2 The Advent of Military Regimes and the Creation of the First Public University in Togo and Benin (1970–80)

The second chapter examines the decades of the 1970s and 1980s in Togo and Benin, a period marked by the emergence of military regimes and the creation of the first public universities. It examines how these political contexts, characterised by authoritarian leadership, interacted with the educational environment. It analyses the political landscapes shaped by the authoritarian rules of Presidents Mathieu Kérékou in Benin and Gnassingbé Eyadéma in Togo, who sought to bolster their legitimacy by courting influential Christian and Muslim leaders despite their repressive policies and strict regulation of religious activity. Kérékou's commitment to Marxism-Leninism and Eyadéma's philosophy of 'authenticity' are also examined.

The chapter also traces the founding of the University of Dahomey in Abomey-Calavi and the University of Benin in Lomé in 1970. These institutions were not merely educational enterprises, but political projects designed to promote nation-building, decolonisation, and national independence. Despite their aim to combat intellectual, cultural, and economic underdevelopment, these universities reflected the educational models of their former colonial power, France, whose financial, material, and human support was crucial to the creation of these institutions and to their development in the early years.

Finally, the chapter addresses the regimes' strategies to suppress student protests as part of their broader efforts to consolidate power. The dissolution of student unions and the co-optation of student leaders and academic staff were tactics employed to stifle dissent. However, in Benin, the state struggled to silence the persistent protests on the Abomey-Calavi campus, which saw numerous demonstrations against Kérékou's regime, unlike the relatively quieter campus in Togo.

2.1 One-Party States and Military Rule: The Regimes of Eyadéma and Kérékou

This section examines the Eyadéma and Kérékou regimes, analysing how military rule and one-party states shaped the political and social terrain of Togo and Benin in the 1970s and 1980s. President Eyadéma came to power in 1967 and established a relatively stable military dictatorship throughout the 1970s and 1980s. His rule was characterised by a strong cult of personality and the strategic co-optation of

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Christian and Muslim leaders through patronage. In Dahomey, the revolutionary regime established after Colonel Kérékou's coup d'état in October 1972 marked a decisive change in the political landscape there. It ushered in a period of relative stability, lasting until the late 1980s, in stark contrast to the prior era of high political volatility, which had earned Dahomey the nickname 'Africa's sick child' ('*Enfant malade de l'Afrique*').

Consolidation of Eyadéma's Power and Patronage of Religious Leaders

Post-independence, the Ewe-speaking elite in Togo, led by President Sylvanus Olympio (1960–63), took over administrative roles formerly held by the French. Olympio's regime, initially championing pan-African and pluralist ideals, gradually became authoritarian. The Ewe elite, benefiting from higher literacy rates and control over key economic resources, were overrepresented in government and administration. Conversely, during the French colonial period, northern ethnic groups, particularly the Kabye and Kotokoli, made up over 80% of the armed forces.[1]

On 13 January 1963, demobilised non-commissioned officers, including Étienne Eyadéma and Emmanuel Bodjollé, orchestrated the first coup d'état in West Africa, leading to President Olympio's assassination.[2] Four years later, the army intervened again to depose President Nicolas Grunitzky (1963–67). Eyadéma, who then seized power, claimed he had 'saved' Togo from an ethnically imbalanced government dominated by the southern Ewe and Mina. In April 1967, Eyadéma broke his promise to hold early elections, banning all political parties and consolidating executive power. By November 1969, he had founded the *Rassemblement du Peuple Togolais* (RPT, Rally of the Togolese People) following his '*Appel historique de Kpalimé*' ('Historic call of Kpalimé') in August.

The RPT, as the sole political party until 1991, facilitated Eyadéma's establishment of a patrimonial and dictatorial state. His regime was characterised by corruption, nepotism, and the dominance of senior military officials and the Kabye, his northern ethnic group.[3] This fostered both a north-south and an ethnic divide between the Kabye and the Ewe.[4] The media – Radio Lomé, the newspaper *Togo-Presse*, and the *Télévision togolaise* (TVT) – functioned as propaganda tools for the

1 Kothor and Lawrance 2023.
2 For a historical analysis of what was West Africa's first coup, see Skinner 2020.
3 Osei 2018, 1465–67.
4 Toulabor 1999.

party-state.[5] Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, numerous conspiracies, assassination plots, and staged coups were employed to consolidate Eyadéma's power.[6] The Togolese resorted to political satire to critique the regime's excesses.[7]

The international community played a crucial role in supporting Eyadéma's rule through financial aid. Despite its small size, Togo held strategic importance during the 1970s and 1980s. Surrounded by socialist-Marxist regimes leaning towards Soviet alliances – Benin to the east, Burkina Faso to the north, and Ghana to the west – Togo stood as the only pro-Western country in the region. In the early 1980s, Togo's position on the United Nations Security Council allowed it to wield significant influence in the Cold War. In addition, France, driven by economic and historical ties from its half-century of colonial rule, maintained substantial financial and emotional investments in Togo.[8] It was this flow of money that earned Togo the nickname 'Little Switzerland'[9] of West Africa.

Drawing inspiration from Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire and Kim Il-sung of North Korea, Eyadéma established a grand cult of personality. This involved orchestrated performances, giant photos of the 'Guide of the Nation,' loincloths adorned with the portrait of the 'National Helmsman' ('*Timonier national*'), hymns, and the erection of an imposing statue of the 'President-Founder' in Lomé.[10] The regime's official mythology grew even more elaborate after Eyadéma survived a plane crash in Sarakawa on 24 January 1974, which was depicted as an 'imperialist attack' against him.[11] A mausoleum at the crash site became a major pilgrimage destination, enhancing the myth of the president's invincibility and supposed divine and mystical powers.[12]

Further emulating Mobutu, Eyadéma introduced a cultural policy of 'authenticity' in 1974, altering the spelling of place names and encouraging Togolese to abandon their Christian names in favour of traditional ones. Eyadéma himself set the example by replacing Étienne with Gnassingbé.[13] Concepts of 'revolution', 'anti-imperialism', and 'authenticity' dominated the political discourse of the time. The end of the *régime d'exception* in 1979, marked by the election of the first

5 Douti, Sossou, and Tsigbé 2021, 76–77; Rambaud 2006.
6 Toulabor 1986; Piot 2010, 21–34.
7 Toulabor 2008.
8 Piot 2010, 28–29.
9 Dash, 'Togo's Ruler Aims…,' *The Washington Post*, 15 June 1980.
10 Piot 2010, 21–51.
11 'Le peuple togolais…,' *Togo-Presse*, 8 February 1974.
12 Macé 2004, 863–64.
13 Bassah, 'Culture et authenticité…,' *Togo-Presse*, 18 April 1979.

National Assembly since 1967 – still under single-party rule – and the establishment of the Third Republic in 1980 indicated a relative softening of the regime.

Eyadéma's strategy for regulating the religious sphere relied on building loyalties to keep religious leaders out of politics. Leaders of all denominations were co-opted through favours and personal relationships to legitimise and sanctify Eyadéma's power. Major regime commemorations typically included a Catholic mass, a Protestant service, and a Muslim prayer at the Maison du RPT. Prominent religious figures such as imams from the *Union Musulmane du Togo* (Muslim Union of Togo, UMT), bishops like Msgr Robert-Casimir Dosseh-Anyron,[14] and Protestant pastors including Ayi Houenou Joachim Hunlédé[15], often competed to display their loyalty. For instance, during Togo's 18th independence anniversary, Imam Alassani Anem urged reflection on divine leadership, asserting that God chooses leaders like President Eyadéma, whose survival in the Sarakawa plane crash was seen as divine intervention.[16] This phenomenon, termed 'eyadémistic ecumenism' ('*œcuménisme eyadémistique*') by Toulabor, describes 'a discursive space of competition between the officials of the country's various religious denominations (bishop, pastor, imam, Vodun priest), among whom the government skilfully stirred up underhand rivalries in a spiral of support and praise for the head of state'.[17]

Religious leaders who opposed the regime faced severe repression. In October 1974, Eyadéma met with a delegation of Togolese clergy led by the Archbishop of Lomé, who apologised for a priest's sermon opposing the government's authenticity policy.[18] Similarly, in 1975, the Bishop Bernard Oguki-Atakpah of Atkapamé faced the regime's wrath for criticising Eyadéma and the RPT in a sermon.[19] Despite tensions with the Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II visited Togo in August 1985.[20]

Beyond personal relationships, Eyadéma's regime enforced strict religious regulation. In May 1978, the National Council of the RPT, 'considering that the proliferation of religious sects is likely to seriously disturb public peace and order' and that 'the security of the State could be threatened by the conscious or unconscious use of the followers of these sects,' banned around twenty religious organisations.

