

## AUTHOR:

Limpu I Digbun<sup>1</sup>,  
Lecturer in History

## AFFILIATION:

<sup>1</sup>Department of Social  
Sciences, Bagabaga College  
of Education, Tamale, Ghana.

## EMAIL:

digbun@yahoo.com

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.18820/24150509/SJCH45.v1.3>

ISSN 0258-2422 (Print)  
ISSN 2415-0509 (Online)  
Southern Journal for  
Contemporary History

2020 45(1):30-56

## PUBLISHED:

14 July 2020

## “BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA”: THE BASSARI POLITICS OF EXPEDIENCE IN NORTHERN TOGOLAND, 1920 – 1956.

## ABSTRACT

*This study explores the colonial vortex that spurred the Bassari political outlook. The Germans surrendered in 1918, and the Bassari consciously or unconsciously began to oscillate between the French and the British. They preferred the British with the anticipation of avoiding taxation and forced labour which they had experienced and resisted under the Germans and later the French. The section of the Bassari that came under the British Trusteeship finally had to decide in the 1956 plebiscite whether to reunite with their kith and kin in French Togoland or join independent Ghana. This choice came with a price: by choosing to join independent Ghana, they would avoid the French; but that also meant they would lose their self-determination to the Dagomba rule in Ghana. Paradoxically, the Bassari chose integration with the Gold Coast, disregarding the Dagomba ethnic domination. The data used was sourced from oral interviews, the Tamale, Accra and Ho archives.*

*Key Words: Togoland question, plebiscite, minority groups, majoritarian rule, expedience*



Published by the UFS  
<http://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/jch>

© Creative Commons  
With Attribution (CC-BY)



### 1. INTRODUCTION

The advent of colonialism in the second half of the nineteenth century came with its complex reterritorialisation of Africa along with the colonising metropolitan countries. A peculiar development in the north-eastern corridor of present-day Ghana was the establishment of a

Neutral Zone between the British and the Germans in the late 1880s. The Neutral Zone, covering the territories of east Gonja, and Nanumba, down to the western fringes of River Oti and stretching northwards just outside Sansane-Mango was opened for commercial activities for both powers.<sup>1</sup> By this definition, the Bassari territory east of River Oti did not fall within the Neutral Zone. The two powers were not permitted to sign political treaties with the natural rulers within the defined zone, and there were threats of the French intrusion into the area from Upper Volta. However, the terms of the Neutral Zone broke down in 1899.<sup>2</sup> These threats, coupled with suspicions between the two powers, culminated in the Anglo-German Convention of 14 November 1899 which saw the partition of the Neutral Zone.<sup>3</sup> Thus, a greater portion of this including the Dagomba capital of Yendi fell to German Togoland. At the same time, the remainder, including Salaga became part of the Northern Territories of the British Gold Coast. By 1904 all territories of the present-day Northern Ghana and Togo were firmly brought under British or Germans control.<sup>4</sup>

Ibrahim Mahama describes this act as reshaping the map of the hinterland, and mould the destiny and history of the people without their knowledge.<sup>5</sup> This act brought the Bassari, eastern Konkomba, the Chakosi, B'Moba and Nanumba, and eastern Dagomba under German Togoland administration. During the German administration, German-Dagomba was further split, and the eastern villages of Nakpal and Zabzugu subordinated to Sokode-Bassari district. At the same time, the west was put together with Sansane-Mango district. The post-1914 Anglo-French repartition of Togoland bifurcated the Bassari territory, and a section of this was added to the reunited Dagomba state. Thus, eastern Dagomba, Nanumba, western Chakosi, western B'Moba, the Konkomba west of Oti and western Bassari were brought under the Northern Territories of the British Gold Coast. The eastern people of Bassari, Chakosi, B'Moba and Konkomba then came under French Togoland administration. In Southern Togoland, Ewe people and the other minority groups suffered a similar fate of split between France and Britain. Unlike Northern Togoland, however, Southern Togoland borderline has seen

- 1 RB Bening, "The regional boundaries of Ghana 1874-1972", *Research Review* 8 (1), 1972, p. 22.
- 2 JU Kachim, "African resistance to colonial conquest: The case of Konkomba resistance to German occupation of Northern Togoland, 1896-1901", *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Studies* 1 (3), 2013, p. 163.
- 3 Public Records and Archives Administration Department, (PRAAD; Accra), ADM56/1/36: Anglo-German Convention of 14th November 1899 and the Partition of the Neutral Zone.
- 4 CS Maasole, *The Konkomba and their neighbours: From the pre-European period to 1914* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 2006), p. 161.
- 5 I Mahama, *A colonial history of Northern Ghana* (Tamale: GILLBT Printing Press, 2009), p. 43.

significant scholarship in recent years. These studies have treated Southern Togolanders astute politics for Ewe self-determination especially in the run-up to the 1956 Plebiscite and the immediate post-independence era.<sup>6</sup> Not much has been done on Northern Togoland borderline, especially among the “minority” groups who exhibited some level of shrewd political dynamics that eventually influenced their political participation and decision making in the paradigm of colonial, post-colonial and ethnic politics in Northern Ghana.



6 The most recent studies in Southern Togoland include, P Nugent, *Boundaries, communities and state-making in West Africa: The centrality of the margins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); K Skinner, *The fruits of freedom in British Togoland: literacy, politics and nationalism, 1914-2014* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); H Komedja, *Writing the new nation in a West African borderland: Ablode Safui* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). See also, DEK Amenumey, *The Ewe unification movement: A political history* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1989); D Brown, "Borderline politics in Ghana: The National Liberation Movement of Western Togoland", *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 14 (4), 1980.

Fig 1: Anglo-German Neutral Zone: Source, Bening, "The regional boundaries of Ghana 1874-1972", p. 25.

This article interprets the political antinomies in Northern Togoland between the two World Wars and how that impacted the 1956 Plebiscite, which determined whether British Togoland would become part of independent Ghana or remained a separate entity. It examines the undercurrents of colonial and ethnic politicking that influenced the future of the Bassari in Northern Togoland. The article employed oral histories and archival sources and established that although the Bassari harboured appreciable fear of subjugation into the Dagomba traditional rule, their "hatred" of the French overwhelmed this Dagomba fear-factor, especially after they had bought into the "highly hailed British superior colonial system".

## 2. WORLD WAR I AND THE DAGOMBA UNIFICATION POLITICS

The outbreak of the 1914 war did not only create international political orphans in Africa, but it also resulted in the realignment of international boundaries, engulfing ethnies in colonialists' politics. It became the final phase of Africa's territorial boundary demarcation. France and Britain were the beneficiaries of the German booty from the war in West Africa. Immediately Major Marlow occupied Yendi on 6 August 1914 he was authorised, "[...] in the first instance, [to] arrange with the French Authorities on the spot the provisional boundaries of the Dagomba country which, pending further arrangements with the French Government, is to be administered by the British officers".<sup>7</sup>

This instruction to the British officers in Yendi was formalised on 27 August 1914 when Commander Maroix and General Bryant agreed on a provisional boundary based on the territories their troops had occupied.<sup>8</sup> Under this provisional boundary, the entire Bassari region came under the French. This meant that the territory east of River Oti provisionally came under the French supervision.<sup>9</sup> Captain Evered Poole in 1920 confirmed that "[t]his sub District was taken over from the French in November 1920 and is inhabited by Dagombas, Konkombas and Chambas [Bassari]. The town is large and compounds inhabited solely by Dagombas. The Konkombas being

7 Public Record and Archives Administration Department, (PRAAD; Accra), ADM67/5/1: General Instructions Issued by His Excellency to the Officer Commanding Field Force Togoland, Informal Book, Yendi, 1916-1930.

