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# Muslim public schools in post-conflict D.R. Congo:

## New hybrid institutions in a weak state

Ashley E. Leinweber\*

*Since the Democratic Republic (D.R.) of Congo has long been hailed a classic example of state failure, one might imagine that the plethora of public goods being provided by non-state actors in the post-war period is the result of such actors stepping in to fill the void left by a deficient state unable to provide for its own citizens. In reality, however, the situation is much more complex. The Congolese state, following the Belgian model, has a long history of encouraging faith based organizations, and the Catholic Church in particular, to be the primary providers of education. After President Mobutu, the dictator for over three decades, launched a failed attempt in the 1970s to take back control of the education system for the state, he reached a compromise by creating the 'convention' system. This hybrid system allows the state to maintain control of the education system, while religious organizations are responsible for the day-to-day operation of schools. Though Christian groups have been running schools for several decades, the post-war period has seen the development of a new hybrid institution in the form of Islamic public schools. The minority Muslim population of Congo has historically been known for its quiescence and detachment from most public sectors, but empirical evidence from fieldwork reveals that the community has begun collaborating with the Congolese state to provide public education in recent years, and is doing so very effectively. This study argues that this has been possible because of a shift in historic tensions within the Muslim community itself, while this moment in post-conflict Congolese history presents an opportunity as the state is too weak to govern on its own, yet is also increasingly democratic and allows access to previously marginalized groups, such as the Muslim minority. Therefore, the provision of education in post-conflict D.R. Congo is an example of hybrid governance, requiring the cooperation and resources of both the Congolese state and religious organizations.*

## 1 Introduction

A World Bank (2005) report on education in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) at the end of two disastrous wars places the country as among the bottom five countries in the world for the number of children in school. What is striking about the Congo case is that as the state retreated from providing this public good, (education represented only six percent of government expenditure) individual households and voluntary social organizations responded. The report notes that, 'households finance between 80-90 percent of total expenditures in public sector institutions' (World Bank, 2005: xviii). The majority of the management of the education sector in post-conflict DRC is provided by faith based

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organizations whose vocations include not only spiritual tasks but also providing local communities with much needed services that the central state is incapable of providing alone.

In his most recent book, Robert Bates (2008) seeks to understand why some African states failed and remained in a state of failure at the end of the twentieth century. One of the important factors, in Bates' analysis, was the decline in public revenue, partly the result of recession in the global economy, and partly from poor policy choices made by African state elites. With fewer state resources, the salaries of public employees suffered, forcing many to make different choices in order to survive. Some chose to spend little time at their public place of employment and seek revenue in the private sector, while others chose to retain their position but make ends meet by selling 'services to which the citizenry were formally entitled,' (Bates, 2008: 105). Soldiers demanded that citizens contribute for their own security, doctors demanded that they pay for medical advice at public hospitals, and teachers demanded that parents augment their meager government salaries. The result was that the burden for providing goods that had once been public and provided by the state now fell on the shoulders of African citizens. This study seeks to understand how one such African society organized to cope with the demands of public goods in the absence of state leadership.

In this study, the theoretical concept of 'public good' is employed in similar fashion to its usage by other members of the African Power and Politics Program (APPP). In particular, a public good includes 'a large range of outcomes from human activity including both quite concrete things – buses, bridges and lavatories, and health and education services – and relatively more abstract good things: regulations that make buses, bridges and lavatories safe to use; inspections and disciplinary regimes that underpin the quality of health care and teaching' (Booth, 2008: 1). By focusing on the importance of the term 'good', Booth encourages us to look at positive development outcomes, something that would be more difficult to accomplish by referring to education and healthcare simply as 'public services' (ibid.). Therefore, the use of the concept of 'public goods' here differs from the narrow sense in which the term is used in much of the classic economics literature, which restricts the use of the term to goods that are non-excludable (that is, if they are available to anyone they are thus available to all), as well as non-rival (capable of being enjoyed by many consumers at once). Such a definition applies to very few phenomena; clean air is a classic example. From this viewpoint, goods such as education are not considered public goods, but rather as social services. Nevertheless, I follow here the political science convention of scholars such as Posner (2004), Miguel (2004), Habyarimana et al. (2007, 2009), and Baldwin and Huber (2010) who include education as a public good. In this broader sense, public goods refer to goods or services that states are normally expected to provide to all citizens.

The theoretical concept of state weakness bears directly on the literature regarding the provision of public goods. In many developing countries suffering from some form of weakened state capacity, the provision of public goods is especially dependent on non-state actors, such as international organizations, non-governmental organizations, religious institutions, and grassroots movements. In recent years, scholars of African politics in particular have categorized a number of states on the continent as 'failed', 'weak', or 'quasi' states.<sup>1</sup> Though these labels are useful, by focusing our attention exclusively on the

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<sup>1</sup> For discussions of failed states see Young (1994) and Lemarchand (2003). Young discusses four failed African states in the 1990s, of which the Congo is one (2). Lemarchand echoes that the DR Congo was at the top of the failed states list in the 1990s (38). Despite the formal end to the Congo wars, according to the Foreign Policy Failed States Index in 2011 the DRC was still ranked as the fourth most failed state in the world, following closely behind Somalia, Chad and Sudan. For a discussion of weak states and state capability, see Herbst (2000) and Migdal (1988). Herbst defines a weak state as one that is unable to prevent the movement of people, arms, finances, rebel groups, wars, and resources within the territory,

limitations of state capacity, these approaches tend to ignore questions about whether, in fact, other actors are compensating for state weakness in such areas as the provision of public goods. That is, what are the consequences of state weakness for other institutions and forms of social organization? This literature has, for the most part, not explored the efforts of non-state actors to fill the void left by formal states that are either unwilling or unable to perform tasks such as providing security, education, healthcare, and humanitarian relief. Regardless of the various terminology and definitions offered, these distinctions imply that the central state is not sufficiently strong or capable of fulfilling its sovereign duties, one of which is the provision of goods to society.

Several recent scholarly contributions on African state capacity have begun to address the work of development organizations in the context of weak or failed states. Various scholars have suggested that there are functional alternatives to the state such as religious NGOs, agencies of the United Nations focused on peacekeeping or refugees, and groups who profit from disorder such as warlords and mineral extracting entrepreneurs.<sup>2</sup> They have shown how such informal organizations have been responsible for many aspects of governance and the provision of public goods on the African continent.

While there are many kinds of non-state actors involved in the politics of development, of particular interest to this study is the role of faith based organizations (FBOs) in providing public goods such as education and healthcare. This topic is of increasing importance to international politics more broadly, as religious institutions all around the globe are expanding to assume functions previously carried out by sovereign states. Agencies involved in international development, such as the World Bank, the United States Agency of International Development (USAID), and others are promoting the role of religious organizations, particularly in Africa, in arenas such as the fight against HIV/ AIDS, education, environmental issues, the reduction of poverty, and more (e.g. Belshaw et al., 2001; Marshall and Keough, 2004; United States, 2006; Haynes, 2007; Marshall and Van Saanen, 2007). For example, the United Nations World Health Organization has estimated that faith based organizations account for thirty to seventy percent of healthcare in Africa, and as a result UNAIDS has begun to partner with and build capacity of religious organizations to help in their AIDS prevention and treatment campaigns on the continent (PlusNews, 2009). In addition, in a speech called the 'Modern Development Enterprise' in January 2011, the USAID Administrator paid particular attention to the partnership of his organization and faith communities in providing for people around the world, and noted 'in Kenya for example, thirty percent of all healthcare services are provided by Christian hospitals' (Shah, 2011).