14 Toulabor 1989.

15 First Minister of Foreign Affairs under Eyadéma (1967–76), he retired from political life in 1976 to become a pastor. He was appointed head of the Église Évangélique du Togo in 1977. See 'M. Hunledé est consacré…,' *Togo-Presse*, 16 August 1977.

16 'Célébration de nos 18 ans…,' *Togo-Presse*, 28 April 1978.

17 Toulabor 1993, 280.

18 'Mgr Komlan Messan Anyron…,' *Togo-Presse*, 8 October 1974.

19 'Brandissant des pancartes…,' *Togo-Presse*, 7 May 1975; 'Le sermon séditieux…,' *Togo-Presse*, 9 May 1975.

20 'Arrivé hier à Lomé…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 9 August 1985.

Only the Catholic, Evangelical, Methodist, Baptist, Muslim, Assemblies of God, and Adventist churches were permitted to operate.[21] Practicing any banned sect clandestinely was punishable by imprisonment and fines.[22] This law allowed Muslim Union leaders to officially ban the Fayda Tarbiyya.[23] Under the influence of the popular Senegalese Sufi sheikh and scholar Ibrahim Niasse, the Tarbiyya revival had taken root in Sokodé, one of the main centres of Islam in Togo, creating a sharp division between its supporters and critics.[24] As for the Protestants, the law indirectly favoured the Assemblies of God, the dominant Pentecostal denomination. Despite these restrictions, at least twenty new clandestine Pentecostal churches sprang up in the first half of the 1980s, particularly in Lomé.[25]

The state also regularly intervened in national religious umbrella organisations. The state played a mediator role in internal divisions, particularly within the Muslim Union, to promote its political marginalisation and loyalty.[26] In 1976, Eyadéma dissolved the UMT executive committee due to internal disputes.[27] Demonstrating goodwill, in 1983, Eyadéma personally arranged the repatriation of Togolese pilgrims stranded in Jeddah by chartering the presidential plane.[28] In 1987, Ayité Gachin Mivedor, a powerful RPT Central Committee member in the 1970s and former Minister of Public Works and Mines, was appointed lay Vice-President of the Methodist Church of Togo (*Église Méthodiste du Togo*, EMT).[29]

Similarly, a one-party military regime was established in Benin in 1972, officially adopting Marxist-Leninist principles, contrasting with Togo's pro-Western stance.

21 'Fin de la 2e réunion…,' *Togo-Presse*, 10 May 1978.

22 'Hier au Conseil des ministres…,' *Togo-Presse*, 28 February 1979.

23 'L'Union Musulmane jette…,' *Togo-Presse*, 17 July 1972; 'Avis et communiqués…,' *Togo-Presse*, 15 February 1973.

24 At the heart of these debates were different interpretations of the term tarbiyya, traditionally understood in Sufism as spiritual training aimed at promoting a direct experience of God. This spiritual regimen often included activities such as fasting, meditation, and seclusion. See, Seesemann 2011.

25 Noret 2004, 79–81.

26 'Le président Eyadéma a reçu…,' *Togo-Presse*, 11 June 1970.

27 'En raison des dissensions internes…,' *Togo-Presse*, 30 July 1976.

28 'La communauté musulmane du Togo…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 18 October 1983.

29 Attiogbe-Akogoni, 'Synode de l'Eglise Méthodiste…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 25 February 1988.

From Africa's Sick Child to a Marxist Regime in Benin

Between 1960 and 1972, Dahomey experienced a tumultuous political landscape with over a dozen leaders – six military and five civilian – assuming power. During this period, the country adopted five constitutions and witnessed twelve coups, five of which were successful. The political arena was characterised by intense rivalry among three key figures: Sourou Migan Apithy, Hubert Maga, and Justin Tométin Ahomadegbé. Their cyclical alternation in power culminated in a triumvirate between 1970 and 1972, eventually leading to Mathieu Kérékou's coup d'état. This instability, driven by ethno-regional rivalries and historical north-south divisions, had significant economic, social, and cultural repercussions, earning Dahomey the moniker 'Africa's sick child'.[30]

On the afternoon of 26 October 1972, young officers with little political influence staged a coup d'état, ending Dahomey's political turbulence and the power monopoly of the southern Benin intellectual elite that had emerged from the colonial system. To secure northern support, they entrusted the leadership to Colonel Mathieu Kérékou, a Somba from the north. Following the coup, the military embarked on a series of reforms and voiced populist and nationalist grievances about Dahomey's subjugation and neo-dependence on the former colonial power. Initially, their ideological stance unequivocally rejected the 'external lessons' of 'socialism, communism, or capitalism'.[31] The coup d'état ushered in a period of relative stability, which underwent significant changes due to evolving factional struggles. According to Banégas, these changes included a brief nationalist phase (1972–74), a period of regime radicalisation (1974–early 1980s), a 'Thermidorian' phase marked by a pragmatic retreat from socialism (1982–88), and ultimately a crisis that led to the regime's downfall (1989–90).[32]

On 30 November 1974, at Place Goho in Abomey, President Kérékou officially adopted Marxism-Leninism as the state ideology in his '*Discours d'orientation nationale*' (National Orientation Speech). His speech, while echoing the nationalist and anti-imperialist themes of 1972, now articulated these ideas through the lens of 'scientific socialism'. The *Gouvernement Militaire Révolutionnaire* (Military Revolutionary Government, GMR) was subsequently established. In November 1975, Dahomey was renamed the People's Republic of Benin, launching an extensive project to 'revolutionise' society. This transformation included nationalising all economic sectors, reforming the education system, and establishing local revolu-

30 Banégas 2003, 32–36; Sedegan and Allocheme 2021.
31 Decalo 1985, 125.
32 Banégas 2003, 44.

tionary committees. Concurrently, the dictatorship was institutionalised with the creation of the *Parti de la Révolution Populaire du Bénin* (People's Revolutionary Party of Benin, PRPB) in 1975, the election of a National Revolutionary Assembly, and the adoption of a new *Loi fondamentale* in 1977.[33]

The revolutionary agenda included the 'fight against obscurantism' ('*lutte contre l'obscurantisme*') and the eradication of 'feudal forces' ('*forces féodales*'). Cults and religions were perceived as retrograde forces impeding socio-economic progress. While opposing the 'imperialist agenda' of the Catholic Church and the 'obscurantist forces' of traditional religion, the regime stopped short of completely eliminating religious freedom. At a meeting with leaders of various religious leaders in November 1974, President Kérékou assured them, stating, 'We have never proclaimed that our revolution was against cults and we have never said that our revolution wants to install atheism in our country.'[34] However, addressing the Muslim community specifically, Kérékou criticised the practice of 'mystifying people with prayers' and imams who 'exploit their compatriots by reciting bad prayers'. He issued a stark warning: 'But if Muslims continue to hold prayers in the homes of former politicians [...] so that they can take power in this country again and serve them (we know all about that), we will demolish the mosques.'[35] Similarly, an article in *Ehuzu* in 1975, titled 'Our attitude to religious beliefs', emphasised that the enemies of the revolution were spreading disinformation by falsely claiming that the socialist regime was against religions. The article asserted that if 'a religion attacks our ideology under any pretext, it will be fought vigorously and objectively' because 'our socialist option marks the end of all myths and mystifications, the end of all political, economic, cultural and spiritual alienations.'[36]

Despite ideological assurances of some religious freedoms, the regime's actions told a different story. Sacred trees were felled and vodun shrines were closed or destroyed in the fight against feudalism. Religious ceremonies faced strict regulation or severe restriction. At the height of the anti-feudal struggle, sorcery was explicitly labelled as 'supreme feudalism'. In the 1970s, when vodun remained a significant religious practice, the Marxist discourse aimed to liberate the people not only from capitalist domination but also from the 'retrograde feudal lords' through a 'nationwide, state-sponsored anti-witchcraft campaign'.[37]

33 Decalo 1979, 237–47; Allen 1992, 64–66; Banégas 2003, 43–47.

34 'Le chef de l'État aux communautés...,' *Daho-Express*, 18 November 1974.