8 Maasole, *The Konkomba and their neighbours*, p. 163.

9 Public Records and Archives Administration Department, (PRAAD:Accra), ADM67/5/2: Village Record Book Vcl.1, 1919-1930. This document showed in detail villages east of the Oti were taking over from the French in late 1920 after the final agreement in Versailles in July 1919.

in the North of the District, the Chambas [Bassari] in the Southern part".<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the Bassari people got a brief stint of French administration from 1914 up to the Anglo-French boundary delimitation in 1920.

Before the war, the German governor was reported to have "visited Yendi, and the matter of bringing Sansugu (sic) and Napari (sic) under Yendi as part of the district was put forward. The governor [had] agreed to look into the matter".<sup>11</sup> This meant that the Dagomba settlements of Zabzugu and Nakpal (east of Oti) which the German had brought under the District Commissioner (DC) of Bassari remained so under the French between 1914 and 1920.<sup>12</sup> The disintegration of the Dagomba state was not only a matter of concern to the Dagomba people but also an important concern to the British. Even before the end of the war, the British emphasised the need to reunite the Dagomba state. Incisively, Governor Clifford favoured this course and indicated that, it should "[...] be noted for future reference, that any attempt once more to divide the Dagomba country in a manner which is opposed to the ethnological distribution of the native population, will be keenly resented by the chiefs and people in both the Northern Territories [NTs] and the Sansane-Mangu district of Togoland".<sup>13</sup> The colonial officials in the NTs, however, appeared enraged when the Colonial Secretary in Accra sent Captain Armitage a sort of official colonial position on the Dagomba unification question. According to the Colonial Secretary,

His Excellency fully appreciates the strong desire of the Dagomba people to be united once and for all under British rule, and he is strongly representing this matter to the Secretary of State. During the continuance of the European war, however, and until some final and formal settlement is reached the portion of the Dagomba country hitherto administered by the Germans must continue to occupy the somewhat anomalous position which His Majesty's Government has decided to assign to it.<sup>14</sup>

This appeared to have rushed the Chief Commissioner of Northern Territories' (CCNTs) gerrymander for a united Dagomba kingdom. Chief Commissioner Armitage's outburst later showed feelings of little sympathy

10 Public Records and Archives Administration Department, (PRAAD:Accra), ADM.67/5/3: Village Record Book Vcl.2, September 1919 - 1923.

11 Maasole, *The Konkomba and their neighbours*, p.196; Maasole cites ADM56/1/229: Yendi Official Diary, April 12, 1918.

12 Interview: Author with N Tindow, 77 years, Utindaa and Traditional Healer, Kuyuli-Clan, Tatale 6 January 2012.

13 Quoted in M Staniland's *The Lions of Dagbon: Political change in Northern Ghana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 67.

14 Public Records and Archives Administration Department, (PRAAD: Accra), ADM67/5/1: Colonial Secretary to C.C.N.T, 24th September, 1914, Informal Book, Yendi, 1916-1930.

but arrogance towards the Dagomba people. His outrage is shown in the report below,

I told them that England had given the whole of her manhood to preserve the freedom of the world and that there was not a single family that did not mourn the loss of a husband, a son, brother or relative. I pointed out how grateful they ought to be when, in the midst of such worldwide misery, they were sitting peacefully in their villages protected by the power of the British Empire. All other matters dwindled, and were eclipsed by the Titanic struggle now being waged in Europe [...] all minor considerations, such as reunited Dagomba, must await its advent.... we were out to slay the German Beast and when that had been accomplished, and not until then, could any final partition of its carcass be made. The "King" [...] said he would make no further reference to his longing to see Dagomba reunited under him until the end of the war.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, the Dagomba ought to be grateful because they were "international citizens" and the War was purely an "international political show of might". Despite Armitage's arrogant disposition, he did not mean to dismantle the British machinery for the unification plan. He was never antinomic on his stance on matters of Dagomba reunification. In October 1916, he educated Cardinall, the acting District Political Officer (DPO) of Yendi to know some Dagomba villages which were dotted across the east of the river Oti under the French control. He forcefully indicated that "[a]t the end of the War we must have a case ready prepared to be put forward for the return of these villages and lands to their rightful owners".<sup>16</sup> Thus, Armitage only aborted the immediate reunification agenda but was futuristic of its fulfilment.

Advertently, NTs officials, promptly reactivated historical narratives that extended the Dagomba rule to the east of the Oti. Thomas Spear, writing broadly on the indirect rule and the "invention" of traditions, conservatively contends that such narratives were, "far from being created by alien rulers [, ...] tradition was interpreted, reformed and reconstructed by subjects and rulers alike".<sup>17</sup> The existence of Dagomba towns east of the Oti was the basis of this claim.<sup>18</sup> This was, therefore, the major case the British made after the war to get eastern Oti enclaves under British Mandated Territory of Togoland. Some scholars and available archival materials have questioned

15 Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD: Accra), ADM56/1/211, Quoted in Staniland's *The Lions of Dagbon*, p. 67.

16 Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD: Accra), ADM56/1/211: C.C.N.T. to the Acting D.P.O. of Yendi, 23rd October 1916.

17 T Spear, "Neo-traditionalism and the limit of invention in British colonial Africa", *Journal of African History* 44 (1), 2003, p. 4.

18 Li Digbun, *A History of the Bassari of Northern Ghana: From the pre-European period up to the 1930s* (MPhil, University of Cape Coast, 2015), p. 128.

the authenticity of the British claim of Dagomba rule east of the Oti. David Tait, for instance, asserts that “It is difficult to estimate the former power of Dagomba east of Yendi”. He continues,

The Germans distinguished the independent and conquered Konkomba, a division that followed the course of the Oti River; those on the west were regarded as conquered by the Dagomba. With the imposition of the British rule, the power of the Dagomba chiefs in eastern Dagbong [sic] was strengthened [....]<sup>19</sup>

Some British officials later criticised this extension of Dagomba authority to the east. H A Blair in the 1930s was sceptical about Dagomba rule east of Yendi. He lamented that,

Today, they (i.e. Konks) are under Dagomba rule. There is no doubt that before the German occupation they had been divorced from that rule (I have failed to find out in what this “rule” consists – Tribute is certainly not paid, and the Konks keep themselves very much to themselves, nor are they visited by their rulers. There is nothing to warrant any such visit).<sup>20</sup>

This, however, confirmed the grandiose efforts Armitage and his contemporaries made during the inter-war years. Consequently, by the time the Milner-Simon Agreement (which finally fixed the Anglo-French boundary in Togoland) was concluded in July 1919, the Bassari and Konkomba in this area were firmly brought under the British-Dagomba rule. Benjamin Talton cites Patrick Chabel as having argued that “[t]he colonial mind attempted a wholesale re-creation as though it was in its power to wipe the slate clean and write a new history”.<sup>21</sup> For Maasole, “[c]olonial interest was paramount, as the African inhabitants of the area to be affected by the partition were not taken into serious consideration”.<sup>22</sup> A new history was indeed scripted because the legitimacy of the indigenous people to their lands and autonomy was entirely stifled by skewed historical narratives. It is therefore absurd for Sir Hugh Clifford to have concluded that “[... British officials] have probably pleased more natives than [they] have annoyed”, during the Anglo-French boundary

19 D Tait, *The Konkomba of Northern Ghana* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 8-9.

20 Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD: Tamale), NRG8/4/63: Informal Diary, Yendi District, 28 Aug. 1932.

