# Transformation of Islam in Northern Kenya: Changing Islamic discourses in Garissa Town and the Influence of Returning Kenyan-Somali Graduates from Two Saudi Universities

By

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**Summary**

From the 1960s and onwards, Islam in the Horn of Africa experienced deep and enduring changes. Several key developments occurred during this time contributing to the transformation of Islam in this region. This dissertation examines Garissa, a town and county in northern Kenya, and the factors precipitating this transformation in the interpretation and dissemination of Islamic epistemology and ontology in the region. The arrival of Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi, a Somali man born in the Ogaadeen region of Ethiopia, helped promote Salafism to the majority Sufi locals. Cabdi is credited with introducing reformist Islamic ideology to the region providing the theological and ideological foundations for later Salafism. Indeed, a few years after Cabdi's arrival, Sheikh Maxamed Ibrahim Awal arrived. However, Awal did not arrive on his own volition as Cabdi had. Awal was an employee of the Saudi government and was dispatched to Garissa as part of Saudi Arabia's outreach program to propagate its version of Islam. The convergence of these two men and the support they received from the locals and their governments (both Saudi Arabia and Kenya) eased the shift that the reformists sought. A substantive factor influencing the relationship between both regimes and regions was the awarding of hundreds of scholarships to Kenyan locals to study in Saudi universities and ensure that Saudi-style Salafism held sway in Garissa.

The introduction of reformist ideology by Cabdi and Awal generated sudden backlash from the existing religious order: the traditional culama and the Sufi leaderships. The situation got more precarious as Cabdi and Awal immersed themselves in dacwa (da'wa) and durus (sing. dars: lesson) in the two institutions of the town: Jamiica Mosque and Madrasatul Najaax. The traditional culama and the Sufis rose up in arms and passionately rejected the two men from taking up space or spreading their message in the mosque and the madrasa. Understandably, the

furor was stimulated by the difference in their understandings and interpretations of Islam, which were born out of their scholastic backgrounds. The traditional culama were educated in the Somali system of traditional education, which commenced with dugsi (Qur'ānic school) and culminated into xer (higher traditional Islamic education) and expressed itself through Shaafici-Sufi-Ashcari (Ash'ari) nexus. While dugsi was common and could be had anywhere there was a Somali family, xer attendees travelled to distant regions in the present-day Southern Somalia and the Ogaadeen region. In addition to a selected number of books on tafsīr and xadiith, students often studied axkaam (fiqh) and aala (Arabic language). Xer is described as deep and time consuming. A single text takes months to finish and, depending on its rank of importance, is studied multiple times a year. After students graduated, they were sent to various parts of the Horn by their master to serve as teachers, jurists, and imams.

The stability of the traditional epistemology and the practices it engendered was upended by the rise of modern Islamic universities. The Islamic University in Madina (IUM) from which Sheikh Maxamed Ibrahim Awal graduated, for instance, has had a far-reaching influence on the traditional approach in Garissa. Based on a rationalist approach to Islam, Saudi universities produced graduates who returned to lend support to the changes spawned by Cabdi and Awal with the backing of Saudi Arabia. Curriculum is narrow and serves a dual function: it emphasizes preaching to the common folk, while at the same time refuting opposing camps. Students are exposed to a heavy dose of polemics to prepare them for their encounter with their opponents: Sufis or Shicas (Shi'as). As such, it is the critical place of knowledge from Saudi Arabia that sits at the center of the transformation in Garissa. The polemic is interwoven with the curriculum, which concentrates on tawxiid and puts the Qur'ān and the xadiith as the first recourse to theology and law. Other subjects studied with devotion include: caqīdah, tafsīr and Arabic

language. Not only is Arabic considered a gateway to knowledge, but it is also understood as the language of revelation and mujtahid ought to grasp the original message in it.

While the major findings of this research align with existing recognition of Saudi interventions seeking to centralize and regulate Islamic thought and practice—the Garissa-based reforms were homegrown and expressed using local vocabulary. As an insider/outsider Somali-Kenyan researcher from the region, I raise an important issue which stands out from existing research: conceptualizing locality. As we will see in later chapters, previous claims state that many of the changes were conceptualized and implemented by locals. Based on the colonial and postcolonial experiences of the Somalis, epistemic locality in the context of the Horn is uniquely complex. Accordingly, though they share much, Somalis in the various countries and regions of Kenya and greater Somalia differ in many other relevant aspects. I contend that returnees—graduates from Saudi universities who returned to Garissa town with degrees in the various Islamic sciences—were pivotal in disrupting the status quo and helping usher in changes we see in Garissa today. While I do not insist that the returnees alone are responsible for the transformation of Islam in this region, they have played a major role in it. Upon their return, they animated, in a very public fashion, the activities of their predecessors: they opposed grave visitation, intercession, and traditional healing among other indigenous ways. Their hostility to these acts were identical to Cabdi's; however, their methods differed. Benefitting from their Saudi education, they used Arabic and referenced the xadiith to delegitimize others. These were methods that Cabdi and other early reformists did not deploy in a substantial manner.

Be that as it may, the relationship between the local Kenyan and ethnic Somali traditionalists and reformists/Salafis has not always been acrimonious. The unique dynamics can be illustrated through the remarkable exchanges that featured in this relationship, particularly

recently. As the initial antipathy toward each other tapered off, a more cordial worldview took shape. A nuanced interconnection arose, including borrowing knowledge and ideas from one another. Accordingly, the traditional culama and their relatives joined the madāris and intensified their knowledge in Arabic, jumping onto the bandwagon of modernizing their education and dacwa. On the other hand, traditional forms of knowledge have historically been the hallmark of madāris and universities. In Garissa alone, the returnees from Saudi universities run xer in various mosques across town and identify themselves as Shaafici, though they still privilege dalāʾil closest to Qur'ān and xadiith.

The current research is crucial for the study of Islam in local contexts and aspires to contribute to its literature in a Somali-speaking areas. There is a dearth of literature in this region to which scholars blame on the historical absence of jihadi movements as was the case in West Africa. This has meant that reductive colonial conceptualizations of Islam have persisted and are held up as accurate representation. Sparse research has been undertaken and lumped together large swathes of diverse peoples without regard for the spectrum of their colonial and postcolonial experiences and expressions. Finally, the recent conflation of Islam and radicalism and the (mis)representation of Somali-Muslims through the imageries of al-Shabab further complicates understanding the sources of regional conflict, post-colonial hybridity, and indigenous cultural flows. This multifaced tension - of lack of representation, misrepresentation, and reification - demands remedial measures. A scholarly undertaking is required to examine and represent the moving parts that continue to inform, shape, and direct Islam as a discursive tradition in how these Muslims interpret and live it.

In conclusion, I hope this research contributes to the emerging discourse on Islam in Africa as interest in African Islam continues to rise; however, much more work needs to be done,

particularly among the Somali-speaking people. I have sought to dialogue with diverse people of varying ages, education and social standing from learning institutions including: Qur'ānic school, universities, and xer, about the resulting Islamic epistemologies, paradigms, and reform movements to move the debate forward and deepen inquiry. By challenging the existing assumptions on Islam in this area and beyond, I hope to represent changes in interpretations and practices of Islam in Garissa Town as part of broader transnational and transcultural flows.

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG DER DISSERTATIONSSCHRIFT**

Transformationen des Islam im nördlichen Kenia: Die Veränderung des islamischen Diskurses in der Stadt Garissa und der Einfluss der Rückkehr von Alumni zweier saudi-arabischer Universitäten

Seit den 1960iger Jahren erlebt der Islam am Horn von Afrika tiefgreifende und anhaltende Veränderungen, die hauptsächliche durch einige wichtige Entwicklungen ausgelöst wurden. Diese Dissertation untersucht, welche Faktoren den Transformationsprozess in der Epistemologie und Ontologie in der Stadt und dem gleichnamigen Verwaltungsbezirk Garissa im nördlichen Kenia ausgelöst und verbreitet haben.

Die Ankunft von Scheich Maxamed Cabdi, eines im äthiopischen Ogaadeen geborenen Somaliers, löste in der vorrangig sufistischen Bevölkerung einen Reformationsprozess aus. Cabdi wird zugerechnet, durch seine reformistische islamische Ideologie den theologischen und ideologischen Grundstein für den späteren Salafismus gelegt zu haben. Nur wenige Jahre nach Cabdi folgte ihm  Scheich Maxamed Ibrahim Awal. Im Gegensatz zu Cabdi kam dieser jedoch nicht aus eigenen Stücken, sondern wurde als Angestellter der saudi-arabischen Regierung im Rahmen eines Programms zur Verbreitung der saudi-arabischen Auslegung des Islams nach Garissa entsandt. Das Zusammentreffen dieser beiden Männer, gekoppelt mit der Unterstützung, die sie sowohl von ihrer jeweiligen Regierung (der Kenianischen und der Saudi-Arabischen) als auch der lokalen Bevölkerung erhielten, bereitete den Nährboden für Reformisten. Ein Katalysator für die Annäherung beider Regionen und deren Regierungen war die Vergabe hunderter Stipendien an Kenianer für saudi-arabische Universitäten und damit die Sicherstellung, dass sich der saudi-arabische Salafismus in Garissa durchsetzte.

Die Einführung der reformistischen Ideologie durch Cabdi und Awal provozierte von der regionalen sufistischen Führung und den traditionellen religiösen Gelehrten (culama) eine heftige Gegenreaktion. Die Situation verschärfte sich weiter, als Cabdi und Awal sich in die beiden religiösen Institutionen der Stadt, der Jamiica-Moschee und Madrasatul Najaax, zurückzogen, um sich ganz auf Da'wa (Ruf zum Islam) und Duruus (Sg. Dars: Unterricht) zu konzentrieren. Daraufhin wurden sie von bewaffneten Sufis und traditionellen Gelehrten mit Nachdruck der Mosche und der Madrasa verwiesen und die Verbreitung ihrer Lehren unterbunden. Dieser Zorn war selbstverständlich dem unterschiedlichen Verständnis zur Auslegung des Islam geschuldet, der vor Ort traditionell durch das Gelehrtenwesen geprägt ist. Die traditionellen Gelehrten (culama) waren im traditionellen somalischen System erzogen worden, dessen Grundlage die Koranschule (dugsi) ist und an das sich die höhere islamische Lehre (xer) anschließt und so den Asch'arismus formt.

Während dugsi sehr verbreitet ist und überall absolviert werden kann, wo es eine somalische Familie gibt, müssen Studierende des xer oft in weit entfernte Gebiete im heutigen südlichen Somalia oder die Ogaadeen Region reisen. Dort studieren sie dann ausgewählte Schriften zu Tafsir und Hadith und oft zusätzlich islamische Rechtswissenschaft (fiqh) und Arabisch (aala). Xer wird als sehr tiefgehend und zeitaufwendig beschrieben, das Studium eines einzigen Textes nimmt mehrere Monate in Anspruch und wird – je nach seiner Wichtigkeit – mehrmals jährlich wiederholt. Nach erfolgreichem Abschluss des Studiums werden die Absolventen von ihren Ausbildern als Lehrer, Juristen und Imame im ganzen Horn von Afrika ausgesandt.

Die Stabilität der traditionellen Epistemologie und der daraus hervorgehenden religiösen Praktiken wurde durch das Aufkommen moderner islamischer Universitäten erschüttert. Die

Islamische Universität in Medina (IUM), dessen Alumnus Scheich Maxamed Ibrahim Awal ist, hat einen Einfluss auf traditionelle Auslegung, der bis nach Garissa reicht. Die an den saudi-arabischen Universitäten vorherrschende rationale Herangehensweise an den Islam brachte Absolventen hervor, welche nach ihrer Rückkehr die durch Cabdi und Awal ausgelösten Veränderungen mit Hilfe ihrer saudi-arabischen Rückendeckung unterstützten. Das Curriculum dieser Universitäten ist eng gehalten und hat im Wesentlichen zwei Funktionen: Das Hervorheben der Wichtigkeit des Predigens und des theologischen Kampfes gegen jegliche andere Ideologien und Meinungen. Um Studierende auf die Begegnung mit ihren theologischen Gegnern – Sufis oder Schiiten – vorzubereiten, werden sie einer gehörigen Dosis Polemik ausgesetzt. Diese Polemik ist eng mit den Studieninhalten verwoben, die sich auf das Prinzip des Tauhid konzentrieren und den Koran als erste Anlaufstelle in Theologie und Rechtsfragen sehen. Andere Inhalte, die mit Eifer studiert werden, sind u.a. Aqida, Tafsir und die arabische Sprache. Dabei wird Arabisch nicht nur als Zugangsmittel zu Wissen gesehen, sondern als Sprache der Offenbarung, in der der Mudschtahid die ursprüngliche Botschaft erkennen sollte.

Während die wichtigsten Erkenntnisse dieser Forschung mit anderen darin übereinstimmen, dass die saudi-arabische Einflussnahme darauf abzielt, Idee und Auslebung des Islams zu zentralisieren und zu regulieren, waren die Reformen in Kenia ein Eigengewächs und wurden durch lokale sprachliche Strukturen ausgedrückt. Als ein insider/outsider somalisch-kenianischer Forscher aus der Region möchte ich auf ein Problem hinweisen, die sich in der bisherigen Forschung abzeichnen: Das des Konzeptes von Lokalität. Wie in späteren Kapiteln gezeigt wird, wurde bisher behauptet, dass ein Großteil der Veränderungen von Einheimischen konzeptualisiert und umgesetzt wurden. Auf Grundlage der kolonialen und post-kolonialen Erfahrungen der Somalier, ist epistemische Lokalität am Horn von Afrika einzigartig komplex.

Dementsprechend unterscheiden sich Somalier in verschiedenen Ländern und den Regionen Kenias und Somalilands in vielen Aspekten, auch wenn es durchaus verbindende Gemeinsamkeiten gibt. Ich begnüge mich damit, dass nach Garissa rückkehrende Alumni saudi-arabischer Universitäten mit Abschlüssen in Islamwissenschaften ausschlaggebend darin waren, den Status quo zu verändern und die Veränderungen einzuleiten, die wir heute in Garissa sehen. Während ich nicht davon ausgehe, dass die Transformation des Islam in der Region einzig und allein durch Rückkehrer zu verantworten ist, spielen sie dennoch eine wichtige Rolle. Seit ihrer Rückkehr haben sie öffentlichkeitswirksam die Aktivitäten ihrer Vorgänger weitergeführt, indem sie sich gegen Friedhofs- bzw. Gräberbesichtigungen aussprechen, die Fürbitte ablehnen und gegen traditionelle Heilkunst und andere einheimische Praktiken vorgehen. Die Feindseligkeit, mit der sie dabei vorgehen, ist identisch zu der von Cabdi, ihre Methoden sind jedoch unterschiedlich. Auf Grundlage ihrer saudi-arabischen Bildung benutzen sie Arabisch und zitieren den Hadith, um andere Meinungen zu delegitimieren, worin sie sich von Cabdi und weiteren früheren Reformisten unterscheiden.

Tatsächlich ist die Beziehung zwischen traditionellen Kenianern und ethnischen Somaliern einerseits und Reformisten bzw. Salafisten nicht immer feindselig. Diese besondere Verbindung kann anhand eines aktuellen und außergewöhnlichen Austausches aufgezeigt werden: Nachdem die anfängliche gegenseitige Ablehnung sich gelegt hatte, wurde der Umgang miteinander etwas versöhnlicher und es stellte sich eine nuancierte Verbindung beider Parteien ein, im Zuge derer Wissen und Ideen der jeweils anderen übernommen und eingesetzt werden. Die traditionellen Gelehrten fanden sich ausgerechnet in den Madaris ein, um ihr Arabisch zu vertiefen und ihre Bildung dem modernen Standard anzupassen. Das ist insoweit erstaunlich, da das Kennzeichen der lokalen Madaris und Universitäten seit jeher die Vermittlung traditioneller Werte war. Die

Rückkehrer hingegen unterrichten xer in verschiedenen Moscheen in Garissa und identifizieren sich als Schafi'iten, obwohl sie sich eng am Koran und den Hadithen orientieren.

Die vorliegende Forschungsarbeit ist bedeutend für die Erforschung des Islam im lokalen Kontext und versucht, einen Beitrag zum Literaturkanon für die somalisch geprägte Region zu leisten, für die nur sehr wenig Literatur existiert. Das wird von Wissenschaftlern auf das historische Fehlen von dschihadistischen Bewegungen zurückgeführt, wie es auch in Westafrika der Fall ist, weshalb die vereinfachende kolonialistische Konzeptionierung des Islam fortbesteht und als eine akkurate Beschreibung angesehen wird. Die wenige existierende Forschung in diesem Gebiet hat häufig große Bevölkerungsgruppen ohne Berücksichtigung ihrer unterschiedlichen kolonialen und postkolonialen Erfahrungen und deren Aufarbeitung zusammengefasst. Schlussendlich wurde durch das jüngste Aufflammen des Radikalismus und der damit verbundenen (Miss)Interpretation der somalischen Muslime durch die dominante Wahrnehmung der al-Shabab Miliz zusätzlich erschwert, ein Verständnis für die Wurzeln der regionalen Konflikte, post-colonial hybridity und den unterschiedlichen einheimischen kulturellen Färbungen zu erlangen. Dieses vielschichtige Spannungsfeld aus einem Mangel an Repräsentation, Missinterpretation und Vergegenständlichung verlangt nach Abhilfe. Dazu bedarf es eines wissenschaftlichen Vorgehens, um die Stellgrößen zu untersuchen, die den Islam als diskursive Element und dessen Umsetzung und Auslebung unablässig gestalten.

Zusammenfassend hoffe ich, dass diese Forschungsarbeit zum aufkeimenden Diskurs über den Islam in Afrika, der immer mehr Interesse auf sich zieht, beitragen kann. Diese Arbeit leistet für den Bereich der somalisch-sprechenden Bevölkerung eine Grundlage, es bleibt jedoch viel Raum für weitere Forschungsarbeiten. Für diese Arbeit habe ich den Kontakt zu verschiedensten Individuen unterschiedlichen Alters, Bildung und sozialem Stand aufgenommen,

zusätzlich zu Bildungseinrichtungen wie Koranschulen, Universitäten und xer und habe sie zu islamischen Epistemologie, Paradigmen und reformistischen Bewegungen befragt, um Antworten auf meine Fragen zu erlangen. Indem ich die bisherigen Annahmen zum Islam in der Region Garissa in Frage stelle, hoffe ich, die Veränderungen in der Interpretation des Islams und seiner Praktiken als Teil einer weiteren transnationalen und transkulturellen Bewegung wiederzugeben.

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## NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION

While this text is written in English, getting a better idea of the Somali sound system is crucial for understanding this dissertation as it will make clear Somali sound system and its articulations. The Somali language lacked written orthography until 1972, when president Siad Barre had it written down, adopting the Roman alphabet. Many of the sounds in Somali resemble those of English; however, some are different in either language, hampering correct pronunciation. For instance, the Somali language lacks /p/, /v/, and /z/ sounds and Somali speakers would pronounce English words in which these sounds occur by replacing them with their closest equivalents:  bolice (police), fote (vote), or soo (zoo). On the other hand, the following sounds are unique to Somali and are not found in English: /c/, /dh/, /kh/, /q/, /r/, /x/ and a glottal stop, /'/. Though I offer a table that shows Somali sounds and their transliteration, in what follows I illustrate these sounds using examples.

The sound /c/ is a glottal fricative and often appears before vowels as in these examples: Cali (Ali), Cabdi (Abdi), or culama ('ulama).  The /d/ sound in English has three manifestations in Somali: /d/, /dd/ and /dh/. While the Somali /d/ is a stronger version, and /dd/ is even stronger, and /dh/ corresponds to the English /d/. for instance, the word day in English would be pronounced as dhay in Somali. The sound /r/ is stronger than that of English, coming out almost as a trill. /q/, /kh/ and /'/are identical to those in Arabic and as they appear in the words Qur'ān, khatar (dangerous), and masāʾil (issues). The final sound /x/ is a stronger version of /h/ and is articulated from back of the mouth. It appears in words such as Maxamed (Mohamed). In addition, some of these sounds can be doubled for emphasis. Finally, Somali vowels are standard, though the quality of long vowels are sounded out differently. The English word soon,

for example, will not come out as /uu/ in English, but a long /o/. The sound does not change but elongated as it is. The following table shows the Somali alphabet.

| ’ | B b | T t | J j | X x | Kh kh | D d | R r | S s | Sh sh | Dh dh |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| alef | ba | ta | jeem | xa | kha | deel | ra | siin | shiin | dha |
| [ʔ] | [b] | [t] | [tʃ] | [ħ] | [χ] | [d] | [r] | [s] | [ʃ] | [ɖ] |
| C c | G g | F f | Q q | K k | L l | M m | N n | W w | H h | Y y |
| ayn | ghayn | fa | qaff | kaaf | laan | miim | nun | waw | ha | ya |
| [ʕ] | [g] | [f] | [ɢ] | [k] | [l] | [m] | [n] | [w/ʉː/uː] | [h] | [j/iː/ɪː] |
| A a | E e | I i | O o | U u | Aa aa | Ee ee | Ii ii | Oo oo | Uu uu | |
| a | e | i | o | u | | | | | | |
| [æ/ɑ] | [e/ɛ] | [i/ɪ] | [ɵ/ɔ] | [ʉ/u] | [æː/ɑː] | [eː/ɛː] | [j/iː/ɪː] | [ɵː/ɔː] | [w/ʉː/uː] | |

As will be become manifest in this dissertation, Arabic and Somali are members of the Afro-Asiatic family of languages. Additionally, because of various historical factors that include immigration, commerce, and most notable, Islam, the two languages share a considerable number of vocabularies—an influence, some say, of Arabic on Somali. To ensure that this research maintains a standard approach to representing words, phrases, and sentences, I adopt the Somali orthography. In some instances, I exclude some proper names of people, places, or things in both Somali and Arabic such as: Riyadh, Madina, or Garissa. However, words or phrases that are originally Arabic but that have been borrowed into Somali and which by all accounts are now Somali such as ‘ulama or jami’a will be written in the Somali orthography—culama and jamiica (scholars and university) respectively. The reason for this decision, in addition to a standardized

approach, is to avoid ambiguity or confusion in what language a word or a phrase appears in, how to pronounce it, or what it means.

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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Below is a list of non-English words used in this dissertation. These words cut across Arabic, Somali, and Swahili. As in many other languages across the Muslim-majority contexts, Arabic has heavily influenced both these languages such that some or even most of the words below could be originally Arabic but have become Somali or Swahili. The general assumption, therefore, is that the words will maintain their original Arabic meaning (which will be the same in Somali), and I will point out which ones are Somali. Those not of Arabic origin will be pointed out.

**Adaan**—the call to prayer
**Adab**—moral and ethical values
**Aala**—device, but Arabic language in xer
**Allahu Akbar**—Allah is Great. In dugsi, however, it refers to the beginning chapters of the Qur'ān
**Asbāb al-nuzūl**—reason for revelation (of the Qur'ān)
**Aschari (Ash'ari)**—a Sunni school of theology common in East Africa
**Asharaaf**—A Somali clan that memorializes descent from the Prophet and his family
**Aslayn**—the Qur'ān and xadiith in xer education.
**Axkaam**—jurisprudence
**Baraka**—blessing
**Bidca (bid'a)**—innovation.
**Bisin**—the opening part of each chapter of the Qur'ān, translated as "In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Beneficent)
**Calim ('alim)**— a scholar
**Caamo**—laity
**Cambuulo**—food made from corn
**Cilmi**—knowledge
**Daaci**—preacher
**Dacwa (da'wa)**— propagation or proselytization
**Dalīl** —evidence
**Dariiqa (tariqa)**— way or path used to describe Sufi brotherhoods.
**Dars (durus)**— lesson(s)
**Dhaqan celis**—Taking back children to expose them to Somali culture
**Dhibic**—dot in Somali
**Dhikr**—remembrance of Allah
**Diya**—blood money

**Duco**—supplication
**Dugsi**—Qur'ānic school in Somali
**Fanni**—subject (of study)
**Far dambe**—revision of lessons learned in dugsi
**Ficil**—verb
**Fitnah**—unrest or rebellion, especially against a rightful ruler. In this context, it used to denote corruption
**Gombis**—hijab in Somali.
**Harambee**—funds drive in Swahili
**Higaad** (**hingaad**)—pronunciation in Somali
**Ihya**—revival
**Isim**—noun
**Islah**—reform
**Isnad**—chain of transmission
**Istiqraa**—a scholarly conclusion based on deep research
**Jahiliya**—ignorance
**Jamaaca (jama'ca)**—congregation
**Ka soo bax**—in dugsi, reciting the lesson to the teacher as a sort of assessment
**Karama**—Honor or dignity
**Khilaaf**—dispute/disagreement
**Lafdi**—interpreting āyāt of the Qur'ān in their literal meaning
**Loox**—the wooden slab on which the Qur'ān is written
**Mabcuuth** (**mab'uth**)—a representative/envoy
**Macalin**—teacher
**Machad (ma'had)**—institute
**Maqaasid**—objective
**Mas'ala**—issue, problem, affair or matter
**Minxa**—scholarship
**Mucadila (mu'adila)**— deniers of the existence of Allah's attributes
Murajica (muraji'a)—revision
**Mushabiha**—those who give shape to Allah's attributes
**Mushrif**—supervisor
**Muxsin (muhsin)—**philanthropist
**Niya**—intention
**Nuur**—light
**Ziyaaro**—visitation (to shrines)
**Makhluuq**—creation
**Riwaya**—science of correct pronunciation
**Khat/qat or miraa**—stimulating green leaves chewed in East Africa.
**Qunuut**—supplication the imam makes toward the end of the prayer

**Harambee**—A community funds drive popular in Kenya
**Acmaal (‘amal)**—actions
**Deen**—religion
**Ummah**—community of Muslims
**Radd/raddin**—refutation
**Rixil**—an x-shaped foldable bookrest on which the Qur’ān is placed when reciting it
**Sahaba**—companions of the Prophet
**Rixlah**—trip/journey
**Muqaaranah**—comparative
**Sahwa**—awakening (religious)
**Shahada**—declaration of faith
**Shaqal**—diacritics in Somali
**Shariica**—Shari‘a or jurisprudence
**Shirk**—the act of engaging in polytheism or idolatry
**Sixir**—witchcraft, magic, sorcery, or simply hidden knowledge.
**Subac**—in dugsi, reciting the Qur’ān from heart when memorizing it
**Tajdid**—renewal
**Takfir**—unbelief
**Takhsiis**— to retain, hold back, or preserve something, particularly after discarding others to which it might have belonged
**Taqseem**—analytical simplification (or division) of knowledge
**Tathleeth**—dividing something into three
**Tawqifi**— issues that have been spelled out in the Qur’ān in which there is no ijtihad or interpretation and a person must take them as they are
**Xabib**—love
**Xadro**—chanting (by Sufis)
**Xalaqa**— study circle
**Xaq**—truth
**Xaraf**—alphabet
**Xaramayn**—the two holy cities of Makkah and Madina
**Xer**—higher Islamic education among Somalis
**Xijaaz**—western Saudi Arabia in which Makkah and Madina are located
**Xus**—annual celebration of a sheikh or saint in which Qur’ān is read in his honor.

## INTRODUCTION

On a Thursday afternoon in early April 2016, I traveled from Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia, to the holy city of Makkah to perform cumrah.[1] I went on a rixlah (pl. rixlat; journeys) with 43 students from Imam Mohamed bin Saud Islamic University (henceforth, Imam University). Apart from the Islamic University in Madina (IUM), and Umm al-Qura in Makkah, Imam University, which is in Riyadh, is the other premier Islamic university in Saudi Arabia that trains ducaad (sing. daaci, preachers). Though internationally less renowned than IUM, Imam churns out thousands of graduates and dispatches them to various locations around world. The students on this trip were all from East Africa: Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda and Djibouti. It is not too uncommon for the Saudi government through the universities or wealthy Saudi muxsiniin (donor/philanthropist; sing. muxsin;) to sponsor foreign students for such rixlat multiple times during their education in Saudi Arabia. Some are even sponsored for xajj (hajj). The mushrif (leader; pl. mushrifiin,) of the rixlah, a master of shariica student who was born in Somalia but who now calls Kenya home, invited me along on the Makkah trip when we could not find enough time to conduct interviews in Riyadh. In Makkah, we were put up in a massive hotel, which was a walking distance from the Xaram (the Grand Mosque). Each person or a small group of people performed cumrah at their own time, pace and convenience.

On Saturday, we headed back to Riyadh after completing our cumrah. After a couple of hours on the road, the mushrif proposed that everyone in the bus introduce themselves and

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[1] Cumrah, written as umrah in the common English transliteration, is also called the small xajj. It is performed in the Holy Mosque in Makkah. The rites and rituals are different from xajj. Unlike xajj, it can be performed anytime of the year, and it takes much less time to complete it.

perhaps answer a few questions from the others. Most of the students already knew one another or about one another. I was the only outsider, since, apart from the mushrif, I knew one or two other students who I had previously interviewed for this project or who I met because they also hail from Garissa. What I figured out later, however, was that the introduction was not necessarily about getting to know one another as much as it was to create some sort of entertainment for the 10-hour bus ride back to Riyadh.

One after the other, the students rose and strutted to the front of the bus, holding the backs of the seats on their way. They grabbed the black microphone from the portly Syrian driver who stared straight ahead on the road and seemed oblivious to all that was going on all around him. Some of the students were shy and were asked to speak louder; others were confident and took as much time as they wanted on the "stage". All, however, participated as they were instructed to do by the mushrif. Apart from a few who spoke Swahili[2] as well as Arabic (which was common to all), Somali was the dominant language. Each of the students: all young, male, and African stated their names, nationalities, and their areas of specialization in Arabic and proceeded to state what they wanted to say about their country. After finishing, the audience asked questions like who the president of their country was, or how they identified themselves: did they consider themselves culturally or racially Arab and how and when did that happen? The interaction was light and full of jokes and laughter since not much in the way of intellectual engagement was expected from it. The occasion would have continued to progress in this unremarkable fashion had one of the students—from Somalia—not included in his introduction what sounded to me a profoundly revealing feature of his education and what kind

[2] A lingua franca in East Africa, the language is sometimes written variously as Kiswahili or Swahili.

of person he had become because of studying and living in Saudi Arabia. After he had fully stated what was required of him, he added the following thought-provoking sentence: *"wa anna aydan Salafi."* This statement translates *"I am also Salafi."* By vocalizing these simple words, this student stood out from others as they did not use any kind of religious-identifying or sectarian- leaning information in their introductions.

The other students were either befuddled or blindsided by the claims of this student; some told me later that they had reacted the way they did because they had not expected one of their own to describe themselves as so. Consequently, their responses were bifurcated. Some broke into a clapping, a stupefied laughter or whistles, while others shouted congratulatory messages such as Masha Allah[3] and takbir.[4] I sat at the front row of the bus as all this unfolded, and as I swung my head back, I could see everyone and the expressions on their faces. My interest, which was initially trained on the desert, consisting of basically nothing—no trees, shrubs or any form of vegetation, but the red and rolling sand dunes of the Arabian dessert—was now animated by the happenings in the bus. The statement opened a window into the ways in which education at Saudi universities transforms students to reconfigure their very own identities. The student could and did claim many of the identities available to him: Somali, Kenyan, African, Muslim, Sunni, or simply a student of knowledge as others did; and notably, he decided to self-identify as Salafi. Some people might support such self-identifying strategies or conversely accuse them as being naïve and ideological upstarts with not much knowledge of what these identifiers entail other than what has been drummed into them by their professors or university curriculum; however,

[3] Various spellings and translations of this statement abound, but I adopt this: "What Allah wanted has happened." It is a statement that is often said as a compliment to when something good or positive happens.
[4] Translated into God is great but also used at moments when something positive happens, as in this case.

seeing returnees from Saudi Arabia who live and work as teachers and ducaad in Garissa and other places will demonstrate this claim *"Wa anna aydan Salafi"* has not popped out of the blue. It was not unusual for them to refer to themselves, however obliquely, as Salafi, or for most of them, Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jamaaca,[5] during my interviews. What I found curiously noteworthy, was not the self-identification of the student *per se,* but, as the mushrif said to me later in the rixlah, it was the public expression of the sentiment which stood out.

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Illustrated in the previous paragraphs, especially in the last section where a student demonstrates an exclusionary quality was not limited to him or his ilk. A self-identifying strategy does not benefit only from this type of education and socialization. In contrast, such tribal mindset happened regularly during my field trips and with various groups. I recall similar situations of manifestations of group identity, assertions of difference, demonstration of legitimacy, or simply to abuse or belittle opponents. I recount these experiences to frame the intricacies of this dissertation as well as its transcultural and historical context. The many traditional culama who I had interviewed proudly referred to themselves as xer (the term will be explained in chapter three). But it was the Sufis, like the student at Imam and Salafis elsewhere, who in similar terms illustrated, in their own idiosyncratic ways, what it means to be who they are. In their mosques in cities such as Minneapolis, Minnesota; Kansas City, Missouri; Nairobi, Kenya, I had heard, in various degrees of forcefulness and tenacity, what made them Sufi, or

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[5] Salafi and Ahlu Sunnah Wal jamaaca tend to be used interchangeably in the context of my research. In their respective meanings, Salafi is someone who follows the first three generations of Muslims, Salafi e Saalix, while Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jamaaca are those who follow the tradition and are of the community. The latter is controversial as many different groups, including Sunni groups and Shi'a, lay claim to it.

what distinguished them from Salafis, spoken or unspoken: the way they dressed, how their mosques were draped with their revered green color, the outsized location of their leader and hierarchical relationship that dictated interactions between various members in the congregation; the food that was served in the mosque on daily basis, as well as the unique fragrance that wafted through the air, leaving me with no doubt as to where I was or who I was with. In the realm of theology and everyday practice such as praying in their mosques regardless of whether I was in Minneapolis or Nairobi reminded me what it meant to live as a Sufi, decades after I first had such experiences. Above all else, it was their sentiments and feelings toward reformists and Salafis that were quite revealing. One occurrence in a mosque in Kansas City will help reveal how Sufis chose to distinguish themselves from Salafis.

After we had finished what seemed to be endless cycles of chanting xadro (the presence of the Prophet) dhikr (remembrance*)* and an assortment of other songs that were led by the imam of the mosque and a meal that consisted of a mixture of cambuulo (the word will be discussed in chapter three) and sweet, black tea, I sat to a side with a PhD student in the congregation who had invited me sat me to aside in the mosque. He was a deeply Sufi man and member of the mosque. He lamented to me as follows: "do you see anything wrong with what we are doing here now? What is wrong with being a community or a member of one? What is wrong with praising the Prophet as we are doing here tonight? The next set of questions were intended to show why Sufism is the right way and others—supposedly Salafi— were not. This had nothing to do with interpretations of texts or the rituals of Islam, but longstanding traditions that define Sufi Islam. To put this into perspectives, he posed these questions to me: "why do Salafis address the holy Prophet simply as Maxamed, instead of showing love and respect to him as we do here? You will never see a Sufi refer to the Prophet by his name alone. No way. We call him xabib (habib,

love)."[6] Just as the student at Imam defined himself through Salafism, this Sufi man in Kansas City memorialized the Prophet and love for him. These Sufi experiences in Kenya and USA were enormously meaningful for this project. Not the least was their claim to loving the Prophet as an identity in itself, but that the symbolic implication of physical context as representative of certain sectarian belief systems. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia was viewed by the Sufis as Wahhabi, while the Somali-speaking areas of the Horn of Africa was seen as Sufi strongholds, one Sufi leader in Minneapolis even claiming this region was at one point the most popular center of Fiqh Shaafici studies (and therefore Sufi) in the world.[7]

**Interventions of the Study**

In this section, I discuss the specific intervention that this project hopes to make. Before I do that, however, I want to make general but crucial comments regarding the importance of this study. Islam has a long history in the Horn of Africa; however, scholarship has been severely lacking. What literature that has been produced over the years has been little and even less attention has been accorded to Islamic epistemology, despite the region's rich tradition of Islamic scholarship. This project attempts to reassess this situation by focusing on Islamic learning and practice. It is not the simple study of systems of learning that forms the bedrock of this research; rather, it is how these epistemological persuasions have been produced, manifested themselves, what they are comprised of, what adjustments have been made to them over the years, and how they influenced each other and their actors. Consequently, this is an intellectual exercise that considers education, educational reforms, and application.

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[6] Interview with Cabdiqadir, Kansas City, May 16th, 2014.

[7] Interview with Sheikh Bajuri, Minneapolis, June 15th, 2017.

The paucity of scholarship on Islam in the Eastern Africa is historically established. Pouwels references two factors that he argues are responsible for this scarcity. The first one is the absence of jihadi movements in the region as opposed to West Africa.[8] The implication is that these jihadi movements have been crucial in popularizing Islam and in attracting interest to the region. The second factor is that Muslims in East Africa have stayed away from western menace and withdrew into the ideology of the Qaadiriya.[9] Mohamed Kassim reflects upon this factor. Kassim agrees with Pouwels and states that as early as the 1800s the Bravanese community of Southern Somalia rebuffed reformists encroachments, while continuing to maintain their links with the conservative culama of the Xaramayn (the two holy mosques) and Hadramawt[10] especially those of the Asharaaf culama.[11] Equally concerning is the issue of essentialism. It is easily discernible that whatever available literature has lumped together diverse groups of peoples with the assumption that what is observable in one area holds true for others elsewhere for the simple reason that they belong to the same ethnic group.

Indeed, the objective of this study is to explain the causes of this transformation which in general terms have been from Sufism to Salafism. In doing so, it examines the particularities of this change in modern education and how it has transformed understanding of Islam. The assumption here is that changes in modern forms of Islamic educational institutions have ushered

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[8] Randall Pouwels, "Sh. Al-Amin B. Ali Mazrui and Islamic Modernism in East Africa, 1875-1947," *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 13. no. 3 (1981): 330.

[9] Ibid, 330.

[10] A region in Yemen which has exported a lot of culama to the Horn of Africa.

[11] Mohamed Kassim, "Sufism, Salafism and the Discursive Tradition of Religious Poetry in Brava," In *Translocal Connections across the Indian Ocean*: *Swahili Speaking Networks on the Move*, ed. by Francesca Declich (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 70-91.

in reformist thought. These reforms were not simply topical, fashionable, or unavoidable; rather, they were intentionally pursued for specific ends across Africa and other parts of the Muslim world. In Zanzibar, for instance, Roman Loimeier[12] states that reforms were understood to provide crucial answers to contemporary questions and concerns. While writing specifically on madrasa in Mali, Louis Brenner makes a similar observation, writing "the initial impetus for the founding of madrasas in Mali was to "modernize" classical forms of Muslim schooling to make them more relevant to contemporary conditions."[13] A constant theme is how to train Muslim practitioners to address problems of the day faced by Muslims. It is instructive to recall that most Muslim-majority countries were either obtaining or had just gained independence and were figuring out ways to deal with modern conditions of life as Muslims.

Furthermore, local Islamic institutions do not simply produce culama but social and political leaders as well; thus, they are the lynchpin through which socio-cultural change are visited upon local communities. Following this flow, one of the interventions of this study is to investigate how reforms in local education have successfully fostered new ideas on belief and practice. In Garissa, Madrasatul Najaax and Jamiica Mosque have served as seeds that fueled the reform debate and produced change. The institutions subverted education as it was known to the locals and introduced new pedagogy and curriculum. Their graduates served as madāris teachers, imams, and ducaad. In addition, the study also examines shifts in local Islam through the lenses

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[12] Roman Loimeier, *Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills: The Politics of Islamic Education in 20th Century Zanzibar* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 109.

[13] Louis Brenner, "The Transformation of Muslim Schooling in Mali," in *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, eds. Mohamed Zaman, and Robert Hefner, 199-223 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 203.

of returnees from Saudi universities. The returnees' role as agents of Islamic transformation is not a novel notion neither is it limited to Garissa; in contrast, it is a decades-old and continent-wide phenomenon. For instance, consider Rüdiger Seesemann's contention of returnees to Chad:

> The trajectories of the first generations of African Muslim reformists were very similar and can be summarized as follows. They first went to study at the al-Azhar University or other institutions of higher Islamic learning in Northern Africa. After returning to their home countries, their major concern was with religious education…. they were highly critical of the traditional Muslim leaders…they accused (the Marabouts) of distorting the true teachings of Islam.[14]

In a major way, Seesemann has in this quote encapsulated the two most significant outcomes that are associated with returnees. Alex Thurston has also examined Nigerian returnees from Saudi universities and their dacwa activities in northern Nigeria. He states that a large-scale enrolment of northern Nigerian students at the Islamic University in Madina (henceforth IUM) had picked in the 1980s after Nigeria had been exposed to decades of relationship with Saudi Arabia. When they returned to Nigeria, they vigorously promoted the Salafi canon, by conducting dacwa on the one hand, while confronting the supremacy of Sufi networks on the other.[15] In Garissa, I look to returnees and how this dynamic connects to the process of fostering Salafi thought.

Another critical intervention of this study is to tie reformist education to the extraordinary expansion of Salafi ideology in Garissa. Educational reforms are pointless if they do not

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[14] Rüdiger Seesemann, "The Quotidian Dimension of Islamic Reformism in Wadai (Chad)," In *L' Islam Politique au Sud du Sahara: Identités, Discours et Enjeux,* ed. Gomez-Perez, Muriel (Paris: Karthala, 2005): 327-346.

[15] Alex Thurston, *Salafism in Nigeria. Islam, Preaching, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2016) 64-91.

influence viewpoints on Islam; therefore, the intersection of educational reforms and practice in Islam define this work. While I take caution on the meaning and conception of these educational reforms, there is no denying that educational reforms transformed local perception of Islam. When Maxamed Awal came to Garissa, for instance, he devoted more time and energy to shifting what was taught in Jamiica Mosque than pursuing other dacwa activities. At Jamiica, he changed the focus on what was taught from Fiqh Shaafici to xadiith, and by concentrating on the following texts: Riyadhu Saalixiin[16] (xadiith), bulūgh al-marām [17] (xadiith), and Qatr al-nadā wa-ball al-sad[18] (Naxw). The choice of these texts is both deliberate and insightful as they are a staple at Saudi universities. Awal also invited everyone to attend his lectures. As such, his audience at Jamiica were not only madrasa students or Salafis *per se*, but they also included regular worshippers, turning on its head the notion that this was a closed group or that it was available to specific individuals. In a nutshell, I describe and analyze the intricate relationship of Islamic learning and knowledge transmission in Garissa and Saudi Arabia and tie it to the ascendancy of Salafism. Consequently, I elucidate the intervention of this research from the following standpoints: local Salafism, notions of tradition and reform, and epistemological patterns.

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[16] Riyād as-sālihin mīn min kalām sayyid al-mursalīn by Abū Zakariyyāʾ Muhyī al-Dīn Yahyā b. Sharaf b. al Nawawī, Roman Loimeier, "*Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills: The Politics of Islamic Education in 20th Century Zanzibar* (Leiden: Brill, 2009." 186.

[17] Bulūgh al-marām min adillat al-ahkām by Abū Fadl Shihāb al-Dīn Ahmad Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d.1449; GAL II: 80ff; S II: 72ff).

[18] Qatr al-nadā wa-ball al-sadā, by Jamāl al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Yūsuf b. ʿAlī b. Hishām (d.1360; GAL II: 27ff)

**Local Salafism**

Salafism is inadequately researched in Africa,[19] yet it remains powerful in local discourses and practices of Islam. In the existing literature, reforms in Africa in general and Salafism as an expression of these reforms are confounded and somewhat represented as the same. However, to separate the two can illustrate the manner of transformation in Garissa more clearly. Salafism is a contentious topic in Africa, partly because of the extreme views of certain groups that are associated with it. In the Somali speaking regions, the specter of al-Shabab looms large. Be that as it may, the study of academic Salafism has been pursued from a binary perspective: home-grown or foreign. Even though Salafism is a global phenomenon, understanding its origins has been an issue of debate. So, is Salafism local (African) or foreign? A section of the scholarship has cautioned us against disengaging Salafism from that which some consider the original or archetypal version. Instead, they suggest Salafism should be viewed as a product of complex mutations and interrelations; consequently, as it appeared in various places, it adopted local tastes and flavors as well as local forms.[20] Because of these interactions and interrelations, Salafism demonstrates a remarkable diversity.

In various locations in Africa, most scholars have concluded that Salafism is local and homegrown, and that its origin was essentially African. Nonetheless, these claims still insist, though the actors involved, and the vocabulary used are African, that a connection exists between local Salafism and that of the Middle East. In what follows, I offer an overview of these

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[19] Ousman Kobo, "Shifting Trajectories of Salafi/Ahl-Sunna Reformism in Ghana," *Islamic Africa*, 6 (1-2), (2015), 60-61.

[20] Terje Østebø, "African Salafism: Religious Purity and the Politicization of Purity," *Islamic Africa* 6. (2015), 6.

studies. Abdoulaye Sounaye[21] argues that in Niger, Salafis appeared as social and political critics who sought to impose the norms and values of the al-salaf e salih. He notes that they were inspired by ideas of reform that they either experienced themselves or simply conjured. Still in West Africa, Ousman Kobo[22] reiterates that reformism in Ghana commenced as a contest between local scholarly community and the Tījāniyya Sufi Brotherhood. Kobo asserts that the former had been apprehensive of the Tījāniyya beliefs and practices and therefore opposed them. He further argues that the scholarly community was, "deeply concerned that local Islamic practices had strayed from orthodoxy, verging on associating others with Allah, this group declared members of the Tījāniyya mushrikūn (apostates). In contrast, the Tījāniyya leaders dismissed them as mushrikūn (those who rejected the "hidden truth" and the spiritual authority of their leader, Shaykh Aḥmad Tījāni (1735–1815)."[23] Abdulai Iddrissu concurs with Kobo, suggesting that reforms in northern Ghana had emerged from local Islamic configurations; however, his findings slightly vary because he seems to elevate the function of foreign influence, be it through education or other types of interaction. He writes:

> Wahhabism, the official version of Islam in Saudi Arabia, was and in many ways remains, a homegrown religious phenomenon that built primarily on preexisting tensions in the northern Ghanaian Muslim society and that Middle Eastern and North African contact through pilgrimage, but especially outreach programs and educational provision only provided the ideological justification, the grammar, for reinterpreting the "common good" and for contextualizing localized forms of Islam.[24]

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[21] Abdoulaye Sounaye, "Irwo Sunnance Yan-no!: Youth Claiming, Contesting and Transforming Salafism," *Islamic Africa* 6(2015), 83.

[22] Ousman Kobo. "Shifting Trajectories of Salafi/Ahl-Sunna Reformism in Ghana," 61.

[23] Ibid, 61.

[24] Abdulai Iddrissu, "Contesting Islam: Homegrown Wahhabism," Education and Muslim Identity in Northern Ghana, 1920—2005," (PhD diss., University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign, 2009), iii.

Such depictions of Salafism are also the case in East Africa: that it was local, introduced and developed by local actors despite the region's closer physical proximity to the supposed origin of Salafism. Kai Kresse[25], points to tensions between local Islamic practices and global Islamic movements as being responsible for setting off reform movements. In the coastal region of Kenya where Kresse conducted his research, he notes, like Kobo, that reformers had initially criticized local sharifu clans and accused them of innovation. These criticisms, he adds, were taken up by university-educated activists who had links to the Middle East. In the same token, Terje Østebø posits that Salafism in Ethiopia had the character of a homegrown movement since the new ideas of Salafism were introduced by Ethiopians.[26] He, however, also postulates that the rise of Salafism was broader as changes in conditions on both sides of the Red Sea had influenced the emergence of Salafism in this region of Ethiopia. Further south in Tanzania, Søren Gilsaa[27] also claims that contemporary Salafism in Tanzania was local in origin. Gilsaa refers to the memorialization of religious scholars and Sufi leaders, all from East Africa, as being credited for heralding Salafism reforms in Tanzania.

The arrival of reforms in Garissa followed a similar path as those portrayed in these studies. Reforms came to Garissa in the 1960s and 70s, the same time a wave of religiosity swept

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[25] Kai Kresse, "Swahili Enlightenment'? East African Reformist Discourse at the Turning Point: The Example of Sheikh Muhammad Kasim Mazrui," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 33, no. 3 (2003) 279-280.

[26] Terje Østebø, "The Question of Becoming: Islamic Reform Movements in Contemporary Ethiopia," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 38, Issue 4 (2008), 42.

[27] Søren Gilsaa, "Salafism(s) in Tanzania: Theological Roots and Political Subtext of the Ansār Sunna," *Islamic Africa*," 6, No. 1-2 (2015), 30-40.

across Muslim-majority countries.[28] I use the word arrival to stress the complicated nature of the development of Salafism in Garissa. In trying to discern it, I was confronted by the ways in which the history and the geography of the Somali-speaking peoples of the Horn of Africa has complicated notions of reforms. Somalis, though united by language, religion and a common ancestry and history, have had distinct experiences that arose from the vastness of the regions, but also from colonial and post-colonial experiences. Nonetheless, ideas of reforms sprung from one region and easily spread to others within the Somali-speaking areas, complicating the notion and meaning of what local means. Certainly, reforms were local in origin and shared similar features and framework of other parts of Africa. Before the coming of Salafism, the two local reformist forces that pioneered change in Garissa were the Saalixiya Brotherhood and the singular efforts of one Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi. I will focus on these groups and their role in changes in Chapter One.

As was the case in West Africa,[29] tensions were building between the Sufis (Qaadiriya) and the traditional culama on the one hand and Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi and his supporters, particularly the Saalixiya, on the other. The tensions were centered around key issues that have historically divided reformists and traditionalists: education, Sufi practices that reformists

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[28] Quintan Wiktorowicz, "The Salafi Movement in Jordan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 32 (2000) 222.

[29] Yusuf Dumbe, "The Salafi Praxis of Constructing Religious Identity: A comparative Perspective of the Growth of the Movements in Accra and Cape Town," *Islamic Africa*, 2 no. 2 (2011), 88.

claimed contravened true Islam, as well as religious authority, among others. Saalixiya and Maxamed Cabdi had had their own differences in their understanding and interpretation of Islam. Though reformist, Saalixis were still a Sufi brotherhood and some of their beliefs and practices meshed with Sufism.

Together, they took Qaadiriya head-on. One of their objectives was to revamp the education system by augmenting the traditional education with the reformist one. As such, one of the first reforms that Cabdi instituted was to introduce madrasa—the first in the region. In addition, he challenged the traditional culama who were offering durus at Jamiica, by starting his own xalaqah in the mosque to teach new reformist literature - such as xadiith. Shortly after the arrival of Maxamed Cabdi, Saudi Arabia dispatched its own daaci Sheikh Maxamed Awal Ibrahim, further confounding the situation. In addition to spreading its brand of Salafism, Saudi Arabia was also in competition with Egypt, throwing Cold War politics into the mix. Awal's presence was pivotal to the spread of Saudi Salafism in Garissa for various reasons. First, it unified other reformist groups under one umbrella and under his leadership. Second, Awal could secure significant resources: manpower, scholarship opportunities, financial, and political patronage from the Saudi government and prominent Saudi clerics or muxsiniin. Awal singlehandedly changed the fortunes of the reformists. What followed was an upward movement for the Salafis. Arguably, this combination of actors and organizations who espoused and promoted different, and at times competing interests, was somewhat crystalized against local Sufi practices and communities by the injection of resources which subsequently enabled the entrenchment of Salafism in Garissa.

Salafism found fertile ground in Garissa as it did elsewhere in Africa by claiming to address contemporary issues and to provide solutions for them. Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi argued

for reformism by portraying a picture of a people who spoke the language as he and who shared many elements of the Somali culture, but whose Islam or their practice of it he could barely recognize. He recalled that this version of Islam was inspired more by local culture, echoing observations made in places such as Bale of Ethiopia.[30]

This culture, he claims, was born out of historical accumulations and wanton innovations than by Islam's foundational texts, the Prophet or the salaf e salih. Cabdi, therefore, launched attacks on these aspects of Islam: grave visitations, saint venerations, and other expressions of worship he considered aberrant. He sought to replace traditional paradigms by mounting a concerted campaign to institute specific actions for a long-term transformation, mainly through education and dacwa. Another way in which the reformists did this was to undermine the image of local Islam through its representation, the male figure: the Sufi leader, their saints, using poems, songs and other forms of literature. These forms of literary representations portrayed Sufis as no-good opportunists and illiterate crooks. Such figures could also include Jagac, an anti-reformist and anti-Salafi figure whose story we will pick up in chapter five. Here is one example of reformist representation of the traditional scholarly figure:[31]

| | |
|---|---|
| Sidii Sheikh wayn | like a prominent sheikh |
| Oo wan shilis cunay | who ate a fattened ram |
| Shafka taagyo | (he) projected his chest out i.e., boasted of his (bogus) knowledge |
| shaarubada leef | (and then) licked his moustache (after much eating) |

[30] Terje Østebø, "Local Reformers and the Search for Change: The Emergence of Salafism in Bale, Ethiopia," *Africa* 81, no. 4 (2011), 632.

[31] Interview with Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi, Garissa, December 30, 2019.

The figure of the Sufi as an embodiment of traditional Islam was replaced with revealed books i.e., the Qur'ān and the xadiith. This was aimed at changing knowledge and its authentication from this figure to the Qur'ān and xadiith. They argued that the Qur'ān and xadiith were infallible and self-explanatory, and it was out there for all to access and read and understand for themselves, while traditionalists legitimized their knowledge through a chain of transmitters. Daniel Brown observes this sort of legitimization best by stating that [it is], "a symbol of the link with the prophetic era, the representation of the Prophet in the here and now, a concrete embodiment of the need that Muslims have felt in every generation for continuity with an ideal past."[32] As the reformers forked out to change hearts and minds of the common people, they reiterated that they find recourse in the Islam in the Book and xadiithyo and locate answers in them. A common maxim that emerged in Garissa at this time was, "Nin dhintay muxuu kuu qaban," which literally meant, "How can a dead man help you?" in reference to saints.

**Notions of Tradition and Reform**

A copious amount of literature exists on traditionalism and reformism. The two are enactments and expressions of Islam's knowledge systems. Some view them as binary opposites - contrasting historical ways of understanding and interpreting Islam. Consequently, their relationships are also portrayed as distinct from one another; that they do not intersect and have no features in common. However, traditionalism and reformism are demonstrably fluid concepts which overlap with one another. They borrow from each other and shape each other's worldviews, while still maintaining their own idiosyncratic features.

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[32] Daniel Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (1996), 2.

In a widely cited article, William A. Graham defines traditionalism as, “anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present. It is also anything perceived to have been passed from one generation to the next; or, as Action defined it:[33] “a belief or practice transmitted from one generation to another and accepted as authoritative or deferred to, without argument.”[34] Graham adds that it is “synonymous with “customs” or “customary institutions” in that they are actions, ideas, and written or oral texts received from the past and accepted as normal or normative for a given…”[35] Seesemann points out two critical elements related to this definition. The first is that the traditional approach is widely viewed as the dominant strand within Islam in Africa; secondly, though this approach has been cultivated and handed down for generations, it has successfully changed and adapted to new situations, while maintaining its core principles.[36] Arguably, traditionalism’s continuum and stability is instructive for various reasons. The first one is the notion that traditionalism has never paused or stopped; therefore, it defies time. This timelessness is not about the past, but the present and the future as well. In addition, Seesemann points out it has not only carried along knowledge of Islam, but it has also incorporated emerging ones and newer modes of transmission.

Reformism, on the other hand, gives the impression of a makeover or renovation of something that is already in existence. However, its implication is much broader. Just as

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[33] As cited in William Graham, “Harry B. Acton, “Tradition and Some Other Forms of Order, Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, LIII.

[34] William Graham, “Traditionalism in Islam: An Essay in Interpretation,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, (1993): 496-500.

[35] Ibid, 496.

[36] Rüdiger Seesemann, “Epistemology or Ideology? Toward a Relational Perspective on Islamic Knowledge in Africa,” *Journal of Africana Religion*, 6, no. 2 (2018). 233.

traditionalism, reformism is also old.[37] This is surprising for the many who construe it as a post-18th century Muslim revival. To many scholars, the Prophet Maxamed himself was a reformer and that Islam came as a reformist religion. This understanding is relevant, particularly considering that Islam is a religion that was revealed to right the wrongs of its predecessors. Muslim reformers believe that undesired elements found their ways into Islam over time, tainting the true and pristine message of Islam. But what is reformism? Loimeier defines reformism broadly as follows: "any transformation that is linked with an implicit or explicit program (manhaj) of change, or in short, I see reform as a change with a program."[38] Rüdiger Seesemann and Noah Salomon discern reformism through the interpretation of African Muslim societies and their thinkers.[39] One example they offer is the Sudan where reformers call themselves Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya and who teach and practice Islam like the Salaf e Saleh. While traditionalism presumably continued unabated and sustained as its message travelled from one generation to the next, reformism was truncated, arose at specific moments in history as a corrective measure to cleaning out what reformists understood as bidca: additions, accretions, deviations, or lags.

