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***HEALTH, ISLAM AND ALTERNATIVE CAPITALISM: THREE POSSIBLE KEY FACTORS IN  
DEVELOPING SOMALILAND***

Looking at the different realities composing contemporary Somalia, we can observe multiple political and economic issues concerning whether a nation could exist or not. Considering the world systematic evolution toward a global economy and its constraints, least developed countries are trying to create their separate way, looking for growth and socio-political improvement. This is done using both conventional and unconventional tools mixed with new economic perspectives not rarely rooted and promoted by the Islamic religious community.

The aim of this paper is to give some preliminary observations on the unique capacity of Somalilanders to react to the challenges imposed by the external world, looking at three key-factors. Through this perspective I analyze a concrete sample of enterprise which combines health, Islamic and Western charity support and economic sustainability through wide fundraising and humanitarian assistance. Thus, I have the opportunity to face some of the mechanisms which rule the parallel economic way-out newly adapted and performed by Somali people in extremely harsh contexts. It is fundamental to point out how these complex factors match together responding to specific needs expressed by the local population.

Health policy can be a paradigm to gauge society effectiveness and is definitely among the leading catalysts of funds and resources from private investors and governmental institutions (most of them deriving usually from multilateral donors, United Nations first). The public health sector in Somaliland has endured a sharp rehabilitation phase during the last twenty years with scarce meaningful results. Currently it is living in a condition of chronic dependence from foreign assistance. The services provided could be considered in general of poor quality and not competitive with the recently emerged private sector. Private health care, with its clinics and pharmacies mushrooming, is operating without any kind of central control and monitoring system. There is a third typology which has to be mentioned: it is the private no-profit category which combines public and private financial sources delivering good quality services through an efficient, cheap and sustainable strategy.

The prolonged dictatorship and the following civil war, which is still going on in the Central and Southern regions of Somalia, shredded what remained of the feeble Health Service Network established during the Siyaad Barre era. The reconstruction phase, endorsed by the newly proclaimed Republic of Somaliland since 1995, tried to fill the gap of the provision of basic medical assistance. This has been done with a huge amount of resources supplied by the International Community, delivered in particular through humanitarian agencies. Even though the virtual state suffered the disadvantages connected with its political illegitimate condition, which prevented it from exploiting the possibility to ask for heavy bilateral financial support, humanitarian cooperation, mostly Western, fed up the most urgent necessities of the country facing a hard rehabilitation process.

Moreover during the last years the frameworks of wealth re-production employed by Somalilanders has been keenly shaped by the aforementioned foreign steady intervention. The constant financing process and

import of management settings from abroad had modified the relationship between internal and external actors. Economy has been developed along with an underground network of entrepreneurship which is still keeping on working, sometimes even thriving, apart from the political system which is still not reliable enough to guarantee the private revenues protection and the rights of entrepreneurs. In the absence of an effective governmental apparatus and regular economic institutions monitoring the financial activities through an accountable banking system, *hawilaat* (money transfer agencies), importing remittances from the *diaspora*, are the specific channels featuring this original informal background which looks at the primary function of personal ties and mutual trust as its peculiar attributes.

Another actor influencing this very fragile balance is the Islamic element. Somaliland is an Islamic country ruled by the Islamic Law, Shari'a, in the Sunni Shafi'ite School. It is possible to say that here kinship ties and religion go together warding a syncretic and original social and cultural background. This religious network yielded Somaliland what political traditional praxis and bureaucracy have not been able to guarantee: international legitimacy and accountability. This integration within the international Islamic society gave free access to political and financial support which has been recently translated into humanitarian assistance. Islamic intra- and inter-regional cooperation seems to be a relatively new phenomenon. It was born from the ashes of community-based associations founded during the colonial period and has developed in the 1960s/1970s into modern urban charity and local voluntary development organizations. They began to expand rapidly, finally creating a consolidated web of assistance entailing however a substantial amount of religious and political implications.

The major sources of Islamic charity are *Zakat* (Islamic alms) and *Awqaf* (charitable endowments). These wealth redistribution agents are different from each other: while the first is compulsory, the second is completely voluntary and could assume many faces. This versatility encourages its usefulness in the poverty alleviation dynamics and justifies its strong role as vehicle for national and international charity operations. However there are many problems concerning its transparency which worsened after September 11, 2001. 9/11 date was a watershed in the relationship between Western countries and the Muslim world. Many linkages interconnecting Islamic solidarity institutions have become harshly over-monitored by American investigation authorities for national security, creating a simultaneous association process tiding allegedly Islamic relief organizations with international terrorism promoters.

The case study I'm going through is a no-profit hospital founded and managed by a Somali charity organization receiving funds and donations from a various range of partners. The reflection I would like to make concerns how this hybrid form of assistance highlights local actors' ability to relate with governmental institutions for essential tutelage and on Western secular organizations for fund raising but in the mean time points out unquestionably how they are able to gather resources even through alternative channels: Islamic charities, *diaspora* remittances, with their referral money transfer agencies, and private sponsorship by local firms.

This positive outcome is suggested as the result of Somali distinguishing capacity to run competitive private businesses merging their sustainability strategy with public interconnections and multiplying simultaneously the resources suppliers with a consequent increase in autonomy and efficiency.

The successful compromise bearing the fruits of Somali engagement could be identified in their inexhaustible adaptability to adverse conditions and their ability to avoid, when not deny, the rational rules imposed by external actors and their ostensible insurmountable interests.

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