

Variations in the Colonial Representation of Islam and Muslims in Northern Ghana, ca. 1900-1930

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Introduction

In 1910 the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh declared its protest against – what was said to be – British pro-Muslim colonial policies in Africa. According to Christian missionary organisations, British policy tended to favour Islam and Muslims. Even worse for the missionary societies, the British colonial government had closed some regions, among others Northern Nigeria, to Christian missionary activities and restricted their activities in others, such as the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast.¹ Furthermore, in some areas the British colonial government was utilising Muslim authorities and administrative personnel in systems of indirect rule, sanctioning Islamic education and law. Such a policy, the missionary societies claimed, contravened the general goals of colonial rule, namely spreading (Western) civilization and lifting up Africa 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 both to Christian missionaries as well as to European rule in general.²

A similar claim of a 'pro-Muslim' British policy in the Northern Territories has been put forward by Okafor in his thesis on Christianity and Islam in Ghana.³ However, Okafor's

¹ The main thorn in the flesh of the missionary societies was the decision by Sir Frederick Lugard at the beginning of the twentieth century 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 emir. For Lugard, the CMS had caused a political mess and endangered his policy towards the Muslim rulers of the Sokoto Caliphate. As a consequence, therefore, for decades Northern Nigeria was more or less closed to Christian missionaries, 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 E.A. Ayandele, *Missionary impact on modern Nigeria 1842-1914: a political and social analysis*, London 1979; Andrew Barnes, 'Evangelization Where It Is Not Wanted': Colonial Administrators and Missionaries in Northern Nigeria during the First Third of the Twentieth Century', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XXV: 4 (1995), 412-41.

² *World Missionary Conference, 1910. Report of Commission 2: The Church in the mission field* (Edinburgh 1910); Diedrich Westermann, 'Die Edinburger Weltmissionskonferenz in ihrer Bedeutung für die Mission in den deutschen Kolonien', in Karl Schneider (ed.), *Jahrbuch der deutschen Kolonien* (Essen 1911), 130-131. For a general discussion, see Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A history of the church in Africa* (Cambridge 2000).

³ Gabriel Maduka Okafor, *Christianity and Islam in West Africa: the Ghana experience. A study of the forces and influence of Christianity and Islam in modern Ghana* (Würzburg, 1997), 97-98.

argument is problematic as it is echoing a popular concept rather than being based on archival research. Although a general process of Islamization has been taking place in Ghana during the twentieth century, it cannot be linked to any deliberate colonial (or postcolonial) policies that would have favoured Muslims and Islam in Ghana, as will be argued in this article. Historical and anthropological investigations by Goody, Wilks, Hodgkin, Levtzion, Benzig, Ferguson and Seidu have identified a steady process of Islamization in contemporary Northern Ghana, which can be dated back to at least the early eighteenth century, if not centuries earlier.⁴ Here, as elsewhere in the Sudan savannah, this process was first confined to settlements of Muslim traders and scholars with their close links to the local rulers. However, unlike in other parts of the Sudan savannah where militant reform movements attempted to establish Islamic governments whenever possible,⁵ no attempt was made by the Muslim community in the kingdoms in the so-called Volta Basin. Instead, the precolonial states of Gonja and Dagbon developed in a similar fashion to some earlier multi-religious states in the Sudan savannah, such as the Malian empire or the pre-jihādic Hausa states. The king was perhaps nominally a Muslim, but the political and religious structures of the states remained non-Islamic.⁶

The aim of this article is to investigate British perceptions of Islam and Muslims in the Northern Territories up to the early 1930s. Although the study of the relationship between Muslims and the colonial state is rather well established, some aspects have so far been less examined by historians. For example, British colonial policy vis-à-vis Muslims in Northern

⁴ Jack Goody, 'A Note on the Penetration of Islam into the West of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast', *Transactions of the Gold Coast and Togoland Historical Society*, 1: II (1953), 45-46.; Jack Goody, *The Ethnography of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, West of the White Volta* (London, 1954), Jack Goody, 'The Over-Kingdom of Gonja', in: *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. D. Forde and P. M. Kaberry (London, 1967), 179-205; Ivor Wilks, *The Northern Factor in Ashanti History* (Legon, 1961), Ivor Wilks, 'The growth of Islamic learning in Ghana', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, II: 4 (1963), 409-417, Ivor Wilks, 'A Note on the Early Spread of Islam in Dagomba', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 8 (1965), 87-98, Ivor Wilks, 'The position of Muslims in Metropolitan Ashanti in the Early Nineteenth Century', in: *Islam in Tropical Africa*, ed. I. M. Lewis (London, 1966), 318-341; Thomas Hodgkin, 'The Islamic Literacy Tradition in Ghana', in: *Islam in Tropical Africa*, ed. I. M. Lewis (London, 1966), 442-462; Nehemia Levtzion, *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa* (Oxford, 1968); Birgitta Benzig, *Die Geschichte und das Herrschaftssystem der Dagomba* (Meissenheim am Glan, 1971); Phyllis Ferguson, 'Islamization in Dagbon: A Study of the Alfanema of Yendi' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge 1972); Phyllis Ferguson and Ivor Wilks, 'Chiefs, Constitutions and the British in Northern Ghana', in: *West African Chiefs*, eds. M. Crowder and O. Ikime (New York and Ile Ife, 1970), 326-369; Salifu Abdel Seidu, 'The Influence of Islam on the Dagbamba in the Twentieth Century' (M.Phil thesis, University of Ghana, Legon, 1989).

⁵ The most renowned cases being that of states led by the TorodBe in Senegambia (Futa Bundu, Futa Jallon and Futa Toro) as well as the Caliphates of Hamdallahi and Sokoto. See further Mervyn Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa* (London and New York 1984) and Murray Last, 'Reform in West Africa: the jihād movements of the nineteenth century', in: J.F.A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder (eds), *History of West Africa, Vol. II* (Burnt Mill 1987), 1-47.

⁶ Goody, 'Over-Kingdom', 175 footnote 2; Levtzion, *Muslims and Chiefs*, 108-9; Ferguson, 'Islamization', 89, 100-1, 108.

