

# **CHAPTER ONE: THE 'NORTHERN FACTOR' IN GHANAIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This book is an attempt to provide an outline of the development of Muslim communities in contemporary Ghana with special reference to the history of Islam in Northern Ghana. Its main focus is on political and societal history. Although I have tried to use an actor-oriented approach, much of the text has to be limited to identifying structures due to the paucity of historical sources, especially in the first part of the book on the precolonial situation. Here my sources are limited to the few local chronicles and texts that were available to me in addition to the scholarly work of modern historians and anthropologists. Although the availability of sources increases tremendously for the colonial period, notes about Muslims or colonial investigations into Islam in the then Northern Territories of the Gold Coast (contemporary Northern Ghana) or the other regions are few. Based on archival sources, I have tried to identify Muslims and their activities in the North during the colonial period, ending up with painting the contours of their space within the colonial state. However, although Muslims did exist in the colonial files and sometimes even figured as actors, the colonial state was never able to fully control or dominate the Muslim communities (as it never did control local society at large either). Thus, much of the daily life of Muslims and many changes within the Muslim communities left no mark in the colonial files. The situation is much the same during the contemporary period. One can speak about a postcolonial situation in this respect: Muslims are absent from the state and public horizon as long as they did not challenge the authorities or start to claim a rightful share of government interest and investment. However, in comparison to the colonial period, the visibility of Muslims in the public sphere, as well as in Ghanaian civil society, has increased tremendously during the last decades. Thus, whereas governmental sources are hard to come by, there exists a much greater variety of texts to be used for a reconstruction of the internal activities in and between Muslim communities, their relationship with the state and their gradual appearance and position in civil society.

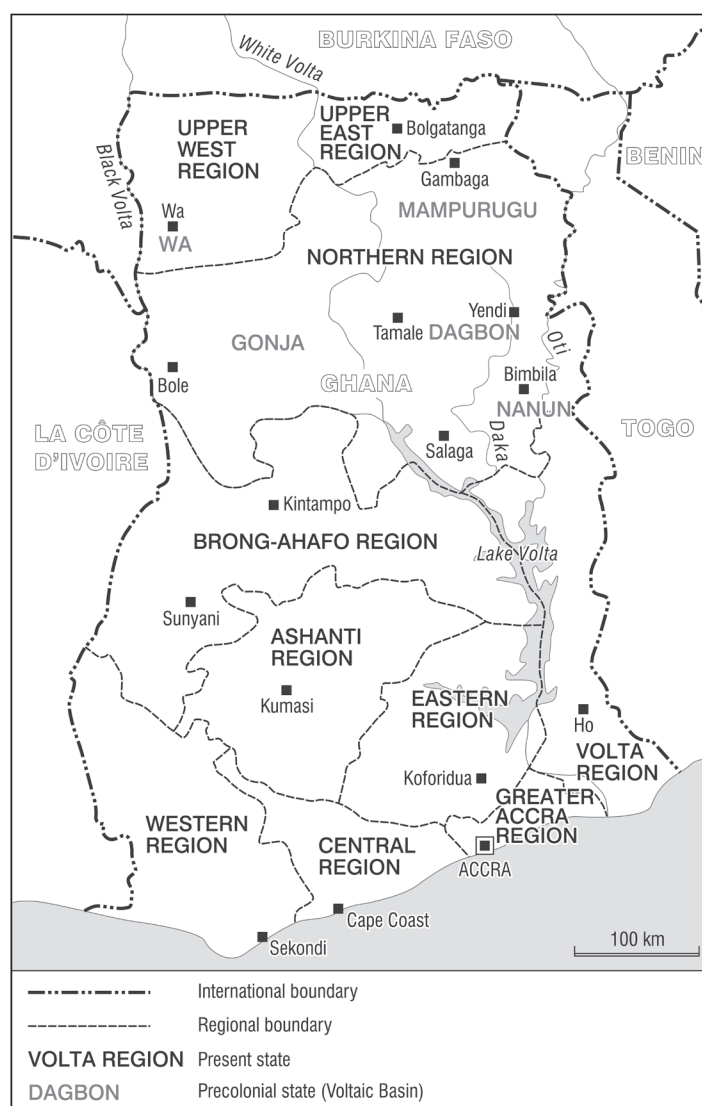
This book cannot cover all aspects of the history of Muslim communities or the development of Islam in Ghana. First, although I am not against using oral history or engaging in interviews, the reader will soon find out that I made only a few interviews. This is due to the fact that the original purpose my research in

Ghana was not to write this book but to conduct research on mandatory/obligatory almsgiving (*zakat*) and the position of Muslim scholars towards poverty in Northern Ghana. Since 1999, I have interviewed some 36 scholars, including the National Chief Imam Uthman Nuhu Sharubutu as well as the National Imam of the Ahlus-Sunna Alhaji Ibrahim Umar Imam, but these interviews concentrated on aspects of almsgiving, begging and poverty alleviation among Muslims in contemporary Ghana. Thus, in only a few of my interviews did we touch upon and discuss Muslim affairs on a general level. Second, the original aim for doing archival research on Muslims in the precolonial and colonial Gold Coast was to identify situations where almsgiving and begging were described and discussed. When going through the files and reading old texts, I was able to collect different kinds of data on Muslims but not much on almsgiving. When I started to write my manuscript some years ago, I realized that I had amassed much more material relating to the political and societal history of Muslims than on almsgiving. In the end, after having completed the first version of my manuscript, I was advised by my colleagues to divide the manuscript into two and rewrite it as two separate books, the present one becoming a monograph on Muslims and Islam in Ghana (and thus lacking oral sources) and the other one on almsgiving and the position of Muslim scholars on begging and poverty. Consequently, although my book is only a contribution to a skeleton of the history of the Muslim communities and the development of Islam in Ghana, it is the first one that tries to encapsulate a narrative that stretches from the precolonial to the postcolonial period.

As outlined above, my original intention was to study *zakat* in Northern Ghana. In my earlier research on *zakat* in the *Bilad as-Sudan* or precolonial Sudanic Africa, I had noted various attempts among Muslim communities to handle the collection and distribution of *zakat* without the establishment of an ‘Islamic economy’. The establishment of an ‘Islamic Economy’ or the Islamization of the economic, and especially the fiscal, structures in accordance with Islamic Law in a territory controlled by a Muslim ruler was widely debated by local Muslim scholars. In some cases, especially as the consequence of the various Islamic militant reform movements that affected both Muslim and non-Muslim states in West Africa during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the fiscal structures of these new ‘Islamic’ states, such as the Caliphate of Hamdallahi (the Diina of Masina) and the Sokoto Caliphate, were based on Islamic Law, thereby introducing *zakat* as a tax and transferring its collection and distribution from the private to the public sphere.<sup>1</sup> However, not all of the Muslim states in the *Bilad as-Sudan* underwent this change, and in most cases, the fiscal structures were at most a mixture of local and Islamic outlines. More often, however, *zakat* was not a public affair, i.e., its collection and distribution were not controlled by the state or its legal representatives. Instead,

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<sup>1</sup> Weiss 2003a, chapters IV and V.



**Map 1.** Ghana and Voltaic Basin.

the general condition in precolonial Muslim societies was *zakat* being part of and closely connected to the private sphere.<sup>2</sup>

Based on the insights above, my research on *zakat* in Ghana ended up as an investigation into the process of Islamization in Northern Ghana and on the various ways the Muslim community has tried to establish a ‘Muslim sphere’ and the possibilities and constraints for almsgiving, whether *zakat* or *sadaqa*.<sup>3</sup> As will be discussed further below, Islamization concerns both the individual and society, but as a process Islamization differs when concentrating on the individual from

<sup>2</sup> Weiss 2003a, chapter VII.

<sup>3</sup> *Zakat* is a moral obligation that constitutes one of the five pillars of Islam. Although *zakat* is commonly defined as a form of charity, almsgiving, donation, or contribution, it is a formal duty not subject to choice. *Sadaqa* or voluntary almsgiving is an individual pious act and never has any collective connotations. Thus *zakat* is more than just a ‘good deed’ because it is an obligation, whereas the giving of alms (*sadaqa*) is the decision of the giver alone.

concentrating on a society. Thus, whereas some individuals could convert to Islam and try to live their lives as good Muslims, the Islamization of a whole society is a much slower process which often includes setbacks and sometimes even violent reactions against the introduction of a new faith. In societies in Northern Ghana or the precolonial Voltaic Basin<sup>4</sup>, such as Dagbon (Dagomba), Mampurugu (Mamprusi), Wa, Nanun (Nanumba), and Gonja, the process of Islamization has been regarded by several (Western) researchers, such as Ivor Wilks, Nehemia Levtzion and Phyllis Ferguson, as being an interesting test cases for the gradual – and mostly peaceful – change from non-Muslim during the precolonial period to a largely Muslim society in the postcolonial period. However, the essence of this process is a debated topic among researchers, not only with regards to the process of Islamization in the Gold Coast/Ghana but in Sudanic Africa in general.

