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Masjid Musa Mosque and The Narratives of Radicalization of School Children in Mombasa, Kenya

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Abstract
Not long ago, a number of research findings linked Muslim pupils and students in boarding schools and colleges that are considered more likely to be indoctrinated by extremists to join terrorist groups such as *Al-Shabab*-that children living away from their parents were easier to mislead and indoctrinate. While acknowledging that violent extremists have no direct relationship with nor represent Islamic teachings, this study argues that whereas it is true that most *Madrasas* are peaceful and serve a constructive role in societies where education is often a privilege rather than a right, this overlooks the fact that *Madrasas* have been vitally important in furthering the mission of some of the most volatile terrorist groups. Therefore, this study intends to explore these competing claims and address how the *Madrasa* question is systematically linked to radicalization by using examples of the Masjid Musa Mosque that became a centre of international scrutiny in a similar case.

Keywords: Masjid Musa, madrasa education, radicalization, extremism, youth

Introduction

Approximately 4.3 million Muslims comprise a little more than 10 percent of the overall Kenyan population and about 30 percent of the coastal population. Large concentrations of Kenyan Muslims live in the former Coast Province, North Eastern Province, and the capital city of Nairobi, particularly in the neighbourhood of Eastleigh. Ethnically, Kenya's Muslims are primarily Swahili or Somali, although there are also sizable Arab and Asian groups (Chacha, 2013).

The Coastal region of Kenya has however, a complex political history. By the mid-nineteenth century, European missionaries, abolitionists, and explorer expeditions coincided and justified imperialism, facilitating the 1895 declaration of Kenya's Coastal strip as a British protectorate (Ndzovu, 2014). Race, religion, and class structured relations, access to jobs and leadership positions during colonization by the Omanis, Portuguese, class-structured relations, access to jobs, and leadership positions during colonization by the Omanis, Portuguese, and British culminated in different forms of exclusion (Mwakimako et al., 2009).

Since the unification of the Coast with Kenya, ensuing secessionist campaigns have generated unlikely alliances, at times aligning Africans with Arabs and, at other times, Africans against Arabs (Willis & Gona, 2012). Both sides have historically been nervous about one another, with Arabs regarding African nationalists as 'inferior' and 'outsiders,' while African nationalists considered Arabs 'non-indigenous,' aiming to perpetuate racial privilege (Ndzovu, 2014). These indigeneity and migration politics continue to structure Kenya's Coastal politics.

In the 1980s, civil society and churches' efforts led to multipartyism, creating new spaces for organizing. Using this opportunity, local Coastal politicians instrumentalized grievances that resulted in violence targeting non-coastal communities (Willis & Gona, 2012). The

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administration responded heavy-handedly, banning the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) and labelling it a 'radical Islamic' group (KHRC, 1997), hence delegitimizing IPK's activism and framing Muslims as 'troublemakers' and 'unpatriotic'.

After 9/11, the ensuing 'war on terror' increased tensions between Kenya's government and its Muslim communities, accused of colluding with 'Islamist' groups. Coupled with renewed secessionist calls by the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) that draw on indigeneity, perceptions of Coastal people as 'not fully Kenyan' (Prestholdt, 2011, p. 7) and Muslims as a problem has increased. The government continues to curtail separatist efforts, politicizing and labelling them as 'radical fundamentalists' and '*Al-Shabab* affiliates'. In 2015, Muslim-run NGOs (Muhuri and Haki Africa) were labelled 'sympathisers/financiers of terrorism' (Mohamed, 2015). They faced restrictions for criticizing violations of human rights (HR) and international law and exposing corruption in the security forces (Kiai, 2015).

Within this context, Coastal youth are characterized as 'radicals' and 'extremists'. Several studies show increasing radicalization of Coastal youth (Badurdeen, 2018; Botha, 2015; Khalil & Zeuthen, 2014; Mogire & Mkutu, 2011). However, emerging radicalization frames require further scrutiny, given Kenya's position as a key regional player in the Global War on Terror (GWoT). Coastal politicians have condemned characterizations of youth as 'radicals' through agenda setting, law-making, and implementation of policies (Ndzovu, 2014).

