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From Dakpema to Gulkpe-Na: Introducing indirect rule in urban Tamale

Introduction

In the years before and after 1930, indirect rule was introduced across much of British Africa. On paper, this meant a new emphasis on creating native institutions, taking account of the historical dimensions of native affairs. The introduction of indirect rule set in motion a movement to resurrect ‘tradition’ across much of Anglophone Africa, with the intention of endowing chiefs with a broader range of political, judicial, and financial tools in order to regain public legitimacy. The first steps of indirect rule were to unearth traditional trajectories and re-establish them where such trajectories were felt to have been altered by, amongst other things, the European presence. In some instances, traditional trajectories were felt to have been only fractionally changed by the European arrival. In such cases, indirect rule aimed to consolidate chiefly authority. But in other instances, the traditional political system was felt to have been profoundly altered and thus needed to be structurally and fundamentally restored. In short, the system rested on the extension of chiefly

jurisdiction to include both a powerful native tribunal and a native treasury. The relationship between chiefs and their subjects was to be guided by these two institutions. In exchange, adherence to the traditional laws, recognition of the jurisdiction of the native tribunal, and the payment of taxation were motivated by the chief's power to allocate tracts of land. In other words, customary rights in land were seen as flowing downward. 'They were derived from political authority, rather than residing in the African peasantry'.⁵⁴

In line with what was happening across Africa more generally, in 1929 an explicit policy of indirect rule was introduced to the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, including Tamale. This chapter argues that both in Tamale and in the Northern Territories more generally, the introduction and implementation of indirect rule was rather a damp squib, albeit for somewhat different reasons. In many instances in the Northern Territories, the potency of both native tribunals and native treasuries was undermined by the colonial administration itself.

But the failure of indirect rule in Tamale, judged by the criteria of indirect rule itself, was spectacular. This chapter is concerned with the reasons for the spectacular failure of this indirect rule. The chapter argues that the failure of indirect rule in Tamale was the result both of an equally spectacular underestimation on the part of the colonial administration of how chiefly legitimacy functioned in an environment of rapid economic and demographic change, and of Tamale's increasingly urban, heterogeneous character.

Indirect rule and its 'imposition' in the Northern Territories

There were essentially two arguments that promoted the introduction of indirect rule in British Africa: A financial one, and an ideological one. The financial consideration was essentially a response to the onset of the Great Depression in 1929. The Depression limited the resources available for colonialism, and the policy of indirect rule, with its reliance on chiefs and native institutions, addressed the new restrictions without having to abandon colonialism altogether. As Christian Lund

⁵⁴ Chanock, M., 'Paradigms, policies and property: A review of the customary law of land tenure'. In: Mann, K. & R. Roberts, eds, *Law in colonial Africa*. James Curry, 1991, 64.

puts it, the recognition of chiefs as native authorities in turn meant that chiefs could act as ‘mediators between government and the population’.⁵⁵ This in turn reduced the expense of having a large administration. But although Sir Donald Cameron (the co-initiator of indirect rule along with Lugard) ‘acknowledged that the initial attraction of indirect rule was administrative and financial expediency, he stressed that it represented that “will of the people”, the “natural authority” of chiefs and the established customs of the people’.⁵⁶ Ideologically, indirect rule suggested that the maturity of African political systems could be achieved through the creation of local governments. Devolution would provide for chiefs an education in the proper administration of their jurisdictions. As Ladouceur notes, ‘it was hoped that chiefs would learn to exercise political authority within a simplified framework of modern local government’.⁵⁷ In contrast to direct rule, indirect rule thus meant the recognition not only of the institution of chieftaincy but also its historical dimension and the rules by which it operated. Native authorities would be presided over by a chief, one determined by custom. Each native authority would possess a native court and a native treasury. The major source of revenue was to be taxation. The native authority would also have the power to distribute land.

The introduction of indirect rule to the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast led to a conflict between northern and southern administrators, with severe consequences for the staffing of the northern colonial administration. Wholesale staff changes followed the conclusion of the ‘conflict’. Staniland calls this the ‘Battle of Watherston Road’.⁵⁸ The ‘Battle of Watherston Road’ was, according to Staniland, a short and bitter conflict between long-serving northern colonial officials (he calls them the ‘northern interest’) and mostly southern colonial administrators determined to introduce fully, indirect rule (he calls them the ‘Indirect Rule Team’). The

⁵⁵ Lund, C, *Local politics and the dynamics of property in Africa*. Cambridge, 2008.

⁵⁶ Spear, T., ‘Neo-traditionalism and the limits of invention in British Colonial Africa’, *Journal of African History*, 44: 1(2003), 8,

⁵⁷ Ladouceur, *Chiefs*, 54.

⁵⁸ Watherston Road in Tamale is the road where the political apparatus is concentrated. Furthermore, the colonial administrators lived in bungalows along Watherston Road. At the western end of the road (the opposite end to the ‘Tamale Township’ side) was the CCNT’s offices and residence.

striking thing about the tension between the ‘northern interest’ and the ‘Indirect Rule Team’, however – in the transition from direct rule to indirect rule in the Northern Territories – is that while discussion about the introduction of indirect rule was heated and the personnel implications profound, the change in form of administration was only incremental. This apparent incongruence is understood only if the analysis of the transition to indirect rule and the discussions surrounding the transition take account of deteriorating north-south relations over a longer period. This subsection argues that the ‘southern’ imposition of indirect rule on the northern colonial administration and the disputes that arose within that discussion were the result of a deteriorating relationship between the northern colonial administration and ‘Accra’, rather than a fundamental and deal-breaking difference of opinion on the method of administration.

In his analysis of the ‘Battle of Watherston Road’, Martin Staniland distinguishes between those who supported the introduction of full indirect rule, the ‘Indirect Rule Team’, and those who did not – the ‘northern interest’. The disagreements about indirect rule itself were less polarised than the title ‘Battle of Watherston Road’ suggests. Indeed, the northern colonial administration had always been relatively reliant on chiefs as instruments of colonial rule, even before the formulation of indirect rule. In 1898, even before the formal annexation of the Northern Territories, Captain Northcott had written:

... the agency employed will be that of the native chiefs, and their power will, during good behaviour, be uniformly supported, except in matters of their relationship with neighbouring chiefs and of offences of a capital nature.⁵⁹

In 1906, Acting Governor Bryan echoed Northcott’s sentiments, when he wrote of the Northern Territories to the Secretary of State:

The 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 system of administering this country.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ladouceur, *Chiefs*, 41.

⁶⁰ PRO, Kew, CO98/14 (Letter by Acting Governor Bryan to Secretary of State, 13th July, 1906).

The formulation of indirect rule as ‘ruling through the chiefs’ was thus not something which northern colonial officials regarded as radical. During the ‘Battle of Watherston Road’, the DC for Eastern Dagomba, W. E. Gilbert, commented:

... indirect rule ... has been my policy ever since I have been stationed here, all civil cases and all orders concerning the Dagomba country have been sent to the Na, so that the proposed innovation under the heading Indirect Rule will change in detail only.⁶¹

That the perceived difference between direct and indirect was not as large as the argument surrounding the transition suggests does not mean that there were no differences at all between the two systems of administration. The manner in which ‘ruling through the chiefs’ had been carried out prior to the introduction of indirect rule is well illustrated by an entry in the diary of CCNT Armitage. On 15 May 1918 Armitage recalled a letter he had received from Captain Hobart regarding the succession of the Karaga ‘Stool’:⁶²

... This morning I endeavoured to hold an election but I regret to say that I was unsuccessful. All the Chiefs and Headmen stated that they wished the appointment to be made direct by the Government ... in the old days the claimants to a stool appeared before the big Chiefs, presided over by the King of Yendi, and their choice was final. Now-a-days it was their wish that the Chief Commissioner should appoint new Chiefs.

Hobart stressed in his letter to the CCNT that,

Addressing the Chiefs I told them that it had always been my policy to interfere as little as possible with native custom and that I learnt with some regret that they had been unable to bring forward a candidate for the Karaga Stool on their own initiative.⁶³

Under pressure from the chiefs to elect a new Karaga-Na, Hobart obliged, describing his decision-making procedure as follows:

⁶¹ Staniland, *Lions*, 80.

⁶² ‘Stool’, as it is used here, referred to the seat of chief. It was a term taken from the south, especially from Asante, where the golden stool of the Asantehene is sacred. In colonial terminology, ‘Stool’ was used as a synonym for chieftaincy in the south and also in the north. In the north, however, chiefs sit on ‘skins’ rather than stools. Later on in the colonial period, the term ‘skins’ generally replaced the term ‘stools’. Interestingly, the department for local lands in Tamale continues to refer to ‘Stool Lands’.

⁶³ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56/1/252. (Tamale District Native Affairs), ‘Extract from the Informal Diary of the CCNT Armitage, 15th May, 1918’.

