

## FAITH BASED MEDIA AND CULTURAL COMPETITION IN NORTHERN CAMEROON: SAWTU LINJIILA, FULBE IMPERIALISM AND THE HAABE'S QUEST FOR SELF-ESTEEM

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**Abstract:** This reflexion uses *Sawtu Linjiila* - an audiovisual (1964-2008) and a broadcasting institution (since 2008) - as an entry to investigate the dialectic between Fulbe hegemony and *Haabe* cultural resistance in the post-colonial Northern Cameroon. Through a metadiscursive perspective based on the examination of *Sawtu Linjiila's* broadcasting program and a thick description of ground based facts collected from the field, the study sheds light on how Fulbe cultural imperialism both contradicts and conflicts *Haabe's* strategic cultural conservation. The main point on stake is that, as a media instrument for religious purposes and ideology, *Sawtu Linjiila* both reinforced and challenged the historical based binary cultural settings - Fulbe-*Haabe*, Muslim-Non-Muslim, Master-Slave, etc. Above and beyond the thematic of cultural conflicts and competition, the reflexion also focuses on the cultural interaction in a diversity setting. It contends that the role of *Sawtu Linjiila* has both been devastating and productive of a complex societal landscape that is yet to unveil its insights. Last but not least the study navigates between religion, ethnicity, politics and ideology in order to capture rationales that govern the ongoing quest for self-esteem.

**Key words:** *Sawtu Linjiila*, Cultural competition, Fulbe, *Haabe*, Northern Cameroon.

### Médias religieux et compétition culturelle au Nord-Cameroun : Sawtu Linjiila, Impérialisme Foulbe et la quête de l'estime de soi des Haabe

**Résumé:** Le présent article s'appuie sur *Sawtu Linjiila* - une maison de production audiovisuelle (1964-2008) transformée en institution de radiodiffusion (depuis 2008) - pour étudier les rapports de force entre Foulbé et Haabé au Nord-Cameroun. L'étude aborde spécifiquement la dialectique entre l'hégémonie foulbé et la résistance culturelle des Haabe au nord du Cameroun post-colonial. À travers une analyse métadiscursive des programmes produits par *Sawtu Linjiila* ainsi que des données de terrain, l'étude postule que *Sawtu Linjiila* a contribué aux stratégies de résistance des Haabé à l'impérialisme culturel des Foulbé, devenus maîtres du Nord-Cameroun après le Djihad lancé au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle. En tant qu'instrument de diffusion de la religion et de l'idéologie chrétienne, *Sawtu Linjiila*

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*a été mise en œuvre dans le processus de redéfinition des rapports de force historiques entre musulmans et non-musulmans, Maîtres et esclaves, etc. Ce processus visait à permettre aux Haabé (non-musulmans/esclaves) de se libérer de l'hégémonie des Foulbé (musulmans/maîtres). Ce faisant, l'étude aborde la problématique de l'interaction culturelle en situation de domination et de diversité. Elle relève le caractère paradoxal de la contribution de Sawtu Linjiila dans cette interaction culturelle. Autant Sawtu Linjiila s'est investie dans la diffusion de l'Évangile afin de saborder l'influence de l'Islam, autant elle a contribué au renforcement de l'emprise culturelle des Foulbé à travers la promotion du fofoulbé. La réflexion navigue ainsi entre la religion, l'ethnicité, la politique et l'idéologie pour analyser les motivations et les défis de l'engagement de Haabé dans une quête de l'estime de soi.*

**Mots clés :** Sawtu Linjiila, Compétition culturelle, Foulbé, Haabé, Nord-Cameroun

## Introduction

The interconnection between media and religion is not a recent phenomenon. It dates back centuries ago notably when the Bible was printed by Johannes Gutenberg in 1450 within the context of the European Renaissance of the fourteenth century. However, this interconnection between media and religion has become more significant in this twenty-first century known as the "Media Age" due to Information and Communication Technology hegemony. According to Hoover, "it is through the media today that much of contemporary religion and spirituality is known".<sup>1</sup> Media "*interact* with religion in ways that are changing both the media and religion." (Hoover, 2008) This interaction has led to the secularisation of the sacred (Religion) and the sacralisation of the secular (media).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in several multicultural societies, characterised by religious pluralism, the media play an important role in revealing different relations between religions practiced by humanity. In the African context, they have given way to religious transformations by creating "greater opportunities for intra-religious debates and public critique of religious 'Others' and helping "to change the configurations between different religious groups" (Hackett & Soares, 2015:7). This can mostly be observed between two Abrahamic religions (Islam and Christianity), considered the largest revealed religions in the world (Baksh, 2007). As a matter of fact, the media contribute to the disharmonic or harmonic coexistence of Islam and Christianity. On the one hand, they are used to foster intercultural/interfaith dialogue of Muslims and Christians (Bergley, 2009). On the other hand, one witnesses religious competition between these two (Saeed & Saeed, 2004). Analysing this competition, Rosalind I. J. Hackett (2006) observed that the relationship between the media and religion could "constitute an important site of conflict between religions and the state, and among religious groups".

This religious competition is characterized by an ostensible desire of Christian believers to convert Muslim faithful into Christianity. Christians initiated a "cross-cultural evangelism" that Panya Baba describes as "evangelizing and planting new churches among people groups culturally different from the evangelizing Christians" (Baba, 1990:173). Christianity then seems to confront Islamic culture (Mayers, 1987).

