

WHEN THE PERIPHERY BECOMES THE CENTER: NEW ISLAMIC ENGAGEMENTS IN DOUALA-CAMEROON

Gilbert L. Taguem Fah

The University of Ngaoundéré

Director of the Community Research and Development Center (COREDEC)

tafagila@yahoo.fr

Abstract: This paper seeks to address the recent trends and new developments of Islam in a traditionally “non-Muslim” coastal city of Douala in order to make new frontiers of Islam visible. It is the assumption that in Cameroon, unlike many other African countries, localities that did not experience the XIXe Century Jihad and where Islam was recently introduced have shifted from the periphery to the center of Islamic effervescence. The research is mainly based on empirical data collected from the field through interview and participant observation. It considers the local, regional and global factors to study the extension, the dynamics and characteristics of Islam in the coastal city of Douala.

Key Words: Douala, Islam, Islamic effervescence, new frontiers of Islam, Muslim community

Résumé : *La présente réflexion aborde les tendances récentes et les nouveaux développements de l'islam à Douala, ville côtière traditionnellement «non musulmane». Elle ambitionne de rendre visibles les nouvelles frontières de l'islam au Cameroun. L'étude permet ainsi de constater que Douala qui n'a pas connu le djihad du XIXe siècle et où l'Islam a un caractère périphérique du fait de son introduction récente, s'est très vite transformée en un véritable centre religieux dynamique. L'analyse convoque principalement des données empiriques collectées sur le terrain à travers des entretiens et une observation participante. D'un point de vue analytique, elle combine les facteurs locaux, régionaux et globaux pour décrypter la nouvelle dynamique et surtout les caractéristiques de l'islam dans la ville côtière de Douala.*

Mots clés : *Douala, Islam, effervescence islamique, nouvelles frontières de l'islam, communauté musulmane*

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Introduction

During the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910, the Chairman of the commission on “*Carrying the Gospel to all the non-Christian World*”, Dr. Robinson concluded his speech as follow “The very first thing that requires to be done, if Africa is to be won for Christ, is to carry a strong missionary force right across *the* centre of Africa to bar the advance of the Moslem’ (Kumm, 1918)¹. This statement revealed the main goal of the Sudan United Mission in Africa at the beginning of the XXe century. Its ambition was to stop the evolution of Islam and its dissemination in areas that were situated at the southern fringe of the African *dar al Islam*. After this conference, evangelical missions were carried out in several parts of Africa to stop Islam from getting out of its already conquered areas. One century after the Edinburgh conference (2010) the situation of 1910 has drastically changed, various contradictory and convergent forces have entangled and Islam had grown up and had deeply penetrated areas that a century back were called non-Muslim areas. The dynamics and rapid developments of areas recently embarked into the *Dar al Islam* - Land of Islam - are spiritually becoming focal points that have started attracting researchers. Douala, - a Cameroon city where Christian missionaries have worked for decades prior to the effective colonization of the territory towards the end of the XIXe Century is part of this area that was, for several reasons, out of reach of Muslim propagandists during the Jihad of the XIXe Century.

The main purpose of this reflection is to examine how the city of Douala - the numerically most important urban city of Cameroon, both the economic capital city and the commercial center - had shifted from the periphery (here defined as a locality situated beyond the ‘sanctuary’ of Islam) to the center of Islamic effervescence. The paper seeks to address the new dynamics of Islam in the coastal city of Douala that was often looked upon as the periphery of the traditional Muslim area in Cameroon. It will shed light on the new developments and recent trends of Islam in Douala in order to make the new frontiers of Islam in Cameroon visible. The study will show how Muslim activism and engagements had shifted from its original Jihad area (the Northern Cameroon that is often portrayed as the center of Muslim area and defined as the most important Islamic center of the country) to new localities where Islam is both a recently introduced phenomenon and a growing minority.

¹See also <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/fulltext/119810992/PDFSTART>

Notionally speaking², ‘periphery’ in the perspective of this reflection will simply be defined as a locality that is situated beyond the original region shaped by Islam. It refers to area where Islam is emerging and is significantly changing previous perceptions. Periphery can be assimilated to new frontier where Islamic effervescence is noticeable. Broadly speaking, periphery and new frontier here designate localities where new Islamic engagements are becoming more active than areas in Cameroon where Islam is considered as a historical and cultural element of local people or places where it is theoretically often considered as the religion of the majority of the population. This means that periphery falls into the frame of locality where Muslims were the insignificant minority when they got settled down and Islam is surrounded by non-Islamic cultural and social practices. Broadly speaking, periphery refers to what is currently called “new frontiers of Islam”. Frontiers being used to indicate new places where Islam is trying to gain roots and is evolving as an integral part of the pluralistic cultural makeup.

The study contends that (1) scholarly community understanding of Islam is lacking a crucial point by not focusing enough on areas where Islam is both a recently introduced phenomenon and a minority that is struggling to survive in a diversity makeup localities and (2) that the zeal of recently converted Muslims - especially at the periphery of the so called Muslim sphere - coupled with the new context are key factors in the Islamic identity or citizenship under construction. The study uses the city of Douala as a case study and assumes/ hypothesizes that the most dynamic areas of Islamic revival are often found out of traditionally/originally Muslim space/field. Therefore, it is important - if not imperative - in order to map out the new feature of Islam and deeply grasp the transformational process on the move, to thoroughly investigate areas that can be considered as new frontiers of Islam. But it should be clear that the “frontier” goes far beyond space (geographically speaking) and includes spiritual frontier that has to do with the entire process of Islamic (religious) knowledge and related practices (Islamic performances). In this respect, frontier becomes an inclusive operational concept.