At the same time, however, *zakat* can also be taken as an indicator of a changing discourse within the Muslim sphere. Whereas there was little, if any, debate among Muslim scholars about the conditions and circumstances of obligatory almsgiving during the precolonial and colonial periods, the question of the collection and distribution of *zakat* started to be discussed by Muslim scholars in Ghana in the postcolonial period. At the same time, the Muslim sphere underwent drastic changes when it was challenged with the postcolonial political situation. Whereas Muslims, especially in Northern Ghana, had effectively shut out the British colonial sphere, including Western education, they established at the same time a kind of ‘working relationship’ with the colonial authorities through the demarcation of a relatively distinctive and autonomous ‘Muslim sphere’. However, the postcolonial modern secular state had even less use for the Muslims and their special knowledge, which eventually made some of the foundations of the ‘Muslim sphere’, such as the Quran schools, obsolete. The effect has been an increasing polarization within the Muslim community in Ghana and was manifested in the emergence of new Muslim groups, such as the ‘reformists’ [Wahhabis] or *Ahlu-Sunna wal-Jama’a* (‘The People of the Sunna and the Community’),<sup>5</sup> who started to challenge the ‘old’ Muslim way of

<sup>4</sup> The term ‘Voltaic Basin’ refers to the region comprising the Black and White Volta Rivers: the northern part of contemporary Ghana, i.e., the Northern Region, the Upper East Region and the Upper West Region, as well as the southern part of Burkina Faso.

<sup>5</sup> The terms ‘Wahhabi’ and ‘Wahhabism’ were started to be used by colonial, especially French, administrators to loosely refer to reformist Muslims in West Africa. The term is still used today in the region’s vernaculars but, as several researchers have indicated, is in fact somewhat misleading. The Wahhabiyya is an Islamic community founded by Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (1703–1792) among Arabs in the heartland of the Arabian Peninsula. Its doctrinal foundation is a rather rigid interpretation of Islam, being mainly based on the teachings of Ahmad ibn Hanbal (9<sup>th</sup> century) and Ahmad ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) who both stood for literal adherence to the Quran and the Tradition of the Prophet (*sunna*) as the sole valid source of religious and moral law. They term themselves as ‘Muwahhidun’ (Unitarians). Today, Wahhabism is the official doctrine in Saudi Arabia. However, in a West African Muslim context, the label Wahhabiyya is given to those groups whose members have studied in the Arab world and who are critical about Sufism, for example, the Ahlu-Sunna [*Ahl as-Sunna*] in Ghana. In Dagbon, they are termed *Munchire* or ‘rejecters’. However, of equal

life, especially in the field of education, and, on the other hand, attempts within the 'old' Muslim community to respond to both the challenge of the modern world and the criticism from the 'radical' Muslims.

Although my research in Ghana was guided by a holistic approach, this work will not be a history of Islam in Ghana. Although I have tried to encompass the political, social and economic history of Northern Ghana from the fourteenth through the early twenty-first century, my research is mainly concerned with the Muslim population and its interaction with the rest of the society at various periods. To achieve this end, I have concentrated on the relationship between Muslims and the political authorities. Therefore, this book is made up of three parts. The first part (Chapter Two) provides a comprehensive overview of the process of Islamization in the precolonial Voltaic Basin and the emergence of 'Muslim spheres' in some of the precolonial states, namely Dagbon, Gonja, Mampurugu and Wa. The second part (Chapters Three through Five) tackles various aspects of the complex relationship between Muslims and the colonial state and its administration in the then Northern Territories of the Gold Coast. The third part (Chapters Six) concentrates on the postcolonial period, on issues about the political and especially economic disempowerment of the Muslim segment of Ghanaian society at large and of the inhabitants of the urban and rural savannah especially.

The geographical context of the research will thus be broadened in Part Three, noting political changes between the colonial and the postcolonial period. The term 'Voltaic Basin' is used to demarcate the precolonial geographical setting, comprised of what earlier European travellers called as the Ashanti or Gold Coast 'hinterland', including the 'kingdoms' of Dagbon, Mampurugu, Wa, Nanun and Gonja. The colonial administrative entity called The Northern Territories of the Gold Coast was, from a British colonial perspective, a politically autonomous entity (labelled 'Protectorate') that was linked to the two other parts of the Gold Coast, the Gold Coast Colony and the Protectorate of Ashanti, through the Governor and the Colonial Secretariat in Victoriaborg (Accra).<sup>6</sup> In the postcolonial era, i.e., after Ghanaian independence, the North has, since 1983, consisted of three regions, namely the Northern Region, the Upper West Region and the Upper East Region. Administratively, at least, the three northern regions are an integral part of the Republic of Ghana. However, in terms of levels of economic development and the general quality of life, contemporary Ghana is marked by a deep division between the relative backwardness of Northern Ghana in relation to Southern Ghana. Of key importance is the religious factor, which continues to play a crucial role in

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importance for the reformists are the various Salafi doctrines and modern Salafiyya ideas. The reformists in West Africa, including Ghana, never refer to themselves as 'Wahhabi' but *Ahl as-Sunna* (the People of the Sunna). See further Westerlund 1997 and Soares 2005, 181–182.

<sup>6</sup> Since the First World War, the British administered a portion of German Togoland as a League of Nations mandated area.

contemporary Ghana and cannot be disregarded in an analysis of political, societal and economic problems, as Gyimah-Boadi and Asante also underline:

The ethnic map of Ghana is almost coterminous with its religious map. [...] The spatial distribution of the two major foreign religions, Islam and Christianity, almost coincides with the division of the country into the Northern half that is poor and disadvantaged, and the southern half which is wealthy and more developed.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, the major inequalities in Ghana are the North-South, the rural-urban and the rural-rural dichotomies.<sup>8</sup> In addition, one has to highlight the gender and class aspect of inequality in contemporary – and, per extension, also precolonial and colonial – Ghana.

Apart from politics and economics, religion and ethnicity is an important factor, not only in contemporary Ghana, but one that also marked the precolonial and the colonial era, especially as inter-ethnic relations were and are sometimes complicated by religious differences. According to the 2000 census, Ghana's population of about 19 million inhabitants is made up of a vast mosaic of larger and smaller ethnic groups. The major ones are the Akan (ca. 49.1 percent), Mole Dagbani (16.5 percent), Ewe (12.7 percent), Ga Dangme (8 percent), Guan (4.4 percent), and Gurma (3.9 percent). The majority of the Ghanaian population, including the majority of the Akan, Ewe and Ga Dangme ethnic groups, reside in the seven southern regions<sup>9</sup> whereas the three northern (savannah) regions, the Northern, Upper East and Upper West Region, contain of only about 20 percent of the total population. The ethnic composition of the three northern regions is a heterogeneous one, including the Mole Dagbani<sup>10</sup>, Guan<sup>11</sup>, Gurma<sup>12</sup> and Grusi<sup>13</sup> ethnic groups, and most of the ethnic groups that inhabit the savannah are rather small.<sup>14</sup> However, apart from ethnicity, a crucial line of division in the North is the societal composition of these groups. Among five groups – the Dagbamba, Mamprusi, Nanumba, Wala and Gbanya – early state structures emerged, whereas other groups were typically organized as an 'acephalous' or segmentary system around clan or lineage heads and other leaders, but not chiefs. During the colonial era, the groups with chiefs typically ruled or administered their neighbours without chiefs according to the outlines of 'Indirect Rule', a system that was, with little

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<sup>7</sup> Gyimah-Boadi and Asante 2003, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Tsikata and Seini 2004, 6.

<sup>9</sup> The seven southern regions include the Greater Accra Region, the Eastern Region, the Central Region, the Western Region, the Volta Region, the Asante Region and the Brong Ahafo Region.

<sup>10</sup> The Mole Dagbani ethnic group consists of Dagbamba, Dagaba, Nabdom, Kusasi, Mamprusi, Wala, Builsa, Nanumba, Nankansi and Gurense.

<sup>11</sup> Among others, the Gonja, Yefi, Nchumuru and Krachi.

<sup>12</sup> This group includes the Konkomba, Bimoba and Baasari.

<sup>13</sup> This group consists of the Kasena, Mo, Sisala and Vagala.

<sup>14</sup> Gyimah-Boadi and Asante 2003, 2–4.

change, taken over by the postcolonial state.<sup>15</sup> However, inter-ethnic conflicts have increasingly shaken the three northern regions, a major background factor being clashes between the ‘chiefly’ and so-called ‘non-chiefly’ groups mostly centred on control over land and other resources and sovereignty issues.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. AN OUTLINE OF THE ‘NORTHERN FACTOR’

During the early 1960s, two academic studies on the ‘northern factor’ in Anglophone West Africa were published – Ivor Wilks’ *The Northern Factor in Ashanti History* and H.F.C. Smith’s *The Islamic Revolution of the Nineteenth Century: A Neglected Theme of West African History*.<sup>17</sup> Both articles deal with a similar theme, namely that of the impact of Islam and Muslims in Ghana and Northern Nigeria respectively. However, whereas Wilks’ paper depicts the influence of Islam and Muslims as a cultural and social factor, Smith’s presentation was to highlight Islam as a political factor. The ‘northern factor’, as one could label the impact of Islam in both Ghanaian and Nigerian history, was thereafter to become a much debated subject, and, especially in Nigeria, one that was to cause very divergent positions. Whereas in Ghana, academic historical research on the northern regions remained in the shadows of research concentrating on the South, especially Asante (Ashanti) and the coastal regions – perhaps mainly due to the fact that for decades to come, there was no university in the North – academic historical research on the ‘northern factor’ in Nigeria was to spark off a variety of positions and interpretations.

