The Culture of Terrorist Propaganda in Sub-Saharan Africa

A Case Study on Al-Shabaab's Use of Communication
Technologies in Somalia and Kenya

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Abstract

Communication is vital to the construct of terrorism. It allows terrorists to rally troops and support for their cause and to use "terror" as an effective political tactic. Terrorist groups have become increasingly creative in the ways they use information communications technology (ICT) to spread their messaging. This is especially true in Sub-Saharan Africa, where access to technology is still low, but spreading at an exponential rate. This research paper examines the case of al-Shabaab, a Salafi-jihadist group in southern Somalia, to answer the research question: do cultural contexts a significant role in the way terrorist groups in Sub-Saharan Africa communicate with the outside world? It finds that culture does have a substantial role in how al-Shabaab builds its communication strategy. Specifically, it discovers that al-Shabaab exploits certain aspects of overall culture and the cultural usage of ICT in order to compete effectively in the media arena to gain public support.

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I. Introduction

Terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa is not a new phenomenon, but the trend of globally oriented Salafi-jihadism is new. Over the past twenty years, Salafi-jihadism has slowly spread south into Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa. This trend has attracted global media attention and spurred numerous comprehensive studies of terrorism on the African continent. These macro-scale analyses tend to homogenize these terrorist groups and dilute them down to single points of ideology and technique. Like all terrorists, they use violence to advance political objectives and many are rooted in particular interpretations of religion, the most prominent being Salafi-jihadism. But politics and religion are not the only lenses we should use when studying these groups.

I posit that these terrorist interests and activities are also molded by local historical, cultural and social contexts. And oftentimes these contexts shape priorities and strategy more than the religious ideology or political goals of the group itself. I want to explore how these contexts impact terrorist actions by looking at a smaller subset of terrorist activities that involve the use of the information communication technology (ICT). Societies interact with technology in vastly different ways. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the use of ICT varies immensely country to country, region to region, even city to city, depending on the reach of these technologies, the openness of the society, the perceived cultural value of ICT, and the level of technological innovation within a society. Terrorist groups use ICT more predictably, especially groups with global networks and objectives, for communication within the group and externally.

For the purposes of this paper, I focus on the external communications, which I place into three broad categories: radicalization, recruitment and, what I call, theater. Terrorists groups use ICT to radicalize marginalized populations, to draw in recruits once that radicalization has

happened (or on false premises), and to publicize the "theater" of violence (or in some cases, humanity) they produce. Conventional wisdom would predict that there are few variations in how this ICT is used from group to group and that each group has a grand communications strategy that guides its overall tactics. My research, however, challenges this view. The purpose of this research is to answer the question: do cultural contexts and differences in societal uses of ICT play a significant role in the way in which global jihadist terrorist groups in Sub-Saharan Africa communicate with the outside world?

Terrorist acts do not occur in a vacuum. They are components of a broader political strategy that an organization puts together to accomplish an objective. While an agreement on a definition of terrorism in the international community has proved difficult, in the simplest terms, terrorism is a tactic that uses violence or the threat of violence as a strategy to cause fear and intimidation in pursuit of political goals. Because of this, we tend to frame terrorists' organizational strategy as a product of politics. In the case of Salafi-jihadism we admit that religion plays a role too. For example, we recognize that the organizational strategy of ISIS to recruit thousands of foreign fighters is a product of a political goal to bolster its ability to defend a territory and the religious goal of establishing a caliphate.

But I think that culture and society also play a role in how terrorist groups think, act, and build strategy. If we have a better understanding of that role, we can make better predictions about what terrorists are going to do and we can come up with better programs for de-radicalization. The nuances in terrorist strategy should then guide the creation of a more nuanced counter-terrorism strategy. This could be especially pertinent in Africa, where cultural and historical context is a significant driver for how politics and religion manifest in a society.

To answer my research question, I will use relevant literature to build a foundation for my theoretical framework. My literature review discusses and analyzes the theories about why terrorism in Africa is unique. I will then turn to explore the ways in which terrorist groups use ICT and how important these tactics are to a group's existence. I look at communication specifically because it is vital to a group's overall strategy. I also examine the relationship between culture and communication. I then derive an analytical framework founded in the communications theory known as the political contest model. I apply this framework to the single case of the terrorist group, al-Shabaab. I look at Al-Shabaab's communication techniques in Somalia and Kenya to develop an understanding of the relationship between terrorist communications and cultural context.

II. Literature Review

Terrorism and Africa

Over the last decade, there has been an exponential increase in academic literature on religious terrorism in Africa. It chases the growing number of terrorist groups, attacks, and media attention in the region. National and international counterterrorism efforts have also grown exponentially in response. As these efforts fortified, so too have the terrorists, showing their resilience to conventional counter-terrorism means.

The literature attempts to explain why terrorism, especially Islamist terrorism, has become so much more prevalent in the region and what makes it so distinct from the nature of terrorism in other parts of the world. A number of publications attribute this growth to the increasingly international dimension of terrorism. Joel Busher focuses on the last 5-10 years,

listing international aspects such as attacks beyond boundaries of origin countries, the targeting of foreign nationals, recruiting among diaspora communities, and the increasing online presence of many of these groups. He also notes the incorporation of what were initially national or sub-national groups into regional and global terrorist networks. Al-Shabaab announced its alliance with al-Qaeda in 2008, and in 2015, Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the Islamic State.[1]

Forest and Giroux go back even further citing the end of the Cold War as the moment the use of terrorism in Africa moved to the forefront of conflict. They blame the end of foreign backing for opposition groups and the huge caches of small Soviet-produced arms that became available. They also point to the shift from primarily inter-state armed conflict to intra-state armed conflict and the weak abilities of these states to control their terrain. Lastly they credit the shift in the global media environment as new technologies, such as the mobile phone and Internet, have become much more accessible in African societies.[2]

Hussein Solomon, on the other hand, sees Islamism as the key component to the spread of terrorism in Sub-Saharan. He argues that Islam is a unifying factor that violent groups use to transcend ethnic and clan identities. Islamists also capitalize on social discontent, economic failures and dissatisfaction with corrupt governments, using their interpretation of Islam as a way to inspire mass mobilization. He points at the governance structures put in place by terrorist groups in northern Nigeria and Somalia as evidence that this competition with the state is vital.[3]

The exploitation of weak state structures and growing trend of domestic-groups turned international are not the only characteristics that make jihadist terrorism in Africa unique. In

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[1] Joel Busher, "Introduction: Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Journal of Terrorism Research* 5, no. 1 (February, 2014): 1.
[2] James Forest and Jennifer Giroux, "Terrorism and Political Violence in Africa: Contemporary Trends in a Shifting Terrain," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 5, no. 3-4 (September, 2011): 5-6.
[3] Solomon Hussein, *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Africa – Fighting Insurgency from Al Shabaab, Ansar Dine and Boko Haram* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

2015, the U.S. Director of National Intelligence (DNI) James Clapper reported to Congress that most Sunni violent extremist groups in Africa are much more concerned with local political objectives than attacking the "far enemy" – the United States and the West.[4]

In 2003, Christopher Clapham built a foundation that helps explain these distinctions. He distinguishes between terrorism and guerilla movements that target unacceptable political regimes. He notes how the availability of "political space" in Africa (in comparison to the Middle East) has reduced the need for movements that use terrorism to seize that space. He makes the prediction that terrorism will blossom in the form of violent political movements but decidedly not radical Islam.[5] Clapham's prediction was wrong but his assessment of why terrorism was different on the African continent is important.