Consequently, there is need to reset the scholarly view of how debates on the two notions of traditionalism and reformism are conducted, both by reassessing the ways in which these debates proceed based on the available literature, and how traditionalism and reformism are

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[37] For a deeper discussion, see John Esposito, *The Future of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
[38] Roman Loimeier, *Islamic Reform in Twentieth-Century Africa*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 20.
[39] Rüdiger Seesemann and Noah Salomon, "Epistemological Foundations of Divisions Within Sunni Islam: Traditionalists, Reformists, and Islamists in Contemporary Africa," *A grant application submitted to Submitted to and Funded by the German Research Foundation* (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG), 8.

embodied in the choices Muslims make in their everyday devotions. Accordingly, the quality of debate would benefit by moving away from juxtaposing binary opposites and instead moving towards recognizing fluidity and interconnectedness. Despite the claims of each one regarding their exclusionary and special status and therefore being the right one, they should be recognized as having much in common. The reifications that traditionalism is immutable and therefore unalterable and unchanging, or that Salafism (as a form of reformism) is the more pristine one or Firqa Najdiya (the Saved Sect)— do not hold up when placed in historical context or everyday practice.

The traditional paradigm is hardly fixed in time or static; instead, it is resilient and demonstrates a historical flexibility: it changes, borrows and adapts. A good example is the 18th and 19th centuries Sufi revival in many regions of the Muslim world. While many argue that such revivalism came into existence to oppose or thwart European colonialism, others point to the theological reforms which these revivalists helped to usher in. In Africa, two among the many examples of Sufi reformists are the Izala in West Africa and Saalixiya Brotherhood in the Horn of Africa. Currently, the traditional paradigm is reemerging with a renewed vigor and dynamism in various places. In Garissa County, for instance, Salafis have met this reappearance with dismay and consternation. They were disheartened that their decades-long efforts are being challenged, and that they were not able to crush the Sufis and disappear it into obscurity. In a speech that was captured on video, prominent Salafi leaders in Garissa lamented Sufi resurgence, something considered an unlikely occurrence a few years back. The leaders who gathered at the graduation ceremony of young Salafis stated how Sufis posed a clear threat, even resorting to violence toward Salafi culama and imams in madāris and mosques. What is important to note about these statements is that they are made by luminaries who introduced reformism to the

region and helped entrench Salafism, including Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi. They are experiencing such changes in real time, close to six years later. One of them stated as follows:

> The Sufis are taking over small towns and villages. They outnumber what I see here today (those graduating) by at least three to one. They are teaching (their youth) all sorts of knowledge; knowledge they never taught before: they are teaching their young tajweed; they are teaching them mustalax, they are teaching them xadiith; and they are teaching them tafsīr. These are not the men (Sufis) who used to sit around and do nothing (did not engage in dacwa). The sheikh who runs the xer in Xagar Dheer and Dhagaxleey knows his students individually and personally, and he knows their families. When he trains them, he posts them to the villages from which they (graduates) came in order to continue with dacwa. All this happens before these young men turn 20. They begin their missionary [work] and shortly after, they introduce their dhikr, xadro and other things. People in the villages have no knowledge (of Islam) and will accept whoever comes to them and claims to be a sheikh. The Sufis are filling that void.[40]

Clearly, these claims are not without merit. The traditional culama and Sufis are reemerging across the region. They are adjusting themselves and appropriating Salafi ways of learning and activism and are utilizing them in their own dacwa. While books on Fiqh Shaafici and other texts still form the backbone of this approach, students are now increasingly being exposed to the tools that have been crucial to the rise of Salafism: Arabic, xadiith and tafsīr with the intent of widening their reach and combating Salafism. As the quote above clarifies, Sufis are also turning to activism as a dacwa strategy and are training their youth to carry out dacwa activities in different areas. Sufis are also now observing their rituals with renewed vigor and confidence. For the first time, the annual Sufi procession of mawlid is conducted openly in Garissa and other

[40] A lecture by Sheikh Cali Guure which was published on Youtube on April 12, 2018. Here is the link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YmcBsErlR4

towns and cities across the region. They mount loudspeakers on their mosques and chant xadro and dhikr. The activities going on at Xagar Dheer and Dhagaxleey, villages in the refugee camps, as sites of Sufi revival are troubling to Salafis more than any other. Sufis have survived in the refugee camps on the Kenya-Somalia border despite intensive Salafi encroachments by Middle Eastern NGOS and returnees among others.

Sufi revivalism in Garissa is also benefitting from the Sufi reemergence in the wider Horn of Africa region. The highly amorphous border between Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia and further afield in southern Arabia, Sudan and Egypt has maintained interactions between various Sufi groups. However, the one that has had an unsurpassed influence on Sufis in northern Kenya and Garissa in particular in the recent past is the Ahlu Sunna Wal Jamaaca of Southern Somalia. This group's political and military success in fending off al-Shabab and living as Sufis has been a moral boost to Somali Sufis elsewhere. Symbols of Sufis holding processions and celebrating on the streets complete with their green flags and holding public functions that challenge the supremacy of al-Shabab has helped reinvigorate the desire to replicate the same in Garissa. On the other hand, the diminishing influence of post 9/11 Saudi Arabia and the subsequent vacuum it has left behind has made Salafis vulnerable for the first time since the 1960s. Many dacwa activities bankrolled by Saudi Arabia have deeply atrophied. In effect, Salafis now operate on the same level playing field as the Sufis and are effectively winding the clock back to the pre-1970s, if not beyond.

In this larger debate to reconsider notions of reforms and traditions, there is need to reexamine returnees especially regarding the notion that they all ascribe to Salafism and are therefore antithetical to local forms of Islam. While the argument carries some weight and as

elsewhere, not all would consider themselves Salafi.[41] Even less stressed is adherence to a madhab. The picture we see is less monolithic and more of a mosaic. Amongst the returnees is a growing number, including prominent culama, who are increasingly preferring Shaafici over Hanbali in their teaching curricula or interpretation of Islam. However, subscribing to one or other school of thought follows from a clear pattern of education and socialization. Notably, despite the long streak of Salafi dominance in the region, the traditional paradigm (not necessarily all Sufi) is making a comeback and it is surprisingly partly driven by Saudi-trained culama.

**Epistemological Patterns**

Traditional and reformist paradigms are anchored in epistemological frameworks in which they situate their theological and legal foundations.[42] Louis Brenner makes the distinction between what he calls esoteric episteme (traditionalism) as opposed to rationalistic episteme (reformism).[43] In his description of the two paradigms, Brenner notes that esoteric episteme is hierarchical, initiatic and is conveyed through personal transmission, devotional praxis, and is connected to one's social status. On the other hand, he maintains that rational episteme is the knowledge that is theoretically available in texts, while the act of devotion becomes separated from that of transmitting knowledge. While these approaches dominate scholarship of Islam,

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[41] Alex Thurston, "Ahlussunnah: A Preaching Network from Kano to Medina and Back," in *Shaping Global Islamic Discourses: The Role of Azhar, Al-Medina, and Al-Mustafa,* edited by Masooda Bano and Keiko Sakurai (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 93.

[42] For more information, see Ousamane Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

[43] Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power, and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 7-8.

Seesemann has argued for a third paradigm, which he calls the maqaasid (objective) paradigm.[44] He notes that advocates for this paradigm call for a return to twentieth century usul ul fiqh.

As I illustrate in chapters two and three, traditional epistemology is manifested in its own time-honored history of learning and scholarship. As such, knowledge in this paradigm is represented and expressed in the Shaafici-Sufi-Ashcari framework. In the long journey that ends in becoming a sheikh, students of knowledge are immersed in this framework very early on in their lives. Instilling the Shaafici-Ashcari-Sufi framework serves as a torch that illuminates their way and guides their educational and devotional journeys. The framework commences at age three or four with a question-and-answer method in the first few days of a child attending his or her dugsi. Though variations might exist in the various regions, some would teach the following:

> Teacher: Who is your God?
> Student: My God is Allah.
> Teacher: Who is your Prophet?
> Student: My Prophet is Maxamed.
> Teacher: What is your deen?
> Student: My deen is Islam
> Teacher: Who is your teacher?
> Student: My teacher is Jibril.
> Teacher: Who is your sheikh?
> Student: My sheikh is Shaafici.

Evidently, this interview seeks to capture the young minds in their formative years and inculcate this framework in their impressionable minds. However, not all that constitutes this framework is

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[44] Rüdiger Seesemann, "Epistemology or Ideology? Toward a Relational Perspective on Islamic Knowledge in Africa," 356.

represented. As children progress in learning, more layers of this framework will be added, both in terms of what they learn and how to put that knowledge into practice. Indeed, it is only logical that young children learn Allah, Maxamed, and Islam as young as they are. What is less usual for most other Muslims especially in this day and age is the invocation of Jibril (Gabriel) and Shaafici. Jibril is said to be a teacher as he brought down the Qur'ān to the Prophet. Imam Shaafici is also another remarkable figure to learn at this age. The Shaafici school is dominant in the Horn of Africa, particularly among Somalis. Introducing him to children of this age is to inculcate in their hearts his importance as a scholar, but also someone whose works they will have study and deploy in their devotion: rules for prayer or fasting among many others.

Also, as manifested in the interview, the master is a crucial figure in this paradigm. He personifies the system and is the embodiment of everything that is taught and learned: curriculum, pedagogy, discipline, and all other elements that characterize modern institutions. While not much polemics is imparted at this stage or more generally in the traditional paradigm as is the case with the reformist one, a strict adherence to this framework is instituted. I had heard a rather banal but revealing element of this framework. An imam of a local mosque in a Somali hamlet had died and people of the village went out to prepare the body for burial. One man, however, refused to participate in the preparation or even the burial. This was shocking to many as both had travelled together and studied in the same xer. When asked, the man retorted that the imam had made an Arabic grammatical mistake in one of his sermons and therefore wanted nothing to do with him. Though we will take up xer education more deeply in chapter three, this story is insightful in how seriously the learners took their education, how it defined their lives, and how it did (or didn't) foster relationships.

The traditional paradigm is a product of both an educational institution and the social setting. Xer was a place of learning and community in which the religious and the social heavily intersected. Accordingly, most believe that traditional approach to learning had either evolved out of or was heavily influenced by Sufism. Either way, the two were so interwoven it was difficult to tell them apart.[45] This intertwining of learning and Sufi practices was told to me by an interviewee who affirmed that their knowledge of Islam was from the texts, and its expression was from the Sufi tradition. Such influence seems rather linear and goes beyond what most learners draw from the community in which they live. For instance, on certain days and nights of the week, the xer were invited to homes where they recited the Qur'ān, performed dhikr and xadro. Their sheikhyaal participated in these functions and led the rituals. Other times, the sheikh would have a student lead them, blending Shaafici and Ashcari knowledge systems to the Sufi practice.

The reformist paradigm, on the other hand, expresses itself through a Hanbali-Salafi-Wahhabi nexus. Here knowledge is contained in a small set of texts and is dominated by creed. The narrowness is apparent through the heavy concentration of few subjects and texts. They include: tawxiid or caqīdah, xadiith, tafsīr and Arabic language. A slight distinction is made between tawxiid and caqīdah. Some construe caqīdah to be more general, while portraying tawxiid to be more specific. Nonetheless, the two overlapped in the two universities in which the research was based. This inordinate focus on these areas at Saudi universities blurs any line between knowledge and dacwa or the possible transcendence of one over the other. Instead, they are intimately interwoven, and support one another. Accordingly, the classrooms mimic giving a

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[45] Stephan Reichmuth. "Islamic Education and Scholarship in Sub-Saharan Africa." In *The History of Islam in Africa*, eds. Levtzion, N. and Pouwels, L, 419-440 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 428.

dacwa: how to offer a sermon, choose words or generally express their worldview, or how to counter an opponent.

While tawxiid or caqīdah is the philosophical foundation on which education and dacwa are anchored, Arabic is the vessel through which tawxiid is conveyed. Saudi universities also reframe knowledge by reenacting the lives of the salaf e salih; thus, students are equipped with the knowledge and the tools (mustalax) to reach independent conclusions. To instill this, emphasis is put on mustalaxaad or the core subjects mentioned above. The universities recreate an environment in which students lead social lives that Muslims ought to lead: lives free of haram, ranging from music, drugs to mixing with the opposite sex. While the traditional approach encourages its students to be part of the community and even stay in the homes of the villages, the opposite is true for Saudi universities. The universities are tightly controlled, and entry or exit is surveilled. This socialization is intended to indoctrinate what is considered acceptable physical demeanor or dress, including: clothes, beard, walk and gaze.

As returnees settled back in their communities, some transposed the Hanbali-Salafi-Wahhabi worldview to their home communities. In this enactment, they are more wont to designate xaraam anything that does not align with their worldview. This exclusionary perspective was clarified by a returnee:

> Some of the returnees have had difficulties telling apart whether an individual's profession of Islam or their expression of it was Sufi, Shaafici or some other category. Not that it mattered as they considered bidca anything that was not Hanbali. What they did not recognize was that there was a little difference between Imam Shaafici and Imam Hanbali, the latter being a student of the former, for who he had much respect and admiration.[46]

[46] Interview with Ibrahim G., Nairobi, September 5th, 2016.

These viewpoints are widespread especially on matters of acmaal (sing. camal), which are Islam's basic rituals. Part of what motivated some of the returnees' devoutness to Hanbalism and set them on this path was the narrowness of Salafism, the polemic in which this information was conveyed to them, and their disinterest in trying to learn any alternative framework. They legitimized their subscription to this perspective by arguing that it is the one closest to the Sunnah of the Prophet.

Despite all this, however, the two groups appropriate each other's knowledge systems and ways of transmission, creating a unique and rich hybridity in the process. Two poignant examples are the xalaqa or and madrasa and Islamic universities. The latter are associated with modernity and bureaucracy, and graduates are trained to live and operate in modern societies. Still, mosques are active centers of scholarship and community in which xalaqa is a good example and is emblematic of the resilience of this form of epistemology. Both groups are increasingly attending and obtaining knowledge from the xalaqat and the modern institutions of learning, gaining a blend of the features that describe each. Graduates from both systems allude predictability, schedules, and rigidity to the madāris and Islamic universities. On the other hand, depth of knowledge, virtue, discipline (adab), patience, endurance, extreme self-investment, and drive is attributed to xer.

**Positionality in the Research**

In what follows, I explore how my position as a researcher has impacted on this research and whether it helped or hurt. From a general perspective, I encountered two challenges during the research: personal and institutional. I faced the personal hurdles to getting the information I wanted in Kenya, while institutional ones were rife in Saudi Arabia. Suffice it to say, I had not

faced any individual or institutional obstacles in the USA. This section is a personal reflection on the difficulties I confronted in Kenya more than other places. It is here that my position as a researcher became an issue and weighed heavily into whether I was given access to a piece of information. Still, I got more access to interviewees such as students, professors, or Sufis in Kenya than in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is a very research-unfriendly place where even that initial contact with, say, professors, is hard to make. I view Saudi Arabia as a uniquely dry place for research.

I approach this section from three different vantage points: a) laying out how the research was conceived; b) explaining the meaning of positionality; and c) describing specific obstacles. Most ethnographers do their fieldwork in cultures that are not their own or which they are not deeply familiar with, although this is increasingly becoming marginal. They come into their target groups with a passing knowledge, if any, of the people they are studying, and learn these cultural dynamics on the field. This has the potential for researchers to project their own biases and wittingly or unwittingly allow their backgrounds to color their interpretation of their data. Others suggest that an ethnographer's attitude toward the target group might likely follow from his or her own attitude toward his or her own culture.[47] My situation, as I understood it, was different in more ways than one. I understood myself as traveling to my place of birth and among people that I knew. Not to mention that I spoke Somali and Swahili as native or near native, could easily navigate the social and political terrain. In short, I assumed my position as that of an insider with all the advantages that come with it. While this assumption bore out to be fairly

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[47] Michael H. Agar, *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography*, 2nd edition (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2008), 93.

accurate, I was shocked when it did not. Before recounting specific challenges, I would like to lay out how the research unfolded.

When I got back to Kenya for the first time in 2013, I had two objectives for making the trip. The first one was to visit my family, whom I had not seen for a decade, including: my parents, siblings and their many children. Despite this long absence, such visits do not normally take up too much family time, and I was finished with it two weeks after arrival. I was therefore left with sufficient time to concentrate on my second objective: laying the groundwork for research I was to initiate during summer 2014. Though I had a year left to complete graduate courses, I felt I had a good grasp of my research area and how it would pan out. I was also in the initial stages of writing up my proposal. Contacts I made during this trip, or any preliminary interviews I conducted, would be incorporated in the proposal. Accordingly, it was more than just making initial contacts but a serious framework of planning. I began compiling names of participants: old folks, students and teachers of various lessons, Sufi and Salafi leaders, and returnees from Saudi Arabia. Though I could do this by myself, my prolonged absence slackened my familiarity with many of the locals; however, Abdiaziz, my brother, was there to help. I would come back to Garissa for more research in 2014, 2016, 2018, 2019, and 2020.

Before exploring what specific issues I confronted in the field, I want to first briefly situate the concept of positionality. Almost all ethnographers are forced to negotiate their position in the field, including their sex, race, religion, insider/ outsider, or even representation of truth or power relations.[48] The perception their participants hold of them ultimately shapes the

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[48] Sandra Corlett and Sharon Mavin, "Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods* edited by Cathy Cassell, Ann Cunliffe, and Gina Grandy (London: Sage, 2018) 377-389.

research in many and unpredictable ways. According to Berger[49] these researcher positions are potentially meaningful for the researcher and the research in three important ways: a) they may affect access to the 'field' and conduct research, b) they may shape the relationship that the researcher has with his or her participants, c) the researcher's worldview impacts how he or she conceives of the world and interacts with participants and ultimately how he or she translates the findings. While there is no predicting how to navigate this research terrain, I reflect on the personal elements in all that I represented to the people among whom I did my research: how do they see me as a person and as a researcher? How did the places from which I came influence the information I was trying to get? How did they understand my research?

I was not immune to the realities of research, as I immediately faced its complexities, including my positionality and the nature and context of the research. While recruiting participants or gaining their trust was not particularly problematic, what proved harder than I had anticipated was to explain who I was, the goals of the research, and research tools. Some participants were genuinely outspoken in demanding to "know" who I was and why I would do this kind of research. What underlay their concern was that Islam, as it was understood locally, had to be studied authentically as faith and not necessarily examined as a reified social phenomenon. Also, studying Islam was only possible through the proper channels: the institutions that transmit legitimate Islamic knowledge, including: dugsiyo, madāris, xer, or Islamic universities. Any study of Islam or research on it outside of this tradition was suspect and confused many. Others flatly refused to consider that it was possible to study Islam or Muslims from a western university or perspective. What did I intend to accomplish by studying Islam in

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[49] Roni Berger, "Now I See It, Now I don't: Researcher's Position and Reflexivity in Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Research*, 15 no. 2 (2015): 219-234.

such a fashion? On the flipside, who is historically known to undertake these kinds of research lurked under the veneer. For most participants, it would have been perfectly acceptable for a nonlocal, say a westerner, and more precisely a white ethnographer, to approach them for this sort of research, and they would have been happy to provide them whatever information they needed without batting an eye. Not only are they known to do this kind of research, are interested in knowing more about others, but it may open them to the possibility of understanding Islam better and ultimately converting into it. I, on the other hand—a local who was born a Muslim—should not waste time with things done by "others" and instead study proper Islam.

Accordingly, the tables would be turned, and I would become the subject of interrogation. Constant demands would be made of me to validate myself, and I would be peppered with endless questions that sought to clear their concerns or help them reveal my real identity or intentions. At the beginning, I was a little taken aback that these questions, comments, and concerns ever arose; after all, I knew most of the respondents or at least someone from their family, or they knew of me. As the research picked up momentum, and I began asking questions that dug beyond their backgrounds, I was astounded to learn that the cynicism often came from highly educated individuals who would be expected to have conducted research of this kind or who would at the very least tolerate, accommodate, or appreciate it. It was interesting that it was they—graduates from Saudi universities who classified themselves as Salafi—exhibited the deepest and often loudest skepticism about the objective of the research and why me (of all people) was the one to do it. This does not mean that others did not raise questions. In one instance, I went to interview a graduate from Imam in a shop in Garissa town, and the shopkeeper—a high school graduate whose brother I knew— warned the interviewee to be careful about me. The interviewee, though he eventually offered me the interview, asked for

reassurances. I was fascinated by returnees from Saudi Arabia who remained stoically suspicious of me as a person and the research. I tried to make excuses for them by imagining what supposedly triggered their concerns: that the sad realities of colonialism, postcolonialism or a host of other factors could have instilled in them an enduring suspicion and fear of the West or its education. However, if that were the case, why did other participants of this study, particularly older Sufi leaders, who were more likely to have experienced colonialism personally, not question my intentions or that of the research? Why was scrutiny coming only from Saudi-educated Salafis more than any other group of people? While I did not pursue this topic any farther, I assumed that such attitudes must have had something to do with the returnees' experiences in Saudi Arabia.

A few incidents will demonstrate what occurred during the fieldwork and help put it in perspective. One of the participants, a PhD in shariica graduate from IUM, did not hold back at how baffled he was concerning the intent of my research. While sitting across from him in a coffee shop along Kismayu Road in Garissa for an interview on how his education in Madina changed him and the society, he wondered about the value of my study, asking bluntly—and without much nuance— "Who is going to benefit from your research?" My shock was not so much from his incredulity of the work at hand or who it would impact in the long run as much as it was his negative, almost accusatory tone. When I explained to him that it was an academic project that will be available to anyone who was interested in reading it, he dismissively protested that ours (apparently pulling me into the fold) was not a reading society and that I should know better, and this research would not benefit locals. "You are simply writing for other

people and not us,"[50] he concluded. It was not the futility of my work to the local population that concerned him; rather, it was the fact that the result of this research was supposedly being written for people who will more likely use it for ends he was unhappy with. Though I did not ask, it was clear that he meant western secret agencies that he surmised would use it for nefarious reasons. In this arrangement, he partly saw me as an informer and an agent for "others"—often invisible; I was here to do the dirty work for the enemies of Islam and Muslims.

Others viewed my research as misplaced and undeserving of all the energy that I was putting in. They advised me that I redirect it to topics or regions that were more consequential to Islam and Muslims than what I came to ask them. The first one was a graduate from Umm- al-Qura University who proposed that I address the origins of Shici (Shi'i) Islam. He was particularly interested in me figuring out what he purported was the flimsy origins of Shicism and its destructive theology and politics towards "Muslims". He assumed that Shicism was a topic he understood better than me and I should learn more about it and tell the world. The second one, a degree holder in Islamic studies, wondered why I should not be more inclined to writing about the Muslim Brotherhood. According to him, I would be more useful to Islam and Muslims to find out how they—members of the MB who were the true Muslims were being targeted and persecuted by everyone else, including Muslims. Their suggestions portray the larger currents among Salafis as a global community who continuously worry about the wellbeing of their fellow Salafis. In my own small way, their view expressed that I was obligated to help voice those threats as well as to create awareness of their tribulations.

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[50] Interview with Dr. Feisal, Garissa, July 17th, 2014.

The basis of this project is how various epistemologies manifested themselves on the ground, with each one using its own instruments: books, historical figures, personal charisma, and networks within the society. Oftentimes, the various competing collectives —Salafi or Sufi groups— will know who constitute their congregations and constituencies. Other times, it was less clear, creating an altogether dicey situation. The concern, particularly for the older culama, was the need to prevent needless tension and instead maintain a fairly peaceful rapport with the others. Though the relationship between the groups has eased recently, the likely flare up of old wounds might occur if one inadvertently wandered into critical topics. Consequently, I was occasionally received with a less than warm reception or told that certain information would be held back from me because they were not sure to which ideological camp I subscribed. Another juncture of negotiation was the clan factor, whereby some of my interlocutors (those who did not know me already) demanded to know my family affiliations before we began interactions. I had learned about this early on and would carefully address these borderlines of trust by continuously offering reassurances to them. While some opened up, others did not and as a result I would be given information whose source was either held back or would be given to me in confidence. In the former situation, I would be left with the responsibility to determine how to cite the source. I will offer two examples. While interviewing a Sufi leader and calim in Minneapolis, he spoke of a debate he had with Salafis, suggesting that they (Salafis) did not know the works he was citing, referring to them as ill-educated. In another instance, a notable Salafi in Garissa called Sufis charlatans and conmen but immediately warned me not to mention him. In either case, the men were not sure whether I was a Sufi or Salafi (because I am Somali and from the region).

The fears, suspicions, and deflections swirling around my fieldwork were also partly motivated by the geopolitical situation of northern Kenya. During my entire fieldwork, Kenya

was highly volatile and unstable—and continues to be— as al-Shabab unleashed constant and deadly campaigns of bombings and other types of attacks in Garissa and other towns in the north. On the other hand, the Kenyan government had resorted to punitive measures against anyone it considered was involved in terrorism.[51] Some of these measures included extrajudicial killings and indefinite detentions as a way to eliminate those suspected of being involving in terrorism. Many of the detained were innocent people. In such a context, and for their own personal security, there was reticence to engage in my research as it sought to ask questions that were potentially adjacent to al-Shabab, its ideology, or military operations. It was a risk a few wanted to take. In one instance, a professor in one of the local universities, with whom I attended university in the US, said semi-jokingly that he did not want any trouble and instructed me to not mention his name at all. In another, a woman whose husband I was interviewing peered into my laptop to see if I was video or voice-recording him and demanded I not do so.

**Outline of the Study**

This section briefly lays out the chapters of this dissertation. The dissertation is primarily divided into seven chapters and though it is neither a longitudinal nor a case study, many of the chapters are ordered in such a way as to demonstrate a process of knowledge transmission and its outcome. The first chapter is the introduction and sets the foundation of the study. Accordingly, it discusses knowledge, its transmission, and application. Second, it lays out the objectives of the research and its interventions. The chapter culminates into research methodology and the outline of the chapters. Chapter One, entitled, "Hybridity in Habitus," positions the setting of the study

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[51] Brian Machina. "Lifting the Veil on Enforced Disappearances and Extrajudicial Killings in Kenya." *Oxford Human Rights Hub: A Global Perspective on Human Rights*," 4th January 2017.

by covering topics such the people and places in which the study was based, including: the United States of America, Kenya, and Saudi Arabia. One limitation of the study was my inability to visit the xer. Xer were exclusively located in Somalia and Ethiopia, and I could not make the trip for reasons that included safety or time. However, I recreate xer-based learning experiences using stories from interviewees. The chapter also offers a brief survey of Islam in the Somali-speaking regions of the Horn of Africa.

The next three chapters: two, three, and four are descriptions of learning and institutions. Overall, the chapters examine curriculum and pedagogy. Chapter Two is titled: "Dugsi: Where the Journey Begins," discusses the memorization of Qur'ān in dugsi. It analyses the ways in which dugsi has traditionally operated among Somalis: the content and format of how they learned, physical spaces, and enrolment. The next two chapters concern higher education. Chapter Three is titled: "At the Feet of the Master: Traditional Islamic Higher Education among Somalis," and reconstructs knowledge and its transmission in traditional higher learning settings. The chapter investigates the xer system, renowned centers of higher learning, what areas of specialization and texts were popular, professions as well as the titles of these culama they assumed upon finishing the various levels of study. Chapter Four, titled: "Grooming Salafi Scholars at Saudi Universities: Back to the Past to Move Forward," examines contemporary Islamic higher education with an emphasis on Saudi Arabian universities. I particularly focus on the Islamic University in Medina (IUM) and Imam Mohamed bin Saud Islamic University (Imam) in Riyadh. The purpose here is to illustrate what kind of training and socialization students are exposed to.

Chapters Five and Chapter Six address the second vital objective of this dissertation: transformation of Islam in Garissa. Accordingly, the chapters locate the competing applications

of the various kinds of knowledge. Chapter Five is titled, “Salafism in Garissa: Intellectualism, Epistemology, and Ideology,” and it reconsiders how differing approaches to Islamic epistemologies have led to scholarly discourses and confrontations between Sufis and traditional culama on one side and reformists and Salafis on the other. The chapter will anchor the discourses on the two groups’ educational training, and how their worldviews have been shaped by those institutions and knowledge. Chapter Six, titled, “The Tales of a Sheikh: Education, Travels and Transformations,” illustrates the personal journey of one calim. It shows how the encounter with the various knowledge systems have transformed him or not. The chapter also discusses the social, religious and political function of returnees from Saudi Arabia. The dissertation concludes with summary and reflection in Chapter 7 where the key points of this research text are reviewed.

**Conclusion**

This introductory chapter considers various important aspects of this dissertation. The purpose of this chapter, however, transcends simply introducing the crux of the project or introduces aspects for later discussion, but rather examines foundational arguments, including interventions of the study, and the various foundational themes on which the dissertation is anchored: Local Salafism, notions of reform and tradition, and epistemological patterns. While the intervention of the study doubles down on the specific contribution that the dissertation seeks to make as well as its relevance, the last three (local Salafism, notions of reform and tradition, and epistemological patterns) offer the dissertation the theoretical and philosophical mooring. The implication is that they serve as broad guidelines and direct the arguments made in the dissertation. They also help demonstrate the connection of this research to the larger relevant literature across the African continent. Another important part of the introductory section is that

of my own positionality as a researcher. I recount the personal and institutional difficulties that I encountered throughout the various places in which I conducted this research. The salience of this is not only to portray authorial investment and intrusion into the project but to reflect on this journey relate what it felt like to be a researcher in all these different places.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Hybridity in Habitus

I begin this chapter by briefly qualifying basic terms, phrases, and other markers of identity that occur in this research. They include a phrase such as Somali-speaking areas which is used frequently in this research. This phrase is helpful in describing areas where Somalis reside. On a broader level, I use the term Horn of Africa and less frequently East Africa to mean the same thing: that Somalis are present in all these countries. These labels are a product of the colonial period but are contemporarily in heavy use, helping designate the various and often different administrative regions into which Somalis find themselves. Though not used frequently in this dissertation, Somalis may also self-identify based on their areas of residence or nationality such as: Kenyan-Somali, Somalis (Somalia), Djiboutians or Ethiopian-Somalis. Following the fall of Said Barre's regime, the mushrooming semi-autonomous states are increasingly becoming a marker of identity: Jubaland, Somaliland, and Puntland, and Southwest, among others.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this research concerns the transformation of Islam in Garissa County. It specifically investigates how young Kenyan-Somali men who were educated in Saudi Arabian universities have been at the forefront in transforming the ways in which Islam is understood and practiced. Therefore, education will be considered the most consequential variable in changing patterns of Islamic practice. While this remains to be the main objective, the research also pulls in other factors, historical or otherwise, without which the said transformation would not be possible. The chapter explores the setting of the study and covers the following subtopics: locations in which the study was carried out, participants of this

study, research methodology, and data analysis. In addition, I also describe the history of Islam in Garissa and the larger Horn of Africa.

## Geography and People

Garissa County is located in the southeastern tip of northern Kenya, in which Garissa is the largest town. Thus, Garissa is both a county and a town. Other mid-level towns dot this expansive County, including: Bura, Ijara, Dadaab, Balambala, and Modogashe, as well as numerous villages and settlements. Garissa town is the current headquarters of Garissa County. Before the current county administrative system was introduced in Kenya, Garissa town was the administrative capital of the former Northeastern Province (NEP) in which Garissa was located. The County shares borders with other Kenyan counties, foreign countries, and water bodies. To the north are Wajir and Mandera counties, the two that constituted the former NEP, and which comprise the same ethnic composition as Garissa. To the northwest, southwest, and south, are Isiolo, Tana River and Lamu counties, respectively. To the east is the newly created state of Jubaland in western Somalia, while the Indian Ocean lies to the southeast.

Garissa is primarily semi-arid: it is hot and dry throughout the year with insufficiently low precipitation during the rainy seasons. Consequently, there is not much vegetation, and some forest growth is concentrated around River Tana. The main economic mainstay of this region is nomadic pastoralism. Most people keep livestock such as cows, goats, sheep, and camels. However, this pattern has been changing gradually over the last few decades. Residents have turned to growing crops as an alternative to keeping animals whose numbers have been dwindling because of the draughts and famines that have reduced many of them to destitution. Others have moved into villages and towns and now engage in alternative livelihoods. This ever-

increasing rate of urbanization has catapulted Garissa to one of the largest and fastest growing towns in Kenya.

The population of Garissa County is concentrated in Garissa town. Ethnic Somalis constitute the majority, particularly the three Ogaadeeni families of Cabudwaaq, Cabdalle, and Cawlyahan.[52] However, other Somali clans and non-Somali Kenyans like the Kambas have also recently been moving in as Garissa continues to be more connected to the national and international economy. In addition, Garissa is home to hundreds of thousands of refugees who fled wars in neighboring countries, of who the largest group originate from Somalia. Considering that the refugee camps are in Garissa County and are around 100 kilometers away from Garissa town, many have resettled in Garissa town and have blended into the local population. The implication is that they have had a considerable impact in the discourses on Islam. In fact, some of the leading sheikhyaal in Garissa or even Kenya are originally from the Ogaadeen or Somalia.

**Fieldwork Site: Garissa, Kenya**

I carried out my fieldwork in Kenya, the United States of America, and Saudi Arabia, and I was based in the following cities: The Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul), USA; Garissa and Nairobi, Kenya; and Makkah, Medina, and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia. In all, I spent a little over seven months in Kenya and more than four years in Saudi Arabia. The fieldwork began in the summer of 2013, while a graduate student at the University of Kansas. On an ongoing basis, I interviewed culama in both Kansas City and Minneapolis from 2013-2018. In Kansas, I focused exclusively on Sufi culama whose mosque I visited often; however, it was in the Twin Cities of

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[52] The Ogaadeen is part of the larger Daarood clan-family. The Ogaadeen is spread across Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia.

Minneapolis and St. Paul of Minnesota that I conducted much of my fieldwork. The traditional culama and Sufis were extremely helpful especially on Sufism and Islamic education in the Horn of Africa. Also, I interviewed Salafis who were educated or who had worked in Saudi Arabia. One of them had taught Arabic language at King Saud University for more than thirty years and had a deep understanding of the social life and education of Somali students there. Most of these culama were either from Garissa or originally from Somalia or the Ogaadeen but had spent a considerable amount of time in Garissa. These culama had had their education in the Horn of Africa, Saudi Arabia or both and were therefore able to speak to my twin research interests of education and transformation.

In Kenya, I focused on a cross-section of people and places, but mostly the culama. I sought for the culama who, as in many other places across the Muslim world, are loosely divided into the traditional culama and Sufis and the reformists (in this case Salafis, Salaxis, or other individuals). Returnees is a composite category that will conceptually include graduates from universities in many Islamic countries that include Yemen, Sudan (they form the vast majority of the returnees), Egypt and even Uganda. In this research, however, I concentrate on returnees from Saudi Arabia, and the term refers to them. The reason is that returnees from Saudi Arabia have been more active locally in terms of dacwa activities. This owes to the inordinate amount of resources that Saudi Arabia has been spending. Saudi NGOs and other agencies have also employed many of the returnees, making them more visible, but also offering a higher social status. Also, Saudi universities have inculcated a sense of activism in these returnees. Why this is the case has to do with the fact that students in Saudi Arabia are trained to think of themselves as being on a mission to preach Islam.

**Saudi Arabia: Universities and Students**

Saudi Arabia is a unique place to conduct research for several reasons, the least of which is the inability to do so without funding. As I did not have any research funding, it would have been impossible to travel and carry out this research. However, this was by no means the only obstacle as it was offset by the fact that I found a job as an English lecturer, which allowed me to earn an income and conduct my research at the same time. What I found difficult even when residing in Saudi Arabia were the structural challenges that stood in the way of carrying out my research adequately. The conservative nature of the Saudi society and the deeply bureaucratic state eschew free movement of individuals, ideas or even access to information most would consider basic and harmless. Instead, the sort of information I was seeking would be considered sensitive and of national interest and would make it hard to come by, limiting my prospect of successfully reaching out to, say, university professors or administrators. Applying for clearance to conduct research—any kind of research— would be so frustratingly drawn out and caught in bureaucratic maze that one was better off finding a wasda (a connection) or simply deserting it altogether. In addition, following the normal procedures of applying to conduct research to concerned authorities would more often turn out to be unpredictable or even unreasonable that one had better not try. I offer the example of a friend who was PhD student, and when he sought for clearance to conduct research among the students, was given the option of either adding a Saudi national into his PhD dissertation research, or he would not be granted permission to do research. However, my job allowed me to move freely around the universities in which the research was based and conduct interviews or hold group discussions with students. Finally, the absence of existing research in Saudi Arabia concerning the Saudi post-secondary education system in general confined the data I could gather to interviews and other forms of informal

interactions. In what follows, I elucidate further on my qualitative inquiry process at two Saudi universities.

My research in Saudi Arabia was primarily based at Imam, located in the capital city Riyadh, and IUM in the holy city of Madina. Riyadh is in the central region commonly known as Najd, and the homeland of the al-Sacuud and ibn Cabdiwahab families, while Madina is in the Xijaaz region in the west. The two cities are distant from each other, about nine-hour drive. Naturally, I spent more time at Imam as I resided in Riyadh; however, I made frequent visits to Madina. Selecting these universities followed from two main factors. The first factor was that the two campuses in Riyadh and Madina, in addition to Umm al-Qura University in Makkah, remain the premier institutions of higher Islamic learning in Saudi Arabia. Second, many Kenyan-Somali students study in these universities, with those from Garissa being the majority. This offered me a large sample among who to conduct sufficient research.

The universities are mainly or partly missionary institutions with the objective of training ducaad.[53] For instance, as per the statute that established IUM in 1961, its founders envisioned a university where graduates will return to their home countries to spread the message conveyed to them.[54] Therefore, from the moment it opened its doors this university has been defined by the presence of a large international student body. Imam, like IUM, is also large and offers secular programs such as medicine, engineering, and teaching, but has also extensive Islamic Studies program. Imam's significance and global reach is as deep and extensive as IUM. One area that Imam has fully and successfully established itself and even surpassed IUM in preparing future

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[53] While IUM was created to train international and local culama, so was Imam. However, Imam does not attract as much attention as IUM.

[54] Ahmed Chanfi, *West African 'Ulama and Salafism in Mecca and Medina,* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 12.

Salafi scholars is the building, staffing, and funding of middle and high schools and institutes around Africa, including Djibouti and Mali. These schools focus entirely on Arabic and Islamic studies from a Saudi Salafi perspective.[55] They are free boarding schools where students live in and study for their entire education. After high school, some may stay for a year to obtain Teaching Arabic to Speakers of Other Languages (TASOL) certificate. After obtaining TASOL, many proceed to Imam to pursue bachelor's degrees in the various Islamic sciences. In addition, Imam assists madāris in other countries with resources such as manhaj (curriculum), books and sometimes even teachers. Madrasatul Najaax and Salaam, the two premier madāris in Garissa where many of the Kenyan-Somali students in Saudi universities have graduated from, are two of the beneficiaries.

Toward the end of the 2016 academic year, a total of 32 Kenyan students were enrolled at Imam University, 30 of who were Kenyan-Somali. Of these 30, 24 were from Garissa, while the remaining six were from Wajir and Mandera. IUM had a larger student body in which Garissa was also well represented. Saudi Arabia has been and continues to be the number one choice for Somali students hoping to study Islamic sciences. Reasons for such preference are varied but revolve around the following key areas: the two holy cities of Makkah and Madina where students can perform xajj and umrah for free. Saudi Arabia is also identified with the correct caqīdah in comparison to Ashcarism (Ash'ari),[56] which dominates other major destinations such

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[55] This information is based on an interview that I had with a graduate from al-ma'had al-Islami as-Saudi fi Djibouti.

[56] This was based on an interview of a former student who had applied to IUM and Azhar University at the same time. He was admitted to Azhar but dropped out and joined IUM. His statements were based on a comparison of both universities, giving examples of what was considered correct caqīdah and what was not in the different contexts.

as Egypt and Sudan. Also, financial incentives formed a huge part of choosing Saudi universities, considering that most students come from poor families. They are given a monthly stipend of 800 riyals (200 dollars), an annual summer return ticket, housing and books.
As a result of these benefits to students, the interest and competition for admission is high, drawn out, and awfully unpredictable. There are no standardized exams to guide admission or timelines to follow. Admission is arbitrary, unregulated and sometimes depends on luck or connection to top officials in Kenya's Muslim religious organizations than fulfilment of requisite conditions. Application was traditionally made by preparing documents and handing them to current students who submitted them on the applicants' behalf. Application documents included: madrasa certificates (certified from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Education in Kenya and the Saudi Embassy in Nairobi), photos and a copy of passport. Alternatively, those with the means traveled for cumrah, and during their visit, arranged to take impromptu admission exams. However, due to travel restrictions within Saudi Arabia, potential students could only visit IUM and Umm al-Qura and not those outside of the two holy cities. Interviewees reported the admission exam was often created on the spot and focused on core areas of the deen[57] such as Qur'ān, xadiith, and caqīdah. An impromptu panel would, for instance, ask the applicant to recite a random surah of the Qur'ān, or test their caqīdah by asking for their opinion on the metaphorical interpretation of Allah's attributes. Admission often took years, some applicants even abandoning it altogether assuming they would not be granted an admission. I interviewed two people who had applied to Egyptian and Sudanese universities in addition to Saudi ones. While they were admitted to the former almost immediately, it took years for their Saudi

[57] The word deen is popularly defined as religion. However, in the university settings, it was understood as the core subjects that defined a religion such as Qur'ān, Hadith and Sunnah.

admission to come through in which case they dropped out and went to IUM and Imam respectively.

**Research Methodology**

Ethnography was the primary method I used, specifically I conducted informal interviews, group participation, participant observation, and focus groups. I used these strategies for various reasons. Interviews created a friendly and relaxed atmosphere to ask questions, pause for clarification, and interrupt them when I needed explanation. After I introduced a point or posed a question, the conversation took its natural course, meaning that several other points would be looped in under the same point. However, I would return them back to the point if I felt it was insufficiently covered. Observation and participation were also very critical tools. They enabled me to observe and participate in social, academic and religious activities and interview them after the experience. These included sitting among children in their dugsi, reciting the Qur'ān with university students on Fridays, studying with university students in their library, playing soccer with them, or having a cup of coffee with a retired professor at Barnes and Noble in Eagan, Minnesota. It was also more practical and less stressful. I would spend the weekends at student dorms at Imam or King Saud Universities, giving me a greater insight into their personal and educational lives. I not only got a sense of what they read or how they discussed topics, I also took note of the subtle nuances of their personal lives. Finally, focus group discussions were all conducted at universities since it was more convenient to organize students who didn't know one another in a campus context than it was to convene groups of unfamiliar adults back in Kenya or the US.

Recruiting participants in Kenya and Saudi Arabia commenced while I was still in the US. I started off with people I knew and explained my research objective to them. However,

after I arrived on the ground, I began to branch out. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, I started by visiting students whose names or contacts I was given in the US or in Kenya. When I could figure my way around, I sought for those who I thought would be more resourceful. For instance, I asked for older students or those who had been at the universities longer and were therefore more experienced and could answer my questions more sufficiently. In other non-university settings, snowballing new contacts from acquaintances was also a useful strategy: as in the universities, the contacts that I had already made introduced me to others in their circle. Such people would include family members, friends or coworkers. Once I settled on a participant, I contacted them through a phone call and introduced myself to them. For those who did not know me or my family in Kenya, it was only after a trust had been established that we met face to face.

I used notebooks, computer and audio recording tools to collect data. These methods were effective for collecting and recording data, but also in pacing during the actual interviews. Generally, I had sufficient time with the participants and these tools gave me enough room to pause, ask follow-up questions, and resume discussions without any major interference or deviation from the topic at hand. Many times, however, I lived far off from some of the participants from whom I would constantly need crucial information, particularly when I began to write up the dissertation. In these situations, I corresponded with them through phone calls, or I simply wrote them messages using messaging applications such as messenger or WhatsApp. What made our interactions not only simple, more productive and less time consuming was Somali, my native language and which almost all the others spoke. Still, some used Arabic, which they readily and generously explained. After I finished gathering the data, I transcribed it into a written format with the identity of the participant, date, time and place clearly at the top. When identifying the participants in the written form, I tried my best to anonymize their names

and protect their identities. Some asked me to do so, while others did not. Afterwards, I coded the data into themes and put them under the appropriate chapters.

**Islam in the Horn of Africa**

The arrival and development of Islam in Garissa is intimately connected to and demonstrates strikingly similar features as that of the neighboring countries such as: Somalia, Djibouti, and Ethiopia. The similarity derives from a shared history, scholarship and practice. Ethiopia and Somalia are critical to comprehending Islam in the entire region but Kenyan-Somalis in particular, owing largely to the factors stated above, but also a shared kinship with the huge Oromo population, Afar and other Cushitic populations that cut across the entire region. They are also united by a devotion to the Shaafici school of thought. Indeed, the centuries-old movements of people and ideas between these Cushitic groups have deepened their existing ties. Their expeditions such as that of the 16th century Axmed ibn Ghazi's or Ahmed Gurey's (Axmed The Left Handed) wars of jihad illustrate their unity, particularly when they (Cushites) fought the Christians highlanders in Ethiopia, an experience deeply etched in the Somali consciousness.[58] In the same token, centers of Islamic learning and scholarship in cities such as Harar have drawn thousands of Cushitic Muslims knowledge seekers, creating more intensive cultural ties.

The history of Islam goes deeper than these experiences of Muslims or their cultural or historical ties. Scholars of Islam in the Horn note that Islam in the region is old even as old as Islam itself. Lidwien Kapteijns, for instance, reinforces this point when she observes that: "From its emergence in the seventh century, Islam has formed an integral part of the history of what are

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[58] I. M. Lewis, *Understanding Somalia: Guide to Culture, History and Social Institutions* (London: Haan Associates, 1993), 10.

today Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia."[59] Proponents of this claim suggest that Islam reached the shores of the Horn of Africa during the Prophet's lifetime, and immediately after the Hijra (the Prophet's flight from Makkah to Madina). A well-known historical event that buttresses this claim is when the Prophet dispatched for safety a group of his followers to Abyssinia in the present day Ethiopia, an event deeply memorialized in the region. Accordingly, Islam has been a fundamental part of the fabric of the Horn of African societies as much as it has been for the Arabs in the Xijaaz.

Studies of the Somali people began at the turn of the 20th century when the Italians and the British colonial administrations started writing about Somalis for colonial purposes, while that of Islam followed a little while later. Studies on Islam have evolved over time and have been covered different subjects within Islam based on the demands of the time. More recently, studies coming out have been driven by geopolitical or security motivations. After the fall of Siad Barre regime, for example, much of the literature was devoted to terrorism and radicalization,[60] as well as political Islam.[61] The prevailing demands of this time was less about Islam as a faith and belief system and more about Islamist groups such as the Union of Islamic Courts and al-Shabab that dominated the Somali scene in the recent past and their threats to regional security.

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[59] Lidwien Kapteijns, "Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa," in *The History of Islam in Africa*," eds. Nehemia Levtzion & Randall Pouwels, 227-250 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 227.

[60] David Anderson, and Jacob McKnight, "Understanding Al-Shabab: Clan, Islam and Insurgency in Kenya," *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 9, no. 3 (536), (2015); Hussein Solomon, "Al Shabab in Somalia: Between Clan and Faith," in Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Africa: New Security Challenges Series, 39-66 (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

[61] They include: Ken Menkhaus, "Political Islam in Somalia," "Political Islam in Somalia," *Middle East Policy Council* Vol IX no. 1 (2002).

There, however, is a more serious and insightful scholarship on Islam in the Somali-speaking regions. In the English language, Ioan M. Lewis features more than any other scholar. For over half a century, the late I. M. Lewis (d. 2014) was the consummate intellectual on Somali culture, prolifically producing extensive literature on various aspects of the Somali society. While he is remembered for a breadth and extensive set of work on such issues as Somali kinship, social and political organization and have remained central reference to Somali studies, his writings on Somali Islam have remained rather marginal. This is the case not because he wrote less on them, but because he considered it as part of the culture, and therefore undeserving of consideration as the other themes. Despite that, Lewis has been the "go to" person on Somali Sufism. He has produced books and articles on all aspects of this subject, but specifically on the following areas: Sufi brotherhoods, saints and saint veneration, Sufis and the Somali social structure, as well as Sufism and syncretism.

**Islam in Garissa**

Before the dariiqooyin (sing. dariiqa, brotherhood) reappeared in the present-day Garissa, there was little awareness of Islam much less appropriately practiced. Some interviewees likened this period to jahiliya (age of ignorance). However, there were periodic visits by the Men in Green[62] whose arrival helped reinvigorate Islam. They were a band of itinerant men who came from Somalia. The residents anticipated these visits though these men were as mysterious as they were assumed to be holy. They wore oversized green clothes and moved from village to village, visiting people and leading them in Sufi rituals. They carried large, green flags, from where their name came. On the flags was an Arabic inscription that read: "La Illaha Ila lah Maxamadda

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[62] I call them Men in Green based on how my interviewees called them.

Rasulu Lah Cabdiqadir Sheey Lilah Uweys Axmed Waliulah."[63] The invocation of Cabdiqadir Jaylani and the representative of the Qaadiriya Brotherhood in Somalia Sheikh Uweys ibn Ahmed al-Baraawe indicates that they were Qaadiri and its offshoot Uweysiya.

The stories of these men are complex though particularly unpleasant when told from a Salafi perspective. Their visits are often explained from the standpoint of extorting "gifts" from the local folks. A common refrain is told that in order to extract the maximum property from the locals, these men would repeat the mantra: "oodda ayaan ku weeyneeynayaa."[64] Eager to reap from this baraka and the subsequent wealth and other benefits they promised such as children, people made generous offerings to them. On the contrary, if one was miserly, the men threatened to withhold wealth or even shrink one's own existing herd. While they constituted any number of clans or families, tribes and races, one specific Somali clan the Asharaf[65] were believed to possess a special baraka, on the belief that they descended from the ahl al-bayt (the family of the Prophet). The men mostly preferred livestock, but they also accepted other gifts: ghee or articles of clothing. Elaborate feasts befitting their status were thrown for them, where untold number of animals were killed, and the best parts served to them. After reading the Qur'ān, the men drew a circle in which they demanded gifts to be filled in. These visitations, however, should not be viewed strictly from the perspective of collecting property or enriching themselves. A Salafi leader in Garissa stated that these men and the dariiqooyin filled important social and religious

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[63] People who descended from the family of the Prophet. The word could also be written in various forms such as: shurfa, sheriff etc.

[64] "I will make the kraal bigger for you"—is a figure of speech which meant that if you give me animals the animals and the other offerings that I want from you, I will increase your wealth for which livestock is basically a symbol.

[65] Seesemann writes this word as Shurfa.

gaps.[66] They revived Islam in general and adab in particular for which the Sufis and traditional culama are best known. They also re-centered devotional activities, suggesting that a dearth of local religious practitioners to lead vital day-to-day or even occasional rituals such as ninkaax (marriage contract) or janazah (prayer for the dead) perhaps characterized the enthusiasm for such men.

Locals partly explain away the lack of practitioners by pointing to the peripheral location of the region.[67] The assertion might be conceptual as the region has relatively been connected to Muslims either through education, physical borders, or travel. Sufi dariqooyin have continued to stream in from Somalia, Ethiopia and further afield. Owing to lack of written material on how Sufis reasserted themselves in Garissa, the data I present below is based on interviews and other oral submissions. The dominant Sufi brotherhoods in the Somali-speaking regions were Qaadiriya and Axmediya and their offshoots.[68] In Garissa, however, Qaadiriya and Saalixiya (an offshoot of Axmediya) tended to be the dominant ones, and they came to Garissa through different routes based on their relative locations in Somalia. Saalixiya was based in Northeast Somalia, where Maxamed Cabdulle Xassan settled upon his return from Makkah. Therefore, the Saalixiya Brotherhood reached Garissa from the northern Kenyan town of Mandera, on the Kenya-Somalia-Ethiopia triangle. Sheikh Cali Nuur Weyne, a Dhulbahante,[69] is credited with introducing Saalixiya to Kenya. Dhulbahante reside in northeastern Somalia where Maxamed

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[66] Interview with Sheikh C. G, Garissa, January 12th, 2018.

[67] Interview with Sheikh C. G., Garissa, January 13th, 2017.

[68] Abdurahman Moallim Abdullahi, "The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Historical Evolution with a Case Study of the Islah Movement (1950-2000)" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2011), 3.

[69] Dhulbahante is part of the Daarood clan-family. Dhulbahante is also significant as they were the backbone of the Dervish movement of Maxamed Cabdulle Xassan.

Cabdulle Xassan had his headquarters. After the death of Sheikh Nuur Weyne, the leadership of the Order was inherited[70] by Sheikh Cali Cabdinoor, a Garre man and one of his disciples (a Somali clan-family that resides in Mandera). Sheikh Cabdinoor left Mandera and traveled to southern Wajir, setting up his camp between Habaaswayn and Modogaashe, calling his new settlement, Baladul Macruf (Famous Town), which has since been renamed Sabena. After his death, the leadership passed on to his son Seyyid Abbas. Seyyid Abbas' reign saw momentous changes on Islam in the region, including the introduction of modern Islamic education and other reforms.

The Qaadiriya Brotherhood's arrival is attributed to the singular effort of a man known as Sharif. He was an enigmatic figure that the locals knew little about. Arriving from southern Somalia through the village of Hulugho, he did not stop at Garissa or any of the villages that he passed through but continued his journey on to the northern villages of Saqa and Banaaneey, eventually settling in Modogashe. Along the way, he left traces of Qaadiriya influence which spread as far south as Masalani and Ijara. Choosing Modogashe as his headquarters was rather intriguing but also dangerous as it was a stone throw away from the seat of the Saalixiya Brotherhood. Evidently, it was a provocative decision that instigated flashpoints with the Saalixiya. As in many other places in Africa, including West Africa,[71] Qaadiriya dominated the

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[70] the interviewee used the Somali word dhaxal or inheritance. Though it points to succession, it also points to well-known Sufi practice of inheriting leadership from one another.

[71] Rüdiger Seesemann, "Sufism in West Africa," *Religion Compass* 4/10 (2010), 606.

surrounding areas of southern Somalia, giving Sharif the confidence to take on the Saalixiya Brotherhood, which he considered not only nascent but also dislocated.

The conflict between the two camps escalated to the point that chief of Wajir Cabdi Ogle intervened and ordered the Saalixiya leader Sheikh Cali Macruf to leave the area and go back to his ancestral homeland of Mandera. Macruf obeyed the order but relocated to Garissa instead; however, a short while later Sharif followed him to Garissa where their differences and hostilities only continued to intensify. They established themselves in different parts of the town: the Saalixiya camped in the house of Mahad Xaaji Sabul, forging alliances with Mahad's kinsman including the Sultan of the Cabduwaaq clan-family Sultan Macalin Muxumed, himself a Saalixi. The Qaadiriya, on the other hand, settled in the house of Noor Cabdille in the Jaribu area. The two formed alliances with the two clan-families that have historically been dominant in the area: Cabduwaaq and Cawlyahan. It became increasingly unlikely that they would come to any kind of amicable coexistence. Nevertheless, as competition for the local population intensified, there was a clear Sufi revival and reinvigoration - not only of Sufi practices - but Islam in general.

A point I would like to reiterate is the ideological and theological terrain of local religious authorities in Garissa, which would also extend to other areas of the Horn. Two types of religious leadership prevailed before the arrival of reformism: traditional culama and dariiqooyin (Sufis). The culama were graduates from xer who spent years studying fiqh and mastering those texts. They were understood to be the real culama and had strict adherence to legal codes of Islam. Suffice to say, they were also Sufi. The second group was the leadership of the Sufi dariiqooyin. Though a few of them had studied any meaningful religious texts, most had an in-depth understanding of Sufism: its history and rituals. They led its ceremonies such as xadro,

dhikr and qasiidooyin.[72] Moreover, they were political leaders. While the relationship between the two was amorphous, there was an uneven distribution of power. Evidently, while knowledge lay with the culama, the leadership of the dariiqooyin had more power and influence in the local population. This power came from the sense that the dariiqooyin represented saints and were more likely to be saints themselves, led in rituals and they had access to more social and political capital than the culama. Accordingly, locals tended to side with dariiqooyin over the culama. The powers and actions of the dariiqooyin were rarely questioned much less tested.

**Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi and Reformism in Garissa**

Reformism in the Somali-speaking areas harkens back to the late 1800s. Before these reforms, the landscape was dominated by the Qaadiriya Brotherhood. Toward the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s, however, Sufi reformism appeared in the Somali-speaking areas. These reforms are attributed to the Saalixiya Brotherhood: a Sufi outfit that was constituted in Makkah between 1887 to 1890 by the Sudanese scholar and Sufi leader, Maxamed Salix,[73] and spread to southern Arabia and Somalia.[74] Saalixiya gained traction in the region immediately as the more established Qaadiriya was said to be undesiring of reforms,[75] was less

[72] The songs and chants that extoled the virtues of the Prophet or the founders of Sufi brotherhoods such as Sheikh Cabdulqaadir Jaylani. For more, see B. W. Andrzejewski, "Is There Arabic Influence in Somali Poetry?" *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 23, no. 1, (2011).
[73] Said Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism: The Case of Said Mohamed 'Abdille Hasan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 103.
[74] For more on this, see B.G. Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth-Century Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1976).
[75] For more on this topic, see Mohamed-Rashid Sheikh Hassan and Salada M. Roble, "Islamic Revival and Education in Somalia, in *Educational Strategies Among Muslims in the Context of Globalization: Some*

puritanical,[76] and, "endorsed the idea that deceased holy men or saints could and should act as mediators between individual believers and God."[77] There are claims that members of this Brotherhood were corrupt owing to the widespread use of drugs, especially khat.[78] When Saalixiya burst into the Somali scene, it did not only question the prevailing understanding of Islam, but successfully destabilized local Islamic traditions and challenged the supremacy of the Qaadiriya. A confrontation broke out between the two brotherhoods in which the khalifa (a representative of a Sufi order) of the Qaadiriya, Uweys is said to have been killed. Most Somalis understood the Saalixiya Brotherhood as Wahhabi based on their specific activities and preaching in Somalia and other places. A widely held assumption was that the Wahhabiya had ideologically influenced the former in its formative years in Makkah. In the 1890s, Maxamed Cabdille Xassan was a student of Maxamed Saalix and helped transpose Saalixiya to northern Somalia and propagated its ideas in northern Somalia. Some of his teachings which unsettled many Somalis who were known to be moderate Muslims were his objection to the use of tobacco, intoxicating drinks, tea, coffee and qat. As such, local Somali Sufis were alarmed at the Saalixiya teachings and pejoratively called the Seyyid, "Wahhabi."

Along with the Saalixiya were a network of other culama who appeared in the 1960s and who played a pivotal role in the many reforms that Muslims have experienced. As I hinted in the

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*National Case* Studies (Muslim Minorities, eds. Holger Daun and Geoffrey Walford (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2004).

[76] Said Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism: The Case of Sayid Mahammad 'Abdille Hasan*," 96.

[77] Scott Reese, "The Best of Sufi Guides: Sufi Poetry and Alternate Discourses of Reform in Early Twentieth Century Somalia," *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 14, no.1 (2001) 50.

[78] Susan Beckerleg, *Ethnic Identity and Development: Khat and Social Change in Africa* (New York City: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 6.

introduction, a key figure in these reform process in Garissa was the singular effort of one sheikh named Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi. Cabdi gave me a few interviews and elucidated to me these experiences and the many battles he fought. Now old, almost completely blind and unable to recall these developments that he was involved in over the last 60 years, Cabdi still resides in Garissa where he is held as a father of reforms, an icon, and a religious leader. In one of my visits to interview him at his house, I was asked to wait outside as the former khadi of the town and other elders sat with him. Much as Cabdi was a local leader and a reformer, he is someone who traveled widely throughout Somalia, the Ogaadeen and Kenya, both during the colonial and the postcolonial eras. These experiences and reform efforts by Cabdi unravel the complexity of Islam in this region and demonstrated in the past as now that it was complex, trans-local and attracted culama from far and wide.

Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi, popularly known as Ilka Dahable because of the silver he has in one of his front teeth was born in Qabri Dahar, a town in the Ogaadeen. Slightly before his birth, the region of his birth had been experiencing extreme violence, complicated by the territorial claims made by various forces that included the Ethiopians, British, and of course the Somali residents of the region. Suffice it to say, the Ogaadeen was renowned for its popular centers of Islamic learning and scholarship. Like other children of his age, Cabdi began to memorize the Qur'ān at a very young age in his native town. He then pursued further education, studying more texts in xer within the Ogaadeen. Though he was humble enough to tell me that he had not completed all the texts he needed to finish to attain the level of a sheikh, he was nonetheless renowned locally for his erudition and knowledge. After he had exhausted local xer, he traveled to southern Somalia for more learning. Like all the other xer, he moved from one place to another, searching for the right xer. He likened this directionless movement as being without any

nidaam (order or organization). The unreliability of finding a good master coupled with expending much time trying to locate one must have motivated him to found Madrasa Najaax once he settled in Garissa. During this period of itinerancy, he mastered naxw (grammar) and fiqh (jurisprudence) in line with their geographical specialization.[79]

In Somalia, the situation was equally complex as it was in the Ogaadeen. At that time, the Cold War was still raging and geopolitical competition in the Middle East and Africa was rife impacting Somalia directly and indirectly.[80] To align Somalia with Egypt's vision of Arab socialism and further align it with Russia and away from the West and the Gulf, it (Egypt) established several machado (sing. machad, institutes)[81] and high schools in various places in Somalia. Some of these were: Jamal Cabdel-Nasser Allahi, and Sheikh Sufi—which was affiliated with Azhar University, and Machad Tadaamul al-Islami—, which was a conduit for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. In the machado, students came from all over Somali-speaking areas and were taught Islamic knowledge and the ideologies of the MB. While it was not an Egyptian government policy to explicitly spread the ideologies of MB in Somalia, some of the teachers were undoubtedly members or sympathizers of the MB. Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi would attend one of these machado, which was in Balad Wayn. Here, he was introduced to both secular and Islamic studies, brushing up on his Arabic along the way. In this institute, he also encountered Salafism.

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[79] This topic will be taken up more clearly in chapter four. However, it is worth noting that while the Ogaadeen region was known for naxw, southern Somalia was prominent for fiqh.

[80] Abdurahman Moallim Abdullahi, "*The Islamic Movement in Somalia*," 3.

[81] Written as ma'had, the word means institute, both in Somali and Arabic.

Unlike other culama with who I had interacted during my fieldwork, Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi was unique in that he had never been a Sufi during his entire life though it was taught and practiced all around him. As such, it was a little striking even baffling considering the time and place. As a young child in the 1980s and with all the reformist ideas floating around me, I participated in the Sufi rituals in Garissa such as the xadro, dikr, xus, and mawlid. What sympathy he had had for Sufism died when he enrolled at machad in Beled Wayn, while Maxamed Awal completely erased its last vestiges. He said: "the last time I cut ties with Sufis or even thinking positively of it was when Sheikh Awal came."[82] Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi moved to Garissa in the early 1960s whence he introduced reformism in Garissa. At the time, no such thing was known in Garissa. A former student of his portrayed him as having been the first one to declare the tawxiid in Garissa. Controversial as that statement may seem to many, it should be understood in the context in which it appeared: that he was the spark for reformist ideas. For many years, he was the lone reformer and battled the Sufis of Garissa. He informed me that he had no support until Sheikh Awal came along. He had not traveled to Saudi Arabia nor attended its universities and therefore did not know the Saudi Salafism.

**Conclusion**

This chapter is a setting of the dissertation. Accordingly, it has sought to introduce the main players and places that constitute the dissertation. These diverse topics include people and places geography, students in Saudi Arabia, research methodology, as well as Islam in the Horn of Africa. As much as the chapter underscores the importance of each of these topics, it also seeks to demonstrate how they will crosscut and intersect in various ways throughout the

[82] Interview with Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi, Garissa, December 29th, 2019.

dissertation as they point to the larger goal of illustrating the transformation that has and continues to happen in Garissa and the entire Northern Kenya. The chapter has, however, delved in a relatively greater detail in two areas: Saudi universities and students as well as Maxamed Cabdi, a religious figure in Garissa. It is not by accident that these areas have received greater emphasis; indeed, their explication offers a useful background to the participants who were at the forefront of the transformation of Islam in Garissa. Focusing a little more on Maxamed Cabdi also helps to show how important this figure was—and continues to be— but his change of fortunes will be demonstrated in the various periods: while he suffered in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, he is now held by many as an icon. He is visited by all and is invited to grace important functions such graduations at madāris. In short, he is an embodiment of this change, which can only be captured through comparing the periods.

**CHAPTER TWO**

## Dugsi: Where the Journey Begins

Dugsi (pl. dugsiyo) is a term in the Somali language that refers to Qur'ānic school. Though seemingly simple and straightforward, its ambiguity underscores the larger complexity already existing in the Arabic-speaking countries where several terms such as kuttab, khawala, or zawia[83] are used for Qur'ānic school. In its most generic use, dugsi simply means Qur'ānic school. However, the term has a more place-specific implication which arose from the emergence of the modern nation-state as well as public education system. In postcolonial Somalia, Djibouti and the Ogaadeen, in addition to Qur'ānic school, dugsi is also used to mean public schools. In these places, dugsi is a site where most forms of early literacy take place. Therefore, distinctions between dugsi and public schools are expressed through certain qualifiers. While Qur'ānic school is simply dugsiga (The School), other words are attached to public schools to designate them as follows: dugsiga hoose (primary/elementary school), dugsiga dhexe (middle school) and dugsiga sare (secondary or high school). In Kenya where this study was based, the situation is different as Somali is neither a national nor an official language of the country, but one of the 42 other languages that is spoken around the country. Kenyan-Somalis, therefore, need no qualifiers as they use the word "school" as other Kenyans for public schools and reserve "dugsi" only and strictly for Qur'ānic school.

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[83] El Sammani,M. O.,Hassoun,I.,Abdalla,B. & Gadir,H. A, '*Koranic' Schools in Sudan as a Resource for UPEL: Results of a Study on Khalwas in Rahad Agricultural Project* (Aids to Programming UNICEF Assistance to Education UPEL 12). Paris: Unit for Co-operation with UNICEF and WFP (1985), 1.

Despite these challenges of definition, the dugsi system remains crucial as it is where the long and arduous journey to learn the Qur'ān before proceeding to study other Islamic sciences begins. In addition to imparting the basic religious knowledge, dugsi like Islamic knowledge in general has also the powerful power and function of cultivating positive moral character among young children.[84] It gives moral direction to young Muslim minds. While these features of Qur'ānic school are universal among Muslims everywhere, major variations remain regarding how the Qur'ān is transmitted.[85] This chapter addresses dugsi specifically among Somalis.

**Dugsi: A Background**

Less than a hundred meters from my family's house in Garissa town's Bula Iftin area stands a midsized, nondescript mosque, which is surrounded by low-roofed, white buildings with iron sheets that shine brightly during the day. This mosque is quiet most of the day apart from the five prayer times when the adaan (Muslim call for prayer) from the loudspeaker brings men of all ages out from the nearby houses. Immediately after the prayer, the mosque falls silent again until the next adaan and the next prayer. However, the small dugsi that is attached to the mosque remains active throughout the day. This dugsi is a lively learning center for children, and like most other Qur'ānic schools around the world, is a product of the local community.[86] The mosque and the dugsi are in the same compound though there is no physical marker of such, they are run and managed separately. Just like other Qur'ānic schools also, this dugsi is easily

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[84] Robert Hefner, "Introduction," in *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, eds, by Robert Hefner and Muhammad Zaman,1-39 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 5.
[85] Daniel Wagner and Abdelhamid Lotfi, "Learning to Read by 'Rote'," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 1983, no. 42 (1983): 111.
[86] Lansiné Kaba, "The Politics of Qur'ānic Education among Muslim Traders in the Western Sudan: The Subbanu Experience," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 10, no. 3 (1976): 409.

noticeable for its simplicity, which flows not only from the materials used to build it, but also the learning activities that go on inside of it and how those activities are carried out. In its physical structure, this dugsi is long and rectangular with a high roofing. It has been constructed from materials that are readily and locally available. The dugsi is built from large poles and thin, dried twigs from the kamora tree, both of which grow along the river Tana that flows not too far from the dugsi itself. Relatively deep holes are dug on the ground and a few centimeters from each other. The poles are put in the holes and a cement is poured into them to make them strong. Slightly smaller poles are horizontally nailed onto the large ones. Then the kamora twigs are tied to them using sisal ropes, making the structure stronger and durable. The roof is iron sheet that is purchased from local hardware stores. However, the floor remains bare, and the students sit on the sand, which is always cold.

The semi-permanent nature of this structure derives from the Somali lifestyle, which is described primarily as pastoral nomadic people.[87] In the countryside, there were no physical structures to speak of, but hastily assembled structure which is also easily dismantled. This owes to their constant movement from one place to another, searching for water and pasture for their animals. In such an ephemeral lifestyle, permanent structures were inconsequential and illogical. As in other places, lessons would be conducted in any open space that was available to the macalin (pl. macalimeen: teacher: teachers). Because of these constant movements, Somalis

[87] I. M. Lewis, *Understanding Somalia: Guide to Culture, History and Social Institutions*, 10.

devised two types of dugsiyo: dugsi koraad[88] and dugsi hoosaad.[89] The former was held under trees and was often located at a relative distance from the huts and was used during daytime. The purpose was to accord maximum quiet for students and teachers to conduct their teaching and learning without any interruption. On the other hand, dugsi hoosaad was located within the hamlets where students learned during the night. It was any open space available between huts or in front of the macalin's house, primarily for safety from wild animals.

The local dugsi is neither koraad or hoosaad because it is in a major town, and there is no need to move around. It is comprised of young boys and girls who come from the local bula[90] Iftin. No special dress for the boys as they come in the same sport jersey shirts and jeans or macawis[91] that they wear when playing soccer in the neighborhood. But the girls are somewhat different as they cover themselves with their colorful gombis.[92] They all sit on the sandy floor, facing the direction of the teacher. The head of their alwaax (sing loox: wooden tablet), curved to a semicircle, rests on their laps, as they recite āyāt from it.

Each section of this dugsi is subdivided into two other subsections. The first one, all girls with one young boy, is for orphans who are sponsored and study for free. The other section is

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[88] Koraad is derived from the adjective kor, which means up, above, or outside. In this situation, however, it is used to denote the dugsi that is held outside of the hamlets.

[89] Hoosaad, on the other hand, is the opposite of koraad. Hoos means down, under, or to describe something closer to the speaker than the listener. It is used to describe the dugsi within the hamlets and therefore closer to the speaker.

[90] Bula is a Somali word that is more commonly used among Kenyan-Somalis. It refers to a village, settlement, estate, or district that is connected or part of a larger town or city. Thus, a town is constituted of various bulas.

[91] It is loose fitting piece of cloth that is worn by men wear in Somalia, Yemen and other countries. It is worn by tying it around the waste and making it into a tight knot.

[92] Gombis literally means to cover or cloak something. In this situation, gombis is simply the Somali word that for hijab.

occupied by self-paying students who pay a monthly fee of 700 KSH ($7). In total, the dugsi has four rooms that are separated by thin partitions of woven sticks. One can see through the partition, allowing the headteacher to see whether learning is taking place in all the classes. The orphans occupy two rooms while paying students take up the other two. The total population is 47 students, 25 of whom are girls are the remaining 22 are boys. The ages of the students vary, ranging from five to fourteen, and their level of the Qur'ān also differ markedly. Some are still learning the alphabet or are in the Allahu Akbar[93], while others are in Suratul Huud (Chapter 11). This dugsi and the others that I visited have retained many features of traditional dugsiyo, while new changes have also been introduced. One among the many new features of the dugsiyo is that boys and girls, who used to sit side by side and study together, are now separated and are often taught in different rooms.

In administrative terms, there is not any discernible complexity in the distribution of teaching responsibility among the macalimeen; instead, there is the age-old approach where the macalimeen are equal and share out work evenly without one supervising or overseeing the other. In fact, because of the relatively fewer number of students in this dugsi, there are only two macalimeen. They were trained the same way as both have been through dugsi where they memorized Qur'ān. They also conduct their lessons in the same fashion. The only distinction noticeable is in regard to their monthly remuneration. At the end of the month, the macalin who teaches the paying students earns KSH 18,000 ($180), while the other one gets KSH 12,000 ($120). When I inquired why there was a discrepancy in their pay, I was informed that the

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[93] Allah Akbar is a common Islamic refrain that means, Allah is great. However, among the Somalis, the phrase is used to describe the small chapters of the Qur'ān that the students must memorize before moving on to the more difficult or longer ones.

difference has arisen from the number of students that each one has in his class. As such, the teacher for the paying students earns more since he teaches more students than the other.

**Students, Enrollment, and Attendance**

Children are usually enrolled in the dugsi closest to their homes, as is the case with my neighborhood dugsi. Enrollment ages vary and can begin as early as three years old.[94] For some of the teachers and parents that I spoke to, including my brother whose children attend the same dugsi, there is no clear consensus on how the child is initially introduced to the dugsi. This is despite the literature's claim that parents, particularly the father, determines when or how the child enrolls in a dugsi. As was the case with my young niece, enrollment is arbitrary and can happen in any number of ways. Sometimes, it is motivated by an older sibling or a neighbor's child whom the younger one follows to dugsi without asking for permission. One of my brother's daughters was not taken to the dugsi by anyone. She simply tagged along her older sister and that way began her Qur'ānic education. However, initially these children do not participate in learning the Qur'ān but simply sit and observe other students.[95] Learning only happens when the child shows a degree of seriousness such as regular attendance or discipline. Others are purposefully taken to the dugsi by one of their parents. Either way, enrollment in this dugsi, like others elsewhere, is uncomplicated, simple, flexible and open; there are no placement tests, uniforms or other features characteristic of modern, public education.

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[94] Peter Easton and Mark and Peach, "The Practical Implications for Koranic Learning in West Africa," *document was prepared for the ABEL Project, Center for Human Capacity Development Bureau for Global Programs, Field Research and Support Contract: HNE-Q-00-94-00076-003 (1997),* 8.

[95] Leslie Moore, "Body, Text, and Talk in Maroua Fulbe Qur'anic Schooling," *Text & Talk-An Interdisciplinary Journal of Language, Discourse Communication Studies* 28, no. 5 (2008): 647-648.

Teaching revolves around the teacher: he dictates what is learned and how it is learned. However, the mixture of the different level students and their ages can oftentimes complicate learning and overwhelm the macalin. To make the teacher-student interaction of learning more orderly and productive, students are grouped into some sort of either full-time or part-time basis. However, such categorization is overly simplistic and do not properly portray what happens in the classroom. In fact, their classification is grounded on two broad categories that are directed by the student's end goal for learning the Qur'ān. This is the case both in urban and rural settings with different and sometimes overlapping terms used to described them. In rural areas, the two categories typically are: loox jiid[96] and ninkaax.[97] In urban centers, students are either loox jiid and taxfiid.[98] Loox jiid are students whose attendance is irregular and only show up when they can. Their absence is not the truancy we know in public education, but one that is understood and excused by both the dugsi and the community. Loox jiid are absent because they attend to family chores such as looking after their family's animals, watching the farm, taking care of younger siblings, or going to public school.[99] Ninkaax and taxfiid are the same, and they attend dugsi regularly since their singular objective is to memorize the Qur'ān and become xaafid (one who memorized the Qur'ān). In fact, the term ninkaax refers to the legal status that exists between a Muslim man and a woman who are married to one another, and in this case, points to the constant togetherness of the macalin and these students. A former ninkaax student and a current

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[96] Loox jiid literally means pulling the loox. But it is a metaphor for student that are not regular.

[97] Ninkaax or meher refer to the marriage bond that exists between a man and woman. Because of the constant presence of the student around the macalin, thus the term. Derivatives of the term referring to the student (often male) also exist such wuu ninkaaxsanyahay or he is married to the teacher.

[98] Taxfiid and ninkaax mean the same.

[99] Peter Easton and Mark and Peach, "The Practical Implications for Koranic Learning in West Africa," 9.

student at Imam University expressed this bond to me: “ninkaax students have to be in the dugsi twenty-four hours a day.”[100]

Categorizing students in this manner has important implications on attendance and instruction. While the ways in which such categorization affects instruction will be taken up later in this chapter, I want to highlight how scheduling takes place in the dugsi. The dugsi is open and operational from Saturday to Wednesday and closed on Thursdays and Fridays as these days are the Muslim weekend the world over.[101] Attendance depends on the types of students: loox jiid or ninkaax/taxfiid. Because of this, different times of attendance are drawn for each of the groups. Ninkaax/taxfiid students attend dugsi all five days of the week. Their day starts at 6:30 am when their lessons begin. At 9 am, they go back home for breakfast, and return at 10 am, staying until 11 when they go back home for lunch and duhr prayer. They come back at 2 pm and practice their lessons until casar prayer, returning at again at 3. They come back at 4:30 and stay until 5 PM.

The ninkaax/taxfiid students used to stay in the dugsi until 10 or 11 at night, but because of the insecurity that stems from the attacks from al-Shabab, the government has imposed a curfew on the town where students should be at home by 6 pm. This has affected the timetable at the dugsi. Thus, for certain periods, students are not allowed to stay in the dugsi beyond 6 pm, though the government seems to be easing on this. On the other hand, loox jiid students attend public school during weekdays and are not able to attend dugsi. Their attendance is restricted to the following three days: Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday and their scheduled time runs from

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[100] Interview with Daud, Riyadh, December 21, 2015.

[101] Wadad Kadi, "Education in Islam—Myths and Truths," *Comparative Education Review* 50, no. 3 (2006), 311-324.

4-6 PM. Such scheduling helps the macalin to devote himself and offer personalized instruction to the ninkaax/taxfiid students and beginners who have not yet started public school.

### Approaches to Memorizing the Qur'ān

Memorization of the Qur'ān is as old as the Qur'ān itself and underscores the enduring significance of this methodology of learning. Despite this, however, memorization has received ambiguous treatment in the literature. One the one hand, it is portrayed as an archaic rote learning strategy where students' critical and analytical skills are not harnessed at all, but only memorizing material whose meanings and implications they do not know.[102] On the other hand, memorization is characterized as a necessary and useful first step in the long journey of Islamic education. It is considered that an accurate memorization of the Qur'ān as well as its recitation lays the groundwork for further learning in Islamic sciences such as tafsīr, xadiith and fiqh later in life.[103] Memorization, therefore, is the first phase in a long and cumulative process that results in comprehension. As such, this initial memorizing of the Qur'ān would give the students the knowledge on which to build and expand to embark on a lifelong process of understanding and analysis.[104] Though there are similarities, there are also remarkable variations among Muslims on

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[102] Helen Boyle, "The Growth of Qur'anic Schooling and the Marginalization of Islamic Pedagogy: The Case of Morocco*," Annual Meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society* (Orlando, FL: 2000).

[103] Dale Eickelman, "Madrasas in Morocco: Their Vanishing Public Role," In *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education,* edited by Robert Hefner and Muhammad Zaman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 134.

[104] Helen Boyle, "Memorization and Learning in Islamic Schools," *Comparative Education Review* 50, no. 3 (2006), 488.

how the memorization of the Qur’ān happens.[105] This section focuses on how Somali children memorize the Qur’ān, highlighting the techniques that are deployed in memorizing the Qur’ān.

We ought to understand that Muslims are incredibly diverse, which implies that that there is no one learning strategy they all use but various, often conflicting, approaches.[106] Accordingly, two of these approaches are exhaustively analyzed in the literature. One of these is the corporeal knowledge where learners personify knowledge.[107] Illustrations of this are easily demonstrated in the cases where learners physically consume qad (the ink made from charcoal), or food items on which āyāt of the Qur’ān are inscribed. Though this bodily consumption of physical material are intrinsically linked to Qur’ān learning, symbolically or practically, the strategy that I am focused on is what happens in the Qur’ānic class: the actual learning activities, actions and interactions between the students and their teacher that lead to the memorization of the Qur’ān.

**The Letter, the Sound, and Writing**

In the long journey of learning to recite or even memorizing the Qur’ān, students begin with the Arabic letters.[108] The profound emphasis on which the alphabet is placed is appropriately expressed in the following Somali saying: Qur’ān alifka ka halaabay Baqarah kama hagaago.[109] The saying can loosely be translated into: a learning (of the Qur’ān) that has failed or

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[105] Leslie Moore, "Moving across Languages, Literacies, and Schooling Traditions," *Language Arts* 88, no. 4 (2011), 288.

[106] Leslie Moore, "Muslim Children's Other School," *Childhood Education* 88, no. 5 (2012), 299.

[107] Rudolph Ware III, *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa*,” (UNC Press Books, 2014), 8.

[108] Jarmo Houtsonen, “Traditional Qur’ānic Education in a Southern Moroccan Village,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies 26* no. 3 (1994), 491.

[109] Interviewees constantly reiterated the amount of time and effort that students and the macalin spend to ensure that they completely memorize the Qur’ān.

gone wrong in the alif (the first alphabet, but here it symbolizes the whole sum of the alphabet), will never succeed or go right in Baqarah (Surah 113, or the entire Qur'ān). The saying, therefore, underscores the critical role of the alphabets in Qur'ānic education and how much effort must go into learning them. Young children go through a rigorous regime of mastering Arabic letters and sounds before embarking on learning the Qur'ān. I was informed by a teacher that the reason for this rigor is twofold. The first one is obviously for students to learn the alphabet well. However, the bigger and longer-term objective is for students to learn enough tools to be independent in functioning in this journey quickly, including: writing, pronunciation, memorization of the Qur'ān, and ultimately a correct recitation of the Qur'ān.

Memorizing the alphabet takes months and comprises various steps. However, there are primarily eight steps that Somali children go through. Even though learning the alphabet, like other components of the Qur'ān, is flexible and students can take as much time as they reasonably need to learn one element before moving on to the next component, they also understand that there is an implicit timeframe in which they should finish each segment. As one interviewee informed me, learning the Qur'ān is a social process in which more than the macalin and the learner are in involved:

> If you linger too much in one segment of the alphabet or a surah, people, particularly the parents, siblings, or relatives will begin asking questions or worrying about the student's intellect. "What is wrong with him? Words like dameen (individuals with learning disabilities), or doqon (retarded) will start to be applied to the student. Because of this, there is a lot of competition between students, and a lot more pressure from the community.[110]

[110] Interview with macalin Osman, Garissa, September 9th, 2016. Osman was the junior teacher who taught the orphans at our local dugsi in Garissa.

The first step in learning the alphabet begins with those that have no shaqal[111] (pl. shaqalo, diacritic markings) though they will still retain dhibic[112] (pl. dhibicaan, dots). The alphabets commence with the first letter, /ا/ [ā] and end in the last one, which as per the dugsi curriculum, is the /ي/ [y]. In this first step, while students focus on all the characters, a strong emphasis is placed on those letters and sounds in which Somali and Arabic languages differ. Some of these include: /ز/, /ف/ and /غ/. Though diacritic marks are learned first, the process nonetheless assumes an integrated approach. Students learn to recognize the letters, their arrangement, and their accurate pronunciation. Still, students have not yet reached that stage where they can write for themselves. In each lesson or several lessons, the student learns how to enunciate two or three alphabet which they repeat after the macalin until they learn to pronounce them.

In step two, the macalin introduces the letters with shaqalo. The primary shaqalo in this step are: fatxa, kasra, and dhama which are placed on these letters. For instance, /ا/ will have the fatxa and will be pronounced as /ā/, and when it has kasra it sounds as /i/. When dhama is applied to this same letter, it sounds as /u/. Each alphabet will be pronounced in three different ways depending on where the diacritic mark is placed. Step three gets progressively more challenging as students are introduced to the tanween. In addition to the difficulty of recognizing and pronouncing the double markings, the complex, sentence-like constructions in which these sounds are placed present further difficulty. Also, this step involves two languages, Somali and Arabic, which makes it even more problematic. The table below demonstrates a construction for letter /ا/ [ā], which is replicated for all 28 letters, bringing it to a total of 84 such constructions.

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[111] Shaqal are diacritics markings like fatxa, kasra, dhama, sukun, and tanween that determine pronunciation.
[112] Dhibic is the dot or nuqaat in Arabic that certain Arabic sounds such as (ب) carry naturally and which cannot be separated from the letter.

| The Arabic alphabet | Somali Construction |
| --- | --- |
| اً | An alif laba kor dhaban |
| اٍ | Alif la hoos dhaban |
| اٌ | Alif laba godan |

In the next step, or step four, students master sukun. Here, the /ا/ [ā] is connected three times to each of the consonants, producing sounds shown in the table.

| The Arabic alphabet | Somali Construction |
| --- | --- |
| اَبْ | ab |
| اِبْ | ib |
| اُبْ | ub |

Sukun continues to step seven. Pronouncing the sukun, which is conducted entirely in Arabic as opposed to the tanween or the ones before that were learned in Somali or Somali and Arabic, enables students to understand the various ways in which certain common letters in the Qur'ān are connected with other letters. Students practice stopping at a consonant with an alif that is accompanied by either fatxa, kasra or a dhama and ending with a sukun. However, certain sounds are not possible this way as they would come out awkwardly. Thus, these three letters are given extra emphasis and each one constitutes a step of its own. The first one, which is step five, is /ل/ or /lam/. /ل/ is a very common letter in the Qur'ān and is therefore given a special consideration when teaching the alphabet. /ل/ is attached three times to all the other sounds so

that students can learn to pronounce it together with them. Examples include: /اَلْ/ /اِلْ/ /أُلْ بَلْ/ بِلْ/ بُلْ/ or /al/, /il/, /ul/, /bal/, /bil/, /bul/, and ending in /ي/. The second letter is /و/ or waw. When teaching /و/, it follows a different pattern from /ل/. /و/ is attached once to each of other letters using only fatxa and sukun. The reason is that it sounds awkward when /و/ is attached to a kasra, resulting in sounds such as /'iw/ or /biw/, which are not found in the Qur'ān. The final letter that is taught separately is /ي/, which behaves exactly like /و/ as it only takes fatxa and sukun. For example, if /ي/ is attached to a dhama, it sounds awkward. When students have mastered the steps, they learn xuruful madd,[113] a summation that helps learners apply all the rules of the previous steps and bring them together into one construction.

Now, students begin to memorize the Qur'ān. There are no special exams to determine successful memorization of alphabet though the teacher knows who memorized well and who did not. However, to signal the completion of the alphabet and the beginning of the Qur'ān, students must accomplish two things. The first one is to learn and memorize the following duco (pl. ducooyin, supplication): *"*Rabbi yasir waala tu casir cawnaka ya Rabbi ya Ilaahi ya Allahu," which is an invocation to Allah (Rabb) to make learning, memorizing, and recitation of the Qur'ān easy for learners. Also, until this point, the macalin has been writing lessons for them, but from this point on, they begin to learn to write for themselves through the new skill of higaad.[114] To set off this new skill, the macalin will hold the student by the hand and help him or her write

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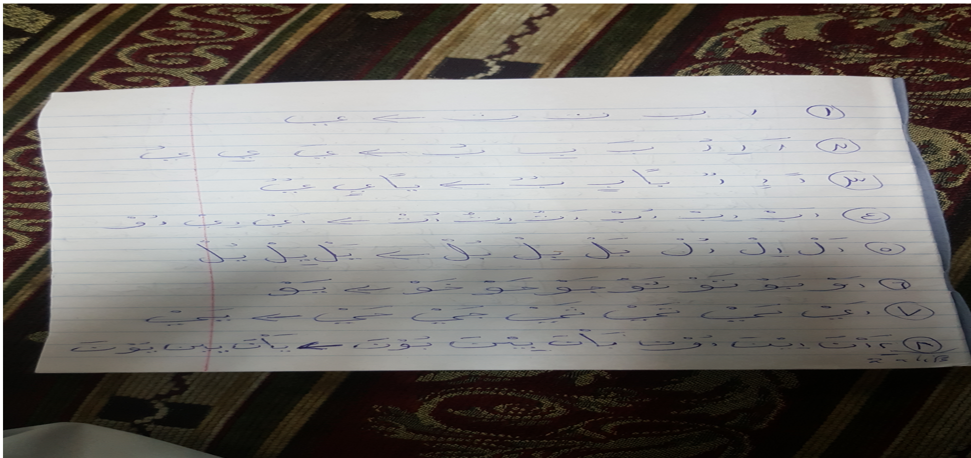
[113] Xuruful madd is the stringing together of /ا/, /ي/, and /و/ which are preceded by fatxa, kasra, and dhama in that order.

[114] Higaad can mean dictation or spelling. It is specifically for those students who have just finished the alphabet and are in the beginning stages of the small chapters where they are supposed to write for themselves. When the macalin tells them what to write, they sound out the components of the words: letters and diacritic markings.

the first two or three words of the duco above. Students try to write the remainder, while the macalin watches and helps them with spelling and writing. Higaad will continue to Suratu Duha (Chapter 93) from where students are expected to write for themselves without much help.

The image below shows all the steps



**Memorizing the Qur'ān**

Two learning activities that happen post-alphabet are kicin and commencing the memorization of the Qur'ān. Kicin is a crucial step where learners string letters together as they begin to learn to write a word and later a sentence. It is the same process that students in public education go through when learning to write in English. It helps learners recognize what letters go together and how to pronounce and write them. The two, though deeply overlapping, are also mutually exclusive. As in other places, loox jiid students memorize the shorter chapters for functional purposes such as prayer and supplication. Still, they might finish the entire Qur'ān without necessarily memorizing all of it, though they could recite it from the text. On the other hand, the entire objective of taxfiid/ninkaax students is focused on memorization. To the former, memorization is important, while for the later, it is critical. In the literature on dugsi, not much research has been done in the precise ways in which Qur'ān is memorized. Here, memorization

begins after the completion of the alphabet. The first surah that is memorized is al-Faatixa, which is followed by the other shorter chapters. Contrary to much of the research, cases exist where memorization was top-down, that is after al-Fatixa, students memorized longer suwar, Suratul Baqarah down to an-Naas.[115] Admittedly, it is extremely rare for this to happen. The main reason for beginning with the smaller chapters is not only because they are shorter and easier to commit to memory, but that parents and older siblings could also assist children as they are more likely to know shorter suwar than the longer ones. In this section, I reexamine how memorization is done in the dugsi. The process is not uniform for all dugsiyo or for students as it is determined by the type of student, personal efforts, and fahan.[116]

**A) Far Dambe**

Daily lessons are often insufficient for students to adequately memorize the Qur'ān; therefore, additional and compulsory practice lessons are put in place to make up for this deficiency. The first memorization practice, which is applied to all students regardless of their age or level at which they attained in the Qur'ān, is known as far dambe.[117] Students assemble in the dugsi around barqo[118] time when their morning lessons have been completed, and they have

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[115] Interview with Sacad, Riyadh, December 4th, 2016.

[116] Fahan is Somali for understanding or appreciating something. Originally Arabic, it has the same meaning in Somali. However, the part of speech that it assumes matters. It is spelled the same way, but listeners can easily discern the meaning from context. When it is a noun it means understanding (n), while as a verb it means to understand. Thus, as a verb it takes various inflections.

[117] The phrase literally means "the letter/writing that happens later." It is called since students practice writing and memorizing what they have already learned or wrote down.

[118] Barqo (the suffix dii is a definite marker, or 'the') is a term that describes the time of day that is roughly translatable to midmorning; that is, when students have finished their morning lesson, gone home and had their breakfast and then returned for the Far Dambe lesson.

had their breakfast. As in other areas, in far dambe practice, no new lessons are introduced; instead, students revise their most recent lessons as well as previously learned ones, which are rewritten and then memorized. This approach is unique, and even for dugsi, is relaxed, flexible, and to a small degree, involves a level of self-direction. The lesson is an interactive practice and is a confluence of self-teaching, peer review, and community engagement. Moreover, if the student feels comfortable enough to study alone, he or she may do so. Still, the teacher will be present to help. This was clear in our local dugsi. As I sat in a corner, I noticed that the macalin was walking around to ensure that students were focused on their lessons and writing, reciting or memorizing.  As he came to sit next to me on the floor, I asked him about far dambe and its usefulness:

> Far Dambe is as if the student is learning two lessons at the same time. Let's consider a student who is in Surah Yassin in the regular lessons. In these regular lessons, he or she will continue to study that surah (Surah Yassin).  However, there is an enormous risk that the student will forget all the āyāt that he has already completed and therefore fail to be a xaafid (memorize) or fail to make any headway in his Qur'ān education. To avoid this situation, the student will, in far dambe, go back to the beginning of the Qur'ān, Surah al-Faatixa, and begin relearning and rememorizing each surah he/she has studied, while still taking his regular lessons.[119]

In far dambe, students focus on two salient skills that are also clearly interwoven. The first one is writing. In dugsi, writing is not viewed simply a skill that students should learn to write down the Qur'ān, but a strategy to memorize it. Regardless of whether they have fully memorized a given surah or not, the students have had to rewrite it all over again. For that matter, writing is considered not only as a means to an end, but an end in itself. Having students write again what

[119] Interview with macalin Osman, Garissa, September 9th, 2016.

they had already written, learned, and likely memorized, they will have an intimate familiarity with the material. This repetitive process of writing and rewriting, therefore, makes it easier for them to recognize and internalize the material and acquire further engagement with it even without the text. In the writing lessons during far dambe, students will, as if it were a parallel dugsi, bring an additional set of alwaax to be used specifically for far dambe. After writing the lesson, students will recite it like they recite their own regular lessons. Another utility of far dambe is that though this repeated writing is considered important for all students, it is even more vital for the lower-level or beginning students. While advanced students can independently write and recite the material without much difficulty or even much help from the teacher, the lower-level students use far dambe to learn the writing skill itself. It is a remedial strategy which both the students and the macalin use to polish areas that were particularly difficult for the students or correct certain spelling or pronunciation of those constructions that students might not be familiar with.

**B) Subac: Chanting Together**

A second and a frequently used strategy for memorizing the Qur'ān is a study circle where students and the macalin loudly chant portions of the Qur'ān together. This strategy, as in the case with Muslim West Africa, is an oral practice that involves both the teacher as well as individual students.[120] The term that is used to describe this memorizing activity is the Somali

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[120] Ibrahima Diallo, "'Oh, Lord, Give [me] Knowledge That is Meaningful! 'Overview of Knowledge and Education in the Peul Fuuta Community through Qur'anic Education," *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning* 6, no. 2 (2011), 148.

word subac.[121] The term is ambiguous in regard to how it came to be applied to this memorizing strategy. However, the most plausible explanation is that it has its origins in Arabic though the Somalis have coopted it to mean the subdivision of the Qur'ān. Somalis subdivide the Qur'ān into seven different sections and use the days of the week to label each division as shown here: a) Jumca (Friday) starts from surah al-Fatixah to An-Nisa'; b) Sabti (Saturday) is from the middle of An-Nisa' to Surah al-Acraaf; c) Axad (Sunday) is from the middle of al-Acraaf to Ibrahim; d) Isniin (Monday) is from the middle of Ibrahim to Mu'minuun; e) Talaada (Tuesday) is from the middle of Mu'minuun to Sabba; f) Arbaco (Wednesday) is from the middle of Sabba to Xujarad; and, finally, g) Khamiis (Thursday) is from Xujarad to Surah al-Naas. The division of the Qur'ān in this manner is useful for various reasons. They guide the reader or reciter not only in learning to recite the Qur'ān in dugsi but also on occasional prayers such as taraweeh[122], tahajud[123] or even during Qur'ān saar.[124] It gives the student, sheikh, or the imam directions on where to start or stop. Though it is not possible to complete any of the segments above in one subac session, the segmentation, helps direct the chanting.

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[121] Sab'a means seven in Arabic. While all the days of the week in Somali are borrowed from Arabic, the numbers are not. In this instance, *sab'a* is a number not a day of the week and is therefore interesting why they did not use the Somali number for seven, which is toddobo, and instead use the Arabic one.

[122] Taraweeh is the long prayer that Muslims pray in the early part of the night during the holy month of Ramadan. It is an optional prayer that comes after the last obligatory prayer, 'isha.

[123] Tahajud is the late-night prayer during the holy month of Ramadan. It is also optional, and it is only conducted during the last ten nights of Ramadan.

[124] Qur'ān Saar is the recitation of Qur'ān on people for medicinal purpose. Before beginning to recite the Qur'ān on the person, the men will assign different portions of the Qur'ān to recite. This will largely depend on who knows how much of the Qur'ān.

Not all students participate in subac, but only the advanced-level ones. During subac sessions, lower-level students sit aside and practice their own regular lessons or are sent home. Subac is conducted each night after the completion of the regular lessons and continues for two or three hours, until 11 pm or sometimes even at midnight. It is held at night to allow for maximum attendance and less distraction. In addition, some parents attend not to participate in the subac but to watch as their children recite the Qur'ān from the heart. Subac is a rolling recitation where students and the macalin pick up from where they had left off the previous night. Sometimes the macalin can decide to start off from somewhere else, particularly areas that need more practice or revision. The students and the macalin sit around in a circle and without any special arrangement. Since there is no electricity, fire is lit at the center of the circle for warmth, to see one another, or simply to ward off mosquitoes. The length to recite is fixed and everyone knows where to begin and where to end. The āyāh can be long or short, depending on the surah. When it is one's turn to recite, others listen and prepare for their own turn. As one recites, he or she keeps a flat-level voice, often reciting in a high pitch for others to hear. He or she stops several times to take a breath or correct himself or herself. Toward the end, the reciter raises his or her voice, signaling to others that it is time to join in. In unison, they finish together, their intonation rising in fever pitch in the dead of night, and then falling drastically to what is called hoorin.[125] Then the next reciter picks up from where the previous one stopped. Preparation for subac is intense and takes a lot of practice. The evening before the subac, particularly until maqrib prayer when regular lessons begin, students embark on an intense practice for the subac.

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[125] Hoorin is a Somali word that means reciting together or in chorus. Its function is not only to conclude that section but signal turn-taking. It prepares the next reciter who begins immediately after *hoorin*.

One of these methods is called cashir bixis.[126] A few students in the same surah or suwar that are close to each other sit aside and recite the entire subac segment for that night, taking turns, listening and correcting one another. At the end of their practice, each will have covered the entire material. It is a thorough and daily practice.

Since the goal of this kind of oral practice is to implant the Qur'ān in the hearts and minds of the students,[127] they are not allowed to use any aid. The rules are communicated early in the afternoon, and they often include: cawimaad (help from others*)*, bootis (skipping when one cannot complete their section), or bixid (leaving or being sent away*)*. Still, it is the macalin's prerogative to decide which of these to apply, depending on the difficulty of the material. For instance, when a student fails to recite well or cannot remember a xaraf[128], an āyāh or any other part of a surah, the macalin might ask other students to help him or her the first time. This is called caawimaad or help. However, if the student fails to recite well two more times, he is skipped to the next student who recites what the previous one failed to recite, which is called bootis or skipping. In case he or she fails more than three or four times, the macalin dismisses the student, or bixid, and he or she goes home for the night. Being dismissed is a traumatic experience for all, particularly the students and their parents. Not only is the pressure immense as demonstrated through the attendance of the parents, but the public context of this failing is itself stressful. Moreover, the expectation is also high. A macalin would wonder how a student could

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[126] Cashir bixis comes from two words: Cashir meaning lesson and bixis to offer or give. Together, they mean recite to each in preparation for subac.

[127] Chouki El Hamel, "The Transmission of Islamic Knowledge in Moorish Society from the Rise of the Almoravids to the 19th Century," *Journal of religion in Africa* 29, no. 1 (1999): 70.

[128] Xaraf means letter. It is Somali but borrowed from Arabic.

fail to recite a surah accurately when it is supposed to be embodied and therefore is part of him or her at this point.[129]

### Instruction and Pedagogy

While the students and the macalin are actively engaged in the learning of the Qur'ān, all learning activities revolve around the macalin.[130] He or she works with individual students and collectively at the same time, constantly switching from one to another, ensuring that all are focused on their lesson either taking down the lesson or practicing it. He or she determines time, content, length of material, and when a student should move on to the next āyāh or surah.[131] What has traditionally made teaching and learning more productive is not simply categorizing students into ninkaax/taxfiid or loox jiid but adopting teaching and learning strategies that are meaningful and engaging to students. Dugsi activities revolve around a three-step pattern that proceed in this manner: modeling with modeling—imitation, rehearsal, and performance.[132] The pattern is not always rigidly or uniformly applied. Oftentimes, they are more relevant to lower-level students than the more advanced ones. While the latter only need the lessons to be "recited for them"[133] before practicing on their own, lower-level students need to go through all the steps. In this case, the macalin expends an inordinate amount of time writing the lesson for the lower-level students, drilling them, and having them practice. Moreover, these steps are often

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[129] Ware III, Rudolph, *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa*," 49.

[130] Helen Boyle, "Memorization and Learning in Islamic Schools," 482.

[131] Dale Eickelman, "The Art of Memory: Islamic Education and Its Social Reproduction," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20, no. 04 (1978), 493.

[132] Leslie Moore, "Body, Text, and Talk in Maroua Fulbe Qur'anic *Schooling*," 650.

[133] Somalis express the action of the macalin giving lessons to students as "reciting for".

interwoven into the numerous other activities that constitute a daily lesson. The following section, therefore, describes a dugsi lesson.

A typical day at the dugsi begins at markuu diiqu yeero.[134] Because of the region's state neglect, most dugsiyo do not have access to electricity. Instead, students light firewood that they collect from the nearby bushes on their weekends. When they arrive at the dugsi in the morning, they are cold, tired and sleepy; thus, the kabir[135] or some other student leads the shaafin.[136] Other students sing after him (it is almost always boys who lead the shaafin), helping them to wake up but also to expel or ward off the sheydhaan (sheitan).[137] After the shaafin to generally commence learning, each student scrambles for his or her loox and begin revising the previous day's lesson.[138] Depending on the fahan of the student or their level in the Qur'ān, it may take anywhere from half an hour to an hour. When the teacher determines that the students have had ample practice, the macalin shouts in Somali: "ka soo baxa."[139] A frenzy of activity follows this

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[134] This expression literally means "when the rooster crows," which refer to the early morning when students report to dugsi. This crowing of the rooster is therefore used as bell would be used in public schools. The time is, however, arbitrary since changes in seasons could mean that they report at different times.

[135] Kabir, loaned from Arabic, refers to the macalin's assistant. In the western setting, this would be a class leader, prefect or a monitor. However, there are significant differences. Kabir does not only oversee and report student behavior to the macalin but takes on other serious responsibilities. Because he/she is often the most advanced student, he can teach students and even discipline them.

[136] An opening prayer or du'a that is recited in the mornings and evenings to banish sheytan. Two students chosen by the macalin, ones whose voices are the loudest, sound out the shaafiin and others sing after them.

[137] Arabic/Somali for Satan.

[138] Spratt, Jennifer, and Daniel Wagner, "The Making of a Fqih: The Transformation of Traditional Islamic Teachers in Modern Times," (Harvard University Graduate School of Education: 1984). 7.

[139] Ka soo baxa (sing. ka soo bax) corresponds to Leslie Moore's performance stage. It is an assessment stage where the macalin listens as the student recites the lesson. Students line in front of the macalin and demonstrate to him that they memorized the lesson.

announcement where students line up in front of the macalin. Each one will recite to him as the teacher sits listening, correcting, flogging, or having them to sit back and practice some more. Ka soo bax serves as both a revision and as an introduction to the new lesson.

Recitation during ka soo bax is not a straightforward act, but a complex process particularly for the lower-level students. While advanced students recite their lessons from heart, lower-level students must prove knowledge of content on a deeper level. As I watched students during ka soo bax, some were shaking, almost collapsing. As they stand in front of the macalin, they turn their alwaax the other way around so that they are not able to see what is written on them, and therefore to recite their lessons from memory. In the recitation, students must include the tiny details that characterize each letter or word, beginning with the letter, and for each letter, they state the diacritic mark (shaqal) as well as its type (dhama, kasra or sukun). Finally, they clearly specify what part of the letter had the diacritic mark on it (at the bottom or at the top). Apart from the initial recitation, all the other explanations were conducted in Somali. These details are considered a crucial part of the lesson, and if students missed any of them, they would be punished and made to repeat all over again. After ka soo bax, some students will have successfully mastered the lesson while others will not. Those who memorized their portions prepare for the new lesson while those who did not, repeat the lesson all over again.

Preparation for the new lesson entails several steps, beginning with readying the loox. Students with one loox rinses it from the old lesson and dry it by leaning it against a tree or the walls of the dugsi. When it is too early in the morning or during the winter months, the loox does not dry quickly, so students hold it against the fire to dry it quickly. Meanwhile, those with two or more alwaax, rush home to prepare other materials: qad (ink) and qalin (reed pen). While each student makes his or her own qad and qalin, parents and older siblings help younger ones, so

they do not do it sluggishly, a punishable offense. Qad is made from ground charcoal that is mixed with milk or tea. Milk or tea are more popular as water produces diluted qad liquid sloppily runs off the surface of the loox. These materials are preferable because they do not stick to the loox but are also easily available and washable. More recently, students use electrolyte from used batteries. Qalin is made from twigs from the local trees, which is cut and peeled, making a sharp edge. When the loox has dried, students pluck green leaves known as shaar shaar from local shrubs and paint lines across the loox to resemble a notebook. This helps students to write on straight lines and better manage their alwaax as they write.

When students are ready for the new lesson, they gather around the macalin, surrounding him as he sits on a low chair, allowing him to keep an eye on all of them. The macalin begins with the alif students for whom he writes the lessons, followed by those in the shorter chapters, the slow learners, and then loox jiid. The ninkaax/taxfiid students are the last. Among the first three, the more attention a student needs, the closer he or she sits to the macalin. Before giving a lesson, the macalin routinely asks, "intee ku joojisay?" meaning, "where did you stop?" He can easily identify where they stopped, but it is a way of reviewing the previous lesson and ensuring that the students have mastered it. The student states the point at which they stopped and from there the next lesson begins.

**The Lesson**

Just like they did in ka soo bax, alif students and those in the shorter suwar who cannot write stand in a line, and hand over their alwaax, qad, and qalin to the macalin who writes down the lesson for them. The lesson ranges from a single letter to a few, or a short construction. The slow learners, loox jiid, and ninkaax/taxfiid write for themselves. The methods used to deliver lessons vary and depend on the various-level students. Strictly adhering to every step for lower-

level students is a must. Oral repetition and accurate reproduction are key for the students.[140] The macalin begins drilling them the moment he commences writing the lesson as the student watches keenly. The intention is for accurate recitation.[141] The macalin listens to the student's pronunciation to ascertain that they got it accurately and can reproduce it as well. The repetitions, adjustments of voice and pitch, and connecting of the oral to the written is intended to produce an accurate oral recitation. The goal is not to inculcate a wrong pronunciation which has the potential of altering the meaning of the verses. All the while, other students patiently wait in line for their turn to come around and to go through the same process. When satisfied that learner is adequately producing the sounds, the macalin instructs the student to sit a side and rehearse on his/her own as he calls and attends to the next student. As the material increases, pronunciation becomes more difficult.

Ninkaax/taxfiid students write lessons for themselves. Giving lessons to this group is an interactive exchange, almost a collaboration between themselves and the macalin. It is characterized by two major features. These advanced students do not stand in line but sit down on the floor. When it is their turn, they sit near the macalin, placing their own qad in front of themselves. Each one begins by reciting from memory where he or she stopped, an activity called yeeris[142] in Somali. The macalin listens and recites back the beginning of the new lesson

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[140] Gregory Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics, and Religious Transformation in Egypt*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 1998), 37.

[141] James Heyworth-Dunne, *An Introduction of Education in Modern Egypt* (London: Luzac & Co., 1939), 2.

[142] Yeeris happens is when a student recites the previous lesson for the macalin. The macalin recites back the new lesson from heart and the student rights down the lesson.

which a student starts writing down. This one is called meeris.[143] Yeeris and meeris continue until the student has written the entire lesson. At this moment, the macalin juggles his attention from the several students who are doing their yeeris. However, their interaction is limited to yeeris and meeris as these students need no assistance with spelling or pronunciation. Oftentimes, their lesson tends to be long, and they fill more than one loox, writing in small letters called shiilid.[144] When they finish, they sit amongst others to rehearse, reading it aloud like the others.

The lesson is completed, and the students are now sitting around each other on the floor, practicing their lessons, their voices blending into each other. The noise level during practice is high and the macalin encourages it since it is a demonstration of engagement with the material. As the vigor with which they recite continues to seesaw, the macalin shouts in Somali, "akhriya" or read, which is immediately followed by a loud burst of tiny voices that cut into the air. Students whose voices are falling are assumed to be disengaged from their lesson are called out. The macalin walks around with a stick in his hand, listening, correcting, and criticizing those that are distracted or reading in low voices. As they recite, students who have memorized their portion would turn over their loox, close their eyes or rock their bodies back and forth. The scene creates an interesting interplay between the written and the oral, leading to the formation of the virtuous subject who is not only learned but is also disciplined.[145] It also separates between those

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[143] The action of the macalin reciting back to the student after the latter did yeeris. In other words, it is a dictation.

[144] Advanced students write in small and fine letters that only they can read to fit as much material as possible in the loox

[145] A'ishah Sabki, and Glenn Hardaker, "The Madrasah Concept of Islamic Pedagogy," *Educational Review* 65, no. 3 (2013), 346.

who are struggling and those who are comfortable with their material, allowing the macalin the opportunity to devote himself to those who need help. Sometimes, to ensure all who need help get it, the macalin instructs the kabir and other advanced students to assist the lower-level ones.

Punishment has always been part of the learning process in dugsi. No one questions the various forms of punishments that prevails in the dugsi; instead, they are sanctioned by the community. The well-known adage goes: cilmiga usha caaradeeduu ku jiraa.[146] Children can be punished for several reasons spanning from academic underperformance to behavioral issues, including coming late to dugsi, not memorizing their portion of the lesson, fighting or bullying other children, being disrespectful to the macalin, or even dozing off during lessons. The teacher has a wide array of punishment styles that he can choose at his own will, including hitting them on their bodies. Before punishments are carried out, the teacher blindfolds the students to protect sensitive parts of their bodies such as the eyes. Otherwise, all other parts of the body are a buffet for his punishment.

**Conclusion**

As is the case in much of the literature, dugsi is the starting point for all religious practitioners whether traditional culama, Sufi leadership, reformists, or Salafis. While many of Qur'ānic schools are devoted to issues of curriculum and pedagogy: what is learned and how it is done, much more happens in this crucial institution. Dugsiyo are crucial sites where students are exposed to salient religious and cultural material. The memorization of the Qur'ān and its various other elements, such as tajweed, form the bulk of what happens in the dugsi. From past to present, the dugsi is an important site of ethical and moral training and education - serving a

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[146] Literally: knowledge is in the tip of the stick

collective motivation for learners and their families to be better Muslims and more informed members of the community. Oftentimes, it is the only institution in any given locality, and has served as the quintessential educational institution. As such, it has created its own ways of scholarship, where education is availed, discipline is instituted, and the continuity of this culture is enabled for generations.

## CHAPTER THREE

## At the Feet of the Master: Traditional Islamic Higher Education among Somalis

Dugsi has always been in a flux, marked by constant instability that often resulted in oscillating "enrollment"[147] levels. This largely owed to the Somali social and economic lifestyle of itinerancy that led to the teacher moving in one direction, and some of the students in another, splitting up or shutting down of a dugsi. What made these fluctuating enrollment levels even more pertinent and urgent was how it prevented the continued training of culama to serve as religious practitioners in local communities. As elsewhere in Africa, many of the students stopped their education after dugsi,[148] meaning that a few committed students proceeded on to higher education. Despite these factors, higher Islamic education among Somalis has always been a robust and active process defined by production of knowledge, reception, and application within the community. When dugsi graduates went for higher education, they embarked on a challenging and rigorous journey of learning one or more of the culum (sing. cilmi, knowledge)[149] that were available in the Somali-speaking areas. This education was characterized by extreme levels of personal sacrifice, dedication, and commitment. While considering the previous experience at the dugsiyo, this chapter explores the various aspects of traditional higher Islamic education from a Somali perspective.

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[147] The word "enrollment" or "enrolled" has been used very loosely in this context. As was illustrated in chapter three on dugsi, there is/was no formal organized method in which admission into dugsi and xer was sought or xer which involved admission as understood in a western sense. Instead, it was a simple process and was conducted through a word of mouth between a parent and the teacher.

[148] Roman Loimeier. "*Muslim Societies in Africa, A Historical Anthropology,"* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 104.

[149] Written as 'ilm in the literature, the same word is also used in Somali. However, it doesn't occur in plural.

## Somali Islamic Higher Education: A Brief Background

After finishing dugsi, daalib ul cilmi[150] or more popularly xer used two different routes to pursue their higher education: “local”[151] or “foreign”.[152] However, most Somalis I interviewed had received their higher education locally. That is not to say that the Muslim-majority areas of the Middle East and North Africa did not attract Somali students or generally influence the region regarding Islamic education. Indeed, knowledge came from the Middle East to Muslims across the world, including the Horn of Africa. However, it must be understood as a mutual exchange rather than a one-way flow. One specific example of mutual of Africans who influenced higher learning in the Middle East were notable West African scholars who had established themselves, particularly in the Xaramayn (Makkah and Madina).[153] On the other hand, many African scholars particularly in the Horn were educated in the Middle East and North Africa and returned to their home countries. For Somalis, this phenomenon goes back centuries, as students have been undertaking long journeys to the Middle East for knowledge,

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[150] Though this phrase was not constantly used by former *xer* that I interviewed, it featured a few times. The more common one was its Somali equivalent, xer.

