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Los Angeles

Coastal Islam:

Religion and Identity among Minority Muslims in the French Colonial City of Porto-Novo,
1889-1939

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

Tiffany Kathleen Gleason

2014

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Coastal Islam: Religion and Identity among Minority Muslims in the French Colonial City of
Porto-Novo, 1889-1939

by

Tiffany Kathleen Gleason

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Andrew Apter, Chair

This study challenges commonly held notions that Islam in colonial societies was a monolithic religion and that Muslims universally self-identified as one population or *umma*. Instead I suggest that in colonial Porto Novo, religion was not the only defining or unifying feature of one's identity, but rather one element within a complex social structure more firmly centered on ethnic, commercial, and economic lines. Furthermore, the role of France in its colonies was complicated by the secularity of the public sphere which did not fall in line with policies that specifically targeted Muslim populations. These policies affected Porto Novan Muslims in French West Africa who were put under surveillance. In the high colonial era, the French administration readied itself for a larger pan-Islamic threat and fearing destabilization in its

African territories. Yet, during this era, the Muslim populations of Porto Novo were synonymous with the merchant middle class. Thus, French colonial administrators had to contend with the fact that those on whom they relied to bolster the colonial economy were the same people they mistrusted and put under surveillance for practicing Islam. This larger group of Muslims was also part of a wider Yoruba ethnic identity in addition to these economic and religious categories. Furthermore, French perceptions of the inter-ethnic divisions within the Muslim communities - those between the privileged Brazilian returnee group and the Yoruba- further complicated the way colonial society evolved in Porto Novo. I argue that through interactions with differing ethnic and religious African communities and the French colonial state and despite their minority status, Porto Novan Muslims significantly contributed to the modernization of their society. Through the histories of these marginalized populations, this dissertation explores how the interactions of minority populations of a shared faith negotiated their position in society through their reliance on a variety of identifying categories.

The dissertation of Tiffany Kathleen Gleason is approved.

Dominic Thomas

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Andrew Apter, Committee Chair

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2014

To my sister Jennifer, and my parents Barbara and John.
I love you. Thank you for making this all possible;
and to all the Bruin women in the family who inspire me, especially to my mother
-class of '65, my grandmother Alicia (Kenealy) Connell- class of '32, and my
godmother Alice (Wener) Gleason -class of '38

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Abbreviations

AOF	Afrique Occidental Française
AEF	Afrique Equatoriale Française
ANB	Archives Nationale du Bénin
CAOM	Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer
AP	Affaires Politiques

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Figure 1. Porto Novo from the CAOM French Archives. Carton [Senegal/IV/120]. 1889



Fig. 2 Map Republic of Bénin

1 Introduction

This dissertation investigates the resourcefulness of a minority religious population in coastal West Africa during French colonial rule. It is a study of Muslims in Porto Novo, modern-day Republic of Benin. Traditionally, it sits outside of the generally accepted sphere of Islamic Africa, yet in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries it came to be ruled by France, which often represented itself as a Muslim power.¹ Several research questions informed the foundation of this project. First, what were the historical circumstances that provided the opportunity for Muslims, as a minority population in colonial Porto Novo, to assert their agency against the French? Second, how did the community itself become divided in a way that one side became functionaries of the colonial endeavor and the other side was seen as inciting dissent against colonial French control? Many other inquiries arose from these initial questions. The following dissertation is an attempt to answer them in a historically relevant manner. The current literature surrounding the theme of French colonial rule and Islam in West Africa is both significant and expansive. Yet, the question of how practitioners of Islam in areas where they were neither the majority representative population nor considered long-term residents, and how these factors impacted the enforcement and interpretation of colonial policies created for areas where Islam was the dominant religious culture thus far have gone unasked. Specifically, a general history of Muslims as a minority in a French colonial population is something that has been generally overlooked in the historiography.² The following research project examines the relationships

¹ David Robinson, "France as a Muslim Power in West Africa," *Africa Today* 46, nos. 3-4 (Summer-Autumn 1999):105-127.

² Some of the most relevant works to which I refer are: Sean Hanretta, *Islam and Social Change in French West Africa: History of an Emancipatory Community* (New York: Cambridge University

between the French colonial administration and their African subjects during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in the location of a small coastal lagoon area with fluid borders, as well as fluid identity constructs. The study reveals the significance of Porto Novo's Muslim populations in expanding our present conceptions of colonial African history. Additionally, it provides a foundation to better understand the climate of the present-day Muslim *umma*, or global Muslim community, by providing a contextualized version of past events as they were understood and applied to decision-making processes within that community.

The scope of this narrative involves African Muslims in the Porto Novo area of modern-day Benin, formerly known as colonial Dahomey. This already small population of coreligionists first became dispersed, and then divided into two parties over the period covered in the present work. I argue that the Muslim members showed a great amount of flexibility in their application of Islam to the local conditions and social life. Framing the study from local, African, and global perspectives, with a specific examination of the French relationship with Islam, are central features. The work also provides a useful framework in which the intricate roles adopted by various

Press, 2009); David Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1880-1920* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000); Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power, and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001); Cheikh Anta Babo, *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853-1913* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007); Benjamin Soares, *Islam and the Prayer Economy* (Edinburgh, UK: University of Edinburgh Press, 2005); Denise Brégand, *Commerce caravanier et relations sociales au Bénin les Wangara du Borgou* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998); Séraphin Nene Bi Boti, *Les Institutions Coloniales de l'Afrique Occidentale Française* (Abidjan, Ivory Coast: Les Éditions ABC, 2011); and Marie Miran, *Islam: Histoire et Modernité en Côte d'Ivoire* (Paris: Karthala Press, 2006). Classic studies of Islam in West Africa include: Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam in West Africa 1860-1960* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels, eds., *The History of Islam in Africa* (Athens, OH: The Ohio University Press, 2000); Ivor Wilkes, *Wa and the Wala: Islam and Polity in Northwestern Ghana* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Jean-Louis Triaud, *La Légende Noire de la Sanûsiyya: Une Confrérie Musulmane Saharienne Sous le Regard Français, 1840-1930* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1995).

communities of coastal West African Muslims inserted themselves. Illustrating and revealing the story of Muslims in Porto Novo in this way complicates the all-too-often simplified narrative of colonizer versus colonized. The historical figures who are the subjects of this dissertation—each of whom looked to consolidate their positions and pursued their own interests, whether African or French,—engaged with one another on various social, civic, and political levels. In this particular story, we find that the political roles became solidified, particularly as the French related to Porto Novo’s Muslims as if they, while African, were also foreigners to that area.

By the end of the period of this study, which is the era between the two world wars, the French succeeded in helping crystallize the idea that the Muslims of Porto Novo belonged to one of two distinct parties. The first was a smaller population, descending from the Portuguese influence in the area, particularly the returnee populations from Brazil in the nineteenth century. These people were termed Brazilian Muslims. The second and larger group became identifiable as the Yoruba Muslims. Each of these groups experienced different labels, and these labels are explained in detail in the following chapters. One must keep in mind that colonial culture in French imperial Africa was one that encouraged its administrators to deliberately single out both allies and adversaries from its subject populations. It is for this reason that the Brazilian Muslim community received elite status in Porto Novo, whereas the larger Yoruba Muslim population was treated with caution. As the colonial era progressed and policies changed, the French found themselves beholden to the wishes of the Brazilians, to whom they had bestowed their civil-service appointments. The other faction, the Yoruba, came to be considered outsiders by the French, and was targeted to take the blame for any failures the French administration experienced in enforcing and enacting colonial policy. It is the interactions between these two small and so-called alien

Muslim populations, as well as the relationships that each had with the French that form the basis of this dissertation.

Background

Unlike the majority of French West Africa,³ where Islam was the dominant religion practiced by the majority of the subject population at the time of the French occupation of Porto Novo in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Muslims made up only about five percent.⁴ By the end of the period that we examine here, the population of Porto Novo's Muslims was still relatively minor: it consisted of, at most, around fifteen to twenty percent of the entire population. Regarding Islam in this part of coastal West Africa, the fundamental question to consider here is whether or not the relationships between the French colonials and the Muslims in Porto Novo, Dahomey differed from the relationships that the French had with Muslims in other parts of Africa. The short answer to this question is yes. Along this same line of inquiry, one also might ask if Muslims in Porto Novo were similar in their cultural behavior and make-up as Muslims in other parts of French West Africa. Here, the short answer is no. Thus, expatiating on the role of Islam using new information and new interpretations of preexisting knowledge, specifically the history of colonial Porto Novo, provides important examples that scholars need to more fully expand on in what is a prominent, but incomplete understanding of French colonial African history. In this

³ The AOF was the Federation of West Africa, or *Afrique Occidentale Française*. I will refer to this as French West Africa or with the abbreviation of AOF from this point forward unless I need to further differentiate between the years in which Dahomey was part of Equatorial Africa and had not been incorporated in the Federation of West Africa

⁴ "1906 Trimester Report, [Unsigned]," Carton 4E16, Dossier 5, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

location, African Muslims did not have a history of ruling politically as was the case in the majority of other North or West African French colonies. Further, the experiences of Africans and French colonials in Porto Novo did not fit the mold established by colonial policy-makers for a number of reasons. First, Islamic laws and practices were not incorporated as part and parcel of the local culture. Second, those who did practice Islam, while a small percentage of the population, were still significant to the region because of their important roles in the Porto Novan economy. Third, whether labeled as Yoruba or Brazilian, as all Muslims in Porto Novo eventually came to be seen, none were considered autochthonous to the make-up and structure of the pre-colonial Hogbonou Kingdom.

The fact that two separate Muslim communities made administration of this colony difficult for the French powers was, in and of itself, not new. Much of the Sahelian regions of the *Afrique Occidentale Française* (AOF) also experienced divisions among their populations, usually based upon which Sufi brotherhoods were active. Yet, the difference is that these better known schisms occurred in areas where the majority of the overall subject population was Muslim. The unique element of Porto Novo, where this perceived division existed among such a small percentage of the total population, but could still cause a similar number of problems for the French is what made the particular situation on the ground unpredictable and far from formulaic in this specific location. Whatever the leaders in Paris or Dakar expected to be the outcomes of their directives could not have been predicted in Porto Novo. In fact, there are many other outposts where predictability in that time and place was impossible, and my study examines this as an attempt to better understanding the real differences between design and implementation, or said another way, concept and reality. Of course, history should reflect as much of the true record as possible, and my study contributes to the demystification of theoretical ideas behind colonial rule

by considering the story from a relatively understudied African locale and through the experiences of a minority population there.

In order to better comprehend why events unfolded as they did, it is always best to start with an overview, laying a strong foundational understanding of the peoples and places that will be the focus of the history. In this case, I begin with an introduction to the small kingdom of Hogbonou, which incorporated the area now known as Porto Novo which lay between two larger, and much better known kingdoms in West Africa's Bight of Benin.

In the seventeenth century, the Hogbonou Kingdom emerged as an independent, non-Muslim polity. The local Goun population and its rulers developed their own relationships with the Muslims of the area, who constituted the small, but significant merchant class of the region by the nineteenth century. When the French subsumed full control of the region, the Goun-Muslim relationship changed. In the French colonial endeavor, their empire-building programs were designed with the idea that the majority of their subject populations would be both indigenous and Muslim. However, implementation of these wider policies in colonial Dahomey did not fit perfectly into this colonial model. The confusion that emerged as the French attempted to implement directives from both Dakar, the capital of the AOF, and Paris, the home of the Colonial Office, reflects the discontinuity of the empire. In relation to French colonial rule, this dissertation examines the relationships between the French and their colonial subjects via the localized history of Porto Novo's extra-local Muslim communities. The effective disruption to the "civilizing mission"—the *mission civilisatrice*—by these Muslim Africans, who themselves were outsiders, was an experience unique unto itself during the French colonial era. Thus, the following work

presents an examination of the determined actions and general fortitude taken by a marginalized subject population, and the problems they caused for France, a self-described Muslim power.

In this introductory chapter, I briefly review three particular topics as they are currently positioned in the general historiography. In addition, I provide short histories for the various time periods leading up to the colonial era. An overview of the current literature, an outline of the following chapters, and a short introduction to the debate on Yoruba ethnogenesis bring this chapter to a close. The first of the three subjects to be considered is how Islam in Africa was generally conceived. The second topic discusses the relevancy of Porto Novo as a location within the broader considerations of this dissertation, including its pre-colonial evolution as an African kingdom. The final subject in this introductory section looks at French imperial constructs of Islam, as well as both North and West African history, and France's changing relationship to the idea of a particular religion and the people who practiced it. Following this section is a short outline of the importance, both geographically and culturally, of Porto Novo. In conclusion, I discuss what "being Yoruba" has meant to the historiography. While this is not central to the following research project, it nonetheless is necessary for the reader to understand if he or she is to fully appreciate this Muslim population and the impression it has left on colonial Porto Novo.

While Islam in both North and West Africa are well documented in the historiographical literature with regard to French conquest, it is only lately that an essential connection has come to the academic forefront. Both the images of the French moving east from Dakar as they attempted to conquer the interior of Africa in the Sudan and the encroachment on peoples starting in the Mediterranean and advancing south from the North African colonies are common in our perception of European imperialism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. That France basically desired

to enclose an area that would become a resource-providing quadrilateral, rather than the hexagon as we knew it, is evident in the vast amount of scholarship on these areas. However, the fact that the French also moved in from the south, in what is the Bight of Benin, and progressed northward to enclose this large colonial acquisition is often neglected in the history. This is likely due to a number of factors, and Islam not being prevalent in these forested coastal regions is one main reason for this particular omission. To adjust our understanding of how France conquered Muslim Africa, particularly as it claimed itself to be a Muslim power, becomes exponentially more complicated if we are to include this non-Islamic, and geographically separated region to the story. However, for places such as Côte d'Ivoire and Dahomey, their interior spaces, their northern areas, were included. They were also often given separate categorization in studies because the authors had them fit into the religious mythology that informed the colonial era.

Hogbonou, a kingdom on the Atlantic coast, existed outside of the conceptual boundaries of the French colonial imaginary. In the past, this area has been included in studies that have focused on its position as a transshipment point in both the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the era of legitimate commerce, and has also been included in pre-colonial era studies of African kingdoms, but again, only marginally. Yet, this specific region tends to be dropped as the studies move chronologically into the colonial era. The following synthesizes a history of Porto Novo, which expands previously accepted notions of the boundaries ascribed to it in present-day scholarship. A history of Muslims in colonial Porto Novo provides all of the details needed to make innovative and original arguments, particularly if we push ourselves to experience this history from a wide variety of angles. Of course, as we have heard from innumerable scholars, one can always argue that “gaps” in the literature, if filled, would make that history more “complete.” This is true, of course. However, this project does more than fill in empty spaces in the

historiography: it creates a new space for historians to investigate previously unconsidered ideas, and it finds responses for questions not yet asked.

When examining the origins of the Hogbonou Kingdom, it is necessary to consider the changing demographics of the Porto Novo area. For the time period of this study, which begins with the official end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, there was a period of increased illicit trade of human beings, which utilized the specific assets of the Porto Novo region, mainly its intricate lagoon waterways, in order to ply their unlawful trade.⁵ These nineteenth-century slavers were largely traveling between Brazil and Cuba in the Atlantic and the Bight of Benin and Biafra in Africa. They made use of the coastal lagoons and preyed on refugees coming into this region because of the neighboring Oyo civil wars.⁶ The connections made between Brazil and this part of the Atlantic Coast in the early nineteenth century are the beginnings of what was to develop into a community of Muslims who become known by the early twentieth century by the term “Brazilians.”

From the perspective of the fallout of the Oyo, and the emergence of Ibadan which developed from the remnants of military regiments out of the greater Oyo region,⁷ emerges a

⁵ Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire c. 1600-1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Brookfield VT: Gregg Revivals, Ashgate Publishing Company, 1991), 274-5. See also J. F. Ade Ajayi and Robert Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, UK: University Press; University of Ibadan, 1971); Patrick Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640 -1960* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁶ In addition to those in footnote 5, see J. Lorand Matory, “The English Professors of Brazil: On the Diasporic Root of the Yorùbá Nation,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 1 (Jan. 1999): 72-103.

⁷ Ruth Watson, “‘Ibadan - a Model of Historical Facts’: Militarism and Civic Culture in a Yoruba city,” *Urban History* 26, no. 1 (1999): 5-26. Watson takes up the acceptance of *Yoruba urbanism* as a historical truism and explores the impact on Yoruban urban creations, particularly in the city of Ibadan. This city was settled and formed after the dissolution of military companies that arrived after the fall of the Oyo Empire. Watson argues that the

Muslim group who migrated to Porto Novo during this era, who eventually become known most often as the “Yoruba Muslims.” That Brazilian slave traders profited from the sale of the Yoruba is nowhere specifically explained or explored in the archival documents as a possible motive for animosity, but it must not be overlooked today as a distinct possibility. However, because I rely on the archival documents and oral interviews, and because I start this study most fully at the point at which the illicit slave trade ended, I do not focus on these *possible* motivations, but rather use the evidence itself as it is presented to us historians today to unravel the story. What emerges is a history of a group of Africans who were neither numerous nor well-established in Porto Novo. This group, which at one time represented a wider community of Muslims, eventually fractured under the pressure of French colonial activity. Nonetheless, at the time, these “outsiders” caused substantial problems for the French, which is particularly interesting, as they represented such a small percentage of the Dahomean subject population. This dissertation is thus the story of a marginalized group making itself heard through the centuries despite existing as a minority people within an oppressive hegemonic system.

While I cannot deny the influence of Gramscian concepts of hegemonic relationships that were part of the colonial world, and which can be used to explain the relationship between the French and the various Africans with whom they negotiated their experiences,⁸ I do not rely on

emergence of “big men” in Ibadan arose because these men were former military leaders. She stresses that oral (and other primary) evidence provides a story of civic Ibadan that does not fit the present conception of a modern Yoruba city, which is what historians have based their initial assumptions on.

⁸ Antonio Gramsci, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Electric Book Co., 2001). While Gramsci does acknowledge that cultural conceptions of the world are contradictory and fragmented, he maintains the notion of a seemingly unified worldview, one where most or all members of a cultural group must adhere in order to bring about any type of social change. Furthermore, he asserts that language is essential to the process of articulation. Gramsci argues that subaltern cultures articulate

these ideas to carry the story line. Informing my perspective also is Michel Foucault's notion of the *panopticon* originating from his study of the prison system, into which colonial structures can easily be inserted, particularly as one considers the position of surveillance within the creation of colonial policies.⁹ But again, just as with Gramsci, I do not rely on Foucault to construct a framework on which I build this history. Rather, my work falls in line with a more simple social history that incorporates a number of readily accessible theoretical viewpoints, applying them as appropriate as I approach and represent the past. For those of us who write histories about people, places, and times that are recurrently marginalized, a discussion of the theoretical methods needed to understand a particular past does not require a chapter of its own. In writing Africa histories, theoretical synthesis automatically inserts itself into the analysis. In this way, social history is the product of using change and continuity as a regulating tool that has kept various stories alive. As it is conceptualized, history is also about the dichotomy that exists between "wanting to know" the past and "being able to know" the past with certainty. Achieving a balanced perspective within this dichotomy is the best we can do in our attempts to denote moments of history. Edward Simpson discusses a similar idea in regards to Islam found in the world of the greater Indian Ocean. Referencing his words here is the truest way I can explain why I engaged in a study of Islam in colonial French West Africa:

... ethnic diversity as a social unity view is informed by travel and trade, and functions as a confirmation to a bounded notion of religion; ... the real truth of the matter will never be known primarily due to the lack of empirical historical evidence – if indeed it is desirable or possible to know such truths – but also because both are largely projects of the imagination.

counter-hegemonic conceptions of the world through a variety of ways. It is his ideas of hegemony and counter-hegemony in the *Notebooks* that I find useful in this case.

⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 195-229.

The issue is not what was or was not true in the past but what claims people make for it.¹⁰

While there are more findings of such empirical evidence every day, the significance of the aforementioned quote is less about sources as it is about the idea that it may not be relevant to know such realities because the ways in which they were perceived and transmitted tells us what we want to know about the society under study.

Without wishing to succumb to current academic trends, I do recognize one particular scholar as being the most applicable to my work, and so I conclude this section with a reference to Arjun Appadurai. As historians, we must acknowledge that the past is open to interpretation, just as cultural constructs are accepted as truth. As Appadurai reminds us, “that the past is a limitless and plastic symbolic resource infinitely susceptible to the whims of contemporary interests and the distortions of contemporary ideology.”¹¹

Some research questions that were asked during the formation of this study, aside from those mentioned at the outset, include the investigation of French colonial policies towards Muslims, especially in Porto Novo, but also in Africa in general. Also questioned was how implementation differed in a place like coastal Dahomey from other French-controlled locales such as Algeria or Dakar. Were these differences regional or based on different moments in which French attitudes toward Muslims emerged? In what ways did the French colonial interpretation of

¹⁰ Edward Simpson, “History of Bhuj as Told by Its Own Historians,” in *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean*, eds. Edward Simpson and Kai Kress (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 119.

¹¹ Arjun Appadurai, “The Past as a Scarce Resource,” *Man* 16, no. 2 (June 1981): 201-219.

certain types of Muslim activity cause an exaggerated reaction to what was seen as the broader movement of Pan-Islamism? Did the fact that African indigenous religious practices, which were stronger and more organized in a place like Dahomey (such as Vodun), distort colonial policies from their original inception, or further, did they facilitate new attempts at implementation? Other questions that surfaced included inquiries about France's attitudes towards any practice of religion in Africa related to the Third Republic or Republican views which focused on individual characteristics rather than on the labels of race or religion. Why is Porto Novo different from other studied areas in Africa? Was Porto Novo important to France because of its location between the African interior and the Atlantic World, or because of its location on the French-British colonial border? How did the Goun Kingdom of Hogbonou, which was relatively ignored by Europeans, and where Muslims were not the majority, become the area that served as the turning point in conquering Dahomey? What was the aftermath of this involvement? In asking all of these questions of the archival evidence and notable members of Porto Novan society during interviews, the history materialized in concrete form.

Literature Review

In the chapters that follow, primary evidence is interwoven with ideas from current research literature that is germane to understanding the history of West Africa. A short examination outside of the realm of the narrative exhibits certain primary sources found in the French language, as well as English and French secondary sources, which informed the research I conducted. I begin with the most relevant primary sources.

Primary sources were utilized and accessed in a variety of ways. They exist in the forms of archival materials located in France and Benin, as well as in certain colonial-era publications. The

oral interviews I was able to conduct in Porto Novo on my research visit of 2009 also fit into this category. The archives, while heavily dominated by the French perspective, do contain holdings in which African voices mingle with those of their colonial oppressors. Monographs and published reports by colonials or Frenchmen in the employ of the administration are also informative first-hand accounts. Some of these documents, such as Alain Quellien's *La politique musulmane dans l'Afrique occidentale française*, were invaluable.¹² This text was written at the request of Governor Ernest Roume, who approached Quellien as early as 1906. Quellien's pamphlet was then used to inspire Robert Arnaud. In 1912, Arnaud, a French colonial administrator and the head of the Muslim Affairs division, wrote *L'Islam et le Politique Musulmane Française en Afrique Occidentale Française*.¹³

In the period between these two publications was the formation of the International Commission of Muslim Affairs which was established in June 1911. This was created by the French colonial administrators in Dakar, who perceived increasingly anti-Islamic sentiment among their subjects as well as among French nationals at home. The meeting of fell in-line with the universal French attitude that grew out of the assumption that educating the masses was the only way to really instill true French nationalist ideas. In order to broadly create an educational system for the colonies, it had to be based on French values and in one language, French. The use of Arabic was gradually eliminated from colonial procedures as part of this larger overhaul, and reports demonstrate that they meant to do this throughout the colonies of the AOF. While this was going to be more difficult in their North African colonies, the outright creation of new Muslim

¹² Alain Quellien, *La politique musulmane dans l'Afrique occidentale française* (Paris: Larose, 1910).

¹³ Robert Arnaud, *L'Islam et la Politique Musulmane Française en Afrique Occidentale Française* (Paris: Comité de l'Afrique Française, 1912), 105.

policies were justified under the idea that Islam in French West Africa unlike Islam as practiced in areas that were considered part of the so-called Islamic world. The creation of *l'Islam Noir* and *l'Islam Maure* is elucidated below. For North Africa, the impact of Muslim policies changed when, instead of a French colonial writing about it, an indigenous North African conducted the study. For example, there is a 1925 pamphlet published by G. H. Bousquet with the title *La Politique Musulmane et Coloniale des Pays-Bas. Manuel de Politique Musulmane*. While there is no name associated with this publication, the author claims to be “*un africain*.”

The creation of the colonial school of ethnology produced a number of scholars trained in the Durkheimian and Maussian approach to studying “the other,” which differed from the Lucien Levy-Bruhl approach that was typically used in African areas prior to the 1920s.¹⁴ Particularly, Maurice Delafosse made an impact when writing about the peoples he observed throughout the AOF from the turn of the twentieth century onwards. Because he and Paul Marty were the two men who essentially created the categories of *Islam Noir* and *Islam Maure*, their impact on policy and history—both negative and positive—is immeasurable. Marty, as “the” Islamic specialist, is considered in detail in the chapters that follow. And of all of the studies about Delafosse, the edited volume *Maurice Delafosse: Entre orientalisme et ethnographie, l'itinéraire d'un africaniste, 1870-1926* probably has had the most impact and relevance for my current study.¹⁵

As mentioned, the French schools of ethnology that came about in the twentieth century attempted to perceive colonial subjects in new manners. Marcel Mauss, Émile Durkheim's

¹⁴ Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 45.

¹⁵ Amselle Jean-Loup and Emmanuelle Sibeud, *Maurice Delafosse: Entre orientalisme et ethnographie, l'itinéraire d'un africaniste, 1870-1926* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1998).

nephew, began teaching at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in 1902, and along with Delafosse, he founded the Ethnology Institute of the University of Paris in 1925. In this same category of important scholars who inform our understanding of colonial West African history is Louis Massignon and his work *Les études islamiques a l'étranger* (1919).¹⁶ In the 1920s he became the chair of Muslim Sociology at the Collège de France in Paris. In some circles, Massignon is considered a forward thinker who enlightened the West about Islam and its Abrahamic roots. Others, however, consider him an unsystematic racist, and discuss the fact that his identification with Arab and Muslim culture arose, at least in part, because he did not appear to like Jews very much.¹⁷ Despite what is said about him, his writing is typical of the period, but it also holds some genuine insight amongst the orientalist and racist language.

While the majority of the governor generals of the AOF, as well as lieutenant governors of the individual colonies, often wrote studies of the locations which were formerly under their control, Gaston Mary's *Précis historique de la colonisation française en Afrique occidentale depuis les premiers siècles jusqu'en 1910* is the best study from this era by a former colonial who explains the early colonial processes in French West Africa.¹⁸ The last particularly helpful publication in French from the colonial period of study is a doctoral thesis by J. Machat on the French in Africa in the eighteenth century, a period much earlier than mine, but still quite useful

¹⁶ Louis Massignon, *Les études islamiques a l'étranger* (Paris: Éditions Ernest Leroux, 1919).

¹⁷ Massignon has also been both criticized and praised for being involved in a forbidden homosexual relationship with Luis de Cuadra.

¹⁸ Gaston Mary, *Précis historique de la colonisation française en Afrique occidentale depuis les premiers siècles jusqu'en 1910 (À l'usage des candidats aux carrières coloniales)* (Paris: Larose éditeurs, 1937).

to get a sense of how the French saw themselves in Senegal at that time.¹⁹

Among the secondary literature, I have chosen to expand on the sources that have allowed me to distinguish between what has been done versus what still needs to be completed, as well as to synthesize the available research and gain new perspectives from it. Furthermore, the authors included here have allowed me to establish the context of my own research questions about Islam as a minority religion in colonial French West Africa. Additionally the information gathered has allowed me to construct rational research questions. The historical works on the broader subject of French colonialism, Africa, and Islam that I consider here relate to the core ideas of my project while providing the groundwork on which I have built my own models of interpretation of this information. There are seemingly limitless texts to which I am indebted for establishing the foundation of my scholarship in the field of African history. Those texts in English and French discussed below have been exceedingly relevant as I have pursued this topic.

The most recent works in English that have informed my research both directly and indirectly, include the research of Ruth Watson²⁰ on the emergence of Ibadan as a military-camp-turned city, Nile Green's work on Indian Muslim soldiers,²¹ and Myron Echenberg scholarship on

¹⁹ J. Machat, "Documents sur les établissements français de l'Afrique occidentale au XVIIIe siècle" (Ph.D. dissertation, Université de Paris, 1905).

²⁰ Ruth Watson, *Civil Disorder is the Disease of Ibadan: Chieftaincy and Civic Culture in a Yoruba City* (Oxford: James Currey; Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2003).

²¹ Nile Green, *Indian Sufism Since the Seventeenth Century: Saints, Books and Empires in the Muslim Deccan* (London: Routledge, 2006); and Nile Green, *Islam and the Army in Colonial India: Sepoy Religion in the Service of Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

“French”-African soldiers.²² In addition, Alice Conklin,²³ Gary Wilder,²⁴ Sean Hanretta’s *Islam in Social Change in West Africa*,²⁵ Lorelle Semley on Ketou,²⁶ Louis Brenner,²⁷ Cheikh Anta Babou,²⁸ as well as Ibrahim Diallo’s writing on *ajami* literacy, were distinctly helpful.²⁹ The literature on West Africa and Islam, while vast, is almost entirely centered on the North African Sahelian regions. There is relatively little focused on the areas of the forested coastal regions, where Islam was a minority religion during this colonial period.

There is also the consideration of historical eras and the various time periods in which Africanist historiography is grouped, often combined with particular themes of interest. The early specialists on Islam in West Africa, such as David Robinson, John Hunwick, and Richard Roberts,

²² Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991).

²³ Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford, CA: University Press, 1997); and Alice L. Conklin, *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology, and Empire in France, 1850-1950* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013). See also Alice L. Conklin and Julia Ann Clancy-Smith, “Introduction: Writing Colonial Histories,” *French Historical Studies* 27, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 497-505; and Alice L. Conklin, “Colonialism and Human Rights, A Contradiction in Terms? The Case of France and West Africa, 1895-1914,” *The American Historical Review* 103, no. 2 (1998): 419-442.

²⁴ Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

²⁵ Hanretta, *Islam and Social Change ...*

²⁶ Lorelle Semley, *Mother Is Gold, Father Is Glass: Gender and Colonialism in a Yoruba Town* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011).

²⁷ Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge ...*

²⁸ Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad ...*

²⁹ Ibrahim Diallo, “Qur’anic and *Ajami* Literacies in Pre-Colonial West Africa,” *Current Issues in Language Planning* 13, no. 2 (May, 2012): 91-104. *Ajami* is where Arabic script is used to write an African language phonetically, and therefore even Muslims who could not read Arabic could read the Qur’an in its transliterated form.

have written seminal works. Each continues to research and publish a vast number of publications.³⁰ Newer scholars that have expanded on the theme of Islam in West Africa include Benjamin Soares, Sean Hanretta, Robert Launay, and Cheikh Anta Babou. Nonetheless, their scholarship remains focused on the areas of Senegal, Mauritania, and Mali, where Islam was the dominant religion. Reconsiderations of earlier scholarship of Islam in Africa continue to omit the non-Sahelian regions or removes African agency from conversion about Islam in these areas, ignoring the impact of the nineteenth-century Fulani jihads.³¹ Other works on Muslims in Africa that are critical to a broader understanding of both popular and political Islam include the research of Patrick D. Gaffney and Ernest Gellner.³²

From the outstanding scholars who have engaged in studies of Islam in perceived non-Islamic areas, I have gained profound insights from the work of Ivor Wilkes in Ghana and Marie

³⁰ Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation* Robinson addresses the ways in which France approached formal colonization in Senegal and Mauritania in the era of 'legitimate commerce,' until the end of World War I. He discusses the various colonial administrators' relationships with Muslim leaders as it regards the ways in which conquest was carried out in this region. In this history, he writes about people such as Amadu Bamba, Malik Sy, and Sidiyya Baba. Furthermore, he examines the complex interpersonal relationships between the French colonial authority and the ways in which administrators manipulated the cultural, political, and social relationships in which they engaged. See also Robinson, "France as a Muslim Power ..."; and David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Richard L. Roberts, *Litigants and Households: African Disputes and Colonial Courts in the French Soudan, 1895-1912, The Social History of Africa Series* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005). In addition to these works, see Richard L. Roberts, *Two Worlds of Cotton: Colonialism and the Regional Economy in the French Soudan, 1800-1946* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996); John Hunwick, "Secular Power and Religious Authority in Muslim Society," *Journal of African History* 37, no. 2 (1996): 175-94. Also, see John O. Hunwick and R. S. O'Fahey, eds., *Arabic Literature of Africa* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994); and John O. Hunwick, Alida Jay Boye, and Joseph Hunwick, *The Hidden Treasures of Timbuktu: Rediscovering Africa's Literary Culture* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2008).

³¹ Robert Launay and Benjamin F. Soares, "The Formation of an 'Islamic Sphere' in French Colonial West Africa," *Economy & Society* 28, no. 4 (1999): 497-519.

³² Patrick D. Gaffney, "Popular Islam," in *Political Islam*, eds. Charles E. Butterworth and I. William Zartman (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992), 38-51; Ernest Gellner, "State and Revolution in Islam," *Journal of International Studies* 8, no. 3 (Dec. 1979): 185-199.

Miran in Côte d'Ivoire.³³ Beyond the available primary sources, the consideration of Islamic policies in Africa demonstrate that there is no one answer or a single general consensus about French colonial policies, as discussed by the studies of Donal Cruise O'Brien's 1967 article on the lack of a singular *Politique Musulmane* and Jean-Louis Triaud's 2006 chapter *Le Choc Colonial et l'Islam: Les politiques religieuses des puissances coloniales en terres d'Islam*, which both came to the same conclusions even with 40 years of scholarship between them: simply put, *Politique Musulmane* is still an enigma.³⁴

For a solid understanding of the French colonial endeavor in West Africa written in English, the most informative were Alice Conklin's *A Mission to Civilize: the Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930*. This is a well-researched analysis of the letters of French West African colonial administrators, in which Conklin emphasizes the initial importance of assimilation and France's adjustment towards a policy of association during World War I. She shows the centrality of the governors in Dakar in the creation of policies implemented in French West Africa and how, in many cases, they were or were not enforced or supported by the metropole. Gary Wilder's *The French Imperial Nation State* is an excellent synthesis of history within the field of anthropology and successfully includes the theoretical interplay of a variety of sociological texts. Wilder's book is divided into two parts. The first half focuses on the French colonial administration in West Africa, and the second part concerns intellectuals from France's colonies who were living in Paris. Wilder presents the crucial question of how to hold these moments and

³³ Ivor Wilkes, *Wa and the Wala: Islam and Polity in Northwestern Ghana* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Miran, *Islam: Histoire et Modernité en Côte d'Ivoire*.

³⁴ Donal Cruise O'Brien, "Towards an 'Islamic Policy' in French West Africa, 1854-1914," *The Journal of African History* 8, no. 2 (1967): 303-316.

places together, as when he states that it is “not how the universalistic republican nation [of France] was able to maintain and justify a racist colonial system but how republicanism, bureaucratic authoritarianism, and colonialism were internal elements of an expanded French state that were articulated within an encompassing imperial system.”³⁵ In *The Invention of Decolonization* by Todd Shepard, we have an innovative study of the relationship between the creation of North African colonial and anti-colonial policies from the French-Algerian experience.³⁶

The Yoruba literature is addressed at the end of this chapter in the notes on Yoruba ethnogenesis as concerns this project. There are three scholars whose work provided astute insight into the Brazilian subjects who impacted the historical era covered. In the 1830s, groups of former Brazilian slaves and their descendants returned and established commercial centers along the Slave Coast.³⁷ These communities were collectively referred to as Brazilian or *Aguda*.³⁸ Among these Afro-Brazilians were a large number of Christian converts, but also a strong but small Muslim community which had been exiled or encouraged to leave Brazil after what branded an Islamic

³⁵ Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State...*, 26. See also Gary Wilder, “Colonial Ethnology and Political Rationality in French West Africa,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 14, no. 3 (2003): 219-52. For a review of the discussion on interwar-era literature, see Matthew G. Stanard, “Interwar Pro-Empire Propaganda and European Colonial Culture: Toward a Comparative Research Agenda,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 44, no. 1 (2009): 30–34.

³⁶ Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

³⁷ Pierre Verger, *Bahia and the West African Trade, 1549-1851*. Published for the Institute of African Studies. (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1964.) 32-33. See also, Matory, “English Professors”... 70-75. Verger Bahia

³⁸ Turner, Lorenzo Dow. 1942. *Some contacts of Brazilian ex-slaves with Nigeria, West Africa*. Washington, D.C.: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Inc. And Kim D. Butler’s chapter “Africa in the Reinvention of Nineteenth-Century Afro-Bahian Identity,” in Edna Bay and Kristin Mann, eds. *Rethinking the African Diaspora: The Making of a Black Atlantic World in the Bight of Benin and Brazil* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2001) 135-154. I did not see the term *Aguda* for Porto Novo’s Brazilians in the archives during this era, although currently the terms has spread in colloquial parlance.

uprising in 1835.³⁹ In the case of colonial Porto Novo, many of these returnees converted to Islam once they returned.⁴⁰ The historian John Ballard and his 1965 article about the political “incidents” that the colonials experienced in Porto Novo in 1923 is the first noteworthy study on this era and place.⁴¹ The second work is the 1975 dissertation on the Brazilians of Porto Novo by historian Jerry M. Turner has been useful in gathering relevant information about the social history of Brazilian returnee populations in Dahomey and his work remains the only full study of this group.⁴² His placing of the Ballard article into the historiographical context helped me to better understand those events as well. While the larger population of the overall Muslim community of Yoruba Muslims becomes the central focus of this dissertation, their existence as defined would be meaningless if there had not been an opposition. The Brazilians of colonial Porto Novo are significant to the argument of identity assertion and colonial manipulation of elites which are both common threads in this project. The Brazilian Muslims in the scope of this study identified with the descendants of formerly exiled Brazilians in order to emphasize their diasporic heritage. For recent studies of these diasporic ties the scholar Ana Lucia Araujo, who holds multiple doctorates in Social History, Anthropology and Art History, offers insightful acumen.⁴³ Because these

³⁹ Turner, Jerry Michael Turner, “Les Brésiliens: The Impact of Former Brazilian Slaves upon Dahomey” (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1975), 55-85; João José Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 206-07.

⁴⁰ See Appendix 1A for the story of Jose Paraiso’s conversion.

⁴¹ John Ballard, “The Porto Novo Incidents of 1923: Politics in the Colonial Era,” *Odu* 2 (1965) 59.

⁴² Turner, “Les Brésiliens...”, 155-212.

⁴³ Ana Lucia Araujo, ed. (*Paths of the Atlantic slave trade: interactions, identities, and images*. Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria Press 2011.) 1-19. See also her edited volume *Politics of Memory Making Slavery Visible in the Public space* (New York: Routledge, 2012) 3. Also, "Remembering and reconstructing Brazilian slave past in Bénin". *Africa E Mediterraneo: Cultura E Società*. 9 (67): 29-33.

interface with a number of academic disciplines, the perspective her work gives is invaluable to understanding the complexities of displaced peoples and the process of (re)establishing identity.

Moving on to writings in the French language, I start with publications from the colonial era, albeit those that came after the specific period of my own study. The early scholarship that came out of Dakar and the Institute Française Afrique Noir was central to my understanding of the overall history of Porto Novo. One of the most informative histories that I read was written by Adolphe Akindele and Cyrille Aguessey in 1953 entitled *Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire de l'ancien royaume de Porto-Novo*.⁴⁴ This is a short, but comprehensive history of the kingdom of Hogbonou (Porto Novo) by two Beninois historians. Additionally, two authors who were part of the colonial system, and whose writings explore the perspective from within that system, are Georges Hardy and Claude Tardits. Hardy was an educator who eventually became the director of the L'école Colonial after receiving a doctorate in colonial history at the Sorbonne. More than just an administrator, Hardy was a soldier who fought in World War I. An immensely useful text for understanding the overall colonial mentality is his broad-sweeping account of France and its colonization policies throughout the empire, including North Africa, French West Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean.⁴⁵ By generalizing the similarities in processes and noting differences, Hardy's book allowed me to incorporate his thoughts with my observations into more specific texts and to reassess these texts from a new perspective. Tardits was another soldier-scholar. He ended up in Algeria as a military officer and pilot during World War II. His initial interest was in African art,

⁴⁴ A. Akindele and C. Aguessey, *Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire de l'ancien royaume de Port-Novo* (Dakar: IFAN, 1953).

⁴⁵ Georges Hardy, *Histoire De La Colonisation Française*, 5. ed. (Paris: Librairie Larose, 1947).

and while working with Claude Lévi-Strauss, he was encouraged to train at Northwestern University as an ethnologist. He finished his degree at Columbia University, and upon returning to France, he immediately left for two years of research in Porto Novo in the 1950s, where he worked on examining *palmeriaes* and land rights.⁴⁶ His publication from that research, *Porto-Novo; Les Nouvelles Générations Africaines entre Leurs Traditions et l'Occident* considers the relationship between Brazilians and the autochthonous communities, and how both readily adapted to legitimate trade in palm produce after the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.⁴⁷ These two men have given me a great amount of insight into the colonial mentality on levels both broad—Hardy—and regionally specific—Tardits.

French-language works, though revealing both wider geographical and thematic expanses, are much less problematized than those in the English in their overall approaches as they concern the complexity of religious-identity formation. Books and articles that assisted me in gaining a wider breadth of knowledge in these areas include the writings of Séraphin Nene Bi Boti⁴⁸ on colonial institutions in West Africa, Marie Miran on Islam in Côte d'Ivoire,⁴⁹ and both

⁴⁶ *Palmeriaes* are important in this area of Africa from the local use by Africans over time until the era of legitimate commerce and beyond when the palm products were extracted to fuel the industrial revolution in Europe and function to keep Africans working in slave-like conditions as a way to earn the monetary requirements which eventually became the taxation process of the colonial system.

⁴⁷ Claude Tardits, *Porto-Novo; Les Nouvelles Générations Africaines entre Leurs Traditions et l'Occident* (Paris: Mouton, 1958), 6. See also Claude Tardits, "Parente et classe sociale a Porto Novo, Dahomey," in *The New Elites of Tropical Africa*, ed. P.C. Lloyd (Oxford: University Press, 1966), 185.

⁴⁸ Nene Bi Boti, *Les Institutions Coloniales ...*

⁴⁹ Miran, *Islam, Histoire et Modernité en Côte d'Ivoire...*, 7-35.

Jean-Claude Barbier⁵⁰ and Helen d'Almeida Topor⁵¹ on the economy in West Africa. Furthermore, both Naomi Davidson⁵² and Christian Roche⁵³ added to my understanding of the French in Africa in the nineteenth century, while Ben Salama's research on democracy and religion also proved valuable.⁵⁴

Other themes include education and the changing *mission civilisatrice* ("civilizing mission") after World War I. I became aware of the disunity in methods of French educational policies in considering colonial education after reading the article about "teaching networks" in Burkina Faso, written by Marie Philiponeau.⁵⁵ Addressing the theme of the interwar period, the article "Monde nouveau, voix nouvelles: Etats, sociétés, islam dans l'entre-deux-guerres" by Anne-Laure Dupont and Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen answered many questions I had.⁵⁶ Essential to my

⁵⁰ Jean-Claude Barbier, "Cohabitations et Concurrences Religieuses dans le Golfe de Guinée; le Sud-Bénin, entre Vodum, Islam et Christianismes," *Bulletin de l'Association de Géographes Français* 79, no. 2 (2002): 223-236.

⁵¹ Helene d'Almeida Topor, *Histoire Économique du Dahomey (Benin): (1890-1920)* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 1995), vols. 1-2.

⁵² Naomi Davidson, "La mosquée de Paris. Construire l'islam français et l'islam en France, 1926-1947," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 125 (July 2009): 197-215.

⁵³ Christian Roche, *L'Afrique noire et la France au XIXe siècle: conquêtes et résistances* (Paris: Karthala, 2011).

⁵⁴ Ben Salama, *Au Nom de l'Islam L'Enquête sur un Religion Instrumentalisée* (Paris: Atelier, 2009).

⁵⁵ Marie Philiponeau, "Micro-histoire de la diffusion de l'islam en Afrique de l'Ouest. Création de réseaux et de chaînes d'enseignement en Bwamu (Burkina Faso)," *Cahiers D'études Africaines* 49, no. 196 (2009): 969-1000.

⁵⁶ Anne-Laure Dupont and Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, "Monde nouveau, voix nouvelles: Etats, sociétés, islam dans l'entre-deux-guerres," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, nos. 95-98 (April, 2002): 9-39.

work specifically on Benin were the writings of Denise Brégand on the Wangara caravans,⁵⁷ and Professor Michel Videgla's history of the Hogbonou Kingdom.⁵⁸

While histories on Islam in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire are uncommon, those on Benin are even rarer. Even when scholars do focus on Islam in Benin, the uniform method that is used to engage the subject is often approached in an elementary manner. The early writings of Denise Brégand, specifically her study of the Wangara in Benin, also known further to the west as the Dioula, contextualize twentieth-century Islam. She states:

Among Muslims here, the will to reform and ideas of modernity are numerous. Reform simply means allowing the flexibility to deal with modernity which encompasses the mastery of science and technological progress In Benin, no one [Muslim] refers to the classic leaders or the contemporary thinkers on Islam and the term reform is a pragmatic element aiming to purge Islam of its adaptations such as ceremonies and magical practices in order to return to the founding texts, the Qur'an and the hadiths. It all depends on what one classifies as modernity.⁵⁹

Brégand's consideration of modernity and what it means to Muslims in Benin is relevant in destabilizing the idea that Islam can only be practiced in one way. Yet, she forgets that even in Benin, there are more than the Wangara Muslims in the recent era to consider and to generalize

⁵⁷ Denise Brégand, *Commerce caravanier et relations sociales au Bénin les Wangara du Borgou* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998). See also her more recent work on the Sufi order of the Ahmadiyya: Denise Brégand, "La Ahmadiyya au Bénin," *Archives De Sciences Sociales Des Religions* 51, no. 135 (2006): 73-90; and Denise Brégand, "Circulation dans les "communautés" musulmanes plurielles du Bénin. Catégorisations, auto-identifications," *Cahiers des Etudes Africaines* 206-207, no. 2 (2012): 471-491.

⁵⁸ Michel D. K. Videgla, "Un Etat Ouest-Africain: Le Royaume Goun De Hogbonou (Porto-Novo) Des Origines À 1908" (Ph.D. dissertation, Université de Paris I-Panthéon-Sorbonne, 1999; Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2002). Interview with Professor Michel D. K. Videgla, (Flore Nobime present), at University Abomey Calavi, Cotonou, Benin, September 26, 2009.

⁵⁹ Bregand, *Caravaniers*...56.

Islam even for all of Benin and without historical contextualization is as problematic as having one definition for modernity.

Modernity, like Islam, is not a static or monolithic concept. Any attempt to historicize these topics without providing space for them to move and change constrict the manner in which that history is approached. Thus, through the analysis and synthesis of the current literature and my own interpretation of the fieldwork, I present a new understanding of Islam in French colonial West Africa. While Brégand's more recent research looks at the shifting categories that characterize Islam in Benin in a much more nuanced way than her previous work, she often only refers to recent movements towards what is considered "fundamentalist" Islam, and this is done without historicizing the process that led to the current social factors as they are experienced within Muslim communities. For broader discussions on Islam as a religion as it is perceived among Europeans and the media, I found Thomas Deltombe's research that covers a 30-year period dealing with this issue quite beneficial.⁶⁰ Additionally, the literature on mosques in Africa and Europe that provide a better understanding of visual impact of Islamic architecture in regions where Islam is considered foreign, includes Abderrahmane Moussaoui's article "La mosquée en Algérie: Figures nouvelles et pratiques reconstituées," Ian Coller's work "The Basement and the Mosque," and Maureen Healy's talk on "The Steeple and the Mosque."⁶¹ These papers provided

⁶⁰ Thomas Deltombe, *L'islam imaginaire: La construction médiatique de l'islamophobie en France, 1975-2005* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005).

⁶¹ Abderrahmane Moussaoui, "La mosquée en Algérie: Figures nouvelles et pratiques reconstituées," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 125 (July, 2009), last accessed February 1, 2014, <http://remmm.revues.org/6159>; Ian Coller, "The Basement and the Mosque: The History and Politics of Islam in Marseille" (presentation, AHA Meeting 2013, "The Mosque in Europe" panel, New Orleans, LA, January 3-6, 2014); and from the same panel, Maureen Healy, "The Steeple and the Mosque in the Austrian Skyline" (presentation, AHA Meeting 2013, "The Mosque in Europe" panel, New Orleans, LA, January 3-6, 2014).

additional ways for me to consider and interpret the history of the Friday mosque in early-twentieth century Porto Novo.

Finally, I want to briefly readdress Paul Marty, considered the premier Islamic specialist of French West Africa during the colonial era, and the voluminous amount of writing he did about Islam throughout the AOF. Using Marty's work as primary source documents is problematic, yet they are still influential for historians of Islam in colonial West Africa. When using his work, it is necessary to make the best use of the relevant information that he collected, yet simultaneously discuss it with caution. Everyone who writes on Islam in French West Africa knows of, and utilizes, the work of Paul Marty. However, all too often, his works are cited without being problematized. Only recently, with scholars such as Cheikh Babou and Rudolph Ware, has the subject of using Marty's texts become more of a central research problem in and of itself, and in these particular cases, his work is only critiqued in regards to his writings on education, and not looked at more critically overall.⁶²

Chapter Outline

The chapters outlined below take on the larger questions of my dissertation through local, regional and global perspective. Chapter two, *The Local History and Diversity in a Coastal Lagoon* considers how people of the intricate lagoon system on the Bight of Benin contributed to both vertical and lateral movements of goods and ideas at a transshipment point between interior regions of West Africa and the greater Atlantic World. As an independent kingdom, separate from the

⁶² Rudolph Ware, "Knowledge, Faith, and Power: A History of Qur'anic Schooling in 20th Century Senegal" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2004). Chapter Six on Marty and Education is one of the only attempts to really critique the writings of Marty, and this is only on his views of education.

surrounding interior kingdoms of Dahomey and Oyo, the Goun people welcomed others from different regions in the hopes that they would contribute to the development of the Porto Novo region, just at the time when the ports of Ouidah and Lagos began to decline after the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in 1808. Ignominiously, Porto Novo's location as a transshipment point began to serve as an outlet for human cargo in the illicit era of slave-trading, with the majority of captives by the 1820s coming from the collapsed Oyo Empire. Some of these refugees remained in Porto Novo, and many of them were Yoruba-speaking Muslims. Around the same time, returnee populations from Brazil came to the African Coast, and many of these people were also Muslim. By the 1850s, there was a clear relationship between the Muslim community and the Goun royalty. This chapter explores the changing relationships amongst the Muslims and the Goun ruling system, and then the beginnings of the French occupation, from the late-nineteenth century through the early-twentieth century.

Chapter three, *French Policies and Approaches to Empire and Islam*, looks to the origins of the French colonial mentality in relation to the religion of Islam in areas south of the Sahara, when divisions such as *Islam Noir* and *Islam Maure* become part of the colonial lexicon. Explored here is the creation and implementation of a specific "Muslim Policy" that was not universally imposed, and the creation of the so-called "civilizing mission," This was done in part via the establishment of an education system built into the *mission civilisatrice*, and because of French concerns over Islamic education. However, for Porto Novo, the emergence of Qur'anic schools did not fit neatly into French policies because of the ways in which the Muslim populations were dispersed in the first years of colonial dominance.

The fourth chapter, *Mise en Valeur and the Tirailleurs Haoussas* is a brief look into assimilation and association are explored as part of the larger attempts at implementing a condition of subservience known as *mise en valeur*. The notion of development and infrastructure paid for with the time and labor of Africans is at the heart of this creation. In the case of Porto Novo, I present the creation of a unique military force and the issues the French experienced with mandatory conscription efforts among the Muslim populations in particular.

Chapter five, *Porto Novo's Muslims Privileged Elites and Targeted Foes* brings together the ideas from the previous two chapters through an examination of the ways in which the Muslim populations continued to gain ground and assert themselves despite the French administrations' repeated attempts to oppress them. In this chapter, specific incidents of imam selection, acts of surveillance, and the concern over Arabic literacy are examined in detail. At the time, a division between the two main Muslim population groups was exacerbated by the continued, systematic attempts by the French to privilege one sect over the other. The French administrators celebrated members of the Brazilian Muslim population, who constituted only a small percentage of the total *umma* in Porto Novo, yet held all of the positions that Africans were able to hold within the official colonial system and bureaucracy. Alternatively, the actions taken by the Yoruba Muslim population continued to reflect African agency through their continued call for fair and just treatment from all elements of Porto Novan society. Certain individuals and their unique personalities emerge in this chapter. The particular case of Porto Novo and its Muslim population is unique in French West African history because of the energy that the French administrators expended on the Muslims of this city despite their comparatively small overall numbers in colonial Dahomey.

The conclusion is *Cooperation and Controversy among Co-religionists*. While the building of the Friday mosque was initially supposed to show how well France embraced diversity in its empire, the resulting experience of its construction became a reminder of implicit and explicit differences, as well as the general hegemony under which the African populations attempted to assert themselves within the colonial system. The controversy and corruption that surrounded the grand mosque's construction shows some of the difficulties that Africans faced under colonial rule. At times, discord was overcome by the larger goal of creating a place of worship. However, the various trials that the larger West African population experienced as colonized peoples were replicated on micro-levels in the experiences of the Muslim communities during this time. Using the story of this mosque helps illuminate the broader experiences of colonized Africans in general.

