

## POLITICS OF MUSLIM MINORITY IN UGANDA AND BURUNDI

**ABSTRACT:** There are Muslim minorities in Burundi and Uganda that are influenced by their Christian co-citizens rather than other Islamic states. They live their Islamic faith with the feeling of being marginalised by the rest of society. They have ambitions to play more active role in politics. While looking for their Islamic identity, they struggle with the negative perception of the origins of their faith linked to the Arab slave trade, with the feeling of alienation by Christian majority, the lack of education, and the weakness of their leadership. Muslim approach to the past tries to defend the achievements of Kiswahili culture and absolve the shameful parts of history, e.g. slavery or Idi Amin's dictatorship. They show great creativity in commerce and are able to create a strong sense of community.

Muslim presence in Burundi and Uganda can be seen through some geographical sites and monuments which symbolise political aspirations of the Muslims. Kibuli and Old Kampala, the hills of the Ugandan capital, with their imposing mosques testify to the vitality of Muslim community. Communities in Iganga and Mbale districts have built Islamic Umma and started the most important educational project – the Islamic University. Buyenzi, the suburb of the Burundian capital, and districts on the shores of Lake Tanganyika are places where economic aspirations of Burundian Muslims are realised.

There is a twofold dynamic in the politics of Muslim communities. On the one hand, they strongly hold to the tradition based on Kiswahili language, culture and commerce; on the other hand, they try to advance on the political stage by searching for strong Muslim leaders.

The Muslims of Uganda and Burundi tend to withdraw from public politics when they lack a charismatic leader. How can Muslim society remain the leading group in politics? To claim the place in the society there must be more emphasis put on education. Muslims seem to be aware of this need and have already taken some measures.

**KEYWORDS:** Politics, Muslims, Uganda, Burundi, Muslim society, Buyenzi

### INTRODUCTION

In Bujumbura and in Kampala, like in many capitals in the region of the African Great Lakes, the great mosques situated on the hills, or at other imposing locations dominating over the cities, can be seen. As monuments and places of religious cult, they bear witness to the history of the Muslim community in these countries. Their symbolic presence in the heart of the political power of Uganda<sup>1</sup> and Burundi speaks not only about the past, but also about the present: how the Muslim population has been searching for the ways to be the leading group in the Ugandan and Burundian societies.

The article focuses on remarkable historical and geographical sites where Muslim communities, which are minorities in the two countries,<sup>2</sup> reside. I consider these sites as

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<sup>1</sup> The British Protectorate of Uganda, established in 1894, embraced many ancient kingdoms and chiefdoms, including Buganda, Bunyoro, and others.

<sup>2</sup> The exact statistics of religious adherents in these countries are constantly disputed. Muslims are accused of overestimation, the Christians of lowering the numbers down. According to the census

symbols – the stepping stones in the process of searching for Islamic identity. To grasp their significance, background information about the origin and history of Islam in this region is required. In this paper, I would like to focus on the most important political periods for the Muslim community in Uganda and in Burundi, i.e. when they exercised strong leadership.

On the basis of my long years of work in these countries as a Catholic missionary and supported by academic research, I would like to encourage reflection on the impact Muslim communities have on the political and social life of these countries today. Finally, in the conclusion I will indicate the common elements of the Muslim politics in Uganda and in Burundi.

## UGANDA

### THE ORIGINS OF THE MUSLIM SETTLEMENT IN UGANDA

Islam reached Uganda from two different directions. The northern route with the Turko-Egyptian influence had a very limited impact. The southern route, leading through the region of Great Lakes to the court of the sultan of Zanzibar, had a much greater influence. The first Arab trader to be received by *kabaka*<sup>3</sup> Suna in 1843 was Sheik Ahmed-bin-Ibrahim. After that, more and more Arab traders arrived, bringing fire arms, gun powder, and luxury goods, such as beads or cotton clothes, and looking for slaves and ivory. During the reign of *kabaka* Mutesa I (1856–1884), Islam gained many adherents. Several mosques were constructed. Even the king at some point considered becoming a Muslim. On the basis of available literature, one might have the impression that it was just a part of political game and looking for better military and commercial alliances (Faupel, pp. 9–12). Similar motivation could be observed with the arrival of the Protestant and Catholic missionaries. The major obstacle to becoming a Muslim for Mutesa was the required ritual of circumcision, which he despised. When the political situation changed, Muslim scholars claim that between 1874 and 1876, 74 Muslim martyrs<sup>4</sup> were killed at Namugongo on account of their faith. In most of the cases, the Baganda<sup>5</sup> kings left their subjects free to convert to Islam, which was gaining ground even during the reign of Mutesa's son, Mwanga II, and his eldest brother, Kiwewa. In the 1890s, the struggle of the Muslim community with the Christians took place as the former wanted to have an upper hand in the fight for political power. The culminating point came in 1888 when the Muslims and Arabs launched a military coup and installed on the throne *kabaka* Kalema. He was overthrown by common efforts of the Protestants and the Catholics who eventually restored Mwanga II to the royal court the following year. The battle to

