3 Surviving in an Authoritarian Context: The First Faith-Based Student Associations on Campuses (1970s–80s)

This chapter examines the emergence of faith-based student associations on the campuses in Lomé and Abomey-Calavi during the politically charged decades of the 1970s and 1980s. It explores the interplay between local initiatives and transnational religious movements, highlighting that these associations were embedded in global networks of religious activism. The chapter also investigates the survival strategies that these groups employed under the authoritarian regimes of Presidents Eyadéma and Kérékou. Although both countries experienced strict control over religious and student bodies, the distinct political and ideological contexts shaped the opportunities and challenges faced by Christian and Muslim student groups differently, despite their similarities.

In Togo, the GBUST established a presence on the University of Benin campus in the mid-1970s. Despite not being officially recognised until 1987, the GBUST organised Bible study groups and other activities, benefiting from the relatively tolerant religious climate under Eyadéma's rule. In contrast, the GBEEB faced significant challenges under Kérékou's Marxist-Leninist regime. Founded in 1977, the GBEEB had to navigate the suppression of religious activities and the state's attempts to channel student activism into official organisations. Nonetheless, the GBEEB persisted by holding meetings in private homes, churches, and even in the open air on campus.

As for the JEC, it maintained a relatively strong presence on the University of Benin campus, partly due to the Eyadéma regime's decision to exempt religious youth movements from the ban on associations. Conversely, the JEC in Benin retreated to northern parishes, where political control was less intense, to survive. These differing experiences can be attributed, in part, to the perceived political and social potency of Christianity in these countries, with Christian groups seen as potentially more threatening to state authority, especially in Benin.

Muslim student associations, representing a religious minority in both countries, were perceived by authorities as less politically threatening. This perception is exemplified by the CIUB in Benin, which gained official recognition from the state in 1979. The regime's preference for centralised and hierarchical structures, along with its growing ties to the Arab-Muslim world, likely contributed to this relatively accommodating stance towards Muslims. However, these associations still faced challenges in asserting their presence on campus. This is evident in the delayed

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creation of the JEIUB in Togo until 1987, partly due to the reluctance of Muslim students to draw attention to themselves in a politically sensitive environment.

These associations were far from passive recipients of state repression or international influence; they demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability. They navigated complex socio-political landscapes, negotiated with university authorities, and even influenced state policy on religious practices on campus. In both countries, the relaxation of regimes in the 1980s provided new opportunities for these students to express their faith on campus. These faith-based associations not only provided spiritual refuge but also offered students alternative visions of the good life. By creating spaces for intellectual engagement and community building, they allowed students to pursue meaningful lives even within authoritarian contexts.

3.1 From Chad and Central African Republic to Lomé and Cotonou: The Creation of the First Bible Groups on Campus

This section traces the intertwined origins of the first evangelical student associations on the campuses of Lomé and Abomey-Calavi in the early 1970s. The *Groupes Bibliques Universitaires et Scolaires du Togo* (GBUST) and the *Groupe Biblique des Élèves et Étudiants du Bénin* (GBEEB) emerged from the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES), a transnational student movement that began at Cambridge University in the late 19th century and spread to sub-Saharan Africa in the late 1950s. According to the official history of IFES, the group's origins date back to 1877, when Christian students at Cambridge University decided to study the Bible together and share their faith with peers. Similar initiatives soon sprang up on campuses in the United States, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Australia, and China. Throughout the 1930s, student groups emerged worldwide, culminating in 1947 with the founding of IFES by delegates from ten national movements at Harvard University.[1]

The first university Bible groups in sub-Saharan Africa were established in 1958 after a British businessman visited several English-speaking universities. This led to the creation of the Pan African Fellowship of Evangelical Students (PAPES), with Ghana, Kenya, and later Nigeria as members. In Francophone Africa, a *Groupe Biblique Universitaire* (University Bible Group, GBU) in French-speaking Switzerland sent Louis Perret to establish Bible groups in the region's universities. He began in Dakar in 1965, followed by Abidjan in 1966, and Chad in 1967. In 1968, a congress of about 15 students in Abidjan gave birth to the pan-African movement

1 Hutchinson 2011; 'Our Story,' accessed 27 September 2022.

Groupes Bibliques Universitaires d'Afrique Francophone (University Bible Groups in Francophone Africa, GBUAF). In 1972, at the IFES International Congress in Austria, GBUAF became an affiliate of IFES.[2] Today, the organisation is present in over 180 countries.[3]

The Birth of the *Groupes Bibliques Universitaires et Scolaires du Togo* (GBUST)

The birth of GBUST in the mid-1970s exemplifies the resilience and adaptability of Christian students amid political instability and displacement. A pivotal figure in establishing the first Bible study group on the Lomé campus was Granga Daouya, a Chadian medical student. This highlights the significance of transnational connections and solidarity among Christian students. Due to the Chadian civil war (1965–79), many Chadian students, like Daouya, relocated within West Africa to continue their studies. During the 1974–75 academic year, Daouya, a former member of the *Union des Jeunes Chrétiens* (Union of Young Christians, UJC), initiated a Bible study group on the Lomé campus. He aimed to organise Bible studies with other Togolese students, including Théophile Lawson, Poidi Napo, and Corneille Sadzo-Hetsu, who were keen to share their faith.[4] By 1981, driven by the UB Bible Group, additional chapters formed at the Lycée de Tokoin in Lomé and other high schools and colleges in Togo. However, GBUST, an interdenominational movement of all evangelical and Pentecostal missionary movements, was not officially established until its first national congress in 1987.[5]

The following year, as a sign of the dynamism of the UB Bible Group, its members organised the 8th Triennial Congress of the GBUAF. This event brought together 350 delegates from 23 countries in Lomé for over a week, focusing on the theme 'The African Intellectual in God's Design'. Pastor Agbi-Awumé, President of the *Conseil Chrétien du Togo* (Christian Council of Togo, CCT), initiated the proceedings, while a government liaison from the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research attended on behalf of his minister. The conference emphasised the dual mandate of the African Christian intellectual: to be both present and vocal, to administer and to proclaim. Framed as God's active agents in society, Christian intellectuals were seen as bringing a unique message of divine love through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This role places a significant burden

2 'L'histoire des GBU,' accessed 15 February 2023.
3 'Our Work,' accessed 15 February 2023.
4 Armand Dzadu, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 12 August 2021.
5 Ibid.

on Christian intellectuals to fulfil this dual mission of presence and proclamation, ethics and evangelism, strengthened by divine power. The closing remarks stressed that Africa's salvation is both economic and spiritual: 'Africa has a bright future, there is no doubt about it.' However, this promising future must be built by all Africans, especially African Christian intellectuals, who have a unique contribution to make. The speaker urged all delegates to fully embrace their role as evangelists, ensuring the Gospel reaches students from all socio-professional backgrounds.[6] The active involvement of the *Groupe Biblique Universitaire du Bénin* in preparing the congress underscores the strong links between the two movements since their inception, highlighting the potential for collaboration and mutual support in their shared mission of evangelism and discipleship among students.