Busher also focuses on the political arena, but he sees the regional peculiarities in Sub-Saharan Africa as indicative of the relationship between the states and their citizens. He argues that weaker states have a hard time building and sustaining their legitimacy when substantial segments of the population see counter terrorism measures as further abuses of state power.[6]

While Clapham and Busher make notable observations about why terrorism might be different in Africa, their assessments offer only simple explanations that ignore local cultural and historical contexts. Solomon is also correct in his analysis of exploitation but he places far too much of an emphasis on the unifying ability of Islam. He ignores the multitude of other tactics that terrorists exploit to gain legitimacy, specifically the framework of conflict that already may exist. Forest & Giroux support this idea in part with their argument that "the strategic use of terrorism in Africa has been interwoven into broader conflict systems such as insurgencies, civil

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[4] Testimony of DNI James R. Clapper, Senate Armed Services Committee, Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, hearing, February 26, 2015.

[5] Christopher Clapham, "Terrorism in Africa: Problems of Definition, History and Development," South African Journal of International Affairs 10, no. 2 (2003): 13-28.

[6] Busher, "Introduction: Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa," 3.

wars and other forms of political violence."[7] It is true that certain economic and political conditions lay the groundwork for terrorist groups to thrive, but I hypothesize that cultural and societal characteristics dictate the strategies of the group itself.

Terrorism and ICT

Terrorists use ICT in diverse ways depending on goals, interests, and technological savvy. These range from financing and training to issuing command and cyber-attacks.[8] These forms of communication are equally important to a group strategies. However, in order to highlight the cultural aspect of communication, I focus on three key ways that groups use ICT to connect with the world outside of a group's boundaries: radicalization, recruitment, and theater.

While there is little evidence that individuals are more easily radicalized through the internet and propaganda materials[9] (radio programs, jihadist magazines, etc.) there is no doubt that terrorist groups publish content using ICT with the intent to radicalize. Social media allows groups to reach huge audiences and circulate their messages worldwide. It can be used to create a sense of community or for one-on-one conversations between terrorists and interested parties.

Ideology and the radicalization of individuals is just one way groups use ICT to recruit. Other incentives to join are important, as well as the ability to connect to disenfranchised and isolated members of society.[10] Bruce Hoffman attributes al-Qaeda's resiliency to its ability to

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[7] Forest and Giroux, "Terrorism and Political Violence in Africa: Contemporary Trends in a Shifting Terrain," 8.
[8] Craig Espeseth, Jessica Gibson, Andy Jones, and Seymour Goodman, "Terrorist Use of Communication Technology and Social Networks," in Technological Dimensions of Defence Against Terrorism, (IOS Press, 2013): 91.
[9] Ibid., 94.
[10] Kent Layne Oots, "Organizational Perspectives on the Formation and Disintegration of Terrorist Groups, Terrorism 12, no. 3 (1989): 143.

recruit and mobilize fighters and sympathizers.[11] ICT facilitates this recruitment through the expected radicalization and community building, but also with more devious tactics such as luring recruits with job announcements for fake positions in other countries.

Groups also use ICT, most usually the internet, to broadcast their violent acts to the world. Brian Jenkins coined the phrase "terrorism is a theater". This characterization points to the broader concept of terrorism itself. Terrorists use this spectacle or "theater" of violence to draw attention to their cause. In the past, terrorists were forced to rely on news coverage and word of mouth to spread their violent acts. An act of terror had to be committed in the right place at the right time to ensure the maximum number of viewers. Now extremists can use the internet to spread their message of violence to all corners of the world. This propaganda is not limited to violence however. Terrorists also oftentimes portray a more charitable view of their actions.

Terrorists utilize a broad range of communication technologies outside of the internet such as mobile phones, videos, and the radio. But the internet and social media have become the most common and useful tools for terrorists to communicate externally. In 2011, Jason Burke argued that social media could never replace grassroots activism; it may help gain a few recruits or additional funding, but would never play a role in on the ground operations.[12] But in 2016, he changed his tune, writing, "Recent rapid technological change that allows terrorists to reach a large audience quickly and directly has enabled them to achieve their messaging goals without launching large-scale attacks that demand significant physical infrastructure."[13] This also implies that the most successful and long-lasting groups will be the ones that are able to adapt to a

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[11] Gabriel Weimann, "Terrorist Dot Com: Using the Internet for Terrorist Recruitment and Mobilization," The Making of a Terrorist: Recruitment, ed. James J.F. Forest (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 54.

[12] Jason Burke, "Al-Shabab's Tweets Won't Boost its Cause," The Guardian, 16 December 2011.

[13] Jason Burke, "The Age of the Selfie Jihad: How Evolving Media Technology is Changing Terrorism," *CTC Sentinel*. November 30, 2016, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-age-of-selfie-jihad-how-evolving-media-technology-is-changing-terrorism.

changing media landscape, and use that media to directly target the people they want to influence.

Marc Sageman takes this even further asserting that "face-to-face radicalization has been replaced by online radicalization."[14] He thinks that the ideological battle for "young Muslims' hearts and minds" is being fought in online forums and chatrooms.[15] Terrorist groups can also use the internet to influence audiences with the hopes of promoting their political goals. Anne Speckhard agrees, arguing that multi-media and intense imagery often cause a secondary traumatization in viewers that spurs them into action.[16]

In many ways, terrorist groups' use of the internet, social media and other modes of communication can represent the broader ideologies of a group itself. Advanced technological tactics can show a group's depth and level of access to such technologies. Because groups connect externally using these means of communication, they also show how the surrounding environment influences which communication technologies they use.

