

Local Historians and Strangers with Big Eyes: The Politics of Ewe History in Ghana and Its Global Diaspora

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LOCAL HISTORIANS AND STRANGERS WITH BIG EYES: THE POLITICS OF EWE HISTORY IN GHANA AND ITS GLOBAL DIASPORA

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I

In 2001 I attended a meeting at the London headquarters of the Movement for a Resurgent Togoland (MORETO). Seven people—mainly middle-aged and elderly men from the inland Ewe-speaking areas of Ghana—had gathered together to share their findings about the modern political history of the area where they were born. They vocalised their dissatisfaction with the incorporation of this area within the borders of Ghana at independence in 1957, and they discussed how this situation came about, and whether it could be rectified.¹ In the course of this meeting, I began to realize that contests over Ewe history had gone global. Controversial issues, which scholars had previously addressed through detailed diachronic local studies, were now being played out across a global diaspora, capturing the attention not only of Ewe-speakers originating from a specific town or district, or having a direct stake in a particular version of its history, but also of anonymous commentators, scattered thousands of miles across the globe. In this paper, I describe some of my encounters with Ewe-speaking people who study their recent political history, and I analyze some of their writings.² I suggest that,

¹Field notes: meeting of the MORETO in Edmonton, London, 27 January 2001.

²I am grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Board for funding my original doctoral field work, and to the British Academy Small Research Grants Scheme for funding a more recent trip to Ghana in the summer of 2010.

despite recent attention to history-writing by Africans during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, further reflection is required on two key issues: firstly, the circulation of historical knowledge and forms of historical debate among Africans living in the global diaspora; secondly, the implications of this for historians researching the post-colonial period.

II

Historians of Africa are currently benefiting from studies which investigate processes of history-writing by African scholars based on the mainland continent.³ These studies recover Africans' nineteenth- and twentieth-century endeavours in reconstructing local, ethnic and national histories, gathering documentary evidence and oral traditions, conducting social surveys, and disseminating their findings. Attention to these distinctive contributions has generated renewed debate about the unequal relationships between the so-called "professional" or "university-based" historians, and the "research assistants," "informants," and "local" or "amateur" historians with whom they work and from whom they glean "primary data."⁴

Any distinction between "professional" and "amateur" clearly involves their unequal access to the resources that facilitate research and its dissemination, but the terms "local historian" and "local history" are equally problematic. Harneit-Sievers suggests that local histories "address a range of different *small-scale identities* [his emphasis]" and are written as a part of people's struggle to carve out for themselves "a place in the world."⁵ The Ewe case that I discuss in this paper, however, resonates with some of the reservations expressed by Peterson and Macoma.⁶ The term "local historian" fore-

³Derek Peterson, and Giacomo Macoma (ed.), *Recasting the Past: History Writing and Political Work in Modern Africa* (Athens OH, 2009); Axel Harneit-Sievers (ed.), *A Place in the World: New Local Historiographies for Africa and South Asia* (Leiden, 2002).

⁴For a recovery of the experience, knowledge and insights of an individual formerly described only as a "research assistant," see Jean Allman, and T.E. Kyei (ed.), *Our Days Dwindle: Memories of my Childhood Days in Asante* (Portsmouth NH, 2001).

⁵Harneit-Sievers, *A Place in the World*, 3.

⁶Derek Peterson, and Giacomo Macoma, "Homespun Historiography and the Academic Profession," in: Peterson and Macoma, *Recasting the Past*, 1-28.

grounds the bounded nature of an individual's knowledge and audience: it implies that this knowledge is restricted to a particular place or group of people with which the individual is connected and whom he/she is addressing, and is thus in some sense parochial. This obscures the "interpretive and representational work" that the individual has carried out, because he/she may not be addressing a single readership that already shares an "identity." Rather, he/she may be writing in order "to bring a readership—and a political community—into being."⁷

The Ewe-speaking historians whom I discuss here are anything but parochial. They might be described as "local historians" in the sense that they conduct research about the area in which they were born, and they would like people "back home" to know about their findings. They do this precisely in order to emphasize one particular form of political community above other competing forms. But these researchers do not confine themselves to a "local" audience: they also address Ghana's Constitutional Review Commission, the international community (via the United Nations), and the embassies of former colonial powers, in order to remind them of previous decisions, outline the consequences for people "back home," and seek means of redress.

That history-writing among the Ewe-speakers should be complex is not very surprising given the frequent changes of political status of this area during the colonial period. The British extended their control over the coastal Anlo-Ewe strip between 1850 and 1874, and, along with the Peki-Ewe area further inland, this became part of the Gold Coast colony.⁸ The more mountainous inland area, which is also home to enclaves of non-Ewe or "minority" peoples, was colonized by the Germans, who worked their way north from the coast during 1880s to form the colony of Togo.⁹ The first colonial partition across the Ewe-speaking area was drawn in 1890, but was revised as a result of the Allied victory in the First World War. The British and

⁷Peterson, and Macoma, "Homespun Historiography," 8.

⁸D.E.K. Amenumey, "The Extension of British Rule to Anlo (South-East Ghana), 1850-1890," *Journal of African History* 9 (1968), 99-117.

⁹Arthur Knoll, *Togo under Imperial Germany, 1884-1914: a Case Study in Colonial Rule* (Stanford CA, 1978).

French split the former German colony of Togo between them, forming two territories that became subject to international supervision. Thus the Ewe-speakers who lived in the southern third of the former German Togo were grouped along with the various southern “minorities” and several larger northern groups in the League of Nations mandated territories of British and French Togoland. After the Second World War, these mandates were referred to as the United Nations (UN) trust territories of British and French Togoland.¹⁰

The complexities of the colonial period meant that, as the Ewe-speakers contemplated decolonization, individuals and organizations put forward three competing scenarios: (1) that all the Ewe-speaking peoples should join together to form a single nation-state based on shared language and culture; (2) that the Ewe-speakers should cooperate with the other groups within the two trust territories to achieve a joint Togoland independence (effectively recreating the national borders of the former German Togo); (3) that the Ewe-speakers and other peoples of British Togoland should join with Ghana, leaving French Togoland to negotiate its own independence from France.¹¹ The present-day border between Ghana and Togo reflects the implementation of the third of these three solutions.

Scholars from several academic disciplines have been interested in the recent history of this part of West Africa. Among students of International Relations, the Ewe case has been examined in a comparative context in order to glean insights into the workings and weaknesses of international supervision.¹² Political scientists are also interested in the Ewe case because it offers them an example against which to test theory-driven hypotheses about the relative strengths of

¹⁰D.E.K. Amenumey, “The pre-1947 Background to the Ewe Unification Question,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 10 (1960), 65-85.

¹¹D.E.K. Amenumey, *The Ewe Unification Movement: a Political History* (Accra, 1989).

¹²The earliest study examining international supervision is James Coleman, “Togoland,” *International Conciliation* 509 (1956). For more recent work on international supervision see Michael Callahan, *Mandates and Empire: the League of Nations and Africa, 1914-1931* (Brighton, 1999). The most important comparative study is Claude Welch, *Dream of Unity: Pan-Africanism and Political Unification in West Africa* (Ithaca NY, 1966).

ethnicity and nation-state, and to analyze how weak political “centres” can integrate and retain control over their geographical and cultural “peripheries.”¹³ The most substantial recent study of the Ghana-Togo border area, by Paul Nugent, argues that pan-Ewe identity cannot be assumed, that the borders drawn at independence have proved surprisingly resilient, and that communities’ political affiliations are largely determined by highly localized factional disputes and by local calculations as to what the governing party has to offer.¹⁴ Recent examples of history-writing among Ewe-speakers in Ghana and its global diaspora, however, offer us the opportunity to ask some very different questions, and to reflect more broadly on approaches to post-colonial history.

