

The Religious-Political Ideology of Houthis' Rebellion in Yemen: Theoretical Perspective of the Divine Right to Rule

Ideologi Politik Beragama Penentangan Houthi di Yemen: Perspektif Teori Hak Ketuhanan untuk Memerintah

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the religious-political ideology of the Houthi movement in Yemen. In particular, it explores the political objectives and historical roots of the Houthis' rebellion that was initiated in 2004 and continued into 2009 through six rounds of wars, which were called Sa'dah wars. The Houthis implemented a military coup in 2014 against Mansour Hadi's government and seized state institutions which led to Yemen's current civil war. A catastrophic battle also erupted when the Saudi-led military coalition decided to intervene in the conflict in 2015, with the aim of restoring the legitimacy of the previous regime as well as defeating the Houthi insurgency. Despite numerous studies on the issues relating to civil war in Yemen, there is no adequate study on the perspective of Houthis' religious-political ideology. This research is qualitative using in-depth interviews with seven experts and observers of the Yemeni war. This article analyses major reasons for the historical rebellion and the ongoing catastrophic war in Yemen, based on the Houthis' religious-political ideology. The findings of this article inform that the current conflict in Yemen is rooted in historical circumstances which gave rise to a heavy responsibility or burden on the Houthis, whereby according to the theory of the divine right to rule, the Houthis and their ancestors, the Hashemites claim the monopoly of regional (present day Yemen) power. Thus, this theory has been considered as one of the key dynamics of the outbreak and the continuation of the current war in Yemen. It is very likely that the trend of increased Houthis' rebellion will continue for the next few years in Yemen due to the movement's firm aim of power struggle, based on their religious-political ideology of the 'divine right to rule'.

Keywords: Yemen; Houthis; religious-political objectives; root causes of war; theory of divine right to rule

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mengkaji ideologi politik beragama gerakan Houthi di Yaman. Artikel ini secara khusus meneroka objektif politik dan asas sejarah pemberontakan Houthi yang meletus sejak 2004 dan berterusan sehingga 2009 menerusi enam siri peperangan, yang turut dikenali sebagai peperangan Sa'dah. Rampasan kuasa telah digerakkan oleh pemberontak Houthi pada tahun 2014 untuk menentang kerajaan pimpinan Mansour Hadi dengan mengambil alih institusi-institusi negara sehingga membawa kepada perang saudara kotemporari di Yaman. Pertempuran besar telah meletus apabila pakatan ketenteraan yang diketuai oleh Arab Saudi memutuskan untuk campur tangan dalam konflik Yaman. Meskipun terdapat pelbagai kajian lepas yang memberi tumpuan terhadap isu perang sivil di Yaman, tidak banyak penyelidikan yang memfokuskan kepada perspektif Houthi terhadap ideologi politik beragama. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif menerusi temubual mendalam bersama tujuh pakar dan pemerhati perang Yaman, kajian ini menganalisis sebab musabab kepada sejarah pemberontakan dan peperangan yang masih berterusan di Yaman. Dapatan kajian artikel ini menjelaskan bahawa konflik semasa di Yaman adalah terkait dengan beban sejarah lepas, di mana menurut teori hak ketuhanan untuk memerintah, puak Houthi dan keturunan bani Hashim menuntut monopoli kuasa wilayah. Justeru, teori ini telah dipertimbangkan sebagai salah satu dinamika utama kepada kelangsungan peperangan semasa di Yaman. Pemberontakan Houthi di Yaman dijangka akan berterusan untuk beberapa tahun akan datang berikutan matlamat untuk berkuasa yang masih utuh, berteraskan ideologi politik agama dan hak ketuhanan untuk memerintah.

Kata kunci: Yemen; Houthis; objektif politik beragama; punca peperangan; teori hak ketuhanan untuk memerintah

INTRODUCTION

Over the past millennium, Yemen is one of the countries in the Arab peninsula that is most associated with political violence, which is due to the theory of the divine right to rule. This predicament has penetrated the country via the Hashemites clerics' fighters who are the ancestors of the Houthis' rebels. The current war in Yemen can be traced back to this history, in which every new wars were claimed to have its previous roots, regardless of the nature and quality of those roots (Pulkkinen 2017). In this sense, Yemeni's history is suffered with conflict, where the Yemenis are living in a potential state onset of war, which has made a pattern like conflict culture, deeply rooted in the Yemeni people. Moreover, the perpetuation of the wars created a sense of society and cultural syndrome that are embedded in the imaginations of Yemeni's successive generations.

