CONTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN BURKINA FASO: LESSONS FROM HISTORY

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Masters of Arts

By
Janet Claire Sherry Smith
August 2018

ABSTRACT

Since 2010, transnational banks such as the Islamic Development Bank, and governments including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United States and Burkina Faso have begun to promote Islamic education reform programs in Burkina Faso. These institutions agree on the need to create a singular national curriculum and increase governmental regulation of Islamic schools. The rationales for the necessity of this education reform vary from an emphasis on government support for private schools to an assumption that Islamic extremism emerges because of a deleterious Islamic education and misteachings of the Quran. This effort to reform Islamic schools by standardizing the curriculum and increasing government regulation of the education system is based on the assumptions that standardization is possible and Islamic practices and beliefs in Burkina Faso are narrowly divided by fundamental extremists against liberal moderates. In this paper, I seek to challenge these assumptions by offering a history of the Communauté Musulmane de Haute Volta. In 1962, the Communauté became the Upper Volta's first formal Islamic organization. On the occasion of the first General Assembly, the Communauté's leaders declared that Muslims within the newly independent nation were united. However, over the succeeding decade, disputes within the organization over religious teachings and practices revealed a divergence of views on the 'correct' forms of Islam despite a shared political interest in safeguarding Islam from the secular state. The Communauté's efforts failed because of their struggles to codify Islam in creating a national curriculum. I use this case to argue for caution on the part of those who would seek to promote a national Franco-Arab education as a forum through which to deliver religious teachings. I suggest that this rational-technocratic project might learn from the long history of the plural and dynamic nature of Islam in Burkina Faso and the fate of the Communauté.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Janet has worked in West Africa for more than five years as a Peace Corps volunteer, aid worker, and researcher attaining advanced language proficiencies in French and Bambara. She is a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow and has received funding from the Social Science Research Council and Einaudi Center to conduct her Masters and pre-dissertation research on Franco-Arab educational institutions in Burkina Faso.

While living in the home of a Islamic teacher and local leader in Mali, Janet became interested in how local Islamic networks provided social services such as food, employment and basic infrastructures to community members. This experience shaped her broad interests in Islamic humanitarianism, globalization, and economic development.

Janet's research focuses on ethnographic investigations into the actual practices of the Islamic Finance and Banking industry in the emerging hub of Dakar, Senegal. Drawing from critical development studies, social studies of finance and global Islam studies, she aims to explore how the industry is building on and reshaping existing ideals of money, economic development and religion in Dakar.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all of my interlocutors, informants, friends and host family in Burkina Faso. Without their insight, encouragement and assistance this research would not have been possible. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Professor Lori Leonard and Professor Parfait Eloundou-Enyegue for their patient guidance, encouragement and valuable critiques of this research work. I am forever grateful for their passionate advising and extensive readings of my work.

Finally, I extend my deepest gratitude to my parents, friends and family for their everlasting support of my travels and work in Senegal, Mali and Burkina Faso. My trips to the region were enjoyable because of their encouragement and endless interest in my research and work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Since 2010, the government of Burkina Faso has begun to promote Islamic education reform programs in the country, with the purpose of creating a singular national curriculum and increasing governmental regulation of Islamic schools. The rationales for this reform vary from equity in public subsidization to political control: specifically, an emphasis on government support for private schools to an assumption that Islamic extremism emerges because of a deleterious Islamic education and misteachings of the Quran. This effort to reform Islamic schools by standardizing the curriculum and increasing government regulation of the education system assumes that standardization is possible and that Islamic practices and beliefs in Burkina Faso are narrowly divided by fundamental extremists against liberal moderates.

Many of these reforms are enacted under a vast program, the "Project d'Appui à l'Enseignement Primaire Bilingue Franco-Arabe" (PREFA). PREFA is an $18 million-dollar, four-year project funded by the Islamic Development Bank and implemented by the Burkinabe government aiming to standardize the nation's Franco-Arab education with a unified curriculum and government regulation of these schools. PREFA is the Burkinabe government's first attempt to partner with the country's Franco-Arab schools, privately funded institutions that teach the national French curriculum as well as Arabic and provide a religious education. However, this is not the first effort to unify the country's Islamic schools, as the nation's first Islamic association, the "Communauté Musulmane", similarly but unsuccessfully attempted to do so fifty years before. The question being raised in this research is about the prospects of PREFA against the background of earlier reforms: What lessons about the prospects for successful educational reform of Islamic schooling can be drawn from the earlier experiences of the Communauté?

In exploring these questions, this paper seeks to add to the critical empirical literature on faith-based organizations and educational institutions[1] for failing to analyze religion as dynamic and changing in relation to national development. Through a case study of the shifting visions for Islamic education in Burkina Faso, I demonstrate how religious practices and national educational objectives shift in relation to each other and offer insight into the lessons that scholars and development practitioners may learn from this sort of critical analysis. I explain that Islamic educational reform was a national priority in Burkina Faso prior to the government efforts under PREFA. These previous reforms led by the Communauté were never realized for a variety of reasons ranging from profound differences in settlement history, resources and political objectives, and religious practices that ultimately led to the splintering of the Communauté. While the context of Burkina Faso has changed, I propose that from the history of the Communauté, PREFA's administrators and proponents are warned of the difficulties in using education reform as a forum through which to prescribe religious teachings.

To make this case, I begin with a brief description of current reforms and their logic. I follow with a detailed account of the Communauté, the largest and longest-lasting attempt at reforming Islamic education in the country. The presentation of this experience is organized to highlight the historical background under which it emerged but also some of the key obstacles to

[1] Séverine Deneulin and Carole Rakodi. "Revisiting Religion: Development Studies Thirty Years On," World Development 39, no. 1 (2011): 45–54.
Sabrine Alkire, "Religion and development", in DA Clark (ed), Elgar Companion to Development Studies, (Massachusetts: Edward Elgar, 2006). 508.

its success. I conclude with a summary of main impediments to Communauté 's success and lessons for the PREFA reforms. Through the case study of the Communauté, I also offer suggestions for what improvement programs engaging with faith-based organizations and educational infrastructures as well as academic scholars exploring the nexus of religion and development may learn from this case study.

General Background

Education is fundamental to the improvement of individual and social well-being[2] with education of the poor expected to alleviate economic inequality and help poor people improve their socio-economic status.[3] At their core, educational and religious instutions are assumed to operate in different spheres; the first is expected to focus instrumentally on imparting skills and the opportunity to level the playing field by helping the poor improve their socioeconomic status while the latter is about spiritual growth. However, both institutions are in fact multifunctional and they have found themselves deeply intertwined throughout history including in Africa's recent history. The effects of religion on development in the area of education attracted the attention of scholars and development practitioners following the Millennial Development Goals 'Education for All' initiative which made primary education a universal priority.[4] Countries with minimal resources, such as Burkina Faso, scrambled to build their capacity in order to offer this education and acknowledged the importance of religious educational structures that were previously considered informal thus omitted during national censuses. UNESCO, the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), USAID, UNICEF created new models that combine religious elements with basic educational skills of reading, writing and math.[5]

Once private religious education became significant to national education, international development agencies such as the World Bank and private research institutes began funding research on Islamic education. This research compared private Islamic and public secular education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Arabic was determined to be a stepping stone towards achieving universal primary education[6] and Quranic schooling was identified as a potential barrier to secular schooling.[7] Research on Islamic education in Northern Nigeria argues that these private schools remain relevant because the state has failed to deliver an education.[8] Subsequent studies explored potential methods to ease the transfer of students from Islamic schools to secular schools.[9] These studies focused on comparison rather than dynamic

---

[2] T. McCowan and E. Unterhalter, editors. *Education and International Development: An Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

[3] Lloyd Gruber and Kosack, Stephen, "The tertiary tilt: education and inequality in the developing world," *World Development* 54 (2014): 253-272.

[4] Keith Watson and William Ozanne, *Education and Religion: Global Pressures, Local Responses* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

[5] Hamidou Dia and Clothilde Hugon, "Reform States and Arab-Islamic Education in Africa: Heading towards a historic compromise?," *Afrique Contemporaine* (2016): 257.

