Between the late 1940s and 1960, the so-called "Togoland or Ewe-question" became the first postwar international attempt to determine whether or not the borders drawn by the colonizing powers in Africa should be maintained or changed. In 1884 Togo became a German colony, and southern Togo, populated predominantly by the Ewes, became incorporated into the global market as a producer of agricultural commodities. After Germany's defeat in World War I, the League of Nations divided Togo into a British and a French Mandated Sphere. The western British part became integrated into the neighbouring Gold Coast Colony, whereas the French administered the eastern part as a separate Mandate. During World War II, a strong indigenous reunification movement emerged. At first, it only desired to reunite all Ewes, but later it aimed at reunification of both Togos. The United Nations General Assembly and Trusteeship Council discussed the political future of the former German colony. A 1956 plebiscite supervised by the United Nations rejected reunification. British Togo became part of Ghana in 1957, whereas French Togo emerged as the Republic of Togo in 1960. This essay investigates how the Ewes became fragmented after the partition of the German Togo colony into French and British Mandated Spheres, and traces Franco-British economic policies that contributed to the defeat of Togolese reunification attempts.

Togoland was divided by the Togo mountains, which traversed the colony from southwest to northeast. Togoland was bounded to the west by the Asante (Ashanti), kingdom, and to the east by the kingdom of Dahomey. The north and south had relatively large populations, whereas the centre was sparsely inhabited. The north contained a variety of ethnic groups. The Islamic principalities of Sokodé and Mango were part of a long-distance trading network. Caravans carried kola nuts from Ashanti to Hausaland in northern Nigeria. This traffic also benefited northern Togoland through the sale of iron, rubber, and food commodities. The south had a predominantly homogeneous Ewe ethnic population. In fact, however, the Ewe consisted of a collection of sub-groups which had settled the region, i.e., the area which later became southern German Togo, plus the extreme southeast of the British Gold Coast (known as the Volta triangle) in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Despite some obvious differences, this Ewe-region shared common historical, cultural, and linguistic characteristics. Ewe civilization was strongly influenced by Ashanti and Dahomey and by early contact with European traders and missionaries. The latter devised a uniform orthography of the Ewe language on the eve of German colonization. Some Ewe sub-groups had stronger political organizations than others, but a centralized Ewe-state never existed. In the nineteenth century, production and export of palm oil replaced the slave trade in the south. Economic relations between north and south were limited to only two caravan trails, which connected Lomé-Kete-Krachi and Aného-Sokodé via Atakpamé.

When German trading companies felt threatened by local taxes and French expansion, the Second Empire proclaimed a protectorate in the coastal zone of Togo. Subsequent German penetration aimed at reaching Kete-Krachi and Atakpamé in order to profit from the caravan trade in the interior. During German colonization, production of export crops grown by African peasants, particularly palm oil, palm kernels, cotton, cocoa, and rubber, rose considerably. German administrators improved the caravan trails to stimulate trade and production. The construction of a jetty made Lomé an important port. The widening of main roads and the building of feeder road systems developed especially in the south, speeded traffic, and decreased transportation costs. To facilitate control of the north, the Germans
extended the main roads from Lomé, via Kete-Krachi and Sokodé to Mango. Subsequently, forced labourers from Kara and Mango constructed railroad lines that connected Lomé with Aného, Kpalimé, and Atakpamé.

By the time German colonization ended, thousands of seasonal labourers had been migrating annually from southern Togoland to the export production areas in the Gold Coast. German colonization forced a new type of economic integration upon Togoland. The northern region's precolonial east-west orientation shifted southward. As a result, a large part of the south became intimately integrated into the global market, and a regularized labour migration pattern developed.

Until the global depression of the 1930s, export production in French and British Togo rose considerably. In French Togo, cocoa and coffee production increased considerably, but stagnated thereafter until 1945. After 1929, economic development in British Togoland decelerated, but its share in the Gold Coast cocoa export rose from 0.2% in 1929 to 4% in 1938. Northern French and British Togo remained sources of seasonal labour supply to the south. After 1920, a few thousand labourers migrated annually from northern French Togo and the area around Kpalimé to cocoa-producing areas in British Togoland and the Gold Coast. In fact, out-migration exceeded internal migration in French Togo, because the emigrants were attracted by higher earnings in the cocoa fields, but they also fled high taxation in French Togo. Apart from some 14,000 forced labourers from the north the French used to construct the Atakpamé-Blitta railroad line, labour migration suddenly ended in 1929, because the economic crisis forced curtailing of the cocoa production. Between 1929 and 1933, cocoa workers returned from the Gold Coast and British Togoland to their homesteads in French Togo. After 1932, only a few hundred labourers migrated annually to British Togoland and the Gold Coast.

