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‘We all believe in the same god’

Urban youth perceptions on boundaries between religious groups
in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

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List of symbols and abbreviations

CAR	Central African Republic
CEPCA	Le Conseil des Églises protestantes du Cameroun
DMJ	Dynamique Mondiale des Jeunes
DST	Dialogical self theory
ICG	International Crisis Group
JIC	Jeunesse Islamique du Cameroun
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SIT	Social identity theory

[...] Deleted text from interview transcript to increase clarity

[] Text between block brackets is added or altered in interview transcript in order to increase clarity

1 Introduction

In 2014, 2015 and 2016, the International Crisis Group (ICG) released reports which warn for the development of conflict between religious groups in Cameroon. In these reports, the ICG argues that a fragmentation of Cameroon's religious landscape has led to increasing tensions between religious groups. The reports describe the emergence of a growing number of (radical) religious groups and subsequent institutions alongside the established religious groups within Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam. They argue that the increasing number of religious groups and the subsequent multitude of interests to lead to conflict across religious boundaries. The ICG identifies the presence of the violent Islamic organisation Boko Haram and the swift rise of the number of Revivalist churches as particularly dangerous developments. Both developments, argue the reports, lead to increased religious intolerance and a strengthening of boundaries between religious groups (International Crisis Group 2014; 2015; 2016).

To prevent the outbreak of conflict, the reports list recommendations for policy makers, religious leaders and NGOs. Their key advice is to work towards a behavioural and attitudinal change in groups at risk of radicalisation, notably youth. In line with the conclusions of the ICG, several institutions (e.g. local NGOs, the American embassy in Yaoundé, the Cameroonian government) have organised conflict prevention programs, which mostly focus on inter religious dialogue and policing youth 'at risk'. This indicates that they either followed the recommendations of the ICG, or have drawn similar conclusions.

The ICG reports were published in a global context of increasing interest in conflict with religious dimensions which can be dated back to the events of 9/11. Scholars and policy makers have since paid more attention to religious issues in conflict dynamics. As a result, inter religious dialogue projects have increased globally, as has the number of grants made available for academic research and intervention strategies that aim to address and resolve conflict with religious dimensions (Berger 2011; Emerson and Hartman 2006; Hurd 2015; Svensson 2013). Recent reports on conflict dynamics in Africa aim to identify potential hotbeds for religious conflict. There is particular attention for the role of youth, as they are seen as instrumental in promoting or increasing conflict dynamics (Abbink and Kessel 2005; Christiansen, Utas, and Vigh 2006; Knoope and Chauzal 2016; Resnick and Thurlow 2015). There is however still much discussion about if, and if so, why, religion would be particularly prone to induce conflict (Haynes 2009; Hurd 2015).

1.1 Problem Statement

Moving back to the context of Cameroon: Cameroon is a heterogeneous country. Nicknamed 'Africa in miniature', Cameroon's society is intersected by many social boundaries, including, among others, religious, ethnic, and linguistic boundaries. Its religious landscape has historically been characterized by a myriad of religious groups. The country has been applauded by the international community for its peaceful coexistence of many different social groups, in contrast to countries in its vicinity, such as Nigeria and the Central African Republic (CAR) (Fonchingong

2005; Ngeve and Orock 2012). As this thesis will show, the narrative of Cameroon as a diverse yet peaceful country is also promoted by the young Cameroonians who participated in this study.

The ICG reports, however, sketch a different context: one of increasingly problematic boundaries. This raises several questions. What has changed? Are Cameroon's existing structures for facilitating peaceful coexistence are no longer effective? Why are religious boundaries problematised, whereas others are not? And does the situation sketched in the reports reflect the everyday realities of the youth 'at risk'?

This thesis seeks to solve part of this puzzle by exploring how urban youth in Yaoundé perceive the religious landscape of Cameroon and how they engage with the boundaries they identify within this landscape. It follows the assumption that youth are key actors in promoting conflict. For this reason, it places youth central in investigating potential conflict dynamics in the country. The central research question is therefore as follows:

How do urban youth in Yaoundé, Cameroon, identify, experience and respond to boundaries between religious groups in their everyday lives, and in what way does their response shape boundary construction along religious lines?

The study rests on a review of conceptual literature around social identity and boundary construction. This theoretical basis is used to ground the critical analysis of an ethnographic research conducted in Yaoundé in 2016. The main data source for this study is formed by interviews, informal conversations and observations, conducted during five months of field research.

The thesis takes a social constructivist approach to understand when boundaries become problematic. The academic departure point is the idea that social identification, including identification with religious groups, is a dialogical process which may have different outcomes in different situations (Hermans and Konopka 2010). Following Eriksen (2002), another theoretical assumption underlying this thesis is the idea that boundaries are situational. They are not problematic by character, but are made as such by those engaging with them. Combining these theories, this thesis argues that processes of social identification influence whether boundaries are perceived as problematic or not problematic in specific situations. This theoretical background is used to interpret and explain the way urban youth in Yaoundé think about the boundaries between religious groups and engage in interactions across these boundaries.

The research found that three ways of engagement with boundaries between religious groups can be distinguished: strengthening, ignoring and bridging these boundaries. How, when and why these different ways of engaging with boundaries are employed is situational en dependent on the specific context. These conclusions do not only provide more in-depth understanding of how boundaries across religious lines may become problematic, but also shed light on the ways in which potential problems are already mitigated and solved by the youth who took part in this research.

Herein lies also the relevance of this study. The topic of this thesis is placed within the theoretical debate on boundary construction and conflict. Many studies have focused on understanding conflict dynamics by investigating how conflict strengthens boundaries and vice versa. With this thesis, however, I add to this discussion by arguing that to understand conflict dynamics, it is useful to take a broad outlook on engagement with boundaries. Not only can this improve insight in when these boundaries may become problematic, it can also uncover structures and processes that are possibly already present which help to mitigate tensions between (religious) groups. As will be argued in the conclusion to this thesis, intervention strategies that aim to prevent conflict need to tap into these existing solutions. This will likely make them more effective, as they will be grounded in a thorough understanding of local realities.

1.2 Structure

This thesis is structured as follows: chapter two explores state-of-the-art academic literature on social identity and boundary construction. The following background chapter discusses the context of Cameroon. Chapter four explains the research approach and methods employed to conduct the field research in Yaoundé. The following three empirical chapters describe and discuss the results of the fieldwork conducted in Cameroon. Chapter five analyzes how youth describe the religious landscape of Cameroon. It identifies which religious groups they recognize and how these groups relate to one another. Chapter six moves from youth's general perspective on the religious landscape to their personal positioning within this landscape. Chapter seven describes how youth think about and engage in interactions across boundaries between religious groups. Finally, chapter eight concludes this research by linking the results to the academic debate as outlined in chapter two. It discusses the limitations of this study and ends with recommendations for further research.

2 Theoretical framework

This theoretical framework aims to explore state-of-the-art literature on social identity and boundary construction in relation to the position of youth in heterogeneous societies. I use this theory to understand how urban youth in Yaoundé engage with boundaries between religious groups.

As explained in the introduction, (international) organisations such as the ICG make assumptions about how the boundaries between religious groups in Cameroon are increasingly problematic. They expect that the increasing number of (radical) religious groups and a subsequent multitude of interests to lead to conflict. Youth are assumed to play a central role in problematising boundaries and exacerbating tensions between religious groups. However, Cameroon's diversity and history of peaceful coexistence of many different social groups, including religious ones, calls into question why such boundaries now become problematic. To better understand the situation, this thesis therefore explores how urban youth in Yaoundé engage with boundaries between religious groups. As will be argued in the empirical chapters, urban youth in Yaoundé respond to the changing religious landscape in various ways. The theory outlined in this chapter will be used to interpret and understand these differences.

This theoretical chapter aims to give an insight in the academic basis in thinking about group identity and boundary construction. It theorizes religion as an identifier for individuals and social groups and outlines scholarly perspectives on social identity and group boundaries, including when these boundaries may become problematic. It opens up discussion about the various viewpoints from which to consider issues of religion and conflict in relation to social identity and group boundaries, explaining, for example, how a heterogeneous society may, in fact, have incorporated strategies that help contain conflict.

The first section explains outlines how the category of 'youth' is theorized and why this category is relevant to focus on in relation to conflict dynamics. The second section explores state-of-the-art literature on social identity and boundary construction. The third section goes deeper into interaction across boundaries in heterogeneous societies, theorizing when boundaries become problematic.

2.1 Youth and conflict

'Youth' as an analytical category is problematic. It entails a large and heterogeneous group which can hardly be captured under one heading. The UNESCO framework on youth defines youth as anyone between the ages of 15 and 35. For practical reasons, these age-brackets are more commonly used for delimiting the category, as I will do in this thesis as well (Klein Klouwenberg and Butter 2011). However, the group is associated with more characteristics than age. Recent literature on African urban youth has often focused on the ambivalent character of the group (Abbink and Kessel 2005; Boeck and Honwana 2005; Klein Klouwenberg and Butter 2011).

However, this ambivalence might be inherent to any a group as broad and diverse as this one (Philipps 2014).

What is understood by ‘youth’ is socially constructed, which means that it depends on specific contexts and settings in time and space. In the Western world, being young is generally associated with a period in ones life which is characterized by personal development, carelessness and happiness. This forms a contrast with sub-Saharan African youth (among which youth in Cameroon), who in many cases have been working for their livelihood from a very young age (Boeck and Honwana 2005; Klein Klouwenberg and Butter 2011). Youth are generally seen as one of the most vulnerable groups in African urban settings. Youth unemployment rates are high in most larger cities in sub-Sahara Africa. Youth often work in the informal sector and are highly dependent on networks to secure an income (Abdoumalig 2005). In addition, they are, among other things, often subject to “marginalisation, uncertain social status, economic hardship and eroding educational opportunities” (Klein Klouwenberg and Butter 2011, 58). As a result, competition among youth is high, the functioning of common morality and ethics is low, and many youth obtain an income in the illegal sector (Boeck and Honwana 2005; Klein Klouwenberg and Butter 2011; Philipps 2014; Resnick and Thurlow 2015).

Summarizing this, what is means to be ‘youth’ in sub-Saharan African contexts is associated with insecurity and hardship. Academics and policy makers argue that this situation may lead to discontent, which in turn may lead to the participation in violent actions with the aim of (re)gaining control over their living situation (United Nations 2015), as is expressed in the following quotation:

“We know violent extremism flourishes when human rights are violated, aspirations for inclusion are ignored and too many people – especially the world’s young people with their hopes and dreams – lack prospects and meaning in their lives.” (Ban Ki Moon 2015)

With this quotation, the former secretary-general of the United Nations suggests that the marginalised position of youth is directly linked to the ‘flourishing’ of violent extremism, a form of conflict which is often related to religion and religious groups (Modirzadeh 2016; United Nations 2015). As youth both take up a large portion of the population and are considered to be most at risk of being involved in conflict situations, their perspective will be the focus for this thesis.

2.2 Social identification and boundary construction

Cameroon’s religious landscape is constructed by many different religious groups. Its composition is changing, which means that the existing boundaries between religious groups are interpreted and understood differently, and that new boundaries appear. Organisations from outside Cameroon problematise this change, as they fear it may lead to conflict. They see Cameroonian youth, who position themselves in this landscape, as primary actors in this process of polarisation. But how do the youth themselves see and respond to this changing situation? The next sections explore state-of-the-art academic literature on social groups, identity and boundary construction. This theory can be used to better understand how a religious landscape is shaped and how youth position themselves in it.

This section is structured as follows. Section 2.2.1 will outline Social Identity Theory, focusing on how social groups are socially constructed and situational. Section 2.2.2 explains how individuals come to identify with a myriad of social groups, making use of Hermans and Konopka's Dialogical Self Theory. Section 2.2.3 describes how boundaries between groups are constructed in a dialogical process of social identification. I conclude by linking these theories to each other. I argue that how youth position themselves in a heterogeneous society shapes social groups and their boundaries, and vice versa.

2.2.1 Social identity theory

As explained in the introduction to this thesis, (international) organisations, among which the ICG, problematise inter group relations as the composition and character of religious groups in Cameroon is changing. Together these groups form Cameroon's religious landscape, which is in turn positioned within and shaped by the heterogeneous context of Cameroon. In order to understand how urban youth in Yaoundé position themselves within this religious landscape, it is useful to look at the issue from a social identity approach.

Identity is generally defined as a person's understanding of one's 'self'. It is a narrative: a theory that describes, interrelates and explains an individual's personal characteristics and the different roles and relationships in which the individual is engaged. It can, to a certain extent, provide unity and purpose (Grotevant 1992; McAdams 2001). A person's identity is situational, dependent on personal experiences and specific contexts. For this reason, identity is not fixed but fluid, and changes over time. It is not merely a psychological phenomenon that is gradually unearthed by the individual to whom it applies (McAdams 2001).

Social Identity Theory (SIT) is a classical theory from the social psychology. Social identity refers to the notion of sharing identifiers (or I-positions, as I will explain in the next subsection) with others. The basis of SIT is the idea that identity is a social construct, developed in recognition of commonalities between people and groups. This categorizes people in social groups. According to SIT, individuals define their own identities with regard to these groups. By doing so, these groups are in turn socially constructed, which means that they are fluid, flexible and situational in terms of both membership and characteristics (Abrams and Hogg 2004; Eriksen 2004; 2015; Tajfel 1974).

Social groups are comprised of group members who may share certain categorical attributes, such as (physical) characteristics, values, ideas, symbols, myths and practices. Such commonalities can fortify the internal unity of a social group. However, the categorical attributes of a group are not fixed and may change over time. The internal unity of social groups can be reinforced through education and an inter generational transfer of categorical attributes. Yet, a social group can also be small and temporary (Camilleri and Malewska-Peyre 1997; Jeong 2008; Tajfel 1978). Identification with a certain social group can be accompanied by emotional and value significance of being a member of this group, such as a positive feeling of belonging. A strong sense of membership identity generally increases this emotional significance and, therefore, heightens feelings of solidarity and allegiance with other in-group members (Abrams and Hogg 2004; Eriksen 2004).

To be a member of a specific group, an individual does not necessarily have a personal relationship with (all) other members. This is especially relevant in relation to identification with large collectives, in contrast to small, local group membership in which personal relationships are more influential than symbolic group construction, (although these are not mutually exclusive). Subsequently, some groups have more social cohesion than others (Brewer and Pierce 2005; Durkheim 2014; Sen 2015). Social groups can be mobilized to a certain end, thereby functioning as a political force (Jeong 2008). In addition, social groups can be considered a cultural or social resource, creating membership access to certain opportunities such as jobs or travels through the group's networks or financial means. Other membership benefits can be less concrete (but no less valuable), such as feelings of belonging and recognition. An important reason for people to change their membership of a particular social group to another can therefore be that this other group offers specific tangible or intangible benefits to the individual (Eriksen 2002; Sen 2015).

People identify with different social groups at the same time. These groups may have different characteristics and interests. These social groups, and the individual members of these groups, influence and shape each other. Increased identification with one particular group may lead to a decreased identification with another, and the other way around. In addition, some groups overlap completely, others only partly, and again other groups do not overlap at all. Where one group ends and another begins is socially constructed. Group boundaries change over time, as does their relevance for an individual (Eriksen 2004; Hermans and Konopka 2010; Sen 2015). Both dynamics will be explained in more detail in the next subsections.

In conclusion, this subsection describes the 'self' as a heterogeneous, ever-changing narrative. How this narrative is constructed is situational and can be explained using a social identity approach. The basis of the SIT is the idea that all identifiers a person can have relate them to others who share this same identification. Every individual is a member of multiple social groups, which are socially constructed in recognition of a shared identity. Not only are these memberships and their relative importance dependent on specific situations, individuals may also have a different approach in making sense of the complexity of their - or others' - social identity. Identity construction is therefore influenced by the complex interplay of different group memberships - and influences these groups in turn. The next subsection explores more deeply the relationship between different social groups by explaining how individuals understand the self in relation to the groups they identify with.

2.2.2 The dialogical self

In the past twenty years, scholars on identity theory have put emphasis on the presence of 'multiple identities' in one and the same individual. The basis of this idea is that identity is not essentialist: rather than explaining identity to be fixed by some core, singular, universal properties, it is contested, multiple and shifting, and is embedded in various cultural and historical practices. Identity is constructed of different elements, and the relation between these elements requires constant renegotiation (Bhatia 2002; Sen 2015). This is in line with SIT as this theory explains how individuals are linked to multiple social groups through social identification. The interplay of these

groups influences the narrative of the self. However, where SIT adequately describes what shapes social groups and what in-group and out-group membership means for individuals, it is limited in explaining how individuals relate to and move between the different social groups they identify with. This subsection explains identity construction as a dialogical process in which different aspects of one's self take dominance over others in specific situations.

An influential theory on multiple identities is the 'dialogical self theory' (DST), as developed by Hermans and Konopka (2010). DST explains the self as diverse and engaged in encounters (e.g. cultural or social) which lead to a constant reconstruction of identity. Within the self, a dynamic multiplicity of identifiers, or 'I-positions'¹, exist which are in dialogue with each other in order to establish a coherent (yet temporary) narrative of the self. Each encounter or situation requires a new dialogue. Thus, the narrative of the self may change slightly or significantly, as the different I-positions negotiate their dominance in each specific situation. Relating DST to social identity theory, all I-positions refer to social identities that are being shared by multiple individuals, together forming a social group.

An individual can exercise a certain degree of agency over her/his process of identity construction. The (re)negotiation of identity is dependent on two processes: (1) deciding which of our I-positions (either achieved or ascribed) are relevant in a certain context, and (2), weighing the relative importance of these different I-positions (Sen 2015, 24). In other words: individuals make implicit or explicit choices about which I-positions dominate over others in specific situations.

The I-positions out of which an individual's narrative of the self is constructed can be either internal or external, or a combination of the two (Bhatia 2002; Malhi, Boon, and Rogers 2009). Internal I-positions are actively chosen or achieved by the individual. External I-positions, on the other hand, are assigned to the individual by others, depending on the context and environment (Grotevant 1992; Sen 2015). External I-positions may grow in dominance when many others assign these I-positions to an individual. This subsequently means that how a person thinks of her-/himself may not align completely with how someone else would identify this person. Assigned identity may, however, be incorporated in the narrative of the self if the assignation is persistent. Hermans and Konopka add to this discussion with the notion that different people emphasize different I-positions of an individual, thereby shaping the interaction with this person. In different interactions, different I-positions take the front. In other words: all people engaging in an interaction have some degree of agency over which I-positions (and related groups) are made relevant in this specific situation. Thus, the outcome of the dialogue influences not only the individual's narrative of the self, but also the group which shares this identification and the other groups which were considered in the dialogical process (Grotevant 1992; Hermans and Konopka 2010; Sen 2015).

The previous subsection explained that a group membership can have certain tangible or intangible benefits to an individual. Hermans and Konopka argue that individuals may prefer an I-position that gives them certain (membership) benefits in a specific situation. In other situations,

1 In talking about the different facets of a person's identity, Bhatia and Sen use the term 'multiple identities', whereas Hermans and Konopka use the term 'I-positions'. I prefer the latter and will continue using this concept in this thesis. To me, the term 'multiple identities' suggests that these identities are fixed and have equal weight. 'I-positions' are more flexible, as positions can shift and gain or lose importance.

these particular benefits may not be present, and it can instead be beneficial to allow another I-position to dominate. Simultaneously, individuals also take group interests into account. They do not only make rational choices to benefit themselves personally, but they may also consider how certain groups they identify with can benefit from the position they take (Hermans and Konopka 2010; Sen 2015). However, people are not wholly rational actors who can perfectly predict advantages and disadvantages of their positioning. This thesis will thus not focus on why youth position themselves in a certain way, but rather on what their positioning might say about how they see the religious landscape and how their positioning may influence relations between groups, as will be theorized in the remainder of this chapter.

In summary, the dialogue or negotiation between the different I-positions and related social identities can have a different outcome in each different situation. In this way, individuals position themselves differently in relation to the groups they identify with in each situation as well, thereby also influencing the inter group relations (Hermans and Konopka 2010; Sen 2015). Approaching social identity as a dialogical process helps to understand individuals' engagement with social groups as a flexible, ever-changing dynamic. As will be explained later in this chapter, this agency in identity construction is important in understanding positionality and interactions in plural societies, in which individuals can feel torn between different identities with competing interests.

2.2.3 Boundary construction

As explained in the previous sections, social groups are not fixed. They are social constructs, which means that they are viewed and understood differently by different people. Where one social group ends and another begins can therefore be understood by taking a relational approach: the groups are defined through their relationship to others. In this view, it is the boundary between group X and group Y, and not the characteristic differences between them, that constitutes their distinctness. What distinguishes one group from another is thus not determined by the inherent character of the groups, but the boundary itself that is being put in place to mark the difference. In other words: where people see a boundary, this is where the boundary is constructed (Eriksen 2002; Jeong 2008).

Group boundaries draw a dividing line between in-group and out-group members. Group characteristics can change without a change in boundaries, and two distinct groups can become more similar or more different. The characteristics of different groups may even strongly overlap. Cultural differences are only important when they influence interaction between different groups (Eriksen 2002). If groups share categorical attributes, group boundaries may become more vague, especially when interaction between the groups increases. However, this is not necessarily the case (Jeong 2008). Groups may be formed initially with weak and flexible boundaries, yet become more rigid in a later stage of their development as a result of internal or external changes. Individuals within and outside groups may argue for stronger or weaker group boundaries depending on their personal experiences and identification (Jeong 2008).

By defining the boundaries of specific social groups, it is defined who do belong to the group (the in-group members) and who are excluded (the out-group members). Describing the out-group is a conscious or unconscious process, also referred to as 'othering' (Baumann 2002).

Describing the in-group, then, is indicated through the concept of ‘selfing’. This process, too, is situational: the boundaries of social groups are flexible and influenced by the context. Some groups allow for flexible membership, while other groups do not. If the identity of the in-group is strongly defined, the distinction between in-group and out-group is generally more clear. Simultaneously, the stronger the articulation and recognition of boundaries between two particular groups, the stronger the basis for identification with either one of these groups (Sen 2015).

As explained in the previous subsection, social groups partly overlap, which increases the complexity of defining the boundaries between the in-group and the out-group. If two people in an interaction both identify with several social groups, of which some are shared and some are not, it depends on which group memberships are deemed relevant in this specific interaction whether these people see each other as in-group or out-group members. Deciding in a particular interaction who is the ‘other’ is dependent on the choice of an individual to allow the dominance of one group membership over another. Individuals have (limited) agency in doing so. Explaining this in the terms of DST: in a dialogical process of identification, one I-position is given dominance over others. This means that the related group and group boundaries are made relevant in this particular interaction. If the dialogical process had allowed another group membership to dominate, other boundaries would have been of importance. In other words: boundaries have no inherent value, but are given meaning in specific interactions. Boundaries are relative in the sense that they can be dormant and only become important in specific situations, for example when there is a power disbalance between different groups. In response to a changing environment, certain boundaries can thus become more important when they were not important before (Eriksen 2002).

In short: boundaries between social groups are socially constructed. Depending on the value and relevance attached to a specific group, boundaries are more or less defined, fixed and transcendable. As the findings of the field research suggest, group boundaries can be either strengthened, ignored or bridged by individuals, who are thereby exercising agency over the relations between the different groups they encounter in their everyday lives.

2.2.4 Characterizing religious groups as social groups

For this thesis, it is relevant to have an understanding of religion which explains how it shapes boundary construction in a society. Religious affiliation is frequently understood to be an important I-position for individuals (Hermans and Konopka 2010; Zock 2010). This section will explain the difficulty of defining religion and its characteristics as a social group.

To define “religion” is challenging. Religion is an often disputed concept, as it is difficult to disconnect from other social denominators such as culture and ethnicity. A traditionalist definition of religion would be as follows: “Religion entails the practices, rituals, beliefs, discourses, myths, symbols, creeds, experiences, traditions and institutions by which individuals and communities conceive, revere, assign meaning to, and order their lives around the account of ultimate reality generally understood in relation to God, gods, or a transcendent dimension deemed sacred or holy” (Carlson 2011, 9). However, this definition leaves the difficulty of deciding which groups may be in- or excluded, also referred to as ‘the membership problem’ (Cavanaugh 2009). Carlson (2011)

therefore refers to a functional definition of religious groups as social groups that refer to themselves as a group with religion as its main unifying factor. This is explanation of religion as a social group is in line with the relational approach to defining social groups as is clarified in subsection 2.2.1. The functional definition of religion will be used in this thesis to further explore the relationship between religion, identity and boundary construction.

Religion can offer strong pillars for social identity. Religious groups frequently build on structures of categorical attributes such as symbols and myths that are shared across generations and so help to construct a strong foundation for group identity. Group members share beliefs and cultural practice, as well as, for example, feelings of a common fate and shared history (Eller 2010). Another feature of religious identity is its capacity to transcend national borders and move between the local and the global. An individual's religious group can be as small as the church she/he ascribes to, or as large as the international community of believers, reading and interpreting the same texts in the same way, performing the same rituals and practices at the same time. In other words: a person can identify with a large overarching group (e.g. Christians), a smaller subgroup (e.g. Protestants) and a very small and localized subgroup (e.g. a specific church) at the same time. Whether the local or the international religious group is dominant as a result of a specific dialogical process is, again, situational (Eller 2010; Hermans and Konopka 2010; Zock 2010).

Hermans and Konopka's dialogical self theory, as introduced in the previous section, is especially relevant for explaining religious identity, because its starting point is the multiplicity and complexity of identity construction. What religion means is fluid and situational, different for each individual, and subject to power structures (such as gender and class) that determine the influence of religion on an individual's life. (Hermans and Konopka 2010; Zock 2010). The construction of religious identity is a combination of personal choice or achievement, and ascription (Grotevant 1992; Cadge and Davidman 2006). Subsequently, like most identifiers, religious I-positions will be more dominant for some people than for others in certain situations. In addition, as the influence of religion on a person's self is fluid, this can change over time. Religious membership can change, as can an individual's engagement with this membership (Hermans and Konopka 2010; Zock 2010).

2.3 Problematic boundaries in a plural society

The previous section described how the dialogical process in which a narrative of the self is constructed influences social groups and their boundaries. This section brings together youth and social identity theory in exploring how dynamics of positioning oneself in a heterogeneous or plural society may influence boundaries and thereby the relations between different social groups.

A plural society is originally defined as "a unit of disparate parts which owes its existence to external factors, and lacks a common social will" (Smith 1974 in: Eriksen 2002). The plural society's lack of a common will results, according to Smith, in permanent instability within this society. However, other scholars, among whom the followers of SIT, have debated this view, arguing that "virtually every society is a unit of disparate parts in so far as it consists of competing interest groups" (Eriksen 2002, 48). In other words, social identity theory assumes that all societies are plural societies, as multiple social groups are present within. These social groups are engaged in

inter group interactions, thereby constantly shaping and reshaping the boundaries between these groups, as well as their categorical attributes.

