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Muslim settlement in a Christian environment in the city of Dolisie (Republic of Congo) from 1937 to 2007

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Dolisie is the third largest city of Congo, located at the entrance of the Mayombe forest. This city became an urban center when, in 1933, the colonial administrator Blanchet set Chemin de Fer Congo-Océan (CFCO) in the center for the construction and management of the country's main railways. At that time, Protestant and Catholic missionaries had settled there for a longtime. But at the end of the CFCO works in 1934, a great number of Muslims - that were traveling-companions of explorers such as Pierre Savorgnan De Brazza for the purpose of valuing the Middle-Congo-settled there as farmers and tradesmen. Therefore, culturally speaking, the city of Dolisie is a Christian city. It is in such a Christian milieu, in the village of colonization that Muslim cult settled itself, with the construction of the city's first mosque in 1937. One of the well-known Muslim at that time was Sy Biranti Kao, born in about 1892 in Tuabu, Eastern Senegal, where he went back and died in 1974. It appears that there had been no religious troubles between such a settlement and Christendom. It was the beginning of an endlessly renewed migration, and also the beginning of fraternization between Muslims and Christians in an urban milieu.

Key words: Settlement, Muslim cult, Dolisie, Christian milieu, fraternization.

INTRODUCTION

The first societies that shape the space of the current Congo were animists. Based on their vision of the world and their beliefs, these societies encouraged polygamy. They did not reject fetishism that considered as ultimate palliative against errant behaviors which were seriously despoiling the social order. But soon, those endogenous practices began to stand against the Christian doctrine that was introduced in the Kongo kingdom by Capuchins after their meeting with Westerners in 1482.

In June 4, 1491 the baptism of King Nzing'a Kuwu (baptized Joao, or John, and that of his son Mvemba-

Nzing'a, baptized Afonso or Alphonse the first) hastened things as it enabled a radicalization of the Christian Church, opposing itself towards local customs or traditions that were said to be heresies and superstition. Yet, despite the inflexibility of their conversion method, the first evangelization did not meet the success expected. It is only at the end of the XIXth century that the missionary halo started to be echoed on the Congolese territory. In Dolisie, Christian missions (Catholics, Swedish evangelical mission) got settled at the same date (1937) under the benediction of the

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colonial administration that was the vehicle of Muslim cult in Congo, with Sergeant Malamine Camara who accompanied Pierre Savorgnan in his exploration trips in central Africa at the end of the XIXth century. Shortly after their settlement, these Christian missions would be followed closely by Islam.

What are the circumstances that enabled the advent of Islam in Dolisie? How would the Muslim cult succeed in imposing itself in a Christian milieu of Dolisie? As a matter of fact, the study of Islam is interesting as it is first of all a history-based fact that places the diversity of belief in the same spatial approach. Moreover, as subject matter, there is very little documentation on Islam in Congo: the meager scientific harvest on Muslim in Congo is only two dissertations (Mbaïdiguimal, 2017: 80; Oula, 1998: 60), a research paper (Nkanza, 2014: 423-441) and a book (Soret, 1978: 140). To palliate such a document scarcity on the issue, oral surveys have been conducted both in Brazzaville and Dolisie, between July and August 2018. This iconography is of paramount importance on the ground that not only it is a witness, but it also stores social, cultural and economic evolution of this colonial city, from 1937 up to 2007, terminus ad quem of this contribution.

In 1937, Dolisie had its first mosque erected. This materializes the Muslim presence in the city. As for the year 2007, it symbolizes the maturity of Islam presence in Dolisie, with the construction of a fourth mosque in the heart of the city. Thus, from 1937 to 2007, we have seventy years of Muslim culture, in a city that nears 125,000 inhabitants. This contribution is built up upon five points. The first one lays an emphasis on the study of the geographic space where Islam would get settled as early as in 1937. The second point focuses on the space occupation by Europeans, which occupation would set off the migrations of populations in search of a job that matches the newly expanding market economy in the nascent city. As for the third point, it is an analysis of conversion methods implemented by faith carriers - among which Islam - in order to be imperative along with Christian churches already settled *in situ*. The fourth somewhat depicts Muslim achievements in Dolisie from a set of activities that would be realized. The last point, that is the fifth, suggests the assessment of Muslim cult in Dolisie, from 1937 up to 2007.

Presentation of the city

Built in the midst of hills and lakes, the city of Dolisie sits on the table land that borders the great range of the Mayombe height - 700 up to 1000 m; which gives the city a contrasted climate. This city covers an area of over fifteen kilometers long from west to east, and more than six kilometers wide from north to south.

Dolisie is located at 73 km from the enclosed territory of Cabinda; at 140 km from the Democratic Republic of

Congo; at 168 km from Pointe-Noire (economic capital of Congo); at 342 km from Brazzaville, the political and administrative capital city of Congo. This city looks like an amphitheater surrounded by the Mayombe foothills. It is located in a space whose people engage in various economic activities. The fact of being accessible to several localities and other points in the sub regions makes the city of Dolisie a transit city or a hub of the Niari department, nicknamed the “Mayombe pearl” or “the golden green city” (Figure 1). This map presents the two districts of Dolisie and the city’s main areas. In the eastern north, we have not only the Christian graveyard, but also the Muslim ward.

Formerly, there was a village - Bungundu village - on the site that now hosts the city. The other neighboring villages are: Kayes-Mboungou, Moukondo, Malembé, and Lutsungi. The Bungundu-Loubomo village became an urban center in 1933 when Mr. Blanchet, the French colonial administrator decided to install a center for the management of the Congo-Ocean Railroad works, known as “Chemin de Fer Congo-Ocean” (CFCO). At that time, the inhabitants of Boungou-Loubomo remained stuck on their traditional religions, although the Niari-Bouenza region (the Niari valley) had already been covered by Catholic missions led by Father Emile Zimmerman since 1890. But the city destiny was doomed to change with the installation of the “Mission Evangélique Suédoise (MES)”- the Swedish Evangelical Mission - which Mission got started in Congo in 1909 (Vounou and Nzaou, 2015: 85-92). During these years, the populations that settled in Dolisie were converted to either Catholic Church, Evangelic Church, or Islam. Such a de-facto reality quickly made it possible for the city of Dolisie to become a multi-religion city.

Thanks to Sy Biranti Kao who arrived in Congo in 1927, the Muslim settlement in the locality was peaceful as he was just interested in commerce and farming stuff such as coffee beans. For that matter, Sy Biranti gained notoriety towards populations in such a way that a doline of the city and a lake even bear his name.

Space occupation by Europeans

Historical evidence presents Boungoundou village as a sociological space in motion. Such a status transfer is imputable to mass arrivals of Western and African populations. However, Portuguese and French people constitute the most important population fringe that would attract the arrival of other populations.

