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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafricaines/88>
DOI: 10.4000/etudesafricaines.88
ISSN: 1777-5353

Publisher

Éditions de l'EHESS

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 January 2001
Number of pages: 293-314
ISBN: 978-2-7132-1390-8
ISSN: 0008-0055

Electronic reference

Alcione M. Amos, « Afro-Brazilians in Togo », *Cahiers d'études africaines* [Online], 162 | 2001, Online since 12 June 2004, connection on 19 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafricaines/88> ; DOI : 10.4000/etudesafricaines.88

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The Case of the Olympio Family, 1882-1945*

The history of the return of Afro-Brazilians to Africa has received attention from scholars in several countries and in several languages. These works have focused on the Afro-Brazilian communities established in West Africa in the 19th century, in the territories that would become today's states of Benin (formerly Dahomey) and Nigeria. Nevertheless, very little has been written about the Afro-Brazilian communities of Togo and Ghana¹.

This study intends to be a preliminary exploration of the history of Afro-Brazilians in Togo. Using, as a point of departure, the history of one of Togo's most prominent families, the Olympio's, the author intends to show the impressive amount of influence that the Afro-Brazilian community had in the economic and political life of the country during a discreet time period between 1882 (just before the beginning of the German colonization) and 1945 (in the midst of the French colonial period, at the end of the Second World War and the beginning of Togo's march to its independence achieved in 1960).

The phenomenon of Afro-Brazilians returning to Africa began in the first half of the 18th century and lasted until the beginning of the 20th century. Scholars have estimated that between 3,000 and 8,000 Afro-Brazilians returned to Africa during that period. The movement began as a natural yearning of freed slaves to return to the motherland that they had never forgotten. Later on, it became a reaction to the lack of opportunities for advancement and to persecutions and restrictions launched by the Brazilian authorities against blacks.

Indeed, several slave revolts in Brazil, notably in the state of Bahia, in the first decades of the 19th century had led the government to enact severe

* A slightly different Portuguese version of this paper has appeared in *Afro-Ásia*, No. 23, 2000, published by the Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais of the Universidade Federal da Bahia, Brazil.

1. Among others: KRASNOWOLSKI (1987), TURNER (1975), VERGER (1987). In 1836 a group of Afro-Brazilians settled in Accra where they were called *Tabong* (a corruption of *Tá Bom* an expression that means "All is well" in Portuguese) (DEBRUNNER 1965: 37).

laws geared to control blacks. After the so-called Male Revolt of 1835 in Bahia, led by Muslim slaves, the restrictions intensified, especially against free blacks. They were denied the possibility of owning property and were subjected to severe taxation. Those free blacks that had the money or connections went to Africa in search of economic opportunity. Many were also deported by the Brazilian authorities against their will².

Francisco Olympio Silva, the founder of the Olympio family in Africa, reportedly was born in Salvador, Bahia on July 24, 1833. He was the son of a father of Portuguese origins and a mother of African and Amerindian extraction, according to family traditions. Indeed, historians have mentioned the Asiatic features of members of the Olympio family in Togo, as a sure confirmation of their Amerindian ancestry.



PICTURE 1. — Francisco Olympio and his granddaughter Ambrosina, daughter of Leontina Olympio Medeiros in 1905.

He was born barely two years before the Male slave revolt shook Salvador, Bahia on January 25, 1835. Consequently, his formative years were passed under the pall of persecutions and lack of economic opportunities. At the threshold of adulthood Francisco, who had never been a slave according to family traditions still preserved in Togo, arrived in Africa in 1850, at the age of 17. He came to Africa aboard one of the slave ships belonging to the rich and influential, slave trading Cerqueira Lima family. A friend named João Gonçalves Baéta, who also would become the patriarch of an important Afro-Brazilian family in the West Coast of Africa, accompanied him. Olympio went first to Vodza, an old center of slave trade near Keta, in the territory of what is today Ghana, where he joined an uncle, variously identified as Anjou or César Cerqueira Lima, in his slave-trading business³.

2. See Mariano Carneiro DA CUNHA (1985: 14), Manuela Carneiro DA CUNHA (1985: 210-216; 74-81), REIS (1993), VERGER (1992: 58-59).
3. "Histoire de l'aïeul Francisco Silva Olympio", unpublished manuscript in the possession of the author. See also CORNEVIN (1963: 110; 1987: 148); about the Cerqueira Lima family see VERGER (1964: 35), PEDLER (1974: 108-109), DE SOUZA (1992: 296), letter from Lucien Bébi Olympio to the author, May 5, 1996.

For the next decade and a half, Francisco would ply the slave trade at various locations along the coast near Keta until he settled at Porto Seguro (today Agbodrafo) in the territory which is today Togo. There he established a trading house, while continuing his slave-trading activities. Father R. P. Borghero, a Catholic missionary from the Order of Lyon, visited Olympio's establishment at Porto Seguro in 1863. He commented that the location was perfect to serve as an embarkation point for slaves. In 1864 Olympio was still operating in Porto Seguro and he was included in a list of the few remaining slave traders of importance in the area. Within the next few years a fire destroyed his family home and trading house. He moved shortly thereafter to Agoue (today in Benin)⁴.