This section explores how boundaries and conflict are related. Section 2.3.1 explores when boundaries become problematic. Section 2.3.2 explains the benefits of having many boundaries intersecting in society. Section 2.3.3 outlines dynamics of boundaries between religious groups. Using this theoretical basis, I argue in the conclusion of this chapter why it is relevant to look at how youth engage with boundaries between (religious) groups when investigating conflict dynamics in Cameroon.

2.3.1 When boundaries become problematic

As the previous section explained, boundaries between groups are only relevant when these boundaries influence interaction between the different groups. This is for example the case when inter group relations are problematic. The purpose of this subsection is to explore the relation between group boundaries and possible conflict dynamics.

Conflict can be defined as the situation that arises when competition between individuals or groups over resources, power, status and prestige “can no longer be contained by the structures and processes ordinarily competent to do so. As a result, after an indeterminate period of confusion and crisis, normal competition moves into phases that are more open, bitter, confrontational, costly, and, frequently, violent” (Lincoln 2003, 74). This definition of conflict is broad. It does not refer only to full-blown war, but to any type of disagreement which is no longer following the structures that have been established to maintain peaceful relations².

Several conflict dynamics can have the effect of strengthening boundaries and vice versa. Firstly, a strong power disbalance between different social groups may invoke grievances which lead to conflict, especially when this power disbalance is a relatively new development. Groups with little power may attempt to increase their share of the cake, whereas more powerful groups generally seek to maintain their position. Related to this, group members of groups who hold little power may be more easily mobilized to engage in acts of conflict when their scope of opportunities is limited. Sudden changes in the power balance may trigger the escalation of normal group competition, but conflict can also develop gradually as an uneven power balance upholds over a longer period of time. As a result of this conflict, the boundaries between the conflicting groups can fortify and become increasingly problematic (Abrams and Hogg 2004; Fearon and Laitin 2003).

Secondly, if the membership of a particular social group becomes the strongest I-position for most of its members, this may heighten the chance of conflict to occur. This dominance of one overarching I-position is conceptualized by Sen (2015) as singular affiliation. As explained before, individuals within a heterogeneous society are likely to identify with multiple groups at the same time, which may have contrasting interests, norms and values (Eriksen 2002). In a dialogical

2 While Lincoln’s definition suggests a gradual development of a situation of competition into a situation of conflict, I understand the movement into conflict more as a dynamic process, dependent on a complex set of factors which influence its direction.

process, individuals weigh the relative importance and interests of these different I-positions in each situation. If one particular I-position structurally dominates the others, however, the boundaries between this group and the other groups may become problematic, because the contradictory interests relating to different group memberships are no longer balanced out. In addition, the exclusiveness of a social group and the extent to which its boundaries are fixed add to the social cleavage between different social groups, lowering the chances (and often the willingness) of finding common ground with competing groups (Eriksen 2002; Sen 2015). Moreover, strong group identification with one group can lead to positive feelings towards the in-group, as explained in subsection 2.2.1. This can amplify negative attitudes towards the out-group, in which case boundaries can become problematic (Abrams and Hogg 2004; Brown 2020). Related to this, group membership can be overcommunicated or undercommunicated (emphasized or downplayed) by both in-group and out-group members (Eriksen 2002). One example of overcommunication is identity politics, which can be defined as the political strategy to emphasize the importance of one overarching identity in order to increase power for the social group connected to it. A result of identity politics is that group boundaries are fortified and group formation is more exclusive, presenting a strong internal identity and setting itself sharply apart from the out-group (Jeong 2008). This active process of ‘selfing’ and ‘othering’ is likely to increase conflict between social groups. Violence is more easily done to out-group members, especially when the in-group adheres to a narrative of worth-less-ness of the out-group (Eller 2010; Juergensmeyer 2003).

Thirdly, identification with a particular group increases when the group perceives itself as threatened (Eller 2010). When a group is threatened, a common response of group members is to identify with this group more strongly. As a result, the boundaries between this group and others become more rigid. This threat can occur in relation to access to resources, as explained before, but also in relation to group identity. For example, when certain groups have a negative attitude towards others because these carry prejudice or stigma’s. Prejudice can increase the felt marginalisation of the group subjected to this prejudice, thereby sharpening the tensions between different groups (Eller 2010; Sen 2015). In addition to threats in the present, the collective memory of past injustice can also invoke polarization between groups that have historically been in conflict, even when this conflict has long since been resolved (Eller 2010). Collective feelings of humiliation and trauma, for example after an episode of severe discrimination or prosecution, are important triggers for a “never again” sentiment which may explain an early resort into conflict or violence as a protection mechanism (rather than, for example, diplomacy). In other words: both present and past threat can problematise the boundaries between different groups (Eller 2010; Posman 2011).

As explained in section 2.2.3, boundaries themselves carry no value. They are situational and only strong insofar as they are given meaning by those who engage with them. In a heterogeneous society, the fact that boundaries are widely recognized does not necessarily mean that they are strong. In addition, strong boundaries between two groups do not equal problematic boundaries. From the above can nevertheless be concluded that an important element in the development of conflict between two groups is a strong boundary separating the one group from the other. Conflict generally strengthens boundaries, and vice versa: strong or strengthening boundaries may make it easier for conflict to occur. In the dynamics described above, it is not always evident which element comes first. However, they do suggest that a changing engagement with group

boundaries may indicate that conflict is present, or that the conditions are increasingly favourable for conflict to arise.

2.3.2 The perks of plural societies

While the previous subsection explores when and why boundaries between groups may become problematic, the presence of boundaries can also reduce social tensions.

On a societal level, when multiple groups are engaged in interaction based on mutual dependence, the segmentation of interests prevents the development of conflict over one subordinate issue (Jeong 2008). Different groups have different interests, and the more groups are present, the more interests need to be taken into account. In addition, the multiplicity of social groups may prevent one group to gain dominance over the others, thereby reducing the power disbalance in a society. While dominating one part of society, a social group may have marginal influence in another. This prevents polarization (Eriksen 2002; Jeong 2008).

On an individual level, as explained in the first section to this chapter, each individual holds multiple I-positions, connected to multiple social groups. Not all groups an individual identifies with are of similar size and strength, nor are they independently positioned next to each other. As a result, people are likely to balance out or negotiate the interests of the different groups they identify with. The fact that their interests are shattered and sometimes mutually contradicting reduces block formation. In the same way, the diversity of group members of a large, overarching group may prevent this group from taking an antagonising position (Sen 2015).

Besides personal identification, people engage with others in social encounters (e.g. through work or where they live or the places they visit). These others may have different interests from them, too, yet both parties have an interest in maintaining their peaceful interactions. This also prevents conflict over interests (Eriksen 2015). Moreover, the fact that there are so many social groups present heightens the chance that different people in an interaction share at least one of their various I-positions. Overarching identities that are shared by people who simultaneously identify with multiple lower level identity groups can function to promote peace between these smaller groups.

2.3.3 Boundaries between religious groups

Relating the above reflections on boundaries and conflict to identification with religious groups, it can be argued that religious identification may also lead to problematic boundaries. Religious groups can be marginalised, stigmatised and threatened, as well as become a main identifier for an individual or be instrumentalised for political gain. In other words: religion as a denominator for social groups can play an important role in triggering conflict (Eller 2010; Juergensmeyer 2003; Posman 2011).

On the other hand, as described above, there are many ways in which one can identify and experience ones religious identification. For some, religion is a frequently dominant I-position,

whereas for others it may be a more dormant identifier. Some people identify strongly with a small, localized religious group characterized by a strong social cohesion, whereas others may identify more with a global group of anonymous believers (Hermans and Konopka 2010; Zock 2010). In any case, identification with religious groups is, like any identification, flexible and situational.

Especially since the events of 9/11, many scholars have focused on explaining how and why religion (in particular Islam) is prone to provoke conflict³. However, none of these scholars explain why religion is especially apt to trigger conflict, in contrast to other I-positions such as ethnicity. The previous subsections have shown that group boundaries may become problematic as a result of various processes, rooted in a specific context. Conflict is situational and not a logical and inevitable result of specific religious ideas or identification. For this reason, in order to understand the relationship between boundaries between religious groups and conflict, one should look at the conditions under which certain beliefs and practices become violent (Cavanaugh 2009; Kippenberg 2010).

2.4 Conclusion

Youth make up a large portion of many sub-Saharan urban environments, including that of Yaoundé. They are perceived as central actors in conflict situations. To better understand when and why boundaries between religious groups in Cameroon become problematic, it is therefore useful to explore how youth engage with these boundaries.

The theoretical argument outlined in this chapter can be summarized as follows: personal identification can be understood as a changing narrative. It results from a dialogical process in which an individual's different I-positions negotiate dominance. I-positions are socially constructed and can be assigned or achieved, or a combination of both. All I-positions relate the individual to others who share this same I-position, thereby constructing social groups. These groups are socially constructed and therefore fluid, flexible and situational. They are shaped by interactions between in-group as well as out-group members. Their boundaries are socially constructed and only meaningful when they shape interaction in turn.

Conflict can strengthen boundaries as tensions between groups are rising. Conversely, a strengthening of boundaries through a growing dominance of one specific group can heighten the chance of conflict to occur. In both cases, boundaries between groups are increasingly problematic. The presence of boundaries in itself, however, is not necessarily a problematic issue. Social diversity may also prevent the development of conflict, as individuals are involved in multiple groups and relationships and are interdependent on each other in a heterogeneous society. This can minimize the risk of conflict, as it balances multiple interests and prevents the development of one overarching societal cleavage.

In short: through the dialogical process of identification, all people in a society play a role in giving meaning to boundaries between groups. By doing so, they have a limited influence on whether boundaries are emphasized or downplayed. For this reason, it can be relevant to investigate

³ See for example (Eller 2010; Esmail 2011; Juergensmeyer 2003; Lincoln 2003; Svensson 2013).

youth's engagement with boundaries between religious groups to learn more about conflict dynamics in a society.

3 Background

This chapter gives a general overview of several elements of Cameroon's history and characteristics, as they have strongly influenced the case described in this thesis. The first section gives a brief overview of Cameroon's characteristics.

3.1 Cameroon: a brief sketch

Cameroon is a presidential republic situated in the middle of the African coast, right between the regions generally referred to as West and Equatorial Africa. According to the most recent estimations, Cameroon's population counts almost 28 million people (CIA 2018). In this subsection, I describe several elements of Cameroon: colonial and post-independence politics; economy; current political crises; diversity; and the capital Yaoundé.

Colonial and post-independence politics

Cameroon's first official borders were established in 1884, then as the German colony Kamerun. Over the years these borders have shifted slightly, but the country currently covers more or less the same territory. During this time of German colonization, the first idea of a Cameroonian national identity arose as all regions were under the same system of colonial administration (Anchimbe 2013; Gilbert and Reynolds 2012). In 1916, after the defeat of Germany in the first World War, the League of Nations divided the formerly German territories as mandate territories of the allied forces. German Kamerun was divided between Great Britain and France. The 'British Cameroons' were considered to be an administrative unit under the federation of the bordering Nigeria, which was also ruled by the British. France ruled the (four times larger) Cameroun as a united territory, distinctive from other territories in French Equatorial Africa (Fanso 1999). In 1959 the British Cameroons split up into the Northern Cameroons, integrating with Nigeria, and the Southern Cameroons. In 1960, following a period of an increased call for independence, French Cameroon gained independence as *La République du Cameroun*. In 1961, the British Southern Cameroons and the independent Republic of Cameroon reunited as an independent two-state federation with two prime ministers, federal legislature and a single president (Fonchingong 2005).

The first president of the Republic of Cameroon was the francophone Amadou Ahidjo, supported by the French government. One of Ahidjo's primary concerns was the creation of unity in a country that was divided along cultural, tribal, religious and linguistic boundaries. To reach this goal, Ahidjo focused on the development of a strong idea of national identity. His efforts led to a referendum in 1972 which proposed Cameroon's development into a unitary state. This proposal was accepted with a shaky 'yes', which resulted in the creation of the United Republic of Cameroon (Fonchingong 2005). Paul Biya succeeded Ahidjo in 1982. In 1984, he changed the name of the United Republic to simply 'Republic of Cameroon': the name of Francophone Cameroun before reunification. A multiparty democracy was constituted in 1991 (Fanso 1999; Mbaku and Takougang 2004). 85-year old Biya has never left the presidential seat since taking office in 1982

Economy

Under the lead of Paul Biya, the country underwent drastic changes in the 1990s. These changes were driven partly by international organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank, like in many other African countries during that time (Gilbert and Reynolds 2012). After an economic crisis in the 1990s, poverty rates and income inequality dropped at the end of that decade (Mbaku and Takougang 2004).

Despite economic growth in some regions, the poverty rates are gradually increasing again. Associated problems are high unemployment rates, poor education and health care infrastructures, limited access to clean water and sanitation, corruption and insufficient social safety nets. Poverty is especially prevalent in rural areas (CIA 2018).

Current political crises

The current political context is characterized by patrimonial relations between state and society, in which corruption and nepotism play a large role. The ruling party and the several influential politicians within it serve as channels to access state-centered opportunities in the form of jobs, public contracts, and so on (Human Rights Watch 2019; Orock 2013).

The last elections took place in 2018. Paul Biya won again, but voter turnout was historically low (Maclean 2018) Before and after the elections, government security forces have used excessive force to silence the political opposition. Demonstrations in Yaoundé and other main cities, in the period leading up to and following the elections, have been violently repressed. Hundreds of opposition members and supporters have been arrested and are still awaiting trial (Amnesty International n.d.; Human Rights Watch 2019).

Another political crisis in Cameroon is known as ‘the anglophone problem’. Since reunification, tensions have existed between the anglophone and the francophone regions. Currently, militant separatists who call themselves “Ambazonians” are battling for independence of the anglophone regions. The current conflict can be dated back to just before I left Yaoundé. On October 1, 2016, teachers and lawyers demonstrated against the ‘francophonisation’ of the legal and education systems in the anglophone regions. These demonstrations fit into a long line of demonstrations against the perceived marginalisation of the anglophone provinces since reunification. The violent response of government security forces to anglophone protests in recent years has added to the felt resentment, thereby exacerbating the conflict. Numerous human rights violations have been carried out by both government forces and armed separatists, including killing, torture, kidnapping, and the torching of villages. Since 2016, over 3000 civilians and hundreds of security forces personnel have been killed in this conflict. More than 200.000 inhabitants of the anglophone provinces are internally displaced or have fled to the neighbouring Nigeria (Eyoh 1998; Fanso 1999; Human Rights Watch 2019; Mbom 2017; Obaji Jr 2017).

While the above political developments have taken place after the field research, from the data collected for this study can be concluded that the dissatisfaction of youth with the political

status quo underlying these crises could already be felt in the accounts of many of my respondents. Throughout this thesis, I argue that this dissatisfaction may also influence Cameroon's religious landscape.

Diversity

Cameroon is nicknamed *le petit Afrique*, or Africa in miniature, because of its striking diversity in various domains, including geography, ethnicity, religion and economy. The diverse landscapes of Cameroon have historically stimulated the development of a variety of livelihoods (Fonchingong 2005; Ngeve and Orock 2012). Cameroon has at least 14 different ethnic groups. 24 major African language groups are spoken within the country, which according to several respondents of this research translate into over two hundred different languages and dialects. The official languages of Cameroon, however, are English and French (CIA 2018). Cameroon's different regions and social groups have historically been in close interaction. Mobility within the country, especially from rural areas to the cities, is high. Inter-marriage between groups is common, as are diverse workplaces and neighbourhoods (CIA 2018; Fonchingong 2005).

From 1996 onward, Biya adopted a divide-and-rule tactic that is often referred to as the 'son of the soil syndrome' or 'autochthonisation politics'. District government officials were replaced along ethno-regional lines, particularly in rural areas. This resulted in a differentiation in access to citizenship rights for specific populations. This factionalisation along ethno-regional lines was masked by slogans of unity and pace, such as the country motto "Peace - Work - Fatherland". As a result, both feelings of national and regional identity were strongly developed at the end of the 1990s (Anchimbe 2013).

The fact that Cameroon has maintained peace for a long time despite its heterogeneity has been widely praised by the international community. Indeed, Cameroon has long been a safe haven in a region of turmoil and conflict (UNHCR 2012).

Yaoundé

The field research for this study took place in Yaoundé. Yaoundé is Cameroon's capital, situated in the francophone central region. According to a 2020 census, the city has a population of almost four million (slightly more than the port city Douala) (CIA 2018). Yaoundé is the administrative center of Cameroon, where Douala is known as the economic capital. Its infrastructure is developed primarily to serve the civil service and the diplomatic services. However, the city holds many other economic activities. The services sector is important, and it is a communications hub for road, rail and air transport. Nevertheless, like in Douala, many of the city's inhabitants are expected to make a living in the informal sector (Abdoumaliq 2005). Cameroon's high urbanisation rate is felt strongly in Yaoundé, which has to cope with the associated challenges of a swiftly swelling population number, including limited access to schools, clinics, jobs, sanitation and clean water (Annie-Claude Pial 2014). Yaoundé has many places of worship, including both Christian churches and Muslim mosques. However, there are no official records on the presence of religious groups in Yaoundé.

3.2 Religion in Cameroon

According to 2018 estimates, 71,2% of the Cameroonians are Christians (of which 38.8% are Roman Catholic, 25.5% Protestant and 6.9% other), 24.4% Muslim, 2.2% animist, 0.5% other and 2.2% none. The majority of Muslims are Sunni, but there are no official numbers on the division of Muslims over the various Islamic denominations present in Cameroon (CIA 2018). In this thesis I will refer to 'Muslims' and 'Christians' as main religious groups, and to the various denominations as subgroups, in line with the theory on social groups as outlined in the previous chapter.

Religion in Cameroon is strongly related to ethnicity and region. For example, in the west and south of the country, the Christian religion dominates. In the northern regions the number of Muslims is relatively high, although the overall population is quite evenly divided over Muslims and Christians. The anglophone provinces, bordering Nigeria, are predominantly Protestant. Most cities have a significant population of both Christians and Muslims. In addition, the characteristics of religious belief and practice differ per region. For instance, Muslims from the north, who mainly belong to the Fulani ethnic group Fulani, practice their religion differently than Muslims from the West region, who are mostly part of the Bamoun ethnic group. Aspects of animist beliefs are present in the belief systems of Christians, Muslims and other religious groups. However, they are mostly practiced in rural areas (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor 2019; CIA 2018).

Cameroon is a secular state. Freedom of religion and worship is a constitutional right. While religious institutions such as churches are required to register, this law is not observed. Many small institutions operate without official authorization. The government does not require traditional religious groups to register (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor 2019). Some scholars argue that religious groups, in a reflection of Cameroon's political structure, have a patrimonial relation with their members, offering opportunities for opportunities for social advancement to individuals in return for political or financial support (Orock 2013).

One of the most visible changes in the religious landscape of Cameroon over the past decade has been the emergence of Revival churches. Most of these churches are unregistered. The development of these churches is often explained against a background of sociocultural instability and fundamental disagreements between the state and the mainline religious institutions. One of the attractions of the Revival churches is understood by scholars in sociology of religion to be the churches' promises of material and immaterial gain: the so-called 'prosperity gospel'. This gospel is based on the idea that 'good' followers of the church – those who pray frequently and contribute financially – will receive happiness and worldly success as a divine reward for their efforts. According to recent studies, Cameroon's Revival churches mainly attract women and youth. This is explained by these groups' relative socioeconomic vulnerability in the society of Cameroon, where unemployment rates, for example, are relatively higher for these groups than for others (Akoko 2002; 2007; Hunt 2000; Lado 2009; Riis and Woodhead 2010).

A final dynamic which needs discussion here is the presence of the militant group Boko Haram in the north of Cameroon. The group, identifying itself as an Islamic organisation, has carried out violent attacks in Cameroon since 2014. These attacks have led to many civilian deaths,

as well as the demolition of mosques and churches, kidnappings, theft and destruction of property. Boko Haram recruits among Cameroonian citizens, notably youth from the north. The presence of Boko Haram has led to a stigmatisation of Muslims in the country. Since 2014, both the Cameroonian government and civil society have initiated programs in an effort to minimize the destructive effects of Boko Haram, focusing mainly on inter religious dialogue and sensibilisation campaigns to prevent religious radicalisation and promote the peaceful existence of different religious groups (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor 2019; De Marie Heungoup 2016; Dynamique Mondiale des Jeunes 2015; Human Rights Watch 2019).

3.3 Youth in Cameroon

Cameroon has an increasing youth bulge, with more than 60% of the population under the age of 25. The high youth unemployment rates cause discontent. Access to (good quality) education is difficult, partly due to high school fees. Yet even having a diploma does not guarantee a place in the job market. Because of the limited formal economic opportunities available for youth, they are left to find jobs in the informal sector. In addition, many young Cameroonians seek their fortunes abroad. Despite making up the majority of Cameroon's population, young people are underrepresented in the national government. Most members of the established political elite are, like Paul Biya himself, at least sixty years old. This age gap between the young population and the ruling elite increases resentment of youth towards the government (Abdoumaliq 2005; Dynamique Mondiale des Jeunes 2015; 2016a; Nyamnjoh and Page 2002; Ortiz and Cummins 2012)

As described before, youth (and women) are considered to be at the bottom of the sociopolitical ladder. While the context of Cameroon is characterized with uncertainties for all, economic decline is felt most by this same group, partly because they are not necessarily offered the same protection as those associated with the political elite (Nyamnjoh and Page 2002; Oroock 2013). Because of young people's weak socioeconomic position as described above, youth are considered to be most at risk in a situation of conflict, either as the victim or the perpetrator of violence (Dynamique Mondiale des Jeunes 2015; Human Rights Watch 2019).

4 Methodology

The goal of this research is to understand how urban youth in Yaoundé perceive and engage with boundaries between religious groups. This includes investigating how they see Cameroon's religious landscape, how they position themselves in this landscape, and how they respond to interactions across religious boundaries. The case study of this thesis is based on an ethnographic research conducted in Yaoundé. This chapter describes how this research was conducted. The first section describes the research methodology. The second section presents the research field. The third section outlines reflections and limitations of the study.

4.1 Research approach

The case study that forms the basis of this thesis is based on qualitative data, collected in Yaoundé during four and a half months of field research in the period of June - October 2016. In this section, I reflect on the methods used for the data collection.

4.1.1 Methods

The ethnographic methods used for this study includes semi-structured interviews, informal conversations and participant observation. The combination of these methods has allowed for a triangulation of my data. In this subsection, I discuss the different methods used.

Interviews

The research includes 18 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Cameroonian youth living in Yaoundé. Of these interviews, ten interviews were one-on-one and eight were group interviews with two to ten participants.

I chose to do semi-structured interviews, making use of a word spin of interview topics instead of a fixed question list. This interview method allows for a flexible interview style and facilitates a natural flow in the conversation. In addition, it leaves space for respondents to elaborate on issues or experiences that they deem important (Kvale 2008). As a consequence of the semi-structured interview method, the order of the subjects discussed during the interviews differs per interview. Whenever the conversation halted, I could make use of the prepared interview questions to revive the flow of our conversation. Several questions were standard in my interview. These included questions about the personal characteristics of the interviewee(s) (age, profession, how long they have lived in Yaoundé). In addition, I always asked a Grand Tour-question about what, according to the interviewee(s), they could tell me about religion in Cameroon (Bernard 2011; Kvale 2008).

Interview questions asked were phrased in a non-directive way so as to avoid steering the respondents' answers. In addition, I was conscious to stay silent and adopt an active listening stance, to encourage respondents to keep talking. By allowing short silent breaks in the

conversation, respondents could reflect upon what they have said. As a result, respondents would often nuance their previously made statements or add examples or extra information.

The research included eight group interviews. I conducted these interviews in a similar fashion as the one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The benefit of the group interviews was that I collect data both on the responses on my question and on the inter group interaction, which improved insight in how different youth discuss with each other about issues of religion. This was especially insightful when interviewing friends, because they trusted each other and were less likely to give socially expected answers, but really engaged in discussion with one another.

In general, the interviews had a relatively informal 'feel'. I mostly found it easy to break the ice, probably helped by the fact that I was about the same age as the respondents. During most interviews, the conversation was open and flowed naturally. Most interviews lasted around one hour.

Informal conversations

In addition to interviews, 26 informal conversations with urban youth contribute to the collected data. These conversations have taken place on the streets of Yaoundé, with friends or in preparation for semi-structured interviews. What distinguished these conversations from the in-depth interviews is the fact that these conversations were informal, often took place in public spaces such as restaurants, and generally took less time. They were also frequently with multiple persons at once, which allowed the conversation to flow without much of my own interference and which gave me more time to observe what was going on, as I will explain below.

Observations

I also made use of unstructured observation to collect data (Given 2008). For example, observations regarding the visibility of religion and religious groups in the environment of Yaoundé helped me to interpret what the respondents told me about religion in Cameroon. I also paid attention to religion in (social) media.

Before going to Cameroon I had hoped to engage in participant observation in activities which were directly linked to my subject, such as interreligious dialogue projects. However, due to the timing of my research (there were only few programs organised in the summer months) and to financial constraints of the organisations working on these issues, it turned out that no such programs took place during the research period. I did attend some events that taught me more about the place of youth in the society of Cameroon, such as a round table on democratic participation of youth. I also interviewed NGO employees about the projects they had rolled out previously so as to gain an understanding of these initiatives and the role of youth therein.

The interviews, particularly those in French, required most of my attention for making notes and guiding the interview. During the interviews, I could not observe the interviewee's reaction to my questions as well as I had hoped. Informal conversations, however, often took place with and between other people as well. This allowed me to observe while others were talking. This gave me

valuable data on how youth discuss religious issues among each other, and how they interact across religious boundaries.

Triangulation

The combination of the different research methods allowed me to triangulate my data. A risk of interviews is that the interviewee may say things they think the interviewer would like to hear. By comparing the data collected during interviews with what I heard and observed in informal conversations and other interactions, as well as regular streetlife, I could reflect on whether certain opinions or experiences were common or likely. In addition, the different methods enriched the collected data and made it more comprehensive (Bernard 2011).

Confidentiality

With the organised interviews, I asked for consent to use the information at the beginning of each interview. I also informed the interviewee of their right to stop the interview at any point, and their right to refuse answering specific questions. This consent was thus also recorded. In the informal conversations, I asked afterwards whether the person with whom I had talked consented with the use of this information in my research. Because these conversations generally were not recorded, I have no official records of their consent. However, as described above, most conversation partners were aware of my purpose in Cameroon. They therefore knew when they talked with me that I was interested in the subject from an academic perspective.

