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**Between two worlds:
A biography of Honorable chief
Nana Obimpe of Ghana**

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BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: A BIOGRAPHY OF HONOURABLE CHIEF NANA OBIMPE OF GHANA

Introduction

Nana Obimpe, known in private life as Joseph Kwesi Yumpo Mbimadong (1922-2013) was an educationist, politician, academic, advocate and traditional ruler. His life story provides insights into local, national and global politics. It sheds light on local processes and practises of chieftaincy, resistance and economic life as well as on colonialism and the opportunities and problems associated with it. It tells a story of how frustration and the lack of justice led to conflicts and how such conflicts provided access to political recognition.¹

Sustained by ‘Taste and Lie’?: birth and early growth of Nana

Nana was born into a family of hunters and farmers in 1922 in Balai, a village in then Mandated Territory of Togoland. As a territory that once belonged to Germany, Nana will later in life ensure that this Germany colonial legacy is not lost. His clan was Kabesu. Being born into Kabesu meant Nana was associated with the Kankpe shrine and could have risen to the position of the Kankpe priest.² He instead chose to be a Roman Catholic and a staunch one indeed.

¹ For the sake of consistency, I will use the name Nana throughout the paper even though the title Nana came about after his installation as chief in 1996. Also the title honourable was attached to his name after he became a parliamentarian from 1969-1972. But I will still stick to Nana for clarity sake.

² For more on the Kankpe shrine see; Akyeampong, E., and Ntewusu, S.A., ‘Rum, Gin and Maize: Deities and Ritual Change in the Gold Coast during the Atlantic Era (16th century to 1850),. *Afriques: Débats, méthodes et terrains d’histoire*. Vol. 5(2015) ; Ntewusu, S.A., ‘Appealing for Grace: The Guinea Corn Festival of the Nawuri People of Northern Ghana’. In, Newbold, E and Jordan, J. (eds), *Focus on World Festivals: contemporary case studies and perspectives*. (Oxford: Goodfellow publishers, February 2016)

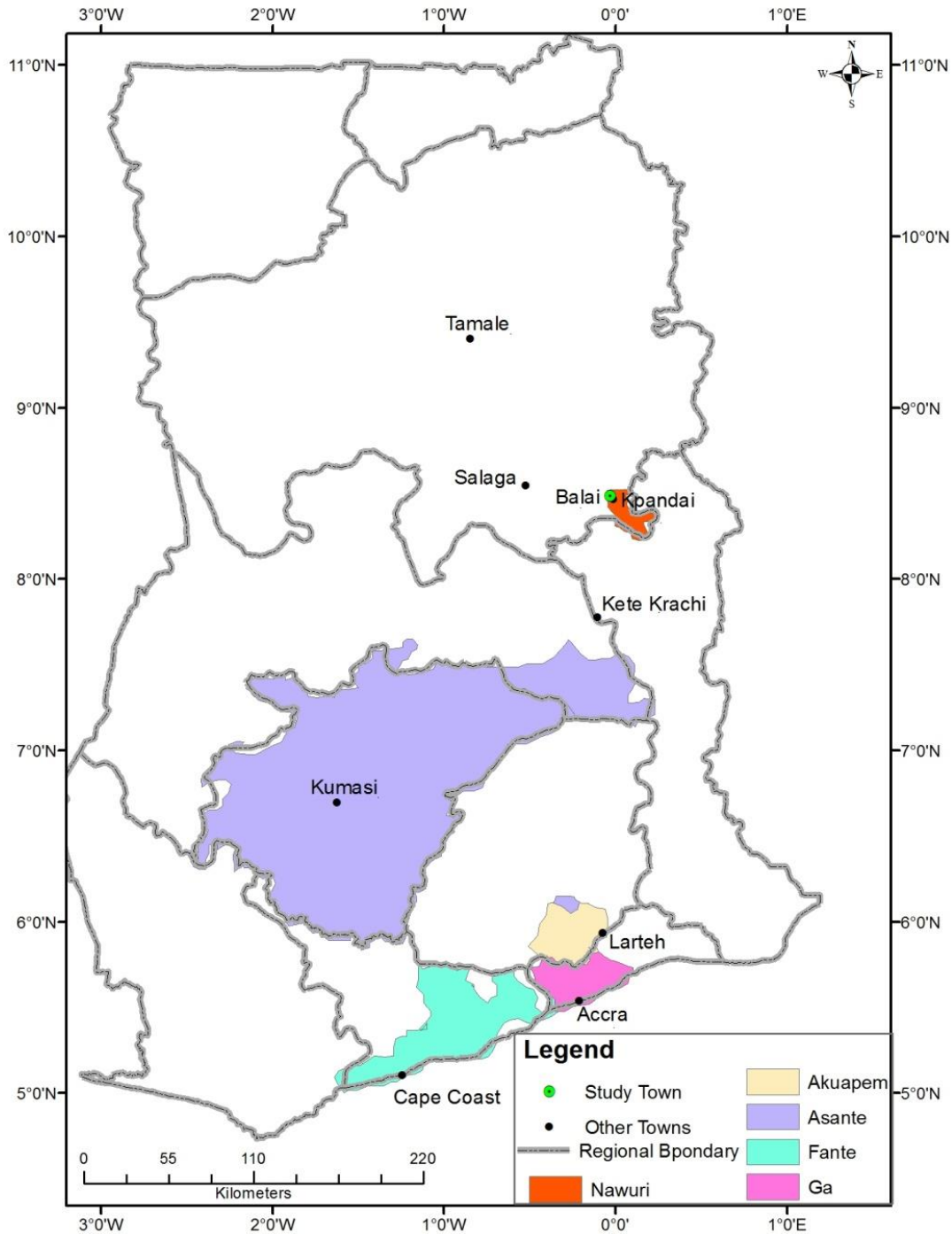


Fig. 1 Map of Ghana showing J.K.Mbimadong’s ethnic group and birth place marked in red. (Map taken from Emmanue Akyeampong and Samuel Ntewusu, 2014)

