

# The origin and spread of Islam in Anglophone Cameroon: A Historic Investigation

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The Fulani and Hausa were among the first people to embrace Islam in black Africa through the Jihads of Muslim clerics, among was Uthman Dan Fodio and had far reaching consequences for Muslims and non Muslims peoples. From their Banyo base in Northern Cameroon, the Muslim clerics waged war on the Wawa and the Munchi and expanded as far as Igbo land. Other southward raids were directed against villages in the present Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon formerly referred to as Anglophone Cameroon. Nevertheless, what is more amazing is the fact that despite the obstacles faced by Muslim Jihadists to subdue villages in Anglophone Cameroon, Islam still penetrated into the hinterland? Thus, we intend to investigate the reason behind the presence and success of Islam in Anglophone Cameroon. Worth noting is the fact that Hausa traders and Fulani graziers from Northern Nigeria contributed enormously in the spread and expansion of Islam in Anglophone Cameroon. Thanks to their efforts among others, Islam is today rated as the second practising religion in Anglophone Cameroon after Christianity.

**Keywords:** *Islam, fulani, hausa, jihad, anglophone Cameroon, muslims.*

## L'origine et la propagation de l'islam dans le Cameroun anglophone : une enquête historique

Les Peuls et les Haoussa ont été parmi les premières personnes à embrasser l'islam en Afrique noire à travers les jihads. Les leaders religieux comme Uthman Dan Fodio ont eu une part active dans la propagation de cette religion. De leur base de Banyo au Nord-Cameroun, les musulmans ont ainsi fait la guerre sur le Wawa et le Munchi et se sont étendus jusqu'au pays Igbo. D'autres raids ont été dirigés contre les villages des actuelles régions du Nord-Ouest et du Sud-Ouest autrefois appelés Cameroun Anglophone. Néanmoins, ce qui est étonnant c'est le fait que, malgré l'obstacle rencontré par les Jihadists musulmans à obtenir l'acquiescement des villages du Cameroun Anglophone, l'islam a réussi à pénétrer l'arrière pays. Ainsi, nous avons l'intention d'analyser sur la raison de la présence et du succès de l'islam au Cameroun Anglophone. Il est à noter que les commerçants haoussas et les éleveurs Peuls du Nord-Nigeria ont énormément contribué à la propagation et à l'expansion de l'islam au Cameroun Anglophone. Grâce à leurs efforts, l'islam est aujourd'hui considéré comme la deuxième religion pratiquée au Cameroun Anglophone après le christianisme.

**Mot Cles :** *Islam, Peul, haoussa, jihad, Cameroun anglophone, musulmans.*

## **The origin and spread of Islam in Anglophone Cameroon: A Historic Investigation<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Introduction: The Jihad movement and Zeal to spread Islam**

Africa south of the Sahara first came into contact with Islam through Arab travellers and traders from the Middle East and North Africa. According to Njeuma (1978), some of those Arabs merchants had as prime mission to convert non-muslims into the Islamic religion. The spread of Islam in Africa gained momentum from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Beginning from the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Islam had extended to almost every part of Africa thanks to the activities of Jihadists. From Northern Nigeria, Islam continues spreading and also implanted herself in Northern Cameroon. From the Adamawa region, Islam gradually descended down south to the Grassfields area of Cameroon. Though the majority of the people of the Bamenda Grassfields remained non-Muslims, the Jihadists succeeded in converting some of them. What is even more surprising is the fact that the Southwest Region of Cameroon which was also quite close and on the same attitude with the Northwest Region escaped total subjugation by the Fulani warriors. One principal reason explain why the Southwest Region was never brought completely within the sphere of the Fulani influence despite it precarious location. This was the advent of Europeans and spread of the Christian faith all over the region. Nevertheless, Islam made it appearance in the region in the early 1920s with the arrival of the Hausa from Northern Nigeria who were Muslims and had also participated in the Jihad movements of Uthman Dan Fodio. Our main preoccupation as far as this paper is concern is to examine the advent and spread of Islam in Anglophone Cameroon. Before then, which area of Cameroon is referred to as Anglophone Cameroon?

### **Historical and geographical presentation of Anglophone Cameroon (Southern Cameroons)**

When we talk of Anglophone Cameroon, we are referring to the territory of former Southern Cameroons before independence. Ngoh (1987: 163-165), is of the opinion that the League of Nations, through article 22 of its covenant, gave former German Kamerun to Britain and France as mandated territory. Britain received one fifth of the territory and for the sake of convenience, London divided her territory into two parts: a northern portion which was administered as part

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<sup>1</sup> This was originally published in Adama, Hamadou (éd.), 2016, *Traditions historiques et développement, Mélanges offerts aux Professeurs Thierno Mouctar Bah et Eldridge Mohammadou* (Annales de la FALSH, Numéro spécial Volume XV), pp. 155-171, Université de Ngaoundéré, Cameroun.

of Northern Nigeria and a southern portion which was administered as one of the provinces of the Eastern Region of Nigeria. British Southern Cameroons was later divided into four divisions namely: Victoria, Kumba, Mamfe and Bamenda. Ngoh goes further to analyse that when Southern Cameroons achieved independence on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1961 after reunifying with the republic of Cameroon, the territory henceforth became known as West Cameroon. West Cameroon was made up of the North West and South West Provinces. By Anglophone Cameroon, we are referring to the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon. We will now proceed with the advent and spread of Islam into the Anglophone regions.