By the time Francisco Olympio moved to Agoue, the town already boasted a large Afro-Brazilian community. The first Brazilians had arrived around 1835. Under the leadership of Joaquim d'Almeida, a Brazilian ex-slave, the town became a strong center of Christianity (Verger 1992: 43-48). The first Catholic church established in the so-called Slave Coast was built there by an Afro-Brazilian woman named Venosa de Jesus. After this church burned down, Joaquim d'Almeida rebuilt it in 1845. For several decades Agoue's main business had been slave trading. Then, British repression to the human trade, beginning in the 1850s, had nudged Afro-Brazilians, who profitably had engaged in it, to switch to legal commerce. Francisco Olympio, who had received a land grant from one of the indigenous leaders of Agoue, for services rendered to the community during its war with Petit-Popo (today Anecho, in Togo), proceeded to establish a trading house. From that time on, Agoue became the seat of the Olympio family in Africa⁵.

By the time Francisco established himself in Agoue he had dropped the surname Silva, possibly because the name reminded him of his time as a slave-trader or as a persecuted free man of color in Brazil. He also had wholeheartedly adopted the local custom of polygamy. He proceeded to build a large family, with seven different women. Eventually, he would give life to at least twenty-one children. The first was a girl named Agnes, born in the early 1850s. The last one was a boy named Francisquhoun (Francisquinho) born in 1886. Most of his children had Brazilian names. One of his spouses, perhaps his main consort, was an Afro-Brazilian named Constancia Talabi Pereira dos Santos. She was the daughter of Antonio Pereira dos Santos who had arrived in Agoue around 1836. She had eight children with Olympio, including two of his most successful sons: Octaviano and Epiphanio⁶.

4. "Histoire de l'aïeul", *op. cit.*; BORGHERO (1997: 124-125); BURTON (1966: 65).

5. KRASNOWOLSKI (1987: 101), DECALO (1996: 26), CORNEVIN, (1981: 135-136; 1987: 153). Unnamed unpublished document dated July 29, 1870, explaining how Francisco Olympio obtained his lands for services rendered during the war between Agoue and Petit-Popo, copy in possession of the author; "Histoire de l'aïeul", *op. cit.*

6. Letter from Lucien Bebi Olympio to author May 5, 1996; "Ascendants-descendants-collatéraux de feu Octaviano Olympio", unpublished manuscript in the possession of the author.

The Afro-Brazilians had built on the West Coast of Africa a community, which mirrored that of the white upper classes in Bahia, where they had been slaves or disenfranchised, freed slaves. They had large households where Portuguese was the main language, and where domestic slave servants were abundant. Their family houses (*maison familiale*) were built in the Brazilian baroque architectural style, thanks to the many Afro-Brazilian artisans who had also migrated to Africa.

Francisco Olympio was no exception. Although the effective end of the slave trade in 1865 had heralded an era of diminished resources for the Afro-Brazilians, he seemingly successfully made the transition from slave-trader to planter and commercial trader. His plantations reportedly stood for miles along the beach in Agoue and Grand-Popo. Most likely, he began using the slaves who he otherwise would have exported to Brazil as the labor force in his plantations. His trading business also developed steadily. In 1882 Olympio reportedly maintained considerable trade with Europe⁷.

Afro-Brazilians also gave considerable importance to the education of their children. The Olympio children were first educated locally, in the schools run by the Catholic priests where Portuguese was the language of instruction. Octaviano was sent to Nigeria to continue his studies and then on to London to receive higher-level education in accounting and business. His brother Epiphanio was also sent to London to study.

Daughters, most likely were not as well educated as sons. But they also had an important role to play in the forging of this new society. They married men from other Afro-Brazilian families, thus strengthening the community's ties. Three of Francisco's daughters, Laurinda, Leontina and Delia, married Medeiros men, members of an important Afro-Brazilian family (actually of Portuguese ancestry who integrated itself into the Afro-Brazilian community) from Agoue and Ouidah (in today's Benin)⁸.

As they built their new society on the coast of Africa, Afro-Brazilians did not lose sight of Brazil. As much as they traded with Europe, they also maintained an intense and lucrative trade with Brazil. Some of them went back to see family and friends, and others eventually went back for good. As a matter of fact the remembrances of Brazil, the use of its language, the celebration of its religious feasts remained a constant in the Afro-Brazilian community in the West African coast well into the 20th century⁹.

7. COQUERY-VIDROVITCH (1971: 120), VERGER (1953), TURNER (1975: 115-116), KRASNOWOLSKI (1987: 104), THOMAS (1997: 696). Francisco Olympio died in 1907. His headstone, in the cemetery in Agoue, Bénin, reads in Portuguese "A memoria do sempre chorado e lembrado Francisco Olympio. Nasceu a 24 de julho 1833 e falleceu a 24 de julho 1907, 74 annos didade. Seus filhos e filhas mondaram [sic] erigir", photograph in the personal collection of the author, courtesy of Lucien Bebi Olympio.

8. See TURNER (1975: 125-127, 161-162b); "Le père Octaviano Olympio", unpublished manuscript in possession of the author; letter from Lucien Bebi Olympio to the author May 5, 1996; "Histoire de l'aïeul", *op. cit.*

9. In 1964 Antonio Olinto, a Brazilian diplomat, interviewed Epiphanio Olympio, son of Francisco, in Portuguese, at his home in Agoue (OLINTO 1980: 219-220);

The new generations of Afro-Brazilians born and raised in Africa were steeped in a tradition of trading—first in slaves and later in goods—and had knowledge of several European languages. It was natural that they were soon drawn into the role of agents for the various European trading companies established around the coast. At least three of Olympio's sons, Francisco (Chico) Jr., Cesar, and Octaviano worked for the British trading house of A. and F. Swanzy, another son, Epiphanio, worked for the trading house of Miller Brothers from Liverpool (Pedler 1974: 108).

