

Ameen al-Rihani on Statecraft in Imamic Yemen

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ملخص:

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تقييم بعض الأفكار الأبيستمولوجيا والسياسية من خلال عالَمين مرموقين في المشرق العربي، هما: إدوارد سعيد الذي استقر في أمريكا وألبيرت حوراني الذي استقر في بريطانيا. فالأول ركز على أهمية مساهمات الناطقين بالعربية للدراسات للمنطقة؛ بينما كان انشغال الثاني منصبا على سياسات الوجهاء في الفترة الأخيرة من الإمبراطورية العثمانية. وللقيام بذلك، فإن هذا البحث يتقفي أسفار مهاجر لبناني أمين الريحاني عبر الجزيرة العربية في المراحل الأولى من القرن العشرين. إن تحليل الريحاني لفن حكم الإمامة في اليمن يعرض أدوات تقييم وصفات إدوارد سعيد وألبيرت حوراني.

وبالوقوف على التحديات الضمنية في قراءة متأنية لنصوص الريحاني، وبالرجوع إلى الزائرين الآخرين للمنطقة، فإن هذا البحث يكشف عن الطبيعة غير المترابطة للعادلة والإجراء البيروقراطي خلال فترة الإمامة. ويخلص أيضا إلى تقييم أهمية الوضع للإمام يحيى تحت التنظيمات العثمانية وما بقي من الميراث استمر لعقود. فضلا عن ذلك، فقد أكد هذا البحث الطرق التي بواسطتها تم تفضيل أشكال السلطة السياسية للإمام وإعادة الظهور بين الأجيال المتعاقبة للإدارة اليمنية.

Abstract:

The aim of this article is to assess some epistemological and political ideals from two prominent scholars of the Arab mashreq, Edward Said (based in the US) and Albert Hourani (based in the UK). Said emphasized the contributions of Arab speaker to the studies of the region; while Hourani was more concerned with the “politics of the notables” of the late Ottoman empire. This article follows the travels of the Lebanese emigrant Amin al-Rihani through the Arab peninsula during the early twentieth century. His analysis of the statecraft of Imamic Yemen offers a means to assess Said’s and Hourani’s prescriptions.

Acknowledging the challenges implicit in a close reading of Rihani’s texts, and turning to other visitors to the area, this article notes the unbounded nature of justice and the bureaucratic process during the Imamate. This article brings about an assessment of the the significance of the Imam Yehia’s position under the Ottoman tanzimat, and the legacy this left for the following decades by noting ways in which the forms of political authority the Imam favored, reappeared among the succeeding generations of Yemeni administrators.

Introduction

In 1911, Yemen became the first postcolonial Arab state. For some, in this ‘pristine’ corner of the Arab peninsula, ruler and ruled, poor as well as wealthy mixed with one another in an Edenic political community; this country was consistently identified as beyond the space of modernity—‘remote,’ the ‘Tibet of the Red Sea.’

In his *Covering Islam*, Edward Said emphasized the significance of language in order to bridge difference. Speaking of the US-based media coverage of the Iranian revolution, he bemoaned “the sorry truth that too many expert writers on the Islamic world did not command the relevant languages and hence had to depend on the press or other Western writers for their information.” Said also regretted observers’ tendency to avoid historical forces, thereby allowing timeless ‘tradition’ to stand in for political analysis. Keeping in mind the many who passed through the former Ottoman Empire’s Arab provinces did not speak local languages, I use the published observations of one early-twentieth century Arab traveler in the Yemen to assess Said’s observations.

Ameen al-Rihani stands out as an ‘outside insider,’ at home in both English and Arabic; he was an attentive observer of Imamic statecraft as well. This article will weave Rihani’s with others’ texts to identify distinctive practices as well as suggest putative sources for the document management practices that characterized Imam Yehia’s administration.

Rihani’s biography exemplifies the Lebanese muhajjar emigration to the United States. Born in Frayki, Lebanon during 1888, Rihani’s family left for New York, as other Lebanese Christians migrated to Boston and Detroit during the last years of the Ottoman Empire. His parents established a grocery store at 85 Washington Street in Greenwich Village, turning the shop’s accounting over to their son.

Struggling to reconcile his domestic responsibilities with literary ambitions, Rihani walked out at eighteen to join the Henry Jewett Theater Company's productions of 'Hamlet' and 'Macbeth' on its Midwest tour. Rihani also struggled to establish his credentials as a literary translator. He re-titled Arab poet Abu al-'Ala al-Ma'arri's *Luzumiyat* [from the original, *Luzum ma la Yalzam/The Necessity of What Is Unnecessary*] and published his translation. In the published edition, Rihani's source notes and comments refer to European literature: Shakespeare's 'Measure for Measure,' Tennyson, and Milton.

While the adolescent Rihani was able to quit his parents' grocery store, he never seems to have walked out on the English literary canon he mastered during his adolescence. Rihani acknowledged as much when he published notes from his trip to the Yemen as *Muluk al-Arab/Arab Kings* [1926]. In the preface to the Arabic-language memoir, he credited English literature with leading him to Arabism. Thomas Carlyle's *The Life of Mohammad* and Washington Irving's *The Tales of the Alhambra*, he wrote, inspired his readings into Arabic poetry and prose. In addition to this narrative, Rihani published *Arabian Peak and Desert* [1930] in English to describe one part of his trip, as well as *Ibn Sa'oud of Arabia; His People and His Land* (1928) and *Around the Coasts of Arabia* (1930) to describe another.

Despite Edward Said's generalizations about language, Rihani may have had more in common with English readers than with the Umayyads. Perhaps this issue of "native informants" is more complicated than it would appear.

Informant, Labor, Justice, and News

A self-taught litterateur, Rihani struggled to establish himself as a contributor to the Arabophone press of the US's eastern seaboard.¹ His

¹- For al-Rihani's significance to Arab mahjar literature in English, see Nadeem Naimy, *The Lebanese Prophets of New York* (Beirut: American University in

intellectual biographer described his contributions to *Khutba fi al-Tasahul al-Dini* (Philadelphia: al-Huda, 1901), *Nudbdha fi al-Thawra al-Faransiyya* (NY: al-Huda, 1902), *al-Muhalafa al-Thulathiyya* (NY: al-Huda, 1903) and *al-Mukari wa al-Kahin* (NY: al-Huda, 1904) as marginal works, having “hardly contributed much to his credit as a literary figure.”¹

It is Rihani’s travel narratives which take on particular interest. Rihani spent 1922 traveling throughout the Yemen, as a reporter and also an diplomat without portfolio. An unidentified benefactor appointed Rihani to visit each of the Arabian peninsula’s independent kingdoms. Expecting to serve as an envoy between Abdullah (Hashemite King of Jordan between 1923 and 1951), Abdul ‘Aziz ibn Sa’ud (who would become king of Saudi Arabia in 1932, ruling until 1953), and Yehia Hamid al-Din (who ruled Yemen between 1904 and 1948)—none of whom had ever met one another in person—Rihani’s contributions also wandered between English and Arabic literature.