[151] The word local has been ambiguous in its use throughout my research. On the one hand, it was used to refer to someone’s home, village or region, as opposed to foreign ones which could mean non-Somali speaking areas. The yardstick for such a measurement, therefore, was the presence of Somalis, despite the latter’s own internal differentiation.

[152] Here, I use the term “foreign” loosely. Xer education stretches back to a time when nations or the current conception of them set off by boarders that separate them either did not exist or were not understood in the sense in which they are currently understood. Moreover, some of the destinations such as Yemen or Egypt formed part of the Ottoman Empire and therefore were part of a single “Ummah”, at least in the imagination of some of my interviewees. While foreign was used to refer non-Somali speaking areas, cities such as Harar, which is clearly non-Somali area despite the presence of Somalis and its proximity to the Ogaadeen was somewhat considered local.

[153] Ahmed Chanfi, *West African Ulama and Salafism in Mecca and Medina* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

beginning from the Mamluk period.[154] Such journeys were motivated by the belief that the Middle East was considered as the more purer center of Islamic knowledge tranmission, especially in the Xaramayn, as well as in the wider region.[155] What amplified the salience of the two holy mosques was not only for education, but also to perform xajj and cumrah in which case many remained behind for education.[156] In addition, while the Xaramayn was popular for obvious reasons, Azhar University in Cairo and Zabid University in Yemen[157] were crucial both for their proximity to the Horn and their Shaafici and Ashcari traditions.[158] Accordingly, Azhar University was reported to have housed so many Somali students that they were allocated their own special Ruwaaq (halls of residence), known as "Ruwaq al-Jabarti," or "Rubat Az-Zaylaci."[159]

**Xer: What is it?**

Like dugsi, Somalis speak of higher Islamic education using Somali terms. The term that describes traditional higher Islamic education is xer. However, xer lacks a clear contemporary use or relevance. Whereas dugsi has successfully been transposed into the Somali modern education systems and is actively deployed as a reference to both secular and Qur'ānic schools,

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[154] For more on this, refer to Stefan Reichmuth, "Islamic Education and Scholarship in Sub-Saharan Africa," in *The History of Islam in Africa*," 428.

[155] Francis Bradley, "Islamic Reform, the Family, and Knowledge Networks Linking Mecca to Southeast Asia in the Nineteenth Century," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 71, issue 1 (2014), 89.

[156] Interview with Shariff C. in Eagan on August 24th, 2015.

[157] Christine A. Choi, "God, Anti-Colonialism and Drums: Sheikh Uways and the Uwaysiyya," *Ufahamu: a Journal of African Studies* 17, 2 (1989), 97.

[158] Interview with Shariff C. in Eagan on August 24th, 2015.

[159] Alawi Ali Adam, "A Critical Analysis of Al-Zaylaci's Prose Works" (PhD diss, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, 2001), 80.

xer seems to have remained a historical term. Though aspects of xer, such as xalaqat, are still in practice, much of what defined this enterprise has become largely obsolete alongside the system of education that it represented. Therefore, while dugsi is used for western-style lower-level education such as elementary and high schools as well as Qur'ān schools, xer was a place-specific allusion to an education system that took place at a particular time. Nonetheless, the erosion of this system of education does not mean that has completely disappeared. Current Somali culama, even those who have obtained their degrees from modern Middle Eastern universities such as IUM or Imam have obtained some of their earlier education at xer, pointing to its enduring relevance.

Xer is an eclectic concept that signifies various interrelated components of Somali traditional Islamic higher education. By default, xer represents the entire enterprise of traditional higher education, which includes the student and the physical location of learning, making the term too general and oftentimes too ambiguous to pin a specific meaning on it especially for non-Somali speakers. In this chapter, the term will be used to represent both the whole enterprise of traditional higher Islamic education and to refer specifically to students. Since no research has been done on this subject, the definition I give here and the general description of this system that educated Somali culama for centuries is based on interviews.[160] In addition, these definitions are invaluable in explaining both xer education and experiences as well as how it differed from higher Islamic education elsewhere. One of the first definitions I was given was by a former xer who defined it in the following terms: "the word xer was derived from the word xor, a Somali

[160] In this context, for example, the word xer refers to students.

word, which was in turn extracted from Arabic, meaning independence or freedom."[161] The freedom it denoted meant extricating oneself from the negative forces of this world as well as in the one beyond, including: ignorance, the seduction of worldly possessions, or even hellfire. As if echoing the abovementioned definition, another former xer defined it this way: "xer is one who gives up everything, mainly worldly things, objects, comforts and the pursuit of activities that bring about these things; instead, he devotes his life to studying cilmi."[162] Departing from these definitions is another one which simply stated that xer came from xero, a Somali word for pens where animals are kept at night, particularly the circular-shaped ones.[163] Here an association of the word is made to the ways in which xer sat during lessons. When taking lessons, they sat around in circle, resembling the kraal in which animals are kept at night, tying it to Somali cultural life.

Based on its diverse physical locations, xer was divided into two main categories: xer guri and xer gamaas. As a language spoken in a wide area and with various dialects, these words will specifically apply to Somalis in Kenya and Southern Somalia. Xer guri literally meant the xer of the guri (house) or more directly the xer that took place at the student's home. In more general terms, xer guri referred to local xer which took place in the xer's locale or environment. Xer guri commenced toward the end of dugsi or immediately after one completed memorizing the entire Qur'ān. Since no certificates were issued upon finishing dugsi, graduates knew what they had to know at this point: complete mastery of the Qur'ān. However, as they drew towards completing this phase of their education, those who wanted to continue with their education began their

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[161] Interview with Sheikh Ahmed Taajir, Minneapolis, July 19th, 2017.

[162] Interview with Sheikh C. R.H., Minneapolis, July 15th, 2017.

[163] Interview with Prof. S., Minneapolis, July 16th, 2017.

initial advanced learning in their homes, villages or settlements. At this level, this would be the first foray for most of these students into studying anything other than the Qur'ān. Hence, it was new knowledge, and it was introduced through simple texts. Their sheikhyaal were unlikely to be well-known scholars, but local culama who were familiar with the basic texts of cilmi. One former xer personalized how this process unfolded for him: "After I memorized Qur'ān al-Kareem, my xer began right at our house. My father started me on the beginning texts of axkaam, while my uncle, my father's brother, taught me naxw. I studied both at the same time. My uncle continued onto more advanced texts of morphology. After I had finished the beginning level texts, my uncle asked me if it was enough. At this point, I knew I had to move on and seek more knowledge."[164]

The goal of xer guri was often to prepare students for more learning; thus, they could not get recognition for it as the teachers were family members who had no authority to confer ijaza but the knowledge. What is instructive, however, is that this post-dugsi xer guri student was not required to go through the hardship of travel and living in a life of scarcity, suffering and itinerancy that characterized xer gamaas education. Subsequently, xer guri does not necessarily articulate the complexities for which xer education is renowned. Just like this student, all former successful xer that I interviewed started off at xer guri before proceeding to the next one, meaning that while a student could gain all of their xer knowledge away from their homes, it was almost unlikely that they could do so at home. Thus, what makes xer gamaas, the next xer, more significant and consequential, was not only that it was the site of more advanced knowledge and training, which indeed it was, but also a stage of learning which came at a personal cost.

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[164] Interview with Shariff C., Eagan, August 21$^{st}$, 2017.

**Xer Gamaas: Travel and Suffering in Search of Knowledge**

Higher Islamic education among Somalis, as Islamic higher education elsewhere, is cumulative, commencing with dugsi, and then xer guri. While higher education did not necessarily end anywhere, much of it took place in xer gamaas. In seeking higher education, the movements of knowledge seekers were circular, uncertain and often unstable. One former xer employed the following Somali metaphor to describe this movement: "Xerta xad ma leh."[165] The metaphor points to the fact that xer crisscrossed all the pre-independence Somali-speaking areas. They moved back and forth, depending on what sort of knowledge they were interested in, where and with whom they wished to study. However, a more profound twist to this statement was the explicit appreciation that xer was synonymous with the search for Islamic knowledge: this is universally manifested among Muslims in the Prophetic tradition of traveling to as far as China to seek education.[166]

However, what is implicit in this statement also is not only how transnational or transregional the pursuit of knowledge in Islamic history has been,[167] but the unique experiences unconnected to learning and knowledge *per se* that the students often encountered in the process of their travels. Before traveling to these distant centers of learning, students contacted a deep network of current xer students or graduates for advice and counsel. Information on where potential students sought for higher studies was available in several ways. Since there were not

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[165] In its denotative meaning, the metaphor means: "The xer have no barriers, borders or walls, or any physical or nonphysical boundaries that stopped them while pursuing their education."

[166]Lansine Kaba, "The Politics of Qur'ānic Education among Muslim Traders in the Western Sudan: The Subbanu Experience, "411.

[167]John Bowen, "Intellectual Pilgrimages and Local Norms in Fashioning Indonesian Islam, *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Mediterranee,* 123 (2011), 38.

written accounts of how this information was shared, much of it was passed on through word of mouth: students passed to each other relevant information regarding centers of learning, their location, the sheikhyaal, their specialization, and ways to survive during the long period of absence from home. Based on this information, potential students would determine where to go and what to study. As we will see shortly, the sheikhyaal were also crucial sources of information for students who finished studying one of the texts they taught, recommending students they graduate to other sheikhyaal with whom they could study. The experiences of xer and their travels have changed dramatically over the years as reflected in the following two accounts. To put these experiences into perspective, I begin with an account of 1980s Kenyan-Somali xer.

> When I completed my xer guri in the local mosques of Garissa town, I started looking around for information on where to continue with my cilmi deen (religious knowledge). However, there were not local places from where I could get an advanced education. All the major culama around the town had acquired their own education from elsewhere. Therefore, I traveled to Xamar (Mogadishu). I traveled by large trucks throughout the rixla. From Garissa, I stopped briefly in Kismayo where I spent a night. When I arrived in Xamar, a relative of mine who was a sheikh received me, and I stayed with him for six months. However, I moved in with two teachers for the remainder of my time in Xamar. After two years, some other xer and I decided to leave for Qoqaani. While we did not finish the kutub that we came to study, life grew more difficult, and we had to move. Qoqaani is a small village that is nestled in the Kenyan and Somali border. A new xer that had just been opened there by a new sheikh from the Ogaadeen was attracting students from all over the place. I studied with this sheikh and when I finished the kutub that he was teaching, I left for Afmadow, another small town 45 minutes away. We were too many and our ustadh Sheikh Maxamed Amin asked the new one Sheikh Khalif Aw Xussein in Afmadow to take in some of us. So, our Sheikh in Qoqaani sent all of us who had finished his kutub to Sheikh Aw Xussein. I finished

naxw with him, and then I went back to Garissa.[168]

The journey described above demonstrates a contemporary experience, particularly occurring in the post-independence period. Like xer guri, contemporary xer does not come close to offering a true feel of what real xer looks, feels or sounds like. As shown in the quote, travel happened using modern forms of transportation, while the xer found relatives to stay with in the course of his travels. However, in pre-colonial period as well as during colonialism, xer was described through the medium of physical and mental pain and suffering: the journeys were long, and the xer life was tough, unforgiving and very challenging.[169] The journey began in the student's own home village or hamlet and ended in distant places that he knew very little or sometimes absolutely nothing about. Success in this journey was measured in terms of whether the student found and was satisfied with the education he sought. Suffering was not taken as a hurdle, but as a true sign of investment and a challenge to overcome. For most, if they were comfortable with the education they were getting, suffering was considered inconsequential. However, if they were not satisfied with the education, the rixla continued.

In this section, I will recount the experiences of one xer who epitomizes this kind of xer. Like many xer, he completed his xer guri in his home village in Ogaadeen before proceeding to Southern Somalia. His travels to Southern Somalia are emblematic of the circular nature of this enterprise: as he traveled through Southern Somalia searching for xer, he said other xer would be heading in the opposite direction. The journey took him from place to place, trying and gauging

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[168] Interview with Sheikh Cabdiwahab, St. Paul, MN, July 27th, 2017.

[169] I took this citation from this website: https://ashaacira.wordpress.com/2009/02/23/taariikhda-somaliya-iyo-ahlusunna-wal-jamaaca/

different xer. He ended up in Xamar, and then shortly after continued to the lower Shabelle[170] village of Bariire. Bariire was close to Marereey, the site of the largest sugar manufacturing plant in postcolonial Somalia. While in Xamar, he tried to join one of the xer, but the books being taught there were too advanced and difficult for him. Therefore, he prayed to Allah to help him find xer which was commensurate with his level of education. In one of the nights, he had a vision; the Prophet came to him in a dream and commanded him and a friend of his to go to a sheikh in the village of Bariire. He was told that as he traveled, he would come upon two mosques. The first one would not be the mosque in which the xer would be located. The sign for this would be that he would see a man easing himself in the nearby bushes of the mosque. He should continue with his journey until he found the next mosque.

Sure enough, the dream turned out to be true. When they men arrived in Bariire, they came upon the wrong mosque, which they easily figured out using the symbol from the dream. He informed his friend about it, and they proceeded to find the right one. Upon meeting the sheikh that they had come to study with, they were shocked to find that the sheikh and they did not speak a common language, and therefore could not understand and communicate with each other well, perhaps an indication of how tough life and learning would become. The sheikh spoke no Somali but af Maay, a language some say is a variant dialect of Somali and is not easily intelligible to Somali speakers. The sheikh had to find someone to translate between them. When they explained themselves, he declined to take them on as students, basing his rejection on the raging droughts and the fact that he could not support them with the meagre resources available

[170] A region in Southern Somalia named after the river Shabelle which flows through it

to him. However, the actual reason he declined them was not necessarily because of the poverty in the area as the interviewee put it:

> In addition to the drought and hunger in the region at the time, the sheikh also informed us that there were a lot of sixir (sorcery) in the area, and he feared that we would be harmed. But we were stubborn, and we said to him that Allah will protect us.[171]

When a xer arrived in a place, he found for himself or was assigned to jil/tacaluq/korsaar,[172] mostly by the sheikh leading the xer. Other times, though less common, a xer would become a qarafaysi; one who would sleep in the mosque or mowlac (makeshift mosques) and who would walk around in the community and beg for food, chanting libaan akhwaan (help me brothers!) during mealtimes with a bowl in his hand. The men only resorted to qarafaysi when they could not find a jil/tacaluq. This emerged not only from droughts and other situations of scarcity, but often too many xer, sometimes over 200 of them showing up in a village with only 50 or less slots available. To make up for this shortfall, some families would shoulder the extra burden to care for these xer: they would make tea and cook cambuulo (maize boiled in water) on certain days, particularly on Monday and Wednesday nights and invite the xer to come to their homes and share a meal. However, the food was infrequently free as they were asked to offer services such as singing salligii nabiga (prayer for the Prophet) for the family hosting them. For many of these men, these would be the only meal they would have for the entire week. In xer, the meal of choice was cambuulo, as it was grown locally and therefore readily available. As one old man

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[171] Interview with M., Minneapolis, July 22nd, 2017.

[172] All these three words refer to those people who host the *xer*. Hosting for xer was strictly restricted to giving them food a couple or few times a week. However, it did not mean providing the xer a place to sleep. Two of the terms are Somali, jil/korsaar, while the other, tacaluq, is Arabic.

explained to me, when cambuulo was cooked with a lot of oil, particularly ghee, the mixture helped dampen hunger and make one feel full for a longer period.

The two insisted on being the sheikh's xer and the sheikh finally gave in, telling them to wait for a word from him as he sought for families that could take them as jil/tacaluq. A little while later, he informed them that he had found host families for them. My interviewee's friend was paired up with cad cad[173] family, and my interviewee was taken to a jareer[174] family, pointing to the diversity of the village and the larger Shabeele region of southern Somalia. However, the two families were struggling and did not have much to offer the two men. Still, though, my interviewee was luckier than his partner in regard to eating arrangements. My interviewee was offered two meals a day: qurac (breakfast) and casho (supper). However, these two meals were not consistent or always available. His friend, on the other hand, was told to come every other morning for a breakfast. It meant that while my interviewee could have his meagre meals, if any, his friend could only have breakfast every other morning. The only days that they could eat well were those they were invited to Qur'ān recitations. The experiences in this xer, per this interviewee, were extremely challenging:

> There was never enough food in either of our host's homes, and we were always hungry. What meal was given to me was a small portion of cambuulo and black tea. It was not enough, so in most days, I would fast in order not to think about food at all. I fasted for hundreds of days and in the evening, I would often not have something to break the fast with.

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[173] It is an adjective that literally translates into white-white. However, these refers to the light-skinned people found in the Somali coastal cities and who epitomize centuries of trade and migration along the Somali coast. They are predominantly found in the main cities of Mogadishu, Marka and Kismayu, as well as smaller villages. They do not belong to the bigger clan-families and therefore are classified using their skin color.

[174] These groups have Bantu features. Jareer is a pejorative term that literally means coarse hair, some treat this description as derogatory.

> Because of the hunger, I contracted stomach ulcers, and I got very ill. There were no hospitals, so a man said he could treat me. He ground sesame seeds and extracted oil from it. He told me to drink it and instructed me not to eat anything after consuming the concoction. In the evening, he gave me black tea and then the sesame oil. I passed out soft stool and vomited blood. Fortunately, I got gradually better.[175]

A little while later, the situation eased, and the suffering reduced as the rainy season began bringing in more food. However, the suffering did not end there. He continued to sleep on a mat in the mosque, and his clothes were infested with lice since they did not have money to buy detergents. In addition, his loneliness was compounded by the departure of his friend. Even though they were 78 in the xer, 60 locals and 18 nonlocals, he felt lonely. Only he and his friend came from the same region and could relate to each other and find common things to talk about. But the friend decided to drop out of the xer. As the sheikh had cautioned them when they had first arrived, the Bariire area had two types of "education", which were sixir and xer. While my interviewee studied cilmul deen, his friend decided to pursue sixir, in which he became a well-known practitioner until recently when he died. However, my interviewee stayed on and studied in the xer until he moved on to other areas for more learning.

**Sites of Higher Learning: Spaces, Individuals and Scheduling**

Centers of higher learning, both small and big, dotted the expansive region that Somalis inhabit. A xer traveled for hundreds of miles to find an appropriate xer. As we saw in the preceding examples, these journeys were not linear or predictable, but often circular and arbitrary. Certain centers were more famous than others, resulting in more of the students

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[175] Interview with M., Minneapolis, July 22nd, 2017.

flocking into them. While students sought knowledge wherever they thought they could find, two regions featured prominently as centers of higher learning: the Ogaadeen region and the South-Central region of Somalia. The former was popular for Arabic linguistic sciences, while the later was well-known for axkaam or Fiqh Shaafici. Still, each of these centers taught these areas of knowledge as well as others. Students came from all over Somali-speaking areas to these regions to study one or the other or both. Some xer were so popular that some students never went back to their homes; instead, they devoted themselves to a lifetime of learning and community. My own relative left Garissa for the Ogaadeen region almost four decades ago. In all this time, he came back a few times for a brief period such as the passing of his father.

In the Ogaadeen region, there were both larger towns and smaller villages in which xer were located. Larger towns included: Jigjiga, Dhegex Maddow, Dhegex Buur, Dir Dhaba, while smaller ones included, Haar Wayn, Balbalayti, and Garbo. Some of these centers were well-known as they were established centers with a long tradition of scholarship. They were also identified with past or present scholars who had either studied or had taught in them, robustly enhancing their image, prestige, and therefore as a popular destination for many a xer. These luminaries were not only religious scholars, but at times even political leaders. In my interviews with culama who had studied in these xer, they made this point abundantly clear. An example was the city of Harar, an important religious center,[176] which was not particularly located in the Ogaadeen but is linked to it through Islam and other cultural ties. Here the legendary Sheikh Ali Sufi, who was from the Ogaadeen region and whose sons are now prominent sheikhyaal in Qatar, had established his own xer in this town, making it a widely sought-after destination for

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[176] Stefan Reichmuth, "Islamic Education and Scholarship in Sub-Saharan Africa," 429.

many. In Jigjiga, Sheikh Cumar Azhari who trained many students including some of my own interviewees taught at the xer, attracting students from as far as Somalia, Kenya, and Djibouti. Dhegex Maddow was also the seat where Sheikh Cabdiqadir had taught. More consequentially, perhaps, is Haar Wayn, a small village sandwiched between Goday and Qalaafe in the southern tip of the Ogaadeen. After getting his initial education at Haar Wayn, Maxamed Cabdulle Xassan proceeded to Makkah for further education.

Centers of higher learning in southern Somalia were similar to that of the Ogaadeen region in many ways. Prominent centers of scholarship in this region included: Mogadishu, Marka, Baraawe, Beled Wayn, and Baar Dheere.[177] Like the Ogaadeen, hundreds of xer would be studying in each location at any given time. Baar Dheere, for instance, featured as a pivotal center of education where many fuquhaa (sing. faqiih, jurist) were trained and sent out to teach or serve as judges in various parts of the Somali-speaking areas. The sheikh who had pioneered this tradition of training and dispatching culama from Baar Dheere was Sheikh Abdullahi Yare. Sheikh Abdullahi Yare is credited with this tradition, as well as the establishment of several new xer across the region. After he died, I was informed that no man surpassing him in knowledge emerged until Sheikh Cabdirahman Irdo, who was recently killed by al-Itixaad.[178] Another luminary in this region was Sheikh Muxiyadin Macalin Mukaram who was based in Mogadishu. In his long and illustrious career as a fiqh scholar, he trained and sent out many of his students some of whom included: Sheikh Aadan Cawlyahan who was posted to Qalaafe in the Ogaadeen, Sheikh Ali Samatar was sent to Hobyo and Gaalkacayo in the Northeastern region of Somalia,

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[177] Interview with Shariff C., Eagan, August 13th, 2014.

[178] Interview with Sheikh Bajuri, Minneapolis, August 7th, 2017.

the present state of Puntland; Sheikh Maxamed Faarax Guleed was dispatched to Balad Wayn, while Abdullahi Feera Yare stayed back in Xamar.

The physical spaces where xer lessons were conducted were either permanent structures as would be found in big cities or simpler ones in small villages. However, there was a third category. It is worth noting that Somalis were (and many continue to be) transient nomads. Therefore, the sheikhyaal who did not live and teach in established centers were highly mobile and found themselves in different places. The implication was that they either had a band of itinerant students who moved around with them, or they would start off new xer whenever they settled in a new place. While larger cities had permanent structures that were more or less similar to a modern learning environment, they still shared certain features with the mobile xer. Overall, while the guiding principle was how best knowledge could be transmitted to students, which, like dugsi, could be anywhere, the shape, size and the type of physical setting dictated actual learning. Physical spaces were therefore divided into two. Large towns and cities had somewhat different spaces of learning and living areas for students compared to villages.

In larger cities, mosques were permanent structures in which learning took place. Though the permanence of these buildings enabled a more structured learning and interaction between the sheikh and his students, it was also complicated by the fact that there were usually more students in attendance than the mosque could handle. Unlike their counterparts in the Middle East and other Muslim-majority contexts, mosques in this region would only have one sheikh teaching at any given time.[179] The xer, were, however, not restricted to taking classes in that singular mosque alone. Instead, they could take lessons from many sheikhyaal and mosques around the

[179] Interview with Sheikh Ahmed Taajir, Minneapolis, July 19th, 2017.

city and therefore study several texts simultaneously. The sheikh did not mind it as there were no registration neither could the sheikh know who or how many xer would be in attendance. This openness made it possible for more than planned-for attendance, though it took away the likelihood of personalized instruction as was the case in villages.

Though conducted in permanent structures, the style in which the students sat at xer was relatively flexible. There were two ways in which both the sheikh and the students sat during lessons. In both, the xer sat in front of the sheikh and formed a semi-circle that flanked the sheikh on both sides. In the first instance, the sheikh would sit at the mimbar,[180] a symbol of the authority of the sheikh not only as a teacher but also a religious leader and an imam. This style mostly took place after the obligatory prayers were performed. Though lessons depended on various factors, the most common times that he sat at the mimbar were after fajr (dawn prayer) and casr (afternoon prayer). At these times, the sheikh sat with his back to the qibla, while the xer faced the qibla. Other times, however, the sheikh would sit at the back of the mosque with his face toward the qibla. Factors influencing sitting styles included the availability of sufficient light, number of students, as well as the direction of the wind. For example, if there was no microphone in the mosque in bigger cities, the sheikh would sit at the back of the mosque, facing the qibla to enable the wind to carry his voice to students sitting at the furthest end of the mosque.[181] In villages, sitting style was not necessarily an issue not only because there were far fewer students, but they sat in the open either under a makeshift structure, the shade of a tree, or in the sheikh's own house.

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[180] The pulpit in the mosque where the imam stands when delivering sermons

[181] The direction toward Kaaba (the sacred building at Mecca), where Muslims face during prayer.

Preparations for lessons were similar in all situations and involved similar motions, though they were logically more regimented in the mosque than in the villages. In both situations, some of the xer would either volunteer or be chosen by the sheikh to serve as the sheikh's gacan yarro.[182] The gacan yarro were always the brightest, most committed and motivated students in the class. Though their assistance was crucial to the lesson, it was by no means restricted in the class only. Instead, they assisted the sheikh by carrying his books or helped him walk if he was old or ailing. Depending on the sheikh's preference regarding where he wished to sit, the gacan yarro would lay out the stage for him before the lesson began. After the prayer, they would be the first to get up to prepare for the lesson. They would put the kursi (chair) or darin (mat), or joodari (mattress) in the mimbar area or at the back of the mosque. In addition, the gacan yarro would also fetch the sheikh's rixli[183] as well as his kutub, the matni and the sharx, which he would use for the lesson, and place them on the kursi, joodari or the rixli. Oftentimes, the gacan yarro would set the microphone in front of the sheikh.

In both places, there were no specific sitting arrangements for students; instead, it was based on whoever came first. As such, the xer who came earlier and who prayed in the jamaaca (congregation) sat to the front, while others sat behind them. Though uncommon, the gacan yarro or those students who worked hard, would have spaces reserved for them in the front. Daily lesson schedules were uniquely local to each context. For instance, I was informed that in one mosque, a sheikh used to teach four different times a day.[184] The first lesson would begin

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[182] Literally 'small hand", this was a small band of students who ensured that everything was in order before lessons began.

[183] A small wooden object that is folded and on which people place their kutub on.

[184] Interview with Sheikh Ahmed Taajir, Minneapolis, July 19th, 2017.

immediately after fajr prayer and continue for roughly an hour. After the lesson, both the students and the sheikh would go for breakfast and return around 9 am for another hour. Afterwards, the group would reconvene immediately after duhr prayer and continue until 2 pm in the afternoon. The sheikh delivered the last lesson of the day after the casr prayer. In each of the lessons, the sheikh would teach different kitāb, seldom repeating the same one in successive lessons or even during that day. In addition, the sheikh could also teach a different fanni. Reasons for this disparity revolved around two issues. First, students were often at different levels, and the sheikh had to schedule teaching them at different times. Students who did not belong to a given level, which was either too low or too high for them, did not have to attend lessons not intended for them. Instead, after they had taken their own lesson, they attended lectures with other sheikhyaal in the neighboring areas or more conveniently did murajica with their peers. Also, students had to write down lessons since there were not many books around for all to use during lessons,[185] indicating the importance of learning outside of the xer.

**Foundations of Knowledge: What Was Emphasized and What Was Not**

In the xer as traditional centers of learning, knowledge was organized in a hierarchical order[186] and the dissemination of that knowledge followed that pattern. Knowledge was therefore understood, categorized, and delivered following that order. Two areas of study were emphasized in xer. At the top of the pyramid was fiqh, or as the xer preferred to call it, axkaam. This was also true in the classical Islamic higher learning and described as, "the queen of the

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[185] Interview with Sheikh C.R.H, Minneapolis, July 15th, 2017.

[186] Roman Loimeier, *Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills*, 153.

Islamic sciences."[187] The second category was aala (Arabic linguistic sciences). While the two formed the core of Islamic learning, another area which seldom attracted much interest in xer was the al-Aslayn (or the original two, Qur'ān (tafsīr) and xadiith. It sounds ironical or even outrageous to some, particularly Salafis who balk at xer education that the al-Aslayn would be relegated to the backwaters, while they remain the primary sources of Islamic law and theology. Salafis have attached a pejorative spin to the xer and their deep interest in fiqh, calling them, axkaamley, a scornful term that refers to those who studied or know nothing more than Fiqh Shaafici.[188] In addition, the more serious charge or even denunciation of the Salafis against the traditional scholars was that the xer only studied texts that were written by men instead of locating their education in the al-Alslayn. Rooted in these are the taqlid vs. ijtihad debate. However, the reverence with which axkaam was treated is easily discernible in the popularity of xer centers that specialized in Fiqh Shaafici. Respected sheikhyaal were those who studied axkaam. Why axkaam was so pivotal in higher learning was put to me in the following terms:

> Axkaam is the biggest[189] cilmi in culumul Islam. Because of this, all other culum come under axkaam. But why is[190] it so important, you may ask? There are a few reasons for this. First, let us say that as a Muslim you want to leave your wealth with someone else when you travel or even when you die: that trustee must be someone who understands axkaam to guarantee that your wishes are carried out as you want. Second, if you want to leave your wealth for

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[187] George Makdisi. *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1981.9.

[188] Interview with Mukhtaar, Garissa, June 16th, 2016.

[189] This word was used superlatively by the interviewee. In the Somali context, the interviewee used the two Somali words: oogu weeyn, which means the biggest to express meanings such as the most popular, the biggest, or the most important. I used biggest in the text to give it

[190] Despite the reformulation of knowledge in the modern context, particularly in universities in Saudi Arabia, the interviewee still maintains that *axkaam* is the most important Islamic knowledge.

waqf and to benefit other Muslims, you will have to leave it with people who know axkaam. Pedagogically, axkaam is the most difficult field of knowledge in cilmul Islam, underscoring its importance. What is more, there is the likelihood of axkaam as a knowledge to disappear if it is not taught regularly compared to other culum such as tafsīr, xadiith or aala. There is a common understanding among the xer that if one does not teach or study/listen to cilmul fiqh for a year, that knowledge will be lost. Also, axkaam has influenced the teaching and learning of other culum, meaning that when and where axkaam was taught, it was more likely that other culum followed and were also taught and not the other way around. At every given moment, there would be a fiqh text being taught. Whenever a fiqh text was completed, it would be restarted all over again. Other kutub were taught based on student need or availability. Students of axkaam would request the sheikh to teach them these other texts. That is why Somalia was one of the most important centers of Fiqh Shaafici studies.[191]

In this ordering of knowledge, aala came after axkaam. While axkaam was easily understood on the face of it, aala was more ambiguous and described through its importance to other Islamic sciences. In addition to aala, one also heard other terms such as naxw, complicating what the speaker was referring to. These complexities also spilled into the functions of Arabic in xer and later as culama. While axkaam was viewed as a self-constituted and independent strand of Islamic knowledge, aala served the double function of being seen both as knowledge and as means to knowledge. The basic, dictionary definition of the term aala is a device, meaning that Arabic was seen as a device for accessing Islamic knowledge. None, if any, of the interviewees failed to mention this function of aala. One interviewee put it this way: "the intention of learning aala in xer was for the students to access, study and  understand axkaam, the Qur'ān and the

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[191] Both terms are Arabic, but have assumed Somali inflections, suffix. The *–dda* that come after *luuqa* (language) is the definite article, the. Also, the *-ga* after Arabic is a definite article. The two differ based on the phonemic environment in which they occur.

xadiith."[192] When I asked why they pursued knowledge that they saw as a scaffolding to some other real, higher knowledge, another interviewee who said his uncle had studied naxw alone for twelve years put it this way, "isn't the key the most important tool to accessing anything: the house or the car?[193]

Still, many students specialized in aala. Although what to learn in Arabic and how to do so are universal, the sort of Arabic studied in xer has some unique intricacies not experienced by native Arabic speakers. In the Somali-speaking regions, as in other parts of Africa, Arabic was a foreign language. Consequently, the Arabic taught at xer greatly differed from the Arabic contemporarily taught at modern institutions of learning. For instance, the Arabic courses taught at IUM or Imam are comprehensive and cover various skills for both social and academic functions. In xer, however, Arabic was intended purely for academic purposes and its dissemination manifested itself in this strategy. Arabic at xer was strictly book-based and was taught in a translational method where students learned Arabic words, phrases, grammatical, morphological, and syntactic items through Somali. It is also worth noting that knowledge was considered contextual in which the various aspects of Arabic linguistics was taught in the context in which they occurred. Students learned the grammatical components such as whether a word was a noun or verb in a text-focused way disconnected from social situations. Accordingly, missing from this system of education was the conversational or communicative-oriented Arabic common in today's curricula. While this approach fulfilled the training goals of xer, that is, an intimate study of texts, Salafis conflate any inability to speak Arabic with an inability to

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[192] Interview with Prof. S., Minneapolis, July 5th, 2017.

[193] Interview with Sheikh Cabdiwahab, St. Paul, MN, August 15th, 2017

comprehend Qur'ān and xadiith. Suffice it to say, the xer-trained culama understood Qur'ān and xadiith as much as the Salafis, if not more so, as some of the latter have acknowledged.

The exhortation of axkaam and aala as principal fields of knowledge in xer education explains why many of my interviewees studied one or the other. Some had acquired nicknames of famous scholars in their fields in which they gained expertise. One of my principal interviewees was nicknamed Sheikh Bajuri. However, it would be simplistic to assume that other forms of Islamic knowledge other than these two did not exist or were not transmitted. As argued by others regarding Muslim scholars,[194] xer graduates were complex individuals with specialization in multiple fields within the Islamic sciences and taught in one or more subject area upon graduation. What was different, however, was their strict fidelity to isnad[195] as well as the oral nature in which knowledge was imparted to them. For instance, graduates could not teach what they did not "hear"[196] from a master or knowledge they self-taught irrespective of the expertise they attained in it. Intimacy with the sheikh to gain all the knowledge they could was integral to the whole system of education. The two areas that mostly tended to supplement axkaam or aala were cilmul xadiith and tafsīr. However, there was no consensus on these claims as I was given varying and often opposing versions on their prevalence in the Somali regions. The first version, which was less likely to be accurate as I heard it from fewer interviewees, was

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[194] Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 84.

[195] Rüdiger Seesemann, "Epistemology or Ideology? Toward a Relational Perspective on Islamic Knowledge in Africa,"238.

[196] A question that would be asked to ascertain the *sanad* of a specific sheikh's knowledge was: Yaad ka dhageeysatay?, which literally translated into: "From who did you listen this knowledge?" As such, knowledge not gained directly from an established scholar was not considered as credible. Furthermore, such as knowledge could not be taught.

contrary to the situations prevailing in both axkaam and aala. While axkaam and aala entailed extensive travel and often stretched out periods of absence and learning, this first report claimed that xadiith and tafsīr were easily and locally available. The assertion was that these culum was accessible around every village and settlement and therefore did not warrant travel.

On the contrary, the other version held that tafsīr and more frequently xadiith were less commonly taught, and the arguments in favor of this claim were also bifurcated. One report insisted that there was simply no culture of xadiith education in the Somali-speaking areas.[197] This lack of culture contributed to the dearth of general scholarship or even the expertise to teach them. Accordingly, the inordinate interest given to traditional strands of knowledge—axkaam and aala—relegated tafsīr and xadiith to a position of complementarity rather than free-standing knowledge. A former xer who later attended IUM, and who spoke dismissively of the status of xadiith in xer said as follows: "xadiith was insufficiently taught and often two or three books were taught such as Riyād as-Sālihin and al-arbaʿīn, [198]"[199] The discourse revolving around this complex situation - between what was considered legitimate knowledge and what was not and how that knowledge was organized - goes beyond xer and has been a source of serious debate. As per an interviewee who had xer education before also attending IUM, and, who exalted Salafi modern, reformist knowledge over the traditional one, claimed:

> All there was before modern Islamic education were simple texts such as Safinat Salaad[200]

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[197] Interview with C.G., Makkah, September 5th, 2016.

[198] Kitāb (or 'matn') al-arbaʿīn, by Abū Zakariyyāʾ Yahyā b. Sharaf b. Muhyī al-Dīn (al-Dimashqī) al-Nawawī (d. 1277/8; GAL I: 496; S I: 680).

[199] Interview with Sheikh Cabdiwahab, Saint Paul, September 2nd, 2017.

[200] Safīnat al-ṣalāt *by* Abdallāh b. ʿUmar al-Ḥaḍramī (720/1320). See Carl Brockelmann, *History of the Written Arabic Tradition, Supplement Volume, edited by Maribel Fierro,* M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, Renata Holod, and Florian Schwarz, Volume 117/S1 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 168.

> and Minhāj.[201] Nothing more than this. However, when people began studying at Saudi universities, they were introduced to the science of xadiith. When they went back to Garissa and other places that Somalis inhabit, they introduce xadiith and talked to people about how they should revere it, telling them that it should be placed before other sources of knowledge. After all, fiqh is extracted from xadiith and the Qur'ān. However, when graduates from Saudi Arabia explained to traditional scholars about the need to privilege xadiith, they were accused of bringing new religion as traditional culama did not know anything about the xadiith.[202]

**Curriculum: Axkaam**

In the literature, preference for axkaam among Africans, some have claimed, emerges from the fact that Africans embraced Islam's legal framework and not its theological, philosophical or literary and artistic culture.[203] This is farfetched, and I will not pursue it further. To the local culama however, the veneration of axkaam exuded from its very real and consequential utility in everyday life. Indeed, the dominance of axkaam in higher learning was informed by the religious roles that the xer graduates undertook upon completing their education: as judges, teachers, and community leaders. Their function in the society was also exemplified in their social roles as guardians of peace and arbiters. Though it has its own idiosyncrasies, studying axkaam in the Horn has over the centuries taken after that of the rest of the larger Muslim world. This was shaped by the flow of culama back and forth as well as the exchanges of other resources such as books, particularly from other Horn of Africa Muslims, Middle East, and

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[201] Minhāj al-tālibīn by Abū Zakariyyāʾ Muhyī al-Dīn Yahyā b. Sharaf b. al-Nawawī. See Loimeier, "Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills," 182.

[202] Interview with Sheikh C. G., Garissa, January 13th, 2018.

[203] J. Spencer Trimingham as cited by Scott Reese, "*Islam in Africa: Challenging the Perceived Wisdom*," in The Transmission of Islam in Africa, eds. Scott Reese, 1-14 (Brill: 2004), 4.

North Africa. The impact manifested itself in the curricula, especially in the breakdown of axkaam into the various divisions that addressed social and legal issues within the society. Though the teaching materials used at xer and the Saudi universities differ markedly, the divisions are show certain similarities.

The study of axkaam is divided into four major areas. The first one is cibaadaat, which addresses the rules and regulations of worship, particularly on the daily and occasional rituals and how to perform them. They included: salaad (prayer), saum (Ramadan), Zakaat (paying alms from one's wealth), and Xajj (performing pilgrimage once in a lifetime). Another one axkaam is mucaamaalaad, which is primarily civil law or the rules on business contracts such as buying, leasing, renting, borrowing, or taking credit. Ankixa - family law – which covers inheritance, children rights, wills, child custody, and divorce is another subdivision. Finally, jinaayaad, or criminal law is another section. It is divided into three sections: qisaas or the laws that deal with homicide, xuduud or the dunuub and their ciqaab; and tacaazir, which are the cuquub (punishments) that a qadi determines and how best implement. In addition, jinaayaad also includes other procedures of the law, including the academic or experiential component to determine who can be a judge or witness.

As is traditional to all knowledge, axkaam curriculum began with what the xer called kutubta yar yar[204] before moving onto the kutubta waa wayn.[205] Since it was an open and rolling enrolment, it was the student's responsibility to ensure that they started off from the most basic or beginning level texts and progressed to advanced ones. How simple or complex the topics of study were did not depend on the topics themselves but the text in which such a topic was

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[204] Literally small books, or more conventionally beginning level texts.

[205] Literally big books, but in this context, it means advanced texts.

located. In addition, while some of the kutub, especially those at the beginning levels restricted themselves to one of the axkaam segmentations above, the topics covered in the more advanced texts were more variegated and various topics usually intersected each other. They, however, were not necessarily too explicit, and instead were seamlessly integrated. Typically, axkaam started with Safinat Salaad, a beginning-level kitāb that, true to its name, restricted itself to salaad—prayers. This was and continues to be a widely popular text among xer. It is taught contemporarily in the xalaqat in local mosques in Garissa and elsewhere. Its import in xer lay in its heavy focus on the rules of prayer from a Shaafici perspective. After Safinat Salaad, other texts were introduced in the order in which they followed each other, for instance: matn Kitāb al-taqrīb[206] and ʿUmdat al-sālik wa-ʿuddat al-nāsik.[207] Each text was more difficult and complex as the time to complete it grew longer.

The texts were important and were all taken seriously. Each one was studied multiple times a year, and it took a long time to finish it. However, two texts stood out the most in importance: Minhāj and Irshād.[208] Evidently, their significance stemmed from their content, difficulty, as well as their pedigree. Underscoring the salience of Minhāj in particular is this famous aphorism common among the xer: "Minhāj la ma xanto. A loose Somali translation of the statement would be: "one never backbites or gossips behind Minhāj."[209] The interpretation is not only symbolic of

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[206] Kitāb al-taqrīb (or ghāyat al-ikhtisār), by Abū Shujāʿ Ahmad b. al-Husayn Taqī al-Dīn al-Isfahānī (d. 1106; GAL S I: 492; S I: 676)

[207] ʿUmdat al-sālik wa-ʿuddat al-nāsik, by Shihāb al-Dīn Ahmad b. Luʾluʾ b. al-Naqīb al-Rūmī al-Misrī (d. 1367/8; GAL S II: 104).

[208] Irshād Qaawīi ila masalik al-Haawii by Ismāʿīl b. Abī Bakr b. al-Muqriʾ al-Yamanī (d. 837/1433 see II, 190). See Carl Brockelmann, "*History of the Written Arabic Tradition, Supplement 1*," 696.

[209] Interview with Sheikh C.R.H, Minneapolis, July 16th, 2017.

this text's salience in xer curricula, but its significance in terms of its content, and that it was written by al-Imam Nawawi, an enduringly influential Shaafici figure. It is striking to note that the Minhāj, per the statement above, is accorded human qualities, but the more substantial feature is that Minhāj is considered complete and is presumed to impart both legal knowledge and also it was a crucial Shaafici reference. The reverence for this book is apparent in the vigor in which it was studied. An interviewee said of Minhāj: "my sheikh, Sheikh Maxamed Cali Sheikh Xassan Raabi, for instance, studied Minhāj 28 times from cover to cover, and he could recite the entire book from memory."[210]

The other text is Irshaad. Irshād was treated with similar reverence and admiration as Minhāj though it was written by a man with somewhat less intellectual pedigree among the xer than al-Imam Nawawi. However, what it lacks in pedigree, it easily makes up for content. The reason Irshād is put at the end of xer curriculum, even coming after Minhāj and so many other texts, is because of its difficulty: it is said to be extremely challenging to students. Finishing its study, while at the same time understanding its meaning, is a badge of honor for most. What is particularly demanding about Irshād is the language in which it was written. The same xer recalled that at the time Irshād was written, Arabs used to compete on the use of Arabic language, specifically the stylistics and the colorfulness of the language, resulting in the text's complex and impenetrable register.

While the qualities of the two texts is already clear, a question that begs an answer is why so much emphasis is put on these two books. Though Somali culama attained a very high level of scholarship, few, if any, wrote their own texts, neither did any of them translate or write

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[210] Interview with Sheikh C.R.H, Minneapolis, July 16th, 2017.

commentary on any of these texts they studied or taught.[211] And though the interaction between culama and the texts were profound, the books were preserved in their original language - Arabic. What we see, therefore, is a bit confusing. In part, the awe the culama held for these texts offers us a window in the power distribution between the texts, their authors, and the Somali culama. There was a lack of a critical and analytical approach to teaching these texts. Instead, there was conformity in which the books were accepted as they came, and thus were passed on to students in the same fashion. When I probed into the continued importance of these texts among Somalis, in addition to the obvious factor of madhab, I was reminded about the place of commentary in traditional learning. One of Minhāj's strengths is argued to be the sheer number of commentaries written on it. One interviewee put it this way: "the many commentaries demonstrate to you how important Minhāj is."[212] There are perhaps tens of commentaries on Minhāj written on it by Syrians, Egyptians and Yemenis. In addition, he also pointed to the example of Azhar University where Minhāj is taught in all the four sections of axkaam throughout the four-year study of law.

Another former xer compared beginning-level axkaam texts and advanced ones in the following terms: "in the basic texts such as Safinat Salaad, students learned the dos and don'ts of Islam or the beginning of fiqh, masāʾil that any semi-educated Muslim is required to know—macluum mina diin bi dharuura.[213] For instance, a graduate should not hesitate to answer a question (for lack of knowledge) when asked if salaad is waajib (obligatory) as is true for all the

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[211] Interview with Sheikh Bajuri, Minneapolis, August 7th, 2017.

[212] Interview with Sheikh C.R.H, Minneapolis, July 16th, 2017.

[213] Mas'ala that is necessary for a Muslim to know. This would the obligatory subjects without which one ceases to be a Muslim, including the existence of Allah, that salaad and zakat are wajib etc.

other arkān.[214] In the beginning and toward the intermediate level, students are not introduced to masāʾil that would be considered polemic or controversial. What was covered in the lower-level stages were material generally accepted by Shaafici and were common to other madahib as well. Still, Shaafici would be the only fiqh taught and the sheikh would not yield to other madahib. For instance, the sheikh will explain how to perform prayer from a Shaafici perspective. But when students started advanced texts, they encountered three new dimensions of knowledge: more complex material and topics, polemical material, and the evolving views of a scholar on a range of masāʾil.[215]

> Students were exposed to how a scholar changed his understanding of an issue, depending on his exposure to new material, say xadiith. This is clear with Abu Shujaac by Imam Shaafici. Evident in this text are changing perspectives of Shaafici in which he incorporated qowl qadiim[216] into the qowl jadiid.[217] During the time that the Imam lived in Iraq, he understood the deen in a certain way and spoke about them as he knew them; however, when he relocated to Egypt, he came to understand it differently."[218]

These changing perspectives emerged from the Imam's encounter with additional xadiith that he had not seen or known before coming to Egypt. Another area introduced in the advanced texts are the khilafaad that exist(ed) among various Shaafici scholars. The maxim that little knowledge is dangerous was rife in xer and mirrored in their curriculum. Introducing khilafaad or conflicting scholarly legal opinions in the early phases of xer was considered counterproductive. Instead, such discussions were conducted when studying advanced texts. Even then, khilafaad

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[214] The steps, the basic things one ought to know in Islam such as *arkānul Islam.*

[215] Interview with Prof. S., Minneapolis, September 7th, 2017.

[216] Literally old word, but more commonly preexisting knowledge.

[217] Literally new word but understood to mean newer knowledge.

[218] Interview with Prof. S., Minneapolis, September 5th, 2017.

was restricted to within fiqh Shaafici, and other madahib were not included. This does not only demonstrate the depth of study of this madhab, but it enabled students to compare weak and strong points of an argument within Shaafici tradition, informed by available dalāʾil.[219]

**Cilmul Aala**

Aala followed a strict syllabus and knowledge was imparted in the same fashion as axkaam. Within aala, two subfields dominated xer curriculum: naxw and sarf—or more popularly grammar and morphology. Studying naxw and sarf was considered central to avoiding misunderstanding or misinterpreting the meaning of the Qur'ān, the xadiith and the Arabic language in which classical texts were written. What also made these two subfields indispensable was that Arabic was foreign to the Horn of Africa, and that its shaqal (diacritics) system, essential to meaning making, had to be actively learned and applied. A slight change in pronunciation of a word could interfere with or change the entire meaning of a given word, phrase, or longer constructions.

An interviewee posed a question to me that demonstrated the indispensability of naxw. Take for example the word qaala (he said) or yaquulu (he says or is saying) in the Qur'ān. To many, these simple words sound innocuous, but are fundamental to the Qur'ān and figuring out its meaning. He asked: "if someone were to claim to be calim and does not know the difference between these two simple afcaal (verbs), would he make sense of larger or more difficult texts? How would one claim knowledge of Islam if he or she cannot read and understand the simple language in which it was written?[220] This was a straightforward assessment, but what was more

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[219] Interview with Prof. S., Minneapolis, September 5th, 2017.

[220] Interview with O., Makkah to Riyadh, April 16th, 2017.

important was that in these simple words are important components of a language, primarily, aspects of person and tense that one ought to know. Another interviewee offered a more comprehensive illustration of the need to deeply understand the intricacies of the Arabic language. Consider this āyāh: Ina Laha bari'un minal mushrikiina wa rasuuluhu (9:3).[221] In its original version, this sentence translates into: "that Allah is free from (all) obligations to the mushrikūn, and so is His Messenger."[222] Now, absence of a grounding in Arabic grammar could twist the sentence and render a wrong interpretation of it. Therefore, by erroneously changing one letter in one word (the Arabic version of the statement) in this construction, from rasuuluhu to rasuulihi, the meaning would change as follows: "Allah does not associate Himself with what the mushrikūn and the Messenger are doing." This amplifies the robustness with which aala was pursued and the detail in which was learned.

While the study of naxw and sarf allowed for an excellent competence in Arabic grammar, they lacked in communicative performance. The grammar lesson above demonstrates this, but a former xer recounted a story to me that makes the situation even clearer. He said: "I sponsored my uncle who had taught me Arabic to perform Xajj. As we walked around the Xaram (The Grand Mosque), he heard people speaking in Arabic, and he turned to me asked what they were saying. As a professor of Arabic at King Saud University, I easily interpreted for him and then wondered how different this Arabic was from the one that he had taught me as a child. How come he didn't understand? He replied that it was not the same Arabic."[223]

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[221] Mohamed Khan, and Muhammad Al-Hilali, *Interpretations of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'ān in the English Language* (Riyadh: Darrussalam Publishers, 2001).

[222] Interview with Prof. S., Minneapolis, September 7th, 2017.

[223] Interview with Shariff C., Eagan, MN, August 27th, 2017.

The xer studied Arabic not for social purposes but strictly for academic and this was reflected in the ways in which they studied it. Most xer recalled that each book was taught independently and that they followed a strict pattern, beginning with simpler ones and progressing on to more advanced ones. These were the books that dominated their curriculum: al-Ajrumiya[224], Mulxatul al-icraab[225], Al-Kawaakib[226], Qatr an-Nada[227], Shuduur ad-dihab[228], and, finally, Alfiyya ibnu Malik.[229] Other xer, on the other hand, related a different pattern. Here, while the kutub remained primarily the same, the ways in which they were taught were more ordered. Their observation was that books were divided into three broad sections: qaybta bilawga (beginning level), qaybta dhexe (intermediate level), and, finally, qaybta sare (advanced level). Though less extensively taught, sarf was dominated by texts that include the likes of lāmiyyat al-afʿāl [230] al-fiyati ibnu Malik.

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[224] Al-muqaddima al-ājurrūmiyya fī ʿilm al-ʿarabiyya, by Imām Abū ʿAbdallāh Muhammad b. Muhammad al Sanhājī b. Ājurrūm, (d. 1323; GAL II: 308; S II: 332ff)

[225] Mulhat al-iʿrāb, by Muhammad al-Qāsim b. ʿAlī al-Harīrī (d.1122; GAL I: 486ff; S I: 325ff).

[226] Al-kawākib al-durriyya fī mad khayr al-bariyya, usually known as the qa īdat al-burda, by Muhammad b. Saʿīd al-Būhīrī al-anhājī (d. 1294; GAL I: 308; S I: 467)

[227] Qatr al-nadā wa-ball al-sadā, by Jamāl al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Yūsuf b. ʿAlī b. Hishām (d.1360; GAL II: 27ff)

[228] Shudhūr al-dhahab fī maʿrifat kalām al-ʿarab, by Jamāl al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Yūsuf b. ʿAlī b. Hishām. See Loimeier, "Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills," 91.

[229] al-alfiyya by Jamāl al-Dīn Muhammad b. ʿAbdallāh b. Mālik al-Andalūsī. See Loimeier "Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills," 191.

[230] Lāmiyyat al-afʿāl, by Jamāl al-Dīn Muhammad ʿAbdallāh b. Mālik al-Andalūsī (d. 1273; GAL I: 359; S I: 521ff).

**Adab: Developing the Learner's Character**

Another area that attracted emphasis was adab. In my interviews, former xer spoke of adab using terms such as akhlaaq and asluub,[231] which could imply good manners and discipline. This salience of adab throughout Islamic history is apparent in the meanings and interpretations ascribed to it.[232] Clearly, axkaam and aala gained their authority and popularity through the confluence of the power of the text and the voice of the sheikh. Adab, on the other hand, while still robustly maintaining all the features of a serious academic discipline, also displayed more holistic, far-reaching, character-building features than the other disciplines. When I posed the question of what adab meant to the former xer or how they conceived of it, I heard multiple answers. Some discussed aspects of local Somali and Islamic poetry or other forms of Islamic literature.[233] This literature, which was either in the form of written Arabic or oral Somali, popularly known as nabi amaan,[234] have been incorporated into the adab curriculum to portray moral standing and sound character amongst the xer.

Adab developed through the recognition among scholars that formal Islamic education alone could not exclusively be gained from kutub alone; instead, a true calim was one who had high morals in ways that supplemented formal education. Specifically, books to which the xer dedicated substantial amounts of their lives studying did not necessarily avail a complete and

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[231] A Somali term that means manners. The word is active in everyday speech to underscore good morals and personal conduct

[232] For a more detailed treatment of this term, see: Rudiger Seesemann, "Ilm and Adab Revisited: Knowledge Transmission and Character Formation in Islamic Africa," In *The Piety of Learning: Islamic Studies in Honor of Stefan Reichmuth*, edited by Michael Kempers and Ralf Elger, 15-37 (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

[233] Interview with Shariff C., Eagan, MN, August 27th, 2017.

[234] Songs that are sang in Sufi gatherings that praise the Prophet.

conclusive knowledge. Neither did the books educate xer on ethical conduct commensurate with calim's social standing within the community. Adab developed the xer and manifested itself in the social realm. Adab mirrored the larger Islamic education which approached learning from the vantage point of developing the whole person.[235] This did not in any way lessen adab as an academic discipline since xer were taught books on adab. Referred to as cilmul adab, an interviewee said that adab was tassawuf knowledge, and the books taught included: Ixya Culum Deen[236] and Xikaam ibnu Cadda Illah.[237]

In this social realm in which adab mean that, "adab is better shown than taught."[238] Consequently, much of adab was suffused in the lived, day-to-day lives of the sheikhyaal. Hierarchizing adab in the knowledge pyramid, a former xer said that adab was higher[239] than other forms of knowledge,[240] pointing to the public nature in which this knowledge is demonstrated. Consequently, piety, even for the culama, was demonstrated in their adab. Unlike other forms of knowledge, the person who had adab could be seen and those who did not could also be seen. Adab set off from the ways in which knowledge was obtained, as it set the rules that guided how one acquired xer knowledge, and what one did with that knowledge. For instance, adab directed how the person interacted with his surroundings in the process of learning: how he or she studied books, how he or she interacted with people around him, or how

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[235] Helen Boyle, "The Growth of Qur'anic Schooling and the Marginalization of Islamic Pedagogy: The Case of Morocco*."* 4.

[236] Ihyāʾ ʿulūm al-dī, refer to Roman Loimeier, "*Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills*," 210

[237] al-hikam al-ʿAtāʾiyya, by Tāj al-Dīn Ahmad b. Muhammad b. ʿAtāʾullāh al-Iskandarī al-Misrī (d. 1309, GAL II: 143f).

[238] Interview with Prof S., Minneapolis, September 6th, 2017.

[239] The Somali word used was sareeye, at the same time, lifting his arm above his head for a demonstration

[240] Interview with Sheikh Bajuri, Minneapolis, August 7th, 2017.

he or she treated non-human objects.[241] Accordingly, there was no context as good as education in which adab was learned. In what follows, two situations in which adab was demonstrated will be pursued.