Wilks’ and Smith’s essays opened academic research into the ‘northern factor’ in Ghana as well as in Nigeria. Though research on the role and impact of Islam in (Northern) Nigeria was to emerge as one of the leading topics in Nigerian historiography over the years, historical research in Ghana was never to concentrate on the North in any greater respect. One could claim that such a difference in research emphasis does reflect more than the interests of the academics, and, not surprisingly, one might argue that the main reason is politically motivated – whereas the Nigerian intelligentsia has debated over the role and influence of the North for over a decade, such a debate has been more or less absent in Ghana.

One of the key questions about the ‘northern factor’ has been whether or not Islam – and, by extension, the Muslims – are to be perceived as an alien factor or not in the historical development of the societies in the region and in the making of a national historiography. Seen from a southern perspective, this is clearly the case. However, especially in Northern Nigeria, the role of Islam as a dynamic internal force has been stressed by some schools of historians starting with academics at Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria. Attached to the question of the ‘northern

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<sup>15</sup> Kirby 2003, 161.

<sup>16</sup> Hughes 2003; Kirby 2003; Tsikata and Seini 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Wilks 1961; Smith 1961.

factor' on a national level, is the claim of a peripheral or even backward position for the North. Such a position can easily be identified in the Ghanaian case, but it has emerged, too, in Nigeria.<sup>18</sup>

One crucial factor missing in Northern Ghana as compared to Northern Nigeria is, without any doubt, the lack of a glorious past of a Muslim or even Islamic state. As will be argued in Chapter Three, Gonja and Dagbon, the two political entities which early nineteenth-century European reports labelled as kingdoms ruled by Muslim rulers, turned out to be something other than quasi-feudal Muslim polities – in fact, they were neither feudal nor Muslim. It is important to stress this early European perception because it was to guide future political as well as intellectual developments in the Gold Coast and later on in Ghana. Furthermore, the stress on feudal and Muslim political units during the nineteenth century does, to a large extent, explain the difference in approach by the Europeans towards the various African societies. Nineteenth-century European travellers, such as Dixon Denham, Hugh Clapperton, Heinrich Barth, Gustav Nachtigal and Gerhard Rohlfs had made a clear differentiation between various forms of political organization in Sudanic Africa, the most important one being to highlight the possibility of cooperating with the 'feudal' Muslim kingdoms of the savannah whereas the so-called 'stateless' societies were of no interest. For these European travellers as well as later colonial officials, the most promising political as well as economic entity in the central Sudanic savannah was the Sokoto Caliphate.<sup>19</sup>

Not surprisingly, at the end of the nineteenth century, when the imperial race towards the coastal hinterlands reached its zenith, hopes were expressed by the imperialist lobby both in Africa and in Europe that similar conditions in the Ashanti hinterland might be found.<sup>20</sup> The idea of the existence of 'Muslim' kingdoms was, however, challenged and refuted at the end of the nineteenth century with the establishment of British and German colonial rule and the attempt of the colonial powers to identify – in vain – an Islamic order and Islamic institutions resembling those of the Sokoto Caliphate in Northern Nigeria. Thus, oral traditions were to confirm the argument of all late nineteenth and early twentieth century imperial investigations, that is, that the Islamic character of the Hinterland of the Gold Coast and Togo was not merely an oversimplification but an overstatement. Rather, as will be discussed in Chapter Four, most of the early reports by British colonial officers painted a rather stagnate picture of Islam in the Northern Territories.<sup>21</sup> In fact, the outcome was more or less a 'de-Islamization' of the North and by the time of R.S. Rattray's classical anthropological investigation *The Tribes of the Ashanti*

<sup>18</sup> See further Kaese, 1999, 237–264.

<sup>19</sup> The first part of Chapter Three is an extended and rewritten version of my article "European Images of Islam in the Northern Hinterlands of the Gold Coast" (Weiss 2001).

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Levtzion 1968, 106–107; Arhin 1974a, 109–110; Gruner 1997, 97.

<sup>21</sup> This chapter is, in part, an extended and rewritten version of an earlier article "British attitudes towards Muslims in the Northern Territories until the early 1930s" (Weiss 2005a).



*Hinterland* (1932), Islam seemed to play no role at all and Rattray himself did not devote attention to the question either.

In a narrow sense, therefore, the ‘northern factor’ in Ghanaian history was and is the question of the spread and impact of Islam. Here, again, the research on the so-called Suwarian tradition in the Voltaic Basin by Wilks and others has had a profound impact on the understanding of Juula (Dyula) intellectual history, their trading and scholarly networks as well as the spread of Islam in the Voltaic Basin.<sup>22</sup> One of the central themes of the Suwarian tradition has been the idea of a peaceful coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims in regions where Muslims were a minority and under the rule of non-Muslim rulers and chiefs. There has been a strong argument by several scholars, among others Wilks and Levtzion, that such an idea was adopted by most of the Muslim scholars in the Voltaic Basin and, therefore, had a profound influence on the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. The accommodation of Muslim scholars and traders to local political and cultural conditions as long as these did not downright contravene the Five Pillars of Islam was to evolve as the guiding line for the coexistence of Muslim communities among non-Muslim societies. However, the rulers and the commoners usually remained lukewarm towards Islam and the Muslim communities had minimal political influence. In some states, such as Gonja and Dagbon, where the ruler nominally converted to Islam, the structure of the state and the society were not affected by his conversion and none of the states developed into an Islamic state or a Muslim theocracy. In fact, Islam seems not have made any deeper impact upon the population before the twentieth century. The state of Islamic learning among the Muslim communities was said to have been rather low compared with the Muslim centres in the Sudan savannah and none of the royal cities in Dagbon (Yendi) or Gonja (Buipe, Kpembe, Damongo) were known as scholarly centres.<sup>23</sup>

Only with the coming of a new generation of Muslim scholars, mainly from Hausaland and Borno, was there a rift both within the Muslim community at large and between some of the Muslims and the non-Muslim rulers. According to Western scholars, the rift within the Muslim community was to reflect a general split between an accommodationalist and a rejectionalist approach towards non-Muslims and religions other than Islam. Such a debate within the Muslim community was in itself not an atypical phenomenon; in fact, this split was one of the most debated subjects in Sudanic Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth century.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, whereas Wilks’ 1961 paper was restricted to the influence of Muslims and Islam up until the early nineteenth century, one could argue that an extension of the debate to include the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would have to include

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<sup>22</sup> A good introduction is provided by Wilks 2000.

<sup>23</sup> Muslim scholars had established a scholarly community in Gambaga in Mampurugu during the eighteenth century, but when Na Atabia felt that the influence of the Muslims was becoming too strong at his court, he moved his court to Nalerigu.

<sup>24</sup> See further Chapters II and VI.

both the Sokoto (Hausa) factor as well as the ‘reformist’/Wahhabi (or Ahlus-Sunna) factor. Further, as C.C. Stewart suggested some twenty years ago, studies on Islam in Africa have to be broadened and to include in their focus a wider perspective on the historical processes affecting Muslims in Africa and the process of Islamization. Hitherto, research had concentrated on colonial policy toward Islam,<sup>25</sup> Muslim education,<sup>26</sup> and Muslim communities in the nationalist era. He pointed out four areas that should be included in the research agenda, namely the significance of pan-Islamic sentiments across sub-Saharan Africa,<sup>27</sup> applications of *shari’ a* (Islamic Law) and adaptations in legal systems to accommodate colonial conceptions of Islamic law,<sup>28</sup> Islamic arts and architecture as well as the process of Islamization itself.<sup>29</sup>

As will be noted in Chapters Five and Six, an increasing mobility of Ghanaian Muslims during the latter half of the twentieth century resulted in the establishment of new contacts with the Muslim world. Although the Muslims had not been cut off from the rest of the Muslim world during the precolonial and colonial periods, their contacts had been restricted to the scholarly and trading contacts of individual Muslims. Twentieth century investigations into the Islamic literacy tradition in Ghana have emphasized that the Voltaic Basin was by no means beyond the limits of the *Dar al-Islam*. On the contrary, works by Goody, Levtzion, Wilks and Hodgkin have pointed to the close contacts of Muslim scholars with the rest of the Muslim world.<sup>30</sup> With the expansion of the kola trade to the Sokoto Caliphate,<sup>31</sup> there was an influx of Muslim traders and scholars from Hausaland and Borno, and they generated an

<sup>25</sup> However, this topic has not been studied very much in Gold Coast/Ghanaian history, apart from some narrow topics such as the Muslim-colonial relationship in Kumasi by Enid Schildkrout (1970a, 1970b). A thorough investigation into Muslim-colonial relationship, as is provided in Part Two, has so far not been produced for the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast. An investigation into the Muslim-colonial relationship in Ashanti and the Gold Coast Colony has not yet been written.

<sup>26</sup> This, too, was for a long time an under-researched topic in Ghana but lately there has been an upsurge in studies, among others those by Owusu-Ansah, Mumuni, Sey and Iddrisu.