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conducted in 2014, 14% of Ugandan population is Muslim ([washington.mofa.go.ug](http://washington.mofa.go.ug)...). For Burundi, Muslims will claim 10–12%, while government institutions will estimate this number at 5% or even less. Compare: <http://www.burundiembassy-germany.de> [13.04.2020].

<sup>3</sup> The official title of the king of Buganda.

<sup>4</sup> The number of the persecuted and killed Muslims is disputed. The estimates come from the oral tradition, there are no written reports from that time. F., Mugabe, *Why Muslim martyrs are not celebrated in Uganda*, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/why-muslim-martyrs-are-not-celebrated-in-uganda-1707580> [11.04.2020].

<sup>5</sup> In bantu languages, prefix *ba-* denotes the plural form of human being. Baganda is literally a group of people called Ganda.

make Uganda an Islamic state was lost, except for some conversions to Islam of some distant Buganda<sup>6</sup> royal family members ([visitkampala.net/...](http://visitkampala.net/)).

Gaining power by Christian fractions was the turning point for the Muslims in Uganda. Since then, they have reached an impasse and had to define themselves against the Christian majority. There will always be a sort of “deja vu” feeling in the Muslim community, a sense that somehow Christian missionaries and the British have stolen their number one position in the Ugandan society. The Muslims remain a minority with limited links to other Islamic societies. It is the presence of their Christian neighbours that shapes Islamic society in Uganda.

### THREE SPOTS OF MUSLIM FAITH AND POLITICAL PRESENCE IN UGANDA

Kampala is a city of green hills. Many of them are associated with a particular religion because of the dominating religious buildings and religious administrative headquarters located there. I will limit the discussion to Kibuli and Old Kampala, two hills within Kampala city that have a symbolic meaning for Muslims, and geographical regions that have significant Muslim concentration, namely Mbale and Iganga districts.

#### KIBULI – WHERE THE MUSLIM TRADITION HOLDS ON

Since the beginning of the 20th century, Kibuli has been considered a Muslim hill.

The history of this place starts with the signing of the 1900 Buganda Agreement when the leader of the Muslim community in Buganda then, Prince Nuhu Mbogo, was given 24sq miles for him and his followers ([www.monitor.co.ug/...](http://www.monitor.co.ug/)).

Kibuli has a large Muslim population. Its big mosque can be seen and heard well from afar at the hours of the Muslim prayers. It was regarded the centre of Islamic presence in Uganda until the 1990s. The mosque became the base of the Ugandan Muslim Council (UMC), an organisation led by prince Badru Kakungulu.<sup>7</sup> Later on, UMC was opposed by the rival National Association for the Advancement of Muslims (NAAM) which sympathised with Obote I's regime based in Wandegeya<sup>8</sup> mosque.

Kibuli represents a modern face of the Muslim society in Uganda. Many important Muslim institutions are located there, including, among others, Kibuli Muslim Hospital and Kibuli Secondary School. They testify to how Ugandan Muslims advanced to modernity, without neglecting their tradition, which still holds strong. Kibuli lives from trade and transport services. In terms of the language, one can hear more Kiswahili in Kibuli, whereas Kampala is dominated by Luganda. Still, one must admit that many Muslims from Buganda are deeply attached to Baganda culture. Ugandans dislike Kiswahili because it is associated with army and war: it was used by the Tanzanian soldiers who chased away Idi Amin's army in 1979. They were notorious for looting and stealing. Since that event, during a burglary the thieves usually speak Kiswahili not to betray their tribal identity. Consequently, in the minds of Ugandans, Kiswahili has got negative connotations and is associated with being foreign. It is also the language used by the Ugandan army.

<sup>6</sup> In bantu languages, prefix *bu-* signifies territory, region, kingdom, state.

<sup>7</sup> The son of the above-mentioned prince Nuhu Mbogo.

<sup>8</sup> Another suburb of Kampala metropolitan area.

