

Research Africa Reviews Vol. 1 No. 2 pp.19-21, September 2017

These reviews may be found on the RA Review website at: <https://sites.duke.edu/researchafrica/ra-reviews/volume-1-issue-2-september-2017/>

Hamdi Abdurrahman Hassan. *Transformations of The Islamic Discourse in Africa: from Sufi Reform to Boko Haram* (Arabic Text). Cairo: Al-Ahram Publishing House, 2015. 400 pp. ISBN 978-977-320-240-8.

Reviewed by Randa Mousa (Egypt, Public intellectual); translated with commentary by Badr Abdelfattah Badr, Assistant Professor, Ain Shams University, Cairo, badr_elkafy@edu.asu.edu.eg.

Africa's multiple Muslim movements are a major concern for many who are interested in studying African affairs especially during this time of intellectual transformation; and the purpose is to know the reasons behind the transformation, and this remains one of the main continuous challenges. Between the appearance of Sufi groups, and the deliverance of fundamentalist discourse by groups such as Boko Haram and al-Shabab Mujahidin movement, the African case evidently devises strategies of how to deal with these challenges.

It cannot be ignored that the waves of violence and terrorism, and the deteriorating security situation in the Arabian Peninsula have had and continue to have a great impact on the rise of Jihadi extremist movements in the African continent. The environment in which these movements emerged represented a climate of backwardness, poverty, and corruption at all levels. And these are in addition to military coups, ethnic, racial divisions, and the dilemmas of patriotic engagement; all these issues led to the strengthening of extremism that has become a threat to the Africa's nation states.

In this context, Hamdi Abdurrahman Hassan presented a comprehensive vision through nine chapters to understand the environment of the Islamist reform, and its renewal speeches that differed through time and place; this is in addition to discussing the circumstances that led to a shift from traditional discourse to renewal or reform ones.

Religious Speech: Fundamentalism and Revolution

The Muslim movement emerged and developed in Africa in a way that was not different from the rest of the Muslim world, especially in its relation to the colonial period. The author mentioned that Africa's Muslim movements were contributed to social change and addressed educational issues but, at the same time, they articulated themselves using Islamic rhetoric and discourses that were characterized by political styles that opposed both the West and the forces of globalization. This was as a result of them having been influenced by the religious reformists that operated in the Arab and Islamic world.

For example, it was affected by:

- The thoughts of Jama'at Islamiya in Asia, the appearance of Jama'at Islamiya which was founded by Abul Ala' Mawdudi during 1934, and the appearance of Jam'at Islamiya in India during 1941. All these things impacted on the reform movements in eastern and southern Africa.
- The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, which was established in 1928, was an inspiration for many of the individuals and groups who raised the banner of religious reform as well as Wahabi Salafi and others; it represented as an inspiring and intellectual source for Africa's Islamic movements.
- After the stage of decolonization, many intellectual projects that sought to achieve renaissance based on nationalism, socialism, or liberalism, emerged in Africa to find themselves unable to survive;
- Muslim nation-states' imposition of secular Constitutions and their adoption of ideologies such as Socialism that was an attempt to neutralize the religious diversity remained problematic;
- The 1979 Iranian revolution, which was an inspiration resource for many of the Islamic organizations and movements, adopted a religious discourse that called for the formation of an 'Islamic State'.
- Absence of democracy, spread of corruption in Africa, and the deterioration of African renaissance model were another set of factors that gave rise to the formation of radical groups.

Jihadi speeches: Deforming Islam's image

The author of this text confirmed that the mentioned variables worked in changing the traditional discourse of Islam in Africa. As a result, Africa witnessed three main models that emerged; the first was the 'Islamic movement of Nigeria' that was set up by two Nigerian brothers but led by Sheikh Ibrahim Alzigzegi who adopted Ahl al-Bayt doctrine; the second was Nigeria's Boko Haram, and the third was Somalia's Jihadi al-Shabab. The author underlined that the radical Islamic discourses, which escalated in many of African countries, focused on issues of corruption, poverty, and the feeling of political alienation.

