



Research Article

This article is published by JAH,
Journal of Arts and Humanities,
Volume 5, N. 1, Sept., 2021.

ISSN: 2710-3013 (Print)

ISSN: 2788-6360 (Online)

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Article detail

Received: Nov. 17th, 2021

Accepted: Feb. 11th 2022

Published: March 5th 2022

Conflict of Interest: The author/s
declared no conflict of interest



Inter-Faith Relations in the Bamenda Grassland, 1900-2016: Scrutinising Rivalry, Conflicts and Intolerance

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ABSTRACT

Religious differences have been the source of many conflicts in Africa especially in areas that harbour two or more religions that have sharp differences in beliefs and practices. Taking the case of the Bamenda Grassland, this paper takes into consideration three main religions; African Traditional Religion (ATR), Islam and Christianity. Even though Islam and Christianity are Abrahamic religions, they differ greatly in doctrine and practices. African Traditional Religion is completely of a different background. The co-existence of these religious traditions in the Bamenda Grassland demarcated its religious landscape in terms of beliefs and practices with each religion claiming to be the most genuine. Cultural, economic and political considerations played a major rule to further project the diversity between and within these religions in this area. Using primary, secondary and other sources, it was realised that the differences that existed between these three faith traditions from the pre-colonial and colonial periods were deepened in the post-independence era and resulted to physical confrontations in some areas.

Keywords: *Bamenda Grassland, Conflict, Inter-religious, Intolerance, Rivalry, Scrutinising.*

5.3.1. INTRODUCTION

Before the introduction of Islam and Christianity in the Bamenda Grassland, ATR was the lone faith tradition in the area. Since it was inbuilt in the customs and traditions of the people, everyone was a de facto follower of it. When Islam came, it was mostly limited within the Hausa traders who brought it and the few people who were converted were mostly through inter-marriage or some trading partners. Christianity which came after Islam was more aggressive in proselytising the inhabitants. Many became converted and some either consciously or unconsciously did not give up their traditional religion. The existence of three well distinct religious traditions which in some cases individuals practiced two (ATR with either Islam or Christianity) made religious skirmishes inevitable.

This paper seeks to examine the differences between the various religious traditions that operated in the Bamenda Grassland from 1900 when alien religious traditions began making their way into this area which constituted the basis of inter-religious and intra-religious rivalry, conflicts and intolerance. The first to be introduced was Islam (Amadou, 2017, P. 53). In 2016, the long standing Anglophone problem in Cameroon escalated into an armed conflict and became a very serious challenge to religious authorities who tried to meet with the state authorities to get lasting solutions for it. Very outstanding was the joint communiqué of The Bishops of the Bamenda Provincial Episcopal Conference (BAPEC) and Protestant leaders (Mbuy, 2018, P. 71). It was a true manifestation of inter-religious co-operation for the common good of the people.

At the beginning of the 20th century therefore, the monopoly that had been enjoyed by ATR started facing challenges. Islam was introduced from the North in 1900 and in 1902 Christianity was also introduced from the South. Beginning with a conceptual and contextual framework, attention is focused on the religious policy of the colonial governments beginning with

the German colonial period which ended with the First World War and the British colonial era covering the Mandate and Trusteeship periods. The role of the post-independence governments is also examined in an attempt to show how they each contributed to inter-religious antagonisms, followed by that of the mass media. Episodes of inter-religious tension, rivalry, conflicts and intolerance are also examined.

5.3.2. Conceptual and Contextual Framework

For a better understanding of this paper, attention is given to the concepts of faith, rivalry, conflict and intolerance that have been engaged in scholarly discourse having a direct bearing on the issues under discussion within the context of the Bamenda Grassland. These concepts in this specific context defined the relationship that existed within the various religious traditions that operated in this area. After examining different definitions of faith, S. Nizhnikov (2018, P. 12) states that we should consider not the philosophical faith as the faith of philosophising subjects, but the philosophy of faith as an ontological science of the spiritual foundations of existence. His concept of faith is bi-polar in outlook. Faith in a natural aspect of reasoning and self-confidence without any spirituality attached to it and faith as a religious phenomenon. The analyses in this paper will be treating issues of faith purely from the perspective of creed.

According to Newman (2004, P. 103), faith defined as a general religious attitude or accepted set of personal beliefs was not present in the ancient worlds of Greek and Roman culture. The Christian concept of faith is therefore centred on the belief in Jesus Christ who is believed to be the only intermediary between God and man. It can therefore be suggested that the recognition of other faith traditions by most Christians is a mere social obligation but not a genuine conviction that there can be salvation out of the belief in Jesus, or that other methods of worship and religious rituals are valid as recorded in John 14:6.

