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## Togoland's lingering legacy: the case of the demarcation of the Volta Region in Ghana and the revival of competing nationalisms

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### Abstract

Since independence in 1957, the Volta Region of Ghana has endured ethnic-riddled internal torment and has been used as a pawn in national and international political struggles. The looming decision by the Ghanaian government to demarcate the Volta Region, to create the new Oti Region, has revived nationalistic sentiments that stem from the 1880's German protectorate of Togoland which encompassed the region. Drawing upon theories of nationalism, this article reflects upon the turbulent history of the area and situates the three competing nationalisms of Ewe, Voltarian and Western Togoland, amidst the current political and social debate. This article suggests that these nationalisms are precariously balanced as the proposed Oti Region threatens to redefine the future of each and give rise to a dominant Voltarian identity.

### Introduction

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 2017, the President of Ghana, Nana Akufo-Addo, utilised his constitutional power and appointed a Commission of Inquiry to examine the prospect of creating new regions within the country (Government of Ghana, 2017). This decision was prompted by petitions presented by chiefs, individuals and advocacy groups in some regions of Ghana, and the findings of the Commission of Inquiry have identified four regions as having a need and demand for demarcation to create six new regions (Government of Ghana 2018). The process is being administratively

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managed by the 2017-created Ministry of Regional Reorganisation and Special Projects headed by the Honourable Dan Botwe, the Commission of Inquiry, and by the Electoral Commission who will manage the referendum slated for December 2018 in the affected districts that comprise the newly proposed regions.

The Volta Region is one of these four regions which have been earmarked for demarcation to create the Oti Region out of its northern half, leaving the southern half to remain as the Volta Region. Support for the Oti Region is split on an almost perfect parallel to that where the regional line is proposed. Various groups and leaders from the north of the Volta Region welcome the proposal as they have long felt marginalised and claim national development has failed to improve their standard of living (Krachi Youth Association, 2017; Nettey, 2017). Yet on the other end of the debate, the southern end, many prominent figureheads and activist groups claim the proposal is ill-conceived and that it is a thinly veiled attempt at unconstitutional ethnic appeasement and a further affront to the traditional inhabitants of this region – the Ewe people (Association of Volta Youth USA, 2018; Dzigbodi-Adjimah, 2017).

The Oti Region proposal has rekindled a larger historical debate that has its roots in the scramble for Africa. In the 1880's, the majority of the Ewe people found themselves belonging to the German protectorate of Togoland (Amenumey, 1989). After World War I the western third of Togoland became British (Western) Togoland and the eastern two-thirds French Togoland, later mandated by the League of Nations and then the United Nations (Amenumey, 1989). The future of Western Togoland was decided in a 1956 plebiscite which saw a union with the neighbouring British colony of the Gold Coast, to then form the new nation-state of Ghana (Buah, 1980). The Ewes of Western Togoland decried the outcome which relegated them to an ethnic minority within Ghana and drew them further away from the Ewe in French Togoland (Nugent, 2002). The Oti Region proposal symbolises a further territorial attack to not just the Ewe people, but to those irredentists that desire Western Togoland to reclaim independence from Ghana, and to those disaffected Ghanaians who wish to see the Volta Region remain whole but with greater national integration.

The objective of this research is to critically analyse the impact the proposed Oti Region has on these competing nationalisms in the Volta Region. Theoretical views on nations and nationalism from Plamenatz (1970), Gellner (1983) and Kingsbury (2007) will be contextualised to this setting and placed alongside Ewe and Western Togoland scholarly work by Brown (1980; 1983), Amenumey (1989), Nugent (2002) and Skinner (2007;

2010; 2015). The first chapter will analyse the similarities between the geographical split in support of the Oti Region and the 1956 Western Togoland plebiscite that created the union to form Ghana. These parallels past and present provide a framework for considering the impact the Oti Region will have on each nationalism. This will be followed by a reflection of the 1970's Western Togoland Liberation Movement commonly known as Tolimo. It was Tolimo who posed the most recent threat to Ghanaian sovereignty and their demise is critical in positioning the current movements strengths and weaknesses. Finally, a reconstruction of the challenges and opportunities facing each nationalism will take place in order to provide a path forward to survive and thrive within the current political machinations.