21 B Talton, *Politics of social change in Ghana: The Konkomba struggle for political equality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 45.

22 Maasole, *The Konkomba and their neighbours*, p.165. See also, LI Digbun, “Colonial policy and the politics of subordination in Northern Region of Ghana: A study of the “minority” Bassari up to the 1930s”, *A Multi-disciplinary Journal of the Arts and Humanities* 4, 2016, p. 22.

delimitation.<sup>23</sup> One fundamental question that remains, however, is whether the Konkomba, Nawuri, Nchumuru, B'Moba, Chakosi and Bassari would have willingly come under the Mamprusi-Dagomba and Gonja groups if they were consulted during the Anglo-French boundary delimitation?<sup>24</sup> Naturally, none of them would have consented to that purely based on the traditional political hegemonic rule. There was, however, another undercurrent issue (the French system of rule, compared to that of the British) these people, especially the Bassari considered as overriding the Dagomba hegemony.<sup>25</sup> The next section reviews the politics of Anglo-French boundary delimitation and the "natives" responses.<sup>26</sup>

### 3. ANGLO-FRENCH BOUNDARY DELIMITATION AND THE BORDERLINE POLITICS

Following her formal surrender in 1918, Germany finally ceded her overseas possessions at the Treaty of Versailles which became an international law known as the Milner-Simon Agreement of 10 July 1919. In West Africa, Britain and France were the major beneficiaries of German possessions. Britain garnered 33 300 square kilometres of German Togoland territory under the Trusteeship of the League of Nations; a whopping 26 900 square kilometres of this was in the northern section of Togoland.<sup>27</sup> Britain realised the vision of

---

23 Amenumey, *The Ewe unification movement*, pp.18-19.

24 CK Mbowura *et al.*, "The ethnic factor in international politics: Reconstructing the role of the Nawuri in the pan-Ewe nationalist movement", *Historical Research Letter* 4, 2014. They argue that the Nawuri and Nchumuru groups relentlessly resisted when the British, subsumed them under the Gonja rule for administrative purposes.

25 Interview: Author with A Konami, 105 years, Sieni, 14 January 2012.

26 Native refers to the indigenous peoples but European colonialists used it derogatively to mean the backwardness of African people and their institutions.

27 Maasole, *The Konkomba and their neighbours*, p.163.





Interpreting Albert Ernest Calvert's *The German African Empire*, Dennis Laumann argues that, "[...] Calvert not only sought to dismiss the Germans as failed colonisers but, more importantly, to promote the British as superior in the task of ruling Africans."<sup>28</sup> The British administrators in the NTs justified this "superior rule" in the way they viewed the French authority in Togoland. On 6 November 1920, Poole blamed the ineptitude of the people of French supervised Northern Togoland on the French administration. He reminisced that,

[I] remained in Sansugu (sic). [I] [v]isited every compound, [and] found all very dirty, and houses neglected many in ruins and the thatch in a deplorable condition. There could have been no attention paid for years, was told that since German days they had not been repaired, owing to the French having kept them so busy working in Bassari.<sup>29</sup>

The French labour policy did not only deny the citizens working hours to repair their houses, it also led to *en masse* migration into the British side of the territory. After Poole called on some chiefs in the Bassari region on 9 November, he noted that,

This town and all the villages have lost large numbers of young men, who to avoid the French force labour system carried on without the thoroughness of detail as would be peculiar to the Huns, have run away into British Territory, some to Coomassie (sic) others to Kratchi (sic) and Bimbilla.<sup>30</sup> Yesterday I was talking to an old couple who seemed to me to be building a far too elaborate set of compounds, and they told me that though they were now alone, they hoped that now the British had come their ten young men would return from Coomassie (sic), who had run away owing to French treatment.<sup>31</sup>

Constructively, the British did not only hold their colonial policy above others, and the colonised themselves appeared impressed with the British. They had also castigated the Germans for disintegrating and disrupting the earlier political tradition leading to a fluid behaviour of the Konkomba. Talton recalls that,

From a policy standpoint, after 1916 the British regarded the Dagomba political authority as the traditional power in the Yendi District, and much of the Northern

28 D Laumann, "A historiography of German Togoland, or the rise and fall of a "model colony"", *History in Africa* 30, 2003, p. 199.

29 Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD: Accra), ADM56/1/259: Yendi Diary, November 1920.

30 Poole was referring to Kumase in the Asante Region of Ghana. As a result of the introduction of cocoa in the forest belt of Ghana in the late nineteenth century, the region became the destination to the Bassari who escaped the German rule first, and later the French administration in Togoland to become farmhands on cocoa farms.

31 PRAAD: ADM56/1/259: Yendi Diary, November 1920.

Territories. District Commissioner Short of Yendi described the “restoration” of unified Dagomba authority in the region as merely an act of restoring political tradition in the region to its state before the political disruptions of the late nineteenth century and the imposition of German rule.<sup>32</sup>

The British purported restoration of Dagomba authority was a means to entrench their legitimacy after the demise of German Togoland. It only brought together unfamiliar ethnies under the Mamprusi, Dagomba and Gonja chiefs for the purpose of administration. Most of the groups, however, resisted their subordination under Dagomba chiefs. The Bassari did this diplomatically by making several complaints to the District Commissioner in times of infractions, extortions or irregularities meted out to them by their Dagomba overlords.<sup>33</sup> The Konkomba resisted with force, and their outburst became very frequent after this so-called “rightful restoration” of political order.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the aversion of these groups to Dagomba rule, they equally resented the labour and tax policies the French administration had subjected them to between 1914 and 1920.<sup>35</sup> It was an intractable dilemma that required unswerving political tactfulness. The French systems were equally awful in the eyes of the British administration, and they capitalised on this for their political gain. Paradoxically, the Germans’ social development policies were favourably compared to the French negligence resulting in the ruins of the German legacy under French supervision. According to Poole, despite the amount of labour the French received, they earnestly mismanaged it. In a visit to Bassari, Poole observed the undesirable state of Bassari in the following passage,

In the early morning [I] inspected Bassari plantation. [I] Was most disappointed at it. The French have let the whole deteriorated. The plantation is all in rank grass. All the thousands of labour a day being employed under incompetent supervision on making motor roads between Dahomey, Sokode and the North. As the French seem quite unable to carry on two separate undertakings at the same time the plantation is now consequently suffering [...] an exceptional number of kola trees have been allowed to go to the devil, as also the coffee which was so productive in German days. The work of years has all gone to hell, and it is a crying shame.<sup>36</sup>

---

32 Talton, *Politics of social change*, pp. 51-52. See also, ADM.56/1/211: Annual Report, Yendi District, February 1916.

33 PRAAD: NRG8/4/63: Informal Diary, Yendi District, 28 August 1932.

34 Talton, *Politics of social change*, p. 49.

35 Interview: Author with K Baatube, 95 years, Chief of Kuyuli, Tatale, 9 January 2012.

36 PRAAD, ADM56/1/259: Yendi Diary, November 1920.

Indeed, this was not the Bassari that Mr. Muckè, the Sub-Division Commissioner, chose ahead of Berlin in the early 1900s.<sup>37</sup> Typical of British colonial hoopla, the French were seen so incapable of the colonial task to the extent that,

