A Path from Slavery to Freedom: The Case of the Ologoudou Family in Southern Benin

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A PATH FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM

The Case of the Ologoudou Family in Southern Benin

SAMUEL LEMPEREUR

ABSTRACT: What can family biographies, life stories and memories of individuals tell us about the sociohistorical transformations of domestic slavery in Benin? By focusing on the generational dynamics among the Ologoudou, a family of former slaves, this article attempts to shed some light on how economic, social and school trajectories have influenced the situation of descendants of slaves in Benin over the generations. The case of the Ologoudou family, descended from a Yoruba slave who arrived in Ouidah in the mid-nineteenth century, shows that domestic slaves, placed under particular conditions, may have had the capacity to take their fate into their own hands and not only to be passive beings as they are often described.

Introduction

> So slavery . . . it has to be said that . . . well . . . according to what I have lived through, what I have found . . . It is the conversion that is important. There are several individual recognitions of slavery. Someone whose father was already a slave, the son or daughter who is to be born to him, is not automatically a slave. It can be released through various ways, for example if you give your daughter to a vodun convent. At that moment, she was released. She is a vodun adept, she is liberated, she has passed from one authority to another. Now some slaves are liberated by goods, I mean by the fields. For

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> example if your parent worked in a field, an agricultural domain, you continue to cultivate that, it changes status, at this time it's a free person who behaves freely, who continue the inheritance. The slave may have bought or been given this for his work. Donation of the land, I mean. Let's assume at a moment that in the masters family, there is a disintegration such that . . . well . . . no one 'answer the call' anymore . . . It is even better to give to the one who has always cultivated it. So slavery . . . there is an inheritance . . . the question of inheritance raises the question of how far . . . it exists.[1]

The history of the Atlantic slave trade seems better known today than the history of slavery within Africa. According to Robin Law, more than one million slaves transited through Ouidah for the Atlantic trade.[2] But many others were also used on the spot, in particular following the economic upheavals that had arisen with the abolition of slavery and the transformation of the slave trading economy into the palm oil trade in nineteenth century. Dahomey was able to benefit from an economic revival linked to the palm oil trade, where the labor force was mainly composed of slaves.[3]

How many slaves are we talking about? It is difficult to know how many slaves there were in West Africa.[4] Some authors have tried to quantify them. Martin Klein points out that in the Western Sudan, slaves represented 40 percent of the population in agricultural areas.[5] Lovejoy mentions that in the early days of colonization, there were more slaves in West Africa than there had ever been in the history of slavery in America.[6]

We do not have reliable data for Benin. It is well known that the southern cities, such as Ouidah and Abomey, are surrounded by hundreds of villages mostly inhabited by former slaves and some families who were responsible for their surveillance.[7] Frederick Forbes, an English sailor in the mid-nineteenth century, counted thousands of slaves in the hands of the five greatest African merchants of Ouidah.[8] If we add those of the Brazilian merchants, those of the small merchants, those present in families and different kinship groups, and if we think over several generations, we can imagine a very significant number of local slaves.

According to Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, "Dahomey presents a relatively privileged case for the historian."[9] It is not necessary to review everything that has been written, but we note Akinjogbin, Garcia, Newburry and Schnapper, as well as economic historians Manning and Polanyi.[10] Their work mainly takes into account the relations that existed between Western traders and African middlemen, based on the travel stories of the centuries of slave trade and on accounts written by Dahomean intellectuals. The reports of merchants and sailors, while valuable, do not describe the daily life of the Dahomean people, and when they do, are superficial. Local intellectuals tend to highlight family stories, such as that of Maximilien Quenum.[11] Since

the intellectuals mostly come from old aristocratic families, their historical vision is oriented to their advantage.[12]

The historiography unfortunately does not allow us to understand the lives of slaves in Dahomey. Since their lives were not reported, and therefore remain unwritten, it has escaped historical attention. But as Vansina has shown, it is possible to reconstruct the history of a population with oral traditions.[13] Through family biographies, life stories and memories of individuals, it is possible to reconstruct the sociohistorical transformations of slavery in the Republique du Benin, which has been achieved through ethnographic work carried out in Benin over the last few years.

In this article, the focus is on the Ologoudou family in Ouidah and its path to freedom, which preceded that of many slaves in southern Benin. And this is no coincidence. The social trajectories of slaves and their descendants are already strongly marked by the economic needs of Dahomey during the past centuries. Depending on their abilities, occupations, gender, and age, slaves were assigned different functions and performed their roles in different places. In the days of slavery, a peasant slave did not enjoy the same social status as a high-ranking slave, especially the Yoruba diviners, like Emile's grandfather.[14] It is therefore understandable that descendants are strongly marked by their starting point.

Being a farmer or a priest; living in the countryside on a field; residing in the city next to one's master; having a poor master or a high ranking nobility; an African or an Afro-Brazilian master—all these details resulted in variations in treatment that are important considerations for slave descendants.[15]

Through multiple meetings with Emile Ologoudou, interviews initially focused on the the heritage of vodun in Ouidah, and in particular the local political conflicts created and in which Emile was involved.[16] Subsequent conversations explored the past of Ouidah city and the presence of Yoruba cults in southern Benin. Other subjects followed logically: the question of slavery, the consequences of the Atlantic slave trade, and his personal history. And in these discussions, his father and his grandfather kept emerging. Since he was arriving at the twilight of his life, he was overwhelmed with the desire to talk about his forebears.

It is therefore necessary to address some methodological questions for such an approach. What "regime of truth," to use Foucault's expression, should Emile Ologoudou be granted? What Ologoudou tells us is "his" truth, in the sense that it is a series of omissions and commemorations of the family past and multiple re-readings over generations. What he retained from his family's past, what he decided to put forward, or to keep silent, and the interpretation he makes of it is personal to him

and is the fruit of his social trajectory. By exposing Emile Ologoudou words, there is, at least, a double exercise. The first is to try to better understand the past and the history of slaves in Benin. Behind the personal and family reinterpretations, the fact that the Ologoudou family were domestic slaves who gradually emancipated themselves from their former masters is not to be questioned in its substance, but rather in the way it happened. The second exercise is then to question Emile and how he interprets his history and then how he projects his vision on other descendants of slaves in Benin.

Pierre Bourdieu has pointed out that the succession of events put forward by someone recounting his or her life or that of the family, as is the case here for Ologoudou, is a selection and construction of the respondent.[17] This "socially irreproachable artifact" should not be taken for granted by the researcher. Bourdieu insists on the need to place the social changes of biographies in their social space. But Bourdieu pushes his logic too far on these autobiographies when he speaks of "artificial creation of meaning,"[18] unless scholars consider the meaning that actors give to their past, the actions—their own and those of their forebears—as systematically artificial or subjective.[19]

As Paul Veyne has observed, "subjectivity does not mean arbitrariness."[20] He also notes that historical facts do not exist in isolation, and that it is the role of the historian to put them together to give them meaning and to understand how they are intertwined. As Veyne observes, "'events' are not totalities, but knots of relationships; the only totalities are the words 'war' or 'gift'-that one freely extends widely or narrowly."[21] This logic should prevail for all social sciences, not just history. Social facts do not exist by themselves, and it is the scholar's role to put them together to make sense.

