



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 and the Northern Territories: Contrasting histories of demographic change

Introduction

The previous chapter has situated Tamale's founding within a regional framing. This chapter continues that discussion. But the chapter also begins to reach into Tamale itself, revealing the changing demographic and economic configurations arising out of the uptake of motorised transportation after 1920. This chapter presents three interrelated arguments. The first is that during the decade after the introduction of motorised transportation, Tamale's demographic growth was negatively correlated to that of the Northern Territories generally. In short, while Tamale's demographic growth was a positive function of increased mobility arising out of the introduction of motorised transportation after 1920, the population growth rate of Northern Territories declined during this period. As a result, as the colonial and post-colonial historiography of the Northern Territories is dominated by themes aligned to northern out-migration, and Tamale's demographic mechanisms worked against that of the north more generally, Tamale is not visible within this dominant discourse.¹

¹ See N.J.K. Brukum, 'Studied neglect or lack of resources?: The socio-economic underdevelopment of Northern Ghana under British colonial rule', *Transactions of the*

The second argument presented in this chapter relates strongly to the first: Tamale's economic change was driven by ex-servicemen returning from WWI and migrants moving between the north and cocoa farms in the south. Note that the emphasis on economic change as distinct from demographic change is purposeful. Indeed, the third argument suggests that the economic reconfigurations induced by non-Dagomba, ex-servicemen and cocoa migrants was far more significant than their direct contribution to Tamale's demographic growth. The challenge in understanding change in Tamale during the period after WWI is separating economic and demographic change. That sources which relate to demographic change, such as census reports, are much more accessible than sources which relate to specific economic changes taking place within Tamale's local economic structures, can be misleading. In 1907, when Tamale was founded, in all likelihood Tamale's 1,435 residents were close to 100 per cent Dagomba. In 1960, when Tamale's population had grown to over 48,000, over 75 per cent were Dagombas. Despite the relatively small percentage change in Tamale's ethnic composition, a demographic analysis alone betrays a number of economic realities – notably, that local economic innovation was largely driven by a relatively small group of non-Dagombas in Tamale (primarily ex-servicemen and migrants to cocoa farms).

From revenue to labour

The pacification drives in the Northern Territories had put pressure on northern revenue, and in the years following 1906, the northern colonial administration looked for ways to boost northern revenue.² The cotton, shea-butter, and tobacco initiatives mentioned in the previous chapter were outcomes of the search for northern revenue. Within the colonial administration, the failure of each of these initiatives served to worsen the colonial perception of the north's prospects. Prior to 1908, a caravan tax on trade passing through the Northern Territories served as the

Historical Society of Ghana (New Series) (1998), 2; Nii-K. Plange, 'Underdevelopment in Northern Ghana: Natural causes or colonial capitalism?', *Review of African Political Economy*, 6 (1979), 4-14; I. Sutton, 'Colonial agricultural policy: The non-development of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 22: 4(1989)

² Grischow, *Shaping*, 47.

primary source of revenue for the Northern Territories. In 1908, however, with Accra concerned that on account of the caravan tax, traders were redirecting their trade through French and German territories, west and east of the Gold Coast, respectively, the caravan tax was abolished. The northern revenue fell from an average of £13,800 for the period 1904-08 to £2,525 for the period 1909-13.³ In 1910, Chief Commissioner Arthur Festing wrote that ‘one must be possessed of great optimism to be able to throw out hopes of much export trade from the Northern Territories’.⁴ In the years that followed, this sentiment was consolidated, especially within colonial circles in the south. It was a sentiment that more or less dominated northern colonial economic thinking for the remainder of the colonial period.

Gold mines, cocoa farms, and WWI

Before discussing the drivers of demographic and economic change in Tamale, a number of points regarding labour migration need to be clarified. There is a distinction to be made between labour migration to the gold mines and labour migration to the cocoa farms. The recruitment process for the former was centralised and highly coercive – while for the latter, to cocoa farms, it was significantly more voluntary: labourers came down to cocoa farms in ones and twos. To date, the majority of the work on labour migration during the colonial period has focussed on labour for the gold mines. But the numbers of men who went to the gold mines is far less than that which went to work on cocoa farms. This is in line with the argument presented by Inez Sutton. She notes:

... although officials emphasized the role of the north as a labour reserve, the drain of labour itself was itself not a significant factor in the northern economy as is sometimes implied. Rather, the vision of the north as a supplier of labour conditioned colonial investment, or lack of it, in northern agriculture, especially infrastructure, so that little was done to create alternatives to labour migration when cash was demanded.⁵

³ Ladouceur, *Chiefs*, 45.

⁴ CCNT Author Festing, quoted in Grischow, *Shaping*, 47.

⁵ Sutton, I., ‘Colonial agricultural policy: The non-development of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 22: 4(1989), 638.

Sutton concludes that the north was not ‘drained of its surplus (here, in terms of labour) ... Northern agriculture changed little during the colonial period, and did not on the whole deteriorate’.⁶ Sutton of course is not disputing that a large number of men went southwards in search of remunerative opportunities, but that the affect of this migration on northern agriculture was not as destructive as previous authors have suggested. Furthermore, the northern colonial disillusionment with the labour initiative that emerged from about 1915 arose out of – not the supply labour itself – but the frustration of the implications for colonial capital of being identified as an economy that supplied labour. Certainly, when CCNT Watherston first agreed to supply labour to gold mines in 1905, it was not the intention that labour alone would define the role of the Northern Territories. Sutton’s observations are economic in focus. The recruitment of labour, however, had a number of important socio-political implications. Notably, recruiting labour for gold mines, because it was so coercive, as was the case with soldiers between 1914 and 1918, affected relationships between chiefs (especially ‘whiteman’s’ chiefs) and their subjects. Thus, to say that labour migration to the mines was not significant in terms of northern agriculture is not to suggest it had no impact at all.