His father, Eblisa Mbimadong was a renowned hunter and a farmer. His hunting prowess was not limited to Nawuriland but was widely acclaimed in Kete Krachi, Nanun and other areas. His grandfather was an exceptional hunter who killed several animals including elephants, buffalos, and lions among others. Aside hunting, his grandfather played a prominent role in the resistance against slavery and slave raiders. He was among a group of warriors from

Buem, Krachi, Nawuri, Nchumburu and Gonja who attacked Afreh Safo, a notorious slave raider from the south and his band of raiders who crossed the Volta in the 1800s to raid northern Guans. He was instrumental in the defeat of the slave raiders and the decapitation of Afreh Safo at the battle of Apaaso by Bresiam Okori another warrior of distinction from Kpandai. He and his band of fighters returned to Nawuriland with the head as trophy.³ His mother was a Chala from Agou, in present day Nkwanta District of the Volta Region.

Nana's birth and initial stages in life was characterised by pain and mistrust of humankind. Five year after birth, his mother left her matrimonial home in Balai to stay with her brother in Efiduasi near Kumasi in Ashanti. Nana's uncle was among those that were recruited for the construction of the 'Great North' road which was completed in 1920, linking the northern town of Tamale to Kumasi.⁴ However after the completion of the road Nana's uncle chose to work instead on cocoa farms and did not return to the north. At the tender age of five, Nana was always left alone in the house since both the mother and uncle had to go and work as labourers on the cocoa farms. The young Nana could not be sent to the farm because his presence slowed down their pace of work and obviously reduced the amount they could earn per day. In the house he was locked up in a room with only the window open. He was not allowed to roam freely in the town because of the possibility of getting lost.⁵

Two years later the father followed to Ashanti and pleaded that the mother returned to Balai but she refused. Since it was evident that she was not going to come along with him he pleaded that Nana is given to him for which both mother and uncle obliged. In Kumasi, his father bought boxes of Tate and Lyle sugar; each box containing about 100 cubes. The father also bought other personal effects for him. They both travelled back to Balai. But the name of the sugar itself will shape Nana's analytical insights later in life. For as he indicated, back in Kumasi when the father bought the sugar it was called 'Taste and Lie'.

³ The head was later taken away by Buem warriors to Jasikan

⁴ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/3/3, Yeji-Makango Road- Completion Report, 1914. For more on labour migrations of northerners to the south in colonial times see; Davidson, R.B., *Migrant Labour in the Gold Coast*, Achimota, University College of the Gold Coast, (1954) Rouch, J. *Notes on Migrations into the Gold Coast*, Musue de l'homme Paris, (1954).

⁵ There was also the possibility of being captured and used for labour or murdered for ritual purposes. For instances of forced labour in the 1920s and 1930s see; Cammaert, J.V., 'The undesirable practices': women, children and the politics of development in Northern Ghana, 1930-1972'. (PhD thesis, Department of History, Queens University, Canada, 2014).

Later when Nana enrolled in school he decided to reconstruct the social history of sugar in Ghana. He drew the conclusion that the issue of linking taste to communication could be traceable to the introduction of sugar into the country in the pre-colonial and colonial times. In most instances, Ghanaians are quick to link clear and convincing communicative skills of a person to sugar. Even till date, it is not out of place for someone to say in Twi, the popular language spoken in Ghana; *na nu ye de ti se asikyire*. Meaning; ‘his/her mouth is as sweet as sugar’. Such an expression is similar to the English expression ‘sugar coated mouth’. Later on, the name *asikyire* or sugar was used in most love songs that were sung by Ghanaian highlife musicians.⁶ In the same way students in secondary schools used *asikyire* or sugar in their love letters to their girlfriends and boyfriends. As we shall soon realise for Nana sugar was not about love or communication it meant survival in life.

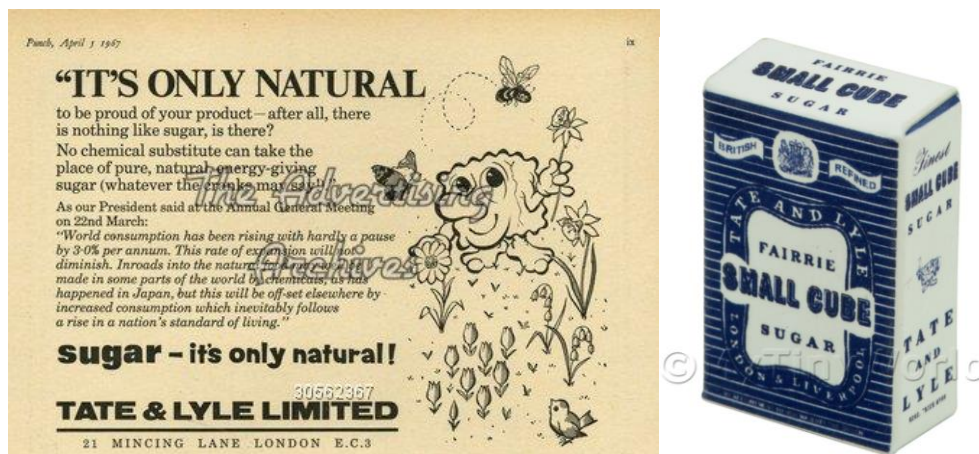


Fig. 2. Pictures of Tate and Lyle advert and container.⁷

Back in Balai, Nana was given to the paternal grandmother to take care of. Unfortunately hunting and farming always took both grandmother and father away from the village. But unlike in Ashanti, in Balai he could move freely. He soon had friends to play with but that was not too comfortable either because he had problems communicating in his mother tongue. He could only speak Twi the language spoken by Ashantis better than Kinawuri the language spoken by Nawuris. The lack of basic local communication skills made it difficult for him to play certain traditional games. Examples of the games include; *attire*, a kind of

