Strategic Shifts In The Speeches of Mr. Abdulmalik Badruddin Al-Houthi (2014–2025): An Analytical Study

النقلات الاستراتيجية في خطاب السيد عبدالملك بدرالدين الحوثي(2014–2025) دراسة تحليلية

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Abstract:

This research explores the strategic shifts in the speeches of Mr. Abdulmalik Badruddin Al-Houthi between 2014 and 2025, framing his speeches as an unconventional form of political discourse that played a central role in reshaping the Yemeni public sphere and mobilizing socio-political action. Set within a context defined by religious-tribal dynamics and lacking stable institutional structures, the study is guided by a core hypothesis: Al-Houthi's discourse is not merely expressive but functions as a social practice that generates collective consciousness, reconstructs identity, and formulates symbolic legitimacy especially during moments of profound political transformation.

Employing a sociological-analytical methodology, the research conducts a qualitative textual content analysis of selected speeches delivered across three pivotal stages: the Revolution phase (2014), the Regional Aggression phase (2015), and the Gaza Battle phase (2023–2025). The findings indicate that Al-Houthi's speech evolved from an internal reformist appeal into a transnational resistance narrative, with its target audience expanding from the Yemeni domestic sphere to the broader Islamic Ummah. This transformation was marked by structural changes in symbolism, rhetorical substance, and performative style.

The study concludes that Mr. Al-Houthi's speech succeeded in re-engineering the Yemeni public space by constructing an imagined resistant community that transcends national borders. It facilitated the emergence of an alternative legitimacy beyond formal state institutions and seamlessly integrated religion, identity, and grievance into a highly effective mass mobilization project. The study recommends continued discourse analysis as a strategic tool for examining political action and understanding the role of rhetoric in shaping public awareness in non-institutionalized settings.

Keywords: Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, political discourse/speech, strategic shifts, traditional societies, symbolic legitimacy.

الملخص:

يتناول هذا البحث النقلات الاستراتيجية في خطاب السيد عبدالملك بدر الدين الحوثي بين الأعوام 2014 و2025، بوصفه خطابا سياسيا غير تقليدي أدى دورا محوريا في تشكيل المجال العام اليمني وتحفيز الفعل السياسي والاجتماعي في بيئة يغلب عليها الطابع الديني–القبلي وتفتقر إلى البنى المؤسسية المستقرة، ينطلق البحث من فرضية مركزية مفادها أن الخطاب الحوثي لم يكن مجرد أداة للتعبير بل كان ممارسة اجتماعية يولد الوعي الجمعي ويعيد إنتاج الهوية وتصوغ الشرعية الرمزية لا سيما في لحظات التحول السياسي الكبرى.

اعتمد البحث على منهج سوسيولوجي–تحليلي وتحديدا تحليل مضمون نصي–كيفي لعدد مختار من خطابات السيد الحوثي ضمن ثلاث مراحل مفصلية: مرحلة الثورة (2014)، مرحلة العدوان الإقليمي (2015)، ومرحلة معركة غزة (2023–2025)، وأظهرت النتائج أن الخطاب تطور من خطاب داخلي إصلاحي إلى خطاب مقاوم أممي وتبدل جمهوره المستهدف من الداخل الوطني إلى الأمة الإسلامية مع تحولات بنيوية في الرموز والمضامين والأداء الخطابي .

وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن خطاب السيد الحوثي استطاع إعادة هندسة المجال العام اليمني وتشكيل جماعة متخيلة مقاومة تتجاوز حدود الدولة كما أسهم في إنتاج شرعية بديلة خارج الأطر الرسمية واستطاع دمج الدين والهوية والمظلومية في مشروع تعبئة جماهيري فاعل وتوصي الدراسة بمواصلة تحليل الخطاب بوصفه أداة استراتيجية لإنتاج الفعل السياسي، وفهم أثره في تشكيل الوعي العام في السياقات غير المؤسسية .

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الكلمات المفتاحية: عبدالملك الحوثي، الخطاب السياسي، النقلات الاستراتيجية، المجتمعات التقليدية، الشرعية الرمزية.

Introduction:

The year 2011 marked the onset of revolutionary upheavals across the Arab world. Amidst a rapidly shifting landscape and the successive waves of what came to be known as the "Arab Spring," political discourse emerged as a central tool in reconstructing the public sphere particularly in contexts lacking institutional frameworks and dominated by traditional sociopolitical structures. Within this milieu, the political speeches of Mr. Abdulmalik Badruddin Al-Houthi present a compelling model in the ongoing revolutionary movement in Yemen. His speeches evolved from a protest-oriented narrative focused on domestic Yemeni issues into a broader resistance-based speech advocating for pan-Arab causes chief among them the Palestinian struggle, which was especially prominent in his statements following the Israeli aggression against Gaza in 2023.

This study gains its significance by examining the strategic shifts in the political speech of a non-state actor operating within a traditional environment and addressing a politically and culturally diverse audience. Through a sequence of speeches, Al-Houthi succeeded in fostering mass awareness built around themes such as sovereignty, independence, victimhood, and the sanctity of religious sites. As Beck (1992, 49) notes, in non-institutional societies, political discourse often serves as a substitute for formal systems, performing the functions of constructing symbolic legitimacy, defining adversaries, and shaping collective identity. This dynamic is clearly reflected in the Yemeni context, wherein Al-Houthi's rhetoric transitioned from confronting domestic corruption and marginalization in 2014 to constructing legitimacy in resistance to a broad international coalition in 2015, and eventually to global mobilization in solidarity with Gaza from 2023 onward.

Al-Houthi's political speech thus mirrors the transformation of the Yemeni public sphere from a space of internal protest to a transnational arena of resistance and mobilization. It can be argued that this speech was not simply a medium of expression but an active mechanism for producing and directing collective consciousness, especially within a tribal-religious society such as Yemen, where symbolism, faith, and tribal identity play pivotal roles in politicizing social action. This renders the study particularly valuable within the broader field of discourse and public sphere analysis, both in the Arab world and in Yemen specifically.