Though the general atmosphere of learning was egalitarian, still, strict rules existed or were expected to prevail between the sheikh and the xer. The xer were bounded by a set of rules that ensured lessons proceeded without any interruptions. While this set up was intended for smooth learning, it was also the normative relationship that set the tone between the sheikh and the students. However, this is not to suggest that light moments did not occur in the process of learning, particularly when the sheikh had to make interesting or funny references in his teaching. Thus, several examples exist in which adab was represented during lessons and how students absorbed it. When the lesson began, the xer sat down in front of the sheikh and conducted themselves in a disciplined and regimented manner. They assumed a specific physical posture such as sitting style, called caga lab (folding the feet). This is a position where one folded back their legs in order not to show their feet to the sheikh. In addition, they would hunch forward to maintain eye contact with the sheikh, as well as the book in front of them. It was also intended to show respect to the sheikh and to minimize movements for as long as the lesson was in progress. They did not change their posture neither did they speak other than when spoken to or when instructed by the sheikh to do so. As in other places in the Islamic world, they also did not ask questions;[242] instead, they waited for the lesson to end so that they could ask questions. If the xer had questions at the end of the lesson, all the others would continue to sit, until the sheikh

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[241] Interview with Sheikh Bajuri, Minneapolis, August 7th, 2017.

[242] Dale Eickelman, "The Art of Memory: Islamic Education and Its Social Reproduction," 501.

indicated that the lesson was over and that they could leave. Even so, they remained seated and waited for the sheikh to get up and left.

A considerable part of adab entailed preserving the character of the sheikh, as one xer would want his own character to be respected later as sheikh. It means showing him respect both during the lesson and outside of it. An appropriate illustration of this was when the sheikh misspoke or accidentally misrepresented a point. This was delicate as it appertained to knowledge in which the sheikh was held as the master. If xer heard the sheikh misspeak or misrepresent a point, he would be careful as to the ways in which he approached it or pointed it out to the sheikh. Instead of the student assertively expressing to the sheikh that what was said was wrong or that the sheikh had erred, the xer would handle it more carefully. One way in which the student could express the error to the sheikh was to wait and ask the sheikh alone after class. Even then, the xer would not be explicit. Instead, he would repeat the erroneous statement as if it was he who was making the error and let the sheikh correct him. Such cordiality did not owe only to the student's dependence on the sheikh for knowledge as well as professional reference, but also to preserve the sheikh's respect and social position within the class and the community.

How the xer conducted themselves in relation to their sheikh was not confined in the classroom, but outside of it as well. It is a fact that most people viewed the xer as poor individuals who depended on the community for sustenance. Still, they were held in higher moral standing than the ordinary people. As the xer accompanied the sheikh to events such as ninkaax or Qur'ān saar where he led in social functions, they were careful how their sheikh and the community viewed them. Also, the sheikh was careful regarding how he conducted himself: how

he sat, ate, or spoke. Positive adab meant being xaafid.[243] As the best moral example in the community, everyone else looked to him. A former xer related this story to me, "Sheikh Xassan never walked through town, even when he went to the mosque. Instead, he would walk around the town, spending much more time but in the process avoiding unnecessary indulgence with men and women."[244] Another story echoed a similar experience: "Sheikh Xussein Cadde Fiqh was 20 years old the last time he saw an ajnabi (unrelated) woman, and he instructed his xer to conduct themselves the same manner."[245] As these examples clarify, public spaces served as lessons for xer. They made it clear to them what it meant to lead an ethical and moral life from the lived experiences of their sheikhyaal.

**Transmission of Knowledge**

Traditional Islamic learning was local, often forming out of the resources available to them. As we will see, these situations were mostly controlled by the physical locations, even though certain modes of knowledge transmission cut across cultures. While many of the teaching strategies depended on the lecture method, more creative and student-centered approaches were also at play. They included higher-level students tutoring lower-level ones, group discussions, or approaching the sheikh separately for a personalized instruction. This section will explore how lessons were delivered in xer.

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[243] The interviewer used two both Somali and Arabic to describe this situation: dhowrsanaansho and xaafid. The two have the same meaning and point to someone guarding themselves against things presumed to be tainting their morality.

[244] Interview with Sheikh Bajuri, Minneapolis, August 7th, 2017.

[245] Interview with Sheikh Bajuri, Minneapolis, August 7th, 2017.

As the sheikh began a new book, part of what was considered crucial knowledge for students was the author's background. This was considered indispensable knowledge especially in the advanced stages as students began to study controversial topics. Some of the information imparted to students as a background included: the full name of the author, place and time of birth and death, other books he wrote, history of his father—whether his father was a scholar and what books he wrote, where he lived and who his teachers were or who intellectually influenced him. Going through some of these lessons on social media sites such as Youtube.com amplifies the depth at which such an introduction went.[246] The assumption was that a given calim did not necessarily exist in isolation, nor did he take a specific legal position based solely on education, but rather emerged from the social milieu in which he operated. The sheikhyaal, therefore, believed it crucial that students deeply understood this milieu.

As we have already seen, xer curriculum was heavily book-based. Despite this, however, a major conundrum that influenced learning was a general lack of books. Whether students had access to books or not depended on the location of the xer. In cities, the possibility of finding—either purchasing books or borrowing them—was higher than in villages. Books were brought in from Middle Eastern or North African countries. They were not necessarily for sale though they could be, but they were brought by returning students or other itinerant travelers. Therefore, the xer could either purchase the few books around or make copies for themselves. However, it was difficult to find books for those xer located in the hinterland such as Baar Dheere. Long before the continuous stream of books arrived from the Middle East, there would be only one book, which often belonged to the sheikh. The xer borrowed the book from the sheikh—or rarely from

[246] For a full example on lesson on introduction, please watch this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDG5TNHybAY&t=875s

another xer—and copied down by writing it down longhand. Still, though, the sheikh would have the matn and less likely the sharx. Writing down an entire book longhand was a painstakingly cumbersome undertaking. So, the xer wrote each lesson before or after the sheikh delivered it. Before notebooks and pens were available, the xer wrote down on easily available resources like loox as in dugsi, and less often, harag (animal hide or skin).

Assembling these resources illustrates the devotion to learning and the aspiration to building individual libraries. In turn, copying down books enabled them to follow the lesson as the sheikh taught as well as studying them on their own. The situation, however, changed drastically from the 1960s onwards when printed books became increasingly available for purchase.[247] A major reason that the flow of books became more during this time was the gradual relaxation of colonial rule and the eminent independence that began to take shape in the Somali-speaking areas and the places where these books originated. One interesting complaint I heard from a former xer was the poor quality of the prints in some of the books that came in from the Middle East and North Africa. The ink was faint or running and was therefore difficult to read.[248] Moreover, these books were more likely to be mutun than shurux, and with only one sharx in a class of over 300 xer or more, it was simply a struggle. If this one sharx belonged to the sheikh, having access to it or even simply reading it was much more challenging.

Three interconnected pedagogical approaches formed the basis of lesson delivery. Two important elements guided the lessons: the first one was that lessons were heavily book based,

[247] Interview with Sheikh C.R.H, Minneapolis, July 15th, 2017.

[248] Interview with Sheikh C.R.H, Minneapolis, July 15th, 2017.

and its delivery revolved around the sheikh.[249] The first teaching technique was kalimad kalimad, which in other words is word for word instruction, an intensively close study of the book.[250] The sheikh taught lessons by explaining each word, detailing its meaning from the beginning of the book to its very end. Indeed, the purpose of using this teaching method was both deliberate and strategic. The underlying objective was fidelity to detail. Whether it was axkaam or aala, the sheikh spent an inordinate amount of time on every single word on the page.[251] Still, more emphasis was put on key terms, where the sheikh stopped and elucidated meanings and implications. He would sometimes use local analogies to explain it. An example on this was the naxw lesson. Here, the sheikh explained tense, parts of speech, inflections, and the various shades of meanings while still locating them in a given context. In axkaam, the sheikh explained each word, often digressing and making connections to other words, events, or other fanni. Meanwhile, students followed along and listened intently while taking notes.

The second approach is connected to the previous - the use of Somali as the medium of instruction. All instruction in xer took place in Somali. Thus, xer education involved concomitant learning in two languages. Lessons were essentially translational. The sheikh read the original material from the text in Arabic, which were a couple of words or sentences at a time. The usefulness of reading Arabic was to have students listen to the correct pronunciation and intonation of the words and sentences. Part of why Somali was the medium of instruction

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[249] Zachary Wright, *Living Knowledge in West Africa: The Sufi Community of Ibrahim Niasse* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2015), 91.

[250] Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 21.

[251] Kalimad Kalimad is literally word for word. Teaching was done by analyzing each and every word in the text.

was the lack of another mutual language between the sheikh and the xer. Therefore, centuries of translational teaching enabled the accumulation of a corpus of terms in Somali, which the culama agreed were the most credible equivalent of the original (Arabic). It also cemented the place of Somali in xer education as a language of Islam and the xer had to memorize both versions and use them when their time came to teach. It was part of what it meant to be calim.

A typical lesson is exemplified as follows. In naxw, words are inflected or conjugated toward the end; however, sarf results in changes all overall the word. Accordingly, naxw was more complicated and time consuming. An example of a lesson on tense would proceed as shown in the following example: ja'a Zeydun. The sheikh began by pointing out that the sentence was a verbal sentence, and assuming that students already understood what verbal sentence meant or after explaining it, proceeded to double down into analyzing its constituent parts. He pointed out that Zeydun is faacil, while ja'a is ficil maadi. Thus, Zeyd is nominal and subject because wuu godanyahay (which is dhama), while ja'a has kor dhaw (fatxa), and as such is a perfect indicative. In addition, Zeyd can be a mansuub or object, as demonstrated in the next example: ra'a Mohamadun Zeydan. In this example, ra'a is ficil maadi or past tense verb, and Zeydan is mafcuul bih, also an object. Other times, it is hoos dhow: marartu bi Zeydin. Here, it is majruurun bi xarfi jar,[252] which comes because of xuruf jar or the genitive case. To identify ja'a and understand the part of speech to which it belonged, it is imperative to have a firm grounding of both naxw and sarf.

This short grammar lesson would take days to finish, illustrating how the concept of time was conceived of in relation to teaching and learning. Lessons progressed in a slow manner and with

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[252] Any noun that follows a preposition, in this case Zeydin, will be treated as majruur bi xarfi jar (Xuruufu jar bi, 'alaa, fii etc).

deep precision. One strength that former xer relished about their education was the complete lack of pressure in regard to time. A former xer said to me: "we did not classify time into hours, periods, weeks or days, or months. Time was counted in terms of whether we learned what we set out to learn. Therefore, we (both the sheikh and the students) took as much time as we needed. Years and years with no end, and we cherished it because we learned all we wanted to learn to the finest detail."[253]

Using Somali made knowledge easy to access, personalized the content, and aided in the preservation of knowledge through memorization. Memorization was not confined to the Qur'ān alone, but traversed all sorts of learning, including axkaam and naxw. In the literature, learning is often described through the intimacy between the student and the sheikh.[254] Additionally, it was the intimacy that the xer developed with the books that augmented their learning. Described to me by a former xer, the textual connection was often profound:

> A student of my sheikh shared Minhāj with another student. Since he sat on the opposite side of his classmate to share the kitāb during lessons, he could only see the book upside down and therefore memorized it that way. When years later he got a copy of his own Minhāj, he could only read the text the way he had studied it—upside down, and not the normal way.[255]

Another xer was said to have memorized Minhāj 28 times, back and forth.[256] This capacity noted above stands out, as most of those who memorized the Qur'ān have done so only a handful of times. The direct method of memorization at xer was conducted differently from dugsi pedagogies, primarily owing to the use of the two languages. Learning was thorough

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[253] Interview with Sheikh C. R. W., Garissa, August 20th, 2016.

[254] Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350*," 81

[255] Interview with Sheikh C.R.H., Minneapolis, July 15th, 2017.

[256] Interview with Sheikh Bajuri, Minneapolis, August 7th, 2017.

and meticulous. The sheikh would say the Arabic words on the text and relay the meanings in Somali: e.g., wa laa yazuzu (ma banana: it is not allowed), then begin the long process of simplifying each to its minute form and variegated meanings.[257] While the Arabic words were written on the text and students could access them for themselves, the Somali equivalents came from the sheikh himself and were always oral.

**Academic Titles among Traditional Culama**

Rankings within the Somali traditional culama were more structured than the university-educated ones and titles were based on their levels of education. Ranking set their position in the society, and what function they would assume. In traditional Islamic education, students were recognized for their academic achievement in different ways. In the Middle East, graduates were issued with formal ajza.[258] While Somalis also issued ajza, it was less formal than those of the Middle East. The word ijaza was not actually used in the xer; instead, it was the Somali equivalent—ogolaansho.[259] When a student finished a certain number of kutub or gained an expertise in a certain area, ogolaansho was conferred on him or her in two ways. Mostly, it was offered orally by the sheikh giving it, in which case the graduate recounted the isnad for proper identification[260] to those for who he wanted to conduct services.

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[257] Interview with Sheikh Bajuri, Minneapolis, August 7th, 2017.

[258] Jonathan P. Berkey, *"Madrasas Medieval and Modern: Politics, Education, and the Problem of Muslim Identity,"* in *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, eds. Robert Hefner and Muhammad Zaman, (2007), 43.

[259] Ogolaansho literally means to be allowed, permitted, or accepted. While the word itself broad and is not as specific in meaning as ijaza, it is understood in this context to mean someone who has finished certain requirements and is allowed to teach that knowledge

[260] Interview with Sheikh Bajuri, Minneapolis, August 7th, 2017.

Oral ogolaansho was more frequent among xer who had not completed all the kutub or had not gained expertise in a field in which they wanted practice. But the more widespread way in which graduates who had finished all the kutub were recognized was where the sheikh dispatched them to in the Somali-speaking regions. In doing so, he gave them contacts of people in their new destinations and instructed them to introduce themselves to those people. As they were dispatched, the new culama would be assigned roles and what to do when they settled in, determined by their sheikh and their area of expertise. At times, the sheikh sent along a written document to introduce these new culama. One interviewee informed me that, in total, his sheikh had dispatched more than 500 to various places, including: Garowe, Hargeisa and Kismayo.[261] The first and the most common title was, therefore, macalin (pl. macalimeen). Macalin was both an academic and professional title. The term, borrowed from Arabic, simply means a teacher. The academic reference for the term, on the other hand, is one who memorized the Qur'ān. Professionally, it meant one who could teach the Qur'ān. Dugsi teachers are well-known macalimeen.

Slightly above macalin in rank is aw. Like macalin, it has both academic and professional connotation. Aw is awarded to anyone who, after memorizing the Qur'ān, has also completed the basic texts of the culum. Entomologically, the word is said to be originally Harari, a Semitic language spoken in the city of Harar of southern Ethiopia, meaning, "the educated one." However, it is now borrowed into Somali. Aw could teach dugsi and beginning-level texts of xer, particularly xer guri. After aw, came sheikh. Sheikh is the highest in rank. Sheikh successfully completed all the texts required to teach culum. As elsewhere, those who taught xer were

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[261] Interview with Sheikh Bajuri, Minneapolis, August 7th, 2017.

sheikhyaal. Finally, there is the wadaad (pl. wadaado). A Somali term that is a substitute for any of the titles mentioned above. The word wadaad is more common as most laypeople would likely not know the level of education of culama or the difference of the titles and therefore simply lump them together as wadaaddo.

### Conclusion

This chapter examined traditional Islamic higher education. While discussing this subject from a Somali perspective, it also reviewed elements common to other transcultural Muslim pedagogies. The chapter is crucial, as, in the process of conducting my in-depth literature review, I encountered none on xer education. Xer education has decreased tremendously and has been replaced by modern universities— a process that will be addressed in the next chapter. In the xer system, learning was a lifelong process where time did not control learning, but the amount of knowledge gained; travel and suffering were the hallmark of the knowledge obtained. Detail and extreme mental labor defined actual learning. Beyond the texts, xer education was holistic and emphasized character-building and instilling discipline and decency. As such, the character and knowledge of xer was cultivated through their master who was erudite but led a simple and unassuming life. He was a selfless man who gave knowledge without asking for anything in return. Xer held traditional Somali societies together as xer methods of mentorship framed the epistemic and ontological prism through which Islam was interpreted and understood.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Grooming Salafi Scholars at Saudi Universities: Back to the Past to Move Forward

The preceding chapter discussed xer or traditional higher education among Somali speakers. The objective of the chapter was to illustrate this form of learning, where, and how it was obtained. However, in the past half a century, the situation has changed dramatically. The emergence of nation-states has led to the rise of modern universities that train culama with a view to serving modern societies. The following chapter, therefore, considers Islamic studies at modern universities. Departing markedly from chapter three not only in place and time in which learning has occurred, but also in terms of the underlying philosophy and objectives of these institutions. Chapter Four is based on research that was conducted at Imam and IUM universities and examines learning from various angles. It explores the social dimension of education, the various nodes of pedagogical methodologies, and overt as well as subtle knowledge transmitted in these two universities, ranging from classroom activities to texts and their interpretations. In essence, the chapter concerns the knowledge and training future Somali culama undergo during their studies in these universities, the out of class socialization and experiences that they are exposed to, and the Saudi worldview in which they have been inculcated.

### Knowledge Community: Interplay of Knowledge, Socialization and Practice

Out-of-class student life, both intra-student interactions and local encounters with the communities in which they live, are crucial aspects of student training and socialization. The wandering hermeneutic spectrum of how xer were exposed to Sufi life in people's homes or in the larger community is a good example that was covered in previous chapters. However, the socialization at Saudi universities is deliberately constructed with the intention of instilling

students with specific worldviews and outcomes. As such, mingling and socializing with students in both Riyadh and Medina gave me impressions of relatively synchronized behavior and mannerisms which blended into a singular community. These experiences would obviously include the normative Salafi conduct that these universities are famous for, ranging from dress code, preference for the Arabic language, or other etiquettes such as eating, sitting, or speaking. To me, these deeply personal student behaviors and the intimate social affect amongst themselves offered an insight into what and how they were taught, shattering any presumed separation between knowledge and practice. The presumption is that education is not simply an idea or a theoretical construct but a living and humanized object. As we will see in this chapter, this lends itself to the idea that education should not only produce knowledgeable individuals but also transformed, practicing subjects.

The physical layout and the social arrangements of these universities are purposefully designed to socialize students into a fixed belief system, using a specific set of symbols and with certain intended outcomes. Socializing students into an intended dogma or ideology is not a preserve of Islamic education, Saudi Arabia or Salafism. Rather, it cuts across learning traditions in all cultures, countries, and institutions. Studies carried out in the USA, for example, demonstrate a similar pattern of student socialization. The central claim of these studies is, that as students mature and enter university life, they seek ways to adjust and function in the physical, social, and academic life of their new environments. In their pursuit of adjusting themselves, how quickly students can find safe spaces to fit into and feel comfortable is critical, and they come throughout this process of adjustment in different ways. One of these strategies is the

connections that new students often make with other students as well as their professors.[262] Particularly, such students will more often begin this cultivation of friendships with those they subscribe to similar belief system, come from the same geographical areas, or are in the same academic programs as themselves.

What demarcates the two, however, is the extent to which universities are involved and push for the socialization of their students into their organizational or national vision and mission. This, too, can better be viewed from two vantage points: students' own social life and the academic programs offered at the universities. Universities construct physical settings and design them to purposely lead students into preferred social experiences. In Saudi Arabia, what students can and cannot do comes down from national programs that are understood to inculcate certain narrowly defined virtues as well as preventing supposed wrongs. Though the stringent laws that have always restricted social life have been presented as partially lightened in recent changes in Saudi Arabia's leadership, formal and informal ideological regulations are still substantive and severely limit interaction and discourse. Suffice it to say, the Saudi state has the active policy of controlling public conduct, which also plays out at the universities. Ideological regulation manifests in the design and use of physical spaces and conditions students' intellectual skills and religious knowledge as well as their experiences in social relationships as they adjust to the demands of the academic programs together.[263]

By default, all foreign students are on scholarship and their expenses, such as housing

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[262] Jenny Small, "“Do You Believe in the Whole Idea of ‘God the Father’?” How College Students Talk about Spiritual Transformation," *Religion and Education* 34, no. 1 (2007), 14.
[263] Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 108.

and food, are completely paid for; thus, their lives are generally controlled by the nature of where they live and how.[264] Their only choice of residence are on-campus dormitories, unless they are married, which is seldom the case. Saudi citizens mostly study from their homes and drive to the universities, while the few that hail from distant towns and villages are put in separate dorms or halls at both IUM and Imam. In both, also, student residential areas are closed-off and entering or leaving the campus are strictly monitored by security guards who ensure that nothing illegal happens or find its way into the university premises. Non-students are not allowed inside or can only get in if a student promises to take responsibility for them for the period they are visiting. Life in the two universities defer slightly. Imam University is generally newer and more modern. Buildings are cleaner and more spacious. Part of this also owes to the fact that it is in the capital and serves more Saudi students than IUM.

What would typically be considered xaraam (unlawful) in Saudi Arabia, or in these universities, and in which immense energy is expended to prevent, includes anything as innocuous as smoking, playing or listening to music, dressing "inappropriately", to more serious crimes that include mixing of the opposite sex, stealing, or the use and sale of illicit drugs. Needless to say, encountering the latter is infrequent in the Saudi Arabian street, and even less likely in the universities, especially for foreign students. Still, extreme caution is taken to ensure they do not come into these universities. On the other hand, universities have been designed to promote and instill what is considered acceptable, good or positive based on their interpretation

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[264] Michael Farquhar, "The Islamic University of Medina Since 1961: The Politics of Religious Mission and the Making of a Modern Salafi Pedagogy," in *Shaping Global Islamic Discourses: The Role of Azhar, Al-Madina, and Al-Mustafa*, eds. Masooda Bano and Keiko Sakurai, 21-40 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 28.

of Islam and the laws of Saudi Arabia. These closed-off spaces where students spend most of their entire day or even week offer the basics of what they need. Within a short distance from their dorms are the classrooms, multiple mosques, libraries, and cafeterias. Time is ordered and organized around what they ought to do as students and as Muslims during the day, often punctuated by the adaan (call to prayer), meals, and their lessons. During these times, students are physically together or see one another constantly, walking to and from each of these locations, creating a tight-knit grouping.

Other subgroupings are also evident, springing from such identities as ethnic, regional, national or fields of study. As students leave their classes, libraries, mosques, or the dining hall, there is a noticeable kaleidoscope of identities as well as cacophony of languages, which demonstrates the diversity of the student body. The implications of these identities continue to shift depending on who one interacts with; therefore, they are constantly reviewed, interpreted, and tested. In addition, at nights and during the weekends and the times when they are not preoccupied with learning activities, students visit each other's apartment rooms and regale in stories and are each other's' critics, minders, and reminders. Endless kettles of tea are made and news from home, including politics, weather, and travel plans are told. They also talk about their classes, professors and other fellow students fill the rooms. Common questions would be where is so and so, he did not come for maqrib prayer today, or when do the exams begin or whether one would be leaving for the summer or stay back for summer school. They also engage in extracurricular activities and form football teams where students from, say, West Africa will play against those from the Horn of Africa/East Africa. Despite this immersion into university life in Saudi-Arabi, this determining frame is limited to the classrooms and their residence halls are populated almost exclusively by international students. A few if any have a passing knowledge

of Saudi social life. None has visited a Saudi home or has Saudi friends. Accordingly, the socialization they undergo largely comes from within themselves and their ability to translate classroom knowledge into action.

These interactions animate a more inward-looking social in-grouping that celebrates a more parochial, ethnic-based but intimate solidarity. In a foreign land that many students find conservative and unwelcoming, students stand up for each other when they are visited by problems or other life circumstances. With the absence of friends and relatives, they help each other address local, day-to-day challenges that they face, further cementing their solidarity. These problems would include anything from the death of a loved one, illnesses, academic challenges, or other social and financial problems from home. Most students hail from poor, often rural-dwelling families or are married with wives and children back home in which case problems and concerns are steady occurrences. The group members rally around each other and help offset financial burdens from the meagre stipends that they get or take turns to stay with a sick one at the hospital. Sometimes, intra-student problems or conflicts occur with the potential to descend into clan, ethnic or even national conflict and unsettle the general wellbeing of the group. At these times, the more advanced students as well as the older ones, step in and settle conflicts without involving the university administration or the state. An incident requiring this internal conflict resolution occurred during one of my own campus visits.

In May 2017, I was in Medina for some clarification on previous research points when a student who was learning to drive a car got into an accident. The car had been leased by a Somali student and was charging 50 riyals an hour to train students to drive. Following the accident, a major split opened up between the learner and the one who leased the car on who was at fault. As historically true, their respective Somali clans within the student body rallied around each of the

students for support. What to do? No one wanted to shoulder the blame and therefore fix the car or volunteer to report the incident to the government/university because of all the bureaucracy, particularly as they were preparing to leave for the summer holiday. The students decided to take the matter to an improvised Islamic court system amongst themselves. After back and forth, they agreed to form a committee constituted by three Somali PhD students of shariica at IUM. The "judges" were not related to either of the students and were considered neutral and therefore fair. Both parties agreed that the outcome would be binding. I am a close relative of one of the involved students, the student driver. I was his closest kin in the whole of Saudi Arabia, and my presence in the location made me significant to the resolution of the internal process. As we waited for the decision from the "court" to come down, we discussed what we would do in case we were to foot the hefty bill of fixing the car. It was a grim scenario, but one we knew was a possibility. Later in the day, the decision came down and that the one learning how to drive, my cousin, had to pay to fix the car. Our fears had come to pass. Since there was nowhere else to find the money, we had to share it among ourselves. I paid my share of the 7,000 riyals (around 1,900 dollars).

**Beginning Years: The Machad**

The machad is obligatory at Imam but not at IUM, primarily because IUM has a more strenuous admission process, including face-to-face interviews, where students who are ready enough to begin their academic programs are given preference over those who need preparatory or remedial programs. Imam, on the other hand, is less rigorous concerning admission, but those admitted have to go through the machad. Attending the two-year machad program means that it takes students six years to complete a BA degree instead of the usual four.

Students from Garissa graduated from the two prominent madāris of Najaax and Salaam

before enrolling at universities in Saudi Arabia. Both are historically supported in terms of books, curriculum and other crucial resources by Imam. This, unlike IUM, highlights Imam University's global reach on education and proselytism.[265] Despite these inter-institutional connections (or dependence) and the student preparation that Imam expects of these madāris before admitting their graduates, new students must also enroll and study in the machad for two years before moving on to their academic programs. While the machad serves the genuine task of preparing students, particularly those from the West, to orientate them into the basics of Islam and gradually prepare them for the academic programs they will enter later, those from Garissa feel it is an unnecessary repetition of what they studied in their madāris and a waste of time.[266] These students have already studied and mastered many of the Islamic and Arabic texts taught at the machad.

From the perspective of the university, and the ministry of higher education where university policies are set, however, the goal of a machad program is to ground new students in the proper theological foundations and linguistic abilities before beginning their arduous academic programs. In addition, some incoming students are considered by the Salafi administration to have a deviant and wrong caqīdah, especially those of Sufi or Ashcari backgrounds; therefore, the machad is designed to extricate them from this "aberrant" caqīdah and expose them toward proper Salafi caqīdah. Students are exposed to demanding classes and exams before proceeding to their programs. Subjects taught at the machad are wide-ranging, but

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[265] Mohamed Zaman, "Epilogue: Competing Conceptions of Education," in *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, edited by Robert Hefner and Muhammad Zaman,1-39 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 253.

[266] Interview with A. Y., Riyadh, February 2nd, 2016.

there are core course objectives around which others revolve.

As students report to Imam, they enroll for the foundational courses which include: tawxiid, Arabic language, Qur'ān, and xadiith. The books studied at the machad program are provided by the university. Copies of these books are liberally distributed to students and are seen laying around in their rooms once they complete studying them. The books are highly localized. Though many of these books are recent ones that have been written by current and former Imam professors, they also include classical Islamic texts. The books and pamphlets and other instructional materials are also routinely printed locally by university presses. The selection of these learning materials is highly deliberate with the objective of capturing student's formative years on Islam and with the objective of exposing them to a controlled set of literature. Therefore, the goal of education is to address students' developing perspectives and weave them into the broader topics and masāʾil that they ought to know and internalize as Salafis.

The first subject in which, understandably, a substantial amount of time is devoted to, is tawxiid. As one of the interviewees informed me, students described Saudi Arabia variously as ardul tawxiid (the land of tawxiid) or ardul xadiith (the land of xadiith).[267] The perspective of Islam presented through tawxiid is intended to counter some of the caqīdah that newly admitted students might bring. Tawxiid in these universities is wide and can include most other areas of Islam. Basic questions addressed in tawxiid curriculum typically encompasses the following questions: what is the meaning of tawxiid? What are the classifications of tawxiid? What is the meaning of shirk: major shirk and minor shirk and what are their differences? What are some examples of shirk? What are the five pillars of Islam and the six pillars of iman? Other topics

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[267] Interview with Sacad, Riyadh, May 19th, 2016.

that are taught are: ihsan, sunnah, and bidca. Along the way, students would learn tawxiid, but also its opposite. The matn used for tawxiid at both universities, predictably, is Maxamed ibn Cabdiwahab's Kitāb Tawhid. While the book addresses the abovementioned topics and issues within tawxiid, it focuses more, especially on the beginning levels, at the three classifications of tawxiid that students memorize and readily recite from the heart: uluhiya (the Unity of God), rububiya (Oneness of Lordship), and Isma wa Sifaad (Oneness of Names and Attributes of Allah). In addition to specific tawxiid courses as guide to Salafism, tawxiid is further embedded in Qur'ān and xadiith as a source of dalāʾil. The broader implication of centering tawxiid at the machad has the powerful potential of building students' knowledge around this fundamental concept.

Another subject which the two universities, and indeed other universities that teach Islamic sciences in Saudi Arabia, emphasize with an extraordinary devotion is the Arabic language. The philosophical foundation of this interest mimics that of xer, though the two depart markedly in both process and outcome. While xer emphasized Arabic specifically for ease of access to knowledge, the goal for Arabic at the universities is dacwa. Arabic at xer was both book-based and contextual. At the Saudi universities, stress is laid on both the academic aspect and the social situations where Arabic has been designed to occur. While the academic aspect of teaching Arabic centers on the ability of the student to read, research, and write Arabic, the social part concerns not only giving a khutbah (sermon) in Arabic, dacwa in a public setting, but also making references to Qur'ān and xadiith and explaining them in Arabic. The weight accorded to Arabic is evident in that more than 10 of the 15 courses that students take over two years at the machad are Arabic, highlighting the extent to which the universities go to expose Arabic to students and have them fully operational in it. In contrast to xer also, Arabic is taught

in terms of courses and not necessarily in terms of books. The courses are reading (qira'a), conversation (muxaadatha), grammar (naxw), listening and comprehension (istimaac wa istacaab), writing (al- kitāba), composition (insha'), syntax (bina' al-jumla), prosody (al-sarf), literature (adab) and rhetoric (balaqa).

Dacwa is another area of study. Dacwa is explicitly taught at these universities, with a department of dacwa granting BA, MA, and PhD degrees. However, from the moment students enroll, part of their identity formation encompasses viewing themselves as people on a mission to spread Salafism and therefore ducaad (preachers). As missionary institutions, an essential part of these universities' mandate is to have students relay what they have learned to other parts of the world and preach it to others.[268] Whatever they learned, as well as interactions they had with professors, is seen through the prism of not only knowledge gained for personal use and for professional growth, but specifically for dacwa. A master of shariica student at Imam clarified the formation of such an identity:

> A daaci is anyone that is involved in any activity regardless of place, time and context. A teacher is a daaci, so is a judge, a preacher, or an imam. Therefore, whether we are in the department of xadiith, Qur'ān, or fiqh, our foremost assignment is to learn the message and pass it on to others back home.[269]

To put it more vividly, the pivotal location of dacwa in these institutions is somewhat distinguished from other Islamic universities in other countries. A PhD graduate of shariica from IUM described it as follows:

> Students who graduate in other disciplines have been trained for the singular objective of finding a job. Say someone gets a degree in medicine, he or she will begin to find a job

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[268] Mohamed Zaman, "Epilogue: Competing Conceptions of Education," 253-254.

[269] Interview with Sacad, Riyadh, May 2nd, 2016.

immediately after graduation. Even if someone is trained in Azhar as a daaci, that person would be trained with the singular objective of finding a job in the private sector or joining a government agency. However, it is all different in Saudi Arabia. Wherever a Saudi graduate goes, he embarks on dacwa. He is trained to spread the Truth. He stands up in mosques and gives sermons, establishes schools, and does nothing else but to make people to see the Truth.[270]

These views reflect Muslim mass education and the activist feature that such an education has come to demonstrate.[271] Beginning from machad, education illustrates the Salafi contention that dacwa should not only be central to education and learning, but also be decentralized considering who can be daaci and how effectively can he or she perform it. As others have put it, Salafi approach to dacwa, particularly in regard to graduates from Saudi Arabia, frequently revolves around the following three key points: "(1) to establish the prominence of the Sunna of the Prophet; (2) to provide a direct example for society; and (3) to advocate the purity of tawxiid."[272]

Dacwa is also significant as it is the most crucial tool utilized to compete in the marketplace of preaching. Who does best in successfully passing on their message to others will ultimately have more following and will orient more people to their message. Dacwa, therefore emerges as a tool to other[273], to exclude non-Salafis. Students or returnees do not simply consider dacwa as a dry or remote theoretical construct inculcated at their universities or alma

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[270] Interview with Dr. Feisal, Garissa, July 17, 2014.

[271] Dale Eickelman, " Mass Higher Education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Societies." *American Ethnologist* 19 no. 4 (1992) 643.

[272] Noorhaidi Hassan, "Laska Jihad: Islam, Militancy and the Quest for Identity in Post-New Order Indonesia, (PhD diss., Utrecht University, 2005), 135.

[273] Michael Farquhar, Expanding the Wahhabi Mission: Saudi Arabia, the Islamic University of Medina and the Transnational Religious *Economy"* (PhD diss., The London School of Economics and Political Science, 2013), 189.

mater, nor do they wait until after graduation to undertake it or put it to use. In contrast, dacwa is objectified and practiced during their own education and learning. From the insufficient monthly allowances that they receive from their respective universities, students from Garissa County make a one-time and annual payment of 200 riyals (roughly 50 dollars) contribution for dacwa activities back in their home communities.[274] During the summer holidays and particularly in the month of Ramadan, they venture out and live among the nomads where the Salafi message has not reached or has not had a fuller impact. They stay with the nomads for weeks on end, teaching the Qur'ān, engaging in after-morning-prayer or late-afternoon-prayer sermons, addressing or clarifying specific masāʾil such as how to pray properly, dressing well for women, paying zakat, or purifying themselves well; topics which these budding Salafis surmise are aberrantly understood or not practiced.

**Regimes of Regulation**

National educational philosophies dictate what is emphasized in a curriculum and the ways to deliver content. The politics of education in Saudi Arabia presents an interesting puzzle. Education is centralized and has a top-down approach, as the Supreme Educational Council is the only body tasked with making the curriculum for the entire education system, ranging from nursery school to graduate school. It determines the broader guidelines and frameworks of what to study and how to do so.[275] For higher studies where one would expect a relaxed and free environment to construct learning materials but also engage, it is even more stringently restricted

[274] Interview with Sheikh Xussein, Madina, January 12th, 2016.

[275] Interview with a university administrator, Riyadh, April 14th, 2016.

as the government exerts a "strong control over the governance of universities."[276] In addition to the general inward-looking and conservative nature of the society where curriculum has been planned to inculcate loyalty to the government,[277] my interviewees also suggested this control owes to the fact that education is free to all, both foreign and local students, giving the government unfettered leverage. Here I include my own personal experience to illustrate what this control looks like. During my fieldwork and later, I taught university-level English language in one of the premier universities in Riyadh. In all this time, neither I nor any of my colleagues was ever asked, involved in, or participated in designing the curriculum. Instead, at the beginning of each semester, we were handed readymade syllabus, which we strictly adhered to. The syllabus never changed in any substantial manner, and if it did, the changes would be made at the top and handed down to us.

Islamic studies curriculum in Saudi Arabia revolves around delicate and highly guarded national, international, cultural, and religious matters. Teachers, lecturers, and professors were supposed to know this. For instance, a meeting for staff is held at the start of every semester, outlining what topics to never broach or discuss in class, including religion. The general implication of this is that while universities in general and professors in particular might have a very narrow window, if ever, of involvement with the curriculum, the government remains the ultimate determiner of what to teach and how, including books, topics to discuss or prompts to

[276] Einass S. Al-Eisa and Larry Smith, "Governance in Saudi Higher Education," in *Higher Education in Saudi Arabia: Achievements, Challenges and Opportunities*, eds. Larry Smith and Abdulrahman Abouammoh, 27-35 (NY: Springer, 2013), 29.

[277] For more information, see Eleanor Abdella Doumato, "Saudi Arabia: From the "Wahhabi" Roots to Contemporary Revisionism," in *Teaching Islam: Textbooks and Religion in the Middle East*, eds. Eleanor Abdella Doumato and Gregory Starrett, 153-176 (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007).

write about. In this context, the view is that whoever has control of the curriculum and teaching is the one to shape the narrative on issues such as global Islamic discourses.[278] Controlling the narrative means controlling knowledge: managing the curriculum, hiring of professors, and controlling what and how they teach. While subjects such as fiqh and Arabic language are central to the dacwa project, they are considered less central to the Salafi narrative being propagated in the Islamic universities. Therefore, not much thought goes into who teaches them. Hence, it is more common for these two subjects to be taught by foreign teachers and professors, most of who tend to be Egyptians and Sudanese, and to a lesser extent, Syrians and North Africans.

On the other hand, fields of study that are central to the Salafi project such as caqīdah/tawxiid, Qur'ān and xadiith, are exclusively taught by Saudi nationals. All the students I interviewed confirmed that these subjects were taught to them by Saudis. The objective is to deliver the intended narrative by people who believe in it and who will not add or remove anything from it. Saudi teachers and professors have all been educated locally and have been through these same universities. Since teaching staff is employed based on their educational qualification as well as the soundness of their caqīdah, Saudis are a perfect fit for these courses. Furthermore, they are familiar with the politics of education: what to teach, what to avoid, or what to stress. Not only are they aware that these universities and programs are seminaries that cultivate students to imbibe certain sets of norms,[279] they also understand it is what defines their Islam and that of their country, and its position in the Muslim world.

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[278] Masooda Bano and Keiko Sakurai, "Introduction," in *Shaping Global Islamic Discourses: The Role of Azhar, Al-Medina, and Al-Mustafa,* eds. Masooda Bano and Keiko Sakurai, 1-18 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 3.

[279] Masooda Bano and Keiko Sakurai, "Introduction," 2.

Consequently, subjects, courses, and books are fixed and predetermined, and pedagogy can be simply showing up and following them. In addition, knowledge is organized around dalīl; therefore, what students learn and how is predictable and are organized around this pyramidal pattern based on dalīl: Qur'ān and xadiith. Qur'ān and xadiith are the principal sources of knowledge, and students must take a substantial number of courses in both. Regardless of their specialization, they continue to take these classes until they graduate. One student at Imam reiterated the salience of studying these two subjects: "I am a student of fiqh, and the sources of my knowledge, what I know and what I use as dalīl, are the Qur'ān and xadiith, in that order."[280] Another said to me: "Qur'ān and xadiith are pivotal to our learning as they are the sources of law and constitute the deen."[281]

The syllabus demonstrates a blend of traditional, Islamic reformist as well as western approaches to teaching and learning.[282] The two transcripts shown below are from two students of shariica, and they demonstrate this composite perspective. The first one is from IUM, while the second one is from Imam. They show details of all learning activities a student engages in throughout the semester. Translated from Arabic, the transcripts reveal the arrangement of courses and their codes, course titles, hours and grades, and GPAs as would any western university. Excluding the machad at Imam, students graduate with a bachelor's degree in four years. The academic year is divided into two semesters lasting four months each. There used to be three short breaks throughout the academic year, but with the uneven Ramadan calendar, the breaks have recently changed and reduced to a one-week break in January.

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[280] Interview with K, Riyadh, December 18th, 2015.

[281] Interview with Mohamed Cabdi, Madina, February 17th, 2015.

[282] Masooda Bano and Keiko Sakurai, "Introduction," 2.

In each semester, students must maintain a workload of anywhere from 20 to 25 credit hours. There are various types of assessments, including: Continuous Assessment Tests (CAT), acmalul fasli (classroom activities) and the major assessment i.e., the end of semester exams, or ikhtibaraad niha'iya. There are hardly any essays or research papers that the students write. Most assessments are based on tests that focus on multiple choice or short answer questions. One student criticized the exams as lacking in creativity and ensuring the internalization of only what was fed to them and not to question them.[283] Nonetheless, exams are demanding and students invest a lot of time and effort to passing them, as they run the risk of losing their minxa (scholarship). Students must maintain an aggregate GPA of at least 2.5 on a 5-point scale, below which they would lose their scholarship and be discontinued from the university. Many of the materials taught are often overlapping, meaning that certain books can be used for different courses. As in the lower levels of Saudi education, a student of fiqh will likely study the same book in a fiqh class as well as in xadiith.[284] More than anything else, what these transcripts demonstrate is that a few courses and texts must be studied by all students regardless of specialization as they form the loci of what it means to be a daaci.

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[283] Interview with H., Riyadh, January 5th, 2018.

[284] Eleanor Abdella Doumato, "Manning the Barricades: Islam According to Saudi Arabia's School Texts," *The Middle East Journal* 57 no. 2 (2003), 232.

Second Semester 2009-2010 G-Full Time-Islamic Law (Shariica)

| Course Code | Course Title | | G. Hours | Q Points | Grade |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| JR 253 | Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence) | | 0 | 0 | W |
| QUR 253 | Tafsir (Qur'anic Exegesis) | | 3 | 15 | A+ |
| HAD 206 | Hadith (Sayings of Prophet Mohammed) | | 3 | 12 | B |
| JRS 252 | Principles of Figh | | 0 | 0 | W |
| QUR 251 | The Holy Qur'an (4) | | 1 | 5 | A+ |
| ENG 180 | English | | 2 | 10 | A+ |
| JRS 250 | Islamic Jurisprudential Maxims | | 2 | 9.5 | A |
| PSY 251 | Educational Psychology | | 2 | 10 | A+ |
| ARB 241 | Grammar | | 3 | 14.25 | A |
| Hours | Registered | Passed | Earned | Q points | Grade |
| Term | 16 | 16 | 16 | 75.75 | 4.73 |
| Accumulative | 91 | 91 | 91 | 438.25 | 4.82 |

Second Semester 2009-2010 G-Full Time-Islamic Law (Shariica)

| Course | | | | Final Grade | GPA | Points |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Course Number | Course Code | Course Name | Credit Hours | | | |
| 351 | Fiqhi | Fiqhi 6 | 4 | 97 | 5 | A+ |
| 354 | Fiqhi | al-Faraid 2 (inheritance) | 2 | 95 | 5 | A+ |
| 351 | Asl | Usul-al-Fiqhi 6 | 3 | 100 | 5 | A+ |
| 353 | Asl | Al-Maqasid Shariica | 2 | 95 | 5 | A+ |
| 352 | Qadhaa | Al-Qadha fil Islam 1 | 2 | 87 | 4.5 | B+ |
| 351 | Qira'a | Al-Qur'ān Karim 6 | 1 | 98 | 5 | A |
| 301 | Fasr | Tafsīr 5 | 3 | 95 | 5 | A+ |
| 252 | Sunnah | al-Xadiith 4 | 3 | 92 | 4.75 | A |
| 252 | Lugha | Nahwa 4 | 3 | 92 | 4.75 | A |

**The Foundation of Knowledge: Qur'ān and Tafsīr**

Reformist education is centered on Qur'ān and xadiith, and the goal is to apply them, while eliminating the traditional commentaries that have been historically legal and theological sources for the culama.[285] As the original source of Islamic knowledge and dalīl, Qur'ān is privileged more than any other text. However, Qur'ān is not taught in the Saudi universities as prominently as one would expect. The reason is that students arrive while already xufaadul Qur'ān (sing. xaafidul-Qur'ān, one who has memorized the Qur'ān). Therefore, less time is expended on memorizing Qur'ān itself, and more time is devoted to the teaching of its interpretation or tafsīr. Still, students continue to take Qur'ān courses throughout their time at the universities. While students who specialize in usul deen (foundations of religion) at Imam and Qur'ān wa tafsīr at IUM are obligated to take more of their core classes in Qur'ān and tafsīr, those specializing in xadiith, shariica, or dacwa are also required to take a sizeable number of Qur'ān and tafsīr courses.

To illustrate this point, we might want to consider the distribution of the overall classes at the two universities. At Imam, a BA in shariica student must take upwards of 21 credit hours of tafsīr and eight Qur'ān credit hours to qualify for graduation, totaling to 29 credit hours. At IUM, the same student would take 15 credit hours of tafsīr and eight credit hours of Qur'ān. The Qur'ān taught in the universities shares similarities with dugsi, while it also differs in other ways. Contrary to dugsi where memorization begins with Allahu Akbart (the short chapters); it is the other way around at the universities. Students begin from surah al-Baqarah and continue down to

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[285] Rudolph Peters, "Idjtihād and Taqlid in 18th and 19th Century Islam," *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 20 Issue ¾ (1980), 131.

the smaller chapters. Consequently, after eight semesters, students at both universities will have completed only an eighth of the total 30 ajza and is concentrated in three main areas: Xifth (memorization), qira'a (reading) and nutq (pronunciation).

Tafsīr is taught with an extraordinary caution and students are exposed to Salafi interpretation. As in xadiith, caqīdah, and other subjects that deal with theology, a carefully selected list of books are used. Like the Qur'ān, it is also not exhaustive. Students do not learn the tafsīr of each āyāh, a remarkable difference from the detailed approach of xer: tafsīr is less thorough and comprehensive. The argument is that what these students miss out on the tafsīr program at xer, they easily make up for it through their proficiency in Arabic and xadiith, making tafsīr easier for them to learn on their own. The approach to teaching tafsīr takes off from a more global perspective. Two major principles are introduced to students. First is the specific context in which the āyāt (sing. āyāh) were revealed, or, technically, asbāb al-nuzūl (or occasions of revelation).[286] Second is the literal interpretation of the āyāh, or technically, lafdi.[287] The two are not mutually exclusive, but complement one another. Each perspective has as its own tools to figure out the meaning of the āyāt. To determine asbāb al-nuzūl, a student learns to answer this question: why, how, or in what context was this āyāh revealed?[288] What follows is a deep understanding of the āyāh, an approach to the Qur'ān that was favored by Maxamed ibn Cabdulwahab.[289]

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[286] Jonathan Brown, "Scriptures in the Modern World: Qur'ān and Hadith," in *Islam in the Modern World*, eds. Jeffrey Kenney and Ebrahim Moosa, 13-33. London: Routledge, 2014), 17.

[287] Interview with Sacad, Riyadh, April 5th, 2017.

[288] Interview with K., Riyadh, June 2nd, 2015.

[289] Natana Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 42-43.

In the lafdi approach, an answer to a question guides the teaching and learning of the Qur'ān. The question is as follows: what does this āyāh mean?[290] The answer of the āyāh directs teaching that follows. Lafdi is therefore understanding and interpretating of the āyāt in their literal meanings. This strategy dominates Salafi methodology, as it is identified with the literal approach to religious texts.[291] This approach is obviously a linguistic enterprise where the words that constitute a sentence are put under the microscope and deciphered in their literal sense. Consequently, a focal theme in the teaching of tafsīr is taking the word for what it is intended to mean, hence avoiding the assumption of a different meaning, particularly the allegorical interpretation that is identified with the Ashcari, which according to Salafis, leads to unbelief. Lafdi is taught with near obsession in tafsīr, and it is intimately connected to other themes of usul deen. Lafdi, makes demands on students to demonstrate their competence in the Arabic language. As he expounded on the differences between literal and allegorical interpretations of all texts, their benefits and dangers, an interviewee pointed out how tafsīr, dalīl, and caqīdah are all interconnected, and a careful appreciation of tafsīr is not simply necessary but mandatory.[292]

In teaching and applying tafsīr, the strict hierarchy of drawing and using dalāʾil follow this pattern: Qur'ān (tafsīrul al-Qur'ān bi Qur'ān), xadiith (tafsīrul Qur'ān bi Sunnah), and sahaba and taabiciin (tafsīrul Qur'ān bi aqwaali saxaaba wa taabiciin). Though this organization is deployed at different points in the interpretation of the āyāt, I restrict myself to tafsīrul al-Qur'ān bi Qur'ān. Within the tafsīrul al-Qur'ān bi Qur'ān abound a further classification, depending on

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[290] Interview with K., Riyadh, June 2nd, 2015.

[291] Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (Cambridge University Press 2006), 3.

[292] Interview with Sacad, Riyadh, April 12th, 2016.

the type of āyāh as demonstrated in the following: mutlaq (absolute), muqayyad (qualified), mansukh (abrogated), or mubayyan (explained).[293] Students at these universities learn that interpreting an āyāh must commence from another āyāh. This method constitutes the highest form of interpretive authenticity. Tafsīrul al-Qur'ān bil Qur'ān stresses that if one can find a dalīl that is clearly demarcated in the Qur'ān, then that dalīl is conclusive, indisputable, and therefore incontestable. Therefore, it is unnecessary to pursue any more dalīl. A common example I was given is that the Qur'ān states that the punishment for stealing is amputation of the hand.[294] Because the dalīl is crystal clear in the Qur'ān, all there is left to do is to apply it. The dalīl that is extracted from the Qur'ān is called nass.[295]

A nuanced illustration of āyāh-to-āyāh interpretation was related to me on our journey back from Makkah to Riyadh by the mushrif of the cumrah trip. The mushrif began by stating these simple words Alhamdulillah Rabb al-Caalamin. He stopped for a moment to look at the expansive red sun dunes and the black tarmac that disappeared into the horizon. He then flipped the words he had just spoken into a question: what is Rabb al-Caalamin? For a moment, I thought he was addressing me, but he continued and said that to understand Rabb al-Caalamin, one has to go down the interpretive pyramid that was taught to them at Imam. The first stop is the Qur'ān where, "an āyāh that helps to explain the meaning in ways that leaves no doubt in one's mind regarding its specificity and the intended denotation."[296] The mushrif references an incident between Pharaoh and Prophet Musa to clarify his point. Indeed, when Pharaoh asked

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[293] Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (NY: Routledge, 2006), 43
[294] Interview with K., Riyadh, April 21st, 2015.
[295] Nass, according to Sheikh Nasser Albaanee in his book, "The Necessity of Adhering to the Sunnah and Forbidding Defying It," is the text of the Qur'ān itself and not the comments of it.
[296] Interview with O., Riyadh, April 21st, 2015

Prophet Musa who He (Musa's) Lord was, Musa recited this āyāh: Rabb Samawatu Wa al-ardh Wamaa Baynahumaa in Kuntum Muqiniin (26:24). The āyāh is an excerpt, but this part translates into: "The Lord of the heavens and the earth, and all that is in between them, if you seek to be convinced with certainty."[297] Still, Pharaoh could not grasp what Rabbi al-Caalamin meant, for he believed to be a lord himself. But this āyāh in Surat as-Shucaraa is central to illustrating that Rabb al-Caalamin is the Lord Who created the earths and the heavens.

Though the books for tafsīr heavily overlap, they have been carefully selected to bolster the message, and the missionary visions of these universities and the country in general. At IUM, the two tafsīr books that primarily dominate the curriculum, both of which are mutun, are Fatx al-Qadir[298] and Tafsīr ibn Kathīr;[299] Imam, on the hand, uses Fatx al-Qadir. Other books used at Imam include those written by prominent luminaries such as ibn Tabari and Qurtuby. The syllabus for tafsīr is eclectic and transcends madhab. However, the absence of tafsīr with a Hanbali bent was an issue that the students could not immediately discern. Most took pride in this neutrality, and thus insisted that they did not belong to any madhab, but whatever dalīl that is closer to the Qur'ān and xadiith.

They were interested to speak less about the books and more about the background and the character of the authors of those books. In a significant way, this represented an overlap between the traditional and reformist approach to learning. Whenever I broached the idea of why

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[297] Mohamed Khan, and Muhammad Al-Hilali, *Interpretations of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'ān in the English Language* (Riyadh: Darrussalam Publishers, 2001).

[298] Fath al-Qadīr by Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shawkānī (d. 1250/1834). See Carl Brockelmann, *History of the Arabic Written Tradition, Supplement 1*, 261.

[299] Tafsīr ibn Kathīr by Abu 'l-Fidā' Ismāʿīl b. ʿUmar b. Kathīr ʿImād al-Dīn b. al-Khaṭīb al-Qurashī al-Buṣrawī al-Shāfiʿī, (d. 774/1373). See Brockelmann, "Supplement vol. 2,"53.

they studied these books or how they were chosen in the first place, which was a stretch for them as they did not know how the books were chosen, they would recount the character of such luminaries as ash-Shawkani and ibn Kathir. They stressed their admiration for reasons that align them with larger Salafi approach to dalīl. The most frequent reason for such an admiration as it was the use of xadiith to explain their points.[300] To me it revealed a top-down approach to curriculum, and the absence of a clear theoretical or thematically schematized academic program. But the students had their own take on the choice of those books. A student at IUM told me that he thought the texts were chosen for their isnad, adding that universities trusted these authors and were indeed confident of their caqīdah.[301]

In contrast to xer, instructional methodology used to teach tafsīr and other subjects such as Qur'ān or xadiith is summative. The assumption with the modernist epistemology is the belief that to produce a mujtahid, emphasis must be placed more on the mechanisms of discovering knowledge than feeding knowledge to students. Alongside the books, students are availed the tools to locate the dalāʾil they need for dacwa. Lesson delivery begins with the basic aspects of what is being taught such as the different pronunciation strategies (qira'at) of certain words, in isolation and in context. When it comes to elucidating the content of the material, the professor assumes a more general approach. Seldom is he as specific as the kalimad-to-kalimad strategy of xer. Instead, he isolates key words or phrases which he writes on the board for a more in-depth analysis. Afterward, he shows how the surah or āyāh is a source of dalīl, paying attention to its asbāb al-nuzūl and lafdi. If there is a xadiith connected to it, he discusses it as well. Furthermore, the professor also highlights ikhtilaaf al-culama, or disagreement between scholars. This is

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[300] Interview with Mukhtar, Madina, May 9th, 2017.

[301] Interview with Mukhtar, Madina, May 9th, 2017.

particularly critical as the authors of the tafsīr books are overwhelmingly non-Hanbali scholars: Ismaaciil ibn Kathir and Tabari were both Shaafici, Qurtuby was Maliki, and Shawkani is said to have had no madhab. Tafsīr lessons typically end with the professor expressing his own opinion on a mas'ala.

**What You Can't Find in the Qur'ān, Find It in the Xadiith**

The fact that heavy emphasis is placed on the teaching of xadiith in Salafi institutions is well established.[302] This focus on xadiith and its ranking in the dalīl structure is one thing the students reveled especially as it set them apart from traditional Somali culama. Xadiith is second in the dalīl ranking, coming only after the Qur'ān. While this is considered generally accurate, there have historically been oscillating attitudes toward xadiith's dalīl lineup. For instance, some Salafis consider certain types of xadiithyo as more crucial source of dalīl than the Qur'ān.[303] Consequently, celebrating this status, Albani reiterates that xadiith alone could be used to provide answers to questions not found in the Qur'ān.[304] In the two universities, the teaching of xadiith is heavy and intensive, and like the Qur'ān, is a requirement for all students regardless of specialization. At Imam, a non-xadiith specializing student for a BA in shariica had to take a total of 23 of the 202 credit hours, while the same student would be required to take 15 of the total 170 credit hours at IUM.

Studying xadiith begins from two broad dimensions under which other areas generally

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[302] Laurent Bonnefoy, "How Transnational is Yemen," *in Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement,* ed. Roel Meijer, 321-342 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 325.
[303] Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (2006), 214.
[304] Stephane Lacroix, "Al-Albani's Revolutionary Approach to Hadith," *ISIM Review* 21 (2008) 6.

fall. The first one is exposing students to the copious amounts of normative xadiithyo, while the second is a deeper immersion into the mechanism that helps to discern and conclusively determine the authenticity of a xadiith. In other words, these are Xadiith Nabawi or traditional xadiith and Mustalax al-Xadiith, respectively. Xadiith Nabawi are the authentic xadiithyo that have been reported from the Prophet with their various rankings, while Mustalax al-Xadiith are the rules that have traditionally been put into place to classify and codify the xadiithyo based on their degree of authenticity. These two broad categories are broken down into four subsections in which these xadiithyo are applied in real life: xadiithyo on cibaadaad focus on the worship of Allah such as prayer, ramadan, zakat and xajj. Mucamalaad concern rules of trade and cover buying and selling and what is considered haram, halal, usury, or dishonesty. Jinaayat are about human conflict (xukn) such as rulings for thieves or killers. Finally, fiqhi al-Usra or xadiithyo for families are rules that govern marriage, divorce, or inheritance. The foregoing grouping underscore the legal and theological implications of xadiithyo.

