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Living Islam in Colonial Bujumbura – The Historical Translocality of Muslim Life between East and Central Africa

Geert Castryck

Abstract: This article applies a translocal approach in order to make sense of the internal dynamics in the Muslim community of colonial Bujumbura. The establishment of the community and its religious evolutions – from a practical living of Islam to *Qadiriyya* Sufism to Islamic Reform – are interpreted in regard to, on the one hand, religious tendencies in East African Islam and, on the other hand, processes of integration, marginalization, and exclusion in an urban, colonial and Burundian context. An answer to the social needs and challenges on the local level was found in religious intensification and a widening of the geographical scope, drawing on age-old connections across East and Central Africa.

Résumé: Cet article poursuit une approche translocale afin de mieux comprendre la dynamique interne de la communauté musulmane de Bujumbura à l'époque coloniale. Le développement de cette communauté ainsi que ses évolutions religieuses – d'abord un islam vécu d'une manière pratique, puis le soufisme de la voie *Qadiriyya*, enfin la réforme islamique – sont interprétés suivant deux axes: d'une part, en rapport avec les développements de l'islam est-africain et, d'autre part, par rapport aux étapes successives d'intégration, de marginalisation et d'exclusion à plusieurs échelles (contextes urbain, colonial et burundais). L'intensification et le resserrement de la religion, ainsi que l'élargissement de la portée géographique, fondés sur des réseaux de longue durée en Afrique centrale et orientale, ont permis aux musulmans de Bujumbura de faire face à des défis sociaux au niveau local.

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Introduction¹

The story of the Muslim community of Bujumbura – whose internal communal dynamics and religious evolutions during the colonial period are explained by combining individual, local, national, regional, and Islamic perspectives – fits uneasily into the historiographies of Burundi, of East and Central Africa, and of Islam in Africa. After identifying why this community has remained in the shadow of national, regional, and continental historiographies, this article applies a translocal approach in order to demonstrate that these people, who seem marginal from each of the usual perspectives, have themselves exploited and overcome these spatial distinctions throughout the colonial period.

To start with, research on Islam in Africa usually falls apart in different areas of knowledge production. In broad strokes, a North African Islam is dealt with as part of the Islamic heartlands, Islam in West Africa is treated as a core element of that area's history since many centuries, and an East African research tradition considers Islam as a coastal phenomenon, until quite recently turned toward the Indian Ocean rather than to the rest of East Africa.² Roman Loimeier makes a more sophisticated analysis of the geography of Muslim societies in Africa and thereby identifies the *Bilād al-Maghrib* ("the Land of the West" or Northwest Africa), the Sahara, the *Bilād al-Sūdān* ("the Land of the Black," more or less coinciding with the Sahel region), the Nile area, the Horn of Africa, and the East African coast as the main historical areas of Islam in Africa.³ Either way, Islam in East Africa is dealt with in connection or distinction to the coast, with "Central Africa" usually not being included in overviews of Islam in Africa at all.

This does not mean that historiography has completely ignored Islamic presence in areas commonly considered Central Africa, but rather that the

¹ I am grateful to Katharina Zöller, Katja Naumann, Achim von Oppen, Adam Jones, Forrest Kilimnik, Gregory Maddox, and the reviewers of *History in Africa* for their useful comments on successive versions of this article. I also want to thank the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO), Ghent University, Yakoub Nsabimana, Jean-Marie Nduwayo, and above all my informants in Bujumbura for enabling the field research that provided the invaluable data for this research. The article has been conceived in the context of the Collaborative Research Centre "Processes of Spatialization under the Global Condition" (SFB 1199) at Leipzig University.

² A recent example making sense of Islam within the context of the East African mainland is: Felicitas Becker, *Becoming Muslim in Mainland Tanzania, 1890–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Nevertheless, her research does remain comparatively close to the coastal area. Also see Julia Verne's contribution in this issue.

³ Roman Loimeier, *Muslim Societies in Africa: A Historical Anthropology* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2013). Apart from the regional subdivisions, he pays further attention to Muslims from all over the Indian Ocean world in Cape Town and to Muslims under colonial rule.

scarce literature on Muslims in this area tends to treat them as foreign to the region, as an intrusion from the East (or occasionally from the North).⁴ Consequently, in the historiography on the Congo, for instance, Muslims only figure prominently in the guise of the African-Arab adversaries of European colonizers.⁵ After they were defeated in wars of colonial conquest by the mid-1890s, they received relatively little attention from historians, and when at all, they were seen as marginal and exotic to the region rather than as a genuine part of Congolese society.

At the same time, the interest in Islam from an East African coastal perspective does not capture Central African Muslims either, and instead abruptly ends around Lake Tanganyika. Colette Le Cour Grandmaison, for instance, has undertaken research on Omani in Bujumbura, whereby her argument of a social and spatial stratification is premised on the presumed peripheral position of Bujumbura in relation to the Indian Ocean coast.⁶ On another note, Kelly Askew, in her monograph on Swahili music, mentions between brackets that the popularity of *taarab* reaches “even as far as Burundi,” thereby marking Burundi as the outer reaches of East Africa.⁷

The considerable mobility across East and Central Africa, which for a long time was intertwined with Muslim activity, was seldom ever traced across this apparent epistemological divide. The few scholars who did bridge Lake Tanganyika in their treatment of Muslim communities are either written from a Congolese perspective, stressing the importance of the connection to the East, or do not much more than tracing sheikhs from the coast who traveled as far west as eastern Congo.⁸

⁴ For an overview of literature on Muslims in the Congo, see: Jean-Pierre Rossie, “Bibliographie commentée de la communauté musulmane au Zaïre des origines à 1975,” *Cahiers du CEDAF* 6 (1976), 2–38. After the publication of Rossie’s bibliography, mention should be made of S. Bimangu and Tshishiku Tshibangu, “Contribution à l’histoire de l’implantation de l’Islam au Zaïre,” *Paideuma*, 24 (1978), 225–230; Luigi Lazzaroto, *L’Islam à Kasongo* (Kasongo: published by the author, 2001 [1979]); Xavier Luffin, “L’islam congolais: le cas particulier des Basonge de Kasongo, Maniema,” *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara* 1 (2007), 117–164; Ashley E. Leinweber, “The Muslim Minority of the Democratic Republic of Congo,” *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 206/207 (2012), 517–544.

⁵ See Maarten Couttenier’s contribution in this issue.

⁶ Colette Le Cour Grandmaison, “Rich Cousins, Poor Cousins: Hidden Stratification among the Omani Arabs in Eastern Africa,” *Africa* 59–2 (1988), 176–184.

⁷ Kelly M. Askew, *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 225.

⁸ Respectively Armand Abel, *Les Musulmans noirs du Maniema* (Bruxelles: Centre pour l’Étude des Problèmes du Monde Musulman Contemporain, 1960) and August H. Nimtz, *Islam and Politics in East Africa: the Sufi Order in Tanzania* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980). For a rare focus on a mobile community straddling this divide, see Katharina Zöllner’s contribution in this issue.

My way to bridge the divide is by staying put in one place and applying a translocal approach, that is to say that I try to explain how local needs were met by drawing on connections, mobility, and inspiration on different scales.⁹ I focus on the Muslim community of colonial Bujumbura and how different ways of living Islam, inspired by personal relations and socioreligious evolutions across East and Central Africa and the wider Islamic world, met their changing local needs. After Bujumbura had come under Belgian rule during the First World War, this community was the largest Muslim community in Belgian Africa. Already in German times, the community was fully integrated in an East and Central African network of Swahili-speaking people¹⁰ at the same time living against the backdrop of political and ethnic dynamics in the African Great Lakes region. A community seemingly on the edge of all these frames of reference was in fact thwarting these different regional perspectives.

Not only in a regional Central or East African frame but also in Burundian national history writing have Bujumbura's Muslims not been attributed a prominent place. If they appear at all, their position is usually relegated to the temporal, spatial, or societal margins of national history. While historiography has acknowledged the presence of Muslims in the years leading up to colonization or on the far western frontier of the country,¹¹ historiography largely underplays the continued central position of Muslims in the city of Bujumbura, which was to become the national capital. When, in German colonial times, Bujumbura became a strategic stronghold from where the border with the Congo Free State could be overseen, and Burundi and Rwanda militarily occupied, it was primarily Muslims who built and populated the new town. Neither national nor regional historiography highlights this Muslim imprint on Burundi's current capital city. Bujumbura's Muslims' marginal place in historiography parallels their place in the mainstream national and colonial societies. Being urban, of ethnically hybrid descent, and Muslim, they fit neither the

⁹ Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen, "Translocality: An Approach to Connection and Transfer in Area Studies," in: Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen (eds.), *Translocality: The Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1–21.

¹⁰ In the context of Bujumbura, these people are usually referred to as Swahili. See, for instance: José Hamim Kagabo, *L'Islam et les "Swahili" au Rwanda* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1988). Yet, contrary to the etymology of the word Swahili ("coastal"), there is no direct genealogical link between the vast majority of the "Swahili" of Bujumbura and the Indian Ocean coast. As we will see later, most of the so-called Swahili in and around Bujumbura have their roots around Lake Tanganyika and in areas west of the lake, in what is today known as eastern Congo.

¹¹ Émile Mworoha (ed.), *Histoire du Burundi: des origines à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Hatier, 1987), 237, 240–242.

Christian and containment ideal of Belgian colonialism nor the exclusive nationalistic and rural ideal of Burundian elites leading up to and after independence. Put otherwise, these Muslims were central to the urban history of Bujumbura, but they did not fit in national or colonial perspectives. Adding the regional dimensions, so I argue, breaks the stalemate between anti-Muslim national (or colonial) and Muslim urban histories. In this article, I aim not only to write the Muslims of Bujumbura back into the urban history they helped to shape, but also to assess how their being ignored, marginalized, and excluded colonially and nationally has influenced the history of Bujumbura's Muslims themselves.

Specifically, I demonstrate that internal communal dynamics and changes in practicing religion among Bujumbura's African Muslims¹² mirrored anti-Islamic attitudes held by colonial authorities and national political leaders in Burundi throughout the colonial era.¹³ Contemporary religious tendencies within Islamic communities in other parts of East and Central Africa, and in the Islamic world more broadly, were taken up in a productive way, informing communal responses to a climate of suspicion, segregation, marginalization, and exclusion. In the end, Islamization and living Islam in colonial Bujumbura were the result of an interplay between gradually tightening anti-Islamic policies on urban and national scales, ever more constrained living conditions and enclosure on the communal scale, and reaching out to connections in East Africa, Central Africa, and the wider Islamic world. Thus Bujumbura's Muslims faced local challenges translocally through connectedness on different scales.

