

## **AFTER PEACE: EDUCATION, NON-STATE ACTORS, AND THE EROSION OF STATE AUTHORITY IN THE EASTERN DRC**

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### **Abstract**

Most public education in the Democratic Republic of Congo operates on a hybrid model whereby the state, religious authorities and parents combine their efforts to manage and regulate the provision of education. This system is necessary in the Congo's fragile state, but its existence poses a challenge to the long-term process of state reconstruction and the reassertion of state authority in the sector.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

What happens to state authority when non-state actors operate 'public' services in a fragile state? How can the state re-establish its authority in such a situation? The case of the education system in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo provides a test case to examine these questions. In the Kivu provinces, the bulk of education is managed, administered, and operated by non-state actors, mostly from the religious sector. While provincial and local education officials are still technically in charge of the education system, most lack the basic means to monitor, administer, or otherwise exercise any authority over the sector. Instead, religious organizations have developed and operate large bureaucracies that exercise real authority over day-to-day operations in the sector. Based on data collected in field research conducted between 2005-2010 in four cities in the eastern Congo (Beni, Bukavu, Butembo, and Goma), I argue that the development of the religious education bureaucracies represents a parallel administrative structure that indirectly challenges the state's authority.<sup>1</sup> I argue that religious leaders, not state officials, hold the upper hand in determining how schools are run, personnel decisions, and fees, among other factors. I further postulate that this situation poses a long-term challenge to the Congolese state as it attempts to re-establish its authority in the east. Given that local populations do not trust government authorities to provide solid educational opportunities (and have good reason not to do so), few outside the government have any incentive to see the government re-establish its authority. I then raise questions as to what this might mean for the state's long-term reconstruction project in the midst of ongoing conflict in the Kivus.

In the following section, I discuss my research methodology. I then explain how this research fits into existing theories of provision of social services by non-state actors. The following sections of the article provide an

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overview of the way that educational administration works in the Kivu provinces and the specific roles played by various non-state actors in Goma, Bukavu, Butembo, and Beni. Finally, I discuss the nature of the parallel administration of education and its implications for long-term state reconstruction.

This research is based on fieldwork conducted in four cities in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo between 2005 and 2010. In Nord-Kivu, I conducted research in Goma (2005, 2006, 2007, 2010), Butembo (2010), and Beni (2010). In Sud-Kivu, I conducted research in Bukavu (2005, 2007). For this study, which is part of a larger project on social service provision by non-state actors in the eastern DRC, I interviewed more than 200 subjects using semi-structured interview techniques. Approximately 2/3 of the subjects are Congolese citizens, while the remaining 1/3 are from other states. Interview subjects were selected through snowballing methods and were chosen based on their ability to comment knowledgeably on social service provision in the region, both in the current era and during and before the wars. Subjects include civil society leaders, religious leaders, administrators of educational and health care programs, local and provincial government officials, health care and educational personnel, international non-governmental organization employees, Congolese academics, civilian and military peacekeeping staff, and local non-governmental organization leaders.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. BACKGROUND

The fragility of the state in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo is well-documented. The state is incapable of providing basic public services, cannot secure Congolese territory, and its institutions are predatory mechanisms for personal enrichment rather than the public good.<sup>3</sup>

Christian Lund eloquently described the rump structures of a now-collapsed state as “twilight institutions,”<sup>4</sup> that is, a set of state institutions that represent the state in name, but do not act as agents of meaningful state authority. I draw on his understanding of the nature of such institutions as a way to understand the so-called “collaboration” between what is left of the Congolese state and the civil society organizations (CSOs) who do the state’s job. “Collaboration” is a polite way of acknowledging the fact that although the state should be operating its own schools in the *de jure* sense, the *de facto*

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<sup>2</sup> Due to restrictions imposed by the Morehouse College Institutional Review Board and concerns about subjects’ safety, I am prohibited from naming or identifying interview subjects here.

<sup>3</sup> ENGLEBERT, P., *Africa: Unity, Sovereignty, and Sorrow*, Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienner, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> LUND, C., “Twilight Institutions: An Introduction”, *Development and Change*, Vol. 37, No. 4, 2006, p. 673.

reality is that it cannot. Instead, civil society organizations substitute for the state in almost every aspect of public goods provision present in the region.<sup>5</sup>