⁶ Examples of such musicians include; J.A. Adofo (a.k.a City Boys, Holy Devil, Black Chinese, Kwahu Bob Marley) Akwasi Ampofo Adjei, (a.k.a Mr. A.A.A.) Kofi Sammy, (Abrekyieba), Daddy Lumba, Kojo Antwi among others.

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tate_%26_Lyle; Retrieved 3/06/2016.

game involving the spinning of large seeds and *dambue, dambue*, a kind of swimming game with intermittent recitals in the water. Within a few months Nana overcome that and life became much livelier. But there was another problem which left him with a lot of pain.

Any time he played with friends during lunch they would abandon him for their homes to eat leaving him alone on the playground. A few times he followed up but each time his friends blocked him from entering their house to eat. For Nana these unfortunate incidences occurred because whenever the father and grandmother left for hunting or to farm they only returned in the evening. His parents, felt that life in the village was communal therefore a family will provide him with food. This never happened. On several occasions he left for the bush to harvest mangoes to eat that was if it was in season or survived on wild fruits which grew in abundance in the area. But he missed home prepared meals during lunch time so he had no choice than to complain to his father.

The father asked the grandmother to always prepare a kind of tick porridge from maize called *Kafa* for Nana before going to farm. *Kafa* could be eaten with soup or with sugar but Nana preferred eating it with sugar and in particular with Tate and Lyle which the father bought in large quantity. So whenever it was lunch time he also went back home to eat his lunch. His friends decided one day to find out what he was eating. He gave each of them a cube of sugar and after tasting it they changed their mind and beckoned him to join them for lunch. A wise Nana refused, they had already lost his trust. He maintained the established rules that they can be friends on the playground but whenever it was lunch time it was each for himself. Clearly at this stage Nana was already developing survival skills.

Of interest was how unknowingly, his father had connected him to a product that was of global essence. As we shall realise later in this paper his use of sugar will shape his ideas regarding commerce and the need for Ghana to process its agricultural products.

At age twelve Nana's life of boredom was transformed, he was grown enough to herd cattle. He loved the job. It gave him the power to explore and to exercise. Wrestling was part of the culture of cattle herders so in the afternoon he and his colleagues parked the cattle under trees and took to wrestling. On a more significant level Nana was at that age being given economic responsibility. This was because raising cattle was a traditional way of expressing wealth. Nana's life as cattle herder did not last long as political events in Nawuriland will define a different trajectory for him.

In early 1930s it became evident that the British policy of indirect rule was going to be implemented in the northern part of the country.⁸ Within that policy was the interest of the British in empowering Kingdoms in the north. British administration felt that the success of colonialism in the north was dependent on chiefs. By that system established political entities such as Gonja, Mamprusi and Dagomba could have their king's authority further strengthened by including other ethnic groups such as the Nawuri, Nchumburu, Konkomba, Vagla, Mpre, Kusasi, Frafra and Builsa under the more centralized groups such as those already mentioned above. As Guggisberg then Governor of Gold Coast clearly stated:

*Our policy must be to maintain any paramount chiefs that exist and gradually absorb under these any communities scattered about. What we should aim at is that someday the Dagomba, Gonja and Mamprusi should become strong native states. Each will have its own 'public works department' and carry on its own business under the political officer as a resident advisor. Each state be more or less self-contained. I would like the chief commissioner to draw up a policy for the Northern Territories showing a definite scheme for fostering the formation of these big states by compulsion.*⁹

At a conference in Yapei, Tamale port the subjugation of Nawuris under Gonja rule was finalised. They were put under the Gonja chief of Kpembe and from then on their affairs were to be handled by both the Kpembewura and the District Commissioner for Salaga. Nawuris were against this move. In the first place they served Germans in Kete Krachi and were not under any chief in Kete Krachi so the move by Duncan Johnston then commissioner of Northern Province and other district administrators marked the beginning of Nawuri and Gonja hostilities. A council of Nawuri elders including Nana's father were sent to Kete-Krachi to negotiate the return of the Nawuri area to Kete Krachi after the departure of Germans.¹⁰

It was at the negotiations that his father met one Mr. Wilhelm Henkel, an educationist of German-Ghanaian parentage who impressed upon his father and the other Nawuris to send their children to school since the socio-political burden ahead of them called for well-educated elite who could carve out a good plan to solve their problems. His father felt the need to send the young Nana to school but also was concerned about his welfare. He felt sending him to school at that stage amounted to punishment or banishment. He was mindful

⁸ Talton, B., *Politics of Social Change in Ghana: The Konkomba struggle for political equality*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 83.

⁹ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 8/2/5. Native Administration, 1925.