Tamale and labour migration to gold mines

In August 1905, CCNT Watherston received a request from Tarkwa mine managers for labourers.⁷ Given that certain guarantees were met, the first request was met with enthusiasm: large parts of the Northern Territories, especially in the far north adjacent to the French and German borders, were densely populated and, if carefully controlled, northern men could head southwards without any sacrifice to the colonial aspirations of the Northern Territories, such as the development of agricultural surpluses for export. Watherston demanded from the mine managers that men from one village should work at the same mine, that they should be able to communicate

⁶ Sutton, I., ‘Colonial agricultural policy: The non-development of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 22: 4(1989), 667.

⁷ Thomas, R., ‘Forced labour in British West Africa: The case of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast 1906-1927’, *The Journal of African History*, 14: 1(1973), 80. (Secretary for Mines to Chief Commissioner, Northern Territories (CCNT), 15 Aug. 1905, quoted in CCNT to Secretary for Mines, Sept. 1905).

with their chiefs at all times, and that a political officer should escort them south as far as Kumasi. Watherston's careful approach was borne out of his observation that chiefs were reluctant to let men go to the mines, particularly during the farming season.⁸ Nevertheless, in September 1906 the DC for Navrongo and the DC for Wa were both instructed by the CCNT to send 30 specially selected men south to inspect the mines, in the hope that the prospect of regular work and wages would induce increasingly large numbers of men to seek employment in the mining districts. The men arrived in Tarkwa in December 1906 and were reported to have enjoyed their trip. The reaction by all parties to the visit was, in fact, generally positive. A year later in 1907, for the first time, 271 northern men from Bawku were recruited for the mines in Tarkwa.⁹ The mines, however, were not the only sector desirous of northern labour. Three to four hundred labourers were requested to work on an extension of the railway from Tarkwa to Prestea,¹⁰ and an additional three hundred men were required to construct the new Accra-Kumasi line.¹¹ Mine managers complained that the railway was poaching mine labour and felt obliged to ask for 1,000 labourers.¹² Despite increasing calls from the mines for more labour, by mid-1908 a definite labour shortage was emerging in the Gold Coast.

Between 1905 and 1909, the initiative to recruit labour for the mines was generally unsatisfactory in that it failed to remedy labour supply problems in the mines.¹³ Recruitment was complicated and politicised, often carried out through sceptical or self-interested chiefs. Furthermore, where labourers found themselves mistreated by mine managers or taken advantage of by southerners, they refused to go, or did so

⁸ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56/1/3. (CCNT reply to Secretary for Mines, Nov. 1905).

⁹ Thomas, R., 'Forced labour in British West Africa: The case of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast 1906-1927', *The Journal of African History*, 14: 1(1973), 81.

¹⁰ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56/1/5 (Acting CCNT to Consulting Engineer, F. Shelford, London, 12 Aug. 1908).

¹¹ PRO, Kew, CO 96/484. (Acting Governor Bryan to Lord Crewe, June 1909).

¹² PRAAD, Accra ADM 56/ 1/5 (CCNT to Commissioner North West Province, Apr. 1909).

¹³ As a result of the failure of 'the Northern Territories experiment', the colonial administration sought to employ the 'South African Solution', a far more sophisticated system of labour recruitment, through Native Recruitment Agencies, on behalf of the mines. The negative impact the South African Solution would have on labour supplies in other industries caused the Government of the Gold Coast to abandon the idea of the South African solution in 1912.

reluctantly.¹⁴ Many labourers were also reluctant to do underground work owing to the adverse working conditions.¹⁵ The increasing number of men who ‘deserted’ was evidence that northern men were not particularly inclined to work in the mines. In June 1909, 540 labour recruits left Gambaga, 200 of whom deserted at Tamale, and a further 82 disappeared on the way to Tarkwa.¹⁶ In 1910, the ‘Northern Territories Labour Experiment’ was abandoned.

A year later, however, the fortune of the gold mines, in terms of labour supply, began to change – albeit temporarily. Owing to worsening local conditions in the French Territories further north, where both conscription and taxation had been implemented, French ‘subjects’ began to cross the border in significant numbers.¹⁷ Crisp notes that voluntary labour from the Northern Territories also increased during this period, despite the reluctance of previous years. In 1917 migrant workers accounted for 47 per cent of the mining industry’s 19,000 workers and over 64 per cent of the 8,600 underground workers, an increase of over 20 per cent since 1911.¹⁸

Tamale and labour migration to cocoa farms

The boom in mining labour ended abruptly in 1918. In that year the Spanish influenza epidemic broke out. It is estimated to have killed 60,000 people in the Gold Coast, including 28,000 in the Northern Territories,¹⁹ although Tomkins put the number at 80,000-100,000.²⁰ Not only did this reduce the supply of able-bodied

¹⁴ Crisp, J., *The story of an African working class: Gold miners’ struggles, 1870-1980*. UK, 1984, 35-54.

¹⁵ Crisp, *Story*. See also R. Thomas, ‘Forced labour in British West Africa: The case of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast 1906-1927’. In: *The Journal of African History*, 14: 1(1973).

¹⁶ Crisp, *Story*, 36.

¹⁷ Crisp, *Story*, 41.

¹⁸ Crisp, *Story*, 42.

