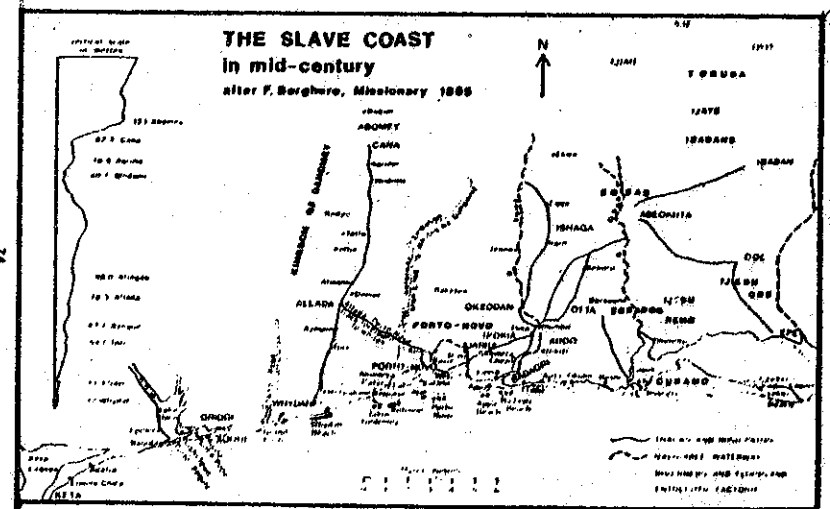


**AFRICANS, AFRO-BRAZILIANS AND EUROPEANS;
19th CENTURY POLITICS ON THE BENIN GULF**

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This essay attempts to define and analyze a series of group interactions and group misunderstandings which occurred on that part of the West African coast which today includes the countries of Nigeria, Benin (ex-Dahomey), Togo and Ghana, these events taking place during the latter half of the 19th century. Principal participants in the various mini-dramas localized in the area of the Benin Gulf were the Yoruba coastal merchants, many residing in Lagos, the Gun of Porto-Novo, members of the Abomean Fon dynasty who controlled the kingdom's Atlantic port of Ouidah, Mina or Ewe groups whose predominance was along that part of the coast separating Dahomey and Togo and whose influence continued into what at that time was called the Gold Coast, and the Ga, whose area of concentration included the port of Accra. ¹ European interaction can be analyzed in multiple forms, consular agents making and breaking solemn treaties between indigenous African coastal groups and the agent's respective government. Normally either France or Great Britain constituted an integral part of this European community. Missionaries, while representative of various European nationalities, served larger church interests in Great Britain (example the CMS in Lagos or Accra), or in France (les Missions Africaines, with headquarters in Lyon initiated Roman Catholic activities on the Benin Gulf). An exception was the Portuguese Fort and Mission station in Ouidah, which continued to receive Portuguese speaking priests, normally from Goa, until the period of the French conquest. ² European commercial interests were also represented along the coast, either through the large quasimonopolistic commercial "houses" such as Régis, Frères Cyprien Fabre or Royal Niger Co., or in the decreasing numbers of individual European traders who moved along the coast or upland from the coast, in direct commercial contact with indigenous communities. A third distinct group or community present in the Gulf of Benin was the stranger-Africans, first generation Africans who had been sold into slavery and sent to the Americas, or whom had

- 1 AKINJOBIN, I.A. *Dahomey and its Neighbours 1708-1818*. Cambridge, 1967; William Johnson Argyle, *The Fon of Dahomey*. Oxford, 1966; Julio Braga, "Notas sobre o 'Quartier Bresil' no Daomé", *Afro-Ásia*. N^{os} 6-7, junho de 1968; TURNER, J. Michael, *Les Bresiliens - The Impact of Former Brazilian Slaves Upon Dahomey* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis), Boston University, 1975; and TURNER, "Cultura Afro-Brasileira na África Ocidental", *Cadernos Candido Mendes, Estudos Afro-Asiáticos*, n^o 1, jan-abr de 1978.
- 2 BOUCHE, Pierre. *La Côte des Esclaves e le Dahomey*. Paris, 1885; H. Borghero, "Missions du Dahomey", *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*, tome trente-quatrième, Lyon, 1862; VERGER, Pierre. *Bahia and the West Coast Trade, 1549-1851*. Ibadan, 1964.

experienced re-capture at the hands of the British Royal Navy and had been sent to Freetown on the coast of Sierra Leone. ³ These *Amaros* and *Saros*, ⁴ also included emigrants born in Brazil, Cuba and Sierra Leone whose importance increased during the latter part of the 19th century, as they established their economic and political ties with the indigenous coastal ethnic groups. ⁵ Conflict was not limited strictly to relations between these three larger communities; indigenous African, European, and stranger-African, but also served to define intragroup action. At work was a variation of *centripetal* force affecting group behavior and action in which localized conflict tended to influence attitudinal formation for the group and subsequent group behavior with the other communities. Certain of these localized conflicts will serve as points for continuing discussion and analysis later in the study.

During the middle decades of the 19th century, the area of the Benin Gulf, which had served as one of Africa's major embarkation points in the transatlantic slave trade, attempted with only a fair measure of success to adhere to the British exigencies of stopping the illegal commerce in human traffic and substituting it with the approved cargoes of palm oil, or tapioca. All three major communities had made substantial profits in the now-illegal commerce and attempted to continue the old system despite the increasing surveillance and direct pressures of the Royal British Navy to end the traffic. ⁶ Among the more established members of the Afro-Brazilian community on the coast of Benin, several families had themselves engaged in the slave trade thereby founding fortunes which helped to create an elite status for the clans' later generations. Joaquim d'Almeida, Dahomean born, after spending more than twenty years in Bahia, purchased his freedom and managed to return to the Gulf of Benin, settling in Agoué, a coastal town on the Togolese-Dahomean frontier. ⁷ Arriving on the coast in 1835,

- 3 KOPYTOFF, Jean H. *A Preface to Modern Nigeria, The Sierra Leonians in Yoruba 1830-1890*. Madison, 1965; also C.W. Newbury, *The Western Slave Coast and Its Rulers*. Oxford, 1961, p. 56 e 81; VERGER, Pierre. "Memoires de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire" (I.F.A.N.). N^o 21, Les Afro-Américains. Dakar, 1952, p. 11.
- 4 KOPYTOFF, J.H. "Preface", p. 95; NEWBURY. *Slave Coast*, p. 57 and see Pauline Baker, *Urbanization and Political Change: A Study of the Politics of Lagos 1917-1967* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis). U.C.L.A., 1970.
- 5 *Id.*, *ibid.*, p. 99, also A.I. Mabogunje, *Urbanization in Nigeria*. London, 1968, p. 243.
- 6 NEWBURY. *Slave Coast*, p. 57.
- 7 VERGER, Pierre. *Flux et reflux de la Traité Des Negres entre le Golfe de Benin et Bahia de Todos os Santos du XVII^e Siècle*. Paris, 1968, p. 474.

d'Almeida through former contacts in Bahia and with his newly established African agents was able to become one of the most successful slave traders on the Benin Gulf during the 1840's. While his wealth enabled d'Almeida to recreate the physical lifestyle of a Bahian planter, going so far as to construct a chapel dedicated to the Bahian church Senhor Bom Jesus da Redenção, political advantages also accrued to the former slave. Joaquim, because of his business activities, remained in continual communication with agents of the King of Abomey who were stationed in Ouidah. Relations between Agoué, an enclave of the Mina ethnic group and Abomey were never excellent, however Joaquim was able to establish a certain "territoriality" which recognized his sphere of influence in the Agoué region.⁸ He was particularly successful in using his influence in the neighbouring kingdom-town of Petit Popo, administered by the Lawson family. George Sally Lawson who ruled in Petit Popo during the 1840's depended heavily upon the financial contributions of d'Almeida; the former slave was able to use this financial leverage upon the king to extract political favors and to suggest or promote certain positions and attitudinal behavior on the part of Petit Popo in its relationship with other slave traders, African and European.⁹ There is a parallel in the relationship between d'Almeida and the Lawson clan of Petit Popo and the close relationship between the white Brazilian slave trader Dom Francisco "Xaxa" de Sousa of Ouidah and King Cuezo in Abomey.¹⁰ What began as a classic patron-client relationship, in both cases, a royal African patron with foreign slave-trader clients, over time manifested subtle modifications in the relationship between the participants. The commercial aspects of the partnership come to predominate, the royal dependence upon the Brazilians' contributions increased and with that increasing dependency an emerging *de facto* patron status for the foreign or stranger-African merchant.