Unlike the Christians who believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to God, John L. Esposito (2002, P. 4) states that Muslims simply believe in one God, the creator, sustainer, ruler, and judge of the universe. Muslims believe in

prophets, not just the Prophet Muhammad but the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, including Abraham and Moses, and of the New Testament, Jesus and John the Baptist. The concept of faith in Islam according to al-Jifri (2012, P. 14) is the surrender which is to testify that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is God's Messenger, to perform the prayer, bestow the alms, fast during Ramadan and make, if you can, the pilgrimage to the Holy House. The role of Muhammad in Islam is similar to that of Jesus Christ in Christianity as a messenger or intermediary but the Muslims do not take Muhammad as the son of God and do not believe that he possesses any Divine powers. This had varying implications on their diversity and pluralism.

To Lateju et. al. (2012), adherents of ATR believe in divinities that are derivatives from God. In other words, they have no independent existence of their own. They are only in existence due to the being of God. They also believe in the supreme God just like Christians and Muslims and that ancestors and divinities are their intermediaries between God and themselves. Ndemanu (2018, P. 76), argues that there is strong belief that something fortunate or unfortunate happens to someone for a reason; and if we have strong faith in God fortunate and not unfortunate events would abound. As a result, there is a constant quest to unearth the cause of a mishap. Adherents of ATR understand that there are some peculiarities in their practice that vary from one community to another and as such are more inclusive than Christianity and Islam.

The term rivalry has long been part of the lexicon of relations between groups or states. Most often, rivalry is used casually to depict the feelings of enmity between two or more entities. Diehl and Goertz (2021, P. 19) observe that rivalry consists of the same pair of state competing with one another, and the expectation of a future conflict relationship with the same specific opponent. In the context of this study, the entities are the faith traditions that operated in this area and the various denominations of the same faith like the Christian churches.

Looking at the activities of the Mill Hill missionaries in this area, Ndi (2005, P. 41) states that the seeds of mutual exclusivity between their Christians and Traditional Rulers were inherent in their very fabrics. This was based

on the fact that Traditional Rulers for the most part comprised of polygamous leaders who wielded enormous powers even over life and death. The Catholic doctrine which prescribed monogamy and declared equality before God triggered the incompatibility between these two groups.

Michael Nicholson (2009, P. 5) defines conflict as an activity which takes place when individuals or groups wish to carry out mutually inconsistent acts concerning their wants, needs or obligations. Conflict refers to some form of friction, disagreement or discord arising within a group when the beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group.

The sermons and the teachings of the early Christian missionaries in the Bamenda Grassland sharply contrasted the culture and tradition of the people in which their religion was strongly embedded. Their differences over polygamy in particular and the world view in general, laid the foundation for future conflicts. Forcha (2007, P.184) observes that traditional religion and customs constituted a religious and cultural anathema to the petic missionaries. Even when the missionary period was over in Christian churches, the indigenous clergy that took over continued to castigate ATR and other forms of worship. Religious conflicts were not only witnessed between the various faith traditions but also between groups professing the same faith (Ndi, 2014, P. 64).

According to Verkuyten and Kollar (2021, P. 182), intolerance is mainly embedded in terms such as prejudice, bigotry, and discrimination. Religious intolerance in the Bamenda Grassland was implanted with the introduction of alien religious traditions as observes by Ndi, (2005, P. 42) "The divergences that eventually built up between the missionaries and the traditionalists largely resulted from these factors but also because the missionaries tended to be rudely intolerant to traditional religions and cultures." Religious intolerance was therefore a long standing aspect in inter-faith relations in the area beginning 1900 and 1902 when Islam and Christianity were introduced respectively to meet ATR.

When the Germans annexed Cameroon in July 1884, their religious policy influenced the relationship between faith traditions. When the First World War erupted in 1914, Germany was defeated and expelled out of Cameroon by 1916. At the end of the war, Britain and France partitioned Cameroon and the Bamenda Grassland fell under the British portion and their own policies also seriously affected inter-faith relations.

5.3.3. Religious policy of the colonial Governments

On a global perspective, the German colonial policy as far as religion was concerned in Cameroon was not much different from those of other colonial powers on the African continent. At the down of European colonialism in West Africa in the 1880s, the aspect of religion was considered very important just as trade, navigation, exploration and exploitation. Its official and legal recognition was well spelt out in articles six of the Berlin Act which stated that:

All the powers exercising sovereign rights or influence in the aforesaid territories bind themselves to watch over the preservation of the native tribes, and to care for the improvement of the conditions of their moral and material well-being, and to help in suppressing slavery and especially the slave trade. They shall without distinction of creed or nation, protect and favour all religious, scientific or charitable institutions.... Freedom of conscience and religious toleration are expressly guaranteed to the natives,...