[6] Peter Easton, "Education and Koranic Literacy in West Africa," *Indigenous Knowledge (IK) Notes* 11(1999).

[7] Pierre André and Jean-Luc Demonsant, *Koranic Schools in Senegal: A real barrier to formal education?* (Paris: Paris School of Economics, 2009).

[8] N.M. Baba, "Islamic Schools, the Ulama and the State in the educational Development of Northern Nigeria," *Bulletin de l'APAD* (2011): 33.

[9] Manos Antoninis, "Tackling the Largest Global Education Challenge? Secular and Religious Education in Northern Nigeria," *World Development* 59 (2014): 82–92.

interaction: they begin with the assumption that a public secular education offer a preferable and stable contrast to a religious education, without examining the relationship between the two systems, their internal diversity, or the historical change in the dynamics between the two.

Research on Islamic educations would benefit from debates in development studies that argue for religion and religious institutions to be understood as dynamic and heterogeneous and the need to rethink what development- or education- may mean for religious leaders and organizations. Since the 2000s, religion and faith-based organizations have been considered useful in the execution of improvement projects because they are assumed to be integrated into local communities and best positioned to provide social services, defend human rights and manage international aid.[10] In the late 1990s, the World Bank generated a 'faith and development' interface[11] and the United States government permitted the funding of non-proselytizing activities of religious organizations following George W Bush's Faith Based Initiative. The sudden donor support for social service deliveries by religious organizations was combined with a shift in academic definitions of development. Whereas development was previously measured by national economic growth, definitions became multidimensional, encompassing economic goals while sensitive to culture and religion.[12] Academic studies began to integrate the possible roles of religion in the distribution of social services.[13] This led to investigations of the potential roles of faith-based organizations in international development[14] and alternative development models imagined, supported and practiced through one's faith.[15]

This growing body of religion and development literature was criticized by Ben Jones and Marie Juul Petersen for being "instrumental, narrow and normative."[16] First, these studies assume that religion can be used as a tool in the process of distribution of social services.[17] Second, they narrowly focus on faith-based organizations, which they assume to be embedded in all communities of the same faith and able to deliver social services efficiently.[18] Finally, religion is understood as separate from mainstream development, without exploring how

---

[10] Gerard Clarke and Michael Jennings, *Development, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations* (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[11] See, for instance, Marshall & Marsh, *Millennium Challenges for Development and Faith Institutions* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2003); Marshall & Keough, *Mind, Heart and Soul in the Fight against Poverty* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2004); and Marshall, K and L. Keough, *Finding Global Balance: Common Ground Between the Worlds of Development and Faith*, (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2005).

[12] Jenny Lunn, "The Role of Religion, Spirituality and Faith in Development: a critical theory approach," *Third World Quarterly* 30, no. 5 (2009): 937-951.

[13] Gerrie ter Harr & Stephen Ellis, "The Role of Religion in Development: Towards a New Relationship between the European Union and Africa," *The European Journal of Development Research* 18, no. 3 (2007): 351-367.

[14] Gerard Clarke, "Agents of transformation? Donors, faith-based organisations and international development", *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2007): 77–96.

[15] Wendy Tyndale, "Idealism and practicality: the role of religion in development," *Development* 46, no. 4 (2003): 22–28.

[16] Ben Jones & Marie Juul Petersen, "Instrumental, Narrow, Normative? Reviewing recent work on religion and development," *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 7 (2011): 1291-1306.

[17] Gerrie ter Harr & Stephen Ellis, "The Role of Religion in Development: Towards a New Relationship between the European Union and Africa," *The European Journal of Development Research* 18, no. 3 (2007): 351-367.

[18] Gerald Clarke and M. Jennings (eds) *Development, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations: Bridging the Sacred and the Secular*, (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

religious practices are reshaped by improvement projects. Severine Deneulin and Caroline Rakodi similarly critiqued the recent literature on religion and development for failing to recognize religion as dynamic and heterogeneous.[19] Their analysis ends with a suggestion for improving this literature by starting not with the assumption that religion can be integrated into development, but instead by rethinking what development might mean for different faith groups, practices and beliefs. Sabrine Alkire suggested that the best writings on religion and development are historical and anthropological, offering a narrative of changing religious practices alongside other variables such as the economy and politics.[20] Examples of this approach include Erica Bornstein's study of Protestant NGOs in Zimbabwe;[21] Occhipinti's analysis of religious NGOs in Argentina[22] and Ben Jones's research on the role that religious institutions play in shaping social, political and economic life in rural Uganda.[23] These studies focus on the everyday practices of religious organizations to offer insight into their goals, changing organizational practices and visions of development that are based in both material and spiritual progression.

This paper seeks to contribute to this literature on religion and development by offering a case study of the Communauté Musulman's attempts to reform Islamic education in Burkina Faso. The focus of the paper on a religious association, not a faith-based organization or religious non-profit, draws attention to the role of this under-discussed actor in national development and education. Additionally, I focus on shifting Islamic practices and beliefs in Burkina Faso, examining how expressions of Islam changed alongside political change and progression in secular and Christian education. This paper joins the critique that development studies research on religion and faith-based organizations needs to analyze religion as dynamic. I build on this literature by arguing that development practioners and scholars may learn lessons for improved engagement through employing this critical and historical approach to their project plans and research.

Case Study Selection and Methodological Approach

The Communauté was selected as a case study for this paper because it was the first Islamic association in the Upper Volta and the first national attempt to create and unify Franco-Arab institutions. My interest in Islamic education originated from my previous experiences living, volunteering and working in Dialacouto, a rural village in Eastern Senegal for two years, and Koutiala, a district town in Southwestern Mali near the border with Burkina Faso. In Mali I lived in the home of a marabout, or religious teacher, for one year and became fascinated by the constant stream of individuals who would travel for days to speak to him, learn from him and be healed by his incantations. The research I present in this paper is based on empirical data collected in the course of fieldwork in Ouagadougou during the summers of 2016 and 2017.

---

[19] Séverine Deneulin and Carole Rakodi. "Revisiting Religion: Development Studies Thirty Years On," *World Development* 39, no. 1 (2011): 45–54.

[20] Sabrine Alkire, 'Religion and development', in DA Clark (ed), *Elgar Companion to Development Studies*, (Massachusetts: Edward Elgar, 2006), 508.

[21] Erica Bornstein, *The Spirit of Development: Protestant NGOs, Morality, and Economics in Zimbabwe* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

[22] Laurie A. Occhipinti, *Acting on Faith: Religious Development Organizations in Northwestern Argentina* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005).

[23] Ben Jones, *Beyond the State in Rural Uganda*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2009).

While conducting research in Burkina Faso's capital, the four years I had spent in the region shaped my daily engagements with development workers, religious leaders and students. My local language skills, fluent in Bambara, and cultural acumen facilitated access to documents and interviews.

I conducted more than forty semi-structured qualitative interviews with representatives of local and international NGOs, Islamic associations, government offices and PREFA. These interviews ranged from one to one and a half hours and were recorded and transcribed. Interviews were conducted in French, with greetings and informal discussion often in Bambara. Respondents were selected on the basis of snowball sampling, beginning with contacts at UNICEF, the United Nations and a local non-profit organization that works with Quranic schools, IQRA. These initial interviewees provided me with contacts at other organizations, all of whom were willing to be interviewed. Interviews were held at the organization's headquarters where I sat with directors, secretaries and project managers, asking about the organization's history in Burkina Faso, objectives, funding sources, ongoing activities and collaborations with external institutions. A hospital or school was attached to four offices and I was allowed to visit the services, observe ongoing activities and ask employees about patrons, daily activities and ongoing struggles. I also spent three weeks in the government office that regulates NGOs, DSONG, where annual reports and activities are reported and archived. As I read through documents and collected data on Islamic NGOs, I talked to government workers about new developments in the Burkinabe government's approach to Islamic schooling.