One of the most salient indicators of these strategic shifts is the change in target audience while the speech in 2014 was aimed predominantly at the Yemeni public with its varied social and political factions, by 2015 it had expanded to address the regional and international actors. Between 2023 and 2025, the scope widened further to engage with the Islamic Ummah as a whole. Researchers such as Sajjad et al. (2023) affirm that a key marker of strategic transformation in discourse is the evolution of its symbolic structure and the widening circles of engagement a phenomenon clearly observable in the analysis of Al-Houthi's rhetorical phases. As they note, "discursive authority is not fixed but shifts in accordance with the actor's role and the discourse's context; in certain settings, dominant social agents shape and influence the narratives of others" (Sajjad et al., 2023, p. 2).

Accordingly, this research seeks to analyze the major rhetorical shifts in the speeches of Mr. Abdulmalik Badruddin Al-Houthi and to explore the mechanisms of mobilization and symbolic legitimation by tracing three critical phases:

1. The September 21 Revolution (2014)

2. The onset of Arab aggression against Yemen (2015)

3. The Gaza Battle (2023–2025)

All within a socio-political theoretical framework centered on the role of speech in constructing public spheres in traditional societies.

Statement of the Problem

In traditional societies, modern institutional structures are often weak or absent, and rational political engagement gives way to tribal and religious affiliations. Within such contexts, political discourse becomes a central tool for constructing meaning and shaping collective consciousness. This study poses a critical question: _How has Mr. Abdulmalik Badruddin Al-Houthi's political rhetoric evolved from mobilizing around domestic concerns such as corruption and state-building to adopting a transnational position focused on external issues like Gaza? And how has it succeeded in persuading an embattled and exhausted audience to actively participate in a broader regional resistance movement?

This inquiry goes beyond tracking the linguistic content of speeches. It explores the transformation in the function of political rhetoric—from an instrument of internal critique to a strategic tool for confronting regional and international powers. Al-Houthi's speech is examined as a continuously restructured strategic performance, shaped by shifting sociopolitical contexts. The central problem, therefore, revolves around the following: What strategic shifts have occurred in Mr. Al-Houthi's speech across three key phases (the September 21 Revolution, the Arab Coalition's intervention, and the Gaza conflict), and how have these shifts contributed to the reconfiguration of the public sphere in Yemen? _

Questions of the Study

To address the overarching of the statement of study problem, the study poses several sub-questions:

1.   How did the content of Al-Houthi's speeches evolve across the years 2014, 2015, and 2023–2025?

2.   What symbolic frameworks did his speeches employ during each of the three stages?

3.   How did the composition of the intended audience shift, and what impact did the speeches have on reshaping the public sphere?

4.   What relationship does the speeches maintain with religious and national identity?

5.   How was it possible to mobilize the Yemeni public despite external pressures and siege conditions during the later phases of the speeches?

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

1.   Analyze the strategic evolution of Al-Houthi's speeches in response to changing local, regional, and global contexts.

2.   Interpret the role of political discourse in traditional societies as a force for constructing legitimacy and collective identity.

3.   Provide an analytical model demonstrating how resistant public spheres are shaped through political speeches.

4.   Deepen the understanding of political mobilization strategies in non-institutionalized environments.

Rationale of the Study

This study fills a gap in the academic literature by analyzing Yemeni political rhetoric through a socio-political lens rather than through rhetorical or linguistic frameworks. It offers a scientifically grounded understanding of how political speeches can mobilize audiences in traditional settings dominated by religious-tribal paradigms. Additionally, it presents a comparative perspective on three critical phases in Yemen's contemporary history and contributes to developing analytical models for understanding discourse in "post-state" environments, where authority is an amalgam of charisma, religion, and grievance.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a multidisciplinary approach involving:

1. Sociological discourse analysis, which treats speeches as a form of social practice rather than merely textual expression.

2. Structural-functional analysis of the public sphere under investigation.

3. Qualitative textual content analysis of a selected corpus of Mr. Abdulmalik Badruddin Al-Houthi's speeches delivered in 2014, 2015, and 2023–2025.

Central Research Concepts (Operational Definitions)

1. **Political Discourse/speech:** The body of texts and symbolic acts articulated by Al -Houthi leader to interpret social realities and galvanize public sentiment.

2. **Traditional Public Sphere:** A collective, informal space of engagement rooted in religious affiliations and tribal structures.

3. **Strategic Shift:** A significant alteration in the thematic or symbolic makeup of political discourse/speech, often triggered by pivotal sociopolitical developments.

4. **Collective Grievance:** A widely shared perception of external threat or enduring injustice that prompts unified mobilization and response.

5. **Symbolic Legitimacy:** A form of societal endorsement for a leader or political cause, derived from religious iconography and cultural identity.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This part explores the political speeches of Mr. Abdulmalik Badruddin Al-Houthi by drawing on several key sociopolitical theories that illuminate the ways in which speech contributes to the construction of the public sphere and the reshaping of collective consciousness. The focus is on traditional societies in which modern institutions are largely absent and mobilization depends on symbolic and religious ties.

Framing Theory

First introduced by Erving Goffman, framing theory offers insight into how discourse structures reality and redefines social crises (Goffman 21). Snow and Benford later extended the concept to the study of social movements, emphasizing how symbolic frames are used to identify enemies namely Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the United States and to highlight a collective sense of grievance (Snow and Benford 613). In al-Houthi's rhetoric, framing serves to legitimize resistance as both a religious obligation and a patriotic act. Rather than merely reflecting reality, the frame reconstructs it in line with distinct political and cultural objectives.

Social Movement Theory

Social movement theorists argue that speech is a central resource for mobilization, organizational strategy, and the exploitation of political opportunities (McCarthy and Zald 1217; Tarrow 76). Mr. Al-Houthi's speech exemplifies this dynamic, evolving from the 2014 local protests into a broader regional resistance movement by 2023–2025. His speeches and texts served as tools for coordination, mass mobilization, and ideological justification for extending the movement's reach beyond national boundaries.