Studies on Islam and Muslim communities in Cameroon have been prolific during the past decades (Njeuma, Bah, Taguem, Hamadou, Jiasse Njoya,

² For more details about this notion of ‘periphery’ as far as Islam is concerned, see Eickelman D.F. and James Piscatori (Eds), 1990, *Muslim Travelers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination*, London, Routledge, Buhru Zewede (Ed.), *Society, State, And Identity in African History*, Addis Ababa, Young (Ed.), 2006, *Travel writing in the Nineteenth Century: Filling the Blank Space*, Anthem Press. See also D. Matringe “Asie: un Islam peripherique?” in *Journal de la paix*, 493 (2006), PP. 48-54.

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Abwa). Islam and Muslim communities in the former Jihad area – the Adamawa province of the Sokoto Califate that is known today as the Northern Cameroon - have been deeply covered. The so called ‘massive islamisation’ (Motaze, Kees Schilder, Taguem, Beauvilain, Boutrais) that constituted the most important sociopolitical phenomenon of the seventies is often seen something specific to the Northern part of Cameroon. The Southern part of Cameroon have for long been victim of a kind of epistemological marginalization (Bah, Taguem). This has prevented us from understanding the phenomenon as a unique experience, different from what happened in the *Fombina* (Mohammadou, Sa’ad, Njeuma) and the immediate southern borders of the Lake Chad Basin where the spread of Islam goes as far back as the XVIIe Century (Idriss Alaoma of the Bornu).

Broadly speaking, the characteristics of studies on Islam in Cameroon are three fold: 1- Scholars and or researchers have focused on Islam in its traditional area, giving the feeling that it should only be useful to study Islam in areas where it appears to be both rooted in local cultures and constitute the majority (sociologically and not numerically). The feeling that Islam in the periphery is less important and cannot impact the trends both at the local and at the national level has thus governed the production of knowledge. This tendency has been crucial in the scholarly community understanding of the phenomenon that has behaved as if the less development of radical or fundamental Islam in the north meant that Cameroon is out of reach of the ongoing worldwide reformist and or fundamental movements. 2- Based on the assumption that Islam is a minority in the south, Islam and Muslim communities have been neglected and often seen as an unfertile research ground. 3- Last but not the least, the fact that the new dynamics of Islam is being carried out on our watch makes it a delicate issue to deal with. Most researchers feel unsecured to get involved in ongoing issue that has no clear visibility of its outcome and whose trends can hardly be made visible. Researchers have lacked anticipation that would have helped drawn sustainable policy.

This paper is an introductory essay to the process of filling this gap. It is both a research in progress and a follow up study of what recently started being watched as the epistemological and historiographical shift of Islam and Muslim communities in the southern part of the country from their marginal position and clandestine confinement to the public sphere (Habermas).

The approach will be a tentative integration of both the phenomenon (Islamic engagements and practices- performative dimension) and the context (local, regional and international). The study will use field data collected through participant observation and from interviews. Available archives have also been

used even if they only provided us with insufficient data. When necessary, the study will use a comparative approach in order to make the phenomenon under study more visible. This appears crucial to grasp Islam and Muslim communities in Douala. It will first of all map out Islam in Douala (in its historical perspective), will follow with the interplay of context, factors and actors of the ongoing phenomenon of revival and end up with the examination of the new Islamic identity in Douala.

How Islam took shape in Douala and the first Muslim community

The introduction of Islam in what is currently known as Cameroon dates as far back as the XVIIe century. The first Muslim communities were the Mandara, Kotoko, Choa Arabs, Kanuri. Their home base was mostly around the southern border of the Lake Chad basin which is historically known as parts of former empires in the area namely Bornu state, the Sokoto Califate and many other Hausa cities that existed in the North of Nigeria. With the Jihad lunched by Usman dan Fodio in early XIXe Century, small group of Fulani herdsmen who had settled in the area with their cattle, converted to Islam and responded to the Jihad. The process led to the creation of more than fifty Muslim kingdoms called Lamidats in the *fombina* (southern part of the Sokoto Califate). With this Jihad the Northern Cameroon or what was later on going to become the Northern Cameroon became sociologically, but also politically and culturally under the domination of Islam. Even if Muslims were not numerically the majority, they still had the preeminence over local populations that were in a way subdued. They conquered the space and created a political hierarchy on top of which were their leaders (Lamido). The Fulani conquest of the XIXe Century Jihad drastically changed the sociopolitical but also cultural and religious landscape of the region. The Northern Cameroon became the traditional area of Muslim and, for long was considered as such by political entrepreneurs be they colonial or post-colonial.