Archival data on the Communauté was gathered at the National Archives in Ouagadougou. Scholarly research on the Communauté and Islamic associations in Burkina Faso was collected at the University of Ouagadougou. A current Professor and acclaimed scholar of Islam in the region directed my investigation and gave me his published and unpublished papers for review. At the University, I became acquainted with numerous members of the University's Muslim student association, Association des Elèves et Etudiants Musulmans au Burkina. The student association's headquarters were located close to my residence in Ouagadougou and I would often visit informally, talking to the association's President, Secretary and other members, several of whom lived in the association's mosque that is under construction. These individuals accompanied me to interviews with local religious leaders, imams and Quranic teachers. In return, I would pay for a lunch of rice and sauce or a cold drink after our meetings. Following field work, I implemented an extensive review of existing literature on Islam and Islamic associations in the country and region. Finally, online research on national media sites, Islamic medias and social media was gathered. I use the data gathered from interviews, archival research and contemporary media to offer insight into the ongoing project, PREFA, and to propose that improvement projects engaging with religious associations, infrastructures and practices may learn from history.

PREFA

PREFA is a joint effort between the Burkinabe government and the Islamic Development Bank that is aimed at strengthening the government’s contribution to the development of Franco-Arab schools in twenty-one provinces. Running from 2015 to 2018, PREFA intends to offer an inclusive and equitable education in order to achieve the international development goal of “Education for All.” PREFA’s primary activities entail improving the quality of the education in

Franco-Arab schools by building new facilities, offering bilingual training for supervisors, and creating a standard curriculum and program for teachers with one textbook for use at all schools. Finally, a certification diploma will be given to students upon completion of their studies. PREFA will allow students to be integrated into French public schools after their Franco-Arab education and obtain formal employment without the risk of being marginalized because of their minimal French knowledge.

The reform of Quranic and Franco-Arab education was identified by the International Crisis Group as instrumental to fighting extremist ideology that recently spread across the nation's borders. A coup d'état in Mali in 2012 was attributed to extremist groups made up of ethnic Tuaregs in the country's north. These rebels demanded independence, continuing to voice discontent over their political status as the Tuareg separatist groups have staged rebellions since 1990. Kidnappings in Northern Burkina Faso and deadly attacks in the country's capital targeting hotels and restaurants frequented by foreigners led the United Nations Security Council and US State Department to label Burkina Faso as vulnerable to Islamic extremism.[24] International Crisis Group published a report in 2016 that attributed the country's instability to the geographically uneven education that is concentrated in the country's southern regions with fewer government school structures in the country's northern regions. The report states that failure to upgrade the education system, particularly in the North, will potentially result in members of the population questioning the state's involvement and investments in their lives and become engaged in rebellious activities.

The United States Embassy in Burkina Faso also argued for the need to reform Islamic educations in a report on the country's Quranic schools. A year-long study identified the education of Quranic schools to be inadequate because students do not understand Arabic, are illiterate and instruction is based on oral memorization of Arabic passages. In addition, the report deemed the teachers unfit because less than seven percent of them had formal schooling or were literate in French. The report concluded that demand for Islamic schools, both Quranic and Franco-Arab, was rapidly growing and needed to be recognized by the government with an organized curriculum and teaching program. After this report, the US government financially supported a local non-profit organization, IQRA (meaning to read in Arabic), that aims to contribute to peace and development in Burkina Faso by promoting activities in Quranic schools. IQRA primarily educates Quranic teachers to read and write in local languages using Arabic script.

International actors including the Islamic Development Bank and the International Crisis Group and foreign governments such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United States and Burkina Faso all promote Islamic education reform programs in Burkina Faso. Similar to PREFA, the national governments of Senegal, Niger, Mali and Chad are working with international organizations including UNESCO, UNICEF and the Islamic Development Bank to bridge the gap between public and Franco-Arab education and guarantee an education for all. This is the

---

[24] Associated Press. "In Burkina Faso, Living with Risk of Terror is New Reality," *VOA News* online, June 15, 2017, http://www.voanews.coma/a/burkina-faso-danger/3901663.html
Security Council Press Release. "Security Council Press Statement on Terrorist Attack in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso." United Nations, August 14, 2017. Accessed December 15, 2017. http://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12955.doc.htm

first moment that the reform of these Franco- Arab schools has received widespread international attention, yet this is not the first attempt to reform these schools in Burkina Faso. This paper argues that the history of the Communauté offers insight for PREFA of the difficulties in establishing a long lasting educational reform across the country's dynamic Islamic beliefs and practices.

The Communauté Musulmane

The Upper Volta's[25] first Islamic association, the Communauté Musulmane de Haute Volta, was set to represent the unity of all Voltaic Muslims. One of its primary goals was to restructure the country's Islamic schools. Prior to independence from France, the only Islamic schools in the region were Quranic institutions. These schools are generally described as the lowest level of learning in Islamic educations because their pedagogy is based on oral memorization of Arabic passages from the Quran with minimal education in the Arabic language. The Communauté envisioned the creation of new Franco-Arab schools with a national curriculum to be regulated by the Communaute and an education in French, Arabic, and the Quran. Within ten years of existence, the Communaute splintered as an organization and a unified network of reformed Islamic schools were never created.

However, Franco-Arab schools were independently established by communities and the number of Islamic school structures, both Quranic and Franco-Arab schools, continued to grow, particularly since the 1980s.[26] Franco-Arab schools have differing definitions throughout francophone Africa. For the context of Burkina Faso, I define them as bilingual institutions that teach both French and Arabic and offer an education that is similar to the state school program in addition to an Arabic education and teaching of the Quran. The majority of Franco-Arab schools have been built since the 1980s by NGOs, such as Direct Aid, Qatar Charity, and Fatawa Islamique el Hairia. These organizations rely on funding from Middle Eastern donors. Almost 2,400 Quranic and Franco-Arab schools opened since 2000. Currently, sixty-six percent of private schools in Burkina Faso are Franco-Arab schools.[27]

History of Islam in the Voltaic Region

At the first national Assembly of the Communauté, the division of the association into three distinctive religious sects became apparent. These groups were called the Subbanu, Tijaniyya and early Sufi converts. The majority of Muslims at independence associated with the latter category, blending local traditions with religious practices outlined in the Quran. The Subbanu sought to purify Islam in the Upper Volta of these local practices they call unlawful such as the consumption of alcohol, the deification or worship of anything or anyone other than Allah, and rituals that are not laid out in the Quran. The Tijaniyya believe that there are prophets after Muhammed and worship these individuals and their descendants. This along with teaching litanies to be repeated twelve times, instead of eleven, are fundamental differences in religious practices between the Tijaniyya and the rest of the Communauté. The following section offers a history of Islam's formation in the Upper Volta up to the establishment of the Communauté. This history demonstrates how multiple sects developed unevenly throughout the country, with the

[25]Prior to 1984, Burkina Faso was called the Upper Volta

[26]Holger Weiss, *Social Welfare in Muslim Societies in Africa*, (Stockholm: Nordic Africa Institute, 2002).

[27]"PREFA," *Ministère de l'Education Nationale et de l'Alphabétisation* online. Last modified August 27, 2015. http://www.mena.gov.bf/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=396&Itemid=1073#

first converts to Sufi Islam in the Southwest since 1200 A.D and the Tijaniyya concentrated in the North, gathering a following during French colonial rule. The Subbanu emerged last in urban areas, appealing to the elite Mossi (the nation's ethic majority) in the 1950s. This history demonstrates the dynamism of Islam in the region that persists today.

