



ISLAM IN YAOUNDE: A HISTORICAL STUDY OF ETHNIC TENSION AND STATE CONTROL

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ABSTRACT

The Islamic faith was spread in Northern Cameroon by Fulani clerics and Hausa traders from Northern Nigeria following the 19th century Islamic Jihad organized by Uthman Dan Fodio.^[1] Modibo Adama extended the Jihad to Fombina, (Old Adamawa) after him. From the Adamawa, Islam spread to the south and it finally reached Yaounde in the early 20th century. Yaounde being the capital city of Cameroon welcomes Muslims of various nationalities and different ethnic

backgrounds. As a result, Yaounde gradually changes to be a veritable center of Islamic effervescence. Nonetheless, Islam in Yaounde appears to have constantly lost ground due to ethnic tension and confrontation with the state. As a matter of fact, relationship between Islam and the state had always alternated between collaboration and confrontation, suspicion and intimidation, negotiation and containment of Islam. This couple with ethnic tension had triggered bitterness and sowed division in the Muslim community. To bring the situation under control, the conference of Imams and dignitaries of Cameroon convened a conference in 2009 aimed at restoring peace and unity among Muslim faithful in Yaounde.

KEYWORDS: *Islam, Muslim, Tension, Collaboration, Intimidation, Peace, Unity.*

INTRODUCTION

The 19th Century was characterized by various religious movements within the African continent carried out by Christian missionaries and Islam was not an exception. Islam, an

Arabic word meaning “Submission to God (Allah)” started gaining grounds in Yaounde and the whole of Cameroon during the early 20th Century. Islam first entered Yaounde through Hausa traders from Northern Cameroon who in turn migrated from Northern Nigeria.^[2]

The Islamic faith was first spread in the Northern part of Cameroon by traders and cattle breeders who had settled among the indigenous groups generally known as *kirdi*. Unfortunately, it never gains grounds. By the turn of the 19th Century, Uthman Shehu Dan Fodio’s Jihad had almost Islamized the entire Northern Cameroon through Modibo Adama, set up an Islamic theocratic state which necessitated respect for the five fundamental pillars of Islam.^[3]

The Fulani who spread the Islamic religion into Northern Cameroon originated from Futa Toro in Northern Senegal. They began to migrate eastward to central and eastern Sudan. They eventually reached Northern Cameroon where they wandered in search of land and pastures. Their contact with the local population encouraged co-existence since they respected the traditional practices of the indigenous people.^[4]

From the beginning of the 19th Century, the Fulani were massively converted and became militant missionaries of the Islamic faith. From then on they began to extend the Islamic influence to areas of Northern Nigeria and Northern Cameroon through wars of conquest. Uthman Dan Fodio’s Islamic campaign often refer to as the Muslim Political Militancy by Hamadou Adama, spread southwards through Fombina (present day Adamawa) to the rest of Central Cameroon in general and Yaounde in particular.^[5]

It is worthwhile mentioning that the Hausa who fought alongside the Fulani in the Jihads were great travelers and traders. Their involvement in long distance trade resulted in the establishment of Hausa communities of varying sizes which today are conspicuous in different towns in Cameroon. It is also worthwhile to mention that the Adamawa plateau became the Springboard for emigration to new areas for settlement, especially in the town of Yaounde.^[6] Hausa Muslims in Yaounde contributed enormously in the spread of Islam in Yaounde.

Yaounde being the capital of Cameroon became one of the reception areas for Muslims migrant. They were mostly traders, Islamic scholars and teachers and adventures in search of new fortunes. With the passage of the time, other Muslims from in and out of Cameroon

converged in Yaounde. Yaounde gradually turned to be a veritable melting point for the practice of the Islamic religion. Apart from the Hausa, Fulani and Bamum ethnic groups who practice Islam, other ethnic groups came into play such as the Beti, Bafia, Mbam and Bamileke people.^[7] Nevertheless, the Islamic religion in Yaounde was faced with some major problems that retarded its growth. The major objective of this paper is to show that ethnic tension and state control ragged on constant bases the growth and survival of the Islamic religion in Yaounde.

Situated on many small hills in the heart of the southern plateau, Yaounde is one of the earliest settlements of the Ewondo.^[8] This settlement gained its first importance in 1889 when the Germans arrived from Kribi to make it their military post. After the expulsion of the Germans, the French made Yaounde the seat of their government. Its position was economically strengthened in 1927 when the railway line made its arrival in this town. With a population hardly exceeding 7.000 inhabitants in 1933, this town grew rapidly immediately after independence to about 100.000 inhabitants in 1963; 313.706 inhabitants in 1976, 656.700 persons in 1986 and at over one million in 2010. Yaounde is the second town of Cameroon after Douala.^[9] It presently fulfills many functions. Paramount is the administrative role. It is the political capital of the country, the provincial capital of the central region and the chief town of the Mfoundi Division and therefore houses mainly administrators, foreign diplomats and civil servants.^[10]

The Advent and Spread of Islam in Yaounde

It is difficult to give exactly the year when Islam came to Yaounde. Some people argued that Islam entered Yaounde towards the end of the 19th Century.^[11] This view is based on the fact that during this period the Yaounde people were involving in long distance trade with the people of Nigeria. Others hold the view that it entered Yaounde in the early 20th century. What is clear is that the entry of Islam in Yaounde was a gradual process through trade contacts. It is also true that there might have been Hausa-Muslim and Fulani traders in Yaounde before the second half of the 19th century, but might have been more concerned with trade than the spread of the religion.^[12]

Whatever the case, Islam became prominent in Yaounde by the first half of the 20th century. The first Muslim to settle in the town of Yaounde was Hausa and Fulani traders from Northern Cameroon. The area in which they first settled were Olezoa and Hippodrome. They later transferred to Nlongkak. Their final settlement area was Ekoudou (Hausa Quarter)

which later became known as *Briqueterie*. Their arrival in Yaounde was in 1936.^[13] Since then, the Muslim population in Yaounde has grown far and wide into many small pockets of settlements in the outskirts. They presently constitute a whole community (Umma) and have extended to many other localities or neighborhoods of the town among which are: Mvog Atangana-Mballa, Elig Effa, Mvolye, Yaounde station, Mfoundi, Marche Central, Hippodrome, Nlongkak, Biyem-Assi, Essos, Bastos, Mvog-Ada, Mvog-Mbi, Melen, Rue Mangué, Ecole de Police, Tsinga, Nsimeyong, Emaná, Etoudi etc.^[14]

Apart from the Muslim communities such as the Hausa, Fulani and Bamums, Kotoko, Shuwa Arab Mbam and Bafia people who have adhered to the religion, with the passage of time, the Ewondo, Eton, Voute Mbam and Bamileke also became interested and started converting themselves to Islam.^[15] That increases the number of Muslim population in Yaounde. To the above mentioned, migrants who can be identified as the first group of actors who introduced Islam in Yaounde, one can add a couple of other religious entrepreneurs: Marabouts from West African countries such as Guinea, Senegal, Mali, Nigeria, Benin, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Ghana, who use to tour Yaounde and deliver talks or organize seminars and conferences. Despite the diversity of its origins and background, the first Muslims community in Yaounde belonged to the *Tidjaniyya* Islamic brotherhood-the most important brotherhood of the time.^[16]