<sup>27</sup> A notable form of pan-Islamic sentiments that aroused the suspicion, if not the fear, of the various early colonial authorities was Mahdism and the idea that a ‘Mohammedan crusade’ was being planned by ‘fanatical itinerant preachers’ throughout the Sudanic savannah at the beginning of the twentieth century. One of the first studies on Mahdism in the Northern Territories was conducted by Jack Goody in 1970. I discuss the ‘ghost of Mahdism’ in Chapter III.4.1 (German-controlled Dagbon/Togoland, based on my article on the attempt by the Basel Missionaries to establish a station at Yendi in 1912, see Weiss 2005b) and Chapter IV.2.3 (an extended version of an earlier article on British colonial policies in the Northern Territories, see Weiss 2005a).

<sup>28</sup> Apart from J.N.D. Anderson’s survey (1954) there is not much on *shari’ a* in the Gold Coast or contemporary Ghana. However, some years ago Mustapha Ibrahim has published two booklets on Islamic Law, one concerning the concept of *waqf*, endowment (Ibrahim 1996) and another on Islamic law of inheritance (Ibrahim 2001). Another contemporary Ghanaian Muslim scholar, Dr A.O. Abudu, has published books on Islamic economics (Abudu 1996) as well as on the Islamic System of Inheritance (Abudu 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Stewart 1986, 226–229.

<sup>30</sup> See further Wilks 1963, Hodgkin 1966, Goody 1968, Wilks 1968a, Levtzion 1968, Goody and Wilks 1968.

<sup>31</sup> On the expansion of the kola trade, see Lovejoy 1980.

increase of Islamic knowledge.<sup>32</sup> However, unwittingly the colonial state created new avenues and opportunities for inter-Muslim contacts – either by enabling an increasing number of Muslims to perform the *hajj* (the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina) or enabling Muslims to study in Middle Eastern countries. For a brief moment, the Muslim minority in Ghana even tried to engage in the independence struggle and national politics and to establish a common political platform for all Ghanaian Muslims – the Moslem Association Party – although with little success.<sup>33</sup>

### 3. SOURCES FOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH ON ISLAM AND MUSLIMS

One of the major problems a Western-trained historian faces when conducting academic research on African history is the paucity of written sources, especially for the precolonial period. However, instead of capitulating and relapsing into a Eurocentric notion of the ‘darkness’ of African history, Africanist and African historians have turned the lack into a challenge: how to pursue a reconstruction of the African past by using other sources. One of the most important methods that Africanist and African historians have utilized is making critical use of oral traditions.<sup>34</sup> The interaction among anthropological, sociological, linguistic and historical researchers has been important. Thus, to conduct historical research on a topic in African history requires a multi-disciplinary approach.

The situation with regards sources for conducting research on Muslims and the process of Islamization in Ghana is, to some extent, less problematic than for other regions although the availability of sources is biased and mostly reflects the North-South divide of the country. Whereas there is a relative wealth of written sources available for the precolonial history of the coastal regions and even Asante, this is not the case for the Voltaic Basin. Thus, Ivor Wilks’ 1995 lectures, *One Nation, Many Histories. Ghana Past and Present* (1996), capture most directly present-day Ghanaian historical writing: the focus is on the South with a remark on the ‘northern factor’ which at one time had an impact but was to be overshadowed by the rise of Ashanti. But, on the other hand – what was the ‘northern factor’ in Ghana? Despite the focus of research during the 1960s, as well as Wilks and others path-breaking inroads into opening the past of the northern regions in Ghana, much is still to be done. Yet, as Wilks himself noted, northern history does actually have a much better position than southern history in terms of internal sources, namely the literary products of Muslim intellectuals dating back to at least the eighteenth century, if not earlier.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Levtzion 1968, 103.

<sup>33</sup> Balogun 1987; Allman 1991; Ahmed-Rufai 2002.

<sup>34</sup> In fact, oral history as a method was largely developed by Africanist and African historians, most notably Jan Vansina.

<sup>35</sup> Wilks 1996, 14–15.

### 3.1. Muslim and Non-Muslim Indigenous Sources

Literary products produced by Muslim scholars in the Voltaic Basin that are of importance for historians conducting research on Northern Ghana consist mainly of local chronicles, king-lists, lists of imamships and historical accounts as well as letters and documents written by Muslim scholars for religious and political purposes. First of all, there are the various chronicles of Gonja, which were already known to historians during the 1960s but were translated, edited and published only during the 1980s,<sup>36</sup> including different versions of the *Amr Ajdādinā*, the *Kitāb Ghanjā*, and the *Ta'rikh Ghunjā*.<sup>37</sup> The key importance of these chronicles is their information on the foundation of the Gonja kingdom as well as the relationship between the Muslims and the rulers. In addition, the volume includes extracts from the *al-Kalām Māghu Sansani* and the *Kalām Mulūk wa Mamālikihim* which deals with other aspects of the political history of Gonja as well as translations of some of Arabic manuscripts in the Royal Library in Copenhagen, namely letters between Gonja and Kumasi.<sup>38</sup>

The sheer number of the many Arabic manuscripts produced by Muslim scholars in Gonja is regarded as a sign of a vibrant Muslim community that was firmly rooted in the traditional Islamic perception of history and time. Most of the texts are combinations of chronicles and annals, usually starting by summarizing earlier important historical events. The essence of the texts is political-cum-religious, focussing on the actions of the rulers, the Muslim scholars and the relationship between these two groups. Information on society at large is usually absent, which means that these texts provide little or no data on the economic and social conditions and developments of the society. Only in rare cases do the Gonja chronicles include information on natural calamities such as droughts or locust invasions – in fact,

<sup>36</sup> Wilks, Levtzion and Haight 1986 (hereafter WLH 1986).

<sup>37</sup> Another version of the *Amr Ajdādinā* has been published by Goody together with other texts on the foundation of Gonja (*Bole Manuscript*, translated by Duncan-Johnstone and reproduced in Goody 1954, Appendix VI).

<sup>38</sup> The author of the *Amr Ajdādinā* is not known. One copy of the text is dated 1931 (1349 A.H.), but according to WLH 1986, the original version must be substantially older. The *Kitāb Ghanjā* was completed in 1751/52 (1165 A.H.) with supplementary additions in 1763–1764. Levtzion argues that the authors of the chronicle was al-Hājj Muhammad b. al-Mustafā and Imām 'Umar Kunadī b. 'Umar, whereas the additions were made by al-Hājj Muhammad's son (WLH 1986, 61–66). Wilks, on the other hand, claims that the original chronicle was a compilation but that the 1764 redaction of the text were made by Imām Muhammad Kunadī. The *Arabic Literature in Africa, Vol IV*, hereafter ALA (IV, 2003, 544) states that the author of the *Kitāb Ghanjā* was Muhammad b. Muhammad b. al-Mustafā, known as Kunadī (Juula: “the fortunate”), who became Friday Imam of Gbuipe in 1745/46. The *Ta'rikh Ghunjā* is a late nineteenth century chronicle, partly compiled by Malam al-Hasan. (On Malam al-Hasan, see further footnote 44.) However, as WLH (1986, 151) demonstrate, it is likely that the original authorities of the text were one Gharba Baghunjā and Mahmūd b. 'Abdallāh. *Al-Kalām Māghu Sansani* or “The Account of Sansanne Mango” was probably written in the second half of the eighteenth century, perhaps by one Imām 'Umar Dabara (ALA IV, 2003, 545). The age of the *Kalām Mulūk wa Mamālikihim* or “The Account of Kings and their Kingdoms” is more difficult to reconstruct, perhaps it was compiled during the 1880s (WLH 1986, 192).

such information is only found in the annalistic, eighteenth-century part of the *Kitāb Ghanjā*.

Another large group of local Muslim manuscripts from the Voltaic Basin is the collection of Arabic manuscripts in the Royal Library in Copenhagen (Code Arab CCCII, Arabic Manuscripts from the Guinea Coast, 3 bundles). The main bulk of the manuscripts, about 900 folios, were produced in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Most of these manuscripts are religious and esoteric texts and had been in local use as talismans and amulets, but the collection also includes 15 letters between the Muslims in Kumasi and those in the northern states.<sup>39</sup> A thorough description and analysis of the Copenhagen Muslim amulets has been provided by David Owusu-Ansah,<sup>40</sup> and it is obvious that, for any research on the religious and ideological impact of Muslims in the Voltaic Basin, these texts are highly interesting. However, some of the Copenhagen manuscripts have no religious or esoteric content. Some of these ‘secular’ texts are (private) letters written by Muslim scholars to other Muslims, including letters from scholars and imams in Gonja and in Gambaga (Mampurugu) to the leading members of the Muslim community in Kumasi and vice versa. Other letters were part of the correspondence between the Muslim community and the Asantehene, i.e., having both a diplomatic as well as a religious character. For example, such a letter could include the request for a favour as well as asking for the blessing of the ruler.<sup>41</sup>

Another set of local manuscripts containing historical data were produced by a group of Muslim scholars in Salaga, Eastern Gonja, during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The so-called ‘Salaga school’ was a remarkable concentration of Muslim intellectuals, including Imam Mahmūd b. Abdallāh, Malam al-Hasan and Imam ‘Umar (or Alhaji Umar of Kete-Krachi).<sup>42</sup> A local history of Salaga including an account of the Salaga Civil War of 1876, the *Qissat Salghā wa-ta’rīkh Ghanjā*, was written by the Imam of the Lampur Quarter in Salaga, Mahmūd b. Abdallāh, at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup> Malam al-Hasan’s texts were already known to British colonial officials, who translated some of them,<sup>44</sup> However, the case of Imam ‘Umar is the most interesting,<sup>45</sup> as he wrote accounts and treatises not only

<sup>39</sup> Levtzion 1965.