The current war in Yemen is an extension of the previous wars that is linked to religious ideologies, which dates back to the late ninth century (897 AD) (Julan & Matei 2015). On that year, Yahya Hussein al-Rassi (the first grandfather of the Yemeni's Houthi group) intended to establish a religious state in Yemen from Hejaz, which is under the name of the theory of the divine right to rule, and the exclusivity of the rule to the dynasty. This idea indicates that the ruler is affiliated solely with the fourth caliph, Ali bin Abi Talib, and the descendants of his sons, Hassan and Hussein, or what became known as the Alawi Hashemite state based on heredity. Accordingly, the claim to the right of leadership and ruling are not only limited to Yemenis but also the whole Muslim community (Julan & Matei 2015; Porter 2017; Vom Bruck 2016). Nevertheless, the theory of the divine right to rule, which has caused invasions in Yemen, resulting in dozens of wars that have detrimentally affected the Yemenis' stability and prosperity. This paper explores the political objectives of the Houthis insurgency, which were based on religious ideologies, derived from the descendants of Prophet Mohammed. The qualitative research method was applied because the method allowed for an in-depth exploration of perceptions and underlying reasons and motivations for specific actions (Rabionet 2011). Specifically, this idea facilitated a more nuanced understanding of the role of the Houthis rebellion's religious ideologies as well as their political engines. Seven interviews were conducted with experts and observers of the conflict in Yemen over Skype and in person in Yemen, Malaysia, Egypt and UAE in

2019. The interviews were utilised as a way to obtain more in-depth information on the historical roots of the current war in Yemen. The transcribed interviews were encoded based on the related topics and headings. Then, the data were categorised manually into smaller subgroups under keywords and themes, in which these subgroups were then selected according to the literature review, previous research, and research questions. Lastly, the results of data analysis form a collection of citations and quotes. Additionally, secondary sources, such as International reports and previous analytical studies related to the issues of Yemen civil conflict were also employed in this study.

ANCIENT YEMEN AND ITS INDIGENOUS POPULATION

Historically, Yemen is considered one of the region's prominent-established empires along with the Sasanian and Byzantine empires. In the twentieth century, historians and the derivative of the discovered inscriptions indicate that the ancient Yemeni empire comprises the kingdom of Sheba and Himyar that established in the second millennium BC (Hoyland 2001). According to the local tribal tradition, the capital of Yemen, Sanaa, was built by Shem, which was the son of Noah who built the biblical ark. As opposed to the present conditions, Yemen developed strong kingdoms and a thriving culture. Yemen's documented history spans more than 3,000 years, as expressed today in the country's vast, well-developed arts, and architecture. The region was ruled by several civilisations from 1000 BCE, prospered due to the spice trades, and thrived by irrigation and cultivation. This area served as a route from India and provided aromatics such as myrrh and frankincense to Egypt, Greece, and Rome. An ingenious dam was built about 800 BCE at Maarib, provided irrigation to Yemeni farmland for more than 1000 years (Watson 2016). Given the importance and wealth of ancient Yemen, the Romans called this region Arabia Felix, which means 'Happy Arabia'.

Yemen's indigenous population comprises the descendants of Qahtan, who is the son of Prophet Houd, and the great ancestor of the Yemeni clans in the southern Arabian Peninsula. Furthermore, the descendants of Qahtan were named Himyar and Kahlan, which are the sons of Saba Bin Qahtan. Hence, Yemen's indigenous population originated from the descendants of Himyar and Kahlan, which

formed the two main tribes that became the majority of the current Yemen population. Currently, in the Republic of Yemen, these tribes have migrated from Yemen to the Arab world at varying intervals of time. (Hoyland 2001; Lucks 2008; Manea 2012).

