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Ablɔdɛ

African Political History, from Below and from Within

In the year 2010, a former teacher and member of parliament, Kosi Kedem, published a petition to the Ghana Constitutional Review Commission.[1] This petition analysed the mechanisms by which the former United Nations trust territory of British Togoland had been integrated with the neighbouring British colony of the Gold Coast and deemed a part of Ghana at Independence in 1957. Kedem concluded that the process of integration was deeply flawed, and he demanded negotiations over the terms by which British Togoland could remain in a union with the republic of Ghana in the twenty-first century. He thereby took up the central issue of a political movement which, from the late 1940s, had insisted that British Togoland had a political status quite distinct from that of the Gold Coast, to its west, and was thereby entitled to a form of Independence which would allow for its unification with French Togoland, to its east, in a single African state.

In his associated publications Kedem argued that this movement, the Togoland Congress, had a legitimate cause, but had fallen foul of the British government, which was fully committed to the integration of its trust territory with the Gold Coast.[2] Commenting on the role that the British administration was allowed to play in organising the popular consultation recommended by the United Nations and in interpreting its results, Kedem likened the plebiscite of 1956 to a judicial case between a hawk and a chicken: 'how [can] the hawk [Britain] ... objectively and

[1] Kosi Kedem, *2010 Constitutional Review and the Rectification of the Ghana-British Togoland Union* (Accra, 2010).
[2] Kosi Kedem, *How Britain Subverted and Betrayed British Togoland* (Accra, 2007).

sincerely preside over a case involving the chicken [Togoland]. It cannot happen! What justice or fairness would the chicken expect?'[3] Kedem concluded that, in allowing the integration of British Togoland with the Gold Coast, the United Nations had failed in its duty to the peoples of the trust territory, who had been denied their right to self-government. In Kedem's eyes, this failure was compounded by the treatment of Togoland Congress activists at the hands of the Ghanaian state after 1957. His publications and petitions therefore aimed to salvage truth and dignity for the 'men, women and the freedom fighters who were exiled, lost their lives and property, [and were] detained, imprisoned and suffered serious violation of their human rights during the struggle' that became known as *Ablɔdɛ* ('freedom' in the Ewe language).[4] After a decade of research and campaigning, Kedem had forced open a controversial issue that historians of modern Ghana had considered to be dead.

Kedem's writings reflect his concern for the memory of Ablɔdɛ activists, and can be read as attempts 'to give back to men of the past the unpredictability of the future and the dignity of acting in the face of uncertainty'.[5] He was challenging the 'construction of ignorance' and practices of 'sanctioned forgetting', which have threatened to edit the Ablɔdɛ movement out of Ghana's national history.[6] Such editing makes Ghana's national borders appear far more certain than they ever really were, and thereby obscures not only the agency of the individuals who sought to challenge them, but also the political and diplomatic work which had to be undertaken by former colonial powers and by new African national governments in order to achieve and maintain what now looks like the status quo.

This book is about the people who directed and participated in Ablɔdɛ from the late 1940s through to the present day. It explains who these people were, why they opposed the integration of British Togoland with the Gold Coast, and why they sought to preserve the possibility of a joint Independence with French Togoland. It also considers why they failed, and details the consequences of this failure for their families, livelihoods, and future political activity. It is a study of political activism, starting in

[3] Kedem, *2010 Constitutional Review*, 12–13.
[4] Kosi Kedem, *British Togoland: An Orphan or the Death of a Nation* (Accra, 2005), iii.
[5] Reinhard Bendix, *Force, Fate and Freedom: On Historical Sociology* (Berkley CA, 1984), 48.
[6] These phrases are used by Jean Allman, who argues for an 'agnotological approach' in her quest to understand why the key female activist Hannah Kudjoe 'got forgotten' in Ghana's national history. 'The Disappearing of Hannah Kudjoe: Nationalism, Feminism and the Tyrannies of History', *Journal of Women's History* 21 (3) (2009), 13–35.

the small towns and villages of southern British Togoland, and following individuals and networks through space and time. It maps the movements and connections of activists across borders in West Africa and beyond, shedding light upon their reorientation towards surprising new political projects in the post-Independence period.