When states weaken, social services are among the first government-provided services to decline. Health care, education, and other programs for social well-being are expensive, and leaders who lack revenue streams and authority are typically more concerned with paying the army or shifting funds into personal bank accounts than purchasing medications or paying for the construction of new schools. If the state collapses, government becomes completely incapable of providing social services. Human suffering becomes widespread.<sup>6</sup> Professionals in the public health and education sectors often have economic incentives to seek employment in the private sector, where they can at least be guaranteed a salary. This further contributes to the decline of the public sector. Since the state no longer has the ability to fully secure its territory, conflict almost always disrupts public goods provision. Failed states become vulnerable to predation by outside forces and can even pose a danger to neighboring states.<sup>7</sup> Finally, in the downward spiral, elites who have learned to profit from the state's absence may show little interest in re-establishing state authority and order.<sup>8</sup>

Even in collapsed states, however, local populations still need basic social services. Where government is incapable of delivering them, local civil society organizations fill the gap. Often operating in *de jure* partnerships with a skeletal state's twilight institutions, these organizations typically have almost full control over their own activities and the management of the "state" apparatuses they manage. Many establish partnerships with international donors and non-governmental organizations to support their work, but final say over the organization's social service programs belongs to the civil society organization (CSO) and its leaders. In contrast to most instances of civil society-based service provision, in which civil society organizations are in partnership with the state, in many African states, CSOs "often ... operate with little reference to state providers." In such cases, elements of civil society often serve as the only social service providers.<sup>9</sup> They effectively substitute for state regulation, management, and authority.

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<sup>5</sup> Basic security, arguably the most important public good, is in short supply. Providing security to a city or region is anathema to most CSOs, and local defense organizations tend to lack enforcement capacities.

<sup>6</sup> MILLIKEN, J., KRAUSE K., "State Failure, State Collapse, and State Reconstruction: Concepts, Lessons, and Strategies," *Development and Change*, Vol. 33, No. 5, 2002, p. 764 and BRENNAN, R. J., NANDY, R., "Complex Humanitarian Emergencies: A Major Global Health Challenge", *Emergency Medicine*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2001, p. 148.

<sup>7</sup> ROTBERG, R., "Failed States in a World of Terror", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 4, 2002, pp. 116-26.

<sup>8</sup> MENKHAUS, K., "State Collapse in Somalia: Second Thoughts", *Review of African Political Economy* Vol. 30, No. 97, 2003, pp. 405-22.

<sup>9</sup> CLAYTON, A., OAKLEY, P., TAYLOR, J., "Civil Society Organizations and Service Provision", Civil Society and Social Movements Programme Paper Number 2, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2000, p. 5.

The nature of social service delivery in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and in other extremely fragile states challenges traditional notions of the divide between « public » and « private » services. Whereas in a traditional state, the « public » sector maintains a monopoly on the legitimate use of force in the Weberian sense and provides – or at least regulates – public services by default, in the Congolese state, so-called « public » services are almost entirely privatized. This privatization complicates discussions of « public » goods in the traditional sense. Is there such a thing as a public good when public services are only available to those who can pay for them and when basic security and other non-excludable goods are virtually non-existent?

Civil society organizations most often providing social services in the DRC are not NGOs in the traditional sense; they are religious institutions.<sup>10</sup> There is a long and well-documented tradition of CSO social service provision in developing states and in industrialized democracies, particularly in the Congo, where the Catholic Church and its educational institutions were part of the famed « Colonial Trinity » in partnership with business and the state bringing Belgian authority to the territory.<sup>11</sup> Under this system, the Catholic Church educated Congolese children and schooled them in the virtues of loyalty and obedience to state authority. While their relationship with the state was initially less formal, Protestant churches also played a major role in providing education in the Belgian Congo. After independence, the Catholic Church – along with the Protestant Church, the Église du Christ au Congo – continued to play essentially the same role. In this sense, it is perhaps not surprising that religious institutions and other CSOs continue to provide many social services in the post-conflict era.

However, the relationship between CSOs and the state has changed in the past few decades in that CSOs play a much more central role than they did prior to the state's collapse. In the colonial and the post-independence periods, the state had ultimate authority over education, particularly in regulating and overseeing curriculum and instruction. While the DRC Ministry of Education and its regional offices technically play this same role today, their effectiveness and ability to carry out their functions is particularly limited in the east, which very often leaves the churches and mosques running schools to their own devices.

Some see this as problematic. Clayton et al. argue that civil society should not act as “contracting agents of the state,” but rather should maintain

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<sup>10</sup> For more on the history of education provision by churches in the Congo, see BUSUGUTSALA, G. G., *Les politiques éducatives au Congo-Zaïre de Léopold II à Mobutu*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1997; MARKOWITZ, M. D., *Cross and Sword: The Political Role of Christian Missions in the Belgian Congo, 1908-1960*, Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1973; BOYLE, P. M., “School Wars: Church, State, and the Death of Congo”, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 1995, pp. 451-468; and GINGRICH, N. L., *Belgian Education Policy in the Congo, 1945-1960*, PhD Diss., Tulane University, 1971.