THE THEORY OF THE DIVINE RIGHT TO RULE

Fundamentally, the theory of the divine right to rule indicates the striving of the claim to be the descendants of Prophet Mohammed via his daughter Fatimah and her sons, Hassan and Hussein. Moreover, given that they are the heirs of the Holy Quran and Sunnah after the Prophet Mohammed's death, the claim essentially allows the descendants to rule the Muslim world (Al-Ahmadi 2007). Additionally, the Hashemites believe in the divine right of the Prophet's relatives to lead and rule the Muslims in all areas of life such as religious, political, military, economic, cultural, social, and educational issues. Specifically, this sacred right is limited to the descendants of Hassan and Hussein until the day of judgement, which is according to the religious ideas of the Hashemites (Albahesh 2018 & Jaber 2018). However, this theory is changing continuously according to the nature of the conflict, and thus, it has many pictures such as the Zaydi doctrine, Wilayah, Imamate, and recently Houthism (Al-Ahmadi 2007 & Al-Batool 2007). Accordingly, in 2012, the intellectual and cultural document of the Houthis was issued and signed by the leader of the rebels Abdul Malek al-Houthi. The main concept of the document highlights that:

We believe that God Almighty elected the household of the Prophet and made them guides to the Umma and inheritors of the holy book after the Messenger of God until the day of judgment, and that in every age, He prepares one to be a guiding light for His worshippers, one able to lead and champion the Umma in all its needs (ACRPS 2014).

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THE RISING OF HOUTHISM: WHO ARE THE HOUTHIS AND HOW DID THEIR ANCESTORS PENETRATE YEMEN?

After the Prophet Mohammed's death, a bloody political conflict between the Quraish tribe occurred, where the eligibility of the leadership of Muslims was raised. Moreover, the conflict started after the caliphate of Abu Baker, Omar, and Othman and especially during the period of Ali's caliphate. The tribe was splitted into two branches, namely, the Umayyads and the Hashemites, in which the Hashemites had been further divided into the Abbasis and the Alawites. Notably, the sudden drastic increase in the wars between the Umayyads and Hashemites has caused the Umayyad's rule under the Hashemian flag to be overthrown. However, based on the divine right to rule, a political rivalry between the Hashemites stirred the relationship between the Abbasids and Alawites (Ali's descendants). Specifically, the Abbasi regime initiated the war against the Alawites, in which most Alawites were killed and imprisoned during the Umayyad period, where many were forced to flee (Vom Bruck 2016). Thus, this political conflict led the Alawites to look for other lands to build their Imamate state, which is based on the divine right theory to rule, and their claim that they are descendants of Prophet Mohammed.

In the trajectory to find land for a theological Imamate system, Yemen was targeted by the Alawites. In this context, by the late ninth century (897 AD), Yahya bin Hussein al-Rassi and his followers penetrated Yemen to establish a religious state in northern Yemen, which was based on the theory of the divine right to rule. Furthermore, he claimed that he was the descendant of Prophet Mohammed, which meant that Muslims must respect and select him as a ruler as well as the Imam. Additionally, he also said to Yemenis that 'If you obey me, you will only lose Prophet Mohammad's personality,' which indicated that there was no difference between him and the Prophet Mohammad; thus, the Yemenis must obey him. However, according to his claim that he was from the Bani Hashim tribe in Hijaz, Yahya al-Rassi was not geographically or ethnically belong to the Yemeni's society. Therefore, the Yemeni tribes resisted al-Rassi and his soldiers because they refused to be ruled by migrants who came from behind the borders, which did not belong to Yemen's soil.

Additionally, the Yemenis rejected this invasion and declared as an independent state with its unique civilisation, in which they were to be ruled by someone who does not belong to its territory, identity, and history. However, Yahya al-Rassi did not succumb to the rejection and gathered more than six thousand fighters from Hijaz and Iran (Tabaristan) to combat the tribes of Yemen. As a result of this predicament, several wars erupted that started with the al-Rassi, which was the great grandfather of the Houthis, followed by his sons and grandsons. Thus, with several Alawites that were loyal to him, al-Rassi went to the Sa'adah province and began his battles to create a religious state, which was opposing the Yemeni tribal leaders who fought him and his army for years until his death in 911 AD. Between 897 to 911 AD, more than 140 battles were waged by al-Rassi against Yemenis, where the main idea was to impose the Hashemite dynasty's theory of the divine right to rule in their descendants and offspring imposed on Yemenis. Since then, wars had occurred where the Yemenis form the indigenous people, while the Hashemites as aggressors, which continued until now with the Houthis, who were the new generation of their ancestor Yahya al-Rassi and his alliance with the Iranians (Tabaristanis) (Al-Ahmadi 2007; Al-Ahmadi 2018; Pulkkinen 2017).