### **Islam in the North-West region**

The Islamic faith was introduced into the North West Region by Fulani and Hausa clerics from Northern Nigeria and Adamawa Region of Cameroon. From then, it expanded into all the divisions and villages of the region. So many indigenous population accepted and converted into Islam to become true practicing Muslims. Worth noting is the fact that Islam from the beginning entered the North West Region through the Jihad movement. It was only when the Jihadists faced stiff resistances from the locals that they adopted peaceful method.

### **Islam in Bui Division**

Islam started gaining grounds in Nso and the entire grassland regions of Bamenda around the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It is difficult to give exactly the year when Islam came to Nso. According to Ladi (1999: 8-19), Islam entered the area before the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This view is based on the fact that during this period the Bansa (i.e. the people from Nso village) were involved in long distance trade with the people of Nigeria. Others hold the view that it entered Nso in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. What is clear is that the entry of Islam in Nso was a gradual process through trade contacts. It is also true that there might have been Hausa Muslim traders in Nso before the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but might have been more concerned with trade than with the spread of the religion. Whatever the case, Islam became prominent in Nso and all over Bui Division during the period of German rule in Cameroon because the Hausa and Fulani were sure of their protection from the Germans. Several versions have been advanced to explain the birth of Islam in the Nso society. The first of these is put forth by the Muslim community of Nso. According to some of them, the first group of Hausa and Fulani Muslims came from Bamessing and settled at Jakiri before finally moving to Kumbo in the 1920 during the reign of Fon Nghah Bifon I (1910-1947). They are said to have come from Northern Nigeria to Bamessing before moving to Nso. While in Kumbo, they requested a piece

of land on which to settle. The Fon offered them the piece of land which is presently occupied by the Catholic Cathedral. This came about when Fon Ngah Bifon 1<sup>st</sup>'s successor Sembum II (1947-1972) offered the Catholics the site and gave the Muslims a new site at Mbeh. When some Muslims refused to leave the site for the new one, the Fon ordered their forceful expulsions from the site (Ladi, 1999: 8-19). It should be pointed out that, contrary to this fact, Banso Muslims believed that it was because of the spread of Islam in Nso that problems arose between them and the Catholics over their first piece of land. They argued that it was for this reason that the Catholics attacked them and destroyed their property. Having been evicted from this site, some of the Hausa Muslims moved to Sabon-Gari and Ndu and some moved to different villages in Nso, while a small number remained at Mbeh (Ladi, 1999: 8-19).

Some Muslims also believe that Islam first came to Nso through Banso men who went to sell kola nuts at Yola and Kano in Nigeria and adopted it, calling it 'LiGasah' (Hausa way of life) and through a group of Hausa immigrants who settled at Mbivt in mbang in Kumbo. To some people, Islam came to Nso through indigenous Nso cattle drovers who either admired the religion practiced by their masters the Fulani, and decided to be converted to it or were provoked into adopting it because their masters referred to them as infidels.<sup>2</sup> Another version states that the Hausa Muslims and Fulani first settled in the Bamenda station. They came from Adamawa as carriers, guides and servants since they had invaluable knowledge of West Africa. They numbered around 30. By 1905, their number had increased to about 50 thanks to other new comers led by Sarikin Balarebe and assisted by Mallam Baba Gando. Mallam Baba Gando had four wives namely Wurawa, Nuhra, Pulera and Habiba and 15 children. This settlement resulted in trade and exchange between the Hausa and the indigenes. According to Awasom (1984: 34-36), trade became so beneficial especially to the Hausa who often carried kola nuts and ivory to as far as Adamawa in Northern Nigeria that they cultivated an attitude of going directly to the kola nuts and Ivory areas so as to deal directly with the indigenes. This explains why a group of Hausas were said to have been identified in Nso during an elephant hunting expedition in about 1906 searching for ivory. This led to their settlement in Nso a few years before the First World War.

While in Nso, the Hausa presented themselves to the Fon (Ngah Bifon I) as friends of the Germans. This is because they felt that the Fon of Nso could not refuse their demands in view of the punitive raid which the Germans had organized against Banso people in 1906 when the Banso attempted to resist German rule. The Hausa Muslims were thus settled at the site

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Mallam Musa, Bamenda, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2002.

presently occupied by the Kumbo Catholic Cathedral which is a few metres away from the Fons's palace. These Hausa Muslims were led by their leader Mallam Maidougou Inusa of Katagam from Nigeria (Ladi, 1999: 8-19). These different versions seem to suggest that Islam came to Nso from different directions. Even some widely travelled Banso traders who had embraced Islam were also instrumental in implanting Islam in Nso. The first settlement of Muslims at the present site of the Kumbo Cathedral paved the way for another Hausa Muslims to join the group and by 1922, the Hausa community numbered about 100 people in Nso. This spread was in line with the Islamic stipulation that a "Muslim who professes Islam, must be armed and determined to spread the word of God (Allah). As the faith spread to other parts of Nso, a Home Quranic school was established by Mallam Abdullahi to instruct children and other interested persons of Nso in the precepts of Islam and way of life of Muslims. (Ladi, 1999: 8-19). Many Nso persons sent their children to this school which was also attended by adult such as Mallam Gargari of Njoubow, who established their own school in their own village after completing their course of study. The Hausa settlement in Kumbo also resulted in the construction of a mosque where the Hausa and Fulani settled, most of whom resided on grazing hill top with their cattle. They and their Hausa brethren worshipped and practiced Islam together. It is said that this mosque was constructed with sticks and a thatched roof. This did not only concretize their settlement in Nso but also symbolized the presence of Islam in Nso (Ladi, 1999).