Throughout this research, I only use the respondents' first names to ensure that their responses remain anonymous. For the respondents whose personal data were relevant for this thesis and who are therefore more recognizable, I replaced their real name with a pseudonym.

As the research concerns an everyday topic which is generally much discussed in Cameroon, there is no significant personal risk involved for the respondents of this research.

4.1.2 Processing data during and after fieldwork

Handwritten field notes, mainly in the form of key words, summarized each interview. I processed these notes on my laptop as soon as possible after the conversation. In addition, each interview was recorded. Because of the semi-structured interview method, some interviews meandered a little and not everything that had been said was relevant to transcribe literally. While transcribing the recordings I therefore focused mainly on the interview parts which complemented the field notes where they were not clear, or where important issues were discussed. When there were parts which I did not find immediately useful for my research, I just noted in key words what had been said.

In addition to recording what had been said during an interview, I also noted details about the setting in which the interview had taken place: where it was held, who had participated and which other persons were present.

After each interview, I summarized the main points discussed during each interview at the top of each interview document. Sometimes an interview went too quickly in French, so that I could

get the point the respondent was making, but I could not record the actual words in which it was made. In these cases I summarized these points in *Italic*.

The informal conversations were not recorded. Sometimes I took notes during the conversation, but most often I jotted down some quick field notes as soon as the conversation had ended so as not to disturb the flow of the conversation. Observations too were recorded by means of field notes. All field notes were processed on my laptop afterwards.

Finally, I wrote part of this thesis two years after I left Cameroon. During these years, my French improved quite a lot, due to French courses and another period in a francophone country. When I went back to writing my thesis, I found that some of my notes or transcriptions were not clear because I had not understood correctly at the time of writing. For this reason, I listened back some of the recordings to better understand what had been said. I did not have time anymore, however, to improve the transcriptions.

4.1.3 Sampling

I found interviewees by making use of non-probability sampling. I combined the snowball sampling method and the respond driven sampling method (Bernard 2011). In addition, I paid attention to find a balanced group of research respondents in terms of socioeconomic background, religious affiliations and gender. By doing so, I aimed to have the research group represent the heterogeneity of the group at the focus of this study: urban youth. I paid specific attention to finding a balanced group of research respondents in terms of socioeconomic background, gender, religious affiliations and neighbourhood.

Because I had limited knowledge of the research topic before starting the fieldwork, I kept the research group deliberately large at the start of my research. Throughout the fieldwork period I reflected on the conversations and adjusted the research group according to my conclusions. In this way, I decided halfway the fieldwork period, for example, to particularly include motor taxi drivers. This group has several characteristics which were relevant in relation to the research questions I was asking (which I will discuss below).

4.2 Introducing the field

The field research took place in Yaoundé, Cameroon. The research group consisted of urban youth. In this section, I describe how I choose both research site and research group and how I negotiated access.

4.2.1 Selecting research sites

As explained in the introduction to this thesis, my interest in Cameroon was sparked by a series of reports of the International Crisis Group on conflict between religious groups in the country. To learn more about the situation, I contacted several people who came from or had visited Cameroon

and who worked in the field of conflict prevention. With them, I spoke about the potential conflict dynamics they identified in the country and what they thought could be interesting research sites.

As I did not really speak French before going to Cameroon, I considered for a while to do research in Bamenda, the capital of one of the anglophone provinces. Based on the conversations I had in preparation of my research, however, I concluded that the problem might not be as present in Bamenda as in other regions of the country.

I also considered the north of Cameroon as my research site, because Boko Haram is active there. It can be assumed that this has changed the relations between Christians and Muslims in this part of the country. However, it was not possible for me to do research there, because the three northern provinces of Cameroon were deemed unsafe for foreign traveler.

I finally chose Yaoundé because it is highly diverse. Being the capital of a country with a high urbanisation rate, people from all over the country, bringing along their religious groups, are represented. It is also one of the few cities outside the north of Cameroon where conflict prevention projects focusing on religious groups were organised. From this I deduced that the organisations responsible must assume or have proof that the city is at risk of the conflict they aim to prevent.

4.2.2 Selecting the research group

As explained in the theoretical framework, the category of youth is problematic because it includes many different subcategories. For practical reasons, the research group of youth comprises all people within the age limit of 15 to 35 years old. In recognition of Cameroon's diversity, the research group has been kept deliberately broad, so as to capture as many perspectives on the research topic as possible (Bernard 2011). I aimed therefore to meet many young people in my first weeks, thereby gaining access to many social networks as well. In total, I spoke to about 50 youth.

At the end of August, when I had spent over two months in the country, I reflected on the variety of respondents I had spoken to thus far. As my first way into the field was facilitated by local NGOs, I had up to then mainly spoken to relatively well-educated youth from middle class families. I had hoped to gain access to groups targeted by NGOs in conflict prevention programmes, but it turned out that none of these programs took place when I was there, in the quiet summer months.

By then I had also developed an interest in the motor taxi men, as they had been mentioned in several conversations as examples of the changing circumstances. According to research by a local NGO, the growing number of motor taxi drivers is seen as alarming by many people. The profession does not provide a stable income and the safety and health risks are considerable. In addition, motor taxi drivers carry a stigma of aggression and uncivilized behaviour (Dynamique Mondiale des Jeunes 2016b). These views were repeated by respondents of my research. According to the people I had spoken to, these motor taxi men were new in the city. While motor taxis had been present in the thriving business town Douala, in Yaoundé they were not common, until recently. My respondents indicated that they were mostly young men who could not find other jobs.

They appeared first in the poorer neighbourhoods of the city. I decided to include interviews with motor taxi men. This ensured that my research respondents were varied in socioeconomic position. In addition, it forced me to go to different neighbourhoods, thereby expanding the scope of my respondents.

This reflection halfway allowed me to broaden the scope of my research, thereby enabling me to gain more in-depth insight. Simultaneously, this comparative approach allowed me to capture the diversity inherent to a broad category such as youth (Philipps 2014).

4.2.3 Negotiating access and building rapport

My first contacts in Cameroon were made during the preparatory phase of my fieldwork, while still in the Netherlands. Via via, I got into contact with several Cameroonians who worked together with Dutch NGOs. Among them was Dupleix Kuenzob, who worked for the local NGO *Dynamique Mondiale des Jeunes* (DMJ). He was my primary gatekeeper into Yaoundé. Dupleix arranged that I could stay at the lodging facilities of another NGO. In addition, he introduced me to his colleagues and invited me to all activities organised by his organisation during the first weeks of my stay. Through him and his organisation, I got to meet my first respondents.

Other respondents I found through meeting people in my neighbourhood. As my research group consisted of young people such as myself, I could easily get in contact. While making friends in my neighbourhood, I simultaneously gained access to larger social networks to which my new friends functioned as gatekeepers. As people asked me what I was doing in Cameroon, the subject of my research was often already discussed during the first introductory conversations with people I had just met.

The fact that I was also young helped to gain the trust of my research respondents. Many of the interviewees cited in this research also became my friends during my brief time in Cameroon. This has created an intimacy and trust which allowed for frank conversations. Another benefit was that I could talk to people multiple times, so I had time to reflect on the first conversation and refer back to this conversation when asking follow-up questions. It also provided me with the opportunity to see whether and if so, how, statements made during conversations and/or interviews were put into practice.

The interviews with the motor taxi men were different from my other interviews in that they mostly took place on the street, in groups of three or more (up to eight at once) young men. In addition, to do these interviews, I had help from two friends. They helped me to explain what the research was for, as the motor taxi men did not always trust me. In addition, they helped me and the motor taxi drivers understand each other. My french was poor, but sometimes the french of these men was poor, too, when they were mostly speaking local languages among each other. In addition, the noise and bustle of the Yaoundé streetlife interfered with my understanding.

This way of interviewing had several advantages and disadvantages. Having conversations with multiple people at the same time allowed me not only note their answers to my questions, but

also how they responded to each other. It gave an insight in the composition of the groups and in the interaction between people from different religious backgrounds. On the downside, the interviews were very chaotic. The men I spoke with often had to leave quickly when they had a customer, so the group of people I was talking to often changed during the conversation, which was difficult to keep track of. In addition, there were more misunderstandings in these conversations because of the chaos. The recordings of these conversations were messy due to the street noise as well, and it was not always clear who was talking. I had to rely strongly on my notes therefore, but they were difficult to take standing on the street and responding to three people talking at once. I tried to minimize these negative sides as much as possible by directly processing my notes after I came home, when I still remembered most of the conversation. In addition, my friends were of great help as they could structure the conversation when I had difficulties understanding or managing the group of young men.

4.3 Reflections

Thankfully, the research subject of religion and religious groups was a popular topic in Yaoundé. I often found myself immersed in conversations about religion without being the one who started them. I was also surprised at the openness of all the youth I spoke to, both those with whom I developed friendships, and random people I met on the streets or in bars. Without exception, my respondents were eager to share their views, which made conducting the research pleasant and interesting.

As a researcher in the field, you are an inevitable part of the social situation you are trying to research. This subsection therefore reflects on how the data collected may be biased by my specific role and position as a researcher (Madden 2017). I discuss how my positionality and my limited French may have influenced the fieldwork results.

4.3.1 Positionality

Being a young, white woman has influenced my research in several ways. As explained before, I was easily approached on the streets of Yaoundé, notably by young men. This made it easy for me to get into contact with youth. I did have to manage expectations and explain that my interest in them was academic rather than romantic, but this was generally not very difficult after I mentioned that I was 'married'. However, as explained above, it made me have to balance my research respondents so that I would also speak to young women. Where men easily approach young women on the streets, I found that young women were generally more hesitant. To get in touch with young women therefore required more effort from my side. I attempted to curb this gender disbalance by actively approaching young women, asking respondents and friends whether they knew of young women who might be interested to participate.

The stereotype that I was white so would be rich sometimes came up, but as I was a student and a young woman, this was not often assumed of me. I do not think this particular stereotype has influenced my research much. I conducted most interviews with people I had generally met multiple times, so they were based on a minimal relation of trust.

On the basis of my appearance, people generally assumed that I was a Christian. If I was directly asked, I mostly responded that I grew up in a predominantly Christian country. When people asked further questions, I explained that I did not believe in God, which was often met with surprise and even suspicion. A few respondents have tried to convert me by discussing bible texts or challenged me by asking in-depth question about the why and how of human existence. Mostly, however, respondents seemed to consider me being an atheist as an exotic quirk. They also often responded with: “That is a personal choice”, or “It does not matter, we are together”. As this thesis will argue, such narratives are often used in Cameroon to smooth relations between people with different opinions or identifications.

I have limited the ‘interviewer effects’ as much as possible by building trust, through being open about the research purpose of my interest and by sharing information about myself as well (Kvale 2008).

4.3.2 Limited knowledge of French

The working language of most of the field research was French, because this is the language which is spoken mostly in Yaoundé. Arriving in Yaoundé, my French was limited to basic conversational skills (A2). While my French improved significantly throughout my stay in Yaoundé, it was challenging to perform the interviews and conversations in French, especially at the start of my research. As a result, it took me a month to feel confident to conduct interviews in French.

As a result of my limited French, however, I did not always understand everything that had been said during an interview. Sometimes my understanding of a certain phrase came only after transcribing the interview. Next to my understanding of the French spoken by the respondents, my own spoken French was limited. Because of this, I could not always phrase my questions in a way that the person I was speaking with understood what I meant, or express nuances by my language. This meant that I did not always ask relevant follow-up questions during the interview, possibly missing interesting information or a more in-depth insight in the topics discussed.

I tried to limit the negative impact of this limitation in several ways. Firstly, I spent a lot of time trying to improve my French by working on my vocabulary and grammar. Throughout my fieldwork period, I improved my French from A2 to B1. Next to this, I made use of English to try and express myself when I could not find the words in French. As Cameroon is theoretically a bilingual country, most of my respondents had a basic knowledge in English and we could understand each other by making use of English words when my French failed. In the interviews with motor taxi men, I also made use of an interpreter in the form of Cédric, who, as described above, functioned as a gate keeper to this group of respondents. Lastly, when I really had the feeling that I had missed things (this happened not only because of the French, but also, for example, because it was difficult to guide a group discussion, as described above), I organised a follow-up interview to be able to go back to some topics discussed too superficially during the first interview. In this way, there was time to reflect on a conversation and ask follow-up questions or explications a next time.

5 Urban youth's perception of the religious landscape

In order to explore how urban youth in Yaoundé engage with boundaries between religious groups, it is imperative to know which boundaries they identify. As explained in the theoretical framework, social groups and the boundaries dividing them are situational and carry a different meaning for all individuals engaging with them. To understand how urban youth in Yaoundé see the religious groups, this chapter explores how these youth themselves described the religious groups and their boundaries, thereby mapping how they see the religious landscape. It deepens this understanding with an analysis of how these youth perceive the relations between the religious groups they distinguish.

5.1 How youth perceive the religious landscape

To explain how youth in Yaoundé engage with boundaries between religious groups, it is necessary to first explore how they perceive the religious landscape that they are part of. What boundaries are present? How do they recognize these boundaries? Do they see changes, and if so, how do they feel about these changes? Do they see a difference in the amount or importance of boundaries between religious groups?

5.1.1 Mapping religious groups

In the interviews, I first asked respondents an open question: 'What can you tell me about religious groups in Cameroon?'. The responses I received were often similar. Most respondents replied that there are three large religious groups in Cameroon: Protestants, Catholics and Muslims. Some respondents, especially Christians, added also the *nouvelles églises*, 'new churches', as a fourth group (a group which I will zoom into below). Some people described the groups in broader terms: 'Christians and Muslims'. Other religious groups mentioned were Orthodox churches, Jews, Animists, Buddhists and Rastafari. A few respondents also mentioned atheists, which are technically not religious groups. Yet the fact that they are mentioned could suggest that the boundaries between atheists and religious groups are considered to be part of Cameroon's religious landscape.

The way people divided Cameroon into different religious groups is telling of how they see boundaries between religious groups permeating the religious landscape of Cameroon. As explained in the theoretical framework, large groups can have smaller groups within them. Whether someone refers to the larger group to encompass all the smaller groups within, or explicitly names the smaller groups, can say something about how this person perceives which boundaries are important. In this case, respondents who identified as Muslims spoke about 'Christians and Muslims', whereas respondents who identified as Christian more often distinguished Catholics and Protestants within the broader group of Christians. Muslims did not do the same with different strands within Islam, such as Sunni and Sufi Islam, even though these different groups are present in Cameroon. This

suggests that the boundaries between groups within the overarching group of Christians are seen as more important than the boundaries between different Islamic groups.

After establishing which groups the respondents identified, I next asked them about how they tell these groups apart: where do they see the divide between religious groups? In response to my question, the respondents mostly listed differences between groups. As explained in the theoretical framework, I follow the relational approach on group formation which indicates that characteristic differences between groups do not necessarily constitute their boundaries. However, differences between groups are likely to strengthen group boundaries. By distinguishing different groups respondents already indicated that they are aware of boundaries. What they say about the differences between the groups does therefore not explain where exactly these boundaries lay, but can increase understanding about how they are perceived.

While the respondents gave various answers, most responses could be grouped in one of the following main differences: *belief and practice*; *organisational structure*; and *social cohesion*.

Religious beliefs and practices

Most respondents referred to different sets of beliefs and/or practices. An example is Yvonne, a Catholic, who explained the differences between Christian and Islamic groups as follows:

‘Muslims are different because the Qur’an is not the same as the Bible. The New Testament is not in there. The practices are not the same. They have different feasts. They have polygamy. Protestants do not know Holy Mary. But they have the same feasts.’ (Yvonne, interview, 28 July 2016)

From her analysis, it can be concluded that she sees more differences between Christian and Islamic groups than between different Christian groups, such as Protestants and Catholics. This idea was phrased by most respondents. As explained before, some respondents distinguished directly between Protestants and Catholics whereas others originally spoke about Christians in the broad sense. Both groups, however, emphasized that the difference between these groups is minor. They referred to specific beliefs to clarify this. Alan, a 22-year old Catholic, said for example about the difference with Protestants:

‘The only difference is that they don’t believe in the holy virgin Mary, that’s all’ (Alan, informal conversation, 22 August 2016).

By emphasizing that this is ‘the only difference’, Alan deliberately makes the difference between two Christian subgroups very small and technical. A similar example was given with regard to Islamic subgroups:

‘There are three large groups within Islam: Sunni, Shiite and Sufi. Cohabitation is natural. We greet each other, we work together. There are certain things that one group does not accept and the other does. If you invite everyone, some come, and some do not come’. ‘Even in a Shiite family, the children may be Sunni. It is not a divide, it is almost invisible’ (Issa and Idrissou, group interview, 2 October 2016)

Here, Idrissou states that the ‘divide’ between different Islamic subgroups is ‘almost invisible’. In accordance with the theoretical framework, this could indicate that the boundaries between these groups are perceived as of minor importance. Indeed, by explaining how members of the different Islamic groups greet each other and work together, Issa suggests that the boundaries between these different groups hardly influences the interaction between members (although he also acknowledges that it does influence interaction sometimes).

The difference between Muslims and Christians was mostly described in practical terms. Respondents referred, such as in the quotation above, to belief in specific religious figures and stories (e.g. Jesus, the holy virgin Mary) or practices and celebrations (e.g. the way and frequency of praying, Christmas, the Ramadan). Religious books were also mentioned a few times, such as in these comments in a conversation with a motor taxi driver and a friend who helped me with the interviews with motor taxi men (both Christians):

‘In fact, you know, what they read is more or less the same thing, but the practice is not the same. In practice is the difference’. ‘The Qur’an is the Bible of Muslims. In fact, the principles of the Bible are not very different from the Qur’anic principles’. (Victor and Maurice, group interview, 16 September 2016)

These men did make a distinction between the different religious books, but minimized the difference by explaining that they think that what these books say is not very different. This suggests that while they see some difference, they do not attach much value to it.

Some respondents referred to different ways of how sermons are held. Some churches, for example, do not allow the use of mobile phones in church, whereas others stimulate people to take notes on their phones or tablets. The sermons of the *nouvelles églises* were also mentioned as different, because they are often accompanied with songs and dancing. These latter churches also generally include ‘testimonies’ in their church program. These testimonies are stories of people who claim that God has helped them with a particular problem they needed Him to solve or favour they asked of Him. For example, I witnessed the testimonies of a woman who was miraculously cured from a stubborn skin disease, and a man who received a visa to Europe.

A final practice which respondents referred to was the way people dress. Here again, most difference was seen between mainline Christians and people from *nouvelles églises*. Some of these churches preach a modest dress:

How are their views different from yours? ‘They do not like mini skirts. They wear long skirts, they don’t wear make-up, they are natural.’ (Rosine, group interview, 12 August 2016)

Muslims, too, sometimes dress differently from Christians. On Fridays, most Muslims wear traditional Islamic clothing. For men, this is a boubou (long-sleeved, flowing shirt that falls to the hips or longer) with pants and small round cap. Women wear long dresses and a headscarf. However these clothes are also associated with a specific region: the two most northern provinces. I learned this from one of my Christian respondents, who was wearing this particular type of dress to a formal event. This shows that it is sometimes difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish religious characteristics in Cameroon from regional or ethnic ones. Related to this, many respondents

indicated that religious groups are linked to specific localities. This influences their religious practice, as described by Arnaud:

‘Religion is strongly ethnicised. People from the same ethnicity frequently have the same religious affiliations. If you go to the church on Sunday, you will notice that the visitors all speak the same local language. Even the cultural ways attached to Christianity are related to ethnicity and local culture’ (Arnaud, interview, 18 July 2016).

Arnaud reflects here on different ways of practicing Christianity as related to ethnicity. Some respondents also mentioned differences in the religious practice of Muslims from the North and Muslims from the West:

Only maybe, for example, there are the Bamoun, they are always Muslim. But they make more of an effort than the Muslims from the North. They are more different. As if they have a different religion. Even their behaviour, it is just... another way’ (Joshua, group interview, 16 September 2019)

Different ethnicities were introduced to Christianity and Islam in different ways, and the relationships between people and their religions have developed in relation to their respective localities. In practice, this means that the larger churches in Yaoundé hold religious ceremonies for different religious groups. For example, a church in my neighbourhood always had six different Sunday masses, at six different times, in six different languages. Smaller churches may cater specifically to one ethnic group, offering masses in one local language. Ethnicity or local culture also influence people’s engagement with religion. Each ethnic group has its own characteristics, and some respondents indicated that these cultural characteristics were reflected in the way people practice their religion:

‘Bamileke people have a totally different culture from all tribes in Cameroun. They are considered the most smart people in Cameroun, they are intelligent. They know how to economize their money. ... It is difficult to see Bamileke spending more time in churches doing nothing. In their culture, first money, then the rest comes’ (Ebolo, informal conversation, 22 July 2016).

Ebolo implies here that how Bamileke people practice their religion is generally different from how other people might, due to their ethnic culture. Linking these results to theory as outlined in chapter 2, these findings can be interpreted as examples of how different social identities influence each other. Identifying with a particular ethnic or regional group may not only influence which religious group one belongs to, but also how one practices religion. This also means that what it means to identify as a ‘Christian’ may for example be understood differently by people who identify with different ethnic groups.

Organisational structure

The organisational structure of religious groups was also mentioned several times as an important difference between these groups. As mentioned above, respondents mentioned subgroups within Christianity more often than subgroups within Islam. Several respondents explained that Christian subgroups are institutionalized in a different way than Islamic subgroups. Most Christians are registered members of a specific religious group. This membership can be aligned to specific churches, parishes or religious leaders. These specific religious groups all have their own particular

ways of preaching. A telling example is the problem of CEPCA, an umbrella organisation of Protestant churches. As an employee of the organisation told me, CEPCA has difficulties collecting its membership fee from the different churches. The reason these churches give for not paying is that they do not agree with the other churches. In their view, it is thus not useful to have a unifying organisation, as the perspectives and interests of its members are divided. Muslims, on the other hand, do generally not identify with a specific mosque. Individuals can have a preference for a specific Imam or mosque, but they are not obliged to register with a mosque or Islamic group in particular.

While this characteristic is in itself a practical thing, it does have an influence on more abstract characteristics of the religious groups, such as group identification and group solidarity. Several respondents remarked that this particular structure of Islam makes Muslims a more uniform group than Christians. Several respondents indicated for example that they saw greater divisions in the way different Christians think, than the way different Muslims think:

‘With Muslims, they all see life the same way. They have the same ideology. So if two Muslims talk together, they don’t want to say different things. They both want to say the same. Whereas among Christians, there is more than one idea. There are always differences’. (Bruno, group interview, 1 September 2016)

Bruno indicates here that he sees Muslims as a more unified group than Christians, or at least as a group with stronger shared views among members. In the same conversation, Bruno’s friend Alan, also a Catholic, remarked on how different Christian groups disagree with each other:

‘In my opinion, Muslims are good people. The Muslims all share one idea, which is Allah. In comparison to us Christians, we are in conflict with each other, because we all have different ideas. The Catholics have a different idea from the Pentecostals, who think again other than the Jehovah’s Witness, and so on. Christians are not united like Muslims are. The Muslims know they have one single God and that God is Allah’ (Alan, group interview, 1 September 2016).

According to Alan, Christian groups all have different beliefs, whereas Muslims all believe in the same thing. These statements by Bruno and Alan reflect their perception of the different religious groups and their characteristics. I have not heard similar statements from Islamic respondents. However, the fact that they are less inclined to mention the different Islamic denominations, or to describe their differences as ‘almost invisible’ (as explained in the previous paragraph) may suggest that they see this perception as well.

As the next subsection will argue in more detail, *nouvelles églises* were also considered to have a different structure. These churches are often founded by one person who does not have to justify his (not her, as I have not heard of any female religious leader in Cameroon) way of running the church to anyone but himself and his followers.

Comparing these three religious groups, their organisational differences can be interpreted as differences of scale: while *nouvelles églises* are relatively small, personal and localized, mainline Christian churches have a local representation of a denomination of a global Christian structure, and Islamic groups represent a global Muslim identity.

Social cohesion

Related to the organisational structure, several respondents indicated that the degree of social cohesion differed for the different religious groups. With social cohesion, I refer to the degree in which a community is close-knit, with strong group identification and little interaction outside the group.

As an example of how close-knit a group was, respondents often reflected on the subject of marriage, and whether this was allowed with someone outside the religious group. For example, in a conversation with Rosine and Chimène, two 18-year old Catholics, we spoke first about Islam, and later about *nouvelles églises*. They compared their own religious group with the other two and noted that ‘the Catholic church is universal, you can marry anyone’. They emphasized that they could marry a Muslim if they wanted, but that it would not be possible to marry someone from a *nouvelle église*:

‘They find their husbands and wives among themselves’ (Chimène, group interview, 12 August 2016).

The *nouvelles églises* and the Islamic communities were often named as examples of groups that were more cohesive, as opposed to many of the mainline Christian religious groups. In the following statement, Vanessa describes her aunt’s religious group, Jehovah’s Witness, as very closed:

‘My aunt is a Jehovah’s Witness and she is trying to force me to enter. They force everyone. When I visit her, they try to force me but they don’t do it well. I don’t like it. The Jehovah’s Witness stick together. I don’t want to join them, they are not social, they think that the others are mundane. They pray three hours each day. I have to do my studies in that time. They are not open. It is difficult to make friends with them’ (Vanessa, group interview, 12 August 2016).

Similar remarks were made about Muslims:

‘The Muslim religion has a lot of impact on Muslims, the Arabs. They are more close-knit than the others’.
(Félix, group interview, 7 October 2016)

Regarding Muslims, many respondents indicated that they had the idea that they keep more among themselves. Some respondents related this to specific characteristics of Islamic groups, such as the use of the Arabic language. This language barrier is difficult to overcome for non-Arabic speaking people.

As a final remark about differences, it cannot be assumed that all people mean exactly the same thing when they talk about ‘Muslims’ or Christians. The theoretical framework explains that group identity and group boundaries are social constructs, fluid, situational and understood differently by different people. This is also true for the boundaries between religious groups. If two people say that they are a member of the same religious group, this does not mean that their idea of what this group is and where its boundaries lie are the same. This also counts for people describing a group

they do not identify with. This can for example be observed in the comment below, about how Cameroonian Muslims from the North and from the East are seen to behave differently:

‘In Bamoun, in the West, people are not as radical as those in the North. They are even very peaceful, as Christians and Muslims are unified in one family, by marriage. It is a moderate Islam, not like the Islam you see in the North’ (Arnaud, informal conversation, 18 July 2016)

While both groups would probably identify as Muslims, they are perceived by others as distinct groups. As I did not speak to Muslims from both regions I cannot say whether they see this distinction as well, but this comment can serve here as a reminder that group characteristics are not fixed properties.

