

Abstract

Title of the Thesis

Ansar Allah in Yemen: History and
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International Studies 2021

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Ansar Allah (Houthis) is a modern Islamic Movement that started to gain momentum in the political environment of Yemen since late 2004 after the killing of its founder Hussein Badr al-Din Al-Houthi. Since the start of the civil war in 2015, the movement has been seen by outside observers as an Iranian proxy-actor that poses a significant threat to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the international waterways in the Red Sea and the strait of Bab Al-Mandab. The main two questions this paper will try to answer are what factors led to the establishment of the movement and where does it derive its discourse from? The Zaydi community after the collapse of the Imamate in 1962 was repressed and marginalized to a large extent by the republican state which continued to spread anti-Zaydi narrative to consolidate its power. Additionally, the spread of the Wahhabi ideology in the 1980's and 90's in traditionally Zaydi territories, namely the province of Sa'da, posed a significant threat to the Zaydi identity. These two factors will be discussed in the first part of this thesis. The second part includes translations of the lectures of the movement's founder, Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi, which he delivered to his followers in the early 2000's before being killed in 2004 by the state's forces.

Ansar Allah in Yemen: History and Ideology

By

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Thesis submitted to the College of Literature, Science, & Arts
at the University of Michigan in partial fulfillment
for the requirement for the degree
of Bachelor of Science
International Studies with Honors
2021

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Chapter I: Introduction

Ansar Allah, also known as Houthis, is an Islamic armed movement that originated in Sa'da, which is a province in the far north of Yemen, near the borders of Saudi Arabia. The movement was founded by Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi, hence the name Houthis, in the 1990s, as a response to the anti-Zaydi narrative that was carried by that state and the increased Wahhabi influence in traditional Zaydi territories. Both factors led Zaydi leaders, both Hashemites and non-Hashemites, to recognize the threats that their community was facing and decided to take necessary actions to preserve it. The Islamic movement didn't use the name Ansar Allah until 2004; the year where its founder was killed in the first armed conflict with the republican state. The Ansar Allah movement attracted and promoted its Zaydi followers by advocating for regional-political issues in its media fronts, including the longtime Arab-Israeli conflict over the land of Palestine and America's oppression over Muslims all over the world and its conspiracies to undermine Islam and the Islamic identity in the region. Their official slogan, "Allah Akbar, Death to America, Death to Israel, Damn the Jews, and Victory for Islam," became their trademark.

This chapter will discuss the methodology used in researching the movement and a literature review of one of the papers that discussed the movement in its early stages. This paper will focus on highlighting the grievances the Zaydi community suffered under the republican state which came into power after the revolution of 1962 which overthrew the Zaydi Imamate and installed the republican form of government. The republican anti-Zaydi narrative along with the Wahhabi school of thought threat on the Zaydi doctrine collectively led young Zaydi community leaders to start on reviving the Zaydi doctrine to protect from getting deteriorated by the Wahhabi school of thought and the republican state's narrative. The paper will also look into

the discourse of Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi, the movement's founder, and provide an insight into his interpretation of the Qur'an and how the Khomeini's revolution of 1972 inspired him to start his movement. These translations intend in no way to promote for the movement's cause, but to help researchers and political analysts understand the current behavior of Ansar Allah in the political scene of Yemen.

Methodology

This paper will analyze the growth of the movement by discussing the challenges it faced from the increased Wahhabi influence in traditional Zaydi regions, in Sa'ada namely, and the anti-Zaydi narrative that was carried by the republican state. Both challenges led to a significant marginalization of the Zaydi community and pushed Zaydi leaders and scholars to take necessary actions to preserve the Zaydi doctrine and protect its adherents.

The paper will be divided into two parts. Part I will discuss the Zaydi doctrine, how Zaydism entered Yemen, and the struggles of the Zaydi community after the republican revolution of 1962. Part II will be dedicated to analyzing Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi's lectures (*Malazim*): the paper will interpret his method of reading and explaining the Qur'an in a way that matches today's life and demonstrate how he used this method in structuring his followers' perspectives of the outside world and their attitude towards America, Israel, and the Jews. This part will also discuss the influence of the 1978 Iranian Revolution led by Khomeini on the discourse of Hussein.

The first part will primary try to answer the question of where Ansar Allah (Houthis) came from, and what led them to start their movement. This part will discuss the Zaydi community before and after the 1962 revolution. The discussion will involve what the Zaydi doctrine is, how it entered Yemen, how Zaydi Imams governed the highland of Yemen for a

millennium, and how the Zaydi doctrine shaped the Ansar Allah Movement. Part I will also analyze the situation of the Zaydi community after the 1962 revolution and the establishment of the republican state. The paper will demonstrate their situation by discussing their three different attempts to survive under the nationalist republicans and they are: renunciation, reconciliation, and revivalism.

The sources used in this part are scholarly journals that wrote about Hussein's Islamic movement in its early stages, and during the conflicts the movement was having with the state. The sources used in this part were written by scholars who are known to have an extensive knowledge about the political history in Arabia, and in Yemen particularly. These scholars include James Rubin King, Lucas Winter, Bernard Haykel, and Alexander Knysch. These sources provided me with reliable information on the Zaydi school of thought, how it entered Yemen, and how the Imamate became the ruling system in the highlands of Yemen for centuries. The articles written by these scholars helped me identify the main two factors that led to the establishment of Ansar Allah which are: Anti-Zaydi narrative carried by the republican state and the threat of the Wahhabi school of thought on the Zaydi community in the province of Sa'ada.

All of the sources used in this thesis are primary sources. One source that was of a great value, yet I couldn't find it online, was the article written by Bernard Haykel "A Zaydi Revival?". The article was cited by many journals that wrote about the movement, but I couldn't find it. Therefore, in some pages, you will encounter phrases like 'Haykel argued in his article' but you will see an in-text citation of a different journal that used the same argument.

The articles used in this part talked about Ansar Allah, also known as Al-Houthis, and their development in a chronological order without necessarily highlighting the main factors that led to their formation. I intended to follow suit in my writing about the movement, but I saw that

I won't add anything new to the literature. In other words, I found myself writing another paper that talks about Yemen's modern history. To avoid that, I tried through reading these papers to find answers for the question of what challenges were faced by the Zaydi community after the collapse of the Imamate, and how did they respond to that change.

Part II will primarily focus on the ideology of the movement that was formed by its founder Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi. The main focus of this part is to give the reader an opening into what the leaders and followers of the movement believe in. This will be done by giving translation of Hussein's lectures (*Malazim*) which he delivered before getting killed in 2004 by the state forces. The primary purpose of this part is to not advocate for his discourse but to give comprehensive translation of his discourse. Hussein delivered over 60 lectures to his followers, and this paper will not try to translate as many as possible. Rather, this paper intends to give translation of the main ideas that shape the movement, namely Hussein's interpretation of the Qur'an and the where and how Khomeini's discourse as well as his revolution of 1972 inspired Hussein to make his own movement. I initially struggled to find the PDF versions of his 'transcribed' lectures. I found several of them in a Telegram (messaging app) channel that is called "*Kounu Ansar Allah*" (Be the party of Allah). But after some online research I found all of Hussein's lectures in Majalis Ahl- al-Bayt online library (al-majalis.org). This website includes all of Hussein's lectures as well as a separate collection of lectures that he delivered in Ramadan; this collection is called '*Durus Ramadan*' (Ramadan's lessons). The paper doesn't intend in no way to promote or advocate for Ansar Allah's ideology. Rather, it tries to provide pathways for scholars and researchers in the field of Modern Islamic Movements to navigate, explore, and compare Ansar Allah to other movements.

Literature Review: “The al-Houthi insurgency in the north of Yemen: An analysis of the Shabab al-moumineen” by Jack Freeman.

The works of literature that delve into the evolution of the Islamic movement of Ansar Allah are very few. It's a very difficult to find peer-reviewed publications covering the period between 2004 and 2011. However, more literature is being published about the movement since the start of the civil war in 2015, which significantly increased the awareness of this group's international community. The involvement of Saudi Arabia and its coalition to remove the rebels out of Sana'a and reestablish the internationally recognized government helped bring more academics to research this movement. Many of the papers, such as those by King, Winter, and Weir, discuss the history of the movement in its early stages without thoroughly contextualizing the ideology of its leaders and explaining what exactly motivated their followers to continue marching with them. Many papers, including the one that I'm reviewing, do not adequately explain the reasons why this movement transitioned from a social non-violent group to an armed revolutionary movement. To be more specific, much of the literature that I read about the movement didn't consider the endogenous and exogenous dynamics that led the Houthis, their unofficial reference, to completely abandon the non-violent model of articulating their grievances and resort to the use of arms instead.

Jack Freeman's paper is a piece that I worked very hard to find considering the time of its publication, 2009, as well as its relatively small number of citations and viewership. Routledge published the paper under the topic "Studies in Conflict and Terrorism." It's worth noting that I couldn't find any other published pieces for the author of this paper, as well as his institutional affiliations. The premise of his paper is to explain the origin of this movement and to suggest the importance of the then conflicts - the conflicts between the Yemeni governments and the Houthis between 2004 and 2010 – to Yemen and its neighboring countries. The paper referred to the

Houthis as "Al-Shabaab Al-Moumineen," which was the name of the movement when founded in 1992 in Sa'da, located in northwestern Yemen about 240 kilometers to the north of Sana'a. The paper didn't report the name of the movement accurately by misspelling its title. The author used the plural form of the Arabic noun *Mu'min*, a believer or faithful in English. At the time, the movement's actual name was *Al-Shabab Al-Mu'min*, "Believing Youth" in English. When analyzing the origins of a certain movement, researchers should sufficiently address its aspects, including its title. Freeman's paper targets Western readers; a group of audience that has not been exposed to the movement before, and for that, he should've been more thorough in his analysis. Freeman, in this paper, didn't explain why the movement founders choose the word "*Shabab*," or youth, in its title - which is a crucial dimension of the movement's objectives.

This is one aspect my thesis will look deeply into by researching the environment and the culture in which the movement developed in. This thesis will provide the readers with the founders' goals for their followers and their successors and the movement used in spreading its teachings. Freeman did address the strategy the movement used to spread its teachings and obtain more followers in its early stages but missed other factors that were essential to its growth. Freeman mentioned how the founders created summer centers in the province, recruiting as many as 15000 students to teach them Zaydi beliefs and values. Still, the question left hanging was why they would try to recruit 15000 and what they actually try to achieve? Why targeting the young generation?

To answer that question, I had to look up an article written by professor Ahmed Addaghashi at Sana'a university and published by Al-Jazeera. In the article, Dr. Addaghashi stated that the movement was established as a moderate theological movement that advocated for mainly for tolerance and held a broad-minded view of the entire Yemeni population (Batati,

2015). The professor indicated that *Al-Shabab Al-Mu'min* - whom I will refer to with SAM for the rest of this review – goal was to revive the doctrine of Zaydism again, which was being diminished by the increasing growth of Salafism, hence their use of the term *Shabab* and their attempt to recruit as many students as possible. Moreover, the term *Shabab*, or youth, indicated a breakaway from the strategies used by previous Zaydi movements in confronting the grievances suffered within the Zaydi sect of the population and its scholars throughout the country.

Pre-Houthi movements' leaders who advocated for Zaydi grievances failed to mobilize the population and garner more support from people who follow the Zaydi school of thought; they still had significant influence over SAM founders, namely Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi. This failure led to more internal debates within Zaydi leaders and scholars, which led the once unified Zaydi movement to divide into confrontational and moderate factions. The moderate factions decided to continue advocating for their cause through democracy; many decided to join the first political party of a Zaydi faith, "*Hizb Al-Haqq*," The Truth Party.

When analyzing the growth of an Islamic movement, scholars must include the small details that paint the full picture. I found this one factor missing in several of the literature that spoke to the development of *Ansar Allah*, Houthis, including the one I'm reviewing in particular. I understand the difficulties academics face when researching the topic of Houthis; language barriers, lack of access to detailed local information, and often having little acquaintance of the traditional Yemeni culture, especially that of the tribes. In discussing the first military conflict between SAM and the government, Freeman suggested that what triggered the war was Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi refusal to meet with Ali Abdullah Saleh, president of Yemen at the time, to discuss the grievances of the movement as well as that of the Zaydi population in Yemen. This is true, Hussein did refuse to meet with Saleh, but that wasn't what specifically caused the war.

Most people in Yemen, including other Yemeni researchers and me, know that what triggered the war was Saleh's visit to Sa'da on his way to Saudi Arabia to perform the Hajj (pilgrimage). He made a stop there to attend the Friday prayer. Once the prayer was over, he wanted to say a few words to the people inside the mosque, but he was surprised by the chants they all screamed: *Allah Akbar, Death to America, Death to Israel, Damn the Jews, Victory for Islam*. The same chants were screamed at the Grand Mosque – *Al-Jami'e Al-Kabeer* - in Sana'a in June 2004 after a Friday prayer as well. Such an action attracted the authorities' attention, and on that day, several individuals affiliated with SAM were arrested (Thawra News, 2020). Government troops went to Sa'da to arrest Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi but failed in doing so after his supporters from the Zaydi community felt that authorities were targeting them. Reconciliation attempts failed miserably, leading to the killing of some soldiers outside Sa'da, making the state respond by launching an aggressive military campaign that eventually killed Hussein in September of 2004. The individuals arrested in Sana'a became known as *Mokabireen*, a title Hussein dedicated to them for their courage and bravery in "standing against America" (Thawra News, 2020).