¹⁰ For earlier deputations to Krachi in the 1920s see; PRAAD, Kumasi, ARG 1/1/106, Transfer of Krachi, Mandated area to the Northern Territories Administration, 1922-28

of his son's experiences in Ashanti and Balai and to take him to another town was a risk that his father was initially not willing to take.

In early 1940s Mr. Henkel went round recruiting children for school and in the Nawuri area Katiejeli was the recruitment centre.¹¹ The method was to make the candidate stretch the right hand across the head to touch the left ear. If one's hand did not reach the left ear, it meant that individual was not matured for school. If one's hand went beyond the ear then that person was considered overaged and was not taken. Nana's father took him to Katiejeli for examination and possible enrolment. Nana went through the exercise of hand placement but his hand went beyond the ear and naturally should have been disqualified since it showed that he was overaged.

As stated already, Henkel's recruitments were for educational purposes but with political undertones. He wanted more people from German Krachi to fill up the schools. Later on Henkel's excellence in utilising local political processes and systems in running schools will mark him out as an exceptional educationist in Ghana an achievement that earned him one of the greatest medals in the 1980s- Order of the Star of Volta. As noted, in September of 1943, Nana was taken to The Native Administration School, Bunda- Kete Krachi, after a long walk of two days from Balai to Kete-Krachi, a distance of about 91 kilometres. Nana and his father arrived in the school when pupils from the school were playing a football match, a game that he will love and actively play throughout his school days.

Even though he had not been to Krachi before he nonetheless knew a lot about Krachi before his arrival. He was already aware about the spiritual link between the Kankpe shrine and the other notable shrines such as Krachi Dente and Brukum. He knew of the market in Kete Krachi since his father and grandfather bought their guns and gunpowder from the German traders there.

Regarding his education, Nana revealed that his late enrolment in school should not only be analysed using love for children as his father claimed. Providing his opinion in retrospect, he felt other reasons prevented him and his colleagues from early education. In the first place, Nawuris did not attach any kind of recognition to formal or western education. *Kakpan* and *Dogi* (literally meaning; hunting and subsistence agriculture) were more important to them than education. Educated elites had no place in Nawuri popular culture.

¹¹ Katiejeli was originally used by the Germans to recruit soldiers for the local army.

During traditional dances, hunters flourish jaws, tails, ears and bones of animals that they have shot. These objects come along with spoils of praise songs and appellations some of which include: the scarier of beasts, one who burdens women with lumps of meat, one who's arrows and bullets fly across rivers and streams, one that women see and take out okro from the cooking pot - and replace it with lumps of meat. This mattered most to Nawuris.

Educational certificates were a direct opposite of this. For example paper cannot scare off lions. The lack of appellation sent many away from school. With education they could not leave any legacy of praises after their death. And during death rituals, non-hunters funerals (with the exception of chiefs and Kankpe shrine priest who are also added to hunters albeit posthumously) end without the much cherished *Enyinawu* (literally meaning; dance for brave dead man'). One could conclude that there is an intangible heritage that lives on long after the death of Nawuri hunters. The second was the fact that formal education denied people food and proper modes of eating. The regimental way of food supply in educational institutions sent many people away from school. By Nawuri tradition one can only be deemed satisfied if there is surplus in the bowl. But schools never made provision for that manner of feeding. Insufficient supplies therefore took them away from school.

As stated, after the father left him in the school the next day he tried going back but got to a point called 'Toten' by Germans later changed to 'Target' by the British. This was a place where Germans used to practice how to shoot. It was a hilly place and the thoughts of guns sent Nana back to school. The next day he overcame his fear and just when he went pass Target, Henkel who had gone to town to fetch the daughter Elise from the lorry park in Krachi saw him and sent him back giving him a few lashes on the buttocks. After a few warnings in Krachi language Nana settled down and took his studies seriously. His father at a point visited and Henkel told him what happened. The father also gave him some words of advice. The words from Henkel and his father made him draw the conclusion that he was not studying for a paid job rather he was being trained to acquire knowledge to 'free' his people from Gonja and British rule.

In school he studied subjects such as English language, Arithmetic, Civics, Geography and History. His favourite subject was English Language, which he described as 'interesting and easier to learn and understand'. After a few years in school, leadership qualities were already discovered in Nana by the school authorities who broke traditional protocol and started giving him positions in the school. He was made Assistant Dinning Hall Captain 1946,

Dormitory Prefect, 1947, Nchumburu House Captain, 1949, and Senior School Prefect 1950. Nana completed his middle school education in 1950.¹²

His time in school brought him closer to global issues. They had a kind of relay radio system in their school that enabled them to listen to local and international news. In addition, Henkel the headmaster and his mentor explained to him in detail how his ethnic group the Nawuri became colonised by Germans. Henkel's stories shed more light on Indirect Rule and other issues related to north-south relations in Ghana. Nana's stay in Krachi also revealed interconnections and similarities in terms of culture and history of the Nawuris and other Guan ethnic groups such as the Buem, Nchumburu, Krachi, Anum, Larte, Adele, Achode among others. All these interconnections were important as they helped him decided on which individual or group of people he could contact in later days of his political life.

Work and Political Life

Soon after completion in 1950, he was offered a job as a teacher. He accepted it and was posted to teach in schools in present day Volta and Northern Regions. At the same time he was active in local politics especially in the affairs of the Nawuri Youth Association (NYA) which was formed in the 1940s for which he was the secretary. NYA and Nana had two main aims. The first was to resist British rule and Gonja domination. The second was to ensure the recognition of the Nawuri and the Trans Volta Togoland area as a distinct political entity created by the Germans for which such status should be recognised. Nana and the rest of Nawuris pursued this agenda using three strategies; Petitions to the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations, engaging in national politics, and warfare.