<sup>11</sup> YOUNG, C., *Politics in the Congo: Decolonization and Independence*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1965.

independence in order to be effective in service delivery.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the precise relationship between state failure and the growth of civil society is poorly understood. As Scott notes, “[w]ar, revolution, and economic collapse often radically weaken civil society.”<sup>13</sup> But in some cases it seems that state failure and violent conflict open the door for civil society organizations to play a stronger role in society. As Posner points out, part of this discrepancy may be due to imperfect specification of what is meant by “civil society” and “state failure,” or it may be related to differences in the presence or absence of war, lootable resources, or warlordism.<sup>14</sup>

Religious communities are the dominant agents of social service delivery in the eastern Congo, a phenomenon that repeats throughout the world. In industrialized societies, churches have long played a major role as providers of parochial education. Almost every major American city has one or two health systems supported by a religious organization. The same is true in Europe, where churches, particularly the Catholic Church, have provided health and education services for centuries. In Latin America, too, the Catholic Church has a long history of involvement in education and health care that dates to the arrival of the Jesuits, and both Protestant and Catholic churches have always played an important role in Africa’s social service sectors.<sup>15</sup>

Militant groups with a basis in religious ideology and their political wings almost always have an interest in gaining support among local populations, and they often turn to social service delivery as a means of attaining that support. Organizations espousing variants of a political Islamist ideology are particularly prevalent in the social service sectors of the Middle East. Hezbollah is a major provider of social services in Lebanon, a societal position that helped the group gain legitimacy and broad support.<sup>16</sup> Hamas also operates some services in the West Bank, and in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood has a longstanding presence as a major provider of health care, education, and other social programs.<sup>17</sup>

Clearly, the phenomenon of social service provision by religious organizations is not unique to the D.R. Congo, and the role of church leaders in politics in the D.R. Congo is well-documented.<sup>18</sup> What is different in the

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<sup>12</sup> CLAYTON, OAKLEY, TAYLOR, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> SCOTT, J. C., *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, New Haven, Yale, 1998, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> POSNER, D. N., “Civil Society and the Reconstruction of Failed States”, in ROTBERG, R. (ed.), *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. 248-49.

<sup>15</sup> JENKINS, K., “The Christian Church as an NGO in Africa: Supporting Post-Independence Era State Legitimacy or Supporting Change?”, in SANDBERG, E. (ed.), *The Changing Politics of Non-Governmental Organizations and African States*, Westport, Praeger, 1994), pp. 83-99.

<sup>16</sup> HARIK, J. P., *Hezbollah: the Changing Face of Terrorism*, London, I. B. Tauris, 2005, p. 81.

<sup>17</sup> GAVRILIS, G., “The Forgotten West Bank,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 1, 2006, p. 2; and “Egypt: Social Programs Bolster Appeal of Muslim Brotherhood,” IRIN News, 22 February 2006, <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=26150>, 3 September 2008.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, OYATAMBWE, W., *Eglise catholique et pouvoir politique au Congo-Zaïre : la quête démocratique*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 1997; MAKIOBO, C., *Eglise catholique et*

Congo, however, is the extent to which religious institutions are involved in regulating, managing, and maintaining social service structures. Religious institutions in the eastern Congo do not simply partner with the government to provide health care and education; they essentially take over from the government, and are subject to only very limited substantive government oversight.

This study, therefore, makes a contribution to our understanding of how religious organizations substitute for the state. It adds to the large body of existing literature on the relationship between religious institutions and the state in Congo and elsewhere in Africa.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, it also problematizes the question of what this substitutionary role means for the long-term process of state reconstruction and the re-establishment of state authority.

### 3. EDUCATION IN THE KIVU PROVINCES

In this section, I discuss the nature of education delivery in the Kivu provinces. I begin with a general overview of the conventional education system, then discuss the specific role of non-state actors, parents, and the state in providing education.

#### 3.1. The Convention System

As in the rest of the Democratic Republic of Congo, « public » education in the Kivu provinces is delivered primarily by religious institutions.<sup>20</sup> Although some schools operate independently outside of religious authority structures, the vast majority of schools are managed under what is known as the convention system. Religious management of public schools has a long history in the Congo; the Catholic Church – and, later, some Protestant Churches – were subsidized by the colonial government and were the sole providers of education in the vast majority of Congolese communities.