The first Muslim converts in the Volta Basin were concentrated in the South-Western region of present day Burkina Faso and were members of the Mande-Dyula ethnic group. The Dyula were (and are today) known throughout West Africa as regional traders. During 1200 A.D., Dyula traveled from North Africa to forested, gold and kola rich communities south of the Sahelian desert into present day Cote d'Ivoire.[28] Bobo-Dioullasso became home to the first Muslim community in the Volta basin because of its position as a major trade center along the 50-day journey from Djenne in Northern Mali to southern communities.[29] Welcomed by the local Senufo population, the Dyula married into local communities, built a mosque and Quranic schools.[30] Local ethnic groups, the Fulbe, Gourma and Senefou, gradually converted to Islam as the economic influence of the Dyula spread and they built permanent settlements throughout the region. This group of Muslims are termed 'early converts' and are considered to practice a flexible version of Islam that mixes animist practices along with Sufi Islam.[31]

Religious sects that emerged in the early 1900s differentiated themselves from these early converts who they argued practice a less pure version of Islam because of their continued use of animist rituals along with Islamic practices and because they drink alcohol and consume pork, activities that are listed as haram or illegal in the Quran. Most of the country's ethnic majority, the Mossi, did not convert to Islam until the 20th century and had different beliefs about the practice of Islam. The Mossi Kingdom functioned as a unified network of kingdoms and encompassed the majority of the population and territory of what became the Upper Volta. Mossi leaders were initially resistant to engagement with Islam and Muslim Dyula traders whom they feared to be political rivals, refusing to allow them settlements within the Mossi kingdom until 1650 in Ouagadougou.[32] Hoping that a Dyula settlement would facilitate their engagement in the gold trade, the Mossi leaders allowed for the construction of the first mosque next to what continues to be the capital's main market. Trade opportunities as well as the ability of Muslim religious leaders, or Imams, to read and write using Arabic script instigated their acceptance into the Mossi court where they served as advisors to the kingdom. Between the 1600s and early 1900s, an increased number of the royal court and prominent traders converted to Islam,[33] reciting Quranic verses while continuing animist practices. However, Mossi subjects outside of the elite rarely converted to Islam. The different historical moments in which the range of ethnic groups and social classes converted to Islam shape the plurality of Islam in Burkina Faso today.

---

[28]Peter B Clarke, *West Africa and Islam: A study of Religious Development from the 8th to the 20th Century*. (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd, 1982), 58.

[29]Ibid.

[30]J. Spencer Trimingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1962),143.

[31]Nehemia Levtzion, *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

[32] Peter B Clarke, *West Africa and Islam: A study of Religious Development from the 8th to the 20th Century*, (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd, 1982), 93.

[33] Ousman Murzik Kobo, *Unveiling Modernity in Twentieth-Century West African Islamic Reforms*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 59.

By 1900, less than 1 percent of the 400,000-person population of Upper Volta practiced Islam.[34] The religious beliefs and practices of Voltaic citizens who converted to Islam during colonial rule were shaped by the political context during which they became Muslim. French colonists traveled from Afrique Occidentale Francaise (AOF) headquarters in Dakar to the Upper Volta, composing reports on the status of Islam in the region. These reports were based on preconceived notions of an Islamic identity and culture after interactions with Muslims in Senegal. In 1892 Lieutenant Monnier reported that Islam was a religion of 'convenience' in the Upper Volta because self-identified Muslims continued to drink local alcohol and perform animistic rituals.[35] The Lieutenant-General for Muslim Affairs in Dakar from 1912-1921, Paul Marty, visited the Upper Volta during his term. He wrote reports that confirmed and continued prior generalizations of Islam in the region made by Governor General William Ponty. His report stated that "indigenous pre-Islamic customs and traditions were a more powerful influence than the doctrines contained in the Qur'an."[36] This understanding that being a Muslim necessitates a strict rejection of pre-Islamic customs such as animistic rituals became a central belief of later Mossi Muslim converts who were educated by the colonial state.

Islamic practices and beliefs emerged unevenly across the regional and ethnic geography of the Upper Volta. In Northern Upper Volta, a sect of Islam that followed religious practices different from the early converts in the Southwest was forming, following the Tijaniyya order. Originally founded in North Africa by Sheikh Ahmad Tijani (1735-1815), Tijaniyya Islam spread rapidly and reached West Africa in the mid-nineteenth century.[37] Tijaniyya Islam is commonly distinguished from other forms of Islam by the annual celebration of Prophet Muhammad's birth, daily routines of spiritual litanies performed individually and in groups, particular chanting at social events and the worship of an intermediary spiritual mentor. The Hamawiyya branch of the Tijaniyya order reached northern Upper Volta from the Segu region of Northern Mali in the 1920s. By the 1950s, the Hamawiyya had three main leaders and emerged as a dominant Muslim sect throughout the AOF. In the Upper Volta, Tijaniyya Islam was concentrated in the north and amongst the Mossi, Fulbe and Tuareg ethnic groups.[38] The following of a single leader whose spiritual elevation is hierarchically structured based on their level of religious knowledge is fundamental to Tijaniyya brotherhoods. This practice became a major point of contention amongst the Voltaic Muslims in the Communauté as some members claimed that Muhammad was the last Muslim prophet and therefore the worshiping of other leaders should not be endorsed.

Simultaneous to these developments in the north, preachers aligning with the Subbanu Movement arrived in the Upper Volta from Bamako, Mali. This group criticized the practices of Tijaniyya Islam and Voltaic Sufi Muslim's practice mixing animist and Islamic practices. The Subbanu movement was started in West Africa by a group of Malian students who obtained a

---

[34] J. Spencer Trimingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 240.
[35] Idib 187.
[36] Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam in West Africa, 1860-1960*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 128.
[37] Peter B Clarke, *West Africa and Islam: A study of Religious Development from the 8th to the 20th Century*, (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd, 1982), 132.
[38] Ousman Murzik Kobo, *Unveiling Modernity in Twentieth-Century West African Islamic Reforms*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 113.

religious education at al-Azhar University in Cairo. They declared that the worshiping of specific Muslim holy men and the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammed's birthday were heretical because they were introduced into Islam after the death of the Prophet. The Subbanu movement was led by Al- Hajj Kabine and Al-Hajj Muhammad Fode and emphasized a need to provide an Islamic education that explained the Sunna and excerpts of the Hadith in local languages to Muslims who were illiterate in Arabic. The emphasis for a literate and comprehensive education of the Quran was based on the assumption that reading the Quran would illuminate awareness of incorrect religious practices. These explanations appealed to a group of French-educated and employed scholars, teachers, jurists and functionaries who were interested in direct translations of the Quran into French.[39] Local Muslim leaders labeled the Subbanu movement as foreign because of its introduction by non-native Voltaics and were angered by the movement's objection to their local Islamic practices. Bobo-Dioulasso became a center for the Subbanu movement as merchant leaders of the movement settled in the city that remained a key location for the Dyula trading network. These merchants prospered financially, gaining respect amongst local traders and a growing group of spiritual followers.

Throughout the 1950s, Islamic beliefs and practices in the Upper Volta were rapidly shifting alongside rising demands for independence and requests for an education that would allow for formal employment opportunities and financial improvements. The history of the evolution of Islamic practices detailed above demonstrates how Islam in the Upper Volta was defined by a plurality of religious expression. Upon independence from France in 1960 only 27.5 percent of the Voltaic population identified as Muslim.[40] However, religious practices throughout the Upper Volta varied dramatically, with Tijaniyya followers in the North, Malian Subbanu reformers gaining a following in Bobo and older, non-Dyula converts concentrated throughout the South whose piety was defined by their mixing of traditional and Islamic practices. The aim of the Communauté was to unite Muslim communities and to form a way to communicate as a bloc to the new secular administration that was largely dominated by Catholic educated Voltaics. The high representation of Catholics in government was because Catholic missionaries built the country's first schools, educating a small number of Voltaic citizens. Voltaics educated at Catholic schools were the first colonial subjects to be literate in French, therefore they occupied the majority of colonial government positions and formed an elite group.

The desire from Voltaic Muslims to guarantee religious freedom and ensure that their religious interests were not compromised by the state was a primary motivator in their objective to unify by establishing the Communauté. This interest was combined with Voltaic Muslims' aspiration to build schools that would facilitate their entrance into government positions. While these concerns were shared by members of the Muslim community, the religious beliefs and practices of the Voltaic Muslims varied. As the early Sufi converts, Tijaniyya, and Subbanu gathered to pursue these political goals, conflicts arose within the association over the Communauté's leadership and the content and form of an Islamic educational curriculum. This history offers insight into the difficulty of establishing a national Franco-Arab education acceptable to all. The following section explains the status of Franco-Arab schools in the Upper

[39] Lansiné Kaba, *The Wahhabiyya; Islamic Reform and Politics in French West Africa*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 214.
[40] Abdourahmane Idrissa, "Genealogies of a Non-political Islam in the Sahel: The Burkina Case," *Leipzig and Halle*, 23 (2017).

