



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

‘Tamale is more an administrative and commercial centre within Dagomba than a Dagomba town.’¹

Introduction

The opening paragraph of Staniland’s seminal text, ‘The Lions of Dagon’ reads:

When the British moved their administration to Tamale in 1907, it was a village of 1,435 people. Now it is a sprawling town of 80,000, and the morning plane from Accra swings down to land over shimmering iron rooftops, concrete offices, and a web of asphalt roads, masts, and aerials.²

Despite Staniland’s multi-layered recognition Tamale, he hardly mentions Tamale in the remainder of the book. Tamale’s urban formation is in fact hardly mentioned at all in the otherwise rich historiography of the Northern Territories of the Gold

¹ Staniland, M., *The lions of Dagbon: Political change in Northern Ghana* (Cambridge, 1975), 1.

² Staniland, *Lions*, 1.

Coast. This is peculiar given that, on the one hand, the impact of colonial rule is perhaps the dominant theme in the historiography of the Northern Territories, and on the other hand, Tamale is arguably the single most profound transformation of the colonial period in the Northern Territories. The kind of transformation that Tamale represented has been regarded as rather a non-issue both within academia trends, as well as within the colonial administration of the Northern Territories. One colonial official, referring to Meyer Fortes (who perhaps serves as the most prominent bridge between modern academia and the colonial administration, although he might have resented such a categorisation) wrote:

An anthropologist of unquestionable ability and some repute remarked to the writer how regrettable it was that the Talansi (sic) were becoming money conscious and generally criticised the efforts that are being made to develop trade in the Protectorate.³

The omission of Tamale's urban formation from the historiographical landscape of the Northern Territories, however, says as much about the development of the academic study of the Northern Territories (and colonialism), as it does about Tamale itself. The title of this introductory chapter, a remark, almost in passing, also by Martin Staniland, goes some way to consolidate this fact; in 1960, three years after Ghana had attained its independence, Tamale's population was still over 60 per cent Dagomba, down from over 70 per cent in 1948. The second single largest 'ethnic' group in 1960 were Ewe, with 4.5 per cent, followed by the Asante, with 3.6 per cent.⁴ Furthermore, Tamale's 'traditional' political apparatus was, and is, dominated by Dagomba institutions. The Gulkpe-Na, the chief of the Gulkpeagu subdivision, is a Dagomba chief, as also is the Dakpema, another of Tamale's chiefs.⁵ The Imam of Tamale's Central Mosque is also a Dagomba. And yet, despite an overwhelming ethnic demographic majority, and a political structure which at least until 1957, defined Dagombas as 'natives' and all others as 'strangers', Tamale may still feasibly be regarded as an urban entity which is somehow not of Dagbon.

³ Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD), Tamale, NRG 8/3/49 'Annual Report for the Northern Territories, 1933-1934'.

⁴ Eades, J., *Strangers and traders: Yoruba migrants, markets and the state in Northern Ghana*, Edinburgh, 1993, 57.

⁵ The tension between these two chiefs is a major theme of this thesis.

Within this context, this thesis is fundamentally one about urban formation in Anglophone Africa during the colonial period. It is concerned with an urban settlement in the periphery, which came to exist directly due to, and for the purposes of, colonial administration. The thesis is concerned with how these specific characteristics relate to the dynamics of the urban formation itself.

Central arguments

Present-day Ghana is made up of a distinct north and south. The north stretches from the northern fringes of Asante's cocoa-growing forest belt to the Burkina Faso border. Its landscape is generally of a savannah type, made up of shrub-bush dotted with shea trees. The north consists of three administrative units: The Northern Region, Upper East, and Upper West. They are, however, in a number of contexts often considered as a whole.⁶ The north's economy is overwhelmingly agrarian and largely has a subsistence nature. The principle crops are yams, rice, sorghum, maize, shea, cassava, groundnuts, and cotton. The north possesses strong Muslim influences (except in isolated areas, that is Navrongo and Bolgatanga, where missions have had a strong influence),⁷ in contrast to the south, which is dominated by Christianity. Northern Ghana consists of a plethora of ethnically bound groupings, with diverse socio-political structures. The area is, however, politically dominated by five large centralised kingdoms, namely Dagbon, Mamprussi, Gonja, Wala, and Nunumba. In the years prior to its official inclusion in the British Empire in 1902, northern Ghana was referred to as the 'Asante Hinterland'. In that year the area became recognised as the Northern Territories, a protectorate of the Gold Coast Colony. Since Independence, the area has been referred to as northern Ghana (containing the three aforementioned administrative units). Each of these titles reflects a different relationship vis-à-vis British colonialism, and for the remainder of this dissertation the employment of these terms is expressly linked to those differences. Tamale, the subject of this thesis, is the regional capital of northern Ghana. In 1907, when the British colonial administration moved its administrative

⁶ The Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA) is perhaps the most recent example of this tendency.

⁷ Kimble, D., *A political history of Ghana, 1850-1928*, Oxford, 1963, 79-80.

headquarters from Gambaga to Tamale, Tamale consisted of a cluster of small villages,⁸ with a total population of around 1,435 residents.⁹ Today, a little over a hundred years after the founding of the administrative headquarters in 1907, Tamale's population is somewhere around the 400,000 mark.¹⁰

The argument presented by this thesis is that Tamale's socio-political and socio-economic urban dynamic was informed profoundly by the cleavage between a colonially motivated, traditional political and administrative focus on the one hand, and an economic structure which relied almost entirely on the motorable road between Tamale and Kumasi, without any regard for traditional political centres such as Yendi, on the other. In this way, Tamale was a by-product of the colonial purpose. Although the nature of colonialism changed through the colonial period from pre-indirect rule, to indirect rule, to the second colonial occupation, all three colonial periods had one thing in common: Each strongly favoured the maintenance of African social structures as they were perceived by the British colonial administration. This thesis argues that the cleavage outlined above had the effect of firstly, disconnecting Tamale from traditional Dagbon structures, and secondly, creating a multitude of socio-political frameworks in Tamale which were regularly played off against each other in local disputes and claims, especially over land. More specifically, the thesis argues that:

1. Tamale was isolated, in that its economic centrality was not matched by any real traditional political significance within the politics of Dagbon. In other words, Tamale's urban growth must be understood in the context of a disconnection between a colonial discourse that emphasised legitimate traditional authority on the one hand, and on the other hand, an economic and administrative spatial framework that ignored that authority.
2. The lack of traditional focus in Tamale, which itself was the result of the coincidence of Tamale's lack of traditional importance coupled with its economic centrality, led to a local political structure in which many different

⁸ MacGaffey, W., 'A history of Tamale, 1907-1957 and beyond', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana, New Series*, No. 10 (2006-7), 121.

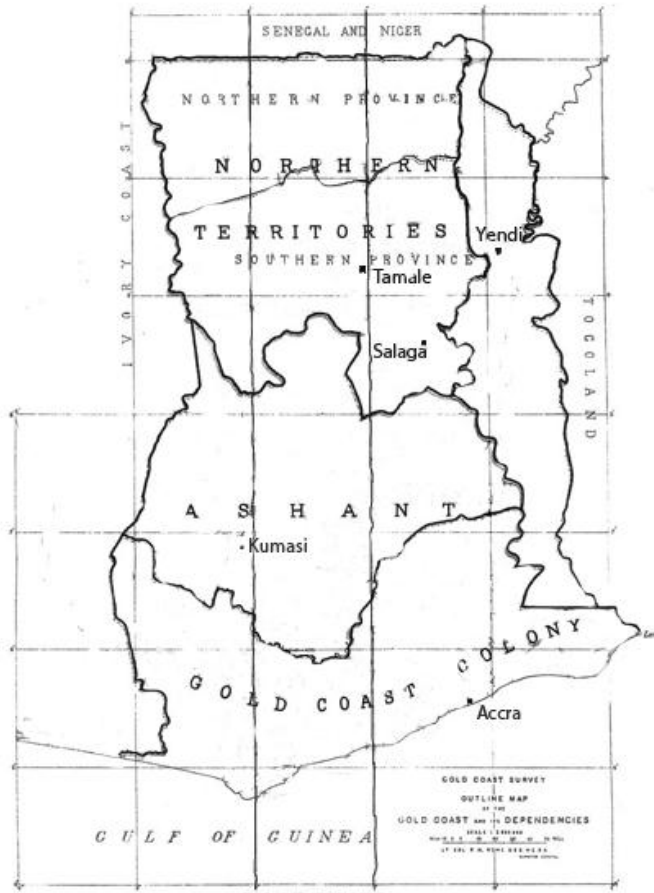
⁹ Staniland, *Lions*, 1.

¹⁰ See Ghana Districts, Tamale. www.ghanadistricts.com (accessed on 15 March 2009).

claims to authority could be, and often were, legitimated. Furthermore, Tamale's political structure functioned in a climate of profound ebbs and flows in economic activity, the commercialisation of a number of key institutions, including land, and increasing ethnic and religious heterogeneity. This climate both increased the number of claims and raised the stakes further, which both placed enormous strain on Tamale's ill-defined political structure and enhanced and consolidated its ill-definition.

3. The conditions arising out of unique historical urban trajectories inform the social interactions in the city in question. The thesis thus argues that Tamale's disconnection from traditional political structures, as well as its institutional multiplicity (arguments 1 and 2 above), shaped and informed socio-political interactions within Tamale during the colonial period

1.1. Protectorate of the Northern Territories, Ashanti Colony, and the Cold Coast



Source: Chipp, T.F., 1923. *The Gold Coast forestry problem*. Empire Forestry Journal: 1-11.

