulayman bin himyar, they gathered what they could—children, wives, and some of their possessions—and withdrew from their last stronghold in Birkat al-Mawz Fort, ascending to al-Jabal al-Akhḍar through the Manakhir pass.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁵ Interview No. 1, Izki, Imti village, Oman, November 25, 2023.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁷ Said Al-Harthi, *Al-Lu'lu' al-Ratib fi Ibrāz Mustawda 'at al-Qalb* 336.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid. 337-340.

⁶⁰⁹ Interview No. I. Izki city, Imti village, Oman, November 25, 2023; Mansur bin Hamdan al-Jabri. Ibid. p 35.

Thus began the final chapter of this anti-colonial uprising: the Green Mountain phase, which would last from September 1957 to January 1959.

The al-Jabal al-Akhḍar Phase

The Royal Air Force wasted no time in pursuing the rebels into the highlands of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar. The aerial campaign resumed on 25 August, with four *Venom* aircraft launching a devastating strike on the village of Siq, located at the summit of the mountain. Meanwhile, British ground forces were ordered to withdraw by Brigadier J. A. R. Robertson, who feared the annihilation of his relatively small contingent. Despite having spent much of his military career commanding Gurkha units along the perilous slopes of the North-West Frontier of India, Robertson assessed his current forces—composed largely of mercenaries—as neither sufficiently trained nor equipped to meet the extreme demands of mountain warfare. Artillery support and logistical supply were nearly impossible to sustain at altitudes approaching 7,000 feet, let alone in conditions where the enemy consisted of expert snipers intimately familiar with the terrain, its natural defenses, and concealed positions. The British commander's decision to pause the ground campaign reflected a strategy of temporary restraint—aimed at regrouping, masking intent, and preparing for a full-scale eradication operation against the Omani Liberation Army.⁶¹⁰

This section examines the most consequential stage of the war in the al-Jabal al-Akhḍar: the period during which Britain waged a total war on the mountain and its inhabitants. It encompassed coordinated ground advances, aerial bombardment, strategic planning and command, intelligence operations, and the deployment of elite special forces. This phase extended over approximately

⁶¹⁰ WO 337/9. Ibid. p18.

sixteen months, constituting the final chapter of the revolutionary military campaign within Oman's territorial interior.

Between Handles and Locks

The terms *maqbaḍ* (handle) and *qufl* (lock) evoke, in the imagination, the image of a fortified space or a tightly sealed vault. This metaphor aptly captures the strategic thinking that shaped the Omani resistance in the face of colonial brutality—an unrelenting campaign that employed every means available to uproot the revolution. Al-Jabal al-Akhḍar was the final stronghold, the secure vault to which the Omanis retreated after the colonial machinery descended upon them by land, sea, and air. And because the Omanis knew the mountain's paths and secrets as intimately as the lines on their own palms, the Revolutionary Command Council—comprised of Imam Ghalib, Emir of the al-Jabal Sulayman bin himyar, and Shaykh talib (Commander in Chief of the Omani Liberation Army)—resolved to make a strategic stand on the mountain and begin planning the next phase of the struggle.

In parallel, both the internal and external fronts of the revolution were mobilized to rally local and international support. Domestically, the leadership issued a declaration titled “Free Sons of Oman”, distributed across numerous towns and cities, calling upon Omani youth to rise against colonialism and imperialism.⁶¹¹

Externally, under the stewardship of Shaykh Ṣalih bin ʿisaal-harithi, the diplomatic front intensified its efforts to internationalize the Omani cause, particularly through the channels of the

⁶¹¹ FO 371/126879, EA1015/139, Julay 22, 1957.

United Nations. These efforts were bolstered by strong backing from Egypt and Saudi Arabia, whose political weight in the Arab world, the Global South, and beyond played a critical role in elevating the revolution's visibility.⁶¹²

In the Arab media sphere, *Sawt al-‘Arab* (Voice of the Arabs) and Egyptian newspapers such as *al-Ahram* and *al-Jumhuriyya* covered the Omani Liberation Army's confrontations with British forces extensively.⁶¹³ In Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, the revolution featured prominently in outlets like Radio Beirut and the newspapers *al-Zaman* and *al-Thawra*, where it became front-page news. These platforms celebrated the Omani liberation struggle, called upon Omanis and Arabs to rally around the revolutionary leadership, and condemned the British occupation in strong terms.⁶¹⁴

On the international stage, Imam Ghalib issued several appeals—through the Imamate office in Cairo—to major global powers such as Russia and the United States, urging them to intervene and put an end to what he called the “wicked British aggression against Oman.”⁶¹⁵

Shaykh Ṣalīh bin ‘īsa al-harīthī also addressed an appeal to the American ambassador in Cairo, urging U.S. intervention to counter British aggression. However, the British response to the U.S. State Department was swift and unequivocal. The Colonial Office dismissed the appeal on the

⁶¹² Fathi, Al-Deeb. *Abdel Nasser wa Tahrir al-Mashriq al Arabi: Shahadat Fathi al-Deeb*, Cairo: Markaz al-Dirasat al Istratijya wal Siyassiya bil Ahram, 2000)204–23.

⁶¹³ See, for example, headlines from *Al-Ahram* in the early days coinciding with the Omani Revolution: “Britain Fears the Consequences of the Revolution against the Sultan of Muscat,” *Al-Ahram*, Monday, July 22, 1957, front page, continued on page 4; “Britain Sends Troops to Aid the Sultan of Muscat,” and “The Revolution Threatens a Crisis in the Middle East Like the Suez Crisis,” *Al-Ahram*, Tuesday, July 23, 1957, 15; “The Oman Revolution Shakes Britain's Prestige,” and “Oman Fights Colonialism with Primitive Weapons,” *Al-Ahram*, July 29, 1957, 2–4.

⁶¹⁴ FO 37/126877

⁶¹⁵ “The Imam of Oman Requests Intervention from Russia and America,” *Al-Ahram*, August 5, 1957, 4.

grounds that Oman fell within the domain of Britain's *special relationship* with Sultan Sa'īd bin Taymur, thereby framing the matter as an internal affair not subject to outside interference.⁶¹⁶

Meanwhile, officials in Whitehall ensured that NATO allies were promptly briefed on the military developments and the rationale behind Britain's overt intervention in Oman. This briefing was accompanied by a formal memorandum containing a historical summary of prior British engagements in the region, reinforcing the strategic and imperial motivations behind the current operation.⁶¹⁷

The colonial administration in London grew increasingly aware of the mounting international pressure resulting from its military suppression of the Omani revolution, particularly after the so-called "Terrible Trio" (Imam Ghalib, his brother talib, and al-harithi)⁶¹⁸ succeeded in positioning the al-Jabal al-Akhḍar uprising as part of the broader global wave of anti-colonial national liberation movements. In response, British authorities issued strict directives to broadcasters such as the BBC and other European and Western radio stations, urging them to adopt language that would delegitimize the revolutionary movement.

These media directives were explicit: terms such as *revolutionaries*", *Imam's forces*", or *the revival of the Imamate*" were to be avoided entirely. Instead, all such references were to be replaced by a single label—"talib's tribal supporters".⁶¹⁹ This semantic reframing was fully aligned with the colonial worldview that had shaped the British Empire for centuries—a worldview in

⁶¹⁶ FO 37/126877, EA1015/102.

⁶¹⁷ FO 37/126877, July 25, 1957.

⁶¹⁸ S. Monick, Victory in Hades: The forgotten wars of Oman, 1957-1959 and 1970-1976. *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, (1982). 12(3).

⁶¹⁹ FO 37/126877, July 25, 1957.

which any national liberation movement was cast not as a legitimate struggle, but as a primitive rebellion aimed at disrupting order and peace,” which the empire regarded as its exclusive domain and responsibility.⁶²⁰

Once all revolutionary leaders and their followers had reached the upper villages of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar—particularly the village of Siq, the base of Emir of the al-Jabal, Shaykh Sulayman bin himyar al-Nabhani, the Revolutionary Command Council convened at the Siq Fort. There, alongside the tribal elders of the Bani Riyam, native to the mountain, they conducted a full assessment of the situation. The meeting was devoted to critiquing the prior phase of the struggle and laying the foundation for a new strategy that would define the next stage of resistance.

The aforementioned critique itself exposed several key shortcomings in the revolutionary leadership's strategic judgment.

Firstly, misjudgment. The scale of loss in both life and property between 18 July and 12 August 1957 AD proved too vast to be concealed in a small, impoverished society confronted—many for the first time—with the terrifying spectacle of advanced weaponry in both the skies and on the ground. Civilian casualties and destruction of civilian assets—palm groves, homes, wells, and *aflaj*—exceeded the losses sustained by the armed resistance itself. The Royal Air Force systematically demolished the region's historical fortifications: centuries-old structures such as the forts of Nizwa, Izki, Birkat al-Mawz, Tanuf, and Bahla' were either obliterated entirely or damaged

⁶²⁰ The British Empire pursued a policy of diminishing the status of the indigenous people in the territories it colonized and dominated over. This was achieved through the systematic destruction of the people's confidence in themselves, culture and social fabric, ensuring the sustainable exploitation of natural resources for trade and securing the interests of the empire. For a more detailed analysis of this complex relationship, see the work of John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson on "The Imperialism of Free Trade John Gallagher, Ronald Robinson *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1953), 1-15 'Immanuel Wallerstein. *Historical Capitalism*. London: Verso, 1983.

to the point of being rendered useless. Towns and villages were left exposed to the threat of even the smallest ground assault. British forces committed acts amounting to mass extermination and forced displacement, obliterating entire villages such as Tanuf, Farq, al-Sahamah, Bilad Sayt, and Ghamr.⁶²¹ The destruction of *aflaj* systems in Nizwa, Izki, and Tanuf triggered a sudden and acute water crisis, leading to the loss of key seasonal harvests—dates, lemons, wheat, barley, and maize—leaving many without sufficient provisions for the winter. Livestock herds and traditional means of transport such as donkeys and camels were either decimated, terrorized by aircraft, or poisoned.

Tribal elders and religious scholars were shackled and transferred to al-Jalali prison, without regard for their age, status, or religious authority. They were further vilified by Sultan Sa‘id bin Taymur and British propaganda as *hypocrites, mercenaries, and traitors*.⁶²²

These mounting and highly visible losses forced the Revolutionary Command Council to confront the stark asymmetry between its own limited material capabilities and the overwhelming superiority of British military power. As one internal critique put it: *They miscalculated badly when they underestimated the extent to which Britain would support Sa‘id bin Taymur*.⁶²³

These failures severely damaged the revolution’s credibility. Public confidence in the leadership was shaken, especially as no immediate or convincing alternative means of subsistence were offered to civilians whose livelihoods—agriculture, trade, and transport—had been abruptly disrupted.

⁶²¹ Al-Falahi’s interview with al-Harhi SH for al-Harhi Salih bin Isa. Ibid.

⁶²² Said Al-Harhi. Ibid. 337-3340.

⁶²³ Al-Falahi’s interview with al-Harhi SH for al-Harhi Salih bin Isa. Ibid. Also, Ial-Jabal al-Akhdar/ Jabal al Akhdar, Bani Rayam Revolutionary Leader and Tribal Chief, Wadi bani Habib village, Oman, June 15 , 2022.

Secondly, misreading of the geopolitical landscape. A fundamental misapprehension lay in the revolution's reading of Britain's regional alliance network. The imperial military infrastructure was never far from action when the moment arrived. Oman was surrounded by well-established British bases—deeply entrenched for decades in India, Malaya, Bahrain, Sharjah, Aden, Cyprus, and Kenya—staffed with highly trained personnel and equipped with advanced weaponry. Not to mention the British base on Maşirah Island, which had become operational following the 1939 AD agreement between the Sultan and Britain, as noted in earlier chapters. The revolutionary leadership also placed excessive hope in the idea that Egyptian and Saudi support would be sufficient to repel a full-scale invasion armed with air, land, and naval superiority—without adequately appreciating the contradictions between the interests of regional actors and global powers, or the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Egypt over regional leadership.⁶²⁴

Thirdly, operational mismanagement. This was evident both in battlefield conduct and logistical oversight. Fighters often found themselves exposed in open terrain, facing enemy forces equipped with far more advanced weaponry and superior tactics. Ammunition, landmines, and weaponry—already scarce and difficult to procure—were not rationed effectively. These supplies, typically shipped across great distances by sea to reach the rebels in Oman's interior, required weeks or even months to arrive, given the logistical challenge of moving materials across the Empty Quarter and up into the most rugged and elevated mountain range in the Arabian Peninsula. In contrast, British forces had the advantage of nearby ammunition depots and the capacity to resupply quickly by air, transporting personnel, fuel, and rations to the front lines with relative ease.⁶²⁵

⁶²⁴ al-Riyami, *The Green Mountain War (1957-1959)*, Damascus, Dar al-Farqad, 2018) 241-294.

⁶²⁵ Al-Deeb, Fathi, *Abdel Nasser wa Tahrir al-Mashriq al Arabi: Shahadat Fathi al-Deeb*, Cairo: Markaz al-Dirasat al Istratijya wal Siyassiya bil Ahram, 2000), 241–248 .

Accordingly, after three days of deliberation—and in view of the fact that the balance of power was clearly not in the rebels' favor—the Revolutionary Command came to a sobering assessment.

The total remaining human resources amounted to no more than 500 trained fighters from the Omani Liberation Army, supported by 180 tribal snipers drawn from among the Omani communities backing the uprising.

In terms of weaponry, their arsenal was severely limited. They possessed only 0.5 inch Browning machine guns and a supply of landmines, which they had used during raids on the surrounding plains to disable 150 vehicles, including 18 British Ferret scout cars.⁶²⁶



Figure 4: Photo of Al-Rīḥāniyya Cave that served as the headquarters of Imām Ghālib bin 'Alī throughout the years of the al-Jabal al-Akhḍar War.

Photo by the author

⁶²⁶ S.Monick, Victory in Hades: The forgotten wars of Oman, 1957-1959 and 1970-1976. *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*.(1982) 12(3).

In light of available resources and operational constraints, the leadership's deliberations culminated in the adoption of a five-pronged revolutionary strategy, built around the following core pillars. Firstly, Diversion and Dispersion (*al-Tashtit*). Recognizing that the revolutionaries now held the geographic advantage of occupying the highest mountainous terrain in the country—and given Oman's vast and rugged landscape—the leadership sought to capitalize on their superior knowledge of the terrain. The elevated vantage points of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar provided broad visibility, enabling early detection of enemy movements. As a result, the revolution adopted a strategy of conducting dispersed, high-impact operations designed to disorient British forces and create the impression of a broader presence by the 'Umani Liberation Army across the territory. This approach proved effective in operations such as the shooting down of a Venom aircraft on 30 August 1958, when a group of rebels positioned on a high rocky ledge successfully struck the aircraft's engine mid-flight. The pilot, Lieutenant Owen Watkinson, was killed instantly in the crash.⁶²⁷

Secondly, attrition (*al-Istinzaḥ*). The remaining forces of the Omani Liberation Army, along with volunteer tribal fighters—particularly from the Bani Riyam and Bani Hana'ah tribes—were redeployed according to strategic tribal and ideological alliances, whether grounded in loyalty to the Imam, belief in the revolution's goals, or kinship obligations. These fighters were distributed

⁶²⁷ Wreckage of the crashed Venom fighter-bomber, serial WR552 of Flight Lt Owen Watkinson, remain as reminder of the revolution. Also: al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, al Shereja village, Oman, December 17, 2023.

across twelve defensive encampments known as “Locks” (*Aqfal*) positioned to surround al-Jabal al-Akhdar from all sides.

Each camp, composed of approximately 10 to 15 fighters, was tasked with sealing off access points and intercepting any attempted incursions by invading forces. These “Locks” were located at lower elevations along the mountain’s key wadis, gorges, and rocky passes that allowed for human movement. A limited number of these positions were equipped—using supplies carried on foot or by donkey—with mortars, and a single anti-aircraft gun, which arrived in late 1958.

In 1958 AD, the revolutionaries planted at least one hundred and twenty (120) anti-tank mines, with approximately 80% effectively damaging enemy vehicles. Among them were two M6 anti-tank mines, one of which resulted in five casualties. Intelligence confirmed the presence of American-manufactured hand grenades in rebel possession, and evidence suggested that villagers themselves also participated in mine-laying activities, motivated in part by financial incentives awarded for successful detonations.⁶²⁸

The revolutionaries carried out mortar attacks on the Sultan’s military camps in Izki, Muti, Kamah, and Tanuf, with each assault involving a maximum of six mortar rounds. Though limited in scale, these operations were symbolically and tactically significant, reinforcing the narrative of continuous resistance.

Thirdly, concentration and expansion (*al-tarkiz wa al-tawassuʿ*). The revolutionaries adopted a method of targeted, dispersed operations across multiple villages and military encampments, carried out at irregular intervals and deliberately avoiding conventional, face-to-face

⁶²⁸ WO 337/9. Ibid.23.

confrontations between two fixed battle lines. The emphasis shifted toward the quality of engagement over quantity, with strict instructions to conserve ammunition and landmines to ensure the longevity of limited supplies.

Clear operational directives were issued to focus attacks specifically on British forces and the mercenary soldiers of Indian and Balochi origin, while avoiding direct confrontations with local Omani tribal forces, especially those from the interior, such as the ‘Abriyyin, Bani Shakil, Bani Ghafir, and Bani Rawahah. This policy aimed to confine the conflict strictly to colonial forces, in order to prevent the resurgence of tribal blood feuds (thar), which had long fractured Oman’s social fabric during earlier phases of civil conflict between the Hinawi and Ghafiri tribal alliances—issues discussed in detail in Chapters One and Two.

Revolutionary commanders also stressed the need to avoid combat in or near populated towns and villages, in order to protect civilians—especially elders, women, and children—from British retaliatory violence. Parallel to these precautions, the revolution expanded its operations targeting British Petroleum activities, further straining colonial supply chains and economic operations in the interior.

According to colonial intelligence estimates from November 1958, the strength of the Omani Liberation Army (OLA) stationed in al-Jabal al-Akhḍar was as follows: between 60 and 100 trained combatants, within a broader range of 400 to 500 total fighters, of whom 60% were drawn from the Bani Riyam tribe. The Bani Riyam fighters were primarily armed with .45 Martini–Henry rifles (effective up to ~200 yards), while the Bani Hina and OLA-trained fighters were equipped with SMLE rifles. Fighters from the eastern regions reportedly possessed semi-automatic rifles, light machine guns (LMGs), and at least one—and possibly up to three—.50 caliber Browning

machine guns. Additionally, six 81 mm mortars were distributed across revolutionary encampments on the mountain.⁶²⁹

Fourthly, shock and concealment (al-ṣadma wa al-takhaffi). In parallel with the establishment of the twelve Locks” (Aqfal)—defensive encampments manned by trained fighters—the revolutionaries designated twelve Handles” (Maqabid), strategically positioned around al-Jabal al-Akhḍar like a bracelet around a wrist. These Handles” consisted of elite snipers from the Western hajar mountains, reinforced by the best marksmen of the Omani Liberation Army. Each unit typically comprised 3 to 5 snipers, tasked with intercepting and eliminating any enemy soldiers who managed to breach the outer Locks.

Given the devastating impact of sustained Royal Air Force bombardment, the revolution adopted guerrilla tactics as the most viable offensive strategy. These operations targeted high-value military installations—typically executed at night, when British air superiority was compromised. This time, the orders from the Revolutionary Command Council were unequivocal: avoid direct confrontation wherever possible, maximize enemy losses, and minimize casualties and ammunition expenditure among the revolutionary ranks.”⁶³⁰

Life on al-Jabal al-Akhḍar changed profoundly. Residents, forced to abandon their centuries-old routines, relocated whatever provisions and essential supplies they could into mountain caves, which became critical shelters for women, children, and remaining livestock.

⁶²⁹ KCL-Lt. Colonel Deane-Drummond, SAS Project for Oman: Rebel Forces on JABAL AKHDAR and surrounding area ,No. 1, 17 November 1958 (Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King s College, London—Private collation of Lt. Colonel Deane-Drummond).

⁶³⁰ al-Jabal al-Akhḍar/ Jabal al Akhdar, al Shereja village, Oman, December 17 , 2023.

Fifthly, intensification (al-takthif). The rebels' loss of Nizwa and its surrounding towns—within less than two weeks of their recapture—was a severe shock that significantly damaged the revolution's credibility both locally and internationally. This defeat was quickly exploited by Sultan Sa'īd bin Taymur, who issued a formal declaration—widely disseminated through the imperial media networks in London—stating that the revolution led by Ṭalib bin 'Alī has come to an end.”⁶³¹

This narrative caused serious disruption on the domestic front. A number of tribes and their elders publicly withdrew their support for Imam Ghalib, aligning instead with the Sultan. Others were overtaken by fear and despair, concerned about potential British reprisals. In response, Imam Ghalib intensified his religious appeals, urging Omanis to join the jihad against the British and framing resistance as a divine obligation.⁶³²

To mislead the international community, Britain temporarily withdrew its forces from Nizwa and redeployed the Cameronians to their bases in Kenya and Cyprus. This move was aimed at projecting the illusion—especially before the November 1957 session of the UN General Assembly—that British military operations in support of their “friend” the Sultan had concluded.⁶³³

These developments placed enormous pressure on the revolutionaries to not only intensify their military operations within Oman, but also to publicize them internationally—despite formidable

⁶³¹ FO 371/126882. EA 1015/233A, August 15, 1957.

⁶³² Kaylani, N.M. 1979: Politics and Religion in Oman: A Historical Overview. In *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 10.

⁶³³ Monick, S. (1982). Victory in Hades: The forgotten wars of Oman, 1957-1959 and 1970-1976. *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, 12(3).

obstacles in communication and media access. The Omani resistance faced severe logistical challenges: their only communication channels were handwritten letters smuggled by laborers and students studying in Gulf cities. Sultan Sa‘id bin Taymur had imposed a total ban on foreign journalists, allowing only embedded correspondents affiliated with Whitehall to accompany British troops and document the “achievements” of the imperial war ministry through photos, films, and official war reports.

This imbalance has deeply affected the historical record: researchers today will find a rich archive of written and visual material in colonial repositories, while only fragments of oral testimony survive—shared by the few living combatants or eyewitnesses who endured the war’s horrors. The revolution’s own media was limited to handwritten communiqués and oral transmissions delivered by individuals visiting training camps in Cairo and Saudi Arabia.

As a result, enormous responsibility fell on the Office of the Imamate in Cairo, led by Shaykh Ṣalih al-harithi, to convince global diplomats of the legitimacy and continuity of the Omani revolution.

This strategy—though provisional—temporarily restored cautious confidence within the revolutionary ranks and among the broader Omani public. Egypt, under the leadership of President Jamal ‘Abd al-Naṣir (also known as Gamal Abdul Nasir), renewed its support for the revolution and its leaders. ‘Abd al-Naṣir issued explicit instructions to continue assisting the Omani revolution in its struggle against British colonialism by all means possible⁶³⁴.

⁶³⁴ Al-Deeb. Ibid. 246.



Figure 5: The view of the outside world from the mouth of 'Ayn al-Ḍab'ah Cave—the residence of Shaykh Sulaymān bin Ḥimyār and his family during the al-Jabal al-Akhḍar War

Photo by the author

Table 2: Key “Handles” (al Maqabiḍ): Primary Engagement Points with British/Sultanic Forces.

Handle (Maqbaḍ)	Location	Fighting Force	Commander
Dar al-Qala‘	Al-Jabal al-Akhḍar overlooking Izki and the village of Imti	Banu Tubah, Awlad Rashid, Banu Riyam	Ahmad bin ‘isaal-‘Umri
‘Aqbat al-‘Urqub		Banu Tubah	Sa‘id bin Sulayman al-Tubi “al-Qaṣayyir”
Qarn al-‘Ayn		Banu Tubah, Awlad Thani	Sa‘id bin Sulayman al-Tubi “al-Qaṣayyir”
Masdud		Banu Tubah, al-‘Umur	Naṣir bin Saif al-Tubi
‘Aqbat al-Masnqah		Banu Nabahan, Banu Tubah	Muhammad bin Khalfan al-Riyami
Dar Tha‘lab	Al-Jabal al-Akhḍar overlooking Nizwa	Banu Hana‘ah, al-harth, al-Manadhirah, Banu Abu hasan	Muhammad bin ‘Aday al-Hana‘i, then Yahyabin ‘Abdullah al-Nabhani, followed by Salim bin ‘Abdullah al-harithi
al-huwaylah	Opposite Tanuf village	Banu Hana‘ah	talib bin ‘Ali al-Hana‘i
Wadi Kamah	Village of Kamah near the Nizwafrontier	Banu Hana‘ah, Banu Riyam	‘Abdullah bin Salam al-Tubi
al-Jibtayn	Between Tanuf and the mountain	Banu ‘Uwymir	Salim bin hamud al-‘Uwymiri
‘Aqbat al-Ẓafar	Toward Wadi Bani Kharuṣ / al-‘Awabi / Nakhl	al-Sharqiyyun, al-Jawamid, al-Manadhirah, al-harth, Banu Riyam, Banu ‘Uwymir, Banu Zakwan	himyar bin Sulayman al-Nabhani
‘Aqbat al-‘Is		—	—
al-talhat		Awlad Thani, Banu Rashid of the villages of al-Shari‘ah and al-‘Ayn	Khamis bin Muhammad al-Riyami

Table 3: Key “Locks” (*al Aqfāl*): Main Camps for Training, Supply, and Defense⁶³⁵

Camp / Lock	Location	Commander	Fighting Force & Armament	Strategic Role
Wadi al-Sumayt	Gateway to and from Nizwa	Salim bin humayd al-Mandari	al-Manadhirah, Banu Hana’ah	Provisioning, intelligence, and role assignment.
Marwah	Nearest camp to Wadi al-Sumayt and the main ascent route to the mountain	Salim bin ‘Abdullah al-harithi	al-harth, Banu Hana’ah, Banu Riyam; 51mm mortar, French-made anti-aircraft gun from Syria	Diversion tactics and luring enemy soldiers into side skirmishes. Hosts the most skilled rebel snipers.
Wadi Kamah	Narrowest and most difficult path to the mountain	Sa’id bin Marhun al-Tubi	Banu Riyam, Banu Nabahan	Relieves pressure on the main operations room; serves as the primary support for the Tanuf camp.
Wadi Tanuf	Widest wadi descending from the mountain, with natural cover and branches	talib bin ‘Ali al-Hana’i	Banu Hana’ah	Location of the main war operations room; receives multiple supply routes and dispatches leadership directives.
Wadi halfayn	From al-Manakhir to the plains of Sama’il	Sa’id bin Sulayman al-Qaṣiyyar	Banu Tubah, Banu Nabahan	Controls all activity between Imti and al-Manakhir.
hayl al-Shaykh	Route between Imti and the mountain	—	Banu Riyam, Awlad Rashid	Monitors all movement between the city of Izki and the mountain.
hayl Law	Midway point on ascent from Birkat al-Mawz	Muhammad bin Yunus al-‘Umri	al-‘Umriyyun	Surveillance and monitoring of ascending movement toward the mountain.
al-Jibtayn & al-Maṣirah	Connects Wadi al-Mu‘aydin, al-Maṣirah, and Birkat al-Mawz	Muṣabbah bin Darab al-Ṣubayhi	Banu Zakwan, al-Ṣubayhiyyun	Most critical supply camp for food and weapons for the rebels; also functions as a security post.
Wadi al-Mu‘aydin	Gate to upper mountain villages; meets Wadi Bani habib	Thabit bin hamad al-Zakwani	Banu Zakwan, al-Jawamid, al-Shairqiyyun, Awlad Thani, Awlad Rashid	Strategically positioned midway to upper elevations; blocks infiltration beyond lower-positioned camps.
Jihm al-Jubayl	Natural barrier between al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, Nakhal, and al-‘Awabi	Naṣir bin Rashid al-‘Uwymi	Banu ‘Uwaymar, Banu Bahri	Controls infiltration from the al-Batinah region and the Sea of Oman.

⁶³⁵ All data in the table is derived from multiple interviews with combatants who participated in battles during the Jebel Akhdar War (1957–1959), as well as from various segments of the mountain's population. Additionally, see: Ali Muhammad al-Riyami, *harb al-Jabal al-Akhḍar 1957–1959* (Damascus: Dar al-Farqad, 2018), 161–70.

al-Masnaḥ	The most important gateway from the sea: the mountain's main entry point via Wadi Mistal and the town of Nakh	Muhammad bin Khalfan al-Riyami	Banu Tubah, Banu Nabahan	Oldest known path—used historically by the Persians in their attempt to ascend the mountain; locally known as "The Persian Path."
al-Bad'ah	Qarn al-'Ayn	Sa'id bin Sulayman al-Tubi	Banu Riyam, Awlad Thani	One of the most active camps; main supply point for sniper ammunition.

*Table 4: Key Caves that Played a Central Role in Protecting the Revolutionary Leadership and Civilians of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar from Royal Air Force Bombardment*⁶³⁶

Cave	Function	Key Features
'Ayn al-Rummanah	One of the first hideouts used by Imam Ghalib bin 'Ali; employed multiple times for diversion from surveillance	Small entry point; concealed and ideal for deception
Al-Rihaniyyah Cave	Main refuge for Imam Ghalib bin 'Ali after intensification of aerial bombardment and infiltration by British intelligence	Naturally shielded by a mountain ridge, blends with the surrounding topography, isolated from population centers, it contains a corridor leading to a large chamber that sheltered the Imam for nearly 18 months
Wadi al-Qilt Cave	Temporarily used by the Imam and repeatedly by the rebels	Site of the infamous "al-Qilt Massacre," where 11 fighters—mostly from al-Sharqiyyah and al-harth tribe—were killed in a British airstrike using penetrative bombs
Ghawr al-Ḍab'ah Cave	Residence of Shaykh Sulayman bin himyar al-Nabhani and his family	Multi-chambered; difficult to access; provided long-term shelter for the Emir's family, children, workers, and valuables
al-Sarab Cave	Refuge for residents from al-Raws, al-Maṣīrah, and surrounding areas	One of the largest caves, located atop the mountain, aligned with its jagged western ridge, accommodated hundreds of people
The Red Cave (al-Kahf al-Ahmar)	Played a major role in protecting the inhabitants of the mountain, sheltering both their livestock and valuables.	Located at the mountain's highest peak, internally spacious, protected by a natural ridge that shields it from aerial visibility

⁶³⁶ All data in the table is derived from multiple interviews with combatants who participated in battles during the Jebel Akhdar War (1957–1959), as well as from various segments of the mountain's population.

al-Naḍd Cave	Used for storing weapons, ammunition, and landmines smuggled from abroad. It also served as the site of a round of ceasefire negotiations between the Revolutionary Command Council and Shaykh hamad bin Sulayman al-harithi and Shaykh Hilal bin ‘Ali al-Khalili, who represented the Sultan and were the initiators of the ceasefire proposal	Strategically located between the mountain’s eastern and western flanks, natural exterior and interior defenses make it highly discreet
Wadi al-Bawarid Cave	—	—
al-Ma‘awil Cave	Long-term residence of Awlad ‘Uwaymar during the war	Played a key role in protecting residents on the western front of the mountain
al-hamir Cave	Used for storing provisions and ammunition; a distribution point for donkeys and trusted guides	Located above the two main camps: Wadi Tanuf and Wadi Kamah

A Mountain Resists an Empire

In response to the tactical maneuvers employed by the revolutionaries, the colonial strategy rested on a number of core principles, as follows.

Firstly, deception on both local and international levels. From August 1957 onward, the British colonial administration in London sought to buy time by projecting misleading signals across all fronts as it prepared for a decisive military strike against the Omani revolution.

On the domestic British front, the Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd played a central role in reassuring Members of Parliament and the British public. On 23 July 1957, Lloyd told the House of Commons: *There was no question... of large-scale operations by British troops on the ground.*⁶³⁷ He further claimed that, given the extreme summer temperatures in Oman, any deployment of ground forces in desert areas would amount to military futility. Yet, before September 1957 AD had ended—and just prior to the scheduled debate on the Oman question at

⁶³⁷ Central Oman (Situation), UK Parliament, Hansard: Volume 574: debated on Tuesday 23 July 1957.

the United Nations—Her Majesty's Government had already withdrawn all British forces from the country.⁶³⁸

On the internal Omani front, Sultan Sa'īd bin Taymur circulated letters to tribal shaykhs assuring them that the situation had been brought under control. To reinforce this narrative, he declared that he would spend his time enjoying the summer capital in Ṣalalah. He delegated full civil authority over Nizwa and the broader interior to Ahmad bin Ibrahim, granting him unrestricted powers of arrest and detention. The military command, however, was placed entirely under the authority of Brigadier Robertson, who coordinated his operations through two command centers: the first in Bahrain, and the main hub in Whitehall, London.

Secondly, exploiting tribal divisions. The British made deliberate use of a tactic they had long mastered in moments of crisis, particularly in societies such as Oman, where social and tribal rivalries play a decisive role in determining allegiance and justifying shifts in alliance based on the prevailing balance of power and the strength of the ruling authority.

While Brigadier Robertson had withheld British troops from field deployment—fearful of dehydration and heat exhaustion amid the searing summer temperatures—on 26 September 1957 AD, he deployed untrained tribal forces, composed largely of men from the 'Abriyyin and Banu Shukayl, alongside a small contingent of Indian and Balochi soldiers from the Sultan's army. These units operated under aerial cover from Pembroke aircraft, which broadcast pre-recorded messages via loudspeakers warning local populations against cooperating with the revolutionaries.

⁶³⁸ Smiley, D. (1960). Muscat and Oman. *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, 105 (February-November), 32.

The objective of this operation was twofold: to identify the caves being used by the revolutionaries in al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, and to survey the shortest possible ascent to the village of Siq, which the British hoped to capture. However, the attempt ended in resounding failure, as the revolutionary snipers repelled the tribal units and their advance was decisively blocked.