35 Ibid.

36 'Notre attitude face...,' *Daho-Express*, 13 February 1975. The Ehuzu newspaper published several articles on the issue of revolution and religious beliefs. See for example d'Almeida, 'Tribune libre...,' *Ehuzu*, 14 January 1976.

37 Kahn 2011, 4.

The Catholic Church, a dominant religious institution since the colonial period, was compelled to comply with regulations dictating a specific calendar for religious activities and imposed spending caps on celebrations. From 1973 to 1974, religious education was secularised and nationalised, impacting the Catholic Church significantly, as it owned the most prestigious educational institutions.[38] Throughout the 1970s, the Catholic Church was subjected to state-led denunciation campaigns and the arrest of several priests, including the Bishop of Lokossa.[39] In 1975, Abbé André Quenum, an intellectual priest and director of the prestigious Père Aupiais College in Cotonou, was arrested and sentenced to death along with other political opponents, although the sentence was not carried out.[40]

Like Togo, the Beninese state did not hesitate to interfere in religious affairs. The state created the *Conseil Interconfessionnel Protestant du Bénin* (Protestant Interconfessional Council of Benin, CIPB) to have a single representative for the Protestant community alongside the Catholic Church. The CIPB, which included evangelical and prophetic churches, maintained close ties with the government. Chaired by the Methodist minister Henry Harry throughout the revolutionary period, the CIPB enabled the churches to conduct a minimum of activities in Benin.[41]

Like Eyadéma's regime, Kérékou's government became deeply involved in managing rivalries among various Islamic groups to consolidate its authority. In 1973, President Kérékou repeatedly criticised the disarray within the Muslim community, attributing it to political machinations, vested interests, and human exploitation. This disorder was supposedly particularly evident during Ramadan and the organisation of the pilgrimage. At a meeting with Muslim leaders, Kérékou's adviser on cultural affairs asserted that 'the state is certainly secular; it is careful not to interfere in religious affairs.' However, he emphasised the need to 'end the anarchy stemming from the profusion of these [Islamic] organisations, first by ensuring their dissolution and then by creating a broad-based revolutionary Islamic movement at the national level that truly addresses the real interests of all Muslims, without exception.'[42] Two months later, during another meeting with Muslim community leaders, Kérékou reiterated the 'effective *laïcité* that the Military Revolutionary Government has always applied', insisting that 'internal divisions and disagreements must cease' and warning that 'all those who confuse

38 Strandsbjerg 2015, 90–95.
39 Tall 1995, 197.
40 Strandsbjerg 2015, 62–63.
41 Mayrargue 2005, 253.
42 'Vers l'union de la Communauté…,' *Daho-Express*, 14 August 1973.

religion with activism will be severely punished.'[43] Despite a 1975 *Daho-Express* article suggesting that Muslims had achieved 'Order and Unity' with the creation of the National Islamic Directorate of Dahomey (*Direction Islamique Nationale du Dahomey*),[44] the 'mass faith-based organisation' known as the *Union Islamique du Bénin* (Islamic Union of Benin, UIB) was not officially established until 1984.[45]

The regime entered a new phase around the turn of the 1980s, when civilian authority began to replace military control, and ideological radicalism gradually gave way to pragmatism. Facing escalating social unrest and resistance from high-ranking civil servants unwilling to join the PRPB, Kérékou opted for dialogue. In 1979, he convened a 'cadre conference' that brought together representatives from various administrative sectors. This softening of the regime was marked by a noticeable easing of repressive measures, including inviting exiles to return and releasing political prisoners and leaders detained during the anti-feudal campaign. The regime also allowed a limited opening of the public sphere, exemplified by authorising local development associations from 1985. Diplomatic relations improved unexpectedly, highlighted by the historic visit of French President François Mitterrand in 1983.[46]

The new pragmatism of the early 1980s was evident in the regime's relaxed control over religion. Following the proclamation of religious neutrality in the 1977 Basic Law of the People's Republic of Benin,[47] the government permitted Pope John Paul II to visit in 1982 and resumed religious radio broadcasts.[48] From 1979, major religious groups were represented in the new Revolutionary Assembly, in which representatives were elected locally and then stood on a single national list. 'Animists' were allocated three seats, while Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism each received one.[49] By 1986, the Ministry of the Interior had registered over 500 applications for the recognition of churches or religious associations.[50]

As Strandsbjerg has shown, the relationship between political power and religious institutions was complex. The authoritarian military regime vehemently attacked religious and traditional powers while simultaneously drawing on symbolic references to the Kingdom of Dahomey, the Vodun universe, and a wider

43 'Le chef de l'Etat exhorte…,' *Daho-Express*, 1 October 1973.

44 Assouma, 'Tribune libre…,' *Daho-Express*, 17 July 1975.

45 'L'Union islamique ou…,' *Ehuzu*, 31 January 1984.

46 Banégas 2003, 47–63. See also, Vittin 1991; Gandonou 2010.

47 'Belief or non-belief in a religion is a matter for each individual, and the Revolution remains strictly neutral' (Article 12).

48 'Reprise des émissions religieuses…,' *Ehuzu*, 9 July 1985.

49 Strandsbjerg 2015, 63.

50 Tall 1995, 198.

'occult' or mystical realm.[51] By the early 1980s, Kérékou had officially engaged the Malian-born marabout Amadou Cissé as an advisor. Cissé, who had reportedly worked for presidents Mobutu Sese Seko and Omar Bongo, became a public figure, often appearing alongside the head of state at official events. By this time, Kérékou had already established significant connections with Vodun cult leaders.[52]

Ultimately, the radical phase of the Beninese revolution was short-lived. The popular term '*laxisme-béninisme*' ('Laxism-Beninism') encapsulates the ideological inconsistencies of Kérékou's regime, its failure to impose a revolutionary project on a resistant society, and its eventual descent into corruption and bankruptcy.[53] Despite the highly personalised nature of governance, the revolutionary period did not witness the emergence of a personality cult around Kérékou, unlike the situation in Togo. Contrary to some perceptions, Kérékou's regime was not ethnically biased or 'northern-centric'. Unlike Eyadéma's army, which was predominantly composed of members of the Kabye ethnic group, Kérékou's military was not an exclusive praetorian guard of his Somba ethnic group. He skilfully incorporated representatives from various regions into his circles of power.[54]

While both Eyadéma and Kérékou sought to bolster their legitimacy by courting influential Christian and Muslim leaders, their approaches reflected their distinct ideological orientations. Eyadéma's strategy, rooted in his philosophy of 'authenticity', focused on building personal relationships and loyalties to keep religious leaders out of politics. He mobilised religious figures through favours and personal ties to legitimise and sanctify his power, while severely repressing dissenters. In contrast, Kérékou's commitment to Marxism-Leninism led to a more confrontational stance towards religion, initially restricting religious activities and targeting traditional religions and Catholic institutions as retrogressive forces. Despite this, he maintained a degree of pragmatism, particularly in the later stages of his rule, allowing some religious activities and easing restrictions. However, both leaders strategically interfered in religious affairs to establish their authority. Eyadéma played rival Islamic groups against each other, while Kérékou criticised disorder within the Muslim community. Ultimately, despite their differing ideological foundations, Eyadéma and Kérékou employed similar tactics of patronage, repression, and interference to consolidate power and regulate the religious sphere in their respective countries. It was against this backdrop of political authoritarianism, ideological manoeuvring, and religious regulation that the University of Dahomey in

51 Strandsbjerg 2015, 77.
52 Ibid., 103–09.
53 Banégas 2003, 52.
54 Ibid., 62.

Abomey-Calavi and the University of Benin in Lomé, both founded in 1970, developed during the 1970s and 1980s.

2.2 The Birth of Higher Education in Benin and Togo

Before the establishment of the first public universities in Togo and Benin, students from both countries had to attend the University of Dakar, the University of Abidjan, or universities in France to pursue higher education. Although plans for national universities emerged in the early 1960s, the projects did not materialise until 1970, encouraged by the expulsion of Beninese and Togolese students from the University of Dakar in 1968 and facilitated by support from international partners, particularly France. The creation of these institutions aimed not only to train administrative cadres for the newly independent countries but also to serve as national projects linked to decolonisation.