The attempt made in this article is therefore to try to disentangle Emile Ologoudou's interpretations of his family history, while giving them a sociological meaning. We will see that the story of the emancipation of his family passes, in each generation, through different investments that can be described as "entrepreneurial." The first generation became known through its identity as a voodoo priest. The second generation continued to invest in this legacy and seemed to accumulate money and social credit. Then, Ologoudou's father introduced a reconversion of family strategies towards schooling, which became the new way to capitalize on social credit and continue the family's rise in the local social hierarchy. This progression is particularly noticeable through the analysis of kinship and matrimonial strategies.

Emile Ologoudou: Intellectual Elite with a Servile Past

In the Ologoudou family trajectory, the family founder Chohountan arrived as a captive. His master was Francisco Felix de Souza, who held the title Chacha, and was the famous Brazilian slave trader.[22] Usually Afro-Brazilian families did not try to integrate their slaves into their kinship network as African communities structured in lineages often did.[23] The Afro-Brazilian community, to which the Ologoudou belonged, had more freedom of actions than those with Africans masters because they allowed such integration. Emile Ologoudou is a well-known person in Benin. Born in Savalou on 17 June 1935, he now lives in Ouidah, the hometown of his father, a colonial civil servant who arrived at the highest possible level of the hierarchy for a "native" during French domination, as detailed below.

Emile Ologoudou's career is exemplary on more than one point. He attended primary and secondary school in the former French colony of Dahomey. In particular, he attended the school of Ouidah known as "Brazil," named after the district, where it was located and attended in the first half of the nineteenth century by the Brazilian trade and slave elite of the time. He then graduated from the University of Dakar with a major in economics and did a PhD in philosophy in Cologne. He was also the leader of the UGEAO (Union Générale des Étudiants d'Afrique Occidentale) student union, and as such, participated heavily in the vigorous anti-colonial debates that animated Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. He was expelled from Ivory Coast in the late 1950s because of his anti-colonial position. He traveled a lot and, as the leader of a student trade union movement, was supported by the USSR. Because of this, he went to Prague and Moscow. In 1968, he became a diplomat and adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He then became the director of the public radio and national lottery. In 1972, he was one of the country's leading consultants in the development of the university school system. He became a professor in sociology at the university. He opposed the violence of the militaro-marxist regime of Kerekou and fell into disgrace during the 1980s. Forced into exile, he became a freelance journalist in the Maghreb and France until the "democratic renewal" allowed him to return home in 1991.

Emile wrote poetry. He published at least two collections, the second of which is called *Prisoner du ponent*.[24] The latter constitutes, as its name suggests, a critique of the West, both Western Europe and the Soviet East, of which Benin was a satellite. A few anthropologists and historians of Africa are aware of the articles he published, as noted in *Présence Africaine* in 1983 and *Gradhiva* in 2008.[25] In *Gradhiva*, Emile Ologoudou outlined the history of his family since the arrival of Chohountan and how his great-grandfather was taken by force to Ouidah in the service of de Souza around 1850.

In general, the people of Ouidah do not remember much about this life journey. Emile Ologoudou is mostly described as the former director of national radio and a former university teacher. He is renowned for being an intellectual figure of reference. He is seen as a wise man, a social anthropologist as he likes to define himself. But above all, he is considered an initiate in the Yoruba cults of *Ororo* and *Egungun*. In French, he is described as a *connoisseur* of these *vodun* cults.

But no one is fooled: if Ologoudou, with his Yoruba name, is a dignitary of Yoruba cults, it is because his ancestor was a slave, like many Yoruba who have lived in Ouidah for several generations. But this slave origin is rarely mentioned by the inhabitants of the city, while his knowledge, wisdom, social and religious prestige are regularly highlighted: "You should talk to Mr Olougoudou about this, he knows better than I do." This is the phrase that the field investigator in Ouidah can hear from time to time.

The Ologoudou Family: Construction of Economic Capital to Escape Slavery

Chohountan Ologoudou, Emile's great-grandfather, arrived in Ouidah during, or after, the wars against Abeokuta (1844–1851). At that time, England had obtained the abolition of the slave trade from other Western powers when the Vienna Treaty of 1815 was signed. But has Manning underlined, the effective abolition of slavery took a century and a half.[26] The economy on the West African coast then underwent a transformation to the palm oil trade, while continuing a slave trade under the cloak that would then be called "illegal trafficking." This conversion of the economy had a catalyst effect on local slavery. Palm grove agriculture was highly dependent on labor and developed at a time when Abomey's army was the most effective in its slave raids, while the Atlantic market for slavery closed down with abolition. These changes resulted in an explosion in the number of slaves along the African coast, particularly in southern Dahomey.[27]

In this context Chohountan Ologoudou remained at the service of Francisco Felix de Souza (or, more precisely, in the service of de Souza's eldest daughter, Francisca, known as Cika) as a *bokonon*, the soothsayer of Fa, in origin Ifa, the diety ot "devination art."[28] This may seem surprising: many of de Souza's descendants take pride in identifying with Catholic and Portuguese traditions, despite the inherent contradictions. Similarly, Emile Ologoudou reinforced the legend that Francisco Felix Chacha de Souza, the slaver, had nearly one hundred African women:

> There were various kinds of dependents. . . . there were "slave goods" going away. . . . we, in fact, what saved us was that we were *bokonon*. The Fa! So the Fa, at one point, Chacha needed it. It's just because . . . women, there were a lot of them. African women, yes, he married some African women! So from there . . . it must be said that these people are eminently intelligent, especially in politics. That is to say, for their economic interests, all alliances are allowed. Alliances with women, alliances with connoisseurs, . . . *bokonon* are likely to make advanced diagnoses, in witchcraft . . . so having a certain number of *bokonon* in one's entourage is also a considerable source of power.[29]

It is difficult to say how many of de Souza's wives were slaves and how many were alliances with large families in Ouidah and elsewhere. But we know that the sex ratio of local slaves was very much in favor of women, which encouraged polygyny practices. And it is also known that the great African merchants, and somehow Chacha de Souza was one of them, possessed many slave women.[30]

The case of Chohountan Ologoudou is of course not unique but rather is another example of a *bokonon* used by de Souza, which Milton Guran has analyzed in his of the construction of Afro-Brazilian identities in Benin and Togo.[31] Prudêncio echoes very much that of Ologoudou, which allows Guran to describe succinctly the social ascension of another descendant of a de Souza slave.

Slaves benefited from different considerations according to their place in their host society.[32] In Fon and Yoruba cultures, diviners and great priests, who somehow were enslaved, nonetheless have often been among the most privileged slaves. The kings and important persons were always surrounded by diviners and priests, especially the Yoruba Fa soothsayers. Some of them have contributed to research in anthropology, such as Guèdègbé, who, near the end of his life, became the privileged informant of Bernard Maupoil.[33] As Joël Noret has demonstrated, Guèdègbé's divinatory powers led him to the royal court at Abomey.[34] As a soothsayer close to the king and appointed by him as the person in charge of the Yoruba cults for Abomey, Guédégbé enjoyed considerable prestige and freedom of action. It seems, on the basis of extensive testimonies in southern Benin, his success was a common path for diviners and *vodun* priests. The more prestige and power slaves had, the more quickly they were able to free themselves from the bonds that bound them to their masters.[35] The freedom of action enjoyed by the *bokonons*, in comparison with the average work-force slaves, allowed Chohountan Ologoudou to amass financial capital while he was still a slave from the middle of the nineteenth century.