<sup>40</sup> Owusu-Ansah 1991.

<sup>41</sup> See also Levtzion 1968.

<sup>42</sup> See further Hodgkin 1966 as well as Goody and Wilks 1968.

<sup>43</sup> El-Wakkad 1961+1962; ALA IV, 2003, 545.

<sup>44</sup> J. Withers-Gill, *A Short History of the Dagomba Tribe* (s.a.), The author of this manuscript, Al-Hasan b. ‘Umar Alfā Kiri b. Ibrāhīm Alfā Sabi Jara al-Salghawī, known as Malam al-Hasan, was born in Kpabia, about 20 miles southwest of Yendi. He was a son of ‘Umar al-Faqīh of Salaga who himself was an ‘*alim*’ (a learned man) who descended on his father’s side from Shaykh Alfā Sabi who had left Djougou for Salaga in the early nineteenth century. On his mother’s side, Malam al-Hasan was related to Alfā Hama, a Masina Fulbe whose son, ‘Uthmān, had established a school at Kpabia. In his later life, Malam al-Hasan became Imam of the Friday Mosque in Salaga, where he died in 1933/4 (ALA IV, 2003, 584).

<sup>45</sup> Al-Hājj ‘Umar ibn Abū Bakr ibn ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Alī al-Kabbawī al-Kanawī, known as Imam

on Hausa histories and material customs and traditions,<sup>46</sup> but also compiled texts on local affairs in Northern Ghana, on the impact of European rule<sup>47</sup> as well as edited texts by other authors, such as Malam al-Hasan's two works, 'History of the Dagomba people' and 'History of Gurunsi',<sup>48</sup> and one Darho's reflection on the conditions of poverty and wealth.<sup>49</sup>

A different set of manuscripts from Salaga is the collection of Arabic and Ajami (Hausa text written in Arabic characters) of G.A. Krause.<sup>50</sup> Krause collected these manuscripts while he was living in Salaga during the 1890s and, according to Sölken, some of these texts had been written by Imam 'Umar for Krause.<sup>51</sup> While some of the manuscripts deal with political, social or economic affairs in Hausaland, others are of importance for topics in late nineteenth-century northern Ghanaian history, such as the kola trade and the organization of trade caravans from Hausaland to Gonja as well as letters dating to the second Salaga Civil War.<sup>52</sup>

However, Salaga was not the only centre of Muslim scholarship in terms of producing literary texts. Local chronicles and lists of imamships were also produced by scholars in Wa, by Malam Isaka (Friday Imam [Limam] Ishāq b. 'Uthmān, ca. 1860–1931) among others, which have been studied and partially reproduced by Ivor Wilks.<sup>53</sup> Other texts from Wa scholars include Malam Abu's manuscripts on the history of the Zabarma as well as on Babatu and Samori, which were initially commissioned by British officials.<sup>54</sup> In Dagbon, too, several local

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'Umar or Alhaji 'Umar [Umaru/Imoru] (ca. 1858–1934) was born in Kano but moved to Salaga in 1892 where he established a *makarantar manya* or advanced school in Islamic sciences. After the (second) Salaga civil war he moved to Kete-Krachi (German Togoland), where he became Imam of the Friday Mosque. During the period of German rule, he closely collaborated with the German administrator and Hausa expert Adam Mischlich, who commissioned and translated most of Imām 'Umar's texts on Hausa social and economic conditions (Mischlich 1907–1909, Mischlich 1942). In 1913 he went to Mecca, returning in 1918. Thereafter he lived in Kete-Krachi (then British mandated territory) until his death (ALA IV, 2003, 586–588). He was one of the most influential Muslim scholars of his time in Togoland, the Gold Coast and Northern Nigeria and was the spiritual head of the Muslims in Togoland and the Gold Coast. The most recent bibliography of Imam 'Umar is presented in Pilaszewicz 2000. I have written in Swedish a presentation on Imam 'Umar (Weiss 2002d).

<sup>46</sup> Ferguson 1973, Pilaszewicz 2000.

<sup>47</sup> *Nazm al-la'ālī bi-akhbār wa tanbīh al-kirām*, 'The Arrival of the Christians', see Pilaszewicz 1975.

<sup>48</sup> Pilaszewicz 2000. The various Hausa Ajami manuscripts are fully presented in Pilaszewicz 2001.

<sup>49</sup> *Wakar talauci da wadata*, 'The Song of Poverty and Wealth', see Duffill 1986, Duffill 1989.

<sup>50</sup> Heepe 1928.

<sup>51</sup> Sölken 1959/60, 124.

<sup>52</sup> Goody and Mustafa 1967. Krause MSS: The Organisation, Departure and March of a Hausa Caravan from Kano to Salaga; Message from King Andani to Caravan Leader (*Madugu*) Isa Sarahu in Salaga; Letter from Madugu Isa Sarahu in Salaga to King Andani in Yendi, December, 1893; Reply of the Dagomba Warriors to the Message from their King, December, 1893.

<sup>53</sup> Wilks 1989, 48; ALA IV, 2003, 566–567.

<sup>54</sup> Pilaszewicz 1992, 10–11; ALA IV, 2003, 565. Malam Abu's narrative was already partially translated by J.J. Holden during the 1960s (Holden 1965); a further translation of the text was made by

Arabic manuscripts have been found, despite the destruction of all official files and manuscripts in Yendi when the town was sacked by the Germans in 1900. Several of the Dagbon manuscripts have been consulted and translated by Phyllis Ferguson, the most important being the chronicle of the Mole scholars.<sup>55</sup>

However, one might claim that texts produced by Muslim intellectuals, who in the case of the Hausa *malams* even might be regarded as foreigners, at least on an ethnic basis in Dagbon or Gonja, would be biased and reflect a Muslim or even Islamic version of past events and intrigues. One can, though, also find some non-Muslim versions of northern history and society, including the mimeographed manuscript by E.F. Tamakloe on the Dagomba.<sup>56</sup> Tamakloe's text is a reflection on local history and society based on oral sources and is similar to anthropological research, such as that by Cardinall, Rattray and Tait.<sup>57</sup> The common denominator in all of these theses is to downplay or even exclude the 'northern factor'. This is, on the other hand, not surprising as these anthropological studies dealt with societies that either had had a painful relationship with Muslims or claimed Muslim warlords and kings, such as Babatu and Samori, or had felt the impact of slave raiding most directly as being the target groups for Gonja and Dagbon slave raids.

Another important written account on societies in the precolonial Voltaic Basin are the various reports produced by the Fanti George Ekem Ferguson,<sup>58</sup> who as a British official extensively travelled the north and, in fact, greatly shaped the British perception of the social and political conditions in the Voltaic Basin. He was the first outside spectator who made the division of the region into 'stateless' societies and 'organized government'.<sup>59</sup>

### 3.2. European Written Accounts and Archival Sources

Ekem Ferguson and Tamakloe were local civil servants whose texts can be labelled 'indigenous' outsider accounts of local histories and customs. Their texts also serve as a kind of bridge between a precolonial and a colonial European interest in the North. Although Europeans had been present on the coast since the late fifteenth century, and an increasing number of European travel accounts on the coastal region (the Lower Guinea Coast) had been produced before the nineteenth century, few of these accounts include any information about the coastal hinterland. Only during the seventeenth century did some information about the state of affairs in the Voltaic Basin, such as the Asante campaign against Gonja and Dagbon, trickle down to the

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Pilaszewicz in 1992. For a critical commentary on Pilaszewicz' translation as well as a discussion about the identity of Malam Abu, see Wilks 1993b.

<sup>55</sup> Ferguson 1972.

<sup>56</sup> Tamakloe 1931a. Also included in Cardinall 1931 (= Tamakloe 1931b).

<sup>57</sup> Cardinall 1921a + 1921b, Rattray 1932, Tait 1954, Tait 1961.

<sup>58</sup> Ferguson's reports have been edited and published by Kwame Arhin (Arhin 1974a).