The article follows a chronological order in three stages. I, firstly, provide a short introduction to the history of Bujumbura and its Muslim population while elucidating the initial process of group formation and identification with Islam during the first three decades of the colonial era. Secondly, I unravel the links between internal social structure and Sufi

¹² During the colonial era, the city of Bujumbura was called Usumbura. In this article, I use the more common present-day name. Although the Muslims in town included Arab and Indian Muslims, I here focus on the African Muslim community, unless explicitly stated otherwise. More information on the town and its Muslim communities, including the Arab and Indian Muslims, see: Geert Castryck, "Moslims in Usumbura (1897–1962): een sociale geschiedenis van de islamitische gemeenschappen van Usumbura in de koloniale tijd," PhD dissertation, Universiteit Gent (Gent, 2006).

¹³ Undeniably, the anti-Islamic measures became more drastic under Belgian rule than they had been under German rule. Yet, as I demonstrate elsewhere, the Belgian colonial policy towards Muslims showed a lot of continuity within the German period. Castryck, "Moslims in Usumbura," 93–98; Carol W. Dickerman, "Economic and Social Change in an African City: Bujumbura, Burundi, 1900–1962," PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin (Madison WI, 1984), 38–43; Kagabo, *L'Islam et les "Swahili,"* 19–35.

religious practices in Bujumbura, Belgian colonial anti-Islamic policy, and Islamic developments in the rest of East and Central Africa during the next three decades, up to the 1950s. Thirdly, I show how during the final years of the colonial period drastic changes within the Muslim community matched sociopolitical processes in Burundi as well as reformist tendencies in the Islamic world at large. Finally, the conclusion establishes how the interplay between religious dynamics, political realities, and social relations, on the one hand, and hopping between different scales, on the other, facilitated creative ways to respond to, escape from, and sometimes even subvert subjugation without, however, being able to fundamentally change the dominant order nor the mainstream perception thereof. Precisely because of the crucial strategy of hopping between different scales, none of the dominant regional or national perspectives has come to grips with the resilient idiosyncrasy of the Muslims of Bujumbura.

Becoming Muslim: Introducing Islam in Colonial Bujumbura

This section introduces the main protagonists of my case study: the town of Bujumbura and its Muslim inhabitants.

- Situating the Town of Bujumbura

Bujumbura, a commercial port town on the north-eastern tip of Lake Tanganyika and the present-day capital of Burundi, is in many ways a marginal town. Geographically, it is squeezed between Lake Tanganyika and the Congo-Nile divide mountain range. This position places Bujumbura outside the Burundian mainland, at the periphery of Burundian political influence during most of the pre-colonial era, but still within the Burundian cultural sphere of influence. On the eve of colonization, this coastal strip between the lake and mountains came under the control of the African-Arab commercial network in East and Central Africa, with Ujiji as most important nearby hub. The hills of the Burundian mainland were never subdued by these African-Arabs, which leaves the coastal strip along the lake at the fringe of African-Arab influence as well. Colonization, then, demarcated Congolese and German East African territories, including this area along the rim of the German protectorate. Bujumbura, which had already served as a marketplace since time immemorial, was officially founded in 1897 as a German colonial garrison town, meant to guard the border with the Congo Free State and to serve as a stepping stone towards “pacifying” Burundi and Rwanda, thus exploiting its multiple marginal positions.¹⁴

¹⁴ For more information about colonial Bujumbura, see: Dickerman, “Economic and Social Change.”

Before the founding of Bujumbura, there were already urban settlements on the Burundian lakeshore, which were part of the Ujiji-centered sphere of influence and predominantly inhabited by an Islamized population. Rumonge was the most important of these centers and would remain so well into the twentieth century. Nyanza-Lac, nowadays close to the border with Tanzania, likewise was a significant Swahili urban center, with Ujiji, Nyanza-Lac, Rumonge, and Bujumbura at more or less at equal distances. The colonial and increasingly national role of Bujumbura as the administrative and economic capital of the country would tilt the hierarchical relation between these places in favor of Bujumbura in the two decades after the First World War.

As far as the religious evolutions of its Muslim inhabitants are concerned, however, the urban centers along the lake saw parallel evolutions and Ujiji remained the main reference in the religious domain. Nevertheless, especially towards the end of the colonial period, the religious and communal dynamics became more pronounced and more autonomous in Bujumbura. The decisive differential had to do with the colonial and national centrality of Bujumbura, which both led to a considerably larger Muslim community together with a more rapid minoritization of Muslims within a booming town. A detailed interpretation of this differentiation is at the heart of the fourth section of this article.

At the onset, the border position rather than the colonial or later national centrality defined the fate of Bujumbura. Being on the margins of political, cultural, economic, and ecological zones offered pivotal opportunities. As a meeting point, crossroads, and gatekeeper, Bujumbura combined urban functions in the military, commercial, administrative, and demographic fields. Planned as a military-strategic stronghold, Bujumbura witnessed the further development of its role as a local and regional commercial center, the establishment of a colonial administration serving the whole of Burundi and Rwanda,¹⁵ and the settlement of a new urban population predominantly coming from the broader Lake Tanganyika region. Three aspects are of crucial importance in order to situate the importance of Bujumbura and its – for long – predominantly Muslim population.

First, through commercial links the port and market of Bujumbura formed the connection between the local and national economy on the one hand and East and Central Africa and the world economy on the other. Thus, despite its eccentric position, Bujumbura became both Burundi's main window to the world and the world's main point of access to Burundi.

¹⁵ From 1906 until 1916, as far as Rwanda is concerned, and from 1913 until 1916, as far as Burundi is concerned, Bujumbura temporarily lost its role as the colonial administrative capital. Parallel to the joint Ruanda-Urundi colonial administration in Bujumbura, the towns of Gitega and Kigali (from 1906 till 1908, Bukoba) were the respective locations for indirect rule and relative autonomy of Burundi and Rwanda (*Residentur/résidence*).

Second, the colonial course of fixing borders, pursuing control, establishing an administration, and state formation turned Bujumbura into the capital of a country to which it only marginally belonged at first. Both its location on the other side of the Congo-Nile divide when seen from the Burundian heartlands, and its urban character in a predominantly rural country underscore this marginality. Third, the town was populated with people from around Lake Tanganyika, many of them with roots in what is today known as eastern Congo.

One part of the population was comprised of artisans and clerks with their families drafted in Ujiji and in other parts of German East Africa by the German colonial authorities. Furthermore, the new town attracted fishers and farmers as well as their families from around the northern part of Lake Tanganyika. Apart from the urban pull factor, the Belgian conquest war and the Batetela rebellion in eastern Congo in the 1890s as well as the sleeping sickness epidemic, which struck the northern Lake Tanganyika area particularly hard at the beginning of the twentieth century, caused large numbers of displaced people to settle in a space between the lake and mountains relatively depopulated by disease.¹⁶ Forced resettlement as part of the colonial campaign to fight sleeping sickness led to a further increase of the population of Bujumbura – as well as of Rumonge and Nyanza-Lac. By the time Rwanda and Burundi fell under Belgian rule as a consequence of the First World War, Bujumbura had become a predominantly Muslim town of between 2,500 and 3,000 inhabitants. The big questions, however, are why and how this new urban population came to identify with Islam, and what their being Muslim meant in the first place.

- Practicing Islam in Early Colonial Bujumbura

Islam is a religion of practice. The five religious obligations, or pillars, of Islam are its ritual, or outward, signs, in which believing and doing go hand in hand.¹⁷ Becoming Muslim, therefore, can develop out of emulation. In late nineteenth-century East and Central Africa, the emulation of Islamic practices, as part of Swahili culture, provided guidance, stability, and belonging in a context of social dislocation. Not unlike other towns around Lake Tanganyika and along the nineteenth-century caravan routes, Bujumbura was populated by people from very diverse origins, who found

¹⁶ For more information about the devastating impact of the sleeping sickness epidemics, see: Christian Thibon, *Histoire démographique du Burundi* (Paris: Karthala, 2004).

¹⁷ Pronouncing the Islamic creed (*shahada*), perform five daily prayers (*salat*), paying a tax for the benefit of the religion and the needy (*zakat* or *sadaka*), fasting during the month of *Ramadan*, and performing at least once the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) on condition that he or she has the material and physical capacity to do so.

a common ground in Swahili culture.¹⁸ Most of these people were uprooted, be it as captured slaves, as auxiliaries of slave and ivory traders, as refugees of war, orphans due to epidemics, or persons excommunicated for sundry reasons, or simply as enterprising or venturesome people seeking opportunities. On top of that, they all arrived in a new urban living environment that they had to shape.

The combination of having to reinvent themselves personally, to build a way of life that could accommodate people of myriad stock, and to face new challenges in new surroundings led people to adopt a common urban life style. Forging a common living environment in which new urbanites could all feel at home included the adoption of common culinary and clothing habits, dance and music, building styles, the organization of time, the use of the Swahili language, and an identification with Islam. The motivations as well as the agency for this urbanity were local, and they should be understood and explained locally rather than as a diffusion of Swahili culture from the East African coast. All the same, the only urban culture they had all encountered before was the coastal culture of the caravan traders, with whom they all had – for better or for worse – been confronted over the past couple of decades.¹⁹ The local need for communication, belonging, and meeting everyday challenges in towns like Bujumbura; the availability of an East African coastal culture in Central Africa; as well as a line of communication and mobility into Central Africa and up to the Indian Ocean coast provided the constellation in which solutions for local problems were carved out throughout the colonial period. These solutions were neither strictly local nor urban, neither Burundian national nor Great Lakes regional, neither East nor Central African, but genuinely translocal.

The majority became “at least nominal Muslims”²⁰ with “a minimum of religious practice.”²¹ Especially the uprooted and dislocated Muslims, who

¹⁸ See, for instance: Beverly Brown, “Ujiji: the History of a Lakeside Town, c. 1800–1914,” PhD dissertation, Boston University (Boston, 1973); Dickerman, “Economic and Social Change;” Jan-Georg Deutsch, *Emancipation without Abolition in German East Africa, c. 1884–1914* (Oxford: James Currey, 2006); Stephen J. Rockel, “Slavery and Freedom in Nineteenth Century East Africa: The Case of Waungwana Caravan Porters,” *African Studies* 68-1 (2009), 87–109.