This trajectory of Islam and Muslim communities in Northern Cameroon is far different from what happened in the Southern Cameroon where Islam came late and mostly after the colonial forces had settled down. It was through a realistic strategy that Islam first took shape in Douala. Contrary to what happened in the North, Islam was introduced in this coastal city roughly at the beginning of the XX Century (ca 1912 See Takou) by migrants both from outside and from inside the German territory (protectorate from 1884 through 1916). From outside migrants were from Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Senegal, Togo, Chad and Dahomey. Those from inside came from the North (Arab Choa, Kanuri, Mandara, Sokoto, Hausa and Fulani), from the grass field (the Bamun), from the center (the Bafia,

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Vute and Tikar). These migration itineraries were made possible by the Germans who turned the city of Douala into the most important trade city that both attracted merchants and needed people. Be they from within or from outside the territory, these migrants came in for economic and commercial purposes. The locality attracted them because of its potential of offering possibility of earning a living. Factors of their settlement went far beyond Islamic militancy that had determined the Islamization of the Adamawa. The implementation of Muslims in Douala was backed by secular rationales. Additionally, the Germans wanted to cut off the former trade links between the coast and the hinterland of Cameroon. They aimed at creating a powerful economic area along the coast that could serve as the heart place of their so called 'Mitte Africa' that went far beyond the coast and extended into the hinterland of the central African region. By so doing they transformed Douala into a focal point that did not only serve their interests but attracted several populations. This created favorable conditions for the emergence of Douala as the main economic city of Cameroon.

To the above mentioned migrants who can be identified as the first group of actors who introduced Islam in Douala, one can add a couple of other religious entrepreneurs: some itinerant marabouts from West Africa who use to tour Douala and deliver talk, preaches, organized seminars and conferences during their stay and few Muslims actors from Lebanon or Arab countries. Despite the diversity of its origins and background, the first Muslim community in Douala belonged to the *Tidjaniya* Islamic brotherhood. The *Tidjaniya* was the most important brotherhood of the time.

Douala is a gateway to Cameroon. It is both the most important and the economic capital city of this west-central African country. Douala appears to be the very first Cameroon modern city that started in the middle of the XIX^e Century with contact with Europeans (British were the first European to get in touch with local coastal people of Douala) who came in for various purposes including evangelization. In fact, the first Christian Pastor to settle in Douala was Rev Alfred Sacker who implemented the first church and built up the first Christian community in Cameroon. As the port of entry to Cameroon, Douala attracted foreign nationals. British came first but were later on followed by the German who succeeded in signing agreements with local coastal chiefs. Cameroon became a German Protectorate in 1884 and started the colonial experience until World War one that brought in French and British and sacked out Germans. Towards the end of German colonial period in Cameroon, Douala had to experience a new foreign religion, Islam that came in to join the growing Christian community. Even if Islam was not the key factor/motivation of their

mobility (that means they had to be seen mostly as job seekers and not religious actors engaged in proselytism) the first Muslims were migrants from West African countries who settled in Douala. Islam was and still is a minority in Douala and Muslim community share their daily life with Christians. As a growing minority, Islam deeply changed the socio-religious landscape of Douala and gave it both new patterns and identity. The coastal city of Douala started going through new dynamics of change that contributed to the extension of the “traditional sphere of Islam” and went beyond the original XIXe Century Jihad area mainly composed of the northern part of the Country.

The first Muslim community in Douala was a melting pot of different people from various backgrounds. Among the first Muslims settled in Douala, only few mastered Islam and Arabic well and could hardly possess the level of knowledge required to carry out proselytism. They could only share the minimum Islamic knowledge they possessed with their immediate environment. Additionally, their religious practices were a mixed up of religion and African customs. This prevented them from being engaged in Islamic militancy based on literacy and the mastery of the Qur’an and the Hadith. Their daily life could only be built up around simplistic Islamic requirements such as the 5 daily and obligatory prayers; almsgiving, fasting during the month of Ramadan. It was a realistic Islam that did not aim at carrying out proselytism (Bah, 1996). They were united by religious belonging instead of real motivations for a religious transformation of their community. Islam in Douala becomes an identity marker that serves as a uniting factor for a plurality of ethnic groups. It acted as a catalyst factor of social integration. This economic based Islam was right from the beginning, deeply rooted in the urban area that constitutes its fabric and determines both its characteristic and current developments. Contrary to what happened in the former Adamawa province, Islam in Douala did not result from conquest or real intention of converting people. It was rather a peaceful adventure of economic migrants doubled with sporadic visits of few West African marabouts (Takou). For a long time, Islam in Douala has remained a marginal phenomenon struggling to cope with a majority non-Muslim environment. Religiously but also geographically, it was a peripheral Islam that constantly grown up, structured its identity as a group. It progressively became more visible, especially during the last two decade of the colonial period but mainly when a Muslim from the North (Ahmadou Ahidjo, a Fulani from Garoua in the North) took office as the chief of government and later on the first Head of the state after the independence of Cameroon. Islam in Douala was to open up and progressively become influenced by foreign forces. This appeared to be the beginning of the ongoing revival

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movement that is drastically and deeply transforming the identity of Islam in Douala and positioning it as the most important center of Islamic effervescence in Cameroon.

Muslim community in Douala during Colonial and early postcolonial periods

Islam in Douala during the French colonialism: from Fear to Control

The French colonial administration (1916-1960) drastically impacted Islam in Douala. Through its policy of containment, the French colonial administration prevented the dissemination of Islam in traditionally non-Muslim areas of the territory. Religious entrepreneurs could not move or travel without official authorization. On the one hand clandestine marabouts and/or preachers – often seen as dangerous for the colonial administration - were arrested and jailed by the French colonial administration. And on the other hand some marabouts and/or leaders of Islamic brotherhoods were given official authorization to travel, visit Muslim communities and deliver talk during which they clearly invited local Muslims to trust the “Franco Islamic fraternity” and the necessity for the entire community to back up the French policy because “it was the best thing that could happen to them”. The French administration also developed a policy of “sympathy”, “generosity” to attract and convince Muslim leaders. Some of them were given the opportunity to perform their pilgrimage to Mecca and/or to attend the French national feast in Paris on July 14 at the expenses of the colonial administration. At the same time, Muslim leaders were appointed and assigned specific duty that mainly consisted in shaping Muslim communities and serving as auxiliaries of the colonial administration. This is how Youssouf Paraiso, a native of Dahomey –present day Benin - settled in Douala became the first chief of his community. Being himself a foreigner and having been appointed chief of a community mostly composed of foreign citizen recently settled in Douala after migration, Paraiso could not oppose the French administration. This would have been both strategically unrealistically against his personal interest and the interest of his community as a whole. The fact that Islam in Douala was still a marginal religion/community surrounded by non-Muslim did not favor a different behavior and Islamic engagements in the public space remained an epiphenomenon.

