



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Tamale 1907-1957 : between colonial trade and colonial chieftainship
Soeters, S.R.

Citation

Soeters, S. R. (2012, May 8). *Tamale 1907-1957 : between colonial trade and colonial chieftainship*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/18927>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/18927>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/18927> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Soeters, Sebastiaan Robbert

Title: Tamala 1907-1957 : between colonial trade and colonial chieftainship

Date: 2012-05-08

Founding Tamale: Between European capitalism and African peasantry

Introduction

The establishment of a colonial administrative headquarters at Tamale in the first decade of the twentieth century coincided with a shift in colonial development policy. Joseph Chamberlain's vision – advocating a colonial development approach which relied primarily on European capitalism and ‘destroying “unprogressive” African political and social systems, imposing direct taxation, and encouraging the development of landlordism and agrarian capitalism’¹ – was replaced by a liberal agenda which sought to link existing African socio-economic structures with global economic forces, through European merchant capital. This chapter argues that Tamale's founding is best understood within the transition between these two colonial development strategies. By situating Tamale's founding within larger

¹ Grischow, *Shaping*, 20.

colonial development processes, this chapter argues that Tamale proved an uncomfortable choice as an administrative centre and trade hub within the colonial development approach. Furthermore, the chapter argues, as a result of the absence of a railway and the uptake of motorised transportation, a trade-based economy was created after 1920 (with Tamale at its centre), which neither enticed European traders nor consolidated the systems and structures of the African peasantry in Tamale. Moreover, the rise of the single owner/driver model and petty traders, and the subsequent lack of trade centralisation which a railway might have provided, made it difficult for the colonial administration to derive financial benefits from the increases in trade that motorised transportation was inducing. The single lorry-owner/driver model at the heart of north-south trade also created individual accumulations of wealth, which were regarded by the liberal agenda as the antithesis of the African social and political systems through which the colonial administration was attempting to operate.

Founding Tamale

Christine Oppong notes that Tamale ‘... owes its present prominence (to) being chosen as the district headquarters of the British Colonial administration in the first decade of the century’.² What does Tamale’s founding reveal about the colonial developmental strategy for the Northern Territories more generally? One assumes that the choice of location of a regional headquarters is a strategic decision. Identifying why Tamale was selected thus should reveal something about northern colonial strategies and aspirations more generally. However, sources which relate to the reasons why Tamale emerged as a regional centre paint a confused picture of colonial development strategy in the Northern Territories, and trying to link the strategic sentiments contained within colonial citations to larger colonial policy and practice creates a number of contradictions. But, as this subsection argues, there are a number of lines that may be drawn to explain the founding of Tamale in terms of larger colonial processes. Those lines are to be found not in one or other colonial strategy but in the transition from one such strategy to another. More specifically,

² Oppong, C., *Growing up in Dagbon*. Ghana, 1973, 16.

the choice of Tamale as a regional administrative headquarters is situated in the transition from a developmental approach that focused on the economic utility of European capitalism and direct taxation, to one that focused on the African peasantry and how it may be linked to global economic forces.

In beginning to attempt to understand the founding of Tamale as an administrative headquarters and a trade hub, one is struck by the absence of advantages that Tamale offered the colonial administration. Tamale possessed very few identifiable advantages for the purpose of administration as it emerged in the decades after its founding in 1907. Tamale's lack of traditional political significance has been discussed in the introductory chapter. Furthermore, Tamale was not of any particular economic importance. It was a village of 1,435 at its founding, reflecting its relative economic irrelevance. Although there was a rotational market system in and around Tamale, Tamale was not an integral part of a much more valuable north-south transit trade. Tamale also had no obvious physical benefits. The water supply was a perennial problem throughout the colonial period – Tamale is not located adjacent to any rivers – and it has no obvious defensive features. Gambaga, which preceded Tamale as the base for colonial activity, was believed by Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories (CCNT), Lt. Colonel H.P. Northcott, to be the centre of the Mamprussi dynasty.³ The choice of Gambaga as a colonial base reflects the colonial administration's focus on, firstly, the 'pacification' of peoples like the Tallensi, who continued to resist British rule after 1900, and secondly, on consolidating the structures of states, like Mamprugu, that were felt to have been relatively unaltered by the slave-raiding activities of Samory and Babatu.

Only very few attempts have been made, directly or indirectly, to address the question of how colonial administrative activity came to be centred in Tamale around the turn of the twentieth century. The colonial administration had initially considered Lungbunga as the site for the new headquarters and went as far as to invite the chief of Lungbunga, together with the chief of Savelugu, to tour Accra.⁴ MacGaffey notes that 'legend has it that it was the Dakpema, Nsung-Na, who went

³ Grischow, *Shaping*, 31.

⁴ MacGaffey, 'History', 110.

to the military headquarters in Gambaga and persuaded the British to chose Tamale'.⁵ Martin Staniland elaborates on this 'legend'. He argues that the headquarters of the Northern Territories were moved to Tamale largely on the initiative of the Dakpema, Nsung-Na.⁶ According to Staniland, the Dakpema had managed to assert himself as chief of Tamale after 1902, when the Anglo-German border was formally established. At the time of partition of Dagbon into British and German jurisdictions and the establishment of the Anglo-German boundary, the Gulkpe-Na was visiting Yendi and was ordered to remain there. Staniland notes that the Dakpema made the journey to Gambaga (then the headquarters of British colonial administration) to persuade the colonial administration to establish a colonial headquarters at Tamale. Staniland states that the Dakpema,

... seized the opportunity (of the Gulkpe-Na's absence) to increase his own power and importance, actually making the journey to Gambaga ... to invite the Government to build a station in his town where there was plenty of water.⁷

In support of this argument, albeit with a slightly different emphasis, the DC for Yendi, Blair,⁸ noted in the early 1930s that according to conversations he had with the prominent members of Tamale's community, notably the Serekin Zongo (Hausa Headman in Tamale), '... when the English were at Gambaga, they summoned all Dagomba Chiefs ... Foremost amongst these was the Dakpema of Tamale ...'.⁹ Blair noted from his own research that '... when the N.T. headquarters were moved to Tamale ... the Da-Kpema arrogated all the powers of a chief, being safely cut off from Yendi and the Gulkpe Na'.¹⁰ But relating these facts to the decision by the colonial administration to house their headquarters at Tamale seems to be a stretch. The Dakpema had been described only a few years prior to the founding of Tamale

⁵ *Ibid.* 110.