In the early 1880s, a new trading center began to develop on the West Coast of Africa, which would become very important for the Olympio family. The Europeans knew this small village on the West coast of Africa, as Bey Beach (or Be-Beach). But beginning in 1880 the area was settled by Anlo traders who took possession of land by the sea and built their trading houses. By 1881 European trading houses also were attracted to the area. In 1882, Chico Olympio and his brother Octaviano were commissioned by the British trading company A. and F. Swanzy to open a branch at the location¹⁰. The arrival of the Olympio brothers at Bey Beach (also known as Lomé) in 1882 would be the first chapter of the history of the family in the city. Chico Olympio died in 1886, but Octaviano would go on to become one of the most distinguished members of Lomé's commercial and political elite for six decades and under three colonial powers.

Being a shrewd businessman, Octaviano not only took care of Swanzy's business, but also immediately secured commercial property for the family's use. He acquired land on Market Street, right behind the line of European trading houses facing the beach. His two older sisters, Clara and Julia who were single, tended the family business (Sebald 1988: 62).

By 1884 the Germans had signed a protection agreement with a local chief and had established a colony, which they called Togo. First the Germans installed their capital in Baguida, later they moved it to Anecho, but in 1897 they moved it to Lomé. Octaviano Olympio, fast becoming an

a series of letters written by José Francisco dos Santos, an Afro-Brazilian trader from Agoue, between 1844 and 1871 are an extensive source of information on this exchange (VERGER 1953: 53-98). Julio, one of Francisco Olympios sons born in Africa in 1859, returned to Brazil where he stayed permanently, letter from Julio Olympio January 17, 1897 from Rio de Janeiro, to Francisco Olympio, copy in the possession of the author. The last remembered celebration of the Buriyan (a Brazilian inspired festival) took place in Togo in 1947, letters from Lucien Bebi Olympio to the author May 5, 1996, and January 27, 1997. Still today Portuguese derived words are used in Togo: *Farofa* (a Brazilian Portuguese word for a dish made with manioc flour, which in Togo became the word used for manioc flour); *Ferigna* (derived from the Portuguese word *farinha*), *Kpono* (derived from the Portuguese word *pão*) for manioc flour bread. See MARGUERAT & PELEI (1993, t. 2: 169).

10. Memorandum of Agreement, December 12, 1882, between W. H. Williams on behalf of Swanzy and Joachim Acolatse, Francisco Olympio, Jr. signed as a witness; Fonds allemand (FA) 1/601: 30, Archives nationales du Togo (ANT); MARGUERAT (1992: 10); "Ascendants-Descendants"; for a history of the early development of Lomé, in English, see SEBALD (1977: 36-38).



PICTURE 2. — Octaviano Olympio wearing the medals he received from the French Government, date unknown.

important businessman, did not have trouble in coming to terms with the new colonial power. Above all, Afro-Brazilians on the West Coast of Africa had learned to be pragmatists who would deal with anybody if it meant economic success¹¹.

11. KNOLL (1978: 18-20), MARGUERAT (1992: 13-14), SEBALD (1988: 62); FA 3/315: 10; FA 3/313: 71-75, ANT; "Father of the Ewe Unity", *West Africa* (March 10, 1951: 207); MARGUERAT & PELEI (1992, t. 1: 12).

Nevertheless, the Olympios were not the only Afro-Brazilians to take advantage of the booming trade in Lomé in the early 1880s. In 1884 Domingos de Freitas and a member of the Medeiros family were also trading in the city. The Germans soon employed other Afro-Brazilians in official positions. João (usually called Juan by the Germans) d'Almeida was hired as a customs agent in 1888. He also had a trading business in Lomé. Another member of the same family, Adolpho d'Almeida worked as an interpreter. Members of the de Souza family, descendants of the famous Chacha de Souza who originally had come from Portugal, were also prominent as German government functionaries. Ignacio de Souza worked as a customs inspector; Augustino de Souza, eventually to be known as the richest man in West Africa, worked as an interpreter for the Germans, and Felício Marcelino de Souza worked as a nurse at the German hospital¹².

Afro-Brazilians had been well known throughout the coast for their ability as builders and craftsmen, and some of them came to ply their craft in Lomé. The Aguiar brothers, Damião and Jacintho, were well-known bricklayers and carpenters. Jacintho da Silva, who had been born in Brazil, built the first Catholic chapel in Lomé in 1892-93. José (known by the Germans as Josephu) Santana was a well-known carpenter. Other Afro-Brazilians worked as clerks for the many European trading houses operating in Lomé. Thus the names of Cosmos Reis, Francisco Gregorio de Souza and B. M. Aguiar appeared in several German lists as being clerks¹³.

Afro-Brazilian influence was also prominent in the religious arena in Togo. On August 28, 1892, Octaviano Olympio, by then undoubtedly the most prominent citizen of Lomé, welcomed the Catholic missionaries of the German Society of the Divine Word. Olympio immediately requested that the priests open a school. A month later the school was operating with 25 students. Although not recorded, it is possible that many of the students were Afro-Brazilian. The first Catholic mass was held in Lomé the next week, on September 4, 1892, and a 12-year-old Afro-Brazilian boy named Facundo Calencio Carvalho de Souza served at the mass. He had been one of the first children taught by the Catholic missionaries in Anecho, José (known by the Germans as Joseph) Anthonio Kodjovia de Souza, another member of the de Souza family, served as an interpreter for the priests (Muller 1968: 41; Lange 1991: 34; de Souza 1992: 49, 185).