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and is unable to protect its citizens from external threats. Migdal defines state capability as the ability to '*penetrate* society, *regulate* social relationships, *extract* resources, and *appropriate* or use resources in determined ways' (4). According to him, strong states do this well but weak states have low capabilities to perform these tasks. For a discussion of 'quasi states', see Jackson (1990), who argues that the process of decolonization brought 'into existence a large number of sovereign governments which are limited in the capacity or desire to provide civil and socioeconomic goods for their populations' (9). He sees many post-colonial states as 'quasi' states because they were granted international sovereignty but 'by definition are deficient and defective as apparatuses of power' (168).

<sup>2</sup> Bornstein (2003) demonstrates how protestant NGOs have provided public goods in Zimbabwe. Jacobson (1964) details how the United Nations Peacekeeping mission in the Congo (ONUC) in the early 1960s carried out many functions that the feeble state could not. Murphy's (2006) description of the UNDP's various programs in the developing world also discusses the organization's role in providing state functions in the Congo in the 1960s. Malkki (1995) describes how international organizations help to provide governance for the state-less peoples, discussing the example of Burundian refugees living in Tanzania. Reno (1998) describes how warlords are performing the task of security, which used to be the monopoly of the sovereign state, and demonstrates his argument in a chapter focusing on the Congo. Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers (2004) detail how rebel movements, armed militias, and mineral-extracting entrepreneurs are vying for power and influence and establish informal governance structures in eastern DRC.

As this topic's importance and relevance in diverse areas of the globe has attracted increased interest, some scholars have begun to focus their attention on the role of religious organizations in providing public goods. Nishimuko (2009) examines the case of Sierra Leone, a country with many similarities to the Congolese case explored here because despite the end of recent civil war, the government does not have sufficient capacity to provide adequate education or rebuild the many schools destroyed during the conflict. Like Congo, faith based organizations have responded to demands in the education sector, the result of which is that 'currently, about 75% of primary schools are owned and managed by FBOs in Sierra Leone' (284). She argues that an important benefit of FBO involvement in development work is that they often have the trust of the local population because they have worked in the area for a long period of time, while a weakness of FBO provision is that associations may make choices restricting who benefits from their work. Nishimuko, like the present study, finds 'that when the government's ability to provide education is not adequate, collaboration between the government, NGOs and FBOs brings about effective outcomes and their involvement in development projects is vital. This is because local NGOs and FBOs can reach the poor and marginalized' (ibid.: 293).

In a discussion of the role religious communities have played in the education sector in Tanzania, Mallya (2010) argues that the FBO-state relationship is a complicated one. On the one hand, the state is weak and unable to provide much needed goods and services to citizens, leading to a potential loss of legitimacy, but on the other hand, it dictates the rules within which FBOs can operate (132). In Tanzania the partnership has been quite productive since the state requested that religious communities and other NGOs increase their activity in the health and education sectors in the late 1980s. As a result, by 1993, statistics from nine regions of Tanzania revealed that NGOs were providing 61% of secondary schools, 87% of preschools, and 43% of hospitals, with recent studies showing that FBO-run schools have the best rate of exam performance (ibid.: 143).

As our discussion thus far has highlighted, religious organizations have played a paramount role in the provision of public goods in Africa. Most studies exploring this phenomenon from the Congolese case have exclusively focused on Christian organizations, as they represent the majority. Jenkins' (1994) examination of the historical role of missionaries and Christian churches in development in Africa demonstrates the unique position of such organizations to fulfill public services today. Originally sent to Africa during colonialism to win religious converts, the churches realized the only way to effectively do so was to assist the development of the whole individual in addition to focusing on their spirituality. In colonial administrations unwilling to provide rural services, the church stepped in to become the main provider of education and healthcare. Jenkins offers the example of churches in the Belgian Congo as holding a monopoly over the education system, by noting 'until 1946, the entire school system was composed of mission schools, with the few government-run schools staffed by missionaries' (Jenkins, 1994: 88). Her work demonstrates the need to recognize the historical experience and established infrastructure of such non-state actors, as well as their proven success in providing for local populations, while at the same time acknowledge the underlying motivation of such FBOs in making converts.

Since the formal end of the conflict in the Congo in the early 2000s, the eastern provinces have remained in a state of insecurity and are, even more than the rest of the country, home to alternative governance structures. In her work on the role of civil society organizations providing social services in North and South Kivu provinces, Seay concludes, 'in a situation of state collapse, civil society organizations step in to substitute for the state's role as the provider (and, in many cases, regulator) of social services. In the eastern D.R. Congo, that

CSO is most likely to be a church,' (Seay, 2009: 202). Her research focuses on the services provided by Catholic, Protestant, and other Christian organizations in the region. Although Seay's findings closely resemble those presented here, there are two key differences. First, this study focuses on the Muslim minority, and second, argues that religious organizations do not simply fill a vacuum left by the failed state, although it often appears to be so upon first glance.

Instead, this study argues that in the Congo there is a hybrid system of governance involving both religious organizations and the state in the provision of education. This echoes the findings of a recent work titled 'Real Governance Beyond the "Failed State": Negotiating Education in the Democratic Republic of the Congo' (Titeca and De Herdt, 2011). They argue that instead of continuing to emphasize what the central Congolese state is unable to do, scholars should instead focus on the ways governance is manifesting itself in reality. Therefore, 'the specific case of the education sector enables a demonstration of how the Congolese state continues to survive and transform itself. As an administrative framework the state has never ceased to exist, and its role in providing public services has been redefined rather than having evaporated' (ibid., 214).

The current, in addition to historic, education system in the D.R. Congo is primarily managed by religious communities, and in fact seventy-five percent of all primary school children attend religious schools (ibid.: 220). But as will be described below, these FBO-led education institutions operate because of and in conjunction with the Congolese state, and are thus hybrid state-FBO governance structures. As will be argued, Muslim associations, not discussed in Titeca and De Herdt's analysis, are not simply replacing the state by providing public goods, such as education, but are in fact working in tandem with the state. Despite their historic marginalization from such realms, it is argued here that Muslim FBOs are involved in the provision of public goods in the Congo at this particular time because they have been able to mobilize for collective action, where they had previously been embroiled in intense internal divisions, and have seized upon the opportunity to do so in this moment of post-war state weakness, intense citizen demand for public goods, and increased political liberalization.

## 2 The Congolese Muslim minority

The Democratic Republic of Congo was chosen in particular as the context of this study because it is an excellent example of a state with extremely weak capacity, as is evident by the continuation of civil unrest (especially in the eastern provinces) and in its ranking as the fourth most failed state in the world (Foreign Policy, 2011). The empirical research focused on an extremely understudied case: the Muslim minority population of the D.R. Congo. Reliable estimates of national religious demographics suggest that Muslims constitute ten million, or ten to fifteen percent, of the total Congolese population, while Catholics comprise fifty percent, Protestants twenty percent and Kimbanguists (a Christian sect, mostly located in the Bas Congo province and Kinshasa, founded by the Congolese prophet Simon Kimbangu) ten percent (U.S. Dept. of State, 2010).

Islam originally came to the Congo in the late nineteenth century (even before the arrival of Europeans) as Swahili-Arab traders penetrated the hinterland from the east African coast. Tippu Tip, the most famous of these traders, has been the subject of the bulk of scholarly work on Islam in the Congo, which emphasizes not the role of religious expansion, but the primary interest of the newcomers in ivory and slave trading (Alpers, 1975; Brode, 1969;

Renault, 1987). Incidentally, Tippu Tip was also involved politically as the governor of Stanley Falls, appointed by Belgian King Leopold II.