The thesis situates the formation of Tamale's internal socio-political and socio-economic layers within four interrelated historical narratives, namely, (i) the development of Dagomba political structures, (ii) colonial administration, (iii) north-south trade, and (iv) new developmentalism and the emergence of nationalist politics in northern Ghana. These narratives, and how they have served as drivers of change in Tamale, form the frames of reference for the remainder of this thesis. The subsections below discuss each of these narratives and briefly how they relate to

Tamale's urban development. Before doing so, however, it is useful to situate Tamale within cross-cutting themes in contemporary interpretations of northern history, not only to contextualise Tamale's urban development, but also to contextualise the major thrust of this thesis and its contribution to the academic study of northern Ghana. To a considerable extent, the most dominant discourse within the study of northern Ghana is that relating to 'underdevelopment'. Two inter-relating themes in particular are used to prop up this 'agenda', namely, north-to-south labour migration, and the Northern Territories railway that never was. The following subsection locates Tamale within those existing themes.

Tamale and the 'underdevelopment' narrative

The 'underdevelopment' narrative that underpins much of the historiography of the Northern Territories has its foundations within the colonial period. Seasonal hunger in the north created very early in the colonial period an imagination of 'backwardness' in the minds of the colonial administration.¹¹ However, there is a marked distinction between the perception of an existing backwardness and the active 'underdevelopment' and 'neglect' which came to dominate much of the northern historiography.

Northern 'neglect' arose as a point of serious dissatisfaction in colonial debates between 'northern' and 'southern' administrations, and it was later taken-up and extended by historians reflecting on regional relationships in Ghana generally. Carola Lentz notes that the talk of 'neglect' was '... adopted by the educated elite of the North, and Marxist-inspired authors (who) spoke not only of neglect, but of a deliberate policy of protracted "under-development", pursued by the colonial government for the express purpose of sustaining in the North a reservoir of labour'.¹² Indeed, works by N.J.K. Brukum,¹³ Nii-K. Plange¹⁴ and R. B. Benning¹⁵

¹¹ Destombes, J., 'From long-term patterns of seasonal hunger to changing experiences in everyday poverty: Northern Ghana c. 1930-2000', *Journal of African History*, 47: 2(2006), 189.

¹² Lentz, C., *Ethnicity and the making of history in Northern Ghana*, Edinburgh, 2006, 146.

¹³ Brukum, N.J.K., 'Studied neglect or lack of resources? The socio-economic underdevelopment of Northern Ghana under British colonial rule', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana (New Series)*, 2(1998), 117-31.

sought to apportion blame for the north's lack of development not to a lack of natural resources but to the colonial administration, and later, to southern-dominated governments. Ironically, there is a more or less straight line between such works and sentiments expressed by many early northern colonial administrators, especially those who had held northern posts before 1930. This thematic trajectory emphasised the impact on northern societies of north-to-south labour migration, especially to the mines, and the policies that encouraged it, particularly the decision not to build a railway. Interestingly, migration to the cocoa sector, which in terms of pure numbers was probably a larger and more sustained catchment of northern labour, has been less frequently incorporated into the 'underdevelopment' theme. There are some obvious reasons for this imbalance. The centralised nature of gold mining in terms of labour and labour recruitment makes it an easier study than, for instance, the cocoa sector. Sutton notes of the cocoa sector: 'Labour ... has come in ones and twos to work on farms of several acres ... farmers probably employed more labour than the mines and other European enterprises, although because it was scattered it was less obvious a group than the concentrated labour force at the mines'.¹⁶ But there was certainly also something less-coercive about the migration to cocoa farms than the migration to the mines. The case that this kind of migration (not directly coercive, and less centralised) made for the active 'underdevelopment' or 'studied neglect' of the Northern Territories was weaker than those where the emphasis lay on a centralised policy of labour recruitment, such as for the gold mines. Gold mines as a labour pool were legitimated as an object of enquiry also by what Lentz and Erlmann called the 'workerist tendency': Studies were inclined to focus on 'those aspects of African labour, such as miners ... that best seem to illustrate such a

¹⁴ Nii-K. Plange, "'Opportunity coast' and labour migration: A misinterpretation of proletarianisation in Northern Ghana', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 17: 4 (Dec. 1979), 655-76 and 'Under-development in Northern Ghana: natural causes or colonial capitalism?', *Review of African Political Economy*, 4: 15-16 (1979), 4-14.

¹⁵ Benning, R.B., 'Colonial development policy in Northern Ghana, 1898-1950', *Bulletin of the Ghana Geographical Association*, 17(1975), 65-79.

¹⁶ Sutton, I., 'Colonial agricultural policy: The non-development of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 22: 4(1989), 482-3.

concept of an African working class'.¹⁷ In other words, in the gold mines in Tarkwa and Obuasi, leftist northern and southern historians seemed to find common ground and could engage in discussion about the development of the Ghanaian nation-state, which transcended regional histories.

Adjacent to the theme of the labour migration, at the core of the 'underdevelopment' theme is a discussion about transportation – more specifically, the Northern Territories Railway. This debate has been dominated by the argument that the colonial administration decided to 'indefinitely postpone' the building of a Northern Territories railway in order to secure a labour supply for the priority industries in the south. The main trend of this argument is that by the administration's ensuring that transportation was prohibitively expensive in terms of northern farmers gaining access to southern markets, northerners were robbed of remunerative opportunities and were thus forced to head southwards to offer themselves as labour.¹⁸ This linkage between the decision not to pursue the construction of a Northern Territories Railway and purposeful underdevelopment in order to secure a labour supply for priority industries in the south, also has its roots in the colonial period. The District Commissioner for Eastern Dagomba wrote that,

The large number of labourers that go south each year will not in my opinion leave the Northern Territories as soon as they can obtain work and make money by growing food locally.¹⁹

Another Northern Administrator wrote that, 'The movement of labour would diminish as soon as the demand for exports provided local employment with a remunerative return.'²⁰ As transportation was generally regarded as the prohibiting

¹⁷ Lentz, C. & V. Erlmann, 'A working class in formation? Crisis and strategies of survival among Dagara mine workers in Ghana', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 29: 113(1989), 70.

¹⁸ Bening, R.B., 'Colonial' development policy in Northern Ghana, 1898-1950', *Bulletin of the Ghana Geographical Association*, 17, (1975), 65-79 & N.J.K. Brukum, 'Studied neglect or lack of resources? The socio-economic underdevelopment of Northern Ghana under British colonial rule', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana (New Series)*, 2(1998), 117-31.

¹⁹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56/1/238. 'District Commissioner for Eastern Dagomba, Government Railways, Reports on Railway from Kumasi to the Northern Territories'.

²⁰ Ibid.

factor, such statements referred directly to the impact on labour of the decision not to construct a railway to the Northern Territories.

Where is Tamale situated within the ‘underdevelopment discussion? Chapter 3 of this thesis argues that Tamale’s demographic growth spurts were positively correlated with surges in north-to-south labour migration, especially those related to migration to the cocoa farms. For instance, in the late-1920s, during the cocoa boom, the population growth of the Northern Territories, largely on account of out-migration, returned rapid year-on-year declines. Simultaneously, Tamale recorded its fastest demographic growth during the colonial period. Tamale’s demographic mechanism is thus negatively correlated to that of the Northern Territories more generally. The emphasis on ‘underdevelopment’ and the arguments which prop up this argument, coupled with the negative correlation between the drivers of Tamale’s urban growth and those of the Northern Territories more generally, has had the effect of writing Tamale out of the underdevelopment discourse, a dominant component of northern history.

Having outlined the major cross-cutting themes of northern Ghanaian historiography, we turn now to the four aforementioned frameworks within which this thesis situates Tamale’s urban transformation, namely (i) Dagbon political structures, (ii) colonial administration, especially in its influence over chieftaincy, (iii) north-south trade, and (iv) new developmentalism and the emergence of nationalist politics in northern Ghana. The following subsection discusses each of these historical narratives and how they relate to Tamale’s socio-political and urban development.

Frames of reference

The thesis locates Tamale within a number of frames of reference. The following subsection discusses each of these frames of reference.

Dagbon political structures

Tamale is located within the kingdom of Dagbon, perhaps politically the most powerful of the north's ethnic groups. Dagon covers an area of 15,467 square kilometers and is divided into eight administrative districts. Its accounts for more than half of the total population of northern Ghana. Dagbon was established by conquerors from the north prior to the fifteenth century.²¹ Dagomba folklore relates the origins of Dagbo to *Tohadzie*, the Red Hunter, who hailed from the area that is today northern Nigeria. According to this version of Dagbon's history, *Tohadzie* settled within the Mali Empire somewhere between the thirteenth and fifteenth century. The village in which *Tohadzie* settled relied on a river for water, a river which had been taken over by a wild bush cow. According to the legend, the bush cow was believed to be an evil spirit who killed anyone who ventured to the river to draw water. *Tohadzie* led the villagers to kill the wild beast, making the river accessible. *Tohadzie*, by defending the village against attacks from rival villages, gained the reputation of a capable warrior and leader. Through his various military victories, he was able to marry *Pagawugba*, a princess from the area. *Pagawugba* gave birth to a son, *Kpognambo*. After the death of *Tohadzie* and *Pagawugba*, *Kpognambo* travelled westwards from the Mali Empire to *Biun* in *Fadan Grumah*, where he became chief. *Kpognambo* ruled the kingdom of *Biun* until his death. *Kpognambo* married two women: *Sihisabiga* and *Suhuyini*. *Suhuyini* gave birth to *Gbewaah*, and *Sihisabiga* gave birth to *Malgimsim*, *Nyelgili*, and *Namzisheli*. After the death of *Kpognambo*, there was constant war between his sons for the chieftainship of *Biun*. In response, *Gbewaah* and his followers migrated to *Pusiga*. *Naa Gbewaah* established the kingdom of Greater Dagbon, which he ruled until his death. Of the other sons of *Kpognambo*, *Nyelgili* founded the chieftainship of *Nangodi*, and *Namzisheli* founded the chieftainship of *Tongo*. After the death of *Naa Gbewaah*, there was once again a power struggle among his sons, which led finally to the break-up of the Greater Dagbon kingdom. *Tohagu* founded the Mamprussi

²¹ MacGaffey, W., 'Death of a king, death of a kingdom? Social pluralism and succession to high office in Dagbon, Northern Ghana', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 44: 1(2006), 79-99.

