

Ghana

The Ghanaian National Archives, called *Public Records and Archives Administration Department* (PRAAD), has a head office in Accra and a branch archive in Ho, capital of the former Trusteeship Territory of Togoland under British administration. While in Accra some documents of general nature were of interest for this study, the Branch Office in Ho was of acute importance. The holdings in Ho include some documents on the security architecture shortly after Ghana's independence and show how the transition was supposed to happen in relation to security services.

As Kate Skinner noted already in 2010,³⁰ the Ho archive is still awaiting improvements in storage and cataloguing. Moreover, it can be assumed that a not so insignificant part of the archive was deliberately destroyed after the 1966 coup that overthrew Nkrumah. In addition, an accident shortly before my arrival made research difficult. A large part of the holdings is stored in cellars, and shortly before my arrival, a particularly strong storm caused the storeroom to be flooded and many files and folders to be affected. Once again, I would like to thank the archivist, Augustine Julius Gede, who made documents available to me that have not yet been catalogued in the directory.

4.2.2 Challenge of Access & Supplementary Sources

Archives in France are slow to open due to French archival law, as files are still subject to a special clearance and security review procedure due to the 60-year retention period for documents concerning the private lives of individuals or the security of the state and national defence. For example, it was not possible to gain full access to Jacques Foccart's documents, which could have provided essential information on the strategic bearings of French colonial or post-colonial foreign policy. The staff member of the French National Archive, who had the appropriate security clearance, described Jacques Foccart's collections as "very sensitive" holdings. Thus, an exemption for consultation had to be applied for at the French Ministry of Culture, which they granted to me only partially after a 10-month waiting period. For historians of security, such procedures have a foreboding aftertaste. Only recently, the descendants of Sylvanus Olympio renewed their efforts to gain access to the French archives dealing with the assassination of Sylvanus Olympio on 13 January 1963.³¹ In 2021, the Togolese bi-weekly newspaper *L'Alternative* ran the headline that France had sent French archival documents on the assassination to the family's lawyers.³²

Another challenge was the selection of the documents, as the *Archive Nationale d'Outre Mer* (ANOM) has restrictive security regulations: Only 6 boxes may be ordered per day, regardless of the number or content of the documents they contain. Moreover, the explanation that, for security reasons, there is no Wi-Fi in the reading room, of all places, is perplexing in these times of advancing digitisation. Direct transfer of the collected docu-

³⁰ Skinner, "Local Historians and Strangers with Big Eyes," p. 141.

³¹ Fanny Pigeaud, "La Famille Du Président Du Togo Tué En 1963 Réclame L'accès Aux Archives Françaises," *Mediapart*, 21 June 2021

³² *L'Alternative*, "La France Transmet Des Archives Aux Avocats De La Famille," 15 October 2021.

ments and storage in a digital archive in the cloud or server-supported optical character recognition are therefore not possible.

In addition, one challenge is the geographical span of the archive locations: the archival material on the French administration in Togoland is partly in the *Archive National d'Outre-Mer* (ANOM), partly in the *Archive Nationale* in Pierfitte-sur-Seine, Paris, or in the *Archive diplomatique* in Nantes, all several hundred kilometres away from each other. However, the archival sources on Togoland extend not only to the mandate powers of the two trusteeship territories, but also to the UN and to actors scattered around the world. For example, contrary to UN regulations, part of the correspondence between Sylvanus Olympio, former leader of the reunification movement and later President of Togo, and the then UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, after the latter's death in 1961, was transferred to archives in Stockholm rather than to the UN archives in New York. Another example: Since Sylvanus Olympio was assassinated on the grounds of the American Embassy in Lomé in 1963, the documents on the still unclear events of that night, which are important for security policy research, are in the holdings of the US State Department in the United States National Archives in Maryland. Furthermore, due to Olympio's untimely death and thus prematurely ended role in the post-colonial order of the African continent, he was less received in documentary, cinematic or literary terms than some of his contemporaries, despite his prominent role in the reunification movement, in the UN negotiations, and the decolonisation process of Togo in general.

All these limitations, challenges, and the hurdles demand time, money, travel, and academic career privileges that structurally exclude a considerable proportion of historians from the countries concerned. Despite the pretence to do justice to postcolonial aspirations, this work would have been difficult to write without the privileged access to the field, archives, and academic support structures.