¹⁹ Thomas, *Forced Labour*, 90. Thomas notes: ‘This was conservatively estimated to have caused at least 28,000 deaths in the Northern Territories alone, and the havoc was increased by the fact that the period of infection was concentrated in the months between September 1918 and January 1919. See Annual Report Northern Territories, 1918 and David Scott, *Epidemic Disease in Ghana 1901-1960* (London, 1965), Chapter 7. Scott estimates that the epidemic killed 60,000 people out of an estimated Gold Coast population of 1.5 million.’

²⁰ Tomkins, S.M., ‘Colonial administration in British Africa during the influenza epidemic of 1918-19’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 28: 1(1994), 60-83.

men who potentially could migrate from the north, but many mine workers were also killed by the epidemic.²¹ In 1920, among other measures, the administration placed a guard on the route between Navrongo and Zuarungu and banned infected persons from travelling to Tamale.²² The end of the war also marked the end of conscription in French territory, and the stream of French labour, although not drying up, diminished. Furthermore, in 1919 the newly appointed Governor of the Gold Coast, Frederick Guggisberg, announced his 'Ten-Year Development Plan', in which he proposed several large infrastructural projects, including the deepwater harbour at Takoradi. Guggisberg estimated that in order to achieve his goals he would require the employment of a further 27,000 labourers, reducing the amount of labour available for the mines. But perhaps the biggest threat to mining labour during the 1920s came from the cocoa sector. In the 1920s the production of cocoa soared, inducing large numbers men to head south to work on cocoa farms. The cocoa sector was generally preferred as work was better paid and the conditions were far more favourable than those of the mines. During the 1920s, the mining companies were effectively squeezed out of the market for labour by cocoa and government projects. By the mid-1920s, the government had stopped sending men to the mines. In 1922, 3,079 labourers went to work in the gold mines, and in 1923, no labour at all was sent southwards. By the close of the 1920s, owing largely to labour shortages, '... many gold mines had either relapsed into a moribund condition or had disappeared altogether'.²³

Between 1921 and 1930 several attempts were made to increase the amount of labour going to mines. But such attempts became increasingly coercive. On receiving a request for mining labour, the DC in Bole wrote, '... if I am ordered to send men I can do so of course – but it will be forced labour'.²⁴ The problem of labourers 'deserting' increased during this period, another indication that labour was

²¹ Patterson, D., 'The influenza epidemic of 1918-19 in the Gold Coast,' *Journal of African History*, 24(1983), 488-91.

²² Grischow, J., 'Globalisation, development and disease in colonial Northern Ghana, 1906-1960', WOPAG - Working Papers on Ghana: Historical and Contemporary Studies Nr 9 (January 2006), 19.

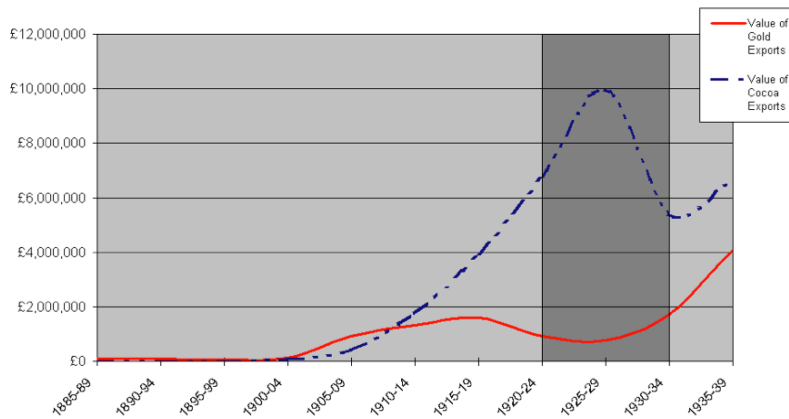
²³ Crisp, *Story*, 56.

²⁴ Crisp, *Story*, 47, (Acting DC Bole to PC Southern Province, 7 July, 1921).

not as voluntary as the government and the mines had hoped. In November 1922, 48 of the 90 recruits from Savelugu deserted, and in March 1923, 2,524 men were sent to the mines, of which 483 deserted prior to reaching the south.²⁵

During the period 1920-30, the cocoa industry emerged as the major destination of northern labour. In 1927-28, shortly before the onset of the Great Depression, the cocoa output of the Gold Coast peaked (Figure 3.1).

3.1. Total value of gold vs total value of cocoa, 1895-1939



Source: Colonialism and underdevelopment in Ghana, R.E. Howard

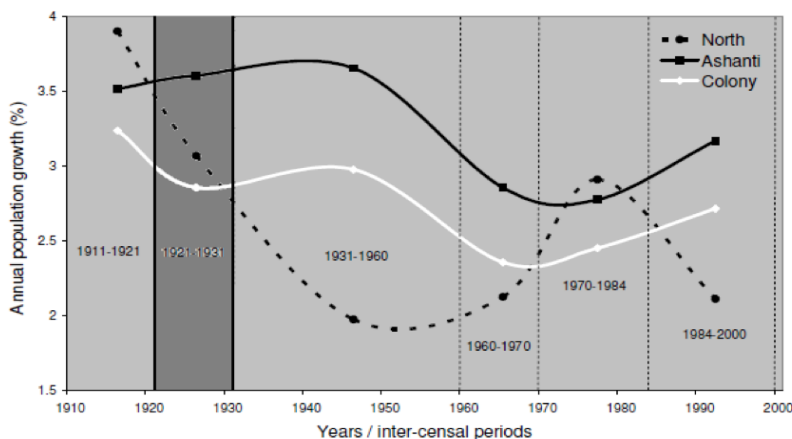
Figure 3.1 above presents the total value of cocoa output and the total value of gold output for the period 1895-1939. The darker-shaded area represents the period 1920-34. Although the production of gold fell during this period, the booming cocoa industry went well beyond simply attracting reluctant mining labour. Thus, despite the mines' problem in securing northern labour, during the 1920s the volume of casual-labour migration rose steadily. The volume of labour heading southwards corresponded with the increase in cocoa output. Although the available data is not particularly accurate in terms of casual-labour migration, the 1922-3 Northern Territories Annual Report records 16,816 men headed south.²⁶ That of 1924-5 states

²⁵ Crisp, *Story*, 48.

