

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THE COLONIAL STATE AND MUSLIMS IN THE NORTH**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

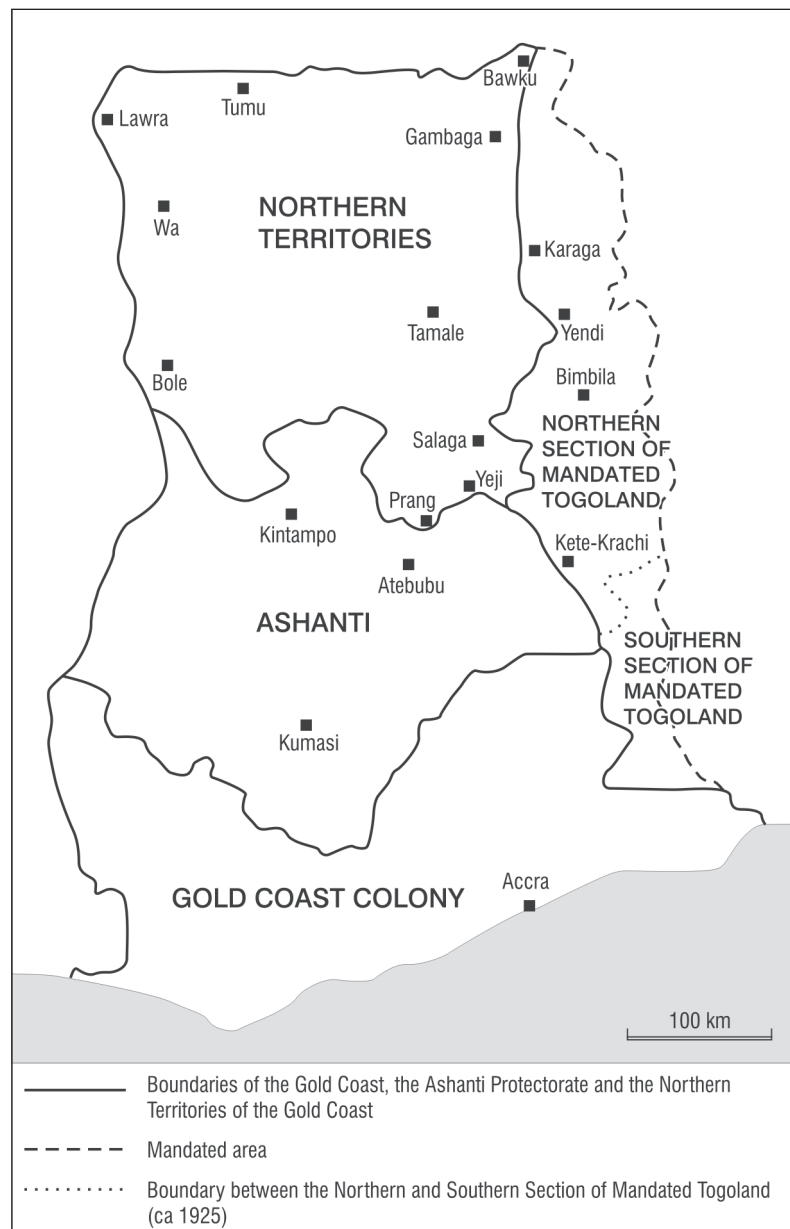
The aim of this chapter is to investigate British perceptions of Islam and Muslims in the Northern Territories up to the early 1930s. My key object is to examine the various positions of the colonial officials in the North towards Muslims and how these perceptions changed during the period of observation. In the Northern Territories, it will be argued, British attitudes shifted from a ‘pro-Muslim’ perspective to an indifferent, if not derogative one.

In retrospect, it seems as if the colonial officials were confused by the kind of Islam that was practiced in the Northern Territories. Many of them seemed to have thought that there existed a kind of a ‘true’, monolithic Islam that had been outlined and studied by European experts for centuries. This ‘idealistic’ image of Islam was based on the scholarly interpretation of legal and religious texts, which had produced a legal and moral code that Western scholars thought to be the only true way to live and act as a Muslim.<sup>1</sup> Thus, according to the European – and increasingly also according to a radical or reformist Muslim – notion, there existed something like an *Urislam*, Pure Islam or a Right Path, which was not followed by most of the Muslims (especially in sub-Saharan Africa). Whereas colonial officials only made sarcastic remarks about the various ways Islam was mixed with local beliefs, precolonial Muslim militant reformers went a step further and condemned the mixers and syncretists as unbelievers.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first part, early twentieth-century British attitudes towards Islam in West Africa are presented. Basically, two perceptions are identified, a positive and a negative one, which were also held by early British colonial officials. The second section deals with the changing perception on Islam and Muslims in the Northern Territories and contains a subsection with information from the early censuses and the data about the Muslim population. In another subsection, various British policies and perceptions towards Muslim are discussed, including education, marriage law and the use of *malams* in the administration. In the third section, the impact of British policy towards Islam and Muslims is discussed within a West African framework.

---

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion, see Djait 1985 and Hourani 1991.



**Map 15.** The Gold Coast and Togoland (1925).

### 1.1. Imagined Development in the Northern Territories

British forces occupied Kumasi in January 1896 and Asante was effectively brought under colonial domination. Thereafter, in November 1896, the British forces in Asante moved farther north and in June 1898 the boundaries between the British, French and German possessions were defined. By an Order in Council issued in September 1901, the Gold Coast Colony and the Protected Territories south of the river Pra were merged, while Ashanti (Asante) and the Northern Territories were proclaimed a colony and a protectorate respectively, with effect from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1902. The Northern Territories were under a Chief Commissioner who

was responsible to the Governor, resident in Accra. In effect, however, the North was under British military rule between 1902 and 1906, after which a modification of the administrative structures were undertaken and a Constabulary force replaced the army battalions to cut down on administrative costs.<sup>1</sup>

The administrative system that was to prevail until the early 1930s has been characterized by Ladouceur as one of 'direct rule'. The general policy was to rule through the chiefs, who were regarded as mere instruments for implementing orders and had no inherent political authority.<sup>2</sup> At the head of the administrative hierarchy was the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories (CCNT). Under him were two (three) Provincial Commissioners (PC) who supervised the activities of a number of District Commissioners (DC). The tasks of the DCs' were to maintain law and order in their districts, they presided over their own courts and supervise the local constabulary. In addition, he was required to promote the economic and social development of his district. However, due to the lack of personnel and transportation infrastructure, effective control of the districts was seldom a reality. During the first decades of colonial rule, there were about 20 Europeans stationed in the North, and by 1927, their number had increased to 27.<sup>3</sup>

During the 1920s and early 1930s, there was a discussion among the colonial officers as to whether to implement Indirect Rule in the Gold Coast Colony and Ashanti as well as in the Northern Territories,<sup>4</sup> but the outcome of the discussion was that the classical application of Indirect rule of the type developed by Lord Lugard in Northern Nigeria was never applied in the Colony and in Ashanti due to the fact that it was felt to be unsuitable. Only in 1932 was a Native Authorities system established in the region.<sup>5</sup>

As early as 1899, the Governor of the Gold Coast, Sir F.M. Hodgson, remarked that the commercial potential of the Northern Territories was not favourable as there were no natural resources readily available for exploitation. The policy of 'benign neglect' initiated by Hodgson in 1899 was pursued by succeeding Governors who saw the Northern Territories mainly as a source of unskilled labour for the exploitation of the southern part of the country. By confining expenditure to the smallest amount consistent with maintaining British rights in the Protectorate, the authorities caused the area to stagnate economically. The British officials in Accra

---

<sup>1</sup> Plange 1984, 35–37; Bening 1999, 5–7.

<sup>2</sup> Ladouceur 1979, 41.

<sup>3</sup> Lance 1995, 126–127. For a critical perspective on the actions of the DCs, see Plange 1984, 37–38.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the Chief Commissioner stated in a letter: "... we should be guided by the Nigerian Native Courts Ordinance, the Nigerian Native Authority Ordinance and, in addition, the Tanganyika Native Administration Ordinance" (PRAAD/T NRG 8/2/32, Memo by CCNT to CNP, 21.8.1931).

<sup>5</sup> Apter 1955, 123, 133. The formal framework for Indirect Rule in the Northern Territories consisted of three ordinances approved in 1932: the Native Authority Ordinance, the Native Tribunals Ordinance and the Native Treasuries Ordinance. See further Staniland 1975, 86–98; Ladouceur 1979, 55–57.

had not the slightest interest in the affairs of the North.<sup>6</sup> As the policy of limiting government investment in the area persisted, the regional economic disparities and the effect of restrictive educational policies applied in the Protectorate constituted a handicap for the political integration of the Northern Territories with Ashanti and the Colony in 1946.<sup>7</sup>

British colonial officials usually declared that the wealth of the Northern Territories was its labour force and its agricultural potential. In the case of labour policies, the colonial administration first supported labour migration to the plantations and mines in Ashanti Protectorate and the Gold Coast Colony where there was an ever-increasing demand for wage labour. In 1906, the colonial government started recruiting labour from the Northern Territories.<sup>8</sup> During the 1920s, however, colonial officials in the North started to look critically at the expanding labour migrations out of the territory and largely stopped putting pressure on their subjects in terms of labour recruitment for the South. Although labour recruitment diminished, the conscription of forced or political labour for the colonial government did not. Being constantly short of revenue, the colonial government turned to the use of forced labour for carrier services and road building. Though colonial officials recognized the harmful effects of forced labour on the local economy and society, on the other hand, they claimed that there was no alternative. Only with the advent of lorry transport during the 1920s, did the demand for forced labour drastically diminish.<sup>9</sup>

On the other side, British officials did not regard the agricultural potential of the region to be very promising. As early as 1913, Governor Hugh Clifford complained in a letter to the Secretary for the Colonies, Lewis Harcourt, about the low economic potential of the Territories. According to Clifford, slow economic progress was to be expected as it could only derive from the agricultural sector, i.e., the production of a surplus of food-crops and eventually some cash-crops. Clifford also noted that the British Cotton Growing Association had started to engage itself in the promotion of cotton cultivation.<sup>10</sup> However, cotton was not to become the

<sup>6</sup> Lance 1995, 123. During the era of Governor Sir Hugh Clifford, the administration in Accra was asked by the Secretary of State for the Colonies Lewis Harcourt to give particular attention to the development of the Northern Territories, yet Clifford remarked that the economic progress of the Gold Coast depended upon the provision of adequate transport facilities and as long as the southern parts of the colony lacked sufficient means of transport, the North had to wait. The extension of the railway to the North was put forward as one possible solution, but as the Protectorate produced little and consumed even less, the plans were buried (Bening 1999, 232–233).

<sup>7</sup> Bening 1999, 234. See further Ladouceur 1979, 44–47. The lack of the establishment and development of an educational system in the North is discussed in Bening 1990 and Brukum 1998b.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas 1973; Phillips 1989, 45.

<sup>9</sup> Staniland 1975, 41, 45–46; Ladouceur 1979, 48–49; Phillips 1989, 41, 46. However, of equal importance was the international outcry over forced labour, which was eventually outlawed by the International Labour Organisation. On the other hand, seasonal labour migration to the mines and cocoa farms in the South did not come to an end. Instead, as Phillips (1989) and Grishow (1998, 2006) have underlined, the discussion of British colonial labour policy in West Africa was tied to land policy and the making of a ‘peasant road’.

<sup>10</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/464, Letter of Gov. Clifford to Lewis Harcourt, 14.7.1913. See also Bru-

Northern Territories major export crop. Instead, food crops, such as yams, maize and rice, would eventually turn the region into the 'breadbasket' of the Gold Coast and later of Ghana.

Next to export food production, the aim of colonial development policies was to focus on cattle rearing and the export of cattle to the southern markets. Although the Northern Territories were known to be rich in cattle from an early period and the income from taxing the cattle trade was one of the most important sources of revenue of the colonial administration, most of the cattle came from French territory, i.e., the French Soudan (Haute-Volta/Upper Volta, now Burkina Faso). As late as the mid-1930s, the Chief Commissioner had to admit that the local cattle owners did not regard their cattle as a marketable commodity but solely as a means of increasing the numbers of their wives.<sup>11</sup>

The development of markets and trade was slow, too. A major problem in the early years was the cost of transport as all goods had to be brought up from the South by porters until the use of motor vehicles evolved during the 1920s. Although governmental policies, such as the abolishment of the caravan tax in 1907, were aimed at encouraging the flow of trading caravans to the South, the prospects for traders, European and African alike, remained weak for a long period, especially as the infrastructure was poor and there was a general shortage of coinage in circulation in the Northern Territories. However, the economic conditions in the Northern Territories slowly started to change during the 1920s as a consequence of the increase of labour migration to the south as well as the beginning of a network of basic roads which connected the larger settlements and towns in the territory as well as the Northern Territories (Tamale) with the South (Kumasi). In addition to labour migration, a further stimulus to trade came from the growth of the colonial administration and personnel in the main towns. A notable example was the urbanization of Tamale, the colonial capital. From only a small village in 1908 when it was made the headquarters of the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories, Tamale rapidly developed into the regional colonial political and commercial centre, attracting both foreign African and non-African traders as well as people from all over the region. In 1931, the population of the town was already 12,941, having trebled since 1921. Nearly 2,500 of the inhabitants counted in the 1931 census – men and women included – were engaged as in trade and other commercial activities, whereas some 3,000 were listed as 'farmers'.<sup>12</sup> However, the most remarkable feature of urbanization in the north was the growth of towns in the Northern Province. By 1931 there were five 'towns' in the Protectorate with over 10,000 inhabitants and four of them were situated in the Northern Province: Navrongo, Sandema, Bolgatanga and Nangodi (see Table 1).

---

kum 1998b.

<sup>11</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/49, AR NT 1934–1935, para 83. See further Brukum 1998b.

<sup>12</sup> Eades 1994, 30–33.

1. Navrongo (NP)	18,128		[...]	
2. Tamale (SP)	12,941		20. Prang (SP)	2,640
3. Bolgatanga (NP)	12,756		21. Walewale (SP)	2,297
4. Sandema (NP)	10,727		22. Karaga (SP)	1,636
5. Nangodi (NP)	10,286		23. Bole (SP)	1,336
[...]			24. Gambaga (NP)	1,251
12. Wa (NP)	5,313		25. Yeji (SP)	1,179
13. Salaga (SP)	4,826		[...]	
14. Yendi (SP)	4,680		29. Bimbila (SP)	1,064
15. Bawku (NP)	3,752		30. Krachi (SP)	1,045
16. Savelugu (SP)	3,439			
17. Kumbungu (SP)	3,550			

**Table 1.** Towns and larger settlements in the Northern Territories 1931. (Source: 1931 Census Report)

Due to a chronic lack of funding, infrastructure development was reduced by the colonial government to a minimum, just enough to serve colonial administrative needs and trade purposes.<sup>13</sup> Agricultural development (or, in Sutton's words 'non-development') was modest and was restricted solely to cash crop production, particularly cotton, groundnuts, shea nuts and some tobacco. Yet, most of these projects failed. One of the problems of the agricultural schemes, such as the Gonja Development Company, concerned the attraction of settlers and their relationship to the company. Other problems were technical and mechanical: the crops were not suitable for mechanization as had been supposed and the equipment was unsuited to the soil. The situation did not change appreciably in the postcolonial period. Report after report complained about bad animal husbandry, lack of transport, reliance on traditional methods of subsistence agriculture as well as the continued discrepancy between the North and the South.<sup>14</sup>

The failure to establish and develop an educational system in the North was another major lapse of the colonial state. Governor Guggisberg had established Achimota College (1924, opened in 1927) in order that Africans could pursue higher education locally. However, the principle of higher education was only applied to the southern regions. According to Guggisberg, the standard of primary schooling in the Northern Territories was too high and should be limited to Primary Six with only the best pupils being allowed to reach Standard Seven. The number of government educational institutions was also restricted. The reason for such a policy was the belief that the inhabitants of the Northern Territories were not yet

<sup>13</sup> Ladouceur 1979, 46–47; Brukum, 1998, 126–129.

<sup>14</sup> Sutton 1989, 661–663.



sufficiently advanced to keep pace with the educational progress of the rest of the country and that their need was a thorough system of primary education and not one that was a mixture of primary and secondary schools. At the same time, colonial officials feared that Western education might create similar problems as it had in the Colony and Ashanti, namely public criticism and unrest. One consequence of the policy of restricting the expansion of education in the Protectorate was the exclusion of many Christian missionary societies, which provided the bulk of education in the rest of the country, from the Northern Territories.<sup>15</sup> The development of Muslim schools was never put on the agenda. As with the policy of economic isolation, the educational isolation of the Northern Territories continued until the end of the colonial era.

## **2. COLONIAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS ISLAM IN WEST AFRICA**

During the early colonial period, the general European view of the various traditional religions on the African continent was that they were ‘fetish worship’ and that Africans themselves were uncivilized and savage. Christianity, it was understood, was at the apex of theological, philosophical, moral and ethical standards. Yet it was argued, especially among many colonial officials and Western academics, that Christianity was too complicated, systematic and analytical for the African mind. Instead, it was claimed that Islam would be the perfect religion for Africans: simple, a certain level of morals and ethics and no demand for absolute monogamy. Some observers even argued that Islam had brought unity to Africa in place of tribal division and had provided a basis for economic and cultural progress.<sup>16</sup>

Early British as well as French and German colonial attitudes towards Islam and Muslims varied from hostility towards Islam and fear of Islamic militancy to outright sympathy. British colonial attitudes towards Islam in Africa were influenced both by Muslim responses to colonial intrusion and by past experience in dealing with Muslim populations. Earlier experiences of militancy in India, Uganda and the Sudan overshadowed British attitudes towards Muslim regimes and Islam in West Africa: Islam, it was stated, posed a threat through its militant organizations. On the other hand, rivalry among Christian missionary organizations could also cause substantial turbulence.<sup>17</sup> For the French, experiences in Algeria, Morocco, Senegal and Mauretania strengthened the division between Islam Arab and Islam Noire<sup>18</sup> whereas German attitudes were affected by experiences with Muslims in

---

<sup>15</sup> Bening 1999, 235. See further Staniland 1975, Bening 1990, Brukum 1998b.

<sup>16</sup> Hiskett 1984, 210; Walls 1999.

<sup>17</sup> Hiskett 1984, 208; Griffiths 2001.

<sup>18</sup> However, although French views were softened through the concept of Islam Noire and an uneasy policy of cooperation between the colonial administration and the Sufi brotherhoods in French West Africa, the French position towards Islam and Muslims in West Africa was still based on a rather negative view of Islam. Apart from Harrison 1988, see further Cruise O’Brien 1967; Robin-

German East Africa, Togo and Kamerun (Cameroun).<sup>19</sup> As some colonial officials became more familiar with Muslims and their institutions, they often acknowledged the intellectual achievements of Islam – its system of education, its codified law and its respect for learning as well as for law and order, its political and social stability. Islam, it was claimed, would be a bridge between the ‘savages’ and the modern (Western) world and could be used as a civilizing force.<sup>20</sup> However, such ‘sympathizers’ seemed to have belonged to a minority. The bulk of the colonial officials seemed to have harboured the age-old European negative perceptions of Islam, seeing it as the equivalent of ‘oriental despotism’, the primary cause of the slave trade and slavery in Africa and, in general, a destructive force.<sup>21</sup>

Early British colonial policy towards Islam and Muslims in West Africa was basically shaped in Northern Nigeria. It was here that Indirect Rule became the foundation of British colonial rule, which in effect was based on an alliance between the traditional Islamic establishment and the colonial government as first stipulated in the various Memoranda written by Lord Lugard.<sup>22</sup> In his 1903 proclamations in Kano and Sokoto, Lugard had already assured the local Muslim rulers of British non-interference in religious matters and in his 1904 Annual Report, he underlined the “admirable qualities of the Fulani as rulers.”<sup>23</sup> Similar pro-Muslim expressions were articulated by C.L. Temple in his writings concerning ‘native rule’ in Northern Nigeria.<sup>24</sup> The first Resident in Sokoto, J.A. Burdon, was also one of the first propagators of a British pro-Islamic policy in the protectorate.<sup>25</sup>

According to Jonathan Reynolds, attitudes towards Islam greatly varied among individual colonial officials in Northern Nigeria, but there was still a general division between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Muslims. Although Lugard stated that Islam was inferior to Christianity, it represented the highest spiritual achievement that could be attained by Africans, being itself superior to any African traditional religion. Furthermore, Lugard held the view that Christianity caused disorder among traditional African societies, especially in those areas, such as Northern Nigeria, that were dominated by Muslim rulers.<sup>26</sup> In addition, Lugard and many of his subordinate officials in Northern Nigeria believed that the missionaries had failed to introduce to Africans the collective self-discipline necessary for a civilized society. Even worse, missionary

---

son 1988; Triaud 2000, and Loimeier 2001a, 59–73.

<sup>19</sup> See further Weiss 2000b.