The Portuguese

The Niari valley - where the current city of Dolisie is located - was owned by Portuguese colonists who, settled in the area since the period of slavery, had

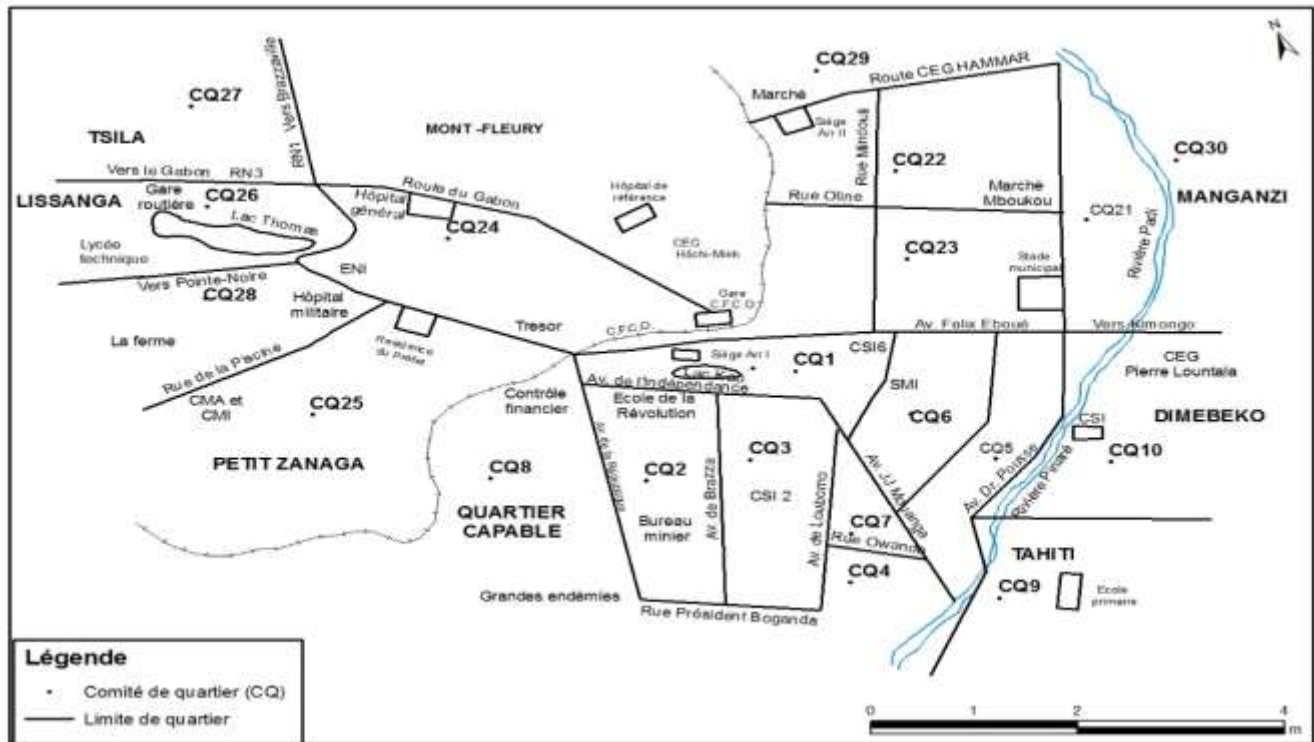


Figure 1. The Dolisie commune.
Source: Hugues Ngoma-Mboumba, 2017.

maintained their foreign posts both along the coasts and inland. The 1884-1885 Berlin Conference had settled ongoing land disputes and fixed the border of Cabinda where the “boundary-stone for the three borders” (Cabinda, Zaire, Congo) Berger-Levrault (1978) was erected at Moukéké.

During that Conference, salient disagreements between France and Belgium have fortunately settled. Thanks to the agreement of February 5, 1885, the *Etat Indépendant du Congo (EIC)* - the Independent State of Congo - property of King Leopold II of Belgium withdrew from Kouilou-Niari. (Vidrovitch, 1969). In return, it received sovereignty recognition for the left bank of the Pool area (Soret, 1978: 143). France therefore received compensations in the Tchimpézé region. Foreign posts would exchange slavery commodities for gazelle skins, chiefly ivory and cabbage trees. Those Europeans kept on doing business under the French colonization regime.

The French

After the Portuguese, French explorers engaged in a second colonial exploration in the center of Africa. This area was subject to many other colonial missions, including those of Pierre Savorgnan De Brazza in 1880; Mizon in 1882; Albert Dolisie in 1884-1885; Marchand

and Baratier in 1886, all of them being French explorers. Up to 1920, there was only one village on the current site of the city: Boungoundou, located along the tracing of the Congo-Océan Railroad. But for unknown reasons, that village was abandoned by its inhabitants after the death of Tsalou, the last chief of the Boungoundou village, thus leaving the area with no people. It was a deserted village that Blanchet, public works engineer for the railroad, chose as a center that would host the future station of the railroad that was launched in 1933. That same year, Lebouriste, head of the railroad division and based at Loudima, informed the Europeans that the weather in Dolisie and its surroundings was milder, wetter and more enjoyable, which led him to mature the idea of installing there the country town of the railroad region as early as in May 1, 1934. Afterward, a market was opened in order to supply railroad workers with cassava, bush meat, etc. When Blanchet went back to France, he was replaced in 1934 by Edvisse, another French colonial administrator who, later, designed the cadastral map of the city (Eon², Aboué Emile, 2018), still used nowadays. For the colonial administration, creating a town goes along with its recognition, space delimitation, division in portions. The latter will be subject to an in-depth analysis.

In May 29, 1934, General Governor Raphael Antonneti inaugurated the Dolisie railroad station, thus marking the achievement of railroad works (Soret, 1978). Some

Europeans, former and newcomers decided to settle there on their own. According to the Official Journal of AEF (French Equatorial Africa) in 1934, 5 portions of 2000 m²-land were adjudicated at 5000 F each. Public works engineers, Istre and Marc carried a land survey to establish blocks, roads, civilian and administrative houses. Once again, the Official Journal dated 1937 evoked the issue of land transfer for rural purposes and free transfers for churches and businesses. The following statement tells us more about the matter: Through the ordinance dated September 18, 1937, taken during a permanent commission of the board of directors, Mister Pastor Södergren, President of the "Mission Evangélique Suédoise" (MES) - the Swedish Evangelical Mission - is provisionally granted, on condition of third party and by free gift, a rural plot of 30 ha land located near Dolisie (AEF Official Journal, 1937). Here is the case of the Protestant Church. The same Official Journal dated September 1, 1947 would add the following:

Middle Congo...Through the ordinance dated August 7, 1947, Sy Birante is provisionally granted, on condition of third party and for an onerous consideration, a rural plot of 2.50 ha land located at 1 km away from Dolisie (Niari region). Such a plot of land with a surplus hereby appended holds the form of a trapeze located immediately at the north side of Mr. Mauvigner's concession...This plot of land is allotted for the establishment of coffee tree plantations (Cf. Official Journal, 1937). When we analyze the 1947 Official Journal, one can read: "Middle Congo, Mister Barbier requests adjudication of block n°5, located in Dolisie, with an area of 2048 m², at the price of 100 francs per square meter. The adjudication ceremony will take place on August 30, 1947 in Dolisie"

Always in the Official Journal of August 1, 1947, one can read the following: "definitive rural concession. Through the ordinance dated July 17, 1947, taken during the board of government, the concession of a rural plot of 2 ha land, developed and located in Dolisie, is granted for good to Mr. Romano. This title deed will be handed over to Romano against payment at the internal revenue service in Brazzaville, in addition to registration fees, stamps and any other deeds pertaining to this concession for a sum of 300 francs, representing the provisional amount for land delimitation fees required by article 33 of the ordinance dated March 19, 1937. Mr. Jean Romano will request, without delay, the matriculation of the plot of land mentioned above, in accordance with the provisions of article 7 of the ordinance dated March 28, 1899 pertaining to the land regime, modified in December 12, 1920."