Identity Politics

The theory of identity politics underscores how discourse reshapes collective identities, especially within traditional contexts where religious and sectarian affiliation are politically charged. Stuart Hall emphasizes that identity is constructed through difference, which in al-Houthi's speech takes the form of a resistant Zaydi/Islamic self-opposed to the Zionist/American/Saudi other (Hall 5). This dichotomy fosters internal unity while legitimizing external confrontation.

Discourse and the Public Sphere in Traditional Societies

Drawing on Jürgen Habermas's conceptualization of the public sphere (Habermas 1991), this study proposes an adaptation tailored to the Yemeni context. It argues that the public sphere is built not only on communicative rationality but also on religious symbols, tribal dignity, and political victimhood. In this light, discourse becomes a means of constructing the public sphere not merely an expression within it. Charles Taylor's thesis on the "imagined" identities of pre-modern societies likewise underscores this point (Taylor 2004).

Previous Studies

Although numerous studies have addressed conflict in Yemen and the Ansar Allah movement, the analysis of Mr. Abdulmalik Badruddin Al-Houthi's speech as a strategic instrument for constructing the public sphere remains markedly underexplored. The relevant literature can be grouped into three main streams, political discourse analysis, studies on the rhetoric of Ansar Allah, and social-political theories on the public sphere and legitimacy.

Studies in Arabic

Abdulmalik al-Ajri (2017)

Al-Ajri's study examines the intersection between discourse and political mobilization within Ansar Allah from a socio-cultural perspective, linking religious symbols to social reality. It emphasizes form and symbolism more than discursive structure or phase dynamics.

❖ **Similarity:** Both studies emphasize Ansar Allah's discourse as a means to understand mechanisms shaping political and religious identity, focusing on its symbolic use, and its role in social mobilization, legitimation, and reproduction of authority.

❖ **Difference:** Al-Ajri does not offer a phase-based analysis nor explain the discourse's impact on collective transformation.

❖ **New Contribution:** We provide a functional–structural analysis of Mr. Al-Houthi's discourse/speech across extended political phases.

Azzam Amr (2024)

This study addresses the geopolitical importance of the Middle East, centering on the Palestinian issue through analysis of the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation, revealing regional and international stances, the U.S.–Israel alignment, and the effects of Arab weakness and Western student activism.

❖ **Similarity:** Both studies analyze political discourse as a means to confront hegemony and mobilize public opinion.

❖ **Difference:** Amr's focus is on the Palestinian context and the international–geopolitical frame, and it does not address Mr. Al-Houthi's discourse/ speech nor internal discursive structure.

❖ **New Contribution:** We offer an internal, transformative analysis of Mr. Al-Houthi's speech within a prolonged Yemeni context.

Imad AbdualLatif (2020)

This foundational work in Arabic political discourse analysis presents an integrated theoretical and rhetorical framework for analyzing political speeches within both authoritarian and resistance contexts. It discusses the concept of discursive power, symbolic hegemony, the rhetorical function in legitimating policies, shaping public opinion, and resisting tyranny, supplemented with analytical examples from the Arab world, making it a unique methodological reference.

❖ **Similarity**: Like our study, it focuses on discourse as a tool of power and resistance and provides effective analytical tools applicable to Mr. Al-Houthi's speeches.

❖ **Difference:** It does not address Sayyid al-Houthi's speech specifically, focusing instead on general theoretical frameworks without application to the Yemeni case.

❖ **New Contribution:** We apply this methodology practically to Mr. Abdulmalik Al-Houthi's speech, linking it to the construction of political and social legitimacy.

Studies in English

Jonah Carlson (2024)

Carlson examines Ansar Allah's motivations in maritime attacks on Israeli and Western vessels in the Red Sea through a method of cultural terrains. He argues that Houthi speech should not be understood solely as an extension of Iranian agency or hostility toward Israel but rather as part of a national-religious narrative structure that employs themes like victimhood, aggression, and divine duty to generate independent, coherent legitimacy.

- ❖ **Similarity:** Both studies focus on Ansar Allah's discursive symbols and their role in building legitimacy and popular mobilization, regarding discourse as an active tool in shaping the public sphere and political-religious identity.

- ❖ **Difference:** Carlson uses an anthropological symbolic methodology (cultural terrains), while our study employs a sociological functional structural method. Carlson does not provide an internal analysis of discursive structure, nor trace discursive transformations over time or link discourse to institutional or social structures in Ansar Allah–controlled areas. His focus is on maritime attacks rather than the broader discourse of Mr. Al-Houthi as a transformative leadership framework.

- ❖ **New Contribution:** We offer a phased analysis (2014–2025) of Sayyid al-Houthi's discursive structure through a functional–structural lens, showing how discourse shapes revolutionary leadership, legitimacy, and collective identity amid state collapse. We introduce the concept of "transformative-leadership discourse" as a means to understand the relationship between language and the non-state governance structure.

Andrea Carboni (2024)

Carboni analyzes how Ansar Allah managed instability during wartime, achieving relative cohesion in its territories. Employing a socio-institutional theoretical framework, the study examines elite containment, repression, and legitimation strategies as tools to ensure regime continuity under internal and external pressures. Carboni argues that the group's transformation resulted not solely from external support but from the restructuring of local power networks and elite alliances.

- ❖ **Similarity**: Both studies address Ansar Allah as a strategic socio-political entity, focusing on political discourse and legitimacy, and both employ a functional–structural methodology to analyze internal transformations.

- ❖ **Difference:** Carboni emphasizes institutional alliances and elite networks during war but does not analyze discourse as a means of constructing the public sphere. Our study, in contrast, deconstructs discourse as a structure producing power and legitimacy, applying temporal sequencing of discursive shifts, while Carboni's approach is more descriptive of institutional changes.