²⁶ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5-1-62 (Annual Report for the Northern Territories 1922-23).

that 33,111 men went south in the year.²⁷ The impact on the demographic of the Northern Territories of out-migration has been illustrated by Kees Van der Geest. Van der Geest has employed the population growth rate over time of the Northern Territories, coupled with ‘out-migration’ statistics from 1931, to make some general observations about the demographic details of labour migration (Figure 3.2).²⁸

3.2. Annual Population Growth by Region, 1911-2000



Source: Van der Geest, K., ‘North-South Migration in Ghana: What Role for the Environment’, 2008. Inter-censal population growth (1911-2000). The figure is based on population figures from Engman (1983) and Ghana Statistical Service (2005). Census years: 1911, 1921, 1931, 1960, 1970, 1984 and 2000. Figures for 1948 are excluded.

The chart above presents the population growth rates over the period 1911-2000 of the three territories: The Colony, Ashanti, and the Northern Territories. The darker-shaded area represents the period 1921-31. The steep, negative gradient of this period indicates a sharp falling off of the Northern Territories’ growth rate, whilst

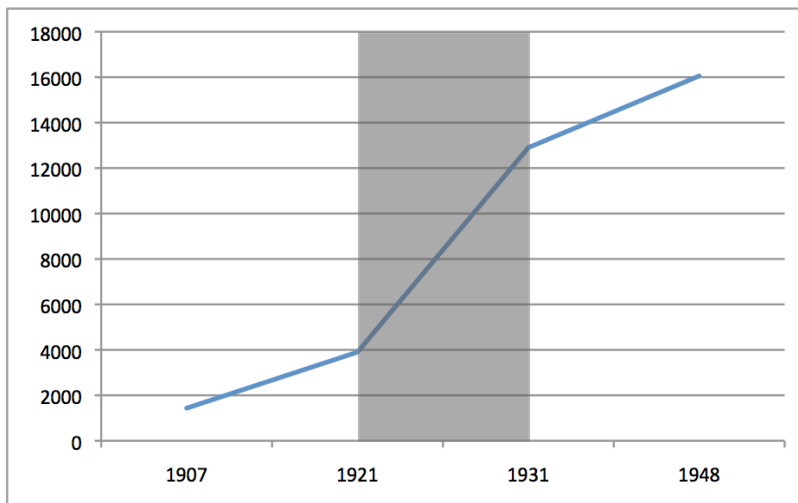
²⁷ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5-1-63 (Annual Report for the Northern Territories 1924-25).

²⁸ Van der Geest, K., ‘North-South migration in Ghana: What role for the environment’, October, 2008. http://geest.socsci.uva.nl/publications/vd_geest_2008a.pdf (accessed 5 March 2009).

during the same period, the growth rate of both the Colony and Ashanti are relatively flat or decrease at a much lower rate than is the case for the Northern Territories. Van der Geest comments on the finding: ‘From the figure, one can read the trend in migration propensity in Northern Ghana. Declining population growth indicates increasing out-migration’.²⁹

It is logical that the period in which cocoa production boomed coincided with a period of intense out-migration from the Northern Territories. However, in stark contrast to this trend, the population of Tamale grew at an unprecedented rate during the 1920s. The chart below shows the population growth of Tamale for the period 1907-31 (Figure 3.3).

3.3. Tamale, Population growth rate, 1907-1948



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

The darker-shaded area shows the period 1921-31. Tamale’s population more than tripled during this period from 3,901 to almost 13,000. If we compare the ‘darker-shaded’ areas (1920s) for the three graphs above, we may conclude that the greater the cocoa production, the greater the fall in population growth rate of the Northern

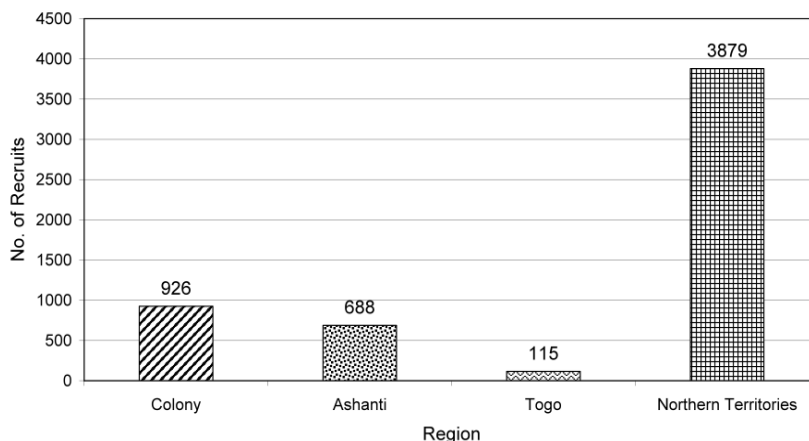
²⁹ Ibid.