⁶ Staniland, *Lions*, 100.

⁷ *Ibid.* 62.

⁸ Blair is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

⁹ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/2/28 (Dagomba Native Affairs). 'Note by District Commissioner for Eastern Dagomba Blair'.

¹⁰ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/2/28 (Dagomba Native Affairs). 'Note by District Commissioner for Eastern Dagomba Blair'.

as ‘... one of the poorest men in Tamale, and apparently has no following’.¹¹ His influence over colonial policy was, in all likelihood, limited. Paul André Ladouceur notes simply, ‘In 1907 ... the capital was moved to Tamale, which was better situated for purposes of communication’.¹² Ladouceur is also certainly not incorrect, but ‘communications’ alone cannot explain the establishment of a regional headquarters at Tamale as a base for colonial administration.

The superficial nature of the explanations as to why Tamale was selected reflect the apparent randomness of the choice of Tamale within larger colonial development policies. A more holistic account of how and why the colonial administration selected Tamale as its base must take into account broader changes and contestations within colonial development visions and aspirations. In 1895, Joseph Chamberlain sounded the call that the British had a duty to develop the colonial possessions. In terms specifically of the Gold Coast, Chamberlain’s call reflected a desire to open up the territory to British commercial interests in order to extract raw materials and develop consumer markets for British goods. Jeff Grischow notes:

Chamberlain set out to achieve this goal by nationalising African lands, building state-sponsored infrastructure, destroying what he considered to be “unprogressive” African political and social systems, imposing direct taxation, and encouraging the development of landlordism and agrarian capitalism on African soil.¹³

Chamberlain’s vision was, however, abruptly ended around 1906 by a liberal reaction to what was seen to be the exploitation of the West African colonies. During the period 1906-12, the colonial development of West Africa shifted from encouraging the development of agrarian capitalism to blocking its growth in favour of preserving peasant production and African community.¹⁴ Coincidentally, Tamale was founded in 1907, at the very beginning of this transition.

¹¹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56/1/60 (Report on Sites for New Headquarters, Tamale). Report by Capt. Kineally.

¹² Ladouceur, P.A., *Chiefs and politicians: The politics of regionalism in Northern Ghana*. Longman Group Ltd., 1979, 41.

¹³ Grischow, *Shaping*, 20.

¹⁴ Grischow, *Shaping*, 20.

Tensions in colonial discourse

The period 1906-12, when the transition from an emphasis on European capitalism to an emphasis on preserving peasant production took shape, coincided with crucial years for Tamale's early development. We have noted that Tamale's founding is best understood within this transition. The colonial sources underpin this assertion. The following subsection discusses a number of the colonial references to the founding of Tamale within the themes set out in this subsection.

Only a few sources relate specifically to the founding of Tamale. The Annual Report in the year 1906 mentions Tamale on a number of occasions. The other two sources are a note by the CCNT, Lieutenant-Colonel Watherston, and his address to 57 chiefs to mark the opening of Tamale. The following subsection analyses each of these sources. In 1906, the Annual Report for the Northern Territories notes:

The new headquarters have been selected at Tamale in place of Gambaga. The latter place, situated as it is in the north-east corner of the Protectorate, was most inconvenient for communication with the outstations, whereas Tamale occupies a more central position.¹⁵

This reflects the point raised by Ladouceur: Tamale was selected as an administrative centre owing to the communication benefits which it offered. Such reasoning alone, however, over-simplifies the complexities of colonial economic ambitions. Communication is not all. The Report of the Transport Department for 1906 noted:

When the headquarters of the Northern Territories are moved from Gambaga to Tamale, which lies in the centre of this district, a very great impetus to trade is expected.¹⁶

In the same year of 1906, CCNT Lieutenant-Colonel Watherson wrote to the Governor, noting of Tamale as follows:

Situated on a ridge, with very extensive views to the east and west in open park-like country, excellent water supply, and reported amongst the natives as being extremely healthy for men, cattle and horses ... it is doubtful if a better situated

¹⁵ PRO, Kew, CO 98/16 (Annual Report for the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast for the Year 1906).

¹⁶ PRO, Kew, CO 96/16. (Report on the Transport Department for the Year 1906).

station exists in West Africa. Plenty of excellent sites exist for European residences, should traders settle later on.¹⁷

Watherston's note appeals largely to Europeans. The references to European traders, and especially their 'residences', is particularly revealing in this regard. It points loosely to a liberal agenda, where African peasantry, through European traders, is connected to global economic forces. Tamale would serve as the hub of such an economic system. There is only one source that reveals how the colonial administration reasoned the founding of Tamale to (representatives of) the African peasantry they were attempting to coerce. This comes in the form of the address of the CCNT at the opening of Tamale in 1907. The opening of the new headquarters at Tamale came finally on Friday, 10 April 1907, and was declared a holiday. Only the telegraph office and the treasury remained open, the telegraph office for one hour in the morning and one in the afternoon to receive mail from England and Accra, and the treasury to collect caravan taxes from traders passing through. Following Watherston's address, 'a telegraph of loyalty to the king' was to be sent to His Excellency, the Governor. At 5 p.m. horse races were to commence. Fifty-seven Dagomba, Mamprussi and Gonja chiefs gathered to mark the opening of the new headquarters. Amongst the chiefs was Mahama of Savelugu, Dakpema Nsung-Na of Tamale, Bukari of Sanerigu, Yisifu of Nanton, Suleman of Choggu, Naena of Kanvilli, and Yaya of Kasuli. Watherston addressed the 57 chiefs in the refurbished market-place. He told them:

