4 Faith-Based Activism in an Era of Democratisation and Campuses in Turmoil (1990s)

The 1990s were a watershed decade for Benin and Togo, characterised by profound political upheavals and religious transformations. This chapter examines how these socio-political changes influenced the development of Christian and Islamic student associations on the campuses of Abomey-Calavi and Lomé. Students spearheaded protests against the one-party regimes of Kérékou and Eyadéma, leading to national conferences. During the period of socio-political liberalisation, neo-Pentecostal and evangelical movements flourished, affecting the spiritual, cultural, and political landscapes. This religious resurgence was not unconnected with the rather favourable management of religious groups on both campuses by university authorities.

The 1990s witnessed significant changes in faith-based student associations, particularly in Benin. Here, associations like the JEC could officially resume activities after operating clandestinely in the north. In both Togo and Benin, the dynamism of Christian associations and the elitism of their members often led to tensions with similar groups in parishes and churches beyond campus. Meanwhile, Muslim students from the JEIUB and CIUB, influenced by other Islamic student associations in West Africa, collaborated with high school and college students to form a broader national organisation to better promote Islam within a minority context.

Despite significant differences in political contexts, faith-based student associations in Benin and Togo operated in notably similar ways. Both countries saw these associations providing social and spiritual support amidst economic crises and the massification of university enrolment. This suggests a relative autonomy of religious dynamics from central political influences. The consistent emphasis on mediation, community support, and moral guidance indicates that, while political contexts shaped their strategies, the core mission of these associations transcended immediate political circumstances, focusing on the holistic development of their members and communities.

In the face of deteriorating living conditions on campuses in the 1990s – due primarily to underfunding of education and increasing student numbers – faith-based student associations in both countries offered crucial social and spiritual support to help new students integrate into university life. Mediation became a priority, particularly in Lomé, where hyper-politicisation, insecurity, and violence were prevalent. Muslim students aimed to counter both prejudice against Western education within the Muslim community and concerns about Islamic 'fundamentalism'. By situating the experiences of these associations within the broader contexts of democratisation, economic crisis, and increased religiosity in the public sphere, this chapter underscores the forces that shaped their evolution.

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4.1 Students Protests, National Conferences, and Religious Fervour

This section examines the political and religious transformations in Benin and Togo during the 1990s. Although both countries faced economic crises and external pressure for reform, their paths to democratisation differed. Benin transitioned peacefully from a dictatorial regime to a model democracy for West Africa. In contrast, Togo experienced a turbulent transition marked by entrenched authoritarianism, political violence, and unfulfilled democratic aspirations. Amidst liberalisation and state retrenchment, Pentecostal and evangelical movements expanded rapidly. This sociopolitical context provides insight into the flourishing of Christian student associations at the universities of Abomey-Calavi and Lomé during this period.

'The Winds from the East are Shaking the Coconut Trees'[1]

In Benin, political change resulted from a complex and uncertain dynamic, marked by the financial collapse of the state, the erosion of the Kérékou regime's regulatory mechanisms, internal and external contestation, pressure from international donors, and polarisation around the multi-party system.[2] In the south, the Marxist-Leninist regime was seen as corrupt and had lost all credibility. The collapse of the Soviet bloc further weakened Benin's position, compelling it to seek assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In 1989, Benin agreed to implement a structural adjustment programme, which involved cutting subsidies, privatising public enterprises, and reducing the size of the civil service. In January 1989, students went on strike for several months over unpaid scholarships, demanding the dissolution of the PRPB, a new constitution guaranteeing multi-party elections, a liberal economy, and the suspension of structural adjustment conditionalities. In November, unpaid civil servants and teachers threatened to strike if they did not receive their overdue salaries. Despite further promises and the gradual release of political prisoners, civilian and military discontent grew, leading to continued street protests. On 5 December 1989, the PRPB renounced its state monopoly and Marxism-Leninism as the official ideology.

Kérékou yielded to pressure and convened a Sovereign National Conference from 19 to 28 February 1990. This conference included civil society groups, reli-

1 A quote from 17 February 1990, attributed to Omar Bongo, President of Gabon, who predicted that the upheavals in Eastern Europe would lead to unrest and democratic change in Africa.
2 Banégas 1995.

gious leaders, and exiled opposition figures. Presided over by Msgr Isidore de Souza, Archbishop of Cotonou, the conference made several pivotal decisions, including the adoption of multi-party politics, the establishment of a constitutional commission and electoral office, and the appointment of Nicéphore Soglo as prime minister and head of a transitional government. A new constitution was subsequently approved by referendum.[3] In the first presidential elections under the new democratic regime in March 1991, interim Prime Minister Soglo won with 67.5% of the vote against Kérékou's 32.5%. This made Kérékou the first continental African president to lose power at the ballot box. The National Conference became a model for other African countries, demonstrating how to peacefully remove a dictator and establish a democratic constitution.[4] Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Benin emerged as a model democracy in West Africa, consistently holding elections deemed free and fair.

In Togo, like Benin, economic crisis, global changes, and external pressure compelled President Eyadéma to convene a National Conference. At the Franco-African summit in La Baule in June 1990, President François Mitterrand praised Benin as an exemplar for Africa, announcing that French aid would henceforth be contingent on liberalisation efforts. This declaration was made before 33 African delegations, including 22 heads of state.[5] The Togolese people, aware of Kérékou's ousting in neighbouring Benin and widely reported events in Eastern Europe and Latin America, demanded similar reforms. International development agencies and Western governments grew increasingly frustrated with Eyadéma, who stubbornly refused to liberalise his regime while continuing to seek development aid.

Togo had been under pressure from the IMF and the World Bank to reform its most inefficient state-run economic sectors since the 1980s. The country's financial difficulties with creditors and donor countries worsened during the political turmoil of the 1990s. Togolese students vehemently opposed the austerity measures mandated by the SAPs. Nine students from the University of Benin, including Hilaire Dossouvi Logo (1956–2014),[6] were arrested in August 1990 for distributing tracts against the Eyadéma regime.[7] Their trial on 5 October 1990, for distributing the so-called '*tracts mensongers*' ('false leaflets') ignited an unprecedented student protest movement supported by opposition leaders. In 1990, at least ten 'illegal'

3 Heilbrunn 1993; Nwajiaku 1994.

4 As many as seven National Conferences took place in Francophone Africa. See Eboussi Boulaga 2009.

5 Toulabor 1995.

6 Dossouvi Logo 2004.

7 'Affaire des tracts mensongers…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 4 September 1990.

student associations were formed, three of which came together in February 1991 to present Eyadéma with a list of demands. These included a general amnesty, the dissolution of the RPT and 1980 constitution, freedom of the press, the creation of autonomous associations, political parties and trade unions, and a national conference followed by free elections.[8]

Clashes between the population and security forces in April and May 1991, followed by a general strike on 6 June, compelled Eyadéma to agree to a national conference, which was held between 8 July and 26 August 1991. The delegates elected a nine-month transitional *Haut Conseil de la République* (High Council of the Republic, HCR) to serve as a legislative body and appointed Joseph Kokou Koffigoh as interim prime minister. The HCR, chaired by Philippe Fanoko Kossi Kpodzro, the Archbishop of Lomé, was tasked with ratifying a new constitution to pave the way for multi-party elections. However, Koffigoh was abducted by the military in an attempted coup in December 1991. The HCR subsequently agreed to form a government of national unity with the RPT, allowing Eyadéma to stand in the 1993 presidential election.

Benefiting from France's policy of non-intervention, Eyadéma utilised his loyal northern army to terrorise society into submission, regaining power in 1993. This period was characterised by a crippling 18-month strike (from November 1992 to August 1993) organised by the *Collectif de l'Opposition Démocratique II* (Collective of the Democratic Opposition, COD II), which caused a third of Lomé's population to flee to Ghana,[9] and by riots and social unrest in the south. Amidst bloody coups, divisions within the opposition, redistricting, and the revision of electoral lists, Eyadéma maintained power with tacit support from France. He won the presidential election in 1993, which was boycotted by the main opposition candidates,[10] and secured victories again in 1998 and 2003, each time through military force, corruption, and electoral irregularities.[11] Although the democratic transition remained stalled and the population grew disillusioned with the authoritarian restoration,[12] two democratic achievements were realised in the early 1990s: the establishment of a multi-party system and the liberalisation of the media.[13]

Liberalisation in Benin and Togo extended beyond the political and economic realms, profoundly impacting the religious landscape. This newfound freedom not

8 'Le chef de l'Etat a reçu le…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 20 March 1991.

9 Gervais-Lambony 1994.

10 von Trotha 1993.

11 Heilbrunn 1993; 1996; Iwata 2000; Macé 2004; Rambaud 2006.

12 Toulabor 1996b.

13 For an in-depth comparative study of the democratisation process and transition in Benin and Togo, see Houngnikpo 2001; Seely 2009.

only diversified religious affiliations but also increased the public presence of religion, reaching even the highest levels of the state in Benin.

'Prions pour le Togo,' '*Dieu aime le Bénin*': Religious Freedom and Expansion of Pentecostal-ism

Far from being an isolated phenomenon, the religious resurgence on the campuses of Lomé and Abomey-Calavi in the 1990s was reflective of broader societal trends in Togo and Benin. Toulabor noted, 'never have we prayed that much in Togo'[14] following the National Conference. Various religious activities, such as novenas, fasts, pilgrimages, a national week of prayer and thanksgiving for democratic renewal,[15] and a prayer and fasting march to 'exorcise the demon of violence',[16] were organised in support of democratisation. The 1990 relaxation of the law banning religious sects culminated in its official abolition with the proclamation of freedom of religion in 1992. Pentecostal denominations proliferated rapidly, influenced by neighbouring Ghana and Nigeria.[17] The swift rise of Radio Évangile, the first Pentecostal radio station launched by the Assemblies of God in 1995, turned some pastors into celebrities.[18] Evangelistic campaigns of miracles and healing in Lomé by the American evangelist Morris Cerrullo in 1992 and 1997,[19] and by the renowned German missionary Reinhard Bonnke in 1991, highlighted Pentecostalism's growing popularity. Bonnke, who had also visited Togo in 1985,[20] drew massive crowds, received significant media attention,[21] and was granted an audience with President Eyadéma.[22]

As Piot has emphasised, 'It would be hard to overestimate the significance of the new Pentecostal churches in the post-Cold War cultural life of Ghana and Togo, especially among the middle classes in the capital cities.'[23] He has argued that the

14 Toulabor 1997, 228.

15 Amouzou, 'Semaine de prières pour le renouveau...,' *La Nouvelle Marche,* 21 September 1991; Souley-Nyaw and Aguiar, 'Fin de la semaine de prières...,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 23 September 1991.

16 Fiawumo-Dotsey, 'Marche de prière et de jeûne...,' *Togo-Presse*, 30 January 1992.

17 Fancello 2005.

18 Noret 2004, 84–87.

19 Adjignon, 'Croisade de miracle à Lomé...,' *Togo-Presse*, 14 December 1992; Tchangai, 'Morris Cerrullo en campagne...,' *Togo-Presse*, 21 August 1997.

20 'Trois audiences hier au Palais...,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 16 February 1985.

21 Aguiar, 'Grande campagne d'évangélisation...,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 18 February 1991; 'Mardi dernier au bord de...,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 21 February 1991; Gbete, 'Plusieurs milliers de togolais...,' *Forum Hebdo*, 22 February, 1991.

22 Amana, 'Audience présidentielle: le pasteur...,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 26 February 1991.