<sup>20</sup> See further Hiskett 1984, 220–221, 279–280; Barnes 1995, 426–427; Crowder 1968, 358–361.

<sup>21</sup> Hassing 1977; Reynolds 2001.

<sup>22</sup> See further Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1993. However, as subsequent observers and researchers have noted, Lugard’s intention was not to create two parallel administrative systems but to accomplish a merger of the two systems and the establishment of a (new) central administration. See further Bull 1963; Nicolson 1969.

<sup>23</sup> “Northern Nigeria,” 1905–1906, 388.

<sup>24</sup> Temple 1918/1968.

<sup>25</sup> Burdon 1904.

<sup>26</sup> Reynolds 2001, 603.



activities were blamed for destroying and uprooting the existing social fabric and contaminating it with new ideals. Individuals like the Christian converts in Southern Nigeria – dressed in Western clothes and demanding Western civil rights – were seen as a nuisance by Lugard and his colleagues. Such creatures had no position either in colonial or in traditional African society.<sup>27</sup>

A rather similar situation existed in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast during the first years of colonial rule. A.E.G. Watherston, Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories between 1905 and 1909, was known for his sympathy towards Islam. He considered Islam a religion ‘eminently suited to the native’. It helped to spread civilization, encouraged a ‘decent life’ and provided the impetus for trade. Watherston was even reluctant to allow Christian missions to work among non-Muslim communities.<sup>28</sup> But was there a connection between Lugard’s agenda and the situation in Northern Nigeria on the one hand and the Northern Territories on the other? I would say yes, at least during the first decade of the twentieth century. As Stewart and Hiskett have already pointed out, Watherston’s perspective was similar to that of Lugard with respect to Islam.<sup>29</sup> Kimble even claims that Watherston’s active hostility towards Christian missionary societies was far stronger than Lugard’s.<sup>30</sup> Still, there was also a basic difference between Northern Nigeria and the Northern Territories: there existed no Muslim states in the Northern Territories.

## **2.1. Watherston’s Positive Approach**

Although George Ekem Ferguson’s investigations of the 1890s dispelled the notion of a great northern Muslim kingdom (see Chapter III.2.1), the division of the northern hinterland between states and stateless societies continued to be applied throughout the colonial period.<sup>31</sup> Following the logic and assumptions of the early colonial officials, the rulers of Ferguson’s ‘organized governments’, i.e., Dagbon, Gonja, Nanun, Wa and Mampurugu, were seen as valuable allies – Muslim or not. Even more important was Ekem Ferguson’s information about the Muslim communities and their attachment to the local courts: here one could find possible intermediaries for colonial rule. The importance of Muslims was highlighted by European emissaries, who visited the north after Ekem Ferguson.<sup>32</sup> The first European visitor to Mampurugu, Captain D. Mackworth, stopped at Gambaga and was received by

---

<sup>27</sup> Barnes 1995, 413.

<sup>28</sup> Crowder 1968, 359; Der 1974; Okafor 1997, 96.

<sup>29</sup> Crowder 1968, 358–359; Hiskett 1984, 279.

<sup>30</sup> Kimble 1963, 79–80.

<sup>31</sup> See further Lenz 1999, 121; Hawkins 2002, 108–122. Ekem Ferguson’s division of ‘barbarous tribes’ and ‘organized governments’ is also discussed by Goody 1971, 54–64.

<sup>32</sup> In fact, Ekem Ferguson himself had first visited Gambaga and was received by the imam before he was able to proceed to Nalerigu and meet the Nayiri. Ekem Ferguson’s introduction to the court at Nalerigu had been handled by the imam’s brother. Lance 1995, 100.

the imam. His discussions with Mampurugu officials were confined to meetings with Imam Baba of Gambaga as the reigning Nayiri, Na Bariga, refused to meet the Europeans in Nalerigu. Mackworth's assessment of the political situation in Mamprusi added to the colonial confusion as he claimed that the Muslim party in the kingdom was the leading one and the imam was virtually the leading power.<sup>33</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, Gambaga was chosen as the site of the first British headquarters and a close, working relationship was established with the imam, who evolved as the intermediary between the British and the Nayiri. Although the British military commissioner Colonel H.P. Northcott soon realized that the imam in fact had no personal authority,<sup>34</sup> the British-Muslim alliance prevailed and Chief Commissioner Watherston remarked in his 1908 article:

The best in organisation at the present day is the Mamprusi country, ruled nominally by a King who lives at a small town near Gambaga, but in reality by the Lamam [Imam] of Gambaga, a patriarchal-looking Mohammedan.<sup>35</sup>

For Watherston, the "patriarchal-looking" Imam of Gambaga represented a person with whom one could establish a relationship since the imam was fluent in Hausa and Arabic whereas the Mampurugu king was not. Even more important seems to have been Watherston's and his successor Armitage's belief that it was the imam who was the most influential person while the ruler was said to avoid visiting European officials due to 'juju'.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, a pragmatic alliance was to be established between the British and the Mampurugu Muslim community at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>37</sup>

Watherston presented an outline of his projected cooperation with the Muslims in a letter to the Acting Colonial Secretary in May 1906. In this letter, Watherston noted the existence of 'great' Muslim centres in Wa, Walewale and Gambaga, and it seems as if the local Muslim leadership, the imams and *malams*, were at that time his key informants, if not collaborators. Watherston claimed that the relationship between the British and the local Muslim population was a peaceful one, especially as the Muslim leadership seemed to appreciate the British policy of non-interference in religious matters and the colonial attempts to establish peace and order. At the time of writing his evaluation, Watherston was worried about the impact of "foreign Marabouts" or itinerant Mahdist preachers (see Chapter IV.2.3), but was persuaded

<sup>33</sup> Report by Captain D. Mackworth, 30 May 1898, quoted in Lance 1995, 56. See further Davis 1986, 243. On Islam and Muslims in precolonial Mampurugu, see further Chapter II.2.5.

<sup>34</sup> Report by Colonel H.P. Northcott (1898), quoted in Lance 1995, 57; Davis 1986, 243.

<sup>35</sup> Watherston 1908, 349.

<sup>36</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/124, Tour of Inspection by Chief Commissioner Armitage, letter dated Tamale, July 1911, para 7; Watherston 1908, 349, 351. The notion of the central position of the Imam of Gambaga was further highlighted by Westermann in his overview of the state of Islam in West Africa. According to Westermann, who based his information on Watherston's 1908 article, it was the imam who ruled Mamprusi and Westermann speculated that most of the inhabitants were Muslims (Westermann 1913, 88).

<sup>37</sup> Davis 1987, 636.

– after consultation with the Muslim leadership – that their message would have little impact on the local Muslim population. In his view, ‘all’ Muslims in the North were traders and declared:

(T)heir desire to make money is on a very near level with their religious devotion and they pride themselves on bringing out Mohammedan principles and necessary duties, and feel insulted at intereference [sic!] from outside quarters.<sup>38</sup>

It is evident from the above quotation that Watherston made no distinction between the various foreign Muslim communities of traders and scholars, such as the Mande (Wangara), Mossi and Hausa, and the local Muslim communities; what seemed to have mattered to him was their acceptance of British rule and the colonial order. On the contrary, Muslim influences in terms of their demand for the banning alcohol and their propagation for cleanliness in local non-Muslim communities were hailed by him as being a positive sign. In fact, Muslim preachers were said to have achieved more ‘social’ development in a few weeks than the colonial administration had been capable of doing for several years.<sup>39</sup> In an earlier letter, Watherston equally praised the effect of Muslims: many local rulers were said to be under heavy influence of their Muslim advisors, who have banned the sale of liquor in their realms and thus made the introduction of collective licences to sell alcohol by the colonial government more or less impossible.<sup>40</sup>

For Watherston, at least, Muslims and their religion were to be integrated within the colonial project as Islam was perceived by him as a “religion eminently suited to the native,” and informed the Acting Colonial Secretary about his policy towards Muslims and non-Muslims in the territory. The basic idea in Watherston’s religious policy was to be positive towards peaceful Muslim missionary activities among non-Muslims, thereby transferring the civilizing mission to the Muslims. Non-Muslim communities or “fetish tribes” had no say at all, but were to be protected by the colonial state from the possible negative side-effects of the Muslim preachers, most evidently enslavement:

I have in my tour informed all the Malams and leading Mohammedans that as long as they push their religious propaganda amongst the Fetish tribes in a quiet and peaceful manner they will always have the support of the various Commissioners but that the ill-treatment of natives who are slow to see the benefits to be derived from carrying their belief will be invariably met with severe punishment, and this they fully approved of.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/3, Duplicate letter book, file 359, Letter from CCNT Watherston to Acting Colonial Secretary, 18.5.1906, paras 8–9.

<sup>39</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/3, Duplicate letter book, file 359, Letter from CCNT Watherston to Acting Colonial Secretary, 18.5.1906, para 14.

<sup>40</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/3, Duplicate letter book, file 358, Letter from CCNT Watherston to Acting Colonial Secretary, 15.5.1906, para 5.

<sup>41</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/3, Duplicate letter book, file 359, Letter from CCNT Watherston to Acting Colonial Secretary, 18.5.1906, para 15.

Watherston's concept of the civilizing mission of the Muslims was that they would spread 'civilization' in terms of clothing – and thus provide an impetus to trade: the converts would have to clothe themselves.<sup>42</sup> In the end, therefore, Watherston's positive approach towards Muslims and Islam had nothing to do with the propagation of Islam and colonial backing for Muslims for the sake of spreading their religion. What mattered was that the Muslims, for the time being, were in Watherston's view the only possible 'civilized' partners with whom the colonial mission of the Pax Britannica, i.e., the safe conduct of trade and commerce, could be established in the North. If the (peaceful) Islamization of the North would benefit Pax Britannica, it was to be supported and integrated within the colonial order; if not, it was to be rejected and checked.

Watherston was not the only British officer in the Northern Territories who held the Muslims in high esteem and was in favour of a Muslim civilizing mission. The District Commissioner of Black Volta District, Captain B.H. Taylor, claimed in 1906 that the Imam of Nandaw had declared that the white man's law was the law of the Quran. Not surprisingly, therefore, Taylor used both the ruler of Ulu (neighbouring to Nandaw) as well as the Imam of Nandaw as his advisor in native law and customs.<sup>43</sup> In fact, it seems as if the imam was used as the key informant. Taylor's pro-Muslim position is most evident in his urging the opening of Muslim schools in the various settlements, making Muslim education compulsory for the children of the ruling class and integrating it within the colonial order:

Failing the White Missionary, I propose, with your sanction, to immediately start Mohammedan schools at Bussie, Daffiama, and Cheripon, making it compulsory for the children of the chiefs and headmen of the surrounding country to attend, the cost of the schooling to be borne by the parents. Should this scheme meet with your approval, I will submit after consultation with the leading Mallams of Wa a programme of the proposed schools, curriculum, cost and capacity. The existing [Muslim] school at Nandaw could be utilised for that Kingdom and the neighbouring Kingdom of Ulu.<sup>44</sup>

However, for reasons not known, Taylor did not receive Watherston's approval. I have not found any documents or memos where Watherston or somebody else at the Chief Commissioner's office discussed and remarked upon Taylor's idea of integrating Muslim education into the colonial structures.

<sup>42</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/3, Duplicate letter book, file 359, Letter from CCNT Watherston to Acting Colonial Secretary, 18.5.1906, para 17.

<sup>43</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/50, Tour of Inspection (NWP), Report on tour of Black Volta District April–May 1906 by DC B.H. Taylor, pages 8 and 13.

<sup>44</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/50, Tour of Inspection (NWP), Report on tour of Black Volta District April–May 1906 by DC B.H. Taylor, page 22.

## 2.2. Early Colonial Investigations and the Critique of Watherston's Model

Watherston's positive approach was mainly based on his personal views and his experiences at Gambaga, where the British-Muslim alliance seemed to work. However, if Watherston's plan was to be implemented and become the backbone of a future British policy in the Northern Territories, investigations into the position of Muslims, their political influence and economic activities had to be conducted. Therefore, it became the task of the District Commissioners to investigate and report on the position of Muslims and the state of Islam throughout the region. In Eastern Gonja, Salaga was known to be an important market, which had declined due to the aftermath of the collapse of Asante power in the 1870s and the civil war in the 1890s,<sup>45</sup> but which still was a centre for Muslim traders and scholars. The picture of Salaga as a Muslim centre was confirmed by early colonial reports, according to which there lived an influential Wangara Muslim named Alhaji Bukara as well as several rich and powerful *malams*. Each section of the town had its own mosque and there existed six Quran schools in the town.<sup>46</sup> Another important Muslim centre was Wa.<sup>47</sup> According to the investigations of DC Moutray-Read, all Wala chiefs and men of standing in the country were Muslims, while the poorer classes were said to be non-Muslims. Furthermore, Moutray-Read noted that the descendants of the first two Mande Muslims had played a very important role in the history of the country,<sup>48</sup> first and foremost Malam Isaka (Friday Imam Ishāq b. 'Uthmān, ca. 1860–1931), with whom the colonial authorities had a very good relationship.<sup>49</sup> In Mampurugu, Wa and all of (British) Dagbon, Muslim traders and imams were found living in almost all the larger settlements. By dealing with the Europeans, the imams and Hausa traders rose to important positions. At the British Headquarters in Gambaga (Mampurugu, renamed Mamprusi District), Chief Commissioner Morris hoped that the 'Muslim' cattle traders would be able to develop a local cattle trade and market which, according to him, was "not a native characteristic."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> In 1906, Salaga was alledged to have some 6,000 inhabitants – a mere third of its estimated former population, but still one of the largest, if not the largest, towns in the Northern Territories (TNA CO 96/440, Report of Governor's Tour through the Northern Territories, December 1905–March 1906, Accra 17.3.1906, page 26). On the decline of Salaga, see further Chapter II.3.1.

<sup>46</sup> PRAAD ADM 11/1/824, Wheeler, *A description of the Customs of the Gonja Tribe, Salaga District*, page 2. According to Sedgwick (PRAAD ADM 56/1/413, Annual Report [AR] Gonja District 1904), there existed two considerable mosques and five 'native' schools in Salaga.

<sup>47</sup> When Governor John Pickersgill Rodger (1904–1910) visited Wa in January 1906, he was impressed by the sight of the mosque, which he described as "the largest and best built Mosque I have yet seen, either in the Colony or these Territories" (TNA CO 96/440, Report of Governor's Tour through the Northern Territories, December 1905–March 1906, Accra 17.3.1906, page 9).

<sup>48</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/824, Moutray Read, *Wa or Wala*, page 5.

<sup>49</sup> Wilks 1989, 148.

<sup>50</sup> TNA CO 98/10, AR NT 1900 (Morris). A few years later, Chief Commissioner Watherston was pleased to report on the "rapid" development of new markets with Hausa traders in towns and places which only a few years earlier had been considered by the Hausa as unsafe (TNA CO 98/17, AR NT 1908 [Watherston], para 22).



Due both to the Muslim-British ‘alliance’ in Mampurugu as well as the good ‘working relationship’ with the Muslim community in Salaga and Wa, colonial officials would often ask the views of the Muslim communities on local affairs. A similar preference for Muslims also existed in British-controlled Dagbon. Muslim scholars were posted to local courts to serve as clerks and they were ordered by the colonial government to keep a record of all the cases tried by the chief.<sup>51</sup>

On the other side, in many regions, including Western Gonja and the northern parts of the Northern Territories, Muslim influence was more or less absent. Even worse, from a British perspective, the general outlook for relying on existing ‘organized governments’ and tracing any Islamic ‘civilizing’ influence among them was admitted to be a chimera, as Chief Commissioner Armitage declared in 1911:

We are dealing with a number of tribes that, however powerful they might have been in the past, never possessed that ancient civilisation or an organised system of direct taxation as based on the Koranic law.<sup>52</sup>

According to British (but also German concepts), one of the most visible signs of the impact of Islam was said to be the spread of a ‘Muslim’ dresscode. Especially Hausa cloths and robes were held in high esteem among the ruling elite, and for the early colonial officials, this was understood to be a clear sign of a gradual cultural impact of the Muslims. In the northwestern parts of the territory, for example, Captain Read noted a positive influence of the Muslims among the ‘Lobi’ in eastern Lawra District. Such ‘Lobi’ that had come into contact with Muslim settlements had started to wear clothes and were said to be more ‘civilized’ than those ‘Lobi’ who had not been in contact with the Muslims.<sup>53</sup> A similar ‘cultural impact’ was also noticed by Armitage among the Kusasi and ‘Frafra’ in the northeast where chiefs and headmen had started to wear “Mohammedan costume”.<sup>54</sup> However, such an interpretation missed one crucial point, namely the direct impact of colonial rule. Through the creation of new political structures among the so-called stateless societies, the colonial government had in fact set up a new group of political upper class whose power was based on their link with the colonial state. Hausa *malams* and local Muslims served, at least during the early period, as intermediaries between

<sup>51</sup> PRAAD ADM 56/1/177, Tamale Informal Diary, November 1913. The appointment of Muslim scholars at a court was, as such, not a novel idea. Muslims had already been engaged as scribes, judges and imams at court during the precolonial period (Ferguson 1972, 198–202). However, during the colonial period, their number was to increase remarkably and although it was said that their appointments were made by the Ya Na, the ruler of Dagbon, as a result of British ‘recommendation’, the Ya Na was in no position to refuse such an order.

<sup>52</sup> PRAAD ADM 56/1/105, Report of the Northern Territories Land Committee, Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories [CCNT] Armitage to Colonial Secretary 1911, para 90.

<sup>53</sup> Discussion of Captain Read in 1905, quoted in Hawkins 2002, 48: “They [i.e., the ‘Lobi’, HW] are uncivilized and turbulent in the extreme on the west, but an improvement is made towards the centre and the east where there are many Mahomedan settlements. Except in the latter places the men are generally naked and invariably armed with bows and arrows.”

<sup>54</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/124, Tour of Inspection 1911, Report by CCNT Armitage (July 1911), para 7.



the local chiefs and headmen and the colonial officials, thereby strengthening the image of the favoured position of Muslims in the colonial setup.

Further investigations found that Muslims and non-Muslims generally lived side by side without any apparent friction throughout the Protectorate. However, after further dissections of the matter, a somewhat different picture emerged. In Mamprusi (Mampurungu), for example, Muslims were found to be in the minority and were said to be very contemptuous of the non-Muslim majority.<sup>55</sup> In fact, Chief Commissioner Watherston's 'pro-Muslim' position – if not policy – was already put into question by one of his officials, F.A. Irvine. Whereas Watherston wanted to pursue a policy which would have partially integrated the Muslim scholars and traders into the colonial sphere, such a policy turned out to be problematic due to the limited number of Muslims in the Northern Territories. In his 1909 Annual Report, Irvine, who at that time was acting Chief Commissioner, noted that only a small proportion of the population in the protectorate were Muslims,<sup>56</sup> and a few years later, DC Arthur Festing lamented that the expanding cola and cattle trade was in the hands of outsiders, who “reaped the profit therefrom.”<sup>57</sup> Muslim traders – Festing's outsiders – had become a problem, too. Thus, a new approach to Muslims and their position had to be worked out – if one wanted to deal with them at all. However, one could claim that Irvine's skepticism about the impact and position of Muslims was a reflection on an episode of political and social turmoil that had swept over the West African savannah from German Kamerun to French Soudan a few years earlier. In fact, as will be discussed in the following subchapter, Watherston himself had to redefine his Muslim policy.

### 2.3. Fearing 'Fanatics' and a 'Mohammedan Crusade'

Colonial pro-Muslim policy was seriously challenged when Mahdist movements were reported throughout British, French and German West Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century. The British colonial officials especially viewed Mahdism or 'Muslim fanatics' as a kind of an arch enemy, especially after the traumas created by the Indian mutiny in 1857 and the fall of Khartoum in 1885. Mahdists or 'radical' Muslim preachers were closely watched by the colonial officials after the Mahdist uprisings in Northern Nigeria and adjacent regions (French Niger, German Adamawa) between 1905 and 1907.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/824, G.F. Mackay, *A Short Essay on the History and Customs of the Mamprusi Tribe* (s.a.), page 45.

<sup>56</sup> TNA CO 98/17, AR NT 1909 [Irvine], para 15. Irvine's statement was not based on 'hard data' – as such was not available, but on his own impressions.

<sup>57</sup> TNA CO 98/18, AR NT 1910 [Festing], para 5.

<sup>58</sup> See further Chapter III.4.1.