The underfunding of archives in Togo and Ghana poses problems for domestic and external researchers of colonial history. Since it is not only domestic archival material there that deals with interrelated history that Europe would rather forget, not only the local authorities should be called to task, but also the international donors. For example, the archival holdings in Ho were stored in a basement. A heavy downpour a few days before my arrival flooded the archives and soaked many boxes. The archivist on-site, Augustine Julius Gede, did the utmost while at the same time taking care of my requests. Personal contacts on site were immensely helpful when it came to finding basic documents that were not (yet) recorded in the electronic databases.

Regardless of challenges access and the hurdles, much material is destroyed anyway and lost to historical research forever. Efforts were made to think about this blank space and reflect it in the research question. To fill these gaps identified early on, interviews were to be conducted with former activists. This proved difficult, as many activists have since died due to the historical distance or were too young to be actively involved in the Togoland unification movement. What remained were contacts at universities and interviews with Togolese historians. Memoirs, autobiographical, or historical accounts for Togoland and the decolonisation period were also used. Inspiring were especially accounts

of Emanuel Kodjo Bruce,³³ a tutelary of the German colonial administration, who accompanied the independence process, or the Ghanaian academic and politician, Obed Asamoah, who was born in Likpe, the traditional area of the Volta Region, and thus not impartial regarding the Togoland reunification question.³⁴

Ultimately, however, non-recorded voices will always represent archival voids. To address this issue, radio, and film recordings as well as oral history conversations were collected. To get an impression of the context where the supposed security-related speech acts occurred and a sense of the narratives during the trusteeship period, photographic material and film recordings were used, though admittedly, these were almost exclusively recordings in which the white gaze operated behind the camera (or the microphone). These media gave a sense of the atmosphere in the UN negotiations and the rallies in the territories, which clarified the analytical context. Although they were not used systematically as a theory, these materials were helpful in the research process as they functioned as a sounding board to better understand processes of securitisation, and to locate rumours and narratives that emerged in the material studied. Furthermore, the photos presented throughout this study served as a basis of conversation for some of the interlocutors.

Oral History

Skinner holds that “oral history was critical to the de-centring of ‘western’ political-scientific theories and the re-centring of the ideas and experiences of African protagonists in political mobilizations and events.”³⁵ Thus, many historians of contemporary Africa find that their methodological inclination towards oral tradition is challenged by the passage of time.³⁶ What is not written down now is subject to the vagaries of oral tradition or, in the worst case, lost forever and thus subject to speculation. Many of the contemporary witnesses to the decolonisation of Togoland are either deceased or were so young at the time that active key participation in the events was hardly possible. This is particularly tragic for historians working on their case as it makes the transition from contemporary history to archival history.

The history professor and former president of the University of Lomé, Théodore Nicoué Lodjou Gayibor, systematically takes up the main themes of the oral sources debate.³⁷ In May 2011, Gayibor invited historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists to meet in Agbodrafo, Togo, to take stock of the contribution of oral sources to the historiography of Africa and to examine the prospects for research. The resulting volume included several Togo-related chapters, which offer perspectives for methodology and

³³ Emanuel G. K. Bruce, “Vom Kolonialen Zum Unabhängigen Afrika,” (unpublished manuscript, 2007), PDF; Asamoah, *The political history of Ghana* (1950–2013).

³⁴ Asamoah, *The political history of Ghana* (1950–2013).

³⁵ Skinner, “West Africa’s First Coup,” p. 378.

³⁶ Erin Jessee, “The Limits of Oral History,” *The Oral History Review* 38, no. 2 (2011), available from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41440904>.

³⁷ Nicoué Lodjou Gayibor, *Sources orales et histoire africaine: Approches méthodologiques*, with the assistance of Moustapha Gomgnimbou, and Komla Etou (Paris: Harmattan, 2011).

analysis using oral sources. These highlight the pitfalls that await the historian in this field, including the disappearance of certain categories of informants.³⁸

But, as Erin Jessee holds, even these approaches are not without controversy.³⁹ Oral history is valued for its humanising potential and its ability to 'democratise' history by making visible the narratives of people and communities that are normally missing from archives, thus bringing them into conversation with the narratives of the political and intellectual elites who normally write and disseminate history. However, considering her highly politicized research environment, Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Jesse questions the idea that oral history allegedly promotes the democratization of history: "By uncritically disseminating the narratives of complex political actors who seek to delegitimize their governments or justify their involvement in mass atrocities, for example, oral historians risk inadvertently becoming part of the machinery of propaganda by promoting memories and myths that could be used to promote further bloodshed between communities."⁴⁰ The attempt to contextualize these narratives historically or politically compromises the very goal of allowing people to tell their stories on their own terms and giving them a voice not normally found in history or the archive. In other words, it might silence them. This is precisely what oral historians seek to avoid, for it undermines efforts to share and democratize the authority of historiography.