Madrasa: Between Sacred and Profane

The role of the *Madrasa* in offering both secular and religious education changed with the coming of independence. The first education commission Report of independent Kenya (Ominde Commission) aimed at promoting social equality and removing racial barriers perpetuated by many years of colonialism. Since no religion was to be privileged in independent Kenyan society, the religious convictions of all people were to be safeguarded and respected. Therefore, Public schools were not to be used for proselytization or propaganda. Regarding Muslims, an education report recommended improving education in Muslim areas (As'ad, 1994).

This improvement was to be made by uplifting the standards of teaching in both secular and religious education. The commission report suggested formulating an agreed syllabus of Muslim religious instruction. The commission found the teaching of secular education in the *Madrasa* inadequate because the teachers were not trained, and teaching facilities were inadequate. Similarly, according to the report, secular instruction in the *Madrasa* tended to interfere with public school education because Muslim children who attended them after *Madrasa* started again from scratch rather belatedly. In other words, the secular education of the *Madrasa* did not prepare the pupils who later joined the secular public school (Babo, 2003).

According to the report, the *Madrasa*, which offered both secular and religious education, had to be registered as schools by the government under the Education Act. Secular education was necessary for the Muslims, as was religious education. However, since the leaders could not offer adequate secular education, the report recommended the improvement of public schools so that Muslims could attend without any suspicions whatsoever. This move was meant to exclude the *Madrasa* from secular education. Consequently, the *Madrasa* was left entirely to the teaching of Islamic religious subjects.

The *Madrasa* was developed to fulfill the Muslim's educational needs and safeguard their religious values and cultural heritage. Islam does not dichotomize education into religious and secular, though knowledge comprises both revealed and acquired knowledge. In practice, the revealed knowledge gives birth to religious education, while acquired knowledge gives birth to secular education. *Madrasa* education is concerned with moral training and the spirit of Islam. This is the role that the *Madrasa* as an education institution is identified with.

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Despite all this, secular education cannot replace the role of the *Madrasa* in moral and religious training. The education experts have been of the view that Muslims should give equal weight to both religious and secular education. The religious and moral training of its students underlined the importance of Madrasa. It is, therefore, critical that the integration of religious (Islamic) education with secular (modern) Muslim education is emphasized for the continued survival of the *Madrasa* system.

In 2008, Crises Group international admonished the Kenyan government to be much more proactive in terms of monitoring 'radical' *Madrasas* that were reported to promote very extremist Islamist views, particularly from the radical groups in Somalia. The report clearly indicated that such groups could easily develop in historically very poor parts of Kenya, where Kenyan Somalis live **(**Khalid, 2014). In 2014, Kenya's Ministry of Education piloted a new curriculum in 50 schools in three major cities.

Shiekh Abdilatif Abdulkarim, an executive board member with al-Mutanda al-Islami Trust in Nairobi, was quoted as saying that failure by the government to have a unified Islamic Madrasa studies curriculum has left opportunities open for extremist clerics to exploit radicalised youths. Seemingly, he must have been pleased with the initiative, saying it would help as one way to streamline Islamic studies and deal with Islamic extremism.

The Masjid Musa Mosque: Sheikh Aboud Rogo's Toxic Teachings

The mosque was built by the family of former Mombasa mayor Ali Taib, and after the death of the family patriarch, the affairs and running of the mosque were left in the hands of Taib's brother. During the IPK insurgency in the 1990s that influenced the nearby Sakina mosque, orphans of the banned political party, including Sheikh Aboud Rogo, sought refuge in Masjid Musa. After the infiltration of Al Shabaab insurgents into the mosque, Masjid Musa had cemented its reputation as the hotbed of Jihadism in the country for more than two decades (Khalid, 2014). That is the point when the Taib family left the running of the mosque to a select committee. The committee wrestled for control of the mosque from the Islamists until an idea was mooted that a retired Kenya Ports Authority employee who had a reputation of commanding respect in the community take up the role of chairman of the committee of the Musa Mosque in a bid to establish a sense of normalcy in the institution (Jumbe, 2014).