The most well known (and virtually the only) work on Islam in the Congo was written by Crawford Young (1966, 1969) in the early years of Congolese independence. Young's work is primarily historical, focusing on describing the arrival and survival of Islam in the present-day areas of Kasongo, Nyangwe, and Kisangani. The author stresses that the Swahili-Arab traders did not have religious conversion as their main goal, but were interested in the vast amount of ivory and slaves that could be obtained in the Congo. In fact, 'Tippu Tip's objectives were always primarily commercial; he assumed political authority in the region because his trading aims could be best served in this way' (Young, 1969: 254). The Belgian colonial force effectively conquered the Swahili-Arabs, and the regime remained hostile toward the local Muslim community when it appeared active. Partly due to their weakness, the community preferred to maintain a low profile so as not to receive reprisals from the administration. Nevertheless, the community began to grow and increase its proselytizing mission in the 1920s as it had more interaction with the outside Muslim world. Qur'anic schools were formed, men were sent to Islamic institutions in other countries to receive education in order to teach upon their return, and the *Qadiriyya* Sufi order made important inroads in the area for Congolese Muslims, who are primarily Sunni.

Muslims were almost entirely excluded from colonial and Christian missionary education, thus eliminating their prospects for acceptance into the civil service. Instead, Muslims were active merchants, continuing their heritage from the Swahili-Arabs. Young finds it intriguing that one of the largest post-independence political parties (the MNC-L) as well as being the primary seat of the nationalist movement occurred precisely in the heart of the Islamic community, yet there were virtually no Muslims involved in these political processes. Adherents of the religion remained marginalized by the Congolese government after independence, while other major religious groups were formally recognized and received subsidies for their schools. Young concluded that, 'Islam, it would seem, remains as quiescent and isolated as it had been during the colonial period' (Young, 1966: 464). Beyond this seminal early work of Young's, however, there is virtually no literature examining the role of the Congolese Muslim community in contemporary national politics. This study has, as one of its primary aims, the motivation to fill this gap in our understanding of the political activity of this minority.

In order to most effectively observe and understand the Congolese Muslim community, research was conducted in four sites within the D.R. Congo. The majority of the fieldwork, and the location of two research sites, was conducted in the eastern province of Maniema, the historical and present-day home to the majority of Congo's Muslim population. Today, the total population of the Maniema province is around 1.8 million (Ngongo et al., 2007: 20). The main site of the fieldwork for this study was Kindu, the ethnically and religiously mixed provincial capital, with a population of about 254,000 (ibid.: 13) of which Muslims constitute approximately twenty-five percent. Kindu was selected as the primary location of field research because as the provincial capital, almost all governmental offices, non-governmental organizations, and faith based organizations operating in the region are headquartered there.

Comparative research was carried out in two secondary locations. The first was Kasongo, the second largest city in the Maniema province, and the historical birthplace of Islam in the country. Kasongo is the capital city of the Kasongo territory, one of the seven territories of the Maniema province. The Muslim community of this southern town constitutes a large majority, most likely between eighty and ninety percent. The second was Kisangani, the third largest city in Congo located in the northeastern Orientale province, which has the most substantial Muslim community outside of Maniema. Swahili-Arab traders who originally brought Islam to

the Congo made their way from Kasongo up the Congo River to settle in the Kisangani area. The primary motives for selecting this research site were twofold. First, Kisangani is home to a minority but substantial Muslim population and can provide a comparative context with which to contrast the activities of the Muslim community of Maniema. Estimates of the Muslim population range from ten to thirty percent, but the most reliable sources place the Islamic community about fifteen percent of the Kisangani population. Second, the University of Kisangani is one of the oldest universities in Congo, and it provided an ideal setting to undertake archival research in libraries that house several theses and doctoral dissertations written by local scholars on topics of interest to this study.

The final location of research was the Congolese capital, Kinshasa. The national Muslim organization, *Communauté Islamique en République Démocratique du Congo* (COMICO), is headquartered there. Interviews with members of the Muslim community who are very active on the national stage proved paramount for a broader understanding of the Congolese Muslim community and their role in development and education. The motivation behind selecting these three additional research sites was to assess the extent to which one can accurately extrapolate from the Kindu case to the broader Congolese context.

While in each of these research sites, fieldwork was conducted using the methods of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and archival and documentary collection. Participation in holidays, celebrations, religious ceremonies, and organizational meetings and activities provided additional nuanced information on the workings of several organizations and faith communities. Observation and interviews were conducted in several schools in Kindu. Public institutions in the Congolese education system include schools managed by the government and institutions run by religious organizations, each of which follows the national curriculum and in theory has teachers and administrator salaries paid for by the state. Observation took place in at least one school from each of the six categories present in the Maniema province (also representative of the country as a whole): private school, Islamic public school, Protestant public school, Catholic public school, Kimbanguist public school, and public state school. Two hundred elite and non-elite interviews (in either French or Swahili) were conducted with government officials, religious authorities, leaders and members of faith based organizations, civil society associations, and international organizations. During archival research at the University of Kisangani libraries numerous useful documents were found, including two historical texts about the Muslim community of Kisangani, six undergraduate and one doctoral thesis from the Department of Sociology, and three undergraduate theses from the Department of Political and Administrative Sciences.

The early post-colonial period witnessed modest scholarly interest on the topic of Islam in the Congo, but since then these communities have received very little attention. The lack of current scholarship on the topic belies the continuity of a vibrant and organized Muslim community, especially in Maniema. There has been very little information available about these organizations and the broader Muslim community in the region for several reasons. The Maniema region where the majority of Congolese Muslims reside is extremely poverty-stricken and remote, making travel difficult. Roads are in disrepair and expensive risk-prone airplanes remain the primary transportation outlet. Additionally, insecurity has been a major factor, as the region borders the volatile North and South Kivu provinces, the primary location of civil war violence since the mid-1990s. In research prior to fieldwork in Maniema, the only available news about the contemporary Islamic community came from the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Congo. Known as MONUC at the time, the mission that was charged with securing the demobilization of armed groups and overseeing the post-conflict transition to democracy has a field office in Kindu. They released a news article (Bakody, 2004) discussing a three day conference held in the provincial capital by a local group, known

as *Collectif des Associations des Femmes Musulmanes Pour le Développement du Maniema* (Collective of Muslim Women for the Development of Maniema) or CFMUDEMA, encouraging Muslim women to become active in development in the region. Beyond brief reports such as this, however, this study is not aware of any literature analyzing the current development activities of the Muslim community in the Congo.

Though very little information exists about the post-war social organization of the remote Maniema province, in reality there are a plethora of local, regional, national, and international organizations performing development functions on the ground. In numerous interviews with civil society and religious associations, leaders and members expressed their dismay at the lack of assistance they receive from their national, provincial, and local governments which prompted the need for citizens to work together to meet their own needs.<sup>3</sup> Some suggested that their organizations are stepping up to do the government's work.<sup>4</sup> Many secular organizations have been created since the end of fighting in Maniema, around 2002, to encourage children to go to school, to take care of war orphans, to assist those handicapped by the war, to rehabilitate ex-combatants, and to assist women victims of sexual violence.

Religious associations of Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims are also actively involved in these service-oriented and war reconstruction projects. Despite their history of quiescence and marginalization, in post-war Congo there is a vibrant and active Muslim minority community. The principal organization for Congolese Muslims is COMICO, *Communauté Islamique en République Démocratique du Congo*, which was founded in 1972 at the insistence of President Mobutu who followed the corporatist politics of the time by organizing all sectors of society into one sole association. But in recent years there have been national women's organizations that have been created in conjunction with COMICO, including CONAFEM, *Comité Nationale Feminine de COMICO*, and its affiliate at the provincial level COPROFEM. There are other national women's organizations with representatives at the provincial level such as UPMC, *Union des Femmes Musulmanes du Congo*, which in Kisangani created the Therapeutic Nutritional Center during the conflict period, and *Fondation Zam-Zam*, which in Kindu runs a private Islamic primary school and literacy class for uneducated Muslim women.