¹⁹ For a recent analysis of people around Lake Tanganyika who already emulated the coastal way of life during the second half of the nineteenth century, see: Philip Gooding, “Slavery, ‘Respectability,’ and Being ‘Freeborn’ on the Shores of Nineteenth-Century Lake Tanganyika,” *Slavery & Abolition* (published online, 19 December 2017), 1–21.

²⁰ David C. Sperling and José H. Kagabo, “The Coastal Hinterland and Interior of East Africa,” in: Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels (eds.), *The History of Islam in Africa* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2000), 273–302, 280.

²¹ In French: “un minimum de pratique religieuse.” Bimangu and Tshishiku Tshibangu, “Contribution à l’histoire,” 228.

had their roots in the area west of Lake Tanganyika but were highly mobile throughout East and Central Africa, became the actual carriers of the further spread of Islam in this part of Africa. Integration into a community rather than proselytization were the engines of this spread. Initially, Islam in this area was primarily lived or practiced rather than contemplated or consecrated.²² Moreover, Muslims continued to combine their Islamic practices with several other ritual or healing practices and habits stemming from their places of origin.²³

As far as Bujumbura is concerned, the German and Belgian colonial administrations helped in perpetuating an Islamic imprint that was still weak at the beginning of the twentieth century, and they did so despite – or perhaps because of – their hostility to anything that had to do with slavery, “Arabs,” and Islam, which were their economic, political, and religious rivals. In the Congo, and later in the mandate territory of Ruanda-Urundi, the Belgian colonial authorities assumed that former allies of the “Arabs,” former slaves, as well as people making a living in these surroundings were all Muslims. I do not want to suggest that this assumption was essentially false. However, by treating people with diverse and even opposed origins as one group – and by reducing them to their presupposed religion – the colonial government reinforced early Swahili community formation and if not caused, then at least facilitated, a self-fulfilling Islamization process.²⁴

By making the Swahili language the language of administration in German East Africa, the German colonial policy likewise contributed to the spread of Islam, which is one of the attributes of Swahili culture. This policy did not reach into the Burundian and Rwandan heartlands, which held a high degree of autonomy, but it did apply to the lacustrine strip between the mountains and Lake Tanganyika, where Bujumbura is situated. In so doing, they made Swahili *asharis* and artisans of diverse cultural and social backgrounds spread throughout the colony and settle in urban centers, another feature of Swahiliness. Albeit unintendedly, these colonial policies strengthened internal dynamics leading to Swahilization.

²² Melvin E. Page, “The Manyema Hordes of Tippu Tip: A Case Study in Social Stratification and the Slave Trade in Eastern Africa,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 7–1 (1974), 69–84; Bimangu and Tshishiku Tshibangu, “Contribution à l’histoire,” 228–229; Sperling and Kagabo, “The Coastal Hinterland,” 289–290.

²³ For a detailed study of ritual and healing practices of Maniema origin in Ujiji, see: Sheryl McCurdy, “Transforming Associations: Fertility, Therapy, and the Manyema Diaspora in Urban Kigoma, Tanzania, c. 1850–1993,” PhD dissertation, Columbia University (New York, 2000). The continuity of ritual practices after becoming Muslim is also described in Becker, *Becoming Muslim*.

²⁴ Abel, *Les Musulmans noirs*, 9; Bimangu and Tshishiku Tshibangu, “Contribution à l’histoire,” 227–229.

A translocal process of identity and community building explains how Bujumbura became an almost entirely Muslim town, from its foundation at the end of the nineteenth century until around 1930. The town's Muslims soon built the basic infrastructures of Islam. The first mosque, which was to remain the town's Friday mosque until the segregating urban planning measures in the 1930s (which is discussed later), was built around 1900 in the Mbugani quarter, the central Swahili, Arab, and Indian neighborhood between the German fortress and the lake where the city developed during the first three decades of its urban existence. Within the first decade, a Muslim of Congolese descent, Idi Asumani, became the most important imam of the Friday mosque.

Parallel to the religious institutions, the community shared a "force for cohesiveness"²⁵ and a "capacité d'accueil"²⁶ ("a disposition towards hospitality"), which refer to their willingness to absorb or integrate the socially weak and needy as well as to their capacity to stand as a cohesive and translocally connected group vis-à-vis their colonial and Burundian contexts. Once a core Muslim community in town was established, further newcomers were integrated and assisted in finding housing and work. Solidarity and hospitality deeply impressed newcomers in the community,²⁷ who were in later years mostly orphans, women or girls threatened with abduction, or otherwise vulnerable people, much like the initial members of the community, who also had backgrounds of displacement and vulnerability.²⁸ The experience of hospitality and the process of integration in the community was tantamount to their integration in the city and the religion.²⁹

²⁵ Dickerman, "Economic and Social Change," 382.

²⁶ Kagabo, *L'Islam et les "Swahili,"* 73.

²⁷ Interview #7, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 9 September 2004; interview #18, Kinama Bujumbura, 18 September 2004. Also see: Dickerman, "Economic and Social Change," 382, 391 n72. The author conducted the interviews in the context of the research for his PhD dissertation during field research in Bujumbura in August-October 2004. Due to the civil war context at the time, some informants were reluctant to talk openly about their life (which implies information about their identity). Therefore, interviews have been anonymized and numbered chronologically. The interviews were conducted in Swahili and interpreted into French by a research assistant. Transcriptions (in Swahili) and translations (in French), safeguarding the anonymity of the informants, are available from the author on demand. During a second research trip to Bujumbura in September-October 2011, the author, accompanied by the same research assistant, revisited some of the informants for follow-up interviews.

²⁸ Kagabo, *L'Islam et les "Swahili,"* 86.

²⁹ Dickerman, "Economic and Social Change," 119-126; Christian Coulon, "Vers une sociologie des confréries en Afrique orientale," in: François Constantin (ed.), *Les voies de l'islam en Afrique orientale* (Paris: Karthala, 1987), 111-133, 118; Kagabo, *L'Islam et les "Swahili,"* 71, 76, 131.

For the early colonial period, it actually makes the distinction between urbanization, Swahilization, and Islamization needless. Until the 1930s, integration in the city had been virtually synonymous with integration in the Swahili community and conversion to Islam.

During this period, Bujumbura saw a demographic evolution from a population of less than 2,000 inhabitants around 1910 to close to 4,000 in 1930, which was almost homogeneously Muslim. Over the next five years, the Muslim population grew by a further 1,500, which was the most rapid growth so far. During those same years, however, the entire population of Bujumbura grew by 3,000 inhabitants, which means that for the first time a substantial share of the urban population was not Muslim. This divergence continued, leading to a demographic situation of 12,000 to 14,500 Muslims within a total urban population of around 50,000 at the time of independence in 1962. This simultaneous absolute growth and relative decline of the Muslim population of Bujumbura can be explained from outside and from inside the community. Externally, this evolution was the result of a combination of Belgian anti-Islamic policies, the fact that the influx of rural Burundians was too rapid for the Muslim community to absorb every newcomer, and eventually the arrival of a new national elite.³⁰ At the same time, however, the Muslim community of Bujumbura addressed these challenges by connecting in a multitude of ways to a Great Lakes context, Central Africa, East Africa, and the wider Islamic world (as will be shown in the next section).

Qadiriyya Sufism and the Pillars of the Muslim Community

During and immediately after the First World War, “during the eight year hiatus [1916–1924] in effective colonial administration,”³¹ East and Central Africa saw the largest growth of Islam. This expansion in numbers was also a deepening of Islam, accompanied by an Africanization of Islam and its religious personnel, and an extension of a primarily ritual practicing of Islam into a more normative and pious form of Islam. Thorough Islamic knowledge and scholarship, without a doubt, did not reach everyone. But even in relatively small urban centers like Bujumbura, Muslims paid more attention to religious interpretations while, at the same time, strengthening and deepening the ritual underpinnings of Islam. They also attached more importance to religious education on the spot as well as in the nearby Islamic center of Ujiji, or possibly on the coast, and as a consequence

³⁰ For more information on the demography of colonial Bujumbura and its Muslim population in particular, as well as on Belgian anti-Islamic policies, see: Castryck, “Moslems in Usumbura,” 72–110.

³¹ Nimtz, *Islam and Politics*, 14.

religious personnel was increasingly drawn from the local community.³² Sufi brotherhoods and particularly the *Qadiriyya tariqa* (Sufi path) were the most important carriers of these more African, more pious, and more substantial forms of Islam in Bujumbura. The same dynamics took place in other Swahili centers along the lake, like Rumonge and Nyanza-Lac, or in the slowly developing Swahili communities in the Burundian highland, at Muramvya and Gitega, where one of the regional leaders of the *Qadiriyya*, Sheikh Mohamed Kibaraka, lived.

The success of Sufism is largely attributed to:

First, compared to established orthodox Islam, they tended to be more tolerant of local customs. Second, the Sufi orders were regarded as more egalitarian than clerical Islam because status in the *tariqa* was based more on piety rather than on learning. This proselytizing role enabled the *tariqa* to carry out what has been one of its most significant functions, that of social integration.³³

The egalitarian character and potential for integration of Sufism is indeed important, but it should not be exaggerated. It does not at all mean that wealth did not play a decisive role in determining social status, but rather that a rich person would primarily gain respect if he used this wealth for *sadaka* or group solidarity. Similarly, learning (*'ilm*) continued to give rise to prestige and authority, but not as a goal in itself. Rather, it was a means that allowed practitioners to contribute to piety and togetherness. Kinship and connections continued to play their status-defining role, but they did so in a way that was oriented towards the community and offered opportunities to meritorious and pious believers without pedigree. In short, as always the prevalence was still with those possessing economic, symbolic and/or social capital – “respecting the social order”³⁴ – but nevertheless the *tariqa* brought people together and gave them a group feeling that was not based that much upon inequalities and unbridgeable gaps. A subtle balance between hierarchy and egalitarianism was at play, largely

³² Nimitz, *Islam and Politics*, 9–15; José Kagabo, “La formation des *walimu* et leur rôle dans la communauté musulmane du Rwanda,” in: François Constantin (ed.), *Les voies de l’islam en Afrique orientale* (Paris: Karthala, 1987), 73–83, 81; Randall L. Pouwels, “The East African Coast, c. 780 to 1900 C.E.,” in: Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels (eds.), *The History of Islam in Africa* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2000), 251–271, 264–265; Sperling and Kagabo, “The Coastal Hinterland,” 296.

³³ Nimitz, *Islam and Politics*, 56.