In the Northern Territories as well as Northern Togo, too, Muslim itinerant preachers began to be viewed with suspicion – if not fear – by the colonial officials.<sup>59</sup> At first, the advent of Muslim itinerant preachers did not cause much anxiety among the colonial authorities. The mobility of Muslim literati was a known fact – at least among those European academics and colonial authorities who had read the travel accounts of Heinrich Barth and Gustav Nachtigal. Muslim teachers and their students, known in Hausa as *yawon almajiranci* (literally ‘roving studentship’), would travel in search of jobs which they could perform, such as teaching the Quran, praying for people, divination, preparing charms, and preaching at special occasions.<sup>60</sup> As long as these itinerant preachers did not cause troubles with the local political authorities or challenge local religious conditions, they would receive little attention. Such an influx of Muslim preachers (who usually combined their religious activities with trade) was already an old-established process in the Voltaic Basin at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, in 1905 local and colonial authorities became increasingly anxious about the straight-forward demand for renewal and repentance by these preachers. Captain Charlton, who at that time was stationed in Ashanti, noted the change of attitude during 1905. At first, the colonial authorities marked the advent of the itinerant preachers and their retinues, who claimed that they had come from the holy cities and started mission activities among the non-Muslim population. British suspicion, however, arose when letters from important Muslims in Mecca – or at least alleged to be letters from Mecca – started to be circulated among the Muslims in the region.<sup>61</sup> Before long, Charlton noted, “... what was nothing less than an anti-European agitation showed itself.” Both local and colonial authorities feared an outright clash and consequently did their utmost to suppress the activities of these preachers, the British by expelling them, the Germans and French by imprisoning them.<sup>62</sup>

As Ivor Wilks notes, there was a clear change of tone in Chief Commissioner Watherston’s reports during these years. In his 1905 Annual Report, Watherston still gave a positive image of Muslims in the Northern Territories, “the general sanitary conditions of the towns in the Protectorate is improving, the revival and spread of Mohammedanism having much to do with this.”<sup>63</sup> According to Watherston, the recent spread of Muslims throughout the territory had had a positive effect on the

<sup>59</sup> Mahdist movements and their impact in the Northern Territories are discussed in Goody 1970, Wilks 1989, 152–157, and Goody 1998, 234.

<sup>60</sup> Adamu 1978, 15.

<sup>61</sup> A copy of one of these letters was translated into Hausa and published in Charlton’s book (Charlton 1908, 52–60). Charlton, however, had to admit that the letter had no political message but the object of the circular letter was that of stirring up religious enthusiasm among the Muslims in West Africa. Similar so-called Mecca-letters were circulated in East Africa, which prompted the German authorities to call for an investigation which was made by Carl Heinrich Becker, one of the most well-known German specialists on Islam (Becker 1911, 43–48).

<sup>62</sup> Charlton 1908, 52.

<sup>63</sup> TNA CO 98/14, AR NT 1905 (Watherston), para 11. See also Wilks 1989, 152.

development of trade and markets. In fact, in his view, the recent social and political impact of Muslims had been a much more profound one than any colonial attempts had been able to accomplish so far.<sup>64</sup>

One year later, the tone had changed to alarm. British colonial officials, especially in the Gonja and Black Volta Districts, were worried about the impact of itinerant Muslim preachers, whom they labelled as ‘Mahommedan missionaries’ or ‘Senoussis’, i.e., Mahdist preachers. In January 1905, the officer in charge of Gonja District, Acting DC Sedgwick, was informed about the arrival of an ‘Alhaji’ in Yeji, who supposedly succeeded in converting the local ruler to Islam and having the ruler’s “fetish house” demolished.<sup>65</sup> However, although information about the ruler’s conversion was put in question by the officer, he noted that the ‘Alhaji’ had been able to persuade the ruler to build a mosque for the Muslims in the town. As the Muslim preacher had left Yeji in February, where his impact was believed to have been minimal, the colonial officer had nothing further to report and lost sight of him.<sup>66</sup> About four months later, the arrival of an itinerant Muslim preacher was reported in Wa at the end of June 1905. It is not clear from the report whether it been the same ‘Alhaji’ who earlier had visited Yeji. Later investigations suggest that the Muslim preacher in Yeji and Wa was the same person, namely one Malam Musa (see below).<sup>67</sup> The behaviour of the preacher in Wa was similar to that in Yeji: he asked the local ruler of Wa to summon all his chiefs and people, preached to them and eventually was reported to have converted “all” the people. As a consequence, DC Moutray-Read noted a mushrooming of Muslim prayer grounds in the villages around Wa and a marked change in daily life, namely the prohibition of locally made beer or *pito*.<sup>68</sup> When news about the situation in Wa reached Acting Chief Commissioner Irvine, he regarded the change in the town as remarkable and interesting but in no way problematic.<sup>69</sup>

One month later, DC Moutray-Read’s positive reporting had taken a critical tone as the Muslim preacher in Wa was accused of preaching against the British government. Although Moutray-Read tried to investigate the matter, he could not find any evidence against the Muslim preacher and had to let him go.<sup>70</sup> Watherston himself was worried about the activities of these preachers. In the northeast, for example, it was reported that Muslim preachers and their followers had been able to “slightly” disorganize parts of the Fra-Fra country, “who have accepted their

<sup>64</sup> TNA CO 98/14, AR NT 1905 (Watherston), para 9. In his 1906 Annual Report, Watherston still welcomed the consequences of the activities of Muslim preachers, namely the rising demand for ‘Muslim’ clothes as well as brass kettles and prayer beads (TNA CO 98/16, AR NT 1906 [Watherston], para 23).

<sup>65</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/411, MR Gonja District January 1905 (Sedgwick).

<sup>66</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/411, MR Gonja District February 1905 (Sedgwick).

<sup>67</sup> Goody 1970, 149–150.

<sup>68</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/411, MR Black Volta District June 1905 (Moutray-Read).

<sup>69</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/515, Progress Report June 1905 (Irvine) para 9.

<sup>70</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/411, MR Black Volta District July 1906 (Moutray-Read).

statement that the whiteman will soon have no power.”<sup>71</sup> When arriving in the villages, the preachers gathered the population and revealed their message about the future coming of a Mahdi. The message was simple but, from a colonial perspective, highly critical: “(The Mahdi) would punish all non-believers, white or black and have generally conveyed the idea that the Whitemen would be exterminated in the country.”<sup>72</sup> Similar reports were also handed in by German and French officials.<sup>73</sup> Such reports definitively caused alarm among the colonial governments. They threatened the fabric of the existing society as well as the recently established colonial order. As a consequence, more or less drastic measures were applied to curb the threat of an imminent Mahdist rebellion.<sup>74</sup>

However, during 1905 there still was much confusion in the British headquarters in Gambaga about the impact of the Mahdists. Acting CCNT Irvine, for example, sent a letter to the German Resident in Yendi in July 1905 where he acknowledged the information he received about Muslim itinerant preachers, including one Malam Musa, in German Togoland. It seems as if the activities of Malam Musa had caused much concern among the German and Irving told the German Resident about Malam Musa’s earlier successful propaganda in the Northern Territories. Seemingly concerned, however, Irvine assured the Resident that “... in view of the allegations contained in your letter, I have given orders that should he return to this Protectorate, he is to be very carefully watched and all his movements reported to me.”<sup>75</sup> Watherston, too, seemed to have been perplexed by the various reports and in December 1905 ordered from all District Commissioners “any later information on the ‘spread of Mohammedanism’ due to the late crusade.”<sup>76</sup> The change of language is evident in his circular: the spread of Islam was viewed with suspicion, if not fear, and the activities of the Muslim preachers were seen as being a crusade.

By 1906, British, German and French colonial officials had a good idea about what was going on in their respective West African colonies. While touring the Northern Territories, Governor Rodgers was informed by the DC Wa in January 1906 about the recent development in the North. Despite the potential danger of the itinerant preachers turning into ‘trouble-makers’, he argued against restrictive actions:

<sup>71</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/515, Progress Report August 1905 (Watherston), para 2.

<sup>72</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/3, Duplicate letter book, File 359: Letter from CCNT Watherston to Acting Colonial Secretary, 18.5.1906, para 3; Wilks 1989, 154.

<sup>73</sup> BMA D-1,85, file 71, Report by Missionary Gottfried Martin about his travel in the hinterland of Togo (4.7.1906); Westermann 1914; Sebald 1988, 468.

<sup>74</sup> Goody 1970, 153–154. Also BMA D-1,85, file 53, Letter from Governor von Zech to Gottfried Martin, Lome 16.1.1906.

<sup>75</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/3, Duplicate letter book, file 127, Act. CCNT Irvine to the Imperial Resident, Ssansane-Mango, Yendi, dated 4.7.1905.

<sup>76</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/3, Duplicate letter book, files 283–284, Circular No 228/05, Watherston to the DCs Wa, Kintampo, Salaga and Navarro (30.12.1905).

Provided that they do not mingle politically with religious doctrines, there is no objection to this proselytism, as the Muhammedan religion is very preferable to any form of Fetichism; but I know from experience that these wandering fanatics can seldom avoid denouncing ‘infidel’ rule, and I shall warn the Chief Commissioner that their movements and teaching must be carefully watched.<sup>77</sup>

The Governor’s instructions were carefully followed by the British authorities. Soon, however, disturbing news arrived from the French intelligence sources, who informed the British about an uprising at ‘Niamey’ (Niamey) near Say in the Niger Territory. The uprising, it was claimed, was organized by Muslims and was directed against the ‘infidels’, i.e., the colonial powers. According to French sources, further uprisings were planned to occur after Ramadan in Timbuktu, Niamey and Say, organized by Tuaregs but to be joined by local Muslims. The report caused much anxiety among both the French and British in the Voltaic Basin: one had to watch more carefully the activities of the itinerant preachers.<sup>78</sup>

As noted above, in the Northern Territories as well as in Northern Togo and in the French territories, the key person of the movement was identified as one Malam Musa (Mūsā, also known as Karamoko Moussa<sup>79</sup>), an Adamawa FulBe. He and his followers had moved across the hinterlands of Dahomey, Togo and the Gold Coast in 1904–1905. Early in 1905, Malam Musa was reported to have entered Yeji,<sup>80</sup> and to have started a religious campaign, which included the building of mosques and praying grounds. In addition, he preached against drinking. However, as Malam Musa started to challenge the position of the (non-Muslim) local ruler causing friction in the town, the British officials decided to expel him from Yeji.<sup>81</sup> Operating

<sup>77</sup> TNA CO 96/440, Report of Governor’s Tour through the Northern Territories, December 1905–March 1906, Accra 17.3.1906, page 10.

<sup>78</sup> TNA CO 96/442 (20698), Gold Coast. Intelligence Report. Head III. March Quarter 1906.

<sup>79</sup> Marty 1922, 70. According to Marty’s informants, the key Mahdist preacher in Bonduku was one ‘Umar Faruk (Oumara Faraokou/‘Umar Fārūq). He had been a student/disciple of Malam Musa while the latter was living and preaching in Salaga. ‘Umar Faruk had arrived in Buna on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 1905, but was quickly arrested and deported by the French authorities to Bingerville on the coast. However, ‘Umar Faruk was not the first emissary to arrive in the region. Earlier in the year, one Muhammad ‘Uthman (Mohammad Othman/ Muhammad ‘Uthmān), a Baghirmi from Kuka (Borno, Northern Nigeria), had arrived at Bunduku and was preaching a Mahdist message, including the imminent retreat of the Europeans. Consequently, the French arrested him and sent him to Dakar (Marty 1922, 69).

<sup>80</sup> According to Watherston, there was one ‘Malam Alhaji’ active in Yeji at the beginning of 1905. Due to having little success in his preaching, he was said to have left the town for more fruitful soil and the mosque he had build had been converted into a donkey stable (PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/3, Duplicate letter book, file 359, Letter from CCNT Watherston to Acting Colonial Secretary, 18.5.1906, para 16).

<sup>81</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 64/5/2, page 80. Only two *malams* were said to have lived in Yeji before the arrival of Malam Musa but their influence had been limited and they had made no converts. Malam Musa made an attempt to convert the ruler of Yeji, but did not succeed as he had to leave the town after his trouble with the colonial government. One year later, the DC reported that the ruler had rather quickly turned away from Islam and had turned the mosque built by Malam Musa into a resthouse for his sheep and cattle. The ruler had rebuilt his ‘fetish house’, which Malam Musa had destroyed.



from Salaga and Yeji, Malam Musa's followers, named [by Imam 'Umar] al-Husayn, Abu Bakr [Abū Bakr] and al-Hasan, spread as far as Nanumba in the east, Ejura in the south and Kintampo in the west, at first making a tremendous impact on the local population but soon encountered hostility, imprisonment and rejection. Malam Musa, too, seemed to have been banned from Yeji after which he and some of his followers moved to Wa.<sup>82</sup> At first, their activities in Wa were hailed by the colonial officials, including Watherston, who was impressed by the cleanliness and sobriety in the Wa country after Malam Musa had banned the consumption of beer.<sup>83</sup> One month later, however, the first alarming reports about the activities of Malam Musa reached Watherston, and about one year later Malam Musa and his followers were expelled from British territory.<sup>84</sup> In German-controlled Nanun and Dagbon, where itinerant preachers had also been active,<sup>85</sup> measures by the colonial officials were even more drastic. Preachers were jailed and "*unschädlich gemacht*" (taken care of).<sup>86</sup> The French officials in Bonduku (Bondoukou) had ten 'marabouts' executed in February 1906.<sup>87</sup>

However, it was not only Malam Musa and his followers whose activities were viewed with suspicion by the colonial governments. In his 1904 Annual Report on Gonja District, Acting DC Sedgwick had already mentioned that the religious fervour among the Muslims in Salaga was due to "Sanousi" influence,<sup>88</sup> and by 1906 British officials started to perceive the Muslim community in Salaga as being antagonistic, if not totally hostile, towards British rule. Watherston even stated that "... if any trouble does arise from the Mohammedans it will start in Salaga."<sup>89</sup> Such a statement is especially appalling since the local colonial officials only a few years earlier had held the Muslim population in Salaga in high esteem. On the other hand, the situation in Salaga was a special one as it had a very prominent and large community of Hausa traders and scholars, and it is possible that the Hausa community had started to agitate against the colonial order.

The key agitator in Salaga was Alhaji Bukara, who was the village chief of Dogonkadi, but most of the time resided in Salaga where he had a large compound and a mosque. Alhaji Bukara was accused by the District Commissioner of

<sup>82</sup> Goody 1970, 146, 149–151.

<sup>83</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/3, Duplicate letter book, file 359, Letter from CCNT Watherston to Acting Colonial Secretary, 18.5.1906, para 14. According to Watherston's letter, Malam Musa had sent one Malam Issa to Wa and it was the latter who had achieved the revival of Islam in the town.

<sup>84</sup> Wilks 1989, 154.

<sup>85</sup> BMA D-1,85, file 71, Martin, Travel Report (4.7.1906), 14–16; file 74, Report on the conditions in northern Togo by Mohr (1906), 10.

<sup>86</sup> BMA D-1,104, file 16, Letter from Missionary Schimming to the BMS headquarters, Jendi 11.9.1913.

<sup>87</sup> Wilks 1989, 153.

<sup>88</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/413, AR Gonja District 1904 (Sedgwick). The report was dated 5.1.1905.

<sup>89</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/3, Duplicate letter book, file 359, Letter from CCNT Watherston to Acting Colonial Secretary, 18.5.1906, para 7.



harbouring foreign itinerant preachers in his compound, and it was even suggested that his compound served as a focal point for all new arriving ‘missionaries’ (i.e., Mahdist preachers). According to British opinions, Alhaji Bukara, in fact, was one of the most influential persons in the whole of Gonja District, but at the same time he was a, if not the, leading figure in the local Muslim “quiet” opposition to British rule. His actions were thus being watched by the District Commissioner, who used a local colonial official, Native Officer Wangara, to spy on Alhaji Bukara’s activities. Not surprisingly, Native Officer Wangara was hated by every *malam* in Salaga.<sup>90</sup>

Alhaji Bukara was accused of having been in contact or of having assisted several suspicious itinerant preachers. First, there was “one man from the Bahr al Gasal”. This man was perhaps from Wadai or Kanem, two regions which, at least in the eyes of the early colonial officials, sounded like Muslim troublemakers or ‘Senoussis’ since this Sufi order, the Sanusiyya, had its strongholds in the region. On the other hand, one of the Mahdist preachers in German Kamerun, Gwoni Wadai, was from Wadai, which could indicate that there was a Mahdist centre in Wadai. This preacher had been fined and expelled by the British since his followers – four Dagbamba who Alhaji Bukara was said to have provided him with – had wounded five men including a local chief when they had made an attempt to destroy a local ‘fetish’.<sup>91</sup> The second case was his connection with two other suspicious itinerant preachers, Malam Mahama from Hausaland and Malam Abudulai from the region of Timbuktu. One of their followers had gone to the village of Zongoiri and had started to propagate the Mahdist message of the end of the white man’s rule. Both *malams* denied having instructed their follower, but Alhaji Bukara was found to have given provision to the preacher. The preacher was whipped in public in the market of Gambaga.<sup>92</sup>

Although the British were suspicious of all itinerant preachers during 1906, they had to admit that not all of them were Mahdist ‘missionaries’. The two above-mentioned *malams*, Malam Mahama and Malam Abudulai, turned out to have already been travelling for three years, had met in Accra in September 1905 and thereafter had continued their journey together. In the North they had requested help from chiefs and the local population – but asking only some 30 cowries to enable them to get food.<sup>93</sup> Others had been accused by the local population of wanting both horses and wives as gifts and contributions – as was the case with one Abudu Kadari, who was expelled from the Protectorate after a trial.<sup>94</sup> In Bolinga,

<sup>90</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/3, Duplicate letter book, file 359, Letter from CCNT Watherston to Acting Colonial Secretary, 18.5.1906, paras 4–6.

<sup>91</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/3, Duplicate letter book, file 359, Letter from CCNT Watherston to Acting Colonial Secretary, 18.5.1906, para 10.

<sup>92</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/3, Duplicate letter book, file 359, Letter from CCNT Watherston to Acting Colonial Secretary, 18.5.1906, para 13.

<sup>93</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/3, Duplicate letter book, file 359, Letter from CCNT Watherston to Acting Colonial Secretary, 18.5.1906, para 13.

<sup>94</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/3, Duplicate letter book, file 359, Letter from CCNT Watherston to Acting

however, a ‘travelling Malam’ or ‘Marabout’ and his disciples were accused by the colonial authorities of having caused disturbances and even a riot in February 1906. Without any hesitation, the DC of the Black Volta District had them jailed and put on trial.<sup>95</sup>

British methods seemed to have been effective in checking the advance of itinerant Muslim preachers in the Northern Territories. In his 1907 Annual Report, Watherston already claimed that there had been no new reports about foreign Muslim preachers (“Marabouts and foreign Mallams”) in British territory and, in those places where they had been active, people seemed to have turned their backs on their message. Instead, a “retrograde motion” to former religious practices was noted, but in some places, the newly cleared praying grounds were still kept intact.<sup>96</sup>

However, Watherston had clearly become frightened about the threat of a Muslim ‘crusade’, especially as the number and impact of these itinerant preachers was not at all clear to him. Although in 1906 he had already tried his best to curb the tide by monitoring foreign Muslims and local suspect ones, he issued a new order for the surveillance of Muslim preachers in May 1907. In this circular, the District Commissioners were requested to invariably send for all “marabouts, strange *malams*, or missionaries” they hear of in their districts and to obtain all necessary information from them, such as their country of origin, how long they had travelled as missionaries, which places in the Northern Territories they had visited and which local Muslims they had met and stayed with, and, last but not least, their final destination and purpose for travelling. The DCs were also ordered to send copies of their reports to both the headquarters in Gambaga as well as to all other District Commissioners.<sup>97</sup>

In addition, intelligence reports were to be exchanged between the British and French colonial officials. It seems as if the colonial governments had become increasingly nervous about the activities of itinerant Muslim preachers by spring 1907. This might have been a reaction to the various Mahdist uprisings in Northern Nigeria, especially the incident at Satiru in 1906, and in French Niger.<sup>98</sup> In May 1907, the Commissioner of the North-Western District, B. Moutray Read, notified the Acting District Commissioner of Tumu of the agreement for the exchange of information “in case of any local unrest due to either to Mahommedanism or any other cause,” especially if the disturbances were to be directed against Europeans.<sup>99</sup>

---

Colonial Secretary, 18.5.1906, para 11.

<sup>95</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/421, MR Black Volta District February + March 1906 (Taylor).

<sup>96</sup> TNA CO 98/16, AR NT 1907 (Watherston), para 42.

<sup>97</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 66/1/1, Duplicate letter book Tumu, CCNT Watherston to DC Wa, Circular Memo 45/95/05, dated Gambaga 19.5.1907.

<sup>98</sup> On the Mahdist uprisings in the Central Sudan during 1905–1906, see Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1990.

<sup>99</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 66/1/1 Duplicate letter book Tumu, Circular Memo 10/1907, Comm. NW Distr. B.M. Read to ADC Tumu, dated 22.5.1907.