Moreover, the Yemenis belong to the Qahtan tribe, which is dominant in the southern Arabian Peninsula, while the Hashemites and Alawites belong to the Adnan tribe that is dominant in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula. Therefore, the conflict was indicated to occur between the Qahtanis and the Adnanis, and meanwhile, the Hashemites established themselves as a superior class compared to other Yemenis tribes. Furthermore, the 'Zaydi Imams' in Yemen came from this supremacist class controlled by force in intermittent periods on some territories of northern Yemen until the revolution of the 1960s. Today, the Houthis clan that leads the current rebellion is linked with the tribal group of Hashemites (Manea 2012). Generally, the Houthis are the new wave of the Hashemites or Alawites dynasty, in which they apply a mandate perspective (Wilayah), based on the theory of the divine right to rule Yemen's land, while completely ignoring to the civilised conceptions of democracy and free elections.

At the beginning of the 1960s, a Yemeni revolution against the Imamate theological system (ancestors of the Houthis) erupted and established the first Republican system. The revolution

targeted the Imamate system led by the Hashemites clerics, which derived from the divine right theory. Furthermore, in the previous theological Imamate structure, the Hashemite families dominated the government's leading positions based on the divine right to rule theory. Therefore, the revolution targeted these monopoly religious standers, which kept a unique rank in the political body as compared to the indigenous people. As a result, in relative to the vast majority of Yemenis, the republican system no longer acknowledges the Hashemites in Yemen as a separate social group. It was one of the objectives of the revolution of 26 September 1962, that states the elimination of differences and privileges between Yemeni social classes (Al-Rasheed & Vitalis 2004). Despite the success of the 1960s revolution, the fear for the return of the religious and rigid Imamate regime to the pre-26th revolution is still becoming a source of anxiety for the indigenous people of Yemen. Therefore, the rise of the Houthis provoked an uneasiness towards the Hashemites' ambitions to restore the Imamate rule and repeat their dark past against the Yemenis (Porter 2018). Hence, this idea is because the Hashemites refused to accept living under a democratic system after the 1962 revolution, which did not coincide with their theory (the divine right) (Al-Ghaili 2018).

The rise of Houthism is based on the concept of the Hashemites' divine right to rule Yemen and to restore the system of Imamate that collapsed after the revolution of 1962. To mobilise the Hashemites families, the Houthism used the ideology that became the solid foundation for its agenda to restore the extinct theological Imamate system (Jaber 2018 & Mohammed 2018). Therefore, to mobilise the Hashemites, the Hashemite's family leaders started a network of social programmes and political parties under the all-encompassing title al-Shabab al-Moamen 'Believing Youth' and Al-Haq party to give them an organised political voice (Lewis 2015). Consequently, in 1979 after the Iranian revolution, the arrival of Khomeinism came to power, in which the father of the founder of Houthism (Badr al-Din al-Houthi) started connecting with the new Iranian regime. This idea was because Khomeini was a Shiite cleric that shared al-Houthi in al-Wilayah concept (the divine right theory) (Al-Ahmadi 2007). In the middle of the 1980s, because of this connection, the Houthism activities focused on organising religious courses in mosques of Sa'adah and teaching within the framework of the Zaydism doctrine, especially the Hashemite families. Later, at the end of the

1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, Houthism established an entity called the Believing Youth Forum (BYF), which was to spread the Houthism thoughts nationwide by building centres, which sought more than 15,000 followers (Albloshi 2016; Freeman 2009 & Juneau 2016).

The rise of Houthism was related to the first leader of the movement, which is the son of the Hashemite cleric, Badr al-Din al-Houthi or Hussein Badr al-Din. At the beginning of his political career, Hussein in cooperation with the Hashemites' clerics founded the 'Truth party' and won two seats in the parliamentary elections of 1993. Specifically, the party serves as a political forum for their religious beliefs as well as to protect their interests (Albloshi 2016 & Palik 2018). Later, Hussein al-Houthi left the party and focused on the BYF, and by leveraging common demands from the central government, he transformed the forum into a political platform, which eventually became a military rebellion (Nagi 2019).