In the first two generations, Chohountan Ologoudou and then his son Abatan Ologoudou (≈ 1850–1934), ran a "school of the Fa" in Ouidah. This

"temple school," as described by Emile Ologoudou, was also the symbol of both personal and financial autonomy in relations with the de Souza family.[36] In the days of slavery, only a slave who had prestige and enjoyed freedom from his master could embark on such an entrepreneurial path. A person who was able to benefit from his own "office" and had clients could travel throughout the whole region, which indicated a much lower degree of domination than, for example, that of what a master exercised over an enslaved farmer or an enslaved craftsman.[37]

Another sign of Abatan Ologoudou's independence, which also shows an evolution in comparison with Chohountan, is his temporary settlement in Agoué, 45 km west of Ouidah, on the Togolese border. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Abatan made numerous trips between Ouidah and Agoué, where he had installed a second "cabinet of the Fa." At this time, Abatan Ologoudou had become a famous *babalawo*, as can be demonstrated by contemporary ethnography of *anago fa* (the Yoruba Fa). At the beginning of the act of divination, the *babalawo* started by "calling" tutelary figures including Ologoudou.

During this period of travel between Agoué and Ouidah the family home of the Ologoudou was in the district of Zomaï. Chohountan first settled in the Adjido district, also known as "Brazil district," run by the de Souza family and where Afro-Brazilian families were historically located.[38] It is also in this area that many of the families dependent on de Souza, that is, former slaves, were to be found. But Abatan moved to a house in the Zomaï district, sharing a house with other Yoruba.[39] Zomaï is said to have been managed by Francisca de Souza, the eldest daughter of Chacha de Souza. This is hardly surprising, since Emile Ologoudou repeated several times that they depended on Cika, as Francisco's daughter was nicknamed. The Ologoudou moved into her neighborhood as a symbol of their relation of subordination. But according to Emile Ologoudou, that was also a sign that the dependency relationship with Francisco Chacha de Souza had faded. It leaves only a form of patronage relationship, in which the responsibility for the Ologoudou family was transferred to Francesca de Souza.[40] This form of dependency presupposes a much softer domination in terms of intensity, which translates into forms of gratitude, social recognition, participation in family ceremonies, and tithing. But to quote Emile: "My grandfather was no longer a slave in the most servile sense of the word, to the point that the master could, for example, throw you away or sell you; it's only the recognition of domination, like a boss."[41]

This phrase by Emile, who insists on the fact that his grandfather Abatan was no longer a slave, underlines something current for the ancient kingdom of Dahomey. For Emile, the children of slaves were no longer regarded as

slaves in the full sense of the word. When he says that his master could no longer throw his grandfather away, he talks about the possibility for a slave to be sold to another master. And even potentially to be sold into the Atlantic trade, far from Africa. For Emile, if his grandfather could no longer be sold, he was no longer totally a slave.

This study may not be the place to discuss a definition of slavery, but Alain Testart has shown, in a convincing way, that slavery cannot simply be understood through the idea of ownership. According to him, slavery is above all a legal condition.[42] Emile Ologoudou's conception of slavery, where the slave is no longer really a slave when he can no longer be sold, is the result of an "Atlantic imagery" strongly rooted in Ouidah in particular but also in all southern Benin. Here as elsewhere, people's perception of slavery is strongly linked to Atlantic slavery. There are several reasons for this, and it is probably impossible to list everything but some details can be pointed out. As Robin Law has demonstrated, the memory of former slave traders is conveyed through the commemoration of slavery in Ouidah.[43] Paradoxically, this memory was even positive, since the slavers explained that they had saved their slaves from the clutches of local bloodthirsty kings and the customs where thousands of slaves were murdered. Law highlights the many inventions presented to tourists (auction square and mass graves) while taking care to explain that such interpretations are based mainly on a "imaginative reconstruction" and "misinformed speculation," as the inhabitants of Ouidah tend to link everything that concerns their city with the Atlantic slave trade.[44]

We should not fall into the naive trap of thinking that this reconstruction of history meant the end of any relationship of domination or patronage.[45] As Emile points out, his grandfather always had to show a form of gratitude towards Francisca de Souza. Until now, descendants of slaves are still designated as such in families. They do not have the right to the position of head of the family. They rarely have the right to claim ownership of the land they have occupied for generations, and they are still sometimes ostracized within their families. They are rarely proven right in family disputes. When children argue, "sons of slaves" is still a common insult, which creates problems in adult relationships, especially when the children are cousins. Historians like Roger Botte and Paul Lovejoy have shown that the abolition of slavery does not mean the disappearance of coercive relationships and domination.[46]

The reason why Abatan settled in Agoué was primarily a financial one. According to Emile Ologoudou, his grandfather was looking for clients that Agoué, at that time, was likely to have.[47] As Emile says, his great-grandfather was "hunting for money." Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century, Agoué had become a hub for the slave trade, and many merchants were

based there. It was a small town that had become perhaps more economically dynamic than Ouidah and could attract a *bokonon* and entrepreneurs like Abatan Ologoudou. As a sign of his success, Abatan became a landowner. In December 1917, Reynier, then commander of the Ouidah Cercle, wrote a report on the state of "indigenous command" in which he listed the main families of Ouidah district by district.[48] For Zomai, he mentions Abatan Ologoudou, owner of land in Adjundja and descendant of a slave of de Souza.

While I was questioning Emile Ologoudou about his grandfather's return trips, trying to understand how the domination of de Souza evolved, he expressed the following:

> —At one point, the last image we have of him, we know, and we can't hide, the dependence that existed in relation to de Souza, but our links were already . . . our grandfather was already clear of this . . . of this patronage.
> —Your grandfather has been detached from patronage?
> —Yes, by his own means, having money . . .
> —Did he buy his freedom?
> —No, no, no, I don't think, as far as he is concerned, that we had to ask for pledges for him to be . . . well, these are people who won their independence, they had no problem at our level to hide anything for the relations at first, but they won their independence, we have no trace of command that some made to my grandfather.[49]

Emile Ologoudou insisted on this idea of "conquering one's freedom," to the point of considering his family example as canonical. For example, I have sometimes heard him say that all farmers were able to go to school, emancipate themselves and become administrative or political leaders, while the local social structure tends to show a certain social reproduction that contradicts this.

The journeys between Ouidah and Agoué, the move out of Chacha de Souza's slave district, the installation of two cabinets of divination, all of this involves a freedom to choose economic activity. This ability to build his own career, without strong patronage from a former master, allowed an influx of money that helped Abatan buy land around Ouidah. All of these signs of emancipation for former slaves through their economic practices draw their roots from the social and cultural logics of Dahomey of the time.

One last thing must be emphasized here, which is the irrelevance of a simplistic distinction between master and slave. There were many different forms of slavery. In a Yoruba cultural context, John D. Y. Peel has shown in his historical anthropology among Yoruba that such a distinction made little sense in understanding the complex relations between master and slave. For example, there were slaves whose master was himself a slave to a second

master.[50] Chohountan was indeed de Souza's slave, but his life had little to do with the slaves who, at the same time, were occupied in the palm oil fields.