Islam in Douala from 1960 to 1990: Toward the Institutionalization

Cameroon won its independence in 1960 with a Muslim from the North as the first head of State. Ahmadou Ahidjo was to run the country from 1960 to 1982 when he resigned and was constitutionally succeed by Paul Biya, a Christian from

the south. The fact that a Muslim took over from the colonial administration impacted the dynamism of Islam in Cameroon. If in Cameroon as a whole this drastically changed the feature of Islam, it is worth mentioning that Muslims in Douala, no matter their origin, felt a close connection to the Head of the State that was to redefine their way of expressing their Muslimness. Even if Islam in Douala remained a marginal phenomenon, it became a growing and significant phenomenon that was to start being visible in the public space and take a crucial part both in the economic fabric of the city and in its political development.

The first signal of the public appearance of Islam in Douala was in 1959 when, in the turmoil of the fight against UPC nationalist movement, Muslim community in Douala stood without any ambiguity behind Ahmadou Ahidjo, then Prime Minister³. It was the first evidence of Islam hood solidarity and the instrumentatization of religious belonging as a key element of political affiliation. Even if Muslim community in Douala was far from being a homogeneous entity that could speak in one voice in taking political position, the fact that Muslims in Douala backed Ahidjo in such a context of conflict between local political forces (the local government and the upc rebellion) can be seen as sign of expressing religious based affiliation. Was it only a strategy to defend their interest in an environment where they were a minority surrounded by non-Muslims? Did Muslims in Douala wanted to position them in order to back another Muslim knowing that it would help in the next future? Anyway the connection started in Douala and was to last for long between Ahidjo and Muslims in Douala.

In fact, in order to counter the growing opposition among local Northern Muslim leaders, some of whom saw him as illegitimate (politically, religiously and socially speaking⁴) and somehow without strong roots in the region, Ahidjo encouraged en facilitated the development of Muslim business men in Douala right from the beginning of his office. Many Muslim business men gain local and national recognition. The new plutocracy was very strong especially during the one party system in Cameroon (1966-1990). People like Tanko Hassan, Tanko Ahamadou, etc are among those who were put to the forth front by their economic

³ Ahmadou Ahidjo took over from Andre Marie Mbida in February 1958 when the latter was forced to resign because of political inappropriateness and the lack of support by the French colonial administration.

⁴ According to most of the traditional leaders in the North, Ahidjo was neither a good Muslim nor from the aristocracy. Yaya Dairou, Lamido of Maroua was among the leader of the opposition against Ahidjo. Because he had attended western school and was a member of the local modern bureaucracy, Ahidjo was seen as a “Young Turk”, a group of non-conformist who were challenging local traditional establishment.

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activities. They were all engaged in the Cameroon National Union, the only legal political party at the time. They were all members of the local bureaucracy of Ahidjo's political party and member of the national hierarchy as well. They were associated to decision making process within the party. This was the continuation of the first motivation of their settlement in Douala: economy was the driving force of their migration and now that they were well settled down, economic based activities turned out to be the key factor of their political promotion and the consolidation of their settlement. The growing economic class of Muslim business men became crucial to Ahidjo. It appeared to be a counter force that he could rely on in order to consolidate his power and extend his political position in several parts of the country. Thanks to the pathway of their accumulation⁵ (which in part was strategically made possible by the government), they developed as key players in the political setting. But this imbrication and/or entanglement of economics and politics is not the only factor of connection between the state and Islam during Ahidjo. The creation of the Cameroon Cultural and Islamic Association (ACIC) and the emergence of new actors in the Islamic local landscape should also be seen as elements to be considered in understanding Ahidjo Islamic policy or what can be seen as such.

Created in 1962, the Cameroon Cultural and Islamic Association was to be legally recognized in 1967 by Ahidjo's government. At first did not trust the Association enough but he latter on legalized and used it for political matters. The ACIC was funded by the government and its members were appointed by the State. It aim was to serve as intermediary between the Muslim World and local Muslim and government in term of implementing sustainable policy of education of Muslims in Cameroon. 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 Douala gained recognition and legitimacy. Their role in this association was the same as the role local chiefs were assigned by colonial bureaucracy that helped legitimate them and provided them with legal platform of action in their respective community. From 1962 to ca. 1988, the ACIC was the only Muslim legal organization with what the government interacted closely. It had a kind of monopoly in dealing with Islamic affairs even if internal conflicts, leadership problems and poor management of fund prevented it from being satisfactory, broadly speaking.

It is difficult to understand the philosophy and action of the ACIC without putting it into its context of inception. This state sponsor association was both

⁵ See P. Geschiere and P. Konings (Eds), *Pathways to accumulation in Cameroon*, ...