Of the seven candidates, one was immediately ruled out. I referred to Mahama, ex-Chief of Savelugu, who had once held one of the most important chieftainships in Dagomba but who lost his head and committed acts that brought about his de-stoolment in 1910, and subsequent imprisonment. He could never again expect to be appointed a chief under our administration ... I considered Zibbrim, Chief of Pisigu, and eldest son of the late Chief, to be the best man to place on the stool of Karaga. I had watched him for some years and had found him to be an energetic and just man, and one whose loyalty to the Government was beyond dispute. In electing Zibbrim chief of Karaga, I was not only paying a tribute to his father's memory, but was giving to the people a man who would, I was convinced, rule over them wisely and well.⁶⁴

Finally, Hobart wrote:

It was extremely gratifying to the P.C. and myself to witness the unanimity with which the chiefs accepted my decision ... not a single note of protest against it was struck and the chiefs returned to Tamale on the best possible terms with each other.⁶⁵

But northern colonial administrators struggled to see how the attitudes expressed in this type of administration differed from those set out by indirect rule. The DC for Tamale, Rutherford, stated that 'indirect rule is an established fact and has been so for years ...'⁶⁶

The key issue was the extent of chiefly authority and on this point there were certainly a number of disagreements. The northern administrators argued for a limited amount of authority with which chiefs would be endowed. Members of the 'northern interest' cited a lack of education and other 'northern conditions', of which they felt 'Accra' was not aware, as the reasons for curtailing the power of chiefs. But these were not more than technicalities, albeit significant ones, and can hardly explain the obstinacies displayed by northern colonial administrators. On 16 December 1929, Governor Thomas announced categorically that 'indirect' rule is the policy of the government',⁶⁷ bringing to an end the 'Battle of Watherston Road'.

⁶⁴ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56/1/252. (Tamale District Native Affairs), 'Extract from the informal diary of the CCNT Armitage, 15th May, 1918'.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Staniland, *Lions*, 80.

⁶⁷ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56/1/238, (Memorandum of Native Administration in the Northern Territories by Acting Chief Commissioner).

Wholesale changes of northern colonial staff followed, as the northern interest was replaced by the 'Indirect Rule Team'.

There is important sub-text in the discussions about the introduction of indirect rule in the Northern Territories. The 'northern interest' comprised men who had served long terms as northern officials and, against the backdrop of a desire amongst the northern colonial administrators to create a northern *raison d'être* beyond the supply of labour, had developed a degree of hostility towards the 'southern administration', or 'Accra', on account of a series of setbacks. The negative attitude towards the north more generally has been dealt with in previous chapters. The sentiment contained in the advice in 1898 of Governor Hodgson – 'I would not at present spend upon the Northern Territories ... a single penny more than is absolutely necessary'⁶⁸ – had not significantly changed in the thirty years since the annexation of the Northern Territories in 1900. The abolition of the caravan tax in 1908, stripping the Northern Territories of the lion's share of its revenue, had served as a reminder of the general attitude. In 1910 colonial administrators in Tamale submitted a request for funds from the colonial treasury for the building of a clubhouse in Tamale. To the great dissatisfaction of the northern colonial administration, the funds were not granted, a refusal regarded by a number of colonial administrators not only as indicative of the negative perception by southern administrators of the northern contribution to larger colonial aspirations, but also as an underestimation of the brutal conditions under which northern administrators were forced to work. The increasingly tiresome debate about the Northern Territories railway was running alongside the discussion about the introduction of indirect rule. It was, in fact, in the same year that the 'Battle of Watherston Road' was concluded that the railway project was indefinitely postponed. Such setbacks had soured the northern view of 'Accra'. One official from within the 'Indirect Rule Team' noted retrospectively that there was

⁶⁸ Eades, J.S., *Strangers and traders: Yoruba migrants, markets and the State in Northern Ghana*. Edinburgh University Press, UK, 1993, 29.

... a definite attitude of hostility to the Coast emanating from the N.T.s headquarters. Officers were allowed to speak and write openly of 'Accra' (the name by which all authority was known) in a most contemptuous way.⁶⁹

The 'Accra' view of the northern administration was at least contemptuous. A dim view was taken of the feeling that the 'northern interest' had become, as a group, isolated from the central administration in Accra. Governor Shenton Thomas, who replaced Guggisberg in 1926, wrote:

... so far as I can ascertain, this Government is completely in the dark as regards the native Administration policy in the Northern Territories; there seems to be no clear-cut statement of policy; we do not know what is being done or what our administration is intended to bring forth.⁷⁰

Finally, the CCNT after 1930, referring to the few northern administrators who were not re-posted after the introduction of indirect rule, noted that 'the use of this administration as a dump for unsuccessful officers is not obsolete'.⁷¹

By the time the 'Battle of Watherston Road' took place over the transition from direct to indirect rule, hostilities between northern and southern administrators had soured to such an extent that it is difficult to separate exiting frustrations from the discussion about indirect rule itself. Put differently, the 'Battle of Watherston Road' was as much about existing frustrations as it was about the introduction of indirect rule. Furthermore, the manner in which indirect rule would be implemented rendered the heated nature of the 'Battle of Watherston Road', and the consequences thereof, even more nonsensical. Most of criteria outlined by Lugard's manifesto were never realised in the Northern Territories, despite the ambitious intentions. This was especially true of Tamale.

Duncan-Johnstone & Blair

Changes in the staffing and character of the Northern Territories colonial administration followed the 'Battle of Watherston Road'. In 1929 members of the 'Indirect Rule Team' such as Duncan-Johnstone and Blair replaced long-serving members of the Northern Territories' administration such as Major Walker-Leigh,

⁶⁹ Staniland, *Lions*, 78.

⁷⁰ Staniland, *Lions*, 80.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 78.

who was CCNT between 1924 and 1929, but had first served in the north in 1907.⁷² Before turning to Tamale itself, a brief discussion on prominent personalities amongst those who took over the northern colonial administration is illustrative of the colonial context in the Northern Territories after the introduction of indirect rule. Two men were particularly influential: Duncan-Johnstone and Blair.

The members of the 'Indirect Rule Team' were, generally speaking, more integrated into the colonial centre at Accra. They comprised men such as A. C. Duncan-Johnstone, who became Provincial Commissioner (PC) for the Southern Province after the introduction of indirect rule, and Blair, who became DC for Eastern Dagomba after 1930. The approach to colonial administration changed rather radically with the change of personal. Administrators such as Duncan-Johnston and Blair immersed themselves in understanding 'native affairs'. Blair gained the nickname 'Dagbon-bia', which translates from Dagbani as 'son of Dagbon'. He spoke Dagbani and was revered for spending days in the field, investigating Dagbon history and tradition. Duncan-Johnstone's career reads as an ode to the British Empire, and his approach and attitude towards administration also reads as an ode to indirect rule, both its ideological underpinnings and its financial necessity.

Duncan-Johnston began his career serving with the British Red Cross expedition in Turkey in 1912. In 1913 he first arrived in the Gold Coast, assuming the duties in the Southern Province, Ashanti. A year later in 1914, he became the DC for Sunyani. He served with the British forces in Togoland during WWI and in 1917 joined the administration of the Northern Territories, serving as DC for Lawra. In 1922 he was transferred to Akim, again in the Ashanti region, and spent a year in the Seychelles arranging the repatriation of the exiled Asantehene, Prempeh. In 1925, the year in which he became engaged to a niece of Lady Guggisberg, wife of Governor Guggisberg, he served as Acting Chief Commissioner of Ashanti. Thora Williamson notes:

⁷² *Ibid.* 48.

The career and reputation of Duncan-Johnstone are said to have advanced considerably during the 1920s when he became engaged to a niece of Lady Guggisberg, wife of Governor Guggisberg.⁷³

In 1928 he returned to the Northern Territories, serving as PC, and in 1936 he served as acting CCNT. On a day in August 1930, he noted in his diary that he spent 'the afternoon and evening on the Arabic manuscript I got from Kpandai. From the dates given the chronicle begins about 1693 A.D. or the 1093 ... It is full of information'.⁷⁴ He felt strongly that administrators had a duty to be very close to their subjects, in order to improve the quality of colonial administration. He wrote that '(t)he first thing I did here was to strafe the District Commissioners for not travelling ...'.⁷⁵ He also wrote: 'It is of paramount importance that they (Political Officers) should be in touch with their Chiefs and people and should know every inch of their Districts and the characteristics of their villages'.⁷⁶ He deplored the 'tendency to discourage' what he called the 'personal elements of government'.⁷⁷ He noted in his diary:

Reading a delightful book entitled "The India We Served" by Sir Walter Lawrence. He remarks that in British India there is now very little personal touch between the people and the British members of the administration ... increasing office work, decreasing opportunities for going on tour, the use of motor cars which rarely leave the high road and the disuse of languages of the people, all combined, are destructive of that touch of nature which leavened and lightened the heavy regularity of our rule. We are following a somewhat similar road out here, but can we read the writing on the wall?⁷⁸

In a similar vein, he wrote in his diary in August 1930:

There is a good article in *Elders Review* for July by a former Nigerian resident, Hastings, entitled 'Nigeria Revisited'. He says, head transport is slow and expensive and economically unsound and is rightly superseded. But it had one

⁷³ Williamson T. & T. Kirk-Greene, *Gold Coast diaries: Chronicles of political officers in West Africa, 1900-1919*. London, 2000, 389. Thora Williamson notes: 'The career and reputation of Duncan-Johnstone are said to have advanced considerably during the 1920s when he became engaged to a niece of Lady Guggisberg, wife of Governor Guggisberg.'