## UGANDA NATIONAL MOSQUE IN OLD KAMPALA – A SYMBOL OF MUSLIM INFLUENCE

With the military putsch of Idi Amin Dada in 1971, a new chapter in the Islamic history of Uganda began and the Muslim community started to be associated with Old Kampala Hill. Trying to unite the Islamic community, the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council was established and the construction of the great *Gaddafi National Mosque*<sup>9</sup> was initiated. The big mosque of Old Kampala, with its enormous minaret overshadowing the city, signifies the ambitions of Ugandan Muslims in the contemporary politics and social life of Uganda. The construction took many years and was interrupted by the lack of funds. The stories concerning the mismanagement of the construction funds circulated across Uganda ([www.newvision.co.ug/...](http://www.newvision.co.ug/)). The problem was symbolised by the crooked minaret. The construction works restarted after 2002 and the mosque was completed in 2007 thanks to the efforts of the Ugandan government and the financial support of colonel Gaddafi.

## THE PERIOD OF IDI AMIN DADA IN UGANDA

Being a Muslim, Amin wanted to push his community forward. But like many of his initiatives, this one was also badly planned and disorganised. The years of this illiterate military dictatorship are considered a horrible period in Ugandan history. Amin's secret service consisted mainly of his own ethnic group, Kakwa and Nubians, who came to Uganda as immigrants. Many of them were Muslims and were granted numerous privileges. Muslims have different approach to this matter than the majority. They turn a blind eye to the brutality of the army, mass killings, physical elimination of the opposition, secret torture rooms and terrible economic crisis. This is how majority of Ugandans remember Idi Amin's reign. However, when a Muslim is asked for opinion, he will generally praise Amin's achievements: breaking the colonial rule and vesting Ugandans with economic power by chasing Indians out of the country. Idi Amin Dada openly promoted Islam. Colonel Gaddafi (1942–2011) called him the warrior of Islam. He made Uganda having very close ties with the Arab League. The Ugandan Muslims rallied round him. They recall that period with nostalgia as they had a real influence on the politics of the country. Idi Amin Dada launched many projects for the benefit of the Muslims, united them, and initiated Islamic Bank and the construction of many mosques. After the fall of Idi Amin in 1979, the Muslims in Uganda withdrew to the second or even the third line of Ugandan politics. They were mistrustful of the governments that followed.

MBALE AND IGANGA DISTRICTS –  
MUSLIM ISLANDS ON THE CHRISTIAN MAP OF UGANDA

Mbale (Bagisu tribe) and Iganga (Basoga tribe) districts – with their large Muslim population – are like islands on the Christian map of Uganda. The district of Iganga is situated north of Jinja and Mbale lies at the foot of Elgon mountain. They are the only regions in Uganda that have got rural Muslim population as it can be observed that, in general, Ugandan Muslims live in towns.

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<sup>9</sup> The name was changed into *Ugandan National Mosque* after the fall of colonel Muammar Gaddafi.

Why is Islam so popular in these regions? Because of the mixture of historical events and elements of the local culture that go well with Islamic customs. Bagisu tribe is one of the rare cases in Uganda that practises male circumcision. For a man to become a Muslim, circumcision is one of the fundamental requirements. At the same time, this kind of practise is abhorred by the majority of the tribes in Uganda. Another reason for a large number of Muslims in this region is its history, especially at the beginning of the 20th century when the early Muslim posts were established there. British Colonial administration used Muslim militia led by Semei Kakungulu to conquer and control Eastern Uganda. The first Muslim settlements come from that time.

The first Muslim institution of higher education, the *Islamic University in Uganda*, was founded in Mbale in 1988 ([www.iuiu.ac.ug/...](http://www.iuiu.ac.ug/)). It represents the aspirations of the Islamic community to have educated human resources that will shape the politics of Uganda. For a long time, the level of education at the university was low. At the beginning, it was mocked and nicknamed “a glorified secondary school”. But its quality has improved in the recent years. According to the *2020 Ugandan University Ranking*, it is the 14th university in the country.<sup>10</sup>

One must say that university has got a very positive influence on the social and political life of the Ugandan Muslims. In the civil legislation they follow legal tradition influenced by British law and local African traditions. In their *umma* they follow the heritage coming from Sunni Shaff'i legal school. Because of the *hajj*, Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, and studies in Saudi Arabia, the Hanabali school gains influence.

