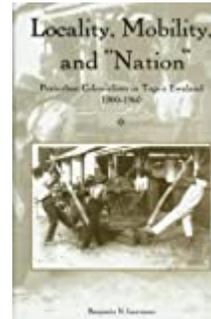




Benjamin N. Lawrance. *Locality, Mobility, and "Nation": Periurban Colonialism in Togo's Eweland, 1900-1960.* Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007. Illustrations. xi + 288 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-58046-264-8.



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The Ewe Nationalist Project in French Togoland

The colonial history of Togo is complicated. Between 1884 and 1914 it was colonized by Germany and incorporated into German Togo. After World War One, the League of Nations divided the territory into two. The western section was handed over to Britain to administer as a mandated territory, while the eastern section was given to the French. The literature on the history of colonial Togo published in English tends to follow this post-World War One division. Scholars study either German colonial or French colonial rule in Togo, but not both. In 1978, for example, Arthur Knoll published a history of colonial rule in Togo, focusing on the German period (*Togo under Imperial Germany, 1884-1914: A Case Study in Colonial Rule* [1978]). Ten years later, R. O. Lasisi examined colonial agricultural policy but focused exclusively on the French period (*Colonial Agricultural Policy and Peasant Reaction: The Case of French Togo, 1922-1945* [1988]). In early 2010, Andrew Zimmerman expanded on this agricultural focus by moving his study back in time to investigate Germany's use of Tuskegee Institute envoys in German Togo to enhance local cotton produc-

tion (*Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire and the Globalization of the New South*). Benjamin N. Lawrance's book, *Locality, Mobility, and "Nation"* takes us forward in time again to French colonial rule, but shifts the focus to an analysis of local urban resistance and the emergence of the nationalist movement. His book is a welcome addition to this small but growing literature not only because it contributes to Togolese colonial history but also because it expands our understanding of the history of Ewe nationalism to include the much less studied set of developments that were occurring on the Togo side of the Gold Coast-Togo border.

Lawrance argues that resistance to colonial rule in French Togoland rested on an indigenous political tradition that encouraged individuals and groups to take advantage of the contradictions in the exercise of power. He traces this political tradition to the popular oral narrative about Ewe efforts to escape political persecution in the seventeenth century. Using these traditions as a template, the Ewe united in their opposition to French colonial rule. Lawrance notes, however, that it was this same

indigenous political tradition that also eventually undermined the ability of Ewe nationalist leaders to implement and sustain a broader movement. Just as the Eweâs who battled political oppression in the seventeenth century dispersed to form their own independent political communities that were at times in conflict with one another, so the various Ewe-speaking groups in French Togoland came together in their opposition to colonial rule only to find themselves ultimately unable to set aside their sectarian interests.

Evidence in support of these three points is deployed in chapters 2 through 6, where Lawrance documents the efforts of local chiefs, women, and various groups of educated elites to combat the excesses of French colonial rule. In chapter 2, for example, Lawrance examines colonial interference in a chieftancy dispute in the coastal town of Anãho. He argues that the colonial decision to back one group over another seemingly more legitimate candidate for the chieftancy led those in the losing camp to embrace a willingness to work with others in southern Togo to oppose colonial rule. Chapter 3 shifts the focus from chiefs and their supporters to the role of women. Here, he documents the origins of womenâs most serious discontent (the colonial effort to extend taxation to women), and the immediate events that led women to stage a riot in Lomã in 1933. He notes that although the women demanded the release of a number of educated Ewe political leaders who had been arrested because of their opposition to changes in the organization of municipal councils, the two groups—the women and the male members of the political opposition—actually operated separately. In demanding the release of the two arrested political leaders, however, the rioting women took advantage of the convergence of events to momentarily come together with the educated opposition to challenge those colonial policies that affected both groups. In chapter 4, Lawrance continues to document opportunistic unifications among the colonized by examining how those seeking chieftancy positions used local religious beliefs to oppose the French efforts to secularize the chieftancy system. The subsequent chapters then document how these various oppositional efforts were ultimately undermined by a leadership that was unable to expand its vision beyond a set of narrow interests. In chapters 5 and 6, for example, Lawrance explores the role of the Deutsch Togo-Bund, a group of educated Ewe leaders who opposed French rule, and who sought not greater autonomy nor independence but rather the return of German colonial rule. In arguing for this return, leaders of the Deutsch Togo-Bund focused almost exclu-