⁷⁴ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/4/53. (Informal Diary of Duncan-Johnstone, Commissioner, Southern Province), 'June, 1930'.

⁷⁵ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/4/53. (Informal Diary of Duncan-Johnstone, Commissioner, Southern Province, June, 1930).

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

value which was, and still is incalculable and its disuse will be disadvantageous to all administrative officers. They used to trek their twenty miles a day along bush roads, halting continually to talk with hamlet headmen and even the folk who passed them on the track. They would interview all sorts and conditions of men while breakfasting by the road side, make notes, notice small things in every mile and above all they were moving at the peoples own pace living in an atmosphere of calm unhaste. Today, they flash past villages and wayfarers on motor cycle ... sometimes too impatient to reach camp a hundred miles ahead. They have become strangers to the people they are supposed to know. The old liaison between them is broken; the old confidence weakened. A night's camping – six or seven of them in a hundred miles – did very much to familiarise both with each other. It may be true that far more ground is covered and far more often, but nowadays a village gets no more than a whiff of petrol to remind it that the District Officer had come and gone.⁷⁹

Duncan-Johnstone was not only intensely engaged with ideological and moral aspects of indirect rule, he was also intensely engaged with the financial restrictions which had been ushered in with indirect rule. He boasted: 'On my last two trips I have travelled without a lorry cramming everything into the car in order to save money, uncomfortable but necessary as we are so hard up',⁸⁰ and juxtaposed this with Rutherford, DC for Tamale, a member of the 'northern interest'. In a June entry, he wrote of Rutherford:

'The District Commissioner, Tamale (Rutherford), is going on tour today for three days, the first time he has left the station for a long time, in fact since the beginning of April ... I noticed a lorry outside his house this morning ... as the District Commissioner is only to be away for four days I cannot see why he wants a lorry ...'⁸¹

He was especially hard on Rutherford, writing, 'I have to push the District Commissioner continually to do something. The trouble is he is lacking in ability and initiative ...'⁸² Rutherford was one of the few surviving members of the 'northern interest', having first served in the north in 1924, the same year that Walker-Leigh became CCNT. But Rutherford was certainly not the only one. Mr. Plange, a new administrator who was on his way to his new post at Navrongo, could

⁷⁹ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/4/53. (Informal diary of Duncan-Johnstone, Commissioner, Southern Province, August, 1930).

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

not complete the journey as a result of his lorry getting stuck. Duncan-Johnstone wrote disapprovingly in his diary:

Mr Plange presented himself having given up his attempt to get to Navaro. Said the lorry could not get along after leaving Wulugu. Apparently he made no attempt to get carriers to take him on to Pwalugu but came straight back on the lorry ... If you want something done in Tamale ... you have to do it yourself.⁸³

In contrast, Duncan-Johnstone noted of Blair, then DC for Yendi:

I have a high opinion of Blair, an earnest, keen, highly principled young man. When he has gained a little more experience he should grow into a very fine type of Political Officer.⁸⁴

Blair particularly impressed his seniors with the energy with which he engaged with his 'subjects', their history, and the local customs. Duncan-Johnstone noted enthusiastically in his diary: 'He (Blair) tells me that he has spent three days at Gushiegu getting the drummers to drum out the old Dagomba history'.⁸⁵ Duncan-Johnstone boasted regularly about his own fluency in Hausa, while Blair was fluent in Dagomba. Together, Blair and Johnstone embodied the new colonial administrator. They were men who prided themselves on getting their hands dirty and knowing their 'subjects'. And certainly, they were indirect-rule men, through and through.

The new northern administration, embodied by men such as Duncan-Johnstone and Blair, was thus fiercely dedicated to indirect rule and its introduction and implementation. Indirect rule was to be based on the Nigerian system.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the historical basis for the introduction of indirect rule was based on the fieldwork carried out by Rattray for the purposes of writing *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*.⁸⁷ In a car, on the road between Yendi and Tamale, the Governor of the Gold Coast asked Duncan-Johnstone, the Commissioner for the Southern Province

⁸³ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/4/53. (Informal diary of Duncan-Johnstone, Commissioner, Southern Province, June, 1930).

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ladouceur, *Chiefs*, 53.

⁸⁷ Rattray, R.S., *Tribes of Ashanti hinterland*, Volume II. Clarendon Press, 1932.

of the Northern Territories after the introduction of indirect rule, if he had ever visited Nigeria:

... to which I replied in the negative and I thought we ought to see the Northern Nigeria Courts, Treasury and native Authority Ordinances before framing our own ... and he agreed and said the Nigerian were very good and thorough.⁸⁸

But the dedication of Duncan-Johnstone and Blair to understanding native customs did not equate directly to a significant devolution of power to chiefs, as indirect rule demanded. There were without question a number of changes in the new approach to colonial administration. Clear attempts were made to identify the traditional domain, and every attempt was made not to intervene in matters which were regarded as being within that domain. In one instance, a young woman was seen 'hobbling through Tamale with her feet in leg irons'.⁸⁹ After an enquiry, it turned out that the woman was a young wife of the Savelugu Chief (Yo Na). She had eloped from Savelugu to the house of a Steward Boy in Tamale. The Steward Boy, fearing punishment for the seduction of the wife of a chief,⁹⁰ had sent her back to Savelugu, where the Yo Na, displeased with her actions, beat her and fettered her legs. At midnight she had once again escaped from the Yo Na's compound and returned to Tamale, this time in leg irons. Duncan-Johnstone responded to the incident by noting that 'although to our ideas it is repugnant to us to see a woman in leg irons, it is not so to the native, and according to Native Custom the Chief of Savelugu was acting within his rights'.⁹¹ He went on to state that 'to have taken action against Savelugu would have served no good purpose ... it would not have been in accordance with the Policy of Ruling Indirectly through the Chiefs'.⁹² A week previously, on the arrival of the Governor in Tamale, Duncan-Johnstone had noted

⁸⁸ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/4/53. (Informal Diary of Duncan-Johnstone, Commissioner, Southern Province) July, 1930.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ There were strict punishments handed out for those of guilty of seducing the wife of a chief. This too was part of the indirect rule paradigm: the seduction of the wife of a chief undermined the chief's authority. As a result, heavy fines were imposed on those who seduced the wife of a chief.

⁹¹ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/4/53. (Informal diary of Duncan-Johnstone, Commissioner, Southern Province, June, 1930).

⁹² *Ibid.*

in his diary of the chief in question that '(t)he Na of Savelugu marred the proceedings by turning up very drunk and being violently sick before His Excellency's arrival.'⁹³ The Yo Na was a regular source of disruption. A month previously, Duncan-Johnstone, on hearing that the Yo Na had contracted Guinea Worm in his Stomach and one in each thigh, remarked that he could not 'understand how he got them as he lives on Peto'⁹⁴ and sometimes, I suspect, something stronger'.⁹⁵ Despite the ill-repute of the chief, he was still allowed to act, unhindered, within the domain which the colonial administration deemed to be 'customary'.

But such inactions were superficial, especially in terms of what indirect rule was essentially about, namely native institutions – most prominently, the native treasury and native courts. Native institutions, with some kind of legitimated authority, were to form the bedrock of the new policy, satisfying both ideological and financial requirements. In practice in the Northern Territories, however, such native institutions never attained the kind of autonomy which indirect rule propagated, despite the enthusiasm with which they were pursued. The native treasury was one source of chiefly authority. But the potential revenue streams of the Dagomba native treasury were limited: monies came from court fees, fines, and cattle kraals and were by and large meagre. As a result, the Dagomba native treasury in Yendi (the monies available to the Ya Na) never possessed the funds to carry out any real 'development' projects or command significant authority (the Ya Na got authority from other sources). In 1933 it had only £593. Taxation was introduced only in 1936, and even then, there were serious problems with revenue collection. Furthermore, the colonial administration retained all manner of rights over chiefs, which worked to de-concentrate traditional authority, specifically in terms of the judicial powers of chiefs. The Native Tribunals Ordinance of 1932, which was supposed to empower chiefs in judicial terms, was laden with restrictions. It

⁹³ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/4/53. (Informal diary of Duncan-Johnstone, Commissioner, Southern Province, June, 1930).

⁹⁴ Peto is a locally brewed beer, derived from Guinea corn.

⁹⁵ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/4/53. (Informal diary of Duncan-Johnstone, Commissioner, Southern Province, June, 1930).

empowered the colonial administration to establish native tribunals as it saw fit, and colonial administrators had the right of access to all courts and their records. The DC could also order the transfer of a case from the native court to his own. Innez Sutton notes that 'by the 1930s, the British felt that more effective supervision of traditional tribunals was necessary',⁹⁶ largely on account of local challenges to chiefs' courts. She notes, 'gradually the traditional courts came more closely under government control ... a great deal of litigation was carried on through the British court system in the Gold Coast, more so than in East Africa'.⁹⁷ Sutton states further that 'it was difficult to fit new urban centres and new social and economic classes into the structure of indirect rule; in this situation, more direct British rule, and the English court system had to be applied'.⁹⁸ In this sense, the compromise with the authority of Tamale's Gulkpe-Na was heightened, compared with other northern native authorities.