In the Cameroonian context, the media has been used for religious purposes since the German colonial era when modern media tools were introduced in Cameroon (Fame Ndongo, 2006). It

was also during the colonial era that marriage between the media and religion occurred in this country (Ngongo, 1982). Though some Christian newspapers<sup>3</sup> were circulating in the southern part of the country, it is only after independence (1960) that a faith based media was founded in the Northern Cameroon. That is, the Sawtu Linjiila production House, which was also the first private religious audio-visual institution in Cameroon. Contrary to what was observed in the southern Cameroon where religious newspapers were used only to spread gospel among pagan local populations, the creation of Sawtu Linjiila was informed by particular rationales. The main aim of this audio-visual institution was to underlie the evangelization of Muslim communities. By so doing, Sawtu Linjiila got involved in the ongoing socio-political and cultural competition between the Fulbe and the *Haabe* in Northern Cameroon. In Fulfulde<sup>4</sup>, *Haabe* means pagan.<sup>5</sup> It refers to any local community that rejected Islam during the jihad launched from Sokoto, in present day Nigeria, by the Fulbe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

Examining Sawtu Linjiila as a production house, this study tackles the issue of media participation in cultural competition in Cameroon. This problematic is absent from the literature dealing with religious rivalries in Cameroon in general (Myazhiom, 2001) and in Northern Cameroon in particular (Nyiwé, 1998, Drønen, 2009). By focussing on the Northern Cameroon, it questions the influence of faith based media on the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. Its main objective is to see to what extent Sawtu Linjiila has both reinforced and challenged the historical based binary cultural settings (Fulbe-*Haabe*, Muslim-Non-Muslim) in Northern Cameroon.

The analysis relies on data collected through Written and audiovisual archives of Sawtu Linjiila. Interviews have also been conducted with the staff and audience of Sawtu Linjiila. The paper starts by investigating the reasons of the cultural competition between Muslims (dominant) and the non-Muslims (dominated) in Northern Cameroon. Later on, it sheds light on the controversial contribution of Sawtu Linjiila to this cultural competition through its involvement in the production of programmes to spread Christianity and weaken Islam as well as the promotion of fulfulde brought into the area by the Muslims (Fulbe). To this prospect, the study analyses the creation of Sawtu Linjiila, its evolution and its programmes. It ends with an assessment of the evangelization process undertaken by Sawtu Linjiila.

## **1. Religious competition between Muslims and Christians in the Northern Cameroon**

Geographically, Cameroon is divided into two main parts. The Southern part which comprises seven regions (Littoral, Centre, East, South, est, North West and Southwest regions) and the Northern part made up of three regions (Adamaoua, North and Far North).<sup>7</sup> This division which is informed by geographical features has been reinforced by historical trends. Contrary to the southern part of the country that had witnessed just western colonisation<sup>8</sup>, the Northern Cameroon had experienced two different phases of domination. The first phase began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the Jihad. As for the second, it occurred at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was carried out at first by the Germans who were later on driven out of Cameroon by the French and the British at the outset of World War I (Ngoh, 1996). It is during these two stages of domination that Islam and Christianity were strongly implanted in Northern Cameroon.<sup>9</sup> Then, chronologically speaking, Islam was the first reveal religion in the area.

### **1.1. From jihad to Fulbe hegemony in Northern Cameroon**

The expansion of Islam was invoked as the main and official motivation for the Fulbe conquest in northern Cameroon though the facts were different. Actually, the spread of Islam was just a pretext for the Fulbe occupation and hegemony (Adama, 2004:7). The genuine and unavowed reason of this conquest was to expand the military and political influence of the Fulbe in order to control a geographical area favorable to livestock farming which was their main economic activity. Quoting Eldridge Mohammadou, Zachary Njeuma notices that: "the reason for Fulbe migration into the region was not to proselytize and spread Islam to those who were not born Muslims, but to find better conditions for pastoralism" (Njeuma, 1993:88-89).

The Fulbe who were herdsmen arrived in the area known today as Northern part of Cameroon as far back as the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. The first Fulbe got to the area in search for pastures and noticed the existence of abundant pasture and water sources rich in natron, good for cattle feed. After they settled in the area, the Fulbe were initially under political domination of local ethnic groups such as the Mboum to whom they were paying taxes. In order to free themselves from that influence and have complete control over the pastures, the Fulbe took advantage of jihad, led by Modibo Adama (Mohammadou, 1983; Boutinot, 1999) to impose their political hegemony and sociocultural influence. The political hegemony was materialized

through the creation of traditional political entities called lamidate. Each lamidate was ruled by a lamido, who was conferred authority both as a political and spiritual leader.

Contrary to popular belief, Islam was not introduced in the northern Cameroon by the Fulbes as this religion existed in the region before the arrival of the Fulbes. The first group to convert into Islam were the Kanuri, the Mandara, the Arab Choa and the Kotoko, who had arrived the area well before the Fulbe. Nevertheless, the jihad initiated from Sokoto by Usman Dan Fodio, gave a new impetus that really expanded the religion throughout the region in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Njeuma, 1978). Thus, thanks to Jihad, the Fulbe who were politically and socially overshadowed by the local groups they found in the area, were able to achieve their domination by moving from the status of “subjects” to the one of Masters.

As result to Jihad, the Fulbe became the political leaders of the Northern Cameroon. They created about thirty Lamidates which were political units whose organization was inspired from Hausa and Kanuri Islamic states (Burhnam, 1991:77). The other groups whose settlement predated theirs were treated according to their attitude towards Islam.<sup>10</sup> Those of the groups that were forcefully or peacefully Islamised were integrated in the political apparatus. Some of them even succeeded in keeping their traditional political structure.<sup>11</sup> Those of the groups that rejected Islam were looked at as pagans and were enslaved. A part from this political influence, the Jihad also led to a Fulbe cultural hegemony through the spread of their language (fulfulde) which became the *lingua franca* and their way of dressing.