The examples of d'Almeida in Agoué and Petit Popo, de Sousa in Ouidah can be duplicated in other towns along the Benin Gulf. In Porto-Novo during the 1860's the Paraiso clan acted as financial supporters and

advisors to the Gun King, of that frontier city.¹¹ Family influence within the town had been based upon its wealth and contacts with foreign traders and merchants. French consular agents repeatedly attempted to encourage the Paraisos to use their prestige and influence at court to press for concessions to be given to the French government, eventually their assistance being solicited to help the French establish a protectorate over that coastal city.¹² As the most prominent of the returned Afro-Brazilian merchant families in Porto-Novo, the French attempted to use the Paraisos as examples or models to persuade other commercial groups to support French strategic and political interests over those of other European nations, particularly Great Britain. In Lagos however where British political and commercial interests were paramount,¹³ returned families such as the da Rochas, Campos and Santos entered into similar relationships with British commercial and political authorities, trading not only among the Lagotians of the inland town, but also establishing and Afro-Brazilian or Amaro semi-network of commercial links that went through Yorubaland as far north as Ibadan and Illorin.¹⁴ On the Gold Coast Afro-Brazilian emigrants arriving in the 1860's established themselves in the role of clients to the Otublohum branch of the Ga ethnic group located in the town of Accra. There the Ga chief or Mantse was able to use their commercial skills and knowledge to assist him in his relations not only with British agents and officials but also local Fante groups.¹⁵

What was the nature and compositions of the stranger-African community which provided it with skills, knowledge and information of value to both African and European communities? For the Afro-Brazilians, as well as the Afro-Cubans,¹⁶ the period of slavery in the Americas, apart from the obviously traumatic nature of that experience had given the slave, per force, new perspectives and attitudes. The institution required that the slave learn a new language, new terminology and new skills and technology. Customs and mores of the new larger society came indirectly through observation, imitation;

11 MARTY, Paul. "Les Afro-Américains", p. 20, also Dépôt des Archives, Aix-en-Provence, Senegal, A.O.F. Serie, Crespin to Ministre, 1902, Interview with Jean Paraiso, Agoué, Benin, 10 April 1972.

12 TURNER, *Les Brésiliens...*, p. 315-316; VERGER, "Afro-Américains", p. 20.

13 Interview with Alexandre Onofre Soluete in Lagos, Nigeria 27 June 1972, Interview with Mrs. da Rocha Thomas in Lagos, 25 June 1972, Field Notes at meeting of Brazilian Descendants' Friendly Society Meeting, Lagos 29 June 1972. Also Archives of the Missioni Africani (Rome), manuscript of the "Journal" of M. Borghero, p. 127, 155, 169, 175.

14 *Ibid.*

15 TURNER, "Cultura", p. 23.

16 *Id.*, *Les Brésiliens...*, p. 220.

8 Interview of author with Antonio d'Almeida, Agoué, Benin, 12 March 1972, Field Notes from d'Almeida Chapel in Agoué, March 1972.

9 Great Book, Anécho, Togo, dated March 1849, Field Notes, April, 1972.

10 HAZOUMÉ, P. *Le Pacte du Sangue au Dahomey*. Paris, 1956, p. 28, Verger, *Flux et reflux*, p. 463-467, NEWBURY, *Slave Coast*, p. 46 and BURTON, Richard, *A Mission to Gelele, King of Dahomey*. London, 1954, Vol. I, p. 47, 68-69.

resulting usually but not in every instance, in assimilation on the part of the captured African to the non-African culture. One cannot discount cultural fusion and assimilation occurring between African and non-African in the Americas, Brazilian culture in a general sense, Bahian culture in a more specific example being the resultant consequences; however European values as transmuted into Brazilian values of the 19th century were obviously adopted by the African slaves and served to change and modify original African cultural attitudes and thinking. This experience of as much as twenty or thirty years of inculcated Brazilian, i.e., foreign culture was brought back to West Africa by the returning former slaves marking them as different and other, truly a stranger-African community,¹⁷ in comparison to indigenous African groups, either those from which the slaves had been originally captured at the beginning of the 19th century, or the more cosmopolitan African groups of the coast, whom despite centuries of contact (commercial and social) with Europeans, had retained a certain authenticity, lost to those who had been sold into slavery.

A sizeable proportion of the returning Afro-Brazilians were Yoruba or descended from Yorubas who had been captured and sent to Brazil early in the 19th century.¹⁸ One interesting aspect of the Brazilian or foreign acculturative process was that few of the *retournées* upon arriving on the West African coast returned to their actual home villages or communities. While the stated rationale for returning to Africa given by the emigrants was a return to lost family and ethnic group relations,¹⁹ the actual fact upon returning to the continent was different, in that the majority of settlers chose to remain along the coast of Benin in the small trading enclaves and towns. Their acquired Bahian skills of urban street vendor, small-scale merchant, mason, carpenter, ship-builder, tool mechanician, waggon-maker, would be more easily incorporated into the coastal economies and trading system than in the central interior. Commercial opportunities because of the number of European traders and commercial houses proved greater upon the coast, also providing the Afro-Brazilians, or *Brésilien*,²⁰ as they

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ TURNER, Lorenzo. "Some Contacts of Brazilian Ex-Slaves with Nigeria, West Africa", *The Journal of Negro History*. Vol. XXVII, n° 1, January 1942; VERGER, "Retour Des 'Brésiliens' au Golfe du Benin au XIX^e Siècle". *Etudes Dahomennes*. N° 8 (Octobre, 1966); TURNER, "Os escravos brasileiros no Daomé". *Afro-Asia*. N°s 8-9, 1970; TARDITS, Claude, "Les Brésiliens en Afrique", *Marco Polo*. N° 25, November, 1956.

¹⁹ TURNER, "Cultura", p. 20.

²⁰ The French adjective *Brésilien* was applied to the group in Dahomey and Togo, areas of the group's greatest numerical concentration and historical importance.

came to be known in Dahomey and Togo, with a specialized economic role, that of middlemen. Increasingly during the 19th century they would become agents for European firms selling manufactured goods initially for slaves, but after 1860 for palm oil produced by upcountry African farmers. Speaking some African language, with a certain but not complete ethnic identification with a local group and with the additional ability of being able to speak Portuguese, the *lingua franca* of coastal trade during the 19th century, the *Brésiliens*, easily adapted to this role of middleman.

Language became an important criterion and skill for the community. Europeans and Africans along the coast and central interior were engaged in a variety of relationships and interests, political and commercial, harmonious and fractious. Interpretation in a most basic form was required by each group. The logical choice for this task was again the newly arrived emigrants, with their familial knowledge of Yoruba, Fon, or Mina and their recently acquired knowledge of Portuguese. The one linguistic instance in which the Afro-Brazilians did not easily fit into the position of interpreters was that of the Gold Coast, where their familial languages did not correspond to that of the Akan speaking group and their Portuguese while of use as a part of the commercial or trading language of the region quickly gave way to English as the dominant European tongue.²¹

The *Brésiliens* frequently accompanied European consular agents on missions into the interior, acting as guides and interpreters. Again this middle position between African and European served to typify not only their profession but also emerging social status along the coast.²² Pragmatism in part dominated the economic relationship involving the three communities, each having a commodity, skill, or possession desired by a different group. For the Afro-Brazilians it was their ambiguity being neither African nor European, which constituted their major asset and perhaps also major deficit. They were in a middle position which by its nature called into question their loyalty as individuals and as a group or community.

It is possible to discuss the *Brésiliens* as a community or another ethnic group (popularly, a tribe), upon their arrival on the African coast. Although their actual ethnic origins were diverse, many of them born in the Americas and not in Africa, they began to manifest group traits and

²¹ TURNER, *ibid.*, p. 23-24.