## BURUNDI

### THE ORIGINS OF THE MUSLIM SETTLEMENT IN BURUNDI<sup>11</sup>

In the 1820s, the first caravans reached the shore of Lake Tanganyika, arriving from the Indian Ocean coast in Bagamoyo. Between 1830 and 1840 the commercial settlement was established by the armed group of Swahili traders helped by the Banyamwezi tribe. From 1840, regular commercial expeditions started coming from the court of Omani sultanate in Zanzibar. The expeditions were controlled completely by the traders of Arab origin. They were looking for ivory and slaves, while importing into Africa considerable quantities of cotton rolls, glass pearls, and brass wire. The slavery track to the region of Maniema<sup>12</sup> led along the shore of Lake Tanganyika. The first Muslim settlement on the Burundian territory was the consequence of this trade. The caravans of slaves carrying ivory needed food supplies. On the way to Bagamoyo they often camped for the night at Buyenzi<sup>13</sup> and at what is now the town of Rumonge. Some trade exchanges with the local Burundian chiefs took place. In general, Arab traders did not try to penetrate to the well-organised Burundian kingdom, which was known for notorious warriors and excellent archers.<sup>14</sup> They were satisfied with the control of the shore. In the second

<sup>10</sup> [www.4icu.org/ug/](http://www.4icu.org/ug/) [13.04.2020].

<sup>11</sup> The majority of this paragraph is based on: Mworoha, pp. 236–246.

<sup>12</sup> Maniema is a province in the DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo).

<sup>13</sup> Present district of Bujumbura city.

<sup>14</sup> In 1884, the Banyamwezi raiders looking for slaves under the command of Murambo were spectacularly defeated by the forces of Burundian chief Rurakengereza in the North-East East Burundi near Murore. In 1886, Rumaliza and Bangwana tried to enter the interior of Burundi from the east of Uzige. At Kiyenzi, they were pushed back by the Burundi warriors who took advantage of the

half of the 19th century, the quasi states of Banyamwezi warriors, who started calling themselves Bangwana,<sup>15</sup> were established under Arab leaders with Kaponora (Mwinyi Kheri), Kambirombiro (Bwana Nkombe), and Sarimwe (Salume). They acted with a considerable autonomy, but their trade was linked to the Sultanate of Zanzibar. We can consider the quasi states as Zanzibar's agents who concluded a number of treaties concerning friendship and trade with a number of local chiefs in order to enslave others (Ceillier, 2011, p. 201). The successor of Mwinyi Kheri, Mohammed bin Khalan, known as Rumwaliza, extended his slave trade activity and tried to resist colonial forces for some time. These logistic trading sites on the shores of Lake Tanganyika gave birth to Muslim communities even after the slave traders were chased away from the region by the colonial forces of Belgium and Germany between 1894 and 1896.

#### CONCENTRATION OF MUSLIMS IN BURUNDI

There are many Mosques in Bujumbura. As far as the Muslim population is concerned, the so-called *Asian district* of Bujumbura plays the role of the commercial heart of the city. It is in *Asian district* that the most frequented mosques are situated. It is home to the Arab, Indian and Pakistani Muslims who own a significant part of the Burundian trade market.

In my opinion, Buyenzi has got a strong influence on the daily life of the Burundian Islamic community. The former ancient camp for Arab trading caravans is now a part of Bujumbura city and has got the largest Muslim population. There are many smaller mosques in the locality built by the local traders, and Muslim institutions, such as schools and associations. In 1940, many Muslims lived in Kabondo, another part of the city at present, but then a village south of Bujumbura. From 1928 till 1942, the Belgian administration forced Swahili speakers to move from Kabondo to Buyenzi while organising the architectural space of Bujumbura ([www.minorityvoices.org/force...](http://www.minorityvoices.org/force...)).

The biggest mosque in Bujumbura belongs to the Shia community that constitutes a negligible percent of Burundian Muslim community. The mosque has been sponsored by Iran, but its construction has not been finished yet. It is situated in the district of Nyakabiga, in the neighbourhood where Comibu (Islamic Community of Burundi) owns a large plot of land and has its headquarters. It is the place where big Muslim religious festivities are organised. And on that site the massive mosque is planned to be erected.

Finally, we shall have a quick look at Rumonge and Nyanza Lake districts situated on the shore of Lake Tanganyika. These are the only places in Burundi with a large rural Muslim population.