Communication and Culture

I define culture as a set of norms, characteristics, and internalized values that influence a groups' behavior and motivations. It encompasses language, forms of expression (such as art, music, etc.) and social behaviors. A key facet of culture is defining the norms for interpersonal communications. As Samovar et al. make clear in *Communication between Cultures*, "Our entire repertoire of communicative behaviors is dependent largely on the culture in which we have been raised. Culture, consequently, is the foundation of communication. And, when cultures vary,

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[14] Marc Sageman, "The Next Generation of Terror," Foreign Policy, March/April 2008, p. 41.
[15] Ibid., p. 42.
[16] Anne Speckhard, "Battling the "University of Jihad:" an Evidence Based Ideological Program to Counter Militant Jihadi Groups Active on the Internet," Countering Violent Extremism, September 2011.

communication practices also vary."[17] These cultural definitions permeate all levels of communication, but much less research has been done on what these norms look like in ICT.

Leonard et al. examine cultural differences in the media. They find that differences between cultural patterns can have a considerable effect on the richness of media. More individualistic cultures tend to prefer media that is less personal and less contextual, while more collectivist cultures prefer deeper levels of context.[18] Sein and Harindranath take this connection a step further to focus on ICT and culture. They argue that ICT use is relative, and that the ways in which different cultures view and use ICT can affect how big of an impact ICT has on development.[19] These studies all drive home the idea that communication is contextual and this these environmental differences occur at all levels: face-to-face communications, the media, and ICT.

This last paper also echoes Marshall McLuhan's, *The Medium is the Message*, which states that the manner in which information is communicated is more important than the information itself.[20] McLuhan's theory is elaborate but it points to an important idea that is incorporated in my analysis: the medium of content-delivery shouldn't be ignored. In looking at how terrorists communicate; it will be important to look at the content of their propaganda as well as how they relay that content to the public.

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[17] Larry A. Samovar, Porter, R. E., Jain, N. C. *Understanding Intercultural Communication*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1981.

[18] Karen M. Leonard et al. "Culture and Communication: Cultural Variations and Media Effectiveness." Administration & Society. 41 no. 7, 2009: 850-877.

[19] Maung K. Sein & G. Harindranath, "Conceptualizing the ICT Artifact: Toward Understanding the Role of ICT in National Development", The Information Society, 20:1, 2010: 15-24.

[20] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 1964. http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/ www/mcluhan.mediummessage.pdf

III. Developing a Theory of Terrorist Communication: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Political Contest Model

The theoretical framework that I use to help answer my research question is Gadi Wolfsfeld's political contest model. In his 1997 work, *Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East*, Wolfsfeld describes the communications landscape, specifically the news media, as a competition between political antagonists for media control. This arena is where political conflicts take place and each "antagonist" in the arena fights to promote their own frame of the conflict to gain political influence. His theory focuses on unequal political conflicts between a state and an antagonist with less power and control. He calls these actors the authorities and the challengers. In the case of terrorism, terrorist groups are the challengers and the states they are trying to coerce are the authorities.

He notes that this struggle takes place at two levels: the contest over access, which he names the structural dimension, and the competition over ideological and cultural frames of meaning, or the cultural dimension. The structural dimension explains the power dynamics of who has control of the media and who is trying to gain access. For challengers, that access is almost always shared with the authorities, rarely do challengers have control. The cultural dimension focuses on the way norms and beliefs have an influence on the construction of media frames. Not only do challengers fight for access, they fight for meaning and a media frame that can lead to higher levels of support.[21]

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[21] Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East*, Edinburgh: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Terrorists compete for access in the structural dimension by using different methods of ICT to bypass the authorities, typically this is the Internet, but other forms of ICT can serve this purpose as well. In the cultural dimension, terrorist groups publish their own media in order to dictate the frame of their stories. They can cover what they deem is important to the conflict and portray themselves as martyrs and freedom fighters. This theory narrows down my scope to look at communications that allow terrorists to compete in the political contest: namely propaganda that radicalizes, recruits, and paints a group in a specific light (violent or charitable).

Analytic Framework

Based on the political contest model, I offer three possible explanations for how differences in societal uses of ICT could affect the way terrorist groups communicate. The first is that there is no relationship: communications strategy is born from a political or religioius goal and differences in culture and society play no role in how groups communicate. The second is that constraints on communication, such as access to ICT and government regulations, determine differences in communication. And the third is that communication is driven by a strategy that exploits cultural differences and societal values.

If the first explanation is true, I would expect to see a group using similar delivery methods and content no matter the audience the group is targeting. Groups would be communicating a basic message that outlines its specific political goals. Its cultural frame would stay consistent. Structurally, it would stick to whatever medium it thinks is the best way to gain access to the political arena, in most cases this would be the Internet. Groups would likely use similar communication tactics as political campaigns or resistance movements – sticking to a few single messages and not wavering, clearly outlining avenues for change, and attacking a single

opponent (or government policy, ideology, etc.). Groups would only take advantage of one or two technologies in order to streamline their message. In this scenario, both content and medium would stay consistent among different audiences.

The second theory takes into account different constraints on communication that may be in place and assumes that groups work around these constraints by using different technologies. This theory emphasizes structural competition. Content may vary somewhat but key messages will stay the same. Instead groups change their medium to bypass the constraints in the area they are targeting. If government regulations on media are fairly open and Internet penetration is high, the group will use the Internet. If government regulations are restrictive or Internet penetration is low, the group will rely on other communication technologies such as radio, television news media, or handing out communication materials.

The last theory posits that groups will take advantage of cultural frames to gain political influence. And they would use specific forms of communication technologies to permeate society in a way that the authorities cannot. This exploitation targets the communities they are trying to reach in order to better recruit, radicalize and terrorize very specific groups of people. It is a strategy driven by cultural contexts. If this theory is true, content and medium would both change on a case-by-case basis.

Methodology

To test these hypotheses, I focus on the communications strategy of al-Shabaab, a Salafi-jihadist terrorist group that originated in Somalia. Many groups produce multiple videos, statements, and tweets on a daily basis. I chose to do a thorough analysis of just one group, though my theoretical framework could be applied to multiple. Al-Shabaab recruits and

broadcasts its activities throughout the world. I split its communications into two distinct cases: the first is radicalization and recruitment, the second is theater and propaganda. Messaging that aims to recruit and radicalize is typically directed at very different audiences than the messaging a group uses to display its acts.

Within each case I test the consistency of content and the consistency of delivery method as directed towards different audiences. The first case looks at communications to radicalize and recruit in Somalia, central Kenya, and eastern Kenya. The second looks at theater propaganda directed toward Somalia, and the broader Kenyan audience.