Nigeria or French Islamic policies in Senegal have been topics that have already interested several generations of researchers,⁷ and there has been considerable research on the colonial concept of 'Islam noire'.⁸ My key object is to study the various positions held towards Muslims by the colonial officials in the north and how these perceptions changed during the period of observation. I have mainly made use of written colonial sources, which directly reflect the opinions of the colonial officials. Although there exist some studies about British colonial policies in the Northern Territories,⁹ only Wilks' study about Wa deals directly with the relationship between Muslims and the colonial state.¹⁰

In the Northern Territories, it will be argued, British attitudes shifted from a 'pro-Muslim' perspective to a somewhat negative one. My paper links up with Rüdiger Seesemann's recent investigation into the perception of Islam and Muslims in West Africa by the French and British colonial administrators during the late colonial period.¹¹ As Seesemann demonstrates, there existed no clear-cut or systematic British 'Islamic' or Muslim policy during most of the colonial period, and such a situation is also well reflected in the period under investigation in this article. According to Seesemann, British colonial administrators did not take Islam into consideration as an independent category when they formulated their colonial policies in their four West African colonies. They only appropriated Muslim personnel and institutions – if and when they existed and were found suitable for the administration of the colonial dependencies.¹²

⁷ Among others Lucy Behrman, 'French Muslim policy and the Senegalese brotherhoods', in: Daniel F. McCall (ed.), *Aspects of West African Islam* (Papers on Africa 5) (Boston, 1971), 185-208, John Paden, *Religion and political culture in Kano* (Berkeley, 1973), Robert Launay & Benjamin F. Soares, 'The formation of an 'Islamic sphere' in French colonial West Africa', *Economy and Society* 28(1999), 497-519, Muhamamd Sani Umar, 'The Tijāniyya and British colonial authorities in Northern Nigeria', in: Jean-Louis Triaud & David Robinson (éds.), *La Tijāniyya* (Paris, 2000), 327-355, David Robinson, *Paths of accommodation. Muslim societies and French colonial authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1880-1920* (Athens & Oxford, 2000). A general synthesis is provided by several authors in Nehemia Levtzion & Randall Pouwels (eds.), *The History of Islam in Africa* (Athens, 2000).

⁸ The difference between an 'African' ('Islam noire') and an 'Arab' Islam ('Islam arabe') was especially highlighted by French colonial researchers. See further Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam in West Africa, 1860-1960* (Cambridge, 1988).

⁹ Among the few published monographs on the political history of northern Ghana are Martin Staniland, *The Lions of Dagbon: Political Change in Northern Ghana* (Cambridge, 1975) and Paul Andre Ladouceur, *Chiefs and Politicians: The Politics of Regionalism in Northern Ghana* (London, 1979). On Yoruba migrants in the North, see Jeremy Seymour Eades, *Stranger and traders: Yoruba migrants, markets and the state in Northern Ghana* (Edinburgh, 1993). Patrick J. Ryan, 'Ariadne auf Naxos: Islam and Politics in a religiously pluralistic African society', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XXVI: 3 (1996), 308-329 is one of the few recently published articles on Islam in Northern Ghana.

¹⁰ Ivor Wilks, *Wa and Wala. Islam and Polity in Northwestern Ghana* (Cambridge, 1989). Wilks already indicates that there was no deliberate 'pro-Muslim' policy, but rather that the Muslim community in Wa tried to accommodate to the various external challenges and internal frictions that emerged during British colonial rule.

¹¹ Rüdiger Seesemann, "'Ein Dialog der Taubstummen': Französische vs. britische Wahrnehmungen des Islam im spätkolonialen Westafrika," *afrika spectrum* 37: 2, 2002, 109-139.

¹² Seesemann, "Dialog der Taubstummen," 115-116.

This article is divided into three sections. In the first, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European attitudes towards Islam in West Africa are presented. Basically two perceptions are identified, a positive and a negative one, can be seen in the writings of the early British colonial officials. The second section deals with the changing perception of Islam and Muslims in the Northern Territories and is exemplified by a discussion of the early censuses and the data about the Muslim population. In the third section, the impact of British policy towards Islam and Muslims is discussed within a West African framework.

European 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.¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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, such as the nineteenth-century British traveller and Orientalist Richard Burton and the Sierra Leonian writer Edward W. Blyden even argued that Islam had brought unity in place of tribal division in Africa and had provided a basis for economic and cultural progress.¹⁵ Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European concepts about Islam in Africa were based on the assumption that Islam provided 'pagans' with a superior civilization (although not as elaborate and modern as Christianity and Western civilization). Islam was associated with the formation and consolidation of a kind of 'medieval', 'feudal' and 'despotic' state-formation, not as developed as Western concepts but better than the anarchy of 'pagan' tribalism.¹⁶

¹³ Among others, Carl Meinhof, *Afrikanische Religionen* (Berlin, 1912).

¹⁴ This was the case, among others, in Northern Nigeria. See further Barnes, 'Evangelization'.

¹⁵ Sir Richard Francis Burton, *Abeokuta and the Cameroon Mountains I-II* (London, 1863), Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (London, 1888). Similar arguments were put forward by, among others, L.G. Binder, *Esclavage, islamisme et christianisme* (Paris, 1891); Franz Hutter, *Wanderungen und Forschungen in Nord-Hinterland von Kamerun* (Braunschweig, 1902), and Jesco von Puttkamer, *Gouverneursjahre in Kamerun* (Berlin, 1912). See further Mervyn Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa* (Burnt Mill, 1984), 210; Andrew F. Walls, 'Africa as the Theatre of Christian Engagement with Islam in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XXXI: 2 (1999), 155-174.

¹⁶ An illuminating example of the position of European Orientalist scholars during the first decade of the twentieth century is outlined in Carl Heinrich Becker, 'Der Islam und die Kolonisierung Afrikas', *Internationale Wochenschrift* IV (1910), 227-252. Becker was one of the chief architects of German public opinion concerning Islam in Africa and had intensive contacts with French, Dutch and British Orientalists.

Early colonial attitudes towards Islam and Muslims varied from hostility towards Islam and fear of Islamic militancy to outright sympathy. This was especially the case among the British and the Germans in West Africa, but a similar situation also prevailed among the French in their West African colonies. 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 militant experiences in India, Uganda and the Sudan overshadowed British attitudes towards Muslim regimes and Islam in West Africa: Islam, it was argued, posed a threat through its militant organisations. On the other hand, rivalry among Christian missionary organizations could also cause substantial turbulence.¹⁷ For the French, experiences in Algeria, Morocco, Senegal and Mauretania strengthened the division between 'Islam arabe' and 'Islam noire',¹⁸ whereas German attitudes were affected by experiences with Muslims in German East Africa, Togo and Kamerun.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ However, such 'sympathizers' seemed to have belonged to a minority. The bulk of the colonial officials seemed to have harboured the age-old European

¹⁷ Hiskett, *Development*, 208; Tudor Griffiths, 'Bishop Alfred Tucker and the Establishment of a British Protectorate in Uganda 1890-94', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XXX: 1 (2001), 92-114.

¹⁸ 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, *France and Islam*, see further D. Cruise O'Brien, 'Towards an 'Islamic Policy' in French West Africa, 1854-1914', *Journal of African History* 8: 2, 1967, 303-316; David Robinson, 'French 'Islamic' policy and practice in late nineteenth-century Senegal', *Journal of African History*, 29: 3, 1988, 415-435; Jean -Louis Triaud, 'Islam in Africa under French Colonial Rule', in: Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels (eds.), *The History of Islam in Africa* (Athens, 2000), 169-188, and Roman Loimeier, *Säkularer Staat und islamische Gesellschaft. Die Beziehungen zwischen Staat, Sufi-Bruderschaften und islamischer Reformbewegung in Senegal im 20. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg, 2001), 59-73.

¹⁹ See further, Holger Weiss, 'German Images of Islam in West Africa', *Sudanica. A Journal of Historical Sources* 11 (2000), 53-94; Roman Loimeier, 'Edward Said und der Deutschsprachige Orientalismus: Eine kritische Würdigung', *Stichproben. Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien*, 1: 2 (2001), 63-85.

