

# **The Conception of Islam in Somalia: Consensus and Controversy**

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## **I. Introduction**

Islam and colonialism had reconfigured Somali history since its people's conversion to Islam in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. As a result, Somalis adopted a new identity and culture by embracing a patrilineal genealogy, new customary law (Xeer), consultative governance, and collective leadership.<sup>1</sup> Also, Somali people had established multiple states in the Middle Ages, connected with the Muslim Empires, applied Sharia blended with local customs, defended their territory from foreign invaders, and spread Islam in the Horn of Africa. On the other hand, multiple colonial powers seized the Somali Peninsula during the European scramble for Africa, which coincided with the fragmentation of Somali states into smaller clan-based and city-states.<sup>2</sup> These colonial powers introduced the European model of governance, secular legal system, the market economy, and new culture. Nonetheless, they had failed to refashion the belief system of the Somalis because of the vigorous resistance under the leadership of Sufi scholars of Islam. This resistance took an armed form of resistance mainly in the pastoral regions and peaceful defiance in the agricultural and settled communities.<sup>3</sup> The Somali elites who inherited the post-colonial state in 1960 maintained the European model of governance and political system by adopting liberal democracy in the first nine years (1960-1969). After that, however, the system was abused extensively, instigating political violence in the election of 1969 that led to the assassination of President Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke and the military coup d'état that imposed a dictatorial rule for 21 years (1969-1991).

The fundamental doctrine of the Somali ruling elites was strengthening nationalism (modernization) and weakening tradition (Islam and clan system), imagining that this strategy realizes national unity and promotes national development.<sup>4</sup> However, the deep-rooted Somali tradition resisted resolutely and fought back in violent identity politics and Islamist movements, which ignited even more societal fragmentations.<sup>5</sup> The conflict of modernity and tradition reached its height in the 1980s and culminated in the final defeat of modernity (state) in 1991. Hence, the vacuum left behind by the state was filled by clan warlords and Islamists. In this circumstance, Islam and the clan were used as the only available instruments in restoring rudimentary administrations in Somaliland, Puntland, and the federal state of Somalia.<sup>6</sup> The final setback to Somali nationalism occurred when the clan factor triumphed at the Somali Peace and Reconciliation Conference in Djibouti in 2000, and clan power-sharing of 4.5 formula was adopted.<sup>7</sup> Also, the success of the Islamists' project exhibited in depositing Islam the ultimate reference for all laws and prohibiting to disseminate other religions in Somalia.<sup>8</sup> What is more, the role of Islamists in politics has strengthened since 2000, and the Somali political landscape has entirely transmuted, placing Islamists as the ruling elites and the armed oppositions.

Indeed, the cosmology of Somali society is obsessed with two contradictory convictions: clan particularism and Islamic universalism. Clan particularism often induces communities to prejudice and parochialism, while Islam, unless given an extremist interpretation, calls for peace, brotherhood, and tolerance.<sup>9</sup> The dominant perspective of Somali studies highlights clan particularism and offers a clannish interpretation of history and politics. Conversely, Islamic universalism and Islamic-inspired movements were not given enough academic attention unless perceived as a threat to the Western powers. This predilection was evident from the literature produced on the Somali Darwish movement (1900-1920) and after the 9/11 Global War on terrorism.<sup>10</sup> Since then, most scholarly studies focus on Islam and Islamist movements as part of global security studies. However, doctrinal controversies within Islamist movements and traditional Sufi Orders received less attention.

Thus, this essay attempts to answer the frequently asked question of what the difference between various Islamists is since they all call for

the application of Sharia. It explores the various conceptions of Islam espoused by Sufi Orders, Salafia groups, and Muslim brotherhood. Initially, it introduces Sufi Orders and genealogy of Islam followed by the Somali society. Then, the essay provides a brief background of the Muslim brotherhood and Salafia groups, exposing their consensus and controversy with the Sufi conception of Islam. Moreover, it brings forth the controversy between Muslim Brotherhood and Salafia groups. Finally, the essay concludes with a typology of the three Islamic persuasions and their relations to the schools of theology, jurisprudence, and Sufism to unveil their consensus and controversy.

