PARTITION OF THE GERMAN TOGO COLONY: ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

Between the late 1940s and 1960, the so-called "Togoland or Ewe-question" became the first postwar international attempt to determine whether or not the borders drawn by the colonizing powers in Africa should be maintained or changed. In 1884 Togo became a German colony, and southern Togo, populated predominantly by the Ewes, became incorporated into the global market as a producer of agricultural commodities. After Germany's defeat in World War I, the League of Nations divided Togo into a British and a French Mandated Sphere. The western British part became integrated into the neighboring Gold Coast Colony, whereas the French administered the eastern part as a separate Mandate. During World War II, a strong indigenous reunification movement emerged. At first, it only desired to reunite all Ewes, but later it aimed at reunification of both Togos. The United Nations General Assembly and Trusteeship Council discussed the political future of the former German colony. A 1956 plebiscite supervised by the United Nations rejected reunification. British Togo became part of Ghana in 1957, whereas French Togo emerged as the Republic of Togo in 1960. This essay investigates how the Ewes became fragmented after the partition of the German Togo colony into French and British Mandated Spheres, and traces Franco-British economic policies that contributed to the defeat of Togolese reunification attempts.

Togoland was divided by the Togo mountains, which traversed the colony from southwest to northeast. Togoland was bounded to the west by the Asante (Ashanti), kingdom, and to the east by the kingdom of Dahomey. The north and south had relatively large populations, whereas the centre was sparsely inhabited. The centre contained a variety of ethnic groups. The Islamic principalities of Sokodé and Mango were part of a long-distance trading network. Caravans carried cola nuts from Ashanti to Hausaland in northern Nigeria. This traffic also benefited northern Togoland through the sale of iron, rubber, and food commodities. The south had a predominantly homogeneous Ewe ethnic population. In fact, however, the Ewe consisted of a collection of sub-groups which had settled the region, i.e., the area which later became southern German Togo, plus the extreme southeast of the British Gold Coast (known as the Volta triangle) in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Despite some obvious differences, this Ewe-region shared common historical, cultural, and linguistic characteristics. Ewe civilization was strongly influenced by Ashanti and Dahomey and by early contact with European traders and missionaries. The latter devised a uniform orthography of the Ewe language on the eve of German colonization. Some Ewe sub-groups had stronger political organizations than others, but a centralized Ewe-state never existed. In the nineteenth century, production and export of palm oil replaced the slave trade in the south. Economic relations between north and south were limited to only two caravan trails, which connected Lomé-Kete-Krachi and Aného-Sokodé via Atakpamé.

When German trading companies felt threatened by local taxes and French expansion, the Second Empire proclaimed a protectorate in the coastal zone of Togo. Subsequent German penetration aimed at reaching Kete-Krachi and Atakpamé in order to profit from the caravan trade in the interior. During German colonization, production of export crops grown by African peasants, particularly palm oil, palm kernels, cotton, cocoa, and rubber, rose considerably. German administrators improved the caravan trails to stimulate trade and production. The construction of a jetty made Lomé an important port. The widening of main roads and the building of feeder road systems developed especially in the south, speeded traffic, and decreased transportation costs. To facilitate control of the north, the Germans
extended the main roads from Lomé, via Kete-Krachi and Sokodé to Mango. Subsequently, forced labourers from Kara and Mango constructed railroad lines that connected Lomé with Aného, Kpalimé, and Atakpamé.

By the time German colonization ended, thousands of seasonal labourers had been migrating annually from southern Togo to the export production areas in the Gold Coast. German colonization forced a new type of economic integration upon Togoland. The northern region's precocious east-west orientation shifted southward. As a result, a large part of the south became firmly integrated into the global market, and a regularized labour migration pattern developed.