The analysis to be made with such a multitude of ordinances is that space or land occupation of the present city is not to be considered at random. Several sources reveal that mass arrival of populations from neighboring departments and village at the end the railroad works in 1934 was untrue. The truth is that only

franchised dealer companies were authorized to settle in the city for the purposes of wholesale and semi-wholesale trade. Afterward, migrant workers through a parent or relative already settled in Dolisie. In fact, the colonial administration forbade immigrants - even nationals - with no formal written invitation to enter the city. In addition to this, there were construction works for COMILOG (the Ogoué Mining Company, for the exploitation of the Gabonese manganese) from 1957 to 1960.

The surge of migrations

According to the definition given by J. Noon, migrant workers are "those that spend between 1/3 and 2/3 of their time in towns since they leave their villages" (Noon, 1952). This alludes that the populations entered an era of permanent instability. At the time when the railroad construction was being achieved, a quite different type of immigration contributed to at least people temporarily areas along the railroad. Such a surge could be explained owing to a circular letter by general Governor Antonetti, the builder of Congo-Océan railroad. At that time and to the attention of the heads of constituencies, he wrote the following:

"Encouraging administered citizens to near the railroad and settle on well-watered, fertile and uninhabited territories of the Niari plain... However, I have not been reported any population movements in that sense so far...For this objective and from now on, please make arrangements for an active campaign...You will preferably address inhabitants of remote areas, the poorest people and those lacking means of communication..."

From this circular letter aforementioned, it is noticed that there were some advantages or benefits granted to volunteers. The colonial administration would commit itself to supply not only timber for building wooden cabins, but also commodities till the moment when fields would be operational. The contingents selected included some Bandjabi people, but chiefly Bambamba ones, a somewhat mixed people of Bakota ones, and Batéké people taken both in Sibiti and Zanaga. They were grouped or split into sixteen villages...the others belonged to the most diverse tribal groups and came from far away (originated from the country's northern region of "la cuvette congolaise") (Gilles Sautter, op. cit.). The Dolisie community of believers is therefore made up of this melting pot

Franchised dealer companies

Franchised dealer companies and traders were motivated by several reasons. They would have to make up for supplies, refloat public administration earnings through

Table 1. List of informants.

Number	First, middle and last name	Venue of discussion	Issues debated
1	Hamadou Amidou, 75 years old	Dolisie	What do you know about the city of Dolisie
2	Aboué Emile, 65 years old	Dolisie	Town planning and development; Islam, etc.
3	Pongui Pierre, 64 years old	Dolisie	Conversion methods; construction of worship places;
4	Pembe-Mbitsi, 47 years old	Dolisie	Cohabitation among believers
5	Diloungou Jacques, 50 years old	Dolisie	Worship venues ; Muslims' activities ; Activities of Muslims; Conversion methods, etc.
6	Koumba Mariam, 53 years old	Brazzaville	The melting-pot of Dolisie; the population, etc.

Vidrovitch, 1969).

various taxes, stimulate the output of natives by beginning an economic activity. For, any settlement would involve payment of trading license, taxes and guarantees... Obtaining land leases from the administration as proportion as the railroad was being processed, traders from various origins got settled, shopping wholesale not only in Brazzaville, the political capital city, Pointe-Noire the economic capital endowed with a seaport, but also in the territory of Cabinda. To big firms such as CPKPN (Compagnie Propriétaire du Kouilou-Niari) that generated SCKN (Société Commerciale du Kouilou-Niari) were added firms like: Hatton and Cookson (Soret Marcel, op. cit.), as well as a number of West African merchants: Senegalese, Dahomeans, and several Congolese among whom were Bayonne, Ngoma Victor, Mavoungou and Auguste Nzoungou. This urban economy began with trade. It is therefore a service economy that occurred from the end of the railroad works, and developed progressively. At that time, Dolisie had no production unit, and the economic activity was only based on the supply of essential products. To those could be added not only manufactured products, but also local farm and fauna-based products. To counter Congolese, "Wara" (term used to designate West Africans) tradesmen specialized themselves in the sale of loincloths, materials, foodstuffs and even refreshment bars, although the Coran forbid the sale of alcoholic beverage.

Methods of conversions

With the aim of gaining people's souls for their gods, various methods were put in place in accordance with this or that type of religion. (Côme Kinata 2008).

With Protestants

For protestants, what is fundamental in the evangelical mission is to communicate knowledge on Christian faith through dialogue, preaching or methodical teaching.

However, Swedish missionaries acknowledge the existence of the natives' religion, and then make arrangements not to jostle or rebuke such a religion. Thus, the missionaries tailored a specific strategy: preaching in local language, kikongo (Martin Pariss Vounou, 2017). This implies the knowledge of people you're praying with and for; hence the necessity to collect ethnographic material, to do research on linguistics and the history of religions.

With Catholics

The lack of social living conditions that could favor both the Gospel reception and Church development was, among others, the reasons stated. On that issue, Libermann thought that apostolic action should not only preach the faith. It should also strive for progress and happiness of people through instruction, learning and teaching. Fundamentally, recommendations from clerical hierarchy and pontiff sovereigns were corroborating Libermann's missionary methodology (Moulambaye, 2016). In 1926, Pope Pie XI published the *Rerum Ecclesia* encyclical in which he would invite heads of mission to act according to the following plan of action: recruiting and training native ecclesiastical ministers; putting in place native religious congregations; multiplication of catechists; occupation and evangelization of any religious constituency; healthcare for sick persons; global extension of educational teaching at all the levels, etc. They would create Christian-oriented villages, dispensaries, schools, training centers, etc.

With Muslims

The third and last community to study is the Muslim community of Congo. For this community that came almost together with the first two in Dolisie, conversion is of paramount importance in the life of a believer. Another aspect Muslim vitality in Dolisie is proselytism noticed in the mind of several Islam followers. They are deeply

concerned with the idea of finding many followers, and make Islam a universal religion, as prophet Muhammad wishes it. Any novice is attracted by the Islam's ideal which makes someone feel secure in a community life (Umma). Islam impregnates every sphere of life, and it is viewed as a sociological milieu which rather guarantees better tomorrow thanks to its relative wealth: almost everywhere in Congo, Muslims hold monopoly in commerce, even in Dolisie after the country independence, controlling the entire chain, from the supply chain to the local retail sale. That is why Islam appears to be rather simpler than Christianity (Eon¹, Hamadou Amidou, 2018). Thus it is relatively easy to "claim being Muslim" when you observe ritual prayer, attend assemblies for Friday prayers, and offering legal alms known as "Zakat". This social change is noticed in the behavior and the dressing code, and even in mentalities, as stated by Guy Rocher. In Dolisie, Islam rather puts up easily with the practices of traditional religions, as it does not reject a certain syncretism and seems to be tolerant with fetishism and polygamy. According to Emile Chaudron, "For most pagans, Islam easily appears to be a form of superior animism" (Emile Chaudron, 1985). Islam is a sociological and religious reality that really meets the needs of today's Congolese.