II

I attended the 2001 MORETO meeting in London at the invitation of the late Dr. Ben Kofi Kodzi. He was born in the early 1930s in Dodome—an Ewe-speaking town which now lies in Ghana’s Volta Region, close to the border with Togo, but was previously part of the UN trust territory of British Togoland.¹⁵ Although neither of Kodzi’s parents had attended school, they both became members of the Ewe Church and he therefore persuaded them, after a struggle, to support him through primary school.¹⁶ His secondary education was punctuated by a pupil-teacher post, and spells in the Gold Coast capital, Accra, where he took jobs in a “Syrian” ice cream store, a spare part store, a brewery, a newspaper and a post office.¹⁷ In the early 1960s

¹³David Brown, “Politics in the Kpandou Area of Ghana, 1925 to 1969: a Study of the Influence of Central Government and National Politics upon Local Factional Competition,” PhD dissertation, University of Birmingham (1977).

¹⁴Paul Nugent, *Smugglers, Secessionists and Loyal Citizens on the Ghana-Togo Frontier: the Lie of the Borderlands since 1914* (Athens OH, 2002).

¹⁵Interview with Kofi Kodzi, Edmonton, London, 19 July 2001.

¹⁶The Ewe Church grew from the endeavours of the Pietist Bremen mission society in the second half of the nineteenth century. It later became known as the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (and the “Eglise Evangélique” in what is now the Republic of Togo). See Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana* (Edinburgh, 1999); Hans Debrunner, *A Church Between Colonial Powers: a Study of the Church in Togo* (London, 1965).

he travelled on a UN scholarship to Poland, where he attended university.

Kodzi was practising as a medical doctor in Bé (Lomé, Republic of Togo) when he founded the MORETO in 1984. Soon after, in 1985, he was detained on a trip to Ghana, which was then governed by the PNDC regime of Jerry Rawlings. After his release he travelled to the UK, where he wrote and published a vitriolic account of the abuses inflicted by Rawlings' regime upon its actual and perceived opponents, himself included.¹⁸ By the time I met Kofi Kodzi at a West African Studies seminar almost a decade later, he had turned to Ewe religion, language and history. Aged approximately 70 he was beginning a PhD thesis on Ewe religion at the University of Birmingham.

Initially, I regarded Kofi Kodzi as an “informant” for my own research, for, as a young man, he had been active in one of the main political movements that operated along the southern portion of the Ghana-Togo border during the 1950s. This party, the Togoland Congress, was active among the Ewe-speaking peoples (and indeed the non-Ewe enclaves) in the southern part of the trust territory of British Togoland, and it also had a smaller number of supporters in northern Togoland. The Congress had campaigned—unsuccessfully—for the reunification of British Togoland with the neighbouring UN trust territory of French Togoland and their joint independence as a reunified Togoland nation-state. Locally, these people were known as “unificationists” or as *Ablode*.¹⁹ From the interviews that I had conducted with former Togoland Congress activists during my field work in Ghana, I knew that some of them were dissatisfied with the UN-supervised plebiscite that was held in British Togoland in 1956 and the subsequent incorporation of all of British Togoland (northern and southern sections) within the borders of Ghana when the latter

¹⁷In Ghana, the term “Syrian” is often used to denote all people who came from the Levant, including those from Lebanon.

¹⁸Kofi Kodzi, *Worse than South Africa* (London, 1991).

¹⁹*Ablode* is an Ewe word meaning “freedom.” “Unificationists” sometimes preferred to be called “reunificationists” to stress that they were putting back together the Togo which had been torn asunder during the First World War.

achieved its independence in 1957 under the government of Kwame Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party (CPP).

My early hope, therefore, was that Kofi Kodzi would help me in my own doctoral research by adding to my collection of "insider" accounts of the ideals, organization and tactics of the "losing side" during this contested process of decolonization. During our interviews, however, I realized that whilst Kodzi was willing to help me, he also saw me as a potential ally in his objective of re-opening the border question. He believed that this political project depended upon historical research on the Ewe-speaking peoples, particularly those from the inland towns and villages which had belonged to the former trust territory area. He informed me that our objectives were complementary and our endeavours could be mutually reinforcing. As far as Kodzi was concerned, "there is no proper Ewe history," and as "the problem with the [inland] Ewes is that we are too timid," an outsider might have to start the job.²⁰

Although two historians who were based in North American universities had recently completed important eco-social and socio-cultural histories of the coastal Anlo-Ewe area, this would have been of little comfort to Kodzi, who was already concerned that history-writing in Ghana was dominated by the Anlo.²¹ He argued that despite the basic similarity in language between the Anlo and the inland (or Ewedome) people, and a shared tradition of migration from the east, the Anlo had never been part of the trust territory and did not share the historical experiences or political interests of its inhabitants.²²

²⁰Interview with Kofi Kodzi, Edmonton, London, 13 December 2000. I smile when I recall this comment, because no-one who had met Kofi Kodzi would ever describe him as a timid man!

²¹Emanuel Akyeampong, *Between the Sea and the Lagoon: an Eco-Social History of the Anlo of South-Eastern Ghana c.1850 to Recent Times* (Athens OH, 2001); Sandra Greene, *Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Change on the Upper Slave Coast: a History of the Anlo-Ewe* (Portsmouth NH, 1996); Sandra Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter: a History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana* (Bloomington/Indianapolis, 2002).

²²Geographically, Peki is "inland," but due to its early colonization by the British, it did not fall within the trust territory area along with the other "Ewedome" groups. For an intriguing account of evolution of Ewe migration traditions, and the annual celebration of the flight of the Ewes from the walled town of Notse, see chapter one of Greene, *Sacred Sites*.

Kodzi was particularly concerned to see even-handed representation of different Ewe-speaking groups within the Organization for Research in Eweland, which, at that point, had brought out two volumes of the *Handbook of Eweland*.²³

Kodzi was therefore keen for me to make professional progress, partly because he was a kind man who wanted me to succeed, and partly because he wanted to see a scholarly counter-weight to the University of Ghana's senior Ewe historians, D.E.K. Amenumey and Francis Agbodeka. This was a terrifying prospect for a young researcher, particularly as Kodzi (and indeed other Ewe-speakers) also liked to remind me of the aphorism *Amedzro nku ga me nya xodome o* (usually translated as "a stranger with big eyes can never see all the corners of the town").²⁴ This saying suggests that there is some scepticism on the part of the so-called "local" historians as to what the so-called "professional" outsiders may have to offer in terms of knowledge or insight.²⁵ The value of the "stranger with big eyes" lay elsewhere, and I shall return to this point later on.

The distinction between the coastal Anlo-Ewe and the inland Ewe-dome may appear to be a rather particularist matter of "identity," of importance mainly to those people with a direct stake in the towns in question, and best approached by historians through detailed diachronic local studies. From his base in London, however, Kodzi was pursuing his research agenda through the plethora of voluntary associations that were flourishing in the late twentieth-century global Ewe diaspora. The UK branch of the Organization for Research in Eweland was bringing out its own periodical (*Eweland News*) to which Kodzi was a contributor on the history of the Ewe language

²³Francis Agbodeka (ed.), *A Handbook of Eweland: vol. 1—The Ewes of Southeastern Ghana* (Accra, 1997); Francis Agbodeka, and Kodzo Gavua (ed.), *A Handbook of Eweland: vol. 2—The Northern Ewes in Ghana* (Accra, 2000). A third volume, concentrating on the Ewe-speakers in Togo and Bénin, was brought out by Benjamin Lawrance in 2005. The handbooks did in fact give attention to the different Ewe-speaking groups.

²⁴Nugent apparently encountered a similar phrase in the Likpe area (see *Smugglers*, 231). Literally, *dome* means "between" and *xo* means "house"—suggesting that a newcomer cannot see the spaces between the houses where things may be hidden.