There has been a real integration between the original and new Muslim population in Yaounde town. Marriages between the Hausa, Fulani, and Ewondo Muslims have become a common phenomenon. Franco-Islamic Schools have been opened which is not restricted only to Hausa or Fulani children. Children from various backgrounds attend those schools. Subjects taught in those schools are not only islamically inclined. Apart from the normal Quran that are being taught, other subjects such as Arithmetic, Reading, Writing, General studies, History, Geography, and Hygiene are also taught. This has gone a long way to consolidate unity and integration between the various communities. One case in point is the Franco-Arab School at the Central Mosque, Briqueterie.^[17]

Muslim Community in Yaounde during the Colonial Period

Cameroon was a mandated territory of the League of Nations. France and Britain administered Cameroon. The French had 5/6 of the territory while the British had 1/5. Yaounde happened to fall within the French Sphere of influence. The French colonial administration prevented the dissemination of Islam in traditionally non Muslim areas for the

territory. Religious leaders were not allowed to move or travel without official authorization. Some radical Muslim preachers were at times arrested and jailed by the French administration. Muslim leaders or clerics who remain faithful to the French were allowed to move from one region to another preaching. These were mostly Muslim preachers who supported the French, were considered as non-extremists and who promoted French institutions in French Cameroon.^[18]

The French administration went to the extent of compensating Muslims in Yaounde who were loyal to them by sending them to Mecca to go and perform their pilgrimage. Muslim leaders in Yaounde were also appointed and assigned specific duties that mainly consisted in shaping Muslim communities and serving as auxiliaries of the French colonial administration.^[19] By the 1920s, relationship between the French and Islam in Cameroon began ailing. By 1924, the High Commissioner, Paul March inaugurated a new policy that Daniel Abwa aptly qualified as one of “taming”.^[20] It was essentially constituted by tolerance, generosity and influence. Loyalty and faithfulness to France were presented as beneficial to the Muslim Chiefs and Islam. The ultimate goal being to seduce and appease Muslim elite’s, intellectuals and rulers so as to associate them in the colonial policy. Muslim scholars of doubtful loyalty were pursued and systematically eliminated either physically or politically.^[21]

What is important to recall is the fact that the French adopted a rather cautious and suspicious attitude in dealing with Muslim Traditional Rulers by institutionalizing Islam in Cameroon. On the one hand, it regulated, supervised and controlled the flux of pilgrims who travelled annually to Saudi Arabia by introducing passes and setting up the *Bureau des Affaires Musulmanes*; on the other hand, it facilitated the visits of faithful foreign Muslim scholars whose sojourn on the Cameroonian territory was actually often transformed into an official trip.^[22]

In sum, two attitudes dictated the interaction between Islam and the colonial administration and both were articulated around safeguarding mutual interest and perception of local realities. The position of the Adamawa Emirate carried out by the Germans prevented contacts with and incursion of clerics and scholars from Northern Nigeria where Islamic militancy was still active. Visiting Muslim scholars from neighboring Chad or Nigeria were reported to the *Bureau des Affaires Musulmanes* and urged to leave the country or face persecution.^[23]

French Cameroon got her independence in 1960 with Ahmadou Ahidjo, a Muslim from the North as the first head of state. Ahidjo ruled the country from 1960 to 1982 when he resigned and appointed or passed power to Paul Biya, a Christian from the South. The fact that Ahidjo was a Muslim impacted the dynamism of Islam in French Cameroon in general and Yaounde in particular. Also, with the help of the French, Ahidjo was able to make Islam become a growing and significant phenomenon that was to become visible in the public space, and take crucial part both in the economic fabric of Yaounde and its political development.^[24]

According to Hamadou Adama, Islam and the State moved slowly and progressively towards reproducing a dynamic relationship dictated by new realities. The “whip” was resorted to in holding back attempts at emancipating from the state and discouraging the emergence of Islam in the public sphere, while the “carrot” was displayed to lure prospective traditional rulers as well as compromising religious leaders to rally round and relay state policy to lower levels of the society. During post independence Cameroon, the Ahidjo and Biya regime employed similar strategies to keep Islamic militancy at the bay while secretly negotiating with obstreperous and prominent Muslim scholars.^[25]

The Activities of Muslim Preachers in Yaounde

Beginning from the early 1930s, Muslim intellectuals in Yaounde started preaching and explaining the content of the Islamic faith to non Muslims. According to them it was their own way of continuing the jihad movement earlier began by Modibo Adama in Northern Cameroon. What was even more peculiar about these Muslim preachers was the fact that, instead of using conquest and force as before, they adopted a peaceful method of meeting and convincing non Muslims to convert to the Muslim faith. It was more of a proximity campaign, with the main objective of converting as many non-Muslims as possible.^[26]

Early in the morning after the *Subhi* prayers, groups of Muslim preachers in Briqueterie and its environs will leave and visit other neighborhoods in Yaounde to meet and preach Islam to non-Muslims. Others even visited some villages in the outskirts of Yaounde, such as Mbalmayo, Bafia, Mvog-Betsi etc. Most often they will read certain verses of the *Quran* and *Hadith* and explain its content to the non-Muslims. The Muslim preachers laid emphasis on the importance of the Islamic faith and the reason why they should convert to Islam. The Muslim preachers often preach in Pidgin English. Those who could understand a bit of French preach in French, while others moved with interpreters who could speak the local languages.^[27]

The work of the Muslim preachers in Yaounde started yielding fruits in the late 1950s and early 1960s when some local population started adhering and converting into the Islamic religion. Some of the just converted Muslims in Yaounde in turn convinced their family and tribes men to do the same. Most of the new converts were given a copy of *Quran*, a cap, a gown; a kettle and a mat to help them better practice their religion. They were also taught the five pillars of Islam, how to perform the ablution and five daily prayers. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Muslim population in Yaounde had greatly increased. Islam was rated second after Christianity.^[28]

Irrespective of an increase in the number of Muslims in Yaounde, Muslim preachers were still determined more than ever before to convert non-Muslims to the faith. In order to attain that objective, the Muslims preachers themselves had to live by practice. The Islamic religion in Yaounde also needed to undergo some reforms to attract others. The Muslims in Yaounde needed to be devoted to their prayers, follow the rule and regulation of the *Quran* and *Hadith*, practice tolerance and be kind to one another. Muslims in Yaounde who were illiterate and did not master the Islamic religion very well were advised to go back to *Quranic* schools. *Quranic* schools were open in some Yaounde neighborhoods to teach Muslims Arabic and how to better practice the Islamic religion.^[29] The Ahidjo government in Collaboration with some Arabs countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Sudan awarded Islamic Scholarship to some young Muslims in Yaounde to go and study in those Arab countries. Example of some of those who benefited were Mallam Sule, Cheikh Banufe, MallamBalla Ali, Mallam Uba, Mamudu Mallam, and Mallam Oumarou. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, most of those youths came back home well inspired and ready to help promote the Islamic faith in Yaounde. With the religious knowledge they acquired and following the Islamic doctrine found in the countries they studied, they came along with the phenomenon of Islamic brotherhoods.^[30]

