



**Cahiers d'études africaines**

206-207 | 2012  
L'islam au-delà des catégories

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## The Muslim Minority of the Democratic Republic of Congo

From Historic Marginalization and Internal Division to Collective Action

*La communauté musulmane minoritaire de la République démocratique du Congo. De la marginalisation historique et de la division interne à l'action collective*

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**Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafriaines/17091>  
DOI: 10.4000/etudesafriaines.17091  
ISSN: 1777-5353

**Publisher**

Éditions de l'EHESS

**Printed version**

Date of publication: 1 June 2012  
Number of pages: 517-544  
ISBN: 978-2-7132-2349-5  
ISSN: 0008-0055

**Electronic reference**

Ashley E. Leinweber, « The Muslim Minority of the Democratic Republic of Congo », *Cahiers d'études africaines* [Online], 206-207 | 2012, Online since 01 July 2014, connection on 19 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafriaines/17091> ; DOI : 10.4000/etudesafriaines.17091

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# The Muslim Minority of the Democratic Republic of Congo

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- 1 The Muslim minority community of the Democratic Republic of Congo represents approximately ten percent of the total Congolese population. The history of the community, 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. This article examines the strife within the Muslim community at three levels: local, provincial, and national. In the Maniema province, the historic birthplace of Islam in the Congo and still home to the majority of Congolese Muslims today, evidence comes from the provincial capital of Kindu, where Muslims approximate twenty-five percent of the population, and Kasongo, where Muslims constitute a clear majority of between eighty and ninety percent. For a broader understanding of contemporary Congolese Muslims, we look to comparative data from Kisangani, the capital of the Oriental province, where Muslims are a minority of about fifteen percent of the population, as well as the Congolese capital, Kinshasa.
- 2 This article will demonstrate how the evolution of the Muslim minority mirrors the turbulent political history of the Democratic Republic of Congo. However, as the country has experienced immense change since 2003 in the democratizing post-conflict period, so too has the Congolese Muslim community demonstrated a drastic change from the past as well, despite their history of disunity. The community now boasts a strong national leadership, there are a growing number of Muslim associations, and the Congolese Muslim minority has begun to act collectively as a player in the politics of re-building post-conflict Congo. Perhaps most telling about the mobilization of the Muslim minority

community in recent years, has been their role in providing the public service of education, as will be described in the final section.

## Background: Marginalization of the Muslim Minority in Colonial Congo

- 3 Muslims in the Congo are a small minority group (comprising about ten percent of the country's people) living in an overwhelmingly Christian nation where Catholics comprise fifty percent of the total Congolese population, Protestants twenty percent and Kimbanguists ten percent (US Dept. State 2010). The Congolese Muslim minority community has struggled against foreign domination and exclusion. Islam originated in eastern Congo in the pre-colonial period as Swahili-Arab traders from the east African coast, especially the historical figure of Tippu Tip, penetrated the interior as far as present-day Maniema province in search of ivory and slaves (Alpers 1975; Brode 1969; Renault 1987). Their goal was not islamization, but economic in nature. However, the local communities began to emulate the foreigners and many adopted the new religion.
- 4 In the early 1890s, the Swahili-Arabs were defeated by the Belgian colonial forces and expelled from Eastern Congo. The new colonial regime was hostile toward Congolese Muslims, fearing a threat to the regime and rebellion by the minority which represented "a potential breeding ground of insurrection politically" (Young 1969: 256). As such, the Muslims remained underground to avoid reprisals from colonial authorities. However, as the result of increased interaction with the outside Muslim world in the early xx<sup>th</sup> century, the community began to witness a resurgence. Most importantly the 1920s brought the proselytizing efforts of the Mulidi movement led by Muslims from Tanzania who promoted the spread of the *Qadiriyya* Sufi order. More mosques and Qur'anic schools were built, and men were sent for Islamic education abroad in order to teach upon their return. The colonial regime reacted harshly to this new religious activity by forbidding Muslim foreigners from entering the country, destroying several mosques, and outspoken and potentially rebellious leaders were uprooted from their communities and relegated to distant locations of the vast Congo territory (Lazzarato 2001: 44).
- 5 Beyond forced exile and mosque destruction, the arena where most Congolese Muslims experienced marginalization during the colonial era was in education. Most schools were run by the Catholic Church, which systematically attempted to counter the spread of Islam. In contemporary interviews with Congolese Muslims, they detail how they, their parents, and/or grandparents were forced to convert, eat pork, and drink water during the fasting month of Ramadan in order to prove their loyalty to the Church and be eligible for attending school<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, most Muslim parents forbid their children from attending school in order to avoid conversion to Christianity, leaving generations of Congolese Muslims uneducated, unable to speak the administrative French language, and therefore marginalized from bureaucratic posts and involvement with state institutions. Traces of this legacy can still be seen today in the under-representation of Muslims at all levels of Congolese government and advanced professional posts. For instance, after the 2006 elections at the national level, there were only four Muslims in the five hundred-person assembly and three out of one hundred twenty Senators. Of the twenty-four deputies in the provincial assembly of the Maniema province, which boasts the largest Muslim population, none are Muslims.

- 6 However, the end of colonial rule marked a big change for previously marginalized Muslims as their situation improved with Congolese independence. Freedom of religion was guaranteed by law in 1960 and enshrined in the constitution of 1964. The first national Muslim conference was held in the Maniema province in March 1964 with the purpose of selecting an official representative to interact with the state. Despite their increased political freedoms, the post-independence period led to a new kind of hardship for the minority community. Instead of facing an external threat in the form of a repressive and suspicious colonial regime, Muslims now faced myriad internal conflicts. As one Congolese informant acknowledged, “division kills the community at all levels”<sup>2</sup>. In the sections to follow we will examine the internal conflict at local, provincial, and national levels within the Muslim minority of Congo.