²⁵Nugent, *Smugglers*, 231.

and its orthography.²⁶ ORE (UK) was planning an “Ewe Language and Cultural Awareness School” that would teach the mother-tongue to children of Ewe migrants, and “assimilate the youth into Ewe culture” in order that they could “communicate with relations when they visit their respective countries of origin” and “support their ageing parents in our annual cultural festivals.”²⁷

This emphasis on the umbrella role of ORE (UK) in promoting the mother-tongue and Ewe culture sat alongside an organizational tendency towards a plethora of smaller associations which mobilized resources for more specific agendas, some which were associated with particular towns or districts. These included, among others, an Anlo Students Union, a Togo Nationals Union, an Atorkor Development Foundation, and *Noviha* (“brotherhood”/“sisterhood”). Kodzi was anxious to ensure that the Ewedome groups should be well-represented within the London diaspora, and he wanted a public affirmation of academic interest in the Ewedome. He was delighted to welcome the anthropologist Lynne Brydon to an Easter festival held in London for migrants from the inland Ewe area.²⁸ But I suspect that my own reticence disappointed him.

Since Kofi Kodzi’s death in 2008 I have often felt guilty I was not able to live up to his expectations. I appreciated his letters, the copies of his drafts on Ewe language and religion, and his visit to me after the birth of my first child. He taught me many things that I would not otherwise have known about Togoland and Ewe history, and in this respect he helped me a great deal. I certainly took Kofi Kodzi seriously as a former political activist and thus as a repository of knowledge and experience regarding Ewedome politics and the border question in the 1950s. And, given that I am now writing about his opinions, it is only fair to add that I sympathized with some of his

²⁶Kofi Kodzi, “Orthography of the Ewe Language,” *Eweland News* 12 (2002), 3.

²⁷B.B.K. Ayivor, “What is ORE (UK) About?” *Eweland News* 12 (2002), 1.

²⁸Lynne Brydon has worked for over thirty years in Avatime, where the people speak *Siyase*, a “Togo remnant” language (see below, footnote 30). The great majority of Avatime people, however, also speak Ewe fluently, partly as a result of missionary use of standardized Ewe in churches and schools.

grievances about the ways in which the British, the UN and the CPP had settled the future of British Togoland in 1956-1957, and about the treatment of former unificationists during the independence era. The problem was that I also hesitated over the viability and the wisdom of mobilizing these historical grievances behind a twenty-first century political objective.

In the aftermath of the December 2000 elections, which saw the departure of Jerry Rawlings (in power since 1981) and the victory of John Agyekum Kufuor, Kofi Kodzi nursed the hope that the New Patriotic Party (NPP) government would reopen the Togoland question and give renewed attention to the people of the former trust territory area. It was difficult for me to see why the NPP leadership should buck the strong continental trend towards maintaining the borders as they lay at independence.²⁹ Even if the NPP had agreed to re-open the Togoland question and amend the border, I was not persuaded that this would be in the best interests of the people who were citizens of Ghana, because Ghana's economy was in better shape than that of Togo in the year 2001, and Ghanaians enjoyed a much wider range of civil liberties than their Togolese neighbours living under the late Gnassingbé Eyadéma.

Were the middle-aged and elderly MORETO members in London accurately reflecting the views of the majority of voters residing in the former trust territory area? Or was Kofi Kodzi a lone warrior, pursuing an issue that was no longer relevant to people who had been brought up as Ghanaian citizens? Enquiring about the scope for reopening the border question during my field work the previous year, I was struck by the response of one retired educationist, E.K. Datsa, in the village of Amedzofe-Avatime: "It is now just an old man's issue. [...] People wouldn't concern themselves with that kind of lost

²⁹The Volta Region of Ghana (which includes the areas formerly belonging to the trust territory of British Togoland, along with the Peki and Anlo areas) had voted heavily in favour of Rawlings and the NDC in 1992, 1996 and 2000. See Paul Nugent, "Winners, Losers and Also Rans: Money, Moral Authority and Voting Patterns in the Ghana 2000 Election," *African Affairs* 100 (2001), 405-28; Paul Nugent, "The Things that Money can Buy: Chieftaincy, the Media and the 1996 Elections in Hohoe-North Constituency," *Ghana Studies* 4 (2001), 85-106.

cause. People got on with the opportunities that were open to them.”³⁰

In his 2002 *Smugglers, Secessionists and Loyal Citizens*, Paul Nugent reviewed a very substantial body of documentary evidence, which, along with his interviews and observations in the border area, led him to much the same conclusion as E.K. Datsa. Nugent emphasized both the economic advantages that the border presented to the people living alongside it (smuggling), and the importance of highly localized, factional struggles (as opposed to any pan-Ewe ethnic sentiment) in determining the political affiliations of rural communities. By the end of the 1950s, *Ablode* activists had already recognized that the penalties attached to continued agitation would be severe for individuals—including long spells in preventive detention or politically-motivated exclusion from chiefly office by the CPP government. Moreover, communities’ access to the developmental resources of the state depended upon acceptance of (or at least, an end to vocal/visible opposition to) the status quo. Pointing to the failure of the 1970s group, TOLIMO, to garner significant support for the secession of the former British Togoland from Ghana, and the winding up of its operations in 1977, Nugent concluded: “As far as the politics of unificationism is concerned, therefore, this really is the end of the story.”³¹

III

Then, in 2007, a former Member of Parliament for the Hohoe South constituency published a book entitled *How Britain Subverted and Betrayed British Togoland*. This book was surprising for three reasons. Firstly, its author, Kosi Kedem, belonged to a different generation to that of Kodzi and the other former Togoland Congress activists. He was also a graduate of the University of Ghana, and held a higher degree. Explaining the reduced salience of the border

³⁰Interview with E.K. Datsa, Amedzofe-Avetime, 3 June 1999. Mr. Datsa later described his own role in the Togoland unification question in his memoir, *Doing My Duty: Memoirs of a Ghanaian Educationist* (Accra, 2006), 109-24.

³¹Nugent, *Smugglers*, 230.

issue in the 1960s, Nugent pointed to the rise of a new generation of local leaders and parliamentarians who had benefitted from the considerable expansion of educational opportunities during the Nkrumah era. These individuals were heavily invested in social, professional and developmental networks based in Ghana, and thus, according to Nugent, “For the generation that increasingly wielded power at the local level, the *Ablode* past was as much a foreign country as Togo itself was.”³² Kedem’s writings, on the other hand, suggested that the Togoland question was not only an “old man’s issue,” but had now been taken up by a vocal former parliamentarian from the Ewedome area.

Secondly, Kedem lists actions taken over a period of several years by a group of activists and sympathizers. These included attempts to raise the Togoland question at Ghana’s National Reconciliation Commission (which was organized in the aftermath of the 2000 elections and the departure of Jerry Rawlings), and a series of letters sent to the British High Commissioner in Accra in 2005-2006.³³ Thirdly, Kedem’s book outlines some of the very same issues that my own elderly interviewees had identified in their explanations of how the current border settlement had been reached during the 1950s. Indeed, in his 2005 book, *British Togoland: an orphan or the death of a nation?* Kedem even deploys strikingly similar metaphors to those used in 1950s vernacular and English-language propaganda.³⁴

It would appear then, that since the publication of Nugent’s book, the Ghana-Togo border question has enjoyed a resurgence of interest, and that this interest is manifested not only among Ewe-speakers in

³²Nugent, *Smugglers*, 218.

³³Kosi Kedem, *How Britain Subverted and Betrayed British Togoland* (Accra, 2007), 47-66. Although Ghana had held multi-party elections in 1992 and 1996, these had resulted in victory for Jerry Rawlings and his party. 2000 was considered to be a litmus test because Rawlings had now served the two presidential terms permitted under the 1992 constitution. Commentators were anxious to find out whether he would indeed hand over power to Kufuor and the NPP, thus “consolidating” Ghana’s transition to a multi-party democracy. See Nugent, “Winners.”