In 1952 Nana was invited by the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations to New York. As indicated already, the Nawuri area was part of the Trans-Volta Togoland that was under the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations. The Council was authorized to examine and discuss reports from the Administering Authority on the political, economic, social and educational advancement of the peoples of Trust Territories and in consultation with the Administering Authority, to examine petitions from and undertake periodic and other special

¹² At the time that Nana went to school they had an educational system called standard 7. The standard 7 system was what later became popularly known as Form Four. By that system the lower primary that is class one to three was not counted. Standard one started from class four. Standard two started from class five and standard three started from class six. That was a terminal stage for which pupils could go and seek employment but then one could also continue to standard four which became form one then standard five which was form two and standard six which was form three and standard seven which was form four.

missions to Trust Territories. Nana and a number of Nawuris in the 1940s up to 1950, had written a number of petitions to the United Nations complaining about the economic and social neglect of the Nawuri area by the Administering Authority in this case the British colonial administration. Their petitions formed part of the general report on racial and ethnic abuses in Trust Territories in Africa and Asia that were to be discussed in 1952 for which his presence and input was considered very crucial and necessary.¹³

Nana's participation in the UN however seems not to have been well captured in the UN reports. So far documentary evidence indicates that the Nawuri and the Nchumuru authorised Mr. H.E. Anku Morny to represent them at the UN General Assembly's session. Mr. Anku's mandate was to protest against the amalgamation of Nawuris with the Gonja kingdom, to demand the transfer of Nawuris from the Northern Territories to the Southern Section of Togoland, and to demand the unification of British and French spheres of Togoland. Also, the Nawuri and other ethnic groups in the Northern Section of British Togoland mandated Alhassan Chamba to present their oral and written representations to the U.N. General Assembly in 1952.¹⁴ Clearly there was no mention of Nana's participation in the assembly deliberations.

In an interview with Nana in 2009 he indicates that both Anku and Chamba were representing groups which included the Nanumba who had the same concerns as the Nawuris so it was better to let them handle the Nawuri case during the Assembly deliberations since at that time they already were well informed about the Nawuri problem. Secondly, both Anku and Chamba were seasoned politicians who really understood global politics better than he Nana. Finally, Chamba was older than him and as Nana indicates, in traditional systems, gerontocracy is of essence. The insights offered regarding Anku and Chamba revealed Nana's level of objectivity, honesty and respect for traditional protocol. But he pointed out that he played other roles in New York. For example he met intellectuals and a significant segment of the press and organizations such as the Council on African Affairs under the leadership of Paul Robeson, and other notables such as Max Yergan, Alphenus Hunton and more importantly the German/French journalist Paul Ecker who reported frequently on affairs and conditions in former German colonies. After deliberations and discussions with the

¹³ PRAAD, NRG 8/2/210, Nawuri and Nanjuro (NTs) Under United Nations Trusteeship. 1951-1954.

¹⁴ Mbowura, C.K. , Nawuri-Gonja Conflict, 1932-1996. (PhD thesis, History Department, University of Ghana, 2012), 140-141.

people and organizations mention above, it was obvious that internal reform in the Trust Territory had a long way to go but the representations meant that affairs in the territory in general and the Nawuri area in particular were monitored with keen interest by the United Nations.

On his way back from New York, through England, the Secretary of the Labour Party in London offered him a scholarship to study in Oxford University. Nana rejected the offer. He considered the offer as an attempt to take him away from home and thus allow for the manipulation of the Nawuri people.

In the meantime, the Gold Coast was preparing for independence. A new constitution was approved. The approval of a new constitution meant that the so called 'tribal councils' no longer elected assembly members, the Assembly was enlarged, and all members were chosen by direct election from equal, single-member constituencies. It established a cabinet composed of African ministers, and only defense and foreign policy remained in the hands of the governor; the elected assembly was given control over the majority of internal affairs.

Political parties were formed to contest the general elections among which were; Convention Peoples Party, Ghana Congress Party, Northern Peoples Party, Togoland Congress, Muslim Association Party and Anlo Youth Association. The elections of 1954 witnessed the formation of political parties along regional and ethnic lines. For example, the Ghana Congress Party later National Liberation Movement was largely Akan base and represented the conservative position of the chiefs and intelligentsia. The Muslim Association Party (MAP) was formed in 1954 out of the Gold Coast Muslim Association established in the early 1930s. As the name indicates, it was formed primarily to cater for Muslims especially those who were resident in the migrant urban communities called the Zongos.¹⁵

The Northern People's Party (NPP) was formed by the educated elite and chiefs of the Northern and Upper Regions, out of fear of becoming dominated by the people of the south after independence.¹⁶ Its aim among other things was to win respect for the culture of the

¹⁵ Richard Asante and E. Gyimah-Boadi, *Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public Sector in Ghana*, (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2004),23

¹⁶ Richard Asante and E. Gyimah-Boadi, *Ethnic Structure*, 23.

people of the Northern Territories, to ensure their just treatment, their protection against abuses, and their political and social development.