The dominating position of the Fulbe was reinforced during the colonial period when the lamibbe became the main interlocutors of the colonial masters (Bah & Taguem, 1993). To exercise more power, the colonial masters later decided to associate them in the management of the territory because of their strong political power (Abwa, 1994; Taguem, 2002; Temgoua, 2002) and their well-organized and powerful army (Bah, 1982). By so doing, the Germans and the French contributed in consolidating the domination of the Islamo-Peulh<sup>12</sup> over the *Haabe*. This domination was however, perpetuated even after the proclamation of independence in 1960. After the official departure of the French colonial administration, the lamibbe developed strategies with a view of maintaining their influence and domination in the Northern Cameroon (Taguem, 2003). This time around, they benefited from the position of Ahmadou Ahidjo, the first Cameroonian Head of State and a purported Muslim. Since Islam was an excuse for Fulbe hegemony,

many members of the oppressed ethnic groups -such as the Dii, Gbaya, Tupuri, Massa just to name a few- converted to Christianity in the perspective of getting free from this hegemony (Muller, 1997).

### **1.2. The Arrival of Western Missionaries and the Introduction of Christianity**

The first Christians missions to arrive in the Northern Cameroon at the dawn of 1920 were the Sudan Mission and the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) (Lode, 1990). They came respectively from America and Norway. The Sudan Mission was founded in 1918 by Adolphus E. Gunderson with the aim of evangelizing the Adamawa region that he visited previously between 1912 and 1916 (Ibid, p.11). Gunderson and his missionary team, composed of his wife, Anna Maria, Olette Berntsen and Anne Olsen arrived Ngaoundéré in May 1923. The next year, they moved into the hinterlands, notably to the Gbaya area and settled in Meiganga in 1931 (Fogue, 2004). The arrival of Sudan Mission in Northern Cameroon was closely followed by the Norway Missionary Society (NMS). Founded in 1842, the NMS decided to send some missionaries in the Northern Cameroon. The expedition led by Karl Flatland got to Ngaoundéré in March 1925 (Ibid., p.28) and settled in today ... Adamawa region as their mission field, partly because of cool climate on the plateau (about 1000m above sea level), partly because of its large size with unlimited possibilities for expansion, and partly because it was close to the older mission field in the Southern Cameroon from where they could secure catechists and evangelists" (Gullestad, 2007:38). Chronologically, it is during the French occupation (1915-1960) that the Christian missions were allowed to settle in the Northern Cameroon. Christian churches were prohibited in the area during the German period. In 1903, Von Puttkammer banned the Catholics in the Adamawa region (Lode, 1990: 9).

The Islamo-Peulh and the *Haabe* differently welcomed the Christian missions. The first were reluctant to their settlement and activities in order to protect their religion (Islam) (Sinderud, 1993). As regards to the second, they had a positive attitude towards the Christian missions (Drønen, 2009). The *Haabe* considered Christianity as an alternative that could help free them from Islamic influence and counterbalance the Muslim hegemony they were facing (Muller, 1997). They considered Christian religion as an outlet towards freedom as stated by Samuel Nygandji Ndi (Nygandji, 1993).

In a sociocultural perspective, the Northern Cameroonian social landscape was split into two conflicting groups: on the one hand,



there was the Islamo-Peulh made-up by the Fulbe and other ethnic groups that accepted Islam, and on the other hand, we have ethnic groups opposed to Fulbe conquest by preventing themselves from Islam. These non-Muslim (*Haabe*) communities were made-up of such ethnic groups as the Moundang, the Tupuri, the Guziga, the Massa, the Gbaya and the Dii. They were numerically more than the Islamo-peulh. In spite of their numerical superiority, the *Haabe* were being marginalized in the political arena for many years (Fendjongue Houli, 2006). Because of their resistance to Fulbe hegemony and their opposition to Islam, the *Haabe* were politically eclipsed by the Fulbe and considered as political and social subalterns. In their position of victims and unwanted people, they constituted a fertile ground for Christianity. Deussom Noubissie (2004) mentions the case of Golopo, the great chief of the Tupuri who welcomed the Christians missionaries because he was hostile to the Fulbe and to Islam (p.137).

Though the *Haabe* were really concerned by evangelization, Western Christian missionaries did not limit their activities to them. They also undertook the evangelization of Muslim population. This initiative that consisted in evangelizing Muslim populations in areas dominated by Islam was falling within a general policy implemented by Christian missions with the aim of hindering the evolution of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa. Johann Haafkens (1995) contends that: "For the missionaries [...] Islam in Africa was clearly seen as a danger and a force to be combated. [They] worked out plans to set up a string of mission stations designed to act as a barrier to stop the spread of Islam to the South" (p.303). The relationship between Muslim and Christian then became more complex. Nygandji Ndi (1993) gives details about some events that happened between Muslim and Christian *Haabe* in Bankim locality situated Mayo Banyo Division (Adamaoua region) With the prospect of underlying the evangelization of Muslims in Northern Cameroon, missionaries adopted different strategies (Nyiwé, 1998). In addition to the opening of schools and health care centers, they decided also to implement media in their strategy to weakened Islam. To that prospect, they created the audiovisual house of production Sawtu Linjiila which is known as the first and most important media structure involved in the evangelization of Muslims.



## 2. Creation and Evolution of Sawtu Linjiila

Compared to most private audiovisual institutions based in Cameroon, Sawtu Linjiila has the particularity to have been created long before the adoption of the 1990 social communication law and the signing of the 2000/158/PM Decree fixing conditions of creation and exploitation of private audio-visual enterprises in Cameroon. So to speak, Sawtu Linjiila was created in a particular socio-political context characterized by a juridical vacuum as far as the Cameroon private media landscape is concerned.