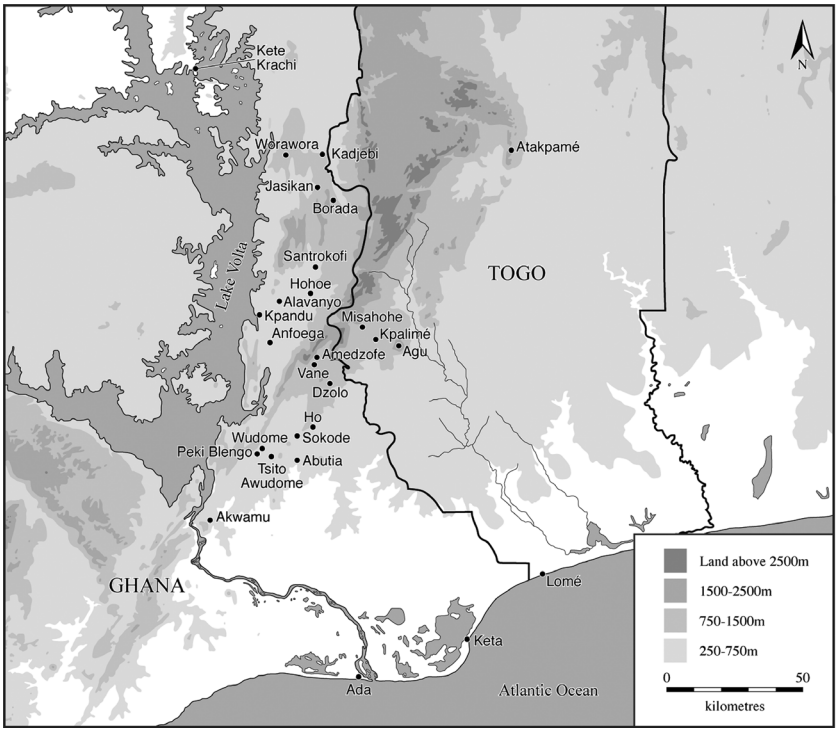
On the most optimistic reading, this is a book about possibilities – it recovers alternative imaginings of nationhood and the creative labour of political struggle.[7] On the most pessimistic reading, it is the tale of a nation that never was, a historical sideshow to the main event. In writing about Ablɔdɛ, I have sought to tell readers, whether of optimistic or pessimistic dispositions, one part of a larger story about the contingencies of decolonisation in Africa. The achievement of Independence and the subsequent consolidation of national territories become more remarkable when the full plethora of competing visions of nationhood is really understood; the dynamics of citizenship and the control of dissent in post-colonial nations are more comprehensible when the persistence of alternative political projects is revealed.

LOCATING ABLƆĐE

The Ablɔdɛ movement grew up in the southern section of British Togoland, where Ewe is spoken by the majority, as a first, second, or occasionally a third language. Ablɔdɛ had small clusters of supporters in the savannahs of northern British Togoland, but it was always stronger in the southern section, through the cocoa-growing areas of Buem (where Akan is widely spoken), in a series of mountain communities (some with their own distinct languages), and in the larger commercial and administrative centres of Kpandu, Hohoe, and Ho (where Ewe is spoken as a first language). The strength of Ablɔdɛ in Ewe-speaking areas, however, does not mean that the movement should be interpreted as a form of Ewe nationalism, for the Ewe-speaking peoples experienced diverse historical trajectories and developed a range of political projects in the era of decolonisation.