- ❖ **New Contribution:** We provide a functional–structural analysis of Sayyid al-Houthi's political discourse not just as a media tool but as a strategy for leadership formation, legitimacy reconstruction, and identity crafting. We highlight strategic discursive shifts and tie them to field-level socio-political contexts. We also introduce the concept of "transformative-leadership discourse" to explain how the group manages legitimacy and popular cohesion amid central state collapse.

Imane Elimadi (2018)

Elimadi applies critical discourse analysis to the rhetoric of Morocco's former Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane, focusing on persuasion, justification, and political image-building within populist contexts.

- ❖ **Similarity:** The study's focus on discursive structure and its impact on legitimacy and public acceptance intersects with our analysis of discourse as a legitimation tool.

- ❖ **Difference:** Elimadi examines resistant speeches outside wartime or institutional vacuum contexts, and within the Moroccan political landscape, which structurally differs from the Yemeni case.

- ❖ **New Contribution:** We analyze political discourse in a resistance context, directly linking it to political and institutional transformation in Yemen beyond the realm of language and persuasion alone.

Similarities, Differences, and the New Scholarly Contribution

Dimension	Previous Studies	Current Study
Methodology	Most studies employed a descriptive approach or partial political analysis.	This study adopts a three-phase sociological-analytical framework.
Focus	Some focused on isolated military, ideological, or symbolic dimensions.	This study investigates discourse as a strategic tool for constructing the public sphere and mobilizing the masses.
Temporal Scope	Most research covered short or static timeframes.	This study spans an extended period from 2014 to 2025, reinforcing its phased analytical approach.
Innovation	No studies have integrated discourse analysis with the sociological structure of the political group.	This is the first study to link changes in discourse to transformations in Yemen's political and social structure.

Research Gap

Despite the abundance of literature on Yemen and the Ansar Allah movement, there remains a notable absence of comprehensive analytical studies linking the speech of Mr. Abdulmalik Badruddin Al-Houthi's to the formation of the public sphere in Yemen. No existing research has conducted a thorough, phase-based analysis of his speeches as a strategic tool for constructing a traditional public sphere and mobilizing the public under shifting contexts. Most prior studies have primarily focused on military or ideological dimensions, without addressing discursive strategies or their impact on collective consciousness. Moreover, they lack a functional–structural approach that connects discourse to transformations in collective awareness.

This study, therefore, is the first to employ a three-phase sociological–analytical methodology to trace the strategic shifts in Mr. Al-Houthi's speech and interpret its effects on public perception amid extended political transitions (2014–2025). It bridges symbolic changes in discourse with transformations in Yemen's political and social structures.

Strategic Shifts in Speech Across Three Phases

Phase One: Internal Speech (2014) – The September 21 Revolution

Discursive Context

In 2014, Mr. Abdulmalik Badruddin Al-Houthi's speech was situated within a purely domestic sphere, focusing primarily on issues such as corruption, administrative failure, foreign domination, and the demand for justice. His speech positioned itself in direct opposition to the regime of then-president Abdurabbu Mansour Hadi, denouncing subservience to external powers, rampant corruption, and governance through crisis. This positioning enabled the widespread mobilization of popular support behind the September 21 Revolution (Eissa, 2012, 51).

Mechanisms for Generating Public Consciousness

Through a series of speeches and public addresses especially those aimed at tribal and local delegations al-Houthi advanced what can be described as a **"collective responsibility discourse,"** grounded in religious and ethical values. Key rhetorical frames included:

- ❖ **Justice as a Religious and National Obligation**: "Establishing justice is both a religious duty and a national necessity."

- ❖ **Awareness of Reality over Dependence on External Forces**: "Do not wait for the unknown to shape your future."

- ❖ **Encouraging Popular Participation**: "The conditions are ripe, and it is the duty of all free people to seize the opportunity."

This type of speech aligns with what Snow and Benford (2000) refer to as **"mobilizing framing"**, wherein the current state of affairs is portrayed as a negative contrast to a collective aspiration, and political mobilization is framed as the only viable path to survival and renewal (Benford & Snow, 2000, 612).

Target Audience

The speech in this phase was directed toward traditional social blocs, which can be categorized into three primary groups:

- ❖ **Tribal Elites**: Engaged through direct meetings and encouraged to play a political role in driving change.

- ❖ **Disaffected Youth**: Addressed using vocabulary of change, popular will, and shared responsibility.

- ❖ **Marginalized National Forces**: Appealed to in an effort to integrate them into the broader project of liberation from external tutelage.

Characteristics of the Speech during the September 21 Revolution Phase

Dimension	Core Features
Language	Preaching in tone – Religious in nature
Identified Enemy	The corrupt internal regime and American hegemony
Central Message	We must govern ourselves justly and eliminate corruption
Nature of Action	Internal reform through popular pressure

Symbolic and Strategic Outcomes

The speech of Mr. Abdulmalik Badruddin Al-Houthi during this phase served as a mobilizing framework for the revolution. It effectively dismantled the psychological barriers separating the masses from revolutionary action. Furthermore, it succeeded in legitimizing change outside the official mechanisms of the state and garnered broad tribal and societal support. Al-Houthi skillfully employed religious and moral speech to justify the toppling of the existing regime, achieving notable success in doing so. This corresponds with Tarrow's assertion (1998, 155) that discourse within non-institutional movements typically begins from local or religious symbolism before expanding into political and ideological dimensions.

Discussion

Phase One: Speech on the September 21, 2014 Revolution

Excerpt One:

"A people moved decisively and with dignity, and as much as they embodied in this movement, pride and honor, they also demonstrated determination, seriousness, and persistence. Their legitimate movement in pursuit of just and rightful causes shall not be deterred by the efforts of others to obstruct them or continue subjugating, oppressing, and exploiting them and their resources (…)"

- **Speech Shift:** From general exposition to mobilizing rhetoric, emphasizing perseverance and steadfastness.

- **Objective:** To galvanize the public and encourage continued participation in the revolutionary process.

- **Target Audience:** The general Yemeni populace, particularly those participating in sit-ins.