From the above article of the Berlin Act emanating from the Berlin Conference in which Germany was the main coordinator and host, it was obvious that Germany was going to protect and promote the work of Christian missionaries in Cameroon including the Bamenda Grassland, as a moral obligation to protect and respect the decisions of the Berlin Conference.

Looking at the situation of Cameroon, the German colonial policy vis-à-vis religion to an extent respected the provisions of article six of the Berlin Act.

Before the German colonisation, the English Baptist Mission popularly known as the London Baptist Missionary society had been operating in Cameroon especially along the coast since 1844 (Fanso, 2017, P. 127). When Cameroon became a German protectorate on July 1884, the English Baptist Mission, finding it difficult to work with the German colonial authorities decided to leave the territory in 1886. Before leaving, the English Baptist Mission signed a protocol agreement with the Basel Mission (Ngoh, 2002, P. 88) in which they handed over their work, property and congregations to the new comers.

At this juncture the Germans became more comfortable with missionary activities in their newly acquired territory. This was because the suspicion against the English Baptist Missionaries for inciting native resistance against German colonial rule was erased. It is important to note here that the English Baptist Missionary society had favoured a British annexation of Cameroon than German. Secondly, the Basel Mission had a home branch in Stuttgart and went into an agreement with the government on the conditions of work (Ngoh, 2002, P. 88).

The Roman Catholic Mission also carried out considerable primary evangelisation in Kamerun during the German Colonial era. The German Pallotine Missionaries under the leadership of Mgr Heinrich Vieter opened their first Mission station at Marienburg just below Edea in October 1890. They were joined later on in 1912 by the Sacred Heart Fathers of Holland whose area of operation involved the Bamenda Grassland (Ndi, 2005, P.22). Besides the Basel Mission, other Protestant churches operated in German Cameroon such as the American Presbyterian Mission and the German Baptist Mission.

When the Germans penetrated the interior of Cameroon, they subdued the Muslim dominated communities in the North and brought them under German control. The Islamic revolution in West Africa launched by the venerable Muslim scholar and reformer Uthman Dan Fodio had created well organised theocratic states in this area under the leadership of Lamidos. Koranic schools were opened and the political institutions commanded a lot of respect. In order to make use of it for easy administration and reduce the propensity of native resistance against

German colonial rule, the Germans officially prohibited Christian Missionaries from venturing into the Muslim territories (Ndi, 2005, P.22). One can therefore posit here that the German religious policy in Cameroon was that which disfavoured inter-religious interactions and promoted exclusivism.

After the German annexation of Cameroon in 1884, Germany like any other colonial power in Africa soon realised that Christian Missions could play a vital role in promoting social and economic Development in the colony. In this domain, the aspects of health care and especially education were outstanding. In the Bamenda Grassland, the Basel Mission opened the first school in Bali on 1st September 1903 with 63 boys on role and by 1905 the attendance had risen to 181 children with three classes (Dah, 2007, P. 16). The establishment of this pioneers school in Bali eventually made the place an important Centre of learning, attracting pupils all over the Bamenda Grassland. When the Catholic Missionaries arrive in 1912, it did not take them long to get involved in the promotion of socio-economic development. By 1914, there was a convent providing medical services, a domestic science centre and educational facilities for girls and women in Kumbo (Ndi, 2005, P.23). The establishment of these social facilities especially educational institutions did not favour inter-religious tolerance since the doctrines of the various missions had a strong bearing on the curriculum. In effect, the schools were not just educational centers but also religious centers that operated strictly within the cultural frame of the various denominations. Learners from different religious backgrounds were compelled to worship as prescribed by the religion of the school.

Despite the galactic efforts made by these early missionaries to promote socio-economic development especially education, some Cameroonian inhabitants in general and those of the Bamenda Grassland in particular, only saw the missionaries as colonial agents as observed by Gwanfogbe (2007, P.128)

... Since the German government invited the BM in particular, they could not escaped being accused as accomplices of the colonial regime by those who were resisting the alien



rule. Secondly, the Christian doctrine and education were sometimes diametrically opposed to African religion and traditional practices. The missionaries were also adamant to many of the traditional practices and cultures of the natives, which they considered repugnant. This caused many people who went to school not to fully accept the Christian culture but rather to use schooling as a means to attain their own goals which in many cases were material focused.

The First World War ended the German Protectorate rule in Cameroon. If the Basel Mission success in the pre-war years were attributed to German patronage, the nationals including missionaries and pro-German missionaries were expelled from Cameroon. The delay in bringing back these Christian missionaries greatly hampered the progress of work they had started under the Germans. The British and especially the French who took over the territory were very hostile to the German missionaries hence the educational and other social services they started were almost shattered. From 1915 to 1920, Missionary activities in Cameroon suffered a major setback because the total expulsion of all German missionaries in Cameroon and the non-replacement of these missionaries particularly in the British occupied zone almost crippled the efforts they had made over the years (Ndi, 2005, P. 24).