²² Archives Nationales du Dahomey (Benin). Series DI/I, Lieutenant Colonel Bonard to Resident Grand Popo, Ouidah 14 December 1892, concerning services of Brigadier of Police Pereira, and agent Pedro Santos.

characteristics soon after their return to Africa. Important was having shared the experience of Brazil and that particular culture. Within the *Brésilien* community this meant a certain superiority in attitude and often behavior to the indigenous coastal groups who lacked the "advantages" of having been slaves in the Americas. In the larger *Brésilien* communities between Lomé and Porto-Novo, and among many of the families settled in Lagos, there was a refusal to relinquish the Portuguese surnames, or names given to them by their Brazilian masters, and accept only African *patronymics*.²³ The Portuguese surname apart from being an instant identification of either foreign background or heritage was for them a certain source of pride, a distinguishing trait or difference from other Africans. Following the established custom, these *Brésilien* mini-fundiaries upon establishing their own plantations along the coast would then give their slave surnames to their own African slaves, who in turn would guard these names as a badge of distinction, in the twentieth century being mistakenly considered full fledged members of the larger *Brésilien* clans.²⁴ Any trait or characteristic which illustrated a social difference or distinction for the *Brésilien* became desirable in their often erroneous belief that is conferred upon them a certain superior status. This was manifested in their choice of architectural style which self-consciously modeled itself upon Brazilian colonial architecture, found notably in Salvador,²⁵ culinary habits and patterns of dress all of which harkened back to their singular Brazilian history.²⁶

A caste-like behavior exhibited by the *Brésiliens* becomes apparent when one studies family structure, marriage patterns and incidence of inter-marriage (as opposed to intra-marriage), as reflected within the community. The sample for the study is necessarily taken from Roman Catholic Baptismal Records, Marriage Registries and Death Certificates, but also includes interviews with non-Catholic, i.e., Muslim *Brésiliens* and newspaper records which tended to record actions of the entire community.²⁷

23 TURNER, *Les Brésiliens...* Chapter VII.

24 Interview with Alex Bernardo d'Almeida in Ouidah, Benin 2 March 1972 and interview with Philippe d'Almeida in Cotonou, Benin 6 June 1972 describing confusion between real and false Bresilien families of Benin and Togo.

25 TURNER, "Cultura", p. 21.

26 *Ibid.*

27 Records and documents used at the Portuguese Fort, Ouidah, Catholic Mission documents housed at Cathedral, Ouidah and in Diocese Offices Cotonou, Benin, Catholic Diocese Office in Accra, Ghana, also Paul Marty, *Etudes Sur L'Islam au Dahomey* (Paris, 1926) and Dahomean African press as represented by *La Presse Porto-Novienne*, *La Voix du Dahomey*, *La Phare du Dahomey*, *Supreme Sagesse* and *La Tribune Sociale du Dahomey*.

It is possible to estimate the number of returned former Brazilian slaves at approximately 4,000.²⁸ The sample provides evidence for a recorded 250 marriages involving members of the *Brésilien* community. Within that group more than 65% of the marriages were between *Brésilien* and *Brésilien(ne)*. These marriage preferences are significant and illustrative both of the community and the situation along the coast at the time of the Afro-Brazilians' arrival. Class distinction was a major point of consideration within the group; alliances were weighed for their social, political and economic possibility and potential. Quite literally families married families as much as individual to individual; clan feuds, often based upon commercial rivalries could be resolved, at least temporarily with an alliance or truce based upon a marriage. The important *Brésilien* families also did not hesitate to form alliances with local African aristocracy, a merchant marrying the daughter of a local ruler.²⁹ A somewhat defensive attitude on the part of the community was also being expressed in these intra-group marriages as many families felt that a *suitable* marriage partner could only be found within the *Brésilien* group, as the cultural level of the group was supposedly so superior to that of the local Africans. To a certain extent these attitudes continue to be expressed among certain members of the present generation of *Brésiliens*, discerning cultural and social differences representing for them a continued elite status.³⁰

In what was a genuinely hostile environment of the 19th century West African coast, the newly arrived emigrants socially and culturally intermingled in a attempt to form a common defense, as they had no natural allies or familial and clan patrons. They were in effect strangers without the governmental or economic support offered to the resident Europeans; placed therefore in a precarious political position, a logical first reference group became the Afro-Brazilian community itself. Unstated and probably even unconsciously over time, the *Brésiliens* began developing "tribal" characteristics, clans relating to clans, client and patron relationships which were similar to patterns existent within the surrounding African communities. There was a turning-inward by the *Brésiliens* socially and culturally, this becoming marked as they became increasingly unable to compete commercially with the large European trading houses in the market represented by the coast itself and with the beginning of the twentieth century, the few truly large scaled international *Brésilien* firms lost their

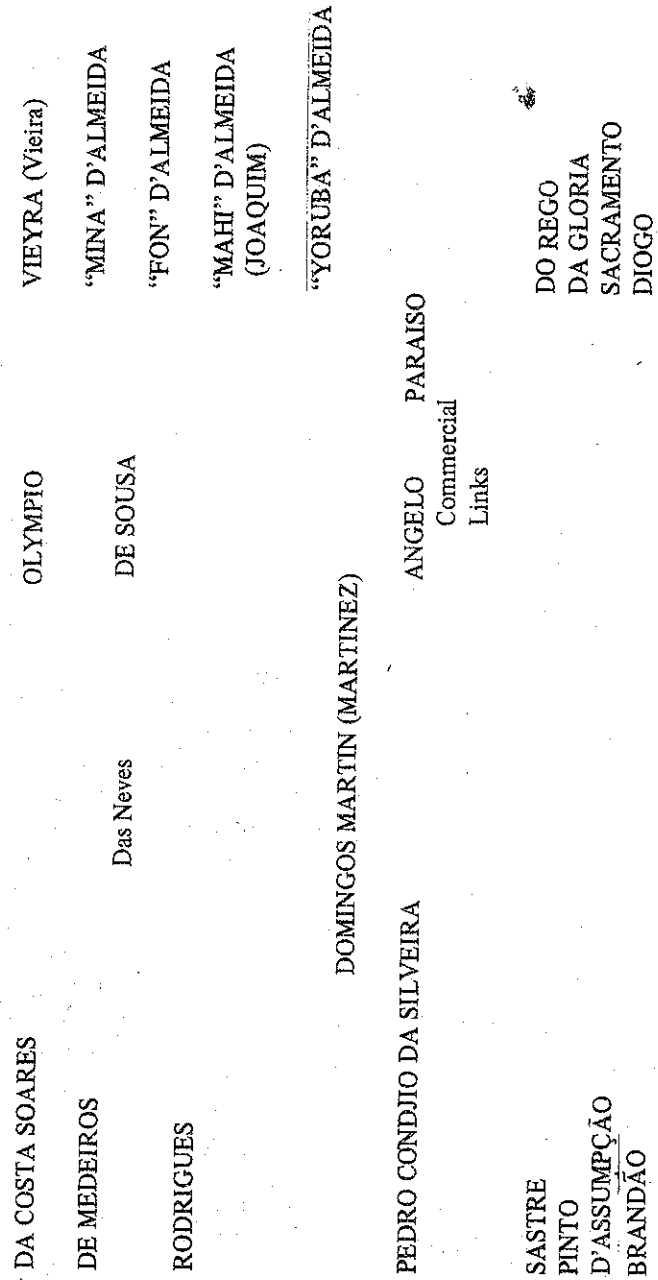
28 NEWBURY, *Slave Coast*, p. 56 e 81; VERGER, "Afro-Américains", p. 11.

29 TURNER, *Les Brésiliens*, p. 106.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 352-353.

FIGURE 1

THE EXTENDED BRÉSILIIEN FAMILY



coveted Lagos-Bahia connection.³¹ Community status of course did not preclude intra-group rivalry and strife.