### 2.1. Motives for the creation of Sawtu Linjiila

Talking about the evangelization of Muslim women, Ana states that “modern media can provide immediate access to new audiences around the world and is one method God has given his church to communicate with the remaining unreached 50 percent of the world’s population. I am convinced that radio and media in general, are God’s mighty tools for world evangelisation (...)” (Anna, 2002:103). However, though some churches were using media long before the deregulation process, in Cameroon, for example, Christian churches, today more than ever before, tend to make use of modern information and communication technologies such as radio, television, CDs and DVDs to spread the gospel among the local population. This evangelization strategy has increased dramatically since the second half of the 90’s and the beginning of the 2000s as a result of democracy and the liberalization process of the audio-visual landscape in the country. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, with headquarters in Ngaoundere, founded Radio Sawtu Linjiila, as a communication hub involved in the production of radio programs and other audio-visual material in the 1960s. The motive being to broadcast neither in French nor in English but in the language used by the local population.

By definition, Sawtu Linjiila” means “The voice of the Gospel”. Its *raison d’être* was to hinder the spread of Islam and promote Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>13</sup> In the framework of their struggle to spread the gospel and limit the expansion of Islam in Africa, many protestant churches created a huge communication network throughout the continent. This communication network encompasses many radio stations and production houses including Sawtu Linjiila. Fridjov Birkeli, the director of communication of the World Lutheran Federation, was one of the first proponents of such a network. Birkeli came up with the idea in 1956 during his tour in Africa as he was struck by the impact a community radio had on

people in the continent. Thus, one year later (in 1957), at the General Assembly of the World Lutheran Federation, he presented the idea to sustain African and Asian missions and churches by evangelizing through radio broadcasting.<sup>14</sup> It is within this context that Sawtu Linjiila was founded in Ngaoundéré in 1962, conjointly by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Norway Missionary Society and the World Lutheran Federation (Fogue, 2004:43). After the creation of Sawtu Linjiila by the afore - mentioned institutions, its management was entrusted to some local churches based in Cameroon, Chad and the Central African Republic. Those churches are: the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon (EELC); the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Central African Republic (EELRCA); the Fraternal Lutheran Church of Chad (EFLT); the Fraternal Lutheran Church of Cameroon (EFLC) and the Union of Evangelical Churches of Cameroon (UEEC).

Besides, the creation and the place of localisation of Sawtu Linjiila deserve to be questioned. During the French colonial era (1915 to 1960), the Muslim traditional authorities of Ngaoundéré developed a policy of religious protectionism vis-à-vis the Christians. This policy mainly consisted of pushing Christians to the outskirts of the city. At the time of their arrival in Ngaoundéré in 1925, the missionaries of the Norway Missionary Society (NMS) were obliged to set up their headquarters at the city periphery. In order to avoid tensions with traditional and religious authorities of Ngaoundere, the French colonial administration did not allow that the Norwegian missionaries establish themselves amongst Muslim population. Though they were also Christian, the French administrators were more concerned in preserving their relationship with the Muslim rulers in Northern Cameroon. This French attitude should be understood within the context of what Taguem Fah (1996) calls "*Politique musulmane de la France*" ("French Muslim policy") which is an illustration of the pragmatic approach of colonial administration to Islam. Besides, the settlement of the missionaries at the periphery of the city of Ngaoundere attests the idea that "colonial authorities even imposed restrictions on Christian missions in strongly Muslim areas" (Haafkens 1995:303). After the independence of Cameroon in 1960, the local administration that inherited the power reiterated the pragmatic approach to Islam. This deeply affected the evolution and sustenance of Sawtu Linjiila.

## 2.2. Evolution of Sawtu Linjiila: the main periods

Five main periods can be identified in the evolution of Sawtu Linjiila. The first period (from 1962 to 1966) corresponds to the installation of Sawtu Linjiila's infrastructures with the first buildings in 1964. It also involved the recruitment of the first employees in 1965, and the official launching of Sawtu Linjiila's programs on June 11, 1966 (Schöningh, 1980:60). Those programmes were broadcast all over Africa by "The voice of the Gospel" radio network based in Ethiopia. The second period (from 1966 to 1981) was characterized by the creation of new departments such as the World news department founded in march 1971 and the cassettes department created in 1975 with a mandate to "extend and supplement the radio work of Sawtu Linjiila, to help church members witness to non-Christian, to serve the diverse needs of E.E.L.C., E.F.L.C., E.F.L.T., M.F.L., E.E.L.R.C.A." (Ibid). The third period (from 1981 to 1985) was a difficult era in the history of Sawtu Linjiila. In 1981, Sawtu Linjiila was closed down by the Cameroonian government. The confidential letter ordering this closure and signed by Guillaume Bwele (the then minister of information and culture) did not indicate the reasons of this decision. From our own analysis, this closure can be explained by ethno-religious rivalries between Christians and Muslims in the neighbouring Northern Nigeria where the programmes of Sawtu Linjiila were really appreciated by the Mbororo (Salawu 2010; Nicolas, 2010). Besides, anti-Christian sentiments began to develop in the Northern Cameroon. Administrative authorities -all Muslims- adopted a discriminatory attitude towards the Christian who were almost persecuted (Zelao, 2006: 241-242; Slageren, 2005:364). This particular context could have influenced the closure of Sawtu Linjiila considered a danger for Islamic interests in the region. In fact, Sawtu Linjiila did indeed constitute a real danger for Islam in Northern Cameroon. Köre Lode (1990) noticed that between 1968 and 1969, 80% of Sawtu Linjiila's listeners were Muslims. In 1969, Sawtu Linjiila received 220 letters coming from its audience. Of 220 letters, 113 letters were written by Muslims asking for advice and general information. The fourth period (from 1985 to 2008) constitutes an important time in the history of Sawtu Linjiila. Coincidentally, after the resignation of the Muslim born president, Ahmadou Ahidjo, and his replacement by a Christian born President Paul Biya, Sawtu Linjiila was allowed to resume its activities in 1985.