Despite the fact that most Afro-Brazilians were Catholic, one of the most prominent leaders of the Protestant Church in Togo was Afro-Brazilian. Robert Domingos Baéta, the son of João Gonçalves Baéta who had come with Francisco Olympio from Brazil in 1850, was trained in the so-called Ewe School at Westheim in Germany between 1897 and 1900, and was ordained in 1917. He was placed in charge of the Lomé school that

12. SEBALD (1988: 62); FA 3/315: 10; FA 3/313: 71-75, ANT; "Father of the Ewe Unity", *op. cit.* (1951: 207); MARGUERAT & PELEI (1992, t. 1: 12).

13. MARGUERAT & PELEI (1993, t. 2: 59-60, 175); FA 3/313: 40, 44, 71-75, ANT.

served the congregation of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (predecessor of the Ewe Church) when the last European pastor left in 1921. He was described as having drive and personality and the ability to deal with the government officials, be they German, British, or French. He was another example of the famous Afro-Brazilian adaptability on the West Coast of Africa¹⁴.

Another not as well known religious faction among the Afro-Brazilians in Togo was the “Nago”. These were Muslim Afro-Brazilians of Yoruba origin who came to Lomé via Nigeria and Benin (then known as Dahomey). The Géraldo, Santana, Pereira, Aguiar and Reis families of Lomé belonged to this group.

The “Nago” were, in general, less affluent than the Christian Afro-Brazilians and had great expertise in the construction trade. They played an important role in creating a style of architecture typical to Lomé which was based on construction and decorative techniques imported from Brazil. The “Nago” João dos Reis and Jacintho Aguiar were responsible for the construction of innumerable houses in Lomé during the early decades of the 20th century (Marguerat 1993: 167-176; *id.*: *Lomé...*, in preparation; Deval 1980: 160-621).

Many of the Afro-Brazilians in Togo, being part of the upper crust Europeanized local society demonstrated interest in new techniques including photography. The Aguiar brothers besides being talented craftsmen, owned a trading house, and produced postcards that are part of the historical iconography of Togo. Fabriano Francisco Olympio, son of Francisco and brother of Octaviano, was a trader and photographer in Lomé. He apparently moved to German Cameroon in the beginning of the century, and then went back to Lomé where he died in 1910. Later, beginning in the 1920s C.M. (most likely Christian Modesto) Santos also worked as photographer in Lomé. Perhaps as a corollary of this interest, movies were first brought into Lomé by an Afro-Brazilian, member of the Géraldo family, in the late 1920s¹⁵.

While the Afro-Brazilian community in Togo was expanding, Octaviano was becoming by far the richest and most influential indigenous citizen of the city. One of the first economic investments he made was to establish a connection with the Hausa traders from Salaga, in the territory which would become the Gold Coast. In 1887 Olympio influenced the new German Governor Jesko von Puttkamer to expand German colonial influence into the Palime area in order to protect the routes of the Hausa traders who

14. DEBRUNNER (1979: 356); “She translated Tolstoy into Ewe”, *West Africa*, (December 30, 1950: 1221); GRAU (1964: 34).

15. FA 3/313: 43, ANT; DAVID (1995: 168); “Ascendants-descendants”; MARGUERAT & PELEI (1993, t. 2: 73, 78); electronic mail from Yves Marguerat to the author, March 25, 1998; obituary of Fabriano Francisco Olympio, copy in the personal collection of the author.



PICTURE 3. — “Carte postale”, produced by Fabriano Francisco Olympio, depicting Lomé under German colonization. Photo taken from the bell tower of the Lomé Cathedral, ca. 1905. Source: Archives nationales du Togo.

were under his auspices in Lomé. He was called Tافيانو (a corruption of Octaviano) by the Hausa (Sebald 1988: 68, 71; Agier 1983: 65, 67).

In 1889 Olympio established Lomé’s first coconut plantation in the northwest side of the city. The plantation covered 90 hectares of land. A year later, after a fire destroyed many of the dwellings in the city, the German administrator proclaimed all land to the northwest to be government property and established his own coconut plantation there. Nevertheless, Olympio’s previous claim was respected. By then he had 12,000 coconut palms planted. He was the first Togolese to export copra extracted from his coconuts. Copra was the dried kernel of the coconut from which oil was extracted to produce soap, candles and margarine, products that were in high demand in Europe.

During this period Octaviano Olympio also established the first—and for a long time the only—brickyard in Lomé. In an excellent early example of energy conservation, he used the residue from his coconut plantation to fire the bricks. In 1892, around the time he left their employment, Octaviano Olympio obtained a line of credit from Swanzy Brothers, most likely to expand his trading business on Market Street. By 1903 Olympio had added cattle raising to his economic activities and had a herd with 150 heads¹⁶.

16. One hectare equals 2471 acres. See SEBALD (1988: 103, 122), *DYNAMIQUE URBAINE...* (1993: 67), KNOLL (1978: 155), MARGUERAT & PELEI (1996, t. 3: 135, 187). In 1918 Octaviano Olympio stated that he had worked for the Swanzy Brothers in Lomé for 11 years, beginning in 1882, declaration of Octaviano

Olympio's investments were not restricted to the territory of Togo. In 1900 he joined his brothers Epiphanio and César and brother-in-law João Amorin in establishing coconut plantations on the coast near Agoue, which by then was already under French colonial control. One measure of Octaviano's immense economic success was the fact that between 1909 and 1913 he more than doubled his income from 9,842 Marks in 1909 to 21,000 Marks in 1913. He seemed to have invested most of his wealth in real estate. By 1914 his land holdings in cities throughout Togo were valued at 750,000 to 1,000,000 gold Marks. This diversity of economic activities would serve him well in the future¹⁷.