Another manifestation of Britain's exploitation of tribal contradictions was its policy of administrative reconfiguration in the towns and villages surrounding the mountain. The colonial authorities installed historical rivals of each tribe to govern their opponents' villages, entrusting them with control over local resources and decision-making.

For instance, in the village of Kamah, the British installed tribal forces from Banu Ghafir, led by their ambitious shaykh Muhammad bin Naṣir al-Ghafri, who sought to assert dominance within the Ghafiri alliance. In Tanuf, following its destruction, they brought in forces from the 'Abriyyin, the historical adversaries of Banu Hana'ah. A similar strategy was implemented in Birkat al-Mawz and Izki, where they allowed Banu Rawahah—long-standing rivals of the resident tribes—to loot and administer the area's resources. The British were well aware of the bloody conflict history that defined this specific region, torn between Yamani and Nazari tribal affiliations.

Meanwhile, the entrance routes to the mountain from the al-Batinah plain, such as Wadi Bani Kharuṣ and Wadi Mistal, were garrisoned by units of the Sultan's army, specifically the Musqat Regiment and the Northern Border Force.

Thirdly, shock and terror. The British war command deliberately pursued a strategy of shock and terror in order to instill deep psychological fear among the population and reinforce the perceived asymmetry of power. Generals of the Empire believed that such methods could cut the battle in half, achieving a strategic advantage without prolonged engagement. Their doctrine emphasized overwhelming force, exhibited through the dramatic deployment of advanced military hardware in regions where local communities had never before encountered such weaponry—fighter jets, machine guns, cluster bombs, and deep-penetration ordnance designed to destroy targets beneath the earth's surface, including caves and underground shelters.

Between 14 and 16 November 1957, aircraft from the Royal Air Force (RAF) conducted intensive bombing raids on densely inhabited upper-mountain villages such as Wadi Bani habib and Siq. The raids involved the use of dozens of 201b cluster bombs,⁶³⁹ a type of fragmentation ordnance. One of the targets was the falaj of Imti, whose ancient suqmah tree—traditionally believed to guard the water system—was split in half by the blast.⁶⁴⁰

The primary goal of this operation was to terrorize the civilian population, erode morale, and coerce villagers into abandoning the revolutionaries, either by withdrawing support, applying social pressure, or betraying their positions to the colonial forces, once the fires reached their homes. The bombardment lasted for two full days, from sunrise to sunset. Its impact included the obliteration of Siq Fort, the destruction of most elevated falaj channels and aqueducts, and the mass killing of livestock herds. Massive bombs rained down, leveling their dwellings. Orchards

⁶³⁹ WO 337/9, Operations in Muscat and Oman 1952-1959, Ministry of Defence, Whitehall, S.W.1. July 1964. 18

⁶⁴⁰ This ancient tree still stands today as a historical witness to the events of this airstrike.

and trees were burned to cinders, and the farmlands were reduced to barren dust. The people of the mountain abandoned their villages, leaving behind deserted homes and ghostly settlements now claimed by wild beasts.⁶⁴¹

Despite the intensity of this aerial assault, ground forces were unable to ascend the mountain. The Deputy Commander of the Sultan's forces was killed, and the rebels had mined all ascents and wadis, leading to severe losses among troop transport vehicles and armored units. The operation resulted in a sharp decline in morale among the Sultan's forces.⁶⁴²

1958: The Empire Turns on Its Ally

By January 1958, Britain had come to the realization—or rather, the conviction—that it was facing an intractable dilemma that could not be resolved without further marginalizing its local partner, Sa'īd bin Taymur. The revolutionaries were on the verge of achieving a breakthrough that threatened the interests of British oil companies. Egypt and Saudi Arabia were winning the hearts and minds of Omanis through their military, political, and diplomatic support. Meanwhile, public awareness across the region was rising, particularly among youth, regarding Britain's colonial and imperial ambitions.

In classic British fashion, the decision was made at the War Office in London to pursue a strategic reversal—one that would maximize imperial gains while quietly sidelining the local ally, all

⁶⁴¹ al-Jabri, *Sulḥ al Juman* 36.

⁶⁴² WO 337/9. Ibid. p 19.

without drawing attention. On 22 January, Britain dispatched a mission to Sultan Sa‘id bin Taymur, led by Julian Amery, then Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office.

Amery brought with him Britain’s blueprint for extinguishing the revolution, but at a steep price the Sultan would have to pay if he wished to remain on his throne. This plan—initially framed as a “deal”—soon evolved into a formal “agreement”, signed on 25 July 1958. It cemented an expanded British military and economic hegemony over Oman, the Gulf, and the Arabian Peninsula—a form of control whose legacy endures to this day.

This hegemony manifested in the establishment of British military bases in southern, central, and northern Oman—specifically in Ṣalalah, Maṣirah, and Khaṣab. These bases granted the Royal Armed Forces of Britain unrestricted access to land, air, and sea across the country. Even the civilian domain—particularly the formulation of a national development plan—was entrusted by the colonial administration to Colonel Boustead, who had only recently served as Resident Adviser in the Eastern Aden Protectorates.

Before the Sultan of Muscat signed the agreement, the War Office in Whitehall had already begun executing its operational measures to eradicate the revolution, following a clearly defined sequence of steps. A total of 123 British officers were appointed to the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF), and the establishment of an air wing composed of five aircraft, operated by pilots seconded from the Royal Air Force (RAF), was expedited. The British Army also supplied the Sultan’s forces with various military equipment, arms, ammunition, and transport vehicles. Two 5.5-inch howitzers

were loaned to the Sultan's army, complete with their ammunition. Furthermore, specialized aircraft were deployed for psychological warfare (psywar) purposes—intended to instill terror among the inhabitants of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar by flying at low altitudes over villages while broadcasting threatening messages via loudspeakers. These aircraft also disseminated Arabic-language leaflets designed to undermine the reputation and social standing of the Imam and the revolutionaries, fabricating personal scandals and alleging their affiliation with hostile foreign powers. The most significant provision of this agreement, however, was the appointment of a new British General Commander of the Sultan's Armed Forces, charged with overseeing the implementation of these directives and safeguarding the strategic interests of Her Majesty's Government. This provision was realized in April 1958, with the appointment of Colonel D. O. Smiley as Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces.

Colonel David Smiley, an officer from the Royal Horse Guards (the 'Blues'), was serving as the British Military Attaché in Stockholm at the time. He had previously worked alongside Julian Amery in Albania during 1944 AD as part of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), and the two shared a longstanding personal and professional relationship. In preparing Smiley for his new assignment in Oman, Amery cautioned him about the complexities of the role, emphasizing the delicate balance Britain sought to maintain: 'We assist the Sultan, we occasionally offer guidance—but we do not issue commands.'⁶⁴³

⁶⁴³ Monick, S. (1982). Victory in Hades: The forgotten wars of Oman, 1957-1959 and 1970-1976. *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, 12(3).

Smiley's appointment created an awkward predicament for Waterfield, who had served for many years as commander of the Sultan's Armed Forces and had long enjoyed the Sultan's confidence. The situation was resolved through a characteristically British compromise: Waterfield was appointed as the Sultan's Military Secretary and Minister of Defence, while operational control of the armed forces and strategic military planning in Oman was entrusted to Smiley. In effect, Smiley was given full authority to engineer the military configuration of Oman in line with the interests of the British Empire during what was arguably the most volatile period in the country's twentieth-century history (1958–1970).

Waterfield, alongside the Sultan's Foreign Secretary Neil Innes, continued to play a pivotal role within the inner workings of the Omani state apparatus. Both figures were adept at managing the temperament of their guarded and understandably wary sovereign, and each, to varying degrees, subscribed to his belief that reform in Oman—a country they regarded as fundamentally underdeveloped—had to proceed with cautious and deliberate slowness.⁶⁴⁴

The arrival of Colonel Smiley in Oman marked a decisive turning point in the trajectory of British imperial dominance over the country. It is no exaggeration to describe him as the principal architect of a new and distinctly engineered form of colonial control—one shaped by the construction of a modern military force infused with the institutional ethos and strategic imperatives of the British

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

Empire. This restructured force was designed first and foremost to safeguard British geopolitical and petroleum interests through Oman's vital strategic location.

Following Smiley's appointment, Sultan Sa'īd bin Taymur effectively vanished from the political scene—whether by choice or by coercion remains unclear. He spent the greater part of 1958 oscillating between Ṣalalah and London. Smiley would later admit that he deliberately withheld significant details of military operations from the Sultan, particularly those relating to the destruction of villages, the forced displacement of populations, and the targeting of agricultural settlements. His operational doctrine was unambiguous: This was provided it did not conflict with... allegiance to Her Majesty.”⁶⁴⁵

According to Smiley, the condition of the Sultan's Armed Forces at the time of his arrival was dire. The total force numbered no more than 700 to 900 men—most of them mercenaries—with no coherent military doctrine, no offensive spirit in combat, and minimal capacity in terms of training or armament. The force, as he described it, was fragmented and ineffective, distributed across various locations with little operational coordination. The following structure summarizes the composition and deployment of the SAF and its auxiliary units as of early 1958:

(a) Headquarters of the Sultan's Armed Forces (Force HQ): Situated at Bayt al-Falaj, approximately five miles from Masqat, this location served as the primary military nerve center.

⁶⁴⁵ Smiley, D. (1960). Ibid.

It was strategically positioned at the juncture of all inland routes from the capital. The base also featured an adjacent airstrip, utilized by the Royal Air Force (RAF) for communications and medical evacuation via Provost aircraft.

(b) The Muscat Regiment: Comprised of approximately 250 men, this unit was nominally based at Bayt al-Falaj but functioned in a limited, non-combat capacity, largely assigned to ceremonial and guard duties within Masqat. A single company stationed at Izki was later absorbed into the Northern Frontier Regiment, being a residual element of the disbanded Oman Regiment.

(c) The Northern Frontier Regiment: This regiment, numbering roughly 450 personnel, was headquartered in Nizwa, with a forward deployment at Kamah. It represented the most active field unit within the SAF structure, though still suffering from limited operational capacity.

(d) Artillery Troop: Stationed at Kamah, this artillery detachment operated two 5.5-inch howitzers loaned by the British government, marking one of the few heavy weapons assets available to the SAF at the time.⁶⁴⁶

(e) Military Depot: Located 15 miles from Masqat, the depot was manned by a single British officer and 25 personnel, along with 60 recruits—later expanded to 120. It served as a logistical support hub for SAF operations, though it remained modest in scale and capability.

(f) Attached British Troops and Trucial Oman Scouts:

- Two squadrons of the Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS) were positioned at ‘Ibri and Izki.
- One troop from the 13th/18th Royal Hussars was based in Nizwa, later reinforced to two troops.
- Additional support came from specialized British personnel: operators from the Royal Corps of Signals at Bayt al-Falaj and Nizwa, Royal Air Force staff managing Pioneer

⁶⁴⁶ WO 337/9. 20-21; Smiley, D. (1960). Muscat and Oman. *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, 105(February-November), 32.

aircraft, and Royal Marines integrated as junior leaders within the Northern Frontier Regiment. The total number of British military personnel embedded within SAF structures remained under fifty.

(g) The Royal Marines: On 29 March 1958, a detachment of Royal Marines was deployed from vessels of the Royal Navy's Persian Gulf Squadron under the command of Lieutenant Grey, RM.

The initial contingent included three sergeants, four corporals, and one marine. Corporals were granted an additional stripe as field recognition. This force was later augmented by officers and enlisted men from the 3rd Commando Brigade, who were assigned to operational tours lasting up to three months. Symbolically, the Marines adopted local dress—donning Arab headdresses in place of their traditional green berets—and replaced their insignia (the Globe and Laurel) with the crossed sabres and stars of the Sultan's Army.

(h) Composition of Officer Corps and Rank-and-File Soldiers: The officer cadre of the SAF consisted primarily of fifteen contract officers from diverse backgrounds, some of whom were seconded from the Pakistan Army. Notably, these officers were proficient in Arabic or Urdu—unlike many of their successors—and initially maintained a degree of mistrust toward their seconded counterparts. This tension subsided as their positions were confirmed. As for the enlisted ranks, they comprised both Omani Arabs, primarily recruited from coastal districts, and Baluchi mercenaries drawn from Gwadar—a coastal enclave then under the Sultanate's jurisdiction. By April 1958, the ethnic composition of the SAF was evenly divided between Arabs and Baluchis, although this ratio later shifted to approximately 75% Baluchi and 25% Arab.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

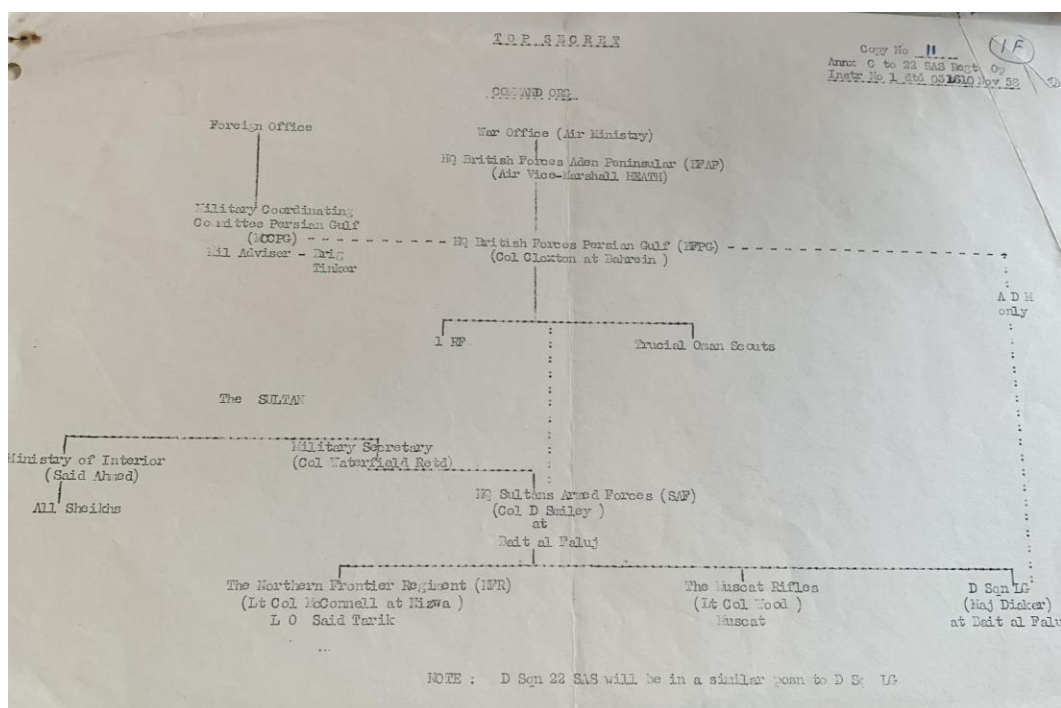


Figure 6: Command structure that managed the operations of the war in the al Jabal al Akhader, and the colonial dominance of Britain over the decision. Source.

Source: KCL-Lt. Colonel Deane-Drummond, Top Secret Message, Anne B to 22 SAS Regiment Op Inster No. 1 0316, 10 November 1958.

Despite these extensive military preparations,⁶⁴⁸ British and Sultanate forces were unable to withstand the sustained attacks of a revolutionary force numbering no more than 500 fighters—composed largely of tribal snipers and seasoned guerrilla combatants. Many of them operated like phantoms, vanishing during the day and launching ambushes under the cover of night against the forces encircling al-Jabal al-Akhḍar. One of the most effective insurgent tactics was the strategic

⁶⁴⁸* KCL-Lt. Colonel Deane-Drummond, Top Secret Message, Anne B to 22 SAS Regiment Op Inster No. 1 0316, 10 November 1958 (Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London—Private collation of Lt. Colonel Deane-Drummond).

deployment of landmines, which inflicted significant damage not only on British military convoys stationed around the mountain but also on the transport vehicles of the British Petroleum Company, which carried engineers, workers, and supplies to and from the oil fields at 'Ibri and Fahud. Movement along internal routes in Oman became perilously dangerous, and mining operations severely disrupted the ongoing exploration and development of oil infrastructure.⁶⁴⁹

According to British military reports, between January 1958 and January 1959, out of a total of 73 documented injuries, approximately 50 were directly attributed to landmine incidents. In June 1958, the revolutionaries succeeded in recapturing the towns of Barkat al-Mawz and Imti, further eroding the morale of the troops encamped around the mountain and prompting Colonel Smiley to panic at the evident fragility of the forces under his command. The rebels' persistence, combined with their disciplined guerrilla tactics in this geographically isolated terrain, exposed the inadequacies of the counterinsurgency campaign.

However, the most harrowing moment for Smiley came in June 1958, marking the first anniversary of the Omani Revolution. While trailing an unfamiliar British military truck in the town of al-'Awabi—one he had grown suspicious of—Smiley narrowly escaped death after his vehicle drove into a landmine ambush. Though he survived, the vehicle was destroyed and his accompanying soldiers were injured, necessitating their evacuation by helicopter. The mysterious truck evaded pursuit, disappearing into the mountains surrounding Wadi Bani Kharuṣ.⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁹ Monick, S. (1982). Victory in Hades: The forgotten wars of Oman, 1957-1959 and 1970-1976. *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, 12(3) 11.

⁶⁵⁰ Smiley, D. (1960). Ibid.

Subsequent British intelligence assessments concluded that the truck in question had been a camouflaged transport vehicle delivering the most significant military reinforcement the revolutionaries had received to date—both in terms of quantity and quality.

The Omani revolutionaries managed to smuggle a lorry laden with reinforcements and arms from Sharjah, successfully navigating its way through the Customs Post at al-Aswad, along the al-Batinah coastline, and past three government-controlled tribal guard stations. The vehicle continued beyond al-‘Awabi and deep into Wadi Bani Kharuṣ, where the cargo was offloaded and the lorry subsequently set ablaze to prevent its recovery. The vehicle—an old, former British 3-ton military truck—was transporting a significant consignment: four Browning .50 caliber anti-aircraft guns, nine heavy mortars, thirteen Bren light machine guns with their accompanying ammunition, three radio communication sets, and a team of no fewer than ten armed men.⁶⁵¹

It was later revealed that among the ten men onboard the smuggled lorry were some of the most highly trained members of the Omani Liberation Army, having arrived from the Dammam training camp via Sharjah. They were carrying a shipment of advanced weaponry procured from Syria. The success of this infiltration operation—led by Shaykh Salim bin hamad al-harithi, one of the revolution s foremost commanders—marked a major escalation in the revolution s tactical capability. Upon reaching the summit of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, Shaykh Salim took charge of military operations from strategic high ground known locally as Muraikh and the ridge of Dar Tha‘lab.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

Over the course of six months, he inflicted substantial losses on the colonial forces through carefully coordinated guerrilla engagements.⁶⁵²

Meanwhile, on the eastern flank of the mountain, two additional arms consignments reached the revolutionaries in tandem with the western breakthrough led by Shaykh Salim and his contingent from the coastal front. The first of these shipments was secured by another prominent commander, Shaykh Muhammad bin Khalfan al-Haddabi, who oversaw the delivery of anti-aircraft weapons, rifles, ammunition, and landmines. The arms were transported covertly via camels belonging to the Bani Qutb tribe, originating from the Trucial States (modern-day UAE). The second consignment arrived through a caravan of the al-Duru' tribe—loyal to the Sultan—who, unaware of the cargo's contents, transported it from al-Buraymi and 'Ibri to Bahla, and from there to Kahf al-Naḍad, where all the weapons and materiel were carefully stored.⁶⁵³

Smiley experienced profound dismay in response to these events. He feared that his mission would fail in this isolated and terrifying place, characterised by extreme heat and intimidating people, as he described it. Therefore, he urgently requested a brigade for an assault on the al-Jabal. When the availability of a full brigade seemed improbable, he revised his request to two battalions, emphasizing that one of these should be a specialized unit such as a Royal Marine Commando, a Parachute battalion, or a Special Air Service (SAS) unit. Smiley expressed concerns that a standard infantry battalion would lack the requisite physical conditioning to execute the assault effectively without undergoing extensive additional training. Ultimately, he was allocated a Special Air

⁶⁵² al-Jabal al-Akhḍar! Jabal al Akhdar, al Shereja village, Oman, December 17 , 2023.

⁶⁵³ Said Al-Harṭhi, *Al-Lu 'lu' al-Ratib fi Ibrāz Mustawda 'at al-Qalb*. 344.

Service Squadron, which was later reinforced by the addition of a Headquarters element and another Squadron. Concurrently, the two troops of the 13/18 Hussars stationed in Oman were replaced by a Squadron of the Life Guards. This troop rotation was carried out between 16 August and 28 September.⁶⁵⁴

By September 1958, the Royal Air Force (RAF) had carried out a total of 1,907 sorties over Oman, during which it dropped approximately 1,540 tons of bombs, launched 3,718 rockets, and fired 278,060 rounds of 20mm ammunition. Notably, more ordnance was dropped on al-Jabal al-Akhḍar than on the city of Coventry at the height of the Blitz during the Second World War. Villages at the base of the mountain were systematically searched, and all weapons discovered were confiscated. Roadblocks were erected, and those suspected of resistance were arrested. Moreover, water infrastructure—particularly the ancient falaj irrigation systems—was deliberately targeted and destroyed, disrupting the vital lifelines that sustained civilian and agricultural life in the region.⁶⁵⁵

The first British breach of the Omani Liberation Army (OLA) front occurred in the second week of November 1958, when a patrol under the command of Major Tony Hart—a contract officer—accidentally came across an unguarded access route leading to the mountain's summit. This path, known as Darb al-hajar, extended from the town of al-ʿAwabi on the western flank and required approximately six hours to climb. Comprising around eighty stone-cut steps believed to have been

⁶⁵⁴ WO 337/9. p 22; Smiley, D. (1960).Ibid.

⁶⁵⁵ Peter Shergold, *The War in Northern Oman: Muscat and the Sultanate of Oman, 1954–1962* (London: Helion & Company Limited, 2021), 24.

carved by the Persians centuries earlier, the trail, though steep, was navigable by pack animals such as donkeys.⁶⁵⁶

Some members of the revolutionary movement argue that the British breakthrough would not have been possible without the betrayal of certain tribesmen residing in the Wadi Bani Kharuṣ region—particularly a handful of local shepherds who, it is claimed, were bribed with modest sums by British officers. As one former fighter remarked: This route is so treacherous that only mountain goats and nimble-footed ibex are capable of traversing its narrow ledges and towering heights.”⁶⁵⁷ It was through this critical gap in the defensive front that Colonel Smiley ordered platoons 16 and 17 to advance along *Darb al-hajar*. However, the revolutionary fighters had anticipated the maneuver and staged an ambush near ‘*Aqbat al-Zafar*, forcing the British soldiers to retreat under heavy fire. Despite this setback, British forces managed to station a fixed detachment at the base of the ‘*Aqbah*, thereby securing a forward position and improving their chances of ascending toward the summit.

In the final week of November, the Special Air Service (SAS) launched a diversionary operation through the same gap, aiming to distract and disperse the revolutionary fighters. However, the rebels successfully repelled the attempt and killed Corporal Swindell, causing considerable alarm within the elite SAS ranks.⁶⁵⁸ These forces, trained in the jungles of Malaya, were accustomed to engagements conducted at a visual range of just 20 to 50 yards—sharp, close-quarter clashes. In

⁶⁵⁶ Monick, S. (1982). Ibid.

⁶⁵⁷ al-Jabal al-Akhdar al Shereja village, Oman, December 17, 2023.

⁶⁵⁸ KCL-Lt. Colonel Deane-Drummond, Top Secret Message, No. 733/28 Form D Squadron 22 SAS To: 22 SAS Regiment Kuala Lumpur, 28 November 1958 (Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London—Private collation of Lt. Colonel Deane-Drummond).

Oman, however, the context was drastically different: the air was clear and dry, enabling visibility up to 2,000 yards. Moreover, the Omani fighters possessed superior knowledge of the terrain, vanishing into mountain caves that neither the SAS's optical equipment nor the reconnaissance systems of British aircraft could easily detect.

As a result, skirmishes persisted throughout November and into December, with the revolutionaries maintaining prolonged and highly mobile resistance. On the morning of 1 December, a low-altitude RAF sortie spotted movement along one of the slopes and launched a barrage of airstrikes. One of the bombs struck with devastating precision, killing an estimated eleven fighters in what became known among locals as the *Kahf Wadi al-Qilt Massacre*.⁶⁵⁹

In retaliation, the revolutionaries mounted a coordinated counterattack on British infantry positions, killing between five and seven soldiers.⁶⁶⁰ British forces stationed on the western front, facing 'Aqbat al-Zafar, repeatedly attempted to advance up the ridge in subsequent operations, but their efforts to seize control of the high ground were met with stiff resistance and ultimately failed. One of the most significant of these offensives was the night assault launched on 27 December 1959. The Special Air Service (SAS) mounted a nighttime assault on the 'Aqbat al-Zafar stronghold, with covering fire provided by Browning machine guns from the Life Guards and heavy mortar support from the Muscat Regiment. Employing ropes to ascend the cliff faces, the SAS managed to catch the revolutionary fighters off guard. What followed was a night of fierce, close-quarters combat that raged throughout 27 December. The SAS report states: “...Approximately 50–60 rebels were engaged. The rebels held their ground and fought fiercely,

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid, Top Secret Message, No. 786/02 Form D Squadron 22 SAS To: 22 SAS Regiment Kuala Lumpur, 2 December 1958 (Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London— Private collation of Lt. Colonel Deane-Drummond).

⁶⁶⁰ WO 337/9. pp 22-25; Smiley, D. (1960). Ibid.

even taunting troops by shouting, Come on and fight, Johnny! By 0800 hours on 28 December, 16/17 Troops withdrew to base. Subsequent intelligence confirmed nine rebels killed, with no SAS casualties.”⁶⁶¹

By the end of 1958, the year concluded without the British forces—or their experienced commander, David Smiley—making any meaningful progress in breaking the resistance. Smiley came to the realization that prolonging the confrontation would serve neither his interests nor those of Her Majesty’s Government. The onset of intense heat by late March would pose a serious threat to British troops, as heat and thirst were formidable weapons in this region.

Meanwhile, the years 1957 AD and 1958 had significantly strengthened the popularity of the resistance, particularly among Omani youth. The revolutionaries had skillfully taken advantage of their elevated positions on the mountain, while the wider Omani population living in the lowlands below steadfastly refused Smiley’s repeated—and increasingly coercive—requests to disclose the secret mountain paths leading to the summit.

Internationally, the Omani cause had become a regular feature in anti-colonial Arab radio broadcasts and newspapers. Smiley capitalized on the growing domestic and international pressure mounting on Whitehall and the Colonial Office by requesting additional elite reinforcements from the Special Air Service (SAS) to respond to the escalating crisis.

⁶⁶¹ Report by Major Spreule, RHQ/SAS/9214 (26/RECORDS A/2440).

1959: Smiley Finally Smiles

On 1st January 1959, Officer Commanding (OC) 22 SAS (Lt. Colonel Deane-Drummond) and his headquarters arrived in Oman. A joint SAS/SAF/RAF Headquarters was formed, and on 7th January, a Tactical Air Operations (TAO) HQ was established at Nizwa under the Northern Frontier Regiment.⁶⁶²

Events on the ground escalated dramatically in January. The War Office in Whitehall had instructed Colonel Smiley to bring the campaign to a swift and covert conclusion—especially given that his earlier requests for reinforcements from the Royal Air Force's elite Special Forces had been granted.

Upon the arrival of these reinforcements, Smiley immediately appointed Major Deane-Drummond as his deputy, granting him full operational authority over all deployed units, including the British Army, the Oman Coastal Scouts Battalion, and the Sultan's Armed Forces. This newly established field headquarters assumed responsibility for coordinating land and air operations, and served as a centralized hub for intelligence gathering, analysis, and dissemination.⁶⁶³ On 12 January 1959,

⁶⁶² A plethora of sources exist which describe the SAS operation in Oman with unparalleled colonial pride, based entirely on the archives of the War Office in London's Whitehall. These sources are quoted verbatim, yet pay no attention to the Omani point of view, as if it did not exist. For a more extensive discussion, see: De La Billière, Peter. *Looking for Trouble: SAS to Gulf Command – The Autobiography*. New ed. London: HarperCollins, 1995. 'Fiennes, Ranulph. *Where Soldiers Fear to Tread*. New ed. London: Mandarin, 1995. 'Henderson, Edward. *This Strange Eventful History: Memoirs of Earlier Days in the UAE and Oman*. London: Quartet Books, 1988. 'Innes, Neil. *Minister in Oman: A Personal Narrative*. Cambridge: Oleander Press, 1987. 'Jeapes, Tony. *SAS Secret War: Operation Storm in the Middle East*. London: Greenhill Books, 2005. 'Kennedy, Michael Paul. *Soldier I: SAS*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1990. 'Perkins, Kenneth J. *A Fortunate Soldier*. Oxford: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1988. 'Sibley, Paul. *A Monk in the SAS*. Trafford Publishing, 2006. 'Thwaites, Peter. *Muscat Command*. Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1995.

⁶⁶³ KCL-Lt. Colonel Deane-Drummond, SAS Project for Oman, 1-2 November 1958 (Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London—Private collation of Lt. Colonel Deane-Drummond).

A Squadron of the 22nd Special Air Service Regiment (SAS) arrived from Malaya. Following five days of intensive acclimatization and field training, it replaced D Squadron on the front lines of the so-called “Locks and Handles” sector (*al-Aqfal wa-l-Maqabiḍ*) on 18 January.⁶⁶⁴

Deane-Drummond focused his campaign strategy on two principal elements: intensified aerial bombardment and high-level intelligence infiltration. While most ordinary Omani guides and informants generally refused to cooperate, Smiley had successfully recruited one of the most influential tribal leaders from among the Bani Hina’ah—an individual who, according to declassified SAS intelligence documents, began providing sensitive information about the activities within one of the primary revolutionary camps in the “Locks” sector of Wadi Kamah.⁶⁶⁵

In addition, Drummond identified and recruited an Omani man from Zanzibar named Sulayman bin Naṣir Filanah al-habsi. Born and educated in Zanzibar, al-habsi was fluent in both Arabic and English—and according to the author of *Silk al-Juman*, he may also have possessed a working knowledge of Hebrew, although this claim requires further scholarly verification.⁶⁶⁶ Al-habsi appears to have maintained close ties with British intelligence in Zanzibar. Acting on their recommendation, he composed a letter addressed to Sulayman bin himayr al-Nabhani, the military commander of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, in which he introduced himself as a devout Omani who had studied in Zanzibar and acquired advanced skills in operating anti-aircraft artillery, telegraph

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid, SAS Project for Oman: Rebel Forces on JABAL AKHDAR and surrounding area ,No.1, 17 November 1958.

3.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁶ al-Jabri.*Sulk Al Jumman* 50.

systems, and explosives. He declared his intent to place these rare and valuable skills in service of Islam and the Muslims, to obey the Imam, and to fight in the path of God.”⁶⁶⁷

True to his reputation, the Emir of al-Jabal al-Akhdar welcomed the volunteer without consulting the broader revolutionary leadership. Al-habsi quickly embedded himself within the ranks of the resistance. Yet from the outset, some fighters harbored suspicions. He never fought alongside us,” one witness later recounted. He constantly took notes in a small notebook, recording every detail. I informed Shaykh talib bin ‘Ali that he was counting our soldiers, weapons, and artillery. He moved quickly between caves and offered no help repairing the telegraph.”⁶⁶⁸

Within two weeks, al-habsi had compiled a detailed map of the revolutionaries’ positions, routes to the summit, the “Locks and Handles” defensive lines, and the contents of their supply depots and armories. More alarmingly, he marked specific locations—including caves and camps—with small, discreet piles of stones arranged in recognizable patterns. These turned out to be ground signals for targeting aerial bombardment. The revolutionaries only realized the deception once Royal Air Force aircraft began concentrating fire around these markers. By the time his role was discovered, it was too late: al-habsi had bribed one of the fighters and escaped through Wadi Bani Kharuṣ.⁶⁶⁹

Drummond wasted no time in acting upon this unprecedented intelligence breakthrough—one that had eluded colonial authorities for more than eighteen months. He immediately ordered a precision airstrike campaign based on the coordinates provided by al-habsi. Four Venom fighter-bombers of

⁶⁶⁷ al-Jabri. Ibid. p 50. Also: Said Al-Harthi, 347-350.

⁶⁶⁸ al-Jabal al-Akhdar! Jabal al Akhdar, al Shereja village, Oman, December 17 , 2023.

⁶⁶⁹ al- Jabri. *Sulk Al Jumman*.50-51.

the Royal Air Force's No. 8 Squadron, based in Sharjah, were dispatched—later reinforced by four additional aircraft. These planes executed a total of 94 sorties, firing 350 rockets of 60-pound caliber and discharging 36,811 rounds of 20mm ammunition.⁶⁷⁰

It was confirmed that a daytime assault on al-Jabal al-Akhdar was unfeasible due to the heightened vigilance of the revolutionary fighters, who had strategically dispersed themselves along the mountain's ridgelines and were equipped with anti-aircraft weaponry. This operational reality necessitated a nighttime advance. Given the ruggedness of the terrain, moonlight was deemed essential for navigation, leading planners to schedule the assault during the full moon period from 22 to 26 January 1959.⁶⁷¹

The axis of advance was selected from the south, specifically via Wadi Kamah, owing to several strategic advantages. This route was shorter, more direct, and allowed forces to reach the summit in a single night—a critical factor for operational success. Logistically, a southern approach was more feasible: the command headquarters was based in Nizwa, close to an airstrip and equipped with civilian communication lines, while the Special Air Service (SAS) supply depots were already located at the Bayt al-Falaj base.⁶⁷²

The terrain dictated that the assault proceed via the ridgelines rather than the valleys, which were dominated by steep rock escarpments. In the context of mountain warfare, ridgeline approaches are generally preferred, as valleys tend to present greater risks of ambush. Furthermore, the southern route enabled effective artillery support and benefitted from the assistance of local fighters from the al-ʿAbri tribe, whose intimate knowledge of the terrain was instrumental.⁶⁷³

⁶⁷⁰ WO 337/9. 26; Smiley, D. (1960)..