All the political parties wanted NYA on their side. Winning NYA over was considered crucial because there were ethnic groups that were also resident in the territory occupied by Nawuri and were quite a sizable number. At a time that Ghana's population was about 5,853,000 the Nawuri area could already boast of a population of over eight thousand.¹⁷

Naturally, Nana and the rest of the Nawuris and settlers would have supported the NPP since it was a northern party but Nana convinced others not to support NPP because it was already dominated by the Mamprusi, Dagomba and Gonja ethnic groups. Their chiefs were the proponents of indirect rule. Supporting and voting for NPP meant re-enforcing British hegemonic structures even after independence. Secondly the proposal not to join the NPP was also due to the fact that since the departure of Germans, Nawuris have resisted British rule in the north by indicating in their petitions that they were not from the North and that they originated from Larte in the present day Eastern Region of Ghana. They claimed that their culture and customs were quite different from the rest of the ethnic groups from the north. Essentially, one could conclude that Nawuris did not want to contradict their claim of being southerners by joining a party that was for all intent and purposes meant for northerners.

The second option was the Muslim Association Party. Nana nursed the idea of actually supporting this party because as at that time Muslims had significant population in Kpandai. However, by its nature, the MAP had an urban rather than a rural outlook. In the end Nana and Nawuris settled for Togoland Congress. The Togoland Congress was formed in 1951 out of a number of political associations, which were already in existence in the region. These included the Togoland Union founded as early as 1943, the Togoland Youth Conference and the United Nations Association of Togoland. Nana and Nawuris chose the Togoland Congress because, the principal aim of the Congress was to intensify the campaign which had been raging since the 1920s and 1930s for the unification of the British and French mandated territories of Togoland created out of the former single Germany colony of Togo.¹⁸

Despite its clear aims and objectives the Togoland Congress was opposed in the region by the Anlo Youth Organisation (AYO). The AYO was opposed to the unification of the two Togos

¹⁷ PRAAD, NRG 8/2/210, Nawuri and Nanjuro (NTs) Under United Nations Trusteeship. 1951-1954

¹⁸ Richard Asante and E. Gyimah-Boadi, *Ethnic Structure*, 24

on the grounds that it would permanently separate the Ewes living in the then trans-Volta district of the Gold Coast Colony from those living in the reunified Togo. On the contrary, it advocated for the unification of all the Ewes in French Togo, British Togoland and the trans-Volta Region.

The only party that seems not to have these ethnic, intellectual and religious trappings and internal divisions was Kwame Nkrumah's CPP. The limitations of the rest of the political parties became the strength of the CPP, which won the elections.

Even though Nana's efforts to get the Togoland Congress into government failed, he nonetheless had another opportunity to campaign for unification and integration of former German territory. Residents in the former German colony including Nana and Nawuris had made a case to the United Nations that they were a trust territory and should therefore be given the opportunity to decide in a referendum what their future should be.¹⁹ As pointed out already, since World War I, the territory had been a League of Nations mandate, then a United Nations Trust Territory under British control. The referendum will offer residents the choice of remaining a Trust Territory until neighbouring French Togoland had decided upon its future, or becoming part of soon-to-be Ghana.²⁰

Once more Nana and the Togoland Congress campaigned against joining the soon to be independent Ghana. They preferred amalgamation with French Togoland. Kwame Nkrumah and the CPP just as the British wanted unification of Togoland with Ghana. What was of great interest was the extent to which affairs of the territory watered down the initial collective interest of the French and the British as far as the First and Second World Wars were concerned. In the struggle for this territory the British and the French became antagonists. The tensions at the international level were just as serious as affairs in the domestic scene. At the local level it was a struggle between Gonjas and Nawuris. Nawuris considered the referendum as the last chance to re-establish their 'German identity' and to

¹⁹ A referendum is that type of a vote that is normally conducted in an attempt to resolve issues; or a provision that permits the voters to either accept or reject a policy question or a public policy measure at a formal election. The particulars of a referendum vary in different states and countries. On the other hand, a plebiscite is actually the vote itself, that is, the election for the referendum.
<http://www.differencebetween.net/miscellaneous/politics/differences-between-a-plebiscite-and-a-referendum/#ixzz4AmiHChgU>. Retrieved 6/6/2016.

²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Togoland. Retrieved 3/6/2016

break away from Gonja domination and British attempt at perpetuating their subordinate status which they had created during colonialism.

The Gonjas saw it as a last chance to have a firm grip on the Nawuris. What is of essence however was the extent to which the District Commissioners in Salaga, and the chief commissioner in Tamale particularly singled out the Nawuri as a group that should be monitored. The concerns of the colonial administrators reveals the strategic importance of Nawuris in the scheme of affairs.²¹ In the meantime Kwame Nkrumah and the British government had succeeded in convincing some influential people in Togoland to change their mind and vote for unification. One of them was Theodore Asare. Asare was a Guan from Worawora in former German colony. Politically Nana was mentored by Theodore Asare, S.G. Antor, an important member of the Togoland Congress and Alhassan Chamba. Nana was not comfortable with the closeness of Asare and Nkrumah since that had some negative implications for Nana's political agenda.

Theodore Asare qualified as a lawyer from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, Nkrumah's Alma matter. In 1953, he was already promised an ambassadorial position specifically to Germany by Nkrumah.²² As the time for the referendum drew near Theodore Asare invited Nana to Jasikan and offered him a scholarship meant for 'natives of Togoland'- to Lincoln University to read law. Nana felt the timing was wrong and turned down the offer. He saw the scholarship as a clear case of sabotage meant to permanently take him away from his native home thereby paving the way for the continuous suppression of Nawuris. He saw a link between Asare's actions and the ambitions of both Nkrumah and the British which was to ensure that Togoland became part of the soon to be independent Ghana. Having refused these overtures the only option left was for Nkrumah to go after Nana's life. On one of his campaigns in Jasikan Nkrumah ordered his arrest. He and several others who were also arrested around that time were accused of trying to destabilize the country. Nawuris rallied behind Nana and demonstrated, citing issues of persecution of ethnic minority. The demonstrations led to his release.