sively on the problems faced by the Ewe-speaking peoples of southern Togoland. Concerns of other groups who lived in northern Togo were essentially ignored. The final substantive chapter, chapter 6, documents how the Ewe educated elite built on the Deutsch Togo-Bunds focus on southern Togoland to champion more explicitly Ewe nationalism, using a variety of written communication forms to convey their message to the larger public. When their efforts failed, Lawrance argues, Ewe nationalists attempted to redefine their movement to embrace a broader Togo nationalism. This effort also failed, and according to Lawrance, because of that failure, the Ewe were unable to retain power in an independent Togo.

Lawrance is largely successful in his portrayal of oppositional politics in Togo. He analyzes with care the history of the different anticolonial groups that operated in the larger towns and market centers in southern Togo. He examines how they took advantage of opportunities to mobilize against colonial policies, but still failed to construct an inclusive nationalist movement.

Less successful in my opinion is his use of the term *âperiurbanâ* to describe the characteristics of the region where all these events were taking place. Lawrance defines the periurban in Togoland as that region in Togo that was neither urban nor rural. Those who lived in the periurban region are said to have possessed a particular mind-set, a way of thinking about how one operated in a world that involved not just the geographical but also the social, political, and economic. Unfortunately, the capaciousness of this definition brings with it a lack of specificity. According to Lawrance, the Ewe-speaking areas of French and British Togoland were periurban by the interwar period because there were no towns and villages that were so remote as to be unconnected to urban areas in the region. In support of this, Lawrance carefully charts in chapter 1 the expansion of the road system that connected the coastal city of Lomã to the various towns and market centers in the interior of southern French Togoland. He then argues that it is important to *âreunite the narratives of rural communities with those of the urban environments and the market town economies to which colonization tied themâ* (p. 35). But how appropriate is this term for southern Togoland? If, as Lawrance claims, this region had no such rural villages, what then is being reunited? It is highly likely that Lawrance is correct that in fact all Ewes were indeed quite tied into a regional cosmopolitan market system, but does the term *âperiurbanâ* serve to clarify this fact when the term itself is so dependent on defining a space that existed between the urban environment and a remotely rural one, the latter of

which Lawrance says did not exist in southern Togoland?

Beyond this question, more could have also been said about particular so-called periurban locations and how their connectedness generated a specific mind-set. Yes, we see various political opposition movements emerging, but how did the extensive transportation and communication networks that existed in the region facilitate in some ways, but hinder in others, the spread of the ideas championed by these movements? Who was actually involved? Where did the women come from, for example, who took part in the 1933 riot? Did the actions of these women, the educated male leadership, and those who sought to reinstate traditional religious practices into the traditional political system speak to a larger population even though these movements emerged largely in the LomÃ© and AnÃ©ho districts? The title gestures at these issues by referencing the terms "locality" and "mobility," but more focused attention on these topics in relation to the emergence of the opposition movements discussed would have lent the book greater cohesiveness.

On a more minor point, *Locality, Mobility, and "Nation"* features eleven photos, all positioned to illustrate the different topics and events discussed in the book. Many are excellent in terms of what they add to the narrative. I do wonder, however, about the inclusion of those images that depict the dead: men, women, and children killed in the 1933 riot; and the picture of a highwayman, Amuzuvi Akpadjaka, who was executed by the French colonial government. The graphic nature of these pictures and the fact that the images do not add much to the narrative raise questions about the appropriateness of their inclusion in the book. Permission for their reproduction was granted by the United Nations/League of Nations/etc., but what about the families of the dead? Their faces are clearly visible and recognizable, even though some are quite mutilated. It may be my own sensitivity, but I wonder, again, what they are supposed to add to this book on locality, mobility, and "nation."

None of these concerns, however, should detract from the fact that Lawrance has produced an important contribution about the history of French Togoland.

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