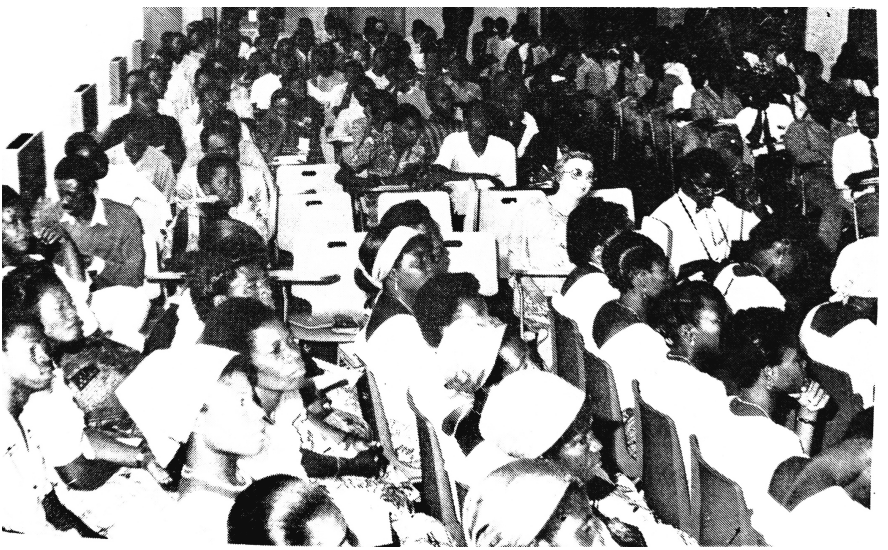

Fig. 8: A view of the delegates at the opening session of the 8th GBUAF Congress.[7]

6 Adom, '8e congrès triennal des…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 3 August 1988; Adom, 'Fin du 8e congrès triennal…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 12 August 1988.

7 Adom, '8e congrès triennal des…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 3 August 1988.

GBUST's 'Little Brother': *The Groupe Biblique des Élèves et Étudiants du Bénin* (GBEEB)

In Benin, GBEEB was founded in December 1977, amidst the height of the Marxist-Leninist revolution. The inception of the first Bible group at the National University of Benin in Abomey-Calavi was catalysed by a Bible camp organised by students from Lomé in 1977. Isaac Zokoué, a Central African who was the secretary of GBUAF and former dean of the Faculty of Evangelical Theology of Bangui, intended to participate in the camp. During his journey to Lomé, he stayed at a church guesthouse in Sike, Cotonou. There, he requested that the pastor introduce him to young Christians he could bring to Lomé to learn about the Bible group. Barnabé Assohoto and Janvier Attignon, both high school students (*collège*), and Issifou Tapara, a medical student at the university, were selected. Assohoto and Attignon accompanied Zokoué to Lomé, where they received a Bible study dictionary endorsed by the nascent Benin Bible Group. Upon returning to Cotonou, they began collaborating with fellow students in high schools and colleges to launch the movement.[8]

The first meetings began in December 1977 at Attignon's home and later moved to the *Foyer évangélique des jeunes de l'UEEB* (Evangelical Youth Centre of the UEEB) by the end of 1978. In 1979, after Attignon obtained his BAC and was admitted to the *Complexe Polytechnique Universitaire* of the National University of Benin, the GBU of the Abomey-Calavi campus was formally established. That same year, Assohoto passed his baccalaureate and undertook his military and patriotic service as a teacher in a college, where he founded the *Groupe Biblique des Collégiens*. He mentored Barnabé Mensah, who also initiated the movement in Parakou under the auspices of his church, though this group was soon absorbed by the church. From 1980 to 1984, the GBEEB expanded to include three chapters: one in Cotonou, which conducted its activities at the reading centre of the *Église Baptiste Méridionale*, the GBU of the Abomey-Calavi campus, and a new chapter at the *Institut National de la Jeunesse et d'Éducation Physique et Sportive* (INJEPS) of Porto-Novo.[9]

However, the university Bible group in Lomé had a larger audience than the one in Abomey-Calavi, largely due to the challenges posed by the Marxist-Leninist revolution in Benin, which hindered GBEEB's activities.[10] The association was not officially recognised by the state, and most school and college officials in Benin were reluctant to accept any religious activities for fear of reprisals. Nonetheless,

8 Augustin Ahoga, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 23 March 2022; Jacob Djossou, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 19 March 2022.

9 Augustin Ahoga, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 23 March 2022.

10 Jacob Djossou, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 19 March 2022.

some schools tolerated or accepted GBEEB activities, while other chapters organised their events in churches or in the open air. On the Abomey-Calavi campus, members resorted to using the hangar in *Bâtiment C*, as requesting classrooms was impossible.[11]

In 1980, Augustin Ahoga moved to Abomey-Calavi to begin his university studies and was drawn to the Bible study sessions offered by GBU. Unlike traditional church settings where pastors led the discussions, GBU's approach had a deeper intellectual dimension, allowing participants to ask questions and learn the inductive method of Bible study. This profoundly impacted Ahoga. GBUAF had even sent a trainer with experience in Cameroon and Togo to enhance the students' Bible education.[12] Similarly, Jacob Djossou, another key figure in GBEEB, arrived in Abomey-Calavi in 1982 and discovered GBU through a friend's invitation. As a practicing Catholic, Djossou had begun questioning certain practices in the Catholic Church. Initially active in the Emmaüs Community – see below –, which focused on prayer and singing, Djossou was captivated by GBU's Bible study and 'began to see the difference between religion and becoming a real Christian.' This led him to leave the Emmaüs Community and join GBU, where he quickly became involved in GBEEB. Ahoga mentored Djossou, helping him deepen his Bible studies and lead the Tuesday night meetings, which attracted around 60 students.[13] The Bible study groups at GBEEB had a profound impact on the intellectual and spiritual development of their members. The inductive approach encouraged a deeper, more analytical engagement with scripture, appealing to university students accustomed to critical thinking. For many, like Ahoga and Djossou, this method offered a new perspective on their faith and a profound understanding of Christianity. By fostering an environment of open dialogue, critical analysis, and shared learning, GBEEB not only strengthened the faith of its members but also equipped them with tools to navigate academic and personal challenges.

GBEEB's relationship with local churches was crucial to its survival and growth, especially during the challenging times of the Marxist-Leninist revolution. By the mid-1980s, GBEEB leaders began considering expanding the movement nationally. They realised that waiting until students were at university to share the Gospel was too late; they needed to reach out to colleges as well. In 1985, when GBEEB leaders decided to hold their first national camp in Za-Kpota, they faced significant obstacles due to the political climate. Ahoga and Djossou, accompanied by GBUAF's itinerant secretary, Djikolngar Maouyo, based in Lomé, visited major cities in Benin

11 Augustin Ahoga, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 23 March 2022.
12 Ibid.
13 Jacob Djossou, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 19 March 2022.

to discuss GBEEB with church pastors and encourage them to send delegates to the camp for training in the group's vision. The Marxist revolution had made direct access to colleges and high schools impossible. They also received substantial support from a Baptist missionary who donated money and food.