At the same time that Octaviano Olympio was diversifying and building an enviable economic situation, other Afro-Brazilian traders were collapsing under the harsh economic conditions created by the Germans. They had no interest in encouraging black entrepreneurs, and provided no credit or other assistance to the local traders. The introduction of high import-export license fees strangled the local merchants. One example of the economic distress affecting Afro-Brazilians was that of the commercial firm of the d'Almeida Brothers, João and Francisco. Located in Anecho, the company had employed seven clerks and 16 workers in 1899, but by 1908 it had succumbed to economic hardship and had liquidated its assets (Knoll 1978: 139; Marguerat 1995: 375, n. 13, n. 14; *id.*: 1993: 76, n. 2; Sebald 1988: 378, 380).

German laws were also harsh in dealing with any perceived transgressions. Physical punishment was constantly applied. In fact, Acting Commissioner Markus Graf von Pfeil flogged even Octaviano Olympio such a prominent citizen in 1891 for insolent behavior in a dispute over a horse. In 1898 Olympio and two other Afro-Brazilian traders were fined for offenses against German tax and trade ordinances. The next year, Olympio was again fined, this time because of an inconsiderate remark against the German colonial government. These conditions led to an indigenous movement to demand redress from the colonial power. These were, in fact, the first stirrings of Togolese anticolonialism and nationalism, which were decades ahead of the wave that would sweep Africa after the Second World War. Octaviano Olympio would be prominent in this movement (Knoll 1978: 70; Sebald 1988: 210; Marguerat 1995: 368).

The first action in this nationalist movement was a petition dated of May 24, 1909 and signed by Octaviano Olympio and Andreas Aku, a teacher

Olympio, Lomé, March 21, 1918 in MARGUERAT (1999: 426); Agreement between F. & A. Swanzy and Octaviano Olympio, September 10, 1992, copy in the personal collection of the author; *District de Lomé, Rapport annuel, 1903-1904 (du 1^{er} avril 1903 au 31 mars 1904)*. FA 3/159: 21-24, ANT.

17. DE SOUZA (1992: 38); FA 3/313: 2; FA 3/131: 68; FA 3/315: 10, ANT; only the German Governor, who earned about 30,000 Mark a year, earned more money than Olympio. Other high government officials earned between 10,000 and 20,000 Mark, personal communication from Yves Marguerat, May 28, 1998; MARGUERAT (1993: 76, n. 1); SEBALD (1980: 62).

and future pastor and leader of the Ewe Church. It was presented to the German governor Count Julius von Zech. Its main thrust was to request equal treatment under the law for the indigenous population; prevention of immediate arrest of natives in civil court cases; and that property be allowed as bond in court cases instead of cash.

In his report to the Reich Colonial Office about the petition, Governor von Zech considered it to be revolutionary but asserted that he believed that the two signatories were, nevertheless, loyal German subjects. His answer to the petitioners, a very long letter in German addressed to Octaviano Olympio, was based in the basic racist view that whites were inherently superior to blacks, and therefore had to be treated differently. He also believed that the fact that the white race was superior, allowed the offenses perpetrated against it to be judged more severely than those perpetrated against the black (and inferior) race. The governor also reflected that the most intelligent among the petitioners should be able to recognize, upon consideration, that their desire for equality under the law was not justified¹⁸.

Four years later, the indigenous leadership of Lomé drew another petition. Robert Baéta who, because of his education in Germany, was fluent in the language wrote this one in German. It was more detailed and amplified the demands for justice presented in the 1909 petition. Dated October 12, 1913, it was signed by several prominent Togolese, with Octaviano Olympio's signature at the top. It presented seven requests: better organization of the justice system in Togo; elimination of chaining and flogging; better prison regulations; inclusion of indigenous representatives in the government Council meetings; introduction of a general national civil code; tax reductions; and permission of free trade for native traders.

The opportunity to deliver the new petition to the Germans was presented by the official visit of Dr. Wilhelm Solf the German Secretary of State to Lomé in October of 1913. Although the German Governor Duke Adolf-Frederich zu Mecklenburg tried to thwart them, a group of Lomé notables, under the leadership of Octaviano Olympio, rushed Solf as he attempted to enter a car at the Governor's palace to tour the city. The German governor was flustered before such audacity, but eventually the petition was accepted¹⁹.

The local colonial government chose to respond to the petition by arresting eighteen indigenous traders, among them three Afro-Brazilians: Octaviano Olympio, A. Almeida and Victorino Pinto da Silveira. Despite this harsh response, there are indications that Governor Mecklenburg had

18. MARGUERAT (1995: 369); Gouverneur von Zech an den Plantagenbesitzer Oktavio [*sic*] Olympio in Lomé, June 9, 1909, copy in the collection of the author; SEBALD (1988: 64).

19. MARGUERAT (1995: 373-374); DEBRUNNER (1965: 121). Apparently there were no lasting hard feelings against Mecklenburg's actions. In 1960 he was present as an official guest at Togo's Independence celebrations in Lomé. See DECALO (1996: 206); GRAU (1964: 34).

intended to include Octaviano Olympio and Andreas Aku in the local government of the colony. But as it was his good intentions, if they indeed existed, were overtaken by events (Marguerat 1995: 375, n. 20; Debrunner 1965: 121; Sebald 1980: 65).

The First World War exploded in early August 1914. German Togo capitulated to the allies on August 26, but even before that date—on August 7—the Germans had retreated from Lomé, which was then occupied by the British. They were received as friends, not as conquerors. Togo's territory was eventually partitioned between the French and the British, and Lomé was located in the British zone (Marguerat 1999: 409-432).