The Conversion of Capital to Complete the Exit from Slavery

I have shown how the economic capital created by Chohountan and then Abatan, the first two generations of the Ologoudou family was created. But what is remarkable in the case of the Ologoudou is the way in which each generation was able to take advantage of the norms of its time to become part of the local bourgeoisie.

Chohountan and Abatan, true religious entrepreneurs, merchants of religious knowledge, were in phase with the nineteenth century when merchants reigned.[51] The third generation, that of André Ologoudou (Emile's father), is the one of the beginning of colonialism. And at that time there was a significant change in value: school. To reach the highest positions of responsibility, the indigenous elite had to send their children to the colonial school, and that is exactly what happened to the Ologoudou.

In this case study, we see how social capital and economic capital have been converted into educ capital. What is at work between these generations is what French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu had called strategies to reconvert capitals.[52] As he points out, these conversions are part of the way the agents project themselves in the future, which is what we will see here with the school. We should underline, in this respect, the active role of Emile Ologoudou's grandmother in her son's "school career," to the point to keep him away from Dakar school. But the importance of schooling will stay strong in the family, which will mark Emile Ologoudou's life trajectory, who will be allowed to go to university.

André Ologoudou, Emile's father, followed a colonial school career that can be described as successful. He was a student at Victor Ballot Superior Elementary School.[53] This school was established in 1913 following the reforms undertaken in colonial Dahomey by Governor Ponty. The superior elementary school of the time consisted of a higher education than the regular elementary schools, reserved to an elite of 20 to 30 students and intended them for the highest administrative functions to which the colonized people could aspire.[54]

But André Ologoudou, unlike other Africans of his generation, trained in their countries of origin, did not pursue his "school career" in Senegal (notably in the William Ponty school, where Emile spent his time in the 1950s). Émile's grandmother Ayiye also had slave origin, and she did not seem to want her only son to leave her for a few years. According to Émile, she devised

a scheme to keep her son André with her. She met with people who could write a letter of recommendation for André, letters that are necessary to be able to go to William-Ponty. But she asked them not to sign such a letter. It should be stressed here that Aliya's role is reversed with Emile. While she had made sure that her son André stayed with her and was not trained in Dakar, Emile told me many times how much she had invested herself in her grandson's schooling.

With his father, his grandmother—because she raised him—is the person Emile talks about the most, it seems that she had an important influence on him and that she particularly pushed him to study and become "a great man", as he says. There is an anecdote that Emile told me three times. As a child, he was jealous of "his little friends" who were not in school and who spent their days playing outside and having fun. Meanwhile, he had to go to school and study. Emile would then have several times mentioned to his grandmother his desire to stop school to play with children of his age. And his grandmother would always have vigorously replied that he had to go to school because otherwise he would never do anything good, like these children. Ayiye, Emile's grandmother was a slave, or a slave's daughter, it is not very clear. But it seems obvious that she had a certain sense of what social emancipation was and that she pushed her son and then her grandson to go to school, even if she made sure that her son André did not go too far to school and stayed with her.

After graduating from the Victor Ballot school, André Ologoudou joined the interpreters' corps in the administrative and financial department. André Ologoudou later became a territorial administrator and was transferred throughout colonial Dahomey (reason why Emile Ologoudou was born in the North, in Savalou). A few times before decolonization, he had a "commanding post," which title is unclear, but he was made deputy prefect ("sous-préfet" in French) of the Ouidah department in 1960 from independence until his retirement in 1963. On August 1, 1960, he was the one who, in Ouidah, lowered the French flag to raise the flag of newly independent Dahomey.

Emile Ologoudou has repeatedly stressed to me the respect and attraction for the "White man" shown by his father. There is an ambiguity in this man, who was both very attracted to the West and its manners, while being very invested in the Yoruba cults of his native culture, proud of his ethnic origin. This tension exists between father and son, in the 1950s, as the son was a leader of anti-colonial movements while the father served the colon and mourned his son's "leftism." This ambivalence in the face of the colonist culture admired, while having to recognize a form of domination, is very similar to that which existed a century ago with the slavers who settled on the West African coasts. Luc Garcia, in his study on colonial penetration of

Dahomey, referred to the subject: on the coast, at the time of the slave trade, many Africans elites whom relations with the king of Abomey had faded, had taken the side of France against the kings of Abomey.[55] Their fortune partly derived from their involvement in the slave trade and plantation slavery in the nineteenth century. Then, they have sometimes been eager to help France colonize Dahomey, like Quenum who supplied the French military column.[56] This local aristocracy was comprised of families, Quenum or Adjovi for example, who some members are still sometimes at the head of local political administrations.[57]

The attraction for the "White culture" among African coastal elite pre-existed colonialism. It was a result of the Atlantic slave trade. The products from the slave trade were valued, as well as the culture imported by Western merchants. As we will see at the next point, the women of the Mina ethnic group, another creation of the time of the slave trade, benefited "by rebound" from the Western social prestige. In a generation, the African economic elite from the coasts, has gone from being an intermediary of trade between kings and Europeans-Brazilians merchants, to a colonial intermediary within the administration, between the white settlers and the native. One can assume that the cultural attraction for the West was transmitted in this social layer from father to son at the same time as their economic and social capital was, and therefore that, in Bourdieusian terms, the interest of the African elites for the West was a sign of social distinction that was part of their *habitus*. In this respect, the investment in schooling is intimately linked to this fascination for the West.

This particular interest is reflected in André Ologoudou's life:

> My father, if I judge him, was someone who was happy to have gone to school. My father was open to anything that might influence him . . . He thought it was a good influence. Basically, my father is not a nationalist in any way, oh . . . is not even a champion of independence to hand and scream. My father in fact, was happy from start to the end, having been in school and being close to strangers. To the White people.[58]

This idea continued in the way he did his work in the colonial administration:

> My father André Ologoudou believed that he had been "saved from the waters" and that his personal crossing is quite enjoyable for him. It is someone who has had time to go to school, to go to the Victor Ballot upper primary school. He didn't go to Senegal because of his mother. My father quickly slipped into the administration, into government interpreters. And as an interpreter for the government, he kept great memories of it, of the disputes between canton chiefs. It was necessary to have the support of the interpreter on your side . . . You are the winner if you have the interpreter on your side

> . . . One of the subjects my father came back to was this way of asserting himself as the White man's adviser and likely to get substantial things. He was an administration soloist, I mean, there are the secrets, and all of that, you have to keep for yourself. He wasn't the kind of interpreter who took a stand against the administration that was what he lived on! But he sometimes made judgments of less reprehensible values, he did not want, for example, to directly accuse a White man by saying 'the administrator of the area did this or that', I did not see this propensity with him. On the other hand, there were things to reform according to him, there were weaknesses . . . the school had become an important preoccupation, there was no way out without it.[59]

In Emile Ologoudou's last sentence, this idea that his father had that "without school, there is no way out," illustrates the final point of this conversion of capital in this family. Chohountan, a Yoruba slave diviner builds a financial fortune, and some social network. This capital is taken over by Abatan, the second generation that amplifies it further, and in particular gains access to land capital. The third generation, André's generation, is heavily involved in the school and reaches a dominant social position within both the colonial and post-colonial administrations. Finally, Emile, a representative of the fourth generation, although he does not seem to have a very large financial capital, enjoys cultural, social, religious or political capital that testifies to a social success, relatively uncommon for a descendant of a slave.