Commerce dominated the *Brésiliens'* relationships with the other large coastal communities, African and European, but also profoundly marked relationships amongst the *Brésiliens* themselves. Trading combinations and deals for the making of a financial profit characterize the community and most often represented motives for intra-group hostility and strife. Clan or family disputes or feuds which could continue for almost a generation were consequences of this economic motivation.³² Ouidah presents several examples of internal rivalry among some of the larger *Brésilien* groups which had a generalized prejudicial effect upon trading possibilities for the entire Afro-Brazilian community. In Lagos the *Amaros* faced severe competition not only from established European and African traders but also the returned Sierra Leonean (former Yoruba captives) *Saros*. The ability of the *Saros* to speak English, their familiarity with English customs, manners and Victorian attitudes naturally made them more favorable to British authorities in Lagos than the Afro-Brazilians.³³ The disadvantages which were experienced by Afro-Brazilians returning to Lagos in the period 1840-1860 in comparison to the returned Sierra Leoneans, help to explain the *Brésiliens'* commercial interests in engaging in "illegitimate" trade. The British accused the *Brésiliens* of engaging in the illegal slave trade, of complicity and used this as a pretext to expel from Lagos several Afro-Brazilian traders during the early 1860's.³⁴ The traders immediately went to Porto-Novo, where family relations permitted them to integrate themselves into the more socially and politically fluid community and continue their economic activities now prohibited by British rule on Lagos island.

Africans and Europeans found it expedient to employ the Afro-Brazilians in their commercial affairs. The *Brésiliens* once removed from their own group as they did not have a natural power base were correctly seen as being dependant upon their employers. If economically viable or profitable they would place the interests of their new patrons above the interests of their Afro-Brazilian commercial community. Loyalty could be purchased. The *Brésiliens* in returning to Africa in effect were proclaiming their dissatisfaction with their existence in Brazil, opportunities not being

31 *Ibid.*, p. 349.

32 Archives Nationales du Dahomey (Benin). Series C/II A.J. Lombard, "Chefferie d'Agoué", p. 21.

33 BAKER, Urbanization..., p. 52; NEWBURY, *Slave Coast*, p. 130.

34 KOPYTOFF, "Preface", p. 99; NEWBURY, *ibid.*, p. 57.

offered; their decision to return to Africa seemed to imply a marked affinity with that continent, its cultures and peoples, but the group's actions after its return belie any natural affinity. Pragmatism typifies Brésilien behavior and attitudes on the West African coast; the individual or family accepted the most advantageous proposition which offered financial and perhaps a measure of political stability.³⁵

The more successful Afro-Brazilian traders were able to use their commercial contacts in Salvador to have exported to them in Africa Bahian *cachaça* and tobacco which they subsequently sold to coastal Africans in exchange for kola nut and palm oil. The Brésiliens then exported the African produce to Salvador, earning substantial profits during the middle decades of the 19th century.³⁶ Portuguese traders were often partners of the Afro-Brazilians in this international trade. Ties of language and cultural similarity obviously facilitated the commercial contacts and provided the new arrivals with needed finance capital. Many of the Portuguese merchants integrated themselves socially into the coastal life; they fathered Afro-European children and played an increasingly important political role entering into the rivalries and divisions which so characterized coastal politics.³⁷ In Ouidah Portuguese influence quite naturally centered around the town's Portuguese Fort, the last remaining vestige of official Portuguese authority in the Benin Gulf.³⁸ With the passage of time, the descendants (Afro-European) of the Portuguese merchants entered into the *Brésilien* community as full participants, contracting marriages with the major Afro-Brazilian families and participating in the group's ceremonial life, becoming trading partners within the community.

Portuguese traders, *Brésiliens* and other merchants in Ouidah were

35 TURNER, *ibid.*, p. 218-221.

36 Examples of Joaquim d'Almeida of Agoué, João Victor Angelo of Ouidah, Joachim Manuel de Carvalho of Porto-Novo, one of the Brésilien traders who signed French Protectorate over Porto-Novo in 1863.

37 Most prominent example is João de Medeiros of Ouidah, Samuel da Costa Soares of Agoué and Joaquim Rodrigues of Ouidah, all three arriving on the Benin coast in the 1850's married or entered into domestic unions with African women, sired large families and engaged in local politics.

38 The Portuguese petulantly abandoned their Ouidah Fort at the beginning of the 1960's under demand for their withdrawal by the independent government of Dahomey. Upon their departure the Portuguese deliberately burned historical documents, furniture and even an automobile which was property of the Fort and which the Dahomean government left as a symbol or monument of the passing of the Portuguese from the country.

compelled to accept the vicissitudes of trading with the Abomean monarchy. Receiving a summons to go 'up' to Abomey from Ouidah could cause considerable concern for any trader fearing that royal authority had been offended by some act and was then seeking retribution. Often such fears proved to be founded in reality, merchants being either severely chastised by the King, losing their property through confiscation, occasionally even more serious measures.³⁹ Entering completely the social, political and economic game offered by Abomey, the foreign participants were also expected to abide by and follow its rules. Economic problems of the traders were not limited to their relations with Abomean royal authority; rises and declines in the world market had direct repercussions on the Benin Gulf.

The changeover from illegitimate to legitimate commerce most often represented for those involved in the commerce a substantial reduction of income and revenue; King Guezo of Dahomey adamantly opposed the changeover based solely upon economic arguments.⁴⁰ There was a continuing treat of military activity along the Benin coast which served to severely hamper the implantation of palm oil agriculture and further served to depress the local economy.⁴¹ An economy but more importantly a culture had been constructed around the slave trade which proved itself inelastic and inflexible when external forces demanded transformation of the old system. The *Brésiliens* along with other African merchants with varying amounts of capital were able to acquire lands for palm oil plantations and through the institution of domestic slavery cultivate palm trees to furnish oil and the kernel which was used for the manufacture of margarine.⁴² For the coastal producers the chronic problem would prove to be their inability to control export prices and an increasing dependency upon control and conditions created and maintained far from their African coast.

Increasing European political influence on the Benin Gulf mean also an ever expanding commercial network which served only to diminish opportunities for the Afro-Brazilian entrepreneurs, whose Bahian commercial contacts by the twentieth century proved unable to compete with the

39 Field Notes, Ouidah, March 1972 and interview with Virgilio de Medeiros, Lomé, Togo 10 May 1972.

40 HOPKINS, A.G., *An Economic History of West Africa*. New York, 1973, p. 107-108, 140n-141.

41 *Ibid.*

42 BOUCHE, "Côte des Esclaves", p. 302; BOOK, Great, Anécho, dated entry for March 1849.

European "monopolis" such as Cyprien Fabre and U.A.C. 43 The merchants who had begun to achieve a kind of economic parity with their European individual merchant colleagues in mid-19th century quickly lost that equality by the end of the century and the transformed political situation total European political domination of the area and region. Apart from a small number of merchants located in Ouidah, Agoué and Anécho who were able to retain their independence trading along the coast between Dahomey and Togo or into the interior, along trading routes which they had dominated during the mid-19th century, 44 the majority of Afro-Brazilian traders were forced to accept positions as employees of the large European companies in an economic parallel to their role as linguistic middle-persons. It became necessary to accept positions as clerks, warehouse keepers, and traveling agents for the Europeans, upriver, in African settlements; while the Afro-Brazilians were able to earn regular fixed salaries as employees, obviously they had lost a large measure of their own financial independence and opportunity to create their own economic structures which would have enabled them to more quickly become an economic elite and power, which in the end would always elude them as a group.

Amalgamation on the part of the larger Afro-Brazilian traders and commercial enterprises could have proven an efficient counterbalance or strategy against complete European commercial domination. Small commercial family dynasties such as the Joaquim d'Almeida clan of Agoué and the neighboring Olympios, in Ouidah the clan of the "Xaxa", Francisco Felix de Sousa, the "Brazilianized" Portuguese family of Francisco de Medeiros also of Ouidah, and in Porto-Novo the Afro-Brazilian Paraiso family, all had accumulated significant commercial wealth throughout the 19th century, initially through the slave trade, but also many of them through the transatlantic trade with Salvador. 45 Economic rivalries and the competition to secure inland African market or produce for their export

43 Archives Nationales du Dahomey (Benin) Series DI/I, Director of African Affairs to Governor of Colony of Dahomey, Paris, 26 November 1902, also Archives Nationales du Dahomey (Benin) Series C/II Annual Report made by Dessirier, Ouidah 1909, 14 January 1910.

