

« Ibadhism and the Omani Nation-Building Project since 1970 »

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Since Sultan Qaboos's accession to the throne in 1970, the building of both a state apparatus and a nation has lain at the heart of the political project he established in order to assert his authority on the whole territory. Thus, the issue of the relationship of the contemporary Omani national identity with Ibadhism has been crucial, given the centrality of Ibadhism, as a historical criterion of "Omaniness", in the building of an Omani political and geographical entity identifiable from abroad.

In this perspective this paper focuses first on the complex role played by Ibadhi historical legacy, symbols and figures in the post-1970 Omani nation-building project. While a substantial part of the population of the new state did not belong to Ibadhism, its references were sometimes appropriated in order to strengthen national unity and concomitantly to place the institutions of the contemporary state in continuity with the Omani glorious heritage and hence to assert the regime's legitimacy. But recently the emergence of debates among Ibadhi community of scholars has developed regarding the place of Ibadhism and Ibadhis in the future of Oman. In a second part, this paper will then pay special attention to these discussions, in the broader perspective of the new social and economic challenges faced by the Sultanate for the last ten years - an issue which has already consequences on the way the Omani national identity will be designed in the future.