I rely on secondary research, news media, and interviews with experts living in Kenya and Somalia to compare the way al-Shabaab communicates in each of these different contexts. I chose the audiences in the first case because Somalia and Kenya are close in proximity but have very different cultures, government regulations, and levels of internet penetration. Kenya's Muslim populations also differ widely between central Kenya (mostly Somali immigrants living in Kenya) and coastal Kenya (Kenyan Muslims). These are also the two countries where al-Shabaab gains most of its recruits and targets most of its political rhetoric towards. In the second case, I look again at Somalia and the broader Kenya. I examine how al-Shabaab portrays itself to Kenya and a wider global audience versus how it frames its violence at home.

IV. Case Study – Al-Shabaab

Historical Context

The fall of Somalia's dictator, Mohamed Siad Barre, in 1991, created a vacuum of power that has since been shared by a variety of insurgent, clan and terrorist groups. In the early 90s,

the United Nations and the United States established consequential peacekeeping missions to address the conflict. But after the subsequent withdrawal of US and UN troops following the "Black Hawk Down" battle of 1994, the international community turned away from intervening in Somalia. Warlords continued to seek out power and clans struggled for protection. At the same time, radical Islamic groups were becoming more prominent and many al-Qaeda members sought shelter in Somalia.[22]

One of these groups, Al Ittihad Al Islamiya (AIAI), which had pivoted from fighting to overthrow Barre to a focus on liberating the Ogaden region from Ethiopia, birthed a number of early jihadists who had more prominent roles in al-Shabaab later on. AIAI was notable for its delivery of certain social services, such as education and food provision. This trend, which secured support from many Somalis, would eventually become a defining tenet of al-Shabaab.

Then around 2000, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) emerged.[23] The ICU, a name designated by Western media[24], was a coalition of several previously autonomous Islamic court systems. These courts were originally set up to offer law and order in a chaotic society and were not particularly tied to Islamic law. Local clans and sub-clans set up the courts to deliver justice and recruited militias to enforce the courts' rulings. They also provided security to the business class in Mogadishu which was predominantly made up of the powerful Hawiye clan.[25]

The ICU coalesced and seized control of Mogadishu becoming an alternative governance structure to the internationally recognized Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which was, at the time, confined to Baidoa.[26] The areas controlled by the ICU were

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[22] Mary Harper. *Getting Somalia Wrong? Faith, War and Hope in a Shattered State.* African Arguments. London; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

[23] Menkhaus, Ken. "The Crisis in Somalia: Tragedy in Five Acts." *African Affairs* 106, no. 204, 2007: 357-390.

[24] Cedric Barnes and Harun Hassan, "The Rise and Fall of Mogadishu's Islamic Courts," *Journal of East African Studies* 1, no. 2 (July, 2007): 152.

[25] Barnes and Hassan, "The Rise and Fall of Mogadishu's Islamic Courts," 152.

[26] Ibid.

also known for their safety and service-provision.[27] While the coalition's main goals were focused on establishing a united government founded on Sharia law, many sections championed more nationalistic goals and sought to unite various regions within and beyond Somalia's borders.[28]

Early on ICU received support from al-Qaeda who continued to have many ties to the region. Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and other senior al Qaeda leaders published video and audiotapes praising the "Somali Jihad." They even produced propaganda in Somali and Arabic that showed Somalis fighting alongside Arab foot soldiers.[29]

In December 2006, the Ethiopian army invaded Mogadishu, installed the TFG and dispersed the ICU. The amalgamated courts militia that ran the ICUs security operations called itself al-Shabaab or "the youth". It was able to survive the disbanding and used the Ethiopian invasion as a call to arms for more people to join.[30] Although the group touted radical Islam as its predominant goal, this early opposition of foreign troops branded al-Shabaab in a unique way. It was both jihadist and insurgent. This, and understanding the group's origination in the ICU, are both extremely important for framing al-Shabaab in its current context.

Like the ICU, Al-Shabaab drew support from multiple clans. It carried a similar vision of uniting ethnic Somalis under an Islamic caliphate but its tactics were much more radical. Some of its members had reportedly trained under al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Its legitimacy, however, was backed by the support the business class had given the Courts. In December 2007, Ahmed Abdi Godane was named the leader of al-Shabaab. In early 2012, Godane announced a formal

[27] "Islamist Control of Mogadishu Raises Concern of Extremist Future for Somalia." PBS, 8 June 2006.
[28] Jeremy Scahill, "Blowback in Somalia." The Nation, 7 Sept. 2011.
[29] Bill Roggio, "The Rise & Fall of Somalia's Islamic Courts: An Online History," FDD's Long War Journal, January 4, 2007. https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/01 /the_rise_fall_of_som.php
[30] Jacqueline Page, "Jihadi Arena Report: Somalia - Development of Radical Islamism and Current Implications." International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 22 Mar. 2010.

merger with al-Qaeda in a public video. This was after years of support from al-Qaeda leaders and suspected linkages between the two groups.[31] This decision was strategic. At the time, al-Shabaab had suffered significant losses in territory. Infighting among the different leaders was rampant and there was danger of a split. Also, Godane may have sought to establish his legitimacy as leader of the group by publicly siding with al-Qaeda. This would open up channels of funding and resource between the two groups.

After the merger, Godane began warning against forming any sort of coalitions within the larger al-Shabaab group. He slowly consolidated power and purged the group killing off all the potential rivals who threatened his standing as leader. Godane was later killed in a US airstrike in southern Somalia on September 1, 2014. His influence lives on through Ahmad Umar, who was named leader after Godane died and, is arguably, more radical than Godane. Umar is notoriously elusive but his actions have shown that he stays loyal to Godane's ideologies and the group's affiliation with al-Qaeda. [32]

Recently, the Islamic State has tried enticing al-Shabaab to switch allegiances but most experts doubt that this will happen.[33] According to Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, "In the end, most people in Shabab are interested in Somalia. The leadership that is allied with Al-Qaeda clearly sees itself as part of the global jihadi struggle, but that's not what gets them local recruits. It is dealing with local issues and claiming to fight for Somali pride."[34]

Al-Shabaab's history is closely enmeshed in Somalia's broader internal struggles. The current-day Somalia is still in a state of relative chaos. Many vital functions of the state are

[31] Gartenstein-Ross, Daveed. "The Strategic Challenge of Somalia's Al-Shabaab Dimensions of Jihad."
[32] "New Al-Shabab Chief Said to Be Experienced But 'Difficult'" *VOA News*, September 8, 2014. Accessed March 6, 2017. http://www.voanews.com/a/new-al-shabab-chief-ubaidah-said-to-be-experienced-but-difficult/2442960.html.
[33] Laing, Aislinn. "How al-Qaeda and Islamic State are competing for al-Shabaab in Somalia." *The Telegraph*, January 12, 2016. Accessed March 6, 2017. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/12015075/How-al-Qaeda-and-Islamic-State-are-fighting-for-al-Shabaab-affections-in-Somalia.html.
[34] Gaffey, Connor. "Why Al-Shabab Is Not Joining ISIS." *Newsweek*, January 22, 2016. http://www.newsweek.com/al-shabab-not-joining-isis-418656.