This research is significant as the Oti Region proposal has reignited Western Togoland nationalism and the Ewe unification debate from a near dormant state, and brought it firmly into the sights of local, regional and national leaders. The rise of a Volta Region identity has added another level of intricacy to the debate. Colonial borders have long divided nations but rarely have they engendered such long-lasting nationalistic affinity. This research is important for placing this struggle into scholarly and political consciousness as history is being written and the future of many groups of people is being decided.

The author claims no political affiliations, is a non-national who does not belong to any ethnic or diaspora groups from the region, and whose analysis is based purely on research and not influenced by external factors. The author's connection to the region began in 2009 through a two-year volunteer program and continues by being the founder and director of a Volta Region based non-government community development organisation which provides educational opportunities for young people; health outreaches to rural communities; and skills training for women.

### **A brief history of nations and nationalism in Togoland, British Togoland and the Volta Region**

The Ewe people have long been divided by colonial and national borders, beginning with the Germans declaring three-quarters of Ewe territory as belonging to the German protectorate of Togoland in 1884 (Amenumey, 1989). Following World War I, the British and French shared in the spoils of victory over the Germans and dissected Togoland vertically into British (Western) Togoland, while the larger eastern portion became French Togoland (Skinner, 2007). This partition stirred the first rumblings of Ewe reunification within British Togoland as previously independent Ewe states sought interdependence to strengthen (Amenumey, 1989). From the depths

of former German rule grew a competing wave of nationalistic sentiment in Western Togoland which centred around those groups of people, not just the Ewe, who first encountered education and development through the German tradition (Skinner, 2007). Western Togoland became a playground for those seeking to influence the future of the territory.

It was the 1956 Western Togoland plebiscite where three competing nationalisms came to a head as the future of Western Togoland was determined. The first pursued a united Eweland; the second an independent Western Togoland with a view to complete Togoland reunification; while the third offered a vision of integration with the British colony of the Gold Coast which was destined to become the nation-state of Ghana (Nugent, 2002). Two paths were presented for voting in the plebiscite: union with the Gold Coast or remain separate. The union vote was victorious in a plebiscite riddled with ethnic divisions and political manoeuvring (Amenumey, 1989). The northern, union-favouring part of Western Togoland became the Northern Region of Ghana, while the southern, majority separatists and Ewe merged with a small Ewe territory in the southern Gold Coast to form the Volta Region. Despite protests to the United Nations that the votes should be considered separately and the south should retain its autonomy as Western Togoland, it fell on deaf ears and the breath had seemingly been taken from the unification movements sails.

When French Togoland attained independence in 1960 and the nation-state of Togo was born, there was hope of rekindling a unified Togoland and an Ewe homeland under Togolese leader, Sylvanus Olympio. This was soon dashed when the Ghanaian pan-African President, Kwame Nkrumah, enforced the Preventive Detention Act to quell Ewe and Western Togoland unrest. This forced 5,700 Togoland reunificationists to flee to Togo by 1961 to avoid imprisonment (Skinner, 2015). The assassination of Olympio in 1963, followed by the successful coup against Nkrumah in 1966, created a period of instability which led to a resurgence in Western Togoland sentiment and Ewe nationalism (Skinner, 2015). In the mid-70's these activists in exile, under the banner of Tolimo, gained widespread attention as they first sought special status for Western Togoland, then fully-fledged Togoland reunification (Brown, 1983). When a 1977 assassination attempt on the irredentist Togolese President Gnassingbe Eyadema failed, Eyadema withdrew his unification position and financial support, and Tolimo and Western Togoland nationalism seemingly quietly folded, once again, into the pages of the history books (Brown, 1980; Nugent, 2002).