In his paper, Freeman displayed some lack of understanding of the Yemeni tribal culture when explaining to his readers the nature of tribesmen there. He mentioned that tribesmen – *qabayel* in Arabic, which is plural for *qabili* – are admired across Yemen for their bravery in combat, shooting skills, and honor. However, according to him, they are viewed by metropolitan Yemenis, namely those living in the capital Sana'a and Aden, as ignorant and backward. That's a severe misunderstanding of tribe culture in Yemen and what the title tribesman, *qabili*, actually means. The word *qabili* in Yemen means several things, but primarily the term refers to an individual class in society. Yemen's society is traditionally divided into three different classes:

- a. Sadah: those who descend from the prophet's grandchildren.
- b. Qabail: those whose origins come from a particular tribe in Yemen.
- c. Muzaynah: those considered to be lower-class citizens merely because their origin is foreign or unknown.

Freeman's lack of access to accurate local information and sources prevented him from realizing that the vast majority of those metropolitan people who live in Sana'a and Aden are *qabayel* themselves. I'm a *qabili*, and my *qabili* identity is reflected in my last name, Mawri. Mawri is not a family's name. Instead, it's the name of the village my family descends from, Mawer, which is actually a part of the Madhaj tribe territory. Demonstrating this misunderstanding in his paper reinforces my point that to fully understand Ansar Allah's development in Yemen, we have to understand the culture that shapes them and the ideology they believe in; these two factors will be addressed in detail in this thesis.

Freeman explained thoroughly the international connections the movement, in its early stages, was trying to make to solidify its position against Saleh's regime. He proposed a critical factor the movement needed to sustain its surgency: political allies. I agree that the movement in its early days didn't need weaponry support from anyone because the population is already armed. Getting weapons in Yemen is not a problem at all since the population is ranked as the second most heavily armed population in the world after the U.S. What the movement was desperate for was to establish concrete connections with some foreign allies who can help it get its message out to reach a broader base within and outside the country. Considering the timing of the paper's publication, Freeman wasn't able to demonstrate well enough what kind of foreign support the movement was getting at the time, and this is absolutely not his fault.

I still remember back when I was in middle school reading in newspapers the claims the government was making about Ansar Allah receiving significant support from the Iranian and the Libyan regime without providing any concrete evidence of how they supported the movement and with what. The only support Iran was providing Ansar Allah, which I still remember vividly, was some media support through TV channels that received funds directly from the Iranian regime, such as Qanat Al-Alem, based in Tehran, and Qanat Al-Manar, based in Lebanon. Both channels shed light on the humanitarian casualties the regime caused in the province of Sa'da during the military conflicts and provide some airtime for Ansar Allah leaders, enabling them to speak to the outside world about their issues and call for more support from humanitarian organizations. Freeman cited in his paper the claims made by some regime officials regarding the support the movement was receiving from Iran; judge Najib Al-Qadiri, the court's chief, claimed that Yahya Al-Duleimi made a lot of contact with Iran's ambassador to support the newly founded SAM organization. However, the judge's claim was not backed by any form of concrete evidence to prove it. In short, all of the claims the Saleh's regime made about the support the movement was receiving from foreign actors were not backed by any form of proof or evidence.

Freeman did very well in introducing the movement to western readers at a time when no one paid much attention to it. I can tell how rigorous it was for him to write this piece considering the narrow number of credible sources that addressed the movement. I'm very lucky to have Arabic as my first language because it will enormously help me research for more accurate local information. Living in Yemen when the movement kept developing enabled me to have greater access to more accurate local information; that includes direct interpretation and summarization of Hussein's teachings to his followers as well as providing readers viewpoints of

Zaydi scholars who generally are not in direct contact with western intellectuals due to language and cultural barrier.

Part I: Ansar Allah's Origins

Chapter II: The Identity of the Zaydi Community and their Marginalization

Introduction

Ansar Allah's movement's core value is resistance to the unjust ruler and his supporters through either armed resistance or by speaking out against him by explaining to the community why he is oppressive and unfit to rule. This notion is derived directly from the teachings of the Zaydi Islamic school of thought, which was created based on resisting oppression and injustice. For us to understand why Ansar Allah chose the path of resistance against the regime of Ali Abdulla Saleh during the six wars, we must look for the teachings the movement's leaders and followers have used and are still using to this day to galvanize the crowds and attract more people to support their cause. Ansar Allah's framing of their movement in its embryonic stages has been effective in drawing the attention of a lot of people by emphasizing the fact that there is an existential threat to the Zaydi teachings, community, and the collective identity of Zaydism as a whole.

This chapter will first look into Zaydism within Islam: what created it and what distinguishes this school of thought from the other Shi'ite doctrines in Iran and Iraq. Additionally, this chapter will discuss how Zaydism arrived in Yemen, how it got to have a rich historical background in the northern territories, and what factors allowed it to persist there for almost a millennium. After that, the chapter will analyze the conditions the Zaydi community after the collapse of the Imamate regime and its leaders various responses to the collapse of their Islamic state in 1962. This part of the chapter will discuss the different reactions adopted by Yemeni Zaydi leaders towards the new republican state which governed Northern Yemen after the republican revolution that overthrew the Imamate in 1962.

Zaydism within Islam

The Imamate system's political structure largely depends on Zaydi religious beliefs and teachings; this is important to understand because it differentiates Zaydis of Yemen from the Shi'ite sects of Iran and Iraq and the Sunni majority in Yemen. Zaydis in Yemen live within a predominantly Safi'i majority (Sunni) population and other Shia minorities such as Ismaili Shia and other Sunni minorities like Wahhabis and Salafis. Zaydis are typically known as the "fivers" Shia because they differ from both the Ismaili sect of Shia – known as Seveners – and the *Ja'fari* Shia – known as Twelvers (Knysh, Pg.184). The difference between Zaydism and the other Shi'ism groups comes from their recognition of Imam Zaid Ibn Ali, a great-grandson of Ali and Fatima and a half-brother of the fifth Shi'ite Imam Muhammad Al-Baqir (Knysh, 2017). Zaydis recognize Imam Zaid Ibn Ali as the fifth and final rightly guided Caliph. They also believe that Imamate is unconfined and not strictly limited to only “Twelve” Imams as the Twelvers believe.

As mentioned in the introduction, the Ansar Allah movement's main principle is *khuruuj*, or the "the coming" out" against an unjust ruler. This principle is taken directly from Zaydism's teachings, which takes Imam Zaid Ibn Ali as its sole founder. Imam Zaid Ibn Ali "came out" against the Umayyad caliphate in 742 because he saw them as corrupt rulers. This *khuruuj* led to his killing in the early days of his revolt in Kufa, modern-day Iraq (Knysh, 2017). Imam Zaid's "coming out" against the Umayyads formed the basis of which created *Al-Madhab Al-Zaydi*, or the Zaydi doctrine.

The Zaydi school of thought has two central beliefs that distinguish it from the Shi'ites and the Sunni teachings. Zaydis neither believe in the Imams' infallibility nor their ability to be hidden for a long time. They also don't believe Imams receive divine guidance the same way the Prophet did (Knysh, 2017). These beliefs, which Zaydis reject completely, form the core of the

doctrine of *Ja'fari* Shi'ites in Iran and Iraq. It's why these groups of Shi'ites despise Zaydism much more than Sunnis and consider them to be even more dangerous. On the other hand, although Zaydis borrow heavily from the collection of Hadith of local Shafi'i-Sunni tradition, what sets them apart from Sunnis is the idea of *khuruj*. This is a key point of departure from Sunnis and Ansar Allah's main slogan in their struggle against the regime.

The Two Main Groups of Zaydism

Before transitioning to Zaydism's history in Yemen and how it mitigated so much of the tribal conflict there, it's essential to understand the difference between the Zaydism school's two main wings: Jarudyia and Batriyyia. The difference between these two groups is centered around three main ideas: the declaration of Ali as the rightful Caliph by the Prophet Muhammad, the position of the Prophet's Companions of Ali being a Caliph after the Prophet, and finally, the idea that the Prophet's companions should be taken as reliable sources for traditions and Hadith of the Prophet.

The Batriyyia, on the one hand, believe that the Prophet Mohammed's declaration of Ali as his successor consisted of many indirect statements and not wholly understood gestures that require careful research and investigation (Haider, 2010). They also believe that the Prophet's companions made a mistake by opposing Ali's candidacy to become the Prophet's official successor, *khalifa*. However, they think that the companions didn't commit an act of disbelief or apostasy (Haider, 2010). Moreover, the Batriyya supported the legitimacy of Abu Bakr and Umar Ibn Al-Khattab. Their opinion on this matter comes from their interpretation of Ali's refusal to launch a military uprising against their rule. (Haider, 2010). When it comes to the legal arena, the Batriyya accepts legal opinions and hadiths that derive from the companions,

regardless of their support or opposition to Ali. This position placed them at "the core of the legal movement," which became known as "Kufan traditionism" (Haider, 2010).

On the other hand, the Jarudyyia disagree with the Batryyia by arguing that the Prophet designated Ali as his successor many times, including in the most famous occasion *Ghadir Khumm*, the Prophet's final pilgrimage to Makkah (Haider, 2010). They argue that the evidence was clear and unambiguous, and any denial of Ali's rights to be a Caliph was tantamount to disbelief (*kufir*) (Haider, 2010). Moreover, when it comes to the legal arena, they argue that the Companions are completely unreliable sources or transmitters of hadiths and general Islamic knowledge. The position of the Jarudyyia became the dominant position of most Zaydis (Haider, 2010).

Zaydism Entering Yemen

A succession of Imams established themselves from the late ninth century in the northern part of Yemen's harsh mountainous environment. It started with the first Zaydi Imam to arrive in Yemen, Imam Yahya Al-Hadi ila Al-Haqq (Yahya who leads to the path of truth), who was asked by some tribes' leaders to mediate and settle the "untraceable conflicts" between them (Knysh, Pg. 184). Settling tribal conflicts is something Zaydi Imams were known for in Yemen. Because of that, the Zaydi school of thought thrived in an intricate and delicate balance with the tribal customs, *urf qabili*, which allowed the Zaydi Imams to acquire both religious followers and political dominance.

The Zaydi principle of *khuruj* was a source of continuous conflicts and created an environment that was politically unstable in Yemen's northern mountainous region. The series of *khuruj* against the ruler ended with the phenomena of "Sunnisation of Zaydism" (Knysh, 2017). Unlike the *Ja'fari* Shia, succession in the Zaydi imamate was typically non-hereditary. Instead,

following Zayd ibn Ali's example, any learned *sayyid*, a descendent of Ali and Fatima, who asserted and fought for his claim could become Imam. However, that was not the case with Qasimites, who started to transmit the Imamate authority from father to son, making it look like the Sunni dynasties against whom the Zaydis usually revolted (Knysh, 2017). The Qasimites, who descent from Al-Imam Al-Mu'ayyad Muhammad bin Al-Qasim, managed to expel the Ottomans from Northern Yemen and establish the first independent Zaydi State around 1627-1635. The hereditary transmission of Imamate continued to be the case in Yemen until the republican revolution in 1962, which overthrew the Mutawakilli Imamate regime, Al-Imam Al-Badr bin Ahamed Hamid Al-Din, and started an entirely new period for Zaydism in the new modern Republic of Yemen.

Zaydism Post the Imamate Era – The Republic of Yemen Era

Understanding the privileged status of the Zaydi *Sadah* during the Imamate state period is fundamental to understand the cultural disenfranchisement this particular community faced during the rule of the republican state and before the rise of Ansar Allah into power. Zaydis were the social and political beneficiaries of the strong Zaydi Imamate state, but after that, they became a religious minority that faced challenges in the newly established republican state. One term that must be understood when observing the political scene in Yemen is *Sadah*. The term *Sadah* is the plural form of *Sayyed*, which refers to an individual whose family descends from the Prophet's grandchildren – either Hassan or Hussein. Another term to keep in mind is *Qudhah*, which is the plural form of the noun *Qadhi*. *Qadhi* in English means a "Judge." In Yemen, they use the plural form of that noun to refer to those families whose origins come from professional judges of the early centuries of Islam.

The Imamate state enforced a strict form of social categorization based on people's descent from a social perspective. During the Imamate regime period, it was known among people that the *Sadah* and *Qudhah* formed two elite classes and obtained the vast majority of religious, military, and political positions in the northern territories controlled by the Imams. The other tribal men who worked in "less professional" occupations were referred to as "*Ahl Al-thuluth*" (the third people). These people were typically known as those who worked as farmers, barbers, and butchers. At least in the North, these professions are considered the occupation of low-class people. The people who work in these professions are also referred to as "*Muzayyina*". This term doesn't have a particular translation in English, but generally, it relates to families and people of lower social classes.

After the 1962 revolution, the republican state started to repress the Zaydi doctrine and any initiative to disseminate it. The state also discriminated against Zaydis, especially *Sadah*, and subsidized any movement that opposed them and their ideology (King, 2012). The marginalization of the Zaydi community reached its peak under the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh, who governed Yemen for more than 30 years and was killed by Ansar Allah in December 2017. One of the tactics Saleh used to strengthen his control of the country was playing off different communities within Yemen against one another. He supported Salafi activists who spread their ideology in traditionally Zaydi regions. He also recruited radical Sunnis, who were fighting in Afghanistan, to continue their fight against the Communist government of South Yemen, and finally fueled tribal feuds and facilitated the fight between some of them by not allowing government authorities to intervene and diffuse the conflicts (King, 2012).