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*mutations socio-politiques au Congo-Zaïre: La contestation du régime Mobutu*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2004; and OKITEMBO, L. N., *L'engagement politique de l'église catholique au Zaïre, 1960-1992*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1998.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, BAYART, J.-F., *Religion et modernité politique en Afrique noire. Dieu pour tous et chacun pour soi*, Paris, Karthala, 1993; DOZON, J., *La cause des prophètes : politique et religion en Afrique contemporaine*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1995; and ANDRÉ, G., HILGERS, M. (eds.), "Intimités et inimitiés du religieux et du politique en Afrique", *Civilisations, Revue internationale d'anthropologie et de sciences humaines*, Vol. 58, No. 2, Bruxelles, Université de Bruxelles, 2009.

<sup>20</sup> There are also private schools that operate outside the convention system and that are often run by religious institutions as well. These schools can be "agree" or "non-agree." An "agree" school uses the national curriculum and its students take national exams. A non-agree school does not use the national curriculum and its students are not allowed to take the national exams, which makes diplomas issued by these schools virtually worthless for gaining employment or university entrance. Finally, parents can also send their children to state-run public schools. These tend to be terribly under-equipped and of lower general quality than the conventional and some private schools.

After independence, both Catholics and Protestants maintained their involvement in the education system, running the vast majority of Congolese primary, secondary, and tertiary educational institutions. As Poncelet, André, and De Herdt note, this arrangement, which they term the « concessionary state » has maintained a remarkable degree of continuity since the colonial period.<sup>21</sup> However, as I will argue below, while the organization and tacit agreements governing the churches' role in education has remained fairly similar over time, the state's breakdown precipitated an essential change when it lost its ability to regulate and oversee the educational process in the conventional schools.

The convention system dates from the Mobutist era. In 1973, as part of his Zaïrianisation nationalization project, Mobutu seized control of the schools from the religious institutions and transformed them into public institutions. Zaïrianisation was a disaster. Previously strong schools were weakened by mismanagement, incompetent and unqualified leadership, and corruption.

By 1977, it was clear that something had to change. Facing pressure from every direction, Mobutu created the convention system, which allowed him to save face by keeping most schools technically « public » while returning management of the schools to religious institutions. There are four conventions, one with each of the Catholic Church, the Eglise du Christ au Congo (the umbrella organization for most, but not all Congolese Protestant churches), the Kimbanguist church, and the Islamic community. It is important to note that the conventions leave ownership and ultimate responsibility for conventional schools in the hands of the state, but provide for a major role for educational bureaucracies within the religious institutions to manage the schools' operations.

These conventions specify particular responsibilities for the state and for the religious institution. Theoretically, schools are managed as such : religious institutions are responsible for the management and day-to-day operations of the schools. They ensure that students are enrolled, have paid tuition and fees, and follow the national curriculum, which culminates in national exams. Religious institutions are also supposed to hire and fire personnel, but the state has ultimate authority over these decisions. The Congolese state is responsible for building construction and maintenance, paying salaries of educational personnel, training teachers and administrators, and regulating and inspecting each conventional school on a periodic basis. The state also sets the curriculum, writes, administers, and grades the national exams, and issues diplomas and certificates of completion.

The reality of school management and operations is quite different from the above-described 'ideal'. Rather than operating under a well-functioning division of labor between the state and non-state actors, Congolese conventional schools are hybrid institutions with management roles played

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<sup>21</sup> PONCELET, M., ANDRÉ, G., DE HERDT, T., "La survie de l'école primaire congolaise (RDC) : héritage colonial, hybridité et résilience", *Autrepart*, Vol. 2, No. 54, 2010, pp. 23-42.

primarily by religious leaders and parents. In the following sections, I examine the roles of the religious institutions, parents, and the state with respect to the actual way the conventional schools function in the Kivu provinces.

### 3.2. Religious institutions

In the Kivus, the major providers of conventional education are the Catholic Archdioceses of Nord-Kivu I (southern Nord-Kivu), Nord-Kivu II (the Grand Nord of Nord-Kivu), and Bukavu and the Protestant 3<sup>ème</sup> CBCA, 8<sup>ème</sup> Communauté Evangelique de Pentecôte en Afrique Centrale, 5<sup>ème</sup> CELPA, and the CECA-20. The Congolese Islamic community and Kimbanguist church play only minor roles as education providers in the Kivu provinces, so my analysis here is limited to the roles played by the Catholic Church and Protestant Churches operating under the ECC umbrella.<sup>22</sup>

The state's fragility in the eastern Congo means that religious education officials in the church bureaucracies are essentially free to manage their schools and personnel with little operational reference to state officials. As one Protestant education official put it :

Officially, it's the state who does [inspections]. In principle, the state should train personnel. ...[But it is] the educational counselors [of the churches] who do the same work as the inspectors. They visit the schools, train the teachers, and do internal evaluations. ... The state cannot do it.<sup>23</sup>

Church administrators widely report that they hire and fire personnel directly, and that the official state approval of these decisions is simply a rubber stamp on decisions that have already been made.