Until the global depression of the 1930s, export production in French and British Togo rose considerably. In French Togo, cocoa and coffee production increased considerably, but stagnated thereafter until 1945. After 1929, economic development in British Togoland decelerated, but its share in the Gold Coast cocoa export rose from 0.2% in 1929 to 4% in 1938. Northern French and British Togo remained sources of seasonal labour supply to the south. After 1926, a few thousand labourers migrated annually from northern French Togo and the area around Kpalimé to cocoa-producing areas in British Togoland and the Gold Coast. In fact, out-migration exceeded internal migration in French Togo, because the emigrants were attracted by higher earnings in the cocoa fields, but they also fled high taxation in French Togo. Apart from some 14,000 forced labourers from the north the French used to construct the Atakpamé-Blitta railroad line, labour migration suddenly ended in 1929, because the economic crisis forced curtailment of the cocoa production. Between 1929 and 1933, cocoa workers returned from the Gold Coast and British Togoland to their homesteads in French Togo. After 1932, only a few hundred labourers migrated annually to British Togoland and the Gold Coast. The postwar partition of Togoland necessitated a major reorientation in the region's infrastructure and transportation system. Some roads disappeared entirely, and others became poorly coordinated. In French Togo, cocoa and coffee production increased considerably, but stagnated thereafter until 1945. After 1929, economic development in British Togoland decelerated, but its share in the Gold Coast cocoa export rose from 0.2% in 1929 to 4% in 1938. Northern French and British Togo remained sources of seasonal labour supply to the south. After 1926, a few thousand labourers migrated annually from northern French Togo and the area around Kpalimé to cocoa-producing areas in British Togoland and the Gold Coast. In fact, out-migration exceeded internal migration in French Togo, because the emigrants were attracted by higher earnings in the cocoa fields, but they also fled high taxation in French Togo. Apart from some 14,000 forced labourers from the north the French used to construct the Atakpamé-Blitta railroad line, labour migration suddenly ended in 1929, because the economic crisis forced curtailment of the cocoa production. Between 1929 and 1933, cocoa workers returned from the Gold Coast and British Togoland to their homesteads in French Togo. After 1932, only a few hundred labourers migrated annually to British Togoland and the Gold Coast.

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As a result of this neglect that reversed prewar German policy, economic relations between French Togo and British Togoland languished. During the German era, Kpalimé had been the “cultural” collection centre of cocoa production. From there, the cocoa was transported to Lomé. Between 1929 and 1938, the volume of cocoa from British Togoland transported to Kpalimé experienced little change, but the proportion in terms of total production shrunk from 90% in 1929 to only 35% in 1938. The bulk of British cocoa production was transported via new roads to the Gold Coast.

Increasing demands for raw materials after World War II stimulated export production in French Togo and British Togoland. Both administrations made large investments in agriculture. In this respect, British Togoland lagged behind France, and made a late start in the mid-1950s. At the time, the administration wanted to compensate for the relative economic neglect of British Togoland after 1946. Both administrations expended large sums on improving the infrastructure of their mandated territories. French Togo improved the main roads and expanded the network of feeder roads. British Togoland also improved the quality of the roads in the south, and constructed a bridge across the Volta River to replace the ferry. Only two new roads crossed the partition line. The northern link soon lost its importance.

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had formed the “Deutscher Togobund.” The Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations ignored their request.19

The influence of economic relations on the Togolese reunification movement became evident during World War II. The British administration hermetically sealed the border between British and French Togo because the French administration supported the Vichy government. The cessation of Anglo-French economic and social contacts particularly affected the south. In 1943, members of the Ewe elite urged the British government in vain to unite all Ewes. In 1946, Ewes from French Togo, British Togoland, and the Volta triangle held a convention at Accra, followed shortly thereafter by the founding of the All-Ewe Conference by Daniel Chapman, an Ewe from the Volta triangle. This meeting boosted the reunification cause markedly.20

Hereafter, Ewe leaders succeeded in placing their unification cause on the international agenda by means of a well-organized campaign, fund raising, and dispatching petitions and representatives to the United Nations Trusteeship Council. In 1946, the Comité d’Unité Togolaise, led by Sylvanus Olympio, won the elections in French Togo. One year later, Olympio pleaded the cause of reunification at the United Nations in New York. As a result of this appeal, the first United Nations Visiting Mission investigated the “Ewe-question” on the spot. In all, three Visiting Missions examined the socioeconomic situation and sounded popular sentiments in both Togos. The Missions held meetings with the local populations, which themselves had a politicizing effect. Ewe nationalists utilized the political rights spelled out in the Trusteeship Agreements to express their views. Gradually, the movement shifted from unifying the Ewe people to reunification of Togo. The political elites were driven by political pragmatism, notably the opportunities offered by the two colonies’ Trusteeship status, and to a lesser degree by economic considerations.

Other factors spurred desires for unification as well. Ewe representatives from Ho feared the domination of better-educated Ewe leaders from the Volta triangle, who dominated the All-Ewe Conference. These were more inclined to support independence of British Togoland together with the Gold Coast as a first step towards reunification of all Ewes. Buem, a cocoa-growing area of recent vintage around Kete-Krachi, was populated predominantly by non-Ewes, who feared being overruled by the Ewes. At the 1949 All-Ewe Conferences in Ho, and Kpalimé in 1951, these contradictions became clear and the All-Ewe Conference did not survive them.