## **II. Notes on the Terminologies**

Various exonymic or endonymic terminologies developed to characterize Islamic-inspired socio-political activism require revisiting. The logic of the exonymic terminologies emanates from the Orientalist scholars and sociologist of religion which does not mind the validity of religious beliefs but studies its effects on societies. According to Martin Kramer, "debate over terminology has always surrounded the West's relations with Islam, and its outcome has been as much a barometer of the West's needs as a description of the actual state of Islam."<sup>11</sup> Thus, scholars in the Western Accademia and media, in general, examined the core ideology of Islamic-inspired activism within their ethnocentric lenses and correlated the actions of Muslims to the religion of Islam.<sup>12</sup> These scholars also studied Islam from a comparative perspective with Christianity and coined terminologies accordingly. Examples of such terminologies are Islamic fundamentalism, Islamic fanaticism, Islamic radicalism, and Islamic extremism.<sup>13</sup> The use of these terminologies reinforces negative stereotypes and prejudices against Muslims.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, other terminologies were coined from the labels of minority Muslim groups such as militant Islam, revolutionary Islam, Islamic terrorism, etc. Likewise, proponents of the Islamic-inspired movements associate their activities with Islam. They brand their movements with terminologies such as Islamic reawakening, Islamic revival, Islamic movements, Islamic State, Islamic resurgence, etc. Therefore, both opponents and proponents share in associating Islam with human actions, yet for different rationalization.<sup>15</sup>

The basic argument of this essay is to distinguish Islam from the behaviors of its believers. It means that the deeds of Muslims as

human beings may or may not conform to the Islamic principles and value system. Therefore, branding Islamic-inspired activism as wholly Islamic, whether it stems from misunderstanding, bad intentions, or good intentions, distorts the image of Islam and its transcendental meaning. Accordingly, terminologies such as traditional Islam, popular Islam, and American Islam are refuted. Equally, the above-stated exonymic terminologies used in the Western Academia and media are also repudiated. On the other hand, the endonymic use of Islamic-inspired movements in describing their activities as “Islamic” is also disapproved. In our perspective, Islam is the transcendental religion with the primary sources in the Qur’an and Hadith. Its explanation by experts of Islamic sciences may offer various theological and jurisprudential variants.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the religion of Islam allows and tolerates various interpretations within the borders of its core principles through what is called ‘Ijtihad.’ Thus, Islam and its practice in the various societies with different cultures may manifest slightly differently in its practical applications.

This essay will use the following terminologies to avoid confusion. *Islamic* is a generic term used to signify anything related to the Islamic religion. For example, Islamic education, Islamic belief, Islamic manners, Islamic laws, etc. It refutes the use of terminologies like Islamic history, Islamic civilization, Islamic arts, etc. Our perspective proposes the use of Muslim history, Muslim civilization, Muslim arts, etc. *Islamists* (Activists) are devoted individuals or organized groups (movements) who assertively promote Islamic teachings in society and advocate for applying Islamic principles at the society and state levels. Islamists are not monolithic and range from moderate reformists and extremist revolutionaries. They differ in their objectives, approaches, understanding of Islam, and relations with non-Muslims and other religious traditions. *Non-Islamists* (non-activists) are the majority of Muslims who may or may not be devoted to Islam. They share the common characteristic of not advocating for the application of Islam in the society and the state but not necessarily opposing it. They are different from the secular minority, who are primarily educated in Western academia. Indeed, Islamists and secularists are minorities among Muslims but more vocal and organized. The above definitions: Islamists and non-Islamists accord the Islamic perspective on classifying Muslims into three groups.<sup>17</sup> Finally, *Islamism* will be used as the ideology of the popular socio-political movements advocating for the

reordering of Muslim societies and states following the principles of Islam.

### III. Brief History of the Somali Sufi Orders

The advent of Sufism in Somalia has been recorded since the early fifteenth century with the arrival of 44 Islamic scholars under Sheikh Ibrahim Abu-Zarbai in 1430. It was also reported that Sheikh Jamal al-Addn bin Yusuf al-Zayli (d. 1389), the author of the famous book *Nasbu al-Raya li Ahadith al-Hidayah*, was one of the Sufi Sheikhs in Somalia. However, this report remains speculative since there are no more accounts of it.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the renewal and reform of Sufi Orders as an organized movement were noted since the mid-nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century (1850-1950).<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Said Sheikh Samatar compressed this period to 40 years instead of 100 years. He wrote, 'These years between 1880 and 1920 can be described as the era of the Sheikhs in Somali history.'<sup>20</sup> Revival is an essential dimension of the historical experience of Muslims; Sufi reformation entailed shifting from individual Islamic activities to institutionalized orders.<sup>21</sup> Traditional Sufi Orders have taken mainly peaceful approaches to socio-religious reform through Islamic propagation and spiritual revitalization.<sup>22</sup> They dominated religious life, reaching out to populations in the urban and rural areas alike, most of whom had identified with one of the Sufi Orders by the nineteenth century. Besides their complementary role in running community affairs, Sufi scholars established Islamic centers, whose dwellers gave their allegiance only to their Sufi masters/Sheikhs.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, in contradiction to conventional historiography that considers Sufi Orders to be mainly apolitical, many leaders of the Sufi Orders and their disciples became the supreme leaders of their communities. In this way, clan allegiances and loyalties were diluted and at times transformed into ideological loyalties.