The Oti Region proposal has given rise to the latest manifestations of nationalism within the Volta Region. As a response to further territorial

incursions threatened by the Oti Region, a wave of movements are drumming up fervour for Ewe and Western Togoland nationalism. However, it is the newly emerging affinity to the Volta Region, that of being a Voltarian, that has grown post-independence and threatens the legitimacy of Ewe and Western Togoland nationalism claims.

### **A literature review of the competing nationalisms**

The real-time deliberations of the Commission of Inquiry means that there is currently no academic literature on the topic. There are however detailed historical scholarly perspectives on the rise and fall of Western Togoland nationalism and Ewe reunification that will ground this papers analysis of the Oti Region proposal. Perhaps the fullest account of the birth and growth of Ewe unification from 1914-1960 comes from Ghanaian Professor, D. E. K. Amenumey (1989), in his chronicle *The Ewe Unification Movement: A Political History*. In the early 1980's, David Brown (1980; 1983) contributed many important pieces of work on the political struggle of the Ewe and Tolimo against the central Ghanaian government. This was followed by Paul Nugent's (2002) study of border communities and an assessment that hopes of Ewe unification and/or Western Togoland secession are all but extinguished as a Volta Region identity amongst Ghanaian citizenship has emerged trump. Dr Kate Skinner is the heir apparent in this regional nationalism discussion, with her 2015 book, *The Fruits of Freedom in British Togoland*, providing the most recent assessment of nationalism. In this seminal work, Skinner (2015) challenges the notion of dead Ewe and Western Togoland movements and relocates their history within literacy and politics frameworks.

Gellner (1983, p. 1) contends that nationalism is “a theory of political legitimacy”, while Kingsbury (2007) provides multiple constructions of how nationalism may develop to ultimately deliver this political legitimacy. *Constructed nationalism* suggests a somewhat artificial, human-decided development rather than an organic nationalistic growth (Kingsbury, 2007). It is commonly agreed upon by Amenumey (1989), Nugent (2002) and Skinner (2007), that Ewe nationalism began as a constructed nationalism, with all pointing to the lack of a singular political entity amongst the Ewe states pre-German colonisation. Yet they all differ on the pivotal factor that unpinned the emergence and adoption of Ewe nationalism. Amenumey (1989) cites German Christian missionaries' development of the Ewe Presbyterian Church and the standardisation of the Ewe language as the birth point of Ewe nationalism. Nugent (2002) cautions against this and instead cites ongoing cross-border trade during colonial times as the impetus, while

Skinner (2007; 2015) believes the catalyst came from mass education in Western Togoland. A common thread amongst these scholars is that *unity through communication* - a construction whereby nationalism develops through the ability to communicate (Kingsbury, 2007) - was fostered by a common language which led to the creation of an intertwined Ewe and Western Togoland high culture. Nugent (2002) furthers this by claiming after Ghanaian independence, Western Togoland nationalism lost appeal as an educated class grew from the Ghanaian institutions of mass education. This group of people had no direct involvement in the previous political struggle and thus found themselves affiliating with national ideals. Skinner (2007) does not take such a fatalistic viewpoint, but does acknowledge that a gap grew between the educated and non-educated Ghanaian Western Togoland in the decades after independence.

*Ethno-nationalism* is premised on a common identity inherent in groups of ethnically homogenous people (Kingsbury, 2007). Ethno-nationalism helped spark the original Ewe unification movement against British and French demarcation (Amenumey, 1989). Yet the dilution of ethnic-Ewe prominence in Togoland, which led to 'Ewe' including those non-ethnic Ewes who could speak the language, limited the appeal of ethno-nationalists (Brown, 1980; Nugent, 2002; Skinner, 2007). Amenumey (1989) argues that ethno-nationalism lost prominence amongst the Ewe in Western Togoland due to the rise of *territorial nationalism*. This powerful form of nationalism is a primeval mechanism that bonds people and communities through "physical proximity, shared resources and common threats" (Kingsbury, 2007, p. 53).