²⁰ R. Bosworth Smith, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism* (London, 1874); Carl Heinrich Becker, 'Staat und Mission in der Islampolitik', *Verhandlungen des 3. Deutschen Kolonialkongresses* (Berlin, 1910), 638-51; Carl Heinrich Becker, 'Die Araber als Kolonisatoren', *Jahrbuch der deutschen Kolonien* VII (1914), 197-206. According to Hiskett, (*Development*, 220-221, 279-280), Bosworth Smith's pro-Muslim position was later on reflected by Frederick Lugard in the latter's *Dual Mandate*. See further Barnes, 'Evangelization', 426-27, and Michael Crowder, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule* (London, 1968), 358-61.

negative perceptions of Islam, seeing it as the equivalent of 'oriental despotism', the root-cause of the slave trade and slavery in Africa and in general a destructive force.²¹

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 Memoranda written by Lord Lugard.²² Already in his 1903 proclamations in Kano and Sokoto, Lugard assured the local Muslim rulers of British non-interference in religious matters and in his 1904 Annual report, he stressed the "admirable qualities of the Fulani as rulers."²³ Similar pro-Muslim expressions were articulated by C.L. Temple in his writings concerning "native rule" in Northern Nigeria.²⁴ The first Resident in Sokoto, J. A. Burdon, was also one of the first propagators of a British pro-Islamic policy in the protectorate.²⁵

According to Jonathan Reynolds, who has recently produced a study on British religious policy in Northern Nigeria, ²⁶ attitudes towards Islam greatly varied among individual colonial officials, but there was still a general trend towards a division between 'good' and 'bad' Muslims.²⁷ Although Lugard claimed 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 that were dominated by Muslim rulers, such as Northern Nigeria.²⁸ In addition, Lugard and many of his subordinate officials in Northern Nigeria argued that the missionaries had failed to introduce to Africans the collective self-discipline necessary for a civilized society. Even worse, missionary activities were blamed for destroying and uprooting the existing social

²¹ Per Hassing, 'Islam at the German Colonial Congress', *The Muslim World* LXVII: 3 (1977), 165-74; Jonathan Reynolds, 'Good and Bad Muslims: Islam and Indirect Rule in Northern Nigeria', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 34: 3 (2001), 601-18.

²² See further, Lord Lugard, *Political Memoranda* (1906, reprint: London, 1970). 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, Mary Bull, 'Indirect Rule in Northern Nigeria', in: Kenneth Robinson and Frederick Madden (eds.), *Essays in Imperial Government* (Oxford, 1963), 47-88; I.F. Nicolson, *The Administration of Nigeria 1900-1960. Men, Methods, and Myths* (Oxford, 1969).

²³ "Northern Nigeria", *Journal of the Royal African Society* V (1905-6), 387-403, quote from page 388.

²⁴ C.L. Temple, *Native Races and their Rulers* (1918, reprint: London, 1968).

²⁵ J. A. Burdon, "The Fulani Emirates of Northern Nigeria," *Geographical Journal* 24 (1904), 636-651.

²⁶ Reynolds, 'Good and Bad Muslims'.

²⁷ A similar division was also made by the Germans in Kamerun as well as in German East Africa. See further, Monika Midel, *Fulbe und Deutsche in Adamaua (Nord-Kamerun) 1809-1916. Auswirkung afrikanischer und kolonialer Eroberung* (Frankfurt/Main, Bern, New York, Paris, 1990), 179-180.

²⁸ Reynolds, Good and Bad Muslims, 603.

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 the colonial or in the traditional African society.²⁹

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 an impetus for trade. Watherston was even reluctant to allow Christian missions to work among non-Muslim communities.³⁰ But was there a connection between Lugard's agenda and the situation in Northern Nigeria on 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 regards to Islam. However, there was also a basic difference between Northern Nigeria and the Northern Territories: there existed no Muslim states in the Northern Territories.³¹

Changing representations

Danish,³² British,³³ French³⁴ and German³⁵ accounts of the Asante hinterland during the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth century suggest that at least Dagbon (Dagomba)³⁶ was

²⁹ Barnes, 'Evangelization', 413.

³⁰ Crowder, *West Africa*, 359; B. Der, "Church-state relations in northern Ghana, 1906-1940," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 15: 1 (1974), 41-61; Okafor, *Christianity and Islam*, 96.

³¹ Crowder, *West Africa*, 358-359; Mervyn Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa* (London and New York 1984), 279.

³² Ludewig Ferdinand Rømer, *A reliable account of the coast of Guinea (1760)*, transl. Axelrod Wisnes (Oxford, 2000), 171. For a discussion on Rømer, see Holger Weiss, 'European images of Islam in the Northern Hinterlands of the Gold Coast until the early colonial period', *Sudanic Africa. A Journal of Historical Method*, 12 (2001), 83-110.

³³ Thomas Edward Bowdich, *Mission from the Cape Coast castle to Ashantee* (London 1819); J. Dupuis, *Journal of a Residence in Ashantee* (London 1824).

³⁴ L. G. Binger, *Du Niger au Golfe de Guinée par le pays de Kong et le Mossi, I-II* (Paris 1892).

³⁵ Curt von François, 'Bericht des Hauptmann von François über seine Reise im Hinterlande des deutschen Schutzgebiets Togo', *Mitteilungen der Forschungsreisenden und Gelehrten aus den deutschen Schutzgebieten*, I (1888), 143-171

³⁶ The name Dagbon is to be preferred to Dagomba when describing the kingdom and political entity. Dagomba is the Hausa name for the population and region, Dagbon the name given by the people themselves. Dagbon is occupied by Dagbamba as well as other ethnic groups, such as the Konkomba. The Dagbamba, or anglicized Dagombas, speak Dagbanli (Dagbane), a language belonging to the Mole-Dagbani language group whereas the political structures are common to the Mossi states.

then ruled by a Muslim king and through Muslim law.³⁷ Early nineteenth century British accounts on Asante, such as Bowdich's and Dupuis', criticized the inhumane state of affairs in Asante, especially the existence of human sacrifice and the despotic manners of the Asantehenes. However, as long as Asante was the major political and commercial power in the region, there was little one could do to counteract Asante hegemony. Therefore, the existence of a powerful Muslim kingdom in the savannah could be a much needed political ally and have even more importance as a commercial market by providing direct access to 'legitimate' trade goods³⁸

The regarding of Dagbon as a Muslim kingdom stopped only at the end of the nineteenth century. Due to the travel accounts of George Ekem Ferguson, a Fanti Official from the Gold Coast who travelled extensively in its northern hinterland during the 1890s,³⁹ the earlier picture of a 'Muslim kingdom' had to be dropped. Dagbon together with Gonja, Mamprusi and Wa were referred to by Ekem Ferguson as being "countries with organized governments," having a "despotic monarchial government," but also an influential "Council of Eunuchs" (in Dagbon) to counterbalance the position of the ruler.⁴⁰ As compared to Gonja and Mamprusi, the ruler of Dagbon was regarded as the most influential 'potentate' in the hinterland,⁴¹ but neither he nor the other rulers can be said to have been Muslims and Muslim law did not prevail. Although Ekem Ferguson made an obscure reference to "Mohammedan-professing tribes",⁴² this seems to refer merely to people "dressed in a Mohammedan style,"⁴³ i.e., wearing clothes of a style produced, among others, by Hausas (who were known to be Muslims). Thus, what Ekem Ferguson noted was only a kind of Muslim cultural influence.⁴⁴

However, with respect to a political or juridical impact of Islam or the existence of 'Muslim kingdoms', Ekem Ferguson gave a negative report: "With the exception of Kong there are no states governed entirely by the Codes of Islamism."⁴⁵ He only noted the existence of a rather influential Muslim trading community.⁴⁶ Although the existence of such communities in the hinterland was already well known, their political and cultural influence was not. Although Ekem Ferguson did himself also mention this aspect, such questions only

³⁷ See further Weiss, 'European images', 87-94.