With the loss of power and privilege after 1962, the Zaydi *Sadah* faced three challenging options. The first is to renounce their *Sayyid* heritage completely. The second is to reconcile their Zaydi and *Sayyid* heritage with the newly established republican state. The third is revivalism: start working to bring back what they lost, possibly the Imamate. A critical factor in deciding which segments of the Zaydi community (or *Zaydiyyah*) came to endorse a revivalist movement, versus the other strategies of 'reconciliation' or 'renunciation,' is the way in which communal memory has taken history and re-imagined the Zaydi identity within the newly established Yemeni republic.

Renunciation

After the collapse of the Imamate regime, some *Sadah* families have intentionally changed their last names. Some have concealed their family lineages in a process that Gabrielle Bruck called "renunciation" (vom Bruck, 2005). In his study, Bruck argued that this behavior of the Zaydi *Sadah* was mainly due to the confinement of the Zaydi communal memory, which is associated with Imamate, to the private sphere to avoid public eyes and them being identified as "other" (vom Bruck, 2005). The renunciation process was of only a tiny portion of the Zaydi *Sadah*. The majority responded with adaptation to the new regime by either trying to join it and be part of it or merely accepting that they are no longer in power, which brings us to the second option adopted by the *Sadah*, reconciliation (Middle East Report, 2009).

Reconciliation

The Zaydi *Sadah*, who chose to reconcile their identity with the new regime, faced many difficulties with establishing it because the nationalists created a narrative that vilified the Imamate's history to increase the legitimacy of the new republic. Every day, I witnessed in school when everyone, students and teachers, collectively saluted the flag and remembered those

who made the ultimate sacrifice to end the "dark period of Imamate." This is nationalism in its purest form to Nicholas Dirks. He defines it as a system that uses the past to create a specific narrative, assumptions, and voices that make a lasting effect on the social and political order (Dirks, 1992).

A nationalist narrative seeks to create an in-group/out-group contrast using a common strategy of historical interpretation. This strategy has been used by many dictators in the Middle East to intentionally exclude "others" who may pose some threats to their authority. The most recent example that shows this strategy is the current Egyptian regime. The militaristic government describes what happened in July 2013 as a 'revolution,' and anyone who thinks otherwise is considered a Muslim Brotherhood member and gets arrested. Although this strategy consolidates the sense of nationalism, it can also have the unintended effect of eroding its long-term legitimacy in the eyes of groups believed inclusive to 'the state' but rendered exclusive to 'the nation.'

The narrative that was carried out by the state also continued to conflate the Imamate period with the British colonialization of the South. In almost all of the ceremonies that celebrated the 1962 revolution, the speakers always emphasized how the Imamate backwardness and injustice in the North is not any different from that of the British colonialism of the South. For example, Yemen's Minister of Defense mentioned in a speech that he delivered in *Eid Al-Adha*, a Muslim holiday, the bravery of the those 'martyrs' who died "liberating our people from the bygone system of the clerical and racist Imamate and the loathsome colonialism" (King, 2012. Pg. 420).

There are countless examples that demonstrate the elites in the Yemeni government and national media pairing the Imamate tyranny in the North with the colonial injustice in the South.

However, the parallel between the two is not concrete and rather tenuous. The Imamate in the North displayed a Yemeni regime that was headed by Yemenis; individuals who were born and raised in Yemen. In contrast, colonialism of the South was a brief period that contributed only a small part of Yemen's overall modern history, whereas the Imamate in the North was part of Yemen's history for over a millennium; the Imamate in the North largely shaped the political history of the country for many centuries.

To this day, the Imamate period is viewed as a period of occupation and oppression, which is a product of a nationalistic narrative that largely obscures a balanced analysis. It's unhealthy of the social fabric in Yemen to view its history before and after 1962 as backwardness vs progress or light vs the dark. The question that must be asked at this point is if this nationalistic narrative that ties one's loyalty to the country to his/her rejection of the country's period between 891 and 1962, then what are the options for those whose communal identity is connected to this period?

The marginalization the Zaydi community, especially those of *Sayyid* heritage, can't be stated as something that was universal across the entire community. Many families of *Sayyid* heritage became materially successful especially those who chose to live in Sana'a away from traditional Zaydi regions in Sa'da, Hajja, and Ammran (King, 2012). The collective memory of the Yemeni population is filled with images of the Imamate's tyranny, insular socio-political order, and the gushing signs that any attempt to go back in time indirectly means people going back to pay respect to the Sayyid class again.

Growing up in Yemen, I and almost everyone I knew took for granted the public and the popular discourse that the Imamate was unjust, discriminatory, and tyrannical. As a result, any attempts of past Zaydi activists, or even current Ansar Allah advocates, to assert Zaydism

theoretical advantages, including that of the Imamate system, is faced with vehement rejections from a broad base of the Yemeni population, even from those who identify themselves as *Sayyids* – those who chose reconciliation or renunciation instead of revivalism.

Revivalism

This is the last option for the *Zaydi Sadah*. They saw themselves not making any progress in getting adapted to the new state or formally accepted by the nationalist leaders. The more hardcore republican revolutionists kept on emphasizing the dangers the *Sadah* posed to the republic. After *Sadah* and *Qudhah* were the main elite class in the Yemeni society during the Imamate era, the new elites who came after were composed of technocrats, merchants, and army personnel who had a robust tribal background (vom Bruck, 2005). Bruck argued that this group represented themselves as having a more Yemeni identity than the *Sadah*. It's worth noting that *Qudhah* had an easier time adapting to the new republican state because their family origins were not similar to those of the *Sadah*. In other words, *Qudhah* are not descendants of neither Hassan or Hussein, which allowed them neither to renounce their identity nor try to conceal it.

Similar to the republican state's narrative of delegitimizing Yemen's (Northern Yemen) identity under the Imamate regime, the state cultivated the tribal culture as the authentic local identity that should substitute that of the *Zaydi* identity. The importance of the tribes in establishing the republican state was not due to some historical accident. Before the republican state, the Imamate regime tried to create an Islamic state that is entirely independent of any tribal affiliations. In what appears to be a retaliation, the republican state afterward sought to disregard all religious and familial beliefs for the sake of promoting tribal identities. Hence some *Sadah* chose to renunciate and concealed their *Sayyid* heritage and replace it with a tribal one (vom Bruck, 2005)

Revivalism is the option that led to the creation of several political factions of Zaydi identity, starting from the establishment of the Al-Haqq party in 1992 and ending with the creation of the Believing Youth two years after that. The Anti-Zaydi narrative carried by the new elites laid the earliest foundation for the revivalism culture to start forming and spreading throughout Yemen's northern region. Revivalism is the nucleus of the modern Ansar Allah movement. This aspect of the movement is often overlooked by outside observers when trying to evaluate the current shape of Yemen's political scene.

The revivalist strategy was aimed at cultivating Zaydi religious and cultural beliefs through education, written materials (*Malazim*), and group activities. The strategy was reactive in nature and developed in response to two critical factors: the first is the republican state's narrative of Zaydi historical and communal exclusion, and the second is the growing Wahhabi movement that was growing in territories that usually follows Zaydi teachings.

The Wahhabi movement started to grow in the North of the country, especially in Sa'da, during the 1980s through locals who immigrated to the oil producing countries, such as Saudi Arabia, and embraced the Wahhabi teachings (Weir, 1997). Many of these migrants were expelled to Yemen due to 'Ali 'Abdullah Saleh's support of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990-1991. As a consequence, the roots of Wahhabism were established in Sa'da, the birthplace of the Ansar Allah movement. The Wahhabi movement in Yemen, which was led by Muqbil Al-Wadi'i, established a school that was known all over Yemen as *Dar Al-Hadith Bi-Dammaj*, the school of Hadith in Dammaj, or *Markaz Dammaj*, the Institution of Dammaj (yemen-press.net).

Conclusion

As a school of thought, Zaydism was created based on loyalty towards *Ahl al-Bayt*, the Prophet's family – Ali and Fatima and their descendants, to be more specific. This school of thought and practice is driven by the strong desire to resist oppressive rulers and achieve justice for the community. Zaydism arrived in Yemen with Imam Yahya *Al-Hadi ila Al-Haqq*, and he came to Yemen by invitation from some tribal leaders to settle the conflicts between them. Zaydism thrived and survived in the Yemeni community thanks to its flexibility to merge and integrate very easily with the tribal customs; this allowed the Zaydi Imams to acquire both religious followers and secular dominance.

The integration of Zaydism with the tribal culture allowed it to be widely accepted and persist for a long time there. The drastic transition in 1962 made many Zaydi *Sadah* feel completely excluded and extensively marginalized in the newly established republican state, which continuously promoted anti-Zaydi rhetoric to increase the sense of nationalism among the population. The anti-Zaydi narrative made Zaydi leaders face three options; two of which didn't work, and the third produced the desired outcomes wanted by Ansar Allah's leaders. Some Zaydi community leaders felt renunciation and reconciliation as strategies that weakened them and worsened the republican state's wounds. This is why Revivalism had to be analyzed separately in a separate chapter by itself because, as we'll see later on, there were several pre-Ansar Allah revivalist movements that, in addition to failing to redress the community's grievances, caused an internal conflict that divided the revivalist movement into two separate ones: a modern, politically active movement anxious to redress the Zaydi community grievances, and a more extreme movement that eventually resorted to violence.

Chapter III: Revivalism of the Zaydi Doctrine in the Face of competing Ideologies

Introduction

Before analyzing the revivalism movement, this chapter will discuss the competing Wahhabi social movement that was just as effective as the anti-Zaydi narrative promoted by the republican state in alarming Zaydi scholars of the danger their community was facing. Both factors fostered the revivalist response by Zaydi community leaders and scholars. The present chapter will first identify the three Wahhabi currents in Yemen, pointing out their differences in terms of leadership and ideas. The discussion then analyzes the success that some Zaydi revivalist factions in redressing the community's core cultural grievances. These successes are determined by efficient resource mobilization, political representation, and strategic framing. The recurring failures the Zaydi political activists to tackle the two-fold threats of the anti-Zaydi narrative and the Wahhabi movement helped gave rise to a revivalist movement which eventually coalesced into the radicalized Believing Youth. The latter took it upon itself to preserve the integrity of the Zaydi community through public protest and actively opposing the regime.

The Three Wahhabi Currents that arrived in Yemen

Wahhabism arrived in three different forms. The first current was traditional Salafism, which was the closest to the Salafist movement's founder in Yemen, Muqbil Al-Wadi'i. Al-Wadi'i was influenced by Wahhabi Shaykhs from Saudi Arabia such as Al-Jami and the Saudi cleric Shaykh Rabi' Ibn Hadi al-Madkhali (Al-Daghshi, 2012). The second Wahhabi current was Al-Hikmah ("Wisdom") Society founded by the Egyptian Shaykh Abdul' Rahman Bin Abdul' Khaleq. The third and final current to arrive in Yemen, known as the Syrian current, is the Ihsan society that follows the Syrian cleric Muhammad Surour. Al-Wadi'i's movement was the most

effective of the three currents, and the one of which Zaydi leaders focused most of their efforts in resisting because it targeted the area of which they consider as the capital of Zaydism, Sa'da.

The traditional Salafism movement, led by Muqbil Al-Wadi'i, was the current that spread the fastest of the three, and became a significant threat to the Zaydi community immediately for two particular reasons: the first is also the earliest of the three currents to arrive in Yemen in the early 1980s (Weir, 1997). The movement started to grow at a very high pace. It was introduced in Sa'da by locals who immigrated to Saudi Arabia, where they studied Islam and embraced the Wahhabi school of thought. The second reason is traditional Salafism always called upon its followers to never disobey the ruler, in other words, the regime. Traditional Salafism was the only Islamic movement that publicly backed the state, that, naturally, supported its spread throughout the country.

The Wahhabi Influence in Sa'da

The Wahhabi school of thought was introduced in Sa'da in the early 1980s and started to grow significantly in the 1990s after the mass expulsions of Yemeni migrants from Saudi Arabia due to the position taken by the republican regime in support of Saddam Hussein's Kuwait invasion. Many of these workers were employed in the Saudi petroleum industry and were heavily influenced by the Wahhabi ideology.

The Wahhabi movement of Muqbil Al-Wadi'i targeted Sa'da as a place for their growth due to the province's historical significance for the Zaydi doctrine and the Imamate regime in Yemen. The province of Sa'da was the capital of the first Zaydi Imamate state, which ruled the highlands of northern Yemen; the first Zaydi state in Yemen was established in 893 by Imam Yahya Ibn Al-Hussain who was invited to Yemen to settle some tribal conflicts (Salmoni,

2010). Despite the deterioration of the province's political fortunes over the years, it remained the center of the Zaydi doctrine and a destination for pupils interested in the study of Zaydism (Winter, 2011).

The Wahhabi activists targeted tribal, Saf'i, and Zaydi youth who still harbored resentment for the last vestiges of the Imamate's anti-egalitarian social structure and who were also targets of the anti-Zaydi narrative carried by the republican state. The Wahhabi movement and the republican state found themselves working towards a common goal: undermining Zaydism's doctrine. The state found a movement that calls for 'obedience of the ruler' publicly and had an anti-Zaydi agenda to execute. Therefore, the state offered financial support to Wahhabi activists and facilitated the activities of their movement throughout the North to counterbalance the secular socialists who ruled the South and who wanted to spread socialism in the North before the unification in 1990 (vom Bruck, 2010).