The Phenomenon of Islamic Brotherhoods in Yaounde

The brotherhood phenomenon had become so rampart in Yaounde. They are more than five Islamic brotherhood movements existing in Yaounde. Each of them has a great following. Some Islamic intellectuals prefer to call them sects because of the division they are bringing into the Islamic religion. What is even more deplorable is that different brotherhood movement often refused sharing the same mosque with one another. That has developed different tendencies and ways of practicing the Islamic faith. This has led to religious conflict

among Muslims in Yaounde. As such, has retarded the growth and development of the Islamic religion in Yaounde.^[31]

The very first brotherhood to infiltrate Yaounde was the *Tidjaniyya* Islamic brotherhood. The *Tidjaniyya* brotherhood was founded by Cheikh Amadou Tigani in the 18th century. It was the most important brotherhood in Yaounde taking into consideration that it came almost the same time with the Islamic religion to that region. Worth mentioning is the fact that Christianity came to Cameroun in general and Yaounde in particular in the middle of the 19th century. This was through the European colonial masters. In fact the first Christian missionary to settle and implement his church in Cameroon was Alfred Saker. The British came first but were followed by the Germans who succeed in signing agreements with local Douala chiefs.^[32]

Islam being a minority religion from the beginning existed alongside the Christian religion. As a growing minority, Islam deeply changed the socio- religious landscape of Yaounde and gave it new patterns and identity. Yaounde started going through new dynamics of change that contributed to the traditional sphere of Islam and went beyond the original 19th century Jihad area mainly composed of the Northern part of the country.^[33]

For a long time; Islam in Yaounde has remained a marginal phenomenon struggling to cope with a majority non-Muslims environment. Islam progressively became more, especially during the last two decades of the colonial period but mainly when a Muslim from the North (Ahmadou Ahidjo, a Fulani from Garoua) took office as the chief of government and later on the first head of state after the independence of Cameroon.^[34] Islam in Yaounde was to open up and progressively become influenced by foreign forces. This appeared to be the beginning of the ongoing revival movement that is drastically and deeply transforming the identity of Islam in Yaounde and positioning it as the most important center of Islamic effervescence in Cameroon.^[35]

Muslim youths and adults who studied in Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Egypt came back with ideas of the *Wahabiyya* and *Sunni* brotherhoods to Yaounde. The *Wahabiyya* brotherhood is not just a religious movement but also politico-religious movement. It was founded in Arabia in 1740 by an Islamic scholar called Mohammed Abd Al-Wahhab (1703- 1792). This was with the assistance of the Emir of Dai'iyya (located round Riyadh) called Abd Al-Aziz Ibn Saids. After achieving some successes in it launching, the movement extended to almost all

towns of Mecca and Medina. The *Wahabiyya* brotherhood with the help of some local rulers succeeded in toppling the ruling class in the Saudi kingdom and putting another one. *Wahabism* finally became the main doctrine of the Saudi government. The reason why this brotherhood is often called *Wahabis* boils down to the name of one of their leaders, Mohammed Bin Abdul Wahab.^[36]

As concern the *Shia-Sunni* brotherhoods, Ali is the central figure at the origin of their split that occur in the decades immediately following the death of the prophet in 632AD. *Shia* regards Ali as the rightful successor of the prophet while the *Sunni* recognized but Abu Bakr. Later on Hussein the younger son of Ali in his ambition to take over the caliph was killed by the armies of Yazid and buried at Karbala. The *Qadiriyya* on its part is a Muslim mystic order founded in Baghdad in the 11th century by Abd al-Jilani. All of the above brotherhoods existed in Yaounde.^[37] By the mid-1990s and early 2000, Yaounde turned to be a real melting point of Islamic brotherhoods. Some of those brotherhoods were condemned by the authorities in place because of the disorder they were causing. They were even banned and fought against. This was the case of the *Qadiriyya* brotherhood.^[38]

The reformist Islamic tendency in Yaounde in particular and Cameroon at large is broad, complex and difficult to grasp. In the field, many Islamic activities claimed to be working towards pure Islam but apart from their origin and their external connection, it is not always easy to distinguish them. Like the brotherhood that had shaped Islam in Cameroon for decades, most of the new Islamic reformist movements appear to be local branches of foreign organization. Besides their institutional affiliation, most Islamic activist' behavior reduces the philosophy of their former training institution. Broadly speaking, the reformist Islamic trend started in Yaounde as far back as the beginning of the seventies when Cameroonian students trained in Arab Institutions came back home.^[39] The pioneers of the reformist movements took advantage of the Arab proselytism movements in the seventies and the oil crisis and international context characterized by growing sentiment of Islamic fraternity to pave their way. If this was only a little group of jobless people back from Arab institutions with degree that could not fit into the local job market system, it was to gain root during the eighties but mainly the nineties with the building of the mosque *Alhu-Sunna Wal-Jamaa* and *Al-Rahmah* in Briqueterie. These mosques served as focal spiritual and social points for their people, without western education.^[40]

Many of these young followers were either facing problem of integration in the local Islamic setting and were jobless even if well trained. Funded by Saudi Arabia, the *Alhu-Sunna Wal-Jamaa* and *Al-Rahmah* mosques became symbols of contestation of the local religious establishment. These mosques attracted new followers and started reducing the number of adherents to local Islamic practices. This generated a conflict between the reformists and the leaders of traditional Islam. The reformist's leaders rapidly gathered a small and dynamic community that was culturally influenced by the Arabs and started developing new dress code and many other new Islamic practices that differ from ongoing common practices. The *Cabdou* was introduced as their prayer style: during sermons, their hands were crossed on their chest.^[41]

Reformist in the town of Yaounde were looked upon by traditional Muslims,^[42] as people who were corrupt during their stay in Saudi Arabia, who do not pay respect to their elders as required by local African traditions and who have deliberately decided to oppose practices like the *Wird* and the *Maouloud* celebration. They saw them as people disturbing the statusquo. On the other hand, reformers accused the traditional aristocracy of being islamically illiterate-especially because they could not write, understand nor speak Arabic which is the sacred language of their religion. Reformers strongly believed Islamic practices were not to be mixed with local non-Islamic customs and that women should veil themselves.^[43]

Traditional Muslim leaders in Yaounde felt frustrated by the new trends and behaviors of reformist activists. They watched the reformist activists progressively seizing an important part of their constituency. As they lost more and more grounds, traditional leaders saw the reformist as responsible. The later were seeking legitimacy and in order to do so they had to challenge the so called traditional aristocracy by increasing their relative number of followers. In Yaounde the local aristocracy was created by the colonial administration. The Cameroonian government saw the struggle between reformist and traditional Muslims in Yaounde as a threat to the local Islamic and political landscape, especially because it was reminded of the Pan-Islamic and Pan-Arabic movements of the colonial period that had posed a veritable problem of high magnitude. There was no legislation limiting foreign funding and it was difficult for local authorities to tract down the origins of the funds that were used to build new mosques, Franco-Islamic Schools or carry out Islamic Non-Governmental Organizations' activities.^[44]

Thanks to money received from donors, reformist leaders constructed mosques in most of the neighborhood of Yaounde. The new mosques' architecture was mostly inspired by the style of the architecture in their donor country. Young Muslim leaders were authorized to lead prayers in these reformist mosques. Some of them were even appointed Imams despite their young age. A generational conflict ensued which reframed the social landscape of Islam in Yaounde. Islamic dynamics became broad with new actors on the field.^[45]

In the early 2000, the Shia Islamic Brotherhood Movement saw the light of day in Yaounde. Adept of this brotherhood also started spreading their own ideology. Inspired by other Shia groups in Middle Eastern countries such as Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, they convinced some Yaounde Muslim youths to join their movement. They constructed their Mosque at the Briqueterie neighborhood.