## Internal Conflict among Maniema Muslims

- 7 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 & Evers 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>3</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. For example, different actors in different locations have referred to the conflict as one between the Tariqa and the Tawahidi; *Wenyeji* (autochtones or natives) against newcomers *Wazalia* (non-autochtones, of Arab descent); or *arabisés* and non *arabisés*; as a generational dispute; and between prominent businessmen and trained Islamic theologians.
- 8 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/Salafists. 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 Sufism, the Tawahidi group accuses the Tariqa of *bid’a*, innovation, for the Sufi rituals they follow.
- 9 The origin of the Tariqa in Maniema is tied to many other Sufis in Africa: they are a part of the Qadiriyya Sufi order. As mentioned previously, this movement made its way from Zanzibar into southern Maniema in the 1920s-1930s and was received with great hostility by the Belgian regime. The author of a local thesis described classic Sufi practices: in

order to become a member one must go through the stages of training for a *murid*, or novice, and follow the *tariqa*, or mystic road (Lazzarato 2001: 50). Currently in the region, however, some ambiguity exists in practice, as reflected in one informant's comments. When asked if the *Tariqa* are Sufi, he said, referring presumably to their practices, that in some areas they are, but not really in Maniema<sup>4</sup>. However, he described how recently some *Tariqa* members have become more involved in "Sufi" practices, such as a man in Kindu who has begun a Sufi prayer on Fridays, and *zikri*, night prayers, occurring in Kinshasa.

- 10 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* 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*.
- 11 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.
- 12 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>5</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, as can be seen in the local cases of Kindu and Kasongo.

### Internal Conflict in Kindu

- 13 In Kindu, the capital city of the Maniema province that contains approximately twenty-five percent Muslims, the community's internal conflicts are between the two religious groups described above. When the conflict was more acute members did not go to one another's mosques. The Tawahidi group primarily frequented the central mosque of Kindu, while the mosque associated with the *Tariqa* was located in the Baceko neighborhood. A key *Tariqa* informant shared his personal experience of having to go to Baceko on the other side of town to pray, but describes how in recent years he is welcome to pray at the central mosque again<sup>6</sup>. This example highlights the larger phenomenon of the easing of tensions between the two groups.

- 14 This dynamic of reduced tensions in the post-conflict democratizing era may be seen as an effort to rally a minority community together for collective action. Thus, a Sheikh whose organization is building a Muslim private secondary school in Kindu and who studied abroad in the United Arab Emirates, notes that he did not return to Congo to try to change Islam, but to help with development<sup>7</sup>. He laments that the majority of Congolese who studied abroad do not return to help their native communities but instead seek more comfortable livelihoods in Europe or the United States. Although descriptions of Reformers with Arab training from other parts of the continent suggest an emphasis on returning home in order to teach “pure” Islam, the Sheikh emphasized his preference not to get involved with religious debates because of a fear of conflict, but instead puts his focus on his family and development projects like the school. He noted that most local sheikhs and imams in Maniema did not have the opportunity to study abroad, although some did travel to Kigoma, Tanzania for Qur’anic education. Reflecting Islamist critiques of Sufi “traditionalists”, however, he argues that their lack of education is the reason why they do not have an “idea of development”.
- 15 In addition to the classic Tariqa/Tawahidi tension, other local issues, such as ethnic divisions, further complicate internal dynamics. For example, the President of Comité national féminin (CONAFEM), the national organization of Muslim women, visited Kindu in 2006 in order to create unity within the Maniema Muslim women’s community<sup>8</sup>. She expressed that there had been difficult internal divisions in Maniema, primarily fueled by disagreements among the Muslim men, but that her visit was successful because they were able to create a provincial level organization and select a woman to lead it. However, the newly elected leader did receive some opposition from those who believed the leader should come from Kasongo and not Kindu, but this opposition was based more on ethnic tensions than religious beliefs.
- 16 Another local issue of concern for Muslims in Kindu is the popular contestation over the leadership of their community. There are complaints about the hereditary nature of granting leadership to local imams. For example, a Muslim man who works for a peasant rights group and describes himself as a researcher and an activist, advocates for his community to fight the corruption of old leaders so that people trained in development can also become leaders<sup>9</sup>. As will be discussed in more detail in a later section on national level conflicts within the Muslim community, this is precisely what occurred as the result of the national Muslim association’s General Assembly in 2009.

### Internal Conflict in Kasongo

- 17 The division between the two Muslim groups is most pronounced and documented in Kasongo, the second largest city in the Maniema province after Kindu and the birthplace of Islam in the Congo. It is the community with the largest Muslim majority where Muslims constitute approximately eighty percent of the population. A work about the local Muslim community of Kasongo describes its tensions along the classic Sufi/Reformist dichotomy: one group known as reformists or *wana Tawhid* (people of the Tawahidi) who seek renovation and progress but in returning to a more orthodox Islam, while they label the other group as comprised of “traditionalists”/“conservatives”/*watu wa bid’a* (Lazzarato 2001: 103-104). The Tawahidi seek to get rid of what they pejoratively label as the innovations of the other group, encourage the use of Swahili during prayer, are associated with the Central Mosque and are considered “children of the country”. The

second group is part of the Mulidi (what others call Tariqa), celebrate the birth of the Prophet, prefer the use of Arabic, and are the descendants of *wazalia* or Swahili-Arabs. In Kasongo the Tariqa are associated with Mosque 18.