Volta at the time of independence to explore the reasons for the Communauté's promotion of Islamic educational reform and the conflicts over this reform that followed.

The building of Islamic educations

The French colonial state established the first madrasas in West Africa which were different from Quranic schools in the Voltaic region. Madrasas were first built in neighboring Mali and Senegal. An administrative report published in 1921 described the oldest madrasa as follows: "the madrasas are Muslim educational establishments designed, in principal, to divert to the profit of French policy the influence that the marabouts exercise over the Muslim populations. The madrasas are meant to dissipate the pretensions of the Muslim world against our civilization. To this effect, they train interpreters, secretaries for the Muslim course, etc… and they developed advanced Quranic studies while giving the students a proper view of the civilizing role of France".[41] In the first half of the 19th century, madrasas were the only institutions to offer a formal French and Arabic education in West Africa. Madrasas were built in Senegal, Mali and Mauritania with none in the Upper Volta. These schools were distrusted by some Muslim communities because of the French intervention in their schooling. The Upper Volta had the second lowest number of public schools in the colonies. These schools were only located in four cities in the South. Therefore, very few Voltaic Muslims were able to attain a French education, and schooling with both a French and Islamic education did not exist.

Before the 1950s, Islamic education in the Upper Volta was provided by Quranic schools. These schools taught memorization of Quranic verses in Arabic without a translation of these passages into local languages. Therefore, the majority of the Voltaic Muslim population memorized Arabic passages but were unable to translate their meaning into local languages. Funding for these schools was gathered by community members and was unstable. The schools were housed in simple, non-permanent structures without chairs or tables. A French political report published in 1952 documented over 300 Quranic schools throughout the country, with some having as few as five students. These schools were required to be registered with the government, a policy that was carried over to the post-colonial government. However, the effect of this policy was less clear: "Most teacher marabouts are in an irregular situation and it seems difficult to influence them to teach regularly, just as it is difficult to refuse them permission if they ask for it."[42] The policy of registration was intended to regulate schools. Permission to open a school was intended to be dependent upon a teacher's ability to offer an Islamic education and the safety of the school structure. However, colonial reports stated that the government was unable to decline a school permission to open because the status and quality of Quranic schools, teachers, and programs across the Upper Volta varied. This variability caused a standard quality to be difficult to locate and the colonial authorities granted permission for all schools to open, so long as the marabout correctly applied and respected colonial policies such as tax payments. The history of the status of Islamic educational institutions across the Upper Volta before the establishment of the Communauté indicates the difficulty for colonial authorities to establish formal control over these proliferating institutions. Additionally, this history of the plurality of Islamic beliefs and practices leading to the establishment of a variety of Muslim educational

[41] Letter from the Director, Ecole Régionale de Tombouktou to the Governor of Soudan Francais, 25 February, 1935, 1g72FR, Mali National Archives, Bamako, Mali. cited in Brenner, Controlling Knowledge, pg 42.
[42] Rapport Politique Annuel, 1953, 7v483, Burkina Faso National Archives, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

institutions offers insight into the difficulties of regulating and gathering a consensus for the promotion of a national Franco-Arab education.

Beginning in the 1950s, some of the Muslim sects in the Upper Volta hoped to expand the Islamic education currently available from Quranic schools to an education that included French, Arabic and Quranic studies. This aspiration became a central point of discussion at meetings of the Communauté. A French education was deemed important for two reasons. First, government policies did not recognize Quranic schools as educational establishments because they did not offer a French education. This meant that Muslim schools did not benefit from the same tax benefits as Catholic schools. In a letter entitled, "On the Subject of the Abuses of the Catholic Mission of Ouagadougou" to the Governor General, the Inspector of Administrative Affairs highlighted that the Catholic mission benefitted from special tax breaks, military services and benefits. He concluded with the observation that the mission "has managed to create a privileged class of a few thousand Catholics who tyrannize the rest of the population."[43] Stable employment positions were rare as only .5 percent of the population held formal employment positions and Voltaic Catholics occupied the majority of these positions.[44] This employment advantage of Catholics over the majority of the population generated demand from Muslims for an education that was oriented at both Islamic teachings as well as teaching the French curriculum and technical skills. In this context, Subbanu and Tijaniyya Islamic sects agreed on the need to offer a new religious education. However, their differing religious practices shaped their divergent opinions on the appropriate educational curriculum and their failure to reach a consensus to co-create such a program.

The joint support from the Subbanu movement and the Tijaniyya for a reformed Islamic education was initially informed by a Senegalese based, Pan-African association, the Union Culturelle Musulmane (UCM). UCM ideology was influential in forming local perceptions of a reformed Islamic education for two diverging Islamic sects. The UCM was established in Dakar, Senegal by Cheikh Fass Touré in 1953 who studied under Serigne Hady Toure, a celebrated follower of a Tijaniyya branch of Islam in Senegal. Following his studies in Senegal, Cheikh Fass spent a short period of time at the Institute of Islamic Studies in Boutlimit Mauritania where he obtained a degree in Franco-Arab studies. At this time, Boutlimit was the only Islamic educational institution in the AOF where students could pass an exam at the end of their studies.[45] He returned to Senegal with the desire to create more opportunities for Franco-Arab schooling. These efforts were met with resistance from the colonial government which proclaimed there was "no need for the teaching of the Arabic language"[46] on a wide-scale. This fueled resentment toward the colonial administration for quenching Arabic education while supporting Christian schooling. The French colonial policies towards Quranic schools directed the formal efforts of the leaders of the UCM to establish Franco-Arab educational institutions across the colonies.

---

[43] Letter from the Inspector of Administrative Affairs to the Governor of Cote D'Ivoire, 11 August 1934, 3h1a, Burkina Faso National Archives, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Romier Loimier "Cheikh Touré: du réformisme à l'islamisme, un musulman sénégalais dans le siècle," *Islam et sociétés au Sud du Sahara* 8 (1994): 55-66.

[46] Ibid.

In the late 1950s, UCM leaders traveled across the AOF to preach on the purification of Islam, the need to form a new Islamic education based on Arabic literacy and to critique the French colonial administration for destroying Quranic schools while supporting Catholic schools. The goal of the UCM became forming a new madrasa education that included setting up libraries, managing schools, collecting funds for student assistance and using 'modern pedagogy' such as conferences, artistic events, film screenings and camping for the education of students. Additionally, the association aimed to purify Islam from practices that were against the Quran yet common in the Upper Volta, such as the continued use of fetishes and consumption of alcohol and pork. Finally, the movement sought to motivate Muslims to improve their economic conditions. By 1960, over fifteen UCM branches were registered with the French government throughout the Upper Volta, the first of which was established in Bobo-Dioulasso.[47] Throughout the AOF, the UCM was presumed to be an anti-Tijaniyya movement because leaders of the UCM denounced the worshipping of specific religious leaders and the celebration of the Prophet Muhammed. In the Upper Volta the head of the Hamawiyya-Tijaniyya branch in Ramtoulaye established a UCM office in Ouahigouya in 1958.[48] In the Upper Volta, religious leaders were able to reconcile conflicting beliefs and practices in order to support a political and religious, pan-African movement and their overarching desire to reform the Islamic educational experience. The effort of the UCM was never realized because following independence, each West African nation created independent national Muslim associations. The history of the UCM's efforts to reform and unify Islamic education during the French colonial era directed the Communauté's vision to establish a unified network of Franco-Arab institutions. This history demonstrates that the prior legacies of these institutions informs how educations are envisioned and desired throughout West Africa and by local Voltaic communities.