The Wahhabi growth in Sa'da and other regions in the North was due to not solely the financial assistance offered by the republican state, but because Sa'da was a fertile region that hosted residents of tribal and *ahl al-thuluth* identity. These residents found Wahhabism simple and egalitarian, because it didn't categorize people into classes (like the Zaydi Imamate) and required no mediators between believers and God (Weir, 1997). Wahhabi activists were successful in portraying the Zaydi community in Sa'da as a discriminatory society in which the *Sayyids (Sadah)* occupy the place above everyone else, including Zaydi tribal individuals. Van Bruck mentioned in her journal that Wahhabi activists gained more followers in Sa'da because they employed successfully the idea that the Zaydi Sadah don't treat tribesmen equally, especially when it comes to marriage. When I was in Yemen, it was very common to hear stories about *Sadah* families rejecting to marry their daughters off to a non-*Sayyid* man. Bruck stated

that the Wahhabis were successful “in Sa'da because of this problem” (vom Bruck, 2010, Pg.190).

The Confrontation between Wahhabism and Zaydism in Sa'da

The Wahhabi activists centered themselves on the west side of the Sa'da province in a region called Razih. They continued to move quickly to other traditionally Zaydi areas to increase their influence in the province. Confrontations between the two schools of thought began to take place as Wahhabi adherents started to either take over Zaydi mosques or establish their own (Weir, 1997). The confrontation inside the mosques was reflected in symbols and rituals that were distinct from one another. For example, Wahhabi adherents would chant *Amin* after the prayer leader finish reciting the first chapter of the Qur'an (*Al-Fatihah*), while Zaydis would remain quiet. Another practice that Wahhabis used to distinguish themselves from Zaydis is folding their arms when praying, while Zaydis leave their hands relaxed on their sides (Weir, 1997).

Wahhabi activists were also able to establish lesson circles inside mosques that intended to teach Qur'an recitation to children. These circles were called *Halaqat Tahfiz Al-Qur'an*. They were also able to establish many religious schools, among of which is the renowned '*Dar Al-Hadith B'Dammaj*' and '*Ma'ahid Al-Ilmyah*' (D. Darar, 2017). Both institutions were a destination for pupils from inside and outside the country. These institutions benefited many prominent leaders of the Yemeni Muslim Brotherhood like Abdul' Majid Al-Zindani, who sought to Islamicize the Yemeni education system (a common goal the Brothers shared with Wahhabis.)

The Wahhabi movement in Sa'da also used popular figures to galvanize collective actions through its followers. Among these figures was Muqbil Al-Wadi'i, who graduated from the

Medina Islamic University. During his studies at the University, he embraced the Wahhabi doctrine and – in a very controversial move, reinterpreted the famous Yemeni reformer Al-Shawkani as a Salafist (D. Darar, 2017). When he returned to Yemen, he founded '*Dar Al-Hadith Bi-Dammaj*,' and used it as a platform to spread his vehemently anti-Zaydi teachings. He used religious brochures and cassette tapes to emphasize the literal interpretation of the Qur'an – a direct attack on the Zaydi *ijtihād* – rejection of *fiqh*, and prohibition of 'evoking' the deceased (Weeden, 2008). To further his public denunciations of the Zaydi great respect of dead religious scholars, Al-Wadi'i called for the destruction of the domed tombs of Zaydi as well as Shaf'i-Sufi prominent leaders and saints (Weeden, 2008).

In sum, the Wahhabi movement is an ally of the republican state's anti-Zaydi narrative that mobilized a Zaydi revivalist response and later fostered an aggressive and radicalized Zaydi movement factions. The Zaydi revivalist movement effectively tied the republican state and the Wahhabi movement to the growing marginalization of the cultural and religious Zaydi community in the 1980s and '90s. They succeeded in doing so because of the integral role the state played in funding the Wahhabi movement (as well as its tolerance of the external funding coming from Saudi Arabia) (Weeden, 2008). The revivalist Zaydi movement copied the Wahhabi strategy of using an educational system to thwart the 'Sunnification' of the Zaydi youth in traditional Zaydi areas. As we're going to see later, more radical revivalist factions – like that of the Believing Youth, which later became Ansar Allah – would successfully use the shadow of Wahhabi influence on the republican state to conflate it with the Zaydi grievances.

The Revivalist Movement Response

The revivalist response was centered on cultivating Zaydi religious and cultural awareness through education, written materials (*Malazim*), group activities, and an overall

defensive attitude towards Zaydism. The revivalist response, again, was reactive in nature. It developed in response to the state's anti-Zaydi narrative and the Wahhabi direct attack on its religious beliefs and scholars.

A core strategy that revivalist leaders used was establishing a network of religious schools that would counterbalance the Wahhabis' effect. These schools were concentrated mostly in Sa'da and neighboring provinces like Al-Jawf. They produced their own teaching materials, including textbooks that focused on teaching the young Zaydi generation '*Al-fiqh w'al-hadith Al-Hadawi*' (vom Bruck, 2005). In addition to the educational schools that the revivalist established in Sa'da, the movement's leaders launched a teacher training institution named after the famous Zaydi-Hadawi scholar Ibn Hariwa (King, 2012). Ibn Hariwa is a Zaydi scholar who attacked his contemporary reformist Al-Shawkani and the traditionalist tendencies that the Imams carried at the time. He was executed for his writing and has since been considered a Zaydi martyr, perhaps for adapting a form of '*khuruj*' at the time. The revivalist leaders at the early stages of their movement intended to bring to life the memory and legitimacy of inspirational Zaydi scholars by naming their institutions after them – among of which is '*Madrasat Al-Imam Al-Hadi*', the birth place of Ansar Allah anti-US, anti-Israel, and anti-Jew-sh slogan (King, 2012).

In addition to the religious schools and teacher training institutes, another source of mobilization was brochures and edited religious texts, which were designed specifically to counter the state's and the Wahhabi marginalization of the Zaydi historical figures and spiritual practices. Much of the literature that these revivalist institutions produced celebrated the Qasimi Imams and Zaydi Hadith scholars like Muhammad Al-Wazir (Haykel, 2003). The reason for taking this approach in preserving the Zaydi identity was largely due to the significant threat Zaydi leaders saw from both the Wahhabis and the state who were deliberate and effective in

attempting to obliterate Zaydis from memory and expunge their thoughts from record.

Establishing educational institutions and literature materials that is rich of Zaydi doctrine saved the Zaydi identity to a very large extent. Zaydis – Zaydi *Sadah* in particular – were a minority by the time Wahhabi movement arrived in Sa'da in the 1980s. Moreover, the republican state was already removing Zaydi teachers and preachers from their mosques and replacing them with pro-state Wahhabi activists (Haykel, 2003).

Zaydi Revivalist Leaders: Strategies and Disputes

The Zaydi community's revivalist movement was led by well-known Zaydi leaders like Badr al-Din al-Houthi, the father of the current leader of Ansar Allah Abdul Malik Al-Houthi. Badr al-Din al-Houthi became known in the Yemeni society for the statement that he wrote in 1979 in rebuttal of Ibn Baz's, a Saudi-Wahhabi ideologue, *fatwa* which attacked the act of praying behind a Zaydi Imam by calling it a heretical act (Haykel, 2003). Many leaders within the Zaydi community considered revivalism the last chance they had to preserve their community. These leaders sought to embody revivalist messages through performances, and to do so, they led their followers in collective action rituals that sometimes were provocative to Wahhabis. For example, the neighborhood that I grew up included both Zaydis and Wahhabis. In the mosque when we pray, as soon as the prayer leader finish reciting '*Al-Fatihah*,' most of the people would say in one voice 'Amin.' But after that, we also used to hear voices of kids and young men saying *kadhabin* (liars); these were the voices of the young Zaydi generation. They were saying *kadhabin* referring to the Wahhabis who were praying among us and all the lies they were spreading among people about Zaydis. This move usually led to some fight after the prayer, but mostly people tend to ignore them. In addition to these rituals, the Zaydi leaders revived festivals that celebrate *Ghadir Khumm*, a commemoration of the day Zaydis believe the Prophet

Muhammad declared his cousin and son-in-law Ali as his rightful successor. The celebration became highly politicized after the collapse of the Imamate and the state prevented Zaydis from holding such an event because it was viewed as an opportunity for those who want to revive the Imamate regime and undermine the 'people's republic' (Salmoni, 2010).

Although the strategies that revivalist leaders used reflected the collective effort and strong coordination among them, younger and significantly *non-Sayyid* revivalist leaders began to *lead* the efforts in establishing religious schools and producing Zaydi writings (Liechtenhaler, 2003). These actions created an intra-movement split among the revivalist leaders that has played out along generational lines. Much of the older and orthodox Zaydi scholars and leaders, such as Abdullah Bin Yahya Al-Houthi, insisted on pursuing revivalism through *hijras* (sanctuaries) – they wanted Zaydis to withdraw from contested zones, where Zaydis encounter Wahhabis, and establish sanctuaries where the Zaydi beliefs and practices can be preserved and protected from the state and the Wahhabi influence (Haykel, 1995). The idea of *hijra* was promoted by old orthodox Zaydi leaders who were unable to adjust to the new strategy of creating schools and spreading teaching materials among followers; they saw the approach taken by the younger generation as dangerous to the community as a whole and its best to just stay away from everything. The dispute between the older and the younger revivalist leaders led to the rise of the Believing Youth movement, which later developed into what we know today as Ansar Allah.

It must be understood that the revivalist response was mostly non-violent in its early days. However, there were occasional confrontations with Wahhabi activists in mosques and public spaces that developed into 'limited' armed conflicts. But for the most part, it didn't sanction or promote violence against either Wahhabi activists or local state authority representatives. Revivalism was definitely less accommodating than the other two responses

adapted by the Zaydi community: renunciation and reconciliation. However, it channeled its collective energy through peaceful mobilization and remained reactive in nature to both the state and the Wahhabi threats to its community.

Political Representation

The revivalists tried to find their way into the political scene by establishing the Al-Haqq party. The party was established in response to two main factors: the ruling political party, General People's Congress – the party that represented the state – which had eased some of the restrictions that prevented forming alternative political parties. Al-Haqq party was founded in the context of this general loosening. As stated by one of the party's founders Ahmed Al-Shami in 1994, the second factor was a direct response to the Wahhabi spread in Sa'da. Founding the party was also a challenge to the state's party, GPC, which the Zaydi revivalist leaders viewed as supportive of the Wahhabi ideology and thus guilty by association (Haykel, 2003).

The party founders' goal was to reassert the Zaydi identity and represent the grievances of the community in the political arena. But before they tried to pursue these goals, they had to create a space for themselves in a society that has a predominantly negative view of the Imamate era. To garner support from the population, the party's leaders issued a public statement that condemned the Imamate institution and emphasized that the ruler of Yemen needn't be a descendant of the Prophet (*Sayyid*) (Haykel, 2003). In their statement, they rejected the Imamate all together in order to legitimize the Republic. Haykel in his brief essay, "A Zaydi Revival?" indicated that the leaders of Al-Haqq Party issued several statements describing the Imamate as 'historical construct,' but dismissed their efforts to distance themselves from the Imamate institution saying: "Hizb Al-Haqq maintained that it represent a Yemeni view of Islam, but without the Imamate, it was very difficult for outsiders to understand what that view consisted

of” (King, 2012. Pg. 426). Hizb Al-Haqq continued to argue that it represented the Yemeni people’s view of Islam, however, it was difficult for outsiders to understand this view without the concept of Imamate and the idea of *khuruj*. Due to the absence of clearly articulated the party principles, the party was deemed by observers to maintain distinctively Zaydi doctrinal stances regarding political leadership. While their statement indicated that the Imamate institution was irrelevant, the principles of the party showed otherwise.

In its charter, the party called for the revival of the principle ‘commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong’ (an important aspect that will shape one of the core values of Ansar Allah that will be discussed in chapter v). The party also called publicly to combat the growing threat of the Wahhabi school of thought that denies recognizing the Zaydi community as Muslims. However, the charter didn’t provide a clear vision of a world where the authority in Yemen isn’t derived from an “inseparable nexus of genealogy and erudition” (van Bruck, 2010. Pg. 201). Muhammad b. Yahya Izzan, one of the founding members said: “we wanted a political movement that respects the past (the *Zaydiyya*) rather than to return it (the Imamate). The past is gone and all with it...the idea was that the party would work within the new political establishment such as democracy, pluralism, and freedom of expression. We wanted to develop the Zaydi ideology so it would be compatible with the current era. We did not insist that the leader be an ‘*alim* (scholar) but was to be educated in shari’a law and knowledgeable of political affairs” (vom Bruck, 2010, pg, 202). Can’t this ‘compatible Zaydi ideology’ of a ruler be just another way to constitute a modern, or redefined, Imamate?

However, some prominent Zaydi scholars and leaders criticized that statement. One of these leaders was Badr al-Din al-Houthi, who was reluctant to join the party and viewed the dominance of the GPC and an inherently corrupt electoral system as an enormous obstacle to the

revivalism goals (Haykel, 2003). Not only did he consider it pointless, but also tremendously challenging to revive Zaydism and its grievances in the political sphere. Additionally, many leaders in the revivalist movement had a negative attitude towards the political approach as the Al-Haqq party agreed to collaborate with the state by taking over the ministry of *Awqaf* (religious affairs) following the 1997 election where they didn't win any parliament seat (King, 2012).