³⁴ In French: “respectueux de l’ordre social.” François Constantin, “Le saint et le prince: Sur les fondements de la dynamique confrérique en Afrique orientale,” in: François Constantin (ed.), *Les voies de l’islam en Afrique orientale* (Paris: Karthala, 1987), 85–109, 92.

depending on the charisma (*baraka*) of the leader together with the collective will to believe in it, or as Abel sums it up: “The tradition of the *tariqas* (...) constantly entails a double aspect: an aspect of popularity (populaire) and an aspect of mastery (magistral).”³⁵

The fact that most of the *khalifa* (successors or accredited representatives of the *tariqa*) spreading the *Qadiriyya* in the wider region were Africans played a crucial role in its resonance and appeal. As a matter of fact, it was mostly former Congolese slaves who brought this Islamic Sufi message to the heart of Africa, and they did so via the same route Islam had followed to initially reach Central Africa, which is the opposite direction than that to the East African coast taken by these Congolese or their parents or grandparents during the nineteenth century. At the same time, it was local needs and demands as well as local agency that steered the adoption and adaptation of this Sufi version of Islam.³⁶ Characteristic of this form of Islam was the combination of informally organized communities, local leadership, and familiar practices with relationships that stretched across East and Central Africa and throughout the Islamic world, and with a universal philosophy that is rooted in a millennium of Islamic history.³⁷ Apart from the importance of piety, learning, wealth, charisma, and connections, the position of women was also crucial to the success of *Qadiriyya* in East Central Africa. Women’s access to religious learning and full participation in religious ceremonies help in explaining the great attraction of *Qadiriyya*.³⁸ Women also had their own religious festivals and could follow religious studies that went further than a basic introduction in the reading of the Quran.³⁹

Thus, by around 1930 the *Qadiriyya tariqa* had become the driving force behind the expansion of Islam in East and Central Africa. Just like Ujiji had been the commercial hub in the region half a century earlier, it now was the religious center for Muslims in the region. The influence of Ujiji radiated into eastern Congo and the Muslim villages and towns along Lake Tanganyika. Bujumbura as well belonged to the sphere of influence of Ujiji and was thus connected to the East African coast and the wider Islamic world. The *Qadiriyya* reached Bujumbura and, contrary to what José Kagabo and Carol Dickerman assert, Sufism played a

³⁵ In French: “La tradition des *tariqa* (...) revêt constamment un double aspect: aspect populaire et aspect magistral.” Abel, *Les Musulmans noirs*, 21.

³⁶ For a detailed analysis of the local initiative in adopting and adapting Islamic influences, see: Becker, *Becoming Muslim*.

³⁷ Constantin, “Le saint et le prince,” 94–100; Coulon, “Vers une sociologie,” 120.

³⁸ Abel, *Les Musulmans noirs*, 37–38, 42–44; Nimtz, *Islam and Politics*, 78–79, 121, 127.

³⁹ Interview #19, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 28 September 2004.

decisive role in Muslim life in the city.⁴⁰ The mere fact that the town's most important Islamic community center in the interwar period was called *Qadiriyya* is sufficiently telling. From the 1930s until at least the 1950s, the Swahili community life of Bujumbura was thoroughly determined by *Qadiriyya* Sufism.

- *Anti-Islamic Policies*

Because of the anti-Islamic policy of the Belgian colonial government, however, the *Qadiriyya* in Bujumbura could not attract newcomers in the same way as elsewhere in East Africa. Through measures of urban planning the colonial administration largely managed to segregate the African Muslim community from the rest of the urban or Burundian population by the 1930s. Upon the forced resettlement of the town's Swahili community, the historical heart of the town where they used to live, between the administrative center of town and the lake, became the *Quartier asiatique* (Asian quarter), being reserved for – primarily Muslim – Indians and Arabs. Thus different groups of Muslims were spatially separated from one another. Furthermore, the new Swahili quarter, Buyenzi, was physically isolated from the rest of town, being squeezed between the Ntahangwa river, the industrial and port area, a buffer zone (gradually occupied by a market, a hospital, an equestrian center, the old football stadium, tennis grounds, a swimming pool, and a golf course), and an easily controllable straight and wide avenue separating Buyenzi from Belge (today called Bwiza). This spatial isolation was complemented by limitations on settlement, mobility, employment, and education for the Swahili urban population.⁴¹ Belge, in turn, was the neighborhood for the African (initially mainly Congolese, later increasingly Burundian and Rwandan) staff of the Belgian colonizers, and thus the first non-Swahili African neighborhood in town – or rather non-Muslim, as in fact the mostly eastern Congolese colonial employees did speak Kiswahili as well, albeit in its Congolese “Central African” manner contrary to the Muslims in town who fancied an “East African” coastal accent.

In short, the rapid growth of town coincided with the forced resettlement, isolation, and discrimination of its original Swahili population and

⁴⁰ Kagabo, *L'Islam et les "Swahili,"* 11; Dickerman, “Economic and Social Change,” 123. The disparity between my findings and the findings of Kagabo and Dickerman is likely due to their informants distancing themselves from, and therefore playing down, the importance of *Qadiriyya* Sufism, at a time when the turn towards Islamic Reform (see later) was still relatively recent, whereas my informants, a quarter of a century later, no longer had reservations to talk about religious practices and community organization of the past.

⁴¹ For more details about these colonial policies, see: Castryck, “Moslims in Usumbura,” 90–121.

the establishment of new non-Swahili neighborhoods, which means that newcomers for the first time had alternatives to Swahilization in order to integrate into urban life. This is the moment when the history of the Muslim community of Bujumbura starts to diverge from that of Rumonge or Nyanza-Lac, which were not only much smaller, but remained primarily Swahili, or at least not spatially segregated, for the rest of the colonial period. Although the religious developments in each of these towns was still in line with and connected to what happened in Ujiji and beyond, the peculiar bearing in Bujumbura requires a specific local and intracommunity interpretation as well.

In the given context, the impact of *Qadiriyya* was largely limited to those people who were already Islamized before, together with only a comparatively small number of newcomers. Nevertheless, the demographic figures do show a marked increase in the number of Muslims in Bujumbura during the first half of the 1930s, albeit within a wider urban population that grew even more rapidly. The colonial government actually felt deeply concerned about the continuing appeal of Islam in Bujumbura.⁴² However, by the middle of the 1930s the growth of the Muslim population had diminished and by the end of the next decade they had become a minority in town. *Qadiriyya*'s success in attracting converts had been ephemeral; however, it had a more thorough and long-lasting impact inside the Muslim community of Bujumbura.

Both in terms of the social and of the ceremonial organization of community life, the Sufi way was omnipresent. *Qadiriyya* was relatively accessible and had a potential to strengthen solidarity and cohesion within a community, which was all the more needed because of colonial segregation policy. The shift from a primarily practical living of Islam as part of urban Swahili culture, to a more pious *Qadiriyya* Sufism, thus also meant a gradual move from a de facto very open community to a more closed in-group solidarity. This move can be understood in Belgian colonial and Great Lakes contexts as a way of coping with isolation and segregation measures against them, whereas this move was in line with a shift from an expansive to an intensive phase in Sufi Islam across East Africa. Internal communal leadership was a crucial factor in this transition.

- Authority beyond Ethnicity

As mentioned before, Abel highlights the double character of the *tariqa*: "popular" and "magisterial." Seen from inside the community, authority or leadership fulfilled an important role in the organization of the Islamic community life but, at the same time, the togetherness and the primacy of the group prevailed. In this, religious and community leadership followed

⁴² Dickerman, "Economic and Social Change," 178, 188.

different logics, but were complementary and, in practice, there was no clear line between both. Religious leadership within the *Qadiriyya* was based on piety, knowledge, charisma, and the *silsila* (chain of succession) within the *tariqa*. Leadership could thus be passed on to a follower who was considered capable of teaching – that is to say, having the piety, knowledge, and charisma to do so. Parallel to this, community leadership was institutionalized in a committee that was alternately called *Comité ya Wazee* (Council of Elders/Sages),⁴³ *Comité zao za Waisilamu* (their Committee of Muslims),⁴⁴ *Wakubwa wa Kabila* (the big men of the tribes),⁴⁵ or the *Comité Musulman de Buyenzi* (Islamic Committee Buyenzi),⁴⁶ which together refer to religion, age, respectability, status, ethnicity, and neighborhood. The committee was both the interlocutor for the colonial administration and responsible organ for the management of religious festivals, hosting visitors, or assignments in prayer or other rituals.

The composition of the committee tells us something about the trans-local functioning of the community. It consisted of representatives of *kabila* or ethnic groups. Twelve *kabila* each delegated two men. Although the delegates were all *wazee* (elders or sages) with some religious and societal prestige, this composition seems to indicate that ethnicity was of utmost importance. However, this composition also helps to overcome ethnic division. Giving each ethnic group equal weight prevented an ethnic group or ethnic criteria from dominating the whole community or religious life. The most important *kabila* in Bujumbura's Muslim community were the Bembe, Bwari, Masanze, and Vira, all of them originating in the Congo. Towards the end of the colonial period, the share of the Rwanda and especially the Rundi ethnic groups grew significantly, but even then the four aforementioned Congolese ethnic groups still accounted for half of the Swahili community of Bujumbura. The Rundi came close to a third and the Rwanda almost a tenth of the community in the final years of the colonial period.⁴⁷ As latecomers in the community, however, they were generally less well-off, less educated, and younger and would therefore usually be less represented among the most prestigious or respected men of the community. Taken together, the remaining ethnic groups (Goma, Bangubangu, Nyamwezi, etc.) added up to less than 10%; however, they had as many

⁴³ Interview #9, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 10 September 2004.

⁴⁴ Interview #20, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 29 September 2004.

⁴⁵ Dickerman, "Economic and Social Change," 250–251.

⁴⁶ Archives Africaines, Bruxelles, Bur (69)3, "Sûreté: groupe de travail, fiches des divers islamisés indigènes. Secret, 1958–1959."