Simultaneous to developments for a concerted effort to reform the Islamic education and teach both Arabic and French, some of the early Muslim converts were staunchly opposed to teaching Arabic. They deemed knowledge of Arabic unnecessary for Islamic expression, indicating a divergence of opinions on the necessary religious education and the inconsistent responses to a Franco-Arab education dependent on religious beliefs and practices. For some Sufi Muslims, Arabic was associated with Middle Eastern Islam and was deemed a foreign practice. Hampate Ba, a respected Malian diplomat and author, was a leader of this group. He identified Islam in West Africa as "black Islam" and labeled its practices as fundamentally different from Arab Islam. The difference, according to Ba, is based on the integration of traditional rituals that are not delineated in the Quran, into West African religious practices. A proponent of Sufi Islam and a student under a Tijaniyya spiritual leader, Ba argued that the introduction of Arabic would deteriorate the local cultural heritage whose richness and sophistication he wished to preserve.[49]

This opposition to the teaching of Arabic was different from the Subbanu who emphasized the language's importance to religious expression. As explained previously, the

---

[47] Ousman Murzik Kobo, *Unveiling Modernity in Twentieth-Century West African Islamic Reforms*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 124.

[48] Enregistrement de l'association UCM, May 1958, 3h2c, OUA. Burkina Faso National Archives, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

[49] Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power, and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), Chap 3.

leaders of the Subbanu movement sought to rid Islam from practices that were not endorsed by the Quran. They believed that a reading of the text in Arabic was a primary method for this cleansing. However, the vast majority of Muslims throughout Upper Volta, including the early converts and the Tijaniyya, continued to integrate these practices alongside Islamic rituals. They preferred an education in French in order to attain formal employment alongside of a basic Quranic education. These diverging opinions on how to institute a religious education were informed by diverse religious traditions in the Upper Volta and were all represented by the Communauté.

Establishment of the Communauté

Muslim leaders from across the Upper Volta, with multiple religious ideologies and conflicting viewpoints over how Islam should be taught and practiced gathered at the Communauté's first meetings. These leaders agreed to establish a singular Muslim voice in opposition to the newly independent secular state. Additionally, they agreed on the need to change the status of Islamic education in the country. However, within the first decade of the Communauté's establishment, the implementation of these goals was hindered because of the conflicts that arose within the community in attempts to form unity. The resultant breakup of the Communauté indicates that the divergent Islamic beliefs makes problematic the implementation of a singular religious, educational curriculum.

The Communauté was established from the Ouagadougou branch of the UCM in 1962. At the association's first annual meetings, representatives from every region of the Upper Volta and over 100 communities were present. A constitution was ratified with a list of articles to outline the association's apolitical goals, organizational structure and leadership. The primary aims were stated as follows: "to safeguard the religious interests of Muslims, to rid Islam of all harmful influences and practices of corruption, to fight by appropriate means the superstitions and exploitation of the credibility of the faithful."[50] The main activities of the organization were meant to be educational, cultural and religious. However, in practice, it quickly became apparent that there were multiple voices of the Muslim community, each representing differing religious beliefs and practices. At these first meetings, the various Islamic sects fought over who could serve as the Imam (or religious leader), and how the Quran should be read and taught, resulting in a splintering of the community and the establishment of numerous Islamic associations.

At the first meeting of the Communauté, there was disagreement over who was to be appointed the association's great Imam. These disputes were the first clear indication of division in the Muslim community. Initially, leaders of the Communauté assumed that the Imam of the Mossi Kingdom, selected by the Mogho-Naba (the Mossi king) and the prayer leader for the Grand Mosque of Ouagadougou, would become the association's Imam. However, this decision sparked conflict between the early Sufi Muslim converts who were considered traditionalists and the Subbanu leaders who were joined by a group of Muslims who were repatriated from Mecca after having spent years in Saudi Arabia, unable to afford the voyage home. The key disagreement between the groups was over a Mossi ritual swearing in the head Imam. The Imam was required to sip a local drink, Tibo, from a calabash while uttering the words: "I will never

[50] Assemblée Générale constitutive des 15 et 16 Décembre 1962. Status. Archives of the Communauté Musulmane de Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. cited in Kouanda, Assimi. "Les conflits au sein de la Communauté Musulmane du Burkina: 1962-1986," 3 *Etudes* (1989) 10.

betray the Mogho-Naba in whatever circumstance it is, I will come to his aid in case of war with the enemy, I will execute without discussion but orders that I will receive from my King."[51] According to the reformers and Subbanu leaders, this proclamation is not in line with Islamic Law and was unfaithful to Islam. The association's President, El Hadji Ousmane Sibiri, was able to convince reformers to accept the imam on the basis of his old age, therefore implying that they would soon have the opportunity to elect a new imam.[52] The differing beliefs of Voltaic Muslims on the saliency of Mossi rituals in accordance with Islam led to diverging opinions on the Communauté's leadership and instigated future divisions within the Muslim community.

At the Second General Assembly, conflicts continued between community members over the selection of a new President and Imam. On May 2nd 1966, the great Imam, El Hadji Mahama Baguian passed away, followed by the association's President El Hadji Ousmane Sibiri in December. The decision of who would become the association's imam was a point of contention and required much deliberation among community members. El Hadji Ousmane, the first President of the Communauté, was respected by all members of the Muslim community because of his reputation as a prominent trader from Bobo, a financier of the grand Mosque of Ouagadougou and supporter of Islamic and French education. He was also well liked by government officials because of his ability to settle disputes within the Muslim community. A replacement Imam was chosen by the Mogho-Naba. The Subbanu refused to follow the Mogho-Naba's choice and appointed Al Hajj Abdoul Salam Tiemtore as the great imam. The early Mossi converts within the Communauté rejected the Subbanu's selection because he was not recognized by the Mogho-Naba, therefore should not be the imam for the Communauté. This conflict solidified a split within the Communauté not just over religious doctrines, but also between members who would continue to support the Mohgo-Naba against those who wanted to break away from this older system of authority.

Attempts to form national Islamic schooling

Expanding French literacy and knowledge was a priority for both the Communauté and the Voltaic government in 1960. At the time, the country had one of the world's lowest literacy rates at 6.6 percent.[53] Regulatory policies of Quranic schools were carried over from the colonial administration. While the state granted permission to establish these schools, Maurice Yameogo's administration did not want to intervene in these institutions or in the conflicts that ensued because of the assumption that interference would suggest the state's religious allegiance. The state offered support by registering these schools, without investigation of the school's curriculum, leadership or infrastructures. The Communauté sought to fulfill the role to create a uniform educational curriculum, training teachers and visiting schools to guarantee a national standard of education.

While working towards agreement on an Islamic educational curriculum, the Communauté intervened in disagreements over the establishment of a new Quranic school in

[51] Dim Delobsom, *L'empire du Mogho-Naba,* (Paris: Donat Montchestien, 1932), 205. cited in Kounda, "Les conflits au sein de la Communauté Musulmane du Burkina: 1962-1986". Pg 10.

[52] Ousman Murzik Kobo, *Unveiling Modernity in Twentieth-Century West African Islamic Reforms*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 191.

[53] Letter from the High Commission of AOF officer of the legion of honor, 30 Oct 1957, 934/SE/PL/STAT, Dakar, Burkina Faso National Archives, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

Bobo. Diverging religious traditions within the Communauté's leadership became apparent and shaped their opinion on the establishment of this new Bobolese school. In order to understand the basis of this conflict, a brief history of the creation of religious institutions in Bobo is necessary. Bobo's first mosque was built by a wealthy Dyula Muslim in 1857 in the Farakan district of the city. As the Muslim community expanded, the mosque became too small to hold Friday prayers. In 1897, a marabout, Sakidi Sanou, returned from studying in Mali and decided to construct a new, Grand Mosque.[54] The selected location was occupied by sacred wood that was worshiped by local Bobo fetishers. This caused violent conflicts while the mosque was under construction as the local population were angered by the destruction of their sacred site.