On February 13, 1985, the Ministry of Information and Communication signed letter N° 398/minfoc/DIP permitting the restart of Sawtu Linjiila's programmes. After the reopening, the programmes of Sawtu Linjiila were still broadcast by radio ELWA

until its destruction in 1989. After this destruction, the programmes were picked up by Trans-World Radio in Johannesburg. It is also during this period that national radio stations (Ngaoundéré radio station, Garoua radio station and Maroua radio station) began to broadcast Sawtu Linjiila's programmes. In 2008, Sawtu Linjiila moved from the status of mere production house to the standing of broadcasting house. This new position helped the institution to reinforce its capacities and its strategies toward the evangelization of Muslims.

### 3. Evangelization strategies and Cultural Implications of Sawtu Linjiila in Northern Cameroon

As an audio-visual media, Sawtu Linjiila's activities consist in conceiving, realizing and broadcasting radio programmes. On this basis, its evangelization strategies rely on two main components; namely the production and broadcasting of religious and social programmes, and the use of fulfulde.

#### 3.1. Sawtu Linjiila's Programmes

Sawtu Linjiila's programmes have evolved greatly since its creation. They moved from four programmes in 1966 to eighteen in 2008. Two categories of programmes emerged from Sawtu Linjiila's mission: religious programmes on the one hand and social and educational (development) programmes on the other hand.

Since 1966, religious programmes that preach the gospel by providing a biblical education to the listeners represent 30% of Sawtu Linjiila's broadcast schedule, namely; « *Waaaju* »: (the Gospel): a programme in which the presenter reads and comments biblical texts; « *Tariiha annabo'en* »: (the history of the prophets): this programme consists in portraying biblical histories and dramas that involve prophets; « *Jangde deftere seniide* »: (reading of the Holy Bible) and « *Gime mangtugo allah* »: (praises to God): an entertaining programme in which religious songs are broadcasted. In addition to those religious programmes, Sawtu Linjiila also produces educational and cultural programmes. All of these religious programmes are produced and presented by pastors and other "men of God".

Sawtu Linjiila's educational and cultural programmes are consistent with the goals of Christian churches which used to tackle development issues in areas where they settle/carry out their activities. Missionaries, for example, targeted populations by building schools and medical facilities. Social work allowed Christians close access to the population to be evangelized. The

social and educational programmes of Sawtu Linjiila fit into the same scheme.

Educational and cultural programmes comprise 70% of Sawtu Linjiila's programmes. Unlike the religious programmes that have changed little since the creation of Sawtu Linjiila, development programmes have evolved greatly. From 1966 to the closure of Sawtu Linjiila in 1981, the production house produced the following shows: « *Ndemri e durngol* »: (agriculture and stock farming), where listeners benefited from advice and other useful knowledge related to the advancement of agricultural and pastoral techniques; « *Duniyaaru Reedu Nyiiwa* »: (World is like an elephant's belly): a programme on sports, games, traditional and modern ways of life; « *Njamu Bandu* »: (body health): a health magazine that educated population on issues of hygiene and sanitary conditions; « *Tawabu yamdé* »: (question-answers): an interactive programme that responded to audience's letters and feedback; « *Joonde nder saare* »: (the situation inside the house): a magazine show that debated on matrimonial issues and other problems related to the household and children's education; « *Nan saawari* » (follow advice); « *Kubaruji duniyaaru* » (news around): This time slot informed listeners about world news.

Before Sawtu Linjiila was shut down, many of its programmes were devoted to socio-cultural issues. This might give the impression that Sawtu Linjiila was more concerned with socio-cultural issues than evangelizing. In reality, those development programmes were aimed at peaking the interest of Muslim listeners in Sawtu Linjiila programmes. After the reopening of Sawtu Linjiila in 1985, some development programmes were suspended while others were created. « *Kubaruji duniyaaru* » and « *nan saawari* » were suspended due to the fact that they addressed Cameroonian political issues. By suspending them, Sawtu Linjiila wanted to avoid conflict with the government. As a result, many other social and educational programmes were created. Those programmes include: « *Tariha lesde duniyaaru* » (history of the world): a history and geography show; « *Num haala ka'a* »: this programme presented different historical events from the Bible and asks listeners to comment on them; « *Sukaabe e duniyaaru* » (youths of the world) in which the presenter advised youth on their daily behaviour; « *Poondol anndal* »: a quiz show on biblical passages; « *Fulfulde don waata* » (Fulfulde is about to disappear) and « *Fulfulde lesde godde* » (Fulfulde of others countries), which are cultural programmes aimed at promoting and popularizing fulfulde; « *Geddi* »: a debate programme and « *Gime al'aada* » (songs of our culture): an entertainment programme during which traditional and cultural songs are proposed to listeners.

The aforementioned programmes were created to sustain the evangelization policy of Sawtu Linjiila. Given that Sawtu Linjiila was a production house until 2008, its programmes were broadcasted by foreign and local radio stations. Besides, all the programmes of Sawtu Linjiila were produced in fulfulde since the use of this language participated in its evangelization strategies.

