Tamale 1907-1957 : between colonial trade and colonial chieftainship
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Conclusion

Introduction

There is a profound tension in Tamale's urban existence; on the one had, Tamale stands as a sprawling symbol of the colonial period, and on the other hand, it never really fitted into the structures which colonial administration was attempting to erect. In many respects, the relationship between Tamale and the many phases of colonial administration is not unlike that between the various forms of colonial administration and the Konkomba[1] and other acephalous peoples in the Upper-West and Upper-East regions, about whom so much has been written.[2] I have waited until the conclusion to make this comparison, because of the feeling that the acephalous/chiefly dichotomy, however relevant (along with the 'underdevelopment theme'), hangs like an albatross around the neck of the historiography of the Northern Territories. But the comparison is relevant nonetheless. In the same way that the colonial administration attempted to force colonial stereotypes on ill-fitting realities, creating disputes, dislocation, complexities, and long standing rivalries, so

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[1] See Talton, B., Politics of social change in Ghana: The Konkomba struggle for political equality. MacMillan, 2009.

[2] On the Dagara, see for instance, Lentz, C., *Ethnicity and the making of history in Northern Ghana.* Edinburgh University Press, 2006, & Van der Geest, K., *The Dagara farmer at home and away.* Brill, Leiden, 2011.

also in Tamale, round pegs were forced into square holes. Of course, the difference between Tamale and the acephalous peoples' narrative is that unlike the latter, Tamale has escaped academic attention, despite being, in its own right, the most overwhelming and tangible example of the transformation of colonial rule in the Northern Territories. This thesis is an attempt to fill that void.

This dissertation has argued that Tamale's economic hegemony in northern terms is a ramification of two inter-related events: The establishment of an administrative headquarters at Tamale in 1907, and the completion of the Great North Road in 1920. These two events together comprise Tamale's administrative and commercial function. Furthermore, both of these functions need to be taken equally seriously in terms of understanding the founding of Tamale. Through the intersection of these two events, a settlement of 1,435 inhabitants with no significant pre-European political or economic relevance became the centre of the Northern economic framework, the largest city by some distance in northern Ghana, and today, Ghana's third-largest city. While the economics of northern Ghana were being centred at Tamale, a political framework was simultaneously being established by colonial initiative with heavy 'traditional' emphasis. In terms of Dagbon, that meant the centring of political power under the Ya Na at Yendi. Tamale thus grew up without corresponding political (and cultural) relevancy. The purpose of this historical study has been to identify the implications for Tamale of its extra-traditional urban process in a climate dominated by traditional discourses. The study identified two central implications of this economic/political discontinuity – one internal, one external: Tamale's institutional anatomy is characterised by 'multiplicity', and Tamale emerged from the colonial period politically isolated, disconnected from the Northern Territories generally.

Relevance of the study

Tamale does not appear to possess the grand history of settlements such as Salaga and Wa. Its history is also not celebrated in the same way as those settlements and, I would add, the mosque at Larabanga, the slave camp at Paga, and the shrines in the

Tong Hills, amongst others. In Tamale, on the contrary, one is faced by that horrible urban façade, neither old nor new enough to be of any interest. Of course, that Tamale's history is not immediately visible does not mean it is not there. As Wyatt MacGaffey points out, the small cluster of villages which made up Tamale in 1907 'behind the urban façade of banks and businesses, this is the Tamale to which the native citizen belongs'.[3] Despite not exposing itself as readily as elsewhere in the north, Tamale's awkward history has thus survived the enormous transformations of the colonial and post-colonial periods.

The tension between the Gulkpe-Na and the Dakpema has never been resolved, although both houses deny any hostilities. However, in 1962, after Ghana had obtained its independence, the Gulkpe-Na contested the right of other chiefs to collect taxes on behalf of the government. Dakpema Alhassan Dawuni installed his own Mallam, Seidu Dagomba. He claimed, 'I am in charge of Changani, Ward H and Ward F … but in these areas other Mallams get to weddings and funerals and the like before Seidu, depriving him of his daily bread.' The DC for Tamale (a CPP supporter, like the Gulkpe-Na, and unlike the Dakpema) replied that the Dakpema was only a fetish priest, not entitled to install sub-chiefs, and that the Limam of Tamale was installed by the Gulkpe-Na; any duplication, he said, would disrupt the unity of Moslems.[4]