Kingdom, *Mantambo* the *Nanun* Kingdom, and *Sitobu* the modern Dagbon Kingdom. With superior military organisation, sons and grandsons of *Sitobu* expanded the modern Dagbon kingdom, destroying existing hierarchies and installing their own kin as chiefs. In time, Yendi, a former Konkomba settlement called *Chare*,²² was established as the seat of the paramount of the modern Dagomba kingdom, and the paramount was entitled the Ya Na.

Contemporary references to Dagbon political structures point to the political crisis which reached its zenith with the murder of the Ya Na Andani II in March 2002. The crisis itself however predates the formation of modern Ghana. In the period 1824-1849 the primogenital tradition of unilateral family succession to the Ya-Na Skin was changed to an alternation of succession between the Abudu and Andani families.²³ These family lineages are referred to as ‘gates. This ‘alteration system’ was introduced to incorporate the male descendants of Ya Na Yakubu I’s two wives.²⁴ Ya Na Yakubu I’s two sons, Princes Abudu and Andani, rebelled against their father. The princes prevailed in the war but spared the life of their father and allowed him to remain Ya Na until his death. Princes Abudu and Andani upon their victory seized and ascended the royal skin, or kingship, of Mion and Savulgu skins, respectively. After the death of Ya Na Yakubu I, the kingmakers of Dagbon decided on Mion Lana, Prince Abudu, as the successor to Ya Na. The system of alteration between gates was complicated by polygamy, and complicated succession protocols, and forms the root cause of the current Dagbon crisis. The system was further complicated by a number of colonial interventions. The relevancy of Dagbon’s ‘gates’ to Tamale is discussed in Chapter 7.

Tamale is located about 95 km to the west of Yendi. There are many versions of this tale. Although Tamale possesses a number of Dagomba local shrines, Ta’ha, whose earth priest is the *Bugulana*, is perhaps the only one of Tamale’s traditional assets

²² Staniland, *Lions*, 5.

²³ West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI), ‘Governance and security in Ghana: The Dagbon chieftaincy crisis’, 2011, 10.

<http://www.wacsi.org/images/public2/b32n865uDagbon%20Crisis%20Report%20WACSI.pdf> Accessed 02-10-2011.

²⁴ Ibid.

that relates to Dagbon more broadly. A.W. Cardinall, who became District Commissioner (DC) for Yendi in 1917 and later Superintendent for Education, notes that the Ta'ha was apparently visited not only by local people 'but by Dagomba from all over the country'.²⁵ But generally speaking, drummers tend to relate Tamale to the larger Dagbon history only if or when prompted, and the ways in which Tamale's political structures may be incorporated into Dagbon are often unconvincing. Put bluntly, despite Tamale's current significance, its role in Dagbon political history is not particularly prominent.

The same is true for Dagomba economic history. In most traditional historiographies, it is of course very difficult to separate the distribution of political authority and the distribution of economic activity. In terms of northern Ghana, this relates especially to trade routes.

According to Ferguson and Wilks, in the century prior to the start of the Asante Wars in 1821, the Dagbon political structure was well developed and relatively robust.²⁶ However, the defeat of Asante in 1874 had implications far beyond Asante itself. Since Asante had defeated Dagbon in 1744/5, Dagbon had served as peripheral of Greater Asante. For Kumasi, because Yendi lay on an important trade route between Salaga and Hausaland, political stability in Yendi was a priority for Asante royal elites. As a result, in the late eighteenth century the Ya Na's armies were modernised with the assistance of the Asante. *Kambonse*, Asante musketeers, were included in the Ya Na's army for the first time. The relationship between Asante and the Yendi certainly strengthened and centralized the authority of the Ya Na. The centripetal effect that Asante domination had on Dagbon political structures had a cost: Dagbon paid (with some resentment) an annual fee to the Asantehene in the form of slaves. When the British first launched attacks on the Asante in the 1820s and 1830s, the Gonja, who like Dagbon paid an annual fee to the Asantehene in recognition of his authority, revolted, killing a number of Asante officials in

²⁵ Cardinall, A.W., *Tales in Togoland*. Oxford: University Press, 1931, 68.

²⁶ Ferguson, P. & I. Wilks, 'Chiefs constitutions and the British in Northern Ghana'. In: Crowder, M. & O. Ikime, eds, *West African chiefs: Their changing role under colonial rule and independence*. New York, 1970.

Salaga. The result was that Asante royalty redirected trade away from Salaga, through Kintampo. Wilks notes:

The early nineteenth century Ashanti, then in command of almost all of what is now Ghana and the eastern Ivory Coast, deliberately re-routed its trade away from the north-west and to the north-east, through Salaga, Yendi, and Sansanne-Mango to the Bussa crossing of the Niger.²⁷

Both Gonja and Dagbon political centres suffered dramatically as a result of being starved of Asante trade. Dagbon central authority declined dramatically after the fall of Asante, either because Yendi's commercial significance severely declined, or because without the support of Asante, Dagbon political structures lost much of their strength. Ferguson and Wilks note that, '(t)he collapse of Ashanti control over northern Ghana appears to have presaged a period of considerable chaos in Dagbon'.²⁸ In the period after the final defeat of the Asante between 1874 and the arrival of the British at around the turn of century, Yendi lost much of its authority over much of Dagbon.

In contrast to Yendi, Tamale's position in the Asante trade was not prominent. K. B. Dickson states that Tamale lay on a major trade route.²⁹ MaGaffey notes that 'a map of the north in 1887 showed Tamale market as the destination of cattle trails from Kumbungu, Savelugu and Daboya'.³⁰ The pre-European commercial importance of Tamale must be related, however, to the size of its population (1,435), which suggests that Tamale's centrality in terms of trade may be overstated. Paul Lovejoy has noted three north-south trade routes, none of which pass through Tamale.³¹ Furthermore, a number of maps of the north produced around the turn of the twentieth century do not include Tamale (see Map 1.2). Thus, not only did Tamale

²⁷ Wilks, I., 'The Northern factor in Ashanti history: Begho and the Mande', *Journal of African History*, 2: 1(1961), 340-1.

²⁸ Ferguson, P. & I. Wilks, Chiefs, 'constitutions and the British in Northern Ghana'. In: Crowder, M. & O. Ikime, eds, *West African chiefs: Their changing status under colonial rule and independence*. New York, 1970, 343.

²⁹ Dickson, K.B., *A Historical geography of Ghana*. Cambridge University Press, UK., 1969, 264

³⁰ MacGaffey, W., 'A history of Tamale, 1907-1957 and beyond', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana, New Series*, No. 10 (2006-7), 121.

³¹ Lovejoy, P.E., 'Polanyi's "Ports of Trade"', *Salaga and Kano in the Nineteenth Century*, *Journal of African Studies*, 16: 2(1982), 245-77

lack traditional political status before the arrival of the British colonial administration in 1907; it was also not a significant economic focal point in terms of Dagbon's political and economic systems.

Tamale thus entered the colonial period without any real significance in terms of Dagbon more generally. It was, indeed, colonialism itself that gave Tamale its significance, even if it did so reluctantly. That being said, that Tamale was not a significant Dagbon centre did not mean that it was unaffected by changes taking place, also on account of colonialism, within broader Dagbon traditional structures. As a result, Dagbon's political and economic structures form the first frame of reference for this thesis.

Colonial chieftainship and its implications for Tamale

The colonial annexation of the Asante Hinterland began slowly after the defeat of Asante in 1874. Very little was known about Dagbon before about 1880. Some Europeans had created accounts based on reports from local travellers. Ludwig Ferdinand Romer, who based his account of Dagbon on Ga informants from Accra who had travelled to the north, was the first to describe Dagbon. Romer himself had never been to Asante, never mind its 'hinterland'.³² Later, Bowditch reported on Dagbon, based on information from Muslims resident in Kumasi. In 1881 Lonsdale visited Yendi and was perhaps the first European to report on Dagbon, having actually been there.³³

Before long, a 'scramble' between German, French, and British interests threatened to erupt, putting increasing pressure on each of the European powers to stake their claim. But competition from other European powers was not the only threat faced by Britain in the annexation of the Asante Hinterland. In fact, the British were fundamentally faced with *three* threats in annexing the Asante Hinterland. The first was the threat from outside powers, namely from competing European powers and

³² Weiss, H., 'European images of Islam in the Northern hinterlands of the Gold Coast through the Early colonial period', *Sudanic Africa*, 12(2001), 95.

³³ Ferguson, P. & I. Wilks Chiefs, 'Constitutions and the British in Northern Ghana'. In: Crowder, M. & O. Ikime, eds, *West African Chiefs: Their changing status under colonial rule and independence*, (New York, 1970), 343.

from forces of the *Mandingo* warrior, *Samory*, which were invading the region. Second was the threat from local actors assimilated to the invasions of *Samory*, such as *Babatu*, a Songhai horseman. Third, as Jack Goody puts it, ‘there were struggles between ... the tribal peoples, continual eruptions of violence in attempts to settle scores by feud or by threat of feud.’³⁴

In terms of threats from European powers, the British feared that if French or German interests came to occupy the Asante Hinterland, the Gold Coast would be dependent on those European powers for important components of its food supply, perhaps most notably meat, which was supplied primarily by long-haul trades from the Niger Bend.³⁵ Martin Staniland notes that the Northern Territories was annexed by the British ‘... not because of any intrinsic value they possessed, but because it was strategically undesirable to let the French or the Germans take them ...’.³⁶ From 1874, after the defeat of Asante, British, French, and German explorers increasingly began to map the area north of Asante, threatening transit trade down to the British-controlled coast.³⁷ The British sent Gouldsbury north in 1876, and in 1892 George Ekem Ferguson went north on behalf of the British colonial administration. In the same year as Gouldsbury’s expedition in 1876, M.J. Bonnat, a French trader, came up the Volta to Salaga, and in 1888 the French explorer Louis-Gustave Binger passed through Mamprussi, Karaga, Salaga, and Kintampo on his way from Bamako to the coast. The Germans were represented in 1886 by G.A. Krause, who travelled from Accra to Ouagadougou, and in 1888 Curt von François visited Yendi and Gambaga. The increased competition for influence in the West African savannah led to the establishment of a Neutral Zone in 1888, in which it was agreed that no European authorities would initiate the signing of trade treaties with chiefs. Salaga, Yendi, and Tamale all lay within the Neutral Zone. In 1895, Britain and Germany tried, but failed, to agree on a solution by which Yendi would fall

³⁴ Goody, J., ‘Establishing control: Violence along the Black Volta at the beginning of colonial rule’, *Cahiers d’Etudes Africaines*, 38: 150/152(1998), 227-8.