Soon after its foundation, the Al-Haqq party found itself in fierce competition with the Muslim Brotherhood branch in Yemen (*Islah*). *Islah* was established in 1990 by the head of the Hashid tribe federation Al-Shaykh Abdullah Bin Hussein Al-Ahmar (Carapico, 1993). Like many tribesmen in Yemen, Al-Ahmar was born and raised in a family that followed the Zaydi doctrine. However, he was a devoted supporter of the republican state because the Imamate regime, under Imam Ahmed Bin Yahya Hamid al-Din, executed his brother Hamid and his father, Abdullah. His party was comprised of prominent tribal leaders, Islamists, and businessmen. This diversity in its leadership helped the party grow its popular base quickly and enter the parliamentary election of 1993, winning a significant minority of 62 seats (Carapico, 1993). Al-Haqq party didn't win much during that election because the election contest was mainly between the state's party, GPC, and the party representing the vast majority of tribesmen, *Islah*.

In response to Al-Haqq's poor performance in its first election participation and intra-divisions with old revivalist leaders, several young Zaydi revivalists resigned from the party. These young leaders include Hussein Badr al-Din Al-Houthi (the founder of the Believing Youth), Abdul' Karim Jadban (co-founder of the Believing Youth), Abdullah Al-Rizami (a tribal leader), and Muhammad Salem Izzan (vom Bruck, 2010). The Al-Haqq party's failure laid the

groundwork for the rise of other Zaydi revivalist movement offshoots that would use more aggressive forms of collective action and display much more confrontational posture vis-à-vis the regime.

Conclusion

The Wahhabi influence in Sa'da and the revivalist response give the observer the impression that these Islamic movements have a lot in common. Both movements see Islam as divine guidance to people's religious and temporal lives; this is the framework of these Islamic movements' argument that 'Governance is that of God alone.' In other words, these movements view any system of governance that emanates from people and is independent from God's will and the tenets of Islam is illegitimate. Islam, to them, is not an isolated political practice but a comprehensive life system that applies to the economic, social, and political spheres. Both movements also believe in following worthy ancestors' example, regardless of the differences between them on specific issues; the Wahhabis consider the Prophet's companions as worthy examples, while Zaydis consider their Imams and scholars as their models.

Both movements also showed signs that the only one worthy to rule the community is a pious and knowledgeable Imam. In other words, they believe that the community needs a leader who is committed to Islam and its spread throughout the world, however, the title of that leader might differ from one movement to another: *khalifa*, *amir*, *Imam*, etc. Moreover, both movements see themselves as global movements that are not limited to their local society. Because Islam is global, both movements intend to spread further afield to the larger Arab and Muslim world. We saw that with Wahhabis and their spread from Saudi to Arabia to Yemen, Jordan, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, U.S, and several western countries. The Zaydi revivalist movement has started its global activism through the Believing Youth when they declare their famous chant

"Allah Akbar, Death to America, Death to Israel, Damn the Jews, Victory for Islam" as their primary message to the world.

Chapter IV: The Believing Youth (Al-Shabab Al-Mu'min)

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the emergence of the Believing Youth (*Al-Shabab Al-Mu'min*) as a product of the internal division within the Zaydi revivalist leadership. The chapter will show how this organization established a deliberately confrontational mobilization network that emerged under the leadership of key Zaydi figures, such Hussein Badr al-Din Al-Houthi and Abdullah Al-Rizami. Additionally, this chapter intends to explain how Hussein's period of leadership in *Al-Shabab Al-Mu'min* was essential in the transition of the organization into a militant group. This transition took place after Hussein invented the famous slogan that intended to critique the state's domestic policy and its effect on the political, religious, and social disenfranchisement of the Zaydi community and the entire Yemeni population as a whole. Hussein argued that these domestic policies were nothing but a product of foreign influence, that is the U.S and Israel, that is dedicated to eliminating the Islamic character of Yemen.

The Believing Youth Organization (Tandhim Al-Shabab Al-Mu'min)

The split among the revivalist leaders can be traced back to the late 1980's when some young Zaydi leader started to advocate for more proactive actions in reviving the Zaydi community. The first proactive Zaydi organization was established in 1982 by Salah Ahmed Flayteh the founder of what was initially known as the Union of the Believing Youth (*Ittihad Al-Shabab Al-Mu'min*). Flayteh used his organization as a platform to preach about the Iranian revolution and its philosophy (Winter, 2011). By 1991 – the year where the state produced a legislation that allowed for the formation of political parties – this particular group transformed into the Assembly of the Believing Youth (*Muntada Al-Shabab Al-Mu'min*). This assembly

consisted of six members and a single room in Sana'a. They devoted their organization to cultural studies and publication of Zaydi teachings (Winter, 2011).

In 1997, a radical transformation emerged that finally produced a well-coordinated organization that became known as The Believing Youth Organization (*Tandhim Al-Shabab Al-Mu'min*) which was under the guidance and active involvement of Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi. Hussein's goal was to focus on recruiting young Zaydis during summer vacations and offering them a program of cultural awareness and activism outside of the religious schools that focused primarily on teaching the Zaydi doctrine (Winter, 2011). The Believing Youth Organization was not only a response to the recurring failure of Al-Haqq party, but also as a deliberate and more aggressive embodiment of collective action that was missing in the earlier Zaydi movements of renunciation, reconciliation, and revivalism. The organization was created out of a desire for more tangible results in defending the besieged Zaydi community.

As an alternative to the religious schools created by the early revivalist leaders, the younger Zaydi leaders created and administered a network of Zaydi summer camps during school summer vacations. These summer camps were directly managed by three key figures: Hussein Badr al-Din Al-Houthi, Abdulkarim Jadban, and Muhammad Izzan. The first summer camp consisted of only 35 students, but the early 2000's the organization was administering 67 summer camps. Most of these camps centered around Sa'da and was a destination for at least 15,000 young students (Winter, 2011). The popularity and the growth of these summer camps benefited a lot from the lack of job opportunities for those who were expelled from Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War as well as the lack of government-run summer centers that could compete with those of the Believing Youth. These schools didn't focus only on delivering teachings of the

Zaydi doctrine, but it also sought to develop a generation of activists who would be prepared to assert and defend the Zaydi community (Klapprodt, 2018).

The camps under the leadership of Izzan and Jadban emphasized cultural self-defense via education – the strategy that was developed by early revivalists in their religious schools. However, Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi, on the other hand, tried to take another route of making these camps a pool of young Zaydi foot soldiers. By making the camps geared toward radicalizing young Zaydis and adopting more aggressive and focused forms of collective action, Hussein believed it was time to start a new wave of *khuruj* against the state (King, 2012). Such an idea was vehemently rejected by Jadban and Izzan who thought such a step would endanger the Zaydi community and spoil all of the progress they made as an organization. By the late 1990s, an enormous split over the ideology, teachings, theology, and goals of the Believing Youth Organization emerged. Abdulkarim Jadban and Muhammad Izzan wanted to adhere to the peaceful means and academic theological education, whereas Hussein wanted to adhere the traditional Zaydi doctrine which emphasizes ‘going out’ against the ruler directly (King, 2012).

The Principle of Khuruj

Khuruj, as a concept, is an Imam’s (community leader) rebellion against the unjust ruler (state) and to call the people of his community to come under his Imamate to take control of their community. This principle has been cited by many republican and nationalistic figures to justify their suppression of the Zaydi thought after 1962 because they feared a counter-revolution that would overthrow their state (King, 2012). This central tenet of the Zaydi doctrine has been debated by numerous Zaydi scholars who disagreed over the requirements of *khuruj* and the proper means to conduct it.

Zaydi scholars, including those who founded Hizb Al-Haqq, emphasize *khuruj* as a critical expression of the Zaydi doctrine's singular devotion to political justice. However, they question the controversial rules that govern the execution of this principle (King, 2012). These scholars transformed the concept of resisting injustice through popular consent to a new process of voting out unjust leaders through democratic means instead of the traditional way of revolting against them (King, 2012). These new leaders in the Zaydi community believed that the legislation that allowed for creating opposing political parties and expanded free speech (allowing people to express their resentments of the government freely) should suffice the requirements for *khuruj*. Abd Al-Karim Jadban said on this topic that since "the constitution guarantees me that I can express my opinion and topple the ruler through constitutional methods – by way of election and the ballot box – then the result is the desired change. Zaydism seeks better rule, so if you arrive at this goal through peaceful change and constitutional *khuruj*, this is better. Fighting and bloodshed are resorted to only in emergency situation when other paths are blocked" (King, 2012. Pg 428).

Jadban's argument is sound; if one can remove an unjust ruler by the peaceful democratic means of voting and express resentment through free speech, then why bothering to revolt? A counter question to that is: can the people of Yemen, at that time, remove Ali Abdullah Saleh from his seat through the electoral process? Moreover, can one under his regime express his thought and ideology without being held accountable? Jadban's argument appeared to be either wishful thinking or trying to praise the new legislations at that time. His community tried to express their grievances to the government in several peaceful ways and all of their attempts fell to deaf ears. This aspect of 'peaceful' *khuruj* was one of the main reasons that led Hussein Badr al-Din Al-Houthi to break away from the organization that he created with Jadban and chose to

pursue a more radical method that would force the republican government to at least hear him out.

Preparing for the “Coming-out” (al-khuruĵ)

Shortly after the split, Hussein encouraged his followers to be armed; he easily justified this action by that arguing that it was necessary to protect Zaydi tombs from the attacks carried by the Wahhabis. Additionally, arming his followers was designed to offer protection to Zaydi religious schools, mosques, and summer camps against occasional small-scale clashes with Wahhabi activists. It’s important to note that arming his followers didn’t mean that Hussein and his followers completely disregarded the reactive-nature of the Zaydi movement – Hussein wanted to remain in the self-defense position and to never transition to the offense. This will be demonstrated in Part II of the paper that analyzes the ideas he delivered to his followers. In chapter VI, we will see that there was no record in his ‘transcribed’ lecture that indicate any nature of attack against the state or starting a revolution. His main concerns were the deteriorating condition of the Zaydi community and the economic situation of Yemen at the time.

Hussein was very successful in his framing techniques which elevated the cultural danger the Zaydis faced from the Wahhabi movement and the state’s policies. He fostered a new collective Zaydi identity among his followers which was defined by protecting the Zaydi community against its external adversaries. Additionally, Hussein’s own charisma was an additional key ingredient in his successful framing of the self-defense necessity. He successfully tied metaphors of group trauma (the loss of the Imamate) to the young Zaydis hardships in the face of the well-entrenched Wahhabi movement threat and the state’s systematic exclusion of their community. His charismatic character was purely reflected on the audio cassettes and

brochures that displayed his aggressive interpretation of Zaydi revivalism and denunciation of the US-Saudi backed state which he described as corrupt and dictatorial (Hilterman, 2009).

The Believing Youth Slogan

The current slogan that is chanted by Ansar Allah's followers came to the scene as a byproduct of the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. In the wake of these two events, Hussein urged his followers to resist the American imperialism by publicly chanting: Allah Akbar, Death to America, Death to Israel, Damn the Jews, and Victory for Islam. He declared to his followers in of his lectures:

How long is it going to take us to do something about the American threat...I say to you my brothers, Shout! Don't you all have a voice you can use to shout: God is the Greatest...Death to America and Israel...Victory for Islam and Muslims? This must be our slogan. This slogan must be an honor for us to have, right here in this school. We will be the first to make this shout, but it will not stay in this place alone for long. By God, we will find other faithful people who will shout with you in other places (Hussein, 2003b. Pg. 16-17).

The slogan became what defines the movement Ansar Allah as an entity, and it was the main factor that triggered the first war in 2004. In early 2003, Hussein and his followers organized a bold and a very telling protest against the state when they knew that the then-President Ali Abdullah Saleh was going to stop by the city of Sa'da to pray the Friday prayer before heading to Saudi Arabia to perform the pilgrimage. After finishing the prayer, the president wanted to say a few words to the people in the mosque only to be drowned by the voices of Hussein's followers who filled the mosque chanting their slogan (Winter, 2011). Such a bold move led to the arrest of more than 600 individuals.

On June of 2004, the same slogan was chanted in the Saleh Mosque after Friday prayers, and their insistence on chanting the slogan attracted the attention of authorities, leading to the arrest of 640 individuals and the issuing of an arrest warrant for Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi

(Winter, 2011). Government troops went to Sa'da to arrest him but failed to do so. After several failed mediation attempts to stabilize the extremely tensed situation, three soldiers were killed outside the city of Sa'da in unknown circumstances causing the state to respond by launching an aggressive military campaign. This marked the start of the first of six-military conflict between the state and what is now known as Ansar Allah. The first round ended with the killing of Hussein in September of 2004 (Winter, 2011).