Colonial Education in French West Africa

In French West Africa (AOF), colonial education primarily aimed to train auxiliaries for the colonisers, with little focus on developing local higher education.[55] Besides primary education, a number of vocational schools were established, including the William Ponty School, the Rufisque School, notably the Dakar Medical School (1916), the Institut Pasteur de l'AOF (1924), and the Institut français d'Afrique Noire (IFAN, 1936). These institutions represented the initial steps towards higher education in AOF.[56] Compared to British colonies, the development of higher education in French West Africa came relatively late. For instance, the Achimota School in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) was founded in 1927,[57] and the University of Ibadan in Nigeria in 1948.[58]

In French West Africa, serious discussions about a higher education system began only after the Brazzaville Conference in 1944. That year, an IFAN centre was opened in Dahomey, focusing on humanities research. Located in Porto-Novo, it was affiliated with the Museum of the Ancient Palaces of the Kings of Dahomey in

55 Jézéquel 2007.
56 Gamble 2017; Singaravélou 2009.
57 Yamada 2009.
58 Livsey 2017.

Abomey and the Museum of Ouidah.[59] Following the unanimous approval of the Grand Council of the AOF, the Institut des Hautes Études de Dakar (IHED) was established by decree on 6 April 1950. In February 1957, the IHED evolved into the University of Dakar, becoming both the 18th French university and the first African university in the AOF region, setting a precedent for higher education in francophone Africa.[60] In Dahomey, known as the 'Latin Quarter of Africa', education played a significant role during the colonial period. Consequently, it was unsurprising that, from the early 1960s, the political elite of the newly independent country aspired to create a national university.

From the *Institut d'Enseignement Supérieur du Bénin* (IESB) to the Establishment of National Universities in 1970

French colonial rule profoundly reshaped Dahomey's elite structure, dismantling the monarchy and fostering a new dominant class known as the *Akowé*, or 'educated elite' ('*évolués*'). The advent of direct French rule in 1900 created an urgent need for local intermediaries in the colonial administration, elevating educational qualifications above traditional social or communal origins as the primary determinant of power. This new elite, predominantly born between 1910 and 1920 and largely products of Catholic education in the southern regions, fully emerged in the aftermath of World War II. They adeptly leveraged the institutional reforms of the 1940s and 1950s to assert their political influence, soon dominating 'press societies', public administration, parastatals, legislative assemblies, governments, and party hierarchies.[61] Their influence extended beyond Dahomey's borders, with many *Akowé* serving in administrative roles throughout AOF.[62]

As in many African nations, the early 1960s saw Dahomey's national elite envisioning the university as a potent symbol of post-colonial emancipation and national identity. This institution was expected to revolutionise the educational system, transforming it from an imposed, metropolitan-modelled structure into one that could train a new African elite, particularly a bureaucratic cadre capable of replacing departing colonial administrators.[63] Hubert Maga, the first president of independent Dahomey (1960–63), championed the creation of a national univer-

59 Hounzandji 2021, 47.
60 Capelle 1990; Baldé 2023.
61 Banégas 2003, 38–43; Ronen 1974.
62 Capelle 1990, 18–20.
63 Provini, Mayrargue, and Chitou 2020, 3.

sity. However, this ambitious project faced significant hurdles: political instability impeded progress, while France, having made substantial investments in the Universities of Dakar (1957) and Abidjan (1959), was hesitant to fund yet another national university in West Africa.

Despite these challenges, Dahomey signed its first higher education cooperation agreement with France on 24 April 1961. Under this agreement, France committed to providing Dahomey with technical and financial assistance to train senior scientific, educational, technical, and administrative staff. Scholarships were awarded to young Dahomeans to pursue higher education at French institutions. In November 1962, a '*propédeutique de lettres*' – an intermediate course between *terminale* and bachelor's years in the French system – was established in Porto-Novo as the *Centre d'Enseignement Supérieur* (CES). The CES prepared students for admission to French higher education institutions.

The development of higher education in Dahomey and Togo took a significant step forward with the creation of the *Institut d'Enseignement Supérieur du Bénin* (IESB). A tripartite agreement between Dahomey, Togo, and France, signed on 14 July 1965, established a joint higher education structure. This agreement divided disciplines between the two countries: scientific studies were based at the Lycée Béhanzin in Porto-Novo, and literary studies at the Lycée de Tokoin in Lomé. The institutions offered the *Diplôme Universitaire d'Etudes Littéraires* (DUEL) and the *Diplôme Universitaire d'Etudes Scientifiques* (DUES), with the second phase of studies continuing at French universities.

Between May 1968 and October 1970, several events brought the national university project back onto the political agenda in Dahomey. The crisis at the University of Dakar in May 1968[64] led to the mass expulsion of foreign students, including more than 400 from Dahomey. These students were sent home in the middle of the academic year with no prospects for continuing their studies. The Dahomean student movement, led by the *Union Générale des Étudiants et Élèves du Dahomey* (General Union of Students and Pupils of Dahomey, UGEED), became more radical in May 1969 – the 'Dahomean May'[65] – demanding the creation of a national university. UGEED organised a movement of students and schoolchildren to persuade political decision-makers.

In response to the escalating social crisis, the Dahomean government intensified its contacts with potential international partners, including France, UNESCO, the United States, Canada, and Israel. Dahomey's Minister of Education, Culture, Youth, and Sport, Edmond Dossou-Yovo, emphasised in a May 1970 interview with

64 Blum 2012; Gueye 2017; Bianchini 2019.
65 Hounzandji 2016.

the *Daho-Express* that constructing a national university would 'stop the exodus of our students and stem the brain drain, saving time and money' and that Dahomey would 'have cadres who are better adapted to the realities of the country.'[66] These efforts culminated in a tripartite meeting between France, Dahomey, and Togo in Paris on 9 July 1970, which led to the dissolution of the IESB and the creation of national universities in Togo and Dahomey.[67]

The presidential decree of 21 August 1970, 'establishing and organising higher education in Dahomey', formalised the creation of the University of Dahomey. A week later, Professor Édouard Joshua Adjanohoun, who had been working at the University of Abidjan, was appointed the first rector of the national university.[68] Minister Dossou-Yovo stressed that 'for us, the creation of a Dahomeyan University is not an institution of prestige, but an irreplaceable national imperative, a priority for which we are prepared to make many sacrifices.'[69]

In September 1970, a Franco-Dahomean commission met to decide on the university's location, a matter of significant national debate. Some advocated for Porto-Novo, the political capital and provisional site of the university. There were also plans to build the campus in Ouando, a town less than ten kilometres northeast of the capital. Others argued that Cotonou, the economic capital and largest city of Dahomey, would be ideal. Another proposal favoured Abomey-Calavi, 18 kilometres north of Cotonou, where a large plot of land was available for the campus, which would have been difficult to find in Cotonou. Some also supported Ouidah, a city with a strong historical significance.[70] Ultimately, the choice of the Abomey-Calavi plateau was made as a response to the concern of politicians to keep student protests away from Cotonou.[71]

The university opened its doors on 26 October 1970 in Porto-Novo, at the site of the Lycée Béhanzin, serving as a provisional location before its definitive transfer to Abomey-Calavi. The laying of the foundation stone for the University of Dahomey in Abomey-Calavi on 6 November 1970 raised great expectations. In his speech, President Maga compared the event to the historic proclamation of national independence:

66 'Priorité à l'université…,' *Daho-Express*, 16 May 1970.
67 'Signature à Paris…,' *Daho-Express*, 11 July 1970.
68 'Création de l'Université dahoméenne…,' *Daho-Express*, 27 August 1970.
69 'Université dahoméenne…,' *Daho-Express*, 13 August 1970.
70 'Université: pourquoi les…,' *Daho-Express*, 26 September 1970; 'Université: le choix…,' *Daho-Express*, 29 September 1970.
71 Université d'Abomey-Calavi 2016, 105.