44 Case of João Victor Angelo family as reported in Archives Nationales du Dahomey (Benin) Series DI/I João Victor Angelo to Vice-President, Porto-Novo, 26 May 1893 and Antonio d'Almeida of Agoué who purchased factories of the German firms Wolber and Brohm after the French conquest discussed in Archives Nationales du Dahomey (Benin) Series DI/I d'Albecca to General Commandant Superior, 3 February 1893.

45 TURNER, Les Brésiliens... Chapter V.

companies had made difficult, but not impossible the possibility of large scale cooperation. When one remembers the social and familial caste within which the Brésilien community lived along the Benin Gulf, the very high incidence of inter-marriage among the Afro-Brazilians, these social links could have been applied to the solving of the increasingly serious financial and political problems which began to menace the group in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Like the more general political danger of the increasing European presence which was taking place, many Afro-Brazilians were unable to perceive it until it had already occurred. The European companies, well informed concerning rivalries between African groups and rivalries within the Brésilien community were able to play one group off against the other, weakening from the beginning attempts for consolidation or unity against the external threat. 46 The European firm was able to offer more stable conditions to an individual trader as he became a salaried worker, which under short term conditions might appear attractive to a veteran of the cutthroat commercial wars always taking place along the Benin Gulf. Prosperity, even short term profits often proved ephemeral to the individual trader; also the small commercial trading house was subject to a precarious existence, facts which were exploited by the European firms. Association with a European firm might initially have been proposed in the form of a quasi-partnership; similar in hidden purpose to the many treaties of "protection" then concurrently being offered to African sovereigns for their signature and approval by itinerant European political "counselors", these, in turn, promised Africans European military protection against other traditional local enemies. However the peril quickly showed itself to be not the traditional African enemies of the group, but its new European protectors. 47 For the Brésilien merchants initial financial stability soon passed into the status socially and economically of an employee of a European enterprise whose rationale and workings were only to benefit the parent company in Paris or London; local interests and concerns were always to be subordinated to the larger European needs, illustrating that the price for financial stability for the individual trader proved, in the end, to be quite costly.

Another problem for the Afro-Brazilians concerned their general position within the economies of the coastal cities. While there was an incipient merchant class of some importance, larger numbers were employed

46 Ibid., p. 274-275.

47 OBICHERE, Boniface. *West African States and European Expansion: The Dahomey-Niger Hinterland, 1885-1898*. New Haven, 1971.

as artisans, particularly in the towns of Porto-Novo and Lagos.⁴⁸ The Brésiliens, when compared to the returning Sierra Leoneans did not manage to occupy positions of equal intellectual or commercial importance in representative numbers. They became the masons, tailors, carpenters and metal workers of Lagos and Badagry, much as they had been in Salvador. In Lagos their linguistic difficulties with the English language placed them at a disadvantage with the former slaves from Sierra Leone, who had had the advantage of a Victorian-style education which provided certain insights into the English character and allowed them to more successfully deal with the official English presence, which in 1862 had declared Lagos to be a Crown Colony.⁴⁹ In larger numbers, the economic impact of the Afro-Brazilians was diminished, as the artisan class to which a majority of its members belonged did not carry the same weight or influence as the merchants. The larger group would perhaps suffer less drastic economic dislocation with the coming to power of the Europeans than did the Saros from Sierra Leone; however in Nigeria which was the scene of major rivalry between Saro and Amaro, the Brésiliens, as a group, would never be able to achieve the economic success or prestige of their anglophone rivals. In Nigeria they did not produce the large number of lawyers, newspaper editors, merchants and builders which characterized the Sierra Leoneans. Although an Afro-Brazilian elite in Lagos was created, it was not able to withstand or combat full-fledged European colonialism, as represented by a Sir George Goldie and his Royal Niger Company,⁵⁰ which of course also defeated the Saros' independent commercial schemes. In the new "political kingdom" as represented by colonialism there was no possibility for the Afro-Brazilian to successfully compete as an equal; against him, (and not only the Afro-Brazilian), was ideology, economics and international politics.

While the political situation in Lagos tended to favor the Sierra Leoneans over the Afro-Brazilians (reaching a critical level in the mid 1860's when the British actually expelled Afro-Brazilians from the Colony for suspected complicity in the illegal trading of slaves),⁵¹ in the still independent kingdom of Dahomey and the coastal enclaves along the coast to Togo, the Brésiliens attempted, with greater success, to influence the activities of French consular officers, in their attitudes towards the Fon kingdom in Abomey and its powerful centralized monarchy. Linguistic

48 BAKER, Urbanization..., p. 52.

49 NEWBURY, ...Slave Coast..., p. 130.

50 HOPKINS, "Economic History", p. 155, 199 e 164.

51 KOPYTOFF, "Preface", p. 95. also Newbury, *ibid.*, p. 57

ties and a set of cultural mores learned in Brazil during their period of slavery quite naturally brought the Brésiliens into contact with the resident Portuguese traders and merchants along the coast. These contacts often were as much social as economic and the Brésilien culture which developed during the 19th century included several of these Portuguese-African families. The Afro-Brazilians could be seen as being natural political "clients" of the Portuguese in a political system (closely correlated with the accompanying economic system), based upon the theory of patron and client, superior and inferior person and group relationships. The Portuguese were able to use as a political base their Fort in Ouidah, an institution which also served as a sometime political home for Brésilien families along the coast.⁵²

This relationship with the Portuguese afforded the Afro-Brazilians a measure of independence, at least initially, in their dealings with the French; they attempted to juxtapose their European patrons (sometimes their European clients), balancing off one against the other, the Brésiliens attempting to realize the greatest benefits for themselves. Unfortunately for the Afro-Brazilians this initial strategy met with only limited success as the Portuguese must be considered poor political rivals to the French. In 1864 France declared a protectorate over the town of Porto-Novo, an action which mirrored the British protectorate declared two years earlier over the neighboring island town of Lagos.⁵³ The Brésiliens were not indifferent to the French action, and were even cited by one French official as a partial justification for the declaration of the mandate.⁵⁴ The actual treaty has the signatures of several Afro-Brazilian traders and in various letters of extension, which could be considered official annexations to the treaty of protection, the names of important Brésilien traders figure prominently. This particular merchant class saw the French as a stabilizing political force in Porto-Novo which could prove beneficial to their group's commercial interests. Of particular interest to the Brésilien traders was the possibility that their new European benefactors in Porto-Novo would serve as needed protection against the wrath (always a possibility) of the King and court in Abomey; anger usually in function of commercial dealings and misdealings between the Afro-Brazilian traders and Fon traders

52 TURNER, "Les Brésiliens...", p. 239-240.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 222.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 223.

representing the King.⁵⁵ Unfortunately the French proved no more adept at handling the Abomey "mafia" than the Brésiliens, so that after a short time the French protectorate for the Brésiliens proved more illusory in its protection than real. Many Brésiliens attempted to place themselves under the French suzerainty, seeking the position of *protégés*, however they were quickly disillusioned as France proved unwilling to use its economic and military force to "protect" Porto-Novo against the periodic predatory actions of Abomey.

The Afro-Brazilians again illustrating their middle group status identification attempted at a later date to interest the Portuguese in the establishment of a Portuguese Protectorate over the town of Ouidah, in an effort to block Fon influence and as an additional challenge or provocation to the French.⁵⁶ Encouraged by the Brésiliens, Portugal in 1885 attempted to proclaim the entire Dahomean coast as being under Portuguese protection, an action which infuriated not only the French, but also the royal court in Abomey. These two latter parties demanded to know by what right Portugal was declaring for itself authority over large sections of the country; challenges to the Protectorate were made immediately. However for the Afro-Brazilians the proposed scheme seemed to offer great potential advantages in that they saw themselves as the favored protégés of the Portuguese with accompanying economic advantages for the group and the possibility of increased political influence within the new Protectorate.⁵⁷

Identification of the Brésiliens with either the French or the Portuguese indicated to the indigenous African community that initial suspicions of Brésilien loyalty were probably well founded in that the former slaves seemed more than willing to ally themselves with Europeans if it would enhance their own position, at the expense of the local Africans. Dahomean "sovereignty" was seen as being compromised in the protection treaties in which the major benefits went to the Europeans and the semi-Europeanized former Brazilian slaves. The position of middle-persons, occupied by the Brésiliens, could no longer remain politically neutral; it was necessary for the group or its most articulate members to declare themselves and their loyalties as the developing political situation by necessity divided itself

55 Archives D'Outre-Mer, Afrique II, Dossier 4, Memoires Generaux Projects d'Établissements, Didelot to Commander West African Coast 1863, and Didelot to Gelli, Porto-Novo, 26 February 1863. Signatures of the Brésiliens on actual Treaty, dated 23 February 1863.