Although Sufism existed and was practiced since early Islamic history, most organized brotherhoods emerged in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries. For instance, the most popular Sufi Orders such as Qadiriyyah were founded by Sheikh Abdulqadir al-Jeylani (1077-1166); Rufaiyyah by Sayid Ahmed al-Rufai (1118-1182); and Shadaliyyah by Abul-Hassan al-Shadali (1196-1258). In the nineteenth century, the Muslim World was experiencing reform and revival of the

Islamic call associated with the emergence of the new revivalist movements, reorientation, and renaissance of the Sufi Orders. In Somalia, as part of this reform and revival, its scholars of Islam initiated an inventive and sustainable system of education, using effective techniques to educate the population. There are two main Sufi orders in Somalia: Qadiriyyah and Ahmadiyah, and each of them have its local offshoots.<sup>24</sup> For example, Qadiriyyah has two branches: Zayliyyah and Uweysiyyah. Zayliyyah was founded by Sheikh Abdirahman al-Zayli (1815-1882) and headquartered in Qulunqul near Dhagahbur in the Somali State of Ethiopia. Also, Uweysiyyah was founded by the spiritual master Sheikh Aweys ibn Ahmad al-Barawi (1846-1907), and its seat was located in Balad al-Amin near Afgoye, 40 km south of Mogadishu. On the other hand, Ahmadiyah has three offshoots in Somalia: Rahmaniyyah, Salihiyah, and Dandarawiyah. Rahmaniyyah was founded by Maulana Abdurahman ibn Mohamud (d. 1874). Moreover, Salihiyah has two branches: the southern branch introduced by Sheikh Mohamad Guled al-Rashidi (d.1918) and the northern branch by Sayid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan (1856-1920). Furthermore, Dandarawiyah was introduced by Sayid Adan Ahmad and had a limited following in northern Somalia.<sup>25</sup>

Sufi Orders have been weakened with the emergence of the Islamist movements in the 1960s. However, it was transformed in reaction to their interaction with Salafism and, in particular, with Al-Shabaab. In particular, Ahal-Sunna Wa Al-Jama became a symbol of Sufi militancy to encounter Al-Shabaab.<sup>26</sup> Otherwise, transformed Sufi Orders established charity institutions, modern schools, and universities. The new generation of Sufi Orders in Somalia are more educated and being integrated with modern institutions. One example of such Sufi Order affiliated institution is Moallim Noor Foundation which runs Imam al-Shafi University and many schools, besides other traditional Sufi activities such as Qur'anic schools and building mosques.<sup>27</sup>

Name of the Sufi Order	Founder in Somalia	Center of operations
Qadiriyyah (Zayliyyah)	Sheikh Abdirahman al-Zayli (d. 1882)	Qulunqul (Dhagahbur)
Qadiriyyah (Uweysiyyah)	Sheikh Uweys al-Barawi (d. 1909)	Beled al-Amin (Afgoye)
Ahmadiyyah (Rahmaniyyah)	Maulana Sheikh Abdirahman Mohamud (1874)	Basra (Afgoye)
Ahmadiyyah (Salihiyyah/north)	Sayid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan (1921)	Qoryaweyne (Las-Anod)
Ahmadiyyah (Salihiyyah/south)	Sheikh Mohamed Guled al-Rashidi (1918)	Misra-Wayn (Jowhar)
Ahmadiyyah (Dandarawiyah)	Sayid Adan Ahmed (second half of 19 century)	Haahi/Sheikh

Table 1. Somali Sufi Orders, Founders and their Center of operations

#### IV. The Genealogy of Traditional Conception of Islam

Traditional Islam in Somalia follows three main genealogies: the Ashariyyah theology, Shafi jurisprudence, and Sufism. The *Ashariyyah* theology was founded by Abu al-Hassan Al-Ashari (873-935) in reaction to the extreme rationalism espoused by the school of *Mu'tazilah*. In developing its defense mechanism, the *Ashariyyah* school employed the method of *Tawil*, meaning interpreting some of the attributes of Allah. The Ashari theology and methodology were accepted as the standard for mainstream Sunni theology by most of the Sunni scholarly community.

This theology is based on seeking to defend Islam from excessive literalism and extreme rationalism, retaining Islam's middle and moderate way. Examples of the most contentious issues of the debate are how to understand the divine attributes and consign meaning to Allah. The position of the Ashari theology was to validate whatever attributes Allah has affirmed for Himself and negate what Allah has negated for himself, which is any resemblance between the Creator

and creation. This concept is bluntly affirmed in the Qur'anic verse, "There is absolutely nothing like unto Him."

However, to avoid such similitude, Asharites interpret metaphorically some attributes of Allah, which may appear to the public as a similitude to the humans, such as: "His face," "His hand," "Seeing," and "Hearing" which repeatedly appears in the Quranic verses. Among the most prominent scholars of Asharites is the famous scholar Abu-Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111), who articulated moderate Sufism in combination with *al-Ashariyah* theology.