³⁸ Weiss, 'European images', 91.

³⁹ George Ekem Ferguson travelled through Dagbon in 1892 and 1895.

⁴⁰ Kwame Arhin (ed.), *The Papers of George Ekem Ferguson. A Fanti Official of the Government of the Gold Coast, 1890-1897* (Leiden & Cambridge, 1974), 75, 99.

⁴¹ Arhin, *Papers*, 74

⁴² Arhin, *Papers*, 68.

⁴³ Arhin, *Papers*, 83, 86, 128.

⁴⁴ Weiss, 'European images', 95-96.

⁴⁵ Arhin, *Papers*, 127.

⁴⁶ Arhin, *Papers*, 99-100.

became a matter of debate during the early colonial period. Ekem Ferguson also noted that the majority of those who "adopt the Hausa and Mahomedan garbs"- thus pointing to a cultural influence of that could be described as "Hausanization" - could neither read nor write their names. However, those Muslims - and Ferguson made it quite clear that he referred only to Muslims, and especially to the imam - who could read and write had a certain amount of influence over their converts as well as at the local courts.⁴⁷ Ekem Ferguson's description of the state of affairs in the hinterland reminds one of later representations of Muslims, especially imams, who served as intermediaries between rulers and (visiting) strangers.⁴⁸ A similar situation also existed between the Muslims and the Asante court.⁴⁹

Although Ekem Ferguson's investigations dispelled the notion of a great northern Muslim kingdom, the division of the northern hinterland between states and stateless societies continued to be applied throughout the colonial period.⁵⁰ Following the logic and assumptions of the early colonial officials, the rulers of Ekem Ferguson's "organized governments", i.e., Dagbon, Gonja, Nanumba, Wa and Mamprusi, 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. This was clearly the argument of Chief Commissioner Watherston 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 of Gambaga, a patriarchal-looking Mohammedan."⁵¹ For Watherston, the "patriarchal-looking" imam of Gambaga represented a person with whom one could establish a relationship as the imam was fluent in Hausa and Arabic, whereas the Mamprusi king was not. Even more important seems to have been the belief by Watherston and his successor Armitage that it was the imam who

⁴⁷ Arhin, *Papers*, 109-110, 112.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Goody, 'Over-Kingdom' and Levtzion, *Muslims and Chiefs*.

⁴⁹ Apart from the literature cited in footnote 34, see also Enid Schildkrout, 'Government and Chiefs in Kumasi Zongo', in: *West African Chiefs*, eds. M. Crowder and O. Ikime (New York and Ile Ife, 1970), 370-392, Enid Schildkrout, 'Strangers and Local Government in Kumasi', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 8:2 (1970), 251-269, Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge 1975), Enid Schildkrout, *People of the Zongo: the transformation of ethnic identities in Ghana* (Cambridge, 1978), David Owusu-Ansah, 'Islamization Reconsidered: An Examination of Asante Responses to Muslim Influence in the Nineteenth Century', *Asian and African Studies*, 21 (1987), 145-163, David Owusu-Ansah, *Islamic Talismanic Tradition in Nineteenth Century Asante* (Lewiston, 1991), as well as T.C. McCaskie, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante* (Cambridge 1995).

⁵⁰ See further Carola Lenz, 'Colonial Ethnography and Political Reform: The Works of A.C. Duncan-Johnstone, R.S. Rattray, J. Eyre-Smith and J. Guinness on Northern Ghana', *Ghana Studies*, 2 (1999), 119-169, this ref. to page 121; Sean Hawkins, *Writing and Colonialism in Northern Ghana* (Toronto, 2002), 108-122. Ekem Ferguson's division into "barbarous tribes" and "organized governments" is also discussed by Jack Goody in his *Technology, Tradition and the State in Africa* (London, 1971), esp. 54-64.

⁵¹ A. E. G. Watherston, 'The Northern Territories of the Gold Coast', *Journal of the Royal African Society*, VII: XXVIII (1908), 344-373, this ref. to page 349.

was the most influential person whereas the ruler was said to avoid visiting European officials due to 'juju'.⁵² Consequently, a pragmatic alliance was established between the British and the Mamprusi Muslim community at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵³

However, the crux of the matter from the British point of view during the early colonial period was that not much was known about the influence and position of the Muslims in the Northern Territories. 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,⁵⁴ 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 but unnamed Alhaji as well as several rich and powerful Malams (Hausa: Muslim scholar). Each section of the town had its own mosque and there existed six Qur'ānic schools in the town.⁵⁵ In Mamprusi, 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. Due both to the Muslim-British 'alliance' in Mamprusi 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 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.⁵⁶

⁵² PRAAD/A (Public Records and Archives Administration Department, Ghana; A = Accra) ADM 56/1/124, Tour of Inspection by Chief Commissioner Armitage, letter dated Tamale, July 1911, para 7; Watherston, 'Northern Territories', 349, 351. The notion of the central position of the imam of Gambaga was further noted by Westermann in his overview of the state of Islam in West Africa. According to Westermann, who based his information on Watherston's 1908 JAS-article, it was the imam who ruled Mamprusi and Westermann speculated that most of the inhabitants were Muslims (Diedrich Westermann, 'Der Islam in West- und Zentral-Sudan', *Die Welt des Islam*, 1:1 (1913), 85-108, this quote p. 88).

⁵³ David C. Davies, "'Then the White Man Came with His Whitish Ideas...": The British and the Evolution of Traditional Government in Mampurugu', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 20: 4 (1987), 627-646, this ref. to page 636.

⁵⁴ On the decline of Salaga, see further J.A. Braimah and J. R. Goody, *Salaga: The Struggle for Power* (London, 1967).

⁵⁵ PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/824, Wheeler: A description of the Customs of the Gonja Tribe, Salaga District, page 2. According to Sedgwick (PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/413, Annual Report [AR] Gonja District 1904), there existed two considerable mosques and five 'native' schools in Salaga.

⁵⁶ PRAAD/A 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, 'Islamization', 198-202). Yet 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.

In the northwestern parts of the territory, 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.⁵⁷ As late as 1931, the census official in Eastern Gonja district argued that "...[t]he general moral tone of the people is improving especially with the spread of Mohammedanism..."⁵⁸ On the other side, in many regions, among others in Western Gonja and the northern parts of the territory, Muslim influence was more or less absent. Even worse from a British perspective, the general outlook for relying on existing "organised 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 civilization or an organized system of direct taxation as based on the Koranic law.⁵⁹

From fearing 'fanatics' to criticizing the example of the Muslims

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. Especially the British colonial officials viewed Mahdists or 'Muslim fanatics' as arch enemies, 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 1907.⁶⁰ In the Northern Territories as well as

⁵⁷ Discussion of Captain Read in 1905, quoted in Sean Hawkins, *Writing and Colonialism in Northern Ghana* (Toronto, 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."