According to article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, former German Cameroon was partitioned between Britain and France. For administrative convenience, Britain went ahead and partitioned her own portion into British Southern Cameroons and British Northern Cameroons. The Bamenda Grassland fell within British Southern Cameroons which was administered as part of the Eastern Region of Nigeria from 1922 to 1953 (Ngoh, 2002, 168). Throughout the Mandate period 1922-1939, and the Trusteeship period 1946 – 1961, the British Colonial policy vis-a-vis missionary activities was not very different from that of her predecessor.

When the British consolidated their authority over the area, they opened up for missionary bodies to operate in the area mostly because they needed

some partnership in development. Despite the open door policy for missionary activities, preference was given to British or pro-English Missionaries. This explains why in March 1922, Missionaries of St. Joseph society for foreign Missions, Mill Hill, (the lone British Catholic Missionary Organisation) arrived British Southern Cameroons with the consent of the British government to take over the work of the Pallotine fathers there. The Basel Mission that initially had been expelled with the German colonial administration in 1916 was allowed to return in 1925 and continue its work of evangelisation under the surveillance of the British colonial authorities. The Baptist Church which had become more indigenous after the German annexation was not left out. In The Bamenda Grassland, its seeds were first sown in Wombong in 1921 (Ndi et. al., 2014, P. 63).

The British government did not really take a keen interest in promoting socio-economic development in British Southern Cameroons. Social services especially education were neglected as remarked by Gwanfogbe (2007, P. 137) “meanwhile government policies of letting only the missions provide education remained unchanged. Government continued to grant subventions to the missions to run schools” this explains why as late as 1950, the British colonial administration could not boast of a single secondary school in British southern Cameroons. It was thanks to the catholic mission that the first secondary school was opened at Sasse in Victoria and the Basel Mission about ten years later opened the Cameroon Protestant College (CPC) at Bali in the Bamenda Grassland (Ngoh, 2002, P. 176). When the Southern Cameroons achieved independence by reunifying with the Republic of Cameroon in 1961, government policy continued to influence relations between faith traditions.

5.3.4. Government Policy on Religion in Post-Independence Cameroon

Before independence the people of the Bamenda Grassland were already used to a pluralistic society as far as religious practices were concerned. From the German colonial period through the Mandate and later Trusteeship periods under the British, the people were used to religious freedom which was consolidated at independence after the adoption of the Federal constitution. According to article 1(2) of the Federal constitution,

the new nation was a secular state and allowed freedom of worship (Rubin, 1971, P. 115).

At independence, the new leaders inherited a secular state that had learned to live with the numerous religious denominations in the country. Ahmadou Ahidjo, a moderate Muslim Fulbe from the north became the country's first president. He came to power at a time of great social unrest and political upheaval caused by the UPC rebellion (that had serious religious implications as it was against the Catholic church and some traditional institutions) that had started during the last years of colonial rule and continued after the territory became independent and reunited with the former British Southern Cameroons after which J. N. Foncha, a staunch Roman Catholic from the Bamenda Grassland became his vice president. Ahidjo was viewed with suspicion by the southerners who feared that he might try to impose Islam on the country. It became an irony that initial resistance to Ahidjo's religion-state policies came from his fellow Muslims in the north who did not take long to discover that the new president had no plans to change the colonial policy of pragmatic cooperation with the Muslims which deprived them of real powers in running their affairs (Fombad, 2013, P. 6) However, the Ahidjo led government did not also grant undue privileges to Christians even in the Christian dominated south. The state was strictly secular.

Ahidjo nevertheless restricted Christian evangelisation campaigns to the North to the barest minimum as a preventive measure against religious conflicts and tried to contain Muslim radicalism by adopting new executive orders which restricted some of the privileges granted to Muslim chiefs during the colonial period. In a series of decrees in 1974, the Ahidjo regime formally subordinated traditional Muslim rulers to the local representatives of the political administrative authorities. This marked the turning point in the relationship between the government and Muslim leaders who denounced and condemned all these measures. The relationship between the Muslims and the Ahidjo regime had deteriorated so badly by the time he voluntarily stepped down from power in 1982 the accession of Paul Biya to power was greeted by them with relief and hope. This was however short lived because after an abortive coup d'état of 1984

blamed on Ahidjo loyalists who wanted to regain power, all northerners were blamed. Muslim leaders decided to keep a low profile politically whilst the Christians used this opportunity to expand their evangelisation campaigns in that part of the country (International Crisis Group, 2015, P. 14).