Rihani’s voyage through the Arab world as an informal mediator turned into a private adventure of self-discovery. At the time of Rihani’s visit, Yemen was considered one of the most autarkic parts of the planet.² European states’ embassies and missions were not received, and private trade across the border was not permitted.³ Foreigners could

Beirut, 1985). For a social history of Lebanese emigration to the US, see Akram Khater, “The Mahjar,” *Inventing Home* (2001); Kemal Karpat, “Ottoman Emigration to America 1860-1914,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17:2 (May 1985); compare with Donald Quataert, “Economic Climate of the Young Turk Revolution,” *Journal of Modern History* (1979) and “Ottoman Workers & the State,” in Zachary Lochman, ed., *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles, Histories, Historiographies* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994).

¹ - Naimy, **Lebanese**, p. 20.

² - Quoted in Faiz S. Abu-Jaber, *American Arab Relations from Wilson to Nixon* (Washington DC: University Press of America, 1979), p. 180.

³ - Kiren Aziz Chaudhry, **The Price of Wealth: Economies and Institutions in the Middle East** (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 108. See ‘Report on

not enter the country except at the personal invitation of the Imam. Rihani waited weeks in British-controlled Aden for his visa.¹

Yemen's closure to foreigners hardly meant the country was isolated, though. Yemen shared a labor market with the bordering British crown colony, and, by the time Rihani's family left Lebanon for New York, significant numbers of Sunni men from the agricultural south of Yemen (as well as a few Shi'i men from the highlands) had become accustomed to leaving their homes for two-year stints in what was becoming one of the world's busiest trading centers.²

Just as Rihani's family took him into migration, family values also lead Yemenis over the border. These workers crossed -frequently, disregarding Aden's regulations- into the crown colony in order to "acquire a sum of money with which to assist the family, purchase land

Yemen,' in al-Rashid, *Yemen Enters the Modern World*. See Peterson, *Yemen*, p. 198; Manfred W. Wenner, *Modern Yemen, 1918-1966* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967); and Robert Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic* (Boulder: Westview, 1978). For smuggling into Ottoman and Imamite Yemen, see Harold Jacob, *Kings of Arabia: the rise and set of the Turkish sovereignty [sic] in the Arabian Peninsula* (London: Mills & Boon, 1923), p. 174; Douglas, *Free Yemeni Movement*, p. 47; Ahmed Saif, *A Legislature in Transition: The Yemeni Parliament*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 116; Caesar Farah, *The Sultan's Yemen: Nineteenth-century Challenges to Ottoman Rule* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), chapter 11; Isa Blumi, "Thwarting the Ottoman Empire: smuggling through the Empire's New Frontiers in Yemen and Albania" in Kemal Karpat, ed., *Ottoman Borderlands: issues, personalities and political changes* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2003).

¹- Geoffrey Nash, "Ameen al-Rihani" in ***Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopedia***, pp. 1011-1012. See also Arnold Hottinger, "Amin al-Rihani: The Self View of A Modern Arab" in **Marwan R. Buheiry**, ed. *Intellectual Life in the Arab East 1890-1939* (Beirut: American University in Beirut, Center for Arab and Middle East Studies, 1979), p. 105.

²- After the second world war, "Aden became one of the most important of the world's oil bunkering ports. Only London, Liverpool, and New York surpassed it in the bunkering trade." **Karl Pieragostini**, *Britain, Aden and South Arabia: abandoning Empire* (St. Martin's Press, 1991), p. 25.

or domestic animals, or to marry and set up a home.”¹ Most contracted as gang laborers with a straw boss (serang), someone with tribal connections that bridged Aden and the Yemen.

From the highlands, men and boys migrated to Aden’s booming labor markets on annual and seasonal bases. A small merchant community specialized in inland trade, as well.² ‘Foreigners’ from the Yemen came to form the bulk of Aden’s permanent population by the end of the nineteenth century, growing from 34,860 during 1881 to 44,079 in 1891. Such figures reflect the number of permanent migrants; certainly temporary migrations (not meriting entry in the British administration’s reports) grew even faster.³ Straw bosses contracted makeshift homes for those they employed. A British imperial inquiry later explained, “The wages they earn are received by the serang from the employer and are then paid over to the men after a number of deductions have been made. In some ways the deductions are legitimate since they are made in respect of food supplied to the men by the serang directly or through agents operating eating houses, loans, the hire of beds and remittances back to their families. But since he [the

¹ Aden Colony. **Annual Report of the Department of Labor and Welfare**, 1953, p. 3; see also Captain F. M Hunter, *An Account of the British Settlement and of Aden in Arabia* (London: Trübner & Co., 1877), p. 27. For illegal immigration, see Aden Colony. **Annual Report of the Department of Labor and Welfare**, 1954, p. 8. **Most incarcerated youth were Yemenis in violation of immigration regulations**; see Aden, Arabia. *Report on the Administration of the Aden Prison*; Year ending 31 December 1947, p. 6.

² Captain F. M Hunter, *An Account of the British Settlement and of Aden in Arabia* (London: Trübner & Co., 1877), p. 27; G. Wyman Bury, *Arabia Infelix or the turks in yamen*, (London: MacMillan and Co., 1915); Harold Jacob, *Kings of Arabia: the rise and set of the Turkish sovranty [sic] in the Arabian Peninsula* (London: Mills & Boon, 1923), p. 162; Aden, Arabia. *Report on the Administration of the Aden Prison*; Year ending 31 December 1947, p. 8; Aden Colony. **Annual Report of the Department of Labor and Welfare**, 1953, p. 2; Aden Colony. **Annual Report of the Department of Labor and Welfare**, 1954, p. 3; Aden Colony, *Census Report*, 1955, p. 9.