Ethnic Tension over Muslim Religious Sites in Yaounde

The introduction of the reformist mosque in Yaounde remapped the Islamic fabric of this capital city. The *Tidjaniyya* had their own mosque as well as the *Shia* and *Wahabiyya* who also had their own mosque. Newly built mosque in Yaounde also followed ethnic and tribal linings. The Hausa and Fulani had their own mosque; the Bamum had their own mosque, as well as the West African immigrants who also had their own mosque.^[46] Worth mentioning here also is the tension that develops between the Hausa, Fulani and Bamums as far as the control of religious site were concerned. The Hausas were of the opinion that they were the first Muslims to settle in Yaounde. More to that almost all the Islamic religious sites were founded by them; as such they had to control them. The Hausa chief in Briqueterie appointed most of the Imams of the different mosque found in Yaounde as well as the grand Imam. Most of the preaching and announcement done in mosques in Yaounde were done in the Hausa language. On the whole, Islamic practices and Centers were under the control of Hausa elites. This was also thanks to the support they got from the Ahidjo administration and the paramount chief of the Ewondos. Beginning from the mid 90s, other ethnic groups found in Yaounde such as the Fulani, Bamuns and Anglophone Muslims started contesting the monopoly of Hausas control over Islamic sites in Yaounde.^[47]

The Fulani from North Cameroon who migrated and settled in Yaounde in the early 1950s were the ones who began contesting the leadership position of the Hausas over Islamic sites in Yaounde. Taking into consideration that the Fulani population in Yaounde had grown far and wide, and with the emergence of an intellectual Islamic Fulani class, they also wanted to

assume leadership position. Couple with the fact that the Biya government appointed many Fulani to leadership position, the religious Fulani elites in Yaounde sought the help and assistance of their political elites. The Fulani political elites never hesitated doing so. As such the Fulani Muslims started assuming leadership positions in Yaounde. This was not done without the contestation of the Hausas. The Hausas should be noted had little or no appointed members in the Biya regime that could support them. They could not count on the Fulani political elites as well as the other Muslim political leaders found in the Biya regime since they were their adversaries. Conflicts over control of religious sites between the Hausa and Fulani went on for some time in Yaounde until the state authorities had to intervene to restore order. The Muslim faithful themselves were reminded of the fact that Islam is a religion of peace. As such; they should forget their differences and live in peace and harmony for the sake of the religion. The intervention of the state to resolve this conflict helps in bringing about a temporal peace among the Muslim communities in Yaounde. But it never ended since a third actor gradually came into play. The third actor that came into the scene was the Bamum Muslims.^[48] It is important to recall that by 1933, the Bamums were already visible in Yaounde thanks to Sultan Njoya who had been exile to Yaounde because of what the French Colonial Administration refers to his act of insubordination against them. Charles Atangana, the Ewondo paramount chief welcomed Sultan Njoya and gave him land to settle at Mvolye. Shortly after, Nji Gboron bought a piece of land at Ekoudou and they built their mosque. By the early 1970s, Bamum population in Yaounde had increase tremendously. Majority if not all were Muslims. They were under the leadership of Pouoporo Njoya Yakouba.

Beginning from the 1990s under the leadership of Nsangou Mama, the Bamums also started clamoring for leadership position in Yaounde mosques and other Islamic centers. They turned to some of their elites found in the Biya government for support. Unfortunately, they were unable to get their request. The Bamum then started boycotting most of the mosques headed by the Hausa Imams in Yaounde. They contributed money, bought a piece of land and built their own mosque in Briqueterie. Most of the Bamum Muslim Faithful henceforth were praying there. The Bamum were surprise that even the Hausa and Fulani were attending prayers in their new built mosques. Nonetheless the Bamum continued building Mosques in other Yaounde neighborhood such as Mvog-Ada, Etoudi, Mokolo, Byem-Assi and Nlongkak. The Bamums remained very faithful to their mosques and Imams in Yaounde.^[49]

Leadership conflict over the control of religious sites in Yaoundé took a different turn with the construction of the Tsinga Islamic complex in 1997. Worth mentioning is the fact that the Hausa and Fulani were the ones who requested funds from the Saudi Arabian Government to help them build a modern Mosque in Yaounde. The Saudi government being the center of holy Islamic sites and following their politics of promoting the Islamic faith where ever in the world accepted the request to build a brand new modern mosque in Yaounde. Worth noting is the fact that the Mosque was to be built around Carrefour Golf neighborhood on a land earlier given to Muslim Faithful in Yaounde by former President Ahidjo. Unfortunately, the Government Delegate to the Yaounde Urban Council at the time reallocated the land to the Tsinga neighborhood. This was not without serious confrontation between the forces of law and order and the Briqueterie Muslim faithful, with heavy casualties on both sides

In the early 90s, the Saudi government with the help of some Hausa and Fulani elites in Yaounde was given a land by the government for the building of the Islamic Complex at Tsinga. It should be noted that ACIC played a very important role for the acquisition of this land. The land was so vast extending up to the Congress Hall Building. Before the construction began, some Yaounde indigenes in collaboration with the Government Delegate wanted to seize or reduce the size of the land. It was then that the Muslim Faithful in Yaounde woke up like one person to defend the land. Clashes ensued between the Muslim Faithful and forces of law and order that registered some casualties especially on the part of the Muslims. The government finally intervened authorizing the building of the mosque. The Tsinga Islamic complex having seen the light of day, the problem of who to manage the center emerged.^[50]

President Biya personally inaugurated the center in 1997; in the presence of the Saudi foreign minister who came for the occasion as well as Saudi Ambassador to Cameroon. Cameroonian Muslim elites from various ethnic backgrounds attended the inaugural ceremony. President Biya called for tolerance among the different Muslim groups in Cameroon vis-a-vis one another. He warned against extremists and Islamic fundamentalists in the country. He also thanked the Saudi government for sponsoring and offering Cameroon the magnificent edifices. According to President Biya, that was a sign of good diplomatic ties that has come to stay and will continue between Cameroon and Saudi Arabia.^[51]