⁴⁷ Note that Rundi and Rwanda were used as ethnic identifiers, and no distinction was made between Hutu and Tutsi. Castryck, "Moslems in Usumbura," 196; Dickerman, "Economic and Social Change," 250–252; Archives Africaines, Bruxelles, Ra/RU (160)9, "Rapports C.E.C. Usumbura, 1956."

representatives in the committee as the six big ones. In practice, the functioning of this Swahili “parliament” rather neutralized than strengthened the predominance of the largest ethnic groups and thus prioritized the general interest of the community. It also indicates that the people remained very aware of their ethnic identity, thus maintaining their connections, mentally, and materially, with their Congolese roots as much as with friends and family across East and Central Africa.⁴⁸

The fact that the committee was composed according to ethnic grounds does not mean that in practice every member was equally influential. Through knowledge, prestige, wealth, or experience some individuals had greater authority than others. In the actual functioning of the committee, the ethnic factor was clearly subordinate to the qualities of individual members. What the most influential members all had in common was some degree of religious merit, which could be based on knowledge as well as on wealth, on *ilm*, as well as on *sadaka*, and which could be cause as well as result of social prestige.

- Religious Underpinnings of Communal Leadership

Huseni Msozerwa, the *mwalimu* of the main *madrassa* of Buyenzi and one of the imams for Friday prayers, has been identified as the most important person for religious issues in the colonial period. Hilali Hamisi, Mahamudu Kaburwe, Rajabu Sudi, and Ramazani Shabani were also recognized as religious authorities within the community during the period under scrutiny.⁴⁹ All five were *mwalimu* (teacher) and their prestige was at least partly based on their religious knowledge. Moreover, all of them were of Congolese descent (Bembe, Bwari, and Masanze). Ramazani Shabani was the only one born in Bujumbura, from a father who immigrated from Uvembe.⁵⁰ The other four were born in what was by then the Congo, in Kigoma-Ujiji

⁴⁸ Interview #12, Cibitoke Bujumbura, 13 September 2004; interview #19, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 28 September 2004.

⁴⁹ In interviews held in Bujumbura between August and October 2004, nine out of eleven people who were asked to name the religiously most important people in colonial Bujumbura named Huseni Msozerwa. Five out of eleven mentioned Mahamudu Kaburwe, Hilali Hamisi, and Rajabu Sudi. Ramazani Shabani was mentioned by three out of eleven, but two of them strongly insisted that he was by far the most important imam of the community. When, during follow-up meetings, I presented a list of twenty names, two more people confirmed that Ramazani Shabani was indeed the most important imam.

⁵⁰ One of my informants (interview #20, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 29 September 2004) asserted that Ramazani Shabani was born in Uvembe and came via Tanganyika from Congo with his father. In 1980, Carol Dickerman interviewed Ramazani Shabani, and he then told that his father came from Uvembe to Bujumbura before he was born (Dickerman, “Economic and Social Change,” 119).

(Tanganyika) or in Nyanza-Lac (Burundi), and had already gained religious knowledge before coming to Bujumbura. This first generation, who arrived in Bujumbura during German colonial times, had mainly received their religious learning in Ujiji, and it was still limited to some practical knowledge about rituals and the ability to recite the Quran.⁵¹ Yet, they were the community leaders who underpinned the *Qadiriyya* way of living Islam in the interwar period.

Within the Muslim community of Bujumbura, there were not yet full-fledged Islamic scholars (*'ulama* or sheikh) before the Second World War. The religious input came from visiting sheikhs who would stay in Bujumbura for a few months or a few years and were provided with housing and livelihood from the prominent members of the community. These sheikhs provided religious teaching during their stay and in particular provided religious training for the *walimu* in Bujumbura. Sheikh Abdul Muhsin Kitumba from Kigoma-Ujiji and the already mentioned Sheikh Mohamed Kibaraka (alias Kijungute) from Kitega visited Bujumbura repeatedly.⁵² Both sheikhs were mentioned by August Nimtz as major *khalifa* who played an important role in spreading the *Qadiriyya tariqa* around Lake Tanganyika and in Ruanda-Urundi by the late 1920s.⁵³ The most important "visiting" sheikh in Bujumbura during the first half of the century was Sheikh Salih bin Muhammed. He was of mixed African-Arab origin and first came to Bujumbura via Kigoma-Ujiji in the 1920s. His importance to the Muslim community of Bujumbura was based not only on his great knowledge but also on the fact that he stayed long and often in Bujumbura, where he had a wife and child. Everyone having some religious function or ambition in town would learn with him. Although he belonged to none of the *kabila*, he was involved in all religious or community matters. He as well was *khalifa* of the *Qadiriyya tariqa*, albeit from another branch than Abdul Muhsin and Kijungute.⁵⁴

All of this shows that *Qadiriyya* influences, both coming from outside and developing inside the Swahili community, permeated the Islamic life in Bujumbura. Hilali Hamisi, for instance, was *murshid* (guide) and later

⁵¹ Kagabo, "La formation des walimu," 80–81; José Kagabo, "Réseaux d'ulama 'swahili' et liens de parenté: une piste de recherche," in: Françoise Le Guennec-Coppens and Patricia Caplan (eds.) *Les Swahili entre Afrique et Arabie* (Paris: Karthala, 1991), 59–72, 59.

⁵² Eight people I interviewed remembered either Sheikh Kijungute or Sheikh Abdul Muhsin Kitumba, or both.

⁵³ Nimtz, *Islam and Politics*, 59–60.

⁵⁴ Interview #12, Cibitoke Bujumbura, 13 September 2004; interview #19, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 28 September 2004; interview #20, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 29 September 2004. Also see: Sheryl McCurdy, "The 1932 'War' between Rival Ujiji (Tanganyika) Associations: Understanding Women's Motivations for Inciting Political Unrest," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 30–1 (1996), 10–31, 26 n15.

also *khalifa* (successor) and was the local leader of the *Qadiriyya*. He taught in the community center with the same name and organized *zikr* sessions. Ramazani Shabani, who thanks to his good knowledge of Arabic became the main imam of Bujumbura towards the end of the colonial period, was also *murshid*. He had his own madrasa, where he had as many as two hundred pupils.⁵⁵ He was both an imam and a tax officer, collecting taxes needed for the colonially instituted administration of the Buyenzi neighborhood.

This combination of community leadership, religious authority, and semi-colonial offices occurred more often.⁵⁶ Also Rajabu Sudi, one of the town's religious leaders most often mentioned by my informants, worked for the colonial administration. The same is true for Simba Idi Ndume, the son of the first imam of Bujumbura.⁵⁷ Rajabu Sudi had a remarkably modern profile and in 1952 he was the first Muslim in Ruanda-Urundi to receive the *Carte du mérite civique*, a colonial recognition of advancement and merit – or *évolué* status as it was called in colonial parlance.⁵⁸ Upon his retirement in 1957, he opened a bookstore in Buyenzi, where he sold both newspapers and religious books. He had taken both his modern and his religious education serious, and propagated this modern religious combination as the way forward for the community.⁵⁹ In 1946, Rajabu Sudi and Simba Idi joined forces to build a school in the Buyenzi neighborhood, the Jumuiyya Islamiyya.⁶⁰ In the morning, the school would provide religious teaching, and in the afternoon modern education.⁶¹ It is striking that many prominent

⁵⁵ Interview #16, Kinama Bujumbura, 18 September 2004; interview #19, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 28 September 2004; interview #20, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 29 September 2004.

⁵⁶ Castryck, "Moslems in Usumbura," 199–201.

⁵⁷ For more information about the first imam, mwalimu Idi Asumani, see: Dickerman, "Economic and Social Change," 119.

⁵⁸ Dickerman, "Economic and Social Change," 217–218, 264 n22.

⁵⁹ Archives Africaines, Bruxelles, Bur (69)3, "Sûreté: groupe de travail, fiches des divers islamisés indigènes. Secret 1958–1959 – fiche Rajabu Sudi;" interview #9, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 10 September 2004; interview #19, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 28 September 2004; interview #20, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 29 September 2004.

⁶⁰ For similar, and earlier, developments in Dar es Salaam, see: Daisy Sykes Buruku, "The Townsman: Kleist Sykes," in: John Iliffe (ed.), *Modern Tanzanians: A Volume of Biographies* (Dar es Salaam: East African Publishing House, 1973), 95–114, 106–107. Thanks to Katharina Zöller for drawing my attention to this parallel.

⁶¹ African Archives, Bruxelles, Bur (233)11, "Lettre N°1015/A.I.M.O. du Résident de l'Urundi à l'Administrateur Territorial de Bururi, Objet: Requête pour école musulmane Nyanza-Lac, 3 mai 1948;" interview #4, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 6 September 2004; interview #9, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 10 September 2004; interview #12, Cibitoke Bujumbura, 13 September 2004; interview #19, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 28 September 2004; interview #20, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 29 September 2004.

Waswahili worked in the public service and were on the vanguard of both modernizing and religious developments. It is equally remarkable that the individual and/or family prestige always preceded their public service jobs and that their prestige was either directly or indirectly based on religious merits.

Mahamudu Kaburwe in turn belonged to what could be called a local dynasty. The Kaburwe were an influential family, not only in Bujumbura but also in Rumonge and along the Burundian shores of Lake Tanganyika.⁶² He represented the Masanze kabila, of Congolese origin, in the Muslim Committee.⁶³ In the German period, he had been able to accumulate a lot of land in and near Bujumbura,⁶⁴ which gave him both wealth and influence through lease and loan relationships.⁶⁵ He himself was *mwalimu* and *muridi* (member or follower of the *Qadiriyya*) and has taught a lot in the time before Ramazani Shabani became the main teacher. He thus combined religious knowledge, wealth, influential family ties, and a respectable age. On top of that, he was a long-time resident of Bujumbura and his family had a long track record in the region, which further reinforced his status as *mzee* (elderly sage). He is a prime example of someone who was respected in all domains. Although not really surprising, it is noteworthy that status and authority often remained within the family.⁶⁶ By the middle of the century, his “son” Amrani Juma would become Bujumbura’s first homegrown sheikh. We will learn more about him in the next section.

So far, I only mentioned Swahili men whose prominence was, directly or indirectly, based on religious learning. Yet, even without significant religious knowledge, wealth, and generosity could be used to earn respect. Ibrahim Kibombo was one of the largest landowners of Bujumbura.⁶⁷ After the forced relocation of the Swahili community to the Buyenzi district in the 1930s, he used his wealth to build the first mosque in their

⁶² Archives Africaines, Bruxelles, Bur (69)3, “Sûreté: Groupe de travail, fiches des divers islamisés indigènes. Secret 1958–1959, fiche Amrani bin Juma;” “Annexe I: Contribution du chef Salumu (Rumonge),” in: Armand Abel, *Les Musulmans noirs du Maniema* (Bruxelles: Centre pour l’Étude des Problèmes du Monde Musulman Contemporain, 1960), 79–90.