Not only were the colonial authorities troubled by the advent and agitation of the Mahdist preachers but local Muslim scholars were also critical of their message. The most well-known case was the position taken by Imam ‘Umar of Kete-Krachi (at that time part of German Togoland). He was regarded by the German officials as one of the most influential Muslim scholars in the region and at that time had been working closely with one of the German District Commissioners (*Bezirksleiter*), Adam Mischlich. However, Imam ‘Umar’s position is somewhat unclear and gives a good picture of the complex situation the local Muslim scholars were facing.<sup>100</sup> According to German sources, the Imam of Kete-Krachi – presumably Imam ‘Umar – was said to have treated these itinerant preachers with great respect.<sup>101</sup> Local informants in Yendi, however, claim that Imam ‘Umar had announced that the two Mahdist preachers, who had appeared before him, were both lying.<sup>102</sup> In fact, Imam ‘Umar publicly denounced the agitation of the Mahdist preachers in a pamphlet which he wrote to his disciples. In his letter, *Ya Khalilayya*, he declared Malam Musa and his followers to be charlatans and distanced himself from them.<sup>103</sup>

Finally, in 1908, Watherston was able to report that the threat of Mahdism and a possible Muslim ‘crusade’ had been averted:

In towns where Mahommedans are settled substantial Mosques have been built, which previously did not exist, but as far as is known no Missionaries from Senoussi or other parts have come to the country during the year. The movement reported some three years ago appears to have died out and very little remains of it amongst the Pagan tribes in the North.<sup>104</sup>

The arrival of itinerant Muslim preachers raised a new problem which earlier colonial officials usually had not taken into account when dealing with the Muslim population in West Africa, namely the existence of differences among Muslims in their interpretation of Islam. Although Mahdism, Panislamism and ‘Islam Arabe’ had been identified by European scholars as posing a threat to the colonial order, such movements and ideas were believed to be more or less absent in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>105</sup> What was noted was the ‘mixing’ of Muslim and non-Muslim practices and traditions, which colonial French scholars called ‘Islam Noire’. Later scholars have pointed to an age-old tradition of accommodation, especially among Juula and other

<sup>100</sup> As Goody points out, Imam ‘Umar (Alhaji Umar) had earlier published a work, *Labarin Nasara*, which was highly critical of the European imperialist conquest of the states in the Sudan savannah. However, like other established Muslim scholars, he resented the intrusion of outside preachers into his community. Therefore, when Malam Musa arrived in the Salaga area and preached his Mahdist message, Imam ‘Umar refused to join in his attempt to reform the locals and expel the whites (Goody 1970, 146 fn 2).

<sup>101</sup> Westermann 1914, 208.

<sup>102</sup> Lubeck 1968, Interview 30.

<sup>103</sup> See further Goody 1970, 143.

<sup>104</sup> PRAAD ADM 56/1/432, AR NT 1908, para 46; TNA CO 98/17, AR NT 1908 (Watherston), para 45.

<sup>105</sup> Becker 1909.

Mande Muslims,<sup>106</sup> which Ivor Wilks terms the Suwarian tradition.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, both British and German scholars had noted the generally positive impact and influence of Hausa merchants and Muslims.<sup>108</sup> However, Mahdist movements at the beginning of the twentieth century made it clear to the colonial officials that some Muslims were not in favour of the colonial order and could – as in the rest of the Muslim world – become the arch enemy of the colonial state. Interestingly, the overall conclusion reached by British, German and French colonial officials was that the negative, potentially troublemaking, element always came from abroad, ‘alien’ Muslims. Local, ‘native’ or ‘our’ Muslims were ‘peace loving’, i.e., they were believed to have accommodated themselves to the colonial order.<sup>109</sup>

In the end, the impact of colonial policies in the Northern Territories was double-edged. On the one hand, some colonial officials supported the idea of fostering the growth of Islam among the chiefly groups, i.e., the Dagbamba, Mamprusi, Nanumba, Wala and Gbanya. On the other hand, there never existed any outright pro-Islamic policy. In the end, the religion of the chiefs and their chieftaincies did not matter. The outcome of the colonial policy of non-interference was an increasing societal split in the Northern Territories. Among the ‘chiefly’ groups, Islam gained further strength whereas in the non-chiefly or ‘stateless’ societies, Christianity along with African Traditional Religions were to constitute the peoples’ faith.

The colonial government in the Northern Territories did not choose a similar approach towards Islam and the Muslims as was taken in Northern Nigeria. In fact, one could even claim that the colonial discourse on Islam in the Northern Territories changed during Watherston’s era, the breaking point being perhaps the 1906/07 Muslim insurrections. Islam gradually ceased to be a kind of ‘favoured’ religion and Watherston sent an invitation to the Basel Missionary Society, asking it to establish a shop and a mission station in Tamale.<sup>110</sup> He also started to be less suspicious about the Catholic mission in Navrongo.<sup>111</sup> Although such softening of attitudes towards Christian missionaries continued among the British administrators during the 1910s, missionary activity remained restricted to non-Muslim areas.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Sanneh 1976; Sanneh 1997.

<sup>107</sup> Wilks 2000, 96–98. See further Chapter II.1.2.

<sup>108</sup> Weiss 2000b, 68–72.

<sup>109</sup> Weiss 2005b.

<sup>110</sup> BMA D-1,91, file 91, Letter from Chief Commissioner Watherston, Tamale 29.4.1909. See further Chapter III.4.2.

<sup>111</sup> The White Fathers were allowed to settle at Navrongo in 1906. However, the relationship between the Catholic fathers and the colonial administration remained strained during the next decade or so. See further Der 1974; Bening 1990, Chapter 2.

<sup>112</sup> Kimble 1963, 80–81; Bening 1990, 30; Wilks 1989, 179.

#### **2.4. Changing Perceptions: the Criticism of Colonial Policy before WWI**

Early British colonial policy and especially the British-Muslim alliance in the Northern Territories was not only criticized internally but also came under heavy attack from external, Christian, pressure groups. In 1910 the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh protested against – what was said to be – British pro-Muslim colonial policies in Africa. According to Christian missionary organizations, British policy tended to favour Islam and Muslims. Even worse for the missionary societies, the British colonial government had closed some regions, including Northern Nigeria, to Christian missionary activities and restricted their activities in others, such as the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, in some areas the British colonial government was utilizing Muslim authorities and administrative personnel in systems of Indirect Rule, sanctioning Muslim education and Islamic Law. Such a policy, the missionary societies claimed, was in contrast with the general goals of colonial rule, namely spreading (Western) civilization and lifting Africa up from the stage of barbarism and heathendom. It was argued that such a pro-Muslim policy would enable the spread of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa and pose a serious threat to both Christian missionaries as well as to European rule in general.<sup>114</sup>

Although Watherston and his successor Cecil Armitage could largely ignore the demands of the Christian missionary lobby, the Christian criticism as well as internal skepticism about the problematic administrative and political construction of the Protectorate required a reformulation of the British position towards the Muslim population in the North. During the next decades, British colonial vocabulary in the Northern Territories began to differentiate between ‘true’ and ‘pseudo’ Muslims. ‘True’ Muslims were those who could read and speak Arabic, and in their daily lives came close to the European image of Islam. Usually Muslims from Northern Nigeria and the French Sudan were identified as being ‘true’ Muslims. However, although the Hausa, Yoruba and Juula traders and scholars were still regarded as being a valuable asset for the colonial economy and administration after 1906, they were also seen as ‘aliens’ and ‘foreigners’, thus posing a possible threat. Local Muslims, on the other hand, did not pose such a threat. Their Islam was termed by many

---

<sup>113</sup> The main thorn in the flesh of the missionary societies was the decision by Sir Frederick Lugard to ban Christian missionaries from establishing themselves in Muslim areas of Northern Nigeria, i.e., most of that protectorate. The background for Lugard’s negative perception of Christian missionary activities in the area went back at least as far as 1900, when members of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) tried to establish a missionary station in Kano, the metropolis of Hausaland. The attempt ended in failure, and the missionaries were expelled by the amir. In Lugard’s opinion, the CMS had caused a political mess and endangered his policy towards the Muslim rulers of the Sokoto Caliphate. As a consequence, therefore, Northern Nigeria was more or less closed to Christian missionaries for decades, mainly due to political reasons: The political order established by Lugard in Northern Nigeria was not to be shaken by anti-Muslim Christian missionary activity. See further Ayandele 1979; Barnes 1995.

<sup>114</sup> For a general discussion, see Sundkler and Steed 2000.



colonial officials a ‘debased’ form; they were said to interpret the religious rules in a more lax way and would usually be criticized for their superficial or ‘insignificant’ knowledge by both the colonial officials as well as the ‘true’ Muslims.<sup>115</sup> Thus, Chief Commissioner Armitage claimed that

... Mohammedanism would appear to make little, if any, progress in this Dependency, and is, in the case of many of those who profess it’s tenets, of a debased form, and more than tainted with the prevailing paganism. The bulk of the Mohammedan population is to be found in the Southern Province.<sup>116</sup>

Local or ‘pseudo’ Muslims were said to show little respect for the ‘integral rules’ of Islam. Islam was said to be making little or no progress, what was practiced was a ‘debased form’ and it had, for example, no impact upon local traditions of justice or land tenure.<sup>117</sup> Irvine, who used a rather neutral language in his description of local Muslims in his earlier reports, declared in 1911 that local Islam was of an indifferent form and that individuals turned to Islam for prestigious considerations yet still practiced many of their ‘pagan’ customs.<sup>118</sup> Curiously, it seems as if the colonial officials were somewhat disappointed in the tame variety of Islam that they encountered in the North: “Mohammedans do not make any serious attempts to proselytise among the neighbouring Pagans,” it was declared in the 1916 Annual Report.<sup>119</sup> Even the Muslims in Wa, which had caused some concern to the colonial officials in 1906, were said to lack “any crusading enthusiasm” and were living in peace and good will with their non-Muslim neighbours about one decade later.<sup>120</sup>

If the colonial officials during the early years reported the spread of ‘Muslim’ influence among the ruling elite (British appointed chiefs and local headmen) in a positive manner, their tone changed during the 1910s. Armitage, too, admitted that the British-Muslim alliance in Mamprusi had been based on a miscalculation and misconception of local political conditions in Gambaga and Nalerigu and regretted the loss of political influence of the Nayiri due to British policies.<sup>121</sup> In 1912, however, a correction in British policy followed in the northeast with the proclamation of the Nayiri, Na Wubga (Mahama), as Paramount Chief of the entire North-Eastern Province. In fact, being the Paramount Chief, the Nayiri now became the key collaborator between the colonial government and the local chiefs.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>115</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/466, AR Southern Province (SP) 1912, page 12.

<sup>116</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/464, AR NT 1912, page 34. Similar reference in ADM 56/1/473, AR NT 1913, Section IX.

<sup>117</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/105, Report of the Northern Territories Land Committee. J.A.S. Donnelly, Act. DC Bawku 13.9.1911, page 36.

<sup>118</sup> TNA CO 98/20, AR NT 1911 [Irvine], page 15.

<sup>119</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/486, AR NT 1916, para 64.

<sup>120</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/489, AR Northwestern Province (NWP) 1918, para 45; also ADM 56/1/489, AR NT 1918, para 59.

<sup>121</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/124, Tour of Inspection by CCNT C.H. Armitage, July 1911, para 7.

<sup>122</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/124, Tour of Inspection November 1912–January 1913, Report by CCNT Armitage, para 9; Lance 1995, 138.



However, although the reforms carried out by Armitage in 1912 were to strengthen the non-Muslim political position as “all” of the Chiefs and local headmen were known to be non-Muslims, the decision to regard Hausa as being the lingua franca in the Northern Territories was both erroneous and, at the same time, strengthened the Muslim position as Hausa was closely linked with both Hausa culture (“Muslim costume”) and Islam.<sup>123</sup> The matter was to become a highly contested one during the late 1920s and 1930s when the introduction of Indirect Rule was debated, not least because Hausa as a language was regarded as a foreign language, and the Hausas were perceived as ‘aliens’ and ‘true Muslims’, i.e., a possible threat to the colonial setup.

At the outbreak of war in 1914, there already was some anxiety among the British officials about the loyalty of the Muslim communities towards the colonial state: what position would they choose in the war against Germany and the Ottoman Empire? As in Northern Nigeria, the colonial officials in the Northern Territories feared a kind of unspecified Panislamic resurgence or rallying behind the call for a joint uprising against the colonial government. The Shaykh ūl-Islam in Istanbul issued a call for *jihad*, heavily supported – and, in fact, orchestrated – by Berlin.<sup>124</sup> Even worse, only a few months before the outbreak of the war, the French authorities informed the Acting District Commissioner of Lawra, M.G.S. Sheriff that they had arrested one *malam* and his twenty followers who had been preaching a Holy War.<sup>125</sup>

Despite German and Ottoman hopes of a general uprising against the British and French colonial governments in West Africa, the Muslim population chose to side with their colonial masters. In British West Africa, the colonial authorities did their utmost to underline the pro-Muslim position of the Empire and to give a British interpretation for the causes of the war. In the Northern Territories – as in Northern Nigeria – the Muslim communities did not question the British position but rather expressed their confidence in the British administration.<sup>126</sup> The local Muslim intermediaries, such as the Imam of Gambaga, remained loyal and continued to work with the colonial officials.<sup>127</sup> On the outbreak of war with Turkey, Chief Commissioner Armitage instructed his officials to explain to the Muslim communities that “Great Britain is not only the greatest Mohammedan Power in the World but the true and consistent friend of the followers of that religion.”<sup>128</sup> Throughout the Protectorate, the colonial officials called the leading Muslims – if

<sup>123</sup> Lance 1995, 138.

<sup>124</sup> See further Norris 1990.

<sup>125</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 61/5/7, Informal Diary Lawra, entry for 20.4.1914.

<sup>126</sup> TNA CO 98/24, AR NT 1914 [Armitage], page 22.

<sup>127</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/184, Informal Official Diary for the Northern Territories, entry for 14.8.1914.

<sup>128</sup> Letter of Armitage to the Provincial Commissioners, dated 7.11.1914, quoted in Kimble 1963, 83.

not the whole community – for meetings at the District Headquarters where they explained the causes for the war between Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire as well as underlined the British pro-Muslim position.<sup>129</sup>

Such meetings were repeated during the following years. In Wa, for example, the DC held meetings with local Muslims again in 1916, and discussed with them pamphlets in Arabic sent by the Chief Commissioner which projected German rule in East Africa as anti-Islamic.<sup>130</sup> In Lawra, a letter from the Secretary of State about Turkish misrule in Arabia was read to the local Muslims.<sup>131</sup> According to Wilks' investigations, the main cause for the repetition of British propaganda in Wa was due to their fear of Muslim unrest after the return from Mecca of Alhaji Muhammad b. 'Uthman Dun and his companions in March 1916. The cornerstone of British propaganda was its claim that the British Empire in fact was a, if not the, major Muslim power since Britain ruled over India and other Muslim territories, and that most of the Muslims in the world were supporting the allies and not the Germans.<sup>132</sup> The DC, at least, was confident that the situation in Wa was under control and that the Muslim section was backing British rule.<sup>133</sup>

The fear of Panislamism was once again articulated a few years after the First World War. In late 1920, the Colonial Office in London had received news about possible contacts between the Shaykh *ül-Islam* and Muslim communities in the Gold Coast. An investigation was immediately launched, but no concrete evidence was ever brought forward. Instead, London was told that either the Political Officers had no news about such rumours in the Colony or in Ashanti. Only in the Northern Territories, was something possibly going on. District Commissioner of Lawra Duncan-Johnstone reported an "unusual," friendly attitude on part of the Hausa community at Kunyukuong and a rumour that a letter had been received by them from "somewhere." However, both the DC as well as the PC regarded the affair as unproblematic. They felt that there was little cause for alarm as the activities of the Hausa community had been wrongly interpreted: the friendly attitude, it was believed, was due to the Hausa beginning to regard the British as a kind of ally as they live in the midst of non-Muslims.<sup>134</sup> However, as the officers noted, nothing ever happened.

<sup>129</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 68/5/2, Informal Diary Zuarungu, entries for 17.11.1914 and 20.11.1914; PRAAD/A ADM 61/5/7, Informal Diary Lawra, entry for 14.12.1914.

<sup>130</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/177, *Precis of Informal Official Diary*, NWP, Wa District, entry for 8.11.1916.

<sup>131</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/177, *Extract from Informal Diary*, Lorha, entry for 28.10.1916.

<sup>132</sup> Wilks 1989, 158.

<sup>133</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/177, *Precis of Informal Official Diary*, NWP, Wa District, entry for 8.11.1916.

<sup>134</sup> TNA CO 96/617 (63715), letter from Deputy Governor to Viscount Milner, Accra 11.12.1920.

### 3. THE FORMATION OF COLONIAL AND MUSLIM SPHERES

Since the establishment of colonial rule in the Voltaic Basin, the colonial authorities and subsequent Western scholars have been trying to study and define the state of Islam, the impact of Muslims on local political, social and cultural structures and the process of Islamization in the region. The situation at the beginning of the twentieth century was more than confusing. On the one hand, some of the societies – the kingdoms – were either identified as Muslim or places where Muslims had a strong influence. Others, such as the ‘state-less societies’ were known to be indifferent or even hostile towards Islam. On the other hand, Ekem Ferguson’s investigations challenged all this, claiming that the Muslim communities in some of the kingdoms had a strong and influential position, but that the political, social and cultural structures had few if any traces of Islam. After the establishment of British rule over the Northern Territories, the political sphere was defined as being controlled by the colonial authorities and the local ruler, either ‘traditional’ or ‘invented’. Thus, whatever the political conditions had been before British colonial rule, by the imposition of British colonial rule, the political sphere – and by extension, the judicial sphere – were ‘secularized’. This process was highlighted when the German-controlled part of Dagbon came under British rule after 1914. Whereas Islamic Law had no official position in the Northern Territories, the use of Muslim Law was not only permitted but also encouraged by the German administration in Jendi (Yendi). However, with the establishment of British rule in Eastern Dagbon (Yendi) during the latter part of the 1910s, the Islamic courts were abolished. Although the British colonial administration was critical about Islamic Law – according to its investigation, Islamic Law was nowhere applied in the Northern Territories – the British were in desperate need of the services of the Muslim scholars, not as jurists but middlemen, assistants and in administrative roles.<sup>135</sup>

It can be argued that the British authorities never really fully understood the complex relationship that prevailed in some regions between the local political authorities and the Muslim community. Nor did it occur to them that, from the perspective of the Muslim community, the imposition of colonial rule was not a structural break. If the position of the Muslim communities in the precolonial kingdoms was that of ‘stranger communities’ (Skalnik), their condition did not change during the colonial period. What the leaders of the Muslim community had to do was to renegotiate the terms of trade with their new political overlords, which they eventually did and at times with some success (for example, the British-Muslim alliance in Gambaga).

However, the imposition of colonial rule resulted in some regions, notably Dagbon, in a problematic situation for the Muslim community. Following Phyllis Ferguson’s investigation into the process of Islamization in Dagbon, precolonial Dagbon had witnessed an increased process of Islamization in terms of the

---

<sup>135</sup> Ferguson 1972, 203.

proliferation of Muslim offices in Yendi. This development came to an end during the twentieth century. Instead, the Muslim community was increasingly cut off from the political sphere, which was to be solely controlled by the local, usually non-Muslim, ruling class and the colonial authorities. On the other hand, the division of the colonial (political) and the Muslim sphere meant – at least in Dagbon – that the focus shifted from the Islamization of society to the conversion of individuals. What the colonial investigations time after time emphasized was the ‘lukewarm’ attitude of the local population towards Islam and ‘Islamic culture’, but what these investigations missed was that the services provided by Muslim functionaries, such as circumcision, naming, regulation of the festivals, medicine, charms, to mention but a few, or their influence on the dress-code, had created the framework for the Islamization of society. The imposition of colonial rule made a total Islamization of society impossible – such a process would have necessitated the introduction of Islamic Law, the public conversion of the ruler and the ruling class as well as the reformulation of the political order along a perceived Islamic order (whatever that might have been). However, Ferguson further argues that the development of the ward-mosque system in Yendi (at least), which commenced after the imposition of colonial rule, was a reaction to the political changes and to the threat to the maintenance of the *sunna*:

... in order to preserve the sunna, the Muslim community [in Yendi] sponsored the emergence of a new and non-political class of imams who were to provide services to the community not at the organizational level of the state – which was the role of the Muslim officials of the Ya Na – but at the local level of the town wards.<sup>136</sup>

Thus, as will be outlined and discussed in the subsequent subchapters, the establishment of a distinct ‘Muslim sphere’ more than anything else seemed to have provided the means for the conversions of individuals and the growth of the *umma*. However, as this sphere was controlled by a non-political class of imams, the colonial officials rarely, if ever, had anything to do with the sphere. Not surprisingly, therefore, as long as the actors in the Muslim sphere did not challenge the colonial sphere, the colonial authorities would not be interested in them or in the activities within the Muslim sphere.

### 3.1. British Attempts to Identify Muslim Centres

After more than a decade of colonial rule in the Northern Territories, the British authorities had to admit that Islam was not the religion of the majority of the population. The 1911 and 1921 censuses, which will be discussed in the next subchapter, depicted the Protectorate as a mainly non-Muslim territory, Muslim influence and presence being restricted to a few places. However, despite this fact,

<sup>136</sup> Ferguson 1972, 309.

the main occupation of the colonial administration continued to be identification of the main Muslim centres and to report on changes in the religious composition of the population. This, it can be argued, was perhaps mainly due to the continued fear by the colonial authorities that itinerant Muslim preachers could cause unrest among the Muslim population.