⁵⁸ PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/45, Census Report Eastern Gonja District 1931, para 35. The NRG-files are located in the regional archives in Tamale (T).

⁵⁹ PRAAD/A 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.

⁶⁰ See further Paul Lovejoy and Jan S. Hogendorn, 'Revolutionary Mahdism and Resistance to Colonial Rule in the Sokoto Caliphate, 1905-1906', *Journal of African History*, 31: 2 (1990), 217-244, and Thea Büttner, 'Die Mahdi-Erhebung 1907 in Nordkamerun im Vergleich mit antikononialen islamischen Bewegungen in anderen Regionen West- und Zentralafrikas', in: *Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Kolonialismus in Afrika*, Hrsg. Peter Heine & Ulrich van der Heyden (Pfaffenweiler 1995), 147-159.

northern Togo, Muslim itinerant preachers began to be viewed with suspicion – if not fear – by the colonial officials.⁶¹

As Ivor Wilks notes, there is 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."⁶² 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 "Mahomedan missionaries" or "Senoussis," i.e., Mahdist preachers.⁶³ Watherston himself was worried about the activities of these preachers. They predicted the coming of the Mahdi "...who would punish all non-believers, white or black and have generally conveyed the idea that the Whitemen would be exterminated in the country."⁶⁴ Similar reports were also handed in by German and French officials.⁶⁵ Such claims 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.⁶⁶

By 1906, British, German and French colonial officials had a good idea about what was going on in their respective West African colonies. In the Northern Territories as well as in northern Togo, the key person of the movement was identified as one Malam Musa, an Adamawa FulBe. He and his followers had moved across the hinterlands of Dahomey, Togo and the Gold Coast in 1904-05. Early in 1905, Malam Musa was reported to have entered Yeji, and to have started a religious campaign, which included the building of mosques and

⁶¹ A presentation about the Mahdist movement and its impact in the Northern Territories is found in Jack Goody, 'Reform, renewal and resistance: a Mahdī in northern Ghana', in: *African Perspectives. Papers in the history, politics and economics of Africa presented to Thomas Hodgkin*, ed. Christopher Allen and R. W. Johnson (Cambridge, 1970), 143-156, Wilks, *Wa and Wala*, 152-57.

⁶² Quoted in Wilks, *Wa and Wala*, 152.

⁶³ See PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/411, Monthly Report [MR] Gonja District, January 1905 (Sedgwick) + MR February 1905 (Sedgwick), PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/411, MR Black Volta District, June 1905 (Moutray-Read) + MR July 1905 (Moutray-Read), PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/421, MR Black Volta District, February 1906 (Taylor) + MR March 1906 (Taylor), and PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/515 Progress Report of the Northern Territories, July 1905 (Irvine) + August 1905 (Watherston).

⁶⁴ Watherston (May 1906), quoted in Wilks, *Wa and Wala*, 154.

⁶⁵ Basel Mission Archive (BMA) D-1,85 file 71 Gottfried Martin, Eine Erkundungsreise im Hinterland von Togo (4.7.1906); Diedrich Westermann, 'Die Verbreitung des Islam in Togo und Kamerun', *Die Welt des Islam* II: 2/4 (1914), 188-276; Peter Sebald, *Togo 1884-1914. Eine Geschichte der deutschen 'Musterkolonie' auf der Grundlage amtlicher Quellen* (Berlin, 1988), 468.

⁶⁶ Goody, 'A Mahdī in northern Ghana', 153-154. Also BMA D-1,85 file 53, Governor von Zech to Gottfried Martin, Lome 16.1.1906.

prayer 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. Accordingly, Malam Musa and his followers moved to Wa.⁶⁷ At first, their activities in Wa were hailed by the colonial officials, among others Watherston, who was impressed by the cleanliness and sobriety in the Wa country after Malam Musa had banned the consumption of beer. 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.⁶⁸ In German-controlled Nanumba and Dagbon, where itinerant preachers also had been active,⁶⁹ measures by the colonial officials were even more drastic. Preachers were jailed and "unschädlich gemacht" (taken care of).⁷⁰ The French officials in Bondoukou had ten 'marabouts' executed in February 1906.⁷¹ In 1908 Watherston was able to report that the threat of Mahdism 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.⁷²

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.⁷³ What was noted was the 'mixing' of Muslim and non-Muslim practices and traditions, which colonial French scholars termed as 'Islam noire'. Later scholars have pointed to an age-old tradition of accommodation, especially among Juula and

⁶⁷ Goody, 'A Mahdī in northern Ghana', 146, 149-151.

⁶⁸ Wilks, *Wa and Wala*, 154.

⁶⁹ BMA D-1,85 file 71, Martin, Reisebericht (4.7.1906), 14-16; Mohr, Reisebericht (1906), 10.

⁷⁰ BMA D-1,104 file 8, Otto Schimming to Basel HQ, Jendi 11.9.1913.

⁷¹ Wilks, *Wa and Wala*, 153.

⁷² PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/432, AR Northern Territories (NT) 1908, para 46.

⁷³ C.H. Becker, 'Ist der Islam eine Gefahr für unsere Kolonien', *Koloniale Rundschau* I (1909), 266-293.

Mande Muslims,⁷⁴ which Ivor Wilks terms the Suwarian tradition.⁷⁵ Further, both British and German scholars had noted the generally positive impact and influence of Hausa merchants and Muslims.⁷⁶ 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 both British, German and French colonial officials was that the negative, potentially troublemaking, element always came from abroad, being termed 'alien' Muslims. Local, 'native' or 'our' Muslims were 'peace loving', i.e., they were believed to have accommodated themselves to the colonial order.⁷⁷

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 life 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 after 1906 were still regarded as being a valuable asset for the colonial economy and administration, 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 colonial officials as being of 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 'low' knowledge by both the colonial officials as well as the 'true' Muslims.⁷⁸ 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 its tenets, of a debased form, and more

⁷⁴ Lamin Sanneh, 'The Origins of Clericalism in West African Islam', *Journal of African History* 17:1 (1976), 49-72; Lamin Sanneh, *The Crown and the Turban. Muslims and West African Pluralism* (Boulder, 1997).

⁷⁵ Ivor Wilks, 'The Juula and the Expansion of Islam into the Forest', in: Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels (eds.), *The History of Islam in Africa* (Athens, 2000), 96-98.

⁷⁶ Weiss, 'German Images', 68-72.