Conflicts continued throughout the early 1900s, with Bobolese natives and Malian foreign members of the Subbanu both killed in August 1941. After the death of the new mosque's initial founders and imams, Sanou Salia was selected to become the new Imam. However, his appointment sparked disputes within the local Muslim community that was largely anti-French and against Sanou Salia, who politically aligned with the colonial administration. Local authorities refused the request of the local Bobolese population to remove Sanou from the position of Imam based on their statement that he lacked Koranic knowledge. This incident angered the local population and Bobolese natives held a 'family council' which resulted in their decision to stop attending prayer at the grand mosque because of Sanou's position as the imam. From this time on, hostility between the two groups, the Bobolese natives and the Subbanu foreigners, deepened. So much so that the colonial administration thought it useful to have the mosque monitored by the police on Friday prayers in order to prevent possible incidents.[55] French authorities hoped that the construction of another mosque would dispel tension and granted permission for a new mosque to be built by the Subbanu leaders in the city's Hamdallaye district in 1949. Additionally, a new school was attached to the mosque to hold 300 students and offered instruction in both Arabic and French. This mosque and school obtained financial support and praise from Malian, Ghanaian and Guinean visitors. The Hamdallaye mosque gathered followers locally because of the mosque's newer appearance and the large, formal school attached. However, it also deepened divisions within the Muslim community in Bobo as the Subbanu foreigners launched campaigns that denigrated the old mosque and the prayer rituals and Muslim teachings practiced there, saying they were not in accordance with Islam.

These conflicts were brought to the attention of the UCM in Bobo and became central to discussions over Islamic education during the first meetings of the Communauté. The disagreements over the school's establishment indicates how the dynamic religious beliefs and practices throughout country informed differing opinions on the religious education and problematized the execution of a unified educational curriculum. A meeting was held by local Bobolese government and school officials on the 12th of January 1960. The school's leader, El Hadj Bengali Diana, thanked the city council and the government for approving the school's construction. Simultaneously, he offhandedly reprimanded the negative attitude of the local director of education, Dienepo Ibrahim, for having denounced the newly established school that offered an education in Arabic literacy and the Quran. Government reports on this meeting stated that Ibrahim defamed these schools because they competed with Quranic schools that he

[54] Notice de renseignements sur les deux grandes mosquées de Bobo-Dioulasso, 29 July 1964, 3h1b1, Burkina Faso National Archives, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.
[55] Ibid.

managed.[56] Additionally, the new school was supported by the Subbanu foreigners, while Ibrahim was affiliated with the local Bobolese Muslim population. Nationally, the state responded to these disputes by emphasizing the need for the schools to be open to all interested individuals.[57] However, ongoing conflicts in and around Bobo indicated that differing viewpoints on the structure of an Islamic education are informed by diverse religious traditions and complicates assembling a consensus for a unified educational curriculum.

Communauté's vision for Islamic education reform

The Communauté largely agreed on the need to redefine the country's Islamic schools from only Quranic to Franco-Arab schooling. They envisioned an education in French and professional skills as well as a comprehensive Arabic and religious education. Due to conflicts within the Communauté including over the instruction of religious beliefs and practices, the association's vision for a unified Islamic education was never realized. The program structure promoted by the Communauté is similar to PREFA's program with a national curriculum, French and Arabic teachings, and a streamlined process to enter public schooling. The Communauté asked for government support for this program in the 1960s. However, they failed to gather government support and a consensus from members for the institution of this education.

Communauté members agreed to work together to form new teaching establishments where religious education was general and given in a 'rational' manner, by which they meant an education in both Islam and a modern education with the standard French curriculum.[58] They hoped that students who obtained a diploma from a Franco-Arab school would be able to achieve the same level of employment as a student from a state school. In order to do this, the members asserted that French as well as Arabic was essential to the education of Muslims. However, the Communauté members acknowledged that the lack of personnel and French speaking teachers made this final requirement impossible to fulfill. In a speech delivered to the Second General Assembly of the Communauté, the President of the Commission of Education, El Hadj Souleymane Konate, directly addressed the government and asked for support from the administration in order to provide this French education. A confidential report was written by a government representative at this meeting, outlining the association's request for support of these schools.[59] However, this bid was never fulfilled because assisting these schools was not deemed a priority by the low-income state.[60] The first active effort by the Burkinabe government to provide support for schools with an Arabic and French curriculum was not until PREFA in 2014.

Another of the Communauté's goals was for these new Franco-Arab schools to have a unified program and educational curriculum. This would guarantee that students across the country had equal access to education. El Hadj Souleymane Konate requested that students who

[56] Letter to the Ministry of interior entitled 'Sur la reunion de l'Union Culturelle Musulmane de Bobo- Diallasso', 12 Jan 1960, 3h1a, Burkina Faso National Archives, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.
[57] Letter to the Ministry of Interior, 4 June 1960, 3h1a, Burkina Faso National Archives, Ouagadougo, Burkina Faso.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Confidential report on the Congress of the Communauté Musulmane, 22 Dec 1964, 7v483, Burkina Faso National Archives, Ouagadougo, Burkina Faso.
[60] Hatime Deme (Assistant Director of PREFA), interviewed by Janet Smith at Islamic University of Burkina Faso, 31 May 2017.

graduated from the Franco-Arab schools obtain a certificate of 'Etudes Primaries Arabes' to formally acknowledge that these students obtained the same education. Additionally, the formality of a national curriculum would permit the best students to continue on to secondary and superior studies. A current professor, N'Diaye Diawara was appointed the authority to inspect all of the country's Islamic schools, ensuring a uniform cost of inscription and program management. However, the conflicts amongst Muslim factions in the Upper Volta over the Communauté 's leadership stalled these projects from becoming implemented. After 1964, the association's focus shifted towards resolving disagreements within the Communauté over leadership, the specificities of the national education program and ongoing conflicts in places like Bobo. The leaders did not meet again until 1972 when divisions within the Muslim population were already crystallized and the Tijanniya had left the Communauté.

Tijanniya members promoted the inclusion of teachings on Prophets after Muhammed and particular gestures during prayer that were rejected by the majority of the Communauté. This division was evident at the Second General Assembly and the Tijanniya left the Communauté shortly thereafter and hindered the Communauté from gathering a consensus for a unified Islamic education. The early Tijanniya members of the association aspired to include an education of these spiritual leaders in the curriculum, which was at odds with the majority of the Communauté. At the second general assembly, a community leader pointedly criticized Tijanniya practices stating: "We solemnly warn, many of our confreres, who are still being duped by certain foreigners who pretend to be direct descendants of the Prophet's grandsons […] because this is the reason for your coming to this great Assembly, we criticize, objectively. It is at this price alone that our Organization will go, progressing."[61] In this statement, the Communaute leader directly stated that the teachings of the Tijanniya are improper versions of Islam that are hindering the organization from progressing. Boubacar Sawadogo, the leader of the largest Tijanniya branch called the Hamawiyya, and other leaders of northern Tijanniya movements rejected the support of talibe, or Quranic students who beg for food and money that is given to their marabout teacher. Other members of the Communauté endorsed this practice, saying that if the talibe are nourished by what they receive from begging, they will see all of this food as from Islam and become grateful.[62] These differing beliefs over the support of talibe and the worshiping of prophets complicated the implementation of a unified educational curriculum across these diverging religious traditions.

The lack of funding for a Franco-Arab education directly impacted the activities of Communauté members. After demands for a reform of Quranic education were sent to the Voltaic administration, government officials responded by stating that they lacked funds to support these schools and there were not enough trained French educators to send teachers to these schools. Additionally, Yameogo's administration was fearful that involvement in this Islamic education would hurt Upper Volta's reputation as a secular state. Instead, the Communauté and local community leaders were forced to rely on their own networks for support for Franco-Arab and Quranic schools. Throughout the 1960s, financial support was collected locally for schools. Funds were obtained through donations from local community members and small school fees. However, Communauté leaders also sought international support, voiced in a

[61] Financial report from the 2nd National Assembly of CMU, 16 Dec 1964, 3h1a, Burkina Faso National Archives, Ouagadougo, Burkina Faso.
[62] Ibid.

speech by the President of the Commission of Education, El Hadj Souleymane Konate at the 1964 General Assembly on the financial status of the community that ended with the statement: "It is desirable that we try to build relationships that will benefit us with Muslim brothers from outside, especially Arab countries."[63] In 1965, the Communauté received small donations such as books from the Saudi Arabian embassy in Ghana that were intended to improve Arabic.[64] Larger donations of over fifty million CFA were provided by the Algerian government for the construction of a Franco-Arab school and a madrasa in 1968. Four years later, the Libyan government contributed forty-eight million CFA for the construction of a Central Mosque in Ouagadougou.[65] The amount and form of aid to the Communauté shifted after the oil crisis of the 1970s. As larger sums of money were sent to the Upper Volta, Franco-Arab schools and religious activities in the country became organized around formal associations while government policies shifted to appease these donors in order to tap into this wealth.