Organization of the Muslim Community in Congo

After their timid implantation, Muslims created Muslim Associations in order to voice up at the national level. The coordination being in Brazzaville, the political capital, those associations are part of progressive organization of Islam in black Africa. They are a kind of secretariat that represents the entire Muslim community, and devote themselves to coordinate the activities of various existing associations (cultural, religious, pilgrimage, etc.). It is through these national associations that the "Funds for the World Muslim League are deposited" (Victor, 1980). In Congo, the National Association holds the denomination of "Communauté Islamique du Congo" (Muslim Community of Congo), created in September 10, 1968. Its missions are as follows:

- (1) Gathering all the Muslims of Congo - regardless of nationality, race, sex - within a big, representative and lawful organization;
- (2) Gathering all the Muslims in a unique group for the achievement of philanthropic work or deeds to the benefit of Muslims and the masses;
- (3) Striving for the development of mutual aid, solidarity and cooperation;
- (4) Contributing to the implementation of national socioeconomic development plans through active participation of its members;
- (5) Developing and promoting peace and love, Islam's basic principles;

(6) Promoting intellectual and religious training of women, young Muslims and especially young girls;
Thus, several presidents had headed the Muslim Community of Congo since its creation. Here is a chronological approach of those presidents and their office:

- El Hadj Manzibai Abdourhamane (UMAC), from 1968 to 1975;
- Mamadou Moukou (AMC), from 1975 to 1977;
- El Hadj Mamadou Mohamed Moutoukouenda nicknamed Mimi (CIC), from 1977 to 1978;
- El Hadj Younous Dzonbgbé (CIC), from 1978 to 1988;
- Cheikh Aboubakar Nguelouoli, from 1988 to 2003;
- El Hadj Bachir Daniel Gatsongo (CIC), from 2003 to 2009;
- El Hadj Gabriel Djibril Abdoulaye Bopaka (CSIC), from 2009 up till now.

Construction of mosques in Dolisie

The construction of worship places in Dolisie is an emanation of Muslim tradition. In fact, after his arrival at Medina (second holy city, also called the prophet's city), prophet Muhammad had a meeting place built for the Muslim community, a place viewed as a life and gathering center. It is on that model that the first Dolisie Muslim community built a mosque in 1937, located in 14, rue Jolly (street denomination and number), 50 m away from the modern market of the district known as "quartier Sénégalais". The first imam of that mosque was Sy Biranti Kao. The multiplication of worship places in Dolisie is explained by solidarity in the Muslim community of the city. The proliferation of mosques demonstrates the awakening of Islam in Dolisie. There are four mosques for a city of 125,000 inhabitants (CRETH, 2014). It is the only department that presently has more than six mosques.

According to several sources, the multiplication of worship places and particularly the number of tradesmen that originated from West Africa is due to the June 5, 1997 civil war. Added to this is not only manhunt of foreigners that were in Angola and Cabinda, but also tradesmen from other cities of Congo in search of extra capital gain. Those worship places are generally built by faith followers pursuant to different calls for funds organized in mosques. As Hissein states it, for he who gives money for the edification of the house of God, "God will, in return, build a house for him in paradise". As Christians do, Muslims gather around a building site when it is about the construction of a mosque, each of them acting according to his job specification (mason, painter, electrician, etc.). And we often see a kind of work on an assembly line, where everybody brings his contribution (Figure 2).

This photography shows us the first mosque of



Figure 2. The Dolisie mosque, indoors.
Source: Martin Pariss Vounou, 2018.

Dolisie, with the minaret and the two main entrances. It comes out that the green and white colors are regularly applied to make the worship place holier and more attractive. The construction of a mosque may also be initiated by an individual faith follower. That is the case of Bernard Yoka, citizen of West Africa (a Malian), naturalized Congolese and businessman (he presently fled away because he is wanted by the justice of Congo, with charges of embezzlement and breach of trust) who had built, in 2003, the Khouba mosque in Moungali, the fourth district of Brazzaville. Help may also come from Arab countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and Libya. In so doing, it is noticeable that the mosque deepens brotherhood, friendship and solidarity bonds that convey unity and social approach eagerly needed by a Muslim for his fellow mate, considered as a brother or a sister thanks to Islam believer.

As a matter of fact, the mosque is a fundamental tool for interiorization of norms or standards, theological and religious values, which make such a mosque become or remain a base for sociability. It is a strong socialization institution. Today, the mosque is a religious sanctuary, a place where Muslims meet for common and collective prayers. God's word is taught there; preaching is conveyed in Arabic and Kikongo, as well as in Lingala. The themes or subject matters of preaching aim among others to encourage man to be righteous. The mosque is also the place of reunion for Muslims to celebrate in common the Friday prayer, considered as weekly holyday.

Activities of Muslims

The Muslims that came to Congo are great tradesmen

operating their dealings generally around Dolisie markets; which explain why they often build their mosques in the vicinity of markets (cf. the map). At the beginning, they were selling in detail. But for some time past, they have been selling wholesale; selling products like onion, garlic, kao (also called "niébé", a plant looking like beans), tomato, etc. As said earlier, they are major owners of big shops. In fact, the main activity of Muslims is commerce; tradesmen are thus composed of entrepreneurs, sellers or commercial agents. The category of employees in commerce includes youngsters working for tradesmen, either in their stores, or in portorage and delivery of goods. Most Muslims have little or no family because of life expensiveness. For years they often stay in Dolisie with a Congolese wife, prior to going back in the home village and bringing back a second wife; hence the rotating phenomenon of co-spouses between Congo and the husband's homeland. Some of them have proper documentation that legitimates their presence and their activities in Congo. They speak the local language (Kikongo). In addition to the core activity, they are engaged in agriculture, stock farming (chiefly in neighboring villages), fishery and the sale of "coupés-coupés", name for barbecued beef or mutton meat.

Assessment of Islam settlement in Dolisie

For Congolese people, Islam is an immigration religion as it is a foreign contribution, notably of West African citizens (Makosso-Makosso, 1976). This religion has had impacts on local populations. For populations, the sonorous call for prayers is not only a trouble, but also a call for occupation of sidewalks for the Friday prayer.

The “Avenue de l'indépendance” of Dolisie is subject to traffic jams because of that. For Congolese “wara” are dirty people: they seldom have a bath, except washing feet and the head, and sell eating stuffs and other commodities to the populations, irrespective of hygiene principles (Eon^o3 et 5, Pierre Pongui, 2018). They are very dishonest, swindlers and forgery dealers; they promote child begging, etc., they do not let their children go to school”. Islam implantation in Dolisie did not solve all the problems. Recurrent quarrels between Malians, Senegalese, Beninese and other Islam believers hinder the expansion of the doctrine, like the echoes of terrorism all over the world do. (Moulambaye, 2016)

Apart from this negative aspect aforementioned, Islam brought a lot to the Congolese civilization in the areas of food habits, conservation techniques for dried cassava (gari), palm wine, onion consumption, etc. As far as clothing habits are concerned, Islam has introduced the West African “boubou” cloth, Turkish sleepers and the “bazin” clothing material. In Dolisie, several houses have the style of Muslim architecture.