Despite the enthusiasm to introduce indirect rule by the administrators who were posted to the north after 1930, indirect rule did not, in many instances, really empower chiefs. There were a number of changes, some more significant than others. But the changes to the institution of chieftaincy were often cosmetic rather than structural. Essentially, indirect rule had the same motivation as direct rule: A response to the 'native question' – how a tiny minority can effectively maintain control over an oppressed mass.⁹⁹ And it functioned in much the same way: At its apex a colonial administration concerned with maintaining control.

Indirect rule in Tamale: From Dakpema to Gulkpe-Na

An inherent tension within indirect rule was that between chiefly control over land and control over people, and if and how such powers should be separated. In many rural settings this nuanced distinction was often unproblematic. But in the urban setting, where the question of control over land and people was often difficult to

⁹⁶ Sutton, 'Law', 46.

⁹⁷ Sutton, 'Law', 46.

⁹⁸ Sutton, 'Law', 46.

⁹⁹ Mamdani, M., *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of colonialism*. Princeton, 1996, 4.

separate, indirect rule was especially problematic. That urban centres did not easily fit into the indirect-rule framework did not mean that Tamale was exempt from its application. On the contrary, the introduction of indirect rule in Tamale served as a type of test case for colonial administrators.

It was noted in Chapter 2 that Tamale's 'traditional' political structures had been confused by the partition of Dagbon into British and German Territories in 1902. British chiefs were ordered to abstain from any form of contact with the Ya Na at Yendi and faced punishments if such orders were breached. The argument presented by those who supported the Gulkpe-Na's return to Tamale was that the Gulkpe-Na, chief of the Gulkpeagu subdivision, in which Tamale is located, was in Yendi at the time of the partition and was ordered to remain there.¹⁰⁰ As a result, between 1907, when the administrative headquarters were moved to Tamale, and 1932, when the Gulkpe-Na was (re)instated as the highest chief in Tamale, the Dakpema consolidated his position as the apex of 'traditional' authority in Tamale.

Staniland states that the colonial administration 'discovered the falsity of the Dakpema's claims to paramountcy in the district at the end of the twenties, during investigations connected with the establishment of indirect rule'.¹⁰¹ Although this version of facts makes for a logical correspondence between the introduction of indirect rule and the change from Dakpiema to Gulkpe-Na, the return of the Gulkpe-Na to Tamale began in 1920, when the British colonial administration first sought contact with the Ya Na at Yendi, after it became increasingly likely that Germany was going to lose its colonial possessions, and talk of a united Dagbon began to surface. The Ya Na lodged a complaint with the colonial administration regarding the position of the Dakpema in 1920, a number of years prior to the introduction of indirect rule. According to the Annual Report of the Northern Territories for the years 1921-2:

The status of the Chief of Tamale was challenged by the Head Chief of the Dagombas who lives at Yendi. It appeared on investigation that during the

¹⁰⁰ Staniland, *Lions*, 62.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

separation of the Dagbombas into English and German he had been given powers in excess of those allowed him by old custom.¹⁰²

The report stated that ‘an agreement was come to by which he (the Dakpiema) was allowed to retain his powers until his death, when his successor would revert to his proper position’.¹⁰³ The Commissioner for the Southern Province wrote a letter to the DC for Yendi on 15 April 1922, explaining:

The Chiefs of Tamale, Choggu and Kanvilli are proceeding to Yendi for the Paramount Chief to explain to them personally the result of the palaver ... Tamale is to remain in its present position during his (the Dakpiema) lifetime and that afterwards the ancient custom of placing the villages under Gupero (sic) will be revived.¹⁰⁴

He stated that with immediate effect, ‘any village stools becoming vacant from now on will be appointed by the Gupero (sic)’.¹⁰⁵ The Ya Na’s version of Tamale’s political history (corroborated by Blair) did not go uncontested. A. H. Chandler, then Superintendent for Education, challenged the Gulkpe-Na’s legitimacy. According to his source,¹⁰⁶ within Dagomba tradition, the origins of the Dakpema were as follows:

... a very long time ago a Na of Yendi came to Tamale to fight a rebellion of some of the adjacent village, and after a struggle he conquered them during this civil war Tamale was actually loyal to Yendi ... The day after the decisive action the Na was taken ill of a head-ache. He retired to the shade of a tree and there the pain became so acute that he decided to leave this earth ... he rose and shook himself whereupon the earth opened and swallowed him. Consequently the earth of Tamale still contains his spirit. To guard this the next Na had a house built on the spot and entrusted Gupiena (sic) with its care. The latter lives close to Yendi so he had to make a local representative. This he did and called him the Dakpiema. Every year the Na still sends a present of a cow to the Dakpiema.¹⁰⁷

Chandler’s informant was J.S. Kaleem, a teacher from Tamale. Blair noted of Chandler’s memorandum in a private letter to Commissioner for the Southern

¹⁰² PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/62, (Annual Report NT 1922-23).

¹⁰³ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/62, (Annual Report NT 1922-23).

¹⁰⁴ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56-1-252, (Tamale District Native Affairs). ‘C.S.P. letter to DC Yendi, 15th April, 1922’.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Chandler’s source was J.S. Kaleem, a teacher. As it turned out, he was in line to succeed the Dakpiema. He later became a prominent member of the CPP branch in Tamale.

¹⁰⁷ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/2/28 (Dagomba Native Affairs), ‘Memorandum submitted by Chandler, 1930’

Province, Duncan-Johnstone, that 'it must be remembered that Chandler's informant was Mr Kaleem, School Teacher, and possible heir to the present Dakpema'.¹⁰⁸ Blair rejected Chandler's version of the origins of the Dakpiema. According to Blair, the line of the Dakpiema was started by Dabila, who was an elder of the chief of Kumbungu (Kumbungu-Na), a village some 21 kilometres north-east of Tamale. According to Blair, Dabila was driven from Kumbungu because he was charged with murder and fled to Tamale. Once in Tamale, he married into Tamale's local elite. His first son was then placed in charge of the market.¹⁰⁹ In a thorough response to Chandler's memorandum, Blair stated that 'the Dakpema was a petty elder, not an elder of Dagbon at all'.¹¹⁰ He went on to speculate that the Dakpema 'would not stand for a month if we left the country'.¹¹¹ The Dakpema was, according to Blair, 'an excellent example of a "white-man's chief"'.¹¹² In yet more correspondence on the matter, Blair noted, perhaps rather dramatically, that '(t)he loss of the Gulkpe-Na's regime around Tamale has caused much discontent against our rule'.¹¹³ The standing of Blair within the colonial administration rendered the discussion rather a no-contest.

The Dakpema Nsung-Na's successor, Lag'mbu, himself objected strongly to the Gulkpe-Na's position in Tamale. He wrote to the District Commissioner that 'it has never occurred that the chief of Yendi has interfered with the business of Gukpeogu,

¹⁰⁸ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/2/28, (Dagomba Native Affairs), 'Letter by Commissioner for Western Dagomba, H.A. Blair to Duncan-Johnstone'.

¹⁰⁹ In an interview with the current secretary of the Gulkpe-Na in 2008 (there is no Gulkpe-Na at present on account of the Yendi crisis) the secretary offered a variation of this account. He informed me that the said Dabila indeed did come to Tamale from Kumbungu. On arrival in Tamale, he proceeded to have an illegitimate affair with the mentally handicapped daughter of the Bugulana. In the course of the affair, the daughter of the Bugulana fell pregnant, and to prevent shame, the Bugulana consented to a marriage between Dabila and his daughter. As a result, he was forced to appoint Dabila to the head of the market, the Dakpema.

¹¹⁰ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/2/28, (Dagomba Native Affairs), 'Blair's response to Rev Chandler'

¹¹¹ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/2/28, (Dagomba Native Affairs), 'Note by District Commissioner for Western Dagomba Blair, 'Da-Kpema of Tamale'.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/2/28, (Dagomba Native Affairs), 'Chieftainship (Nam) and the Dagomba Constitution compiled primarily by District Commissioner for Western Dagomba, H.A Blair'.

the Tamale area. This area has never been under the rule of any prince of Yendi'.¹¹⁴ The Dakpema was forced by the colonial administration to retract his assertion and apologise. He denied writing the letter and blamed his court clerk, J.S. Kaleem, a recent graduate of Achimota, the same Kaleem who had informed Chandler. Although the administration accepted the Dakpema's apology, J.S. Kaleem was sent into exile as a punishment, to teach at a school in Yendi.¹¹⁵

The return of the Gulkpe-Na was further complicated by a series of taboos. There was, for instance, a taboo on the Gulkpe-Na's coming west more than three times. The last holder was said to have died from the effects of a fourth visit to Tamale.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, the Gulkpe-Na was reportedly 'very frightened of the local fetishes and taboos, to take over the reigns of government from the Dakpiema and begin to seriously organise Gulkpiego himself'.¹¹⁷ The Ya Na, on the consultation of the colonial administration, claimed that the taboo was only operative if the Gulkpe-Na actually entered Tamale township and set eyes on the Dakpema, and he made the suggestion that the Gulkpe-Na make his headquarters just outside Tamale in Zoguyili.¹¹⁸ Finally, in April 1932, the colonial administration took advantage of a stroke suffered by the Dakpiema to reinstate the Gulkpe-Na. In a report on the progress of native administration, Blair noted:

'On this date (April, 1932), the newly appointed sub-divisional chief of Gulkpiego, the Gulkpe Na was persuaded to come to Tamale ... This takeover was facilitated by the Dakpiema unfortunately having a stroke from which he is still suffering'.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Dakpema Lag'mbu letter to District Commissioner, Tamale, October 1930, quoted in MacGaffey, 'History', 112.