⁶³ Interview #5, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 7 September 2004; interview #9, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 10 September 2004; interview #12, Cibitoke Bujumbura, 13 September 2004; interview #20, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 29 September 2004.

⁶⁴ Archives Nationales du Burundi, Bujumbura, AA 393(1), Oger Coubeau, “Note au sujet des terres occupées par les Waswahili, 1933.”

⁶⁵ Dickerman, “Economic and Social Change,” 289.

⁶⁶ Abel (*Les Musulmans noirs*, 41) also described the concentration of religious, legal, and political power in one family.

⁶⁷ Archives Nationales du Burundi, Bujumbura, AA 393(1), Coubeau O., “Note au sujet des terres occupées par les Waswahili, 1933.”

new neighborhood. This mosque on 13th Avenue, in the heart of the district, became the city's new Friday mosque.⁶⁸ Ibrahim Kibombe became *imam* as well as *mwalimu* in the adjacent madrasa. However, these religious offices were attributed to him more out of gratitude than religious knowledge. He had not studied extensively and was, for instance, not considered able to lead the Friday prayers.⁶⁹ It is significant that his esteem within the community was still based on religious merit, albeit here in a material form. The family wealth and status would allow his son Yahya to study and become a respected *mwalimu*.⁷⁰

Being well-off without proper religious formation did not preclude obtaining prestige. By giving *sadaka* in the form of investment in religious infrastructure, in the form of gifts to the needy, or in the form of funding *hajj* pilgrimages or religious ceremonies, one could still gain respect within the community.⁷¹ The primacy of religion, including the community aspect that is inherent to it, also becomes clear from the reverse example of a rich family who did not invest in religion. Makangira Kasongo and his son Ramazani Makangira should, in theory, have been the most influential figures in the community. Makangira was head of the Swahili community from the Belgian takeover until 1948, and he had the largest estate of the whole community. In 1948, he was succeeded as chief by his son Ramazani, who previously was already deputy chief and judge. As most of the leading figures in the community, they were of Congolese descent and Muslim. However, contrary to most longtime residents, Makangira had only arrived in town with the Belgian occupation in 1916. Despite their theoretical power as official leaders of the Swahili community and despite their great wealth, they were feared at most but hardly respected. Makangira still enjoyed the respect of old age, but Ramazani lacked even that. What they both lacked was religious merit. Neither of them had religious knowledge, nor did they compensate this lack with *sadaka* or solidarity. The only example that could somehow be seen as *sadaka* is the fact that Makangira

⁶⁸ The oldest mosque in town, built in the town's Mbugani neighborhood around 1900, had been the Friday mosque for all of Bujumbura's Muslims until then, and it became the mosque of the Arabs after the forced relocation of the Swahili to Buyenzi. In the 1980s, a grand mosque was built with the support of Libya's president Muammar al-Qaddafi, and it became the new Friday mosque for Swahili and Arabs alike.

⁶⁹ Interview #6, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 9 September 2004; interview #19, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 28 September 2004; interview #20, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 29 September 2004. In this Friday mosque Ramazani Shabani was the main imam for quite some time.

⁷⁰ Interview #11, Cibitoke Bujumbura, 13 September 2004.

⁷¹ Religious knowledge and investments in the community were, of course, not mutually exclusive, as can for example be seen from the foundation of the Jumuiyya Islamiyya by (amongst others) Rajabu Sudi.

provided a small plot of land to *mwalimu* Huseni Msozerwa, but that did not suffice for a respected or prominent status, and instead he was seen as a collaborator of the Belgians.⁷²

In conclusion, we can say that authority in the Swahili community of Bujumbura was indeed based on wisdom, kinship, wealth, and age, but these assets would only translate into esteem or respect if they were put into the service of Islam or the community. Since religion literally means connectedness and *Islam* *umoja* (Islam is unity),⁷³ serving Islam and serving the community is de facto the same. As we have seen in the previous section, until the 1930s, integration into the city had been virtually synonymous with integration into the Swahili community and conversion to Islam.⁷⁴ During the height of the colonial period, roughly the decades between 1930 and 1955, Islam in Bujumbura was strongly influenced by the Sufi *Qadiriyya*, which even more than Islam in general has charity and solidarity as core characteristics.⁷⁵ It is therefore at least ironic that the rise of *Qadiriyya* coincided with an increasing segregation of the Swahili community. It would be highly speculative to ask what could have happened without this anti-Islamic segregation policy. What we do know, is that the *Qadiriyya* has mainly functioned in a relatively closed Swahili community, where newcomers were still efficiently integrated, but not very numerous.

By the end of the colonial period, the influence of the *Qadiriyya* was already waning. The causes and consequences of this evolution, and in particular the introduction of an Islamic Reform in Bujumbura from the last decade of the colonial period onwards, will be discussed in the remainder of this article.

Proselytization after Conversion: Islamic Reform and Widening of Scope

After uprooted people had found socioeconomic support in an Islamic Swahili culture at the beginning of the colonial period, and after African leadership and familiar ritual elements had contributed to the success of

⁷² Archives Nationales du Burundi, Bujumbura, AA 393(1), Coubeau O., "Note au sujet des terres occupées par les Waswahili, 1933;" Archives Africaines, Bruxelles, Bur (206), "Liste des juges et assesseurs des tribuna[ux] – Waswahili et de Centre (Extra-coutumière)" (sic); interview #19, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 28 September 2004; interview #20, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 29 September 2004. Also see: Dickerman, "Economic and Social Change," 184.

⁷³ Interview #7, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 9 September 2004.

⁷⁴ Dickerman, "Economic and Social Change," 121–123; Kagabo, *L'Islam et les "Swahili,"* 156, 220–221, 255–256.

⁷⁵ Abel, *Les Musulmans noirs*, 40.

Sufi Islam a couple of decades later, it was not until the middle of the century that an Islamic missionary movement from outside gained influence. Paradoxically, but not untypical for reformist Islam, the first massive proselytizing efforts focused on those who had already converted. At about the same time, the movement came from three different angles and gradually led to a profound change in how Islam was practiced and experienced in Bujumbura.

- *Globalization of Islam in Bujumbura*

Firstly, and more important as a catalyst than as a direct influence, in the 1940s and 1950s, the Indian Ismaili Shiites in East Africa answered the call of their spiritual leader, the Sultan Mohamed Shah Aga Khan, to invest in social services. In 1936 and 1937, his followers had given him his weight in gold and diamonds on the occasion of his golden jubilee as Aga Khan, which he then distributed again via the Jubilee Cooperating Society, the Diamond Jubilee Investment Trust, the Ismailia Building Society, and the East African Muslim Welfare Society. In Bujumbura there were also sections of these societies and trusts, with the merchants Ali Rawji and Fidaali Abdul Hussein Talib as local leaders. They built the Jamatkhana, an Ismaili mosque that was inaugurated in 1943, and furthermore gave credits to Ismaili traders or entrepreneurs in the city. Although the Ismaili especially take care of their own relatively closed community,⁷⁶ in the 1950s they also started supporting social services for the African Muslim communities in Ruanda-Urundi, which yielded some degree of sympathy and rapprochement.⁷⁷ Reaching or converting African Muslims was not their primary concern, but the *Qadiriyya* in Bujumbura did feel threatened by these initiatives on what they considered to be their domain.⁷⁸ The activities by the

⁷⁶ Thanks to Abdul Sheriff (personal communication, June 2013) for pointing out the paradox between the primarily closed character of the Ismaili community, yet their apparent impact on another community.

⁷⁷ Archives Africaines, Bruxelles, Bur (219)5, "Liste des sujets britanniques non européens résidant en territoire d'Usumbura au 28 février 1941;" Archives Africaines, Bruxelles, Bur (221)4, "Liste des personnes asiatiques résidant en territoire d'Usumbura au 30 juin 1939;" Archives Africaines, Bruxelles, Bur (233)11, "Extrait du discours prononcé à l'occasion de l'inauguration de la Mosquée Ismailite à Usumbura le 31 octobre 1943 (traduction);" Archives Africaines, Bruxelles, Ra/RU (45)1, "Service des Affaires Économiques – Rapport Annuel 1956;" Archives Nationales du Burundi, Bujumbura, AA 241(1), "État nominatif de la population non indigène au 1-1-1946." Also see: Christine Deslaurier, "Un monde politique en mutation: le Burundi à la veille de l'indépendance (± 1956-1961)," PhD dissertation, Université Paris I – Panthéon Sorbonne (Paris, 2002), 354.

⁷⁸ Abel, *Les Musulmans noirs*, 60-61; Crawford Young, "L'Islam au Congo," *Études Congolaises* 10-5 (1967), 14-31.

Ismaili were probably more an irritation than a cause for the sense of threat that the *Qadiriyya* felt. The Sufi pious and popular form of Islam was also under attack from other angles.

Secondly, a reformist movement of Islamic missionaries came to persuade the Muslim population of the city that their Sufi Islam was not in accordance with Islamic orthodoxy. This missionary initiative came from Saudi Arabia, and the first recalled envoy to Bujumbura was the Sudanese 'Assir Kamal ud-Din, who twice spent two years in the city, where he acted as imam and mwalimu. After Burundian independence, the Saudi missionary efforts would continue unabatedly, and under this continuing influence many Waswahili left the *Qadiriyya tariqa* in the 1960s and 1970s.⁷⁹ This is considerably earlier than in neighboring Ujiji, despite the fact that in religious matters this town had always been the main point of reference for Bujumbura's Muslims. The different historical and political contexts reveal why Muslims in both towns responded differently to the appeal of these "orthodox" missionaries. Ujiji was the stronghold of *Qadiriyya* in East Central Africa and was part of a state in which Islam was recognized – albeit in some regards disadvantaged. In Ujiji, there was no immediate sense of crisis or need for change. For Bujumbura's Muslims, against the backdrop of a forced exclusion on the national level (see below), Islamic Reform did offer a positive choice to accommodate and appropriate exclusion on the local level, while at the same time linking up translocally and transcendentally with the promise of a global and universal Islam.

Thirdly, and fully in line with this local appeal and sense of crisis, some people from Bujumbura itself also started to criticize the way Islam was lived and community life was organized. At the end of the 1950s, Sheikh Amrani Juma, the "son" of Mahamudu Kaburwe, returned from several Islamic study stays abroad with a religious knowledge that was not inferior to that of the aforementioned Arab missionaries. Sefu Asumani, the son of the neighborhood judge Asumani Katembo, and Yahya Ibrahim Kibombo, mentioned before, likewise supported Islamic reform.⁸⁰ It is noteworthy that all three were "sons" from the big families and better educated than most of the local religious leaders of the time.⁸¹ This reflects the fact that the protest came from inside the community elite. A change of generations was taking place, where the young elite seemingly acted against

⁷⁹ Interview #8, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 10 September 2004; interview #9, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 10 September 2004; interview #16, Kinama Bujumbura, 18 September 2004; interview #20, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 29 September 2004.