³⁵ This proved indeed to be the case during WWII, when, on coming to power, the Vichy government closed the Northern border, creating a crisis in the livestock sector.

³⁶ Staniland, *Lions*, 39.

³⁷ Agbodeka, F., *African politics and British policy in the Gold Coast, 1868-1900: A study in the forms and force of protest*. Northwestern University Press, US, 1971, 165.

under German jurisdiction and Salaga under British administration. A year later in 1896, a German explorer, von Carnap-Quernheimb, passed directly across the Neutral Zone, inciting protests from London and increasing the instability of the Neutral Zone. In that same year, the Neutral Zone was abandoned.³⁸

Another serious threat to British domination of the Asante Hinterland were the forces of Samory, the Mandingo warrior. In September 1895, Samory's forces attacked Wa, Sankana (in Dagarti), and Bole (Gonja). What was of concern to the British colonial administration was not only the destruction and instability which Samory and his forces were causing in large swaths of the Asante Hinterland, but also the possibility of Samory linking up with either French or German troops.³⁹ Finally, after a rather long run-up, the occupation of the area by German, French, and British interests was effectively settled in a rush during the final days of 1896. The occupation of the Asante Hinterland has been described by Martin Staniland:

The partition finally took place in a rush at the end of 1896, with British, French, and German expeditions converging on the neutral zone in the last weeks of December. The German force, under Grunner and von Massow, moved up from Kete-Kratchi, defeated the Dagomba at Adibo, and then went on to occupy Sansanne-Mango before a French mission could get there. The French arrived too late, on Christmas Day. But when a German detachment moved on Gambaga, they in turn found that a British expedition under Captain Stewart had arrived before them. The French withdrew to the east, while Stewart entertained the German commander over Christmas.⁴⁰

The borders between French, German, and British troops stabilized relatively quickly. In 1902 the Anglo-German border was finally formalised.⁴¹ It was to run along the Daka River, to the ninth parallel, and thereafter to pass northwards through

³⁸ Staniland, *Lions*, 10.

³⁹ Goody, J., 'Establishing control: Violence along the Black Volta at the beginning of colonial rule', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 38: 150/152(1998), 227-8.

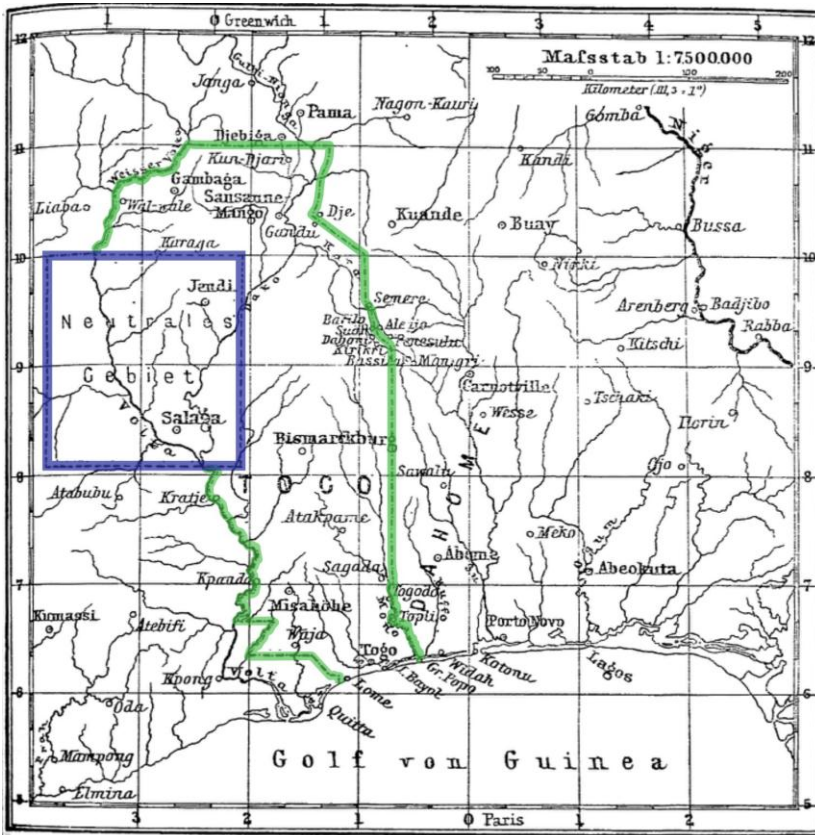
⁴⁰ Staniland, *Lions*, 10.

⁴¹ In 1902 the Northern Territories order in council came into effect, marking the formal integration of the Northern Territories into the British Empire.

a point twenty kilometres west of the centre of Yendi.⁴² Four years previously, in 1898, Samory had been captured by the French administration, further stabilising the area.

The Anglo-German border bisected Dagbon such that Yendi, the seat of the Ya Na, the paramount chief of Dagbon, fell within German territory, whilst second-tier chiefs of Mion, Karaga, and Savelugu all fell under British jurisdiction.

1.2. German Togoland and its protectorates, 1897 (showing 'Yendi')



Source: Geographischer Monatsbericht. In: Dr. A. Petermann's Mitteilungen aus Justus Perthes Geographischer Anstalt (Gotha), 43 (11), 1897, p.270f.

⁴² PRO, Kew, CO 879/54/7 (Correspondence on Anglo-German Boundary 1896-195).

The splitting of Dagbon into Western (British) and Eastern (German) components was not considered especially problematic by the colonial administration. Even the Ya Na himself could not convince the British to take an interest in negotiating the position of the Anglo-German border such that Yendi would remain united with Dagbon. The Ya Na had written to the British authorities as early as 1898 stating that, ‘I am King of Yendi ... I want to be English not German ... I am king of Yendi for the English not the Germans. I trust in God and the English’.⁴³ Although archival sources suggest a number of sensitivities in terms of the location of the border, the fact that Yendi was excluded from British Dagbon does not appear to be amongst them. Colonel Morris, a veteran of northern military operations, declared famously to an assembly of Dagomba chiefs that, ‘... since the Ya-Na was now in German Territory, he (Colonel Morris) and not the Ya-Na was henceforth their Head Chief’.⁴⁴ The division of Dagbon, such that the authority of the Ya Na was excluded from much of Dagbon, including that part containing Tamale, created a significant political upheaval also in British Dagbon. Various chiefs in Western Dagbon took advantage of the Ya Na’s absence and advanced their chiefdoms. Tamale, along with Mion, Karaga, and Savelugu, found itself on the British side of the Anglo-German border, isolated from the authority of Yendi, and it is to this that we now turn.

For Tamale, the re-unification of Dagbon in 1922 was as significant as its division between British and German jurisdictions in 1902. Indeed, the reunification of Dagbon and the re-introduction of the Ya Na at the apex of Dagbon authority largely shaped Tamale’s internal politics. During the period in which Dagbon was divided, the Dakpema, which translates as ‘head of the market’, had established himself as the chief of Tamale.⁴⁵ He managed to do so by gaining the sanction of the colonial administration. In 1919, following the end of World War I (WWI), when the Anglo-German border was on the verge of collapse, the colonial administration began talks

⁴³ Public Records Office (PRO), Kew, CO. 879/52, African (West) 549, p. 110: Dispatch by Capt Kenny-Herbert, encl., Translation of letter from Ya Na, Jan. 6th, 1898.

⁴⁴ Staniland, *Lions*, 57, quoting Major Morris.

⁴⁵ There are a number of versions of the origins of Dakpema, which are discussed in Chapter 3.

with the Ya Na to negotiate his return to the British Dagbon political fold. One of his first demands was that, on the grounds that the Dakpema was not the legitimate chief of Tamale, the Dakpema be replaced by the 'rightful' chief of Tamale, the Gulkpe-Na. His claim was that at the moment at which the Anglo-German boundary was established, the Gulkpe-Na was visiting Yendi and was ordered to remain there. In that time, the Dakpema presented himself as the chief of Tamale and, being uncontested, received the backing of the colonial administration. The colonial administration agreed that upon the death of the Dakpema, his successor would receive reduced powers, and the Gulkpe-Na would be reinstated as the chief of Gulkpeagu. In 1930, when the Dakpema suffered a stroke, the colonial administration moved to reinstate the Gulkpe-Na in Tamale. It is hardly surprising that those within the Dakpema's house sought to prevent the reintroduction of the Gulkpe-Na. The British operation was deemed a success, and given the introduction of indirect rule around the same period, deemed utterly necessary for the successful administration of Tamale. However, the result was a traditional system in Tamale continually plagued by confusion over the authority and legitimacy of the Gulkpe-Na and the Dakpema. Whilst the Gulkpe-Na had the authority of Yendi and the colonial administration behind him, the Dakpema had strong local support. This tension was a hallmark of Tamale's local politics both during the colonial period and beyond.