While salaries for teachers and administrators are supposed to be payed by the state, few-to-no educational workers in the Kivus actually receive state salaries on anything approximating a regular basis. Instead, they are dependent on the « prime » system, whereby tuition and fees paid by parents are used to provide teachers with « bonuses » for their work. These bonuses are the only pay teachers and administrators receive, and it is common for teachers who feel they have not been appropriately compensated to refuse to work or issue grades until another bonus is paid.

### 3.3. Parents

In addition to paying teachers and administrators directly out-of-pocket for their children's education, parents are also held responsible for other necessary fees. For example, if a school that was damaged during the wars

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<sup>22</sup> For an outstanding analysis of the Islamic community's role in education sector in Maniema province, see LEINWEBER, A., *Faith Based Organizations and Public Goods in Africa: Islamic Associations in the Education Sector of the Democratic Republic of Congo*, Ph.D. Diss., University of Florida, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Author's interviews, 2007.



needs rebuilding, or if a new school is needed, parents are assessed fees to cover construction costs. These fees can pose a significant burden on Congolese parents. Tuition at a Catholic conventional primary school in Butembo, for example, is approximately \$30 per year, while secondary education costs up to \$45 per year, with additional fees beyond tuition being common.<sup>24,25</sup> Multiply these fees times 5-6 children in many families and it is easy to see how providing a full education for an entire family is not within reach for many Congolese parents.

Parents play a role in governing schools through school committees, which are set up to work in conjunction with religious authorities to set tuition and fees and to oversee each school system's operations. Parents have a vested interest in the management of conventional schools as approximately 75% of all primary school students attend conventional schools.<sup>26</sup>

### 3.4. The Congolese State

Titeca and De Herdt describe the process of school governance in the DRC as a « negotiated order » by which state officials, school employees, parents, and religious institutions reach a tacit agreement on the ways that schools should be managed.<sup>27</sup> This is an apt description of the means by which actors representing the remnant of the Congolese state continue their involvement in the education sector. In this section, I discuss the nature of the state's role in education provision historically and today.

When Congolese social service systems functioned fairly well (eg, in the early 1980's), state and provincial education would regularly visit schools under their jurisdictions for inspections. The inspection regime stayed fairly strong even as the collapse of the Congolese economy and subsequent state collapse began in the mid-1980's. While the payment of salaries ended long before the state fully collapsed, the inspection regime was effective. Government officials collected extensive statistics on the schools and had the final say over decisions about hiring and firing personnel. Each provincial education ministry office, the Division d'Enseignement Primaire, Secondaire et Professionnel (EPSP), managed urban and rural offices that regulated schools at the local level.

Following the state's collapse, however, state education officials lost most of their capacity to manage the inspections program. The lack of reliable transportation and fuel for vehicles and the expense of communications

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<sup>24</sup> Author's interviews, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> For a list of typical school fees in the DRC, see DE HERDT, T., TITECA, K., WAGEMAKERS, I., *Making investment in education part of the peace dividend in the DRC*, UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report background paper, 2010.

<sup>26</sup> TITECA, K., DE HERDT, T., "Real Governance Beyond the 'Failed State:' Negotiating Education in the Democratic Republic of Congo", *African Affairs*, Vol. 110, No. 439, 2011, pp. 191-211.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

equipment are the primary problems for most officials charged with keeping track of the schools in a territory. While a school located near an official's office or in a smaller city may receive regular, monthly or quarterly inspection visits from a local EPSP official, schools in more remote areas can go months or even years without any meaningful contact with the authorities tasked with overseeing their work.

When inspections do happen, it is difficult to assess whether they are meaningful or not. Often, inspections consist of collecting basic statistics on school enrollments, the number of students who have paid tuition, and personnel. Data from the schools tends to be unreliable as children enrolled at the beginning of the school year may not finish out the year due to tuition payment problems or fleeing from insecurity. When data is available, statistics are collected (and copied for researchers) by hand, which leads to copying errors and bureaucratic inefficiency. While state and provincial education officials still maintain offices in Bukavu, Goma, Butembo, and Beni, their efforts are significantly hampered by their near-total lack of enforcement powers. If, for example, a school or religious bureaucracy fails to report its enrollment statistics for a term, there is little the education officials can do but wait for the school to comply.<sup>28</sup> When data is collected, very little is done to respond to that data because the state lacks capacity to implement programmatic solutions to problems. The state, for example, is supposed to be responsible for continuing education of teachers, but in reality, if any continuing education happens in response to a perceived need for improvement, it is planned, financed, and carried out by the religious institution in charge of the school, sometimes in conjunction with international NGOs.