The President of ACIC representing the Muslim community in the person of Ahmadou Bello was handed over the key and given the responsibility of controlling the Tsinga Islamic

complex by the Saudi authorities. To them were added some Hausa and Fulani Islamic clerics. The Grand Imam to always officiate prayers especially on Fridays, feast of the Ramadan and feast of the Ram was the grand Imam of Yaounde who happened to be a Hausa. The Fulani, Bamum, and later on Anglophone Muslims from the onset were not happy with this state of affairs. The Bamum in Yaounde most especially kept on challenging the leadership position of the Hausas as far as the management and control of the Tsinga mosque was concerned. The Hausa were referred to as a stranger population from Nigeria who are not true Cameroonians. As this was going on we noticed the arrival of a new actor into the scene. These were the Muslims from the North West and South West Regions who also settled in Yaounde mostly for studies in state Universities.^[52]

The Bamums saw the Anglophone Muslims as possible allies to join fight the Hausa leadership position since all of them had a common enemy. The Bamums, Fulani and Anglophone Muslims in Yaounde started condemning the Hausas mismanagement by levying some accusations against them. They first of all accused the Hausas of mixing Islam with their cultural and traditional practices. Taking into consideration that some of those Fulani, Bamums, Anglophone youths have studied in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, they presented themselves as reformers of the Islamic religion in Yaounde. Most of them were of the *Wahhabist* Islamic Movement. They projected the Hausa Muslims as not perfect Muslims, since the latter were of the Tiggani brand.^[53]

The Hausas did not also let things lying down. They held meetings in Briqueterie with their traditional leaders to look for strategies to counteract the Fulani, Bamums, Bansa, and Anglophone Muslims attacks. They contacted all the Hausa Muslims living in Yaounde to join hands together and face their opponents. Taking into consideration that there was some understanding existing between the Hausas and the Fulani, and couple with the fact that they had joint control of the Tsinga Islamic Complex, the Hausas convinced some Fulani Muslims in Yaounde who were close to them to join hands and face the others. As such we had two main camps confronting each other for the control of Islamic sites in Yaounde. On one side we had the Bamum-Anglophone Camp; while on the other side the Hausa-Fulani Camp.^[54]

The Bamum-Anglophone Camp accused the Hausa-Fulani camp of embezzling most of the funds sent by the Saudi government for the maintenance of the Tsinga Islamic Complex. Some of them even went to the extent of petitioning the Saudi government. The Hausas most especially were accused of unorthodox practices in the Tsinga mosque. The Saudi

government after a very long period of reluctance finally sent a delegation to come and investigate into the allegations levied against the Hausa-Fulani regarding embezzlement, corruption and poor management of the Tsinga Islamic complex. After some thorough investigations, the Saudi delegation discovered that most of the allegations were true while others were false. What was even very bad about it was that most of the funds sent to run the complex ended up in wrong hands. Some of those who were in charge of running the Islamic Complex were force to ask for Ties and Offerings from Muslim Faithful in order to meet up with the electric and water bills of the complex. The Saudi delegation then went back and presented the result of the findings to the Saudi government.^[55]

The Saudi government following the results of the findings decided to bring some order on how the Tsinga Islamic Complex should be managed. They decided to appoint a new Imam from Saudi Arabia to assume the total responsibility and management of the center. He was to lead prayers, manage the finances of the complex and assured sanity on how Islam was practice in the complex. Taking into consideration that the Hausa and Fulani were retrograded from the management and control of the Tsinga Islamic Complex, the Bamum-Anglophone Muslims took it as a victory on their side.^[56]

The Hausas were not happy at all with the fact that the control of the Tsinga Complex was taken away from them. In order to show their discontentment, they stop coming for prayers in the complex. Before going, the Hausas reminded the new authorities that there were the ones who fought for the consolidation and construction of the Tsinga Islamic Complex. They also stressed on the fact that their children have lost their lives in that place in the course of fighting for that piece of land. The Hausa-Fulani finally accused the Bamums for allying with the Arabs to take over management control of the Tsinga Islamic Complex. The Hausas decided to look for funds to build their own large and modern mosque in Briqueterie, at the premises of the Grand Mosque.^[57]

In early 2000, an influential business Hausa magnet in Yaounde called Alhaji Nabara took upon the challenge of building a new modern mosque in Briqueterie. The old mosque found in the premises was demolished and a new structure started. Alhaji Nabara made it clear that he has taken the responsibility of building the mosque alone. But then he was not reluctant to receive contribution from any well wisher. He decided to open an account making the account number known to any possible contributor. By 2010, the new modern edifice of the Central mosque, Briqueterie was near completion. Prayers were already officiated and

perform inside the mosque before the completion of the construction.^[58] The Hausa and Fulani were very happy with the new modern Grande Mosque that had come to wipe their tears from the humiliation they received from the Tsinga Islamic complex.

Regarding the differences pitting the Hausa, Fulani, Bamum and Anlophone Muslims in Yaounde, it greatly died down thanks to the intervention of various dignitaries and Imams who kept on preaching and sensitizing all Yaounde Muslims from different ethnic backgrounds on the importance of peace and tolerance among fellow Muslims. The different parties were brought together and a consensus was arrived at. Emphasis was also laid on the importance of peace and living together as Muslim brothers and sisters. The conferences of Imam and dignitaries of Cameroon contributed enormously to this lasting peace.^[59]

The Conference of Imams and Dignitaries of Cameroon (CIDIMUC)

It was in 2008 that the Grand Imam of Yaounde Cheikh Ibrahim Moussa, proposed to Dr. Moussa Oumarou to think of creating an association aim at promoting peace among muslims and non-muslims in Cameroon. The idea was to frequently hold an annual peace conference that will bring together muslim and non-muslim leaders and dignitaries to discuss peace, unity and solidarity aim at folstering development in Cameroon. In 2009, during the first ever CIDIMUC conference that held at Hotel de Ville, Yaounde, it brought together Imams, Muslim dignitaries and other well wishers to discuss peace. Dr. Moussa Oumarou was elected first General Cordinator of CIDIMUC during that session. Thereafter, another conference held in Maroua, still centered around peace and development.^[60]

CIDIMUC since creation had been organizing prayer sessions in various mosques across the country to pray for peace, security, solidarity and development in Cameroon. The first year it was organized at the Essos Central Mosque. The second one held at the Briqueterie Central Mosque. From there, it extended to the Regions. It began in the Littoral, then North and finally Northwest Regions. CIDIMUC should be noted lay much emphasis on peace, tolerance, mutual collaboration, and solidarity among muslims and non-muslims in Cameroon. All of these is aim at promoting and preserving peace in Cameroon.^[61]

State control of islam in Yaounde

The Ahidjo Era 1960-1982

Amadou Ahidjo, a Fulani Muslim from the North became president of French Cameroon in 1960. Beginning from the early 1960, President Ahidjo in order to sustain his support

amongst Muslims found in Yaounde encouraged and promoted Muslim businessmen. Many of them gained local and national recognition. He also appointed others to high post of responsibilities in his government. Example of some Fulani political elites who were appointed by Ahidjo were Sadou Daodou, Moussa Yaya Sarki Fadah, Bello Bouba Maigari, Maikano Abdoulaye, etc.^[63] the only way they could pay back the services rendered to them by president Ahidjo was to be loyal and become members of the lone Cameroon National Union (C.N.U) party created in 1966. Most of them became members of the local bureau of the CNU and president Ahidjo always consulted them before taking crucial decisions of the state.^[63] By embarking on this policy of including Muslims into his administration, President Ahidjo wanted to ensure his full control over the Islamic religion in Yaounde.