Conclusion

This study on the settlement of the Muslim worship in a Christian environment in the city of Dolisie reveals that Islam is an immigration religion. This religion structured itself on the Congolese territory in historical circumstances marked by the European exploration, prior to the French colonization of a huge territory of central Africa. The religion has already known emulators, at least in terms of duration; because from 1937 to 2007, there is an existence of 70 years of Islam in Dolisie. The Muslim worship was introduced in Congo by the citizens of West Africa at the beginning of colonization. Expatriates that came from Chad (the “Sara”) and Oubangui-Chari (the “Banda”) joined West Africans in the settlement of this worship in Dolisie and in other regions of Congo.

Indeed, Congo is a land which is propitious to the development of Islam, given that this religion - as explained earlier - arouses Congolese adherence with enthusiasm. Islam and Christian-oriented religions evolve in the mood or environment that favors understanding and mutual respect. The advent of political single-party system in 1969 had slowed down religious activities in Congo. Their return to public spaces happened owing to the 1991 sovereign national conference. But before such a comeback, Islam, along with the Catholic Church, the Protestant Church and the Salvation Army has been perceived - by political authorities of that time - as the only religious doctrines authorized to operate in Congo. This made it possible for Islam to experience success, with the conversion of a great number of Congolese people to Islam. The achievement of this study made it possible to notice that Muslims have used several conversion techniques to conquer souls for the religion of Muhammad: construction of schools, hospitals, granting

scholarships in Muslim-oriented countries such as Morocco, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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Foot notes

- 1 Dominique Ngoie-Ngalla, 2010, «Les Royaumes », in *Histoire Générale du Congo. Des origines à nos jours.* L'Harmattan., p. 198.
- 2 Cf. Decree dated July 29, 1958, by President Charles de Gaulle; enacting the creation of the mixed commune of Dolisie in full exercise.
- 3 It was up to Albert Dolisie in Spring 1884 to show French citizens the way through the Kouilou-Niari, fief of AIC (Association Internationale Africaine - African International Association) for two years. Cf. C. Coquery V., 1969, *Brazza and the handing over of Congo. The West-African mission, 1883-1885.* p. 165.
- 4 INRAP, 1980, *Geography of the Republic of Congo CM.*
- 5 For the execution of the Congo-Ocean railroad works between February 6, 1921 and May 29, 1934, thousands of citizens from Chad and Ubangi-Chari were hired by force; and among them there were numerous Muslims.
- 6 Loubomo means « fort ».
- 7 The first mosque of Dolisie was built in 1937, under Imam Sy Biranti Kao. Sy Biranti Kao is a Senegalese, who was instructed by the colonial administration to preside over the native tribunal. Born around 1892 in Tuabu, Senegal, he had arrived in Congo in 1927, then went back and died in 1974. He was also prison attendant. This prison was concerned only with minor offences and traffic fines. The other serious infringements depended on the AEF Court of Appeal.
- 8 Marcel Soret gives some details relating to the issue of borders between Republic du Congo and its neighbors of Gabon, Angola and Democratic Republic of Congo. Cf., *Histoire du Congo Capitale*

- Brazzaville. Berger-Levrault, 1978, pp. 141-142.
- 9 Idem.
- 10 Eon², Aboué Emile, August 2018, son of sergeant Ango Aboué, a Fang from Gabon, in duty for AEF in 1944, in Dolisie.
- 11 Soret Marcel, 1978, in « Histoire du Congo Capitale Brazzaville ». Berger-Levrault.
- 12 AEF Official Journal, 1937, p. 1141. Consulted at « Préfecture de Brazzaville » in August 6, 7 and 8, 2018.
- 13 Some allocations were definitive, while others were provisional Cf. Official Journal, from 1937 to 1947 on land allotments in Dolisie.
- 14 Idem.
- Noon J. A., 1952, « Capitalisme, salariat, prolétariat. La mécanique des bas salaires en Afrique Noire », in « Présence Africaine » n°13, pp. 189-204.
- 16 Circular letter by the AEF general Governor, to Heads of constituencies of Bas-Congo, Loudima, Sibiti, Franceville, Mvouti, Pointe-Noire, Djambala, dated April 12, 1933. Quoted by Gilles Sautter, 1966, in « De l'Atlantique au fleuve-Congo. Une géographie du sous-peuplement. République du Congo, République Gabonaise. Editions Mouton » ; II volumes, p. 626-627.
- 17 Gilles Sautter, op. cit.
- 18 Franchised dealer companies (40) are the enterprises that had been assigned the mission to exploit soil and subsoil resources of Middle-Congo in 1899.
- 19 Soret Marcel, op. cit.
- 20 We are grateful to Professor Côme Kinata for his numerous works, notably in "Prosélytisme chrétien au Congo français. Missionnaires catholiques et protestants, une compétition âpre".
- 21 Kikongo: is the language spoken in the ancient Kongo kingdom that included the present Republics of Angola, Congo (DRC) and Congo (Republic of Congo). Preaching had been conveyed in this language since 1909 in the French Congo. Read also Martin Pariss Vounou, 2017, « Madzia porte d'entrée des Luthériens au Moyen-Congo. 1909-1958 », in « les Cahiers congolais d'anthropologie et d'histoire », n° 19, pp. 92-107.
- 22 Eon¹, Hamadou Amidou, Dolisie, August 2018. Thrashing Christians who, as long as they didn't know the church of others, could not be invited to the prayer, whereas this was automatic with Muslims.
- 23 Emile Chaudron, 1985, Le monde aujourd'hui, p. 191.
- 24 Victor Mertens, 1980, La nouvelle vitalité de l'Islam en Afrique Noire, Liège, p. 45.
- 25 The Senior Muslim Board of Congo, denominated « Conseil Supérieur Islamique du Congo (CSIC), which includes several communities: Central African Muslims Union (UMAC= Union des Musulmans de l'Afrique Centrale) ; Muslim Community of Congo (CIC = Communauté Islamique du Congo) ; Muslims Association of Congo (AMC= Association des Musulmans du Congo).
- 26 Estimates from « Centre de Recherche et d'Études Techniques de l'Habitat », a center for research and technical studies on habitat (CRETH), 2014.
- 27 In June 5, 1997, a civil war burst out between the backers of the present president Denis Sassou Nguesso and those of the former president, Pascal Lissouba, democratically elected president at that time. This war killed more than a hundred thousand people in villages and cities - among them Dolisie - that had been subject to pillages by Angolan, Rwandese and Chadian troops that had come to militarily support Denis Sassou Nguesso.
- 28 Wara » or « ndingari » is a generic term used by the populations of both Congo, to designate West-Africans.
- 29 Eon³ et 5, Pierre Pongui, Dolisie, June 20018.
- 30 Slaughter, a term used by many associations that have spoken out about the conditions in which the Congo-Océan Railroad - 512 kilometers long - was built, in terms of hiring conditions of workers, accommodation and miserable living conditions in construction sites..., quoted by Marcel Soret, 1978, in "Histoire Du Congo. Capitale Brazzaville, P163.