The two universities assign different course books though their contents are similar, if not identical. At Imam, the matn used is subul al-salām[305] along with its sharx, bulūgh al-marām.[306] The xadiithyo in these texts are drawn from Saxiix Sita: Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood, An-Nisaee, Axmed and At-Tirmidhi. On the other hand, the matn for the non-xadiith specializing students at IUM are, like Imam, the Saxiix Sita. While those familiar with xadiith will know these texts, what is less well familiar, perhaps, is that their choice and how they are organized are

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[305] Subul al-salām by al-Amīr Muhammad b. Ismāʿīl (al-Kahlānī) al-Yamanī al-Sanʿānī (d.1789; GAL S II: 74).

[306] Bulūgh al-marām min adillat al-ahkām by Abū Fadl Shihāb al-Dīn Ahmad Ibn  ajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d.1449; GAL II: 80ff; S II: 72ff).

determined by their ranking. Bukhari, for example, is the most authentic of the six, coming only after the Qur'ān, followed by others in a descending order. When using these six books, Bukhari will be the first to be taught and referenced. However, these multivolume books are not exhaustively taught; instead, they serve as reference texts where only about a third of the xadiithyo are eventually encountered.[307] Choice of a xadiith is predetermined by course themes, including: caqīdah or siira of the Prophet, among others.

By far, Xadiith Nabawi and Mustalax al-Xadiith are the core of the xadiith syllabus. Still, universities assume different approaches in their teaching. While access to the normative xadiith is relatively straightforward as students can read, understand, and memorize them, the same does not apply to Mustalax al-Xadiith. The latter are daunting as knowledge of them transcends the mere words on the page; rather, they constitute an understanding of the technical components and the tools used to rank the xadiith as well as gauging their authenticity. Mustalax al-Xadiith is critical for dacwa since only through it can a daaci tell the ranking of a xadiith and whether it is saxiix, xassan or dhaciif. This demarcation has assumed a renewed meaning and traditionalist Salafis have helped shape these institutions' preference for the more reliable xadiith.[308] The text for Mustalax al-Xadiith at both Imam and IUM is taysīr mustalah al-hadīth.[309] Under Mustalax al-Xadiith, learning takes off from ascertaining the authenticity of the xadiith: is this xadiith from the Prophet or is it not? Mustalax al-Xadiith was therefore put in place so that people do not lie about the Prophet or twist his message.[310] What follows is a deep immersion into the rules of

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[307] Interview with Mukhtar, Medina, May 23rd, 2017.

[308] Jonathan Brown, "Scriptures in the Modern World: Qur'ān and Hadith," 29.

[309] Taysīr mustalah al-hadīth, a text on the ways to use hadīth, by Ahmad Qittān. Roman Loimeier, "Between Marketable Skills," 187.

[310] Interview with Mukhtar, Madina, May 25th, 2017.

validating a xadiith.

The two universities deploy two strategies that determine the authenticity of a xadiith. The terms that situate these two aspects of Mustalax al-Xadiith study are Mutawatir and Aaxaad. Mutawatir is a xadiith that has a long chain of narrators or sanad tawila. Based on this isnad, Xadiithul Mutawatir are considered authentic, attaining the level of yaqin (certainty) and having the same daraja (ranking) as the Qur'ān. The rationale behind ranking Mutawatir is that it is unlikely for a group of people with the piety of the saxaaba (companions of the Prophet) to agree to lie on something as fundamental as xadiith. Aaxaad, also called khabar waaxid (single narrator) has a shorter isnad than a Mutawatir; therefore, it is ranked less than Mutawatir. Aaxaad is further broken down into three subcategories: Ghariib (strange), Aziz (rare), or Mash'huur (famous). Gharib are xadiithyo whose isnad contains only one narrator, while Aziz has two, and Mash'hur has more than two narrators. Though Aaxaad are not as strong as Mutawatir, it does not imply that they are weak or inadmissible. Aaxaad can include saxiix, xassan or dhaciif. Students learn these classifications which are embedded in Mutawatir or Aaxad, and therefore resulting into saxiix, xassan or dhaciif. At the center of this classification is, of course, the character of the narrators which help classify the xadiith as well as the xadiith's benefits and practical applications to axkaam.

The mutun are non-polemical works that simply contain hundreds of normative xadiithyo. On the other hand, shurux have been written by various scholars over a long time and are replete with variant, or conflicting interpretations. IUM curriculum comprises the following:

Fatḥ al-bāri[311] (Bukhari); Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim (Muslim),[312]; ʿAwn al-maʿbūd,[313] (Abu Dawood); and, finally, Tuḥfat aḥwadhī [314] (Sunan at-Tirmidhi). What is interesting in these shurux is that none of them comes from the Hanbali tradition. Xaafid ibnu Xajar and Nawawi were both Shaafici while al-Haydar and Al-Mubarakfuri are both Xanaffi. The selection of these texts somewhat underscores the image of IUM as an international university which teaches students of different madahib. Imam does not have a fully-fledged xadiith department; instead, it falls under usul deen. By default, all students in the Islamic sciences faculty must take xadiith courses. Those specializing in xadiith study it more deeply than others, and the matn for shariica students is Bulūgh al-marām by Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī, a Shaafici. Students in the Arabic department, on the other hand, do not study these texts, but a compilation of preapproved xadiithyo which cover various areas such as cibaadaad and mucamalaad.

As students try to make sense of the meanings of xadiithyo using both shurux and Mustalax, the issue of madhab becomes poignant, owing to their multiple interpretations and the need to know them and decide which one to choose during their dacwa or debates. To students and professors, the madhab of the shurux is immediately clear from the meanings they render the xadiithyo, although professors will certainly explain it more clearly. In the shurux, authors

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[311] Fatḥ al-bārī by Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1448) G I 159. For more, see Carl Brockelmann, History of the Arabic Tradition, Supplement Volume 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

[312] Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim by Abū Zakariyyāʾ Yahyā b. Sharaf b. Muhyī al-Dīn (al-Dimashqī) al-Nawawī Nawawī (d. 676/1227). See Carl Brockelmann, "*History of the Arabic Written Tradition, Supplement 1*," 692.

[313] ʿAwn al-maʿbūd by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Sharaf al-Ḥaqq Muḥammad Ashraf b. Amīr b. ʿAlī Ḥaydar, Ind. 1318/9. Refer to Brockelmann, "*History of the Arabic Written Tradition, Supplement Volume 1*," 993.

[314] Tuḥfat aḥwadhī bi Sharh Jami' al-Tirmidhi by Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Abd al-Rahim Mubarakfuri. See, Brockelmann, "Supplement 1," 266.

typically render their interpretation based on the dalīl available to them.[315] However, this interpretation sometimes departs from the author's own madhab. Now the onus falls on the class— the professor and students—to determine whether the dalīl is strong and acceptable to them. Of course, decisions are made based on strength of the dalīl. The professor states whether he agrees with the musharix (the author of the sharx), a crucial factor in student education. If the professor does not agree with the musharix, he will introduce another sharx. Reasons why the professor would do this include insufficient explanation of the xadiith, or when the sharx contains the sole interpretation of the musharix's madhab, particularly if there is stronger dalīl in a different madhab. Students may or may not agree with the professor. Cases abound where students do not agree with the professor as classes constitute variety of madahib from across the globe; here, students present their own dalīl and often a debate will mostly certainly ensue. Nonetheless, the professor's view is likely to always prevail. I was informed of specific instances in which a student and a professor viciously disagreed, which will be taken up later.

Though some of the literature suggests Salafism deemphasizes madhahib,[316] it does not always bear out in the teaching of xadiith in Saudi universities. Quite an effort is invested on teaching the various interpretations that madahib have on a range of masāʾil, the purpose being to equip the ducaad with the information needed to make their arguments well, conduct dacwa, or counter opponents. Thus, students' insights into the madhahib are strengthened. This narrative became clear during my fieldwork. As students recounted the names of past scholars and authors, they offered extensive background information about these authors, including what madhab they

[315] Interview with Mukhtar, Madina, May 26th, 2017.

[316] Zachary Wright, "Salafi Theology and Islamic Orthodoxy in West Africa," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 35, no. 3 (2015), 647.

ascribed to. The utility of madhab, in addition to the dacwa dimension, is also local as students imbibe the Hanbali bent from their daily lives and the xalaqat that they attend in mosques. These xalaqat emphasize the Hanbali approach to legal matters more than is the case at universities.

The application of xadiith to daily life is crucial to students and are therefore challenged to determine how to choose between equally strong xadiithyo. The following example is often used to demonstrate the strength of a xadiith, only in this case considering madhab. Here is the scenario: does camel meat nullify wudu (ablution)? In all the madahib but one, a person does not need to take ablution after eating camel meat. The exception is Hanbali. It is imperative to remember at this point that the Prophet used to take wudu after consuming all foods that have been cooked, but he stopped this practice. According to shariica, the latter action will always override what came before it. As such, to determine whether or not to take ablution after eating camel meat, the professor tests the xadiith that commands people to do so. He states where the xadiith appears, in which case it is in Imam Muslim, one of the saxiix sita. On the other hand, other madahib use as dalīl another xadiith that holds that one does not have to take wudu from foods that are cooked. The dalīl for this argument is from Abu Dawood, a saxiix sita. In this situation, students are introduced to a third dimension of categorizing xadiith used by the Hanbalis, called takhsiis.[317] The argument is that when the xadiith concerning taking wudu after eating camel meat came down, the Prophet clarified that one indeed has to take wudu after consuming camel meat. It is a specific instance. What buttresses this argument is the sharx by Imam al-Nawawi to which most of my interviewees originally ascribed. Imam Nawawi agrees with the takhsiis and accepts the Hanbali approach. Therefore, this deep engagement with

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[317] Takhasiis means to retain, hold back, or preserve something, particularly after discarding others to which it might have belonged.

xadiithyo produces complex entanglements with various madhab, but also an unwavering fidelity to dalīl.

## Caqīdah: Foundation of Belief

The Salafi doctrine is understood, defined, and represented through creedal tenets,[318] or caqīdah (pl. caqā'id). Caqīdah is a subject of study and a pivotal standard to measure everything else: how acceptable course books are, professors, and their authors are in all departments of the universities. It is not too uncommon to hear this statement around the universities: is his caqīdah correct? A great illustration is that of one Sheikh Sabuni, a Syrian professor and author whose books were a staple at Saudi universities before they were withdrawn following concerns about his caqīdah.[319] Whether politics informed the decision to pull back Sabuni's books, or it was based solely on erroneous caqīdah is unclear. But the seriousness with which caqīdah is handled is discernible in the curriculum and students' social life. On the latter, I will illustrate it using my own personal research experience. In an ongoing interview at IUM, a student came into the room and sat to listen to the interview. Since it was early in the morning and we were sitting in the interviewee's dorm room, my interlocutor wore a macawiis[320] and a t-shirt. The student who came in interrupted, and in a joking manner, said: "look at him (referring to my interviewee), a student of caqīdah wearing a macawiis and a t-shirt! Why would anyone expect us to dress any

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[318] Bernard Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 35.

[319] Interview with Dr. Mohamed, Riyadh, June 2nd, 2017.

[320] It is a loose-fitting garment which is worn by men by wrapping it around their waist and tying it into a tight knot

better, as in thawb[321]?" I later asked the student who made the comment, himself a PhD student in shariica, about his comments, and he clarified that students of caqīdah are notorious for their firmness in dress, demeanor, and all matters religion.

The centering of caqīdah as an object of study underscores several key points, including the "correcting" of the caqīdah of foreign students. Consequently, the significance of caqīdah as an object of study was explained as follows:

> When it comes to caqīdah, one of its biggest goals is the intersection of the academic and the personal. You know why? Because wrong caqīdah is a recipe for weakness of faith and unbelief in ways that fiqh may not be. Consider that we have four madahib: does that mean belonging to one madhab over the other will make you a disbeliever? No. But we do not have four caqā'id. Any other caqīdah other than the Salaf is wrong.[322]

The extremely narrow approach to caqīdah is clear. This comes from their understanding of caqīdah as tawqifi[323], and that there is no wiggle room for competing interpretations of it.[324] All students must study caqīdah, though the caqīdah program at Imam is a continuation of the tawxiid from the machad. At IUM, caqīdah falls under the department of usul deen, together with Qur'ān and xadiith. Students who do not specialize in in usul deen take more than 20 out of their cumulative 202 credit hours. Of the total 170 credits hours at IUM, students must take a total of 11 credit hours of tawxiid. The universities use various course books for caqīdah. The mutun

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[321] Long flowing dress that Muslim men wear. While it is the national dress in the Middle East, other Muslims wear it more frequently on Fridays. It has different names in the various Muslim contexts. In Saudi Arabia, it is called thawb, while it is called khamiis in East Africa.

[322] Interview with K., Riyadh, December 18, 2015.

[323] Masāʾil that have been spelled out in the Qur'ān in which there is no ijtihad or interpretation, and a person must take them as they are and follow them.

[324] Interview with Billow, Madina, May 23rd, 2017.

taught at Imam are al-ʿAqīdah aṭ-Ṭaḥāwiyya[325] and al-Aqīdah at-Tadmuriya.[326] IUM, on the other hand, has one matn: Kitāb Tawhid.[327] Caqīdah is the loci around which the founding principles of the universities or even the awarding of minax to international students play out. Interestingly, in the teaching of caqīdah, less attention is paid to the matn than the sharx as one would generally expect. Part of the reason is that the matn is highly dense and needs clarification which occurs in the sharx. This indispensability of the sharx is showcased through an example of Kitāb Tawhid, a tiny book, has many shurux. An example is Fatxul Majeed, which has two mujalaad (pl. mujala: volumes).

Caqīdah is taught in both universities as a polemic, represented on the oppositional binary of what is correct caqīdah and what is not. These binaries mean strictly worshipping Allah alone, while disassociating anything or anybody with Him. All else that is learned springs from this dualism. Students are reminded that to successfully assess whether caqīdah is correct or aberrant, they ought to ask themselves this question: "is this how the ahlu Sunnah wa jamaca understood or practiced caqīdah?"[328] No wonder Kitāb Tawhid is the matn at IUM for its fidelity and

[325] ʿAqīdah aṭ-Ṭaḥāwiyya by Abū Jaʿfar Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Salāma al-Ḥajrī al-Ṭaḥāwī, d. 331/933. For more, see, Carl Brockelmann, History of the Arabic Tradition, Supplement 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 294.
[326] Al-Aqīdah at-Tadmuriya by Abu 'l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm (d. 682/1283, Ibn al-ʿImād *ShDh* V, 376) b. ʿAbd al-Salām (I, 690) b. ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Taymiyya Taqī al-Dīn al-Ḥarrānī al-Ḥanbalī. For more, refer to Carl Brockelmann, History of the Arabic Tradition, Supplement 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1996) 123-4.
[327] Kitāb Tawhid by Al-Imām Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb b. Dāʾūd, the founder of Wahhābism, was born in 1115/1703. For more, see, Brockelmann, "*History of the Arabic Tradition, Supplement 2*," 551.
[328] Interview with Billow, Madina, May 25th, 2017.

devotion to the concept of uluhiya[329] and addresses itself to the vast international student body. This text is also a perfect manifestation of these oppositional binaries: worshipping is for Allah alone, fearing is for Allah alone, killing (animals) should be in His name, one seeks help from Him alone, among others.

The most controversial topic in caqīdah is the ways to understand and interpret the attributes of Allah. This makes al-ʿAqīdah aṭ-Ṭaxāwiyya well regarded as a course book as it, "has been commonly associated with Salafi influence—a doctrinally narrow and literalist orientation historically averse to rationalist or mystical orientations. Al-ʿAqīdah aṭ-Ṭaxāwiyya contains explicit exhortations against Mu'tazilites (rationalists) and Qadiriyya Sufis."[330] It pushes back on these groups and calls for a literal interpretation of Allah's attributes. Students told me that these attributes must be understood literally as Allah said He has them and interpreting them in ways contrary to this leads to wrong caqīdah and therefore unbelief. The texts are written in response to opposing caqā'id. For instance, at-Taxawi states that heaven and hell are eternal as opposed to others who contend that heaven and hell will end at some point.[331] Ibn Taymiyya's is structured in a question-answer method, is highly personable and relatable to most students. It is radd

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[329] Kitāb Tawhid focusses Uluhiyya more than the other two: rububiyya and Isma wa Sifaat. Though these two are equally significant, it seems that it is more intellectual or abstract compared to the other two or even in everyday practice. A student reminded me that during CabdulWahhab's time, Uluhiyya was more urgent and important as people in un-Islamic acts such as worshipping of trees and visiting of graves. The subtext from selecting this book as a matn is that many of the students, particularly those I was studying, come from an Ashcari background and therefore are what Cabdulwahab fought in his time.

[330] Peter Mandalville, "Islamic Education in Britain: Approaches to Religious Knowledge in a Pluralistic Society," in *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, eds. Robert Hefner and Muhammad Zaman, 224-241 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 232.

[331] Interview with Sacad, Riyadh, May 2nd, 2017.

(refutation), and like Taxawi's, admonishes those with "aberrant caqīdah" such as the Ashcaris. The book lambasts those who interpret Allah's attributes allegorically. In a bid to clarify these attributes more clearly, an interviewee at Imam explained that when we say that Allah has attributes, the arguments is not that such attributes resemble those of humans. Instead, they are unique and exclusive only to Allah."[332] He added that the dalīl for the uniqueness of Allah's attributes and His monotheism comes from the following āyāh: leisa kamithlihi shay'un wa huwa as-Samiicu al-Basiir (42:11). This verse translates into: "there is nothing like Him, and He is the All-Hearer the All-Seer."[333] When Ibn Taymiyya used this āyāh as dalīl, he was primarily addressing two groups of people: mushabiha and mucadila. Mushabiha give shape to Allah's attributes, while mucadila deny the existence of these attributes altogether. As such, the first part of the āyāh, Leisa kamithlihi shay'un, refutes the mushabiha, while wa huwa as-Samicu al-Basiru, refutes al-mucadila. Contrary to these groups, Ahlul Sunnah Wal Jamaaca positions itself in-between the two, or wasad, which is that Allah has attributes, but are unique to Him.

**Pedagogy, Meaning-Making, and Subjectivity**

As pointed out earlier, conducting research in Saudi Arabia is difficult. It is even more daunting when trying to get data from universities such as how learning happens or to simply interview professors. However, I worked around these challenges by enrolling in Arabic as a Second Language (ASOL) program at Imam to get an insight into learning in the classrooms. In the regular classes, class sizes differ and range anywhere from 20 to 80 students depending on

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[332] Interview with K., Riyadh, May 1st, 2015.

[333] Mohamed Muhsin Khan, and Al-Hilali, Muhammad, *Interpretations of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'ān in the English Language* (Riyadh, Darrussalam Publishers, 2001).

the subject being taught. The length of lessons varies, too, and could last anywhere from one to four hours, depending on credit hours. Actual teaching offers an interesting interplay of traditional and modern teaching methodologies. Instructional materials differ from the traditional setting and would typically include course books, computers, and white boards with markers. More striking is the physical setting of the classrooms, which reveals how quickly this country has changed, but on a larger scale how this impinges on learning and the kind of subjects the universities strive to produce:[334] the transformation impacts on the nature of graduates. These changes are constructed toward fitting the graduates in a modern context in which they will inevitably operate and become important functionaries.

Students do not sit on the floor anymore, but learn in new, spacious, air-conditioned, and multi-storied buildings, with elevators and stairs. They are not using reed pens, hides or loox, but books and pens. Facilities such as coffee shops, printing shops and large libraries are always around the corner. Admittedly, such general transformation is not restricted to Saudi Arabia, but are widespread, including madāris elsewhere in the Muslim world.[335] Furniture consists of armchairs for students and a chair, a long table, and lectern for the professor. Each student would have one or two books and a notebook depending on the subject. For example, if they were studying xadiith, they would have to bring both the matn and sharx. Though all or nearly all the students have smartphones, they are not allowed to use them in class or record any of the lessons.

The lecture method is still the most widely used. The professor would stand in front of the class and lecture. Lectures are book-based and are linear as the professor explains and the

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[334] Dale Eickelman, "Mass Higher Education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Societies," 647

[335] Louis Brenner, “The Transformation of Muslim Schooling in Mali,” 203.

students follow in their own books. Lessons begin with the professor writing basic information on the board, and asking students to read or recite, whichever the case may be, while he or another one explained. Since students know what they will learn based on the book, they often read ahead of time and come to class prepared. Classes would consist of students from various disciplines, adding another dimension to the lecture method. In teaching students of different specializations, professors isolate key words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs in the Qur'ān or the xadiith that they feel they need to pay more attention to. The detail embedded in this could entail tracing the etymology of a word, sentence or the literal implication or even the context of revelation. Thus, definitions and explanations that they extend to these words, phrases, or paragraphs vary as each strand of definition is intended to be useful to the various mawaad (sing. madda: subject) such as fiqh or xadiith. Words and phrases may have slightly or vastly different significance depending on the subjects.

In learning Qur'ān and xadiith, the main technique is xifth (memorization). Memorization varies from dugsi or xer, especially the former. Instead, university students memorize parts of a text (Qur'ān or xadiith), while at the same time they are exposed to their meanings. This will be too elementary for the xer who will already have memorized the entire Qur'ān and will at this stage only be learning the meanings of the Qur'ān.[336] The argument, however, is that as students recite the āyāt, they would have a deeper engagement with it and what the āyāt are communicating because of their proficiency in Arabic. Xifth, therefore, is an active process of learning. In each lesson of the Qur'ān, a student memorizes five to eight āyāt. Also, the number of āyāt memorized are uneven, as are the xadiith. Nevertheless, the salience of

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[336] Hellen Boyle, "Memorization and Learning in Schools," 488.

memorization was underscored a student at IUM who pointed to kitāb al-muharrar,[337] a xadiith and fiqh text on his small table, and said: "you see that book? It contains 1,324 xadiithyo, and I have memorized them all."[338]

Understanding, appreciating and applying the āyāt of the Qur'ān as well as the many xadiithyo to specific instances during dacwa is a major them in teaching. As they do this, what a daaci would need to remember is not simply the text of the āyāh or the xadiith; rather, it is the plethora of other elements that go along with these text(s): the meanings of Qur'ān or xadiith, asbāb al-nuzūl or lafdi, the isnad of the xadiith, or the status of a xadiith. One student explained the implication of memorizing, understanding and application to dacwa this way, "if someone studied material as we do, one will remember it and apply it to dacwa."[339] Retelling these details allow for an engagement with the audience or an opposing party. The endgame is who is more convincing and obviously the ultimate arbiter is the Qur'ān and the xadiith. I also encountered occasions, though seemingly a little comical, where memorization was identical to the xer, illustrating its enduring importance even for modern universities. When writing their exams, students will be required to reproduce sentences or passages from their books verbatim. During one of the exams, a student who was writing his end of year exam requested from the proctor if he could lie down on the floor of the exam room, while the exam was still ongoing. Finding it a little absurd, the proctor asked if he was unwell and needed to lie down. The student answered: "I used to read this book while lying down on my bed, and I can only remember the material if I

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[337] Kitāb al-muharrar by Abū l-Qāsim al-Rāfiʿ al-Qazwīnī. See Roman Loimeier, "Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills,"185.

[338] Interview with Mukhtar, Medina, May 24th, 2017.

[339] Interview with K., Riyadh, March 6th, 2015.

lie down."[340] In another case, a student blacked out a letter in a word on his exam paper, and when the professor returned the papers and asked the student why he had done so, the student replied that it was also dark in the book. The professor asked to look at the book, and he discovered that it was actually a printing problem.

Perhaps what truly highlights dacwa and its activism and therefore agency especially when these students graduate and return to their communities is the teaching strategy that draws real world issues and scenarios to solve problems. This is clearly discernible in areas such as inheritance and the use of appropriate dalīl. Beyond the generic questions of what inheritance is, where dalīl comes from, reasons for inheritance, or why some would be disinherited, the more strenuous but practical strategy is when executing and dividing the estate of the deceased. It was explained to me as follows: a man has died and left behind his mother, daughter, granddaughter, maternal grandmother and paternal grandmother. What are the conditions for inheritance in this case? After teaching how to calculate fractions, LCM and MCM, the professor would either ask students to calculate the inheritance either on their own or have one of them do it on the board. When he finishes, the professor asks the other students whether they agreed with the calculations and the solutions he arrived. Whoever disagrees will correct the problem and therefore solve it.

Other times, the professor will break the class into small groups and give them a mas'ala, asking them to solve it and reach a verdict by finding the appropriate a dalīl. They should explain the dalīl and where they retrieved it from, its strength, and how they used it to arrive at their solution. Such scenarios help them as mujtahid and to use it to solve emerging modern problems. At Imam, a student reported how they had to determine if the use of ATM services was halal or

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[340] Interview with H., Riyadh, February 15th, 2018.

haram and demonstrate their decision using appropriate dalīl. In deciding the status of ATM or its use by a Muslim, they began from the broad perspective that masāʾil that deal with cibaadaad are xaraam until such a time that one finds a dalīl that proves otherwise. On the other hand, mucamalaad are xalaal until one finds a dalīl that negates it. As one cannot locate dalīl that overtly discusses modern technological discoveries in both Qur'ān and xadiith, it means that its dalīl will not be nass nor thahir; one would therefore have to deploy the mucamalaad dimension.

**Conclusion**

I conclude by exploring the intersection of the curriculum, pedagogy, and subjectivity. I bring up subjectivity because of the dogmatism that is infused in the curriculum. Subjectivity is a broad and problematic concept that can mean many things, and it can be informed and shaped by various forces within and without the universities. The experiences students have in Saudi universities are purposeful and dogmatic with the objective of transforming them and their home communities. Many of the interviews, informal conversations, and other contacts that I have had with the students have constantly reminded me of the objectives of their education. Salafism has already been said to be about change: from the individual to the community.[341]

Students are taught eponymous texts that have been the bulwark of Salafism, the likes of which are ibn Taymiyya's and ibn Wahab's. Throughout my fieldwork, I had not encountered a student who called these culama by their names without adding a qualifier: Sheikh Maxamed Cabdulwahab and Sheikhul Islam ibn Taymiyya. Texts espousing or discussing opposing ideas or notions are avoided as they considered to spread shirk and fitna. On more than one occasion, I

[341] Frank Griffel. "What Do We Mean By "Salafi"? Connecting Mohamed Abduh with Egypt's Nur Party," *Die Welt des Islams*, 55, (2015), 190.

was told that graduates from Saudi universities do not seek livelihood after graduation but pursue dacwa: spreading and guarding the religion; to be vigilant and look out for any belief or action they understand to be departing from true Islam and address it through the tongue, hand, or simply dislike it. The universities therefore strive to produce a packaged individual, prepared in a certain way through their education, but also in their appearance. Both implicitly and explicitly, the aim of these universities is to transform students to transform their societies.

Modern institutions of higher learning produce ducaad or culama who have the knowledge and the attitude to function in a modern setting. The objective is to train culama for the domestic or foreign market, as individuals who understand Islam and interpret it through the prism of that country's social, political or sectarian worldview. In a major way, it is an expression of that country's character. An example is in order here: prior to 2018, a woman driving a car was an abomination in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, this and many other issues would find their way into the curriculum and taught as basic principles of Islam. In truth, however, it has nothing to with Islam, but are the cultural practices of Saudi Arabia. One is therefore left wondering about these discrepancies. More damaging is how some students would replicate these practices in Garissa and other places as the larger emphasis of these universities is to inculcate graduates into Saudi-style Salafism for a larger and a more global change to happen through them. The broader purpose of this education project is to empower students and free them from centuries-old knowledge and instead redirect them to the Qur'ān and xadiith. They also avail them tools to carry out these missionary activities, which encompasses not the knowledge offered in these universities, but literature as well. As we will see in the next chapter, Saudi Arabia's or its proxy's constant presence in Garissa, the patronage and assistance it offered the returnees and mabcutheen would prove crucial to the spreading of its version of Salafism.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Salafism in Garissa: Intellectualism, Epistemology, and Ideology

In the recent past, two major incidents that took place in Kenya thrust discussions on Salafism[342] to the fore. Unfortunately, these were horrific events that were orchestrated by al-Shabab and resulted in the death of hundreds of people. On September 21, 2013, the group launched an attack on Westgate Mall in Nairobi, resulting in the death of 167 people; the other one was the Garissa University attack in 2015 that led to the death of 148 innocent people, mostly students. These episodes of violence are but a fraction of the daily attacks that the group carries out in Somalia. The discussions that follow these violent attacks are not restricted to al-Shabab but often loop in Salafism, indiscriminately casting a large segment of Muslims as violent or predisposed to violence simply because they are Salafis. In the process, Sufism is also pulled into the punditry, emerging as a convenient foil for Salafism. Questions such as why Sufism is peaceful, accepting and harmless, while Salafism is the opposite are a staple. In the recent past, Salafis have endured accusations of violence and militancy;[343] they have been represented as intolerant and foreign by other Muslims. Salafis have derisively been labeled Wahabi, a code-word for radicalism and were denounced as mintidiin in Somali (sing. mintid, militant).

In Garissa, conflation of Salafism and militancy attained a practical relevance in the attack on Garissa University College, especially when viewed from the perspective of the man

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[342] In this chapter and more generally, Salafism is understood to be a composite concept globally, but more specifically in Garissa.

[343] Terje Østebø, "African Salafism: Religious Purity and the Politicization of Purity,"2.

who orchestrated the attack. Widely known through his alias Gacma Dheere (The Man with the Long Hands); Maxamed Muxumed Cali was born in Garissa and was a respected educator at Madrasatul Najaax before running off to join al-Shabab, rising to its highest echelons. His defection to al-Shabab and Somalia has a historical underpinning and underscores larger currents that stem from colonial divisions and postcolonial realities. These include a common language, religion, and cultural practice of crisscrossing of people and ideas for centuries. In chapter three, we saw how the xer from the northern Kenya have been educated in in Somalia and the Ogaadeen. Contemporarily though, as a group that espouses the notion of Islamic state, al-Shabab does not recognize the borders that cut through the Somali-speaking regions, particularly considering that they have been drawn by non-Muslims. Inversely, the apparent congruity of Salafism and al-Shabab fails to stand much scrutiny. Indeed, theological disagreements between certain Salafi scholars and al-Shabab stalwarts unraveled the illusion of a monolithic Salafism in the Horn. Sheikh Umal, a leading Salafi voice and a graduate from IUM and based in Nairobi has had his fair share of spats with al-Shabab. One of these, of course, was the issue of jihad as practiced by al-Shabab and which Sheikh Umal vehemently opposed. After the attacks in Kenya, Sheikh Umal reacted strongly against al-Shabab attacks.[344] The point that I make here is that both Sufis and Salafis are misunderstood into two ways. First, none of them is predisposed to violence or have a monopoly over it; secondly, both are composite labels and contain within them various conflicting groups or ideologies.

This chapter will focus on how Salafism arrived in Garissa and found footing but also the local realities that it faced. While analyzing the complexity of its adjustment in the region, the

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[344] Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi Umal on one of his lectures on al-Shabab: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3ecCyDTEPk

chapter re-centers the place and function of knowledge—traditional and reformist—in the discourse. It will examine epistemological arguments that both Sufis/traditional culama and the Salafis/reformist group have used to bolster their arguments.

**Sheikh Maxamed Awal, Saudi Arabia and Salafism in Garissa**

As mentioned in the Introduction, Salafism came to Garissa under very difficult circumstances. Before Salafism explicitly set foot in the region especially in Garissa, a mix of groups were already present and jockeying for ideological supremacy. The Saalixiya Sufi Brotherhood in conjunction with a handful of reformist culama were in competition with the Qaadiriya. Though the former had had their own differences, they were aligned on the broad outlines of the kind of changes that they wanted to see happen in the region. The Qaadiriya bitterly opposed these reformist schemes as it viewed as an attack. It used its deep resources, connections, and centuries of presence in the region to thwart these attacks. It was in this climate of contestation and hostility that Saudi Arabia sent a missionary in the 1960s. The arrival of Awal turned the tables on Qaadiriya and ushered decades-long Salafi upswing.

Sheikh Maxamed Awal Ibrahim was born in present-day Eritrea to the Tigre ethnic group that dominates the political and economic life of this tiny Horn of Africa nation. As is true for much of African communities, Tigres traverse borders and are also present in Ethiopia. What is known of Maxamed Awal is based on recollections of those who were associated with him in Garissa. I tried to locate his family that I was informed lived in Makkah, but I was unsuccessful. In any event, it is reported that Awal commenced his early education in Eritrea, where he memorized the Qur'ān and began his post-Qur'ān Islamic studies: beginning level Shaafici and Arabic grammar. Later, he traveled to southern Ethiopia for xer, specializing in Fiqh Shaafici. At the same time, Awal was an active member of the Qaadiriya Brotherhood in which most of the

xer were situated and which dominated social and religious life of that region. While in Ethiopia, he also learned Oromo, the dominant language in the area. In the late 1950s, Maxamed Awal traveled to Saudi Arabia as part of a large contingent of Ethiopians making the journey for xajj and cumrah. As others returned home, he stayed back and enrolled at the Institute of xadiith Studies, or Darul Hadith, in Makkah. Here he specialized in caqīdah and xadiith studies and became a Salafi. This education and influence from the leading scholars of the Xijaaz weaned him off Qaadiriya. Awal severed ties with Sufi Islam and later in Garissa went to the extent of equating it to heresy. Upon graduating from Darul Xadiith, he joined IUM. Sheikh Abdul-Aziz ibn Baz was president of IUM and the driving force behind Saudi dacwa around the globe. Ibn Baz and Awal forged a close relationship and immediately after Awal completed his studies, he was dispatched to Ivory Coast for missionary work.

A short while later, Awal was moved to Mali and Guinea-Conakry before being recalled to Saudi Arabia. Perhaps realizing his work was more expedient elsewhere, Awal was posted to Kenya, landing in Nairobi in 1969. He knew he was coming for missionary work but was given no clear instructions on where in Kenya to go or with whom to meet. Part of this was that the Saudis were not completely familiar with Kenya or other newly independent African nations yet. By sheer chance, however, Awal happened upon a Somali daaci*,* a Sheikh Axmed, in Nairobi. Axmed had just returned from Arusha in Tanzania where was conducting dacwa of his own. Axmed urged Awal to go to the Somali region where the residents were Muslim and could use his services. Awal agreed and the two men set off for Garissa, then a nondescript, small village in northern Kenya. Sheikh Axmed assembled the local culama, particularly the Saalixis and reformists and introduced them to Maxamed Awal. Those who welcomed Maxamed Awal included: Sheikh Qassim Sheikh Nuur, Sheikh Yussuf Qase, Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi, Sheikh

Cali Muuse, Caddow Muse, Sheikh Maxamuud Qayliye, Sheikh Xassan Xaamud, and Sheikh Cusman Xade. They celebrated Sheikh Awal for the support he would extend them, the resources he would bring, and to help further advance their own reformist cause. Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi said the following to me: "Sheikh Maxamed Ibrahim Awal was a mabcuuth, a representative or envoy. We did not ask for him; Allah sent him to us. The Saudis wanted to send him elsewhere[345], but he liked places where he could benefit people."[346]

Awal's coming spawned immediate sentiments, controversy, and confrontation. The simmering conflict only worsened as the culama became more divided on Awal's message, dacwa, and teaching. His anti-Sufi rhetoric, his establishing of his missionary activity at Jamiica Mosque, and his appeal to the youth of the town rankled the traditional culama and Sufis. Young xer flocked in from the countryside to learn from him. Two years after starting his teaching at Jamiica, in 1971, Awal's classes were overflowing. These young men constitute the current crop of the town's culama: Cali Gure Burale, Cabdiwahab, Mucawiya, Cabdullahi Cusman Isxaaq, Sheikh Cabdiwahab Maxamuud, Cabdiqadir Caddow Faarax, and Sheikh Raage. Sheikh Awal's lessons were didactic but also polemic. He taught Arabic language and the Salafi message, while discrediting Sufism, attempting to change his students' perspectives on it. Perhaps expecting the backlash, his Saudi employers, Idaaratul Buxuuth al-Cilmiya wal Ifta wa Dacwatu wal Irshad,[347]

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[345] Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi gives a different rendition on where Awal was being sent by the Saudis before he came to Garissa. Isiolo is in northern Kenya as well but is populated by the Oromos and Somalis.

[346] Interview with Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi, Garissa, December 29th, 2018.

[347] The Directorate of Scientific Research, Propagation, Ifta and Islamic Guidance. This sub-organization falls under the larger organization which goes by the name 'The Organization of Senior Scholars' and is charged with among other responsibilities offering fatwas, propagating Islam, conducting research, and controlling the production and movement of Islamic literature.

sent four sheikhyaal to support him and his activities. They were Sheikh Ibrahim, Sheikh Maxamed Haadi, Sheikh Suheib and sheikh Fatxudiin. This was a temporary measure to allow him to figure things out for himself. A short while later, the sheikhyaal were relocated to other regions of Kenya: Sheikh Ibrahim was sent to Machakos, while Sheikhs Fatxuddin and Suheib were deployed to Nairobi, the latter was stationed at Majengo slums. Mohamed Haadi joined Machadul Fatxi in Wajir.

**Institutionalizing and Bureaucratizing Islam**

Before addressing Sufis/traditional culama vs. reformists/Salafis discourses, I briefly introduce two institutions that are crucial to the development of Salafism in the area. The reformists understood that the change they desired could come about in two ways: education and dacwa. In this early stage, reformists and Salafis had the same objectives; however, the two groups had their own internal differentiation. For a start, none of the reformists had any substantial formal education much less a university degree, though they had been through xer and had a deep understanding of Figh Shaafici. Awal, on the other hand, was a graduate from IUM. He, therefore, was by default the *de facto* leader and their guide, while the rest offered political and social support. Accordingly, Awal was the sole Salafi, while the reformists were an amalgam, including the Saalixiya who still maintained their Sufi leanings, and other culama. On the other hand, the traditional culama and the Sufis had different educational backgrounds but were ideologically close. Despite these complexities in each of the group, I will identify them in this chapter as follows: reformists/Salafis and Sufis/traditional culama. Both groups, however, understood the importance of Madrasatul Najaax and Jamiica Mosque and claimed them for themselves. Establishing new mosques was not an option as historically there were no separate mosques or schools in this town or the wider region. Consequently, reformists/Salafis sought to

co-own these two institutions for the following reasons: a) reformists had already established themselves in these institutions; b) they did not want to alienate themselves from the larger community; c) they wanted to operate from within and strengthen their position; d) The institutions were conveniently located at the center of town. To avoid appearing to be taking over everything, Sheikh Awal initially stayed away from Najaax and confined himself to Jamiica.

Jamiica Mosque precedes the reformists and dates to its founding in 1948. Its establishment unravels the historical diversity of this town. Still under colonial rule, the local community, Sufis of all races: Somalis, Indians, Arabs, and other Africans, came together to found the mosque. The effort was led by notable individuals of the town such as Cusman Dhebe, Maxamed Aden, Maxamed Xaaji Xarage, and Yusuf Xaaji. They petitioned the British colonial administration for land to put up the mosque and were donated the one on which it stands today. Initially, they built a structure using locally sourced materials. In the next few years, the makeshift materials were turned into a more permanent structure using modern building material, including bricks and iron sheets. The mosque underwent more extensive reconstruction in the years after, particularly in 1973 and 1985.

Najaax, on the other hand, came into existence in the 1960s through the exclusive efforts of the reformists; consequently, its ownership and management was always in their hands. Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi who founded it, explained to me:

> We started Najaax in January 1964. At the time, the Ingiriis (The English) were around, and we had to clear everything with the colonial office. I had recently arrived from Somalia and found the local politics to be intense. People were agitating for the Ingiriis to leave. My father and I went to the DC (District Commissioner, the highest-ranking colonial official in the area) to allow us to open a madrasa, which he did. We had no much money, so we started with only two rooms. Up until then, all knowledge was dugsi. Education on the deen was dismally low, and we needed our young children to have the knowledge to function in a

> modern society. At this stage, the students sat on jambi (mat) on the floor, though we provided them desks and benches later. In the years that followed, we invited local leaders and we conducted harambee (a community funds drive) through which we built three more rooms. We taught deen, Arabic, and xisaab (math). I was the only teacher. I learned math from Egyptians in their machad in Mogadishu. Then we hired another teacher. It is at this point that the Sheikh (Awal) arrived.[348]

The quote echoes initiatives to modernize Islamic institutions elsewhere. Subjects taught at Najaax, however, departed from what Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi had begun with, and concentrated on Salafi learning, intensifying focus on xadiith and tawxiid. Salafi books such as those of Maxamed ibn Cabdiwahab were a staple.

The mosque was now regimented, well-ordered, and had a leadership structure with plan of activities. That the madrasa had become a functioning institution with an administration only added to the tension and power struggle. Questions that were being asked at this point were: how does one classify these institutions, Sufi or Salafi? Who controls them and whose messages do they espouse? For Salafis, the centers epitomized institutionalizing Islam, an emerging framework of modernity; traditional culama/Sufis regarded them as a space of learning and community. Awal assumed a leading position in the affairs of the mosque, though not as an Imam. Upon noticing the substantial inroads that Awal was making into a mosque and a community that they considered their own, the Sufis/traditional culama intensified their attack on him and the reformists. The Sheikhyaal who led the campaign against him were Sheikh Axmed Jiir, Sheikh Qassim, Sheikh Maxamuud Qayliye, and Sheikh Xussein Baxar. They accused Awal

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[348] Interview with Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi, Garissa, December 30th, 2019

as a non-Somali and a foreigner, looping in the bitter Somali- "Amharic"[349] history. They treated him with suspicion, even claiming that he was uncircumcised and unfit to lead a Muslim ummah. As the tensions rose, the Sufis/ traditional culama petitioned the DC on Najaax:

> They told the DC that Awal was an Eritrean. If he wanted to teach at Najaax or at the mosque, they would agree to it. What they would not agree to, however, was any interference with the management of Najaax or Jamiica. The DC said he would assemble both sides at the social hall the following day. People like me (the interviewee), xerta yar yar (young xer), were not allowed to attend; only the culama were allowed. The traditionalists were: Sheikh Cabdullahi Aden Jire, Sheikh Mursal Sheikh Muxumed Ragaad, Shariff Cabdi Aar, and Sheikh Indha Yare. On the Salafi side were Sheikh Mohamed Cabdi and Sheikh Cali Muse. The DC asked the Sufis/traditional culama to present their case. They said they were Muslims and Shaficis, and this man (Awal) came and subverted their religion, took the madrasa and the mosque, and they were objecting to it all. They also wanted their mosque and madrasa back.[350]

In contrast, the reformists/Salafis asserted that their opponents were uneducated and backward, anti-moderns who opposed contemporary education and medicine, and that the Salafi leadership was suited to lead Najaax and Jamiica. Salafis wondered how people without modern education could teach at a modern institution. They pointed to their more formal education as an expression of modern life and therefore beneficial to the country (Kenya). They argued that they could not allow their people to wallow in jahiliya (ignorance) any more than they already have. The reformist/Salafis deftly played their cards well. Faced with the dilemma of having to decide

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[349] Somalis often conflate Amharic, one of the ethnic groups in Ethiopia, with Ethiopia itself, the reason being that the emperorship of Ethiopia has been in their hands for centuries and therefore the county came to be identified with them.

[350] Interview with Sheikh C. G., Garissa, January 12th, 2018.

between the two groups without appearing partisan, the DC instructed both to stand up and ordered the chief to count them. The Sufis/traditional culama were 11, and the reformists/Salafis were 9. He ruled in favor of the majority, the Sufis/traditional culama. The Salafis/reformists accepted the outcome, but on one condition: the madrasa should not be closed. The Sufis/traditional culama requested seven days to get ready to take over the madrasa, to which the DC acquiesced. After the seven days, the Salafis/reformists informed the DC that the Sufis/traditional culama had not come for the keys of the madrasa. The DC dispatched a land rover to bring them but found only three of them. Though they asked for seven more days, they still never showed up. Finally, the DC wrote a letter allowing the Salafis/reformists to continue operating Najaax.

The Salafi star was now steadily rising. The Sufis/traditional culama tried another channel to halt the Salafi ascendancy - they reached out to the government of Somalia for assistance. They wrote a letter to the Somali embassy in Nairobi, detailing how the government of Kenya had sided with people they claimed were twisting the message of true Islam. Following protocol, however, the ambassador handed the letter over to the Kenyan foreign affairs minister, who, in turn, sent it down the chain of bureaucratic command to the PC and then the DC. What the Sufis/traditional culama took for granted was the political dynamic of the time. Concurrently, the military dictatorship of Siad Barre was battling Islamists and was in no mood of getting involved in Kenya. What is more, an open conflict between Kenya and Somalia had just ended but its aftermath was still fresh: there was much suspicion between the Kenya and Somalia, confounding cordial discussion. Incensed by what the Sufis/traditional culama had done, the DC demanded to know why they had overstepped the sovereignty of Kenya and involved a foreign power in what was clearly an internal matter, eventually sending them off to jail. It took the

intervention of local politicians for their release. Najaax remained in the hands of the Salafis/reformists ever since. The reformists/Salafis were buoyed on the setbacks of the Sufis/traditional culama and what followed from this point on was to attack each other in the mosques.

**Initial Encounters: 1965-1990**

While the disputes regarding the two institutions were ongoing, other debates were also taking shape. Debates between reformists and Sufis/traditional culama have been ongoing since the early 1960s; the Salafis joined in later in the decade. The initial confrontation and the issues under discussion as well as how they were articulated can be dissected into roughly two timeframes: 1965-1990 and 1990-present. There is limitation in assigning broad timeframes to social phenomena owing to their fluidity. However, what stayed true, constant, and significant for this study are the interactions themselves. The debates revolved around several key and contentious issues, ranging from the social to religious, and were defined by these two features. In the early phases, the debates were muddled and more defined by negativity and slander than a serious and constructive engagement.

The interactions began with reformist castigation of Sufis, and the latter fighting back. I begin this encounter through an anecdote. From the early 1970s, a man named Jagac (not his real name) who lived in Garissa exemplified how the Sufi, traditional culama and the general population, viewed reformists. He was easily identifiable with his Omani cap and walking stick. Considered insane by most, others believed that he was normal and rational. From his words, it was clear that he was on a mission to oppose Wahabis[351] as well as "educate" the public on what

[351] He preferred Wahhabi or Wahhabiya because it was used derogatively.

were the dangers they posed, articulating specific charges in a resolute and public manner. While the contents of his chants were not captured in any sort of media or stored in any way, I reconstruct some of what others and myself could remember. The topics he covered in his street chants were wide-ranging; however, what I recount here concerns women clothing, a contentious topic at the time:[352]

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|---|---|
| Mad madoobeey | all these darkened/blackened things (women wearing xijab) |
| wixi jiri jiray | what used to exist (tradition) |
| wax baa ka jiro | It is correct |
| waxaan jiri jirin | what never used to exist (Wahhabism/Salafism) |
| Waxba ka ma jiro | nothing is true about it |
| *ufta*[353] naga duwa | Take these uf (smelly things) away from us |
| Waxa la dadadi | what is being covered/cloaked |
| Wax baa lagu dadi | is covering sinister (new) things |

In the evenings, crowds of onlookers formed a ring around him and trailed him through the streets. For some, particularly the children, it was all an amusement and entertainment, while the older folk understood his message as a religious and/or political statement. His interaction with them was also intriguing. He did not stop to discuss anything with anyone, neither did he ask for any help, obviously aware of the various perceptions that people had held of him. His only mission was to portray the Wahhabis as foreign and un-Islamic, likening all reformist/Salafis, their teaching and practices to that of the jinnis (devil). To a larger extent, he did what the Sufis themselves did obliquely or would have wanted to do if it had been less outrageous: to curse the

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[352] I collected this stanza from various individuals, but mostly Ibrahim Abdi (aka, After).

[353] A word that has its origin in Arabic and used to describe bad smell or odor. In this context, however, it means something wrong.

"Wahhabis" in public. Salafis/reformists have represented Jagac as an essential embodiment of deficient Sufism/traditional culama: crazy, deranged, uneducated, and not to be taken seriously.

Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi, the foremost reformer, denounced Sufis and invited others to dissociate themselves from it. When Awal came, he reinforced this idea and challenged Sufis/traditional culama for dalāʾil regarding their beliefs and practices. Awal's lessons and sermons were virulent, casting Sufism as bidca (an invention) which was invented hundreds of years after the passing of the Prophet. He went further and lumped Sufis and Ashcaris together, rekindling historical Salafi revulsion for Ashcaris.[354] Awal also added traditional culama into the mix as people who at the very least should know better and practice Shaaficism in its pristine form. He specifically dared them to produce any evidence for the things they taught, practiced and advocated for, and he would happily qualify himself. He, like other Salafis,[355] rejected the difference of legal opinion among madahib, partly to ensure that his mission remained mainstream; instead, he had no qualms with the madahib if they were observed correctly; that one could not take some and leave others, and when khilaaf (conflict) arose, it only spoke to the strength of one dalīl over another. The antagonism between Salafi/reformists and Sufis in particular was stoked by these factors, which a former Sufi summed as follows. The Sufis:

> …visited shrines and graves, conducted xus for dead men, performed xadro on weekly basis and mawlid, asked for intercession for myriads of health and social problems. They wore amulets to ward off evil or for healing and consulted astrologers. The women were basically naked: their breasts hung in the open, and their hair and necks showed.[356]

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[354] Frank Griffel, "What Do We Mean By "Salafi"? Connecting Mohamed Abduh with Egypt's Nur Party,"191.

[355] Zachary Wright, "Salafi Theology and Islamic Orthodoxy in West Africa," 647.

[356]Interview with Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi, Garissa, December 30th, 2019.

Salafis/reformers accused the Sufis of removing Allah from the equation and instead appealing to mortal humans for assistance, elevating their status to that of a deity. But what agitated reformists/Salafis the most was the Sufi observation of their rituals in the mosque, which as one informed me,[357] was to deliberately get under the Salafi/reformist skin. Immediately after prayer and as the reformists and Salafis began their silent, personal supplications, Sufis would gather around the mimbar and break into xadro to memorialize their awliyo (saints). More vexing was the Sufi killing of animals in the compound of the mosque and serving the food to the crowds that gathered for their various functions: dhikr, mawlid or xus. Initially, reformers, and the Salafis who came later, were unsure of how to respond these Sufi activities. The reticence owed to the fact that they did not have enough power to take on the Sufis as well as a need to scale back animosities and be seen as peaceful. As such, they allowed Sufis to carry out their rituals without much interference. When they could, Salafis/reformists spun the narrative and made a modest demand. For instance, they consented to grave visitations not to memorialize awliya, but for visitors to remind themselves of death or make duco for the dead. Awal was, however, resolute on animals being slaughtered in the vicinity of the mosque and insisted that at the very least, they be killed elsewhere, and the cooked food brought in. An older man and an early critic of Awal wondered how one could take food out of the equation, calling it sadaqa (charity). Most Sufis understood the Salafi/reformists campaign against mawlid, among other rituals, from a broader political perspective, suggesting that Saudi denunciation of mawlid arose from fear it would reactivate the Asharaaf who were indignant at being displaced by the Saudi regime and would therefore potentially foment a political revolution in Saudi Arabia.

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[357] Interview with Sheikh C. G., Garissa, January 11th, 2018.

While Salafi/reformist disagreement with Sufis is well documented, what is important but less researched is the reformist/Salafi vs. Shaafici polemic where, as others have observed,[358] prayer arose as both a symbolic and a doctrinal contestation and controversy. The Salafi/reformist condemnation of the Shaafici method of performing daily and other occasional acts of worship, ranging from how to conduct prayer or fast proved controversial - particularly based on the strength of dalāʾil. Somalis have always been strict adherents of the Shaafici School and denigrated other madahib as expressed in the following maxim: salaadda sidaa u xun ma tii Xanaafi baa.[359] The devotion to Shaaficism opens a window into what their reaction would be when Salafism/reformism demanded certain changes that long defined Somali Islam. Areas of dispute between Salafis and some of the reformists vs. Shaaficis are inexhaustible and present deep resentment. For instance, before the obligatory prayers, Shaaficis affirmed intention to pray through a loud recitation of the following duco: nawaytu fardh salaatul (insert the current prayer) and then followed by Allahu Akbar.[360] Another thorny issue was qunuud during prayer: a loud supplication which the congregation repeated after the imam and which goes as follows: Allahu mahdinaa fii man hadayd, wa caafina fii man cafayd wa tawalanaa fii man tawalayd wa baariklanaa fii maa cadyat wa qinaa sharra maa qalayd.[361] When finishing some of the prayer, the imam recited this duco and the congregation chanted after him: Allahu ma rabanaa aatina

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[358] Benjamin Soares. *Islam and the Prayer Economy: history and authority in a Malian town* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 187.

[359] The literal translation of the axiom is as follows: what is that prayer that is as bad as the Xanaffi prayer?

[360] A loud announcement of the intention to pray.

[361] My Lord, guide me and make me among those whom You have guided; forgive me and make me among those whom You have forgiven; take charge of me and make among those whom You have taken charge of; bless me in whatever You have granted me; save me from the undesirable consequences of Your decisions.

fidunya xasanah wa fil akhiratu xasanah wa qinaa cadaabu nar.[362] In addition, during Ramadan, and particularly the evening before the following day's fast, this supplication for intention of fast was declared: Nawaytu sauman ghadan can adai' fardu shahri ramadaan haadii imaan waxdi saaban lillahitaala.[363] Salafis/reformists dismissed these supplications as baseless innovations with no evidence in fact. The Salafis and some of the reformists asserted that prayer and acts were personal issues, and believers needed to simply make niya (intention) without necessarily verbalizing it for others to hear.

The touchiest issue by far, however, was al-Jahru bil basmalah,[364] which was sounding out the bisin[365] during fajr, maqrib and cisha prayers. Well into the 1980s, al-Jahru bil basmalah defined theological debate. As a young boy[366], I remember men breaking off from the jamaaca (congregational prayer) prayer to perform on their own because the imam hid the bisin, setting off parallel prayer within the same mosque. On a strictly ideological basis, al-Jahru bil basmalah was a complex matter even within the reformist/Salafi camp. An example abounds of a Saalixi imam, who was an early student of Awal and who ardently continued to observe al-Jahru bil basmalah right up to his death in 2010. While this sheikh's devotion to this issue was based on

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[362] Our Lord, give us in this world [that which is] good and in the Hereafter [that which is] good and protect us from the punishment of the Fire."

[363] O Allah! I fasted for You and I believe in You and I put my trust in You and I break my fast with Your sustenance

[364] Al-Jahrul bil basmaalah is the sounding out of the opening of the Qur'ānic chapters. While Sufis and traditional culama do so, some of reformists and all the Salafis were opposed to it, suggesting that there was no dalīl for it from the Prophet.

[365] In Somali, bisin is the first part with which all chapters of the Qur'ān but one begin: Bismillahi raxmani raxiim.

[366] I grew up in a small village in the mid-south where Salafism arrived late. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, sheikhyaal were sent out to villages to preach and open

his Shaafici tradition, there are instances in which Saudi money swayed some of the imams in favor of leaving out the bisin. Saudi patrons banned the bisin along with other ducooyin before, during, or after prayers. However, some of the sheikhyaal - not completely sold on this concept - were influenced by the salaries they received. I was informed of an imam at Jamiica who stopped sounding out the bisin for as long as he was in the Saudi payroll; however, when the money ran out and he was not in their payroll anymore, he reverted to sounding out the bisin.[367]

These disputes were analogous to those that have for a long time been taking place in other parts of the broader East Africa,[368] but how the Salafi/reformists perceived and approached Sufis/traditional culama merits a deeper analysis. Salafi/reformists believed they were Firqa Najdiya, while the Sufis and to a lesser extend traditional culama who were not completely adhering to Shaafici edicts had strayed; Salafi reformists treated them as badil in need of redemption. Consequently, they were sometimes frustrated and saw any engagement with Sufis/traditional culama on an ideological level as baseless and fruitless. Others treated them as jahil who knew nothing but commodifying and misinterpreting Islam. A reformist who led the Young Muslim Center[369] for decades echoed these majoritarian Salafi/reformist claims, stating that Sufis/traditional culama strayed from the right path primarily because of "jahli, particularly in the areas of tafsīr and xadiith."[370] He referred to the popular tales of Sufis claiming that they did not have to pray with others because they traveled at night to pray in Makkah. Questioning

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[367] Interview with Sheikh C.G., Garissa, January 12th, 2018.

[368] Mohamed Mraja, "The Reform Ideas of Shaykh ʿAbdallāh Ṣāliḥ al-Farsī and the Transformation of Marital Practices among Digo Muslims of Kenya." *Islamic Law & Society*, 17 no. 2 (2010), 246.