During the six years the British were in Togo they instituted welcomed economic measures such as the suspension of the collection of all direct taxes and trading license fees. The Bank of West Africa installed an agency in Lomé and began to make loans to the local traders taking as collateral the products exported to England. Furthermore, the British discontinued the hated practices of physical punishment and chaining of prisoners. The British occupation, by removing economic obstacles to trade and providing a less restrictive environment, allowed the Lomé elite, including the Afro-Brazilians among them, to regain their influence and status which had been curtailed under the Germans²⁰.

Consequently, it was not surprising that at the end of the war in 1918 when the allies began to decide what to do with Togo, the Afro-Brazilians of Lomé were intent on having the British as their new colonial power. Octaviano Olympio sent a steady stream of telegrams and petitions to the British Foreign Office, British newspapers, and the League of Nations requesting that Togo remain under the British. Olympio, who was heading the Committee on Behalf of Togoland Natives, was well aware of the discussions on the future of Togo. In a telegram of September 12, 1919 he mentioned the so-called fourteen points made by President Woodrow Wilson. These were part of Wilson's address to a joint session of the American Congress on January 8, 1918, stating the peace terms that the United States would accept.

Wilson asserted in his speech that "The day of conquest and aggrandizement is gone. . ." and that "A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined". Olympio interpreted Wilson's anti-imperialistic statements to mean that the opinions of the colonized peoples of Africa about their future should be heard. He also

20. For information on the swift conquest of Togo in 1914 see MOBERLY (1931: 5-7, 14-41), MARGUERAT (1995: 376, n. 31; 1999: 417), SEBALD (1988: 598).

had enough political savvy to attempt to use this knowledge to influence decisions about the future of Togo, which were taking place in Europe²¹.

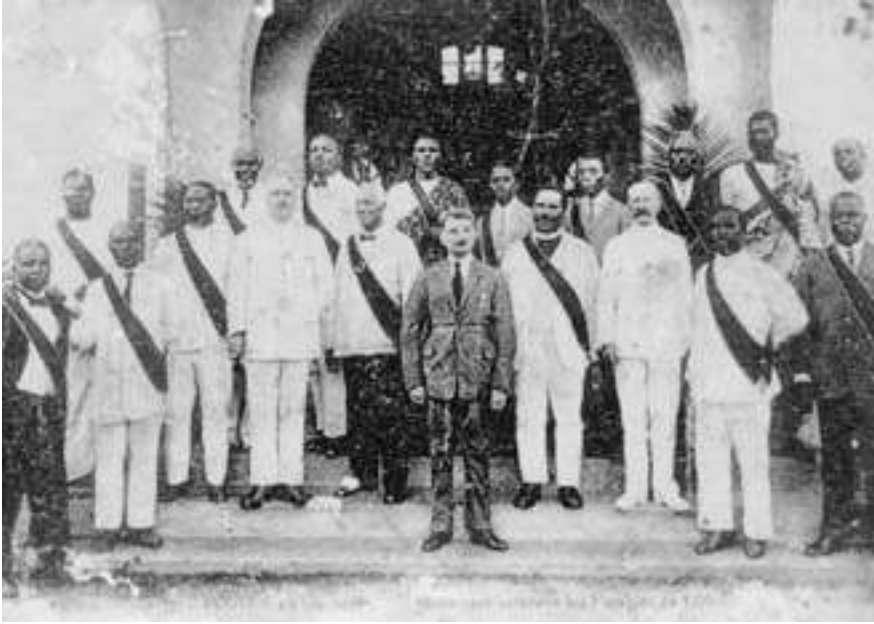
But, despite the petitions and Wilson's anti-imperialistic views, an agreement between France and England in July 1919 put Togo under French control. On September 30, 1920 the French arrived in Lomé to take over as the new colonial power. The next day, Octaviano Olympio, once more displaying the famous pragmatism common to all Afro-Brazilians in the West Coast of Africa, delivered the welcome speech. Nevertheless his attitude towards the French was considered extremely cold. Eventually his allegiance was conquered by Governor Auguste François Bonnacarrère who arrived in Togo in 1922. By then Olympio was already respected by the French as the most important indigenous leader in Togo, not only because of his considerable fortune, but also for the influence he exerted on the indigenous population and the *éléments évolués*. Despite his advancing age—61 years old—he learned French, which he was able to understand well.

In 1922 Bonnacarrère installed the *Conseil des Notables* in Lomé. This was a definite innovation in the realm of French colonization practice; a consultative body, composed of the notable citizens of the city, which advised the French on matters such as taxation, public works and the budget. Octaviano Olympio was a member of the first *Conseil* along with eleven other notables, four of them Afro-Brazilians, Felicio de Souza, Augustino de Souza, Pastor Robert Baéta, and Henri Mensah de Souza. In 1924 Octaviano Olympio sealed his allegiance to France by traveling to Paris after going to London to visit the colonial exposition²².

Octaviano Olympio was now at the culminating point of his life. He was in his early sixties and had been able to acquire remarkable wealth. He was finally fully acknowledged as a leader by the colonial power and would be given due responsibility—he would serve in the Lomé *Conseil des Notables* from its inception in 1922 until 1935. He would also be invited

21. Telegram from Octaviano Olympio to Horatio Bottomley, London, September 12, 1919, R20, 1/3099, Doc. 4900, League of Nations Archives and Historical Collections Unit, United Nations Library, Geneva, Switzerland. File R20, 1/3099, Doc. 4900 in the Archives of the League of Nations contains six telegrams signed by Olympio; Files CO 96/599/66055 and CO 96/607/4048 in the Public Records Office, New England, contain three telegrams signed by Olympio. See WILSON (1924: 467-468).