One area in which the state education system is still effective is the national exam system. As Tull notes, "it needs to be emphasized that public authorities have not altogether withdrawn from the sector of education."<sup>29</sup> The Congolese value state-approved diplomas above all others, and it is virtually impossible to find formal employment or to gain entrance to a university without an official state diploma. The only way to obtain a state diploma is to take the national exams at the end of the school term, and the only way to pass the national exams is to enroll in a school that follows the national curriculum. Conventional schools follow the national curriculum and are required to prepare their students to take the national exams. Even during the war, national exams were carried from Kinshasa to Nairobi by MONUC troops and then transported to the eastern, rebel-controlled territories so that students there could take the state exams. They succeeded in this task in four out of the five years of the 1998 war.<sup>30</sup>

Education in the DRC is not organized by geographic zones or districts. Instead, parents send their children to the best schools they can afford. Thus a

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<sup>28</sup> Author's interviews, 2005-2010.

<sup>29</sup> TULL, D., *The Reconfiguration of Order in Postcolonial Africa: A Case Study from North Kivu*, Hamburg, Institut für Afrika-Kunde, 2005, p. 216.

<sup>30</sup> Author's interviews, 2006-07.

child who lives in Kadutu, one of Bukavu's large, crowded neighborhoods, might travel several kilometers each day to attend College Alfa Jiri or another elite institution. Poorer families who can still afford tuition payments tend to send their children to neighborhood schools, as the cost of transport is also a major concern. Schools tend to be located in areas where there is a high concentration of church members, or where the church already owns property. Thus many schools are adjacent to or meet on the grounds of churches. This is similar to the Belgian system on which Congolese education is modeled, but it is important to note that the system is highly unjust and inequitable. Low-income families have access only to the worst schools and can rarely afford to educate all of their children. In this sense, it is quite different from Belgium, where every child is guaranteed access to a basic level of education in decent facilities with qualified teachers. The lack of state authority in the Congolese educational sector produces a high degree of inequality in the sector.

#### **4. A PARALLEL ADMINISTRATION**

The *de facto*, negotiation-based functioning of the Congolese conventional school system represents a parallel administrative system that is distinct from – though still connected to – traditional Congolese state authority. This administration exists out of necessity ; without it, it is highly unlikely that the vast majority of Congolese children would be educated. However, its necessary existence simultaneously creates a challenge for the re-establishment of state authority, should the Congolese state ever become strong enough to operate and regulate the schools again. In this section, I explore the implications of the existence of an entrenched system of parallel administration and discuss possible ways to strengthen the state's capacity in the education sector.

##### **4.1. Colonial/Post-Colonial/Conflict/Post-Conflict Institution**

Congolese families go to great lengths to ensure that their children are educated, even under the most difficult conditions. As De Herdt, Titeca, and Wagemakers note, the high value that Congolese parents and communities place on educational attainment means that

Education can thus play an important role in reconstructing the social contract between the population and the state and is therefore at the heart of state reconstruction efforts. However, this is particularly difficult since the state has largely retreated from the education sector since the 1980s, and education is now organized through public-private partnerships with religious networks.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> DE HERDT, TITECA, WAGEMAKERS, *op. cit.*

Indeed, the prospects for long-term state reconstruction and reassertion of state authority in the education sector are complicated.<sup>32</sup> There is no tradition of high-quality, well-administered state education provision in the Congo. Western missionaries provided and administered limited educational opportunities in the pre-colonial period, and very little about that system changed in the first decade of independence. The brief foray into state-run education in the mid-1970's was a disaster, and since 1977, the vast majority of Congolese children have been educated in public schools operated by religious institutions. Except for the brief interruption of Zairianisation and the loss of state subsidies, the role of religious institutions in providing education has changed very little in its essence since the early 20th century.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4.2. Untrustworthiness of the Congolese State

The essential institutional continuity in the methods and nature of education provision coupled with the discontinuity in government regulation means that very few Congolese trust the Congolese state to provide the highest-quality education possible. Parents send their children to the best schools they can afford, in many cases regardless of which religious community runs the school. If a Catholic school is perceived to be the best in a particular city (as is the case with College Alfajiri in Bukavu, and many other schools), most Protestant parents who can afford to do so will send their children to the Catholic school. Because religious schools can rely on their supporting religious bureaucracies and the social capital of their members for support, any parent who can afford to do so will almost certainly send his or her child to a religious school before choosing a state-run school.<sup>34</sup> The quality of education in state-run schools is – correctly – perceived to be vastly inferior to that found in religious institutions.