This fourth generation would not be complete without mentioning the two younger brothers of Emile Ologoudou. André-Guy Ologoudou, who died on 14 April 2013, had been the Benin Ambassador to France between 1995 and 2003, after having had a career as a senior civil servant in Benin. The second, Louis Ologoudou, is a general practitioner based in France.[60] As we can see, through school investment, the fourth generation of Ologoudou had reached an important social rank.

Local Bourgeoisie and Social Capital

A good way to emphasize the importance of Ologoudou's economic and social/cultural capital at the turn of the twentieth century is to look at their family tree for fruitful marriages. Unfortunately, Emile Ologoudou's memory of his kinship seems sometimes lacking, the holes are numerous, but what emerges is enough to point out several marriages which, according to Emile, testify to the social rise of a former slave who has become a *medaho*, fongbe word for "great person."

As pointed out in the previous point, Emile's father had an attraction for Western culture and for Afro-Brazilians in particular. In southern Benin, Afro-Brazilians and equivalent communities (such as the *retornados*, African

slaves freed in Brazil who returned to the African coasts to integrate into the trafficking circuit) enjoy a great social prestige because of their integration into the Atlantic slave trade. This participation in the slave trade made it possible to distinguish oneself, in the Bourdieusian sense of the word, as Emile Ologoudou underlines here when he evokes the relations they had with the de Souza:

> The de Souza, we wanted to imitate them because . . . well . . . at the table, what we can eat is not what the common African mortals could eat . . . there were all kinds of dishes, we kept *feijoada* for example . . . to show that the table is not only the gumbo sauce. . . . The second thing too, using drinks from there, from the trade circuit: good gin, whiskey and all that, have become popular things in this environment.[61]

It is important to understand here that for a number of Africans connected to the slave trade, the "Brazilians" were perceived as civilization, progress or culture. This is a well-known practice of sociology, that of the will of the dominated to copy the social and cultural practices of the dominant, i.e., practices of social distinction. Milton Guran provided a good overview of this particular culture.[62] Among these African families, we first and foremost find those who lived in contact with the Agudas and tried to come closer to them and imitate their behavior, as Emile Ologoudou points out in this excerpt:

> Well, being a slave means that you are . . . you belong to him and that he can sell you! Oh, yeah! For those who are dependents and who are in fact admirers of the de Souza for the civilization that it brings, to be white of course, especially on the commercial and economic level, we recognized a dependency . . . which is much more cultural than anything else.[63]

The most fascinating part of this passage is the *in fact* when Emile Ologoudou says that de Souza's dependents persons are their admirers for the civilization that Afro Brazilians brought with them.We also find the statement already underlined above in this article that the difference between "slave" and "dependent" comes from the idea that the slave could be sold, unlike the dependent, indicating a less powerful relationship of domination. It is worth noticing that in this sentence Emile links trade activity and economy to progress. For example, he regularly insists on the figure of his grandfather Abatan as being always in search of customers and people having the means to offer his services, as a religious entrepreneur of his time.

The second community sought for a matrimonial alliance, if one could not have direct access to Whites, were the mixed race. This issue, the attraction of the White, or dominant, culture, had been brought to light by Ann Laura

Stoler. In particular when she stressed the "danger of metissage" for Whites and the attraction that these metis on the colonized people.[64] As Emile says:

> Yes, the miscegenation was . . . well, the race-mixed was quite . . . very prize-winning! That is to say, if you were not a White man, if you were a half-cast, but it is obvious that you had the key to superiority! Of course, of course! People were looking for you, the girls on that side were saying "I can at least take advantage of it," color, stuff like that.[65]

The "Brazilian community" is not the only one to benefit from this prestige of distinction from the African populations of the coast. The Mina, because of their history closely linking them to the Atlantic slave trade, are endowed with similar qualities.[66] To quote Emile: "Mina women are sought after for their clothing, jewelry and perfumes."

Finally, apart from these racial and cultural considerations, which are a pure product of the slave trade, another social group was particularly targeted as a "good marriage," this is the local African elite. At the beginning of the twentieth century, many positions within the French administration were only accessible for an indigenous elite. For a family like Ologoudou's, whose third and fourth generations would settle in the civil service and the resulting social prestige, marrying these first indigenous elites inserted within the colonial administration was also a form of distinction.

This "marrying well," to quote Kristin Mann, was common to several African communities educated in the West.[67] As elitist practices, these marriages reveal strategies of social demarcation and the search for success. As Stoler points out, they are at the same time involved in exploding the oversimplified colonial categories between colonists and colonized, putting the emphasis on the middle ground.

When looking at the Ologoudou genealogy, one can see that Abatan, Emile's grandfather, married at least two women (those are the ones Emile had retained, but there seems to be a third one). The first one, Emile's grandmother is Ayiye, who was an Ijesha slave placed in a Fon de Ouidah family.[68] The second wife is Assogba Ayiton, (Assogba is autochthone family of Ouidah).

These marriages are not particularly socially extraordinary: a slave and a daughter from a local family, which was common practice. But Emile's father's generation successfully integrated into this social distinction through marriage and seemed to perfectly transform the economic capital that Abatan had conquered into a social capital that propelled this family into the indigenous elite of the time.

Emile's father had three wives. Emile's mother was the daughter of Badou, the Canton Chief of Lonkli, in the municipality of Aplahoué. A Canton

Chief, who was directly under the supervision of the Circle Commander and who was responsible for a township (or village group), had a position of strong responsibility under French colonialism, as the township had become a "guarded hunt" for the chiefs and sons of local traditional chiefs. André, Emile's father, had two other wives. One was a Johnson daughter, a great Anecho family born from an English merchant from the time of the slave trade, who trained as a midwife in Dakar. The other one was a half-cast, daughter of a French white doctor and Togolese mother. These three marriages show an undeniable social and economic prestige. Two metis women or women assimilated to mixed race, at least one of whom has been educated at the highest level and a daughter of a canton chief (one of the highest administrative ranks that can be reached for an African under colonialism).

Emile's three aunts, on his father's side, are socially successful too. One is a d'Almeida from Anecho linked to the Mina ethnicity (which combines the double prestige of Afro-Brazilian ascendance and Mina ethnicity).[69] The second a rich merchant from Niamey (the prestige of the social class) and the third, Kodo, a local train station chief (another high administrative function for an indigenous during the colonial era).

Whereas the second generation, the grandfather's generation, had practiced a certain social and cultural endogamy, the third generation, the father of Emile's father, contracted three marriages with men and women from the Afro-Brazilian (or assimilated) community, two marriages with the indigenous administrative elite and one with an apparently rich merchant. In this case, there are six "fruitful" marriages out of the six that Emile Ologoudou remembers. It's a perfect score, but one mustn't doubt that there is certainly a process of remembering and selecting the "relevant cases" carried out more or less consciously by Emile Ologoudou. One can see this selection of marriages when he presents his family as a demonstration, even if unconsciously, of the importance that they have taken in the "family career" of the Ologoudou and to what extent they are relevant for social distinction.