23 Piot 2010, 53–54.

retreat of the Togolese state from public service provision and the liberalisation of the economy and public sphere fundamentally transformed Togo's cultural and political landscape. This shift empowered non-state actors, especially NGOs and Pentecostal churches, to fill the void left by the state. Pentecostal churches like the Assemblies of God, Church of the Pentecost, and Winner's Chapel have proliferated nationwide, offering strict moral codes, promises of worldly success, and End Times narratives. These institutions have evolved into powerful cultural and political forces, promoting a neoliberal subjectivity that emphasises individual responsibility and empowerment. Unlike earlier mission churches in Togo, they are intolerant of local religious practices, viewing spirits and ancestors as local 'demons' and attributing many of Africa's problems, particularly underdevelopment, to these beliefs.[24]

As in Togo, religious freedom in Benin was restored and guaranteed following the National Conference. The 1990 constitution not only declares the state's secular nature, but also asserts that 'everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and worship [...] in accordance with the public order established by law and regulations. The exercise of worship and the expression of beliefs shall be carried out in accordance with the secular nature of the State.'[25] This democratisation process was accompanied by a resurgence of religiosity in the public sphere, epitomised by the popular phrase '*Dieu aime le Bénin*' ('God loves Benin'), which attributes the success of Benin's peaceful transition to divine intervention or blessing.

The Catholic Church regained political influence from the early 1990s. Before this period, the Church had remained relatively quiet, despite issuing critical pastoral letters during the revolutionary regime's final years. The charismatic Archbishop of Cotonou, Msgr de Souza, emerged as a pivotal figure, initially as president of the National Conference and later as head of the High Council of the Republic until its transformation into the Constitutional Court in 1993.[26] The Catholic Church, along with other Christian denominations, organised public marches and collective prayers in support of peaceful elections. Early pastoral letters in the 1990s demonstrated political engagement, notably in 1995, when the Church called for strong but peaceful citizen participation in the democratisation process.[27]

However, the dominant role of the Catholic Church was increasingly challenged by the growing prominence of evangelical churches, which, although still a

24 Piot 2010; 2012.

25 'Constitution de la République du Bénin,' accessed 31 May 2023.

26 Mensah 2011.

27 Strandsbjerg 2015, 71.

minority, became highly visible. Liberalisation spurred the remarkable growth of Christian churches and facilitated the arrival of foreign churches, primarily from Nigeria and Ghana, which could now operate in Benin without fear of repression. Cotonou became the epicentre of Pentecostal activity in the country, hosting frequent crusades, evangelistic campaigns, training seminars, and other events.[28] Mayrargue has argued that the prosperity gospel has resonated with many Beninese who, amid political uncertainty and socio-economic crisis, seek solutions and support for their daily struggles, as well as a sense of purpose and identity. The rise of Pentecostalism mirrors the process of individualisation.[29]

Consequently, Benin's evangelical and Pentecostal community now consists of numerous competing churches, varying significantly in size, dynamism, origin, and doctrinal orientation. The unity of the *Conseil Interconfessionnel Protestant du Bénin* (CIPB) – a single structure established during the revolutionary regime – has fractured. A new organisation, the *Fédération des Églises et Missions Évangéliques du Bénin* (Federation of Evangelical Churches and Missions of Benin, FEMEB), has emerged around the Assemblies of God. Meanwhile, in 1993, the CIPB became the *Conseil des Églises Protestantes Évangéliques du Bénin* (Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches of Benin, CEPEB), which later launched Maranatha Evangelical Radio in 1998.[30]

While President Soglo was widely perceived as a promoter of Vodun, particularly for his role in organising the Ouidah 92 festival – the first global celebration of Vodun arts and cultures – and establishing a national Vodun holiday (10 January), his motivations were more complex, rooted in both economic and political strategies.[31] In contrast, Kérékou's return to power in 1996 marked a significant rise in the political influence of evangelical Christians. After spending several years on the political sidelines, Kérékou re-emerged, presenting himself as a transformed man: a democrat and a born-again Christian. His frequent use of biblical quotations in his speeches and his new religious identity significantly enhanced his appeal among Christian voters.[32] During Kérékou's two terms in office (1996–2006), several evangelical figures held key political positions, including ministerial roles, leadership of public enterprises, and ambassadorial posts.[33] Despite this, in the 1996

28 de Surgy 2001; Mayrargue 2008.
29 Mayrargue 2001.
30 Mayrargue 2005, 252–56.
31 Tall 1995; Mayrargue 1997.
32 Mayrargue 1996; Strandsbjerg 2005a; 2005b.
33 Mayrargue 2005; 2007.

presidential and parliamentary elections, regional affiliation and Soglo's economic and social record were more influential on voter behaviour than religion.[34]

The 1990s marked a significant turning point in the sociopolitical landscapes of Benin and Togo. Both countries faced economic crises, external pressures for reform, and demands for democratisation. However, their paths diverged: Benin achieved a relatively peaceful transition to a multi-party democracy, while Togo's democratic aspirations remained largely unfulfilled as Eyadéma maintained his grip on power. Despite these differences, both countries witnessed a notable resurgence of religiosity in the public sphere, characterised by the expansion of Pentecostal and evangelical movements, the growing influence of the Catholic Church, and the diversification of religious affiliations. In societies increasingly marked by the proliferation of Christian churches and 'sects' from Nigeria and Ghana – frequently reported upon in the press[35] – the favourable arrangements for the expression of religiosity granted by university authorities at Abomey-Calavi and Lomé were widely accepted by the campus communities at the time.

This religious fervour permeated university campuses, where faith-based student associations thrived amidst newfound religious freedom and supportive arrangements from university authorities. The proliferation of religious organisations in the 1990s marked a significant departure from the stringent state control over religion that characterised the authoritarian regimes of the 1970s and 1980s. The implementation of SAPs and the resulting economic liberalisation further reshaped the landscape, reducing the state's capacity to regulate various societal aspects, including religion. The following sections will delve into the specific experiences and strategies of these faith-based student associations as they navigated the interplay of religion, politics, and campus life in the 1990s. This exploration occurs within the context of a shifting political economy and the loosening of state control over religious activities.

34 Mayrargue 1996, 130.

35 Baneto, 'Prolifération des églises chrétiennes…,' *Togo-Presse*, 30 September 1994; Towanou, 'Escroquerie: quand la religion…,' *La Nation*, 5 September 1995; Tapsoba, 'Où va l'argent des sectes…,' *Forum Hebdo*, 22 September 1995; Jules, 'Dossier complet sur les sectes…,' *L'éveil du Peuple*, 3 November 1995; Blaise, 'Les sectes du Togo…,' *Carrefour*, 28 August 1997; Laurent, 'Comprendre le regain d'intérêt…,' *L'éveil du Peuple*, 23 November 1998.

4.2 Tensions between Christian Student Associations, Parishes, and Churches

This section examines the development of the JEC and Bible groups in the 1990s, highlighting their strategies to navigate the evolving campus environment, their engagement with broader socio-religious dynamics, and their impact on university life and larger Christian communities. During this decade, JEC chapters on the campuses of Lomé and Abomey-Calavi sought to assert autonomy from their diocesan counterparts. In Lomé, university students aimed to establish a distinct religious and intellectual space separate from secondary school students. Meanwhile, in Benin, JEC experienced a revival in the south following the country's political liberalisation, spearheaded by *Jécistes* from the north. Bible groups in Benin also underwent a revival following the reauthorisation of religious activities at educational institutions, creating tensions with local churches due to their approach to biblical study and activism.

The Elitism of the JEC-U and its Tug-of-War with the JEC in the Parishes of Lomé

Under the leadership of a new cohort of JEC students who arrived on campus in Lomé in the early 1990s, the JEC-U underwent significant changes. Among these young leaders were Théophile Tonyeme, Sabin Sonhaye, Blaise Pagmiou, and Vivianne Togbi. While Tonyeme, Sonhaye, and Pagmiou began their JEC activism as high school and college students in various cities across Togo, Togbi attended JEC in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in the late 1980s.[36] Although some students were new to JEC upon their arrival, most had been actively involved in JEC activities before joining UB, leading to a sense of familiarity among them.[37] As Sonhaye noted, these former JEC schoolmates, hailing from different parts of Togo and accustomed to only seeing each other at national camps, all converged at the university: 'All the young people of the same generation, at the same time, met here on this campus. […] So it was like a national meeting, but for one year, two years, five years. […] We will be able to build something interesting.'[38]

JEC-U was considered a chapter of the diocesan JEC of Lomé. However, some *Jécistes* from UB aimed to establish it as an autonomous organisation. According to Tonyeme, this aspiration stemmed from two observations: firstly, the differing

36 Vivianne Togbi, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 27 August 2021.
37 Théophile Tonyeme, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 7 September 2021.
38 Sabin Sonhaye, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 10 September 2021.

needs of secondary school and university students, and secondly, the presence of university students in diocesan JEC activities hindered the personal development of secondary school students.[39] Sonhaye concurred, highlighting that the JEC-U possessed 'a certain singularity' because, as university students, 'we don't have the same facts of life. We won't have the same way of seeing, judging and acting. […] We have to do something special to fulfil ourselves.'[40] This push for autonomy was also influenced by the 1991 IYCS World Congress decision allowing university chapters to become independent entities. Consequently, during the first JEC university camp in Togoville in 1992, the *Jécistes* resolved to become an autonomous entity affiliated with the IYCS.[41] The following year, JEC-U organised a pan-African meeting of university JECs in Lomé.[42] However, Pagmiou noted that this initiative was poorly received by the national office of Togo JEC, who perceived it as an attempt by JEC-U leaders to supplant them.[43]

The university students' desire to distinguish themselves from the parishes was evident in the numerous activities organised by JEC-U in the 1990s. Besides campus masses, the *Jécistes* conducted their own Stations of the Cross for the university community during Easter. They also organised a Marian pilgrimage to Togoville[44] for university students, staff, faculty, cadres, and 'intellectuals' in Lomé, featuring speakers on topics of a 'higher level' than those arranged by the archdiocese.[45] As Sonhaye explained, JEC-U members cultivated a certain elitism, strongly encouraged by the university chaplain: 'Agbobli put something in our heads. He said the campus is not a parish, it is the university chaplaincy. It has to think differently.'[46] The chaplain, who was still a professor of history at UB, tailored his homilies for an academic audience: 'If you are not a university student and you come to mass here in the Amphi 600, Agbobli looks at you like this and asks you: what are you looking for? […] The parish will be at your level. Don't come here.'[47] With Agbobli's support, the JEC-U also managed to persuade Msgr Kpodzro to grant them a voice alongside the Archdiocese of Lomé in meetings with the Bishops' Conference of Togo.

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

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

41 Modeste Lemon, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 11 November 2022.

42 Vivianne Togbi, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 27 August 2021.

43 Blaise Pagmiou, in conversation with the author, Zoom call, 9 November 2021.

44 In 1973, the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared on a boat in the middle of Lake Togo. Since then, every first Sunday after All Saints' Day, some Catholics make a pilgrimage to Togoville to celebrate the 'Lady of the Lake', the 'Mother of Mercy'.