Territories, and the more rapid the level of urbanisation in Tamale. In short, Tamale's demographic is a function of north-south mobility. The completion of the Great North Road monopolised the north-south trade route through Tamale. Thus, whereas before the completion of the Great North Road migrants may have taken any number of routes southwards and northwards, after 1920 migrants funnelled through Tamale to the south. However, whilst the introduction of motorised transportation explains a significant part of the increase in mobility, it does not explain all of it. As has been explained above, the cocoa boom during the 1920s is the first addition in explaining the increase in mobility. The second important addition is the conclusion of WWI and the discharge of soldiers. This is the subject of the following section.

The impact of ex-servicemen during the aftermath of WWI

In 1914, the Northern Territories became directly involved in the WWI when an offensive was launched to seize control of German Togoland. In the years that followed, as the war escalated, the Northern Territories would play an increasingly important role, largely in the supply of soldiers. According to Thomas, a total of 9,890 Gold Coast soldiers (differentiated here from carriers and drivers) were used during the war, of which 5,608 were recruited during the period 1914-18. Of the 5,608 men recruited during the period 1914-18, 3,879 or 69 per cent were recruited in the Northern Territories, an overwhelming regional majority when compared with the 17 per cent recruited in the Colony, 12 per cent in Ashanti and 2 per cent in Togo. The figure below reveals the number of men enlisted between 1914 and 1918 by region.

3.4. Number of recruits by region, 1914-1918.



Source: From Data in Thomas, 'Military Recruitment in the Gold Coast during the First World War', in *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, Vol. 15, Cahier 57, 1975, pp 57-83

In reality, the number of northern men employed in the Gold Coast Regiment during the war is likely to have been even higher. Governor Hugh Clifford stated in 1918 that '(t)he Northern Territories has rendered an even more important service to the Gold Coast by providing, by voluntary enlistment, *ninety per cent* of the rank and file of the Regiment which bears this Colony's name' (emphasis mine).³⁰ Many men recruited in Ashanti were known to be northerners who had migrated to Ashanti prior to the outbreak of the war in 1914. There were examples of some northerners who '... were paid by the Ashanti Chiefs sums ranging from £5 to £25 to induce them to join the Gold Coast Regiment in their (the Chiefs') names.'³¹

Roger Thomas has illustrated in an excellent article how soldiers were recruited in the Northern Territories. He argues that although forced recruitment is a phenomenon largely attributed to French colonial administrations, in the Northern Territories recruitment policies were also highly coercive. The high rates of

³⁰ PRO, Kew, CO 98/30, (Annual Report for the Northern Territories, 1918), 'Governor Clifford'.

³¹ PRO, Kew, CO 98/30, (Annual Report for the Northern Territories, 1918).

desertion amongst recruits en route to the training centre at Tamale is an indication that the 'voluntary' nature of British recruitment was perhaps not so 'voluntary' at all. In October 1915, the Acting Chief Commissioner wrote: 'it is difficult to understand why if recruits were desirous of enlisting so many should have bolted and I cannot help thinking that the terms of enlistment was (sic) not understood by the recruits.'³² Recruitment was carried out through the chiefs. The effect was in many places a breakdown of an already tenuous relationship between chiefs and their subjects. Thomas lists a number of examples, including in Bole and in Bongo.³³

Despite a military training base at Tamale, for Tamale the end of WWI was perhaps more significant than its commencement. In 1918, after the conclusion of the war, a relatively large number of soldiers were demobilised. It was noted in the Annual Report for 1918 that on

'... the 1st January 1918 there were 429 rank and file stationed at Tamale. 1,595 recruits were enlisted during the year ... The signing of the Armistice in November was followed by instructions to discharge all recruits who had enlisted for the period of the War ...'³⁴

Although no direct data is available for the resettlement patterns of ex-servicemen, the colonial administration in Tamale frequently referred to ex-servicemen. In the Annual Report of the Northern Territories for 1918, ex-servicemen were referred to as a '... large body of high-spirited young men ... who possessed more money than they knew what to do with'.³⁵ There are also other indications that suggest that soldiers came to settle in Tamale after being discharged and that they had a significant impact on Tamale's local economy.

The first indication is obtained through a comparison between the ethnic breakdown of enlisted men and the ethnic breakdown of non-Dagomba leaseholders. The

³² Acting CCNT Mountray-Read, quoted. In: Thomas, R., 'Military recruitment in the Gold Coast during the First World War', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 15: 57(1975), 57-83.

³³ Thomas, R., 'Military recruitment in the Gold Coast during the First World War' *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 15: 57(1975), 62.

³⁴ PRO, Kew, CO 98/30, (Annual Report for the Northern Territories for the Year, 1918).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