¹¹⁵ MacGaffey, 'History', 112.

¹¹⁶ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/2/28 (Dagomba Native Affairs), 'Memorandum submitted by Chandler, 1930'.

¹¹⁷ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/2/91, (Dagomba Native Administration), 'Note by H.A. Blair, 1932'.

¹¹⁸ MacGaffey, 'History', 112.

¹¹⁹ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/2/91, (Dagomba Native Administration), 'Note by H.A. Blair, 1932'.

Blair concluded rather categorically that ‘the controversy that the Dakpiema was an important chief was laid to rest’.¹²⁰ To Blair, the appointment of the Gulkpe-Na as chief of Tamale marked the opening of the way for the introduction of indirect rule to Tamale. Indeed, within a relatively short period, the Gulkpe-Na, with the assistance of the colonial administration, was able to assert some authority in Tamale. He built a house in Tamale and extended his house in Zoguyili. In June 1932 he went on tour to Accra, taking along with him an entourage of 16 subordinate chiefs, paying all the expenses. Furthermore, five years later in 1937, the Ya Na and council stated that, ‘the Ya Na holds the ultimate control over land in Dagomba and may remove any person from such land. The right of removal, however, is not exercised in practice save in cases of extreme insubordination’.¹²¹ In such ways, as the Ya Na’s authority over Dagbon increased, so too, it was felt, did the authority of the Gulkpe-Na, whose authority came directly from Yendi. However, while the Gulkpe-Na drew his authority from Yendi, the Dakpema had the advantage of deep and extensive political and marital alliances in the local population, and so the rivalry continued.¹²² Thus, the matter of the Dakpema/Gulkpe-Na was not laid to rest as Blair had anticipated. In 1932, Lag’mbu was replaced by Dakpema Allassani, who managed to assert some authority over parts of Tamale, especially Dagomba Fong (which translates in Dagomba to ‘area of men’, an area in the heart of Tamale which served as a mausoleum for local royals). He was paid a salary of £20, and extracted rent in parts of Tamale. The Dakpema continued to have a strong local following, while the Gulkpe-Na was seen as someone who belonged to both Yendi and the colonial administration. Fifteen years after the Gulkpe-Na replaced the Dakpema as chief of Tamale, in 1947, the DC for Tamale, on drawing up a scheme for the establishment of a Tamale Urban Council wrote: ‘The Chief problem seems to be the relation between the proposed council and the N.A. as well as the position of the Gulkpena and the Dakpema in the

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Mahama, I., *History and traditions of Dagon*. GLLBT, 2004, 60.

¹²² MacGaffey, ‘History’, 118.

future'.¹²³ After 1957, the tension between the Dakpema and the Gulkpe-Na would again lead to the intervention of the national government and the Ya Na. The result was a political structure riddled with ambiguities. Frequently, authority overlapped, especially when disputes over land arose. Such disputes worked to legitimate either the Dakpema or the Gulkpe-Na, despite colonial support of the Gulkpe-Na. The colonial administration either overestimated the value placed on 'tradition' by Tamale's increasingly urban community or underestimated the importance of claims legitimated by the Dakpema prior to 1932.

Tamale's institutional multiplicity manifested itself primarily in how contested claims were made and settled in Tamale. Usually such claims related to land, but not always. For instance, in 1948 Niendow Dawuda claimed that plot 6 in Ward D was given to his father by the late Dakpema, Nsung-Na, 'during the time the white men were at Gambaga'.¹²⁴ Niendow Dawuda had gone to Accra to work as a cook. On his return a Mallam, Alidu Nyobaliga, was residing in his house. The Mallam claimed that the Dakpema had said that he could stay in the house until Niendow Dawuda returned. Niendow Dawuda, who was on a short visit to Tamale, went with the Mallam to the Dakpema to ascertain if that was indeed the case. The Dakpema confirmed that it was, so Niendow Dawuda returned to the south leaving the Mallam in his house. While Niendow Dawuda was in the south, the Gulkpe-Na was enskinned as chief of Tamale. The Gulkpe-Na reallocated the house. Niendow Dawuda notes that 'the Gulkpe-Na came from Yendi and put his people in the house'.¹²⁵ Niendow Dawuda put his claim to Mr Barker, the Commissioner of Lands. Mr Barker referred the case back to the Gulkpe-Na, who ruled that Niendow Dawuda 'should quit his house'.¹²⁶

In another case, in 1946 Emmanuel Bawah had consulted the DC for Tamale, Irvine Glass, regarding a dispute about plot 27 in Ward B of the town. The DC sent

¹²³ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 2/7/2, (Informal Diary, District Commissioner, Tamale), May, 1947.

¹²⁴ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 19/1/17, (Ward D), 'Letter from Niendow Dawuda to District Commissioner, 1948'.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

Emmanuel Bawah to see the Gulkpe-Na. According to Emmanuel Bawah, the Gulkpe-Na told him that if he paid the Gulkpe-Na £6, he would be granted the plot. Emmanuel Bawah claimed to have paid the money but was not awarded the plot and so wrote a letter to the District Commissioner stating that, 'the Gulkpe-Na is selling justice for money, I therefore humbly and respectfully beg to appeal to you to re-hear the case please'.¹²⁷ Irvine Glass, after carrying out some investigations, concluded the case by judging that 'there is a clear attempt by Bawa to bribe the court'.¹²⁸

The cases above (of which there were many) were not simply disputes about facts, but a debate about the control and, consequently, the constitution of authority and legitimacy in Tamale. They called into question the authority of the District Commissioner, the authority of the institution of chieftaincy in Tamale, and the legitimacy of 'traditional customs', on which indirect rule relied, and confused the traditional focus which they were attempting to create. Christian Lund has noted that 'the process whereby rights over land ... are settled and contested, are fundamental to how public authority is established and challenged'.¹²⁹ The colonial administration was compelled to side with the Gulkpe-Na, as in the cases above, in order to consolidate his authority. By doing so, however, men like Emmanuel Bawah, and especially Niendow Dawuda, sought alternative sources of authority. In this way, the Dakpema remained a figure of political concentration in Tamale. Chiefs were also far more than simply settlers of disputes. They were regarded by most as possessors of wisdom and capable of providing useful advice in the case of domestic or other problems. The Dakpema did not suddenly lose these characteristics on the arrival of the Gulkpe-Na. He continued to gain the respect of many of the residents of Tamale, thereby maintaining the presence of his authority. As long as there were people in Tamale who legitimised the authority of the Dakpema, the institution of the Dakpema would continue to exist. This was an oversight of the top-down approach taken by the colonial administration. Thus,

¹²⁷ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/2/91. (Dagomba Native Authority), 'Letter from Emmanuel Bawah to District Commissioner Tamale'.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Lund, C., *Local*, 3.

despite the efforts of the colonial administration, the claim of the institution of the Dakpema to at least some authority in Tamale persisted – and for indirect rule, remained problematic.

Furthermore, such disputes frequently induced the colonial administration to wade into jurisdictions which under indirect rule were intended to be dealt with within the ‘traditional’ domain (as in both the examples cited above). The persistent involvement of colonial authority in such domains set precedents which further undermined ‘traditional’ authority and, importantly, ran contrary to the tenets of ‘ruling indirectly’. Duncan-Johnstone had hoped that ‘the Political Officers of this Province will act as sympathetic advisors and councillors to the Paramount Chiefs, keeping in the background as far as possible so as not to lower the Chief’s prestige’.¹³⁰ This was rarely the case in Tamale, where the colonial administration was in many instances looked to settle claims. Tamale’s increasingly urban population was well aware that the colonial administrators held the ultimate authority.

To conclude, that the Gulkpe-Na’s authority did not replace that of the Dakpema is clear, and as a result Tamale’s traditional focus developed as a confused hierarchical system, accommodating several ill-defined centres of traditional authority. The constant interference of the colonial administration in domains regarded as ‘traditional’ by indirect rule further weakened the native institutions in Tamale, which the colonial administration was trying to create.

The politics and economics of an urban space under indirect rule

Paul Nugent does an entertaining job of highlighting a number of symbols of power in Accra. In Tamale, symbols of power are perhaps less overt than they may be in Accra.¹³¹ But certainly, behind a low-key façade, they are there; what is more, with a few exceptions, many have been there since the 1930s. On the corner, opposite Tamale’s first underground petrol tank, built by Lebanese businessman, P. K.

¹³⁰ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/4/53, (Informal diary of the Commissioner, Southern Province, Duncan-Johnstone) July, 1930.

¹³¹ Nugent, P. *Big men, small boys and politics: Power, ideology and the burden of history in rawlings’ Ghana, 1982-1994*. UK, 1995, 1.