“products of reaction to or contestation of situations or behaviors judged to be contrary to Islamic norms” (Hamadou Adama, 2007) and a symbol of the institutionalization of Islam from “above”. Ahidjo wanted to “domesticate” Islam in order both to use it and protect it from foreign influences (especially from Arab countries). This was the continuation of the French colonial policy toward Islam (Bah and Taguem, 1993). It was the best way to make sure that Islam will not get out of the track and the government will keep an eye watch on its activities⁶. It is with the Biya’s regime that the “deinstitutionalization” (Hamadou Adama, 2007) of Islamic association started and many Muslim associations came to being with the democratization process. Ahido’s policy toward Islamic community in Douala was similar to this strategy of domestication. He both controlled and helped built up a strong and strategic Muslim community that he could recon with and that could serve his political ambitions.

Another main characteristic of the Ahidjo’s regime was the emergence of new Islamic actors during the seventies. It is at the beginning of the second decade after independence that the first Cameroonian Muslim Students who had received scholarships to study in Arab institutions (in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, etc.) started coming back to Cameroon (Taguem, 2003). This new generation of Muslim activists was well trained in religious matters. They could speak, read and write Arabic very well and were proud of their mastery of the language of the Qur’an. Their education provided them with legitimacy in their community and they started pushing backward the former local and traditional intellectuals who did not master nor the language nor the meaning of the Qur’an. This new generation of Muslim intellectuals started challenging the *status quo*. They arrived on the field with new ideas and different Islamic practices that made the local aristocracy worried about the new role they may have to play in the changing society.

In this respect, knowledge appeared as the key factor of the new dynamics of Islam (Taguem, 2005). The difference between the old and the new Muslim intellectuals was built up around Islamic knowledge and the ability of the latter to speak Arabic. The fact that these homecoming Muslim Intellectuals could hardly get jobs in the local civil servant system was also the *raison d’être* of their spiritual dedication. They could hardly earn a living working in the local system because the type of education they were trained to did not fit into the local job market. The only thing they could do was to enhance their religious activities and

⁶ In fact the Ahidjo government did the same with trade union and other labor organizations that were put together within the UNTC (Union National des Travailleurs du Cameroun, that was a branch of the sole party CNU (Cameroon National Union)

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thus challenging the existing establishment led by the traditional intellectuals/aristocracy.

Beside and beyond these new actors, there was a phenomenon of “massive” islamization in Cameroon during the seventies. Despite the fact that the phenomenon was mostly in the Northern part of the country, Douala experienced both the development of Muslim immigration coupled with the natural population growth. The Railway between Ngaoundere in the North and Douala in the South was officially inaugurated in 1974. This great achievement of Ahidjo’s government opened room for the increase in the number of people leaving the North for the south where they settled down in view of carrying out activities that could help them increase their life standard. The fact that Douala was a prosperous city with potential and concrete job opportunities also attracted people from abroad mainly from West Africa, but also from the West Cameroon and the North West province. Many foreign and national citizens came to join those who had already settled in Douala and the Muslim community became important and started gaining momentum. The intensification of traffic and travels between the north and the south through the railway also allowed some Muslims to settle down in Douala and increased the size of Muslim community. This double phenomenon was due to the development of infrastructure, the economic prosperity of the city of Douala and the activities of newly arrived Muslim students from Arab Institutions of Islamic learning. The prestige of Muslim economic entrepreneurs also played a key role in the development of Islam. Local people imitated Muslims and thought that Islam was the main factor of their enrichment. By becoming Muslim, they expected similar consequences. Intermarriage between Muslim and non-Muslim was also one element that contributed significantly to the development of Islam in Douala during the seventies.

The Shift from the Periphery or New Dynamics of Islam in Douala (1990-2010)

The beginning of the political pluralism and the democratization process in a context mainly characterized by economic crisis and the post-cold war era coincided with the generational shift in Muslim activists in Cameroon in general and in Douala in particular. Muslim scholars or intellectuals assigned themselves new roles in their community and started getting rid of their predecessors’ spiritual and life styles. Those who can be qualified as the third generation of Muslim activists became more dedicated than the two first generations and started a process of transformation of their community from within. Their number grew exponentially thanks to the increase in interest in religious issues, the availability of

Arab institutions where most of them could be trained, the offensive policy of many Muslim organizations from Arab countries that led to heightened attention to Islamic teachings and preaching worldwide. It is in this context that Douala started experiencing a drastic shift and became one of the first cities in Cameroon where the interaction between the traditional and conformist Islamic leaders and the new generation of well-trained Islamic actors turned out to a violent confrontation even if it did not escalate. The sort of break between the two groups was radical, a situation that could hardly be seen in the North where Islam is both sociologically a majority and historically a cultural phenomenon. Reformist Islamic movements started gaining momentum in the city of Douala and turned the city into the fertile ground for the development of proselytism through a subtitle process of Islamization from below.