The postwar partition of Togoland necessitated a major reorientation in the region's infrastructure and transportation system. Some roads disappeared entirely, and others became more important. In French Togo, cocoa and coffee production increased considerably, but stagnated thereafter until 1945. After 1929, economic development in British Togoland decelerated, but its share in the Gold Coast cocoa export rose from 0.2% in 1929 to 4% in 1938. Northern French and British Togo remained sources of seasonal labour supply to the south. After 1920, a few thousand labourers migrated annually from northern French Togo and the area around Kpalimé to cocoa-producing areas in British Togoland and the Gold Coast. In fact, out-migration exceeded internal migration in French Togo, because the emigrants were attracted by higher earnings in the cocoa fields, but they also fled high taxation in French Togo. Apart from some 14,000 forced labourers from the north the French used to construct the Atakpamé-Blitta railroad line, labour migration suddenly ended in 1929, because the economic crisis forced curtailing of the cocoa production. Between 1929 and 1933, cocoa workers returned from the Gold Coast and British Togoland to their homesteads in French Togo. After 1932, only a few hundred labourers migrated annually to British Togoland and the Gold Coast.

As a result of this negative effect that reversed prewar German policy, economic relations between French Togo and British Togoland languished. During the German era, Kpalimé had been the "cultural" collection centre of Togoland production. From there, the cocoa was transported to Lomé. Between 1929 and 1938, the volume of cocoa from British Togoland transported to Kpalimé experienced little change, but the proportion in terms of total production shrank from 90% to 29% in 1938. The bulk of British cocoa production was transported via new roads to the Gold Coast.

Increasing demands for raw materials after World War II stimulated export production in French Togo and British Togoland. Both administrations made large investments in agriculture. In this respect, British Togoland lagged behind France, and made a late start in the mid-1930s. At the time, the administration wanted to compensate for the relative economic neglect of British Togoland after 1940. Both administrations expanded large sums on improving the infrastructure of their mandated territories. French Togo improved the main roads and expanded the network of feeder roads. British Togoland also improved the quality of the roads in the south, and constructed a bridge across the Volta River to replace the ferry. Only two new roads crossed the partition line. The northern link soon lost its importance.

Leo J. de Haan

Partition of the German Togo Colony

Increased labour migration accompanied revived export production in British Togoland. After 1950, labour migration from north to south resumed in French Togo, but by the end of the colonial era, about 10,000 labourers migrated to the Gold Coast and British Togoland from French Togo, while more than 10,000 from British Togoland to British Togoland and the Gold Coast between 1940 and 1945. After 1945, British Togoland also turned more and more into an out-migration area, because new cocoa areas opened up and because of the increasing attractiveness of Accra as a labour market. In the early postwar period, economic integration of the two Togos appeared impracticable. The only common denominator connecting the two colonies was the cross-border transportation of cocoa.

British Togoland became part of the new Republic of Ghana in 1957. A cocoa tree blight and low prices set by the Cocoa Marketing Board reduced production. Investments in the region's infrastructure languished. Only one hardtop road, from Accra via Ho to Jaiakan, remained operational.

In French Togo, however, economic development accelerated after independence in 1960. Regional development corporations and new state enterprises promoted coffee, cocoa, cotton, and palm oil production. Even so, in the late 1960s, phosphates discovered near the coast replaced agricultural products as the most important export item. Simultaneously, various industries came into operation in Lomé. After 1966, the government launched an ambitious road improvement programme. By 1980, an excellent road network penetrated all the way to the country's northern and southern borders. Two new railway lines in the south improved the transportation infrastructure.

Communications links between the two former Togos suffered neglect. Some cocoa still flowed from former British Togoland to the Republic of Togo, especially from the late 1960s until 1971, the peak year. Generally, the traffic remained below the modest levels achieved in the 1930s. Decline was partly due to stricter border controls and occasional border closures. Economists and Togolites found it important to improve relations in the Republic of Togo and prospering Togolites to support the reunification of the two Togoland migrant labourers in their own country. Migration to Ghana decreased to between one and two thousand migrant workers annually. They were attracted by jobs in Accra and in the newer cocoa fields to the west. In an attempt to overcome its economic problems, Ghana's government expelled 81,000 Togolese in 1969-1970. Thereafter, labour migration to Ghana shrank to only a few hundred workers annually. In the post-colonial period, economic relations between both parts of the former German Togo colony became marginal.