56 TURNER, *ibid.*, p. 242-44.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 247.

into two camps, African and European. When called to account or forced to identify their group interests, the Brésiliens increasingly seemed to opt for the side of the Europeans. Often the Afro-Brazilians were used by the European consular agents as linguistic interpreters; it was not unusual for the Brésiliens to present knowingly altered versions of treaties to the African monarchs, presenting the treaties in a manner more "benign" than realistic. This mis-representation which could also be considered a form of treachery against the individual African state or kingdom obviously facilitated the political actions and policies of the Europeans, as Africans were lulled into a sense of security with the protection treaties, which would ultimately prove inimical to their own interests and the interest of their peoples.⁵⁸

This duplicitous behavior earned the Brésiliens the wrath of the African group, wronged, and provoked charges of disloyalty and treason against some of the group's members and upon occasion actual loss of life.⁵⁹ The Abomean court could prove ruthless when it considered cases of treachery. For the Brésiliens however it was more a case of self-interest which becomes understandable, if not pardonable when one considers that in the political rough and tumble of 19th century West Africa, the Brésiliens had returned to the continent without a secure patron group. They were not numerous when compared with the indigenous African groups and of course lacked the international protection available to the European merchants and consular officials. Self-interest was seen as being an integral part of group survival. As a group the former Brazilian slaves can be considered supreme realists, weighing the relative importance and power of various groups and blocs, and then shifting their loyalties accordingly.

Not all of the important Afro-Brazilian traders however entered the "camp" of the French. Motivated partially by a rivalry with their fellow Brésilien merchants who were becoming French partisans, motivated also by a dislike of Europeans and a fear concerning eventual colonization, some traders pledged their loyalty and their skills to Abomey.⁶⁰ Hostilities between France and Abomey began in 1890; as the situation between the two countries became increasingly difficult and intransigent, certain attempts were made to mediate what was in fact a dispute immune to mediation. In a meeting between French officials and the Abomean court held in the royal capital

67 TURNER, *ibid.*, p. 308-309.

68 Example of one Peréira of Grande Popo, Benin who was responsible for "explaining" the presence of the French to the local inhabitants.

69 TURNER, *ibid.*, p. 315-316.

at the end of 1889, one issue under discussion was the furnishing of arms and ammunition to Abomey through or because of the service of Afro-Brazilian traders, loyal to the aging King Glele, and his son the Crown Prince, who in 1890 would assume the throne as Béhanzin. The French accused the Brésiliens of worsening an already difficult diplomatic crisis with their shipments of arms, which served only to make the King unwilling to negotiate a diplomatic settlement with the French.⁶¹ During this turbulent pre-war period, the Brésilien Candido Rodrigues played a crucial role as Béhanzin's emissary to the Europeans residing on the Dahomean coast; viewed as a turncoat or trader by both Europeans and Brésiliens, Rodrigues entered into the personal service of the King, acting as interpreter and at times as spy.⁶² Particularly chagrined by the actions of Rodrigues were the European missionaries at whose school in Ouidah, he had been a student. There was a general outrage at the actions of Candido, as it was believed that he had turned against "civilization" (European), and creole culture,⁶³ to serve Abomey. While Candido Rodrigues remained one of the more publicized Brésiliens aiding the cause of Béhanzin, he was not alone among the creole merchants. In Porto-Novo after the initiation of hostilities between France and Abomey, several Brésilien merchants clandestinely sold arms, smuggled from Lagos, to Abomey. In their official pronouncements and declarations the merchants avowed their loyalty to France and the Protectorate again in effect; their commercial transactions belie this loyalty. The arms embargo imposed by the French was ignored by the Brésiliens who acquired smuggled guns from the Germans in Togo and from British agents in Lagos. It is perhaps pertinent to pose the question when does pragmatism become treason? The Brésiliens saw themselves facing a very fluid and rapidly changing political situation. From the middle decades of the 19th century they had been suppliers to the Abomey kingdom and to the various interior communities which joined the kingdom to the coast. Through a bureaucratic and diplomatic maneuver, they now found themselves residents of a European protectorate, subject to the political will of this new entity. How well is the protectorate able to "protect" their own group's commercial interests? As these commercial interests placed them in direct contact with the interior it was to their immediate interest to maintain positive relations with Béhanzin and the court.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

62 *Ibid.*, also CHAUDOIN, E. *Trois Mois de Captivité au Dahomey*. Paris, 1891, p. 52.

63 Archives Nationales du Dahomey (Benin). Series DI/I Victor Ballot to Secretary of State, Porto-Novo, 4 May 1890 and Missioni Africani, Rome, Dorgère to Béhanzin, copy of communication.

Imposition of the European protectorate did not automatically result in an improved financial situation for the Afro-Brazilians. Commerce was for them an important criteria for the successful functioning of any political system. Economic realists, the Brésiliens had expectations that the imposition of European protection would enable them to collect outstanding debts from their African customers and clientele through a not so subtle coercion by means of official sanctions. In fact many of the Afro-Brazilian merchants and landlords soon found that they had almost as many complaints concerning non-payment of debts against their French "protectors". Provisions ordered by the protectorate were tardily paid for; lands and houses leased from the Brésiliens by the French were the subject of dispute as rents were never paid on time.⁶⁴ These factors weighed heavily upon the decision of the Brésiliens not to break off relations with Abomey in favor of the French. France would first need to prove itself and its protectorate to the Afro-Brazilians before gaining their allegiance. The pragmatism which had traditionally influenced Brésilien political alliances and loyalties continued to play an important role in their decision making.

Béhanzin used Afro-Brazilians not only as interpreters and spies, but also as foreign affairs advisers in his war against the French. He dispatched them to trade with British and German agents and commercial houses,⁶⁵ with the knowledge that historical British and German antipathy towards the French could work in the favor of an African king attempting to retain his country's sovereignty. While Béhanzin was not able to acquire international diplomatic support for his case and fight against France he did secure shipments of armaments, enabling him to prolong hostilities. In one instance a Julio de Medeiros, of Ouidah, was sent on a secret mission to Lagos to purchase 800 new Linder model guns and some 15,000 cartridges and later two cannons which were sent from Berlin to Abomey. In addition, de Medeiros contracted the services of a Swiss agent in Lagos named Barth, to travel to Abomey to instruct the Dahomean army on the use of these new weapons. The Brésilien's plan in Togo and in Lagos was to offer a "most favored nation" status to Germany in exchange for that country's military and technical assistance against France;⁶⁶ obviously this status would work against all French trading houses along the Dahomean coast as in theory they would lose all rights with the ending of a protectorate following a French military defeat.