#### RUMONGE AND NYANZA LAKE DISTRICTS – THE SHORE OF LAKE TANGANYIKA

The two districts are situated on the Burundian shore of Lake Tanganyika. They have a quite distinct climate than the rest of Burundi: they are hot and humid tropical places. A number of people there earn their living from fishing and growing palm trees for oil.

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time the aggressors needed to reload their guns and showered them with arrows. Oral stories relate that many were killed, others were castrated and released. The fact is that it was the last serious attempt on the slave traders' part to fight directly the Burundi kingdom.

<sup>15</sup> In contrast to the local rural population called Bashenzi, meaning wild and pagan, Bangwana had some aristocratic touch as the civilised part of population.



The Muslims of Rumonge have been heavily influenced by the neighbouring Tanzania and Swahili culture. In that region, during the period of insecurity (1994–2007) there were very few massacres of Bahutu and Batutsi.<sup>16</sup> People attribute this to the Islamic Umma, a sense of the community that goes beyond ethnic divisions.

#### BUYENZI AS A MUSLIM ENCLAVE IN THE CHRISTIAN CITY

Many of the Buyenzi Muslims are of the Congo origin and their Kiswahili has got a strong Congo accent. That historical part of the capital city confirms the Muslims' social role of traders and transport facilitators. Most of the properties and houses belong to the Muslim owners, although they often rent them to Christian migrants who come to Bujumbura from the countryside looking for employment. The rich Muslims are merchants and traders. When the wealth of a Muslim family increases significantly, the family nurtures an ambition of building a mosque of which the male benefactor will become an honourable mufti. On the other hand, the poorer part of Muslim population engages in activities which earn small revenue, e.g. welding, repairing cars, panel beating, or selling second hand car parts. Muslim families have numerous children and there is a clear division of roles and labour. Women occupy themselves with children and the household, while men earn money and are responsible for the religious affairs. It is a very coherent society that keeps to its ethical beliefs.

As an outside person, I could observe some weaknesses of this society. The youth are not interested in education. The rich ones only take up trade and commerce in order to inherit the family business. The ones from a poor background are not interested in going to school either. They look for apprenticeship as soon as they can to learn some manual skills and start earning their own money. In practise, they are condemning themselves to the low paid jobs. The Muslim youth's favourite means of recreation is playing football and board games. Many players in the Burundian national team are Muslim. In contrast, Christian youth would spend their time studying.

For a person who lived in Buyenzi for four years, the way Buyenzi differs from other parts, not only of the city, but of the whole country, is striking. In some way, it makes an impression of an independent state.

The Muslim presence has several distinctive features: Swahili culture, little education, rich commerce, and resistance to any political interference from the outside. The Muslim population feels that Buyenzi is their home and belongs to them. In their social life they follow Sunni Islam of the Shafi'i legal school. In the daily life they are confronted with the civil legislation, influenced by the Belgian colonial and local Burundi tradition. The state of Burundi guarantees freedom of religion. In practice if immigrants come to live there, they must respect and accept Muslim terms of cohabitation.

#### RADJABU AS THE HERO OF BURUNDIAN MUSLIMS

Burundi has a long history of ethnic conflict between Bahutu and Batutsi groups. It was the agreement in Arusha (Tanzania) in 2004 that stopped the civil war. The elections that followed brought to power the former rebels from the Bahutu majority,

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<sup>16</sup> Classification of Bahutu and Batutsi as tribes has been hotly disputed since the time of Rwandan genocide (1994–1998). The topic is beyond the scope of interest of this paper. In this work, all tribal groups mentioned have the prefix *ba*, a grammatical category for plural in Bantu languages.

who organized themselves and created a political party called CNDD-FDD.<sup>17</sup> At the beginning, there were two outstanding leaders in that new political force: the former late president of the country, Pierre Nkurunziza, who is evangelical Christian; and the second leader, Hussein Radjabu, who is a Muslim. They shared the power and worked hand in hand. The Muslim community was delighted and proud to support government initiatives. Radjabu turned out to be a zealous promotor of the Islamic faith, whereas Nkurunziza promoted evangelical Christianity built on the pastoral ministry of his wife. Nkurunziza's cooperation with Radjabu came to a standstill and an open conflict arose. It was Nkurunziza who mobilized greater support and marginalized his Muslim rival. Radjabu was arrested without a trial on charges of treason, and put in prison, from which he finally escaped in 2015. With Radjabu's disappearance from the public political scene, the Muslim population withdrew its support of the government, and united around a small opposition party called Union for Peace and Democracy (UPD-Zigamibanga), led by Zedi Feruzi. In September 2010, the government of Burundi tried to appeal to Burundian Muslims by appointing a local Muslim politician from Buyenzi, Mohamed Rukara, to the post of Burundian Ombudsman (reconciler). He was very influential despite his disputed lack of education. He also fell into president's disgrace when he opposed Nkurunziza's so called third term of office. Although some other appointments of Muslims followed, e.g. that of Hafsa Mossi,<sup>18</sup> the ruling government party scores poorly in the regions where Muslims constitute the majority.