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

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

The dynamism of the JEC-U caused friction with the JEC in the parishes of Lomé. Following the socio-political unrest of the early 1990s – marked by student strikes, the closure of secondary schools, colleges, and the university, and the general strike of 1992–93 – the involvement of the JEC in the schools and colleges of Lomé significantly diminished. When classes resumed, many school officials were hostile or suspicious of youth organisations that had been instrumental in the strikes. To revive the movement, some *Jécistes* considered shifting their activities to parishes, where they could continue to meet. Consequently, some *Jécistes* remained involved in parishes rather than joining the JEC-U when they arrived on campus. For instance, Komi F. Djeguema continued as a *Jéciste* of the Archdiocese of Lomé during his time at UB before being appointed national coordinator of the JEC in 1999.[48] He noted their effective recruitment strategy in the parishes, which included promoting activities at masses, making courtesy visits to reluctant parents, and organising outings to the beach. Despite initial concerns from the Catholic hierarchy, who deemed these outings 'too festive' in a 'place of debauchery,' they became an annual tradition that significantly attracted young people.[49] However, JEC-U activists teased university students who returned to their parishes on Sundays, participating in activities not suited to their level: 'Do you want to be children forever or do you want to grow? If you want to grow, come to the JEC-U.'[50]

In the 1990s, JEC-U had about fifty highly active members, though there were barely five women, despite Vivianne Togbi being elected as the first JEC-U leader in 1992. She noted that girls were reluctant to join student groups due to the tense socio-political context.[51] Catholic students, whether *Jécistes* or not, who attended mass on campus initially met in the *Village du Bénin*, then moved to *Cité A*, the *Grand Amphi*, the *Amphi 20 ans*, and finally the *Amphi 600* as these spaces became too small.[52] With the support of Pierre Radji, a JEC-U pioneer who became a professor at the university in 1991, and Professor Maryse Quashie,[53] they persuaded Rector Seddoh to authorise the construction of the *Centre Catholique Universitaire*

48 Komi F. Djeguema, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 26 August 2021.

49 Ibid.

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

51 Vivianne Togbi, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 27 August 2021.

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

53 Maryse Quashie, then a professor of education at the University of Lomé, is a well-known figure in both academia and civil society. Quashie is a founding member of the *Ligue Togolaise des Droits de l'Homme* (Togolese League for Human Rights, LTDH) and participated in the National Conference as a member of the presidium. She regularly takes part in socio-political debates in Togo. See, for example, Ayetan, 'Au Togo, Maryse Quashie…,' *La Croix Africa*, 28 June 2019.

(Catholic University Centre, CCU) on campus.[54] Built around 1996, the CCU now includes a chapel and a conference room, providing a space for masses and other JEC-U activities.

Fig. 10: Centre Catholique Universitaire, 11 November 2022, photo by the author.

While the JEC in Togo faced tensions between its university and parish chapters, a similar situation unfolded in Benin, though with notable differences. In Togo, the friction arose primarily from JEC-U's quest for autonomy and perceived elitism. In contrast, the JEC in Benin experienced a 'resurrection' in the southern part of the country, with the movement expanding from parishes to educational institutions. Despite these differences, both countries saw a dynamic interplay between JEC chapters in parishes and those in schools and universities during the 1990s.

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

The 'Resurrection' of the JEC in Southern Benin: From Parishes to Educational Institutions

As previously discussed, the JEC managed to survive clandestinely during the revolutionary period in a few parishes in northern Benin, particularly in the dioceses of Parakou and Natitingou. In the early 1990s, following the country's social and political liberalisation, the JEC, whose activities had been entirely suspended, was revived in southern Benin. This revival was facilitated by some *Jécistes* from the north who had passed the *baccalauréat* and moved to Cotonou for higher education.[55] Among the key figures were Pacôme Elet and Gildas Agonkan, former clandestine JEC members in Parakou, along with Gustave Djedatin and Auxence Vivien Hounkpe. Upon arriving in Cotonou, these students recognised the importance of their JEC experiences and established new JEC groups within the parishes where they attended Sunday mass.

Many *Jécistes* from the north attended mass at the Bon Pasteur parish in Cadjèhoun, led by Father Jacob Agossou (1939–2018).[56] Agossou, who held doctorates in theology and philosophy, was the first African Eudist priest and the founder of the Université Catholique d'Afrique de l'Ouest (Catholic University of West Africa) in Cotonou. Known for his eloquence in both French and Fongbè,[57] Benin's most widely spoken national language, Agossou significantly contributed to developing a JEC chapter in this parish during the 1990s. The *Jécistes* also received support from two Eudist deacons from Atrokpocodji, Honoré Kouassi from Côte d'Ivoire and Raphaël Drabo from Burkina Faso, both of whom had been active in JEC in Côte d'Ivoire in the 1980s. They oversaw the parishes of Bon Pasteur and Sainte-Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus in Godomey, the latter being near the Abomey-Calavi campus. The Archbishop of Cotonou, Isidore de Souza, appointed Kouassi and Drabo as JEC chaplains.[58]

According to Djedatin, who was elected president of the JEC of the Archdiocese of Cotonou, their goal was to establish JEC chapters in parishes and then gradually extend them to schools. They set up approximately ten parish chapters, with the Zogbo parish being particularly dynamic. The first educational institutions where JEC was established were the private Catholic College of Père Aupiais and the Cours secondaire Notre-Dame des Apôtres. From these schools, a JEC chapter was estab-

55 Pacôme Elet, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 9 March 2022.

56 Auxence Vivien Hounkpe, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 7 March 2022.

57 Bossa, 'Bénin: Jacob Médéwalé…,' *La Nouvelle Tribune*, 10 October 2018; Sarr and Hlannon, 'Hommage au père Jacob Agossou…,' *La Croix Africa*, 25 October 2018.

58 Gustave Djedatin, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 11 March 2022.

lished in the nearby CEG Gbégamey. Establishing JEC chapters in schools posed challenges, as many principals feared these groups might evolve into union movements. However, they managed to earn the trust of several headmasters by actively combating cheating, conducting sanitation activities, and offering tutoring.[59] While serving in the Zogbo parish, *Jécistes* established JECs in both CEG Zogbo and CEG Vèdoko. The parish played a pivotal role in founding these school chapters, with members engaging with students and leading JEC activities throughout the week.[60] This initiative soon extended to other parishes, such as Sainte-Thérèse in Akpakpa, Cotonou,[61] highlighting the parish's role as a vital support structure for expanding the JEC into educational institutions.

Djedatin's team organised the first-ever JEC national camp in Benin in 1993 at the Père Aupiais College, which significantly increased membership and marked the association's rebirth.[62] One of the camp's most significant achievements, according to Djedatin, was breaking down ethnic and geographical barriers through cultural and interregional exchanges. The camp attracted over 300 participants, including large delegations from Parakou and Natitingou, an ambitious undertaking given the political tensions between the north and south. For many southern Beninese, Kérékou's revolutionary regime was perceived as dominated by northerners. There were also concerns about the interaction between groups of different socio-economic backgrounds. Students from Cotonou, often referred to as children of wealthy families ('*fils et filles à papa*'), had very different upbringings from their less privileged northern counterparts. The north was less affluent than the south, leading to stereotypes: southern students viewed their northern peers as rural or, pejoratively, as '*gambalinu*', a term associated with 'savages', while northerners saw southerners as spoiled and decadent. The first few days of the camp were tense, including an argument between chaplains from the north and south over alleged derogatory remarks. Despite these challenges, barriers began to crumble during the 10-day event. Djedatin recalls this experience as one of the most memorable of his time in the JEC, demonstrating that despite regional, economic, and cultural differences, common ground and friendships could be forged.[63]

The *Jécistes* also established a JEC chapter on the Abomey-Calavi campus and gained official recognition from university authorities.[64] At the time, the Emmaüs

59 Ibid.

60 Clotaire Deguenon, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 19 March 2022.

61 Alain Gnansounou, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 27 February 2022.

62 Auxence Vivien Hounkpe, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 7 March 2022.

63 Gustave Djedatin, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 11 March 2022.

64 Emile Eteka, Elvis Vitoule and Alain Gnansounou, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 9 March 2022.

community was the most prominent Catholic organisation on campus.[65] The administration was very receptive, providing the JEC and other religious groups with an ecumenical room widely used for meetings and various activities.[66] By the late 1990s, the JEC was actively involved in both religious and social activism on campus. Clotaire Deguenon, who arrived at UAC in 1996, highlighted the JEC's initiatives, which included awareness campaigns on critical issues such as HIV/AIDS prevention and anti-corruption measures in the academic environment. These were significant challenges at the time. Additionally, the JEC prioritised the spiritual growth of its members through retreats, pilgrimages, and other faith-based activities that reinforced their religious beliefs and strengthened community bonds. Support from the university administration, such as the provision of transport for pilgrimages by the *Centre National des Œuvres Universitaires* (National Centre for University Services, CENOU), underscored the recognition and approval of these activities and their importance within the campus community. The core group, consisting of about 30 students, drove the organisation's initiatives and ensured its continuity. However, the JEC's reach extended beyond this core group, especially during major events. Pilgrimages, for instance, could attract up to 100 participants, filling two university buses. Similarly, JEC conferences were attended not only by members but also by other interested individuals through the association's outreach efforts.[67] The JEC also fought harassment, abortion, cheating, and environmental issues.[68]

On campus, the JEC benefited from the support of Professor Albert Tévoédjrè, a former *Jéciste*,[69] and Bernard de Clairvaux Toha Wontacien[70] of the Emmaüs University Chaplaincy.[71] The latter, who had been involved in various Catholic action movements, including the JEC (1983–87), held roles in spiritual affairs (1993–95) and served as president (1996–97) of Emmaüs while studying geology at UNB.[72] The *Jécistes* also counted on the support of Professor Jean Pliya (1931–2015), a former JEC leader during his studies at the University of Toulouse in the 1950s.[73] An internationally renowned Beninese writer and playwright, Pliya was a deputy and minister in the 1960s and served as Rector of the National University of Benin from

65 Pacôme Sevoh, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 15 March 2022.
66 Gustave Djedatin, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 11 March 2022.
67 Clotaire Deguenon, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 19 March 2022.
68 Alain Gnansounou, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 27 February 2022.
69 Clotaire Deguenon, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 19 March 2022.
70 He has been the bishop of Djougou since 2022.
71 Gustave Djedatin, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 11 March 2022.
72 'Bernard de Clairvaux Toha Wontacien…,' *Fraternité*, 8 April 2022.
73 Foster 2015.

1981 to 1983. From 1983 until his return to Benin in 1991, he taught geography at the University of Niamey, Niger. Influenced by charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity, he became the national leader of the *Renouveau Charismatique Catholique* (Catholic Charismatic Renewal) for over twenty years. Pliya authored several prayer anthologies and actively participated in the inculturation movement, which seeks to localise Catholic liturgical practices. He played a pivotal role in promoting the Charismatic Renewal within intellectual circles.[74]

Similar to the JEC in Togo, the environment within the Beninese JEC fostered a culture of seriousness and regular attendance among its members, leading to improved academic performance. Pacôme Sevoh, who served as the JEC's campus coordinator for the 1998–99 academic year, noted that the group consisted of young people who excelled academically. This success bolstered the movement's credibility and reassured parents, making them more comfortable entrusting their children, especially young adolescent girls, to the JEC. This experience highlighted the importance of academic excellence in gaining parental support and cultivating a sense of elitism within the JEC.[75] However, as with the JEC in Togo, tensions developed between the JEC in educational institutions and the JEC in parishes. From 1996 onwards, some JEC leaders advocated for transferring all parish branches to schools and universities: 'The JEC is a Catholic action movement. What can we transform in parishes? But we can bring our Christian faith into the educational environment to raise awareness among our classmates.'[76] Ultimately, the JEC leaders decided against this move, allowing *Jécistes* the freedom to meet in parishes. This decision helped maintain student involvement in the JEC, as many had college or university schedules that conflicted with weekly meetings.[77] This situation began to change in the early 2000s when a significant group of Beninese students returned from Côte d'Ivoire, where the JEC had been particularly dynamic. Their return revitalised the university JEC.[78]

While the JEC was experiencing a revival and navigating tensions between its parish and educational institution chapters, a similar dynamic was unfolding within the Protestant student movement. The GBEEB, which had been in a state of lethargy, underwent a resurgence following the end of the ban on religious activities in educational institutions. This 'crossing of the Red Sea', as it was referred to in the association's memory, saw the GBEEB establish a strong presence on campus.