provided by NGOs and international organizations and al-Shabaab still controls large swathes of land. The Somalis are the largest ethnic group, making up about 85% of the country. There are other minority ethnic groups such as the Shabeel, the Hamar, and the Bangu. Among the Somalis there are further ethnic divisions between the Samaale, and the Digil and Rahanweyn of southern Somalia. Especially important are the clan-based divisions among the Samaale. Clans are groupings based on genealogical trees dating back many generations. These clans are further classified into sub-clans and even sub-sub-clans and so on. This degree of granularity can be seen even down to the household level.[35] There are many unique ways individuals can connect to or separate from fellow Somalis, these infinite permutations makes politics in Somalia incredibly complex.

There are two schools of thought surrounding the relationships between clan members in Somalia. The first, championed by anthropologist I. M. Lewis, characterizes Somalian society by primordial elements that focus on patrilineal linkages as the main reason for continued clan alliances.[36] Scholars in the other camp take a more modern view to clan relationships. They argue that clans today exist in a more structured political framework and that these networks and alliances are manipulated by political elites for their own purposes.[37]

Cultural trust and local knowledge are two key outcomes of these relationships. This role of lineage identity creates circuits of trust by which people identify one another. This trust is what makes it possible to have a financial system without a state regulator. This unique aspect of Somali society is an asset and a threat to al-Shabaab. The group can use its social ties to evade

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[35] Brian Hesse, "Introduction: The Myth of Somalia," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 28, no. 3 (2010): 249.

[36] Anderson, David M., and Jacob McKnight. "Understanding al-Shabaab: clan, Islam and insurgency in Kenya." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 9, no. 3 (2015): 539.

[37] Ibid., 540.

state control and surveillance, but there is no anonymity, so the group is forced to work with society rather than against it.

This network of clan alliances and built-in systems of trust shine a light on why al-Shabaab campaigns on a nationalistic view of Somalia. Hussein Solomon argues that this is an "Islamist nationalist" movement. He notes that the particular brand of Islam that al-Shabaab adheres to, however, doesn't fit with the Somali practice. He says that, because of this attempt to use Islam as a unifying force, civilian support for al-Shabaab has dramatically declined.[38]

David Anderson and Jacob McKnight, on the other hand, argue that al-Shabaab uses its theology much more strategically than most Salafi-jihadist groups. They point out that the practice of Islam in East Africa, specifically Somalia, is "far from fundamentalist and is best thought of as a veil lightly worn."[39] Many traditional Islamic practices are not followed in Somalia and Somali politics tends to be secular. They find that when al-Shabaab has been in a position to govern, the group imposes a fundamentalist doctrine and adheres loyally to Salafi theologies. But in cases where they have to rally locals against foreign invaders or organize its military using asymmetric warfare tactics (population-centric, guerrilla techniques), the group tends to be more flexible in its use of theology.[40] Based on evidence, this assessment is more plausible. Ken Menkhaus notes that, "Historically, Islam has never succeeded as a sustained political rallying point in Somali society, it has never been able to overcome the more powerful organizing forces of clannism."[41]

Al-Shabaab's commitment to Salafi-jihadism is confined to the top leaders. Though it always had a leaning toward a Salafi-jihadist orientation, the group's leaders varied in their

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[38] Hussein Solomon, "Somalia's Al Shabaab: Clans vs Islamist Nationalism," *South African Journal for International Affairs* 21, no. 3 (2014): 351-366.
[39] Anderson and McKnight. "Understanding al-Shabaab: clan, Islam and insurgency in Kenya," 540.
[40] Ibid., 541.
[41] Ken Menkhaus, 'Political Islam in Somalia', *Middle East Policy* 9, no. 1 (2002): 110.

commitment to Salafism. Godane's views were far more fundamentalist than many of the group's other top figures. [42] Ahmad Umar is known to stay loyal to al-Qaeda, but some have shown a desire to join ISIS while others remain committed to controlling the Somali government. These varying degrees of commitment have led to fractures within the group and muddy the group's true motive: is it global jihad or control over the Somali population? Foreign fighters also add to these mixed aims, creating a situation where al-Shabaab in one part of the country can look vastly different from al-Shabaab in another part.[43] With the increase in foreign troops challenging al-Shabaab's presence, however, the true goal of the group is presumably survival.

Kenya saw a rise in al-Shabaab activity after Kenyan Defense Forces (KDF) crossed into Somalia in 2011. In September 2013, they attacked the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, which killed 68 people and wounded 175 others. Then in April 2015, five al-Shabaab fighters conducted its deadliest attack to date when they stormed the Garissa University in Kenya and killed 150 people.[44]

Al-Shabaab asserted that these attacks were because of the KDF incursion. Anderson and McKnight and many others echo this view.[45] But Solomon emphasizes the idea that al-Shabaab turned to Kenya because its Islamist nationalist project was failing at home and it needed another outside enemy. It hoped Kenya would retaliate to a much greater degree and bring more fighters to its cause.[46] Cannon and Pkalya argue that al-Shabaab targets Kenya because of the "opportunity spaces linked to Kenya's international status and visibility." They list a number of

[42] Bryden, Matt. *The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab: A Strategy of Choice or Necessity?* Report. Center for Strategic & International Studies. February 2014.

[43] Dustin Caniglia. August 18th, 2017. Personal Interview.

[44] "Al-Shabaab." Counter Extremism Project. January 2017. https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/al-shabab.

[45] David Anderson and Jacob McKnight, "Kenya at War: Al-Shabaab and Its Enemies in Eastern Africa," *African Affairs* 114, no. 454 (2015): 1–27.

[46] Solomon, "Somalia's Al Shabaab: Clans vs Islamist Nationalism," 358.

reasons why Kenyan society offers the best avenue for al-Shabaab to publicize its attack, including its independent media, expanding democratic space, and high levels of corruption.[47]

Radicalization and Recruitment

Somalia

Al-Shabaab's goal of survival has put pressure on it to recruit troops in both Somalia and Kenya. It uses communications technology in elaborate ways to entice young men (and sometimes women) to its cause. The telecommunications structure in Somalia is limited but relatively impressive compared to other infrastructures within the country. Private telecom companies offer mobile and internet services in large portions of the country and there are estimated to be over six million mobile phone users (out of a population of 14 million). Mobile technology is also very cheap and efficient. This has stimulated a spread in mobile banking throughout the country.