Due to the student strike movement in Abomey-Calavi, the GBEEB leaders chose to hold the camp in Za-Kpota, a village near Bohicon. However, local authorities, informed of the camp by the prefecture, decided to ban the activity. About a hundred delegates from various churches across the country had already arrived. Ahoga and Djossou returned to Cotonou the same day, hoping to obtain permission from the Ministry of the Interior. The intervention of prominent religious leaders, such as Henry Harry, president of the Protestant Methodist Church of Benin, and Joseph Tamou, a senior evangelical civil servant, was instrumental in securing formal authorisation for the camp. Despite this, the local prefect assigned three military officers to monitor the camp, but according to Ahoga, 'they soon realised that these students were only talking about God.'[14]

The Za-Kpota camp in 1985 marks a pivotal moment in GBEEB's history and collective memory. Despite the initial ban and the presence of military officers, the camp was a resounding success. For many participants, the camp proceeding despite political opposition was a powerful testament to God's providence and protection. This event became a symbol of GBEEB's resilience and determination in the face of adversity and is celebrated as a defining moment in the movement's history. 'The participants saw the hand of God', said Ahoga.[15] The Za-Kpota camp also marked a turning point in GBEEB's organisational development. Following the camp, GBEEB experienced significant growth, with the number of chapters rising to twelve across eight cities by 1986, including Abomey, Bohicon, Parakou, Kandi, and Djougou. The leaders also decided to organise national camps every two years to encourage the formation of new chapters. The second and third national camps were held in Abomey and Bohicon in 1987 and 1989, respectively. The establishment of a national office in 1988, under the leadership of Moïse Montcho, an agronomy student, further solidified GBEEB's institutional structure and paved the way for its future expansion. In the same year, Djossou and Ahoga travelled around the country to establish the Friends of GBEEB, a network of former members and supporters who joined the workforce to support groups in secondary schools and colleges. GBEEB also actively participated in the organisation of the 8th GBUAF Congress in Lomé with a delegation of nearly 50 people.[16]

14 Ibid.

15 Augustin Ahoga, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 23 March 2022.

16 Djossou 2013.

By 1988, the need for full-time staff to manage GBEEB nationally had become apparent. Ahoga took on this role. While at university, he realised the importance of working with students on campus: 'Benin is the seat of Vodun. […] I was saddened to see many students resorting to rituals and occult powers to pass their exams instead of studying. […] These are the people who will run the country tomorrow. People who are not enlightened at all. What kind of development are they going to do?'[17] After graduating with a master's in economics, he decided to spend two years travelling around Benin as a volunteer. With no financial support, he offered home classes and relied on local churches for assistance. However, Ahoga realised that to be effective, he needed theological training, as discussing the Bible with university students differs from discussing it with uneducated people. He shared his plan to study in Vaux-sur-Seine, France, with GBEEB, and many activists contributed so he could buy his plane ticket. He also received financial support from the German organisation Bruder Hilfe to fund his first three years of study. He spent five years in France before returning to Benin,[18] where he continued to play a central role in GBEEB throughout the 1990s.

Like the Bible study groups, the JEC, founded during the colonial period in both Togo and Benin, quickly gained a foothold on the campuses of the University of Lomé and the University of Abomey-Calavi. The story of the JEC during this period is one of regional disparities, resilience, and adaptation to the complex socio-political landscapes.

3.2 The *Jeunesse Étudiante Catholique* (JEC): Contrasting Paths in Togo and Benin

This section examines the historical development of the *Jeunesse Étudiante Catholique Universitaire* (JEC-U) in Togo and Benin. It highlights the unique 'See-Judge-Act' methodology that distinguishes this action movement from a traditional prayer group,[19] emphasising its resilience in the face of political repression and its transformative impact on Togolese and Beninese students, both spiritually and intellectually. The section also profiles key figures instrumental in the creation and growth of the JEC during the 1970s and 1980s. While the JEC in Togo, like the other religious youth associations, managed to avoid dissolution in favour of the JRPT, the JEC in Benin faced greater challenges. Its activists retreated into the parishes,

17 Augustin Ahoga, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 23 March 2022.
18 Ibid.
19 Gustave Djedatin, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 11 March 2022.

especially in the less policed north, to survive during the revolutionary period. On the Abomey-Calavi campus, the Emmaüs community provided Catholic students a platform to navigate faith and activism in a politically sensitive environment.

The *JEC Universitaire* (JEC-U) in Lomé and the See-Judge-Act

The *JEC Universitaire* (JEC-U) in Lomé became the first officially recognised faith-based student association at the UB. This Catholic action movement for the evangelisation of the school and student environment, now present worldwide, was founded in France in 1929.[20] In Africa, the first JEC was established in Madagascar in 1937. In Togo, the association '*Jeunesse et Culture*' (Youth and Culture) of the Collège Saint-Joseph in Lomé, created by Father Schmidt during the 1951–52 school year, became the JEC in July 1956. Subsequently, new chapters were created in other schools in Lomé and expanded to Sokodé in 1966, Atakpamé in 1967, and to Dapaong in the north in 1970.[21] Like other Christian movements operating in parishes and schools, such as the *Légion de Marie* or the *Cœurs Vaillants-Âmes Vaillantes* (CV-AV), the JEC avoided the abolition of youth movements. The bishops of the Catholic Church argued that these Catholic action movements were apolitical and that the spiritual training offered by these groups did not contradict the ideals of the RPT.[22]

In February 1972, shortly after the Minister of the Interior issued a decree dissolving all youth movements and associations other than the JRPT, *Togo-Presse* published a correction. The amended statement from the Minister clarified that religious youth movements and associations, in accordance with the statutes of the JRPT, were exempt from the decree's provisions.[23] In a press interview the following month, Emile Borozé, the first president of the JRPT, reiterated that 'the religious denominations accepted by Togolese society have the possibility of providing their young followers, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, etc., with appropriate religious education.' However, he emphasised that, as full citizens, they had the same rights and duties as everyone else, implying that one could not be a good Togolese citizen if detached from the JRPT.[24]

In Togo, Catholic action movements and prayer groups were very popular, particularly as priests encouraged children to join them after the sacrament of con-

20 Barbiche and Sorrel 2011; Giroux 2013.
21 Broohm, 'Il y a 45 ans, naissait…,' *Togo-Presse*, 13 February 2001; JEC Togo 2018, 4–7.
22 Pierre Radji, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 30 August 2021.
23 'Les associations de jeunesse…,' *Togo-Presse*, 17 February 1972.
24 'M. Boroze: bientôt des…,' *Togo-Presse*, 18 March 1972.