Presently, there is a lull in the rivalry between the two houses, but that has much to do with what is currently taking place in Yendi. In 2003 the Ya Na Yakubu Andani II, King of Dagbon, was murdered. His succession remains a profoundly complicated affair and threatens to unlock simmering tension.[5] In 2008, Tamale's Gulkpe-Na passed away. Because, according to Dagbon custom, the Gulkpe-Na can only be 'enskinned' by the Ya Na, the fact that there is currently no Ya Na means that the Gulkpe-Na also cannot be replaced. In the interim period (which shows no

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[3]   MacGaffey, W., 'The blacksmiths of Tamale: The dynamics of space and time in a Ghanaian industry', *Institute for African Studies*, 79: 2(2009), 172.

[4]   MacGaffey, 'History', 118.

[5]   In March 2011, the acquittal of 15 men suspected of murdering the Ya Na caused conflicts in Tamale. One man was said to have been killed. A curfew was imposed at the time but has subsequently been lifted.

signs of ending in the foreseeable future), a regent of the Gulkpe-Na carries out the responsibilities of the Gulkpe-Na. The Dakpema of Tamale, on the other hand, is not bound to Dagbon political hierarchies. As a result, the institution is also not dependent on the Ya Na for succession. Thus, in 2009, after the death of the Dakpema, a new Dakpema was 'enskinned' relatively quickly. Currently thus, especially in the absence of the Gulkpe-Na, the Dakpema has a very prominent traditional function in Tamale. The Dakpema recently wrote an article for GhanaNation.com, a popular Ghanaian digital news source. Credit for the article was given to 'Chief of Tamale, Naa Dakpema Alhassan Dawuni'.[6] A recent article on a popular Ghanaian internet site began as follows; 'The chief of Tamale, Dakpema Na Alhassan Dawuni has called on the youth of Tamale to exercise restraint'.[7]

Furthermore, when in December 2010 I attended a conference in Tamale, the subject of the conference was the lasting impact of mandated territories. In Ghana's case, this referred especially to the impact of German colonial rule in Togoland, which, after WWI, became a mandated territory. On the second morning, the conference was interrupted by the sound of drumming outside. This signalled the arrival of the Dakpema along with his entourage. He was presented to the group (of primarily non-Ghanaians) as the chief of Tamale. I am certain that no irony was intended, but I doubt there was a more real and tangible example of the lasting impact of German colonial rule than the Dakpema of Tamale being presented to a group of largely non-Ghanaians as the chief of Tamale.

What these contemporary examples reveal is that the Dakpema's traditional prominence in Tamale is in large part related to the weakness of Dagbon. In Tamale's history, there has indeed been only one other period in which the Dakpema effectively functioned as the chief of Tamale. That has been a thread throughout this

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[6]   GhanaNation.com. (19 April 2011).
       http://news1.ghananation.com/vivvo_general/137689-chief-of-tamale-naa-dakpema-
       alhassan-dawuni.html (accessed 4 December 2011).
[7]   GhanatoGhana. (5 April 2011).
       http://www.ghanatoghana.com/Ghanahomepage/dakpema-na-alhassan-dawuni-calls-
       tamale-youth-exercise-restraint (accessed 4 December 2011).

study. Between 1899 and 1919 the Anglo-German boundary existed such that Yendi lay in German territory while the larger part of Dagbon fell under British jurisdiction. Indeed, during this period, and partly on the initiative of the Dakpema, the British colonial administration established an administrative headquarters at Tamale. Later, after Dagbon had been reunited in the early 1920s, the Dakpema would be referred to as 'an excellent example of a white-man's chief'.[8]

At the aforementioned conference, I (thankfully not in the presence of the Dakpema) presented a paper on chieftaincy in Tamale, the subject of Chapter 4 ('From Dakpema to Gulkpe-Na') and argued that tension between these two houses in Tamale is the result of the division of Dagbon into British and German jurisdictions in 1899. A number of Ghanaians who were present objected to the suggestion that there existed (and exists) competition between the institution of the Gulkpe-Na and that of the Dakpema. They pointed out that the Dakpema and the Gulkpe-Na have different functions in Tamale. The Dakpema, they told me, is the market head, while the Gulkpe-Na is the chief of Gulkpeagu. As chief of Tamale, they said, the Gulkpe-Na has authority over Tamale's land. Today, however, Tamale's urban character has ensured that customary land tenure has been replaced by private land ownership. That the Gulkpe-Na 'controls' Tamale's land is an idea born out of theoretical momentum, rather than an established, practical fact. This we have also seen in the course of this study (Chapter 5, 'The Whole of Tamale is the Property of the Crown'). Then, like now, the Gulkpe-Na did not control Tamale's land, in spite of a discourse which suggested that the source of his chiefly legitimacy was his control over land. As a result, Tamale's traditional focus was (and is) unstable and circumstantial. Indeed, this study has been concerned fundamentally with understanding the implications of urban Tamale's colonial origins in a climate dominated by traditional discourses. The question of land tenure is one example thereof. Of this cleavage between Tamale's urban growth on the one hand, and the development of a colonial paradigm focussed on interpretations of 'tradition' on the other hand, the study argues that there are, broadly speaking, two significant