### **3.2. The Use of Fulfulde by Sawtu Linjiila: From an Evangelization Strategy to a Cultural Controversy in Northern Cameroon**

Fulfulde is the language spoken by the native Fulbe living in Cameroon and elsewhere in Western and Eastern Africa (<http://www.Peul.fr.exsugo.org/>). It has become the *lingua franca* of many ethnic groups in the Northern Cameroon. The predominance of this language can be seen as one of the major manifestations of the “fulbeisation” process related to the Fulbe hegemony. This process which is culturally based refers to spread of Fulbe cultural values such as the way of dressing, nomenclatura (Fulbe names) and language (Burnham 1991:78). It is then in the framework of the Fulbe hegemony that fulfulde imposed itself as the main vehicular language in the Northern Cameroon (Haman Bello, 1997). Fulfulde has become the language of commerce and command in the army according to Thierno Mouctar Bah (1993:84). This language has overhung other local languages. Many ethnic groups living in Northern Cameroon, even those that resisted to Fulbe conquest, used fulfulde in addition to their own native tongue. Besides, populations from southern Cameroon that moved northward learnt fulfulde to socialize and integrate into their new community (Fogue, 2002). Because fulfulde is the most spoken language in Northern Cameroon, it is easy to understand why Sawtu Linjiila’s programmes were produced mainly in this language.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that, Sawtu Linjiila used fulfulde to infiltrate the Muslim community. Otherwise, how come that in a context of religious competition between Muslims and Christians, the latter are acting in the sense of promoting the culture of the others. Actually, it should be mentioned that, by using fulfulde in its programmes, Sawtu Linjiila was promoting this language. This is more obvious as it has been mentioned before that Sawtu Linjiila has devoted some of its programmes to the learning of fulfulde.<sup>15</sup>

However, the use of fulfulde is above all a strategy to attract Fulbe, who are Muslims, and thus the main target of Sawtu Linjiila’s activities in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular. At a conference organized in Garoua, Cameroon from November 18 to

November 20, 2002<sup>16</sup>, the managers of Sawtu Linjiila issued a report arguing that, Sawtu Linjiila, participates in the evangelization of Fulbe population and contributes to their spiritual, cultural and social development.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, the use of fulfulde in the evangelization process of Muslims in which Sawtu Linjiila was involved gave way to some cultural challenges. As a matter of fact, programmes of Sawtu Linjiila had a real cultural impact on the population living in northern Cameroon. Through these programmes, Sawtu Linjiila instilled new and challenging perspectives of thinking and cultural experiences among the Muslim population whom, though there are not Christians, are nevertheless aware of the existence of Christianity and its instructions and dogmas.

However, it is undeniable that the cultural impact of Sawtu Linjiila is ambiguous and ambivalent in the Northern Cameroon. For the Fulbe, Sawtu Linjiila is both a factor of cultural promotion - through the promotion of the fulfulde- and an instrument of cultural depreciation because of its opposition to Islam. This dual and contrasting perception has placed Sawtu Linjiila at the core of what Max Weber calls "The War of Gods" in reference to the conflicting coexistence of competing value system (Mesure & Renaut, 1996). By promoting fulfulde, Sawtu Linjiila has been reinforcing the cognitive influence of the Fulbe over the *Haabe*<sup>18</sup> since language greatly contribute to hegemonic and domination policies. Herman Batibo (...) contends to that effect that: "The pressure from stronger language group could take the form of political domination (...)" (Batibo, 2005:63). It can then seem paradoxical that in their effort to combat Islam and set free from the Fulbe influence, the Christian *Haabe* working with Sawtu Linjiila have been promoting the language of their "oppressor". But from the opinion and perspective of the Christian *Haabe*, the use of fulfulde has become a necessity in consideration of their ambition to convert the Fulbe into Christianity. From there, one can understand that the *Haabe's* quest of self-esteem does not only consist in setting free from the Fulbe domination. Beyond the achievement of freedom there is also the ambition to reverse the situation. The concern of Sawtu Linjiila in this quest of self-esteem was more to pave the way to a "religious revenge" of the Christians over the Muslims than merely contributing to the freedom of the *Haabe*. This religious revenge consisted in weakening Islam by undertaking the evangelization of the Muslims. Then through its activities, Sawtu Linjiila has contributed to the social promotion or "social mobility" of the *Haabe* who were working towards that



prospect. In the same vein, it has been fighting against the spread of Islam insofar as some Muslims were converted into Christianity.

#### **4. Assessment of the Evangelization of Muslims through Sawtu Linjiila in Northern Cameroon**

The assessment of the evangelization of Muslims is not an easy task since Muslims converted feared being identified as Christians by their peer. This justifies the difficulty to determine the impact of Sawtu Linjiila in the evangelization process of Muslims. The fact remains that some Muslims became Christian as a result of Sawtu Linjiila as a medium. Because of this difficulty, coupled to the fact that Sawtu Linjiila hardly follows up the evangelization process on the field, we have restricted this assessment only to the Adamawa where Sawtu Linjiila is based. This assessment will be carried out through the analysis of the radio programmes valued by Muslims and the use of the ELCC's statistics on the evangelization of Fulbe.

##### **4.1. The Muslim Audience of Sawtu Linjiila in the Adamawa**

A high percentage of Muslims were interested in the programmes produced by Radio Sawtu Linjiila disregarding what Sawtu Linjiila is really (Fogue, 2004). Most of the Muslims were not aware of the involvement of Sawtu Linjiila in cross-cultural evangelism. Some of the Muslims interviewed even mingled Sawtu Linjiila with state owned and run CRTV<sup>19</sup> local radio stations because Sawtu Linjiila's programmes were locally broadcast by those radio stations.

Interviews carried out in the Adamawa led to the conclusion that Muslims are generally less interested in religious programmes. Listeners of this category of programmes were just curious to know how Christians go through their religion and how Christianity has evolved in comparison with Islam.<sup>20</sup> In this prospect, Muslims were particularly interested by "*Tarriha anado'en*", which depicted stories from the Bible and dramas involving the prophets.