Using the history of Muslims in colonial Porto Novo as the center of this case study allows the reader to look at the exchanges of ideas between a number of disparate groups. These groups include: Muslims and non-Muslims; Africans and Europeans; Atlantic-world Africans and those who never left; French colonials on the ground in Dahomey versus colonials in Dakar; and French in Dakar versus those in Paris. This research also allows the reader to examine what occurred as West and North African policies begin to intertwine. In regards to conceptions of identity, we can see the way that one specific group—the Muslim one— is represented in the historiography, particularly the ethnographic literature about cultural and ethnic formation. Yet, the aspects which unfold are related to, but not directly reflective of, the French relationship with coastal Muslims. In fact, what becomes apparent are the ways in which Africans relied on labels and changing concepts of cultural diversity to make their own way. In the case of colonial Porto Novo, intra-Muslim interactions, layered onto the complex French-Muslim relationship, and then combined

with how the local ruling class wanted to retain its last bits of power, show the complexity of self-definition in a cosmopolitan port city.

Note on Yoruba Ethnogenesis

Whether people are tied to the land or forcibly separated from it, the meaning of ethnicity is historically specific to each group, and includes either a real or imagined geography. One of the biggest obstacles to writing about these ideas in African history is that the story told by the conquering Europeans relied on the false representation of racial exclusiveness within the societal structure and a Rousseauian presentation of Africans being members of the “unspoiled tribes.”⁶³ *Yorubanness* is a historical explanation for the process of a specific type of identity formation. Sometimes when the term Yoruba is used, it solidifies a certain type of behavior into a specific moment in time, rather than allowing for a continuous and ever-changing nature to flourish. It would be a disservice to suggest that any aspect of a particular people’s history could be studied in such a fixed way, as both past and present are evanescent.

In the nineteenth century, the label of a Yoruba *nation* slowly became synonymous with *tribe*, and thus in the historical memory, small independent polities within the Oyo Kingdom eventually amalgamated through the combination of common language, belief systems, and political organization. As with most identity formations that evolve within the confines of the state, pressure from outside influences created concepts around “the other.” In Nigeria, this built

⁶³ Ana Isabel Madeira, “Portuguese, French and British Discourses on Colonial Education: Church-State Relations, School Expansion and Missionary Competition in Africa, 1890-1930,” *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* 41, nos. 1-2 (2005): 39.

up a perception that was once genuinely Yoruba (for how could it be otherwise?), and yet also something foreign that emanated from the appropriation of outside ideologies. *Yorubanness* also came about as a result of the disproportionately large numbers of peoples from Yoruba-speaking areas who were forced into the trans-Atlantic slave trade and into impressed communities of the Atlantic World. These Africans suffered labels, which were often designated by Europeans who needed to establish categories that they found useful, without any regard for African agency. Later on, interestingly, these same labels were used to elevate some groups' status among other African ethnic groups.

The British colonial machinery exhibited power via military might, economic dominance and thus the religious practices of the British were presented to the Africans as contributing to their success, via successful missionary settlements, The Governor of Lagos, Cornelius Maloney, even encouraged more returnees to come and settle in the Lagos; he did not like calling them Brazilians, however, but simply referred to them rather as “repatriated Yoruba.” This can become confusing, as in neighboring Porto Novo the Yoruba were both indigenous and returnees, but those who were returnees chose to identify as Brazilians, The pre-colonial influence of Christian missionary efforts, mixed with the economic repercussions of the slave trade, led to a forced concept of identity for many Africans under European domination, just as the same was occurred simultaneously across the Atlantic Ocean in the Americas.

Eventually, some of the Atlantic Yoruba identities that were formed under slave life in the Americas were reinvented in coastal areas during later eras in legitimate commerce in the nineteenth century, especially when returnee populations, or in the case of Sierra Leone, Yoruba speakers, were caught by British naval squadrons patrolling the West African coast looking for

illicit slave-trading ships. These “recaptives,” as they came to be known, never made it across the horrendous Middle Passage, but instead were transplanted to Freetown, Sierra Leone, where they lived among other Yoruba-speaking recaptives. Here, these communities were given the label of “Saro.” There were many Saros who eventually moved east in search of their homelands, but most ended up settling in Lagos, which, though closer to the regions from which they originated, was not the same. Yoruba nationalists in a particular generation made the Yoruba into a unified race, who fought together for patriotic unification and against British cultural hegemony. Returnees from the Atlantic World did much the same thing when they remained in the coastal areas after arriving from the New World. These returnees shared in the experience of the Atlantic World, either after having survived the crossing of the Middle Passage, or more usually, having been born in the Americas and then choosing to cross to Africa. In the space of the Americas, where they were outside of Africa, they were in a place where they could begin to conceptualize *Africa*; this is where they learned how to be “African.” Yet upon setting foot on the actual continent of Africa, most returnees found it more comforting to identify with those same people with whom they shared the common experience of having been in the Americas, and not with those whom, prior, they may have claimed identity with in the imaginary. In this newly actualized reality, self-identification made sense under a different label. In Porto Novo, that label was *Brazilian*. Thus, seen from this broader perspective, this history is equally crucial to the emergence of “a Yoruba identity” as was the return of Saro communities to Lagos and its hinterlands in the mid- and late-nineteenth century.

In Sierra Leone they were labeled as a homogenous group of people and disproportionately educated and anglicized. This is what allowed them to function as the commercial elite of Lagos. But as we look to Porto Novo, the commercial elite were the Muslim

Yoruba, who were neither Anglicized nor highly educated in the Western sense. This challenges many accepted ideas of why the Yoruba were commercially successful. Sara Berry suggests that they chose to accept Christianity or Islam for economic reasons. In fact, this argument reflects an older discussion that broadly suggests that the spread of Islam in West Africa came only through trade. Both J. D. Y. Peel and J. L. Matory take this line, whereas Berry's argument goes even further into a discussion of education, and how education in the British colonies was related to perceived economic independence.⁶⁴ The very first place that the Church Missionary Society, the official organ of the Anglican Church in Britain, made its mark was in Freetown so the history of missions in Sierra Leone was already established by the end of the nineteenth century. Saros who had migrated back to Nigeria had to self-realize and redefine what a community was based on a two-tiered ethnic identification, that of conceptualizing Yoruba as a Christian population, and as an Anglicized and educated political presence. With this, many African clergy started promoting the pan-Yoruba identity as a shared experience to which they all could relate.⁶⁵

The idea of *being Yoruba*, which resonates with millions of people in Africa and the African diaspora, is a relatively recent idea; it has only been in existence for about a century. While the trans-Atlantic slave trade narrowed the categories of Yoruba speakers to only a few of the original groups, the language from which this ethnic identity stems is derived from a language that was originally spoken in the Oyo Kingdom. Furthermore, the idea of "Yoruba people" was

⁶⁴ J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounters and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2003); and J. D. Y. Peel, "The Cultural Work of Yoruba Ethnogenesis," in *History and Ethnicity*, ed. Elizabeth Tonkin, et al. (London: Routledge, 1989), 198-215; Matory, "The English Professors of Brazil ..."; and Sara Berry, *Fathers Work for their Sons: Accumulation, Mobility, and Class Formation in an Extended Yorùbá Community* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985).

⁶⁵ For a study of Krio Yoruba as Muslims in Sierra Leone, see Gibril Cole, *The Krio of West Africa: Islam, Culture, Creolization, and Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2013), 147-209.

adopted as an umbrella category for Nigerians of various groups, most specifically the Ieşa, Ijebu, Egba, and so forth. This unification occurred as a result of a number of social, political, and economic changes brought on by colonialism, such as when forced migration, cash cropping, Western education, and conversion to world religions converged on the African continent, all of which restructured what it meant to be *Yoruba*. These changes then led to the nationalist movements of the 1930s and 1940s, and beyond, into the independence politics of the 1950s and the post-colonial Nigerian society of the 1960s onward. Independent Africans drew their political party allegiances along ethnic and religious lines in the former British colony of Nigeria, whereas in Dahomey, these same kinds of ethnic allegiances did not factor into the decision of accepting arbitrarily placed European borders. In Nigeria, the Hausa in the north rallied around Islam and their military prowess, while those identifying as Igbo,⁶⁶ and for those whom we see today as Yoruba, their identities were rooted in the values of Christianity, which was a type of elitism provided by Western education and commerce.

The methods of discussing ethnogenesis are not limited to Peel and Matory. For example, the impact on the literature by scholars such as Luis Nicolau Parés and Andrew Apter has vastly expanded the ways in which we perceive the complications of constructing identity in historically-specific ways.⁶⁷ However, for the purposes of challenging the general acceptance of what it means

⁶⁶ The concept of the Igbo as a single-ethnic entity is as problematic as the Yoruba, yet for different reasons. Although this is not the right place to go deeper into this, the following works will provide the reader more detailed information: G. T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (Lagos: University Publishing Co., 1983 [1921]); O. A. Anigbo, *Igbo Elite and Western Europe* (Onitsha, Nigeria: Africana-FEP, 1992); E. Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People* (London: Macmillan, 1976); L. N. Oraka, *The Foundations of Igbo Studies* (Onitsha, Nigeria: University Publishing Co., 1983); and V. C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1965).

⁶⁷ Andrew Apter, "Yoruba Ethnogenesis from Within," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, no. 2 (2013): 356-87. See also Andrew Apter, *Black Critics and Kings: The Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991): 19-23. Also Luis Nicolau Pares, "The 'Nagoization' Process in

to be Yoruba, I have focused on Peel and Matory's arguments with the goal of adding a third possibility which neither considered. Peel does recognize the problems with attaching identity so firmly to the contemporary structural context, and he seems not to see that ethnic identity is likely to depend on the realities of the past as well as the demands of the contemporary structural context. But overall, it is clear that for Peel, Yoruba identity cannot be separated from either Christianity or the British. The basis of his argument is that whether the term Yoruba was used as a communal identity in religious terms, or to promote their religion as a communal good, it was restrained by the religious pluralism of the time, and that the communities of Christian missionaries promoted Yoruba ethnicity to serve European purposes via the expansion of an existing ethnic group- the Oyo—whose own historical destiny proved to embrace Islam and the success of the Yoruba intelligentsia.

For Matory, revealing the role of Afro-Brazilians in creating a trans-Atlantic culture with consequences no less revolutionary in Africa than in Brazil sits at the center of his argument about the creation of Yoruba identity. His is a dialectical approach, investigating diasporas and homelands, and how transnational politics have reshaped the diaspora and its homeland through dialogue. Matory investigates what diasporas have to do with the nations that they call home.

Bahian Candomble,” in *Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, eds. Toyin Falola and Matt Childs (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 185-208. In this chapter, Pares discusses the term “Nago” as identified by a religious nation, regardless of actual ethnic background and that the idea of Nago was what empowering. Also examined is the expansive/inclusive dynamic of Nago ethnonyms. Once restricted to religion, it lost its political connotation and the notion of “purity.” His argument is that there were three periods of Nagoization in Brazilian Candomble. While his idea of why these changes occurred in Brazil are good arguments, his ideas, specifically referring to the actual use of the term Nago, are less credible, as based on my own research and that of Lorelle Semley's work in Ketu, Benin.

Ethnicity is not fixed, but a problematic and contradictory method of classification, and distinctions between ethnic categories and racial ones are not always clear.

The following chapters discuss the history of the French in coastal West Africa and their relationships with Muslims in an area where Islam was not a majority religion. The emphasis that I make with this history in relation to ideas of “being Yoruba” are as follows: Yoruba ethnicity emerges in this history for what it is—a process or project—rather than a structure. The creation of a Yoruba identity is relevant to the following chapters, and it relates specifically to the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries because of the scholarship that aims to define it within this time period, but which also confines it to both its geography and its religious affiliations. I rely on the arguments of Peel and Matory in order to balance a third, non-Atlantic and non-Christian framework, one which emerged in colonial Porto Novo where Muslims continuously adapted to the colonial hegemony while simultaneously asserting their own identities, part of which was the idea of “being Yoruba.”

2 The Local History of Hogbonou as a Diverse and Cosmopolitan Locale

As members of an independent kingdom, separate from the surrounding interior kingdoms of Dahomey and Oyo, the Goun people functioned as interlocutors in the commercial transmission of goods between the interior regions of Africa and within the larger Atlantic world. The ports of Ouidah, to the west, and Lagos to the east, began to decline in use by the early part of the nineteenth century.⁶⁸ Ignominiously, Porto Novo's location as a trans-Atlantic shipping point for goods began to serve as an outlet for human cargo during the illicit era of slave-trading, with the majority of captives coming from the collapsed Oyo Empire by the 1820s.⁶⁹ Some of these refugees remained on the coast, adding to the already diverse community, and many of them were Yoruba-speaking Muslims. Around this same time, returnee populations from Brazil arrived on the West African Coast, many of whom were also Muslim.⁷⁰ The increased diversity of the region and the different skills of these immigrant populations appealed to the king, and he welcomed these outsiders with their various religious practices. By the 1850s, there was a clear and designated relationship between the Muslim community and Goun royalty. This chapter explores the histories of these diverse African peoples, the changing relationships amongst them, and their relationships to

⁶⁸ Robin Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving 'Port,' 1727-1892* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004).

⁶⁹ Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire c. 1600-1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Brookfield, VT: Gregg Revivals; Ashgate Publishing Company, 1991). See also Patrick Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁷⁰ João José Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

Europeans in the Porto Novo region from the late-nineteenth century through the early-twentieth century.

The history of Porto Novo, not only as a commercial hub but also a cultural crossroads is significant because it is part of a history that links the Atlantic World and many European and African populations, including those who were autochthonous to coastal lagoons and those who migrated from the hinterlands.⁷¹ Misinterpreting identity formation in a place such as this is an important element to address as we study this African history. Our focus on this element will provide new insights for the historiography about intra-African agency, colonial contestations, and the various feelings of tolerance and acceptance in cosmopolitan areas. Here, we can contribute to the existing literature, which for the most part focuses on the French in West Africa, where they engaged with Islam as the religion of the majority of the colonized population of this large region.⁷² This study of social and civic activity in a location where Muslims were in the minority adds an important new dimension to the research literature. In Porto Novo, we are provided with layers of complex history that need to be unraveled. Religious labels are only one of these layers, and to this

⁷¹ I use this term in reference to Paul Lovejoy, Robin Law, and Elisee Soumonni for UNESCO, “The ‘Nigerian’ Hinterland and the African Diaspora,” (Conference Publication UNESCO/SSHRC Summer Institute, York University: Ontario Canada, 1997), which investigates movements of people from the interior of present day Nigeria (and Benin) en route to the coastal ports in the Bights of Benin and Biafra.

⁷² Daniel Rivet, “Quelques propos sur la politique musulmane de Lyautéy au Maroc (1912-1925),” (pp. 255-270), and J. L. Triaud, “Politiques musulmanes de la France en Afrique subsaharienne à l’époque colonial,” (pp. 271-282) in *Le Choc Colonial et l’Islam: Les politiques religieuses des puissances coloniales en terres d’islam*, ed. Pierre-Jean Luizard (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), four decades after Donal Cruise O’Brien’s famous article “Towards an ‘Islamic Policy’ in French West Africa, 1854-1914,” which questions whether the French ever really had a true Muslim policy, and if so, what that was, Triaud does not add new insight into this repeatedly asked, but never answered question; cf. Donal Cruise O’Brien, “Towards an ‘Islamic Policy’ in French West Africa, 1854-1914,” *The Journal of African History* 8, no. 2 (1967): 303-316.

we will add the constructions of ethno-linguistic labels that were then present, thus complicating the history of colonial Porto Novo even more.

Historians' continual reinterpretations of the past two hundred years regarding identity formation have demonstrated that we can no longer treat geographical isolation as a condition of cultural reproduction in Africa, and more importantly, the research pushes us to recognize that the assumption of local affixation has been problematic to the objectivity of the scholarship. It is important that historians do not read into, and that ethnographers no longer reproduce, these ideas through present-day Western societal norms that argue ethnicity as locally and territorially bound. This chapter is a *mélange* of the general history of what today is Porto Novo, Benin. An overview of the origins of the city's foundation is relevant, particularly because of the fact that even in the early years of its development, the region attracted a diverse assemblage of outsiders. This draw of peoples from the large global pool of the Atlantic world, the hinterlands, and the Sahel Region is central to this dissertation. The contradictory explanations of not only who founded this coastal lagoon area, but why, gives depth to the complexity of later colonial history which is at the center of my argument. To follow this history, it is evident that chronological accuracy is not necessarily the historical memory passed down from generation to generation. However, by using a temporal structure, I am able to connect the significance of how local inhabitants embody the history of the region to replicate their understandings of it in order to plan for the future. The following groups of people remain the focus throughout the present study; culturally or ethnically they are: the Yoruba (or Nago); the Goun of the Hogbonou Kingdom; the Brazilians (sometimes *Aguda*) as returnees from the Atlantic World, and Europeans (mainly the French, but also some British and German peoples) in the form of either commercial merchants or profiteers of the era of *legitimate commerce*,

or as colonial oppressors. The role of a globally significant, but regionally minor religion, Islam, is at the center of how these three different communities repositioned themselves within a complicated power structure. In all, the focus on Islam and its malleability allows for a deeper understanding of the nuances within African history that are often difficult to determine in regional historical studies where Islam is the default and dominant religion.

The geographical delimitation of the Porto Novo region, with the inclusion of global interactions (i.e., the impact of the Atlantic World, Europe and the vastness of its accumulated empires, and the intra-African movements of peoples from the interior to the coasts via multiple migrations) are necessary to more fully comprehend the larger global impact of small regional histories in terms of recognizing new historical processes. In this case, it is the renegotiations of identities encompassed here that make this project important in a field that requires one to understand broad patterns of behavior as well as particular and unique displays of agency. To begin, we look at the foundations of what is now a small African city located in the coastal lagoon system of the Bight of Benin.

The present-day city of Porto Novo in the Bight of Benin sits on one of the most environmentally diverse lagoon ecosystems in Africa. The area, which is located among the wetlands and *marigot* marshes,⁷³ before being named by the Portuguese,⁷⁴ was part of the larger polity first called Adjatche (sometimes known as Aklon or Okoro). It later became the Goun Kingdom of Hogbonou.⁷⁵ With a complicated history, this lagoon zone was the location of the

⁷³ This is a term unique to West African mangrove forests that are part of the lagoon systems.

⁷⁴ The Portuguese sailor Eucaristus de Campos named it Porto Novo in 1748.

intertwining of peoples from its very beginnings, through the colonial era, and even after that. Placing Porto Novo in physical and ideological context is especially important for fully comprehending the larger narrative because its geographical location is, in large part, what initially drew so many different types of people to this location. The busiest moment of this region in the modern era was specifically due to its position as a shipping center during the last years of the legal trans-Atlantic slave trade and the period of flourishing illicit trade in human cargo in the first part of the nineteenth century.

The Atlantic world in the eighteenth and nineteenth century dominated international commerce, resulting in the decline of certain kingdoms in the region, such as the Benin Kingdom, east of Lagos, while others, such as Dahomey, grew in size and power specifically because of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The connections made between Europeans and Africans in this early time paved the way for a move to *legitimate commerce*, and eventually to European colonialism. As far as those on the Continent were concerned, Porto Novo was a crossroads for interior trade routes that radiated from its center to places like Kumasi, Timbuktu, and Kano, and vice versa.

Examining the lagoon port and the independent Hogbonou Kingdom provides an understanding of the general background of the region and its peoples through its accessible historiography and the historical memories of the peoples who inhabited the region. It also demonstrates the significance of Porto Novo in the history of coastal Africans, and their

⁷⁵ Michel D. K. Videgla, *Un État Ouest-Africain: Le Royaume Goun de Hogbonou (Porto Novo) des Origines à 1908* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq, France: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2002); le Ct. Renaud and A. Akindele, "La Collectivité actuelle chez les Goun du royaume de Porto Novo," *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'Afrique noire (IFAN)* 15, no. 4 (1953): 169-170.

relationships with the European and Atlantic worlds. For hundreds of years, peoples living in the Bight of Benin were caught in the middle of fundamental economic, religious, and social changes, which set the stage for specific religious and social identity negotiations among Africans and between Africans and Europeans in the colonial era. The following provides an overview of the many transformations that occurred in the region presently known as Porto Novo, Benin.

An Inimitable Lagoon Setting

Porto Novo is strategically situated in the middle of one of the most intricate waterway passages in Africa. Unique to this location is the entwining of two distinct categories of lagoon systems. The first is a continuous littoral that runs parallel to the coast, from Grand Popo in the west to Badagry in the east.⁷⁶ The second is a configuration of lagoons behind the larger plateaus or territorial bars of the interior. These are most notable geographical features in Porto Novo, feeding into the area's larger lakes, including Nokue (also known as Denham during the colonial era) and Aheme.⁷⁷ Porto Novo's location at the crux of where these two water systems meet is one reason why the Hogbonou Kingdom endured, as the large barrier provided a form of natural protection, and did so without limiting access to the easily navigable smaller passageways. Even though larger kingdoms in the interior, such as Oyo to the northeast and Dahomey to the northwest, came about in the late-seventeenth century, they were repeatedly unsuccessful in their attempts to conquer this smaller kingdom because it was both well hidden and the lagoons made it relatively

⁷⁶ Benoit Bessa, "Porto-Novo et Cotonou (Bénin): origine et évolution d'un doublet urbain" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Bordeaux, 1997).

⁷⁷ Bessa, "Porto Novo et Cotonou. . .," 20.

easy to defend. The wetlands kept outsiders at bay geographically, while simultaneously, people could readily escape raiding forces by using the many islands between larger rivers, lakes, and the mangrove forests, which then provided strategic hiding places to repel attacks. Also, the armies of these larger interior kingdoms were often well trained for land battles, but were much less prepared to engage in fighting in marine areas, especially in this difficult liminal space situated between the land and the sea that incorporated the Hogbonou Kingdom. In the regular biannual rainy seasons, the lagoons became connected via small streams, rivers, and lakes; in the two dry seasons, the area was divided by small, marshy islands of land.⁷⁸ Simply put, the ever-changing topography made it difficult for outsiders to organize effective attacks.

In the Atlantic Ocean's Bight of Benin, not far from the coast's sandy shores, the ocean floor makes a dramatic break as the continental shelf drops off by a kilometer or more. This not only produces an incredibly dangerous undertow, but also creates a situation where the waves break far from shore. Because of this tectonic peculiarity, sea-fishing was limited to a very narrow stretch off the shoreline, between the sand and the breaking waves, but not beyond them.⁷⁹ Because of the various hydrological and geological anomalies that abound in the region, it created a relatively diverse subsistence economy. While fishing occurred along the rivers, lakes, and estuaries of the lagoon system, various other types of skills were needed to procure food and goods.⁸⁰ Crabbing was one form of food collection that was successful in the region, and continues to be so today. The areas of brackish water, where mangrove forests flourish, are where freshwater lakes

⁷⁸ Alexandre d'Albea, *La France au Dahomey* (Paris: Hachette, 1895), 58.

⁷⁹ J. M. Dalziel, *La Pêche de Dahomey* (Dakar: IFAN, 1935).

⁸⁰ Léonce Grandin, *Le Dahomey*, vol. 1 (Paris: Haton, 1895), 23.

and rivers meet the ocean tides.⁸¹ The inlets not only provide excellent areas to trap crabs but also are the locations where salt has been collected for trade for many centuries. This is also where fish caught in the ocean and in the lagoon system are preserved and dried.⁸² The *marigot* area is one of the most fertile places for harvesting palm oil, and large palm plantations have thrived there since before the Europeans began their mass production of its principal products, which occurred during the period of *legitimate commerce*.⁸³

Aside from subsistence farming and harvesting, a variety of trading activities of various local products were also readily available there. Simultaneously, the location of a lagoon port functioned as a north-south entrepot between the West African interior and the Atlantic World, where rare goods became commodities for long-distance trade. Somewhere between the very local and the global trade was a mid-level system that benefitted peoples on the east-west axis of the lagoon. The lateral movement of goods and ideas in the pre-Colonial Era converged at Porto Novo. Furthermore, when the cities of Ouidah and Lagos began to decline after the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in 1808, Porto Novo's location between these two cities made it possible for the illicit trade of humans to continue relatively unimpeded for at least another half-century.⁸⁴

Along with the abolition of the overseas trade in human cargo, and with increased patrolling activity by the British Navy, came the transition to plantation economies on the African continent,

⁸¹ D'Albeca, *La çce au Dahomey*, 57.

⁸² Grantin, *Le Dahomey*, 29. He argues that this is the most fertile place in all of West Africa for Pam Oil groves.

⁸³ Robin Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa: The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on an African Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 46. Turner, "Les Brésiliens..." , 213-245.

⁸⁴ See Introduction for a discussion of ethnic terminology and the use of the terms Yoruba and Nago and how they are often used interchangeably.

specifically, the production of high-quality palm products from Porto Novo and its environs. Partly because the Porto Novo area was a prolific producer of palm oil and kernels, but also because illicit slave-trading flourished in the lagoons, the economy of the Porto Novo area improved and became successful when compared to other areas of West and West-Central Africa, where we find that ending the trans-Atlantic slave trade finished off the economies and social systems, which had moved from diversification and manufacturing to reliance on a single commodity—slaves. For example, in nearby Ouidah, the infamous slave port, suffered an economic decline that was rapid and visible.

Because of the relative instantaneity of the change in supply and demand, by the mid-nineteenth century Africans gave up even more autonomy over their economic decisions than they had during the slave-trade era. Yet in Porto Novo, the land, sea, and the areas in between managed to continue to provide for the people of Hogbonou, both before and during various and numerous European attempts of its exploitation.

Three Nago Hunters



Figures 3 and 4

Nago Origins

The location where the first three Nago hunters were said to have established themselves in the region is commemorated by this museum and shrine to the Anata family line.

Porto Novo, Bénin

According to local oral traditions, the Nago claim to have been the first peoples to inhabit the region now known as Porto Novo.⁸⁵ These oral traditions are largely confirmed by archaeological and

⁸⁵ Rather than using Ajatche, Hogbonou, and Porto Novo interchangeably, I will stick with the present name of Porto Novo to avoid confusion.

linguistic evidence.⁸⁶ Commonly known by Porto Novans today is the origin story of the three brothers named Obagadjou, Anata, and Akakpo-Agbon, who came from the northeastern interior after having heard of a nine-headed monster occupying the forests of this area. They were resolved to destroy this monster. As this particular origin story conveys, upon arrival in the forests that surround the lagoons, these hunters consulted the Fa divination system,⁸⁷ and came to understand that the monster did not intend to harm them; instead, it wanted to help them establish a new village. After this revelation, they immediately set up a temple where they could make sacrifices to Abori Messan (meaning “nine heads” in the Yoruba language). They then made their settlement permanent by establishing a village on that spot.⁸⁸ Over time and little by little, other Nago hunters heard of their counterparts’ experience and moved into the area and built houses, which eventually established the village of Aklon (although sometimes it is known as Okoro, or eventually Adjatche).⁸⁹ At some point in its history, the area of Aklon transitioned from a Nago village to one that was considered predominantly Goun. Most accounts present the same version of the following story, which discusses how the transition from Nago to Goun rule happened.

The story is that after having founded Adjatche (also known as Aklon or Okoro), the eldest brother of the three hunters, Obagadjou, ruled, while the other two brothers held high political

⁸⁶ Philip Allsworth-Jones, *West African Archaeology: New Developments, New Perspectives* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010).

⁸⁷ William Russell Bascom, *Ifa Divination Communication between Gods and Men in West Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1969). Written documentation of Fa used in Porto Novo shows that the terminology was strictly Yoruba in form and specific word choices, from at least the 1890s. Later claims of Fa belonging to marabouts from the north appears, but the earliest written account that I have come across shows very “Yoruba” elements in it. Grantin, *Le Dahomey*, 1895.

⁸⁸ Akindele seems to take for granted that the reader will know that Abori Messan means “nine heads” in Yoruba.

⁸⁹ Videgla, 65; Bessa, 21. Additionally, in my notes and discussions with locals, some versions of the founding myth list these places as neighboring, yet separate villages.

positions.⁹⁰ At some point over a period of undetermined time, a refugee from the northern kingdom of Allada arrived in the area seeking asylum. Most say this was Te-Agbanlin, who is considered by locals and scholars to be the founder of the Hogbonou Kingdom. The chief of Adjatche at this time was named Ahounwa and he was a direct descendent of Obagadjou. Ahounwa welcomed Te-Agbanlin despite the fact that his two counselors, Oga and Akpetou (descendants from the other two founding members), had consulted the Fa and had warned their chief that Te-Agbanlin would be Adjatche's downfall. Despite this warning, Ahounwa welcomed Te-Agbanlin, who then asked the Nago leader if he might have as much land as an antelope skin could cover.⁹¹ This sounded like a reasonable request, and Ahounwa agreed. However, Te-Agbanlin cut the skin into one long thin string with which he outlined a large portion of land, claiming it for himself. Because of the large amount of property that he now controlled and because of the show of wit that he had demonstrated, from that moment on, Te-Agbanlin ruled over what would eventually become known as the Hogbonou Kingdom, which incorporated the remaining portions of Adjatche.⁹²

Additional versions of the Adjatche origin story suggest that the small regional villages that were built around the area eventually converged (although these stories differ as to which were the originary villages). One account states that the village of Aklon, which was ethnically Nago, and a neighboring village called Djassin, which was formed by Alladan dissidents, merged their resources along parts of the southern Oueme River under the rule of the Aklon chief, Agboni-

⁹⁰ There appears to be significance to the number three, in that later the Goun Kingdom also uses the three branches of the royal family, and alternates political seats of power between them.

⁹¹ Videgla, 243; Akindele, 13; Interview with Rafou Kabirou (Yessoufou Kabirou, present), Porto Novo, Benin, November 25, 2009.

⁹² P. Brasseur-Marion and G. Brasseur, *Porto Novo et sa palmerie* (Dakar: IFAN, 1953), 44; A. Akindele and C. Aguessey, *Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire de l'ancien royaume de Port-Novo* (Dakar: IFAN, 1953), 26; Interview with Rafou Kabirou (Flore Nobime, present), Porto Novo, Benin, November 21, 2009.

Alousa,⁹³ and that this is what the larger Adjatche area became. From these sources, it is unclear if this larger Adjatche was then taken over by Te-Agbanlin. Another published version from the 1950s suggests that a Nago chief named Avesan created a village in the area called Okoro (based on a particular religious deity), but that the village was then occupied by a second group of Nago from Djassin, originally from the Ijebu-Ode regions to the east.⁹⁴ In this version, the second group gave the area the name Adjatche (*Adjase*, or place conquered by the Adja). Additionally, this version is slightly different in that here, like the others, Te-Agbanlin is said to have come seeking asylum from Allada, but that his place of settlement was Hueta (later known as Seme), which was an area rich in oil palms that faced the lagoon side, across from the city center of present-day Porto Novo.⁹⁵ Te-Agbanlin apparently then made contact with the Nago at Okoro (which again, in this version, is a separate village from Aklon or Adjatche) and convinced their chief, Atahue, to allow him to settle in the Honu quarter there.⁹⁶ From this place, Te-Agbanlin carried out the takeover of Adjatche to create his own kingdom.

Despite the slight nuances in the various versions of Porto Novo's origin myth, all seem to infer that the Goun presence in the area came after the Nago, who appear to be the autochthonous ethnic group in the region. However, the Nago do recognize that their ancestors were politically overthrown by the Hogbonou kings and that it became, at its core, an ethnically Goun kingdom, in which the Nago were welcomed, but were not thought of as an autochthonous group. The issues

⁹³ Akindele and Aguessey, *Contribution à l'étude ...*, 19.

⁹⁴ Brasseur-Marion and Brasseur, *Porto Novo et sa palmerie*, 14 These authors do not consider Okoro and Aklon the same place, which is different from Videgla and Bessa, who do think of them as the same place.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17. This is the region that is later settled by the returnee Brazilian population, before they moved into the city proper of Porto Novo on the west side with the Europeans.

⁹⁶ Bessa, 26; Interview with Rafou Kabirou (Flore Nobime, present), Porto Novo, Benin, November 21, 2009.

that arise in writing a history about Islam in this area in the later period occur precisely at this juncture. While there were Nago peoples in this area, there is no evidence—neither written nor archaeological—that they were Islamized peoples. The Yoruba speakers who came later, and who brought Islam, were not the same Yoruba speakers who founded the settlement. Yet, due to the conflation of the idea of “being Yoruba,” local memory allows for all Yoruba speakers to claim indigeneity in this area, where, in fact, there are two distinct groups of people with separate origins. Therefore, when I argue that Yoruba Muslims are as foreign to the area as Brazilians, though this is historically accurate, it does not align with the oral tradition, which has merged the first Nago peoples with later arrivals who shared the same language. Thus, today, there is still a Nago ruler (*obá*) in Porto Novo, and he claims direct descent from the same Anata line, which was one of the three lineages that founded Aklon in 1485. A crucial element that emerged from an interview that I had with the ruler Obá Anata VIII was when he informed me that the Nago in this area have, since the time of the three hunters, been followers of Islam.⁹⁷ What local memory constructed to satisfy later political, social, and cultural needs, continues to be passed down generation to generation.

⁹⁷ Interview with Oba Anata VII (Royal attendants and Flore Nobime, present), Yoruba Palace, Porto Novo, Benin, December 9, 2009.

The Hogbonou Kingdom

Figure 5 Te-Agbanlin's Replicated Palace (in the shape of a termite mound); Fig 6- Close-up. Porto Novo, Bénin



The Kingdom of Hogbonou (Xogbonou) is thought to date back to the early-eighteenth century. As noted, small Nago enclaves existed prior to this area's transition into what became a Goun kingdom.⁹⁸ Although this may be seen as an anachronistic truism, it seems as if it was almost inevitable that the kingdom would grow and become prosperous, as it is at the crossroads of where

⁹⁸ The term Nago is used here to represent Yoruba speakers who essentially inhabited the south-westernmost regions of Yorubaland. The term Yoruba itself is highly problematic. Its use and critiques of the terminology is addressed in other chapters of this dissertation. For the purposes of this chapter, I will use the term Nago to refer to early Yoruba-speaking populations in this region. See also Videgla, *Un État Ouest-Africain ...*, 88; Brasseur-Marion and Brasseur, *Porto Novo et sa palmerie*, 32; Akindele and Aguessey, *Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire ...*, 14.

traders have historically congregated.⁹⁹ Also, because it was a merging point for various types of trades, the area tended to have an ethnic diversity and commercial cosmopolitanism from the earliest times of its habitation. This diversity of peoples and their differing belief systems is perhaps also responsible for the numerous origin myths remembered and propagated by the founders, migrants, and returnees who moved there over the centuries.

One of the very few academic studies of the Hogbonou Kingdom was written by the Beninois historian, Michel Videgla. In his two-volume tome, which is his published dissertation, he examines a number of versions of the origin of the Hogbonou kingdom,¹⁰⁰ although he is unable to explain with historical certainty which one is the most factual. The majority of the origin stories suggest that a refugee from the disintegrating Allada Kingdom changed the course of the area, where there had been a preexisting polity, by laying claim to it as the new ruler.¹⁰¹ A differing version from the Te-Agbanlin founding is that Hogbonou was established by a man from Allada named Aholouho, who was not a king in any strict sense, but rather the ruler of a small clan that settled in the area. In this version, members of his clan intermarried with successive waves of immigrants, particularly Nago (or those today who are considered Yoruba¹⁰²) from the east. In this explanation, the descendants of these unions are considered to be the original Goun people and the original inhabitants of the kingdom.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Christopher Ehret, personal communication, January 27, 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Videgla, *Un État Ouest-Africain ...*, 283.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 35. See also Paul Marty, *Études sur L'Islam au Dahomey: Le Bas Dahomey- Le Haut Dahomey* (Paris: Éditions Ernest Leroux, 1926), 3.

¹⁰² Videgla uses the term "Yoruba" instead of the often-used regional term "Nago," but as I have mentioned previously, Yoruba is often substituted for the term Nago, although in other areas and documents the reverse would not be true.

¹⁰³ Videgla, *Un État Ouest-Africain ...*, 36. See also Alain Sinou and Bachir Oloude, *Porto-Novo: ville d'Afrique noire* (Marseille, France: Parentheses/Ortsom, 1988), 21.

Videgla also gives credit to the fact that, since Te-Agbanlin is the first recorded king of Hogbonou, there is a possibility that this king migrated to the region and via a succession of intermarriages, took over a number of smaller chiefdoms.¹⁰⁴ Videgla also suggests that the Goun language is a result of a fusion of the Adja and Yoruba languages. There are many different versions of the oral tradition and these are often explained using linguistic reconstruction, archaeology, or a combination of the two. Some of the oral traditions claim that “Goun” was the Yoruba term for the Aja, whom the Yoruba immigrants saw as good hunters or “*jagun jagun*,” meaning soldiers or warriors in Yoruba.¹⁰⁵ Others have suggested that Goun referred to the group of people who lived to the west of the Ogoun River, in what is today western Nigeria and eastern Benin.¹⁰⁶ Robin Law defines them as Egoun,¹⁰⁷ and part of the larger Yoruba world, although I have not personally met an ethnic Goun person who would categorize him- or herself as Yoruba or Nago, particularly because they speak a separate language.

Christopher Ehret’s recent, unpublished work on the languages of this area shows that Goun does not come from the same proto-language family as Yoruba; rather, it is more closely related to Fon, a Gbe language, and one that is spoken in Allada.¹⁰⁸ In terms of present-day self-identification, the Goun in this region attribute their origins to the royal dynasty of Hogbonou,

¹⁰⁴ Videgla, *Un État Ouest-Africain ...*, 68-9.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 21. In the Yoruba language, *jagun jagun* is the word for soldier, often referring to the cavalry of Oyo.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 20.

¹⁰⁷ Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire c.1600-c.1836...*, 124. This is problematic, as he is using Samuel Johnson’s *History of the Yorubas* as his source, which is entirely Oyo- and Yoruba-centric and rather subjective. Johnson was one of the privileged Christian elite that the British supported at this time when they were essentially attempting to make a class of *Black Englishmen*. As an Oyo Yoruba speaker he was likely to support this idea of its ethnogenesis.

¹⁰⁸ Personal communication, Ehret, Proto Niger Congo Language Project, February, 2010. I was a graduate student researcher helping put together wordlists on this project in 2010.

which both came from, but also was separate from Allada and Dahomey, where Te-Agbanlin was the common ancestor.

Furthermore, beyond the Goun in this area, the ethnic group of the Nago still affirm their autochthony, while those who consider themselves Adja identify with Allada.¹⁰⁹ Most importantly, in the history of the Hogbonou Kingdom throughout the Colonial Era, the inhabitants readily made room for, and peacefully coexisted with a variety of ethnic groups. What we can see in the numerous accounts of the foundation of this Kingdom is that there seems to be some continuity in these origin stories, but enough differences to allow for each separate ethnic groups to promote their own role and presence into the history of the Kingdom. The origin stories that are conveyed by Videgla's accounts, as well as earlier versions, consider the various origins of the Kingdom through the merging of smaller villages into a more centralized polity. The aforementioned written accounts are those that scholars have had access to as they referenced the history of the pre-Colonial Porto Novo region. Early European travelers and agents of imperial powers were the first to record these written histories, which causes some methodological problems; even so, in some of the early accounts, it seems that no one version is necessarily privileged over any other.¹¹⁰

There are two royal palace complexes in Hogbonou. The first was constructed by Te-Agbanlin, and was made out of clay and adobe in the form of a termite mound. The specific architectural design was planned so that there was only one entrance into the palace, with the intention of having one royal guard outside at all times. Within the palace compound, there were surrounding buildings, but each was a separate, and stood on its own. Within the royal political

¹⁰⁹ Videgla, *Un État Ouest-Africain ...*, 69.

¹¹⁰ L. Brunet, *Dahomey et Dépendances: Historique général, organisation, administration, ethnographie, productions, agriculture, Commerce* (Paris: A. Challamel, 1900), 88.

structure, there were ministers assigned to the palace and to the commercial outlets. Te-Agbanlin's palace compound was located in the quarter known as Honme. When the French decided that they were there to stay and began the process of official colonization through negotiations with the then-current ruler of Hogbonou, King Toffa, it resulted in Toffa building a new palace compound in a new quarter, called Gbekon, which then became the new center of political power. The older palace at Honme, however, continued to be used for rituals. The political structure of the Hogbonou royal system, as Videgla notes, was a combination of rules and hierarchies similar to those of the neighboring kingdoms the Oyo Yoruba in the east and the Dahomey at Abomey in the west. But there was also a truly original aspect to their system, which entailed another realm of royal supervision when it became night. The Hogbonou Kingdom had a second, more private "night king," who was expected to keep watch on the kingdom and paired with the royal guard security system and masquerade known as Zangbeto.¹¹¹ A commonly used phrase regarding the Goun is that the "king is more than one man."¹¹² Some scholars, including Videgla, imply that this was a reference to the very real influence of the councils and dignitaries who surrounded him. However, I argue that this is also a reference to the "*roi de la nuit*" and the Zangbeto under his charge. As they saw it, the council members and dignitaries were designated by Fa divination, as were the members who composed the king's elaborate network of spies, informing him about the best

¹¹¹ Although outsiders, from merchants to colonials to modern day scholars, are aware of the night king and Zangbeto system, there has been much secrecy about this topic, and the identity of the night king was kept secret from all but the highest ranking court officials. I have only ever come across one name of the night king and that was Zounon, under King Toffa's reign. Although very little is said about him, it was stated as something of an aside in the archival notes. Cf. Muslim Affairs, "[Letter from Houndji, Dated 1914]," Carton 4E9, Dossier 4, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

¹¹² "Political Reports 1901-1903," Carton #2C, Dossier 32, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

practices to control the outlying regions of his kingdom. The *laris* (or *larys*) acted as servants and messengers of the Hogbonou kings —the term originating with the Oyo Kingdom’s well-known *ilaris*, who were both male and female palace messengers, but also slaves. Yet for the Hogbonou kingship, the *laris* were men only, although they had a feminine component regarding the retention of the privilege of them braiding their hair.¹¹³ Initially they were servants to the king and his ministers of culture, war, commerce, and so on, but over time, the *laris* became a powerful organization that functioned as the police, border guards, customs regulators, and more.¹¹⁴

Society in the Hogbonou Kingdom was hierarchical and stratified along four major echelons. The first and most important level was the nobility, which included the king and his family. The second level constituted the administrative nobles, who were high ranking administrators, military officials, and other dignitaries of the Kingdom (including the *laris*, who were not slaves as they were in Oyo). The third ranking position was the level of free men, who included merchants, notable Africans with some status, such as being property owners, and in the later years, Yoruba Muslims, Brazilians, and the French. The lowest and most populous level included common subjects in addition to the slave population.

As briefly mentioned above, the following explanation of the Zangbeto system is unique to the Hogbonou Kingdom and the area. There are no other kingdoms in West Africa where a second

¹¹³ One *lari* was always designated as the calendar-keeper; he shaved and braided part of his hair according to the lunar cycle so that the king knew what part of the month it was based on the re-growth of this particular *lari*’s hair. Interview with the palace docent (Jennifer Gleason, present), Porto Novo, Benin, October 25, 2009. See also J. L. Matory, *Sex and the Empire that is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yoruba Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

¹¹⁴ Zinhoué C. Kokoye, “L’administration de l’ancien royaume de Porto Novo de 1894-1908 aspects politiques” (master’s thesis, University of Benin, Calavi, 1985), 9.

king, a “night king,” existed nor is there a type of secret guard designated to serve him. It comes into play as the different non-Muslim groups of Porto Novo began to take sides with either the Yoruba group or the Brazilian group at certain moments when they resisted the French colonial presence.

Porto Novo as Trans-Shipment Point

The lagoon system, in which the Porto Novo area is the most expansive, in terms of its sand bars, rivers, and lake access, was part of a number of trade systems, which included Africans of various ethnic and religious backgrounds.¹¹⁵ Early European travelers tended to mention Porto Novo, but only in passing as they were discussing the history of the Dahomey Kingdom or the “Slave Coast” in general.¹¹⁶ Usually, this area is discussed either because it was the outlet point where the Oyo traders sent slaves or because of the trade system of the lagoon area. It has rarely been discussed as a central component of any specific study of the area. Yet the area was central to trade for this region. For example the port fits into the greater history of the region in the Pre-colonial Era in relation to the trans-Atlantic slave trade: it functioned as a trans-shipment point, where Africans using interior land-based travel or small water craft met up with Europeans and their large ocean-going vessels.

¹¹⁵ Renaud and Akindele, “La Collectivité actuelle chez les Goun . . .,” 1692.

¹¹⁶ William Snelgrave, *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea, and the Slave-Trade, Containing, I. The History of the Late Conquest of the Kingdom of Whidaw by the King of Dahomè. II. The Manner How the Negroes Become Slaves. III. A Relation of the Author’s Being Taken by Pirates, and the Many Dangers he Underwent* (London: J. J. and Knapton, 1734), 252. See also Archibald Dalziel, *The History of Dahomy, an Inland Kingdom of Africa; Compiled from Authentic Memoirs; With an Introduction and Notes* (London: Dalziel, 1793); and L. Brunet, *Dahomey et Dépendances...*

Hogbonou's port area was utilized by the kings of both Oyo and Lagos in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as an outlet for both the legal and illicit periods of the slave trade. It is important to note, however, that not everyone who was captured and sent to Porto Novo ended up on a ship crossing the horrific Middle Passage, as some captives managed to procure freedom or a form of indentured servitude right before the moment when they would have been transferred from a pedestrian chain gang to the hold of a slave ship. Porto Novo was also a place where migrating peoples often settled, similar to the early peoples on the Swahili Coast. Because of its crossroads location—or, more accurately, its cross-waters location—it is important to recognize that there has always been an element from the migrating populations who broke off from their respective community to remain in Porto Novo.

Local public memory in Porto Novo suggests that Islam was first brought to the region before the nineteenth century by the movement of Yoruba immigrants. The definitive evidence shows that Islam was practiced by small numbers since the seventeenth century, when Wangara, Hausa, and Dendi peoples from the north settled in this lagoon area. More importantly, however, it was only in the early part of the nineteenth century that Islam really took root in Porto Novo. This came after large numbers of Yoruba-speaking refugees, who were displaced by the collapse of the Oyo Empire, settled along the coast and in the Hogbonou Kingdom.¹¹⁷

This was the same era that certain African Brazilians “returned” to coastal West Africa and established a trading population consisting exiled Muslims in the region.¹¹⁸ In the 1840s, one

¹¹⁷ Law, *The Oyo Empire c. 1600-1836 ...*, 1991, 274-5. See also J. F. Ade Ajayi, and Robert Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: University Press; University of Ibadan, 1971).

¹¹⁸ For the first and most detailed analysis of Muslims as returnees from Brazil, see Pierre Verger, *Trade Relations between the Bight of Benin and Bahia from the 17th to 19th Century*, trans. Evelyn Crawford (Ibadan, Nigeria:

Hogbonou king surrounded himself with slave Hausa individuals (which is dissimilar to other forest kingdom leaders who surrounded themselves with Hausa Muslims as sage and spiritual advisors¹¹⁹), but Islam became so visible that just a few years later, a newly enthroned king, King Sodji, assigned himself a Muslim confidant. Further, he offered to build a Friday mosque for *all* Muslims living in his kingdom.¹²⁰

In the 1780s, European traders were aware that slaves sold at Porto Novo were not only Yoruba speakers from the large Oyo Kingdom but also were Bariba, Nupe, and Bornu and all the other regions of the northern and eastern hinterlands.¹²¹ Even in the nineteenth century, during the illegal slave trade, a European traveler named John Adams¹²² referenced the large numbers of Hausa slaves who were brought to Porto Novo by the Oyo traders.¹²³ Many of these slaves passed by the coast en route to the Atlantic Ocean,¹²⁴ but those who remained on the coast became part of the local labor force. Hausa slaves in the nineteenth century were usually incorporated into the Hogbonou as palace slaves. Those who became laborers, either free, or coerced outside of the palace purview, were essentially integrated into existing coastal communities; it is difficult to find

University Press, 1976), 498-501; and João José Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

¹¹⁹ Melville J. Herskovits, *Dahomey, An Ancient West African Kingdom* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1967).

¹²⁰ “Colonial Report 1883,” Carton 16E4, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

¹²¹ Paul E. Lovejoy, and Nicholas Rogers, eds. *Unfree Labor in the Development of the Atlantic World* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1994), 226.

¹²² Ch. J. Adams, *Remarks on the Country Extending from Cape Palmas to the Congo* (London:,1823; Facs. ed. London: Cass, 1966), 77, 96.

¹²³ Law, *Oyo Empire*, 227.

¹²⁴ Law, *The Slave Coast*, 87.

a sense of Hausa-ness in the historical records, other than a few quarters of the city that tended to be the central gathering locations for ethnic Hausa.¹²⁵ There was by no means enough of a sense of solidarity to form a Zongo (Muslims Hausa quarter) just as the Hausa in the intra-African diaspora had done in much of West Africa, particularly in areas along the kola nut routes, from present-day Ghana to Niger and Nigeria.¹²⁶ The specific culture and geography of Porto Novo and the ways that certain kings incorporated Muslims into their larger communities resulted in a dispersal of Muslims throughout the city which was different from other cities where Islam was the religion of the minority, which is how Zongos came about.¹²⁷

Unlike Hogbonou, the large slave-trading kingdom of Dahomey was located far into the interior because it needed a coastal outlet for transferring slaves to ships. During the height of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, both Ouidah and Porto Novo were in privileged locations along the coast. Ouidah was a relatively defenseless kingdom in the early eighteenth century. Although there was some resistance to incorporation, Dahomey eventually conquered Ouidah and used it as its main trading port.¹²⁸ The Hogbonou Kingdom also served a special function: whenever feasible, Europeans preferred to trade outside of the areas under Dahomey control because they could

¹²⁵ Robin Law and Silke Strickrodt, eds., *Ports of the Slave Trade (Bights of Benin and Biafra): Papers from a Conference of the Centre of Commonwealth Studies, University of Stirling, June 1998* (Stirling, Scotland: Centre of Commonwealth Studies University of Stirling, 1999). Also, the archives contain information on a Hausa elite named Pierre Atata who had spent a lot of time in France but on his final stay in Hogbonou, established large quarters in Porto Novo.

¹²⁶ Enid Schildkrout, *People of the Zongo: The Transformation of Ethnic Identities in Ghana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

¹²⁷ Ivor Wilks, John O. Hunwick, and Nancy Ellen Lawler, *The Cloth of Many Colored Silks: Papers on History and Society, Ghanaian and Islamic, in Honor of Ivor Wilks* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996).

¹²⁸ Karl Polanyi, *Dahomey and the Slave Trade: An Analysis of an Archaic Economy and Law* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1966), 27.

continue to deal also in guns and ammunition; if they tried this within the borders of the Dahomey Kingdom (including Ouidah and Allada, in addition to the capital at Abomey), their goods would be confiscated, as it was illegal for anyone other than the Dahomean royalty to conduct this type of business.¹²⁹ As was the case for most coastal communities in the eras of trans-regional trade, the people of Hogbonou were the necessary intercessors between white traders stationed at the coast and Africans in the hinterlands.¹³⁰

Aside from the role that the area and people of Hogbonou played in the commercial negotiations of arms-for-slaves transactions with various peoples of the interior, their commercial enterprises were just as significant in the Atlantic World because shipments of various cargos worked in many directions, and not simply from the hinterlands out to the sea. In addition to being involved in all forms of commerce and trade, including the continued illicit slave trade, Porto Novo also played a relevant part in supporting returnee slaves to Africa. We will now turn our attention to this next group, who are often called the *Aguda* in areas around Ouidah and Lagos, but in Hogbonou, more often than not referred to as *Brazilians*.

Porto Novo as a Crossroads: A Place of Return

A disadvantage of the vast lagoon system to which Porto Novo was connected was that the illicit Portuguese and Brazilian slave trade persisted into the 1860s and 1870s.¹³¹ This trans-Atlantic

¹²⁹ Law, *Oyo Empire*, 179.

¹³⁰ Polanyi, *Dahomey and the Slave Trade* ..., 33. See also Grandin, *Le Dahomey*, 9-10.

¹³¹ Law, *The Slave Coast*... . See also Martin A. Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa. African Studies Series* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 94.

connection introduced another group of people moving into the Porto Novo area. These were former slaves and others of African origin who traveled against the typical Atlantic route, meaning they left South America and went to Africa.

The history of returnee communities has recently gained ground in both the African and Atlantic fields of history as it expresses globalization in its most complex and multi-dimensional forms. The connections across large areas, such as oceans or deserts, remind us that goods and ideas did not only move in one direction—in this case away from Africa—but converged and diverged at a variety of different locations. One of these convergences can be explained by investigating the idea of returnees. Brazilians, as they self-identified, were united by the common thread of having traveled east across the Atlantic. Whether these Brazilians were originally of Yoruba, Hausa, Nupe, Dendi or any other African origin, upon their return they were considered—and considered themselves—Brazilians.¹³² In fact, many “returnees” were not born in Africa at all, but rather, in the Atlantic World; but their cultural and linguistic origins and their desire to redefine and establish themselves with a new label was more than enough of a reason to place them into the category of “returnee.”¹³³

Although most of the returnees were former slaves in Brazil, some had bought their freedom, whereas others were born free, of parents who had been slaves but then were freed, often having mastered a variety of trades as free people of color. Some, however, came to Africa not to engage their newly learned skills, but to capitalize on the illicit trade in human cargo, becoming

¹³² The term *Aguda*, is thought to be a Portuguese term for the slave port city of Ouidah and is used today for Afro-Brazilians and returnees. It was used in Ouidah and in Lagos to refer mostly to Catholic Brazilians; it was not initially used in Porto Novo, although it is today.