However, Ewe solidarity disintegrated. Some leaders, such as Chapman, joined Kwame Nkrumah’s independence movement, the Convention People’s Party, and others founded the Togoland Congress.21 In the 1951, 1954, and 1956 Togolese elections the Togoland Congress defeated the Convention People’s Party in southern British Togoland. The Convention People’s Party had organized in the cocoa-growing areas of the Gold Coast, because farmers held the CPP government responsible for the low cocoa prices paid by the Cocoa Marketing Board. The Togoland Congress failed to gain any support in northern British Togoland, where the people favored the Northern People’s Party. This party also represented the northern Gold Coast’s ethnic groups, with which the northern British Togolanders were allied. In French Togo the Comité d’Unité Togolaise initially advocated unification of the Ewes, then switched to Togo reunification. This shift could not prevent its defeat in the 1952 elections by a combined north-south opposition led by Nicolas Grunzyki.22

The third United Nations Visiting Mission in 1955 had to find a solution for the future of British Togoland, because the British government planned to grant British Togoland independence. The Commission recommended separate plebiscites for north and south, a plan which the United Nations ignored. In 1956, one plebiscite was held throughout British Togoland.23 In the campaign preceding the plebiscite the Togoland Congress supported separation from the Gold Coast, whereas the Convention People’s Party strongly opposed “Separation.” On the grounds that British Togoland was economically vital to the Gold Coast British Togoland produced one-tenth of the country’s cocoa exports and had just been drawn into an ambitious and expensive project. The scheme involved the construction of a large dam on the Volta River that would generate hydro-electricity in order to facilitate industrialization, mainly on the Gold Coast. The Convention People’s Party tried to influence the outcome of the plebiscite by accelerating investments in British Togoland agriculture and infrastructure. The (anti-Convention People’s Party) also opposed separation. Northern People’s Party also opposed “Separation.”24

The voting pattern showed large differences between north and south. In the three northern districts, 84%, 81%, and 79% of the electorate rejected “Separation.” In the cocoa-growing districts of Buem-Krachi, 60% of the population opposed “Separation.” Only the two southernmost districts of Kpalimé and Ho supported the cause of Togo-reunification. These two districts only 34% and 28% of the voters opposed “Separation.”25 Throughout British Togoland, 58% of the voters opposed “Separation” from the Gold Coast. As a result, British Togoland merged with the Gold Coast, and became part of the independent Republic of Ghana the next year.

The Third Visiting Mission, the plebiscite, and the unification of British Togoland with the Gold Coast radicalized public opinion in French Togo. In the 1958 elections the Grunzyki government, which had been advocating Togolese autonomy within the French Union since 1956, suffered defeat by the Comité d’Unité Togolaise, which demanded independence. Two years later, French Togo became the independent Republic of Togo.26

Until shortly after World War II, Ewe nationalism was stimulated by the Trusteehip status that split the Ewes ethnically, but was drawn by the same status into an approach that favored territorial Togolese unity. The influence of economic conditions on reunification is difficult to analyze because the United Nations failed to organize an integral plebiscite in both Togos. It is clear, however, that northern British Togoland opposed reunification because contacts with French Togo were almost totally lacking. Voting behavior in the cocoa-growing districts was preponderantly ethnically oriented. Only this can explain the difference in voters’ choices between Buem-Krachi on the one hand and Ho and Kpalimé on the other hand.

Apparentely, the weakening of economic links between both Togos ensured that political reunification could not be forthcoming, despite evidences of Ewe ethnic solidarity. This does not mean, however, that voters in the cocoa-growing areas lacked other than ethnic reasons to oppose separation. Discontent with Gold Coast cocoa prices was the main cause of support for Togo-reunification, but the lack of economic integration between British and French Togo weakened Ewe resolve to support territorial and ethnic unification in sufficient numbers to warrant a successful resolution of Ewe consolidation into a single political unit.

A few months before Ghana’s independence, the authorities discovered three military camps in northern British Togoland. The Nkrumah administration immediately ordered their liquidation and arrested the Togoland Congress leadership. In 1958, Nkrumah exacerbated the poor relations with the newly-elected Comité d’Unité Togolaise government. He declared that French Togo must at all times be a part of Ghana. At the same time, the Togolais desired a federation with Ghana.27 In 1960, Ghana’s government again discovered a secessionist plot in northern British Togoland. Some of its leaders fled to the Republic of Togo. Thereafter, mutual relations deteriorated, and Ghana frequently closed its borders with Togo. With the rise of new political leaders in both countries relations improved.