As already stated above, article 1(2) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Cameroon in 1961 was a booster to religious plurality in the newly independent and reunified nation. The Federal Republic of Cameroon was made up of two states, former French Cameroon which gained independence on the 1st of January 1960 as the Republic of Cameroon (East Cameroon) and the territory of the Southern Cameroons, formerly under British Trusteeship which gained independence on the 1st of October 1961 by reunification with French Cameroon (West Cameroon). Article 1(2) of its constitution stated:

The Federal Republic of Cameroon shall be democratic, secular, and dedicated to social service;

it shall ensure equality before the law of all its citizens; and it proclaim its adherents to *the fundamental freedoms written into the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Charter of the United Nations*. [emphasis added]

From the fore mentioned quotation, it can be suggested that “its adherence to the fundamental freedoms” promoted religious plurality given the fact that freedom of worship was one of the fundamental Human Rights defended by the Charter of the United Nations. The tradition of religious freedom was not unprecedented since the Mandate and Trusteeship agreements under which British and French Cameroons were governed for nearly half a century made provision for it (Lang, 2014, P.280). Again its dedication to social service suggests why the leadership of Cameroon at this time encouraged religious movements to provide social services like schools, health centers and Vocational training centers. Communication also greatly influenced other developments that affected inter-faith relations during this period in the Bamenda Grassland.

5.3.5. The Mass Media and Inter-religious Interactions

In the traditional African society, issues of religion were part and parcel of the social and cultural life of the people. Everyone in the society was involved in their religious beliefs and practices. As such, there was no need for competition to reach out to a greater audience and win followers. With the coming of Islam and Christianity, the religious landscape of the Bamenda Grassland became diversified. The new comers needed converts and this necessitated the use of the mass media. The means of communication and the gadgets were evolving as technology was also developing with greater implications on inter-religious interactions.

Colonialism affected ATR in various ways and the development of the media landscape in the Bamenda Grassland cannot be disconnected from the impact of colonialism or better still, its contacts with the outside world. In the Traditional African society, traditional rulers, chief priests and other religious authorities made use of town criers and the wooden gong to pass across a religious message or to summon the people for a religious ceremony or ritual. With developments in the media chorography, ATR made use of the mass media by propagating its activities like the annual dance and other traditional festivals in Newspaper articles, Radio and Television programmes. The implication here was that most traditional occasions that initially were the reserve of ATR, started witnessing the participation of members of other religions.

The people of the Bamenda Grassland were first exposed to aggressive noise as a religious practice with the introduction of Islam. Their local religious leaders (Imams) were used to the tradition of always shouting at the top of their voices when conducting their prayers. This was the sole means of meeting a greater audience and also with the understanding that Muslims around the vicinity who could not make it to the Mosque could also follow up with prayers. With time, Mosques were equipped with loud speakers and Radio and Television channels also conducted Islamic meditation programmes especially on Fridays following trends of development in other parts of the world with the intension of meeting a greater audience as stated by Eisenlohr (2011) "... including its numerous diasporas, such differences are also shaped by media-sustained networks,



in which particular forms and practices of Islam are authenticated through media use." Such new developments in the Bamenda Grassland made some non-Muslims to become used to some aspects of Islamic worship.

In the post-independence era, main stream churches especially the Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church made use of the print media more than the newly introduced Pentecostal Churches and the Muslims in the Bamenda Grassland. The Catholic weekly Newspaper "L'Effort Camerounais" was widely read in the Bamenda Grassland by Catholic Christians and others. The Catholic doctrine and other core values of the Church were made available to the public through it. The Communication Department of the PCC published annually, the Daily Bible Readings and Dairy, Almanac and a quarterly magazine-The Messenger through which it also disseminated its information (Nyansako-ni-Nku, 1982, P.60). The information sent out on these channels had great implications on the issue of religious interactions since it was not only limited to members of a particular religious group.

Also, with the audio-visual media, adherents of ATR, Muslim Faithfuls and Christians made good use of it. Documentaries of the tradition, customs and cultural life of some tribes in the Bamenda Grassland were developed and broadcasted on Radio programmes and projected on Television with a strong bearing on ATR. The Muslims also conducted Islamic religious programmes on CRTV Bamenda (Radio) and the National Station in Yaoundé (Television). Their live programmes were mostly on Fridays and at times with rebroadcast on other days. It was the same with main stream churches which ran programmes like Presbyterian Echoes, Catholic Meditation, and the Baptist Voice. Most of these Christian programmes were broadcasted on Sunday mornings.