¹³³ Turner, “Les Brésiliens... .” 88-89.

slave traders themselves. Initially, the most successful returnees established themselves in Ouidah, but a few ended up in Hogbonou, where they utilized the vast lagoon system and the disputed borders between the French and the British powers to grow their commercial enterprises. This practice of crossing the opaque borders between Lagos, Badagry, and Porto Novo was particularly risky for those dealing illegally in slaves, as the British had anti-slavery brigades which were much more effective at quelling this illicit trade than French forces. Over time, and certainly by the 1860s and 1870s, slave trading had become progressively more difficult. Further, despite the extensive lagoon system, it had also become less economically worthwhile for the traders. This resulted in a historical transition to *legitimate commerce*, where Europeans and African elites created a new type of West African plantation economy that was designed to fuel the industrial revolutions then occurring in Europe and the Americas.¹³⁴

One must also keep in mind that there was an influx of returnees to the African Coast after the 1835 Muslim rebellion in Bahia, so many of these new coastal residents were not only Brazilian but also religiously Muslim. From the time of their arrival on the African Coast, Brazilian returnees formed alliances with other returnee communities, functioning as separate entities apart from the coastal Africans who had never made the trip across the Atlantic Ocean. The alliances were often underscored by a marriage between a Brazilian merchant and either a daughter of a local leader or a daughter of another Brazilian.¹³⁵ This practice harkens back to the fifteenth century, when

¹³⁴ Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City Lagos, 1760-1900* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007).

¹³⁵ Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil ...* , 226.

Portuguese traders along the African Coast married locals, eventually leading to the creation of a “mixed” population of traders living along the seaboard.¹³⁶

These Brazilians were considered more civilized by the Europeans because of their language—Portuguese—and their style of dress—Western. Because of this, the Europeans often used them as interlocutors between themselves and the autochthonous Africans, with whom they had to interact more regularly than before, during the legal period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade era.¹³⁷ This position as middlemen (and women) allowed the Brazilians to solidify their more elite social position, which was something they used later to their benefit during the African Colonial Era.¹³⁸ At the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade period, the Brazilians in Porto Novo found themselves making new economic arrangements. Even though they had been the major slave traders during the illicit era, many also had unique vocational skill sets and could make their livelihoods as either craftsmen or by becoming part of legitimate commercial enterprises as businessmen.¹³⁹

However, one highly significant exception to this comes in the story of a family line whose members appear quite regularly throughout this dissertation. I am here speaking of the Paraiso family. The broader picture of this family’s history in the region emerges from various sources,

¹³⁶ George E. Brooks, Jr. “The Signares of St. Louis and Gorée: Women Entrepreneurs of Eighteenth-Century Senegal,” in *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, eds. Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), 22.

¹³⁷ James Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹³⁸ Frequently referred to because of having adopted European customs, dress, and language, they were seen as distinct; but there was also a form of negative connotation, since it was inferred by Africans that all Brazilians were former slaves.

¹³⁹ Francine Shields, “Palm Oil and Power: Women in the Era of Economic and Social Transition in Nineteenth Century Yorubaland” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Stirling, 1997). Also, Turner, *Les Bresiliens ...*, 189.

including several interviews I had with the oldest living descendent of the family, and Porto Novo elite agitator, Karim da Silva. Yet, there is one particular source that tells their narrative in a succinct and rather complete manner. This is a document that was written by a group of Porto Novo Muslim elites in 1921, with the intention of expressing the group's dissatisfaction and frustrations with the French colonial administration there. I reference this letter in later chapters when discussing the issues surrounding the imamate and the building of the grand Friday mosque in Porto Novo. I have also translated this document and have included this translation as Appendix 1A. This letter also is relevant because the information contained within it about the Paraiso family supports what other sources argue, and this gave me insight into the legitimacy and ethical character of this Yoruba and how they perceived themselves as in relation to the Paraiso family and its Brazilian Muslim supporters.

Islamic practice has been understudied as it pertained to Muslims in the Hogbonou Kingdom. Although Paul Marty argued that Islam first came to the area in a viable way only with the Paraiso family, the few times it is mentioned in the scholarship indicate that it had been practiced in the region much earlier. While there were Muslims in the area beginning in the sixteenth century with the Wangara traders, Islam really did not seem to make a significant impact on the overall society of the Hogbonou Kingdom until the fallout of Oyo's civil wars that occurred in the 1820s and 1830s, and with the Brazilian returnees who began to arrive in the 1830s and 1840s. While current, local memory varies on when Islam first came to Porto Novo, the evidence of the first imam is more transparent. It was under King Sodji (1848-1864) that was the turning point. While Sodji wanted his palace slaves to be Hausa, he also took in Seidou, the acting imam and confidant of the Porto Novo Muslims. Seidou moved from the Oyo region, where he was raised by a Hausa

immigrant family.¹⁴⁰ Eventually Sodji allowed the Hausa palace slaves to go free, which concurs with the idea that after he learned more about the religion and began to embrace some of its followers, he felt a sense of duty to release them. These changes with the king happened around the time that he offered land to Jose Paraiso and the Muslim community so that they could build their mosque.

In the 1850s, when a cousin of Jose Paraiso who was a chief in the neighboring Oyo area, assisted King Sodji in fending off an attack by another neighboring group, the Hogbonou king did something unprecedented. He rewarded the Paraiso family by allocating a large section of land to the local member of that family, Jose.¹⁴¹ However, Marty contradicts himself in the telling of these events. Initially he states that, “Seidou, a prince of Oyo,” became Sodji’s advisor and that Sodji gave Seidou the land for the mosque. This reference to a prince of Oyo is also confusing, as Marty stated one page earlier that Seidou was Hausa when discussing the version of Sodji taking an interest in this “new cult,” and then inviting Seidou into his palace.¹⁴² Thus, one major problematic for historians is laid out in the following chapter as it regards how best to use Marty as a decisive source. Not only do questions of bias regularly appear but even the misinformation that is conveyed is repeatedly overlooked and is only addressed when the details get interrogated in close fashion.

As previously discussed, the early period (1830-1889) welcomed a Muslim minority to the area under Hogbonou King Sodji, but they were also localized to a singular constituency. Thus,

¹⁴⁰ Personal interview with Professor Aminou, leader of the Ansarou Dine organization, (Flore Nobime, present), October 30, 2009. The Ansarou Dine organization of Muslim notables started in the 1930s; it should not to be confused with the Ansar Dine terrorist organization of present-day Mali.

¹⁴¹ Paul Marty, *L’islam en Bas Dahomey...*, 52.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 49.

from this point on, Akpassa was the quarter for immigrant Yoruba Muslims. However, over the second half of the nineteenth century, with the central role of the mosque coming into play, Akpassa played host to a larger community, in whose members found commonality in their shared religious Islamic beliefs. Before this time in Hogbonou history, Muslims were considered outsiders both ethnically and religiously, but their common bond was recognized as legitimate by King Sodji, who did little to disrupt Islamic practices and growth.

Beginning with the choice to allot land for a Friday mosque, Sodji's decisions set the stage for later disputes. The results can be seen in a variety of ways. First, it destabilized the rule that foreigners could not own property. Further, according to Marty, it also aggravated a small portion of Nago inhabitants, who founded and developed the Issale-Odo¹⁴³ region of Hogbonou at the time, but who were then forced to relocate. However, according to Louis Hunkanrin in his detailed history of Zangbeto, he argues that it displaced the Nanabloukou (or Yeke) Zangbeto temple and that followers of this sect were forced to relocate. These people did relocate, but the quarter Hounkanrin discusses was called "Insert," which is just on the edge of Issale Odo, so they did not move far. He mentions Yeke for the name of the spirit mother of smallpox.¹⁴⁴ I find that Marty was incorrect in his assessment of why Yoruba were displaced in various quarters of Porto Novo. He used the names of the quarter without understanding the different meanings in the multiple languages of the city's inhabitants but with Hounkanrin's explanation, of the name for a smallpox spirit is clearly Goun. In the Yoruba language, and even the Fon term for this deity, is Şoponna or Şakpata. There is, in fact, on Hounkanrin's list another quarter in Porto Novo where there was a

¹⁴³ This makes sense in terms of the name, which means "area underneath the river" or "fertile ground," in Yoruba, author's translation.

¹⁴⁴ "Louis Hunkanrin Study of Zangbeto, [Dated 1921]," CAOM 14, MIOM 2142, Microfilms G/55.

Şakpata shrine and where followers went to worship, which is in a completely different area than Akpassa. Thus, I argue that Marty neither fully understood the complexity of the situation nor the language of the people he wrote about, and therefore there is less support for his initial, early claim that there was a Brazilian/Nago division.

From the late 1850s on, a friendship developed between King Sodji and Jose Paraiso, to whom the king gave a special position in the royal complex. This relationship can partially be attributed to the fact that, at the time Sodji was installed on the throne, in 1851, he had a significant number of enemies, both within and outside his kingdom. Because of Sodji and Paraiso's close relationship, other Brazilians moved into this area with the support, and under the protection, of the Hogbonou king. It is interesting to note that the Paraiso family line itself was of Yoruba origins having come from Oyo originally. Yet, the Paraisos of Porto Novo never self-identified with the Yoruba ethnic or linguistic group; instead, from his arrival in Hogbonou in the 1840s, Jose Paraiso and his descendants were known only as Brazilians, returnees, creoles, senhor, sieur, or *Aguda* in Ouidah,¹⁴⁵ with no recognition of their Yoruba-speaking ancestry. It is from this point on that this community really staked its claim in the region.

Brazilians became either part of the royal complex and worked as negotiators, civil servants, translators, or notaries, or they used the skills that they had acquired across the Atlantic to work as artisans, craftsmen, or specialists in certain vocations, such as barbering, just as Jose Paraiso did. Jose arrived in Badagry in the 1840s, and first lived in the Seme, Seme (also known as Hueta), was

¹⁴⁵ This is significant. In my research I observed that all Brazilians (Creoles, Aguda, etc.) in colonial Porto Novo were either given the prefix of Sieur or were referenced as "the named" in all official documents. Any other African of any ethnic or religious background was only ever referred to by name. This makes the formality a slight one, but certainly distinct if one wanted to claim elite social status.

also incorporated¹⁴⁶ because it was considered to have the richest palm oil groves in the entire Bight of Benin area.¹⁴⁷ Because of their economic success, Western dress, and fluency in Portuguese—the lingua franca of the Portuguese European merchants used by colonials—this Brazilian community was labeled more “civilized” than other black Africans in the area.¹⁴⁸ In addition to these factors, I reason further that Europeans also perceived the Brazilians as such because of their privileged position within the Hogbonou hierarchy, despite their foreign origins.

Within their own community, the Brazilians separated themselves by religion into Christians (Catholics) and Muslims. But because they identified first and foremost by their shared experiences half a world away, there was little conflict, and people frequently intermarried despite differences in faith. Jose Paraiso, who converted to Islam upon his return to Africa in the 1840s, involved King Sodji in the issue of where worship should be allowed in the Akpassa quarter as it pertained to the building of a Friday mosque. This was done with the support of the region’s imam, Seidou, who also happened to be a cousin of Paraiso.¹⁴⁹ Marty suggests that it is as early as this period when the division among Muslims began.¹⁵⁰ If he is correct in his argument, it would place this division almost fifty years earlier than any document supports. While there were likely disagreements, the letter from the Yoruba elite written in 1921 which is included in full translation as Appendix 1A, suggests that only after the French come and encourage Paraiso

¹⁴⁶ Brasseur-Marion and Brasseur, *Porto Novo et sa palmerie*, 42.

¹⁴⁷ Akindele and Aguessey, *Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire ...*, 19.

¹⁴⁸ Marty, *Islam en Bas Dahomey ...*, 52. Also see Grandin, *Le Dahomey*, 48.

¹⁴⁹ Grandin, *Le Dahomey*, 48.

¹⁵⁰ Marty, *Islam en Bas Dahomey...*, 51.

is the dislike of Paraiso turned into something more solid that can be referred to as a schism. So Marty's suggestion that the division originated in the 1850s is anachronistic, and is something he posited while visiting Porto Novo in the 1920s during the moment when tensions were at their apex because of the French involvement with Houndji and the Paraiso party to choose an imam. The argument that is the touchstone throughout my present study is that the divide began much more organically and occurred over a lengthy period of time, thirty or more years, and that one cannot claim a real split in the Muslim community in Porto Novo until the turn of the twentieth century. This period of a localized Muslim community within the Hogbonou Kingdom ended in the 1880s when European pressures and expressions of power allowed for the razing of the mosque. This one act triggered a dispersal of Porto Novo Muslims causing their relocation to small neighborhoods (quarters) that were defined by family lineage and therefore, ethnicity.

The European-led transition to *legitimate commerce* in the second half of the nineteenth century profoundly affected the African kingdoms in the region. Dahomey had come to dominate the Bight of Benin because of its involvement in the Atlantic slave trade, but once the British declared the trade illegal, though they had been its largest beneficiaries, the Dahomean kings lost the basis of their economic capital and thus, their legitimacy. The Hogbonou Kingdom, however, which was mainly an entrepot, moving peoples to and from the interior and the Atlantic, also had raw materials on which it could rely for continuing commercial endeavors.

The region was considered by most European commercial agents as being home to the most productive palm plantations in West Africa.¹⁵¹ These *palmeraies* became more successful and productive with the transition to legitimate commerce in the later nineteenth century, eventually

¹⁵¹ Brunet, *Dahomey et Dépendances*, 44; Georges Francois, *Dahomey* (Paris: É. Larose, 1906), 139-140.

helping to fuel the industrial revolution in Europe. According to one of the Hogbonou origin stories, after the towns of Djassin and Aklon merged, a third village located right at the coast, called the region mentioned earlier as an outlying principality and one of the most fertile areas for oil palms in West Africa. So with the trade in humans no longer a truly viable form of income, the Hogbonou fared better than its larger neighbor, Dahomey, whose entire existence had depended upon the trade of human beings. The plantations in Hogbonou were numerous and their palms produced an enormous amount of palm oil, palm kernels, and other useful products. Nonetheless, this type of plantation economy required a large labor force. The need for laborers and the nature of the plantation system exacerbated and reorganized the intra-African slave trade, resulting in the establishment of a type of plantation slavery. This new form of slavery varied significantly from former practices of intra-African slavery, with certain recognizable characteristics more akin to the chattel slavery of the Americas, particularly in its violent treatment of the slaves.¹⁵²

The mid-century transition to *legitimate commerce* exponentially increased plantation slavery on much of the African continent. This was the case especially for the tropical areas of the continent, such as coastal West Africa, where Europeans found it more profitable to extract resources produced by Africans in Africa than to transport Africans across the Atlantic to plantations in the Americas for the same products.¹⁵³ This transition opened up the West and West-Central African Coast to African-centered commercial competition. To be sure, this commercial system involved business exchanges between Europeans and elite Africans, just as was the case

¹⁵² Edna G. Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Culture and Politics in the Kingdom of Dahomey* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 188-89.

¹⁵³ Susan M. Martin, *Palm Oil and Protest: An Economic History of the Ngwa Region, South-Eastern Nigeria, 1800-1980* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth ...*. See also Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City...*

with the slave trade, but it also included many other members of African society. Kings had the ultimate say in the slave trade, but as wild-resource extraction developed and turned into commercial for-profit production, individuals could deal directly with one another without chiefs or kings dominating the trade. In one sense, it started a true free-market economy, but then quickly turned into a zero-sum economy as the plantations evolved and a cash-crop system emerged at the beginning of the Colonial Era. In certain attempts to control the various markets, Africans came together in small conglomerates. Those who were engaged in *palmeraies* along the West African Coast included various peoples allied along newly created cultural lines, such as the Brazilians, but also those who united around a common faith, such as the minority Muslim population, particularly as members of this specific religious faith had been part of the commercial class for many years throughout the West African region.¹⁵⁴ Early on in the periods of exchange and trade in Africa, beginning with the Portuguese traders in the sixteenth century, European commercial houses were in the region of what would later become the colony of Dahomey.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Brazilians were fully present in Ouidah, where they were known as *Aguda*; the majority were converted Catholics. With the prohibition of this business enforced after 1808, and even more so after France joined the abolition of the trade in the 1830s, most private companies that thrived in Ouidah during the slave trade era no longer made a profit. Thus, they tended to move their factories to Porto Novo, which was known for having a more diversified economy, even during the slave trade.¹⁵⁵ Of the companies that did relocate, Europe was well represented with three French, two British, and one German businesses. The company with

¹⁵⁴ Turner, “Les Brésiliens ...,” 213.

¹⁵⁵ “Reports on commercial houses 1881,” Carton 16E4, Dossier 3, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. See also Grantin, *Le Dahomey*, 22.

the biggest part to play in the palm produce trade was the Regis Brothers. Second to the Regis Brothers, were the Lassier Daumas Corporation and Cyprien Fabre and Company.¹⁵⁶

From the time of the 1890s, when the French began rehearsing colonial policies on Dahomeans, and up until Dahomey was incorporated into the recently federated Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF) in 1904, Muslims in Porto Novo were both ethnically and geographically separate from one another, resulting from not having one central Friday mosque. The implication of a multi-ethnic and divided Muslim population played into the early ideas of the French *Politique Musulmane*,¹⁵⁷ a subject that will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Three of this dissertation. The ways in which the French treated the Muslim populations at that time and place were unlike anywhere else in their colonial federation of West Africa, thus making this unique in colonial African history. The complications of enforcing colonial policies designed with Muslim subject in mind, but for the French administrators in areas their government labeled as “non-Islamic” were immense. Beyond this there was still a minority Muslim population which also represented Muslim elites, with whom they had to cultivate special relationships as to engage them because of their vast commercial ties. A second major historical interaction that I discuss in this dissertation is the history of intra-Muslim dynamics in colonial Porto Novo. African Muslims in this area related differently to the French than other Muslim communities in West Africa for a number of reasons, including their “foreignness” for the reasons that I discussed above, but also because of the reality of the geography. The Atlantic World converged with the French through

¹⁵⁶ Kokoye, *L'administration de l'ancien royaume de Porto Novo*, 14.

¹⁵⁷ In 1912, Robert Arnaud, a French colonial administrator and the head of the Muslim Affairs division wrote *L'Islam et le Politique Musulmane Française en Afrique Occidentale Française* as a way to reposition French policies affecting the Muslim populations in its colonies.

the Brazilian Muslim population along the lagoon coast, while the breakdown of the Oyo Empire led to the creation of a rather porous border between British and French territories. These experiences were unique to Porto Novo and completely new to the French who administered the area.

In the era from the 1880s through the end of World War I, the larger Muslim *umma*¹⁵⁸ became dispersed throughout the city into small, ethnically defined groups of Muslims. In an act that was both culturally and economically motivated, the position of Muslims in Porto Novo was changed forever when their mosque was destroyed in the 1870s. While the British and the French had constant disputes over the area between Lagos and Ouidah, which was essentially a lagoon region that incorporated the Hogbonou Kingdom, they still managed to support one another's imperial endeavors, particularly when it came to a tête-à-tête that could possibly affect either country's potential for African-based economic growth. While neither France nor Great Britain had control of Porto Novo legally at this particular time in the 1870s, both colonial powers were present economically. Palm produce replaced slaves as the number one export from the area and literally fuelled the Western World's Industrial Revolution, as palm oil was an excellent lubricant for large machinery, in addition to providing the basis for new high-demand consumer products, like soap. German, French, and British commercial agents established themselves as private company representatives during this time in the era of *legitimate commerce*.

¹⁵⁸ In Islam, the *umma* is, in its simplest form, the Muslim community throughout the world, similar in idea to the concept of the Christian *church*. However, in the following pages and in the historiography more generally, the term is complex and often needs explicit definitions in particular circumstances. For my study, I am looking at the general West African *umma* and its eventual division, based upon issues that are other than religious at their core.

One particular factory built by John Holt & Company of Liverpool, England in the Akpassa quarter, had the best lagoon access for ships, enabling them to move products efficiently.¹⁵⁹ One incident involving this particular company provided the impetus for the changing relationship among Muslims in Porto Novo, or what I call the period of the ethnicization of Islam in Porto Novo. Quickly summarized, John Holt built a home near his factory in this the Akpassa quarter. At this time, the French signed a treaty with the Hogbonou king which, although it was not to last, provided them with decision-making power. Holt complained to the French about the “terrible noise” of the muezzin’s calls to prayer, and convinced the French to raze this mosque—one that all Muslims in the city used as their Friday mosque. Upon the mosque’s destruction and over the next few decades, Muslims dispersed into small areas and began to worship in the various quarters of the city in which they lived, and where they basically felt confined.¹⁶⁰ The city quarters developed along ethnic lines as it grew and new people moved in and settled the region based upon common origins. Thus, what was once a city with a large Muslim *umma* of varied ethnic backgrounds became a city where small groups of Muslims practiced their faith bound by the geography and ethnic make-up of particular neighborhoods. Today, the divide is anachronistically considered the norm regarding the colonial past of Porto Novo’s Muslims, despite the fact that my research clearly shows that there were specific moments in time when this schism appeared.

When Ouidah became basically useless after the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, a number of factories that had been based there moved to Porto Novo (incentivized by French

¹⁵⁹ This company is now the most famous high-end fabric company in all of West Africa, known as Vlisco.

¹⁶⁰ “Notes on Origins of Islam in Porto Novo by colonial administrators 1880s...,” Carton 4E9, Dossier 15, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

colonial authorities to compete directly against British and Portuguese companies). One of the biggest was a cloth manufacturer out of Manchester England called John Holt & Company. This factory was built in an area facing the lagoon, next to the newly established Catholic convent and close to the center of the city. This was in the Akpassa quarter. In this same quarter in the 1860s, under King Sodji, the first Muslim communities built their Friday mosque. According to many written and oral accounts, when John Holt built his residence adjacent to his factory and moved in, he was extremely bothered by the muezzin's calls to prayer five times a day.¹⁶¹ Although he was a foreigner, and a British one at that, the French needed his business and his taxable income, which was much higher for foreigners than for local inhabitants.¹⁶² With more concern for their commercial relationship with the British companies than for the local African populations, the administrators had the mosque completely razed.

When reflecting on economic profitability, one must consider, as we have in the pages above, the dynamics of global trade and the development of new ventures. Additionally, however, one must also contemplate the other side of the coin, that is to say, the inevitability of military campaigns and violence in achieving occupational control. As we know, after trans-Atlantic slave trade, Europeans were concerned with gaining control of Africa and its resources through a few key approaches. The first, as I noted above, was by engaging, often duplicitously, African leaders

¹⁶¹ Interview with Cheikh Ibrahim S. Onifade, Predicateur de l'Islam, Mosquee Centrale de Porto Novo, (Flore Nobime, present.), October 14, 2009. Cheikh is a long-time inhabitant of the Akpassa quarter and notable Muslim in Porto Novo who gave me the family history of the experiences of dealing with the John Holt & Company from his grandfather. Also, in my interview with the Imam Damala, before his passing the following year, he told the same story of the razing of the mosque in Akkpassa quarter with little variation from the Cheikh's verions. Interview with Imam Damala and daughter, (Flore Nobime, present), November 12, 2009.

¹⁶² Law, *Ouidah*, Introduction.

in commercial transactions that secured their access to profits from resources. In our case here, palm produce, such as oil and kernels in the Bight of Benin, was the most important.

The relationship of the Hogbonou kingdom and European powers that were in the Bight of Benin had been precarious since the slave-trading era—both legitimate and illegitimate—in the early and mid-nineteenth century. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the kings of the small kingdom of Hogbonou played the British and the French off each other with quite a bit of success, particularly from the 1850s through the 1890s, and it took this period of time for the French to fully gain a foothold in Porto Novo. One way in which the French asserted their power during the first period of colonization took the form of putting economics before politics.

The fact that a treaty was signed and then reneged upon by this small African kingdom is a rather significant issue. This was made possible because of the liminal space that Porto Novo, and the Hogbonou Kingdom in general, occupied in the colonial sphere. As mentioned earlier, as part of the intricate lagoon system that connected British Lagos to French Ouidah, both of which were highly important outlets for the licit and illicit trans-Atlantic slave trade, Porto Novo held a cherished position simply because of its real estate location. If one considers that the kingdom was marginalized among other African kingdoms in the area, and was sandwiched between two of the most important kingdoms that strongly resisted Europeans on their soil, it becomes even more relevant that these Goun kings used their physical and symbolic positions to negotiate terms and conditions of land use and access.

As a result of the desire for raw materials needed to sustain the industrial revolution, Great Britain and France's general disputes over the region were a veritable tug-of-war for the majority of the nineteenth century. Initially, they fought over an area called Ketonou (not to be confused

with Cotonou) and the canals at the River Oueme bordering the northwestern area of the Hogbonou Kingdom, which were the only waterways connecting the hinterlands to the lagoon system, and thus the coastal outlets. In 1863 the French signed a protectorate agreement with Hogbonou's King Sodji as a response to earlier treaties signed between Great Britain and Hogbonou's King Mekpon. This was made especially complex when Kossoko made a similar move, by promising the British power in Lagos if they helped him take the throne from Docemo, whom many people saw as the rightful heir.

Looking to the Hogbonou system of succession, one can see how this complicated the issues due to the rotating lines of ascendancy as they related to the three founding brothers. Once Great Britain and France staked their claims on territories in this region, Hogbonou's royal lineage raised the stakes by including these outside forces as both influential and relevant to the throne-ascension process. Goun supporters divided along British and French lines. But what complicated the process even further, in a way that the Lagos kings did not experience, was the fact that Porto Novo remained in transition as it pertained to European occupation. Britain and France continued to fight for access to the outlets of the coastal lagoon systems between Lagos and Ouidah. This left an opening for the Hogbonou kings, whose power fluctuated depending on which European power at the time claimed Porto Novo. Various Hogbonou leaders put themselves in positions of power by playing Great Britain and France off one another, which was a rare opportunity for African kings during this time.

After almost 50 years, this Hogbonou political strategy ended when France definitively took over the Porto Novo area when it signed a protectorate agreement with Toffa in 1883. The French colonial administration deemed this final agreement advantageous for many reasons. Firstly, it

allowed the French access to the inland kingdom of Dahomey; but another important reason was that having control over Porto Novo permitted the French close supervision of Great Britain's actions in Lagos while simultaneously blocking the trade outlets of three significant African polities, which is to say, it stopped illicit trade by the Dahomeans, Oyo and Egbas.¹⁶³

Additionally, there were also intra-African wars that took place, and while not directly affecting the European powers, the indirect influence of weapons and land appropriations were always just under the surface. The kings of Porto Novo respected, or at least appeared to respect, the lives and property of their enemies. Yet, within the lineage of the Hogbonou royal family, thoughts of murder and power usurpation were always a possibility. In 1873, King de Messe of Porto Novo came to rule after King de Mekpon. Yet de Mekpon's son, Mehounou, was angry that his cousin, de Messe, was enthroned even though this was legitimate—this order of succession followed the same system it had for as long as anyone could remember. In his disgruntled state, Mehounou started causing real problems in the Porto Novo region, and when he went too far, he sought refuge in neighboring British-controlled Abeokuta. He was only welcomed there because his mother, who was from the region, had given the Egba people a plethora of gifts. So, when the Egbas of the Abeokuta region engaged in battle against the Hogbonou Kingdom in 1874 to determine control of the trade outlets of the lagoon system there, Mehounou was the one who advised the Egba.¹⁶⁴ In this case, Dahomey backed the Hogbonou king because there was a mutual agreement of access to this territory, and additionally, because Dahomey was also an enemy of the

¹⁶³ Oluwatoyin Babatunde Oduntan, "Elite Identity and Power: A Study of Social Change and Leadership Among the Egba of Western Nigeria 1860-1950" (Ph.D. dissertation, Dalhousie University, 2010), 39-45; Ade Tejuoso, *Ripples on so Far so Memorable: Egba History in Focus* (Ikeja, Nigeria: Pumark Nigeria Limited, 1991). See also the classic study by S.O. Biobaku, *The Egba and Their Neighbours, 1842-1872* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957).

¹⁶⁴ Odebiyi Oladapo, *Abeokuta: Home of the Egba* (Lagos, Nigeria: VBO International Limited, 1985), 128.

Egba. Mehounou was well-informed about the practices of the Dahomean armies and advised the Egba about what to do with Glele, simply as a form of retribution against de Messe, for whom he felt great animosity.¹⁶⁵

With the transition from the slave trade to legitimate commerce, which then eventually led to the Colonial Era and the physical relocation of commercial factories from Ouidah to Porto Novo, something more ideological occurred in the form of cultural institutionalization that fundamentally changed the dynamics among the local inhabitants. This is to say that one embodied cultural characteristic that is apparent throughout the time frames and events denoted in this dissertation can be closely compared to the colonial ideas of *practices of difference*, but now, with the addition of a type of geographical determinism.

In the nineteenth century, Muslims in the area identified along religious lines and lived and worshipped in one area of the city despite their ethnic backgrounds. Thus Hausa, Nago, Fon, Goun, and newly returned Brazilians all lived together in the same neighborhood,¹⁶⁶ and attended the central mosque. They also had one imam to whom they were beholden. However, with the destruction of this mosque by the French during their first foray into colonialism, came the second era of Islam in Porto Novo.

¹⁶⁵ Losi Ogunjumi, *History of Abeokuta* (Lagos, Nigeria: Bosare Press, 1924). Entire discussions about the Egbas (at Abeokuta) versus those at Ibadan, and the use of Porto Novo and Lagos as the locations where they worked out their problems, can be found in Edouard Dunglas, “Deuxième attaque des Dahoméens contre Abeokuta (15 mars 1864),” *Etudes Dahoméennes 2* (1949): 37-58. The interesting fact here is that, even as Dunglas recounts this information, he never recognizes this as significant in the way that it truly was. This indicates that he did not understand that Porto Novo was actually an independent kingdom called Hogbonou at that time, in spite of the fact that he uses words like “kings” and “thrones” to describe certain situations there.

¹⁶⁶ See the Introduction of Videgla, *Un État Ouest-Africain...*

While Europe was on the eve of World War I, the power position of Muslims throughout the federation of the AOF, including those in colonial Porto Novo, changed. The 1910s were complicated, as early colonialism settled in and the Hogbonou kingdom lost its relevance. The legitimacy structure of the kingdom was one in which various lineages from the original three founding family lines rotated control of the throne. The specific details of this are explained in greater detail below in this chapter. As the relevancy of the African leaders declined, a dispute among would-be successors took hold in both the local and colonial courts, and members of the broadly dispersed elite communities took sides.

By understanding the state of affairs for this minority population within the geographical limits of this colonial capital city, historians are able to discern the ways in which those experiences reflected disruptions to the evolution of African societies on a broader scale, including cultural, political, and social interactions and their respective outcomes. Further, historians can then begin to explore the impact of the events and the ways in which local groups and individuals maneuvered to make the most of their positions in a constantly changing society. Examining and analyzing the continual repositioning, both in terms of a self-projected Islamic identity as well as the internalized imposition of identity construct, provides another layer to the scholarly interpretation of identity formation under French hegemony.

How identity formation is conceived of by historians is relevant in the case of republican France, which was for all intents and purposes, a secular power whose policies were not supposed to be concerned with religious matters. When academics investigate the past with the notion that this official political doctrine was enforced in the colonies, it can, and indeed has, affected the ways in which the gathered information is dealt with. On the other hand, forgetting this aspect altogether, and simply researching religious experiences with the assumption that they occurred

outside of the secular world, is equally negligible when presenting the depth of colonial African history. Aside from the religious elements of identity are the prescribed categories that outsiders place upon peoples, particularly those they want to dominate. In the case of Porto Novo, the very meaning of Yoruba-ness, as it is commonly understood today, can be seen in a wholly different light, breaking down the confines of those identity markers. This becomes relatively obvious once we begin to unfold its history.

The case of colonial Porto Novo, when processed as part of both the sacred and profane, reveals that the French were not all that concerned with the spiritual aspect of Porto Novo's Muslim communities. This makes sense considering French republican values. However, this did not mean that the religion was approached in exactly the same way as other aspects of African culture, and that the French were unquestionably involved in the Muslim community's commercial, civic, and political practices. Clarifying the relationship between colonized and colonizer provides better insights into their respective histories, and sheds light on Porto Novo in general. Indeed, the religion of Islam plays a major part in this clarification. Exploring this relationship through identity formation can present and represent the various manifestations of the life spans of particular identities. In the case of this study, these are those of the Yoruba ethnic construct and its commonly conceived boundaries, as well as the place of Islam in a colony where it was a minority religion, and where the colonizing power's previous experiences dealt only with Muslims as a majority. The unique experiences of Porto Novo's population show that the multitude of identities in this place and during this time adapted to change, and rather than give way to altogether new creations, they resurrected the elements which permitted their continuation in new articulations at the very moment when they were all but destroyed.

As discussed in Chapter One, the established ruling hierarchy of the kingdom of Hogbonou, which encompassed Porto Novo and surrounding areas, was unusual. As is traditional elsewhere, one did not necessarily become king after the death of his father. In fact, because of the origin story that the three brothers functioned as the kingdom's original founders, the ruling lineage rotated between those three families. This was problematic during the period of legitimate commerce, when one king would side with the British in Lagos but his successor, from another branch of the family, would then privilege the French. The intertwining of Hogbonou succession with not only European occupation but also perceptions of Islam in the region becomes a key factor in Muslim identity formation at the turn of the twentieth century. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, the French officially colonized the region by striking a deal with King Toffa to gain access to the interior. The French general, General Dodds, led the final campaign against Dahomey King Behanzin, securing colonial power for the French. The French regarded the kingdom of Dahomey in Abomey and Behanzin as the last obstacle that prevented them from conquering the entire region.¹⁶⁷ The agreement with Toffa made the conquest possible, and in return for the use of Hogbonou's land and people, France awarded Toffa a lifelong stipend and the title of Chevalier among the Légion d'Honneur. Despite the fact that the French were the official rulers of the newly established colony of Dahomey, King Toffa still considered himself the area's sovereign ruler. Unfortunately for him, however, the French considered him only a *Chef Superior*. Yet, because Toffa was instrumental in the French conquest of the Dahomey, he did continue to wield influence, thus the French administrators did what they could to keep him happy. As Toffa aged and when

¹⁶⁷ Reprint of François Michel, *La Campagne du Dahomey 1893-1894 - La réédition de Béhanzin* (Paris: Harmattan, 2001); Jules Poirier, *Campagne du Dahomey, 1892-1894. Précédée d'une étude géographique et historique sur ce pays et suivie de la carte au 1/500,000e établie au Bureau topographique de l'État-major du corps expéditionnaire par ordre de m. le général Dodds* (Paris: H. Charles-Lavauzelle, 1895).

the question of who would be the next king (or *Chef Superior*) at the turn of the twentieth century, the animated discussion of which of the possible forty-five princes to succeed him was in full

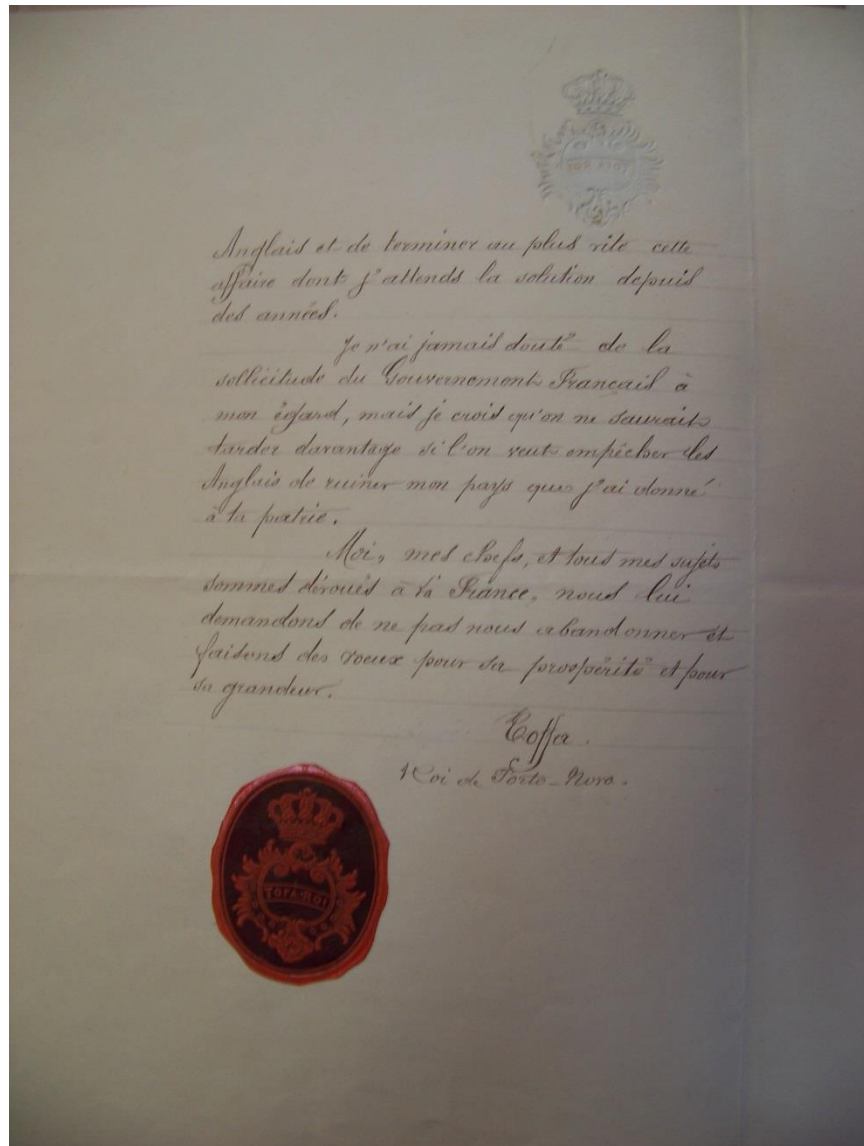


force.

Figures 7 and 8.
King Toffa's
official seal on his
official stationary
and a close-up of
the seal.

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In 1908, upon Toffa's death, the question of succession was still unanswered. The two main claimants to the throne were Adjiki (later known as Gbedessin) and his younger brother, Aboma (later known as Houndji), both of whom were sons of Toffa and represented the de Noupon line. However, also in the contest was Mehounou's—the former king's—nephew, Sohingbe, from the de Mekpon dynasty. In the end, Toffa's son Adjiki ended up claiming the throne from 1908 to

1913, when he unexpectedly died.¹⁶⁸ He was succeeded by his brother, Aboma, known from then on as Houndji, who had his eyes set on the kingship from the very beginning, and who had shown the French his support throughout their time in the area. Even before his father's death, it was apparent that Houndji unnecessary was more in tune with the French, whereas the aging and perhaps mentally debilitated Toffa had begun to forget his alliance with them.¹⁶⁹ Sohingbe, on the other hand, being from the de Mekpon line, which had ties not only to Lagos and its environs, including Abeokuta, but also to the British because of his maternal family continuing to live in the area as British subjects. He was also clear about his impressions of the colonizing powers and was unhappy with the way he observed the French managing Toffa. In fact, in 1904, at a time when there were accusations of property theft under Toffa, which I discuss below, Sohingbe lived in an area of Nigeria with a large number of his family and supporters.¹⁷⁰ The significance of Sohingbe to the reformation of the Muslim communities of Porto Novo is a momentous occasion in the history of African agency in colonial history.

In the metropole of Paris, France's authority to present its secularity in true republican fashion was largely destroyed at the turn of the twentieth century with the Dreyfus Affair.¹⁷¹ In its empire, however, religion had always been a more ambiguous factor and often came into play. The

¹⁶⁸ "Trimester Report, [Dated 1914]," Carton 1E8, Dossier 7, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

¹⁶⁹ Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism and Economic Growth...*, 59.

¹⁷⁰ "Sohingbe and the 'Muslim Question,' Report #317," [Dated June 12, 1914, No signature line], Muslim Affairs Report to Dakar], Carton 4E9, Dossier 22, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin, Porto Novo, Benin. When Marty discusses this briefly in his study of Islam in Lower Dahomey, he gets the dates incorrect, putting the trial from 1903 to 1910, which meant it continued even after Toffa's death. The archival material is clear that this trial was short and occurred in 1901. It also states that Sohingbe did not lose his property, thus he defeated Toffa in court.

¹⁷¹ Frederick Brown, *For the Soul of France: Culture Wars in the Age of Dreyfus* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

French political system, which espoused separation of church and state in concrete terms from the time when revolutionaries stormed the Bastille, functioned in a much greyer area when it came to its colonies. This was particularly significant once Algeria was incorporated into the larger French hexagon. From the 1830s on, France not only considered itself Muslim-friendly, but more than that, as a global Islamic power.¹⁷² There are of course too many problems with this perspective to address here, and many of these issues already have been detailed by scholars' work on Islam and France.¹⁷³ Nonetheless, what is important to keep in mind for the AOF is that the ideas and policies that the French colonials incorporated into West African rule, particularly regarding Islam, came out of the experiences of their men on the ground in North Africa.¹⁷⁴ Those interpretations of what it meant to be Muslim were then reified and carried out in the AOF. Thus, the turn of the century brought with it the larger question of whether or not France could continue to express itself as an Islamic power, particularly because Muslims under French rule never found this statement to be actually true. At this time, French colonial leaders began to formally categorize Muslims based on the perceived racial and cultural syncretism of the religion. As I discussed in the Introduction, the

¹⁷² Sahar Bazzaz, *Forgotten Saints: History, Power, and Politics in the Making of Modern Morocco* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

¹⁷³ See the Introduction and the literature review, as well as Chapter Three of the present dissertation. Other works that are significant here include the following previously unmentioned titles: Julia Clancy-Smith, *North Africa, Islam and the Mediterranean World: From the Almoravids to the Algerian War* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2013); George R. Trumbull, *An Empire of Facts: Colonial Power, Cultural Knowledge, and Islam in Algeria, 1870-1914* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *Beyond Colonialism and Nationalism in the Maghrib: History, Culture, and Politics* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave, 2000); and Claudine Bavoux, *Islam et métissage des musulmans créolophones à Madagascar, les Indiens sunnites sourti de Tamatave* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 1990). Primary sources include: Fernand Carles, *La France et l'Islam en Afrique occidentale. contribution à l'étude de la politique coloniale dans l'Afrique française* (Toulouse, France: V. Rivière, 1915); and *Les musulmans français et la guerre* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1915).

¹⁷⁴ See my discussion of Marty and North Africa in Chapter Three.

categories of *Islam Maure* and *Islam Noir* came to be seen as legitimate labels by France's colonial administrators, which then created and enforced many colonial policies.¹⁷⁵

The coterminous advent of a trans-continental, pan-Islamic threat¹⁷⁶ occurring at a time when Europe embraced its new imperial century only worked to exacerbate anti-Islamic sentiment among French colonials. One strange and unforeseen outcome of this in the A.O.F. was that the infantilization of Africans increased, particularly by the French but also with the British.¹⁷⁷ The paternalistic notion of needing to “protect” the *Muslim Noir* population, with its *inauthentic* and *nominal* understanding of Islam, emerged in this era. There were efforts to keep the *fundamentalist* Islamic propaganda of the so-called *Arab* (bilad al-Islam) populations, who were *legitimate* Muslims out of the hands of those in *Black* Africa (bilad al- Sudan), who were perceived as only nominal practitioners.¹⁷⁸ Even non-Islamic colonies such as Dahomey felt the impact of this fear of a pan-Islam. It started with general calls of surveillance in the AOF, but even a 1910 report by the Governor of Dahomey suggests ideas about France's view of the “authenticity” of the Muslims

¹⁷⁵ See the bigger discussion of the racialization of Islam by the French in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Chapter Three of this dissertation. See also Paul Marty, *Etudes sur l'islam maure* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1916).

¹⁷⁶ Most historians date this to around the same time as the first discussions that centered on creating a Muslim Affairs Office, anywhere from about 1906 to 1911. However, while this is the most common time period when these documents circulated in large numbers, the idea was certainly there earlier. A letter to the Minister of Colonies (who happened to be Andre le Bon), dated November 12, 1897, is an inquiry about what to do about the spreading pan-Islamic influences emanating from the Ottoman Empire to France's various colonies. CAOM Carton: AOF/IV/2 Affairs Musulmans from St. Louis, Senegal Doc. #2720.

¹⁷⁷ Zibani Maundeni, *Civil Society, Politics and the State in Botswana* (Gaborone: Medi Pub., 2004), 50.

¹⁷⁸ Vincent Monteil, *L'islam noir* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1964).

with whom they dealt, particularly the perceived differences between southern and northern Dahomey.¹⁷⁹

From King to *Chef Superior*: Hogbonou Royalty's Waning Relevance

In the late nineteenth century, Sohingbe, having been a supporter of the British, was outraged by Toffa's decision to aid the French. In a declarative move, he exiled himself to British-controlled territory among the Egba, just north of Lagos. With the transition to full colonial status, King Toffa realized that any actual power he had left was quickly slipping from his grasp. One way he attempted to remedy this situation was to take the *palmeriaes*¹⁸⁰ throughout the region and redistribute the land to those who served him. He then planned to take a percentage of the profits of the land-harvests once this was accomplished. Although it was the turn of the de Mekpon line to rule, with Sohingbe not only outside of the Hogbonou borders but also in British, and not French territory, Toffa prepared his son, Gbedessin, to succeed him. In doing so, Toffa also redistributed a large portion of the kingdom to the men of his court and his many other sons. In this move he gave away many of the *palmeriaes* that were the basis of the economy. A large portion of these *palmeriaes* were in the outlying areas of Djoffin¹⁸¹ and belonged to Sohingbe, who although living in exile, had never relinquished ownership of this property. Upon learning about this political move

¹⁷⁹ See Carton 4E9, Dossier 10, in the Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin for the Administrative report form Dakar on surveillance of Tijaniyya marabouts. More documents on surveillance from the same folder are dated September 27, 1906; August 31, 1907; and December 23, 1910.

¹⁸⁰ See the previous chapter regarding a discussion of the *palmeriaes* (palm plantations) that are central to the economic and overall success of Porto Novo, particularly at the end of the slave trade and through the era of legitimate commerce.

¹⁸¹ “[Letter to Dakar and the Muslim Affairs Office #317, Dated June 12, 1914],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 22, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin, Porto Novo, Benin. This letter is about both Sohingbe and the Muslim situation.

by Toffa, Sohingbe returned to Porto Novo at the beginning of the twentieth century to fight for his property and for his title. Toffa did not believe that Sohingbe would have much support in his endeavors and was not particularly concerned that Sohingbe's actions would have serious repercussions. Yet an aspect of the situation that Toffa did not count on was the outrage of a particular population, namely, the Yoruba (or Nago) merchants.¹⁸²

Because of the disputed origin of the kingdom, even though Yoruba inhabited the area before the Te-Agbanlin line, they were not considered direct subjects within it. This affected them in a variety of ways, one of which was property rights. The Yoruba population actually benefited from not being Hogbonou subjects in the sense that only Hogbonou royalty had the right to own property and the land's produce.¹⁸³ However, foreigners had been allowed a bit of freedom from the era of legitimate commerce, when private companies extracted massive amounts of, in this case, palm products from this land. The Yoruba, also then considered "foreigners," were thus allotted these same freedoms. So, in the situation where an owner of a palm plantation happened to need capital for whatever reason, he could sell off usufruct rights of his land and its products. Or like Sohingbe, who moved away from the area, functioned as an absentee landlord renting out the arable land that needed tending in order for it to remain productive. The people who bought these rights were the middle-class merchants, whom we know were the Brazilian and Yoruba Muslim populations.

¹⁸² These merchants were called the "landed class" by colonial administrators, who did not fully understand the system in that these Yoruba only had usury rights and made a living off of what the land produced, but the land itself still belonged to Sohingbe. This explains why the French did not have any sympathy for Sohingbe when he came back to fight Toffa, and why they began to express fear of the Yoruba Muslims (Ibid.).

¹⁸³ See the previous chapter's discussion of the four classes of people within the Hogbonou system.

Toffa had been upset with this system, which essentially bypassed the law for many years. He may have realized that quite a large portion of this land was in the control of second parties, particularly parties he saw as being supportive of the British and of Sohingbe because of their shared “Yorubanness” with the peoples on the other side of the French border. It is also clear that he was incensed at Sohingbe and the de Mekpon line and did not want to relinquish any power or property to the other family lineages. Fifteen years before Sohingbe’s return, Toffa and his *laris*, whom Toffa essentially used as henchmen, particularly at this time, attacked various villages in which the inhabitants had familial ties to the de Mekpon line of Sohingbe.¹⁸⁴ Thus, when Toffa confiscated land in 1900 to give it to his favored subjects, he was well aware that he would enrage Sohingbe and most likely the populations who profited from that land.

When we look back at the situation, we can recognize that in the case of Sohingbe, because of his ties to Yoruba areas in British Nigeria, he had sold off his rights to members of the Yoruba Muslims, even though there was no real division at that time, and the Muslims were not yet thought of as belonging to either the Brazilian or Yoruba “side.”¹⁸⁵ Suffice it to say, when the Sohingbe and Toffa trial started, and when the observation by the French was that Yoruba Muslims were behind Sohingbe, the categories of these so-called inherent divisions began to be defined and made more concrete. From the local African perspective, it is clear that Toffa had chosen to go against the Yoruba Muslims, even before there were actual sides to take.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ “[Report #112 to Paris about situation in Porto Novo, Dated May 5, 1885],” Carton 1E8-1, Dossier 1885, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin, Porto Novo, Benin.

¹⁸⁵ Jerry Michael Turner, “Les Bresiliens of Porto Novo (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1976), 132-144.

¹⁸⁶ Robert Cornevin, *Histoire des peuples de l’Afrique noire* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1960), 298, 318.

Sohingbe's return and the legal battle was an extremely important moment to a large percentage of the Yoruba Muslim population. Although at this time the Muslims were still mainly divided by quarter and were not a united community, these events began to reunite them, in the sense that it did not matter which quarter in which they lived, they supported Sohingbe and resisted Toffa Who had attempted to destroy their economic livelihoods. For example, the legal hearings regarding the property of Sohingbe were not immediately organized, but in 1901, on one of the first days of the trial, hundreds of Yoruba Muslims came to the courthouse swarming in support of Sohingbe. This image is what Governor Fourn used as he began to create the story of Islam in Porto Novo as he saw it. On that day,¹⁸⁷ the concept of a *dissident Yoruba Muslim community* was fashioned for two key reasons. The first was to create a group who could be blamed if colonial endeavors ever failed or backfired. The second reason was because part of the tradition of creating colonially constructed identities, which allowed the French to continue the practice of "divide and rule" and assuaged their fears of potential unification among coreligionists, who not only possessed the intellect but also the economic backing that could be drawn upon to overthrow French power in colonial Dahomey.

When a report arrived with information that the Yoruba Muslim communities supported Sohingbe's nomination as king/*Chef Superior*, it was a tangible way for the French to become part of the decision-making process. If they had to suborn the rivals, and if the Brazilians had to take illicit actions, then so be it. This alliance of Sohingbe and the Yoruba Muslims was reason enough

¹⁸⁷ "[Unsigned letter to Dakar and the Muslim Affairs Office #317, about both Sohingbe and the Muslim situation, Dated June 12, 1914]," Carton 4E9, Dossier 22, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin, Porto Novo, Benin. Also see the letter from same carton dated April 10, 1914 for more explanation of the property laws.

for the French to support Houndji, so when Toffa made a formal claim to the legal tribunal of the colonial administration, stating that Sohingbe had stolen a considerable amount of money and property from him, they were legally entitled to get involved.¹⁸⁸ While the legal disputes of land property lasted into the early 1910s, Toffa's death in 1908 allowed the French to install Toffa's son Gbedessin, who took the king-name of Adjiki.¹⁸⁹ However, when he died in 1913, his younger brother, Agoma, took the throne under the name de Houndji. De Houndji's real power was limited, however, as his title of *Chef Superior* meant little more than an annual stipend at this point. The French never considered him a legitimate king, even though the inhabitants of Porto Novo—particularly the Goun population—continued to give him the honor.

It is my contention that the trial of Sohingbe¹⁹⁰ was most likely what actually gave the French administrators the idea of, and limits to, a divided Muslim community in Porto Novo. Again, the planned and specific construction of these two categories is not something ever explicitly mentioned in the archival documents or in local historical memory, nonetheless it is my conclusion based on the synthesis of collected information. Though this evidence has been available to all, my analysis and connections are the first time that we are able to step back from the details in order to see the larger project and the intent of the French colonials. Knowing that

¹⁸⁸ Civil Affairs, "Sohingbe and the Muslim Question, [No Author, Dated June 12, 1914]," Carton 4E9, Dossier 22, #317, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

¹⁸⁹ Because there was a constant turnover of administrators in Dahomey, some of the reports after 1913 that refer to the early days after Toffa's death refer to the role of Houndji as *Chef Superior*. It is likely that these French colonials were not informed about the short period of time that the first son of Toffa, Adjiki, was the Chef Superior and with Houndji in power, and as Toffa's son, they assumed that he had immediately succeeded Toffa on the throne.

¹⁹⁰ For the letter from Office of Muslim Affairs, dated June 12, 1914, Nno. 317, and the response to letter written by Marty to Dakar Muslim Affairs office about Sohingbe and the Muslim Question, see Carton 4E9, Dossier 22, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

they were being asked by higher ranking colonials in the faraway environs of the French empire to report on Muslim dissidence, the administration on the ground in Porto Novo first had to turn the Muslims in the city into two opposing factions. As the Muslims were basically scattered throughout the city at the turn of the century, there needed to be a clear division between them, one not based on geography. In order to assign the label of “good Muslim subjects” on one side and “bad Muslims subjects” on the other, the issues with Sohingbe and the British were the perfect opportunity to create a real schism. In the tradition of French colonial policies throughout Africa, the French gave preferential position to the minority population within the selected group. The general thinking behind the process was that by giving those who did not have the power in numbers preferential treatment, they could keep the larger population of Africans as a whole, from unifying and resisting.¹⁹¹

A letter from June 1914 sent to Dakar from the Porto Novo administration states two goals set by the colonial administrators at that time in Porto Novo. Even though it was labeled under the Bureau of Muslim Affairs,¹⁹² the initial concern was the issue of the African property owners (the landed class) and their issue with Sohingbe. It is in this report, and similar ones, where one can see the direct complications of labeling something solely by ethnicity or religion, and not allowing space for more complicated identities in the terminology. In the changing dynamics, and with diminished African rights, the political divisions became more apparent. Sohingbe became known

¹⁹¹ There are many classic discussions of the colonial creation of “internecine troubles.” For the purpose of this subject, the chapter in Christopher Harrison’s, *France and Islam in West Africa 1860-1960*, entitled “The French Stake in Islam” (pp. 164-182) is likely the most succinct. Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam in West Africa 1860-1960*, African Studies Series No. 60 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), online publication date February, 2012.