It should be noted that economic, social and political factors were responsible for the spread of Islam in Nso. Economically, trade was the most common and important factor that helped in the spread of Islam within and without the Bamenda Grassfields and most especially in Nso. Kola nuts and ivory which the Hausa needed very much were in abundance in Nso and thus attracted their presence. Also, as earlier mentioned some Banso traders had come into contact with Hausa Muslims from Ngaoundéré, Garoua, and some of the Hausa states of Northern Nigeria, notably Kano, Katsina Ala, and Yola. This encounter had made some of them to embrace Islam especially as the Hausa in these areas treated them cordially. Awasom (1984) tell us that when they came back to Nso, they did not practice Islam until the arrival of the Hausa because most people in the area did not know anything about it. They were thus only interested in their trade.

Socially, worth recalling is the fact that the ideas preached by Uthman Dan Fodio during the Jihad of 1804 greatly influenced the spread of Islam in Nso. According to Njeuma (1989: 5), and Njiasse Njoya Aboubakar (1997: 241), Uthman cautioned his followers that whenever

they gain influence they should teach those who have accepted Islam and after their understanding of the Muslim religion, they may inter-marry with them. This situation greatly enhanced the spread of Islam in Nso, as some of the people of Nso who completed the Quran were converted to Islam. Typical examples were people like Adamu Karajan and Alkali Salle, the father of Aoudou Tar, who with some other Hausa Muslims inter-married with the local population of Nso. This helped to increase the number of Islamic believers in Nso and hence its spread. Even more important in the spread of Islam in Nso was the fact that a majority of Nso traders had to learn the Hausa and Fulfulde languages for communication purposes. The Hausa and Fulani understood neither Pidgin English nor Lamso and preferred to use their languages. Although some Bansa Muslims felt that the Hausa and the Fulani were pruned to these languages, in order to force the Nso people to learn them, this paved the way for their conversion into Islam. However, there were some Nso traders who studied the language in order to facilitate communication with the Hausa and Fulani Muslim communities.

Politically, the Hausa and Fulani Muslims were said to be peaceful people. In addition the hospitable nature of the people of Nso and their willingness to accept any new religion helped to hasten the spread of Islam in Nso. Ladi (1999) is of the opinion that Fon Ngah Bifon I sent Umaru Dor and Garba Langwa to Ngaoundere to study the Hausa and Fulani languages so as to ease communication problems between himself and the Hausa Muslims. The gesture by the Fon and the willingness of the Nso to be receptive to new ideas, also worked in favour of the spread of Islam. It should be noted that while in Ngaoundere, Umaru Dor and Garba Langwa also studied the Quran and when they returned to Nso, they established home Quranic schools in their respective villages of Mendzem and Mveh in Kumbo. By so doing, they prepared the way for the conversion of more people to Islam. Ibrahim Nformi, Adamu Chin and Adamu Ndze were converted to Islam by this means. The first woman to be converted to Islam was Kiwoushu. Inter marriages also took place between the Hausa-Fulani and indigenous Muslims. This further acted as a spring board for a holistic integration between the two communities. The attitude of the various Nso Fons towards Islam also contributed to the spread of Islam in Nso. The Fons were willing to accept new comers. The warm reception accorded the first Hausa Muslims and Fulani settlers who requested a piece of land for settlement indicated his willingness to allow the new comers to settle, worship freely and spread their religion. His decision to send Umaru Dor and Garba Langwa to Ngaoundéré to learn the Hausa and Fulfulde languages also showed the importance he attached to Islam. Before his death in 1947, he had

helped to lay the ground work for the spread of Islam and his successors did their best to accomplish it.

His successor Sehm III as already indicated continued with Fon Ngah Bifon's policy of encouraging Islam. Unlike his predecessor, Sehm III's dealings with the Hausa and Fulani Muslims went further in that he was converted and given the name Ibrahim which made him a full Muslim. His decision to be converted to Islam with the name Ibrahim is said to have been due to his admiration of the Fon of Bamum, Sultan Saidou Njimoulou, Njoya who had just returned from Mecca. It is said that before leaving sultan Njimoulou's place, where he was visiting, he had already made up his mind to become a Muslim. Aboubakar and Ladi tell us that, there are two versions concerning the story of his conversion. The first is that Sultan Njimoulou sent a delegation to Nso to convert him with 100 notables and 300 other persons. The second one is that Sultan Njimoulou personally officiated his conversion into Islam. What is important is that he finally became a practicing Muslim. Fon Sehm III laid the foundation stone for a Friday Mosque to be constructed near the Nso Palace. As a matter of fact, he gave part of his Palace for that Mosque to be constructed. His decision to construct a mosque in the Palace was unsuccessfully opposed by many Nso Christians.