But reunification desires among the Ewe kept on smouldering. At the 1969 and 1971 Pan-Ewe Festivals in Nôdê and in Ho in 1970, revived Ewe nationalism became noticeable. In 1972, Ewe nationalist founded the National Liberation Movement of Western Togoland (TOLIMO). This organization disputed the validity of the 1956 plebiscite, and proclaimed its desire to amalgamate former British Togoland with the Republic of Togo.28 The Eyadéma administration of the Republic of Togo, which came into power in 1967, supported TOLIMO. The leadership of Eyadéma, a Kabêy from the Kara area in the north, meant an important shift in the political balance of power from southern (Ewe) to northern politicians in the Republic of Togo.29 Championing TOLIMO ensured Eyadéma the support of the Ewes.

Throughout the 1970s, TOLIMO was active, but its actions were limited to mounting demonstrations and presenting petitions in the Republic of Togo and in Ghana. They aroused not interest in the international community.30 TOLIMO found scanty support in
the Volta triangle, and in other areas it failed to become a mass movement. In Ghana, the
government suppressed TOLIMO. After 1978, TOLIMO disintegrated, thanks to its sup-
pression and lack of qualified leadership. The support TOLIMO received in Ghana was
due to Ghana's political instability and economic decay, which contrasted unfavourably with
the situation in Togo.

This essay has analyzed the influence of economic integration in German, French, and
British Togo on Ewe nationalism and reunification attempts of both parts of the former
German colony. During German colonization, the south became incorporated into the global
export market as a production area and the north mainly as a source of labour supply. These
economic functions remained unchanged under the French and British, but the economic
integration of the two regions begun in the German period first came to a premature halt,
then altered direction. British Togoland became progressively integrated into the Gold Coast
economic orbit, in defiance of prevailing infrastructural and transportation facilities, and
even in the face of prevailing labour migration patterns. Franco-British relations in these re-
spects became increasingly weaker. A high economic integration level of both Togos could
therefore not have been the reason for the desire of Ewes to reunite both parts politically. On
the contrary, at first, the reunification movement was based on ethnic ties, although economic
considerations, such as discontent with low cocoa prices and border closures, strongly rein-
forced reunification sentiments. But in fact it was the lack of economic integration of both
Togos, owing to separate colonizations after 1920, that prevailed the Ewe political movement
from gaining more support for reunification. The pragmatic path that the reunification
movement chose after 1951 to reunify both Togos instead of all Ewes lacked sufficient voters'
support in the north. The lack of economic integration, therefore, must be added to the pres-
ence of different official languages and educational systems and physical difficulties of main-
taining clan and family ties across borders as a major contributing cause for the
weakening of relations between both Togos.

Colonial powers often drew African and Asian borders irrespective of ethnic and political
entities or historical claims. This policy split homogeneous communities and combined
different, often hostile, ethnics in one colony. The Ewes suffered just such an experience.
With the rise of political awakening in the colonies, contradictory trends often emerged. One
was to assume political power in the divided colonized territory, the other to restore precol-
onial entities. After independence, these contradictory objectives at times resulted in border
conflicts among the new states and in the birth of separation movements within them.

The former German Togo colony is an exceptional case insofar as reunification attempts are
concerned. The Ewes rejected restoration of the precolonial entity, but chose a later colonial
determination. This example demonstrates the power of colonial administrations and the independent governments succeeding them to counterbalance the efforts of unification attempts by means of obstructing economic integration. The union of the German Togo colony into French and British Mandated Spheres at the end of World War I constituted the first phase in the disruption of unification along ethnic lines. The divergent Franco-British economic policies in Togoland in the interwar period introduced the second phase in nullifying ethnic unity trends in the region. These efforts ensured that Togolese reunification attempts in the ethnic sense would prove abortive.

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1. The Author wishes to thank Huib Verhoeff for his contribution to the research project, which has resulted in this essay. The diagram was drawn by J. ter Haar.
5. Ibid., 131-133.
6. German colonizers of Togo depended to a large extent on forced African “tax labour” and “contract labour”. From 1907 onward, tax labour was compulsory for all adult African men for a period of twelve days annually. Only Africans living in Lomé and Aného could buy exemptions. Tax labourers were used mostly for the construction and maintenance of local roads. Contract labour was used for plantation work and larger projects such as the construction of railroads. In the latter instance, village headmen designated a number of men, who had to work at poor wages for a period of six months before returning to their villages. Mortality rates were high, especially among rail labourers. The French administration continued these practices, to a certain extent, until the 1950s.


22. Welch, *Dream of Unity*, p. 86.


25. At first sight, the choice was between "integration" (within the Gold Coast) or "separa-