> Situated at the heart of the Gulf of Benin, Dahomey, through its university, will serve as a link and crossroads between the large Anglophone states of Nigeria and Ghana and the Francophone states of West Africa. The development of the University will be progressive, in accordance with the real and priority needs of the nation. [...] It will be the first factor in changing the backward mentality that hinders development. [...] Our university must not produce intellectuals who abdicate their essential responsibilities. This will only be possible if it is not a transplanted university. It must be rooted in African soil so that it can flourish within African traditions and culture. [...] Thanks to the cadres who will have the opportunity to be trained through specialised courses, our economic development will accelerate and, as a result, our cadres will have enough jobs. [...] Thanks to our university, the large number of our cadres should no longer be a curse but a blessing. We were threatened by quality; from now on we will win by the quantity and quality of our people. [...] Our university will be a hotbed of intellectual influence, a testimony to an original civilisation and to the modernity that drives us forward.[72]

Less than a month after the ceremony, Rector Adjanohoun faced a complex situation. The management of the first intake of students was complicated by the expulsion of 142 Dahomean students – along with Togolese, Malian, Voltaic, and Nigerien students[73] – from the University of Abidjan and their repatriation to Dahomey in November 1970. The repatriation was triggered by protests in support of Sékou Touré's Guinea.[74] Another major challenge was the limited number of Dahomean professors available for recruitment. Few were willing to leave their positions as 'French civil servants' in Dakar, Abidjan, Brazzaville, or France to join the uncertain venture of a new university.[75]

Although the plan for a national university was seen as an emancipatory project, the National University of Dahomey relied heavily on France to meet the financial needs of its newly created university.[76] Initially, the teaching staff comprised Dahomeans and French aid workers. The first seven Dahomean lecturers were recruited in 1970. A year later, this number increased with the recruitment of Dahomeans already working in higher education abroad and within the national territory. Senior members of the public administration and experienced secondary school teachers were also co-opted to work at the University.[77]

On 8 December 1973, the University of Dahomey began its first official academic year, presided over by President Kérékou. On 30 November 1975, the University of

72 'Pose de la première pierre...,' *Daho-Express*, 7 November 1970.

73 'Le Bureau Politique réaffirme...,' *Fraternité Matin*, 27 November 1970.

74 'Nos étudiants expulsés...,' *Daho-Express*, 27 November 1970; 'Les étudiants dahoméens...,' *Daho-Express*, 28 November 1970.

75 Hounzandji 2021, 188.

76 Ibid., 192.

77 Université d'Abomey-Calavi 2016, 117.

Dahomey was renamed the National University of Benin (*Université Nationale du Bénin*, UNB) to avoid confusion with the University of Benin in Lomé. During the revolutionary period, the UNB benefited from cooperation with North Korea in the 1970s and, in 1980, the Kim Il-sung Maréchal Pavilion, a 150-bed student hostel, was inaugurated on the campus.[78]

Fig. 5: The 'Marshal KIM IL SUNG Pavilion'. The fruit of Benin-Korea cooperation.[79]

Dahomey's decision to create the National University of Dahomey and dissolve the joint IESB prompted the Togolese government to establish its own national university.[80] The University of Benin (UB) in Lomé was announced by presidential decree on 14 September 1970. Initially, it comprised four schools: the School of Law and Economics, the School of Science, the School of Arts, and the University Institute of Technology. By 1974, it had expanded to ten schools.[81] At first, the various schools operated in classrooms borrowed from the Lycée de Tokoin, using hastily converted buildings. This temporary arrangement continued until 29 November 1973, when the University of Benin was officially inaugurated at its current site, about

78 Bibilary, 'Inauguration officielle du…,' *Ehuzu*, 21 March 1980.
79 Ibid.
80 'Une mission française à Lomé…,' *Togo-Presse*, 30 January 1970.
81 Aléza 2021, 36.

2 km north of the centre of Lomé. Student enrolment increased from 845 in 1970–71 to 2,180 in 1975.[82]

Regarding the teaching staff, the university started with about twenty professors and expected around forty new teachers for the 1971–72 academic year. Most of these educators came from France and other countries such as Canada, West Germany, the United Kingdom, and Israel. The teaching staff increased from 128 in 1972–73 to 156 at the start of the academic year in October 1973.[83] As in Dahomey, French support was crucial for the development of UB. A joint Franco-Togolese commission on higher and secondary education met twice a year to review French aid to Togo. France's support for the University of Benin included buildings and equipment, subsidies to the operating budget, teaching staff, and scholarships for Togolese students.[84] Additionally, the university received support from West Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, and UNESCO.[85]

In May 1971, at a conference titled 'Why a national university?', Marcel Fritz Voulé, technical advisor to the Minister of National Education and Director of the Department of Educational Planning, outlined the reasons for creating a national university in Togo. He argued that the establishment of a university was essential for sovereignty and political and economic imperatives. Voulé, who had been involved in the negotiations leading to the creation of the university since November 1966, described the project as ambitious yet necessary. He asserted that every sovereign and independent state must have its own university and *grandes écoles* to train its cadres. Without these institutions, a nation would struggle to develop its culture, train its cadres according to its economic realities, and meet societal needs.[86]

In November 1973, an article in *Togo-Presse* titled 'The University of Benin: essential enterprise for our development' highlighted the significance of UB's inauguration.[87] In his speech at the event, President Eyadéma emphasised that the primary task of the institution was to train cadres in line with the country's development plans:

> Inaugurating a university is inaugurating the future [...] Continuing to ask other countries to educate our students on their own posed a double danger. First, the so-called 'brain drain.'

82 Anika, 'Université du Bénin...,' *Togo-Presse*, 13 January 1977.

83 'En dépit de certaines difficultés...,' *Togo-Presse*, 5 November 1971.

84 'M. Malou a présidé...,' *Togo-Presse*, 15 February 1972; 'Accroissement de l'aide...,' *Togo-Presse*, 17 November 1973.

85 'L'amphithéâtre de 3000 places...,' *Togo-Presse*, 30 November 1973.

86 Voulé, 'L'Université nationale...,' *Togo-Presse*, 27 May 1971.

87 'L'Université du Bénin: une...,' *Togo-Presse*, 29 November 1973.

> Trained by others, in touch with other people's realities, concerned about other people's needs, and tempted by comfort rather than the struggle of our young nationalism, the scholarship holders who had completed their studies did not return to their home countries. [...] Secondly, the inappropriateness of the structures of education provided in these countries no longer met our needs, because they obviously did not take into account our realities and the progress of our development. This education was not only inadequate in form, but it was also inadequate in content, because it kept our elites in a cultural alienation, an intellectual dependence that was detrimental to our true independence. If decolonisation brought us political independence, our development will lead us to economic independence, and it is the national university that will decolonise us intellectually, and all of these are sufficiently and intimately linked that one cannot go without the other. These are the main reasons why our government wants to educate its students locally. [...] No sacrifice is too great for the government when it comes to the future of young people, because young people are the Togo of tomorrow, the African we want to be.[88]

The 'intellectual decolonisation of the Togolese people,' as articulated in a December 1973 editorial in *Togo-Presse*,[89] was central to the higher education reforms adopted just two years after the official creation of the University of Benin. At a 1972 press conference, Benoît Malou, then Minister of National Education, outlined recent government reforms in higher education. Malou emphasised the need for educational structures that were 'in tune with the realities of Togo and Africa in general.' He argued that past educational models, although effective, no longer aligned with the country's evolving economic and social landscape. Malou also criticised the arbitrary selection of academic disciplines, which often resulted in a surplus of graduates who were employable in public administration or the private sector but could not be sustained long-term.[90] In another press conference, he pointed out that the UB's initial structure mirrored that of European countries, particularly France. Malou stressed the urgent need to change mentalities by 'decolonising ourselves' ('*nous décoloniser nous-mêmes*').[91]

A year later, an editorial in *Togo-Presse* titled 'Educational reform and decolonisation,' reiterated that the objectives of higher education reforms were to 'adapt education to the needs of the country, a young country, essentially agricultural and in the process of development', and to uphold the 'national sovereignty of a country which is in its second decade of independence and which must assert its personality in the concert of the great African family.' The editorial concluded that 'the reform has already begun, it will continue, and it will certainly achieve its goal: to

88 'L'amphithéâtre de 3000 places...,' *Togo-Presse*, 30 November 1973.
89 'Editorial: une université...,' *Togo-Presse*, 3 December 1973.
90 'M. Malou parlant de...,' *Togo-Presse*, 1 September 1972.
91 'Conférence de presse du recteur...,' *Togo-Presse*, 7 October 1972.

train citizens who are intellectually decolonised, aware of our realities, educated for our needs and adapted to our personalities as Africans and Togolese.'[92] In 1979, the Vice Rector of the UB reported a 357% increase in student numbers between 1970 and 1979. Originally designed to accommodate 5,000 students by 1985, the university already had 3,208 students by the end of the 1970s.[93]