When Fon Sehm III died, his successor Fon Ngah Bifan II (1972-83) continued with his religious policy. As a Muslim converted, Fon Ngah Bifon II earned the name Mohammadou. He was converted at the same time as Shunfaay Yuwar, Shunfaay Luun and Shunfaay Mvem all of them great Lords, Fon's councillor and councillors of the Friday mosque started by his predecessor and personally supervised the collection of funds for the project. The construction began in earnest with contributions in cash and kind from the Hausa and Fulani Muslims as well as non Muslims. The importance of the construction of this mosque lies on the fact that it attracted the highest sense of responsibility from every Muslim in Nso through contributions towards its realization. The Fulani from all Bui villages contributed immensely in cash and in kind (Jumbam, 2005: 86-89). Besides this, another mosque was constructed at Roogasa. The Fondom of Nso could then boast of a giant mosque besides many other minor ones spread all over the Fondom. Fon Ngah Bifon II was the first Nso Fon to go on pilgrimage to Mecca, under the sponsorship of the then president of the United Republic of Cameroon Ahmadou Ahidjo (Ladi, 1999: 8-19). The third Fon of Nso to be converted to Islam in the same order of reign was Ngah Bifon III (1983-1993). He was previously a Catholic and converted into Islam in December 1986. Fon Ngah Bifon III became the second Nso Fon to go on pilgrimage to Mecca, sponsored this time by the Muslim community in Nso. His conversion earned him the name

Saidou. During his reign, he helped in the spread of Islam by completing the building of the Friday mosque begun by his predecessors. About fifteen of his wives and their children were also converted to Islam. The conversion of all these three traditional rulers greatly advanced the cause of Islam in Nso. After having examined the advent and spread of Islam in Bui Division, the Mezam and Ngoketunjia Division will be discussed (Ladi, 1999: 8-19).

### **Islam in Mezam and Ngoketunjia divisions**

The coming of Islam into Mezam and Ngoketunjia Divisions was viewed by most of the indigenes with mixed feelings. This was because the first Caravan of Hausa traders who came to Bamenda between 1902 and 1903 signalling the advance of Islam into Ngemba land entered the region from the direction of Bali Nyonga (Moti, 2001: 108). Before long, Muslim communities of Hausa people were already settling up in different parts of the Grassland generally and in Mezam and Ngoketunjia areas in particular. If there was any hope of forestalling the implantation of Islam forcefully before it had won its first adherents in the regions, such hopes were destroyed by the German's proscription of war after they had set up an effective administration in the western Grassfields and established a military fort of Bamenda in 1902. The Germans outlawed war and any form of repression in the regions. This actually encouraged the influx of Hausa traders and Muslim scholars who did well to implant and spread the Islamic religion in Mezam and Ngoketunjia Divisions. The early Hausa settlers were mostly German guides, carriers and servants recruited from the Adamawa plateau and Northern Cameroon because of their wide knowledge of West Africa (Keller, 1969: 28).

The penetration of Muslims into Mezam and Ngoketunjia areas were marked by tension, fear and suspicion on the part of the indigenes. The people developed apprehensions against the Muslims because the memories of the Bali-Nyonga-German wars against Mankon and Bafut ally in 1891 and in 1889 were still very fresh. Those wars had resulted from an alliance contracted between the German, Eugen Zintgraff, and the Fon of Bali-Nyonga on August 24, 1891. One of its provisions was that Bali would serve as the base for German expansion and control of the powerful chiefdoms of the Bamenda Grassfields.<sup>3</sup> When the German military station in Bali was transferred to Bamenda station in 1902, the indigenes feared that it was another attempt by the Germans to wage another war against the Mankon people. This fear was increased when Hausa again came from the direction of Bali. Stories were already told

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<sup>3</sup> NAB, File No. Ab 20, Assessment report for Ngemba and Moghamo area, Bamenda Division, Shawood smith.

about their skills in wars<sup>4</sup>. The reason for accepting Muslims to settle in Mankon and Santa was because of the German administration. The Hausa were considered to be friends of the Germans. They provided the Germans with intelligence reports concerning the activities of the indigenous communities. But the fear that any war against the Hausa might be considered as an attack against the Germans prevented the Mezam people from rising in war against the Muslims. This reason, however, encouraged the Muslims to build their mosques in Mankon and Santa.

From the beginning, these settlements were small in size in terms of population; but as time went on, it attracted other Hausa migrants to come and settled there. The Hausa communities in Bali and Bafut eventually choose their leaders to head their settlements. As the Hausa population kept on increasing, the Sarikin Hausawa of Bali and Bafut decided to build a mosque each in their respective settlements. With the contribution of the Hausa faithful in cash and kind, two erected mosques saw the light of day in Bali and Bafut. Quranic schools were also open beside those mosques to teach the faithful the Quran and basic principles of the Islamic religion. Thanks to the preachings and numerous infrastructures realised, some of the indigenous population of these villages became interested in the Islamic religion and were converted to it.<sup>5</sup> Awasom (1984) tell us that the first erected Hausa settlement was the Abakpa-Mankon Hausa settlement under the leadership of Mallam Baba Gando. When the Germans were dislodged from the Western Grassfields in 1916, the British took over the administration of the region from the Muslims in Abakpa-Mankon who then took refuge in Fouban and Bafia. Under G.S. Podevin, the region extending from Kentu in the North to Ossidinge (Mamfe) in the south was reorganized and named Bamenda Division. G.S. Podevin decided to negotiate the return of the Hausa refugees from Fouban because he faced the administrative problem of lack of adequate intelligence and auxiliary staff. When the Muslim refugees returned in 1916, they made their first settlement at Poto Poto near the German Fort. But because of their noisy activities – announcement of prayer sessions and the sound of maize pounding at late hours and early mornings, they were forced to move their settlements to the foot of the Bamenda escarpment where they constructed another mosque for religious worship and prayers.