Except in just the immediate proximity to the European quarters [in Bassari town,] the roads are all badly in need of cleaning. The whole town is filthy, and the separate portions – Bassari [Bassar] being a large town consisting of clumps of houses almost villages at some distance apart – are not joined up except by native bush tracks, all like gulleys from the rain and overgrown with prickly weed. Rank grass surrounds all the native houses.<sup>38</sup>

The French neglect of the erstwhile German legacies was enormous, and Poole seized every opportunity to ridicule the French colonial administrators in Northern Togoland. On 15 November, Poole and the French Commissioner left Bassari to Bendjeli via Kabu and spent 7½ hours when they could have spent 4 hours through Bassari-Bendjeli direct route. Poole later concluded that the French Commissioner avoided the Bassari-Bendjeli road because "it had not been cleaned or repaired and the [French Commissioner] did not want me to see it in its neglected state, so he took me where the road was excellent".<sup>39</sup>

District Commissioner Poole did not spare the French Commissioner and treated him as a pariah in the eyes of his colonial subjects. He described his interpreter as a scoundrel who extorted indiscriminately from villages he visited. He explained that the French Commissioner was "[...] heavily handicapped in dealing with graft owing to his actions in that regard. Two chiefs were fined £5 and £10 respectively for not meeting him [...], and receipts were not given".<sup>40</sup> The French Commissioner's extravagance also manifested in the number of 5 hammocks he travelled with – himself, the Bassari chief, his woman, his steward and another joined him later. He was also seen as being mean in his dealings with the "natives". Poole narrates that,

His troupe of followers, soldiers, carriers etc. numbered anything up to 60, and where they couldn't get relieved owing to the smallness of the villages they had to be fed.

37 M Gehrts, *A camera actress in the wilds of Togo* (London: Seeley, Services & Co. Limited, 1915), p. 255. Gehrts asserts that Muckè had gone on leave to Germany and visited Berlin where he was asked what he thought of the German capital. His response was, "Ah – Berlin! ... give me Bassari".

38 PRAAD, ADM56/1/259: Yendi Diary, November 1920.

39 PRAAD, ADM56/1/259: Yendi Diary, November 1920.

40 We shall later learn that these were chiefs who so desired to have their villages join the British side of the border that they decided to avoid the French Commissioner). See, PRAAD, ADM56/1/259: Yendi Diary, November 1920.

They are never paid. He never had less than four sheep per day and seventy bundles of yams, for which he made a return dash of a few handfuls of salt.<sup>41</sup>

The British views of the French confirmed the long-held notion the Bassari on the periphery had about the imperialists' politics. Shei Yabambe painfully recalled in an interview that:

Our people worked for the Germans. They went there with their food, wives and everything. My mother told me she used to trap me at her back and cooked for my fathers on German farms. When they planted, they would harvest it, and if the yield was poor, they would beat you [...] Under the Germans, the major tax was in the form of labour. So after the labour they gave a chit as tax coupon. The French were not any different. They engaged us on an irregular basis and would not even feed or give us any token for our labour. When we came under the British, apart from getting our children to school, which made us run away, they did not beat us. The British tax system was also lax in the form of money and provision of labour each time they requested.<sup>42</sup>

Consequently, even before the Versailles' agreement was put on paper, the Bassari were already opposed to the French rule.<sup>43</sup> Having drawn significant experience from two decades of German rule and the French supervisory rule during the inter-war years, the Bassari unapologetically became crypto-Pax Britannica. This conviction that Britain would be a better master caused those who were affected by the 1920 Anglo-French border delimitation to employ unconventional means of crisscrossing the border into the British territory. Thus, on 8 November 1920, District Commissioner Captain Poole was host to,

Four small boys [who] appeared having run away from Bassari [Bassar] and arrived very hungry and tired. After being fed, they were interviewed, they complained of ill-treatment, where they were beaten and never fed. From their accounts, they were brought into the school by compulsion from outside. As two stated, they are orphans, and the other two alleged that their relatives have bolted to Coomassie (sic). I am allowing them to go to Yendi till someone applies for them.<sup>44</sup>

Characteristically of colonial cross-border migrations, the outflow of population from areas of the French control increased notably after the Treaty

41 PRAAD, ADM56/1/259: Yendi Diary, November 1920.

42 Interview: Author with S Yabambe, 106 years, Utindaa, Sieni Clan, Sieni, 14 January 2012.

43 Digbun, "Colonial policy and the politics of subordination in the Northern Region of Ghana", p. 29.

44 PRAAD: ADM56/1/259: Yendi Diary, November 1920.

of Versailles. In some weird cases, almost whole towns and villages fled. On 9 November 1920, Poole noted after visiting a Bassari town that,

This town and all the villages have lost large numbers of young men, who to avoid the French labour system carried on without the thoroughness of detail as would be peculiar to the Huns, have run away into British Territory, some to Coomassie (sic) others to Kratchi(sic) and Bimbilla.<sup>45</sup>

It should be noted that during the inter-war years, and even up to the end of the Anglo-French boundary delimitation, there were no restrictions on movement across the border unlike what had pertained in southern Togo during the German days.<sup>46</sup> The British authorities permitted people to choose which side of the border they wished to belong.<sup>47</sup>

Scholars have often attributed this kind of migration to the implementation of "[...] forced labour practices, compulsory cultivation of crops, and heavy taxation in French, Belgian, and Portuguese colonies".<sup>48</sup> Inez Sutton calls them "push factors" or "selective investment and development".<sup>49</sup> Talton cites Albert Adu Boahen, who stipulated that in 1910 "[...] 14 000 people fled German Togoland for the Gold Coast. In 1916 and 1917, the Gold Coast attracted more than 2 000 people from the Ivory Coast".<sup>50</sup> There were no reciprocal flow of people into the French control territories. These inflows furthered the exceptionality of the British colonial brand. Laumann argues that the British had always harboured the desire "[...] to promote the British as superior in the task of ruling Africans".<sup>51</sup> To the colonised, Kwame Nkrumah warned any attempts to differentiate between colonial brands favourably. He notes that,

[There are some] who make subtle distinctions between one brand of colonialism and another, who declare that the British are "better" masters than the French, or the French "better" than the Belgian, or the Portuguese or the white settlers of

45 PRAAD: ADM56/1/259: Yendi Diary, November 1920.

46 Amenumey argues that the German government of Togo made capital out of such migrations by taxing each migrant ten marks from 1892. When the numbers increased, the government in turn increased the tax to 20 marks. See, DEK Amenumey, "German administration in Southern Togo" *The Journal of African History* 10 (4), 1969, p. 637.

47 PRAAD, ADM56/1/259: Yendi Diary, November 1920. Kachim argues that Captain Poole personally disliked the French style of administration which was termed as harsh and ruthless. It was against this background that Poole encouraged those who were affected by the delimitation to cross over to the British side. See also, JU Kachim, *Staying on the margins: Konkomba mobility and belonging in Northern Ghana, 1914-1996* (PhD, University of the Free State, 2018), pp. 73-4.

48 Talton, *Politics of social change in Ghana*, p. 61.

49 I Sutton, "Colonial agricultural policy: The non-development of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast" *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 22 (4), 1989, p. 664.