Western Togoland territorial nationalism fell out of favour in the 1970's as Tolimo failed to gain support through this form of nationalism (Skinner, 2015). Brown (1980) concludes that government repression effectively destroyed grassroots Tolimo support, while Nugent (2002) argues that Ghanaian identity had greater attraction than the territorial nationalism offered by Tolimo. What is clear is that territory imbued nationalism has played a defining role in the rise of these nationalisms.

Strong Ewe ethno-nationalism exists in the diaspora, however, it struggles to maintain relevance to overseas-born generations in the USA (Kothor, 2012). Skinner (2010) shares in the importance of diaspora voices in countering the pure local history approach, and credits the UK diaspora with keeping Ewe unification and Western Togoland nationalism alive into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is somewhat unexpected then that a strong vocal voice has arisen within the Volta Region since the turn of the millennium. Skinner (2015) finishes her book with the writings of Kosi Kedem - a former Volta



Region parliamentarian whose stance is that Western Togoland was robbed of their nationality. She concludes that despite Nugent's (2002) claims some 13 years earlier, the demise of Ewe reunification hopes and Western Togoland nationalism is not complete and there remains a local and diasporic network of educated individuals and groups who have taken charge of upholding this vision. It is here that this research paper enters the debate.

### **Oti Region: recreating the 1956 plebiscite divisions**

The 1956 plebiscite to determine the future of Western Togoland was conducted by the United Nations in the six District Council areas that made up the British mandated territory (Nugent, 2002). The vote was either for integration with a soon-to-be independent Gold Coast, or to remain separate and have its future decided thereafter (Amenumey, 1989). The integration vote emerged triumphant with 58% of the vote, however, there were clear differences evident between voting patterns in the north and south council areas (Nugent, 2002). Despite attempts to have the two considered separately, the United Nations set in motion actions to integrate the entirety of Western Togoland into the Gold Coast to form the newly independent nation-state of Ghana (Nugent, 2002). The three northern districts who voted overwhelmingly for integration, Mamprusi, Dagomba and Gonja, joined the Northern Region of Ghana, while the three southern districts became the Volta Region. Of the three southern districts, the majority of voters in the northernmost Buem-Krachi District sought integration, while the southernmost districts of Kpandu and Ho proved to be the hotbed of separation, voting overwhelmingly against integration (Nugent, 2002). There were now clear divisions within the newly formed Volta Region. The curse of the African nation-state, which Davidson (1992) attributes to the adoption of western political models, struck Western Togoland through this foreign populace majority voting system that birthed the Volta Region.

The Oti Region proposal is stirring the same divisions that were experienced at independence. What was the Buem-Krachi District of Western Togoland will basically become the Oti Region, so it is therefore no surprise that support for the proposal is once again split along those lines. During the 2016 presidential campaign, 57 chiefs in the northern Volta Region declared their support for then presidential candidate Nana Akufo-Addo and his pledge to create the Oti Region (New Patriotic Party, 2016). The chief of the Krachi Traditional Area, who purports to be behind the petition to the President to create the Oti Region, claims he has 400 chiefs supporting the proposal (Nettey, 2017). While the exact number of chiefs in support was not made explicit by President Akufo-Addo, he did confirm that

a petition was received which prompted the appointment of the Commission of Inquiry (Government of Ghana, 2017). The strong evidence of support coming from the northern Volta Region is in contrast to the views of those in the south.

The Commission of Inquiry has drawn scorn from the Association of Volta Youth (2018) – who argue against the demarcation - for holding four of the five community consultations in districts that will form the Oti Region. Individuals, Church leaders and councils of chiefs are further enraged by the fact that only those within the boundary of the proposed new region will have a vote in the referendum that will decide the matter (Asogli State Council, 2018; Dzigbodi-Adjimah, 2017; Kanyi & Sowah, 2018). The discontent accorded to the political processes are not dissimilar to those shared by the southerners who condemned the 1956 plebiscite results for being considered as one.