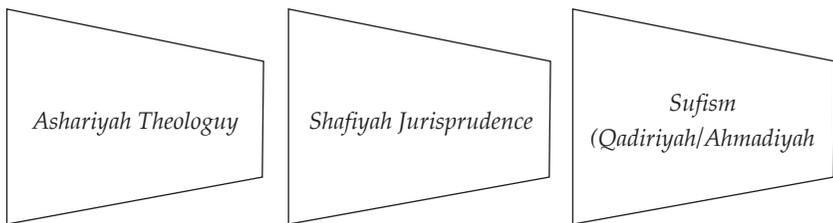
The *Shafiyah* School of jurisprudence is one of the four major Sunni schools rooted in the methodology and teachings of Abu Abdallah al-Shafi (767–820). He was a student of Malik ibn Anas (d.795), the *Malikiyah* School of jurisprudence founder. Al-Shafi is famous for his development of the science of Fiqh in his illustrious book *al-Risalah*, in which he laid the foundation of *Usul al-fiqh* (sources of jurisprudence): the Qur'an, the Sunnah, Qiyas (analogy), and Ijma (scholarly consensus). With his systematization of Sharia, al-Shafi provided a framework for deducing Islamic laws that permit independent and locally based legal systems. The four Sunni legal schools kept within the general framework and methodology that Shafi initiated. The traditional conception of Islam in Somalia adheres to the Shafi school introduced through its connection with Yemen.

Sufism appeared as a reaction against the luxurious lifestyle that grew prevalent in the Islamic urban centers when Muslims became powerful and wealthy and came under the influence of other cultures. Its roots are argued to be linked to the practices of the Prophet Muhammad and early generations of the companions and followers. However, its systematization into organized brotherhoods appeared in the eleventh century. Abu Hamed al- Ghazali (1058–1111) is considered the scholar who best succeeded in combining Sufism and Islamic jurisprudence in his works, where he argued that Sufism originated from the Qur'an was compatible with Islamic thought. In Somalia, Sufi Orders have long been the most important form of religious identification in the country. Sufism in Somalia belongs to the moderate Sufis rooted in al-Ghazali 's way, and it had a significant missionary impact throughout Somalia. Its tremendous influence is exercised through its two main brotherhoods: *Qadiriyah* and *Ahmadiyah*.

Therefore, the traditional conception of Islam espouses *taqlid* (imitation) and strictly follows three genealogies. In doing so, it resists change and upholds its historical heritage in the globalized world. In addition, these three genealogies are perpetuated through traditional Islamic institutions comprising educational establishments and Sufi order's centers where the master-disciple intimate relationship is strictly nurtured.

This relationship is the core foundation of Sufism, preserved through various social functions. The most important functions are *Mawliidka* (commemoration of the Prophet's birthday), *Xuska* (offering alms to the souls of the deceased parents), and *Siyaaro* (paying homage to respected teachers and visiting their tombs). In a nutshell, the nature of the traditional conception of Islam is adhered to by the overwhelming majority of Somalis. Traditional establishments represented mainly by the Sufi orders do not carry any particular political agenda, and reform programs focus mainly on ritualistic and spiritual-religious practices.

Figure 1. The Traditional Conception of Islam in Somalia



## V. Salafia versus Traditional Conceptions of Islam.

The terminology of Salafia is highly contentious and used differently by various schools and scholars. As a general rule, Muslim scholars accept to follow the understanding and methodology used to interpret Islam by the first three generations of scholars and look to them as their role models. In this sense, all Muslims cherish and adore Salafism; however, many groups claim to belong to a particular school of Salafia. Detractors of this school call them Wahabiyah, linking them to the teachings of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703- 1792), an Islamic scholar highly popular in Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf

States. Sometimes, they also call themselves people of Hadith (*Ahl al-Hadith*) interchangeably with Salafism. However, “all Wahabis are Salafists, but not all Salafists are Wahabis.” The methodology of this school stands entirely in opposition to the traditional conception of Islam and rejects *taqlid* (imitation), claiming to follow directly the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. Its adherents identify the *bid'a* (innovations in Islamic practices) introduced to Islam as the primary impediment that caused the decadence of the Muslim civilization. Therefore, in placing principal importance on preaching idealized *Tawhid* (monotheism), they emphasize their criticism of traditional Muslim practices as innovations and *shirk* (polytheism). The theology of Salafia is based on the refutation of any *Tawil* (figurative interpretation) of the attributes of Allah, advocating the belief in these attributes instead of as they appear in the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions, without asking how, a principle known as *bila kayf* (acceptance without further inquiry). The most crucial difference between the Asharites and the Salafia is the permissibility and refutation of interpreting divine attributes.