Douala is currently experiencing a new Islamic revival that is drastically changing its identity and providing local Muslims with new citizenship. The beginning of the political pluralism in the early nineties that was backed up by the liberalization of media and the new legislation about association coupled with the fact that at the international level, a new context arose with the first gulf war (1990), the attacks of the US Embassy (1998) and later on the 9/11 (2001) with the emergence of terrorism have both raised awareness among Muslims and increased competition by Arab and Islamic activists to capture the growing awareness and impact the implementation of a new Islamic identity. Additionally, the liberalization of the local political setting opened up rooms for the diversification and the multiplication of networks between local Muslims and Arab agencies. This was also made possible by the new dynamics of these Arab agencies, organization and Institutions seeking connections in Sub Saharan Africa in order to attract African Muslims. The global context did also play a great role by creating venues (through mass media and the new technology of Information and Communication) thanks to its technological gadgets and other tools, in the transformation of the Islam in the economic capital city of Douala. One of the key factors is the role played by new Islamic activists whose action significantly contributed to the transformation of the feature of Islam in the urban Douala.

In fact, the first Islamic elites were ill trained, did not master the language of the Qur'an and were numerically less important. They could hardly convince people to adhere to what they saw as the "pure" Islam. They were merchants and traders who got settled in Douala for economic purposes. Islam was far from being their main concern and they hardly think of carrying out proselytism. They belonged to Islamic brotherhoods especially the Tidjaniyya.

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The second generation of Muslims that was composed of Islamic intellectuals who came back from their education from Arab Institutions were not ground based and did mainly paid attention to their social position even if most of them were unable to find a suitable job in the local job market because the education they had received and the degree they brought back did not match the local job system. They challenged the *status quo* but failed to carry out activities that aimed at impacting the daily life of Muslims. They mostly concentrated on education through the unique state sponsor Association (ACIC). Most of their leaders were closed to the government and were mostly concerned with their personal career. They wanted to restructure Islam from above and not from the base (below). The impact of their action was less perceptible among the majority of Muslims in Douala and they were not interested in community based activities (health, professional training, etc.) that later on became the main concern of the third generation during the nineties.

Contrary to the two up mentioned generations of Muslims entrepreneurs, a new generation of Muslim activists arose during the last years of the eighties and early nineties. This generation was composed of well-trained Muslims, with an impressive network of contacts in Arab countries and worldwide connection. They face problems getting into the local job market as well. They also challenge the local establishment and fought against the persisting brotherhood affiliation. They made good use of new tools and develop what can be called soft Jihad which consist of using secular strategies to achieve spiritual goal. They concentrated on their community's wellbeing by taking care of social facilities. Beside their religious activities; they carried out social activities in the domain of health education, infrastructure, etc. They are engaged in proselytism and regularly organize conferences, seminars, workshops, etc to sensitize local Muslims and bring them back to what they consider as the truth Islam. It is on the ground that their activities and engagements are gaining momentum.

Between pro-Islamic and anti-Western rhetoric

While developing anti-western rhetoric that aims at pointing out the West as responsible of the moral decline of our society, they address secular issues like corruption, human rights, democracy and governance and end up stating that Islam holds the key to saving humanity from its current ethics and social failure (Taguem, 2007). They also portray the West as the Zionism that will end up destroying Islam if appropriate actions are not taken to stop the madness. Thanks to their mastery of Arabic and the fact that most of them are equally well educated from Western institutions after their childhood Qur'anic schooling, they know,

understand and can operate within both Islamic and Western philosophies (ibid). They manipulate equally well arguments based on Western historical facts and Arabic literature. They challenge westerners' use of terms such as fundamentalism, radicalism, Islamism, terrorism especially (but not only because these concepts are often used in scholars works) in the media, arguing that it has to do with Western world perception and their lack of understanding of Arabic. Most egregious to them is the misrepresentation of Islam as a religion that encourages conflicts and all sorts of extremism. Their contention is that of an Islam presented as victim of Western imperialism coupled with the ontological essentialism that portrays Muslims as people with violent behaviors. To most of them, Western Islamic lexicon is nothing but cosmetic view of Islam and does not reflect what their religion is.

They scrupulously put in practice in their daily life, what they define as real Islam and constantly appear in public arenas to sensitize Muslims about their religion, its practices and requirements. Their main target group is mostly composed of Muslims who, to them are out of track. Their action aims at bringing back these “*brebis egare*” to the original Islamic practices through teachings, preaches and any other ways of knowledge delivery and/or propaganda material/style. They are engaged in a subtitle form of Jihad (here means inner conversion) that aims at bringing back Muslims to the “pure” Islam and stop them from syncretism – use of amulets, affiliation to brotherhoods, practice of divination, etc. They define themselves as “Salafis” or/and “people of the Sunna” and refer themselves to those who strictly follow the Qur’an and the Sunna. By so doing, they distinguish themselves to other Muslims who are stick to local non Islamic practices. Their aim is to live and practice Islam in its fundamental principle and this is why they are called fundamentalists. This new trend is referred to as the Wahhabist that is significantly and progressively changing the identity of Islam in Douala. They appear to be reformists whose action aims at seeking legitimacy and popular recognition in their community.