⁶⁷¹ Ibid.

⁶⁷² Ibid.

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

Following additional aerial reconnaissance by Deane-Drummond, the final decision was made to launch the offensive from the south, between Wadi Kamah and Wadi Sumait. This route was lightly guarded and offered a tactical advantage through the element of surprise, given its unexpected direction. It was also short enough to be completed within a single night, allowing the forward units to secure the mountain's summit by dawn and to be resupplied by air thereafter.

When Donkeys Betrayed the Empire

The assault was scheduled to coincide with the full moon on the night of 25 January 1959. Deception and misdirection played a central role in the operation's strategy. Deane-Drummond deliberately circulated misleading information among most British and allied units, indicating that the main offensive would be launched simultaneously from the west via 'Aqbat al-Zafar and from the east via Wadi Tanuf. Two companies were ordered to advance along these axes in a diversionary maneuver. The disinformation swiftly reached the revolutionaries, who responded with heavy fire. As a result, the bulk of the rebel forces mobilized to counter what they believed to be a coordinated two-pronged assault on these two strategic chokepoints.

Yet at this critical moment, British forces encountered an entirely unexpected obstacle: a mutiny among the donkey handlers. "The rented donkey was as vital as the modern aircraft," observed the war correspondent for *The Times*, highlighting the pivotal logistical role of these animals in the mountain campaign.⁶⁷⁴ The plan had been to deploy donkeys alongside the assault units that night, with additional animals prepared to follow through Wadi Kamah once the path had been secured.

⁶⁷⁴ "The Brilliant but Little Known British Desert Action," *The Times* (London), April 9, 1959, 13.

These pack animals were intended to serve as a contingency transport system in the event that adverse weather conditions disrupted planned aerial resupply operations.

To the astonishment of the central command, the coordination of over 126 donkeys and their handlers nearly resulted in a catastrophic logistical failure.⁶⁷⁵ The Somali donkeys, purchased in bulk by the British military, were unfamiliar with the jagged terrain of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar. They required grain-based fodder and needed to be trained to ascend narrow mountain paths and steep ridgelines. By contrast, local donkeys bred on the al-Jabal al-Akhḍar were well-adapted to the sharp, rocky clefts and could navigate them without guidance. Their diet consisted of dates and fresh green *barseem* (alfalfa).⁶⁷⁶

Although Deane-Drummond initially assigned the task of handling the animals to mercenaries within the Sultan's forces, their unfamiliarity with the landscape forced him to recruit local tribesmen from the surrounding areas at the last minute—despite concerns that they might leak the true direction of the assault to the revolutionaries. He attempted to secure their cooperation with modest cash payments—ten qurush (single qirsh) for one night's work.⁶⁷⁷

The Final SAS Airborne Operation

The objective designated by the joint command (Deane-Drummond and Smiley) was to seize the highest peak of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar—referred to in the operational plan by the codename *Beercan*—through a coordinated airborne parachute drop, coupled with a simultaneous ground ascent from

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁶ WO 337/9. p 26.

⁶⁷⁷ The Maria Theresa Thaler, also known locally as the "Riyal Fransi", was a widespread silver trade coin bearing the 1780 AD date. During the 1950s, ten qurush for a goat herder or donkey handler is a one-year income.

the base of the mountain. This southern assault would be launched after securing a strategic vantage point overlooking the Wadi Bani habib area, designated *Colin* in the operation plan. The offensive was divided into three distinct phases.

Phase One: D Squadron of the Special Air Service (SAS) was tasked with capturing *Pyramid*, *Beercan*, and *Colin*. Following this, A Squadron of the SAS was to secure *Vincent*—a key position leading to *Pyramid*—by dawn.

Phase Two: Relief of A Squadron at *Vincent* was assigned to O Company of the Northern Frontier Regiment. Control over *Pyramid* would subsequently be handed over to the Life Guards of the Royal Household Cavalry.

Phase Three: Consolidation of positions would follow, with D Squadron fortifying its presence at *Colin*, and A Squadron entrenching its hold over *Beercan*.⁶⁷⁸

Additionally, fifty irregular tribal fighters under the command of Major Clarke, operating in coordination with SAS squadrons on the southern flank. In the north, 200 fighters from the al-‘Abri tribe, supported by a platoon from the Muscat Regiment under Major Coates, carried out a diversionary assault from the direction of al-‘Awabi, scaling the mountain from that axis. Simultaneously, aircraft from No. 8 RAF Squadron, based in Bahrain and Sharjah, provided direct aerial support, while three SAS detachments and two helicopters were placed on standby to execute nine aerial supply drops from the logistics depot in Nizwa on the morning of the assault.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁸ KCL-Lt. Colonel Deane-Drummond, Report on Operations by 22 SAS Regiment in Oman ,February 1959 (Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King s College, London— Private collation of Lt. Colonel Deane-Drummond).

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid.

The scheduled date of the operation (D-Day), initially set for 25 January 1959, was postponed by 24 hours due to unfavorable weather conditions, including low cloud cover obscuring the mountain's summit.⁶⁸⁰

At 1000 hours, personnel from A and D Squadrons of the Special Air Service (SAS), stationed at Tanuf, received a final operational briefing from Colonel Deane-Drummond. Donkey convoys departed shortly thereafter for the assembly area at Kamah, which had been prepared in advance by the Northern Frontier Regiment. By evening, the SAS units were transported by vehicle to Kamah, arriving after nightfall.⁶⁸¹

The squadrons remained in the staging area until the full moon had risen. Thirty minutes later, the assault units began their advance. However, a renewed mutiny among the donkey handlers caused a delay in the arrival of the mountain-adapted local donkeys, which had been assigned to accompany A Squadron. This disruption affected the timing of the advance and risked compromising the carefully choreographed schedule of the operation.⁶⁸²

The arrival of the donkeys assigned to F Squadron—intended to follow A Squadron in front of Headquarters (HQ)—was delayed. This contingent, comprising twenty-five donkeys (ten allocated to each squadron and five to HQ), was tasked with carrying Browning machine guns, each squadron's ammunition, as well as wireless equipment for both the central headquarters and field

⁶⁸⁰ WO 337/9, p 26; Smiley, D. (1960).Ibid.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid.

⁶⁸² Ibid.

command units. Ultimately, the donkeys reached the assembly point fifteen minutes after the HQ unit had arrived.⁶⁸³

At 2030 hours, as SAS forces advanced steadily, the diversionary attack was heard in the distance. The element of surprise had been successfully achieved. Nevertheless, the terrain proved arduous, and progress remained slow. A number of less fit or heavily burdened soldiers were left behind to navigate the ascent independently while the main companies pressed forward. The small Somali donkeys, ill-suited to the rugged conditions, became more of a hindrance than an asset. Most were abandoned at *Vincent*, although a handful managed to reach *Pyramid*.⁶⁸⁴

The only recorded casualty at this stage occurred when a stray bullet ignited a grenade in the backpack of an SAS soldier, wounding him and two comrades walking behind. All three were immediately evacuated by helicopter, but two later died from their injuries within 24 hours.⁶⁸⁵

Meanwhile, G Company of the Northern Frontier Regiment encountered sustained machine-gun and mortar fire from the Kamah camp, indicating that resistance from entrenched revolutionary positions remained active and coordinated.

Due to the ruggedness of the terrain, the donkeys failed to reach their designated target—the summit of *Beercan*. As A Squadron of the Special Air Service (SAS) advanced to occupy *Beercan* without encountering resistance at approximately 0650 hours, the troops abandoned much of their heavy equipment en route in order to maintain mobility. Upon securing the summit, the unit began fortifying its position.

⁶⁸³ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁴ Deane-Drummond, Report on Operations by 22 SAS Regiment in the Oman ,February1959. Ibid.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid.

Shortly thereafter, Valetta aircraft commenced aerial supply drops over *Beercan*. All nine scheduled drops were completed, despite initial confusion among the revolutionaries, who mistook the descending containers for a parachute landing. The first wave of supplies was scattered, and several containers were damaged in the process. After nearly ten hours of climbing, SAS forces successfully reached the summit, gaining full visual control over the mountain and the ability to monitor all movement across the surrounding terrain.

By 0700 hours, as daylight broke, Deane-Drummond arrived accompanied by the Air Liaison Officer (ALO), equipped with a GJ6U ground-to-air radio set. He promptly informed Smiley that the mission had been accomplished. The colonial forces had achieved their objective through deception, psychological manipulation, and betrayal, at minimal economic cost. It was, by British standards, an ideal campaign of economic warfare, a mode of imperial conquest in which Britain took great pride.⁶⁸⁶

We were stunned—humans were falling from the sky.⁶⁸⁷ It was a terrifying sight. Where were these people coming from?” It was a moment of immense rupture, one that many among the local population struggled to comprehend. We were gripped by fear that the Imam would fall into British hands and be humiliated. The Imam was not merely our leader in this war—he was the symbol of Oman’s long history of resistance to foreign invasion.”⁶⁸⁸

The resistance quickly collapsed—indeed, it all but vanished, dissolving into the surrounding civilian population.⁶⁸⁹ Inhabitants of key villages such as Siq, Wadi Bani Habib, and al-Sharijah

⁶⁸⁶ The Brilliant but Little Known British Desert Action," *The Times* (London), April 9, 1959, 13.

⁶⁸⁷ Ial-Jabal al-Akhdar! Jabal al Akhdar, Wadi bani Habib village, Oman, January 20 , 2023.

⁶⁸⁸ al-Jabal al-Akhdar! Jabal al Akhdar, al Shereja village, Oman, December 17 , 2023.

⁶⁸⁹ al-Jabal al-Akhdar! Jabal al Akhdar, Wadi bani Habib village, Oman, December 17 , 2023.

began to surrender and were instructed to hand over their weapons. Royal Air Force aircraft circled low over the mountain communities, broadcasting threats and warnings through loudspeakers:

O people of the mountain, O Bani Riyam, surrender your sons, your families, your homes, and yourselves. Obey the Sultan before you are all destroyed... O people of the mountain, hand over Ghalib, talib, and Sulayman bin humayr. Tell us where they are hiding, and you will be spared punishment.''⁶⁹⁰

Immediately afterwards, tariq bin Taymur established an open interrogation headquarters, where villagers were questioned about the whereabouts of the revolutionary leadership.⁶⁹¹

The British also gave the al-‘Abri tribe—under their shaykh ‘Abd Allah bin Muhanna—as well as fighters from the Bani Rawahah, free rein to loot caves and homes in the villages of Siq, al-Sharijah, and Wadi Bani habib. These raids targeted weapons, money, and food supplies and were deliberately permitted in order to ignite tribal vengeance and ensure that cycles of retribution would persist into the next phase of domination.

At the same time, the colonial administration made a concerted effort to confiscate all documents, correspondence, books, and manuscripts found in homes, caves, and mosques—part of a broader strategy to suppress historical memory and maintain imperial control for as long as possible.⁶⁹²

Smiley flew by helicopter to the summit of *Beercan* to join Deane-Drummond. Together, they proceeded to Siq, where Smiley immediately established a formal British military command to oversee the administration of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar in the post-conflict phase. Smiley recorded this moment through the lens of the triumphant colonial officer:

⁶⁹⁰ al-Jabri, *Sulk Al Jumman*. 52-53.

⁶⁹¹ Interview No. 28. Ibid.

⁶⁹² WO 337/9. 29.

"At Saiq we joined a patrol that was setting off with a guide to Sulaiman's cave. There we found the fire still smoking and the cave, or rather system of caves which ran back into the mountain like a rabbit warren, was found to be filled with loot ranging from arms, amunition, and food to such things as a new Singer sewing machine. Sulaiman was also stupid enough to leave behind all his personal letters, and from the 1,000-odd that were later translated much valuable intelligence was gleaned on the rebel organization, arms supplies, and those who were rebel helpers or sympathizers. A number of our so-called allies turned out to be double-crossers, one tribal guard leader who was supposed to be guarding a sector of road against mining turned out to be the chief minelayer himself."⁶⁹³ Casualty Assessment (2nd Jan - 31st Jan 1959).⁶⁹⁴

Table 5: Sultan's Armed Forces and British Casualties

Unit	Killed	Wounded
Northern Frontier Regiment	4	37
Muscat Regiment	-	1
Artillery Sultan's Armed Forces	2	1
Royal Marines (attached Northern Frontier Regiment)	2	3
Life Guards	-	3
13/18 Hussars	-	1
Special Air Service Regiment	3	4

⁶⁹³ WO 337/9. 29; Smiley, D. (1960).Ibid.

⁶⁹⁴ WO 337/9. 41.

Unit	Killed	Wounded
Trucial Oman Scouts	1	-
Other Units	-	5
Civilians British	1	2
Total	13	57

Table 6: Assessment of Revolutionaries Casualties

Unit	Killed	Wounded
Air (Bombing and Strafing)	89	12
Northern Frontier Regiment	21	1
Guerillas	3	-
Booby Traps	7	9
Artillery Sultan's Armed Forces	4	-
Special Air Service Regiment	52	Unclaimed
Total	176	57 (est)

Following the horrors unleashed by the Empire—from relentless aerial bombardments to waves of armed troops—the Imam and the revolutionary leadership became firmly convinced that direct, asymmetrical confrontation was futile. There would be no repetition of 1955, when Imam Ghalib was left behind within Oman. This time, it was clear: the Imam had to leave. British colonial authorities had, on multiple occasions, expressed their intent to assassinate him by any means necessary, viewing his elimination as essential to breaking the backbone of the resistance and crushing revolutionaries morale.⁶⁹⁵

Thus, the revolutionary triumvirate—Imam Ghalib, talib bin ‘Ali, and Shaykh Sulayman bin himyar—made the decisive choice to continue the struggle from exile, especially after gaining confidence in Arab support, notably from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, with Iraq joining their ranks following the 14 July 1958 Revolution led by ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim.

⁶⁹⁵ al-Jabri, *Sulk Al Jumman*. 68.

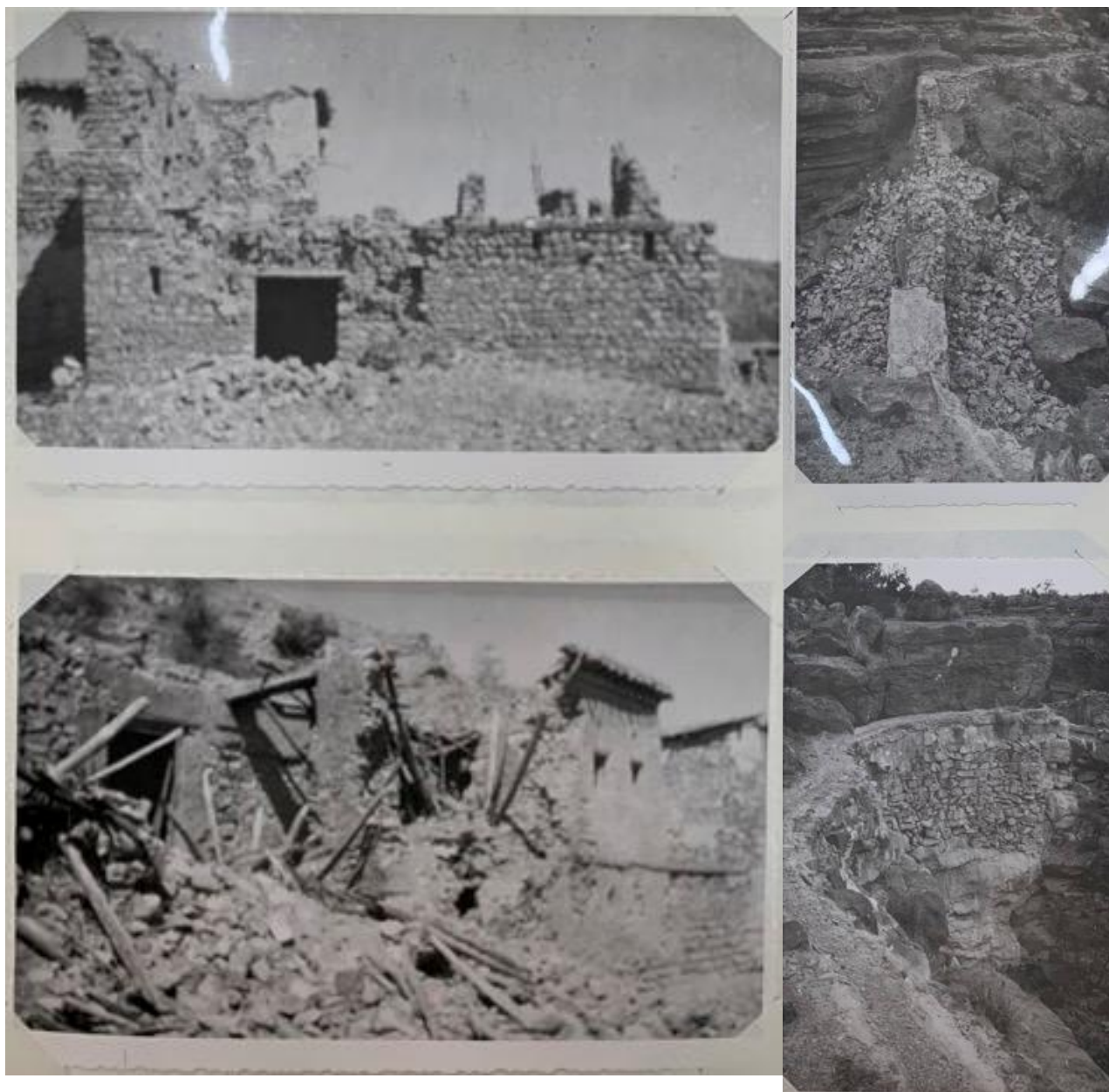


Figure 7: The comprehensive devastation of dwellings and water channels as documented in a British intelligence report following the Jebel Akhdar War.

Source: WO 208/5276 "Report on Intelligence Information and Description of Part of the JEBEL AKHDAR Region of OMAN Area visited February Report-1959 Written by C.W Maguire/July 1959."

On 29 January 1959 AD, Imam Ghalib, along with Shaykh Sulayman bin himyar and Yahyabin ‘Abdullah al-Nabhani, departed al-Jabal al-Akhḍar in disguise via the village of Sallut and Wadi

Sa‘dah, eventually reaching Nizwa, and then a cave in Jabal al-Kawr.⁶⁹⁶ From there, Shaykh Yasir bin hamud al-Maj‘ali, leader of the al-Janabah tribe, secured camels to transport them covertly from Bahla’ to Sharjah. In Sharjah, Shaykh Şaqr bin Muhammad al-Qasimi of Ra’s al-Khaymah arranged for a boat that would avoid detection by British agents and informants from the Trucial Oman Scouts. The vessel successfully delivered them to the Saudi port of Dammam on the night of 16 March 1959.⁶⁹⁷

As for Shaykh talib, he took as many of his children as he could and descended the mountain in disguise via Wadi Mistal, continuing on to Wadi Bani Kharuṣ, and from there to the Sea of Oman, where a boat carried them safely to Dammam.⁶⁹⁸

With this, the final chapter of direct military confrontation between the revolutionaries of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar and the British Empire came to a close. Yet, another chapter was just beginning—a five-year revolutionary exile, during which the Omani cause was sustained and internationalized. The experience of exile deepened revolutionary consciousness and kept the memory of the struggle alive—a wound left open—until the revolution later evolved into new forms that would continue to shape Oman’s political future for the next fifteen years.

⁶⁹⁶ Ial-Jabal al-Akhḍar! Jabal al Akhdar, Bani Rayam Revolutionary Leader and Tribal Chief, Wadi bani Habib village, Oman, June 15 , 2022. The same trajectory of the Imam’s exit is confirmed in the book: Ali l-Riyami, *The Green Mountain War (1957-1959)*. 296-297.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁸ al-Jabri. *Sulk Al Jumman*.68.



*Figure 8: Remnants of British bombs still scattered today (January 2025). (Far right and the middle)
Source: Photo from the archive of Abdullah Al Fahdi.*

*Figure 9: Remnants of British bombs Feb 1959. (Far left)
Source: WO 208/5276 "Report on Intelligence Information and Description of Part of the JEBEL AKHDAR Region of OMAN
Area visited February 1959. Written by C.W Maguire/July 1959."*

CHAPTER FIVE: ON THE TRANSFORMATIONS AND OUTCOMES OF THE REVOLUTION 1960–1965

This chapter seeks to trace the outcomes of the revolution, focusing particularly on the role played by Egypt and Saudi Arabia in vying to influence the revolution's leadership. Their efforts unfolded across multiple fronts: internationally, where they sought to present and garner support for the Omani cause; domestically, through attempts to build grassroots solidarity within Oman; and within exile communities across the region. Drawing upon archival documents and oral interviews conducted by the researcher with individuals who shifted their allegiance from supporting the Imamate-led revolution under Imam Ghalib to joining the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG), this chapter interrogates the constellation of local, regional, and international contradictions that precipitated these ideological shifts.

It argues that a disillusioned generation of younger revolutionaries—alienated by the conservatism of the traditional leadership—constituted the vanguard of a new revolutionary left. This cohort continued the struggle but within an entirely distinct ideological paradigm that would define the 1960s and extend into the mid-1970s.

To make sense of such ruptures, the chapter adopts the analytical lens of Charles Tilly's notion of the revolutionary situation,⁶⁹⁹ exploring seven key transformations that reflect the evolving *al-halah al-thawriyyah* (revolutionary condition). The revolution of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar did not only experience transformation through changes in geography or tactics of engagement with empire. Rather, it underwent profound structural shifts—driven by the internal contradictions

⁶⁹⁹ Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492–1992*, 10–14.

of its own ideational and doctrinal architecture. The leadership's conservative and religiously grounded worldview found itself increasingly at odds with a historical moment marked by the global rise of national liberation movements, the expansion of decolonization, and the popularization of the principle of self-determination for colonized peoples. The spirit of Bandung was at its zenith.

This chapter will thus explore the following dimensions of revolutionary transformation: from armed confrontation to legal-political internationalization of the cause; from theocratic Imamate to secular nationalism; from ideological traditionalism to revolutionary progressivism; and from parochial struggle to internationalist solidarity. It will then examine how these transformations were reflected in the revolutionary culture itself, with particular attention to the emergent roles of youth and women. The lens will narrow further to a case study of a prominent revolutionary figure who began within the orbit of the Imamate and ended as a militant in the transnational revolutionary movement spanning the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula.

Finally, the chapter offers a reflection on the cultural imprint of the revolution—its afterlives in the realms of literature and art. These, it argues, should be understood as repositories of contradiction and aspiration: mirrors of the human condition in times of war and peace, revolt and silence.

To be sure, it is not possible to exhaustively document every transformation or capture every nuance of this transitional period. The topic calls for sustained scholarly engagement and deeper excavation of primary materials, which—compared to the 1950s—are more plentiful and diverse. This relative abundance reflects the revolution's increasing regional and international

visibility, as well as the geographic dispersal of its leadership to cities such as Dammam (where Imam Ghalib was based), Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, and Beirut.

Accordingly, this chapter does not claim to offer a comprehensive account of all revolutionary shifts. Its ambition is more modest: to illuminate the most critical and indicative of these transformations.

From Armed Confrontation to Political Cause

The institutionalization of the Arab dimension and the establishment of regional alliances were central pillars of Imam Ghalib bin ‘Ali’s political strategy, intended to break the isolation imposed upon Oman by the British Empire and by Sa‘id bin Taymur. One of the earliest such efforts was undertaken by Shaykh Ṣalih bin ‘isaal-harithi, who visited Cairo in April 1953 and met with President Muhammad Najib, as previously detailed in earlier chapters.⁷⁰⁰ From the moment of his election, the Imam demonstrated a clear commitment to internationalizing the Omani cause at both Arab and global levels. His brother, talib bin ‘Ali, together with Ṣalih bin ‘isa, assumed responsibility for coordinating this diplomatic portfolio, cultivating strong relationships with both Egypt and Saudi Arabia. As early as October 1954, they formally submitted an application for Oman’s membership in the League of Arab States.⁷⁰¹

⁷⁰⁰ Egyptian Foreign Ministry Documents: Portfolio 1568, File 37/104//2, Part 2, a memorandum prepared by the Acting Director of the Arab Department (Ahmad Fathi Radwan) dated 30/11/1954. For further details, see: Abdel Hamid Shalaby, *Egypt’s Position on the Imamate Issue in Oman, in Fifty Years Since the July 1952 Revolution: Proceedings of the International Conference, 20–22 July 2002* (Cairo: National Library and Archives, 2003), 353–397.

⁷⁰¹ Documents of the League of Arab States, Portfolio 650, File 140/140/3, Vol. 3, Meetings of the Council of the Arab League, Memorandum from the Secretary-General Concerning the Issue of the Imamate of Oman, 1954.

In the second half of June 1955, the Revolutionary Command Council in Egypt resolved to respond to the appeal of the Imam of Oman on behalf of his people.”⁷⁰² Subsequently, an Omani office was established in Cairo, which began issuing Omani passports to nationals seeking to travel abroad.⁷⁰³

On 13 January 1957, the representatives of eleven Arab states submitted a request to the Secretary-General of the United Nations calling for an emergency session of the Security Council to address the British military aggression against Omani sovereignty.⁷⁰⁴ In New York, the colonial administration engaged in a concerted diplomatic campaign aimed at recasting the situation in Oman as nothing more than a domestic dispute and a divergence of political opinion.⁷⁰⁵

The rationale for bringing the Omani case before the United Nations was succinctly articulated by Ahmad al-Shuqayri in his address to the General Assembly: First, to affirm the right of the Omani people to independence and self-determination; second, to demand the withdrawal of British forces from the entirety of Omani territory; and third, to call for the release of detainees and compensation for the damage inflicted by British acts of aggression.”⁷⁰⁶

⁷⁰² Fathi al-Deeb, *Abdel Nasser wa Tahrir al-Mashriq al- Arabi: Shahadat Fathi al-Deeb* (Cairo: Markaz al-Dirasat al-Istratijiyya wal-Siyasiyya bil-Ahram, 2000), 223.

⁷⁰³ Muhammad Ali al-Dawood, *Mahadarat fi al-Tatawwur al-Siyasi al-Hadith fi Qadiyat Uman* [Lectures on the Modern Political Evolution of the Oman Issue] (Cairo: Arab League, Institute of Higher Arab Studies, 1964), 45.

⁷⁰⁴ Official Records of Security council, Twelfth Year Supplement for July-August 1957. Documents S/3865 and Add. 1.

⁷⁰⁵ See: FO 371/126883, Internal political situation in Muscat and Oman, 1957. in: <https://www.agda.ae/en/catalogue/tna/fo/371/126883> [accessed 27 April 2025].

⁷⁰⁶ Ahmad Shukairy, “Statement Before the Fifteenth General Assembly of the United Nations Special Political Committee on the Question of Oman” (statement presented at the United Nations Special Political Committee, New York, April 19, 1961), United Nations Digital Library, accessed [20 May 2025], <https://www.agda.ae/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9/catalogue/tna/fo/371/156782/n/4> . 49.

At the fifteenth session of the UN General Assembly, held in September 1960, ten Arab states—namely the United Arab Republic, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, and Yemen—formally requested that the question of Oman be placed on the Assembly's agenda. The justification offered was that Oman had been subjected to invasion by forces under British command, which had occupied its capital, Nizwa, in December 1955 in retaliation for the Imam's refusal to grant oil concessions on Omani territory to British companies.⁷⁰⁷

The case was referred to the Special Political Committee. Indonesia, together with the ten Arab states, along with Afghanistan, Guinea, and Yugoslavia, submitted a draft resolution calling for recognition of Oman's right to independence and self-determination, and urging a peaceful settlement that would restore normalcy to the country.⁷⁰⁸ However, the resolution was never brought to a vote and was deferred to the sixteenth session.

In 1961, the coordinated efforts of Arab advocacy groups, diplomatic coalitions, and Southern bloc states succeeded in securing 40 votes in favor—against 26 opposed and 25 abstentions—for the inclusion of an Omani representative to speak before the Special Political Committee. This marked a significant breakthrough. Shaykh talib bin 'Ali al-Hina'i delivered the address on behalf of a delegation that also included Shaykh Sulayman bin himyar and Muhammad Amin 'Abd Allah.⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁷ United Nations, Index to Proceedings of the General Assembly: Fourth Emergency Special Session, 17 to 19 September 1960; Fifteenth Session, 20 September to 20 December 1960 (Part 1), 7 March to 21 April 1961 (Part II), Bibliographical Series No. A/11 (New York: United Nations, 1961.), 136-148.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁹ Fathi al-Deeb. 254.

In his speech, Shaykh talib emphasized several key themes: Oman's longstanding independence over several centuries; the consistent opposition of successive imams to British attempts to impose control over the country; the atrocities committed by British forces since the 1955 military campaign; and the subjection of Oman to British domination, which had resulted in severe human and material losses. He also condemned Britain's systematic efforts to obscure its war in Oman and to prevent the international community from gaining access to reliable information. These measures included the refusal to allow foreign journalists into the country and the prohibition of Red Cross representatives from entering Oman to document the situation. Shaykh talib concluded by affirming both his people's and his own willingness to enter into negotiations with Britain in pursuit of a peaceful resolution.⁷¹⁰

The British delegation, for its part, resorted to a strategy of categorical denial—an attempt not merely to deflect responsibility, but to negate the very existence of conflict. In what stands as a paradigmatic example of imperial obfuscation, the British representative declared before the committee:

We are asked to halt aggression. There has been no aggression. We are asked to withdraw British troops from the area. There are no British troops stationed there. We are asked to dismantle our military bases. There are no military bases. The record of my country's part

⁷¹⁰ Ibid.

in the events I have been describing is there for all to see. We are not ashamed of it. There is no case for the United Nations to consider”.⁷¹¹

This statement—striking in its unapologetic tone—was not merely a rebuttal of the Omani delegation’s claims; it was an erasure of the war itself. It exemplified what might be termed a colonial rhetoric of invisibility, in which the deployment of power is made to vanish discursively even as it operates violently on the ground. The contradiction between Britain’s declarations before the United Nations and its extensive military interventions in Oman—well-documented in both archival sources and oral testimonies—underscores the disjuncture between imperial narrative and lived reality.

The deliberations of the Special Political Committee culminated in its 303rd meeting, the conclusions of which were submitted to the sixteenth session of the United Nations General Assembly on 30 November 1961. The committee’s report delivered a strikingly clear assessment:

The British aggression against the unarmed people of Oman and their occupation of its capital, Nazwa, could never be justified on the pretext of help to a friend under the obligations of a treaty. It was a flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter and of the accepted rules of international morality. The British, who were well known for their ability to reach a compromise through negotiation, could have used their good offices to obtain a settlement on the lines of the one established under the 1920 Treaty of Sib, in which they

⁷¹¹ United Kingdom Mission to the United Nations (New York, NY), communication to the Eastern Department, Foreign Office, April 20, 1961, FO 371/156782, p. 60, The National Archives, Kew, UK (received April 24, 1961).

had acted as intermediaries. But today it was not merely a friend, but their own interests, which were threatened, and which could only be protected through the complete domination of Oman. The question of Oman was the most recent case of colonial occupation and active subjugation of a whole people for material interests. It should be considered in that light and from the angle of the Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples”.⁷¹²

This assessment—rendered at the height of postwar decolonization discourse—positioned the British intervention in Oman not as a matter of internal dispute, as the colonial authorities repeatedly asserted, but as a paradigmatic case of continued imperial domination. By invoking both the Charter of the United Nations and the 1960 Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, the report reframed the Omani question as a litmus test for the credibility of the international order in confronting the aftershocks of empire.

The reference to the 1920 Treaty of Sib as a precedent for peaceful mediation further underscored the possibilities Britain had actively foreclosed. Whereas earlier treaties were predicated on a nominal balance between the Imamate and the Sultanate, by 1955, the calculus had shifted: Britain's imperial interests demanded not arbitration, but absolute control. The occupation of Nizwa and the suppression of the Imamate were thus cast not as security measures, but as strategic maneuvers in the service of extractive and geopolitical imperatives.

⁷¹² United Nations General Assembly, Sixteenth Session, *Official Records*, Special Political Committee, 303rd Meeting, November 30, 1961, New York.

To sum up, "the Question of Oman" was repeatedly brought before the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) between 1960 and 1967, reflecting broader decolonization struggles during this period. Initially included in the agendas of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth sessions (1960–1962), the matter was referred to the Special Political Committee. At the fifteenth session, deliberations were postponed due to time constraints.⁷¹³ In subsequent sessions, draft resolutions—invoking UNGA Resolution 1514 (XV) on decolonization—were approved by the committee, affirming Oman's right to self-determination, demanding the withdrawal of foreign forces, and urging peaceful conflict resolution. However, these failed to secure the required two-thirds majority in plenary votes.⁷¹⁴ In 1963, the UK, acting on behalf of the Sultan of Muscat and Oman, invited a UN representative to assess the situation firsthand.⁷¹⁵ Secretary-General U. Thant appointed Swedish Ambassador Herbert de Ribbing, whose June 1963 report informed discussions at the eighteenth session.⁷¹⁶ That year, UNGA Resolution 1948 (XVIII) established an Ad Hoc Committee to further investigate Oman's status.⁷¹⁷ By 1965, the committee's findings culminated in Resolution 2073 (XX), which explicitly condemned British colonial presence as an obstacle to self-determination and called for remedial measures, including UK troop withdrawal and resource sovereignty for Omanis.⁷¹⁸

⁷¹³ United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Question of Oman: Report of the Special Political Committee, 15th sess., A/4684 (1960), paras. 1–2.

⁷¹⁴ UNGA, Resolutions Adopted by the General Assembly, 16th sess., A/5100 (1961); 17th sess., A/5217 (1962).

⁷¹⁵ *On the Occasion of Resubmitting the Question of Oman to the United Nations* in Nizwa, a newsletter issued by the Omani Representation in Beirut, no. 3 (October 1, 1963).