The British administrators then informed the village head of Mankon that the Hausas were authorized to settle only after their chief offered the Fon of Mankon some gifts in the form of

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<sup>4</sup> NAB, File No. Ab 20, Assessment report for Ngemba and Moghamo Area, Bamenda Division, Shawood smith.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Mohamadou Madugu, Bali, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2002.

beads, salt, cloths, and a variety of European goods and made a formal request to settle in Mankon. They then established a Muslim settlement at Azire quarter where they were only for a short time. They later moved to the present settlement (old town). The Hausa eventually called the whole town Abakpa, meaning in Hausa 'a stranger settlement'. The original population of the settlement was estimated in 1932 at about two hundred Hausa (Moti, 2001: 111). Since 1961, a bigger central mosque had been built in a place of the old one, and two other mosques have been added in Down Town and New Town. From the time of the founding of the Abakpa settlements four Imams have led the community in prayers. These are Mallam Suley Manu from 1918-1950, Mallam Hamisu from 1950-1972, Mallam Haruna from 1972-1993 and the present Imam Alhaji Swaibou Baba Mallam from 1993 to present. It is important to note here that many indigenes of the villagers in Bamenda have been converted to the Islamic faith.<sup>6</sup> Some of the Hausa who earlier settled in Abakpa-Mankon later decided to migrate and settle in Bamessing, Ndop. Haven arrived there; they contacted the traditional rulers of Ndop for permission to settle. The traditional ruler granted them the permission and they sent gifts to him as a form of gratitude and good will. They then founded a new settlement in Bamessing, Ndop. After that a mosque was built to enable the faithful to pray five times a day. Quranic schools were also opened to teach the Muslim faithful the Quran and Hadith. Here also, some indigenous people became interested in the Islamic faith and they were converted into it. Apart from conversion to the Islamic Faith, inter-marriages have also taken place between the Hausa Muslims and the local population of the various villages. This has gone a long way in binding the two communities together as well as fostering fruitful cooperation among themselves.

Second Muslim community after the Hausa was that of the Jafun Fulani who are a mixture of patrilineal clans also from Northern Nigeria and Northern Cameroon. The branch of Jafun that penetrated the region with the help of Hausa traders from the Adamawa plateau about 1916 was led by Ardo Sabga Bi Hobba. Sharing both a common religion (Islam) and place of origin with the Hausa, the Fulani developed a closer relationship with them than with the local people of the Bamenda Grassfields. By the 1930s a considerable number of Fulani pastoralists were already settled in the Bamenda Grassfields. The Gosi clan of Ardo Sabga who was deeply rooted in the Islamic faith, settled at Babanki Tungo (Amadou, 2004: 9) Rahmani is of the opinion that those who settled in the Ngemba region were concentrated in the South Western outskirts of Mankon and Santa central (2004: 8-11). Due to the fact that the Sabga settlement was made up generally of nomadic pastoralists, some of them only began to settle in Abakpa-

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Alhaji Swaibou Baba Mallam, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2003, Imam, Bamenda Central Mosque.

Mankon after the 1950s. But the Fulani Muslim population in Mankon remained small in comparison with that of the Hausa. Ardo Sabga contacted the traditional rulers of Ndop for permission to settle in the area. When the request was granted, the Fulani sent some gifts of cows to the traditional ruler of that area. Ardo Sabga was then chosen as the traditional leader of all the Fulani in Ngoketunjia in particular and the Bamenda Grassfields at large. He first took the title of Ardo and later Lamido when the Ardorate was up-graded to a lamidate.

The Lamido of Sabga immediately ordered the construction of a mosque for prayers. Contributions were made in cash and kind by the Fulani and Hausa Muslim faithful to build the mosque. A giant mosque was then erected in Sabga where the Muslim faithful pray five times a day following the prescription of the Holy Quran. Islamic schools were also opened to teach the Muslim faithful the Quran and the Hadith. The building of this mosque attracted other Hausa and Fulani Muslim faithful to migrate and settled in Ndop. The manner of worship of the Muslims also attracted some indigenous population of Ngoketunjia. Many of them were subsequently converted into the Islamic faith. As time went on, two other mosques were erected in Bamessing and Babanki respectively. It is worth while noting that the Muslim population in Mezam and Ngoketunjia Division has grown to alarming proportions. This is thanks to the numerous conversion of the indigenous population into the Islamic faith.<sup>7</sup> Following the implantation of Islam in Mezam and Ngoketunjia Divisions, some indigenous people accepted conversion into that faith. Such conversion helped to swell the Muslim population and to the spread of the faith in the areas. Some of the indigenes who embraced Islam moved to settle and stay in Muslim quarters with the rest of the Muslims. This equally forced them to change from their traditional ways to the Muslim ways of life. Examples were Mama Hellen Mambo in Santa–Ndzong, Mama Mary, Titus and Mr. John of old Town who converted to the Islamic faith. All the Muslims in Mezam and Ngoketunja who were converted were educated and given doctrine classes by the Imams and Mallams in both areas (Motti, 2001: 113-114).