With the dramatic increase in oil prices in the 1970s, the wealth of the Gulf states allowed newly affluent Middle Eastern donors in countries like Saudi Arabia to provide substantial international donations. The onset of the Sahelian drought drew attention to the region's need for international aid and assistance. The Voltaic government was dependent on external donations for the government to function and local communities were dependent on food aid and social support services from non-profit organizations and government organizations. Additionally, Sangoulé Lamizana revoked the previous President's diplomatic relations with Israel, opening the country up for support from Arab organizations. In 1975, Upper Volta joined the organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), the Muslim World League and the World Association of Muslim Youth (WAMY).[66] Arab philanthropists sent funds to the leaders of the main Islamic associations, first the Communauté, but also leaders of the Subbanu movement. These funds were used to build mosques, schools and provide for the basic needs of communities during the Sahelian drought. However, the increase of funds to leaders of the Tijanniya, Subbanu and Communauté leaders solidified divisions between the already disputing Islamic sects as leaders competed among themselves for limited funds.[67]

As the population of practicing Muslims in the Upper Volta continued to grow, the demand for mosques and Franco-Arab and Quranic schools grew as well. Additionally, a school building made with mud and without tables and chairs was no longer desirable, raising the cost of a school's construction and maintenance. Disputes between these groups reached a climax after a polemic sermon from a Subbanu leader denounced local rituals that blended Islamic practices and local traditions at the Grand Mosque in Ouagadougou. The sermon provoked an argument over whether or not the Subbanu foreigners could attend the mosque for Friday prayer. This dispute resulted in violence and required the police to step in to stop the conflict.[68]

---

[63] Ibid.

[64] Confidential government notice, January 1965, 7v483, Burkina Faso National Archives, Ouagadougo, Burkina Faso.

[65] Ousman Murzik Kobo, *Unveiling Modernity in Twentieth-Century West African Islamic Reforms*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 205.

[66] Ibid 203.

[67] Ibid 189.

[68] Letter to the Minister of Interior and Security from the Notables of the Quarter of Zangouettin, 4 May 1973, 7/v/483, Burkina Faso National Archives, Ouagadougo, Burkina Faso.

Following this event, the Subbanu leader, Muhammad Malick Sana, realized that he needed police protection in case of another conflict. Additionally, Sana and his followers were determined to establish a mosque of their own, thus requiring permission from the state to register as an association[69] and formalizing Islamic practices as Muslim communities became organized into government recognized structures. In 1973, Sana and his followers established a formal religious association entitled 'Mouvement Sunnite de Haute Volta.'[70] It is with the establishment of the Mouvement Sunnite that the Muslim community of the Upper Volta was officially divided as leaders of disputing Muslim factions no longer gathered on a unified platform and the goal to create a unified network of schools elapsed.

Summary and Discussion

The history of the Communauté Musulmane offered in this paper contributes to a body of literature within development studies that seeks to analyze religious categories as dynamic and to revisit the relationship between religion, society and politics.[71] Through a case study analysis of the shifting visions for Islamic education in Burkina Faso, I investigate how religious practices and national educational objectives shift in relation to each other. The long historical review and the critical analysis attempted here can expand existing literature with insights for scholars and development practitioners. For scholars, the review clearly underscores the highly dynamic and interactive relations between educational and religious institutions, as both contribute to national development objectives. For development practitioners and especially those attempting deep educational reforms such as envisioned in PREFA, my analysis questions the assumptions of religious unity and cultural consensus that often undergird these efforts.

Since the association's establishment, Communauté leaders disagreed over the integration of local traditions into the association's structure. These practices, such as worshiping prophets after Mohammed, the consumption of pork and alcohol and the appointment of the head Imam by the Mossi king, established clear divisions between members. These rifts were deepened after leaders of contending religious sects fought over the Communauté's leadership and funding. The history offered in this paper outlined how these dynamic religious beliefs and practices throughout the country informed diverging opinions by Communauté members on the structure of a religious education. While these members agreed on the need to reform the status of Islamic education in the Upper Volta, the execution was problematized by these differing religious practices that informed various visions for a model Islamic education and the Communauté splintered.

Following the Communauté's break, the association retained their role as the formal representative platform for Burkina Faso's Muslim communities, even though the association no longer met across all of the country's religious traditions. Their dominance weakened over time

---

[69] Adama Ouedraogo, "Les mosquées de Ouagadougou (Burkina-Faso) : organisation et fonctionnement". *Insaniyat / Revue algérienne d'anthropologie et de sciences sociales* 38 (December 31, 2007): 45–71.

[70] Ousman Murzik Kobo, *Unveiling Modernity in Twentieth-Century West African Islamic Reforms*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 198.

[71] Séverine Deneulin and Carole Rakodi. "Revisiting Religion: Development Studies Thirty Years On," World Development 39, no. 1 (2011): 45–54.
Sabrine Alkire, "Religion and development", in DA Clark (ed), Elgar Companion to Development Studies, (Massachusetts: Edward Elgar, 2006). 508.

as more associations were established. During the 1990s, clashes between the Communauté and the Mouvement Sunnite over the control of mosques and urban spaces became violent, particularly in Ouagadougou. Smaller associations with objectives related to Islam were established throughout the country and by the end of the century, the number of Islamic associations rose to over 100. Today, there are over 250 Islamic associations in Burkina Faso and approximately thirty Islamic NGOs registered with the government. All Islamic NGOs work in education in some capacity, providing school supplies, paying teacher salaries and pupil fees or constructing Franco-Arab, Quranic and Madrasa school infrastructures. Three of these NGOs are international, with headquarters based in the Middle East. They all construct and frequently regulate Quranic and Franco-Arab schools, stipulating their own sets of objectives and educational visions.

Academic scholars exploring the nexus of religion and development can learn from the history of the Communauté's and the contemporary international efforts to reform Islamic educations in Burkina Faso. First, the Communauté's struggle to unify and inability to represent the nation's Muslim population indicates that gathering a consensus amongst religiously like-minded individuals is difficult. This dynamism issues caution to scholars who assume that groups or projects that identify with the same religion are better positioned than secular or religiously different organizations to offer development assistance to affiliate members.

Second, the history of the Communauté demonstrates that visions for an Islamic education changed after the Upper Volta's independence and was different according to individual religious beliefs. This underscores the importance of research that revisits the ongoing relationship between religion and national development projects. The implementation of PREFA today indicates that the government has changed their legal classification of an education to include Franco-Arab institutions after the local expansion of these schools and global attention to their need to reform. The Communauté also changed their vision for an Islamic education because of the Voltaic Catholic education and a desire for a French and Arabic education. Since the early 2000s, religion has been considered important to development. However, the key shifts in Islamic education in Burkina Faso indicate that both religious and development practices are shaped in relation to one another. To better understand the nexus of religion and development, the conditions under which religions and religious associations became valuable to improvement programs deserves further scholarly attention to ensure that the needs of project recipients, rather than donors and international actors, is being met.

Lastly, in employing this critical and historical approach to studies of religion and development, scholars can offer key insight to ongoing development projects and programs. PREFA's objective to standardize Franco-Arab education was similarly attempted by the Communauté, yet this history is unacknowledged by the current programs. The Communauté member's differing religious traditions shaped their diverging educational preferences and provoked conflicts when selecting a singular curriculum. From the case study of the Communauté, scholars and development practitioners are warned of the difficulties in using education reform as the mechanism through which to deliver religious teachings. In order for PREFA or Islamic educational reform programs to be successfully adopted across the country's diverse religious communities, the history of each school and religious community needs to be

taken into consideration. I recommend that the educational curriculum, while standardized, allow for local flexibility so as to accommodate religious pluralism.