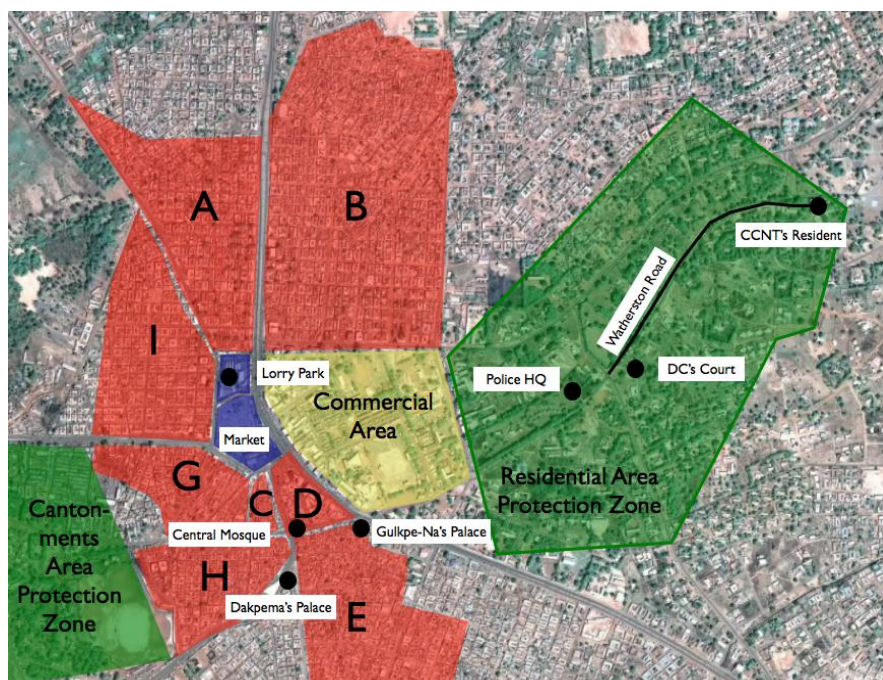
Kassardjan, is the palace of Gulkpe-Na. A little to the west is the central mosque, perhaps the most prominent building on the Tamale skyline. To the north of the mosque lies the taxi-rank and the central market, while to the south of the central mosque lies the palace of the Dakpema (it is somewhat grander than that of the Gulkpe-Na). Far to the west, along Watherston Road, lies the administrative heart of Tamale. Heading eastwards along Waterstone Road, the first striking presence is that of the Parade Ground. It is not comparable to Independence Square in Accra, but somehow, relatively speaking, its presence is equally powerful. Further down Waterston Road, on the right-hand side, is Tamale's police headquarters. One then approaches a traffic circle. The traffic circle has, through its centre, gates on both the eastern and western side. Apparently, it was built when Nkrumah came, so that his motorcade could cross straight over the circle, without slowing down to go around it. Then, on the right-hand side, lies Tamale's High Court. It was first the court of the administration, and later, when the Gulkpe-Na was re-introduced to Tamale, he established his native tribunal there. Then, on both the right and left, one comes across a series of dilapidated, colonial-style houses. These served as the residences for colonial administrators and medical officers. Finally, right at the end of Watherston Road, by now some distance from the town centre, lies the largest residence of all, with military guards at the gate, under a giant Ghanaian flag – the former residence of the Chief Commissioner of the Gold Coast, now the residence of the MP for northern Ghana. How these symbols of power relate to one another spatially is more than a simple metaphor. Their location is rather the result of those relationships. Tamale's constellation of authority had a spatial dynamic. Andreas Eckhert notes:

Relations of power and social stratification are reflected in space ... we can discern in the order of space something of a lived map of daily life. Space is an important and contested area of colonial and post-colonial daily life. Power structures are inscribed in space, and space reflects social organisation and defines the people in it.

A spatial analysis of Tamale thus helps not only to further delineate the centres of power in Tamale, it also provides insights into how each of these related to one

another in daily life. This subsection is concerned with the power and the politics of urban space in Tamale under indirect rule.

4.1: Map of Tamale showing wards as they were in 1932



Apart from the problems arising from a lack of traditional focus in Tamale, indirect rule was severely undermined by the increasingly urban character of the town. Indirect rule assumed geographically bound, mutually exclusive, ethnic units. Tamale's increasingly heterogeneous character contradicted these assumptions. In order to cater for Tamale's heterogeneous character, wards were intended to be ethnically bound, although this was not enforced by law. In some instances, a narrow street was all that separated wards. The Moshie Zongo, for instance, lay adjacent to the old Dagomba area of Tamale (Central Mosque or Ward D) to the north, and to the South of Ward D lay the Hausa Zongo. The Gold Coast had a longer history of attempts at ethnically bound urban planning, when the British first

began 'planning' Accra. While the Ga community claimed the area around Korle Lagoon to be sacred, the British created Agbogbloshie (from Ga, meaning 'site of the Agbogblo shrine') for the Ga, and Fadama (from the Hausa, meaning 'floodplains') for northern migrants.¹³²

Despite these attempts, the kind of heterogeneity created by urban settlements caused a plethora of administrative problems. This is best illustrated in a note in his informal diary of the Commissioner for the Southern Province. He reported that

... trouble originated with certain Hausas who lived in the Hausa Zongo going to live in the Moshi Zongo ... If the Sarikin Zongo (Hausa Chief) called them for work ... they replied they were not under him but under the Moshi Chief because they lived in the latter's Zongo. If the latter called them for labour they replied they were Hausa and not Moshis.¹³³

Thus, apart from the ongoing confusion between the authority of the Dakpema and that of the Gulkpe-Na, the large communities of non-Dagomba residents posed other problems for Tamale's 'traditional' structures under indirect rule. It was, for instance, problematic that the Gulkpe-Na, a Dagomba, presided over a native tribunal which heard cases often involving non-Dagombas. As a result, a system of 'headmen' was established. Under the system, each 'stranger' community elected a headman, who would act as an advisor to the Gulkpe-Na in cases where members of their community were involved. These headmen became powerful members of Tamale's community, although the Gulkpe-Na was regarded, at least by the colonial administration, as the apex of Tamale's 'traditional' political system. Furthermore, there was the large community of southern clerical employees of the colonial administration. The Twi-speaking element of this community already numbered over fifty in Tamale in 1913. The 'little colony' rejected any initiatives to be integrated into Tamale's northern communities. Kimble notes that they 'must have lived like expatriates, with their own amusements and church services'.¹³⁴ They

¹³² Myers, G., *African cities: Alternative visions of urban theory and practice*. Zed Books, London, 2011, 91.

¹³³ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/4/53, (Informal diary of the Commissioner, Southern Province, Duncan-Johnstone), 'February 21st, 1930.'

¹³⁴ Kimble, D., *A political history of Ghana, 1850-1928*. Oxford University Press, 1963, 535-6.

seldom intermarried. In 1913 the Twi-speaking element formed a society, 'The Foreigners' Arbitration', 'in order to avoid being summoned before local tribunals'.¹³⁵ The colonial administration refused to officially recognise the society, but it serves as an illustration of southerners' aversion to local political elites in Tamale, thereby creating yet another extra-colonial constellation of authority in Tamale.

Before reflecting on Tamale's urban space, several groupings need to be considered, some of which have been mentioned previously in this chapter. There is a strong distinction between the colonised and the coloniser. This distinction may be less relevant than in comparable East African towns as a result of larger European populations, but the distinction is relevant in the case of Tamale nonetheless. The fact that segregation in the West Africa was underpinned by medical theories has a long history.¹³⁶ In the case of Tamale, as in many East African examples, the distinction between Europeans and Africans, despite only a small European population, had a strong spatial dynamic. But racial distinctions were not the only urban socio-cultural distinctions; ethnic distinctions form another important framework within which to understand the daily politics of urban space. These too had a spatial dynamic, although perhaps not as vivid as the racial distinction. Within the ethnic distinction, an important distinction needs to be made between natives and strangers, or between Dagombas and non-Dagombas. In Tamale, religious distinctions also has a spatial dimension. Finally, there was the large aforementioned community of southerners. A spatial analysis of Tamale under direct rule reveals a number of insights into the relationships between these categories. It also reveals something about the manner in which chieftaincy operated in Tamale. The remainder of this subsection is concerned with these revelations.

Thomas Spear, regarding colonial town planning in colonial cities, notes:

European headquarters usually overlooked and physically dominated 'native settlements', while Europeans preferred to live in picturesque hillside locations

¹³⁵ Kimble, D., *Political*, 535-6.

¹³⁶ See, for instance, Leo Spitzer's article, 'The mosquito and segregation in Sierra Leone', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 2(1968), 49-61.

with ‘a breeze and a view’ that dominated those below them, socially and culturally.¹³⁷

Although Thomas Spear was especially interested in East African towns, he did not limit his description to East African towns. During the planning of Tamale, there was indeed evidence of Spear’s ‘colonial vision’. In 1907, the colonial offices and residences were to be built ‘not windward of the town’.¹³⁸ Everything was done to create the type of ‘Garden City’ feel which colonial administrations across Africa were trying to create. Watherston Road, along which the colonial residences were built, was lined with *Neem* trees, which originate from the Indian subcontinent. At the end of Watherston Road, furthest from Tamale Township, stood the residence of CCNT, by some distance the largest residence in Tamale. The employment of the phrase ‘protection zone’ to denote the colonial residential area on the 1932 map of Tamale is also interesting. This type of discourse was employed in the urban planning of many African cities which possessed a colonial administration, and it points to prevailing medical theories as vindications of segregation. Perhaps the most well-documented of urban planning underpinned by medical arguments is that of Free Town, where a similar discourse was used to justify urban segregation owing to malaria.¹³⁹ The police headquarters and the court were situated at the beginning of Watherston Road, between Tamale Township and the start of the colonial ‘protection zone’. Thomas Spear notes: ‘Colonial planning was further marked by European iconographies of status ...’¹⁴⁰ Although the examples of this in Tamale are relatively few (I suggest not due to a lack of intent, but due to a lack of resources), the location of the police headquarters and the court in relation to European and African residences does provide an excellent example of this kind of

¹³⁷ Spear, T., “‘A town of strangers’ or “‘A model modern East African Town’”? Arusha & the Arusha’. In: Anderson, D.M. & R. Rathbone, eds, *Africa’s urban past*. James Currey, 2000, 109.

