

dent in our present times where the reductive logic of the media infuses also the textbooks sold to university students today. The contribution of George Christ for instance, usefully analyzes how something akin to “news networks” informing merchants trading between Venice and various Mamluk polities shaped the contours of the entire Mediterranean’s political economy. As such, these networks integrated as well as defined both the distinctive and shared spaces by which actors engaged each other. As social, political, cultural, and/or economic interactions manifested in various kinds of networks, these exchanges extended the legal barriers that seemingly secured distinctive roles for subjects of these Mamluk polities, as demonstrated in the chapter by Johannes Pahlitzsch. Indeed, as Orthodox Christians constantly forged working relationships across the political boundaries separating Byzantium and the Mamluk Sultanate, Dr. Pahlitzsch offers a fascinating contrastive study to those who found similarly complex associations shaping Mamluk spirituality. Michael Winter, in an excellent comparison of two distinctive Sufi networks emerging in Syria and Egypt, as well as Carl F. Petry, in his study of the travels of various mystics in the period, help the reader reconceive the geographic, spiritual and ultimately cultural “limits” of the Medieval/Early Modern world. In sum, this volume is an excellent addition to the already extensive literature fitting this genre and, more importantly, usefully contributes and expands the sophisticated conclusions made by the vanguard of trans-regional studies of this era to highlight how we must move beyond the crude binary constructions that still, in

the media and many academic texts, distinguish Islam from Europe.

Silke Strickrodt: Afro-European Trade in the Atlantic World. The Western Slave Coast c. 1550–c. 1885, Woodbridge: James Curry 2015, 266 S.

Reviewed by
Natalie Everts, Amsterdam

After the Scramble for ‘the Popos’ took off in the 1880s, the people of Little Popo (modern Aného) were incorporated in German Togoland (Togo), whereas those of Grand Popo found themselves subjected to French rule in Dahomey (Bénin). Though debates among historians of Africa tend to question if the colonial partition actually mattered much to the local inhabitants, to the peoples of these two western Slave Coast states – Grand Popo (Hula) and Little Popo (Ge) – it did. Only shortly before they had experienced the transformation from the slave trade to the legitimate trade, but the new boundaries cut the coastal centres off from the palm oil plantations situated inland. It also impeded canoe transport across the region’s lagoon system, which since time immemorial had been a pillar of their economy. In spite of this, as Strickrodt argues, it is a simplification to regard this dramatic partition to be just an external matter - caused by foreign settlers who were attracted to get their piece of the pie. Structural disunity among Popo’s fragmented commercial

elites, that can be traced back to the early 19th century or even before, had resulted in a power vacuum in both polities.

The internal African political structure and how it was affected by the Afro-European commercial encounter on the *longue durée* is the focal point of this subtle and significant book. Notwithstanding the English, Dutch, Danish or Brandenburg trading companies did not establish permanent factories in the region, the western Slave Coast served as a long-term point of embarkation for enslaved Africans bound for the Americas. Nevertheless, it has been neglected in the historiography of pre-colonial sub-Sahara West Africa. Contemporary Europeans considered it an intermediate region, notably between Ouidah, which was incorporated by Dahomey (1727), and the Gold Coast hubs. Strickrodt's profound study definitely fills the gap. Particularly the long-term approach works out well as it enables the author to reconstruct patterns of economic and political transformations on the micro level, and to demonstrate the impact of interregional migration. A methodical investigation of generations of competing 'middlemen' reveals how the most successful slave traders among them achieved political influence, by assembling armed dependants to defend their cause and challenge their predecessors. At times this went with open violence between rivalling factions, particularly during the period of the illegal slave trade (1807–1860s) which was partly overlapped by the beginnings of the legitimate trade.

The first chapter questions how environmental aspects determined social arrangements. Indigenous Gbe-speaking peoples, such as the Hula, settled between the sea

and the lagoons. Inland waters abounded with fish and crops were cultivated on fruitful shores. They navigated the lagoons, that ran over a long distance from the west through the east, but did not venture out onto the dangerous sea.

Chapter two explores the opening up of connections to the wider Atlantic world. Unlike the open savannahs of the eastern Slave Coast, mountains formed a natural barrier against hinterland invasions in the west. Consequently, the Popo's were never subjected by another state, nor was there a main slave route leading from the interior to the western coast. Grand Popo, the coastal outlet of the small Hula kingdom, consisted of several settlements situated near the only natural entry (for canoes) into the lagoons. Little Popo was situated a few miles to the west, at a beach that used to serve Gold Coast canoe men as a way station. Europeans hired 'Mina' (originating from Elmina as well as other Gold Coast towns) as expert canoe men to carry out sea transport. Next to the Mina community, Ga refugees (Ge in the local tongue) from around Accra settled down in the 1680s, following their defeat by Akwamu. These and other groups of Akan-speaking migrants from the Gold Coast, merged with local Hula and founded the small, but plural Ge kingdom of Little Popo.