- 18 In the local context of Kasongo, this Sufi/Reformist division is further complicated by the historical origins of the Muslim community. In the 1960s there was a quarrel between Mosque 18 and people in other parts of town, so a new Central Mosque was built. A Catholic priest who was raised Muslim describes the conflict at the base of the construction of the new Mosque as between *wazalia* (non-autochtones, non-natives) and *wenyeji* (autochtones or natives) (Tata 2003: 68). The *wazalia* are the descendants of those who were directly in contact with the Swahili-Arabs and refer to the neighborhood near Mosque 18 as the “groupement arabisé”, whereas *wenyeji* are tribes who were located in Kasongo even before the first foreigners arrived. Tata describes the *wazalia* as having an air of superiority and claiming that they helped to “civilize” the others. In response to this conflict, the *wenyeji* constructed the new mosque in an effort to detach from what they viewed as the more “orthodox” Islam of Mosque 18.
- 19 The former Secretary General of the national Muslim association from September 2004, who is a member of the Qadiriyya, sees the internal conflict as one between the “autochtones” (“natives”) against newcomers<sup>10</sup>. In his account, this division led to the creation of the Central Mosque by the *autochtones*. The other main mosques in Kasongo are Mosques 17 and 18, which are affiliated with the Tariqa, while the newer mosque is Tawahidi. However, the former Secretary General believes these conflicts are not truly spiritual in nature, but revolve around other issues that people claim are spiritual. The true underlying causes are most likely political in nature and reflect leadership tensions and efforts to garner the support of the largest segments of the Muslim population.
- 20 Nevertheless, the discourse reflects classic critiques of Sufism, such as members of the Central Mosque accusing those of Mosque 18 of *bid'a*, particularly around the celebration of the Prophet’s birthday. The controversy became so considerable for a time that people stopped visiting and greeting one another and it even caused some couples to divorce. Tata (2003: 68-69) also describes many smaller conflicts present in Kasongo, such as the timing of the end of Ramadan. Language represents a source of conflict within the community, as they debate the issue of the translation of the Qur’an into local language and in what order Arabic and Swahili should be used during the liturgy. Debates about the language of the Qur’an are representative of the larger Sufi/Reformist schism, as the case of the use of Swahili in East Africa has demonstrated (Lacunza-Balda 1997: 95).
- 21 An important source of contention that reflects Sufi/Reformist tensions but with local variety comes from generational issues, as some Muslim youth of Kasongo have gone to study theology in Egypt or Saudi Arabia and come back critical of how Islam is practiced in Kasongo. In an informal conversation with a twenty-year-old Sheikh whose father runs Mosque 18 in Kasongo, he describes the division within the Muslim community not in terms of Tariqa or Tawahidi, but as a division between old and young people<sup>11</sup>. He is one of the few Muslim youth in Kasongo who has graduated from secondary school and also has received extensive training in the Qur’an, granting him the title of “Sheikh”. In his opinion the Muslim leadership should be drawn from the younger generation, such as himself, who are educated in both the Qur’an and in French and have the ability to help the Muslim community advance. He asks how the current leaders can talk to the governor, foreigners, or other important people when most visitors do not speak Swahili or Arabic? Similar to sentiments expressed by informants in Kindu, he believes that

Muslims need leaders who speak French and are focused on their community's development in order for them to truly evolve. His views reflect a Reformist attempt to modernize the Muslim community.

- 22 Local scholars lament that one result of all of these internal conflicts within the Muslim community of Kasongo is an inability to unite for development purposes (Tata 2003: 69). They cite the absence of a common treasury to be used for development projects and that plans for the creation of an Islamic bureau of development still have not born fruit. During a meeting with the women of Mosque 18 it became apparent that the divisions within the community do not just involve the male leadership<sup>12</sup>. The women's association, as all other associations, requested assistance to find an international organization that can provide financial assistance for their development projects. However, they also stressed that there are three different women's organizations in town, one associated with each of the three main mosques, and that any funding secured should come to them and not be designated for the women of Kasongo more broadly, implying that they do not work well together.
- 23 Tellingly, however, despite providing examples of the tensions within their community, Maniema Muslim informants also argue that they believed such conflicts were on the wane, and instead emphasize the Islamic community's unity. For example, the former Secretary General emphasized that the conflict is better now largely because mosques are all now what he called more "moderate". The BIDH president who lives in Kindu and is a member of the Tariqa recounts that he used to be forbidden to go to the central mosque, but that the last time he visited Kasongo he was able to do so<sup>13</sup>. These statements reflect the evolution of a pattern found in other African Muslim communities: the prevalence of Sufism, the rise of Reformism, a period of tension between the two, and the eventual blurring of distinction between the categories. However, in the particular case of the Congo, it also reflects the continuous attempt in recent years to mobilize the Muslim minority for collective action purposes within the broader state context. Evidence from outside of the Maniema province reveals similar processes occurring, with their own local essence.

## Contentious Internal Politics in Kisangani

- 24 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.

- 25 According to the Sheikh, there are two distinct groups, and they correspond to the two large mosques, the central mosque and Centre islamique Nuuru el'Yaquini (CINY). 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.
- 26 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 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.
- 27 The coordinator for Islamic public schools in the Oriental province also laments the division among the community, claiming it has been its downfall<sup>15</sup>. Noting that most Muslims in Kisangani are Tariqa, he argues instead that the conflict stems from interest groups that fight over positions of power within the community. He mentioned that there are two large groups with different interests and that for a long time the Muslim community of the province was ungovernable because the two groups were unable to compromise. In speaking about these groups, the coordinator does not describe the conflict in generational terms, but nevertheless suggests that he believes young Muslims feel ashamed because their community has not been able to assist the larger community in comparison to Catholic and Protestant groups which have done much for development. Therefore, the youth's views he expresses are much in line with Reformist critiques of Sufi mismanagement and the Reformist desire to be "modernizers".
- 28 When leaders and members of many Muslim associations active in Kisangani were collectively asked why their community seems to be behind others in the development arena, they cited important historical reasons such as the colonial legacy of lack of education, which meant a dearth of Muslim leaders<sup>16</sup>. But in the contemporary era the factor they insisted as having significantly impeded the advancement of their

community, in addition to these historical legacies, is internal divisions within their own community. What is also interesting about these internal divisions within the Muslim community is that they are not just perceived by Congolese Muslims themselves, but are also acknowledged by their Christian neighbors. For example, a Christian agent at the state education office for Kisangani schools, who had been a top bureaucrat for the province for three decades, argued that in addition to being a minority population with limited resources, the reason the Muslim community was behind other religious communities developmentally and unable to run schools in the past, was the high level of internal conflict within the community<sup>17</sup>.