74 Mayrargue 2007, 304–05.

75 Pacôme Sevoh, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 15 March 2022.

76 Auxence Vivien Hounkpe, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 7 March 2022.

77 Ibid.

78 Pacôme Sevoh, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 15 March 2022.

Bible Groups at the UNB and the UB: Training an Evangelical Elite

Augustin Ahoga and Jacob Djossou, pioneers of the GBEEB in the 1980s, significantly contributed to the organisation's revival. Ahoga, returning from theological studies in Vaux-sur-Seine, served as secretary general from 1989 to 1999. Under his leadership, and with the assistance of his wife, the association organised numerous training camps and seminars across various regions of Benin. The biennial national camp was reinstated in 1994, with the fourth edition held in Dassa.[79] Djossou, on the other hand, left his teaching career in 1992 to dedicate himself to the GBEEB and specifically to the *Amis du GBEEB* (Friends of the GBEEB). He was motivated by his personal transformation: 'When I saw what God had done in my own life, I had to do something so that many pupils and students could leave the path of debauchery and embark on the true path.' The objective was to enable GBEEB alumni to better support the students. Djossou succeeded Ahoga as secretary general in 1999.[80]

At the UNB, following official recognition in 1992,[81] GBEEB leaders aimed to maintain amicable relations with university authorities. They adopted a non-militant approach, avoiding open demonstrations typical of other student movements on campus. The appointment of the president of the National Board of Trustees of the Friends of the GBEEB as the *Directeur Administratif et Financier* (Administrative and Financial Director, DAF) of the UNB in the early 1990s facilitated their interactions with the rectorate. Although they secured an agreement in principle to construct the GBU headquarters on campus, the university ultimately refused the request after other religious groups demanded similar provisions.[82]

Despite this setback, the *Centre des Œuvres Universitaires et Sociales* (University and Social Services Centre, COUS) supported religious groups, including the GBU, even providing a subsidy of 500,000 CFA francs from the campus activities budget.[83] During this period, the COUS actively encouraged religious groups to organise cultural and spiritual events during the 'Students' week'. For instance, the GBEEB had access to classrooms for lectures and film screenings and could organise concerts on campus.[84] GBEEB members were divided into several groups based on their availability and field of study, with Bible studies conducted almost daily, either at lunchtime or in the evening, across various locations.[85]

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79 Augustin Ahoga, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 23 March 2022.
80 Jacob Djossou, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 19 March 2022.
81 'Le GBEEB, un mouvement en mission,' accessed 13 February 2020.
82 Jacob Djossou, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 19 March 2022.
83 Ibid.
84 Camille Yabi, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 19 March 2022.
85 Ibid.

Similar to the JEC, the elitism promoted by the GBEEB caused tensions with many churches. Ahoga noted that the numerous evangelical leaders trained by the GBEEB led him to assert, 'The GBU has been an instrument in God's hand to populate the evangelical churches in Benin. If we take away the GBU, the evangelical churches would be filled with semi-literate and illiterate people.'[86] The GBEEB fostered a certain elitism, even at the high school level. As the secretary of the GBEEB from 2009 to 2021 recounted, he discovered the association as a student in Parakou. He attended a meeting at his college at the invitation of a classmate:

> There were no teachers there. […] I was placed in a small group of five or six students for Bible study. […] They handled the Word of God very well and spoke good French. I was in *classe de seconde*, but I couldn't form sentences properly. […] I thought, 'Wow, here's a very interesting group of young people who talk about God and are eloquent. I need to be part of this group.' So that's how I've been involved with the GBEEB since 93.[87]

According to another activist from the 1990s, many evangelical churches viewed the GBEEB as a rival movement.[88] The 'Observation-Interpretation and Application' (OIA) method of Bible study used by the GBEEB trained congregants to critically evaluate pastors' teachings. The GBEEB endeavoured to explain to the churches that their organisation supported Christian students on campus, helping them navigate the unique challenges of living and sharing their faith. The association perceives itself as an outreach arm of the churches on campus, collaborating with them to train and support Christian students. In doing so, the GBEEB contributes to the evangelisation of the university community and the growth of the church. It was crucial to convey to churches and pastors that they had a vested interest in supporting the GBEEB, as its members were future leaders and contributors. Moreover, traditional street evangelism with loudspeakers would not appeal to intellectuals, according to Ahoga.[89]

In Togo, the GBUST maintained its activities, with some even featured in the national press. For instance, in December 1993, it organised a national seminar in Kpalimé for university and school Bible groups across the country. The seminar aimed to 'start afresh, being more active and committed to the work of evangelisation' and participants were trained to lead Bible studies.[90] In April 1994, the *Groupe Biblique Universitaire de Lomé* (University Bible Group of Lomé, GBUL) held

86 Augustin Ahoga, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 23 March 2022.
87 Camille Yabi, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 19 March 2022.
88 Ibid.
89 Augustin Ahoga, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 23 March 2022.
90 'Les groupes bibliques universitaires…,' *Togo-Presse*, 29 December 1993.

a week of evangelisation during the annual celebration of the International Day of the Student, initiated by the IFES. The theme, 'Hope in despair', expressed young Christian students' faith amid global crises.[91]

The elitism and tensions between campus-based and parish/church-based religious associations provide valuable insights into the evolving nature of religious authority and identity formation among students in the 1990s. The rise of elite campus-based religious associations, such as the JEC-U in Togo and the GBU in Benin, signalled a growing desire among university students to create a distinct religious and intellectual space that catered to their specific needs and aspirations. These associations emphasised a more intellectually rigorous and critical approach to faith, illustrated by the JEC-U's focus on 'higher level' topics and the GBEEB's use of the 'Observation-Interpretation and Application' method of Bible study. This elitism was further bolstered by the support of university chaplains and professors, who encouraged students to develop a different way of thinking and engaging with religion compared to parish and church-based groups. The tensions between campus-based and parish/church-based associations highlighted a contestation of religious authority and a shift in the locus of religious identity formation. For university students, the campus became a primary site for exploring and asserting their religious identity, often in ways that challenged or diverged from the established norms and practices of parish/church-based groups. The desire for autonomy and the assertion of a distinct religious identity among university students can be seen as part of a broader process of individuation and self-discovery characteristic of the university experience.

4.3 JEIUB and CIUB in the Era of 'AEEMisation': Bringing Together Western-Educated Pupils and Students

The 1990s marked a transformative era for Muslim student associations on the campuses of Lomé and Abomey-Calavi. During this period, the JEIUB and CIUB not only gained unprecedented visibility and influence but also became central hubs for broader Islamic activism. This surge coincided with the establishment of significant partnerships with transnational Islamic NGOs in Togo and Benin. These developments culminated in the formation of the *Association des Élèves et Étudiants Musulmans au Togo* (AEEMT) and the *Association Culturelle des Étudiants et Élèves Musulmans du Bénin* (ACEEMUB), which unified Muslim student groups across various educational institutions. This section examines the strategies that propelled this metamorphosis.

91 Oboubé, 'Semaine de l'étudiant: campagne…,' *Togo-Presse*, 20 April 1994.

From the JEIUB to the *Association des Élèves et Étudiants Musulmans au Togo* (AEEMT)

When Kondor Bag'na arrived on campus during the 1990–91 academic year, he encountered the general secretary of JEIUB, who was frustrated with the lack of mobilisation among Muslim students and contemplating resignation. Bag'na, however, persuaded him to complete his term, promising to succeed him.[92] Under Bag'na's leadership, JEIUB experienced unprecedented dynamism. Increasing numbers of students began openly expressing their faith and wearing Islamic attire on campus.[93] One notable event was the 'Welima[94] 94' celebration organised by JEIUB, which attracted coverage from the newspaper *Togo-Presse* in 1994. Fourteen students who had completed their Qur'anic studies received diplomas, and two conferences were held: 'The Importance of Reading the Qur'an' and 'Women and Islam'. JEIUB's growing influence was evident as prominent figures attended the ceremony. These included Imam Ahmed Limiou of the Central Mosque of Lomé, representatives of the UMT, the Africa Muslims Agency (AMA), the *Comité International pour l'Expansion des Rites de l'Islam* (International Committee for the Expansion of the Rites of Islam, CIERI), and the *Centre Culturel Islamique* (Islamic Cultural Centre) of Lomé II.[95]

The growing popularity of JEIUB's activities even alarmed Bag'na and other group leaders. As Bag'na recalled, 'we were afraid, because we were being courted from all sides, with people offering us honours and favours.'[96] With political liberalisation, an increasing number of transnational Islamic NGOs began operating more actively in Togo. The AMA, informally present since 1987, received official recognition in 1993.[97] Between 1987 and 2000, AMA constructed 75 mosques, 127 wells, three health centres, and five socio-educational centres in Togo.[98] Additionally, the WAMY,[99] active in Togo since 1989, organised numerous Islamic training seminars and activities for youth, imams, and preachers across various cities.[100] Another

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

93 Kondor Bag'na and Yaya Assadou Kolani, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 11 August 2021.

94 This word means to gather or meet in Arabic and refers to a celebration.

95 N'Bouke, 'Jeunesse Estudiantine Islamique…,' *Togo-Presse*, 4 August 1994.

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

97 Kezie, 'Togo-Koweit: Lomé signe…,' *Togo-Presse*, 27 December 1993.

98 ATOP, 'Le quartier d'Agoè-Gbonvé doté…,' *Togo-Presse*, 9 February 2000.

99 Schulze 2022.

100 Adom, 'Séminaire national des jeunes prédicateurs…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 1 August 1990; 'Ouverture à Tchamba d'un séminaire…,' *Togo-Presse*, 30 March 1994; ATOP, 'Tchamba: fin du

influential organisation was Al-Muntadah Al-Islami, a Saudi NGO based in London, which began operating in Togo in 1994.[101] Several Togolese Islamic associations, including the *Association pour l'Appel de la Culture Islamique au Togo* (Association for the Call of Islamic Culture in Togo, APACIT)[102] and the CIERI,[103] were also active. The political landscape was further shaped by President Eyadéma's official visits to Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates in December 1996,[104] followed by Libya in 1999.[105] Togo's membership in the OIC in 1997 underscored these developments.[106]

Amidst this backdrop, JEIUB's leaders sought counsel from their 'elders', the organisation's founders, on navigating potential funding from these NGOs. M. S. Mizim'ma Toukounte was appointed chairman of JEIUB's advisory board.[107] The association also remained under the 'patronage' of professor and politician Inoussa Bouraïma. This arrangement was far from symbolic, as Bag'na noted, given the authorities' concerns about 'Islamic fundamentalism' ('*intégrisme islamique*') during this period,[108] especially with the widely reported actions of the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria in the Togolese media.[109]

Under Bag'na's leadership, JEIUB underwent a significant transformation in the mid-1990s. Initially composed solely of UB students, the association expanded to include all Muslim students and pupils from schools and universities across Togo. This period saw the emergence of numerous Muslim student associations throughout the country. In 1992, high school and college students in Lomé founded the *Mouvement de la Jeunesse Islamique du Togo* (Islamic Youth Movement of Togo, MOJIST) to promote Islam in schools.[110] Similarly, Muslim high school students in Kara formed the *Cercle des Élèves Musulmans de Kara* (Circle of Muslim Students of Kara, CEMK) during the 1995–96 academic year. One founder explained the group's purpose: 'We are born in Muslim families. Now we go to the White school. So if we

séminaire…,' *Togo-Presse*, 2 April 1994; Amana, 'Associations islamiques du Togo…,' *Togo-Presse*, 13 August 1994; Amana, 'Fin des travaux du WAMY…,' *Togo-Presse*, 23 August 1994.