It is not clear how, or if, it would be possible for the Congolese state to reassert its authority over an entrenched system of education provision by non-state actors. The Congolese state has provided almost no social services for its citizens for the better part of thirty years. Few Congolese adults have memories or experiences of state-run social service systems, and they have little reason to entrust the state with such a highly valued commodity as their children's

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<sup>32</sup> I further explore this question in "Post-Conflict Authority and State Reconstruction in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo", in FALOLA, T., NJOKU, R. C. (eds.), *War and Peace in Africa: History, Nationalism, and the State*, Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2010, pp. 517-534.

<sup>33</sup> This is not to say that the nature of education and curriculum itself has not changed. In colonial Congo, religious education was an instrument of domination, used to teach children the virtues of obedience and loyalty to the state, and used to limit children's access to higher education. Most Congolese children were only allowed a sixth grade education under the colonial regime. This has obviously changed and for the better. What has not changed, however, is the fact that non-state actors continue to provide the bulk of educational opportunities.

<sup>34</sup> See DE HERDT, TITECA, WAGEMAKERS, *op. cit.*, for an excellent description of the financial burden school fees impose on Congolese families.

education. The Congolese state will find it very difficult to regain the public's trust.

Paradoxically, however, there is a high level of expectation among Congolese adults that the state *should* play a role in providing education and other social services. Most adults are well aware of how the system is supposed to work, and do not enjoy having to pay fees out of pocket to fund what the state cannot. Respondents in this study frequently repeated the refrain that they wished that the state would live up to its responsibilities under the convention system, particularly with respect to building and maintaining schools and paying faculty and administrative salaries. It is important to note, however, that they do not express a desire for the state to take over education provision, but rather for it to operate under the conventions – that is, for the hybrid system of educational provision to continue, but in a more well-functioning form. They view education as a public service that should be publicly financed, but one that should be provided by private entities. Parents want the state to collect taxes and use them to provide social services, but they do not trust the state to actually teach their children. This is a puzzling paradox worthy of more study. I suspect that the fear of a return to the Zairianisation disaster is the most likely explanation for this reasoning, but it may also be related to expectations and experience. Most of today's parents were educated by the churches, not the state and want their children to experience the same.

### 4.3. The International Community

Might the international community play a role in strengthening the state's capacity to provide and regulate education? As De Herdt, Titeca, and Wagemakers note, it is common for international donors to speak of their efforts to improve Congolese education as part of the « peace dividend », but they find little evidence that Congolese state capacity is anywhere near strong enough to support such ambitions.<sup>35</sup> However, there is no question that the Congolese state needs more resources if it is ever to be able to maintain its responsibilities under the convention system, much less provide high-quality public education on its own. As the Congolese population is for the most part extremely poor, those resources almost certainly have to come from external donors.

One possible means by which the international community could strengthen the Congolese state's capacity in the education sector can be found in the health care sector. The Congolese health care sector suffered greatly from the effects of conflict and the state's collapse, with many hospitals and clinics destroyed, doctors and nurses not being paid salaries, and armed groups looting medical supplies and medications. As in the education system, much of

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<sup>35</sup> DE HERDT, T., TITECA, K., WAGEMAKERS, I., "Aider l'état à délivrer le dividende de la paix : le cas de l'éducation en RDC", *L'Afrique des Grands Lacs Annuaire 2009-10*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2010.

the health care system is managed by religious bureaucracies that partner with the state, with responsibilities divided in similar fashion as they are in the education sector (e.g., the state is responsible for salaries while the religious institution is responsible for managing the hospital's operations). As with the education system, the reality is that religious institutions are left largely to their own in managing their hospitals. Further complicating the situation is the fact that many Congolese health zones lack partners in the religious sector, meaning that they are managed by the state, typically with access to very few resources beyond patient fees and perhaps sector-specific support from an international NGO.

The uneven management of various health facilities further exacerbated the health crisis precipitated by the state's collapse and the wars. The European Union's *9eme Fond* is an effort to combat these negative effects by strengthening access to the health care sector and improving the state's capacity to provide and regulate health care.<sup>36</sup> In just a few years of operation, the *9eme Fond*'s efforts show demonstrable improvements in the capacity of state regulators to do their jobs. For example, in health zones receiving support from the *9eme Fond*, health inspectors have laptop computers on which to keep records and transport by which to get to the health zones. These very practical, highly localized steps are likely to yield strong dividends in the improvement of health care in the zones over time.