Chieftaincy was central in all forms of colonial administration, both before and after indirect rule, and, as Grischow notes, also under the new developmentalism (see Chapter 6). Instructions given to officers in charge of northern districts in 1899 noted that '... officers will act through the native chiefs as far as possible ...'.⁴⁶ In 1906, Acting Governor H. Bryan echoed existing northern administrative sentiments when he wrote to the Secretary of State that '(t)he policy of supporting and emphasising the position of the paramount native chiefs while, at the same time, making them realise their responsibility, appears to me to be the only practicable

⁴⁶ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56/1/35. 'Instructions to Officers in Charge of Districts re Administration of the Northern Territories, March, 1899.

system of administering this country'.⁴⁷ Furthermore, in the annual report for 1906, it was noted that moving the headquarters to Tamale was favourable as it lay within Dagbon, and 'Dagomba country is the most advanced from a civilised point of view in the whole protectorate'.⁴⁸ The perceived strength and functioning of organisation of the Dagomba traditional political system fed into the use of chiefs as auxiliaries of colonial administration. It was felt that in such instances where chiefs had managed to retain some semblance of pre-European significance, they served as a more effective colonial tool, in contrast to those chiefs amongst peoples where traditional systems had lost much of their legitimacy. This also allowed for a 'thinner' British administration. Colonial chieftaincy thus provides the second important frame of reference for this thesis. Colonial chieftaincy was not static and certainly changed through the colonial period.

Commerce and Tamale

The British annexed the Asante Hinterland largely for the purposes of securing north-south trade to and from the British-controlled coast. Trade was thus central to colonial policy in the north even prior to the formal annexation of the 'Asante Hinterland'. George Ekem Ferguson, an explorer from the coastal town of Anomabo, was sent to the north by the British in 1892 with a mandate to negotiate 'treaties of friendship and freedom of trade' between the Crown and the leaders of indigenous polities'.⁴⁹ Chalfin notes that Ferguson's 'sights were set on a central object: The unobstructed movement of goods in and out of the savannah zone'.⁵⁰ The Asante Hinterland was not believed to possess any significant economic potential beyond the trade that passed through it. Staniland notes that '... the NT had very few of the assets which had made colonialism elsewhere such an uplifting and profitable enterprise'.⁵¹ This is supported also by Sutton, who notes that '... the Northern Territories was acquired belatedly, and added almost as an afterthought to

⁴⁷ PRO, Kew, CO 98/14 Letter by Ag Governor Bryan to Secretary of State, 13th July, 1906.

⁴⁸ PRO, Kew, CO 96/16. (Report on the Transport Department for the Year 1906).

⁴⁹ Chalfin, B., *Shea butter republic: State power, global markets, and the making of an indigenous commodity*. Routledge, 2004, 96.

⁵⁰ Chalfin, *Shea*, 96.

⁵¹ Staniland, *Lions*, 39.

the Gold Coast Colony'.⁵² But the Asante Hinterland was annexed by the British colonial administration owing to the transit trade which passed through it en route to and from the coast. Brenda Chalfin notes that the colonial administration harboured ambitions to establish a 'massive trade corridor where Britain was the sole imperial power'.⁵³ The corridor was to run several hundred miles north from the boundary of the Gold Coast into Mossi territory and east through the jurisdiction of the Niger Company.⁵⁴ The strongest statement in this direction was the abolishment of the caravan tax in 1908. The southern administration felt that the tax on caravans passing north-south was hindering the volume of trade down to the coast. As a result of the abolishment of the caravan tax, the northern colonial administration was left without any revenue, which was believed, especially by southern administrators, to be inconsequential: Revenue for development was not important as long as there was nothing to develop.

Tamale's demographic and economic prominence may be reduced to two developments. The first was the decision by the colonial administration to establish a colonial headquarters at Tamale, and the second was the uptake of motorised transportation by local and 'Syrian'⁵⁵ entrepreneurs, following the completion of the Great North Road in 1920. The argument is not so much if one or both of these developments provided the catalyst for Tamale's demographic growth and economic centrality, but how the two related to one another in order to produce Tamale's urban growth. The demographic pull that the administrative headquarters alone provided was limited. Monies to build the new headquarters pulled some labour towards Tamale. The chiefs were encouraged to provide labour for the construction of the new headquarters at Tamale, in return for gifts proportionate to the amount of labour provided. The cost of building the headquarters was estimated at £8,935, but

⁵² Sutton, I. 'Colonial agricultural policy: The non-development of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 22: 4(1989), 637.

⁵³ Chalfin, *Shea*, 95.

⁵⁴ Chalfin, *Shea*, 95.

⁵⁵ 'Syrian' and 'Lebanese' are used interchangeably in the colonial records.

two years later the cost had risen to £15,000.⁵⁶ The demographic impact of this financial focus was significant but not defining. Tamale grew from 1,435 residents in 1907 to 3,901 in 1921. Although this growth is certainly significant, Tamale did not grow much faster than settlements such as Savelugu. In 1921, Navrongo, where a provincial and headquarters was based, had a population of 14,798, whilst Bawku also had a much larger population than Tamale in 1921, with 7,710 residents.⁵⁷ However, that the colonial headquarters were built in Tamale meant that in 1920, the Great North Road was built between Kumasi and Tamale and not elsewhere in the Northern Territories. From the moment the Great North Road was completed, it was the local commercial energies that prompted Tamale's economic and demographic growth.

The introduction of motorised transportation provided a huge impetus for trade and traffic between Tamale and Kumasi. As Kumasi was linked by rail to the coast, northern producers were able to access new demands at the coast. Furthermore, the road, being the only motorable road that connected the north and the south, monopolised the route through Tamale, and as a result, Tamale flourished. The increase in trade passing through Tamale on account of the adoption of the lorry created new, non-agrarian remunerative opportunities in the Northern Territories. The number of petty traders in Tamale boomed, as also did markets in car parts, auto-related services, oil, and petrol. The increase in lorry traffic is an indication of the increase in trade and human traffic which passed through Tamale. In 1927, only seven years after the Great North Road was completed, 4,420 lorries crossed the Volta River at Yeji in both directions, 2,462 of them with trailers.⁵⁸ Tamale's population grew correspondingly. In 1921 Tamale had a little under 4,000 residents, not significantly bigger than several other northern settlements. In 1931, eleven years after the Great North Road had been completed, Tamale's population was 12,901.⁵⁹ During this period, Tamale grew faster than both Kumasi and Accra. By 1948, Tamale's population had grown to 16,055, and in 1960 it was around

⁵⁶ MacGaffey, 'History', 110.

⁵⁷ The Gold Coast Handbook, 1928.

⁵⁸ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56/1/310 (Yeji Ferry Trade Statistics).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

48,000.⁶⁰ In economic terms, Tamale became increasingly connected to southern demands and supplies. Syrian traders set up stores, retailing consumer goods such as sugar, soap, bicycle tyres, and flour. In the 1930s and 1940s large foreign-owned trading firms began to take interest in Tamale's markets. Yoruba traders settled in Tamale and bicycled United Africa Company (UAC) goods to rural markets.⁶¹ The amount of beer taken northwards increased from zero in 1925 to a little less than 1,400 cases in 1929.⁶² Livestock, especially sheep, goats, and chickens, were taken southwards on lorries, as also were agricultural surpluses such as shea butter, bundles of corn, and groundnuts.⁶³ These kinds of local economic activities were not perceived by the colonial administration to add value in the way an export crop would. As a result, they were relatively ignored, at least until after 1945.

Both literally and figuratively, Tamale was linked to its Great North Road. Tamale's population grew as trade volumes grew, and Tamale's growth declined when, as during World War II (WWII), the volume of motorised trade declined. This statement must be understood, however, in the context of the Northern Railway which was never built. The railway (the lack thereof) in turn was (and still is) the ultimate symbol of northern underdevelopment at the south. It coloured colonial sentiment, and the motorised transport driving Tamale's urban expansion was never regarded as a successful colonial economy. Despite the pervasiveness of a sense of commercial failure, trade statistics kept at the ferry crossing at Yeji tell a much different story, a story in which Tamale's urban transformation is perhaps the protagonist. Motorised trade forms the bedrock of Tamale's demographic and economic growth.

“New Developmentalism” and the rise of party politics in Tamale.

The end of WWII saw a great change in the method and purpose of colonial administration. Indirect rule was replaced by local government structures in order to absorb African intelligentsia, who might be tempted to engage in growing anti-

⁶⁰ Population Census of Ghana 1960.

⁶¹ Eades, *Strangers*, 112.

⁶² PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56/1/310 (Yeji Ferry Trade Statistics).

⁶³ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56/1/310 (Yeji Ferry Trade Statistics).

colonial nationalist movements, into a local political structure in which they would work alongside chiefs. Furthermore, land planning and mechanisation replaced mixed farming. However, Grischow argues, in contrast to Cooper, that unlike the development ideology set forward by Chamberlain around the turn of twentieth century, the new developmentalism was intended to ensure large-scale economic development without decimating existing African social structures.⁶⁴ In this sense, the Northern Territories, on account of having large tracts of uncontested land, which in any case was vested in the Crown, and only a small African intelligentsia to absorb, was seen as an ideal playing field for the new developmentalism. This framework, however, wholly excluded Tamale, as Tamale's social fabric, largely on account of the resettlement of ex-servicemen in Tamale, was undergoing profound urban processes. The contradiction between the aims of the post-war new developmentalism and Tamale's urbanising process worked to further isolate Tamale from the north more generally, a major theme of this dissertation.

It was in this context that party politics entered the north. Nationalist politics came relatively late to the Northern Territories, and the inclusion of the north in the political forces which led finally to independence was not unproblematic. An important starting point for a discussion about nationalist politics in the Northern Territories is that the north's original inclusion in the state apparatus in the south was orchestrated by colonial intervention and conducted within the colonial vision. That meant primarily that chiefs and/or those aligned with chieftaincy were given the lead in integrating the north into nationalist politics. This was done through the creation in 1945 of the Northern Territories Council (NTC). Later, in 1953, in the run-up to the 1954 elections, the leadership of the NTC formed the Northern Peoples Party (NPP), to run as a northern interest group in the upcoming elections. The rivalry between a tradition-laden, conservative NPP and a southern dominated, progressive Convention People's Party (CPP) forms the most significant political dichotomy of the nationalist political narrative of the Northern Territories. Although other political actors feature in the narrative, such as the Muslim Association Party

⁶⁴ Grischow, J.D., *Shaping tradition: Civil society, community development in colonial Northern Ghana, 1899-1957*, African Social Studies Series, (Brill, 2006), 170.