¹⁹² “[Letter from Noufflard to Muslim Affairs Office, Dated June 12, 1914],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 22, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

as merely anti-French and pro-British thus the French had to install Adjiki, and later Houndji, into the premier position of power. In terms of recognizing Sohingbe's claim to his property, the court ruling was also unfavorable which is not a surprise. One might guess that this would be the case in a structure where the French legal system made the rules, and when dealing with the reality that Sohingbe was *persona non grata* in Porto Novo at that time. While the official colonial reports do not discuss Islam as a factor until 1914, well after the return of Sohingbe, it is clear that it played into their decision-making. It is apparent for example in the letters written by the Muslims themselves. However, we must first proceed to the following chapter, moving beyond the local histories of Porto Novo, and into the wider French colonial system in North and West Africa to understand the formation and continual adjustment of French colonial policy and general attitudes towards their subjects, particularly those that were adherents of both *l'islam maure* and *l'islam noir*.

3 French Policies and Approaches to Empire and Islam

This chapter relates the ways in which the French developed and practiced their hegemonic colonial policies in West and North Africa with consideration to Islam. The origins of ideas like *Islam Noir* and *Islam Maure*, and the creation of the genre of a “Muslim Policy” (*politique musulmane*), never universally imposed, concern our study here.¹⁹³ The impact of the work of Paul Marty as an Islamic specialist for the AOF (*Afrique Occidentale Française*, also known as French West Africa) is also examined in detail. The French creation of a “civilizing mission” (*mission civilisatrice*)¹⁹⁴ is explored via the actions that were taken with the educational systems, including Governor General Clozel’s answer to the madrasa, the *medersa*.¹⁹⁵ However, for Porto Novo, the emergence of Qur’anic schools does not fit neatly into these French creations, as the way in which the French not only perceived Islam in the colony of Dahomey but also because of the way Muslims were dispersed throughout the city of Porto Novo, rather than having formed a Zongo. Additionally, again, they were not a religious majority within the society.¹⁹⁶ The concepts of *assimilation* and *association* are also explored. In the case of Porto Novo, I present the creation of

¹⁹³ Jean. L. Triaud, “Muslim Policies in French West Africa,” in *Le Choc Colonial et l’Islam*, ed. Pierre-Jean Luizard (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2006), 271-282 .

¹⁹⁴ For the best examination of French colonial practices, particularly the emergence of French colonial ideas such as the *mission civilisatrice*, *mise en valeur*, and *assimilation* versus *association*, see Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford, CA: University Press, 1997).

¹⁹⁵ Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power, and Schooling in a West Africa Muslim Society* (Bloomington, IN: Indian University Press, 2001).

¹⁹⁶ Enid Schildkrout, *People of the Zongo: The Transformation of Ethnic Identities in Ghana* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

a unique military force and the problems that came with it using Saurat's *mise en valeur*, which was the implementation of a notion of development and infrastructure in the colonies, paid for with the time and labor of Africans.¹⁹⁷

At the turn of the twentieth century, French colonial policy in West Africa was complicated by a number of internal and external factors. Some of these factors included general feelings of ambivalence towards imperialism within the metropole, concern over France as a global power, political and economic aims that were being affected by world religions, and the meaning of republicanism and citizenship. Historians who study the AOF and the creation of colonial policies during the early twentieth century must seek to understand the interaction between France and the colonial administrations in French West Africa, as well as those in North Africa, in order to unravel the complexities of the decision-making processes, both in Paris and in French overseas territories. In attempting this fleshing out of the various sources, the conundrum of French colonialism emerges.¹⁹⁸ The ideas that inform the larger questions of my dissertation consider how a duplicitous policy—being colonial and empirical in action, but beholden to French republican ideals—functioned.

France and Islam in North and West Africa

¹⁹⁷ Albert Sarraut, *La mise en valeur des colonies françaises* (Paris: Payot, 1923). Albert Sarraut (1872-1962) was a French politician, radical socialist, governor of Indochine and member of several governments between 1906 and 1940. During the 1920s he was colonial minister and published *La mise en valeur des colonies françaises*, where he set out principles for the economic development of the French colonies that were paid for with the blood and sweat of the colonized peoples. See Robert Aldrich's review article, "Imperial *mise en valeur* and *mise en scène*: Recent Works on French Colonialism," *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 4 (Dec. 2002): 917-936.

¹⁹⁸ G. H. Bousquet, *La Politique musulmane et coloniale des Pays-Bas*, vol. 2, *Collection du Monde Islamique* (Paris: Paul Hartmann, 1939); *Manuel de politique musulmane* (Paris: Éditions Bossard, 1925); Alain Quellien, *La politique musulmane dans l'Afrique Occidentale Française* (Paris: Larose, 1910). In general, the French do not capitalize their titles, save for the first word or proper nouns.

The historiography of Islam in French West Africa, the Maghreb, and North Africa comprises a vast literature in French, English, and a few key works in German. The majority of these within the West African field of history encompass topics situated geographically in the Sahelian regions of present-day Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, and Niger. While it makes sense that the areas with the majority of the population practicing Islam would be the focus of many historians, to ignore other areas of the federation of West Africa, such as Dahomey, Guinea, and to an extent, Côte d'Ivoire, because they were not considered Islamic colonies by the French at that time leaves certain questions unasked and therefore unanswered. Although Islam was a viable religion in these secondary areas, they were not considered Islamic states or colonies, and thus, even less research on Islam during the colonial era in these forested regions has been undertaken. When these areas and topics are engaged, scholars have tended to choose to research the time periods of pre-Colonial states or post-World War II nationalism, whereas the High Colonial Era is often jumped over.

There were, and are, populations within these forested areas where practicing Muslims significantly impacted the ability of the French to enforce a standardized colonial policy, or even to know which policies should be viewed as successful for the overall entity known as *l'Afrique Occidentale Française*. Scholars have tended to focus on these regions when their interest in Islam is a result of reviewing archival evidence from the perspective of French colonials. It was these administrators who decided if a certain colony was *Muslim* or not. Furthermore, the division that the French created between *Islam Maure* and *Islam Noir* only adds to the strict containerization of their views of African subjects; as such, researchers following these ideas are understandable. The mistake is in the assumption that this was a valuable way to label Africans, as it perpetuated a

regional separation of Africans peoples of different religious practices instead of looking to understand particular communities in all regions of the federation. Even recent studies considering Islam as something reconstructed by French colonials misrepresent the agency of Africans under colonial rule.¹⁹⁹

As an imperial power in Africa, France first arrived in Algeria in the 1830s.²⁰⁰ The form of colonization that occurred there differed, however, from later West African colonial endeavors, in that Algeria was made part of France, rather than kept as a colony. Yet the impact of French actions in Algeria in the 1830s affected France's approach to occupying West Africa in myriad ways. Most significantly, the people who became administrators in the AOF learned "how to colonize" either from spending time in North Africa or by being trained by those who had done so. While we know that private French companies were involved in trading off of the Senegal Coast for years before the late nineteenth century,²⁰¹ using the time period of Louis Faidherbe is the most logical starting point to best understand the colonial mentalities necessary for the greater imperial project.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ See the article by Robert Launay and Benjamin Soares, "The Formation of an 'Islamic Sphere' in French Colonial West Africa," *Economy and Society* 28, no. 4: 497-519. These are two well-respected scholars on the subject of Islam and French West Africa, and this article, while making some valid points, they actually continue to focus only on Islam in areas of the Sahel. This work also undermines African agency and the large numbers who converted to Islam during the three major Fulani jihads of the nineteenth century.

²⁰⁰ William Gallois, *A History of Violence in the Early Algerian Colony* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). I do not start with France asserting itself as a Muslim power with its involvement in Egypt because it may not have been perceived in the same way as Algeria. The French attempted to make the argument with Algeria that the original inhabitants were Roman, just as they claimed to be Roman, and thus they found a connection in the very peculiar idea of blood heritage among themselves and the Algerians.

²⁰¹ James Friguglietti and Emmet Kennedy, *The Shaping of Modern France: Writings on French History since 1715* (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

²⁰² I. Brunel, *Le général Faidherbe* (Paris: Librairie C. Delegrave, 1890).

Louis Léon César Faidherbe (1818-1889) was a military general who was initially sent to North Africa, but later became famous in French colonial history as the commander who defeated Al Hajj Umar Tal in what was the second of three major jihads of the sword, led by a Fulani in West Africa in the nineteenth century. It was with conquer of what is today Mali and Burkina Faso, part of the Tukolor Empire, that Faidherbe shined as Governor of the colony of Senegal, pushing for the conquest of larger regions south of the Sahara, with which the French had been economically connected for some time.²⁰³ Faidherbe's actions in this capacity set the stage for how the French would present themselves as a colonial power, particularly after the federation of the AOF in 1904.²⁰⁴ Faidherbe left his military approach to colonization as a legacy for those who followed in his footsteps. Ruling by the sword was problematic for most of the colonial administrators in terms of policy creation and enforcement. The military tactics borrowed from the Native Affairs branches that moved south across the Sahara did not align well with the Marine Affairs conscripts who were used by the French, who traveled westward across the Sahara from the Atlantic. In fact, there is no real understanding of how movement from the Bight of Benin impacted these other two ways of conquering the "bloc" which was supposed to become part of the French Empire in Africa.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ David Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal: The Western Sudan in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). In the 1850s and 1860s, Senegal was really the Four Communes that were established during the Atlantic Era of trade.

²⁰⁴ Barnett Singer and John W. Langdon, *Cultured Force: Makers and Defenders of the French Colonial Empire* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

²⁰⁵ For a discussion of France, Islam, and Empire, see John Victor Tolan, et al., *Europe and the Islamic World: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

Another important individual within the French colonial administration was Ernest Roume, who was appointed Governor General of French West Africa in 1902. He was seated in this position when Dahomey was incorporated into the federation of the AOF; again, this was in 1904. His impact on the administration's decisions is particularly relevant during this period of transition.²⁰⁶ Roume was especially interested in the conflict with King Toffa and Sohingbe in terms of the various communities in Porto Novo that seemed to have taken sides. Arguably, it was the Muslim population which was seen as the one starting to cause trouble for the French by seeming to support Sohingbe, who had been living in exile in English controlled territories. Up through 1907, when Roume was getting ready to leave his position as Governor General of French West Africa, he was in contact with Joost van Vollenhoven, Acting Governor of Senegal and Guinea, about the situation of Qur'anic schools in Dahomey.²⁰⁷ Roume knew that van Vollenhoven had been the Governor General of the Equatorial Afrique Française (EAF) when Dahomey was in his purview.

Yet, it was probably William Ponty who was the most significant Governor General of French West Africa as it regards the changing ways in which the French approached Islam. Ponty became Governor General in 1908. He was first particularly interested in the educational system and in other general aspects of the *mise en valeur*, as I discuss below. Ponty's declarations in 1913 regarding the creation of a Muslim Political Affairs Bureau, and the requested level of surveillance that was to be part of it, caused quite a bit of trouble for the administrators in Dahomey. It also

²⁰⁶ Formerly Dahomey was marginally ruled by the administrator for French Equatorial Africa, although the administrators and military leaders in Porto Novo, made many of their decisions through the French *troupes de marines* as well.

²⁰⁷ “[Letter from Roume to Van Vollenhoven, Dated April 17, 1907],” and “[Letter from Roume to Van Vollenhoven, Dated September 15, 1907],” 14 MiOM 1182 (J85), CAOM, Aix en Provence, France.

affected the various Muslim communities as they interacted with those administrators. Ponty was also the man who requested that Alain Quellien (1910) write a general work on Muslims Policies for French West Africa, and he was the person who asked Paul Marty to write the histories of Islam for each of the colonies within the AOF. Victor Ballot was the first Lieutenant Governor of the earliest Porto Novo colony, before being transferred to the colony of Dahomey, where he was an administrator from 1894 until 1899, when he left to administrate in Guadeloupe. His is a legacy that is not particularly central to the story of this dissertation; he had a relatively benign relationship with King Toffa, but it is important to mention him briefly, as the Muslims of Porto Novo posthumously honored him by naming a school after him.²⁰⁸

For the purposes of understanding more about the creation of the armed forces, known as the *Tirailleurs Haoussas*, which were a separate entity from the broader *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*, there are a few particular men within the French colonial administration that need to be mentioned as we discuss this history. In terms of the French gaining full control of the colony known as Dahomey, General Dodds, who led the campaign from Porto Novo with a number of Hogbonou's men as soldiers, including the first *Tirailleurs Haoussas*, defeated the king of Dahomey, Behanzin, in 1894. Another important military man was Commander Joseph Gallieni, who was responsible for bringing the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* to Madagascar for the French campaigns against the Malagasy Kingdom in the 1890s. Military Governor Hubert Lyautey is relevant to our discussion, as he was involved in the Madagascar Wars, and also served as Military Governor of Morocco

²⁰⁸ *Le livre d'or des anciens de Ballot: École primaire supérieure et collège Victor Ballot, Porto-Novo* (Cotonou, Benin: Editions du Bénin, 1992).

when Paul Marty decided to try to answer the *Berber* question.²⁰⁹ Finally, for the purposes of military history and the Muslim populations of Porto Novo, Xavier Coppolani was an Algerian-born French citizen. He had a unique relationship with Maghreb Islam and led the occupation of Mauritania. His military tactics were incorporated by French-led African soldiers throughout the AOF.

Paul Marty, Islam in the AOF, and Dahomey

The contributions to the written history of Islam in Africa by Paul Marty are often considered to have more depth than other French colonials, simply because of their relevance both at the time and to the current historiography. This history of Porto Novo differs from the bulk of existing studies on Islam in French West Africa, both from the French and African perspectives. It is original, and sits outside of most of the literature, but it is something that ought to be considered as part of the overall catalog. This chapter, which focuses on the French decision-making processes in colonial Africa, both in the north and the west, appears as if it relies heavily on Marty. While his works are important sources, historians examining that time and place must continually question his *modus operandi*. In the case of colonial Porto Novo, from the point of view of French Muslim policies in a region where the Muslims were a minority population, we are

²⁰⁹ Amar Ouerdane, *La question berbère dans le mouvement national algérien: 1926-1980* (Sillery, Québec: Septentrion, 1990); Mohamed Benhlal and Daniel Rivet, *Le collège d'Azrou: une élite berbère civile et militaire au Maroc, 1927-1959* (Paris: Karthala, 2005), 62-63.

limited to a few sources that specifically focus on Islam. It is for this reason that Marty becomes necessary to our understanding of the French perspective during the colonial era.

Marty was born and raised by French settlers in an area just east of Algiers. As an adult, he spent six years in Tunisia, then two years with the French Army in Morocco, before moving to French West Africa as the designated Islamic advisor to William Ponty and the colonial administration. He held that position for nine years, from 1912 to 1921. His last decade with the colonial administration was in Morocco, where Marty created the policy to deal with the *Berber* question in Rabat after leaving his position as the director of a school in Fez. He retired in Tunisia and died seven years later.²¹⁰ With the 1913 declaration by Ponty, and in order to better understand the Muslim populations via surveillance programs and other methods, Marty was asked to conduct extensive research on Islam in a number of colonies, on which he published one book for almost every colony in the federation of French West Africa. It was during this time that Marty subscribed to the legitimacy of, and the division between, *Islam Maure* and *Islam Noir*.

Using literature available to him by proto-ethnographers and colonial administrators, who were often one in the same, Marty accessed and utilized the information from such sources as Alain Quellien's 1910 government report and the *Manuel de Politique Musulmane*.²¹¹ These studies written by Marty are often what Africanist scholars refer to their primary understandings of Islam in West Africa over the past 70 years. Contemporary scholars tend to use Marty's observations as definitive, and often without problematizing them.²¹² Although Marty was

²¹⁰ Pessah Shinar, *Islamic Law and Society*, 13, no. 1 (2006): 33-62.

²¹¹ *Un Africain Manuel de Politique Musulmane* (Paris: Éditions Bossard, 1925).

²¹² Even Pessah Shinar, whose 2006 article looks at the ways that Paul Marty's West African experiences influenced his actions upon returning to North Africa, does not consider the work of Marty in West Africa as problematic in its account of how and why Islam was practiced there. See also works by premier scholars of West Africa and Islam,

employed by the colonial administration to write these histories, the information contained in these works do not seem to be perceived as a problematic by even the most renowned scholars. Many historians rarely contextualize Marty's writing, nor do they situate it properly in the time of its production. In fact, it is only very recently that historians have begun to take issue with Marty's legitimacy as an Islamic expert. The yet-to-be published dissertation by Rudolph Ware contains a chapter in which he takes Marty to task.²¹³ He does so, however, on just a single topic—education—where Ware engages with Marty's research on the issues of Qur'anic education in Senegal in 1913.²¹⁴ However, there are a plethora of other subjects covered by Marty, and many in areas outside of the heavily studied area of Senegal, which need to be analytically reexamined by current researchers.

Marty's study of Dahomey and Islam²¹⁵ is the most frequently cited source for more recent scholars who try to incorporate Islam into Dahomean and most French West African histories, but there appears to be little effort to critically engage with, and expose its flaws, as well as its Virtues. There is also some inconsistency when referencing Marty's work. For example, one of the greatest

such as David Robinson, in his *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania 1880-1920* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000), 39, 52. Here, Robinson critiques the colonial administrators, and even Robert Arnaud, who was charged with writing the first report of the Muslim Policy in 1906 by Ernest Roume, but who tends to take Marty's information as it is presented in many cases. Sean Hanretta is one of the few who recently has gone through the historical records thoroughly to bring out these types of issues, but even he only uses Marty to suggest that, at the moment of colonialism, Marty's works might have been problematic to other Frenchmen who saw Marty's work as being overly North African in how it was informed, and did not pay attention to how colonial administrators in "black Africa" made observations about which ethnic groups would practice Islam or which would be unable to do so "authentically." In this case, Hanretta is still basically accepting Marty's records without problematizing them. See Sean Hanretta, *Islam and Social Change in French West Africa: History of an Emancipatory Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 126-27.

²¹³ Rudolph Treanor Ware, "Knowledge, Faith, and Power: A History of Qur'anic Schooling in 20th Century Senegal" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2004).

²¹⁴ Ware, chapter six.

²¹⁵ Paul Marty, *Études sur l'Islam au Dahomey: le bas Dahomey, le haut Dahomey* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1926).

scholars on the Slave Coast and the pre-Colonial Era in this region, Robin Law, uses Marty's information in one citation as completely accurate, while in another one, completely invalidates the work, both of which occur within the very same article.²¹⁶

Marty's discussion of Islam in Dahomey is divided into a northern section and a southern section. The title and geographical division of his study is telling, as it shows us how the French perceived interior Muslims differently from coastal Muslims. Porto Novo is a city that is afforded a brief historical description in *Le Bas et l'Haute Dahomey*,²¹⁷ within which Marty observes that, in general, there is a "civilized" culture, and that the people of Porto Novo are "the furthest from the primitive character of their ancestors ... engaging in commerce in a uniquely effective way."²¹⁸ Also, according to Marty, there were a number of "Islamic personalities"²¹⁹ in Porto Novo, and he estimated that there were about 300 Muslims total in the city. Oddly, in point of fact, at the time of his study, it was well documented by the French with whom he worked that there were about 3,000 Muslims in the Porto Novo area. He may have underreported the number by accident but considering he was the specialist on Islam this seems unlikely. His decision to write about Islam in Dahomey by dividing it geographically reflects that he perceived northern Dahomey as part of the Islamic sphere and the southern part as outside of it. In order to keep this argument he must have wanted the numbers of Muslims in the southern areas to remain extremely low in comparison.

²¹⁶ Robin Law, "Islam in Dahomey: A Case Study of the Introduction and Influence of Islam in a Peripheral Area of West Africa," *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* 9, no. 2 (1986): 50-64.

²¹⁷ Marty, *Études sur L'Islam au Dahomey*... . My translation.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3. My translation.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6. My translation.

The colonial documents reflected the numbers more accurately however, so it is difficult to know his true motive.

According to Marty's assessments, the most influential purveyors of Islam on the coast were the Hausa merchants and the settled Yoruba immigrant communities. As the reading I have done about the Wangara suggests, it seems likely that it was they who introduced Islam from the north, and that the Hausa came later, but there is no mention by Marty of the Wangara in the south of Dahomey. The Yoruba were often considered by Marty as, "more sensible from those [we] see in other black societies."²²⁰ This fits into the rhetoric of the time: the Yoruba were often considered to be more "civilized" than other Africans,²²¹ although Marty also contradicts himself and his colleagues here, when they argue that the Yoruba, as outsiders from Nigeria, are the root cause of the problems in Porto Novo. This is dissimilar to the case of how Moorish Islam was seen when it was described simultaneously as dangerous, smart, and problematic. The whole notion behind *Islam Noir* was that these Muslim Africans were simply fools playing at religion, and in fact, what they needed was to be protected in a paternalistic sense, because they were unaware of what

²²⁰ Ibid., 13-14.

²²¹ J. Lorand Matory, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yoruba Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). J. D. Y Peel, *Ijeshas and Nigerians: The Incorporation of a Yoruba Kingdom, 1890s-1970s*, vol. 39, *African Studies Series* (Cambridge, Cambridgeshire; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). See also J. D. Y Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, *African Systems of Thought* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000); Samuel Johnson and O. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1973); Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire, C.1600-C.1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, *Oxford Studies in African Affairs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

civilized society meant. This appears later in the language that is used to keep them from the marabouts of *Islam Maure*, who were seen as taking advantage of them.²²²

Marty first discusses Brazil in a reference to Muslim captives from the north being sent to Ouidah, and from there to Brazil.²²³ Other themes in this text include discussions of the Yoruba (also referred to by Marty and others in Dahomey as *Nago* or *Anago*) and the Brazilians. From the beginning of the history of Muslims in the south of Dahomey, his focus is on the Yoruba and the problems that they had caused the French in that region. The consideration of the two communities of outsiders who were also Muslims is especially apparent in the colonial notion of *Islam Noir* and *Islam Maure*.²²⁴ It is to this subject that I now turn.

The *authenticity* of practitioners of *Islam Noir* is constantly challenged in the colonial archives, and even by Marty in much of his work. Yet, he also forgets himself at certain points. In one observation he recorded from Porto Novo, not only does he reassign the racial and ethnic category of his subjects, he reflects that, “they talk, *the devout Arab*, praying to God many times throughout the day, they have neither fetishes nor gris-gris and they wash themselves each time before praying. They read and write their language very well.”²²⁵ It is significant that in this passage, there is a conflation of race and religion, even by a noted French specialist of Islam. In this text he also writes about Huedanou Muslims (those with origins in the Ouidah area of the

²²² My thanks to Erin Pettigrew, a scholar of Mauritanian Islam, who recognized this vastly different approach, along with the language used, regarding being “civilized” and those “causing problems.”

²²³ Marty, *Études sur L’Islam au Dahomey ...*, 11.

²²⁴ I use the italicized version for *Islam Noire* and *Islam Maure* as I have found it in other scholarship written in English.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 9 Emphasis mine.

coast), but refers to them as “Arabs” because of the rigidity with which they practiced their religion.²²⁶ It seems that even Marty himself was unable to reconcile what he observed with the signifying labels that were assigned: *Black Africans* were seen as “legitimate” in their religious practices versus those of *Islam Maure*, who needed to be assigned a new racial category.

In point of fact, his observations of these particular Huedanou countered what the colonial administration’s propaganda about *Islam Noir* suggested, which was that *Black Africans* were incapable of “authentically” practicing Islam. This example of how certain attributes were occasionally applied to particular African groups, but not uniformly, disrupts the idea that there was a single civilizing mission, as opposed to multiple civilizing missions. A deeper exposition may lead to an understanding of how racial and religious identities played out among coastal Muslims in colonial Porto Novo. It can elucidate the places where there was still an opaque comprehension of Islam—one that presented Islam in colonial West Africa as if religion and race were one in the same. In the same way that other French colonials and ethnographers privileged Sahelian Islam, Marty’s assessments suggest that the most influential purveyors of Islam on the coast were the Hausa merchants, and at certain points in his study, also the settled Yoruba immigrant communities. As the little research on the Wangara in Benin suggests,²²⁷ the best scenario for the introduction of Islam came from the north with Wangara caravans, and that the Hausa came later, and yet there is no mention of the Wangara in southern Dahomey by Marty.

²²⁶ Ibid., 11.

²²⁷ Denise Brégand, *Commerce caravanier et relations sociales au Bénin les Wangara du Borgou* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998).

By the mid-1920s there are other studies of Islam in Africa, but those of particular importance are the report by Captain Andre from his travels in Nigeria on behalf of the French colonial government²²⁸ and Andre's 1925 book, entitled *L'islam Noir*, which addresses Islam in all of French West Africa, but dedicates a large portion at the end of the book to Dahomey, and to Porto Novo in particular. Andre was also extremely concerned with the Ahmadiyya Sufi order, which is clear in both the report from Nigeria and also *L'islam Noir*,²²⁹ which includes a chapter on the Ahmadiyya and the influence of these "Hindus" in Porto Novo.²³⁰ Calling Hindus practitioners of a Muslim tariqa ought to have been a red flag for his credibility, but apparently it was not. Even the infamous "Arab" missionary from America, Samuel Zwemer, reproduces much of Andre's information in his book just four years later, entitled *Across the World of Islam: Studies in Aspects of the Mohammedan Faith and in the Present Awakening of the Muslim Multitudes* (1929).²³¹ During this period of Western domination, the main problem readers would have seen was that non-Christian elements were having a significant impact in various parts of the world that should have already been arrested according to millenarian Western ideals. That Christianity was not taking off in these places was of more concern than conflating Hindu and Islam as two separate religious practices. The idea that neither was Christian would have been what mattered most to the reading public of these texts.

²²⁸ "[Report from Captain P. J. Andre]," MiOM 2839, Series 19G/ 12, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France.

²²⁹ P. J. Andre, *L'islam Noir: Contribution a l'Etude des Confreries religieuses Islamiques en Afrique occidentale, suivie d'une etude sur l'Islam au Dahomey* (Paris : Geuthner, 1925).

²³⁰ Denise Brégand, "La Ahmadiyya au Bénin," *Archives De Sciences Sociales Des Religions* 51, no. 135 (2006): 73-90.

²³¹ Samuel Marinus Zwemer, *Across the World of Islam: Studies in Aspects of the Mohammedan Faith and in the Present Awakening of the Muslim Multitudes* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1929). Zwemer does refer to him as Captain P.W. Andre, however.

Colonial Policies, European Culture and African Muslims

This chapter reveals some of the specific events regarding Porto Novo in the early twentieth century, by examining the French administrators in the city and their perception of the roles that surveillance could play, as well as their interest in Qur'anic education. It is necessary to detail the manner in which surveillance was used in this specific city because the French in Porto Novo wanted to keep the Muslims divided. One of the ways that they did this was by keeping track of which neighborhoods supported which imam, and thus which areas could be targeted as dissident versus those that were made up of the more sycophantic Brazilians. Discussions of surveillance and Qur'anic education are well-documented in the historiography of Muslim West Africa, but in this case, where Islam followers were such a small percentage of the population, the amount of effort put into disrupting the Muslim population of Porto Novo was disproportionate to the overall population, as was the manner in which the French involved themselves with the building of the Friday mosque and the imam-selection process.

The particular administrators in Dahomey feared the potential power of the so-called dissidents, the Yoruba. Furthermore, the potential significance of a perceived connection to British Nigeria by this Muslim population was clearly a connection they felt was out of their control. None of the colonials placed in administrative positions in Dahomey were Islamic experts, and from the records, it is clear that when they did encounter the few Porto Novan elites who knew Arabic, it put them in a poor position with headquarters in Dakar, which expected the colonials to be able to address the larger issue of Pan-Islamism. Essentially, the colonials on the ground were ill-equipped and unprepared, and they feared being found out for the sub-par factotums that they really were.

The Muslim elites were the only real threat who could expose the inadequacies of these Frenchmen; and these colonials knew this to be the case. In addition, that fact that the Muslims were so spread out in all of the quarters of the city, with their own small mosques and schools, added to the evidence that there was no real Sufi connection, where they would have been able to keep an eye on just one or two Sufi leaders, which made their jobs more difficult. There is nowhere else in the AOF where a similar situation arose. Even in the more Islamized colonies, there is no record of a minority population's intra-city dispersal that gave the French this sort of challenge.

In trying to create policies that fit into both humanist and inherently racist categories, the French encountered something in West Africa that they had not previously faced in Algeria. Yet the experience in North Africa allowed them to deal with what they referred to as the "Berber Question" of colonial Morocco in the 1920s and 1930s. The events that contributed to Algeria's history, which shaped it as a colony, were directly related to the construction and implementation of colonial policy in the AOF. In June 1911, the International Commission of Muslim Affairs (ANSOM) was created by French colonial administrators. The increasing anti-Islamic sentiment among the French converged with the growing assumption that educating the masses was the only way to truly instill French nationalist ideas. One way in which this was justified was that Islam in French West Africa was seen as innately different from Islamic practices found in the north of Africa and in the east.²³² This general growing Western European anti-Islamic thought, exhibited between 1905 and 1914, came from larger issues between France and Germany and the final days

²³² Richard L. Roberts, *Litigants and Households: African Disputes and Colonial Courts in the French Soudan, 1895-1912* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005), 313.

of the Ottoman Empire.²³³ These issues of Pan-Islamism, and even Pan-Arabism, are addressed in the following chapter.

In 1910, Alain Quellien, a colonial administrator, was commissioned by Jean Morel, the Minister of Colonies in Paris, to write *La Politique Musulmane dans l'Afrique Occidentale Française*,²³⁴ a manuscript of French policies which presented the official colonial stance on Muslims in West Africa. As we know, from the very beginnings of their occupation of North and West Africa, the French characterized Muslims, not only by religion but by race, and further, that they also labeled the religions practitioners under either *Islam Maure* or *Islam Noir*. In his official reports about *Islam Noir*, Quellien suggests that black Muslims were not “authentic,” in that, though they had been culturally Islamized, they were not true believers or devout followers of the religion.²³⁵

While the French felt confident in their hold on the colony of Dahomey at the beginning of the twentieth century, the colonial office in Paris began to feel less confident that France was truly an Islamic power and a friend to Muslims around the world, as it had loudly proclaimed in the nineteenth century.²³⁶ At the *fin de siècle*, the Governor Generals in Dakar requested that the

²³³ Donald M. McKale, *War by Revolution: Germany and Great Britain in the Middle East in the Era of World War I* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1998).

²³⁴ Quellien, *La Politique Musulmane...*, 73. There is an ANB letter from Governor Roume to the Minister of Colonies dated March 17, 1906 that suggests that it was time to rethink the policy towards Islam now that the AOF was a federation of many colonies.

²³⁵ Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation ...*, 3-4. See also chapters three and four, particularly regarding Islamization and Arabization, in David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

²³⁶ David Robinson, “France as a Muslim power in West Africa” *Africa Today* 46, nos. 3-4 (1999): 105-127. “[Letter No. 790, Dated April 12, 1913, Signed by Ponty],” Carton AOF IV, Dossier 6, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France. Also “[Letter No. 2720, Dated Nov. 12, 1897],” Carton AOF IV, Dossier 2, CAOM, Aix en Provence France: this last letter is addressed to the Minister of Colonies and concerns the “impact of Pan-Islamism and the Ottoman

administrators placed throughout the colonies put directives into effect that would document the social and political behavior of the Muslim communities under their purview. In addition to writing the first comprehensive report on a *Politique Musulmane* for the AOF administration at the request of Governor General Roume in 1906, Robert Arnaud was actually the mastermind behind creating files on any questionable Muslim that was a subject.²³⁷ This process emerged from a wider pan-Islamic fear taking place in France's North African territories at the time. This idea of Pan-Islamism is addressed in the following chapter. However, the development of surveillance and information-gathering coincided with a strange form of paternalism by the individual administrators.

The French colonials decided they needed to “protect” Sub-Saharan African Muslims, the *Islam Noir* community,²³⁸ from the anti-colonial political movements of North African Muslims, whom the French regarded as both “legitimate Muslims” and a threat to their empire-building. The French considered these latter Muslims, which included the “Arab” population in Mauritania and parts of the French Soudan, as “authentic” as these were the followers of *Islam Maure*.²³⁹ The

Empire.” A third letter, found in the same dossier, dated April 14, 1897, from Louis Gustave Binger, concerns the same pan-Islamic issue.

²³⁷ See pages 51 and 52 in Robinson's *Paths of Accommodation* for more of this discussion.

²³⁸ Dahomey, *Journal officiel de la République du Dahomey* [Porto-Novo: s.n.], no. 24 (Decembre 15, 1908). An arrêté from this date is an instruction to the various administrators of the region to continue to use written laws where they existed (an idea that was the case in heavily Islamic regions) because it was easier than “traditional law,” and to let areas that have a majority of Africans who are Muslim stay that way. At the same time, however, it says that they should work to keep Islam from infiltrating and gaining converts among the “fetishist” population. This is later formalized with Ponty, who created a policy on race (*Politiques des Races*) and who wanted to undo some of the privileging of Muslims. This was unlike Colonel Combes, who wanted to create Muslims who adapted to French culture and had learned about both Islam and France in the schools they created called medersas, a version of the madrasa a type of Qur'anic school. For more on this see Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*...39-40.

²³⁹ There were various ideas behind the legitimacy, but the most prevalent interpretation by the French administrators on the ground relied on racialized notions and the differences between “civilized and authentic” practitioners of *Islam Maure* versus the “pseudo-legitimate Islam” that was “played at” by black Africans. See Bruce

colonial officers in Dahomey considered the south a non-Islamic region, with simply a few pockets of adepts; but even in these cases, French colonials saw their coastal subjects as followers of *Islam Noir*, which again, was not “legitimate” according to French categories of the religion.²⁴⁰ The French administrators considered Islam in these southern coastal regions as inauthentic, and that practitioners did not know the Qur’anic laws. Further, the French believed that followers of *Islam Noir* merely faked their way through their daily prayers, and that they still used gris-gris and other remnants of their true “fetishist” backgrounds.

At the moment just before the federation of the AOF, the commitment to *universal human rights* did exist on a theoretical level there, but it was never fully implemented. And if certain aspects of it were embraced, they were lost in a morass of racism, economic pragmatism, and the changing views in the metropole regarding who could become French at that point in time. Having just gone through the Dreyfus Affair, the French public was in the midst of an identity crisis.²⁴¹ For the secular and Republican French who promoted the ideas of equality, the rise of anti-Semitism that emerged from the idea of a Jewish military traitor turned the French public on its head. On top of incidents such as Emile Zola’s “*J’accuse!*,” which questioned the real values of French citizen, came the violent campaigns of Voulet and Chanoine who, after securing the areas

Hall’s arguments on ideas of lineage tracing: Bruce S. Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). However, in all of these cases, there was only consideration of black Muslims as they came up against what was considered Arab Muslims in Sahelian regions; there was no consideration of what made Islam “authentic” in areas where all of the population was black, and where most of the population did not consist of practicing Muslims. Whether they were “authentic” or not in the eyes of the French in Porto Novo, was not considered,

²⁴⁰ The way these were constructed by the French resulted in books such as Paul Marty’s 1916 book, *Études sur l’Islam maure*, as well as Captain P. J. André’s book, *L’Islam noir contribution à l’étude des confréries religieuses islamiques en Afrique Occidentale, suivie d’une étude sur l’Islam au Dahomey* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1924).

²⁴¹ Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize ...*, 42.

of modern-day Burkina Faso, went on a rampage killing thousands of Africans on their trek east into the Chad basin, the carnage of which the French people were also attempting to reconcile.²⁴² Colonial policies did, at times, actually reflect humanitarian Republican ideologies; however, these policies were too difficult to put into practice at such a distance from European France without better financial support, as is made clear in the recent academic works of Alice Conklin²⁴³ and Ann Laura Stoler.²⁴⁴

In reference to these two racialized categories of Islam, Robert Arnaud's 1912 report discusses how, early on, the French regarded Islam as offering benefits to *black* Africans, but that those benefits were replaced by the French implementation of education in schools.²⁴⁵ This was the primary approach the French took in their attempts to "civilize" the Africans in West Africa. The perceptions on education and secular ideology, as necessarily relating to both race and religion, developed at this time. For the purposes of discussing the *mission civilisatrice* in Porto Novo, I have focused on the role that educational systems played for Muslims in the section below. The colonial tendency after 1900 was to portray Islamic education as radical, in that there were traveling marabouts, particularly from British Nigeria, who threatened the passive ways of Islam

²⁴² Bertrand Taithe, *The Killer Trail: A Colonial Scandal in the Heart of Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). While this book is rather sensationalist in its perspective, the information in it is accurate and is something which has not been adequately covered before. Whether this is due to embarrassment, or the fact that the story was effectively whitewashed, even in 1899, is difficult to know.

²⁴³ Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize...*, 9, 164.

²⁴⁴ Ann Laura Stoler, "Racist Visions for the Twenty-first Century: On the Banal Force of the French Radical Right," in *Situating "Race" and Racisms in Space, Time, and Theory: Critical Essays for Activists and Scholars*, eds. Jo Anne Lee and John S. Lutz (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 114-137. See also Ann Laura Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in Twentieth-Century Colonial Cultures" *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (Nov. 1989): 643-660.

²⁴⁵ Robert Arnaud, *L'Islam et la Politique Musulmane dans l'Afrique Occidentale Française* (Paris: Comité de l'Afrique Française, 1912), 106. David Robinson discusses this, and the creation of the "J Files" in the colonial archives, in *Paths of Accommodation*, pp. 52-53.

as had been practiced in Dahomey. I show that Qur’anic schooling in Porto Novo functioned solely to teach the tenets of Islam and did not deter locals from also attending the colonial schools. Anti-Islamic rhetoric is reflected in Arnaud and others’ writings about maraboutic teaching as being “anti-French” in nature,²⁴⁶ but the archival evidence does not show this for Dahomey. Most absurd is Arnaud’s contention that black African Muslims did not have the sophistication to deal with theology, and were against all forms of progress.²⁴⁷

Many of the reasons motivating the decision to conduct and document surveillance of Muslims came from the French *mission civilisatrice*.²⁴⁸ We see that in the regions of French West Africa that were perceived as non-Islamic, French colonials were particularly encouraged to monitor and report on the foreign marabouts. The archival records, although mostly from the point of view of the oppressive hegemonic regime,²⁴⁹ provide space for the historian to do more than read them at face value. By going beyond the surface of the information, these records work as a catalyst to provoke multiple interpretations of this history from a variety of perspectives. This realization is significant for obtaining information about, and from, those who are often viewed as

²⁴⁶ Arnaud, 106.

²⁴⁷ Arnaud, 107.

²⁴⁸ Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize ...*; see also Denise Bouche, *Histoire de la colonisation française*, vol. 2, *Histoire De La Colonisation Française* (Paris: Fayard, 1991); Pernille Røge and Marion Leclair, "L'économie politique en France et les origines intellectuelles de 'La Mission Civilisatrice' en Afrique" *Dix-Huitième Siècle* 44, no. 1 (2012): 117; Amadou Lamine Faye, *Les mercenaires de la nouvelle mission civilisatrice* (Dakar, Senegal: Les Éditions du Panafricaniste, 2009); and Spencer D. Segalla, *The Moroccan Soul: French Education, Colonial Ethnology, and Muslim Resistance, 1912-1956* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

²⁴⁹ There were not records from every year in the time period for Dahomey and Porto Novo regarding Qur’anic schools; however, with the records available, it is possible to get a general sense of the numbers and locations of these schools, which is enough to provide a basis to make wider observations about Porto Novo’s Muslim communities.

having little to no agency during the colonial period.²⁵⁰ By employing a broader analysis towards archival holdings, and by utilizing a more holistic outlook, the larger intra-Muslim and intra-African dynamics within colonial Porto Novo begin to emerge.

Engaging the archival material discussing Qur'anic schools provides a lens for the larger context in which religion existed in colonial Dahomey. It was in the early 1900s when a number of Qur'anic schools began to emerge, where Muslims were generally confined to small worship groups along the physical boundaries of the quarters in which they lived. Small schools erupted with the ad-hoc mosques, becoming outlets for teaching opportunities and prayer by leaders who took on positions of authority, albeit with relatively little true power. Although not every one of the quarters at this time had its own distinct mosque, within each area, they did select a leader to whom decision-making authority was granted, and who was also the organizer the Qur'anic education in their quarter. From the late nineteenth century, the influence of a variety of Sufi teachings also made their way into Porto Novan Muslim communities. The Tijaniyya tariqa was generally followed, along with the core books that most Tijaniyya members were known to read, *Jawahir al-Ma'ana* and *Kitab rimah hizb al-rahim 'ala nuhur hizb al-rajim*,²⁵¹ which were being taught by most of the educators. The city still had only one imam, but the unification among coreligionists was not what it had once been in the city. This segregation between Muslims—whether from internal or external factors, and probably, both—in addition to the French penchant

²⁵⁰ Garth Andrew Myers, *Verandahs of Power: Colonialism and Space in Urban Africa* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 18-26.

²⁵¹ Carton 4E9, Dossier 22, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. December 17, 1906. Letter from Lieutenant Governor Marchal as a response to Governor General Roume's request to start keeping individual files of notable Muslims.

to privilege a single minority group among their colonial subjects, were the two root causes that set the stage for the politicization of Islam in early twentieth-century Porto Novo.

In order to better understand how the Qur'anic schools were perceived, it is relevant to see that they were the object of a larger project of surveillance, coinciding with the French intervention of the selection of the in imam within the city. These efforts, not only to practice aspects of the “civilizing mission” but also the attempt to answer “*the Muslim Question*,” emerged in Dahomey as early as 1907. Administrators in Porto Novo responded to Governor General Roume’s inquiry about the speed with which Islam was taking hold in Dahomey.²⁵² Because of the way that the French colonials in Porto Novo considered Muslims in the city at this time, and the fact that there was the small group of Brazilians whom they privileged over the larger group of Yoruba Muslims, because they had decided the Yoruba were dissidents because of their ties to British Nigeria and Sohingbe, these men appropriated Roume’s request for their own benefit and used it to address the situation of Qur'anic education. This included analyzing the number of Qur'anic schools, the instructors of these schools and their backgrounds, and most importantly, which schools and people supported their Paraiso party and its choice for imam, and which were to be labeled as problematic Yoruba Muslims favoring Nigerian influence.²⁵³

From the perspective of the ministry of colonies in France, and even those in Dakar, Dahomey was generally thought of as divided into northern and southern sections, and that these two separate Dahomey’s were made up of different types of Africans with wholly separate cultures. The north was regarded as similar to the French colonies in other parts of the Sahel, such

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ April 6, 1908, from Microfilm 14, MiOM 1183, p. 59, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France.

as Senegal, Mauritania, and the French Soudan, in that, although there were no large Islamic kingdoms, they were considered to have a significant Muslim dimension within their small overall populations. The south was considered non-Islamic and *fetishist*, more like southern Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and seen as having more in common culturally—and therefore socially and politically—to the colonies in equatorial Africa. The report that serves as the answer to the inquiry recognizes this unique situation of southern Dahomey, and the author mentions that the surveillance for the northern part of the colony had a much more thorough and detailed reporting system regarding Muslims than existed in the non-Muslim south. The overview given regarding Islam in the south suggested that, while Islam was more visible in Porto Novo than elsewhere in the coastal regions, the notable Muslims in the area were illiterate marabouts, for the most part from Lagos, who taught the Qur'an to the locals.²⁵⁴ What is also important to consider is that just before the author relayed his opinions about the marabouts from Lagos, he clarified that he was newly appointed to the region and suggested that his reports might be lacking in fully accurate information; he suggested that the Governor General also ought to review similar reports from the previous year. While this letter is unsigned, it appears to have been written by Marie Gaudart, who held the position of Governor of Dahomey in 1907, for less than a full year. The inexperience of colonial officials is something that is an element that additionally complicates our consideration of the transmission of information in that place and time. Thus the government documents that are often the only written records available to researchers can be full of misinformation provided by inexperienced

²⁵⁴ It is important to remember that many of the Qur'ans had been transliterated into a Yoruba form of *ajami* (where Arabic script is used to write an African language phonetically), and therefore even Muslims who could not read Arabic could have read the Qur'an in its transliterated form. See the letter in the Appendix written by Muslims on April 4, 1921, which I have translated to the best of my abilities, and include here for reference; Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

colonials. The turnover of colonial administrators in the AOF was high in general, and in colonial Dahomey, was even higher than elsewhere. The years from 1906 through 1909 were particularly rough for keeping governors in place in Dahomey, when six different men held the position of Lieutenant Governor of Dahomey in that three-year period.

The attempt at a unified *Politique Musulmane* was interlaced with the idea of surveillance, and of course, Arnaud's suggestion of keeping files on Muslim elites who were "suspect characters." Having watched Islam as a religion and culture both grow and proliferate in Porto Novo from the era of legitimate commerce on, in addition to orders from headquarters in Dakar and from Paris to place surveillance on the significant Muslim leaders and teachers, the local colonial officials may very well have felt a need to consolidate the Muslim population, which had become dispersed throughout the city once there was no longer a common mosque. This consolidation or containment of Muslims would then make monitoring, surveillance, and eventual control easier. As previously mentioned, unlike any other so-called non-Islamic city in the AOF (i.e., one where Islam was a minority religion), there was no *Zongo*,²⁵⁵ or region of the city where foreign Muslims converged to live. As is apparent, French policies initially acted as the catalyst for the dispersal of Muslims throughout the city. This led to the unique manner of organization amongst them, where they identified along ethnic and regional lines, and not simply as one large *umma* within the city, even one where Muslims constituted no more than a small percentage of the total population. Only by the early 1900s did there appear to be some sort of reorganization of the Muslim population, but this is seen via the perspective of the French at that time. It was the

²⁵⁵ Monique Bertrand, "Migrants Nigériens a l'Épreuve du Grand Accra (Ghana): Un Redéploiement Métropolitain des Figures Zabrama du Zongo" (conference paper presented at the Rapport d'étude du Programme 4 "Parcours citoyens et dimension trans-générationnelle de la migration," [Volet 2/2 – Ressortissants de la Boucle du Nigeret générations urbaines dans le Grand Accra], April 2011).

colonials who started this era of labeling Yoruba Muslims as “foreigners” (i.e., from British Nigeria, and supporters of Sohingbe’s accession to the throne) and deciding that the smaller Brazilian population was supportive of Toffa’s line, which supporting French rule. It was the creation of these two groups which made it easier to vilify one and place them under surveillance, while privileging the other.

The directives coming from Dakar’s headquarters of the AOF included identifying and reporting back to the colonial office the commercial, religious, and educational activities within the various Muslim communities. Additionally, the French colonial administrators called for descriptive observatory reports when those elements intersected with non-Muslim African society. Governor Fourn was acutely concerned with this intertwining of groups. Keeping track of this information was seen as particularly important in the colonies of Côte d’Ivoire and Dahomey because they were not categorized within the *Islamic World* by the Ministry of Colonies. Yet, fear of proselytism persisted among the administration, and one of the justifications for keeping files on marabouts and other notable Muslims was because these “Black Africans” needed *protection* from the “Arab” Muslim influence.

A letter written on April 11, 1906 from Governor General Roume advises Governor Liotard of Porto Novo and his Lieutenant Governor, Marchal, to take precautions against the marabouts, who had been propagating Islamic movements in West Africa. The letter also mentions that there had been a significant amount of propaganda against France by these marabouts, who were trying to profit from and extort the “ignorant black Africans.”²⁵⁶ Further, Roume suggests that the results

²⁵⁶ "[Report No. 25, To Dahomey and its Dependencies and the Protectorate of Porto Novo, Dated April 11, 1906]," Carton 4E9, Dossier 22, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

of these acts were to the detriment of the local Africans and to the work of the French (i.e., the “civilizing mission”) in their colonies. The root of the letter was his request that the governor and his men in Porto Novo create identity cards and files on the notable Muslims in Porto Novo, and that he, himself, was going to personally keep these files at his residence.²⁵⁷ Secondly, he requested that they keep track of the movements of these individuals within the colony, and that they should note when and if these men had traveled to neighboring British territories. Finally, the letter explains that this type of surveillance is only permitted against foreigners and not French subjects; yet, all Muslims were conveniently considered “foreigners” in the legal sense of the colonial structure, and therefore this type of profiling he hoped would help keep Dahomey out of all possible danger from potential Islamic propaganda against France.²⁵⁸

A confidential letter written on July 20, 1907 to the Lt. Governor of Dahomey from the *chef du cercle* in Zagnanado, a neighboring administrative area just north of Porto Novo, shows the early conceptions held by the French in this area, even before the Ponty’s 1913 order for surveillance.²⁵⁹ Reports from the region indicate that the majority of Muslims were Qadiriyya in tariqa membership and that their marabout received instructions from other elites, such as the known Amirou, Saif, and Mamandiebo, who ruled the territories from the mouth of the Niger. Further south, their direct local leader, Moussa d’Ilory (which likely meaning he was from Ilorin),

²⁵⁷ Carton 4E9, Dossier 23, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin: Entire file kept on Qassoumou, with a letter from Binger dated 1906. Also in Carton 4E9, Dossier 22, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin are letters from June 6, 1906 on marabout Wahaballah Moussa who, “when interrogated always claims to be on a mission from God.” Another letter, dated April 17, 1906, from a marabout named “Cairo,” who is “not anti-European and only wants to distribute gris-gris. His is no threat.”

²⁵⁸ "Report No. 25, From R. Roume to Dahomey and its Dependencies and the Protectorate of Porto Novo, on the DOSSO incident, and a request to please fill out files on marabouts ...],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 22, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

²⁵⁹ F. Frays, Écoles Coraniques No. 108, Microfilm 14, MiOM 1182, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France.

recognized his own importance to the Muslims in this area, but his file mentions that he knew that he could turn to his superior, Imam Mouteirou of Porto Novo, if he ever needed anything.²⁶⁰ The author who interpreted the files and who reported to Marchal did not understand Islam as it was practiced in the region, which is clear when this person incorrectly observed that it spread into this area “by transient Hausa colporteurs or the few al Hajjis who came through in their caravans.”²⁶¹ Marchal was not known for being very well-informed about Islam, and this letter from a *commandant du cercle* of one who has attempted to impress his superior, but who himself was ill-informed. In this letter the author mentions that “pagan” black Africans are recruited into Islam as followers in a fairly easy manner.²⁶² The paternalistic attitude is elucidated in the author’s description, when he says that the “blacks are like children, born without much intelligence and having practiced as fetishists for so long, that Islam appeals to their morality.”

The French colonials, and even the eventual ethnographers who reify these ideas of black Africans and the idea that they are being “suckered-into” Islam, give no agency to the Africans, who might have accepted the religion for themselves for any number of reasons. For example, they might have been chosen to believe in something different, and its transference for personal reasons, or that it could potentially facilitate trade with other Muslims between a porous border, are just two ideas that may have caused conversion. Another idea, namely, that Islam had been practiced in the region for a good period of time, also seems to have been ignored. Additionally, there is no mention about the lack of a major missionary effort by the French in this area, probably because

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ If he had mentioned the Wangara caravans, this would have been a somewhat more reasonable assumption. See Brégand, *Commerce caravanier et relations sociales*

²⁶² F. Frays, Écoles Coraniques No. 108, Microfilm 14, MiOM 1182, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France.

of French Republican ideas about its civilizing mission, which was not to incorporate the Catholic Church. All of these ideas are missing in the discussions about Africans taking Islam as their faith in a significant manner in certain areas.

Even further, there is no recognition that one could practice a religion in the way it was locally interpreted, and that this could be just as authentic as its practice in its place of origin. While the idea of religions adapting to, and working with the cultures that incorporate them is a relatively new understanding of religious consciousness by academics, people observing the ways in which religion, particularly Christianity and Islam, took hold in various areas have observed differences in practice; however, whether they consciously recognized what was going on in recorded observations or not is another story. When we realize that in the same era, across other parts of Africa, the “Ethiopianization of Christianity” (i.e., making Christianity something inherently African) was a movement from Malawi with John Chilimbwe²⁶³ to the Congo with Simon Kimbangu.²⁶⁴ The idea that Islam was not observed in the same manner can only be attributed to the fact that French policies and ideologies had pigeonholed it into a monolithic form, incapable of any real flexibility. Yet, its malleability was visible to its practitioners in Porto Novo and Dahomey, and throughout Africa, as well as throughout the world.

²⁶³ John Chilembwe, *A Plea for Africa*, [pamphlet, 190?]. I accessed this while working on the private library of Carter G. Woodson, Emory University, 2005. See also George Shepperson and Thomas Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915* (Edinburgh, UK: The University Press, 1987).

²⁶⁴ Shannen Hill, “Minkisi do not die: BaKongo Cosmology in the Christian ritual of Simon Kimbangu and Simon Mpadi” in *Undressing Religion: Commitment and Conversion from a Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. Linda B. Arthur (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000), 25-43. See also volumes 1-3 of Serge Diantantu, *Simon Kimbangu* (Amfreville-la-Mivoie, France: Mandala, 2010).