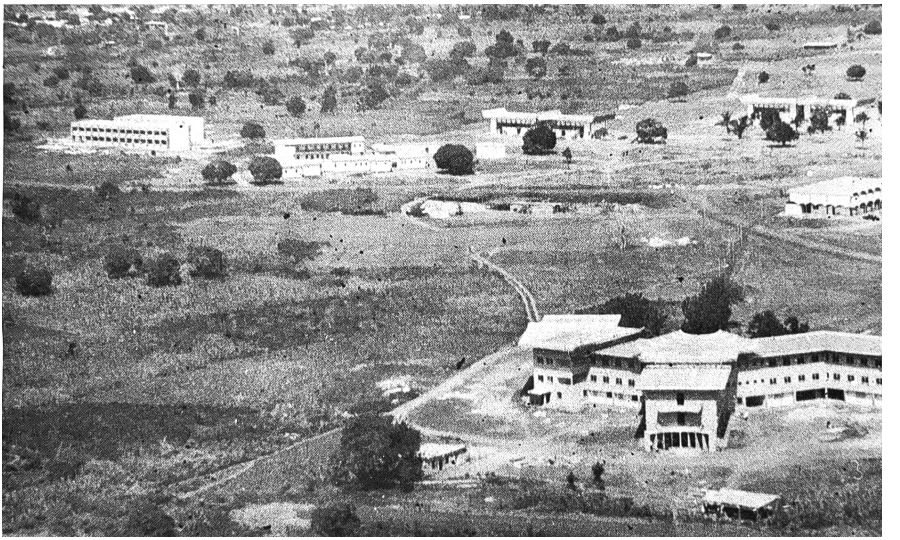

Fig. 6: Aerial photograph of the University of Benin campus in 1973.[94]

The emergence of higher education in Benin and Togo in the 1970s was shaped by a complex interplay of political, social, and international factors. Both countries aimed to establish national universities as symbols of post-colonial emancipation and tools for nation-building, yet their paths to realising this vision were marked by distinct challenges and influences. In Benin, the creation of the University of Dahomey was driven by the expulsion of Beninese students from Dakar in 1968 and subsequent student movements demanding a national university. Togo's decision to establish the University of Benin was more directly tied to the dissolution of the joint IESB and the need to assert its own national identity in higher education. However, both universities initially depended heavily on French cooperation and resources, revealing the enduring legacies of colonialism and the challenges of

92 'Editorial: réforme de…,' *Togo-Presse*, 12 June 1973.
93 'Première réunion du grand…,' *Togo-Presse*, 6 October 1979.
94 'Vue aérienne du Campus…,' *Togo-Presse*, 29 November 1973.

forging truly independent institutions. The rhetoric surrounding the universities' founding emphasised their role in decolonisation, nation-building, and forming a new African elite. Yet, the realities of their establishment and operation often reflected the continued influence of external actors and models.

In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, student unions in Togo and Benin, like those elsewhere in Africa, were inspired by movements resisting colonisation and imperialism. Many African student leaders were strongly influenced by Third-Worldism, particularly the ideas of Frantz Fanon. Anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, and Marxism were often intertwined in their visions for the future of African nations.[95] On both the Lomé and Abomey-Calavi campuses, the regimes attempted to install their own loyalists in charge of the institutions and student movements to stifle any open dissent.

2.3 The National University in Togo and Benin: Highly Politicised Institutions

This section explores the relationship between educational reform, political ideology and student activism in Togo and Benin from the 1970s to the end of the 1980s. Both regimes embarked on significant educational reforms in the 1970s, known as the 'New School' ('*École Nouvelle*'). Rather than emancipating education from its colonial past, the reforms often served as conduits for the propagation of the ruling party's ideology. The RPT's influence was particularly strong at the University of Benin. Statements by key figures, including President Eyadéma, reveal attempts to steer academic discourse and student activism within the ideological confines of the party. In Benin, Kérékou's promotion of the '*Université Nationale Nouvelle*' and the '*Coopérative universitaire*' as instruments of socialist transformation met with much more resistance. This section reflects upon the state's attempts to reassert control in the face of volatile campus politics and unrest, revealing the dynamics of power, resistance, and ideology that characterised this tumultuous period on the Abomey-Calavi campus.

The Enlistment of Youth in the RPT

Aligned with the policy of authenticity, the Togolese state enacted an educational reform known as the 'New School' ('*École Nouvelle*') by decree on 6 May 1975. The

95 Blum, Guidi, and Rillon 2016b, 24.

reform aimed to introduce two national languages (Ewe and Kabye) into the education system and ensure that all children under the age of 15 attended school free of charge.[96] Above all, the reform sought to 'reject the work of alienation done by the colonial school'[97] and 'destroy the myth of the "pure intellectual" with its derisory universality by confronting it with a citizen with a practical mind, rooted in the realities of Togo and Africa, a citizen with useful, concrete knowledge.'[98] However, rather than truly transforming the school inherited from colonialism, the educational reform enshrined the cult of Eyadéma in schools and maintained a pedagogy based on physical coercion.[99] As the then Minister of Education stated, 'The educator's task is to educate a citizen imbued with the ideals of the RPT and free from all prejudices harmful to the building of national unity.'[100]

The UB was far from being an institution independent of the political and ideological influence of the RPT. In November 1973, during his speech at the official inauguration of the campus at its present site, President Eyadéma declared that:

> If our university must not be closed to ideologies that can add something positive to the knowledge of our students, it must not become a convent of imported ideologies that generate disorder, hatred between people and political confusion. So be vigilant; be militant within the framework of the RPT, which has opened the way for dialogue with your elders.[101]

At the same ceremony, the university rector, addressing the students directly, said:

> You must always bear in mind that what is true in Europe or elsewhere is not necessarily true in Africa, and that the University of Benin, like all African universities, has serious responsibilities towards the nation. Therefore, while your comrade from the old world is exhausting himself in a paralysing protest […], you should know that after your studies you will be faced with serious tasks of national construction, and that any loss of time or gains will mean a regression in the march of progress.[102]

At the RPT's major national congress in Kpalimé in November 1971, one resolution, alongside upholding Eyadéma as leader and the role of the army in political life, called for the creation of a youth wing of the party. The first congress of the *Jeunesse du Rassemblement du Peuple Togolais* (Youth of the Togolese People's Rally,

96 'Objectif de la réforme…,' *Togo-Presse*, 26 February 1975; Lange 1999, 135–51.
97 K., 'Réforme de l'enseignement…,' *Togo-Presse*, 13 January 1978.
98 Cited in Floriani 1987, 67.
99 Toulabor 1986, 171.
100 'M. Alassounouma a réuni…,' *Togo-Presse*, 14 May 1979.
101 'L'amphithéâtre de 3000 places…,' *Togo-Presse*, 30 November 1973.
102 'Le recteur JOHNSON…,' *Togo-Presse*, 30 November 1973.

JRPT) in December formalised the 'principle of a single movement for all Togolese youth' within the framework of the single party.[103] The first resolution adopted by the congress stressed the need to create a unified movement of RPT youth because the 'disparity of youth movements leads to disorderly outings without state control' and that 'this proliferation of movements and the lack of a coherent programme do not allow the development of an effective programme that takes into account the real aspirations of all Togolese youth.'[104] In February 1972, all other youth associations were dissolved by order of the Minister of the Interior.[105] The aim of the JRPT was to consolidate the unity of young people against 'regionalism' and 'tribalism', and to supervise, guide, and promote them to serve the country's development.[106]

According to the official discourse, before the creation of the JRPT, the Togolese youth were 'disorganised, headless and then divided into a multitude of associations, secular or confessional, belonging to one or another of the many political parties of the time.'[107] Speaking at a conference on 'The student movement before and after independence', Fambaré Ouattara Natchaba, Chief of Staff to the President of the Republic, stated that since 1946, Togolese students had shown their determination to defend just causes. In response to anti-colonial and anti-imperialist themes, Togolese students had supported the struggle for the political liberation of their country. With a tradition of anti-imperialist resistance, the student movement rejected the Olympio regime as authoritarian, regionalist, neo-colonialist, and subordinate to imperialism. However, 'the student movement must leave the field of systematic protest and take a more active and consistent part in the work of national construction to which the founding president of the RPT invites us.'[108]

Regarding university students in particular, the *Union Nationale des Étudiants Togolais* (National Union of Togolese Students, UNETO), which had existed since 1961, was dissolved in 1977 because some of its members were involved in a network that distributed 'defamatory, misleading, and seditious' leaflets against President Eyadéma.[109] This incident led to a wave of arrests, including a dozen UB professors. They were released five months later in a highly publicised ceremony in which the minister, Kpotivi Têvi-Djidjogbé Théodore Laclé, 'invited the professors to make our university not an office of foreign ideology but a school for the new