(MAP), they broadly align to one or other side of the dichotomy. Although the staunchly conservative MAP won the Tamale constituency in 1954, in the 1956 election, the CPP recorded a resounding victory. The manner in which the CPP worked to win over Tamale's electorate, especially through (mis)use of the Tamale Urban Council, is an interesting feature of Chapter 7. Equally important for this thesis was the alignment of traditional actors in Tamale, such as the Gulkpe-Na and the Dakpema, especially in relation to the positioning of the Ya Na in Yendi, and how such alignments affected Tamale's internal socio-political dynamic. The introduction of party politics to Tamale not only shaped Tamale's socio-economic and socio-political fabric going into the post-colonial period; it also reveals Tamale's position within the Northern Territories more generally. It provides the fourth and final of the frames of reference in which this thesis situates Tamale's urban development.

Theoretical frameworks

There are a number of theoretical perspectives that need to be unpacked in this introductory chapter. The theoretical frameworks employed in this dissertation relate to why cities come to exist, how they are sustained, and how the forces which prompted a city's creation relate to the socio-economic and socio-political landscape within the city. Throughout the thesis, these theoretical perspectives are related to Tamale as a colonial city.

Economic considerations

How and why do cities created for and by colonial commercial aspirations thrive beyond the colonial period? The continued existence of cities is a theoretical question at the centre of a number of economic sub-disciplines, for instance New Economic Geography (NEG), launched by Paul Krugman in the 1990s. Although NEG is not customarily applied to the case of colonial cities, there is no reason why it should not be. Its arguments for the ongoing existence of individual cities, even in situations of changing political and/or economic conditions, are as relevant for colonial cities in the post-colonial context as they are for Chicago, London, or New York. The novelty of NEG is that whilst most theories preceding that of Krugman

suggest that the location of cities is a rational economic outcome, the NEG models suggest that urban development is rather characterized by path dependence, whereby historical accidents may have long-term cumulative consequences. In terms of Tamale, this encapsulates both its colonial underpinnings and its continued existence (expansion) during the post-colonial period.

NEG makes a strong argument for why cities grow. In short, market-size effects (such as economies of scale) make it desirable for firms to locate close to one another, which simultaneously has the effect of increasing wages, and thus pulling labour. Once the process of agglomeration has started, it continues because, up to a point, the larger the city, the more beneficial it is for firms to locate there (cumulative causation). However, after 'that point', it is no longer beneficial for firms to move to the city. This is determined by centrifugal forces, which include land rents and immobile factors, such as natural resources and congestion. For instance, once land rents and/or congestion outweigh the benefits of market-size effects, firms will no longer locate to that agglomeration. As in Von Thunen's work, transportation is another fundamental component of the NEG models. High transport costs result in less trade. In such instances, regions⁶⁵ will be isolated and differ little from each other. Workers and firms will be evenly divided across regions. However, a drop in transport costs changes the distribution of both firms and workers across regions.⁶⁶ Transportation is thus a critical variable of city growth within the NEG models. Despite its strong colonial origins, Tamale's existence beyond the colonial period, as is the case with most colonial cities, is theoretically explained in this way.

NEG is, however, subjected persistently to two primary criticisms. The first is that it lacks the tools to cater effectively for empirical application of its models.⁶⁷ The second persistent criticism, perhaps more relevant to this thesis, is that although NEG models may well explain why firms locate to existing cities, the models have

⁶⁵ The word 'region' refers to any spatial entity – communities, localities, towns, cities, conurbations, etc.

⁶⁶ Krugman, P., 'What's new about the new economic geography?', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 14: 2(1998), 7-17.

⁶⁷ Martin, R., 'The new geographical turn in economics: Some critical reflections', *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 23(1999), 65-91.

far more difficulty in explaining why agglomerations come to exist in the first place. Krugman's rebuttal to this accusation is simply to state that if we are to understand the location of cities, 'history matters'. Krugman argues that the initial spark of urban growth is 'an accident of history'.⁶⁸ Tamale's emergence as a truly urban space is the result of such an accident of history. What is the accident of history that created Tamale, and what are the implications for Tamale of the nature of that accident of history? Although this has been touched on previously, it deserves more attention.

Urbanising the Gold Coast

Another important aspect of agglomeration is how cities emerge in relation to one another. In understanding Tamale's urban formation, it is thus useful to understand a little about the formation of other urban spaces in the Gold Coast, and how the emergence of such cities relate to Tamale's own historical narrative. What follows is a brief discussion of the urbanisation of Ghana. This overview is then linked to Tamale's urban emergence.

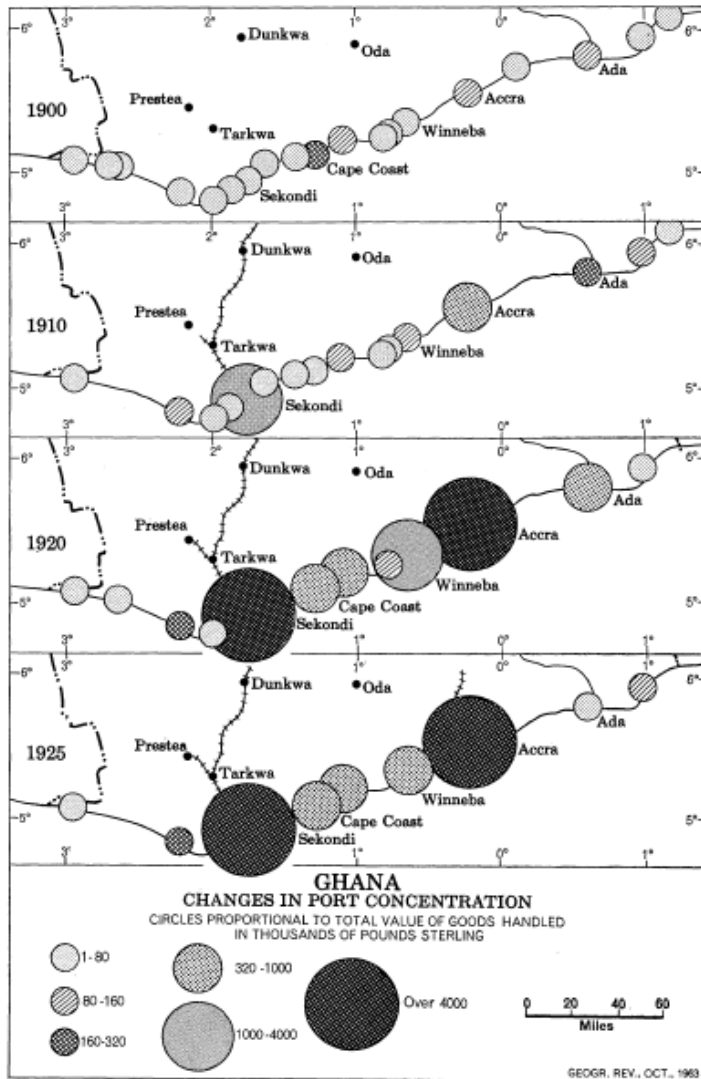
Today Ghana possesses perhaps four genuine urban centres (Accra, Kumasi, Tamale, and Sekondi-Takoradi). Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi both possess ports. The 'historical accident'⁶⁹ which produced each of these cities is different. Accra was first inhabited by the Ga, who moved there during the fifteenth century. The Ga evolved economically as fisherman, making use of their location on the coast. That alone, however, does not explain the emergence of Accra as the primate city it is today. The figure below is taken from Taafe, E., Morrill, R. & P. Gould, 'Transport Expansion in Underdeveloped Countries: A Comparative Analysis'. It shows the total value of goods handled at Gold Coast ports for the period 1900-25. The figure reveals that in 1900, economic activity was distributed fairly evenly along the length of the coast of the Gold Coast. The only variation in concentration is at Cape

⁶⁸ This reference to 'historical accidents' refers to chance locational circumstances.

⁶⁹ This term is particularly popular with economic geographers in explaining why an agglomeration takes off in the first place: An accident of history. Paul Krugman noted in terms of spatial agglomeration that 'history matters'. It refers usually to location advantages, such as along rivers, or on the coast, or closer to trading partners than other potential sites for such agglomeration.

Coast. In 1877 Accra replaced Cape Coast as the capital of the Gold Coast colony largely because Accra had a drier climate than Cape Coast and was not plagued by tsetse fly. After 1877 there was an influx of Europeans as administrative functions moved to Accra. In 1905 the motorcar was introduced to the Gold Coast. Lorry chassis were imported and assembled in the Gold Coast, and during the 1920s, the cocoa sector started to blossom. Increasingly, cocoa traders brought goods to the Accra port by lorry. Although such developments significantly increased Accra's demographic, it was the construction of a railway between Accra and Kumasi in 1923 which really sparked Accra's rapid growth in economic activity and, subsequently, population size.