³ Gavin, *Aden under British Rule*, quoted in Chaudhry, *Price of Wealth*, p. 113.

laborer] never handles his entire wages the worker never knows what he is being charged for these services.”¹

Unlike Rihani (whose family grocery store had a fixed address), most of these workers were effectively homeless. The census of Aden equivocated, “owing to the almost unique climate of Aden, where the temperature rarely drops below 70 degrees Fahrenheit at night, even in the cool season, and where the average rainfall is two inches per annum, houses are less a necessity than almost anywhere else in the world. As a result of this and also of the large influx in search of work of young male labor from the Yemen, there has always been a comparatively large number of persons who avail themselves of these conditions.” As early as 1877, the Yemeni migrants- described as “coal-coolies and laborers”- who were “not married, or have not their families with them; these live in messes or parties of fellow-tribe or countrymen, eating their meals in the Mokhbazah [bakery] or cook-shops or in the open, as they find themselves when darkness falls.”² The census taker went on to explain how homeless Yemenis fared in Aden on a day-to-day basis. “Many of them store their personal belongings in a box which they leave with a shopkeeper, eat in open-air restaurants and hire a bed which they pull out at night on to any convenient open space or on the pavements of smaller streets.”³

¹ Aden. Commission of Inquiry into the causes of trade disputes which occurred in the colony during March 1956. Report. P. 9. For the serang system characteristic of pre-war Aden, see Bury, *Arabia Infelix or the turks in yamen*, (London: MacMillan and Co., 1915). Douglas describes the serang system of labor brokers to be ‘falling apart’ by the mid-1950s; p. 209. As part of this process of ‘falling apart’ see the belated attempt to implement the International Labor Organization’s Employment (Indigenous Workers) Convention of 1939, see J. V. M. Shields, D. L. Davies. *The Laws of Aden containing the ordinances of the colony of Aden*, 1955, chapter 31, “Contracts of Employment (Indigenous Workers),” p. 398.

² Hunter, *Account of the British Settlement*, p. 28. See also Harold Jacob, *Kings of Arabia: the rise and set of the Turkish sovranity [sic] in the Arabian Peninsula* (1923), p. 162.

³ Aden Colony, *Census Report*. 1955, p. 20.

While they were in Aden, homeless Yemeni workers were outside the law. Just British administrators described the migrant workers slept under the crown colony's stars, homeless Yemeni workers had no recourse to the law in the British Crown Colony. Zaydis -as Shi'ia Muslims- were also denied the protections of the Ottoman Empire's Sunni courts, which followed the Hanafi interpretation of Sunni Islamic law.¹ The Imam Yehia Bin Mohd Bin Hamid al-Din (who ruled Yemen between 1904 and 1948) retained responsibility for administering law among those following the Zaydi interpretation of Shi'a Islamic law.²

Rihani described the head of the Zaydi state presiding over a judicial session in San'a's open air. Those responsible for upholding Zaydi law were without official capacity in the post-Ottoman state. Instead of uniforms, soldiers conscripted from the tribes daubed themselves with indigo to mark themselves as public servants on the occasions they provided security for public administration.

There, under the Tree of Justice, was the Image of Perfection, seated on a stool, with one indigo soldier to his right bearing high the sword of State and another to his left holding over his head one of the Imamic umbrellas. Before him sat cross-legged on the ground a scribe, and around him was a crowd of people of every rank and class, in turbans and shawls of all colors as well as in rags, waiting to be heard. And everyone was heard. Quietly, the pristine scene rolled before my eye and to the satisfaction, evidently, of the Imam and the people.³

¹ Mohammed Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (New York, 2002) addresses "homeless texts."

² In Zaydi doctrine, **Imams must possess religious knowledge** (ijtihad) and descent from either of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib's two sons. See Jere L. Bacharach, *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia* (London: Routledge, 2006), vol 2, p. 875.

³ Ameen al-Rihani, *Arabian Peak and Desert: Travels in al-Yaman* (London: Constable, 1930), p. 104.

Even as Rihani's characterized the Imam's 'homeless' justice in San'a's open air as inclusive ('a crowd of people of every rank and class'), his notes retained ambiguous ties to English-language Orientalism. We might take as a "test case" his texts on the austerity of the Imam's political power.

Like Imamic justice, records of the Yemeni state were 'homeless.' Rihani reported that no archive cared for the state papers of Yemen. The Imam's offices in San'a' had "no furniture, no desks, no chairs; the secretaries sit cross-legged on cushions and write with the knee supporting the left hand, in which the paper is held. As for State documents, this being a Government without red tape, the archives are reduced to a portfolio which is carried under the arm of one of the secretaries."¹ While Yemen's state documents might have been as homeless as Zaydi law, Rihani was comfortably settled. Remarks on Imamic austerity were oft-expressed among European writers.² Rihani's twentieth-century observations about the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, find accommodation in nineteenth-century travelers' notes from the Ottoman capital, Istanbul.³ So while the Imam's justice may have been 'homeless,' Rihani's observations were not.⁴

¹ - Rihani, *Arabian Peak*, p. 220.

² - See also Thomas Philipp, "The Autobiography in Modern Arab Literature and Culture," *Poetics Today* 14:3 (1993); David Commins, "Arab Travelers and Western Civilization," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31:4 (November 1999).

³ - Particularly Charles Pertusier, *Picturesque Promenades in and near Constantinople and on the Waters of the Bosphorus* (London: Sir Richard Phillips and Co., 1820), pp. 24-5; S. W. Vane, *A Steam Voyage to Constantinople: by the Rhine and the Danube in 1840-41, and to Portugal, Spain etc in 1839, to which is annexed, the author's correspondence with Prince Metternich, Lords Ponsonby, Palmerston, etc., in two volumes* (London: Henry Colburn, 1842), p. 237; Charles White, *Three Years in Constantinople; or, Domestic Manners of the Turks in 1844* (London: Henry Colburn, 1846), pp. 224-225.

⁴ - Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Verso, 1979) asserts that this structure of knowledge was based on citation rather than direct observation.

Yet Rihani's observations also diverge from those of his predecessors.

Even as he noted that the Imam's office -like any Ottoman diwan -was under furnished, Rihani acknowledges the Imam Yehia was well-briefed.

With strict controls over strangers' access to Yemen, the state also controlled the press that disseminated news from overseas among the residents. The head of state prevented foreign newspapers and magazines from entering the country; he banned residents from owning radio receivers, retaining only an antiquated telegraph to facilitate the capital's direct contact with distant parts of his kingdom.¹

The sole domestic periodical was the official newspaper, al-Imam, supplemented for a brief time by a weekly magazine, the Majallat al-Hikmat al-Yamaniyya [Journal of Yemeni Wisdom].² Even though the Imam exercised strict control over his subjects' reading matter while they were in the borders of the country, Rihani went to pains to emphasize that this particular head of state was as well-connected to news from around the globe as his subjects exchanging news in Aden's coffeehouses.