¹³⁸ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56/1/60 (Report on Sites for New Headquarters, Tamale), ‘Report by Capt. Kineally’.

¹³⁹ Spitzer, L., ‘The mosquito and segregation in Sierra Leone’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 2 (1968), 49-61.

¹⁴⁰ Spear, T., “‘A town of strangers’ or “‘A model modern East African Town’”? Arusha & the Arusha’. In: Anderson, D.M. & R. Rathbone, eds, *Africa’s urban past*. James Currey, 2000, 109

thinking. The police headquarters was situated as a kind of gateway between Tamale township and the colonial offices and residences (see Map of Tamale above).

Natives and strangers

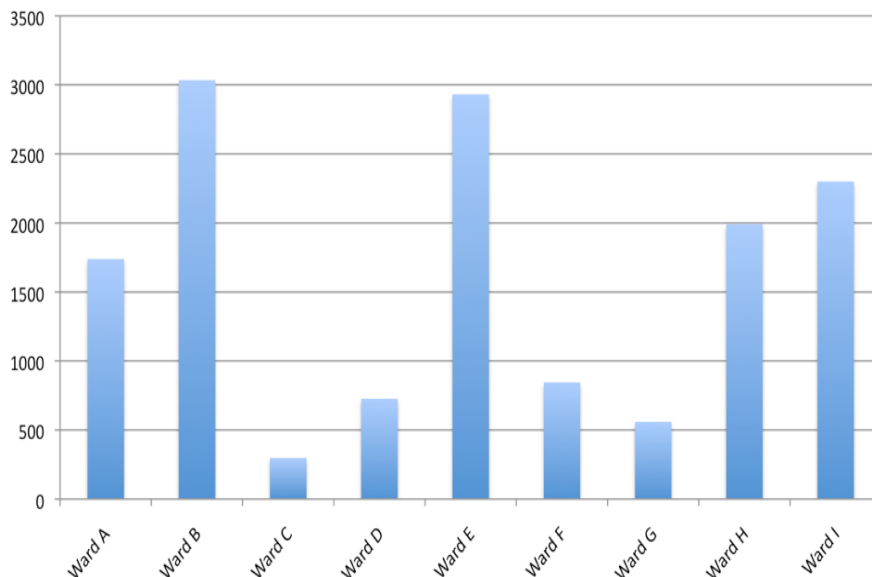
The wards which were created to house Tamale's growing population were intended to have an ethnic dimension, but there were no legal rules as to who could lease land where. However, that there were no legal rules regarding the ethnic settlement in wards did not mean that wards did not possess strong ethnic inclinations. Newer wards tended to be larger than older ward. Ward C, D and G, the oldest wards, were also the smallest in terms of number of persons, whilst newer wards, such as B and E, and H and I, were larger.

The oldest and original settlement in Tamale is Ward D, illustrated on the map above. In 1935, Ward D comprised almost entirely Dagomba leaseholders. It was the most homogenous ward in Tamale. Apart from 49 Dagomba leaseholders in Ward D, there was one Mamprussi leaseholder, 1 southerner, 1 Bamzaberima, and 1 other. Ward D lies close to the market. It also contains all the prominent political and religious intuitions: The central mosque is located in Ward D, as also is the palace of the Gulkpe-Na and that of the Dakpema. Interestingly, in 1948, Ward D had the second least educated persons as a percentage of total persons in the ward.¹⁴¹ Only Ward G, also an old ward, had a lower percentage of educated persons. Ward C, like Ward D, was both an old ward of Tamale and had a largely Dagomba demographic, albeit slightly more heterogeneous. Ward C had 4 southern leaseholders, 3 Mamprussi, 1 Hausa, and 1 Grunshi leaseholder, the remainder being made up of Dagomba tenants. The concentration of political and religious apparatus in and around Ward D and C, more or less in the centre of Tamale, is highly suggestive of the manner in which both colonial and local politics operated in Tamale: Politically, Tamale was a Dagomba town. Irvine Glass, DC for Tamale in the early 1930s, noted:

¹⁴¹ Population census of the Gold Coast and its protectorates for the year 1948.

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.¹⁴²

4.2. Tamale Wards, Number of Persons, 1948



Source: Population census of the Gold Coast and its protectorates for the year 1948

Wards A and B were demarcated after WWI, when a number of ex-servicemen, mainly Moshis, settled in Tamale. Ward A unsurprisingly later became known as the Moshi Zongo,¹⁴³ consisting overwhelmingly of Moshi leaseholders, although there were also a number of Hausa, and Grunshi leaseholders. It is not coincidental that these ethnic groups formed prominent components of the men recruited for WWI. Of all the wards, the ethnic breakdown of Ward A most strongly resembles the ethnic breakdown of soldiers employed in WWI and WWII. This is hardly surprising, given that Ward A was specifically built to house returning soldiers.

¹⁴² 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.

¹⁴³ Eades, J.S., *Strangers*, 17.

Ward B, adjacent to Ward A, resembles Ward A and was inhabited primarily by Moshi, with a strong Hausa presence. Ward D also housed a ‘foreigner’, probably a Lebanese trader. Wards G and I, which later became known as ‘Sabongida’, housed a number of Yoruba, the subject of Jeremy Eades’ book, *Strangers and Traders*.¹⁴⁴ The Yoruba had a very prominent economic role in Tamale: They served as ‘bulk-breakers’ and were also often to be seen bicycling consumer goods purchased from colonial trading firms out to rural areas. As a group, the Yoruba are distinguished by a degree of urbanisation altogether exceptional in tropical Africa.¹⁴⁵ Ward E housed many southerners, the majority of whom were employees of the colonial administration. Finally, Ward F, which later became known as the ‘Zongo’, housed Hausa traders.

The political conservatism of the large Dagomba community in Tamale is reflected also in the spatial constellation of Tamale’s political apparatus. Financially, however, the opposite was true. Of all the wards, Ward D had the largest number of persons per household. Political hegemony thus had little if no relations to financial or economic hegemony. Furthermore, the distinction between ‘native’ and ‘stranger’ was not only important for how politics in Tamale functioned but also in terms of the native treasury. ‘Natives’ would pay only ‘peppercorn rent’,¹⁴⁶ which amounted to a small tribute to the chief, and only if called upon to do so, while ‘strangers’ paid ‘economic rent’, which was fixed by the colonial administration. Half of all ‘economic rent’ went to the native authority, while the other half went to the colonial government. This financial arrangement empowered the ‘stranger’ communities in Tamale, both within the native authority and within the colonial government. Duncan-Johnstone noted, for instance, that he ‘issued permits to the Limam of Tamale, the Serikin Zongo, the Sarikin Moshi and the Sarikin Yoruba to

¹⁴⁴ Eades, J.S., *Strangers*, 29.

¹⁴⁵ Law, R., ‘Towards a history of urbanization in pre-volonial Yorubaland’. In: *African Historical Demography*, 1977, Centre of African Studies University of Edinburgh.

¹⁴⁶ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/1/240 (Tamale Ward D New Layout), ‘Letter to CCNT by DC, Tamale, 3rd July, 1946’.

sacrifice sheep in their houses on the feast of the Zulhadj on May 10, the first day of the Moslem New Year'.¹⁴⁷ However, he noted that '(t)he Principal Veterinary Officer (Stewart) has written protesting against this and insists that the animals must be killed in the slaughter house'.¹⁴⁸ Duncan-Johnstone noted that 'Stewart asks why we should study the wishes of aliens with an alien religion'.¹⁴⁹ He stated that the grounds for his refusal to renege on his word were, in his own words, '(t)he so-called aliens have been settled here for years and it is from them that we draw the town revenue'.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, the economic activity generated by groups such as the Yoruba was extraordinarily valuable. Albeit much later, in the 1960s, Yoruba traders occupied over a third of all stalls in the Tamale Central Market.¹⁵¹ But even in 1931, 305 Yoruba were residing in Tamale and injecting significant entrepreneurial energy into the town.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/4/53. (Informal Diary of the Commissioner, Southern Province, Duncan-Johnstone), 'May 1930.'

¹⁴⁸ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/4/53. (Informal Diary of the Commissioner, Southern Province, Duncan-Johnstone), 'May 1930.'