The Imamate in Question and Qur'anic Schools

General surveillance acquired a particularly unique form in Porto Novo. As the French had already begun to label certain Muslim communities as foreigners based on their support of Sohingbe, they solidified their concept of a divided Muslim population via the Qur'anic schools, which came to exist in each of the quarters based upon the inhabitants' support for the future imam. While there seemed to have been a general understanding that the current imam was allowed to choose his successor among most Muslims prior to this era, with colonial rule disrupting norms in most aspects of life, the involvement in imam selection simply became another way to impact the society and keep the divide-and-conquer mentality in place. It was advantageous to the French if Muslims quarreled with each other, because that left no time for them to unite their resources and revolt against them. While there was certainly a history of the French getting involved in large Islamic areas with so-called Muslim "troublemakers," such as Amadu Bamba, there do not seem to be other accounts of French colonials specifically creating a division among a minority religious population in order to keep tensions high between coreligionists, as happened with the Muslims of Porto Novo.

From the 1880s to the 1910s, the role of neighborhoods or quarters is essential to understanding the development of religions in this colonial city. One way of understanding this is by looking at the geography and organization of these quarters. Over time, the city was settled by people from the neighboring regions and settlement in areas of the city depended upon temporal and ethnic factors. When the French destroyed the central mosque, Muslims were now integrated into a variety of the city's quarters then defining themselves as Nago (Yoruba), Goun, Hausa, or "Togolese," rather than by their religion. Yet, these same individuals and families did not give up

their Islamic faith, but simply adapted their practice of it to fit the new geographical definitions. While a number of small mosques began to be built throughout the city, what often went along with those new structures were Qur'anic schools. In addition, sometimes these schools were built to function without an affiliated mosque at all.

The emergence of these schools occurred slowly over time. Many of them were established and were attended by families with particular agendas, supporting one side of the Yoruba versus Brazilian division or the other. Tracking the schools via location, as well as by teacher and student information, allows for a greater understanding of the meta-position of this divide.²⁶⁵ While quarters were broken down ethnically, as time passed and Porto Novo Muslims felt the pressure to choose a side, the ethnic elements became less critical. In its place, the politicized aspect of Islam in the city became the dominant issue. At first, before the politicization of the city regions, it is clear that there was an attempt for ethnic groups to remain within general boundaries, even if they moved to a different quarter within that larger area after a length of time. For example, the Goun and the original residents of the modern kingdom of Hogbonou built up the neighborhood around the King's palace in the south-eastern area, just north of the lagoon. The Nago or Yoruba settlers, who were in the region earlier than the Goun and the Alladan descendants, but who had not founded a kingdom, tended to establish their quarters in the central region, north of the lagoon, and then expanded mostly northward over time, but a bit west also. The Hausa traders, as well as those who were referred to as Hausa because of their involvement with the French in the Madagascar campaign and later in World War I, tended to live close to the barracks in the north-

²⁶⁵ “[Letter from February 20, 1914],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 20, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. In all, there were 22 quarters, with 17 mosques and 15 schools teaching a total of 421 students according to the tally of this report.

central region of the city, just north of the Nago quarters. In the fourth quadrant were the newcomers, and they established their area in the western part of the city, closer to Lake Denham, but also just north of the lagoon. This region was populated by Europeans, first the factory owners and merchants who were French, German, and British, but later by the French colonial administrators. The other cultural component making up this southwest quadrant was the Brazilians. This makes sense on many levels, including the fact that the Brazilians saw themselves as “better” than the Africans, who had never traveled the Atlantic and who they felt were less cosmopolitan. In addition, the Brazilians also dressed like Europeans, spoke a European language, and were privileged by French colonials.

A handwritten note stuck to the back of Guillaume de Gentile’s report in the Porto Novo archives mentions Governor General Clozel’s various requests for information. Clozel’s concern with Pan-Islamism was at an all-time high during the period of the Great War. The note appears to be written by Gaudart, who was the Acting Governor of Dahomey from March to September 1908. It explained that after having interviewed one of the Qur’anic school instructors, Mama Djema, intervened and vouched for the man of whom the French were unsure. Djema was considered both a friend to the French over the years, and a rather important Muslim elite, yet somehow, he was the only notable Muslim to be placed, literally, into the neutral category within the archival documentation on the Brazilians and the Yoruba.²⁶⁶ The information contained in the note articulates that Djema was the head of the Qur’anic school in the Ahounticome quarter, and

²⁶⁶ “[Letter from February 20, 1914],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 20, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. This letter reports the Qur’anic schools, their quarters, number of students, and if there are mosques there. In this particular report, Mama Djema had only 11 students and no mosque in his quarter of Ahounticome.

was born in Ilorin (part of the British protectorate of Nigeria) to his father,²⁶⁷ Moussa, and his mother, Assia, in 1877.²⁶⁸ According to the note, Mama Djema arrived in Porto Novo in 1902 and began his career as a Qur'anic school instructor in 1905.²⁶⁹ Even in these early years, instructors were supposed to get permission from the French before opening a Qur'anic school, no matter the size. The central idea of the document shows a line of questioning where essentially Djema admitted that he had not received permission from the administration to open his school, but that he had not thought it necessary since he had received permission from the imam. The imam at the time was Qassoumou,²⁷⁰ who was the leader of all the Muslims in Porto Novo, who Mama Djema mentioned to the administrator was also supportive of the French. Furthermore, in answering the questions, Djema recognized that France had sole political and administrative authority and made

²⁶⁷ "[Report from de Gentile, dated May 12, 1917]," Carton 4E9, Dossier 20, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. This letter is written as a direct response to a letter from May 4, 1917 (Carton 4E9, Dossier 14, ANB). While the letter by de Gentile is dated 1917, the personal handwritten note that is signed by Gaudart must have been something that he came across while in Porto Novo, since we know that Gaudart was only there for about six months in 1908. However, clearly, de Gentile follows up this information as a lead and goes looking for Mama Djema, who is known to be an instructor at an undocumented Qur'anic school, but who is still working within the French law. In a document within the same file there is a vague request to find out how many other Qur'anic schools existed in Porto Novo that the French administrators might not be aware of. Initial reports came in as early as March 21, 1906, with M. Arnaud's report out of Gorée, on surveillance of Muslims in the entirety of the AOF (Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, ANB). Additionally, this is likely part of the larger movement that was created by Governor General William Ponty in Dakar. He circulated an official and confidential three page document on January 15, 1913 requiring all of his administrators to follow a systematic and regulated pattern for the surveillance of Islam, and for recording information on Islamic proselytism throughout AOF (Carton 4E9, Dossier 11, Cabinet circulation No. 6, ANB). The Ahounticome quarter in the early twentieth century was known as one of the bigger Yoruba quarters.

²⁶⁸ De Gentile, May 12, 1917, Carton 4E9, Dossier 20, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

²⁶⁹ Although this note says 1905, Mama Djema is listed as the instructor of the Attake quarter's Qur'anic school in the 1904 report, which likely means he moved to the Ahounticome school the following year, in 1905, and this is what the note is referring to. See unsigned "1904 report on *Écoles coranique*," Carton 4E11, Dossier 5, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

²⁷⁰ This is despite the fact that the successor, named by Qassoumou just a few years later, is seen by the French as an enemy and on the side of the dissident Yoruba Muslim population.

sure to mention that despite having been born in Ilorin, which made him a French, and not a British, subject. It is apparent that he was also under the impression that the colonial government was unconcerned with religious matters, referring to the secular Republican rhetoric that the colonials used.²⁷¹ In this same vein, the report mentions Ignacio Paraiso's loyalty to Djema, which is where his neutrality regarding the schism becomes apparent.

In this particular case, Djema had 16 students altogether—thirteen boys and three girls—all of whom were between the ages of seven and fifteen.²⁷² The number of students enrolled is on the small side when we compare it to the other Qur'anic schools in Porto Novo at that time. According to the report, all of the students were either Nagos or Gambari (the term for Hausa used by the Goun and the Brazilians), and were definitely “native sons,” meaning that they were born in Porto Novo.²⁷³ In the official report, located in the same folder as the handwritten notes on Mama Djema, there is another document, unsigned, which mentions that there is a Qur'anic school in the Sadognon quarter that was exclusively Gambari, where the sons of Chief Seriki Djiffa attended. By his name, we know that the teacher was clearly Hausa, which were often grouped with the Yoruba, and not with the Brazilian populations. At this time in Sadognon, the Qur'anic school was the newest building in the neighborhood, opening in 1915. It had been funded by

²⁷¹ De Gentile, May 12, 1917, Carton 4E9, Dossier 20, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. This is significant because of his Ilorin origins. The French administrators were frequently trying to exile British subjects, often with the help of the British in Lagos.

²⁷² In Letter No. 623, dated April 28, 1917, it asks about the two Muslim groups in Porto Novo, including: the approximate number of followers for each group; where the principal chiefs are from; what type of influence they have; Qur'anic schools; and the names of indigenous individuals who have made the Hajj.

²⁷³ De Gentile, May 12, 1917, Carton 4E9, Dossier 20, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

Sohingbe. There were 20 students at the time of the report under Director Alpha Gambari, who was also a “Muslim of status,” according to the colonials.²⁷⁴

The assembly known as either the Saroukou or Mouteirou group, which were the names of the Alfa naibi and the imam respectively, the one considered by the French administration as the “dissident faction” of Porto Novo’s Muslim community. Within the quarters where the majority of this group lived, the schools emerged in center city south of, but also including, Sadognon, which was Sohingbe’s home quarter. The Qur’anic school in the Zebou Aga quarter, which was one of the first quarters settled by Yoruba Muslims, was run by Alfa Bello, who was Qassoumou’s son. His naibi was a man named Youssef, who was the one who did most of the teaching. He supported Mouteirou over Lawani, simply because he was a Yoruba merchant who had had conflicts with the Brazilian population, utilized so well by the French.

The Togo quarter, also called Qassoukome, had two Qur’anic schools, both of which supported the Yoruba faction. The larger of the two schools was run by imam Saroukou, although he himself provided little instruction due to his duties as imam. Alfa Ahiou founded both schools, and during the period when Saroukou was imam, Ahmadou Fazazi was the naibi providing the instruction. In Sadognon, there were two schools, a small one for supporters of Lawani, and the main, large one, where a man named Alarou, who was the son of Mama Djema, directed it. Djema was a notable Muslim from a region outside Porto Novo, for whom the French had great respect, although none of the documents explain exactly why. Another quarter with a Qur’anic school and

²⁷⁴ Ibid. It is likely that these sons of Seriki Djiffa attended the Yoruba school in Sadognon, as the Hausa were not a large ethnic population.

with members who supported the Yoruba/Saroukou side was Avassa, which was a notably poor quarter unlike the majority of Yoruba neighborhoods. The teacher of the Avassa Qur'anic school was named Youssoufou, who was in his late teens. In the Lokossa quarter, which was a large Yoruba quarter, a student of Alfa Ataki named Alfa Kaffo instructed the students. The Attake quarter was another unique situation, for the school there claimed to have families on both sides.

Some reports mention their support of Qassoumou and Lawani, while others describe their support of Saroukou and Mouteirou. In these reports, there is a focus on information about the Qur'anic schooling situation in Porto Novo, even though these reports were part of the larger *Politique Musulmane* and were designed by the Governor General to continue surveillance decrees in order to keep track of potentially radical or threatening marabouts. However, for the southern Dahomean administrators, the information in question was clearly used and adjusted to fit another purpose, as well, which was why many Porto Novan Muslims supported one imam over any other.

In the 1910s, the documentation shows there were fewer quarters of Lawani supporters than quarters with Mouteirou supporters. In the Hlinkome section of the Fiekome Quarter in the east-central section of the city center, the instructor of the Qur'anic school, Alfa Ali Balogoun, despite having a Yoruba name, was a Brazilian in terms of his Porto Novan identity. In the Sadognon quarter, which was just a bit north from the city center, there was a small Qur'anic school of Lawani supporters, but the larger school in the this quarter was for Mouteirou, which makes sense considering that this quarter was the home of Sohingbe, and his family still occupied much of it. In a report by Fourn in 1921, he discusses that Inspector Vidal allowed a number of

Qur'anic schools to function under specific teachers, such as Mama Djema and Mama Gambari, even though they were both Nigerians.²⁷⁵

While there are many subcategories within the historiography that deserve attention, the ways in which scholars have approached Muslim colonial policies are further explained via the idea of *mise en valeur*. This came about as French assimilationist policies failed in the racialized and economically deprived colonies. The rhetoric of assimilation began to crumble around the realities of how to keep black Africans from becoming French. Turning peasants into Frenchmen within the AOF was impossible. The brown skin of the rural Frenchman could be metaphorically and physically washed away, but this was not the case with the African.²⁷⁶

Race, as well as religion, was a major factor in reframing French colonial policies. In the years leading up to World War I, *assimilationist* tactics that were encouraged by the French colonials turned into *associationist* ones. The reports and writings of French colonial administrators who were directly involved in decision-making in North and West Africa, as well as the scholarship examining this information, affects how we see the history of Porto Novo, especially because of the role that Paul Marty played in the colonial administrations and their Islamic policies. However, it is the ideas surrounding religious and racial differences that are viewed as the essential factors when these colonial policies were determined. Early in the French

²⁷⁵ “[Report from Fourn to Governor General, Dated 1921],” Carton 1E8, Dossier 6, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

²⁷⁶ Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976). When I spoke with Prof. Weber at a conference shortly before he died, I mentioned that I was working on the idea of modernization through a French perspective in Africa around the same era as his book. I told him that I felt the visual obstacle of skin color, particularly with Muslims who had previously been put on a random hierarchy of civilization by the French of being closer to the civilized European Christians, was viewed as a similar issue as the rural versus urban dichotomy of France. He was supportive of me exploring the idea further. Also, see Caroline Ford, “Peasants into Frenchmen: Thirty Years After” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 27, no. 2 (2009): 84-93.

occupation of Africa, various colonial officials had different ideas and approaches as to how best to govern with their North African protectorates and West African colonies. But a generation of colonialism later, as racism had continued to grow during the interwar period, what originally were inherently bad and ineffective policies became much more sinister in their implementation.²⁷⁷

When the AOF consolidated into a true federation in 1904, a new process of its administration came with it. The Governor General of all the colonies within the federation was seated in Dakar and reported to the Minister of Colonies in Paris. Each colony had a Lieutenant Governor, and various administrators below him held the titles of *chefs du cercle* or *chefs des cantons*. The new federation coincided with the transition from *assimilation* to *association*; whether it was yet formalized at that point in time or not, it was certainly practiced on the ground. One might ask whether this change was a result of viewing mistakes made in Algeria, or whether the federation was perceived as needing a remodeling. I would argue that the French made changes after learning from mistakes made in the north, but to ignore the increasing awareness of race and what it meant for French citizenship as a major consideration in colonial policy, circumvents an obvious obstacle that the French imperialists were forced to embrace. Most scholars have addressed this in various ways,²⁷⁸ but none have turned to an examination of the creation of the

²⁷⁷ Georges Hardy, *Histoire De La Colonisation Française*, 5. ed. (Paris: Librairie Larose, 1928): “...la colonization française, en réalité, et malgré l’inévitable erreurs, les a sauvées, et elle entreprend aujourd’hui l’augmentation leur valeur d’humanité. Il n’est pas en français de bonne foi qui ne puisse rallier à ce programme” (p.149).

²⁷⁸ David Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation...*; P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Martin Thomas, *The French Empire between the Wars: Imperialism, Politics and Society* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2005), 34; Gregory Mann, “Locating Colonial Histories: Between France and West Africa,” *American Historical Review* 110, no. 2 (2005): 409-34; Raymond Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); George Trumball IV, *An Empire of Facts: Colonial Power, Cultural Knowledge and Islam in Algeria, 1870–1914* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

military force, the *Tirailleurs Haoussas*. The formation of this force was based upon ideas of inherent military aptitude and racial misrecognition. It is this specialized military group which is the focus of the next chapter.

4 MISE EN VALEUR AND THE TIRAILLEURS HAOUSSAS

We have in hand a letter from a native of Dahomey, former combatant who did his legal “duty” in the war. Some extracts from this letter will show you how the “batoala”¹ are protected and in what manner our colonial administrators fabricate the native loyalty which decorate all the official reports and which feed the articles of whatever size by the Regismansets and the Hausers.² ‘In 1915,’ says the letter, ‘At the moment of the forced recruitment ordered by Mr. Noufflard, Governor of Dahomey, my village was pillaged and burned by the agents of the police and the military club guards. In the course of these lootings and burnings, all that I possessed in the way of goods was taken from me. Nevertheless, I was enlisted by force, and without paying any attention to this heinous outrage of which I was the victim, I did my duty at the French front. I was wounded at Aisne. ‘Now that the war is ended, I am going to return to my country, without home and without resources. ‘Here are the names of friends living in the same neighborhood as me and who were enlisted by force, the same day as me, and whose houses were looted and burned. ‘Many are still the victims of Governor Noufflard’s such exploits, but I do not know their names to tell them to you today....’²⁷⁹

This quote refers to the African soldiers who fought on behalf of the French cause, historically considered volunteer recruits. In many cases taking up arms for the colonizer was far from a choice for these men. The quote above is from Hồ Chí Minh’s pamphlet, *Le Procès de la Colonisation Française*. While it gives the African perspective, the archival record from the perspective of the colonials reflects a similar picture. In 1915, when the administration put extreme pressure on local Africans to serve during World War I, there was still opposition to recruitment and despite offers to compensate chiefs there were reports of Africans “resisting their local chiefs’

²⁷⁹ Hồ Chí Minh, *Le procès de la colonisation française. Première série, Première série* (Paris: Libr. du travail, 1925), chapter one, p. 6-7. This letter that Minh references is found in the ANB, Porto Novo, Republic du Benin. Carton 1E16, Dossier #3, “[Monthly report by Lieutenant Governor Noufflard, Dated September 1915].”

requests,” and there were, “reports that they often fled to Nigeria to avoid conscription.”²⁸⁰ Those who fled into the opacity of the French and British border were mostly referred to in the archives as Yoruba, Muslims, or Yoruba Muslims.

Muslims in Porto Novo became one of the first groups to identify as a political community in addition to recognition by ethnic and religious labels. As discussed in chapter three, French surveillance of Muslim communities often took the form of detailed reports on Qur’anic schools which worked as one way to keep track of them and reinforce divisions among the various quarters of the city of Porto Novo. The French also privileged Brazilian Muslims, while labeling the Yoruba Muslim population as tools of the British, and progenitors of radical Pan-Islamic movements. While Pan-Islamism from a global view is addressed in the following chapter, a specific component of the *mise en valeur* via mandatory military service is the focus of the pages below and is an example of the conflicting colonial practices which transformed from assimilation to association.

The creation of a small military force in Dahomey by the French on the eve of colonialism became a way both literally and figuratively entrench Africans. The *Tirailleurs Haoussas* was a colonial army assembled specifically in Dahomey. Little, if anything regarding this special force is addressed within the larger field of African colonial conscripts.²⁸¹ How the *Tirailleurs Haoussas*

²⁸⁰ “[Monthly report by Lieutenant Governor Noufflard, Dated September 1915],” Carton 1E16, Dossier #3, ANB, Porto Novo, Republic du Benin.

²⁸¹ Aside from the texts mentioned in the literature review there are many studies on the African conscript during the colonial era and earlier with no reference to the *Tirailleurs Haoussas*. See the following works on this subject as just an example of the vast literature available on African soldiers in general. Myron J. Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960*. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991), Jan-Bart Gewald, *Colonial Warfare: Hehe and World War One, the Wars besides Maji Maji in South-Western Tanzania* (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2005); Timothy J. Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1923-80* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011); Timothy Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File:*

came to be is part of a larger story of French maritime acts, especially because of France's weak military numbers at the time they decided to conquer Madagascar in the late 1890s. Aside from obvious problems with recruiting and training West Africans to fight in colonial campaigns in the Indian Ocean, other components of the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* that emerged included issues of desertion, payment of wages, and some forms of resistance to the French colonials. The other aspects of how the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* factor into other questions considered in this dissertation include the force's unique geographical situation (as they bordered the French and British territories), and the fluidity of the borders, which provided options for desertion unlike anywhere else in the AOF.

Most historians of Africa have heard of the French colonial military force comprised of Africans called the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*, or in British colonial history, regiments such as the West Africa Frontier Force and Governor Glover's Hausa Force of Lagos and the Gold Coast. Yet, the military force called the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* is rarely mentioned in the literature. At the center of this military force is both a trans-oceanic and intra-African story. The *Tirailleurs Haoussas* was created specifically to aid General Alfred Dodds in the battle against the Dahomey Kingdom and to fight in the French wars of conquest in Madagascar in the 1890s. Later, these soldiers were used within West Africa, fighting on behalf of their oppressors in World War I.²⁸² Unique to the more common story of Africans being conscripted by Europeans to fight European battles from the 1850s

Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964 (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999); David Killingray and Martin Plaut, *Fighting for Britain African Soldiers in the Second World War* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: James Currey, 2010); Anthony Clayton and David Killingray, *Khaki and Blue Military and Police in British Colonial Africa* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1989); Joe Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of the First World War* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999).

²⁸² Jean Darcy, *Cent années de rivalité coloniale - L'affaire de Madagascar* (Paris: Perrin, 1908); Leonce Grandin, *Les Français à Madagascar* (Paris: R. Haton, 1896).

onward is that, in this particular case, there was a trans-European factor. The French illegally conducted some of their most serious and successful recruitment efforts in the British territories of Ibadan and Abeokuta, in what is today southwestern Nigeria. Understanding the nuances behind the creation and use of this African military force in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries allows historians to consider broader notions of identity, power, and space in the colonial historical imaginary. Through a deeper consideration, we can even surmise how Africans used their collective and individual knowledge of intra-European relations to manipulate and hinder colonial momentum.

At the intersection of French and British colonial borders in West Africa in the Bight of Benin, a unique African military force emerged in comparison to the other European-created African militaries of the time. Furthermore, the commercial component in the creation of this force in its early years was economically significant, as it was designed in part to defend the coastline on behalf of the European commercial houses, such as Les Frères Regis out of Marseilles, and the British firm of John Holt & Company of Liverpool. Much of the evidence was lost due to the precarious nature of their creation and demise. However, from the sources that do still exist, we can begin to understand the implications of this particular force of African soldiers.

The *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* were the most numerous and well-known colonial forces in African history, active from the 1850s through World War II. Initially made up of Africans from the Senegalo-Mauritanian area, eventually the term *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* was applied to all African military forces fashioned by French colonial powers throughout French West Africa, despite their non-Senegalese composition. Myron Echenberg writes about the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*, particularly in the Sahel regions of French West Africa in his 1991 work, *Colonial Conscripts:*

*The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960.*²⁸³ Further, the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* from Mali are the subject of Gregory Mann's article, "Locating Colonial Histories," which documents African soldiers in World War II as part of a diaspora of Africans throughout the south of France both during and after the war.²⁸⁴ Nancy Lawler's work on the Ivoirian companies of *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* critically canvasses the experiences of African soldiers, especially their legacies after returning home from World War II, and their spending the rest of their lives trying to reintegrate into society. Yet, there are no specific studies of the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* in Dahomey, let alone the uniquely different and specially named *Tirailleurs Haoussas* force which came from this region. In French Equatorial Africa, a force similar to the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* existed for a brief period. They were called the *Tirailleurs Gabonais*, which incorporated Africans from the present-day Congo Republic, Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, and Gabon.

The French colonial administration considered certain of its North and West African colonies part of the broader Muslim world, and frequently this religion was the preferred one among the soldiers for a number of reasons that are addressed in the general scholarship. As early as the 1850s, the French colonial administration had experiences to draw upon from Algeria and from what was then the Four Communes of Senegal. From the African populations in these occupied areas, the French formed armies which fought on their behalf, and for their imperial goals.²⁸⁵ Originally, most *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* were ethnically Oualof and Serer, and both of these groups predominantly practiced Islam. In these early years, the French influence in North Africa,

²⁸³ Myron J. Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960* (Portsmouth: Heinemann; London: Currey, 1991).

²⁸⁴ Mann, "Locating Colonial Histories"

²⁸⁵ Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam in West Africa, 1860-1960* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 31.

and then West Africa, was limited to regions inhabited by a Muslim majority. However, France did not regard the areas in the Bight of Benin as “Islamic” as they did in modern-day Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, and other regions of the Sahel. Dahomey, a mostly forested region, was a colony whose residents, particularly in the south where the majority of the inhabitants lived, practiced what are today termed as *African Traditional Religions*, with a few having been converted to Catholicism. Yet during the colonial period, the political and religious aspects of the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* became significant, particularly in the lagoon areas of Porto Novo.

African soldiers from Algeria were the first to come to the coast of Porto Novo in the 1880s. European powers utilizing the North Africans was significant for a number of reasons. First, Europeans preferred training and leading Muslim soldiers over what they considered “pagan” Africans, as some of the ethnic groups that Europeans found “inherently militaristic” also shared the religion of Islam. Also, Islam was a religion in the nineteenth century that was more respected by Europeans than “fetishist” practices of “Black Africa.”²⁸⁶ As mentioned above, the French made a distinction between *Islam Maure* and *Islam Noire*, the former having been accepted with a legitimacy that the latter never did. What prevailed in Dahomey, however, where Islam was a minority religion, and with how the French viewed those Africans who adhered to the faith as not “real Muslims,” was the construction of a military force based upon a British cultural fabrication of Hausa ethnicity; militarization came about as a result of the Fulani jihads that swept across West Africa over the course of the nineteenth century. The components of identity on which these concepts were founded were precarious to say the least, but one aspect that remained in the European consciousness was that Muslims made good soldiers.

²⁸⁶ Arnaud, *L’Islam et la Politique Musulmane* ..., 60-61, 348.

The archival records do not contain a single reference to the decision on how the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* were named, but I posit here that the name was also conscripted from the Hausa Force created by Governor Glover in the neighboring British colony of Lagos.²⁸⁷ Governor John Glover of the Lagos colony developed his Hausa Force after using former Hausa slaves living in exile in Lagos as porters on an exploratory campaign to the interior of Nigeria in the 1850s. With Porto Novo's close proximity to Lagos, it is possible that the French administrators in the region appropriated the familiar term. Further it is conceivable that they did so without ever having had the intention that their own "Hausa Force" would be an ethnically distinct military unit based on a particular ethnic group, as Glover had consciously chosen to do. In the 1870s, it was extremely likely that the French in the region encountered Glover's force, which not only crossed colonial borders but also actually helped the British establish them.²⁸⁸ The role of the Lagos Hausa Force in assisting the British to conquer the Asante on the Gold Coast in the 1870s was a major moment in European conquest.

In the nineteenth century, the Gold Coast was a contentious territory for the French and Germans in the area, although the British had the deepest hold on it by this point. Glover's Hausa Force moved east from Lagos, literally crossing through the land that would later become the

²⁸⁷ Flora L. Shaw, *A Tropical Dependency: An Outline of the Ancient History of the Western Soudan with an Account of the Modern Settlement of Northern Nigeria* (London: James Nisbet and Co. Ltd., 1905). Here, Lady Lugard (Shaw) mentions that "... in the year 1897, to a decision on the part of the British Government to raise a local military force, of which the primary duty should be the defence [sic], under proper control, of the inland frontiers of the British settlements. It was decided to raise this force from native Haussa material, to be officered by picked white officers selected from the regular army for the purpose" (p. 361). Thus, even at the turn of the century, it was not questioned *why* they should choose the Hausa; it was simply accepted as the best possible choice.

²⁸⁸ For more information here, review the Gold Coast campaign of 1870s. The British also managed to station their Hausa forces along the coast at Badagry and Ouidah, where the French would have been in contact with them. See "[147/1 Government House Memorandum, Dated July 1, 1863]," Colonial Office Reports, British National Archives.

colonies of Dahomey and Togo, on its way to the Gold Coast as part of the Asante campaign. In creating the Hausa Force, Glover likely reasoned that the cavalry-trained Hausa would be good soldiers. What he did not consider was that those Hausa, who had been enslaved and ended up living in Lagos after the jihad of Uthman dan Fodio,²⁸⁹ were probably not from the class of society who would know how to handle horses. In any case, Glover succeeded in recruiting and training his own Hausa Force, most likely because they were outsiders living in Lagos, who would have benefitted from the British providing them housing and income, which legitimized them in a way that they would not have been by local African populations of Lagos who were mainly Yoruba speakers.

Even if the Hausa of Glover's military fit the stereotype that Hausa were excellent horsemen, the futility of Glover trying to capitalize on this endeavor cannot be overstated. He trained and utilized these forces in areas that were uninhabitable for horses because of tsetse fly and trypanosomiasis. At least when the French colonial Dahomey used the rhetoric of the Hausa as "terrific horsemen," it made some amount of sense, since unlike elsewhere along the Slave Coast, this was an area geographically known as the *Benin Gap* which had a relatively high survival rate for horses and cattle, since it was drier, and therefore not as hospitable to tsetse flies as the surrounding areas. Yet when Glover decided to train his military in the lagoons and coastal areas of the Bight of Benin, it is clear that he had not reflected upon the deathtrap that it would be for the

²⁸⁹ Uthman dan Fodio, with the help of his daughter Nana Asma'u, led the Fulani jihad of 1804 against the Hausa emirs and turned it into the Sokoto Caliphate which lasted for almost a century before falling under British control. For more on this jihad, see the classic study by Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate* (Harlow: Longmans, 1967); as well as the work, Jean Boyd, *The Caliph's Sister: Nana Asma'u, 1793-1865, Teacher, Poet, and Islamic Leader* (London, England: F. Cass, 1989).

horses, which he was then forced to replace on a regular basis.

In addition to the above mentioned physical obstacles, it is necessary to elucidate the history of the Hausa peoples in Dahomey in order to get a greater sense of the unorthodox choice that the French made in naming a military force after them. The Hausa were always, and still are, a minority ethnic group in Dahomey in general, but particularly in southern Dahomey. The Hausa traders who moved to the area were a small population, even from the earliest times. The few Hausa communities in Porto Novo were members of the larger kola-trade caravans coming south from Kano, of whom some ventured off-route at Nikki and headed due south, rather than continuing southwest to modern-day Ghana. By the nineteenth century, the Hausa population of Porto Novo settled at this transshipment point, having come from the interior, but they did not make up a noteworthy portion of the population. Some of the Muslim returnees from Bahia, Brazil were also Hausa ethnically, but as we will see, they identified themselves as Brazilian.²⁹⁰

General Dodds was famous for his 1893 campaign against Behanzin, the last king of the Dahomey Kingdom, where he relied upon African soldiers from Algeria, *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*, and early *Tirailleurs Haoussas* regiments. Dodds even conscripted some of King Toffa's *laris* for the campaign.²⁹¹ After what was labeled a win for French imperial advancement, Dodds immediately traveled to Paris and requested financial backing from the Minister of Colonies to develop more troops for the region. He did so only after receiving the request to create the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* in 1888. With the financial support of the colonial office in Paris, and after

²⁹⁰ João José Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). See also the classic study by Pierre Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres entre le Golfe de Bénin et Bahia de Todos os Santos, du XVIIe au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Mouton, 1968).

²⁹¹ "[Information Dated September 24, 1892]," Carton AOF/VIII, Dossier 2a, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France.

the successful campaign in Abomey, it was the French administrators in Dakar who had the final say. They allowed Algerian troops to stay on in Porto Novo in an effort to train more Africans. Over time, the force was used not only locally, as was the case when it was first created, but also across much larger areas, including joining the French campaigns in Madagascar, in Futa Toro, as they held off Samory Toure's brigades, as well as in World War I.

As the British and French fought over the lagoon areas between Lagos and Ouidah, they also had to come to terms with each of their country's own goals—if not exact borders—for occupation. For the purposes of discussing the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* here, however, the fact that the conscripts came largely from British-controlled Yorubaland, mainly the city of Ibadan, adds to the intricacy of the situation.²⁹² When the first battalions of *Tirailleurs Haoussas* were originally created, they were incorporated as a division of the French Marine Corps due to the geographical nature along the coastline, which was full of lagoons and had sea access.²⁹³ These lagoons, along with the coastal areas, were the main modes of transportation for Africans. They were also where numerous problems abounded for the French and British, particularly with the movement of commercial goods and how to appropriately collect taxes. Additionally, because of the muddy definitions of these borders, it was often difficult for the French to hang onto the men who they trained, who could easily slip into neighboring British lands. The first commander of one of the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* regiments, a man named Lieutenant Goldshoen, oversaw much of the early decision-making at the inception of the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* creation. His reports mention problems when the civil authorities in the neighboring frontier of British Nigeria, who were

²⁹² Carton 3N 076, Dossier 5, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

²⁹³ Carton 3N 076, Dossier 34, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

supposed to send back deserters, actually allowed them to live in the areas of the British protectorate without fear of being deported.²⁹⁴

After conquering Dahomey, the French needed to make sure to hold onto their territory. This military control originated from a fear that the British, who were threateningly proximal with their own colonial designs on the area, also had a well-established, African-based military at the ready. The other aspect of this desire was a logistical quandary. One of the first commanders of the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* envisioned his force consisting of non-local Nago recruits from Ibadan,²⁹⁵ which was on the British side of the border. It is never clear why this is so, or how he reconciled the name *Tirailleurs Haoussas* with his personal desire to incorporate and train members of a completely different ethnic group. Attempting to decipher how these two distinct factors—the need to protect the border and the desire to use people who could be seen as subjects of another power allow historians to better grasp the depth at which colonial confusion functioned, and why the outcome of decisions made in these circumstances inflicted what is oftentimes considered irreparable damage to social norms within a culture. The majority of *Tirailleurs Haoussas* recruited in Ibadan were also the majority of the ethnic makeup of the force, and were followers of Islam. According to one French report, the Muslims from Ibadan made up eighty percent of the troops, integrated more easily, and showed more military aptitude.²⁹⁶ According to this report, they were also the best soldiers in the battalion. This same report also reflects the general prejudice and

²⁹⁴ “[Report by Lt. Goldshoen],” Carton 3N 033, Dossier 5, (1904-1928), Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

²⁹⁵ The Yoruba speaking population were referred to interchangeably as Nago/Nagot/ or Yoruba by the various Europeans and even altered how they referred to themselves over different periods of time.

²⁹⁶ “[Political Affairs Report, No. 116, Letter Dated April 10, 1895],” p. 6, Carton 2C (1902-1904), Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

racism of the time, when the author opines, “They have repugnance for manual labor and being far from home are inclined toward nostalgia. They stick together and the proximity to the border enhances their tendency towards desertion but with time and patience will make a good indigenous troop.”²⁹⁷

The *Tirailleurs Haoussas* were a unique creation of the French. Like other African forces in French West Africa, they were primarily Muslims, but unlike the other African forces which also came from regions that were predominantly Muslim, Islam was a minority religion in the coastal area from whence they originated. Another particularly significant factor that contributed to the complicated history of these forces was the legitimate concern by the colonial authorities regarding the movement of soldiers across intra-European colonial boundaries²⁹⁸ and fears of desertions. The following outlines some of the preclusions of African soldiers and their relationships with the French along the Bight of Benin, both geographically and in the imagination of African ethnic and religious identities, using the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* as a model case.

The evidence suggests that although these French commanders specifically set out to recruit Muslims for their campaigns in Madagascar and elsewhere on the continent, the “why” of this decision remains ambiguous in the archival record. Later on, it becomes apparent that trying to recruit Muslim soldiers was understood as a disadvantage because of their resistance to the French when they avoided recruitment. This is an aspect that is more fully explored in the following

²⁹⁷ “[Lt. Goldshoen Report],” Carton 3N 033, Dossier 5, 1904-1928, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

²⁹⁸ “[Letter No. 1782, dated August 27, 1913],” Carton 5E2, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. This letter to Governor Noufflard requests that he send troops to Beguira, Algeria as part of their increased political surveillance there. It seems the *Islam Noir* of the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* was dependable, unlike the *Islam Maure* of the Algerians.

chapter. Nonetheless, for our discussion here, it is evidence of yet one more fluid component of the idea of African identity at that time, and how even in hegemonic relationships, the marginalized expressed some agency.

Islam and Outsiders: Recruiting the ‘Other’

One of the main arguments used by the colonials in Porto Novo in their reports to their superiors about Islam in the region was that the majority of agitators and radical Muslims were, in fact, British subjects, and were foreign-born Yoruba from areas such as Ibadan, Abeokuta, Lagos and other regions to the east.²⁹⁹ For the colonials in Porto Novo, this relieved them of some responsibility for the problems they experienced, in that they decided that the problems were more about colonial borders than religious differences.³⁰⁰ This argument is directly connected to some of the issues between the French and the British regarding border disputes, and other disagreements between the colonial powers.³⁰¹ It also suggests that for these Frenchmen on the ground in Dahomey, they perceived Muslims under British rule as having been allotted too much freedom, and suggest that it was from this freedom and the British colonial policy of “Indirect Rule” that

²⁹⁹ As per multiple documents in Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³⁰⁰ See the letters between Lagos and Porto Novo dated between 1896-1905: Carton 5E7, Dossier 1, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. Also Carton 5E7, Dossier 2, ANB has correspondence between Lagos and Porto Novo with Alfred Maloney as Administrator of Lagos for 1896 and 1897. The discussion found here is about the borders at Aguegue and Ketonou, particularly an agreement starting in 1882. Specifically, see the letter dated February 13, 1886 by Toffa about the colonial borders.

³⁰¹ See the letter from Noufflard dated May 18, 1912 regarding anti-French propaganda and transient marabouts extorting gifts from the indigenous population: Carton 4E9, Dossier 14, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. See also the letters on surveillance from Dakar dated April 18, 1907, December 26, 1911, and May 31, 1912. In addition, Letter No. 409 from A. Le Herisse includes a blank template of the file that they were to keep on notable Muslims.

provided Africans in British territories the space to become religious zealots. In contrast, what one colonial called “our French Muslims,” were not seen this way under “Direct Rule.”³⁰²

The role of Islam also continuously changed, beginning with the way it was originally applied as a form of social capital, and over time, became anywhere from a neutral element to one of increasing concern, particularly after the creation of the *Politique Musulmane* in the first decades of the twentieth century. During World War I, it was the same Muslim community that provided a majority of the soldiers who took political stands by resisting both conscription and recruitment, which may have been a direct reaction to changing French attitudes towards Islam.³⁰³ On the other hand, it may have been more specific to the Porto Novo Muslim population, as the French singled out the Yoruba Muslims as dissidents and generally anti-French.³⁰⁴

By 1911, the first wave of *Tirailleurs Haoussas* in Dahomey had already traveled to and returned from the French campaigns in Madagascar.³⁰⁵ We also know that by this time the Yoruba

³⁰² Official colonial policies differed among the European powers. For the British, Lorg Lugard had developed a plan of using indigenous subjects that were amenable to the British as regional leaders over their fellow populations. He had developed this while in India and Uganda and formalized it in Nigeria where it became the official policy. The French, on the other hand, practiced what was known as Direct Rule where Frenchmen were placed in regional areas known as departements and cercles to rule over their indigenous subjects directly. This changed over time and often the French would privilege a group of subjects (usually a minority population) and give them positions of power over their fellow indigenous populations.

³⁰³ Quellien, *La Politique Musulmane ...* ; Arnaud, *L'Islam et la Politique Musulmane ...* .

³⁰⁴ A letter from Fourn to the Governor General, dated 1920, discusses a special report from September 15, 1917 with soldiers in Porto Novo needing administrative actions: Carton 1E8, Dossier 4, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. Specifically, reference page 16 of the report.

³⁰⁵ Carton 3N 076, Dossier 34, 1896-1907, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. A letter from Paris dated December 16, 1896 states: “On behalf of the General in Madagascar, please send a battalion of *Tirailleurs Haoussas*. According to General Gallieni, they will not be needed before January 1, 1897 so it should be relatively easy to recruit them I will send another telegram regarding where and when the battalion should leave. Signed Minister of Colonies to M. Governor of Dahomey.”

peoples in this area were for the most part Muslims. That aspect of the community, in combination with their incorporation into a military unit named after a different ethnic group, which was itself synonymous with Islam, was just one more complication in question regarding identity for colonial African populations. In the late nineteenth century, there were well-established regiments of *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* brought from the Sahelian regions to Dahomey as a kind of mid-level training element. Having them in Porto Novo played into the establishment of another type of ethnic hierarchy, as the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* troops who were sent were mainly Oualof, and were treated better than the local *Tirailleurs Haoussas*; this is in spite of the fact that the French colonials considered both ethnic groups as “foreign” to the region.³⁰⁶ There is little evidence about how these Senegalese troops were perceived by *Tirailleurs Haoussas*, but giving Africans who were not part of the community positions of power, was likely a cause for dissent among the Yoruba populations. A different perspective would be that the French inferred a connection among soldiers based upon their shared religious practices, as the Oualof were Muslims also. But the fact that the Dahomean soldiers were frequently trained by, but not integrated into, the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* makes one question the idea of whether they were seen on the same social plane, especially because in Porto Novo, unlike many other parts of the AOF, religion did not trump ethnic background or geographical origins for self-identification.

As one might guess, not everyone was willing to join the colonial armies. Initially, the French in the Bight of Benin, like other European imperialists, began arming Africans as part of a civil guard or local police force. This occurred as European governments began to replace private

³⁰⁶ The French made a distinction between the original Yoruba founders as fetishists, and the recent immigrants who were Yoruba, but also Muslim. With this distinction, it then makes historical sense why the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* were treated better than the *Tirailleurs Haoussas*; this was because the former were considered *Islam Maure*, whereas the latter were thought of as *Islam Noir*.

companies in the second half of the nineteenth century from South Africa to Kenya and Lagos. Convincing African men why they ought to join these types of forces was difficult for the early colonial administrators. In neighboring Lagos, Governor Glover capitalized on a marginalized element of Lagosian society by recruiting the ostracized Hausa there. From the names of the early death certificates,³⁰⁷ recruits in the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* who served in the Madagascar campaigns were ethnically Yoruba and Hausa, in addition to small numbers of Goun, Fon, and Dendi. During World War I, the recruits and regiments became increasingly Yoruba.³⁰⁸

Within Dahomey, the troops served to solidify the recently acquired territory and border with Great Britain in the east. In April of 1895, the second company of *Tirailleurs Haoussas* moved north with Lt. Léon Vermeersch to Nikki,³⁰⁹ an ancient kingdom that had been a significant merchant town on the kola trail from the area of the Hausa states to present-day Ghana. A letter from Lt. Vermeersch shows how far various battalions of *Tirailleurs Haoussas* had extended their presence, even at this early phase. The third company was sent to Abomey, but it was supposed to

³⁰⁷ “[Reports on Tirailleurs Houssas],” CAOM DAHO/XVI/ Dossier 8.

³⁰⁸ “[Letter by Fourn to the Governor General, 1921],” Carton 1E8, Dossier 6, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. He argued that policing was necessary in the Porto Novo area and that there were certain groups that were more likely to succeed in this position. He refers to the night guard of the *larys* and the power Houndji had over them. How these two groups—the “Djedje” locals, who were not Muslim, and the *Tirailleurs Haoussas*—were to reconcile via the civic role of police protection was a question that he left unanswered.

³⁰⁹ “[Letter from Lt. Vermersch to Commander Decoeur, Dated April 10, 1895],” p. 1, Carton Dahomey/VI/Dossier 8, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France.

cover the wider areas of both for the Zagnanado and Dogba, a very large region,³¹⁰ while the first company was in Porto Novo going through extensive firearms training and getting more recruits.³¹¹

Disregarding the name of this military force completely, it is clear that even the Yoruba who made up the majority of it were not the preferred ethnic group by the French. High-ranking officials who wrote dispatches from Dakar were far removed from the actuality of the situation.

Lt. Goldshoen, who was on the ground in Porto Novo, wrote,

It has always been the Nagots from the coast or the interior who come in large numbers from which it is impossible to know the best choices. I am convinced that the question will be resolved one day and it is decided that a race more warlike than the Nagots, the Senegalese for example, or the Dahomeans, can be recruited. I am not the first to voice this opinion and even General Dodds asked to recruit a group from the Senegalese.

He then continues, "... we need to recruit more from the Djedji (Fon) populations who have a chimerical fear of saying no to us. The Dahomeans [Fon] have a very rigorous aptitude toward warfare according to the residents of Abomey and Zagnanado."³¹²

The fifth and sixth companies of *Tirailleurs Haoussas* came into existence in May and June of 1894. The fifth joined the first company on a campaign north to Sagon within the colony, while the sixth was sent to defend the recently conquered kingdom of Allada. While they were spread out all across the colony, colonials made further plans to form another two battalions specifically consisting of Fon/Djedje and Mina peoples. We see that this was the preference of Lt. Goldschoen.

³¹⁰ These three areas form an isosceles triangle with the furthest points being about 70 kilometers, rather far for foot soldiers.

³¹¹ "[Letter from Lt. Vermersch to Commander Decoeur, Dated April 10, 1895]," p. 6, Carton Dahomey/VI/Dossier 8, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France.

³¹² "[Letter from Lt. Goldshoen to Dakar]," Carton 3N 033, Dossier 5, 1904-1926, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

However, it did not turn out the way he had envisioned, and the move was largely unsuccessful. The Fon were the people who had raided the Mina for captives throughout the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, so placing them into a military force where they were to fight side by side was unlikely to succeed. It seems that the French either never considered this element or had not adequately understood the Dahomey Kingdom and how it functioned during the trans-Atlantic slave trade period. Although the French policy makers did not make this important connection, we now know that this was a likely reason for this particular recruitment effort to fail. When this effort was unsuccessful, the contingency plan was for the commander of the first and fourth battalions to provide some of his “Ibadans” to the fifth and sixth regiments, and to do so somehow without draining his forces too much.³¹³ That these people were identified by their place of origin rather than their ethnicity or their language demonstrates the French frame of mind about certain groups of Africans in this region. In the early colonial era, we see that the French did a majority of their recruiting from Ibadan, a city in the former Oyo Empire with a significant Muslim population.³¹⁴ That Ibadan is located in a former British territory makes it difficult to understand why the French initially went there to recruit. Even more perplexing is why it seemed to work. Those who then moved to the French side of the border had to contend with additional complications in their identity construction when adding colonial politics as yet another component. Although there was already a strong Yoruba population in the Porto Novo area, those who first became soldiers were not necessarily local, and were most likely former British subjects.

³¹³ “[Letter from Commander of Troops to the Officer of Military Affairs, Dated March 8, 1895],” Carton Dahomey/XVI/Dossier 8, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France.

³¹⁴ “[Reports, Dated November 12, 1889],” Carton DAHO/XV/1, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France. See also Carton DAHO/X/1, Dossier 2. CAOM, Aix en Provence, France.

In April 1895, a recruitment effort designed specifically as part of the French mission to conquer Madagascar resulted in a total of 308 new recruits from the areas around Porto Novo, in addition to another 59 who were former soldiers in General Dodds's campaign against the Dahomey Kingdom. From our current vantage point, a force of 367 soldiers meant for the purpose of joining the French in the Indian Ocean seems unlikely,³¹⁵ and not necessarily the best use of their resources. From Porto Novo they headed west to board a larger ship bound for Marseille.³¹⁶ Local administrators became nervous that the first company of fifty-two soldiers who set off for Cotonou might desert before meeting with the other battalions. A telegram from a member of the French Marines, Monsieur Lenave, stated that he asked for "someone to wait in Cotonou" in order to make sure that they got on the boat.³¹⁷ Two months later, they had selected another 250 to go to Madagascar, but there was concern about getting all of them registered and matriculated with the other 632 Europeans and laborers waiting to leave from Marseilles, and with whom these men were supposed to assemble.³¹⁸

Following up on Gallieni's request for more troops in 1896, on January 23, 1897 Captain Loyer of the third battalion of *Tirailleurs Haoussas* wrote to the Minister of Colonies that he presumed it was possible that he could recruit about thirty men each month in Dahomey for the

³¹⁵ "[Letter from Commander of Troops to Office of Military Affairs, Dated April 10, 1895]," Carton Dahomey/XVI/Dossier 8, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France.

³¹⁶ "[Letter to the Colonial Office from Victor Ballot, Dated April 10, 1895]," Carton DAHOMEY/VI/8, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France.

³¹⁷ "[Letter from Mr. Lenave, Dated April 8, 1895]," Carton 3N 076, Dossier 5, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³¹⁸ "[Letters to Colonial Office, Dated September 6, 1895 and November 8, 1895]," Carton Dahomey/VI/Dossier 14, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France.

following six months. He also stressed that it would be less complicated to send them to Madagascar piecemeal rather than to assemble them together to create one large exodus. In his opinion, the only problematic area for recruiting in all of Dahomey was Porto Novo. He believed that the men from this region were either absent from recruiting endeavors or likely to desert because they were the most mobile people in the region. Further, he suggests that they should not wait for these particular *Tirailleurs Haoussas*, who were more trouble than they were worth and would likely never make it to the point of embarkation.³¹⁹

The changing reasons that the French gave for desertions during the colonial era is made apparent at this point. The absence of men in Porto Novo before the *Politique Musulmane* was credited to the fact that the community of men from which they potentially could recruit was a mobile and commercial one, whereas when there was absenteeism after the *Politique Musulmane* was put in place, the reason behind the difficulty was just because they were Muslims.

Although these soldiers were referred to as “volunteers,” the fear of desertion challenges the assumption that they were there of their own accord. Though there is little known about the *Tirailleurs Haoussas*’ experiences in Madagascar, what we do know is that they had a much lower mortality rate there than any of the other external forces. It has been argued that this was because of their knowledge of, and their ability to fend off, malaria, which killed the French soldiers in unprecedented numbers.³²⁰ However, this is one of the few places where African soldiers actually fared better than their European counterparts. After having read the few accounts that do reference

³¹⁹ “[Letter from Captain Loyer to the Minister of Colonies, Also signed by B. de Leschamp, Dated January 27, 1897],” Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³²⁰ Yvan G. Paillard, “The French Expedition to Madagascar in 1895: Program and Results,” in *Imperialism and War: Essays on Colonial Wars in Asia and Africa*, eds. J. A. de Moor and H. L. Wesseling (Leiden: University Press, 1989), 183-84.

the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* in Madagascar, I suggest that the troops may simply have benefitted from the knowledge of locals, as they were frequently paired up with the few local troops that fought on the side of the French. The local troops and the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* were given the menial tasks, such as clearing brush for roads. Sharing their working space with locals, they likely would have had access to better food sources and local plants for medicine, which would have improved their general health.

One of the main reasons that the French chose to train Africans as soldiers was the issue of the “White Man’s Grave.” The idea behind this was that Africans were more immune to diseases, particularly malaria and yellow fever, and that they dealt with the local climate better than Europeans. But there are at least two large problems with this argument. One is that the language used in the colonial office in Paris, when arguing for the creation of an African army, was actually because the French felt they did not have a big enough population if they were forced into a land war with their neighbors, particularly with the British outside of Porto Novo. This reasoning goes against the argument of Africans being better suited to the environment. The second problem with the “White Man’s Grave” argument, according to Hew Strachan in his book *The First World War in Africa*, was that a large number of African soldiers died from diseases and malnutrition because they often fought in regions of Africa where they, too, were not indigenous. Thus, when looking at the facts, the number of Africans who died in certain areas was comparable to the number of Europeans. This information has only been uncovered recently. In hindsight, it seems a poor decision by the Europeans to create these African forces, though at that time, the idea that Africans would be better suited to fight in these regions was semi-logical. After all, French soldiers who were sent to West Africa often had many health problems, so many European countries created

their own imperial troops who were made up of local or semi-local peoples. Dahomey was no exception.

Beyond the health of the French soldiers, there were other reasons for creating these forces. In 1895, one colonial administrator wrote to his superiors in Paris that replacing European troops in Porto Novo with Africans “has had an effect on calming the situations between the kings and chiefs who recognize our [France’s] domination and Dahomey is calm.”³²¹ Yet when the French sent troops away, they began to see problems arise, as many locals had come to rely on them for regional law enforcement. For example, by sending the soldiers to Grand Bassam in modern-day Côte d’Ivoire, the posts in Dahomey were left with reduced garrisons.³²²

One of the rare direct references to Islam among these troops comes from a report of a Marine lieutenant in charge of the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* in Madagascar. He mentions that upon embarkation in Cotonou, “on the passenger list were a Nago imam and a Hausa imam” who wanted to be available as council for the soldiers.³²³ Although nothing else about these men is discussed, there is still much to take from this brief, but pertinent observation. The fact that two religious leaders were allowed to go with the soldiers says something about the importance of Islam to the troops, especially the fact that a European observer found it an important factor on which to

³²¹ Military Affairs, “[Letter from A. St. Leger to the Colonial Office, Dated November 8, 1895],” Carton Dahomey/XVI/14, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France.

³²² Political Affairs, “[Report No. 116, Dated April 10, 1895],” Carton 2C (1902-1904), Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³²³ “[Report, Dated August 8, 1898],” Carton 3N 054, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

comment. About one year later, this same company repatriated to Dahomey, but the religious men are not mentioned a second time.³²⁴

There are few observations in the archival records about the return process from Madagascar, but the first regiments that were sent must have been viewed as successful because upon one regiment's return another group was set to leave. A report from January 29, 1896 from Captain Brenaud, who had been stationed at Abomey, let officials in Paris know he was taking his troops to Madagascar when the next group of men returned.³²⁵

Although not as far as Madagascar, the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* were sent on other military campaigns outside of Dahomey. A report on the general state of the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* in 1895 showed the French concern with other areas of West Africa. Commander Decouer's "opinion on sending troops of *Tirailleurs Haoussas* to Grand Bassam has been ineffective,"³²⁶ so said one report. There, the French had been given 300 guns for the campaign but could not make up a group of 150 men. Eventually some companies of *Tirailleurs Haoussas* were sent to Grand Bassam to hold the region that had been conquered by Samory. Sheer lack of numbers showed that there would need to be replacements sent the following year, and from the troops that existed in Dahomey, this would be impossible. Commander Decoeur anticipated the need for more soldiers in the future, requesting funding and approval to create three new companies and one depot.