From the above description of differences between groups, a few tentative conclusions can be drawn with regard to how the respondents see group boundaries. The three types of main differences mentioned above are all examples of the categorical attributes of groups: the characteristics that help define them. As explained in the theoretical chapter, these differences do not necessarily shape the boundaries between the groups as well. I think the data outlined above confirms this idea. While most respondents have clear ideas of the different religious groups present in Cameroon, many of them describe the differences between these groups as relatively minor. This suggests that the boundaries between these groups are not necessarily shaped strongly by their characteristic differences. The differences which were focused on most often were the differences between Muslims and Christians, and the differences between mainline Christians and *nouvelles églises*. Differences between other subgroups within Christianity or Islam were generally downplayed even more.

Differences between groups do not necessarily mean that the boundaries distinguishing these groups are perceived as strong. However, as described in the theoretical framework, if groups are perceived as very different, it can be harder to identify with other groups, which makes group boundaries more difficult to cross. Likewise, when boundaries between groups are perceived as strong, it may be difficult to recognize similarities between these groups (Eriksen 2002). The fact that Muslims and Christians were seen as more different than the various subgroups within Christianity or Islam therefore suggests that the respondents see the boundaries between Muslims and Christians as stronger boundaries than boundaries between subgroups of a larger religious groups.

Finally, I spoke with respondents about how they saw Cameroon’s religious diversity reflected in the different neighbourhoods of Yaoundé. The respondents indicated that most neighbourhoods are fairly mixed, meaning that they house members of different religious groups. In some neighbourhoods, the balance tips over to one or two groups. The neighbourhood Briqueterie, for example, was seen as a predominantly Islamic neighbourhood by many Christian respondents. I conducted several interviews in Briqueterie, speaking to both Christian and Muslim inhabitants of the neighbourhood. They said that, while the number of Muslims is indeed higher there than in other neighbourhoods of the city, their neighbourhood was mixed as well. They viewed the image of Briqueterie as a ‘Muslim neighbourhood’ as a simplification. This perceived misunderstanding can be interpreted as an example of how different individuals participating in this research have

different images of where boundaries lie and which boundaries are important: while some people see a dividing line between Muslims and Christians which literally separates neighbourhoods, others do not.

5.1.2 Changing boundaries

The previous section described how the respondents generally identified two to four main religious groups which together comprise the religious landscape of Cameroon. Within these main groups, they identify several subgroups. Like group characteristics, group boundaries are not static, nor is the number of boundaries present always the same. In Cameroon, many respondents mentioned that the number of religious groups has augmented over the past ten years. They indicated that they recognized this as a relatively new phenomenon by using words such as ‘the start of religious groups’ or ‘the rise of Born Again’. They did not necessarily speak about this change negatively.

Respondents reported an arrival of new groups both within Christianity and Islam, and outside these larger categories. Regarding Islam, one of the members of the Islamic Youth Organisation JIC reflected as follows upon the arrival of new strands:

‘Fifty years ago, there weren’t so many groups. The Sunni were there, the Shiite were there. With time, more and more small and unknown groups have come. ... Now there is more capacity to travel to Arabic countries. And a lot is shared on social media. So because of new technologies it is easier to know more different varieties of Islam’ (Issa, group interview, 2 October 2016).

For Issa, an important contributor to the arrival of new groups is access to ICTs, including social media. This facilitates learning about religion and different ideas, practices and beliefs. Increased travel to Arabic countries where Islam is the prevailing religion also adds to a broader knowledge about how Islam can be practiced. The fact that, according to the respondent, this new information has led to an increasing number of Islamic currents in Cameroon, is an example of how changes in society as a whole influence the make-up of religious groups in this society. This indicates that to understand religious dynamics it is helpful to understand them in relation to the context in which they are embedded.

Within Christianity, almost all Christian respondents mentioned the arrival of many new churches in the past ten years. For example, Ebolo, who spent four years in Qatar, came back to see the religious landscape of Yaoundé much changed:

‘There was no many churches. I came back and now there are churches all over the street’. (Ebolo, interview, 15 July 2016)

The collective name used by most respondents to indicate these churches is *nouvelles églises*, which literally means ‘new churches’. Which specific religious groups are or are not included within these terms was often not clear. However, these new churches were considered to have several characteristics in common. In the next section, I will go deeper into these *nouvelles églises*. Some respondents reported that members of their religious group switched membership to these *nouvelles*

églises, which indicates that the presence of these churches influences also the character and/or demography of the established churches.

Respondents also mentioned new religious groups outside Christianity and Islam, such as Buddhism and Rastafari. I spoke to people who identified with these groups and they explained their identification as a membership of a religious minority in Cameroon. The presence of smaller groups outside Christianity and Islam was also noted by others, such as Félicité:

‘There are also other currents, like atheists and panafricans. For them, those Christians and Muslims.. They say you have to go back to tradition. It is really an upcoming current. There are many youth who are attracted by it. I’m in a Whats app group and there was a clash, it was Sunday and someone said: “I’m sorry for those who go to church today”. And the others became angry’ (Félicité, group interview, 7 October 2016)

With this comment, Félicité identifies ‘atheists’ as a religious group or ‘current’, whereas atheism is generally defined as the rejection of the existence of a God. However, by filing it under the header of religion, this can be interpreted as the idea that, for Félicité, these groups are also part of the religious landscape in Cameroon. A possible explanation is that being a member of these groups generally excludes the possibility (or want) to identify with a religious group, thereby also shaping boundaries within the religious landscape.

The respondents spoke to me about how they thought these new groups influence the religious landscape. The interaction between groups shapes boundaries and relations between them. Simultaneously, groups define themselves in relation to others, but may also change their characteristics as a result of external influences, such as the arrival of new groups in the religious landscape. For example, as the number of religious groups grows while the number of religious believers does not change, this means that some religious groups will lose members as other groups grow. One of the motor taxi drivers told me, for example, that ‘old churches’ are threatened by the new arrivals:

‘There are more churches, new churches. People go to these churches because they want change, they want to feel better. It is complicated. The old churches are threatened, because the women go to these new churches. There are good ones and bad ones.’ (Dilane, group interview, 16 September 2016).

The way how Dilane phrases this, suggesting that old churches ‘are threatened’, indicates that the increasing number of religious groups may lead to rivalry between religious groups as they all scramble for group members.

Respondents who identified as Christians mostly remarked on newly emerging Christian groups, and respondents who identified as Muslims on newly emerging Islamic groups. This can be explained by the idea that it is easier to see what is changing if you are more knowledgeable about a group. If you identify as a Christian, it can be assumed that you know more about Christianity than about Islam, which makes it easier for you to notice change within this group than within a group of which you have little knowledge. In addition, the difference between the organisational structures of Christianity and Islam in Cameroon can make it more difficult to see changes within Islam. A rising

number of churches is more easily spotted by a rising number of church signs, for example. New Islamic groups on the other hand may be less visible.

A final remark on how youth see the religious landscape, is that some respondents reported that youth in general have less interest in religious groups than before. This development was recognized within both Christianity and Islam, as can be concluded from the following remark:

‘The number of Christians going to church is going down. Churches are trying to organize activities for youth, because they don’t come anymore. Youth have more interest in partying than in going to church. They just want to amuse themselves. For Muslims it is almost the same. Youth have different interests now’. (Issa, group interview, 2 October 2016)

This comment refers to a change Issa sees in general. As the next chapters will show, youth sometimes also referred to how they have a relatively flexible and/or personal approach towards their relationship with their religious groups. This demographic change thus tells us something about the religious landscape as a whole. It may indicate that the dominance of religious identification for youth is decreasing, which may in turn influence the position and power of religious groups in the society of Cameroon.

5.1.3 Nouvelles églises

Because the most reported change (by Christian respondents) in the religious landscape is the arrival of the *nouvelles églises*, it can be interesting to take a closer look at this development. This subsection shows that in the way respondents talk about the *nouvelles églises*, it can be concluded that youth relate religion or identification with religious groups to their socioeconomic position.

As described before, when respondents say *nouvelles églises*, they refer mostly to churches within the Pentecostal revival movement (or *églises réveillés*). These revival churches are Christian churches, falling under the Protestant denomination. However, whereas some respondents referred to all revival churches, others specifically included or excluded, for example, the Born Again churches or the Jehovah’s Witness, and again others referred only to those groups. The following quotes from two interviews exemplify that the boundaries between religious groups are not always agreed upon or clear to everyone:

‘The new churches, they all have different names, but we call them all Born Again’ (Carine, informal conversation, 4 July 2016)

‘What are the *églises réveillés*?’ ‘Jehovah’s Witness, Evangelical, Pentecostal’. ‘Not Born Again?’ ‘No, not Born Again. They are Protestant’ ‘No, they are Presbyterian, right?’ (Chimène and Rosine, group interview, 12 August 2016)

The comments in this last example were made during an informal conversation with two friends, who proceeded discussing which churches belong to which broader religious group. This shows that religious boundaries are not known or understood the same by different persons. The disagreement among youth about which groups can be considered as *nouvelles églises* can be interpreted as an example of how the boundaries between religious groups are not necessarily related to fixed

structures such as religious institutions. In this case, it is not the specific doctrine, but the characteristics and the behaviour of certain religious groups that makes others group them together. As will be argued below, the new Christian groups that are referred to as *nouvelles églises* have several elements in common which makes them grouped together by out-group members. So even though the members of these individual churches may not identify with one another, they are assigned this common identity by out-group members, the ‘group’ here being *nouvelles églises*. However, as I have not spoken to many members of Pentecostal churches, I cannot reflect on whether they accept this identification or not. Throughout this thesis, I will be using the term *nouvelles églises* to refer to all churches associated with it, in recognition of the ambiguity of the group.

From what the respondents of this research told me about what they considered to be *nouvelles églises*, the religious groups this term referred to had several things in common. Firstly, the churches promote a strong sense of social cohesion, membership identity and group boundaries, which is sometimes accompanied with a negative attitude towards out-group members. This was discussed in section 5.1.1. Secondly, the churches have a relatively loose organisational structure. Thirdly, the churches preach a variety of the prosperity gospel which promises wealth to its followers, thereby attracting youth.

According to the respondents of this research, the *nouvelles églises* often operate individually, outside structures which may link them to other churches. The following quote gives an idea of how easy it is for individuals to open up a church:

‘My pastor said: “There are no more marabouts, because they have all become pastors”. People say: “I have a vision, God is calling me”, and so they open a church. The law is not very strict, you can go and buy power. (Félicité, interview, 7 October 2016).

Félicité states here that any individual can start a church. According to her, the law does not restrict this. She suggests also that the attraction of opening a church lies in the position of power you can ‘buy’ by doing so. She quotes her pastor, who apparently stated that marabouts⁴, convert and become pastors of a church they start themselves. Félicité explains this as an issue of power⁵. I interpret her comment therefore as an example of how competition within the religious landscape may manifest itself.

The ease of opening these churches has led to Pentecostal churches ‘popping up everywhere’, catering to different groups and neighbourhoods in Yaoundé:

‘Oh, so many! The French speaking, the English speaking, we have not really the same culture but you find Pentecostal everywhere. Here at Chapel Obili, there are fifteen churches: Christ Embassy, The Living Christ... You have so many of them!’ (Yanila, interview, 11 September 2016)

4 Traditional religious leaders in West-Africa, mostly associated with Islam

5 While the scope of this research does not permit a thorough analysis of power positions of religious groups, it is interesting to see how religion and power are related in the context of Cameroon.

Yanila refers to ‘the French speaking’ and ‘the English speaking’ as cultural groups which, despite their cultural differences, both frequent Pentecostal churches. This shows that he is aware that other social boundaries than only religious ones may influence the religious landscape, for example determining which cultural or ethnic groups are over- or underrepresented in specific religious groups.

The high (and rising) number of *nouvelles églises* suggests that there is a similarly high number of new members. The respondents of this research indicate that the demography of these members is characterized by a relatively high percentage of women and youth. During the same interview, Yanila (a Catholic) explained the attraction of the *nouvelles églises* as follows:

‘Jehovah’s witness have a different doctrine. People who go there look to remove poverty. People believe that when you are poor, you go to church and you will reach God. That when you go to church, like Full Gospel Church, they will say “You are blessed. Today everything will change”. They think that poverty will be gone. Any member of the Pentecostal church or of Full Gospel, they need change. The pastor says “You are blessed. Today is your day. Tomorrow you will be rich”. People think: “I am a Catholic and nothing has ever changed in five years. Today if I am in this [Pentecostal] church, they heal people, the blind can see. Tomorrow I can be a rich man”. This is why many people go to Pentecostal church: poverty pushes them. [...] All of them that are there, they are looking first to change their life. People call when they are sick, they need an ointment. They are looking for things the Catholic church cannot heal. Why you see people frustrated is that first of all, they need money. Second, they are tired, they have lost faith. They need to see where people are healing everyday’ (Yanila, interview, 11 September 2016)

From Yanila’s comment can be concluded that he also groups churches together on the basis of certain characteristics. The Full Gospel Church is a Pentecostal church, for example, whereas he sets it apart from the Pentecostal church in this comment. He also refers to Jehovah’s Witness, which is not a Revival church like the others. However, Yanila mentions all of these churches seemingly randomly and without distinction. He focuses instead on their shared characteristic: the promises they make to improve the lives of their members. This indicates that he sees the boundaries between these religious groups as irrelevant in this context.

Indeed, part of many of these new churches’ doctrine is the so-called “prosperity gospel”. As explained briefly in the background chapter, this gospel is based on the idea that the world’s riches are distributed among the global population according to the piousness of the individual. In other words: if you are a ‘good’ believer, if you pray frequently and, in many cases, if you give generously to the church and/or its priest, you will be rewarded with financial means. Or, if not financial, other needs will be met: you will find a partner, a job, or a visa to Europe (Akoko 2002; 2007; Hunt 2000). While there are scholars who think this direct link between poverty and the attraction of the prosperity gospel somewhat too simplistic (see for example (Lado 2009), many of my respondents agree with Yanila. They explain the poor socioeconomic position of youth as a push-factor driving them to these churches:

‘There are so many, and it makes me angry sometimes, because they demoralize youth. In Cameroon, poverty and suffering is common. The pastors of these churches lay their hope in it. [...] Cameroon is in a condition in which it is difficult to feed your family, to get access to water. These pastors gather a big crowd with their preach, and then the population feeds the pastor. [...] They promise wealth to come faster’. (Ebolo, informal conversation, 28 June 2016)

Félicité links this weak socioeconomic position not only to youth, but also to women:

‘There are more women in my church. Women have so much problems, stress. And they are much more emotional. The Pentecostal churches know how to touch emotion, through the Holy Spirit. By the way they are preaching, singing, everything is set up to touch emotion. [...] When people are really desperate, they’ll just go for anything you offer. They will buy holy water, buy a car for the pastor. Many pastors are playing on that. Youth are suffering. It is difficult to find work, to get married. Men control the money, that’s why for women it is difficult. In Africa, when you are a certain age, a woman has to get married. You have to have a child. The child has to be a boy, a girl is not a good child. Society is too much. They put pressure on you. With all that stress, you go to church easily’ (Félicité, group interview, 7 October 2016).

Félicité’s comment suggests that the socioeconomic position is different for women than for men, which influences also their engagement with religious groups. While this research does not particularly take gender into account, this could be recommended for further research on this topic. Félicité is a member of a Pentecostal church herself. In her comment, she does not refer to any church or religious group in particular, but she describes the same dynamics and religious leaders as other people do when they speak out negatively about *nouvelles églises*: pastors using the desperate situation of youth for their own benefit. From this can be concluded that Félicité does not identify with these particular religious groups. This shows again that boundaries are understood differently by different people.

As can be discerned from the above comments, the youth who spoke about the *nouvelles églises* generally took a negative stance towards them. They indicated that they thought these churches have little to do with religion, and a lot with making money for the pastors:

‘The *églises réveillés*, they are the people who have a lot of belief. But there are also those who take it as a commerce. It’s like a market. There are those who don’t have money, they use even churches. To influence people, because churches have their followers. A bit like a market. ... Really. A small bottle of water, like this [holding a bottle up]. They say it’s holy water and you have to buy it. For at least 300.000 CFA. There are people who buy it. But of course, a real church of God is not a market. Such water would be given away, it is shared’. (Yoyo, group interview, 16 September 2016)

Chapter 7 will elaborate more on youth’s perception of the *nouvelles églises*.

In short, the respondents of this research see the presence of the *nouvelles églises* as a new phenomenon which has affected the religious landscape of Cameroon significantly. They link the popularity of these churches to the fact that their doctrines promise wealth to their church members. Against the backdrop of socioeconomic instability and hardship, this is an appealing thought, especially for youth and women.

5.2 Relations between religious groups

The previous section outlined which religious groups were identified by the respondents of this research and how they tell them apart, thereby sketching the boundaries between the different groups. It also briefly touched upon the interaction between religious groups, possibly influencing

each other when characteristics change and boundaries shift. How youth perceive the religious landscape of Cameroon is therefore not only a matter of mapping which groups they see making up this landscape, but also how they perceive the relations between these groups, which will be explored in this section. As described in the theoretical framework, a heterogeneous country such as Cameroon has many boundaries across which conflict may or may not emerge. The next subsections outline how youth speak about peaceful and problematic relations between religious groups.

5.2.1 Peaceful coexistence

‘Cameroon is a country of peace, because the Cameroonians have one great fear: we are afraid of war. When we are in a cafe, when we are drinking, then there may be a conflict about religion’. ‘What he says is: there is only a conflict of words, when we’re drunk. Because the Cameroonians have a huge fear of conflict, and they love peace’. ‘Cameroon is a country of peace. I can’t see any risk. Everyone holds his own opinion, you hold yours, I hold mine. Cameroonians are too afraid of getting hurt!’. ‘Cameroonians love to party’. ‘Well, who doesn’t love to party?’. (Bruno, Arnold and Alan, group interview, 1 September 2016)

Like in the comment above, Cameroon’s religious landscape was generally described as a situation of peaceful coexistence. All youth I spoke to answered a general question about how the relations are between different religious groups with ‘good’. There was a strong narrative of Cameroon being a ‘country of peace’ as was emphasized in many conversations, such as the following:

‘The fact that this country is a country of peace, this is more true. There are only small groups posing problems. But if you look at the bigger picture, there is more peace’. ‘Stigmatisation is minor, peace is big. We are not at a level of violence’. (Habiba and Mohsin, group interview, 9 October 2016)

While these respondents do acknowledge the existence of some tensions, such as stigmatisation, they emphasized the good relations. Other respondents referred to a different kind of ‘bigger picture’, comparing Cameroon to other countries:

‘About the relationship between Christians and Muslims ... I don’t think there are too much problems. Attacks on villages because Christians do not want to be Muslims, we don’t have that. That is maybe in Iraq and all that, but in Cameroon that doesn’t exist’ (Arnold, group interview, 1 September 2016)

‘There are no imams preaching non-tolerance. Everyone knows the most popular imams, they are also the most modern. Perhaps in the neighbouring countries there are imams preaching fundamentalism, but not here’. ‘We don’t have that. Everyone respects everyone. There is no violence, nor radicalisation’ (Idrissou and Amina, group interview, 2 October 2016).

‘There is not really conflict between religious groups. Really, we respect each other. In Europe that is not the case. We value people like the pastors’ (Yvonne, interview, 28 July 2016)

In this latter comment, Yvonne reflects on the differences between Europe and Cameroon in the coexistence of different religious groups. She explains this difference in terms of respect: according to her, religious groups and their leaders are respected, regardless of the specific characteristics of the group. Another respondent said a similar thing, referring specifically to religious leaders of different religious groups:

'I like Muslims'. 'They are social'. 'Kind'. 'Very kind'. 'There is no war between religions. There are no tensions'. 'Everyone mixes well. The Imam, the Pastor, they have the same level [of respect]'. (Vanessa, Stan and Daniel, group interview, 12 August 2016)

This indicates that the respondents perceive religion as an element of society which is generally respected and valued.

As explained in section 5.1, the respondents identified many different religious groups in the society of Cameroon. When talking about the relationships between these groups, some respondents, such as Yvonne, spoke in general terms about 'religious groups'. Others emphasized the relationships between Christians and Muslims. As mentioned before, the differences between Christians and Muslims were generally seen as bigger than differences between different Christian or Islamic groups. This can be an explanation for the reason that the relationship between these groups was most often referred to. However, there was also frequent reference to the relationships between different Christian groups. Islamic respondents only spoke about the relationship between different Islamic groups when I specifically asked about this. As the following comment exemplifies, these relations were always described as peaceful:

'We are all together. There are not many Sufi. There are Tijani and Sunni. Shiite I don't know any. But we all live well together. If you shave your beard, it's no problem. But if you want to keep it, it's good too. We pray together, we eat together. We are all Muslims'. (Noor, group interview, 9 October 2016)

In Islam, we have the Sunni, the Shi'ite, the Sufi, but we all pray together every day. We are still in the same mosque. It is the same daily prayer which unites us. Its the same Qur'an which unites us' (Ramatou, group interview, 6 October 2016)

By emphasizing the things Muslims from different groups do together, the respondent focuses on how the boundaries between these groups are transcended. This bridging of boundaries will be discussed in more detail in chapter seven.

To explain how religious groups live together in peace in Cameroon, respondents described several structures present in Cameroon which make all people feel free to practice their religion. Firstly, the fact that the state is secular and freedom of religion is a constitutional right was mentioned several times:

'Muslims nor Christians cause conflict. We respect each others way of life'. 'Even the constitution is *laïc*. You are free to choose. If you don't want to go to church, or to the mosque, no one will condemn you'. (Amina and Issa, group interview, 2 October 2016)

Secondly, respondents referred sometimes to the facilities public and/or shared spaces, such as markets, schools and offices, have to accommodate religious practice for Muslims:

'Inside schools there is always a prayer room for Muslims. If Muslims want to go pray, they can come to the prayer room, pray, and go back to class. At work it's the same'. (Idrissou, group interview, 2 October 2016)

Thirdly, Cameroon's religious diversity was mentioned as a reason that the relations between them remain peaceful:

'We don't see much conflict between religious groups. I don't think that will change. Because we have so many different religions, we all have our own ways. We all have different ideas'. 'You will have to bring a lot of people who believe the same as you'. (Bruno and Arnold, group interview, 1 September 2016)

Bruno and Arnold suggest here that religion cannot be problematic, because a person cannot mobilize enough people who believe the same things as her/himself to form a large enough group to dominate other groups. This is in line with Eriksen and Jeong's views on plural societies as explained in the theoretical framework: diversity reduces block formation, thereby hindering the development of conflict. Another example of this was beautifully phrased during a group interview with members of an Islamic youth organisation, in response to a broad question of mine: *What can you tell me about conflict between religious groups in Cameroon?*

'Cameroon's principle characteristic is its diversity. In Cameroon, 250 different dialects are spoken. There is not one group which is bigger than the other. In the North, Christians and Muslims live together, in the South it is similar. Everywhere it is the same. We grew up together. We went to school together. We eat the same dishes, we sleep together. In our whole lives, everyone knows everyone'. 'If there are two ethnicities opposed to each other, this can be a problem, like in Rwanda. In Cameroon we don't know this'. 'The key word is respect. It is said that Cameroon is Africa in miniature. We have multiple ethnicities here. [pointing around the group]: 'He is Kanuri, he is Bamoun, she is from Niger. Language is no problem. We accept everyone. The principle point is respect. We even have all different landscapes: forest, mountains, desert'. 'The only thing we don't have is snow'. (Issa, Amina and Faiza, group interview, 2 October 2016)

This shows that these youth also acknowledge the risk of one large societal cleavage. They explain Cameroon's diversity as the main reason why there is not much conflict. They do not only speak about religious diversity, but also about diversity in terms of language, ethnicity and landscape. This may suggest that they acknowledge different boundaries than only those along religious lines to shape the religious landscape. In their own organisation, this is for example visible in the fact that its members come from different ethnic groups.

5.2.2 Problematic boundaries

While most respondents described the relationships between different religious groups as good, some boundaries between religious groups were seen as problematic. In other words: while the religious landscape is generally described as peaceful, respondents did acknowledge some factors which may threaten this peace. During the interviews, we discussed how recent changes in Cameroon influenced relationships between religious groups. The two topics which were discussed most were Boko Haram, a violent group identifying as Islamic, and the arrival of the *nouvelles églises*. According to most of the respondents, these changes had a negative effect on the relationships between religious groups. This section discusses four dynamics which makes relations between religious groups more tense, according to the respondents of this research: competition, disagreements, fundamentalism and stigmatisation.

Competition

While their doctrine can be considered to fall under the Protestant denomination, the *nouvelles églises* do not engage much with mainline Protestant churches in Cameroon. For instance, they are not represented in the umbrella organisation for Protestant churches, CEPCA. In subsection 5.1.3 I mentioned briefly how these churches attract members who previously identified with mainline churches. This was argued by Félicité, who is a Pentecostalist herself, as follows:

‘Most people of the Pentecostal church are coming from normal churches; they were at another church in the past. In normal churches it seems like they don’t have a strong relationship with God. They just go because their father went to the same church. The people from the normal churches see the Pentecostal churches as exaggerating, and the Pentecostal churches say the normal churches don’t know what they’re doing. They both feel superior to each other’ (Félicité, interview, 7 October 2016)

Her comment implies that there is some rivalry between Pentecostal churches and mainline Christian churches, which is expressed by changing group membership and negative feelings towards each other.

Disagreements

The feelings of superiority as described by Félicité can lead to disagreements between members of different religious groups. Mackenzie perhaps phrased this most elaborately:

‘The relationship between Christians and Muslims is not good, because Christians criticize Muslims, and Muslims criticize Christians. Muslims say that Christians don’t have a God, that they don’t know what they’re doing. Christians say the same about Muslims. That is why Christians and Muslims, when they must be together for a day, they end up fighting. I see that my cousin [who is a Muslim] always fights with Christians. She always says: Christianity does this, Christianity does that... They are always fighting about the church. They say mine is better than yours. [...] Within Christianity, it is the same. For example, Presbyterians criticize the Catholics, Catholics criticize Christians. For example, if you say ‘Jesus Christ died this day’, Presbyterians in my church do not like that. And Born Again, they say “Don’t eat this, don’t do that”’ (Mackenzie, interview, 7 October 2016).