Matters came to a head with the killing of the Sheikh Aboud Rogo when his followers became emboldened as they demanded the killers of the late Sheikh to be named. Islam Oshan and his committee had a tough time controlling the restless supporters of the Rogo, and his close associates stepped into his shoes to continue with the evening lectures. One of them, Sheikh Ibrahim Amur, was killed five months later alongside three other people. At the same time, the pressure on the committee from both the government and the faithful in the mosque was too much for the committee to bear (Jumbe, 2014). Islam Oshan had served as the chairman of the committee at Masjid Musa in Mombasa during the tumultuous period marked by the assassination of Sheikh Aboud Rogo. Oshan, a retired government employee respected within the community, was appointed to lead the mosque's committee in an effort to restore order amid rising radicalism. At some point, the government of Kenya used him to address the radicalization of youth across various institutions, especially schools.

The mosque committee was summoned to the Provincial Headquarters, where the then Interior Cabinet Secretary Joseph Ole Lenku delivered President Uhuru Kenyatta's message in person, stating that radicalization lectures in the mosque must be discontinued. That was after the youth had burnt the nearby Salvation Church while demonstrating the killings of their clerics the previous day (Jumbe, 2014). Oshan and his committee hung a notice at the entrance of the mosque to the effect that preaching in the mosque without the express authority of the committee would no longer be tolerated, alongside begging and making impromptu announcements. The youth did not take notice of the directive and even brought a preacher

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from Tanzania to a newly appointed imam, which led to the intensification of militant lectures (Shepard, 1987).

Aboud Rogo, the key preacher and Sheikh of the Masjid Musa Mosque, was born around the mid-1960s in the remote village of Siyu on the expansive Pate Island, where he spent his early childhood. As a child, Rogo attended Siyu Primary School but later opted to drop out before completing his elementary-level studies. Upon leaving secular education, he decided to pursue Islamic religious education at a local *Madrasa* school in his birth village. Later, Rogo left his home village and proceeded to Mombasa, where he apparently enrolled at the Kisauni College of Islamic Studies to pursue a bachelor's degree in Islamic studies, which he could not complete due to financial constraints. Consequently, Rogo decided to involve himself in various business activities like fishing, poultry keeping, and running kiosks as a way of meeting his financial needs while at the same time serving as an imam of a local mosque.

In 1991, Rogo joined the defunct Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK), served as its youth activist, and failed to become one of the town's councillors under the party's banner, which had entered into a partnership with the FORD Kenya. In line with the programmes of other political parties that were formed after the ushering of multiparty politics in the early 1990s, the IPK was primarily seeking reform and improvement of the public institution in order to facilitate justice and fair play. The concern and struggle of the party was to make the system more open, fair, and honest rather than demolishing it (Ndzovu, 2009) Clearly, the IPK members, including Rogo at that moment, were willing to work within the existing political system (Ndzovu, 2009). Upon failing to secure the political position in his first attempt at competitive politics, Rogo decided to concentrate on his duties as the imam of Masjid Musa, Mombasa, where he regularly preached.

As a full-time Imam, conflicting reports portray his nature and how he relates to the general public. Outside his mosque, Rogo was described by many as someone careful in his talks. Whenever outside the precincts of the mosque, he would be reluctant to criticize the government, condemn US policies, comment on the supposed 'injustices being done to Muslims' in the country, or 'even engage in politics during a casual conversation'. This attitude contrasts with his fiery posture as a vocal preacher who espoused views many would not accept while in the mosque. Despite opting to discontinue secular education, Rogo easily moved his listeners as an informative person as he easily tackled both local and international issues facing Muslims (Ndzovu, 2009).

Ironically, he criticized the international media and local FM stations, which he evidently relied on in acquainting himself with global news. In early 2001, Rogo allegedly introduced Fazul Mohamed, a Federal Bureau Investigation (FBI) wanted terrorist mastermind, to Siyu village while in a group of Muslim preachers. During his stay at Siyu, Fazul married a local girl from a family related to the cleric. It was during the search for Fazul by the FBI agents and the Kenya Anti-Terror Police that the intelligence network began focusing on Rogo. Consequently, after the 2001 bombing of the Paradise Hotel in the coastal town of Kenya, the intelligence intensified their close watch on Rogo (Ndzovu, 2009).