³⁴Kosi Kedem, *British Togoland: an Orphan or the Death of a Nation* (Accra, 2005). For more on unificationist propaganda in the 1950s, see Kate Skinner, “Reading, Writing and Rallies: the Politics of ‘Freedom’ in Southern British Togoland 1953-1956,” *Journal of African History* 48 (2007), 123-47.

Ghana, but also in the global diaspora. Evidence of renewed activism does not necessarily invalidate Nugent's broader conclusions about the resilience of the border: after all, an issue that exercises a particular pressure group may not be a priority for the majority. It is also important to clarify that Kedem was not leading a secessionist movement along the lines of the TOLIMO in the 1970s: his focus was on the nature of the union between Ghana and the former British Togoland, and, more specifically, on the British and CPP interpretation of the 1956 plebiscite as a mandate for unconditional integration rather than as a basis for a round-table conference on the terms of a Ghana-Togoland union.

Kedem considered that "complete separation and full unfettered sovereignty" for the former British Togoland was, in principle, legitimate, given the achievement of such sovereignty by other former UN trust territories. However,

The fact is that Ghana and Togoland have been together for over ninety years and reality on the ground indicates that this [i.e. a separate Togoland nation-state] may not be too popular an option unless it is forced on the people by extreme provocation where dialogue and diplomacy are completely ruled out or if the hawks and the extremists in the Togoland Nationalist front *are compelled by unavoidable circumstances to resort to extreme alternatives* [his emphasis].³⁵

Kedem's preferred option, therefore, was "a thorough review, regularization and rectification" of the "political relationship" between Ghana and the former trust territory of British Togoland, and "a properly written *union agreement* [his emphasis]."³⁶ The absence of such an agreement was a key element in the proposals that he sent to the Constitutional Review Commission in 2010.³⁷ Kofi Kodzi also told me that he had written to the UN on several occasions, asking them to forward him a copy of the Ghana-British Togoland union agreement. He argued that the failure of the UN to produce such a

³⁵Kedem, *How Britain*, 20-21.

³⁶Kedem, *How Britain*, 21.

³⁷I am grateful to Kosi Kedem for providing me with a copy of his published proposals, *2010 Constitutional Review Commission and the Rectification of the Ghana-British Togoland Union* (Accra, 2010).

document for public scrutiny was evidence that the status quo was *de facto* rather than *de jure*, and did not therefore constitute an immutable legal union.

In comparison with the factors that David Brown identifies in his studies of the TOLIMO in the 1970s, the twenty-first century campaign did not focus either on any economic benefit to be derived from secession, nor on a desire for ethnic unity with the Ewe-speakers of the former trust territory of French Togoland (now the Republic of Togo).³⁸ Indeed Kedem, like several of the prominent *Ablode* activists of the 1950s, was actually born in one of the minority enclaves—although, like most members of these enclaves, he is also a fluent Ewe-speaker.³⁹

The key point here is that ethnicity is striking mainly by its absence as a significant factor in his case. Instead, Kedem referred directly to the previous 150 years, and called for a constitutional settlement to historic grievances over the right to self-determination of all the peoples of the former trust territory. His case turned upon the identification of specific errors and omissions in the process by which integration (or, as he preferred, “annexation”) had been effected in the mid-1950s. And as a former History teacher, and the holder of a higher degree, Kedem was assiduous in his references to UN trusteeship agreements, reports of the UN visiting missions and resolutions of the UN General Assembly.

Upon reading Kedem’s work, I realized that I had not fully understood either the nature of Kofi Kodzi’s objectives or the role of history-writing within his campaign. Kodzi was deeply interested in pre-colonial Ewe history, including the different migratory paths of the

³⁸David Brown, “Borderline Politics in Ghana: the National Liberation Movement of Western Togoland,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 18 (1980), 575-609; David Brown, “Who are the Tribalists? Social Pluralism and Political Ideology in Ghana,” *African Affairs* 81 (1982), 37-69; David Brown, “Sieges and Scapegoats: the Politics of Pluralism in Ghana and Togo,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 21 (1983), 431-60.

³⁹According to his memoir, *The Chance of a Lifetime* (Accra, 2008), Kedem comes from Logba—which was also the hometown of S.G. Antor, who led the Togoland Congress during the 1950s. For a discussion of the non-Ewe “enclaves,” see Paul Nugent, “‘A few lesser peoples’: the Central Togo Minorities and their Ewe Neighbours,” in: Carola Lentz, and Paul Nugent (ed.), *Ethnicity in Ghana: the Limits of Invention* (London, 2000), 162-82.

Ewe sub-groups, and the relationships between coastal and inland peoples during the slave trade era, and we discussed these matters on several occasions.⁴⁰ But for Kodzi, as for Kedem, it was in fact the twentieth-century legal and political history that mattered most, and it was this that propelled their efforts to achieve redress for the former trust territory area. Indeed, Kodzi reminded me several times that he had taken courses in law as well as medicine whilst studying abroad.

In researching and writing about the former British Togoland, Kodzi and Kedem were engaged in “interpretive and representational work” in the sense that they were addressing younger readers “back home” who had grown up as Ghanaian citizens, and who therefore needed to be reminded that they might also identify themselves as “Togolanderns.” However, in addressing their other audiences—particularly those in the UN, the embassies of former colonial powers, and more recently the Ghana Constitutional Review Commission—Kodzi and Kedem believed that their credibility depended on the accurate citation and objective interpretation of relevant documentation. For this reason, Kedem had travelled to London in order to carry out his own first-hand research. Paradoxically, whilst I was initially attracted by the “interpretive and representational” aspects of Kodzi and Kedem’s work, they were more concerned that, as a university-based researcher, I should verify their interpretation of the primary texts. Having allowed the “stranger with big eyes” to glimpse a little of what lay between the houses, the “local” historians did not want her to sit quietly on the fence.

In any case, this would not have been possible. In 2008, I was surprised to find that I had been cited on the website ghanaweb.com in an article by Kofi Ameyo, entitled “Trans Volta Togoland and the Refuseniks of the Union with Ghana.”⁴¹ The article attracted 192

⁴⁰On pre-colonial Anlo and the slave trade, see Greene, *Gender*. An excellent summary of the available literature on pre-colonial Ewedome is provided in chapter one of Wilson Yayoh, “Local Government in Ewedome, British Trust Territory of Togoland (Ghana), 1920s-1970s,” PhD dissertation, SOAS (2010).

⁴¹Kofi Ameyo, “Trans Volta Togoland and the Refuseniks of the Union with Ghana,” (8 May 2008) <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/artikel.php?ID=143373&comment=3728992#com> (accessed 6 August 2010). I am grateful to Kwame Kwateng of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, for bringing this article to my attention.

online comments, including some from readers who indicated that they were writing from Yendi, London, Washington DC, Germany, Amsterdam and Canada.⁴² The comments culminated in an angry exchange: “Wise Observer” criticized both Nugent and me for our failure to give greater attention to vote-rigging in our explanations of the results of the 1956 plebiscite, and he reminded Kofi Ameyo of the pitfalls of relying upon the “logic of outsiders.” “Kola, London” doubted that Kofi Ameyo could be a real Ewe, and challenged him to write a response in Ewe to prove his identity, whilst “Energy” called Ameyo a “Judas” and a “bastard,” and advised him to “cut the crap.”