This support from Ahidjo to the Muslims in Yaounde motivated the continuation of their settlement in the capital city. Other Muslims left Northern Cameroon and headed to Yaounde. Upon arrival they immediately contacted the local authorities for land to settle. The Yaounde chief willingly gave them land to settle and they established their settlements. Two major reasons explain the reason why Muslims from the North settled in Yaounde. First of all they felt much secured taking into consideration that Ahidjo, one of them was in power. Secondly, the welcoming attitude as well as the degree of confidence the Ewondo chiefs bestowed on them. The Muslim political elites in Yaounde became so powerful and were indispensable as far as consolidation of president Ahidjo's power was concerned.^[64]

Worth mentioning is the fact that the Ahidjo regime granted state scholarships to more than one hundred and fifty students from 1965 to 1980 to pursue religious studies in Arab countries. His concealed intention was to substitute scholars trained in Arab countries for local illiterate clerics in the Arabic language as a strategy to dismantle and weaken the opposition to his regime mounted around the traditional rulers.^[65]

Locally, Ahidjo favored the introduction of the Arabic language in the curricula of public primary and secondary schools and encouraged the creation of a new educational system made from a blend of the Arabic and French curricula: the resultant structure was dubbed Ecole Franco-Arabe. Traditional Quranic schools flourished without subvention from the government. Both the traditional and modernized or renewed Franco-Arabic schools increase their intake by progressively integrating qualified personnel, the majority of whom was trained in Middle Eastern Universities. Religious radio programs and television shows, production and distribution of audio cassettes and video tapes, the printing of religious

booklets, importation and wide distribution of religious pamphlets, most often illustrated subtitled in local languages, constituted the various opportunities that worked to the advantage of the spread of Islam within the entire region of Yaounde.^[66]

Apart from the political and business Muslims class in Yaounde who supported and sustained the Ahidjo regime, we also have some Muslim associations who also contributed enormously in consolidating Ahidjo's reign in power. Prominent among these was the Cameroon Cultural and Islamic Association (ACIC) that was created in 1963.^[67] This association was legally recognized by the Ahidjo government in 1967. Worth mentioning is the fact that Ahidjo never trusted this association from the onset, probably because he never knew its motives or objectives. Nevertheless, when the objectives of ACIC were made known to him, he not only legalized it but even went to the extent of using the association for sustaining his political powers. ACIC was henceforth funded by the Ahidjo government and its members were appointed by the state. Its main objective was to act as an intermediary between the Muslim world and local Muslims and government in terms of implementing a sustainable policy of education of Muslims in Cameroon. ACIC was also aimed at managing central mosques in Yaounde in particular and Cameroon at large.^[68]

ACIC became the best forum of interaction between the government and Muslim communities through their elites. By taking part in this association, Muslim leaders in Yaounde gained recognition and legitimacy. Their role in this association was the same as the role local chiefs were assigned by the colonial bureaucracy that helped legitimate them and provided them with legal platform of action in their respective communities.^[69] From 1962 to 1988, ACIC was the only Muslim legal organization with which the government interacted closely. It had a kind of monopoly in dealing with Islamic affairs even if internal conflict, leadership problem and poor management of funds prevented it from being satisfactory. The relationship between the Ahidjo government and ACIC was seen as the best way to make sure that Islam wouldn't get out of hand and that the government kept a watchful eye on its activities in Yaounde. Generally speaking Muslim in Yaounde during the rule of president Ahidjo enjoyed a high degree of confidence and privileges that enable them freely practice their religion.^[70]

Concretely speaking, religious authorities and their relatives regularly benefited from the generosity of senior administrators in terms of scholarship in Arab countries, transport requisitions during the pilgrimage (Hajj), or preferential treatment during visits at the

presidential palace. Interestingly, the activities of a number of Christian churches, notably evangelization campaigns were reduced to a minimum. Jehovah's witnesses were prohibited from proselytizing activities. In 2000, Muslim faithful represented approximately 30 per cent of the 16 million inhabitants. The two major Islamic celebrations, *Aid al-iftar* (Ramadan) and *Aid al ad-ha* (Ram), were declared public holidays. In public administration as well as in the national army, the hierarchy, with regards to commanding positions or promotion in grade, treated the educated Muslim elites, mostly graduated from high schools, with preference. Exchanges with the Arab countries and Muslim world were intensified and in 1974 Cameroon became a full member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).^[71]

President Ahidjo never, at any time, wanted a direct confrontation with the Muslim leaders and preferred to concentrate his efforts on other regions of the country racked by violent insurrections. Before he stepped down in November 1982, Ahidjo succeeded in rallying traditional rulers and religious leaders while dismantling many other radical Muslims strong holds that were in opposition to his regime.^[72]

The Biya Era 1982-2012

Ahidjo resigned from power as president of Cameroon in 1982 and passed over power to his natural successor Paul Biya in conformity with the Cameroonian constitution. With the advent of the Biya regime, things took a different turn. The funding ACIC used to received from the Ahidjo regime were drastically reduced. More to that, the privileged position ACIC used to enjoy with the former regime stop. Even though the Biya government continued helping ACIC financially, the help was minimal as compare to what they used to receive from Biya's predecessor. This made it in such a way that relationship between the ACIC and Biya administration became so strenuous. To the Biya's regime, it was a way of controlling and checking the excesses of the Muslims in Yaounde. This was even made worse with the advent of the 1990 liberty laws that break ACIC monopoly and cohered in new Muslim associations.^[73]

Multipartism and the democratization process of the early 1990s also gave an opportunity for Muslims in Yaounde to criticize the role of ACIC and clamor for the formation of other Muslim associations. Muslim clerics also benefited from the freedom of expression to make their religion known to non-Muslims. This led to new conversion of non-Muslims into the Islamic faith. The number of Muslim in Yaounde increased exponentially. This was also due to interest in religious issues, the availability of Arabic institutions where most young

Muslims were trained and the aggressive policies of many Muslims organizations from Arab countries that led to heightened attention to Islamic teachings and preaching worldwide. It is in this context that Yaounde started experiencing a drastic shift and became one of the first cities in Cameroon where interaction between the traditional and conformist Islamic leaders and the new generation of well trained Islamic actors turned into a violent confrontation. Reformist Islamic movements started gaining momentum in the city of Yaounde and turned the city into fertile ground for the development of proselytism through a subtitle process of grassroots Islamization.^[74]