Following the Paradise Hotel attack and attempted shooting down of an Israeli plane with around 260 Israeli passengers on board, Rogo, together with others, were arrested as Fazul's accomplices who had fled to Somalia. However, Rogo and the co-accused were eventually acquitted after being held for several months in custody on the allegation that 'key witnesses were too scared to testify', the country's Attorney General observed (Mwakimako et al., 2009). However, to Rogo and the other suspects, it was clear that the war on terror was a global war on Islam and Muslims, which, through the grace of God, they have been vindicated. However, his release coincided with the government crackdown on Islamists in the country, where some were deported while others went underground. The crackdown created a leadership vacuum among the Islamists in the country. Coincidentally, during that period, Islamists 'groups in

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Somalia began gaining momentum, with the Union of Islamic Courts controlling major parts of southern Somalia' being 'in dire need of recruits to boast its fighting capacity' (Mwakimako et al., 2009).

Rogo seized the opportunity and established contacts with some of Somalia's Islamist groups. As a result, in 2009, he supposedly visited Somalia and received military training from foreign jihadists with affiliation to al-Qaeda, thereby intensifying his radicalization. Accordingly, the cleric established the Sirajul Munir *Madrasa*, which he allegedly used as a centre for recruiting Muslim youths from Likoni, Majengo, and Kisauni to the *Al-Shabab* cause. In February 2012, at his farm in Kanamai, Rogo was arrested allegedly with an AK 47 rifle, two hand grenades, two pistols, 102 detonators, and 113 bullets, which the police contended he was intending to use in an orgy of violence that involved blowing up churches in Mombasa, the Nyali Bridge and the Likoni ferry (Mwakimako et al., 2009). At the time of his death on August 27, 2012, he was out on bond, facing a series of terror-related charges.

According to reports, Rogo was killed by a 'killer squad' who shot his van with several bullets on a traffic highway. After his death, he suddenly became a hero and a martyr among the Muslim students in most *Madrasa* points in the coastal region. His online sermons spread like a bushfire on social media; the youth spoke and dressed imitating him; they wore his badges and t-shirts, and carried with them school pamphlets, which they shared amongst themselves. There is evidence that the state seized such items from lower primary pupils, indicating the depth of this matter in this direction.

It was, therefore, no wonder that in 2016, a team from the NIS and Education Ministry raided the *Madrasa*s and ordered their immediate closure. 'Intelligence reports' had indicated police discovered four *Shabaab*-linked youth arrested on the way to Somalia that year. The newspaper reported that Idris Sadalla, Ahmed Fadhili, Issa Abdullahi, and Issa Faraj were part of the terror group's recruiting team. Fadhili was a *Madrasa* teacher. The state police thus began investigating several *Madrasa*s in Likoni and closed those that they got evidence. Sources indicate the two Madrasas had been spotted on ATPU radar for carrying out secret recruitment and funding terrorism in Mombasa. The children are allegedly recruited through jihad literature. A police Chief reported that 'We stumbled upon Aboud Rogo sermons in CDs used to radicalise the children by luring them to join al Shabab.' Most of the youth are lured into joining the group after being promised money, wives, and jihad brides.

Madrasa: Language and Discourse of Youth Radicalisation

It is generally perceived that *Madrasa* produces extremism, which poses a threat to the peace and security of the state and to the world as well. That is why the government, along with the local and International community, has always wanted to eradicate extremism and terrorism by targeting *Madrasa* education. However, the question is how Rogo's extreme ideas penetrated the *Madrasa*. What effects did this have on the children and youth?