recruitment of men for WWI in the Northern Territories was not simply random.³⁶ Significantly in this respect, the colonial administration relied on a distinction between ‘martial’ and ‘non-martial’ peoples. Whether a people were regarded as ‘martial’ or ‘non-martial’ was often based on little more than historical coincidence, but to colonial administrators these types of distinction were real and informed policy. Hausas, for instance, were considered to be a particularly ‘martial’ people. This sentiment was born first due to the fact that in the early 1860s in present-day Nigeria, runaway slaves were recruited into a local constabulary. Interestingly, not all of these men were Hausa, but Hausa was adopted as the lingua franca. Hausa troops become known as Glover’s Forty Thieves and in 1872 were added to the garrison of the Gold Coast and employed successfully in the Anglo-Ashanti war in 1874, consolidating the imagination of the Hausa as being a particularly ‘martial’ race. In 1916, General J. C. Smuts, Commander in Chief in East Africa, for instance, requested 4,000 Hausa carriers to join the Nigerian Regiment. The Colonial Office responded to Smuts stating that the Hausa were a ‘combative race’ and could not be spared as carriers, which instead should come from ‘non-combative’ peoples such as the Mende and Temne of Sierra Leone.³⁷ A correspondent writing to the *London Times* described Hausas as ‘all pure blooded negroes, and, as a rule ... fine, tall, and soldierly ... they walk with a good deal of swagger.’³⁸ The high incidence of Mossi men enlisted in the Northern Territories for the Gold Coast Regiment had its own incidental history. In 1898 Major Morris, an early pioneer of the ‘Northern Hinterland’, began recruiting Mossi into a cavalry corps known as the ‘Moshie Horse’. These men were used in expeditions against the Tallensi and the Dagomba. Through these campaigns the Mossi gained a reputation as excellent fighters and horsemen. Major Morris wrote that ‘... without their (Mossi men) most valuable assistance these expeditions could not have been brought to so successful an

³⁶ A breakdown of men enlisted by ethnicity does not correspond at all with the relative population sizes of each ethnicity, suggesting that there were other, mitigating factors in the enlistment process.

³⁷ Killingley, D., ‘Imagined martial communities: Recruiting for the military and police in colonial Ghana, 1860-1960’. In: Lentz, C. & P. Nugent, eds, *Ethnicity in Ghana: The limits of invention*. Macmillan, 2000, 121.

³⁸ Killingley, D., *Imagined Martial*, 121.

issue'.³⁹ Furthermore, Killingray notes that '... coastal and southern peoples were regarded by political and military officials as non-martial and often useless even for carrier work'.⁴⁰ Thomas explains the high incidence of acephalous groups amongst the enlisted men as reflecting the invented nature of the chiefs that came to possess power over them. According to Thomas, that the colonial administration had installed such chiefs meant that such chiefs were reliant on the colonial administration for their legitimacy. In turn, they were far more receptive to the coercive recruitment methods of the colonial administration than other chiefs. According to Thomas, 64 per cent of recruits came from what are today the upper regions of Ghana. 'This was also the area – apart from Mamprussi proper – where chiefs had been imposed by the British upon a basically “acephalous” population'.⁴¹

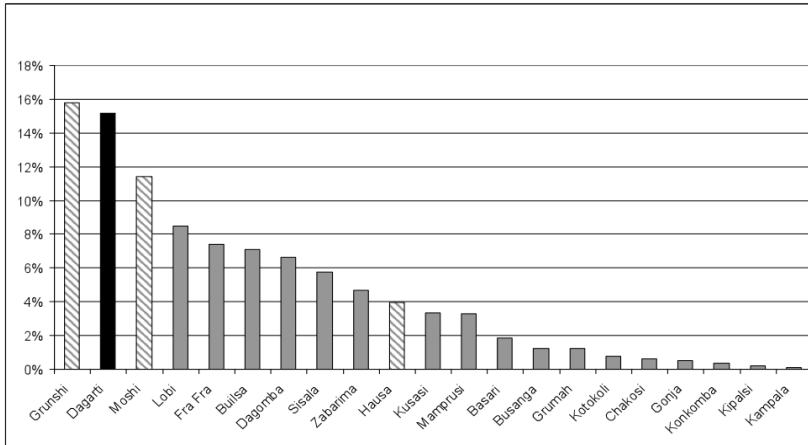
For the reasons given above, Mossi, Dagarti, and Grunshi made up the bulk of recruits (11, 16 and 15 per cent, respectively). A number of other acephalous peoples, such as the Fra Fra and the Sissalla, also contribute significantly (Figure 3.5). This is in contrast to the number of Dagomba recruits (only 7 per cent), which is rather low considering the large demographic of Dagbon and the fact that the training base was at Tamale.

³⁹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56/1/2 (Morris to Secretary of State, Dec. 21st, 1900).

⁴⁰ Killingray, D., 'Beast of burden: British West African carriers in the First World War'. In: *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 13: 1(1979), 90.

⁴¹ Thomas, R., 'Military recruitment in the Gold Coast during the First World War', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 15: 57(1975), 72

3.5. Ethnic breakdown of northern men enlisted, 1914 -1918 (per cent of total)

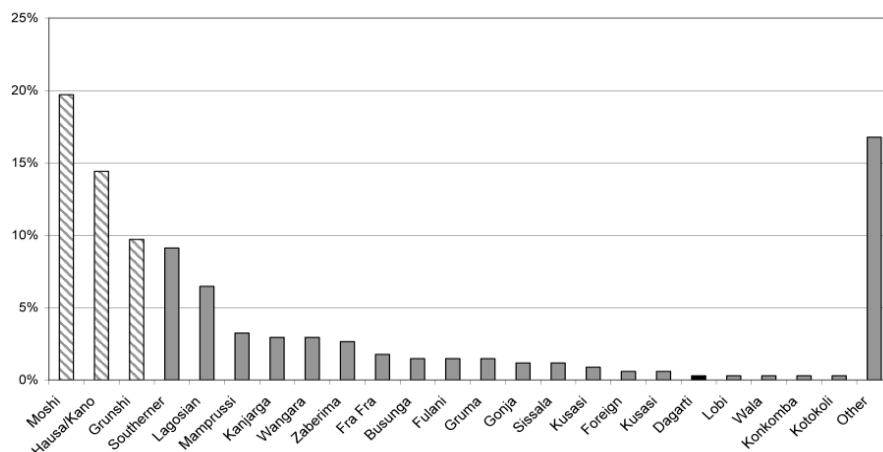


Source: Thomas, R., 'Military recruitment in the Gold Coast during the First World War'. In: *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, Vol. 15, Cahier 57 (1975).