64 TURNER, *Les Brésiliens...*, p. 329.

65 DORGÈRE, Manuscript, Chapter IX.

66 *Ibid.*

Espionage and intrigue characterized much of the Franco-Dahomean conflict, each side contracting or putting pressure upon its partisans to provide compromising information as to the actions of the opposition. France was also able to find Brésiliens willing to work as secret agents, particularly in the frontier area between Dahomey and Togo. 67 The Brésiliens agents were able to profit from the situation by sending supposedly "secret" reports to the Protectorate in Porto-Novo describing the movement of the Abomean army in their region. In a situation both ironic and humorous, the Brésiliens decided what type of information would be best received by the French and thus prepared their reports, never failing to include that the general sentiments of the local population of the Mono region were decidedly pro-French. Any understanding of the complexity of the politics of the Mono region would have indicated a fierce independence which favored neither Fon nor French; loyalty of the region was to the region itself. However the Brésiliens prepared intelligence reports in a manner to please or reassure the French in Porto-Novo that the political situation in the Mono was favorable to France. France asked its creole intelligence agents to undertake a quasi-survey of public opinion, in the local regions, concerning the popularity of the French as opposed to the Fon, and in areas deemed hostile to Europeans, the agents were asked to attempt to change these local group attitudes. The Brésiliens served as an auxiliary European reference group for many indigenous Africans, a consequence of European influence in Africa, thereby better able to explain or interpret the new customs and culture. They proved themselves to be particularly important during the phase of implantation of the protectorate or treaty, used by the Europeans to soften its impact on the life of the African inhabitants. 68

The French also relied upon the Brésiliens to act as recruiters, convincing other members of their own group and more importantly Africans hostile to the Fon to join the French forces. Porto-Novo proved particularly fertile ground for anti-Fon sentiment as the town was composed of Gun and Yoruba residents, historic enemies of Abomey. Ignacio Paraiso, who had been a Bahian slave with the profession of bamber, was contracted by the French to recruit among his fellow Porto-Novo Yoruba. 69 Paraiso was particularly valuable to the French campaign as he was creole and Muslim, able to

68 *Ibid.*, p. 252.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 253-257, recounting the fall of the Brésilien Julio de Sousa, imprisoned and subsequently executed by Glele for crimes against Abomey, i.e., complicity with the Portuguese to establish an extended protectorate over the kingdom.

60 Archives of the Missioni Africani, Rome, Manuscript of Pere Dorgère, Chapter VI.

influence members of both groups, convincing them to fight against Abomey. The loyalty of the Muslim trader was rewarded by the French with commendations, medals and more importantly commercial contracts and contacts which Paraiso used not only for himself but also to help the Brésilien commercial community of Porto-Novo. By 1893, Paraiso, after the King, was the most important indigenous citizen of the town as a result of his French contacts, a member of the Porto-Novo Defense Council and Council of Notables, established under the new French administration. His influence was such that the returned Afro-Brazilian Muslim community in Porto-Novo was able to wield significantly more influence than the "native" Yoruba Muslim group with the victorious French. 70 Political influence and the ability to wield patronage counted for more in 19th century Porto-Novo than authenticity or strict piety as the returned Afro-Brazilian Muslims were thought to be in a state of contamination after their experience in Brazil!

The victory of the French forces and the fall of Béhanzin in 1893 created political conditions which seemed to favor the Afro-Brazilian emigrants. The European infra-structure which the French administration began to impose upon the now-colony of Dahomey required indigenous personnel to interpret and explain it to Africans either uninterested or hostile to anything European. The new political system also meant a social and educational program patterned upon European models which would prove of more immediate interest to the Brésiliens than to the Africans. 71 The presence of a new political administration within the country would bring with it, by necessity, new European personnel requiring services such as housing and food supplies, which initially would be provided by local entrepreneurs; 72 this entrepreneurial role was often assumed by the Afro-Brazilians. Initially the creation of the colony promised continued social, political and even economic ascension to the creoles, however this structure had within it very distinct limits, to monitor and check the degree of mobility of any "indigenous" group, be it African or Afro-Brazilian.

What were these limits of power and responsibility? During the hostilities many Afro-Brazilians had served as interpreters and scouts for the French army commanded by General Dodds. 73 In the postwar period

70 *Ibid.*

71 RONEN, Dov. "The Colonial Elite in Dahomey", *African Studies Review*, No 1, April, 1974, vol. XVII.

72 Interview with das Chagas family, Ouidah, Benin during April 1972, a collectivity with a history of support for the French position in Dahomey, also J. Charles Roux *Colonies et Pays de Protectorats*. Paris, 1900, p. 142.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 142-143.

they received assignments to work again as interpreters for the colonial administrative offices and district stations now installed throughout Dahomey. Even at this relatively low administrative level, the Brésiliens held the rank of colonial civil servant, employees of the colonial administration, a status which earned them both respect and resentment within the colony. They were charged with implementing a foreign, alien system of government; which had militarily displaced the local or indigenous order. As representatives of the Europeans, exercising an official function, they did have a measure of power which demanded recognition from the local population, but they remained only spokespersons or mouthpieces for that European system, not its organizers or theoreticians. As a part of their function as interpreters, the Brésiliens were expected to furnish information about a particular area or region of the colony to the French administration; they reported on the political, social and economic aspects and functioning of the specific traditional society of the area, relations between the traditional leadership and the people, and developing local attitudes and opinions concerning the imposition of French colonial rule within the region.⁷⁴ In this situation the distinction between intelligence gathering and mere interpreting of a language seems indistinct. The intermediary position of the Brésiliens was being used by the French to secure valuable information concerning local conditions and reactions to the colony. If one is to question group loyalty of the Brésiliens at this particular point in Dahomean history, it must be seen to be on the side of the colonial administration. Pragmatism and political exigencies had coincided.

While the tangible rewards of positions and employment within the colonial administration awaited those loyal Brésilien servants and friends of the French, it was a different situation for those who were considered to have been friends of Abomey and the now defeated and exiled Béhanzin. As supporters of the losing side, these Brésiliens had no rights under the colony and suffered a series of indignations, imposed by the French. In several cases Brésiliens whom had aided the monarchy had been well-to-do traders and merchants, with trading firms and substantial property holdings, particularly in Ouidah. The colony lost little time in issuing orders to confiscate the property; (including houses) of the "traitorous" group and designate said property as being under the legal protection of the French government. Houses were used to shelter French military forces and administrative personnel. Other Brésilien holdings were turned over to the

74 Archives Nationales du Dahomey (Benin). Serie DI/I Administrator of Ouidah to General Commandant Superior, Porto-Novo, 20 April 1894 and dispatch Cornilleau to Inspector Cavion, Commander of the Fort at Allada, 25 April 1894, also Cornilleau to Secretary General, 15 May 1894.

private French commercial firms such as Cyprien Fabre and Régis Frères to be used at their own disposition and choosing.⁷⁵ Other Brésiliens, who would not have been considered friends of the former independent Abomey monarchy and thus enemies of the new colony also lost their property, however for technical legal reasons established under the new colonial system. Land or houses which were considered to be "abandoned" for an indeterminate period of years became subject to confiscation for use of and by the colony; it was the privilege of the colony to declare or attempt to declare determined areas and holdings as within the public domain. This policy clearly ran a foul of the interests of the affected Afro-Brazilians and would serve as the reason and basis for a whole series of lawsuits brought by them against the colony and various administrators.⁷⁶

European rule quickly proved to be as much a hindrance as a help for many of the Brésiliens. The imposition of the new system would force the group to abandon certain commercial and trading behavior, often a laxness in attending to accounts and settling of due bills, and obey by force of law, commercial regulations deemed necessary by the colonial government. The arrival of the French as rulers in Dahomey also ended the political flexibility which had characterized the Brésiliens and their relations with both Africans and Europeans. They were no longer able to manipulate both groups to the best advantage of themselves; it became necessary to readjust their group expectations and ambitions to the new dominant European model. French justice when determining land claims, confiscations and reparations usually followed the interests of the colonial administrations;⁷⁷ judgments which did not interfere with the implantation of the colony's infrastructure, public buildings, basic road construction or French needs, might then be rendered in favor of an African or Afro-Brazilian claimant. Fledgling Afro-Brazilian entrepreneurs quickly learned that the government would not grant permits and licenses to anyone who applied, that it was necessary to demonstrate that one had sufficient capital, to prove to the French authorities the commercial value of the project. Laws and regulations were now the order of the day and of the colony.

The new administration also attempted to protect the rights of Africans and African landholders against potentially predatory Brésilien merchants. In certain instances there occurred the paradoxical situation of African

75 Archives Nationales du Dahomey (Benin). Serie II Decree of General Dodds (to confiscate property of suspected traitors to the colony) Porto-Novo, 9 January 1893 also Cornilleau to Secretary General, 16 August 1894.

76 Interview with Pellegrin Rodrigues, Ouidah Benin, 12 May 1972, Field Notes, Ouidah, April-June 1972, Grand Popo and Agoué, May 1972.