According to Mackenzie, the problem lies in the superior attitude religious groups have towards each other. Each group thinks their views on religion are the best, which can lead to fighting. The examples she gives are examples between Muslims and Christians, and between Christian subgroups. Earlier in this chapter, I described how some respondents, including Alan, Arnold and Bruno, view Christians as more divided than Muslims. They gave some examples of disagreements between members of different Christian subgroups:

‘It’s like we said before: there is too much disorder’ ‘There is too much conflict’. ‘Each bible, of the Jehovah’s Witness, of Catholics, of Protestants, of Pentecostals, they all have a different way of telling, they have different words’. ‘Everyone has their own analysis’. ‘It all depends on your education’. ‘They all say they are the best religion. The Jehovah’s Witness will tell you their religion is the best. And if you approach them, they don’t just want to talk with you about God, but they want to evangelize you, they want to convince you’. ‘They all say they speak the truth, but they all have differences’. ‘They all have their own way of reading, they speak of their religion and say that the others are wrong’. ‘Especially the Jehovah’s Witness’. ‘Catholics don’t like the Jehovah’s Witness’ (Alan, Arnold and Bruno, group interview, 1 September 2016).

Alan, Arnold and Bruno describe here how different religious groups use different language to tell the same stories. Each group has its own interpretation of the Bible. According to Alan, Arnold and Bruno, this different interpretation lies at the basis of tensions between these groups: by telling another group your interpretation is the only correct one, you dismiss the beliefs of this other group as false, or sometimes even as ‘not Christian’. This indicates that there is discussion about what it means to identify as a Christian and about where the boundaries of this group lie. Alan, Arnold and Bruno also spoke about disagreements between Muslims and Christians:

‘The conflict between Christians and Muslims is about the idea of Christ. Muslims say: “We believe in Christ, but he is not God”. They only believe in Allah. That’s the real conflict between us and Muslims. [...] They have only Allah, who is peace and God’ (Alan, Arnold and Bruno, group interview, 1 September 2016).

In these comments, they do not refer to any feelings of superiority, just to a different belief system. During the interview, I noticed that the statements by Alan, Arnold and Bruno about Islam and conflict in Cameroon were hesitant and carefully phrased, whereas their comments about conflict between Christian denominations came much faster and were expressed more passionately. I interpreted this as an indication that they personally have more experience with and/or opinions about a tense relationship between different Christian groups.

Some respondents referred to family life to explain where tensions between different religious groups lie. For example, Ebolo explained the fact that people from some religious groups marry each other and other groups do not as an example of groups whose relations are more tense:

‘We have three religions here, Jehovah’s Witness, Protestant and Pentecostal, these religions understand each other. They get married within them. They look at Catholics as fake people who don’t know what they are doing, that they do not practice well. They think they are demonic, because Catholics have their own funny way of practice. It’s different’. (Ebolo, informal conversation, 22 July 2016).

With this comment, Ebolo refers to marriage as an indication of how closed a group is. He relates this to this group’s disapproval of other religious groups. This suggests that he sees the boundaries between these groups and other groups as stronger. In another comment, Ebolo links the same idea of superiority (‘Catholics are fake people’) to conflict within families:

‘[The rise of *nouvelles églises*] causes conflict between families. Many families have been divided or separated by those churches. And some of those churches are insulting the Catholic church, by saying that the Catholic church is the fake church. They are not doing the right way of living. And that’s how people are believing’ (Ebolo, interview, 15 July 2016).

The *nouvelles églises* are also mentioned as especially at risk of conflict because they are, as section 5.1.3 explained, relatively unstructured. They can be started by anyone and do not have to justify themselves towards a higher authority (like Catholic churches are placed in a strict hierarchy of organisations and need to justify themselves towards the Vatican). According to some respondents, this leads to frequent disagreements between religious groups or leaders:

'Pentecostal churches, they have an ego, they are really a bit full of themselves. For example, we have Pentecostal churches, and even among themselves there is war. Pastor X says pastor Y is a fake one. Even to bring them together is difficult' (Félicité, interview, 7 October 2016)

So while in many of the examples above the different religious groups are identified as subgroups embedded in a larger group of Christians, these subgroups are considered to frequently be in conflict with each other. According to some respondents, such as Rosine, such conflict is even more common:

'Even among ourselves [Christians] there is conflict. There are people who do not accept the confession. There are people who do not want to give offers, or baptise their child. So they try to start a new church in which offers are not obligatory. [...] There are more conflicts within religions than between religions, because between religions you don't have to work together. Everyone can be at his own side, have his own version' (Rosine, group interview, 12 August 2016).

The first remarks indicate that existing groups are split up by the formation of new groups around different ways of interpreting religious texts or religious practice. It can be expected that this process of boundary construction creates tensions, also related to competition as described in the previous paragraphs. The last remarks reflect on which groups are most likely to engage in conflict. As was concluded in the previous sections, youth identified the strongest boundaries between Muslims and Christians, and between mainline Christians and *nouvelles églises*. This comment suggests however that it is not always the strongest boundary which becomes problematic. There are more factors which influences this, such as the need of cooperation or the intensity of contact which may determine whether boundaries become problematic or not.

Stigmatisation

While the youth I spoke to generally considered Christian and Islamic groups to be in good terms with one another, many recognized that the attacks by Boko Haram had put this good relationship under stress. This is for example reflected in the comments of Habiba and Issa, two members of the Islamic Youth Organisation:

'Despite Boko Haram and the terrorism, all is well. We are doing well. There is an inter religious debate going on, we pray together. And people know Boko Haram is killing more Muslims than Christians'. 'There is no problem between Muslims and Christians. It is all going like before. It is not like in the CAR, we don't have such phenomena here'. 'We really live together. Christians have embraced Islam'. (Habiba and Issa, group interview, 2 October 2016)

While Issa and Habiba emphasize the good relation between Muslims and Christians, they do recognize the threat that Boko Haram poses to this relation. Issa compares the situation in Cameroon to that in other countries, in this case Cameroon's neighbour: the Central African Republic. This means that Issa is aware of how the presence of both Islamic and Christian groups creates tensions in other parts of the world. These respondents, however, negate the presence of similar tensions within Cameroon.

Other respondents, such as Arnold, did report increased tensions within Cameroon relating to the presence of Boko Haram:

‘In Yaoundé, I did not notice a negative change in the relation between Muslims and Christians because of Boko Haram. Maybe in the North. I have a friend there who told me that dressing like a Muslim may create problems. Women who wear a veil may have problems. It is true that Boko Haram does not give a positive image for the Muslims. Boko Haram says they are Muslims, but for me this is abusing the term. Because I know that Islamic people wear their heart in their hands; that means they are really nice. Boko Haram, they have no fear of death, they know they can die any moment. But Cameroonian Muslims are not like that, they are too scared. Yes, that is the truth, Cameroonians are scared! But it is true that their image changes. In schools, they now call their Muslim friends “Boko Haram”. That is not good. That could create conflict. But I have not seen any conflict in Yaoundé yet, nor in Douala’ (Arnold, group interview, 1 September 2016).

Here, Arnold admits that Muslims encounter stigmatisation due to the negative image related to violent acts conducted by Boko Haram. According to Arnold, the tensions between people identifying as Muslim and other groups is however still limited in Yaoundé. What is interesting in Arnold’s comment is that he refuses to identify Boko Haram as an Islamic group. This is an idea which was also mentioned by several Islamic respondents. According to Carlson’s functional definition of religious groups, Boko Haram can be considered a religious group because it identifies itself as such. However, as was argued in the theoretical framework, with which groups you identify is not only a personal choice, but can also be assigned. Arnold denies in his comment the Islamic identity of the group. By doing so, he expresses different boundaries of the group of Muslims than a member of Boko Haram would probably do. This shows that boundaries are a social construct and can be understood differently by different people.

Fundamentalism

Finally, some respondents made remarks in which they mentioned the terms fundamentalism, (violent) extremism or radicalisation. As explained before, the most obvious example was Boko Haram. However, most respondents reported that the influence of this group on the relations between religious groups is minimal. Several people said that its popularity has dwindled since 2014, and that former Boko Haram members have deradicalised in prison. Especially in Yaoundé, the amount of radical groups was expected to be very limited. Ebolo, for example, thought that people are just not interested:

‘In Cameroon we don’t really have radical religious groups. We don’t really have. [...] Maybe someone will tell you there are radical groups, but they are not so open. Like Boko Haram wants to destabilize the president, but most of Cameroonians they don’t care about that. Most they care about is if they have a job, if they can take care of their families’. (Ebolo, interview, 15 July 2016)

Arnaud, a Catholic, was convinced that Boko Haram has very little influence on the relations between Muslims and Christians, which he considered to be very good. He did warn, however, for the emergence of radical Christian strands:

‘There is more and more extremism. There is an extremist strand of Christianity. They are really radical, they do deliverance of demons. There is also a violent, aggressive way in their discourse, a language of miracles. The phenomenon of marabouts, of sorcerers, is not very different from these people. Without a doubt they are among the extremists’ (Arnaud, informal conversation, 18 July 2016).

While he did not specify which groups he meant in particular, his ‘language of miracles’ may refer to the teachings of the *nouvelles églises* as explained in section 5.1.3. This shows once again that the relations between the *nouvelles églises* and the mainline Christian churches are often seen as problematic.

5.2.3 Religion is not the problem

The previous subsections showed that most respondents are very aware of the increased attention for the relationship between Christian and Islamic groups in the Cameroonian society. As explained in the introduction to this thesis, my research fits into a series of investigations, reports, programs and other projects focusing on the relations between religious groups, notably Christians and Muslims. The aim of these projects is either to understand or to improve these relations. The assumption behind many of them, is that the boundaries between religious groups can cause conflict. However, while most respondents acknowledged this, they also often emphasized that religion is not the problem everyone should be looking at. They suggest that even when conflict arrives across religious boundaries, the reason for this conflict does not lie in religion, but in the instrumentalisation of religious identity. In this subsection, I discuss some of their views on this issue.

First of all, conflict between religious groups in Cameroon were sometimes actively placed as issues outside the religious domain. As described before, Boko Haram was, for example, not identified as a religious group. Therefore, attacks by Boko Haram are explained as attacks that have nothing to do with religion:

‘Religion can never be the problem, never. The issue of Boko Haram is very different. They kill both Muslim and Christian, even their own Muslim church they destroy. I don’t know their problem, because they are killing both Muslim and Christians’ (Yanila, interview, 11 September 2016).

Yanila indicates here that according to him, the issue of Boko Haram has nothing to do with religion. Other respondents who talked about Boko Haram linked the participation of youth in the ranks of Boko Haram to the socioeconomic position of youth:

‘The problem of conflict is not in religion, it is in the socioeconomic domain. A solution would be to create employment. [...] Youth are the first layer of victims, they are favoured because they are vulnerable. Terrorist groups, Boko Haram, they enroll youth by giving them money. [...] They give you money. When you see a sum of money you’ve never seen in your life, you are flattered; you accept.’ (Yvonne, interview, 19 July 2016)

Poverty and hardship has been a recurring theme in most of the conversations I had in Yaoundé. As mentioned earlier, the popularity of the *nouvelles églises* was also explained by youth’s difficult socioeconomic position. Religion, and religious groups, are one way to deal with the pressure:

‘I think youth are really desperate. They try here, try there, they pray, they go to the mosque, because the Muslims, they say: when you go there, they help. The solidarity is very strong. For some this also means opportunities. They say: “I saw a friend who went there, he got this”. Media also plays a role. When

something happens, they say: “If you want to have a visa, just call this number”” (Félicité, interview, 7 October 2016)

This dynamic does give religious groups a certain degree of power over youth. I had a conversation with Cédric, who is a young peace builder who works, among other things, to minimize conflict between religious groups. He stated several times that according to him, religion is not the problem in Cameroon. He focused on hopelessness as a driver for conflict: when youth do not have any perspective of improving their lives (‘they don’t have dreams’), they will look for other opportunities and desperate measures. Radical groups make use of this to instrumentalise religion for political gain (Cédric, informal conversation, 26 August). In other words: even if conflict is played out across religious boundaries, this does not mean that religion itself has anything to do with it.

Félicité shares the same viewpoint as Cédric. She works in the development domain and has been approached by international actors in response to the ICG report, which warns for conflict between religious groups. While Cédric addresses relations between religious groups in his peace building programs, Félicité is not convinced of their use:

‘Looking at religion is superficial, that’s my feeling too. It is not going deep into what is the problem. [...] Some people instrumentalise religion, they say this is the problem. It is a bit true, but in Cameroon the mosques, the Catholics and the Pentecostals, all of us are really free to choose our religion. Religion can be instrumentalised, like with Boko Haram, but it is not the real problem. Yet I worked at several NGOs and I see that donors are coming directly from the ICG report. They ask us: can you do a project on radicalisation. But we don’t know how we can go about it without creating a problem, because people are not really saying what is the problem. You can go now and talk about religion and now it becomes a problem’. (Félicité, interview, 7 October 2016).

As the boundaries between religious groups can be the boundaries along which conflict is performed, it is relevant to learn how these boundaries are perceived. However, Félicité warns that there is a need for a deeper understanding of the root causes of conflict. She reflects that organisations are asked to act upon a dynamic that is not fully understood yet, which she fears may exacerbate the problem. From the academic perspective of boundary construction, this can be understood as follows: by assuming religious boundaries are problematic and focusing all attention on resolving this, these boundaries are given more significance. This is likely to strengthen boundaries, which can amplify or even create the problem you are trying to solve. It is therefore it is important to look broader than religious issues alone to understand conflict dynamics in the society of Cameroon.

5.3 Conclusion

The sections above allow to draw conclusions on what the religious landscape looks like for the youth who participated in this research. They describe a landscape which is dominated by the mainline denominations of Christianity and Islam. Christian respondents identify a broad variety of different denominations, all forming subgroups, and all with their own characteristics. Islamic respondents, however, reflect only on Islamic subgroups when specifically asked. The religious

landscape intersects with other fields, such as ethnicity, geography and politics. The boundaries between religious groups are therefore shaped also by boundaries crossing these other fields.

From the way these youth talk about religious groups, it can be concluded that not all youth see groups and their boundaries in the same way. Some groups are recognized as important by some youth and not by others. Christians, for example, often mentioned the arrival of the *nouvelles églises* as a significant change of the religious landscape. These *nouvelles églises* were generally regarded with suspicion by the respondents of this research. The respondents regarded the boundaries between Christians and Muslims and the boundaries between mainline Christian churches and *nouvelles églises* as most strong. While the relationships between different religious groups are generally described as peaceful, there are cases in which the boundaries between groups become problematic.

In short, the youth who participated in this research perceive Cameroon's religious landscape as heterogeneous and changing. Conflicts of interests, competition and disagreement between religious groups are not uncommon, but respondents emphasize rather the peaceful coexistence between religious groups.

6 Positioning oneself in the religious landscape

The previous chapter described how youth view the religious landscape of Cameroon. In the interviews held for this research, youth reflected on the many groups that make up this landscape and the relations between these groups. They acknowledged that religion is an important element of Cameroon's society.

As such an important element of Cameroon's society, religion is also present in multiple ways in the lives of the youth who took part in this research. Of the 59 youth who participated, only one identified as an atheist. All the others identified as being part of a religious group. In addition, they all actively practiced and thought about their religion. In this section, I reflect on how Cameroonian youth explain how and why they identify as members of specific religious groups and what this identification means to them. The insights that can be drawn from this contribute to understanding how everyday life religion influences youth's perceptions on boundaries between religious groups.

6.1 Identifying with religious groups

This section explores which groups youth identify with, what their reasons for this identification are and whether their identification shifts throughout their lives. It does not only reflect on how they relate themselves to the specific religious groups they identify with, but also how they relate their position to the religious landscape as a whole.

6.1.1 Presenting your religious identification

'I'm a Christian'. 'A Muslim'. 'I'm Roman Catholic'. 'Presbyterian'. 'Christian, Evangelical church'. 'Atheist'. 'I'm still searching'. These different responses to the question of what religious group someone belongs to shows that identification with religious groups is not straightforward. Whether a person chooses to put forward her or his identification with a specific church or rather with a large group can say something about how they experience their membership. This subsection reflects on how the youth participating in this research have presented their religious identification.

As explained before, the religious groups present in Cameroon can sometimes be seen as subgroups, falling under larger, overarching groups. Within the group of Christians, for example, there is a group of Protestants, which in turn can be divided into the eleven groups related to the main Protestant churches and their followers. Youth who identify with one of these eleven groups are likely to also identify as a Protestant and as a Christian. When I asked someone with which religious group she or he identified, they did not always refer to the same group but instead chose which group they mentioned: 'I am a Presbyterian'; 'I am a Protestant', or 'I am a Christian'. Explaining this in the context of the dialogical self theory, these youth can choose from the different I-positions they inhabit, preferring one to take dominance over the others. In this process, it is also defined whether the person with whom they engage in an interaction is considered an in-group or

out-group member. In an interaction with only Christians, for example, I noticed that respondents usually specified their church or denomination. In a conversation with multiple religious groups, respondents more often referred to the all-encompassing group of Christians.

This was different for Islamic respondents, who all identified as 'Muslim'. They did not specify any particular subgroup. As explained in the previous chapters, Christian religious groups are often connected to churches, but this is not the case with Islamic religious groups. Muslims can pray in any mosque and are not a follower or member of a specific mosque, in the way that Christians can be a member of a specific church. This is a possible explanation for why Islamic respondents all identify with the same group. It also reconfirms the analysis made in the previous chapter that the boundaries between Islamic groups are seen as less important than those between Christian groups.

Regarding most youths I spoke with about their religious identification, I cannot say why they take the I-position they did when presenting themselves to me. Our encounters were too brief to draw conclusions. It is likely that they present themselves differently to me than to a fellow Cameroonian, or to a friend, or a family member. As explained before, identification (and presentation of identity) is situational. They could have assumed that I do not know the names of the different churches in Cameroon, therefore choosing to respond 'Protestant' instead of 'Presbyterian'.

However, I had the opportunity to get some more insight through observing my friends, people with whom I spent more time, whose friends and families I met, and whom I was allowed to follow into settings to which I would normally have no access, such as their work, family dinners or when meeting friends on the street. One example is Cédric. His ideas about religion differed from those of most people I talked to. Whenever we discussed religion, he indicated that he finds it difficult to combine his ideas about how the world should be organised with the Church as an institute. He does not practice his religion regularly, either by going to church or by praying, and he doubts the existence of a God. To me he presents himself as an atheist. His family is Protestant, and as being an atheist is not very common in Cameroon, Cédric mostly presents himself as a Christian or Protestant, as the following example will show.

Cédric supported me as gatekeeper and translator during the interviews with motor taxi drivers. In our conversations with these young men, they always asked us about our religious affiliations as well. Cédric usually introduced himself as a Christian. When we were in a group of only Christians of different affiliations, he introduced himself mostly as a Protestant. Whenever we met someone who told us he was a member of the specific Protestant church Cédric used to go to as a child, Cédric immediately responded with an enthusiastic: 'Me too!', even though he hardly ever frequents this church anymore. This means that while Cédric does not practice his faith often anymore, this does not keep him from identifying with the associated religious group. He emphasizes shared identity in a similar way when he meets another Bamileke, his tribe, or when he meets someone who shares his last name, which is fairly common in Cameroon. This suggests that he sees shared identity as a positive thing which may bring something good to the interaction, and

that he will thus emphasize this even when this specific group membership does generally not influence his life strongly.

How youth position them in the religious landscape can therefore be seen as situational. The next chapter will show in more detail how this differs with regard to the persons with whom someone interacts.

6.1.2 Reasons for group membership

To understand youth's engagement with religious boundaries, it is useful to know why they identify with a specific religious category. In this subsection, I sum up several reasons the respondents mentioned.

First of all, many Cameroonians go to the same church as their parents, or, if their parents were members of different religious groups, as their father:

'My mama is a catholic, my papa is a catholic, so I am still a catholic. I can't change my religion. It depends on your history' '*And your children?*' 'They all follow me. They are catholic like me. And their mothers too' (Gido, group interview, 16 September 2016)

As explained in the previous chapter, religious identification is also connected to ethnicity. In the background chapter to this thesis, it is described how religion and ethnicity are closely connected in Cameroon. Youth may therefore also identify with a religious group in accordance with the religious group which has members who share their ethnic identity. However, ethnic or regional background was never mentioned by any of my respondents in explaining their religious identification.

As the example of Cédric in the previous subsection showed, identifying with your parent's religious group does not even require active practice of or belief in said religion. While some respondents were dedicated followers of the religious group they were a member of since birth, others, like Cédric, accepted the identification passively.

On the other hand, there were also many youth who reported that they had actively searched or were still searching for a religious group that 'fit them well'. As can be concluded from the interviews, religious mobility is high in Cameroon. This means that youth easily shift between different religious groups. For these religious groups, group membership can therefore be considered as relatively fluid.

As described above, youth are traditionally a member of the same religious group as their parents or father. However, many respondents in my research indicated that freedom of religion (or *laïcité*) is an important value in Cameroon. This also meant that they felt free to choose their own religious group, as expressed by the 22-year old Adèle:

'Even in your family, you can choose your church, you have the choice' (Adèle, interview, 12 August 2016).

With ‘choosing your church’, Adèle refers to becoming a member of a specific church. As explained in the previous chapter, a church can be considered a subgroup within larger groups of Protestantism and Catholicism, which can again be considered subgroups within Christianity. As will be described below, changing group membership to a different church was quite common among the youth I spoke with. Changing group membership from Protestantism to Catholicism or *nouvelles églises* was also common. These types of changing group membership were also not described as ‘converting’, whereas changing from Christianity to Islam and the other way around was. This was also done less frequently and considered to be more difficult. Yet overall, many respondents indicated that they had been introduced to different religious groups throughout their life.

In the interviews, several reasons for changing membership of religious groups could be distinguished. Firstly, most respondents mentioned that they wanted to make their own choice. As people in Cameroon mostly grow up being a member of the religious group of their parent(s), several respondents indicated that they wanted to ‘choose for themselves’ (Chakra, informal conversation, 26 August 2016). For some youth, the idea of making up their own mind about which group to follow was enough reason to switch groups or try out several groups. Other youths reported that they did not feel at home in the religious group they had originally been a member of. In the previous chapter, for example, I described how Daniel disliked his original religious group (Catholics) for their involvement in politics. This was a push-factor that led him to search for another group that would fit him better. Other respondents named pull-factors which convinced them to change their group membership. For example, Félicité went from a Presbyterian church to a Pentecostal church (one of the *nouvelles églises*). She explained elaborately how she thinks the way of preaching of her new church fits better what she is looking for:

‘The difference is only in the preaching. It is more deep, and closer to my reality. When I’m going to church it’s really solving my situation. [...] The difference is, in other churches they have another message, of condemnation. You have to confess, you’re a sinner. Now, I am blessed by Christ, this is the message of my church. That’s a fundamental difference. Their message really attracts youth, it is a message that does not condemn, but says you can do what you want, you are free, so that is why there are so many youth there’. (Félicité, interview, 8 October 2016).

Félicité justifies her choice of membership of this particular religious group by explaining how this group has characteristics which she prefers over the religious group she originally identified with. She even indicates that she thinks that this is a reason for other youth to join this group, too.

Secondly, curiosity played a role for many youth who had tried different religious groups. Respondents expressed that they had wanted to try out something new, or ‘just to see how it is’, in the words of Mackenzie (interview, 7 October 2016), who regularly visits other churches than the one she usually goes to. Thirdly, friends or family members had introduced youth to a different religious group. Some respondents indicated being forced to go to other churches with family members, others that they went along out of respect or kindness. Fourthly, several respondents mentioned that they changed their group membership because they had moved from one place to another. For this reason, they could no longer go to the church they used to visit. Sometimes respondents who moved found a local branch of ‘their’ church in their new environment, but others

had taken the opportunity (or were forced by these circumstances) to compare different churches so as to find one that fit them best. And finally, a fifth reason given by youth who changed their religious membership was that it was not their choice, but that of God or Allah. For example, Guy used to be a Roman Catholic, but he joined a Pentecostal church ten years ago. When I asked him why, he responded: 'I didn't choose to go there, it was God who guided me'. Of course, these five reasons are not mutually exclusive.

One interview in particular gave an insight in several reasons for youth to move between religious groups. This was an interview with three friends: Vanessa, Stan and Daniel. They had all visited multiple religious institutions. For Vanessa, switching churches was a necessity, because she is a singer who moves around Cameroon a lot. Vanessa identifies as a Catholic, but she has been following sermons with the Jehovah's Witness and with Pentecostal churches. She told me that her traveling around requires her to visit other churches, and that she has used this as an opportunity to try different religious groups. Another factor determining which churches she went to was her family. Her aunt is a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses, and has tried fervently to convert her, which is why she spent quite some time in her aunt's church as well. Vanessa also told me that she would have like to be introduced to Islam, but that she did not feel welcome, being a woman. When I asked Stan with which religious group he identifies, he responded 'I am still searching'. He elaborated that his parents are Catholics, and so he had been a member of the Catholic church as well, but he did not feel at ease in this group. Now, he was trying many different Christian churches, but he had not gone to mosques 'because they don't have Jesus'. Their third friend Daniel also tried many different religious groups: Jehovah's Witness, Catholic, Protestant and Islamic mosques. His reason for trying multiple religious institutions was mainly curiosity: 'I am a Catholic because my parents are Catholic. I don't want to stay Catholic. I want to test, to learn about many religions, to go to testimonies around the world to learn about religion' (Daniel, group interview, 12 August 2016). This interview gave an insight in the various reasons youth may have for moving between religious groups: necessity, curiosity, not feeling comfortable with the group you're in, and other people trying to invite you to their group.

Most youth I spoke to who had 'tried' different religious groups, remained within their broader group of Christianity or Islam, like Stan and Vanessa. However, a few respondents, like Daniel, had tried another religious category as well. Some youth even moved from being a member of one of the more mainstream religious groups to some of the minority religious groups in the Cameroonian religious context. For example, one of the youth I spoke to was a young man who had grown up a Catholic, but who was curious to see what other religions had to offer. After trying out many religious groups, he finally settled with Buddhism as he found this the best 'spiritual fit' (Herve, informal conversation, 12 August 2016).

There is a difference between participating in the activities of a religious group, such as going to a mass or prayer in a church or mosque, and identifying as a member of this group. Many youth who indicated to 'try' different churches and/or mosques out of curiosity did not necessarily become a member of these religious groups, which requires identification with this group (achieved and/or assigned). On the other hand, the youth who explained that God or Allah had guided them all

had more or less officially changed their membership (or ‘converted’) and considered their current group as the religious group they identify with most.

Yet the distinction between being a member and not being a member is not always that clear. In the case of Ebolo, for example, he joined a Pentecostal church out of curiosity:

‘I was always interested in people, just like you are doing your research. I went to these churches to see how things are going there. If the Catholic people are bad people because they don’t practice their religion very well, me as a Catholic I wanted to see if they really practice their religion very well’ (Ebolo, interview, 15 July 2016).

Ebolo went to this Pentecostal church for two years before deciding that he did not want to go there anymore. He approached this religious group as an outsider and presents himself as such now, but two years is a long time. It is therefore likely that either he identified as a Pentecostalist himself during that time, or that other people assigned that identification to him. Switching back and forth, such as Ebolo had done, was also not uncommon:

‘I’m having friends and over the long run they have changed their faith. They moved from Catholic church to Pentecostal. Now they have left Pentecostal and joined Catholic again, after a time, when they discover the church is not what they had in mind, what they expected, they come back’ (Yanila, interview, 11 September 2016).