- **Style:** Rhetorical and mobilizing; employs repetition and antithetical structures.

Excerpt Two

"From the standpoint of justice, there is no party in this country, no political stream or force, that stands as a loser or aggrieved by these arrangements... and a national unity government as well (…)"

- **Speech Shift:** From revolutionary posture to inclusive political proposition; a unifying rhetoric aimed at establishing a national political vision.

- **Objective:** To emphasize national partnership and avoidance of exclusion.

- **Target Audience:** Opposing political forces and the Yemeni political elite.

- **Style:** Rational and political, with undertones of "marketing" the revolution as inclusive.

Excerpt Three:

"People are in need of justice, for the alternative to justice is injustice. Establishing justice is a religious responsibility and a necessity... The previous government had governed the country through crises (...)"

- **Speech Shift:** From political speech to ethical and religious-moral narrative; a humanistic and ethical appeal with a pronounced religious tone.

- **Objective:** To present the revolution as a moral corrective movement.

- **Target Audience:** Religious communities and rural tribal societies.

- **Style:** Preaching and reformist; relies heavily on themes of justice and injustice.

Analytical Summary

The stylistic transitions in the discourse range from passionate and mobilizing to rhetorical, religious, and ethical. This variation reflects the multiplicity of agendas within resistance speech. The multiplicity of target audiences, ranging from the general public to political factions and religious elites, demonstrates an acute awareness of the composition of the Yemeni public sphere. The objectives evolve in a phased manner: beginning with mass mobilization, progressing to the construction of political legitimacy, and culminating in moral justification.

Phase Two: Sovereign and Resistance Speech (2015) – The Onset of the Saudi–UAE Aggression

Context and Shift in Speech Positioning

This phase represents a critical juncture in the political speech of Mr. Abdulmalik Badruddin Al-Houthi. His rhetoric transitioned from an internal reformist-protest discourse to a sovereign, resistance-oriented regional narrative. Upon the announcement of war by the Saudi-led Arab Coalition on March 26, 2015, Al-Houthi's speech introduced a redefined conception of the enemy not as a corrupt domestic political regime, but as an aggressive external coalition posing an existential threat to national sovereignty.

This radical shift is marked by a reorientation of the threat reference point: from internal (the former regime) to external (regional and international powers). This aligns with what Wedeen (2008, 5) refers to as the transition from "reformist speech" to "sovereignty discourse."

The New Symbolic Structure

The symbolic fields within this phase of speech expanded significantly to include:

- **The Martyr** as a symbol of dignity and deterrence.

- **The Criminal Enemy** as a unified frame encompassing the Arab-American-Zionist coalition.

- **The Resistant Yemeni Identity** as an existential counterforce to external domination.

Al-Houthi states:

"Today, truths have been revealed, the hidden is exposed, and reality has come to light; the forces of evil and criminality have unmasked themselves."
This articulation encapsulates what revolutionary movements often enact during moments of existential threat: a symbolic unveiling of what had been previously concealed.

1)

2)   *Mechanisms of Influence and Mobilization*

This stage introduced new rhetorical tactics, including:

- **Unification of the Domestic Front** by portraying internal opposition to resistance as collaborators with aggression.

- **Mobilization of Popular Jihad**, calling upon tribes and the military for recruitment and support.

- **Moral–Religious Framing of Resistance**, as reflected in the statement:

"It is an unjust aggression with no legitimacy. Where is the legitimacy of this aggression? Where is it?"
(Al-Houthi, 2019).

Such language corresponds to what Charles Taylor (2004) terms *"the moral space of resistance,"* wherein war becomes an expression of virtue rather than merely political necessity.

3)

4)   *Target Audience*

The speech in this phase targeted a broader and more cohesive base:

Audience	Nature of Addressing
Yemeni Tribes	Direct calls for mobilization, funding, and participation in battle
Military Institution	Redefinition of its role as a national and sovereign defender
General Population	Persuasion that the aggression represents an existential threat

5)   *Strategic Shifts – Comparative Overview*

Aspect	Phase One (2014)	Phase Two (2015)
Identified Enemy	Corrupt local regime	Arab Coalition + United States
Type of Discourse	Internal Reformist	Sovereign / Resistance
Central Symbol	The Oppressed People	The Martyr and the Mujahid
Nature of Mobilization	Civil Protests	Armed Resistance and Mass Mobilization

Symbolic Function	Deconstructing the Old Regime	Defending Sovereignty and Existence

6) Symbolic–Social Impact

The speech successfully unified the public sphere under the logic of *"defending dignity and sovereignty"*, establishing a new relational dynamic between leader and public one based on the notions of *collective victimhood* and *existential threat*. These are concepts deeply rooted in the literature on resistance discourse during asymmetric wars.

Phase Two: The 2015 Saudi–UAE Aggression

Excerpt One:

"From Washington, the Saudi ambassador declared the war… The tyrannical powers entered the scene with all their arrogance and criminality."

- **Speech Shift:** From internal affairs to direct identification of the external enemy.
- **Objective:** To declare external aggression and mark the beginning of an armed resistance phase.
- **Target Audience:** The Yemeni public at large aiming at national mobilization.
- **Style:** Dramatic and mobilizing, exposes the coalition and frames it as a legitimate external adversary.

Excerpt Two:

"These oppressive forces are merely executing American will and Israeli desire."

- **Speech Shift:** Direct association of the aggression with a broader U.S.–Israeli agenda.
- **Objective:** To construct a resistance-consciousness and offer a geopolitical framing of the conflict.
- **Target Audience:** Yemeni society and the broader Islamic world.
- **Style:** Binary, invokes Islamic symbolism to distinguish good from evil.

Excerpt Three

"What do they want from this country? Has this people done anything to justify such aggression? Absolutely not."

- **Speech Shift:** Reinforcement of the national victimhood narrative.
- **Objective:** To strengthen the legitimacy of self-defense and demonize the aggression.
- **Target Audience:** Domestic audiences, neutral entities, and public opinion.
- **Style:** Interrogative and rhetorical; evokes empathy and promotes mobilization.