101 Tchangai, 'Un nouveau centre islamique…,' *Togo-Presse*, 22 June 2000.

102 ATOP, 'Tchaoudjo: APACIT veut redynamiser…,' *Togo-Presse*, January 1994.

103 Adjignon, 'Pèlerinage à La Mecque: les…,' *Togo-Presse*, 18 April 1994.

104 Agnam, 'De Koweit aux Emirats Arabes Unis…,' *Togo-Presse*, 23 December 1996; Agnam, 'Voyage du président Eyadéma au Koweit…,' *Togo-Presse*, 24 December 1996.

105 Tchangai, 'Après une visite d'amitié et de…,' *Togo-Presse*, 7 December 1999.

106 'Le Togo, 55e membre de la…,' *Togo-Presse*, 6 October 1997.

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

108 Kondor Bag'na and Yaya Assadou Kolani, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 11 August 2021.

109 See for example Djabaku, 'Algérie: le FIS à la croisée…,' *Togo-Presse*, 4 March 1992.

110 Soudoukou, 'Assemblée générale du MOJIST…,' *Togo-Presse*, 28 September 1994.

are not careful, we risk losing what we got from our parents, which is Islam.'[111] Similar groups sprang up in Mango, Sokodé, Atakpamé, and Kpalimé.[112]

Two key factors prompted JEIUB to collaborate with these student groups. Firstly, the influence of subregional dynamics, characterised by the 'AEEMisation' phenomenon, played a significant role.[113] In the early 1990s, JEIUB established connections with other Muslim student movements in West Africa, often participating in mutual visits during school holidays. In 1994, JEIUB attended the second national training seminar for young Muslims organised by the *Association des Élèves et Étudiants Musulmans au Burkina Faso* (AEEMB) in Yako. Bag'na, who participated in this event, noted that JEIUB was the only organisation represented without a national scope, unlike the AEEMB, the *Association des Élèves et Étudiants Musulmans de Côte d'Ivoire* (AEEMCI), and the *Association des Élèves et Étudiants Musulmans du Sénégal* (AEEMS). Upon returning to Togo, JEIUB aimed to unite various local student and school associations into a national movement.[114] This initiative continued in July 1995, when the JEIUB hosted 40 university students from AEEMB in Lomé to discuss, among other topics, the management of associations.[115]

Although Bag'na and the JEIUB leaders had the support of Abdoulaye Alassani, the former president of MOJIST, the preparatory meetings to define the contours of this new federation were challenging. The then head of CEMK recalled significant resistance from both university and high school students, often leading to what he termed a 'fiasco'.[116] However, the decisive involvement of elders such as Minister Abdoul-Hamid Sègoun Tidjani Dourodjaye, a regular supporter of MOJIST and JEIUB activities, and Sani Karim, now the chief imam of the university mosque and vice-president of the UMT, proved crucial in uniting these groups.[117] During the 1995 school holidays, a consultative general assembly was held in Bassar, leading to the birth of AEEMT on 16 May 1996, in the great mosque of Doumasséssé near to the campus. Former leaders of MOJIST and CEMK subsequently held significant positions in AEEMT. The AEEMT mission was to 'contribute to the better practice

111 Ibrahima Ouro-Gouni, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 11 August 2021.

112 Kondor Bag'na and Yaya Assadou Kolani, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 11 August 2021.

113 Yaya Hussein Touré, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 14 May 2019.

114 Kondor Bag'na and Yaya Assadou Kolani, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 11 August 2021.

115 Baro and Sogsey, 'Vie des Associations,' *L' Appel*, September 1995, 3.

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

117 Yaya Hussein Touré, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 14 May 2019.

of Islam in schools, universities, professional training centres, and university residences, whether public or private, secular or religious, throughout the country.'[118]

Upon its founding, AEEMT established its headquarters in the Adéwi neighbourhood of Lomé. The association's leaders then petitioned the university authorities for a campus space to build a mosque and their headquarters. Two factors favoured their request. Firstly, Rector Seddoh had previously set a precedent by approving the construction of the CCU. Secondly, his departure in September 1995 to join UNESCO left the interim rector, Osséni Tidjani, a Muslim, in charge. Tidjani, along with other Muslim staff at UB, such as Abdourahman Condé, the director of the *Direction de la Formation Permanente, de l'Action et de la Recherche Pédagogiques* (Directorate of Continuing Education, Pedagogical Action and Research, DIFOP), supported the establishment of a dedicated place of worship on campus.[119]

The university authorities eventually granted AEEMT a plot of land on campus near the CCU. Al-Muntadah Al-Islami funded the construction of a 300-seat mosque and an annex housing the AEEMT's headquarters, at a cost of approximately 15 million CFA francs (22,500 €). The mosque was inaugurated in November 1999 in the presence of representatives of the Muslim Union of Togo and Minister Dourodjaye. In his speech, Dourodjaye emphasised the state's commitment to promoting diverse religions, despite its secular stance, and stressed the importance of rejecting religious fundamentalism ('*intégrisme religieux*'). The press article also noted the growing Muslim community at the University of Benin.[120]

Al-Muntadah Al-Islami further contributed by sending Mouhamed Arabe as a tutor for the students. Born in Togo, Arabe graduated from the International Islamic University of Africa in Sudan and had earned a degree in Islamic law from the Islamic University of Madinah (1991–95). Upon returning to Togo, he began working for Al-Muntadah as a teacher of Muslim students at UB. In 2005, he was appointed director of the NGO's Togolese office.[121] The campus mosque quickly became a vital venue for Arabic learning sessions, Qur'an readings, and preaching.[122]

118 'A la découverte de l'AEEMT,' accessed 1 February 2023.

119 Ibrahima Ouro-Gouni, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 11 August 2021.

120 Awui, 'Une mosquée pour la communauté…,' *Togo-Presse*, 1 December 1999; 'Al-Muntada Al Islami-Togo…,' *Togo-Presse*, 17 December 1999.

121 'Al-Muntada change de main…,' *Le Rendez-Vous*, 1 September 2005.

122 Ibrahima Ouro-Gouni, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 11 August 2021.

Fig. 11: Mosque on the campus of the University of Lomé, 17 August 2021, photo by the author.

The transformation of JEIUB into a national organisation, AEEMT, during the 1990s was not an isolated phenomenon. A similar process was unfolding in neighbouring Benin, where the CIUB was undergoing its own evolution. CIUB faced challenges and opportunities akin to its Togolese counterpart, influenced by similar factors, including growing ties between Benin and the Arab-Muslim world and the 'AEEMisation' trend in West Africa.

From the CIUB to the *Association Culturelle des Étudiants et Élèves Musulmans du Bénin* (ACEEMUB)

According to a former CIUB activist from the 1990s, the main challenge for Muslims on campus remained the same as in previous decades: expressing their faith and performing daily prayers. While there were no restrictions on practising their religion at the university, there was no accommodation for it, either. Students had to choose between leaving class to pray or accumulating prayers and performing them

in the evening.[123] However, similar to Togo, Benin's relations with the Islamic world in the 1990s were marked by several significant events and visits that impacted the practice of Islam on campus.

One notable event was the visit of the President of its organisation in November 1991 to inaugurate two important projects funded by WICS: the ILACI on the Abomey-Calavi campus, and the Islamic Centre of Dantokpa.[124] Additionally, President Soglo's official visits to Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates in 1992 aimed at strengthening diplomatic and economic relations with these countries.[125] Another key event was the official establishment of AMA in Benin in February 1997.[126] This Kuwaiti Islamic NGO had been active in Benin since 1994, building mosques, social centres, and wells in various regions.[127] Relations between Benin and Libya, which had cooled after Soglo's election in 1991, resumed after Kérékou's return to power in 1996. This was demonstrated by Kérékou's visit to Libya in March 2000[128] and Gaddafi's visit to Benin a few months later,[129] his first since 1983.

Muslim students in Abomey-Calavi greatly benefited from the contributions of their peers at the newly established ILACI, who took on the task of promoting Islam on the university campus.[130] Announced with great fanfare in 1979 (see Chapter 3), the institute was officially inaugurated in November 1991.[131] Supported by the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ICESCO, formerly ISESCO) and the WICS, ILACI was well-equipped with the necessary teaching materials, faculty, and an operating budget. As Minister Karim Dramane pointed out, the institute aimed to train *Arabisants* familiar with the social, economic, and cultural realities of Arab countries. ILACI's curriculum focused on training Arabic language teachers, interpreters, translators, and diplomats. Additionally, it offered Arabic language courses accessible to students of all disciplines and religions, as well as to professors and anyone interested in learning or improving their Arabic skills.[132]

123 Zakary Sofian Traoré, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 23 April 2019.

124 Ahounou, 'Bénin–Libye: arrivée à…,' *La Nation*, 14 November 1991; Ahounou, 'Le Centre islamique de Cotonou…,' *La Nation*, 18 November 1991.

125 Gnanvi, 'Visite officielle du président Soglo…,' *La Nation*, 12 May 1992; Gnanvi, 'La tournée présidentielle au Koweit…,' *La Nation*, 22 May 1992.

126 Boni Seni, 'Coopération bénino-koweitienne…,' *La Nation*, 14 February 1997.

127 Tahir, 'L'Agence des musulmans d'Afrique…,' *La Nation*, 28 September 1998.

128 Gnanvi, 'Visite d'amitié et de travail en Libye…,' *La Nation*, 28 March 2000; Gnanvi, 'Visite d'amitié et de travail du président…,' *La Nation*, 29 March 2000.

129 Akponikpe, 'Visite du guide de la Révolution…,' *La Nation*, 13 July 2000.

130 Abou-Bakari Imorou, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 14 March 2022.

131 Ahounou, 'Bénin–Libye: inauguration à…,' *La Nation*, 15 November 1991.

132 Ahounou, 'Le Centre islamique de Cotonou…,' *La Nation*, 18 November 1991.

Fig. 12: ILACI building, 12 June 2024, photo by the author.

Adjacent to the Kim Il-sung university dormitory[133] was a multipurpose hall that served as a hub for various cultural, sporting, and religious activities. For many Muslim students, this space functioned as a prayer room or even their campus mosque for Friday prayers. It also hosted most of their meetings and Qur'an classes. During Ramadan, Muslim students would formally request exclusive use of the room for the month, usually granted without controversy. Similarly, if other student groups needed the room for extended periods, they would approach CIUB leaders, who typically accommodated them. Catholic and Protestant students also organised some of their activities there. When the room was unavailable for prayer, Muslim students would pray in the dormitories.[134] The life of the Muslim community on campus largely revolved around the dormitories. Consequently, the most active CIUB members came from more Islamised regions such as Porto-Novo, Djougou, and Kandi, as their geographical distance from home made living on campus more practical. In contrast, students from nearby areas such as Cotonou

133 Benin's Council of Ministers decided to demolish the building in June 2021. See 'Compte rendu du conseil des ministres du 16 juin 2021,' accessed 23 October 2023.