²¹ PRAAD, NRG 8/2/210, Nawuri and Nanjuro (NTs) Under United Nations Trusteeship. 1951-1954.

²² Skinner, K., *The Fruits of Freedom in British Togoland: Literacy, Politics, and Nationalism 1914-2014* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 125.

The plebiscite was held in July 1956 and Nana's bid to join Togoland was defeated since majority voted in favour of amalgamation. R.B. Bening points out that out of a total of 160,585 voters, 93,093 representing 58 percent voted in favour of union with Ghana and 67,492 representing 42 percent voted for separation.²³ Other sources have it that out of a total of 224,313 votes cast, 142,214 representing 63.9 percent votes were in favour of integration with Ghana and 80,199 representing 36.1 percent votes were in favour of U.N trusteeship.²⁴ Despite the variations in figures what is of essence is that majority voted for amalgamation with Ghana.

Nana pointed out that the referendum was the most unfair in electoral history. There were physical abuses and torture, compelling people to vote to be part of Ghana. The question however remains why Nana was interested in the Nawuri becoming a part of Togo and not Ghana. Apart from the fact that he felt becoming part of Togo would take them away from Gonja and British rule there were other benefits.

He indicates that at that time Ghana was far advanced in politics and with the experience gathered in Ghana, if Togo decides to fight for independence, Nawuris will be able to play a very important and leading role in the affairs of Togo since in Ghana their power was subsumed under Gonja authority. Secondly, Nawuris by their proximity to other parts of Ghana would have a linguistic advantage. They would be bi-lingual which would make it easier for them to fill up jobs in Togo. Finally, as an individual he could simply not come to terms with the double standards or hypocrisy of both Nkrumah and the British colonial administration. For on one hand the British imprisoned Kwame Nkrumah for struggling for independence. In the same way in his bid for leadership and independence Kwame Nkrumah on a number of occasions attacked the British. His popularity in Ghanaian politics was based on his open attack on British colonialism. But when it came to the issue of 'German territory' the two united against the French. To him that behaviour should not let anyone trust Nkrumah or the British.

As explained earlier, the results of the referendum meant that Ghana was ready for independence and on the 6th March 1957 Ghana became independent. With all hopes of

²³ Bening, R.B. *Ghana Regional Boundaries and National Integration* (Accra: Ghana Universities press, 1999), 264.

²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Togoland_status_plebiscite,_1956 Retrieved 6/6/2016

liberating the Nawuris through politics impossible Nana and the rest of the Nawuri elite changed their strategy. They chose to work with the Ghanaian press especially the Asante Pioneer which was an anti-Nkrumah newspaper. They continued to launch attack on Nkrumah and Gonja's whiles at the same time revealing some of the injustices and maltreatment in the Nawuri area.²⁵ In 1966 when Nkrumah was overthrown Nana and his colleagues were among the first to send congratulatory message to the new military government.

Ghana returned to constitutional rule in 1969, after the 1966 coup d'état. The race for the second republic (1969-1972) of Ghana saw the formation of the following political parties- Progress Party, All Peoples Party, Justice Party, National Alliance of Liberals, People's Action Party, and United Nationalist Party.

Nana felt that the time had come for Nawuris to fight their case from within rather than without. Merely supporting political parties without effective participation was not the answer to their problems. He contested the parliamentary elections in Kpandai on the ticket of the National Alliance of Liberals. The National Alliance of Liberals (NAL) was formed by Komla Agbeli Gbedemah. It is important to indicate that NAL was metamorphosed from the CPP and naturally Nana should distance himself from this party based on the fact the CPP's leader Kwame Nkrumah had imprisoned him in Jasikan before. However, aside the CPP flavour, NAL was led by Gbedemah and others who were from the Volta Region, a former German colony which had been made part of Ghana just twelve years ago. Nana still felt he bonded well with the leadership of the party because most of them at one point in history were part of the German colony. Some of the members of the party were even his seniors or school mates in Kete Krachi.

In elections held on 29 August 1969, Nana emerged victorious among three other parliamentary contestants. By his victory, he became the first Nawuri parliamentarian and one of the 29 that NAL won countrywide, the remaining 111 seats were won by other political parties making 140 seats in the National Assembly.

²⁵ See for example Thursday January 18th, 1951 issue of *The Ashanti Pioneer*



Picture of Nana taken when he was a parliamentarian in 1969 (Picture reproduced with permission from Mbimadong family)

Nana's victory and presence in parliament was significant in many ways. It paved the way for him to put before parliament a number of issues that he considered very important for his constituency as well as the nation. For example on several occasions on the floor of parliament he emphasised the need for a separate district for Nawuris with its capital in Kpandai. The district was to take into consideration all important towns in the Nawuri area that were formerly under German rule. His request led to the establishment of a Committee of Enquiry in 1971 to look into the economic, social and political situation of the people living in Kpandai in particular and the Gonja, Nchumburu, Krachi and Nanun area in general. But still a separate district administration was not created. Nana engaged the chiefs in his area and they wrote a strong petition to the government requesting that they should be transferred to Nanumba district and administered from Bimbilla. This was granted by then Prime Minister, Kofi Abrefa Busia.