Over time, in 2004, the Houthism began its rebellion against the central government until 2010 (Al-Ghaili 2018), where they fought six rebellion wars (the so-called wars of Sa'adah) between 2004 and 2010, and several wars and disputes within the Yemeni tribes in Sa'adah, Amran, and Jawf (Clausen 2018 & Palik 2018). Although the leader of the insurgency, Hussein al-Houthi was killed during the fight in 2004, the rebellion continued due to the new political-religious engines, which led to their insurgency, and was the precursor to the 2014 coup and the current war (Al-Ghaili 2018 & Jaber 2018). Most Yemenis considered the rise of Houthism was an effort to target and overthrow the republican system, which would end the monopoly over-power of the Hashemites dynasty since the 26 September 1962 revolution (Al-Dawsari 2017).

REGIONAL TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS THAT SUPPORT THE HOUTHIS

Regional terrorist groups standing alongside the Houthis rebels believe in the theory of the guardianship of the jurist (i.e., the theory of the divine right to rule). Among these prominent groups are the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Hezbollah (Lebanon), and Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq (Iraq). In addition to considering Iran as an official sponsor of (state) terrorism, in 2019 the United States designated Iran's IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization (Byman 2020). Also, on the

10th of August 1997 and the 1st of October 2020, the United States designated Hezbollah and Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq as foreign terrorist organizations. These organizations are fully supported by the IRGC of Iran and the Supreme Leader of the Iranian regime. On January 10th, 2021, the U.S. Department of State has designated the Houthis Group (Ansar Allah) as a terrorist organization. The designation became effective on 19 January 2021. However, on February 12th, 2021, the U.S. Department of State has revoked the designation of the Houthis group as a terrorist organization after Biden's administration took office.

These organizations have a history of intervention in Yemen's internal affairs. In 2009, Iran was accused of training Houthi insurgents by the Yemeni government. The Yemeni media claimed that they had been trained in an Iranian-run settlement in Eritrea. In December 2014, numerous media reports quoted US intelligence officials who said that Hezbollah and IRGC units were training Houthi rebels in Lebanon and the IRGC base near the Iranian city of Qom. According to these reports, the IRGC advisers who serve the Houthis (Ansar Allah) may be dozens or hundreds. General Abdul Reza Shahlai, director of the Iranian Qods Force for External Operations, a branch of the IRGC, is the most prominent of those advisers who are still advising the Houthis inside Yemen. The IRGC aimed to prepare Houthis to become, like Hezbollah in Lebanon, a pawn in Iran's regional game as a guarantor of its access to the strategic Bab al-Mandab Strait in the Southern Red Sea region (Juneau 2016, Knights, Ingram, Whiteside, & Winter 2020; Vatanka 2020 & Zweiri 2016). As proof of IRGC's support for the Houthis, in early 2013, Yemeni coast guards caught a Panamanian flag-operated vessel carrying small arms and ammunition, 122 mm rockets, C4 explosives, bomb-making equipment to assemble IEDs, and night vision goggles made in Iran. Besides, Yemeni forces found anti-aircraft missiles that appeared to be Iranian-made Misagh-2 missiles (Terrill 2014). Additionally, in February 2020, the US Navy seized Iran's weapons, including three Iranian surface-to-air missiles and 150 anti-tank guided missiles, in a traditional sailing vessel in the Arabian Sea. The U.S. warship's statement said the weapons were on their way to the Houthis rebels in Yemen (Reuters 2020).

In addition to hosting the Houthi media on the Lebanese land, Hezbollah has been involving in the ongoing war in Yemen. In 2016 the Yemeni

legitimate government announced to have physical evidence that Hezbollah training the Houthi rebels and fighting alongside them in attacks on Saudi Arabia's border. Abu Ali Tabatabaei, former Hezbollah specials operations commander in southern Lebanon has been sent to Yemen as a military advisor for the Houthis. Also, one of the prominent leaders of Hezbollah Khalil Harb, a former special operations commander and a close adviser to Hasan Nasrallah, was overseeing Hezbollah's activities in Yemen according to the U.S. official's government. Moreover, in April 2015, Naem Qasem, the Hezbollah Deputy Secretary-General warned Saudi Arabia that would "incur very serious losses" and "pay a heavy price" as a result of its war against the Houthis in Yemen (Levitt 2016 & Wyss 2016). In 2019, Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, acknowledged in a speech that his fighters existed in Yemen fighting alongside the Houthis rebels. He added that some of the Hezbollah fighters had been killed in the Yemeni battleground (KhabarAgency 2019).