In many ways, mobile banking is an extension of business culture in Somalia, specifically the practices of *hawala* and *hagbed*. *Hawala* is the practice of sending remittances home through trusted agents. *Hagbed* is an arrangement made between a small group of individuals, usually women, to create a micro-loan system.[48] These connections demonstrate the way technology is enforcing trust within families and clans. The telecom system allows for individuals who are related but geographically distant to remain in touch, making the lineage system financially functional despite the massive diaspora of Somalis over the world. It also allows credentials to be checked and credit offered because no one can stay anonymous in the system.

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[47] Brendon J. Cannon and Dominic Ruto Pkalya, "Why al-Shabaab Attacks Kenya: Questioning the Narrative Paradigm," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2017): 6.
[48] Brian J. Hesse, "Where Somalia Works," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 28, no. 3 (2010): 345.

Brian Hesse stresses the high level at which Somalia thrives in the "virtual realm". He says that even the Somalis living in rural areas are able to connect by contacting relations in town and abroad. He even quotes a Somali poet who commented on Somalia's obsession with the web that translates loosely to, "Mushrooming they are, these Somali websites."[49]

Somalis are drawn to the virtual world. Even with poor infrastructure, ICT is becoming a part of Somalia's identity. It is much more than just access to the internet or owning a mobile phone; these tools have spurred innovations that equate to signs of progress. Mobile banking reinforces trust and the private institutions have taken advantage of low regulation. Most importantly, this rapid revolution in technology is a source of pride in what it means to be Somali. It meshes with clan and lineage systems and acts as a unifying tool in a way that al-Shabaab's ideology couldn't.

In Somalia, radicalization is spurred by a desire to defend a common Somali cause. The Ethiopian intervention was the starting point. Fighters were not motivated by ideology but felt obligated to defend Somalia against foreign invaders. As Menkhaus notes, "Periods of stronger support for Islamic fundamentalism in Somalia have tended to coincide with a threat of foreign invasion."[50]

Al-Shabaab consists of members from disparate clans throughout Somalian society. These members can be easily swayed by differing clan interests and shifting alliances. In addition to this, the National Counterterrorism Center states that most of al-Shabaab's fighters are more interested in the battle against the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) than in waging a global jihad. In al-Shabaab, it is

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Menkhaus, "Political Islam in Somalia".

a fight for power and clan alliances that lure soldiers to the cause. The leaders exploit these factors to recruit foot-soldiers.

Over the last few years, the group has issued a series of bans on communications technology. In 2013, al-Shabaab members in Barawe announced over loudspeakers that watching television was against Islamic principles and therefore banned. The same year, smart phones were banned and in 2014, the group declared a ban on using the internet. The group warned the Muslim population that it could be spied on through the internet and that mobile internet devices had "adverse effects on the moral behavior of the Muslim population in Somalia."[51] These bans seem to contradict the use of media by al-Shabaab itself, which has two main media centers that produce and distribute al-Shabaab propaganda. The first is Radio Andalus which produces a number of radio broadcasts and the second is al-Kataib, an al-Qaeda entity that produces videos for online distribution. It produces content in English, Arabic, Swahili, and Somali. Even though Somalia has undergone a technological revolution, the mode of communication al-Shabaab uses in Somalia is almost entirely radio. Radio Andalus creates output that focuses on local concerns and touts al-Shabaab's ability to provide infrastructure.[52]

These choices, to ban communication technologies and to rely solely on radio to radicalize and recruit in Somalia, look strategic. In all else, al-Shabaab follows Busher and Clapham's theories, it occupies the political space and builds legitimacy by providing infrastructure. Yet it loses in this competition with the state by destroying telecommunications structures and banning devices. And it antagonizes the business community that was originally its principle financial backer. It is even hindering its own ability to use propaganda techniques

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[51] Nel Hodge, "How Somalia's Al-Shabab Militants Hone Their Image," *BBC Monitoring*, June 6, 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27633367.

[52] Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens and Abdihakim Ainte, "The Return of Al-Shabaab," *The Daily Beast*, March 15, 2016, https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-return-of-al-shabaab.

that it has perfected. These actions are a deliberate way to keep technology from being the unifying force Somalia so desperately needs.

Al-Shabaab has engrained itself in a culture that is derived through clan divisions and rural communities. It uses these aspects of society to bolster its own existence by exploiting clan alliances and using the one-way communication of radio as a propaganda machine. Opening up ICT would also allow the *hawala* system to penetrate and challenge al-Shabaab's economic stronghold. Trying to utilize *hawala* would destroy the anonymity of the al-Shabaab leadership. The virtual world, which unifies parts of Somalia, undermines al-Shabaab's influence by strengthening cultural norms and practices. With more access to the Internet, al-Shabaab could not exploit these cultural practices.

In the political contest model, al-Shabaab would no longer have control of the media arena. Structurally, new voices would have access through the Internet or other media, and culturally, al-Shabaab would lose the ability to portray itself within the frame of uniting Somalia under a common cause. This shift is already occurring as Somalis under al-Shabaab's rule gain more ways to communicate both nationally and globally.

This first case explains how it might be possible for al-Shabaab to manipulate cultural aspects for political gain but it doesn't answer the question of whether or not the group changes its strategy to exploit cultures outside of Somalia. To do this I will compare al-Shabaab's radicalization content and the mediums it uses in Kenya to this example in Somalia. The inconsistency of this usage determines the answer.

Nairobi

The Kenyan culture and ICT landscape widely differ from Somalia's. The country is home to over 40 ethnic groups making it one of the most diverse places in Sub-Saharan Africa. Due, in part, to these ethnic divides, Kenyans are much warier of corruption and politics typically falls along ethnic lines. But while these divides are common political fodder, Kenyans are historically concerned with mutual assistance and giving back to the community. This concept is epitomized in the concept of *harambee*, a word that came to represent a national identity movement in the 1960s. *Harambee*, derived from a Swahili word, loosely translates to "Let's pull together." President Jomo Kenyatta used the phrase to motivate Kenyans to come together and donate time and money to development projects across the country. The movement was fairly successful and community *harambees* are often organized today to raise money for weddings, school fees, etc.[53]

The ICT infrastructure in Kenya provides affordable access to mobile phones and the internet. Government regulations in Kenya allow the internet to be relatively free and devoid of much censorship. Kenya's mobile penetration rate is at 87% and it has one of the fastest mobile internet speeds in the world. [54]

In Nairobi, the citizens are tech savvy and have widespread access to the Internet. Due to this connectivity and very open laws governing the internet, Nairobi is often referenced as the "Silicon Savannah". In Nairobi innovation is a common thread of daily life. Anne Salim, a product specialist at iHub, Nairobi's largest innovation hub, said, "Everyone in Nairobi is innovating, whether it's building a new website or having a business on the side, everyone innovates." She cited Nairobi's over twenty tech hubs as one of the drivers behind this

[53] N. W. Sobania, *Culture and Customs of Kenya*. Greenwood Press. Westport, Conneticut, 2003: 165-166.
[54] "Kenya - Freedom on the Net 2017," *Freedom House Report,* 2017, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2017/kenya

blossoming culture of innovation.[55] This innovation is especially interesting when coupled with the group-oriented, *harambee* aspect of Kenyan culture. The two most notable Kenyan technological innovations, M-Pesa and Ushahidi, combine innovation with community assistance. The first is a platform for mobile payments and the second is a crowd-sourcing application for mapping crises.