⁷¹⁶ UNGA, Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on His Visit to Oman, 18th sess., A/5562 (1963).

⁷¹⁷ UNGA Resolution 1948 (XVIII), "Question of Oman," December 11, 1963.

⁷¹⁸ UNGA Resolution 2073 (XX), "Question of Oman," December 17, 1965; 'Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Oman', A/5846 (1965).

The Special Committee on Decolonization revisited Oman in 1966–1967, hearing testimonies from Omani petitioners but deferring final recommendations due to time constraints.⁷¹⁹ Meanwhile, UNGA Resolution 2238 (XXI) (1966) escalated criticisms, framing British military bases as threats to regional stability and denouncing resource exploitation by foreign entities⁷²⁰. The following year, Resolution 2302 (XXII) (1967) reinforced these positions, demanding immediate compliance with prior resolutions and urging member states to support Oman's independence movement.⁷²¹

Key themes emerge from this decade of UN engagement: (1) the tension between Cold War-era British interests and postcolonial sovereignty norms, (2) the strategic framing of Oman's struggle within broader anti-colonial discourse,⁷²² and (3) the procedural challenges of enforcing resolutions against resistant powers⁷²³. The case underscores the UN's limited leverage in decolonization disputes where permanent Security Council members were implicated.⁷²⁴

⁷¹⁹ UN Special Committee on Decolonization, Report to the General Assembly, A/6300/Add.3 (1966), para. 5.

⁷²⁰ UNGA Resolution 2238 (XXI), "Question of Oman," December 20, 1966.

⁷²¹ UNGA Resolution 2302 (XXII), "Question of Oman," December 12, 1967.

⁷²² Fathi al-Deeb, *Ibid.* 255-256.

⁷²³ For further detail see: United Nations General Assembly, "Oman," working paper prepared by the Secretariat, A/AC.109/L.442, February 14, 1968.

⁷²⁴ For analysis of UN decolonization efforts, see Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 178–203.

Arab states continued to place the Question of Oman” before the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) until as late as 1967.⁷²⁵ However, Britain—acting explicitly as both representative and proxy of the Sultan of Muscat and Oman—persistently obstructed the passage of any binding resolution aimed at restoring stability and securing self-determination for the Omani people.⁷²⁶

Between 1960 AD and 1967, the issue appeared repeatedly on the UNGA agenda, a testament to the salience of Oman’s predicament within the broader global landscape of decolonization. Initially listed in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth sessions (1960–1962), the case was referred to the Special Political Committee. Although time constraints postponed substantive discussion at the fifteenth session, subsequent draft resolutions—grounded in UNGA Resolution 1514 (XV) on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples—were passed at the committee level. These resolutions recognized Oman’s right to self-determination, demanded the withdrawal of foreign forces, and called for peaceful resolution of the conflict. However, none secured the two-thirds majority required for full adoption by the General Assembly in plenary session.

In 1963, the United Kingdom, seeking to reassert procedural control over the discourse, invited a UN envoy to conduct an on-the-ground assessment. Secretary-General U Thant appointed Swedish diplomat Herbert de Ribbing, whose June 1963 AD report informed the eighteenth session’s deliberations. The outcome was UNGA Resolution 1948 (XVIII), which established an Ad Hoc

⁷²⁵ The Oman Question at the Seventeenth Session of the United Nations, *Sawt Oman Magazine*, (Cairo), no. May 1963, 16-17.

⁷²⁶ The Imamate of Oman Lodges a Protest with the Secretary of the Human Rights Defense Committee,” *Sawt Oman* (Cairo), no. 19 (May 1963), 19.

Committee to investigate Oman's colonial status. That committee's findings culminated, by 1965 AD, in Resolution 2073 (XX), which explicitly identified Britain's military presence as a direct impediment to Omani self-determination. The resolution called for a series of remedial actions, including the withdrawal of British troops and the restoration of Omani control over natural resources.

Despite these developments, substantive enforcement remained elusive. In 1966–1967, the Special Committee on Decolonization revisited the case, hearing testimonies from Omani petitioners. Yet final recommendations were deferred, again citing time constraints. Meanwhile, UNGA Resolution 2238 (XXI) in 1966 escalated international criticism: it denounced the continued presence of British military bases as a destabilizing force in the region and condemned foreign exploitation of Oman's resources. The following year, Resolution 2302 (XXII) in 1967 reiterated these condemnations, demanding immediate compliance with prior resolutions and calling upon member states to actively support the Omani national liberation movement.

What emerge from this protracted decade of UN engagement are three interrelated themes. First, the tension between Cold War geopolitics and the principles of postcolonial sovereignty; second, the strategic reframing of Oman's struggle as emblematic of the global anti-colonial project; and third, the structural limitations of the United Nations in confronting entrenched imperial powers, especially when those powers occupy permanent seats on the Security Council. The Omani case thus stands as a revealing index of both the aspirations and constraints of the international system in its attempt to mediate the unfinished business of the empire.

From Imamatism to Nationalism

Since the Imamate of Oman first submitted its request to join the League of Arab States in September 1955, Arab support for the Omani revolutionary cause remained consistent and multifaceted—spanning political, economic, diplomatic, and media arenas.⁷²⁷

In August 1957, President Jamal ‘Abd al-Naṣir received an Omani delegation led by Shaykh Ṣalih bin ‘isaal-harithi, accompanied by members of the al-harath tribe: Sulayman bin hamad, Ibrahim bin hamad, and Salim bin ‘Abd Allah. During this meeting, ‘Abd al-Naṣir affirmed his unequivocal support for the Omani revolution and urged the delegation to prioritize the immediate establishment of a political office in Cairo to oversee political and media operations, as well as to coordinate financial and military support.⁷²⁸

Over the following years, Oman—its revolution, and eventually its political cause—became a recurring and essential item on the agenda of the Arab League. The League regularly reiterated its call for member states to provide financial and material assistance to the Omani freedom fighters,” in accordance with Resolution 1555 (March 1959) and Resolution 1825 (April 1963). The League also supported bringing the Omani issue before the United Nations General Assembly during its eighteenth session and continued efforts to raise the matter with the Committee for the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.⁷²⁹

⁷²⁷ Ismail al-Buhalal, *Qaḍiyat ‘Uman: Bahth Mufaṣṣal li-Qaḍiyat al-Imamah fi ‘Uman fi Jami’ Marahiliha* [The Oman Question: A Detailed Study of the Imamate Issue in Oman Throughout Its Phases] (Baghdad: Al-Azhar Press, 1963), 90–93.

⁷²⁸ Al-Falahi’s interview with al-Harthi SH for al-Harthi Salih bin Isa. Ibid.

⁷²⁹ Documents of the League of Arab States, Thirty-Ninth Ordinary Session, 2 April 1963, Resolution No. 1883.

In March 1962, the League formally invited Imam Ghalib to attend its thirty-seventh regular session in Riyadh. Following his address to the assembly, all member states expressed support—by every available means—for the Omani people's struggle to achieve independence and liberate their territory.⁷³⁰ However, full membership was not granted to the Imamate due to objections raised by certain member states, who were unwilling to recognize a government-in-exile unless it demonstrated effective presence and control within Oman itself.⁷³¹

The Imamate's network of foreign offices played a critical role in embedding the Omani revolution within its regional and global contexts, as elaborated in Chapters Three and Four. The effectiveness of these offices—which in many respects functioned as the diplomatic missions of a sovereign entity—owed much to the sustained efforts of Shaykh Ṣālih bin ʿIsa al-Harithi, who remained a central diplomatic figure throughout the various phases of the Omani revolution, from the height of military confrontation in the 1950s to the exile of the Imam in Dammam during the 1960s. The Cairo office was the first to be established and remained the most central. It was followed by the office in Damascus.⁷³² The heads of these offices also worked to assist Omanis who faced severe restrictions on travel due to internal repression and external surveillance. The leadership of the Imamate's diplomatic missions was as follows: the Cairo office was initially headed by Abu Ishaq Ibrahim Atfish, followed by Muhammad bin Hamad al-Harithi, and later Himyar bin Sulayman al-

⁷³⁰ Ibrahim Shahdad, *Internal Conflict in Oman During the Twentieth Century (1913–1975)* (Beirut: Dar Al-Awzai, 1989), 212–14.

⁷³¹ Jamal Zakariyya, Qasim. *Al-uṣul al-tarikhiyah li-qadiyat ʿUman*. [The Historical Roots of the Oman Question]. *Journal of the Egyptian Society for Historical Studies*, no. 12 (Cairo, 1964/1965).

⁷³² Al-Falahi's interview with al-Harithi SH for al-Harithi Salih bin Isa. Ibid.

Nabhani. The Damascus office was led in succession by Ibrahim bin hamad al-harithi, Sulayman bin Muhammad al-Salimi, and Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Nabhani. In Baghdad, Muhammad bin ‘Adiyy al-Hina’i was succeeded by ‘Abd Allah al-Sha‘ayli. The Kuwait office was first led by ‘Abd Allah bin Ahmad al-Ghazali and then by ‘Abd al-Rahim bin Saif al-Khuruṣi. In Dammam, the office was initially assigned to Sulayman bin Muhammad al-Salimi and later to Ahmad bin Zahran al-Riyami. Attempts to establish representative offices in ‘Amman and Rabat were unsuccessful due to the influence exerted by Britain and France over the host governments.⁷³³

The primary function of these offices was to issue travel documents to Omani nationals whose mobility had been severely curtailed by British surveillance and repression across Gulf ports. The passports issued by the Imamate s offices held no official status or diplomatic protection, and their utility depended entirely on the discretion and sympathy of Arab authorities aligned with the Omani revolutionary cause. Britain, for its part, refused to recognize these documents and routinely treated them as evidence of subversion, leading to the arrest, interrogation, and in many cases, prosecution of those who carried them.⁷³⁴

Yet these offices did not function as effectively as expected. Operational shortcomings were not merely a matter of technical inefficiency; rather, they stemmed from a deeper problem of patronage and internal favoritism. The three principal revolutionary leaders—talib, Sulayman, and Ṣalih—often favored their relatives in appointing heads of the Imamate s foreign offices. This nepotism

⁷³³ Ibid.

⁷³⁴ Ibid.

engendered internal discord and undermined the credibility of the revolution from the outset, particularly in the eyes of political actors in Cairo, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Iraq.

A notable example of such tensions was the conflict between Shaykh Abu Ishaq Ibrahim Atfish (1886–1965) and Ṣālih bin ‘īsaal-harithi, the Imam’s deputy and head of foreign affairs. The dispute arose when Ṣālih appointed his cousin, Muhammad bin hamad al-harithi, to take over operations at the Cairo office. Atfish, a respected Ibadi scholar from Algeria and a senior figure at Dar al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya (the Egyptian National Library), had been instrumental in anti-colonial intellectual movements in Algeria and Tunisia. Sympathetic to the Omani cause, he had mobilized his extensive religious, scholarly, and social networks across the Arab and Islamic worlds to support the revolution and its goals—most notably by facilitating the establishment of the Imamate’s first foreign office in Cairo.⁷³⁵

Among those who joined the Cairo office were Fayṣal bin ‘Alī bin Fayṣal (a cousin of Sultan Sa‘īd bin Taymur) and Muhammad Amin ‘Abd Allah. Together, they played a foundational role in launching and managing Ṣawt ‘Uman (The Voice of Oman) magazine, the revolutionary movement’s principal media organ. Both Fayṣal and Muhammad Amin embraced a distinctly Arab nationalist line, which shaped not only the magazine’s editorial content but also extended into the

⁷³⁵ **Abu Ishaq Ibrahim Atfayyish** (1886–1965 AD / 1304–1385 AH) Born in the town of **Beni Yezguen** (Bani Yizgen), one of the villages of the **M'zab Valley** in southern Algeria, he was exiled by the French colonial authorities to Egypt in 1923. In Cairo, he met **Emir Khaled ibn Abdelkader al-Jaza'iri** and **Abdelaziz Thaalibi**. A prolific author, he wrote numerous works and treatises reviving the principles of Ibadi Islam. He also edited and critically annotated classical Islamic texts, including: Partial verification and correction of *al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an* (Qurtubi's exegesis). *Tuhfat al-A'yan bi-Sirat Ahl 'Uman* (al-Salimi's history of Oman, published in two volumes). *Musnad al-Imam al-Rabi' ibn habib* (a hadith compilation). For further details on his intellectual legacy, anti-colonial activism, and biography, see: Dr. Muhammad Naṣir, *al-Shaykh Ibrahim Atfayyish fi Jihadihi al-Islami* (The Islamic Struggle of Sheikh Ibrahim Atfayyish). Heritage Association, Ghardaïa, Algeria, 1991.

language and political tone of the revolution's communiqués, position papers, and memoranda presented to the Arab League and the United Nations.

By the mid-1960s, however, both men became increasingly disillusioned with the conservative, traditionalist leadership of the revolution. Their frustration mirrored a broader generational critique emerging among young Omanis, who began to voice sharp criticisms of what they saw as a stagnant leadership out of step with the revolutionary moment. As one contemporary activist framed it, theirs was a struggle against the backward leadership that had come to dominate the national movement.”⁷³⁶

Imam Ghalib, in nearly all interviews conducted with him and published either by Imamate-affiliated outlets or the Arab press, consistently emphasized the Arab and regional dimension of the Omani revolution. As he stated: The Arab cause, from the [Atlantic] Ocean to the [Arabian] Gulf, is a single cause—it is indivisible and cannot be fragmented. The victory of the revolution in Algeria and Yemen is a victory for Oman. And a setback in any Arab country is a setback for Oman and for the war being waged between the tyrannical forces and the free people. That is why a large number of our revolutionaries are receiving military training in Arab countries... and we are receiving military assistance from our Arab brothers.”⁷³⁷

⁷³⁶ *The Omani Revolution (1957–1959): A Critical Historical Study*, June 9 Studies, Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1974, 38.

⁷³⁷ *Kull Shay'* magazine published the following interview with Imam Ghalib, *Nizwa* bulletin, no. 3 (October 1963): 10–11.

At the same time, some Arab newspapers began to highlight the social contradictions produced by British colonialism, stating: Oman—rich in its resources, poor in its standard of living and in the life of its people [...] exemplifies the stark contradiction between the buried wealth beneath Arab soil and the miserable lives lived above it. Britain has imposed this reality upon our Arab people in Oman [...] believing it to be a means of preventing the inevitable explosion. Yet the role of the Omani people [...] is to teach Britain that this condition is, in fact, the most fertile ground for revolution. The recent Omani revolutionary experience is the clearest proof of this.”⁷³⁸

Such statements increasingly linked material deprivation to revolutionary legitimacy, underscoring the imperative to sustain armed resistance. Within this paradigm, colonial control was not simply political—it was rooted in the extraction of economic value and the strategic function of military bases. As many commentators noted, Britain would not willingly surrender its grip over such critical resources and installations.⁷³⁹

Arab solidarity with the Omani revolution expanded steadily, particularly among youth, labor groups, women, and students in both schools and universities. This solidarity was not limited to rhetoric, media coverage, or celebratory events, but extended to the organization of financial support campaigns and material assistance initiatives.⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁸ "Why the people revolted in Oman: The contradiction experienced by the people of interior Oman between agricultural and mineral wealth... versus ignorance, poverty, and disease." *Al-Tali'a* newspaper, Kuwait, no. 88, Year 2, Wednesday 1 July 1964, 15.

⁷³⁹ The Oman Question and the Fact-Finding Committee: What Has Oman's Political Struggle Achieved," *Al-Tali'a*, Kuwait, no. 98, 2nd year, Wednesday, September 16, 1964, 14.

⁷⁴⁰ Damascus Supports the Omani People in Their Struggle Against Colonialism," *Sawt Oman*, Cairo: no. 20, 1959, 8.

From Traditionalism to Progressivism

The characteristics of taqlidiyyah (traditionalism) and muhafazah (conservatism) marked the leadership of the revolution from its first contact with the Arab world—a world that, by contrast, was moving steadily toward a progressive and Arab nationalist discourse. Anyone who reads the memoirs of Fathi al-Dib and his impressions from his first meeting with Shaykh talib bin ‘Ali will immediately sense the gap between men who had only just emerged from a state that had been isolated and besieged since the early twentieth century, and states such as Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, which were rapidly advancing toward modernity and progress.⁷⁴¹

Yet that gap did not constitute a barrier for these leaders—who were by no means lacking in sharp, intuitive social intelligence—to quickly bridge it, at least on the level of public discourse and official statements. However, when it came to adopting progressive behaviors or engaging with critical thinking as a mode of reasoning, they remained largely untouched. This failure had deep implications for their decision-making and historical consciousness, ultimately producing disastrous outcomes for both the revolution and the revolutionaries.

Accordingly, from the earliest stages of the revolution, progressive writings began to emerge emphasizing that the struggle over Oman was a dual struggle: one between competing colonial interests on the one hand, and another between national forces and colonial powers on the other. Articles, media coverage, and investigative reports published in revolutionary periodicals regularly

⁷⁴¹ "In late November 1954, one of the Arab sheikhs from the Arabian Gulf region arrived in Cairo. He introduced himself as Talib bin Ali, the brother of Imam Ghalib... Upon receiving Egypt's guest, I found myself facing a unique Arab personality embodying all the quintessential traits of Bedouin life—evident in the traditional robe he wore, the leather sandals he donned, the stern austerity etched on his face, the hoarse tone of his voice, and his conspicuous lack of familiarity with any forms of urban civility in demeanor." See: Fathi al-Deeb. 197.

discussed and analyzed the importance of progressivism and the inevitability of its triumph.⁷⁴² These writings also made clear that oil lay at the heart of the hidden conflict—whether between the United States and Britain, or between both of them and the Omani national liberation movement.⁷⁴³ The revolution of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar was understood as one among many battles for peoples to reclaim ownership over their national wealth and to resist colonialism,⁷⁴⁴ its projects, its alliances, and its monopolies.⁷⁴⁵

The revolutionary leadership was keen to adopt the common lexicon of statements issued by progressive and revolutionary regimes across the Arab world, the three continents, and the Global South.⁷⁴⁶

A clear example of this shift was the language transformation in the revolution's publications and journals, where terms such as *al-mujahidin* and *al-mujahid* were gradually replaced by *al-fida'iyyin* and *al-thuwwar*—⁷⁴⁷a telling indication of the revolution's growing alignment with the

⁷⁴² Al-Taḡaddumiyah wa hatmiyyat intiṣariha[Progressivism and the Inevitability of Its Victory],” *Ṣawt ‘Uman* [Voice of Oman], Cairo, no. September 1961, 19.

⁷⁴³ See, Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, “The True Secret Behind Oman's Problem,” *Al-Ahram*, Cairo, August 10, 1957, 4.

⁷⁴⁴ Abd al-Mun'im al-Ghazzali, *Mushkilat al-Qawmiyya al-Arabiyya: al-Udwan al-Baritani ‘ala ‘Uman wa al-Yaman* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1957), 41–43.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid. 62.

⁷⁴⁶ Ismail al-Buhalal, *Qaḍiyat ‘Uman: Baḥth Mufaṣṣal li-Qaḍiyat al-Imamah fi ‘Uman fi Jami’ Marahiliha*[The Oman Question: A Detailed Study of the Imamate Issue in Oman Throughout Its Phases] (Baghdad: Al-Azhar Press, 1963)Ibid.

⁷⁴⁷ The term *al-mujahidin* (sing. *al-mujahid*) derives from the Arabic root j-h-d, connoting struggle or exertion, particularly in a religious sense. In the context of the Omani Imamate, it evoked a theologically grounded legitimacy rooted in Ibadi resistance traditions, framing anti-colonial struggle as a form of jihad. By contrast, *al-fida'iyyin* (lit. “those who sacrifice themselves”) emerged in the 1950s and 1960s as a secular revolutionary term, especially associated with Palestinian fighters, connoting militant heroism and voluntary self-sacrifice for the national cause. *Al-thuwwar* (sing. *al-tha'ir*), meaning “revolutionaries,” is ideologically broad but politically modern, widely used in pan-Arab and socialist contexts to denote actors engaged in systemic political transformation.

rhetoric of surrounding national liberation movements.⁷⁴⁸ The second generation of revolutionary leaders actively adopted progressive terminology when articulating the aims of the revolution. One such instance was Muhammad bin hamad al-harithi's speech at the Afro-Asian Conference, in which he stated:

The heroism of the Omani mujahidin affirms their commitment to the principles of Bandung. The brutality of colonialism is manifest in acts of extermination and the torture of political detainees... The Omani people are struggling to liberate themselves from colonialism and the dependency that the colonizers seek to impose upon them—to isolate them from their brothers across Asia and Africa.”⁷⁴⁹

Similarly, himyar bin Sulayman bin himyar wrote that: The Omani revolution aims first and foremost to achieve national independence, political freedom, the elimination of all forms of colonial dependency, and the affirmation of sovereignty.”⁷⁵⁰

The terminological shift from al-mujahidin (those engaged in sacred struggle) to al-fida'iyyin (those who sacrifice themselves) and al-thuwwar (revolutionaries) reflects a broader ideological transition within the Omani revolutionary discourse. While al-mujahidin evoked religious legitimacy rooted in the Imamate's Ibadi tradition, the adoption of al-fida'iyyin and al-thuwwar

⁷⁴⁸ See, for example, the shifting discourse in *Sawt Uman* (Voice of Oman). The issues published in the late 1950s used only *al-mujahidun* (the mujahideen), whereas by the 1960s—particularly after the revolutionary leaders left Oman—the journal incorporated additional terms such as *al-fida iyyun* (the fidayeen), *al-munaḍilun* (the fighters), *al-mukafihun* (the strugglers), and *al-thuwwar* (the revolutionaries).

⁷⁴⁹ Muhammad al-Harithi, “On Oman Day,” *Sawt 'Uman* (Cairo), August 1960, 8.

⁷⁵⁰ Hamir bin Sulayman, *Ahdaf al-Thawra fi Uman* [The Goals of the Revolution in Oman], *Sawt Uman* [Voice of Oman] (n.d.), Cairo: 4.

aligned the movement with secular Arab nationalist and progressive anti-colonial currents, particularly those associated with the Palestinian and Algerian struggles. This lexical evolution marked a symbolic departure from tradition toward modern revolutionary identity.

The revolution's scope was not confined to Omani territory alone. It extended material support—albeit covertly—to other liberation movements in the Gulf, such as the Bahraini National Liberation Front (a communist organization). During the March 1965 uprising in Bahrain, this support took the form of weapons, ammunition, and guerrilla warfare training. As one statement from the period noted: Despite our ideological differences, a fundamental idea united us: resisting a common enemy—British colonialism. We all stood in the same trench, fighting for independence, democracy, and progress in our countries.”⁷⁵¹

It is worth noting that the most significant structural transformation of the revolution after the leadership's departure from Oman occurred during a meeting held in Cairo between 15 June and 28 October 1963.⁷⁵² This gathering, later referred to as the “Revolutionary Command Council,” brought together the traditional leadership—Imam Ghalib, his brother talib, Shaykh Ṣālih bin ‘īsaal-harithi, and Shaykh Sulayman bin himyar al-Nabhani. The context and rationale for this meeting will be elaborated later in the chapter.

What is striking is how the decisions made at this meeting were presented through the publications of the Imamate's foreign offices. According to Ṣawt ‘Uman magazine (from the Cairo office)⁷⁵³

⁷⁵¹ Interview with Abdullah Ali Al-Binali, one of the leaders of the Bahraini National Liberation Front, conducted at his residence in Arad, Bahrain, on February 12, 2024.

⁷⁵² “A New Tactic for the Omani Revolution,” *Sawt Oman* (Voice of Oman), Cairo, no. October–November 1963, 16.

⁷⁵³ Ibid

and *Nizwa Bulletin* (from the Beirut office), this was described as a “tactical” shift.⁷⁵⁴ At first glance, the decisions appeared to mark a turn toward institutionalizing the revolution—establishing a modern political entity capable of leading the revolutionary process into a new phase aligned with the historical demands of the 1960s.

The document resulting from the 1963 Cairo meeting of the Council of the Omani Revolution declared that the official meeting of the Council of the Omani Revolution was held on 28 July 1963 and was attended by all members of the Council representing the people of Oman.”⁷⁵⁵ The assembly adopted the name “Revolutionary Command Council of the State of Oman” (*Majlis Qiyadat al-Thawrah li-Dawlat ‘Uman*) and established three official committees. The Supreme Authority of the Council was to be chaired by Imam Ghalib bin ‘Ali al-Hina’i and comprised unnamed Omani tribal leaders and shaykhs; its secretariat included Muhammad Ahmad al-Jamali and Ahmad Muhammad al-Salimi. The Foreign Affairs Committee was tasked with managing relations with Arab states and all external affairs related to the Omani cause, including propaganda, oversight of the Imamate’s representative offices, and the educational advancement of Omanis. The Finance Committee was responsible for receiving financial aid from friendly and fraternal countries and allocating funds to support the revolution, including the needs of the mujahidin, fida’iyyin, and official offices; it was composed of Muhammad bin Khalfan al-Isma‘ili and Sulayman bin Muhammad al-Salimi. The Military Committee, based inside Oman, was charged

⁷⁵⁴ A new tactic of the Omani revolution, *Nashrat Nizwa*,” no. 3 (October 1963) 7–8.

⁷⁵⁵ This document has been published in multiple locations. The sources consulted by the researcher are: 1- *Nizwa Bulletin*, no. 3 (October 1963): 7–8. 2- *Sawt Oman* Magazine (Cairo), October–November 1963 issue, 16. 3- Arab Documents, 1963, document no. 154, Department of Political Studies and Public Administration, American University of Beirut, 630–31.

with continuing the armed struggle, strategic planning, and training; its members were Sulayman bin himyar al-Nabhani, Ṣālih bin ‘isaal-harithi, and talib bin ‘Ali al-Hina’i.

The document also outlined what it referred to as the “Revolutionary Program” (al-manhaj al-thawri), which would guide the liberation movement in Oman. The “Council of the Omani Revolution,” in its commitment to supporting the national struggle both inside and outside the country, and to establishing that struggle upon sound progressive foundations that would guarantee the Arab people of Oman the realization of their aspirations for freedom, sovereignty, and unity within the framework of Arab nationalist principles, resolved to adopt a clear Arab policy based on the following foundations.

Firstly, the council affirmed its belief in the territorial unity of Oman and considered it indivisible. Secondly, it committed to the continuation of revolutionary action against the British occupying forces until their expulsion and the full restoration of Omani sovereignty. Thirdly, it affirmed that the people are the source of legitimate authority, exercised freely in accordance with Islamic teachings. Fourthly, it pledged adherence to Islamic principles in organizing the state and named Arab nationalism as the foundational basis for building a sound Arab society. Fifthly, it sought unconditional support and assistance from all friendly nations and fraternal peoples, regardless of their political systems or ideologies, and emphasized the strengthening of diplomatic relations. Sixthly, it endorsed all international efforts aimed at global peace and human welfare. Seventhly, it expressed support for Afro-Asian solidarity and opposition to racial discrimination. Eighthly, it emphasized the importance of Omani communities abroad, recognized their citizenship, and called for their participation in national liberation efforts and for facilitating their return to Oman.

Ninthly, it committed to combating subversive movements and organizations hostile to the revolution.

Tenthly, it declared its openness to any initiative seeking a peaceful resolution that would ensure full sovereignty, freedom, and rights for the Omani people.

Eleventhly, it called for the strengthening of national unity, enabling the people to build the state after liberation, organizing tribal forces for constructive participation in political and social development, and fostering a spirit of cooperation and individual initiative to achieve national goals. Twelfthly, it called for the expansion of education and cultural life, easing access to overseas study for Omani students, and working to steadily increase their numbers to prepare an enlightened and capable generation for post-liberation governance. Thirteenthly, it stipulated that anyone proven to have betrayed or collaborated with colonial forces—or conspired with their agents—was to be considered an enemy of the people and the revolution, and would face appropriate punishment, including members of the Revolutionary Command Council itself.

Externally, the Council's principles were equally clear. Firstly, it affirmed that the people of Oman were part of a single Arab nation and believed in the indivisibility of Arab unity. Secondly, it pledged support to the Arab League and affirmed adherence to its Charter. Thirdly, it affirmed the unity of the Arab nation regardless of internal disagreements. Fourthly, it declared its opposition to Zionism and committed to cooperating with Arab states to liberate Palestine. Fifthly and finally, it pledged resistance to colonialism in all its forms, affirmed the right of all peoples to self-determination, and supported the global eradication of imperialism and colonial rule.⁷⁵⁶

⁷⁵⁶ American University of Beirut. Department of Political Studies and Public Administration. *al-Watha'iq al-Arabiyyah: Arab Documentation*. 1963. 630-631.

From the Local to the International

One of the most important transformations the revolution underwent between 1957 and 1967 was its shift from being a domestic matter concerning Omanis alone to becoming an international issue. It was regularly placed on the agendas of international organizations such as the United Nations (as discussed earlier), as well as numerous regional and global bodies. What is particularly notable about this transformation is the intensified presence and solidarity expressed through Global South organizations, which had a fundamental impact on the discourse adopted by the revolutionary leadership. That discourse became increasingly radical and revolutionary, aligning with the spirit of Bandung and adopting its principles and terminology.

The Afro-Asian People s Solidarity Organization declared 18 July of each year as "Oman Day," to entrench international awareness of the Omani revolution and express support for its struggle for liberation from colonialism.⁷⁵⁷ When Imam Ghalib was asked about the proclamation of a republic in Oman, he responded: "The system of the Imamate that has long been in place in Oman is a republican system, in which the Imam assumes the presidency through general elections in which the people participate."⁷⁵⁸ He added: "The Omani cause is a cause of struggle and liberation from foreign domination and colonial rule, so that [the Omani people] may ultimately govern themselves and determine their destiny in accordance with their Arab interest and the national unity that colonialism has worked to dismantle."⁷⁵⁹

⁷⁵⁷ Faisal Ali Faisal, "Solidarity of the Peoples of Asia and Africa: On July 18th...Oman's Day of Struggle," *Sawt Oman*, no. 20 (August 1959).

⁷⁵⁸ Ghalib bin Ali al-Hinai, press conference held at the headquarters of the Permanent Secretariat of the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization in Cairo. " *Sawt Oman* " *Voice of Oman* magazine, Cairo, February 15, 1964, 3-6.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid 4.

The revolutionary leadership, in its addresses at international conferences, was keen to emphasize the Arab and international solidarity it had received in the face of Britain's systematic efforts to obscure the events unfolding inside Oman.⁷⁶⁰ The political literature of the time, published in the Arab press, made a deliberate effort to link the Omani revolution to other Arab revolutions—particularly those in Algeria⁷⁶¹ and Palestine—and to underscore shared historical and structural conditions. As articulated in one statement: “The Omani revolution is an extension of the revolutions and uprisings undertaken by the Arab people. It is not separate from the liberation struggles ongoing in Lebanon, Jordan, Algeria, and Yemen.”⁷⁶² Another affirmed: “The battle is not against the people of Oman alone—it is the battle of all Arabs.”⁷⁶³

In September 1960, Shaykh Ṣālih bin ‘isaal-harithi visited Moscow at the head of a delegation that included the Syrians Fawzi al-‘Allaf, director of the Syrian news agency SANA; lawyer Fatih Sabir, secretary of the Committee to Combat Colonialism; and Sulayman bin hamad al-harithi, Shaykh Ṣālih's personal secretary. The Egyptian ambassador in Moscow accompanied the delegation during its meetings and facilitated the visit. The agenda was filled with high-level engagements. The delegation met with the Soviet Foreign Minister Semyonov and Deputy Minister Kiselyov. It secured political and diplomatic support for the Omani revolution on multiple

⁷⁶⁰ See: The speech delivered by Mr. Muhammad al-Harithi, head of the Omani delegation, at the Asian-African Conference in Conakry, the capital of Guinea. *Sawt ‘Oman*, Cairo: April 1960, 8-9.

⁷⁶¹ *Tahiyat al-Jaza ir ila Uman al-Tha ira* [Algeria's Salute to Rebellious Oman], *Sawt Uman*, Cairo, September–October 1959 issue, last page; Mustafa Ghazal, *Uman... Filastin Thaniya* [Oman... A Second Palestine], *Sawt Uman*, Cairo, no. 32 (August 1960), 7; Muhammad Abu al-Futuh, *Hal Tataqarrab Tajribat al-Jaza ir fi Uman?* [Will Algeria's Experience Be Repeated in Oman?], *Sawt Uman*, Cairo, February 15, 1964, 9.

⁷⁶² Ahmad al-Jamali, “On the Occasion of a Single Battle,” *Sawt Uman* (Cairo), no. 9 (September 1958), 8.

⁷⁶³ *Al-Ahram*, Cairo, Wednesday, July 31, 1957, 2. Also, Monday, August 12, 1957, 1–2.

levels, both directly and through the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Committee.⁷⁶⁴ The Soviet press took interest in the Omani revolution and covered it on several occasions.⁷⁶⁵ Notably, Russia had shown early interest in the Omani struggle from the moment the revolution reignited in 1957.⁷⁶⁶

This visit was followed by another successful mission to China, where the Omani delegation met with Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai. The delegation, again led by Shaykh Ṣālih bin ʿīsa, included Sayyid Fayṣal bin ʿAlī bin Fayṣal, Saif Ghobash—who would later become the Foreign Minister of the United Arab Emirates—and Sulayman bin ḥamad al-ḥarithi. China extended limited support to the Omani revolution in the form of light weaponry, along with political and diplomatic backing in international forums.⁷⁶⁷ Hashim Bahbahani, in his assessment of Chinese support for the revolution of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, argues that this assistance influenced the subsequent development of the Omani left. According to him, the Chinese viewed the revolution as an early opportunity to promote principles of anti-colonial liberation and the foundational tenets of people's guerrilla warfare. Bahbahani characterizes this moment as the "political phase" in the formation of the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf, which would later spearhead the revolution in Dhufar and lead the longest armed struggle against imperialism in the history of the Arabian Peninsula.⁷⁶⁸

⁷⁶⁴ Al-Falahi's interview with al-Harthi SH for al-Harthi Salih bin Isa.