... we have no doubt (that Tamale) will very soon form the distributing centre of trade in the Northern Territories, ... (which) extends to Sokoto, Kano, the Upper Niger, Tenkodogo, Morocco, and Tripoli, in fact to everywhere where the Kola nut is in demand. To help yourselves you must produce things that traders will buy. You have enormous herds of cattle which you keep to look at. There are plenty of Kumasi traders ready to buy them, and give you money for them or cloths. Your cotton can be improved, and I hope shortly to be able to give out cotton seeds to people round here, who will be able to sell their cotton to traders in this town. Shea-butter nuts and Shea-butter will all bring you money ... Some of your youngmen should come here for permanent work and learn carpentering, blacksmith and stone-mason, trades in all of which they can earn money in the future ...

¹⁷ Ibid.

He also noted:

When European traders come here they will want men who can talk English and Dagomba, English and Mamprussi, English and Wala, English and Gonja and those youngmen who can do this will get work and good wages at once.¹⁸

The contradiction is obvious: despite the liberal agenda in which African peasantry was to play a central economic role, by locating the centre in Tamale, which had no real political or economic relevance in the socio-economic and socio-political structure of the African peasantry, no regard was given to existing African spatial systems. Trade to and from Tamale had to be motivated. This contradiction reflects the tension created by the transition between the two colonial development paradigms outlined above.

Rethinking the transportation history of the Northern Territories

To date, the transportation historiography of the Northern Territories has concentrated primarily on the Northern Territories railway, or the lack thereof. This framework, created by this concentration, brings certain histories into focus whilst ignoring others. This subsection is concerned with demarcating a different transportation history for the Northern Territories, one that emphasises the presence of motorised transportation rather than the absence of a railway. Through the adoption of such a transportation history, Tamale's urban formation becomes a central component of northern historiography more generally.

¹⁸ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56/1/73 (Opening of New Headquarters at Tamale), Address to Chiefs by C.C.N.T. Watherston at the opening ceremony of the new administrative station at Tamale.

also to the economy of the Northern Territories more generally. Watherston, in his address, noted that '(a) big road is being built from Kumasi to Tamale, through Salaga. And a road to Yapei, on the river, so that goods can be brought up to Tamale by cart or by canoe'.²² He also urged that '... all chiefs in the country ... clear their roads to Tamale 12 feet clear of all trees, stumps, roots, so that carts drawn by horses can go along them'.²³ A year later, in 1907, the Annual Report for the Northern Territories noted '... the future development of these territories depends so largely on cheap and reliable transport facilities which at present do not exist'.²⁴

The Northern Territories railway debate

The construction of a Northern Territories railway had initially been an assumed eventuality by the northern colonial administration when they moved to Tamale.²⁵ The initiative, however, soon encountered some resistance, especially from the south. In 1912, Governor Thorburn noted that 'until the colony and Ashanti have been thoroughly opened up and developed, the Northern Territories must be content to wait their turn and any extensive programme designed to render the area more accessible must be suffered to stand over for a long time to come'.²⁶ The outbreak of WWI put any talk of development on hold as resources were largely directed towards the war effort. At the outbreak of the war, it was noted that 'the object of Government in the immediate future must be to reduce not to increase expenditure, especially in the Northern Territories'.²⁷ The economic slowdown was exacerbated in the Northern Territories by the fact that within the wartime political and economic

²² PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56/1/73 (Opening of New Headquarters at Tamale), Address to Chiefs by C.C.N.T. Watherston at the opening ceremony of the new administrative station at Tamale.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ PRO, Kew, CO96/17, (Annual Report for the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast for 1907).

²⁵ Plans were drawn for a railway station at Tamale and approved by the Sanitation Board.

²⁶ Governor J.J. Thorburn, quoted in D. Kimble, *A political history of Ghana, 1859-1928*. Oxford University Press, 1963, 534.

²⁷ Letter from Colonial Secretary to CCNT, 1914, quoted in Kimble, *Political*, 534.

framework, the Northern Territories were to supply men not only to the Gold Coast Regiment but also to the gold mines.²⁸

After the war, the Northern Territories railway debate resumed, and the appointment of Guggisberg as governor of the Gold Coast was cause for optimism for pro-railway elements within the colonial administration. Jeff Grischow puts Guggisberg's pro-northern affinity down to a staunch commitment to the liberal agenda that was defining the colonial agenda more broadly. Grischow notes, 'the Northern Territories provided Guggisberg with a clean slate for his experiment in development without denationalisation'.²⁹ That Guggisberg was committed to the liberal agenda is not in question. But Guggisberg also saw in the Northern Territories the potential to diversify an economy that he felt was overly-reliant on cocoa and gold. In his vision, the Northern Territories railway would be heavily loaded with groundnuts, shea-butter, corn, and cattle'.³⁰ In Guggisberg's ten-year plan, the north featured prominently, and a budget was set aside for the building of a Northern Territories railway.