Knowing these aspects, we can begin to explore how al-Shabaab is recruiting within Nairobi's communication infrastructure and tech culture. Al-Shabaab's use of technology in Somalia is seeking to ban or restrict, but in Kenya we see an entirely different story. Menkhaus observes, "Consequently, the group has a schizophrenic relationship with new communication technologies, simultaneously using them to communicate globally while seeking to ban or restrict them domestically." While he attributes this to a lack of internal organization, I think that this dichotomy is strategic.

In Nairobi, al-Shabaab loves the Internet. Radicalization occurs in the form of websites and YouTube videos. And recruitment often occurs over social media. Al-Shabaab produces websites with propaganda materials that will only be live for short amounts of time. The links and times are sent over email throughout Muslim communities.[56]

YouTube videos are a common radicalization and recruitment tool. Al-Shabaab's primary audience in Nairobi is the Somali immigrant population and a much smaller population of Kenyan Muslims. The majority of its videos are produced in only Arabic. But there are many produced in other languages as well. One in particular is called "Battlefront – El-Wak: Repelling the Kenyan Proxies." This video is only in English and Somali. The video, published in 2012,

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[55] Anne Salim. August 14th, 2017. Personal Interview.

[56] Scott Hinkle, August 11th, 2017. Personal Interview.

shows a battle between al-Shabaab and a Kenyan-backed Somali militia in the southern border town of el-Wak before the full-scale invasion.

The video sticks to a jihadist message, claiming, "Our objective is to bring back Islam to life, we seek to remove the tyrannical and parasitical rulers of the Muslim world and replace them with men of God." But the footage in the video adheres to a couple major themes: Somalis dying fighting against al-Shabaab for the Kenyan government and Kenyan government officials calling for more help in this fight. One caption states "Corpses of Kenyan-trained militia." A spokesman, whose caption reads "Brother Abu Ahmed from Kenya", says "Dear brothers in faith, in and out of Somalia..." The language and content of the video clearly target an audience of Muslim Somalis living in Kenya.

In Nairobi, it is also common to see recruiters try to lure young people over social media. They will build a profile for a beautiful woman and friend young men. They will initiate conversations and build trust, then try to convince the men to come north for a meeting. Dickson Okong'o, co-founder of Stretchers Youth Organization, has seen this first-hand a number of times. Okong'o often meets with groups of teens in youth forums to discuss issues from employment opportunities to reproductive health. He has heard multiple stories of young men and women being reached out to on social media by someone offering a job, a passport or money.

In Nairobi, al-Shabaab plays on the culture of innovation and trust created by *harambee*. It uses social media expertly to gain access to communities. This is very different than the way the group uses ICT in Somalia. Its content, however, remains fairly consistent. It continues to preach an ideologically jihadist message with a few subtle changes to resonate with a Kenyan audience. This fits the second theory of my framework: that the constraints created by access to

ICT and government regulations determine differences in communication. In the case of Somalia, however, these constraints are created by the group itself. Looking at the way al-Shabaab communicates on the Kenyan coast demonstrates a clear inconsistency in both content and medium, and reinforces my theory that communications strategy is an exploitation of culture.

Coastal Kenya

The technology boom is significantly less apparent on the coast. Internet and mobile penetration is not that much lower than in Nairobi but there is very little sense of "innovation culture". The coast also has much higher rates of poverty. Kwale, Kilifi, and Lamu, the three coastal counties outside of Mombasa, have some of the highest poverty rates in the nation.[57]

Ethnic tensions are more heightened than in Nairobi. In the most recent election, the coastal cities tended to vote against the winning president, Uhuru Kenyatta. Kenyatta is Kikuyu, one of the main ethnic groups in Kenya, but Kikuyus are a minority on the coast. In Mombasa, the political systems, both national and local, play on ethnic and tribal loyalties as a basis for support and reward.[58] Mombasa, the second biggest city in Kenya, and the neighboring county, Kwale, are homes to huge Muslim populations.

Scott Hinkle, the Countering Violent Extremism team leader at Wasafiri Consulting Group, calls Kwale County the "ideological heartbeat for Kenya". He says that much of the radical jihadist ideology occurring in Kenya stems from this area. Aboud Rogo Mohammed was a Muslim cleric who preached in Kwale for years. He was killed in 2012, but he was a

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[57] "World Bank Country Fact Sheet." *The World Bank*, 2017. http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kenya/overview
[58] Biniam E. Bedasso, "For richer, for poorer: why ethnicity often trumps economic cleavages in Kenya," *Review of African Political Economy*, 44 no. 151, 2016: 10-29.

charismatic teacher and leader and is seen as martyr for the cause. He was often a conduit for jihadist teachings and many suspected him of channeling recruits to al-Shabaab.

This type of radicalization is much more common on the coast. Hinkle makes clear that, instead of YouTube, propaganda videos are distributed in certain "mother mosques" in Mombasa and Kwale.[59] One of these mosques, in the Majengo area of Mombasa, was raided in 2014. In it police found printed pamphlets and DVDs made by al-Shabaab.[60] These videos tend to stress the importance of fighting oppression. The videos describe the police as oppressors, who will kill Muslims at the first opportunity. They would also include content in their videos about killing Kenyans of specific ethnic groups to deepen political divides.[61]

Yusuf Lule Mwatsefu is the Executive Director of the Mombasa-based NGO, Human Rights Agenda (HURIA). He works on protecting Muslims from state-based initiatives that violate human rights in the name of fighting terrorism. He says that that the initial response to terrorism by the state (extrajudicial executions, forced disappearances, etc.) created a lot of sympathizers. One propaganda video, "Mujahideen Moments 4," is part of a series which was not circulated widely online. It broadcasts fighters relaxing and singing while threatening the Kenyan government. The video is completely Swahili with English subtitles thus targeting a Swahili speaking audience. It focuses heavily on the Westgate attack and getting revenge on the government for killing Muslims.[62]

[59] Scott Hinkle, Personal Interview.
[60] Shirleen Njeri. August 17th, 2017. Personal Interview.
[61] Schilfrin, Nick, and Zach Fannin. "How Al-Shabab is recruiting young men from Kenya." *PBS News Hour*, April 10, 2016. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/how-al-shabaab-is-recruiting-young-men-from-kenya/.
[62] "In a newly released video Al-Shabaab threatens Kenya with more attacks," Harar24News. April 18th, 2014. Accessed April 16th, 2018, http://harar24.com/?p=12838.