firmation,[25] typically occurring around CM2 or *classe de sixième*.[26] In high schools and colleges, the JEC organised numerous activities to help students live their faith, evangelise their environment, and train themselves intellectually and spiritually. These activities included meetings, friendship days, spiritual formation, recollections, spiritual vigils, Lenten walks, retreats, communal prayer, visits to the sick, and multi-day training camps. As one JEC member explained, there were few activities to occupy students during school vacations apart from those organised by JRPT and MONESTO, which significantly contributed to the popularity of the JEC national camps.[27] In the 1980s, these camps could attract between 150 and 300 participants.[28]

At the heart of the social curriculum offered by the JEC is its 'methodology' of analysis and action, known as *Voir-Juger-Agir* (VJA, or See-Judge-Act). This method has profoundly impacted many former JEC members by 'awakening in young people an awareness of the problems of their environment (See), fostering a transforming reflection in the light of Christian values (Judge), and encouraging the necessary action to improve their living conditions (Act).'[29] A former JEC member, now a professor at the University of Lomé, shared how the JEC helped him overcome his agoraphobia and shyness:

> When you are in the JEC, you learn how to speak in public. [...] You are forced to speak and talk with your brothers and sisters who are in the movement [...] You learn how to be responsible, how not to run away from responsibility. [...] You also learn to talk to those who are older and more educated than you. [...] And when I said that it has an impact on your life, it obviously has an impact at home. Parents sense that something has changed. If you have been turbulent or if you have been a bit unruly or lazy, they feel that something has changed.[30]

Similarly, another former JEC member highlighted that the association was well-regarded by most parents and school principals. Good academic results were strongly encouraged within the JEC, fostering a sense of emulation among pupils. 'Parents saw the JEC in a very positive light because it motivated everyone to live a disciplined life in and out of school', he noted.[31]

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25 Sabin Sonhaye, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 10 September 2021.

26 In Togo, primary education is organised into three levels: *cours préparatoire* (CP1 and CP2), *cours élémentaire* (CE1 and CE2) and *cours moyen* (CM1 and CM2). Secondary education begins with the *classe de sixième* and ends with the *Brevet d'Études du Premier Cycle* (BEPC).

27 Albert Akakpo, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 2 September 2021.

28 Pierre Radji, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 30 August 2021.

29 'Statuts et règlements intérieur de la Jeunesse étudiante Catholique (JEC) du Togo' 2012.

30 Pierre Radji, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 30 August 2021.

31 Théophile Tonyeme, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 7 September 2021.

However, it was not until 1981 that the JEC was established on the UB campus as a continuation of the school-based JEC. Two students drove JEC-U's growth: Albert Akakpo and Pierre Radji, considered the main pioneers, and who became leaders in the 1980s. Akakpo began his JEC activism in Atakpamé in the early 1970s, while in the *classe de quatrième*. His involvement deepened in the *classe de première*, leading to his appointment as a delegate for the Diocese of Atakpamé to the JEC national office. Upon arriving on campus, Akakpo and other former JEC members realised that the university environment differed greatly from high schools and colleges, necessitating a specific framework for university students.[32]

Bertin Agbobli-Atayi, now Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Lomé, also played a central role in the creation and development of the JEC-U. A doctor of history from the Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne[33] and then a professor in the history department at UB and campus chaplain, Agbobli-Atayi had a background as a *Jéciste* and former national chaplain of the JEC. He encouraged Akakpo to quickly establish a university branch of the JEC, fearing that Catholic students might be drawn to create a Togolese section of the *Mouvement International des Étudiants Catholiques* (International Movement of Catholic Students, MIEC/IMCS), which was not formalised until 1990.[34]

Throughout the 1980s, the JEC in Togo and on the UB campus flourished. Affiliated with the International Young Catholic Students (IYCS) from 1982, it maintained connections with national organisations in other west African countries, including Burkina Faso and Benin, through the *Coordination de la JEC ouest-africaine* (West African YCS Coordination). The JEC Togo was even tasked with 'secretly' cooperating with the JEC in Benin, operating under the Marxist-Leninist regime there. As the national head of the JEC, Akakpo participated in several meetings in Benin, often fearing repercussions from the authorities. He recalled, 'I remember one day we were forced to hold the meeting in the bedroom where all windows and doors were closed.'[35] Akakpo also represented Togo at the first congress of the Pan-African Council of the JEC in Nairobi in 1986, and at the World Council held in Kenya the same year.[36] While the JEC in Togo thrived, its counterpart in Benin struggled to survive under a regime hostile to its activities.

32 Albert Akakpo, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 2 September 2021.
33 Agbobly-Atayi 1980.
34 Albert Akakpo, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 2 September 2021.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.

The Resilience of the JEC-Benin: Retreat to Parishes in the North of the Country

In Benin, the Catholic Church's contribution to the intellectual formation and socialisation of the elite is undeniable, dating back to the colonial period. After the Second World War, Catholic missionaries founded two emblematic educational institutions in Cotonou: the Père Aupiais College for boys and the Cours Secondaire Notre Dame des Apôtres for girls. These institutions quickly became some of the most prestigious in the country. Beyond formal schooling, the Church influenced youth education through various associations. The first *Fédération de la Jeunesse Catholique du Dahomey* (Catholic Youth Federation of Dahomey), founded in 1935, and the JEC, established in 1956,[37] served as platforms for spiritual engagement. Catholic journalism also played an important role, particularly through the influential magazine *La Croix du Dahomey*, later renamed *La Croix du Bénin*. Its first issue was published in April 1946, and it has continued to exert considerable influence on public discourse.[38]

On the campus of Abomey-Calavi, the Catholic Chaplaincy of the National University of Benin was founded in 1972, initiated by Cardinal Bernardin Gantin, then Archbishop of Cotonou, who enlisted the Dominican friars to assist with pastoral work at the university. The chaplaincy, known as the Emmaüs Community and affiliated with the MIEC/IMCS, aims to help Catholic students live their faith through prayer meetings, catechetical classes, and eucharistic celebrations organised on campus. The Dominican friars were initially based in the Gbegamey district in Cotonou before acquiring the land for the Saint-Dominique Cotonou convent. According to the current chaplain of the University of Abomey-Calavi, who was himself a student on the campus during the Marxist revolution, although the regime was anti-religious, the Dominicans were known for their tenacity and commitment to the students. This was evident during the events of May 1968 at the Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar,[39] where President Léopold Sédar Senghor vehemently accused the French Dominicans, who were university chaplains, of instigating communist-inspired student riots.[40] Catholic students in Abomey-Calavi in the 1970s and 1980s could profess their faith but had to be cautious. They were advised not to expose themselves unnecessarily or to openly provoke the authorities, which could lead to severe consequences. However, some members of the Emmaüs Community

37 Hlannon, 'Bénin: les étudiants catholiques…,' *La Croix Africa*, 3 September 2021.

38 Mayrargue 2007, 303–04.

39 Ephrem Cyprien Houndje, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 14 March 2022.

40 Foster 2019, 56–57.

were imprisoned in Segbana, in the north of Benin, due to their activism against the regime.[41]