Rihani demonstrated the Imam's awareness of global events by describing the daily briefs that brought regional and global news to him:

[Yehia] keeps himself informed of the principal events of the world, without having to read all the newspapers of Cairo and Damascus and Baghdad, even of New York and Rio [de] Janeiro (Arabic, of course), which are sent to him. His secretaries read them

¹ - Douglas, **Free Yemeni Movement**, p. 12.

² - Douglas, **Free Yemeni Movement**, p. 12. For another perspective on the late Ottoman press, see Kemal Karpat, "Knowledge, Press, and the Popularization of Islamism," in **The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith and Community in the Late Ottoman State** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

and give him a summary of the news. Nor is he in this alone, as will be seen later, like the prime minister of an Empire or the president of an American Corporation.

His questions considering the distance of San'a' from the world were surprising. Has Ireland achieved her independence? Will Curzon succeed Lloyd George? Where is Zaghloul Pasha now? Has Mustapha Kamel made a separate treaty with the French? And is he receiving much assistance from America?¹

Since Rihani paid such close attention to the Imamate's offices' austerity, so we will next turn to those passages in his narrative in which he describes bureaucratic administration. His eyes followed papers and petitions that entered the country from abroad (as well as those delivered from hinterland towns) as they passed under the Imam's pen before entering the state's bureaucracy:

When the diwan opens, a soldier comes in with a bag which he empties on the carpet before the First Secretary; this heap of papers, rolled like cigarettes and cigars, is the mail, and Siyed Abdullah, opening it, disposes of every letter or petition, according to its importance, by either giving it to one of the scribes direct[ly], with a reply briefly noted upon it, or by laying it aside for the consideration of the Imam. But every letter written, no matter how unimportant, is placed before the Couch of State, and His Eminence, after reading it and adding a word at the end in his own hand (the date or his initials, a sign that he has passed it), gives it to the soldier before him, who applies to it the seal and then hands it to the addressing scribe.²

Drawing attention to the documents' movement through the Imam's office, the traveler represents the flow of resources towards the

¹ - Rihani, *Arabian Peak*, p. 99.

² - Rihani, *Arabian Peak*, p. 221.

state. Rihani's original observations appear to have inspired subsequent scholars.

Contrary to a widely accepted view that Imamic absolutism functioned without a bureaucracy, Kiren Aziz Chaudhry pointed out that its extractive agencies were highly developed. Functionaries responsible for collecting taxes made up over 60 percent of the state's employees.¹ For Chaudhry, the tribal structure of Zaydi northern Yemen prevented the Imam from instituting conscription, and lead him to pursue a tax state that had no permanent army; eventually, the Imam turned to trade monopolies as a substitute for taxation.²

Rihani diverged from his European predecessors, in noting that the state's demands on its servants were hardly restricted to daylight.³ No time of day was specifically allotted to tasks considered 'public' (citizenship, civic belonging) to the exclusion of those allotted to 'private' activities (leisure, sexuality, reproduction, children's upbringing).⁴

About midnight, the telegraph clerk comes with a packet of telegrams, which are given precedence to the business in hand. An hour after, the flourish of the drum is heard, and as soon as the cannon is fired, a little later, the assistant secretaries, without asking permission, begin to sidle out one after the other. Their work is done. But the Imam and the First Secretary remain sometimes until the early dawn-until the work of the day, in fact, is entirely finished.⁵

¹ - Chaudhry, **The Price of Wealth**, p. 106.

² - Chaudhry, **Price of Wealth**.

³ - Bernard Lewis equates 'modernity' with adoption of the 24-hour clock; see **What Went Wrong?** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), "Time, Space, and Modernity." Compare with "The clock, not the steam-engine, is the key-machine of the modern industrial age: even today no other machine is so ubiquitous," Lewis Mumford, **Technics and Civilization** (NY: Harcourt, 1934), p. 14.

⁴ - See Zubeida, "The Public and the Private," unpaginated.

⁵ - Rihani, **Arabian Peak**, p. 224.

To some, the ‘space of the state’ seemed to be co-extant with the Imam’s personal presence; here, too, Rihani appears to have been influential. Madawi al-Rasheed suggests that the presence of the Imam’s authority and the applicability of the law defined the tribes’ place in a shifting moral geography of obedience (ta’ah) and dissention (fitna).

Sheila Carapico and Richard Tutwiler blame the Imam’s excessive personal authority for restricting Yemeni commercial classes’ private accumulation of wealth and property and emerging as a modern ‘middle class.’¹ For Martha Mundy, the dynastic house created modern ministries only to be headed by the Imam’s brothers, sons, and cousins.² J. Leigh Douglas emphasized that the Imam took personal responsibility for every aspect of state affairs; if the government at San’a’ had been divided into ministries, these were “of a very perfunctory nature” and the bureaucracy never developed an autonomous presence.³

The Lebanese-American who had earlier written such platitudes as: “weak and oppressed nations are fundamentally spiritual; strong nations are, as a rule, chiefly materialistic”⁴ may have reaped immaterial benefits from his trip; among them, perhaps, a fixed abode in Arab letters. His year in the Yemen became an aspect of his ‘finding himself’ as an original observer.

¹ - Sheila Carapico, Richard Tutwiler. **Yemeni Agriculture and Economic Change: Case Studies of Two Highland Regions** (San’a’: American Institute for Yemeni Studies, 1981).

² - Martha Mundy, **Domestic Government: Kinship, Community, and Polity in North Yemen** (London: I. B. Tauris, 1995). p. 2.

³ - J. Leigh Douglas, **The Free Yemeni Movement, 1935-1962**, Giovanni Chimienti, ed. (Beirut, AUB, 1987) p. 12.

⁴ - Ameen Rihani. **The Path of Vision**; Pocket Essays of East and West (NY: James White & Co., 1921), p. 9.

The Archives of the Imamate

Rihani played on European observers' expectations about the materiality of communication in the Yemen. G. Wyman Bury had been a civil servant in Aden, on the Imamate's borders, who took part in the Anglo-Turkish commission of 1902 which set the boundary between the two empires.¹ For Bury, Yemeni documents were distinctive for the poor quality of the paper on which they were written, a characteristic color of ink, and evident marks of Ottoman and Islamic belonging.