77 *Ibid.*

plaintiffs contracting French lawyers to sue in the courts of the colony Afro-Brazilian merchants who were represented by Brésilien lawyers. 78 Disputes inevitably involved rival claims to land and landholding, often the courts finding in favor of the Africans and against the Afro-Brazilians, who had a reputation for certain rapaciousness in the acquisition of land. The creole status of the Brésiliens, while it was obviously of use to the colony, also was viewed by the French with caution when it conflicted with the interests of indigenous Africans. Many French residents and officials tended to support African claims in this particular instance, partially in the belief that the emerging elite social status of the Brésiliens or that select group of wealthy merchants within the group could present a kind of alternative model to that provided by themselves. It was necessary upon occasion to humble the Brésiliens, for them to remember that they were of the same juridical and social status as any other African resident of the colony.

For the Brésiliens, the major consequence of the imposition of the colony was their rapidly declining status within it. Observable in economic terms, this decline also had its social characteristics, as the true model elite could only be European within a colonial context. An African or Afro-Brazilian "elite" could in the final analysis only imitate determined facets and aspects of that European culture and only to the extent which the rulers permitted and allowed. Effective power had been removed from their hands with Abomey's defeat in 1893. 79 Had the Brésiliens been able to readily accept an African identity it is possible that their social dislocation and anxiety might have proven to be less serious; the problem was that they continued to believe themselves to be an elite, separate and better than their fellow African members of the colony, although legally, economically, politically and socially there would be little difference during the time of the colony. Within the colonial service, the Brésiliens were adjuncts to the new administration, not making decisions and policy but rather charged with the implementation of the regulations which came from Europe. Their professional status came to be characterized more by the image of the petty bureaucrat, than the successful international merchant and trader; typewriters and rubber stamps serving as symbols for the group

78 Archives Nationales du Dahomey (Benin). Serie DI/I Rouhaud to Lieu-tenant Governor, Porto-Novo 24 March 1904, recounting the case of a group of villagers near Cotonou in litigation against a group of Bresilien merchants from Porto-Novo who had attempted to gain a land concession prejudicial to the inhabitants of the village.

79 TURNER, S. "Cultura", p. 23.

in the 20th century, as opposed to the slavers and palm plantation owners of the mid-19th century.

It is possible to ask the question at what level or degree does identity, as an individual, or as a group, stop being merely subscribed by society and become motivated by the persons directly affected? Afro-Brazilians returning to Africa in the 19th century were confronted with a series of choices regarding their identity, none of these choices, secure or certain. A few attempted to completely identify with indigenous African society and cut all associations with European culture and society. The emigrants who opted for life in the interior, away from the coastal enclaves were more successful at reentering traditional African patterns of living and culture. 80 These emigrants represented a minority of the Afro-Brazilian group, whose majority elected to enter into the rapidly transforming societies of the coastal towns. In these international enclaves, identity and loyalty were constantly being tested and subjected to a variety of tensions and pressures, by the two major opposing forces, local African societies and Europeans. It became possible and at times necessary to 'trade of one's nationality for the highest or most secure bidder, in the search for a patron who could offer needed protection within this changing milieu. Client-patron relationships came to typify much social and political behavior along the Benin Gulf during the 19th century; those without power or influence sought to attach themselves to those with these qualities. Reciprocity in services, assistance and commercial advantages became an integral part of the client-patron relationship in which each member had specific responsibilities towards the other. This relationship was not limited to a particular African region (nor to the African continent), not limited to the 19th century, but became increasingly important as an evolving political situation demanded of all the participants, increasing numbers of allies and associates.

The Brésiliens had returned to Africa as a stranger group without an indigenous base of support; apart from a small number who had been able to make substantial fortunes in the transatlantic slave trade, or who had been able to acquire large tracts of land for the cultivation of palm trees (often members of the slave trading group), the Brésiliens, from the beginning were clients in search of powerful patrons. Options proved to be limited, African or European. Either choice involved a certain measure

80 Archives of the Missioni Africani, Rome, Borghero, "Journal", p. 110, 155, 169 e 175, case of Afro-Brazilians in Abeokuta and region farther to the north in Yorubaland.

of compromise for the Brésiliens, a subservience of their group cultural identity to a cultural pattern not completely their own. That they tended to remain united as a group in their social lives, marriage relationships should not surprise, if one considers the other compromises forced upon the group by economic and political conditions in the Benin Gulf.

The installation of full scale European colonial administrations on the African continent at the end of the 19th century successfully curbed the professional possibilities, if not the ambitions, of African elite groups throughout the continent; the example of the Afro-Brazilians on the Benin Gulf was not unique. The creoles of Sierra Leone, the rising Fanti confederation on the Gold Coast, the "westernizing" Egba of western Nigeria encountered problems and frustrations similar to the Brésiliens of Dahomey and Togo. African or Afro-European intelligence and competence which had been demonstrated continually throughout the 19th century, Africans were to be found in few positions of importance within the different colonial administrations.⁸¹ These few educated Africans with experience and training (many with formal studies concluded in the European metropole) were relegated to relatively marginal positions in law, medicine or journalism, unable to enter into the policy making decisions for their own countries; at best they were critics of the system, vocal only to the extent to which the individual colonial administration permitted.

As an intermediary group, the Afro-Brazilians can be seen to display the characteristics, contradictions and traits of both Africans and Europeans. The experience in Brazil had marked them in their own eyes and in the opinion of many Africans, who often referred to them, not without some derision, as Europeans with brown faces.⁸² That experience became a point of cultural difference between the Brésiliens and the Africans, particularly with the imposition of colonial rule and the impossibility of unimpeded political, economic and social mobility which affected both groups. If the reigning power saw Brésilien and African as simply colonial subjects with little if any distinction, within the African colonial community, within the small elite group (problematic as there existed a true elite, which was the European exercising real power), the foreign experience was seen

to have represented a certain kind of achievement. The actual experience in Brazil was somewhat turned on its head, as slavery, or the experience, transforms itself into a badge of seeming honor or quasi-prestige. The Portuguese names given to the slaves at the time of their entry into Brazil, upon returning to Africa are guarded as symbols of the experience, passing from one generation to another, acting as distinguishing labels to separate the Brésiliens from their fellow African subjects.

Within a colonial world of diminished and diminishing possibilities, the Brésiliens reverted to culture and cultural identity, to reestablish a control and hegemony which had been lost to them at the time of the French conquest. This must be seen as, at best, a substitute or palliative because of the lack of positions of real power open to them. Whom were the Brésiliens able to impress or to deceive with their role-playing? There were real limitations to the effectiveness and importance of a cultural elite, resulting in manifestations of self or group-importance. As a clear and evident manifestation of accomplishment and achievement within the colonial system, the Brésiliens should be considered important; their educational attainments and contributions to the colonial administration should be neither neglected nor considered without due significance. The indigenous Dahomean press, journalistic endeavors of the period 1920-1945, headed by the Afro-Brazilians,⁸³ served as a kind of potential check upon the excesses of French colonial administration; at its best the Dahomean press was able to articulate the problems and concerns which affected the literate and educated part of the African population. If the African or creole intelligensia had simply accepted all colonial exigencies and demands without comment or reclamation, the eventual process of independence and transference of political power would have been even more delayed. Given the parameters of political, social and economic flexibility open to the group under that particular administrative structure, the Brésiliens took advantage of the existing opportunities and possibilities. If one through the vantage point of historical past faults the group for self-delusion, cultural rather than forthright political action, the particular historical context should be studied and considered within which the group acted. Within that context the Brésiliens as a cultural elite, a dual point of reference for Africans and Europeans, do enjoy a real measure of group influence and significance.

81 PORTER, Arthur T. *Creoledom*. London, 1963 for the case of the Sierra Leone elite of Freetown, or work of Ibrahim Sundiata based upon *The Fernandinos: Labor and Community in Santa Isabel de Fernando Poo*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Northwestern University, 1972.

82 Statement attributed to Glele in a caustic reference to a westernized elite group whom he had defeated in an attack upon their settlement at Ishagga in western Nigeria, found in Burton, "Mission to Gelele", p. 250.

83 These newspapers present an extremely valuable source and insight into the African intellectual response to French colonialism during the period 1920-1945, they were located mainly in the Versailles Dépôt of the Archives Nationales in Paris and to a lesser extent, the Archives Nationales of Benin in Porto-Novo, these sources are discussed in Ronen, "Colonial Elite" and in Turner, *Les Brésiliens...*, Chapter VII.