As for the JEC, it had to officially cease its activities during the revolutionary period when the government sought to channel all school and student movements into state-controlled organisations, as previously mentioned. According to a former *Jéciste*, government surveillance was particularly intense in Cotonou, where political power was highly centralised. Political control was so tight that there was no room for movements like the JEC that deviated from the government's ideology. The only activities allowed were those under the auspices of scout organisations, particularly the CV-AV. As a result, the JEC was effectively forced out of educational institutions, including the University of Abomey-Calavi, and had to retreat to parishes to survive, although even there they were closely monitored.[42]

In northern Benin, particularly in the dioceses of Parakou and Natitingou, the JECs continued to operate, largely due to relatively relaxed state control in the region. During this period, Pacôme Elet emerged as a key figure. Initially a member of CV-AV in Nikki, Elet joined the JEC in 1983, inspired by a camp organised by the Parakou JEC in his hometown. He actively participated in JEC meetings and activities in Parakou until 1985, when he moved to Cotonou for higher education. According to him, the state recognised a certain authority of the Catholic Church by allowing religious activities in parishes on condition that public order and discretion were maintained. This tacit understanding permitted the Church, particularly in the north, to operate within prescribed boundaries without direct government interference. The regime's campaign against witchcraft inadvertently granted the Church additional operational space, albeit within strict limits.[43] The contrasting levels of government influence in the north and south significantly impacted the activities of the JEC. While the organisation remained largely dormant in southern regions until the democratisation of the early 1990s, its northern counterparts skilfully navigated the political landscape. By maintaining their activities in the face of political repression, the JEC provided students with a sense of purpose and community, essential elements in their pursuit of the good life during challenging times.

Meanwhile, Muslim students at the Abomey-Calavi campus proactively established their own association in the mid-1970s, just a few years after the Emmaüs Community. In Togo, official permission granted to Catholic students to set up a JEC chapter on the Lomé campus encouraged Muslims to do the same from the mid-1980s. The governments of Benin and Togo were particularly sympathetic to their

41 Ephrem Cyprien Houndje, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 14 March 2022.
42 Auxence Vivien Hounkpe, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 7 March 2022.
43 Pacôme Elet, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 9 March 2022.

Muslim communities, likely influenced by both countries' diplomatic outreach to Muammar Gaddafi's Libya. This geopolitical orientation towards closer ties with Libya may have shaped the governments' accommodating policies towards Muslim student organisations.

3.3 Closer Links with Libya and the Creation of an Islamic Association on the Abomey-Calavi and Lomé Campuses

In Benin and Togo, the minority status of Muslim students presented both challenges and strengths. Unlike the Catholic Church, perceived as a dominant societal entity and viewed with suspicion by the state, Muslims were seen as less likely to form a significant political opposition. In Benin, Muslims were more receptive to Western education than their counterparts in many West African countries, leading to the early emergence of Muslim youth and student associations, even during the colonial period. The establishment of the *Communauté Islamique Universitaire du Bénin* (CIUB) on the Abomey-Calavi campus in the 1970s and the *Jeunesse Estudiantine Islamique de l'Université du Bénin* (JEIUB) on the Lomé campus in the late 1980s provided platforms to address social inequalities faced by Muslim students and promote Islamic identity.

Growing cooperation with Libya in the 1970s and 1980s significantly impacted the development of Muslim student associations in both countries. This diplomatic relationship enabled Islamic NGOs to provide financial and material support for constructing mosques, Islamic centres, and educational institutions. These transnational connections empowered Muslim student associations by offering resources, legitimacy, and a sense of belonging to a larger global community. However, they also exposed these groups to greater state scrutiny, as the governments in Benin and Togo sought to balance foreign policy objectives with domestic concerns about the influence of external actors on national politics and religious dynamics.

The *Communauté Islamique Universitaire du Bénin* (CIUB): Heir to a Long Tradition of Organisations of Western-Educated Muslims

In southern Benin, the roots of Western education date back to the 17th century, particularly due to the Portuguese presence and the partial assimilation of Afro-Brazilians into Western culture. This historical context led many Muslims in the

region to enrol their children in colonial schools.[44] By the 1930s, Yoruba bourgeois and commercial intellectuals in Porto-Novo recognised the relative disadvantage of Muslim students compared to their Christian peers. They therefore founded the Ançarou-Dine Association to combat the social injustices faced by Muslim students in public schools. A significant milestone for the association was achieved in 1936 with the establishment of the Léon Bourgine private Muslim primary school. Named in honour of the governor of the time, this institution uniquely combined the official French curriculum with religious education.[45]

In 1945, a group of Muslim civil servants created the *Jeunesse Musulmane Franco-Dahoméenne* (Franco-Dahomean Muslim Youth, JMFD) in 1945. This organisation sought to advance Islam through French-language education and published a quarterly bulletin, *Islam-Dahomey*, to disseminate Islamic teachings. In 1948, Parrinder observed 'the efforts of justification and propaganda undertaken by some of the younger, educated members of the community' in Dahomey, noting their active role in promoting Islamic values:

> In April 1945 there appeared, in French, the first number of a quarterly bulletin entitled *Islam-Dahomey*, with the explanatory sub-title of *Bulletin trimestriel de liaison et de documentation de l'Association culturelle et d'entre-aide dite 'Jeunesse Musulmane Franco-Dahomeenne*'. [...] The Association which it represents was founded in the same year, and had as first president M. Serpos Tidjani, an employee of the Institut Francais d'Afrique Noire in Dahomey. [...] The most striking side of *Islam-Dahomey* is the manifest attempt to conciliate Christian and educated opinion, and even to copy Christian method and spirit. This new propaganda of Islam has nothing of the old fanaticism, which is explicitly renounced. It is Islam aware of the necessity of justifying its faith and practice, and conscious of the impact of Christianity upon its faith and morals.[46]

Although the JMFD had a relatively brief existence, it served as a precursor to new Islamic associations in the 1950s, such as the *Élite Musulmane du Dahomey* (Muslim Elite of Dahomey, EMD). The EMD focused not only on educating its members in proper Islamic practice, but also on actively defending the rights of Muslim students in secondary schools and colleges. It published a magazine called *La Voix de l'Islam*.[47] In 1956, the EMD supported the establishment of the *Jeunesse Étudiante Musulmane du Dahomey* (Muslim Student Youth of Dahomey, JEMD) at the prestigious Collège Classique et Moderne Victor Balo in Porto-Novo, a key institution for

44 Marty 1926.
45 Miran 2005, 49; Abdoulaye 2007, 117.
46 Parrinder 1948.
47 Abdoulaye 2007, 118.

training cadres for the colonial administration.[48] Throughout the 1960s, the association addressed misunderstandings within the Islamic community by emphasising the fundamental principles of Islam, such as belief in the oneness of God, prayer, almsgiving, pilgrimage to Mecca, and annual Zakat. The association mainly used French as a medium of communication, which helped integrate members from different ethnic backgrounds, given the country's linguistic diversity.[49] Under the leadership of JEMD's first president, Machioudi Dissou, the association played a key role in forming the *Union Islamique du Dahomey* (Islamic Union of Dahomey, UID), which later became the *Union Islamique du Bénin* (Islamic Union of Benin, UIB).[50] After independence in 1960, the JEMD evolved into the *Jeunesse Musulmane du Dahomey* (Muslim Youth of Dahomey, JMD), and later the *Jeunesse Musulmane du Bénin* (Muslim Youth of Benin, JMB).[51]