Starting with the early 1910s, the major Muslim settlements were reported to be at Tamale, Salaga, Bole, Larabanga, Gambaga, Walewale, Bawku, Wa and Wahabu (see Map 16).<sup>137</sup> The rise of Tamale as an important Muslim centre was not surprising as the colonial government had moved its headquarters to the village in 1908 and Tamale had thereafter developed into the political and economic centre of the Protectorate, attracting many Muslim traders to the town. Salaga and Larabanga in the Southern Province and Wa and Gambaga in the Northern Province were already known as major Muslim centres. However, the colonial authorities were rather puzzled about whether Islam was spreading or not, not to mention the impact of Muslims on non-Muslim societies. During the 1910s and 1920s, the official line of the colonial authorities was that Muslims did not make any serious attempts to proselytize among their non-Muslim neighbours, and that most Muslims lived in settlements in the towns along the trade routes.<sup>138</sup>

The development of Muslim settlements in the larger towns was a clearly visible feature of the spread of Islam in the North. As during earlier centuries, the spread of Islam was tied to the settlement of Muslim traders (and scholars), and the colonial authorities both witnessed and promoted the establishment of *zongos* or special quarters for trading communities. In all the important towns of the Southern Province, the *zongos* were mainly inhabited by ‘foreign’ trading communities: Hausa, Wangara, Zabarima, Mossi (Moshi) and a certain number of Fulani (FulBe).<sup>139</sup> A similar situation was found in the North-Western Province: apart from Muslim settlements at Wa, Gorupisi, Walembele and Nandaw, *zongos* had been established throughout the Province and were inhabited by Hausa, Bambara, Fulani, Mossi, and Zabarima.<sup>140</sup>

However, the colonial authorities had difficulties in providing an assessment of the impact of the Muslims. In 1915, PC Berkeley in the North-Western Province claimed that Muslims had not made any spread “worthy of notice,”<sup>141</sup> and a few years later it was stated that even the inhabitants of the Muslim settlements and *zongos* were not ‘true’ Muslims and did not comply with ‘Islamic order’ – or at least not to the Western idea of how a Muslim was supposed to live his life as a Muslim:

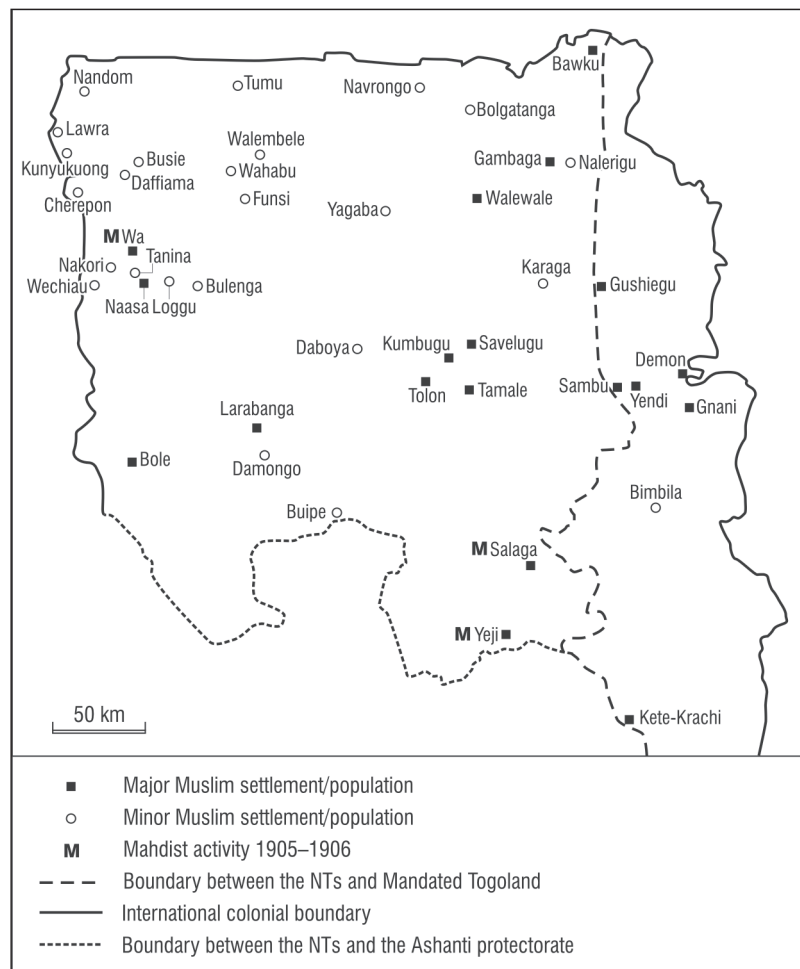
<sup>137</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/464, AR NT 1912, page 35; PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/473, AR NT 1913 (Armitage), Chapter IX. Religions.

<sup>138</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/486, AR NT 1916 (Moutray-Read), Chapter IX, para 64; PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/38, AR NT 1926–27 (Castellain), para 82.

<sup>139</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/109, Census Report SP (CSP Irvine, November 1911).

<sup>140</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/489, AR NWP 1918, para 45.

<sup>141</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/424, AR NWP 1914 (Berkeley), page 11.



**Map 16.** Muslim settlements in the Northern Territories (ca. 1930).

“the majority [of the Muslims, HW] who practice the outward forms of Islam show very little respect for its integral rules which they maltreat and mix with various pagan beliefs.”<sup>142</sup>

Especially among the so-called stateless societies, i.e., in the northern part of the Protectorate, Islam did not seem to make much progress. Wa, Bawku and Gambaga were identified as being the main Muslim centres, but Islam was not ‘strong’ and local Muslims were said to consult both their *malams* and local ‘fetishes’ in times of stress.<sup>143</sup> In Navrongo, a Muslim scholar was said to preach Islam, but had made no converts by 1918,<sup>144</sup> and in Lawra District only a few Muslims were said to live in Nandaw [Nandom].<sup>145</sup> During the early 1920s, Muslim settlements were reported at Gambaga, Walewale, Yagaba, Bawku, Wa and Wahabu, although the colonial officials were not impressed by the Muslim inhabitants. In fact, the rather negative reporting about the ‘debased’ form of Islam that was said to prevail among the

<sup>142</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/489, AR NWP 1918, para 45.

<sup>143</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/493, AR NP 1921, para 43.

<sup>144</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/489, AR NT 1918, para 59.

<sup>145</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/489, AR Lorha 1918, page 10.



Muslims in the Protectorate had, by the 1920s, become an annually repeated phrase in official reporting. In such a vein, the District Commissioner of Lawra-Tumu, E.Q.M. Dasent, for example, noted that few of the Muslims in his district had any deeper knowledge of Islam, and showed hardly any respect for what he seemed to have thought to be a Muslim way of life. Instead, as the colonial officers usually claimed, most Muslims would secretly practice their traditional religion.<sup>146</sup>

However, the colonial authorities did notice some changes on a local level in the Northern Province within the next decade. The chief Muslim settlements were still located in the larger towns of Wa, Gambaga and Walewale (see Map 2). New Muslim settlements were reported, although the colonial authorities were not sure about what to make of this information. In Southern Mamprusi District, Muslim settlements were found in most of the larger towns. In Lawra District, ‘foreign’ Muslims had settled at Lawra, Tumu<sup>147</sup> and Kunyukuong, apart from the already existing Muslim settlement in Nandom. In Wa District, which was known to have a considerable Muslim population, several villages and towns were listed as having Muslim settlements: Wa, Dundoli, Gorupisi, Nasa, Kadoli, Wahabu, Wuchiau<sup>148</sup>, Loggo, Funsu, Tanina, Bulanga and Nakawro.<sup>149</sup> A remarkable feature seems to have been the reported spread of Islam in Kusasi District,<sup>150</sup> but other reports argued that the expansion was confined to Bawku town where Islam was said to have become “fairly well established” and the number of Muslims was said to be increasing.<sup>151</sup> On the other hand, Islam had made no progress in Zuarungu District and the number of Muslims was said to be as low as 5 in 1930.<sup>152</sup>

A similarly (confusing) situation seemed to prevail in the Southern Province (including parts of Mandated Togoland, i.e., Eastern Dagomba and Nanumba) during the 1920s. Apart from some large Muslim settlements, such as those in

<sup>146</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/493, AR NP 1922–1923, para 116.

<sup>147</sup> According to the 1931 Census, the Lawra *zongo* included 29 compounds and inhabited 246 persons whereas the Lawra ‘Carawanserai’ listed 10 compounds and 106 inhabitants. No data for religious or ethnic affiliation. (Return of Population Census on Form A/villages, *The Gold Coast 1931*, 190.) The size and importance of the Muslim settlement in Tumu is somewhat unclear. Although the town was reported to have a small Muslim population during the mid-1920s (PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/511, AR NP 1924–1925 (Louis Castellain), para 73–74; same information in PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/9, AR NP 1926–1927, para 55, and PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/10, AR NP 1928–1929, page 10.), there was no reference to Tumu in the list of (small) Muslim settlements in the Lawra-Tumu District (PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/27, AR Lawra-Tumu District 1930–1931, page 10).

<sup>148</sup> Wuchiau was described as a fairly large Wala town in 1916, with a mosque and a Muslim population of about 60. However, the bulk of the population were non-Muslims (PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/177, *Precis of Informal Official Diary, NWP, Wa District*, entry for 22.10.1916).

<sup>149</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/493, AR NP 1923–1924, paras 87–90; PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/505, AR NP 1923–1924 (Cutfield), para 87–90. According to another report (Wa District 1923–1924, included in ADM 56/1/505), Muslim settlements were located at Wa, Dundoli, Gorupisi, Nasa, Kadoli, Wahabu, Wuchiau, Loggo, Funsu, Tanina, Bulanga and Nakawro.

<sup>150</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/494, AR Kusasi District 1923–1924, page 12.

<sup>151</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/493, AR NP 1923–1924, paras 87–90; PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/505, AR NP 1923–24 (Cutfield), para 87–90; PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/47, AR NP 1932–1933, page 16.

<sup>152</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/19/4, Mohammedan Marriages and Divorces.

Tamale, Salaga and Yendi, the colonial authorities claimed that the majority of the population were non-Muslims.<sup>153</sup> But, on the other hand, in Western Dagomba District alone, the colonial authorities had counted at least 100 *malams* in 1931,<sup>154</sup> and (small) Muslim communities were found in almost every (Eastern) Dagomba village.<sup>155</sup> However, some officers were not sure about the impact of the local Muslim communities in (Eastern) Dagbomba District, and felt that Islam had affected the Nanumba “probably” more than the Dagomba.<sup>156</sup> Be that as it may, such observations highlight the superficial (and usually conflicting) insights that some of the colonial authorities were able to obtain, especially when compared to the observations and impressions of the Basel missionaries in Dagbon and Nanun.<sup>157</sup>

### 3.2. British Colonial Censuses from 1911 to 1931

The change in the presentation and image of Islam in the eyes of colonial officials in the Northern Territories can also be exemplified through the three early censuses conducted between 1911 and 1931. The quantitative data presented in them is of little value as they generally added up only rough estimations and sometimes even pure guesses.<sup>158</sup> However, the data can be used for a qualitative assessment, especially when studying the change in the colonial presentation of various groups, such as the Muslim population. All the three census reports, made in 1911, 1921 and 1931, can be regarded as mirroring a colonial ‘fiction’. At the time of the 1911 census, there was still no sign of any doubt towards the belief in the usefulness of local Muslims and the ‘civilizing’ effect of Islam. Such an image had changed at the time of the 1921 census, and the report stated that the overwhelming majority of the population in the Northern Territories was, in fact, non-Muslim. By 1931,

<sup>153</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/501, AR SP 1926–1927 (Cutfield), para 119.

<sup>154</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/45, Census Western Dagomba District 1931. The figure of 100 *malams* living in Western Dagomba District is somewhat puzzling. The same figure was given by Cardinal in his analysis of the 1931 census – but in his presentation there was a total of 100 ‘ministers’, i.e., “teachers of Mohammedan persuasion,” in the Northern Territories (Cardinal 1932, 171–172: Table – Return of Africans in Occupations other than Industry [1931 census]). It is likely that the census officials did not receive data on Muslim teachers and scholars from the other districts. Thus, Cardinal’s figure shows only a small fraction of all *malams* living in the Northern Territories at the beginning of the 1930s.

<sup>155</sup> Imams existed in at least the following villages: Gushiago (Limam Yakubu), Demon (Limam Bukari), Gnadi (Limam Saibu), Sambu (Limam Sulemanu). (PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/124, Copies of Captain Sword’s Office Diary (Yendi Dec 1915–May 1916), entry for 20.4.1916; PRAAD/A ADM 67/5/1, Informal Book Yendi, pages 90, 130; PRAAD/T NRG 8/4/1, Informal Diary 1916 (Moutray-Read), entries for 20.1.1916 and 26.1.1916).

<sup>156</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/499, AR Mandated Togoland 1930, para 49.

<sup>157</sup> See further Chapter III.4.3.

<sup>158</sup> According to Ivor Wilks, who has studied the census returns for Wa, the 1921 census is the earliest count upon which some reliance may be placed. However, what Wilks notes for Wa holds true for all other regions in the North: the early figures are estimates rather than counts and at best crude approximations of reality (Wilks 1989, 11–12).

the diminishing interest on the part of the colonial administration towards the local Muslim population is reflected in the census report where only so-called ‘true’ Muslims were counted as Muslims.

The 1911 census contained some conflicting messages which somewhat distorted the colonial discussion of the Northern Territories. According to the 1911 census – which certainly has to be regarded at best as a ‘good guess’ – the majority of the population in Tamale District was Muslim (32,463 out of 63,976) and a substantial minority of Muslims lived in Salaga District (3,919 out of 10,328) and a lesser one in Wa District (3,567 out of 64,884). Although British Dagbon was presented as a relatively Muslim area, Salaga town in Eastern Gonja (Salaga District), Larabanga town and the Wala ‘tribe’ in Wa District were singled out as being highly Islamized. Most Muslims were said to be engaged in petty trade and to control the commercial sector. Therefore, they were identified as the major target of colonial interest.<sup>159</sup>

When compared to the 1911 census, the 1921 census revealed that there was a non-Muslim majority in all the districts of the Southern as well as the Northern Province of the Northern Territories. In fact, the figures of the 1921 census demonstrated that the 1911 census had been pure fiction. Especially in the case of Dagbon, the figures concerning the number of Muslims were now completely different. Whereas the majority of the population of Tamale District in 1911 was said to have been Muslim, ten years later the Muslim population of Western Dagomba District had been reduced to a small minority (7,728 Muslims out of



**Plate 10.** Salaga Central Friday Mosque, 2000; photo: HW.

<sup>159</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/109, Census taking 1911 – Northern Territories, para 32, 41–42, 44.

93,944 inhabitants). While the 1911 census had counted some 37,000 Muslims in the Southern Province, ten years later only 20,919 Muslims seemed to be living in the province. The 1921 census thus established two new ‘facts’ about the Northern Territories. First, only a relatively small minority of Muslims lived in the territory, and, second, the bulk of the total population lived in the Northern Province, which was almost totally non-Muslim.<sup>160</sup>

Although the 1921 census regarded the Northern Territories as principally a non-Muslim territory, there still existed local Muslim settlements. In Dagbon, both Tamale and Yendi, the two main urban settlements, had substantial Muslim populations. So, too, did Salaga, which was said to have 18 mosques although the population of the town was said to be decreasing.<sup>161</sup> By and large, the 1921 census fixed the image of Muslims and Islam in the north:

Most of the Mohammedans live in the Southern Province with the exception of such places as Wa, Gambaga, Walewale and Bawku in the Northern Province. Larabanga, Bole, Salaga are the chief centres of Mahommedanism in the Southern Province, and Wa, to a lesser extent Daboya. The great majority are Pagans, and in this connection many registered Mahommedans in the South are only so in name, and are by no means strict followers of their adopted religion.<sup>162</sup>

During the 1920s a separation of the believers into categories according to the depth of their faith became standard in colonial reporting. Thus, Chief Commissioner Walker-Leigh reported in 1923 that “the Mohammedans for the most part are not very strict in the observance of the rites of their Religion, though the minority are devout enough,”<sup>163</sup> and the 1928–1929 Annual Report confirmed that

... the majority of the Natives are Pagans, there are a sprinkling of good Mahommedans, with a few thousand people who, though they profess Mahommedanism, do not by any means carry out its tenets.<sup>164</sup>

The ‘mixing’ and ‘syncretic’ form of Islam had already been observed by many colonial officials, especially by those in the Northern Province. Such a re-evaluation of Islam and Muslims can be linked to the discussion among the colonial officials about how and through whom to rule. These discussions started with an internal criticism concerning the ‘invention’ of chiefs among the so-called stateless societies and the identification of the *tindana* (Earth Priest) as the key person in those societies.<sup>165</sup> Whereas the Commissioner for the Southern Province, Duncan-Johnstone, suggested the utilization of local, literate Muslims as late as 1932,<sup>166</sup> his

<sup>160</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/241, Census taking 1921 – Northern Territories.

<sup>161</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/241, Census taking 1921 – Northern Territories, para 72.

<sup>162</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/496, AR NT 1921, para 48.

<sup>163</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/500, AR NT 1922–1923, para 66.

<sup>164</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/18, AR NT 1928–1929, para 44.

<sup>165</sup> Grishow 1997, 143–148. An early discussion is found in Cardinal 1921a, 15–16, Rattray 1931, 44, and Eyre-Smith 1933, 38–39.

<sup>166</sup> Ferguson and Wilks 1970, 336; Staniland 1975, 91.

counterpart in the Northern Province, Whittall, was known for his negative, if not hostile, attitude towards engaging local Muslims for government work.<sup>167</sup> Especially in the Northern Province, Muslims were presented as outsiders and said to have little ‘civilizing’ impact. For example, District Commissioner Eyre-Smith derogatorily noted that it had become the fashion for an imam or a *malam* to be attached to a court of a Paramount Chief and the entourage of some local chiefs.<sup>168</sup>

One finds ample examples of disappointment in the remarks made concerning the prevalent, ‘decadent’ form of Islam. District Commissioner Castellain’s wrote in the 1922–1923 Annual Report of the Northern Province that

... the Commissioner of Lawra-Tumu states that very few of these even know, and those that do so show little respect for, the rules which govern the Mohammedan Religion. They appear to make few efforts towards converting their Pagan brothers to their own belief and are more occupied in making a living by the easiest possible means. Many of them live entirely off the Pagans by professing a supernatural power, which in reality means nothing more than pure chicanery.<sup>169</sup>

A similar description was given by the District Commissioner of Wa who reported that

... these people who profess to follow the Prophet also believe in the principle of keeping on the safe side and offer sacrifices to the local fetish concurrently with their supplications to Allah. When a mines labourer returns with a pocket full of money he will frequently buy himself a white robe and a red fez and before any length of time has elapsed, he is a sort of Mallam. Very few of the so-called Mallams can even write in the Arabic Script, and only two to my knowledge have ever become “Alhaji” by making the pilgrimage to Mecca.<sup>170</sup>

In most cases, however, the influence of “Mohammedanism” was perceived as a cultural one. People started to wear “Mohammedan” costume.<sup>171</sup> The most prominent – or at least the most vivid – form of “Mohammedan” influence was the production of charms and amulets by some Muslims.<sup>172</sup> None of these activities were perceived to be signs of the existence of a ‘pure’ Islam in the North. Or, as Castellain declared, “quite a number of these so called Mohammedans traffic in charms and their Mohammedanism is undoubtedly tainted with paganism.”<sup>173</sup>

The colonial concept of ‘pseudo’ Muslims had become fairly well established by the early 1930s. The colonial administration felt that it had nothing to fear from

<sup>167</sup> Wilks 1989, 167.

<sup>168</sup> Eyre-Smith 1933, 39.

<sup>169</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/493, AR NP 1922–1923, para 116.

<sup>170</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/493, AR Wa District 1923–1924, para 37.

<sup>171</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/824, Essays by Assistant District Commissioners on Tribal History: B. A. Moutray-Read, *Wa or Wala* (s.l., 1908), 9; PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/124, Tour of Inspection 1911; PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/45, Census Report – SP 1931; PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/127, AR Navrongo District 1943–1944, para 63.

<sup>172</sup> Eyre-Smith 1933, 39.