IV

Nugent has provided a very thorough explanation of why, in spite of its apparently illogical and intrusive colonial origins, the Ghana-Togo border that lies across the Ewe-speaking area has proved so resilient. My point here is not that Nugent is “wrong” or that secession is suddenly likely (or even desirable) for inhabitants of the former trust territory of British Togoland. My point is that the recent resurgence of interest in the Togoland question challenges us to consider the opposite angle: why does this issue have the capacity to reformulate and reinvigorate itself more than half a century after the fact, stimulating such strong feelings among people of different generations living thousands of miles apart? This requires us to pay more attention to the post-independence era, and to find out how former *Ablode* activists understood and experienced the failure of their movement to effect the reunification and joint independence of British and French Togoland. This question has a broader relevance to the field of African Studies because we cannot fully understand the “authoritarian” nature of post-colonial African states without

⁴²It is difficult to be certain of contributors’ actual locations—the list of places above is based upon the information contributors had entered along with their names/nicknames. For another example of how historical knowledge circulates on the world wide web, see Tom McCaskie, “The Life and Afterlife of Yaa Asantewaa,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 77 (2007), 151-79.

finding ways of recovering the experiences of those who were on the “losing side” during contested processes of decolonization and who thus became the enemies of newly independent governments.

It may prove impossible to answer these questions by attempting to replicate the case study approach that historians and political scientists have found so useful in their analyses of the colonial period.⁴³ This is partly a question of availability of documents for the post-colonial period: central government departments’ records may trail to a halt rather earlier than we might like, and, where controversial policy areas were removed to direct presidential control, national archives have been left with some gaping holes. The regional archive at Ho (Volta Region) is still awaiting the significant improvements in storage and cataloguing that other regional archives in Ghana have enjoyed, and it seems likely that some records were deliberately destroyed in the aftermath of the 1966 coup that toppled Nkrumah.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, some of the district commissioners’ correspondence survives, and on the francophone Togolese side of the border, the district-level records for the Klouto area are surprisingly detailed into the mid-1960s.

In principle, this increases our chances of understanding local politics, but the problem is that these records reflect the way in which the district commissioner (or, on the francophone side, the “commandant de cercle”) operated. They tell us about what the state sought to achieve in a given locality, and how state representatives identified and rewarded potential allies whilst marginalizing opponents. District-level files also contain some evidence of issues that individuals or communities looked to the state to resolve—hence the many let-

⁴³Dennis Austin was one of the first scholars to integrate a local case study (Bekwai) into his analysis of mass nationalism in Ghana. A similar approach was later used by Dunn and Robertson, Brown, and Nugent, among others. See Dennis Austin, *Politics in Ghana 1946-1960* (London, 1964); John Dunn, and Alexander F. Robertson, *Dependence and Opportunity: Political Change in Ahafo* (Cambridge, 1973); Brown, “Politics;” Paul Nugent, “National Integration and the Vicissitudes of State Power in Ghana: the Political Incorporation of Likpe, a Border Community, 1945-1986,” PhD dissertation, SOAS (1991).

⁴⁴Yayoh, “Local Government,” chapter six. Wilson Yayoh has done very valuable work in establishing what is available in the Ho archive and teasing out some of the key aspects of local government in Ewedome.

ters and petitions related either to the resolution of chieftaincy disputes or to the distribution of development funds.

We can certainly read these archives “against the grain” to reveal the ingenuity of Africans in presenting district commissioners with invented (or selectively remembered) “traditions.” But whilst district level records permit insights into “centre-periphery relations,” and thus, indirectly, into the instrumentalist logic of party-political affiliation in rural areas, there may be swathes of activity which either escaped the district commissioner (or “commandant de cercle”) altogether, or were insufficiently interesting (or perhaps too controversial) to be recorded. The nature of district records is such that, whilst they are highly suggestive of the individual and community benefits attached to supporting the governing party, they tell us rather less about internal dynamics of trans-national or cross-border political movements, particularly when the individuals involved were secretive about their activities and spent considerable periods in exile.

The limitations of the post-colonial archive point to the urgent tasks of interviewing former political activists and investigating their practices of “self-archiving.”⁴⁵ Importantly, I approached elderly individuals not as “local” historians of any particular town or district, but rather as grass-roots participants in *Ablode*. This changed the focus and dynamics of the interview: in the former scenario, politics may be presented as an unfortunate intrusion that “brought confusion” into a town at the price of internal unity and the disfavour of the central state; in the latter scenario, the work of grassroots activism is validated and this permits greater discussion of the ideas and strategies of political movements operating in rural areas, including their trans-national dimensions. The politics of the 1950s and 1960s was clearly remembered from the vantage point of the present,

⁴⁵For some examples of “self-archiving” see Stephan Miescher, “‘My Own Life:’ A.K. Boakye Yiadom’s Autobiography—the Writing and Subjectivity of a Ghanaian Teacher-Catechist,” in: Karin Barber (ed.), *Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self* (Bloomington/Indianapolis, 2006), 27-51; Ruth Watson, “‘What is our Intelligence, our School Going and our Reading of Books Without Getting Money?’ Akinpelu Obişesan and his Diary,” in: Karin Barber (ed.), *Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self* (Bloomington/Indianapolis, 2006), 52-77.

and former activists tended to locate *Ablode* within popular narratives of Ghana's post-colonial political trajectory. Whilst there is not room to consider this aspect in detail here, it is appropriate to mention a second consequence of interviewing individuals as part of an *Ablode* cohort: each person recognized that I would also be talking to their fellow activists (or, where these individuals had passed on, to their relatives).

V

Former activists put forward three main reasons for the failure of the Togoland Congress to achieve the reunification of the trust territories of British and French Togoland. Their primary argument—and the one that features most prominently in Kedem's account—concerns the perfidy of the British. The gist of this argument was as follows: entrusted with the economic development and the political future of the territory of British Togoland, the British ignored its needs and chose, for their own convenience, to administer it as part of the neighbouring colony of the Gold Coast. They effected integration via the “back door” by including the people of southern British Togoland in a region with the Ewe-speakers of the Anlo and Peki areas of the Gold Coast. By the time of the UN-supervised plebiscite in 1956, the British had already decided in favour of integrating their trust territory with the Gold Coast, and thus gave covert support to the CPP, which also desired integration in order to facilitate the damming of the River Volta (the main geographical barrier between the trust territory and the Gold Coast).⁴⁶ This argument was made forcefully in the English-language and Ewe-language propaganda of the 1950s, and was frequently reiterated in interviews.⁴⁷

However, from the vantage point of the year 2000, former *Ablode* activists tended to emphasize two additional reasons for their failure to achieve unification. Firstly, they cited early betrayals by key unifi-

⁴⁶Ghana still depends on the hydro-electric power generated by the dam at Akosombo on the River Volta. New research is being undertaken on Akosombo by Stephan Miescher, University of California at Santa Barbara.

⁴⁷For further detail on 1950s propaganda, see Skinner, “Reading.”

cationists, particularly two members of the 1951 legislative assembly, F.Y. Asare (of Buem) and G.O. Awuma (of Ho). Both of these individuals were considered to have launched their political careers on the back of unificationist sentiment, but to have “crossed the carpet” in order to obtain the personal status and financial rewards that flowed from the Gold Coast majority party, the CPP. Moses Asase lamented the character flaws of G.O. Awuma, who had been his teacher and a major influence on his entry into *Ablode* politics in Ho: “He was very talented, but you could never know with him. He will say to you, ‘Let’s do this thing,’ and then you will just hear that he was doing something else.”⁴⁸

Whilst disinclined to attribute this epithet to any individual, Michael Senoo explained that in his hometown of Hohoe, the term *ele memi* was used to describe “a person who starts out well but ends up unsuccessfully or badly.” This analogy was based on the observation that the lizard’s faeces are black, with a white tip. Carpet-crossing, he suggested, had undermined the Togoland Union’s claim to act as a mass nationalist movement for all the peoples of the trust territory, and therefore forced the unificationists into a party-political contest with the CPP.⁴⁹

Tactical errors were identified as the final major factor in the failure to achieve Togoland re-unification. During the mid 1950s, unificationists focussed on the UN as an external arbiter. Considerable time and funds were expended in constructing arguments which appropriated the internationalist discourse of the post-war period and asserted the duty of the international community to secure the right of small nations (including trust territories) to self-determination. Underlying the strategy of petitioning the UN, however, was an

⁴⁸Interview with M.K. Asase, Ho-Dome, 11 August 2000.