134 Ambdel Gannille Inoussa, in conversation with the author, WhatsApp call, 14 March 2022.

were often absent from these spiritual gatherings, mainly because they did not live on campus.[135]

From 1998 onwards, the idea of a unified Islamic association for school, college, and university students gained traction, influenced by developments elsewhere in West Africa, notably the recent formation of AEEMT in Togo. Similarly, in Benin, groups of Muslim students from various cities formed the *Association des Élèves Musulmans du Bénin* (Association of Muslim Pupils of Benin, AEMB) in the 1990s. Although not active nationwide, AEMB had representation in Cotonou, Porto-Novo, Bohicon, Natitingou, Parakou, and Djougou.[136] The leaders of CIUB and AEMB thus considered merging, as they shared the same objectives. CIUB members even visited several schools from 1998 to explain to Muslim pupils the benefits of uniting.[137] However, it took almost three years before Muslim students from across the country convened at Lycée Descartes in Cotonou in February 2001 for a constituent congress to formalise the creation of the *Association Culturelle des Étudiants et Élèves Musulmans du Bénin* (ACEEMUB). To avoid confusion with AEEMB in Burkina Faso, a 'C' was added to the acronym to signify 'Cultural'.[138]

According to Ambdel Gannille Inoussa, the first president of the new association, ACEEMUB's creation was a response to the sub-regional trend of 'AEEMisation' and a fear of the spread of Islamic sects among high school students. Inoussa explained, 'It was a fear that everyone would come with their own [Islamic] ideology, their own way of thinking, their own way of seeing things, and that they would all come to the same university and instead of working together to move forward, they would get in each other's way, which could cause serious problems for Muslim students.'[139] To prevent this, CIUB leaders proposed a unified organisation. Since the 1990s, the landscape of Islam in Benin has changed significantly, becoming more heterogeneous with the introduction of new mystical orders such as the Alawiyya and the Nimatullahi, alongside the Ahmadiyya and the Tablighi Jamaat, which have gained prominence. In addition, a diffuse and heterogeneous 'reformist' trend, initially driven by transnational Islamic NGOs and graduates of universities in the Arab world, has gained momentum.[140]

Like the Bible Group, ACEEMUB was denied permission to build a mosque on the campus in the name of *laïcité*. However, a partnership with the Islamic NGO

135 Abou-Bakari Imorou, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 14 March 2022.

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

137 Bourhanou-Dine Mamam Awali, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 18 April 2019.

138 Ambdel Gannille Inoussa, in conversation with the author, WhatsApp call, 14 March 2022.

139 Ibid.

140 Brégand 2006; 2012.

Organisation Humanitaire pour l'Entraide Islamique au Bénin (Humanitarian Organisation for Islamic Mutual Aid in Benin, OHEI-Bénin) enabled ACEEMUB to build the Oumar Ibn Khattab Mosque in 2004. Located in the Zogbadjè neighbourhood, just behind the university campus, this mosque has become a central hub for student prayer and Islamic practice, proudly standing as the first mosque in the vicinity of the university.[141]

In conclusion, the strengthening ties between Benin, Togo, and the Arab-Muslim world in the 1990s profoundly impacted the religious identity and activism of Muslim student associations. The establishment of ILACI in Benin, the construction of the mosque on the Lomé campus, and the support of transnational Islamic NGOs enhanced the visibility and legitimacy of Islam in the public sphere, empowering associations like CIUB and JEIUB. These developments provided Muslim students with dedicated spaces for religious practice and learning, challenged the perceived dominance of Western education, and asserted the value of Islamic knowledge in the academic setting. The 'AEEMisation' process, involving the creation of unified Islamic associations across educational levels, emerged as a strategic response to the challenges of being a religious minority. By pooling their resources and presenting a united front, AEEMT and ACEEMUB sought to enhance their visibility, legitimacy, and bargaining power with authorities and other student groups. Beyond fulfilling a need for spirituality, Muslim and Christian student organisations on both campuses offered their members a sense of belonging, alleviating the difficulties of surviving in a university environment perceived by many as hostile.

4.4 Navigating Campus Life in Faith-Based Student Associations: Coping with the Challenges of Being a Student

In the 1990s, public universities in Benin and Togo became the focal points of national debates about education, governance, and public policy. Struggling with underfunding, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of institutional autonomy, these institutions mirrored the political climate. Faith-based student associations played crucial roles beyond religious education by integrating new students, providing emotional support during exams, and mediating during political upheaval. In predominantly Christian environments, Muslim student associations aimed to challenge existing prejudices against Islam, complicated by the geopolitical context and changing perceptions of the religion, particularly in light of the Algerian civil war.

141 Tomoussossi and Ogbon, 'Fermeture de la mosquée des étudiants…,' *ASSALAM*, January 2019, 4.

The Crisis of Higher Education: Deteriorating Living Conditions on Campuses and their Impact on Students

From the early 1980s until the late 1990s, universities in many African countries faced heavy criticism for being under state control, severely undermining their autonomy and the development of independent academic activities.[142] In both Benin and Togo, Estates General on Education were organised shortly after their respective National Conferences. In Benin, the *États Généraux de l'Éducation* were held in Cotonou in October 1990 as part of the new national policy called for by the National Conference. These special meetings aimed to diagnose the national education system and propose solutions to the impasse created by the New School reform introduced by the revolutionary regime in 1973.[143] According to the Special Commission on Higher Education and Scientific Research, the UNB faced major issues such as underfunding, lack of resources to promote research, poor utilisation of existing infrastructure, and inadequate scientific documentation. However, the most pressing challenge identified was the 'overcrowded' student population coupled with an 'insufficient' number of teaching staff.[144]

Since 1970, the number of students had grown steadily, and the cramped conditions in classrooms, lecture halls, and the university library had become increasingly untenable. Ten years after its foundation, UNB was already operating at nearly 80% of its capacity, with 3,990 students enrolled.[145] This situation worsened with the advent of democratic renewal, leading to a surge in student numbers. According to Künzler's estimates, UNB had 9,794 students in 1990–91, 11,108 in 1995–96, and 22,564 in 2000–01.[146] Despite this significant growth, the university's infrastructure remained largely unchanged, with no major new construction for over twenty years. The primary facilities were those built between 1970 and 1980, a stagnation attributed to the financial constraints of the 1980s revolutionary period and the political inertia of the 1990s.[147] Benin implemented three SAPs between 1989 and 1999, reflecting the economic pressures on the country's education infrastructure. In a controversial move in 1994, President Soglo's government even considered privatising the UNB, underscoring the institution's challenges in accommodating its growing student population.

142 Provini, Mayrargue and Chitou 2020, 3.

143 See Chapter 2.

144 'Actes des états généraux de l'éducation. Cotonou du 2 au 9 Octobre 1990,' Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 1991, 119.

145 Université d'Abomey-Calavi 2016, 74.

146 Künzler 2008, 220–21.

147 Hounzandji 2021, 261.

The situation at the UB in Lomé was equally difficult at the turn of the 1990s. In 1990, Rector Seddoh highlighted the major challenges of the growing student population and the adequacy of training and employment. This was compounded by the difficulty of 'doing more with much less' due to the decline in government spending on education.[148] At the 1991 National Conference, representatives of teachers and students criticised the failures of education policy since the 1975 reform. They denounced geographical disparities, overcrowding, gender inequalities, lack of qualified staff, insufficient classrooms and teaching materials, difficult working conditions, low salaries, tribalism, and the politicisation of the University of Benin. They called for an Estates General on education, which was held in May 1992.[149]

As in Benin, each successive SAP in Togo resulted in cuts to the education budget, the abolition of subsidies, and neglect of university and school facilities. Throughout the 1990s, the living conditions of Togolese students deteriorated. They faced precariousness, recurrent issues with late or non-payment of scholarships, uncertainties about professional integration, and problems with accommodation, food, and transport. The poor quality of teaching and frequent campus strikes were regularly reported upon in the opposition press.[150] The lack of university infrastructure and overcrowding on the Lomé campus exacerbated these issues: from 1,500 students in 1974,[151] enrolment rose to 9,000 in 1991[152] and to 24,000 in 2003–04.[153] These difficulties were intensified by chronic underfunding of education, linked to Togo's deteriorating economic situation, the suspension of international cooperation following the 1993 presidential election, and the devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994.[154] Job prospects after graduation became increasingly uncertain, leading to the formation of the *Union des Diplômés de l'Enseignement Supérieur Sans Emploi* (Union of Unemployed Higher Education Graduates, UDESSE) in 1997,[155] which met with President Eyadéma to address these concerns.[156]

148 Aziaglo, 'Gestion des universités en Afrique…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 10 April 1990.

149 Deliry-Antheaume 1995, 726; Awui, 'Etats généraux de l'éducation nationale…,' *Togo-Presse*, 7 April 1992.

150 'Il faut équiper l'Université,' *Atopani Express*, 28 March 1991; 'Éditorial: l'Université du Bénin…,' *Courrier du Golfe*, 27 May 1991; Faustinos and Focy, 'L'enseignement: un secteur négligé,' *Atopani Express*, 2 July 1991; Agbodji, 'Les étudiants s'interrogent…,' *Le Démocrate*, 9 August 1991.

151 'Première réunion du grand…,' *Togo-Presse*, 6 October 1979.

152 Lowa, 'Université du Bénin: vingt…,' *La Nouvelle Marche*, 13 January 1991.

153 'Université de Lomé: le Pr Gayibor…,' *Togo-Presse*, 29 October 2003.

154 Frisch 2021.

155 Balouki, 'Les jeunes de l'UDESSE…,' *Togo-Presse*, 11 June 1997.

156 Kamazina, 'Plusieurs milliers d'étudiants et de…,' *Togo-Presse*, 20 October 1997.

A 1991 article in the *Atopani Express* noted that students had to rise at 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning to secure a seat in class.[157] In 1998, *Togo-Presse* published a detailed report titled 'How to get a room in the "Cité U"? A nightmare for the Togolese student', highlighting the difficulty of accommodating students in university halls of residence due to the significant increase in enrolment. Many students from other towns in Togo could not afford a room in Lomé with their scholarship, and only a fifth of the 16,500 students were housed in the university's residences and villas. The shortage of rooms led to corruption and favouritism in the allocation of student accommodation. Moreover, it was common for students to share rooms with friends, relatives, or acquaintances, resulting in four students in a double room or two in a single room.[158]

As student enrolment soared, the availability of on-campus accommodation progressively declined, despite government efforts to expand capacity. Campus canteens and transport services similarly failed to keep pace with growing needs. Additionally, the state struggled to provide scholarships or financial aid to a large proportion of the student population. Consequently, most students faced precarious living and studying conditions, often residing in cramped rented rooms without basic amenities such as electricity and running water, and struggling to secure adequate food.

In Togo and Benin, student strikes became an integral part of the academic calendar, with few academic years in the 1990s passing uninterrupted. Even after the transition to civilian rule under President Soglo, the Abomey-Calavi campus remained plagued by unrest and riots. Student demands frequently centred on improving living and studying conditions, including scholarships, accommodation, food, and transport. Between 1992 and 2001, the UNB was particularly contentious, with both Presidents Soglo and Kérékou struggling to contain frequent protests by students and professors, such as the massive strike in 1999 that lasted almost two months. Demonstrations often led to violent clashes between students and the police. A significant number of young graduates faced unemployment, especially after the end of automatic public sector recruitment in Benin in 1987,[159] forcing many to become motorbike taxi drivers, commonly known as *Zémidjan*. One solution in both countries was the creation of a second public university: in Kara (Togo) in 1999, and in Parakou (Benin) in 2001, as will be discussed in the next chapter. In this context, faith-based associations on campus provided invaluable social and

157 'Il faut équiper l'Université,' *Atopani Express*, 28 March 1991.
158 Waguena, 'Comment gagner une chambre…,' *Togo-Presse*, 11 September 1998.
159 Université d'Abomey-Calavi 2016, 44.

spiritual support to their members, who perceived the environment as increasingly hostile.