The Muslims of Burundi describe themselves as Kiswahili speakers. Many of them do not speak proper Kirundi. Kiswahili determines their identity. They interpret the history of Burundi in their favour. They disregard the atrocities committed by the Arab slave traders and portray them as the heroes fighting the coloniser's forces, and bringing values of Swahili culture to Burundi. Manifesting a typical mentality of a victim, Kiswahili speakers accuse the Catholic Church of collaboration with the Belgian colonial government at the expense of marginalising Muslim faith and Kiswahili speakers.

## CONCLUSION

There are many common features among the Muslims of Uganda and Burundi which have determined the way these Islamic communities approach politics in their countries.

It can be said that, in comparison to their Christian neighbours, Muslims often use the complex of their past failure to win more adherents to their faith. They feel that they have been marginalised in their societies for historical reasons. There is also a sense of alienation of Islam as a foreign and imported faith, due to the fact that the majority of Muslims use Kiswahili language at the expense of the local dialects. The Muslims must struggle to live with the dark side of their history that has stuck to their faith. In Burundi, it is mainly the slave trade of the Arabs. In Uganda, the Muslims are blamed for the atrocities committed during the dictatorship of Idi Amin.

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<sup>17</sup> The National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy (fr. *Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie – Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie*, CNDD-FDD).

<sup>18</sup> Educated in the United Kingdom, Mossi used to be a CNDD-FDD politician who served as minister from 2009 to 2011. She was also a Burundian representative to the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) from 12 June 2012 until her assassination on 13 July 2016 ([www.eac.int/statements/](http://www.eac.int/statements/) [13.04.2020]).



The Muslims in both countries have influence on urban rather than rural population. They have got strong position in the economy of the country, being engaged in much of the trade. This strong economic standing does not translate, however, into political influence.

The Islamic community in the two countries lives in the context of a large Christian majority. The Muslims in Burundi and in Uganda are relatively isolated from the influences of other Islamic states. In their official public communication, they claim to follow the Islamic way of life that can be observed in the Arabic countries. In many aspects, especially in education and health services, they imitate their Christian co-citizens, rather than their “Arab brothers”.

Since their independence, the military regimes that govern both countries have been taking advantage of the divisions within the Muslim communities and used them in the internal political games. In modern times, there have been serious attempts to regain political influence under a strong leadership of a Muslim politician. In Islam, there is no division into political and religious spheres of life. The Muslims believe that politics should serve religion. It is not exactly the view of the multi-cultural and multi religious societies.

The tradition of Islam teaches that a Muslim living in a non-Muslim state should fight for the establishment of the state of Islam (*dar-al-Islam*), or emigrate to the “world of Islam”, or leave, resign from any cooperation with non-Muslims... or finally make some kind of agreement (pact) to guarantee oneself religious freedom (Sakowicz, p. 197).

When Ugandan and Burundian Muslims see that the political system is dominated by the believers of other faith, they keep their distance and withdraw until the moment a Muslim is in charge.

In the face of ethnic conflicts, the Muslim community of Burundi has shown greater unity and coherence than Christian community. The massacres of Bahutu and Batutsi were very rare in the districts heavily populated by Muslims, for the religious element seems to play a greater role than the ethnic one. During the worst years of ethnic crisis in Burundi in the late 1990s, even the Christians were keen to flee and look for safety.

The contemporary Muslim community aspires to receive education. It is their weakest point, which is used by the rest of the society to justify their marginalisation. What Isabella Soi writes about Ugandan Muslims can be easily applied also to Burundi: “this minority status was confirmed by the fact that lack of education was given as one of the reasons for Muslims being excluded from jobs in the administration” (Soi, p. 170). In the past, Muslims were satisfied with investing their human resources in commerce and transport. We can risk a statement that from the time of independence, the Muslims in both countries have been underrepresented in politics. Due to being influenced by their Christian neighbours, they have been striving for education in the last forty years. Ugandan Muslims have already made the first step by founding an institution of higher education. Burundian Muslims still have a long way to go.

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