Despite Guggisberg's optimism for the northern economic potential, questions about the financial feasibility of a Northern Territories railway continued. It was felt, especially by some southern administrators, that the north did not possess the economic potential to justify such a railway. Northerners argued that the very reason that surpluses were so difficult to generate was because of the difficulties of market access, and this was attributed to the lack of a Northern Territories railway. Northern Nigeria was pointed to as an example where a railway northwards had initiated a successful groundnut industry.³¹ The rebuttal to this argument by those opposed to a Northern Territories railway was that on account of the population disparities

²⁸ The Northern Territories provided 69 per cent of the men enlisted for the Gold Coast Regiment during 1914 and 1918.

²⁹ Grischow, *Shaping*, 62.

³⁰ Konings, P., *The state and rural class formation in Ghana: A comparative analysis*. London, KPI Limited, 1986, 164.

³¹ PRO, Kew, CO96/693/8 (Papers Relating to a Project for the Construction of a Railway between Kumasi and the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast 1927-1928).

between the Northern Territories and Northern Nigeria, a comparison between the two could not be considered feasible.

In 1926, when Guggisberg's term as governor ended, no start had been made on the Northern Territories railway. The end of Guggisberg's governorship also ended much of the northern colonial hope for a railway. Three years later in 1929, Secretary of State Lord Passfield finally ended the debate surrounding the Northern Territories railway. He stated categorically:

I cannot but agree with you that circumstances ... do not justify the construction of such a railway which must accordingly be postponed and need no longer be regarded as a project to be taken up in the near future.³²

The uptake of motorised transportation

The only other modern transport variation on the railway was motorised transportation. In 1920 the Great North Road, which linked Tamale to Kumasi, was completed, and for the first time, motorised transportation was introduced to the Northern Territories. The potential offered by motorised transportation was revered within colonial circles. It allowed officers to trek through their jurisdictions without prejudice to office duties. The Annual General Report for 1929-30 noted that colonial administrators,

... can now visit various places and the tours, which usually occupied weeks are now only a matter of days. A tour taking ten days with carriers, can now be done easily in a day. This leaves Political Officers more time to attend to their office work, besides reducing enormously the burden of head carriage on the community.³³

As a result, the northern colonial administration was certainly gratified when Guggisberg entered Tamale in a motorcar in April 1920. Not only did the introduction of motorised transport assist directly with administration within the Northern Territories, it also greatly increased the convenience of the transportation

³² Secretary of State Passfield in Despatch to Governor, 1929, Despatches relating to a project for the construction of a railway between Kumasi and the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, Sessional Paper no. XIV, 1929-30. In: Kay, G.B., ed., *The political economy of colonialism in the Gold Coast: A collection of documents and statistics 1900-1960*. Cambridge, 1972, 166.

³³ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/3/26 (Annual General Report 1929-30).

of stores to and from Kumasi, transportation which had been a perennial problem for the northern administration. In lieu of the fact that the road would not be completed in the foreseeable future, a new system of transportation was employed to get government stores to Tamale: goods were taken by lorry from Kumasi to Ejura (one hundred kilometres from Kumasi), where the road stopped; from Ejura to Yeji by carrier gangs, where they would be put on canoes and then taken up-river to Tamale Port (Yapei); and from Tamale Port they would once again be taken by carrier gangs to Tamale.³⁴ Stores often arrived late, or not at all, and quite frequently they had been ruined by water while being taken up-river from Yeji to Tamale. The Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories complained in 1913:

I regret to say that the new system of transport has worked so far, most unsatisfactorily. An unprecedented amount of looting of loads ... many losses were caused by breakages, and by water which permeated the contents of boxes placed in leaky canoes that transport them from Yeji to Tamale Port. The delivery of stores was in no way expediated, in fact loads very frequently arrived at Tamale from two to three months after they had been despatched from Coomasie.³⁵

Interestingly, in the same year, the Transport Officer at Kumasi wrote of the new system, that ‘... no loss of loads by any of the permanent gangs has been reported’ and ‘the service is working satisfactorily and is a great saving of time’³⁶.

The introduction of motorised transport also put an end to head-porterage. Prior to the introduction of motorised transportation, head-porterage had been widely employed in order to get stores from the south to the north. Head-porterage was considered expensive and inefficient in terms of the opportunity cost of labour. The Northern Territories could not, it was generally agreed, develop if it had to rely on head-loading as its economic motor. Per ton-mile, head porterage had been shown to be more expensive than both motorised transportation and railway. Although the colonial arguments against head-porterage were primarily economic, it was also

³⁴ PRO, Kew, CO96/17 (Annual Report for the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast for 1907).

³⁵ PRO, Kew, CO96/22 (Annual Report for Northern Territories of the Gold Coast Report for 1913).

³⁶ PRO, Kew, CO 96/22 (Report on the Transport Department for the year 1913).

recognised as a brutal means of transportation. Governor Guggisberg described it as '... an injurious form of occupation'.³⁷ In 1908, the report for the Transport Department noted:

With constant walking for a twelve-month averaging 400 miles a month ... the majority (of carriers) had their soles almost completely worn through, to say nothing of the cracks. The experiment was then tried of tarring the carriers' feet.³⁸

Apart from being injurious, colonial administrators also regarded head-porterage as primarily slow and inefficient.

Motorised transportation thus provided a number of new advantages: Colonial stores moved easily between the coast and Tamale, officers could be much better acquainted with their respective jurisdictions, and it put an end to head-porterage, which was slow and expensive, but also regarded as inhumane. But the lorry was not considered a direct economic development tool. In that respect, the lorry was not seen by colonial administrators to have been an adequate substitute for the railway. In 1924, in his address to the legislative assembly, Governor Guggisberg echoed mainstream colonial thinking when he stated:

Motor transport is not a paying proposition, it certainly seems that railway is the only solution ... on long haul trunk roads ... they (lorries) are not a practical proposition ... It is obvious that motor lorries can only be regarded as temporary and inadequate measures in meeting the general demands for trade in this country'. With more railways we shall be safe for all time; without them our future is not only imperilled, it is doomed.³⁹

Two years later, in 1926, W. G. A. Ormsby-Gore, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies (1922-29), made a tour of West Africa and noted in a report:

The Northern Territories may be suitable for the cultivation of groundnuts and American cotton. The bulk of the area is free of tsetse fly. The meat supply of the Gold Coast Colony is obtained from the Northern Territories and French

³⁷ Sir F.G., Guggisberg, *The Gold Coast*. Accra, 1927, 84.