The basic linguistic similarities between the Ewe-speaking peoples can be attributed to a common origin in Ketu (now in the republic of Benin) and a shared experience of seventeenth-century migration from Notsé

[7] In this sense it is consistent with Frederick Cooper's concern to avoid determinism and examine paths not taken. See 'Possibility and Constraint: African Independence in Historical Perspective', *Journal of African History* 49 (2) (2008), 167–96.



MAP 1: Physical Map of the Region

into the coastal and inland areas that now form the south-eastern quarter of Ghana and the southern quarter of Togo.[8] The inland areas include a forested mountain range, running NNE-SSW, from the settlements of Peki, in modern-day Ghana, into central Togo. (See Map 1.) These mountains accommodated many waves of migrants, and thus became home to a complex mosaic of small Ewe-speaking settlements interspersed with other distinct language groups.[9] Ewe-speaking settlements are also

[8] For a discussion of evidence drawn from oral history, archaeology, and historical linguistics, see Nicoué Gayibor (dir.), *Le Peuplement du Togo: état actuel des connaissances historiques* (Lomé, 1997).

[9] For an analysis of the linguistic diversity of the inland mountainous area, see Mary Kropp Dakubu and K. C. Ford, 'The Central Togo Languages', in *The Languages of Ghana*, ed. Mary Kropp Dakubu (London, 1988), 119–54. For historical context, see Paul Nugent, '"A Few Lesser Peoples": the Central Togo Minorities and their Ewe Neighbours', in *Ethnicity in Ghana: The Limits of Invention*, ed. Carola Lentz and Paul Nugent (London, 2000), 162–82; Paul Nugent, 'A Regional Melting Pot: The Ewe and their Neighbours in the Ghana-Togo Borderlands', in *The Ewe of Togo and Benin*, ed. Benjamin Lawrance

to be found on the flatter land to the sides of this mountain range, but as one moves south towards the coastal strip, the ecological characteristics are quite different. The southern and south-easterly areas of Ewe-speaking settlement lie in the Benin Gap – a savannah corridor which interrupts the belt of forest that otherwise stretches across West Africa. The Ewe-speaking migrants who settled on the coastal strip, 'between the sea and the lagoon', reoriented their livelihoods from farming towards lagoon fishing and then sea fishing.[10] Further inland, farming, along with hunting and river fishing, remained the dominant livelihoods.

To the Europeans who came to trade on the coast, the Ewe-speaking towns and villages were the 'upper Slave Coast'.[11] But whilst the settlements close to the coast coalesced into a state known as Anlo, Europeans remained unclear as to the nature of the Ewe-speaking interior, which they referred to as Krepe and regarded as a source of ivory and enslaved labour.[12] This perception of Krepe was also taken up by historians of the militarised expansionist states to the west, notably J. K. Fynn, who portrayed Krepe as a 'less sophisticated' region, which was plundered by its neighbours.[13] After 1730, the kingdom of Akwamu gradually established its suzerainty over Krepe with the aim of extracting ivory and enslaved labour and controlling the trade routes up the river Volta

(Accra, 2005), 29–43; and Wilson Yayoh, 'Krepi States in the 18th and 19th Centuries', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 6 (2002), 67–81. Adangme-speaking clusters in the present-day Ghana-Togo border area resulted from an exodus of Adangme-speakers from Accra in the aftermath of its invasion by Akwamu in 1680, as demonstrated by R. G. S. Sprigge, 'Eweland's Adangbe: An Inquiry into an Oral Tradition', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* X (1969) 87–128; and M. B. K. Darkoh, 'Note on the Peopling of the Forest Hills of the Volta Region of Ghana', *Ghana Notes and Queries* 11 (1970), 8–13.

[10] On the distinctive ecology of the coastal strip, see Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Between the Sea and the Lagoon: An Eco-Social History of the Anlo of Southeastern Ghana, c.1850 to Recent Times* (Athens OH, 2001).