The 1970s creation of a Muslim students' association on the Abomey-Calavi campus occurred against the backdrop of a reorientation of Benin's foreign policy. This shift was part of the country's non-aligned stance under the Military Revolutionary Government. A notable example of this diplomatic repositioning was a high-level delegation led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs that embarked on an international tour in February 1973. This tour included stops in North Korea, various Middle Eastern countries, and several African states, with a particularly significant visit to Libya.[52] In the same year, Egypt established a resident diplomatic mission in Benin,[53] and in October 1973, Benin severed relations with Israel, signalling a rapid opening to the Arab-Muslim world.[54] Benin also strengthened its ties with Kuwait.[55] These foreign policy developments facilitated the operation of Islamic NGOs in Benin, as evidenced by the visit of the Muslim World League (MWL) to Cotonou in June 1973.[56] In 1985, the Al Fayçal Medical Centre was inaugurated in Porto-Novo, financed entirely by the MWL and donors from Saudi Arabia.[57]

Cooperation with Libya, initiated by bilateral agreements on 27 August 1976,[58] became a cornerstone of Benin's foreign policy during the revolutionary era. This

48 Miran 2005, 49–50.
49 Séidou Mama Sika, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 5 April 2019.
50 Machioudi Dissou, in conversation with the author, Porto-Novo, 11 March 2019.
51 Brégand 2012, 483–84.
52 'Signature d'un protocole…,' *Daho-Express*, 2 April 1973.
53 Assevi, 'Les relations bénino-égyptiennes…,' *La Nation*, 19 January 1995.
54 'Rupture des relations diplomatiques…,' *Daho-Express*, 10 October 1973.
55 'Pour le renforcement des liens…,' *Ehuzu*, 2 November 1977.
56 'Une délégation de la Ligue…,' *Daho-Express*, 19 June 1973.
57 'Ouverture du centre médical…,' *Ehuzu*, 13 August 1985.
58 Dogue, 'Coopération Bénin-Libye…,' *La Nation*, 7 September 2010.

alliance led to the establishment of two Benin-Libya companies in 1978[59] and culminated in President Kérékou's official visit to Libya in September 1980.[60] During this trip, Kérékou reportedly converted to Islam and adopted the name Ahmed, though this was never officially confirmed. An article in *Ehuzu* recounted the visit, describing how Gaddafi expressed his wish for Kérékou to convert to Islam, suggesting it might inspire the entire Beninese population to follow suit. Kérékou responded with humour, demonstrating his familiarity with the Qur'an by recalling a past challenge to the sincerity of Beninese Muslims. Impressed, Gaddafi declared that Kérékou would henceforth be known as Ahmed Kérékou in all official correspondence, even offering a special flight to Mecca and a grand reception by the King of Saudi Arabia.[61] The incident's significance reverberated beyond Benin's borders, with Togo's *La Nouvelle Marche* boldly proclaiming on its front page: 'From now on in Benin: President Ahmed Kérékou instead of Mathieu Kérékou'.[62]

Gaddafi's first official visit to Benin in April-May 1983[63] marked a significant milestone in bilateral relations between the two countries. It included a notable trip to Porto-Novo, where Gaddafi met with prominent figures from the Muslim community.[64] The visit particularly benefited the Muslim community through the support of the Libyan Islamic NGO, the World Islamic Call Society (WICS).[65] The WICS funded the construction of mosques,[66] a hospital in Porto-Novo, an Islamic centre in Cotonou,[67] and provided medical aid.[68]

During this period, Benin distinguished itself as one of the sub-Saharan African countries with the highest number of students receiving scholarships in Libya.[69] A notable manifestation of this cooperation was the construction of the *Institut de la Langue Arabe et de la Culture Islamique* (Institute of Arabic Language and Islamic Culture, ILACI) at the National University of Benin, financed entirely by Libya. At the foundation stone ceremony in October 1979, the Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Letters, Arts, and Humanities highlighted that the institute would serve as a linguistic bridge between the Libyan and Beninese peoples. The Minister of Technical

59 'Signature de statuts régissant…,' *Ehuzu*, 12 September 1978.
60 Assevi, 'Visite d'Etat et d'amitié…,' *Ehuzu*, 1 October 1980.
61 Toï, 'Fin de la visite du président…,' *Ehuzu*, 29 September 1980.
62 'Au Bénin désormais: Président…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 29 September 1980.
63 Assevi, 'Une solidarité agissante,' *Ehuzu*, 29 April 1983.
64 Adissoda, 'Le président Kadhafi rencontre…,' *Ehuzu*, 2 May 1983.
65 Houehou, 'Un envoyé spécial du colonel…,' *Ehuzu*, 4 November 1983.
66 'Borgou: pose de la première…,' *Ehuzu*, 10 October 1979.
67 Videgla, 'Le nouvel hôpital de Porto-Novo…,' *Ehuzu*, 21 July 1986.
68 'Bénin–Libye: un exemple…,' *Ehuzu*, 22 November 1983.
69 Mattes 1993.

and Higher Education underscored that the establishment of the ILACI represented Benin's political commitment to fostering a privileged channel of cooperation between the two nations, both dedicated to the liberation struggle against imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, Zionism, and apartheid.[70] In May 1983, during his official visit to Benin, President Gaddafi toured the ILACI construction site, which had an estimated cost of 562 million CFA francs. On this occasion, Gaddafi received an honorary doctorate from the National University of Benin.[71] In addition to ILACI, Libya also donated scientific and technical equipment to the university.[72]

Kérékou's supposed conversion, despite lacking official verification – unlike his counterpart Omar Bongo in Gabon –, symbolised an alignment with Gaddafi and the Arab-Muslim world. This realignment was driven by ideological, economic, and geopolitical factors, including Benin's non-aligned movement stance, the pursuit of investment from oil-rich Arab states, and countering neighbouring countries' Western affiliations. For Muslims in Benin, Kérékou's actions signalled increased recognition and potential state support for Islamic education and institutions, as seen in projects like ILACI. However, these developments did not fundamentally alter the Beninese state's Marxist-Leninist ideology or shift the power dynamics between religious groups. The PRPB regime maintained strict control over religious activities and Muslim students continued to operate within a challenging political environment. Kérékou's 'conversion' and the broader shift in Benin's foreign policy can be viewed as efforts to balance domestic political needs with external geopolitical pressures. By fostering relationships with countries like Libya, Kérékou aimed to enhance his legitimacy and secure economic and political support for his regime.