³⁸ PRO, Kew, CO 96/22 (Report on the Transport Department for the year 1908).

³⁹ Governor's Annual Address, Legislative Council Debates, 1924-5, p18-21. In: Kay, G.B., ed., *The political economy of colonialism in the Gold Coast: A collection of documents and statistics 1900-1960*. Cambridge, 1972, 144

territory ... the present wastage of cattle driven down on the hoof is at least 50 per cent.⁴⁰

Ormsby-Gore prioritised the Northern Territories railway, calling its non-existence '... the chief problem before the Gold Coast railway department ...'⁴¹ He noted regretfully that '... the greater part of the territories is outside the economic radius of the railway'.⁴² Ormsby-Gore stated in conclusion:

The Gold Coast cannot be said to have fully developed until the railway to the Northern Territories has been constructed. That it is the duty of the Government to construct such a railway ... I think, is clear.⁴³

In colonial circles it was felt that in order to unlock economic potential, a railway was a prerequisite. In the context of this pervasive sentiment, the fact that the Northern Territories railway was never built was thought, in the vision of the colonial administration, to spell the end of any ambition to create a northern economy. Thus, the outcome of the Northern Territories railway debate has not only informed much of the transportation history of the Northern Territories, it has also, through themes aligned to the underdevelopment topos, shaped the Northern Territories historiography more generally. By implication, a different emphasis within the transportation history of the Northern Territories radically affects the historiography of the Northern Territories. Furthermore, there is more than enough evidence that suggests that an alternative transportation history exists. During the years of the railway debate, in which motorised transportation was routinely overlooked as a (economically) feasible mode of transportation, the number of lorries that crossed the Yeji ferry rose from zero in 1919 to over 3,000 in 1926,⁴⁴ of

⁴⁰ Report by the Honourable W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore on his visit to West Africa during the year 1926, Cmd 2744, London 1926, p 48-55. In: Kay, G.B., ed., *The political economy of colonialism in the Gold Coast: A collection of documents and statistics 1900-1960*. Cambridge, 1972, 141-2.

⁴¹ Report by the Honourable W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore on his visit to West Africa during the year 1926, Cmd 2744, London 1926, p 48-55. In: Kay, G.B., ed., *The political economy of colonialism in the Gold Coast: A collection of documents and statistics 1900-1960*. Cambridge, 1972, 142.

⁴² *Ibid.* 142.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 42.

⁴⁴ The fact that the road was not motorable during the rainy season, which lasts four to six months a year, inflates the relative value of the number of lorries crossing the Yeji ferry.

which over 1,400 had trailers.⁴⁵ Since, by definition, a northern transportation history focussing on the availability of motorised transportation – instead of the absence of a railway – has at its centre the Great North Road between Tamale and Kumasi, such a revised history brings Tamale firmly into the centre of northern historiography. In 1907, Tamale was a village of 1,435 people.⁴⁶ By 1921 Tamale had a little under than 4,000 residents⁴⁷, not significantly larger than Savelugu, Kumbungu and Salaga.⁴⁸ In 1931, eleven years after the completion of the Great North Road, Tamale's population had increased more than three-fold, to almost 13,000⁴⁹ residents, making it by a considerable margin the largest settlement in the Northern Territories.

The Great North Road and its implications for Tamale

The Great North Road was the first motorable road to enter the Northern Territories. Governor Guggisberg ceremoniously drove into Tamale in April 1920, followed by five lorries carrying his stores. Largely outside of the colonial purview, the impact on north-south trade was almost immediate, as also was its impact on Tamale's own internal economy and demographic growth. But the trade which drove Tamale's demographic growth seemed to be, like Tamale itself, ill-fitting within the liberal colonial development programme. The single owner-driver model which emerged was juxtaposed to colonial policy in that the model, firstly, created a private accumulation of wealth which was seen to be counterproductive in the attempts to consolidate African peasant structures, and secondly, it was difficult, beyond ferry dues, to derive any financial benefits from it. Furthermore, in the absence of the railway, European merchant capital was impossible to entice to the north. As a result, both the trade increases that emerged as a result of the introduction of motorised transportation, as well as the demographic growth it induced in Tamale, carried within colonial circles an illegitimate undertone. Such developments served as a reminder that,

⁴⁵ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56/1/310 (Yeji Trade Statistics).

⁴⁶ Staniland, *Lions*, 1.

⁴⁷ Population census of the Gold Coast and its protectorates for the year 1921.

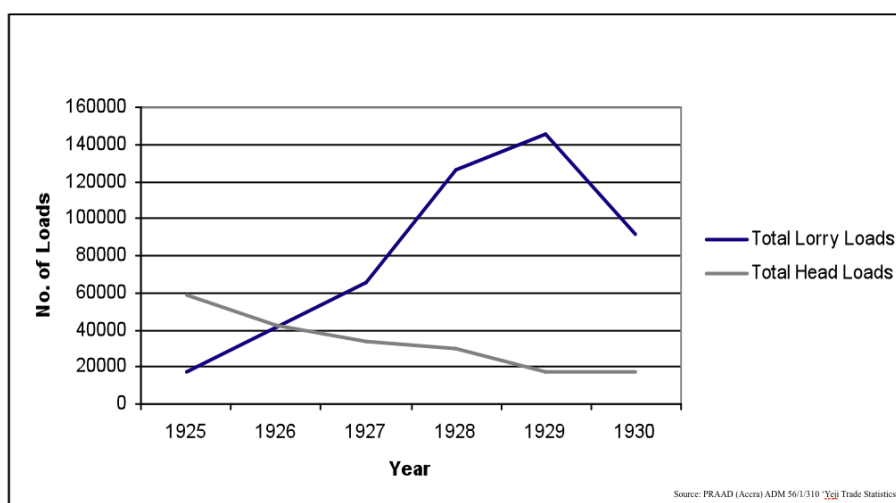
⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Population census of the Gold Coast and its protectorates, for the year 1931.