Limits of Autobiographies and Conclusion

The sociological analysis of a single family case, based on the narratives of a single person, has important epistemological limitations that should not be overlooked. French sociology and history, with the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Paul Veyne, have already shown almost three decades ago, that life stories and autobiographies had to be analyzed with caution.

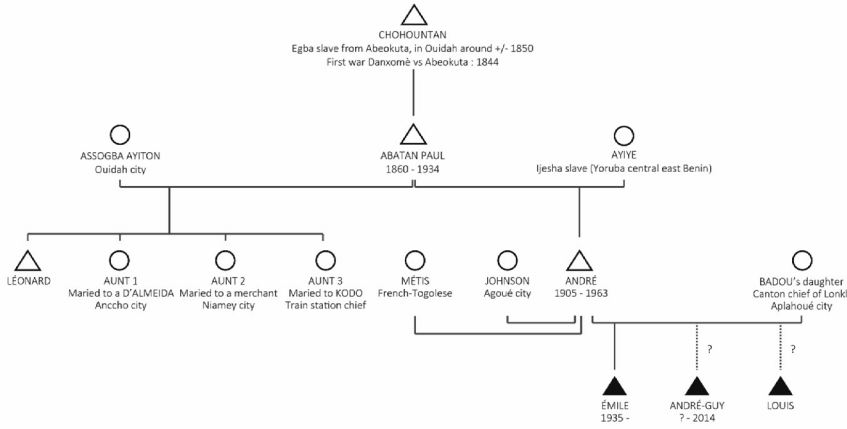
According to Bourdieu, would only the scientist give an objective meaning to the social trajectories of individuals? This may be an exaggeration, but it does not mean, however, that Bourdieu was not right to remind social

scientists of a fundamental fact in qualitative research: individuals, when they are led to produce life stories, select and organize events, rebuild their lives or their past. With Emile Ologoudou, this is particularly true when he considers that the peasants of former Dahomey, or present-day Benin, are getting out of their social situation massively thanks to school. He generalizes his own life and his own social trajectories to others. We have seen that the Ologoudou family's historical trajectory passes through a strong "entrepreneurial" process, whether it is the temple-school of his great-grandfather or the family's investment in a school career. Each generation has taken a path to try to reach the top of the social hierarchy. Emile Ologoudou is no exception and this is obviously reflected when he says that his grandmother had "conquered his freedom".

The case of the ologoudou is both singular and unique, and at the same time it illustrates practices common to many individuals of that era. We know that Brazilian families established on the African shore did not try to assimilate their slaves the way African families did. For the slaves, it is easier to gain independence in this situation. And the fact of not being a slave working in a field, but rather a slave considered in a perennial urban center of the time, also facilitated the Ologoudou's' seizure of autonomy. Their situation is very different, and indeed a minority, compared to the many slaves in rural areas that were placed with Fon families. The Ologoudou are not a representative sample of the whole slavery system in West Africa. They are not the norm among descendants of slaves. But does this mean, however, that one cannot learn from it? Studying a social situation from the margins, not from the norm or center, can help to understand its limits and therefore, ultimately, what is inside.

If we consider with attention what Emile Ologoudou tells us and place it in his own context and that of his forebears, we can see the possibilities that some slaves could had to get out of their living conditions, and also the room for maneuver that could be theirs.

One fundamental thing that the example of the Ologoudou family shows is the freedom of action that slaves could have, while being forced into a social situation that severely limited their possibilities of action. The Yoruba diviners can be compared to the intellectuals of their time and their time, they were the holders of knowledge. This figure of the intellectual is found in every generation among the Ologoudou. We must also highlight the entrepreneurial aspect of this social evolution. There has been a constant willingness on the part of Ologoudou individuals to surpass themselves, or to progress. Chohountan Ologoudou was not content to be just one of the Fa's soothsayers: he created a school and became so famous that the Ologoudou name is still in the local religion memory. His son settled then



Agoué, the most economically dynamic city in the region. Its ability to build economic capital was undoubtedly a determining factor for the generations that followed. André, even though his school career was partly prevented by his mother Ayiyé, made sure that he reached the highest level of the civil service. And we saw in this paper Emile's career. This demonstrates the ability of social agents to make choices, even as slaves in a slave society and then colonial. Of course, these choices are constrained and partly socially determined, if Chohountan Ologoudou had been a simple peasant, the story would most likely have been different. But they are indicative of the ability of these slaves and their descendants to try to find their path within the social rules of their time.

This article also discusses the difficulty of characterizing domestic slavery in Africa. When did Emile's forefathers stop being considered as such? In his article published in Gradhiva, Emile explains that when his father André joined the Victor Ballot school in 1925, several of his "well-meaning" friends suggested that he sign De Souza (their master's name) because at that time the name De Souza was "still likely to open many doors." And André had refused, all indications are that he was no longer considered a slave either. Was Emile's grandfather still a grandfather? Between the grandfather and the father, there are two events to consider. First of all, the fact that there is a generation in between, nothing says that the status of slave had passed from great-grandfather to grandfather. Then, of course, there is French colonization which, although it has never totally abolished slavery despite its claims, has nevertheless broken the dynamic. But we know that the official end of slavery does not mean the end of coercive relations and domination.[70] What the history of the Ologoudou and their ambiguous relationship with Afro-Brazilians and the West in general reveals is that some former slaves

have kept a bond of admiration towards their former masters (Emile speaks of it as "representatives of civilization") that recalls a form of symbolic and cultural domination.

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Notes

1. Emile Ologoudou, 11 December 2015. All translations from interviews are mine. In these translations, I tried to stay as close as possible to the original "local French oral style."

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

3. See Patrick Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640–1960* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

4. I use the term "domestic slave" to speak of internal slaves in Africa, the slaves used locally. There is a debate about the limits and problems of characterizing Africa as a "domestic" for internal slavery, but this article may not be the place to go back on it. Nevertheless, Goody's criticism of the term "domestic" or "household" is perfectly correct. He argues that the work of these slaves went far beyond the family or domestic sphere. See Jack Goody, "Slavery in Time and Space," in *Asian and African System of Slavery*, ed. James L. Watson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 28.

5. Martin A. Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3.

6. Paul E. Lovejoy, "Miller's Vision of Meillassoux," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 24, no. 1 (1991), 143.

7. Robin Law, *Ouidah*: 212 and following.

8. Forbes Frederick E., *Dahomey and the Dahomeans: Being the Journals of Two Missions to the King of Dahomey, and Residence at his Capital in the Years 1849 and 1850* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1851), vol.1, 113. The five merchants cited are still perfectly identifiable, despite the spelling of Forbes. These are Adjovi, Gnahoui and Quenum. The two names he claims to have forgotten are found in the list of "dignitaries" addressed to the king he draws up at the end, namely Codjia and Hodonou (Robin Law, *Ouidah*, 202). This is important to emphasize because these families are still very much alive today. By example, it is in the main branches of the Adjovi, Quenum and Hodonou families that some of the mayors and prefects in recent years have been elected (by example, see the political career

of Sévérin Adjovi, who was the mayor of Ouidah until 2017). It has to be underlines that both Adjovi and Quenum are claimed by De Souza's family to be their former slaves (Robin Law, *Ouidah*, 176).

9. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, "De la traite des esclaves à l'exportation de l'huile de palme et des palmistes au Dahomey : XIXe siècle," in *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa*, ed. Claude Meillassoux (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 107.