[11] Hence the title of Sandra Greene's first book, *Gender, Ethnicity and Social Change on the Upper Slave Coast: A History of the Anlo-Ewe* (Portsmouth NH, 1996). There is a substantial literature on the Slave Coast, including Robin Law's authoritative *The Slave Coast of West Africa 1550–1750* (Oxford, 1991).

[12] In 1764, the Governor of Cape Coast Castle on the Gold Coast tried to persuade the London Committee of Merchants that they should establish a fort close to the mouth of the river Volta in order to secure a regular supply of 'the very best slaves … called Crippes'. Cited in J. K. Fynn, *Asante and its Neighbours 1700–1807* (London, 1971), 127. The term 'Anlo' was often rendered as 'Awuna' by early European visitors, but was transcribed as *Aŋlɔ* in the 'standard' Ewe which emerged from missionary endeavours in the later nineteenth century. 'Krepe' was sometimes rendered as 'Crippe' or 'Krepi' by Europeans.

[13] Ibid., 22–3.

to the market centres of the northern savannah zone.[14] As the value of these trade routes became apparent, coastal Anlo and inland Akwamu were drawn into alliances with each other and with the militarised expansionist Asante empire, making Krepe a kind of frontier between Asante (to its west) and Dahomey (to its east).[15] (See Map 2.)

The peoples of Krepe sought to shake off the suzerainty of Akwamu, and mounted a successful rebellion in 1833. However, as European traders on the central Fante-speaking Gold Coast gradually shifted away from the transportation of slaves into the Atlantic, and as conflicts between Asante and its southerly neighbours disrupted trade between the Asante interior and the Fante coastline, the river Volta and the Anlo coastline to its east became critical alternative routes for imports and exports, including firearms and slaves.[16] Thus in 1869, Asante invaded Krepe and temporarily reimposed control before European powers began exerting a greater presence in the region.[17]

When the Germans and British drew the border between their respective colonies of Togo and the Gold Coast at the end of the nineteenth century, their maps separated the speakers of Ewe in Anlo, and as far inland as Peki, from the speakers of Ewe further north-east, due east and south-east.[18] But this colonial border did not carve up a kingdom or an empire, because the linkages between the speakers of Ewe did not take the form of a large-scale centralised territorial kingship, and the inland Ewe-speakers lived in close proximity with numerous other small groups who were linguistically distinct and politically independent. The border