- 29 The new leader of Congolese Muslims for Kisangani is a member of the younger generation and was elected as a result of the national General Assembly in early 2009. According to him, the reason the Muslim community did not previously have more development projects, such as schools, was a generational conflict<sup>18</sup>. In his description of the situation, the older generation was not interested in development, but the younger generation has now taken over power and with that will come an emphasis on advancement. He characterizes the conflict as between the elders who never left Congo and the youth who went abroad to study. He notes that these youth, like himself, return with an interest in trying to change local practices. For example, he recounts that it used to be that if someone fell ill and it was believed to be because of bad spirits, then the custom was to pay leaders for healing prayers. Instead the foreign-educated youth advocate that if someone falls ill they should receive prayers for free and be taken to a hospital for treatment. So the returned theologians are part of a campaign against old African traditions, such as paying for healing prayers.
- 30 The new leader notes that as a result of the new messages being preached, they have had overwhelming support from younger generations and as such the majority of Kisangani Muslims are no longer supporting the leadership of their elders. Some of the older generation have expressed anger at the new teachings and have said that as a result their livelihoods are being threatened. His portrayal of the situation in Kisangani where challenges to the established historical leadership are met with resistance reflects parallel dynamics of generational divisions among other Islamist movements in Africa (Bonate 2009; Østebø 2009; Soares & Otayek 2007; Westerlund & Evers Rosander 1997).
- 31 An interesting source examining the internal conflicts within the local Muslim community is provided in a set of recent undergraduate theses and a Ph.D dissertation emanating from the University of Kisangani. “The Development of the Muslim Community in the City of Kisangani” laments that Muslims there have not experienced social and political development because of generational conflict, which it efficiently chronicles (Abedi Pene N’Koy 2006). In another thesis on a similar topic, the internal conflicts at the local level in Kisangani are situated within the broader context of conflict at the national level, and the author argues that since its creation the national Muslim association has not been able to realize its objectives because of “egotistical” conflicts of interest among members of the ruling class (Oyoko 1999: 61). The author describes the internal conflict among Kisangani Muslims as between, “the class of conservatives in power, composed in majority by old persons” and “the class of youth who represent the force of change and often translate the profound aspirations of the large majority” (*ibid.*: 78). The latter are for the most part marginalized from positions of power within the national Muslim association, and instead seek to engage by creating their own organizations. However, these youth often feel frustrated at the little they are able to

accomplish, a sentiment also expressed by women's groups who experience a similar marginalization by the Muslim leadership. Making a Marxist argument, Oyoko points out that the leadership maintains its position of power because it controls the means of production in the community, namely the mosques where funds are collected for the greater good of the community. His research highlighted that despite the large sums of money generated at the mosques, especially during the most important religious ceremonies, Muslims did not know how this money was being used.

- 32 Oyoko laments that the Muslim community of Kisangani has not been more of an engine of development for the local population, and particularly in the education sector. He says that blaming their underdevelopment in this area on the difficulties of Muslim children receiving a proper education during the colonial period in Christian schools is no longer a plausible excuse because today the Congolese state is secular and allows each religious community the right to run schools (*ibid.*: 69). However, as evidence that the Islamic leadership is not interested in the development of their community, Oyoko notes that in Oriental province in the late 1990s there was only one functioning Muslim public school. A consequence of the community's lack of interest in schools has been a low level of educated Muslim children. Oyoko cites a study by Hassan Bin Sefu Mukando in 1997 that found that only eighteen percent of students in primary school and about nine percent of children in secondary school were Muslim (*ibid.*: 71). In conclusion, Oyoko states, "in effect, the Islamic community of Kisangani is maintained in a situation of non-progress, more precisely in a situation of under-development. This situation is the primary consequence of the exploitation of the victims who are the faithful Muslims on the part of their leaders" (*ibid.*: 89). These two groups he defines like many others as being distinguished according to generational, educational, and leadership characteristics.
- 33 A sociology dissertation (Yuma 2004) about the Congolese Muslim community also addresses the issue of internal conflicts and presents a history that reflects broader Sufi/Reformist tensions. In this work, the leadership of the Muslim community in Oriental that had been in power since 1987 was accused of poor management and lack of development vision. Therefore, in the late 1990s, several Muslim intellectuals, some of whom had received theological education in universities in Saudi Arabia, while others were Congolese university students, began a movement to denounce the community's stagnation and under-development (*ibid.*: 275). They organized meetings to educate local Muslims about the problems and the need for a change in the leadership. The group petitioned the leadership for reform of the organization's governance several times, but was continually refused.
- 34 When their requests remained unmet, the reformist group along with the majority of Kisangani Muslims demanded that the provincial representative, whose title recognizes him as the spiritual leader of the population, lead a Friday prayer at the central mosque during Ramadan in 2001 as a test of his religious education. The leader was forced to acquiesce, but his attempt demonstrated his lack of religious training, and, according to the author, he was humiliated (*ibid.*). This incident was followed by expressions of anger and more attempts at reconciliation. Finally an accord was signed between the two groups that called for both parties to convene a provincial council to tackle demands for leadership change. The older leadership boycotted this meeting they had pledged to attend, so reformists used the opportunity to elect a new leadership for the province comprised primarily of Muslim intellectuals. In 2004 at the time of his writing, the contestation for the Oriental leadership between the old committee and the new

committee continued, with each group working separately according to their goals. This stalemate continued until the intervention of the 2009 national General Assembly elections to be discussed in a later section.