The growing Reformist Movement in Douala

The Reformist Islamic tendency started in Douala as far back as the beginning of the seventies when Cameroonians students trained in Arab Institutions started coming back home. The pioneers of the reformist movement took advantage of Arab proselytism in the seventies and the oil crisis and international context characterized by a growing sentiment of Islamic fraternity to pave their way. If this was only a little group of jobless people back from Arab Institution with degrees that could not fit into the local job market system, it was

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to gain root during the eighties but mainly the nineties with the building of the Mosque *Alhu-Sunna Wal-Jamaa* and *Al-Rahmah* in New Bell. These mosques served as focal spiritual and social point for their followers who were mainly composed of young people (under 40 years old)⁷ without western education, most of whom were either facing problem of integration in the local Islamic setting, were jobless even if well trained. Funded by Saudi Arabia, *Alhu-Sunna Wal-Jamaa* and *Al-Rahmah* mosques became symbols of contestation of the local religious establishment. These mosques attracted followers and started reducing the number of those who were adherents of local Islam. This generated a conflict between the reformists and the leaders of the traditional Islam. The reformist leaders rapidly gathered a small and dynamic community that was culturally closed to Arab and started developing new dress code and many other new Islamic practices different from ongoing common practices. One of their contradictors contends that in” these mosques, the muezzin and many believers wear turban, had leaved their bear “*long et pointu*” (Taguem, 2000). The *Cabdou* was introduced as their prayer style: during sermons, their hands were crossed on their chest”. They consider as “satan” all those who continued to leave their hands along their body during prayers. Access to their mosques was limited to those wahhabists only. The only books they referred to were the Qur’an and the Sunna.

Reformist were look upon by traditional Muslims as people who were corrupted during their stay in Saudi Arabia, who do not pay respect to the 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 who are only disturbing the *statut quo*. On their own, they accused traditional aristocracy of being Islamically illiterate especially because they can neither write, nor understand and speak Arabic which is the sacred language of their religion. To them Islamic practices were not to mixt up with local non Islamic customs, women should veil themselves. The elders in the community felt frustrated by the new trend and behaviors of Reformist activists. The latter were engaged in a process of seeking legitimacy and in order to do so they had to challenge the so called traditional aristocracy by increasing the number of their followers. The building up of their own constituency depended upon their ability to reduce the influence of the local aristocracy. The specificity of Douala here is that the local aristocracy was created by the colonial administration. Contrary to the north where the aristocracy had a religious, historical and cultural legitimacy.

⁷ Malam Ouba, Imam of the Mosque of Akwa, 8 November 2007, Douala. (see Takou p.160, note 35)

Even if the government took no action to stop this new trend that drastically disturb local Islam reputed calm and non-offensive, it was seriously concerned and worried about its relation and connection with the traditional establishment. There was no legislation on foreign fund and it was difficult to local authorities to track down the origin of funding that were used to build this mosques. Thanks to money they received from donors, reformists leaders built up mosques that were architecturally different from mosques that already exist in Douala. These mosques architecture were mostly inspired by the style of their donor country'. Classrooms were always adjacent to the mosque where student could study the Qur'an and be taught religious practices. Additionally, contrary to existing mosques that were the expression of the belonging or social affiliation of those who came in for prayers (Bamun mosque, Hausa mosque, etc.) the new reformist mosques in Douala had universal orientation and reflected the tendency that built them up. Young Muslim leaders leaded prayers in these mosques. Some of them could even be appointed Imam despite their young age and this practice was incredible and unacceptable in previous mosques where young Muslims could never be given the flow to lead the prayer and where the eligibility at the position of Imam depend mainly on age. This new definition of the Imam in the community is significant as it provided rooms to those who would never had become Imam in the previous system. Islamic knowledge was the main factors of appointment. The so called "old Islam" or "Islam of the parents" slowly but surely started losing ground. This created a generational conflict between older and younger Muslim and started reframing the social landscape of Islam in Douala. The feature of Islam in Douala became broad with new actors on the field. The possession, management and use of Islamic knowledge became a stake.

Furthermore, foreign preachers and Muslim scholars toured this mosques regularly and gave talk about how to life Islam in the pure way. This contributed significantly to the Islam revival that made the difference with "traditional mosques". Reformist mosque in Douala turned out to be social and religious places where Muslim could gather and share knowledge about their religion. It was no more the symbol of power of the local authority and part of their prestige.

The introduction of the reformist mosque in Douala operates a spatial division of the Islamic fabric in this city. Muslims could now identify themselves or be identified by the mosque they attend. Mosques became key elements that reveal the orientation of Muslims. Unlike in the North of Cameroon, Reformist movement in Douala became more visible. Factors that can explain this phenomenon are three fold: the origin of Islam in Douala, the situation of the city and the organization of Muslim community in this coastal city.

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*Muslim non-profits organization: toward new agency and associations:
restructuring the Islamic landscape*

Since the beginning of the 90s, Douala turned out to be the birth place and fertile ground for many Islamic NGO or Associations. The first and only legal Islamic association that existed in Cameroon from the decade of independence through the eighties was Cameroon Cultural and Islamic Association. This association was ...With the new law on Association passed in 1990, the monopole of the CCIA was challenged and many new Islamic associations were to be created. This was made possible by new interest of the national government in Islamic affairs but also by the economic crisis that pushed the government out to seek financial support. For the first time since he came to office, Biya participated in the Islamic Conference that took place in Dakar, Senegal in 1990, soon after the first Gulf War (Taguem, 1992)⁸. This was the inauguration of the new era with the intensification of formal (institutional) and individual (networks) relationships with Arab Countries. A ministry in charge of relations with the Arab world was created in the middle of the nineties and departments of Arabic and Arab civilization came to being at the Universities of Yaounde 1 and Ngaoundere. This demonstrates the new dynamism of Arab World into the Cameroon Muslim communities. The increase in the number of scholarships offered to Cameroonian is also a proof of this new orientation of the relation between local and foreign Islamic communities. The increase in size of Muslim communities due to the growing immigration and the natural growth was also a key factor in the new development of Islam in Douala.