Other important Muslim organizations active today include *Collectif des Femmes Musulmanes pour le Développement du Maniema* (CFMUDEMA), the Collective of Muslim Women for the Development of Maniema that comprises eighteen Muslim women's associations active in development in the region; *Ami Santé*, an association in Kindu working to provide healthcare for Muslims and the broader Maniema society; *Bureau Islamique des Droits Humaines* (BIDH), an Islamic human rights organization which has a provincial office in Kindu and an affiliate in Kasongo; over one hundred Muslim women's organizations active in southern Maniema which are mostly focused around community agriculture projects; the *Dawa'tu Islamiyya* organization of women from Mosque 18 in Kasongo; *Jumiatu Islamiyya* women's association of Mosque 17 in Kasongo; *Association de Développement Communautaire pour les Mamas Musulmanes*, the Muslim women's organization from the Central Mosque in Kasongo; and *Conseil National des Droits de l'homme en Islam* (CONADHI), the National Council of Human Rights in Islam. In Kisangani one finds several more active Islamic associations primarily comprising women such as *Mamas Musulmanes de Communauté Islamique*, *Union des Mamas Musulmanes pour le Développement et Droits Humains* (UMDDH), *Centre Sociale pour le Développement Communautaire* (CSPDC), *Mapendo*, *Maendeleo*, and *Dawati*.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, an interview a development officer for the Catholic organization Caritas, Kindu 7/2/2008.

<sup>4</sup> Interviews with development employee of the Catholic association *Bureau Diocésane pour le Développement* (BDD), Kasongo 7/7/2008; and the Protestant Bishop of Maniema province, Kindu 3/25/2009.

The national, provincial, and local Muslim associations mentioned thus far focus on a wide variety of tasks, whether spiritual or providing important services for their community that the national state has failed to provide. However, the realm in which Islamic organizations have had the most visibility in the post-conflict era has been education.

### 3 Religion and education: the new Muslim school in Congo

The Religious Education research stream of the APPP explores education reforms carried out in recent years in the predominately Muslim Sahelian countries of Senegal, Mali, and Niger. In contrast, this study relies on research conducted in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a case where Islam is a minority religion, the central state is extremely weak owing to its recent emergence from prolonged civil war and democratic transition period, and the colonial legacy is that of a former Belgian colony located in the heart of central Africa, as opposed to the French colonial experience of the West African nations. Muslim schools in D.R. Congo are vastly different from their counterparts in West Africa.

The focus of the Religious Education stream is on the negotiated relations between the majority Muslim society, which has created informal school institutions of its own, and the democratizing state attempting to modify the education system passed down to it from the colonial era so that it more accurately reflects the culture of African citizens today and incorporates the alternative Muslim schools. Thus, research for the stream has demonstrated how the recently created Franco-Arabic schools are a new kind of institution rivaling state institutions. However, in the Congo new Islamic schools are not rivaling the state or other religious institutions, but helping to provide a much needed public good that otherwise would reach many fewer Congolese children. In contrast to the West African developments, the Islamic minority in Congo is choosing to follow national norms and standards in their process of mobilization. They are engaging in the political system as it currently exists, as opposed to creating new or different institutions. The organizational structure of Muslim associations in Congo is identical to those of other religious or secular institutions. The Islamic 'convention' schools are the same as those run by Catholics, Protestants, Kimbanguists, and the state, with the exception of the content discussed during religion class. By working with the existing model, the Congolese Muslim community provides a direct contrast to Islamic associations in other African contexts who create alternative institutions to those currently in existence.

Public institutions in the Congolese education system include schools managed by the government (*écoles non-conventionnées* or *écoles publiques*) and institutions run by religious organizations (*écoles conventionnées*), each of which receive government subsidies. Historically, Christian organizations and particularly the Catholic Church organized education in the Congo during the colonial period. After independence, President Mobutu Sese Seko, the Zairian dictator, wanted to take control of the education sector for the state. Thus, in 1974 he nationalized all schools, most of which were run by religious organizations. However, after a few years of this failing experiment, parents requested that the churches be allowed to take back control of schools because there was a big decrease in quality and discipline. About three years later, Mobutu agreed to give some control back to religious organizations, but under the condition that each signs a 'convention', or formal agreement, with the state.

Religious public schools, or 'convention' schools, are those that were created through agreements signed between the Congolese state and representatives of the four main religions, Catholic, Protestant, Kimbanguist, and Islamic. The latter was signed in 1979 between Mobutu's government and COMICO, representing the Muslim community. In these

conventions, the state has agreed to pay teacher and administrator salaries, set the national curriculum, and monitor the schools through its inspection bureaucracy. The religious organizations in turn have agreed to control the day-to-day operation of their institutions and are granted permission to teach a religion course. This hybrid system of institutions that are simultaneously public and religious-run remains in place today, so that children are educated in the same fashion across the country.

The convention also stipulates that the state will pay teachers and administrators, and it for the most part does so, although usually several months in arrears. However, the amount that each state agent receives (in 2008 a fixed rate of 30,000 FC which is the equivalent of \$40 or \$60 depending on fluctuation in the exchange rate of the dollar) is insufficient. In the early 1990s, because of the low rate of pay and frequent failure to obtain their salaries, teachers began to strike, but to no avail. Around 1993, the Catholic Church was the first to demand a stop to the cycle of children not being educated and created 'conventions' of their own with the parents of their students, in which the parents agreed to pay a monthly fee to support teachers and encourage them to return to work. All other schools quickly followed this trend, which remains in existence even today.

For the 2008-2009 academic year, each primary school has an agreement with the parents of its students about the amount parents will contribute to teacher salaries, and in Kindu it is a fairly universal price of 1,000 FC (\$2 or less) per child per month. However, this system not only operates in the religiously affiliated institutions, but also has extended to the official state public schools. In fact, the World Bank found that that the parental contributions to public education finance about ninety percent of the operating costs of the education system in the Congo (Titeca and De Herdt, 2011: 223). Teachers and state education bureaucrats lament that unfortunately the central state seems to have no plan to increase teacher salaries and rectify this burden on parents. Thus, the Congolese state appears quite content to allow this system of hybrid education to continue, in which the majority of responsibility for the sector falls to religious organizations with parental assistance.

The provision of education by Muslim organizations has been a very recent phenomenon. Before the official end of the war in late 2002, there were very few schools sponsored by the Islamic community. The increasing involvement of the Muslim community in the provision of education was not only repeatedly confirmed by in-depth interviews with members of the Muslim community as well as other citizens, but it was further bolstered by statistical evidence.

In the Maniema province the number of Islamic primary schools more than doubled, from twenty-nine to seventy-six when comparing the school years 2003-04 to 2008-09. The same trend can be seen with secondary schools, where the number has increased from nineteen to forty-two.<sup>5</sup> In addition, this trend is not limited to the Maniema province but reflects a national phenomenon. In the Orientale province, where the percentage of Muslims is not very large, the new coordinator for Islamic schools since 2007 stated that when he began his job there were only ten Muslim schools in the province, but only two years later in the 2008-2009 academic year this number had expanded to over fifty.<sup>6</sup> And the national Muslim public school coordinator in Kinshasa provided the following statistics: for the academic year 2005-2006, there were three hundred sixty-eight primary and one hundred forty-two secondary

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<sup>5</sup> 2003-04 statistics from RDC Ministère du Plan, 'Monographie de la Province du Maniema' (33). 2008-09 statistics gathered from Maniema Provincial Division of *Enseignement Primaire, Secondaire, et Professionnelle* (EPSP), the Primary, Secondary, and Professional Teaching office in Kindu, February 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Coordinator for Islamic public schools in the Orientale province, Kisangani 5/25/2009.