What Europeans encountered in the colonies was not an open terrain for economic domination, but people capable of circumventing and undermining the principles and practices on which extraction or capitalist development was based.⁵⁰

The Great North certainly induced increases in trade volumes. The lorry-driven trade went well beyond simply replacing hitherto relied upon head-porterage. The chart below represents the volume of head-loaded goods against the volume of lorry cargo for the period 1925-30.⁵¹ The increase in absolute trade volumes implies also that the northern farmers responded to demands for agricultural goods in the south by producing surpluses, a point of contention throughout this period, mostly expressed in terms of the debate about whether to build a Northern Territories railway.⁵²

2.2. Total Lorry Loads vs. Total Head Loads, 1925-1930



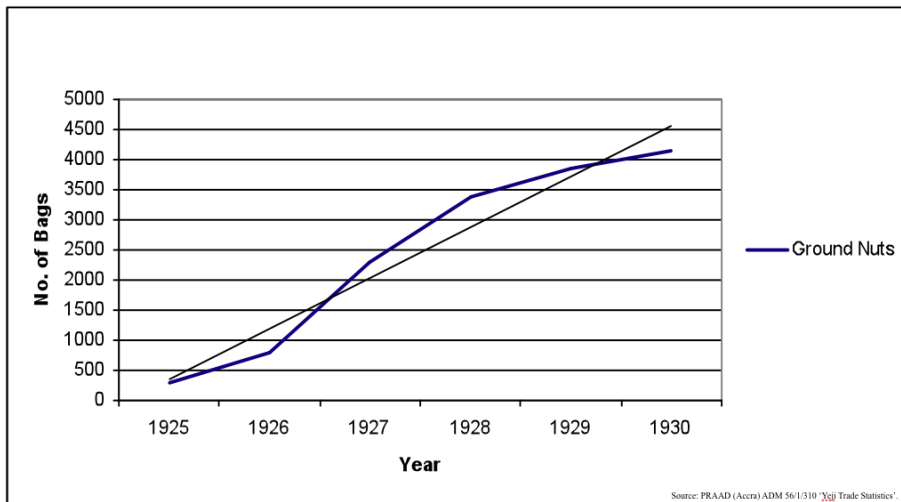
⁵⁰ Cooper, F. & A. L. Stoler, *Tensions of empire: Colonial cultures in a Bourgeois world*. University of California Press, 1997, 5

⁵¹ All data is taken from records taken at the Ferry in Yeji. Although each station kept its own trade data, they were notoriously inaccurate as traders who travelled at night were not required to register their goods. Furthermore, the crossing at Yeji was the gateway to the Northern Territories.

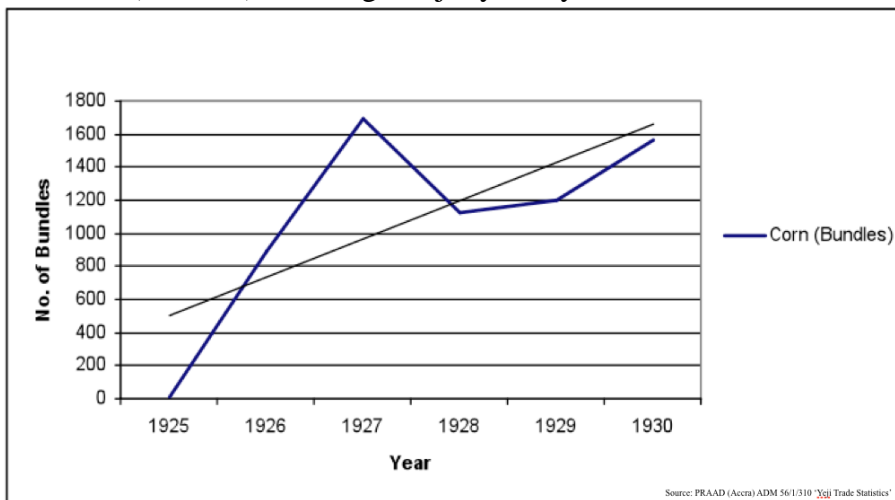
⁵² In the debate whether or not a Northern Territories railway was to be built, pro-railway lobbyists argued that a lack of transportation (access to markets) created disincentives for the production of surpluses. Anti-railway lobbyists argued the opposite and suggested there was nothing of any particular value in the Northern Territories in any case.

The increases in trade were seen across the spectrum, in both northbound and southbound directions. The following graphs illustrate the trend in a variety of northbound and southbound goods during the period 1925-30. Groundnuts, fowls, and corn represent southbound goods (Figures 2.2-3), and beer, European salt, and flour represent northbound goods (Figures 2.5-6). In all instances, trade peaked around the end of the decade.