Full Length Research Paper

Revisiting the socio-economic implications of local-level political competition in Harena, Northern Ethiopia

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In Harena, Northern Ethiopia, local-level political competition for the post of metehadaderi (governor) had twofold impacts. On one hand, it played a role in ensuring the right of every person to participate in the political process, usually exercised by supporting one of the village contenders. On the other hand, it was a cause for social and economic conflict within the community. In other words, it brought winners and losers. The process and outcome of political competition was particularly influenced by wealth or economic capacity and it led to social disruption and an open clash as well among the members of the village. The finding of this study demonstrates that a political contestant used to divide the people into 'core supporters' and 'opponents'. Thereby, he tended to work accordingly, after being assumed the village administration. Moreover, the taking-over of political power by a new local governor or metehadaderi and his decision on the access to available resource such as the nature of land distribution and the social interaction could affect the community. By using data largely drawn from Mekelle Tourism bureau, this paper aims to illustrate the nature and process of local-level political competition, legitimacy and its implications for intra-village contacts.

Key words: Conflict, leadership, competition, legitimacy, land tenure.

INTRODUCTION

In Harena, *metehadaderi* was routinely named after a complex political process, in which it affects the intra-village relations and solidarities. In the village, a governor could not administer without supporters. It is generally believed that leaders acquired assistances in large part by doing favors for their supporters, at least at the local level. The political competitor is said to have more supporters basically by pledging to execute political power on their favor. In other words, issues that highly affect the livelihood and social interaction of the community would have to rise during the competitions. In

the present study, two political competitors were found in Harena with varying interest and determinations. The first competitor had, inter alia, exerted to retain the chiguraf Goses land tenure system in the village, while the other determined to change it into a resti system. This and other complex and daunting issues, impelled the villagers to be carved up into two conflicting groups. It also aggravates the existing economic and social polarities within the community.

In Harena, a governor obtained reputation, honor and legitimacy by attending church and enthusiastically

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participating in village projects. Helping in the rebuilding of the local church and plowing of the field dedicated to the church's support were needed. In other words, it was by putting the village demands above one's own interest, that is, to mean above one's own interests with regard to other roles which one possesses. In this traditional community, the ecclesiastical office was not only a spiritual center, but it had also socio-political and economic influences on the farming community. The local competitors, therefore, often preferred to get vigorously engaged in the local church activities as tax paying members and as adherents of the patron saint. This is not to say, however, that the church legitimized the village leaders but rather it worked to gain support among the villagers (Abraha 2017b).

It seems indispensable to scrutinize how political competitors assumed the office of headmanship and legitimacy in Harena. On one hand, a contestant made an effort to associate himself with any of the rulers of the village or with any of the *balabat* 'noblemen'¹ of the village. At the same time, he is expected to boost his land possession, often through litigation or through bribing the local land distributors. Indeed, land had substantial socio-economic and political factor. In this respect, *resti* could be important. Increasing one's holdings of *resti*, mainly by winning in the court was not only a rightful means but also enhanced the contestant's reputation, both as a 'good court fighter' and as defender of the poor who had deprived of their rights by others. In brief, land was not only a basic source of wealth, but also bestowed political legitimacy. Winning and losing of land cases in the court was, therefore, a strong entailment for political competitors in the village.²

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is carried out based on the qualitative research approach. Pertinent published and unpublished materials have been consulted, interpreted and cross-checked. In addition, a good number of informants who involved in the political competitions and residents have been interviewed and the oral information they given have been properly examined. Since the author himself is from the area under investigation, he has used his own knowledge and observation to analyze and disclose the underlying issues of local-level leadership and its impact on the social and economic life of the traditional community of Harena. Finally, the data analysis is carried out through interpretation, description of meanings, views

and precipitations of the members of local elders of the study area. The collected data were critically and meticulously analyzed through narrative and document analysis approach.

POLITICAL COMPETITION AND SOCIAL DISRUPTION

As previously indicated, the process of political competition and taking-over of political power in Harena had repercussions on the accumulation of wealth as well as social interaction of the community. In village, leaders were not exclusively designated by district governors or any other local notables. Rather, they required to have supporter at grassroots level.³ The post was sometimes assumed after a heated debate among the contestants. This was sometimes affected directly or indirectly the life of the community. In this regard, the competitors were tended to use every opportunity to weaken their rivals, in which it includes attacking of the rival properties or by bringing them into land litigation. Obviously, such case was disparaging in the courts which brought a severe impact on the litigants. The loser of land cases would have compelled to compensate the winner for the expense of the court proceedings and it was at the same as to the 'deprivation of one's reputations.' During the court proceedings also known as *mugut*, the winner would have obtained something invaluable beyond securing a new plot of lands. Hence, the winner had enhanced his reputation as *Tomagati* or *Mugutegn*, which implies a splendid court 'fighter'.⁴

Further, political process was routinely provoked the competition over the scare resources. This was partly owing to the active engagement of the contestants in the land litigation. For example, they may back their respective supports both morally and financially. Consequently, it was routinely imperiled the day to day contacts within or outside the village. Bauer, who observed the process of the selection of village governor in Enderta of northern Tigray, pointed out that the competition for office of village headmanship was destructive and it had affected the social and economic life of the community. The move to assume the office by individual competitors had severe repercussions at the village level since every households tended to take one side in the disputes. In addition, the contestant would have to influence the outcome of certain village deliberations in favor of his supporters. He was at least required 'something' from his supporter in return. It is within the context of such cases that political competition became apparent (Abraha, 2012).

Leaders' ability to influence a decision was largely dependent on the resources they could bring to the

¹In this study, I have used the term 'noble' and 'big man / woman' interchangeably. In Harena, the issue of leadership and legitimacy was more complex since competitors often demand support both from the people as well as from individuals who claimed a noble birth. The nobles even tend to assign their own loyal nominee as village headman.

²*Ibid.*

³Interview: Alem Habtu and Mahari Teklay, 23 November 2017, Mekelle.

⁴Interview: Foten Baraki, Le'ul Gebre-Silasie, 12 November 2017, Harena, Tigray.

competition. These resources were partly dependent on the leaders own performance as household heads, that is to say, on how much money they could make for use. It was also partly dependent on the amount of resource that their supporters willing to put into the competition. In fact, supporter's willing to deliver their resources was based on two important factors (Abraha, 2012). First, it depended on their own concern and assessment of the competitors' possibility of winning. Second, it was based on the constant intimidation as well as their concern of its inevitable effects to the community at large. The supporters' assessment of the possibility of a competitor's winning on the issue was largely based his resources and his past accomplishments. To this end, leaders stage performances, as Bauer has precisely pointed out, in the form of 'confrontations' designed to demonstrate to their supporters and assessment of the accounts of their resources.⁵

It can be roughly categorized a competitor's support into two basics groups: core supporters and following. The core supporters are morally committed to the contestant and are attached to him through complex relationships. Followers by contrast are transactionally attached to the contestant and are connected to him by a single strand relationship. The researcher presumes that there are enough empirical examples of 'morally' committed, single stranded followers and apparently only 'transactionally' committed multiplex attached supporters available to us to make it profitable to separate the type of commitment from the type of relationship. The researcher will, therefore, consider 'core supporter' to mean supporters tied to the contestant through multiple ties and 'following' refers to supporters connected to the contestant through a single link. The type of commitment and support will be regarded as problematic and complex in the village.⁶