It should be recalled that in 1985, the Biya regime refused legalizing the High Islamic Council set up by some muslim authorities and chaired by Dr. Adamu Ndam Njoya, a jurist and former member of government. The body remained powerless until 2003 when it made a sudden and surprising come back into the public arena, this time chaired by Garba Hachimi, Imam of the Essos Central Mosque. Cheikh Mounir, a charismatic Muslim scholar and some prominent members of the council, severely criticized the state when the latter postponed and substituted the Islamic celebration of *Tabaski (Aid al-kebir)* for the secular youth day feast. The verbal skirmishes that resulted from the postponement of *Tabaski* between the Muslim leaders and minister for Interior Affairs over the media complicated the latent and lingering tension with Islam. By intervening and asserting itself in the public domain, tension between Islam and the state became open and caused a split in opinion within the Muslim community. Some of the Islamic faithful spurned the state executive order and celebrated simultaneously the *Tabaski*, according to the Islamic calendar while others respected the decree and postponed their celebration to the following day. The outcome of confrontation gave rise to a division of the Muslim community but also partly contributed to the shifting of the debate on Islamic issues from the private to public sphere.^[75]

The capital city of Yaounde is currently experiencing a new Islamic revival that is drastically changing its identity and providing local Muslims with new citizenship. This was made possible with the new dynamics of Arab agencies, organizations and institutions seeking connection in sub-Saharan Africa in order to attract African Muslims. New Islamic activities contributed enormously to the transformation of Islam in Yaounde urban environment.^[76]

Worth mentioning is the fact that the first generations of Muslims in Yaounde were Hausa and Fulani merchants ill trained, did not master the language of the Quran and belonged to the *Tidjaniyya* Islamic brotherhoods. The second generation of Muslims in Yaounde

composed of the Islamic intellectuals who came back from their education from Arab institutions. They were not well ground base socially and mostly heated by the former because of their Islamic knowledge. The third generations of Muslims in Yaounde were Muslim activists who came up in early 1990s. This generation was composed of well trained Muslims, with an impressive network of contact in Arab countries and worldwide connections. This new generation fought the already established Muslim brotherhood movements in Yaounde. Apart from Islam, they also carried out health, educational and infrastructural development in the town of Yaounde. They regularly organized conferences, seminars and workshops to sensitize and brief local Muslims and bring them back to what they consider as the true Islam.^[77]

Yaounde harbours Muslims from different ethnic backgrounds turned out to be the birth place and fertile grounds for many Islamic NGOs and associations. The monopoly of ACIC was challenged and many new Islamic associations were created. Some of these associations were based in Douala but had branches in Yaounde. For example: we have the Islamic training center *AL-Aqsa* center created in 1995, the *Shia* cultural center *Ahl UL Bayt* created in 1999 etc. These cultural and Islamic associations work side by side with the ACIC. To the above can be added the High Islamic Council of Cameroon (CSIC), the Islamic Center for Research and Culture (C.R.S.C), and the Cameroon Muslim Students Union (CAMSU).^[78] ACIC should be noted was the symbol of the structuralization of Islam from above, where as the new Islamic associations were grassroots and aimed at tackling social and educational issues. ACIC was funded by government while the other newly created associations carried out their activities out of government control. They were strongly connected to foreign donors.^[78]

Within few years, other associations with ethnic connotations also saw the light of day in Yaounde. Examples of some of them were *Bakandamiya* and *Yakamata* Associations created by the Hausa and Fulani Muslim elites. We also had the association of Hausa Elites base in Briqueterie, Yaounde. Other associations created in Douala but having local branches in Yaounde were the Association for the Promotion of Education and Health created in 1994; the Islamic Program for Humanitarian Assistance created in 1995; Association of Committed Muslim Women of Douala created in 1996; Association of young women in Cameroon created in 1998; the group of mother believers of Douala created in 2002, etc. these association main focus is twofold: Social change through the transformation of religious

practice and proselytism. Youth and women are having more through these associations. They are being offered more space where their religiosity can easily be expressed.^[80]

In 1997, Paul Biya for the first time appointed a Muslim scholar, Adoum Gargoun, as minister delegate in the ministry of external relations in charge of relations with the Muslim world. Six years earlier, President Paul Biya, had personally participated in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) summit held in Dakar, a conference during which Cameroon came out with a substantial debt cancellation. Relations with Arab countries and the Muslim world were reinforced through this network, with several international Islamic associations operating branch offices within the country.^[81]

As such, Islam and state relationship under Paul Biya's regime can probably be described as a continuation of former and previous relationships conceived, applied and articulated by his predecessors, but adopted it by strictly monitoring the contemporary evolution of religious activism. The geographical, historical, sociological as well as religious proximity to Nigeria- where Islamic revivalism is still alive- has contributed and reinforced the adoption of such a policy.^[82]

The National Hajj Commission (La Commission Nationale Du Hajj)

The Hajj commission was created by the Government in the early 2000 to organize and better manage the modalities of Cameroonian pilgrims traveling to Mecca. The Cameroonian government created this commission because of the numerous problems Cameroonian pilgrims faced when traveling to perform their pilgrimage in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

From the onset, management and organization of Pilgrimage to Mecca in Cameroon was more or less left in the hands of private companies and individuals. Whenever there were any organizational problems, the government steps in to restore order. The Cameroon government with the aid of the Saudi Arabian government used to subvent the Hajj sector financially. Private individuals with Air lines companies gave priority to their profit, this to the detriment of the traveling conditions of the pilgrims. Added to the above problems faced by Cameroonian pilgrims were the exorbitant prices of Hajj fee, disappointment by some Airline companies for not having planes to fly the pilgrims in time, deplorable travelling conditions, and poor loading facilities as well as lost of pilgrim's luggage.^[83]

Taking into consideration the different problems enumerated above, the government decided to step in to restore order and improve the general organizational conditions of Cameroonian pilgrims. Beginning from the early 2000, the Cameroonian government started discussing the modalities of creating a commission called the Hajj Commission. After some discussions and consultations with some Muslim associations and dignitaries, the Hajj Commission saw the light of day in early 2000. It was placed under the supervision and direct control of the ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization.^[84]

With the creation of the Hajj Commission, Cameroonian Muslims were very happy that problems hampering the affective functioning of the Hajj sector will be a thing of the past. During the first years of the existence of the Hajj Commission, everything was done by MINATD to see into it that Cameroonian pilgrims travel to Mecca normally with little or no problems. The Cameroonian government alongside Cameroon Airlines did everything to facilitate the traveling modalities of pilgrims to and fro without any delay or disappointed. The second year, MINATD still did everything to avoid organizational problems as far as the Hajj Commission was concerned. The two first years of the existence of the Hajj Commission, MINATD did everything to improve the condition of Cameroonian pilgrims to Mecca. Unfortunately, these improved conditions were not going to last for long.^[85]

Beginning mid-2000, the mission of the Hajj Commission started moving from bad to worse. The same problem faced by Cameroonian pilgrims before the creation of the Hajj commission resurfaced again. MINATD decided to increase the Hajj fee from one million to almost two million. More to that, pilgrims travelling conditions became deplorable. Pilgrims lodging facilities in Mecca was not the best. Most pilgrims lost their luggages in the course of traveling back to Cameroon. What was even more deplorable was the fact that MINATD did monopolize the Hajj sector, not letting any private individual to venture into it. Demands of Licenses by some private individuals were refused by MINATD.^[86]