Describing a *laissér-passer* made out in his name and that of his wife, Bury noted:

It was written in red ink on inferior stationery, headed with the crescent, and bore the Ottoman official seal, familiar to all who have ever seen a *piaster*. It was signed, 'Yehia who trusts in God; Emir of the faithful.'²

For Bury, the Imam Yehia's 'inferior stationery' reflected the poverty of life beyond modernity. The Imam's signature, 'Emir of the faithful,' represented -as it appeared to the Englishman- anachronistic reference to the rule of God's law on this materialistic earth.³ This is

¹ - For the 1902 boundary commission, see also Ameen Rihani, **Around the Coasts of Arabia** (London: Constable, 1930), p. 306; Tom Hickinbotham, *Aden* (London: Constable and Co., 1958), pp. 55-56. For an analogy between the boundaries that divide countries and those which separate men's interests from those of women, see Khouri, "Drawing Boundaries and Defining Spaces," in **Women, the Family, & Divorce Laws in Islamic History**, Amira Sonbol, ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

² - See G. Wyman Bury, *Arabia Infelix or the Turks in Yamen* [sic] (London: Mac Millan, 1915), p. 159.

³ - For others, the Imam's documents represented, not the rule of God's law earth, but local Zaydi resistance to Ottoman authority. Compare: "The Zeidi Imam takes the style of Amir al-Muminin, or Commander of the Faithful. The Turks forbade this title, and for a time the Imam complied. The legend is inscribed on his seal, which is red. His letters are sprinkled with red ochre to show he has succeeded to the throne of the old Himyaritic Princes of the province, whose House-flag was red, and their name indicates this color." Jacob, *Kings of Arabia*, p. 109.

not so distant from Rihani's distinction between "spiritual" and "materialistic" nations.

Unlike the European travelers, Rihani was a native speaker of Arabic; next, we will turn to diction.¹ Rihani noted that 'public space' was not restricted to the shadow of the Imam's umbrella, writing paper held on secretaries' knees or the portfolio that enclosed government archives. Rihani described how state servants mingled public and private. A public servant could carry petitions to officials on his person, mixing items of personal significance with state papers.

The Chamberlain Saiyed Ali Zabarah, who was visiting us one day, lingered a while to overhaul his papers. He took out of his bosom pocket about twenty little rolls—cigarettes—and as many out of the folds of his turban, where he also sticks his fountain pen and his araak (tooth brush). He then began to separate the white portion from the written, and tear up the latter. One of these was the following: 'O Saiyed Ali, two [riyals] I beg/and two [riyals], and two more in thy cheer/for butter, wheat and [qat] in [Ramadan]--/ Everything in [Ramadan] is dear.'²

Rihani deviated from earlier texts in noting how public and private overlapped in the Imam's office. Even with such original observations of the Imamate's distinct paper trail, Rihani continued to shelter under Orientalist travel narratives and their distinctive forms. Translating a rhyme about Ramadan price hikes from Arabic, Rihani makes the lines into what sounds like an eighteenth century English Christmas carol. In an exchange of petitions and documents that paralleled the open-air sessions under the Tree of Justice, it seemed to Rihani that all levels of society (from the highest to the most modest)

¹ - Lila Abu-Lughod describes an ethnographer in such a position as a 'halfsie.' See the introduction to her *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

² - Rihani, *Arabian Peak*, p. 225.

used similar vocabularies. Military terms did not preclude references to animal husbandry.

This economy in paper teaches also an economy in words. Some of the petitions which the Imam receives from his subjects are not more than three or four lines. In one of these, which I have seen, the petitioner complains of his neighbor's donkey, who is always kicking against his wall at night, and the Imam orders that the donkey be chained from the hour of the first cannon till dawn.¹

While Bury drew attention to the poor quality of Imamic office supplies, Rihani noted the ways by which Yemeni bureaucratic procedures reflected the country's independence. In much the same way as the Imam and his administrators felt free to overstep public/private boundaries, so too did the documentation regime of the Imamate transgress the precedents of Ottoman statecraft. Rihani described an 'the economy of paper' in the Imam's offices in San'a', as well as Yemeni market towns such as Ibb.

The economy of paper in the Imamdom reaches the sublime. Seldom one sees an envelope, seldom a full sheet of stationery—the scrap is the rule, and very rare is the exception. The first instance we had of this was at Ibb, when we received a telegram from the Ameer of Mawia written on the back of a tax coupon of the Dowlah [Ottoman Imperial state]. At Zamar, too, we received a message from the 'Amel of Ibb,' written on the back of a fragment of a petition presented to 'His Excellency the Kaimakam of Heraz.' Evidently the Imam Yehia, who won 'a wealth' (khairat) of goods and cannons from the Turks, turned their archives also into service. Books, coupons, petitions, documents of every sort, they have all been cut into scraps to use in every department of the Government.²

¹ - Rihani, *Arabian Peak*, p. 225.

² - Rihani, *Arabian Peak*, p. 224.

Here, too, Rihani breaks with contemporaries writing from Britain's empire. Bury simply noted that the Imam didn't spend much money on paper; Rihani noted the reuse of Ottoman archives in the service of the Imamic state. Then, he went on to note the boundaries such pieces of paper imposed on bureaucratic elites' expression. Such an economy of communication not only saved paper: it also encouraged a distinctly poetic economy of diction.

A soldier then came in with a message from the Imam, written on a scrap three inches square, and Sayid Ali replied to it on a scrap not as big. His Eminence is laconic, and his officials, if they want to rise in his favor, try to emulate him. The standard model is the thumb-nail note, with just enough blank space on the sides—the Imam is very fond of writing in circles—for the reply.¹

However cheap his notepaper, correspondents respected the Imam's handwriting as if it were his physical presence. Such an economy of diction was not restricted to exchanges among Yemen's ruling elites. This Imamic poetics reflected popular forms of expression, uniting 'people of every rank and class.'² In addition, Rihani emphasized such an 'economy of paper' served to personalize official communications. Rather than offering refutation in the formality of impersonal address between ruler and ruled, a distinctive form of communication joined those who wielded political power with those they governed -just as exchanges of notes between friends- in an intimate exchange of words and paper.

¹ - Rihani, **Arabian Peak**, p. 225. For more on the Yemen's distinctive circular writing, see Brinkley Messick, **The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society** (Berkeley: University of California, 1993), chapter five.

² - Ameen al-Rihani, **Arabian Peak and Desert: Travels in al-Yaman** (London: Constable, 1930), p. 104.