The ability of a contestant or a leader to settle supporters around him, making them into neighbors, was paramount in creating effective core supporters. Seen retrospectively, an informant recount, the failure of a governor to buildup areas to do this was a reason in the decay of old wards. Persons wishing to signify their support occasionally come and act as neighbors even though they live too far away to be considered neighbors.⁷ At feast, for example, they would have to invite contestant or *metehadaderi* to express their determination and support. Then, everyone can see who and how many were attended in the feast. It can be said that *gorobabti* which in turn, refers to neighbors, often support different political contestants. In other words, if

one is going to support one's neighbor, then his/her neighbor will urge to alter his attachment and decides to support someone else. This was perhaps due to the existence of conflicting interest over the meager resources of the village among the residents. Then it was relatively difficult to establish amicable relations among the neighbors.⁸

It was mostly through *mahber*, a religious self-help institution, which village neighbors used to address their quarrels thereby eased cross-village interactions. Writers have proved that *mahber* has long played and continue to play a substantial role in the course of conflict preservation, management, and solidarity in the traditional community of northern Ethiopia (Abraha 2017b). This is perhaps reflected in the members' preference to set up *mahber* with their neighbors. It has long been known that members of the same family bound to different *mahbers* and offsprings mostly replace their parents thereby ensuring the continuity of the already laid down social affiliation. It offers social identity for individuals who could not otherwise have a relationship with one another particularly by virtue of kinship. The first possible reason for non-kinship tendency of *mahber* is to deal with the relationships among the farming community on the limited resources within or outside the village.⁹

In the village, the nature and process of local-level political competition was more complex and ambiguous than what is already known. As noted earlier, the ways in which the competitors gain support were through manipulations. From the individual actor's point of view, there was little encouragement for them to demonstrate support for other than personal reasons, beyond being constrained from showing support their neighbors' enemies. As one might expect, under these circumstances, support was revealed in subtle and often negative ways. Individuals, for example, could show support for governors within their own ward simply by visiting them.¹⁰ On the other hand, they could reveal their antagonism by refusing to visit their home or by excluding them in their social affairs. Confrontation may take the form of inviting supporters to one's house so that one's opponent may hear who comes or the form of giving a feast so that one's opponent may hear who came to act as 'neighbors'.

Interestingly, local competitors also claimed power either through genealogical ties to the ruling class or through individual performance in the court. The latter refers to the ability of a competitor to attract followers. For example, a person who knows how to fight in the court, a point at which all contestants were vulnerable, could be among the first claimant of the village leadership. Those who exposed to modern schooling are said to have

⁵For details on leaders ability to gain support, see Bauer D, 'Land, Leadership and Legitimacy among the Inderta Tigray of Ethiopia', (PhD Dissertation, University of Rochester, 1973), pp. 267-69.

⁶Interview, Abay Hagos, Teki'an Lilay, and Mehrey Teku'e, 12 September 2017, Mekelle.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸Interview, Mehrey Teku'e, Abadi Enqay, and Gebre-Silassie, 23 September 2017, Harena.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*

claimed the office of headmanship. In the dispute over the village leadership, others appeared to claim through hereditary right. In this regard, two opposing positions were articulated in the village.¹¹ The first, taken mainly by the older people and prominent members of the clergy, supported the hereditary claimant in the local-level political contest in the village. They claimed that Harena, as part of Enderta district, it was 'county of landlords' and advocated a continuation of hereditary rights. The second position, taken mainly by younger people, opined that efficiency should be the principal factor, and that it was the 'learned' that will administer the village communities. Further, the articulation of these opposing positions was itself a source of concern and discussion within the village (John, 1997).

It was at this particular period of time that the people were perplexed by several incongruous issues. This took place in the last years of Emperor Haile Silassie or in the early period of the Military Government. Few of the village residents was said to have supported the old system of administration, while others overtly criticized it. In the past, it was the district governor who appointed the village headman. Through time, however, their authority to name a headman had dropped.¹² This was partly to deal with the popular outrage on the preceding leaders. There was allegation that the district governors solely appointed their own nominees heedlessly of the majority's interest. It was at this juncture that the governor of Enderta *Awraja*, who was responsible for the appointment Harena's headman, was challenged by the people to name his own nominee to the village. For a while, the position of the first *metehadaderi* of the village was not filled. Then the people came to put forward individuals for the position at the meeting in the village yard. They largely propose those who would have to work in their favor. Accordingly, eight nominees were picked up by the villagers for the post. Both the individuals and the nominees tried to the best of their ability to gain support by investing all necessary resources.¹³

The then headman, who claimed by birth, was faced strong opposition from other competitor who came from the neighboring district, Agame. Informants claimed that economic status and attachment to the aristocrats were not the sole criteria to win the competition. Obviously, *dejach* Hagos, the preceding governor of Haren was chosen due to his attachment to one of the district high official. In other words, by genealogically associating himself to the then governor of Tigray, *ras* Seyum, he designated to the post. However, as previously indicated, the villagers openly opposed the nominee. After a prolonged discussion in the village, they agreed to discuss with another lower aristocrat of the district. Then

a group of *shimagletat* (elders), not less than fifteen, went to the district governor to have a new village *metehadaderi*. After fifteen days, the district governor assigned an individual proposed by the elders. Ironically, the new *metehadaderi* was claimed noble birth.¹⁴

Some refuted the new headman as the preference of the few individuals. Hence, it brought a serious blow to the social-welfare of the community. Thereby, competitors attacked the resource of their alleged antagonists using their political positions they assumed. For example, when the village *metehadaderi* order by the district governor to collect agricultural tax from the people under his suzerainty, some of the functionaries¹⁵ were failed to accomplish their duties. The new *metehadaderi* compelled to call and send the *aqeyti* (armed retainers) to expedite the tax collection on time. Paradoxically, this was an indication of the failure of the village *metehadaderi*¹⁶ to coordinate and govern the community. In addition, it cost headman as it obliged to pay the *aqeyti* to pay for their service.¹⁷

On the other hand, the village *metehadaderi* used his position to make several attacks on people he considered as his opponents. For example, he levying a fine of E\$ 1.00 on each household in the upper ward each time he found any of his crops eaten by animals. This was not only a source of quarrels but also brought into question his rivals ability to protect his ward members. Thus the headmen appeared to use his authority to wane his opponents. In fact, the confrontation and disagreements was sometimes used to scale the degree of his opponent's power and ability to win as well as to determine the alleged supporters of each opposing group. It also maintained power balance among the conflicting groups.¹⁸

Furthermore, political competitors were tried to change the existing land tenure system in favor of their respective supporters. The continued reduction of land plots compelled the community to divide and to take up different ideas on the nature of land distribution in Harena. In this regard, the 'first' settlers were sought to change from the *chiguraf Goses* to *resti* system. While in *chiguraf goses* land distributed based residency, in *resti* it was based on inheritance. Anyhow, the difference on the land tenure system was manipulated by the competitors. In other words, the political competitors promised to change the system in favor of their respective supporters.¹⁹ Informants said that some members of the

¹¹Interview: Kiros Baraki and Lilay Teka, 10 September 2017, Harena.

¹²Interview: Kiros Baraki and Lilay Teka, 10 September 2017, Harena.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴The overall description is based on the primary observation and interviews that took place on Monday, May 31, 2011, in Harena.

¹⁵Interview: Hishe Fitsum and Lilay Weres, 6 September 2017, Harena.

¹⁶Village headman and village manager are two different posts and often assumed by different individual. In Harena the first post was by *Qegnati* Demsu, while the latter hold by *Diacon* Kahsu in the period under discussion.