³²⁴ "[Letter from Roume to Ballot, Dated May 9, 1896]," Carton 3N 076, Dossier 5, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³²⁵ "[*Tirailleurs Haoussas* Report, Dated January 29, 1896]," Carton 3N 076, Dossier34, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³²⁶ "[Report No. 922, From Loyer, Commandant des Troupes, Dated October 20, 1894]," Carton DAHO/XVI/Dossier 3, CAOM, Aix en Provence France.

Decoeur argued that it would make the colonial governor's job easier if the men were recruited from the kingdoms of Abomey and Allada because of their experience in fighting in previous campaigns.³²⁷ From our position today, this make little to no sense. One reason for wanting them to come from elsewhere was that, when the troops who had been sent to Grand Bassam returned to Porto Novo, they were seen in a negative manner by the French elite, who argued that they had picked up bad habits there; several even stated that they had seen some of the French there encouraging them to "act more liberally in all of their behavior."³²⁸ Early signs of what later became a significant impetus behind nationalist and independence movements after World War II appear in this case, with French recognition that Africans who went away to fight for them often returned changed.

In addition to those Africans who were sent by chiefs as a form of tax payment,³²⁹ there were also soldiers who were indentured laborers or even slaves within their own communities. In the earlier years of the 1890s, the small percentage of recruits who were either indentured laborers or slaves tended to be Hausa Muslims from Ibadan. According to Lt. Goldshoen, these men were "not free and their engagements seem to be the object of speculation on the part of individuals coming from Porto Novo. On the day of payment, many of them give their money to men who

³²⁷ Political Affairs, "[Report No. 116, Dated April 10, 1895]," Carton 2C, 1902-1904, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³²⁸ "[Military Affairs Report, Dated April 10, 1895]," Carton Dahomey/VI/Dossier 8, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France.

³²⁹ The French *mise en valeur* made the most of the hierarchies and required chiefs of regions to provide a quote of men to serve in the military as part of the overall head taxes that were collected in each village. Additionally, chiefs were often paid extra incentives to get more than their quotas to join. In Senegal, Blaise Diagne earned much of his fame during the first World War getting these incentives and promising both money, tax remittance and eventual citizenship for those who joined. His promised were left unfulfilled however.

come around the camps, they are their masters no doubt and they are paying for having deserted them.”³³⁰

From the early 1900s through the 1920s, there were a number of official complaints made to the administration from former *Tirailleurs Haoussas* or their dependents about collecting back pay that was owed to them. For all intents and purposes it appears that the administration did its best to stall and prolong this process. A number of *Tirailleurs Haoussas* who served in Madagascar in 1886 and 1887, finally received payment after a legal ruling on November 25, 1904—a lengthy seven to eight years after they had fulfilled their duty.³³¹ Different excuses fill the explanations that discuss payment for former soldiers. Some of these reasons include reports that the soldiers had been let go before fulfilling their contracts; that the soldiers had been arrested; or that the troop had disbanded, so there was no way to investigate their claim.³³²

Desertion

Conflicts around payments also occurred between the French and the British. In 1896, a letter from the Colonial Governor of the time, Andre Le Bon, reported to government officials in Paris that the soldiers were paid in English and German money and would not convert it to French currency.³³³ Around this time, the price of silver was fluctuating, so it seems that the Africans did

³³⁰ “[Lt. Goldshoen Report],” Carton 3N 033, Dossier 5, 1904-1928, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³³¹ “[Military Report, Dated November 25, 1904],” Carton 3N 076, Dossier 34, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³³² “[Letters to Director Martin, Dated from June 13, 1905],” Carton 3250, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³³³ “[Letter from Le Bon, Dated November 25, 1896],” Carton 3N 076, Dossier 25, 1896-97, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

not have faith in France's paper currency, and were more familiar with other monetary forms of coinage.³³⁴ Other issues came about between the colonial powers. For example, from 1914 through 1926 there are a series of letters between the British and French about a soldier named Sare, who was from Liberia originally, but then was in the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* and the *Tirailleurs Haoussas* for over twenty years. The letters state that they were in disagreement about which country, France or Great Britain, should pay his pension.³³⁵

In 1915, when the administration put pressure on local Africans to serve during World War I, the desired numbers of recruits were not met, because opposition movements to recruitment efforts grew substantially. This occurred despite offers to compensate chiefs for soldiers. Reports of people resisting their own chiefs' requests appear in colonial reports, as well. While part of the official *mise en valeur* required a certain amount of labor in exchange for "French civilization," this was much more difficult to enforce on the ground. Furthermore, the permeable border with Nigeria, where individuals often fled to avoid being drafted, made recruitment and conscription efforts extremely difficult.³³⁶ Here, in these types of desertion cases, there is a definite form of agency among African populations, especially those coming out of the same families and communities as others who had recently been victimized by surveillance measures taken against them because they were Muslim.

³³⁴ "Bulletin de Comité de l'Afrique Française," Carton 157, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³³⁵ Carton 5E6, Dossier 1, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³³⁶ "[Monthly Reports, Dated August and September, 1915]," Carton 1E16, Dossier 3, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. See also "[Fourn Report to the Governor General, Dated 1920]," p. 15, Carton 1E8, Dossier 4, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

In certain cases there were issues of forced conscription for non-French subjects, as a complaint from the governor of Sierra Leone, addressed to the governor of Dahomey on March 24, 1916, demonstrates. The letter asked why a man born in 1895 in Freetown, Sierra Leone named Fitzjihi, who was on his way to Lagos, had been stopped in Porto Novo and forced to enter the French army. The Dahomey governor responded two weeks later saying that he had found no soldier in his forces going by that name.³³⁷

How did the *Tirailleurs Haoussas*' creation as early as the 1890s fluctuate with the changing attitudes of the French colonial administration into the 1920s and 1930, especially towards Muslims, which many of these soldiers were? These are some of the questions this section will answer. The *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* were the most numerous French West African colonial forces from as early as the 1850s through World War II. Initially made up of Africans from the Senegalo-Mauritanian area, eventually the name *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* was kept even for forces fashioned in other areas of French West Africa where they consisted of different ethnic groups. Myron Echenberg has written thoroughly about the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*, particularly in the Sahel regions of French West Africa in his work, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960*.³³⁸ *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* from Mali are the subject of scholars such as Gregory Mann who documents how African soldiers in World War II were part of a diaspora between Africa and the south of France both during and after the war.³³⁹ Nancy Lawler's

³³⁷ Carton 5E10, Dossier 1913-1929, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³³⁸ Myron J. Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960* (Portsmouth: Heinemann; London: Currey, 1991).

³³⁹ Gregory Mann, "Locating Colonial Histories: Between France and West Africa," *The American Historical Review* 110, no. 2 (April 2005): 409-434.

work on the Ivoirian companies of *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* is critically canvasses the experiences of African soldiers, especially their legacies after their returns home from World War II.

In one recruiting phase, Dahomey was supposed to acquire 750 new recruits in a three month period of 1923.³⁴⁰ This particular operation finally started January third of the following year and ended March first. At the local level at least, it was considered a success. The French leaders in Dakar responded poorly to the effort made in Dahomey and in a response defending himself and fellow administrators on the ground, Fourn argued, “that although Dakar was not happy with the recruitment effort, if it understood Dahomey better it would see that we were in fact successful. The pressure on the population of Porto Novo last March [in reference to the ‘Muslim Uprisings’] was reflected in those who did not show up for recruitment who were the indigenous Muslims.³⁴¹ The total numbers of recruits for the three month time period showed that Porto Novo had 100 percent fewer recruits than any of the other regions in Dahomey.³⁴² The report argued that most of the general population realized that some of their children would have to serve in the military and it was only in Porto Novo where the people were disillusioned about it. It also states that, “the people of the coast are not born soldiers like those of the Soudan and except for the Muslim element, which systematically hides from their obligations, overall the indigenous population showed up and was accepting of this recruitment.”³⁴³ The letter suggests

³⁴⁰ Lieutenant Governor Fourn, “[Report on recruitment of *Tirailleurs Haoussas*, Circulaire #1801, Dated May 14, 1924],” Carton 3N 054, 1923-24, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³⁴¹ “[Report on recruitment of *Tirailleurs Haoussas*, Unsigned letter to the Governor General of AOF, Dated March 29, 1924],” Carton 3N 054 1923-24, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Lieutenant Governor Fourn, “[Report on recruitment of *Tirailleurs Haoussas*, Dated February 25, 1924],” Carton 3N 054 1923-24, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

that this was because of the Yoruba Muslims who continued to live at the margins of the administration. The report also refers to these same Yoruba Muslims as insubordinate and that the administration was planning to start a commission on them immediately.³⁴⁴ It was apparent that the French considered they might have to go to war again. Although French reports discussed long-term amicable relationships with Muslim countries, they did not seem to be aware that in World War I, thousands of Muslims were killed defending the front.³⁴⁵

Recruiting practices followed the changing tides of the colonial mission and the relative dual nature of the administration is visible in the historical record as the French continued to recruit Muslims, despite the reality that the majority of those who did not show up for mandatory recruitment (better known as conscription) largely belonged to this same target demographic. Another report from February of 1924, on recruitment efforts shows that of around 600 possible recruits, only about half of them had reasonable excuses for not signing up. But of the half that did not have justifiable reasons, fifty percent of these (or twenty-five percent of the total number of eligible men) were Muslims. As Muslims only made up five percent of the population, their percentage as draft-dodgers was five times greater than their overall population make-up.

Because of the liminality of the borders and tenuous situation of the early colonial official rule, troop commanders had both real and legitimate fears of desertions. Often they tried to avoid this by going to a trusted source, their *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* who were regarded as much more loyal to the colonial endeavor. An unsigned memorandum states,

³⁴⁴ “[Report on recruitment of *Tirailleurs Haoussas*, Unsigned letter to the Governor General of AOF, Dated March 29, 1924],” Carton 3N 054 1923-24, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³⁴⁵ “[Unsigned, partial handwritten letter, July 31, 1922],” Carton 4E10, Dossier 6, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

I am requesting that in the next two months we get twenty Senegalese to the Wharf of Cotonou. The battalion will become stronger and I am sure the desertions will stop. The cost of bringing them will surely be less than what it has cost us in deserters in fact in the last year we could have transported 140 Sénégalais to Benin for the money we lost in desertions.”³⁴⁶

It is apparent in this above statement the French had little faith in the locals and saw foreigner to the region as the best option. The majority of *Tirailleurs Haoussas* who deserted were from Lagos, Ouidah and Porto Novo and were primarily recruited from Abeokuta and Ibadan. When they were part of the force, they were also those who performed the most menial tasks such as hammock carriers, canoers and porters. The colonials who commented in official reports regarding desertion had to record the reasons they thought these men deserted and the most popular arguments given by the French superiors of these African soldiers, were that the men were unhappy because they did the most useless jobs or that they were bored.³⁴⁷ These excuses do not fit the actual evidence and as the soldier's words in the letter referenced by Hồ Chí Minh shows, these men were brutally forced into joining the *Tirailleurs Haoussas*, and if an opportunity to leave presented itself, it is highly likely that one would take it.

So while the implementation of the well-planned *mise en valeur* appeared to be a success in certain corners of the AOF, for Dahomey and among the *Tirailleurs Haoussas*, this was not the case. The fact that it was the minority Muslim population who caused so much grief to the colonials who needed to enforce their policies only adds to the uncertainty of colonial rule on a larger scale. Subjects were unpredictable and did not necessarily fit the strict categories of the French

³⁴⁶ "[Unsigned memorandum]," Carton 3N 033, Dossier 5 1904-1928, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³⁴⁷ "[Unsigned memorandum]," Carton 3N 033, Dossier 5 1904-1928, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

oppressors. That we see a discrepancy in the ways these administrators reported events versus what actually occurred on the ground is one more area in which the theory did not fall in line with the practice. That the French seemed to ignore this in their own policies eventually made things more difficult for their day to day presence in the endeavor and also opened up opportunities of which Africans made the best use. Perhaps one reason the French in Porto Novo were not effective in their implementation of policies had to do with being distracted by a larger discussion the administrators in Dakar and Paris were having at this time, the threat of Pan-Islamism in the global arena. This is explored in the following chapter.

5 Porto Novo's Muslims: Privileged Elites and Targeted Foes

This chapter brings together the ideas from the previous three chapters through an examination of the ways that the Muslim populations continued to gain ground and assert themselves in the face of the French administration's repeated attempts to oppress them. Here, the specific incidents of imam selection, acts of surveillance, and concern over Arabic literacy come into play. Further, the division between the Muslim populations was continually and systematically exacerbated by the actions of the French in Porto Novo. While the French continued to privilege the Brazilian Muslim populations, who made up a small percentage of the total *umma* in Porto Novo, the actions taken by the Yoruba Muslim population reflect African agency through the continued determination for just and fair treatment. Certain individuals and their unique personalities also emerge from this discussion.

The particular case of Porto Novo and its Muslims population is unique in French West African history because of the length to which the French administrators went despite this population's relatively small numbers. Muslims worldwide are intertwined through their adherence to the core tenets of the Qur'an, but the boundless ways in which they do so are infinitely diverse. One endeavor in this dissertation is to examine how the general characteristics of Muslims in this city differed from their coreligionists in both neighboring and far-reaching locales both from the French perspective, and our own today.³⁴⁸ It is the particular experiences and attributes of its

³⁴⁸ “[Undated Trimester Report from Lt. Governor Fourn, written sometime in 1921],” Carton 1E8, Dossier 6, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. At this point, Fourn blames the increase of Pan-Islamism in the region on a “single source... the English Nigerians who have gained power and expanded into the region” (my translation). However, in later reports, it is apparent that he is more open to possible international influences, particularly the impact of various literature being sent from North African sources to Muslims in Porto Novo who were literate in Arabic. Even after Fourn, the follow-up surveillance of the 1930s shows that Arabic

inhabitants, and precisely because of the manifestation of distinct traits, that these communities ought to be seen as representative of the diversity within Islam, as well as the cosmopolitanism of their fellow Muslims. It is the shared diversity in expression that ultimately provides for global interconnection. Colonial Porto Novo provides a focal point—both spatially and temporally—allowing historians to analyze contradictory behavioral practices in the shared goals of faithful adepts.

The twentieth century *associationist* policies were a reflection of increased racial tension in the metropole, as well as the economic decline in both the federation of the *Afrique Occidentale Française* (AOF) and in France itself. In Dahomey specifically, reforms made through a Republican-based colonialism were socially disruptive because of France's general attitudes towards Pan-Islamism. Although some French administrators attempted to support the Africans, who they administered with the *indigénat* and no real repercussions, the fact that there was no monetary support from the metropole and the new attitude of the time that Africans were lazy and needed to be forced to work, made up the background for the supposedly justified treatment of Africans in the post-World War I era. This time period became the most violent of the entire colonial era. Dahomeans often took matters into their own hands with a very active press and via rebellions led by French-educated individuals. The process of identity formation, ethnicization, politicization, and the process of imperialism on behalf of the changed the role of Islam in Porto Novo forever. The seeds for the schism among the Muslims of Porto Novo were sown even before the turn of the twentieth century, and if one relied solely on the word of the Yoruba Muslims circa

literacy was still unwelcome. Marty also joins in this debate with a letter about xenophobia, Communism in Moscow and Pan-Islam as part of a major anti-Imperialist League to undo the French in their colonies. See "Revue de Presse #922, December 28, 1931," Carton 4E11, Dossier 5, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

1920, it would seem all to be because of the vanity of Ignacio Paraiso and his father Odjo.³⁴⁹ Certain tasks that this chapter grapples with include the French administration's involvement in the choice of the city's imam and their role in the building of the Friday mosque. In regards to these important events was the French's approach to Pan-Islamism throughout its colonies, and its areas that were on the border and periphery of the Islamic world. I now move to more recent history in order to show the impact of Islam on Porto Novo that began over a century ago.

Now and Then: Imam Selection

In May of 2012 a new struggle erupted over the appointment of the imam of the Grand Mosque in Porto Novo. With the death of Imam Damala, the majority Brazilian (now called Creole) Muslim community saw a vacuum that they felt they could fill with someone who fit their interests. Without the consent of the head imam, and even going against the words written by Imam Damala just before his death, the leader of the Creole Muslims, Karim da Silva, placed Houzeifaith Hamzath in the interim position without having the permission of most of the Muslims in Porto Novo. The representatives of each of the bigger ethnic communities within the larger *umma* of Porto Novo—the Goun, the Yoruba, and the Hausa—recently spoke out against this unsanctioned appointment. According to the Friday mosque's imam, El Hadji Amadou Sanoussi Landou, they had all reached the limit of patience, and the final indignities were the “satanic” acts committed by Hamzath, who sacrificed 114 sheep and one cow with the same knife on March 30, 2012.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁹ See the letter in Appendix AI dated April 4, 1920, from Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. This is the most in-depth story we get from an African voice, and there are likely truths to be found within it, but the detail accuracies must also be considered with a bit of caution.

³⁵⁰ It is unclear why the term “satanic” was used here, other than it seems that the leaders felt that using the same knife to slaughter that many cows and sheep was *haram* in some way.

The strong reaction to Hamzath by various elite Muslims in the area was brought to the attention of the man who many felt should have been the city's new imam, El Hadji Amadou Sanoussi Landou. I refer to him from this point on as Imam Sanoussi Landou. He assembled together a delegation of the most respected Muslim leaders from throughout the various quarters of Porto Novo. They then arranged a meeting with Karim da Silva in order to discuss both the massive slaughter of animals with a single knife, and more importantly, the blatant disregard of the previous imam's wishes. Karim da Silva is a descendant of a very prominent Brazilian Muslim, Ignacio Paraiso, whose historical significance is made clear throughout this dissertation. Da Silva is one of the wealthiest people in Benin today. He owns the Afro-Brazilian museum of Porto Novo, which is furnished with items inherited from both sides of his family, each of which was prominent in the colonial era and favored by the colonial administration. Imam Sanoussi Landou brought the assembly of Muslim leaders to da Silva's house on April 20, 2012. This group of influential member of Porto Novan society from all ethnic backgrounds attempted to persuade da Silva to see their point of view and to remove Hamzath from his interim position of power. However, da Silva ignored, and even scoffed at their request. As it became obvious to the group that da Silva would not budge on his stance, the leaders decided that they had had enough and left. One month later, on May 23, Imam Sanoussi Landou was invited by the Police Commissioner to come to the police station at Djegan Daho. Landou thought this invitation was in reference to the imam's role in the community and perhaps to discuss the turbulent situation that had erupted among Porto Novan Muslims. However, the imam appeared to be blindsided when he was charged with "defamation of character" and "public insults," charges brought by Karim da Silva. The police seemed to have tricked the imam, either in support or on the payroll of da Silva. Just one day later, other notables who had been at the meeting as part of Sanoussi Landou's assembly were brought to the same

precinct and charged similarly. Imam Sanoussi Landou was grateful to speak with a journalist during the week of May 25 in order to share his side of the story and plead with the Muslims of Porto Novo not to be divided. He also told them to be aware of what the majority Muslim population leader, Karim da Silva. Imam Sanoussi Landou looked to show that da Silva was trying, once again, to politicize the role of Islam in Porto Novo by bringing political issues directly to the mosque. The similarities of this story to those one hundred years before are uncanny. Karim da Silva seemed to be using the local government to help satisfy his own personal needs, just as his ancestor, Ignacio Paraiso, had done when he used his status as a Brazilian and his position as the right-hand man to the colonial administrators.

During my fieldwork, I was constantly assured by notable Muslim leaders (including the late Imam Damala) that there had never really been a divide between the Yoruba and Brazilian Muslims. Instead, they claimed repeatedly that the French colonials simply created it, or at least found a slight break and then drove a deeper wedge to create a major ordeal. Additionally, when I attempted to set up interviews, most people told me there was nothing to discuss, since there had been no problems 100 years ago and there were still no true divisions today. At the time I took this at face value, but as I interrogated my sources more thoroughly after I returned to the United States, I discovered that much of the documentation was actually written by high-ranking members of various Muslim communities and were signed by even more of these elites. Although today there is wider diversity in the ethnic makeup of Porto Novo's Muslims, and not the simple bifurcation between Yoruba and Brazilian that existed during the colonial era, what the above anecdote shows is that there is in fact a present-day tension among Porto Novo's Muslims regarding the question of who will lead and advise the members of this religion, which is still surrounded by the politics of identity. Even though the French are no longer in power, the lasting hierarchies established

during the colonial era are still embedded in the daily lives of the religious minority of Porto Novo. The history of a similar situation in Porto Novo should be something that present-day problem-solvers focus on as they examine their current state of affairs. The following section aims to outline the various crises and perspectives of this history through an investigation and analysis of the events surrounding imam appointments during the colonial era and the ways in which the French and different African groups, both Muslims and not, politicized the selections, especially as markers of identity.

The anecdote from this “Now and Then” section seems to be a centennial repeat of the high colonial period in Porto Novo. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Brazilian elites who were displeased with popularly elected leaders used the local government to assist them in getting their way. Thus, what occurred in 2012 is really nothing new. In fact, in many ways, recent behavior imitates the occurrences of the imam debates of the 1910s and 1920s. That the average Porto Novan Muslim today has little, if any, knowledge of this particular history is unfortunate for a number of reasons. For example, the significance could help address the current debacle by using the historical precedent to facilitate current decisions in the dispute. Local memory replicates the idea that all Muslims in Porto Novo have always gotten along and that there has never been a true divide.³⁵¹

Imam Disputes, Surveillance, and Literacy

Returning to the history of colonial Porto Novo, the period of most of the conflict between Muslims, as well as with Muslim-French relations, coincided with the time period when the

³⁵¹ Interview with Imams Damala, Rafou, and Yessoufou, (Flore Nobime, present), Porto Novo, Benin, November 20, 2009.

Islamic specialist of the French colonial system, Paul Marty, visited Dahomey to gather information for his monograph on Islam. He did this as a French consultant addressing what the French called, *the Muslim Question*. From 1920 until 1924, there were essentially two Muslim chief religious leaders, imams, who represented Porto Novo's Muslim population. This had not happened before in the history of Porto Novo. As mentioned, this was a place where a multitude of religious practices existed over long periods of time, with general tolerance and acceptance of diversity. Thus the Imam conflict can be seen as a broader implication of the disharmony that the Porto Novo's Muslims experienced under increasingly complicated colonial rule. By looking at this conflict as one way the city reflected the larger global disruption caused by French empire building during the high colonial period, we can begin to explore the changing ways groups and individuals had to maneuver their positions in their respective, constantly changing society. It brings up France's influence in Lebanon and Syria at a time when Ottoman-induced Pan-Islamism and nationalism were at high points globally. At this time, the French did not keep the promises that they had made to both the Syrians and the Lebanese about self-rule, making this a moment of political significance for their imperial governance and its global impact.

In 1920, when Imam Qassoumou of Porto Novo fell ill, he had already chose his naib (or Alfa), a man named Saroukou, to take over his position as imam. The majority of the Muslim population, known mainly by the name of the Yoruba Muslims, was led by Al Hadji Mouteirou Soule. Soule accepted the choice of this successor for a number of reasons, but mostly because it followed tradition. However, the French colonials, in line with the Europeanized Brazilian Muslim group led by Ignacio Paraiso, had another imam in mind. Their choice for successor was a man named El Hadji Lawani Damala, and getting this man into the position of imam was particularly

import to this group as a way to stay in power. Damala was an elite Muslim in the community who was also literate in Arabic.³⁵²

Additionally, local support of the French and Brazilians came in the form of the Chef Superior, Houndji. Houndji was initially antagonized by the Yoruba Muslims during the Sohingbe battle over Toffa's succession in the early years of the twentieth century. During the ceremonial transition of power, Houndji told the newly appointed imam that he had to place his hands on the Royal Staff of Hogbonou. Although this requested action was something unexpected and atypical, the act shows the significance of this minority community within the broader social structure of the population and the society.³⁵³

On June 4, 1920, Imam Qassoumou died. One month later, in order to avoid a perceived full-scale riot among the various Muslim populations of the city, the French colonial administration intervened unlike any time before. Because of the actions taken by the French, outside observers might have thought that this was the hotbed of radical fundamental religious movements, and not an area where Islam was a minority religion rarely considered by global colonial powers. In what had been an issue on the mend, the division between the Brazilian and the Yoruba reemerged. Less than two weeks after this intervention, on June 19, the Yoruba Muslim majority, led by Mouteirou, officially named Saroukou imam of Porto Novo. However, for a number of reasons, but particularly because Ignacio Paraiso had the ear of Lt. Governor Gaston Fourn (1917-1928), the administration rejected this choice of imam, and instead proceeded to set

³⁵² See the letters from 1920 in Carton 4E9, Dossier 22, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. Also see the letter dated April 4, 1921 in Appendix 1A of this dissertation for details from a Yoruba Muslim perspective on the role of the French, Paraiso, and the imam dispute.

³⁵³ See the documents of June 1, 1921 and May, 25, 1921 in Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin regarding the harassment of the new imam by Resident Maria.

up an exam for potential candidates. Fourn insisted on interviewing each of the candidates. A total of 23 notables went to him for this interview and took a written test on July 4, 1920.³⁵⁴ As the official political power of the land, Fourn also announced that the French administrators, with the assistance of the Chef Superior, would select the imam, and in turn, the imam's advisors.³⁵⁵

Some of the elites who were invited to take the exam included Housseni Djedje, Alro Guiwa, Belo Guiwa, Akadin Guiwa, Lawani Guiwa, Amoussou Hamzat, Hadji Mohammed Lawani, Alfa Mohammed Bello, Ibrahima; Soumanou, Badarou, Hajji Badamossi, Hadji Mouteirou, Badarou Soule, Amousaa, Soukou Ali, Alao Fari, and Sanni Adechi. When they finished and the French powers reviewed the exams, the number of candidates dwindled to five

³⁵⁴ See the letter from Yoruba Muslims dated April 4, 1921 in the Appendix of this dissertation for a discussion of the "unnecessary requirement" for a written exam.

³⁵⁵ A report from Fourn and Maria on June 1, 1921 includes the following documentation of Houndji's involvement in the imam selection: "Houndji reunited himself with the Royal Palace of Becon to assist in this proposal of reconciliation of Muslims on May 19, 1921." This was a response to a lengthy letter of April 4, 1921, found in Appendix A [of the present dissertation]. The errand boys of Houndji were sent to all the principal notables, so they would be made aware that there was going to be an attempt at reconciliation. On May 19, 1921 at 9 a.m. a group of Porto Novans went to Becon's palace to respond to Houndji's request. Those present were: Chef Superior Houndji; the Chief of Zounon, the Princes of Porto Novo; former minister of King Toffa, the chefs du quarters, some notable indigenous people, Imam Lawani; and Lawani's adept, Bello Guiwa, who represented the Saroukou party supporters. Though absent, others who were invited were: Imam Saroukou; Saroukou's naib, Ony Bello; and other important numbers of marabouts. It seems to me that he is using the terms "marabout" and "notable" interchangeably, but also to put a sort of bad taste on the term. The meeting opened at 11:30 a.m. and Chief Zounon asked all of the Muslims present (which obviously were mostly for the Lawani side) who they wanted to their imam. Aminou Bagoro of the Saroukou party answered that he was there. Zounon (the Night King), asked, "Where is your imam?" Aminou answered, "He is in charge of the religion, not of public palavers so we had him stay home." (It is not clear to me why the Night King was "out" during the day.) Zounon insisted that they look for Saroukou, Bello, and the other consorts who were absent, and after much difficulty, the party of Mouteirou and of Chitou Masse – decided to go look for them. Houndji made the statement: "... these dissensions have exhausted all of us. The Governor and Us. We do not want 2 imams anyway in Porto Novo. Our decision is to put an end to your differences and choose from the 2, the most capable and continue under that title. Then Houndji asked both parties what they thought of this. Everyone agreed that this was fine and in the customs of their fathers. (Obviously everyone that was left at the meeting was from the Lawani side. Houndji then continued: "... after the request from the Marabouts 2 names were given for you to choose from El Hadji Lawani Damala or Alfa Bello. And Saroukou can only be nominated today to be Naib." At this point, El Hadji Mouteirou Soule protested and wanted Saroukou to be the second choice, saying to Houndji, "You can't impose an imam on us; we are not fetishers like you."

relatively quickly.³⁵⁶ The Yoruba Muslims protested the French's involvement, coming together to write a 16-page letter calling the administration out on its lies, misdeeds, and unfair treatment.³⁵⁷ Something that occurred to me in my research of this moment also occurred to this group of Yoruba merchants. They asked why the French all of a sudden required the imam to be literate in Arabic when no former imam had to have had that qualification. Further, they asked why there had been this change when prior to this the French administration insisted that they be literate in anything other than French. The letter blatantly lays out the hypocrisy of the colonial system, which changed its rules however and whenever they deemed necessary. It is also unclear from the record how these particular French colonials, who were admittedly illiterate in Arabic, could create such a test.

It is obvious that Paul Marty sided with Ignacio Paraiso and the French. Marty argued that the Brazilian Muslims were “more civilized,” more experienced, richer, and contributed more to society than their “uncivilized” brothers. In addition, he claimed that the former gave alms to the local population of Muslims as a form of charity.³⁵⁸ For example, Marty observed the jealousies, competition, hate, and suspicion amongst the Muslims, writing that, “there is no possible peace; it is unfixable”³⁵⁹ He then went on to quote an elder marabout from Ouidah regarding the

³⁵⁶ “[List of Paraiso signatories, and one of the Qassoumou group],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. Included also are the five “tests” of Arabic writing. The last document is dated April 8, 1920.

³⁵⁷ “[Letter signed by Aminou Balogoun and Al Hadji Mouteirou, Dated June 15, 1920],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. This letter is important because both Balogoun and Mouteirou were two of the most elite of all the Yoruba elite.

³⁵⁸ Paul Marty, *Études sur L’Islam au Dahomey: Le Bas Dahomey- Le Haut Dahomey* (Paris: Éditions Ernest Leroux, 1926), 71-79.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

situation, and his response was, “There is nothing to do in Porto Novo; this is how it has always been there.”³⁶⁰

The Yoruba wrote in a letter to the colonials that “recognizing difficulties of their culture,” the imam had become a subordinate to Ignacio Paraiso, and they protested against his schemes to discredit other authorities and modify religious customs.³⁶¹ Just before Qassoumou’s death, another letter that expressed their aversion to Paraiso’s power was submitted to the Comité Franco-Musulmane:

We want to follow the wishes of our imam [thus] we met with the Lieutenant Governor and Resident but they sided with Paraiso, who has them in his pocket. We refused their decision and they put surveillance on our mosque in the Lokossa quarter and interrupted our prayers and will continue to do so until we submit to Paraiso’s wishes. The Paraiso part brought up arms against us in the mosque at the Zebou quarter. We do not wish Paraiso to not practice his religion but he always puts out an effort into separating the Muslims so we are asking you to interfere on our behalf. We pray for you ...³⁶²

Lawani supporters included the colonial administrators, Houndji and the remaining “royal” Hogbonou populations, and the Brazilians under Paraiso who also made up the entire African component of the colonial administration and the newspaper owners. In the 1920s, Porto Novo had an astonishing number of independent presses and newspapers, the majority of which were

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ See the letter dated June 15, 1920 In Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. In yet another letter, they informed the Governor General in Dakar that Paraiso, is neither imam or sheikh and does not act like a Muslim with his brothers, who do not recognize him as such—they can recognize his authority, but he is the one who has provoked the dissensions of the moment ... he was really a Catholic convert and a clone of a Muslim. Please deliver us from the terror of M. Paraiso and rid his influence among the true adepts of Islam

³⁶² “[Letter from Aminou Balogoun to M. Lavenarde of the Comité Franco-Musulmane, Dated June 30, 1920],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 22, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

owned by Brazilians.³⁶³ Many followers of both Lawani and Saroukou were literate enough to read the Qur'an, as well as the *Lakhadariou*, which is a Tidjani document written by Sidi Lekhdar of Algeria, Sidi Khali, and Iba Malik. Those who followed Saroukou also read a work called *Toufat el Oukam*.³⁶⁴

Getting a clear picture of the narrative of the division between Porto Novo's Muslims and the various types of events surrounding it is very important to understanding this time period, which also was fraught with political tension coming from the colonial empires. I introduced this history with a much more recent account of an imam controversy that occurred in Porto Novo in 2012 for the purpose of showing there is a direct link between recent history and historical disputes. Providing a description of this recent event elucidates how we have come to understand the history of related events that occurred a century before.

There are a variety of factors that led to the creation of the divide among the Muslims to the point at which they felt compelled to self-identify with one side or the other. This becomes clear as the narrative unfolds. Furthermore, the actions taken by certain colonial administrators who often overstated their experiences combined with the labeling of certain individual Muslims as "troublemakers," and were not affected the way this history is remembered to this day. However, because African Muslims were forced to live the reality of a colonized community, it was all but impossible to get beyond the labels that were put upon them and the restrictions put in place by the French administration in Porto Novo. France's intertwining of commerce with Great Britain, and the ambiguous relationship between these two allied forces while they continued their border

³⁶³ Marty, *Études sur L'Islam au Dahomey ...*, 65-67.

³⁶⁴ "[Report of Captain Andre, from April 1923]," MiOM 3182, Aix en Provence, CAOM.

disputes, was also a major activator in the division of the Muslims of Porto Novo. A change in economic expectations from the colonial office in Paris and certain demands on the ground in Africa pushed the limits of not only the Africans but also the colonial French administrators, who resorted to convoluted ways of enforcing colonial laws and dictates.

Each of the aforementioned topics has their place in the debate that centered on the choosing of the imam for the city of Porto Novo, as well as explicates the general Muslim divide. They are also elements of colonial interaction with African subjects and are addressed in the broader Africanist literature in one way or another. The toll that World War I took on the colonies economically left the French desperate in their attempts to recover from their wartime financial losses. Indeed, economics was a significant factor regarding France's involvement in local Islamic activities, particularly because the merchant class consisted of mostly Porto Novo Muslims. The issue of the imam designation, which as we have seen, remains significant to the present-day political, social, and economic aspects of Porto Novo, allows for broader implications and questions about Islam in coastal West Africa. Retrospectively studying the imam disputes during the colonial period allows us to re-frame the interests of the colonial powers and a number of their community issues, most specifically regarding France's growing fixation with a Pan-Islamic threat in the early twentieth century.

The years 1919 and 1920 brought a drop in the global price of palm oil, which then forced the increase of the head tax, along with other costs for the average Dahomean.³⁶⁵ Essentially, there was a greater lack of resources for the colonies and a larger demand for raw materials from the

³⁶⁵ Marion P. Brasseur and Gérard Brasseur, *Porto-Novo et sa palmeraie* (Dakar: IFAN, 1953).

metropole. This was a common situation for colonial Africa and the interwar period.³⁶⁶ Additionally, local leaders, from royalty to chieftainship positions, continuously searched for new ways to exert their power. At the same time, colonial policies became harsher, including the enforcement of the *indigénat*. Any remnant of assimilation gave way to accommodation.³⁶⁷ Political movements erupted among the educated elite through newspaper publication articles³⁶⁸ and civil disobedience,³⁶⁹ all of which had to be forcefully quelled. This can be explored through France's direct involvement with Porto Novo's choice of imam, which may have originated from its experiences in North Africa, where French colonials were required to get involved in selecting the imams of certain cities.³⁷⁰

Local Porto Novan Political Involvement

Houndji's role and position of power came about via his father, Toffa, albeit indirectly. As we learned in previous chapters, his brother was the immediate successor in 1908. Even in 1921, Houndji used his official title to condescend to the Muslim community, telling them what the divide was over and that it was up to him to name the imam and alfa candidates. As we know, he named Lawani as imam and then forced the Muslim leaders to place their hands on his sacred staff

³⁶⁶ Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 192. See also Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 26, 85-93.

³⁶⁷ Richard Roberts, *Litigants and Households: African Disputes and Colonial Courts in the French Soudan, 1895-1912, The Social History of Africa Series* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). Also, Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize ...*

³⁶⁸ “[Report on prohibited journals, with dates from of May 8, 1928 through the 1930s],” Carton 1E16, Dossier 5, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³⁶⁹ *Revue Militaire*, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. No. 155.

³⁷⁰ Pessah Shinar, “A Major Link between France's Berber Policy in Morocco and Its ‘Policy of Races’ in French West Africa: Commandant Paul Marty (1882-1938),” *Islamic Law and Society* 13, no. 1 (2006): 33-62.

as an act of declaration.³⁷¹ The fact that the Muslim leaders were told to place their hands on the Royal Staff of Hogbonou shows the significance of this minority community within the broader social structure of the population and the society. That Houndji's character was in question was something that all parties, including the French, were aware of, but this was not anything that Fourn or Resident Mayor Maria had any interest in addressing. An African Muslim who claimed to be neutral in this divide examined the proclaimed accusations of payoffs during the time of Imam Qassoumou's death, and then sent a letter describing it to the colonial administration.³⁷²

It was at the Royal Palace where Houndji made his bold announcement, speaking on behalf of the Muslims of Porto Novo, although he himself was not one. In front of many members of the Paraiso party, Houndji, along with the help of his Night King, Zounon, announced, "We do not want two imams and of the two options that you do have, Saroukou is not one of them!"³⁷³ It almost

³⁷¹ "[Report from Fourn and Maria, Dated June 1, 1921]," Carton 4E93, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. Refer to footnote 8 of the present chapter for additional information regarding this report.

³⁷² The letter reads as follows: "Be careful of an injustice of which will be born scandals. Two opposing parties each want to win their case. On one side is the intriguing El Hadj Mouteirou and his members who have achieved a discussion finally with the head of the colony and who are served by the intermediary of Monsieur Vieira, Saroukou's cousin-in-law who benefits from this dispute by being paid 1100 francs. In the name of these instigators Princes Dossou, Kporogan Oni de Kokossa, Atindopo, Kponou sons of Toffa who encouraged El Hadj Mouteirou Badourou Soule and consorted in obscurity that he would have received 500 francs by the intermediary Kporogan at the completion of the election of Imam. Mouteirou who dared yesterday to call out the traitor Houndji for having received 1250 francs from these naysayers for keeping the second imam (Saroukou) from winning and supporting the first (Lawani) elected by himself. Why must all of these payments allow them to win the cause and triumph over their adversaries? On the other side are the likes of El Hadj Mouteirou Badarou Soule that argued that Ali was paid a bonus of 750 francs by Chef Houndji for the choice of El Hadj Lawani. As for Ali and the fool Houndji, they should be condemned and El Hadj Mouteirou Badarou, Vieira and the rest of the cohort are also condemnable and ought to be chastised. To be sure it must be seen that France will never tolerate this type of injustice any further. Vive la France – Protector of the Religion of All Muslims. Adibi Adini- a neutral and just faithful Muslim" This is the "[Letter to Colonial administration in Dakar from Adibi Adini, Dated August 20]," Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³⁷³ "[Report of the meeting with a recorded start time of 11:30 a.m., Dated June 1, 1921]," Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

appears as if this was a personal mission for Houndji. His direct involvement is clear. The way in which it comes across in the document written by a French administrator is that he took this mission both seriously and personally. To speak in this way is odd for a non-Muslim without any real powers in the colonial administration or over its decision-making. We know that by this point and time, Islam had been politicized and represented a religion of “foreigners” who were disrupting the way Houndji and the French were running the city of Porto Novo³⁷⁴

General Political Activity

As was mentioned in previous chapters, non-Muslim involvement in Islamic culture in Porto Novo began as early as King Sodji’s allocation of land for a mosque, although as we also know, his intentions emerged out of a place of curiosity and interest in the religion of Islam and its Muslim practitioners. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Muslim communities had to fend for themselves on a smaller, more dispersed level, rather than functioning as one large *umma*. This scattering was eventually incorporated into the larger colonial situation. King Toffa manipulated the succession process when he saw his actual power and influence waning under colonial hegemony. In doing so, he created a division among Porto Novo’s Yoruba Muslim population, particularly the landowning and rentier groups, who supported the rightful successor, Sohingbe.³⁷⁵ This move to create a division and to label a large population of Yoruba Muslims as

³⁷⁴ “Confidential Political Affairs letter, No. 303c,” Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. This letter was officially sent to Dakar from Fourn. It discusses how Houndji and Ali were paid off by Paraiso,

³⁷⁵ “[1923 Report],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 14, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. This report speaks of the various Muslims who held the titles to these lands, referencing them by name. This was not nearly as significant as what Paraiso owned. The same elites continued to be discussed, including Aminou Balogoun and Yessoufou Lawani.

“outsiders” and supporters of British Nigeria, in turn allowed the French colonials to favor Toffa’s de Noupon line, which they felt they could control better than Sohingbe and his de Mekpon line, which did indeed have strong ties to the British in neighboring Nigeria from the early nineteenth century. The Brazilian Muslim community, to which the French gave certain privileges, even in the pre-colonial era, was incorporated by the French despite their Atlantic-world foreignness. Thus it was the Brazilians who then rallied in support of the Toffa successor. The restructuring of Hogbonou succession at the expense of Sohingbe and the Yoruba Muslim elite also compelled the already scattered Muslims of Porto Novo to see themselves, or at least, be seen by the French and non-Muslim elites, as belonging to one of two very different sides. One side was the “dissident” and “foreign” Yoruba, who were aligned with Sohingbe, whereas the other was the party of the Brazilians and Paraiso clan, who were in support of the French.

While these two inorganically formed *parties* spent the early part of the colonial period either accepting or refusing the labels that eventually came to define them, it was in the interwar era when the divide became visible enough that the larger French empire became concerned. The reason these French colonial administrators perceived the incidents of early 1920s as actual threats to colonial order are related specifically to the larger fears of Pan-Islamism, as well as the fear of potential loss of territory to neighboring European powers such as Great Britain. Yet the incidents that come out of the French fears amounted to little more than the explosion of a small bottle rocket, and not the explosive blast of a high-impact detonation that they had predicted.

Many colonial work hours in Porto Novo were spent in the act of observing and keeping track of the Muslim notables within the Yoruba party.³⁷⁶ Easing the burden of the logistical aspects of surveillance, and under decree from government officials in both Dakar and Paris, the French administrators required allies to assist them in the unofficial war on Pan-Islamism, with the exception of the Brazilians, who they felt did not possess the necessary qualifications to aid them in this manner. Basically, by the end of World War I, Fourn and his subordinates needed someone who could actually read Arabic and report on what materials came in and out of the region. The French administrators who were sent to Porto Novo were not particularly well educated in general; further, they had not come out of North Africa, as many of the colonials had who were stationed in areas that the French categorized as Islamic territories, such as Senegal, Mauritania, and the French Soudan. For these reasons, they were neither qualified nor appropriately trained to engage in the larger problems of global Islamic pressures put on France. Thus they needed to appropriate one or more of their Muslim subjects for the purpose of exposing potential pan-Islamic threats from abroad that might dangerously infiltrate the local communities. These actions of colonial rule aligned with academic rhetoric of the time, when certain developments were taking place in French ethnography. Observations by people such as Maurice Delafosse argued that the “unassuming and childlike” members of the world of *Islam Noir* needed “protection” from the aggressive and worldly machinations of North African Muslims, the so-called “legitimate Muslims” of the world, who they termed *Islam Maure*. This type of infantilization of Africans took many forms and played

³⁷⁶ For more on the overall approach to Muslim West Africa, particularly concerning the discussion of French policy and surveillance, see David Robinson, “France as a Muslim Power in West Africa,” *Africa Today* 46, nos. 3-4 (Summer-Autumn 1999): 105-127.

out at various levels and stages of the European conquest of Africa.³⁷⁷ For the French colonial endeavors of the interwar era, hegemony took the form of an attempted manipulation of an entire community with the specific aim of acquiring an informant at the expense of peace and camaraderie among a population of coreligionists.

The French's determination that an Arabic-literate imam be put into power was a reflection of the uncertainty that the French Empire faced after World War I, as well as an open political campaign against supposedly dissident subjects. As Sohingbe continued to outwardly and financially support the Mouteirou party, in addition to reinforcing the usury rights to land that Houndji continually attempted to reclaim, the French and Chef Superior's alignment with the Brazilian population reflected the economic situation of the Yoruba as making up the merchant and middle-class members of that society.³⁷⁸

One specific element that enabled the attempts of two opposing parties was the role of the press. In Porto Novo, literate and elite Muslims provided global news to one another. This included

³⁷⁷ Jean-Loup Amselle and Emmanuelle Sibeud, *Maurice Delafosse: Entre orientalisme et ethnographie: l'itinéraire d'un africaniste, 1870-1926* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1998). See also Chapter 10 by Alice Conklin on race regeneration in the AOF, and Chapter 12 by Véronique Dimier on the propaganda of direct and indirect rule, both in Tony Chafer and Amanda Sacker, eds., *Promoting the Colonial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France*. For a discussion of paternalistic tendencies of the colonial system, see the article by Dimier in *Politique et Sociétés* 21, no. 1 (2005), and her discussion of the French in the 1920s and 1930s who were particularly concerned, at least in the official rhetoric, of keeping the indigenous African subjects "protected," which meant under their control and surveillance. She writes: "Certes, partant d'une vision très paternaliste du gouvernement, tous les utilisateurs du concept de politique indigène s'accordent sur le fait que ce bien-être, comme la protection des populations « indigènes », doit être géré par l'État, assimilant ainsi cette protection à l'idée du contrôle et de la surveillance du bon père de famille sur sa famille et sur ses biens. Ils s'entendent également sur le fait que le bien-être des populations « indigènes » doit prendre la forme d'une évolution économique, sociale et politique et doit être appliqué dans le respect des traditions et des « cultures » de chaque peuple, formule qui, nous le verrons, n'est pas sans contradiction. Il semble toutefois que tous n'aient pas entendu de la même manière cette idée d'évolution dans la tradition" (p. 76).

³⁷⁸ "[1921 Second Trimester Report by Fourn]," Carton 1E8, Dossier 4, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. Fourn here disparages the Yoruba "landholding element."

information not simply about the West and World War I and its impacts but also, more significantly, about the actions of the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution and the Ottoman impact in the Baltic. Reading about these events changed the universal acceptance of Western domination by showing them that the European states were weakened and dysfunctional. As a reaction to new possible threats of resistance by their subjects, the surveillance tactics of the French were modified to meet different needs and goals, particularly in the context of the way they approached Islam, now seen as a political and national tool, potentially to be utilized against them. While the information from the various reports on Qur'anic schools came out of the 1907 and 1917 reports, the additional information, specifically regarding the literacy of the instructors and which "side" they supported, emerged from later investigations into Qur'anic education.

However, something unique to the particular situation of Porto Novo, where Muslims represented a minority of the population, is the subject that I contend marks the fundamental element of this history, which then allowed for other factors to fall into place. The element that I am referring to is Arabic literacy. As World War I came to a close and the Ottoman Empire was on its last legs, the French colonial administration needed to find a person whom they could control, but who also had a lot of clout within the broader community. They also needed one who was literate in Arabic.³⁷⁹ My argument is that for the city of Porto Novo, because of the perceived political threat to the French's broad presence as a global imperial power, an imam who was literate in Arabic would be the only imam that the French could accept. Arabic literacy was seen as

³⁷⁹ "[Fourn Report on Arabic literacy]," Cartons 1E84 and 1E86, Cahiers 1920-21, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. The signatures of Muslim men who signed their names in Arabic are evident in many letters to the French administration. Additionally, if one looks into the archival records of the Ansarou Dine organization, by 1936 those who signed their names in Arabic are the same literate men favored by the French administrators.

inconsequential to the majority of the Muslim population, who expressed that they wanted “their ministers to know how to address them from the heart about life ... in a language understood by the whole community... . It is the language of Nagot in which we communicate and [it is] that language with which we are concerned.”³⁸⁰ For the Lieutenant Governor of Dahomey, Gaston Fourn, as someone who knew little about Islam and even less about the Arabic language, keeping track of Arabic literature passing through the colony was more important than acting on the requests of the majority of the Muslims. It is also apparent that a few key individuals in power-positions at certain historical moments allowed certain events to impact this history in immense ways. This would be the case, unless one paid attention to the African voices of the time, who tried to alert the colonial administrators in Dakar about the actions of both Ignacio Paraiso and Lieutenant Governor Fourn, whom they claimed were reckless men who were afforded too much power over the destiny of colonial Porto Novo. It is clear that they were aware that the decision to move in this direction would have a horrendous impact for the Muslim majority.³⁸¹

Arabic Literacy

In addition to all of this, there is one factor which is new to the discussion, and that I argue was the true impetus behind the turmoil in the interwar era of Dahomey. The French colonial administrators, who had a history of misleading their superiors in Dakar, found themselves in the position of needing to co-opt the head leader of the city’s Muslim population so as not to appear as having lost the upper hand to the colonials in the eyes of their supervisors. This was especially relevant for the merchants crossing the borders into British territories on a regular basis. By gaining

³⁸⁰ “[Letter from Muslims to the Governor General, Dated April 4, 1920],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. See Appendix A1.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

access to the perspectives of people on all sides of the debate, many new and interesting aspects of Porto Novo's history come to light. This investigation demonstrates more than just the typical one-sided scrutiny of colonial documents that frequently occurs when studying the history of colonized Africa. Assessing different conflicts about the succession of imam at this time and place is one way in which the city reflected the disruption of the high colonial period. Through this examination we can then begin to explore the ways that both groups and individuals had to maneuver in their positions in their constant search for self-assertion. Examining and analyzing the continual adjustments in terms of self-projected identity and internalized imposed identity constructs, along with the impact of the French dominance, which in our case focuses on Muslims, but then goes well beyond the religious sphere and into a number of other civic and political entities, allows us to begin to understand the complexity of identity formation. Paul Marty suggested that there are two main causes behind the division of Porto Novo's Muslim community in the early twentieth century.³⁸² The politics of choice that went into determining the city's imam can be understood through evidence from field research and the most significant underlying factor in this extremely complex situation was the French need for an imam who was literate in Arabic and whom they could control.³⁸³

³⁸² Marty, *Islam et le Bas Dahomey ...*, 54.

³⁸³ While this comes out of the conglomeration of a number of archival documents, I came to this conclusion by looking at two specific items on the same day. One was a letter from Governor Fourn, "Letter No. 3042," Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. In this letter he states that he is concerned that the literate Muslims have publications sent to them in Arabic frequently and they are examined by the imam before going to their final destinations. This letter, in combination with another letter from the Yoruba Muslims dated April 4, 1921, in which the Yoruba Muslims specifically address the colonials questioning, and want to know why now they must have an imam who is literate in Arabic when for so long the colonial administration kept them from learning Arabic. For this second document, see "[Letter, Dated April 4, 1921]," Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

When raising questions of literacy as it pertains to both French and Arabic, which are often regarded as necessary to legitimize the past, there is little heard of the African voices in the written record in this part of West Africa. Also, because these Africans wanted to engage with the colonials, they used the French language in order to better communicate their needs, despite often being literate only in a local language or in Arabic. This was particularly useful, such as when they made their cases by contacting the Comité Franco-Musulmane in Paris and the Ligue des droits de l'Homme. In these cases, African agency does indeed emerge and is prevalent, as African Muslims went to serious lengths to communicate their grievances to the Parisian authorities regarding the French administration's intervention into their religious affairs. Both groups produced documents written in French. In the nineteenth century, the imam of Porto Novo appointed his successor, who was someone who had been an alfa to him.³⁸⁴ In the early twentieth century, the imam conflict came to represent a broader disharmony between both the local Hogbonou ruling elite, particularly under Toffa, and the way that Porto Novan Muslims experienced increasingly harsh and interfering colonial rule. Unlike their policies in Algeria, where the French had written codes into local city laws about their involvement in imam selection, nowhere in West Africa had this been the case. Even though North Africa was the starting point for the West African policies of a *Politique Musulmane*, these policies in West Africa eventually took on their own dimensions, void of what happened in North Africa, or even as we saw with Marty, which affected what happened in North Africa once an administrator spent time enforcing the *Politique Musulmane* in the AOF.

³⁸⁴ “[Letter Dated November 29, 1900, Signed by the Yoruba Muslims],” Carton 4E11, Dossier 4, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. This is one of the earliest letters written by the African Muslims addressed to the French government. It is signed by the Yoruba Muslims. It states that Toffa, the current leader, is misrepresenting their general traditions to the French colonials, and that they are not happy with his representation of their history. See also “[Trimester Report from colonial officials regarding Islam in Porto Novo],” Carton 4E11, Dossier 4, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

At this same time, Georges Hardy (1884-1972), creator of the colonial school system in the AOF and in North Africa, vocalized his intent on educating the North African populations to be literate in both French and Arabic. In Dahomey, Lieutenant Governor Fourn was extremely energetic in terms of what he continued to call the “dissident Muslim population” members’ interests in Arabic documents. Fourn attempted to get the administration in Dakar to take responsibility for censoring the transmission of printed texts moving about the empire, arguing they should be scrutinized for either Pan-Islamic or anti-imperialist messages in Dakar before reaching their intended recipient in the colonies. Based on the writings of Fourn found in the archives, this suggestion was in line with his approach to his administration in general. It is clear by an analysis of the documents that Fourn would let things unfold whichever way, and then he would send in reports trying to explain his way out of whatever the problem was by placing blame on everyone around him, particularly the Yoruba Muslim community.³⁸⁵ Yet here, there was a dearth of choices in Dahomey of people who were literate in Arabic, unlike the federation capital of Senegal. As he stated in the same letter, “it would be in Dakar’s best interest to exercise this type of control via censorship so that these works could go only to their destination via your [Dakar’s] authority and with your visa in the manner that you deem useful.” Furthermore, attached to the original copy of this letter, AP 382, is an item that is found in the Beninois archives that is not found with copies of the same archives in Aix: this is an erratum by Paul Marty. This handwritten note from Marty mentions Qur’anic schools in Porto Novo as not being any threat for Pan-Islamism. Further, there are multiple mentions in the archives regarding these Muslims not

³⁸⁵ See “Letter No. 144s, Dated March 24, 1922” and “Letter AP 209,” both of which are signed by Fourn: Carton 4E 11, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

knowing Arabic.³⁸⁶ This is, in fact, antithetical to the African-authored pieces, in which there was often a listing of people, including the literate among them, for the benefit of the administrators.