⁸⁰ Interview #9, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 10 September 2004; interview #11, Cibitoke Bujumbura, 13 September 2004; interview #19, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 28 September 2004.

⁸¹ Abel (*Les Musulmans noirs*, 41) also described the concentration of religious, legal, and political power in one family.

the authority or religious convictions of their fathers. Armand Abel, writing at the time, correctly observes what was going on:

Next to the *mulidi* [*Qadiriyya* followers], and perhaps, to some extent, amongst them, there are the ‘Young Muslims’, especially prominent (...) in Bujumbura (...), who, in the name of orthodoxy, reject the quietism and submissive surrender of the *Qadiriyya*, and turn towards an idea of a regenerated, rigorous and strong Islam.⁸²

The colonial intelligence service had also noted that a rift had emerged within the African Muslim community of Bujumbura during the last years of the colonial period, but they wrongly – though significantly – assumed that the older generation adhered to “orthodox” Islam. It, of course, all depends on the perspective. The move towards more “orthodoxy” has been understood as a movement of Islamic Reform,⁸³ and in fact it was the young generation that was calling for Reform. However, there was more to it than a generation conflict or youthful resentment. The same intelligence service established a link with the ongoing decolonization process and political objectives.⁸⁴ Other colonial sources tellingly presupposed that a division inside the Muslim community ipso facto had to be due to a Sunni-Shiite opposition.⁸⁵ These colonial observations were clearly one-sided and based on their own biases, but they were nevertheless to some extent accurate: there was a Shiite, more specifically Ismaili,

⁸² “A côté des *mulidi*, et peut-être même, dans une faible mesure, parmi eux, il y a les ‘jeunes musulmans,’ répandus surtout (...) à Usumbura (...), qui, au nom de l’orthodoxie, rejettent le quietisme *mulidi* [= *Qadiriyya*] et son refus résigné, et s’attachent à l’idée d’un Islam rénové, rigoureux et fort.” Abel, *Les Musulmans noirs*, 70–71.

⁸³ See, for instance: Roman Loimeier, *Islamic Reform in Twentieth-Century Africa* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

⁸⁴ Archives Africaines, Bruxelles, Bur (69)3, “Sûreté: groupe de travail, fiches des divers islamisés indigènes. Secret 1958–1959 – fiche Amrani bin Juma.” For a critical analysis of the documentation of the Sûreté service, see: Christine Deslaurier, “Du nouveau pour l’histoire politique du Burundi à la veille de l’indépendance (1958–1961): la documentation secrète de la sûreté,” *Cahiers du CRA* 9 (1998), 40–44. Deslaurier (“Un monde politique en mutation,” 355–356) nevertheless adopts the interpretation of the Sûreté, assuming that youths wanted political upheaval and that the older generation promoted religiosity and moderation.

⁸⁵ Archives Africaines, Bruxelles, Ra/RU (160)12, “Rapports C.E.C. Usumbura, 1959,” 13; Archives Africaines, Bruxelles, Ra/RU (160)13, “Rapports C.E.C. Usumbura, 1960,” 9. The relevant passages are quoted and discussed in Julien Nimubona, “Le peuplement séparé de la ville d’Usumbura et ses implications socio-économiques (1940–1960),” mémoire, Université du Burundi (Bujumbura, 1990), 148–152.

movement underway; there was a change of generations taking place; and the political background had an important influence on what was going on. The reality, however, was more complex than any of these aspects could explain in isolation.

To start with, the Ismaili Indian, Saudi Arab, and insider religious impulses in the 1950s at least had their international dimension in common: either by being plugged into the international network of the Aga Khan, or by a Saudi pan-Islamic missionary initiative, or by the foreign studies of the sons of the local community leaders. The range of the *Qadiriyya* a few decades before had also already been border crossing and long distance, spanning from eastern Congo to the Swahili coast and back, but each of the three cases at work in the 1950s reached beyond East and Central Africa. After the scale of operation had expanded from translocal sociocultural imitation to an East and Central African Sufi Islam, the scope of operation and of connections now further enlarged, stretching beyond Africa, across the Islamic world at large.

Equally important is the fact that these religious initiatives took place in a global and a local context of decolonization. The particular situation of the Swahili community of Bujumbura is crucial to understand the coincidence between these global initiatives and their local effects. We have already pointed out that the core of the urban population comprised people of Congolese descent who were or became Swahili and Muslim. They remained in touch with Ujiji and the rest of Tanganyika. This contact consisted not only of family ties and trade relations but also of ideas, such as those brought through the spread of the *Qadiriyya* in earlier times. Given that people with roots in eastern Congo played a prominent role in the Tanganyikan decolonization process and were well represented among the founders and militants of the Tanganyika African Association and the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU),⁸⁶ it should not come as a surprise that the winds of change accompanying the decolonization process reached the Swahili population of Bujumbura quite early on. The first Burundian political party, the Union Nationale Africaine du Ruanda-Urundi (UNARU), was at least in part a Swahili initiative and was a de facto duplicate of TANU, albeit functioning autonomously and rooted locally. The main Burundian nationalist party that would lead the country to independence, the Unité et Progrès National (UPRONA), as well as its leader Louis Rwagasore, had strong Swahili connections and maintained close ties to TANU.⁸⁷ The course of the Burundian independence struggle, however, would lead to the exclusion of these pioneering Swahili.

⁸⁶ John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 405–435, 485–490, 537–552; Nimtz, *Islam and Politics*, 86–91.

⁸⁷ Deslaurier, “Un monde politique en mutation,” 262, 354–361, 400–410.

Having been increasingly segregated in the town and country, having become a minority in the town of which they were the first inhabitants, and having always been an urban minority in a rural Burundi, these urban Muslims of Congolese descent were labeled foreigners by the new nationalist elite and were excluded from the political struggle they had helped to initiate.⁸⁸ Within the Muslim community of Bujumbura, this situation led to some paradoxes. Pioneers of the national political struggle did not attain political rights; internal Swahili community leaders, who were almost exclusively of Congolese descent, were denied a political voice; and the most recent newcomers to the community, usually of Rundi descent, turned out to have more political rights than their hosts, leaders, and mentors. The new political order was at odds with the social order within the Swahili community. A kind of social inversion took place in the domain of formal politics, making the first inhabitants politically inferior to the recently arrived newcomers, the rich rulers politically inferior to the poor, the learned inferior to the uneducated, and the – internal – majority politically subjugated to the minority.

- Sheikh Amrani Juma Kaburwe

Against this background, Sheikh Amrani Juma played the card of Islamic reform. His life history illustrates the importance of both his position in town and his connections across East and Central Africa – and beyond – to take up the role of a religious reform leader. He was born in 1920 in the town of Rumonge (Burundi), where his father, Juma Kaburwe, was *mwalimu*.⁸⁹ In 1937, he studied abroad for the first time, namely in Zanzibar. After his return, he settled in Bujumbura with his uncle Mahamudu Kaburwe, whom we introduced earlier. From 1952 to 1954, he was the first African Muslim from Bujumbura, who went to Yemen for Quranic studies. In 1957 and 1958, he specialized at the Islamic University of Lahore (Pakistan). Amrani Juma traveled to learn, and in the end it is hard to say whether it is the acquired knowledge or the long journeys in themselves that were most conducive to the respect he received. The fact is that upon return from his studies in Yemen, he was granted the honorary title of sheikh. His reputation reached into Indian and Arab circles in Bujumbura and beyond. In 1972, he became the first chairman of the Communauté islamique en République du Zaïre (COMIZA). This, in itself, is indicative of connections going both eastward, where he acquired his knowledge, and westward, where his prestige was based not only on his Islamic learning but also on his Congolese origin. Already when he still lived in Bujumbura, he received visiting sheikhs while Muslims came from far and wide to

⁸⁸ Castryck, “Moslims in Usumbura,” 149–159.

⁸⁹ Abel, *Les Musulmans noirs*, 87.

study with him; he also financed studies abroad of young Muslims from Bujumbura and from his place of birth, Rumonge.⁹⁰ This huge recognition was surely based on his great religious knowledge, but it is by no means a coincidence that the first local sheikh came from a rich and prestigious family of *walimu*, who had both the financial means and the intellectual-religious predisposition to make several long study trips abroad. Joined by people like Sefu Asumani and Yahya Ibrahim Kibombo, his internal inclination towards Islamic Reform was more decisive for the Muslim community of Bujumbura than Ismaili, Saudi, or other missionary activities. Yet, even this inclination was premised on connections and mobility, hence translocal rather than local.

The significance of his turn towards Islamic Reform in the late 1950s and early 1960s is threefold. First and foremost, his Islamic radicalism transcended ethnic or national divisions. If religion is of a higher order than politics, the intrigue around political rights ipso facto becomes of minor importance. Second, by transcending politics he also imposed a separation between religion and politics. This is actually to some extent un-Islamic or unorthodox, since in principle Islam covers and fulfills the entire life of the believers, entirely including politics and society. Nevertheless, Amrani Juma strove for a depoliticization of religion, which can be justified by the fact that Muslims – as a group – were excluded from national politics anyway as well as a growing mutual contempt or even hostility between religiously oriented and politically active members of the community.⁹¹ The third point – the promotion of education – follows after a first going deeper into the depoliticization of Islam.

The difficult relationship between religion and politics occurred elsewhere as well and is probably inherent to all processes of state formation based on the European nation-state model. In the Belgian Congo, Muslims even did not play a significant political role at all and Islam was reduced to

a purely religious Islam (...) curiously enough, and for external reasons, stripped of its essential feature: the collective organization, on a religious basis, which constitutes the everyday life of every Muslim society.⁹²

⁹⁰ Archives Africaines, Bruxelles, Bur (66)4:2, “Lettre N°232/M.62/D. Secret de l’Administrateur de Territoire de Bururi au Résident de l’Urundi. Objet: Enquête sur mouvements subversifs;” Archives Africaines, Bruxelles, Bur (69)3, “Sûreté: groupe de travail, fiches des divers islamisés indigènes.secret 1958–1959 – fiche Amrani bin Juma;” interview #9, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 10 September 2004; interview #20, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 29 September 2004.