50 Talton, *Politics of Social Change in Ghana*, p. 61.

51 Laumann, "A historiography of German Togoland", p.199.

South Africa, as though there is a virtue in the degree to which slavery is enforced [...]. More frequently they are apologists for the colonialism of their country, anxious out of jingoistic patriotism to make a case for it.<sup>52</sup>

Arguably, the British colonialists were not any different from others. The British forced or *corvée* labour policy, especially in the NTs, was an apology. Governor Sir John P Rodger, as early as in 1907, had held the view that the NTs was a labour basket. He felt worried that, “[n]o reliable labour can be obtained from Ashanti where [...] the people are strongly averse to any form of systematic work. As a local source of supply, there remains, therefore, only the Northern Territories and ordered the Chief Commissioner to send down 12 000 men for work in the mines.”<sup>53</sup> Captain Poole, who copiously criticise the French in the 1920s as cited above, was a loyal adherent of coercive labour when he was the District Commissioner for Tumu in the 1900s. Poole recorded in 1907 that, he;

found the whole of the men of Tumu to comprise twenty-three, half of which [sic] were of the “sitting down” variety [...] Threatened to fine all Tumu headsmen 20s. And [the Chief] Bawa 40s., if 150 men were not present at 3 p.m. At 3 p.m. there were only 44, so I fined them.<sup>54</sup>

The fines were only refunded after the chief had produced 150 men for Poole to export to Abooso, Abbontiakoon and Tarquah Mines. This was not an isolated case of political actors’ involvement in labour recruitments for the Colony and Asante. Concerning *corvée* labour, “every adult male [...] was liable to do six day’s work on roads each quarter [in the NTs] [...] Western Dagomba alone provided 3 730 labourers in 1909, 3 558 in 1910, and 3 976 in 1912”.<sup>55</sup> It was therefore not surprising that Chief Commissioner W J A Jones described the people of the NTs as “hewers of wood and drawers of water” and feared that educating them would negatively affect the economic fortunes of the mines in Asante and the Colony in terms of labour supply.<sup>56</sup> The forced

52 K Nkrumah, *Africa must unite* (London: Panaf Books, 1963), p. xii.

53 Acting Governor Bryan to Lord Crewe, 21 June 1909, PRO CO 96/484; Cited in Bening, *A history of education in Northern Ghana, 1907-1976* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1990), p. 179. See also, RG Thomas, “Forced labour in British West Africa: The case of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast 1906-1927”, *The Journal of African History* 14 (1), 1973, p. 84.

54 Thomas, “Forced labour in British West Africa”, p. 82.

55 Staniland, *The Lions of Dagbon*, p. 45.

56 BG Der, “The development of education in Northern Ghana during the colonial era”, *Journal of the Institute of Education* 3 (1), 1994, p. 113; Der cited ADM.1/2: Memorandum on Taxation in the Northern Territories, November 5, 1934, Section on Education. Allman argues that this labour exploitation was to play out in the 1950s when these immigrants settled in the “strangers quarters”, otherwise known as the Zongos, in the southern towns rallied together on the basis of “shared economic exploitation” (class-based and religious appeal)

and corvée labour practices affected the local production economy and led to a sharp rise in food prices in the NTs in 1914. In this regard, the Provincial Commissioner, Southern Province, in his 1914 Annual Report lamented that,

[...] our calls for carriers at all times of the year, as not alone does this practice deplete certain country sides at critical farming times but also the young men are inclined to leave the country on account of it [...] In Tamale district alone over 4 000 boys were taken from their farms for periods varying from four to thirty days, and when we calculate the total male population who can work on farms this drain must be very heavy on a population which is purely agricultural.<sup>57</sup>

Invariably, the situation was not different in eastern Dagomba in the post-war years. Poole informed us that on 17 October 1920 he had "[a]rranged with the Chief [Ya Na] to send a messenger to Chief of Djereponi (sic), the territory was lately taken over, for 100 men for the sisal (sic) plantation in Accra, and asking the Chief to come into Yendi with them".<sup>58</sup> On 20 October he had seen off labourers working on the Sambul road with a paltry reward of a hoe each.<sup>59</sup> Such small tokens made the Bassari to favourably compare the British to the French.<sup>60</sup>

Forced labour practices were not without high fatalities both on the journey to the south and at the mines or railway construction sites. Roger Thomas notes that,

The first figures supplied, for the period April to September 1923, that is for labour recruited in the 1922-3 recruiting season, show death rates from the disease for underground indentured labour of 3.5% per annum for the Abbontiakoon Mine, 12.8 % for the Tarquah and Abosso Mines, and 4.4% for the Prestea Mine, and total (underground and surface) death rates of 3, 7, and 2.8% respectively.<sup>61</sup>

Following this argument, it is imperative to conclude that the dichotomy between the British and the other colonialists was not evidently about

---

and founded the Muslim Association Party (MAP) in 1953 as the first nationwide opposition to Nkrumah's CPP to emerge from outside of the established nationalist UGCC. See, JM Allman, "Hewers of wood, carriers of water": Islam, class, and politics on the eve of Ghana's independence", *African Studies Review* 34 (2), 1991.

57 Staniland, *The Lions of Dagbon*, p. 46. Quoted from N.A.G.A., ADM.56/1/470, Annual Report on the Southern Province for the Year 1914.

58 PRAAD, ADM56/1/259: Yendi Diary, November 1920.

59 PRAAD, ADM56/1/259: Yendi Diary, November 1920.

60 Interview: Author with N Bisalrib, 55 years, Community Development Chairman, Lakpal, 23 April 2012.

61 Thomas, "Forced labour in British West Africa", p. 100. These fatalities may sound mild in the minds of jingoistic patriots. Either than that, it did not look any better than other colonial situations in Belgium Congo or German East Africa or German Togoland.



the brand of the British labour policy but rather the effectively superb and conscious manner the British managed the minds of their colonial subjects. Besides, the British aspersion against other colonisers enticed the hearts of the colonised as well. As a result, by the time the Anglo-French boundary delimitation in Northern Togoland was underway in 1920, the Bassari, B'Moba, Chakosi and Konkomba appeared to have bought into this "superior British rule" mantra. It should be noted that the Bassari in particular had not been ruled directly by the British administration by 1920 except those who had been trekking into the Northern Territories or Asante or the Colony or even Northern Togoland areas that were already under the British control (Bimbilla and Kpandai) since the German days. The Bassari expressive love for Britain was a conscious or derivative view from immigrant Bassari already in British controlled territory who were employed as, "pickers of cocoa and the miners of gold".<sup>62</sup> According to Npong Kijopule, these immigrants often returned with goodies and stories of how the British rule was non-violent and the gifts and payments they received for their labour which was different from the French oppressive system.<sup>63</sup> In Southern Togoland, the Ewe had also shown open preference to the British administrative style and this was to play out against them in their unification struggles in the 1950s when the French administration in Togo rejected the idea on the basis that it was a manoeuvre to collect French Togoland and add it to the Gold Coast.<sup>64</sup>

Interestingly, the people of the French supervisory territory immediately began to project themselves as being "English" during the boundary delimitation period. The Chakosi of English zone, for instance, were made to believe that they were escaping from the French-controlled Mango despite their imminent subjugation to the Ya Na.<sup>65</sup> The Bassari expressed similar sentiments to be "English", and when one of the chiefs and his people were informed that they were still under the French, he was "bitterly disappointed and begged to be taken on by the British" obviously to the delight of Poole.<sup>66</sup> At Bichabe, Poole

[h]eld a large meeting [with] the Chiefs [and those] who were informed [that they] were English were delighted [but] the others [who remained in the French territory] became

62 Allman, "Hewers of wood, carriers of water", p. 2.

63 Interview: Author with N Kijopule, 100 years, Elder, Bederibombe-Clan, Tatale, 11 January 2012. This claim of British payment for labour is confirmed in colonial documents where some labourers on Sambul road construction received a hoe each after they were done. See PRAAD, ADM56/1/259: Yendi Diary, November 1920.