Support, Mediation and Networking on Campus and Beyond: Christian and Islamic Student Associations Activities in the 1990s

In both Benin and Togo, faith-based student associations emerged as vital support networks, helping to fill the void left by the retreating state. They offered spiritual guidance and practical assistance, such as help with registration, accommodation, and academic tutoring. These associations fostered a sense of belonging and identity for students who often felt alienated and marginalised on campus. By creating a space for religious expression and community building, groups like the JEC, GBEEB, AEEMT, and ACEEMUB enabled students to navigate campus challenges while maintaining a sense of purpose and direction. The social curriculum provided by these associations, which included soft skills training, leadership development, and civic engagement, complemented the formal academic curriculum, equipping students with the tools to succeed both on campus and beyond.

A student from Parakou recounted his arrival at Abomey-Calavi in the 1990s. Without knowing anyone or having family to rely on, the support from GBEEB members significantly eased his campus integration and motivated him to become actively involved in the association. A GBEEB leader even visited his apartment to ensure he was settling in and later became his mentor throughout his university years.[160] Similarly, the CIUB, and later the ACEEMUB, assisted newly arrived Muslims in enrolling and integrating on campus.[161] According to one activist, solidarity within the CIUB was especially evident during emotionally and mentally demanding periods like exams, with activities such as nightly prayers, Qur'an readings, and *dhikr*[162] recitations, typically held on Thursday evenings.[163]

Similarly, the AEEMT provided support beyond Islamic training to newly arrived students on the Lomé campus. A former AEEMT leader recounted that, upon his arrival at UB in 1995–96, he initially felt no need to join an association to better practise his religion. However, witnessing the actions of AEEMT activ-

160 Camille Yabi, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 19 March 2022.

161 Zakary Sofian Traoré, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 23 April 2019.

162 *Dhikr*, often translated as 'remembrance', refers to the Islamic practice of repeating phrases verbally or mentally to remember and glorify God, and serves as a spiritual exercise to deepen one's faith and awareness of the divine presence.

163 Abou-Bakari Imorou, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 14 March 2022.

ists, who offered comprehensive support including registration, accommodation, and other administrative procedures, changed his perspective.[164] Another former leader agreed, pointing out that the AEEMT not only provided religious training but also addressed academic issues. Students and elders organised free tutoring sessions at all levels, from *classe de sixième* to university, helping activists in their coursework.[165] GBUST also emphasised integrating new students, offering a 'community of mutual help and support' for young people from the interior arriving on campus.[166]

For faith-based organisations on both campuses, the goal extended beyond imparting religious knowledge and values. They aimed to equip students with a broad range of skills to complement their academic training, forming a social curriculum designed to enable students to make an impact on their milieu. For instance, alongside various religious activities such as meetings, trainings, spiritual retreats, and promoting sexual fidelity and abstinence in the fight against HIV/AIDS,[167] the JEC-U in Lomé was notably active in the *Journée de l'Arbre* (Arbor Day) on 1 June, an event that remains a point of pride for many alumni.[168] The *Jécistes* also launched the bimonthly publication *L'Agenda JEC*, featuring columns on student life, time management methods, research, study skills, and more.[169] They contributed to the '*De ma fenêtre*' ('From my window') column in the newspaper *Présence Chrétienne*, which was relaunched in March 1994 after nearly twenty years.[170] The JEC-U did not shy away from responding to socio-political events and issuing communiqués, while maintaining an apolitical stance, feeling somewhat protected by the Archdiocese of Lomé and the Bishops' Conference.[171] Agbobli, the university's chaplain, 'took the risk here, at mass, of saying out loud what the students were thinking down below', even leading to his passport being confiscated by the state.[172]

The flagship initiative of the JEC-U in the 1990s was campus mediation. Throughout the decade, the UB witnessed numerous student strikes and demonstrations, often met with brutal repression by security forces,[173] including the army, and inci-

164 Yaya Assadou Kolani and AEEMT leader, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 15 May 2019.
165 Taofik Bonfoh, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 24 August 2021.
166 Armand Dzadu, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 12 August 2021.
167 Batassi, 'La jeunesse étudiante chrétienne…,' *Togo-Presse*, 21 December 2001.
168 Modeste Lemon, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 11 November 2022.
169 Théophile Tonyeme, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 7 September 2021.
170 Broohm, 'Le journal catholique "Présence chrétienne"…,' *Togo-Presse,* 9 March 2004; Ayetan, 'Au Togo, le mensuel Présence Chrétienne…,' *La Croix Africa*, 28 March 2019.
171 Sabin Sonhaye, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 10 September 2021.
172 Ibid.
173 Abueno, 'Branle-bas sur le Campus universitaire…,' *L'éveil du Peuple*, 23 January 1998.

dents of vandalism[174] and violence among rival student groups involving clubs and knives.[175] This climate of insecurity and hyper-politicisation on campus,[176] reflective of wider Togolese society, stemmed from challenges to Eyadéma's power and demands for improved student living conditions. The socio-political liberalisation facilitated the emergence of numerous student unions, such as the *Organisation Universitaire de Lutte pour la Démocratie au Togo* (University Organisation of Struggle for Democracy in Togo, OULDT), the *Mouvement Étudiant de Lutte pour la Démocratie* (Student Movement of Struggle for Democracy, MELD), the *Groupe de Réflexion et d'Action des jeunes pour la Démocratie* (Group of Reflection and Action of the youth for Democracy, GRAD), and the *Haut Conseil de Coordination des Associations et Mouvements Estudiantins* (High Council of Coordination of the Associations and Movements of Students, HaCAME). Additionally, many actors deplored the 'tribalism' that arose from the instrumentalisation of ethnic and regional interests.[177]

Inspired by Bishop Kpodzro's mediating role during the National Conference and the transitional government,[178] JEC-U activists aspired to play a similar role on campus.[179] One of the JEC-U's mottos was to 'bring light' ('*porter la lumière*') to 'pacify the campus, which was a battlefield', even within their own ranks, which included students of various political persuasions.[180] The JEC-U intervened not only between rival student unions but also between students and the university administration. Notably, they defended a student summoned to the disciplinary committee for writing a pamphlet titled 'Fear of Living on Campus'.[181] The JEC-U also established a social commission to document student challenges, addressing such issues as transport, where tensions between bus drivers and students often led to jostling and fights. They implemented a mediation system to ensure students could take the bus calmly.[182] Moreover, JEC-U leaders organised an event with JEIUB and GBUST focused on ethnocentric issues and interfaith dialogue.[183]

174 Oboubé, 'Contre l'insécurité sur le campus…,' *Togo-Presse*, 21 January 1992.
175 On the use of violence by the youth during this period, see Toulabor 1996a.
176 'Perception des bourses à l'UB…,' *Togo-Presse*, 19 February 1992.
177 Klukpo, 'La Bible, le gourdin et l'argent,' *Courrier du Golfe*, 13 May 1991; 'Encore du tribalisme dans le milieu…,' *Forum Hebdo*, 12 July 1991.
178 Toulabor 1997, 228.
179 Sabin Sonhaye, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 10 September 2021.
180 Blaise Pagmiou, in conversation with the author, Zoom call, 9 November 2021.
181 Théophile Tonyeme, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 7 September 2021.
182 Blaise Pagmiou, in conversation with the author, Zoom call, 9 November 2021.
183 Théophile Tonyeme, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 7 September 2021.

In Benin, although the political climate and campus situation were less dire than in Togo, mediation remained a significant activity of faith-based student associations. The advent of a multi-party system in Benin led to a situation in which numerous political parties quickly began recruiting members on campus. This resulted in intense struggles for control of student unions and the fragmentation of the *Fédération Nationale des Étudiants du Bénin* (National Federation of Beninese Students, FNEB), founded in April 1990 by the student cooperative of the revolutionary era. In August 1992, students defeated in the FNEB elections formed the *Union des Étudiants du Bénin* (Union of Students of Benin, UNEB), which aligned with President Soglo's regime. The following year, the *Union Nationale des Scolaires et Étudiants du Bénin* (National Union of Pupils and Students of Benin, UNSEB), with a communist orientation, was established.[184] Additionally, regional and ethnic-based student associations further complicated the competitive landscape. This competition often involved malpractice and corruption due to the benefits associated with union leadership, such as free accommodation, free transport on university buses, and the administration of subsidies by the COUS. Moreover, student union activism facilitated the development of significant political contacts.[185]

Like the JEC-U in Togo, the JEC at Abomey-Calavi sought to remain apolitical in the 1990s, consistently taking a 'clear stand in the light of the Gospel' during student uprisings. Mediation was a crucial aspect of their activities, along with maintaining sanitation and order in the library.[186] GBEEB adopted a similar stance. During the major university strike in 1999, GBEEB officially called for an end to hostilities between authorities and students through posters and radio announcements.[187] This approach had been initiated by GBEEB alumni since 1990. For instance, Friends of the GBEEB in Cotonou contributed to the preparatory committee for the National Conference, impressing Protestant leaders with the quality of their proposals. As a result, the secretary of GBEEB's national executive committee was chosen as one of the Protestant church delegates,[188] along with Pastor Henry Harry and Professor Paulin Hountondji. According to Jacob Dossou, 'They understood that we are detached from politics, but at the same time we want the good and the progress of the nation.'[189]

184 Nouwligbèto 2018, 130.

185 Université d'Abomey-Calavi 2016, 91–94.

186 Gustave Djedatin, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 11 March 2022.

187 Camille Yabi, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 19 March 2022.

188 Officially, the religious communities had eighteen representatives: four each for the Catholic Church, the Protestants, the Muslims, and traditional cults, and two for the Celestial Church of Christ.

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

The mediating role played by these associations amid political tensions and campus unrest can be understood as an effort to uphold a moral order grounded in non-violence, dialogue, and the common good. By positioning themselves as neutral arbiters and advocates for student welfare, groups like the JEC-U in Togo and the JEC in Benin sought to mitigate the disruptive effects of partisan politics and ethnic rivalries on campus life. This moral stance was rooted in a shared understanding of the university as a place for learning, personal growth, and social transformation, rather than a battleground for political or sectarian interests.

Faith-based student associations in Lomé and Abomey-Calavi, as in the 1980s, maintained links with other organisations both within the subregion and internationally. The CIUB/ACEEMUB and JEIUB/AEEMT had close relations with other Muslim student associations in West Africa. Similarly, the dynamism of the Togolese JEC in the 1990s had a regional and international impact. In the early 1990s, the JEC-U organised a pan-African meeting of university JECs in Lomé. Leaders of the JEC-U held positions at the pan-African and even international levels. For example, Maximin Binabawai Adjaté, national coordinator of JEC Togo (1988–99), was appointed leader of the JEC at the pan-African level.[190] Sabin Sonhaye was appointed one of the pan-African JEC delegates to the JEC World Congress in Paris and also represented JEC at UNESCO.[191] As for the Bible groups, the GBEEB organised the 11th triennial congress of the GBUAF in Cotonou in 1999,[192] while the same year, GBUST became an affiliate member of the IFES in South Korea. The fate of former activists of faith-based student association is analysed in more detail in Chapter 6.