Nana, whilst in parliament was not only concerned about affairs of his constituency but issues of the nation were also important to him. For example, he was concerned about education, health, infrastructure and agriculture. His interest in education was largely due to the fact that he was a teacher before becoming a parliamentarian. However, it was in agricultural development that he did exceedingly well. This should not be surprising as he was coming from a constituency that was largely made up of farmers. He was of the view that the only way farmers could gain from their labour was for their produce to be turned into

finished products. He felt the bane of the Ghanaian economy was because Ghana relied so much on the export of primary products. In this context, his economic ideology was not different from that of the Prime Minister of the time - Dr Kofi Abrefa equally felt the need for rapid industrialisation especially at the rural level. It was in this context that Nana was made a member of the Select Committee on the Komenda and Asutsuare sugar factories. He indicates during interviews that 'My visit to the sugar factories always reminded me of my childhood days and how I survived on Tate and Lyle'.

Nana could not finish his term in parliament. There was a coup d'état in 1972 that led to the military taking over the affairs of the nation.²⁶ He felt the need to go back to the classroom, but to do this he needed a professional certificate in teaching. Nana enrolled at the Pusiga Teacher Training College where he completed his teacher training education. After school, he taught in Buipe in present day Central Gonja District and Bimbilla, present day Nanumba North District. But all the gains he made while in parliament were reversed. For example the military government returned Nawuris to Salaga. Nana and his Nawuri colleagues immediately revived the NYA which had gone dormant for some time. It was officially registered at the Registrar Generals department to give it some legitimacy. And in 1975 the NYA was officially inaugurated in his hometown Balai.²⁷

From 1975 the NYA had the sole aim of getting a separate district administration away from Salaga and also to ensure the control over land and chieftaincy in Kpandai. But the Gonjaland Youth Association was against the move by NYA. Activities and behaviours of individuals or groups belonging to Nawuri or Gonja more or less represented the interest of the two associations. In the 1980s the associations intensified their activities in their respective areas. In the end the claim over land and chieftaincy which was the central activity of the two associations led to the 1991 and 1992 Nawuri-Gonja conflicts.

Two years after, in 1994, the Northern Region was characterised by unfortunate incidents of inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts. The 1994 conflict began between Konkombas and Nanumbas in Nakpayili a town located in the former German territory, but it soon spread to

²⁶ Björn Hettne, 'Soldiers and Politics: The Case of Ghana' *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1980), 181

²⁷ He became its president from 1980 till 1996.

other areas of Northern Region. It is important to point out that the conflicts were not only a drain on the Ghanaian economy but also affected greatly inter-ethnic relations. The government together with other Non-Governmental Organisations set out to find a lasting solution to these conflicts. Nana and other Nawuris were selected to negotiate for peace in the region. Nana's knowledge and understanding of the German colonial past in the area proved useful in the negotiations.

Nana was installed the chief of Balai under the name Nana Obimpe in 1996. Becoming chief further empowered him to be able to struggle for greater things for Nawuris. For example he continued to fight for a separate district which was granted in 2008 collectively with other chiefs. As he indicated in an interview with Nana in 2011:

The greatest achievement is the granting of a separate district administration for Kpandai. Throughout my life I have been fighting for this. All Nawuris were fighting for it. We wrote letters upon letters, petitions upon petitions still no one will listen to us. Finally we had to fight, should things get this far? The British disregarded everything that the Germans put in place. This district incorporates almost all Nawuri towns and villages and I am happy about this.

Conclusion

From the above it is evident that Nana played an important role at the local, national and global level. Throughout his adult life he continued to fight for the recognition of the former German territory of Togoland. That certainly brought him into conflict with both the British and Kwame Nkrumah. At the local level, he fought for the liberation of Nawuris and laid the foundation for the creation of a separate district for Kpandai. Songs were composed in recognition of his sacrifice and contribution. During traditional dances such as *baya*, it is not uncommon to hear songs such as: *Ane Mandela, Ane Mandela mo egyi ane, Nnawuiri Mandela mu egyi ane mu egyi Yumpo.*

Meaning: Our Mandela, Our Mandela who is our Mandela, who is the Nawuri Mandela, the Nawuri Mandela is Yumpo.

Linking him to Nelson Mandela of South Africa, shows that Nana's achievement went beyond his local confines. At the national level, he served in the Ghanaian parliament in the Second Republic and was crucial to the functioning of the sugar factories of Asutsuare and

Komenda. Educationally, he taught in a number of schools and turned out a number of scholars who occupy important positions in society today. Four students of Nana became chiefs in their respective areas. They include; Nana Adong-achor Joka Okuma I chief of Bladjai Awuratu, Volta Region, Nana Richard Kofi Tawiah Mensah Adjabasus I of Katiejeli, Northern Region, Nana Kwasi Nyarko Sachapo II, Agum-Bayin, Volta Region and Nana Anokye of Adjade-Praman traditional area in the Afram plains- Eastern Region. With the exception of Nana Anokye all of the chiefs come from the former German territory.

Nana's last days were characterised by peace. On several occasions he ensured that peace was made between Nawuris and Gonjas. Each year he would send a delegation to the Gonja paramount chief in Kpembe and the Yagbonwura in Damongo during Damba festival to celebrate. Also during the Guinea Corn and yam festivals of the Nawuris, Gonjas and other ethnic groups were invited to celebrate with him. Festivals helped in renewing political bonds between Nawuris and Gonjas and also helped in developing interactions between families since in the area there were intermarriages between Gonjas and Nawuris. He continued this cycle of reconciliation until his death in 2013. Nana is remembered as a man who went beyond the call of duty.

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