From the launching of Ahmed Bamba's Sufi Movement in Senegal, Abdellah Gummy's Salafi Movement in Nigeria, Farid Esack's Call of Islamic in South Africa, up to the formation of Hassan Al Turabi's group that addressed the issue of modernity, the author pointed out that some of these movements sought to Islamize political life in African societies, and in the process they contributed - in one way or another - in deforming the mental image of Islam when some of them adopted the use of violence as a method.

Islamic Discourse of Development: Its Influence and Impact

The author went on to present different models of Islamic discourse that appeared across the continent. The construction of such models started when the speech of the Islamic movement in Sudan was given; one that was characterized more by its vision for political transformation than the quest for religious reform or educational modification. The author further explained that amidst these developments, the Islamic discourse was presented as a part of global Islamic renewal. This discourse went hand-in-hand with the traditional Senegalese Sufi speech that encountered no real challenge since the end of the colonial period. However, this may be related to the fact that (a) Senegal's majority of Muslims expressed their loyalty to the Sufi movements,

and (b) the French adopted direct rule that caused Senegal's traditional political structures to be destroyed, and as a result of this, the Sufi movements worked to fill this gap through declaring a truce with the colonial authorities.

Revolutionary Movements: Violence as an acceptable tool

Boko Haram - being seen as Nigeria's Taliban - adopted violent tactics and this particularly so after the assassination of the group's leader Mohamed Youssef. In this regard, it is recalled that the Afghan Jihad movement stood up against Soviet occupation and as a consequence it culminated in the appearance of Islamic resistance movement that was led by the Taliban; now these developments were important lessons that effectively influenced the events in Nigeria. The author underlined that the Afghan model, the Taliban, came to the fore in Nigeria in 2002, and for this reason some called these Nigerian jihadists Nigeria's Taliban or rather 'Taliban Nigeria'. Nigeria may therefore be considered a microcosm of the real outcomes that were taking place in Africa; a continent that is the home of a multiplicity of religions, races, and cultural groups. The relations between Nigeria's Muslims and Christians were characterized by tensions; most of this being during the post-colonial period. In addition to these points, the author narrated the development of Nigeria's Sharia discourse and the argument regarding its implementation in some of the northern states as well as the role played by western colonialism in fighting the implementation of Sharia.

In East Africa's Somalia, the dream of the Jihadi Al-Shabab and its leadership was not realized until 2007. The author mentioned that the foundation of Somalia's Al-s Shabab goes back to 2004; this was when a group of youth received military training in Afghanistan. They also sought to liberate the whole of Somali land as well as all the Muslims in East Africa. In addition to that, they did not recognize any international organization and foundation that they perceived to be enemies of the Somali people.

The most prominent development and transformation of identity discourse in dealing with the 'other' included the following (a) the process of Arabization and Islamizing north, (b) the formation of Islamic and Arabic settlements and their influence along the East African coast, (c) the competition between the Christian Europe and the Muslim world and with the former wanting to control the world, (d) the spreading Islam in the African societies, (e) the spread of European Christianity and the impact of western colonialism, and (f) the idea of African unity and ideology.

It can be said that as a result to the multiplicity developments of movements, the author concluded that the renewal movements among Africa's Muslims raises many issues and challenges. These issues led to the adoption of a radical discourse that held on to the belief that violence was an acceptable tool in reforming society and in building an Islamic state.

Research Africa

Copyright © 2017 by Research Africa, (research_africa-editor@duke.edu), all rights reserved. RA allows for copy and redistribution of the material in any medium or format, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author/reviewer, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the RA website. You may not distribute the modified material. RA reserves the right to withdraw permission for republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. For any other proposed uses, contact RA's Editor-in-Chief. The opinions represented in the reviews and published on the RA Review website are not necessarily those held by RA and its Review editorial team.