64 DEK Amenumey, "The general elections in the "autonomous Republic of Togo", April 1958: Background and interpretation", *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 16 (1), 1975, p. 49.

65 Maasole, *The Konkomba and their neighbours*, p. 166.

66 PRAAD, ADM56/1/259: Yendi Diary, November 1920.

disconsolate. The Chief of this place begged to be taken on as he said his people hated the French. He told me that he had been ordered to go into Bassari this day but refused as he heard I was coming.<sup>67</sup>

Classically, the Bassari hatred of the French rule resulted in this growing notoriety towards establishing their political assertiveness, and the readiness to accept any consequences that came with it without trepidation.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, this chief was later fined £10 at the behest of the French Commissioner for refusing to meet him. The chiefs whom Poole and the French Commissioner met in Bassari showed similar sentiments. Poole informed us that "those [chiefs who were] informed that they would in future be British ill-disguised their joy, the others received their fate with almost British phlegm".<sup>69</sup> The British officials in Northern Togoland enjoyed this inherent admiration coming from the "natives". Earlier in Zabzugu before he departed for Bassari, Poole had enjoyed the sight of "A large number of Chiefs [who] met me and expressed pleasure at coming under British rule".<sup>70</sup> On 23 November, he reported that,

A number of Konkombas had come into Sansugu to meet me in all their war paint from Nalole and expressed great pleasure at being now British [...] Deputations from several French villages near frontier came in and stated that they wished to pack up and come and live in British Territory. I told them that this was a matter of entirely for themselves to decide.<sup>71</sup>

It appears it did not take long for these people in search of a "better" colonial master to decide – and their destination terminals were not only in the British side of Togoland, but also Northern Territories, Asante and the Colony. Cletus Mbowura *et al* estimate that in the 1920s the Bassari, Konkomba, Kotokoli and Chakosi immigrants at Alfai (BT) alone stood at 1 863, 2 281, 510 and 211 respectively.<sup>72</sup> The 1948 population census figures revealed a massive movement of the Bassari and other minority groups into the NTs, the Colony and Asante (see Table 1 below).

67 PRAAD, ADM56/1/259: Yendi Diary, November 1920.

68 This aversion against the French was not an isolated case. Between 1919 and 1922, the Ewe agitated against Anglo-French border delimitation of 1919 and subsequently petitioned the British Secretary of State for the Colonies for the entire Eweland to be kept under the British administration. See, Coleman, "Togoland", p. 32.

69 PRAAD, ADM56/1/259: Yendi Diary, November 1920.

70 PRAAD, ADM56/1/259: Yendi Diary, November 1920.

71 PRAAD, ADM56/1/259: Yendi Diary, November 1920.

72 Mbowura *et al.*, "The ethnic factor in international politics", p. 15.

Table 1. The Gold Coast Population, 1948 Census

Ethnic Group	Gold Coast	Colony	Asante	NTs <sup>a</sup>	British Togoland <sup>b</sup>
Bassari	12 489	3 395	2 064	149	6 881
Konkomba	59 640	532	640	5 087	53 381
Kotokoli	20 229	9 507	3 172	598	6 952
Chakosi	10 753	160	250	127	10 216
Bimoba	30 927	10	–	1 708	29 209

Source: PRAAD: Accra, ADMS/2/9: 1948 Census

- <sup>a</sup> Northern Territories as used here exclude the British Mandated Territory of Northern Togoland.
- <sup>b</sup> This figure includes those of Southern Togoland Territory under the British Mandate. The Bassari in Ho for instance, were 1 272.

These census figures revealed that by 1948, 44.9% of the Bassari and 65.6% of the Kotokoli were already living outside the British Togoland.<sup>73</sup>

James S. Coleman provides similar figures of the late 1940s and the early 1950s. These figures give a broader comparative data of the population density of “minority” and “majority” groups in British Northern Togoland (see Table 2 below).

These figures put the northern section of British Togoland population at 182 300, which excluded the Mamprusi of Nalerigu area. The total “minority groups” population stood at 140 600. This did not include the Nawuri in east Gonja District. Certainly, there is no gain saying that the “minority” groups in Northern Togoland outnumbered their “majority” overlords. This was despite the population drift into the NTs, the Colony and Asante as has been noted of the Bassari and the Kotokoli. How then did the “minority” groups in the Trustee Territory vote in the 1956 Plebiscite considering the aura already built from the 1920s around the British colonial rule in the Gold Coast? The next section interprets the politics of the Plebiscite.

73 The figure of the Bassari in the Northern Territories, Asante and the Colony equaled to 5 608.

Table 2. Gold Coast – Togoland Population, c. 1948 – 50

Ethnic Group	Gold Coast	British Togoland	French Togoland
Kusasi	70 000	22 400	–
B'Moba	1 600	29 200	54 200
Chakosi	500	10 200	8 900
Konkomba	6 300	53 600	20 100
Dagomba/Nanumba	130 600	41 700	–
Busanga	19 700	7 500	–
Kotokoli	13 300	7 000	51 500
Bassari	5 600	6 900	29 300
Nchumuru	2 900	3 800	–

Source: Coleman, "Togoland", p. 13.

#### 4. THE 1956 PLEBISCITE: THE LAST STAGE OF BRITISH TOGOLAND BORDERLINE POLITICS

Processes leading to the 1956 Plebiscite started after the United Kingdom published a memorandum in 1954 to cede her Trusteeship of Togoland to independent Gold Coast.<sup>74</sup> This was followed by political activism for integration or separation/unification.<sup>75</sup> The three main political parties involved in the Plebiscite politics were Togoland Congress, Northern People's Party (NPP) and the Convention People's Party (CPP)<sup>76</sup>. Ethnic diversities and divisions of the people of Northern Togoland characterised the campaign in

74 The British memorandum on integration of British Togoland to the Gold Coast and the various reactions of the stakeholders have been exhaustively treated by Amenumey and Coleman. This section does not therefore belabour the integrationists and unificationists' arguments in depth at campaign grounds and at United Nations General Assembly Session. It intends to focus on the breakdown of the results of the polls on ethnic basis.

75 The Togoland Congress (with support from JUVENTO and CUT from French Togoland) campaigned on Unification – i.e. British Togoland should be separated from the Gold Coast and reunited with French Togoland. Northern People's Party, Convention People's Party, with the clandestine support of the colonial government campaigned on integration – i.e. British Togoland which had been administered by the Gold Coast, first, as a League of Nations Mandatory Territory and later as a United Nations Trusteeship Territory should be integrated with the Gold Coast which was preparing feverishly toward independence.