103 'Après trois jours de congrès…,' *Togo-Presse*, 20 December 1971.
104 'Un seul mouvement de jeunesse…,' *Togo-Presse*, 23 December 1971.
105 'Les mouvements et associations…,' *Togo-Presse*, 12 February 1972.
106 Borozé, 'La Jeunesse du Rassemblement…,' *Togo-Presse*, 9 March 1972.
107 Lamegu, 'La JRPT: vigilance, conscience…,' *Togo-Presse*, 27 April 1977.
108 Natchaba, 'Le mouvement estudiantin…,' *Togo-Presse*, 6 August 1979.
109 'Eclatant témoignage de la…,' *Togo-Presse*, 7 October 1977.

march undertaken by Togo.'[110] In August 1977, UNETO was replaced by the *Mouvement National des Étudiants et Stagiaires Togolais* (National Movement of Togolese Students and Trainees, MONESTO) at a student congress held on the UB campus.[111]

The President of the Consultative Committee of the Congress lamented that, unlike other sectors of the Togolese population, students remained unorganised. He emphasised that 'at a time when intellectual demagoguery and political anarchism have become principles of thought and action for some academics, the Association of Togolese Students at the UB has been working for three years with the main objective of bringing together Togolese students to seek solutions to national problems within an appropriate framework.'[112] In the political commission's report, delegates criticised 'the complete demobilisation of the national student movement, which allows reactionary groups to carry out campaigns of intoxication of national and international opinion.'[113] Consequently, MONESTO emerged as the sole Togolese student union until the liberalisation of the 1990s. On the UB campus, MONESTO was represented by the *Association des Étudiants Togolais de l'Université du Bénin* (Association of Togolese Students at the University of Benin, AETB).

These organisations primarily comprised Eyadéma loyalists. For instance, Tchaa-Kozah Tchalim, who served on the RPT Central Committee, was the general delegate of the JRPT in the early 1980s before becoming Minister of National Education and Scientific Research from 1987 to 1990. These organisations received extensive coverage in the national newspaper, *La Nouvelle Marche*. Their main activities, often attended by ministers or RPT Political Bureau members, included organising political and union training seminars for students and professors,[114] combating neo-colonialism, imperialism, and apartheid,[115] and staging demonstrations and petitions supporting President Eyadéma.[116] They also organised agricultural weeks[117] and pilgrimages to Sarakawa.[118] Internationally,

110 'Les professeurs libérés ont…,' *Togo-Presse*, 12 October 1977.
111 'Fin du congrès des étudiants…,' *Togo-Presse*, 16 August 1977.
112 'Hier s'est ouvert à Lomé…,' *Togo-Presse*, 9 August 1977.
113 'Fin du congrès des étudiants…,' *Togo-Presse*, 16 August 1977.
114 'L'Université et l'Etat…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 9 January 1981; 'Les travaux du séminaire de…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 5 December 1983; Attikossie, 'Les étudiants togolais de l'UB…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 3 April 1987.
115 'Le MONESTO a organisé hier…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 28 February 1980; 'Ouverture à Lomé d'un…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 23 July 1984.
116 'Deux motions de félicitations…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 1 October 1983; Adom, 'À travers une gigantesque…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 24 August 1987.
117 'MONESTO: une semaine agricole…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 1 August 1983.
118 'Quinzaine culturelle de l'UB…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 27 March 1984.

they maintained connections with groups like the All Africa Students Union (AASU) and the International Students Union (ISU).[119]

Fig. 7: Students on their way to the Maison du RPT.[120]

The UB Council, along with Rectors Ampah Gabriel Johnson (1970–86) and Komlavi Francisco Seddoh (1986–95) – both members of the RPT Central Committee – were equally subservient to President Eyadéma. In October 1985, a council delegation led by Rector Johnson met with the president to distance themselves from the 'misguided' UB professors involved in the production and distribution of 'misleading tracts' about the regime, actions they claimed were 'dangerously compromising the sacred mission of the university.'[121] His successor, Rector Seddoh, addressing a MONESTO congress in 1986, expressed his hope 'that the entire Togolese student community will not allow itself to be guided by any ideology other than that of the RPT' and called for 'greater vigilance in order to block the path of the slanderers of our policy.'[122]

119 'M. Alassounouma a clôturé…,' *Togo-Presse*, 12 April 1979.
120 'Après les diverses couches…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 16 October 1985.
121 'Le Conseil de l'UB, après…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 10 October 1985.
122 Assih, 'Le 4e congrès du MONESTO…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 23 August 1986.

Marxism-Leninism and the '*Université Nationale Nouvelle*': An Unruly Campus in Abomey-Calavi

The Revolution profoundly impacted the nascent National University of Benin. In his programmatic speech on 30 November 1972, President Kérékou described the existing education system as 'colonial and neo-colonial':

> Until now, teaching, education and culture have served foreign domination and exploitation. Here, too, we need a new policy of national independence that breaks free from the constraints of traditional schooling that stifle our national values. From this point of view, it is imperative to establish a democratic and patriotic education system that will teach modern science and technology in the service of the people's interests. To achieve this, a genuine reform of education in line with the new policy's requirements is necessary.[123]

Shortly thereafter, the GMR initiated a project to reform education in Dahomey, which materialised in May 1973 with the establishment of the National Commission for the Reform of Teaching and Education. The commission was tasked with developing a new education system that would be democratic, popular, free, compulsory, secular, and public. The goal was to ensure that all children in Dahomey, regardless of social, ethnic, religious, or linguistic background, had the opportunity to realise their full potential. Measures were therefore proposed to eliminate geographical and socio-religious barriers and social prejudices; university education was to be reimagined to prepare the nation's future leaders.[124]

In 1975, the 'New School' ('*École Nouvelle*')[125] was formally introduced, incorporating collective agricultural work and the teaching of manual and artistic skills into the curriculum. Among the more radical measures was the nationalisation of religious schools, including Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic institutions.[126] By 1976, the reform extended to the university level, transforming the National University of Benin into an 'authentically national, democratic university at the service of the country's economic and social development and capable of training a large number of competent national cadres.' According to Kérékou,

> The National University of Benin [...] must henceforth play its full role in our present society, which we want to transform into a new society, a socialist society, where life will be good for everyone. A new type of Beninese citizen, politically and ideologically committed and aware

123 'Dahoméen, voici ton programme!,' *Daho-Express*, 1 December 1972.

124 Hounzandji 2021, 247–57.

125 'Loi d'orientation sur l'Ecole...,' *Ehuzu*, 17 July 1981.

126 'La situation entre l'Eglise...,' *Daho-Express*, 11 April 1974; 'Conseil des ministres: prise...,' *Ehuzu*, 15 April 1976.

> of the problems of his country; a new type of Beninese citizen, a convinced patriot, determined to participate actively and effectively in the economic and social development of his country [...]. In the same way, the National University of Benin, in addition to its primary mission of training qualified, conscious, politically and ideologically committed Beninese cadres, must also participate actively in the gigantic task of national development, by means of varied and in-depth scientific research which takes great account of the legitimate aspirations and daily concerns, as well as the fundamental interests, of the broad masses of our urban and rural population.[127]

In 1980, on the 10th anniversary of the UNB, Kérékou admitted that the project of a *Université Nationale Nouvelle* had not been achieved 'without bitterness and gnashing of teeth':

> Our university, the National University of Benin, must be considered [...] as a privileged means and a powerful weapon in the struggle to free ourselves from foreign domination and any system of oppression and exploitation of man by man. [...] In the face of the subversive actions of the reactionary forces who are trying and will continue to try in vain to undermine the management of the *École Nouvelle* and the *Université Nationale Nouvelle* with the cynical aim of jeopardising the achievement of their objectives, it is imperative that comrades, teachers, pupils, and students, as well as all comrades working in our schools and universities, redouble their revolutionary vigilance, mobilise, and organise themselves day and night, under the firm, clear-sighted and centralised leadership of our party [...] to ensure the defence of the homeland and the Beninese revolution.[128]