22. Personal communication from Yves Marguerat, May 28, 1998; DECALO (1996: 96-97); MARGUERAT (In preparation); unpublished manuscript courtesy of Yves Marguerat; Bonnacarrère to Minister of Colonies [France], June 28, 1924, photocopy in the collection of the author; "French Methods in Togoland", *West Africa* (October 4, 1924: 1056b-1057); Octaviano Olympio fully demonstrated his allegiance to the French when he donated 10,000 F in 1938 for the construction of a monument to honor Georges Clemenceau. His was the largest donation by a Togolese. Augustino de Souza and Felicio de Souza each donated 5,000 F, receipt of deposit from Banque de l'Afrique occidentale in the amount of 10,000 F dated July 25, 1938, copy in the personal collection of the author; personal communication from Yves Marguerat, June 8, 1998.



PICTURE 4. — Governor Bonnacarrère and the “Conseil des Notables” of Lomé. Flanking Bonnacarrère to the left Octaviano Olympio, to the right Pastor Robert Domingos Goncalves Baéta, far right front row, with dark and white mustache, is Augustino de Souza, date unknown. Source: Archives nationales du Togo.

to serve, along with Pastor Robert Baéta, in the *Conseil d'administration du Territoire*. In time, he would be duly honored for his achievements. The French would bestow on him several decorations including: *Chevalier du Mérite agricole* in 1925, *Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur* in 1927, and *Officier du Mérite agricole* in 1931²³.

Octaviano had also proved to be as prolific a father as his own had been. Along the way, as he built his fortune and acquired his position of leadership, he also had 24 children with several women. Some of his children would rise to prominence. His oldest son, Agostinho, would be an important planter in neighboring Dahomey and would be elected *Chef de Canton* for Agoue in 1937. Another son, Pedro, would be the first Togolese medical doctor trained in Europe. He would open a private medical clinic in Lomé and go on to become a politician and ambassador. Olympio's youngest son, Luciano (Lucien Bebi), born in 1931 when his father was

23. MARGUERAT (In preparation); D'ALMEIDA-ÉKUÉ (1992: 85); ministre de l'Agriculture [France] to Octaviano Olympio, March 10, 1925; ministre des Colonies [France] to Octaviano Olympio, February 23, 1927; ministre de l'Agriculture [France] to Octaviano Olympio, January 9, 1931; copies in the possession of the author.

already 72 years old, was trained as a lawyer in France and became Attorney General of the Togolese Supreme Court²⁴.

Octaviano Olympio continued to wield considerable economic and political power until his death in 1940 at 81 years old. Besides being a member of the *Conseil des notables* and the *Conseil d'administration* he would also become a member of the Chamber of Commerce and of various commissions studying such varied issues as what constituted Togolese citizenship and local indigenous customs (Gbédémah 1982-1984, II: 317, 320).

Over the quarter of a century that the *Conseil des notables* was in existence, seven Afro-Brazilians served in its ranks. Besides the five members of the original Conseil Jacintho Aguiar, who was identified as a *chef de quartier*, and Modesto dos Santos, who had arrived in Lomé in 1896 and was a trader and planter, served in the late 1920s.

Anecho, the other stronghold of Afro-Brazilians in Togo, also had seven representatives of the community as members of its Conseil. They were Amah d'Almeida, Jorge d'Almeida, Ildelfonso d'Almeida, Akuete da Silveira, Kuakuvi da Silveira, Cosmos da Silveira and Antonio de Souza. All of them were descendants of prominent Afro-Brazilian men of an earlier generation such as the Chacha Francisco de Souza, Pedro Codgio da Silveira and Joaquim d'Almeida (Gbédémah 1982-1984, I: 434; II: 447, 453, 495).

But, participation in the highest level of local political representation did not mean that the Afro-Brazilian community was cohesive in its view of political matters. This was clearly demonstrated when an uprising convulsed Lomé in 1933. This uprising, directly connected with the 1929 world economic crisis which had caused a collapse in the trade of the country's main export products, was triggered by the untimely move of the colonial authorities in imposing new taxes on the population. These taxes became especially onerous on the market-women of Lomé who had, for the first time, to pay a head tax in addition to the customary trade license.

The economic depression had caused the indigenous population to lack confidence in the elite representing them. The *Conseil des notables* was being derisively called by the English nickname of not able (a play of words with the French "*notable*") and considered by the general population as being too conciliatory with the colonial power.

Since 1925 the *Conseil* had been elected by the *Chefs de quartier* and the *Chefs de famille* of Lomé. During the economic crisis some members of this electoral college had formed *L'union coopérative des chefs de famille* de Lomé or, as they were popularly known, *Les Duawo* (the people in the local language). The members of the group presented themselves as speakers for the indigenous population and proposed to serve as intermediaries between them and the *Conseil* (d'Almeida-Ékué 1992: 35).

24. "Ascendants-descendants"; letter from Lucien Bebi Olympio, May 5, 1996; DECALO (1996: 222-223).

For the French the Duawo were simply a secret society and consequently an illegal organization. When the authorities jailed the leaders of the organization in January of 1934 a riot ensued during which Octaviano Olympio's life was threatened and the house of the secretary of the *Conseil des notables* de Lomé—Jonathan Savi de Tové—was ransacked and his car burned. The subsequent jailing and trial of the members of the society showed that at least two of the men in the directing committee of the Duawo were Afro-Brazilians. They were Innocencio d'Almeida and Antonio de Freitas. Koffi Géraldo, another Afro-Brazilian was found to be member in the ranks of the organization (d'Almeida-Ékué 1992: 99-105; Gbédémah 1982: 155, 180).