In the early 1970's John Plamenatz (1973) wrote of an Eastern type of nationalism that existed in the Balkan region of Europe. This form of nationalism was said to seek to assert itself over “a chaotic ethnographic map of many dialects, with ambiguous historical or linguo-genetic allegiances, and containing populations which had only just begun to identify with these emergent national high-cultures” (Gellner, 1983, p. 100). This could very well have described Western Togoland in the decade leading up to the 1956 plebiscite. Two months before the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry, Professor Dzigbodi-Adjimah (2017) penned an opinion piece aptly titled: *Oti Region: The First Step Towards the Balkanisation of Volta Region*. In it he warns against ethnic appeasement, viewed as the underlying driver of the Oti Region proposal, and foresees an eventual disintegration of the Volta Region into small regions, each dominated by differing ethnic groups as what occurred in the Balkans. Whilst this aligns with the eventuality described by Plamenatz's Eastern nationalism, the Ewe and Western Togoland voices of the 21<sup>st</sup> century position themselves to avoid this collapse on the grounds of territorial nationalism and a united Volta Region voice. This is in direct contrast to the plebiscite era when campaigners wanted the south to be considered separately. Davidson (1992) surmises that the Asante of the Gold Coast were on their way to a nation-state until colonialism arrived, and, given the chance, Western Togoland and Ewe nationalists now believe they can achieve this with their territory intact. The newly emerging Voltarian nationalism transcends ethnic groupings and positions itself to avoid any demarcation along claims of territorial nationalism, yet does not harbour the same vision of nation-statehood (Concerned Citizens of Volta Region, 2017).

Nugent's (2002) detailed analysis of voting patterns of communities in the 1956 plebiscite indicate that ethnicity played a smaller role than previously thought. Contrastingly, the Oti Region proposal appears to have incited political manoeuvring of local Chiefdoms and traditional areas along ethnic lines. Leaders from the Kpandai District in Northern Region are petitioning to be included in the Oti Region – citing that their expulsion to the Northern Region at the time of independence, rather than inclusion in the Volta Region, separates them from their fellow Guan (Nankwe, 2018). The Krachi Youth Association (2017) supports the Oti Region as a way of giving the Guan and Akan in the north separation from the majority Ewe in south. Ethno-nationalism is on the rise as it has strong attraction for groups that are on the peripheries of national thought (Kingsbury, 2007). The Oti Region proposal has emboldened not only the Ewe and Western Togolanders, but those ethnic groups that felt sidelined within the already marginalised Volta Region. The Guans are leading the Oti Region movement but the Ghanaian government cannot be seen to be bowing to the pressures of ethnic appeasement. The official line is that the creation of the Oti Region will promote regional development and allow the government to be closer to the people (Government of Ghana 2017). However, questions of territorial boundaries arising from ethno-nationalism, whether they be national or regional boundaries, will no doubt linger long after any demarcation - just as the conjecture around the 1956 plebiscite invoked boundaries has remained. These divisions of the past lay the groundwork for understanding how the failure of Tolimo is linked with the current day debate.

### **A comparison to Tolimo**

Many scholars thought that the unravelling of Tolimo in the late 1970's was the death of Ewe unification and Western Togoland secession hopes (Asamoah, 2014; Brown, 1980; Nugent, 2002). Few would have predicted the rise and spotlight given to groups seeking a radical agenda, such as the Homeland Study Group Foundation (HSGF) who demand Western Togoland secession from Ghana. In flashbacks to the days of violent crackdowns against Tolimo supporters, Ghanaian authorities arrested the leaders of the HSGF prior to a 2017 declaration of independence (Ibrahim, 2017). The ensuing trials and media attention have placed the divisive HSGF at the forefront of the Oti Region debate. Like the Tolimo days, there are strong undercurrents from competing movements who seek different agendas. The Volta Youth Association (VYA) of the 1970's actively condemned Tolimo and instead sought greater national benefits for the Volta Region (Asamoah, 2014). Today, a group called the Concerned Citizens of Volta Region

(CCVR) are offering a similar viewpoint and are calling on unity in the region (Concerned Citizens of Volta Region, 2017). They too, just like the VYA in the 1970's, are rejecting the radical agenda and ideologies of Western Togoland secession groups. Amongst this is the flame of Ewe unification held aloft by diaspora collectives in the US and UK (Kothor, 2012; Skinner, 2010). Surprisingly, a coalition of sorts has been formed by eight different groups, including secessionists, pro-Volta Region and Ewe diaspora groups, to condemn the partitioning of the Volta Region (The Coalition of Volta Region Groups, 2018).