<sup>59</sup> Sampson 1956; Thomas 1972.

coast.<sup>60</sup> Two accounts by British Residents in Kumasi from the early nineteenth century, those by Bowdich and Dupuis,<sup>61</sup> are regarded as being among the first sources that contain firsthand information about the Muslim community in Kumasi and its wider Sudanic network. However, despite a few reports by colonial military officers, European traders and Protestant (Basle) missionaries from the 1870s and 1880s,<sup>62</sup> little was known about the North and even less about the Muslim minorities until the travel accounts of Binger and Ekem Ferguson.<sup>63</sup>

German and British imperial activities in the coastal hinterlands of the Gold Coast and Togo increased towards the end of the nineteenth century and ended in the formal demarcation of the borders and the division of the region into the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast and Northern Togo. Both British and German authorities were interested to gain firsthand information about their realms, which resulted in a variety of early investigations into local political, social and economic conditions.<sup>64</sup> Even Christian missionary societies tried to get a foothold in the North, and whereas much of the Northern Territories remained closed to Christian missionary activities for several decades, Northern Togo was opened to Catholic and Protestant missionary societies in 1912. For a short period – between 1913 and 1916 – the Basle Mission Society had a mission station at Yendi.<sup>65</sup> Apart from the published travel report by Fisch and an article on the Dagbamba,<sup>66</sup> which contains some interesting information about local culture and customs, there are some interesting unpublished reports by the missionaries in the Basle Missionary Archive including an assessment on the impact of Islam in Yendi.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>60</sup> See further Chapter III.

<sup>61</sup> Bowdich 1819, Dupuis 1824.

<sup>62</sup> Gouldsbury's 1877 account on Salaga and Yendi is filed in CO 879/9, the National Archives (TNA), Kew; on the activities of the French trader M. Bonnat on the Volta and his account of Salaga in 1876, see Goody 1966a and Johnson 1968. The reports of the Basle missionaries' missions to Salaga during the 1870s, including David Asante's accounts, are located in the Basel Mission Archive (BMA) in Basle.

<sup>63</sup> The French Captain L.G. Binger headed a military expedition that traversed the western Sudanic savannah during the late 1880s from the Upper Niger River via Mossi country to the coast, aiming to explore the region and to sign treaties with local rulers. See further Binger 1892.

<sup>64</sup> Watherston 1908; Armitage 1913; Duncan-Johnstone 1932; Eyre-Smith 1933; von François 1888; von Zech 1904. Most of the British investigations were never published but are deposited in the National Archives of Ghana (Public Records and Archives Department, PRAAD) in Accra under file ADM 11/1/824, Essays by Assistant District Commissioners on Tribal History. Among others, these include the following colonial investigations: G.F. Mackay: *A Short Essay on the History and Customs of the Mamprussi Tribe* (s.a.), R.A. Irvine: *Dagomba* (1908); R.A. Irvine: *Mamprusi* (1908), J.K.G. Syme: *The Kusasis. A Short History* (s.a.), J. Withers Gill: *A Short History of the Dagomba Tribe* (s.a.); F.W.F. Jackson: *Bole District* (s.a.); H.T.C. Wheeler: *A Description of Customs of the Gonja Tribe, Salaga District* (1906); J. O'Kinealy: *Navarro District* (1907); B. Moutray Read: *Wa or Wala* (1908); H.A. Blair: *An Essay upon the Dagomba People* (1931).

<sup>65</sup> See further Chapter III.4.4 as well as Weiss 2005b.

<sup>66</sup> Frisch 1911; Frisch 1913.

<sup>67</sup> Especially Otto Schimming's letter to the Missionary Headquarters in Basle, "Unsere Beziehungen zu den Muhammedanern," dated 11.9.1913, filed in BMA D-1,104.



Although both colonial and missionary accounts of the local conditions must be carefully assessed and dealt with, many of the texts give valuable pieces of information not only about society at large but also on the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. An important aspect, which many of these accounts either directly or indirectly note, is the relationship between the imams and the rulers; some accounts even mentioned a tension between the ruler's imam and the Friday Imam in some locations.

However, despite the increasing presence of Europeans in the North, there is a relative silence and lack of (written) sources on the Muslim community and the emergence of a 'Muslim sphere' in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast and later on in Ghana. Annual Reports from the British administration in the North, in addition to various District Reports, Progress Reports, District Diaries and Informal Diaries, which I consulted in the archives in Accra, Tamale, London and Oxford do not contain much information about the Muslim community.<sup>68</sup> As I will argue in Chapters Four through Six, the silence in the written sources is mainly due to the non-integrated Muslim sphere during both the colonial and the postcolonial period. However, another reason for the lack of sources on the Muslim community in the North or, even more appalling, on the process of Islamization in the North during the twentieth century, was – at least in the case of the British in the Northern Territories – the increasing disinterest of the colonial authorities in reporting about and engaging with the Muslim community.<sup>69</sup>

Still, some reports and articles that were dealing with the Muslim community in Gold Coast were published during the colonial period. However, all of these accounts dealt with Muslims in the South, either as a curious new minority that one had slowly started to recognize,<sup>70</sup> or, increasingly, as a closed, outwardly homogeneous entity of migrants and strangers in the *zongos* of the southern cities, most notably Accra.<sup>71</sup> Subsequent studies, including the various census reports (1911, 1921, 1931, 1948, 1960, 2000) as well as the US Government Religious

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<sup>68</sup> The colonial documents consulted in Accra are the ADM-files whereas those in Tamale are the NRG-files. An informal catalogue of the Regional Archive in Tamale has been published by Patterson 1976. However, although working at the archives in Tamale was easy and the archivist did a great job, the condition of the files is pathetic and some of the files are in an advanced state of decay. In addition, the cataloguing method is sometimes unclear, for example, files containing only Annual Reports from the North-Western Province are headed as 'Northern Territories, Annual Report thus and so,' making research interesting but time consuming!

<sup>69</sup> There are not many files on Muslim in the Gold Coast in the National Archives (TNA), formerly the Public Record Office in Kew. At first I was somewhat perplexed by this, but reading these files made me aware of the fact that Islam was not perceived by the British colonial authorities to be a threat to their rule in the Northern Territories. However, in some of the deposited material in the African and Commonwealth Library at Rhodes House (RH) in Oxford, especially those of Angus Colin Duncan-Johnstone, one can find some remarks on Muslims in the Gold Coast, including the first investigation on the Ahmadiyya and their activities in the Gold Coast.

<sup>70</sup> Brown 1927.

<sup>71</sup> Rouch 1954; Price 1954.

Freedom Reports from 1999 to 2003 (all available on the Internet), have been consulted in an attempt to study the governmental image of Muslims (Chapter Six). In addition, recent studies on politics, conflicts and minority issues in contemporary Ghana by E. Gyimah-Boadi and Richard Asante, Adam Higazi, Tom Hughes as well as Dzodzi Tsikata and Wayo Seini have been consulted.<sup>72</sup>

### 3.3. Newspapers, ‘Grey Literature’, and ‘Radio Trottoire’

Another important corpus of information on the religious development and changes in contemporary Ghana are the newspapers. I have made use of two different types of publications, national newspapers such as the *Daily Graphic*, the *Ghana Times*, the *Ghanaian Chronicle*, the *Public Agenda* and the *Accra Daily Mail* and Muslim magazines such as *The Muslim Searchlight* and *The Fountain*.<sup>73</sup> These two types of publications differ widely in content and distribution. Some of the national newspapers are published on a daily base and have a fairly large geographical distribution, such as the *Daily Graphic*, while others have a more restricted geographical distribution, such as the *Accra Daily Mail*.<sup>74</sup> All of the major newspapers are published in Accra and thus represent a ‘Southern’ perspective, which is reflected in their writings about the North or on Muslims. However, the national newspapers have taken a relatively neutral position on religious matters, and directly critical or even aggressive attacks against the Muslim minority have not been published. National newspapers generally report larger Muslim meetings and events, such as the annual ‘*Id al-fitr*’ and ‘*Id al-adha*’ festivities, where the representatives of the state – either the President or the Vice-President – are giving speeches which can be analyzed to clarify the official position of the government towards the Muslims. Meetings and conferences of Muslim NGOs are usually also widely covered, or at least part of their communiqués are published and commented upon. In this respect, the Ghanaian Muslim community sometimes receives positive feedback in the mass media.

Several Ghanaian newspapers are available on the Internet, which has made research increasingly easy.<sup>75</sup> However, generally only the major articles and news which are published in the printed version of a newspaper are also published electronically. In addition, only some of the newspapers have good electronic archives.

<sup>72</sup> Gyimah and Asante 2003; Higazi 2004; Hughes 2003; Tsikata and Seini 2004.

<sup>73</sup> The *Daily Graphic* and the *Ghanaian Times* are state funded newspapers, whereas the *Ghanaian Chronicle* and the *Accra Daily Mail* are private funded and the *Public Agenda* is published by an NGO.

<sup>74</sup> See further Hasty 2005. The size of the papers varies between the *Accra Daily Mail* which publishes about 4,000 copies per number and the *Daily Graphic*, which publishes between 50,000 and 60,000 copy per issue.

<sup>75</sup> Websites (checked 4.1.2007) for the *Daily Graphic* (<http://www.graphicghana.info/>), the *Ghanaian Chronicle* (<http://www.ghanaian-chronicle.com/>), the *Ghanaian Times* (<http://www.ghanaweb.com/times/>), and the *Accra Daily Mail* (<http://www.accra-mail.com/>).