⁷⁷ British and German evaluations of the situation in the region, for example, were somewhat different. Whereas Governor von Zech in Togo continued the ban on Christian missionary activity in northern Togo, Chief Commissioner Watherston gave permission for the Roman Catholic missionaries to establish a station in Navrongo. However, Navrongo was said to be a virtually non-Muslim area, and the White Fathers were strictly forbidden to establish themselves in settlements with a Muslim population. In Togo, again, the so-called *Hinterlandsperr*e was lifted by von Zech in 1911 and the Basel Missionaries, despite the warnings of the local German officials, were allowed to establish themselves in Yendi, the capital of Dagbon which was claimed to have a substantial Muslim population. Soon the Basel missionaries in Yendi also argued that the Dagbamba Muslims were rather 'worldly' ones whereas the local Hausa Muslims were depicted as the only 'true' Muslims. See further Weiss, 'European images', 103-108.

⁷⁸ PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/466, AR Southern Province (SP) 1912, page 12.

than tainted with the prevailing paganism. The bulk of the Mohammedan population is to be found in the Southern Province.⁷⁹

Muslims were said to show little respect for the 'integral rules' of Islam. Islam was said to be making no progress and what was practiced was a 'debased form'. 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.⁸⁰ Even the Muslims in Wa, which in 1906 had caused some concern to the colonial officials, were said to lack "any crusading enthusiasm" and were living in peace and good will with their non-Muslim neighbours in 1918.⁸¹

However, there was still one crucial problem that the colonial administration had to solve. From the beginning, 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. 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. Muslims had been connected to various courts in precolonial states and they had engaged in long-distance trade.⁸² Such persons were identified by the British, among others, as being the most suitable for the administrative and economic development of their dependencies.⁸³ Not surprisingly, therefore, to be a Muslim was regarded by both the British colonial officials as well as by local individuals to be a sign of

⁷⁹ PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/464, AR NT 1912, page 34. Similar reference also in PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/473, AR NT 1913, section IX.

⁸⁰ PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/486 AR NT 1916, para 64.

⁸¹ PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/489, AR Northwestern Province (NWP) 1918, para 45; also PRAAD/A ADM 65/1/489, AR NT 1918, para 59.

⁸² Levtzion, *Muslims and Chiefs*, passim; Ferguson, 'Islamization', chapter IV.

⁸³ An interesting question, which needs further investigation, is the concept of 'martial races'. British military officials are known to have applied this concept when enlisting Africans in colonial armies (See further Risto Marjomaa, 'Martial Spirit. British Recruitment of the Yao ([Malawi] for Military Service, 1896-1939', *Journal of African History* [forthcoming]). 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 (Charles C. Stewart, 'The Tijānīya in Ghana: An [sic!] Historical Study' [MA thesis, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, 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' (Sam C. Ukpabi, *The Origins of the Nigerian Army. A History of the West African Frontier Force 1897-1914* [Zaria, 1987], 97-99).

superior status. Thus, District Commissioner Nash claimed that most people in Tamale District "...ape Mohammedanism as it gives them status."⁸⁴

After 1906, the question of Hausa became more troublesome as it was realized that most - if not all - Hausa-speakers were in fact 'aliens', i.e., merchants and scholars from Northern Nigeria. Over the following decades, there developed an uneasy relationship between some of the colonial officials and the Hausa malams. Muslims 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. As the collection of such a tax presented the colonial administration 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 are local men and we shan't have to depend on foreign clerks."⁸⁵ In the Southern Province, Muslims were to be employed in the preparation of nominal rolls in the villages as well as scribes at the local courts.⁸⁶ However, the growing suspicion against Hausa malams by 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 (the ruler of Dagbon), as well as District Commissioner Blair, opposed such a bureaucratic innovation. 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."⁸⁷ 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.⁸⁸ 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 argument 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:

⁸⁴ PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/470, AR SP 1914.

⁸⁵ Duncan-Johnstone (Informal diary 1932), quoted in Ferguson and Wilks, 'Chiefs', 336, also in Wilks, *Wa and Wala*, 166.

⁸⁶ PRAAD/T NRG 8/2/28, Notes of Interview between the Commissioner of the Southern Province (CSP) and the District Commissioner (DC) of Western Dagomba, 4.4.1932; Ferguson and Wilks, 'Chiefs', 336-337; Wilks, *Wa and Wala*, 166-167. In the Northern Province, however, due to the expressed hostility of Commissioner P. F. Whittall towards the local Muslims, Muslims were not engaged.

⁸⁷ PRAAD/T NRG 8/2/28, Dagomba Affairs, DC Blair to CSP 16.7.1930, DC Blair to CSP 27.8.1930.

⁸⁸ PRAAD/T NRG 8/2/28, Dagomba Affairs: Letters from DC Blair, 1940, para 1.

'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.

Together with the change in how the British perceived the Hausa malams, there was also a difference in the tone in 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.⁸⁹ 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. In one report, the Muslim population in the Northern Province was accused of residing in more "insanitary conditions" than the non-Muslim population.⁹⁰ Whereas in 1917 the Muslim community provided help to build smallpox camps in the Lorha District (while the 'pagan' communities refused assistance),⁹¹ in 1922/23 the Muslims of Larabanga were criticized for refusing to work for the government and being a "source of trouble."⁹²

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.⁹³ Only in a few reports can one find reference to the existence of basic Muslim education and Qur'ānic schools;⁹⁴ the last reference to Muslim education is found in the 1924-25 Annual Report.⁹⁵ Whereas the 1920 Annual Report still stated that Qur'ānic schools and Muslim teaching existed in all prominent Muslim centres,

⁸⁹ Wilks, *Wa and Wala*, 154; Hawkins, *Writing and Colonialism*, 48.

⁹⁰ PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/511, AR Northern Province (NP) 1924-25, para 74.

⁹¹ PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/177, Lorha Informal Diary, October 1917.

⁹² PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/511, AR SP 1922-23, page 5

⁹³ 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 Qur'ānic school, they would attend a government school (R. Bagulo Bening, *A History of Education in Northern Ghana 1907-1976* [Accra, 1990], 7).

⁹⁴ PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/109, Census Report 1911, Bole Dist, para 9. Irvine was told in November 1913 that eleven Mallams out of 26 held classes in Savelugu which 55 boys attended regularly, whereas in Kumbungu the Limam as well as 18 other Mallams held classes which 'at least' 100 boys attended. Other villages and towns where Irvine noted Muslim education were Vogor (1 Limam + 4 Mallams + 15 pupils), Yabbo (1 Mallam + 6 pupils), Bulaho (1 Mallam + 6 pupils), Kassuri (1 Limam + 9 Mallams + 9 pupils), Yogu (1 Mallam + 5 pupils), Tolon (1 Limam + 7 Mallams + 17 pupils) and Bulong (1 Limam + 20 Mallams + 90 pupils) (ADM 56/1/177, Tamale Informal Diary, November 1913). According to German inquiries, there were six Qur'ānic schools in Yendi; those over which the Zamigu Limam and the Ya Limam presided each had between twenty and thirty pupils, whereas the others had fewer pupils (Westermann, 'Die Verbreitung des Islam', 210-211). About 1918 major Muslim 'schools' existed at the following places: Tamale, Yendi, Savelugu, Kumbungu, Larabanga, Gambaga, Walewale, Bawku, Salaga, Yeji, Bole, and Wa (PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/489, AR NT 1918).