Tolimo's downfall was said to be partly attributed to its weak support within the Volta Region and the inability to connect with the ordinary citizen (Brown, 1983). Tolimo was led by exiles in Togo and sought international publicity to strengthen its cause. Fights against the Oti Region proposal are led by the aforementioned Coalition, which of its eight members, only two are based domestically. A shared challenge between Tolimo and the Coalition is that Tolimo faced internal cleavages brought upon by differing goals – much like Coalition members seeking different outcomes as Western Togoland, Ewes, or Voltarians. Yet the Coalition's joint fight to block the demarcation of the Volta Region signifies a lightbulb moment. The VYA and Tolimo were unable to bridge their differences in 1970's, and even before that, Ewe unificationists could not win the support of the non-Ewe in the 1956 plebiscite, even though they had a similar anti-union position. One could almost describe the Coalition, for all their competing nationalisms, as a patriot of the Volta Region. Plamenatz (1973, p. 24) defines patriotism as “a devotion to the community one belongs to”, while Gellner (1983, p. 138) clearly distinguishes nationalism as “a very distinctive species of patriotism”. If it is devotion they are showing to the Volta Region community, even as a pawn in a larger game, then the Coalition has evolved from the primordial heart-on-the-sleeve, anti-high culture nationalism that Tolimo represented. They are therefore better poised to connect with the ordinary citizen by appealing to the sense of loyalty of Volta Region citizens, and in doing so, achieve their shared goal of keeping the Volta Region whole.

### **Nationalisms awoken: the past, present and future**

Gellner (1983) and Kingsbury (2007) both theorise that individuals must display a shared commitment to a nation in order for it to exist. This shared commitment often manifests into a quest for political legitimacy, and thus a rise in nationalism (Kingsbury, 2007). It seems Tolimo was on this quest without the requisite shared commitment. The nationalisms that have been awoken by the Oti Region proposal are competing against each other for

validation and commitment amongst individuals of the Volta Region. The fight rather than flight response exhibited by these movements compliments Plamenatz's (1973) assertion that nationalism arises in a preservation response to a direct threat on a national or cultural identity. But what chance do they have when the people they pursue a shared commitment with are an overlapping target market for all the groups? The following section evaluates the three competing nationalisms and suggests a final resting point for each of them within the current state of affairs.

### **Ewe nationalism**

Ewe nationalism was constructed during the Togoland era and calls for Ewe emancipation came rapidly after the creation of Western and French Togoland (Amenumey, 1989; Nugent, 2002; Skinner, 2007). However, Amenumey (1989) tracks the origins of Ewe unification to pre-WWI when the Anlo Ewes, who existed in a small corner of the Gold Coast, called for Ewe unification under the British administration. What drives Ewe nationalists is this persistent and intrusive division of their people for over 130 years, continuing today with the Ewes still divided between anglophone Ghana and francophone Togo. The Oti Region proposal represents an attack on their territorial rights and a diminishment of their ability to be a unified ethnic group.

Ewe nationalism is perhaps the purest form of nationalism evident in the Volta Region. Surprisingly, it appears to have the smallest voice amidst the current debate. Anti-Oti Region statements have largely been released by a range of Ewe diaspora groups aligning themselves with the larger Coalition (The Coalition of Volta Region Groups, 2018). There is little evidence to suggest that Ewe nationalism is compelling Ewe people in Ghana to oppose the Oti Region. This places today's situation in a similar position as Tolimo who ultimately failed to gain grassroots support for their ideals (Brown, 1983). One explanation could be a romanticised history and myth in the diaspora of what an Ewe homeland was like as Togoland. The glorified history may not match the reality on the ground where people have successfully transitioned into being an Ewe within Ghana. Unless there is purposeful provocation or something akin to ethnic cleansing, Ewe nationalism may remain hidden behind layers of other competing nationalisms.