The Yoruba Muslims had a tradition of leading their prayers in the Yoruba language, and the Qur’ans were either transliterated by hand or printed in an *ajami* version in Yoruba.³⁸⁷ During the early occupation of the Four Communes, in modern-day Senegal, by the French, Arabic was accepted as an official language, particularly as the judicial system conducted procedures with written documentation in Arabic. However, a transition occurred at the turn of the twentieth century when fears of Pan-Islamism began to spread and continuity under the colonial legal systems unified under the entire federation of West Africa, all by 1905. At that point, official communication became acceptable only in the French language. Further, by 1911 the use of Arabic was fully prohibited.³⁸⁸ In places such as Dahomey, administrators in general were not literate in Arabic, and often the same was true regarding their assigned assistants. In the case of Fourn, for example, he clearly states that his use of a man named Jean Desanti, an administrator from northern

³⁸⁶ “[Fourn report],” Carton 4E11, Dossier 5, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. Also, for a list of names of literate Muslims, see the letter and response between Yoruba Muslims and Laribiere: “Letter A.E. No 840/2843, April 24, 1922,” Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin; and in the same Carton and Dossier, “Letter No. 717 AE, [Dated April 20th, 1922, by Jean Laribière, 3rd class administrative assistant].”

³⁸⁷ “[A letter from the “majority Muslim community” to the Governor (Fourn), Dated July 6, 1920],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 22, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. This letter is signed by 13 elite Muslims and explains that, “when we created an Arabic school in Porto Novo, the administration was eager to immediately close it even though our children continued to pray from the Qur’an. Thus the prayer and most of the Qur’an was translated into Yoruba allowing the doctrine of the Muslim religion of Porto Novo to be followed by all of our coreligionists who do not have the capability of Arabic ... of all the imams in Porto Novo we never heard of one who was completely literate in Arabic” See A1 of this dissertation for full letter. Also: personal interview Baba Yessouffou, (Flore Nobime, present), Porto Novo, Benin November 15, 2009.

³⁸⁸ Ghislaine Lydon, “Obtaining Freedom at the Muslims' Tribunal: Colonial Kadijustiz and Women’s Divorce Litigation in Ndar (Senegal),” in *Muslim Family Law in Sub-Saharan Africa: Colonial Legacies and Post-Colonial Challenges*, eds. Shamil Jeppie, Ebrahim Moosa, and Richard Roberts (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 135-164.

Dahomey, is what allowed him to censor the Muslims in Porto Novo, but that Desanti's reassignment left him no one with Arabic language skills. In a letter dated November 15, 1920,³⁸⁹ Fourn wrote, "we need to monitor certain books and label them as undesirable for reasons of charlatanism or witchcraft. For example, recently received texts came from a Cairo address we currently know to have produced pamphlets with a political aim which we fear are related to inspiring Pan-Islamism. In the past we [were able to] scrutinize these Muslim publications coming into Dahomey from outside points of origin because the chief lieutenant [Desanti] was an Arabist civil servant."³⁹⁰

Surveillance methods directed at pan-Islamic threats also resulted in an exchange of information between British colonials in Nigeria and the French in Dahomey. On March 6, 1920, a report sent to the Porto Novo resident about a man named El Hadji Hussein Borgi, a Syrian living in Lagos who was known to be openly anti-Allies during World War I. For this reason, the British government considered him undesirable and requested that he return to Porto Novo.³⁹¹ The British colonial who wrote the letter wanted to alert the French to the possibility of his arrival in Porto

³⁸⁹ "AP NO 382, [Dated November 15, 1920]," Carton 4E9, Dossier 21, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³⁹⁰ It was considered exceptional that they were able to hire anyone who knew Arabic at this point in the Bight of Benin, which was not considered a place in the Islamic world, or even of Islamic Africa.

³⁹¹ "[Letter from Raoux, an administrator in Lagos, Dated July 21, 1921]," Carton 5E7, Dossier 2, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. This is a report to the French in Dahomey about various Pan-African activities, from Marcus Garvey to the creation of an all-black owned American shipping company. Just as the French did, it seems that the British did not credit these movements with the notion that their goal was to truly unite Africans against imperial tyranny, but that there was some other agenda. In this case, Raoux argues that the black Pan-African societies that were begun by West Indians, and which asked members to pay dues, were only there to extract money from the "poor, unassuming Africans." He does not consider the idea that they might be part of a larger global movement to unite many peoples of African descent.

Novo because, as he put it, the man was “likely as undesirable for Dahomey as for Nigeria.”³⁹² The fascination with Pan-Islamism that was inculcated under Fourn, and the continued surveillance of Muslims who were involved in print culture that originated from outside of the AOF, emerged in the period of time coinciding with the end of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the French mandate over Syria. The fact that the French became almost paranoid about a pan-Islamic threat this long after the Ottoman’s had spread the notion of Pan-Islamism, is particularly nonsensical, especially because the peoples who came under direct French control after World War I, those of Aleppo, Damascus, Mount Lebanon, and other areas affected by the French mandate, were not supportive of the concept of Pan-Islamism in general.³⁹³

A letter from Governor General Jules Carde to Lieutenant Governor Fourn just a few years later³⁹⁴ explained that some censorship measures were put in place, and according to Carde, “because of the anarchists, we need to now engage the police and the postal service along with customs when it comes to the forbidden journals and places of import.” Aside from watching what types of printed texts entered their colonies, the French also monitored what types of documents were dispersed by them. However, Dahomey developed a diverse number of printing establishments, and because of their proliferation, the French censors could not keep up with all of the colonial publications published at the time.³⁹⁵ By the 1930s, about 40 percent of the titles on

³⁹² “[Unsigned letters],” Carton 5E9, Dossier 5, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. These letters were in the wrong files at the archives, as this folder was supposed to only have correspondence between Freetown and Porto Novo.

³⁹³ Mardin Şerif, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), chapter ten: “Nemik Kemal: The Synthesis,” pp. 290-311.

³⁹⁴ “[Letter signed by AOF Governor General Jules Carde, Dated May 15, 1923],” Carton 1E16, Dossier 5, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³⁹⁵ Dov Ronen, “The Colonial Elite in Dahomey,” *African Studies Review* 17, no. 1 (April, 1974): 55-76.

the list of “interdit” or forbidden publications aimed for regions of the AOF came out of Dahomey.³⁹⁶

The literate Muslims frequently have publications sent to them which are in Arabic. These are examined by the mayor, Resident Maria³⁹⁷ and inspected before going to their destination, there is often a long wait before these individuals receive what they ordered. To avoid this inconvenience why we are still maintaining surveillance, I decided that all brochures and publications from now on must have my visa on them- all packages of books must have this before being delivered to their destinations and all will be accompanied with a piece of paper indicating that it was authorized by the local authorities (signed Fourn).³⁹⁸

On both February 26, 1921 and March 5, 1921, the future imam, Ony Bello, received books from Tunis and Algiers, and it was later documented in letters from June and November of 1928 that the same booksellers from Tunis and Algiers sent texts to other prominent Muslims of Porto Novo. An archival document dated December 18, 1923 contains information of language against the French sent from Morocco to Mohommad Boujandar of Porto Novo.³⁹⁹ It is also clear that this monitoring was not short-lived. Even 10 years later, the colonial administration continued to keep alerts on the Muslims of Porto Novo. For example, a 1932 report mentions that Moustapha

³⁹⁶ “[List of prohibited journals with ‘dangerous tendencies,’ Dated March 18, 1935],” Carton 1E16, Dossier 5, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. Those from either Porto Novo or Cotonou were seen as the most “dangerous.” The specific titles were: *Presse Porto Novienne*, *Phare du Dahomey*, *Etoile du Dahomey*, *Voix du Dahomey*, *Courier du Golfe du Benin*. There are only two from anywhere else in the AOF, both of which are Senegalese (*Le Flêch* and *Le Carde*) and those in Arabic such as L’Ikdan [The number of individual publications from Porto Novo and neighboring Cotonou was immense. The Brazilian population was incredible prolific in starting and maintaining individually run newspapers. See W. Joseph Campbell, *The Emergent Independent Press in Benin and Côte d’Ivoire* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998).

³⁹⁷ Fourn must have meant after someone like Desanti translated them, as Mr. Maria had no skills in Arabic.

³⁹⁸ “Letter No. 3042, [From Lt. Gov. Fourn to Gov. Gen of Dakar, Dated September 16, 1920],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

³⁹⁹ Diverse Affairs, “[Unsigned document, Dated December 21, 1923],” Carton 1E8, Dossier 6, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. See also “Document No. 13,” Carton ANB 2C93, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

Cherobanon imported six books in Arabic; Taini Baillaras imported eleven; and Alfa Yesoufou and Ilmi Ichela each received one Arabic book.⁴⁰⁰

Fitting Pan-Islamism into French Colonial Porto Novo

[Pan-Islamism] is a vast plan on the part of the Ottoman government aimed at throwing us [the French] out of Africa, by unleashing against us, the religious passions of the Muslim population ... Ottomans placed obstacles to “our” imperial expansion (signed French Foreign Minister Barthelemy Saint Hilaire).⁴⁰¹

A brief historical understanding of French imperial desires on a more global scale is important in considering the ways in which nationalist ideas within the colonial system took shape in less overtly strategic locales, such as Dahomey. This is particularly relevant because Africans were aware of both European and Ottoman perspectives during these moments in history; as agents of change, they constructed their own philosophies regarding the larger geo-political circumstances of which they were a part. African Muslims were well-versed in the various discussions of the day, and although Pan-Arabism was in its infancy, Pan-Islamic ideas had spread throughout the Muslim communities worldwide since the late nineteenth century.⁴⁰² Using acquired knowledge of the then-current political situations of the larger world in which they lived,

⁴⁰⁰ See the various documents in the file labeled “Arab Propaganda,” Carton 4E9, Dossier 10, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

⁴⁰¹ Barthelemy Saint Hilaire played an important role in Jules Ferry’s cabinet, particularly making the French imperial occupation of Tunis a reality. As this formerly Ottoman area was the key to a greater French presence in Africa on the whole, he saw Pan-Islamism as a real threat, particularly where neighboring Libyans had taken on the Sanussiyān Sufi influence of anti-Imperialism.

⁴⁰² See Azmi Özcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain, 1877-1924* (Leiden: Brill, 1997). See also Basheer M. Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism and the Palestine Question, 1908-1941: A Political History* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1998); Raghīd Şulḥ, *Lebanon and Arabism: National Identity and State Formation* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004); Jesse Russell and Ronald Cohn, *Pan-Arabism* (Edinburgh, UK: Lennex Corp, 2012).

these Africans made decisions based on their position as outliers on the geographical periphery of the Islamic world. At the same time, their decisions regarding various issues reflected the local realities that they faced every day.

Within Porto Novo, an awareness of the universal experiences that the global *ummah* faced is apparent by the early twentieth century, in what is often considered the era of international consciousness of Pan-Islamism. This was the case even though this region was considered outside of the Islamic sphere. In 1912, a letter addressed to the Governor General of the AOF, François Clozel, included a discussion of a Syrian Muslim under surveillance in Porto Novo who was found with a German pamphlet underscoring the Turco-Arab war.⁴⁰³ The following May, Lieutenant Governor Noufflard of Dahomey wrote to Clozel on two separate occasions in regards to a local merchant named Moustapha Adegindi, who sold chromolithographs of “Turkish troops” in which Islam was presented as “triumphant against European aims.”⁴⁰⁴ From an on-site visit to this gentleman, Noufflard catalogued at least one Turco-Italian placard and five war placards with images of the Turco-Balkan War. While Noufflard reported these items as part of his surveillance, his letter also included the caveat that, “one is not to worry about the indigene who has only a simple comprehension of these events and only sees the images as a triumph of a man of color

⁴⁰³ “[Letter to Clozel, Dated March 4, 1912],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 10, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. For a discussion of the German involvement in the Ottoman cause before World War I, see Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express the Ottoman Empire and Germany's Bid for World Power* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2010), 54-83. The Syrian element was obviously an issue, as the French and British were figuring out their new areas of control in what they foresaw as the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The Sykes-Picot agreement of 1915-1916 was similar to the Treaty of Versailles, except that it was done in secret. It determined the spheres of influence in the Middle East that both France and Great Britain agree to after the fall of the Ottoman Empire; see Matthew Hughes, *Allenby and British Strategy in the Middle East 1917-1919* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 120-123.

⁴⁰⁴ “[Letter from Lt. Governor Noufflard, Dated May 23, 1913],” and “Report No. 770 [from Lt. Governor Noufflard, Dated May 28, 1913],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 10, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. Both are similar.

versus a white, he does not see it as a Muslim against a European.”⁴⁰⁵ The seemingly relative laissez-faire attitude of Noufflard, who presumed to know the intentions of the seller regarding the items that he sold, is yet another example of the failure on the part of the French to fully understand their subjects’ global reach and knowledge of the world.

These examples, and the larger ideas represented within them, align with Benedict Anderson’s discussion of emerging nationalisms in the celebrated book *Imagined Communities*, particularly with his examination of the roles that print culture played in informing the eighteenth-century Creoles of the Americas as some of the first conscious acts of nationalism.⁴⁰⁶ I find this fitting in the example of Porto Novo’s Muslim population for two reasons. The first and most obvious one is the idea of the Brazilian Muslims as returnees, and the Yoruba Muslims who were perceived as Nigerian or British subjects living in a French colony.⁴⁰⁷ In chapter four of *Imagined Communities*, Anderson writes about the *pilgrim Creole functionary*, suggesting that the identity was created on the journey, or in the flow of movement, so that those having traveled to the Americas bonded over the experience. He posits that the last thing an absolutist functionary would want to do after such an experience would be to return home.⁴⁰⁸ Furthermore, it is suggested by

⁴⁰⁵ “[Letter, Dated May 28, 1913],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 10, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

⁴⁰⁶ Benedict Anderson, “Creole Pioneers,” in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (Verso: London; New York, 2006), 47-66.

⁴⁰⁷ It states: “Muslim travelers in French territories and specifically Nigerians with propaganda as well as Niuro perhaps. We must be particularly alert because of xenophobia and Mahdist movement in Nigeria in December. Even today the Peuls, and Tukolors even more than the Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya are in touch with their eastern brothers, the fanatics of Egypt (Signed Fourn). Cf. “AP #189 C, [Dated July 2, 1923],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. It is clear that the concern is about ethnic groups and not the *tariqa* in this case.

⁴⁰⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities...*, 50-55.

Anderson that in the Atlantic World, fellowship among Creoles was based on the shared fate of being born in this enlarged world. This argument of legitimacy, whether logical in the present understanding of historical processes or not, worked both ways. Those born in Spain *could not* be American. Thus in terms of identity, the impossibility of the other being something new led to the creation of Eurasians, Eurafricans, and Euramericans, all of whom constituted *visible* social groups.

But where Anderson's chapter on Creoles and nationalism truly underscores the idea of *Muslims on the periphery* of the geographical borders of Pan-Islamism during the interwar era is in his argument about print culture, when he discusses the "creole printment of provinces." Initially in the Americas, small-scale gazettes were printed to keep track of the Spanish colonial economy, but over time a dual purpose arose. Creoles in Latin America read their own paper, but also neighboring papers as well, not to mention those produced by the Spanish for the residents in the metropolises. The reverse, however, was not the case. Europeans only read what was printed and produced on the continent, thus the American Creole population had access to, and synthesized, information from multiple places, and distributed with differing goals. The Muslims of Porto Novo, particularly those who were literate in Arabic, had access to information produced by Europeans as well as the Pan-Arab nationalist and Pan-Islamic groups, which allowed them a more diverse perspective on their role within the larger world. Furthermore, because Porto Novo had such a large number of educated and literate peoples, the local press reflected other discourses and spoke to various peoples, perhaps without colonial Frenchmen on the ground even realizing it, other than to put certain texts on the list of prohibited documents. When Noufflard wrote to Clozel with potentially significant information, but then proceeded to editorialize on behalf of the merchant Moustapha, deciding that his actions neither constituted political nor anti-Imperialist

statements, this type of thing was a great disadvantage for the French colonial goal of clamping down on anti-French activities.

The fall of the Ottoman Empire just after the end of World War I set up new opportunities for Western European nations as they worked to dominate potential economic windfalls in the form of newly acquired colonies. Some of this was due to the redistribution of German territories after Germany's loss and because of the Treaty of Versailles, but another significant area of the world was the Middle East and the potential oil reserves that opened up with the fall of Ottoman rule.⁴⁰⁹ Making sure to distinguish between Pan-Islamism and Pan-Arabism is necessary in understanding this history on a larger scale. I begin with a discussion of Pan-Islamism as a counter movement by the Ottoman sultan to offset Western European aims towards empire building.⁴¹⁰ Here the later emergence of Pan-Arabism comes into play, which was not a response to Pan-Islamism, but rather a separate movement with different, yet not altogether contradictory goals.

Between 1916 and 1918, Sherif Hussein ibn Ali of Mecca, with the support of the British crown, rose up against the leaders in Ankara and spread his doctrine that focused on a unified Arab state that would span the area from Aleppo to Aden. The goals were for regional and ethnic unity, but also were aimed at resisting colonialism, which was not unlike dealing with his adversaries, the Ottomans. However, it was not until the 1930s and the intellectual inclusion of Marxist thinking

⁴⁰⁹ See also BoAY EE 122/3 29 Rajab 1309 Feb 28, 1892 "Gather the Muslims of Central Africa under the roof of the Caliphate"; and James Piscatori, "Reinventing the Ummah: The Trans-Locality of Pan-Islam" (conference paper, Lecture to the Tenth Anniversary Conference: 'Translocality: An Approach to Globalising Phenomena,' Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin, Sept. 26, 2006).

⁴¹⁰ Michael Provence, "Ottoman Modernity, Colonialism and Insurgency in the Interwar Arab East," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43 (2011): 205-225.

that Pan-Arabism really took root.⁴¹¹ The work of predominantly Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals and the role of the Protestants in the United States all played a part in the emergence of a unified Arab world.⁴¹² As a response to the League of Nations mandate for France with the Syrian region and the politics surrounding the Suez Canal, the Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 in Egypt as the first bona fide Pan-Arab nationalist organization. As Pan-Arabism grew in popularity over the years, the members became more radical in their vision of what defined them. This was especially the case in Egypt, where those who began to be proponents of a singular Egyptian nationalist identity were then associated with paganism by the Pan-Arabists.⁴¹³ Making the connections amongst the discord around Pan-Arabism, Pan-Islamism, and Egyptian self-determination, all of which merged in Cairo, the Islam of Porto Novo and the French behavior and actions taken in the colonies can be seen in a new light. Making these connections elucidates why the French seem to have been unnaturally alert to the importation of Arabic texts, which came from Cairo-based booksellers. It appears that their real fears were focused on Pan-Arabism and the nationalist movements that were crucial to its foundation, and their need to documenting these concerns. Thus, Pan-Islamism was misappropriated and co-opted terminology.

⁴¹¹ Barry Rubin, "Pan-Arab Nationalism: The Ideological Dream as Compelling Force," *Journal of Contemporary History* 26, nos. 3-4 (Sept, 1991): 535-51, in *The Impact of Western Nationalisms: Essays Dedicated to Walter Z. Laqueur*, eds. Jehuda Reinharz and George L. Mosse (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1992), esp. 535-36.

⁴¹² For a discussion of the role of the Protestant influence in the creation of an Israeli state and the role of Zionism in global policy, see Caitlin Carenen, *The Fervent Embrace: Liberal Protestants, Evangelicals and Israel* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), especially in the introduction and chapter one. Also, Anderson's discussion of the English-ness of nationalism and private property on pages 67-68 does not directly address Comtist thinking but there is shadow of its influence. In the case of Pan-Arabism this might be explored but for Pan-Islam, it defeats the role of spirituality.

⁴¹³ C. Ernest Dawn, "The Formation of Pan-Arab Ideology in the Interwar Years," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 20, no. 1 (Feb, 1988): 67-91.

Unlike Pan-Arabism, and the nationalist rhetoric of which it was constructed, Pan-Islamism, was not trans-national⁴¹⁴ at its inception; rather, it was born from ideas where national boundaries were transcended, while both ethnicity and specific regions were connected via shared religious beliefs. Yet part of the problem with the confusion between the two ideologies of Pan-Islamism and Pan-Arabism was that the majority of the literature on Pan-Islamism's reach was limited to the Arab world and India, despite the fact that the larger goal was to reach beyond geographical limitations.⁴¹⁵ Nevertheless, during the era of its quickest rate of growth, Muslims in typically considered non-Islamic areas worked themselves into the discourse, just as Anderson's American Creoles in the Americas.

In the pre-colonial era of the 1870s, the Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid used the support of the tariqa brotherhoods in an attempt to rebuild and solidify the Muslim world against colonial European advancement, which the Europeans perceived as a serious threat. In the Berlin Congress of 1878, when the Russian and Balkan issues were "settled," Bismarck also encouraged the French to settle in Tunis. France did this by claiming to protect the region from neighboring "Turkish" attacks on Algeria in 1881. But in a response, Sultan Sadiq Bey sent Ottoman troops to Tripoli.

⁴¹⁴ I do not use the term "trans-national" in its current manifestation as an academic trend, particularly because I do not think it is something that is relevant to African history, as the borders of the national boundaries came out of a forced enclosure of space that created "insiders" and "outsiders" who had their spaces defined for them. While in the Americas, the borders that became national boundaries were also arbitrary, the colonists determining the new rules and laws of independent nations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were foreign oppressors themselves who all but eliminated autochthonous populations; thus the boundaries had no reason to fit into a prescribed arrangement. In French West Africa, however, the boundaries being fought over were not created by Africans, but rather, only used by them in proto-nationalist movements and for a lack of any other options.

⁴¹⁵ See Rasheed Chowdhury dissertation on *PanIslamism and Modernization, 1876-1909* (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 2011). One is an area outside of India that looks at this in Southern Africa, where it continues to deal with Indian migrants in the Transvaal and their registration documents. See *The Caliph and Anticolonial Resistance in Africa*, 255. In 1915, there was an incident known as the "Silken Letters Conspiracy," which signaled the revolt of Indians and Afghans against the British Raj.

Because of this particular standoff, Abdulhamid's Pan-Islamic policies focused on Tripolitania and other Libyan provinces, including Benghazi and Fezzan. The ideas were then put into action on the ground in these regions by both the Madariyya and Sanussiyya Sufi orders.⁴¹⁶ In 1908 when the *Committee of Union and Progress* took control of the former Ottoman government, it also inherited all three of Abdulhamid's Pan-Islamic policies, and proceeded to utilize them to the fullest extent possible. These policies were used effectively during the 1911-1912 Tripolitanian War, World War I, and even the Turkish War of Independence from 1919 to 1922. Notions of Pan-Islamism were highly successful with Indian Muslims, who were known as the "Young Turks," peaking between 1908 and 1918.⁴¹⁷

Outside of geographic Arab borders, one place that Pan-Islamism was successfully incorporated was with the Indian Khilafat Movement against Britain, which occurred in 1919-1924.⁴¹⁸ For the Ottoman Empire, Pan-Islamism ended with the abolition of the caliphate in 1924. The timing of both the Indian and Ottoman's final push towards a Pan-Islamic world correlated directly with France's overreactions to their Muslim subjects in West Africa, and particularly in Porto Novo in the first half of the 1920s. Further, to add one more threat to the vulnerability already

⁴¹⁶ Chowdhury, *PanIslamism and Modernization, 1876-1909*, 122-159. It is significant that scholars of French colonialism are divided between which *tariqa* order disrupted the French more, Tijaniyyism or Sanussiyyism. See John Victor Tolan, et al., *Europe and the Islamic World: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013); and Benjamin Soares, "'Being as Good Muslims as Frenchmen': On Islam and Colonial Modernity in West Africa" *Journal of Religion in Africa*. 39, no. 1 (2009): 91-120.

⁴¹⁷ See *Arab Bulletin*, 1916-1919, and the English *Secret Bulletin*, which also led to the discussion of how both "indirect rule" and "direct rule" works. There is also information on this aspect, which is known as the Arab-Dissident Movements from 1905-1955, as discussed by Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

⁴¹⁸ K. Vélez, S. R. Prange, and L. Clossey, *Religious Ideas in Motion, in A Companion to World History*, ed. D. Northrop (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

felt by the French, this timing also coincides with the Bolshevik Revolution (1917-1922) which inspired oppressed peoples all over the globe to aspire to better kinds of rule than that of one hegemonic occupation.⁴¹⁹ This idea fits into the French observation that Moustapha only saw the photographic image of a person of color defeating white people against a European background.

Further complicating things, as I mentioned, the Ottoman's Pan-Islamic success relied heavily on the strength of *tariqas* in areas not long-considered to be part of the Muslim world, such as India, Indonesia, and Africa. The most visible occurrence of success was in India, where Muslims pushed back against British colonials. These affronts were most often from the Qadiriyya brotherhood, which left a bitter taste on the proverbial colonial tongue, no matter what part of the empire they administered. The French history with *tariqas* actually favored the Qadiriyya, and it was the Tijaniyya and Sanusiyya which they usually labeled as hostile. In the Senegal-Mauritanian areas during the nineteenth century, leaders of the Tijaniyya background led military campaigns and caused enormous problems for the French imperialists and their armies.⁴²⁰ Adversaries at times, in this case the British and French found a common enemies with Pan-Islamism and the Ottomans.⁴²¹

Adding insult to injury, Mahatma Gandhi supported the Indian Khilafat Movement in their collective anti-British sentiment and actions, which he and his followers purveyed as further

⁴¹⁹ See also Jacob M. Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islamism*, vol. 1, 1913-25 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); and A. Burdett, ed., *Islamic Movements in the Arab World, 1916-1966*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), esp. the section focused on the French mandate in Syria in 1921.

⁴²⁰ David Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal: The Western Sudan in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

⁴²¹ Although by the 1940s the British would once again turn on the arrangements made with the French in those areas that they had occupied, such as Jordan and Palestine, withdrawing in order to ensure economic relations with Turkish leaders.

support for self-determination.⁴²² The Indian cultural response was found in educational institutions that fit within the framework of the colonial government, which were known as the Aligarh movements, and which were led by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan.⁴²³ It appears⁴²⁴ that the Ahmadiyya Sufi order opposed the Indian Khilafat movement, and this is the reason why there was so much propagandizing in Nigeria and Dahomey for the British and French subjects there to follow this order, if they were to follow any at all.⁴²⁵ This is the reason why the French encouraged Ahmadiyyism in their colonies in West Africa, along with the grounds that the British supported it in neighboring Nigeria. The unknown author of the previously mentioned report from 1935 from Porto Novo to Dakar argued that Indian Muslims were both more “passive” and more “modern” because of the lengthy period of colonization by the British, and it was his opinion that the Muslims in Porto Novo were finally also starting to be passive because of this. It was his contention that the French should not be particularly alarmed, but rather simply follow the progression attentively.

⁴²² Navigant Srinivasan Raja ram, *Gandhi, Khilafat and the National Movement: A Revisionist View Based on Neglected Sources* (Bangalore: Sanity Sandhu Prakash an, 1999). See also Shabnum Tejani, *Indian Secularism: A Social and Intellectual History, 1890-1950* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).

⁴²³ Avril A. Powell, *Scottish Orientalists and India: The Muir Brothers, Religion, Education and Empire*. (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2010).

⁴²⁴ “1935 Second Trimester Report, [Unsigned],” Carton 1E16, Dossier 4, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. This report states: “Ahmadiyyas are seen as the new elite in the Muslim world even though it has been an isolated order for a long time. In Lagos, it has been there for many years and there is a particular Imam who in 1923 tried to come to Porto Novo and become imam (with the support of the French) and while there are no official organizations of it in Porto Novo, there are certainly enough young Muslims who favor its liberal rules and that it conforms to a modern lifestyle. Thus these young Muslims are in conflict with the older ones who are Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya. The Ahmadiyya mix with non-Muslims in both the political and economic domains and look at the problems of modern life in a new manner. To us, the administrations, we see this is because of the influence of Indian Muslims who were defeated and sent away by the British in neighboring Lagos.”

⁴²⁵ See the entire report of Captain Andre April 24th, 1923, as he traveled through Dahomey and Nigeria and discussed the support for and positive attributes of Ahmadiyyism as he records the “Muslim Question” in these places as part of a colonial reconnaissance: MiOM 1462, Archives Nationales d’Outres Mer, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France.

In regards to the French apprehension towards Arabic literacy among their Sub-Saharan African subjects, comparable experiences in British India show that this is not a far-fetched notion, but one that the colonials were concerned with in many of their overseas territories where language significantly impacted the success of the broader civilizing mission.⁴²⁶ This was later used against them, as Arabic became normalized in the Qur'anic schools and Muslims increasingly adopted Arabic as a language that was not only spoken but also written and read. At the turn of the twentieth century in Turkey, a paper called the *Zamunder* was the mouthpiece of the landlords and young Muslim political activists.⁴²⁷

The Tripolitanian and Balkan wars of 1911-1912,⁴²⁸ “profoundly disturbed literate Muslims...,” particularly those of the Deoband School, or the Dar al Ulum created under Shah Waliullah’s teachings.⁴²⁹ Most Deobandis were Qadiriyya (or Nagsharbardī). Deoband ulema were as concerned as other literate Muslims about the Sultan of Turkey, the Caliph of Islam, but also wanted to stay on the colonial governments’ “good side” in order to continue to hold power over

⁴²⁶ Nile Green and Mary Searle-Chatterjee, *Religion, Language, and Power* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁴²⁷ We see here the tendency of the British to label problematic Muslims as “young,” much in the same way that the French renamed many of the Yoruba Muslims in Porto Novo as “youth.” See Paul Marty, *L’islam au Bas Dahomey...*, 58-68. Marty calls them by various terms, including foreigners, youth, El Hajjis, and Nigerians.

⁴²⁸ F. R. Bridge, and Roger Bullen, *The Great Powers and the European States System 1814-1914* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 311. I was a research assistant for Holger Afflerbach at Emory University before he went to Leeds. We often discussed Islam and Africans in World War I. He planned a conference on WWI for which Jimmy Carter was the keynote speaker with no panels on Africans or Islam, and I admonished him for it. His latest work, along with his coauthor David Stevenson is entitled *An Improbable War: The Outbreak of World War I and European Political Culture Before 1914* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012) at least attempts to address the Ottoman and Muslims aspects.

⁴²⁹ Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 348-355.

their madrasas.⁴³⁰ Despite the few who deliberately went to the British government with complaints against their rivals, the bigger astonishment here was the unification of Hindus and Muslims under Gandhi in 1919-1922.⁴³¹ They pushed the anti-British tendencies of various rivals, such as Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb.⁴³² The transition from the Ottoman Empire to a Turkish Republic was debated within a complex set of identity issues, one of which concerned the role that mass migration played in restructuring the empire in the first place.⁴³³ Turkish nationalism was difficult from the get-go, as Pan-Islamism and Pan-Arabism existed in a web of decolonization and twentieth-century political organizations.⁴³⁴

The direct ties between Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and Pan-Islamism in the nineteenth century were the consequences of interactions between more modern forms of education, new social classes, and political liberalism, all within a specific historical context that produced a different type of Pan-Islamism.⁴³⁵ However, the French attitude in the interwar era towards the

⁴³⁰ For an in-depth understanding of the connections between the British Empire, India, Islam, Russia and the Ottomans during the long nineteenth century, see M. Naeem Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918-1924* (Lieden: Brill, 1999), esp. chapter one, and specifically the pages 23-28.

⁴³¹ Sana Haroon, *Frontier of Faith: Islam in the Indo-Afghan Borderland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 103, 113. See also M. J. Akbar, "Beware of Dust Storms," *India Today*, November 21, 2011: "An astonished British Raj watched the Muslim clergy, led by Imam-e-Hind Maulana Azad and Maulana Abdul Bari, gladly cede leadership of its Khilafat jihad to a frail Gujarati Bania."

⁴³² David Emmanuel Singh, *Islamization in Modern South Asia: Deobandi Reform and the Gujjar Response* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2012).

⁴³³ Karpat H. Kemal, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 115.

⁴³⁴ See Chapter 12 in particular, on the Ottoman Empire in Africa, in Kemal, *The Politicization of Islam...*, 258-275.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 276.

Russian Revolution somehow reinterpreted Bolshevism on behalf of the African elite.⁴³⁶ For Louis Hounkanrin, who went from beloved African to exiled dissident during this time, and his link to the Yoruba Muslim community and its actions supporting Sohingbe early on, and also its resistance to further French oppression, his work became conflated with communist tendencies.⁴³⁷ Governor General Carde dispatched the following information to his lieutenant governors on November 25, 1925: “Bolshevik propaganda is being organized in Arabia by Monsieur Nakimov, a representative of the Soviet government for King Hussein. The English are in the Red Sea and the Sudan at this time. Put your pilgrims [referring to those who were planning to go on the Hajj] under surveillance.”⁴³⁸ Fears of anti-imperialism and Pan-Islamism continued into the 1930s, when Governor General Brevié addressed Fourn in a probe to see if he had noted any activity among Dahomean Muslims and their possible associations with Moscow. This came about because Brevié had recently been made aware of increased activity between Africans and Russians, as well as African conversations with the Anti-Imperialism League of Berlin.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁶ “[Letter from Fourn to Carde, Dated April 21, 1923],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. Fourn writes of the African Yoruba Muslims as communists: “The most compromised of them is Aminou Balogoun to whom he [Hounkanrin] wrote letters.”

⁴³⁷ Albert Gandonou, *Louis Hunkanrin, ou, La grande France: drame historique en quatre actes* (Porto-Novo, Benin: Editions de l'Étincelle, 1994). Of all the work on Dahomey during the colonial era, of which there is still not much compared to other areas of the AOF, Louis Hounkanrin is the most researched, as he was a part of the African intellectual movement towards nationalism. Although his engagement with the Muslims early on is often overlooked, as is his major detailed report explaining the masquerade practice of Zangbeto to the French, he is more than adequately covered in the secondary literature. I only bring him up to connect the Bolshevik fears of the French colonials with their pan-Islamic ones at this moment after World War I.

⁴³⁸ “[Report from Governor General Carde, Dated November 25, 1925],” Carton 1AFFPOL/ POLMUS/208, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France.

⁴³⁹ “[Report from Governor General to the Lt. Governor of Dahomey, Dated December 28 1931],” Carton 4E11, Dossier 5, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. This report followed the earlier circulation of Political Affairs Reports Nos. 190 AP/2 and 263.

Pan-Islamism and Porto Novo in Conclusion

In addition to the intelligentsia, which had emerged in the past decade or so in support Mouteirou, Hounkanrin in particular was yet another thorn in the side of the French. Hounkanrin at one point was a functionary of the colonials, but upon suffering the reality of colonialism he had become an outspoken nationalist, revolutionary, and idealist for independence.⁴⁴⁰ Ony Bello and Dossou Toffa were chosen as the two leaders that both Houndji and the French could support, though just a short time later French colonials charged Bello with a political, anti-French letter-writing campaign and sent him into exile.⁴⁴¹

Overall, Lieutenant Governor Fourn appeared to spend much of his time attempting to manage his mistakes. For example, in one letter addressed to Governor General Carde, who had replaced Merlin in his position only a month earlier, Fourn wrote,

... I want to discuss the menacing propaganda against the entire administration that has been taken under the direction of the notorious communists regarding the previous letters of March 24th. And regarding Hounkanrin who is a dangerous friend and representative of Dahomey as well as the members of the Intercolonial Committee on Studies of the Communist Party have succeeded in monopolizing the situation and gained the ability to manipulate the protocols of the metropolitan association, the Comité d'action Franco-Musulmane and the ligue des droits de l'homme ...⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰ “[Discussion from the members of Ansarou Dine to their selection delegates, Dated 1933],” Microfilm in 8G/51, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France.

⁴⁴¹ “[Official report, marked confidential, from Porto Novan administrator, Dated May 31, 1923],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 21, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin; “[Letters and reports from the organization of Ansarou Dine, 1936].” See also “[Letters requesting parade for Tabaski, Dated April 21, 1925],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 11, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

⁴⁴² “[Letter from Lt. Governor Fourn to Governor General of the AOF, Dated April 21, 1923],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, AP #209, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

Literacy in general was one tool that provided access for Muslims to connect globally, and this caused incredible distress for the French and the elite Brazilians, particularly Ignacio Paraiso. This becomes apparent when the colonials and Paraiso gain knowledge of exchanges between the Yoruba Muslims and the Comité Franco-Musulmane, which had bases in both North Africa and Paris. The French continued to obsess over Arabic literacy, particularly in terms of Porto Novo's imam. The irony is that these Muslims who were literate in French, if not also Arabic, meant that they felt comfortable reaching out to Parisian groups like the Comité Franco-Musulman and the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme. In France, there was a movement to reappropriate Islam within the metropole. As early as 1906, Paul Boudarie proposed building a mosque in France. Several years later, a mosque and hospital were built for North African soldiers who had fought in World War I, and additionally, a cemetery was inaugurated in 1919 for those who died.⁴⁴³ Further, in the midst of the so-called pan-Islamic "scare," on January 30, 1920 the Muslim Institute was created in Paris, and a year and a half later, a law was voted in based on Édouard Herriot's⁴⁴⁴ proposition that the Republic wanted to support the Muslim religion.⁴⁴⁵ While this was most likely intended so that the French government could do more surveillance of Muslims, the visible, pro-Islamic support had already been put into place. While these acts were targeted at North Africans, Muslims even in non-traditional Islamic locales such as Porto Novo felt a connection to their coreligionists, and also felt justified in asking for their help.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴³ Mohammed Arkoun, *Histoire de l'islam et des musulmans en France du moyen âge à nos jours* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2006), 716.

⁴⁴⁴ Herriot worked closely with the French government during the Third Republic, particularly on foreign affairs.

⁴⁴⁵ Arkoun, *Histoire de l'islam et des musulmans ...*, 705-709.

⁴⁴⁶ "[Letter from Aminou Balogoun to Mr. Lavenarde (Director of the Comité Franco-Musulmane) in Paris, Dated June 30, 1920]," Carton 4E9, Dossier 11, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. This is

As just mentioned, notable Yoruba Muslims had connections with people in French associations based in the metropole such as the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme and the Comité Franco-Musulmane.⁴⁴⁷ Their introduction to these organizations came out of their support of Hounkanrin, who held sway with these international associations as part of the wider French West African intelligentsia movement of pre-nationalists, and specifically because he was a member of both of these organizations.⁴⁴⁸ Whereas the informed Muslims of Porto Novo felt a common bond in their right to reach out to international organizations such as those mentioned above, colonial Frenchmen such as Marty did not fully comprehend where these African subjects had developed their sense of worth that allowed them to pursue action based on their perceived rights. As Marty's records show, his interpretation was of the "unfortunate disorder in Porto Novo," which was *because* an organization such as the Comité Franco-Musulmane was engaged in what he called Islam of the "fetishist countries where the adepts speak with indifference or disdain to the [colonial] leaders."⁴⁴⁹ The fact that these were not *Moorish* Africans, but rather those of the world of *Islam Noir* disconcerted Marty, who was determined to actualize a real distinction between the civilized "Moors" and the "pagan and heathen Blacks." Yet Marty was also aware of the local indifference of the vast majority of Muslims towards Arabic literacy. His review of Saroukou,

the first act taken by the Yoruba Muslims, who felt that both Fourn and Mayor Maria were swindled by Paraiso, and thus not treating the majority of Muslims in the city fairly. In this letter, Balogoun reached out to a North African-based group to intervene on behalf of his community. From that point on, Fourn had it in for Balogoun in particular, who, along with Hounkanrin, ended up exiled in Mauritania for 10 years.

⁴⁴⁷ John Ballard, "The Porto Novo Incidents of 1923: Politics in the Colonial Era," *Odu 2* (1965): 52-75. Also see Marty, *Le Bas Dahomey ...*, p. 63

⁴⁴⁸ Louis Hunkanrin, 1920 (reprinted 1970), Louis Hunkanrin Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University.

⁴⁴⁹ Marty, *Le Bas Dahomey ...*, 62-3.

whom he labeled as *Alfa*, but who was considered by the majority as the legitimate imam of Porto Novo, mentioned that “Saroukou was close to illiterate and not allowed [by the French] to preside over prayers. Still, he was considered almost saintly with a mystical affiliation with the Nigerian populations in the region.”⁴⁵⁰

Having analyzed and contextualized findings in the archival documentation from that time with the events that occurred in colonial Porto Novo through the 1920s, along with the agenda of the local administration in its approach to Muslim subjects regarding literacy and how information was spread, what is historically clear is that the bigger concern of the French was, in fact, not local, but a fear of Pan-Islamism throughout the empire, and following how information was spread throughout it. Although Fourn most overtly expressed his concern of Arabic-language documents getting into the hands of Muslims in Porto Novo, the impact of literacy among the Muslim populations in French-controlled areas existed well before he took his station, and even in areas of the AOF that were considered non-Islamic.⁴⁵¹ But as various forms of anti-imperialist movements emerged in the interwar era,⁴⁵² the control of Arabic publications became a key concern to French colonials, and this is well documented in letters from Governor Fourn between 1925 and 1927, which show his demand for detailed reports on particular individuals such as Badji Idrissou and a

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 60-2. Marty also used the terms Yoruba, dissident, youth, and Nigerian interchangeably for the majority Muslim group that supported Saroukou; I refer to this group as the Yoruba or the majority Muslim group.

⁴⁵¹ “[Fourn discussion about the Muslim Press],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 10, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin; “[Fourn discussion about the Muslim Press, Dated November 13, 1911],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 22, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. Both of these documents express concern with Arabic literacy in Porto Novo.

⁴⁵² Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State...*, 141-42. See also “[21G Muslim Affairs, No. 37, Dated June 18, 1938],” MiOM 2182, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France. This document discusses the requirement of Muslims traveling to carry identity cards, even within the colony. This was established in 1930 under Joseph Reste; see Joseph F. Reste, *Le Dahomey, réalisations et perspectives d'avenir*, (Paris: Publications du Comité de l’Afrique Française, 1934).

bookseller named Amadou Tijani of Porto Novo.⁴⁵³ In the end, this lasted only a little while, and by the time Alfa Bello became imam in 1927, the “disputes” were all but over. According to a report on published periodical information about Islamic propaganda that was written to the Political and Administrative Affairs Director on Aug 24, 1933, the Muslims in Porto Novo had caused no problems, neither amongst themselves nor to the colonial administration, and the situation had been well since Bello’s appointment in 1927.⁴⁵⁴ Throughout his time as Lieutenant Governor of Dahomey, Fourn was concerned with Arabic literacy via the types of books, pamphlets, and miscellany that came into Porto Novo, in addition to who ordered and purchased these Arabic titles. M. Saint-Lager sent a letter to Governor General Brevié in Dakar on May 31, 1933 which mentions that despite the surveillance, and the fact that they had kept track of which people in Porto Novo had bought Arabic books, there were no identifiable political threats. Saint-Leger’s letter provides an in-depth examination of the situation, which discusses the fact that Muslims in Porto Novo at this time, “... are still under surveillance but I see no threat to our hegemony because Imam Bello is completely behind the French colonial endeavor.”⁴⁵⁵ They had their own ideas of who supported them and who did not which unfortunately was not a permanent state for Africans who could one day be favored and the next, sent into exile.

⁴⁵³ Under Fourn the concern over Arabic publications did not dissipate even after Bello became imam and Houndji had died. In the 1930s, the offices in Dakar continued to conflate anti-imperialist and Pan-Islamic movements again, so even as Fourn was replaced, the new lieutenant governors continued to carry on the paranoia.

⁴⁵⁴ “Renseignement Rapport, No. 1180, [Dated August 24, 1933, Sent to the Political Affairs Office regarding Islamic Propaganda],” 14 Miom 2359, Files 17G/247, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France.

⁴⁵⁵ “Mixed Affairs Files, No 165, [Dated May 31, 1922, Signed by H. Saint-Leger],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 6, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

Even immediately after Qassoumou's death in 1920, the French administration in Dakar was ready to move on and accept that the city had two communities with two imams. For Fourn, Maria, and the other colonial French ruling Porto Novo, they felt that this was unacceptable. Thus, they spent a lot of effort agitating the two parties, particularly in the way that they expected them to finish building the Friday mosque together while insisting that Lawani would be the presiding imam. These various interconnected relationships pertaining to building the Friday mosque will be the focus of our final chapter.

Despite knowing that Houndji was involved in a bribe that assured El Hadji Lawani the nomination, the administration from Dakar seemed concerned only in ensuring that the proper legal steps were taken against the individual who had received the money, but not against Houndji. Beyond this, there was little attempt on the part of the French to recognize that the decision of having two imams was perfectly acceptable to the Muslims in this part of Dahomey, but that the strong objection came from their own administration. Again, this was an issue for Fourn and his subordinates, who were beleaguered by the issue of Arabic literacy. For Fourn's superiors in Dakar, it did not even occur that finding an Arabic translator could possibly hinder colonial rule in Dahomey. A few days later, a letter from the colonial publicist shows that he became aware of the complaint letter made by the Yoruba Muslims that was sent to General Secretary Amide Lavenarde at the headquarters of the Comité Franco-Musulman in Paris. He wrote to Fourn asking him to clarify the situation. In this case, the efforts made by the leaders of the dissatisfied Muslim party asserted their position in colonial Porto Novo.⁴⁵⁶ Olivier wrote:

⁴⁵⁶ "AS No. 463 [From Marcel Olivier to Fourn of Dahomey, Dated September 25, 1920]," Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. Marcel Olivier was the copywriter, meaning the press publicist for the colonial administration before eventual becoming Gov. General of Madagascar in 1924.

I am transmitting two complaints received by the Comité Franco-Musulman from the Muslims of Porto Novo addressed to M. Amidee Lavenarde of 110 Re Denham, Paris. Please make note of these complaints and return an answer to me. (Signed on behalf of the Minister of Colonies, M. Olivier.⁴⁵⁷)

Thus, despite a lack of knowledge of Arabic, the Yoruba Muslim's mastery of the colonial language of French allowed them to pursue a legitimate and valid complaint against Lieutenant Governor Fourn, Resident Maria, and the rest of the administrators on the ground in Porto Novo. The question of the imam was part of bigger much larger issue of French colonial control in Porto Novo. As one administrator opined in his report to Fourn and Maria, whichever Muslim leader went to the morgue sooner, this would be the quickest, and perhaps only way in which the problem of the grand mosque would be solved.⁴⁵⁸ Our discussion now moves in the final chapter to the details and history of the Friday mosque of Porto Novo, which thus brings all of the aforementioned historical experiences together, allowing us to see this history in a new light.

⁴⁵⁷ "[Letter]" ANB.

⁴⁵⁸ "Letter No. 878 [Address to Lt. Gov of Dahomey from the Inspector of Administrative Affairs of the Southern Regions, Dated February 12, 1924]," Carton 4E9, Dossier 7, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

6 Conclusion: Cooperation and Controversy among Co-Religionists

... the religious issue is of little interest to these pseudo-Muslims of Porto Novo and the issue of the mosque is first, a personal one as can be gleaned from the leaders ... the parties will make no effort to find a solution, then there is no desire not to reach one. Everyone wants the mosque to his imam exclusively. So long as there are two imams there will be no mosque and the question seems unsolvable.⁴⁵⁹

This statement comes from a 1924 letter written to Lieutenant Governor Fourn and Resident Mayor Maria by the Inspector of Administrative Affairs for the Southern Regions. He was yet one more French colonial administrator who was instructed to unearth information about something with which he was unfamiliar. He was asked by the Ministry of Colonies to give a report on the Muslim “issue” in Porto Novo, particularly after the revolts of 1923.⁴⁶⁰ The choice of using the term “pseudo-Muslims” tells us volumes about the mentality of the French assigned to administer this region, showing that it was explicitly constructed by the colonial imaginary as non-Islamic. However by the mid-1920s, when this letter was written, the French already had been in the area for many decades, and these colonials should have known the significance of the Muslim communities of Porto Novo. While they may very well have had the information, colonial

⁴⁵⁹ “Letter No. 878, [From the Inspector of Administrative Affairs of the Southern Cercles to the Lieutenant Governor of Dahomey, Dated February 12, 1924],” Carton 4E9, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

⁴⁶⁰ Most of the research on Porto Novo during the colonial era focuses on what is called “The Porto Novo Incidents.” These so-called incidents occurred in March 1923 when various members of the city became upset with the colonial administration for over-taxing the populace and forcing military conscription, which then led to riots and the colonial government in Dakar sending in troops to quell the disturbances. An article written by John Ballard, to which I have referred in previous chapters, is the most well-known and useful piece of scholarship discussing these revolts, even though it written almost 50 years ago. See John Ballard, “The Porto Novo Incidents of 1923: Politics in the Colonial Era,” *Odu* 2 (1965): 52-75.

propaganda publications by Alain Quellien, Robert Arnaud, and Paul Marty, and the ethnologies by scholars like Maurice Delafosse clearly influenced the attitudes of the Ministry of Colonies even more than the events on the ground. By referring to these people as *pseudo-Muslims*, particularly as this came at the end of the report after myriad details that he had learned regarding the situation, we can see that, by this point, the concepts of *Islam Maure* and *Islam Noir* had been embodied by members of the colonial system and accepted wholly, and without question or critique. From the perspective of the African Muslims, the actions they had taken to appeal through the proper channels fit directly into their understanding of their relationship with the French. Yet, from the perspective of the colonial French, Islam in Porto Novo had little actual significance; they regarded its practitioners as little more than impersonating the belief system of Muslims to the north.

While the building of the Friday mosque was initially supposed to show how well France embraced diversity within its empire, the resulting experience of its actual construction became a reminder of the implicit and explicit differences among the Muslim groups, as well as the general hegemony of the colonial system in which the African populations had to live and attempt to assert themselves.⁴⁶¹ The controversy and corruption that surrounded its construction showed some of the difficulties that the Africans faced under colonial rule. While at certain times discord was overcome in the greater goal of creating this wholly place of worship, the various trials that the larger West African population experienced as colonized peoples were replicated on a micro-level

⁴⁶¹ I use Grand Mosque and Friday Mosque interchangeably as they both refer to the place where the Islamic holy day Friday is celebrated with special prayers in addition to the *salat* (five daily prayers) as compared to a mosque or *masjid* where one might go on a daily basis to pray or consult with others on religious advice or instruction.

when building the Grand Mosque. Explicating this history behind building this mosque illuminates the broader experiences of colonized Africans in general.

This chapter includes documentation from a handful of individuals and groups, both French and African, as they discuss their engagement with elements of Islamic practice in Porto Novo. Through the written words of those living in colonial Dahomey, French West Africa, and Franca, historical events are presented through a variety of individual and collective perspectives. These are oft-forgotten reminders that in our attempts to know the past, each narrative that we encounter is informed by the specific experiences of the unique group or person who lived it. These stories, then, are a reflection of reality as seen through a much focused lens. It is through the collection of multiple narratives that we can access a variety of perspectives. As historians, we collect and synthesize these realities, which inform our representation of the past. In many respects, it is not necessarily advantageous to separate determining one account from another. The act of accurately portraying historical events, is less of a concern than presenting the multitude of voices to be heard. Taken altogether, this chapter consolidates the various controversies addressed in the previous chapters, as we see the ways they played out for Muslims in colonial Porto Novo.

The Friday Mosque and Identity

In order to conclude this history, I asked an important question. Is it possible for a group, while constructing a single edifice, to come together to do the same with their identity. By this I am asking if a unitary identity can be built in the same way that a building can be constructed. But perhaps even more importantly in the case of colonial Porto Novo and the members of the Muslim minority population, did the process of building a Friday mosque signify their experience under

French rule? I contend that the mosque represented more than a house of worship; it was a location in which intra-Muslim and intra-African debates could play out fully in this colonial capital city. I also write this history to give these past events the respect they deserve.

The present-day Wikipedia explanation of the Friday Mosque in Porto Novo is, “a Brazilian-style church, which is now a mosque.”⁴⁶² This is a somber reminder of how widespread misinformation can insert itself into acceptable patterns of understand.. While of course most scholars are highly critical of information found on Wikipedia, it is a reflection of the broader social realms in which many people acquire information. For the future of Porto Novo’s Muslim communities, as well as to genuinely hone in and clarify the idea of these colonial struggles, I hope that someday both the academic world and everyday individuals will come together in both dissemination and appropriation of knowledge.

The first recorded discussion among Europeans and Muslim notables as it concerns the building of a Friday mosque occurred in 1906. A colonial document focusing on the management of the fluid borders in this particular region, those between French and British territories, also focused on the commercial relationships among various European companies. The file, which addresses British commercial houses run by both John Holt and John Walkden in Dahomey, was thus the starting point for the construction of a Grand Mosque.⁴⁶³ As we know, the division between the Muslims groups was sometimes considered in the realm of pro-French verses pro-English African support. And further, the colonial administration dealt with the economic conflicts

⁴⁶² Wikipedia contributors, “Porto Novo,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, accessed March 16, 2014, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Porto_Novo.

⁴⁶³ “Justice: 1910-1911,” DAHO/VIII/ Dossier 6, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France This files contain court records involving John Holt vs. Zinssou Agbolan, and also Holt vs. Alladi Soummamou, December 1911.

between certain Muslims as part of their overall *mission civilisatrice*. On March 2, 1906, a delegation of Porto Novan Muslims, composed of Senhor G. M. Lopez, Al Hadji Mohammed Mokhtar,⁴⁶⁴ and the favorite of the French colonial administration, Ignacio Paraiso, proposed the building of a Friday mosque for the whole city. Their argument for this edifice was that the mosque that they currently used, known as Diouma, which was located in the Akpassa quarter, was forty years old, falling apart, and too small to fit all of the coreligionists.