¹⁷Abraha, *Land Tenure...*, p. 68.; Bauer, *Land, Leadership...*, p.255.

¹⁸The whole analysis is based on the information collected from respondents on 7 September 2017, in Harena.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

village who left it, in search of off-farming works in Mekelle, tended to support the change of land tenure. The land distributors, also known as Harayo, with the patronage of the village *metehadaderi* commenced to redistribute the land of out-going individuals to new comers. When they returned they fought the case at court. They were supported by one recently arrived political competitor.²⁰

A protracted debate on the nature of land tenure was conducted among the farming community of Harena. It was held with the present of the district governor and other court officials. In a debate at the court, the both political competitors had provided moral and financial support to enable their supporters to litigate the matter up to provincial courts. Finally, those who left Harena for work won the case able to return their land. The *metehadaderi* was then order to give back their *resti* land to the claimants. Since Harena was a *chiguraf Goses* village, the order would entail changing the land holding system from a residency based into hereditary one, *resti* system.²¹ When the order was brought to the headman, who would be called upon to carry it out, he would have two options. First, he would have to organize with the village manager in an effort to fight the order. Second, he would have to attempt to put it into effect. Finally, he preferred the latter and in the process brought on a challenge which his opponents could not overlook and survive (Abraha, 2017a).

Then, the political competitors were manipulated the land tenure system in order to attract supporters. The now *metehadaderi* of Harena was required the return to *Resti* system, while his rival who deemed to come from neighboring village was called for the continuation of *chiguraf goses*. The change had several advantages for those who claimed to be *Deki-abata*, first settlers. In this regard, there was a raising demand for some kind of restriction on new claims for land. Some of the *metehadaderi* supporters will benefit most by the change.

This will not only strengthen his support, but also weakened his rival competitor.²² Those who would be benefited and those who would be lose by the change, cross-cut the traditional lines of support including ward boundaries. Importantly, some notables in other villages who could trace descent from Harena's founding ancestors might be counted on to support the change, because as *risti* they might be able to claim a share, whereas under *chiguraf gose* system they would have to be resident to claim a share.²³

Under the *risti* system, those who manage to trace descent through a variety of lines could able to gain a large plot of land. All informants expressed the opinion

that the change to *resti* would bring bad news to the immigrant settlers. As a result, the then *metehadaderi* who was successfully established genealogical ties with the founding fathers of Harena, seemed to have a special privilege, while his rival would became a loser. Henceforth, they recruited followers into their own camps.²⁴ The village residents were said to have supported or opposed the contestants based on their residency in the village. Harena's genealogical charter favors persons in some descent lines over persons in other descent lines. The founder of Harena is said to have three sons: Asimo, Ze-Mariam and Zera-Yohannes. If Harena became *risti*, all of the lay land belonging to the village would first be divided into three parts corresponding to these three ancestors. In fact, genealogical information was complex as it has social and economic implication. Nonetheless, few of the village residents' descended from Za-Mariam and Zera-Yohanes, the majority are said to have descended from Asimo.²⁵

As already mentioned, the village residents divided into groups. For understandable reasons, the support and opposition of the change of the land tenure system was depending on: 1, the amount of land they had already gained under the *chiguraf goses* land tenure system, 2, the branching within the portion of the genealogy through which they trace descent and 3, their estimate of the behavior of persons not living in Harena, but able to trace descent from Harena's founding fathers. In this regard, the anterior residents were favored the change to *resti* system, while many of the immigrant settlers were vehemently opposed.²⁶ The new incomers particularly from Agame district were remained in Harena for a long period of time. But the change would have a far-reaching impact on their economic privilege in the village. The *resti* rules only favored individuals capable of tracing or associating with any of the 'founding fathers' of the village. Therefore, those who considered as *sidetegna* or immigrants will be deprived their share of land.²⁷

The complexity of the genealogies at the lower levels became devastating, partly due to the number of people involved. As well as due to the fact that after the six generation exogamy limits some individuals may be tracing descendent from more than one of the major ancestors. No single individual was, therefore, identified all sections of the genealogy with precision. Due to the presence of individuals living outside Harena who may claim land in a *resti* system, many persons were not firmly committed to one side or the other. According to informants, nonetheless, the incomers are said to have

²⁰Abraha, *Land Tenure*..., p. 54.

²¹Interview: Haftu Kiros and Kiflom Baraki, 17 September 2017, Harena.

²²Interview: Haftu Kiros and Kiflom Baraki, 17 September 2017, Harena.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴Interview: Haftu Kiros and Kiflom Baraki, 17 September 2017, Harena.

²⁵Bauer, *Land, Leadership*..., p. 260.

²⁶Interview: *Memhir* Hatu Belay and *Qeshi* Teferi Hagos, 7 September 2017, Harena.

²⁷*Ibid.*

supported the retention of *chiguraf gose*,²⁸ while the anterior resident vehemently opposed it. At this time, therefore, two groups were articulated, in which it was taken by the competitors. The biggest danger to the immigrants were came from the fact that nearly all priests and deacons supported the change, since they would retain the glebe land they already held for their service of the church, and any *risti* land they perceived would represent a gain. It was at this time that the contestant, who came from the Agame district, came to loss supporters (Bauer, 1973).

Thus in order to assume the office, the immigrant contestant had attempted to prevent the change into the *resti* system. This competitor could not count on all of his followers because some of them saw the change as a way to regain the status of the head of an independent household.²⁹ His core was split, his ward was split and the persons tied to him on a transactional basis were split. Of all those who favored a change to *resti* 'first settler', a total of fifty, twenty were from his own ward. By contrast, all those who publically preferred the change of *chiguraf goses* into *resti* were from his ward. In other words, his ward was strongly split.³⁰ Fifteen priests and deacons favored the change, and only three opposed it. The other two were come from Agame district with no local genealogical ties and who happen to be dependents of immigrant competitor. In fact, only one of the persons favoring the retention of *chiguraf goses* would have been able to claim a significant amount of *resti* land according informants' estimates. With the exception of few individuals, immigrant supporters on this issue were either immigrant Agames without genealogical ties in Harena (Abraha, 2012).

Conclusion

The nature of village leadership in Tigary has always retained distinct features thereby it has given various interpretations. In Harena, a small village northeast of Mekelle, political competitors commonly utilized their reputation, financial resources and kinship ties to win over their rivals that led to social and economic polarities among the village residents. In the local level political election, the competitors compelled to have supporters. To gain support among the village residents, the political competitors for the post of the village *metehadaderi* was used the system of land tenure as instrument to weaken or strengthen their position. While the then *metehadaderi* fought establish a *resti* system, his stood against him.

The allegedly new comers required to apply *chiguraf goses* land tenure system. It was a debate to change from lineage-based land tenure system into a land-share land tenure system. In *resti*, land distributed through lineage ties. While in *chiguraf goses* it was equally distributed to all members, regardless of their genealogical ties to the founding fathers. In short, the local level political competition was not merely affected the social interactions, but also influenced the economic or resource distribution in the village.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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²⁸Interview: *Memhir* Hatu Belay and *Qeshi* Teferi Hagos, 7 September 2017, Harena.

²⁹Interview: *Memhir* Hatu Belay and *Qeshi* Teferi Hagos, 7 September 2017, Harena.

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