Phase Three: Transnational Resistance Speech (2023–2025)

Context, Strategic Shifts, and Transformations in the Public Sphere during the Era of "Al-Aqsa Flood"

Political and Social Context

The "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation, launched in October 2023 by Palestinian Resistance Factions in an unprecedented military initiative against Israeli occupation, catalyzed a major regional upheaval. Within this tense geopolitical environment, Ansar Allah (the Houthis) in Yemen assumed a novel discursive and political positioning that transcended the national framework, situating itself within the broader architecture of what is now referred to as the "Axis of Resistance."

In this context, Mr. Abdulmalik Badruddin Al-Houthi delivered a series of speeches that marked a decisive transformation in the function of political discourse, particularly in its ability to:

- **Redefine public consciousness** concerning the nature of the "enemy" and the concept of "duty."

- **Shift the meaning of nationalism** from local geography to a broader transnational Islamic geography.

- **Reconstruct symbolic representation** by embedding local symbols within expansive frameworks (the Nation, Resistance, Jerusalem).

Symbolic Transformations in Discourse Structure

The discursive logic in this phase shifted from that of a **defensive nation-state** to that of an **ideological vanguard**, a transformation manifested through direct calls for military involvement, missile and drone launches, and the portrayal of Palestine as spiritually and historically linked to the Yemeni people. Al-Houthi's rhetoric blended grand narratives (Yemen, Palestine, and the Nation) into a unified communicative frame.

Symbol	Meaning in the Speech
Al-Aqsa Flood	A turning point inaugurating a new era of resistance in the Nation
The Martyr	A moral icon legitimizing collective sacrifice
America / Israel	A global axis of aggression that must be resisted
Axis of Resistance	The chosen collective to confront the Zionist-imperialist project

From National to Transnational: The Speech as a Tool to Expand the Public Sphere

According to Habermas (1991), the public sphere in modern societies is reshaped during historical turning points through charismatic discourse that evokes emotional and moral engagement. Within this theoretical framework, Mr. Abdulmalik Al-Houthi's speech evolved into a **mobilizing instrument** that surpasses individual interest and builds an **ideologically and ethically charged identity**, superseding traditional political affiliations. This transformation is evidenced by:

- Massive protest marches in *Al-Sabeen Square* (Sana'a)

- Open declarations of readiness to send fighters to Palestine

- Public coordination with the Axis of Resistance (Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad)

Social Functions of the Speech

This phase of speech can be interpreted as a mechanism for producing **resistance-oriented symbolic capital**, where rhetoric operates as both a **mobilization ritual** and a **legitimizing force** for resistance actions. The following functions stand out:

Function	**Manifestation in the Speech**
Construction of a Collective "We"	"Our Yemeni people are not alone; they are at the heart of the Nation"
Undermining pro-Israel Arab regimes	Labeling them as shameful normalizers
Reproduction of grand narratives	Linking resistance to the Qur'an, divine justice, and dignity
Management of public anger	Stressing patience, steadfastness, and jihad

Target Audience and Sociological Shifts

Unlike earlier phases, the target audience in this stage extended beyond Yemen's borders:

1. **The Free of the Nation:** A transnational appeal to all Muslims opposing injustice.

2. **Resistance Movements:** Emphasis on doctrinal and political solidarity.

3. **The Yemeni People:** Elevating their role as a vanguard and exemplary model within the broader Islamic struggle.

Notably, the speech managed to **harmonize doctrinal conviction with political pragmatism**. It remained ideologically charged yet field-oriented, clearly articulating red lines for direct military engagement and emphasizing operational readiness.

Structural Comparison: Phase Two vs. Phase Three

Field	**Phase Two (2015)**	**Phase Three (2023–2025)**
Context	Defense of Yemen	Defense of Palestine and the Islamic Ummah
Enemy	Saudi Arabia, United States	United States–Israel
Central Symbols	Homeland, Martyr	Jerusalem, Nation, Mujahid
Target Audience	Tribes, Army	Islamic Ummah, Resistance Axis, Public
Language	Political–Religious	Transnational, Liberational, Qur'anic
Public Performance	Frontline battles and mobilization	Million-person marches and transnational incitement

The Impact of Speech on the Formation of the Traditional Public Sphere

From the perspective of political sociology, Mr. Abdulmalik Badruddin Al-Houthi's speech has functioned not merely as a mobilization tool but as an **instrument for constructing a new political imagination within a traditional society**. By fusing religious vocabulary with political analysis and redefining nationalism within the framework of the Islamic Ummah, his rhetoric has contributed to **transforming the masses from passive recipients into active participants** in a clearly delineated ideological-political project.

In this regard, speech becomes a **symbolic authority** capable of generating **collective action**, which is one of the cornerstones in the transition from a revolutionary movement to a **regional political actor**.

Analysis of Mr. Abdulmalik Badruddin Al-Houthi's Speech (2023–2025 Gaza Conflict)

Excerpt One

"We extend congratulations… the blessed Al-Aqsa Flood operation… a historic and great victory" (…).

- **Speech Shift:** From a position of solidarity to one of strategic celebration.
- **Objective:** To integrate Gaza's victory into Yemen's new political identity within the Axis of Resistance.
- **Target Audience:** The Islamic Ummah, with Yemenis framed as integral to the resistance camp.
- **Style:** Ceremonial – ritualistic – celebratory.

Excerpt Two

"The Zionist entity was nurtured by arrogant global powers… and enjoys full American and Western support" (…).

- **Speech Shift:** Reframing Israel not merely as a geopolitical adversary but as a colonial instrument.
- **Objective:** To intensify the symbolic charge of the battle and broaden the scope of confrontation to include Western imperialism.
- **Target Audience:** A transnational resistance audience; global liberation movements.
- **Style:** Historical-narrative – explanatory – ideologically grounded.