Only in foreign correspondence are envelopes and regular stationery used. But in the country, the Government itself has set the example- a Government without red tape, without pomp, without official affectation, without luxuries. A messenger brings you 'a cigarette,' which you find is from the Imam, and in his own hand. After reading it, you tear off the blank portion, and write your reply upon it. Should you ever receive a communication in an envelope, you cut it up and use the inside part for correspondence, and should your correspondent be an intimate friend, and his message written on a slip as big as a visiting card, you write your answer in the blank space, though it be as small as a thumbnail, and send it back to him. Waste is reprehensible; extravagance is condemned.¹

Even the Yemen's distinctly egalitarian form of communication not without its own hierarchies. The economy of paper required one person to fit his or her expression in the space left by the other. A French medical doctor posted to the Yemen, Claudie Fayein later noted that the ruler's ex cathedra statements took unquestioned precedence over any other person's self-expression.²

It was a pleasure to adopt the stylistic forms of the grand siècle in addressing the King. But here I must mention that His Majesty himself is accustomed to note down on each request the decision taken, and since it is unthinkable that his august handwriting appear beneath that of his subjects, one must begin in the middle of the page, so that his reply may be written above.³

In an office in which work stretched from dawn to midnight, the hierarchy of written communication was unbounded in tense. It

¹ - Rihani, **Arabian Peak**, p. 224.

² - See also Marina de Regt, **Pioneer or Pawns? Women Health Workers and the Politics of Development in Yemen** (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press 2007).

³ - Claudie Fayein. **A French Doctor in the Yemen**. Translated by Douglas McKee (London: Robert Hale, 1957), p. 42.

governed all Imamic communications- present, future, and subjunctive-remaining foremost even when the ruler had not yet communicated, but merely wanted to retain the option of communication.

Bury and Fayein's observations by no means contradict those of Rihani. Rihani found the Imam's bureaucracy well-connected to news from around the globe, and he found state servitors among whom minors were permitted full responsibility over the state's dues. He found an administration in which servants of the state mingled public and private affairs, and he noted that citizens felt free to call unto the state to satisfy their private needs in the terms of a distinctly poetic economy of diction.

"Politics of the Notables"

Sometimes, old ideas are worth revisiting. A prominent historian of the Arab world ventured some general observations about bureaucratic elites and modernity forty years ago. I propose to assess these ideas' power with regard to the Yemen Rihani visited, as well as the antecedents that made what he saw possible.

Albert Hourani introduced his idea of the 'politics of the notables' in a chapter he wrote for an edited volume on modernization in the Middle East.¹ These were the politics of representation and communication, whereby eighteenth- and nineteenth-century elites mediated between provincial populations and centers of political authority in Istanbul.²

¹ - Albert Hourani, "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables," in **William Polk and Richard Chambers, eds., The Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

² - For late Ottoman Arab nationalism in the mashreq, see **W. L. Cleveland, Islam Against the West: Shaikib Arslan and the Campaign for Islamic Nationalism** (London: Saqi Books, 1985); C. E. Dawn, "The Formation of Pan-Arab Ideology in the Interwar Years," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (1988); Rashid

Hourani's 'politics of the notables' influenced a generation of scholars of the Middle East. Mounira Charrad, Robert Hunter, Rashid Khalidi, Rudi Matthee, and Thomas Philipp are only a few of those who continue to employ a vocabulary indebted to Hourani.¹ For each, 'notables' are an important category for analysis of local politics during the Ottoman era. Carter Findley, Thomas Naff, and Christian Windler emphasize that the Empire's provinces were excluded from a diplomatic system which was, after all, restricted to states that enjoyed full sovereignty. For Findley, Naff, and Windler, bureaucratic modernity upset the delicate balance between the center and periphery in favor of the center, because the practices of western diplomatic practices had the effect of strengthening the Ottoman capital at the expense of an Arab periphery.²

Khalidi, "Arab Nationalism: Historical Problems in the Literature," **American Historical Review** (1991).

¹ - Mounira Charrad, **States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Elliott Colla, "'Non, no! Si, si!' Commemorating the French Occupation of Egypt," *MLN* 118 (2003); F. Robert Hunter, "The Making of a Notable Politician: Muhammad Sultan Pasha" **International Journal of Middle East Studies** (1983); Rashid Khalidi, "Ottoman Notables in Jerusalem: Nationalism and Other Options," *MW* 83, 1/2 (1/4-1994) 1-18; Rudi Matthee, "A Historical Assessment of Basra," presentation at "Borders, Battles, & Cultural Bonds: A Historical and Political Perspective on Gulf Societies," **University of Pennsylvania**, October 2005; Thomas Philipp, "Bilād al-Shām in the Modern Period: Integration into the Ottoman Empire and New Relations with Europe," **Arabica** 1.1 (2004); Christian Windler, "Representing a State in a Segmentary Society: French Consuls in Tunis from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration," **Journal of Modern History** 73 (June 2001); Sami Zubeida, "The Public and the Private in Islamic Law and Society," <http://www.aku.edu/ismc/samizubaida.pdf>.

² - Carter Findley, **Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789-1922** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Carter Findley, **Ottoman Civil Officialdom: A Social History** (Princeton NY 1989); Thomas Naff, "Ottoman Diplomatic Relations with Europe in the Eighteenth Century: Patterns and Trends," in **Thomas Naff and Roger Owen, eds., Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History** (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1977); Christian Windler, "Representing a State in a Segmentary Society: French Consuls

Hourani invoked a predecessor -Max Weber- in order to conceptualize urban politics in the Ottoman Empire's Arab provinces. Even as he derived his idea about the 'politics of the notables' from Max Weber's idea of 'patriciate,' he distinguishing his idea from Weber's by introducing a sense of balance. Notables' access to Imperial authority (which granted them leadership among Arabs) and their place in Arab society (which the powers delegated to them by Ottoman authorities assured them) offset one another; this equilibrium served as the basis for their power.

Historians of the Arab world after 1860 (Hourani explained), note at that point in time "we are entering the modern age of the continuously and self-consciously changing society." Hourani suggested that any history of local elites after that date ought to be written from diplomatic and consular records, since market forces had supplanted the power of the Sublime Porte. Historians were welcome to supplement these with indigenous literary sources, should they wish.

Hourani, however, later backed away from the concept. Towards the end of his life, Hourani acknowledged in an interview that if he had Arab Thought in the Liberal Age to write again, he would write it differently, confessing that he may have neglected to draw sufficient attention to agency at the periphery.¹ So where does that leave his "politics of notables?"

Does it upset his original conceptual balance between center and periphery? Or did the original ideal leave sufficient room for Arab elites' strategies? Statecraft in Imamic Yemen offers an additional opportunity to assess a conceptual framework indebted to Hourani. Did

in Tunis from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration," **Journal of Modern History** 73 (2001).