The German colonizers of Togo had made efforts to consolidate and unify the region by improving the entire area's administrative and transportation infrastructure. Under the French and British rule the divided Togos suffered the effects of sporadic, haphazard, and poorly coordinated economic contacts. After independence, connections between the two former colonies languished, and at times ceased altogether. These disruptive tendencies had a negative impact on indigenous political unification efforts.

The French and British colonial administrations discouraged political opposition by Africans. Initially, however, Africans' concerns focused on economic issues, and desires for ethnic unification had commercial overtones. In 1920, some African traders in Lomé feared being cut off from an important part of their trading area then under British control. They petitioned the British government to reunify both Togos under British rule. In the long-run their fears proved justified.

Shortly after World War I, some petitioners had demanded the unification of all Ewe who were scattered over the Gold Coast, British Togoland, and French Togo. The complainants consisted of the rising Ewe élite, whose members resided in the economically most developed regions, and were the most Europeanized and best educated Africans in both Togos. They had experienced the efficient and progressive German colonization efforts, during which time an Ewe Presbyterian Church came into being. Under German rule, the Ewes had experienced a status that had the semblance of unification of all the Ewes in a unified Togo colony. During the worst years of the economic crisis in the early 1930s, some of the Ewes even restored a form of traditional collegial leadership in some groups of the British-educated civil servants, their careers blocked by insufficient knowledge of English and French.
had formed the "Deutscher Togobund." The Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations ignored their request.19

The influence of economic relations on the Togolese reunification movement became evident during World War II. The British administration hermetically sealed the border between British and French Togo because the French administration supported the Vichy government. The cessation of Anglo-French economic and social contacts particularly affected the south. In 1943, members of the Ewe élite urged the British government in vain to unite all Ewes. In 1946, Ewes from French Togo, British Togoland, and the Volta triangle held a convention at Accra, followed shortly thereafter by the founding of the All-Ewe Conference by Daniel Chapman, an Ewe from the Volta triangle. This meeting boosted the reunification cause.20

Hereafter, Ewe leaders succeeded in placing their unification cause on the international agenda by means of a well-organized campaign, fund raising, and dispatching petitions and representatives to the United Nations Trusteeship Council. In 1946, the Comité d'Unité Togolaise, led by Sylvanus Olympio, won the elections in French Togo. One year later, Olympio pleaded the cause of reunification at the United Nations in New York. As a result of this appeal, the first United Nations Visiting Mission investigated the "Ewe-question" on the spot. In all, three Visiting Missions21 examined the socioeconomic situation and sounded popular sentiments in both Togos. The Missions held meetings with the local populations, which themselves had a politicizing effect. Ewe nationalists utilized the political rights spelled out in the Trusteeship Agreements to express their views. Gradually, the movement shifted from unifying the Ewe people to reunification of Togo. The political élites were driven by political pragmatism, notably the opportunities offered by the two colonies' Trusteeship status, and to a lesser degree by economic considerations.

Other factors spurred desires for unification as well. Ewe representatives from Ho feared the domination of better-educated Ewe leaders from the Volta triangle, who dominated the All-Ewe Conference. These were more inclined to support independence of British Togoland together with the Gold Coast as a first step towards reunification of all Ewes. Buem, a cocoa-growing area of recent vintage around Kete-Krachi, was populated predominantly by non-Ewes, who feared being overruled by the Ewes. At the 1949 All-Ewe Conferences in Ho, and Kpalimé in 1951, these contradictions became clear and the All-Ewe Conference did not survive them.

However, Ewe solidarity disintegrated. Some leaders, such as Chapman, joined Kwame Nkrumah's independence movement, the Convention People's Party, and others founded the Togoland Congress.22 In 1951, 1954, and 1956 Togolese elections the Togoland Congress defeated the Convention People's Party in southern British Togoland. The Convention People's Party lost the elections in the cocoa-growing areas of the Gold Coast, because farmers had held the CPP government responsible for the low cocoa prices paid by the Cocoa Marketing Board. The Togoland Congress failed to gain any support in northern British Togoland, where the people favored the Northern People's Party. This party also represented the northern Gold Coast's ethnic groups, with which the northern British Togolanders were allied. In French Togo the Comité d'Unité Togolaise initially advocated unification of the Ewes, which slowed down their movement's progress.