- 35 Finally, a recent thesis specifically on the topic of conflict within the Kisangani Muslim population from 2000 to 2004 finds that a major source of tension was the relationship between Muslim preachers who earned a diploma in Islamic theology from an Arab university and other religious leaders who were educated in Qur'anic schools in the Maniema province without earning a diploma (wa Kamwanga 2005). In order to test his perception of the conflict with other Muslims in the community, the author conducted a series of surveys in Kisangani. When he asked the reason for the conflict in their community, the plurality of ordinary Muslims (26%) and elites (36%) said the division was according to tribe, friendship group, or education group (*ibid.*: 32-34). When asked what they thought to be the cause of conflict within the Muslim organization, the plurality of non-elite Muslims (18%) responded because of material interest, while the plurality of elites (19%) responded because of ethnicity (*ibid.*: 37-39). Interestingly, few or none responded a conflict of generations, which seems to be the most prominent reason proposed by scholars of the subject. Out of seventy elites questioned, not one said the conflict was the result of a generational divide, while only three non-elites out of 130 responded thus (*ibid.*). Then, wa Kamwanga asked respondents whom they believed to be the principal actors involved in these conflicts. The plurality of non-elites (34%) and elites (39%) responded that it was amongst the authorities of Muslim association (*ibid.*: 41-44). Again he questioned about the generational narrative and found that six percent each of non-elites and elites said the conflict was the result of elders against the youth (*ibid.*).
- 36 Thus, wa Kamwanga concludes that the conflict in Kisangani is less a generational dispute, and more of an ethnic dispute. The "ethnic" groups are defined as *arabisés*, descendants from those close to the original Swahili-Arab colonizers, and non *arabisés*. In his search for a logical explanation of ethnic conflict, the author argues that there are two primary reasons for this division. The first is historical dating back to when the Arabs were present and recruited certain members among their domestic servants to be trained in Islamic theology. This caused trouble in the contemporary era when, "faced with a new generation of preachers trained in theological university, the old ruling preachers took a defensive attitude in order to maintain their power" (*ibid.*: 49). The second is contemporary issues, including material interest, ethnicity, educational level, and fanaticism. Some of the former leaders do not have an adequate level of instruction, believe they have a mandate for life, and use their positions of power for personal gain and nepotism. As a result, the longtime leadership responded to the threat on their power by creating a new mosque, which solidified the clear division of the community.
- 37 These sources clearly demonstrate a local understanding that the Muslim community of Kisangani has experienced a recent history of internal division, particularly since the 1990s, but disagreement on the fundamental basis of the division. However, what is clear is that the division in Kisangani, like that in Maniema and elsewhere in Muslim Africa, is at the core a tension between Sufi/traditionalists and Reformers. A younger generation of Reformists has demanded a leadership change away from the older generation or *arabisés*. The younger generation as described here easily resembles the broader Islamist movement, as they are led by local Muslims who have studied abroad, criticize the lack of true Islamic understanding of the older group, and agitate for an increased focus on

development projects. Given these local dynamics in Maniema and Oriental provinces, how have such internal conflicts been reflected at the national level?

## National Discord: The Case of COMICO

- 38 Not surprisingly, these conflicts on the local and provincial level also reflect the larger internal conflicts present at the national level within the Communauté islamique en République démocratique du Congo (COMICO). Founded in 1972 at the request of President Mobutu, the COMICO 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.
- 39 Although the split did not occur until 1988, the underlying conflict that led to such a situation began much earlier. From the organization's inception, there was a debate about how the community would best be served, by a leader who was financially successful and could help the organization grow economically, or by a leader trained in Islamic theology who could benefit the community spiritually. In 1961, Muslims began an initiative to create a sole organization to represent the Islamic community. They met again in early 1963 to appoint a provisional committee, which did not get along, so it was decided that a Congress would be held in Kasongo in August 1963. There, the Islamic Mission of Congo (MISCO) was created and the leaders selected were Yusuf Lusangi, the vice president of the Muslim Welfare Society, Amir Jumaine, and three others. However, it did not take long for division to emerge within the community, as a competing faction led by religious leaders Mwinyi Selemani and Shabani Baruani expressed their support of the new association but did not approve of Jumaine in a leadership role, describing him as "incompetent and illiterate" (Lazzarato 2001: 95). Therefore, another meeting was convened in March 1964 in an attempt to settle the dispute. Selemani was supported by some prominent Muslims and foreign delegates, while Jumaine and Lusangi received the backing of the youth and Kasongo Muslims. The result was the election of Selemani, the dissolution of MISCO, and the rejection of Jumaine because it was argued that the leader should be able to read and write the Qur'an. A new unity conference was scheduled, but was never held. Although these attempts at organization of the Muslim community ultimately failed, the debate had not been settled, as was later evidenced during elections for the national leader of COMICO.
- 40 In December 1971 the Congolese (Zaire at the time) autocrat, President Mobutu Sese Seko, required all religious organizations to create one sole association, reflecting the movement towards corporatist structures that were common at that time throughout Africa. The Muslim community contained over twenty rival associations who decided to meet at a General Assembly in Kisangani from February 9-11, 1972 in order to discuss the community's response to the law (*ibid.*: 99). The new assembly began by dissolving preexisting organizations and creating the Islamic Community in the Republic of Zaire (COMIZA). The organization, which later became COMICO when the country changed its

name back to the D.R. Congo, is hierarchical with units at four levels reflecting the state structure: the local community, the region, the province, and the country. They elected Sheikh Amrani ben Juma as the Legal Representative and five assistants who had been leaders of some of the recently dissolved associations. Not surprisingly, this leadership cohort did not manage well with one another. As a result, one of the five assistants, Sheikh Ali Kabonga convoked an extraordinary session of the assembly in 1974 to elect a new leader (Yuma 2004: 73). There, Sheikh Hassani ben Sabiti was elected as the new leader, but the assembly was not formally recognized by the state and many Muslims (Lazzarato 2001: 100).

- 41 Therefore, the Muslim community convened another assembly in Kinshasa in October of that year, but it ended after two weeks of indecision. Finally, in early December 1974 a group of about two-thirds of the members met and elected Sheikh Hassani ben Sabiti, who came from a long line of Kisangani Muslims dating back to the arrival of the Arabs, as their leader (Yuma 2004: 73). The Muslim community considered him to be very good for their unity, as he worked to improve relations by travelling to other Arab nations, attended the Assembly of the World Muslim League in Saudi Arabia in 1975, received pledges of foreign aid for Zairian Muslims, and assistance for many to go on pilgrimage to Mecca (Lazzarato 2001: 100-101; Yuma 2004: 74). Despite these successes by the first two religious-oriented leaders of COMICO (Sheikh Amrani Djuma from 1972-1974 and Sheikh Hassan Sabiti Mafuta Mingi from 1974-1978), others were very critical of spiritually trained leaders, whom they accused of wasting funds, lacking rigor in financial management, and the inability to adequately organize the administration.
- 42 In 1978, the disagreement regarding the national leadership led to the convocation of an extraordinary assembly to elect a new chief, this time a Muslim businessman Al Hadji Tambwe Abedi Kauzeni, who stayed in his role until 1988. According to the Assistant Secretary General, some Muslims believed that Sheikhs experienced a leadership problem because their narrow theological training did not equip them for seeking close relationships with the central state and outside communities and that they held a small vision for the community<sup>19</sup>. Yuma (2004) also notes that Tambwe was elected because the community believed that they needed a businessman to lead since the theologians in charge in the 1970s had been too concerned with religious priorities and did not have management skills. One perspective suggests that Tambwe was elected only because of his wealth, and that he proceeded to waste his money on maintaining power, to the detriment of true development of the broader Muslim community (wa Kamwanga 2005: 29). However, Oyoko (1999: 62) notes that since the death of the businessman Al Hadji Tambwe, the conflicts between those who prefer a spiritual imam or businessman did not dissipate, and no group was able to win over the other one.
- 43 Since Tambwe's leadership did not fare much better, the proponents of religious training managed to secure the passage of a statute stipulating that only those with theological training could become Legal Representative, leading to the election of another theologian (Yuma 2004: 74). Al Hadji Tambwe's term was followed by that of Sheikh Gamal Lumumba, who was the official leader of COMICO from 1988-1990 (and again from 1996-2004). In 1990 Gamal's term was suspended and his assistant Al Hadji Mudilo wa Malemba took over the position and was reelected for a second term. Sheikh Gamal did not approve of the situation and sought resolution in the Congolese judicial system. The Supreme Court ultimately ruled in favor of Gamal, leading to his return to leadership in 1996. However, members of his cabinet and others refused to recognize Gamal as the true leader and