⁴⁹Interview with M. Senoo, Hohoe, 13 September 2000. The Togoland Union, which had its headquarters in Hohoe, preceded the Togoland Congress. Advocates of Togoland unification disagreed with each other over whether they ought to boycott the 1951 Gold Coast elections, and this resulted in some organizational realignments. The Togoland Congress emerged as the main vehicle by which the unificationists expressed their opposition to the CPP in the Gold Coast elections of 1954 and 1956, and mobilized against the integration of British Togoland with the Gold Coast in the 1956 plebiscite. See Nugent, *Smugglers*, 171-88.

assumption that power lay in New York, not in Togoland, and that such power could be won over through the correct legalistic formulation of a legitimate case. Whilst no activist doubted either the rectitude of the arguments that were put forward at the UN by their leader, S.G. Antor, some also argued that Antor was too slow to adapt to the way in which politics was moving within the Gold Coast and within Togoland itself.

The leadership of the Congress did not anticipate the overwhelming advantages of incumbency enjoyed by the CPP, as the Gold Coast majority party, and were thus ill-equipped to campaign in the plebiscite of 1956. Alfred Dumoga anticipated in an interview in 2000 the same comment made online by “Wise Observer” in 2008: “The plebiscite too, that vote was rigged in the North. The Togoland Congress did not have enough staff. They couldn’t send agents to all the polling stations, so there was rigging. [...] Long after the results, they [the CPP] admitted that they had cheated.”⁵⁰ With the benefit of hindsight, he concluded, “They [the *Ablode* leadership] should not have allowed the plebiscite to take place. They did not have the finance to campaign properly. [...] It was a big big mistake.”⁵¹

VI

Whilst former activists may have differed as to relative significance of these factors in their failure to achieve Togoland re-unification, they all appeared to believe that the case they had made in the mid-1950s was fundamentally sound and that they had been defeated for all the wrong reasons. Communal voting patterns, however, suggest that many *Ablode* strongholds began to backtrack rather quickly from their unificationist position once the reality of CPP victory and

⁵⁰Interview with A.M.K. Dumoga, Ho, 28 August 2000. In 2008, I met by chance a former CPP activist from Yendi who indicated that he had acted as a returning officer in addition to his avid campaigning in favour of the integration of the trust territory with Ghana. He argued that the vote was not rigged as such, but that the CPP had mobilized a well-resourced local party machinery against unification (interview with Al-Haji Dawuda Yahaya, Nima, Accra, 21 September 2008).

⁵¹Interview with A.M.K. Dumoga, Ho, 29 August 2000. Alfred’s older brother, E.O. Kofi Dumoga, had been one of Antor’s critics (and rivals) during the 1950s.

Ghanaian independence became apparent. David Brown's case study of Kpandu outlines the pressures that were brought to bear: whole towns—or particular quarters within towns—were effectively excluded from the developmental resources of the state until they relinquished their overt opposition to the CPP.⁵² Nugent makes a similar observation, and also points to the problems confronting both individual activists and their organizational network. First the CPP banned parties that were based on ethnic or regional sentiment, thus compelling the Togoland Congress to enter an alliance with the Ghana-wide United Party; then, in July 1958, it passed a Preventive Detention Act, and proceeded to arrest parliamentarians who were representing the former Togoland Congress. One former adult educationist described the position of *Ablode* activists in the following terms: "In those days, if you wanted to have your peace, it was better to ally with the CPP. Keep quiet, go underground or cross the carpet—those were your options."⁵³ Considerations of personal safety and financial security, along with a desire for one's hometown to receive its fair share of the national cake, combined to produce a powerful logic in favour of the "keep quiet" or "cross the carpet" options.

But what about those who did not keep quiet or cross the carpet? Appearing at the National Reconciliation Commission in July 2003, Robert Kwame (Bob) Antor—son of the late Togoland Congress leader—explained the impact that his father's five-year spell in preventive detention had had upon his family: two of his brothers had their scholarships revoked and were removed from Mawuli secondary school. His own education was severely disrupted, and he had to work as a pupil-teacher in order to support younger siblings. His father's car had also been "lost."⁵⁴ This was more than a reduction in

⁵²Brown, "Politics"; Yayoh, "Local Government," also considers the politicization of local government in this period.

⁵³Richard Banibensu during interview with Richard Banibensu and Michael Senoo, Dansoman, Greater Accra, 14 July 2000.

⁵⁴Ghana News Agency, "S.G. Antor's Son Testifies at NRC," (22 July 2003) <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/election2008/artikel.php?ID=39657> (accessed 6 August 2010).

status or comfort—it threatened the entire family’s strategy for securing its economic future.

Loss of educational opportunities was also highlighted in my interviews with other former detainees. Moses Asase spent six years in detention, and he felt that some of his ten children had been negatively affected by this: “All of my children are educated. They all have jobs....” However, whilst most of the children had completed secondary school, the ones who were growing up whilst he was in detention had been forced to limit their ambitions to the fee-free training courses that were then available for respectable but poorly paid jobs in primary school teaching and nursing: “The mother could not get the money for secondary school.”⁵⁵ Elizabeth Ohene also described how her father had been transferred out of his graduate teacher post at Mawuli secondary school following accusations of subversive political activity. She was later allowed to return to the school, but she remembered vividly the poverty of a fellow student who could buy no new sheets, underwear or uniform for years because her father was in detention and could not even send her a letter.⁵⁶

Ghanaian *Ablode* activists had a great deal to lose from continued opposition to the CPP, and the price they paid affected the next generation. This was explicitly acknowledged by the panel that heard Bob Antor’s representation to the National Reconciliation Commission in 2003. During the 1980s, Elizabeth Ohene became an exile from the PNDC regime, and was thus no stranger to the rough end of Ghanaian politics. Yet, almost half-a-century after her time at Mawuli, it was distressing for her to remember the humiliating experiences endured by the children of detainees: “It is like a penance for me to talk about this.”⁵⁷ The fact that the consequences of political failure can still be identified and are so strongly felt within particular communities and families is the flip side of the instrumentalist logic

⁵⁵Interview with M.K. Asase, Ho, 20 July 2000.

⁵⁶Interview with E. Ohene, Airport Residential, Accra, 22 June 2010. The girl in question believed that her father was dead because her letters to him were returned, but he was released after the coup that toppled in Nkrumah in 1966.

⁵⁷Interview with E. Ohene, Airport Residential, Accra, 22 June 2010.

in favour of keeping quiet or crossing the carpet. This may partially explain why, in spite of the apparent resilience of the Ghana-Togo border, the Togoland question retains a Lazarus-like quality.

VII

What then of those who decided to “go underground?” If the price of continued resistance was so high, we need also ask why some *Ablode* activists refused to accept the reality of the integration of the trust territory with Ghana and the subsequent shift towards a single-party state. It is the trans-national and not the local dynamics of *Ablode* that enable us to understand this. The Preventive Detention Act in Ghana was passed just three months after the decisive victory of Sylvanus Olympio and the “Comité de l’Unité Togolaise” (CUT) in UN-supervised elections in French Togoland (now the Republic of Togo).⁵⁸ As an increasing number of arrests were made throughout Ghana, including the former British Togoland, *Ablode* activists began to flee across the border into francophone Togo to avoid detention. By October 1961, the Togolese minister of the interior informed the UN that 5,700 Ghanaians (belonging to various ethnic groups and former opposition parties) had taken refuge in Togo. Those from the former British Togoland clustered around the towns of Lomé and Kpalimé and in the area of Akposso-Badou.⁵⁹ Nugent indicates that,

Whereas the experience of exile may heighten a sense of political grievance, in this case the refugees appear to have been deterred from maintaining an active interest in unification politics. The Togolese authorities did not wish to add credence to Ghanaian claims that they were encouraging subversion, and specifically informed the refugees that they could only stay if they desisted from engaging in political activity. It is easy to see that a highly politicised refugee population might pose a threat to the power base of the Olympio regime itself.