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

implications: The first is Tamale's disconnection from the Northern Territories generally, and the second is Tamale's institutional multiplicity and the resulting legal pluralism.

Before turning to the major themes contained within this study, a second broader relevance may be highlighted. This study inserts an entirely novel entity into northern Ghana's historiography. The historiography of northern Ghana has been dominated broadly by one trajectory; historicising 'underdevelopment'. In terms of transportation (a fundamental component of 'development'), this trajectory has meant an emphasis on the Northern Territories railway, which was never built. The 'underdevelopment' trajectory of northern historiography has also locked the definitions of the Northern Territories into an agrarian paradigm. This study takes a different and entirely unique starting point, that is, the completion of the Great North Road in 1920 and the subsequent introduction of motorised transportation. Taking this transportation presence (rather than the absence of a railway) as a starting point, Tamale's urban 'development' (instead of northern 'underdevelopment') comes into focus. The result is by no means the unravelling of hitherto northern historical narratives. Rather, such an approach adds new contours to the historiographical landscape of northern Ghana.

Theories of urban formation

Anthony O'Connor noted that 'the combination of low levels, but high rates of urbanisation means that tropical Africa provides almost unparalleled opportunities for the outside observer to see 'cities in the making'.[9] That is as true today as it was in 1983, when O'Conner's work was published. Furthermore, in relative terms, Tamale is indeed a very new city. As an academic object of enquiry, that is also Tamale's strength. From that perspective, at its core, this study argues for a disaggregation of African cities: different histories produce different cities. That such differences produce corresponding differences also in the social relations within cities has been argued by Aiden Southall. Southall in the early 1960s presented a model in which two types of African cities exist. Type A cities,

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[9]   O'Conner, A., *The African city*. Hutchinson & Co Publishers, London, 1983, 16.

according to Southall, have pre-European origins.[10] Such cities have a rigid traditional structure (such as Kumasi or Abomey in Benin). Type B cities have colonial origins (such as Tamale). Such cities lack traditional focus. Southall argues that the type of a city has implications for the social relations within the city. Southall's dichotomy has more or less fallen apart. In reality, cities display characteristics of both Type A and Type B cities. However, this study wholeheartedly agrees with the central argument presented by Southall: The origins of cities have implications also for the manner in which social relations are defined within the city. The study thus underlines a concern about blanket definitions of 'urban' in Africa and reaches back to earlier debates about cities in Africa, to promote a more nuanced understanding of African cities (beyond simply primate vs. secondary). This suggests that the specific origins of cities are highly relevant objects of academic inquiry. Tamale is in the first instance an inland, secondary (or second-tier) city. But there is more to the type of city which Tamale is. Tamale is a city created for, and by, the colonial political economy, in a political climate which continues to have strong pre-colonial emphases. Furthermore, the region in which Tamale is located possesses no obvious natural resources (unlike the cities on the Zambian Copperbelt, for instance). Its raison d'être is to provide a central administration for Northern Ghana and to facilitate transit trade.

Tamale's urban development, this study has shown, is rooted in the events mentioned above, namely, the decision by the British colonial administration to build an administrative headquarters at Tamale and the construction of the Great North Road. Urban Tamale was thus an administrative and economic centre created by colonial initiatives for colonial purposes (administration and commerce). Simultaneously, the colonial administration relied on a political system which increasingly employed chieftaincy as an auxiliary of colonial administration. Such reliance, it was argued, required the consolidation of pre-colonial historical dimensions of chieftaincy. Therein, it was felt, lay the public legitimacy of the institution of chieftaincy required in order to effectively incorporate chiefs into

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[10]   Southall, A., 'Social change, demography and extrinsic factors'. In: Southall, A., ed., *Social change in modern Africa*. Oxford, 1961, 7-13.

colonial administrative apparatus. Within that (political) domain, however, Tamale had little relevance. The discontinuity between political and economic frameworks introduced to the Northern Territories through the initiative of the colonial administration had implications for Tamale's urban character, namely, a disconnection from the Northern Territories generally, and institutional multiplicity and resulting legal pluralism. Those implications are, broadly speaking, the subject of this study.

