Emerging Trends of Political Islam

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A militant group affiliated to al-Qaida controlling large swathes in Somalia known as Al-Shabab (the Youth) has been creating havoc in the whole region of the Horn of Africa. The recent terrorist action in the Westgate Shopping Mall in Nairobi caught the attention of the world community to the dangers looming in the region and reaffirmed that terrorism has no religion and ethnicity. Even though Somalis have been suffering terrorism and massive violence of human rights in the last two decades, all Somalis are considered and shunned as potential terrorists. Despite the fact that Western scholarship on political Islam has increased exponentially after 9/11, yet writing from the inside outwards is of paramount importance and may offer added value. First, this article will put the topic in its geographical and historical context and then it will trace trends and persuasions of political Islam, connecting them to their root organization and core ideology.

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Background

Somalia is a Muslim country located in the strategic Horn of Africa connecting Asia, Europe, and Africa. The country was constituted from the unification of the former British protectorate in the North and the Italian trusteeship administration that gained independence in 1960. However, this state totally collapsed in 1991, ushering in gross violations of human rights, a massive refugee crisis and the emergence of Islamic extremism and piracy. There is no single causal explanation for the state's collapse in Somalia. Various schools of thought tend to explain the collapse of the state in different perspectives. These perspectives include the Cold War and foreign aid, Somali irredentism and the war with Ethiopia (1977-78), archaism, the overextension of resources, moral degradation and eclectic factors. However, the mismatch between the modern secular state and traditional society could be considered the original cause. Strangely, Somalia is the longest failed state even though it enjoys all unifying factors such as a common language and religion. The homogeneous Somali ethnic group estimated to be more than 20 million people is scattered in four countries namely: Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya. It addition, more than a million Somalis live in the Diaspora mostly in Europe and North America. Moreover, only half of the Somali ethnic group resides within the territory of the Somali Federal State.

Islam was introduced to Somalia from the Arabian Peninsula in the late 800s and the process of mass conversion of Somalis to Islam occurred between the 11th and 13th centuries. Nonetheless, the country remained peripheral and was not incorporated into successive Muslim states until 17th century, when the Ottoman Empire seized parts of northern Somalia. In the 19th century, Somalia experienced a reform and revival of Islam associated with the reorientation and renaissance of the Sufi brotherhoods (SB). The advent of Sufism was recorded from the early 15th century on, nevertheless, its renewal and reform were noted from the last quarter of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century. SBs have taken mainly peaceful approaches to socio-religious reform through Islamic propagation and spiritual revitalization. As such, they have dominated religious life, reaching out to populations in the urban and rural areas alike, most of who had identified with one of the SBs by the 19th century.

There are two main SBs in Somalia, the Qadiriyah and the Ahmadiyah, and each one has its local offshoots. Thus the Qadiriyah has two main branches, Zayliyah and Uweysiyah, while the Ahmadiyah also has three offshoots, Rahmaniyah, Salihiyah, and Dandarawiyah. The colonial domination at the end of the 19th century introduced the European model of the state and interjected alien culture into the traditional Muslim society. In response, Islam was used as the ideology of resistance by the Islamic scholars belonging to some SBs. The most renowned is Mohamed Abdulle Hassan, who founded the Darwish movement and fought Britain from 1900-1920. During the struggle for independence, Islam also became part of the nationalist expression of national identity and an anti-colonial resistance slogan in combination with nascent nationalism. This phenomenon was evident since 1950s and the modern Islamic trends were developing, brought by Somalis studying in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, besides the Egyptian mission of spreading Arab nationalism and the Arabic language in Somalia. Also, local Islamic organizations began to appear such as the Islamic League.

After the independence in 1960, within the local, regional, and global context of the Cold War, regional competition and transformation of Somali society, Islamic consciousness was gradually growing along with the growing westernization of the elites. This growth manifested itself both in the emergence of modern Islamist scholars educated in Arab universities and marginalized in the job market and in the proliferation of Arabic schools, books, newspapers, and libraries. The growth of the Islamist elites and their rejection of marginalization led to increased Islamic activities and the eventual establishment of more robust organizations. At the same time, westernization and secularization were also growing. Thus, the gap between the two camps was gradually widening.