However, Muslims were mostly interested in socio-cultural and development programmes. Among those programmes, the agro pastoral magazine ("*Demri e Durngol*"); the matrimonial magazine ("*Joonde nder saaré*"); the programme on the history of nations ("*Tariha lesde duniyaaru*") and programmes related to fulfulde ("*fulfuldé don waata*" and "*fulfuldé lesdé godde*") were the most popular. Thus, Muslim listeners mainly focused on specific programmes dealing with development and cultural issues.

#### **4.2. Statistics and Obstacles of the Evangelization of Muslims by Sawtu Linjiila in Northern Cameroon**

According to Drønen, former director of the Islam and Christian relations department at the ELCC, there were only two Christian Fulbe in the Adamawa in 1960. In the year 2000, the number increased to around one hundred<sup>21</sup> These Fulbe who converted into Christianity were people working with missionaries notably in their schools, hospitals and other structures like Sawtu Linjiila. In 1960, many of these institutions were not yet created. This can explain the low number of Fulbe collaborating with Christian based institutions. But the number later on increased with the multiplication of those confessional institutions. Some young Fulbe who were looking for job opportunities were privileged during recruitments. It was then easier to convert them through their jobs. Besides, a study carried out by Drønen (2001) shows that three quarters of Fulbe converts to Christianity are males between the ages of 18 to 40, who have been exposed to and influenced by European culture. In other words, these converted Fulbe were people who have received a western education by attending confessional schools or by simply be in contact with the missionaries. They were then able to collaborate with the missionaries since they were educated. This was the case of Youssoufa Aboubakar Bassir, a producer at Sawtu Linjiila whose conversion in 1996 came as a result of his contact with some Norwegian missionaries. From his own testimony, it is because he used to spend time with those missionaries in their house that he got interested in western civilization and Christianity.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, the weak representation of women in these statistics is due to the fact that in Muslim communities, a woman is submissive to her husband (Houmma, 2000; Mgbakim, 2000). This submission of the woman to men is less recommended by Islamic ideology. It is rather informed by the patriarchal structure or organization of many societies. As a matter of fact, "Islam establishes complete and genuine equality between men and women" (Al Khayat, 2003:7). In some cases, she is even privileged and has certain advantages over men.<sup>23</sup> However, despite this religious and spiritual equality institutionalized in the Qu'ran, women are victims of men's domination in Muslim communities.<sup>24</sup> This domination is informed by the customs and traditions inherent to the patriarchal structure of many Muslim societies. The submission of the woman observed in the Fulbe community is related to the local culture. In the Fulbe culture, the woman is defined and characterized through the idea of submission. In fulfulde, the linguistic basis for the word woman is the word submission.<sup>25</sup> Any woman who refuses to be submissive is

considered a “non woman” (Djingui, 19993:188). Mahmoudou Djingui develops this idea by focusing on the word *rewbe* which is the plural form of the word *debbo* which means Woman. In the word *rewbe*, the radical (*trew-*) means to follow, to submit. The word *debbo* then means “the woman who follows or who is submissive”. In this context; the women can hardly convert to Christianity without the consent or permission of their husbands.

However, Drønen’s statistics only account for the converted Fulbe who are willing to be identified as Christians. There could exist many others, who preferred to remain anonymous for fear of being rejected by their families. In Muslim communities, the conversion of a Muslim to another religion is considered as an act of treason that could lead to his exclusion from family and the whole community. When a Muslim converts to Christianity, he rejects the *Pulaaku*<sup>26</sup> and thus abandons his own culture. For this reason, Muslim converts are simply expelled from their community. This was the case with Modibo Bachirou (a Fulbe commentator of Sawtu Linjiila programmes) who was expelled by the other members of his family after being converted to Christianity in 1990.<sup>27</sup> This was also the case of Pastor Moussa Jea<sup>28</sup>, the father of Daouda (another staff member of Sawtu Linjiila), a former Muslim who was disinherited by his father after his conversion to Christianity.<sup>29</sup>

Youssoufa Aboubakar Bassir, a producer at Sawtu Linjiila whose conversion was a result of his contacts with Norwegian missionaries, was expelled from his family by his parents because of his conversion to Christianity in 1996 when he was 17. He was influenced by some Norwegian missionaries who took him in after he was disowned by his parents.<sup>30</sup> On the basis of those examples, it is easy to understand why Fulbe who accepted the gospel hide their true religious identity. This cultural phenomenon impeded a proper assessment of the role of Sawtu Linjiila in the conversion of Muslims to Christianity.

## Conclusion

In a nutshell, it stands out from the above development that the Northern Cameroon has been characterized by a cultural competition between Muslims and Christians. This competition was underlain by Sawtu Linjiila, a faith based media involved in cross-cultural evangelism. However, it is important to underline that the competition between Islam and Christianity was not only religiously driven. It is necessary to underscore the fact that the politically, socially and culturally oppressed *Haabe*, converted to Christianity confronted Islam with the prospects of being set free from the Fulbe’s

hegemony. Their involvement in the evangelization of Muslims was then determined by sociopolitical rationales in relation with the domination of the Fulbes they were facing since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and which relegated them to the status of slaves and social subalterns. The Haabe saw Christianity as a way out in the sense that it was an opportunity to be relieved from Fulbe's imperialism and recover their Self-esteem. Definitely, Sawtu Linjiila was not only an instrument of evangelization. It was also a weapon for the *Haabe's* in the war of "liberation".

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this, see Hoover, S. M., 2006, *Religion in the Media Age*, New York, Routledge, p.1. 3.

<sup>2</sup> For more see, Hosseini S.H, 2008, "Religion and Media, Religious or Media Religion: Theoretical Studies" in *Journal of Media and Religion*, Vol.7, Issue 1-2, pp.56-69. See also, Karen, L.; Mallia, M.A., 2009, "From the sacred to the profane: A critical analysis of the changing nature of Religious Imagery in Advertising", *Journal of Media and Religion*, vol.8, Issue 3, pp.172-190.