(Dis)connection

The study has argued that Tamale's economic hegemony was not matched by any real political significance within the politics of the Northern Territories, which had implications for Tamale's urban character. On various levels, Tamale detached itself from the Northern Territories generally (disconnection). There is purposeful irony in this subheading. The Great North Road was for Tamale the great connector. Tamale became linked by motorable road to Kumasi, the first such link between north and south. The implication for Tamale of the north-south connection was, however, a disconnection from the Northern Territories generally.

Perhaps the most concrete manifestation of Tamale's isolation and disconnection from the Northern Territories came during the 1956 elections. Martin Staniland has made this observation in a footnote.[11] This study has attempted to unpack that observation (Chapter 7: 'A Town of Little Importance'). The reasons for this disconnection, argued here, lie in Tamale's colonial underpinnings and in a political climate dominated by traditional discourses for the north more generally. This traditional discourse was not dismantled by the ending of colonial domination. With the formation of the Northern People's Party (NPP), a party concerned primarily with the lack of northern development, 'tradition' found a voice also within Ghana's nationalist politics of the 1950s. The NPP emerged from the 1953 elections as the second-most successful party in the Gold Coast, an indication of the dominance of conservative attitudes in the Northern Territories. Between the 1953 and the 1956 elections, Tamale's electorate swung dramatically from the ultra-conservative

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[11]   Staniland, *Chiefs*, 217. See footnote 26.

Muslim Association Party (MAP) to the anti-chieftaincy Convention People's Party (CPP). Northern politics focussed on the traditional apexes of Gonja, Dagbon, Mamprussi, Wa, and Nunumba. Although Tamale was highly politicised and much northern politics found a place in Tamale, Tamale itself was not a part of the debate. As a result, Tamale's politics were by definition local urban affairs. This disconnection is a result of the aforementioned cleavage.

Tamale's disconnection from the north was both illustrated and consolidated after the colonial period. The military regime which overthrew Nkrumah dispatched his large-scale, state interventionism and sold off cheap machinery, mainly for rice cultivation, into the private market. A number of capitalists, including southerners, military men and civil servants, took the opportunity to purchase, mainly in the area around Tamale – and for next-to-nothing – large-scale, mechanised rice farms. Between 1970 and 1972, primarily in the area around Tamale, private farmers, mostly from Tamale, doubled both the area under cultivation and their output. On account of both poor conditions and increases in the price of rice in Tamale, many 'villagers', who would otherwise have sold their labour on mechanised rice farms, themselves took to farming rice, albeit on a much smaller scale. The result was an acute shortage of labour for the mechanised rice farms, which turned to Tamale to recruiting young boys as labourers. Tamale, through 'by-day' labour centres, became a centre for the recruitment of (often illegal on account of their age) casual labour. It was estimated that in November and December 1971, 4,000 men were hired from Tamale very day at labour centres. Tamale served as a location for the procurement of farming inputs, from labour through to tractors. Furthermore, between 1970 and 1983, the by-day rates for adult men increased from 0.50 Cedis to 50 Cedis. This applied not only to those recruited from Tamale but also, as a consequence, to labour which large-scale farmers were still able to source from within the villages. Van Hear notes that 'higher wages were also a consequence of bringing villagers into contact with urban workers; farmers complained that Tamale

workers "poisoned the minds" of the villagers with their wage demands'.[12] Tamale served as a site for contested and seedy labour class struggle. Theft increased. The difficulty of separating perceptions of 'tradition' from agrarian livelihoods mean that Tamale urbanism could only be perceived as a corruption of traditional morality. The idea of Tamale representing something 'other' and certainly 'worse' was, as this thesis has shown, not something new. At least from the moment indirect rule was introduced, Tamale's urban nature came to be seen by traditional and agrarian structures alike as threatening, and this also contributed to its isolation.