In a nutshell, activities of other religious and economic partners like the Hausa merchants, Kanuri clerics (*goni*) and Fulani herdsmen, and more especially the role played by Muslim civil servants, were instrumental in bringing about a substantial number of conversions in Mezam and Ngoketunjia Divisions. Reference should also be made to the different Muslim Associations that were created in the two divisions. For instance, we had the Muslim Student of Bamenda (MUSAB) that was initiated by Mr. Mama and it saw the light of day in the late 90s. The Cameroon Muslim Student Union (CAMSU) was also very present in the region.

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Mallam Ahmadu, Bamenda, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2003.

### **Islam in Menchum and Boyo divisions**

Beginning with Menchum Division, when the Jihadists from North Cameroon arrived the Bamenda Grassfields, some of their raids were directed against the villages of Menchum Division. Before the Fulani began their settlement in the Bamenda Grassfields, Islam had already reached the area. Some indigenous people of Wum, Esu, Weh, Essimbi, Furu Awah, had been converted into the Islamic Faith. The Hausa who are also Muslims first arrived and settled in Menchum Division in the early 1920s. They help spread the Islamic religion in the region. The Hausa with the help of their leaders were able to build a mosque for the Muslim faithful to worship. Quranic schools were also open in Wum, Esu and Weh to teach the faithful the Quran and Hadith (Amadou, 2004: 9-10). The first contingent of Fulani who arrived Menchum Division immediately thought of building a mosque which they did. This was in the early 1950s. The leader of the Fulani, Ardo Umaru, immediately appointed an Imam to lead the faithful in prayers. The Imam was one Mohammadou Umaru. He had his assistant who was the *naibi*. The Imam was a man who was very versed in the Quran and the Hadith. As time went on, other indigenes converted into the Islamic faith and the Muslim population kept on increasing in Menchum Division.<sup>8</sup> As for Boyo Division, Islam arrived the area in the early 1940s. This was through Hausa traders who went to the area to sell their goods. Once in the region, they discovered that some of the indigenes were interested in the Islamic religion. They requested for land from the traditional leader of Kom to settled and build a mosque. Their request was granted and they immediately erected a mosque. An Islamic school followed shortly. All of these developments went a long way to spread the Islamic religion all over Boyo Division. Muslim faithfuls could be found in villages such as Kom, Fundong, and Belo among others. Interaction between the Hausa-Fulani and indigenous Muslims fostered integration among the two. The two communities learn each other's languages and some inter-marriages took place among them.

### **Islam in Donga-Mantung and Momo Division**

Donga-Mantung (sometimes also written Ndonga-Mantung) and Momo Divisions got into contact with the Islamic faith when the Jihad raids or movement reached the Bamenda Grassfields. The Muslim clerics successfully penetrated the area from the Northwest and Northeast. Their advancement as earlier said was stopped by the Bamun powerful kingdom and the advent of Europeans colonialist. As such, Islam was not well spread during that first

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Mallam Umaru, Wum, 10<sup>th</sup> March 2000.

raid.<sup>9</sup> Islam started gaining grounds in Donga-Mantung and Momo Divisions in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century when Hausa traders and Fulani graziers started penetrating the region. Having arrived, the Hausa and Fulani requested for lands to settle from the respective traditional leaders of the regions. Their request were granted and the Hausa and Fulani leaders immediately thought of building mosques and Quranic schools for the Muslim faithful. Muslim clerics started preaching the Islamic religion to the indigenous population. As time went on, some of the indigenous population converted into the Islamic faith.<sup>10</sup> In Donga-Mantung Division, mosques and Islamic schools could be found in villages such as Nkambe, Ndu, Wimbum among others. Imams and their assistants were appointed by Muslim leaders in the region to lead the faithful in prayer, while some Arabic teachers thought the faithful the Quran and Hadith in the respective Quranic schools. As for Momo Division, mosques and Quranic schools also surfaced in villages such as Batibo, Mbengwi, and Meta among others. Imams and Arabic teachers were also appointed to run those mosques and Arabic schools. What is remarkable is the fact that both in Donga-Mantung and Momo Divisions, the Islamic religion had experience a tremendous rise in her followers.<sup>11</sup> Integration was also made possible thanks to the coming together of the different communities. Thanks to the Islamic Faith integration in the North West Region has manifested itself in the domain of education, marriage, language, food, dressing, health, dances and other important ceremonies that always bring the different Muslim communities together. What is even more amazing is the fact that Muslims as well as non-Muslims always interact as brothers and sisters. This has been made possible thanks to the fact that the Islamic religion preach against discrimination. Looking generally at the Northwest Region, the Islamic religion had experience an increase in her faithful. Islam is not more practise only by the Hausa and Fulani who were those at the origin of the religion in the region. Indigenes from villages such as Kumbo, Nkambe, Ndu, Wum, Ndop, Bali, Fundong, Wimbum, Mankon, converted into the Islamic faith and stood fast to it.<sup>12</sup> Having examine the advent and spread of Islam in the Northwest Region, what about the Southwest Region?