The unanswered question about these protests is: were they one of Hussein's framing techniques that will eventually lead to the long-awaited *khuruj* or they were merely an attempt to express resentments of the state's complicity with US foreign policies? During the US's war on terror in the early 2000s, Ansar Allah – like many other Islamic movements in the regions – reflected through their public protests a regional response to what appeared to them insidious Western desires to undermine the Muslim societies. Hence, the slogan was thought to be something everybody would get behind; it can be used to act on an area of widespread desire to defend Islam, and not necessarily serve the movement's interests. Another interpretation of the slogan is that it was designed to mobilize Hussein's followers and generate a sufficient collective action against the state. The emotional appeal of the slogan makes it a particularly strong tool to generate a collective action like the ones in Sa'da and in Sana'a. Fattah in his article "Yemen: A slogan and six wars" stated that the more accurately the slogan expresses the suffering and dissatisfaction of the people, the more effective it becomes in mobilizing latent emotions. Fattah indicated that Hussein succeeded in using the slogan to express the local demands and mobilize his followers against the state (Klapprodt, 2018).

At that point, it's clear how Hussein married the Zaydi grievances with the US's regional threat to the Islamic world. When his followers conflated the Zaydi grievances with the US's

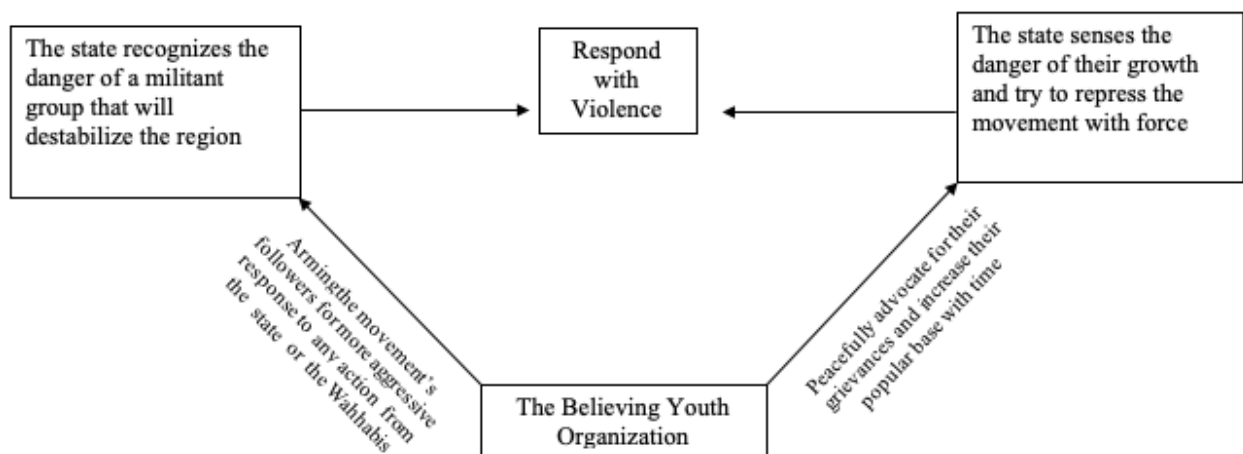
threat, they didn't need any justifications for their militant response to the state in 2004. Just as they saw in Wahhabi mosque takeovers and destructions of prominent Zaydi tombs a necessity to get armed for self-defense purposes, they saw the state's close relationships with the US and Saudi Arabia a justification for an armed rebellion. It could be possible that Hussein did *not* want his followers to take any form of offense against any entity and preferred to stay in the reactive-nature for as long as possible, but that is unlikely to be true looking at how he pushed his followers to the tipping point when he declared "How long is it going to take us to do something about the American threat...?"

Conclusion

As a community that fell from leaders to outsiders, the split that happened within the Believing Youth Organization illustrates how the revival of the Zaydi community emerged from and perpetuated narratives of "in-group/out-group" as the movement's leaders were trying to define themselves in society. *Tandhim Al-Shabab Al-Mu'min* was an organization that evolved in response to particular events including the failure of Al-Haqq party, Wahhabi desecrations of Zaydi tombs, and the US's invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, and, most importantly, the state's continuous repression of the Zaydi community. Witnessing these events convinced Hussein to pursue justice for his community in his own terms. He was able to attract many followers with the slogan and strengthened their devotion to his cause by using powerful speeches that strongly criticized injustice, corruption, and the US-threat to the Muslim world. He urged his followers to persist on shouting the slogan by telling them: "when people shout these slogans, it irritates the Americans greatly. They know it's a religious work in the path of God. The ambassador they sent to our country once said, 'America doesn't want the Arab people to be transformed into religious enemies.' What does he mean by that? What he means is they don't want us to

transform our confrontation with them under the rubric of ‘in the path of Allah (*Al-Jihad fi sabil Allah*).

Hussein was very effective in the integration of the diverse array of Zaydi concerns (political, cultural, and socioeconomic) and marrying all of them to the foreign intervention in the Middle East. The public protests and the content of the slogan itself were not unique to Hussein and his followers. After 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, many Islamic groups across the world were able to stage public protests to express their hostility towards the US and its foreign policy. Banners, symbols, and petitions were deployed in different national contexts. What made Hussein and his followers stand out, however, was they were more successful in marrying the anti-US foreign policy with the grievances of the Zaydi community. Finally, Hussein wanted to use the widespread anger towards the Americans to mobilize collective actions toward defending the Zaydi community grievances. However, it could be easily argued that he was less effective in controlling or directing the public protests once started. This argument is based on the assumptions that his poor control of the protests led to the actual confrontation with the state in 2004. However, my reading of the events that led to the first armed conflict makes me conclude that violence was inevitable; it was only a matter of time.



Part II: Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi's Ideology

This part of the paper primarily deals with the teachings that shapes the ideology of the followers and the leaders of Ansar Allah. Translation of Hussein's lectures will be provided regarding his readings and interpretation of the Qur'an as well as the thoughts and beliefs that he shares with Khomeini in Iran and Hizb Allah in Lebanon. The purpose of the translations is to give the reader an insight into Hussein's thinking and give the reader a chance to relate these translations with what Ansar Allah are saying and doing today. The paper doesn't intend in no way to promote or advocate for Ansar Allah's ideology. Rather, it tries to provide pathways for scholars and researchers in the field of Modern Islamic Movements to navigate, explore, and compare Ansar Allah to other modern movements.

Chapter V: Hussein's Reading of the Qur'an

Introduction

In order for us to understand Ansar Allah's actions and behavior in the political scene in Yemen, we must take a deep look into the teachings that shapes their ideology. This chapter will be dedicated to translating and paraphrasing Hussein Badr Al-Din's 'transcribed' lectures (*Malazim*) where we will explore his ideas on the Justice of Allah to His worshipers – he argued here that contemporary Muslim Scholars are portraying Allah as a wrongdoer. This Chapter will also look into his views on 'Responsibility' that demand an equivalence between faith and action; this is the part that reflects how his discourse and reading of the Qur'an is wholeheartedly Zaydi. This chapter also demonstrates how Hussein seems to represent an absolute commitment to the principle of *defining what is just and forbidding what is unjust* in the spectrum of Islam and the Zaydi doctrine in particular.

The Mu'tazila School of Thought

One aspect that must be understood before jumping into the analysis of Hussein's teachings to his followers is the Mu'tazila school of thought and its relation to the ideology he delivered in his lectures. Mu'tazila is a school of thought that emerged between the 8th and 10th centuries CE. The Mu'tazila's main argument that defines their doctrine is that humans must have total free will, because Allah, who is undoubtedly wise and good, cannot cause evil to take place yet evil still exists (Britannica, 2020). The school of thought has five principles that make up the Mu'tazila creed and they are: Monotheism (*Al-Tawhid*), The Justice of Allah (*Al-Adll*), The Promise and Warning (*Al-Wa'd W Al-Wa'id*), Responsibility, and finally the Intermediary Position (*Al-Manzila Bayn Al-Manzilat*). I found these five principles a useful guide to dissect and analyze Hussein's teachings in his *Malazim* as well as tracing the logic behind them. This chapter will utilize two of the Mu'tazila principles: The Justice of Allah and Responsibility.

Before diving into Hussein's reading of the Qur'an, it must be noted that he has expressed open hostility to the five principles of the Mu'tazila and emphasized only depending on what is known among Zaydis as *Al-Thaqalan* (The Qur'an, and the family of the prophet Muhammad). In a lecture delivered in 2002 Hussein said: "we must reject these arts (funun) which we happen to discover to be resembling many negative things. These arts are *Usul Al-Fiqh* (the five principles) and *Ilm al-kalam* (the study of Islamic doctrine). These are things that we must eliminate from our Qur'anic culture and never return to them because they draw Muslims away from *Al-thaqalan*. They gave us an isolated point of view about life, religion, and even Allah. They led Muslims to have a defective view of Allah and His religion of Islam. We must be operating according to what is between the Qur'an and the family of the Prophet Muhammad" (Hussein, 2002. Pg. 12-13).

The Justice of Allah

The second principle of Mu'tazila pertains to the absolute justice of Allah is predicated on the third chapter of the Qur'an – *Surat Aal-i-Imran* – where it is said: That is because of the evil which your hands have sent before you. And certainly, Allah is never unjust to (His) slaves (Qur'an, 3:182). The argument here is that Allah is not the one who creates the abominable actions, which include heinous crimes like murder, but it is the human being who is responsible for them on his/her free will. In the Qur'an, chapter 30 verse 41, it is said: "Corruption has flourished on land and sea as a result of people's actions and He will make them taste the consequences of some of their own actions so that they may turn back" (Qur'an, 30:41). These verses and their implications are reflected clearly in Hussein's severe criticism of the Muslim community of scholars and those who took power in the Islamic world after the Prophet's death. He says:

"They lied about the Qur'an, and they hid it behind their backs. They transformed the Holy Book into a document that creates false creeds which not only attribute scantiness to Allah, but also make Allah look as if He is the source of all ugliness and that He also preordains every dreadful deed." He followed this phrase by giving an example of a contemporary TV show that showed the story of the renowned Muslim scholar Ibn Maja. He said: "You've probably seen this series called 'Ibn Majah' and how those who worked on it depicted what happened to the poor woman who was robbed by thieves as *qada'a wa qadar* (ordination and predestination) of Allah. They are teaching people that Allah – who we know absolves himself of all abomination, heinous acts, and all concepts that He should will injustice or that He command or predestines injustice." (Hussein, 2001. Pg. 26).

Using this example of the series, Hussein express his distrust of the Jews and how they are trying to influence the mind of Muslims across the world by saying: “Didn’t they demonstrate through this show that Muslims are more hateful than the Jews towards Allah. Didn’t Allah say in His Book ‘And the Jews said the hand of Allah is shackled. Shackled are their hands, and they are cursed for they have said’?” (Hussein, 2001. Pg 26). Hussein in this lecture demonstrated two things: his distrust of the Jews which he claimed are controlling what the Muslims read, hear, and watch throughout the world, and his enormous resentment of contemporary Muslim scholars who approved such things to be done and didn’t say anything against it.

The Promise and Warning (Al-Wa’ad wa Al-Wa’id)

The promise and warning is an essential component of Hussein’s teachings to his followers as he employed it effectively in reproving his followers to take actions as they must comprehend that Allah’s punishment for inactions is not only going to take place in the afterlife, but also in this life we’re living. Hussein used this method to argue that the miserable situation Yemen was living at the time is a result of Yemenis’ sins. He also argued that the same thing applies to the rest of Arab and Muslim states. One of the examples that he used was what happened with Muslims in the battle of Uhud when they lost because the arrow shooters didn’t obey the Prophet’s order in staying at their position during the battle. Hussein complained that Qur’an exegetes have historically attempted to divert the meaning of the verse that says “And what you suffered (of the disaster) on the day (of the battle of Uhud when) the two armies met, was by the leave of Allah” (Qur’an, 3:161).

In explaining this verse Hussein said: “The Qur’an emphasizes that the punishments take place in the life of the world (*al-dunya*), and that for any action that people might do, the

recompense may be sudden. ... the reward or punishment in the afterlife is a separate thing. For the life in this world, Allah could turn a tiger, lion, a camel on you for punishment the same way he turned the nonbelievers on the Muslims at the battle of Uhud.” Hussein continued saying “whenever a human being rebels, and he’s at a place of a great responsibility for a lot of people, then he deserves to be struck at the hands of others ... a lot of Qur’an exegetes are only concerned with the matter of sin when the Qur’an is affirming that the matter here pertains to the life of this world; this is something we must pay attention to as for any rebellion against the will of Allah, there is a punishment to be faced here in this life and in the afterlife as well” (Hussein, 2002b. Pg. 1-4).

Hussein uses the Qur’an successfully to demonstrate that divine threat and promise are consequent to the actions of humans where earthly fertility or scarcity are indicators of divine favor or wrath. Moreover, Hussein’s explanation of the promise and the threat and their relation to the afterlife and the life of this world is mandated in conjunction with three factors: rebellion against Allah (*al-ma’asiyah*), deficiency (*taqsir*), and neglect of duty (*al-tafrit*). The first factor is common in almost all Muslim religious discourses. However, the other two factors are particularly representative of Zaydi thought and pivotal in that of Hussein’s discourse. On an equal footing with ‘rebellion’ against the guidelines of Allah are failures to carry them out satisfactorily – deficiency (*Al-taqsir*) – or neglect them all together – neglect of duty (*Al-tafrit*). This equivalence correlates perfectly with another significant hallmark of Zaydi discourse which is the emphasis on culpability (*taklif*); an emphasis that is predicated on an assumption that humans have discretionary ability to implement the divine commands.