To bring Ewe nationalism to the fore, Ewe movements that seek unification would be better off allowing the Oti Region to come to fruition. Oti Region proponents the Krachi Youth Association (2017), point to the fact that the majority of the northern Volta Region inhabitants are Guan, not Ewe,

and have long held oppositional views to the majority Ewe of the south. In the 1956 plebiscite the Buem-Krachi District, which is the rough territory of the proposed Oti Region, sought integration with the Gold Coast rather than separation (Nugent, 2002). Allowing the Guans and Akans to have their own region could contribute to more coherent regional politics and potentially give rise to greater Ewe ownership of the Volta Region and a stronger territorial and political claim.

### **Western Togoland nationalism**

The 1956 plebiscite result dealt a hammer blow to hopes of a Western Togoland nation-state in the post-colonial era. The failure to gain the support of the northerners, who viewed the separation vote as a kowtow to Ewe dominance, is well documented by Amenumey (1989), Nugent (2002) and Skinner (2015). In the 1970's Tolimo sought special status for what was Western Togoland, but after this was rejected by the Ghanaian government, they demanded total reunification with Togo (Brown, 1980; 1983). Tolimo was viewed by the government as an Ewe secessionist movement despite having strong non-Ewe leaders, and was seen by the majority of the people as an irrelevant ideal from disgruntled exiles in Togo (Brown, 1980; 1983; Nugent, 200). The Western Togoland movements circling on the Oti Region proposal, such as the HSGF, face a number of these same challenges: they are being rejected by regional groups who seek greater outcomes for the Volta Region within the nation-state of Ghana (Concerned Citizens of Volta Region, 2017); and governments are cracking down on their radical secessionist agenda (Ibrahim, 2017).

The most vocal Western Togoland voice in the decade before the Oti Region proposal came to light was Kosi Kedem - a then parliamentarian in the Volta Region who believed that Western Togoland had been denied their nationality (Skinner, 2010; 2015). Instead of a secessionist rhetoric, Kedem sought greater integration of the former Western Togoland territory into Ghana, claiming the Volta Region in particular had been neglected by successive governments (Skinner, 2010; 2015). Western Togoland nationalism does exist in small pockets, however, it may be time for the HSGF to drop their radical agenda and instead align themselves with Kedem's integration approach. Yet this approach is riddled with challenges as they would struggle to push better political representation and economic development concurrently across the Northern, Oti and Volta Regions that comprised Western Togoland territory. Any focus on the Volta Region, the ideological and physical home of the movement, would further marginalise them from the rest of the regions they purport to serve.

The quest for a Western Togoland nation-state has always been hindered by the lack of cultural homogeneity amongst those in the claimed territory (Skinner, 2015). The Guans who pursue the Oti Region are just the latest ethnic group to assert their own territorial claims. Gellner (1983) suggests that nationalism arises as a result of homogeneity, but Western Togoland can never have been said to be a culturally or linguistically homogenous entity. Adding to this challenge is that creation of the Oti Region would see Western Togoland territory primarily divided amongst the Northern Region, Oti Region and Volta Region, with small enclaves also existing in the Eastern Region and Upper East Region. The clear divisions in the 1956 plebiscite voting patterns and the current support of the Oti Region proposal show a fractured region. Competing nationalisms are still present and just like Tolimo was in the late 1970's, Western Togoland secession can be best viewed as an outdated concept with no real practicality. The rise of ethno-nationalism situated within a national Ghanaian consciousness must be considered detrimental to their pipe dream of secession as Western Togoland nationalism once again fails to garner serious grassroots attention.