In this context of shifting political and religious landscapes, the *Communauté Islamique Universitaire du Bénin* (CIUB) emerged as a significant entity. The exact date of its creation varies, with some claiming it was founded in 1975 and others in 1978. Initially, the CIUB operated informally for several years, gradually consolidating its presence on campus. It served as a representative body for the Muslim community at the university, encompassing not only students but also Muslim professors, administrators, and other university staff. However, the student body formed the core of the CIUB.[73] Prominent figures in the early development of the CIUB included Abdoul-Afis Ambékéma, Oumar Chitou, and Nassirou Bako-Arifari, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs in the government of President Boni Yayi

70 Dossavi, 'Coopération bénino-libyenne: pose…,' *Ehuzu*, 9 October 1979.

71 Adissoda, 'Visite du président Moammar…,' *Ehuzu*, 2 May 1983.

72 Gbaguidi, 'Don de la Libye…,' *Ehuzu*, 6 December 1985.

73 Ibrahima Mama Sirou, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 8 May 2019.

and currently Special Envoy for Africa of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).[74]

In 1979, the CIUB became the first faith-based student association at the UNB to be officially recognised by the state. According to Bako-Arifari, the state did not oppose the creation of the CIUB because Kérékou's revolutionary regime preferred to work with centralised and hierarchical organisations. As a result, the CIUB was legally affiliated with the UIB, functioning as its university branch and maintaining close collaboration with UIB leadership. The integration of the CIUB into the organisational structure of the UIB was such that the university was effectively treated as a separate administrative entity, similar to the other six administrative departments ('provinces') under the UIB's jurisdiction. While there were occasional disagreements over the management of the UIB, CIUB officials generally maintained a respectful relationship with Imam Liamidi Kélani, the then-President of the UIB. Efforts to extend the CIUB's influence beyond the university, particularly to secondary school students, met with resistance from the revolutionary government. This led CIUB leaders to pursue alternative strategies, such as encouraging the formation of Muslim students' associations in various regions of Benin. However, these efforts had mixed results and caused some dissension within the CIUB.[75]

Bako-Arifari, who became actively involved in the CIUB upon arriving at the National University of Benin in 1984, assumed the presidency of the organisation in 1987. In the same year, he was also elected president of the *Coopérative Universitaire*. Under his leadership, the CIUB focused on facilitating religious practice on campus. This included efforts to secure prayer spaces, organise celebrations of Muslim holidays, and initiate the construction of a mosque, although the latter did not materialise. The CIUB maintained links with prominent transnational Islamic youth organisations such as the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) and the WICS.[76] For instance, in August 1983, an international Islamic youth camp was held in Porto-Novo, sponsored by WAMY and the OIC. The camp, which attracted about one hundred participants from Nigeria, Niger, Upper Volta,[77] Togo, and Benin, focused on 'The Role of Young Muslims in Nation-Building'. According to Ambékéma, the event significantly heightened participants' awareness of their critical role in national development. The camp featured various lectures and religious activities, culminating in a closing session attended by eminent Islamic leaders

74 Mouhamed Ehi-Olou, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 22 April 2019.

75 Nassirou Bako-Arifari, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 26 May 2019.

76 Ibid.

77 Now Burkina Faso.

from Cotonou and Porto-Novo, as well as Muslim government officials, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation.[78]

The CIUB also engaged with groups of students, preachers, and Arabic teachers from Egypt as part of the cooperation between Benin and Egypt. CIUB organised Arabic language courses on the Abomey-Calavi campus, as well as sermons and conferences with guest preachers to enhance the community's understanding of Islamic teachings. Despite the return of Beninese students from Islamic universities in the Arab world since the 1970s, the CIUB remained free of intense ideological debates between different Islamic currents. Its members were united in their efforts, focusing on common goals rather than ideological divisions. One of the main challenges facing the CIUB in the 1980s was addressing the limited knowledge of Islam among Muslim students on campus. Many students, though born Muslim, experienced a reawakening of their faith at university. To support this rediscovery, the CIUB leadership initiated training programmes tailored to their needs. While not all members of the CIUB's executive committee were fluent in Arabic, the central imam was required to have both a strong command of the language and a deep understanding of Islam.[79] In contrast to developments in Benin, the establishment of a Muslim students' association on the Lomé campus occurred much later.

Last in Line on the Lomé Campus: *The Jeunesse Estudiantine Islamique de l'Université du Bénin* (JEIUB)

In Togo, the evolution of Muslim youth organisations was less dynamic than in Benin, with only one notable group emerging prior to the establishment of the JEIUB in 1987. In 1963, Kassim Mensah founded the *Association de la Jeunesse Musulmane du Togo* (Association of Muslim Youth of Togo, AJMT). Originally Christian and of Ewe ethnicity, Mensah converted to Islam in 1935. He pursued Arabic and religious studies in Morocco and Abidjan. Upon returning to Togo, Mensah dedicated four years to teaching religion and extensive study. The AJMT provided religious education and leisure activities, supplementing familial religious knowledge without requiring Arabic proficiency. AJMT's leisure activities included folklore and sports such as football and boxing, supported by equipment donations from the National Association of Muslim Youth of Cairo. In 1968, the Embassy of the United Arab Republic in Lomé invited Mensah, as President of the AJMT, to participate in the

78 'Ouémé: rendez-vous de…,' *Ehuzu*, 25 August 1983.

79 Nassirou Bako-Arifari, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 26 May 2019.

Fourth Islamic Research Conference at Al-Azhar University.[80] According to Delval, by 1980, the association had 800 members in Lomé, with branches in Sokodé, Atakpamé, and Kpalimé. When the Togolese government attempted to merge all youth organisations into the JRPT, Mama Fousséni of the UMT successfully intervened to exempt religious groups from this mandate.[81]

The creation of the JEIUB at the university was largely due to the efforts of students M. S. Mizim'ma Toukounte, Tchibara Alétchérédji, and Mohamed Tchassona Traoré. When Toukounte arrived on campus in 1983, he observed a stark contrast: Catholic students had organised successfully, securing an amphitheatre for their prayers and activities, while Muslim students lacked a formal space to meet and practice their faith. In response, some Muslim students initiated informal gatherings. These meetings often occurred in unconventional spaces, such as the corridors of university halls of residence or makeshift outdoor areas. Adapting to their environment, students cleared spaces near trees to perform their daily prayers.[82] This grassroots organisation laid the foundation for the establishment of JEIUB, showcasing the resilience and commitment of Muslim students to maintaining their religious practices despite campus challenges.

Similar to Benin, Togo experienced significant shifts in its foreign policy during the 1970s and 1980s. As early as the 1960s, the Togolese state facilitated the development of relationships between the local Muslim community and the broader Muslim world. A Togolese Muslim delegation visited Central Asia in the Soviet Union, including Samarkand, and a delegation of Soviet Muslims reciprocated with a visit to Togo. Representatives of the UMT also frequently contacted Cairo to secure scholarships for Togolese Muslim students and to request for graduates of Al-Azhar University to teach Arabic in Togo. The Togolese press extensively covered these exchanges.[83] However, following the severing of relations with Israel after the 1973 Yom Kippur War,[84] Muslims in Togo benefited from stronger ties with the Arab-Muslim world. President Eyadéma made official visits to several Middle

80 Tantawi, 'Invitation,' 3 September 1968, accessed 27 June 2024; 'Lettre d'Eyadéma au grand cheik d'El Ashar,' 19 September 1968, accessed 27 June 2024.