PROLONGING YEMEN'S WAR: HOUTHISM AND THE HASHEMITE'S BELIEF OF THE DIVINE RIGHT TO RULE

In this article, the research analysed the conflict in Yemen and explored the main engine that played a vital role to the outbreak of the wars, which caused the catastrophic implications on Yemen and its national security. The interviews with Yemeni experts highlighted the dark angles of the Yemeni war that was not discussed clearly in the past. Hence, in this context, the historical roots of the wars such as penetration of Hashemites to Yemen with their religious-political theory to rule, are most associated with the current conflict; thus, informant 1, Ali Muhammad Mutee Al Dahab who is a non-resident researcher at Al Jazeera Center for Studies has stated the following opinions during our interview with him in Egypt on 9 May 2019:

There are those who look at this war in a philosophy which is away from historical roots and expand its dimensions, motives, and goals, but this cannot ignore the essence of the conflict and its real engines. In fact, the current conflict is linked to historical bloodshed-burdens. All the events are revolving around the monopolisation of power, and the one who deserves it. Violence has been the only way to achieve it since the arrival of Yahya bin Hussein al-Rasi in Yemen in the 80s of the third Hijri century, 897 A.D. In this conflict, the Houthis are a political and religious group based on these determinants, in accordance with their belief in the right to rule, as they claim to be descendants

of the Prophet Mohammad's family. However, this exclusivity has faced fierce Yemeni resistance at all political and historical junctures, in which the Hashemites came to power or in the events of the restoration of the Yemenis to rule their country and the latest of which was the 26 September 1962 revolution (Al Dahab 2019).

Meanwhile, informant 2, Mareb Qaid Ahmed Alward who is a Yemeni based journalist indicates that the involvement of the Houthism in the current war as well as during insurgencies between 2004 and 2010 was due to the religious-political objectives, or the Hashemite's right to rule. Based on our personal discussion with him on 25 May 2019 in Yemen, he claimed that:

The Houthi movement represents a political front for an old political project, behind which the 'political Hashemite' is emerging. The political Hashemite means a group of members relies on religious views seek to monopoly authority through the concept of Imamate, claiming that they are entitled to it, based on legitimate texts that have been said and are still controversial. In this sense, the Houthi movement, as a front of political Hashemite, and political Hashemite as a powerful movement of the Houthi movement, is largely involved in the current war in Yemen. This is not only since the September 2014 and February 2015 coup but also since the Houthis declared their rebellion against Yemeni military institution in 2004. Therefore, the movement, with its engines and religious and political tributaries, undermined the state's foundations, especially after the 2014 coup (Alward 2019).

In his explanation on the Houthism's approach that resorted to violence to achieve its political objectives, he further argued that:

The ongoing conflict in Yemen, since the intervention of the Arab Coalition to support the legitimacy in Yemen, must have historical reasons. For example, the Houthi group is a historical extension of the regime of imams who ruled some North Yemen territories for interval periods in the past until the revolution of the Republican on 26 September 1962. The Houthis group believes in what the Imamates believed during their reign, which is the theory of the divine right to rule that must monopoly by their descendants only away from the principle of democracy. This is why the cycles of conflict repeat themselves, as all the families of the Hashemite families took over the rule of North Yemen for a period of time. The point I want to say that the Imamates and those who following the Zaydi doctrine are all working to impose their rule by force. The danger of the conflict - in my view - is a religious conflict based on the claim of the divine right to rule the country, which means the futility of all political negotiations aimed at ending the Houthi coup. So, the military force is the only way in which Houthis believe, and it is the only way to end the conflict (Alward 2019).

It is clear that based on the theory of the divine right to rule, the Houthism's adoption among the Yemeni society would potentially lead to closing all political solutions. On the other hand, another

observant (informant 3), Faisal Ali (President of the Yemenoon Center for Studies in Malaysia), based on our interview with him in Kuala Lumpur on 19 May 2019, has pointed out the return of the Imamate rule, which was overthrown in the 1960s. Specifically, the Imamates' followers disguised themselves in political parties to serve the main goal of returning the 'Imams' to rule the country. Moreover, regarding the seized out of the state institutions in 2014, he added that the establishment of the youth believers in the early nineties was an extension of the Imamate's endeavours to return to the rule, as can be seen in the following quotes:

In my opinion, this is dated back to 1962, when the rule of the Imamate ancestors was overthrown. The Imams continued to observe the right opportunity to invade the state and restore what they consider to be their own divine right, so they penetrated the state and trained their members intellectually and militarily. The Imams failed to return from the political door through the parties they established, such as 'Truth Party', or their infiltration through other Yemeni parties. Despite their failure to seize power, they succeeded in achieving political gains and re-positioning themselves in existing state institutions such as the judiciary and the military institutions (Ali 2019).