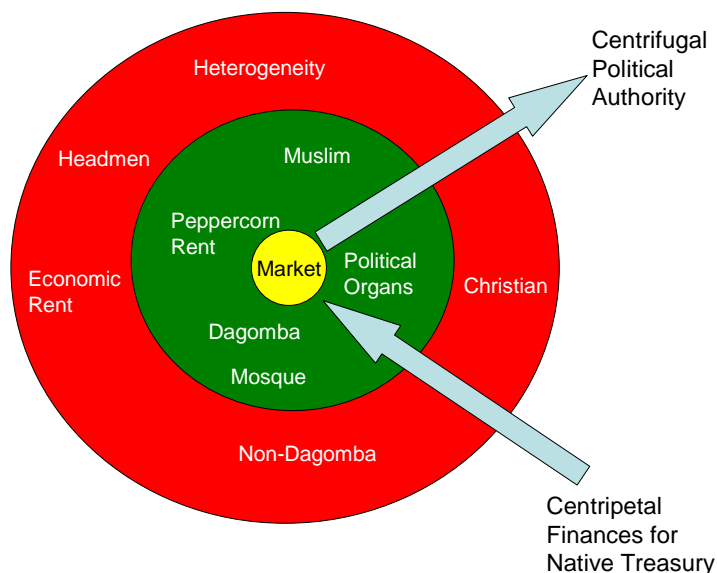
¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Eades, J.S., *Strangers*, 33.

¹⁵² *Ibid.* 34.

4.2: Centrifugal political authority versus centripetal finances for native and colonial treasury



In Tamale there thus emerged an inverse relationship between the spatial distribution of political concentration on the one hand, and economic and financial concentration on the other. This is illustrated by the image above (Figure 4.2). As far as the system of indirect rule was concerned, on paper at least, this contradiction was devastating. It further exacerbated the tension between Dagomba and stranger communities. The relationship between chiefs and their subjects under indirect rule was intended to be through a kind of patronage system, where payments in the form of taxation or rent ensured a degree of ‘belonging’, and on the basis of ‘belonging’, one could access land and profit from other institutional functions, such as protection. In Tamale, especially before the introduction of taxation, the inverse was true. Those who filled the native treasury profited the least from Tamale’s political arrangements. As the town became increasingly populated, pressure on land also increased. This raised the stakes, and the number of land disputes rose. Such

disputes were not only between individual leaseholders, but between the colonial administration and local communities. The most notable of such disputes arose out of the plans to redevelop Ward D. This case study is explored in the following chapter.

Conclusion

The implementation of indirect rule in Tamale, judged by the criteria of indirect rule itself, was a failure. Tamale did not emerge from indirect rule with a strong traditional political structure, as had been the intention of the 'Indirect Rule Team'. Instead, it emerged with several ill-defined centres of authority. In 1930, ambitious administrators keen to introduce indirect rule in the Northern Territories replaced those administrators who had served long terms in the north. The new administrators, represented by men such as Duncan-Johnstone and Blair, put much energy into unearthing the 'tradition' which they hoped to resurrect, in line with the indirect rule mandate. This did not translate into the establishment of effective native institutions, however, as indirect rule demanded. This chapter has argued that for a number of reasons, this failure was particularly felt in Tamale. Underpinning this failure was the replacement of the Dakpema with the Gulkpe-Na in 1932. In attempting to establish a 'traditional' chain of command in Tamale, the colonial administration (re)introduced the Gulkpe-Na's authority at the expense of the Dakpema. The authority of the Dakpema, however, lingered on, despite attempts to legitimise the Gulkpe-Na. This bi-nodal power construction had implications for the manner in which chieftaincy functions in Tamale on a daily basis, illustrated by the two distinct land disputes in Tamale. The problem of urban chieftaincy in Tamale under indirect rule was further exacerbated by the diversity of urban life. Tamale's multi-ethnic composition also resulted in the introduction of headmen, which further diluted authority in Tamale.

Tamale from the east, 1910



Source: Basel Mission Image Archive

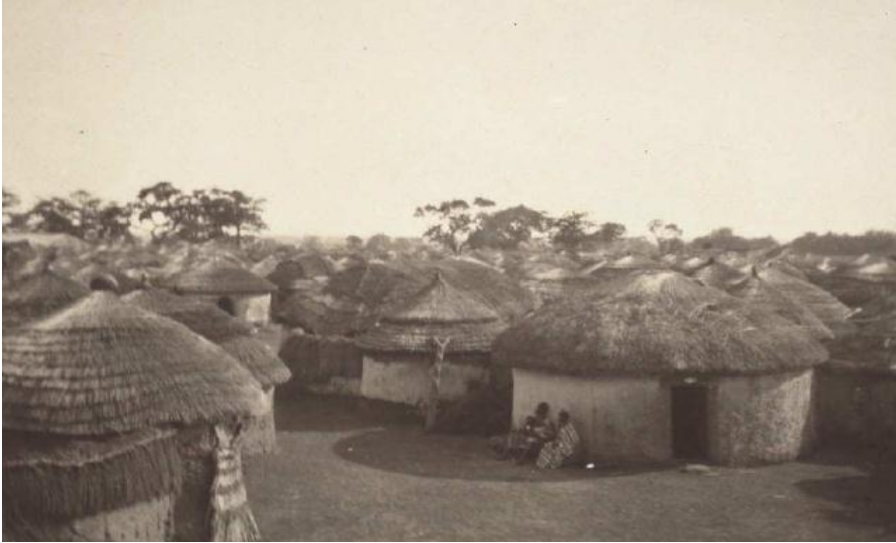
Government station, Tamale, 1910



Source: Basel Mission Image Archive

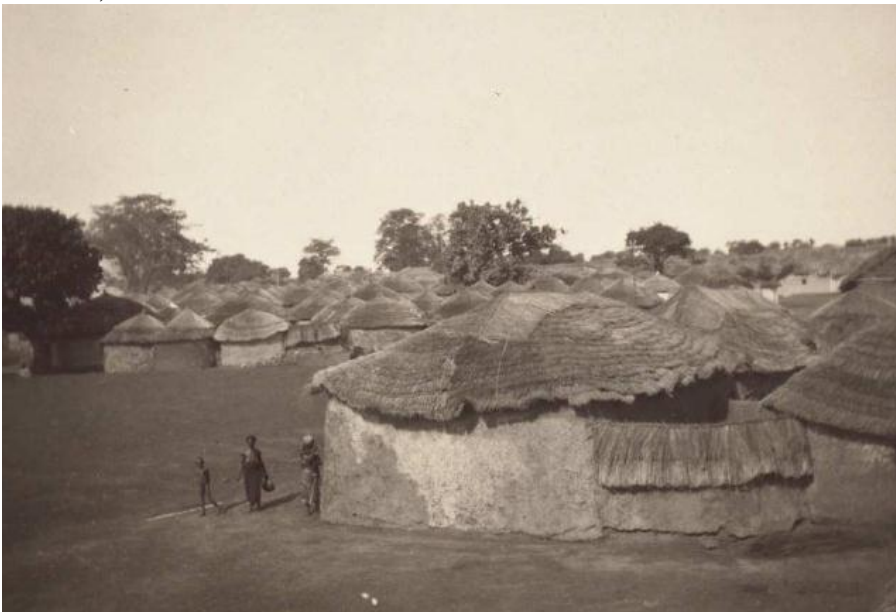
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Tamale, 1928



Source: Basel Mission Image Archive

Tamale, 1928



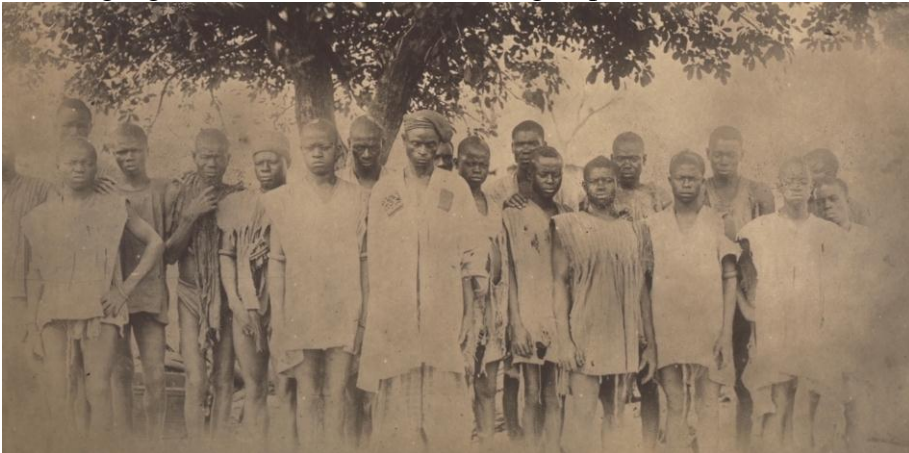
Source: Basel Mission Image Archive

The Ya Na and followers, visiting Tamale, 1936



Source: Basel Mission Image Archive

Carrier gang between Tamale and Savelugu, (pre-1920)



Source: Basel Mission Image Archive

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Government postman, 1906



Source: Basel Mission Image Archive

Tamale high street, 1955



Source: Information Services, Ghana, Accra

Tamale Central Market, 1955



Source: Information Services, Ghana, Accra

Tamale Lorry Park, 1955



Source: Information Services, Ghana, Accra