⁵⁸D.E.K. Amenumey, “The General Elections in the ‘Autonomous Republic of Togo,’ April 1958: Background and Interpretation,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 16 (1975), 47-65.

⁵⁹National Archives, Kew, UK. DO 195/75 Ghana-Togo Relations: UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, London, 13 February 1962.

Exile, then, was a “rather solitary experience” characterised more by material hardship than by political activism.⁶⁰

However, whilst some of the former refugees whom I interviewed certainly recalled the material hardships that they and their children had endured, they also indicated that, far from being cowed by their experiences, they had sought out new avenues through which to advocate for the unification of the two Togolands. Edward Mfojoh (a goldsmith) crossed the border in June 1960. He described Kpalimé as a hive of activity: refugees were drawn to it in the knowledge that they would find their fellow activists. He stated that he travelled regularly between Kpalimé and Lomé in order to attend meetings with Olympio: “I met him plenty of times, sitting down next to him and talking to him, just like I am with you now.”⁶¹ Mercy Akosua Tegbe (one of the wives of the late Togbe Gabusu IV of Hohoe) also recalled that her husband had spent most of his time attending political meetings, along with the Howusu, Mote Kofi.⁶² When I asked former refugee Agnes Tachie Adzraku, wife of the late chief of Kpandu Aloi, whether she and her husband had talked with Olympio about the unification issue, she responded: “Ha! We talked about nothing else!”⁶³

Traces of activity can also be detected in the petitions of refugee organizations: as late as 1965, the Western Togo Refugees’ Union petitioned the Togo government on a variety of matters regarding the material welfare of refugees, and repeatedly stated their hope that it would effect the reunification of the two Togolands. The Union elected Ebenezer Dumoga—a brother of the former Togoland Congress activist E.O. Kofi Dumoga—as its secretary. Younger refugees established their own organisation—the Committee of Youths for the

⁶⁰Nugent, *Smugglers*, 215-16.

⁶¹Interview with E.K. Mfojoh, Sokode-Gbagble, 19 July 2000. I am grateful to Lydia Osei-Brantuo for acting as interpreter.

⁶²Mote Kofi had been paramount chief of the Asogli state during the 1940s, but was forced to cede this position after several bitter disputes (some of which related to the Togoland unification issue). He therefore reverted to the title “Howusu” which was given to him in the town of Ho Dome.

⁶³Interview with Agnes Tachie Adzraku, Kpandu Aloi, 7 June 2010. I am grateful to Cecilia Dusi for introducing me to this elderly lady and acting as interpreter during the interview.

Refugees—which also clearly stated its desire for reunification, adopting the terms “Western Togo” and “Eastern Togo” to describe the former British and French Togolands.⁶⁴

Contemporary studies of the foreign policies of post-colonial West African states focus on the troubled relationship between Nkrumah and Olympio.⁶⁵ Whilst Nkrumah struggled to build a socialist state and to realise Pan-African unity, Olympio hoped to achieve a greater measure of economic and diplomatic autonomy from France, whilst simultaneously asserting Togo’s viability as an independent nation in the face of Nkrumah’s threats to annex the Republic of Togo to Ghana. In the context of the Cold War, Olympio was well-placed to build up alliances with western aid donors, because the British and the United States governments became increasingly wary of Nkrumah and desired the survival of both the Republic of Togo and the Olympio regime. The British, however, were opposed to any renegotiation of the status of their former trust territory, and the United States government, despite its more overt disapproval of the Nkrumah regime, was cautious about over-committing itself in West Africa.

The records of the British Foreign Office outline the indirect pressures that were brought to bear upon Olympio, who appeared to gradually relinquish the unification issue in order to preserve the fledgling Republic of Togo and to promote its broader national interests. From the perspective of the refugees, however, the situation may have looked rather different. In effect, the refugees experienced two “Independences”—one in Ghana and the other in Togo—and if the former was something to be mourned, the latter called for celebration. In Ghana, *Ablode* was the slogan of the defeated Togoland

⁶⁴Archives Nationales Togolaises, Lomé. Series: Klouto, Dossier 110 Affaires Politiques: Western Togo Refugees’ Union, Kpalimé, to Ministre de l’intérieur, 26 October 1965; Petition from the Western Togo Refugees’ Union, Kpalimé to the President of the Republic, Lomé, 11 August 1965; W.K. Prempeh, Secretary of the Committee of the Youths for the Refugees, Kpalimé, to Adjoint Commandant, Cercle de Klouto, Kpalimé, n.d.

⁶⁵W. Scott Thompson, *Ghana’s Foreign Policy 1957-1966: Diplomacy, Ideology and the New State* (Princeton NJ, 1969); E.O. Saffu, “Nkrumah and the Togoland Question,” *Economic Bulletin of Ghana* 12, 2/3 (1968), 37-46.

Congress, whereas in (francophone) Togo, *Ablode* was the slogan of the victorious CUT—a party which regularly reaffirmed its commitment to Togoland reunification.⁶⁶ And in Togo, the refugees were on the “right side” of a very similar kind of politics to that which they had seen in Ghana.

Women in Ghana wore Kwame Nkrumah cloth to display their loyalty to the CPP, whilst those in Togo, including the Ghanaian refugees, bought Sylvanus Olympio cloth to display their loyalty to “Unité Togolaise.”⁶⁷ Chieftaincy disputes in Ghana were settled in favour of candidates who supported the CPP, whilst those in Togo were settled in favour of those who had backed the CUT.⁶⁸ “*Ablode* soldats” in Togo were engaging in acts of violence against their opponents in the “Parti Togolais du Progrès,” whilst the Ghanaian police force was deployed against those who had opposed the CPP.⁶⁹

⁶⁶Before independence, Olympio’s party was known as the “Comité de l’Unité Togolaise,” but after independence this was abbreviated to “Unité Togolaise.” At a two-day congress in Kpalimé in March 1962, the party passed a motion urging that the government should “do everything possible to obtain by peaceful means the reunification of the two Togos,” *West Africa*, 17 March 1962. Similarly, the national assembly, which, after 1958, was dominated by “Unité Togolaise,” continued to pass motions in favour of reunification. National Archives, Kew, UK. DO 195/75 Ghana-Togo Relations: doc. 24, Corbett, British Embassy, Lomé, to British embassy, Dakar, UK High Commission, Accra and Lagos, and Foreign Office, London, 7 June 1961.

⁶⁷Interview with Mercy Akosua Tegbe, Hohoe, 19 September 2000. When I asked this elderly lady if she had any “*Ablode* cloth,” she had told me that she had thought I might ask to see it and that she would put in on for me so that I could photograph her. She appeared dressed in a cloth bearing a picture of Olympio, that read, in Ewe, *Amega Sylvanus Olympio, Dudonunola Gbato. Ablode Blibo*. This translates as, “Leader Sylvanus Olympio, First President. Freedom Everywhere.”

⁶⁸The Togolese national archives held entire files devoted to the chieftaincy disputes that had been resolved after the critical election of 1958. Across the Kpalimé area, chiefs who had supported the French were destooled and replaced by those who had supported the nationalists. I found one case in which the destooled chief turned out to be an uncle of a CUT cabinet minister. When I interviewed the minister, he explained to me that in this particular case, the chief had not been politically active in any party. Rather, the elders wished to destool him because he was accused of inappropriate conduct with other men’s wives. The elders had believed, however, that Sam Klu, the new “commandant de cercle,” would be more likely to endorse the destoolment if they told him that the chief had been a “Progrès” supporter. Interview with Ernest Anani Gassou, Lomé, 21 June 2000.