### **Islam in the South-West region**

Another area in Cameroon where Islam has exercised considerable impact is the South West Region. It was around 1903 that the Muslim faith was introduced in south west regional headquarters of Buea. The man at the origin of this was one Mallam Awudu from Northern

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<sup>9</sup> NAB, File No. Ab 20, Assessment Report for Ngemba and Moghamo Area, Bamenda Division, Shawood Smith.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Mallam Amadou.

<sup>11</sup> NAB, File No. Ab 20, Assessment Report for Ngemba and Moghamo Area, Bamenda Division, Shawood Smith.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Mohamadou Madugu.

Nigeria. Other Muslims who came from Northern Cameroon, Northern and Southern Nigeria and the Bamum country later on came to inhabit the Buea region. Muslims who spread the Islamic faith to the South West Region used peaceful approach (Agbor, 2010: 26-30). Islam later gain grounds in the whole of the South West Region thanks to the Hausa traders from Nigeria. From the on set, their main objective was trade. They came to the region in search of Ivory, cowries, slaves and kola nuts. This was around the early 1930s. The first contingents of Hausa traders entered the South West through Mamfe, Ekok, Akwaya and Kumba. By late 1940s and early 1950s, Hausa quarters were already establish in towns like Mamfe, Kumba, Muyuka, Tiko, Buea and Limbe. Those Hausa quarters encourage other Hausa to come and settle in the South West Region. The Muslim leaders created friendly ties with the local chiefs of these localities and as such, they were given lands to settle<sup>13</sup>. The Hausa were the ones who first immigrated into the Southwest Region before the nomadic Fulani. Having arrived the region and discovering that the indigenes were hospitable and welcoming, they encourage other Hausa from Nigeria to come and settled in the Southwest Region. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, contingents of Hausa migrants left Northern Nigeria and headed to the Southwest Region of Cameroon to join their brethren already settled there. Once in the area, they spread to the different Hausa settlements.<sup>14</sup> The Hausa population kept on increasing and there was need for more lands to settle. The Hausa chiefs of Buea, Kumba, Limbe, Muyuka, Tiko and Mamfe contacted the traditional chiefs of those regions, among whom were the chief of the Bakweri, Bakossi, Bayangis, Bafaw, Bakundu, Balondo and many others, for more land to settled. Once their requests were granted, they built more houses to settle their excess population. What is even more important is the fact that they erected their mosques and Arabic schools in part of those lands.<sup>15</sup>

The Hausa were advice by the administrative and traditional authorities of the Southwest Region to elect new leaders who will lead the community in all the Hausa settlements which they did. Each Hausa settlement in the Southwest Region had a mosque. The different Hausa leaders appointed main and assistant Imams to the different mosques found in the region. The Muslim population kept on increasing in the Southwest Region with the arrival of the Fulani Muslims to the region.<sup>16</sup> Following the footprints of the Hausa immigrants was their Fulani counterpart who also migrated to the Southwest Region alongside their cattle to settle there.

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Mallam Ibrahim.

<sup>14</sup> NAB, File No. Ab 20, Assessment Report for Ngemba and Moghamo Area, Bamenda Division, Shawood Smith.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Mallam Ibrahim.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Mallam Isa, Buea, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2010.

Having arrived the Southwest Region, and taking into consideration that they were Muslims, they preferred to settle beside their Hausa Muslim counterparts. The Fulani were attracted into the Southwest Region by the availability of greener and rich pasture found in the region to graze their cattle. Some Hausa traders also ventured into the cattle business. Muslims like Sarki Awudu Souley reared cattle in the Buea upper farms under the auspices of the British Official W. H. Hagley. Their presence in the region helps increase the Muslim population of the Southwest considerably (Agbor, 2010: 27-29).

The reasons for the rapid spread of the Islamic religion in the South West Region were diverse and revolve around religious, social, cultural economic and political motives. The primary motive for this implantation was evangelisation. They wanted to spread the religion throughout the region. Most of the newly converts in Bamum, the Mbam, and Beti countries help spread the religion. Muslims were also out to promote the Muslim culture. Most of these were done without any interference in the life style of the South West people. From the onset the Muslim clerics in the South West had the desire to establish an Islamic theocracy that was deep rooted in the minds of most Muslim fanatics. The followers wanted to transform the societies they found themselves into an Islamic state with all administration and judicial proceedings operating from Islamic principles. When this proved difficult, they rather preferred to cooperate with the Buea people (Agbor, 2010: 27-29). In order for the Muslims to succeed in spreading the faith, they adopted a peaceful approach to settle side by side with the indigenes of the South West Region. Force or violence was avoided. It was on these bases that the people of the South West Region decided to adopt a welcoming spirit for the Muslims to integrate them in the society. These Muslims included traders, British security guards, carriers, and clerks. They also had hunters, cattle readers and blacksmiths.

It should be noted that the Muslim community in the South West Region were made up of Hausa, Fulani, Tikari, Yaloungo, and Bamum, who respected the existence of other religions in the region. This is the reason why they faced little or no persecutions from either the Christian community or the indigenes of Buea. Rather they were welcome and offered areas for settlements. For instance, Great Soppo and Babuti quarters were offered to Mallam Awudu. Mallam Said was provided residence at the Bismarck square in Buea (Agbor, 2010: 27-29). With time, some South west indigenous population became interested and converted to Islam. There have also been some few cases of marriages between the Hausa and some southwest indigenes. Islam comes second in terms of practice after Christianity in the region. The Muslim and Christian population of the South West region live in peace and harmony with each other.