76 The Northern People's Party and the Togoland Congress had been allies against the Convention People's Party on ideological grounds. But during the plebiscite, the two became political opponents on the grounds that Ewe unification was to perpetually divide the people of the north. Here NPP found an ally in the CPP against the Togoland Congress. This shows that there are no permanent friends or enemies in politics but rather there are always permanent interests. Table 3 shows all the political groupings in the two Togolands.

that area.<sup>77</sup> The NPP functionaries spear-headed the integrationists' course arguing that any attempt towards Ewe unification would mean that the Mamprusi-Dagomba and Gonja groups would remain divided in the northern section of Togoland. According to Amenumey the United Nations Visiting Mission had indicated in their report that, "[...] the integration-unification debate was conducted on ethnic lines; with the Ewe mostly favouring unification and the non-Ewe British Togolanders favouring integration".<sup>78</sup>

Table 3. Political Groupings of the Two Togolands after World War 2

CATEGORY & TITLE	ABBREVIATION	DATE FOUNDED	OPERATIONAL AREA
UNIFICATIONIST	AEC	1945	Southern Gold Coast
All-Ewe Conference	TC	1943	Southern British Togoland
Togoland Congress*	JUVENTO	1951	Southern French Togoland
Mouvement de la Jeunesse Togolaise	CUT	1939	Southern French Togoland
Comité de l'Unité Togolaise	MPT	1954	Southern French Togoland
Mouvement Populaire Togolaise			
UNIONISTA	PTP	1946	Southern French Togoland
Parti Togolaise du Progrès	UCPN	1951	Northern French Togoland
Union des Chefs et des Populations du Nord Togob			
INTEGRATIONIST			
Convention People's Party*	CPP	1949	Gold Coast & British Togoland
Northern People's Party*(b)	NPP	1954	Northern British Togoland

Source: Coleman, "Togoland", p. 29.

\*These were political parties within the British Togoland directly involved in the 1956 Togoland Plebiscite. Ideological, capital and human resource support, however, came from the other political groupings outside BTL.

a The Unionist opposed the kind of Unification the other parties were yearning for. Their argument was that the two Togolands should reunite and then remain within the French Union, whereas others wanted a unified Togolands that would become an independent nation.

<sup>77</sup> See table 2 above.

<sup>78</sup> Amenumey, *The Ewe unification movement*, p. 268.

<sup>b</sup> NPP and UCPC in Northern British and Northern French Togolands respectively were the only non-Ewe in their ethnic composition.

Predictably, the shared government of the Gold Coast was solidly behind the integrationists' course. On the one hand, Nkrumah and his CPP government were so committed to the Volta River Project (which became known as Akosombo Dam) that he could not afford a separate Ewe state. This would have jeopardised the project since the dam site overlapped the Gold Coast and the British Togoland. On the other hand, British colonial administration argued that since British Togoland had been administered together with the Gold Coast, it was sensible for the former to be integrated when the latter became independent. According to Divine Amenumey, the British memorandum argued that,

[...] when the Gold Coast became independent, it would no longer be possible for the United Kingdom Government to administer British Togoland as an integral part of its former colony [...]. The objectives of the trusteeship system would, therefore, be fulfilled by the union of British Togoland with full self-government and independent Gold Coast.<sup>79</sup>

In this regard, Governor Arden Clarke threw his entire administration's machinery behind the integrationists' course.<sup>80</sup> Confessedly, he recollects later that,

We had too, during that time, the problem of Togoland. It will be recalled that a part of Togoland, a long narrow sliver of it running the length of the Gold Coast, was administered on behalf of the United Nations by the British Government through the government of the Gold Coast. It seemed to all of us out there that the natural destiny of Togoland under United Kingdom Trusteeship was to become an integral part of the Gold Coast; it had been administered as such since its capture from Germans in 1914. I was interested to see how cordially all my Ministers agreed with this view. Indeed, I had to twit them on the subject. After listening to a diatribe about British imperialism, I suggested that in the case of Togoland there seemed to be quite a lot of Gold Coast imperialism and imperialism was not necessarily a bad thing!<sup>81</sup>

It was this combined force of Gold Coast imperialism and propaganda that the Togoland Congress with its numerical disadvantage in terms of both capital and human resources had to battle with especially in the northern section of British Togoland. Coupled with this hurdle was the ambiguity

79 Amenumey, *The Ewe unification movement*, p. 241.

80 Amenumey, *The Ewe unification movement*, p. 262.

81 CA Clarke, "Gold Coast into Ghana: Some problems of transition", *International Affairs* 34 (1), 1958, p. 54.

in Togoland Congress' argument for the separation of British Togoland.<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, Alhasan Chambas under the employment of Togoland Congress in the northern section was up to the task and skilfully manipulated the perceived local grievances to canvass the "minority" groups for votes. Paul André Ladouceur asserts that "the Togoland Congress was able to capitalise on local grievances and on the presence of some ethnic groups in the North which in turn had been divided by the Anglo-French Mandated Territory in 1919".<sup>83</sup> Thus, the unification of the Mamprusi-Dagomba and Gonja groups would keep these other ethnic groups at bay from their kin in French Togoland. Ladouceur maintains that these,

groups in the Northern section of Togoland [were] the B'Moba, Chakosi, Konkomba, Kotocoli(sic) and Bassari [who] had more to gain in terms of reunification of populations by opting for French Togoland instead of the Gold Coast [...] Chambas (sic) campaigned among these smaller ethnic groups. He was aided in his arguments by the fact that, except the Nanumba, these were "subject" peoples assimilated for traditional allegiance in the Mamprusi, Dagomba or Gonja states.<sup>84</sup>

Chambas also accused the government (Colonial and CPP shared administration) of using propaganda and "pressure on northern chiefs and people to demand and support integration even against their conscience".<sup>85</sup> Separatists in Northern Togoland therefore "appealed to the people of Bassari by equating integration with their continual subjection to the paramount chief of Dagomba. There was a similar equation in the case of the Konkomba in Mamprusi and the Nawuri under Gonja rule".<sup>86</sup> But did the Bassari heed to these ethnocentric campaigns? No written records exist of the role which individual Bassari played in the Plebiscite politics. A review of the Plebiscite registration figures together with the actual result along with the propaganda that characterised the entire exercise, however, reveals some staggering dynamics which confirmed the surge of some ethnic groups to be British "citizens" from the 1920s.

82 Togoland Congress' argument for separation also meant the unification of the Ewe people of the two Togolands. Implicitly, the two Togolands would have to reunite and gain independence as a nation before deciding on whether to join Ghana or not. Such unification would divorce the Mamprusi-Dagomba and Gonja peoples of northern Togoland from their kinsmen in the Gold Coast. Togoland Congress also innately had in mind of not a permanent separation but they envisage a federal union with the Gold Coast. See Amenumey, *The Ewe unification movement*, p. 162.

83 PA Ladouceur, *Chiefs and politicians: The politics of regionalism in Northern Ghana* (London, Longman Group Ltd., 1979), p.135.

84 Ladouceur, *Chiefs and politicians*, p. 135.

85 Amenumey, *Ewe unification movement*, p. 255.

86 Amenumey, *Ewe unification movement*, p.265.

The 1956 Plebiscite voters' registration, supervised by the United Nations Plebiscite Commission, recorded a total of 194 492 voters.<sup>87</sup> The population of 78 413 was in British Northern Togoland. With a 78% turnout in Northern Togoland, 49 119 voted for integration (union with the Gold Coast) while 12 707 favoured separation.<sup>88</sup> Table 4 below shows four specific Bassari polling stations and the pattern of their votes.