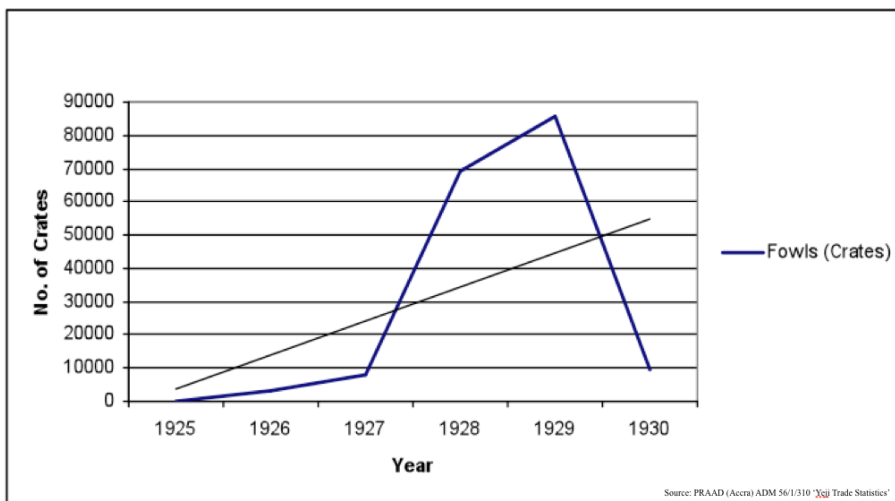
2.3. Ground Nuts (Bags) Crossing Yeji by Lorry, 1925-1931



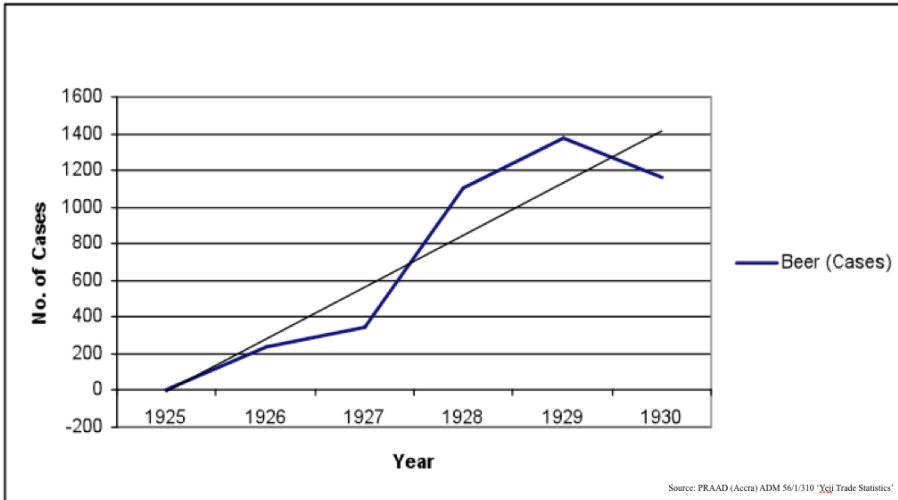
2.4. Corn (Bundles) Crossing Yeji by Lorry, 1925-1931



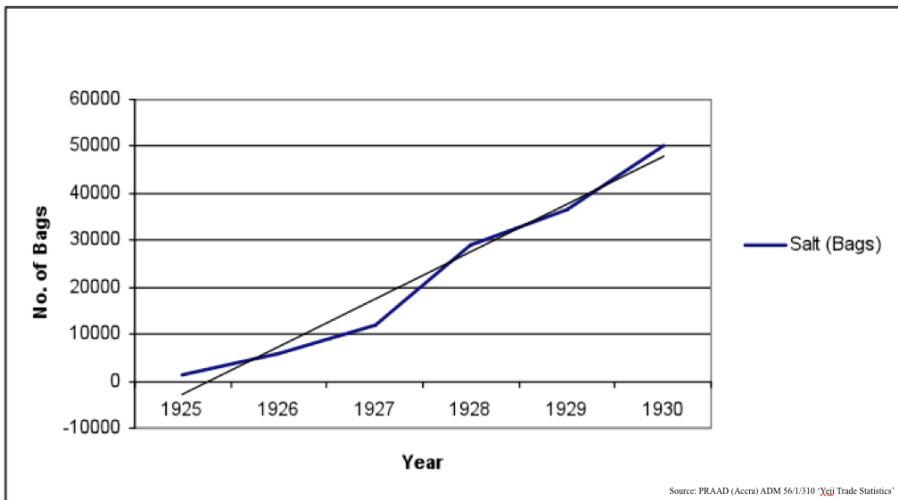
2.5. Fowls (Crates) Crossing Yeji by Lorry, 1925-1931



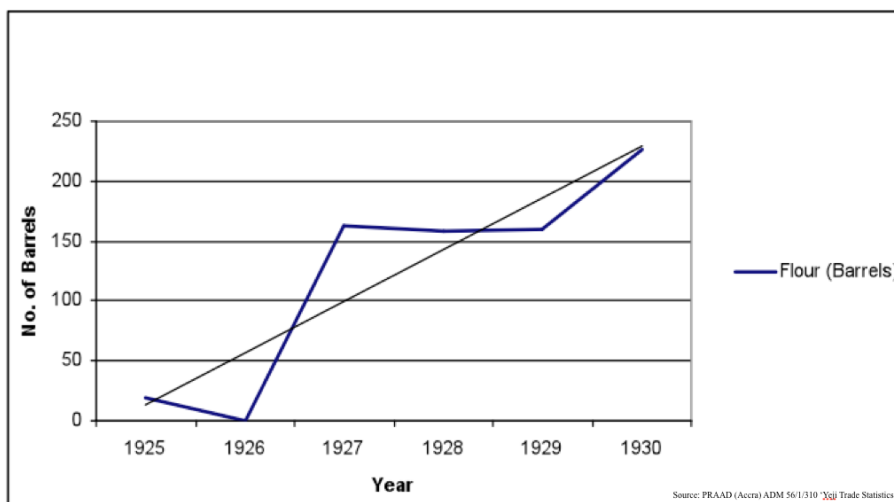
2.6. Beer (Cases) Crossing Yeji by Lorry, 1925-1931