This indicates that religious boundaries are relatively fluid and can be crossed multiple times, multiple ways.

A final reason which was frequently mentioned as an explanation for why youth join other religious groups than they used to go to is personal gain. Especially in the context of the *nouvelles églises*, as argued before, many respondents indicated that youth switch to these churches because they offer certain benefits, such as increasing access to financial, social and spiritual resources. This would also fit in the context of a political structure in which patrimonial relations and network-based benefits, as described in the background chapter (Orock 2013). However, none of the youth interviewed gave this as an explanation for their own personal change of membership, only that of others. This can be explained in several possible ways: firstly, I did not interview many members of *nouvelles églises*. If members of these churches are the only ones who join religious groups for personal gain, I have just not spoken to anyone who thinks this way. Secondly, ‘personal gain’ may not be considered a bonafide reason to join a religious group. As will be explained in the next subsection, youth generally value piety and ‘building a personal relationship with God’. To confess that you do not identify with a religious group for spiritual but material reasons may simply be not accepted.

Between youths who followed their families and youth who chose their own religion were some general distinctions. The latter group had often enjoyed higher education, had spent some time abroad and/or came from a wealthier family. It included, among others, students, artists and people who had well-paying jobs in the business world. The first group included youth who had a more difficult socioeconomic background. For example, this group included almost all the motor taxi

drivers. Possible explanations for this divide can be that modern education values personal choice and reflection; or that youth who are more financially stable have more time to reflect on their religious identification; or that they are more likely to live apart from their family and therefore experience more freedom to choose for themselves. As described before, the *nouvelles églises* were expected to also attract youth who are financially unstable. However, as I have not interviewed many people from these churches, I cannot reflect on this more elaborately.

6.2 Roles and meanings of religion and religious groups

As argued in the theoretical framework, meaning which is given to group membership helps shape boundaries. For this reason, it is relevant to examine the roles and meanings youth give to their religious group membership in order to understand their perception of and engagement with boundaries between religious groups.

6.2.1 Roles and meanings

The participants in this study ascribed many different roles to religion in their personal lives. First of all, religion was most often described as providing hope and comfort, especially in difficult times. When respondents spoke about religion in this way, they mostly referred to a spiritual comfort, such as expressed in the following remarks by Félicité:

‘Finding this church was part of a period in life. I had no job. I was asking myself, ‘where am I’, seeing nothing really. The church gave me comfort, it helped me to go through that period’. (Félicité, interview, 7 October 2016).

Related to this, religion was also explained as a safety net. For example, my neighbour Alan, a Catholic, said that the hardships many people in Cameroon suffer from makes it difficult for them to trust people. ‘It is difficult to make friends. Mostly people have an interest in you. People are dependent on others, they are dependent on their parents. But my parents can die, and what then?’. To Alan, God is therefore the only constant factor. ‘God will always be there’.

Secondly, religion can offer people a set of moral guidelines which helps them steer through life and check that what they’re doing is the ‘right thing’. This came to the fore very strongly when I spoke with Félix, a 34 year old filmmaker. Religion makes him want to do the ‘right thing’, even when this makes other people uncomfortable. He draws strength from religion in order to do the work he feels needs to be done:

‘I make films to talk with young people about problems in society. For example, sexual abuse. At school some girls are pregnant. I project a film to encourage them to talk. But also colonialism. My father fought against French colonialism. He died in 1991. When I became an adult, I decided to make a film about my fathers militancy. For me, religion gives me strength to engage with these themes without being afraid. For others, religion makes them sleep’ (Félix, interview, 7 October 2016).

Félix has a handicap which makes it more difficult for him to walk. As he experienced stigmatisation because of this handicap, he was afraid it would be difficult for him to get married.

When he met his now wife, however, her parents accepted him as their son-in-law because of the morals their religion taught them:

‘For myself, religion gave me the strength to support my disability. I married my wife because of religion. In Cameroon, people like me don’t have girls. Parents don’t want to give a girl the power to be my girlfriend or my wife. Disabled people have the bad opinion. You seldom find a parent who accepts a handicapped husband for his daughter. But personally, I have parents in law who are very religious. They accepted me as their daughter’s boyfriend’ (Félix, interview, 7 October 2016).

Thirdly, religious groups can offer certain membership benefits. The example which was given most often was that of youth joining *nouvelles églises* for personal gain. However, as explained before, I cannot reflect on how the youth who participated to this research saw this role for themselves, because they only related it to others.

Nevertheless, I do argue that in general, religion is seen by many as a way of getting somewhere. Providing hope and comfort, as well as moral guidance, can both also be explained as membership benefits. Religion therefore does offer support, either in material or spiritual ways.

6.2.2 Practicing religion

Most Cameroonian youth indicated that they saw their engagement with religion as a private matter. They explained that the core of their religious practice is individual prayer. Most respondents said they pray at least once a day, often in the evening before dinner or before going to bed. It is also common for Cameroonian youth to study religious texts. Some of the respondents to this interview go to bible study or Qur’an school once a week. Others read the Bible or Qur’an at home or in school. With regard to attending mass or prayers in a religious building, such as churches and mosques, the respondents were more mixed. Félicité, who goes to a Pentecostal church, would like to go to church almost every day, but her job does not permit her to do so (Félicité, interview, 7 October 2016). Yanila on the other hand, who identifies as a Catholic, answered shyly when I asked him: ‘I go to church, but not every Sunday. [...] I should go more often’ (Yanila, interview, 11 September 2016). He admitted embarrassedly that he did have time, but did not prioritize going to church.

Félicité’s comment that she would like to go more often, but that this conflicted with her job, was echoed multiple times in the different interviews. For example, one of the motor taxi drivers told me:

‘I always go to church. That is to say, when I have the time I go. When I have work to do, I cannot go. [...] I would like to go to church every day’ (Joshua and Constantin, group interview, 16 September 2016)

Respondents in this research generally applauded participation in religious activities such as prayer and the attendance of mass. They saw this in others or made resolutions for their own engagement in religious practice. Ebolo, for example, was critical of his personal engagement: ‘I’m trying to practice, but I cannot say I’m practicing as a good Christian’ (Ebolo, interview, 15 July 2016). For Ebolo, ‘practicing as a good Christian’ meant going to church every Sunday. He also mentioned

multiple times that he admired Muslims. He was not the only one: several respondents who identified as Christians remarked that they respect Muslims for their piety and discipline. As examples of this behaviour, they mentioned that Muslims pray five times a day and that they fast during the month of Ramadan. These examples show that taking part in religious activities is generally seen as a positive thing.

The respondents reflected two ways of thinking about attending religious services in religious institutions such as churches and mosques. Firstly, as the examples above have shown, going to church is seen as an important religious practice, something that all believers should aim to participate in.

On the other hand, respondents were also often critical about other youth who spend a lot of time praying or going to church. Just after my arrival in Yaoundé, for example, I got to talking to a group of young people who were having a drink in a bar near the guesthouse where I stayed. They invited me to join for a beer when I passed them, an invitation I gladly accepted. As Yaoundé in general, and my neighbourhood in particular, does not host many foreigners, they were very curious to know why I was there. I explained briefly that I would do research after youth engagement with religion. They immediately started laughing, and one girl was quick to respond:

‘Youth and religion? I will tell you about youth and religion. You see, youth like to go to clubs, right? And drink alcohol, right? They can’t go to church on Sunday. They are too hungover. The youth that do go to church on Sundays, they are like... addicted. [the same word was simultaneously uttered by her friend, who sat next to her]. They are addicted, as they have been told to always go to church, since they were children. But they don’t truly listen to what is being said. They have no inner drive. Usually, in the churches of Yaoundé you see no youth.’ (Theresa, informal conversation, 26 June 2016)

Theresa makes it clear with this statement that for her, going to church does not necessarily mean that you are a ‘good’ believer. I interpret this comment as an insinuation that, if you are not going to pay attention in church, you might as well not go. This can be understood also from these remarks of Yanila:

‘You have people in front of the church who know nothing about God. We call them churchgoer. They are every day in front of the church, but they know nothing about Christ. For me, that I usually pray doesn’t say I’m faithful or that I’m a Christian. In anything I’m doing I know God is there, and everywhere I find Him. That is all I can say. I need to go to church. I’m not really going, but I should. I need to learn the doctrine of God. It is like you don’t always like to do what your father is doing, but you need to listen’ (Yanila, interview, 11 September 2016).

Yanila comments negatively (“they know nothing”) on people who go to church every day, but who, according to Yanila, do not really pay attention. This is directly followed by a reflection on his own engagement with religion: “I’m not really going, but I should”. These comments also suggest that practicing religion (in a ‘good’ way) is generally seen as a way of ‘building a personal relationship with God’. Ebolo, for example, used a metaphor to clarify why he found it important to actively engage with his religion:

‘With the church, it’s like you are going out with a lady. You have to take care of the relationship. When you are going out with God, you have to practice. Do you get my point? You have to maintain your relationship.’ (Ebolo, interview, 15 July 2016)

From these comments can be concluded that there is a precarious balance in how youth think engagement with religion should be practiced. On the one hand, piety is applauded, whereas on the other, religious engagement should not interfere with hard work. As the next chapter will show, these ideas about ‘good’ and ‘bad’ religion are sometimes used to distinguish an in-group from an out-group, thereby strengthening boundaries between these groups.

Some respondents made reference to how gender identity shapes how they engage with their religious group. They reflected on different expectations for women and men regarding their religious practices. For example, Ghislain is a Roman Catholic. He told me he does not go to church often, because he thinks ‘men should have time to think for themselves and to work’. (Ghislain, informal conversation, 7 August 2016). Another example is that in many religious institutions, women have different roles than men. For instance, women were not expected to go to the mosque every day:

‘Women don’t have to go to the mosque every day’. ‘Only on Friday everyone has to be there’. ‘They prefer it when women pray at home. But we do go to Qur’an school every day’. (Habiba and Zaida, group interview, 9 September 2016).

This indicates also that the ideas that youth may have about ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (practice of) religion are not universal, but different for men and women.

Finally, some respondents literally remarked that how they relate themselves to their religious groups is personal and does not necessarily reflect how other in-group and out-group members see this. One of the motor taxi drivers who participated in this research phrased this as follows:

‘The faith is personal. For Christians there is even a large difference already. When you say ‘I am Christian’, you don’t always mean the same thing. There are differences, for example, between Christians from the North and the South’ (Dilane, group interview, 16 September 2016).

He recognizes that the experience of being part of a group is different for each individual. He gives the example of Christians from different regions behaving or thinking in different ways, which is in line with the Social Identity Theory as described in the theoretical framework: a group is a social construct. Its character is not fixed, but dependent on personal interpretations of in-group and out-group members who together construct and reconstruct what the group means to them.

These descriptions about how youth practice their religion tell us more about how youth see the meaning of religious groups and its function in their personal lives. It can be concluded that youth see religion as a personal matter. It may relate them to social groups, but with regard to their everyday life, it is seen mostly as an element in their lives which brings them something personally. As I will argue in the next chapter, this personal approach may also be a reason that religious groups

live together peacefully, because it is considered everyone's own business. On the other hand, the examples also showed that some youth judge others for their religious practice, which can contribute to strengthening boundaries.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that religion is an important element of life for almost all Cameroonian youth who participated in this research. The main reason to identify with a particular group is because a person has grown up among this group. Religious groups also have strong ethnic and regional ties. However, among young people it is also common to move to other religious groups or switch between them. Religious mobility can mainly be seen within broader groups such as Christianity and Islam. From this can be concluded that the boundaries between Christianity and Islam are considered to be stronger than those between different Christian or Islamic groups. However, Christians sometimes also convert to Islam and vice versa.

This chapter argued that membership of religious groups means something differently for each individual. Factors determining how this membership is experienced are, among others, family and ethnic background, gender, and which specific group an individual identifies with. This is in line with the theory as outlined in chapter, showing that what groups mean is situational and understood differently by each individual, yet individuals and groups also shape each other.

7 Engaging with boundaries

The previous chapters gave an insight in how urban youth in Yaoundé see the religious landscape, and where youth position themselves within this landscape. They identified the many boundaries these youth see crossing the landscape, marking different religious groups.

As described in the theoretical framework, boundaries are situational, which means that they do not exist when they are not deemed relevant by those people who interact across boundaries. Youth are among the many actors who help shape these boundaries as well. Their engagement with boundaries has (limited) influence on which boundaries are important in which context, and also when boundaries become problematic. This chapter explores how Cameroonian youth interact across boundaries between religious groups.

I argue in this chapter that there are many situations in which youth are in interaction with people who identify with other religious groups than their own. Yaoundé's great diversity makes it practically impossible for people to engage only with in-group members. The youth I interviewed recognized this as an inherent feature of life in the city. I identified three ways in which they spoke about how they engage with people from different religious groups: by strengthening, ignoring or bridging the boundaries they identify. I will argue that shared identifiers or I-positions are often actively employed to ignore or bridge boundaries between religious groups.

7.1 Interaction across boundaries between religious groups

Throughout the field work period, I spoke with many youth about their interaction with people who identified with other religious groups than theirs. Most of the respondents moved in mixed social environments, meaning that they frequently encounter people from different religious groups.

7.1.1 Encounters across religious boundaries

In this section I describe the most common encounters of people who identify with different religious groups: within families; in neighbourhoods and on the streets of Yaoundé; at school or at work; and in friend groups. Of course, these encounters are not mutually exclusive. I argue that in many of these encounters, two people may not share the same religious group membership, but they do often share membership of another social group, such as being a member of a family, an inhabitant of a neighbourhood or a colleague.

Mixed families

First of all, my respondents indicated that many Cameroonian families contain people who identify with different religious groups. In some families, family members all identify as Christians, but they choose to attend different churches. Other families include members of both Christian and Islamic groups, as was confirmed in a group interview with Islamic youth:

'Of course we have mixed families'. Everybody nods. 'It is difficult to find a family with only Muslims or only Christians. Mixed families are not an extraordinary thing. Even between brothers, one may be a Christian and

another a Muslim. Or a grandfather has two wives: one Christian and one Muslim'. (Idrissou and Issa, group interview, 2 October 2016).

In Yaoundé, I met many youth who lived in such mixed families. For example, Mackenzie lives with her daughter, her sister, her mother and her grandmother in Yaoundé. The latter is a Muslim, whereas the others are all Catholics. Mackenzie told me that she used to be scared of her when she was little: 'You could only see her eyes [because of her veil]'. (Mackenzie, interview, 2 September 2016). Another respondent, Yoyo, told me that his children go to another church than he does, because it is more practical for them:

'My children don't have the same religion as me. They are catholic [he is evangelical]. My own children.' 'Why?' 'Because they preferred that. The catholic church is next to our house. I don't have a problem with it. As long as they speak God [which means: as long as they believe in God] that is all I find important. ... I did go to another church than my father for one year, but then I went back to his church' (Yoyo, interview, 16 September 2016).

He himself has also changed his group membership from that of his father. He changed back to his father's church later. This is in line with the section about religious mobility as described in the previous chapter: it is relatively common for youth to change their group membership.

The cases above describe families in which children decide to identify with another religious group than that of their parent(s). Mixed families through inter religious marriage, however, is also fairly common, as was described in chapter 5. Some youth also indicated that the number of mixed families is larger in some regions than in others. For example, Foumban, a city in the west of Cameroon, was mentioned often by respondents for being well-known for its mixed families. Respondents also reported that mixed families are common in Yaoundé, such as in the following conversation with two Christian motor taxi drivers:

'In the North there are families who are mixed, but not many'. 'Here in Yaoundé there are, but in the North there are only few. Here you find them everywhere'. (Zinedou and Raphael, group interview, 27 September 2016)

Their remarks show once more that ethnic and regional boundaries influence Cameroon's religious landscape. According to them, there are more mixed families in Yaoundé than in the north of the country.

When I asked respondents about mixed families, they most often assumed that I meant families made up of both Christians and Muslims. Sometimes, when I asked specifically about different churches, they came up with examples of families representing multiple Christian groups, such as in the example of Yoyo cited above. This can be interpreted as a confirmation of the analysis I made in the previous chapters that the boundary between Christians and Muslims is given more significance than the boundaries dividing different Christian groups.

One exception is again the boundary dividing *nouvelles églises* from mainline Christian groups. Christian respondents often mentioned family members who joined these *nouvelles églises*. Mackenzie, for example, speaks here about her sister:

‘My other sister, she used to say their church is the best. The church is called the “Only True Church of God”, can you imagine? It’s a new church, apostolic. When we argue, it is about how she is not plaiting her hair anymore, she has no earrings, she cannot wear high heels. We used to go dancing, but now she can’t. She can’t even visit family members if they are not in her church. It has been 13 or 14 years without her visiting me, nor even her dad. She doesn’t even know his whereabouts. You can abandon anything, but not your family. Never your family.’ (Mackenzie, interview, 7 September 2016)

As in Mackenzie’s comment above, the tone of the remarks about mixed families differed when we talked about Christian-Muslim families or families including members of the *nouvelles églises*. Both Christian and Muslim respondents mostly spoke about Christian-Muslim families in a positive way. These families were presented as examples of tolerance and respect for one another, or as proof of Cameroon’s peaceful cohabitation of different religious groups. Respondents emphasized that these families are ‘common’ and ‘normal’. Families consisting of mainline churches and *nouvelles églises* however were mostly problematised. In this specific example, Mackenzie dislikes the fact that her sister’s church calls itself ‘the only true church’. This name implies that any other church is not a ‘real’ church or ‘good’ church, which in turn implies that any member of this church is a ‘real’ Christian. Mackenzie also complains that her sister does not visit her relatives anymore because of her church. This suggests that her sister sees the boundaries between her religious group and other groups as so strong that she cannot even interact with people from outside her own group. This relates to chapter 5, which described that boundaries between mainline Christians and *nouvelles églises* can be problematic due to disagreements. This quote also shows that boundaries are experienced differently by different people: whereas Mackenzie thinks that no boundaries should ever be strong enough for someone to ‘abandon’ your family, her sister apparently thinks differently.

Finally, what I remarked during my conversations with youth about mixed families is that they often mentioned marriage across ethnic or regional boundaries, even when I only asked them about boundaries along religious lines. For example, when I spoke about inter religious marriage with a group of Islamic youth, they referred in stead to marriage across regions:

‘You can marry anyone. South-Nord, or East-West - there are no boundaries to whom you marry’. ‘There are even some who would want to marry a Dutch girl!’ (Idrissou and Amina, group interview, 2 October 2016).

This may indicate that they see religion as strongly related to Cameroon’s different regions, or that they value boundaries between religious groups as of similar or even less importance than boundaries between groups along ethnic or regional lines. In any case, it shows that youth are aware of different boundaries crossing the society of Cameroon than only those dividing religious groups.

Mixed neighbourhoods

A second environment in which encounters across religious boundaries take place is that of the different neighbourhoods of Yaoundé. Muslims are with 25% in the minority as compared to Christians as a broad category, comprising 70% of the population of Yaoundé. As described in the background chapter to this study there are some neighbourhoods that are generally understood to be

dominated by either Muslims or Christians. However, all respondents indicated that most neighbourhoods in Yaoundé are highly mixed:

‘There are many mixed neighbourhoods. In fact, there are no neighbourhoods with only Christians, or only Muslims. Even Briqueterie is mixed’. ‘My own neighbour is a Christian, and there are mosques everywhere, too’. ‘Not in my neighbourhood. I have to take a taxi to Tsinga to go to Qur’an school’ (Habiba and Noor, group interview, 9 October 2016)

That even neighbourhoods such as Briqueterie are mixed was confirmed by both Christian and Muslim respondents. Alan, my Catholic neighbour, for example, lived with his family in Briqueterie before they moved to my neighbourhood, which is mostly Christian. He still goes to Briqueterie often to visit his friends and former neighbours, who are mostly Muslim (Alan, informal conversation, 22 August 2016).

Within these neighbourhoods it is common for people identifying with different (religious) groups to meet and interact on the streets. This is especially true for the neighbourhoods which include many economic activities such as shops and markets. Other neighbourhoods (or areas within neighbourhoods) are characterized as more residential. These areas generally house the Cameroonian middle class or upper middle class. Because there is little economic activities in these areas, the likeliness to run into your neighbours is less here.

An example is Ebolo, a university student who lives in a spacious apartment on a hillside, paid for by his father. I visited him twice there. Both times I was struck by the contrast between the calm streets surrounding his flat and the hustle and bustle of the market on the foot of the hill. When I asked Ebolo about his neighbourhood, he told me that he is one of the few Christians living on the hill. Most of his neighbours are middle-aged Muslims. He interacts with them only sparsely when they meet each other in the hallway (Ebolo, interview, 15 July 2016). On another occasion, however, I interviewed motor taxi drivers at the foot of the hill. Their taxi rank was located next to a busy market. Among the taxi drivers, there were both Christians (of different denominations) and Muslims. They indicated that the neighbourhood is very mixed and that they talk with people of different religious groups every day: their colleagues, their clients, the market vendors and those visiting the market to do groceries (group interview, 27 September 2016). In other words: the economic activities bring people together.

Finally, the respondents also recognized other groups making up the neighbourhoods. I often asked broad questions such as ‘What can you tell me about this neighbourhood?’. Diversity was an often given answer, such as in the following comment:

‘This is a mixed neighbourhood. There are Bamileke, Hausa, Bafa, the anglophones, even Wondo. It is good. We are mixed. There are no problems. We work together. We do business together’ (Dilane, group interview, 16 September 2016).

This comment not only shows that this man recognizes ethnic and regional boundaries, but also confirms the above analysis that working together brings people from different groups together.

School and work

Relating to the analysis in the previous subsection, school and work are common environments where people identifying with different religious groups meet. Many respondents referred to these places to explain how people from religious groups live together, such as in the following example:

‘In Cameroon there are four main religions: Islam, Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox. We are together. We grew up together. We all went to the same schools, we work together, we go to the same places. We Muslims believe in Allah, they believe in God. The only difference is belief’ [...] ‘There is no conflict whatsoever between Christians and Muslims. Me, for example, I work with Christian colleagues. They respect my principles and I respect theirs’ . (Idrissou and Amina, group interview, 2 October 2016)

All of the groups of motor taxi drivers I spoke to, for example, represented multiple religious groups. They generally regarded each other positively as they work closely together. For example, I spoke to a group of motor taxi men which was comprised of a Catholic, two Protestants and an atheist. I asked them whether their different religious backgrounds often was a reason for discussion, which they denied. When I asked whether they also had Muslim friends, they said they had:

‘We also have Muslim colleagues, so they are also friends’. ‘Yes, there are many. We all believe in the same God’ (Julius and Raymond, group interview, 27 September 2016).

Even in mixed groups, however, not all members of this group necessarily have the same experience and/or ideas about how well the different religious groups represented in this group go together. For example, I spoke to a group of motor taxi men in the neighbourhood Plateau. The group consisted of two Protestants, three Catholics and one Muslim. The Christians all said to work and live together peacefully. ‘We all work on the same route. There are Muslims and Christians here. The boundary between Muslims and Christians is only there when you’re not together. When you are together, you share’. But then the Muslim said: ‘When there is a Muslim, I will only share with him. Because the Christians sometimes eat pork, and so they will share together and I can’t eat, because as a Muslim I don’t eat pork’. One of the Christians responded: ‘Sometimes we eat beef, too! We will share with you then’. They all laughed. The Muslim concluded: ‘They share their meat among themselves. But if there are oranges, we’ll share them all. We work together, we are still friends’ (Julius and Djanabou, group interview, 27 September 2016).

Mixed groups of friends

In Yaoundé, even random encounters contributed to my understanding of how young people engage with social boundaries. During an evening walk, I got to talking with two boys who passed me in the street. They were named Aboubacar and John, so I asked them about the religious origin of their names. Aboubacar’s response was immediate:

‘It is no problem here in Cameroon for Christians and Muslims to be friends. We know we do not share the same religion, but we can enjoy each other’s company anyway. Cameroon is a country of peace’ (Aboubacar, informal conversation, 3 August 2016).

Indeed, all respondents indicated that they had friends from many different religious backgrounds.

‘I have Catholic and Protestant friends, but no Muslims’. ‘I have Catholic, Protestant, Presbyterian and Evangelical friends. And I have Muslim friends also. There is no problem of discrimination. The Catholic church is universal, you can marry with a Muslim if you want’. (Chimène and Rosine, group interview, 12 August 2016)

There were some Christians who said they did not have Muslim friends, but they did have friends from different Christian denominations. As explained in the previous chapter, the boundaries between Christians and Muslims are generally considered to be stronger than the boundaries between different Christian or Islamic groups. This can be an explanation for the fact that it is more difficult to have mixed Muslim-Christian friends.

As explained above, some neighbourhoods are more mixed than others. People who grew up in more mixed environments generally had more mixed friends as well. For example, Alan, a Catholic who grew up in the neighbourhood Briqueterie, where many Muslims live, had many Muslim friends. Arnaud, on the other hand, was raised in a largely Catholic environment. He went to a Catholic school and works in a Catholic organisation. He only has one friend who is a Muslim, and he explained that this was only because this boy converted from Catholicism to Islam.

When I asked about mixed social groups, the answers I received sometimes also addressed other social boundaries in Cameroon, such as ethnicity:

‘I have friends, I’m a motor driver, there are Hausa here. So I have friends who are not Christian. They are Hausa, we walk together⁶, there is no problem. It is like that here in Cameroon. ... Religion is not a problem’ (Theo, interview, 16 September 2016)

He referred to ‘Hausa’ as people from another religion. This exemplifies again the strong relationship between religion and ethnicity: Hausa is an ethnic group, and most Hausa people in Cameroon are Muslim.

7.1.2 Analysis: Yaoundé’s many intersections

The subsections above all give insight in what the respondents of this research describe as the different ways in which people of different religious groups meet. While describing different situations, these reports have several elements in common.

Firstly, explanations about mixed social environments are in many cases followed directly by an explanation of peaceful cohabitation of different religious groups. As was argued in chapter 5, there exists a strong narrative of ‘Cameroon is a peaceful country’. This narrative can either be a result of or a reason for these peaceful relations. It shows that youth are aware of the fact that group boundaries can induce tensions, and that they value good relations. In the next section, I will argue that their perpetuation of the narrative can be considered an active action towards building peaceful relations.

6 *On marche ensemble*, ‘we walk together’, is a frequently used expression in Cameroon. It means so much as: we are friends, we support each other, we accept each other.