⁷⁶⁵ "18 July: The Day of Omani Struggle Against Colonialism," *Izvestia*, Moscow, July 18, 1961.

⁷⁶⁶ See: "Russia Requests Texts of the Agreement Between Britain and the Imamate of Oman," *Al-Ahram*, Cairo, August 9, 1957, 1–2. Also: "The Imam of Oman Requests Russian and American Intervention," *Al-Ahram*, Cairo, August 5, 1957, front page.

⁷⁶⁷ Al-Falahi's interview. *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁸ Hashim S.H. Behbahani, *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World, 1955-1975: Three Case Studies* (London: KPI Limited, 1985), 134.

As for India, the Omani delegation visited at the end of 1960, where they met with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru assured Shaykh Ṣalih of India's consistent support for peoples struggling against colonialism and praised the Arab nationalist backing for the Omani revolution. The visit was arranged and its program coordinated by the poet and diplomat ʿUmar Abu Rishah, then serving as the ambassador of the United Arab Republic to India.⁷⁶⁹

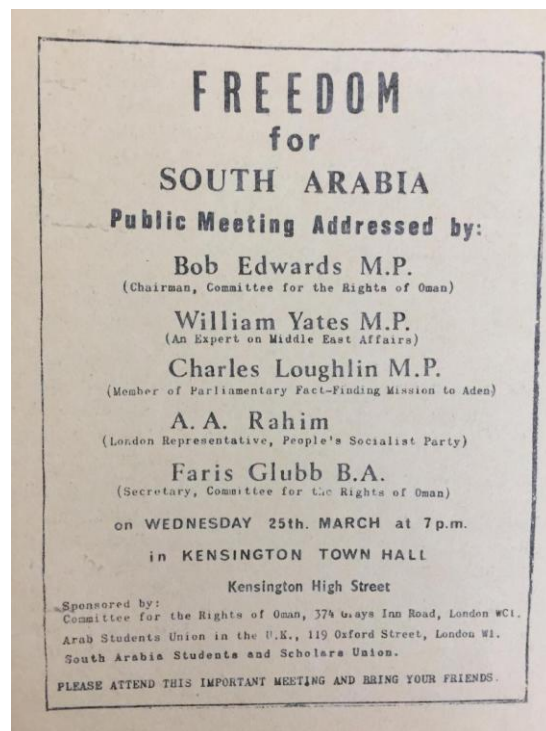


Figure 10: A sample announcement from the meeting of the Popular Solidarity Committee formed in London under the name: Committee for the Defence of the Rights of the People of Oman and the Enslaved People of Muscat

⁷⁶⁹ Al-Falahi's interview. Ibid.

Parallel to the political and diplomatic efforts led by the Omani diplomatic team, there emerged popular initiatives in solidarity with Oman, its revolution, and its cause. In February 1963, the Committee for the Defence of the Rights of the People of Oman (and the Enslaved People of Muscat) was established in London. The committee included members of the British Labour Party, alongside numerous journalists and British activists. Among its most prominent members was Faris Glubb—also known as Faris Yahya—who served as the committee's secretary.⁷⁷⁰

In his writings supporting the Omani cause, Faris argued that the British government had overthrown an elected leader representing a twelve-hundred-year tradition of just rule in favor of a hereditary ruler who owned slaves—as was the case with Britain's support for the Sultan of Muscat.⁷⁷¹ He insisted that Britain must recognize Oman's historical right to independence,⁷⁷² withdraw its troops immediately from Oman,⁷⁷³ and release the imprisoned Omanis.⁷⁷⁴ Faris Yahya also documented, through the committee's activities, testimonies of British soldiers and officers who had participated in the Anglo-Sultanic invasion and who admitted to acts of torture

⁷⁷⁰ For more on the personality of Faris Glubb, see: *The Guardian*, "Faris Glubb Obituary," May 17, 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2004/may/17/pressandpublishing.guardianobituaries> [Accessed May 26, 2025].

⁷⁷¹ The Englishman who told Britain's delegate at the United Nations: "You are a liar," *Sawt Oman* [Voice of Oman], Cairo, February 15, 1964, 25.

⁷⁷² *Free Oman*. Edited by F. Glubb, B.A. Vol. 1, no. 3. April 1963. FO 371/168687. in: <https://www.agda.ae/en/catalogue/tna/fo/371/168687/n/59> [Accessed 26 May 2025].

⁷⁷³ Glubb, Faris. 'Britain's feudal friends in Oman.' *Venture*, vol. 18, no. 9 (oct. 1966), 14-16.

⁷⁷⁴ See Faris Jalub's letter to S.M. Black, Head of the Arab Administration at the Foreign Office in London, in *Ṣawṭ Uman* (Cairo), no. 3 (July 1963): 21.

against captured Omani revolutionaries. He submitted this evidence to the United Nations under the Question of Oman file.⁷⁷⁵

The committee became actively engaged in mobilizing support for Oman's cause within Britain and in international fora, particularly the United Nations.⁷⁷⁶ Its stated aim was to raise public awareness in Britain about the reality of their government's position toward the Omani revolution.

The committee called for the application of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to Oman and for recognition of Oman as an independent state under the rule of its legitimate elected Imam,

Ghalib.”⁷⁷⁷ In its literature, the committee pledged to work toward the liberation of Muscat and

Oman from slavery and tyrannical rule, the elimination of British colonialism, and the granting of freedom to its people.” It organized numerous conferences, demonstrations, and protests—including in front of the British Prime Minister's office at 10 Downing Street.⁷⁷⁸

⁷⁷⁵ *Free Oman*, vol. 1, no. 3 (April 1963), p. 59, FO 371/168687, editorial, "OMANI PRISONERS OF WAR TORTURED SOLDIERS HORRIFIED BY INVASION ATROCITIES." in: <https://www.agda.ae/en/catalogue/tna/fo/371/168687/n/61> [Accessed 26 May 2025].

⁷⁷⁶ See: The full text of the memorandum sent by Robert Edwards, Chairman of the Committee for the Defense of Oman's Rights, to the United Nations Secretary-General, in *Sawt Oman* [Voice of Oman], Cairo, no. October-November 1963, 8-14.

⁷⁷⁷ OMA, *The Oman Question and the United Nations: Extracts from the Report Published by the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee, on Its Investigations of the Oman Question*, with an introduction by Robert Edwards, M.P. (Chairman, Committee for the Rights of Oman) (London: Committee for the Rights of Oman and Movement for Colonial Freedom, 1963; Exeter: Centre for Arab Gulf Studies, University of Exeter), 329.9535.

⁷⁷⁸ "In Britain, a committee was formed to defend the rights of the oppressed people of Oman and the people of Muscat," *Sawt Oman* [Voice of Oman], no. 3 (Cairo, July 1963), 8.

Continuation of Guerrilla Warfare and Negotiations

Britain employed all available means to pressure the revolutionary leadership to cease guerrilla operations, which had continued after Imam Ghalib's departure from Oman, and to withdraw the Omani case from the United Nations.

The first negotiations began after Imam Ghalib left Oman for Dammam, Saudi Arabia. In July 1959, the British sent an envoy to the Imam. Their condition for opening talks was a ceasefire and the cessation of hostilities in Oman—a proposal that was directly rejected. In 1960, Britain requested a list of the Imam's conditions to resume negotiations. The response included the following demands: the restoration of the status quo ante prior to 1955, recognition of Omani independence and sovereignty, withdrawal of British forces from Omani territory, compensation for war damages, and the release of political prisoners. Britain did not respond directly but postponed any decision after two rounds of talks held in Geneva and Beirut in July 1960. The Omani delegation was led by Shaykh Sulayman bin himyar al-Nabhani, while the British side was represented by Mr. Norman, the British Political Agent in Bahrain. The negotiations produced no tangible outcomes.

In December 1960, the British reinitiated direct contact with the Imam, expressing their willingness to resume a new round of negotiations on the condition of a complete ceasefire inside Oman and the removal of the Omani complaint from the United Nations agenda. Imam Ghalib's

reply was simple and direct: the withdrawal of British troops would naturally lead to a ceasefire, and referring the issue back to the United Nations was a fair and peaceful path, given that the organization was established precisely to facilitate political solutions to international disputes.⁷⁷⁹

Throughout 1961, negotiations remained stagnant, despite two meetings between the parties in Beirut. Britain failed to respond to any of the Omani demands. As for Sa'id bin Taymur, he considered the entire negotiation process a waste of time; he categorically refused the return of Shaykh talib under any circumstances and would only allow Ghalib to return to Oman if he renounced his title as Imam. With regard to Şalih bin 'isa, Sa'id bin Taymur reportedly doubted al-harithi s willingness to return to Sharqiyyah under the authority of his nephew Ahmad bin Muhammad.⁷⁸⁰

In effect, this track was nothing more than a political tactic parallel to the lobbying war waged by the colonial administration within the corridors of the United Nations General Assembly in New York—designed to dilute the Omani cause by delaying its discussion and obstructing decisive resolutions.⁷⁸¹ Indeed, colonial secret documents reveal that the underlying goal of the negotiations was to sow division between Sulayman bin himyar and Şalih bin 'isa on the one hand, and the rest of the revolutionary cadres on the other.⁷⁸²

⁷⁷⁹ *Kull Shay* magazine, "The Following Interview with Imam Ghalib," *Nizwa Bulletin*, no. 3 (October 1963), 11.

⁷⁸⁰ FO 371/174554, Telegram From Bahrain To Foreign Office, No.297, June 17 1964.

⁷⁸¹ Ismail Al-Buhalal. Ibid. 127-130.

⁷⁸² FO 371/174554, Memorandum to the British Foreign Office with a Summary of Exploratory Discussions with the revolutionaries, No. 1295, July 2, 1964.

‘Abd Allah Ahmad al-Ghazali, head of the Imamate office in Kuwait, played a prominent role in these talks. He repeatedly stressed that the revolutionaries were eager to return to Oman—with the exception of Shaykh talib bin ‘Ali—and warned the British of the continuing revolutionary activity inside Oman and the growing influence of leftist and communist forces.⁷⁸³

Simultaneously, the British opened a separate, secret channel of negotiation with Shaykh Sulayman bin himyar alone, discussing his personal future and appealing to his aspirations for wealth promised through oil exports. This was contingent upon his breaking with the Imam and his brother talib, and pressuring his tribe, Bani Riyam, to abandon their support for the revolution—an explicit application of Britain’s long-standing colonial strategy of “divide and rule”.⁷⁸⁴

Meanwhile, inside Oman, guerrilla operations targeting British forces continued through the planting of landmines and ambushes on British patrols across wide swaths of Omani territory. The Omani resistance also intensified its attacks on the routes used by the British Petroleum Company.⁷⁸⁵ Additionally, it carried out targeted assassination attempts against prominent Omani or British figures. Among the most notable was Ahmad bin Ibrahim, a key figure on whom Sa‘id bin Taymur relied heavily for managing internal affairs. Ahmad narrowly escaped several

⁷⁸³ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁴ FO 371/174554, Telegram From Beirut To Foreign Office, No.462, July 11, 1964.

⁷⁸⁵ “The Increasing Incidents of Mine Explosions in British Facilities and Forces in Oman,” “17 Enemy Soldiers Casualties Between Killed and Wounded.” These headlines appeared in: *Sawt Oman* [Oman’s Voice], Cairo, September/October 1959 issue, 4. This issue also included images and scenes of “the brutal destruction carried out by British colonialism... against Omani villages and cities”,¹⁴. Additionally: “Omani Guerrillas Wound Lieutenant Keightley, Commander of the Suez Campaign... with a Severe Leg Fracture,” “The Battles of Omani Mujahideen Intensify in Brutality Against British Colonialism,” and “The Killing of Two Muscat Guard Soldiers”—these are scattered examples of press coverage in *Sawt Oman*, no. 30, June 1960.

assassination attempts, the last of which involved an attempt to blow up the ship on which he was scheduled to travel to India for medical treatment. The revolutionaries had planted a bomb in the room he was meant to occupy aboard the vessel en route to India.⁷⁸⁶

The resistance also began to carry out a series of assassinations targeting Omani individuals accused of collaborating with British forces. One such figure was Naşir al-‘Uwainri.⁷⁸⁷ The year 1962 alone witnessed more than thirty distinct resistance operations across the northern cities and towns of Oman: Nizwa, Manah, Barkat al-Mawz, al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, al-Rustaq, Wadi Bani Kharuṣ, Şur, Ja‘lan Bani Bu ‘Ali, al-Suwayh, al-Buraymi, al-‘Awabi, Adam, Izki, Sama’il, Jilah Bani Jabir, Bahla, ‘Izz, ‘Ibri, and others.⁷⁸⁸

In April of that same year, Britain accused the Omani Liberation Army of bombing a British passenger ship in the Indian Ocean, an incident that reportedly resulted in the deaths of approximately 236 people. However, investigations failed to substantiate these allegations, which Britain had used in its international campaign to discredit the Omani resistance.⁷⁸⁹

Despite British intensity in tracking down the revolutionaries and punishing innocent civilians, the Omani resistance continued its operations on the ground. In 1963 AD, al-fida’iyyun detonated eight landmines, destroying three large troop carriers, one armored vehicle, and two military

⁷⁸⁶ Faisal Ali Faisal, "The Reality of the Situation in Muscat," *Sawt Oman*, no. 30, June 1960, 9.

⁷⁸⁷ Unpublished transcribed interview with a revolutionary who began his struggle with the Imamate and became a leader of the National Democratic Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman, from the private archives of Ahmed al-Deen (copy in possession of the researcher).

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid. Also see press coverage in *Sawt Oman*, no. 30, June 1960.

⁷⁸⁹ "A British Defends Oman's Cause," *Sawt Oman [Voice of Oman]*, no. August 1962, 10.

jeeps.⁷⁹⁰ Meanwhile, al-mujahidun launched an attack on a British outpost near al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, resulting in the deaths of several British soldiers and mercenaries.⁷⁹¹

Table 7: List of Martyrs

Name	Place of Birth	Battle / Location	Notes
Shaykh Zahir bin Khamis al-Salimi	al-Sahamah	al-Sahamah Massacre	The village was annihilated; 15–20 villagers killed, including women and children. Names not preserved due to community silence.
Salim bin humayd al-Mundhiri	al-Salif, ‘Ibri	‘Aqbat al-Zafar	Direct clash with British forces.
Darwish bin Ṣalih al-Tubi	Wadi Bani Kharuṣ	Masjid al-‘Aqibah / al-Ṣuwwar / Wadi Bani Kharuṣ / al-‘Alya	Armed engagement.
Naṣir bin Muhammad al-Ma‘mari	hayl al-Yaman	al-Qatitiyyah Camp	Direct bombing by British Royal Air Force.
Sayf bin Sa‘id al-Salimi	Imti	al-Waghilah	Direct clash with British forces.
hamud bin Sayf al-Tubi	Imti	Wadi Imti	Bombed by British Royal Air Force.
Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Hina‘i	Bilad Sit	Wadi al-Muṣallah	Direct clash with British forces.
Salam bin Sa‘id al-Riyami	al-‘Ulya	Wadi Bani Kharuṣ	Died from grenade shrapnel wounds; no medical aid available.
‘Abd Allah bin Salam al-Tubi	Wadi Bani habib	al-Dufayyah / Wadi Kamah	Besieged and fatally wounded in a firefight; bled to death in a small cave.
Naṣir bin Muhammad Awlad Thani	ashurarayjah – al-Jabal al-Akhḍar	Wadi Kamah	Direct airstrike by British Royal Air Force.
Sa‘id bin Salim Awlad Thani	ashurarayjah – al-Jabal al-Akhḍar	‘Aqbat al-talhat	Bombing.
Sallum bin Sa‘id	Wadi Bani habib	—	Bombing.

⁷⁹⁰ See various documented reports in Free Oman, vol. 1, no. 3 (April 1963): 59, FO 371/168687, editorial, "Military Reports from Oman: British Convoy Ambushed." [Accessed May 26, 2025]. <https://www.agda.ae/en/catalogue/tna/fo/371/168687/n/64>.

⁷⁹¹ Ṣawt ‘Oman, Cairo, no. May 1963, p. 21; and no. April 1963, 18.

Sallum bin Sa‘id al-Jamudi	al-halillat	‘Aqbat al-Zafar	Direct clash with British forces.
Hilal bin ‘Abd Allah al-Mujayfi‘i	—	—	Killed by SAS snipers.
hamad bin Muhammad al-Fahdi	Wadi Bani habib	—	Killed by SAS sniper.
Muhammad bin Khalfan al-Fahdi	Wadi Bani habib	—	Engaged in firefight with SAS snipers.
Sa‘id Khalfan al-Shariqi	Wadi Bani habib	—	Killed by automatic fire from SAS sniper team.
Manşur bin Salim al-Shariqi	al-Rus – al-Jabal al-Akhḍar	‘Aqbat al-Zafar	Direct airstrike by British Royal Air Force.
Hilal bin ‘Abd Allah al-Fahdi	Siq	Dar Tha‘lab	Killed during British forces’ raid.
Muhammad al-haraşi	Sama’il	—	Armed engagement.
Marhun bin Salam al-Tubi	Wadi Bani habib	Barkat al-Mawz	Injured in battle; died later in military vehicle crash.
Sultan bin Sarhan al-Qaşir	Izki	Battle of Wadi al-Hijar	Direct clash with British forces just before end of war, January 1959 AD.
Rashid bin Muhammad al-harithi	al-Qabil	Wadi al-Bawadir / al-Qalt / Kahf al-Dunn massacre	Direct airstrike by British Royal Air Force.
Muhammad bin Salim al-Mashayikhi	Ja‘lan Bani Bu hasan	Wadi al-Bawadir / al-Qalt / Kahf al-Dunn massacre	Direct airstrike by British Royal Air Force.
Sa‘adah bint Sayf al-Shariqi	—	Gathering firewood for bread baking	Killed by direct airstrike from British Royal Air Force.
Ghani bint ‘Abd Allah bin Salam al-Şaqrishura	Shurayjah – al-Jabal al-Akhḍar	Bombing of her home	Direct airstrike by British Royal Air Force.
Her daughter ‘Uwainah bint Salam al-Riyamishura	Shurayjah – al-Jabal al-Akhḍar	Bombing of the house	Direct airstrike by British Royal Air Force.
Muhaylah bint Salim bin ‘isaal-‘Uwaymri	Shanut – al-Jabal al-Akhḍar	Khubb hayl Mahlab, while gathering fodder	Direct airstrike by British Royal Air Force.
Qalilah bint Muhammad bin Naşir al-‘Uwaymri	al-Ghalil – al-Jabal al-Akhḍar	Khubb hayl Mahlab, while gathering fodder	Direct airstrike by British Royal Air Force.

Jawkha bint Khalfan bin Salim al-Riyami	—	Gathering firewood for bread baking	Direct airstrike by British Royal Air Force.
‘Ali bin Rashid al-‘Awfi	Wadi Bani ‘Awf	British ascent from Wadi Bani Kharuṣ	Armed engagement.
Shaykh Muhammad bin Khalfan al-Hudhabi	Fanja’	al-hulah Camp	Direct airstrike by British Royal Air Force.
Muhammad bin Sultan al-Mashayikhi	Ja‘lan Bani Bu hasan – Eastern Region	Wadi al-Bawadir / al-Qalt / Kahf al-Dunn massacre	Direct airstrike by British Royal Air Force.
Sa‘id bin Sultan al-Mashayikhi	Ja‘lan Bani Bu hasan – Eastern Region	Wadi al-Bawadir / al-Qalt / Kahf al-Dunn massacre	Direct airstrike by British Royal Air Force.
habis bin Muhammad al-harithi	Ibra’ – Eastern Region	Wadi al-Bawadir / al-Qalt / Kahf al-Dunn massacre	Direct airstrike by British Royal Air Force.
Sa‘id al-‘amiri “Zuzu”	Eastern Region	Wadi al-Bawadir / al-Qalt / Kahf al-Dunn massacre	Direct airstrike by British Royal Air Force.
Sayf bin Ahmad al-Hina’i	Bilad Sit	Battle of Tanuf	Direct clash with British forces.
Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Hina’i	Bilad Sit	Battle of Tanuf	Armed engagement.
‘Aziz bin Sayf al-Rahbi	Sama’il	—	—

The above list is the result of several investigative interviews conducted by the researcher with former revolutionaries and eyewitnesses to the revolution between January 2022 and December 2024. It was further verified and cross-referenced with researchers familiar with this historical period, particularly residents of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, such as ‘Ali bin Muhammad al-Riyami and Shaykh ‘Abd Allah bin Ṣalih al-Fahdi. Additional information was drawn from Ibrahim al-harithi’s book ‘Uman: al-Thawrah fi tariq al-hurriyyah [Eng. *Oman: The Revolution on the Road to Freedom*], Damascus: Dar al-Yaqzah al-‘Arabiyyah lil-Ta’lif wa al-Tarjamah wa al-Nashr, 1964.

Table 8: List of Prisoners

Name	Region	Notes
Shaykh and scholar Muhammad bin Salim al-Ruqayshi	Izki	Died in al-Jalali prison in chains at the age of approximately 95.
Ibrahim bin Muhammad al-Ruqayshi	Izki	—
Ibrahim bin ‘isaal-harithi	al-Qabil	—
Sultan bin Sulayman al-Nabhani	Tanuf	—
Mahmud bin Zahir al-Hina’i	Bilad Sit	—
Sa‘id bin Sayf al-Rahbi	Sama’il	—
hamud bin ‘amir al-Rawahi	Izki	—
‘Ali bin ‘amir al-Rawahi	Izki	—
Ahmad bin ‘Abd Allah al-Hina’i	Bilad Sit	—
‘Ali bin hamad Wud Jaridah al-Tubi	Imti	—
Su‘ud bin ‘Ali al-Tubi	Imti	—
‘Ali bin Su‘ud al-Tubi	Imti	—
Khalfan bin Muhammad al-Tubi	Imti	—
Naşir bin hamad al-Tubi	Imti	—
Sa‘id bin Sulayman al-Tubi	Imti	—
Salim bin Naşir al-Tubi	Imti	—
Khalfan bin Naşir al-Tubi	Imti	—
Zahir bin Sulayman al-Tubi	Imti	—
Muhammad bin Sulayman al-Tubi	Imti	—
hamdan bin Sulayman al-Tubi	Imti	—
Sufyan bin Muhammad al-Rashidi	al-Qaryatayn	—
Su‘ud bin Sulayman al-Kindi	Nizwa	—
Zahir bin Zikri al-Hina’i	Bilad Sit	—
‘Ali bin Naşir al-Na‘ibi al-Hina’i	Bilad Sit	—
Marzuq bin Wahid	Bilad Sit	—
Yunus bin ‘amir	Bilad Sit	—
Sulayman bin Salim al-Kindi	Nizwa	—
Ahmad bin Sulayman al-Nabhani	Nizwa	—

Zahir bin hamad al-Khuruṣi	Nizwa	—
Sa‘id bin hamad al-harithi	al-Muḍayrib	—
Khamis bin Jum‘ah, servant of Bani Hina‘ah	Wadi al-Ma‘awil	—
Sanur bin Jum‘ah, servant of Bani Hina‘ah	Wadi al-Ma‘awil	—
Sayf bin Rashid al-Ma‘awli	Wadi al-Ma‘awil	—
Qaḍi Hilal bin Ṣalih al-‘Abadi	—	—
Sa‘id bin Jamil al-Hashimi	—	—
Qaḍi Khalfan bin Sayf al-Mahruqi	al-Wasit / Sanaw	—
Ghuṣn bin Sayf al-‘Alawi	Yanqul	—
Sayf bin ‘amir al-‘Alawi	Yanqul	Arrested for delivering messages between Saudi Arabia and Oman.
Naṣir bin ‘Ali al-Wardi	—	—
Sarhan bin al-Dhib al-‘Awfi	Wadi Bani ‘Awf	—
Mabruk bin al-Dhib al-‘Awfi	Wadi Bani ‘Awf	—
Mani‘ bin Naṣir al-Mundhiri	—	—
‘Abd Allah bin Naṣir al-Mundhiri	—	—
Khalifah al-Jamudi	—	—
Muhammad bin ‘Abd Allah Shaykhan al-Ma‘mari	hajir Bani ‘Umar / al-Rustaq	Slapped a British officer during interrogation after being suspected of mediating between the revolutionaries and Saudi Arabia.

The above list is the result of several investigative interviews conducted by the researcher with former revolutionaries and eyewitnesses to the revolution between January 2022 and December 2024. It was further verified in collaboration with researchers focused on this historical period, particularly residents of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, such as ‘Ali bin Muhammad al-Riyami and Shaykh ‘Abd Allah bin Ṣalih al-Fahdi.

Revolutionary Culture

Contrary to colonial portrayals that dismissed the “al-Jabal al-Akhḍar War” as fleeting and superficial in its causes and consequences, the Omani revolution in al-Jabal al-Akhḍar—and across Oman more broadly—was never confined to military confrontation between the Omani Liberation Army and British forces. Rather, it extended into and deeply reshaped the Omani cultural consciousness, which itself was not isolated from the intense revolutionary moment that marked the post–World War II era. This struggle cannot be disentangled from the colonial imaginary that sought to contain and distort the societies of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula within the framework of Orientalist and imperial ideologies—brought by powers determined to impose dominance and dismantle local social fabrics. To illustrate this, one may turn to the writings of Jean Morris, who, in describing Omani women during a moment of revolt, reveals not what was before him, but what he chose to see—indifferent to the deeper political and emotional textures of the scene:

Crowds of women thronged this place, and from the pit there were vibrant wailing sounds. A few men lingered on the outskirts, toying with their canes; but the throng was predominantly female, and most of the women wore fearsome peaked black masks, stiff and hot-looking... The cumulative effect of sixty or seventy women disfigured by these things was horrifying; with their black hanging robes, their dirty hands, their screeching voices and their beaked concealed faces, they were like huge hungry birds of prey hovering around carrion.”⁷⁹² This raises a crucial

⁷⁹² Jan Morris. *Sultan in Oman*. 202-203.

question: who writes about whom? And who imagines our societies? As Partha Chatterjee asks in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Whose Imagined Community?*⁷⁹³

In Oman, the revolution reconfigured many structures and meanings within Omani society—whether through solidaristic alignment with other Arab and global liberation movements, through artistic and literary production, or through the emergence of new social roles occupied by women, youth, and workers. This mirrored similar transformations across other revolutionary geographies of the period, shaped by local conditions, regional dynamics, and cultural composition. As one revolutionary publication declared:

The Omani revolution proceeds, guided by the principles of Arab nationalism in the Arab world, and the principles of Bandung in the Afro-Asian sphere. These principles—believed in by the peoples of Asia and Africa—serve as a beacon for their domestic and foreign positions alike.”⁷⁹⁴

Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*, argued that resistance had become systematic in response to the systematic nature of colonialism, which by the mid-twentieth century appeared hegemonic in the postwar global order.⁷⁹⁵ In this light, the Omani revolution generated a durable synthesis—binding the besieged Omani subject, caught under the crushing weight of imperial warfare, to the broader revolutionary world across the three continents and the Global South.

⁷⁹³ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 3–13.

⁷⁹⁴ *Kifah ‘Uman bayna al-ams wa al-yawm* [The Struggle of Oman Between Yesterday and Today] (Damascus: Matba‘at Wizarat al-Thaqafah wa al-Irshad, July 1960), 51.

⁷⁹⁵ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 196, in his dialogue with Jean-Paul Sartre regarding Sartre’s essay on French colonialism in *Les Temps Modernes*. Jean-Paul Sartre, “Le colonialisme est un système” [*Colonialism is a System*], *Les Temps Modernes* 123 (March 1956): 1371–1386. The English version is available in: Jean-Paul Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (London: Routledge, 2001), 30–47.

I will next explore four key dimensions that reflect the deep cultural imprint of the revolution: revolutionary solidarity with Palestine, Algeria, and the global anti-colonial struggle; the impact of the revolution on women and youth; forms of insurgent popular art; and a contemporary example from the literature of the Omani revolution.

These features will be traced through primary sources of the revolution—including periodicals such as *Ṣawt ʿUman* (The Voice of Oman) magazine, *Nashrat Nizwa*, *Nashrat al-Kifah*, and booklets issued by the Imamate's representative offices—as well as personal interviews conducted by the researcher.

I. Revolutionary Solidarity with Palestine, Algeria, and the World

Palestine served as the principal compass for orienting the revolutionary struggle in Oman against colonialism and imperialism. The contemporaneity of the Algerian Revolution likewise provided the Omani revolutionaries with multiple layers of political, military, and media-based inspiration. From the earliest stages, the leadership of the revolution sought to bind the fates of these movements together, adopting the following interlinked conceptual framings.

Firstly, a single revolution frame. From the outset, revolutionary discourse emphasized that these uprisings were not isolated phenomena but expressions of a singular, transregional revolt against colonial domination.⁷⁹⁶ The Omani people, like the Palestinians, were portrayed as victims of an

⁷⁹⁶ For further details on the founding story of the Omani Union Party, see: Hussein Haydar Darwish, *A fighter from Oman: Muhammad Amin Abdullah, 1915–1982*, 2nd ed. ([Place of publication not identified: Publisher not identified], 1990).

imperial conspiracy—betrayed and besieged by the very same global forces. Revolutionary publications are replete with editorials and articles that directly align the Omani struggle with that of Palestine.

One such example can be found in a 1958 editorial from *Şawt ‘Uman* (The Voice of Oman): The Arab people of Palestine have fought Zionism and the British for over thirty years with unwavering resolve. Despite all that has transpired, they have not lost their fighting spirit, nor has the catastrophe that befell them erased their courage or their willingness to sacrifice in order to reclaim and liberate their usurped homeland from the clutch of the Zionist villains and their colonialist backers... This is the nature of colonialism in every time and place: to betray, to scheme, to deceive, to shatter treaties and violate pacts—just as Britain did with the people of Palestine, so too has it done and continues to do with us in Oman. But colonialism is not eternal; it is an aberration that stands in defiance of the natural order. Through unity of struggle, sacrifice, and steadfastness, we shall reclaim Palestine and liberate Oman from the claws of empire.”⁷⁹⁷

Even after *Şawt ‘Uman* became the official media organ of the Imamate in Cairo, it retained this same orientation, consistently linking the wounds of Palestine and Oman: The Arab people have found the right path. They have suffered greatly and sacrificed the most precious of things to achieve their grand aspirations for unity and socialism. They will spare no effort until they purge the body of the Arab nation of the crooked spear planted by colonialism in its flesh.”⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹⁷ *Lam naḡḡad Filastin bi-sabab taḡşir abna iha!* [We did not lose Palestine due to the shortcomings of its people!], *Şawt Uman* [Voice of Oman], the mouthpiece of the *Ittihad al-Umani* [Omani Union] (Cairo), Year 1, no. 6 (June 1958).

⁷⁹⁸ ‘aşim Jad, "Isra’il...fi dhi’,” (“Israel...in Panic”), *Majallat Şawt ‘Uman* (Nisan/Abril 1963), 3, with continuation on 26. (From the private collection of Dr. talal al-Rashud).

The revolutionary convergence of Palestine and Oman only intensified through the 1960s and 1970s, with numerous examples that defy full enumeration. Delegations from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG) regularly attended and participated in Palestinian popular conferences, playing an active role in cultivating solidarity and mobilization around the Palestinian cause. In one such address, delivered at the 1972 conference, a representative of PFLOAG stated: It is an honor to stand before the representatives of the Palestinian Arab people, a people that has foiled every scheme aimed at destroying it and extinguishing the flame of uprising and revolution within. Since the start of the century, this people has faced ferocious assaults—and yet, time and again, it has emerged steadfast, raising high the banner of rejection against liquidationist agendas, and lifting with resolve the flag of revolution and return to the occupied homeland.”⁷⁹⁹

In the same journal, multiple articles were also dedicated to the Algerian Revolution, including an extended piece by the tahahusayn⁸⁰⁰ on French colonialism in Algeria and a detailed report entitled “Struggling Algeria and Its Response to de Gaulle’s Proposal”.⁸⁰¹

⁷⁹⁹ *Kalimat al-Jabha al-Sha biyya li-Tahrir Uman wa-l-Khalij al-Arabi fi al-Mu tamar al-Sha bi al-Filastini* [The Statement of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arab Gulf at the Palestinian People’s Conference], *Majallat 9 Yunyu (al-Jabha al-Sha biyya li-Tahrir Uman wa-l-Khalij* [The June 9th Journal (The Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Gulf)]), no. 9 (30 April 1972), 9. (From the private collection of Fred Halliday, London School of Economics, File No. 346).

⁸⁰⁰ tahahusayn (1889–1973) was the doyen of Arabic literature and a leading Enlightenment figure of the 20th century, renowned for critical works such as *On Pre-Islamic Poetry* and *The Days*. He profoundly influenced Arab education and intellectual thought.

⁸⁰¹ tahahusayn, *Al-Isti ‘mar al-Faransi fi al-Jaza ‘ir* [French Colonialism in Algeria], *Ṣawt ‘Uman* [Voice of Oman], Cairo, no. September–October 1959, 20–22. Also, *Ibid.* .25.

Secondly, a common colonial adversary frame. One of the most significant factors uniting Omanis and Palestinians was their confrontation with a shared colonial adversary: Britain. This was the same Britain that occupied Palestine under the pretense of a “Mandate” beginning in September 1922, and departed only after handing the land over to a new settler-colonial apartheid project—the Zionist entity. Britain facilitated this transformation by supporting the organized migration of European Jews, creating a legal system for land ownership and resource monopolization, and aligning with reactionary forces inside Palestine.⁸⁰² It culminated in Britain's recognition of the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948.