10. Isaac A. Akinjogbin, *Dahomey and its Neighbours 1708–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); C. W. Newbury, *The Western Slave Coast and its Rulers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961); Bernard Schnapper, *La Politique et le Commerce Français dans le Golf de Guinée de 1838 à 1871* (Paris: La Haye Mouton, 1961); Patrick Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Karl Polanyi, *Dahomey and the Slave Trade. An Analysis of an Archaic Economy* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1966).

11. Maximilien Quenum, *Au pays des Fons: Us et coutumes du Dahomey* (Paris: Larose, 1938).

12. For example, Schnapper pointed out this kind of problem. He opposed the claims of Maximilien Quenum, who wrote that his ancestor Houenou had allowed the signing of a major economic agreement between King Guézo, the French administration and the Régis trading house in 1843. Schnapper, *La Politique et le Commerce Français dans le Golfe de Guinée de 1838 à 1871:* 166.

13. Jan Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

14. Joël Noret, "Mémoire de l'Esclavage et Capital Religieux. Les Pérégrinations du Culte Egun dans la Région d'Abomey," *Gradhiva*, no. 8 (2008): 51

15. South Benin is a place that Robin Law has described as "multi-ethnic". Following the military conquests of the Kingdom of Abomey and the effect of the slave trade brought people from many parts of West Africa but also from elsewhere, as shown by the so-called "Afro-Brazilian" community, also known locally as the Agudas. See Law Robin, "Ouidah as a Multiethnic Comunity," in *The Black Urban Atlantic in the Age of the Slave Trade*, eds. Jorge Cañizarez-Esguerra, Matt D. Childs, James Sidbury (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 42–62.

16. Kadya Tall wrote an article on this subject, in which there is also a reference to Emile Ologoudou. Emmanuelle Kadya Tall "Guerre de succession et concurrence mémorielle à Ouidah, ancien comptoir de la traite," *Politique africaine* 115, no. 3 (2009): 155–173.

17. Pierre Bourdieu, "L'Illusion Biographique," *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 62, no 1 (1986): 71.

18. Bourdieu, "L'Illusion Biographique," 69.

19. This argument is a "light" version of the one that the French sociologist, and former student of Bourdieu, Nathalie Heinich produced a virulent critique of this text. See Nathalie Heinich, "Pour en Finir avec l' 'Illusion Biographique'," *L'Homme. Revue Française d'Anthropologie*, no 195–196 (2010): 421–30.

20. Paul Veyne, *Writing History; Essay on Epistemology* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 42–43.

21. Veyne, *Writing History*, 41.

22. There is a lot of publications about Franciso Felix de Souza but one of the most complete summary of his life is the one of Law, *Ouidah,* 165–179.

23. On the integration of slaves among kinship in Ouidah, see Joël Noret, "La Mise en Scène du Retour des Défunts. Les Masques Egun à Ouidah," in *La Dynamique des Masques en Afrique Occidentale*, eds A. M. Bouttiaux (Tervuren: Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, 2013), 197.

24. *Ponant* is an old french word for "west" or "sunset". This idea of "prisonner of the West" will be important a few pages after, especially when the ambivalent appeal of the Ologoudou family to Western culture will be discussed. The two poetry collection are: Émile Ologoudou, *Éloge d'un Royaume Ephémère: (suivi de) Les Derniers jours de Mikem* (Paris: Silex, 1983); Émile Ologoudou, *Prisonniers du Ponant* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986).

25. Émile Ologoudou, "Les Fondements Economiques de l'État: La stratification et les Classes Sociales en Afrique Indépendante," *Présence Africaine*, no. 127–128 (1983), 215–239; Émile-Désiré Ologoudou, "Tours et Détours des Mémoires Familiales à Ouidah," *Gradhiva*, no. 8 (2008), 80–86.

26. Manning, *Slavery and African Life*, 12.

27. Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in slavery. A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 (1983)). Manning points out that in the nineteenth century, apart from the abolition and fall in the price of slaves, the sex ratio of domestic slaves, until then in favour of women, tended to level the playing field between men and women. The time when Chohountan Ologoudou was held in Ouidah was also the time when more and more men were held in slavery in Benin. Manning, *Slavery and African Life*: 49, 142–148.

28. *Bokonon* is the name of the Fa priest in fongbe language, in Yoruba, their are name *babalawo*. Although the Ologoudou are of Yoruba origin, the influence of the dominant Fon culture in the region is such that many Yoruba use the fongbe word *bokonon* when speaking in French. That's the reason why I wanted to keep the word *bokonon* in Emile Ologoudou's original interview.

29. Emile Ologoudou, 12 December 2015.

30. Manning, *Slavery and African Life*, 41–47.

31. Milton Guran, "Du Bricolage de la Mémoire à la Construction de l'Identité Sociale: Les Agoudas du Bénin," *Rue Descartes* 58, no 4 (2007): 73–74.

32. A great example is provided for the Yoruba world by J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), especially pages 65 to 71.

33. Bernard Maupoil, *La Géomancie à l'Ancienne Côte des Esclaves*, Institut d'Ethnologie (Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, 1943).

34. Joël Noret, " Mémoire de l'Esclavage et Capital Religieux. Les Pérégrinations du Culte Egun dans la Région d'Abomey."

35. Robin Law gives some examples of others Yoruba diviners and skilled slaves. Robin Law, *Ouidah*, 187–188.

36. Émile-Désiré Ologoudou, "Tours et Détours des Mémoires Familiales à Ouidah," 84.

37. This general remark must be moderate on at least one point: the distance that could exist between a master and his field, which sometimes also determined the "distance of domination" that the master could exercise. A few surveys carried out in the deep west of Benin, close to the border with Togo, in families of descendants of slaves and who were in charge of taking care of the fields of princely families from Abomey showed me that the too great distance prevented a strict control of the masters over the actions of their slaves.

38. This "Afro-Brasilian" community is locally called "Aguda." For more information, see the work of Milton Guran, especially Milton Guran, *Agoudas: Les « Brésiliens » du Benin* (Paris: La Dispute, 2010).

39. According to Emile Ologoudou, there is no connection between them. But it is very likely that these two families of diverse origin, but belonging to the Yoruba cultural group, were what is call *wanonakpaché* in the fongbe language. This word literally means "come and stand beside me". It designates a social relationship that is neither slavery nor serfdom, but which implies a hierarchy between the *wanonakpatché* and the family to which he comes to settle (the classic example is that of a person who does not own land and occupies that of a neighbor). It is a relationship that can last for generations. It involves rights and above all duties. The house bear the name of "Villa Ologoudou" above the door, which symbolizes the real owners of the place. During my interviews in the house, the people present explained to me that "it's always been like this" and that they had given the name of Ologoudou at home because "the Ologoudou had been to school." But it seems that the name Ologoudou was already present at the time of Abatan, before the family's school investment.

40. This relocation is likely to follow the death of Francisco de Souza on 8 May 1849. If this assumption is correct, it could mean that Chohountan Ologoudou arrived right after Abomey's first war against the Egba of Abeokuta in 1844. At that time he would have entered the service of Francisco de Souza. He then passing under the patronage of Francesca de Souza when Francisco died, and the move from one district to another would be a symbol of this passage from one master to another.