Islamic schools throughout the D.R. Congo. Only three years later during the 2008-2009 academic year, the Congolese Muslim community was running over eight hundred schools in the country, about five hundred primary and three hundred secondary institutions.<sup>7</sup>

It is also important to note that these Muslim schools are not *madrasas*, but public institutions. Though the Muslim community is a minority population within Congo, the new schools being created are not catering only to Muslim students, and therefore provide a service able to be accessed by any Congolese child, regardless of religious affiliation. In fact, there are many teachers, directors, and other administrators involved in the operation of these Islamic schools who are not Muslim. The Coordinator for Islamic public schools in Maniema stated that perhaps fifty percent of children in their schools are Muslim, and many teachers are also non-Muslim.<sup>8</sup> However, the convention signed with the state allows all religious institutions to teach a religion course in their public schools. For example, at *E.P. Jihudi* (E.P. stands for *école primaire* or primary school) a Muslim public primary school in Kindu, and other schools visited, this translated into two thirty-minute religion lessons per week to be taught by the class's regular teacher.

If the teacher is not a Muslim, the school director or religious authorities provide instructors with materials about relevant topics to present each week. As a result, the religious training primary school students receive is not very rigorous and most parents send their children to Qur'anic schools in the evenings and on weekends to expand their Islamic education. Apart from the content taught during religion courses, Islamic public schools presented no discernable difference from public schools run by the other main religions or the state itself. In public schools operated by the state alone, students spend the same amount of class time each week studying morality instead of religion.

These new Muslim public schools are providing Muslims and children from other religious backgrounds with good quality education. In 2009, the Coordinator for Islamic schools in Maniema boasted that for the proceeding two academic years, Muslim schools had the highest ranking of all schools for the number of students passing national exams at the end of the year.<sup>9</sup> In the past Catholic public schools, which have a long institutional history as they were the main schools functioning during the colonial era, were distinguished as the best schools. Shockingly, they came in third place for the 2007-08 academic year in Maniema, falling below the recently created Muslim institutions.

A similar story is told in other parts of the country. Muslim schools in the Orientale province have also demonstrated good performance. In the city of Kisangani, they were in second place with ninety-five percent of students passing national exams in academic year 2006-07.<sup>10</sup> In the previous year, Muslim schools in the entire Orientale province were number one for the percentage of students who graduated, with an exceptional ninety-six percent who passed their exams. In addition, the state inspection office conducted a study for the years between 2000 and 2008 and found that *Institut Hodari*, the oldest Muslim public school in Kisangani founded in 1990, was the best secondary school in the provincial capital, based on the number of students who successfully completed their state exams over the eight year time period. These results further suggest that the Muslim public schools, which are fairly young, are very competitive in terms of the quality of education they provide Congolese children.

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with National Coordinator of Islamic public schools, Kinshasa 6/18/2009.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Coordinator for Islamic public schools in Maniema province, Kindu 3/23/2009.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Coordinator for Islamic public schools in Maniema province, Kindu 3/23/2009. This was also confirmed by the state education bureaucracy.

<sup>10</sup> Statistics from documentation gathered at the State Provincial Education Inspection Office, Kisangani 6/12/2009.

## 4 Internal barriers to Islamic associational involvement in education

The proliferation of involvement in the provision of education on the part of the Muslim community in post-conflict Congo presents a fascinating shift from its historical marginalization. This raises the questions of why this has occurred at this particular time and what factors help explain such involvement. This study suggests that two key factors help explain this phenomenon: one internal to the Muslim community, and the other external. This section examines the former, arguing that internal division within the Islamic minority community of the Democratic Republic of Congo hindered the community from creating associations that effectively contributed to development, and education in particular, and explores how and why it has been possible to begin to overcome these collective action problems.

The history of this minority community, as detailed previously, from its origins in the pre-colonial era to Belgian domination, can be characterized as one of repression and marginalization. Further compounding the struggles of Congo's Muslim minority have been intense internal conflicts within the community in the post-independence period. Numerous interviewees pointed to how internal conflicts have had a devastating impact on their ability to collectively organize and participate in development projects for several decades. Simply put by one informant, 'division kills the community at all levels'.<sup>11</sup> And evidence suggests that the conflicts within the Muslim minority are present at local, provincial, and national levels.

The internal division within the Muslim community of Congo is reflective of much broader trends in the Muslim world. Scholarship on Islam in sub-Saharan Africa has focused on a primary cleavage within Muslim communities as between Sufis and Reformers. However, this classic distinction is too simple; and as the contributors to *African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounters between Sufis and Islamists* show, the internal dynamics of most Muslim groups in sub-Saharan Africa are much more complex (Westerlund and Rosander 1997). As such, today most scholars recognize 'the limitations of the Sufi-Islamist dichotomy and the need to nuance our analyses' (Villalón, 2007: 163). Numerous scholarly accounts exist that demonstrate these nuances through an examination of the empirical data of internal Sufi/Reformist conflicts from specific locations in Africa.<sup>12</sup> Not surprisingly, when examining the internal dynamics within the Congolese Muslim community, the Sufi/Reformist tensions are apparent, yet also become more nuanced by local variations.

The internal disputes within the Muslim community in the Maniema province of eastern Congo largely conform to the Sufi/Reformist dichotomy. However, local manifestations of this vary, as divergent communities sometimes express their conflicts as stemming from ethnic, leadership, origin, or generational differences. But in Maniema the Muslim community's internal conflict exists primarily between two conflicting groups, known locally as 'Tariqa' and 'Tawahidi'. The term *tariqa* means path and is clearly Sufi, while *tawahid* refers to the unity or oneness of God that is a constant theme of Reformists. In the Congo, members of the Tariqa often represent the descendants of the Swahili-Arabs, also known as *Arabisés* and non-autochtones. The Tawahidi is comprised of those who insist they are following the correct path of the Prophet Mohammed, and resemble Reformers/ Islamists. In the classic critique of

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Coordinator of Islamic public schools for Orientale province, Kisangani 5/25/2009.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Lowenkopf (1969) on Uganda; Loimeier (1997) on Nigeria; Weiss (2002) on Ghana; Loimeier (2007) on Tanzania; Soares and Otayek's (2007) edited volume on *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa*; Østebø (2009) on Ethiopia; and Bonate (2009) on Mozambique.

Sufism, the Tawahidi group accuses the Tariqa of *bid'a*, innovation, for the Sufi rituals they follow.

One of the main sources of contention between the two groups has been debate over burial rituals. The Tawahidi say that during the Prophet's time only men accompanied the body and did so in complete silence. The Tariqa allow women to join the procession and for the community to sing. The Tawahidi say that to speak or sing while walking with the dead person is *bid'a*, but the Tariqa counter this by arguing that a *Hadith* (the stories of the Prophet's life) revealed that Mohammed went to three funerals in one day, at one of which they sang the Qur'an and the Prophet said that it was okay. Another source of contention between the two groups in Maniema is the celebration of the birth of the Prophet, the *Mawliidi*. The Tawahidi say this is unacceptable, but it has remained very popular among the Tariqa.

A third point of conflict between the groups is debate over the language used for Friday prayer. The Tawahidi want the service to be a back and forth immediate translation from Arabic into Swahili, reflecting a broader Islamist desire for local language so that individuals can have deeper religious understanding. The Tariqa, on the other hand, prefer the service to be in uninterrupted Arabic, followed by the prayer, and then translated into Swahili. This reflects Sufi/ traditionalist advocacy for the use of Arabic so that people rely on the local leadership as intermediaries.

According to an informant who is a prominent member of the Maniema Muslim community, the conflict between the two groups has been going on for a long time, even before the creation of the national Muslim association in 1972.<sup>13</sup> He noted that at some moments the conflict became so intense in Kasongo and Kindu that members of the different groups did not pray in one another's mosques and almost all dialogue between the groups ceased. In his perspective however, relations are improving and people are free to worship anywhere. There are indeed significant suggestions that the long-entrenched conflict among Maniema Muslims is evolving, and that they are moving toward increased collective action as a group.