### **Voltarian nationalism**

Voltarian nationalism is perhaps the hardest of all to lock down. Nugent (2002) notes that the first generation of highly educated scholars hailing from the Volta Region realised that their region was developmentally trailing behind the others. They sought greater equity for the region through political means, but remained firmly committed to the new nation-state of Ghana that had provided them with educational opportunities. Without explicitly referencing Voltarian nationalism, Nugent's (2002) documentation of this period shows a typology of nationalism that was birthed through the uniting factor of standardised education and language (English), and one which transcended ethnic boundaries.

The dominant view of the proliferation of pro-Volta groups is that of opposition to the Oti Region proposal. They reject government claims that the Oti Region will boost regional development, pointing to numerous yet to be realised infrastructure projects in the south, and warn equally against creating regions based on ethnic delineations (Coalition of Volta Youths, 2018; Ohene-Sefadzi, 2017). The arousal of Voltarian nationalism has occurred due to the proposed territorial incursions of the region. Kingsbury (2007) warns that territorial nationalism paired with the need for a common defence is a primeval form of nationalism that can create strong community bonds. The rise in people speaking with their feet and attending rallies points to the growth of these bonds. Due care must be given by these groups that



their demands and actions do not morph into a breakaway mentality and they retain their desire for regional development through ongoing engagement with the sitting national government. The breakaway path that Tolimo took eventually led to their downfall.

Voltarian nationalism has largely lay dormant until the provocation that is the Oti Region. Plamenatz (1973) bases his writings of nationalism on the simple truth that people who recognize their separation from those around them, and react to this, are displaying trace levels of nationalism. The present moment in time may just be the first reaction that cements Voltarian nationalism in the consciousness of many. It is now not just the educated who are recognizing the perceived underdevelopment of the region, but those across all levels of society. This grassroots connection is what all nationalistic movements that have come and gone have lacked. It is now in the hands of the many Volta groups to deliver a unified message that ties these people to a regional outlook and strengthens the bond of Voltarian nationalism.

## **Conclusion**

There is little doubt that the Oti Region will soon become a reality and the Volta Region will be split along old ethnic and political lines. This article has critically analysed the impact of the Oti Region proposal and highlighted the differing nationalisms competing to take hold amongst dissatisfied people of the Volta Region. The historical perspective demonstrates that many of these nationalistic groups are making the same mistakes as their predecessors did during equally important times. The reconstruction of the challenges and opportunities available shows the lack of grassroots support is significant, particularly with Western Togoland nationalists who are continuing to claim territory that has overwhelmingly and consistently rejected their claims. Ewe nationalists have the purest claim to a brand of territorial and ethno-infused nationalism, but are failing to project a compelling history and myth worth Ghanaian Ewes unifying for. Perhaps the closest nationalism to the people is that of being a Voltarian, however ironic as Voltarian nationalism has not been explicitly branded by the groups that are demonstrating this form of nationalism. It appears that the Oti Region proposal has triggered the unconscious rise of Voltarian nationalism and it is simply awaiting a nationalistic leader to explicate the importance and ideals of being a Voltarian.

More than thirty years ago Gellner (1983, p. 83) remarked on the “stability of the ethnic-defying frontiers that had been arbitrarily drawn up by the colonists” in Africa. South Sudan is the only example of a redraw of



these colonial borders in more than 60 years since Ghana was the first to achieve independence. The curse of the nation-state continues to haunt those people who seek to adjust these borders through Western Togoland reinstatement or Ewe unification. They appear trapped within these borders. Yet the Oti Region proposal that cuts across their claimed territory is providing some political legitimacy to their nationalistic claims. No matter the outcome, nationalistic sentiment other than the dominant Ghanaian high culture is alive in this corner of the globe. As boldly as Nugent (2002) proclaimed the death of Ewe reunification hopes at the end of the 1970's, the end of the road must be nigh for Western Togoland nationalists and hopes for a reunified Eweland. The emerging Voltarian identity appears to provide the most realistic path forward to promote greater integration of the region within Ghana and time will only tell whether this can be seized upon. The Oti Region may just prove to be the hump that broke the camel's back for Ewe and Western Togoland, and the start of a more powerful Volta Region identity.

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