<sup>173</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/492, AR NEP 1920, para 36.



these ‘pseudo’ Muslims. Thus the 1931 census only focussed on the ‘true’ Muslims who might still be regarded as posing a possible danger to the Europeans. However, as one might have expected, the census was able to establish that there was, in fact, nothing to fear. The report for the Southern Province stated that local “religion is Pagan except for a few Christians – chiefly clerks and artisans from the South, a few Mohammedans and a number of pseudo-Mohammedans.”<sup>174</sup> Only the ‘true’ Muslims were now counted in that Province and even their numbers were mere estimates provided by the District Commissioners: 700 in Western Dagomba, 1,000 in Western Gonja<sup>175</sup> and 5,476<sup>176</sup> in Eastern Gonja District.<sup>177</sup> In addition, in Yendi District (Eastern Dagomba, Mandated Togoland), there existed some 420 ‘true’ Muslims and about 2,000 ‘professing’ Muslims “... but they do not observe the Mohammedan Laws regarding marriage and alcohol and ‘perform fetish’ according to local belief.” Other than this, there were only “any amount of pseudo-Muslims” in this area.<sup>178</sup> A comparison between the various census reports reveals some interesting – but conflicting – information. Whereas earlier reports stated that most of the Muslims were to be found in the Southern Province,<sup>179</sup> the 1931 census counted over 10,000 Muslims living in the Northern Province, with the majority, almost 9,000, living in Wa.<sup>180</sup>

Due to the distinction in the 1931 census between ‘pseudo’ and ‘true’ Muslims, where only ‘true’ Muslims were counted, a general assessment of the state of confessions in the Northern Territories cannot be conducted. An analysis of the returns of the 1931 census indicates that the most populated region was the Northern Province. As stated above, the majority of the Muslims were to be found in Wa District, where about 12 percent of the population were counted as Muslim (8,988 of 72,324). The proportion of Muslims in the other districts was less, about 1 percent in Kusasi District (1,114 of 110,599<sup>181</sup>) and 0.3 percent in Southern Mamprusi District (177 of 46,583). As few as 10 Muslims were reported as living in Lawra–Tumu District, the total population of the district being estimated at 93,125 inhabitants. No Muslims were reported as living in Northern Mamprusi District where the bulk of the population, or 365,465 inhabitants, of the Northern Province

<sup>174</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/42, Census Report – SP 1931, 23.

<sup>175</sup> Termed “strict” Muslims, of which 40 percent were said to live in Larabanga (PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/45, Census Report – SP 1931).

<sup>176</sup> Said to include 365 malams; “Only genuine mallams have been counted” (PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/45, Census Report – SP 1931).

<sup>177</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/42, Census Report – SP 1931, 23.

<sup>178</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/45, Census Report – SP 1931, 11.

<sup>179</sup> For instance, CSP A.C. Duncan-Johnstone was still stating in 1930 that “... there is a large section of the population of this Province who profess Islam” (PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/178, Mohammedan Laws on Marriage, Duncan-Johnstone to CCNT 16.9.1930).

<sup>180</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/43, Census Report – NP 1931, 19.

<sup>181</sup> This number includes only the return from Kusasi District (PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/43, Census Kusasi District 1931).



were estimated to live.<sup>182</sup> However, due to the biased counting in the 1931 census, the numbers of Muslims in the Northern Province might be much higher, especially those in Southern Mamprusi District as the figure only included ‘genuine’ Muslims. In fact, the number of these ‘genuine’ Muslims seemed to decrease since they numbered 453 in 1921 and only 177 in 1931. These figures had been obtained from the imams of Walewale and Gambaga.<sup>183</sup> However, the figures must be regarded as a gross underestimation and perhaps only included certain members of the Muslim community. If the relationship between ‘pseudo’ and ‘true/genuine’ Muslims in Southern Mamprusi District was somewhat similar to other parts of the Northern Territories, i.e., about one-fifth of the total number of Muslims, then the number of Muslims in this district could have varied from some 1,000 to about 2,000 or up to 3 percent of the total (estimated) population.

The number of Muslims in other districts of the Northern Province might not have varied as much as in Southern Mamprusi District. The main argument for such an assumption is based on the historical distribution of Muslim settlements. Mampurungu and Wa were the only regions where Muslims had settled during the precolonial period and the influx of Muslims in settlements among the stateless societies had increased only during the colonial period. However, if the number of Muslims reported from Wa district was a similar underestimation and only included ‘true’ Muslims, then the number of Muslims in this district could have been higher, perhaps as many as half of the population or some 35,000 inhabitants although this figure is too high if Ivor Wilks’ discussion on the ethnic composition of Wa District is taken into account.<sup>184</sup> Wilks assumes that about half of the population in the district were non-Muslim Dagaaba, and if the likewise non-Muslim Sisala (‘Grunshi’) and Lobi are included in the assessment, then these ‘tribes’ accounted for about three-quarters of the population in the district in 1931. A compilation of census data presented in Wilks and returns from the 1931 data for Wa that Wilks has not included indicates that the proportion of Wala in the district decreased from 39 percent in 1921 (16,905 out of 43,168) to 28 percent in 1931 (20,333 out of 72,323).<sup>185</sup> If the DC’s estimate of some 9,000 Muslims in Wa in 1931 refers to ‘true/strict’ Muslims only, then less than half of the Wala were regarded as ‘Muslims’ and perhaps a similar number would have been ‘pseudo’ Muslims. Unfortunately, Wilks does not discuss the number or increase of Muslims in Wa during the colonial period. He only refers to the 1921 census which counted 3,771 Muslims in the district, representing 8.7 percent of the total population.<sup>186</sup> However, a comparison

---

<sup>182</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/43, Census NP 1931.

<sup>183</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/44, Census Southern Mamprusi District 1931.

<sup>184</sup> Wilks 1989, 13–14.

<sup>185</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/43, Census NP 1931; Wilks 1989, 13 and Table 1.2.

<sup>186</sup> Wilks 1989, 24. Wilks emphasizes the impossibility of knowing the accuracy of these figures but supposes that it was likely that Muslim households rather than non-Muslim ones had been miscounted. Unfortunately, Wilks does not discuss the 1931 figures on religion.

between the 1921 and 1931 figures clearly indicates that the ‘Muslim’ population in Wa was increasing – from 8.7 to 12 percent.

One must have similar reservations for the returns of the census of the Southern Province. The estimates of the District Commissioners of ‘true’ Muslims have to be related to the population estimates for the districts and to assumptions about the relationship between ‘true’ and ‘pseudo’ Muslims. Most of the ‘true’ Muslims were supposed to live in Eastern Gonja District. In fact, at least 35 percent of the population in the district were ‘true’ Muslims, and perhaps already half of the total population (15,980) might have been Muslims. This comes as no surprise as the district included important Muslims centres, such as Salaga, and Prang, where a large *zongo* had been established in the late 1920s.<sup>187</sup> The situation in Western Gonja District might have been different. This district had a very low population, only 11,212 inhabitants, and did not include any old, large Muslim settlements. Most of the approximately 1,000 ‘true’ Muslims counted in the district, or about 400, lived in Larabanga, the rest resided in smaller communities.<sup>188</sup> Thus, the proportion of ‘true’ Muslims in the district was about nine percent of the total (estimated) population. However, the number of Muslims must have been much higher. Even the District Commissioner remarked on the strong “Muslim influence as to dress and custom” in the district and perhaps another one to two thousand persons have to be added to the total number of Muslims in the district.

The returns from Dagbon are as conflicting as the other ones. The number of Muslims in Western Dagomba District is a gross underestimation (only 700 ‘true’ Muslims) as the Hausa, most if not all of whom were Muslims, already numbered 917 in Tamale town and 389 in Tamale District.<sup>189</sup> If, however, the District Commissioner included in his assumption only ‘true Dagomba’ Muslims (i.e., less than one percent out of about 82,000) and excluding ‘foreigners’, then the amount of ‘true’ Muslims in the district was already about 2,000. The number of Muslims in the district might actually have been as high as 10,000 or about 10 percent of the total population. The situation was similar in Eastern Dagomba District (Yendi District, Mandated Togoland). Only 420 ‘true’ Muslims were reported as living in the district of whom a quarter were said to be Hausa (i.e., about 100), but the number of Hausa was reported to be 812. Although the DC claimed that the Hausa “lapse from rigid Mohammedanism,” the number was certainly underestimated. The DC further claimed that the total number of Muslims was only 2,000 in Yendi District, i.e., about 2 percent out of a total of 91,523 inhabitants.<sup>190</sup> Although the majority in this district were Konkomba, who were (and are) practitioners of African Traditional Religions, the number of Muslim Dagomba and Nanumba already in

<sup>187</sup> See below, Chapter V.1.1.

<sup>188</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/45, Census Western Gonja District 1931.

<sup>189</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/42, Census SP 1931.

<sup>190</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/45, Report on Census 1931 for Southern Province, Northern Territories, Section of the British Sphere of Mandated Territory of Togoland.

1931 must have been higher than the DC's estimate. If it is assumed that about ten percent of the Nanumba and Dagomba in the district were Muslims, then their number was about 3,100. To this number one has to add the number of Hausa (about 800) and other 'foreigners' (about 100), which gives a total of some 4,000 Muslims in the district or about 4 percent of the inhabitants.

The 1931 census officially confirmed what the 1911 and 1921 censuses as well as numerous annual reports had already claimed: Islam had not made a very deep impact in the Northern Territories and the influence of the Muslims was not much felt. In fact, the 1931 census revealed a most puzzling situation regarding the distribution of the Muslim population not only in the Northern Territories but throughout the Gold Coast at large. Although the returns for Muslims in Kumasi and Bekwai (both Ashanti) were missing, the 1931 census demonstrated that most of the Muslims were living in Ashanti and the Colony, not in the Northern Territories (see Table 2).

Region	Muslim pop.	Total pop.
Gold Coast Colony		
Western Province	2,535	284,902
Central Province	9,883	431,384
Eastern Province	12,745	855,076
Ashanti (excl. Kumasi Town and Bekwai Town)	9,873	578,078
Northern Territories		
Northern Province	10,289	577,436
Southern Province	7,176	139,839
Togoland (Mandated Territory)		
Northern Section	2,121	168,142

**Table 2.** Muslim population in the Gold Coast, 1931 census. (Source: Cardinall 1932, 177: Return showing the Religions of the African Population [1931 census])

As Table 2 indicates, about 25,100 Muslims lived in the three provinces of the Colony together with an additional 9,800 in Ashanti – excluding the large Muslim segment of Kumasi.<sup>191</sup> In comparison, the Muslim population in the North counted about 20,000. In relative terms, however, the proportion of Muslims of the total population was higher in the North (2,5 percent) as in Ashanti (1,7 percent) and the Colony (1,6 percent).<sup>192</sup> However, the accuracy of the 1931 census was

<sup>191</sup> According to Duncan-Johnstone, about 12,000 people were living in the Kumasi zongo, presumably most of them being Muslims (RH Mss. Afr. s. 593 Duncan-Johnstone, A. Language for Adoption in the Gold Coast Regiment (1928), page 3).

<sup>192</sup> Cardinall 1932, 177.

already doubted by Cardinall and other officials. The figures of Muslims in the Southern Province (NTs) was certainly too low and seemed to include only 'true' Muslims.<sup>193</sup> By restricting the later counts to 'true' or 'pure/strict' Muslims only, the colonial authority created an impression that Islam was not a very important factor in the Northern Territories. There was some confusion about how to interpret the noticeable increase of 'Muslims' in some districts, but in the end, such reports were not regarded as cause for alarm. The main reason for this seems to have been the colonial position on the peacefulness of Islam in the Northern Territories and the concept of colonial non-interference into religious matters as long as religion and religious leaders did not challenge the colonial system. What was even more important was that Islam or the Muslims were not believed to have had any civilizing effect in the North: neither Islamic Law nor Muslim education was common. Thus, for example, Assistant District Commissioner Amherst noted for Nanumba District in 1931 that

... the Muslim penetration seems to have had no further effect on the administration of the country other than the granting of a certain amount of authority to the Limams in matrimonial matters. Of the establishment of Kadis or Muslim Law or civilisation in general there is no trace.<sup>194</sup>

Similar statements were made by other officials in their investigations during the 1920s and early 1930s into local government and administration, especially concerning land tenure, taxation and legislation. The reason for these investigations was the attempt to introduce a kind of Indirect Rule based on Native Administration similar to that in Northern Nigeria.<sup>195</sup> However, the results of the investigations made in the Northern Territories were rather disappointing from the perspective of the colonial administration. In none of the regions was Islamic Law in force and land tenure proved to be even more rudimentary.<sup>196</sup> On the other hand, inquiries showed that at least Dagbon and Wa had possessed a relatively complex tax or tribute collecting structure in precolonial times.<sup>197</sup> Thus, when the Native Administration

<sup>193</sup> Cardinall 1932, 180.

<sup>194</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/2/35, Amherst, *Nanumba*, 12.

<sup>195</sup> On the introduction of Indirect Rule in the Northern Territories, see further Staniland 1975 (Chapter 5), Ladoceur 1979, 53–57. The influence of Nigerian policy in the Northern Territories is noted in Grischow 2006.

<sup>196</sup> Most officials seem to have commenced their investigations into Islamic Law with the assumption that Islam should have had an impact on marriage and customs (as, for example, Amherst noted for Nanun). In most cases, however, it had not, as DC Irvine reported for Mamprusi, DC Wheeler for Gonja and DC Moutray Read for Wa. On the other hand, Islamic Law had, in some cases, influenced (native) criminal law and penalties. In the end, however, Islamic Law was only applied at the local courts in cases between Muslims. See PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/824, H. T. C. Wheeler, *A Description of the Customs of the Gonja Tribe* (1906), R.A. Irvine, *Mamprussi* (1908), 37, B. Moutray Read, *Wa or Wala*, 44; PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/288, Tribal Histories, salutations, Greetings etc: A.W. Cardinall, *Correlated Report on Native Customs* (1927), 11, 17; PRAAD/T NRG 8/2/35, Amherst, *Nanumba*, 25, 32.

<sup>197</sup> Ferguson and Wilks 1970, 335–336.

was eventually established during the early 1930s it followed local ‘traditions’ and was based on local ‘customs’, not Islamic Law.<sup>198</sup>

### **3.3. Colonial Needs for Administrative Personnel**

From its inception, the colonial administration was in need of individuals who could serve as intermediaries between the Europeans and the local rulers. Even more important was the need for qualified administrative personnel on the local level at the courts of the kings and chiefs. The problem was that the most suitable persons were thought to be the Muslims: they could read and write as well as speak Hausa, which was believed by the early Europeans to be the lingua franca throughout the West African savannah.<sup>199</sup> Muslims had been connected to various courts in precolonial states and they had engaged in long-distance trade.<sup>200</sup> Such persons were identified by the British, among others, as being the most suitable individuals for the administrative and economic development of their dependencies. In addition, Hausa was identified as the key medium for commerce and communication and therefore its use should be promoted.<sup>201</sup> For example, the Lobi mission headed by B. Moutray Read was accompanied by two civilians from Wa, Malam Abdulai and Musa, both fluent in Hausa and who served Moutray Read and his troops as interpreters.<sup>202</sup>

Another problem for the colonial authorities to solve was the recruitment of indigenous personnel for the military and police forces. The British – but also other colonial rulers – throughout the colonial period made a general distinction between ‘martial’ and ‘non-martial’ races, i.e., those ‘tribes’ who they believed fit to become soldiers and those who were not.<sup>203</sup> From these early stereotypes developed official patterns of ethnic recruiting and enlistment which continued throughout the colonial period. Not only among the British authorities, but also among German and Belgian colonial circles, applicants claiming Hausa ethnicity were preferred due to the reputation of the Hausa as courageous and reliable soldiers.<sup>204</sup> The situation on Gold Coast was no exception. Here, Hausas, and later on some of the ‘northern’

---

<sup>198</sup> Duncan-Johnson 1932.

<sup>199</sup> TNA CO 96/440, Report of Governor’s Tour through the Northern Territories, December 1905–March 1906, Accra 17.3.1906, 25.

<sup>200</sup> See Chapter II.

<sup>201</sup> Charlton 1908, 3–4. Similar arguments were also brought forward by German academics and colonial authorities. See further Weiss 2000.

<sup>202</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/50, Tours of Inspection (NWP), Report on Lobi Mission March 1906 by B. M(outray) Read (7.4.1906).

<sup>203</sup> Killingray 2000. At least during the 1870s, the British had a preference for ‘Hausa’ or ‘northern’ Muslims for the Gold Coast Armed Police Force and recruitment parties were sent to Salaga in the 1880s (Stewart 1965, 18–20). In 1899, when recruitment for the West African Frontier Force was discussed, the majority of the British officers thought that the ‘Hausa’ were the best material, although those officers who had served in the Gold Coast preferred the ‘Mossi’, ‘Dagomba’ and ‘Gurunshi’ (Ukpabi 1987, 97–99).

<sup>204</sup> Adamu 1978, 165–166.

groups, were believed to be such martial races.<sup>205</sup> Hausa troops from Lagos were added to the garrison of the Gold Coast as early as 1872, and further soldiers, termed Hausa but enlisted from northern slaves, were added to the troops. After the 1873–74 victorious campaign against Asante, the Hausa, or, rather, ‘Hausa’ as most of them were not ethnically Hausa, were increasingly identified as the archetypal martial race. In addition, the colonial officers assumed all Hausas were Muslims. However, within a relatively short time, the term Hausa also came to be applied to the peoples of the hinterland of the Colony and Asante, and as late as 1906, the 1906 Annual Report on Ashanti said that Hausa was ‘a generic term used to refer to all up-country traders’.<sup>206</sup> Not surprisingly, the 1912 Military Report was full of praise for the capabilities of the ‘Hausa’ soldiers:

As soldiers they are trustworthy, amenable to discipline, well able to march – and to forage – and attached to their officers; they require to be restrained rather than urged on.<sup>207</sup>

However, when referring to the North, the term ‘Hausa’ was more than misleading. In fact, the largest ethnic groups in the Gold Coast Constabulary were Kanjarga, Mossi, ‘Grunshi’ and Dagomba.<sup>208</sup> This was also noted in the 1931 Military Report, which claimed that “nearly every tribe is amenable to the white man’s discipline,” and especially praised the Kusasis, who made good soldiers – and were said to be Muslims!<sup>209</sup>

Anyhow, as long as ‘Hausas’ were preferred as soldiers, religion mattered, too. Up until the early twentieth century, Islam (‘Muslim faith’) was regarded as the foundation of the military character of the force; ‘pagans’ were seen as inferior both morally and militarily. At one time, the authorities in the Gold Coast even built mosques for retired soldiers in the *zongos* of the south.<sup>210</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, being a Muslim was regarded by both the British colonial officials as well as by local individuals as a sign of superior status. Thus, District Commissioner Nash, for example, commented that most people in Tamale District “ape Mohammedanism as it gives them status.”<sup>211</sup>

Nevertheless, after the uneasiness of 1905–1907, the question of the ‘Hausa’ became more problematic as it was realized that most – if not all – Hausa-speakers were in fact ‘aliens’, i.e., merchants and scholars from Northern Nigeria. Some colonial officials, such as Sir Frederick (later Lord) Lugard warned against

<sup>205</sup> Migeod 1920, 121.

<sup>206</sup> Quoted in Killingray 2000, 122.

<sup>207</sup> TNA WO 33, *Military Report on the Gold Coast, Ashanti and the Northern Territories. General Staff*, London: HMSO 1912.

<sup>208</sup> Killingray 2000, 121–123.

<sup>209</sup> TNA WO 287/6 *Military Report on the Gold Coast, Ashanti, the Northern Territories and Mandated Togoland* vol 1 (general), London: War Office 1931, 58, 64–65, 97.

<sup>210</sup> Adamu 1978, 168; Killingray 2000, 123.

<sup>211</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/470, AR SP 1914.



over-dependence upon ‘Muslim’ troops who might be susceptible to religious propaganda.<sup>212</sup> In some localities, the chiefs even started to regard the Hausa as unreliable members of the society, complaining that the Hausa did not participate in communal work or in colonial calls for political labour. For example, the chief of Kunyukuong explained in 1918, that among the ‘foreigners’, every Bambara, Mossi and Zabarima living in the village had responded to the call for road work, but not the Hausa community.<sup>213</sup> In other places, such as Odumasi in Ashanti, DC Duncan-Johnstone reported of a different – positive – experience in his dealings with the local Muslim community. Once he asked the *sarkin zongo* of Odumasi to the bush near the local tennis court and offered to pay for his service. To Duncan-Johnstone’s surprise, the *sarkin zongo* replied that he would do it for free as he had not yet had an opportunity to show his loyalty towards the colonial authorities.<sup>214</sup>

Over the following decades, there developed an uneasy relationship between some of the colonial officials and the Hausa *malams*. The question of the Hausa remained somewhat problematic throughout the colonial period, especially as the Hausa were usually referred to as ‘aliens’ and ‘true’ Muslims, i.e., potential troublemakers. If, however, there were no problems (which, in retrospect, was the case), Hausa traders would be encouraged to settle down and establish their trading communities, and Hausa *malams* were given freedom to perform their duties within the Muslim communities. On the other hand, the colonial authorities were soon to make a distinction between Hausa *malams* and other Muslim scholars: local Muslim scholars were to be preferred as they were regarded as more ‘loyal’ if not ‘reliable’ than the Hausa. Consequently, in the Southern Province, Muslim scholars were found especially useful when the colonial administration planned the introduction of Indirect Rule and the collection of a ‘tribute tax’ at the beginning of the 1930s. In the Northern Province, on the other hand, due to the expressed hostility of Commissioner P.F. Whittall towards the local Muslims, Muslims were not engaged by the colonial state (apart from Wa).<sup>215</sup> Unfortunately, it is not possible to make a full investigation into the recruitment procedure, the numbers and length of engagement of the Muslim literati by the colonial government and the Native Authorities due to the lack of references. It is certain that Muslim scholars were ‘employed’ but their impact was seldom noted in the colonial files.