Table 4. The 1956 Plebiscite Results: The Bassari Polling Stations

Polling Station	Total	Union (Integration)	Separation	Rejected
Zabzugu South (Seini)	524	515	9	-
Nakpali (Gbong)	668	653	11	4
Kpansa (Nakpali)	253	248	3	2
Zabzugu (Kukpla Kuyungli)*	949	923	24	2

Source: Ziorklui, *Ghana: Nkrumah to Rawlings*, p. 100.

These figures excluded the Bassari settlers in Nanumba and Kpandai areas in the northern section of Togoland, and those in the southern part of Togoland.

One fact stands out after a cursory study of these figures – the northern section of Togoland voted massively for integration. Amenumey sums it up, "[...] the northern section voted for integration while the southern section voted against it". For Kate Skinner, the comprehensive victory of the integrationists should be attributed to the northern section's votes.<sup>89</sup> Even in the Nawuri area where Pan-Ewe nationalism was deeply rooted (out of 18 wards, ten voted for separation), the integrationists still won the popular votes with 3 166 votes to 2 729 for separation.<sup>90</sup> In the same vein, the strong campaign put up by J P Kona (son of Bunkpurugunaba) for separation against the Nakpandurinaba who was for integration still did not win the separatists during the election in B'Moba area. Integrationists won the popular votes by 3 437 to 3 035 votes. Kona marshalled these votes not because the B'Moba feared subordination to Mamprusi rule nor did the integrationists votes come from the fear of Mumuni Bawumia's threats that the B'Moba were immigrants from French

87 Public Records and Archives Administration Department, (PRAAD: Ho), DA/D118, Plebiscite Maps. A breakdown of this figure by each Ward is provided in this document. Amenumey's figure for the total is 194 230; See Amenumey, *Ewe unification movement*, p.161.

88 ED Ziorklui, *Ghana: Nkrumah to Rawlings, Kufuor and Beyond, 1949 – 1960* (Accra, Em-Zed Books Centre, 2004), p. 91.

89 See, K Skinner, "Reading, writing and rallies: The politics of "freedom" in Southern British Togoland, 1953-1956", *The Journal of African History* 48 (1), 2007, p.126.

90 Mbowura, *et al.*, "The ethnic factor in international politics", p. 23.



Togoland and that if they voted for separation, they would face expulsion.<sup>91</sup> These threats were without recourse to empirical historical antecedents that the B'Moba were only victims of political-administrative convenience following the Anglo-French boundary delimitation and the subsequent introduction of indirect rule in 1932. Kona's remarkable show was as a result of the stand-off between Bunkprugunaba and the Nakpandurinaba following the latter's elevation to a divisional chief status for the B'Moba area.<sup>92</sup> The startling figures in Kworli local area, which was mainly inhabited by the Dagomba give a far-reaching contradiction to the ethnic card that was played during the campaign. A Dagomba settlement, and the aura for Dagomba unification since the German days, one would have thought that the plebiscite was a grand opportunity to accomplish that (see the results in Table 5).

Table 5. The 1956 Plebiscite Results: Kworli Local Council Area

Polling Station	Total	Union (Integration)	Separation	Rejected
Nakpali (Fon)	110	4	104	2
Nakpali (Nayili)	149	20	129	-
Worribogo	416	20	394	2
Tindan	203	78	125	-
Larabanga	104	6	98	-
Kukuo	299	42	254	3

Source: Ziorklui, *Ghana: Nkrumah to Rawlings, Kufuor and Beyond*, p.100.

Instructively, this fluid pattern of voting demonstrates that the electorate of Northern Togoland seldom followed ethnic politics during the Plebiscite. The result from Kworli, a traditional Dagomba settlement, defied the pre-Plebiscite and the NPP's Plebiscite argument for a united Mamprusi-Dagomba and Gonja groups. It also generally defeated the narrow claim that "[a] breakdown of results by district and local council area in the North reveals the strength of the appeal for separation among the minority groups".<sup>93</sup> On the contrary, the Bassari "minority" in Yelzori (Zabzugu) local council area, the Konkomba in Sunson local council area, the Chakosi in Chereponi local council area, Alfai (Nawuri) in east Gonja local council area and the B'Moba in Yunyoo area generally voted for integration.

91 AM Bawumia, *A life in the political history of Ghana: Memoirs of Alhaji Mumuni Bawumia* (Accra, Ghana Universities Press, 2004), p. 54.

92 Ladouceur, *Chiefs and politicians*, p.135.

93 Ladouceur, *Chiefs and politicians*, p. 136.

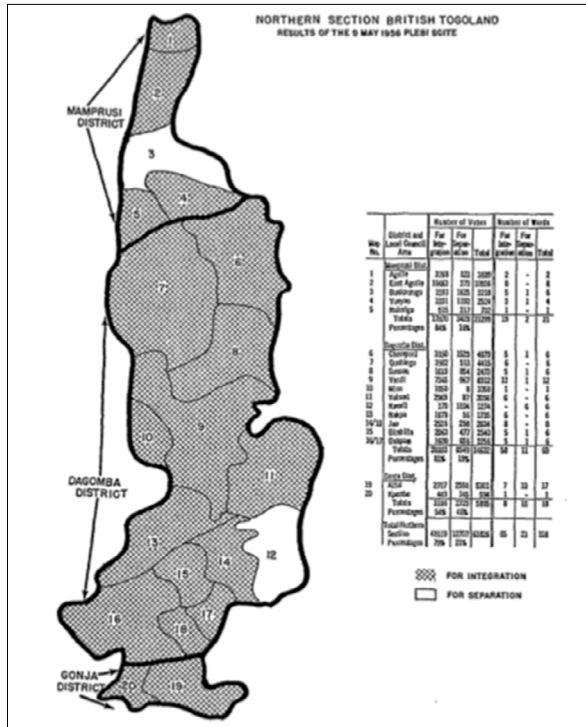


Fig 3: Plebiscite Results by Local Council Area in Northern Togoland: Coleman, "Togoland"

The split in B'Moba votes seemingly came from the fallout in intra-B'Moba politics rather than the Togoland Congress' ethnic propaganda during the runoff to the 1956 Plebiscite in British Togoland.

## 5. CONCLUSION

It has been argued that colonial and ethnic politics in Northern Togoland between the two World Wars laid the foundation which fuelled the decision the Bassari made in the 1956 Plebiscite. Relying on oral histories and archival materials, and the interpretation and analyses of sequential events and figures, this study has drawn three fundamental conclusions: firstly, the

Bassari never liked the German colonial administration, and later the six-year French supervisory rule; secondly, the Bassari were caught up in a vortex of borderline British politics which convincingly overwhelmed their natural fear of ethnic majoritarian rule in Dagbon; and finally, at the 1956 Plebiscite, the last stage of borderline politics in the British Togoland, the Bassari *raison d'être* for integration was not because they did not recognise the Dagomba as a hindrance in their ethnic self-determination, but rather because of their past experience of the German and French colonial systems. The 1956 Plebiscite was, therefore, an affirmation of their “Englishness” manoeuvred since the 1920s and a rejection of any contact with the French. For many, it was implicitly a matter of choice *between the devil* (Dagomba hegemony) *and the deep blue sea* (French Togoland Administration); and the lesser of the two was the British-future Ghana-Dagomba rule.

## 6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Dr Joseph U Kachim of the Department of History, University of Cape Coast, for his comments on earlier drafts of this article.