However, Mousa Qasem, a Yemeni political analyst (Informant 4 – personal interview on 15 June 2019 in Malaysia) has opined that the rebellion of the Houthism was associated with the state-Imamate conflict that resulted from the 1960s revolution. According to him:

In the early sixties of the last century, the Yemenis made a revolt against the rule of the Hashemite Imams, specifically on 26 September 1962, and that revolution was the last battle fought by the Yemeni 'indigenous people' against the Hashemite rule. Then, they declared the first Republic in the history of Yemen after the victory of the revolution. However, during the period in the post Republic establishment, the Hashemites were strategically working in hiding to restore what they saw as opportunity to claim right to rule Yemen, based on their firm perspective of the divine right to rule. Therefore, they started inciting rebellions against the central Yemeni state and specifically during the period from 2004 to 2010. These rebellions, which killed tens of thousands of Yemenis, civilians, and military, formed what has become known today as the 'Houthi group' attributed to the leader of the rebellion 'Hussein al-Houthi' who is a descendant of al-Rassi that entered Yemen in 897 A.D. to establish a theological state of Hashemite. Later, in 2014, during the transition period, the 'Houthi group' took advantage of the opportunity to re-impose the theory of divine right to rule by the military coup which led to the current catastrophic war (Qasem 2019).

In this respect, another academic expert on Yemen's conflict (Informant 5 – name withheld upon interviewee request) supported the above analysis regarding the state-Imamate conflict, which

remained in the dark for decades, and he explained that during an interview on 10 June 2019:

The historical roots of the war in Yemen dated back to the Republican-Imamate conflict that existed in the 1960s after the revolution of 26 September that ended the rule of Hashemites-Imamates who governed the troubled North Yemen since 1918. After eight years of conflict in the 1960s, a reconciliation was signed in al-Taif in Saudi Arabia, to end the war by 1970, but the conflict remained hidden for two decades until the establishment of the 'Young Believers Forum' in the nineties of the last century by Hussein Badr al-din al-Houthi and with the support of his father Badruddin Amir al-Din al-Houthi, who is considered a Hashemite religious cleric. Thus, the Houthis continued to form groups to wage their first armed battle against the central government in 2004 (Informant 5 2019).

In line with the above opinions, Sanhan Ali Senan Alsayed (Informant 6), a Yemeni journalist who works on contemporary history and politics of Yemen linked the Houthism insurgencies with their followers' belief on the divine right to rule as it represented the Imamate while the Yemeni government was seen to represent the republican system. Based on our personal communication with Alsayed in UAE on 15 May 2019, he strongly argues that:

After the 1960s revolution, which erased the existence of the Imamate, life remained stable to a great extent in terms of political conflicts between the Republic and the Imamate. But since 2014, Hashemite has been able to ride the wave of revolution and benefit from the rivalry between the revolution and the ruling party. Therefore, the current conflict has roots extending to the conflict between the Republic and the Imamate, and this is what is happening now as Houthis have swallowed all joints of the state as an attempt to control all institutions in Yemen. Hence, the main factor is the conflict between the Republic represented by the legitimate government and the Imamate represented by the Houthi rebels. There is an attempt by the Houthis to restore what they believe as a divine right to rule, which was robbed by the 1960s revolution that led to the formation of Yemen Arab Republic. As strange as this is, the Houthis believe in the right to take part in the government but at the same time they were planning to topple the regime by force. These are clearly the reasons which have been repeated over the years and during different periods in Yemen (Informant 6).