However, much earlier, Muslims had been nominated by the colonial authorities to serve as intermediaries and functionaries at the local courts, especially in the Southern Province but also in Wa. In 1913, Malam Alhamadu had already been

<sup>212</sup> Still, Hausa, which had been adopted as the language of command for the Gold Coast Constabulary in the 1870s, continued to be so thereafter. In the West African Frontier Force, English replaced Hausa as late as 1937 (Killingray 2000, 127).

<sup>213</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/209, Informal Diary Lorha [Lawra] District, entry for 31.10.1918.

<sup>214</sup> RH Mss. Afr. s. 593 1/1 Duncan-Johnstone, Confidential Diary Juaso (Ashanti), entry for 18.11.1922.

<sup>215</sup> Ferguson and Wilks 1970, 336–337; Wilks 1989, 166–167.

appointed as clerk by the chief of Savelugu and Malam Tahiru as clerk by the chief of Kumbungu – following the recommendation of the DC.<sup>216</sup> In Yendi, the Ya Na appointed – and the DPO (District Political Officer) confirmed – Malam Zakari as the King's Cattle Inspector during the rinderpest epizootic of 1916<sup>217</sup> while Malam Halidu (Khālid b. Ya'qūb, 1871–1937) assisted the British officials in census taking, the collection and translation of histories as well as the solving of administrative problems.<sup>218</sup> In Salaga and Prang, it was noted that the records of proceedings were set down by Muslim scholars in Ajami (i.e., Hausa written in Arabic letters).<sup>219</sup> In Western Gonja, DC Brice-Hall decided in 1927 that the newly elected Buipewura was to be assisted by one Malam Halidu (not the same as above) as chancellor.<sup>220</sup> In Daboya, the Ewura's *malam* was keeping the records of cases heard,<sup>221</sup> at Buipe they were engaged as interpreters at the local courts,<sup>222</sup> and at the Yagbunwura's court, a *malam* acted as the ruler's secretary so that ruler would not forget to discuss court matters when the DC visited him.<sup>223</sup>

Apart from working at the local courts, some Muslim literati were directly engaged by the colonial authorities. This was the case, among others, during the early censuses. For example, the 1921 census in Eastern Dagomba District was conducted by a Hausa *malam* and his two sons,<sup>224</sup> and the 1931 census was also carried out by Muslim scholars.<sup>225</sup> Local Muslim scholars were sometimes engaged in tax assessment, for example DC Blair engaged a local *malam* in the assessment of Demon Division (Eastern Dagomba District) in 1932.<sup>226</sup> As late as 1938, the hut tax assessment for the Konkomba villages was organized by Muslim scholars from Yendi.<sup>227</sup> Another case was the collection of local histories and customs when the British wanted to produce the political outlines for Native (Indirect) Rule. *Malams* were asked by the colonial officials about local traditions and were asked to give an

<sup>216</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/177, Extract from Informal Diary Tamale (Irvine), entry for 14.11.1913.

<sup>217</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 67/5/1, Informal Book Yendi.

<sup>218</sup> Lubeck 1968, 46, 51. Both Malam Halidu (Khālid) and his father Yaqub (Ya'qūb) had already been engaged by and worked for the German administration. During the British period, Malam Halidu had been DC Blair's most trusted interpreter and assistant and seemed to have played a central role in the 1930 Dagbomba Conference by providing Blair with a framework of Dagbon history (Blair 1932, 39). Malam Halidu seems to have been a much trusted and highly esteemed individual. As many other Muslim scholars, he seemed to have been engaged in local/regional business and was one of the few owners of a lorry truck in the early 1930s (RH Mss. Afr. s. 593 Duncan-Johnstone, CSP Informal Diary December 1931, entry for 19.12.1931).

<sup>219</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/374, file 85, Activity Report for the Northern Territories 1929.

<sup>220</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 58/5/2, Informal Diary Bole, entry for 22.7.1927.

<sup>221</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 58/5/3, Informal Diary Bole, entry for 20.4.1933.

<sup>222</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 58/5/3, Informal Diary Bole, entry for 14.12.1930.

<sup>223</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 58/5/3, Informal Diary Bole, entry for 26.10.1933.

<sup>224</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/241, Census Report SP 1921, para. 56–57. This was probably Malam Yakub and his sons.

<sup>225</sup> Ferguson 1972, 203 fn 5.

<sup>226</sup> RH Mss. Afr. s. 626 Blair, H.A. Blair, A Preliminary Survey in Eastern Dagomba, Preparatory to the Introduction of Taxation (Tamale, 27<sup>th</sup> September 1932), para 14.

<sup>227</sup> Ferguson 1972, 190 fn 2 and 203 fn 5.

outline of local history. Some Muslim scholars, such as Malam Halidu of Yendi and Malam Isaka (Ishāq b. ‘Uthmān) of Wa, were regarded as very educated and having a profound knowledge of local affairs.<sup>228</sup> Sometimes the memory and knowledge of the local *malams* was a disappointment from the British perspective. For example, in Bole, the imam was able to outline the ‘Guinea-fowl festival’ for DC Hall but could say nothing about the ‘Fire-throwing festival’. On the other hand, although the historical records of Bole had been destroyed during the sack of the town by Samori’s troops, the imam and his *malams* were able to write a new historical outline when Hall asked them to do so.<sup>229</sup>

The career of Malam Alhamadu in Savelugu was a rather typical one. He had already collaborated with the British authorities in 1897 when he had translated the treaties conducted between the British, the Nayiri and the fugitive ruler of Mossi and was regarded by the British as being a “most intelligent Muslim.” When the British wanted to modify the local judicial administration by establishing or formalizing Native Courts, they needed literate personnel and for this task, the Muslim literati were well suited. After negotiation with both the Chief of Savelugu and the *malam* himself, Malam Alhamadu was appointed and a Court Record Book was sent to him. Malam Alhamadu’s position was thus strictly confined to the colonial sphere, i.e., the Native Courts (which were part of the colonial administrative structure) and it was emphasized that he was not to interfere with the Wulana’s duties.<sup>230</sup>

During the early 1930s, the colonial administration started to plan for the introduction of Indirect Rule and Native Taxation in the Protectorate. As the collection of tax presented the colonial government with major organizational problems, not least in the form of the lack of literate and trustworthy tax collectors, the Commissioner of the Southern Province, Duncan-Johnstone, suggested the engagement of *malams* in the collection: “The Mallams being local men will be employed only in their own areas and so we shall not have [to] depend on foreign clerks.”<sup>231</sup> Duncan-Johnstone was planning to establish a ‘propaganda bureau’ for the dissemination of news and information among the chiefs and the local population already in 1929. His idea was to produce leaflets in Hausa and Dagbani written in Ajami so that they could be read aloud by the local Muslim scholars.<sup>232</sup>

<sup>228</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/824, Essays by Assistant Commissioners on Tribal History, H.A. Blair, *An Essay upon the Dagomba People* (1931), page 1; Blair 1932, 39; Wilks 1989, 48.

<sup>229</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 58/5/3, Informal Diary Bole, entries for 17.11.1931 and 15.2.1932. The lack of knowledge about local customs was not a surprise for the colonial authorities. In a comment to DC Hall’s lamentation, the Provincial Commissioner [?] remarked: “Yes, so say all the Moslems of these parts including the Hausa, but the Arabs do not keep this custom. Islam grafted on a local Fetish custom probably.”

<sup>230</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/177, Extract from Informal Diary Tamale, entry for 14.11.1913. The Wulana was one of the senior officials at the various courts in Dagbon.

<sup>231</sup> RH Mss. Afr. s. 593 (1,2–14) Duncan-Johnstone, CSP Informal Diary, January 1932, entry for 16.1.1932. See also Ferguson and Wilks 1970, 336; Wilks 1989, 166.

<sup>232</sup> RH Mss. Afr. s. 593 (1,2–14) Duncan-Johnstone, CSP Informal Diary, September 1929, included ms: Reflections after two months sojourn in Tamale.

The ‘bureau’ was functioning in early 1930. One of its first tasks was to translate a *précis* of CSP Duncan-Johnstone’s talk held earlier in Bole and write it in Ajami. Thereafter it was cyclostyled and distributed to the chiefs and read to them by their *malams*.<sup>233</sup> The matter was further brought forward and discussed in the 1930–1931 Activity Report of the Southern Province, where the apparent shortage of literate administrative personnel was discussed and a future policy was outlined. The report noted that despite some thirty years of colonial presence in the North, there were still only a few persons who were capable of speaking and reading English. Therefore, the colonial government had had tremendous problems in communicating with the chiefs and disseminating its orders. In the same vein, the existence of literate – and reliable – Muslim scholars was noted; the language of communication was Arabic and the script they used was Ajami. For example, the report noted that among the 2,377 inhabitants of Salaga, there were 103 people who were able to write and read Arabic or to use Ajami, and Muslim literati could be found in all the larger villages of the Southern Province. The report therefore repeated Duncan-Johnstone’s suggestion and noted the decision of the colonial government that future communication between the colonial and the various native authorities and their administrations was to be in Ajami. The benefits of such an arrangement were to be obvious as the colonial government and its various departments, such as the Medical, Veterinary and Education Departments, would from now on be able to receive data from the Native Administration and in turn, would be able to directly disseminate their propaganda.<sup>234</sup>

All of the governmental Departments were quick to propagate the use of Ajami in their communications. The Assistant Director of the Medical Service was said to have hailed the arrangement as being “of the greatest importance” to his Department while the Principal Veterinary Officer considered the new scheme to be of great practical use. In fact, the Superintendent of Education stated that “the Mallams in some areas offer an immediate channel of communication and for many years to come the only channel of communication with most Northern Territories villages.”<sup>235</sup> Consequently, within the next few years, Muslim literati were employed, for example, in the preparation of nominal rolls in the villages as well as scribes at the local courts in the Southern Province.<sup>236</sup> The idea to use *malams* and other trusted Muslims, such as the *sarkin zongos*, in the local administration was demonstrated by CSP Duncan-Johnstone when he implemented the new practice for collecting rents in the Yeji *zongo*. Each ward headman was made responsible to the *sarkin*

<sup>233</sup> RH Mss. Afr. s. 593 (1,2–14) Duncan-Johnstone, CSP Informal Diary, February 1930, entry for 1.2.1930.

<sup>234</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/374, Activity Report, Southern Province 1930–1931, para 11.

<sup>235</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/374, Activity Report, Southern Province 1930–1931, para 11.

<sup>236</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/2/28, Dagomba Affairs, Notes of Interview between CSP and DC Western Dagomba, 4.4.1932.



*zongo*, who in turn was responsible for handling the collected money to the DC to be paid into the Native Treasury.<sup>237</sup>

However, the increasing suspicion of Hausa *malams* on the part of some colonial officials became evident in Dagbon. In Yendi there was a lengthy discussion during 1930 about the employment of *malams* in making records of court cases, and the Ya Na, as well as District Commissioner Blair, opposed such a bureaucratic innovation.<sup>238</sup> According to Blair, the Ya Na feared that it would increase corruption and increase the influence of both Hausa as well as local Muslim scholars, and warned that "... those Dagomba Mallams who know enough to write letters etc. for chiefs have practically become Hausas, and are completely under their influence."<sup>239</sup> The Ya Na claimed that the employment of Hausa *malams* at the local chiefs' courts would increase "munafiksi" and undermine the position of the chiefs if their positions at the courts would receive official recognition. He further questioned the ability of the local (Dagbamba) *malams* to write the sort of messages which one chief would need to send to another as their reading and writing only extended to passages of the Quran.<sup>240</sup> In fact, a closer reading of Blair's and the Ya Na's opposition employing Muslim scholars as clerks reveals that Blair opposed mainly local Dagomba



**Plate 11.** Larabanga Mosque, 1999; photo: HW.

<sup>237</sup> RH Mss. Afr. s. 593 Box 2, Duncan-Johnstone, CSP Informal Diary, December 1931, entry for 10.12.1931.

<sup>238</sup> Staniland 1975, 91.

<sup>239</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/2/28, Dagomba Affairs, DC Blair to CSP 27.8.1930.

<sup>240</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/2/28, Dagomba Affairs, DC Blair to CSP 16.7.1930.

*malams* whereas the Ya Na opposed the employment Hausa *malams*. Blair's main opposition seems to be about efficiency while the Ya Na was afraid of losing his influence over the Dagomba clerics, or, as he explained to Blair: "The business of the Yendi Limam is to make occasional sacrifices for the Na 'for the sake of the land'," whereupon Blair remarked: "In fact, he is regarded as a somewhat superior tingdana [sic] – superior as being the priest of Nawuni."<sup>241</sup> However, despite the opposition of Blair and the Ya Na, it was decided that all sub-divisional chiefs in Dagbon had to choose a *malam* for the keeping of the records.<sup>242</sup> Early in 1932, CSP Duncan-Johnstone pointed out that he saw no problem in making use of the *malams*. In his view, the Arabic figures were practically the same as the Roman ones. In his view, the European staff should themselves at least learn to read and write peoples names in Ajami. Consequently, he started a special course for *malams* in Tamale in January 1932 and issued an order to the Political Officers to practice their Ajami or to learn its basics.<sup>243</sup> Thus, one could argue that the decision to engage Muslims in the local administration was a deliberate pro-Muslim action by the British. However, Blair's correspondence reveals that the matter was a complex one. In fact, it is evident that Blair and the Ya Na stressed the division between 'alien' and local Muslims. The reason why the British in the Northern Territories, especially in the Southern Province, did not opt for an 'indigenization' policy at that time was, perhaps, mainly due to language restrictions: 'alien' Muslims were in most cases Hausa-speakers, a language which was also used by the colonial officials. The use of local languages as a means of communication was – at that time – impractical from a British point of view. However, as some British officials were to underline, Hausa was not a very common language in the North. As Rattray pointed out, earlier colonial presentations usually claimed that Hausa was the lingua franca of the interior, but subsequent investigations had shown that the majority of the population did not understand the language at all!<sup>244</sup>

Another problem with using Muslim literatis in the administration was their unfamiliarity with Western concepts of accounting. For the time being, the District Commissioners had to double check the accounts, but such a system was very time-consuming and the DCs were in favour of a change, i.e., that a local native but Western-educated staff would replace the *malams*. For example, DC Hall lamented that "... it is a laborious job to check the accounts which were kept by the Bolewura's *malam*, but still I think it is worth until more Gonja boys are educated."<sup>245</sup> However, in the end he and other DCs were rather confident about the

<sup>241</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/2/28, Dagomba Affairs, DC Blair to CSP 27.8.1930.

<sup>242</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/2/28, Dagomba Affairs, Notes of Interview between CSP and DC Western Dagomba, 4.4.1932, para 1.

<sup>243</sup> RH Mss. Afr. s. 593 (1,2–14) Duncan-Johnstone, CSP Informal Diary, entries for 11.1.1932 and 16.1.1932.

<sup>244</sup> Rattray 1931, 43.

<sup>245</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 58/5/3, Informal Diary Bole, entry for 19.10.1934.



new system of having *malams* working at the rulers' courts and working with court cases, keeping the accounts of the revenues, records of births and deaths as well as translating ordinances and circulars.<sup>246</sup> As long as there were no other educated persons available, the system suited all needs:

This scheme of using the Mallams as registrars has proved a great success and is a useful stop-gap until more of the local people are educated in English. It has also livened the Mohammedan section up and prevented them from becoming mere charlatans, as they were rapidly doing.<sup>247</sup>

However, not all of the District Commissioners in the Southern Province were convinced of the grade of education most Muslim literatis were said to possess. DC Brice-Hall in Bole, for example, had for some time during the latter part of the 1920s tried to do some investigations into local histories and customs and had consulted Muslim scholars about the matter. Despite repeated efforts, the results of his inquiries had been meagre. According to him, the main reason for this was their low standard of knowledge and education. He concluded that the education provided through Muslim scholars and their schools was not sufficient even to meet local demands, not to mention the new demands of the colonial government:

... I believe the education of these so-called Limams and Mallams is very meagre and not sufficient to enable them to read these books [historical texts and chronicles, HW]. They just know how to read and write, parro wise [sic] a little of the Koran. So any excuse is made rather than expose their ignorance [for example, by claiming that all texts were destroyed when Samori's troops sacked Bole, HW]. For instance, should a letter come from Kumasi to Bole, [the] recipient has to wait upon my friend Mallam Abdulai to have it read.<sup>248</sup>

Others, such as Acting CCNT Duncan-Johnstone, had more positive experiences in their cooperation with Muslim scholars. Duncan-Johnstone waited for two years to meet a certain scholar from Bole to discuss with him Gonja history. One evening the scholar – he had been abroad for a long time – visited Duncan-Johnstone with an old Arabic manuscript, being an account of the old Gonja dynasty. “We spent a very profitable and pleasant evening,” Duncan-Johnstone remarked in his diary.<sup>249</sup>

<sup>246</sup> For example, PRAAD/A ADM 58/5/3, Informal Diary Bole, entries for 11.11.1933, 11.1.1934 and 8.6.1935.

<sup>247</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 58/5/3, Informal Diary Bole, entry for 14.11.1933.

<sup>248</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 58/5/2, Informal Diary Bole, entry for 15.12.1929. DC Guthrie Hall wrote a similar complaint a few years later: “Buipe – talk with the limam, but no interesting history as he stated all his papers were lost during Samori's raids.” (Informal Diary Bole, entry for 8.1.1932)

<sup>249</sup> RH Mss. Afr. s. 593 Box 2, Duncan-Johnstone, Diary of the Acting CCNT, entry for 2.10.1932. The manuscript was later reproduced by Jack Goody (Goody 1954).

### 3.4. The Fate of Muslim Education

The position towards Muslim education, too, changed during the early colonial period. Official colonial interest was only directed towards the schools run by the (Roman Catholic) missionaries as well as the modest attempts by the colonial administration itself to establish government schools in the North.<sup>250</sup> The colonial officials were basically disinterested in Muslim schools, as it was thought by some early colonial officials, such as DC Festing, that Muslim education neither challenged colonial rule nor served as a vehicle for Islamization and the expansion of Muslim influence in the Protectorate.<sup>251</sup> Muslim children were reported as attending Quran schools where they were taught to read and write Arabic. Such schools were said to exist “anywhere” where there was a *malam* in residence, or at least in every town and Muslim settlement.<sup>252</sup> However, education was said to be only “elementary” if not “rudimentary” in most cases.<sup>253</sup>

The colonial authorities, both German (for Dagbon prior to 1914) and British, made a few inquiries about the organization of Muslim education in the North. According to German inquiries, there were six Quran schools in Yendi. The schools of the Zamigu Imam and the Ya Imam each had between twenty and thirty pupils, whereas the others had fewer pupils.<sup>254</sup> The British made surveys in (Western) Dagbon during 1913. Muslim education was mainly, but not only, concentrated in the major Muslim settlements. In Savelugu, eleven *malams* held classes which 55 boys attended regularly.<sup>255</sup> An even greater number of teachers and pupils could be found at Kumbungu: Imam Alhassan as well as 18 other *malams* taught at least 100 pupils. Bulong was another large village with substantial Muslim education: Imam Sayibu together with 20 other *malams* held classes for about 90 pupils. Quran schools were also found in smaller villages: Imam Ishaka (Isakka) and four *malams* had 15 pupils in Vogor, one *malam* had 15 students in Yabbo, one *malam* and six students in Bulaho, one *malam* and five students in Yogu. Kassuri (Kassuli)

<sup>250</sup> Bening gives a brief insight into the argumentation of the colonial officials towards Muslim education. One idea was that after Muslim boys had completed the Quran school, they would attend a government school (Bening 1990, 7).

<sup>251</sup> TNA CO 98/18, AR NT 1910 (Festing), page 9. Festing’s position is interesting as he had previously served in Northern Nigeria and thus must have gained some insight on the position of Islam in West Africa.

<sup>252</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/464, AR NT 1912, page 27. Same information in PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/489, AR NT 1918, para 27; PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/492, AR NT 1920, para 60; PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/496, AR NT 1921, para 33.

<sup>253</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/466, AR SP 1912 (Irvine), page 9.

<sup>254</sup> Westermann 1914, 210–211.