Indeed, it is interesting that the Brazilians created the petition at all. Of course they were the same Brazilians who in favor with the French, especially at this particular time when Sohingbe was in the midst of attempting to take control of the royal palace. At this same time not only did he have the support of the Yoruba Muslims, the French also considered this group of Yoruba Muslims as foreigners in their own right and labeled them British subjects. Nonetheless, the Brazilians helping to push forward the idea makes even more sense when we learn that the Akpassa quarter was a well-known Yoruba quarter, and that the Brazilians would not have been members of that mosque in that neighborhood at that time. It is possible that because Mokhtar was the imam for the entire city, he was able to get the Yoruba of Akpassa to go along with the plan because of his clout as their religious leader. But it was Paraiso and his fellow Brazilians who negotiated for the Friday mosque to be built in the Zincome quarter, near the central market. Though this was also a Yoruba quarter, it was one where the Brazilian Muslims did not hold onto the negative memories of older Yoruba families, which did occur in the Akpassa quarter, particularly when it

⁴⁶⁴ Mokhtar was the imam at this time.

came to their dislike for Ignacio Paraiso.⁴⁶⁵ Taking the focus away from the Akpassa quarter was thus a shared goal of both Paraiso and the Brazilians.

The construction did not begin until 1910, but when it did begin, the issue of where this building was to be constructed once again arose, this time under the interim Governor of Dahomey, M. Antonetti. Antonetti had taken on the future planning and development of the city, where he came up with his own vision of a new Grand Mosque. According to his wishes, it was to be built back in the Akpassa quarter.⁴⁶⁶ In the end, however, the financial compensation went not to the Muslims of the Akpassa quarter, whose mosque was demolished because of the wishes of the company John Holt and Co., the city's most profitable company,⁴⁶⁷ but to the Muslims of the Zinkome quarter, which bordered the Grand Market. Antonetti argued that there would be little displacement in this quarter for the new mosque, but he nonetheless granted 5,000 francs for the construction of it, and a small piece of land along the Avenue Doumnegeje was donated for this purpose.⁴⁶⁸

In May 1911, with the 5,000 francs given to them by the administration for the initial costs, construction officially began. The tasks of organizing the design and the actual construction was given by the colonial administrators to a well-known entrepreneur, Senhor Pereira, who then put the three members of the original delegation in charge; again, this was Lopez, Paraiso, and the

⁴⁶⁵ Interview with Cheikh Ibrahim S. Onifade, *Predicateur de l'Islam*, (Flore Nobime, present), Mosquee Centrale de Porto Novo, October 14, 2009. Mr. Onifade was in his eighties when I met with him in 2009. He has been an inhabitant of the Akpassa quarter his entire life and is also a notable Muslim in Porto Novo.

⁴⁶⁶ Paul Marty, *Études sur L'Islam au Dahomey: Le Bas Dahomey- Le Haut Dahomey* (Paris: Éditions Ernest Leroux, 1926), 76

⁴⁶⁷ For more information on this incident, see Chapter 2, pp. 73-74.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Imam Mokhtar. Because of the scope and significance of building the Friday mosque, and also because Porto Novo was a cosmopolitan city used to religious pluralism, Muslims, Christian, and even “fetishists” or those who practiced the local religion of Vodun, all donated money and assisted in the physical labor.⁴⁶⁹ In addition, materials for the mosque’s construction were also donated. While building was underway, and as the Akpassa mosque had already been razed, smaller mosques in various quarters rotated the Friday services between them.

When Imam Mokhtar died in 1909, his successor, Bissirou, took over all of his duties, including guarding the money that had been collected by the Porto Novan people for the Friday mosque. However, it was Senhor Lopez who was in charge of distributing this money to the correct individuals for their materials and labor. With Bissirou now installed as imam, the project suffered a terrible blow when Lopez was accused of stealing a large portion of the money. Colonial Resident Auguste le Herissy led a small inquiry on the matter but decided that the rumor was unverifiable. However, as we know, Paraiso and many other Brazilians were in the employ of the French colonials, so it would not be unreasonable to consider that le Herissy did not take the complaint from the “dissident” population seriously enough to investigate the matter fully.⁴⁷⁰ The Yoruba were displeased that this issue was not being pursued more seriously, and thus they stopped working on the construction of the mosque. The Paraiso party continued their work, but by the end of 1912, they had run out of money. A few months later, in February of 1913, the Yoruba group

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ More than 10 years later, when referencing this, the Inspector of Administrative Affairs took the side of the Brazilians in his report on the Muslim division: “The contractor was Senhor Lopez. The young [read as Yoruba] accused the old Muslim party [read as Brazilian] under Paraiso of keeping poor accounts. The Resident of Porto Novo before whom these complaints were brought recognized the scope of foolishness in these accusations.” Cf. “[Report, Dated February 12, 1924],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 7, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

again took up the construction project, after having acquired another 5,000 francs from their own community. During this time, Imam Bissirou also passed away. Because there was now heightened tension among the two Muslim parties regarding the mosque and the question over the disappearance of the money, the issue of the new imam became much more politicized and troublesome.⁴⁷¹

This time, the Yoruba group burned through the 5,000 francs in just six weeks, and by September 1913, construction again was halted.⁴⁷² Next, it was the Brazilian's turn again. In this perpetual back-and-forth, the Brazilians had located a few more donors and they had begun to work again, whereas the Yoruba had stopped. After a few more months of varying amounts of labor exerted on the project, by July 1914, while simultaneously dissention over the next imam was at the forefront of discussions, Senhor Lopez died. Then, in that same summer, amidst all of this local disruption, World War I began. When this war broke out, nothing more occurred with the Friday mosque for quite some time.⁴⁷³

In September 1919, according to various interviews with some of the older marabouts, the Mouteriou group of Muslims decided to complete the construction of the mosque, this time by attempting to include the Brazilian community.⁴⁷⁴ There was a big meeting with Ignacio Paraiso and the Yoruba Muslims that started off well, but then disintegrated into a personal polemical

⁴⁷¹ Marty, *Études sur L'Islam au Dahomey...*,76.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 77.

⁴⁷³ “[Letter from Inspector of Administrative Affairs to Lt. Governor Fourn, Dated February 12, 1924],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 7, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. This letter states: “... during the War, construction was suspended as materials became too expensive and the building was left empty...”

⁴⁷⁴ Marty, *Études sur L'Islam au Dahomey ...*,78. The Muslim elites who were interviewed by Marty about this included Aboudou Bamanou, Balogoun, Saroumi, Aboo Fari, and several others.

argument between Al Hadji Mouteirou Soule and Paraiso. At this point, construction resumed by the Yorubas for a while under the direction of Limamou Saroukou, who managed the labor costs of the construction at an amount of 500 to 2,000 francs per week. At this time, the Brazilians then made a move to get a second plot of land not for itself, but for Mouteirou's group. Apparently the Brazilians felt that they had the right to claim ownership of the Grand Mosque, despite having spent less time and money on it than their rival. However, this did not work out, and eventually the French authorities and some locals were obliged to intervene. At this point, construction again was suspended.

Use of the Friday mosque, and who was to become the leader in charge, became the second major Muslim issue in Porto Novo at this time. Thus, the period between 1920 and 1924 was an emotionally heightened moment. This was a period when, for the first time, the city had two imams. In addition, there was a growing fear of Pan-Islamism amongst the French colonials. All of this occurred while the mosque was slowly getting closer and closer to completion. An unknown author of a letter from February 1921 to the Lt. Governor Fourn suggested that the Muslims do "what Protestants in Lagos do," meaning that they should alternate weeks for use of the whole building. This was an idea that clearly came from leaders in Lagos, where Anglicans and Presbyterians used the same church on alternates Sundays. Fourn and the other administrators perceived this as a possible solution. They felt that when the two Muslim groups were within their own quarters, and interacting very little with one another, everything appeared to run relatively smoothly. Furthermore, this was the most fair and just answer to the problem, as each group had contributed varying amounts of money, time, and labor to the building of the Friday mosque. However, the two Muslim parties were not amenable to this idea, and were more inclined to follow

the model of the Lagos Muslim populations, who had one individual Friday mosque built for the returnee population, and one for the local Muslim population.

Why French Involvement?

A number of themes emerge as it concerns the Friday mosque in colonial Porto Novo. I started with the most obvious question, which was a common thread found among numerous themes on this subject: Why would the French get involved with the details of the construction of a Friday mosque in one of their colonies, particularly one which was not seen as Islamic, and where the Muslim community itself was divided? Various answers to this question led to a large number of subtopics. The answers include: French paternalism, money and ethics, indigenous ruling powers, Arabic literacy and the imam, individual colonial personality traits, and power mongering. In addition to those issues that are a part of the larger question of why the French became involved, are those with which the Africans themselves dealt. They continually had to adapt to the specific ways that the French had inserted themselves into their religious decisions. For the larger Yoruba Muslim population, this flexibility was admirable and allowed them to reinvent their identity, but it also forced them into a largely political way of needing to define themselves where the spiritual elements of life often fell to the wayside. This examination includes the perspectives of both the Yorubas and the Brazilians, as well the imam question, and finally, particular acts of violence. Through the words of both African and French voices, all of these themes arose around the construction of Porto Novo's Grand Mosque.

In these concluding ruminations, some of the detailed reasons why the French colonial administrators became so heavily involved in this particular situation emerge. Generally speaking, when colonial cities were built, they often undermined the indigenous economy and disrupted usual patterns of land use and social structure.⁴⁷⁵ New urban designs divided cities as never before. These creations were known as experimental. Unlike places such as Tunis in Northern Africa, or Saint Louis, Senegal, a city not unlike Porto Novo, with its three-dimensional architectural bricolage that was representative of the Atlantic World, European, and Africans who settled there, in their colonies, the French left tangible evidence of the *mission civilisatrice*, and later the *mise en valeur* through state schools, hospitals, government offices, public ports, post offices, and train stations. According to the architectural historian Gwendolyn Wright, the French considered their colonial cities as, “de-tribalized communities *par excellence*.”⁴⁷⁶

In the case of Porto Novo’s mosque, the most interesting aspect of the entire narrative is that the discussion of specific architectural style is not mentioned anywhere in the archival

⁴⁷⁵ “Report from Civil Service following decision #631 of April 11, 1938,” AFFPOL/155/ Administrative Litigation Council of Dahomey, CAOM, Aix en Provence, France. Louis Hounkanrin, after returning from ten years in Mauritania as a political prisoner, was asked to write up the customs of the indigenous population particularly in regards to the Zangbeto masquerade which was part of the Royal Palace night guard under the Night King of Hogbonou. IN This report where Hounkanrin gives explicit details he mentions that it is the smallpox diety Nanabloukou (Yeke) the mother of smallpox whose shrine was in the Agbekome area had once been in Zinkome but was forced to move when the French assigned land to the Muslims to build their mosque. This not only shows the displacement of Africans particularly challenging what the French called pagan practices, but also the misunderstanding when others have attempted to study this. The assumption was that, the smallpox diety in question was Sakpata, the more popular Vodun of this disease, and her shrine which was claiming to be disturbed. There was not the understanding that in Zangbeto, there were two distinct smallpox deities and it was Nanabloukou’s shrine that was destroyed. Sakpata’s shrine was in the Houeyogbe quarter, the older Goun region near the Royal Palace. When the French were confronted with having destroyed the shrine to the smallpox diety because of allotting land to the Friday mosque, there only reference was this second shrine nowhere near the Zinkome area and thus considered the complaint invalid. The roel that colonial language played in disrupting local affairs is a much larger topic but is seen in this example of having contributed to the eventual decimation of an entire diety. When Nanabloukou’s shrine was destroyed, there was no way to rebuild it and the diety herself, eventually disappeared.

⁴⁷⁶ Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 303.

documents. This is incredible considering that the mosque was to be a visual masterpiece. In fact, the style was based on the cathedral of Saint Salvador of Bahia, built both by and for slaves in the eighteenth century. The church in no way resembled a typical mosque from the Arabic, or even West African, world. In terms of its design, it is one hundred percent Atlantic in origin. This anomaly is something that has been addressed in recent years, but mainly in the field of art history. Had the Yoruba Muslims attempted to design a mosque in a more similar manner to regions of the Sahel, one can wonder whether the French would have been so quick to assist the Yorubas in its completion. Architects of that time were aware of the social conventions that were acted out in public and private spaces, which formed a complex ritual of order. The spaces needed for these rituals to take place could both facilitate or hinder their success. Thus, we can argue that these same ideas were implicit in the design and implementation of the Friday mosque in Porto Novo. The difference in colonial Dahomey is that the architecture was specifically Euro-Brazilian in design, created in an effort to proclaim itself as distinctly different. However because of the colonial ties to the architecture, the structure was a contradiction of the very African-ness that it proclaimed itself to be.

In an attempt to contain their subjects, the French administrators on the ground in Porto Novo certainly perceived their version of the events as justified. But it is also clear that in the larger bureaucracy of the French Empire, antagonizing the Yoruba Muslims had a backlash, as this group was willing to reach beyond local authorities for assistance in this matter. This was particularly the case, as the leaders of the Yoruba community were convinced that they were

unfairly oppressed in relation to the Brazilian Muslim population; they were not afraid to make their complaints known to those in higher positions outside the borders of Dahomey.⁴⁷⁷

In any study of colonialism, there is likely to be a discussion of paternalism. For French West Africa, this is found in the ideas of *Islam Noir* and *Islam Maure*, as there are myriad examples of where the French colonials felt that they needed to “protect” the black Africans from, in their perspective, the more civilized, yet also more devious Moorish Africans from North and Sahelian Africa. Thus, the way in which the French treated Islam in these areas of *Islam Noir* was often a paternalistic one. In the case of the Friday mosque specifically, paternalism appeared in the manner in which the French attempted to get the Yoruba to work together with the Brazilians for “the greater good” of completing the building. In one of Fourn’s earlier reports of 1920, he states that he had had a conversation with “the dissidents, telling them that they had the power and freedom to do what was necessary and stop the incidents and conflicts.”⁴⁷⁸ This same type of condescension is also apparent in another document by a third-level administrator named Jean Larivière, in his report of April 1922. The following remarks are part of his reflection after he was visited by a group of 60 Muslims:

... demanding with their usual cleverness our assurance on assisting in the continuation of building their mosque. I let them know that it was their project. I also insisted on the necessity of perfect understanding between both groups in order to get a good result. They promised to do everything possible and left me with an

⁴⁷⁷ This is seen in a letter from Governor General Merlin to Fourn asking him to explain why he, Merlin, received a complaint from the proto-organization of the League for Oppressed Peoples regarding the treatment of Muslims in Porto Novo: “[Letter from Governor General Merlin to Lt. Governor Fourn, Dated May 24, 1921],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

⁴⁷⁸ “[Letter to Governor General of the AOF, From Lieutenant Governor Fourn, Dated June 8, 1920],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

announcement that they would be back to see me after tomorrow and submit the program with what they plan to do.⁴⁷⁹

The tone in this letter is both aloof and paternalistic. Laribière considered these Muslims as devious and manipulative in their pursuit of colonial input. Furthermore his paternalism came across as didactic as he wrote about having to remind them that it was their project and that they needed to work out their differences, as if the French had not inserted themselves on the side of the Brazilians and were part of the problem themselves!

The problem of financing the construction of the mosque in Porto Novo was yet another place where the French and Africans found themselves in conflict. The major issue over the roughly fifteen years of construction was that the Brazilians had tried to control the majority of the building's creation, yet they had not been contributing to the majority of the funds. Thus, the Yoruba population continued to invest, but did not see the types of results that they would have liked. As discussed above, the first major problem with the funding was that there was an accusation of theft by the Yorubas against the Brazilians in 1912. Years later, in the 1920s, when there was another valid attempt to work together and finish the building, the issue of money once again came up. The Yoruba had the 50,000 francs, which was the amount of money that each party had agreed to pay at the outset, but the Brazilians only had about 27,000 francs.⁴⁸⁰ The Yoruba did not trust the Brazilians when it came to money because of the earlier incident of the alleged theft of funds by Senhor Lopez.

⁴⁷⁹ "Letter No. 840, [Addressed to Lieutenant Governor of Dahomey, From Jean Laribière, Dated April 24, 1922]," Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

⁴⁸⁰ "[Letter to Lieutenant Governor Fourn, From Inspector of Administrative Affairs for the Southern Circle, February 12, 1924]," Carton 4E9, Dossier 7, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

To add insult to injury, a meeting with the French administrator Resident Maria resulted in his offer to pay the difference on behalf of the Brazilians in order for both groups to move forward with the correct agreed-upon sums of money for the project. He gave both parties a day to either accept the offer or not. Not surprisingly, the Brazilian party readily accepted the offer, but the Yoruba did not. The French documents then state that the Yoruba Muslims were being “difficult” for not accepting the French offer. There is no recognition on behalf of the colonials that this financial proposal was not only offensive to the Yoruba but also one more example of the favoritism given to the Brazilians by the French. Beyond this affront to their pride was the fact that if the French were indeed allowed to contribute such a significant amount of money at this stage in the construction, it seemed likely that they might also have taken it upon themselves to make more general commanding decisions about the building. Of course, the Yoruba population never wanted the French to enter into this endeavor in the first place, and the Brazilians managed to involve them because the French had always officially supported the Brazilian group whenever a disagreement came up and the French had to take sides. In fact, this is just what happened in the election of the imam, as the French involved Chef Superior Houndji, connecting this issue to the larger problems surrounding the Grand Mosque.⁴⁸¹

The second time that money came into play in the dispute between the Brazilians and the Yoruba was during imam selection after Qassoumou’s death in 1920. While there had already been a divide regarding the officially recognized imam, Qassoumou was generally liked by all Muslims, yet upon his death, when he named Saroukou as his successor, the schism was hardened. The Brazilian group wanted to support El Hadji Lawani Damala, who was neither an alfa nor anyone

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

who would normally have been named as successor. However, the French's interest in Lawani's election was that he was literate in Arabic, and as we learned in previous chapters, they were desperate to be able to monitor and keep surveillance on their Muslim subjects. Houndji, the chef superior, stood behind anything that the French supported, which guaranteed that he would remain in his position of power and receive his annual stipend from the French colonial administration.⁴⁸²

In a blatant move to get Lawani chosen as imam, the Brazilian party paid Houndji 650 francs to officially nominate Lawani and another notable, Dr. Ali, another 100 francs to make sure that these nominations went through.⁴⁸³ The French colonials did not find out about this until afterwards, but none of their reports show a real concern over the fact that the nomination was essentially rigged. Instead, Fourn and the others were clearly delighted at the choice of the new imam and his skills in Arabic. Meanwhile, the Yoruba population was livid over both the nominations and the dishonest election, and wrote many letters protesting the legitimacy of Lawani, and proclaimed loudly that Saroukou was the man who should have been the next imam. These complaints, which were sent to Lt. Governor Fourn, to the Governor General in Dakar, and to the Comité Franco Musulmane in Paris, mostly landed on deaf ears, but the educated elite class of the proto-Nationalists in France picked up on their grievances. This led to the merging of activities by Yoruba Muslim dissidents and certain members of the educated elite in Europe, which occurred in the late 1920s.

⁴⁸² “[Letter from Adibi Adini],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. Here, a “neutral party” wrote to the French administration as a “faithful subject,” reporting on the incidents. He even calls Houndji a “traitor,” and his letter displays an overall disgust with the process of imam selection.

⁴⁸³ “[Reports from August 2, 1920 and August 3, 1920],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. These reports include an interrogation of Houndji's messengers, and a letter from Ignacio Paraiso with his personal version denying that the money was paid to Ali.

As a bureaucrat, Lieutenant Governor Fourn filled a particular type of colonial mold. While there was quite a bit of turnover among the French administration of Dahomey, Fourn spent nine years in his position. He was then followed by a series of men who did not last even a single year as Lieutenant Governor. Does this mean that Gaston Fourn was a superb colonial leader? From historical analysis and interpretation of his reports, as well as those of the individuals around him, the answer is no. This begs the question of how he managed to have such a long career in Porto Novo.

Fourn was the type of colonial who conducted due diligence in accounting for any possible errors or problems by placing the blame on others, thereby eschewing responsibility for any negative situations. Fourn's report to Dakar on June 17, 1920 includes an excellent example of this behavior. A day after the Yoruba Muslims informed Fourn that they were going to make a formal complaint to the Comité Franco-Musulman about the unfair treatment they felt they had been continually receiving by him, Fourn sent a preemptive letter to his superiors in Dakar. In this letter he writes,

... the fervent Muslim environment in Porto Novo takes on more and more significance all of the time. Among them are merchants, traders, building owners both of Porto Novo origin and others from unstable populations who are difficult to administer.... When I arrived in 1917 the two enemy parties frequently caused trouble but with my perseverance and kindness, I have helped to restore order since then. My personal inspections of the Qur'anic schools allow them to function normally. Last year, I even acquire the cross of the Legion of Honor for M. Paraiso, the most important Muslim in Porto Novo. I make note of my different interventions as head of the colony because of their benefit to the Muslim community and I have always supported them. I don't believe it is necessary to answer in detail, the accusation of abuse by the anonymous documents of the Comité Franco-Musulman but I will clarify some basic information...⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸⁴ "Letter 6R, [Response to Dakar, From Lieutenant Governor Fourn, Dated June 17, 1920]," Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

His letter then continues to accent the wonderful work that he had accomplished in Porto Novo. He also says that the only unsuccessful part of his tenure had been in his efforts to recruit soldiers, which he blamed on the Porto Novan locals, who had a history of being deserters, avoiding conscription by using the fluid borders to flee into British Nigeria. In fact, this is one case where his excuse appears to be a legitimate one. A letter sent to the Governor General less than two weeks before this report responded to the question of whether there had been active dissent among the Muslim population. In this earlier letter, he addressed the fact that there were disputes among the Muslim parties over the imam, and that the mosque was likely to remain unfinished unless administration of it was wholly given to one party or the other for their sole use. He also mentions that they needed to reinforce the hierarchies that were in place in Dahomey, particularly those with Chef Superior Houndji, as a way to strengthen what Fourn called “an alliance with certain Africans.”⁴⁸⁵

It was in the 1920s when the toll of the Muslim disputes, and his inability to successfully administer these communities, can be seen in Fourn’s reports. The timing of this coincided with the issues surrounding the Friday mosque, and the heightened fear by the French regarding the spread of Pan-Islamism. By 1923, the supposed control Fourn once claimed to have had over the region’s “trouble-making” elite appears to have slipped away. By this point, after incidents that required French colonial leaders in Dakar to send in troops to help quell the situation, Fourn had begun to blame the bad situation on Muslims, Nationalists, and Communists, who it seems from his report that he considered them all part of the same larger group of individuals. A letter from

⁴⁸⁵ “[Response to Letter #239C from Dakar, From Lt. Gov. Fourn, Dated June 9, 1920],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

April 21, 1923 shows how flummoxed he was by all of the recent events. In it, he complained of “the strict rules giving the accused their rights,” as well as the “menacing propaganda against the entire administration under the direction of the notorious communists.”⁴⁸⁶ The letter continues to discuss the impact of the well-known radical colonial activist from Dahomey, Louis Hounkanrin, stating that he was,

... a dangerous friend and representative of Dahomey and a member of the Intercolonial Committee on Studies of the Communist Party who has succeeded in monopolizing the situation and gained the ability to manipulate the protocols ... a member of the Comité Franco-Musulman and has even managed to communicate with friends in Porto Novo from prison. The most compromised of them is Aminou Balogoun...⁴⁸⁷

Balogoun, of course, is one of the notables who served on the committee for the mosque, writing letters on behalf of the Yoruba Muslims, and also was a member of the League of Human Rights and of the Comité Franco-Musulman. In the interwar era, while it was common for colonized peoples to gain their nationalist inspiration from worker unions and Socialism—Ho Chi Minh is a prime example—in the case of Porto Novo’s Muslims, who made up the commercial class, it is questionable why Fourn thought that Muslim capitalists would find Bolshevism appealing. This is the first and only document that slanders Balogoun in such a way. However, after the “Porto Novo

⁴⁸⁶ “[Letter to Governor General of the AOF, From Lieutenant Governor Fourn, Regarding Political Affairs report No. 209, Dated April 21, 1923],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid. His accusations continue: “He wrote letters to Balogoun and received 10 copies of *Le Paria* [a Communist journal which only began production in April of 1922 under the FCP] and the postal service confiscated 5 more copies of the “*Precis du Communisme*,” by Charles Rappoport which was edited by the Booksellers of Humanists which I have addressed in attachment #3. These facts show why it is necessary to cut Aminou Balogoun off because no one is better fit than he to spread this information as he is a merchant from an influential family. He has a rebellious and ambitious nature and relies on his vanity to achieve power... .”

Incidents,⁴⁸⁸ Fourn was successful at targeting Balogoun, along with five others, who had joined Hounkanrin in exile in Mauritania.⁴⁸⁹

As I argued in Chapter Five of this dissertation, the relationship between France's fear of Communism and pan-Arabism was tied up in their overall policies that put the dread of pan-Islamic agitation at the forefront of their surveillance efforts. Thus, Fourn was on high alert during the summer of 1923 when he wrote about the threat of Nigerians and the propaganda that they were spreading. He also explicitly stated that he wanted his *chefs du cercles* to be particularly alert regarding xenophobia and the fallout from the Mahdist movements of the previous December. There is even a mention of Peuls and Tukolors, which were two ethnic groups with which Fourn normally would have had no dealings, but that he mentions specifically as possibly being even more of a threat than the, "Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya because they are in touch with their eastern brothers, the fanatics of Egypt."⁴⁹⁰ That this era of pan-Islamic fear was simultaneously the era when the French were very actively assisting the Porto Novo Muslims finish their Grand Mosque is now something quite difficult to reconcile. However, if one refers to the discussions about literacy and language use in the colonial era as well as the fact that French administrators still referred to Porto Novan Muslims being "pseudo-Muslim," then an Islamic threat in this specific part of the world should not have been perceived as valid. Furthermore, if the actual mosque was

⁴⁸⁸ See footnote #2 in this chapter for more on this.

⁴⁸⁹ Ann E. McDougall, "Setting the Story Straight: Louis Hunkanrin and *un Forfait Colonial*," *History in Africa* 16 (1989): 285-310. See the explanation in note 4, p. 298.

⁴⁹⁰ "Political Affairs, No. 189C, Porto Novo, [Letter from Lieutenant Governor Fourn, Dated July 2, 1923]," Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. His experience in Porto Novo with Islam is made evident here, as he seems more concerned with ethnic groups than with the *tariqas*, something administrators in Sahelian or North African regions would not have done because of their experiences with brotherhoods in these Islamic regions. Because Porto Novo's Muslims were visible only by their ethnic label, it is clear that this was what Fourn was used to.

being built to represent a Brazilian Catholic church, the daily reminder of a representation of the threat of Islam did not exist in Porto Novo, as it did in regions of North Africa, and even in parts of the Sahel.

On the ground, Fourn and Resident Maria used their positions in the administration as a way to show control by manipulating who had access to the mosque. As the building neared its completion, both groups wanted to use it, of course, particularly on special holy days. In 1920, there was a request to hold prayers at the beginning of Ramadan, but at the last minute, Maria declared that access to the mosque was forbidden to all because these colonials felt the discord between the two Muslim parties posed a potential for violence to erupt if both sides attempted to claim it with their own designated imam to lead prayers.⁴⁹¹ A few years later, before Saroukou's death, but when the Grand Mosque was almost fully built, Fourn actually went to the mosque after reports of an altercation occurring there. His report claims that Lawani went to a service with the Paraiso group, and there, Saroukou and his people began throwing punches. Fourn claimed to have arrived at 11:45 a.m. In his report, he states that the Mouteirou (Yoruba) side was agitated, while the Paraiso (Brazilian) side remained calm.⁴⁹² And then he writes,

We attempted to stop the disorder at the grand mosque. At twelve noon exactly I signaled the police guard but then they all mixed together and filled the mosque. The imam Lawani was accompanied by Moustapha, the son of the former imam Bissirou and they were throwing themselves toward the tower. Nevertheless, the Mouteirou party continued to install Saroukou as imam of the Friday mosque and upon seeing this I went up the stairs with some notables and we tried in vain to get silence. After five more minutes in distress and chaos I hear one of Paraiso's sons Erasmo call out because he was being manhandled by Al Hadji Mouteirou and his

⁴⁹¹ “[Letter from Colonial Administrator Gavoy to Lieutenant Governor Fourn, Dated June 11, 1920],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

⁴⁹² “[Report No. 3c, on Mosques, From Lt. Gov. Fourn, Dated March 17, 1922],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

men. Right after this I noticed people beginning to throw punches from both sides. Realizing that this brawl was getting out of hand I climbed towards the imam Lawani and encouraged him to descend from the tower which he did without difficulty and I followed close. We joined the guards and evacuated the building which is when members from both parties went out on the verandahs. It was there that I forced them to withdraw altogether and to refrain from contact while they left. This entire operation ended at 12:20 without any further incident.⁴⁹³

From this document one can see how Fourn went to the mosque to show support for the Brazilian Muslims and El Hadji Lawani as the rightful imam to this mosque. It is also clear that this altercation as he described it would exacerbate conflict among the Muslims and his version would be the one that was given the most weight under colonial review. It also gave Fourn a chance to get out ahead of any criticism from Dakar or Paris regarding his administration because he put himself in a position to give a first-hand account. Whether or not he reported events in an accurate manner can never be known.

In their work, the colonial architects of urban North Africa Henri Prost and Jacques Herbran argue the need for a strong centralized government to underwrite the close collaboration with politicians, and suggest that even aesthetic decisions have decidedly political implications.⁴⁹⁴ This was clearly the case with the Friday mosque of early-twentieth century Porto Novo. In the case of Porto Novo and the Friday mosque, where the architects *were* Muslim, this idea of colonial urban space becomes particularly complicated. When the French involved themselves in the use of the mosque, this brought an additional level of complexity to the various roles that each group was expected to play.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Less than two months after the incident mentioned above, there was a real effort for the groups to come together and finish the mosque, even in spite of the fact that they could not agree on a single imam to lead Friday prayers.⁴⁹⁵ However, only a few months after this, Fourn received a letter of resignation from a man named J. B. Deen, one of the notable Muslim elites, who for a number of years had been a central part of the mosque's building committee. He was secretary of the committee at the time when he wrote his letter. In it, he states that the cooperation between the Muslims was subverted by one particular man named Ankouri, and that the two parties could not resolve the problem of this particular disagreement.⁴⁹⁶ Deen wrote to Fourn that he could no longer take irrational orders, along with the problems of interacting with the two groups that did not get along, but nonetheless were attempting to complete the project that both parties wanted finished.⁴⁹⁷ This letter left an opportunity for Fourn to follow-up with his own superiors and use the evidence provided by Mr. Deen, to accuse the Yoruba population once again of sabotaging progress.

The themes discussed above regarding the building of the Grand Mosque in colonial Porto Novo both directly and indirectly relate to the larger question of why the French became involved. From a more African perspective, the concern over building the mosque relates largely to the divide about choosing the next imam, keeping track of the money, having each party contribute equally, and the way that each group imagined itself within the larger Porto Novan community. The Brazilians accented their ties to the French colonial administration, seeing it as a privilege, whereas the Yoruba group aimed to distance itself from the French influence and retain their

⁴⁹⁵ "Letter No. 865, [To the Lieutenant Governor of Dahomey, From Larivière, Dated April 27, 1922]," Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

⁴⁹⁶ "[Letter from J. B. Deen, Addressed to Lieutenant Governor Fourn, Dated August 29, 1922]," Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Yoruba connections with the wider Muslim *umma* throughout Dahomey, and even beyond. Seen this way, it is thus no surprise that they could not exactly agree upon the details of the construction of the mosque. While one group was looking to other Africans for inspiration and a greater sense of community, the other wanted to remain a small, privileged faction with close ties to the French colonial system in which they all were subjects.

The French colonial documents continually affirm that the Brazilian connection to the French administration was strong. Each report discussing the imam situation by a lower-level French administrator states that the imam choice was agreed upon by all, and that Lawani was chosen in a fair manner by local custom.⁴⁹⁸ Yet, reading all of the archival evidence shows that each Muslim group would have been happier to have their own imam, as well as to use the new Grand Mosque on alternating Fridays. However, because of their need to assert control, and specifically to have one Arabic-literate imam with whom they could keep an eye on, the French did everything in their power to make sure that the two sides would never compromise.

As introduced above, eventually the Yoruba group used its skills and knowledge to go beyond the local administration and ask for assistance within the wider *umma* community of coreligionists. They also informed the colonial administration of the actions taken against them. There was almost always an immediate letter to the French colonials that informed them that a formal complaint had been made to an outside agency via a grievance letter.⁴⁹⁹ These official

⁴⁹⁸ “[Letter from Inspector of Administrative Affairs, Addressed to Lt. Governor Fourn, Dated February 12, 1924]”; and, “[Unsigned letter to Lieutenant Governor of Dahomey, “No. 187/3136, Dated September 22, 1920].” Both of these documents are located Carton 4E9, Dossier 7, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. This last unsigned letter states: “The Muslims have freely resolved the choice of imam and of the two groups they have selected their own Lawani Damala... .”

⁴⁹⁹ “[Letters from the Yoruba Muslims, Dated April 21, 1923 and April 7, 1923],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. There are three letters with same information, but

complaints were nothing new. A few years before the money issue regarding the mosque came up, the Yoruba Muslims wrote to the Governor General in Dakar to inform him of the type of treatment they had been receiving by the local colonial administration. It reads:

We the Muslims of Porto Novo and supporters of Saroukou respectfully submit this petition which we have also submitted to the Lieutenant Governor of Dahomey on Thursday April 7 under the pretext that we have been insulted by the resident of Porto Novo M. Maria who ... on November 2, 1920 at a time where, we were united in our mosque on his orders and we prayed for France and all the deaths of World War One, Maria came in and disrupted or prayers and called for a meeting at Chef Superior Houndji's to officially select the imam ... (signed in both Arabic and French by Bello Seriki and Aminou Balogoun).⁵⁰⁰

The Yoruba Muslims of Porto Novo spent the colonial era affirming their faith and their identity, not only as Muslims but also as Dahomean Africans from Porto Novo, and their rights therein.

Over the course of the time that I have discussed here, the French employed all sorts of actions in various attempts to dislocate them. Despite the French claiming that this community consisted of British subjects from Nigeria, or that they were marginal Muslims in practice, or that they took a backseat to the Brazilian Muslim population, this community of Yoruba Muslims constantly adjusted to the situation at hand and fought for their rights. While architecturally, the mosque does not reflect the African Islamic influence as much as it does of the Atlantic World aesthetic, the history behind it, and of the Muslims who helped build it, demonstrates the city's identity in diverse ways. Porto Novo was a place of many voices, heard through the physical archival record.

addressed to the French colonial administration, the Comité Franco-Musulman, and the Comité Franco-Musulman, respectively. They are letters from the Yoruba Muslims formally complaining about the fact that each had agreed to provide 50,000 francs, but that the Paraiso group had only contributed 27,500.

⁵⁰⁰ “[Letter written by Bello Seriki and Aminou Balogoun on behalf of the Muslim party, Dated April 12, 1921],” Carton 4E9, Dossier 13, Archives Nationales du Bénin, Porto Novo, République du Bénin. The rest of the letter includes a suggestion that both Maria and Fourn should both separate from the two Muslim parties, and particularly that they should not intervene if they are going to side unfairly with the Paraiso group.

The mosque and the history of the construction of this building became the location onto which personal, religious and political conflicts culminated in the period following World War I, as well as a place to locate Socialist and pre-Nationalist discourse among educated elite. In addition, we can also clearly see the French colonial fears of Pan-Islamism that were perceived as spreading quickly, and an anxiety that this could potentially incite violence throughout their African colonies.

Identity and Its Complexities

Broader discussions of how the concept of identity is used have been relegated to three distinct usages.⁵⁰¹ According to sociologists Peter J. Burke and Sheldon Stryker these are the un-theorized use of identity as equivalent to ethnicity, the more complex use of the term to relate to a common marker or social category and finally the meanings that people attach to the multiple roles they play in a highly differentiated society.⁵⁰² What they eventually argue is the intertwining of social structural processes with internal self-processes which allow the most varied outcomes in looking to how we theorize identity as a construct and a reality. As historians, if we can use our evidence to interrogate social structures as influence the process of self-verification and vice versa, we have a chance to represent marginalized peoples from the past whose histories have yet to be explored in a fair a just manner. The literary theorist Dominic Thomas has discussed the many and varied attempts to negotiate identity via imaginary spaces in post-colonial discourse.⁵⁰³ Applying his concepts to the colonial era itself, and replacing artificial or imagined boundaries with actual

⁵⁰¹ Peter J. Burke and Sheldon Stryker, "The Past, Present and Future of an Identity Theory," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63, no 4 (2000): 284-297.

⁵⁰² Burke and Stryker, 284.

⁵⁰³ Dominic Thomas, *Nation-Building, Propaganda and Literature in Francophone Africa* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2002), 125-26.

tangible structures, historians can begin to answer the same questions of determining identity, in both its social and self-conceived forms. Once we do this, then we can begin to view them clearly through new multifarious voices found in the historical record.



Figs 9 and 10. Friday Mosque, Porto Novo

APPENDIX 1A

Letter from April 4, 1921
4E9 dossier 13.
Petition by “Cassoumou Supporters”

The kingdom of Porto Novo was referred to as Adjatche, not Hogbonou, and in the second half of the eighteenth century. Under the reign of De Gbejon it was the center of attraction for the Yoruba. Kings were favorable with the Yoruba who were merchants that moved here with their wives and children. These Yoruba were mostly the princes of Oyo. They were all Muslims and was the beginning of Islam in Porto Novo which dates to this group settlement in this fetishist kingdom.

Gintou was the first mosque that was built by Mr. Attingui in the Zinsou Acotokiti quarter near Ita Cogo and Togo. The second mosque of Fota was built under the direction of Akadiri Alowokin of Soule. The grand Friday mosque was built in the Apassa quarter under permission given to our grandfathers by King Tognan in the second half of the nineteenth century and thanks to prince Achoua. Our forefathers elected their compatriot Soumainou Assouma to represent them and he was successfully replaced by Ajimba. He was the head and enforced all the rules and small differences between Muslims. He was interested in all affairs of the population and was the last word of authority with his fellow coreligionists.

The first imam of our forefathers was a Haoussa named Gambari⁵⁰⁴ who was friendly with King De Gbejon and lived in the Sokomey quarter from this time until the time of King De Messe. The Muslims chose their replacement leader (*imam*) without any intervention on behalf of the indigenous political authorities but now with the nomination of the fourth imam under Toffa the difficulties become clear as has the interest of M. Paraiso called Nounassou, who origins we will

⁵⁰⁴ The word Gambari is the Yoruba term for Hausa in the generic form. What is also interesting is that the version as it is known by Porto Novan Muslims today is that this imam was a Yoruba, whom the Ifa divination system determined would become a great Muslim leader, so his Yoruba family allowed him to be raised in a Muslim Hausa family to learn the religion. interview with Prof. Aminou, (Flore Nobime present), October 2009.

explain as well as the rise to power that he has made among his coreligionists and we will demonstrate how this has had disastrous consequences for Islam.

It starts with the destruction of a village and the sale of a man named Odjo to slavers. The Village Iye in Nigeria, a tributary to Ibadan and enemy of Oyo is where it begins. Elepo, originally from Iye wanted himself and his only son Odjo to be successful. The Ibadans wanted to send someone from Iye as a vassal to Oyo kingdom. Elepo trained there with a number of other traditional foes of Ibadan and attempted to destroy it. The Ibadans fought back, sacked Iye, and sold these rebels to slavers. Elepo's vanity was the reason for the destruction of the village and he was put to death. Odjo was sold to Brazil, in Bahia. Those who did not engage in Elepo's insurrection were forced to live in a special quarter of Ibadan called Imanlede which still exists.

Return of Odjo to Africa:

Domingo was a Brazilian merchant and slave trader living in Porto Novo during the reign of King Sodji and he found a slave who came back from Brazil. She was originally from Isseyin with the name of Oyagbami and she was then called by her Christian name, having been baptized in Brazil. He was also very upset to have to shave his head with razors, and wanted to find someone who could make a wig in the country of Brazil. Domingo learned of his friend Oyagbemi in Bahia as well as the existence of a slave named Odjo who was a wigmaker for his master Paraiso. Oyagbami wrote at the request of Domingo who then acquired Odjo from Brazil, who, other than acting as wigmaker at the home of his new master was a night watchman at the beach (*ocoun seme*) where he was called Barbero- a denigrating term for Bambero (barber) which became the only name they used to designate him in the city. The friendship between Oyagbami and Domingo was beneficial to Odjo called Bambero to which his new master married him a slave of comparable status. The son who was born of this union was taken to baptism by Oyagbami and they named him Ignacio Paraiso. This last name was given to him certainly in remembrance of Mr. Paraiso of Bahia, Odjo's first master.

The Brazilians, after having made a large fortune left a large number of their servants to the Kings of Hogbonou. In this way they recognized the king in a fashion similar to tribute. There was also the custom taken on by the successful merchants who died in the country and who had served the king. This tradition of leaving slaves to the king come from, "Toumbaci" who was a merchant in

the country under the reign of King De Gbejon and of all the slaves of the late king the tradition only remembered the name of a certain Dossou and the memory of another slave who was the father of Mr. Hounsou Dada Houhe. The head of the family Padamoun Soco who today represents the De Gbejon dynasty always retained for the descendants of the former slaves, “Toumbouci” or the right of sovereignty. The merchant Domingo who attributed his fortunes to the benevolence and protection given to him by honoring the King Sodji left followed this custom and left the king a large number of slaves, the most well-known of which was Acangbe and Odjo called Bambero. Odjo called Bambero was given a concession stand in Hounhonou quarter and one night King Sodji heard the beating of Ze Inri.⁵⁰⁵ Sodji inquired as to what happened and learned that his servant Bambero had acquired a debt that he could not pay. When the people to whom he was indebted came to collect on this there was a complete raucous, so the king assembled Bambero and his creditor. They searched for some time for a palace servant, who was acknowledged as the son of Bambero, for committing the offenses against the king. He called this fact out to King Sodji who cried, ‘Nounassou’! The king wanted to say, your father gave you to me and thus your son also belongs to me. This son has insulted my messengers (larys) I will find him again. He has also affronted against my best servants while shaming the name Bambero. Therefore, more or less his son Ignacio Paraiso called Nounassou was forced to leave his home at the palace of Sodji for inciting a number of larys of the king. It was not the Catholic religion that they were professing and which condemned the fetishist practice to which the positions of the larys were given.

At the same time, another slave living in this country had returned from Brazil and who was also given the name Bambero because he had worked as a wigmaker for his master. This other Bambero lived at Aplogan in the Abocomey quarter and was freed probably before the death of his master. He enjoyed immense popularity thanks to his fortune and general good heart. At the time of the Muslim holidays which were the same as the fetishists’, the two Bamberos displayed their ready pompousness and followed the Muslims into the place where they prayed. Our two Christians went there specifically to make a scene and to show up the Muslims in their ornamentation. At the end of the prayers the Muslims retained the two Bamberos until the *oja oma* separated them. But all the sympathy of the Porto Novo Muslims went to Bambero of Abocomey who was rich, generous

⁵⁰⁵ Drums played by the royal night guard.

and affable, and Odjo called Bambero was not ignorant of this and looked at the occasion as a way to back his co-named brother. The elite Muslims who were made aware of his ambition said that he could only have similar respect as the other Bambero if he embraced Islam. This was the only condition that the Muslims had that would allow him to get out of having disrupted their holidays. Catholicism had saved his family from the rigors of servitude in the Palace of Sodji and he had stayed under that banner of religion while it had worked for him. But that time had passed and a new religion was presenting itself in helping him. Bambero recognized the domination of the city by the Muslims and from this moment he abandoned the Catholic religion and let his desired be known that he would take on Islam. His instincts made him want to climb the social ladder that was much associated with the Muslims and he assented quickly. His vanity and desire to be a notable caused by his ancestral heritage is something we have seen it cause the misfortune of all a village which lived in peace until his family ruined it. Also Bambero had abandoned Catholicism without thinking twice. All of his children followed his examples. The Christian Ignacio Paraiso surnamed Nounassou by King Sodji took the name of Soule. It was when the Odjo called Bambero converted to Islam that the faithful Muslims of Porto Novo, to their word, embraced him at the end of the holiday prayers.

At this time the Muslim nobles Pebi, Salemi, Borou, Abanci, Eniobabi etc. etc. are those to whom Bambero would address to be recognized himself as a notable and also having signs of nobility authorized tattoos (scars) for his children as distinctions. A notable was distinguished by three parallel lines on the left arm going from shoulder to wrist. Three other markings from the ankle of the right foot to knee. On each another two rows each with four parallel lines (*abaja mejo*). And either a circle or a brand on each cheek and eight vertical lines going from forehead to the chin. Four other equal markings from each eye across in eight vertical lines to the ear. Odjo called Bambero had this like all the inhabitants of Iye which were called Kerehounche. The enthusiasm that the conversion of Odjo's family to Islam produced among the Porto Novan Muslims made them blind to the point of unconsciously conceding their power to him. The authorization for markings in the noble fashion and recognitions of Odjo called Bambero went to their heads. So for the entire family, a fairly regular person of Iye was given a meal to seat 500 people and all the nobles came after having received their markings finished up with this man being part of their esteemed Muslim groups.

Governing Customs of the Imam:

Bambero knew how to exploit the crazed-nobles which he created via his own visible conversion and he ascended in their midst. His son Ignacio Paraiso- Soule called Nounassou was judged insufficient for a noble of his lineage and thus desired to increase the scorn of our religious community. From respect of the order of things, which by force of law became an established secular custom became the nomination of their imam by a council of notables designated as his assistants who would naturally take over the succession of their religious leader when he is gone and the Muslim community would abide by these rules. This great tradition is respected and was respected until the third imam, Soumainou of the Afouge house who succeeded Seidou Akiwande. And regarding imams four and five Nounassou got involved at the time of the nominations. The instance of M. Ignacio Paraiso Soule called Nounassou under King Toffa destroyed what we established and Toffa put a veto on the consecration of Bawala and replaced him with Soumainou.

This break with the desire of the preceding imam was reprehensible from all points of view. Nounassou did not give consideration to the designated titles or respect them and he elevated Mamadou de Hassou to imam and we did not know what to do. This contradicted how we ratified nominations and the irregular aspect of it was imposed upon us. While dying, Imam Mamadou de Hassou designated El Hadji Mouteirou of Socomey to replace him. We had wanted this line to give Bawala the place he deserved for so many years but respectfully to Imam da Hassou, and because of his last wishes, we did not think we could disapprove of his choice even despite Nanoussou's interference. But this depended on us convincing Bissirou who was the assistant to the Imam El Hadj Mouteriou of Socomoey when it was also decided at the caprice of Nounassou who took on the direction of the affairs of our religion. Nounassou was opposed to the designation of Saroukou as assistant to Bissirou so we named in his place, Qassoumou of Zebou-Aga who became imam after Bissirou and had been his assistant. Qassoumou's assistant was presumed to be Saroukou.

Construction of a new mosque:

The forcing of a new street being built at the old market at the lagoon of Porto Novo in Akpassa quarter obligated the French administration to demolish the first big Friday mosque (a concession we were given compensation for as land in the Zincomey quarter) The government also gave an indemnity of 5000 francs . This sum would never have sufficed for the construction of a new mosque so the Muslims contributed 22,000 francs of their own and there was a system set up for its distribution. Nourou called Gosalvo Lopez took the key to the box which held the funds with the blessing of Imam Bissirou and the Muslims formed a committee to be in charge of buying materials and paying workers. Nounassou put himself on the committee and exploited his reputation as a “Male Ocrio” a Muslim descendant of so-called Brazilians. Our leaders were unable to make themselves heard among this man who wanted to control all purchases and materials.

The death of Bissirou interrupted the work. Nounassou profited by declaring that there was a debt of 27750 francs and that Qassoumou- who replaced Bissirou- counseled us to reimburse Paraiso to avoid conflict and not to stop progress on the building. We followed Qassoumou’s advice and began construction again under the direction of our imam. Nounassou was excluded from the newly formed committee and could not deal with it. He considered it an affront to his sacrosanct personality. But the Muslims worried themselves little more about the wrath of Nounassou and continued actively constructing the mosque. Unfortunately our imam became ill and could not function before the work got back on track and he confided the work into the hands of his assistant Saroukou who was the last of the honest Muslims to finish the task. We want to say he could not be possessed by the villainous demon of jealousy. Saroukou took, at the request of Qassoumou, and completely took on the affairs of all the Muslim community. Friday prayers, consecration of marriages, burials of coreligionists etc. Before getting into the unfortunate situation in which our community currently finds itself, Qassoumou wrote a declaration in which he asked for the resignation of the Resident of Porto Novo (M. Maria) He also wanted to ensure peace between the Muslims and the agreement of which they needed in order to get the good work beginning. Nounassou who worked very secretly for the replacement of Imam Qassoumou by a man as devious and the resident acted upon his request. Confirmation was needed when they argued that the new person was needed because the Imam Qassoumou “was in a coma for two days” The Resident and the Governor wanted to verify what Nounassou had told them and went to the home

of the venerable Qassoumou whom they found joyous and plenty full of all his faculties and who told the two representatives that his last wish was for the affairs of the religion to get along.

Even though they were denied they found another form of protest which was just as much a sacrilege of corruption. When Saroukou, the head of the indigenous population was to be consecrated – pure and simple- as imam which conformed to the custom and despite everything we wanted to bring the Resident of Porto Novo in to finalize this consecration. This would have, as we believed, made a reflection on Nounassou and his followers. This was all to no effect since because of Paraiso, his vanity would not suffer any act of subordination our government forbade us under the false pretext of following a good order and for the peace of the city and that the construction on the mosque and access to prayer continue. This is why we faithful Muslims want to honor the last wishes of Qassoumou and who form the majority of the Muslim population of Porto Novo have the honor of addressing you with this present petition revealing the origin of Ignacio Paraiso called Nounassou, explaining the rise of his father Odjo called Bambero and what he caused the Muslims of Porto Novo, that we have finally established an unquestionable legitimacy to the right of the Saroukou party to be granted control of the Grand Friday Mosque located in the Zinomey quarter.

In the end we are saying that El Hadj Lawani was never an assistant and he did not conform to the custom which has governed us until the present time, the way we nominated our prayer leaders and he has no right to be invested in the imamate. For the honor of our religion Al Hadj Lawani cannot decently be named imam. He was in effect condemned to be publically flogged for the outrage caused against the moral standards set by King Toffa. And since his return from Mecca, he has seduced most of the wives of his coreligionists. The Muslim notables will attest to this. If men of the same religion who long ago loved themselves justly, who tolerate the religions of others in good solidarity our divided today into two camps that loathe each other and only breath words of hate against one another with destructive ideas, their dissention is attributable to the vanity of one individual who believes that he is always right and who knows what laws will prevail to his whims.

We do not intend to associate ourselves with the obsession of one individual over that of our creator or of Mohammed his prophet. we are firmly resolved to following the last wishes of our imams –

that is to say to defend at the price of our freedom, to see in our lives the good tradition of the nomination of the imam come back to where it belongs. In doing so we are convinced only that we need to defend Islam against the sacrileges of Ignacio Paraiso Soule called Nounassou for the religion is only what it was for his father Odjo called Bambero, a good way to satisfy his personal vanity on this earth.

First Catholicism satisfied Odjo called Bambero as an escape for his entire family, and the option of servitude in Sodji's palace, but second he converted to Islam solely for his vanity and to be recognized himself among the Muslims at their prayers and festivals. Did we not prove that he would leave Islam and take up another religion if it were to aid another one of his vanities? Yes, this is the quality of nobility Nounassou believes has the right to rule the Muslim community of Porto Novo but we have shown his vanity and the quality of which even if it was founded, could not prevail against true law or reason.

We pay homage to the reasonable minds of equity of the Europeans charged with examining the candidates to the position of prayer leaders. But we would like better to see these examinations judge the talent of the preaching of the candidates more than their knowledge of Arabic literature because the Muslims of Porto Novo want their ministers to know how to address them from the heart in the life of intelligence and in a language understood by the whole community. It is the language of Nagot in which we communicate and that language with which we are concerned. The honor of having been on pilgrimage to Mecca is no more important than the interests of the whole community. If the examiners are not scored for the best missions they were given, our governors have missed the point of their work because we will not know how to appeal to the eagerness of the authorities in order to show their kindness even under the orders of the megalomaniacal Nounassou of which our governors have depended on solely for information. We are also protesting against the culpable indulgences of our governors who, in lieu of pursuing the offense of corruption by Chef Superior Houndji by Nounassou who arranged the nomination of El Hadji Lawani as imam for 750 francs and these administrators were content to simply require him to retribute by giving a gift to back to the donors. We estimate that act was essentially impolitic and the humiliation of the scheme by the Resident of Porto Novo on November 2, 1920 after we had been authorized to say prayers in the Grand Mosque in memory of the deaths from the war, for which the Resident signed his name on the circulaire –at the bottom of the page that we made to

invite the other members of the Porto Novo population including Europeans and indigenous to come to the mosque at 11 am. But then the resident very passively followed the orders of Nounassou who disrupted our reunion in the Grand Mosque when they came at us at the very moment were saying our meditations and prayers for the dead and the Muslims were praying for all of the dead and for France. If these men can be excused for their complacency towards him, the creator, we would not mind asking how these monstrous acts of conscience must also be applicable when it comes to their colonies. We pray for you to let go of any polemical feelings you might have towards this petition and the epithets that might be a little too strong wanting only that you understand that the cry of the murdered noble-mindedness that will uniquely preoccupy them at their meeting after death. Imam Saroukou and party salute you.

(Names signed in both French and Arabic).

Alfa Bouraima, Aladji Badamassi, Bello Seriqui, Alli Saroumou, Aminou Achafa, Alaho Bachoroun, Sanni Magadji, Aladji Mouteirou Soule, Badamnassi Lawani, Alaji Adjibade, Alaho Guiwa, Akadi Guiwa, Lawani Guiwa, Bello Guiwa, Guiwa Djinadou, Badarou Bakari, Aminou Balogoun

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