The Muslim population kept on increasing in number to the extent that in September 2009 an Anglo-Arabic school was opened by the Government at Down Beach, Limbe.<sup>17</sup> Education contributed so much in propagating Islam in the South West Region. Islamic schools were opened and Muslim children were sent to western schools. Quranic schools also saw the light of day all over the South West Region. This was to enable the Muslim child to grow up with Muslim ethics and traditions. Almost all the Mosques found in the South West Region became centres for Islamic education. The creation of Quranic schools attracted some indigenes to send their children in these schools (Agbor, 2010: 27-29). Another method used by Muslim clerics to better spread their religion in the South West Region was through inter-religious dialogue. The Muslims adopted a flexible attitude towards other religious denominations. By doing so, it went a long way in the growth of their faith in the South West Region. Pidgin English was embraced by the Muslims which eased their communication ties with the local people. One other important way used by the Muslims to spread their religion in the South West Region was through Muslim associations. The Imam of Buea, Mohamed Abubakar is one of those great figures of the Muslim faith in the South West Region. He founded two great associations in Buea namely the South West Muslim community (SOWEMUC) and the Buea Muslim Community (BMC) with organised structures. Through these associations, the Muslim community in the South West Region promoted the faith. Many Muslim students in the South West Region join the association of Cameroon Muslim Student Union (CAMSU). Muslims have succeeded to control over 1500 faithful in Buea only, distributed in neighbouring streets like Boli Famba, Mile 17, Mile 16, Muea and the main town of Buea.

### **Integration of Muslims in Anglophone Cameroon**

When the Muslim immigrants arrived in Anglophone Cameroon, they never mingled with the local population. The Hausa and Fulani loved living together and this impeded their integration in one way or the other. Muslims were very selective from the onset in their eating habit. Animals slaughtered by non-Muslims were not consumed by Muslims in Anglophone Cameroon. Most of the foods consumed by the Muslims were produced by them. They hardly went to the hospital when they were sick, preferring to treat themselves with traditional herbs. Educational wise, many if not all the Muslims were illiterate and only a handful could boast having studied Arabic. This was mostly the Mallams who were responsible for spreading the religion as well as teaching other Muslims the Quran and *Hadiths* which was the actions

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Mallam Isa.

and traditions of the Prophet.<sup>18</sup> As time went on, it became obligatory on the Muslims to spread the Islamic religion on the local population. They began meeting and talking to non-Muslims in Bamenda and Buea towns and villages, explaining to them what the Islamic religion was all about. Their intention was to convince the local population of Anglophone Cameroon to convert into the Islamic faith. The learned Muslims started moving from one village to the other preaching and sensitising the non-Muslim population about the Islamic religion. Most of those preaching were done in the Pidgin English which was the lingua franca in Anglophone Cameroon.

Thanks to this preaching and sensitisation carried out by the Muslims in Anglophone Cameroon, some of the local population converted to become Muslims. As for those who remained stuck to their Christian religion, the Muslims develop good relations with them. Taking into considerations that all the two religions were Monotheistic, which is that they believed in one God, they were bound to live in concord and harmony. The Muslims in Anglophone Cameroon started going to school, learning English and some local languages, eating different varieties of food and going to the hospital when sick. This peaceful co-existence went a long way to ensure full integration of the Muslim population in Anglophone Cameroon. More so, inter-marrying with the local population was a way to increase the Muslim population. For instance most Hausa Muslims got married to Bamenda and Buea women and the offspring were introduced to the Muslim religion (Agbor, 2010: 27-29). In terms of statistics, the Muslim population in Anglophone Cameroon has registered a considerable increase since its arrival in the region. This is thanks to the numerous converts that the Islamic religion experience from the locals. As a matter of fact, the number of Muslims in the Northwest and Southwest regions has registered a mass increase. Today Islam comes second after the Christian religion in terms of practise. In terms of statistics, Christianity comes first with about 40 percent while Islam comes second with about 30 percent. Then we have the traditional religion which comes third with about 22 percent.<sup>19</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Islam which entered Anglophone Cameroon in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>20</sup> gained grounds in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century with the arrival of the first contingent of the Hausa and Fulani Muslims in the region. As time went on, some social, economic and political factors helped to

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Mallam Isa.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Alhaji Swaibou Baba Mallam

<sup>20</sup> *Kano Chronicle*, 1890s.

spread the religion from Northern Nigeria to the Northwest and the Southwest Regions. This spread was also facilitated by the role of some local inhabitants involved in the long distance trade who had earlier embraced Islam. Other Hausa and Fulani migrants found in Northern Nigeria got to learn about Anglophone Cameroon, the hospitality and welcoming nature of the indigenes, and began migrating into the region. In the course of time, many other indigenes became interested in the Islamic religion and converted to it. Within a decade, the Muslim population in Anglophone Cameroon increase considerably. Islam in Anglophone Cameroon was no more reserved to the Hausa-Fulani alone. With the advent of Christianity, some few skirmishes occurred between the two religions especially at the level of evangelization. Nonetheless, with the passage of time Islam and Christianity were bound to cohabit with each other. Today, Islam is the second religion in terms of following after Christianity in Anglophone Cameroon. From all indications, Islam has come to stay in Anglophone Cameroon and the number of it followers keeps on increasing in the region.

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