Among Rogo's provocative sermons was the one he delivered in July 2012 at Masjid Musa, declaring support and validation for the terrorist attacks in Garissa. Without hesitation, he depicted the attacks as justified retribution by the supposedly marginalized Kenyan Muslims. In this sermon, one could discern the intolerance and exclusivist message that he conveyed to his followers. Rogo praised the killing of the seventeen Christian worshippers, adding that the homicide was significant to control the alleged forced conversion of Muslims to Christianity and continued desecration of 'Muslim land'. In the sermon, the cleric declared that the Christian churches have a hidden agenda to undermine Muslims, and their existence is a great threat that the community should address (Mohamed, 2015).

For Rogo, the presence of churches in 'Muslim territory' portrayed a despicable form of Islam disappearance, which was an obligation of 'pious' Muslims to confront. Consequently, he instructed his audience not to sympathize with the Garissa church killings, which he

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described as a glorious event and a demonstration of a continuation of jihad against 'infidels'. Instead, he reiterated that for any Muslim accused of killing infidels, it is the responsibility of the community to defend the perpetrators from being arrested by the *Kafir* (read government). Such sentiments demonstrate why Rogo condemned any efforts by Muslim and Christian leaders to come together in a show of solidarity after the Garissa church killings. To illustrate that Jihad is obligatory to Muslims, Rogo quoted *Surat at Tawbah* that reads, 'Go ye forth, (whether equipped) lightly or heavily, and strive, and struggle, with your goods, and your persons, in the cause of Allah. That is best for you, if ye (but knew)'. The verse formed the basis for him to urge his audience to join other Muslims on the frontline, including Somalia, for assurance of blessings that emanate from participating in the jihad (Mogire, 2011).

Rogo's call for support of the *Al-Shabab* movement in Somalia was calculated as it is part of global Islamism whose objective is to champion the restoration of a powerful Islamic dominion, which would only be attained by liberating all Muslim territories from the oppression of non-Muslim occupiers. Arguably, it was expected that by successfully putting Somalia under the control of Islamists with support from Kenyan Muslim jihadists, a similar project could be replicated in Kenya in the areas predominantly inhabited by Muslims. He lamented that the Kenyan Muslims, especially the youth, lacked role models and leadership to guide them into jihad.

Despite the acknowledgment of leadership absence, Rogo encouraged Muslim youths to strive to die on battle fronts as martyrs because it guaranteed one access to *Jannah al Firdaus* (Paradise). It is against this position that he glorified the killing of Fazul Mohamed and Osama bin Laden as a blessing since these personalities died as martyrs. Nevertheless, there is an opposing voice of Muslim clerics in Kenya like that of Sheikh Badru Khamis and Sheikh Hassan Omar, who denounce the ongoing war in Somalia as jihad and deem any war waged by Muslims, if necessary, as a lesser form of jihad; a view utterly discarded by Rogo as misrepresenting of facts about jihad.

The killing of the controversial preacher sparked tension and violence in the town of Mombasa, where he commanded respect from his followers. Youthful supporters of the Sheikh directed their rage on any symbol of government and what they regarded as 'un-Islamic'. In the beginning, the violence appeared spontaneous, but after a while, it became evident that some clerics were instigating the disobedience. The protesters, while armed with petrol bombs and grenades, targeted police officers and churches, which the cleric had strongly criticized in his sermons (Seesemann, 2007).

Immediately after the assassination of Rogo, his long-time accomplice and co-accused on terror charges, Sheikh Said Shariff Abubakar allegedly called for the burning and destruction of 'churches and murder of police officers' together with 'certain Muslim leaders'. A total of 56 Police sources confirmed that leaflets were circulated in specific mosques in Mombasa urging Muslims to mobilize and embark on a jihad (Hunwick, 1996).

On the day of Rogo's killing at Masjid Musa, Abubakar is accused of having incited their supporters to violence by ordering the killing of all those imams collaborating with the government together with any police officer; he is purported to have instructed *Imam wote wanaoungana na serikali wachinje na pia polisi yeyote akionekana auwawe*. The stern statement directed at the police and other Muslim clerics was based on conspiracy theories tying competing Muslim priests and government agents to the tribulations of Rogo since the terror attack of 2001 (Roy, 2002).