Pentecostal churches even went a long way to produce cassettes both audio and video of "True Life Story" with a strong bearing on the Nigerian society (most of these audio and video cassettes were recorded and produced in Nigeria by Nigerians) demonstrating the power of God. They were played or projected in markets and other public places with the intension of proselytising more people to join their churches where it was believed healing, deliverance and miracles would take place. Eisenlohr

(2011) further observed that “not infrequently these hopes connected to new media technologies have strong religious overtones, such as in Pentecostal hopes for the global expansion of the Holy Spirit, which many Pentecostal Christians also seek to literally bring about through integrating new audiovisual media in their religious practices and services....” The situation in the Bamenda Grassland was that which most of the Pentecostal churches who wanted to have a foothold in an area already dominated by mainstream Christian churches, planted loud sounding speakers for preaching in some public places. They also organised open air crusades and were involved in other activities that made them conspicuous in public.

Of recent, the advent of social media has increased the conspicuousness caused by some Christian fanatics though not only limited to the Bamenda Grassland. On social media applications such as Facebook and WhatsApp, it is common for someone irrespective of his/her religious background to receive a message from another ordering the recipient to forward the message to ten or twenty people as the case may be and receive abundant blessings from Jesus Christ and threatening that failure to do so will attract tribulation.

Given the role of the mass media in promoting inter-religious interactions in the Bamenda Grassland, one would expect a high manifestation of a spirit of tolerance, collaboration and peaceful co-existence within and between the various faith traditions operated in this area. Unfortunately, these virtues were not fully developed to enhance religious pluralism. Religious tension, rivalries and conflicts were very visible in this area.

6. Manifestations of Religious Rivalry, Tension and Conflicts

The introduction of new religions in the Bamenda Grassland beginning with Islam and closely followed by Christianity in the early 20th century was not just a bed of roses. African Traditional Religion which had enjoyed religious monopoly (though with its own internal differences from one community to another) prior to the coming of Islam and Christianity detested the teachings and preaching of the new comers. Islam saw adherents of ATR and Christianity as infidels. Christianity considered

followers of ATR and Islam as pagans, unbelievers or worshippers of a strange type of God. Even within Christianity, the various Christian denominations that operated at this time were not true collaborators at all instances (Ndi et al., 2014, P. 64) Religious tension manifested during this period made the issue of inter-religious interactions which is supposed to promote pluralism and peaceful co-existence questionable making it more of religious diversity.

Most traditional rulers and their subjects in the Bamenda Grassland had warmly received the Christian Missionaries hoping that their religious practices were going to compromise with those of ATR. This turned out to be wrong as they attacked aspects of ATR especially the practice of polygamy. When the First World War erupted and the missionaries expelled, most of the traditional rulers felt emancipated from a “foreign and aggressive religion.” This moment of relief did not last long as at the end of the war, some of the missionaries returned to revamp their missionary work that had been disrupted by the war. This second encounter with the missionaries was not as peaceful as the first (de Vries, 1998, P. 92). Religious skirmishes were witnessed in some parts of The Bamenda Grassland.

In 1920, Mgr Plissonneau decided to move his headquarters from Fouban in French Cameroon to Shisong in the Bamenda Grassland in the British Cameroons. There was a serious clash between ATR and Christianity as Ndi (2005, P. 28) puts it:

Typical of the period and the area, on learning that a priest had come to the Bamenda Grassfield to sing the necessary papers so as to officially take over the former German mission and its property, the “pagans” were furious and set the church in Kumbo on fire as a warning and a prelude to unleashing a reign of terror on the “Church people.” For three years (1920-23), the French Sacred Heart Fathers and their followers suffered serious obstruction and harassment at the hands of Traditional Rulers....



The persecution suffered by Christian churches during this period was not only limited to Kumbo. At Njinikom in Kom, the activities of the Christians desecrated every facet of Kom tradition and religion especially the seduction of the Fon's wives. The Fon (Fon Ngam) therefore precipitated a series of anti-Christian riots which created serious resentment between them and the traditional institution that resulted to the death of at least one Christian in 1923. Following this incident, Catholic converts were harassed, their houses burnt down, farms destroyed and finally all of them were chased out of the mission Quarter at Njinikom (Ndi, 2005, P. 52-53).

The relationship between ATR represented by the Fon and his subordinates and Christianity represented by Michael Timneng, a former "Nchida" (Palace Assistant) was nothing less than antagonism. Timneng was converted to Christianity (Catholicism) during his service with the Germans in the First World War. Upon his return to Kom after the German defeat, he continued the practice of his new religion which was offensive to the ruling class. De Vries (1998, P. 51) observes that "Timneng and the other 17 Christians at Laikom prison were chained, handcuffed and subjected to hard labour, corporal punishment being meted out intermittently". This harsh treatment was not a one way traffic. Christians were also very ruthless on adherents of ATR.

Religious tension was also witnessed in Weh village. The scene of hostility towards the mission was set when the chief of Weh who was to become a real stumbling block to the efforts of the missionaries, sued a certain Christian for planting maize without observing the necessary traditional sacrificial rites. The Christian lost the case both in the Native Court and in the appeal court and was imprisoned. This victory got into the chief's head and he set up his own god and ordered the Christians to worship it. When they refused, he harassed them until they sought recourse to Father Jacobs (Ndi et al., 2014, P.61). Although the priest intervened and secured some degree of liberty for them, he failed to have the original Christian released from jail.