In sum, the activities of Christian and Islamic student associations in Benin and Togo during the 1990s represent a form of 'moral economy'. This concept, initially developed by Thompson[193] and later expanded by Scott,[194] refers to the shared moral understandings and reciprocal obligations that shape economic transactions and social relationships within a community. On university campuses where students faced economic hardship, political upheaval, and social alienation, faith-based associations became essential support networks. These groups provided spiritual guidance, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging. Their moral economy was rooted in a collective understanding of the challenges students faced and a commitment to mutual aid and solidarity. By offering help with registration, accommodation, and academic tutoring, as well as spaces for religious expression

190 Vivianne Togbi, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 27 August 2021.
191 Sabin Sonhaye, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 10 September 2021.
192 Camille Yabi, in conversation with the author, Abomey-Calavi, 19 March 2022.
193 Thompson 1971.
194 Scott 1977.

and community building, associations like the JEC, GBEEB, AEEMT, and ACEEMUB created a safety net for students often left to fend for themselves amidst state retreat and institutional dysfunction. The social curriculum they provided – encompassing soft skills training, leadership development, and civic engagement – functioned as a form of moral education. This curriculum aimed to equip students with the tools to navigate the challenges of campus life and beyond. Furthermore, their mediating role amid political tensions and campus unrest reflected an effort to uphold a moral order grounded in non-violence, dialogue, and the common good.

Being a Muslim Student on a Christian-Dominated Campus

For the Muslim student associations, their status as a religious minority in a predominantly Christian context significantly influenced their activities at the universities of Lomé and Abomey-Calavi. The challenges Muslim students faced in Togo and Benin as they navigated campus and societal prejudices against Islam strengthened their sense of religious identity and solidarity within their associations. Confronted with misconceptions about the compatibility of Islam with Western education and notions of a 'true' Beninese or Togolese identity, these students sought to demonstrate that one could be both a devout Muslim and an intellectual in a Western academic setting. In response, the associations developed strategies to promote a more authentic and intellectually engaged vision of Islam.

The AEEMT's activities aimed to foster young Muslims who freely practised their religion while combating prejudices from both Muslims and non-Muslims. Similar to other countries in the region,[195] these students first had to convince their co-religionists that a Western-educated Muslim could earnestly practise Islam: 'Being in a secular country, we found that the majority of students, both girls and boys, [...] did not easily demonstrate their faith because of their contact with Western schools, which were not as conducive to learning religion.'[196] One former activist noted, 'It was crucial to show that there was not this clear dichotomy between Islam and Western culture, but that those who came out of Western education could work to promote the values of Islam.'[197]

The National Qur'an Recitation Contest, a flagship AEEMT activity held annually during Ramadan since 1995, has been pivotal in this effort. This initiative

195 Camara and Bodian 2016; Madore and Binaté 2023.

196 Yaya Assadou Kolani and AEEMT leader, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 15 May 2019.

197 Latifou Assikpa, Ouro Padnna Essoh Izotou and Halourou Maman, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 19 May 2019.

aimed to dispel the perception of incompatibility between Qur'anic and Western education. Initially organised in the UB amphitheatres,[198] the competition has been held at the Lomé Congress Centre since 2002[199] and has generated unprecedented enthusiasm among Togo's Muslim community. AEEMT activists also sought to integrate their academic training with their religious practice. During the university's Student Culture Week, activists explained the relationship between their field of study and the Qur'an, illustrating that Western and Islamic knowledge can indeed complement each other.[200]

Similarly, the CIUB in Benin aimed to bridge the gap between Western-educated Muslims and those educated in Islamic schools, illustrating that one could be both an intellectual and a 'good' Muslim: 'We noticed widespread illiteracy in the Muslim community. This was because, historically, some Muslim parents perceived modern schools as incompatible with religion and thus rejected this form of education.'[201] According to the first president of ACEEMUB, Western-educated Muslims in Benin faced a dual challenge. Their primary challenge lay in the scepticism of those educated in Islamic schools regarding the authenticity of Western-educated Muslims. ACEEMUB's principal goal was to bridge this divide by demonstrating that 'it is possible to be an intellectual in a Western academic environment and a true and devout Muslim.'[202] They also aimed to counter the notion that Beninese identity was incompatible with Islam:

> Muslims in Benin are generally ashamed of their Islam. […] Very often, they feel inferior. Our effort to eliminate these feelings must not be confined to Calavi and the university; it must permeate all of Benin. It's as if being truly Beninese excludes being Muslim. We needed to make Beninese society understand that one can be both Beninese and a true Muslim.[203]

The challenges faced by Muslim women, including prejudice, misconceptions about Islam's stance on women's rights, and the difficulties of wearing the veil on campus, led the CIUB to establish a women's cell to organise activities addressing these issues. According to a former female activist, while many women were involved in CIUB, mobilising 'sisters' was more challenging than mobilising 'brothers'. Some feared, mistakenly, that joining the association would force them to wear the veil. Many Muslim women also felt ashamed of their religion. Wearing the veil on campus

198 ATOP, 'JEIB / Concours national de meilleurs…,' *Togo-Presse*, 9 March 1995.
199 Batassi, 'La 6e édition du concours international…,' *Togo-Presse*, 26 November 2002.
200 Yaya Assadou Kolani and AEEMT leader, in conversation with the author, Lomé, 15 May 2019.
201 Ibrahima Mama Sirou, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 8 May 2019.
202 Ambdel Gannille Inoussa, in conversation with the author, WhatsApp call, 14 March 2022.
203 Ibid.

was particularly challenging, as some students had been expelled by professors for doing so. To counter these issues, CIUB organised weekly activities through its women's cell. They discovered that many women lacked a thorough understanding of Islam, often confusing tradition with religion – a misconception frequently reinforced by the media, particularly regarding female genital mutilation and forced marriage.[204] For example, in an interview with the president of the *Association Féminine pour la Promotion de l'Islam* (Women's Association for the Promotion of Islam, AFPI), a journalist from *La Nation* wrote, 'Muslim women are constrained in many ways. Islam, as some would say, produces submissive women […]. They are not allowed to pray among men, they must live in the background, covered from head to toe. […] It seems that the Muslim woman is subject to many restrictions and that her religious beliefs give her a second-class status.'[205]

The lethargy of ILACI was another major concern for CIUB in the 1990s. Despite its official inauguration in 1991, the institute remained non-operational as of July 1995, with no courses offered.[206] This stagnation prompted the CIUB president to publish an opinion piece in *La Nation*, denouncing the blockage on behalf of Muslim students:

> The leaders of the C.I.U.B. decided, after their meeting, to contact the authorities first, including an audience with the Minister of National Education, which has not yet been granted, and a forthcoming audience with the leaders of the U.I.B. It is clear that they [Muslim students] are determined to be heard and to express their dissatisfaction. Given the seriousness of the situation, the C.I.U.B. urgently appeals to the entire national Muslim community to mobilise in defence of the interests of Benin's Muslims.[207]

This article sparked controversy about the place of ILACI within the National University of Benin and its relationship with *laïcité*, as illustrated by a response published in *La Nation*. The author of the tribune stated, 'ILACI is neither a mosque nor a Qur'anic school', emphasising that it is a secular institute within the National University of Benin, as highlighted by the Minister of Education at its inauguration. ILACI is open to all Beninese, regardless of race or religion, who wish to learn Arabic, one of the official languages of the United Nations. Therefore, it does not belong to Muslims or non-Muslims exclusively. The author argued that mobilising the Muslim community around this cause was inappropriate and even 'sympto-

204 Mariam Abaounrin, in conversation with the author, Cotonou, 9 May 2019.
205 Aguiar, 'Mme Darou-Salim Zaria…,' *Togo-Presse*, 16 February 1996.
206 Abdoulaye 2007, 137.
207 Nasser, 'La Communauté islamique universitaire…,' *La Nation*, 21 July 1995.

matic of a march towards jihad.'[208] These remarks should be understood in the context of fears about fundamentalism ('*intrégrisme*') and Islamism, partly due to the civil war in Algeria. In 1995, the Beninese media occasionally evoked these fears, especially after four Algerian Islamists expelled from France ended up in neighbouring Burkina Faso. There were rumours that these militants might seek refuge in Benin, which, according to the press, was already a target for Islamists.[209] After numerous delays and setbacks, ILACI finally opened its doors in 1999.[210]

Amid growing unease about the role of Islam in public life, exacerbated by the Algerian civil war, JEIUB leaders in Togo also felt the need to promote a more nuanced relationship between Islam, violence, and politics. In January 1995, the JEIUB, in collaboration with the Islamic Cultural Centre of Lomé, organised a panel discussion at the University of Benin on the topic: 'Is Islam a source of violence?' The event's keynote speaker, Fambaré Ouattara Natchaba, a law professor at UB, used the example of the Algerian civil war to explain that it is often the breakdown of dialogue between political authorities and the population that can escalate into violence. In these instances, Islam was often utilised to empower the people, who then used it as a cover for waging a political struggle.[211] This suspicion of Islam was rekindled in the early 2000s following the events of 9/11, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

While both Christian and Muslim student associations faced the task of maintaining their religious identity and practices within a predominantly secular academic environment, the challenges and opportunities they encountered differed significantly due to their respective positions as majority and minority religious communities. Christian associations, with their established church links and numerical strength, could more easily assert their presence on campus. In contrast, Muslim associations had to navigate the complexities of being a religious minority in a predominantly Christian environment. The JEIUB and CIUB faced prejudice and misconceptions about Islam from both within the Muslim community and the wider society. They had to work harder to establish their legitimacy and gain recognition from university authorities. Despite these differences, both Christian and Muslim associations exhibited remarkable resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity. They developed innovative strategies, such as the 'AEEMisation' process in Togo and Benin, to enhance their organisational capacity and extend their influence beyond the university campus. They also leveraged their transnational net-

208 Oladeji, 'UNB: Institut de langue arabe…,' *La Nation*, 22 August 1995.
209 Assevi, 'Le Bénin terre d'asile…,' *La Nation*, 21 March 1995.
210 S., 'Crise Libyenne: le sort…,' *ASSALAM*, December 2011, 9.
211 ATOP, 'Au Centre culturel islamique de Lomé…,' *Togo-Presse*, 25 January 1995.

works, participating in regional and international conferences and collaborating with faith-based NGOs, to access resources and expertise.

The divergent paths of democratisation in Benin and Togo in the early 1990s impacted the strategies and experiences of faith-based student associations on the Abomey-Calavi and Lomé campuses. In Benin, the relatively peaceful transition from Kérékou's dictatorship to a model democracy created a more conducive environment for the growth and activities of these associations. In contrast, the more turbulent and ultimately unfulfilled democratic aspirations in Togo posed greater challenges. Despite the initial opening of political space following the National Conference, the entrenched authoritarianism of the Eyadéma regime and persistent political violence limited the scope for autonomous student activism. Groups like the JEC-U and JEIUB had to navigate a more complex and restrictive political landscape, balancing their religious identities with the need to avoid direct confrontation with the state.

While the specific trajectories of democratisation undoubtedly influenced these groups' strategies and experiences, their resilience and adaptability highlight the relative autonomy of religious dynamics from central politics. The continued dynamism of faith-based student activism on the Abomey-Calavi and Lomé campuses, despite the divergent outcomes of democratisation in Benin and Togo, points to the enduring significance of religion as a source of identity, community, and social engagement for many university students. The ability of these associations to maintain a degree of autonomy from central politics, even in the face of state repression or co-optation attempts, suggests that religious dynamics on university campuses are not entirely determined by the broader political environment.

During this period, there were striking similarities in the experiences of faith-based student associations in both countries. In Benin and Togo, these groups emerged as important actors in the broader landscape of civil society, providing spaces for religious expression, community building, and social support in the face of economic crisis and deteriorating living conditions on campus. The activities of Christian and Islamic associations began to diversify, going beyond religious training and contributing to the development of a social curriculum that offered students spaces for socialisation and a set of soft skills, norms, and moral values that complemented their secular academic curriculum. This trend accelerated from the 2000s onwards, particularly with an emphasis on entrepreneurship and leadership development.