¹- Albert Hourani, "The Rise of Arab Nationalism Reconsidered." **International Journal of Middle East Studies** 26 (1994): 201-22.

‘the politics of the notables’ yielded the forms of statecraft Rihani recorded in 1922?

Hourani’s idea of “politics of the notables” can be tested with regard to the presiding judges and jurors which the Imam chose after 1911. Was theirs a politics of mediation and representation? Or did they exercise agency, recreating forms of authority which the Imam had enjoyed in the market towns of Yemen’s periphery?

News and Notables’ Politics

Certainly, many scholars draw attention to local agency influencing the late Imperial policy of military and administrative modernization. The Ottoman tanzimat or ‘reorganization’ was a regularization of law marked by new commercial and penal codes as well as a rationalization of procedures (including a Provincial Administration Law as well as reform of the judicial system).¹ Jon Mandaville emphasizes the Yemeni uprising Yehia Hamid al-Din led forced the 1898 Reform Committee to turn government spending from ‘reform programs and economic projects,’ to ‘pacification measures.’

¹ - Yorguy Haikin, **Yemen Arab Republic: A Country Law Study Prepared for the Department of the Navy, Office of the Judge Advocate General** (1985), p. 39. For the tanzimat in Yemen, see Paul Dresch, Tribes, **Government and History in Yemen** (Oxford 1993). For other Arab provinces’ encounter with modernity during the tanzimat, see Hanna Batatu, **The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq; A Study of Iraq’s Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba’thists and Free Officers** (Princeton: Princeton, 1978); Beshara Doumani, “Endowing Family: Waqf, Property Devolution, and Gender in Greater Syria, 1800 to 1860,” **Comparative Studies in Society and History** 40:1 (January 1998); Phillipp, “Bilâd al-Shâm;” Eugene Rogan, “Bringing the State Back In; **The Limits of Ottoman Rule in Jordan, 1840-1910,**” in Eugene Rogan and Tariq Tell, eds., **Village, Steppe and State: The Social Origins of Modern Jordan** (London: British Academic Press, 1994); Eugene Rogan, “Asiret Mektebi: Abdulhamid II’s School for Tribes,” **International Journal of Middle East Studies** 28:1 (February 1996); Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, “The Transformation of Land Tenure and Rural Social Structure in Central and Southern Iraq,” **International Journal of Middle East Studies** 15:4 (November 1963).

Then, the 1904 Mamduh commission returned the balance of expenses from programs institutionalizing force to promoting ‘progress and civilization.’¹ In order to appease local elites, the central authorities adopted an Ottoman version of the ‘civilizing mission’ by importing Egyptian cotton seeds to improve Yemeni yields.²

Local agency includes that of Ottoman governors. Isa Blum finds documents in Ottoman archives to be characterized by a rhetoric of inherent “superiority [that] silenced local Yemeni resistance;” then, he reads between the lines in order to follow local actors’ contributions to modernization.³ Thomas Kühn takes one step beyond the archives, in order to point out how Ottoman reforms represented “new forms of producing and controlling space, both in the urban context and on the provincial level as a whole.”⁴ Kühn concentrates on ‘urban renewal’ in the Yemeni capital city, San’a’ on the eve of the Da’an treaty. Drawing attention from Istanbul to the power of the periphery, these historians may be stepping away from Hourani’s idea of local notables’ power stemming from a “balance” between center and periphery.

During the years leading up to the Da’an treaty, these governors tried to introduce new technologies to initiate tribesmen to Ottoman

¹ - Jon Mandaville, “Memduh Pasha and Aziz Bey: Ottoman Experience in Yemen,” in **B. R Pridham, ed. Contemporary Yemen** (London: Croom Helm, 1984), pp. 21-22. For military aspects of the tanzimat in the Arab provinces, see Hasan Kayali. **Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918** (Berkeley: California, 1997), p. 32.

² - Jon Mandaville, “Memduh Pasha and Aziz Bey: Ottoman Experience in Yemen,” in **B. R. Pridham, ed., Contemporary Yemen** (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 23.

³ - Isa Blum, “Thwarting the Ottoman Empire: Smuggling Through the Empire’s New Frontiers in Yemen and Albania” in **Kemal Karpas, ed., Ottoman Borderlands: Issues, Personalities, and Political Changes** (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2003), p. 260.

⁴ - Thomas Kühn, “Ordering Urban Space in Ottoman Yemen, 1872-1914,” in Jens Hanssen, Thomas Philipp, and Stefan Weber, **The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire** (Beirut 2002), p. 329.

law, thereby bringing Yemen into the ranks of 'advanced countries.'¹ The Suez Canal and Hejaz Railroad served as key emblems for military and commercial progress; Yakup Bektas suggests telegraphy was introduced to Yemen in this spirit.² According to Isa Blumi, such a characteristic mentality reflected the Empire's administrators' enthusiasm for the 'civilizing mission.'³ According to Ussama Makdisi, such a rhetoric of inherent Ottoman superiority attempted to silence local resistance.'⁴

Even when other parts of the country were invisible to them, bureaucrats from Istanbul could see the way to the port city of Hodeida clearly.⁵ From Istanbul, the highway that linked San'a' to the port (as well as proposals for a railway that would run alongside it) was the road to transformation of the 'tribal' Yemen.⁶ When the Imam Yehia's resisted Ottoman rule at the end of 1910, forces under his command were successful in blocking the road that connected the provincial capital with its port.⁷

¹ - For another example of how Ottoman institutions facilitated nationalisms in the Empire's periphery, see Maria Todorova, "The Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans," in Carl L. Brown, ed., *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

² - Yakup Bektas, "The Sultan's Messenger; Cultural Constructions of Ottoman Telegraphy," *Technology and Culture* 41:4 (October 2000). See also S. Shahvar, *The Formation of the Indo-European Telegraph Line: Britain, the Ottoman Empire and Persia 1855-1865* (1997), et al.

³ - Blumi, "Thwarting the Ottoman," p. 257.

⁴ - See also Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," *American Historical Review* 107:3 (2002).

⁵ - Note images in the Abdul Hamid II photo albums, in the collection of the Library of Congress.

⁶ - Jon Mandaville, "Memduh Pasha and Aziz Bey: Ottoman Experience in Yemen," in B. R. Pridham, ed., *Contemporary Yemen* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 23.

⁷ - Hasan Kayali. *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley: California, 1997), p. 110. For a general discussion of resistance to urban authority, see Schilcher, "Violence in rural Syria," *Peasants & Politics* (1991); Donald Quataert, "Rural Unrest in the Ottoman Empire," *Peasants & Politics* (1991).