instead continued to follow Al Hadji Mudilo. This stalemate of most Congolese Muslims recognizing Mudilo as the leader, while the outside world and the Congolese government recognized the leadership of Gamal continued until the elections in 2004.

- 44 This extended period of internal leadership crisis meant that the Muslim community experienced very little in terms of unity and development. According to the current Assistant Secretary General, the split within COMICO's leadership directly impacted the community's ability to get involved in development in several ways. For example, the Islamic Development Bank of Saudi Arabia had funded many projects for the Muslim population of Congo over the years. However, when the community was divided the Bank decided to stop sending assistance. This explanation, however, may ignore more fundamental causes; one local thesis on the subject of the Muslim community noted that the reason the Arabs suspended their aid to Congo was not necessarily political, but the result of the devastating war which started in the country in 1996 (wa Kamwanga 2005: 55).
- 45 In addition, the Congolese state did not have good relations with the community during this period either; primarily because it was difficult to know which group they should work with. For example, a Sheikh currently building an educational complex in Kisangani consisting of private primary, secondary, and Qur'anic schools with assistance from the Islamic Development Bank described how Muslims had been marginalized by the government. He claimed that when Muslims try to speak to Congolese authorities about development projects, the latter do not really listen to their requests, but instead say that because the Muslim community is separated by internal conflicts, they should focus instead on becoming united, and then come back to ask the state for assistance<sup>20</sup>. These experiences have perhaps reinforced the desire for collective action and to encourage the unity of the minority community in recent years.
- 46 However, the Muslim community has also known periods of very good relations with the central state, especially during portions of Mobutu's reign. To a large extent the genesis of better relations was President Mobutu's speech about the tensions between Egypt and Israel at the United Nations in 1973 (Oyoko 1999: 81). Arab countries appreciated Zaire's position of support and responded by providing financial aid to the country, and particularly for the Muslim community. Mobutu then paid for the Islamic leadership to go on pilgrimage to Mecca around 1977. Mobutu's actions during this period fit into his broader plan of consolidating power in the single-party state by co-opting the Muslim community, as well as using good relations with that community to bolster political and financial support for his regime from Arab countries. However, the financial support earmarked for the Muslim community, according to Oyoko, did not reach its intended beneficiaries, with the exception of those within the Muslim leadership whom Mobutu sought to co-opt, ultimately resulting in religious authorities that appeared to care more about national politics than their minority community (*ibid.*: 82).
- 47 The deepening patronage relationship between the Muslim leadership and the Mobutist state provided a key source of the mounting division within the Muslim community. As other Muslims sought positions of leadership and benefits from Mobutu's patronage, acts of opposition toward religious authorities sanctioned by the authoritarian state were labeled as acts of defiance to the Party. As a result, several acts of protest by Muslims toward their leadership were stifled by the intervention of state security apparatuses, apparently leading to the sequestering, intimidation, and assimilation of such actors (*ibid.*). Therefore what COMIZA accomplished during the Mobutu period was the unity of

the Muslim community, but brought about by force rather than consensus, while suppressing deeper divisions. Another unintended consequence of the organization in its early years was the extension of clientelism, very prevalent in state apparatuses, into the Islamic community. Writing a decade ago, Oyoko decried the problems of the Muslim community as largely the fault of internal divisions that played out at the national level in leadership struggles.

- 48 One of the largest consequences of the lack of unity of the Congolese Muslim community, frequently expressed by informants, is that Islam has had very little impact in the development, advancement, and rebuilding of the Congolese community during the decades of state decay and war. The author of a local thesis on the Muslim community concluded, “at the national level Islam lost its credibility especially on the plan of development and is almost absent in all activities, first in the institutions ruling the country, in the government, in the institutions charged with the transition, even in the independent electoral commission, and even at the local level Islam is not represented when the other communities are represented” (wa Kamwanga 2005: 59). However, despite these gripping internal conflicts within the national Muslim organization from its inception in 1974 until 2004, there has been a radical recent change within the Islamic community.

## The Contemporary Muslim Community: New Leadership and Mobilization

- 49 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 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.
- 50 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>21</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.