Interviews were only possible to a limited extent. During the research stays in Togo, Ghana, Paris, and New York, interviews were conducted with only a few contemporary witnesses that are still alive, but these were of great benefit. The interviewees exchanged views on current relations between Togo and France or Ghana and Great Britain. During the conversations, it became evident how contentious the role of the trustee powers was in the decolonisation process and the unsuccessful reunification attempt. When asked about perceptions and ideas of security, reference was immediately made to the lack of fulfilment of state tasks in the social and societal sphere by the current regime under Faure Gnassingbé or the government under Akufo-Addo. However, against the backdrop of violent unrest in Togo in 2017 and 2018, and the crackdown in Ghana in 2019 to 2021, one should be wary of relegating individuals and their readings to the accuracy of historical events in a study. Kwame Kudzordzi and Kosi Kedem may have been contemporary witnesses to the fate of British Togoland, but their interpretation is regarded as rather peculiar, even among Ghanaian historians.⁴¹ Moreover, in the view of political actors seeking to delegitimize their governments, such as Charles Kwame Kudzordzi, for example, oral historiography is not immune from inadvertently becoming part of propaganda that seeks to promote memories and myths that could lead to, rather than prevent, an escalation of conflict.⁴² Thus, it is important to distinguish between oral history, that is, orally transmitted cultural history and personal accounts of historical events. Undertak-

38 Nicoué L. Gayibor, Dominique Juhé-Beaulaton and Moustapha Comgnimbiou, eds., *L'écriture de l'histoire en Afrique: L'oralité toujours en question*, Hommes et sociétés (Paris: Karthala, 2013).

39 Jessee, "The Limits of Oral History"

40 Jessee, "The Limits of Oral History," pp. 299–300.

41 Most notably Amenumey, "The brouhaha over Togoland Plebiscite. The historical fact."

42 Jessee, "The Limits of Oral History," 300–301.

ing this study based primarily on documentary sources available in public repositories, which I am responsible for interpreting, seemed more sensible to me.⁴³

Because of the present study's focus on archival documents, it is inherently subject to a bias,⁴⁴ which considering alternative oral histories suffers from what Edward H. Carr called "fetishism of documents."⁴⁵ Most of the actors who speak from the archives are colonial administrators, whose notions of threat and security are prominently foregrounded by the sources. Archive-based studies cannot avoid relying almost exclusively on the observations of European imperialists and their activities. In any case, the relevant archival materials for this study are located within Europe and North America and only to a lesser extent in West Africa. Limited to the same archival materials, few have attempted to emphasize the African experience during this historical episode, for example, through the inclusion of handed down oral histories.

4.2.3 Research Procedure & Evaluation

The research procedure was similar in each archive: to be successful in the search, it was essential to understand the 'logic of classification' according to which the archive and its catalogue were constituted. Often overlooked, the archival structures and accompanying comments provide information about colonial or security consideration for the provenance of the documents. For example, the accompanying commentary of the British *National Archives* candidly writes:

"The general rule, as set out in a Colonial Office guidance telegram of 3 May 1961 on the 'disposal of classified records and accountable documents', was that successor Governments should not be given papers which, might embarrass HMG or other governments; might embarrass members of the police, military forces, public servants or others e.g. police informers; might compromise sources of intelligence information; or might be used unethically by Ministers in the successor government. [...] There would be little object in handing over documents which would patently be of no value to the successor government."⁴⁶

Many documents were destroyed on this basis. In the case of the Ghanaian archives (PRAAD), the logic mimics the bureaucratic organization of the British colonial state. Documents from the Admiralty are kept under the entry "ADM" and are classified thereafter by topic and year. Although the archival documents were created in the same

43 Compare these reflections with Skinner, "West Africa's First Coup," p. 379.

44 Danso and Aning, "African experiences and alterativity in International Relations theorizing about security," pp. 78–79.

45 Edward H. Carr, *What is history? The George Macaulay Trevelyan lectures delivered in the University of Cambridge, January – March 1961*, 2nd ed., ed. R. W. Davies, Penguin history (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 16.

46 TNA, "Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Predecessors: Records of Former Colonial Administrations: Migrated Archives," accessed 03 April 2023, available from <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C12269323>.