Whilst the chart above shows the ethnic breakdown for men enlisted during the period of the 1914-18 war, the chart below shows the ethnic breakdown of non-Dagomba leaseholders in Tamale from 1935.⁴²

⁴² In 1935, for the first time, 'stranger' leaseholders in Tamale were broken down by ethnicity. Dagombas were not required to pay rent and were thus not included in the breakdown, despite being the majority. But the stranger living in Tamale may be more interesting than the Dagomba majority in terms of drivers of social and economic change. Furthermore, although this list was compiled for the year 1935, the slowdown of the economy as a result of the onset of the Great Depression and the corresponding slowdown of demographic growth suggest that little changed in terms of leaseholders between 1928 and 1935. As a result, an ethnic breakdown of leaseholders in 1935 provides at least some indication of who was migrating to Tamale during the 1920s.

3.6. Ethnic breakdown of non-Dagomba leaseholders, 1935-1944



Source: List of non-Dagomba leaseholders, Tamale Land Allocations, NRG 2/1/3

The coincidence of the two charts is noteworthy. The Moshi and the Grunshi are particularly prominent in both. The Grunshi and the Moshi rank first and third, respectively, in terms of the numbers of men who were recruited for military service during the period 1914-18, and rank second and first in terms of number of leaseholders in Tamale in the period 1935-9. In the 1920s, the Mossi Zongo (Ward A) was built in Tamale to house ex-servicemen, next to the transport yard. The Fra Fra and the Zabarima also feature fairly prominently in both charts. One notable exception is that of the Dagarti. Although the number of Dagarti recruited in 1914-18 is high, they accounted for only a very small component of Tamale's population in 1935. On the whole, however, there is enough evidence to suggest that ex-servicemen, after the conclusion of WWI, settled in Tamale. It is not yet clear, however, why they settled in Tamale, or why they did not settle in other large towns such as Kumasi or Accra.

The overwhelming majority of the northern men who served during the period 1914-18 had spent some time at the Tamale military training base. Tamale was thus not entirely new to them. Most also returned to the Tamale training base after the war and were discharged from there. Armed with money in the form of gratuities,

Tamale served increasingly as a much more natural place for (northern) ex-servicemen to settle than Kumasi or Accra. Furthermore, through the recruitment methods employed during the war, the relationship between chiefs and their subjects, especially in acephalous communities, had broken down. This created a hostility towards chiefs, exacerbated by the macho and anti-establishment attitudes of young men who had experienced a world largely unknown to their parents and grandparents, and later returned home. In the Annual Report for the Northern Territories for the year 1918, it was noted that:

... in some cases, the chiefs were insulted and informed that they were mere 'bush-men' – if not worse – and their authority flouted. Quarrels also arose between the returned recruits and their brothers who had elected to stay at home and who were roundly jeered at by the former ...⁴³

Economic versus demographic change

I noted earlier in the chapter that the direct ethnic sources of demographic and economic change in Tamale should be viewed differently. Irvine Gass, DC for Tamale in the early 1930s, noted:

The Dagomba in Tamale ... have behind them the power and authority of tradition and although constantly subject to the influence of change, tend to retain their traditional political systems and a social equilibrium – both factors which encourage conservatism.⁴⁴

Although Gass' observation was a political one, the same was true, if not more so, in an economic sense. That is not to say that the Dagomba had no economic function in Tamale at all. Many Dagombas worked as petty traders, catering to food demands of the new human traffic passing through Tamale. But much of the innovative economic change in Tamale, such as the uptake of motorised transportation, was driven by non-Dagombas.

There were a number of reasons for this development. Roger Thomas notes: '... the First World War provided (for the first time) an important ... introduction to a wider

⁴³ PRO, Kew, CO 98/30, (Annual Report for the Northern Territories for the Year, 1918).

⁴⁴ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/2/91 (Dagomba Native Administration) Report by Colonial Administrator, Irvine Gass, The traditional authority in urban administration in West Africa, 1931.

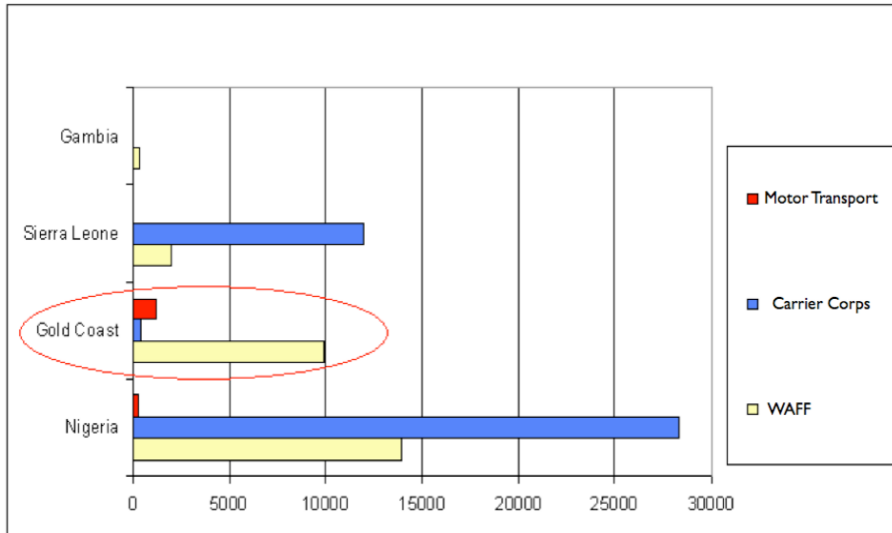
world for thousands of ordinary West Africans'.⁴⁵ Similarly, Killingray asserted that '... the war provided Africans with new technical skills that contributed to the economic development of the Gold Coast in the 1920s'.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the Gold Coast administration resisted, fairly successfully, demands from the East African campaign and the War Office to provide carriers and labour for Inland Water Transport Service in Mesopotamia. The Gold Coast administration, however, did agree to the recruitment of non-combatant motor transport drivers for the East Africa campaign. Between November 1916 and May 1918 about 760 Gold Coast men were recruited. The following table, taken from the work of Roger Thomas, breaks down the function of recruited men by West African country of origin. Nigeria clearly provided the majority of the rank and file of the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) and the Carrier Corps.⁴⁷ Sierra Leone provided, especially in terms of the total population, a significant number of men to the Carrier Corps. The Gold Coast, compared with other West African Anglophone territories, provided relatively few carriers, an average number of soldiers for the WAFF, and a large number of drivers.