Oral traditions indicate that the Ge rulers (descendants from the Accra royal lineage) recognised the precedence of the Hula king of Grand Popo. While the latter remained a community of fishermen and farmers, the Ge kings of Little Popo consolidated their military power. Warrior king Ashampo stood out as becomes clear in the third chapter. Because his ceaseless

wars with neighbouring groups did generate captives, European captains started to frequent Little Popo to purchase slaves from him. Ashampo failed however to create a steady climate of trust in his coastal outlet, the precondition for success in the Afro-European trade. He depended on the trade to pay for his campaigns, but at the same time disappointed European buyers as he often proved to be unable to meet their demand. His own subjects feared him, since at times he seized people of free status to sell them off.

After Ashampo's death (1767) the centralized authority of the Ge kings declined in favour of an increasing number of independent merchants. With the rising demand for slaves Europeans and Afro-Brazilians started to favour the place above Ouidah, where the Dahomey king controlled trade. All of the Little Popo commercial class aimed at having their share in the trade, particularly two: the old 'Mina' community competed with a group of wealthy upstarts centred around one Lattie, who represented British interests and gained the upper hand.

In the fifth chapter political disintegration of the Little Popo community is analysed, in particular the 1820s civil war that was rooted in competition over what now had become the illegal trade. Tensions rose between members of the powerful Lawson family (i.e. Latties descendants) and an elderly trader of Mina origins. The latter, upon suffering defeat, broke away with his party and founded Agoué, on a beach a few miles to the east. Back in the old centre the Lawson family controlled most trade and cooperated with Francisco Felix de Souza, the legendary Viceroy of Ouidah, who originated from Brazil. He

was the most powerful slave dealer on the coast, and partly operated from Little Popo. Agoué attracted settlers too, among them liberated slaves from Sierra Leone and Brazil. In 1860, internal rivalry within Agoué spread over to Little Popo and war broke out again.

The trade activities during the transition phase (1807–1870s) are examined in the sixth and final chapter. In spite of British navy patrols the western Slave Coast became a centre of illegal activities. Prominent Ouidah traders had their human merchandize ferried across the lagoons to Little Popo or Agoué. Enslaved people were no longer kept in baracoons on the beach to await shipment, but in houses instead, as if they were domestic slaves. By 1867, when this finally came to a halt on account of the slackening demand in the America's, the palm oil production had already become big business. Both Little Popo as well as Grand Popo benefitted from the new possibilities, since they were situated favourably near to the lagoon on fertile soil. Agoué, built on a sandy beach, missed out.

Before, the 1860 war was seen as a conflict between slave traders from Agoué and upcoming palm oil entrepreneurs from Little Popo. If however considered from the perspective of the parties concerned, it had to do with the declining profitability of the illegal slave trade and clashes over their shares in it. When old slave trading elites were deprived of income which, admittedly, was due to the growing market for legitimate products, it also meant the loss of their political influence. The trade, or what was left of it, once again disrupted the coastal communities from inside out,

just like it had fragmented them in the more distant past.

G. R. Cole: The Krio of West Africa. Islam, Culture, Creolization, and Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century, Athens: Ohio University Press 2013, 272 S.

Reviewed by
Jacqueline Knörr, Halle

The Krio are the descendants of liberated slaves of diverse backgrounds who settled in Sierra Leone from the late 18th century onwards. Gibril R. Cole's major objective is to foreground the role of Islam in the formation of Krio society in the 19th century. The Muslim Krio have taken a backseat in much of Sierra Leone's historiography, which largely described Krio society as a relatively homogeneous group characterized by Christian values and an English worldview. Contrary to this widely (yet not unanimously) accepted view, Cole explores the heterogeneity of Krio society that included many who were neither Christians nor followers of Victorian values. He focuses on Islam in the construction of Krio society and the emergence of Krio identity, thereby shedding new light on processes of creolization in (and beyond) the region more generally and putting the assumed dominance of European-ness and Christianity among the Krio into a more specific perspective. Cole argues that "African Muslims played

a crucial role in the evolution of Krio society, which included vital contributions to the social, economic, and political landscapes of nineteenth-century Sierra Leone and West Africa" (p. 2). Cole "rejects the assumptions that Christianity and Europeanization were prerequisites for inclusion in a society that evolved out of the multifarious groups of Africans resettled in the Sierra Leone Peninsula" (p. 2). He shows that the relationships between the different groups of liberated Africans and local populations were more complex than hitherto anticipated and that the identity that evolved among them incorporated and integrated dimensions of various ethnic backgrounds. Hence, Krio society has always been multi-faceted and complex, rather than centered on European-ness and Christianity as its core characteristics. Krio identity, Cole claims, did not primarily build on a heritage of enslavement and emancipation, but on a heritage of multi-ethnic interaction and integration.

The book consists of six chapters plus an introduction and a postscript. In his introduction to the book, Cole explains the objectives of his book and reflects upon (some of) the achievements and (many of the) shortcomings (see previous paragraph) of previous scholarship concerning the study of Krio society. In the first chapter, Cole deals with the different processes of creolization (and Kriolization) in the 19th century that led to the emergence of Krio society as the result of ethnic interaction and mixture. The second chapter deals with the liberated Africans who settled in Sierra Leone after having been freed from slave ships bound for the Americas and with the spread of Islam among them. Cole shows how European officials