This same colonial power was the principal adversary in two successive Omani revolutions: the first, from 1955 to 1959, known as the Omani Revolution in al-Jabal al-Akhḍar; and the second, from 1965 to 1975, known as the Dhofar Revolution, which later evolved through various designations—from the Liberation of Dhofar to Oman, and ultimately, to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG). Both revolutions consciously linked their struggles to that of Palestine.

Thirdly, a shared awareness of common fate. In their post–World War II revolutionary struggle, Omanis were deeply committed to articulating their own struggle for self-determination and control over their national resources in direct relation to the Palestinian and Algerian causes. Comparisons between massacres perpetrated by colonial powers in both countries were widespread in revolutionary discourse. Such acts of violence were understood to emanate from the same imperial engine. “The tragedy of Deir Yassin in Palestine,” read one revolutionary text, “was

⁸⁰² For a more in-depth excavation of the social and economic causes of the revolution, see: Ghassan Kanafani, *Thawrat 1936-1939 fi Filastin: Khalfiyyat wa Tafasil wa Tahlil* [The 1936-1939 Revolution in Palestine: Backgrounds, Details, and Analysis], *Shu'un Filastiniyya* [Palestinian Affairs], no. 6 (January 1972).

repeated in the city of Nizwa... Yes, the Sultan has replicated the very calamity carried out by the British and the Jews in Palestine.”⁸⁰³

In a 1960 article titled *Oman... A Second Palestine*, the writer elaborated: Palestine has been Arab for more than fourteen centuries, a fact as clear as the sun at high noon. Yet British colonial policy insisted on transforming it into a tangled and intractable issue—rendering its defenseless people sacrificial lambs at the altar of Zionist power and influence. Few problems have been so thoroughly engineered by colonial design. In reality, Britain created this crisis as part of a broader imperial strategy, to ensure its continued reach in the Middle East even as its overt influence waned. And today, Britain attempts to turn Oman into a second Palestine... But Palestine shall be liberated, Algeria shall triumph, and the Arab people of Oman—and the Arab people everywhere—shall be free.”⁸⁰⁴

This sense of shared destiny—of an existence transcending imposed political boundaries—was vividly captured in the seminal literary text *Death of Bed Number 12* (*Mawt Sarir Raqm 12*) by the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani, published in Beirut in 1961. The story poignantly portrays the Omani protagonist, Muhammad ‘Ali Akbar, dying alone and estranged in exile, far from his homeland—mirroring the psychic dislocation and enforced displacement that came to define the Omani revolutionary diaspora.⁸⁰⁵

⁸⁰³ "Why Does the Sultan of Muscat Surrender to Colonialism?," *Sawt Oman* [The Voice of Oman] (Cairo), no. 10 (October 1958), 7.

⁸⁰⁴ Mustafa Ghazal, "Oman... A Second Palestine," *Sawt Oman*, no. 32 (August 1960), 7.

⁸⁰⁵ Ghassan Kanafani, *Mawt Sarir Raqm 12* [The Death of Bed Number 12] (Beirut: Mu assasat al-Abhath al-Arabiyyah, 1961).

At the same time, the Omani revolutionary press emphasized that the Algerian Revolution possesses vast global horizons. Its openness to the heritage of human liberation movements and its embrace of socialist thought will enrich and illuminate our national character.”⁸⁰⁶

Fourthly, multiplicity of modes of solidarity. From the earliest days of the Palestinian revolution in the 1930s, Omanis closely followed developments in Palestine and expressed solidarity with their brethren, despite geographic distance and the difficulty of accessing or receiving timely news. One example is a March 1939 article in *al-Falaq*, a newspaper published in Zanzibar, then under Omani Arab authority. The article declared unequivocally: Palestine belongs solely to the Arabs, and there is no debate about that. Britain must understand this.”⁸⁰⁷

Following the end of the Second World War, and particularly in the wake of the successive calamities that befell the Palestinians—including the Nakbah, which forcibly displaced more than 750,000 people—Omanis, like others in the Arab world, shared in the grief and horror. Palestine thus became a cornerstone of revolutionary discourse, political programs, and solidarity campaigns.

This centrality is evident in the political program issued by the Revolutionary Command Council of the State of Oman in 1963, which included in its foreign policy agenda: Fourthly: Resist Zionism and cooperate with Arab states to recover Palestine. Fifthly: Resist colonialism in all its

⁸⁰⁶ "The Party Conference in Algeria," *Sawt Oman* (Voice of Oman), May 1964 issue, 22.

⁸⁰⁷ For a broader survey of advocacy for Palestine through literature and discourse in Omani expatriate journalism in Africa, see: Muhsin al-Kindi, "Palestine in Omani Expatriate Journalism and Poetry: A Historical Presence and Early Solidarity," *Oman Newspaper*, May 1, 2021, <https://rebrand.ly/fym2y2u>.

forms and manifestations, support the right of peoples to self-determination, and contribute to the global eradication of imperialism.”⁸⁰⁸

In parallel with large-scale campaigns in Gulf ports—such as Kuwait, Bahrain, and Dubai—in the late 1940s, Omanis mobilized to collect over 10,000 silver riyals, which they entrusted to the governor Isma‘il al-Raṣāṣi for delivery to Palestine.⁸⁰⁹ Migrant-run Omani newspapers in East Africa documented ongoing lists of contributors—Omanis, Arabs, and Africans alike—offering aid to those displaced by the forced expulsion from Palestinian lands.⁸¹⁰

Fifthly, framing the struggle within the global imperial project. Revolutionaries in Oman, Palestine, and Algeria consistently sought to embed their struggles within a discourse that transcended narrow nationalist or regional boundaries, focusing instead on the broader imperialist project aimed at dominating the natural and human resources of the Global South. As George habash observed: History moves forward, governed by scientific laws. But while these global developments and the laws that propel historical movement give us hope, they should not lull us into complacency. The more we struggle and act, the faster we accelerate the revolution.”⁸¹¹

This analytical framing was mirrored in the Omani revolutionary literature, which repeatedly stressed the importance of situating the Omani cause at the vanguard of Arab liberation—

⁸⁰⁸ Nizwa, *Nashrah Ikkbariyyah* (News Bulletin) issued by the Omani Representation in Beirut, no. 3 (1 October/Tishrin al-Awwal 1963): 7–8. See also: *al-Watha'iq al-Arabiyyah* (Arab Documents), vol. 28 (Beirut: American University of Beirut, Department of Political Studies and Public Administration, 1963–1982), 630.

⁸⁰⁹ Rosemarie Said Zahlan, “The Gulf States and the Palestine Problem, 1936–48,” *Arab Studies Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Winter 1981), 15.

⁸¹⁰ Muhsin al-Kindi, “Palestine in Omani Expatriate Journalism and Poetry: A Historical Presence and Early Solidarity,” *Ibid.*

⁸¹¹ An Interview with Dr. George Habash, Secretary-General of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine,” 9 *June Magazine* (Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman, Aden), Year 5, Issue 5 (June 1975), 17.

particularly after Algeria's independence.⁸¹² The effort to connect global imperialism to colonialism and Zionism emerged as a dominant theme in revolutionary statements and publications.⁸¹³

This Algerian tribute, published on the back cover of one of the Omani revolutionary magazines, encapsulates the spirit of transnational revolutionary solidarity—Palestinian, Algerian, and Omani—which became a defining feature of the evolving trajectories of Arab liberation movements, including those in Oman. The following excerpt from a longer poem offers a vivid glimpse into this shared revolutionary imaginary:

As for the youth, in the folds of mighty al-Akhḍar⁸¹⁴
they rage against the enemy and cry out for justice.
In every inch of Oman, there are resisters—
strong-armed, broad-shouldered.
They sacrifice their precious souls for a homeland
that stands with rightful purpose and piercing light.
When the peoples' fury ignites,
only the tested shall endure, and the false shall melt away.
The Green stronghold of heroes roars in revolt,

⁸¹² *Sawt ʿUman*, Cairo, August 1962, 12.

⁸¹³ „Surah min al-kifah al-ʿArabi al-majid , An image from the glorious Arab struggle, *Sawt Oman Magazine*, Cairo, September 1962 issue, 4.

⁸¹⁴ It symbolizes the Green Mountain in Oman.

resonating with the cry of Aurès⁸¹⁵ in sacrifice.

And from Al-Quds and al-Ludd⁸¹⁶ resounds defiance:

the hour of victory nears for the proud Arabs.”⁸¹⁷

II. The Revolutionary Imprint on Women and Youth

The participation of Omani women in the revolution constituted a foundational pillar in establishing and securing a resilient revolutionary base amidst the devastations of colonial warfare and intelligence infiltration—particularly in al-Jabal al-Akhḍar and across Oman more broadly. It was no simple task for women to engage in revolutionary activity publicly in a socially conservative and insular society, already subjected to siege by British forces and the policies of Saʿid bin Taymur. Yet any serious reevaluation of women’s roles in Arab revolutions—especially within the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula—must proceed by interrogating how culture itself shapes social and political agency, rather than confining analysis to European colonial frameworks. Such frameworks imposed rationalized models of political and economic organization as instruments for subjugating non-European societies and securing imperial dominance.⁸¹⁸

⁸¹⁵ A mountain range located in Algeria.

⁸¹⁶ Al-Quds (Arabic: *الْقُدْس*) and al-Ludd (Arabic: *اللُدّ*) are two prominent cities in occupied Palestine.

⁸¹⁷ "Tahiyat al-Jaza'ir ila 'Uman al-tha'ira, Greetings from Algeria to Rebellious Oman, *Ṣawt 'Uman, Voice of Oman*, Cairo, no. September/October 1959. Last page.

⁸¹⁸ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Women*, in *A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986–1995*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 240–62. This study remarkably examines the question of women and its paradox in colonized societies, offering a vital and hopeful perspective on liberation. It diverges from the dominant frameworks in Arab scholarship—whether those emphasizing subjugation or those neglecting women’s

Seen from this decolonial lens, women in Oman were not passive spectators but active participants and creative agents in sustaining revolutionary operations at every stage.⁸¹⁹ Oral sources recount the martyrdom of more than ten Omani women during the al-Jabal al-Akhḍar uprising; of these, six names have been documented and appear in Table 6. Women's contributions took varied forms.

Some participated directly in military operations by transporting weapons and engaging in confrontations with soldiers and collaborators. Others employed clever tactics to target individuals cooperating with British forces. In one strategic role, women erased the footprints of revolutionaries as they moved between encampments to prevent detection by British-affiliated trackers.⁸²⁰ This required them to graze sheep twice daily—at sunrise and sunset—in contrast to the usual single outing typical of pastoral practice.⁸²¹

Women also took on the critical task of preparing and delivering food to fighters. Meals were often cooked in caves and transported under cover of night to avoid detection by British aircraft or local informants. These efforts unfolded under constant threat. British Royal Air Force (RAF) strikes did not discriminate against civilians, and women were routinely exposed to aerial bombardment, in violation of the Geneva Conventions on the protection of civilians in wartime.⁸²²

historical agency—particularly in pivotal moments like revolutions, the election of imams, and civil wars, as seen in Omani history. For alternative approaches to women's roles, see the referenced work.

⁸¹⁹ "Shahamat al-mar'a al-Arabiyya fi Oman al-mujahida" (The Gallantry of the Arab Woman in Militant Oman), *Sawt Oman* (Voice of Oman), Cairo, no. April 1963. 23.

⁸²⁰ The Heroism of the Omani Woman and Her Role in the Battle, *Sawt Oman* (Voice of Oman), Cairo, June Issue, 1964, 25.

⁸²¹ Interview no. 45, with a survivor of the British military operations in Oman (1957–1959), who lost her husband. Village of Wadi Bani Habib, Al-Jabal al-Akhḍar. January 20, 2024.

⁸²² *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War*, August 12, 1949, Diplomatic Conference for the Establishment of International Conventions for the Protection of Victims of War, 75 UNTS 287, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/geneva-convention-relative-protection-civilian-persons-time-war>, accessed May 31, 2025.

In the absence of the men who had joined the armed struggle, women became primary caregivers, sustaining children, the elderly, and the wounded. They worked full time in the fields and orchards disrupted by the war, ensuring the continuity of agricultural life. It was women who preserved revolutionary momentum and raised a new generation of youth who would carry the banner of resistance after its temporary decline in the mid-1960s. One widow recounted:

How can I forget the ember that continues to burn in my heart since Abu 'Iyali was martyred by the British? And yet, I raise his sons to resist the occupier, to reject injustice, to love this land and defend it.”⁸²³

The suffering of women continued as waves of exile swept through Omani society following British control over al-Jabal al-Akhḍar and its administration as a militarized zone well into the 1980s.⁸²⁴

As for youth and workers, they formed the engine and enduring fuel of the Omani revolution. This included those who joined the Omani Liberation Army, as well as those who, as children, bore witness to the atrocities and erasures inflicted by British forces on towns and villages such as Tanuf, Izki, Nizwa, and various communities of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar. A few youth managed to flee Oman during this difficult period and benefited from scholarships granted by Arab states such as

⁸²³ Interview no. 45. Ibid.

⁸²⁴ Contemporary Omani literary works have begun to emerge, shedding light on the pivotal role of women in the Omani revolution. Among these works are *A Woman from Dhofar* (2013) by Ahmed Al-Zubaidi and Sharifa Al-Toubi's *Al-Bayraq Trilogy*, consisting of *Harat al-Wadi* (2022), *Surat al-Jabal* (2023), and *Hubub al-Rih* (2025). The novelist Sharifa Al-Toubi hails from a family with a multigenerational legacy of anti-colonial resistance against British rule—the “Walid Jarida” family—which witnessed at least three revolutions: the 1913, the Jebel Akhdar (1957–1959), and the Dhofar Revolution (1965–1975). In each of these uprisings, British forces imprisoned her father, his father before him, and the family's earliest patriarch. For further reading, see: Saeed Sultan Al-Hashmi, “A Woman from Dhofar: The Marginalized Who Triumphed Over Tyrants and Invaders,” *Taqaddam Magazine*, Kuwait, December 4, 2024.

Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon.⁸²⁵ Meanwhile, Omani laborers constituted a major portion of the workforce in the oil industries of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. The bleak conditions they endured in labor camps catalyzed their revolutionary consciousness and commitment to transforming life back home.

Precise statistics on the number of youth influenced by the two phases of the Omani revolution—from the 1950s uprising to its radical transformation in the 1960s—remain elusive. However, one emblematic figure is often cited as a living and active testament to this transformation: Zahir bin ‘Ali al-Miyahi, popularly known as “the Che Guevara of Oman.” Tracing the contradictions that shaped his life provides insight into the class and generational tensions at the heart of the revolution and reflects the stages and shifts it underwent.⁸²⁶

The “Che Guevara” of Oman

Zahir bin ‘Ali bin Matar al-Miyahi (1941–1974), also known by several noms de guerres including Ahmad ‘Ali, Naṣir Salim, Mani‘ Naṣir, and Mani‘ Sa‘id, stands out as one of the most prominent figures in the Omani revolution during the critical period between 1965 and 1974 AD. He dedicated his short but militant life—thirty-three years—to the anti-colonial struggle against British imperialism in Oman and across the Arabian Peninsula.

Born in 1941 AD in a village near the foothills of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar—variously cited in sources as either Tanuf or Barkat al-Mawz, the primary gateway for ascending the mountain⁸²⁷—Zahir

⁸²⁵ "The Arab League recommends that member states allocate scholarships for Omani students," *Sawt Oman*, Cairo, May 1963 issue, 6.

⁸²⁶ For further research and comparison, see the appendix of correspondences concerning study missions for Omani and Arab students supervised by the Imamate Office in Damascus, published at the end of Volume 5 of: Muhammad ‘Abdullah al-harithi, *Mawsu‘at ‘Uman: al-Watha’iq al-Sirriyya* [Encyclopedia of Oman: Secret Documents], vol. 5 (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wahda al-‘Arabiyya, 2007), 823–43.

⁸²⁷ The Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arab Gulf, University of Exeter, United Kingdom, under the code: OMA 322.409535 JAB-SHA

hailed from a poor peasant family with no land or fixed income. They lived on what they earned through daily labor... [where] everyone worked land that belonged to others, either as agricultural laborers or hired hands.”⁸²⁸ From an early age, he was engaged in farming, sheep rearing, and mountain herding. These formative experiences endowed him with intimate knowledge of firearms, rugged terrain, and the complex tribal, social, and class configurations of Oman’s interior—making him well-positioned to support the revolutionary efforts when the uprising against the British assault on al-Jabal al-Akhḍar began on 18 June 1957.

Later that same year, Zahir left his village for Saudi Arabia to join the military training camps established by the Imamate in the cities of ta’if and Dammam. Initially, he was denied entry due to his young age. Undeterred, he supported himself and his family through manual labor. He first worked in a restaurant, washing dishes and chopping vegetables for long hours, until he contracted jaundice. Thereafter, he cycled through several low-wage jobs: a day laborer at Dhahran Airport, a worker on the Eastern Province–Riyadh railway project, and finally as a janitor at an American oil extraction site—a position he took due to his declining health and inability to endure dust and extreme heat.⁸²⁹

In 1959, he abandoned wage labor and enrolled in a 19-month military training course in ta’if, where he developed advanced proficiency in the use of modern weaponry. Even at this early stage, Zahir advocated for launching guerrilla warfare against the British presence in Oman. However,

⁸²⁸ "The Life of the Martyr Ahmed Ali, Member of the Central Executive Committee, in Brief." *9 June Magazine*, year 5, no. 3 (1975), 11.

⁸²⁹ "The Voice of the Revolution Bulletin, The Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arab Gulf, Aden, Saturday 7 December 1974, no. 133. 3.

the traditionalist leadership of the Imamate denied him and his comrades the opportunity to implement this strategy.⁸³⁰

In 1962 AD, Zahir al-Miyahi enrolled in schools and colleges in Baghdad, where he joined the *harakat al-Qawmiyyin al-‘Arab* (Arab Nationalist Movement) and became active within its ranks. He eventually assumed leadership of the Omani Students Union in Baghdad from its founding in the mid-1960s.⁸³¹ However, the 1967 defeat of Arab armies in the Six-Day War marked a decisive turning point in his political trajectory. He withdrew from formal education and, along with several comrades, returned to Oman’s interior to engage in underground revolutionary activity.

Under the alias "Ahmad ‘Ali," al-Miyahi became a political mentor among Omani students and laborers who circulated between Oman and the cities of Dammam, Kuwait, Baghdad, and Damascus. He was distinguished by his humility, courage, and exceptional capacity to inspire and mobilize nationalist sentiment. His organizing extended beyond Omanis to include Arab youth in Beirut, Cairo, and Baghdad, whom he drew into a complex network of revolutionary cells. These cells eventually coalesced into what became the Popular Revolutionary Movement in the Arabian Gulf.⁸³² Al-Miyahi actively participated in the Lebanese left, engaging in ideological formation and revolutionary cadre-building.⁸³³

A pivotal moment in his political evolution was his break with the Arab Nationalist Movement, particularly in embracing the Marxist-Leninist line that prioritized armed struggle and

⁸³⁰ Ibid.

⁸³¹ Ibid.

⁸³² Interview with the editor of the June 9 Magazine. The Central Magazine of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman. Muscat, January 22, 2024

⁸³³ Interview with Fawwaz Traboulsi, Beirut, 22 February 2024.

revolutionary violence against imperialism and its local allies—whether political, social, or economic—over any reformist alternative. Al-Miyahi assumed several leading positions in the progressive political movements he helped to found, including:

- Founding member of the Popular Revolutionary Movement in the Gulf (1967)
- Member of the Central Executive Committee (al-qiyada al-‘ulya) of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Occupied Arabian Gulf (1968)
- Founding member of the Central Executive Committee of the National Democratic Front (active across northern, interior, and coastal regions of Oman) in 1970

Through the National Democratic Front, al-Miyahi played a central role in launching the 12 June 1970 armed uprising in al-Jabal al-Akhḍar and surrounding towns such as Nizwa and Izki. He was instrumental in leading the military confrontations against British forces. He also spearheaded the internal current of critique and self-criticism within the revolutionary organizations, which culminated in a strategic decision to merge various Marxist and militant factions into the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman. Al-Miyahi was subsequently appointed to its Executive Committee.

When the September 1, 1971 labor uprising erupted—consisting of massive demonstrations by Omani workers, students, and women marching from Matrah toward the Sultan’s palace in Muscat—Zahir al-Miyahi joined swiftly to deepen its revolutionary orientation and align its demands with the broader goals of the ongoing Dhufar revolution, then in its sixth year (having begun on June 9, 1965). The final demands of the uprising coalesced around a broad labor rights platform, including: the provision of employment opportunities for Omani citizens on equal footing with foreign laborers; the enactment of a labor law to define working hours, annual, sick,

and weekly leave; the establishment of fair wages; protections against arbitrary dismissal; and improved working conditions with guaranteed occupational and health safety standards. Additional demands called for the abolition of child labor, comprehensive health and social insurance for workers, vocational training, the right to form unions, and the institutionalization of trade union activity. The protesters—who maintained a three-day sit-in and general strike—capped their demands by calling for the resignation of the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs.⁸³⁴ The uprising posed the most severe test for the first government formed under the newly enthroned Sultan Qabus bin Sa‘id, led by his uncle, Sayyid tariq bin Taymur. Negotiations between government officials and the labor committees leading the demonstrations resulted in partial concessions (notably regarding temporary contracts and wage adjustments) but rejected the majority of demands related to unionization, comprehensive labor law reform, and improved safety conditions. The breakdown in negotiations led to violent confrontations: the army deployed tear gas and live ammunition. Amidst the turmoil, an assassination attempt was made on al-Miyahi. He killed one soldier in self-defense and went into hiding, assuming multiple aliases and disguises to evade capture.⁸³⁵

The situation escalated rapidly following the September 1971 labor uprising. A state of emergency was declared, and air traffic in and out of Muscat was suspended. British officials seized the opportunity to pressure the young Sultan Qabus bin Sa‘id, most notably through the Whitehead Report, which advocated for more authoritarian measures to consolidate centralized, autocratic

⁸³⁴ Ten Years Since the September Labor Uprising," *Freedom Magazine*, no. 1031, vol. 22 (Beirut: Monday, September 7, 1981), 20.

⁸³⁵ *Al-Jabha al-Sha biyya li-Tahrir Uman wa-l-Khalij al- Arabi* (The Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arab Gulf), *Jami at Exeter* (University of Exeter), *Britaniya* (United Kingdom), under the reference: OMA 322.409535 JAB-SHA.

rule.⁸³⁶ As the aftermath of the uprising unfolded, Sayyid tariq bin Taymur's cabinet resigned on December 1, 1971, marking the collapse of the first post-succession government.⁸³⁷

Amid the repressive crackdown, Zahir al-Miyahi managed to escape the country. He was designated "Most Wanted" by the Omani security and military apparatus. Posters offering substantial financial rewards for his capture—dead or alive—were distributed across the Sultanate. His photographs, alongside those of other leaders from the al-Jabha al-Wataniyya al-Dimuqratiyya (National Democratic Front), were plastered on shopfronts, market stalls, and published in the local press. In an attempt to force his surrender, the authorities arrested and imprisoned his brother Zahran in Fort al-Jalali.⁸³⁸

In October 1974, Zahir returned to Oman in response to urgent demands from the Central Command of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf. The leadership had decided to ignite a northern front in order to relieve military pressure on the Dhufar region, where intensified counterinsurgency efforts were being carried out with the support of the Shah of Iran and the King of Jordan.

On the evening of October 29, 1974 AD, in the village of al-hazm at the entrance to Rustaq, a patrol of the Sultan's Armed Forces stopped a civilian vehicle transporting an incoming revolutionary cell. Al-Miyahi was among them. As soldiers ordered the passengers to disembark for inspection, he acted immediately—opening fire with his automatic rifle in an effort to prevent the capture of the group and the discovery of hidden weapons. A brief, intense firefight followed.

⁸³⁶ FCO 8/1683, Development projects in Oman, 1971 Jan 01–1971 Dec 31.

⁸³⁷ Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century*, 209.

⁸³⁸ "Massive Financial Rewards for the Capture of Fugitive Criminals: Zaher Ali Matar Al-Miyahi, Abdullah Saleh Al-Shammar, and Saud Mohammed Al-Marzouqi," *Oman Newspaper*, Saturday, February 10, 1973, corresponding to 6 Muharram 1393 AH. Year 1, No. 13, Front Page.

One soldier was killed, and al-Miyahi was martyred in the exchange.⁸³⁹ His identity was confirmed after the skirmish, while the remaining members of the cell fled to areas such as al-Sib, Şuhar, and Şur.⁸⁴⁰

The Sultan's military and intelligence forces launched a sweeping manhunt from the coast to the mountains, ultimately capturing all remaining members of the group: Sa'ud Muhammad Salim al-Marzuqi (alias Sultan Sa'd, aged 27), Muhammad hasan Makki (aged 21), and 'amir Manşur Sarhan al-Hina'i (aged 27). Only one man—hamdan Sa'id al-Ḍuwayani—escaped, miraculously traversing the mountains to reach Dubai and eventually Aden in South Yemen.⁸⁴¹

On April 20, 1975, the Omani government issued death sentences for al-Marzuqi, Makki, al-Hina'i, and Sa'id Jum'a al-Ghaylani, who was just 17 years old at the time of his execution.⁸⁴²

Zahir bin 'Ali al-Miyahi was buried under the cover of darkness in an unmarked site between Rustaq and Wadi al-Ma'awil to prevent the grave from becoming a symbolic shrine.⁸⁴³ Ten days after his death, on November 8, 1974, his only daughter, Haifa', was born in Aden to his wife, 'aşımat Muhammad al-Jamali (known as Wafa' Yasir), who was elected the following year as the first President of the Omani Women's Organization.

Zahir's revolutionary vision remained resolute: "We must continue our struggle to liberate and unify the homeland, and to establish a democratic, popular national order."⁸⁴⁴ His assassination

⁸³⁹ An interview with the sole survivor of the Al-Hazm incident, in his home, Rustaq city, Hamdan Al-Dhawyani, October 17, 2017.

⁸⁴⁰ "29 October 74" *Majallat 9 Yuniyu* (9 June Magazine), Year 4, No. 4, October–November 1977.

⁸⁴¹ Interview with Al-Dhawyani. Ibid.

⁸⁴² Oman Newspaper, April 26, 1975, 2.

⁸⁴³ An interview with an eyewitness from the city of Rustaq, December 10, 2020.

⁸⁴⁴ "The Life of the Martyr Ahmed Ali, Member of the Central Executive Committee, in Brief." *June 9 Magazine*, Year 5, no. 3 (1975): 11.

marked a devastating blow to revolutionary movements across the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula—particularly those that embraced armed struggle as the principal means of dismantling imperialism and authoritarian regimes. His legacy endures as a potent symbol of sacrifice, transnational solidarity, and radical aspiration in the face of overwhelming repression.

III. Forms of Revolutionary Folk Art

It would have been impossible for the revolutionaries to endure the hardships and brutalities of war without turning to their indigenous folk arts—cultural expressions honed over generations through the lived realities of labor, struggle, and survival. As they navigated the contradictions of revolutionary existence, these expressive forms accompanied them as both emotional sanctuary and political armament. As one revolutionary statement declared: In response to colonial repression and the deployment of British land, air, and naval forces aimed at extinguishing Oman's independence and the freedom of its people, a new spirit of resistance and deep revolutionary sentiment emerged among the citizenry...⁸⁴⁵

These sentiments materialized across multiple registers: as direct confrontation on the battlefield, and as a cultural engagement—an insurgent interaction with the self, with society, with the local terrain, and with the broader Arab revolutionary milieu.

⁸⁴⁵ Muhammad Abdullah Al-Salmi and Naji Assaf. *Oman's History... Speaks...* (Damascus: Al-Matba'a al-Umumiyya, 1963), 245.

At the forefront of these expressions stood the *razha*, a traditional Omani martial performance deeply rooted in tribal and communal life.⁸⁴⁶ Originally conceived as a war chant and collective dance, *razha* served both as a form of social cohesion and a means of maintaining morale amidst the horrors of armed conflict and loss. Despite their involvement in direct combat during the al-Jabal al-Akhḍar Revolution, the revolutionaries preserved vivid memories of the verses they would recite during brief interludes of respite. These moments were not idle or frivolous; rather, they served as opportunities to reawaken collective resolve and invoke historical memory—reminders of previous moments of unified resistance against British imperial incursion.

One such example is the performance of *razha* in the *qaṣafi* mode—a substyle known for its forthright and defiant tone. This chant, sung in rhythm as the men struck the ground with their weapons, reaffirmed the resolve not to reconcile with the outsider,” asserting the revolutionaries’ readiness and armament:

Sayyidi, we will not reconcile; we are under no obligation—

Our belts are full, holding ten-bullet rifles in our hands.”

In other sung passages, the fighters referenced the devastation caused by *madfaʿ al-rumi* (the Roman cannon,” a metonym for British artillery), and voiced their unrelenting desire to engage in open battle: The Roman cannon—how many young boys cry from its wounds,

Our leader seeks the encounter—in the wide-open battlegrounds.”

⁸⁴⁶ The art of *al-Razha*: A traditional Omani folk musical art characterized by poetic exchanges on various themes such as praise, pride, courage, boldness, satire, advice, guidance, riddles, and puzzles. It is performed by a group of men aligned in equal and opposing rows, dueling with swords and words.

These verses exemplify how the sonic landscape of revolution was as much a battlefield of meaning as the physical terrain. By reactivating inherited oral forms, the revolutionaries did not merely perform tradition—they repurposed it into an instrument of defiance, memory, and mobilization.

Another traditional war art practiced by Omanis throughout their history is the ‘azi, a declamatory poetic performance used to rouse fighting spirit and mobilize collective courage.⁸⁴⁷ Echoes of these chants reverberated across the slopes of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar and within the camps and mountain strongholds of the revolutionaries. The verses evoked the 1913 uprising of Imam Salim bin Rashid al-Kharuṣi and recalled figures like Shaykh himyar bin Naṣir al-Nabhani—former emir of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar and leader of the Ghafiri alliance. The “infidel” (kafir)—a metonym for the British colonial presence—was portrayed as having transgressed all bounds, and the moment of his expulsion from Oman was declared imminent.

I begin in Your name, O Guardian,
And from my heart, let sorrow depart.
The tales of the Ghafiri have spread:
He made a vow, and an imam was appointed.

⁸⁴⁷ The art of ‘azi: An Omani poetic recitation style that combines pride, fervor, and artistic performance, characterized by a poet who declaims verses of pride and enthusiasm while brandishing his sword at the front of male ranks, followed by a group of men who loudly echo some of his words with chants that ignite their zeal and instill fear in the opposing ranks.

He made a vow and summoned thousands,

They gathered in 'Ibri and Tanuf.

humayr's resolve none could deter,

Defender of widows and orphans.

Their wealth was not taken unjustly—

He redistributed to those in need,

From al-Zahirah and across the northern front—

Even above the plain, he sent arrows.

Above the plain, he launched his charge,

And from their zakat, he armed his men.

The Salimi was father and forebear—

With them, the Maghrib had long aligned.

With them for years, steadfast in faith,

Wishing victory for all Muslims.

They said yes, with resolute hearts—

A people of obedience and resolve.

And those obedient, bold in spirit,

They launched their strike at Nizwaby dusk.

The fortress trembled with roaring winds,

Its walls collapsed from Dammam's blow.

The walls fell in thunderous ruin—

O son of hamad, what victory remains?

What is left of life's span?

He drank the cup of martyrdom.

He drank the cup of death,

The women did not wail in vain.

He followed the ways of the exalted,

A steed led him by the reins.

A steed bore him captive forth,

And the army prayed in the mosque—

None broken, none fallen—

For victory is by God, and everlasting.

Patient amid hardship and trial,

Oman's agony only grew.

O my clan, the infidel has overstepped—

West of al-Ruway, he pitched his tents.”

In the same spirit, Omanis of the period frequently recited a well-known poem titled ‘Izzat al-Qaba’il (“The Tribal Honor”), included in the collected works of the folk poet ‘amir bin Sulayman al-Sha‘ibi, known as al-Mutawwa‘ (d. 1907). Though the poem is traditionally attributed to him, Naṣir al-Sa‘di notes that its authorship remains disputed.⁸⁴⁸ The poem, comprising fifty verses, became emblematic of Omani collective memory and resistance, celebrating tribal valor, loyalty to the Imamate, and defiance in the face of imperial aggression. The following excerpted lines exemplify its thematic resonance:

I begin in Your name, O Divine Guide,
Creator of both the sun and the night,
Forgiver of every heavy sin,
Knower of all things hidden from sight.

I praise the Creator, ever-generous,
Who governs all by His eternal law.

The shaykh of the Riyami stood firm—never faltering—

⁸⁴⁸ The historian Nasser bin Saif Al-Saadi argues that this poem could not have been composed by the poet Amir bin Sulaiman Al-Sha ibi, as he died prior to the event it describes—namely, the unification of Omani tribes under the leadership of Imam Salim bin Rashid Al-Kharusi and the scholar Nur al-Din Al-Salimi, and their 1913 revolution against British forces. Discussion and exchange of ideas on art and revolution with Nasser bin Saif Al-Saadi, April 19, 2025.

Loyal to the Imam, never defeated.
He held his ground on the front lines
On the day of al-Ṣamah⁸⁴⁹, which many witnessed.

On that day, al-Ṣamah⁸⁴⁹ thundered with fury—
The banners and flanks surged forward.
With the sons of uncles and the ranks behind them,
They stormed even the strongest fortresses.
A noble leader, proud and unyielding,
A falcon unmatched among men.
He never claimed weariness,
Even in the blackest of nights.
The son of al-Jarida—who stands as his equal?⁸⁵⁰
Always seen in the front lines of battle.
He did not cower beneath his cloak
On the days when gunpowder lit the skies.
He did not hide away in the encampment,
Nor did he say, "This war is not mine."