[369] Young Muslim Center is a school located in Garissa which housed and schooled orphans. It has always been funded by Saudi Arabia and therefore it is ideologically connected to the Saudis.

[370] Interview with Sheikh Cabdisalam, Garissa, July 16th, 2016.

himself as to why traditional culama did not speak out against these transgressions, he blamed little knowledge, adding, "they would not come out to us and express their opinion on any matter. They make noise from outside because even they did not have much knowledge."[371] Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi added that in addition to little knowledge, syncretism and additions that had no basis in Islam was to blame. These, he said, had ossified and became part of Islam. His accusation was directed at everyone: the common folk and the Sufi/traditional culama who he blamed as complicit in incorporating dhaqan (custom) as religion. Where this dhaqan came from was an affair Salafis/reformists are often more than happy to discuss. Sheikh Maxamed, for instance, explained that what was dhaqan for the Arabs became dhaqan for the Somalis and needed purification.

Sufis/traditional culama countered the reformists by attacking the claims the reformists were making; they particularly targeted Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi. They accused the Salafis/reformists of bidca, and that Maxamed Cabdi had introduced things into Islam with no precedent farther than Maxamed Cabdiwahab. Sufis/traditional culama asserted that their beliefs and practices were based on centuries-old tradition and not recent inventions like the Salafis/reformists. For instance, Sufis/traditional culama were stunned at the Salafi/reformist omission of the bisin in the al-Jahru bil basmalah debate, wondering: is it not obligatory for Muslims to mention the bisin whenever they recite the Qur'ān? If so, why omit it during prayer? Sufis/traditional culama were deeply frustrated at Awal but more so his Somali interpreters; they denounced them as stooges and sellouts, resulting in drawn out personal attacks. Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi stated that he was insulted to no end. He was accused of selling out the deen,

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[371] Interview with Sheikh Cabdisalam, Garissa, July 16th, 2016.

rejecting the Prophet, cursing the Prophet, and claiming to be a prophet himself. He was physically attacked in 1975, and he almost got killed; a house in which he was teaching women was completely razed to the ground. Awal had it worse: a) the innards of dead or slaughtered animals were buried in front of his house; b) he was accused that the women whose heads he was causing to cover with xijab were being taken to the boys at the madrasa who did whatever they wanted with them. More insidiously, the Sufis had hatched a plan to assassinate him. One of the Sufis would ask a question after one of Awal's lessons, and as he tried to answer it, a melee would break out where he would be attacked and killed. To the Salafis, these abuses were not necessarily strange; they were all too familiar as they echoed the Prophetic experiences in early Islam.

The discourses were not simply a platform to outsmart one another based on Islamic principles but to impress the larger public while ingratiating their side to international networks and governments. The two camps were now firmly divided on ideological grounds with their own leaders. However, neither camp had formed a formal organization. The Salafi/reformist camp was led by Maxamed Awal. He was not only a leader, but he also set their agenda, particularly when it came to attacking the Sufis/traditional culama. On the side of the Sufis/traditional culama, Sheikh Cabdullahi Aden Jire was the leader.[372] In these early encounters, unnecessary distractions and name-calling accompanied serious debate, interrogating Awal's character, as well as that of his colleagues.

In the long run, there seemed to be pattern emerging on what side of the divide the public chose. The reformist/Salafis mounted a successful campaign to court, appeal to, and eventually

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[372] Sheikh C.A.J, long deceased, is a relative of the writer and has known him as a child.

attract the support of the political and business elites of the town. This was decisive as it enabled them to not only survive in the face of so much opposition and hostility, but additionally the Salafis attempted to locate both political patronage and economic capital. The politicians were invaluable as they provided crucial support to cases and complaints that went before the government, while the business leaders propped up Salafis/reformists on social and economic matters. Nonetheless, even with this level of support, the animosity between the two camps was too great for the government to stay away, particularly at times of simple supremacy or legitimacy battles. At one point, eleven Sufis/traditional culama, in a bid derail the Salafis/reformists ascendancy, approached the DC and claimed they were spokesmen for Muslims, while their opponents were foreign and preaching a dangerous brand of Islam (Wahabism). In contrast, Salafis/reformists would argue for the benefit of their provision of formal education and employing many youths and therefore a vital component of the economy.

**The Saudi Money and the Changing Dynamics of Dacwa**

As the fight intensified, Salafis/reformists mounted a campaign to raise their profile and acceptance among the ordinary folk. They deployed multiple strategies such as debate with the traditional culama and educating the youth. However, one area they did not exploit was the dacwa to the ordinary people as their activities were largely confined to Jamiica mosque and Najaax. The reasons for this are murky, but Sufis/traditional culama say that they had nothing substantial to sell to the public. A more nuanced cause of the inability to approach and convey their message to the public, however, was that the latter was overwhelmingly Sufi and would have been hostile to the Salafis/reformists. Nevertheless, it is the remarkable function of Saudi Arabia that resulted in the Salafi engagement of the ordinary folk. Literature on Saudi funding on

Islamic dacwa and education is copious, particularly in Africa.[373] What I am more interested here are examples of the flow of Saudi monies into Garissa and how it changed the face of local Islam. One of the most fascinating revelations that I heard during my fieldwork was a story that was related to me by one of the Salafis, who was intricately involved with Jamiica and Najaax. He said that he attended a meeting in which a random man from Saudi Arabia appeared in the meeting in Garissa carrying cash for the Young Muslim Association (YMA),[374] a school that housed and educated young, orphan boys. The man was confused as he was not informed who to hand over the money to. Evidently, this was the case either from lack of proper planning or that the money had been donated by a random muxsin with no knowledge of the management of the school. Though Sheikh Awal would eventually take responsibility for the money and its management for the school, what is insightful is how generous funding from the Saudis kept on coming and its far-reaching consequences, particularly in the areas of building mosque, madāris and education in general, and dacwa.

As the Salafis/reformists ventured out to the public to relay their message, the locals began to warm up to them. Part of this emerged from their success in effectively expressing their beliefs and the changes they wanted to see happen more assertively as it happened elsewhere.[375] At this juncture, the Saudi money played a role, helping to propel the Salafis/reformists message and influence. The issue of qunuud that we saw earlier is a perfect representation of the times when this money bought loyalty among culama who might otherwise have not been sold on a

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[373] Ousmane Kane, "What is New, What is Not? Lessons from West Africa," *African Journal of International Affairs,* 11, no. 2 (2008) 168.

[374] Interview with Sheikh C.G., Garissa, September 5th, 2016

[375] Abdulai Iddrisu, "*Contesting Islam:* "*Homegrown Wahhabism*," 200.

specific issue. This capital came in through various channels through Saudi government agencies and private donations. Using this money, many returnees were employed and sent out for missionary activities across Garissa County. More imams who would follow the Saudi's line were bankrolled, in addition to the provision of Salafi literature. What was distinctive with these ducaad, however, was that they were not simply Salafi in the category of Maxamed Awal; they were locals who were born in the area, understood Somali culture, spoke both Somali and Arabic, and did not shy away from confronting the Sufis/traditional culama.

With the increasing acceptance of the people, toleration from the government, and support from Saudi Arabia, Salafis trained their sights on decimating Sufism from the area, as in other places in Africa such as the case in Ghana.[376] Sufis were frustrated by the support Salafis/reformists were getting from Saudi Arabia as well as lack of resources to advance their own agenda. Leading Sufi icons such as Sharif Cabdalla, an imam at Jamiica, deserted Jamiica Mosque. He could not endure the overwhelming pressure that was barreling down on him and the humiliation that he faced in the mosque. What is more, Northeastern Muslim Welfare Association (NMWA) became completely intertwined with Jamiica Mosque. Its chairman, Sheikh Xassan Cabdirahman, unleashed an onslaught of dacwa activities: distributing literature (books and syllabus to madāris), paying teachers at Najaax and bankrolling dacwa activities. Vehicles were provided to the ducaad and frequent trips to villages to spread the Salafi message became a staple. On noticing the gap that had been left by the Sufis/traditional culama, the exponential growth of Salafi education and dacwa, local folk began to listen more. The wave of

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[376] Ousman Kobo, "Shifting Trajectories of Salafi/Ahl-Sunna Reformism in Ghana,"63.

Salafi/reformist activity was so great that according to the words of one Salafi, "the Sufis could not even find a mosque in which to pray."[377]

## Laying a Firm Foundation: Youth and Women

Like in other parts of Africa, the hallmark of Salafi/reformist expansion benefited exponentially from their outreach to the youth.[378] In Garissa, Salafis/reformists followed this pattern, in addition to also focusing on women. The Salafis/reformists treated these two demographics of society as crucial to realizing a more transformative change. Attention to youth and women was animated by their perceived neglect by Sufis/traditional culama, presenting an enormous opportunity for a bottom-up, comprehensive and far-reaching reforms. Accordingly, these two groups received an unprecedented level of attention. While this interest in youth can be understood for a host of reasons, the following two points underlay the Salafi/reformist agenda; a) the youth do not yet have fully formed perspectives on Islam and are more flexible and receptive to any message pitched to them; b) Introducing Salafism to the youth would ensure a longer term and enduring transformation. Attention such as this is not out of the ordinary *per* the literature on Islamic reforms.[379] Also, the youth across the Muslim world are not monolithic as social, political, and historical factors influence how active and engaged they are. As opposed to the situation in South Africa where the youth were well grounded and engaged, those in Garissa were often disorganized and lacked formal association or clear and attainable social or political objectives. This created the perfect opportunity for the Salafis/reformists to fill.

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[377] Interview with C.G., Garissa, January 11th, 2018.

[378] Yusuf Dumbe, "The Salafi Praxis of Constructing Religious Identity," 90.

[379] *For more, see,* Abdulkader Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa: The Muslim Youth Movement* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1995).

Toward the tail end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, more mosques began coming up around Garissa as the Salafis/reformists moved beyond Jamiica Mosque and widened their message across the town. Two of these mosques were Taqwa and Towba. Alongside these mosques, Salafis/reformers also established numerous madāris. In the far-flung villages of Hulugho, Modogashe, and Dadaab, madāris were also being established. As elsewhere, these were clear Salafi strategy of recruiting the youth. With the mosques and madāris came opportunities for education: formal classes, xalaqat, and dacwa. There is a unanimous agreement that Sufis/traditional culama lost dominance through Salafi focus on youth education.[380] Jamiica and Najaax were now intertwined and provided teachers, mentorship and leadership to the upcoming mosques and madāris in other areas. The arrival of Saudi syllabus and other literature, particularly from Imam, especially the likes of Kitāb Tawhid[381] intensified the youths' immersion into Salafism, increased their activism, as well as their aversion to Sufism. The passion with which the youth turned violent against the Sufis/traditional culama had been informed and influenced by Kitāb Tawhid. This book virulently criticizes practices that do not meet Cabdiwahab's definition of a true Muslim. Evidently, it was as if this book was speaking to the reformers in Garissa as they battled the same issues that Cabdiwahab did centuries earlier.

The literature and lectures left no room for tolerating any competing ideas or arguments, casting masāʾil as either xaq or badil. As some of the youth of the 1960s recalled, xerta yar yar flowed in from the villages, having already memorized the Qur'ān but without any more knowledge. Awal filled this gap: he embraced and guided them and filled in them the virtues of Salafism, and the weakness of Sufis and Ashcaris. The literature created consciousness among

[380] This point was reiterated multiple times by many of the culama that I interviewed.

[381] The Book on Monotheism by Maxamed ibn Cabdiwahab.

the youth and (un)wittingly pulled them into the simmering theological debates. The adoption of Salafism was far-reaching, and the youth helped this effort in profound way, changing the arc of Islam in the town. The youth went on the street and did not shy from speaking out about Sufism Salafism in the ways conveyed to them. They spoke strongly, knowing that they had the support of their teachers, who often were the Salafi luminaries of the town. In time, Sufism began to recede and there was less talk of mawlid or Cabdiqadir Jeylani.

Salafis/reformers also actively engaged the women, pulling them into their reformist orbit by establishing madrasas that catered specifically to them. Before the Salafis/reformers, women seldom had any opportunities for education, and most knowing only enough Qur'ān to pray. Salafis/reformists targeted both young girls and older women. As one of the early Salafis informed me, they justified educating women as follows, "Once dacwa reaches women, and it is done successfully, it will be much more consequential than that the dacwa given to men."[382] Lessons were varied and wide-ranging. The dacwa and lesson schedules were flexible to balance with their domestic chores. Lessons for the older women started at 2 PM and ended at 7 PM. Reformist icons such Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi taught the women as no woman had had the requisite knowledge to teach yet. And as with the youth, the women were also exposed to Salafi approach to knowledge, morality, dress and personal conduct. Of a particular importance was the dress. Reformists instructed the women to cover themselves, and immediately after, they put away their guntiino (a piece of cloth that is wrapped around the body and tied at the waist) and dirac (long and loose fitting) and adorned the gombis (xijab); in few short years, the town turned into a kaleidoscope of colorful gombis. When the women graduated or attained enough

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[382] Interview with Sheikh Y., Makkah, January 5th, 2018.

knowledge, they became teachers and joined the dacwa activities, spreading the message within their families, among other women, and beyond.

### The Nineties and Intellectualism

From the 1960s to the 1990s, munaaqisha cilmiya (intellectual debates) between Salafis/reformers and Sufis/traditional culama were commonplace. These debates were devoted to the basics of Islam such as caqīdah. They were concerned mostly with how to worship, Sufi rituals, or other topics deemed important. The 1990s changed all that for multiple reasons, both local and transnational. For the first time, the local population began to swing from majority Sufi to evening out with the Salafis, a development that occurred over a long period of time and was bolstered by Salafi dacwa, madrasa education, youth activism, urbanization, Saudi money, and the ever-growing flood of Salafi literature. An element that was unique to Kenya which was also profoundly instrumental in this change was the socio-political instabilities in neighboring countries. As Somalia disintegrated into a civil war and Ethiopia underwent political volatilities that led to the revolution of the 1990s, the culama, both Salafis/reformists and traditional, resettled in Kenya, where they did not simply participate in religious or social discourses but were at the forefront. The debates of this period were inspired partly by Moi's easing of political space, which had previously been severely muzzled,[383] giving the culama the space to speak publicly. On a broader scale, the changes in the constitution that allowed for a multiparty politics helped facilitate Islam to grow and use it address political injustices.[384]

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[383] Adar, Korwa & Isaac Munyae. "Human Rights Abuse in Kenya Under Daniel Arap Moi, 1978-2001." *African Studies Quarterly,* 5, no. 1 (2001), 7.

[384] Hassan Ndzovu. "Kenya's Jihadi Clerics: Formulation of a "Liberation Theology" and the Challenge to Secular Power," *Journal of Muslim Minority Studies* (2018), 2.

In the mid 1990s and well into the 2000s, well-organized series of public debates took place, referred to in Somali as “doodii suufiyada iyo Salafiyiinta"[385] or the debate between Sufis and Salafis. The title is telling, and it involved culama from both camps. Discussion topics were pre-screened and divided into specific themes to maximumly cover them. Though the debates were held in Kenya, the issues themselves, the tone and timing, vocabulary and the references that both groups made were anything but local; instead, they were influenced by and had strong connections to global Islam. As the back-and-forth contestations on who was right or wrong grew took center stage, reducing the tensions became ever more urgent.

Competing narratives on the triggers of these debates abound. Admittedly, the prevailing atmosphere was tense: verbal denunciations of each other (reformers/Salafis vs. Sufis/traditional culama) in their own mosques, accusations of bidca and raddin (refutations) were frequent. Beyond the Somali culama, tensions were also brewing amongst other Kenyan-Muslims, even turning violent in Jamiica Mosque, the country’s largest and most popular located in Nairobi. One of these was the allegation that the leadership at Jamiica was constituted exclusively of Kenyan-Indian Muslims, infuriating coastal Muslim youth who felt that their community was left out. They, therefore, demanded a representation in the running of the affairs of the mosque. In addition, intellectual debates between non-Somali Kenyan culama were also ongoing in other locations such as Mombasa. On a side note, though, these had no bearing on their (Somali) debates. The only commonality was the venue: Jamiica Mosque. The organization and participation of the debates were exclusively a Somali affair. In regard to how the debates began, a Salafi luminary informed me as follows:

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[385] For more on this, see this link on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeV5Gl7hVgc

> Sufis[386] demanded to debate us. They said that their opponents[387] did not know anything and had no real knowledge of the deen, slandering us in every which way. The culama[388] agreed to debate them. We mutually selected Faarax Macalin[389] to moderate the debates to which they agreed. A week later the debates began.[390]

These intellectual exercises unravel epistemological and ideological fissures stemming from the culama's backgrounds, which demanded devotion to specific set of dalāʾil. Noticing this diversity, the organizers were open to a wide array of sources and dalāʾil but urged participants to steer clear of ra'yi (opinion) which many considered a boon for the Salafis. As the debates got underway, the two groups tried to outdo one another in their use of dalāʾil from the Qur'ān and xadiith. The debates were held in Nairobi, and Garissa was well represented. Sheikhs Maxamed Cabdi and Maxamed Awal's protégés of the 1960s/70s were at the forefront of the debates, including: the late Sheikh Cali Guure, the late Sheikh Mucawiya, Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi Umal and Faarax Macalin. The early Salafi/reformists efforts that groomed these Salafis, educated and created job opportunities for them as students, sent them to Saudi Arabia for education, paid off enormously. The Salafis/reformists had now streamlined into an almost identical worldview. Part of this transpired from the fact that most, if not all, of the current crop of culama were graduates of Saudi universities and were therefore Salafi through and through. The Saalixiya who were allies of the Salafis earlier had phased out either because they were too

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[386] In the interview, he never made any distinction between Sufis and traditional culama. He simply called them Sufis.

[387] The opponents are Salafis/reformists or Wahabis.

[388] He referred the reformists/Salafis as culama.

[389] The choosing of Faarax Macalim as a discussant was an interesting element in these debates. Faraax was a former MP and a future MP and deputy speaker of the national assembly.

[390] Interview with Sheikh U., Nairobi, January 4th, 2019.

old to participate in these debates, had died, or the Salafis felt they could do without them. Controversial topics were selected and included: tawxiid (The Unity of Allah), qubuur (grave/shrine visitation), mawlid (observing the Prophet's birthday) istiqaatha (seeking for assistance: the issue was whether a Muslim can ask another human being for help), and al-manāqib (a text popular with the Sufis that will be handled more deeply later in the chapter).

As the debates got off the ground, Sufis/traditional culama demanded each group to identify itself, through what resembled the Somali abtirsiinyo (recounting of the fathers). Sufis established their genealogy in a similar fashion. The identity factor was critical to the Sufis for various reasons. During this time, many African societies were grappling with a renewed sense of identity as dictatorships were on their last legs or falling and were being replaced by some form of participatory politics that unleashed competition. This identity politics was mostly articulated through economics (mainly land) and political power (elections). Accordingly, the Sufi/traditional culama's insistence on ascertaining their identities found firm footing in long and established tradition,[391] that comprised the following: "Shaafici, Sufi, and Ashcari." The Salafis/reformists adroitly avoided doing so as they anticipated it would be a trap that would pull them into what they perceived as a Sufi stronghold. When pressed, however, some of the Salafis said they could consider themselves any of the following, without being too specific: ahlul kitāb wa sunnah, ahlul sunnah wal jamaaca, followers of Salaf wa saalix, and asxaabul xadiith. A reason they were not too upbeat about identity as much as the Sufis was related to me as follows:

> The Sufis intended to use identity, their claims of ashcariya and whatever label they wanted to put on us, for political and strategic advantage. In more than one instance, they claimed that they were well-known and local as opposed to their opponents (us) who they said were

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[391] Terje Østebø, "Local Reformers and the Search for Change," 642.

foreign whose ideas on Islam were wrong.[392]

By resisting to put any labels on themselves as they were wont to do, Salafis identified themselves as part of a larger global community. The identity issue, though misleading in so many ways, never went away as the Salafis would have wished.

**Dalīl: It Cuts Both Ways**

The aspects of identity, rearticulated in the 1990s, revealed each group's assumptions on what they considered a legitimate representation of Islam and its authoritative reference. Identity, therefore, was a code word for specific sets of beliefs and practices. In what follows, I do not cover specific masāʾil, but try to isolate dalīl and how it was used to prop up those masāʾil. Dalīl as evidence was popularized by Salafis and their presupposition was that each mas'ala must be proven using strong dalīl framework from the Qur'ān and Sunnah.[393] Among Somali Salafis/reformists, the following catchphrase became widespread in the years following the arrival of the reformist and later the Salafis, "Maxaa kuu dalīl ah.[394] Another important element that heavily featured in the discussions was the Arabic language. Interpretation of key words, their denotative and connotative implications were analyzed, and the desired interpretation obtained from them. One misnomer ought to be demystified regarding choices and applications of dalīl. Prior to the discourses, Salafis/reformists accused the traditional culama/Sufis as taqlidis, an accusation that meant that they rarely used the Qur'ān and the Sunnah as evidence. Instead, they emphasized that traditional culama's obsessive captivation with non-foundational

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[392] Interview with Sheikh U., Nairobi, January 4th, 2019.

[393] Noah Salomon, "Evidence, Secrets, Truth: Debating Islamic Knowledge in Contemporary Sudan," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 81, no. 3 (2013), 823.

[394] Literally: What dalīl do you have to support your your argument?

texts, and their commentaries, left no room for Qur'ān and xadiith. As we see through what remains of this chapter, these claims might be less than accurate.

I take up two topics that have formed the core of the discourses and discuss them from these vantage points: the nature of the debate and the type of dalāʾil used. The two topics are tawxiid and al-Manāqib. Examining them helps us recognize what legitimate knowledge and dalīl are. It also shows what dalīl, considered authoritative or legitimate knowledge, means to each group. It was common for the two to downplay each other's knowledge. Salafis delegitimized the knowledge of Sufi and traditional culama, even dismissively joking how little of it they portrayed in debates. A Sufi leader and calim stated the same of their opponents: the Salafis/reformists. It is therefore difficult to consider these accusations and counteraccusations any more than the slander and the insult that they are. Here I paraphrase an interview that puts into perspective the traditional culama's purported lack of knowledge. In a debate,[395] that took place between Sheikh Maxamed Awal on the Salafi side and C. A. J. on the traditional side in the 1970s, the kalima (word) huwa (he) came up in a context. In explaining its occurrence and its meaning, Sheikh Awal stated that huwa is a normal and everyday Arabic pronoun, written as هو. Sheikh C. A. J. disputed this claim and insisted that the word was unique as it referred to Allah. When asked to clarify how he had arrived at this interpretation, the Sheikh recounted as follows:

> One night a hyena laughed in the wilderness, but it did not make the usual hyena laugh; instead, it made a unique sound that went as huu. People did not know the meaning of this sound or whether it was different from the usual hyena laugh. Fortunately, a man who had the gift of comprehending and translating animal noises into human language was close by and had heard it. The man said that the hyena was in fact communicating a very important

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[395] He could not remember the date but thought it might have been in the early days of such engagements, late 1960s or 1970s.

message, which was that huu was a pronoun that was applicable only to Allah.[396]

These assertions are outlandish though not uncommon, and they serve as common Salafi slights of Sufis/traditional culama; their persistence owe to failure in subjecting them to serious scrutiny. But they do help to disentangle dalīl, how it is perceived by the various groups, and how it is applied. Prosaic and offensive as the Salafi attitude to Sufi/traditional culama is, it serves the purpose of riling up ordinary folk, particularly youth and madrasa-going students who routinely use them to ridicule and caricature Sufis/traditional culama. At least in Garissa, they have somewhat resulted from Sufi/traditional culama passivity as opposed to Salafi/reformist activism. In addition, to discredit Sufi/traditional culama and put them in a negative light, reformists/Salafis consistently assert that Sufis/traditional culama mislead others by misinterpreting āyāt of the Qur'ān or by gravitating toward weak xadiith. Causes of these tendencies emanate, they claim, from their education which centered on non-Qur'ān and non-xadiith texts or general insensitivity to Islam. While Salafis/reformists admit that xadiith study was less widespread in the past, they marvel at the Sufi/traditional culama's unwillingness to use it contemporarily. In lieu of these normative dalāʾil, for instance, Salafis feel simple logic is oftentimes all it takes to counter Sufis/ traditional culama and dismantle their claims. As one early student of Sheikh Maxamed Awal informed me, Sufis/traditional culama were sometimes defeated in Garissa through simple logic. He simulated the following situation:

> Do you believe in Allah? Then why would you think that some long dead man can assist you, while the evidence [of Who has the power to help] is clearly stated in the Qur'ān and xadiith? Listen: when your animals get lost, and you are afraid they may fall prey to wild animals and you offer your supplications to Cabdiqadir Jeylani, saying: Sheikh Cabdiqadir Jaylaniyow

[396] Interview with Sheikh C. G., Garissa, January 15th, 2018.

kaalay aurtaada dabro[397], how do you think he can help you? Here the Salafis/reformists countered the other side with simple logic and not necessarily dalīl from the Qur'ān and xadiith.[398]

Peaceful as they were, disputes were always festering. However, the serious matter of takfir, or accusation of unbelief[399] came up intermittently but not in a forceful manner. The few illustrations of takfir happened when either group made it to underscore that a certain belief or action culminated into unbelief without necessarily alleging the other party of unbelief. But a defensive use by the Sufis/traditional culama was reported, claiming that the Salafis/reformists had called them so. Most interpreted this accusation as an appeal to the Somali masses, stating (rightly or wrongly) that the Salafis/reformists had accused not only them, but the entire Somali population of unbelief. Some understood it as trying to wrench the growing admiration of the Somali public from the Salafis.

## Tawxiid: Re-centering Islam

As pointed out by others,[400] determining winners or losers in highly charged discourses such as the one taking place between Salafi/reformists vs. traditional culama/Sufis was not only challenging but also counterproductive. It was indeed counterproductive because of the highly

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[397] Literally: "Oh, Sheikh Cabdiqadir Jeylani come and tie your he-camels." Or, in Somali, is he-camel, but because of the place of camels in the Somali milieu, it is oftentimes used symbolically to represent all animals. In the Ogaadeen region, I was informed that instead of invoking Sheikh Cabdiqadir Jeylani, people will supplicate to a local (Somali) one and say: "Sheikh Maxamud Macalin Cumarow fartahaada xidh xidho—translating into "Oh Sheikh Maxamud Macalin Cumar, come and fasten your horses (horses represent wild animals."

[398] Interview with Ibrahim M., Riyadh, October 17th, 2018.

[399] I borrowed this definition of takfir from Rüdiger Seesemann, "The Takfir Debate: Sources for the Study of a Contemporary Dispute among African Sufis Part I: The Nigerian Arena." *Sudanic Africa*, 9 (1998).

[400] Ousman Kobo, "Shifting Trajectories of Salafi/Ahl Sunna Reformism in Ghana," 62-63.

partisan nature of the situation and how each group had dug in. Accordingly, in addition to competing dalāʾil, the debates also demonstrated another purpose: that they are not simply scholarly exercises but were intended to target the public who were either present or who would watch or listen to the debates later. The two groups sometimes talked past each other, viewing these debates as opportunities for outreach. In short, it was a platform for dacwa.

Predictably, few if any of the topics aroused as much passion and sentiment as tawxiid. For Salafis/reformists, tawxiid has been reinvigorated with a widened scope and vigor, making takfir more likely. To them, tawxiid signified Islam itself,[401] and it was the be-all and end-all of Salafi approach to Islam, and by fleshing it out, we appreciate how epistemology (dalāʾil) directs belief (tawxiid). Awal's arrival subverted local understandings and interpretation of tawxiid, puzzling Sufis/traditional culama. Sufis/traditional culama viewed Salafis as (mis)using tawxiid to target Muslims and to portray them as unbelievers. This was disconcerting for the obvious reasons that what the Salafis/reformists were labelling shirk were beliefs and practices that defined local Islam. In addition, the Salafis/reformists targeted Sufi/traditional culama, the *de facto* local interpreters and authority of Islam.

In the debates, tawxiid took a center stage. Tawxiid, however, began in an intriguing manner, especially the Salafis'/reformists' contradictory application of it. At the same time, they were accusing Sufis/traditional culama and the entirety of Somalis of shirk, Salafis determined that non-Muslims (Jews and Christians) did submit to parts of tawxiid. The Sufis/traditional emphasized that the Salafis cannot have it both ways and demanded dalīl for the discrepancy. Salafis/reformists insisted that certain non-Muslims believed and submitted to rububiya as

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[401] Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," 208.

exemplified in suratul Mu'minuun verses 84-9 and Cankabuud 61. Rububiya, God's power to create and to control His creation is an element of tawxiid that is observed across various religious traditions and therefore not specific to Islam.

The debates on tawxiid, however, unleashed irremediable disagreements. Calling the first shots, Sufis/traditional culama condemned the Salafis for needlessly subdividing tawxiid, saying it had no precedent in Islam. There was no need for such classifications, adding that the only tawxiid they knew and whose evidence was clear to every Muslim was based on the Shahada: La Ilaaha Ila Laahu Mohamadan Rasulu Allah.[402] This dampened the possibility of wittingly accusing others of unbelief. To disparage the Salafis, Sufis/traditional culama introduced tathleeth vs. taqseem paradigms. Tathleeth is the act of dividing something, in this case tawxiid, into three; taqseem, on the other hand, is the simplification of knowledge for easier comprehension. Sufis/traditional culama horned in on tathleeth and not taqseem, referring to the Salafis as tathlithiyuun or those who divide tawxiid into three. Doubling down on tathleeth was aimed to irk the Salafis and portray them in the same light as the Christian theology of trinity. Highlighting lack of evidence from the Prophet or the Qur'ān, taabiciin (companions of the Prophet), or taabicu taabiciin (those who came immediately after the Prophet but saw his companions), they declared that it was fitnah (corruption). They also underscored that Maxamed ibn Cabdiwahab and ibn Taymiyya were the originators of these subdivisions, and it was not incumbent on Muslims to believe them. Asmaa wa sifaat (the attributes of Allah) and uluhiya augmented the controversies raging over the segmenting of tawxiid. For example, Sufis/traditional culama condemned the depiction of Allah in the form of jismi (physical being)

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[402] There is no god but Allah, and Maxamed is His messenger.

which markedly departed from Islamic tradition of metaphorical representation of Allah's attributes. To the Sufis/traditional culama, ibn Taymiyya's and Cabdiwahab's exclusionary classification of uluhiya and asmaa wa sifaat did not possess any theological evidence; what they had, however, was the power to declare Muslims as takfir.

Clearly disparaged, Salafis rejected the charge of tathleeth; instead, they strongly expressed preference for taqseem. In responding to claims that ibn Taymiyya or Maxamed ibn Cabdiwahab made these classifications, they argued it went further back in history. They stated that al-imaam Xaadith ibn Mandah of the 3rd century and Axmed ibn Cali, an Egyptian Shaafici scholar and a contemporary of ibn Taymiyya were the first to use taqseem, evidence that the practice was older, more widespread, and cut across various schools of thought. Salafis tried to give taqseem an intellectual spin, asking: what is the dalīl for taqseem? What is being divided is not Allah but the ways to understand tawxiid. They argued that dalīl is arrived through istiqraa, a scholarly undertaking that entails a deep inquiry, research and results from this research. Salafis/reformists however, admitted that there was no nass for the segmentation of tawxiid into uluhiya, rububiya, or wa asmaa wal sifaat. Nonetheless, Sheikh Maxamed Umal pointed to naxw, an area which the traditional culama are known experts, arguing that it was divided into xaraf (alphabet) ficil (verb) and isim (noun), illustrating al-istiqraa as a non-partisan matter in the past. Sheikh Bajuri,[403] a noted Ashcari classified knowledge in the same way. The contention was that taqseem occurs at the level of fanni (subject being studied) and not that of Allah.

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[403] Hāshiya ʿalā fath al-qarīb, by Ibrāhīm b. Muhammad al-Bājūrī (or Bayjūrī, Bījūrī; d. 1861, GAL I: 492; II: 639; S II: 741

Salafis/reformists pointed to several āyāt as dalīl for istiqraa. They analyzed parts of suratul Faatixa (the opening chapter) to prove that all the three subdivisions of tawxiid are captured. Alhamdu lilaahi rabbi al-caalamin, establishes rububiya, particularly the word al-caalamin (the Creator), which is a praise and gratefulness reserved only for Allah. Ar-Raxmaani (The Beneficent) ar-Raxiim, (The Merciful) is demonstrative of Asmaa wa Sifaat or the attributes of Allah. The final section is iyaaka nacbudu waa iyaak nastaciin, which establishes uluhiya and that worship is for Allah alone. They also referred to Suratul Maryam as another illustration of the divisions of tawxiid: Rabbi Samawaati wal ardhi wa maa baynahuma facbuduu wa sabir licibaadatihii hal taclamu lahu samiiyan. Rabul samaawatu wal ardhi shows rububiya, as it addresses rabb as the creator of the heavens and the earth. Facbduhuu wa sabir licibaadatihi speaks to uluhiya as only Allah is worthy of worship, while the last section speaks to al-Asmaa wa Sifaat.

**Al-Manāqib: False Epistemology?**

Authenticating and validating knowledge and what material constituted legitimate dalīl emerged as a major sticking point during the Salafi/traditional v. Salafi/reformist debates. Questions regarding authenticity of texts were by no means confined to these debates. Salafis/reformists have traditionally raised serious concerns or even rejected certain dalīl, books and other materials that Sufis/traditional culama have considered authentic and condemned them as not representing true Islam. Such delegitimization by Salafis/reformists, of longstanding and common material in the Horn of Africa, went beyond Somalis. Terje Østebø also notes a similar trend in Bale, Ethiopia. Østebø argues that Salafis rejected certain material that comprised of Islamic numerology and astrology, mawlid Nabi poems, and the hagiography of Sheikh Hussein,

the Rabi al-Kulub.[404] Similarly, Salafis in Garissa sought to ban literature that they claimed elevated the status of men, including the culama or saints. They prohibited poems that praised the Prophet and his family, songs, chants, and other material that extoled the virtues of Sufi luminaries such as Sheikhs Cabdiqadir Jeylani and Uweys. Opposition to these materials came on the heels of a larger Salafi /reformist campaign to re-center the Qur'ān and xadiith. One book in particular drew Salafi anger, indignation and criticism.

Al-Manāqib is a book that has been central to Sufi cosmology for centuries; they revered, valued it and studied it with tremendous dedication. The full title of the book is: al-Fuyūḍāt al-rabbāniyya fi 'l-maʾāthir al-Qādiriyya wa-yalīha 'l-Qaṣīda al-ghawthiyya, and was written by a Yemeni scholar named Muḥammad Saʿīd al-Qādirī.[405] The inclusion of al-Manāqib in this section owes much to the emotions that it generated in the debates of the 1990s and 2000s, the forcefulness with which the Salafis critiqued it, and the intensity with which the Sufis/traditional culama defended it. It was already acrimonious when discussing the authenticity or the rank of a given xadiith; here the tone of the debate assumed one of ire and resentment. The man who led the Salafi onslaught on the book asserted that the Sufi-Somali reverence and veneration for this book was so profound that it was compulsory for each household to recite it every Wednesday night. He compared this commitment to al-Manāqib with the Qur'ān, which he claimed they did not accord a similar devotion. In their attack, Salafis called into serious question the book's origin and the serious and truly bizarre and un-Islamic allegations it was making. In authenticating this book, they said a question that is worth posing is: "is al-Manāqib a legitimate

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[404] Terje Østebø, "Local Reformers and the Search for Change," 643.

[405] al-Fuyūḍāt al-rabbāniyya fi 'l-maʾāthir al-Qādiriyya wa-yalīha 'l-Qaṣīda al-ghawthiyya by Muḥammad Saʿīd al-Qādirī. For more, see, Brockelmann, "Supplement 1,"808-9

Islamic book?"[406] And if it is, what is the evidence for such claims?

Salafis assert that Cabdiqadir Jeylani could not have been the author of al-Manāqib, as the book was written half a millennium after his death. So, the first falsehood about the book concerned its very origin. In addition, the over glorification of Sheikh Jeylani and the excessive powers ascribed to him in the book are not only a fabrication but constitute an unambiguous shirk. I will summarize a few Salafi accusations about the book before moving onto the Sufi response. Some of the powers attributed to Jeylani in the book are too numerous to reproduce here, but the following form the core. Salafis, while referring to specific pages of the book, point out that Jeylani claimed that the universe belongs to him and that he was the one (waaxid). According to them, the book further asserts that Jeylani had not only met the prophets but relieved them of their various miseries during their lifetimes: that he was with Nuux when the floods were destroying his people; put out the fire that was to burn Ibrahim; cured Ayuub of his sickness; and lent his staff to Musa when his could not turn into a serpent. He claimed to know Allah's cilmi, arguing that he had a count of every single particle of sand on the ground and leaf on trees. However, the Salafis were quick to clarify that not all Sufis/traditional culama endorsed this the book. Sheikh Umal stated in the debates that the Saalixiya considered al-Manāqib a badil, and that it is only the Qaadiris who maintained in its legitimacy.

In their defense of this book and other material like it, Sufis/traditional culama asserted that the al-Manāqib was an indisputable and authentic text with its rightful place in the history of Islam. They connected the book to broader Sufi themes and subjects. In a bid to affirm it a true and genuine book, they honed in on two key points. The first one was that the book contains two

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[406] In Somali, the question is as follows: "kitābka Munaaqibka diinta ma ka mid baa mise?"

types of knowledge. The first one is the easily accessible knowledge, which they said they could answer. However, the second type of knowledge was more problematic for Salafis to understand or conceptualize. Sufis/traditional culama stated that this knowledge is hidden and is only comprehensible to certain cadre of people, such as the awliya, who were not present anymore. Even they had not reached that level of knowledge and understanding and therefore could not address those questions. When Salafis wondered how they could carry around a book whose contents they could barely understand, the Sufis/traditional culama claimed that such knowledge was not in fact without precedent in Islam. This sort of knowledge was aligned to Musa's situation. When asked who the most knowledgeable person in the world was, Musa referred to himself as that person, but he was reminded that there was knowledge that was hidden from him. His attention was also drawn to Khidr[407] who knew this knowledge and from whom he would learn much.

However, what the Salafis considered a blasphemy—Jeylani's purported power to assist those in distress— was explained away by the Sufis in two different ways. The first was an analogy drawn from the Prophet. In the last day when people are resurrected and they are worried on their status, i.e., whether they would go to heaven or hell, some will beseech the Prophet to intercede on their behalf. Another example is of a man who came to the Prophet to assist him get back his eyesight. In both cases, the Prophet cannot extend shafaaca (power to extend salvation), to them, since such powers is only for Allah. They asserted that the statements made in the book are symbolic. The larger issue at hand, Sufis/traditional culama maintained, was that the Salafis were determined to diminish traditional Islam by attacking the karama

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[407] A figure mentioned in the Qur'ān. He was a righteous servant of Allah and possessed wisdom and knowledge.

(honor or dignity) of the sheikh, and all other culama, and belittle their fadli (respect). Jeylani's presence with the prophets should not be understood in a physical sense, but through his karama. Opposition or criticism of the sheikh was therefore based on ignorance.

**Conclusion**

I conclude this chapter by restating that the coming of Salafism into Garissa was not a simple or straightforward one, but one whose arrival was asymmetrical owing to preceding reformist and colonial factors. Furthermore, the relationship that existed between the Salafis/reformists and the Sufis/traditional over the time past half a century was complex. In the early stages of this encounter, their engagements were characterized by much suspicion and expressed through extreme viciousness, hostility, and personal attacks. However, over the past twenty-five years, their interactions demonstrate nuances that should be expected of all social phenomena. While questions and concerns revolved around issues of basic belief and practice and have stayed resiliently that way for over two and a half decades, the paradigms got closer, while the epistemologies that informed their ideologies progressively streamlined. In the intellectual debates of the 1990s and the 2000s, the points of reference for both groups were basically the Qur'ān and xadiith. Each group, also, calls itself al-sunnah wal jamaaca. Still, though, what each group considers dalīl show a wide chasm.

**CHAPTER SIX**

## The Tales of a Sheikh: Education, Travels, and Transformations

*"We know you are going to the land of ibn al-Wahhab to seek for education. We ask one favor from you: learn what you may in their land, but please do not bring it with you when you come back to us"*[408]

This chapter discusses the personal life of a sheikh. By humanizing the two critical aspects of this research, education and transformation, and weaving them within the experiences of this sheikh, we see the idiosyncrasy of each, but their intricacies as well. Biographies of Muslim scholars are critical. These biographical narratives are not only a time-tested and vital tool for the transmission of Islamic knowledge[409], but they are also crucial in elucidating the social and religious impact they have on others. They personalize journeys and show how experiences accumulated over time are deployed for the purpose of Islamic learning, dacwa, and generally at the service of Muslims. Nevertheless, things are much more convoluted than a mere accumulation of knowledge and application. I began this chapter with a short quote which exemplifies not only how individuals were transformed by knowledge and life in Saudi Arabia, but the apprehensions and misgivings of those they left behind. These concerns and the returnees almost feverish desire and drive to see this change happen have captured discourses on Islam in

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[408] This story was related to me in Riyadh. Though the originator of this story was not one of my active interviews, he said that one of the first students to be admitted to IUM was called in by the old men of his village and given this message. While such views have changed over time and are unlikely to come up contemporarily, they came up in the 1960s and 1970s and illustrate the views of most people at the time and what they thought of this reformist movement.

[409] Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. 15.

Africa in the last several decades. Accordingly, the chapter discusses this individual's journey in the Somali-speaking areas as well as in Saudi Arabia and the changes that he experienced along the way. The chapter ties this with the larger issues such as social and political activism of the culama, how the culama make a living, and wind up with the background of Sheikh S.

**Becoming a Salafi**

A widely established truism is that institutions of learning imbue ethos to their students; this is truer for missionary institutions such as the two universities in which this research was based. Often, this ethos are deeply embedded in the ways in which knowledge is structured and delivered, or how they are entrenched in the syllabi, learning materials or demonstrated through teaching. Just as commonly though, students are exposed to non-or semi-structured material which heavily influences them. They absorb this ethos and live by them throughout their lives. At times, some of this ethos do change or are altered if a different set of supposedly more impactful knowledge is encountered. Much as structured materials tend to be the primary means through which student views and perspectives are shaped, other factors are at play as well. This was the case for Sheikh S. While knowledge transmission has been captured in chapter two, three and four, we will now turn our attention to how this knowledge transforms students' views and how they use it to transform others.

As we saw in the previous chapters, two institutions that played a crucial role in the spreading of Salafism in Garissa were Jamiica Mosque and Madrasatul Najaax. When the current crop of Salafi leadership joined Najaax in the late 1960s, '70s and '80s, Salafi the caqīdah was taking root. These young and impressionable students were taught that Sufism and Ashcarism were erroneous for obvious Salafi claims. A current Salafi leader who attended Najaax 1960s

and 70s and who had taken lessons with both Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi and Sheikh Awal said the types of questions that he and others confronted were as follows:

> Who deserves worship or to be asked for help? A dead man who cannot even help himself? These questions provoked me to think more deeply about what Islam those around me believed in or practiced. I had never encountered this sort of questions or knowledge before. The Salafi teachers told us that help only comes from Allah: food, children, health, or peace. It is called tawxiid. Everything is to be addressed to Allah; duco is to be directed to Allah only. When these kinds of questions came up in class, we were told that the best thing was to ask ourselves what the sahaba[410] would do, and what did they believe or practice.[411]

At the core of Salafism was to change the individual before the society, and these institutions doubled their efforts in selling the Salafi agenda to the youth. At Najaax and Jamiica, the youth easily absorbed the Salafi message though the community outside was still largely Sufi. Nevertheless, how the message in these two institutions affected their thinking and transformed them was rather tortuous and not simple or straightforward. This was in part the case because of two reasons. First, the residents of the town were largely Sufi/Ashcari, and these students' own families and relatives practiced Sufism. As such, these students could not openly oppose the beliefs of their parents or other older relatives. Secondly, the older students at Najaax and Jamiica who had already studied at xer resisted extricating themselves from their teachers as well as the networks of culama that they had already formed. The xer had introduced to them centuries old education, but also a profound a sense of community. For Sheikh S., the subject of this chapter, three decades after living xer, this feeling of attachment and community is still palpable.

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[410] Salafis trace their evidence to the sahabas, or the Prophet's companions.

[411] An Interview with Ibrahim G., Garissa, June 23rd, 2016.

> Our sheikhyaal (at the xer) were selfless men, had love for the deen and disseminated knowledge freely for the sake of Allah, without any salary or other forms of benefit. They taught their texts multiple times a day without making many demands of us other than to attend their lectures and to pay attention. They did not ask where we went, which means "there was no protocol"[412], and no control of any sort. "Our relationship was excellent, built on mutual respect, love and trust for each other. They had unrivaled knowledge and expertise of their subjects and adab too.[413] They memorized whole texts and referenced them to the page, without even glancing at it.

Though they readily embraced the knowledge offered at from Najaax, Jamiica and later at IUM, students' attitude toward their teachers and professors were less than favorable. This reflects the image the locals held of Salafis in general, but also returnees. The returnees spoke of their teachers and professors with little affection and regarded them as cold, making a wholesome transformation into Salafism problematic. In this dynamic, returnees were said to be cold and confrontational, owing to their belief that theirs was the correct knowledge and message. They did not entertain opposition in matters of religion or preaching, mirroring the atmosphere that prevailed in their own classrooms and social lives in Saudi Arabia. Their sermons were polemic and called out others they disagreed. What used to be an easy relationship between the culama and caamo became a divided one. Despite this, however, they fell for the message, and it changed most of them.

Accordingly, the most crucial tool in this transformation to self-identify as a Salafi was classroom knowledge. Sheikh S. was exposed different dalīl (using this word to mean

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[412] He used the word loosely to evoke the general atmosphere of learning where there were no strict rules, no exams, and that excellence in education came about because of personal effort.

[413] He mentioned adab multiple times. His referencing of adab was curiously in relation to xer, including one in Saudi Arabia. Not one time did he mention IUM in relation to adab.

knowledge) in his shariica classes at IUM, all rooted in Qur'ān and xadiith. While the shariica at IUM is purported to be al-muqaaranah (comparative), interviewees claimed that the dalīl that ultimately prevailed was the professor's. When a given mas'ala was discussed in class, different and at times conflicting interpretations are debated. The question reiterated by the professors was always: is the dalīl appropriate in this or that context? This also shows a change from the xer where what dalīl to adopt was straightforward to their current situation of comparing multiple dalāʾil, subverting points of reference in their transition from the sheikh to the book. Whereas at the xer, the sheikh would recount what he had heard from his sheikh, here the professor does not speak of his professor but of what the books say or what evidence is in front of him. In the end, three categories of ducaad, all transformed in various ways and degrees, emerged from these universities. The first and the loudest group commenced their education in madrasa and have therefore been Salafi all their lives. They agree with what the professors say and do not question their dalīl. The second group had had some of their learning at xer as well as madāris and universities and were somewhat conflicted on which dalīl to adopt.

The third category obtained a substantial amount of their education from xer but had also earned degrees from Saudi Arabia. This group is more balanced and weighs issues before adopting a dalīl appropriate to a situation. They tend to be level-headed and global both at the universities and back in their home communities, particularly how they approach issues of dalīl. On the other hand, they are also more likely to run into difficulty at Saudi universities and the Saudi Salafi establishment. Notwithstanding the belief that IUM is based on fiqh al-muqaaranah, dire consequences await students who challenge the professors' perspective. A story is told of a former student and a currently renowned scholar in Kenya who disagreed with his professor regarding the choice of a dalīl. The student challenged the professor, observing that his dalīl,

which was based on his Shaafici background, was stronger and more appropriate in the given context than the professor's. The professor felt slighted, and he referred the matter to the university administration, and though it ended without any major disciplinary measures against the student, he was turned down for an admission into the graduate program at IUM.

Saudi universities are hardly open or lively centers of scholarly debate, partly because of the laws that control speech and assembly, significantly restricting what to say and how to say so. Knowledge had already been prepackaged, and it is confined to the classroom. It is unidirectional, characterized by linear flow from professors to students. What literature exists in libraries are narrow and only supports the majoritarian view. Consequently, if there are any semblance of scholarly discourses, they happen between people who know and trust each other: classmates, friends or close acquaintances.

One area outside of class, from where substantial amount of student knowledge comes, particularly one that is geared toward grounding them in the particularities of Salafism, is xalaqat. In the three cities of Makkah, Madina, and Riyadh, students expend inordinate amount of time listening to sheikhyaal, mostly popular Salafi scholars who teach anything from pronunciation to advanced texts on fiqh, xadiith and caqīdah. These xalaqat are different from those in the Somali-speaking areas. Xalaqat in the Saudi mosques are closer, especially in the knowledge imparted, to their universities. The sheikhyaal are mostly current or former university professors, even though some have had their ajza through xer. Popular xalaqat are based in: Masjidul Xaram (the Grand Mosque, Makkah), Masjid Nabawi (The Prophet's Mosque, Madina), and Sheikh Fowzan's mosque in Riyadh.

Schools and universities encourage xalaqa attendance. Foreign students who wish stay back in the summer are are provided food, transportation by muxsiniin or their sheikhs at the

xalaqa. One example is that of Sheikh S's whose university education in Saudi Arabia was complemented by xalaqat in the Xijaaz. In Madina, Sheikh S. attended multiple xalaqat at the Prophet's and other mosques. He also traveled to other cities for more learning, obtaining ijaza in adab under the guidance of Sheikh Maxamed Amin in Makkah. He studied under Sheikh Cabdul Muxsin Cabaad in Madina. A noted professor at IUM and a xalaqa teacher in Madina, Cabaad was a well-regarded xadiith scholar who had a lasting impact on Sheikh S's interest in xadiith. Students take advantage of the xalaqat and study as many books as possible on xadiith, caqīdah, and tafsīr. These, they know, are what will set them apart from traditional culama in Garissa. To perform Salafism, they absorb the knowledge and the way of life and transpose it to Garissa. In what follows, I explore the specific changes returnees have pursued in this town and region.

**Returnees as Agents of Change**

Though transformation toward Salafism began in the 1960s, monumental changes did not happen until the 1980s. As returnees came back from Saudi Arabia and settled in Garissa, they coalesced around certain social issues and strove to fight for them. They plunged themselves into activism with confidence and assertiveness, aided by the fact that they were raised in the town and were conversant with the sociopolitical and religious terrain. Though the returnees knew each other from local madāris or in Saudi universities, they were nevertheless hardly a monolithic group, which partly hampered their efforts at the social changes they sought to bring about. As in places such as Nigeria where not all graduates from Saudi universities necessarily self-identify as Salafi,[414] ideological or political affiliations are scarcely surprising or unique to Garissa as local social and political realities frequently get in the way of such unity. What is

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[414] Alex Thurston, "Ahlussunah: Preaching Network from Kano to Madina and Back," 93.

instructive, though, is that the culama were less united in the political front than they were in the social and religious domains.

To start off, mounting regional insecurity and dangerous geopolitics deprived returnees the opportunity to form organized groups or associations as was possible in Muslim-majority places such as in Indonesia.[415] As Kai Kresse suggests on his study on Kenyan Coastal Muslims,[416] the feeling of being left out in the national narrative is pervasive across Somali-Kenyans and lends itself to real concerns of marginalization. The insecurity was posed by the rise of militant groups in neighboring Somalia, presenting real consequences for all Somalis in the northern region, but specifically for returnees. The Kenyan government passed a raft of anti-terror laws that led to real panic. For Kenyan-Muslims in post 9/11 situation, it was easy for the government to target any individual or group and the consequences of this security state categorization would be dire.[417]

In addition to the toxic geopolitical situation, returnees were also politically divided. As always, Kenyan politics, particularly electoral politics, is transacted through the medium of kinship, and the culama are no exception. As everyone else, they support one candidate over another based on clan allegiance. In the 2017 election, for example, each Somali clan in Garissa

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[415] Zulkifli, "Qom Alumni in Indonesia: Their Role in the Shi'i Community," *in Shaping Global Islamic Discourses. The Role of al-Azhar, al-Medina, and al-Mustafa*, eds. Masooda Bano and Keiko Sakurai, 117-141 (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 125.

[416] Kai Kresse, "Muslim Politics in Postcolonial Kenya: Negotiating Knowledge on the Double Periphery," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. 3 (2009), 77.

[417] Rüdiger Seesemann, "Kenyan Muslims, the Aftermath of 9/11, and the 'War on Terror,'" in *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa* edited by Benjamin Soares and René Otayek, 157-176 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 168.

organized its constituencies into the following segmentation: dumarka (women), dhalin yarada (the youth), culuma u dinka (religious practitioners), wax garadka (secular-educated scholars), and odayaasha (old men). That religious practitioners featured in such categorizations is revealing. Each of these segmentations was assigned specific responsibilities in order to win the election for one of their members: member of parliament, governor, or senator among numerous others. Not only were the culama featured speakers in clan gatherings, but they also advised the campaigns and actively participated in canvassing for votes across the county. To the common folk, the presence of the culama in their midst and their participation in clan politics legitimized it. Consequently, culama from the various clans who were educated together and had known each other for a long time found themselves in opposite political camps.

Moreover, returnees found it difficult to find meaningful employment and other opportunities once back in Kenya, to a degree of difficulty much more than their counterparts from Kenyan universities. Hence, they competed with one another for whatever meagre chances that were available. The corrupt ways in which government jobs and contracts were doled out made it easy for the returnees to act as easy conduits for their clans and politicians. However, the ultraconservatives within their ranks viewed these financial pursuits or clan allegiances as un-Islamic. Despite these bottlenecks, returnees have been instrumental in bringing about real change. In the next few pages, I discuss how the returnees have sought to tackle social, political, and institutional problems.

Two basic factors have helped Salafis to become major social actors in Garissa. Sheikh Ibn Baz's[418] deep interest in the establishment and entrenchment of Salafism in Garissa led to the deployment of ducaad/mabcutheen to the town. These included locals who had returned from Saudi universities and non-locals who were sent in by Saudis to propagate Salafism. The second one was the arrival of Middle Eastern NGOs as well as the emergence of local ones. The objective of these organizations, as elsewhere in Africa, was to help provide basic needs such as food or water or sustain madāris and mosques.[419] Garissa was affected by droughts which killed thousands of animals, leaving the locals impoverished. Also, thousands of refugees arrived in the County from Somalia, straining the already meagre resources. Besides the humanitarian help, other agendas underlay the Islamic-based NGOs, one of which was to pursue their own dacwa activities. They also sought to address what impact returnees could have in their local communities. In that regard, these NGOs created platforms for the returnees to interact, exchange ideas and form a plan of action. The three NGOs that had the strongest presence were: Muslim Welfare Society (MWS), Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM), and Jamicaatul Aema.

Later, smaller clan-based NGOs evolved out of the Middle Eastern NGOs, coalescing culama from specific clans around certain common interests. These were sometimes deleterious and counterproductive, particularly in regard to politics; nonetheless, they were useful when it came to building schools or seeking scholarships for madrasa graduates in Saudi Arabia. The

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[418] Ibn Baz, who was the mufti of Saudi Arabia from 1993-1999, was personally interested and had invested himself and whatever resources he could locate to entrench Salafi reforms in Garissa as I was informed by multiple people.

[419] Abdoulaye Sounaye, "Salafi Revolution in West Africa. Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient," *Working Papers*, No. 19, (2017), 4.

local organizations were: Jimciyatul Bayaan was founded by and largely serves members of the Cabduwaaq family, while Jimciyatul al-Furqaan belongs to the Cabdalla family. The Cawlyahan-family were split between the more nascent Raabidda, and the more financially muscular and Kuwait-funded Jimciyatul ar-Ricaaya.

On almost all social issues, however, returnees forged a united front, an example of which was the youth project. In the early 1960s Salafis/reformists identified the youth as crucial tool to transforming the religious landscape of the town. Those efforts allowed Salafis/reformists to enter and occupy the fabric of the larger society and transform it beyond their wildest dreams. However, a new form of engagement with the youth emerged in the early to mid-1990s. In the Somali-speaking areas, the scourge of khat[420] or miraa in Swahili, was wasting the lives of many a youth. The effects of khat were adverse as it amplified the rate of school dropouts, diseases, and crime. It also exacerbated another vice. The young men clandestinely rented rooms that they called "cubes,"[421] which became meeting grounds for boys and girls, a behavior that was not yet widespread in the town.

The returnees took it upon themselves to tackle youth issues. Their attitude was that the use of drugs arose from lack of proper understanding of Islam, effectively tying it to caqīdah. They asserted that drugs were obviously a gateway to other vices that included mixing of opposite sex, illicit sex, diseases, or children born out of wedlock. But how did caqīdah come into play? They pointed to rituals that drug users ill-performed or ended up not performing at all.