At present, the *Accra Daily Mail* has one of the best electronic newspaper archives if one is to cover articles on Muslims and Islam in Ghana. In fact, one could even argue that the *Accra Daily Mail* is (certainly) pro-NPP and very sympathetic to issues concerning the Muslim population. For example, in 2005 the publisher and editor-in-chief Haruna Attah<sup>76</sup> argued strongly in favour of a more pro-Muslim foreign policy when claiming: “The Kufour Administration has been very successful in its foreign policy, but it’s all been centred around West Africa, Africa, Europe and the US. The time has come for us to cultivate the Middle East.”<sup>77</sup>

A free press is generally regarded as an important mirror of current political, social and economic issues and of public opinion in a country. Since the 1990s, Ghana, too, has (again) a free press. However, in terms of voicing public opinion, free radio broadcasting is even more important, especially in a country like Ghana where a large part of the population, and especially the lower classes, are illiterate. As has been emphasized by several researchers, the radio – and per extension the so-called ‘*radio trottoir*’ (bush telegraph) or the discussions at gatherings and exchange of information or only rumours – is, in such societies, more important than newspapers,<sup>78</sup> although talk-shows and other programmes repeat newspaper articles and ask the opinion of their listeners.<sup>79</sup> However, to integrate the discussions and debates on the radio as well as that of the ‘*radio trottoire*’ in my research on Muslims and Islam in contemporary Ghana would have been too much for this study, although in retrospect I realize that I should have made an effort at least to cover some of the Muslim programmes of the local radio station on the campus in Legon.

Despite being the second largest religious group in Ghana, there exists no widespread Muslim newspaper. There have been several efforts by the Ahlus-Sunna to launch a Ghanaian daily Muslim newspaper, but with little result. One reason for this shortcoming has been the lack of resources, both in terms of trained media personnel and funding. Yet, the greatest obstacle for a Muslim daily newspaper has been the lack of a Muslim readership. At various times, the editors of *The Muslim Searchlight*, one of the few, irregular Muslim newspapers that were published in Ghana, urged Muslims to buy the newspaper, but in vain. This situation reflects the relatively poor state of the Muslim community, both in Accra and in the rest of the country: most of the Muslims are either too poor to afford the luxury of buying a newspaper or have little or no reading knowledge of the English language. Thus, although the Ahlus-Sunna tried for years to subsidize the publishing of *The Muslim*

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<sup>76</sup> For an interview with Haruna Attah and his evaluation of the Ghanaian newspaper landscape, see “Ghanaian Media is Quite Rudimentary,” *Media Rights Monitor* 7:9, September 2002, 8–12, available at <http://mediarightsagenda.org/MRM%202002/MRM%20September%202002.pdf> (4.1.2007).

<sup>77</sup> “Shukran, Prince Alwaleed! Ghana must diversify by bringing in the Mid-East,” *Accra Daily Mail* 6.6.2005.

<sup>78</sup> Ellis 2002, 19.

<sup>79</sup> Yankah 2004.

*Searchlight*, the publication is at present only a monthly magazine due to financial constraints. What is even more appalling is the lack of Sunni initiatives to launch a newspaper or magazine project. *The Muslim Searchlight* being the mouthpiece of the Ahlus-Sunna, the Sunni majority has been silent apart from Shaykh Mustapha Ibrahim's attempt to launch his own magazine, *The Humanitarian*. However, this magazine has been the mouthpiece of Shaykh Mustapha's NGO, the Islamic Council for Development and Humanitarian Services, ICODEHS, largely presenting the various social welfare projects which have been commissioned through the organization. On the other hand, for research on Muslim social welfare, both *The Muslim Searchlight* and *The Humanitarian* provide interesting – though biased – information which is usually not published in the national newspapers.<sup>80</sup>

Further bits information on the contemporary Muslim community in Ghana can be found in the so-called 'grey literature'. I have been able to buy some locally published pamphlets and booklets by indigenous and foreign Muslim scholars, mainly covering issues concerning marriage and inheritance. Usually such booklets are on display near the mosques during the Friday prayers, and in some places in Nima and other 'Muslim' suburbs of Accra, one can find 'Muslim' bookshops, but none in Tamale, for example! What I really wanted to find were local treatises on almsgiving and poverty, but so far I have failed to find any. Perhaps Alhaji Mumuni and the scholars in the North that I interviewed are right when they said that the tradition of Imam 'Umar of writing treatises on religious and social issues has been lost, although I do hope that this is not the case and I just did not look in the right places.

### 3.4. Academic Writing on the 'Northern Factor'

Apart from written accounts, archival sources, newspapers and interviews, earlier academic research forms an integral and important part of my study. Published academic texts, articles or monographs, usually include a wealth of information which is either difficult to get access to, or, in case of anthropological investigations, more or less impossible. At the same time, one has to acknowledge the fact that earlier academic studies are, like other written texts, individual interpretations of a historical event, past actions or the (then) present time, or (possible) reconstructions of the past. Academic historical research is aware of the postmodern critique. Consequently, my own text can only be a reflection of earlier texts and other people's opinions, blended with personal intuition and accumulated insight. The result of my 'hotchpotch' cannot therefore be anything but a personal synthesis of a possible history and development of Islam and the Muslim community in Ghana, not 'A' or 'The History'.

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<sup>80</sup> An outline of Muslim media use in Ghana is outlined in Sawimi 2006, Appendix III.

My own research will – hopefully – be a contribution to the study of the Ghanaian past and the ‘northern factor’ in Voltaic/Ghanaian history. Although there were a few studies carried out by British colonial officials on the ‘history and society’ of the Northern Territories, modern academic research only started in the 1950s, when historians like John Fage and anthropologists like Jack Goody started to outline the ‘long’ history of the northern regions, especially the trade connections between the Voltaic Basin and the Middle Niger River.<sup>81</sup> An important insight of the early academic research was the idea of the importance of the ‘northern factor’, and, consequently, the study of the development and impact of Islam became a major theme among foreign and Ghanaian historians for the next decades.<sup>82</sup> However, any study on the ‘history and society’ of the northern regions has to consult the colonial investigations into ‘social customs and political traditions’ by Cardinall, Blair, Duncan-Johnstone and Eyre-Smith.<sup>83</sup> Although one finds rather little direct information on Muslims in their reports, the bits and pieces one is able to find, in addition to other unpublished material, provides the basis for any further research on both Muslim and non-Muslim societies in Northern Ghana.

The economic and political realities of the North in Ghana are clearly reflected in academic research in Ghana. Whereas there was a profound interest during the 1960s in collecting Arabic and Hausa manuscripts by the research staff of the Institute of African studies (IAS) at Legon,<sup>84</sup> such activities ceased during the following decades – although this was much due to the decline of the Ghanaian economy which was also reflected in the financial crisis of Ghanaian universities. Projects, such as the Yendi Project by the IAS and North-Western University (Evanston, IL.), which were started during the late 1960s, were not followed up, and apart from a few Ghanaian historians, such as R. Bagulo Bening, N.J.K. Brukum, Benedict G. Der and A.A. Iliasu few have concentrated on Northern history and societies since then.<sup>85</sup>

The Yendi Project was, therefore, to become a single landmark.<sup>86</sup> The project was an interesting undertaking where historians, sociologists, anthropologists and linguists combined their efforts to conduct research on the history and impact of Islam in northern Ghana.<sup>87</sup> (A similar combined research project was simultaneously conducted in the South.) The outcome of the Yendi project were some 15 mimeo-

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<sup>81</sup> Fage 1964; Goody 1953; Goody 1954.

<sup>82</sup> Wilks 1961.

<sup>83</sup> Cardinall 1921a, Cardinall 1921b, Cardinall 1921–22, Cardinall 1931; Blair 1932, Duncan-Johnstone 1932, Eyre-Smith 1933. For a critical assessment, see Lentz 1998, Grischow 1998, Lentz 1999, Hawkins 2002 and Grischow 2006.

<sup>84</sup> Wilks 2003.

<sup>85</sup> Bening 1971, Bening 1973, Bening 1976, Bening 1990, Bening 1995; Brukum 1998a, Brukum 1998b, Brukum 1999, Brukum 2000–2001; Der 1974, Der 1979, Der 1998; Iliasu 1971, Iliasu 1975.

<sup>86</sup> A similar project was conducted in Gonja in 1969, see *Oral Traditions of Gonja* 1969.

<sup>87</sup> Wilks 2003, 34.

graphed volumes of field-notes on various topics, such as the mosques, the imams and Muslim life in Yendi,<sup>88</sup> the assimilation of Hausa families in Yendi,<sup>89</sup> or the role of the Zabarimas in Yendi.<sup>90</sup> Other studies conducted on the history and impact of Islam in Ghana concentrated on the Sufi orders,<sup>91</sup> the spread of Islam to southern Ghana<sup>92</sup> or Muslim literacy and Islamic learning in Ghana.<sup>93</sup> Last, but not least, at the end of the 1960s Nehemiah Levtzion published his monograph on Islam in the Volta region.<sup>94</sup> In addition to Wilks' and Levtzion's published works, one must place the writings of Jack Goody (as well as J. A. Braimah) into this period of intensified research on both the 'northern factor' as well as the impact of Islam in Northern Ghana, especially in Gonja.<sup>95</sup>

Thus, by the end of the 1960s, Wilks and his research group had been concentrating on Dagbon for a decade whereas Goody covered Gonja. Further groundwork for Northern Ghanaian history was laid at this time. Academic research during the 1970s resulted in the standard works on the political history of Dagbon, especially that of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, by Martin Staniland,<sup>96</sup> and on the political history of twentieth-century Northern Ghana, especially focussing on the emergence and impact of Northern regionalism, by Paul André Ladoceur.<sup>97</sup> Christine Oppong's research on childhood and adolescence in Dagbon has remained a landmark.<sup>98</sup> An interesting piece of work within the field of political anthropology is Birgitte Benzing's research on the emergence and development of political offices and statehood in Dagbon,<sup>99</sup> a topic that has been further elaborated within the framework of the 'early state' by Peter Skalnik.<sup>100</sup> One of Skalnik's main precursor in studying the uneasy relationship between 'early states' and societies without a clear-cut political hierarchy, i.e., segmentary or non-centralized societies, in the precolonial Voltaic Basin was Jack Goody and his *Technology, Tradition and the State in Africa*.<sup>101</sup>

Two central studies on the impact and development of Islam in Ghana were produced during the 1970s. Phyllis Ferguson's unfortunately unpublished PhD dissertation has remained the key source of information on the emergence and

<sup>88</sup> Stevens 1968; Wilks 1968b; Moro 1968.