The group also tends to highlight financial gain as a way to entice recruits. In a report on al-Shabaab's radicalization and recruitment tactics, former combatants from Kenya were asked why they joined the group. The majority of those interviewed cited economic reasons.[63]

The Internet, which is used so efficiently to radicalize and recruit people in Nairobi, is used far less on the coast. Instead, al-Shabaab falls back on face-to-face radicalization and relies on community networks to spread content. This messaging is both ideological, particularly in Kwale, and preys on societal ills such as ethnicity and economic despair.

Coastal Kenya provides an example of al-Shabaab's communication that is inconsistent in both content and medium. The group does not stick to a jihadist message; it varies its political goals even between the neighboring Kwale and Mombasa County. It could easily use the Internet to spread its propaganda but it prefers to rely on community networks. This difference in medium between Nairobi and the coast was highlighted again and again in each interview I conducted. It solidifies the hypothesis that communication varies in order to exploit cultural differences rather than bypass constraints.

In Somalia, central Kenya, and coastal Kenya al-Shabaab uses vastly different content and mediums to communicate. There is no consistency in its overall message and the mediums it uses to deliver these messages also vary. In radicalization and recruitment, al-Shabaab reveals a communications strategy that changes based on cultural and societal context.

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[63] Botha, Anneli, and Mahdi Abdile. "Radicalisation and al-Shabaab recruitment in Somalia." *Institute for Security Studies*, September 2014. https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/ uploads/Paper266.pdf.

Theater

Somalia

In Somalia, Al-Shabaab doesn't really use communication technologies for the purpose of showing violence. It uses violence to control the local populations but rarely broadcasts that violence within Somalia itself. This is probably because the group is still trying to galvanize, rather than distance, the Somali population. But instead of broadcasting violence, al-Shabaab frequently broadcasts propaganda about its charitable deeds. In early 2017, a growing threat of famine loomed in Somalia's rural southern regions. Al-Shabaab released a number of images to the Somali press showing its members, with AK47s slung over their shoulders, doling out aid to women and children. In one photograph, an al-Shabaab flag is seen behind bags of rice and oil cans.[64]

The purpose of broadcasting these "charitable" deeds is to frame al-Shabaab in a way this is equally benevolent and powerful. Guns still make an appearance to instill a slight sense of fear but fear is not the primary object. These pictures are only for a Somali audience. They have not meaning to those outside and are communicated in an entirely different way than the propaganda shown in Kenya.

Kenya

In Kenya, al-Shabaab relies heavily on the free an open access to information to publicize its violent acts. For example, in 2013, al-Shabaab live tweeted the attack at the Westgate Mall.

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[64] Sunguta West, "Al-Shabaab Plays on Aid Distribution Role to Win Over Desparate Somalis," Terrorism Monitor, 15 no. 7. https://jamestown.org/program/al-shabaab-plays-aid-distribution-role-win-desperate-somalis/

Due to retweets by multiple followers of al-Shabaab's twitter handle at the time, @HSMPress, about 4.5 million tweets appeared on user timelines before Twitter shut down the account.[65]

David Mair analyzed these tweets in a recent study. He categorizes each tweet by audience to determine who al-Shabaab was trying to reach. He identifies six audiences to the tweets: the general Kenyan population, the Kenyan government, the West, the media, terrorist sympathizers, and, emergency responders. But after categorizing the tweets into these audiences, the primary group by far is the general Kenyan population, with 441 out of 556 tweets. The next is the Kenyan government. The tweets are both political and religious in nature. 30% of the tweets constitute what Mair calls "psychological warfare" and only 1% mention anything about recruitment.[66]

This form of theater is vastly different than the kind we see in Somalia. Fear is al-Shabaab's only object. The inconsistency in both content and medium when it comes to this type of propaganda strengthens my hypothesis.

V. Conclusion

Al-Shabaab uses social media to effectively build narratives, but these narratives differ from the ones it spouts on Radio Andalus in Somalia. They also differ from the propaganda and recruitment videos that are distributed among Muslim communities in different parts of Kenya. The group is simultaneously promoting completely separate narratives through multiple different avenues of communication. On the radio, it commits to a narrative of providing for Somali people and fighting for a unified Somalia against foreign invasions. It distributes recruitment videos in Kenya that frame al-Shabaab as a warrior against corruption and an oasis of economic

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[65] START, "Research Brief: Violent Jihadism in Real Time: Al Shabab's Use of Twitter," January 2013.
[66] David Mair, "#Westgate: A Case Study: How al-Shabaab used Twitter during an Ongoing Attack," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40:1, 2016: 24-43.

opportunity. And it is even gaining recognition and support from outside jihadist movements on Twitter under the umbrella of pure Islamist ideologies.

Al-Shabaab caters its communication to the culture and society it is targeting. It uses different mediums and customized content based on societal structures and culture to reach or manipulate different audiences. The biggest challenge to this idea is the fragmented, survivalist nature of al-Shabaab itself. Because its organization's members have no real dedication to a specific religious mandate, it lacks cohesiveness. It has a weak organizational structure and little trust between leaders and soldiers. One might argue that this cultural customization is a strategy far beyond the means of an extremist group that is failing to stay afloat. But I would respond with, this is not the product of a mastermind organization that allow for this customization, it is the nature of terrorism itself.

The use of violence is alienating and the purposefully horrendous acts that terrorists carry out weaken their credibility and appeal. Culture is a useful instrument for alleviating disgust. Exploiting culture then becomes a tool to frame violence in a more appealing way. Additionally, terrorist groups, particularly in Africa, are forced to adapt to their environments if they want to survive. They must grapple with the contradiction of using violence to shock and cause distress while also immersing themselves in the populations they live among. Culture is both a tool and a protector.

What this means for those fighting to eradicate these groups is that using broad generalizations about terrorism in Africa will never be effective. We must be as nuanced as the terrorist groups themselves. And the fundamental "truths" about jihadi terrorism are no longer as applicable. Furthermore, it may mean that if culture is an effective tool for terrorism, it may also be a valuable tool to fight it.

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