The situation in Bafut a few miles from the Bamenda station was not different. When the Catholics were constructing the church building at Manka'a quarter after having received the express permission of the Fon,

his Quarter heads came and pulled it down when it was near completion. The Fon also became cynical and even the intervention of the Administration in early 1934 was fruitless. The major objection of the Quarter heads was the fact that if a Father would come to sit down at Bafut all their women would run away. They threatened to leave the land if the Fon dared permit a resident priest. The Christians there suffered numerous adversities and injustice including floggings and even open robbery, as a penalty for refusing to join the secret pagan cults (Ndi et al., 2014, P. 85-86).

Religious tension during this period was not only witnessed at inter-religious level but was also intra-religious. Even within the Christian churches, the much needed collaboration that was expected also suffered some challenges. In Bali Nyonga which was a strong hold of the BM, protestant Christians campaigned and tried to convince the Fon to stand against the establishment of the RCM in Bali. The Catholics were described as Witches and Wizards because of their belief in transubstantiation or the real presence in the Holy Eucharist. When the Fon discovered that the allegations against this religious group were unfounded, he offered them a plot on the slope at Munung directly across the valley from his palace where he could keep a watchful eye on their activities. As the few Catholic Christians undertook the construction of their prayer house, they came under attack from their protestant rivals who provoked, poured insults and shot at them with stones. As quoted by Ndi, Catholics and Protestants were living like cats and dogs though professing one and the same Christ (Dah, 2007, p. 153). The division even tore through families which were split along religious lines.

In Wombong, inter-denominational tension was witnessed between the Catholics and the Baptists. The first Baptist Church in Wombong in 1924 was torn apart by some Roman Catholic Christians claiming that the Baptist had not secured the Fon's approval. However, Fon Ngam himself did not cherish this unusual outburst of enthusiasm in the maintenance of his authority by a set of people, whom he regarded as little better than outlaws themselves. He immediately granted permission to the Baptists to rebuild their church on the same spot, most probably to neutralize Roman

Catholic domination in the area and to avenge the insolence he had been suffering at the hands of the Njinikom Catholic community which he considered as rebels (Ndi et al., 2014, P. 64). Religious conflicts in the Bamenda Grassland during the colonial period and towards independence, coupled with the introduction of Pentecostalism degenerated to outright intolerance and extremism.

7. Intolerance and Extremism

Religious intolerance is witnessed when adherents of a particular religion are narrow minded and believe that their own world view on religious issues is the best and only way to the creator as posited by Human Rights First (2008):

In a climate of xenophobia and religious chauvinism, the pastors, priests, rabbis, or imams of minority religious congregations are particularly susceptible to threats and physical attacks in some countries, as they face, in some countries, official harassment or even imprisonment. Visiting religious workers of foreign nationality, if permitted access, may also be subject to the same harassment, threats, and violence to which....

In the same manner, extremism is the manifestation of this intolerance when people want to use force to sell their religious ideology and practices or to stop ideologies and practices that they consider to be heretical as presented by Mandaville and Nozell (2017) "Violent extremism is in one instance defined as violence undertaken by nonstate actors that is inspired or justified by, and associated with an extreme political, religious or social ideology. Like terrorism, the notion of extremism can be highly subjective."

With this, it was obvious that with the introduction of new religions; Islam and especially Christianity, during the colonial period, adherents of ATR who had not been exposed to any other form of religion manifested rejection especially against Christianity as earlier discussed. Christian

missionaries who violently attacked ATR in their sermons were also guilty of intolerance and extremism. Towards the post-independence period, the emergence of Pentecostalism in the Bamenda Grassland gave intolerance and extremism a new dimension as it was not only interreligious but also intra-religious. Within Christianity, main stream churches and Pentecostal churches were not cronies.

According to Rev. pastor Mbako Samson Fonyong (personal communication, July 25, 2018) of the Apostolic church Azire-Bamenda, the church was a daring adventure when it was first introduced in the 1960s. Pentecostalism in the Bamenda Grassland at that time was equated to occultism and mysticism. As such, both ATR and main stream churches seriously persecuted it. It was a common practice for people to pull out their family members from church and beat them up and at times, even the church leaders were not spared. The early converts of Pentecostal churches were actually exposed to physical harassment but with time, the people gradually got use to the new churches.