1.3. Changes in port concentration, Gold Coast, 1900-1925



Source: Taafe, E., R. Morrill., & P. Gould, 'Transport expansion in underdeveloped countries: A comparative analysis' in the American geographical society Vol. 53, No. 4 (Oct., 1963), pp. 503-529

Construction on the Kumasi-Accra railway began in 1908 and was completed in 1923. A year later in 1924, cocoa was Ghana's largest export and the Accra port was the primary focus of the cocoa industry. In short, the 'accident of history' which

created Accra was the interaction between possessing a port, on the one hand, and European commercialism (specifically the demand for cocoa), on the other. Accra's harbour is no longer competitive, with harbours at Tema and Sekondi-Takoradi both physically better-endowed than that of Accra. However, in line with contemporary economic geography, Accra's current and continued urban dominance is primarily due its size (market-size effects). Its initial demographic advantage (sparked by the number of activities centred primarily on Accra's port) has been maintained, in the same way that Chicago has continued to exist as a urban heavyweight long after its role as a port between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River had diminished on account of technological innovation in the way of transportation.⁷⁰

Like Accra, Sekondi-Takoradi is also a coastal city possessing a port.⁷¹ Although the settlement stemmed from seventeenth century Dutch, Swedish, and English forts, its urban character has more contemporary origins. The tract of land between Sekondi-Takoradi and Kumasi is Ghana's most lucrative in terms natural resource endowment. Ghana's gold deposits are concentrated in this area. In 1903 a railway was built to Kumasi, directly north of Sekondi-Takoradi, for the purpose of transporting gold to the port before being shipped to Europe. Until recently, however, Sekondi-Takoradi's prominence has been on the decline. The railway between Sekondi-Takoradi and Kumasi has since stopped working, owing largely to disrepair and poor maintenance, and its distance from Accra (coupled with high transportation costs) meant that Sekondi-Takoradi lost much of its economic *raison d'être* in the period after Independence. Sekondi-Takoradi's fortune has, however, changed in recent years. The discovery of oil off Ghana's coast, especially in the Western Region, looks set to re-establish the importance of Sekondi-Takoradi. In line with spatial economic models, because Sekondi-Takoradi (once again) straddles both a location near to natural resources (oil reserves) on the one hand, and a

⁷⁰ Polèse, M.. *The wealth and poverty of regions*. Chicago, 2009, 11-12.

⁷¹ Initially Sekondi & Takoradi were two separate settlements, very near to each other. The port was at Sekondi, and the railway to Kumasi completed in 1903 ran from Sekondi. In 1928, a deepwater harbour was built at Takoradi. During the 1940s, the two cities fused, to become Sekondi-Takoradi. Today it is referred to primarily as Takoradi.

location near to a deepwater harbour on the other, it will, almost without question, emerge as one of Ghana's most prominent cities in the years to come.

Kumasi is, of course, not a port city. Its urban existence is explained by two inter-related circumstances: its proximity to gold deposits, and its location on a major pre-European trade artery from Begho through Tafo and Adansi.⁷² Gold, unlike the ports of Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi, was a commodity with economic value before the arrival of a European presence. Thus, Kumasi did not require Europeans, as the port in Accra did, in order for gold to create centripetal forces. It makes sense thus that the location of Kumasi is the political centre of a large and powerful *pre-European* kingdom, namely Asante. A centralised politic at Kumasi accelerated Kumasi's urban process as regional wealth was centred towards the apex of political hierarchy. Kumasi, unlike both Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi, has a genuine pre-European urban history because gold had a genuine pre-European value. That said, after the defeat of Ashanti in 1874, the building of two railway lines down to the coast, first to Sekondi-Takoradi (1903) and then to Accra (1923), and finally a motorable road northwards (1920), certainly contributed significantly to Kumasi's contemporary urban character.

In each of the cases above, there is a clear connection between physical and locational geography – 'an accident of history' and urbanity. Tamale's urbanisation is somewhat more obscure than Ghana's other urban centres. Tamale does not possess a seaport like Accra or Sekondi-Takoradi and is also not located near to any immovable natural resources such as gold, as in the case of Kumasi. There is, in fact, almost nothing noteworthy about the location of Tamale. What then is the 'accident of history' which created Tamale, a city with around 400,000 inhabitants today? The answer lies in the introduction of motorised transportation and, indirectly, in Tamale being selected as the centre of British administration in the Northern Territories (based on the mistaken idea that Tamale possessed a good water supply, itself an accident of history). In 1907 the British moved its

⁷² Wilks, I. A medieval trade-route from the Niger to the Gulf of Guinea', *Journal of African History*, 3: 1(1962), 337-41.

administrative headquarters from Gambaga to Tamale. That alone, however, was not enough to ignite urban growth, as transport costs were too high to create long-term spatial variations in economic activity. This is best illustrated by the example of the British Cotton Growers Association (BCGA), who built a ginnery in Tamale in 1908 but left the Northern Territories in 1911, citing ‘prohibitive transport costs’ as the reason why their cotton initiative in the Northern Territories failed. In 1920, 13 years after the opening of the administrative headquarters, Tamale’s population was less than 4,000, about the same size as other Northern settlements such as Salaga, Savelugu, Bawku, and Wa.⁷³ In April 1920, however, the Great North Road between Tamale and Kumasi was completed. Together, these two centripetal forces (transportation and administrative hegemony) ignited Tamale’s urban growth. The ‘accident of history’ which created Tamale was entirely man-made: it served as road head, and thus as transport hub (not unlike a sea-port), and as a centre of administration. In the first years after the completion of the Great North road, northern trade made its way to Tamale, to be loaded onto lorries and taken southwards, and conversely, south-to-north trade was lorried to Tamale, offloaded, and head-loaded to northern market systems. That Tamale served as a road-head for north-south trade explains why it emerged, as a result of the Great North Road, as the economic centre of the Northern Territories.

Patterns of urbanisation and the distribution of risk

It has been noted that the effect of transportation on Tamale’s urban development was instant. In 1920, the year in which the Great North Road was completed, Tamale’s population was approximately 3,900, not larger than many other northern settlements. Ten years later, once the introduction of the motorised transportation had gathered momentum, Tamale’s population was almost 13,000.⁷⁴ Innovations in transportation redistribute both economic activity and demographic agglomerations. In the case of the Gold Coast, we have seen how the construction of railways from Kumasi to Sekondi-Takoradi and Accra changed the concentration of economic activity at the coast. Transportation thus shapes the geographical patterns of a

⁷³ Population census of the Gold Coast and its protectorates 1921.

⁷⁴ Population census of the Gold Coast and its protectorates 1931.

national (colonial) economy. NEG models employ wage differentials to explain how this may work. But there are other ways in which we may model the impact of transportation innovations. Peter Gould, Edward Taafe, and Richard Morrill provide a good conceptual illustration of the impact of innovation in transportation through the employment of the concept of 'risk'. In their article, 'Transport Expansion in Underdeveloped Countries: A Comparative Analysis',⁷⁵ they employ a game theory model to create a hypothetical scenario of the impact of a road on cattle traders who operate in the area between the Niger Bend and Kumasi. The argument goes as follows: Cattle traders who drive cattle down on the hoof from Ouagadougou are faced with decisions about whether to sell their bullocks in Navrongo, Tamale, Prang, or Kumasi. Cattle fetch the highest prices at Kumasi and the lowest at Ouagadougou, owing to the distance the cattle have to travel from their origins in the Niger Bend. The trade-off is risk and works as follows: if the season turns out to be a dry one, many bullocks will not make the journey all the way to Kumasi, and so, despite lower prices, traders will be better off selling their bullocks closer to the place of origin, at for instance Ouagadougou, Navrongo, Tamale, or Prang. The drier the season, the more risk involved in travelling and the closer to Ouagadougou traders will sell their stock. The illustration provided by Taafe, Gould, and Morrill suggests that cattle traders are best off selling 53.4 per cent of their cattle at Ouagadougou and the rest (46.6 per cent) should be driven through Navrongo, Tamale, and Prang to the Kumasi market. The authors then suppose that a road is built between Tamale and Navrongo, so that cattle no longer need to be driven on the hoof between these two points and are instead transported by lorry from Navrongo to Tamale. They repeat the same analysis as above, this time with the inclusion of the new road. In this instance, cattle traders are best off if they sell 62.5 per cent of their bullocks at Tamale, 25 per cent at Prang, and the remaining 12.5 per cent at the Kumasi market.

⁷⁵ Taafe, E.J., R.L. Morrill & P.R. Gould, 'Transport expansion in underdeveloped countries: A comparative analysis', *The American Geographical Society*, 53: 4(1963), 503-29.

The model, although applied to the same region as this dissertation, takes as its example a different road. While it is concerned with the road between Tamale and Navrongo, this dissertation has as its starting point the construction of the Great North Road between Tamale and Kumasi. The Great North Road was the first motorable road to enter the Northern Territories and monopolized the north-south trade route through Tamale. There were no other motorable roads southwards, and the advantage of travelling by lorry was substantial (two days to Kumasi, instead of two weeks). The risk distribution model presented above is itself useful. The completion of the Great North Road had implications for the decision-making process of traders. The initial effect of the completion of the Great North Road meant that Tamale had come to be closer to Kumasi (in nominal terms). For the distribution of trade, this meant an increase in the economic incentives to reach Tamale from, for instance, the Niger Bend. By reaching Tamale, traders were suddenly also close to Kumasi, and only a further one-day journey from Accra, where the goods fetched higher prices, without huge increases in the risks involved in travelling. Viewing the completion of the Great North Road as changing risk distribution is conceptually useful. According to the model, the Great North Road brought trade to Tamale, trade which otherwise perhaps would not have come that far south or north.

Political considerations

Until now, all theoretical considerations relating to agglomeration have been economic. But cities are more than simply a dense population of firms of labour. A city is also a set of ideas. A city may receive cultures from its surrounding hinterland, digest, transform, and then transmit an urban version of those cultures. Rayfield notes, for instance, that cities along the West African coast became ‘... points from which Western culture traits were transmitted throughout West Africa.’⁷⁶ Politics is one such transmission. In other words, we may expect that cities, by and large, are spaces where not only economic activity is concentrated but also political power. There is much less theoretical modelling of such spatial

⁷⁶ Rayfield, J.R., ‘Theories of urbanization and the colonial city in West Africa’, *Journal of the International African Institute*, 44: 2(Apr. 1974), 181.

distributions. It is possible, however, to highlight a few political considerations in terms of the development of urban centres.

There exists a dynamic and constantly negotiated relationship between the distribution of economic activity and that of political power. This relationship between economic and political distributions is illustrated perhaps most famously by Rome. Rome lies on the banks of the Tiber River, about 25 kilometres from the sea. Its original existence is contested and mainly lies buried (both literally and figuratively) under the more prominent historiography of the Roman Empire (except perhaps for the myth of Romulus and Remus). Although recognising that Rome's history is of course both long and complex, however, a short illustration will suffice here.