41. Emile Ologoudou, 23 January 2016.

42. Alain Testart, "L'esclavage comme institution," *L'Homme*, n° 145 (1998): 31–69.

43. Robin Law, "Commémoration de la Traite Atlantique à Ouidah," *Gradhiva*, n° 8 (2008): 10–27.

44. Robin Law, "Commémoration de la Traite Atlantique à Ouidah," 21.

45. A good example of this ambiguity is provided by the colonial administrator Le Hérissé, who wrote a history of Dahomey in 1911. It states: "*We have seen that the slave had no rights over his children. These belonged to the master, it does not follow that they remained slaves. Far from it: they became Dahomeans, members of the master's family*" (my translation). Dominance is still obvious, they may no longer be slaves, it's difficult to be sure, but they still depend on the master. The Hérissé then adds

at the bottom of the page:*"We should not take in too strict a sense this term 'member of the master's family'."* The reason, Le Hérissé noticed, is because the children of slaves were separated from the family and paternal inheritance. As I pointed out in the article, this is still the case today. Auguste Le Hérissé, *L'Ancien Royaume du Dahomey, Moeurs, Religion, Histoire* (Paris: E. Larose, 1911), 55.

46. In one of his articles, he shows that we can talk about the transformation of slavery into serfdom: Roger Botte, "Stigmates Sociaux et Discriminations Religieuses: l'Ancienne Classe Servile au Fuuta Jaloo," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 34, no 133 (1994): 109–36. The difficult abolition of slavery and its slow transformations have also been the subject of several publications by Paul Lovejoy, I am thinking mainly of the next two works: Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in slavery. A history of Slavery in Africa*; Paul E. Lovejoy et Jan S. Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery: the Course of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897–1936* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

47. About the important merchant community in Agoué at the time of Chohountan, see Luis Nicolau Parès, "Afro-Catholic Baptism and The Articluation of a Merchant Community, Agoué 1840–1860," *History in Africa* 42 (2015): 165–201.

48. Reynier, "Ouidah: Organisation du Commandement. Eléments sur la Réorganisation du Commandement Indigène a Ouidah [1917]," in *Mémoire du Bénin (Matériaux d'Histoire) n° 2* (Cotonou: Les Editions du Flamboyant, 1993), 57.

49. Emile Ologoudou, 23 January 2016.

50. John D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Blooomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 63–71.

51. This figure of "religious entrepreneur" in Africa at the turn of colonialism is quite well documented. For example on Ghana, see John McCaskie, "Sakrobundi ne Aberewa: Sie Kwaku the Witch-finder in the Akan World," *Journal des Africanistes* 75 no. 1 (2005): 163–167. As described by Noret, Ouidah at the same time, or a little later, was invested by wearers of the Egun-type Yoruba mask, which could also be called religious entrepreneurs. Joël Noret, "La mise en scène du retour des défunts. Les masques egun à Ouidah".

52. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 125.

53. In french: École Primaire Supérieure (EPS).

54. Luc Garcia, "L'Organisation de l'Instruction Publique au Dahomey, 1894–1920," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 11, no 41 (1971): 74.

55. Luc Garcia, *Le Royaume du Dahomé: Face à la Pénétration Coloniale: Affrontements et Incompréhension, 1875–1894* (Paris: Karthala, 1988).

56. Bénédicte Brunet-La Ruche, "Crime et Châtiment aux Colonies: Poursuivre, Juger et Sanctionner au Dahomey de 1894 à 1945" (PhD diss., Université Toulouse 2 Le Mirail (UT2 Le Mirail), 2013), 205.

57. To illustrate this social reproduction of the Beninese elites that history links to the Atlantic slave trade, let us look at the current political elites. Sévérin Adjovi, after having been notably Minister of Defence and an unfortunate candidate in the presidential elections of 1991 and 2006, was for a long time the mayor of Ouidah

until 2017. In 2015, Epiphane Quenum, a former Member of Parliament, was the prefect of the Littoral Department's region, that of the city of Ouidah. In 2016, he was replaced by Jean-Claude Codjia. These three names, Adjovi, Quenum and Codjia, are among the five names mentioned by Forbes in 1849 in his work, as mentioned in the introduction to this article.

58. Emile Ologoudou, 05 December 2015.

59. Emile Ologoudou, 13 février 2016.

60. Unfortunately, I do not currently have reliable informations about the mothers of Emile's brothers.

61. Emile Ologoudou, 05 December 2015.

62. "Among the most remarkable aspects of the cultural contribution of the agoudas are the following: the mononuclear patriarchal family and the use of patronymic; Catholicism and feasts religious communities such as Nosso Senhor do Bonfim and St. Paul's. Cosme and St. John' s Damien; new farming techniques and new eating habits, such as cassava, the feijoada, la concada, etc.; the use of cutlery and other utensils in daily life; construction techniques and a new style of architecture; and occupancy of domestic space; agricultural techniques, carpentry, joinery and cabinet making, etc. The Portuguese language has been so widely spoken on the coast that the Mission's school Catholic of Lyon, established in Ouidah in 1862, already used it in his courses. Only "Brazilians" children had the right to go there, the King of Dahomey had forbidden it for his subjects. This practice was, of course, abolished soon after by the French colonial administration. However, this did not prevent many Portuguese words from entering permanently in use in the languages of the region" Guran,"Du bricolage de la mémoire à la construction de l'identité sociale.", 72 (the translation is mine).

63. Emile Ologoudou, 12 December 2015.

64. Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power. Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, (Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2002).

65. Emile Ologoudou, 13 February 2016.

66. The Mina, initially used as crew to assist the western merchants, who became canoemen, traders, . . . and originally from El Mina on the Gold Coast, settled everywhere on the West African coast, notably in Anecho (Togo) and Agoué (Benin). See Robin Law, "Ethnicities of Enslaved Africans in the Diaspora: on the Meanings of 'Mina'(Again)," *History in Africa* 32 (2005): 247–267.

67. Kristin Mann, *Marrying Well. Marriage, Status and Social Change among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

68. *Ìjèṣà* in Yoruba orthography.

69. To understand this double belonging, it is necessary to know that the D'Almeida of the Beninese and Togolese coasts, although sharing the same name and having the same family community, have three different origins. The family legend claims that three slaves (a Yoruba, a Mina and a Mahi) protected their Brazilian master during the Males uprising (1835) and were freed to thank them. They would have returned to the African coasts of Africa with the same name as their former masters. The family situation is actually more complex than that, but I do not have the

opportunity to discuss details in this article. For more information about D'Almeida, see Olabiyi Balola Yai, "Les 'Agudas': Afro-Brésiliens du Golfe du Bénin," *Lusotopie* (1997), 275–84; Edouard Leslie D'Almeida, "Les Familles d'Almeida du Golfe du Bénin" (MA diss., Paris: Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes–Sorbonne, s. d.); Pierre Verger, "Influence du Brésil au Golfe du Bénin," in *Les Afro-Américains*, Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire 27 (Dakar: IFAN, 1952).

70. See for exemple Roger Botte, "Stigmates sociaux et discriminations religieuses: l'ancienne classe servile au Fuuta Jaloo," *Cahiers d'Études africaines*, 34 n° 133 (1994): 109–136; Paul Lovejoy and Jan Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery: The Course of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897–1936* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1993).