Secondly, when speaking about boundaries between religious groups, both Christian and Islamic respondents are inclined to interpret this as ‘boundaries between Christians and Muslims’. As was concluded in the previous chapters, too, this boundary is apparently given most significance when talking about Cameroon’s religious diversity. However, as the examples of mixed social environments often feature Muslim-Christian relationships, the boundary between both groups seems not to be so strong that it hinders friendly interactions across it. Examples of such strong group boundaries that they could not be crossed were only found in relation to *nouvelles églises*. As I will argue in more detail later in this chapter, this suggests that the strongest boundaries do not always produce most conflict.

Thirdly, in the conversations about boundaries between religious groups, respondents frequently refer to other social boundaries as well. Even when asking only about where and how these youth meet people from other religious groups, their response sketches an image of highly diverse social groups and the need to get along across these boundaries. Their accounts feature, for example, ethnic, linguistic and regional boundaries. This does not only provide this research with primary data about Cameroon’s heterogeneity, in addition to the data derived from the literature study which formed the basis of the background chapter. It also shows that this heterogeneity plays a role in how youth view the make-up of their social environment. Religious groups are not the only groups whose boundaries are deemed significant or which may shape interactions. As explained in the theoretical framework, a diverse society requires a constant renegotiation of identity as different I-positions take dominance in different situations. This suggests that, to understand dynamics around religious boundaries in Cameroon, it is important to investigate also where these boundaries in turn intersect or coincide with the other social boundaries present.

This section showed that most youth have encounters across religious boundaries on a daily basis. The persons they interact with are often members of other social groups they share together: they are neighbours, colleagues, family members or friends. It can be expected that youth value good relations with these people therefore. The emphasis they place on how groups live together in peace confirms this idea. This suggests that youth will often choose to engage with religious boundaries in a way that does not hinder this peaceful coexistence. In the next section, I will go deeper into the different ways youth engage with boundaries between religious groups.

7.2 Engaging with boundaries

As described in the theoretical framework, in a plural society, social groups are divided from each other by boundaries which are socially constructed. Their existence and value is situational. If boundaries are deemed significant in specific situations is dependent on those who engage with them. In all the encounters sketched above, therefore, the different people who engage in these encounters all have some degree of influence on whether the boundaries between religious groups are recognized and allowed to shape the interaction or not, and if so, to what degree.

To explore how youth engage with boundaries between religious groups, I asked them questions about their mixed social networks. In addition, I observed how they interacted with each

other. In my analysis of the results of this research, I distinguished three more or less common, conscious or unconscious ways in which the participants in this research engage with boundaries between religious groups: strengthening boundaries, ignoring boundaries and bridging boundaries.

I define strengthening boundaries as attaching a great importance to boundaries between groups, allowing them to influence interactions between these groups. As described in the theoretical framework, the process of actively distinguishing the 'in-group' from the 'out group' can also be referred to as 'selfing' and 'othering'. In this way, strengthening boundaries reinforces the ideas that exist around boundaries and legitimizes their existence. This can for example be done by emphasizing the elements that divide two groups rather than what these groups have in common.

I see ignoring boundaries as not paying any attention or attaching any value to the existence of boundaries. For example by emphasizing identification with other groups that exceed boundaries between religious groups ("we are all Cameroonian"), thereby denying the idea that these boundaries may influence interaction.

Finally, bridging boundaries can be understood as acknowledging that boundaries exist, but actively trying to limit the boundaries' influence on interaction between people from different groups and promoting mutual respect. This can for instance be done by encouraging interaction and mutual understanding across these boundaries. An example is engaging in an inter religious dialogue in which you look for commonalities between religious groups.

This distinction between bridging, ignoring and strengthening boundaries is artificial. One act of engagement with boundaries can have several results. For example, celebrating holidays together can be interpreted as a form of bridging boundaries, because you aim to share a religious feast with those who don't identify with the same religious group. This promotes dialogue and mutual understanding. On the other hand, it can have the result of strengthening boundaries. As a Christian celebrating Eid Mubarak, your identification as a Christian, and so as a member of the out-group, will probably be stronger than in usual interactions with Muslims, for example while working together as colleagues. In this example, boundaries between religious groups are therefore both bridged and strengthened. This also means that the aim of a specific approach towards boundaries does not always align with the result.

The scope of the field research does not allow for a strong conclusion on whether boundaries between religious groups are actually strengthened or bridged by the youth that took part in this study. Such conclusions would require a longer period of time in the field and a broader research group, reflecting how not only youth, but also others engage with these boundaries. However, the research does give an insight in how youth view and value these boundaries and how they think these boundaries should be approached. It is therefore rather a reflection on youth's perception of boundaries than on boundary construction.

7.2.1 Strengthening boundaries

To start off my analysis of the different ways youth engage with boundaries between religious groups, I go into several ways in which boundaries are possibly strengthened. I discuss not only the ways these youth themselves contribute to stronger boundaries, but also how they respond to people in their environment who do so. Their response contributes to our understanding of how youth think about these boundaries. I describe different ways of strengthening boundaries: converting; excluding; stigmatizing; and emphasizing differences.

Converting

One of the strongest ways of strengthening boundaries between religious groups is perhaps through attempts of evangelisation. Trying to convince people to join your religious group can be seen as actively arguing your superiority. It requires a strong idea of an in-group and an out-group, which are respectively perceived as positive and negative.

Evangelisation was not common among the youth who participated in this research. In the conversations, only two examples were mentioned. One young man told me that he had followed a course about how to evangelize Muslims. He went door to door in Briqueterie to try and do so (Arnaud, informal conversation, 3 October 2016). Another told me that he tried to convert a friend of his to Christianity:

‘I even have a friend who doesn’t believe in God! He is an animist, the traditional African religion. He believes what his grandfather has told him. He doesn’t pray, he doesn’t go to church. But when we talk, I try to manipulate him, I try to make him understand that I don’t like it. I hope that one day I will touch his heart and he will understand’. (Alan, informal conversation, 22 August 2016)

Alan is a Catholic. He has lived in Briqueterie, where many Muslims live, and therefore has many Muslim friends (more than from other Christian denominations, such as Protestants). While these religious divides do not bother him, the quote above shows that he does disapprove of non-monotheistic religions or atheism.

Some respondents told me that they sometimes met others who tried to evangelize them. This was generally perceived as unpleasant. Respondents indicated that they found it particularly annoying when both persons concerned in the interaction identified themselves as Christians, which frequently happened when someone belonging to one of the *nouvelles églises* was evangelizing. Respondents experienced this as insulting:

‘When someone comes up to me and he wants to convert me to Christianity, I get angry. I tell them: I am already a Christian! Go talk to someone who is not! But they want to convert me anyway’ (Immanu, informal conversation, 30 July 2016).

This quote shows that when two people meet, one person can think they belong to the same group (‘Christians’), and the other does not. In relation to the DST, one person in this interaction gives dominance to the I-position relating to the larger group of ‘Christians’, which comprises different Christian subgroups. The other, however, gives dominance to the I-position of the subgroup. This creates tension, because the first person considers her or himself as part of the in-group, whereas the

second person does not. In other words, they each recognize different boundaries in this interaction. In this example, Immanu expresses anger in response to this situation.

Excluding

While the previous section described many examples of mixed social groups, some youth also reported about groups which do not mingle. While no respondents said to be a part of such a group themselves, many made reference to people they know who restrict their social circle to members of the same religious group. The main groups that were mentioned were the *nouvelles églises*. Many respondents said that these new evangelical churches had a strong influence on their social relations. Here I discuss youth's responses to such groups.

'We are still friends, but not as before. The people from Born Again do not mingle, they take their own side. I used to laugh and talk with my friends, but now not anymore. They think differently. Clubs, alcohol, cigarettes, they think the devil is in them. Even some music, they won't listen to it because they think it is demonic'. (Carine, informal conversation, 4 July 2016)

With this comment, Carine reflects on how her friendships have changed when her friends joined Born Again churches. Hobbies and habits they used to share are now considered 'satanic', which drives the friends apart. People joining these churches distance themselves from friends from other religious groups. In some cases, such as Ebolo's, the boundary is so strong that they cannot stay friends any longer:

'I have friends that, up to today, we don't even discuss anymore. We don't even call each other anymore because I am Christian and they are from Pentecostal. They think that keeping in contact with me, I will make them not practice in their religion as they usually practice. ... They don't have to judge other people. They don't have to say that these people have a bad influence to them. It depends on them, they don't have to blame other people if they don't practice. Because practicing your religion is a direct relationship that you are doing with God. It's only you who knows the truth, because you don't even know what the others are doing.' (Ebolo, interview, 15 July 2016)

Ebolo expresses here that he thinks his former friends are wrong to judge others for their religious beliefs. He thinks religion is a personal issue. How people experience and engage with it, he thinks, is nobody else's business and should therefore not influence interaction between two people. This is a form of ignoring boundaries, as I will explain later.

That relationships change because of stronger group boundaries is not restricted to the *nouvelles églises*. In the following conversation, a Christian motor driver told me how he broke up with his girlfriend after she converted to Islam:

'When you have a girlfriend and she becomes Muslim. She only speaks to you about Allah, Allah, Allah. And she asks you to become a Muslim as well. And when you are not of her religion, you easily separate. This is what happened to me. I had a young girl, we spent time together, and then we split up. Now we don't see each other anymore. I don't know why she became a Muslim. She just said it was the right religion. But I couldn't think about leaving the religion I always had'.

'What did you think about her changing her religion?'

'For me it was no boundary. But for her it was. It was not me who refused to be her friend. I didn't mind, but she did. For me it is not a problem if you change your religion during your life. Because we all pray

to the same God, or we don't pray at all. There are no two Gods in the world. There is only one' (Christopher, group interview, 27 September 2016)

This young man clearly indicates that he does not see religious boundaries the way his girlfriend did. Her conversion and the subsequent strengthening of boundaries was a very active choice. According to the man, the woman was very engaged with her religion, speaking only 'about Allah'. In this case, it can be argued that her identification with the religious group was very strong. This is logical, as making an active choice to join another religious group is generally quite impactful. As discussed in the section about religious mobility in the previous chapter, there was more movement between Christian groups than between Christian and Islamic groups. For someone to cross these boundaries and shift membership from Christianity to Islam can therefore be considered a significant change. This made it apparently impossible for her to be with someone who was not a member of this group. For her, this boundary could not be crossed, and by not crossing it, she fortifies the boundary herself as well. This anecdote can be seen as an example of how boundaries grow in importance when group identification is very strong. His approach towards her conversion, however, reflects a strategy of bridging boundaries: emphasizing what you have in common. This particular strategy will be discussed in more detail below.

Stigmatizing

Boundaries are emphasized by negative descriptions of other people or other groups. As described in the theoretical framework, a strong idea of 'us' and 'them' fortifies boundaries, especially when the description of the other group is negative. For this reason, stigmatisation can be considered a strong contributor to the strengthening of boundaries.

Chapter five already showed that people in Cameroon acknowledge that there is stigmatisation towards Muslims. This is partly related to the presence of Boko Haram. During my research, I found several examples in which urban youth were contributing to stigmatisation or otherwise phrasing stigmatising ideas towards Muslims.

'And actually, the Muslims are a bit fast, they are not easy like Christians'. 'That's right'. 'Dominating, they want to dominate. That is not good. That is the problem. *'In Yaoundé?'* 'Everywhere, everywhere'. 'Everywhere in the world'. 'Yes. There are always hidden things. The two races cannot really be together. That is certain. The Muslim, he wants to go to the marabout, he wants to do things differently. The Muslim even calls the Christian impure'. 'Why?' 'Because he drinks alcohol, and maybe because he eats pork meat. Do you understand?'. 'Do you agree?' 'Yes. The relationship between Muslims and Christians is like that'. (Akwo, Gido and Joshua, group interview, 16 September 2016)

When I asked them whether this created conflict, however, they denied this: 'No, it is not like that. No really, everyone respects the others. It is not a problem. We live together. It is not a problem' [with emphasis]. They all had Muslim friends, with whom they discussed religious issues. They explained that the guiding principles in the Bible and the Qur'an were very similar. When I asked for an example, they said that violence was not accepted in both religions. This implies that even among youth who carry some very negative ideas about other religious groups, the idea that Cameroon is a country of peaceful cohabitation is considered common knowledge and repeated by everyone. This suggests that this narrative is perhaps not entirely reflective of everyday realities.

Youth may resort to this narrative as a socially accepted answer to questions about religious groups, whereas they may not completely agree with it.

An observation which possibly confirms this, is the attitude of Ebolo towards Muslims. Ebolo is a Catholic university student whom I had met in the building where I lived, which also held office to an NGO he had come to visit. During this first meeting, Ebolo made clear that he had many ideas about religion in Cameroon and that he would like to talk about it. I met him at least five times to discuss religious issues, of which two meetings were semi-structured interviews. Because I saw him so many times, we got to know each other a bit and build trust. During the last two meetings, I noticed that he was much more critical about Muslims than before. This might be because he felt more at ease around me and was less inclined to give socially accepted answers.

Not all stigmatisation I encountered was overt, such as in the examples above. In some conversations, youth were unaware of the prejudice they held towards other groups. I noticed this mostly in informal conversations with friends, who trusted me and with whom I spent a lot of time, so they were not constantly on their guard or trying to be politically correct. My friend Cédric, for example, considers himself a very open-minded and accepting person. In his work as a cartoonist and peace builder, Cédric is actively trying to build bridges between different religious groups. However, as I spent time with him, I observed that he had some ingrained negative ideas about Muslims which sometimes came to the surface. For example, he got a new dog and wanted to give the dog an Islamic name, to show solidarity with Muslims. I told him that dogs in Islam are considered to be impure, so that Muslims could perhaps perceive this as offensive. Cédric responded with a frustrated sigh: 'Sorry, but these Muslims and their intolerance!'. When I explained that it is just a difference of symbolic interpretation, he hastened to correct himself. This incident gave me a brief insight in Cédric's unconscious prejudice about Muslims. While Cédric attempts to bridge religious groups, this example shows that he may still contribute sometimes, unknowingly and unwantingly, to the strengthening of boundaries through unconsciously repeating stigmatising ideas.

Another group which received much stigmatisation were the *nouvelles églises*. Many of the respondents were highly critical about these new churches. They talked disapprovingly about both practices and beliefs of members of these groups. Some to the extent of pronouncing them satanic:

'There are these churches that are satanic, they worship the devil, the Born Again churches. ... Women may abandon their husbands. I heard this in the media. They might go and live with the pastor. They say the pastor is possessed. Also a woman might go to the store and undress herself on the way while quoting from the bible. Really!' (Carine, informal conversation, 4 July 2016).

Carine repeats here stories she heard in the media, which she listed as 'newspapers, radio, Facebook, but also on TV-stations'. Negative stories about these churches were often shared through these media, as I noticed myself for example when listening to taxi radios. The *nouvelles églises* themselves also have their own TV and radio stations. Many other respondents also mentioned media as important sources for information they had about the *nouvelles églises*. While not directly relevant to the research questions, this does give an insight in what helps shape youth's ideas about different religious groups.

Another form of stigmatisation related to the *nouvelles églises* is the suggestion that the members of these churches are unintelligent, close-minded or not ‘all there’. This can for example be analysed from the following comment:

‘If you see a Jehovah’s Witness lady and a Pentecostal lady, they are the same. Religion made them behave funny. They think the best religion is their own religion. ... People who are open-minded think this kind of religion is nonsense, it is not religion’. (Ebolo, interview, 22 July 2016)

Ghislain said a similar thing: people who are ‘weak, who are not psychologically strong’ can follow ‘dangerous’ churches, which teach them ‘wrong’ ideas. These churches are ‘run like businesses, just in it for the money’. The wrong idea, according to Ghislain, is to expect miracles from the church. This relates to another common stigma around the *nouvelles églises*, which was that their members and religious leaders do not practice their religion right:

‘The *églises réveillées* have a lot of false pastors because ...’ ‘They don’t know the bible’. ‘They create their own church, they take a family’. ‘They say: “It was God who told me to do it”’. ‘They have fetishes, hallucination. The priest, if he touches you you fall. He puts medicine on a napkin. He takes also another medicine so he himself does not fall. When you shake, he says you have a demon. He prays, then gives you an antidote so you stop shaking’ (Vanessa and Daniel, group interview, 12 August 2016).

In this conversation, the *nouvelles églises* were sketched as weird, old-fashioned and fake, all negative descriptions which contribute to the strengthening of boundaries.

The examples given above are all examples in which youth speak about other groups in a stigmatising way. As explained before, this is a way of strengthening boundaries, because it makes a clear distinction between an in-group and an out-group. However, it reflects mainly on whether these youth perceive these boundaries as strong. These examples do not, however, show how these boundaries are relevant in actual interactions.

Group interview with members of an Islamic youth organisation, *Jeunesses Islamique du Cameroun (JIC)* showed that these youth indeed sometimes experience that they are treated differently due to stigmatisation. These interviews took place in the building of an Islamic youth organisation. For the first interview, I had arranged with the president of the organisation that I would interview him first and then perhaps a few others. When I came to the location, I was therefore surprised that eleven youth had gathered for a group interview. I had not prepared for this, so I improvised a bit. When processing the data afterwards, I noticed that the stories they told me were all very positive and felt a bit superficial. I called the president and arranged for a second group interview.

As an excerpt from the first interview shows, the respondents emphasized that the stigmatisation had much decreased since 2014 and that they generally did not experience the boundaries between Muslims and Christians as problematic:

‘We are very much accepted. Cameroon is a *laïc* country. There are some who spread a bad image of Islam, but mostly we live in harmony with others. Other countries generalize: all Muslims are like those

in Boko Haram. But actually, we see that the Muslims in Boko Haram are killing other Muslims. Now these people are also slowly understanding better that not all Muslims are like that'. 'Exactly. In the beginning, even in Cameroon people were afraid that a Muslim might have a bomb in his backpack'. 'People did not want to see veils, or beards. They were afraid'. 'For a while it was even prohibited for a woman to wear a veil to the market. They were asked to lift their veil, but it is part of their tradition. They refused' (Faiza and Amina, 2 October 2016).

However, in the second group interview, the youth shared more personal experiences, which sometimes contradicted their previous accounts of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. They came up with many more examples, including the following:

'I have seen it in taxi's, multiple times, but I'm not sure whether it is religious discrimination. That someone from the North has to pay more, because the taxi man says: 'You're a Nordist''. 'A sister of mine had a debate about praying with a man. He was saying negative things about Islam. At one point, she told him "That's enough", and then he called her a Boko Haram. They even had to go to the police, and the police held her the whole night, because she didn't want to take off her veil. They treated her as a terrorist. This prejudice really exists'. 'They also think girls wearing a veil are not intellectual'. 'Last year it was even worse. You couldn't enter a supermarket with your veil. Women are hit harder by prejudice than men'. 'They are afraid of Muslim men, and they think Muslim women are weak. They think you can insult them and no one will care'. (Mohsin, Noor, Faiza and Habiba, group interview, 9 October 2016)

During the second interview, most youth were present who had been present the time before as well. The fact that these concrete examples were only mentioned in the second interview suggests again that it might be more difficult for youth to speak about problematic than about peaceful relations between religious groups. This would mean that the narrative about Cameroon as a peaceful country should perhaps be interpreted as a superficial idea which does not necessarily reflect the actual state of affairs.

While these comments do not say anything about how these Muslim youth themselves engage with boundaries, they do give an insight in the type of situations they face when the other person in a specific interaction has a different idea of the boundaries of importance. In the example of taking a taxi, for instance, I expect that most Cameroonians do not necessarily consider religious or ethnic boundaries to be significant. Another taxi driver would probably have accepted this person without question. However, because this particular driver insists on treating the Muslim/person from the North differently, this boundary suddenly becomes relevant. What this example also shows is that, here again, ethnic boundaries are difficult to distinguish from religious boundaries. These examples thus give an insight in how stigmatisation shapes boundaries and how these boundaries shape interaction and vice versa. In these cases, the boundaries are drawn up by the other people in the interaction, so strongly that there is not much room to maneuver for those who carry the stigma.

Emphasizing differences

Finally, throughout the field work, some respondents placed emphasis on certain differences between groups. Whereas the three ways of strengthening boundaries explained above (converting, excluding and stigmatising) are all based on underscoring the negative elements of the out-group, this is not necessarily the case for emphasizing differences. Placing emphasis on any difference between two or more groups can be seen as a form of constructing boundaries, as this contributes to an us/them narrative.

A first example is the refusal to acknowledge Boko Haram as an Islamic group. Both Islamic (first example) and Christian (second example) youth responded to the stigma that connects all Muslims to Boko Haram by denying the Islamic identity of Boko Haram:

‘Islam is a religion of peace. Islam does not accept terrorism. Islam forbids violence. Boko Haram is not Islam. They do not only kill Christians, they mostly kill Muslims’ (Habiba, group interview, 2 October 2016).

‘I don’t call Boko Haram religion’. ‘Boko Haram won’t influence how Christians and Muslims are together in Cameroon. Boko Haram will end soon’. ‘It is like a sect, they are not good Muslims. Muslims cannot enter a mosque and kill. It’s a sect’. (Leo and Amadou, group interview, 6 September 2017)

By emphasizing the difference between both groups, these respondents both identify the categorical attributes that define the group they identify with (Islam is peaceful) and determine that the other group does not share these attributes, and can thus not be identified as in-group.

Ebolo referred in a similar way to the *nouvelles églises*. He compared Pentecostals with Muslims, because according to him, both religious groups are ‘more fundamentalist than Christians’: ‘They are more strict about their religion. They don’t joke about their practices’. Ebolo explained ‘fundamentalist’ as living more strictly according to the rules as set out in religious texts. By setting off Pentecostals against Christians, Ebolo actively places them outside the group which technically is often considered a subgroup of Christians according to their categorical attributes, which include typically Christian beliefs, such as believing that Jesus is the son of God and reading the Bible. This links back to the theory as it is an example in which groups have similar categorical attributes, but are still set distinctly apart.

On other occasions, Ebolo praised Muslims for, in his eyes, ‘taking their religion seriously’. He indicated that he admired the way Muslims pray five times a day and fast during the month of Ramadan. This idea was echoed, too, by Alan (a Catholic):

‘I like Muslims. They have a good life. They do not drink alcohol and they pray a lot. They are serious’ (Alan, informal conversation, 22 August 2016).

In another conversation, Alan elaborated on what he likes about Muslims:

‘I would say Muslims are nice people. When a Muslim is with you, he is with you. According to me there is too much hypocrisy among Christians, whereas a Muslim, if he loves you, he loves you the way you are. They are more honest compared to us Christians. A Christian can make you believe he loves you, whereas deep down he hates you’. (Alan, informal conversation, 1 September 2016).

On the one hand, Alan’s positive view on Muslims is likely to have a positive impact on the relations he has with Muslims, and possibly promotes peaceful relations between Muslims and Christians in general. On the other hand, these positive remarks, too, function as a way of distinguishing Muslims from the group he identifies himself with. This is thus also a form of constructing boundaries. While seeing other groups as negative has more impact on strengthening boundaries, as described in the theoretical framework, any us/them narrative contributes to

boundary construction. This may suggest that strengthening boundaries is not necessarily a negative dynamic.

7.2.2 Ignoring boundaries

‘Yes, if my friend is a Muslim, and I am a Christian, we are like that: two. There is no difference. We are together’. (Leo, group interview, 6 October 2016)

In this opening quote, the respondent literally states that there is no distinction between his Muslim friend and himself. This can be considered a second style of engagement with boundaries between religious groups: ignoring them. While for strengthening or bridging boundaries it is necessary to recognize the boundaries present, ignoring boundaries means that there is no value or meaning attached to them at all. I recognized different ways in which respondents of this research ignored boundaries along religious lines: refusing to talk about religious issues; denying relevance; emphasizing personal choice; and focusing on a shared social identity.

Refusing to talk about religious issues

A first example of ignoring boundaries is refusing to talk about issues of religion.

‘There are many people in my neighbourhood. There are Muslims, there are Christians, there are.. Everyone is here! There are Bafa like me. There are anglophones. We all live together. ... I do not want to talk about religion with them. Because we all pray to the same God. It doesn’t matter. We are all friends. We work together, we are together. We have no problems’ (Dilane, group interview, 16 September 2019).

With this comment, Dilane indicates that his neighbourhood is very mixed, both in terms of religions and in terms of ethnic backgrounds. He emphasizes that everyone lives together without problems. He says he does not want to talk with others about religion. His phrase that he does ‘not want to talk about religion’ suggests that he makes a conscious choice to ignore these boundaries, thereby actively making them irrelevant (‘It doesn’t matter’). Dilane also says: ‘We all pray to the same God’. I elaborate upon this idea in the next subsection, where I argue that this can be explained as a way of bridging boundaries.

Colleagues and neighbourhoods are generally not chosen companions, as friends are. This may influence the need to gloss over disagreements, including in the religious domain. However, this happens among friends, too. While the previous section described that many youth have friends who identify with different religious groups, they do not necessarily engage with all friends in the same way. Boundaries between religious groups can influence, for example, the subjects they do or do not discuss among each other:

‘With our friends of the *églises réveillés*, we don’t talk about religion, because they do not accept our views’ (Rosine, group interview, 12 August 2016)

I argue that this is an example of ignoring boundaries, because these youth actively try to create a friendship in which religious identification is not an issue. They know it can be difficult to maintain the friendship as soon as they discuss religion, so they avoid the subject, thereby avoiding situations

in which religious boundaries are of importance. At the same time, however, it requires recognizing boundaries, too. People who identify with one particular group, the Revival churches, are treated differently than others. This shows that acts which aim to ignore boundaries can at the same time strengthen them too.

Denying relevance

A second example of ignoring boundaries is simply denying that religious boundaries are relevant in a certain situation. This way of ignoring boundaries was present in two conversations about family making. In the first example, Ebolo told me about a friend who confided in him when her marriage plans were in danger because of her religious identification:

'I have a friend ... She called me one day and told me she had a problem concerning her boyfriend. "My boyfriend is a Catholic and I am Jehovah's Witness, so I can't get married to him. We have our own religion. Catholics believe in Holy Mary and we do not believe in Holy Mary. My parents, my brothers and sisters cannot allow me to get married". I started laughing, and she was annoyed. She asked "I am serious, why are you laughing?" and I said to her: "I laugh because, do you love that guy? What does it matter? Before dating you were not thinking this would be a problem. You don't have to put the matter with religion, you have to follow your heart". And she said: "But what can I tell my parents?". They got a child eventually but they did not stay together. The guy refused to convert so he realized they cannot stay together, so they separated.' (Ebolo, interview, 15 July 2016)

Ebolo responded to this situation by mocking his friend for allowing religious boundaries to hinder her in marrying her boyfriend. This indicates that he values these boundaries differently than she does. He expresses that he thinks love is the only factor to take into account when marriage is concerned. Alan said a similar thing when discussing inter religious marriage:

What do you think about the fact that Muslim women can't marry Christian men? 'I think that's a bad thing. I think everyone should be able to marry whomever they like, when two people love each other. Also if they are from a different religion or tribe' (Alan, informal conversation, 22 August 2016).