⁹⁵ PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/511, AR NT 1924-25, para 40.

adding a rather neutral remark that Muslim education "...consists in learning parts of the Koran by heart,"⁹⁶ some cynical voices were already raised: "When they can do this [i.e., write Hausa in Arabic characters], and read a few verses of the Koran by heart, they consider themselves educated."⁹⁷ A similar change in tone concerned the situation in Krachi District. The first reports referred to several schools in the district,⁹⁸ later reports noted the existence of "small" Muslim schools and in the 1924-25 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."⁹⁹

The main reason for the ceasing to report on Muslim education was due to the lack of governmental interest. This was due to several factors. Muslim education could not be controlled by the colonial administration mainly because 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 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.¹⁰⁰

'True' Muslims and 'pseudo-Muslims': 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. 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

⁹⁶ 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 1923-24, para 46.

⁹⁷ PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/492, AR Northeastern Province (NEP) 1920, para 16.

⁹⁸ PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/497, AR Krachi District 1922.

⁹⁹ PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/507, AR Krachi District 1924-25, para 15.

¹⁰⁰ PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/45, Census Report 1931 SP, page 11. Similar argument in PRAAD/T NRG 8/2/35, Amherst, *Report on the Nanumba kingdom* (s.l., 1931), 32.

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 by the time of the 1921 census, and the report claimed that the overwhelming majority of the population in the Northern Territories were, in fact, non-Muslims. By 1931, the diminishing interest 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 gave some conflicting messages, which somewhat distorted the colonial discussion over the Northern Territory. 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 there lived a substantial minority of Muslims 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 very Islamized. Most Muslims were said to be engaged in petty trade and to control the commercial sector. Therefore they were identified as the chief group for colonial interest.¹⁰¹

As 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 be Muslim, ten years later the Muslim population of Western Dagomba District had been reduced to a small minority (7,728 Muslims out of 93,944 inhabitants). Whereas the 1911 census had counted some 37,000 Muslims in the Southern Province, ten years later only some 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 main bulk of the total population lived in the Northern Province, which was almost totally non-Muslim.¹⁰²

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, appeared to have substantial Muslim populations. So, too, did Salaga, which was said to have 18 mosques although the population of the town was

¹⁰¹ PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/109, Census taking 1911 - Northern Territories, para 32, 41-42, 44.

¹⁰² PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/241, Census taking 1921 - Northern Territories.

said to be declining.¹⁰³ 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.¹⁰⁴

During the 1920s, differentiating the believers into categories according to the depth of their faith became a standard phrase 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,"¹⁰⁵ whereas the 1928-29 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.¹⁰⁶

The 'mixing' and 'syncretistic' form of Islam had already been observed by many colonial officials, especially by those in the Northern Province. Such a critical 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 critique 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.¹⁰⁷ Whereas the Commissioner for the Southern Province, Duncan-Johnstone, suggested the utilization of local literate Muslims as late as 1932,¹⁰⁸ his counterpart in the Northern Province, Whittall, was known for his

¹⁰³ PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/241, Census taking 1921 - Northern Territories, para 72.

¹⁰⁴ PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/496 AR NT 1921, para 48.

¹⁰⁵ PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/500, AR NT 1922-23, para 66.

¹⁰⁶ PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/18, AR NT 1928-29, para 44.

¹⁰⁷ Jeff Grishow, 'Corruptions of Development in the Countryside of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, 1927-57', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 26: 1 (1998), 139-158, this ref. to pages 143-148. An early discussion is found in A.W. Cardinall, *The Natives of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, Their Customs, Religion and Folklore* (London 1921), 15-16.

¹⁰⁸ Ferguson and Wilks, 'Chiefs', 336; Staniland, *Lions of Dagbon*, 91.

critical, if not hostile attitude towards engaging local Muslims for government work.¹⁰⁹ Especially in the Northern Province, Muslims were presented as outsiders and as having little 'civilizing' impact. One finds ample examples of disappointment in the remarks made concerning the prevalent 'decadent' form of Islam. District Commissioner Castellain reported in the 1922-23 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.¹¹⁰

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.¹¹¹

In most cases, however, the influence of "Mohammedanism" was perceived as a cultural one. People started to wear "Mohammedan costume."¹¹² The most prominent, or at least the most vivid form of "Mohammedan" influence was the production of charms and amulets by some Muslims.¹¹³ None of these activities were felt to be signs of the existence of a 'pure' Islam in

¹⁰⁹ Wilks, *Wa and Wala*, 167.

¹¹⁰ PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/493, AR NP 1922-23, para 116.

¹¹¹ PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/493, AR Wa District 1923-24, para 37.

¹¹² 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 NRG 8/3/45 Census Report - SP 1931; PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/127, AR Navrongo District 1943-44, para 63.

¹¹³ On the production of charms and talismans by Muslims and their use in Asante, see Owusu-Ansah, *Islamic Talismanic Tradition*.

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."¹¹⁴

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 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."¹¹⁵ Only the 'strict' 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 Gonja¹¹⁶ and 5,476¹¹⁷ in Eastern Gonja.¹¹⁸ 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 these, there were "any amount of pseudo-Muslims" in this area.¹¹⁹ A comparison of 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,¹²⁰ the 1931 census counted over 10,000 Muslims living in the Northern Province, with the main bulk, almost 9,000, living in Wa.¹²¹

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. What was even more important was that Islam or the Muslims were not believed to have had any civilizing effect in the North: neither Muslim law nor Muslim education were common. Thus, for example, Assistant District Commissioner Amherst noted for Nanumba in 1931 that

¹¹⁴ PRAAD/A ADM 56/1/492, AR NEP 1920, para 36.

¹¹⁵ PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/42, Census Report - SP 1931, 23.

¹¹⁶ Termed 'strict Muslims', of which 40 per cent were said to live in Larabanga (PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/45, Census Report - SP 1931).

¹¹⁷ Said to include 365 malams; "Only genuine mallams have been counted (PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/45, Census Report - Southern Province 1931)."

¹¹⁸ PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/42, Census Report - SP 1931, 23.

¹¹⁹ PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/45, Census Report - SP 1931.

¹²⁰ For instance, CSP A.C. Duncan-Johnstone still argued 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).

¹²¹ PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/43, Census Report - NP 1931, 19.

...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.¹²²

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.¹²³ However, the results of the investigations made in the Northern Territories were rather disappointing from the perspective of the colonial administration. Muslim law or taxation were not in use in any of the kingdoms and land tenure proved to be even more rudimentary.¹²⁴ 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.¹²⁵ Thus, when the Native Administration was eventually established during the early 1930s, it followed local 'traditions' and was based on local 'customs', not Muslim law.¹²⁶

Muslim or not: Changing representations

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 of the structure of the reports. Whereas previous model sheets included a section on religion, the new formula included a section on 'Liberty of

¹²² PRAAD/T NRG 8/2/35, Amherst, *Nanumba*, 12.

¹²³ On the introduction of Indirect rule in the Northern Territories, see further Staniland, *Lions of Dagbon*, chapter 5, Ladoceur, *Chiefs and Politicians*, 53-57. The influence of Nigerian policy in the Northern Territories is highlighted in Jeff Grischow, 'A History of Development in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, 1899-1957' (PhD thesis, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, 1999).