Salafism was introduced to Somalia as part of the rising influence of Saudi Arabia in global politics. In the 1960s, the Saudis worked in partnership with all Islamist groups, created pertinent institutions to promote Islam, and advocated a joint Islamic stand against growing Communism and secular Arab nationalism in the 1960s. However, since the late 1970s, after the triumph of the Iranian Revolution and the perceived threat of a similar development in other parts of the Muslim world, Saudi Arabia revised its policy; it eschewed Islamism and local political Islamic activism. In Somalia, due to its being part of the Saudi geopolitical sphere, the influence of Wahabism was noticeably augmented through students educated in the Saudi Islamic universities and through Somali migrant labor during the economic boom of the 1970s. These students were taught the thinking of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and copied his hostile approach to the Sufi Brotherhoods in Arabia. Moreover, they have also introduced some aspects of Hanbali jurisprudence, mixing it with other jurisprudences under the pretext of not following a specific school of jurisprudence. Furthermore, they consider their principal duty to spread *al-Aqidah al-Sahihah* (the correct theology), which eventually puts them on the collision course with society's Islamic belief system and practices. Indeed, Salafia believes that their theology is the only

right one because it is the theology of the first three generations of Muslims, from where they draw their name, *al-Salafiyah* (followers of the early pious generations of Muslims). This mode of thinking breeds religious intolerance and community conflict and promotes bigotry and extremism.

Moreover, having been educated in Saudi Arabia, many students were employed after their graduation by various Saudi institutions to preach the “the right theology” (Salafia) in Somalia. It is worth noting that Salafia considers Sufism a dangerous heresy and consider their duty to engage in a campaign against the adherents of Sufism. In that approach, Salafia is not simply a reform movement but a militant approach that aims to change the traditional conception of Islam as practiced in Somalia. *Salafia tendencies* in Somalia are fragmented into four groups: academic Salafia (*Salafiyah al-ilmiah*), political Salafia (*Salafiyah al-Harakiah*), Jihadi Salafia (*Salafiyah al-Jihadiyah*), and new Salafism (*Salafiyah al-Jadidah (La-jama)*). However, these groups are in harmony with each other to confront Sufi Orders, and that conflict, at times, escalates to the point that these schools of thought render each other as infidels. The extremity of this conflict is evident in the Al-Shabaab’s destruction and desecration of the tombs of prominent Sufi scholars in Somalia

## VI. The Muslim Brotherhood versus Traditional Conception of Islam

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) was founded in 1928 by *Hasan al-Banna* in Egypt and reached Somalia in 1953 through Egyptian teachers and then via Somali students who graduated from the Arab universities. MB thought has inspired many Islamist organizations and individuals in Somalia; however, Islah Movement is the organization that represents its international network. The MB stands in the middle of the two orientations: traditional Islam and neo-Salafism. *Hasan al-Banna* postulated in the treatise of ‘*Al-Aqaid*’ (Creed) the following moderate position on the disputed Islamic creed.

We believe that the position of the *Salaf*, which was to refrain from inquiring into the meanings of Allah’s attributes and leave the explanation of their meanings to Allah (SWT), is safer and should be followed in order to avoid problems re-

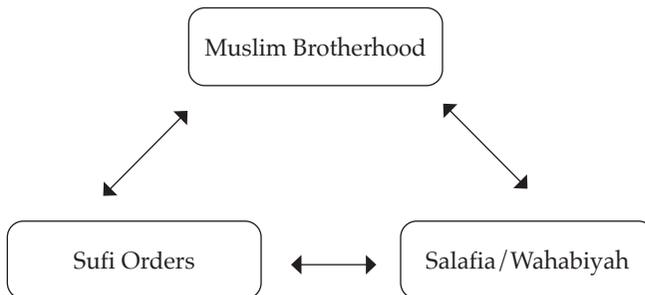
sulting from metaphorical interpretation on the one hand and the nullification of Allah's attributes on the other. ... On the other hand, we believe that the metaphorical interpretations of the *Khalaf* [Asharites] do not sanction any judgment on them as having gone outside Islam or to have strayed from the right path, nor do they justify that long dispute between them and others past and present, because Islam is vast and comprehensive enough to accommodate all of them.