The issue of religious persecution was not only suffered by the new churches but they themselves perpetrated it on other Christians, Muslims and followers of ATR. In 1974, a prophetic uprising spread through Moghamo and Ngie in the Bamenda Grassland. Its major strength was in its spontaneous charismatic healings. Sister Sofie Njie, founder of the movement in Numben-Batibo, championed as a preacher of the gospel using the Mungaka translation of the Bible. The prophetess received crowds in her premises of up to 2000 people. When the prophetic wave entered Ngie under one Deborah, it took on the aspect of witch-hunting. Many elderly people lost their lives because of the maltreatment by the young witch-hunters. Public peace was disrupted. Government stepped in with arrest and banning any further spread of the movement (Dah, 2007, P. 70).

In their preaching, they described Christians of main stream churches as unbelievers and their pastors as people void of the Holy Spirit. Their attack on ATR was very direct. Diviners and chief priests of ATR were insulted as agents of the devil. Some were lured into the church and convinced to bring their traditional religious gadgets for public destruction by burning.



A notorious case was that of Pastor Bernard Eta of Nation Builders International Ministry who between 2001 and 2003 made at least four desecrations (Mofor H. M, personal communication, October 2, 2018).

In some extreme cases, they left their church premises and launched attacks on traditional religious sites considered by them to be abodes of the devil and devastated them. In April 2012, one of the greatest assault resulting from inter-faith conflict was witnessed in the Bafut Fandom. A certain prophet Franklin Afahnwi Ndifor of the Kingship International Ministries decided to destroy a 600 years old shrine (Lang, 2014, P. 283) claiming it was a curse on the Bafut people. An old age tree was cut down and was a serious source of problem between Christian fanatics and adherents of ATR. In his sermon before the act, he used some Biblical quotations to justify his action as presented by Chunyuy:

- Exodus 20:3-6) where God warns the Israelites against idol worship for he is a God who does not like competition.
- Deuteronomy 12: 1-3 where God's command on the destruction of various shrine is made explicit in the following words: " 2 In the land that you are taking, destroy all the places where the people worship their gods on high mountains, on hills and under green trees. 3 Tear down their alters and smash their sacred stones to pieces ..." With this he preaches as well as believes that the destruction of ancestral shrines is therefore executing divine command.
- 1 Kings Chapter 18:1-46 where God disgraces the 450 prophets of Baal in order to vindicate his prophet Elijah causing the people of Israel to surrender themselves to the worship of only one God the God of Elijah.

In the confrontations that erupted between his followers and adherents of ATR, about 20 people were wounded. It should be noted that his attacks on traditional religious sites in the Bamenda Grassland were not only limited to Bafut. The case of Bafut was conspicuous because legal action was eventually initiated against him by custodians of the Bafut culture and tradition.

In March 2013, the Associate pastor of the Baptist church at Three Corners Kakar in Ndu, Rev Biye Stephen imitated a song that was used in a "Mfuh"

house (secret society) and transformed it into a gospel music with the same rhythm. It generated anti-Christian feelings and the situation escalated when the secret society members launched a physical attack on the pastor and the church and had the Pastor well beaten (Ndishey E, personal communication, July 20, 2019).

The recent upsurge of inter-religious tensions leading to violence in Wum has its roots in the Anglophone problem that erupted on October 06th 2016 and later on escalated into an armed conflict. For three years the crisis has brought untold suffering to the people of the affected regions and in Wum, some Fulani Muslim youths blamed their frustration on non-Muslims. They went out on rampage which led to some loss of lives. Christians were the most affected. The first victim was Angus Fung whom they brutally murdered. On October 20th 2019, Benjamin Tem was also murdered in cool blood. It should be noted that the two men worked for the Cameroon Association for Bible Translations and Literacy-CABTAL (Azohnwi, 2019).

8. Conclusion

The culture of religious plurality that developed in the Bamenda Grassland at the beginning of the 20th Century had varied implications on the religious life of its inhabitants. The manifestation of religious conflict and tension was noticed after the First World War in many areas of the Bamenda Grassland mostly between Christian denominations and between Christianity and ATR. The findings reveal that the missionary religions that were introduced in this area at the beginning of the 20th Century, Islam and Christianity had the intention of eradication the indigenous religion of the people in favour of their own. It was only the resilience of the people that saved ATR in this area from extinction. When Pentecostalism was later introduced religious rivalries degenerated to intolerance and extremism. Christianity brainwashed many to discard their customs and traditions irrespective of whether they were good or bad. Surprisingly, the indigenous clergy that took over from the Western missionaries continued like their predecessors to disregard ATR. Foreign religions were therefore deeply implanted in this area which for generations has adversely made many who were converted or born into them think that they were superior religions. Their co-existence which

would have been on the basis of cultural interaction was manifested more in proselytisation. Inter-religious interactions in the Bamenda Grassland were generally not cordial but notwithstanding, there was some degree of peaceful co-existence and ecumenism.

FUNDING

This research paper received no internal or external funding

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