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Frédéric Madore, *Religious Activism on Campuses in Togo and Benin: Christian and Muslim Students Navigating Authoritarianism and Laïcité, 1970–2023*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023. 308 pages. ISBN: 978-3-11-142790-4.

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Frédéric Madore's *Religious Activism on Campuses in Togo and Benin* shifts the study of African student politics by documenting the rise and influence of faith-based movements on university campuses from 1970 to 2023. Combining historical analysis with ethnography, the book demonstrates how student groups such as the Association des Élèves et Étudiants Musulmans du Togo (Association of Muslim Pupils and Students in Togo, AEEMT) and the Jeunesse Étudiante Catholique (Young Christian Students, JEC) in Benin have transformed campus life and influenced secular traditions.

Madore situates this shift within the creation of the University of Abomey-Calavi (Benin) and the University of Lomé (Togo) in 1970, following the 1968 Dakar revolt and the expulsion of Togolese and Beninese students from the University of Dakar in Senegal. A particularity of the book is its integration of materials from the open-access Islam West Africa Collection (IWAC), which provides free access to over 5,000 archival documents, newspapers, photographs, audio-visual materials, and bibliographic records on Islam and Muslims in West Africa.

The book complements existing scholarship on student activism across African campuses, including more recent studies such as Leonardo Villalón and Mamadou Bodian's *Entre le Savoir et le Culte: Activisme et mouvements religieux dans les universités du Sahel* (2020) and Frédéric Madore and Abdoulaye Sounaye's *Religiosity on University Campuses in Africa: Trends and Experiences* (2023). Madore's book shows how both Muslim and Christian groups go beyond mere religious guidance, adopting economic and social strategies to navigate state control. Central to the book is the concept of a "social curriculum," an "informal but crucial aspect of education that takes place alongside, and sometimes overshadows, formal academic learning" (p. 38). Through this curriculum, student groups shape their members' character and social outlook by integrating academic, spiritual, and moral development.

He organizes the book into seven chapters, preceded by acknowledgments, a timeline and map, lists of abbreviations, and a preface by Abdoulaye Sounaye. This is followed by a conclusion, sources, bibliography, and index. Chapter 2 examines how the authoritarian regimes of Gnassingbé Eyadéma (Togo) and Mathieu Kérékou (Benin) shaped the political and educational landscape. Eyadéma's military dictatorship relied on a cult of personality and a philosophy of "authenticity" introduced in 1974. This included co-opting Christian and Muslim leaders through patronage to legitimize his power. By contrast, Kérékou's Marxist-Leninist regime initially targeted Catholic, Islamic, and traditional religious institutions in its "fight against obscurantism" and "feudal forces" (p. 37), before shifting to pragmatism, marked by "relaxed control over religion" in the early 1980s (p. 39).

In Chapters 3 and 4, Madore demonstrates that, from the restrictive 1970s to the liberalizing 1990s, faith-based student movements exhibited remarkable adaptability. Christian groups retreated to northern parishes, where political oversight was less intense, while Muslim associations sustained their activities through clandestine meetings and transnational networks. This allowed both groups to offer spiritual guidance and practical support to their members.

While Chapters 3 and 4 explore the rise, resilience, transformation, and transnational networks of Christian and Muslim student associations, they also present the survival strategies of these groups in a more engaging manner, as compared to Chapter 2's focus on authoritarian stagnation and the state's ideological posturing. This contrast between the rigid, state-centric view and the strategic maneuvers of student groups highlights the paradox of studying African politics beyond the state. By navigating state control, faith-based movements provide a more dynamic and compelling narrative than state-centric perspectives.

Chapter 5 moves into the 2000s and early 2010s, a period that is often regarded as the "golden age" of student movements. During this time, Christian and Islamic student associations developed entrepreneurial initiatives and skills-training programs in response to new socio-economic pressures, rising graduate unemployment, and the disconnect between educational offerings and local development needs. This shift "recognized that a university education alone was no longer sufficient to meet the demands of the contemporary labour market" (p. 127).

Chapter 6 traces how former student activists used their campus experiences to shape civic, political, and religious engagement through alumni networks, including in contexts where formal political channels are restricted. The chapter highlights a key divergence in political strategy: Catholic alumni often adopted a cautious stance aligned with their bishops' conference, while their Muslim counterparts took a more proactive role in "shaping the religious and political landscapes of their countries" (p. 175).

Chapter 7 challenges claim of a decline in faith-based movements on university campuses, arguing that recent shifts reflect adaptation to the stricter application of laïcité on campus, a more dispersed student life, and the transformative impact of COVID-19 and media proliferation.

Taken together, the examination of the movements' economic adaptation and post-campus influence underscores the turn toward entrepreneurial engagement. In the book, this shift is framed as a direct response to the state's failure and the inability of formal education to integrate graduates into the labour market. Through entrepreneurship (Chapter 5) and alumni networks (Chapter 6), student groups projected a narrative of self-reliance (Chapter 7) that counters state deficits. Yet, the analysis could benefit from a more detailed theoretical and empirical exploration of the societal challenges that prompted the pivot from piety to pragmatism.

At the same time, the book's emphasis on faith-based activism risks overlooking how the movements' entrepreneurial activity may extend beyond a mere secular response, intertwined with political, economic, social, and theological imperatives. Therefore, re-examining the "social curriculum" from a theological perspective could show how the movements' economic survival might serve as both a moral and religious mandate for communal activism, thereby transforming state failure into a source of religious authority.

These nuances, however, do not detract from the book's contribution, which is considerable; this is due to its comprehensive analysis of the history and development of faith-based movements in Togo and Benin from 1970 to 2023. The book offers a valuable resource for scholars seeking to understand the complex interplay between faith, activism, and adaptation in Francophone Africa.

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