On this matter, Hussein said: “It’s normal that Allah should create here in this life a promise and a threat. For humans who strive for good deeds, Allah endeavors to grant him

goodly recompense for his righteous works in this life in addition to what He promised him of blessings and goodly reward in the afterlife. On the other hand, He will also cause a person to get severely punished if he/she ever rebels against the command of Allah. The purpose of this punishment is so he/she may fear rebellion (first factor), fear insufficient action (second factor), and fear neglect in carrying out the commands (third factor). These rebellions come either from the society as a whole (*ummah*) or from individuals... a crucial point that we must understand is that there is a promise and there is a threat... we tend to be ignorant of the fact that there is a threat for every dire deed we commit, for every insufficiently fulfilled obligation, and for every obligation and divine command we choose to neglect. The miserable situation the Muslims are living today, and Yemenis in particular, is a punishment for neglect that transpired from us (Hussein, 2002c. Pg: 9).

Hussein is arguing here that difficult circumstances in the real world are tightly linked to Muslim failures to implement the commands of Islam which have manifestations of the promise in the local environment such as the economic hardships people suffers. Hussein, in short, is saying penalty in the earthly realm attaches not simply to direct contravention of the divine commands, but also the inaction – the sitting in one’s house and not doing anything – which falls under the third factor (neglect).

Responsibility (Faith and Action)

In Hussein’s discourse, faith and action in his view are equivalent and reciprocal. This is essential to understand if we want to comprehend Hussein’s discourse. He believes that the two complete each other. In other words, one doesn’t persist in the absence of the other. He explained his views on this matter when he defined Muslims on the basis of the verse in *Surat Al-Baqra* (2:256): “So whoever renounces false gods and believes in Allah has certainly grasped the

firmest, unfailing hand-hold. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing” (Qur’an, 2:256). Hussein explains this verse saying: “Notice my brothers that disbelieving false gods is what I call an ‘operational position’ (*mawqif amali*). The nature of Islam as a religion is not to only preach about how good it’s to believe in Allah, but to show that actively by a movement method (*manhaj haraki*)” (Hussein, 2003a. Pg., 14).

The essential features of Hussein’s readings and explanation of the Qur’an is largely of a Zaydi perspective. This can be observed in his conception of ordination and predestination (*qada’a wa qadar*), the effects of the promise and threat (*wa’ad wa al-wa’id*), and his concept of responsibility (*al-taklif*). In his view, *al-taklif* is to command what is just and forbid what is wrong. Given that he understands the Qur’an from a completely Zaydi perspective, he believes that a true Muslim, who is sound in mind and body, has absolutely no excuse whatsoever to remain inactive. One who strongly believes in Allah (faith) can’t also be someone who isn’t working to command what is just and forbid what is wrong (action). This is how the two (faith and action) work together, if one is absent the other must not exist either. Hussein in this matter insist that “When we accord the absolute rule of Allah to someone who is not operating on the basis of strong faith in Allah, then we’re like those who direct their worship towards someone other than Allah. If you find yourself doing this, then you’ve committed idolatry against Allah” (Hussein, 2002d. Pg. 15).

As we can see, one of the essential features of Hussein’s discourse is the strong emphasis on work (*‘aml*), which appears to be prominent in Hussein’s thinking where faith can only be demonstrated with actions. *Jihad* – in all of its forms – is considered in Hussein’s view as a subset of the category of *al-taklif* (commanding what is just and forbidding what is wrong). Hussein talked about this idea in his explanation of the Qur’anic verse from *Surat Al-Baqrah*

(2:186): “When My servants ask you ‘O Prophet’ about Me: I am truly near. I respond to one’s prayer when they call upon Me. So, let them respond ‘with obedience’ to Me and believe in Me, perhaps they will be guided to the right way.”

Hussein explained this verse saying: “to respond in faith is from the standpoint of our desire of Allah to guide us as to how we should work, and when we work, He will respond. His response is conditional to our response to him; having a strong faith that is paired with a strong desire to work. Isn’t this a natural logic? Didn’t Allah answer his Prophet’s prayers? It was very possible for the Prophet Muhammad to sit at the corner of the Mosque and get all of his prayers answered in a blink of an eye, but the Prophet wanted to set an example for his followers; he was the first to work among them. As soon as he arrived at Medina, he started to build a mosque.... isn’t he the master of all prophets and messengers?” (Hussein, 2002b. Pg 4-5).

Conclusion

Throughout the reading of Hussein’s ‘transcribed’ grievances (*Malazim*), Hussein took his real cues and most of evidences for his arguments from the Qur’an only. He noted in one of his lectures that the “obvious meaning of the Qur’an verses should suffice you” (Hussein, 2002a. Pg. 16). He followed former Islamic reformers and revivalist who appeared long before he did like Sayyid Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani and his disciple Muhammad Abduh in drawing on the verse number 11 of Surat Al-Ra’ad: “Surely, Allah does not change the condition of a people unless they change themselves.” (Qur’an, 13:11). He believed that a fundamental transition in society, including political and economic transformation, must come from within the individual himself in the first place before spreading to the rest of the community and society at large – radical and sweeping change must take the form of a ripple effect. Such transformation is unique in Shi’ism in general and in Zaydism in particular.

Hussein's dismissal of the Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence) when explaining Qur'anic verses is largely due to his belief that the Qur'an is comprehensible for anyone who reads it carefully. Hussein in his lectures have always argued that Qur'an scholars (*mufassirin*) divert Muslims away from the easily understandable and apparent meaning of the Holy Book. As we saw in several examples in this chapter, and the following chapter as well, Hussein's discourse and analysis of the Qur'an proceed almost always from his own readings and interpretations, and he encouraged his followers to do the same when he said: "When you work with the Qur'an, don't approach it like a Qur'an scholar (*muffassir*). A lot of those who sell themselves to the Muslim community as commentator of the Qur'an don't present its true nature in the correct way. If you take a look at *al-Kashshaf* of the renowned Qur'an scholar *Al-Zamakhshari* or that of *Al-Tabari* or any other *muffassir*, you will see that these people are largely oblivious and they tend to forget talking about pivotal verses which we are in a desperate need to understand in these days. Their explanation of the Qur'an is so complicated and makes it seem that the Qur'an is a cryptic book that very few can understand." (Hussein, 2002. Pg. 8).

I believe that Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi's slogans against America, Israel, and the Jews placed him outside the parameters of Western scholars and academic study. The famous slogan chanted by his followers today leave many people in the West extremely worried about the movement's ideology and its implications. Thus, instead of researching and analyzing his lectures (*Malazim*), it seems that a lot of people tend to just ignore his lectures and focus on his movement's political behavior. Hussein's work has not been adequately challenged or debated from within the Islamic world for much the same reason Sayyid Qutb's book 'In the Shade of Qur'an' (*Fi Dhilal Al-Qur'an*) even if the latter has had much more outreach and popularity than the former.

In my opinion, this is the principle that Ansar Allah are using to grow their popularity among young people in the territories that they control. Many young people in Yemen are now graduating from high school and college with no opportunities to advance their careers further. What Ansar Allah are doing is setting up a long-term goal for their followers to work every day toward achieving: that goal is destroying America and Israel. Ansar Allah succeeded in marrying the destruction of America and Israel with the responsibility principle (faith and action). The rhetoric that they emphasize towards people highlights the idea that strong faith leads to bold actions. If centered towards the path of Allah, these bold actions will eventually lead to the destruction of *al-Taaghut*, and by that they refer to America and Israel.

This is a strategy that gave a lot of hopeless young people a sense of purpose. Many of these young individuals believe that everything they do during the day is taking them one step closer to achieving the ultimate goal of destroying America and Israel; they either achieve that goal or die trying to.

Chapter VI: The External Influence of Khomeini and Hizb Allah on Hussein's Teachings and does that make Ansar Allah another Iranian Funded Terrorist Organization

Introduction

Ansar Allah have always been accused of conspiring with Iran and Hizb Allah. This is largely due to the claim that Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi spent time in Iran and Lebanon before starting his movement *Al-Shabab Al-Mu'min* that later became Ansar Allah. Critics have also accused Hussein of borrowing Khomeini's rhetoric in his discourse and that he tried to replicate the Iranian revolution in Yemen. Therefore, this chapter will look into Hussein's lectures and where exactly did his teachings overlapped with those of Khomeini. This chapter will also look into where Hussein differed with Khomeini and how he tried to create a movement that is inherently Zaydi.

Additionally, this chapter will try to answer the question of whether Ansar Allah is another Iranian funded terrorist organization. The movement has been added to the list of the terrorist organizations by the Trump administration and then removed by the Biden's. The question that must be asked here is why the two administrations have two different views on the movement? In other words, why is it so hard for the international community to declare Hussein's movement as a terrorist organization?

Khomeini's Influence on Hussein's Ideology

Hussein's actions and reading of the Qur'an as seen in the previous chapter show that he remained a Zaydi in all of the position that he took. However, he was very explicit about his impression of Khomeini's revolution in Iran and the establishment of Hizb Allah in Lebanon. He once said "Iran and Hizb Allah are the most powerful enemies of America and Israel. We as Zaydis should be just as conscious of American-Israeli threat just as Iran and Hizb Allah" (Hussein, 2001). One of the tools that Hussein borrowed from the Khomeini revolution of 1978

was the slogan. Khomeini insisted to his followers that shouting '*Allahu Akbar*' was a very strong weapon that had no match whatsoever. Khomeini said in 1980 "it's incumbent upon all Muslims to shout...you can see this when our Revolutionary Guards issue the command to everyone to go to the rooftops of their houses and shout '*Allahu Akbar*' (Khomeini, 1980. Pg 106).

Hussein used this slogan as a message of 'liberation' from the 'imperialism and colonialism' of the West. Hussein said: "When people go out and carry out these slogans, which look as an easy task from the outside, it greatly irritates the Americans and their allies. Why? Because it's a religious work in the path Allah. The U.S Ambassador said his country 'Doesn't want to make enemies with the Arab people.' What does he mean by that? He wants to say that the government, which he represents, don't want you as faithful Muslims to be transformed in your confrontation with them under the rubric of Allah...the Qur'an ordered us to say '*Allahu Akbar*' because Allah knows that it affects them...they are not frightened by any slogans except for those that are proceedings in the path of Allah" (Hussein, 2003b. Pg. 16-17).

The question that must be asked here is why did Hussein adopt the Iranian slogan, and followed Khomeini's style of delivering that message to his followers? The other question is what exactly did he hope the outcome of doing this would be? It could be possible that he hoped his message of the slogan would mobilize the people to speak out (*khuruj*). However, it's very unlikely for Hussein to think that way because his movement wasn't that popular at the time compared to that of Khomeini's when he called his people to shout this slogan from their rooftops. The other possibility is that he was directing his message to the Yemeni government, the republican state. It must be noted that despite his severe criticism of the government, no text record in his lectures called his followers to revolt against the state. Another assumption is that

he was calling the government to open the door of its military centers to prepare the Yemeni people for jihad against America and Israel. This assumption could also be false given the fact that Hussein's primary concern at the time was preserving the Zaydi doctrine and community from the Wahhabi threat and the state's repression. Therefore, the final assumption, which I think is more likely, is that he intended this message to be heard and acted upon by the future generations of Zaydis. His discourse didn't resonate with a lot of people when he started to deliver his lectures. Therefore, to call Jihad against America at the time would've been a miscalculated move; he wanted to preserve and protect the Zaydi community first and worry about America later on.

The Party of Allah: where Hussein and Khomeini Differ

The term Hizb Allah is a Qur'anic one that refers to the 'party' of, or those who 'gather' under the name of, Allah. The term Hizb Allah was used in the political sphere in Yemen long before it did in Lebanon. The first one to use it was the renown Yemeni intellectual Muhammad Mahmoud Al-Zubairi who was the mastermind of establishing a wing for the Muslim Brotherhood in Yemen (Al-Saqqaf, 1997). According to Al-Saqqaf, Al-Zubairi wanted to establish a popular party that draws on Islamic values and distance itself from the Yemeni socialist party of the South – he initially named this party Hizb Allah (the party of Allah). This name was changed afterward when tribal leaders and Yemeni residents who have a strong tribal identity started to join Al-Zubairi's party. Since the name implies that its members are Islamist in nature, some tribal leaders, such as Abdullah Bin Hussein Al-Ahmar, thought that the name of the party needed to be changed into one that is more inclusive to those who don't necessarily identify with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The name was changed into *Hizb Al-Islah* (the party of reform).

The term Hizb Allah is largely tied to the Qur'anic verse "And whoever is an ally of Allah and His Messenger and those who have believed – indeed, the party of Allah – they will be the predominant" (Qur'an, 5:56). Hussein, Khomeini, and leaders of Hizb Allah in Lebanon understood the term in its Qur'anic premise – that is any group of Muslims that rally around an idea in the path of Allah and his Messenger should be considered a Hizb. What differs, however, is that the term was used differently by Hussein. Both Khomeini and Hizb Allah leaders are Twelver Shi'ites, and their understanding of the term stems from their Shi'ite doctrine. In other words, they all believed in the universality of (the party of Allah), however, they depart from Hussein when it comes to the conditions that warrant designating a group of people as a Hizb Allah.