The 1930s had brought a new generation of Afro-Brazilians to the fore in Togo. Pedro Olympio, the medical doctor, son of Octaviano Olympio, besides tending to his medical practice, was appointed in 1932 member of the *Commission municipale* de Lomé. Other members of this same commission were the young Afro-Brazilian teacher Paulin Jacinto Kofi de Freitas, and Felicio de Souza, a former member of the *Conseil des notables*. In 1938, Sylvanus Olympio, son of Epiphanio and nephew of Octaviano, was appointed general agent of the United Africa Company in Togo. In 1936 he had been tapped by the French to be *vice-président* of the *Cercle des amitiés françaises*, an organization which aimed at bringing together members of all layers of Togolese society: French citizens, *notables*, *évolués* and traditional chiefs, and had the implicit intent of propagating French civilization. Ironically, this organization would become the embryo of the political party that would lead Togo towards independence from France. These names ought to be remembered for they were to become of utmost importance in the upcoming events of Togolese history²⁵.

Upon the advent of the Second World War in September of 1939, Togo became the arena for political maneuvering by the allies (represented by the British in neighboring Gold Coast and the pro-Pétain faction in Lomé). Although the indigenous population was mostly uninterested in the affairs of the whites, the notables took their sides. The Olympio family seems to have been sympathizers of the allied cause and considered pro-English. Sylvanus Olympio was arrested by the pro-Pétain governor in Lomé in 1942 and detained under surveillance in a hotel in Djougou in Dahomey for several weeks. His imprisonment would color forever his relationship with the French (Marguerat 1994: 59, 61; Kokouvi Agboli 1992: 65).

In May of 1945, upon the victory of the allies in Europe, the new French governor in Togo, Jean Noutary, organized a Conference in Lomé to determine, among other items, the future level of indigenous participation in the local government, the industrialization of the colony and its social development. At least three Afro-Brazilians, Sylvanus and Pedro Olympio and

25. See GBÉDÉMAH (1982-1984, 2: 286-287), YAGLA (1992: 87, n. 65, 52), AMLALO & GATOWONOU (1998: 114), KOKOVI AGBOLI (1992: 62-64).



PICTURE 5. — Photo taken at an “at home” given by Octaviano Olympio, date unknown. Sitting from left to right E. E. Olympio, A. Boliger, General W. H. Grey, Octaviano Olympio. Standing from left to right Dr. Pedro Olympio, S. S. Olympio, Sylvanus Epiphanio Olympio, E. J. Amorin.

Jacinto da Silva, were members of this Conference. Sylvanus Olympio dominated the discussions. This Conference was an early forum for his outstanding oratory skills.

At one point in the proceedings Sylvanus Olympio expressed in no uncertain terms how he believed in the identity of Togo as a country: “We want to remain Togolese [and] we want to evolve in our own setting. We have a history [. . .], we have [. . .] a language [and] we have an interest that our children should learn. . . [them]”. This Conference was considered of great historical significance for Togo because it offered a forum to the burgeoning nationalism of the Togolese people (Marguerat 1994: 70-71; Kokouvi Agboli 1992: 66).

Togo’s political growth continued to take place with the formation of political parties and countrywide elections in October of 1945. But total independence from France would not be achieved for another 15 years until April 27, 1960. At the helm of the first fully independent Togolese government was a second generation Afro-Brazilian, born in Africa in 1902, grandson of the “baiano” Francisco Olympio da Silva, who had first arrived in Africa one hundred years before. This Afro-Brazilian, as if to demonstrate the full measure of his heritage, combined in his name both his Brazilian and his African origins, he was: Sylvanus Epiphanio Kwami Olympio (Marguerat 1994: 74; de Souza 1992: 271; Gbédémah 1982, 4: 307).

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of Afro-Brazilians returning to Africa began in the first half of the 18th century and lasted until the beginning of the 20th century. Studies have been written on the Afro-Brazilian communities in Benin and Nigeria, very little has been written on the communities of Togo and Ghana. This article is a preliminary exploration of the history of the Afro-Brazilian community in Togo, especially in Lomé, between 1882 and 1945. It focuses on the history of the Olympio family, one of the most prominent families of Togo. Beginning with the history of patriarch Francisco Olympio Silva, the founder of the family in Africa, and ending with his grandson's Sylvanus Epiphanio Kwami Olympio, emergence as a liberation leader after the Second World War, the article gives an overview of the level of economic and political influence that the Afro-Brazilian community wielded in the country during the period in question.

RÉSUMÉ

Les Afro-Brésiliens du Togo: l'exemple de la famille Olympio, 1882-1945. — Le mouvement des Afro-Brésiliens retournant en Afrique commença dans la première moitié du XVIII^e siècle et dura jusqu'au début du XX^e siècle. Si la plupart des études porte sur les communautés afro-brésiliennes du Bénin et du Nigeria, peu de choses ont été écrites sur les communautés du Togo et du Ghana. Cet article est une reconnaissance de l'histoire de la communauté afro-brésilienne du Togo, particulièrement à Lomé, entre 1882 et 1945. Il concerne l'histoire de la famille Olympio, l'une des plus importantes familles du Togo. Débutant avec l'histoire du patriarche Francisco

Olympio Silva, le fondateur de la famille en Afrique, et se terminant avec celle de son petit-fils Sylvanus Epiphanio Kwami Olympio, lequel a émergé en tant que leader de la libération après la Seconde Guerre mondiale, cet article donne une idée du niveau d'influence économique et politique que la communauté afro-brésilienne a exercé dans le pays pendant cette période.

Keywords/Mots-clés: Afro-Brazilians, Lomé, Olympio family, Togo, West Africa/Afro-Bréiliens, Lomé, la famille Olympio, Togo, Afrique de l'Ouest.