Additionally, previous work done by the second generation of Muslim activists not only prepared the ground for the emergence of the new trends after the nineties but also reinforced and paved the way to the effervescence of Islam in Douala. Broadly speaking, local and foreign factors intertwined and served as starting block to the new developments of Islam in Douala.

Among others cultural and Islamic centers created in Douala are: the Islamic training Center Al Axa (1991), the research and Islamic informatique center (1995), the Shia cultural Center Ahl Ul Bayt (1999), etc. These Cultural and Islamic associations work side by side with the Cameroon Cultural and Islamic Association, created in 1962 and officially authorized in 1967. The latter was the symbol of the structurization of Islam from above and the new associations were ground based and aims at tackling social and educational issues. The ACIC were funded and shaped by the government. In the contrary,

⁸ It was the first ever conference held in Sub Saharan Africa.

recently created associations carried out their activities beside the government's control. They were strongly connected to foreign donors.

The above mentioned recently created associations' main activity was Islamic education. They made access to their learning centers open to every Muslim regardless their age. Hamadou Adama (1997) calls this the 'democratization of Islamic knowledge'. They made documents available to their students and train them in writing, reading and speaking Arabic because they believe this language is sacred and should be mastered by any Muslim who wishes to understand and practice Islam according to its basic principles and requirements. Knowledge was no more confiscated by a little group of traditional aristocrats who could use it as a means of keeping their social and political positions and earn a living (fabrication and selling of amulets ...). Even if there was no harmony in this group of leaders of Islamic associations, the main characteristic is that they were all Arab trained people, young and religiously dedicated.

In order to grasp the Islamic resurgence in Douala we should analyze the numerous nonprofit associations as well. It is within the democratization process and the global context of the fight against poverty after the incapacity of the State to fulfill its duty that many NPO started gaining momentum in Douala. The coastal city and economic capital of Cameroon became the main center where these organizations were created and carried out their activities. More than in the North, where local aristocracy double with history served as limiting factors, Douala distinguished itself as the most important center where Islam was both active and influenced by reformist movements.

Despite the legal framework implemented in 1990, it is still very difficult to identify these plethora Islamic associations. Within few years, dozens of such associations have been created in Douala. They have changed the feature of Islam in this city and have drastically transformed its identity. Some of these associations are: the Association for the Promotion of Education and Health (1994); The Islamic Program for Humanitarian Assistance (1995); Association of Committed Muslims Women of Douala (1996); Association of Young Muslims of Cameroon (1998); the Group of Mother believers of Douala (2002); etc.

These associations main focus is twofold: social change through the transformation of religious practices and proselytism. The social aspect of their activities has to do with health issues, education (in the broad sense of the word) and all sorts of training, assistance to poor people and all those who need help in the name of the Islamic fraternity and/or solidarity. They act as social welfare organizations by taking care of orphanages and cemeteries, giving alms to

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inmates. New forms of solidarities are being built up through these Islamic associations and the close connection with local population is their motto. During the fast on the month of Ramadan, these associations provide the needed population with enough food, social environment, and spiritual protection.

On the other hand, they focus on proselytism through, meetings that address specific issues regular workshops, seminars, conferences, etc. They seek to enhance Islam through the building of new mosques and especially the training in Arabic. Knowledge of Arabic is a key factor in the mastery of Islamic requirements, practices and ethics. Muslims, regardless their gender should be able to speak, read and write Arabic. They put emphases on training, spiritual development of believers and competence building in the field of religion. Their leaders believe that the best strategy to implement pure Islam should be carried out from below. Their *modus operandis* is activities in the proximity. By giving the flow to women and youth, Islamic associations in Douala provide them with liberty and get them out of the confinement imposed upon them by the local aristocracy. New citizenship take shape through these associations and youth and women gain more legitimacy, they become actors and not victims of their religious affiliation.

The most important element is how the spiritual and the secular intertwine with each other. Muslims affiliated to these associations are trained in such a way that they can both enjoy their spiritual life and earn a living without compromising themselves. Contrary to the false perception that portrays these associations' activities as limiting the freedom of women, they provide them with training that stimulates their dynamism and creates draws connections to the global context. Women are slowly becoming freer and are participating in public arenas. They now understand the elements of Islamic law related to their status and they can defend their rights citing the Qur'an and the Sunna. These new trends and developments are different from the North of the Country-often portrayed as the "traditional land of Islam"-where most youth and women were born into Muslim families and usually practice Islam not as a corpus of knowledge, but as a mimetic habit from childhood. Broadly speaking, Islamic associations address issues related to the significance and orientations of religious engagements, how the spiritual and the secular intertwine, and new challenges imposed upon Muslims in the global context. Through their social welfare programs, they have in a way created a substitute to the State by focusing on social and ethical duties that local government has progressively abandoned.

Conclusion

Broadly speaking, this study tentatively gives new meaning and significance to the concept of frontier as far as spirituality is concerned. In a provocative manner, it challenges the dialectic center-periphery and explores mechanism through which a periphery of Islam can become a center of Islamic effervescence. In other words, localities where Islam is both a recently introduced phenomenon and a minority should be thoroughly considered when mapping out the feature of Muslim communities. In addition, the zeal of recently converted Muslims-especially non-traditional Muslim city dwellers- coupled with the combination of local and global factors are key players in the Islamic identity or the Muslim citizenship under construction. This shows that nowadays, the most dynamic areas of Islamic revival are often found out of traditionally/originally Muslim space/field. Therefore, there is a strong need to thoroughly investigate areas that can be considered as new frontiers of Islam.

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