⁸⁴⁹ "Al-Sam'ah" (Arabic: الصمعة): musket was a matchlock firearm, likely of Portuguese or Indo-Portuguese origin, introduced to Oman during the 16th–17th centuries via maritime trade. Characterized by a long barrel (approx. 1.2–1.5 m) and heavy caliber, it was prized for its range and stopping power, suited for both naval and land combat. The name "Al-Sam'ah" (Arabic: الصمعة) may derive from the Arabic root "صَمَعَ" (to strike forcefully), referencing its impact, or from a local adaptation of a foreign term. Omani forces utilized these muskets extensively during conflicts with colonial powers and regional rivals, reflecting Oman's integration into global arms networks.

⁸⁵⁰ Wad Jarida: A surname of a family from the Bani Tuba tribe, residing in the village of Imti, renowned for their bravery and courage in the arenas of national struggle; they contributed at least three generations throughout the twentieth century, among them martyrs and prisoners.

He was a man of action, fierce and true,
Found wherever the trials were greatest.⁸⁵¹

IV. On the Modern Literature of the Omani Revolution

The impact of the revolution in al-Jabal al-Akhḍar extended well beyond military confrontation with colonial forces. It gave rise to another form of resistance—one articulated not through popular oral tradition, but through modern literary forms such as the novel, short story, and theatre. Within these genres (*al-adab al-haditha*), this particular revolution became the foundational impetus for a pioneering generation of Omani writers and intellectuals who engaged these literary modes as central to their aesthetic and political projects.

The novel, for instance, as theorized by Georg Lukács, expresses the "fragmentation" (*tashazẓi*) experienced by the individual in capitalist society—a world that has lost its organic unity, leaving the protagonist to become a "problem" in search of meaning. The novel," Lukács writes, "is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God."⁸⁵² Its greatness lies in the novelist's capacity to uncover the concealed relations that shape reality.⁸⁵³

A foundational example of this literary-political entanglement is found in the works of 'Abd Allah al-ta'i, particularly his novel *Mala'ikat al-Jabal al-Akhḍar* ("Angels of the Green Mountain"). Al-

⁸⁵¹ 'amir ibn Sulayman al-Shu'aybi, *Diwan al-Shu'aybi* (Al-Dammam: Saudi Arabia, Matabi' al-Dammam, 1967), 61–63.

⁸⁵² Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 56.

⁸⁵³ Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin Press, 1965), 142.

ta'i was raised in a family described as rebellious in the cause of justice and advocates for fairness," several of whose members were subjected to imprisonment, exile, and persecution, as chronicled by Ahmad al-Falahi.⁸⁵⁴ His biographer Muhsin al-Kindi estimates al-ta'i's birth to be in 1924 and argues that *Mala'ikat al-Jabal al-Akhḍar* oscillates thematically between nationalist and pan-Arab orientations.

The narrative's structure unfolds across a broad temporal and spatial field: its protagonists move between Cairo, Baghdad, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the Trucial States. Notably, al-ta'i began drafting the novel in Bahrain in 1958, completed it in Kuwait in 1962, and published it in Beirut in 1963 AD (Matabi' al-Wafa'). The novel's geographical range mirrors the author's own itinerant life, shaped by exile, movement, and political displacement. Within this transregional map of Arab capitals, al-ta'i not only narrates the Omani anti-colonial struggle but locates it within the affective and ideological landscapes of a broader revolutionary moment in the Arab world.⁸⁵⁵ The novel captures the revolutionary Omani subjectivity shaped by the broader revolutionary ferment that swept Arab capitals such as Cairo, Baghdad, Beirut, Kuwait, and Bahrain. Khalid," the central character in the narrative, is an Omani who reunites with his Iraqi friend Faḍil" in Cairo's Tahrir Square after a long absence. Faḍil later hosts Khalid in his home in Kuwait and introduces him to his sister Widad," a revolutionary nurse who was active in the July 14, 1958 revolution in Iraq.

⁸⁵⁴ For more on the personality of al-Ta'i and his works, see: Ahmad al-Falahi, *Ma a Abdallah al-Ta'i* (Beirut: Dar al-Intishar al- Arabi, 2022).

⁸⁵⁵ Mohsin Al-Kindi and Abdullah Al-Tai, Abdullah Al-Tai and the Pioneering of Modern Omani Literary Writing (A Historical Study of Its Literary Arts) (Muscat: Nizwa Magazine, January 1, 1997).

Khalid is deeply impressed by Widad's character. Burdened by the trauma of his colonized homeland, Oman—still under British domination—he decides to join the Omani revolution then unfolding in al-Jabal al-Akhḍar.

“...The British entered the battle [the assault on Nizwa, the capital of the Omani Imamate] like swarms of locusts. The *mujahidin* held their ground at the gates of Nizwa and emerged victorious in the Battle of Firq [a locality at the entrance of Nizwa], defeating General Robertson. The white flag flew high and proud atop Nizwa Fort. But the British regrouped their army and turned to air power, bombarding the fort to little effect. They shredded the white flag with their aircraft-mounted machine guns, only to be surprised by another rising in its place, and another, again and again, until they came to understand that this piece of white cloth was more precious than life, stronger than the gun, and higher than the planes.”⁸⁵⁶

Together, Khalid and Widad establish a rudimentary field hospital in al-Jabal al-Akhḍar to tend to the wounded. Through this setting, the novelist casts light on the profound suffering endured by the *thuwwar* of the mountain: simple firearms pitched against the advanced weaponry of the Royal Air Force, and bullets opposed to internationally banned weapons of war deployed by the British in the post–World War II era.

The British came to demolish the palace of the Emir of the Mountain [Sulayman bin Humayr], known as *Bayt al-Sulayy*. It was a historic structure in Nizwa. The man entrusted with guarding the palace refused to leave. The British began looting the premises and dragged the man to prison when he resisted. His wife, however, insisted on staying. They threatened to demolish the house

⁸⁵⁶ Abdullah al-ta'i, *Mala'ikat al-Jabal al-Akhḍar* (Angels of the Green Mountain): The Story of the Omani Revolution in Its First Phase, 2nd ed. (Kuwait: Al-Rabiean Publishing and Distribution, 2009), 15.

on top of her. She refused. The house exploded with her inside it, collapsing into a heap of rubble and dust, her dismembered body a testimony to colonial brutality and a voice crying out against every treacherous collaborator.”⁸⁵⁷

In the analysis of Karma Nabulsi, it is through such displays of violence that the British war machine claims exclusive ownership over the “truth” of war, by monopolizing the *martial tradition*.⁸⁵⁸ The English officers arrest Widad on the pretext that she is not Omani and exile her to the notorious al-Faw prison in Iraq, where she endures torture, humiliation, and the bitterness of captivity. Khalid too is imprisoned—in the medieval al-Jalali fortress in Muscat—where he suffers unspeakable torture. Eventually, he orchestrates a daring escape. From that point, Khalid dedicates himself to uniting the fractured factions of the revolution. Here, the novelist turns to internal critique, addressing the revolution’s shortcomings: personal rivalries, loss of trust among former comrades, opportunism, and the success of British intelligence in sowing division among the leadership. The absence of a clear post-revolutionary state project becomes evident, underscoring the strategic vacuum left behind once the phase of armed struggle begins to recede.⁸⁵⁹

Do you realize,” Khalid asks, “that apathy and disunity are the enemy’s cause for glee and sense of security? It means, my friend, that Selwyn Lloyd chuckles in the Foreign Office, that Chauncey struts through the alleys of Masqat, and that Waterfield governs ‘Uman with an army of mercenaries. Do you not see, my brother, that death is more bearable than such a condition?”⁸⁶⁰

⁸⁵⁷ al-ta’i. Ibid. p.28.

⁸⁵⁸ Karma Nabulsi, *Traditions of War: Occupation, Resistance and the Law*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 93.

⁸⁵⁹ al-ta’i. Ibid. 52.

⁸⁶⁰ al-ta’i. Ibid.51.

‘Abd Allah al-ta’i continues, through Khalid’s voice, his critique of the internal contradictions that beset the revolutionary movement: “...the bitter truth we must confront in the aftermath of defeat is that we did not undertake this revolution with clarity or understanding. Regrettably, it was closer to a tribal uprising than to a popular revolution.”⁸⁶¹ Yet, despite the tragic outcome of the al-Jabal al-Akhḍar Revolution, the reader discerns that the novelist remains faithful to the notion of revolution as a continuous horizon—one not bound by temporal closure.

And after all this,” he writes, “the Omanis still await a leadership united within itself to enter ‘Uman—whether an older generation that has shaken off the dust or a newer one forged in the fires of battle and tempered by the lessons of defeat. Then, they will be a foundation upon which to build an Arab ‘Uman, with dignity and security, and for its Arab people, stability and glory. And if, by then, you happen to behold ‘Uman, ask for Khalid—you will find him in every home. Ask for Widad—and her presence will fill the house of Khalid al-Jalandani, and her principles will dwell in every household in ‘Uman.”⁸⁶²

What becomes evident from the above is that the terrain of anti-colonial resistance in ‘Uman and the Arabian Peninsula was not confined to mountains, valleys, or ports of the Gulf. There existed other vital terrains that preserved the memory of the revolution—namely, literary texts. These texts became alternative battlegrounds that documented, questioned, critiqued, and safeguarded the legacy of revolutionary struggle. They provoked both the ruling regime and the revolutionaries themselves. On one hand, they defied the apparatuses of absolute power by continuing to write and publish despite censorship, archival erasure, and the silencing of any narrative sympathetic to

⁸⁶¹ Ibid. 53.

⁸⁶² Ibid. 55-56.

the revolution. On the other hand, they preserved the unspoken dimensions of the revolutionary condition—those invisible to conventional historiography and visible only through the lens of literature and art.

These literary interventions became pioneering contributions that exposed the British imperial project early on and traced its social, political, and cultural repercussions on Omani society and the postcolonial state by re-narrating the revolutions through fiction. They also enacted a form of self-critique, holding revolutionary movements accountable. They aligned themselves with the ordinary and marginalized *thuwwar* rather than the leadership. Far from glorifying the commanders of the revolution, this literature placed them at the periphery—indeed, not merely on the margins, but as subjects of sharp critique, blamed for the errors that led to the revolution's eventual fate.

There are many examples that bear witness to the breadth of revolutionary literature in ‘Uman—across poetry, short stories, and novels. It is a corpus deserving of dedicated scholarly inquiry, to reappraise this genre of revolutionary resistance that has preserved the memory of peoples and their solidarity with one another. We conclude with a poem by Muhammad al-Şabbagh, a Yemeni poet from ‘Adan:

Arise, my homeland, and heed the call,

A cry erupted from revolution,

A cry that thundered through the ears of existence,

From the hut, the cave, and the tent,

From al-Quds, from al-Jabal al-Akhḍar,

From the headland, the tree, and the garden.”⁸⁶³

⁸⁶³ Muhammad al-Şabbagh, "Qaşidat Nida' al-Ba'th" [Poem of the Resurrection Call], Şawt 'Uman [Voice of Oman] magazine, Cairo, no. June 1961, last page.

CONCLUSION

“From the moment the Imām left Oman, the revolution became orphaned.”⁸⁶⁴

This eloquent statement, attributed to one of the veterans of the al-Jabal al-Akhḍar uprising who never abandoned the mountain, arguably encapsulates the final chapter of the Omani revolution spanning the years 1955 to 1965.

Several questions emerged: What transpired following the separation of the leader from his popular base and native land? What were the nature and contours of the rifts and schisms that tore through the leadership of the revolution? And how did both objective (structural) and subjective (personal) factors converge? What internal and external dynamics hastened the transformation of the Omani revolution from one historical phase to another?

This chapter endeavors to engage these inquiries before progressing to its concluding synthesis. The above alluded to metamorphosis—perhaps divergent in ideological orientation and operative tools—remained fundamentally consistent with the broader historical arc described by Aḥmad al-Zubaydī as “fanā’ fī ‘aṣr al-isti‘mār wa-l-imbrāṭūriyya” (annihilation in the age of colonialism and imperialism).⁸⁶⁵

⁸⁶⁴ Interview no. 25, Wādī Banī Ḥabīb, al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, 26 December 2024.

⁸⁶⁵ Ahmad al-Zubaidi, *Excavating Memory: Oman Between Two Worlds* (Beirut: Dar Sual, 2015), 223.

Schisms and Fragmentation

In the summer of 1961 AD, intense and conspicuous divisions began to surface within the leadership of the Imamate. These cleavages unfolded across three principal axes. (1) a dispute between Imām Ghālib and Shaykh Ṣāliḥ ibn ʿĪsā al-Ḥārithī, (2) a rift between Imām Ghālib and al-Shaybah al-Sālimī, and (3) a conflict between Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Ḥārithī and al-Shaybah al-Sālimī.

Meanwhile, Shaykh Sulaymān ibn Ḥimyar moved between these disputes—at times a participant in the conflict, and at others a mediator attempting reconciliation among the fractious leadership.⁸⁶⁶

These internal fractures had a devastating impact on the revolution's trajectory within Oman and deeply tarnished its image on both the regional and international stages. The implications were particularly severe for the insurgents within Oman, who found themselves cut off from vital military and financial support, vulnerable to psychological warfare, rumors, and intelligence penetrations. Isolated, they descended into improvised and often contradictory individual strategies—particularly in guerrilla warfare and targeted assassinations—while the central leadership remained embroiled in internal squabbles.

Such a sustained and bitter schism—from 1961 to 1964—cannot be adequately explained without acknowledging the convergence of both structural (objective) and personal (subjective) determinants.

⁸⁶⁶ Interview with revolutionary leader, Ahmed al-Deen archives. Ibid.

Foremost among the objective factors was the pernicious role played by certain “phantom intermediaries”⁸⁶⁷ such as Fāyiz I’jāz, who actively sought to splinter the revolutionary leadership.⁸⁶⁸ I’jāz worked deliberately to marginalize Ṭālib ibn ‘Alī al-Hanā’ī (the Imām’s brother) and Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Īsā al-Ḥārithī from the negotiation process, while presenting himself as a close advisor to Imām Ghālib and a trusted confidant of Shaykh Sulaymān ibn Ḥimyar.⁸⁶⁹

Nevertheless, declassified British documents reveal that these claims were fabrications—self-aggrandizing assertions by I’jāz, whose credibility was highly questionable. He was widely suspected of shifting allegiances in exchange for financial compensation, notably from Saudi sources, and consistently failed to relay the actual stipulations imposed by Britain and Sa‘īd ibn Taymūr for the return of revolutionary leaders. These terms were humiliating, amounting to what was effectively house arrest for Imām Ghālib, Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Īsā, and Shaykh Sulaymān ibn Ḥimyar.

I’jāz accused Ṭālib ibn ‘Alī of being a puppet in the hands of Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir, portraying him as an ideologue committed solely to armed resistance and violent struggle.⁸⁷⁰ Meanwhile, Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Īsā was depicted as consumed by a desire for leadership, acting independently in foreign affairs without reference to the Imām.⁸⁷¹

⁸⁶⁷ Many names emerged under the guise of secret mediation, appearing and disappearing suddenly. Imam Ghalib did not take a stance toward them but rather welcomed everyone, leading to mediation chaos and breaches by individuals who brought proposals and ideas without disclosing the parties they represented. Among these names were Ahmed Mohammed Al-Asiri from Bahrain, Taha Hussein Najad from Iran (working for an oil company), as well as the Kuwaiti notable Abdul Latif Al-Ghanim, who sent Nasser bin Suleiman Al-Harithi to the Imam. However, none of these mediations lasted or yielded any results. See: Al-Falahi’s interview, Ibid.

⁸⁶⁸ Fāyiz I’jāz, according to British secret documents: a Syrian opponent of President Gamal Abdel Nasser, served as a political advisor to Saudi Prince Bin Jalawi, governor of the Eastern Province. He worked as a correspondent for *Le Soir* and presented himself in negotiations between the Imam and Britain as the political advisor to Imam Ghalib, claiming he received no payment from the Imam but rather a satisfactory allowance from Prince Bin Jalawi. See: Records of Oman, vol. 3, 1963, 535; vol. 4, 1964, 115–172.”

⁸⁶⁹ FO 371/174554. Telegram From Beirut to Foreign Office, 11 July 1964.

⁸⁷⁰ See “Conditions for the Return of Some Revolutionary Leaders to Oman,” FO 371/174554.

⁸⁷¹ Records of Oman, Vol.4, 1964, p.115, Confidential from British Embassy, Beirut, To Foreign Office, 1 May 1964.

Throughout the negotiation process, this dubious intermediary made no attempt to mask his hostility toward ‘Abd al-Nāṣir, nor did he observe diplomatic neutrality—despite being fully aware that the opposing party in the negotiations (Britain) maintained a staunchly antagonistic stance toward ‘Abd al-Nāṣir and his pan-Arab nationalist project. I‘jāz referred to ‘Abd al-Nāṣir as “the greatest malignant influence in the Middle East,”⁸⁷² and dismissed the Omani revolution as a mere appendage to ‘Abd al-Nāṣir’s personal agenda.⁸⁷³ In his view, the revolution’s leaders were no more than subordinates in ‘Abd al-Nāṣir’s broader geopolitical design.⁸⁷⁴

Concurrently, nationalist newspapers in the Gulf—such as al-Ṭalī‘ah, published in Kuwait—were dedicating extensive serialized investigative reports to the unfolding situation. Among the headlines: “The Omani Cause in the Phase of Liquidation: On the Path to Reinforcing the Traditional Leadership of the Revolution; What Is the Mission of the Anglo-Saudi Secret Organization in Oman? And Why Did Negotiations with Britain Fail?”⁸⁷⁵

The faction aligned with Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Īsā al-Ḥārithī contended that throughout these negotiations, the individual responsible for managing the revolution’s external affairs—i.e., Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Īsā himself—had neither been consulted nor informed. They argued that the Imām, along with his suspect advisor, had chosen to proceed in secrecy. According to this faction, the leadership—

⁸⁷² Ibid. 189, Appendix A, Confidential from British Embassy, Beirut, To Foreign Office, 15 July 1964.

⁸⁷³ The individual named Ajaz submitted misleading reports about the leaders of the revolution. Among these were his claims that the wealth of Ṣāliḥ bin ‘Īsā al-Ḥārithī was close to one million British pounds. See: FO 371/174555, September 25, 1964. Sheikh Ṣāliḥ died in exile in Cairo in 1987 and did not possess such wealth; on the contrary, he was heavily indebted, and his debts were repaid through the sale of his house in Egypt. For further details, see: Muḥammad ‘Abdullāh al-Ḥārithī, *Mawsū‘at ‘Umān: al-Wathā‘iq al-Sirriyya* [Encyclopedia of Oman: Secret Documents], vol. 5 (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-‘Arabiyya, 2007.), 701. See also a personal interview with Aḥmad al-Falāḥī, Muscat, December 25, 2024, in which he confirmed to the researcher that the allegations regarding Ṣāliḥ bin ‘Īsā’s wealth were entirely baseless and were fabricated by Britain and its agents to undermine national figures.

⁸⁷⁴ Ibid. 199, Appendix B.

⁸⁷⁵ Al-Ṭalī‘a, Kuwait, no. 134 (June 9, 1965): 14–15.

composed of Imām Ghālib, his brother Ṭālib, Shaykh Sulaymān ibn Ḥimyar, and al-Shaybah Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Sālimī—was described as “hasty and lacking in discernment, unfit for the grave responsibilities required of them. They level accusations at their comrades while forgetting their considerable sacrifices; they withhold information on movements and communications from their allies, and place more trust in malevolent infiltrators than in loyal friends. They act unilaterally, without regard for those who share their trench and their fate.”⁸⁷⁶

Among the publicly declared causes of the dispute was Imām Ghālib’s accusation that Shaykh Ṣāliḥ had concealed financial aid provided by friendly Arab states and appropriated it for his personal use. Matters deteriorated further when the Imām directly informed Saudi authorities and accredited Arab embassies in the Kingdom that Shaykh Ṣāliḥ had seized these funds. He urged them to cease all dealings with him, to withhold future transfers through his channels, and to pressure al-Ḥārithī to return the funds in question.⁸⁷⁷

As accusations escalated and the Arab press began to engage with the controversy, a “non-routine meeting” was arranged by Saudi intermediaries in Dammam in April 1963.⁸⁷⁸ The gathering brought together Imām Ghālib, his brother Ṭālib, Shaykh Sulaymān ibn Ḥimyar, and al-Shaybah al-Sālimī. In response, al-Ḥārithī declared that he had transferred all donations he had received directly to the Imām and rejected the slanderous insinuations impugning his integrity and

⁸⁷⁶ Al-Falahi’s interview with al-Harhi SH.

⁸⁷⁷ OMA, IMA, OM A, *The Omani Revolt Between Deviation, Betrayal of Trust, and Treachery: What is the Function of the Oman Imamate Office Which Will Be Opened in Kuwait?* (Exeter: Centre for Arab Gulf Studies, University of Exeter, 1965.), 953.505, 903.505.

⁸⁷⁸ ‘Shaykh Sulayman bin Humayr al-Nabhani, the Amir of the Green Mountain, Arrives in Cairo,’ *Sawt Oman*, Cairo, no. May 1963. 4.

public standing. He asserted that he considered himself a partner in the revolutionary cause—not a subordinate to any individual.⁸⁷⁹

As the exchange grew more heated, Shaykh al-Ḥārithī was threatened with house arrest and a travel ban. In response, he challenged the legitimacy of Imām Ghālib's religious and political authority, asserting that his imamate had effectively ended the moment he abandoned his stronghold and withdrew from the scene. He contended that all the efforts since 1955 had been directed toward garnering support for the Omani revolution, and that upon victory and return to Oman, it would be the people who would select the imām deemed most worthy. Until that moment, he declared, he would assume sole leadership of the resistance.⁸⁸⁰

This confrontational and deeply acrimonious meeting cast a long shadow over the revolution and its trajectory. In its aftermath, the Imām dismissed all individuals affiliated with Shaykh Ṣāliḥ from foreign offices—particularly the two principal branches in Cairo (where Ḥimyar ibn Sulaymān al-Nabhānī replaced Muḥammad ibn Ḥamad al-Ḥārithī) and in Damascus (where Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Nabhānī replaced Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥamad al-Ḥārithī). These two offices subsequently intensified their campaign against Ṣāliḥ ibn 'Īsā and his associates, launching sustained attacks on their reputations and downplaying their earlier contributions. The affair increasingly appeared as a crude power struggle driven by parochial interests and familial rivalries.

In response to this internecine conflict within the ranks of the revolutionary leadership, Shaykh Ṣāliḥ ibn 'Īsā al-Ḥārithī proclaimed the establishment of what he termed the Omani

⁸⁷⁹ "The Imam and his leadership council claimed that upon their arrival in Dammam, they requested Salih al-Harithi to provide an account statement of the funds he held over the past years, but he refused... and that the Imam and the revolution's leaders had sufficient knowledge of material evidence proving that the Omani Mujahideen's funds were in Salih's possession." See details of the claim in: *Salih al-Harithi Claims He Became Imam*, Sawt Oman, August/September 1963 issue. 9.

⁸⁸⁰ Al-Falahi. Ibid.

Liberation Front, appointing himself as its head and identifying himself as “the legitimate representative of the Omani people.”⁸⁸¹ In letters addressed to President Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir and to the League of Arab States, he declared: “The Omani people have decided to depose Ghālib ibn ‘Alī from the imamate... and the Omani Liberation Front is now the sole legitimate representative of Oman and its cause, the voice of the Omani people in all national and international arenas.”⁸⁸²

Among the declared aims of the Front were: the cleansing of Omani territories—both coastal and interior—of British colonialism and opportunism; affirming that Oman is an inseparable part of the greater Arab homeland; organizing popular struggle in Oman in a practical manner consistent with revolutionary and emancipatory standards; and engaging with the people’s will, sovereignty, and principles of equality and social justice—distanced from tyranny, fanaticism, and selfishness.⁸⁸³

The final stated aim of the Front was to work toward the establishment of the foundations of a “new Arab Republic of Oman,” one grounded in Islamic principles and aligned with progressive revolutionary movements—described as “the hope of the free across the globe.”

The communiqués issued by the Front leveled direct accusations at their former comrades, with little regard for the consequences such rhetoric might inflict upon the revolution itself, its fighters within Oman, or its image across the Arab world and beyond.⁸⁸⁴ The Front went so far as to describe the exiled revolutionary leadership as “the Imamate Company Abroad,” equating it in enmity with British colonial forces and their collaborators inside the country.⁸⁸⁵

⁸⁸¹ Ibrahim al-Harithi, *Oman: The Revolution on the Path to Freedom* (Damascus: Dar Al-Yaqaza Al-Arabiya for Writing, Translation, and Publishing, 1964), 53.

⁸⁸² Al-Falahi. Ibid.

⁸⁸³ Ibrahim al-Harithi, *Oman: The Revolution on the Path to Freedom*. Ibid. 53.

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid. 54.

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid. 88.

These statements—issued by the Omani Liberation Front, which many observers estimate to have consisted of no more than three to four individuals from the same extended family—were scathing in tone and far-reaching in implication.⁸⁸⁶ The Front spared no description or allegation in its missives, distributing them to most Arab embassies in Cairo. It described the current Imamate’s methods as “despotic, foolish, and a tool to extinguish the people’s [Omani] struggle”.⁸⁸⁷ One communiqué read: “He who resides in luxurious homes and spends enormous sums collected [in the name of the people] can have no relation whatsoever with the struggle. Revolutionary and progressive struggle has recognized that this autocratic leadership has become distant from the popular sphere and from the real frontlines. The sacrifices of the sincerely devout Omani people have become a plaything for a handful of anarchists who have turned the people’s jihad into a source of pleasure, luxury, and financial gain”.⁸⁸⁸

This petty rhetorical warfare did not sit well with President Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir, who had long embraced the Omani revolution and provided it with all forms of support. Seeking reconciliation, ‘Abd al-Nāṣir personally received Imām Ghālib ibn ‘Alī, his brother Ṭālib, and Shaykh Sulaymān ibn Ḥimyar at his residence in Alexandria on Wednesday, 13 August 1963.⁸⁸⁹

⁸⁸⁶ Interview No. 40, with a member of the Arab Nationalists Movement, Oman branch, Muscat, January 23, 2024. In his critique of the Omani Liberation Front: ‘What was termed the “Omani Liberation Front” in reality consisted only of the following members: the brothers Muḥammad ibn Ḥamd al-Ḥārithī (former head of the Imamate’s office in Cairo), Sulaymān ibn Ḥamd al-Ḥārithī (secretary to Sāliḥ ibn Ī’sā), and Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥamd al-Ḥārithī (former head of the Imamate’s office in Damascus), headed by Sāliḥ ibn Ī’sā al-Ḥārithī. The drafting of their statements was an uncreative process of slogan-mongering, written collectively among themselves and with the help of mediocre scribes. These statements conflated progressive concepts with Islamic teachings while borrowing popular terminology from revolutionary media discourse at the time. This “Front” was nothing more than a very small, isolated, and aggrieved tribal faction driven by narrow sectarianism, exploiting its diplomatic network to retaliate for personal slights, with no regard for the revolution or for Oman and its people.’

⁸⁸⁷ Ibrahim al-Harithi. Ibid. 60.

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid. 58.

⁸⁸⁹ President Gamal Abdel Nasser receives Imam Ghalib bin Ali, the Imam of Oman, and the Omani delegation, Sawt Oman, no. August/September 1963, p. 7.

That private meeting underscored ‘Abd al-Nāṣir’s concern for containing the dispute and preventing its spread—lest Britain exploit the division to sabotage the Omani cause then pending before the United Nations. He subsequently instructed both the Egyptian diplomatic corps and the League of Arab States to intensify their efforts in supporting unity within the national and pan-Arab ranks.

Ironically, in the very same issue of *Ṣawt ‘Umān* (Voice of Oman) that featured the report on ‘Abd al-Nāṣir’s reception of the Imām and his delegation, a “formal communiqué from the representative of Oman in Cairo, Ḥimyar ibn Sulaymān al-Nabhānī” was published. The communiqué denied a report previously published by *al-Jumhūriyya* newspaper (Cairo) on 31 August 1963 AD, which claimed that Imām Ghālib and Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Īsā had met with Prince Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭābī. The statement declared unequivocally: “Imām Ghālib never met with Ṣāliḥ al-Ḥārithī, a man who has deviated from national work and pursued a path harmful to the Omani cause. The Revolutionary Council, under the Imām’s leadership, stripped Ṣāliḥ of all authority in 1960 after his deviation and betrayal were confirmed.”⁸⁹⁰

On page nine of the same issue appeared a detailed communiqué, signed by the Omani Revolutionary Council, condemning recent coverage in the Kuwaiti press, particularly claims that Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Īsā had been selected by Omani tribes to replace the Imām. The statement rejected these as fabrications.⁸⁹¹

What emerges clearly from this public sparring in the newspaper that claimed to represent the voice of the Omani revolution is a troubling political immaturity and lack of diplomatic discretion on the part of its leadership. Rather than safeguarding unity or honoring the mediation

⁸⁹⁰ "Oman’s representative in Cairo formally denies a report published in *Al-Gomhuria* newspaper, *Sawt Oman*, no. 21, August/September 1963.

⁸⁹¹ Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Īsā. “He Claims to Have Become an Imam,” *Sawt ‘Uman*, no. August/September 1963, 9.

efforts of regional leaders—foremost among them President Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir and Syrian President Nāẓim al-Qudsī—the publication instead served as a venue for settling personal scores. That such accusations would be broadcast through the very platform intended to unify the revolutionary voice—at the height of regional and international diplomatic efforts—is a stark reflection of the revolutionary leadership’s failure to rise to the responsibilities of the historical moment⁸⁹² .

After many efforts by the majority of Omanis abroad, all of these attempts led to the convening of a reconciliation conference in Cairo, which lasted for four months—from July until late October 1963 AD. This was the same meeting previously mentioned, and it resulted in the formation of what came to be known as the “Revolutionary Command Council for the State of Oman.”⁸⁹³

⁸⁹² Al-Falahi. Ibid.

⁸⁹³ The issue of tracing the history of this meeting requires further research, investigation, comparison, and verification. The documents available to us and accessed up to the writing of this study are as follows: (1) ‘Nizwa’ Bulletin, no. 3 (October 1963): 7–8; (2) ‘Sawt ‘Oman’ Magazine (Cairo), October–November 1963 issue, p. 16; (3) ‘Arab Documents, 1963’, Document no. 154, Department of Political Studies and Public Administration, American University of Beirut, pp. 630–31. Meanwhile, the June 1964 issue of ‘Sawt ‘Oman’ features a full page (p. 19) titled ‘Results of the Conference of the Leaders of the Omani Revolution in Dammam!’ without specifying the date of the meeting. It appears as a statement bearing an (illegible) code at the beginning: (Damascus, 2 A.B.A.), delivered by Ibrahim bin Hamad al-Harithi en route to Algeria to open an Omani office there. The novelty in this statement mentions two things: first, the names of committee members (unlike earlier statements published in multiple outlets that lacked these names), and second, the formation of a Supreme Council for the State of Oman, comprising (according to Ibrahim al-Harithi): Ghalib bin Ali, Sulayman bin Himyar, Salih bin Isa, Talib bin Ali, and Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Salmi as Omani leaders. One possible interpretation is that the 1963 meeting was a preliminary negotiation that lasted nearly a year to allocate proposed positions, especially given the tense atmosphere surrounding these (gatherings), as affirmed by Sulayman bin Hamad al-Harithi in his extensive interview with Ahmad al-Falahi. Sulayman remarks on this period: ‘There was a sense that sidelining Salih bin Isa was a major loss for the cause, potentially leading to its collapse and fragmentation. Perhaps the other side began to realize the necessity of Sheikh Salih’s return and regretted hastily leveling unfounded accusations... Thus, it was agreed to hold an expanded meeting in Cairo in 1964... followed by another meeting in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, the same year, attended by over seventy Omani figures... That meeting resulted in the formation of a Supreme Command Council chaired by the Imam, with members Salih al-Harithi, Talib al-Hinai, and Muhammad al-Salmi—Salih was not the Imam’s deputy in this council but merely a member, as the council had no deputies.’ See Ahmad al-Falahi’s interview with Sulayman al-Harithi.

This council was considered a mere “tactic” or a ceremonial council, and it had no significant impact on the ground—neither inside Oman nor in exile. Despite this, some reassuring press statements were published in Arab newspapers. For example, *al-Jumhūriyya* of Cairo reported: “Out of concern for national unity and a sincere desire to advance the liberation movement in Oman—and in view of the national interest at this particular time in the struggle, which requires unity among its people and the unification of their ranks—Imām Ghālib ibn ‘Alī, Prince Sulaymān ibn Ḥimyar, and Prince Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Īsā al-Ḥārithī met and agreed to forget all previous disputes among them, to support national unity for the Omani people, and to establish a unified revolutionary organization at all levels in line with the needs of the current stage of the Omani struggle, so that victory may be achieved for the Omani people and they may be freed from the yoke of colonial oppression.”⁸⁹⁴

As for the dispute between al-Shaybah al-Sālimī and Imām Ghālib and his brother Ṭālib, it stemmed from the monopolization of decision-making and the marginalization of those who believed themselves to be partners in leadership. The influence of Ṭālib over the Imām was deeper than even the closest people could perceive. al-Sālimī came to realize this only later—especially after having taken the side of the Imām and his brother against his former comrade Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Īsā al-Ḥārithī. The root of the problem lay in the absence of institutional practices in decision-making among the leadership. Everything was subject to personal whims and judgments. This fragile and backward system of administration allowed slander, gossip, and the spread of misleading information to take root, stirring up resentment and destroying trust among them. A system like this, it was said, could not run a small grocery store—so how could it manage a complex revolution?

⁸⁹⁴ ‘Statement from the leaders of the Omani Revolution’, *Al-Jumhuriya* newspaper, Cairo, March 13, 1964.

al-Shaybah al-Sālīmī was a sharp and public critic of the unilateral decisions made by Tālīb ibn 'Alī. This type of criticism did not align with the personalities of the Imām and his brother, who were committed to secrecy and discretion. al-Sālīmī wrote to one of his friends, expressing his sorrow over the state of affairs: You ask about the cause? It is waves... it is nothing but a love of control and superiority. Souls are filled with evil. That is why you find negotiations and treaties, yet no one keeps their commitments. How quickly they break them, how hastily they go back on their word. The situation has become dire... and we find no listening ears, no aware hearts⁸⁹⁵



Figure 11: An example of the intelligence infiltration and mutual accusations of treachery among the leadership of the Omani revolution, as portrayed in the Arab press.