⁶⁹One incident included the arrival of 51 Togolese nationals in Ghana on 16 April 1961. They claimed that they had been attacked in their villages for not voting in the Togolese presidential and parliamentary elections that were held on 9 April 1961

In Ghana, the discovery of “conspiracies”—such as that in October 1961 following the Sekondi-Takoradi workers’ strike—provided the government with an excuse to intern the opposition. Similarly, the discovery of a plot to assassinate Olympio in December 1961 prompted Théophile Mally, minister of the interior, to take into detention all members of the opposition—who were reportedly tortured until they confessed to their conspiracy. On 14 January 1962, all opposition parties in Togo were banned. Just as the CPP government silenced the *Ashanti Pioneer* newspaper in December 1960, so the December 1961 “conspiracy” was used by the “Unité Togolaise” to silence newspapers such as *Togo Observateur*.⁷⁰

In comparison with both the pre-colonial and colonial periods, these years of Togo’s history are under-researched, and the small number of Togolese historians who have written about the early independence era have tended to pursue one of two agendas: either they wish to expose the failings and the divisiveness of the Olympio regime in order assert the necessity of Gnassingbé Eyadéma’s long period of authoritarian single-party rule (1967-2005); or they wish to salvage the reputation of Olympio as the leader of the independence struggle and a martyr to democracy in Africa.⁷¹

Considerations of space prevent a full discussion on the historiography of the Republic of Togo, but I would like to conclude here by drawing attention to an unusual and valuable historical source which may enable us to understand more about why the Togoland unification remained so important into the 1960s, and the implications of this for the Ghanaian refugee population in Togo.

and won by Olympio and his party, “Unité Togolaise.” National Archives, Kew, UK. DO 195/75 Ghana-Togo Relations: doc. 1A, UK High Commission, Accra, to Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, London, 4 May 1961.

⁷⁰Paragraph based on National Archives, Kew, UK. DO 195/75 Ghana-Togo Relations: doc. 82, British Embassy, Lomé, to J.H.A. Watson, H.M. Ambassador, Dakar, 18 January 1962.

⁷¹See for example Wen’Saa Ogma Yagla, *L’édification de la nation togolaise: naissance d’une conscience nationale dans un pays africain* (Paris, 1978); Tetevi Godwin Tete-Adjalo, *Histoire du Togo: le régime et l’assassinat de Sylvanus Olympio (1960-1963)* (Paris, 2002). In arguing for a social history approach to the colonial period, Benjamin Lawrance also comments on the tendency towards hagiographies of Olympio. See Benjamin N. Lawrance, *Locality, Mobility and “Nation:” Peri-Urban Colonialism in Togo’s Eweland 1900-1960* (Rochester NY, 2007).

Partly as a result of his austerity budgets and his inclination towards western allies, Olympio faced internal dissent from the left-leaning Juvento (with which “Unité Togolaise” had previously been allied). Olympio was particularly perturbed by the prospect of a Juvento-CPP pact to overthrow his regime, and he thus informed the British “chargé d’affaires” in Lomé that:

He [Olympio] did not think that Nkrumah was likely to try to take over Togo by force as this would antagonise the rest of Africa. [...] The overthrow of the Togolese government by subversive means was a much more likely policy and Togolese opponents of the present government were being trained in Ghana for just such a purpose. President Olympio showed great anxiety for help in countering this Ghanaian subversion [...] during his recent visit to America, the US Government, whose appreciation of Nkrumah’s intentions was the same as his own, had offered their help in counter-intelligence and security training.⁷²

Whilst opposition newspapers were banned, the Togolese government gave permission for an Ewe-language newspaper, *Ablode Safui* (the “Key to Freedom”), to be produced by a former Juventist, Holiday Komedja, in his home village of Agu-Nyogbo, approximately six kilometers outside the town of Kpalimé. This paper celebrated Togo’s accession to independence, whilst reviling Nkrumah and his acts of aggression both against the Togolese state and against those *Ablode* supporters who remained in Ghana.⁷³ Komedja explained that he made contact with various foreign embassies in Lomé, and received news items through this route (particularly via the German embassy), as well as by collecting up foreign newspapers (including the *Ghanaian Evening News*). He certainly intended to keep his readers informed of events beyond the Ewe-speaking areas, following stories that ranged from the secession of Katanga to the prospects of reunification for East and West Germany.

⁷²National Archives, Kew, UK. DO 195/75 Ghana-Togo Relations: doc. 101, Oliver Kemp, British Embassy, Lomé, to K.M. Wilford, West and Central Africa Dept, Foreign Office, London, 21 April 1961.

⁷³Copies of this paper are available in the Archives Nationales Togolaises, Lomé, Series: Klouto; Dossier 266. I was also able to interview the man who had produced the paper. Interview with H.K.V. Komedja, Agu-Nyogbo, 29 June 2000.

Nonetheless, a substantial part of most issues is devoted to the border question. The purpose of these articles was not always to track any specific new development, so much as to critique statements made by Nkrumah or by those whom he had appointed in the former British Togoland. Komedja also responded directly to stories culled from the pro-CPP *Evening News*, regularly taking on its analysis or conclusions, and using *Ablode Safui* to explain to readers the errors therein. The paper, written almost entirely in Ewe, was available all over the Klouto district that surrounded the town of Kpalimé, and it also seems to have found its way over the border into Ghana.⁷⁴ Komedja, recalled that his newspaper was also purchased by refugees in the Kpalimé area—most of whom would not have been able to read the Lomé-based press due to their lack of French.

Because issues of *Ablode Safui* appear in Klouto district files as “dépôt légal” it seems likely that Sam Klu (the “commandant de cercle”) not only knew of *Ablode Safui* but actively encouraged its publication. Whilst Olympio’s external allies had no desire to see an active re-opening of the border question, it was within his interests at home to show that *Unité togolaise* remained committed to the reunification of the two Togolands and their achievement of joint national sovereignty. A continued insistence on unification appears to be intended to deter Juventists from contemplating Nkrumah’s proposition that francophone Togo should be annexed to Ghana, and this was also a message that the Ghanaian *Ablode* refugees very much wanted to hear.

VII

The quest for powerful external allies was a key feature of the campaign to reunify the two Togolands in the 1950s, and it remained important throughout the post-colonial period and up to the present

⁷⁴Several informants, including E.K. Mfojoh, remembered that they were sometimes able to get this paper in Ho. The British High Commission reported: “The Ghana government also found it necessary in October 1960 to ban the import into Ghana of an Ewe-language newspaper published in Togo.” National Archives, Kew, UK. DO 195/75 Ghana-Togo Relations: doc 1A, UK High Commission, Accra, to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, London, 4 May 1961.

day. *Ablode* activists during the 1950s invested considerable time and funds in formulating and presenting to the UN a legalistic case that emphasized the right of the Togoland trust territories to self-determination. After the UN disappointed them, *Ablode* activists from British Togoland were forced to reassess their options. Calculations of personal and community interests are certainly important in explaining why some individuals chose to relinquish the aim of Togoland reunification, and in this respect attention to local histories and to intra-local disputes is important.

Nonetheless, recent history-writing by people who originate from the former British Togoland indicates that the controversy over its status has had a surprisingly long post-colonial tail. My contention here is that a “local history” approach will not enable us to understand how or why this struggle was maintained into the 1960s and has been periodically revived up to the present day. Rather, we need to pay attention to cohorts of activists’ experiences of exile, and thus to the trans-national and diasporic dimensions of political struggles which were previously thought to be about “small-scale identities.” The evidence for this turns up in unexpected forms and in far-flung places, and renders the study of post-colonial history all the more exciting.

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