<sup>89</sup> Lubeck 1968.

<sup>90</sup> Holden 1968.

<sup>91</sup> Stewart 1965.

<sup>92</sup> Dretke 1968.

<sup>93</sup> Hodgkin 1966; Wilks 1968a; Ferguson 1973.

<sup>94</sup> Levtzion 1968.

<sup>95</sup> Goody 1966a, Goody 1966b, Goody 1967, Goody 1968, Goody 1970; Braimah and Goody 1967.

<sup>96</sup> Staniland 1975.

<sup>97</sup> Ladoceur 1979.

<sup>98</sup> Oppong 1973.

<sup>99</sup> Benzing 1971.

<sup>100</sup> Skalnik 1975; Skalnik 1978.

<sup>101</sup> Goody 1971.

formation of Muslim offices in precolonial Dagbon, whereas Enid Schildkrout's anthropological research does not only provide insights into the history of the Mossi *zongo* in Kumasi but has become the starting point for any research on Muslim migrants and the relationship between stranger communities and local societies in Ghana.<sup>102</sup>

Although the groundwork was laid for future research during the 1960s and 1970s on both Northern Ghanaian history in general, and the Muslim/'northern' factor in particular, academic research dwindled during the next decade. However, a few important studies, mostly articles, were published by Ghanaian researchers during these years, and since the 1980s there has been a profound proliferation in both thematic research and output.

One thematic extension of research was the focus on Mampurugu and Wala history. Starting with David C. Davis' and A.A. Iliasu's work on British colonialism in Mamprusi (Mampurugu),<sup>103</sup> research by Davis and Ducker-Brown has highlighted the (limited/restricted) impact of Islam and the emergence of Muslim offices in precolonial Mampurugu.<sup>104</sup> Wilks' monograph on Wa was the first study on the relationship between colonial authorities and the local Muslim community.<sup>105</sup>

The colonial roots of the Ghanaian North-South divide have been the topic for several researchers. David Kimble's, David E. Apter's, Dennis Austin's and Richard Rathbone's monographs provide an insight into colonial and postcolonial politics with some reference to Northern Ghana.<sup>106</sup> Another topic has been the late colonial period and the rise of political activism,<sup>107</sup> including the formation of a Muslim party (the Moslem [Muslim] Association Party) and its failure to develop into a national political player.<sup>108</sup> The North-South divide is further elaborated by political and social scientists in a recent anthology on regionalism and public policy in Northern Ghana.<sup>109</sup> Raymond Bagulo Bening's monograph on Ghanaian regional and national boundaries serves as the most important overview of the geographical dimension of national integration.<sup>110</sup>

Colonial and postcolonial educational policies and the lack of interest in Muslim education has recently been a much discussed topic among Ghanaian researchers. A framework of colonial and postcolonial educational policy is also provided by Bening whereas various aspects of Muslim education, both the lack of colonial interest as well as the need for modern education for Muslim children, is

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<sup>102</sup> Schildkrout 1978.

<sup>103</sup> Iliasu 1975; Davis 1987.

<sup>104</sup> Davis 1986; Davis 1997; Ducker-Brown 1986.

<sup>105</sup> Wilks 1989.

<sup>106</sup> Apter 1955; Kimble 1963; Austin 1966; Rathbone 2000.

<sup>107</sup> Brukum 1998a; Brukum 1999.

<sup>108</sup> Balogun 1987; Allman 1991; Ahmed-Rufai 2002.

<sup>109</sup> Saaka 1987, republished in Saaka 2001.

<sup>110</sup> Bening 1999. The monograph includes his earlier studies, such as Bening 1971 and Bening 1976.

discussed by several Ghanaian Muslim scholars.<sup>111</sup> The history of Islamic education is outlined in an article by David Owusu-Ansah.<sup>112</sup>

There has been little research on Sufism and Sufi-orders in Ghana. Charles Stewart's study on the origins and spread of the Tijaniyya is still the only one on that particular topic,<sup>113</sup> although the spread of the Tijaniyya Sufi-order as the result of Ibrahim Niasses' visit to Tamale during the 1950s has been studied by Mervyn Hiskett and recently by Rüdiger Seesemann.<sup>114</sup> Imam 'Umar's (Alhaji Umar) connection to the Tijaniyya and his writings as a Tijani have also been examined.<sup>115</sup>

There are a few general studies on the state of Islam and the conditions of the Muslim community in contemporary Ghana, like those by Bruce M. Haight, Ryan, Sulemana Mumuni, M. Sey and Nathan Samwini.<sup>116</sup> Little academic research has been conducted on Islam and Muslims in the North, apart from Salifu Abdel Seidu's thesis on Islam in Dagbon, J.S. Eades' monograph on Yoruba traders in Tamale and Annette Haber Ihle's thesis on Muslim youth in Tamale.<sup>117</sup> In similar ways, the question of poverty, *zakat* and the Muslim community has received little interest, although there are some Ghanaian academic theses which either discuss or tackle this problem, including Ahmed Kwame Boakye's on *zakat* (with special emphasis on the Ahmadiyya),<sup>118</sup> Atakole K. Rockson's on poverty and the opinion of Muslim scholars in Tamale,<sup>119</sup> and Awudu on aspects of almsgiving in a Muslim community in Asante.<sup>120</sup> In addition, there is my inquiry on poverty and *zakat* in twentieth-century Ghana.<sup>121</sup>

Islam and Muslims in Asante, on the other hand, has been a subject which has been studied from various angles.<sup>122</sup> One angle has been the question of failed or aborted Islamization, namely the negative response of Asante to Muslim influence as well as the relationship between the Asante state and the Muslim minority/stranger community.<sup>123</sup> Other studies have focussed on the relationship between the stranger

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<sup>111</sup> Sey 1997a; Iddrisu 2000; Sey 2001; Iddrisu 2002; Mumuni 2003; Mumuni 2004; Iddrisu 2005. For a nowadays outdated, but still interesting regional comparison between Islamic education in various West African countries, see Skinner 1983.

<sup>112</sup> Owusu-Ansah 2002.

<sup>113</sup> Stewart 1965.

<sup>114</sup> Hiskett 1980; Seesemann 2004.

<sup>115</sup> Abdul-Razaq 1996.

<sup>116</sup> Haight 1991; Ryan 1996; Sey 1997a+1997b; Sey 2001; Samwini 2006.

<sup>117</sup> Seidu 1989; Eades 1994; Ihle 2003.

<sup>118</sup> Boakye 1975.

<sup>119</sup> Rockson 2002.

<sup>120</sup> Awudu 2003.

<sup>121</sup> Weiss 2007a.

<sup>122</sup> For an overview, see Silverman and Owusu-Ansah 1989.

<sup>123</sup> Wilks 1975; Owusu-Ansah 1983; Owusu-Ansah 1987a; Owusu-Ansah 1987b; Owusu-Ansah 2003.



community and local government,<sup>124</sup> the Kumasi Imamate,<sup>125</sup> and Islam and asylum as well as Islam and identity in the Kumasi *zongo*.<sup>126</sup>

There has been a similar academic interest in the Muslim community in Accra. Starting with James P. Dretke's MA thesis on Muslims in Accra,<sup>127</sup> researchers have studied Islamic affiliation among the Sisala migrants in Accra,<sup>128</sup> intra-religious changes in Madina, an Accra suburb,<sup>129</sup> and various aspects of the life of Muslim women in Accra, such as solidarity among Muslim women.<sup>130</sup> Another topic has been the relationship between local authorities and the Muslim community, including the internal segmentation and division of the Muslims.<sup>131</sup> Mumuni has also studied Muslim political activities in terms of the organization of Muslim NGOs.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Schildkrout 1970b; Peil 1971.

<sup>125</sup> Owusu-Ansah 1996.

<sup>126</sup> Maier 1996; Kramer 1996.

<sup>127</sup> Dretke 1968.

<sup>128</sup> Grindal 1973.

<sup>129</sup> Peil 1994.

<sup>130</sup> Pellow 1987.

<sup>131</sup> Pellow 1985; Pellow 1991; Pellow 2002.

<sup>132</sup> Mumuni 1994; Mumuni 2002.