⁹¹ Interview #9, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 10 September 2004.

⁹² “[U]n Islam seulement religieux (...) curieusement amputée, pour ces causes extérieures, de l’élément essentiel, de l’organisation collective, à base religieuse, qui constitue la vie organique de toute société musulmane.” Abel, *Les Musulmans noirs*, 72.

In Tanganyika, the situation was somewhat different. Unlike in the Congo, Muslims did contribute to the leading political movements, and unlike in Ruanda-Urundi, Muslims were and still are considered a constitutive element of the Tanganyikan/Tanzanian nation – albeit in certain regards disadvantaged.⁹³ The different political context explains why, despite continued close contacts, the Muslims of Ujiji and Bujumbura followed different trajectories in the 1960s and 1970s, the former remaining a translocally entrenched *Qadiriyya* stronghold for several more decades and the latter turning towards a more outward-looking and transcendent Islamic reform. Yet, division among Muslims also manifested itself in Tanganyika, between those who pursued immediate independence and those who first sought equal social status for Muslims, and in particular an end to discrimination in education and public employment. For this purpose, the pressure group All Muslim National Union of Tanganyika (Amnut) was founded in 1957.⁹⁴

The situation of the Muslim community of Bujumbura was more or less halfway between the Congolese and the Tanganyikan one. Individual Muslims had been prominent in politics, but as a group they were forced to withdraw from the political arena. The few individual Muslims who remained politically active, such as Juma Muhehe and Juma Idi, did so as ethnic Rundi who happened to be Islamic, and not the other way around.⁹⁵ The historical fact that the Swahili, regardless of ethnic origin, had formed the original population of the city of Bujumbura did not prevent them, as a group, from being reduced to the status of foreigners.⁹⁶ When the ethnic factor could no longer be held in check, the result was not a fragmentation along the manifold ethnic lines mentioned above but a polarization within the Muslim community: Rundi and strangers, insiders and outsiders, citizens and stateless. However, the depoliticized religious stance of Amrani Juma surpassed the exclusive logic of the state. The separation between religion and (formal) politics allowed him to take initiatives for the betterment of Muslims as well as against their exclusion. The depoliticization of religion was not a political surrender but a path towards political action and political relevance outside of formal politics.

This brings us, at last, to the third point, to the fact that Amrani Juma did indeed try to forge a way out of the marginalized situation in which

⁹³ For an analysis of the disadvantaged position of Muslims in Tanzania after independence, see: Mohamed Said, *The Life and Times of Abdulwahid Sykes (1924–1968): The Untold Story of the Muslim Struggle against British Colonialism in Tanganyika* (London: Minerva, 1998).

⁹⁴ Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika*, 551–552; Nimtz, *Islam and Politics*, 89.

⁹⁵ Deslaurier, “Un monde politique en mutation,” 381 n124, 388–389; interview #12, Cibitoke Bujumbura, 13 September 2004; interview #20, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 29 September 2004.

⁹⁶ Kagabo, *L'Islam et les "Swahili,"* 15.

Muslims had been pushed by the Belgian segregation policy and in which Burundian nationalist politics now pinned them down. The man was plugged into East Africa and the Islamic world as much as he remained connected and respected in the Congo, he had studied more than anyone else in his community and knew very well that education was the primary condition for getting Muslims out of their disadvantaged position. As early as 1958, before the creation of the first political parties and before the exclusion of the Swahili as a group from the Burundian nation, he founded the Association Scolaire Musulmane Africaine du Ruanda-Urundi (Asmaru), making it somehow the Burundian version of Amnut. The association called for the intellectual development of its members, the establishment of schools, the provision of scholarships, and ultimately the emancipation and the creation of opportunities for African Muslims. The target group consisted of “all students of both sexes, Muslims, Africans and inhabitants of Ruanda-Urundi.”⁹⁷ The emancipatory project of Asmaru resembled the initiative Rajabu Sudi and Simba Idi Ndume had taken more than a decade earlier, when they built the Jumuiyya school. Not surprisingly, these two men had themselves been able to study. By the same token, these initiatives reversely corroborate the analysis that underpinned both the German and Belgian policy towards Islam, namely that control over education would be the most effective measure against Islamization.⁹⁸

By the end of the colonial period, a coincidence of global and local developments had led to a substantial change in the living of Islam in Bujumbura. The global Islamic impulses of Ismaili initiatives, more importantly Saudi missionary activities, and above all study stays abroad by community members – in combination with the global and local political impact of decolonization and the local dynamics of polarization and exclusion – had led to a formal depoliticization of Islam, a more orthodox and knowledge-based living of Islam, and an enlargement of the scope of operation and the frame of reference that embedded religious life within East Africa and the wider Islamic world. It is worth noting that on top of these external or global influences, the initiative for a religious revitalization came from within the community, from the well-educated, young generation of local leading families. Rather than entailing a generational

⁹⁷ Archives Africaines, Bruxelles, Bur (66)5:4, “Association Scolaire Musulmane Africaine du Ruanda-Urundi;” interview #9, Buyenzi Bujumbura, 10 September 2004. Also see: Deslaurier, “Un monde politique en mutation,” 354–356. One of my informants, Kasesa Juma (b. 1937), was the deputy-secretary of Asmaru at the time of its foundation and became secretary-general of the association in 1960. Nine out of twenty-three of the founding members were women, but the chairman, vice-chairman, as well as secretary-general were men.

⁹⁸ Wm. Roger Louis, *Ruanda-Urundi 1884–1919* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 187; Dickerman, “Economic and Social Change,” 130; Kagabo, *L'Islam et les "Swahili,"* 35; Castryck, “Moslims in Usumbura,” 101–106.

conflict, this can be understood as a changing of the guard, where members of the young generation took on responsibility to address the challenges of their times, and they did so with clear religious underpinnings. Understood in this way, there is more continuity than rupture in the way the leading families of the community acted. Yet, both the historical actors and the historians need the shifting of scales between Bujumbura, Burundi, East, and Central Africa, and the Islamic world in order to grasp these dynamics and escape the master narrative of national or regional historiographies.

Nevertheless, the actions of the new generation of religious and community leaders have not been able to prevent the cohesion of the local community and the close relationship between religion and society from gradually disintegrating. The large or wealthy families as well as the criteria for leadership could only be maintained within the religious sphere and for a more contained group. Religious merit became less a collective issue serving cohesion, integration, and solidarity, and more based on individual learning and devotion. Developments on the global level of the Islamic world thus served very particular local needs. At the same time, although the Swahili community of Bujumbura continued to show cohesion, at least compared to the divided surrounding society, it nevertheless gradually lost its “force for cohesiveness” and its “capacité d’accueil.” It was only a matter of time before the collectivist *Qadiriyya* would lose its prominence.⁹⁹

Conclusion

For the Muslim community of Bujumbura, like in many similar societies in East Central Africa, Swahili culture, with Islam as one of its defining features, offered the potential for social inclusion and social mobility. Uprooted people had built the town of Bujumbura and found a path towards emancipation and integration in a cohesive Swahili culture, bridging East and Central Africa. However, through a colonial policy of segregation and marginalization on a regional and urban scale and through politics of exclusion in a national and international context of state formation, they were subjugated again.

This evolution in the life of Muslims in Bujumbura is reflected in how they practiced or lived Islam. At the time of integration into the community, living Islam remained limited to the mere adoption of a minimum of ritual practices. Then followed a more pious and contemplative collective living of Islam, which was, as elsewhere in East and Central Africa, embodied by the Sufi *Qadiriyya tariqa*. Finally, under the influence of missionary trends and religious studies abroad by members of the local community, on

⁹⁹ Harry Graeffe, “Annexe III – Introduction à l’étude du Mulidi,” in: Armand Abel, *Les Musulmans noirs du Maniema* (Bruxelles: Centre pour l’Étude des Problèmes du Monde Musulman Contemporain, 1960), 99–125, 125.

the one hand, and decolonization, on the other, a reflexive, learned reformist Islam took over. The Islamization of Bujumbura's Muslims occurred in stages responding to local challenges, plugging into trans-regional patterns or religious offers, and being led by translocally connected community leaders.

The religious evolution of the community was intertwined with successive processes of integration, marginalization, and exclusion, reflecting local, regional, and global spatial scales. This history is neither East nor Central African, but genuinely translocal, transregional, and in its religious aspects also transcendental. The social needs and political threats on the local level have always been matched by religious deepening and strengthening, on the one hand, and a widening or extension of the geographical scope, on the other. The initial imitation of rituals was a translocal means for urgent and direct integration, by emulating locally available examples that had spread through East and Central Africa since the nineteenth century. The Sufi path, brought to them from the East African coast by Muslims of Central African descent, offered an opportunity to strengthen the trans-local connections with Muslims in other towns while at the same time providing a response to increasing isolation of Muslims in their regional and urban living environment. Islamic Reform addressed local social and political exclusion, was anchored in the vast Islamic world, and was negotiated by elite community members studying abroad as well as by missionaries travelling to Bujumbura. Each new step made Islam less attractive for the socially disadvantaged and more focused on the ingroup but also more embedded in the world of Islam. In the first phase, a Swahili community was a haven for outcasts; in the second stage, the togetherness and solidarity especially benefitted those who already belonged to the community; and in the third phase, religion and society became disconnected and individualized. A deep and local Islamic cohesion was substituted with a connectedness based on studying and travelling across the subcontinent and the Islamic world at large. This new, larger scale coherence offered opportunities for social mobility, especially for those who had the wealth, family ties, and education to be part of the local elite or were supported by this elite.¹⁰⁰

The depoliticization of religion, however, should be understood in relation to anti-Islamic colonial state politics and the exclusive national dynamics of state formation. If we would interpret the religious reform as nothing more than Bujumbura's Muslims joining religious evolutions in East Africa or the Islamic world, we would miss that it was also a resilient attempt to cope with exclusion by transcending the local, national, and regional containers in which this exclusion unfolded. In much the same way, the success of the *Qadiriyya tariqa* or the Islamization of people of

¹⁰⁰ Pouwels, "The East African Coast," 265.

Congolese and Burundian descent in the first place should be understood translocally, combining local challenges and dynamics as well as East and Central African connections and influences. By transcending rigid frames of analysis, historians can overcome an exclusive reading of history, thereby, on the one hand, assessing the history of East Central African Muslims as more than just a marginal minority and, on the other hand, reframing and enhancing our understanding of the histories of Islam, of East and Central Africa, and of Burundi and Bujumbura more generally.

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