Speaking of foreign involvement in the recent conflict, Mohammed Abdullah Ahmed AL-Muhaimid (Informant 7, personal communication on 12 June 2019 in Yemen), a Yemeni based political activist indicates that there seemed to be a historical extension of proxy wars and conflicts in Yemen, especially with the Iranian intervention to support the Houthis. Tehran's intervention in support of the Houthis and their inter-relationship with the rebel movement reflected the theory of the

rule of the guardian jurist (Wilayat al-Faqih) after the 1979 revolution, which is the idea of governance closest to the idea of the Houthis (the Imamate or the Wilayah). As stated by him:

The success of the Khomeini revolution played a prominent role in the return of the dream of restoring the so-called 'divine right to rule' in Yemen. Several Hashemites clerics have turned their faces to Islamic Republic of Iran, including Badr al-Din al-Houthi, the spiritual father of the Houthi movement (Al-Muhaimid 2019).

Based on these expert interviews' explanation, our analysis of the current war in Yemen is seen to be associated with the historical and theological views, where they revolve around the monopoly of power based on the Houthism's belief in the principle of the divine right. Furthermore, violence was perceived to be the only way to fulfil this principle after the penetration of the ancestor of the Houthis, Yahya Hussein al-Rasi from Hijaz to Yemen in 897 A.D. Hence, this analysis confirmed the idea of Zaydism (i.e. political Hashemiyya) which was also based on the principle of the divine right to rule rather than the popular mandate. Undoubtedly, the historical conflict in Yemen is associated with the belief in the divine right of one kind of human being to rule, which is adopted by the Hashemites, including the Houthi movement. The only way to enforce such thoughts by the Houthis was to focus on using 'swords and weapons' (Mohammed 2018; Porter 2017; Steinbeiser 2015).

This research clarified the Houthism's beliefs in the divine right to rule the Muslim world, including Yemen, where the approach played a central role in the outbreak of rebellions. This idea is essentially based on their claim that they are the descendants of Prophet Mohammad, derived from his daughter Fatima and her sons Hassan and Hussein. However, in the current and previous conflicts, the history of Hashemites' kingdom in Yemen, and the discriminatory thoughts of their followers on power and right to rule were strongly disapproved by a number of Yemenis. Accordingly, previous studies reported that the Houthi community believes in the divine right of the Prophet's relatives to rule and govern Muslims in all spheres of life (political, religious, economic, cultural, social, military, and educational issues). The so-called 'divine right to rule' in Yemen was limited to the descendants of both Hassan and Hussein, according to Hashemite ideology (Albahesh 2018 & Jaber 2018). Nevertheless, due to the small base that supports Houthis and the thoughts of their ancestors in Yemen, the majority

of Yemenis rejected these religious-political agenda (Al-Dawsari 2017).

On the other hand, among of the roots of the Yemen conflict is the endeavour by Houthism to take revenge on the republican system, which established on the ruins of the Imamate regime (Houthi's ancestors) after the 1962's revolution. Therefore, Houthism (i.e. Hashemites) has always been seeking the right time and place to restore the Imamate doctrine of rule, despite the significant refusal by the Yemenis. In general, the present conflict is an extension of the previous conflicts between the state and Imamate systems. In this sense, the Houthis were overwhelmed by the notion of the divine right of the Hashemites to rule Yemen, in which to restore the Imamate regime after the 1960s revolution. Furthermore, we are certain that the Houthis used this doctrine to mobilise families belonging to the Hashemites, which became a solid cluster for the Houthism to return to the extinct theological Imamate system (Al-Dawsari 2017; Jaber 2018 & Mohammed 2018). Similarly, some studies have indicated that the majority of Yemenis believe that Houthism triggered the current conflict is about reclaiming their God-given right to rule, which was stripped from their previous theological framework in the 1962 revolution. Thus, the majority of Yemenis regarded this war as a battle for a republican system that ended the Hashemite dynasty's monopoly of power in the revolution of the 1960s (Al-Dawsari 2017; Al-Ghaili 2018; Jaber 2018; Orkaby 2014).

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, this paper found that one of the key internal dynamics of the conflict in Yemen is Houthism, which represents the political front for an old political project of the so-called 'the political Hashemiyya'. This project, which relies on the divine right to rule principle, is the crucial internal factor of the Yemeni civil wars. The Houthi movements, after the revolution of 1962, refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of being ruled under the Yemen Arab Republic political regime that was seen as not incline to their ideology (the theory of the divine right). Therefore, these circumstances led the Hashemites to rebel and battle against the Yemeni central government to reclaim the right to rule in Yemen, based on the theological-divine perspectives.

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