As we discussed previously, Hussein is a Zaydi leader, and that's clear in his interpretation of verses of the Qur'an. His Zaydi ideology also affected his understanding of the meaning of "Hizb Allah." The primary condition that allow a group of Muslims to call themselves "Hizb Allah" is belief in and acceptance of the *wilayah* (Imamate) of Ali Ibn Abi Talib, Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son in law. On this matter Hussein said, "From this position we know that when Al-Imam Al-Hadi says 'it's mandatory upon every Muslim individual to affirm the Imamate of Ali Ibn Abi Talib,' that we must accept Ali as the rightful leader of the Muslim community after the Prophet Muhammad. Believing in the Imamate of Ali opens many doors of guidance to the Qur'an and the Messenger's teachings. When the Ummah, or any group within it, affirm and accept the Imamate of Ali in practice, then we can go ahead and use the term Hizb of Allah" (Hussein, 2002e. Pg. 14). Hussein defining of what Hizb Allah are under the criteria of the Imamate of which Imam Al-Hadi defined demonstrate that his understanding is intrinsically different from that Khomeini and Hizb Allah in Lebanon. The latter

two recognize that Imamate of *Al-Faqih (Wilayat al- Faqih)* in Iran. This is an idea that the Muslim community should be led by a temporary leader (Al-Faqih) until the Twelfth and final Imam, Muhammad Al-Mahdi, appear at the end of time. When he appears, according to Twelver Shi'ites, this is when all Muslims must unite and declare Jihad against the unbelievers.

This difference displays that Ansar Allah in its ideology although share a lot, in terms of political position against America and Israel, with Iran and Hizb Allah in Lebanon, yet it remains inherently Zaydi. For Khomeini, the Revolution was founded on the example set by Al-Husayn, the Prophet's grandchild, in Karbala. As for Zaydis, the matter doesn't stop with Al-Hussayn, rather it continues with their Imams

Did Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi Establish a Terrorist Organization

After seven years of war between Ansar Allah and the Saudi-led coalition that supports the internationally recognized government, the Trump administration declared Ansar Allah a terrorist organization several days before Biden's inauguration (Hudson, 2021). However, a statement from the Department of State revoked Trump's declaration on the 12th of February 2021. By looking at the change of position towards the movement different administration take, one must ask: was it a political move from Trump to declare Ansar Allah as a terrorist organization as a final favor for his Saudi allies? What factors make a certain Islamic movement a terrorist organization? The United States added all Khomeini-inspired Islamic movements to its list of terrorist organizations, especially Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hizb Allah, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. Ansar Allah, as an Islamic movement, is similar to these movements in many aspects: being linked to Iran, extreme anti-Semitism in their slogans, and extreme hate towards America and Israel alike. Why would the United States, despite all of this, still remove it from the terrorist list? Is Ansar Allah a terrorist organization or not?

Before deciding whether they are terrorist or not, one must find what exactly the definition for terrorism is. In the Middle East and North Africa, it's difficult to declare who is a terrorist and who is not. Hamas in Gaza is considered a champion for the Palestinian struggle by a large portion of the Palestinian population. This was apparent when the movement won the legislative election of 2006 despite all of the terrorist attacks it conducted in heavily populated areas in Israel and killing hundreds of people (The Guardian, 2006). Hizb Allah is also considered a champion for a significant portion of the Lebanese population, especially Shi'ites, for its role in liberating southern Lebanon from Israeli forces (Norton, 2000). This movement is championed despite targeting civilian infrastructure in Israel in the war of 2006. The same principle applies to Ansar Allah. In Yemen, the movement is considered by a significant portion of the population there to be a champion in the face of the Saudi invasion of the country. However, the Saudi government considers them a terrorist organization because of their attacks on infrastructure facilities.

The UN's definition for terrorism is "targeting innocent civilians for political purposes." However, this definition doesn't solve the dilemma. One might ask why Israel's army hasn't been condemned as a terrorist organization for causing severe civilian casualties in all of its wars in Gaza: 2008, 2012, 2014. Israel launched these wars for a political motive; destroying its enemy, Hamas, even if it meant killing innocent people. Is it because they label themselves as Israel 'Defense' Forces? If every organization justifies its targeting of innocent civilians as an act of 'defense,' then who's a terrorist? This is not only the case for the Israeli army; any army of any government in the world has a job to uphold safety, security, and the integrity of the state by the use of force. This is not to say that all armies in the world are all terrorist organizations, but to argue that terrorism, and what defines it, is a dilemma that is still to be solved.

The question that still needs an answer is who is the terrorist in all of this? I think that the terrorist in all of this is the organization that declare itself to be a terrorist without waiting for the international community to label it that way. In other words, there has to be a clear text in the organization's charter, slogan, discourse, etc. that indicate that it dedicates all of its resources to enforce its beliefs and principles with force. In order to answer the question, whether Ansar Allah is a terrorist organization or not, the best thing to do is to see if its discourse and behavior overlaps with that of an actual terrorist organization. In this case it's best to compare them to Al-Qaeda; Al-Qaeda is a terrorist organization that have targeted innocent civilians and still claiming credits for conducting these attacks (France24.com). Al-Qaeda is the only organization that when accused of terrorism doesn't necessarily reject that, but justify the act using the Qur'anic verse "And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and of steeds of war by which you may terrify the enemy of Allah...and whatever you spend in the cause of Allah will be fully repaid to you, and you will not be wronged (Qur'an. 8:60). They literally interpret this verse by saying that it's Allah's order to terrify those who don't believe in him; it's a Jihad to uphold Allah's orders.

We don't have a strict definition of terrorism that applies to all organizations without exceptions, but we do have a terrorist organization that labels itself that way. We will use Al-Qaeda's terrorism and compare it to what Ansar Allah leaders say and how they behave in territories under their control. One of Al-Qaeda's most important characteristics is that it's an international terrorist organization; they conduct multiple terrorist attacks in multiple countries, and they don't focus their terrorism into one country. This is due to their view of the world. Al-Qaeda sees the world as two camps: the camps of the Jihadis vs. the camp of everyone who don't believe in their principles and values.

In this context, the question that needs to be asked is: is Ansar Allah an international movement that seeks to expand beyond the borders of Yemen, or it's just a political movement that was established to protect Zaydism and is representing Zaydis in the political sphere of Yemen? That question was answered by Yahya Al-Shami, the current Minister of the Yemeni Information Ministry, when asked about the movement's borders in the BBC's documentary about the movement. He answered "our borders are the same as the borders of the Holy Qur'an. Our borders encompass both of the Arabic and Islamic world and in every spot in the world where the weak and vulnerable exist" (BBC documentary: 15:30).

This clearly suggest that Ansar Allah view themselves the same way Al-Qaeda does: they must go beyond their borders to uphold Allah's orders. However, does Ansar Allah view the world via 'the two camps' lens? The answer is no. Al-Qaeda doesn't recognize the U.N and has never cooperated with it. On the contrary, Ansar Allah cooperated with the U.N throughout the ongoing civil war in Yemen in addressing the humanitarian needs of the population living in their territories. In addition to that, Ansar Allah have exchanged POW's multiple times with the Saudi coalition and the internationally recognized government, unlike Al-Qaeda who execute everyone they capture (Weirs, 2020). Add to that there are several ambassadors of European countries who came to Sana'a and met with several Ansar Allah leaders to seek a solution for the war (middleeastmonitor.org). Therefore, the principle of Al-Qaeda in declaring everyone who is not in their camp as an enemy of Allah is not shared by Ansar Allah.

Another way to evaluate Ansar Allah is how they treat personal freedoms of the residents who live in their controlled territories. This an important side to be looked at because personal freedom is a standard that is used to measure how advanced or backward a society is. A society where individuals enjoy personal freedoms in expressing their thoughts freely without being held

accountable would likely be much more advanced than that where individuals don't get to have the chance to express their concerns and grievances. The first thing Al-Qaeda does after taking control of a certain territory is forcing a strict social control. When Al-Qaeda took control of my home village, Rada'a, they determined every aspect of people's life starting from what they can eat to what they are allowed and not allowed to say.

Does Ansar Allah do the same in their controlled territories? The answer is almost yes. Ansar Allah have been linked to multiple events where they were restricting personal freedoms, including those of women's health. In early February 2021, Ansar Allah produced a statement that indicated women shall never buy contraceptives without the consent of their husbands (Abuish, 2021). Not only they were restricting women's reproductive rights, but they have also prevented them from working in restaurants citing religious excesses that delay their victory in the war against the Saudi-led coalition. Frankly, it's bemusing how they allow homeless women sleep in the streets and begging people for help but when they try to find a source of income, they prevent them for religious reasons (Abuish, 2021). These kinds of behaviors should completely make them identical to Al-Qaeda, however, Ansar Allah do still let people express their resentments towards their behavior. That is why I argued the answer is 'almost yes.' Al-Qaeda in my home village didn't allow anyone to oppose their behavior, and if one tried to do so, he/she was very likely to be executed. Ansar Allah whenever they make a declaration that restrict a certain aspect of people's personal freedom, such as separating men and women in college classrooms with plastic walls, they face a huge backlash from people on social media.

There are several outspoken people (with tens of thousands of Facebook followers) who criticize the movement and its behavior in Facebook continuously without being held accountable. Among of which is the renowned intellectual, and the previous Minister of Culture,

Khaled Al-Ruwaishan who is known to be very critical of the movement since the outbreak of the war in March 2015. However, Ansar Allah did arrest him once on April 2020 from his home. They released him a couple of days later after severe pressure from public and international organization who condemned the movement's action. In addition to the pressure from the public, it's worth noting that Ansar Allah faced severe pressure from the tribe of Bani Jabr of Khawlan to which Al-Ruwaishan belongs (Barkat, 2020). This is to show that it really matters what tribe one belongs to in Yemen when it comes to situations like this.

Ansar Allah, to a certain extent, do behave like a terrorist organization, but they also show some tolerance toward those who disagree with them. Cooperating with the UN, exchanging POW's, and meeting with international leaders is not the behavior of a terrorist organization. But restricting people's personal freedoms and enforcing inequitable laws do make them no different than Al-Qaeda. The bottom line is before judging Ansar Allah as a terrorist organization, we must look for the possibility that the movement can coexist with others. The answer is to the question - whether Ansar Allah are a terrorist organization or not – should be answered after a peace resolution that ends the war has taken effect. At that point, we will be able to measure how tolerant they are towards those who differ from them in politics and doctrine.

Conclusion

The strong influence of Khomeini's ideology on Hussein's lectures caused his movement to always be identified, since day one, as an Iranian agent and one that coordinate with Hizb Allah in Lebanon. What needs be highlighted is when Hussein was making these remarks about Iran and Hizb Allah at the time, no one in Iran nor Lebanon knew that he existed until the outbreak of violence in 2004 which eventually killed Hussein. What Hussein borrowed and

utilized from Iran was merely the method. One key to this argument lies in Khomeini's discourse to his followers where he attributed the success of the revolution simply to the shouting of '*Allahu Akbar.*'

Hussein's slogan, which reflects extreme hate towards America and the Jews, is one factor that makes the international community assume that they are a terrorist organization. However, what remains unanswered is what exactly do they mean by shouting death to America, Israel, and damn the Jews? This question might appear to be naive, but I think it's worth asking. In one of my conversation that I had with an Ansar Allah sympathizer, I asked if Ansar Allah actually seeks the destruction of America in its entirety. His answer was simply no. He argued that when Ansar Allah followers shout 'death to America' they don't mean death to the country itself along with its population. What they mean by 'America' is the institution that caused all of the destruction and misery in the Islamic world; in other words, death to the 'American government.' However, I pointed out to him that the American government is elected by the American people, and therefore Ansar Allah are subconsciously calling for the death of the people too. His response was that the American population don't care about their government's foreign policies as much as they do about education and healthcare.

On the aspect of hating the Jews, this is where further research is still needed. Their position towards Israel is very similar to that of Hamas, Hizb Allah, and other Iranian funded movements. But why do they have a separate sentence that says, 'damn the Jews?' Why not just saying 'death to Israel?' This sentence could be derived from the Qur'anic verse "And the Jews say, 'the Hands of Allah are chained.' Chained are their hands and cursed for what they have said" (Qur'an. 5:64). This verse is talking about the Jews who were living at a certain time of history. The question here was Allah's curse of the Jews eternal, hence Ansar Allah's slogan, or

it was meant for the Jews who lived at that time and doesn't necessarily include those who live today?

The message of Hussein is, in my opinion, much wider than Yemen or the narrow limits of a particular doctrine. He was a Yemeni resident concerned about the fate of his Zaydi community. His lectures (*Malazim*), perhaps in part due to the events surrounding them – or perhaps due to the difficulty one experience in trying to acquire them – have the impression of 'forbidden' materials. Nevertheless, I have to admit that there is something compelling about them. The simple language Hussein used in his discourse makes it stand well outside the sphere of what can be described as radical Islamic rhetoric. Hussein was not an anarchist; he was an open-minded individual who sought to make changes via democratic means between 1993 and 1997. A lot of people in Yemen view Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi as a champion of the marginalized Zaydi population, especially those in the province of Sa'da. In their view, he was a reformer, a jihadist, but more importantly he's the most recent martyred Imam of the ancient Zaydi line.

Finally, western observers might believe that Hussein's discourse is one that produced to the world another terrorist organization that must be addressed with force all the time. His movement's actions since they took power in 2015 is reflecting similar characteristics to Al-Qaeda but is still showing some tolerance towards those who they disagree with. The best time to make a decisive judgment about them is once the war is over. The movement is now involved in a war, and reckless behavior is very likely under such conditions. Once a peace process has taken place, it would be much easier to evaluate the movement's behavior and see how willing they are to coexist with those who they disagreed with.

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