<sup>3</sup> Some of those Newspapers are: *Mwendi Ma Musango*, *Mulee-ngea*, *Mefoé end Nled Bekristen*.

<sup>4</sup> Fulfulde is the vernacular language of the Fulany. It is the main indicator of Fulany hegemony in Northern Cameroon. Fulfulde is become the lingua franca in the area. Even the *Haabe* who resisted to Fulany hegemony by rejecting Islam had adopted Fulfulde as common language.

<sup>5</sup> *Haabe* has the same meaning with Kirdi. In Chadian Arabic language also known as Shuwa Arabic, Kirdi means unfaithful, that is those who are not converted into Islam. See Pontie, G., "Les sociétés païennes" in Boutrais, J., *Le Nord Cameroun: des hommes, une région*, Collection Mémoires, 102, Paris, ORSTOM p.203.

<sup>6</sup> About the jihad in the Northern Cameroon, see Njeuma, M.Z., 1978, *Fulani Hegemony in Yola (Old Adamawa): 1809-1902*, Yaoundé, CEPER.

<sup>7</sup> These regions have been created in 1984 as provinces before their transformation in regions in 2008.

<sup>8</sup> First the German colonization from 1884 to 1915. Later on the franco british colonisation (1915 to 1960).

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that the introduction of Islam in Northern Cameroon was prior to Jihad. Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some Muslim communities like the Hausa and the Arab Choa were already present in the area that later became part of the Northern Cameroon. However, it is in the framework of the Jihad that Islam became predominant in the area as a result of the political domination of the Fulbe.

<sup>10</sup> The most known of these groups are: the Mbum, Gbaya, Dii, Namchi, Fali, Guisiga, Mofu, Matakam, Mousgoum, Toupouri, Massa.



<sup>11</sup> In the current Adamaoua region for instance, the Mbum who converted into Islam have maintained their traditional political organization led by the Belaka

<sup>12</sup> Islamo-Peulh is a generic concept used to designate the all the Muslim groups in Northern Cameroon. It refers to Fulbe also Known as Peulh and all the other groups that practice Islam.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Nyiwe Thomas, the president of the ELCC, April 2003.

<sup>14</sup> Archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon. Report of Sawtu Linjiila conference held in Garoua from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2002, p.5.

<sup>15</sup> Those programmes are « *Fulfulde don waata* » and « *Fulfulde lesde godde* ».

<sup>16</sup> Talking about Pentecostal ism in Northern Cameroon, Tomas S. DrØnen demonstrates how Christian churches contribute to the socio-economic emancipation of non-Muslims population. This emancipation lead to an economic competition between the Islamo-peulh who were controlling the economic activity and the new religious economic elite represented by the *Haabe*. See DrØnen, T.S., 2013, *Pentecostalism, Globalism, and Islam in Northern Cameroon. Megachurches in the making?*, Leiden, Koninklijke Brill.

<sup>17</sup> ELCC Archives, report of the conference held in Garoua – Cameroon from November 18 to November 20 2002, p. 33.

<sup>18</sup> The staff of Sawtu Linjiila was made-up mostly by the *Haabe*. Some were former Muslims converted into Christianity.

<sup>19</sup> The Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV) is the national broadcasting and television office founded in 1987.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Oumarou Babanya, September 2003 in Ngaoundéré.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Tomas Sundnes DrØnen, june 2003 in Meiganga.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Youssoufa Aboubakar Bassir, September 2003 in Ngaoundéré.

<sup>23</sup> Jamal A. Badawi discusses these advantages in terms of religious obligations. He points out the fact that women are exempted from some religious obligations like the daily prayers and fasting during their menstrual periods, in case of pregnancy and also forty days after childbirth (Jamal. A. Badawi, *The status of woman in Islam*”, available online, [http://www.sultan.org/books/the\\_status\\_of\\_woman\\_in\\_islam.pdf](http://www.sultan.org/books/the_status_of_woman_in_islam.pdf), consulted in decembre 2016). In the same vein, some authors contends that the conditions of women have been improved by Muhammed compare to the pre-Islamic period.

<sup>24</sup> Sherif Abdel Azeem contends that “Almost all Muslim societies have, to one degree or another, deviated from the ideals of Islam with respect to the status of women” (Sherif A. Azeem, “Women in Islam. Versus women in the judaeo-Christian Tradition: The Myth & the Reality”, published online, [https://d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih\\_books/single/en\\_a\\_women\\_in\\_islam.pdf](https://d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih_books/single/en_a_women_in_islam.pdf), consulted in December 2016).

<sup>25</sup> Mahmoudou Djingui develops this idea by focusing on the word *rewbe* which is the plural form of the word *debbo* which means Woman. In the

word *rewbe*, the radical (*trew-*) means to follow, to submit. The word *debbo* then means the woman who follows or who is submissive.

<sup>26</sup> Pulaaku refers to the Fulbe moral code. Elisabeth Boesen defines it as « une instance de sanction idéale [sic] et également concrète (...) qui contribue au maintien de l'ordre familial et plus, généralement, à la stabilité et à la continuité de la communauté ». See Boesen, Elisabeth, « *Pulaaku* Sur la foulanité », in Botte, Roger, Boutrais, Jean et Schmitz, Jean (dir. de), *Figures peules*, Paris, Karthala, 1999, p. 89.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Modibo Bachirou, June 2003 in Meiganga.

<sup>28</sup> During my investigations pastor Moussa Jea was working in Nigeria.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Daouda, August 2003 in Ngaoundéré.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Youssoufa Aboubakar Bassir, September 2003 in Ngaoundéré.