Briefly, Rome's location may be attributed to the fact that the Tiber River has only two islands, one at the mouth of the river and the other where Rome is located. The latter island made crossing the river far easier than in other places along the river – Tiber Island is thus Rome's 'accident of history'. The ability to cross the river relatively easily concentrated farming along the banks on both sides at this location, with human traffic drawn to this location in order to cross the river. That original agglomeration developed into the capital of the Roman Kingdom and then the Roman Republic (from 510 BC) and, finally, the Roman Empire (from 27 BC). Around 20 BC, Emperor Caesar Augustus commissioned the construction of the Milliarium Aureum. All roads within the Roman Empire were considered to begin from this monument and all distances in the Roman Empire were measured relative to that point. In the case of Rome, therefore, economic agglomeration created also a concentration of political power, which then employed this political power to further consolidate economic agglomeration. The same was true of Yendi. Staniland states that '... one of the main caravan routes from Ashanti to Hausaland passed through Yendi.'⁷⁷ He notes further:

The rise of the administrative class in Yendi coincided with this period of prosperity, and conversely, the weakening of the kings' authority appears to have

⁷⁷ Staniland, *Lions*, 35.

followed the collapse of Ashanti power and the resulting disruption of commerce.⁷⁸

The same is also true of Kumasi: Control over commerce centred power politically at Kumasi, power which in turn sought to consolidate commerce for its political benefit. What happens, however, when the initial economic agglomeration does not succeed in the creation of political concentration? Attention has been given to converse instances where political relevance is not matched by any economic significance, such as Yamoussoukro, Abuja, and Brasilia. But what about cities with economic relevance without any political relevance? Perhaps the cities on the Zambian Copperbelt are an example? But those cities, unlike Tamale, developed an organised labour force, which itself translates to political authority. Whilst Tamale, through an accident of history, has emerged as an economic centre of the north, political authority in Dagbon is (and was actively) concentrated at Yendi, a much smaller settlement which lies 95 kilometres to the east of Tamale. Despite Tamale's unprecedented economic and demographic hegemony, political power today remains vested in Yendi, where the Ya Na is seated. The discontinuity between political and economic distributions serves more specifically as the thematic cornerstone of this dissertation.

Methodological Considerations

A methodological note may be useful. Very little has been written on the history of Tamale. As a result, I was very reliant on archival sources. In order to investigate these themes, I undertook a fieldwork period of a little over one year. In August 2007 I spent a period of one month in the archives in Kew, and between December 2007 and December 2008 I worked between archives in Accra and Tamale. To my knowledge, only one of the prominent actors in Tamale's history is still alive, Ebenezer Adam, a prominent CPP member during the post-war period. As a result, although a number of interviews were conducted, I found only three to be particularly useful: interviews with Ebenezer Adam, the secretary to the regent of the Gulkpe-Na, and a representative of the house of the Dakpema.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Three questions provide some methodological insights. The first is how I arrived at the observation that Tamale was disconnected from the north more generally? The second is how I arrived at the observation that Tamale possesses an institutional anatomy characterised by multiplicity? The third is why I think these two characteristics inform the socio-political and socio-economic fabric of Tamale's urban population.

The first observation – that Tamale came to be disconnected from Dagbon traditional structures – was born first out of the notion of 'isolation'. Through reading the exhaustive material on northern Ghana, especially its history, Tamale is notable especially due largely to its absence. Northern Ghana indeed has a very rich academic tradition. Rattray was followed by Fortes. Later Ivor Wilks, Martin Staniland, and Paul-Andre Ladoucer added to the growing canon, as also did Davis Killingray, Jean Allman, R.B. Benning, Roger Thomas, Carola Lentz, Nii-K Plange, Jeff Grischow, K.B. Dickson Inez Sutton, and Wyatt McGaffey – to name but a few. Despite the academic attention given to Tamale since the 1930s, Tamale has never been identified as an object of enquiry. This is peculiar, I would argue (although I do not expect everyone to agree with me), as Tamale's urban growth is the single most profound transformation that has taken place in northern Ghana in the last one hundred years. Out of this absence rose the notion of isolation, especially in terms of the Northern Territories. Later, I would find in a footnote to Staniland's *Lions of Dagbon* the assertion that 'the degree to which Tamale kept to itself politically is interesting'.⁷⁹ Signs of Tamale's disconnect from Dagbon traditional structures were suddenly everywhere. Later still, I came across a report on Dagbon Native Authorities that compared the Dagomba chiefs' attitude towards Tamale townsmen to their attitude towards Konkomba farmers, with whom tensions have on many occasions escalated to open conflict. The report noted:

⁷⁹ Staniland, *Lions*, 217, Footnote 26.

The Dagomba chiefs have thereby found themselves stabilised by government backing in a position of superiority alike over the vigorous Konkomba farmer and the progressive ... wage-earner of Tamale Town.⁸⁰

Not only was Tamale, as an urban space, disconnected from Dagbon traditional structures, but Tamale's urban dwellers themselves also somehow did not 'belong' to the imagery of Dagbon tradition. This emerged as the first line of enquiry.

The second observation came first during an interview with the secretary of Gulkpe-Na in Tamale in March 2008.⁸¹ He explained the origins of the Dakpema to me as follows: The Dakpema originated from Kumbungu. He arrived in Tamale after fleeing from Kumbungu because he had murdered a man. In Tamale he impregnated the mentally handicapped daughter of the fetish priest, the Bugulana, and for fear of shame, the Bugulana gave him the title, the Dakpema. The emphasis which my informant placed on the themes of physical or mental handicaps⁸² and shame, coupled with the fact that I know that such themes are often so loaded in Dagbon folklore, called immediately for attention. After interviewing a number of members of the Dakpema's house and getting a far more 'noble' version of the Dakpema's origins, it was clear at the very least that rivalry existed between the two chiefly houses in Tamale. Later I would learn from archival sources that the newly appointed Ya Na in 1920, Abdulai II, informed the colonial administration that the Dakpema was not the 'rightful' chief of Tamale and demanded that the rightful chief, the Gulkpe-Na, replace the Dakpema as chief of Tamale, and that the colonial administration was quick to oblige. Having found in the archives the moment that the Dakpema replaced the Gulkpe-Na in what was clearly perceived by the colonial administration as an emphatic end to the matter, correspondence seemed to dry up for a number of years. From the record of a number of complaints, it was clear that the Dakpema house continued to play an active role in Tamale's socio-political landscape after the emphatic return of the Gulkpe-Na. The study of the redevelopment of Ward D, in Chapter 4, revealed more legitimate political actors:

⁸⁰ PRAAD, Tamale. NRG 8/2/91 (Dagomba Native Affairs) Report by D.C. Eastern Dagmoba, *Dagomba Native Administration*, 4th November, 1944.

⁸¹ Interview with the secretary of the Gulkpe-Na's palace, Tamale, 3 March 2008.

⁸² For instance, physical deformities, by custom, disqualify a person from occupying the seat of the Ya Na.

The Mallam of the central mosque, the colonial administration, and both the Dakpema and Gulkpe-Na all had agendas and influence and appeared to possess some form of legitimacy. All the documentation on indirect rule seemed to promote a rigid, local, traditional structure. But every local claim or dispute I came across in the archives showed that one or more parties manoeuvred politically between the different nodes of authority. It occurred to me, prompted by the work of Sara Berry, that the manner in which claims were made in Tamale, especially with regard to property, in many instances through the referencing of a number of political actors and institutions, was a dialogue about the constitution of authority and, also, about the form which societal interactions were to take.

The third argument – that these two characteristics of Tamale shape also the socio-political interactions within that town – I found difficult to articulate. I spent several weeks travelling to a number of Dagomba villages outside Tamale to see how Dagomba social relations in Tamale were different from those in the rural hinterland. It turned out to be an impossible comparison to make. Later I spent some time in Kumasi, and then a year in Accra. I compared also my observations of social lives in Tamale with those I had seen in Cape Town, London, and Amsterdam. Of course each of these cities felt entirely different, but how were they different, and what made them different was difficult to formulate. Later I stumbled across the work of Aiden Southall, and his distinction between Type A and Type B cities. Southall argues that Type A cities represent those cities which have long, pre-European urban histories, such as Kumasi, while Type B cities are those created for and by the colonial economy. Southall argues that in Type B cities, where the occupational structure is based on clear distinctions between unskilled workers, skilled workers, and clerical staff, aspirations find expression in trade unions, and political parties and associations. He notes, ‘... there are no traditional institutions to provide a focus.’⁸³ Southall himself noted of his dichotomy between Type A and Type B towns that, ‘... no writer on the subject, including me, has found this

⁸³ Southall, A., ‘Social change, demography and extrinsic factors’. In: Southall, A., ed., *Social change in modern Africa*. Oxford, 1961, 7-13.

classification entirely satisfactory, yet none has escaped from it'.⁸⁴ What attracted me to Southall, however, was not so much in the typology that he produced, but rather in the link that he observed between different types of African cities and the social relationships within those cities. Southall thus made the connection between the specific historical development of a city and the social relations within it. Southall's model suggested more specifically that a given city 'type' produced a number of 'extrinsic factors' such as 'relationship to outlying hinterland', 'occupation structures', and 'wage differentials'. These 'extrinsic factors' in turn shape the social relations within a city. Whether Tamale is a Type A or a Type B city is thus irrelevant. What matters is the revelation that Tamale's specific urban formation affects the character of a number of 'extrinsic factors', and these factors, in turn, affect the social relations within Tamale. Through Southall I found a number of other useful texts, such as that of Anthony O'Conner and Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch. In the end, the question was less whether the connection existed between urban historical trajectories and social relations, than it was whether I could set out that connection in the case of Tamale. I felt I had enough evidence to argue that through the colonial period, Tamale became increasingly disconnected from Dagbon, and also to argue that Tamale's institutional anatomy was characterised by multiplicity, in part as a result of that isolation. The final task is to show how these two characteristics of Tamale's historical trajectory shaped socio-political interactions within Tamale.

⁸⁴ Southall, A., 'Review article: The African port city: Docks and suburbs', *Economic development and Cultural Change*, 38: 1(Oct. 1989), 167.