The broader phenomenon of internal conflict within the Congolese Muslim community is not only applicable to the Maniema province, but is also present in Kisangani, and the Oriental province more broadly. Kisangani contains the second largest Muslim community in Congo outside of Maniema, at approximately fifteen percent of the city's population. As in Maniema, the concern with Muslim disunity is strongly felt in the community. In an enlightening interview with a Sheikh who is the leader of Friday prayer at the central mosque and also a professor of sociology at the University of Kisangani, he expressed his views that the biggest problem facing his community and the reason they are behind the other religious communities in terms of growth and development is due to internal conflicts.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, the conflicts within the Islamic community of Kisangani are expressed by local Muslims as primarily a generational dispute. While the dispute in Kisangani is not labeled as one between the Tariqa and the Tawahidi as in Maniema, the Sheikh pointed out that the conflict in both is quite similar. At the heart of both is tension between those who want to remain the same and others who want change and development. Thus, in his view, another way to classify the divisions within the Muslim community of Kisangani would be as between development advocates and those who prefer the status quo. The manner in which he represents this distinction clearly demonstrates Sufi/ Reformist tensions present in the Kisangani region.

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with president of *Bureau Islamique des Droits Humains* (BIDH), Kindu 5/11/2009.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with sheikh who is a professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Kisangani, 6/9/2009.

According to the Sheikh, there are two distinct groups, and they correspond to the two large mosques, the central mosque and CINY, *Centre Islamique Nuuru el Yaqiini*. Before 2001, there was only one main mosque in town, the central mosque, which was under the management of the older generation. In the 1990s, the younger generation started to demand changes and insist on their community becoming more involved in development. Instead of yielding their leadership positions to members of the younger generation or working out a power-sharing deal, the older generation began construction of a new mosque, called CINY, which was completed around 2003. There was an effort at cooperation after the two groups returned from the national association General Assembly of 2004, where they had been reprimanded by others for their hostility toward one another and encouraged to work together to solve their dilemmas. They formed a new committee in which the top two positions were held by the older generation but the youth camp was granted some important roles, such as the third most important position.

However, the divisions between the two groups remained and could be seen most clearly in joint meetings where opinions were divided along the two camps. They continued to try to work together for a time, until a new dispute broke out over the construction of new mosques. The older generation refused to compromise, so the youth camp quit the committee and the two groups ended attempts at reconciliation. However, as will be discussed later, the 2009 national General Assembly elections brought about change in the form of the youth camp gaining positions of leadership. One might fear this power reversal would result in the continuation of tension between the two groups. However, the Sheikh noted that the youth also included the older generation in several positions as well. Thus, he believes that this change seems to have brought about a real reconciliation between the two camps in Kisangani and Muslims now feel free to pray in any mosque. This discourse by the Sheikh resembles efforts by Maniema Muslims to emphasize the increasing unity of their minority community.

Not surprisingly, these conflicts on the local and provincial level also reflect the larger internal conflicts present at the national level within the COMICO organization. Founded in 1972 at the request of President Mobutu, the *Communauté Islamique en République Démocratique du Congo* is the principal organization of Congolese Muslims, headquartered in Kinshasa with subunits at the provincial and local levels. COMICO has been plagued by internal conflict since its inception, as divergent groups sought dominance in the new unitary organization. These disputes produced a long period of stalemate from 1988 until 2004, when there were two conflicting groups of Muslims at the national level, each headed by a prominent personality claiming to be the true head of COMICO. The opposing leaders were Sheikh Gamal Lumumba, who studied Islamic theology in Saudi Arabia, and a prominent businessman, Al Hadji Mudilo.

The bleak portrait of the Muslim minority of Congo presented thus far in their history of marginalization and deep internal division at local, regional, and even national levels is in fact not reflective of the community today. In the post-war period, the community enjoys much closer relations with the government, as evident in the hybrid relationships involved with the expanding Islamic public school network, and has witnessed much reconciliation from crippling internal conflicts. This change began at the COMICO General Assembly in February 2004, where members from all over the country elected a new leader Sheikh Abdallah Mangala who was recognized by all, bringing an end to almost two decades of leadership stalemate. The new leader is also someone who has encouraged the role of the Muslim community in development and is both trained in Islamic theology, as well as educated in modern sciences and speaks fluent French. Congolese Muslims have most likely been able to unite around his leadership because he possesses both of the traits they value the most,

unlike his predecessors who excelled in only one area. The most recent COMICO General Assembly, which is held every five years, was in February 2009. There the incumbent leader Sheikh Mangala was re-elected to a second five-year term.

In addition to the importance of having one leader for the community, as opposed to the previous period of division, it is crucial to recognize that Sheikh Mangala is a Reformist. The election of a Reformist to the chief position beginning in 2004 also ushered in a new Reformist leadership at the provincial and local levels. As discussed previously, the two competing groups of Muslims of Kisangani were in a stale mate since the 1990s. However, this was to change as a result of the elections of the national general assembly in 2009. According to an informant, only two representatives of the older generation of Kisangani attended the national meeting, as contrasted with five from the younger group.<sup>15</sup> In fact, he stated, this was representative of the delegations arriving from all over the country. Of the two hundred eighty members present for the assembly, two hundred twenty of them were members of the youth/ reformist camp. He related that the reason for this was that funding for plane tickets and travel to the capital usually comes from Arab countries, but that it did not arrive that year because the Arabs were tired of the internal fighting within the Congolese Muslim community. The older generation reportedly continued to wait for funding to arrive, while the youth camp mobilized personal resources to make the trip. As a result, they were a clear majority and used their votes to elect young development-oriented leaders to positions within the COMICO organization all over the country.

There is much hope that because of the new leadership of the Reformist elements of the Muslim community, a development agenda will emerge. Overall the Muslim community is much more able to unite for collective action as a result of the decisive victory of a new leadership at national and provincial levels. Members of Muslim civil society and development associations in Kisangani said that they have noticed a big change since the last General Assembly because the newly elected Muslim intellectuals are encouraging the community's involvement in development.<sup>16</sup> The proliferation of Muslim associations and public schools, this study argues, would not have been possible without the collective action made possible through the clear victory of a Reformist leadership at local and national levels. However, regardless of the internal state of the Muslim minority, effective collective action would not have been possible without a sympathetic external political environment.

## 5 External opportunity facilitating Muslim mobilization

The recent strides of the Muslim minority of the Democratic Republic of Congo in the realm of public good provision, and education in particular, represent a significant shift from the marginalized and internally divided community described thus far. In addition to the overcoming of the collective action problem posed by a history of internal divisions within the Muslim minority itself, this study argues that the other factor affecting Muslim mobilization is the opportunity to do so at this historic moment in Congolese history. In particular, the post-war period in Congo provided the opportunity for the Muslim minority to engage in development activities because of the confluence of a number of factors: the end of historic marginalization, increased freedom and liberalization, the weakness of the Congolese state, and the extension of the hybrid school system.

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with sheikh who is a professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Kisangani, 6/9/2009.

<sup>16</sup> Meeting with leaders of Muslim civil society and development associations, Kisangani 6/12/2009.

An important resource that is now available to the Muslim community is an educated leadership. Historically the Arabs, Belgians, and Catholics excluded the Muslim community from education. For example, during the colonial era Muslim children were harassed, forced to convert, or expelled from Catholic school. Harassment included being forced to eat pork and to drink water during the fasting month of Ramadan. As a result, the majority of Muslims dropped out of school and reverted to trade for their livelihoods, were unable to speak French, and thus not involved with state institutions. As these repressive regimes came to an end, there was the possibility of freedom for Muslim children to attend school. A new cadre of intellectual Muslims has slowly replaced generations that were unable to get a good education, and subsequently find formal employment. The former are now in leadership positions in Islamic organizations and are using their skills to better organize the community and get involved in arenas previously ignored, such as education.