2.7. European Salt (Bags) Crossing Yeji by Lorry, 1925-1931



2.8. Flour (Barrels) Crossing Yeji by Lorry, 1925-1931



The increases in trade as a result of the completion of the Great North Road in 1920 effected significant change in Tamale's local economy. In 1910 the stores and shops in Tamale, built by Watherston, failed to cover their costs.⁵³ In contrast, in 1929 it was noted:

There is also a good sale for petrol, oil and tyres among lorry drivers which ply to and fro from Tamale ... many small stores are being opened, and ... traders, who formerly did not bother about Tamale, are beginning to open up branches here.⁵⁴

The economic activity being generated in Tamale as a result of the uptake of motorised transportation also drove demographic growth in Tamale. The population by 1931 was a little under 13,000. Of these, 1,286 were listed as traders, 866 as market traders, and a further 385 as hawkers.⁵⁵ Thus, over 2,500 of Tamale's 13,000 residents were traders. Ten years previously, very few of Tamale's residents were not farmers.⁵⁶ Even the much-revered European traders came to Tamale. In the early

⁵³ Grischow, *Shaping*, 47.

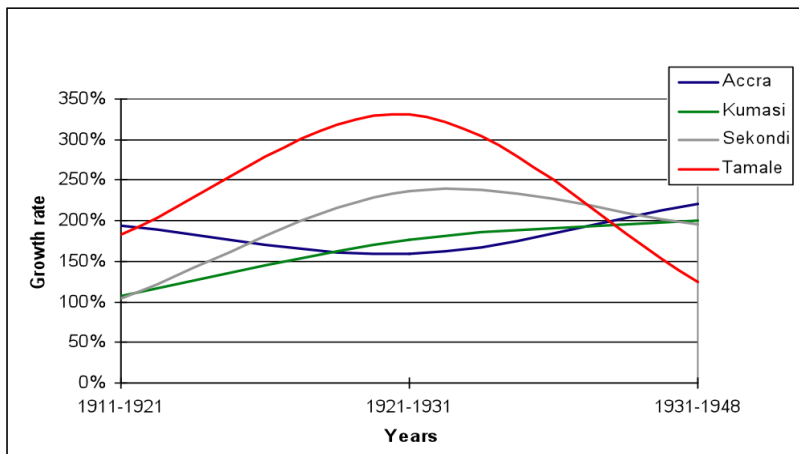
⁵⁴ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/3/26. (Annual General Report for the Year 1929-1930).

⁵⁵ Census report of the Gold Coast and its protectorates, 1931.

⁵⁶ Eades, J., *Strangers and traders: Yoruba migrants, markets and the state in Northern Ghana*. Edinburgh University Press, UK, 1993, 33.

1930s, the United Trading Company (UTC) opened a trading store, as also did a Syrian trader, Ziady.⁵⁷ A 1932 map of Tamale shows two garages. Tamale's demographic growth during this period was remarkable, even in terms of other urban centres in the Gold Coast. The chart below compares Tamale's population growth between censuses to Accra, Kumasi, and Sekondi. During the decade 1921-31, Tamale's demographic growth was by far the highest relative to other urban centres in the Gold Coast and its Protectorates.

2.8. Growth rates between censuses, Gold Coast cities, 1911-1948



Source: Based on data from Census Reports of the Gold Coast, 1911, 1921, 1931 and 1948

By the end of the 1920s, the Annual Report stated that '(p)eople are asking for roads to be made, and lorries are to be seen everywhere, loaded with trade and passengers'.⁵⁸ But the majority of the trade increases southwards came largely in the form of food staples, servicing the non-European demands in the south. Increases in the trade of good such as fowls, corn, groundnuts, and yams were neither centralised nor seen as an integral part of the larger colonial project. The result was, despite

⁵⁷ Before 1924, the area which comprises Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria was known as Syria. The Syrians referred to were in fact Lebanese. See E.K. Akyeampong, 'Race, identity and citizenship in Black Africa: The case of the Lebanese in Ghana', *Journal of International African Institute*, 76: 3(2006), 297-323.

⁵⁸ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/3/26. (Annual General Report for the Year 1929-1930)

economic progression, that the ramifications of the trade increases were not regarded as denoting northern development. Tamale formed a part of the increasingly negative discourse that defined the northern economy. One official complained: 'Tamale itself has grown enormously in the last few years ... and it is still increasing ... most of the increase in population are non-productive and are chiefly petty traders relying on the native population for their food'.⁵⁹ Tamale, as an urban site, was little more than a by-product of what the colonial administration regarded as progress, an unfortunate and unavoidable manifestation of colonial administration.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Tamale, as a colonial creation, straddled two development paradigms: one, set forward by Joseph Chamberlain, advocated for European capital and direct taxation at the expense of African social structures; the other, the liberal agenda which replaced Chamberlain's vision of colonial development advocated for the consolidation of the African peasantry and connecting, through European traders, to the global market. That Tamale held no specific political or economic relevance within the existing African socio-political and socio-economic structures which the colonial economy was attempting to coerce appears to align with Chamberlain's vision. What came afterwards was indeed a focus on the African peasantry. That Tamale's founding straddled these two development paradigms had the affect of making it in all respects an uncomfortable fit within the increasingly liberal programme. The more 'successful' colonialism was in the Northern Territories, the more of a 'by-product' Tamale became. This forms the basis of discussion in the following chapter.

⁵⁹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56/1/238, (Report on Railway to the Northern Territories), 'District Commissioner for Western Dagomba, 1928'.