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the Volta triangle, and in other areas it failed to become a mass movement. In Ghana, the government suppressed TOLIMO. After 1978, TOLIMO disintegrated, thanks to its suppression and lack of qualified leadership. The support TOLIMO received in Ghana was due to Ghana’s political instability and economic decay, which contrasted unfavourably with the situation in Togo.

This essay has analyzed the influence of economic integration in German, French, and British Togo on Ewe nationalism and reunification attempts of both parts of the former German colony. During German colonization, the south became incorporated into the global export market as a production area and the north mainly as a source of labour supply. These economic functions remained unchanged under the French and British, but the economic integration of the two regions began in the German period first came to a premature halt, then altered direction. British Togoland became progressively integrated into the Gold Coast economic orbit, in defiance of prevailing infrastructural and transportation facilities, and even in the face of prevailing labour migration patterns. "Franco-British relations in these respects became increasingly weaker. A high economic integration level of both Togos could therefore not have been the reason for the desire of Ewes to reunite both parts politically. On the contrary; at first, the reunification movement was based on ethnic ties, although economic considerations, such as discontent with low cocoa prices and border closures, strongly reinforced reunification sentiments. But in fact it was the lack of economic integration of both Togos, owing to separate colonizations after 1920, that prevailed the Ewe political movement from gaining more support for reunification. The pragmatic path that the reunification movement chose after 1951 to reunify both Togos instead of all Ewes lacked sufficient voters' appeal in the north. The lack of economic integration, therefore, must be added to the presence of different official languages and educational systems and physical difficulties of maintaining clan and family ties across borders as a major contributing cause for the weakening of relations between both Togos.

Colonial powers often drew African and Asian borders irrespective of ethnic and political entities or historical claims. This policy split homogeneous communities and combined different, often hostile, ethnicities in one colony. The Ewes suffered just such an experience. With the rise of political awakening in the colonies, contradictory trends often emerged. One was to assume political power in the divided colonized territory, the other to restore precolonial entities. After independence, these contradictory objectives at times resulted in border conflicts among the new states and in the birth of separation movements within them.

The former German Togo colony is an exceptional case insofar as reunification attempts are concerned. The Ewes rejected restoration of the precolonial entity, but chose a later colonial determination. This example demonstrates the power of colonial administrations and the independent governments succeeding them to counterbalance the efforts of unification movements by means of obstructing economic integration. The partition of the German Togo colony into French and British Mandated Spheres at the end of World War I constituted the first phase in the disruption of unification along ethnic lines. The divergent Franco-British economic policies in Togoland in the interwar period introduced the second phase in nullifying ethnic unity trends in the region. These efforts ensured that Togolese reunification attempts in the ethnic sense would prove abortive.

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1. The Author wishes to thank Huib Verhoeff for his contribution to the research project, which has resulted in this essay. The diagram was drawn by J. ter Haar.
2. Leo de Haan, "Die Kolonialentwicklung," 130.
6. Ibid., 131-133.
7. German colonizers of Togo depended to a large extent on forced African "tax labour" and "contract labour." From 1907 onward, tax labour was compulsory for all adult African men for a period of twelve days annually. Only Africans living in Lomé and Aného could buy exemptions. Tax labourers were used mostly for the construction and maintenance of local roads. Contract labour was used for plantation work and larger projects such as the construction of railroads. In the latter instance, village headmen designated a number of men, who had to work at poor wages for a period of six months before returning to their villages. Mortality rates were high, especially among rail labourers. The French administration continued these practices, to a certain extent, until the 1950s.


Unity among the Dagombas and Mamprussis in the north, previously divided by German and British colonization, was restored by the incorporation of British Togo into the Gold Coast. J. S. Coleman, "Togoland," International Conciliation, 509 (1956), 17-18.


In 1951, 1954, and 1956, the influence of the U.N. Visiting Missions should not be exaggerated. They demanded, for example, full statistical, constitutional, and budgetary autonomy for British Togo, but tacitly accepted British Togo's total administration from Accra. United Nations Documents A/2150 and A/2152 (New York: United Nations, 1952).

Welch, Dream of Unity, p. 86.


22. Welch, Dream of Unity, p. 86.