Moreover, the MB, promoting Muslim unity among various groups, adopted the slogan, "We should unite upon that which we agree, and excuse each other in that which we disagree." The tolerance of the MB emanates from its worldwide program based on the reform of all Muslim societies that adhere to different schools of jurisprudence, theologies, and various forms of Sufism. Hasan al-Banna, who belonged in his early years to *Hasafiyah* Sufi Brotherhood, wrote that differences in matters of Islamic Jurisprudence should not cause division, contention, or hatred within the ranks of the Muslims. In that context, followers of the MB methodology avoid divisive Islamic discourses on doctrinal matters and legal aspects within its society. Being open to diverse Islamic theology and practices, they tolerate different theological views on Islam and despise rigid obsession with nuances of the religious doctrine. They believe that Sufism and other traditional practices should be accommodated and that the focus in Islamic activism should be directed toward social and political issues rather than theological quibbling that divides Muslim communities. Accordingly, MB does not oppose Ashari theology, Shafi jurisprudence, and Sufism, constituting the basic components of the traditional conception of Islam in Somalia. However, the MB does not hesitate to cleanse practices that contravene Islamic principles in the society through an educational process that does not ruin community cohesion. Indeed, its main agenda is to create an atmosphere of collaboration between various Islamic groups and organizations for the advantage of the bigger goals – the promotion of Islam in society and its application at the state level. In short, besides hostile relations with the traditional conception of Islam, followers of the Salafia School, believing in exclusivity and absolutism of interpreting Islam, are also in conflict with the MB on several issues.

## VII. Salafia versus Muslim Brotherhood

Salafia adherents accuse the MB of accepting Ashariyah theology and tolerating *bida* (innovations). They also criticize the MB for accepting selective elements of Western modernity, such as the democratic process and women's political participation. Moreover, Salafia condemns the ambitious goal of the MB, which is based on "unity in diversity" among Muslims, many of whom are allegedly enmeshed in innovations. On the other hand, the MB also carefully criticizes Salafism in many aspects. For instance, they criticize them for their literalist interpretation of Islam and conflictual approach to other Islamist activists. Moreover, the MB frowns upon the apolitical attitude of the academic Salafism and their acquiescent attitude toward oppressive regimes. MB accuses the Salafis that they tolerate what could be termed '*Shirk al-Qusur*' (polytheism of the ruling place) and focus on the '*Shirk al-Qubur*' (the polytheism of graveyards). This notion is that they do not confront polytheism and deviation of the ruling class while they focus on the simple deviations from Islam, such as Sufi visitations to the graveyards of the saints and seeking their blessing. Furthermore, the MB adherents criticize Jihadi Salafism for aborting the peaceful transformation of the Muslim society and inciting devastating civil wars. Considering Salafia as an extremist group, the MB accuses them of causing more harm than good to the Islamic reformism and tarnishing the global image of Islam and Muslims. The following table indicates the dynamics of the three persuasions in Somalia.

Figure 2. Islamic Conceptions of the three Persuasions in Somalia



### VIII. Conclusion

The conception of Islam in Somalia was founded on Ashariyah theology, Al-Shafiyah Jurisprudence, and Sufism. However, this unity of Islamic conception was challenged by the introduction of the Salafia/ Wahabiyah and the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1960s. Both persuasions interacted with the traditional conception of Islam differently. For instance, Salafiyah considered Sufism a deviant sect from the proper understanding of Islam and labeled most of their rituals as bid'a and apostasy. On the other hand, Muslim Brotherhood tolerates Sufi Orders and Salafiyah and interacts with them positively to fulfill their primary objective of preserving Muslim unity. Moreover, Sufi Orders began to transform after the collapse of the state in 1991. This reform took two forms: Militancy and civil society option. Ahlu-Sunna Wa al-Jama represents Sufi militancy, while Moalim Noor Foundation represents the civil society option. As a result, all persuasions of Islam, except al-Shabab/ Daish, moderated their views, and their consensus while controversy among them is narrowing.

**Table 2. Typology of Islamic persuasions and their conceptions and relations**

<b>Islamic Persuasion</b>	<b>Theology</b>	<b>Jurisprudence</b>	<b>Sufism</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
Islam in the Somali Traditional society	Al-Ashariyah theology	Al-Shafi school	Qadiriyyah/ Ahmadiyah	Confrontational with Salafia persuasions
Salafiyah/ Wahabiyah	Salafia theology (al-Aqidah al-Salafiyah)	Non-affiliation (follow the Qur'an and Hadith)/ mostly follow Hambali school	Intolerant, consider either Bida' or shirk (apostasy)	Confrontational with Sufi Orders
Muslim brotherhood	Tolerant of Ashariyah and Salafia theologies (global movement)	Tolerant to all schools of jurisprudence (global movement)	selective acceptance/ tolerant (Muslim Unity)	Tolerant to Salafism and Sufism (Muslim Unity)