Excerpt Three

"The Palestinian cause is among the clearest of all just causes… they seek to erase it through normalization" (…).

- **Speech Shift:** Intensification of the "victimhood" narrative, highlighting the betrayal of pro-normalization regimes.

- **Objective:** To mobilize against normalization and morally indict the abandonment of Palestine.

- **Target Audience:** Yemeni society and freedom-seeking Muslims globally.

- **Style:** Slogan-heavy – emotionally charged – calls for pan-Islamic awakening.

Excerpt Four

"You are aligned with the truth… as a conscious believer, anchored in patience, sacrifice, and conviction… with elevated spiritual resolve…" (…).

- **Speech Shift:** From external political analysis to internal psychological and spiritual empowerment of the resistant individual.

- **Objective:** To fortify collective consciousness against psychological and media warfare; to **frame sacrifice not as a human cost, but as a sanctified and mobilizing value**. This solidifies community readiness for endurance through its association with divine tranquility and religious legitimacy.

- **Target Audience:** Fighters on the frontlines, families of martyrs, participants in Yemen's popular mobilization, and global supporters of the Gaza resistance anyone enduring or emotionally invested in the confrontation.

- **Style:** Emotional, spiritual, and mobilizing; employs Qur'anic references and repetitive spiritual motifs in a **gradual emotional crescendo**, linking sacrifice with divine serenity and acceptance even amid the harshest conditions of struggle.

This final stage of speech, thus, does not merely respond to events it **redefines the moral and symbolic grammar of resistance**, positioning Yemen not just as a nation in conflict, but as a **spiritual and ideological nucleus** within a broader cosmic struggle. The synthesis of emotional, moral, and doctrinal registers renders the discourse both **transcendent and pragmatic**, a hallmark of charismatic leadership in revolutionary contexts.

Comparative Analysis and Strategic Outcomes of Speech Shifts

Introduction

This chapter explores three critical stages in the political speech of Mr. Abdulmalik Badruddin Al-Houthi, during which the content, goals, symbols, and target audiences of his rhetoric undergo significant transformations in response to evolving political and social contexts. This chapter represents the analytical culmination of the study, interrogating how the discourse transitioned from a **domestic protest function (2014)** to a **defensive resistance narrative against a regional coalition (2015)**, and ultimately to a **transnational mobilization speech within the Axis of Resistance (2023–2025)**.

Rather than focusing solely on linguistic structures, the analysis probes the shifting **socio-political functions** of the discourse as a tool for reconstructing the traditional public sphere in Yemen.

Strategic Transformations in Discursive Structure

From Internal Resistance to Global Mobilization

Category	Phase I (2014)	Phase II (2015)	Phase III (2023–2025)
Nature of Speec	Reformist, Domestic Revolutionary	Sovereign, Defensive Resistance	Global, Offensive Resistance
Defined Adversary	Former Political Regime	Saudi-led Coalition	U.S.-Israeli-Zionist Project
Target Audience	Tribes, Youth, Opposition	Yemeni Public, Armed Forces	Islamic Nation, Resistance Axis
Yemen's Role	Victim of Domestic Corruption	Victim of External Aggression	Active Actor in a Transnational Resistance Axis
Source of Legitimacy	The People and Protest	National Sovereignty and Martyrdom	Jerusalem, Resistance, Divine Right

Speech That Produces Reality, Not Just Describes It

What distinguishes Mr. Abdulmalik Al-Houthi's speech is not merely its descriptive power, but its ability to **generate a counter-narrative that materializes into political action**. The speech frames events within a broader religious-historical sense of injustice and reconstitutes the "we" from a Yemeni populace to a resisting Ummah. The "other" is redefined from a corrupt local adversary to a cosmic enemy (U.S., Israel, normalizing regimes).

This aligns with **Ernesto Laclau's** theory of discourse as a foundational act of politics, wherein the creation of a central antagonism (e.g., people vs. elites or colonizers) becomes the engine of political identity.

Composite Analysis of the Social Signifiers of Speech

Framing the Public

Each phase utilized a distinct **"framing strategy"**, as follows:

Phase	Frame Type	Content
2014	Frame of Justice and Reform	Anti-corruption, economic justice, popular uprising
2015	Frame of Dignity and Sovereignty	National defense, armed resistance

2023–2025	Frame of Nation and Sanctities	Defense of Al-Aqsa, anti-normalization, Axis Unity

These shifts enabled the discourse to **consistently mobilize new audience segments**, expanding the legitimacy of the cause from the local to the regional level.

Speech as a Tool for Constructing the Imagined Community

In line with **Benedict Anderson's** notion of "imagined communities," Yemen is reimagined not as a geographically-bounded polity, but as a **symbolic node within a resistant Islamic Nation**. Through the integration of the Palestinian cause, glorification of martyrdom beyond territorial boundaries, and the unification of supra-national symbols (e.g., Al-Aqsa, Resistance), the Yemeni subject is repositioned as a **moral agent within a broader transnational identity**.

From Marginalization to Symbolic Leadership

This rhetoric marks a symbolic shift from **margins to center**. The previously besieged and peripheral Yemen becomes the **vanguard of the Ummah**, made possible through three key elements:

1. **Symbolic Initiative**: Public declaration of readiness to engage militarily in Palestine.

2. **Popular Embrace**: Mass rallies in Sabeen Square as ritual affirmation.

3. **Adoption of a Pan-Islamic Cause**: Transition from state-based to Nation-based speech.

Socio-Political Impacts of Discursive Shifts

Reengineering the Traditional Public Sphere

The speech operates not merely through formal institutions but **restructures the public sphere** in a traditional society by reinserting religion into political life. The narrative of Ummah-wide injustice becomes a source of moral legitimacy, fostering an engaged audience from **within tribal, sectarian, and familial identities**, transforming speech into a symbolic institution capable of collective mobilization.

Legitimizing Political Action Outside the State

Through his speech, Mr. Abdulmalik Al-Houthi is presented not merely as a political actor but as a **source of symbolic legitimacy**. This establishes a **non-electoral audience** grounded in religious obedience rather than contractual citizenship. Such support is unofficial but **socially effective**, rooted in charismatic authority rather than bureaucratic power.