The *9eme Fond* model might prove useful for improving capacity in the education sector as well. Most Congolese education officials in the Kivu provinces bemoan the lack of access they have to such simple necessities as transportation to go to their school inspections, or a reliable way of securing national exams to prevent tampering. A concerted effort by donors to provide highly targeted, highly localized interventions with measurable outcomes could improve both the quality of education in the Kivus and the state's capacity to manage the sector. This in turn is likely to build trust among the population as it observes state officials working for the public good.

Finally, the development of a functioning taxation scheme is an absolute necessity if the Congolese state is ever to fulfill its responsibilities under the education conventions. Taxation is also necessary to ensure the basic security that is required for development in the eastern Congo. The international community should make the creation and maintenance of a public taxation system a high priority and should work on finding ways to combat corruption and ensure that taxes and fees are used not for personal enrichment but for the common good.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The conventional education system in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo is an essential public good as it provides the primary source of

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<sup>36</sup> Author's interviews, 2007, 2010.

education for Congolese children. However, its existence poses a challenge for the reconstruction of the Congolese state's authority. This does not mean that the DRC's religious institutions actively seek to undermine the authority of the state or to challenge its authority in an adversarial fashion, but rather that their act of providing services and largely self-regulating means that their very existence as service providers challenges the state's authority in a *de facto* sense.<sup>3738</sup> The Congolese state is not fully in charge of one of the major areas over which modern states typically claim authority. Even though the DRC's religious institutions would very much like for the Congolese state to do its job in the education sector, given that the public trusts non-state actors to provide services and has little reason to trust that the state is capable or willing to do the same, it is very unlikely that the Congolese state will be able to reassert its authority in a timely fashion.

An additional dilemma lies in the fact that it is not clear that a lack of state authority over the education sector is necessarily a bad thing. The hybrid model that exists in the DRC is remarkably consistent across the country; students study the same course, take the same national exams, and wear the same school uniforms regardless of whether they are in Bandundu or Bukavu. There is wide variation in the quality of the conventional schools within provinces and even within the churches; however, this, too, is a consistent pattern. Given the difficult conditions in the Kivu provinces and throughout the DRC and given that the Congolese state is highly unlikely to develop more capacity in the foreseeable future, reasserting state authority over the education sector may not need to be a high priority at this time.

However, the fact remains that education in the Congo, both inside and outside the conventional system, is still of very low overall quality, and this is due to the lack of state authority and capacity in the sector. Students learn outdated curriculum with more of a focus on rote memorization than on the critical thinking skills that will be necessary for the leaders of tomorrow who attempt to solve the country's many problems. Because the quality of education is largely dependent on local religious authorities and the amount of money they can extract from parents, the quality of education is widely divergent across provinces and even within cities, which leads to an inequitable and unjust educational system. Because parents must pay tuition for « public » education, the children of very poor parents most often go uneducated. If the family can manage, it might send one or two of its children to school, but these are most often boys, leaving girls with no opportunities to improve their lives.

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<sup>37</sup> As Haynes notes, churches in the DRC played a major role in the country's attempted democratization process. This could be interpreted as having undermined the authoritarian regime under Mobutu, but is not indicative of a more general adversarial relationship with government. See HAYNES, J., "Transnational Religious Actors and International Politics", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2001, pp. 143-158.

<sup>38</sup> There is, however, precedence for an adversarial relationship between church and state in the Congolese education sector, though this happened in the "school wars" of the 1950's, which were fought over education policy. For a detailed discussion of "la lutte scolaire," see BOYLE, *op. cit.*

Parents who can afford to do so send their children to better-quality schools that use supplementary curricula in addition to the state curriculum, but the children of the poor – if they are even able to access education - are left to fend for themselves with substandard facilities, curriculum, and instruction.

In that sense, the reassertion of state authority over the sector could serve as an important catalyst for reform and improvement, as well as more just and equitable opportunities for all Congolese schoolchildren. The parallel administration of Congolese schools and the tuition model of taxation are not sufficient to guarantee that all children have access to good-quality education. Congolese parents already struggle to pay tuition and to raise the fees to provide a higher-quality system would shut out even more children from access to education.

State involvement may not be the only way to improve the quality of education, but, as in industrialized democracies, providing high-quality public education systems run and regulated by the state is the only way to guarantee a high level of equitable access to good-quality education. However, rebuilding the state's capacity to provide education will take significant commitment from the international community, Congolese leaders, and the religious authorities who keep the system running today.

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