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## Notes

1. The earliest mention of the “Somali” has come in the victory poem written by Ethiopian Emperor Gabra Masqal II (Yeshaq) against the king of Adal in 1415 in the Muslim-Christian push-bull wars. See *The Cambridge History of Africa*, Vol. 3, Cambridge University Press, 2008, 154.
2. Abdurahman Abdullahi, *Making Sense of Somali History*, volume one (Adonis & Abbey, 2018), 31-67.
3. *Ibid*; 67.
4. Somali historiography focuses on the armed struggle and diminishes the peaceful cultural resistance which enabled Somalis to preserve their unity of religion and culture. See Abdurahman Abdullahi, *Making Sense of Somali History*, volume one (Adonis & Abbey, 2018), 93.
5. Prominent modernization scholars, such as Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Eric Hobsbawm, argue that nationalism is a phenomenon that arose with the processes of modernization during the late 18th century. See Ernest Gellner. *Nations and nationalism* (2nd ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006); Eric Hobsbawm. *Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality* (2nd ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Benedict Andrson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991).
6. Abdurahman Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Case Study of Islah Movement (1950-2000)* (Adonis & Abbey, 2015); Afyare Abdi Elmi. *Understanding the Somalia conflagration: Identity, political Islam and peacebuilding* (Pluto Press, 2010).
7. May Hope Schoebel, *Hybrid sources of legitimacy: Peacebuilding and state-building in Somaliland* (Routledge, 2018), 200-221; Centre for Security, Armed Forces and Society Royal Military College of Canada, “Clan and Islamic Identities in Somali Society.” November 2011.
8. Nasteha Ahmed, “Somalia’s Struggle to Integrate Traditional and Modern Governance Systems: The 4.5 Formula and the 2012 Provisional Constitution.” *Journal of Somali Studies*, Volume 6 (no.1) 2019, 141-69.
9. See Somali Transitional Charter of 2000, article 2.2, which affirms that “Islam shall be the religion of the state and no other religion or ideas contrary to Islam may be propagated in its territory.” Also, Article 4.4, “The Islamic Sharia shall be the basic source for national legislation. [And] any law contradicting Islamic Sharia shall be void and null.”
10. Sheikh Sharif and Hassan Sheikh Mohamud belonging to the Islamists, became presidents (2009-2012) and (2012-2017), respectively. On the other hand, Al-Shabaab, Hizbul-Islam, and Daish became armed oppositions.
11. Abdurahman Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Case Study of Islah Movement (1950-2000)* (Adonis & Abbey, 2015), 20.
12. See Karim-Aly Kassam, “The clash of Civilization: The selling of Fear,” available from <https://dspace.ucalgary.ca/bitstream/1880/44170/1/Islam.pdf> (accessed on February 14, 2011).
13. Martin Kramer, “Coming to Terms: Fundamentalists or Islamists?” *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2003, 6577, 12.

14. W. Shahid, & P. S. van Koningsveld, "The negative image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and solutions." In W. Shadid, & P.S. van Koningsveld (Eds.), *Religious Freedom and the Neutrality of the State: The Position of Islam in the European Union* (VA: Leuven/Sterling, 2002), 174-196.
15. Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 117; John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 7; Sultan, K. (2016). Linking Islam with terrorism: A review of the media framing since 9/11. *Global Media Journal: Pakistan Edition*, 9(2), 1-10.
16. Ameli S. R., Marandi S.M., Ahmed S., Kara S., & Merali, A. A. (2007). *The British media and Muslim representation: The ideology of demonization* (Isted.). England: Islamic Human Rights Commission; Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam*, rev. ed. (New York: Vintage, 1997), pp. xvi, xix.
17. On critical view of the terminologies used to designate Islamists' activism, See Abdurahman Abdullahi, *Recovering the Somali State: The Role Islam, Islamism and Transitional Justice* (Adonis & Abbey, 2017), 19-29.
18. For example, Sunni and Shi'a, Salafia and Ashariyah theology, four Sunni schools of Jurisprudence like Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanafi, Hambali, and other Shi'a schools.
19. See the Holly Qur'an, 35:32.
20. See Mohamad Ahmed Jumale, *Dawr 'Ulama Junub al-Somal fi al-Da'wa al-Islamiyah* (1889-1941) (Ph.D. thesis submitted to the University of Umm Durman, Khartoum, 2007), 84.
21. See Arabic Translation of the English published book; Abdurahman Abdullahi, *Tarikh al-Harakah al-Islamiyah fi al-Somal (1850-2000)* (under publication, 2021).
22. Said Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism: The Case of Sayid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 97.
23. Scott Steven Rees, *Patricians of the Banadir: Islamic Learning, Commerce and Somali Urban Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (Ph.D. thesis submitted to the University of Pennsylvania, 1996), 306.
24. The nature of peacefulness of Sufi Orders may be interrupted because of external provocations, such as colonialism in the case of many scholars, exemplified by Sayid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan, and internal doctrinal conflicts, such as the conflict between Bardheere Jama and Geledi Sultanates and current fighting between Shabab and Ahl al-Sunna Wa al-Jama.
25. Indeed, all Jama communities in Somalia, estimated by I.M. Lewis in the 1950s to account for more than 80 communities, are under the leadership of a master/sheikh, and the clan factor has not much space. Of these, over half were Ahmadiyah, and the remaining was distributed almost equally between Qadiriya and Salihyah (note here Lewis is not including Salihyah in Ahmadiyah, which is not true). See Lewis, *Saints*, 35. Moreover, Professor Mukhtar produces 92 Jama in the 1920s in the Italian colony, where 50 Jama were located in the upper Juba, 30 in Banadir, 4 in Lower Juba, and 8 in Hiran. See Mohamed Mukhtar, *Historical Dictionary of Somalia*. African Historical Dictionary Series, 87 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 127.
26. Most scholars fail to distinguish between the original Sufi order and their later derivatives. Sometimes these Sufi orders are said to be three, making Salihyah a separate order from Ahmadiyah and neglecting the Rufaiyah Order's existence. See Laitin and

Samatar, Somalia: Nation, 45.