Others emphasize that such were more evident in some parts of the periphery than it was in others. Arab ‘bandits’ who resisted ‘progress’ were denied agency--although they may have been far more responsible for the changes in the regions under question than the state was willing to admit.¹ In this way, they can return agency to local elites and coalitions that were silenced by the rhetoric of Ottoman superiority.²

While Bury described Suq al-Khamis as a crude village, it seems administration over such market towns proved intrinsic to Yehia’s independence from the Empire. However (having blocked the highway to Hodeida) Zaydi liberation from a Sunni empire did not leave the Imamic state free from traces of Imperial administration. Imamate practices of statecraft did not simply derive from the tanzimat in a deterministic manner; individuals participated in the creation of procedures and responses to them.

Yehia’s revolt led to proclamation of the Da’an treaty that recognized Zaydi legal independence from Ottoman Sunni orthodoxy. After 1911, the Imam was to have exclusive jurisdiction over of all court cases in predominantly-Zaydi San’a’; in the outlying districts of ‘Amran, Hajja, Kaukaban, Haraz (excepting S’afan and among the Beni Mukatil), in ‘Anis, Dhamar, Yarim, and Rada.

In addition, Yehia would have jurisdiction over cases raised by Zaydis living in Ta’izz, since Shi’ites were a majority of the residents. The Imam retained the administrative powers necessary to ensure that cases were decided according to the Shi’a jurisprudence. He was to

¹ - Blumi, “Thwarting the Ottoman,” p. 260.

² - Compare J. E. Peterson, Yemen, *the Search for a Modern State* (1982), p. 147.

elect presiding judges and choose jurors for all appellate courts; such decisions were merely subject to confirmation in Istanbul.¹

When Claudie Fayein arrived in South Arabia, she found the country changed since Rihani's visit twenty years earlier. She walked in on a former Ottoman notable—governor of the province of Dhamar—with his ear glued to his shortwave radio, granddaughter massaging his feet.

He would fiddle for hours with his wireless set, while one of his granddaughters skillfully massaged his feet. He spoke without any hesitation of his life, of his political ideals, but never, surprisingly enough, of God. He had known Europe in its belle époque, and yet Tokyo remained his favorite city. He had not been outside Yemen since the first World War, except for brief visits to Egypt, but he kept an eye on the world by means of his wireless, which was plugged into a set of storage batteries supplied with current by the only generator in Dhamar. Thus he passed tirelessly from Cairo to Brazzaville, from Brazzaville to London, and from London to Moscow.²

Local notables were as thrifty with electricity (the “only generator”) as the Imamic center had been with paper and words. Those news briefs Rihani records the Imam enjoyed came to be sampled by the bureaucratic elites that served him and his family. Their exercise of agency, however, mimicked the center's hierarchy based on privilege as consumption of information. The politics of the Imam, it seems, had become the politics of the notables.

In the first section, I followed Rihani's description of Imam Yehia's distinctive statecraft; in conclusion, I have discussed Ottoman origins for provincial administration in an era of short-wave radios. The

¹ - Harold Jacob, Kings of Arabia: **The Rise and Set of the Turkish Sovranty [sic] in the Arabian Peninsula** (London: Mills & Boon, 1923), p. 123.

² - Fayein. **French Doctor**, p. 223.

Ottoman tanzimat served—not as a direct model for the administrative modernization of the Imamate—but rather as a source for several aspects of Yehia’s state.

Just as the secularization of the Empire’s law inspired a Sunni orthodoxy among ruling elites, so too did the secular Ottoman tanzimat serve as inspiration for Zaydi separatism. As we’ve seen, modernization had complicated effects in the areas of gender and children’s rights. And while the Imamate’s ‘economy of paper’ was written on Ottoman records, Imperial modernity was built into the cities of highland Yemen. The politics of the Imam had become the politics of all those who served the state.

Conclusion

In his *Covering Islam*, Edward Said emphasized language, as holding out the potential to bridge difference.¹ Speaking of the US-based media on the Iranian revolution of 1979, he bemoans “the sorry truth that too many expert writers on the Islamic world did not command the relevant languages and hence had to depend on the press or other Western writers for their information.” Said also regretted current observers’ tendency to avoid historical forces, permitting some form of timeless ‘tradition’ to stand in for political analysis.

Assessed in terms Said outlined, Ameen al-Rihani appears an exemplary ‘outside insider’ as he was equally at home in English and Arabic. Born in Lebanon during 1888, Rihani grew up in New York. As an adolescent, he ran away from home in order to join a Shakespearian theater company on tour. As he developed his knowledge of the literary canon in English, Rihani also worked to

¹- Edward Said, **Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How we See the Rest of the World** (NY: Pantheon Books, 1981), p. 21. See also Paul Jahshan, “Edward Said Meets Ameen Rihani: Lebanon’s Forgotten Orientalism,” **Arab World Geographer**, 8: 1-2 (Summer 2005).

establish himself as a contributor to the Arabophone press of the US's eastern seaboard.

We've also noted ways in which his literary contributions wove between English and Arabic. Rihani published *Muluk al-Arab/Arab Kings* [1926] in Arabic; in addition, he also published *Arabian Peak and Desert* [1930] in English to describe his trip to the Yemen, as well as *Ibn Sa'oud of Arabia; His People and His Land* (1928) and *Around the Coasts of Arabia* (1930) to describe his journey through Saudi Arabia. As we've seen, even though Rihani knew the language of the Yemen as his mother tongue, on occasion his debt to Orientalist texts was considerable.

Albert Hourani introduced an idea about the 'politics of the notables' in the context of a historiographical debate. Those who write on the Arab world after 1860 (he explained) should acknowledge the advent of modernity, noting at that point in time "we are entering the modern age of the continuously and self-consciously changing society." Hourani suggested that any discussion of local elites after that date ought to be written from diplomatic and consular records (instead of the records of the Ottoman bureaucracy); historians were welcome to supplement these with indigenous literary sources, should they wish.

Following Hourani, this article has also drawn on literary contributions of Claudie Fayein, a French medical doctor posted to the Yemen. When Fayein arrived in the Imamate, she found the country had changed since Rihani's visit twenty years earlier. She happened upon the governor of Dhamar province, with his ear glued to his shortwave radio. Those news briefs Rihani records the Imam enjoyed came to be sampled by the bureaucratic elites that served him and his family. The "politics of the notables" became a politics of dissemination from the executive to members of the bureaucracy.

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