Resistance Speech as Psychological–Social Mobilization

The rhetoric does not merely seek to persuade but to **inspire readiness for sacrifice**, building deep psychological structures:

Element	Effect
Martyrdom	Sacralization of death and glorification of sacrifice
Victimhood	Creation of morally legitimate collective anger
External Threat	Construction of a cohesive collective identity
Common Enemy	Neutralization of internal divisions

Strategic Outcomes: From Language to Action

Outcome	Description
Expansion of National Cause	No longer confined to Yemen's geography
Formation of a Resistance Society	Audience shifts from consumer to political actor
Delegitimization of Arab Normalizing Regimes	Through moral–religious rhetoric
Redefinition of Yemeni Identity	As transnational, sacrificial, and pioneering

The Social Dimensions of Houthi Speeches Across Phases

Speech as Social Practice

Mr. Abdulmalik Al-Houthi's speech transcends political positioning, acting as a **tool to reshape social reality**. It forges a unifying narrative that interweaves local issues (corruption, sovereignty) with regional struggles (Palestine, U.S., Israel), generating a collective sense of **divinely-mandated purpose** among his audience.

This reconstitution of collective identity has resulted in **new social forms of political participation** including:

- Public demonstrations
- Popular mobilization for war
- Grassroots logistical support structures

Reproduction of the Relationship Between State and Society

Through speech, a new formulation of the social contract has been produced, characterized by the following transformations in pre and post specches of Mr. Abdulmalik Al-Houthi:

Domain	Pre-Speech Phase	Post-Speech Phase
Source of Legitimacy	Centralized controlling state	The leader as symbol and project
Horizontal Relations	Fragmented elite networks	Networked/community-based relations
Concept of Participation	Political representation	Comprehensive social mobilization

The Rise of New Social Symbols

The speech contributed to the emergence of effective and influential social symbols. The martyr, for instance, was transformed into a social not merely religious symbol; the self-sacrificing and nurturing mother became a symbol of resistance; and the fighter was reimagined not as a mercenary, but as a constituent member of society. In this way, the symbolic hierarchy within society was fundamentally reshaped.

Restructuring the Traditional Public Sphere

The public sphere ceased to be the exclusive domain of political elites or official media. It became infused with "symbols of resistance," and the priorities of public speech were reordered from issues of livelihood to those of dignity, sovereignty, and liberation. The society thus shifted from being a passive recipient of events to an active producer of political stance and scene.

Research Conclusion, Findings, and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the political speech of Mr. Abdulmalik Al-Houthi is not merely a linguistic or religious phenomenon, but a complex socio-political one that has significantly contributed to reshaping Yemeni collective consciousness and broadening the concept of resistance from the local sphere to the regional geopolitical domain.

The progression from a revolutionary speech against corruption to a resistance speech against the regional coalition, and subsequently to a global mobilization speech in defense of Gaza, indicates that Mr. Al-Houthi's rhetoric has not been reactive but rather a driving force behind shifts in public awareness and comprehensive political trajectories.

The research confirms that, within traditional societies, discourse functions not only as a means of expression but as an instrument of organization and public sphere construction at times surpassing the capacity of formal political institutions.

This field remains open to deeper studies on the relationship between speech and the public sphere, and between cultural symbols and mobilization politics especially in the midst of the profound transformations unfolding across the Arab world.

Based on the theoretical analysis of Mr. Abdulmalik Al-Houthi's speeches over three phases (2014–2025), the research has yielded a number of substantive findings, accompanied by a set of scholarly recommendations that reflect the study's outcomes and open avenues for further inquiry and understanding.

Findings

1. The speech underwent deliberate strategic shifts, evolving from an internally reformist speech (2014), to a sovereignty and resistance-based speech (2015), and eventually to a transnational mobilization speech in the context of the Gaza battle (2023–2025).

2. The speech played a foundational role in reshaping Yemen's traditional public sphere by reproducing collective identity, redefining legitimacy, and stimulating mass action through a religious–moral symbolic framework.

3. The speech succeeded in integrating the Palestinian cause into the core of Yemeni national consciousness by recasting it as a religious duty and ethical obligation thereby reflecting Yemen's integration into a trans-state regional resistance structure.

4. The speech preserved a coherent symbolic structure centered around the concepts of martyrdom, dignity, sovereignty, victimhood, and divine mandate, which served as central tools for political and social mobilization.

5. In the context of a fragile state, the speech functioned as an alternative to formal institutions by constructing symbolic legitimacy grounded in charismatic leadership and a moral-religious order, thus substituting the institutional social contract.

Recommendations

1. It is imperative to expand studies of political discourse in traditional societies, not merely as a communicative tool but as a strategic practice for redistributing legitimacy and producing collective action.

2. There is a need for in-depth studies examining the psychological and social impact of speech on besieged communities, especially in contexts where the religious and political spheres intersect and symbolic figures increasingly shape public consciousness.

3. The resistant speech in Yemen should be analyzed as a referential case for understanding how speech can construct the imagined community and transcend local affiliation towards broader belonging (the Islamic Nation and the Axis of Resistance).

4. Analytical tools for symbolic speech must be integrated into interpretations of transformations in the Arab public sphere, particularly with the rise of non-state actors who rely more on symbolic power than on formal institutions.

5. Comparative studies should be encouraged to examine the speeches of resistance movements in the region (e.g., Hezbollah, Palestinian factions, Popular Mobilization Forces), with the goal of formulating a shared regional understanding of resistance speech.

6. Understanding the social dynamics generated by speech may contribute to the development of policies that are more attuned to local realities.

7. It is essential to recognize speech as a mechanism for reconstructing the public sphere, not merely as a means of communication.

8. Studies should investigate popular engagement with Mr. Al-Houthi's speech through surveys and interviews to better understand its emotional and political impact.

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