The first modern Islamic organizations began to appear in the mid 1960s; they were mainly influenced by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood ideology. The most significant role was played during this period by the Nahdah Islamic organization and the student organizations of Ahal in Southern Somalia and Al-Wahdah in Northern Somalia. At the same time, Salafism was also growing with the increase of Saudi influence achieved through the opening of educational programs involving local schools and scholarships to Saudi Universities. It is important, however, to characterize this period of the Islamic awakening in 1960-1970s as immature with an emotional attachment to Islamic ideology. It was a period with very low organizational capacity, meager economic resources, and a romantic approach to social and political realities. Nonetheless, by the end of 1970s, more robust Islamic organizations were established. These organizations were not monolithic and pursued various Islamic propagation methodologies and strategies ranging from peaceful evolutionary to violent revolutionary.

Political Islam in Somalia

Political Islam or Islamism is a controversial term defined differently as part of the various terminologies coined by Western scholars to denote the modern development of Islamic movements. This paper adopts the International Crisis Group's definition because of its broadness, that is, «the active assertion and promotion of beliefs, prescriptions, laws, or policies that are held to be Islamic in character». Islamism pose challenges both the post-colonial secular state by advocating its Islamization and the traditional society by preaching Puritanism, reforms and revivalism. Currents of ideas and groups belonging to this category are numerous and diversified. However, in Somalia, the two main conceptions of Islamism are rooted in Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood. The unique attributes of Somali Islamism have grown in a specific environment and thus acquired distinctive characteristics. The first characteristic stems from the fact that Somalia never experienced in its long history the rule of the Islamic state. Notwithstanding its various communities' incorporation of selective parts of Shari'a in their customary laws known as Xeer, full application of Islamic Shari'a was never practiced. This means that there are no local memories of Islamic rule or historical legacies from which contemporary Islamists can draw inspiration and examples. The second character is that Islamic propagation and its institutions are handled by individuals and non-state institutions without state intervention. These institutions, such as Qur'anic schools, mosques and education circles, are established by various

individuals or groups. Besides the unique merits of this system due to its sustainability and mobility, its limitations, nonetheless, remain, such as small size, fragmentation and lack of standardization. The third characteristic is the leadership style of the traditional Islamic establishment, based on authoritarian relations of a master-disciple nature. In such societal organizational culture, the goal of modern Islamic movements to establish larger trans-clan organizations with modern organizational settings is hard to realize. It is very difficult to transcend the incompatibility between traditional organizational models and modern organizations, based on hierarchical and institutional loyalties. These inherent organizational weaknesses haunt modern Islamic movements and are the primary cause of their recurrent fragmentation and splintering. Thus, the concept of a modern Islamic organization based on memberships that offer loyalty not to individuals but to the organization's principles, procedures, and policies is a new venture and, indeed, a revolutionary idea in Somalia.

Moreover, the Somali Islamic movements take advantage of a number of opportunities. The first advantage is the absence of considerable religious minorities, which might pose an obstacle to the adoption of the Islamic Shari› a . The second advantage is the lack of organized secular elites that might oppose an Islamic agenda on the domestic front. The third advantage is the freedom of operations Islamic movements enjoyed after the collapse of the repressive state in 1991. Indeed, Somalia is an unprecedented case in modern history, in which Islamists have been operating freely and openly without the intervention of the post-colonial secular state since that date. As a result, the country became a fertile breeding ground for the growth of various persuasions of Islamism including some violent groups like Al-Shabab.