Unlike President Eyadéma, who successfully suppressed all open protests on campus in the 1970s and 1980s, the situation at the Abomey-Calavi campus was far more volatile. From the 1950s onwards, students from Dahomey became prominent figures among their sub-Saharan African counterparts. Notably, Solange Faladé became the first president of the FEANF, following elections at the inaugural congress held in Paris in 1951. The creation of the *Association des Étudiants Dahoméens* (Association of Dahomean Students in France, AED) in 1955 and the subsequent creation of the UGEED in 1956 testified to the leadership role assumed by Dahomean students.[129]

On 18 April 1974, the GMR announced the dissolution of all youth organisations in the country, including those of pupils and students. The student movement in Benin was quite large; 180 student organisations were dissolved at that time.[130] Before that, students had primarily been organised into two unions: the UGEED and

127 Bibilary, 'Inauguration officielle du...,' *Ehuzu*, 21 March 1980.
128 '1980 sera une décennie de...,' *Ehuzu*, 15 December 1980.
129 Hounzandji 2021, 69–83.
130 Banégas 1997, 44.

the *Front d'Action Commun des Élèves et Étudiants du Nord* (Common Action Front of Pupils and Students of the North, FACEEN). In 1975, the *Coopérative Universitaire des Etudiants du Bénin* (University Students Cooperative of Benin, CUEB) was established as part of the *Organisation de la Jeunesse Révolutionnaire du Bénin* (Organisation of the Revolutionary Youth of Benin, OJRB).[131] The Minister of Education, aiming to revolutionise the UNB, created the CUEB to involve students in agricultural production.[132] The University Cooperative, responsible for student welfare, became the gateway to university residences, scholarships, and other benefits.

From 26 December 1977 to 7 January 1978, a 'patriotic and ideological training seminar' was held at the Mêdji Agricultural College in Sékou for students, administrators, and members of the University Cooperative. The GMR presented agricultural production as a hallmark of the 'new university' and a means of uniting the nation's youth. In his closing speech, President Kérékou stressed that the seminar aimed to revive revolutionary consciousness among participants and the student body. His speech also reflected the intent to break definitively with the oppressive ideologies of the past, which he described as irresponsible and intolerable anarchy. He highlighted the pernicious influence of exploitative ideologies that misled and victimised students. Kérékou outlined specific expectations for student leaders and members of the Cooperative, including the struggle for the implementation and triumph of the New School as a principle of production.[133]

However, the Cooperative faced resistance from students. After the assassination of Captain Michel Aïkpé, a popular figure in the south, in June 1975, trade unionists and university students emerged as a constant challenge to Kérékou's regime. This event sparked widespread protests in the south and centre of the country. In January 1976, President Kérékou and the GMR visited the campus to meet with the rector, faculty deans, professors, students, and service staff 'to tell each other the truth' and to persuade UNB students and teachers to support the University Cooperative and to participate in agricultural production. A report in *Ehuzu* highlighted that the university was plagued by the 'virus of division' and the 'generally polluted atmosphere of student meetings,' characterised by the 'old demons of obstruction, protest, agitation, ineffective revolt, and anarchy.'[134]

Many students' refusal to submit to this organisation led to the creation of the *Union des Étudiants Communistes du Dahomey* (Union of Communist Students of

131 Founded in 1983, the OJRB aimed to unite the intellectual and student youth with the masses of young workers and peasants. See Kérékou 1979, 316–24.

132 'L'Université nationale du Bénin…,' *Ehuzu*, 19 January 1976.

133 Kérékou 1979, 182–87.

134 'L'Université nationale du Bénin…,' *Ehuzu*, 19 January 1976.

Dahomey, UECD) in 1976, which categorically rejected Kérékou's socialist credentials. To unify students from UGEED and FACEEN, the *Groupes d'Unité d'Action Universitaire* (University Action Unit Groups, GUAU) were formed in 1977–78, aiming to end divisions among the youth. These groups played a leading role in the June 1979 student strike, demanding better living conditions and the abolition of the University Cooperative. The strike was harshly repressed, with many arrests and prison sentences for the movement's leaders, notably Issifou Yari Alassane. This temporarily curtailed all protests on the Abomey-Calavi campus.[135]

Learning from the 1979 campus strikes, the revolutionary government sought to prevent any further challenges to its authority. Some PRPB members initiated the creation of an organisational framework for students committed to the revolution, leading to the formation of the *Mouvement Révolutionnaire Universitaire* (University Revolutionary Movement, MRU). Despite the 1979 repression, the new *Organisation de Lutte des Universitaires du Bénin* (Organisation of the Struggle of the University Students of Benin, OLUB), resumed the struggle on university campuses from 1980, aiming to improve students' living and working conditions and to oppose the PRPB state. This struggle led to the 1984 amnesty and the return of the students arrested in 1979. Their focus then shifted to the University Cooperative, aiming for the democratic election of its leaders by students. In March 1985, a congress of the Cooperative was organised, and the newly elected board included the leaders of the 1979 strike, including Issifou Yari Alassane. Dissatisfied with this takeover, Kérékou personally ordered its dissolution in April 1985. In protest, a massive strike ensued, quickly spreading to schools. The subsequent repression was brutal, resulting in the shooting of a student and mass arrests. Despite this, a new student organisation, the *Association des Scolaires et Universitaires du Bénin* (Association of Pupils and University Students of Benin, ASUB), was created between 1985 and 1986. It was within this organisation that students associated with the *Parti Communiste du Bénin* (Communist Party of Benin, PCB) would take part in the struggle that led to the fall of the PRPB, as discussed in Chapter 4.[136]

The attempts by the regimes in Togo and Benin to use universities as instruments of nation-building and decolonisation, while simultaneously suppressing student activism and dissent, reveal the inherent contradictions and tensions in their approach to higher education. On the one hand, universities were conceived as symbols of post-colonial emancipation and tools for forging a new national identity, as evidenced by the rhetoric surrounding their founding and the emphasis on creating a new African elite. However, the regimes' efforts to steer academic

135 Université d'Abomey-Calavi 2016, 150–52.
136 Ibid.

discourse and student activism within the confines of their respective ideologies – Eyadéma's authenticity and Kérékou's Marxism-Leninism – often ran counter to the spirit of free inquiry and critical thinking central to the university's mission. The suppression of student unions, arrests of dissenting voices, and attempts to control the curriculum exposed the limits of the regimes' commitment to genuine intellectual decolonisation. These tensions highlight the challenges of transforming colonial educational legacies and the contested nature of university spaces in Africa, where the struggle for intellectual autonomy and democratic expression often clashed with the authoritarian tendencies of post-colonial regimes.

This chapter provided a historical overview of the revolutionary period in Benin and Togo, marked by the rise of military regimes and one-party states, and the establishment of the first public universities. It highlighted the ways in which politics and education intersected in the 1970s and 1980s. Eyadéma's rule was marked by a patrimonial and dictatorial state, characterised by corruption, nepotism, and a strong cult of personality. In Benin, meanwhile, Kérékou ushered in a period of relative stability, in sharp contrast to the country's previous political volatility. Both regimes adopted strict religious policies, such as the dissolution of certain religious sects in Togo, and strategically co-opted Christian and Muslim leaders. This served a dual purpose: it strengthened the regimes' power structures while regulating religious practices and ensuring that they conformed to state ideologies.

The birth of higher education in Benin and Togo had a common origin. The creation of the IESB in 1965, a joint educational structure between Dahomey and Togo, was an important step in the development of higher education in both countries. The creations of the University of Dahomey in Abomey-Calavi and the University of Benin in Lomé in 1970 were not purely academic undertakings. These institutions were political projects, closely linked to the regimes' broader nation-building and decolonisation agendas. They were conceived as instruments of social transformation, although they often reflected educational paradigms inherited from colonial powers. In Togo, the RPT's tight grip on the University of Benin via loyalist student organisations and compliant administrators left little room for alternative perspectives. In Benin, despite facing greater resistance, Kérékou's attempts to impose a 'New University' model based on socialist principles and agricultural production met with fierce opposition from students who rejected its ideological underpinnings.

As the following chapter will show, despite the repressive political atmosphere and the regimes' attempts to control the universities, Christian and Muslim students in both countries managed to carve out spaces for religious expression and association. The emergence and evolution of these faith-based student groups were shaped by the specific political, ideological, and educational dynamics of the 1970s and 1980s. These associations had to navigate a delicate balance between

their religious identities and the demands of the authoritarian state, developing unique strategies to operate within the constraints imposed by the regimes. The next chapter will explore the tactics employed by Christian and Muslim student associations to establish their presence on campus, build solidarity among their members, and engage in religious activities despite the challenging circumstances.