Through the creation of a substantial system of Muslim public schools, the minority community hopes to ensure the capacity of their youth to take on important posts in the future. They have recognized that because of their lack of education, Muslims have been excluded from important domains. In particular, members of the Islamic community lament the lack of Muslim representation in the political arena.<sup>17</sup> By providing Muslim children with a good education that follows the national curriculum, teaches in the official French language, and provides religion classes on how to be good Muslims, the Islamic community is hoping to improve their social, political, and economic position in the future.

By creating Islamic public schools, the Muslim minority of Congo is also creating employment opportunities for teachers and educational authorities, the majority of whom are members of their community. In the post-conflict society of Congo, finding gainful employment is extremely difficult. In fact, a 2007 study revealed that only four percent of potential workers in D.R. Congo held salaried positions (Lukoki, 2007: 5). The largest economic sectors are NGOs and the state bureaucracy, including the education system. One third of public positions in the DRC are in the education sector (De Herdt et al., 2010: 29). It is not surprising then that from 2001-2007 the number of officially recognized schools increased by sixty-five percent, while the number of newly enlisted teachers rose by sixty-one percent (ibid.). Therefore there is a direct incentive for all Congolese religious communities, and not just Muslims groups, to create new schools and seek government accreditation and funding. Thus, the rapid increase in the number of Muslim schools has ensured a large number of salaried positions. Although there is clearly an economic incentive for Muslim mobilization in the education sector, obtaining salaries for members of the community is just one of the many benefits for their involvement in providing education.

Another important benefit of Islamic education is expanding the faith. Several informants expressed their desire to propagate Islam through the teaching of religion courses in school.<sup>18</sup> Although very few non-Muslim children have converted because of their education in Islamic public schools, this goal is primarily geared toward ensuring that Muslim children retain their faith.<sup>19</sup> In religion courses at Islamic public schools, the community hopes to instill Muslim values in their children and prevent them from leaving the faith, a phenomenon that was prevalent during the colonial era if Muslim children attended Catholic schools.<sup>20</sup> Therefore the

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with members of the Muslim youth of Maniema, Kindu 6/18/2008. Interview with the Muslim community at Mosque 18, Kasongo 7/5/2008. Interview with head Imam for Islamic community in the Kindu region, 3/27/2009. Interview with members of Muslim women's development organizations, Kisangani 6/5/2009.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with head Imam for COMICO in Kindu region, Kindu 3/27/2009. Interview with former Coordinator of Islamic public schools in Maniema province, Kindu 5/14/2009.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with head Imam for COMICO in Kindu region, Kindu 3/27/2009.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Provincial Coordinator for Islamic public schools in Maniema, Kindu 3/23/2009.

post-conflict period has presented a unique opportunity for Congolese Muslims as new leaders emerged and the community built an effective educational infrastructure in an effort to enhance its spiritual, financial, and political potential.

In addition to the end of historic marginalization and increased liberalization, the post-conflict setting provided an opportunity for minority mobilization within the context of a weak state. The weakened, post-conflict Congolese state is not capable of fulfilling all of the needs of its citizens, thus relying on non-state actors, such as religious groups and local and international organizations, to fulfill some governing tasks, especially the provision of public goods. One factor complicating state provision of services is that much infrastructure, such as school buildings, was destroyed during the years of civil strife. In addition, there was a mass influx of people moving from the rural regions of the Maniema province to the capital Kindu because of insecurity caused by roaming militias during the conflict years. Thus, the number of children in towns needing an education is much larger than prior to the war, requiring new schools to be built and managed. In fact, statistics demonstrate that 'between 2002 and 2007 the number of children attending school increased by 11 percent per year' (Titeca and De Herdt, 2011: 221).

The needs of the people are so large in the post-conflict period that other faith based organizations, such as those run by Catholics and Protestants, are unable to meet all needs, thus creating a unique opening for Muslim organizations to become active. One might think that the increasing involvement of the Muslim community in such sectors has displaced other religious associations and created tension. However, that is not the case as representatives of the Muslim and Christian communities affirmed that their associations are not in conflict in the education realm because there are simply too many children needing an education and not enough schools.<sup>21</sup>

The Muslim minority has been able to accomplish so much in the post-conflict period because of the opportunity structure of this moment in Congolese history where the state is weak and unable to meet the demands of society, and therefore willing to compromise with the Islamic community in the creation of Muslim public schools. However, the role of the state in the rapid expansion of the Islamic community in the education sector is complicated. On the one hand, the state is too weak to provide education for the growing population of children interested in attending school and must rely on religious organizations to help it fulfill this task. Even the current number of schools, which is much larger than several years ago, is insufficient for the number of school-aged children, which means that there is still an inadequate supply for the amount of demand. And according to several informants and the history of education in the Congo, even if the state did have the capacity to be the sole provider of education, it may not be interested in doing so, and possibly still lacks the necessary management skills.

On the other hand, the state has exercised its strength in the education domain as well, first by the creation of the convention system, and currently by imposing a national curriculum and providing an inspection bureaucracy ensuring that non-state institutions are operating according to the state regulations. In order to operate these schools, the Muslim community and other religious organizations must seek accreditation from the national government. In short, as Mallya (2010) argued, the state dictates the parameters and rules within which faith based organizations can operate.

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Provincial Coordinator of Islamic public schools in Maniema, Kindu 3/23/2009. Interview with staff at the coordination office of Protestant public schools in Maniema, Kindu 3/25/2009. Interview with Catholic Bishop for Kindu Diocese, Kindu 3/26/2009.

The Muslim community has profited from the state's willingness to incorporate their religion into the hybrid system of schools that operate on a state – faith based organization partnership. As a result, the community has opened many new primary and secondary schools throughout the country. They have the financial resources to do so because the convention school system is such that in theory the national government pays teacher salaries, but when they do not or this amount is inadequate the burden of providing teacher salaries comes from parents, just as it does at schools run by the other religions or the state itself.

There are numerous factors that explain the increased interest and involvement of the Muslim community in providing education at this moment in time. The first is the easing of intense internal divisions within the Islamic community at various levels. The second is the external factor of opportunity that has allowed effective mobilization. Historically the various foreign rulers marginalized the Muslim community from education. As these repressive regimes came to an end, the community experienced greater political, economic, and educational freedom. As a result, a new cadre of intellectual Muslims has slowly replaced the generations that were unable to get a good education, and they now hold leadership positions within the COMICO organization and the education bureaucracy. The space for the Muslim minority to become involved in the education sector has occurred because of a huge demand on the part of children and parents, coupled with the inability of other religious groups, and especially the central state, to produce an adequate supply of education. However, though weak, the state does play an important part in the mobilization of the Muslim community in the education sector through the hybrid state – religious organization system.

Although at this time most Muslim schools are in the early stages of their evolution and it will take many years before the data exist to draw large-scale conclusions about the role they have played in Congolese society, we can nonetheless mention some initial observations. First, it is apparent that by creating new schools, the Muslim community is providing an important service to the Congolese community by increasing the supply and hence the potential access to education for children of all religious backgrounds. Even with the significant proliferation of Muslim schools, there is still a substantial need for more institutions because of the population of school-aged children and increased demand. These schools also provide an additional option for Muslim parents who may question the environment of schools run by other religious communities, for historical reasons, but may now choose to send their children to receive a good education in an environment more closely aligned with their values.

Secondly, the increased organization of the Muslim minority community of Congo does not end with the provision of education. Islamic associations are being created all over with numerous objectives, some spiritual, service-oriented, or political. It seems highly likely that this mobilization will translate into increased involvement in the political sphere in the future. This represents a drastic disjuncture from the past where the minority group was disengaged from such processes. If the Muslim community is incorporated well into the burgeoning democratic institutions of post-war Congo, this will indeed be a positive outcome. If, however, well-organized Muslim groups feel marginalized from political processes, this could prove dangerous.