Private Islamic groups were still determined to take over the Hajj commission so as to regularize the sector. Beginning late 2000, some private individuals with the backing of some Islamic Associations took the challenge of organizing pilgrimages to Mecca. The private individuals began by touring the whole country, meeting all Muslims and explaining to them how they intend to improve the Hajj sector. The private individuals laid emphasis on the fact that their own Hajj fee will be reduce as compare to that of MINATD. They also promised to improve the transport and lodging conditions of Cameroonian pilgrims in Mecca. They also

assured would be pilgrims that planes to transport them will be available in time without any delay. No Pilgrim who has met up with his financial modalities will be left stranded in Yaoundé.^[87]

MINATD being aware of all the above ameliorations promised made by private individuals decided to strengthen her monopoly as far as the Hajj commission was concerned. Private individuals and companies willing to organize Hajj journeys to Mecca were warned by MINATD not to go against her rules, and that sanctions await any individual who ventured into the Hajj sector. The communiqué of MINATD frightened most of the private individuals who had the intension of organizing Hajj journeys to Mecca. MINATD also did everything to discourage private individuals and companies. They were being branded as dupers wanting to collect pilgrim's money and escape with it. Any Cameroonian pilgrim wanting to travel to Saudi Arabia for pilgrimage was warned against falling in the hands of those they called dupers. By 2011, MINATD remain the sole organizer of pilgrimage to Mecca. Her monopoly was maintained much to the disgruntleness of some Muslims and Islamic Associations in Yaounde in particular and Cameroon at large.^[88]

The National Moon Observation Commission (Commission Nationale Du Croissant Lunaire)

The beginning and the end of the month of Ramadan is mark by the appearance of the moon. As such any Muslim who sees the moon at the start of the Muslim month of Ramadan is recommended to inform a recognized Muslim authority who in turn informs the rest of the Muslim Community nationwide. That marks the beginning of the month of Ramadan which usually takes twenty-nine or thirty days. Fasting for twenty nine or thirty days is also determined by seeing the moon which in turn helps Muslim authorities to decide on the day to celebrate the feast of Ramadan.^[89]

In Cameroon before the creation of the Moon Observation Commission, there was a lot of disorder regarding the day to begin fasting, the day to end fasting and the day to celebrate the feasts of Ramadan and sacrifice. Cameroon Muslims were often divided over the day to begin and end fasting, the day to celebrate the feast of the Ramadan and feast of the Ram. While others rely on the day the moon is seen in Cameroon, others prefer to rely on neighboring countries like Nigeria, Niger, Chad and even Saudi Arabia.^[90]

In order to restore order, the Cameroon government in collaboration with some Muslims dignitaries decided to create the Moon Observation Commission in the early 2000. Groups of Muslim dignitaries and clerics were appointed to lead the Moon Observation Commission. Henceforth the commission were suppose to determine when to begin fasting, when to end fasting, when to celebrate the feast of the Ramadan and feast of sacrifice following the appearance of the moon. The main objective of this commission was to make sure that Cameroon Muslims become unanimous as far as those celebrations were concerned. For once Cameroonian Muslims were happy that with the creation of the Moon Observation Commission, problems on deciding when to celebrate the two feasts were going to be a thing of the past.^[91]

The work of the Moon Commission during the first two years of it existence were excellent. Almost all Cameroonian Muslims celebrated the feast of Ramadan and feast of sacrifice unanimously together. That is on the same day. Every Muslim in Cameroon had the conviction that order had been restored into the Moon Observation Commission sector. Unfortunately the Yaounde government gradually started politicizing the Moon Observation Commission. The government most often than not influenced the work of the Moon Observation Commission to attain it selfish aims. More often than not the government changed the day Cameroonian Muslims were supposed to celebrate the Feast of Ramadan and Feast of sacrifice. This triggered a bitter conflict between the state and Muslim faithful.^[92] A case in point was the 11th of February 2003.

In 2003, the Islamic feast of sacrifice (Aid al-Ad'ha or Aid al-Kebir), took place on February 11 in most Arab and Muslim countries. Following the example of Muslim faithful the world over, Cameroonian Muslims were expected to join them in the celebration of what professor Adama refer to as the sacred day of Islam.^[93] The feast of sacrifice as we earlier said is an Islamic ritual celebrated on the last month (dhu al-hajj) and meant to commemorate the ritual act performed by Abraham. February 11 in Cameroon is also a republican day, dedicated to Cameroonian youths. It commemorate the plebiscite day when Southern Cameroons voted overwhelmingly to join their brothers of French Cameroon.

Since 1966, the day has always been repeatedly been declared a public holiday by a decree of the head of state, and actively celebrated throughout the national territory. Students as well as the administrative officials throughout the country gathered in official public places for procession under the supervision of the local governor, divisional or district officer. The

coincidence of these two feasts resulted in an unprecedented popular debate in civil society and compelled the government to postpone the Islamic feast by one day under the pretext of an error that occurred in interpreting the Islamic calendar.^[94]

The displacement of the Muslim feast in favor of the celebration of a republican feast triggered bitterness and sowed division in the Muslim community. The reaction from Muslim scholars through the private media, in replication of the meddling of public authorities in the management of Islamic affairs, translated in a symptomatic way the relations that the state had always maintained with Islam in Cameroon in general and Yaounde in particular since the colonial era. This incident, which is actually the first of its kind in Cameroonian contemporary history, was also embarrassing to the Islamic authorities whose relationship with Islam has ever since alternated between collaboration and confrontation, between suspicion and intimidation.^[95]

CONCLUSION

To round up, it should be recalled that Islam first entered Cameroon through Kanem around the Lake Chad Region and later from Northern Nigeria during the 19th century Islamic Jihad launched by Uthman Dan Fodio. In Northern Cameroon, it was headed by Modibo Adama. From Northern Cameroon, it gradually descended down South and finally reached Yaounde in the early 20th century. Islam, more or less had a very strenuous relationship with the colonial masters. Most especially with the French who wanted to use Islam as a stumbling block to attain their goal or interest. This strenuous relationship was also as a result of lack of dialogue between the two. Beginning from the post colonial period, Islam in Yaounde appeared to have constantly lost ground due to confrontation with the state. In order to better control the activities of Islam in Yaounde, the government decided to appoint some Muslim dignitaries to high post of responsibilities. By accepting those appointments, the Muslim authorities were compelled to collaborate with the government to preserve Law and order. The Ahidjo regime made an effort of integrating Muslim rulers into the day to day running of state affairs. More to that Ahidjo being a Muslim himself promoted and funded Muslim associations. He also encouraged Arab countries to come and sponsor certain Islamic projects. With the advent of the Biya regime, most of the Muslim elites were dropped out of government. Islamic associations received little or no funding. Muslims in Yaounde took that as a challenge to reform their religion. The early 1990s witnessed the emergence of reformist and brotherhood movements in Yaounde. This also came along with conflict between the

traditional and modern brand of Islam. Couple with that was also the ethnic tension among the Hausas, Fulani and Bamum Muslims as far as the management and control of Islamic sites were concerned. There was that urgent need for a Muslim body to restore peace and order among Muslims in Yaounde. The body charged with this prime duty was the Conference of Imams and Dignitaries of Cameroon that saw the light of day in the year 2009.

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