According to his supporters, the state had harassed the Sheikh for decades on charges of terrorism without evidence. At the same time, his rival clerics allegedly spied on him and reported to the government authorities. On the same day, Abubakar allegedly threatened the life of security agents, uttering, N*yinyi polisi na haswa wale mko na uniform tutaonana na nyinyi makafiri* (we will deal with you infidel police officer). More so, he was also charged to

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have ordered, *makanisa yote Mombasa ya chomwe* (all churches in Mombasa should be burned down) (Hunwick, 1996).

These statements point to a deliberate incitement and exhortation to murder a group of people and destruction of property of a specific community. And indeed, violence erupted. Probably instigated by sentiments expressed by clerics like Abubakar, Rogo's assassination saw irate Muslim youth go on the rampage and vow to avenge the death of their 'martyr.' To demonstrate that in death, Rogo attained martyrdom while fighting jihad in defence of Islam, his enraged supporters hurriedly buried his body without washing it in accordance with Islamic burial tradition. This action was censured by other Muslim clerics who considered it a gross misunderstanding of the concept of jihad martyrdom in Islam. Nevertheless, in the engulfing chaos, around five security agents were killed, their vehicles destroyed, and several others injured in different grenade explosions blamed on Rogo's radicalized followers (Mwakimako et al., 2009).

During the three-day violence, intelligence officials maintained that recently trained militants, allegedly recruited by the Sheikh to fight jihad for *Al-Shabab* in Somalia, had joined the rioters and were liable for the increasing turmoil and successive grenade explosions. As violence perpetrated by his supporters ensued, it acquired a sectarian dimension that witnessed the burning and destruction of a Salvation Army church, the Jesus Celebration Centre, Pentecostal Assemblies of God, and Neno Evangelism churches in Mombasa (Mwakimako et al., 2009).

Rogo's initiative came at a time when the country was experiencing religious radicalization, ethnic polarization, and a call for secession by the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) with poor human rights records, weak political institutions, and economic marginalization escalating. Increasing communications with the rest of the Muslim world implies that the waves of 'reform' championed by Islamist groups will continue to be evident in Kenya and, to some extent, affect the country's Muslims. The Arab Spring political upheavals that brought Islamist leadership to power in North Africa, the struggle of Boko Haram in Nigeria and *Al-Qaeda* affiliated jihadists in Mali, will encourage such groups in the country to advocate for social equality, justice, application of sharia, and even ambitiously, to secede and establish an Islamic form of government (Wiktorowicz, 2004). Muslim youths in Kenya, lacking access to educational opportunities and facing unemployment, are likely to challenge the political leadership for a share of social equity and economic benefits. If this situation is not addressed, the Islamists could capitalize on the dissatisfaction and use the desperate youth for their intolerant and exclusivist agenda (Quinn, 2003).

Clearly, the turmoil that engulfed the coastal city after the killing of the controversial cleric was exploited by Islamists who attempted to implant religious violence hence the attack on churches. The Islamists' main opponents will continue to be the state, members of other religions, and moderate Muslim clerics who agree to work with the government authorities. However, despite this possibility, Islamist elements among the Muslim population will be confronted by the government that does not tolerate political opposition presented by religious activism, which could eventually instigate Christian-Muslim rivalries.

Conclusion

Looking at Muslim politics in its wider social context in postcolonial Kenya, we see the interconnections between national politics and Islam sociality in the notion of a 'knowledge economy' within the postcolonial setting of a 'double-periphery' in which Kenyan coastal Muslims are situated, vis-à-vis the state and the Muslim (community of believers). We see interesting dynamics between aspects of knowledge and rhetoric, reasoning and power, and

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ideology and social practice at work in this particular Muslim context. Furthermore, we see that religiously motivated schools have gained a new social and political presence and significance in many African countries. Although religious networks and organizations have played a central role in providing education in colonial and postcolonial settings, liberalization and privatization measures since the 1980s have opened up new opportunities for religious engagement at all educational levels. Finally, there is a need to adopt an increasingly comparative perspective in the analysis of religious education and to understand how (internally differentiated) instances of Christian and Muslim education have developed historically in relation to each other.

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