Source: al-Tālī'ah (Kuwait), Issue No. 173, Wednesday, 30 March / May 1966-18-19.

As for the roots of the subjective causes, they trace back to the impulses of leadership ambition—a trait from which none of the former comrades and now-adversaries managed to free themselves. Each individual carried these impulses from early childhood, and rather than disciplining them within the tribal-social framework from which they emerged, they instead reinforced them as their networks of regional, Arab, and international relations expanded. This dynamic was discussed in detail in Chapters Three and Four.

The gaps between the leaders of the Omani revolution continued to widen, while mutual slander and backbiting flourished, creating fertile ground for multi-layered and multi-purpose intelligence infiltrations.

For instance, colonial reports provided by the British operative known as Tibmerill detail surveillance of conversations between Ṣāliḥ ibn ʿĪsá and Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥamad al-Ḥārithī in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. These conversations concerned the infiltration of 150 Omani fighters into Oman via ʿIbrī, accompanied by a shipment of landmines and military plans aimed at continuing the resistance.⁸⁹⁶

In the Eventual Outcome and the Transformation

The accumulated disputes, declarations, and published statements spanning four years (1961–1965) inflicted deep fissures in the collective psyche and created dangerous fractures within the ranks of the Omani revolution. These were not matters easily forgotten or overcome. A convergence of internal and external contradictions coalesced to produce the transformation that ultimately befell the revolution. The traditional leadership of the revolution failed to grasp the full

⁸⁹⁶ FO 371/174453, “Memorandum on Revolutionary Activity in Oman, dated 12 February 1963,” notes the role of Fayiz Ajaz among the leaders of the Omani Revolution, alleging that he represented the Imam against his brother, Talib bin Ali, in negotiations.

depth of this transformation, despite its efforts to convince itself that it still possessed the same influence over the revolutionaries inside Oman.⁸⁹⁷

Among the most notable contradictions—by no means exhaustive—are two; one internal and the other external. Internally: The revolutionary leadership lacked a comprehensive project for the state that might emerge after the revolutionary phase and the armed struggle against British forces. Nor was this leadership capable of matching the level of financial, political, and diplomatic support it had received from pivotal states in the Arab region and the wider world—such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria, China, and the Soviet Union. This support was never transformed into institutional structures capable of laying the foundation for a robust state. Nor were these resources transparently employed to administer the affairs of Omanis—whether within the country or among those dispersed in diasporic labor and study across the Gulf and Arab world—in ways that would stabilize the homeland or serve its people.

The forced departure of Imām Ghālib and his senior supporters from Omani territory amounted to a lethal blow to the popular struggle.⁸⁹⁸ The Imam's exile and eventual settlement in Dammām, Saudi Arabia, generated consequences that have yet to be critically examined. The ideological and historical divergence between Omani Ibādīsm and Saudi Salafism played a decisive—albeit gradually unfolding—role in draining the revolution of its vitality. The leadership, increasingly drawn into the orbit of competing regional agendas, became a passive participant in broader geopolitical rivalries, distracted from the work of mobilizing the Omani people in their struggle against colonialism.

⁸⁹⁷ "Imam of Oman speaks to Akhbar al-Yawm: Increased activity of revolutionaries in Oman and their siege of British forces in the Dhofar province," *Sawt Oman*, Cairo, February 15, 1964, 25.

⁸⁹⁸ Fathi al-Deeb. *Ibid.* 260.

This fragile leadership proved incapable of deepening the confrontation with the British on multiple fronts within Oman. Many Omanis within the interior gradually withdrew their support from the revolution, disillusioned by the absence of vision and the breakdown of financial and military backing. Even the turn to guerrilla warfare—undertaken in the wake of major military defeats on al-Jabal al-Akhḍar—failed to conform to the fundamental principles of that mode of struggle. The fighters lacked adequate training to confront the British forces, whose superiority in both quality and quantity was overwhelming.⁸⁹⁹

Despite the Imamate's adoption of Arab nationalism and progressivism as a political discourse—largely in response to Nasserist support for the revolution—the principles of Arab nationalism and the commitments of progressive politics were never reflected in the actual practices and decisions of the Imamate's leadership. These principles remained superficial frameworks, confined to official statements and speeches circulated by the Imamate's offices or delivered at regional and international conferences.⁹⁰⁰

This discrepancy led Muḥammad Amīn 'Abd Allāh, the secretary of the Cairo office, to pose a stark question in one of the editorials of *Ṣawt 'Umān*: “Our Nationalist Struggle in the Gulf: Has It Lost Its Revolutionary Character?”⁹⁰¹ The leaders of the Imamate never genuinely believed in the unifying aims of Arab nationalism; rather, personal ambition and the desire for political preeminence were the primary drivers of their engagement.⁹⁰² Neither the Imām nor those around

⁸⁹⁹ Unpublished transcribed interview with a revolutionary who began his struggle with the Imamate and became a leader of the National Democratic Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman, from the private archives of Ahmed al-Deen (copy in possession of the researcher).

⁹⁰⁰ Rana Hamdan al-Dhuyayniyya, *The Arab Nationalist Movement in the Arabian Gulf 1948–1968* (Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes Books, 2022), 152–61.

⁹⁰¹ “Our National Battle in the Gulf: Has It Lost Its Revolutionary Spirit?,” *Sawt Oman* (Cairo), no. June 1961, 3.

⁹⁰² Jamal Zakariya Qasim, *The Al-Busa'idi State in Oman and East Africa: From Its Establishment Until the End of Its Rule in Zanzibar and the Beginning of Its New Era in Oman (1741–1970)*, (Al Ain, United Arab Emirates: Zayed Center for Heritage and History, 2000), 404.

him made any meaningful effort to deepen their understanding of, or build bridges with, key political movements in the region, such as the Arab Nationalist Movement (Ḥarakat al-Qawmiyyīn al-‘Arab, founded in 1951). This failure cost the Imamate the support of influential youth, intellectual, and labor constituencies.

The Arab Nationalist Movement, by contrast, succeeded in attracting the majority of young Omanis working and studying in Gulf cities like Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain, as well as in major Arab capitals such as Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, and Cairo. At first, Arab nationalists saw the revolution in al-Jabal al-Akhdar as a pivotal spark in the larger battle against British colonialism in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula. Yet they quickly came to see its leadership as religious, traditionalist, tribal, feudal, and deeply conservative. The revolution’s internal structure appeared to replicate rigid vertical hierarchies: an imām to be blindly obeyed, surrounded by deferential followers; or a tribal shaykh presiding over the unquestioned loyalty of his kin.⁹⁰³

By the mid-1960s AD, the Arab Nationalist Movement issued a formal statement declaring: “In both form and substance, the Imamate no longer represents anything to the revolutionary Omani people but a detested relic... We call for a boycott of [the Imamate-led revolution]... and affirm that mass struggle alone can secure full independence for every citizen in the Arabian Gulf.”⁹⁰⁴

Two illustrative examples reveal the widening chasm between the revolutionary leadership and the emergent nationalist consciousness of a younger Omani generation increasingly shaped by education and comparative political thought. First is the troubled relationship with Omani political

⁹⁰³ The Omani Revolution (1957–1959): A Critical Historical Study, June 9 Studies, Beirut: Dar al-Tali’a, 1974, 34–43.

⁹⁰⁴ Mufid al-Zaydi, “*Al-Tayyarat al-Fikriyyah fi al-Khalij al-Arabi 1938–1971*” [Intellectual Currents in the Arabian Gulf 1938–1971] (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 2000), 225.

formations. One telling case is the Ḥizb al-Ittiḥād al-‘Umānī (Oman Union Party), which began in 1952 AD as a student association formed by a group of young Omanis studying at the University of Karachi, India. Among its early founders were Muḥammad Amīn ‘Abd Allāh, Ḥusayn Ḥaydar Darwīsh, and Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Jamālī. The association aimed to spread national consciousness among Omanis, especially students scattered across Arab capitals, and to secure broader educational opportunities for graduates of Oman’s only school at the time, al-Sa‘īdiyyah School.

The idea quickly evolved, and in 1953, the founding charter of the Ḥizb al-Ittiḥād al-‘Umānī was formally announced. The party’s central aim was “to explain the cause of the Omani people and expose Britain’s colonial schemes in the country.” The founders later moved to Kuwait.⁹⁰⁵ Between 1953 and 1955, the party witnessed a notable period of activism: supporting Omani students in securing scholarships, conducting political education through its committees, and building broad alliances with Arab and foreign press outlets and international organizations to publicize the suffering of ordinary Omanis under the weight of hunger, illiteracy, and disease.

In 1956, Cairo welcomed the party and its leadership, and in 1958, Ṣawt ‘Umān newspaper was launched in cooperation with the Omani Students’ Association in Cairo. In addition to Muḥammad Amīn ‘Abd Allāh and Ḥusayn Ḥaydar Darwīsh, the editorial board included Sayyid Fayṣal bin ‘Alī al-Bū Sa‘īdī—a cousin of Sulṭān Sa‘īd bin Taymūr—who defected from the Muscat administration and joined the party, taking a clear stance against the colonial subjugation of his homeland.⁹⁰⁶

⁹⁰⁵ Husayn Haydar Darwish, *A fighter from Oman*.

⁹⁰⁶ Faisal bin Ali, *Sultan and Colonialism*.39.

However, the internal contradictions of the 1960s eventually overwhelmed the party. Muḥammad Amīn ‘Abd Allāh, shaken by the collapse of the revolution in al-Jabal al-Akhḍar, grew sympathetic to the Imamate—an attitude that drew strong opposition from his comrades. Together with Fayṣal bin ‘Alī, he redirected the full resources of Ṣawt ‘Umān to serve as the media voice of the Omani people and their cause under the banner of the Imamate. Yet the traditionalist leadership’s lack of transparency and its refusal to involve the remaining youth of the Ḥizb al-Ittiḥād al-‘Umānī, despite their unwavering dedication, led to the party’s disintegration and the demoralization of its members. Ultimately, Ṣawt ‘Umān ceased publication altogether in 1967.

Second is the criticism among the new generation which intensified; along with their commitment to documenting it through Arab newspapers and international organizations. Among the most telling examples were the memoranda that Omani youth rapidly submitted to the United Nations’ Fact-Finding Committee, affirming that “a backward mentality such as that of the Imām cannot be allowed to rule over a people aspiring to progress in the twentieth century AD.”⁹⁰⁷ These youth appealed to the United Nations to stand on the side of justice and truth in supporting their return to a homeland ruled “with iron and fire” by the British, declaring their continued recourse to violence as a final means to eliminate colonial presence from their country.⁹⁰⁸

The traditional leadership of the revolution failed to comprehend the ideological and intellectual transformations taking root in the Omani popular consciousness—especially among the youth, students, and workers. These were the same workers who had been crushed under the weight of harsh labor conditions imposed by contractors and companies in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia,

⁹⁰⁷ ‘Omani Memoirs to the Fact-Finding Committee,’ *Al-Tali a* newspaper, Kuwait, no. 98, Wednesday, 16 September 1964, 15.

⁹⁰⁸ Ibid.

and Bahrain. They endured “the brutality of class oppression, alienation, and political degradation, which generated among them an intense class hatred toward their exploiters... and a deep national resentment against the political conditions in Oman.”⁹⁰⁹

As nationalist elements committed to real change began withdrawing from the Imamate camp, they issued urgent and public demands to establish a new Omani revolutionary organization that would mobilize the full energy of the people and channel it toward “a renewed Omani revolution and a liberated revolutionary Omani leadership.”⁹¹⁰ These transformations soon materialized in the form of youth and student involvement in new organizational frameworks such as the Arab Nationalist Movement, the Arab Socialist Ba‘th Party, the Popular Fronts for the Liberation of the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula, and other popular military organizations.

These young and dynamic actors came to believe that the traditionalist Imamate was fundamentally incapable of waging a genuine liberation struggle. They saw it instead as a casualty of multiple forces: Saudi reactionism, defeatist negotiations with British colonialism, and personal rivalries among tribal leaders driven by authoritarian ambition. All these internal and external contradictions coalesced to push the Omani revolution into a new phase—marked by the outbreak of armed struggle in the southern region of Oman, beginning in Ẓufār and later expanding northward in the subsequent decade (1965–1975).

Externally: In 1964, the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement in Kuwait resolved to launch an armed struggle in Ẓufār, allying with two local organizations founded by youth from the region: the Ẓufārī Charitable Association (al-Jam‘iyyah al-Khayriyyah al-Ẓufāriyyah) and the Dhofari Soldiers' Organization (Tandhīm al-Junūd al-

⁹⁰⁹ *The Omani Revolution (1957–1959): A Critical Historical Study*. 40.

⁹¹⁰ “The Seventh Anniversary of the Omani Revolution: Where is the Revolution Seven Years After its Outbreak? Al-Tali’a Newspaper, Kuwait, no. 140, Wednesday, July 21, 1965, 15.

Ẓufāriyyīn). The Republican Revolution in Yemen, which erupted on 26 September 1962 AD against British occupation in the south and against the Imamate in the north, was among the most significant external factors that, in conjunction with the internal developments noted above, led to the decision to ignite armed struggle in Ẓufār first—and in the rest of Oman and the Gulf thereafter.⁹¹¹

The strategic aim of this decision was to build a bridge linking the armed struggle in southern Yemen with that in Oman and the Arabian Gulf. Britain was swiftly put on high alert across military, political, and economic fronts.⁹¹² The revolutions in Yemen and Oman were seen as the most serious threat to the emergence of a new order—one led by popular movements embracing armed struggle across territories still under British control.⁹¹³ This was especially alarming at a time when British oil companies had begun to reap unprecedented benefits from monopolizing oil extraction across the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula.⁹¹⁴

The polarizing effects of the Saudi-Egyptian rift—intensifying during the period 1960–1965—could not be neutralized, nor could their reverberations on the leadership of the Omani revolution be overlooked. This regional discord reached its peak when ‘Abd al-Nāṣir firmly supported the Yemeni revolution and dispatched Egyptian troops to back it in September 1962. This was soon followed by a renewed British–Saudi rapprochement and the resumption of

⁹¹¹ For further analysis of the complexities, causes, and consequences of Yemen’s successive revolutions, see Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael, *The People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen: Politics, Economics and Society: The Politics of Socialist Transformation* (London: Frances Pinter, 1986), which examines the historical trajectory of socialist governance in South Yemen; Helen Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Autocracy, Neo-Liberalism and the Disintegration of a State* (London: Saqi Books, 2017), a critical study of state collapse and neoliberal policies in contemporary Yemen; and Helen Lackner (ed.), *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition* (London: Saqi Books, 2014), a multidisciplinary exploration of Yemen’s socio-political transformations.

⁹¹² Muhammad Jamal Barut, *The Arab Nationalists Movement* (Damascus: Arab Center for Strategic Studies, n.d.), 395.

⁹¹³ Fred Halliday, "Counter-Insurgency in Oman," in *Gulf Studies*, no. 1, *Armed Struggle in Arabia* (April 1976): 15, Fred Halliday Collection, The London School of Economics and Political Science.

⁹¹⁴ *The British Petroleum Company Limited, Statistical Review of the World Oil Industry, ‘1963’* (London: British Petroleum, 27 April 1964), 310.6, STA-REV 1963, Exeter Centre for Arab Gulf Studies, University of Exeter.

diplomatic relations between the two in 1963.⁹¹⁵ When King Fayṣal ascended to the throne in 1964, his open confrontation with ‘Abd al-Nāṣir’s anti-colonial, anti-monarchist ideas placed the Omani revolutionary leadership in an unenviable position.⁹¹⁶

It became increasingly difficult to take sides—whether to align with Saudi Arabia or Egypt—especially given that both states had directly supported the revolution in different ways. The outcome was internal division and ideological polarization among the revolution’s senior figures. Imām Ghālīb and Shaykh Sulaymān bin Ḥimyar fell under the direct influence of Prince Sa‘ūd bin Jiluwī, governor of the Eastern Province, who leveraged the generous financial and political support provided by the Saudi government to maintain their loyalty. At one point, bin Jiluwī even reprimanded Sulaymān bin Ḥimyar for traveling to Cairo to visit Ṭālīb bin ‘Alī al-Hinā’ī.⁹¹⁷

Meanwhile, Shaykh Ṣālīḥ al-Ḥārithī remained in Cairo, which offered him safe diplomatic movement following disputes with the other factions—remaining there until his death in 1987 AD. Shaykh Ṭālīb, the Imām’s brother, also never left Cairo after finally recognizing—albeit belatedly—the extent of Riyadh’s subversive role in besieging the Omani revolution in accordance with Saudi strategic interests. He remained in Cairo until his death in 1981.⁹¹⁸

⁹¹⁵ This survey, prepared by the British Political Resident, documents the political situation in the Persian Gulf region. It details the importance of Saudi-British rapprochement as a prelude to defeating Abdel Nasser and containing his nationalist project. The report also recalls the colonial options studied in 1960, including severing ties with Sultan Said bin Taimur once he became a burden to the Empire. Additionally, the survey discusses Britain’s attempt to establish a new protectorate in Oman led by one of the former rebel leaders. It notes that the time had come to consider replacing the Sultan (1960), though this option was postponed for the time being (1964) until Britain could ensure the production of approximately 50 million tons annually from Abu Dhabi’s oil fields. For the full survey, see: FO 371/174556.

⁹¹⁶ Thabit al-Umari, Saudi Intervention in Omani Affairs 1952–1960: A Documentary Study, *Journal of the Union of Arab Universities for Literature* 9, no. 1A (2012): 1–37.

⁹¹⁷ Al-Falahi’s interview. Ibid.

⁹¹⁸ ‘Our People Bid Farewell to a Prominent National Leader,’ *Oman Al-Thawra* [Oman the Revolution], Aden, September 30, 1981.

Britain, for its part, spared no effort in dismantling the revolution.⁹¹⁹ As demonstrated in earlier chapters, it successfully infiltrated the leadership ranks, exploited every possible means to deepen internal rifts, and deployed its full arsenal of diplomatic and legal strategies to dilute the Omani case in the halls of the United Nations.⁹²⁰ These efforts, sustained over a decade (1955–1965), unfolded in tandem with relentless military campaigns and psychological warfare waged inside Oman.⁹²¹ The culmination of these efforts was the establishment of a modern, regular army—designed, supervised, and tightly controlled by the British.⁹²²

Finally, and as a cumulative result of all the aforementioned internal and external factors, Arab support for the Omani revolution began to wane—a development with profound consequences, given that such support had constituted a central pillar of the revolution’s political legitimacy and financial sustenance. The internal divisions among the revolution’s leaders played a direct role in diminishing Egyptian, Iraqi, and Syrian support. As for Saudi backing, it not only ceased altogether but was actively reoriented to serve the priorities of Saudi–British relations. In fact, it became a burden on the remaining few members of the Oman Liberation Army, who were subjected to rudimentary and heavily monitored training in camps in Dammām and Ṭā’if.

⁹¹⁹ Minutes of the British Ministry of Defence leaders’ meetings/military support for Said bin Taimur/reasons for the continued presence of British forces. For further details regarding the colonial debate over establishing a regular army in Muscat, consult the file: Persian Gulf and East of Suez. DEFE 4/123. 1959.

⁹²⁰ When the Oman question was first raised at the United Nations, note the evident fear and confusion among British imperial correspondents regarding anti-imperialist and anti-colonial rhetoric. This concern stemmed from directives issued by the central command in London to its forces across the Commonwealth and the world, urging them to resist the influence of broadcasts from *Sawt al-Arab* (Voice of the Arabs) radio. See: UK National Archives, FO 371/126889.

⁹²¹ British Intelligence Report, WO 208/5276, with photographic documentation of the destruction and ruin in the aftermath of the war in the mountain region/al-Fulaij/residential areas.

⁹²² . D. Smiley, "Muscat and Oman," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution* 105, no. 617 (1960): 29–41. Also, W. G. H. Pike, confidential memorandum, War Office, London, November 1960, CIGS/PF/4Z, in *Colonel David Smiley's Collection*, Oman Archive Collections, Middle East Centre Archive, University of Oxford.

Between 1961 and 1965, arrests escalated as Saudi intelligence began handing over complete lists of Omani fighters to British intelligence. These individuals were apprehended immediately upon arrival at Omani ports or land checkpoints.⁹²³

The bitter truth of the revolution's final trajectory was captured in the stinging words of Iraq's Minister of Interior, General Maḥdī 'Ammāsh, who addressed the Omani delegation—composed of Ṭālib bin 'Alī al-Hinā'ī, Sulaymān bin Ḥimyar al-Nabhānī, and Sulaymān bin Ḥamad al-Ḥārithī—during their visit to Baghdad to secure what would be the last Iraqi and Arab assistance in training, coordination, and arms transfers: “Our observation of your movement today leads us to doubt whether you are truly the descendants of those men whose heroism and glory were once recorded by history.”⁹²⁴ This rebuke encapsulated the deep sense of disillusionment with the revolutionary leadership's fragmentation and the erosion of its credibility in the eyes of its erstwhile Arab allies.

Between Revolutionary Ignition and Embers

It is difficult to fully grasp the breadth and depth of the revolution that unfolded in Oman between 1955 and 1965. Nevertheless, one who studies this formative decade of modern Omani history may propose a periodization into two principal phases that reflect the revolution's manifold contradictions and complexities. The first, spanning 1955–1959, may be termed the Revolutionary Ignition. The subsequent years, from 1960 to 1965, may be more appropriately characterized as the Revolutionary Embers.

⁹²³ FO 371/174453, “Memorandum on Revolutionary Activity in Oman, dated 12 February 1963,” notes the role of Fayiz Ajaz among the leaders of the Omani Revolution, alleging that he represented the Imam against his brother, Talib bin Ali, in negotiations.

⁹²⁴ Al-Falahi. Ibid.

Phase One: Revolutionary Ignition

One may assert that the Green Mountain Revolution represents the apex of revolutionary ignition in Oman—a moment that did not begin with the fall of Nizwā to British forces in December 1955, but much earlier, namely with the imposition of the Treaty of al-Sīb in 1920. That treaty marked the beginning of Oman’s geopolitical suffocation—trapped between mountain and sea—while reinstating a retrogressive model of governance secured through the imperial apparatus of the British Empire.⁹²⁵

Although some have argued that the Treaty of al-Sīb spared Omani blood and established a relative peace, this interpretation remains speculative at best—an abstraction detached from the lived realities of deprivation and suffering inflicted upon the people in its aftermath. It is therefore vital to call for deeper, critical studies on the economic, social, and public health consequences endured by Omani society during the period 1920–1955.⁹²⁶ Society during this time was effectively frozen, condemned to live under the conditions of primitive tribal subsistence.

When Omanis realized—especially in the post–Second World War moment—that the world had changed, and that they could draw upon their long history of anti-colonial resistance against Persian, Portuguese, and, finally, British imperialism to reignite their revolutionary legacy and reclaim sovereignty over their land, the British Empire stood firmly in their path. For it had just confirmed the presence of a new strategic resource—oil—beneath Omani soil, a resource it could not afford to relinquish. Oil would serve the Empire and the global imperial order as an instrument of deepened domination.

⁹²⁵ For further analysis of the contradictions, implications, and consequences of this agreement on the local population, particularly the correspondence between Imam Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi and Sheikh Isa bin Salih al-Harithi, as well as the latter’s communications with British imperial agents in the Arabian Gulf and Muscat, consult the British Library archives, especially IOR/L/PS/10/426.

⁹²⁶ ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Riyāmī. *‘Al-Sīb Agreement, 25 September 1920.’* Damascus: Dār al-Farqad, 2019.

The critical rupture occurred in July 1957, when Omani forces retook their historic capital, Nizwā. Despite the overwhelming imbalance of military power, the Empire was unable to swiftly extinguish the revolt. Instead, it resorted to all available means—military, political, diplomatic, and more insidiously, economic and social—to crush the revolution. In return, the Omani people accrued layers of injury and injustice that could not be remedied by even two large-scale revolutions spanning at least two decades.⁹²⁷

The ignition of revolution was thus born of a transition: from the chronic frustration that stretched across the years 1920–1954, to the eruption in 1955.⁹²⁸ This happened at a moment when the country was convulsed by deep social fractures—brought on by the despotic rule of Sa‘īd bin Taymūr and the intensifying intrusion of British imperial authority.⁹²⁹

Phase Two: Revolutionary Embers

This phase was defined by the lingering sparks and residual embers of the ferocious battles fought by Omani resistance across multiple fronts against the total war waged by British forces upon an isolated and modest society. Despite the Empire’s overwhelming superiority in both weaponry and numbers, it failed to extinguish the revolution completely. The embers of revolt

⁹²⁷ Gurr’s seminal work, *Dynamics of Revolutionary Ignition*, examines the underlying mechanisms that precipitate revolutionary upheavals, positing that collective discontent, when coupled with perceived opportunities for systemic change, serves as a critical catalyst for mass mobilization. He argues that the interplay between relative deprivation and political instability fosters a combustible environment wherein even minor triggers can escalate into full-scale insurrections. By integrating psychological, structural, and situational factors, Gurr’s model provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the conditions under which revolutionary movements emerge and gain momentum. See: Ted Robert Gurr, "Dynamics of Revolutionary Ignition," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 14, no. 3 (1970): 329–348.

⁹²⁸ Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution*, rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 50–75, elucidates the transitional phase of revolutions from "chronic discontent" to "outbreak" through sudden catalytic events. Chapter 3 specifically examines the role of "triggering sparks"—such as financial crises or state repression—in accelerating revolutionary momentum.

⁹²⁹ Charles Tilly, in his seminal work *From Mobilization to Revolution*, examines the interplay between structural preconditions ("causes of ignition") and triggering moments ("moments of ignition") in revolutionary contexts. Drawing on *Political Opportunity Theory*, Tilly argues that revolutionary outbreaks are often precipitated by state weakness, particularly under conditions of elite fragmentation or external intervention. For a detailed analysis, see Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 180–200, where he systematically links revolutionary escalation to the erosion of state autonomy and capacity.

remained smoldering within the social, political, and intellectual structure of Omani society—especially among vital groups such as the youth, students, and working classes.

These groups were invigorated by winds of critique and new methodologies of political consciousness awakened by the spirit of Bandung, the momentum of Arab nationalism, and the revolutionary leadership of figures like Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir. They were equally inspired by ongoing liberation struggles such as the Algerian and Yemeni revolutions and by the solidarity of the Global South.

The revolutionary embers phase retained three defining elements: latency—the underlying potential for re-ignition; flammability—the volatility of the unresolved contradictions;⁹³⁰ and organic continuity—its embeddedness within non-state-centered social structures such as labor unions, professional associations, student groups, and transnational Arab solidarity networks linking Baghdad, Beirut, Damascus, and Cairo. These elements sustained the spirit of revolution and allowed it to draw renewed energy from national, regional, and international symbols and memories of resistance.

As Eric Hobsbawm observed in his analysis of revolutions, certain revolutionary episodes become enduring traditions, capable of shaping subsequent movements regardless of changing names or shifting historical contexts. He argued that the “revolutionary aftermath” is a key factor in shaping political consciousness.⁹³¹ This was clearly the case in Oman: the Green Mountain Revolution passed its symbolic and organizational mantle to the Dhofar Revolution (1965–1975), which was itself reignited by the embers and contradictions left unresolved by its predecessor. This

⁹³⁰ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: The Viking Press, 1963; repr., London: Penguin Classics, 2006), 35–40.

⁹³¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789–1848* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 120–25.

dissertation has sought to trace and analyze precisely those contradictions, which defined a pivotal decade in the struggle for liberation in modern Oman.

Even Gramsci may assist us in understanding how revolutions emerge anew from beneath the ashes of former struggles. His analysis suggests that the intersections between class conflict and cultural patterns possess the capacity to regenerate and deepen revolutionary momentum whenever historical conditions allow.⁹³² This dynamic was evident when the divisions and disputes among the leadership of the revolution in exile reached their peak. In response, the student, labor, and military vanguards scattered across exile communities seized the initiative and reframed their revolutionary project through new structures more attuned to the spirit of the historical moment they inhabited.

The fundamental cause of the revolution—the multifaceted and systematic repression perpetrated by the colonial regime and sustained through its protection and reproduction of absolutist rule in Oman—had not disappeared. Resistance, under such conditions, became what James C. Scott has termed the “hidden transcript” of rebellion.⁹³³ According to Scott, the persistence of resistance beneath the surface of repression enables revolutionary ideas to circulate covertly, to reforge alliances, and to reappear in forms more compelling to the wider populace.⁹³⁴

⁹³² Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 55–60.

⁹³³ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 80–85.

⁹³⁴ The boundaries and traces of the term “Revolutionary tinder” or “Revolutionary Embers” (*al-hashīm al-thawrī*) can be traced through seminal classical works that theorized it, albeit indirectly. It may be read through lenses such as revolutionary memory, permanent revolution, latent resistance, discontinuous revolutionary history, and unfinished revolutions—threads that weave a framework for understanding this concept. See, for example: Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984–1992), published in English as *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, 3 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996–1998); Leon Trotsky, *Перманентная революция* [*Permanent Revolution*] (Berlin: Granit, 1930), first published in German as *Die permanente Revolution* (Berlin: Grylewicz, 1930), English edition: *The Permanent Revolution*, trans. Max Shachtman (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1931); James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

And so, this dissertation has sought to construct a counter-narrative of resistance and revolution in Oman. Through this alternative historiography, it has attempted to trace the contours of a prolonged revolutionary condition—one whose links and continuities have been severed or obscured through erasure, marginalization, and the bias of colonial sources aligned with imperial power and its local proxies.

Across its chapters, the dissertation has examined the major transformations within this revolutionary condition, repositioning them within the broader history of Arab uprisings and anti-colonial struggle in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula. It has also sought to illuminate another form of resistance—not merely the one waged on battlefields, but the one inscribed upon the pages of history itself.

This dissertation has centered its inquiry on the Green Mountain Revolution (1955–1959), treating it as a paradigmatic event that reveals the historical significance of anti-colonial resistance in a country little known to many: Oman. It has attempted to analyze the historical, cultural, and religious roots of resistance, while shedding light on the political, economic, and social factors that drove Omanis to reject all forms of foreign domination. Elements such as geography, religion, and the Ibāḍī madhhab were central to sustaining a revolutionary condition in Oman during this period.

Through this recovered narrative of revolution, the study has excavated the layers of complexity, contestation, and contradiction that shaped the practice of national resistance in Oman. This resistance was not monolithic, nor was it unconditionally glorious. The purpose of returning to and re-reading such an episode in history is to draw nearer to the lived realities of ordinary people—and to restore the voices that were lost amid the deafening noise of empire. This dissertation is dedicated entirely to expressing what those marginalized revolutionaries of al-Jabal

al-Akhḍar were unable to record in the annals of history—after sacrificing their last drops of blood and their very freedoms, leaving behind only death, in isolation, on their proud and besieged mountain.

This study has sought to address four central questions:

1. Was the British presence in Oman an instance of colonial domination, or of strategic friendship?
2. Were the events experienced by Omanis during this period a genuine revolution or a mere tribal rebellion?
3. If it was indeed a revolution, was it part of a wider confrontation with international imperialism, or merely a local civil conflict unworthy of mention? And finally,
4. Why has this evolution faded from historical consciousness—was it subject to deliberate erasure, or merely neglected?

These questions have been critically explored through comparative and analytical discussion, grounded primarily in Omani primary sources—oral, archival, and testimonial—and then extended to British materials. Omani sources, in particular, have suffered systemic marginalization, subordinated to colonial archives, even by Omani and Arab historians themselves, under the pervasive influence of Western academia in shaping Gulf historiography—especially with regard to revolutions.

This study thus rests upon Omani and Arab oral history and archival evidence, with British sources consulted only secondarily and cautiously, in an effort to free the narrative from the authority of the colonial archive.

Through this effort, the researcher hopes to contribute to a broader scholarly trajectory—one dedicated to liberating the historiography of Oman and the Arabian Peninsula from colonial frameworks and dominant official narratives, which have long served the victors. These dominant narratives not only disregarded the defeated, but actively demonized them. They forcibly obscured the greater portion of the mountain of resistance against colonial occupation. That very occupation cloaked itself in the language of friendship, partnership, and cooperation, all in the service of renewing its presence and extending its exploitation of peoples, their wealth, and their destinies.

This thesis offers a deliberate intervention into the dominant historiography of revolution and resistance in Oman. By challenging the colonial archive as the primary framework through which the Green Mountain Revolution has been understood, it advances a methodological shift rooted in Omani oral testimony, indigenous memory, and subaltern resistance. In doing so, it seeks to decenter imperial narratives and reclaim the epistemic authority of those long silenced in the historical record.

The findings presented here open multiple avenues for further scholarly inquiry. Future research might explore the cultural afterlives of the Green Mountain and Dhofar revolutions—how they continue to resonate in memory, folklore, family histories, and political discourse. Equally promising is the need for deeper investigation into the interplay between Ibāḍī political theology and anti-colonial praxis, particularly in shaping non-Western visions of legitimacy, resistance, and governance. Ethnographic and archival fieldwork, especially among aging revolutionaries, could further enrich the collective memory of this foundational period.

The revolution's voice—once buried in the stone of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar—still echoes beneath the dust of forgotten archives. This study has attempted not only to hear that echo but to

amplify it, giving presence to what empire sought to erase. It is, at its core, an invitation to listen differently, to read against the grain, and to reclaim the mountain not only as a site of blood and struggle, but as a source of enduring historical meaning.

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Ṣawt al

Baḥrayn

al-Khamīla

Egypt

al-Ahrām

al-Jumhūriyya

al-Shabāb

Lebanon

al-Muḥarrir

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