Alan's opinion that all people should be able to marry each other shows that he would prefer less radical boundaries between religious groups. In addition, without being asked, Alan refers to other social boundaries in Cameroon: those of ethnicity or tribe (in his words: *tribune*). For Alan, being able to marry whomever you love is a universal principle which transcends all social boundaries, not just those between religious groups. His reaction also showed his awareness of the different social boundaries that are being drawn through Cameroon.

Emphasizing personal choice

Another way of ignoring boundaries is by emphasizing personal choice. In several conversations, the idea that what religious group you belong to and how you engage with religion is your personal choice was used to explain that these respondents overlook religious difference:

'I don't care if they do or don't go to church. It's about the relationship they have with God and with their life, how they look at life, how they think and do things. I don't care, for me it doesn't mind.' (Ebolo, interview, 15 July 2016)

Ebolo argues here that he does not mind when his friends belong to other religious groups or practice their faith in a different way than he does. In other words: he does not attach importance to the religious boundaries between him and his friends. This example was also given in relation to families:

‘He is a Christian, I’m a Muslim, he’s my brother. We come from the same mother. We have no problems, we’re together, we eat together. I’m a Muslim and I want to marry a Christian. We are together. My girlfriend is a Christian. We have two children. Because I am a Muslim, they are too, but if they are older and want to convert to Christianity, that would be no problem. It is their choice’. (Amadou, group interview, 6 October 2016)

Focusing on a shared social identity

As explained in the theoretical framework, people identify with many different social groups and subgroups. What I-position is dominant depends on the specific situation. People can actively choose to give dominance to certain I-positions at the expense of others. One way of ignoring boundaries can therefore be to allow other, shared, identities to be dominant over religious I-positions which set people apart from each other. An example is national identity, as comes to the fore in the following quotation:

‘There are no cases of people from different religions who don’t want to speak to one another. There are no cases like that in Yaoundé. Most people today think that we all live in the same country, we live together’. ‘Whether you are Christian or Muslim, it doesn’t matter. We can sympathize with one another. Whether you are anglophone, or Bamileke... I have noted, since long, that it doesn’t matter where you come from, there are always people who come from somewhere else. But we are always together. We mix well’ (Akwo and Joshua, group interview, 16 September 2016, emphasis added)

Akwo and Joshua emphasize that, while Yaoundé is very mixed, everyone lives together in peace nonetheless. They focus on what all these people have in common: they live in the same country. In other words, they consider boundaries along religious lines as unimportant, as all people belong to the same group in the end: that of Cameroonians. In this way, they emphasize a shared I-position at the expense of I-positions which would divide people up into their separate social groups.

As explained in the theoretical framework, a social group can invoke a stronger identification when it promotes a strong narrative of what it means to be a member of this group. As explained in the background chapter, national identity has been promoted since colonization, and increased after independence. In practice, national identity is emphasized by acts such as singing the national anthem before the start of events. The respondents also sometimes referred to the country motto to explain why people live well together in a heterogeneous country such as Cameroon:

‘Our motto is Peace, Work, fatherland. Here it is not like we dominate the Muslim. If I come to the Netherlands and I meet a Cameroonian there, from either region he will definitely welcome me as a blood brother’ (Yanila, interview, 11 September 2019)

With this comment, Yanila explains how he thinks all Cameroonians share a common identity, despite the subgroups they may belong to (either religious or regional). This comment suggests that

he also thinks religious identification is not as important as shared national identity which brings all Cameroonians together.

The narrative about Cameroonian identity was related strongly to the idea of Cameroon as a country of peace. This narrative about Cameroon's peaceful nature was emphasized in almost every conversation I had. In the example of Yanila, this is done by his citation of the national motto, which begins with 'Peace'. The focus on national identity is therefore not only a way to promote a shared identity outside the religious domain, but also a reference to a characteristic associated with this shared identity: peacefulness. In other words, emphasizing national identity is often not only a way of explaining that all Cameroonians belong together, whatever their religious affiliations. It is also a reference to the peaceful nature of this social group, thereby suggesting that all individuals within this group do their best to promote this belonging, for the sake of peace in the country.

As the previous section described, neighbourhoods and work places are common sites where people of different religious groups encounter each other. Both sites are important for Yaoundé's many motor taxi drivers. As described before, each neighbourhood in Yaoundé has one or more motor taxi spots. Here, motor taxi drivers assemble and wait for customers. As the neighbourhoods are mixed, the motor taxi drivers also identify as members of different religious groups. In my interviews with motor taxi drivers, they frequently ignored the boundaries between religious groups by emphasizing that they work together, or that they are in the same neighbourhood (see the different examples earlier in this chapter). I argue that these can also be seen as shared identifications which make religious boundaries irrelevant.

7.2.3 Bridging boundaries

The final way of engaging with boundaries I discuss is bridging boundaries. Bridging boundaries requires recognizing boundaries first, then responding to them in a way which brings people of the different religious group together. The boundaries are treated with mutual respect. In some situations, this can lead to the fact that these boundaries may become less significant for an interaction, but this is not necessarily the case. In the accounts of youth about how they engage with people across religious boundaries, I recognized different ways in which their engagement bridges the boundaries between religious groups. Here, I discuss the following: promoting mutual understanding; sharing rituals and practices; and emphasizing similarities.

Promoting mutual understanding

One way of bridging boundaries is by promoting dialogue and mutual understanding. Because people from different religious groups live and work together in close proximity, respondents report that they sometimes have disagreements with people who do not share their beliefs or practices. One way of dealing with this situation is to engage in discussion so as to learn how to better understand each other's perspective. This does not necessarily mean that you have to agree, but it can promote acceptance of another person's point of view. Several respondents indicated that they emphasized this in their interaction with people from different religious groups:

[about disagreements between Muslims and Christians] We discuss a lot. We discuss in peace. It's true that we don't always understand each other, but we can talk about this'. (Arnold, Bruno and Alan, group interview, 1 September 2016)

'If I [a Protestant] have a conflict with the Catholics, if there is an issue, we can go to the Bible and discuss it, see who is right. We can talk about it' (Simon, group interview, 27 September 2019).

Both respondents did not give specific examples of conflicts or disagreements. The members of the Islamic youth organisation JIC did. As explained above, they acknowledged that public opinion of Islam was negative because people associate Islam with Boko Haram. During the group interviews, the youth of JIC indicated that they thought it would help to have more focus for inter religious dialogue and to look for opportunities to talk to each other. Personally, they all had non-Muslim classmates. They discuss together, comparing the different religions:

'When you go to school, no one insults you. Most of my friends there are Christians. When a Christian insults Islam, another Christian will ask: "Why are you doing that?."' 'Actually, it is the same everywhere in Cameroon. There is no problem, and if there is, we look together for the solution. It doesn't touch Islam'. 'When it is time to pray, a Christian can remind you. Many want to know more about Islam'. (Mohsin and Idrissou, group interview, 9 October 2016)

Other respondents mentioned that they for example read the Qur'an to understand Muslims better, which is also a way of bridging boundaries.

Sharing rituals and practices

According to many respondents, an important practice that contributes to the peaceful cohabitation of different religious groups, is the shared celebration of religious holidays such as Eid al-Fitr-and Easter. It is considered a way of bridging boundaries, as it invites dialogue and promotes a culture of sharing:

'Ramadan is an occasion to make the link with other religions. The Islamic give gifts to other religions. All Muslims then invite Christians for eating with them. In Briqueterie, the Muslim neighbourhood, you can join for dinner with every family during Ramadan, you can eat in all the houses. It is a symbol of inter religious dialogue.' (Christian, informal conversation, 28 June 2016)

I myself was invited to the celebration of Tabaski, or Eid al-Adha: the festival of sacrifice. During this religious celebration, the sacrifice of Ibrahim is remembered by the ritual slaughter of a sheep. One part of the sheep is eaten at home, another is given to family members and the third is distributed among the poor. I was invited to celebrate Tabaski with the chairman of the Islamic youth organisation JIC. He distributed the third part to the children in his neighbourhood: mainly children of Christian families who did not celebrate Tabaski. There were also Christian neighbours invited to eat with the family.

This practice of celebrating religious feasts with people from other religious groups was often mentioned as an example of the peaceful relations between religious groups:

'There are no problems between Catholics and Muslims. When there is a celebration, we invite each other' (Adèle, informal conversation, 12 August 2016)

This does not mean that this practice is always easy or natural. Religious beliefs or practices can hinder celebrating together:

‘Modern Muslims, they invite us to celebrate. But on our side, we cannot very well invite them. When they come, they can’t eat. Maybe we have prepared pork, or we are drinking alcohol’ (Constantin, group interview, 16 September 2016)

Mostly, however, celebrating religious feasts together was seen as a common and pleasant exchange between people from different religious groups. These shared experiences were reported to deepen the relations that exist already between people:

‘I have Muslim friends. Like at Tabaski, recently, we celebrated together. It is not a Catholic celebration. Yet we went to eat sheep in Briqueterie. I went to my seamstress, she is a Muslim, she’s my friend as well. You see, we adapt, we respect each other. Tabaski we celebrate together, like our feast the 25th of December we also celebrate with them. ’ (Dilane, group interview, 16 September 2016)

This shows that, while celebrating together is a common example of what people from different religious groups do together, it is not the only thing. Rather, it is a confirmation of the good relations that already exist.

This celebrating of religious feasts was commonly used for improving Christian-Muslim relationships, but I have not heard about Christian groups celebrating different feasts or celebrating feasts in different ways and inviting each other to celebrate together. A possible reason for this can be that they celebrate the same feasts and prefer to do so among their own family and friends.

Emphasizing similarities

A final example of how boundaries are bridged is by emphasizing similarities. As explained in the theoretical framework, boundaries can become less important or weaker if two groups share the same categorical attributes. Focusing on what to groups have in common may therefore have this effect.

One example is the argument “We all believe in the same God”, which was mentioned several times already in this thesis. This argument is used to promote or explain that different religious groups should respect each other. In other words: it does not matter which specific beliefs and practices other people hold, because in the end there is only one God to whom we all answer.

‘Concerning the relationship between Christians and Muslims: there are no problems. There are always those who do bad and those who do good. There is some stigmatisation of Muslims, there are those who say Boko Haram is how all Muslims are. But I don’t want to talk about it like that. You think in your own way, I think in mine. There are many churches, but we all believe in the same God’ (Raphael, group interview, 27 September 2019)

This motor taxi driver describes here that he sees the relationship between Christians and Muslims as generally good. He acknowledges the presence of ‘bad eggs’ in both groups, thereby actively avoiding generalizing or stigmatizing a whole group. In stead, he emphasizes that, while each person gives her/his own interpretation to religious belief, God is the same for everyone. This way,

he does not add value to what separates different religious groups, but focuses instead on what makes them the same. Instead, he refuses to think about religious groups as separate social entities. The boundaries are not important, as all groups can be fitted into a broader social group: that of believers. Specific preferences or practices, then, are the responsibility of the individual within this large group.

This is a way of broadening the group with whom one identifies: in stead of focusing on the differences between the various religious groups, you focus on what unifies all of these groups: their belief in God, who is the same for all of them. By emphasizing this shared identity, the boundaries between the various religious groups are no longer of importance. This view on how group boundaries should be addressed was also visible in the following statement, regarding Islamic groups:

‘We are all together. There are not many Sufi. There are Tijani and Sunni. Shiite I don’t know any. But we all live well together. If you shave your beard, it’s no problem. But if you want to keep it, it’s good too. We pray together, we eat together. We are all Muslims’. (Idrissou, group interview, 9 October 2016)

‘We are all Muslims’ means that the I-position of ‘being Muslim’ is stronger than the I-position of, for example, ‘being Sunni’. As explained before, for Muslims this is a common stance in their identification with their religious groups. For Christians however, it was more dependent on specific persons and situations. It is possible that when respondents identify themselves as ‘Christians’ rather than specifying their particular denomination or church, they actively try to bridge boundaries. However, this does depend on the specific situation and cannot be assumed.

Whether conscious or unconscious, it does have the result of broadening the in-group to all Christians, all Muslims or all believers, especially when specific shared characteristics are emphasized, such as in the following comment:

‘I don’t have any problem with other religions. Whether you are christian, protestant, catholic, Buddhist, animist, Muslim, I have no problem with that. Because on the basis of us, there is God, and it is only the name that is different.’ (Arnold, group interview, 1 September 2016)

7.2.4 Analysis

This section explored the many ways in which youth strengthen, ignore or bridge boundaries between religious groups in Cameroon.

All of the ways described above to strengthen boundaries – converting, excluding, stigmatizing, emphasizing difference – lead to a stronger idea of an in-group and an out-group. They influence each other: strong stigma’s around one group may enhance exclusion of this group, for example. The comments cited above suggest that this has been the case for Muslims in Cameroon since the presence of Boko Haram in the North. For this case, I have seen examples from both the perspective of people who stigmatize and people who are stigmatised. With regard to other examples, such as exclusion by the *nouvelles églises*, in the interviews there were no examples given of people performing this action themselves, but only examples of how it had been done to them.

As explained previously, most of the respondents of this research belong to moderate religious groups. It is likely that in these groups, tolerance towards others is a highly valued idea. This can be a reason that the youth I spoke to generally aim to bring groups together rather than drive them apart. It is also possible that youth find it easier to recognize examples of strengthening boundaries in the behaviour of others, rather than their own. As the narrative of tolerance and peaceful cohabitation is prevalent in Cameroon, admitting that you may sometimes stray from this ideal is probably not socially accepted.

As I concluded in chapter 5 as well, I noticed that many Christian respondents more often spoke negatively about *nouvelles églises* than about Muslims. They also seemed to be more comfortable when speaking about these churches negatively and did not emphasize that relations were generally good, as with Muslim-Christian relations. Chapter 5 argued that both groups are considered to have strong boundaries with the mainline Christian churches. Chapter 6 showed that mobility across boundaries between mainline churches and *nouvelles églises* is common, which indicates that while these boundaries are strong, they can more easily be transcended than boundaries between Christian and Islamic groups. Despite this, however, the respondents report more conflict between *nouvelles églises* and mainline churches. This suggests that the strongest boundaries are not necessarily the most problematic.

I can see several possible explanations for the fact that youth, notably Christian youth, perceive relations between mainline churches and *nouvelles églises* as more problematic than Muslim-Christian relations. First of all, the strong narrative of Cameroon as ‘a country of peace’ may have influenced the way people think about Muslim-Christian relations more, because it focuses on peaceful cohabitation of different groups. As *nouvelles églises* can be considered as part of the same group as other Christians, this narrative may seem less relevant with regard to conflict between different Christian groups. Second, as chapter 5 showed, conflict imagery is shaped by the situation in the North of Cameroon with Boko Haram, as well as by comparing the situation in Cameroon to that in other countries. In both cases, the focus of news coverage is conflict between Muslims and Christians. If respondents do not recognize their everyday realities in these images, they may be inclined to deny any tensions between Muslims and Christians because they do not want to be associated with the same type of conflict. Third, *nouvelles églises* are a relatively new phenomenon and may therefore feel more threatening, whereas Muslims and Christians have a long history of getting along well together. Even when relations become tense, they may not see this as a long term trend.

From the perspective of Muslim youth, I can imagine that they might underscore the peaceful relations between Muslims and Christians because they are already stigmatised for being violent, as they are associated with Boko Haram. Their active boundary construction between them and Boko Haram, describing the latter as not Islamic, can be interpreted as a similar strategy of escaping this stigma.

While youth contribute to strengthening boundaries both between Muslims and Christians and between *nouvelles églises* and mainline Christian groups, this was not the case for ignoring and

bridging boundaries. These examples focus most always on the boundaries between Christian and Islamic groups. I have found no examples of respondents explicitly trying to ignore or bridge boundaries between *nouvelles églises* and mainline Christian churches. This is interesting: while both boundaries are perceived as possibly problematic, only one boundary is specifically addressed in ways of mitigating conflict across boundaries. A possible explanation for this could be that conflict is more open so the need to bridge boundaries is felt more deeply. The data collected for this research does not suggest this. I suggest that the long history of Muslim-Christian cohabitation has deep-rooted structures of promoting this peaceful coexistence, whereas these structures cannot always be copied to function in a similar bridging manner for other religious groups. It is possible that the basis for group membership of the *nouvelles églises* is a more individual than religious groups in Cameroon historically have. However, the scope of this research does not permit to draw conclusions on this.

A final remark is that I noticed that in all conversations with motor taxi drivers, ways of ignoring or bridging boundaries could be recognized. This can partly be explained by the fact that these were mostly relatively brief group interviews, often with mixed groups. There was no time to build trust or to go really in-depth. However, it did strike me that so many of these men gave concrete examples of how they lived and worked together across religious boundaries. They seemed generally more tolerant towards other religious groups than the highly educated youth, who easily switched religious membership, but who could also have harsh opinions of groups other than their own. Yet if the assumptions on youth and conflict as described in the theoretical framework are correct, the motor taxi drivers would be most 'at risk' of promoting conflict, because of their unstable socioeconomic position. Why is it that in this case, they are the group promoting peace most strongly?

I think this question can be answered by taking the example of the motor taxi drivers as a micro example of the heterogeneous society as described in the theoretical framework. The motor taxi spots are shared among all motor drivers working in the area. They take turns driving customers. Working in such proximity every day may be one of the reasons that these motor taxi men prefer to avoid paying attention to issues of religion, as this may lead to discussion. They are dependent on each other to do their jobs. Strong boundaries between the different religious groups may prevent a successful and pleasant cooperation as motor taxi drivers, thereby impeding the work and the income. I argue therefore that ignoring and bridging these boundaries can be a tactic strategy which helps motor taxi drivers to protect their financial position.

7.3 Conclusion

This chapter showed that all respondents consider Yaoundé a heterogeneous city. They regularly interact with people who identify with other religious groups than their own. In these interactions, they engage with the boundaries between these groups in various ways. In some cases, respondents strengthen boundaries, for example by converting, excluding or stigmatizing others, or by emphasizing the differences between the religious groups. These ways of engaging with boundaries all had a sense of 'selfing' and 'othering' as a result. In other cases, respondents ignored boundaries by refusing to talk about religious issues; denying the relevance of these boundaries in a specific interaction; emphasizing that religion is a personal choice and therefore not of the concern of

someone else; and focusing on a shared social identity, thereby focusing the interaction on shared membership. Finally, respondents also engaged with boundaries by bridging them. This was done by promoting mutual understanding; sharing rituals and practices; and emphasizing similarities in their religious identification.

In general, it can be concluded that from these youth's engagement with boundaries is that they value peaceful coexistence and have ingrained many ways of talking about religious boundaries that minimize their (negative) influence. A group which was particularly prone to ignore or bridge boundaries were Yaoundé's motor taxi drivers. This can possibly be explained by the heterogeneous environment in which they live and work and on which they are dependent.

Another conclusion which can be drawn on the basis of this chapter is that while both the boundaries between Muslims and Christians and the boundaries between mainline Christians and *nouvelles églises* are recognized to sometimes be problematic, the latter are not actively ignored or bridged. The respondents have shown many ways of explaining Muslim-Christian relations as generally good and peaceful, despite 'bad guys' or Boko Haram. For problematic relations between *nouvelles églises* and mainline Christians, however, there seems to be no language yet to bring these groups closer together.

8 Conclusion

This thesis discusses how urban youth in Yaoundé perceive and engage with boundaries between religious groups. It argues that processes of social identification influence how boundaries between religious groups are constructed and re-constructed in interactions between in-group and out-group members. In some cases these interactions strengthen boundaries, which may contribute to conflict dynamics. In others, the boundaries are ignored or bridged. The thesis answers the following research question:

How do urban youth in Yaoundé, Cameroon, identify, experience and respond to religious boundaries in their everyday lives, and in what way does their response shape boundary construction along religious lines?

The respondents of this research generally share a view of Cameroon's religious landscape as a diverse and changing environment, rooted deeply in ethnic and regional characteristics. It is identified as made up of several large groups, notably Christianity and Islam, with numerous subgroups within. While the general outlook of the landscape is similar for most respondents, from their descriptions can be analysed that all youth emphasize different groups and boundaries within the religious landscape. This means that their understanding of and experience with regard to the religious landscape differs. The religious landscape is, in other words, socially constructed. In this thesis, I argue that the boundaries that divide religious groups are situational. Which groups are recognized in each specific situation is dependent on many factors, as is people's response to this situation.

Youth position themselves in this landscape by identifying with specific groups. Which group youth identify with, and how they shape their group membership is dependent on many factors, including family background, ethnicity and gender. However, this identification is not fixed, but fluid and situational. In some interactions, they may present themselves as Christians, in others as Presbyterians or Protestants, in again others as believers. This reflects how they identify in each interaction other in-group and out-group members. In other words: their social identification determines partly which boundaries are made relevant or irrelevant in specific interactions.

The theoretical assumptions on boundary construction and conflict as outlined in the second chapter of this thesis concluded that strong or strengthening boundaries can increase conflict. Likewise, conflict can contribute to the strengthening of boundaries. From this follows that, to understand conflict dynamics in a country, it can be helpful to examine which boundaries are perceived as strong. From the field research can be concluded that the boundaries between mainline Christian churches and Revival churches and the boundaries between mainline Christian churches and Muslims are perceived as strong boundaries by most respondents of this research. In line with social identity theory, the characteristics of these groups help strengthen the boundaries: they are perceived to have a strong social cohesion and group identity. Subsequently, these boundaries are seen as most problematic as well.

In the everyday lives of the youth who participated to this study, they often had encounters with people who identify with different religious groups than they do themselves. Their (perceived) response to these interactions tells us more about the value they give the boundaries between these groups in these interactions. From the field research was concluded that youth's engagement with boundaries could have three effects on boundaries: strengthening, ignoring and bridging them. In a dialogical process of social identification, they emphasize or minimize the importance of boundaries between religious groups and influence what meaning these boundaries are given in specific situations. This means that youth' engagement with boundaries influences to a limited extend the process of problematising boundaries between religious groups.

From their engagement with boundaries between religious groups, I analysed that ignoring and bridging boundaries were only used either in relation to Muslim-Christian relations, or to religious groups in a general, broad sense. Other boundaries which are recognized by youth as strong and/or problematic, particularly the boundaries between *nouvelles églises* and mainline religious groups, were not specifically minimized. This implies that while for some problematic boundaries there have been narratives developed that mitigate tensions, for others this does not yet exist.

Finally, this thesis departed from the assumption that youth, particularly economically vulnerable youth, can be key actors in conflict situations. This thesis however has shown that the most vulnerable group that took part in this research, motor taxi drivers, was also most strong in promoting the ignoring and bridging of boundaries. I explain this as a result of the fact that they are based in the most heterogeneous position of all respondents of this research: they work in generally large groups, in generally crowded parts of crowded neighbourhoods, from where they move all over the city. For their livelihood, they are dependent on each other and their diverse clientele. In line with Eriksen's description of heterogeneous societies, this situation of mutual dependency promotes tolerance and prevents polarisation.

To understand conflict, researchers look at conflict dynamics and the strengthening of boundaries. This research has shown that by asking a broader question of how boundaries are perceived can give more insight in a context of potential conflict. It leads to conclusions not only with regard to when and which situations may be at risk of encouraging conflict dynamics, but also which situations hold possible solutions. In addition, the value of this research lies at asking this question to those people who are considered key actors in the dynamics you aim to investigate. I argue therefore that such research can both help determine where a problem lies and sketch possible ways forward which are embedded in local realities.

As this thesis showed, conflict is more likely to occur between social groups with a strong group identity and rigid boundaries. This suggests that initiatives for conflict prevention focusing on inter religious dialogue might in fact increase the chances for conflict between these groups, because a situation is created in which individual actors are stimulated to, first and foremost, identify with their religious group, thereby reinforcing the boundaries between these groups.

8.1 Limitations

One of the main limitations of this study is that data on the groups with the strongest boundaries is limited. The main gap is data about members of *nouvelles églises*. While many mainline Christians have given their view on these churches, I only spoke to two members of Pentecostal churches. From their input I cannot draw conclusions on how members of these churches react to the negative image of their religious group. In addition, *nouvelles églises* are many and therefore not necessary likely to identify with one another. The research would possibly also have benefited from more Islamic respondents, especially from Islamic strands which are more closed.

While this thesis investigates boundary construction, it cannot draw conclusions on whether boundaries are actually perceived differently by all members of society because of the way youth say they engage with them. I have tried to capture engagement with boundaries through observing if and how groups were mixed and how people from different religious groups interacted with each other, but the bulk of the data reflects how youth think and talk about boundaries rather than how they actually interact across them. I have had no means to determine whether the way youth talk about boundaries is also the way they actually engage with them when they meet them, apart from the relatively superficial encounters on the streets of Yaoundé. However, following the theories outlined in chapter two, I argue that this perception, too, is important in shaping boundaries, as boundaries are situational and do not exist when people in a social interaction do not acknowledge them. It can therefore be assumed that how these youth perceive boundaries also has an effect on how these boundaries are perceived by others.

8.2 Recommendations

This research discusses how urban youth in Yaoundé see Cameroon's religious landscape and how they choose to position themselves and others in it. Understanding of this topic could increase by exploring why youth take these choices and what the influence of their choices is on the religious landscape. Here I suggest several avenues for further research.

First, as this research suggests, personal and group interests may play a role in identification with religious groups. Follow-up research could dive deeper into what youth need and what religious groups offer. This would profit from, for example, more background information on the youth participating in the research, as well as a thorough analysis of power positions of religious groups.

Second, as came to the fore in several paragraphs in this study, economic hardship is felt most deeply by women and youth. While this research has focused on the perspective of youth in a broad sense, the results suggest that the experience of young women is generally different from that of young men. Understanding of the link between religion, identity and socioeconomic position could therefore benefit from an analysis along gender lines as well.

Third, this research has shown that even in a melting pot like Yaoundé, religion and religious groups are highly localized. This brings up interesting questions about the relation between urban

and rural life and the role of churches in promoting a localized identity. Follow-up research could explore how youth relate to the localized culture which is perpetuated in churches in the urban area.

A final recommendation addresses the development (and developers) of intervention strategies. This study has shown that there are already structures and processes in place which mitigate conflict between religious groups. This information can be used to design programs that aim towards conflict prevention. With regard to this particular case, programs could, for example, aim to strengthen the existing narratives of Cameroon as a country of peace, or encourage identification with a group which transcends boundaries between (religious) groups, such as 'believers' or 'Cameroonians', in order to promote unity and limit the significance of boundaries between religious groups. Tapping into such existing solutions could improve the effectivity of conflict prevention programs, as they would be rooted in the everyday realities of the youth they address.

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