By providing Islamic public schools, the Muslim community not only can ensure that their children have the skills necessary to compete in the future, but Islamic associations who run schools procure salaries for teachers and administrators through funds received from the state and/or parents. The economic motivation is one factor explaining why the Muslim community is increasingly becoming involved in education. Other important factors presented

in this study include the motivations of propagation of the faith and preparing the next generation to be more active politically; the creation of effective institutions run by emerging Muslim leaders; and the opportunity structure of this moment in Congolese history where increased religious and political freedom intersects with the weak capacity of the central state. Regardless of these external factors, the Islamic community of Congo would not be rapidly increasing their involvement in providing the public good of education had it not recently experienced a leadership change and calls for unity of the minority after decades of internal conflict at the local, regional, and national levels.

## 6 Conclusion

The aims of this study have been to examine how and why public goods have been delivered by faith based organizations in weak states, particularly Islamic associations in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Provision of public goods, especially education, has been carried out by Catholic and Protestant organizations for decades in Congo. What is new and requires understanding is why the Muslim community has been able to mobilize to run Islamic public schools in the post-war period. Given the history of marginalization of the Muslim minority population, it is even more remarkable that Islamic organizations have begun to play an increasingly important role in the Congolese education system. This study has argued that it has been able to do so for two primary reasons. The first is that intense internal conflicts within the Muslim community itself, which made collective action virtually impossible for several decades, have been replaced by the emergence of a Reformist leadership with development aspirations. The second explanation comes in the form of the opportunity available for mobilization at the particular historic moment in the Congo where increased liberalization and the end of dictatorship and war combined with a weak central state unable to provide the services demanded by its citizenry.

During fieldwork in Maniema, Kisangani, and Kinshasa, informants from both the Muslim community and other religious communities repeatedly discussed how there appears to have been an awakening in the development mentality of Congolese Muslims in recent years, especially since the end of the war. Historical texts and interviews describe the community as having always been marginal to Congolese state institutions in the past. This is no doubt directly related to the exclusion and suffering the Muslim community endured during the colonial era by both the Belgian regime and the Catholic missionary community. The education provided by the latter group harassed Muslim children, and offered the choice of forced conversion or expulsion from the only education available. Consequently, the majority of Muslims relied on trade for their livelihoods, did not speak the administrative French language, and were thus ostracized from state institutions.

This seems to have begun to change as a direct result of the external influences of globalization, liberalization, and development assistance. In the 1990s in Congo, as well as most other African nations, the state was forced to scale back even more its meager services. International donors were increasingly discouraged by poor governance and corruption and opted to instead provide funds to local non-governmental organizations to carry out development projects. Thus, all over Congo there was a large proliferation of NGOs seeking to provide services for their community with the financial assistance of external backers.<sup>22</sup> The Muslim community has also followed this broader trend, as evidenced by the creation of numerous Islamic NGOs.

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<sup>22</sup> For a detailed account of this process in Kinshasa, see Giovannoni et al. (2004).

Additionally, the devastation of the two wars in Congo left many people struggling to find a means to survive in a defunct economy at the beginning of the new century. The most attractive sector at this time was development because it held the possibility of extensive funding from international donors eager to help rebuild the post-conflict society. In order to attract external backers, projects must be well written in French and follow certain criteria. What is truly interesting in this scenario is that the Muslim community's actions confirm that they are now willing to be incorporated into mainstream Congolese institutions, following the Belgian legacy. In interviews with members of Muslim NGOs throughout the country, they have proudly displayed their statutes written in French and conforming to the main model, outlining not only their goals and objectives, but also their administrative structure consisting of the usual posts. A proper national education and fluency in French is necessary in order to participate in NGO development work.

An important policy question that arises out of this study is whether the Congolese Muslim community has created a substantial organized network able to receive international funding in order to perform more development projects from the ground-up as opposed to top-down state or international approaches (i.e. that 'work with the grain' of their society). At this preliminary stage the response is 'yes'. Some international funding has already been obtained by various organizations in Maniema and Kisangani.<sup>23</sup> The World Bank has helped to fund the rehabilitation of school buildings and the Muslim community has proven that they can provide quality education. Muslim women's organizations in all field sites had received international funding to operate an orphanage for children abandoned after the war, rehabilitate victims of sexual violence, provide literacy and income generating skills for widows, or run a malnutrition center. They had proven very effective in doing so until international donors had pulled out or changed their development objectives.

In discussions with the Muslim majority community of Kasongo, speakers complained that some international projects in their area had arrived with a pre-determined project implementation plan, and when informed that their plan conflicted with the values of the Muslim community, refused to alter their course. The result was that such projects wasted many donor dollars and did not produce the intended results because they did not take into account the importance of Islamic values for the people they were trying to assist. However, had they respected cultural values and worked in conjunction with the now well-mobilized Muslim community, they would have likely produced better development outcomes.

Finally, this study aims to make contributions in several realms. It addresses research questions of interest to both scholars and practitioners. The project directly engages the literatures on public goods, faith based organizations, and weak states and seeks to demonstrate how they intersect to provide a better understanding of the complex nature of politics in certain cases. Also, the study adds much needed contemporary knowledge about the virtually ignored case of the political involvement of the Muslim minority of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In addition, it is hoped that the study contributes to central issues of concern and debate for the Africa Power and Politics Program. First, it directly engages the APPP theme of public

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<sup>23</sup> While most of the international funding in post-conflict Congo has come from Western donors, the Islamic Development Bank of Saudi Arabia has also funded a few modest projects in recent years, such as a private secondary school in Kindu and a complex in Kisangani comprising a kindergarten, primary school, secondary school, hospital and mosque. In Kinshasa *Munazzamat el D'aawa el Islamiya* and *Al Maktoum* Foundation have financed the building of a mosque, primary school, secondary school, and Arabic language school. One of the organizations is based in the Sudan, while the royal family of Dubai funds the other. Unlike other parts of Africa, so far there has been little financing from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states for Islamic NGOs in Congo.

goods and provides empirical evidence from the D.R. Congo on the specific good of education. It shows how not only the state or non-governmental organizations can spearhead the provision of these goods, but how non-conventional actors can also become involved when the need arises. The research has endeavored to understand how, why, and how effectively faith based organizations can provide education.

Second, this study provides empirical data to support the APPP's 'going with the grain' focus by studying the involvement of a burgeoning civil society, newly formed Muslim organizations, in development. This aspect of the project links to development policy debates in that it provides information about the benefits and drawbacks for international donors to financially support informal institutions, such as faith based organizations, in their efforts to provide assistance for their own societies.

Third, this project expands the geographical scope of the research being conducted by APPP members. Given the wide diversity in the capacities of states on the African continent today, this data from the Congo provides some consideration of the particular circumstances of the exercise of power and the role of non-state actors in the context of a weak, transitioning, or post-conflict central state.

Fourth, the data presented here contribute to the ongoing discussion about 'hybrid institutions'. In the early stage of this research, it was hypothesized that in the modern context of failed statehood, Muslim organizations have expanded from primarily religious enterprises to informal institutions replacing the state in addressing the basic needs of citizens' everyday lives. Though fieldwork revealed that this is largely the case, it requires further nuance. The 'failed state' approach suggests a total lack of institutional capacity, but the findings of fieldwork research show that the state is in fact not completely absent. Though not very functional, the Congolese state does have a national education curriculum and attempts to oversee this sector. In order for religious organizations to create and run schools, they must receive accreditation from the Congolese government. These new schools are what might be considered 'hybrid' institutional forms because they are public schools run by various faith based organizations. Thus, Muslim (and other religious) associations are not replacing the state by providing public goods, but instead collaborate and negotiate with the state in the education sector.

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