27. Cabdirisacq Caqli, Sheikh Madar: Asaasaha Hargeysa (biographical work on Sheikh Madar written in the Somali Language, no date or publishing house).

28. Abdullahi Hassan, Inside look at the Fighting between al-Shabab and Ahlu-Sunna wa al-Jama. Combating Terrorism Center, Volume 2, issue 3, March 2009. Available from Inside Look at the Fighting Between Al-Shabab and Ahlu-Sunna wal-Jama – Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (usma.edu). Accessed on July 11, 2021.

29. See Imam al-Shafi University website, Home | Imam Shafi University (ishu.edu.so). Also, See Abdurahman Abdullahi, "The Resurgence of Sufi Orders," presented at the 14th SSIA Congress held at JigJiga University on July 2-4, 2021.

30. Mu'atazilah is a theological school founded by Wasil ibn Ata (d. 748). The primary assumption of this school is that reason is more reliable than tradition. See Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1983), 44-65.

31. For instance, al-Azhar University teaches this theology. See, Yusuf al-Qardawi, *Muhammad al-Ghazali kama „Araftuhu: Rihlat Nisf Qarn* (Beirut: Dar Al-Shuruq, 2000), 82-86.

32. Glorious Qur'an (42:11).

33. The four leading jurisprudence schools of the Sunni Muslims are Maliki, Hanafi, Shafi, and Hanbali.

34. For a general overview of the traditional Islamic scholars, see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton University Press, 2002).

35. Ahmad Maussalli, "Wahhabism, Salafism, and Islamism: Who is The Enemy?" Available from <http://conflictsforum.org/2009/wahhabism-salafism-and-islamism-who-is-the-enemy> (accessed on November 8, 2010).

36. See Ibn-Taymiyah, *Sharh al-„Aqidah al-Wasitiyah*, translated and commented by Dr. Muhammad Khalil Harras (Riyadh: Dar-Us-Salam Publications, 1996), 32.

37. In 1957, the Saudi sponsored the creation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), and in 1962, the World Muslim League and many non-governmental institutions were also established promoting the Saudi influence worldwide and its centrality in the Muslim World. See Noohaidi Hasan, *Laskar Jihad: Islam, Militancy, and the quest for identity in post new Order Indonesia* (SEAP Publications, 2006), 36-39.

38. *Ibid.*, 39.

39. Approximately 250,000 Somalis have migrated to Gulf countries after the Somali/Ethiopian war of 1977/78. See Laitin and Samatar, 145.

40. See Abdurahman M. Abdullahi and Ibrahim Farah. —Reconciling the State and Society in Somalia: Reordering Islamic Work and the Clan System II, available from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/15327358/Reconciling-the-State-and-Society-in-Somalia> (accessed on June 15, 2010).

41. Mustafa Abu Isway, —Salafism from theological discourse to political Activism II, available from <http://www.passia.org/meetings/rsunit/Salafism.pdf> (accessed on November 8, 2010).

42. See —Somalia: Al Shabab Militia Destroys the Grave of Well-Known Sheikh in Mogadishu II, available from <http://www.raxanreeb.com/?p=42206> (accessed on June 18, 2010).

43. Hasan al-Bannā, *Risalat Al-„Aqā'id*, available from <http://web.youngmuslims.ca/>

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44. Hassa al-Banna, The Message of Teachings, Article 8, available from [http://web.youngmuslims.ca/online\\_library/books/tmott/index.htm#understanding](http://web.youngmuslims.ca/online_library/books/tmott/index.htm#understanding) (accessed on June 20, 2010).
45. Ibid.
46. Hasan al-Banna, Risalat Al-'Aqa'id, available from [http://web.youngmuslims.ca/online\\_library/books/the\\_creed/index.htm#salaf\\_khalaf](http://web.youngmuslims.ca/online_library/books/the_creed/index.htm#salaf_khalaf) (accessed on June 20, 2010).
47. This Foundation has 2006 Qur'anic schools, five regular schools, a university, and 265 mosques all over Somalia and in the Horn of African countries and Diaspora. Interview with Khalif Abdulqadir Moallim Nur, chairman of the Board of Trustees, Moallim Noor Foundation, on 7 July 2021.

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