⁴⁵ Thomas, R., 'Military recruitment in the Gold Coast during the First World War', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaine*, Vol. 15: 57(1975), 57.

⁴⁶ Killingray, 'Repercussions', 48.

⁴⁷ Ghana probably provided a larger portion of its population to both the WAFF and the Carrier Corps.

3.7. Men enlisted per colony by occupation



Source: Killingray, D. 'Repercussions of World War I' in the Gold Coast

As the majority of ex-servicemen and migrants to cocoa farms were non-Dagombas, Dagombas profited relatively less from the skill-sets acquired during military service. Once the Great North Road was completed in 1920, Tamale became a logical location for ex-servicemen to settle because they could employ their newly acquired skills there, especially in the form of driving, without being too far from home. Today in Tamale, driving is something particularly associated with Moshis.⁴⁸ This corresponds with the coincidence of having established pre-WWI trade networks⁴⁹ and serving as soldiers during WWI (and was supported also by the establishment of the Ward A in 1920, which became known as the Moshi Zongo after a large number of Moshi ex-servicemen settled there). Furthermore, 'strangers' – all non-Dagombas – were forced to pay economic rent for their leases in Tamale, while Dagombas had to pay only peppercorn rent, which amounted to a symbolic gesture, such as a fowl given to the chief if the chief demanded it.⁵⁰ The need to pay

⁴⁸ Thanks to Nteuwusu Agniegye for pointing this out to me.

⁴⁹ Schildkrout, E., *People of the Zongo: The transformation of ethnic identities in Ghana*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

⁵⁰ This is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

rent had the same impact as the introduction of taxation. ‘Strangers’ in Tamale were forced to find remunerative opportunities, while the Dagombas could rely on a relatively subsistence existence, even in Tamale.

Accumulation and individualism

The ex-servicemen and cocoa migrants driving Tamale’s local economy posed an ideological and policy dilemma for colonial administration more generally. Jeff Grischow notes that ‘(t)he colonial office did not want to produce agrarian capitalism through its West African development policy’.⁵¹ That Grischow refers to the agrarian context does not discount its relevance in the urban context. Wealth accumulation was seen as undermining efforts to ‘preserve’ African peasant structures and systems. This was a crucial component of the liberal development approach. In this sense, after 1920, Tamale really began to represent an antithesis to development in the Northern Territories more generally. More specifically, the gratuities and skill-sets of soldiers, coupled with the economy of motorised transportation as it was manifesting itself in Tamale, drove individual accumulation of wealth, seen very much as the antithesis of the African peasantry which the colonial administration was attempting to create. It was noted in the Annual Report for 1929-30:

Transport is increasing in efficiency and in cheapness, as competition of private firms becomes more acute ... there are always plenty of lorries ready to take on any available work ... One private individual ... is given most of the Government transport to do as he only charges one way, whereas it was usual to charge for the return of empty lorries ...⁵²

Migrants returning from the cocoa farms and also from the mines, just like ex-servicemen, possessed money. The individual accumulation of wealth in Tamale, made possible by an increasingly urban economy, served as yet another way in which Tamale contradicted the colonial development approach to the Northern Territories. Tamale’s socio-economic stratification ran counter to the colonial development policy of the Northern Territories that was (increasingly) to consolidate

⁵¹ Grischow, *Shaping*, 149.

⁵² PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/3/26 (Annual General Report for the Year 1929-1930).

African social structures. This sentiment was pervasive at least until the mid-1930s. Referring to Meyer Fortes, one colonial official of the Gold Coast echoed this sentiment in 1933. He 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.⁵³

Conclusion

In Tamale's history, the 1920s was a period of profound demographic and economic change. This fact has been lost in narratives of labour migration and the Northern Territories railway debate. Tamale's early urban growth was a function primarily of migration to cocoa farms and the discharge of soldiers after WWI. In short, Tamale's demographic is a function of north-south mobility. From the completion of the Great North Road in 1920, as north-south mobility increased, so too did Tamale's population. This demographic mechanism was negatively correlated to the Northern Territories more generally, where increased mobility led to out-migration and a decline in population growth rates. Furthermore, this chapter has argued that ex-servicemen and cocoa migrants, both possessed of money, also drove significant economic changes in Tamale. The transportation sector itself especially presented new types of employment, with concomitant socio-political implications, perhaps most notably the rise of individualism through the accumulation of wealth.

⁵³ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/3/49 (Annual Report for the Northern Territories, 1933-1934).