¹²⁴ Most officials seem to have started their investigations on Muslim law with the assumption that Islam should have had an impact on marriage and customs (as, for example, Amherst noted for Nanumba). 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, Muslim law had, in some cases, influenced (native) criminal law and penalties. In the end, however, Muslim law was only followed 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; 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.

¹²⁵ Ferguson and Wilks, 'Chiefs', 335-336

¹²⁶ This is a question that needs further research. Some of the research already mentioned, e.g., Staniland, *Lions of Dagbon*, Wilks, *Wa and Wala* as well as Carola Lentz, *Die Konstruktion von Ethnizität: Eine politische Geschichte Nord-West Ghanas, 1870-1990* (Köln, 1998) provides an analysis of the introduction of Indirect rule.

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 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.¹²⁷

What was to prevail was a different notion of Islam in the north, as outlined by H.A. Blair, who, 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 mallams themselves except perhaps one or two particularly enlightened ones fear the fetish, and propitiate it on every possible occasion. Most true Dagombas in the more central towns at least profess a vague Mohammedanism.¹²⁸

By 1935 Islam as practiced in Northern Ghana 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."¹²⁹ In the previous year, the most influential Muslim scholar in the Northern Territories, Umar ibn Abu Bakr ibn Uthmān ibn Alī al-Kabbawī al-Kanawī or Imam Umaru (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.¹³⁰ Imam Umaru's case gives a good glimpse into how the Muslim scholars interacted

¹²⁷ PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/49, AR NT 1934-35, para 106.

¹²⁸ PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/824, Essays by Assistant District Commissioners on Tribal History: H. A. Blair, *An Essay upon the Dagomba People* (s.l. 1931), 29.

¹²⁹ PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/49, AR NT 1934-35, para 106.

¹³⁰ 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 Umaru during the early 1930s and praised 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 (R.

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 whereas the colonial officials were extremely suspicious towards 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 Tijāniyya sufi order gained many followers in Ghana during the 1920s and 1930s, its spread was not noted by the colonial officials as the order, for the most part, remained apolitical.¹³¹

Concluding reflections

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 seem to have thought that there existed a kind of a 'true', monolithic Islam that had been laid out 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.¹³² 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 Muslims (especially in sub-Saharan Africa). But 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.

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 rank. 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

S. Rattray, 'Hausa Poetry', in: *Essays Presented to C.G. Seligman*, eds. E. Evans-Pritchard, R. Firth, B. Malinowski and I. Schapera (London, 1934), 255-265, this ref. to page 255)." The most recent bibliography of Imam Umaru is presented in Stanislaw Pilaszewicz, *Hausa Prose Writings in Ajami by Alhaji Umaru* (Berlin, 2000).

¹³¹ Stewart, 'The Tijāniyya', 50-51. The only exception were the clashes between Tjāni adherents and followers of the Ahmadiyya movement in Wa in 1934. See further Wilks, *Wa*, 180.

¹³² For a discussion, see Hichem Djaït, *Europe and Islam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985) and Albert Hourani, *Islam in European Thought* (Cambridge, 1991).

outcome of the colonial policy of non-interference was an increasing societal split in the Northern Territories. Among the 'chiefly' societies, Islam gained further strength whereas in the non-chiefly or 'stateless' societies, Christianity along with African Traditional Religions were to constitute 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,¹³³ asking it to establish a shop and a mission station in Tamale. He also came to be less suspicious of the Roman Catholic mission in Navrongo.¹³⁴ Although such a softening of attitudes towards Christian missionaries continued among the British administrators during the 1910s, missionary activity remained restricted to non-Muslim areas.¹³⁵

Despite the hopes of Chief Commissioner Watherson, the colonial government never produced any guidelines or an overt policy towards Islam and Muslims in the Northern Territories. Matters concerning Muslim affairs were thus dealt with in an ad hoc manner. Thus, when Indirect rule was established in the Northern Territories during the early 1930s, it was built on an alliance between the chiefs – who did not necessarily have to be Muslims and whose faith never was considered to be of interest – and the colonial government. As Indirect rule needed 'traditional' rulers, the colonial administration either tried to strengthen the position of the existing chiefs and kings by putting non-chiefly groups, or so-called 'minority peoples', under their administration, or it 'invented' new groups that did not have one.¹³⁶ By the 1930's, therefore, Islam and the Muslims had become a kind of an alien tradition in the eyes of the colonial officials.

¹³³ BMA D-1,91 file 91, letter from Chief Commissioner Watherston, Tamale 29.4.1909. However, all the trade stations of the Basel Missionary Society (BMS) on the Gold Coast rejected the offer, claiming that the prospects for trade were small or limited in the north (BMA D-1,91 file 92 Aussagen über wirtschaftliche Aussichten der Northern Territories). Eventually, the General Agent of the BMS turned down Watherston's invitation (BMA D-1,91, file 100 Auszug aus dem Brief des Generalagenten A. Opferkuch von Accra, 19.7.1909).

¹³⁴ The White Fathers were allowed to settle at Navrongo in 1906. However, the relationship between the Roman Catholic fathers and the colonial administration remained strained during the next decade or so. See further Der, 'Church-State Relations'; Bening, *History of Education*, chapter 2.

¹³⁵ Bening, *History of Education*, 30; Wilks, *Wa*, 179.

¹³⁶ See further Lentz, *Die Konstruktion von Ethnizität* and Hawkins, *Writing and Colonialism*. The question of the *tindana* or Earth priests/custodians of the land, as well as the role of colonial ethnography in 'inventing' new forms of political structures have been popular topics for academic research and will not be dealt with in this article. Connected with the *tindana* is the question of land tenure and land ownership, and ultimately that of political power. See also Grishow, 'Corruptions of Development'.

The Islamization of **some** parts of contemporary northern Ghana is much more recent and it was not the outcome of a deliberate pro-Islamic colonial policy. It is also important to underline that there never existed any official guidelines on what kind of policy the colonial government should pursue towards the Muslims. It is true that there existed a link between the introduction of Indirect rule on the one hand and the alliance of the colonial government and the Muslim rulers on the other, especially as the whole concept was based on British experiences in Northern Nigeria. However, as there existed no Muslim kingdoms in the Northern Territories, the Muslims did not, in the end, receive any preferred position within the colonial system. Instead, they were blocked from taking part in the modernization process in the North as access to governmental jobs and positions required a rudimentary Western education. This type of education was only provided by mission and government schools, not the Qur'anic schools. The lack of a colonial policy towards Muslim education was to further stress the division between Muslims and non-Muslims. Muslims would not send their children to Western schools as they were afraid that their children might lose their faith. However, what the British officials did not (want to?) acknowledge was the existence of an ongoing process of Islamization. At the end of colonial rule, Northern Ghana had become a kind of mixture between a Muslim and a non-Muslim country. A rather typical description of the religious situation at that time was to regard the North as being inhabited mainly by people who professed what was called 'monotheistic paganism'. The observers would mention the 'Muslim' dress-code, the common celebration of 'Muslim' festivals, the fact that many people would fast during Ramadan and swear in court upon the Qur'an, but one would still not regard the north as being 'truly' Muslim.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ See, for example, PRAAD/T NRG 8/3/141, AR NT 1946-47, para 57.