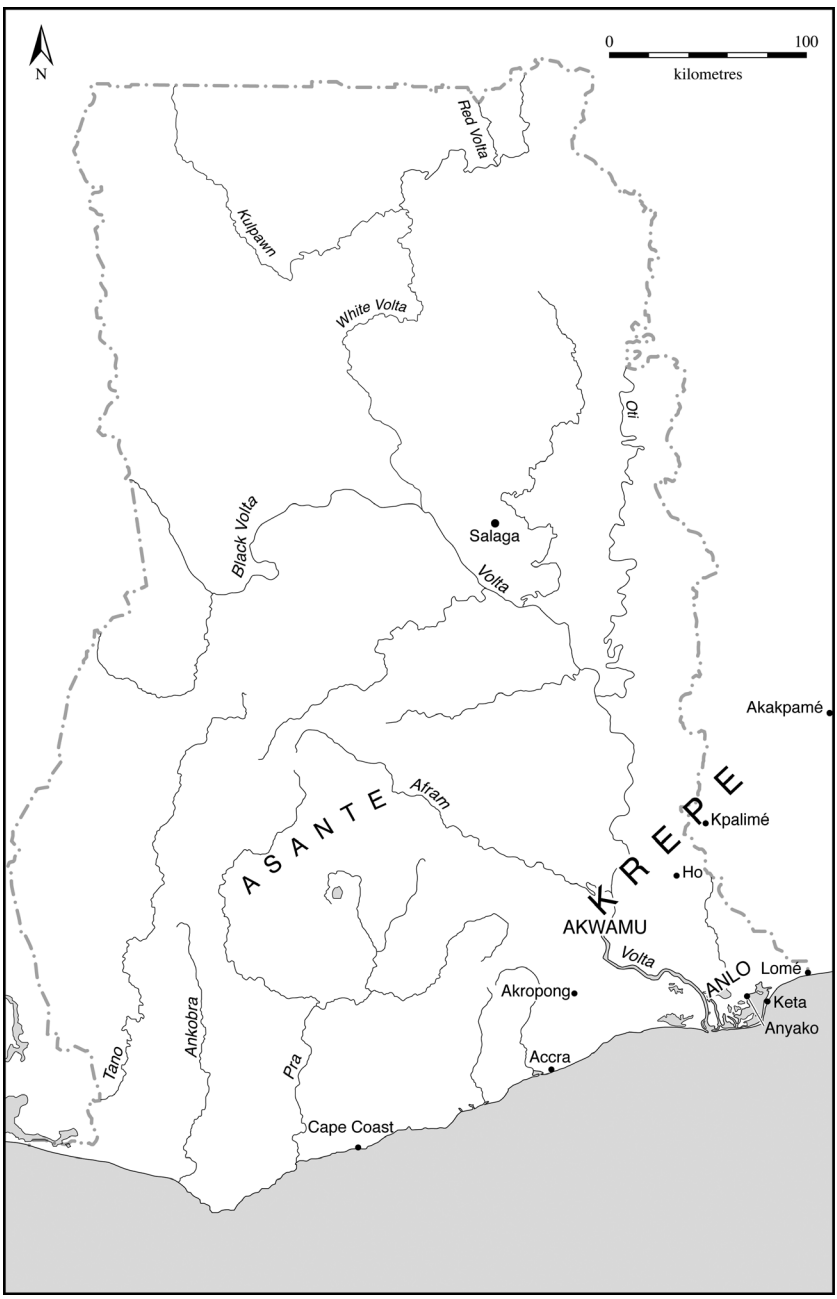
[14] D. E. K. Amenumey, *The Ewe in Pre-Colonial Times: A Political History with Special Emphasis on the Anlo, Ge and Krepi* (Accra, 1986), 69. The river Volta connected the Atlantic coast to markets at Kete Krachi and Salaga.

[15] On Anlo-Akwamu relations, see R. A. Kea, 'Akwamu – Anlo relations, c. 1750–1813', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 10 (1969), 29–63. On the Asante empire, see T. C. McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante* (Cambridge, 1995); and Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of a Political Order* (Cambridge, 1975).

[16] On Anlo's post-abolition slave exporting boom and its social effects, see Sandra Greene, 'Modern "Trokosi" and the 1807 Abolition in Ghana: Connecting Past and Present', *William and Mary Quarterly* LXVI (4) (2009), 959–74. On Asante and other commercial interests in the region see Marion Johnson, 'M. Bonnat on the Volta', *Ghana Notes and Queries* X (1968) 4–17; and 'Asante East of the Volta', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 8 (1965), 33–59.

[17] Lynne Brydon, 'Constructing Avatime: Questions of History and Identity in a West African Polity, c. 1690s to the Twentieth Century', *Journal of African History* 49 (1) (2008), 23–42.

[18] Peki was part of the 'Krepe interior', and led rebellions against Akwamu overlords in 1833. Peki was also involved in resistance to the Asante invasion of Krepi in 1869.



MAP 2: Pre-colonial States

between the British Gold Coast and German Togo cut across other types of ritual and material connections and exchanges, although, as Paul Nugent has argued, it was gradually transformed into a source of economic opportunity as well as constituting a barrier or an inconvenience.[19] In August 1914, at the outbreak of the First World War, the British advanced upon German Togo from their base in the Gold Coast colony to the west. Meanwhile the French advanced from their base in Dahomey to the east. When they converged, German Togo was divided into two spheres: British and French Togoland. (See Map 3.)