<sup>255</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/177, Extract from Informal Diary Tamale (Irvine), entry for 12.11.1913. Rudolf Fisch visited one of the Quran schools in Savelugu in 1911. It seemed to have been one of the smaller ones as there was only one old teacher and two pupils. The teacher sat on a cowhide and in front of him there was an old Quran written in Ajami, though one of the students had a more recent copy. The other student used a wooden table on which he wrote down the texts just read (Fisch 1911, 90).

and Tolon had rather rudimentary Muslim education in comparison with the other villages and towns visited by the DC: in the former, the imam and nine *malams* had only nine pupils and in Tolon Imam Dawudu and seven other *malams* had only 17 pupils.<sup>256</sup>

An investigation into Muslim schools in the North during 1918 stated that major Muslim ‘schools’ existed in Tamale, Yendi, Savelugu, Kumbungu, Larabanga, Gambaga, Walewale, Bawku, Salaga, Yeji, Bole, and Wa.<sup>257</sup> At this time, the colonial officers considered Muslim and Western schools to be the only form of established education in the Protectorate. Larabanga was considered to be a special case – a larger village more or less totally inhabited by Muslims. Not surprisingly, there were several Quran schools in the village.<sup>258</sup> At Salaga, Bole and Yeji, the only form of education was Muslim<sup>259</sup> and three Muslim schools existed in Kete-Krachi.<sup>260</sup> In Wa several *malams* held classes and instructed a number of children and youths to read and write Hausa in Arabic letters. After finishing their education, the former students either engaged in petty trading or became teachers and *malams* themselves. In both cases, however, Muslim education served as a social gateway. If someone had completed a Muslim education, he became one of the ‘intellectuals’ of the community and was thus able to achieve a higher and more influential position in local society.<sup>261</sup>

Only in a few reports can one find reference to the existence of basic Muslim education and Quran schools; the last reference to Muslim education is found in the 1924–1925 Annual Report.<sup>262</sup> Whereas the 1920 Annual Report still stated that Quran schools and Muslim teaching existed in all prominent Muslim centres, adding a rather neutral remark that Muslim education “... consists in learning parts of the Koran by heart,”<sup>263</sup> some cynical voices were already raised: “When they can do this [i.e., write Hausa in Arabic characters, HW], and read a few verses of the Koran by heart, they consider themselves educated.”<sup>264</sup> A similar change in tone concerned the situation in Krachi District. The first reports referred to several schools in the district,<sup>265</sup> later reports noted the existence of “small” Muslim schools and in the

<sup>256</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/177, Extract from Informal Diary Tamale (Irvine), entries for 13.11.1913, 14.11.1913, 15.11.1913, 16.11.1923 and 17.11.1913. One of the schools in Tolon was noted by Fisch when he visited the town in 1910 (Fisch 1911, 81).

<sup>257</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/489, AR NT 1918.

<sup>258</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/492, AR SP 1920 (Leigh), para 11.

<sup>259</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/489, AR SP 1917, Head IV. Education.

<sup>260</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/497, AR Mandated Togoland 1922, para 61; PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/497, AR Mandated Togoland 1923, para 96.

<sup>261</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/489, AR NWP 1918, para 23.

<sup>262</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/511, AR NT 1924–1925, para 40.

<sup>263</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/492, AR NT 1920, para 60. Similar information given in PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/496, AR NT 1921, para 33; PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/500, AR NT 1922–23, para 43 and PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/505, AR NT 1923–1924, para 46.

<sup>264</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/492, AR NEP 1920, para 16.

<sup>265</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/497, AR Krachi District 1922.

1924–1925 report, District Commissioner Cardinall wrote that “... there are no schools in the district. One cannot classify as school the gathering of youths at a Malam’s feet.”<sup>266</sup> Cardinall’s negative perception of Quran schools was a personal reply to his predecessor DC Moreton’s discussion about the future and possibilities for the provision of education in the district: “there are small Mahomedan schools, but these are not a great help.”<sup>267</sup>

The main reason for the cessation of reports on Muslim education is due to the lack of governmental interest. This was due to several factors. Muslim education could not be controlled by the colonial administration since the colonial state was not able to control the Muslim scholars and teachers. Of equal importance was the fact that the colonial state had no use for pupils who had received a Muslim education. With the diminishing interest in the Muslim population in the North, the matter of Muslim education was no longer felt to be a matter for the colonial government to bother about. However, none of the above reasons were articulated. Instead, the reason for governmental disinterest in Muslim education was said to be due to the general lack of interest among the population towards Muslim education.<sup>268</sup>

On the other hand, it cannot be claimed that the colonial government considered the development of modern (Western) education as a priority. The first government school was established at Tamale in 1909, and within the next two decades more schools were opened at Gambaga (1912), Wa (1917), Lawra (1919), Yendi (1922), Salaga (1923) and Bolgatanga (1927).<sup>269</sup> The main stimulus for these early educational efforts was to provide for the needs of the administration and, at least in the Salaga school, special “Mallam Classes” were organized during the late 1920’s and early 1930’s. These “Mallam Classes” were held three times a week for the instruction of the three R’s (reading, writing and arithmetic) and were attended by about 10–15 adults.<sup>270</sup> Unfortunately, not much is known about the training and teaching at the Salaga “Mallam Classes”, but it seems as if the main aim of the classes was to provide basic education for future clerks and administrative personnel. However, the Salaga “Mallam Classes” did not last long and were soon absorbed into the rest of the school.<sup>271</sup> It is also difficult to discern the attitudes of the local population, Muslim and non-Muslim, towards Western education during the early decades of colonial rule. In Gambaga, there was at first discontent among parents and friction with the colonial authorities as the pupils spent only two hours at the school (i.e.,

<sup>266</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/507, AR Krachi District 1924–1925, para 15.

<sup>267</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/507, AR Krachi District 1923–1924 (Moreton), page 4.

<sup>268</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/45, Census Report 1931 SP, page 11. A similar argument in PRAAD/T NRG 8/2/35, Amherst, *Report on the Nanumba kingdom* (s.l., 1931), 32.

<sup>269</sup> Ladoceur 1979, 50; Bening 1990, chapter 1. The first Western school to be opened in the North was the Roman Catholic missionary school at Navrongo in 1907.

<sup>270</sup> The number of *malams* attending the classes had been decreasing from 15 adults in 1928–1929 to 11 in 1930–1931 (PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/11, AR SP 1928–1929, para 17; PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/45, Census Eastern Gonja District 1931, para 28).

<sup>271</sup> Iddrisu 2000, 66.

the so-called Boys' Brigade: one hour drill and one hour lessons) and the rest of the day they were either idling about or were doing odd jobs for the imam and other influential persons close to the political officers. In addition, parents were said to be reluctant to send their children to school for fear of losing their labour and Muslims regarded the school as essentially a Christian institution.<sup>272</sup>

However, not all Muslims were against the introduction of government schools. For example, Malam Isaka, who was one of the key intermediaries between the colonial and the local authorities in Wa, sent his children to the government school.<sup>273</sup> Those *malams* and Muslim parents who cooperated with the colonial authorities by sending their children to government schools acted in line with the Acting Chief Commissioner's proposal for the arrangement of the provision of education in the North, i.e., Muslim boys would first attend a Quran and then a government school:

As regards the Mohammedans my experience is that most boys do not attend Mahommedan schools after they are about twelve years old when they are not too old to attend an English school and I would always encourage them to learn what little they do of the Koran and writing in addition to their school education.<sup>274</sup>

Nevertheless, as Abdulai Iddrisu stresses, despite the Acting Chief Commissioner's positive attitude towards Muslim education, the colonial policy of labour recruitment worked against Muslim education. Both teachers (*malams*) and pupils were forced to engage in colonial road building or to work as porters, which consequently affected the attendance in and output of the Quran schools. Even worse, in some cases, the opening up of new Quran schools was sabotaged (although Iddrisu provides no reference for this).<sup>275</sup>

Educational conditions and the position of the parents towards the government schools did not change over the next decades. In 1931, the Superintendent of Education for the Northern Territories, A.G.N. Thompson, informed the Education Department in Accra that approximately 100 Muslim children attended government schools (but none attended Mission schools).<sup>276</sup> There was no deliberate exclusion of Muslim children from religious (Christian) instruction but nor was there any special provision for the instruction of Muslim children in matters of religion by the local *malams*. According to Thompson, religious instruction was left for the parents to arrange and at least seven pupils went to a *malam* every Saturday for lessons in Tamale. However, Thompson's chief informant, D.A. Mahama, who was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Division teacher at the Junior Trade School in Tamale and was himself

<sup>272</sup> Bening 1976, 58; Staniland 1975, 54; Seidu 1989, 141, 347; Iddrisu 2000, 64; Iddrisu 2005, 57.

<sup>273</sup> Iddrisu 2000, 65.

<sup>274</sup> NT Confidential letter from Acting CCNT to the Director of Education, Accra, 16.11.1915 (PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/86), quoted in Iddrisu 2000, 65.

<sup>275</sup> Iddrisu 2000, 71.

<sup>276</sup> At the beginning of 1930, some 600 pupils were reported as attending government and Mission schools (Ladoceur 1979, 50 table 4). Therefore, about 17 percent of the pupils were Muslim boys, which correlated more or less with the total number of Muslims in the Protectorate.



a member of the Ahmadiyya, claimed that relatively few Muslim parents bothered to send their children to a *malam* for instruction.<sup>277</sup> Thompson further claimed in another report, in which he referred to a statement by the Head of the Gold Coast Ahmadiyya Mission M.N. Ahmad that the only reason for Muslim parents not to send their children to a government school is that they are afraid that their children will desert their faith when they go to school.<sup>278</sup> However, although the condition of Muslim education is discussed in Thompson's reports, the presentation is limited to the government schools. In fact, by the 1930s, the colonial educational system in the North did not even regard the Muslim or Quran schools worth mentioning and did not even consider their integration into the colonial educational system. Muslim education was outside the colonial sphere, despite the fact, as Seidu claims, there were only eight [Staniland: seven] government schools in the whole of the Northern Territories but over fifty Quran schools in Dagbon alone in the beginning of the 1930s.<sup>279</sup>

### 3.5. Muslim or Not: Changing Representations

“Wa, the city of the East with its picturesque Mosque, Palm trees and the strident if not musical voices of the Mallams uplifted in prayer, all these things were probably the same a century ago,” wrote Acting DC Michael Dasent in 1920.<sup>280</sup> Dasent's projection of Wa echoes earlier (positive) descriptions not only of Wa but also other towns and settlements in the North as having an age-old aura of Muslim civilization hanging over them. Soon, however, such descriptions were to belong to the past and by the mid-1930s, the Muslims had more or less disappeared from the official reports. This is perhaps mainly due to a change in the style in which the reports were structured. Whereas previous model sheets included a section on religion, the new formula included a section on ‘Liberty of Conscience and Worship’. This change reflected, in a sense, the limited interest the British now felt towards the Muslim community. It can be summarized by the reflections of one Assistant District Commissioner in Dagbon:

[The pernicious type of Islam, which is said to be spreading in Tamale,] is as far from true Mohammedanism as Theosophy is from Christianity. The hours of prayers are observed, but nothing else. The small literate powers of Mallams are employed to encourage superstitious practices, and texts of the Koran are used in exactly the same way. There is no moral code attached

<sup>277</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/19/1, Report on Muslim education and activities of the Ahmadiyya mission by Superintendent of Education, NT, A.G.N. Thompson, Tamale 8.6.1931 (reply to an inquiry from the Education Department, Accra, on the activities of the Ahmadiyya Mission, 25.5.1931).

<sup>278</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/19/1, Superintendent Thompson to the Director of Education, Accra, Tamale 15.6.1931.

<sup>279</sup> Seidu 1989, 141.

<sup>280</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/50, Tour of Inspection (NWP), Report on Trek Wa to Wa via Tumu and Lorha by M. Dasent (28.4.1920), page 1.



to it. In my opinion there is a far greater potentiality for good in the local Nawuni worship than in Mohammedanism as practised in the Northern Territories. The Nawuni worship can be more easily divorced from its magic and fetishism than local Mohammedanism from its superstitions and abuses.<sup>281</sup>

Together with the change in how the British perceived the Hausa *malams*, there was also a difference in the tone of the colonial reports concerning the impact of Islam and Muslims. Earlier reports, for example those concerning Muslim preachers prohibiting drinking, perceived the impact of Islam and Muslims in non-Muslim communities as a positive one.<sup>282</sup> At one stage, the British even considered the possibility of nominating a Muslim as a chief, as in the case of Senyon in 1923. Here the local “fetish” was alleged to cause trouble and the local population was said to be afraid of it. The chief of Senyon was said to be unable to do anything about the situation and the DC felt that he should be destooled and replaced. According to the DC, the nomination of a Muslim would bring an end to the influence of the “fetish business.” However, the plan was eventually dropped – the nomination of a Muslim, i.e. ‘stranger’, as chief was in contrast to local political tradition with which the British, in the end did, not want to interfere.<sup>283</sup>

However, such views were subsequently challenged. According to some British officials, the Muslims were no longer serving as a good example to their fellow “uncivilized pagan” neighbours, but rather the contrary.<sup>284</sup> In one report, the Muslim population in the Northern Province was accused of residing in more “insanitary conditions” than the non-Muslim population.<sup>285</sup> Whereas in 1917 the Muslim community provided help for building smallpox camps in Lawra District (while the ‘pagan’ communities refused assistance),<sup>286</sup> in 1922/23 the Muslims of Larabanga were criticized for refusing to work for the government and being a “source of trouble.”<sup>287</sup> The District Commissioner of Western Gonja District, Brice-Hall, had few hopes of a positive impact of the Muslim population on the economic prosperity of his district: “The Mohammedans in this District are not notorious for their energy.”<sup>288</sup> Not surprisingly, a few years later, ADC Amherst commented, when visiting Malwe, that the village was noted for its Muslims and dirt.<sup>289</sup> In fact, the combination of Muslims and dirty villages was to evolve as common reflection:

<sup>281</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/49, AR NT 1934–1935, para 106.

<sup>282</sup> Wilks 1989, 154; Hawkins 2002, 48.

<sup>283</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/276, Extracts from Informal Diary Bole, entry for June 1923.

<sup>284</sup> This was also the case in the South. The largely Muslim population in the *zongos* in the South was described in derogatory terms: they had no intercourse with the local population, who regarded the *zongo* people as slaves or prospective slaves. On top of that, the *zongo* people were accused of being dirty (Migeod 1920, 120).

<sup>285</sup> PRAAD/T ADM 56/1/511, AR NP 1924–1925, para 74.

<sup>286</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/177, Lorha Informal Diary, October 1917.

<sup>287</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/511, AR SP 1922–1923, page 5.

<sup>288</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 58/5/2, Informal Diary Bole, entry for 28.9.1929.

<sup>289</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 58/5/3, Informal Diary Bole, entry for 10.11.1930.

“There is a strong Moslem influence here, which possibly helps to explain why the town is usually so dirty,” DC Hall remarked about Daboya.<sup>290</sup> CNP Louis Castellain complained in similar ways: “It is a fact that the villages where Muslims reside are always in a far more insanitary condition than those occupied by Pagans.”<sup>291</sup> Muslim centres, especially the local mosques, in the Kusasi, Wa and Lawra-Tumu Districts were noted by the colonial officers of attracting a relatively large number of poor and disabled persons who would try their best to eke out a scanty livelihood from alms distributed to them after the prayers.<sup>292</sup>

However, although some officers were rather critical about the influence of Muslims, others continued to have a relatively positive view of the impact of the Muslim population. For example, during the early 1920s, when the colonial authorities started to regard the northeastern part of the Protectorate as overpopulated and suggested the relocation of some settlements,<sup>293</sup> only one Hausa community expressed their wish to migrate to the south. Consequently, with the backing of the colonial authorities, the community of Malam Ibrahim and his 60 followers moved to Eastern Gonja and was settled at Jaffo near Salaga.<sup>294</sup> As late as 1931, the census official in Eastern Gonja District stated that “... [t]he general moral tone of the people is improving especially with the spread of Mohammedanism...”<sup>295</sup> A few years later, when the colonial authorities tried to implement small-scale agricultural improvements in the Bawku District, the Hausa population was hailed for being rather progressive in contrast to the local population.<sup>296</sup> For example, the cultivation of cassava was at that time still largely confined to the Hausa, who also cultivated little gardens in the valleys with crops maturing in the dry season.<sup>297</sup>

Despite the arguments and counterarguments about the negative or positive impact of Muslims in the local society, the general mode of presentation of the state of Islam in the North was that it was different from any preconceived *Urislam*. Instead, the colonial officers felt Islam in the North to be blended, if not saturated, with non-Muslim traditions. H.A. Blair, commenting on Dagbon in 1931, stated that

The Dagomba type of Mohammedanism is far from debarring its devotees from fetish worship and sacrifices. Indeed the malams themselves except perhaps one or two particularly enlightened ones fear the fetish, and

<sup>290</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 58/5/3, Informal Diary Bole, entry for 19.11.1932.

<sup>291</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/511, AR NP 1924–1925 (Louis Castellain), para 73–74.

<sup>292</sup> Cardinall 1932, 226.

<sup>293</sup> On the colonial discussion of overpopulation and land degradation, see Weiss 2003b.

<sup>294</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/505, AR NT 1923–24, para. 134; PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/278, Letter from Acting CNP to CCNT, 5.2.1924; PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/276, Extracts from Informal Diary Southern Province, entry for 11.3.1924.

<sup>295</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/45, Census Report Eastern Gonja District 1931, para 35.

<sup>296</sup> On colonial development policies in the Northern Province, see further Grischow 2006.

<sup>297</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 57/5/2, Informal Diary Bawku, entries for 2.7.1934 and 21.8.1934. In fact, the Hausa dryseason cultivation was the so-called *fadama* cultivation, which was traditionally practiced throughout Hausaland. See further Watts 1983.

propitiate it on every possible occasion. Most true Dagombas in the more central towns at least profess a vague Mohammedanism.<sup>298</sup>

By 1935 Islam, as practiced in the Northern Territories, was no longer regarded as a positive example by the colonial officials: “It is a debased form devoid of value for the promotion of the people’s progress.”<sup>299</sup> In the previous year, the most influential Muslim scholar in the Northern Territories, Imam ‘Umar or Alhaji ‘Umar of Kete-Krachi (1858–1934) had died. According to British Intelligence sources, he was the only Muslim scholar who really had achieved a political and scholarly influence throughout the region,<sup>300</sup> according to Acting CCNT Duncan-Johnstone he was the acknowledged spiritual head of the Muslims in the Gold Coast and Togoland.<sup>301</sup> Imam ‘Umar’s case gives a good glimpse into how the Muslim scholars interacted with the colonial government. Although they did put themselves at the colonial government’s disposal, they underlined their integrity and distance from the colonial system. Instead, they sought to build up an independent network, which would be more or less out of reach of the colonial administration and, thus, its influence and impact was little known to the colonial officials. But while the colonial officials were extremely suspicious of such Muslim networks during the early colonial period due to their fear of Mahdism and Islamic extremism, at least in the Northern Territories, Islam was no longer perceived as a threat by the 1920s. For example, although the Tijaniyya Sufi order gained many followers in Ghana during the 1920s and 1930s, its spread was not noted by the colonial officials since the order, for the most part, remained apolitical.<sup>302</sup>

<sup>298</sup> PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/824, Blair, *An Essay upon the Dagomba People* (s.l. 1931), 29.

<sup>299</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/49, AR NT 1934–1935, para 106.

<sup>300</sup> PRAAD/T NRG 8/2/9, Chiefs and Prominent Africans - Report on: Report by A. W. Cardinall, DC Eastern Gonja, 17.6.1926. The British anthropologist and lawyer, Robert Sutherland Rattray (1881–1938), who also met Imam Umar during the early 1930s and hailed him: “The Gold Coast, or rather its mandated area, is fortunate in being the home of the most eminent, perhaps, of those Hausa mallams or teachers, who have a wide local reputation” (Rattray 1934, 255).

<sup>301</sup> RH Mss. Afr. s. 593 Box 2, Diary of the Acting CCNT, entry for 11.7.1932. Duncan-Johnstone met Imam ‘Umar in Yendi in July 1932 where the imam was to open the new mosque. He arrived in a two seater car which he had purchased, driven by his son. In comparison to Malam Halidu of Yendi, who at that time owned a lorry car, presumably as he was engaged as a trader, Imam ‘Umar’s wealth was solely due to his reputation as the most esteemed Muslim scholar of his time. Due to his position as an intermediary, Imam ‘Umar was able to establish himself as a kind of ‘peace broker’ who was called in by both local Muslim communities and colonial authorities to solve internal disputes in the *zongos*. The purchase of the car by Imam ‘Umar can be seen as being similar to the display of wealth, especially cars, by the ‘grand marabouts’ in Niore as described by Benjamin Soares: their wealth being a sign of their closeness to God and, thus, higher in spiritual hierarchy with more privileged access to God’s favour (Soares 2005, 156).

<sup>302</sup> Stewart 1965, 50–51. The only exception was the clashes between Tijani adherents and followers of the Ahmadiyya movement in Wa. See further Chapter V.3.1.