Emerging Trends of Political Islam

As part of its modern development, the Salafiya School appeared in Somalia in the second half of the twentieth century and grew exponentially in the 1980s. The terminology of Salafiya is highly contentious and is used differently by various schools and scholars. It was introduced to Somalia as part of the rising influence of Saudi Arabia in global politics, and it spread into Somalia through students who were educated in the Saudi Islamic universities and also through the Somali migrant labor force working in Saudi Arabia during the economic boom of the 1970s. Many graduates of the Saudi Islamic universities were employed to spread Salafism in Somalia and were provided with enormous resources such as ample Islamic literature, new spacious mosques and other incentives like scholarships and training courses. Numerous organizations belong to the Salafiya persuasions. The mother organization is Al-Ittihad Al-Islami which splintered after the militant period of 1990s into more than four organizations. The prominent ones among them are Al-I'tisam and Al-Shabab. The most notorious extremist organization within Al-Shabab is a mixture of Salafiya Jihadist and Takfir elements.

The second modern development is the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna in Egypt, which reached Somalia in 1953 through Egyptian teachers and then via Somali students who graduated from the Arab universities. The MB, promoting Muslim unity among various groups, adopted the slogan, "We should unite upon that which we agree, and excuse each other in that which we disagree." In this context, followers of the MB methodology avoid divisive Islamic discourses on doctrinal matters and legal aspects within its association. Indeed, its main approach aims to create an atmosphere of collaboration between various Islamic groups and organizations to serve the bigger goals: the promotion of Islam in society and its application at state level. Prominent organizations belonging to these persuasions are the Islah Movement and its offshoot «Dam Jadid» (New Blood) and Al-Tajammu' al-Islami (Aala-Sheikh).

The third modern Islamic development is Tablighi Jama'a, which originated from the Indian subcontinent where it emerged in 1926. It does not focus on political reform and is generally a quietist movement to which a large group of religious preachers in Somalia belong. The Jama'a uses the simplified approach of calling to Islam by sending a group of people to various cities, villages and locations to propagate Islam. The procedures of the call to Islam start with calling people to the congregation prayers in the mosques and then inviting them to stay and listen to their Islamic message after prayers. The Jama'a has succeeded in influencing the uneducated masses because of its teaching's simplicity, community spirit and openness.

These trends are not the invention of the Somalis and are linked with the global trends which are part of the world-wide revival of Islam in the twentieth century. The influence of these Islamic trends in shaping the Somalis' social realities and political views is tremendous. For instance, in all National Charters and Constitutions adopted since 2000, Islam has been affirmed as the ultimate reference of all laws and any laws contradicting Islamic principles have been proclaimed illegal. Moreover, there are considerable numbers of MPs belonging to all Islamic trends among the members of parliament selected through traditional clan elders. However, the common denominator of all Islamic trends is to advocate for the application of Shari'a in Somalia. The application of Shari'a is constitutionally sanctioned, yet, its application should be in accordance with moderate interpretation of Islamic texts and a gradual application that averts factionalism and extremism. This approach is realized through the participatory approach of all groups belonging to the various Islamic trends, including the Sufi brother-hoods, in order to create consensus among Somali Islamic scholars on matters of Islam.

In conclusion, Somalia is currently passing though a post-transition period attempting to put behind it the protracted transition period of 12 years and the brutal civil war that has persisted since 1991. However, this herculean task is very challenging. My personal dream is see Somalia regain its statehood and unity while preserving its cultural heritage and societal values. Moreover, Somalia should attain the socio-economic development that is a necessary pre-condition for transforming the country into a modern responsible state. During the protracted civil war, Somali people have experienced various forms of extremisms in the name of their clans and Islam. Clan belonging and Islam are the basis for Somali identity and without integrating them into nationalism, the state will not be sustainable. That is the challenge of reconstructing the national state of Somalia.

Pressekonferenz der Ministerin für Erziehung und Gesundheit (Sommer 2013):
„Wir hören jeden Tag, dass junge Frauen für Geld sagen, sie seien von somalischem Militär vergewaltigt worden. Das ist eine Lüge, die wir nicht dulden können. Auch wenn es wahr ist, wir müssen es verschweigen."
Städter: „Was ist nur los mit der Sheikhada. Von ihr erwarten wir doch, dass sie die somalischen Frauen schützt."
Nomade: „Es wäre besser gewesen, sie hätte geschwiegen."