- 51 Of course this victory by one segment of the Muslim community has been met with some opposition from the Sufi/traditional/older group. However, because the new leadership was elected through democratic means, the older group has a chance to regain prominent positions at the next assembly in five years time. Opposition was most apparent in the Maniema province, where although Kindu is the capital for governmental purposes, because of its religious majority and heritage Kasongo is the provincial capital for the Muslim community. The former Secretary General expressed his concern that because of the controversy over the new leaders selected by the national assembly in Kinshasa in 2009, there was a chance that the internal conflict, which had seemed to be diminishing, could resurface<sup>22</sup>.
- 52 Prior to the General Assembly, a provincial assembly was held in Kasongo as usual to elect representatives to attend the national meeting. However, as recounted by the BIDH president, this proved very complicated<sup>23</sup>. The former provincial leader, who had recently passed away, had an assistant whom he did not care for and had appointed someone else to become his successor, but the assistant contested this move. When the Muslim community of Kasongo tried to organize its assembly, the assistant refused to come, stating that those who opposed his candidacy were organizing the assembly. Since certain members had boycotted the provincial council, its resolutions were annulled by the national assembly who, in the absence of accredited input from the provincial council, elected the assistant to become the new leader.
- 53 Several months after the General Assembly meeting, the five representatives for the Muslim association in the Kasongo area met to give their trimester reports<sup>24</sup>. There was debate and concern expressed about what was happening in the organization at all levels with a substantial leadership change. However, there was consensus that regardless of what was happening in the organization at provincial and national levels, the local representatives had a responsibility to continue their work. Those presenting these fears and disillusion with the 2009 elections in Kasongo were primarily members of the older generation who had been in power for a substantial amount of time, and it makes perfect sense that they would not be overjoyed by this uprooting of their power.
- 54 The new Muslim leader for Maniema is a Tariqa member, but also represents reform because he is from the younger generation and well educated. In the perspective of the president of a Muslim women's association headquartered in Kindu, a lot of good will come from this change in leadership<sup>25</sup>. She viewed 2009 as the year of young Muslim men gaining positions of power, and views this as a positive change because these new leaders are educated both in a secular system and speak fluent French, also have good Qur'anic training, and are advocating for the advancement of their minority community.
- 55 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>26</sup>.

- 56 Today, despite the history of division, the Congolese Muslim community boasts a variety of organizations. The proliferation of associations did not only occur within the Muslim community or only in Congo, but “with political liberalization and greater freedom of association, new forms of associational life began to flourish in Africa. Suddenly, national Muslim organizations were no longer the only officially recognized modern Islamic organizations, and new Islamic associations of women, youths, and students”, were formed (Soares & Otayek 2007: 12). However, the principal organization for Congolese Muslims remains COMICO, but in recent years there have been national women's organizations created in conjunction with COMICO, including Comité national féminin de COMICO (CONAFEM), and its affiliate at the provincial level COPROFEM.
- 57 There are other national women's organizations with representatives at the provincial level such as Union des femmes musulmanes du Congo (UFMC), 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 classes for uneducated Muslim women. Other important Muslim organizations active today in the Maniema province include CFMUDEMA, Ami Santé which is an association in Kindu working to provide healthcare, Bureau islamique des droits humains (BIDH), over one-hundred thirty Muslim women's organizations active in Southern Maniema, the *Dawa'tu Islamiyya* organization of women from Mosque 18 in Kasongo, and Conseil national des droits de l'homme en islam (CONADHI). In Kisangani one finds almost a dozen more Islamic associations, particularly organizations focused on women and development.
- 58 The national, provincial, and local Muslim associations mentioned above focus on a wide variety of tasks, whether spiritual or providing important services for their community that the national state has been unable to provide. However, the realm in which Islamic organizations have had the most visibility in the post-conflict era has been education. Thanks to the new Reformist leadership and calls for collective action, the Muslim community has received assistance in their educational endeavors from two key sources. First is the return of international Muslim funding in recent years, as can be seen with new school projects funded by the Islamic Development Bank in Kindu, Kisangani, and Kinshasa. In addition to private schools, mosques, and elementary Qur'anic schools, a large Qur'anic secondary school has been operating effectively at Mungomba (in between Kasongo and Wamaza in southern Maniema)<sup>27</sup>.
- 59 Beyond these few international arrangements, the most significant change has been in closer partnership between the minority community and the democratizing government. The Congolese state has increasingly encouraged and financially supported the creation and maintenance of an ever-expanding Islamic public school system. The provision of education by Muslim organizations has been a very recent phenomenon. Before the official end of the war in 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 available statistical evidence.

- 60 In the Maniema province the number of Islamic primary schools more than doubled, from twenty-nine to seventy-six, from the school year 2003-2004 to 2008-2009. The same trend can be seen with secondary schools, where the number increased from nineteen to forty-two<sup>28</sup>. In addition, this trend is not limited to the Maniema province but reflects a national phenomenon. In the Oriental province 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>29</sup>. 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 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>30</sup>.
- 61 Religious public schools, or “convention” schools, are those that were created through conventions 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 schools through its inspection bureaucracy. The religious communities in turn have agreed to control the day-to-day operation of their institutions and are granted permission to teach a religion course. Christian organizations have been running convention schools in the Congo since colonial times, but as the above statistics suggest, the Muslim community’s involvement in the public education sector is a very recent phenomenon.
- 62 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 schools in Maniema stated that perhaps fifty percent of children in their schools are Muslim, and many teachers are also non-Muslim<sup>31</sup>. This brief examination of the proliferation of Muslim public schools in recent years has been presented here as an indication that the Congolese Muslim minority is no longer marginalized and, as a result of its new leadership’s increasing focus on collective action, is able to actively participate in the education sector.
- 63 ❖
- 64 This article has discussed the Muslim minority community in the Democratic Republic of Congo, from its experience of colonial brutality, to the intense internal conflicts that manifested themselves in divergent ways in various locations, and finally to the emergence of a Reformist leadership and the resulting engagement of the community in associations and development in the recent post-conflict period. Although the specific dynamics present in the Congo are a direct result of particular local politics and traditions, we can also see how they are intricately linked to international and national

religious and political phenomenon. For example, it must be acknowledged that the partnership between Muslims and the state in education is in large part possible because of an opportunity provided by various factors: a national political opening at the end of President Mobutu's thirty-two year autocratic rule, the formal end to two devastating wars in 2002, the beginning of a democratic transition, and paradoxically the state's continual weakness and lack of capacity to meet the needs of its citizens alone.