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[420] Khat is a mild, leafy plant that is grown in Kenya and Ethiopia and is consumed in East Africa and Southern Arabia. It is a stimulant and addictive that is classified as a drug by most professionals. For more, see, Neil Carrier, "Miraa is Cool: The Cultural Importance of Miraa *(khat)* for Tigania and Igembe Youth in Kenya," *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 17, no. 2 (2006), 201-218.

[421] It comes from the square-type designs in which these rooms were built.

An example included the inability to pray at all or not praying on time as drug users did not care to pray or simply slept during prayer times. For returnees, prayer was the be-all and end-all, while some have argued that failing to observe prayer took one outside of the fold of Islam. This was a remarkable departure from the traditional culama who the returnees had accused of failing to address this scourge much less help tackle it. Surprisingly, their activism went unchallenged by the government, local politicians and the public, and it resembled a replication of their experiences in Saudi Arabia.

In Saudi Arabia, the religious police forced people into mosques during prayer times, stopped pedestrians and shoppers and demanded to know if couples were married, or profiled women for modesty in dress. However, the religious police were a government agency, and a government-mandated program with the full authority of the law. As they enacted these actions in Garissa, the returnees did so without anyone's— including the government's— approval. They identified sections of the town where the "cubes" were more widespread or those where khat consumption was more prevalent. The two notorious neighborhoods were Ngamia Road, and ironically, Bula Sheikh. Once they knew what rooms the youth would be located in, returnees would burst in and attack them with sticks. Numerous cases abound where unsuspecting youth (boys and girls) were forced out of their "cubes" and chased on the street, half-naked. The youth never fought back neither did they voice their concerns against these violent actions. Instead, they avoided encounter by changing the location of the "cubes" or abandoning these activities altogether. The returnees' success owed to the fact they had the religious argument and social approval on their side.

As the returnees increased in both numbers and clout, they turned their attention to institutions of government to "Islamize" them. The returnees viewed themselves as elites,

formally educated and products of bureaucratic, modern institutions of learning, and therefore deserving of moral leadership in their communities. An interviewee put it this way:

> As educated people, we understand the laws of the country and how they work. We have liberal laws in Kenya which do not dictate how one chooses to live, dress, worship, or get educated. All we need is to apply those laws.[422]

On the other hand, they regarded the Sufis/traditional culama as lacking in knowledge of the modern systems. Thus, it was not only their responsibility as Muslims to ensure they did what was right for their people, they felt they knew better than the Sufis/traditional culama. The returnees were keenly interested in the ministry of education. With precision, they questioned how Islamic Religious Education (IRE) was taught in public schools. Historically, both IRE and CRE (Christian Religious Education) proceeded from a secular perspective, and they were taught by teachers who were educated through Kenyan colleges and public universities. In addition, the books taught in high school were published by the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) and told the story of Kenyan Muslims. In addition, Arabic language was not taught widely in schools, which the returnees argued it should be. Thus, a debate took shape in the mid-1990s regarding the correct ways to educate a Muslim child, and how best to overhaul the system to accommodate these changes. One returnee informed me this:

> I can say that we pursued these changes, but they were also based on iskaashi (cooperation in Somali). We worked with wazazi (sing. mzazi, parents in Swahili), schools boards of governors, local leaders like Macalin Idriss and members of parliament. We sent out codsi (petition in Somali) to the government to accept these changes. Therefore, these leaders spoke to the government on our behalf and the changes happened that way.[423]

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[422] Interview with Sheikh C.R.W., Garissa, January 15th, 2018.

[423] Interview with Sheik C.R.W., Garissa, January 14th, 2018.

Another major sticking point was how Muslim girls were made to dress to public schools. The style of dress was a colonial holdover where girls and boys wore plain Anglo-style school uniforms. Boys wore shorts and short-sleeved shirts, while girls wore trousers, short skirts that ended above the knee, and short-sleeved shirts. What piqued the returnees even more was that the girls were not allowed to wear scarves, therefore exposing their hair. Once again, returnees accused Sufis/traditional culama for their indifference to this critical issue. From the mid-1990s, the returnees initiated a campaign that sought to introduce xijab to Muslim girls in schools. As they did this, however, they were cautious not to upset the politicians whose support they needed in this and other changes, or to appear too aggressive or pushy to the government, especially at such a delicate time. Some even downplayed their role in this campaign as advisors or wacyi galin.[424] However, within a short time, their campaign paid off, as the government relented and girls were allowed to wear long skirts and xijab, while the boys began wearing trousers.

The returnees' engagements in local matters took a deeper turn when they inserted themselves into the political discourses surrounding the Kenyan constitutional reforms of the 2000s. Their prominence came to light in the 2005 constitutional reforms when the country was paralyzed by the acrimonious reform efforts that had split the country into two, signified by the two symbols of banana and orange. Banana was a pro-reform or yes, while orange was against it, and, therefore, a no.[425] The controversial issues were the kadhi's court, land, and the structure of the executive. The Banana camp, which was supported by the sitting president Mwai Kibaki and his NARC government, favored the new draft, including a strong presidency. On the other hand,

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[424] This is a type of "low-risk form of participation."

[425] Bård Anders Andreassen and Arne Tostensen, "Of Oranges and Bananas: The 2005 Kenya Referendum on the Constitution," *CMI Working Paper* (2006), V.

the opposition, which was led by the current president Uhuru Kenya, his vice president William Ruto and opposition politician Raila Odinga did not favor power concentrated in the hands of a strong president. In contrast, they preferred power sharing power between the president and the prime minister.

Even though the national issues weighed heavily on the Muslims, and they contributed to discussions with zeal, the centerpiece of their concerns was the future of the kadhi's court. The kadhi's court is salient for Muslims as an institution where matters of family laws are handled and resolved, including marriage, divorce and inheritance.[426] In the reform debates, the kadhi's court became a thorny issue, and it reflected a larger national discourse where various Christian denominations as well as Hindu groups strove to safeguard their interests in the new constitutional dispensation. Church leaders were particularly opposed to the kadhi's court,[427] arguing that Muslims were accorded preferential treatment in the constitution, sparking violent confrontation, leading to scores of deaths. Garissa was one of those places where death had occurred. Politicians from Muslim-majority regions in the coastal and northern areas were caught between fidelity to their faith and loyalty to their political parties. In Garissa, this division played out around the personalities of the longtime state minister Hussein Macalin Maxamed, the future majority leader of the Kenyan parliament Aden Duale, and the future deputy speaker Farah Macalin.

Hussein Macalin supported the government, while Aden Duale and Farah Macalin were in the opposition. Though a minister, selling the government's position in the reforms to the local

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[426] Ahmed Issack Hassan, "*Working Document for the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission on the Kadhi's Courts, Chief Kadhi and Kadhis,"* Mombasa, 2002.

[427] A Chance to Improve How Kenya is run, *The Economist*, July 29, 2010.

Muslims proved a formidable task for Hussein. The culama threw their support behind Duale and Macalin. Being one of the first instances to thrust themselves into a national debate and as passionately as they did, they effectively framed the discussion as an assault on Islam and that it was incumbent on every Muslim to ensure that the kadhi's court was protected. Utilizing their popularity and their connection to the many current and former madrasa students as well as the residents, the culama mounted a heavy campaign to inform the residents what was at stake and sensitize people into coming out to oppose and vote against the draft constitution. The culama's mobilization and the existing toxic environment enabled the town's youth to take a step further and employ whatever measures they felt was commensurate to derailing the campaigns for the draft constitution. This included violence that stopped the pro-reforms from holding public meetings in the town. This was on display on September 17th, 2005, when the town's youth threw stones at ministers who were in town to campaign for the constitution reform.[428] In the melee that ensued, 33 people were injured and the meeting was cancelled.

**How the Culama Make a Living**

The ways in which the culama make a living have always been a topic of interest both within themselves and in the larger Somali society. While Somalis have always been generous with the culama and lavishly paid whatever dues the culama demanded, for instance, after the (un)successful treatment of a sick or afflicted person, they nevertheless made brutal jokes that derisively scorned the culama, giving the impression of them as leeches who unfairly lived off the backs of others. As such, popular tales about the culama's financial conducts are awash in the Somali language. One of these jokes cautions people to not scratch their bodies near a sheikh

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[428] Kenya police arrest 20 youths after rally violence, *Reuters*, September 18, 2005.

during the drier months of the year when people have skin itches, for he might likely think that he was being offered something. Another one portrayed the culama as a greedy lot who extoled their hosts to serve them the finer parts of the animal during feasts: the liver or the ribs.

The foregoing also portrays that the culama were an enigma to the common Somali folk. As most Somalis were illiterate on Islamic matters, there were constant concerns and questions of who knew what (Qur'ān for teaching and healing), who knew better than who, and whose Qur'ān brought quicker and guaranteed recovery to the sick, and therefore their money's worth. Accordingly, ordinary Somalis were divided into two broad categories: those who could and those who could not tell apart the "fake" and "genuine" culama, specifically regarding healing. The former has often been perceived as Sufis who were believed to be fraud with no knowledge of the deen in general and Qur'ān in particular, while the latter were the genuine culama, and therefore preferable. To illustrate this difference, here is another tale that was related to me:

> There was an old man who traveled long distances; in his travels, he visited villages and purported to treat people by reciting the Qur'ān on the sick, charging them heftily. He wore layers of clothes over each other as a sign of piety. He demanded cattle, sheep and goats. One day he came upon a young boy who was in the beginning stages of learning the Qur'ān, and hence struggling with the alphabet. The boy had one letter written on his loox. Knowing the old man from previous visits, the boy ran to the old man and calling him "awow—grandfather", asked him to help him sound out the one letter on his loox. The old man looked at the letter in every which way he could but could not identify it. After waiting patiently for as long as a child can wait, the boy innocently blurted out to the old man, "awow, you don't know this letter? Is it not /waw/ or /و/?" The old man,

evidently flustered, retorted to the boy, "Last time I saw it, /waw/ was smaller than this. When has it grown this big?[429]

Ordinary Somalis will argue that that the old man was a Sufi and not a genuine sheikh. However untrue or hyperbolic such statements might turn out to be, it demonstrates the complexity of the issue and its social connections to various forms of "knowledge."[430] Accordingly, the earliest debates, which were mostly acrimonious regarding the ways in which the culama made a living had erupted between Salafis/reformists and Sufis/traditional culama as early as the 1960s. The charges were one-sided as Salafis/reformists accused Sufis/traditional culama of fraud and the latter defending themselves. The Salafis/reformists claimed the Sufis/traditional culama took advantage of the common folks' ignorance and fleeced them of their meagre property. Specifically, the Salafis/reformists lodged the following denunciations against Sufis/traditional culama: a) pretending to treat diseases and afflictions in ways they could not, and b) swindling people by charging them excessive prices for those services, c) misused Islam for financial gains.

Diseases and afflictions for which people sought healing were diverse and comprised of social, mental or physical. The traditional approaches for treatment were an assortment of healing techniques and practices many of which Salafis/reformists said were done through dubious and un-Islamic means, including: the wearing of amulets (a piece of paper on which Qur'ān was written and tied to children's necks), dancing and chanting, and recitation of Qur'ān in shrines. It was common for the sick or the afflicted to travel to distant lands to participate in

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[429] Interview with Maxamuud D., Garissa, September 2, 2017.

[430] What is considered legitimate knowledge is relative, particularly when it comes to using that knowledge for social functions like healing.

events or gatherings that took place in shrines where they would be prayed for and Qur'ān read on them, called xus in Somali.[431] In recompense, the sick offered money, animals or other types of property to the healer. Salafis/reformists looped in other areas where much livestock or money was expended such as burials and weddings. In these occasions, many animals, perhaps tens of cows, sheep or goats collected from the family of the deceased were killed for those attending the funerals, irking the Salafis even further.

For the Salafis/reformists, these financial debates were not only simple economic matters that left the left families destitute, or meaningless social discourses; instead, they were serious issues with direct and severe creedal consequences. They were unequivocal that any transaction that involved visitation to graves or shrines, or any money that exchanged hands because of such activities was unambiguously xaraam. The Salafis, therefore, used these financial matters to depict Sufis/traditional culama as charlatans, intensifying their attacks on them. One prominent Salafi who was present in the early 1970s said the following:

> The Sufis/traditional culama lost financially and in religious leadership when Salafis began to preach against what they taught and how they healed the sick. As ordinary people became aware of the Salafi message and realized that their caqīdah was in danger, they started to walk away from them (Sufis/traditional culama).[432]

After having successfully disrupted the economic mainstay of the Sufis/traditional culama, returnees and other Salafis/reformists were confronted with their own ways of making a living. With degrees in shariica, xadiith, Qur'ān, or dacwa, what would they do in Kenya? How would

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[431] In many parts of Garissa, xus was and still is an annual Qur'ānic recitation event for one of the local calim. Though the rite is led by the family member, contributions are made by all who belong to that diya-paying group.

[432] Interview with Sheikh C. G., Garissa, January 15$^{th}$, 2018.

they make a living? Their inability to land jobs was exacerbated by their lack of the two main languages that operate in Kenya: English and Swahili. The madrasa curriculum was and continues to be aligned to the Saudi education system—specifically that of Imam. Consequently, no language other than Arabic is taught in a major way. Neither are Kenyan/African history, geography or civics taught, subjects that would align the madrasa graduates with the national narrative, history, or even identity of their own country. A university graduate from the Sudan who had attended local madāris complained that upon graduating from the local madāris, they knew more about the history and geography of Saudi Arabia than they did of Kenya,[433] completely disconnecting them from the country. In essence, returnees find it very difficult to adjust to the social, political, or professional life in Kenya. In what remains of this section, I will explore what jobs the returnees undertook upon returning to Kenya.

I start off with an answer to a question that I put to a student at Imam. Over lunch at a Yemeni restaurant across from the campus, I asked what graduates from his university do once they go back to Garissa. His answer, though predictable, was to enumerate the number of mosques in which they served as preachers, without mentioning "real work".[434] Since the professional lives of these graduates often begin upon graduating from the local madāris, we will review it from there. Most graduates from the madāris come from poor families or from the countryside, which means few have or have had real connections to the town. Upon graduating, they had to wait for years before being admitted into Saudi universities. These twin factors necessitated that they find meaningful things to do.

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[433] Interview with Dr. Bashir, Garissa on June 21, 2014

[434] Interview with A. Y., Riyadh, March 2nd, 2018.

One of the earliest approaches to addressing joblessness among madrasa graduates was to employ them in the sprawling new madāris.[435] Various local and foreign agencies and people undertook this mission, but none to the degree of Sheikh ibn Baz. From 1976, a number of new madāris were founded throughout Garissa district. With the support of Sheikh Maxamed Awal, madāris were opened in smaller towns across the northern region. Accordingly, returnees were employed as teachers, assistant teachers, while recent madrasa graduates were deployed as maxalli,[436] and dispatched to the new madāris to teach beginning level subjects. The wages for maxalli were donated by Darul Ifta, muxsiniin, and fees from students.

In addition to the salaries that Saudi Arabia paid to the ducaad and mabcutheen, other monies also came indirectly from Saudi Arabia to offset expenditures and create more employment. However, such monies took personal contact and networking to find. Local culama from Garissa found ways of soliciting funds from ibn Baz and others to support the madāris and the graduates. Sheikh Maxamed Cali Raajax, the mudiir of Madrasatul Najaax, for instance, frequently visited ibn Baz to support Najaax, while Sheikh Xassan Cabdirahman, separately petitioned ibn Baz to support Madrasatul Salaam. This was the time the Mufti Caam al-Mamlaka[437] left IUM as its head. However, monies gotten this way were channeled through mulxaqa ad-deen, a religious representative of Ifta who was based at the Saudi embassy in Nairobi and who distributed it to the various madāris. The culama added the donations to the fees from students and paid teachers and mulxaqa, telephone bills, and refreshments for the teachers. The financial contribution from

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[435] Interview with Sheikh C. G., Garissa, January 15$^{th}$, 2018.

[436] In Arabic, the word means "the same place." In this context, however, it is used for students who recently graduated from madrasa and are deployed as teachers in the same madāris or others close by.

[437] Grand mufti, a reference that an interviewee made on several occasions.

ibn Baz, however, took too long to arrive, and following Ibn Baz's death, the slow stream of the money almost fizzled out altogether.

The most sought-after jobs for returnees were with Darul Ifta. Darul Ifta is Saudi-based governmental organization that employs returnees for dacwa activities. It is a competitive program with a steady, comfortable income and extra perks such as travel grants, provision of literature, and easy travel to Saudi Arabia for cumrah or xajj, creating and helping maintain a powerful link between them and Saudi Arabia. The ducaad were sent to different regions, and even far-flung countries. Recent returnees have been deployed to Malawi, South Africa, and other African countries. It is not clear how they functioned in these countries, considering few of them speak any language other Somali and Arabic. These employments are still on-going, and the last batch was hired in 2015, which included the immediate former principal of Mustaqbal University and IUM alum.

Collaborating with the US in the aftermath of 911 has resulted in Saudi funding to slowly be scaled back, and fewer jobs are now available from Ifta. With pressure from US, Saudis have cut back financial support to employment, dacwa, or literature. But the silver lining is that the returnees are becoming more resourceful and are identifying local opportunities.[438] Second only to Ifta, the other job category that the graduates vociferously compete for is as a khadi (judge) in Kenya. Khadis are employees of the government and are permanent and pensionable. However, being employed as a khadi presents its own challenges for returnees. First of all, jobs are few and far between. Secondly, the employment process is demanding. Not only are applicants subjected to a barrage of assessments, but they are also required to be proficient in Arabic, English, and

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[438] Interview with Sheikh Y., Makkah, January 5th, 2018.

Swahili. There are a few who had been educated in madrasa and the public-school system in Kenya before embarking on their educational journey in Saudi Arabia. They speak, read and write Swahili and English, and have employed as khadi, including Rashid Golob, a graduate of IUM, who is currently the deputy khadi of Nairobi.

Less competitive but promising professions for the returnees are in the education sector, where they work as teachers, advisors, or chaplains. Their campaigns of the 1990s to include Arabic and Islamic studies in the curriculum have created opportunities for them. As such, they teach in private madāris as well as in government schools. The premier schools such as Garissa High School, County High School, and NEP Girls' have employed teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies. Recognizing the difficulty in employment, Saudi universities have recently preferred to admit students from public schools to those specifically from madrasa, as it is easier for them to adjust to local realities and find work when they return.[439] Nonetheless, PhD holders from Saudi universities are increasingly joining Kenyan universities as professors: Dr. Maxamed Caliyow, PhD from IUM, teaches at Mount Kenya University; Dr. Ibrahim Faarax, PhD IUM, is a professor at Kenyatta University, while Dr. Welly is at Umma University. Adan Buraya is in the army, while Cabdullahi Bundid is the chaplain for the prisons.

**Sheikh S.: Background**

In what remains, I use the example of Sheikh S. to illustrate issues of education and transformation. Choosing him to represent others, especially when I interviewed culama much older than him, followed from considerations that ranged from ease of access, diversity of previous education, and social standing within the community. He has not only earned a PhD in

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[439] Interview with Sheikh Cabdirashid X., Garissa, January 14th, 2018.

shariica but has gained in depth knowledge in xalaqat. At the moment, he operates various xalaqat and teaches at a university too. Just as the two education systems of which he is a product, Sheikh S. has also been shaped by the unique complexities of the colonial and postcolonial experiences of Somalis. The significance of these incidences helps discern the transnational nature of Islam that would shape this sheikh.

When Sheikh S. was born, the Horn of Africa was unstable as low-level conflict raged between Somalia and Kenya and Somalia and Ethiopia. The conflicts owed from colonial governments dividing Somali lands and therefore separating clans or families. The Shifta[440] War was ongoing between the government of Kenya on the one hand, and the secessionists[441] and the Somali government on the other. Life for Somali nomads was exceptionally difficult marked by constant, unprovoked, and unreasonably prolonged incarcerations, government authorized shoot-to-kill laws, and villagization.[442] Moreover, grazing lands as well as the movement of animals were controlling,[443] leading to impoverishment in the region. For many of the Somalis, life was confined to their homes and was similar if not worse than it was during the colonial era: they could not move around with their animals, and they had to carry extra identification cards (up to

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[440] Shifta is a Swahili term which means bandit. However, in the context of the time, it was used to refer to secessionist Somalis who wanted northern Kenya to join Somalia. The twin references of the term Shifta has been extrapolated and it is now pejoratively used as a reference to Kenyan-Somalis to mean bandits.

[441] These were Kenyan Cushites most of who were Somalis and Boranas that were opposed to merging northern region with independent Kenya.

[442] The concept of putting people into villages was to easily control the insurgency that was spreading in northern Kenyan.

[443] For a more detailed explanation on this topic, see, "Hannah Whittaker, "Forced Villagization during the Shifta Conflict in Kenya, Ca. 1963–1968." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 45, no. 3 (2012), 360.

as late as the 1990s). If they much as accidentally wandered off into areas forbidden by the government, they could lose their herd, or be killed. Sheikh S's family lived in this atmosphere. He was the sixth child in his family in a nomadic family that practiced small scale cultivation, mainly grains that included corn, sorghum, while keeping goats, sheep and camels. These social and economic life of his family's mobility were predictably controlled by climatic conditions. During the dry seasons, the family would move to wherever they could find water and pasture for their animals. However, when it rained, they cultivated the land.

As if to worsen an already precarious situation, the Ogaadeen War of 1977 broke out between Ethiopia and Somalia. Sheikh S. was 10 years old at the time. Faced with this renewed and uncertain concerns and the constant harassment they faced at home, his family fled to Somalia, settling in the town of Beled Wayn in Hiiraan region. The Somali government had recently opened refugee camps for people escaping the Ogaadeen War. The family had stabilized here, and when he was not away to attend xer in other parts of Somalia, he would stay home in Beled Wayn. After the civil broke out in Somalia 1991, he came to Kenya. Unlike other refugees who had settled at the refugee camps, he found relatives in Garissa in whose house he would stay.

Sheikh S. did not come from a prominent family, nor did it have scholarly pedigree. As other Muslims, Somali children from affluent or scholarly families were more likely to gain Qur'ānic education than others.[444] His parents dropped out of dugsi after finishing Allahu Akbart or slightly thereafter. At this point he had no exposure to any sort of education. Then one day, his father took him and his younger brother to the local dugsi. The decision followed the usual

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[444] Dale Eickelman, "The Art of Memory: Islamic Education and Its Social Reproduction," 495.

patriarchal decision-making pattern where the father decided what the child would do with his life. While children who were considered intelligent or lazy were taken to dugsi, those deemed less intelligent or more physically active were left to watch the animals. Also, the function of dugsi was, among other things, to expose students to enough Qur'ān to carry out their daily rituals. For Sheikh S., the pressure was even greater, as he put it to me: "from early on, my father insisted I learn the Qur'ān and gain Islamic knowledge; he wanted me to study more than what other people around us knew; to study the advanced kutub (sing. kitāb) and to teach them. He also wanted me to have edeb (adab) and akhlaaq and to teach them to others."[445]

This message from his father and the mental preparation it imbued in him set him on an early intellectual life. The description of his dugsi mirrors that in chapter two. While his dugsi experience was identical to others in curriculum and pedagogy, it differed from those in nomadic settings. As refugees, they were uprooted from their social habitat and had to adjust to a different one. While students at the nomadic settings were relatives from the same diya-paying group (blood money), his dugsi was diverse. And without the hardship of itinerant life, he poured his heart into dugsi and would spend much of the day there, five days a week, taking two lessons a day. The social life of his family also changed considerably in their new location. Not only did they stabilize, but they even lived in permanent buildings which gave him a sense of place. In time, they owned small businesses, found menial jobs with government or non-governmental agencies as watchmen or food distributors. His father bought animals and a farm in their new location, to which he tended. Beled Wayn was a historically established center of Islamic learning, and students came from all over the Somali-speaking Horn. This scholarly environment

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[445] Interview with C. R. W., Garissa, January 15$^{th}$, 2018.

nudged him further and gave him direction. He completed the Qur'ān at a younger age and well before many of his peers.

After four years of memorizing the Qur'ān, he thought ahead on the long journey that awaited him and began to contact sheikhyaal for advanced study. These sheikhyaal rarely taught one student unless they were family members. He invited fellow students at his dugsi to take the advanced classes with him. Together, they approached local sheikhyaal and requested them to start them off on books on deen.[446] He studied the following beginning-level texts: Safinat Salaad, a fiqh text and ʿaqīdat al-ʿawāmm,[447] a text on caqīdah. While the norm in xer was to commence with naxw, it could begin with these two on worship and the correct caqīdah from an Ashcari perspective. Afterward, he took classes on Arabic grammar and tafsīr: Ajrumiya and tafsīrul Qur'ān. He was only about fifteen years of age. Analysis of these books continued for about a year and was taught by different sheikhyaal.

In 1985 he left the refugee camp to pursue xer full time. The closest one was in Sheikhleey[448], a village roughly 150 kilometers from Qooqane where advanced texts were being offered. Life in Sheekhleey proved difficult almost from immediately. His aunt with whom he lived led a humble life and had nothing much to offer him. Oftentimes, he would come home and find nothing to eat. Instead, he would drink a glass of water and go back to his lessons. Life was

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[446] He used the word deen or more loosely religion to describe the totality of what he had studied than simply mentioning the specific fields of study such as naxw or fiqh.
[447] ʿAqīdat al-ʿawāmm, a rhymed text on the principles of *tawhīd* by Ahmad al-Marzūqī al-Mālikī al-Makkī al-Laudāʿī (fl. 19th century, d. c. 1864)
[448] Probably named after the word sheikh or more specifically after the xer located there. In Somali, the suffix –leey means a person or something that is/has something. In this case, this village would be called the village which has sheikhs.

difficult for other students as well. While some of the locals took a few of the xer through jil/tacaluq, others slept in the mosque and ate with families on certain days. The struggle was constant, but his motivation lay with gaining knowledge. At first, he surveyed the kutub that were being offered in Sheekhley and settled on Qadri, an Arabic grammar text that was offered by a Sheikh Cabdirahman Dheere, and then Mulxatul Cirab taught by Sheikh Xassan. At this point, his aunt moved to another town. Shortly after, he fell ill for lack of sufficient and nutritious food. The tradition in this xer was that whenever the sheikh completed a text, students went for a short break, where they would replenish their supplies, particularly money and books. Sheikh S. went back to Qooqane and came when his health had improved. Since it was such a pivotal book, Qadri was taught a second time, and he retook it. However, after finishing Qadri, he got sick again. He was taken back home, and it this time it took him months to recover. He never came back to Sheikhleey again.

After he recovered, he traveled to Jalalaqsi. Luckily, a great aunt and her daughter lived there; he stayed with them for slightly over year, in 1987. But as he went back home for one of the short holidays, the bus in which he was traveling was stopped by the military in what he would later discern as a forceful conscription into military. They were forced into another truck and taken to Buuq Koosaar, a village in which they were held for ten days. Children, students, teachers, and government employees were later released. He was one of those who were released, and he returned home. In the following year, 1988, he decided to head to Sigalow, a village where a Sheikh Rashid was teaching books on Fiqh Shaafici, particularly ʿumdat al-sālik. From 1988-1991, he traveled and joined xer in Mogadishu where he switched from fiqh to xadiith. He studied al-arbaʿīn and Saxiix Sita. Here, he slept in mosques and had his meals with families.

Toward the end of 1990, Somalia was showing serious signs of political and social turmoil, and in the beginning of 1991, armed conflicts broke out in several parts of the country. These conflicts were initially against the Siad Barre regime, but over time clans jostling for power turned on each other, culminating into the full-blown, three-decade long civil war. Following these uncertainties, people fled to neighboring countries, and Sheikh S. embarked on yet another hijra[449], which separated him from his family: he escaped to Kenya, while his family fled to Ethiopia. In Garissa, he visited Najaax and sat for an entrance exam. He performed well and started from form one. Though much of the education at Najaax was like the xer, his biggest challenge was Arabic, the medium of instruction. The studious student that he always was, he graduated from form six in 1995. Later that year, he went to Saudi Arabia to perform cumrah and to apply for an admission into IUM. He sat for entrance exams, was interviewed, interacted with university officials in person, and got an idea on whether he would be admitted or not. In 1996, he was accepted into shariica and graduated in 2000.

**Professional Life**

I am going to wrap up this section with a brief overview of Sheikh S's own professional life and connect it to those of his ilk. Upon returning to Garissa from Saudi Arabia, Sheikh S. utilized his deep roots in the town, and he immediately found a job at one of the local madāris. His first appointment was with Madrasatul Salaam, where he had taught previously. Here, he taught fiqh

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[449] He used this word hijra—Arabic for immigration—only two times, and they referred to movement across borders. The first time, though not included in the text of the dissertation, was when he immigrated to Somalia from Kenya. For all the other times that he traveled within Somalia, he described it with the simple word safar—travel. Though both are Arabic, safar is used extensively in Somali, while hijra is not. Nonetheless, the choice of words is instructive as it shows how ingrained the colonial boundaries have been ingrained in people's psyches.

and xadiith, and within a short time joined the madrasa's administration as naib mudiir (deputy principal) and then mudiir (principal). He held this position until he left to pursue a master in shariica at the Islamic University in Uganda. Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU) is located in the eastern part of the country and has been successful at attracting students from Uganda and the neighboring countries, and beyond, including Nigeria. Together with the Islamic University of Technology in Bangladesh (IUT), Islamic University Niger (IUN), and International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Islamic University in Uganda was built, funded and run by the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). Its goal was to make knowledge available to Africans of all religious, but from an Islamic perspective.

Islamic universities, such as (IUIU) have been cropping up in East Africa lately, especially in Kenya. These universities, though distinct and unconnected to each other, have played a vital role in providing education to madāris graduates and job opportunities to returnees. Upon graduating with a master in shariica, Sheikh S. returned to Garissa and found a job as a lecturer at Mustaqbal University in Garissa. Mustaqbal is unique and different from others both in origin and vision. It opened its doors in 2012 and was the brainchild of returnees from Saudi Arabia, particularly IUM, including the following: Sheikh Maxamed Cabdi Umal (IUM) Sheikh Shibili (IUM) Sheikh Cusman Maxamuud (IUM), and Sheikh Xassan Cabdi Cali (IUM). As is evident, Mustaqbal was founded through local efforts, and is sustained through harambee (fund raising) and tuition fees. As of the time of this research in late 2019, the university had graduated over 250 students, while the same number were enrolled. Its vision was to avail educational opportunities to graduates from local madāris: Najaax, Khadija and Salaam. However, Mustaqbal is not a freestanding or independent university.

From the outset, Mustaqbal has been affiliated to the University of the Qur'ān and Islamic Sciences (UQIS) in the Sudan and relies on UQIS for both academic and administrative support and patronage. UQIS provides Mustaqbal's manhaj and certificates to graduates. Students are essentially admitted by UQIS where the application material (Kenyan identity card or birth certificate, parents' birth certificates, and madrasa certificates) is sent to but also where placement exam comes from. Madrasa certificates and high school documents (certificates and transcripts) are certified by Kenya's Ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs and the Sudanese embassy in Nairobi. Students who attain 50% or over on the placement exam are automatically admitted, while those who get less join the university's remedial program. UQIS also provides each student an admission number through the Ministry of Education in the Sudan. The university has two semesters, and the annual tuition fee is of KSH 51,000 or 510 dollars, split into the two semesters. Graduates from Mustaqbal have gone on for further studies at IUIU and other Islamic universities or established their own institutions such as madāris in Kenya and neighboring countries.

UQIS Supports Mustaqbal by sending two or three professors every year to assess the latter's programs and to ascertain that its adhering to UQIS manhaj (books, exams and administration). Also, the visiting professors select students of various levels and examine them to ensure that learning is at par with UQIS standards. Additionally, they evaluate students' theses or qualifying papers. The professors meet with Mustaqbal administration, lecturers and the local community to advise them on management and administration. UQIS also invites members of Mustaqbal University, particularly the principal and two board members, to travel to UQIS, participate in conferences, and train them on the running of a university. UQIS also provides Mustaqbal University three scholarships for one master and two PhDs. These are revolving scholarships

which means that as current students are completing their studies at UQIS, others will be admitted. Lecturers at Mustaqbal that want to study at UQIS are awarded half-scholarship. However, these services are not completely free. Though the principal and the board members pay their own tickets as they travel to UQIS, they are provided accommodation, food and transportation. Mustaqbal university also pays 200 dollars (KSH 20,000) a year per student to UQIS.

While still teaching at Mustaqbal, Sheikh S. enrolled for a PhD in shariica at Umm Durman University in the Sudan, which he finished three years later. When he completed it, he started a job at yet another Islamic University Umma University, which had recently opened a branch in Garissa. Umma is financially bankrolled by the government of Kuwait and has its headquarters in Kajiado, an hour's drive south of Nairobi. For the short period it was around, Ummah has grown exponentially and opened campuses in various locations such as Garissa, Thika and Nairobi. At Umma, Sheikh S. continues to teach subjects fiqhi, usul-Fiqh, Qawaaidtul Fiqhi and Madkhal Fiqh.

While jobs available to returnees are few and far between, they are also severely underpaying, and are irregular. To make ends meet, returnees have recently begun to venture into private businesses. While some have joined traditional business of selling merchandise, others have pursued education as business and opened private schools. Over the past twenty years, public schools in Kenya have lost their appeal and private ones are on a steady rise. These schools are modeled after Kenyan public schools or foreign ones, while others have gone their own way, reshaping education in general. Dotted around town are "integrated schools", which merge secular education that students would have studied at public schools and Islamic/Arabic

subjects that they would have been exposed to in the madāris.[450] The schools are privately run, though they accredited by the government. Returnees have also opened machado where Arabic and Islamic studies are taught, catering to both the young and the old. What is more, they have also opened bookstores that sell Arabic and Islamic literature. Walking around town, one would witness bookstores that sell not only Arabic texts such as the Madina Arabic book series, locally produced ones, and classic xadiith and fiqh collections that buyers previously had to order from the Middle East. The returnees use their connections to the Middle East to make these books and other literature available.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was threefold: using Sheikh S. as an example, it sought to assess the transformational journeys of returnees, their impact (social, religious and political reforms) on their local community, and how they adjusted to local life once they got back in Kenya. The returnees are a complex constituency and are composed of individuals of various backgrounds who went through different routes to be part of this group. This diversity has had a deep impact on their own personal transformations, and the path they chose after their education. While this range has sometimes been deleterious to their unity, it has not barred them from working toward the common objective of seeing Garissa County transform into their vision of Islam. Their social, religious and political activism has therefore catapulted them to a position of prominence in the County. Local politicians now jostle for their support, popularizing them even more, yet they are

[450] For more, see Adan Saman Sheikh, "The Role of Islamic Integrated Education in Enhancing Access to Formal Education in Kenya," *IIUM Journal of Educational Studies*, 3, no. 1(2015).

struggling with a job market they have not been trained for. Nonetheless, they are redefining employability and going beyond traditional jobs into government and business.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Conclusion

I conclude the dissertation by referring to the main points made in this dissertation, while at the same time pointing to future research directions. The dissertation sought to understand the various epistemological persuasions in Garissa County over the last 50 years, and in particular, what these persuasions are composed of, how they have been produced, manifested, and interacted, as well as what adjustments have been made to them over the years. This research project focused on traditions of knowledge transmission as well as curricula and the beliefs embedded in them. In short, the dissertation not only examined how knowledge is constructed and imparted, but also how it continues to be the main driver of transformation of Islam in Garissa, the wider region and beyond. Exploring both traditional and reformist epistemologies, this field and text-based research has given considerably more space to education from Saudi universities, particularly the two premier Islamic universities of IUM and Imam and their role in the enormous changes that have happened in Garissa over the last five decades. Consequently, returnees featured in this project more than any category of culama.

Still, this project should be understood from the broader perspective of these epistemologies and paradigms as intersecting—and creating a hybrid—rather than independent or incompatible ontological results. I figured out early in my fieldwork and readings that not a singular cause could be attributed to the changes in Garissa County. Quite the contrary, this change is illustrated through the complex and dynamic interplay of factors, which are as manifest as they are confounding. In addition to education, which is widely acknowledged as the leading factor in this course of religious transformation, other similarly significant, historical or other, including colonial and postcolonial events, have informed and shaped the transformation of

Islam in this region. Within this realm of transformation, the outsized role occupied by Saudi Arabia has been considered. In these concluding remarks, I emphasize two main areas. The first is to offer a summary of this research; and, secondly, I point to the future direction of this research.

**The Traditional and Reformist Epistemologies**

In this section, I flesh out in more detail the key points of these two paradigms and their implication. Islamic scholarship has a rich history of constructing and transmitting knowledge and skills to practitioners. In the core of Islam, therefore, is an encouragement to pursue learning regardless of the distance it takes to acquire it. For many of my interlocutors who had studied in xer, this exhortation underlay their travels and suffering in search of education. As such, the centuries-old scholarship has generated a deep groundwork on which religious belief and practice was anchored. Afterall, the culama are the true heirs of the Prophet. Though informal, traditionalist approach has a set of defined stages of learning that demarcate what is learned: dugsi and xer. In dugsi, emphasis is put on the memorization of the Qur'ān. Reproduction of the Qur'ān by heart is important for certain salient reasons. It equips learners with the basic knowledge to carry out rituals required of Muslims. Also, the Qur'ān is the blueprint on which all sorts of knowledge are based. Accordingly, it is impossible to pursue knowledge on the Islamic sciences without first memorizing the Qur'ān. Dugsi is therefore a self-constituted and organic institution.

The depth of knowledge only grows more at the xer. Xer is also demarcated by limitless travel and investment of time and energy to locate knowledge. For months on end, oftentimes directionless until they located the master, xer relentlessly kept moving. When they had studied all the texts offered in one location, they moved on to find more knowledge. In their itinerant

wandering, the xer sought to find the master—who was the embodiment of the institution—whose knowledge, experience, discipline and piety offered them all they needed in life: knowledge, guidance, direction and inspiration. The master and student formed an unbreakable and lifelong bond. Accordingly, the student served as one in a long chain of transmitters, who conveyed the knowledge, but also authenticated it. This system benefited from centuries of growth, expansion, and interaction, always creatively improving and adding new components both within Somali-speaking regions and beyond.

This tradition focused on long-standing texts and their commentaries, while memorization formed the nexus of transmission. Subjects proceeded from the simple to advanced and the two popular areas were naxw and fiqh. Classical texts ranged from Safinat to Irshād and were studied in thorough detail. The master parsed meanings, contexts and implications of each word; he analyzed and synthesized them in Somali and Arabic. Alongside text-based learning were adab, akhlaaq, or asluub—a holistic approach to character formation. Adab had its own texts, but more importantly, it was living and experiential, as master was a symbol of ethical conduct, righteousness, impeccable morals, and piety. They drank in his knowledge, attitude and demeanor, in the ways in which he carried himself and lived both in the mosque/xer and out in the public. The connection to the master, as one interviewee said to me, was built on love and reverence, augmenting and building on the book-based learning.

The reformist approach is increasingly becoming an alternative to the traditional one. Modern Islamic universities are modeled after western system, regarding the enrolment, scheduling, and learning. Islamic universities especially the Saudi ones avail knowledge commensurate with Saudi Arabia's missionary goals, and knowledge offered material needed for preaching. Accordingly, graduates from Saudi Islamic universities refer to themselves as ducaad

(preachers). The difference between the traditional and reformist methods can be gleaned from their philosophical approaches. Traditional culama spent years studying and after finishing, they took on responsibilities such as preachers, jurists and more frequently xer teachers. No political, economic, or social factor influenced their education; it was simply knowledge. Saudi universities' objective is to produce preachers whose obligation is to instill Saudi style Salafism. As preachers and activists, they are prepared with the requisite tools needed for that role. Accordingly, the dalīl approach grounds students in the Qur'ān, xadiith as well as caqīdah and Arabic language. Their vision is to graduate culama who find recourse in these texts and to implement their vision in their communities.

Upon arriving in Garissa, reformists heavily criticized the traditional paradigm—both in education and the practice. Reformists dismissed the institutions of traditional learning and the knowledge gained as a commission of dry material to memory, and therefore devoid of any meaningful scholarship. The criticism was not so much with the learning techniques as much as what was learned. In contrast, the criticisms pointed to graduates from traditionalist institutions as belonging to a generation that was long gone; that they were ill-trained to sufficiently address contemporary Islamic issues, for they do not possess the necessary knowledge or tools to properly function in a modern society.

The reformists wrested educational institutions from the traditionalists and distinguished themselves in major keys. First, their vision, mission, and curriculum were based on the foundational sources of Islam and translated into dacwa. In addition, learning is polemic and conveyed in an unambiguously clear manner: if one does not affirm and live by the Salafi manhaj, they are wrong and should be corrected. The Salafi manhaj forms the hallmark of their education. While learning is anchored on Qur'ān and xadiith, what shapes student views and

perspectives are the texts and precedent scholars and who they should treat as enemy oppose (Sufis and Shicas). Works studied and referenced are those of ibn Taymiyya, ibn Qayum, and ibn Cabdiwahab. Contemporary protégés, all Saudi, are also a staple in their curriculum and classroom discussion: Cuthaymeen, ibn Baz and Fawzan. A thread of like-mindedness runs through and connect these men, which many critique as too linear. These men, at times, achieve a cult-like following. While students are taught to hold these in high regard, the extremely high pedestal that they are placed is sometimes off-putting, particularly when it comes to prioritizing dalīl or other discourses as shown in the following example. Two Somali students traveled from Riyadh to Makkah for cumrah. As they sat and listened to the Friday khutbah (sermon) in the Grand Mosque, the khatib (the one reading the sermon) discussed a piece of evidence in a jarring manner. The story goes that he referenced ibn Taymiyya first and then added that the Prophet agreed with the statement by ibn Taymiyya. For the students, this was shocking and nothing short of blasphemy.

**The Debate Continues**

The two paradigms represent two knowledge systems with their texts, curricula, and culama; however, they also embody two visions of Islam. Much has been discussed regarding their particularities and the ways in which they differ in education and practice. What is less emphasized, however, is the interaction between them and how they influence and borrow from one another. The seesaw between traditionalism and reformism is not only rich and complex, but it continues to take surprising turns. When traditionalists and reformists first made contact in the 1960s in Garissa, their hostility was not only ideological, but personal as well. It seemed as if they had or would have nothing in common. They fought over the mosque and madrasa and what

was taught in them. Each based its arguments on its own texts as well as legal theological traditions, while disparaging those of the others.

The 1990s altered things in crucial ways. Though much of their earlier differences persisted and was still a cause for much disagreement, other aspects of their relationship had changed in major ways. Salafis/reformists had gotten the upper hand in their supremacy battles with help from Saudi Arabia. Despite this, however, no major conflict, at least in physical terms, had ever occurred. In contrast, their worldview and points of references had curiously begun to resemble the other. In the 1990s, the groups did not only sit and debate, but each of them claimed to base their dalīl on similar texts. This is indeed unsurprising but fascinating as a few decades earlier they would not agree on anything. As if this was not enough, another unexpected turn happened in the last five years. When many assumed that the traditional paradigm had been vanquished and that the reformists cemented their position in Garissa, the former began to make a sudden comeback. The revival of Sufism in Garissa, many areas in Kenya and Somalia are easily noticeable through Sufi symbols, examples of which are the large Sufi mosques or the Sufi rituals. In the Eastleigh part of Nairobi where Somalis constitute the majority, a multistorey mosque where Sufi activities are carried has been erected along 12$^{th}$ Street.

The revival of the traditional epistemology and practice is remarkable for future research. Though it demonstrates the capacity to rise after being attacked and vilified for so long, it shows that not all residents of Garissa have bought into the notion that being a Sufi was heretic, while being a Salafi meant that one was saved. The resilience of the traditional epistemology and paradigm is consistent with the existing literature on Islam in Africa and in other regions, notably

across the Indian Ocean in southern Arabia.[451] In effect, the continuation of the debate that has captivated scholars of Islam in the region for over half a century will continue into the future. Such disputes, as already evident in Garissa, will revolve around the same key points. But so are the appropriation of each other's ways of learning and preaching. As the role and influence of Saudi Arabia recedes, Sufis will continue to rise, and fill more of the space. They will also deploy reformist approach to learning and preaching. Future research will therefore need to probe into the changing relationships of these groups. Salafis/reformists are already worried of what is in store for them. A Salafi icon in Garissa said during a graduation ceremony that Sufis are not what they used to be: those who used to sit around and do nothing. He claimed that they are actively educating themselves in new ways (reformist/Salafi ways) and are using the new knowledge against them (reformists/Salafis).

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[451] Alexander Knysh, "The Tariqa on a Landcruiser: The Resurgence of Sufism in Yemen," *Middle East Journal*, 55, no. 3 (2001).

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Riyād as-sālihin mīn min kalām sayyid al-mursalīn by Abū Zakariyyāʾ Muhyī al-Dīn Yahyā b.

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Tafsīr ibn Kathīr by Abu 'l-Fidā' Ismāʿīl b. ʿUmar b. Kathīr ʿImād al-Dīn b. al-Khaṭīb al-Qurashī al-Buṣrawī al-Shāfiʿī, (d. 774/1373). See, Brockelmann, Carl. *Handbook of the Oriental Studies: History of the Arabic Tradition, Supplement Vol. 117/S2*, edited by Maribel Fierro*,* M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, Renata Holod, and Florian Schwarz Leiden: Brill, 1996. 53.

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*20th Century Zanzibar*. Leiden: Brill, 2009. 187.

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ʿUmdat al-sālik wa-ʿuddat al-nāsik, by Shihāb al-Dīn Ahmad b. Luʾluʾ b. al-Naqīb al-Rūmī al Misrī (d. 1367/8; GAL S II: 104).

**Interviews**

A. Y., Riyadh, 2/2/2016, 02/03/2018.

Ali Tawane, Garissa: 12/05/2019

Billow, Madina: 23/05/2017, 25/05/2017

C. G,. Garissa/Makkah: 9/5/2016, 11/01/2018, 13/01/2018, 15/01/ 2018, 16/01/2018, 1/12/2018

C. R.W, Garissa/Nairobi: 5/9/2016, 20/8/2016, 14/01/2018, 15/01/2018, 23/06/2016.

Cabdiqadir, Kansas City, 16/5/ 2014.

Cabdisalaam, Garissa: 16/07/2016

Daud, Riyadh, 21/12/2015.

Dr. Bashir, Garissa: 21/6/2014

Dr. Feisal, Garissa, 17/7/2014.

Dr. H., Riyadh, 15/2/2018.

Dr. Mohamed, Riyadh, 2/6/ 2017.

Ibrahim G. in Nairobi on 5/8/ 2016, 23/6/2016.

Ibrahim M., Riyadh: 17/10/2018

K., Riyadh: 06/03/2015, 01/05/2015, 02/06/2015, 21/04/2015, 18/12/2015

Maxamed Cabdi, Madina: 17/02/2015

Maxamuud D., Garissa, September 2, 2017.

Mukhtar, Madina: 09/05/2017, 23/05/2017, 24/05/2017, 25/05/2017, 26/05/2017

Mukhtar., Garissa: 16/06/2016

Osama, Makkah and Riyadh: 21/4/2015, 16/04/2017

Prof. S, Minneapolis: 05/07/2017, 16/07/2017, 06/09/2017, 07/09/2017

Sacad, Riyadh: 02/05/2016, 19/05/2016, 12/04/2016, 05/04/2017

Shariff C., Eagan, Minnesota: 13/08/2014, 23/08/2015, 24/08/2015, 21/08/2017, 27/08/2017

Sheikh Ahmed Taajir, Minneapolis 19/7/ 2017

Sheikh Bajuri, Minneapolis, 15/6/2017.

Sheikh C.R. H., Minneapolis: 15/07/2017, 16/07/2017

Sheikh Cabdirashid X., Garissa: 14/01/2018

Sheikh Cabdiwahaab, St. Paul, MN: 16/07/2017, 15/08/2017, 27/08/2017

Sheikh Maxamed. Cabdi, Garissa: 30/12/2018, 30/12/2019

Sheikh M., Minneapolis: 22/07/2017

Sheikh Macalin Osman, Garissa, 6/8/ 2016.

Sheikh Maxamed U., Nairobi: 04/01/2019.

Sheikh Xussein, Madina: 05/01/2015, 3/6/2016, 12/01/2016

Sheikh Yaaqub, Makkah, 05/01/2018

University Administrator, 04/04/2016

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"A Chance to Improve How Kenya is run," *The Economist*, July 29, 2010.

"Kenya police arrest 20 youths after rally violence," *Reuters*, Sept. 18, 2005.

Brian Machina. "Lifting the Veil on Enforced Disappearances and Extrajudicial Killings in Kenya." *Oxford Human Rights Hub: A Global Perspective on Human Rights*," 4th January 2017.

**APPENDIX**

## Pictures from the Field Research in Kenya: 2016-2020

Picture 1: Our neighborhood dugsi in Garissa. Picture taken by Abdifatah Shafat.

Picture 2: A dugsi student holding his loox. This picture is widely shared on the Internet and can be retrieved here This picture is widely shared on the Internet and can be retrieved from here https://www.somalispot.com/threads/somali-man-reading-the-quran-on-wooden-tablet.139447/

Picture 3: Boys reciting the Qur’ān in our neighborhood dugsi in Garissa. Picture taken by Abdifatah Shafat.

Picture 4: Girls reciting the Qur’ān in our neighborhood dugsi in Garissa. Picture taken by Abdifatah Shafat.

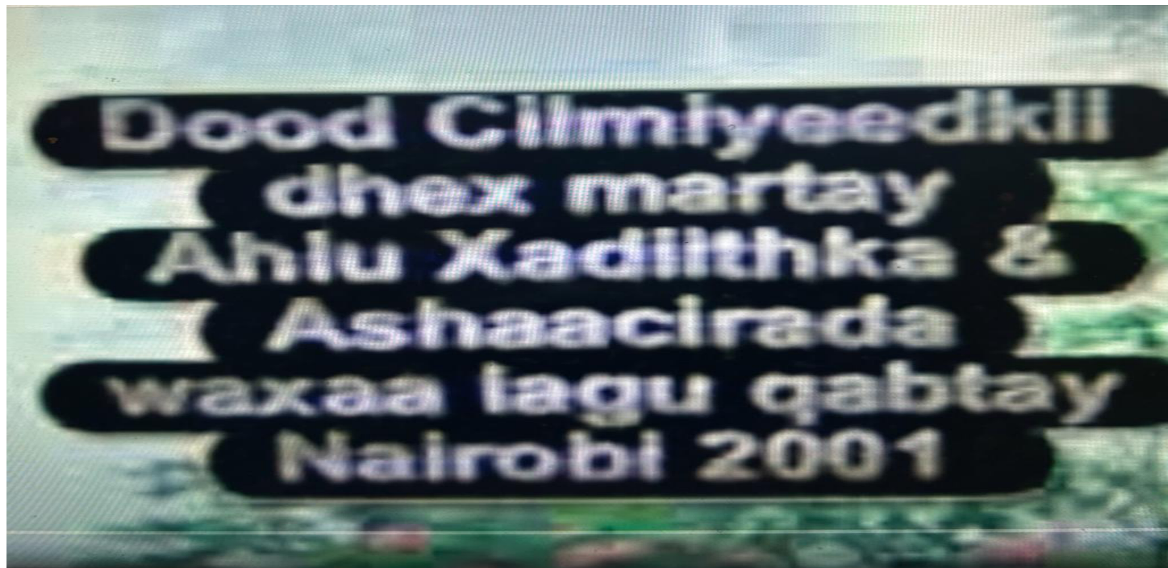
Picture 5: The macalin (teacher) in our neighborhood dugsi in Garissa. Picture taken by Abdifatah Shafat.

Picture 6: Jamiica Mosque in Garissa. Picture taken by Abdifatah Shafat.

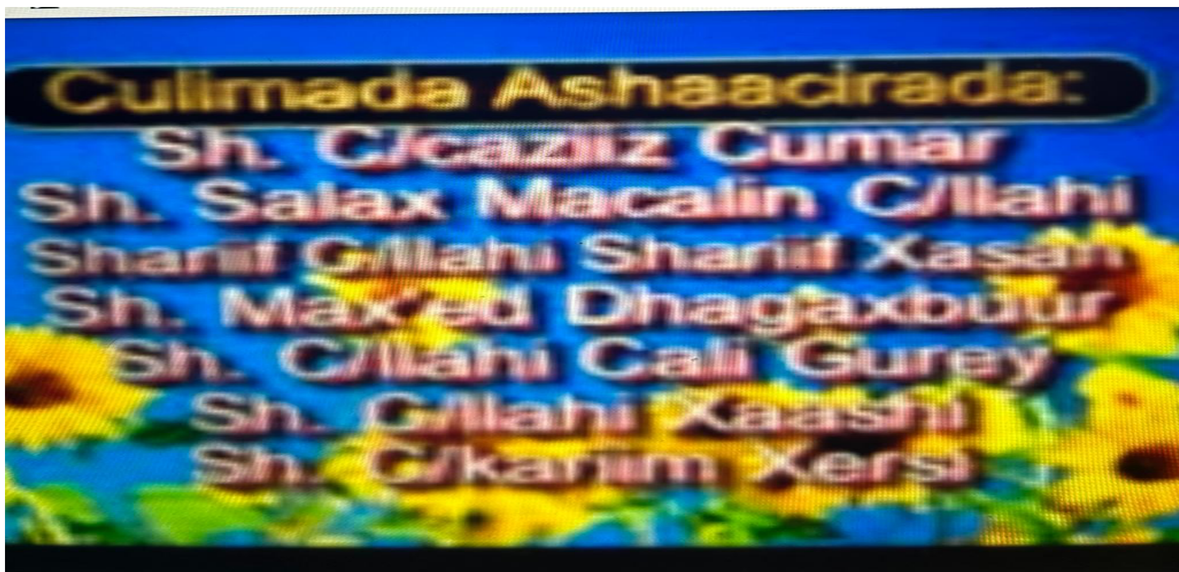
Picture 7: Jamiica Mosque in Garissa. Picture taken by Abdifatah Shafat.

Picture 8: The Board of Madrasatul Najaax. Picture by Abdifatah Shafat in June 2016.

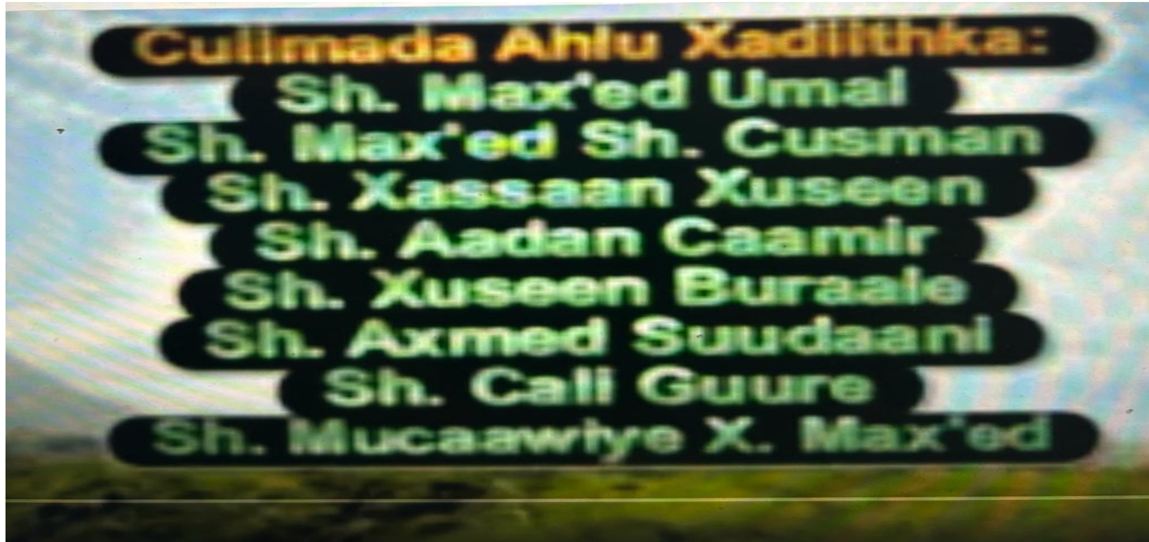
Picture 9: Madrasatul Najaax, Garissa. Picture by Abdifatah Shafat in June 2016.




Picture 10: The picture reads: “The Intellectual Debate between Ahlul Xadiith and Ashaacira (Ash’aris) in Nairobi in 2001.” Picture taken from the Internet at the following YouTube site: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAFqEffDy90




Picture 11: The list shows the representatives of the Ashaacira in the debate. Picture taken from the following YouTube site: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAFqEffDy90




Picture 12: The list shows the representatives of the Ahlul Xadiith in the debate. The picture was taken from the following YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAFqEffDy90

Picture 13: Representatives of the Ahlul Xadiith. Picture was taken from the Internet. Find it at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeV5Gl7hVgc&t=3s

Picture 14: Representatives of the Ashaacira. Picture taken from the Internet. Find it at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeV5Gl7hVgc&t=3s