At the end of the war the border was redrawn, and as the two Togolands became mandated territories of the League of Nations, the British and the French were compelled to administer them under a measure of international supervision.[20] As Susan Pedersen has recently argued, 'one of the most innovative aspects of the mandates system ... was that it included the right of petition', and thereby created channels through which inhabitants of mandated territories could engage in 'claim-making, international lobbying and political mobilisation'.[21] Petitioning was a 'varied and complex practice', and the issues varied between the mandates.[22] One issue of lasting significance for the two Togolands was the extent to which mandated territories should be administered as separate entities, and the extent to which they could be incorporated into 'administrative unions' with the neighbouring British colony of the Gold Coast and French colony of Dahomey.

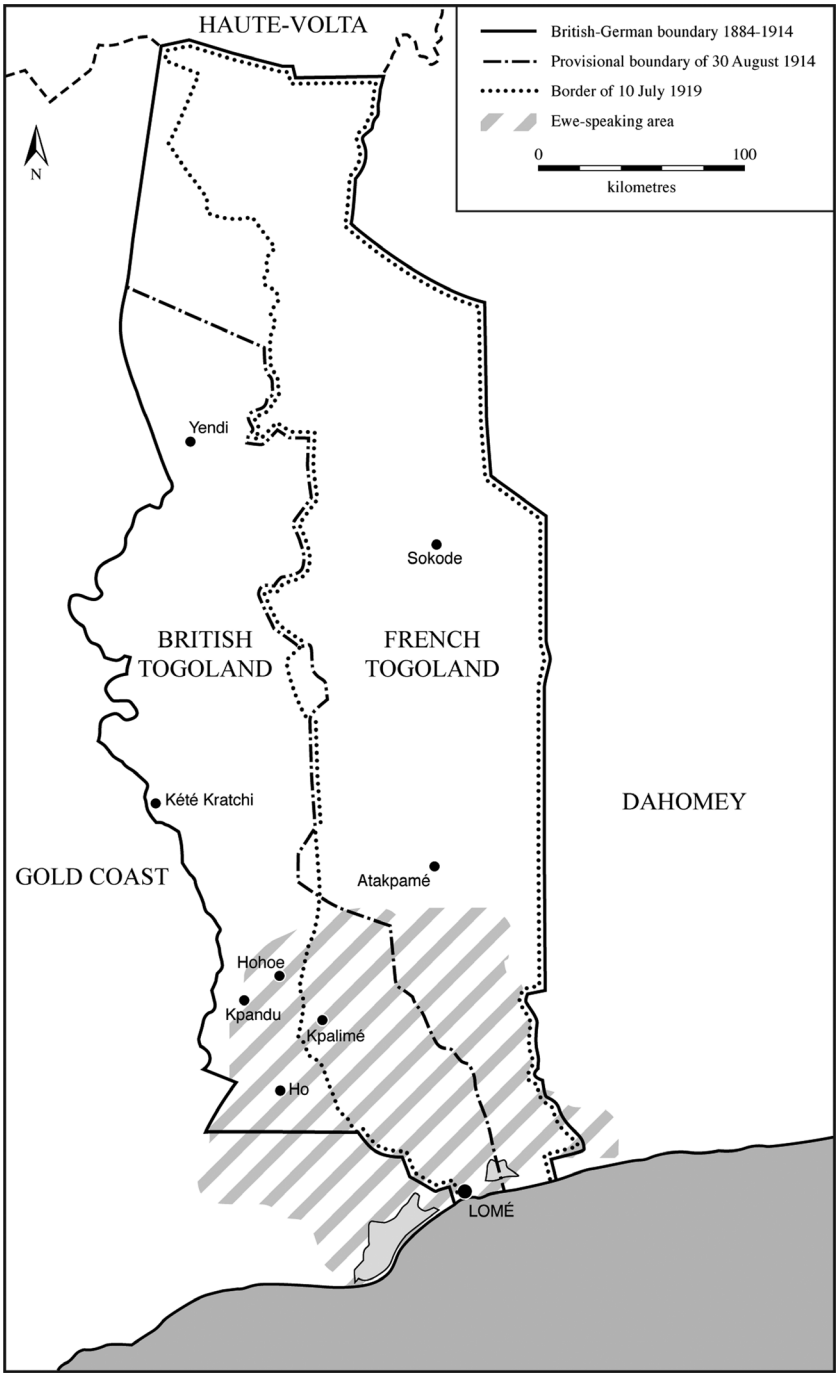
With the formation of the United Nations at the end of the Second World War, a new trusteeship system determined the framework within which the former mandated territories (now trust territories) could be administered. By article 76 of the United Nations Charter, the trusteeship