- 65 Beyond the national context, internal conflicts within Muslim communities are prevalent both in minority and majority groups throughout the African continent. In particular, Islamist/reform movements have encouraged the expansion of Muslim education systems and attracted disenfranchised younger generations (Westerlund & Evers Rosander 1997; Soares & Otayek 2007). Many of these youth focused on social mobility argued that their Sufi traditional leaders did not have adequate training in Arabic and European national languages, which made collaboration between their Muslim communities and international organizations virtually impossible (Bonate 2009: 67). Reformers created Muslim schools throughout Africa so that Muslim children not only received proper training in Islam, but also the skills they would need to succeed and get jobs in the local context. So in countries like Congo where Islam is a minority, the Muslim schools train children in French, in conjunction or instead of Arabic.
- 66 We began the discussion of internal conflicts within Muslim communities by alluding to recent literature on the topic from across the continent, and this article seeks to further nuance our understandings of Sufi/Reform debates. In the Congolese case, the recent leadership change within the COMICO organization reflects the growing importance of Reformists in the form of the younger generation of Muslims and those advocating for the Muslim community to actively engage in development. In Kisangani this group most clearly resembles Islamist groups in other countries, as those educated in the Middle East returned with a vision to rally the local younger generation to change the status quo of rule by the less educated older generation. The internal fissures within the Maniema Islamic community, including divisions between older and younger generations, Tariqa and Tawahidi, and natives and Arab descendants, demonstrate that local dynamics greatly impact the expression and nature of classic Sufi/reform divides. The example of the Tariqa recently coming to power in the province on a reform platform provides another example of the increasing blurring of our categories.
- 67 In conclusion, conflicts in the Congolese Islamic minority reflect both a classic Sufi/Reformist distinction with its divergent local manifestations, as well as the particular case of a minority community that experienced historic marginalization, then intense internal conflicts, but has recently attempted collective action in order to more effectively mobilizing as a minority population.

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## NOTES

1. Interviews with male members of Mosque 18 in Kasongo, 5/07/2008 and 16/04/2009; Interview with Head Imam for Kindu region, Kindu, 27/03/2009; Interview with Head Imam for Oriental province, Kisangani, 10/06/2009.
2. Interview with Coordinator of Islamic Public Schools, Kisangani, 25/05/2009.
3. 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.
4. Interview with president of Bureau islamique des droits humains (BIDH), Kindu, 5/11/2009.
5. Interview with president of BIDH, Kindu, 5/11/2009.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Interview with president of Solidarité humanitaire pour le développement, Kindu, 17/03/2009.
8. Interview with president of CONAFEM, Kinshasa, 18/06/2009.

9. Interview with president of Union paysanne pour le progrès (UPKA), Kindu, 20/06/2008.
10. Interview with former Secretary General of the national Muslim association, Kasongo, 27/04/2009.
11. Interview with young Sheikh from Mosque 18, Kasongo, 20/04/2009.
12. Meeting with Muslim women's association of Mosque 18, Kasongo, 1/05/2009.
13. Interview with BIDH President, Kindu, 11/05/2009.
14. Interview with sheikh who is a professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Kisangani, 9/06/2009.
15. Interview with the Coordinator for Islamic public schools in the Oriental province, Kisangani, 23/05/2009.
16. Collective interview with members and leaders of Muslim associations, Kisangani, 12/06/2009.
17. Interview with the secretary to the chief of the Provincial Division of Primary, Secondary, and Professional Education (EPSP), Kisangani, 26/05/2009.
18. Interview with the newly elected leader of Congolese Muslims in Kisangani, 10/06/2009.
19. Interview with Assistant Secretary General of COMICO, Kinshasa, 16/06/2009.
20. Interview with Sheikh overseeing construction of *Complex Scholaire Nuuru*, Kisangani, 28/05/2009.
21. Interview with sheikh who is a professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Kisangani, 9/06/2009.
22. Interview with former Secretary General of COMICO, Kasongo, 27/04/2009.
23. Interview with president of BIDH, Kindu, 11/05/2009.
24. Observations from attending local COMICO meeting, Kasongo, 20/04/2009.
25. Interview with president of Collectif des femmes musulmanes pour le développement du Maniema (CFMUDEMA), Kindu, 12/05/2009.
26. Meeting with leaders of Muslim civil society and development associations, Kisangani, 12/06/2009.
27. Visit to Mungomba Qur'anic School, southern Maniema, 3/05/2009.
28. 2003-2004 statistics from RDC Ministère du Plan, "Monographie de la Province du Maniema", 33. 2008-2009 statistics gathered from Maniema Provincial Division of Enseignement primaire, secondaire, et professionnel, EPSP (Primary, Secondary, and Professional Teaching) in Kindu, February 2009.
29. Interview with Provincial Coordinator of Islamic schools, Kisangani, 25/05/2009.
30. Interview with National Coordinator of Islamic schools, Kinshasa, 18/06/2009.
31. Interview with Provincial Coordinator of Islamic schools, Kindu, 23/03/2009.

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## ABSTRACTS

### Abstract

The history of the Muslim minority community of the Democratic Republic of Congo can be characterized as one of repression and marginalization, especially during Belgian colonialism. Further compounding the struggles of Congo's Muslim minority have been intense internal conflicts within the community in the post-independence period. This strife resembles Sufi/Reformist tensions in other parts of the continent, but with important variations at the local, provincial, and national levels in the Congo. However, in the post-conflict period a united national leadership has emerged encouraging the proliferation of Islamic associations and their role in post-war development. Perhaps most remarkable about the mobilization of the Muslim minority community in recent years has been the role of the community in providing good quality public education.

### Résumé

L'histoire de la communauté musulmane minoritaire de la République démocratique du Congo peut être caractérisée comme celle de la répression et de la marginalisation, surtout pendant la colonisation belge. Ce qui a encore aggravé les luttes de cette minorité musulmane congolaise, ce sont les conflits internes à la communauté pendant la période post-indépendance. Ces luttes s'apparentent aux tensions sufi/réformistes dans certaines parties du continent, mais avec des variations importantes aux niveaux local, provincial, et national au Congo. Toutefois, dans la période de l'après-conflit, une direction nationale unie a émergé pour encourager la prolifération des associations islamiques et leur faire jouer un rôle dans le développement d'après-conflit. L'aspect le plus remarquable au sujet de la mobilisation de la communauté musulmane minoritaire au cours de ces dernières années est peut-être sa contribution à fournir une éducation publique de qualité.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** République démocratique du Congo, islam

**Keywords:** Democratic Republic of Congo, Islam

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