Institutional multiplicity

More specifically, this study set out to argue that Tamale's rapid urbanisation (both social and economic), in a political context dominated by tradition (in which Tamale lacked relevancy), created in Tamale an institutional anatomy in which the jurisdictions of various institutions continuously overlapped. The first step in the creation of an institutional anatomy characterised by multiplicity was the demarcation of the Anglo-German border in 1899. At that time, the Gulkpe-Na was visiting Yendi and was ordered to remain there. In the absence of the Gulkpe-Na, the Dakpema assumed all the powers of the chief of Tamale. In 1930, the Gulkpe-Na was ordered to return to Tamale in order to resurrect Tamale's traditional structure (for the purposes of indirect rule). The Gulkpe-Na, however, did not simply replace the Dakpema, as the colonial regime had anticipated. Instead, a two-in-one system developed. The nature of the system meant that the colonial administration, in contradiction to its own policy of 'ruling indirectly', was frequently required to wade into affairs which they had hoped would be managed by 'tradition'. This further undermined Tamale's traditional focus and increased its institutional multiplicity.

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[12] Van Hear, N., '"By-day" boys and Dariga men: Casual lLabour versus agrarian capital in Northern Ghana'. In: *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 31, Capital vs. Labour in West Africa (1984), 46.

The term 'institutional multiplicity' is borrowed from work by Jo Beall.[13] It contains a small but relevant difference in emphasis to Christian Lund's reference to 'institutional ambiguity'.[14] 'Institutional ambiguity' suggests an internal dynamic, whereby one institution may define their authority holding over several jurisdictions. 'Institutional multiplicity' suggests that a number of institutions define their authority holding over the same jurisdiction. Both may be used to describe Tamale, but the emphasis is more on multiplicity than on ambiguity, as an result of Tamale's anti-traditional urban process. An example of institutional ambiguity is the establishment of the Tamale Urban Council (TUC) in the early 1950s. Although the TUC had, as its official mandate, municipal affairs, the TUC came to be dominated by the CPP, who employed the jurisdictions of the TUC for political purposes. Tamale's institutional multiplicity is best illustrated by the plans to redevelop Ward D in the 1940s (Chapter 5: 'The Whole of Tamale is the Property of the Crown'). This study reinforces (in a historical context) the argument presented by Christian Lund that 'disputes over land tenure can be understood only if a wider socio-political context is considered and if several different levels of confrontation are included in the analysis'.[15] Lund suggests that in analysing land tenure conflicts, it is useful to distinguish between three types of confrontation: A confrontation between different land users over access to land; a confrontation between different political authorities over the jurisdiction to allocate land access rights: And a confrontation between land users and the politico-legal authorities over the extent of the jurisdiction of authorities to allocate land.[16] Ward D serves as an example of all three of these confrontations. The example of Ward D serves not only as an example of how land was administered but, because land was considered such a fundament source of chiefly authority, also as an illustration of how authority was negotiated in

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[13] Beall, J., S. Mkhize & S. Vawda, 'Traditional authority, institutional multiplicity and political transition in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa', LSE: *Crisis States Programme*, Working Paper no. 48(July, 2004). http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/28212/1/wp48.pdf (accessed 4 December 2011).

[14] Lund, C., 'Struggles for land tenure and political power: On the politicisation of land tenure and disputes in Niger', *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, 40(1998), 1-2.

[15] *Ibid.* 1.

[16] *Ibid.* 1-2.

an increasingly urban Tamale. The case of Ward D thus exposes Tamale's institutional multiplicity and the resulting legal plurality.

Tamale's disconnection from northern Ghana possesses both strengths and weaknesses. Currently, while the Dagbon political structures are in disarray, Tamale possesses political elites who continue to provide socially stabilising functions. In a study about local government accountability carried out in December 2010, many respondents and focus groups stated that if the Tamale Metropolitan Assembly (TAMA) had 'sensitive' information they wished to relay to the residents of Tamale, they should do so through the chief. This, they said, was so because the chief was a very well-respected man in Tamale. Other centres, such as Savelugu and Karaga, are entirely dependent on Yendi for their traditional political stability. Tamale is threatened by the appointment of a new Ya Na, and thus, by the 'enskinning' of a Gulkpe-Na. Although there is no guarantee that such an eventuality need be problematic, it certainly has the potential to generate a series of internal confrontations. The institutional multiplicity which characterises Tamale's institutional anatomy then threatens to destabilise Tamale politically, economically, and socially.