[19] Paul Nugent, *Smugglers, Secessionists and Loyal Citizens on the Ghana-Togo Frontier: The Lie of the Borderlands since 1914* (Athens OH, 2002). On the nature of spiritual and ritual relations between the Ewe-speaking peoples, and their metamorphosis under the influence of missionary Christianity and colonial rule, see Sandra Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter: A History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana* (Bloomington IN, 2002).

[20] For a study of international supervision of mandated territories in Africa, see Michael Callahan, *Mandates and Empire: The League of Nations and Africa 1914–1931* (Brighton, 1999). Susan Pedersen's book on the mandates system was in preparation when my own book went into production.

[21] Susan Pedersen, 'Samoa on the World Stage: Petitions and Peoples before the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40 (2) (2012), 231–61 at 231.

[22] Ibid., 239.



MAP 3: Changing Borders

system set out to 'promote the political, economic, social, and educational advancement of the inhabitants of the trust territories, and their progressive development towards self-government or independence as may be appropriate to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples and the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned, and as may be provided by the terms of each trusteeship agreement'.[23] In some respects, the degree of supervision over the administering authorities intensified, as international missions now visited the trust territories to make their own observations, and petitioners from the trust territories increasingly took up the opportunity to appear directly before United Nations bodies in New York.[24] This reduced the reliance of the United Nations on information provided by administering authorities, and increased the opportunities for Africans within the two Togolands (and indeed in Tanganyika and the Cameroons) to frame their claims within the broader principles of the trusteeship system and to present those claims to an international audience.[25]

The trusteeship agreements for individual territories, however, were drafted by the administering authorities, and whilst the General Assembly of the United Nations would only approve agreements that seemed consistent with article 76 of the charter, the administering authorities took the opportunity to set the terms of implementation. The agreement that was approved for British Togoland in 1946 was deliberately drafted so as to allow for an administrative union between the trust territory and the neighbouring British colony of the Gold Coast.[26] Initially, the British government justified administrative union on the grounds of necessity – the small size of the trust territory made an entirely separate structure of

[23] Charter of the United Nations, chapter XII, article 76, available at: www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter12.shtml [last accessed 2 July 2014].

[24] Petitioners targeted both the Trusteeship Council and the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly.

[25] The representations of Togolanders, and Ewe-speakers from the Gold Coast, are given detailed treatment in D. E. K. Amenumey, *The Ewe Unification Movement: A Political History* (Accra, 1989). For the Cameroon trust territories, see Meredith Terretta, *Petitioning for our Rights, Fighting for our Nation: The History of the Democratic Union of Cameroonian Women 1946–1960* (Oxford, 2013). For Tanganyika, see Ullrich Lohrmann, *Voices from Tanganyika: Great Britain, the United Nations and the Decolonization of a Trust Territory, 1946–1961* (Münster, 2007).

[26] This is explained in further detail in Chapter 3, but the key documents and clauses are effectively summarised in 'Report of the Trusteeship Council on administrative unions affecting Trust Territories and on the status of the Cameroons and Togoland under French administration arising out of their membership in the French Union', (New York, 1952), 4–6 and 23–6.