81 Delval 1980, 224–26.

82 M. S. Mizim'ma Toukounte and Kondor Bag'na, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 24 August 2021.

83 'Ils vont prendre contact avec…,' *Togo-Presse*, 7 October 1963; 'Lomé: une délégation du Conseil…,' *Togo-Presse*, 19 November 1969; 'Lomé: de retour de l'Union Soviétique…,' *Togo-Presse*, 21 November 1970; 'L'ambassadeur de l'URSS au Togo…,' *Togo-Presse*, 22 September 1971. See also Delval 1980, 226–38.

84 'À travers le monde et au Togo…,' *Togo-Presse*, 24 September 1973.

Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia,[85] Egypt,[86] and Kuwait.[87] This period also saw the signing of several agreements between Libya and Togo, culminating in President Eyadéma's visit to Tripoli in February 1976[88] and Libyan leader Gaddafi's reciprocal visit to Lomé in January 1977. During his visit, Gaddafi gave a lecture on Libyan political ideology at the University of Benin.[89] Shortly afterwards, Mensah, president of the AJMT and former president of the UMT (1972–76), was appointed Togo's ambassador to Libya.

Fig. 9: Centre Culturel Islamique of Lomé II, 14 May 2019, photo by the author.

This appointment ushered in a period of substantial financial and material support for the Togolese Muslim community from Libyan sources. In 1982, the WICS held a meeting in Lomé,[90] and the construction of the *Centre Culturel Islamique* (Islamic

85 Djiwonou-Ayi, 'Après sa visite historique en Arabie…,' *Togo-Presse*, 12 April 1978.
86 'Le général Eyadéma au président Sadate…,' *Togo-Presse*, 15 June 1977.
87 'Le général Eyadéma en visite…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 5 January 1982.
88 Johnson, 'Un heureux et fructueux voyage,' *Togo-Presse*, 7 February 1976.
89 'Brillante conférence du colonel…,' *Togo-Presse*, 25 January 1977.
90 'Une réunion de 'l' Association de…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 16 December 1982.

Cultural Centre, CCI) of Lomé II began.[91] The CCI, which now includes a mosque – still colloquially known as the Gaddafi Mosque –, a Franco-Arab school, a dispensary, and sports facilities, became operational in 1984, though was not officially inaugurated until 1997.[92]

Despite the dynamism of Islam in Togo, Muslim students on campus hesitated to establish an association. Toukounte attributed this reluctance partly to the lukewarm attitude of Rector Johnson towards Muslim students and, more significantly, to their fear of political repercussions. This fear was justified by incidents in which students offered Libyan scholarships were arrested due to the unofficial channels through which funds were disbursed. Consequently, most Muslim students preferred to keep a low profile.[93] However, 1987 marked a turning point. Alétchérédji, then secretary-general of the AETB, began discussions with Toukounte about forming an Islamic association at UB. Leveraging his connections with the university administration, Alétchérédji secured a meeting with the new rector, Seddoh. Rector Seddoh, recognising the principle of *laïcité* at UB, expressed support for religious practice on campus. As a devout Christian, he could not oppose the creation of a Muslim association, although he voiced concerns about the international geopolitical implications. Consequently, he stipulated that the UMT leadership must endorse the initiative and appoint a mentor (‘*parrain*’) from within UB. Nassiki Awrufo, the UMT president at the time, enthusiastically supported the proposal and selected Inoussa Bouraïma as the mentor. This choice was significant, given Bouraïma’s dual role as professor of ecology and environmental sciences at UB since 1975 and his well-known affiliation with the RPT. His political commitment was further demonstrated by his subsequent positions as Minister of the Environment and Tourism in 1991 and Minister of Defence from 1992 to 1994.

In 1987, a general assembly of Muslim students on campus formally established the JEIUB, with Toukounte as its leader. Initially, the membership of Muslim women in the JEIUB was remarkably low. This limited participation was attributed not only to reticence but also to prevailing cultural misinterpretations of Islamic teachings on the role of women. Although Islam ‘promotes the fulfilment of women’, many parents at the time believed: ‘If a girl is bold and wants to be on the same level as

91 Kankpe, ‘Pose de la 1ère pierre du…,’ *La Nouvelle Marche*, 20 March 1982.

92 ‘Le directeur général du centre…,’ *Le Rendez-Vous*, 28 April 2006, 4–5; Amouzou, ‘Le Centre Islamique de Lomé…,’ *Togo-Presse*, 24 November 1997.

93 M. S. Mizim’ma Toukounte and Kondor Bag’na, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 24 August 2021.

men, she will have problems [...] You have been sent to school to study, it is not to do men-women business.'[94]

Unlike the Christian student associations of the time, which maintained strong ties with counterparts in other West African countries and were part of larger transnational networks, the Muslim student associations in Benin and Togo operated largely in isolation from each other and from other Islamic student movements in the region. The CIUB in Benin and the JEIUB in Togo emerged as local responses to the specific challenges and opportunities faced by Muslim students on their respective campuses. Their activities primarily focused on addressing the needs of their immediate communities. However, this isolation would change significantly in the early 1990s. Both associations began to develop strong links with Muslim student groups in other countries, particularly Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. These connections, which will be explored further in the next chapter, played a crucial role in the growth and evolution of the CIUB and JEIUB.

This chapter has traced the emergence and development of faith-based student associations on the university campuses of Lomé and Abomey-Calavi in the 1970s and 1980s. These organisations exhibited resilience in the face of political repression and social challenges, far from being mere conduits for global religious movements. In the authoritarian contexts of Togo and Benin under Presidents Eyadéma and Kérékou, Christian and Muslim students demonstrated a unique ability to balance their religious identities with the necessity of navigating the regimes' tight controls on religious and student bodies. Their ability to maintain a distinct identity while avoiding direct confrontation with the state reveals a nuanced understanding of power dynamics and the strategic use of religious discourse for survival. By creating spaces for intellectual engagement, community building, and the articulation of alternative narratives to dominant state ideologies, these associations allowed students to pursue their visions of the good life even within authoritarian constraints. They demonstrated that the pursuit of a meaningful and fulfilling life could coexist with, and even thrive under, challenging political circumstances.

While religious groups of different denominations coexisted on campus without directly competing, mutual influences were notable. Muslim students in Togo, in particular, drew inspiration from their Christian counterparts, especially in articulating and asserting their demands to university authorities. In the early 1990s, political liberalisation, albeit timid in Togo, and the restoration of religious freedom led to significant upheaval – even violence – on both campuses. However, this did not dampen the dynamism of faith-based student associations.

94 Ibid.