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After Trafficking: Naming Violence against Child Laborers in West Africa

by

Liza Stuart Buchbinder

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Medical Anthropology

in the

GRADUATE DIVISION

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN FRANCISCO

AND

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by

Liza Stuart Buchbinder

In memory of Foussena and Ganiou  
and  
dedicated to my father. Wish you were here.

## Acknowledgements

A project of this scope, where my engagement with the Yondans spanned three countries and over a decade of time, could not have been possible without a village of people supporting me. In fact, it was the warmth and generosity of many Yondans during my time as a Peace Corps volunteer that led me to search for opportunities to return as a researcher, and I chose a school that offered a joint master's program for this reason. While it would be difficult to name everyone who opened their hearts and homes to me, of particular mention are Kokotina Aboubakar, Sabi Ali, Sabi Adjara, Sabi Foussena, Sabi Kamarou, Affo Karo Adjingbe, Affo Karo Issa, Kamelo K., Kamelo Palekiyem, Kamelo Masamessa, Affo Karo Mariama, Okotan Kafaya, Okotan Aicha, Kamelo Madame, Olossomare Seibou, Okotan L'Accoucheurse, Alagbe Arissou, Okotan Taiba, Oga Latifou, Le Chef Canton, Affo Tenin Roubatou, Okotan Aicha.

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## **Abstract**

After Trafficking: Naming Violence against Children in West Africa

by

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Following the end of the Cold War, the West African nation of Togo underwent a series of economic and political crises that led to an unraveling of state authority, with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and evangelical Christians taking over the role of governance. Within this climate of economic decline emerged a human rights discourse on child trafficking. Based on field work from 2004 to 2009, this ethnography of child labor migration practices in the Togolese village of Yonda is a counter-narrative to the discourse around the national campaign against trafficking—a campaign that claims that hundreds of thousands of children are working in slave-like conditions across West Africa, one that sustains itself with sensationalized representations of violence to fuel an otherwise ailing development industry. The dearth of cases of exploitation and abuse found during the period of this dissertation research calls into question the human rights explanation: that the root causes of “trafficking” are grounded in poverty, criminality and self interest. Instead, this project asks how the collective imagining of Togo as a site of non-futures contributes to the community’s ritualized practice of sending adolescent girls to work as domestic servants in Nigeria. This project also questions the folk understanding of the practice as a rite-of-passage into adulthood, where

girls secure the clothes and dishes they will need to marry. Instead, I argue that by contributing to the remaking of youth subjectivities in the urban diaspora, the practice does more to transgress customary norms than to reinforce them.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

My dissertation project investigates the impact of adolescent domestic service on the marriage practices of Togolese women living and working in Lagos, Nigeria. As an ethnography, this project is a direct response to human rights discourse on child trafficking in West Africa. By presenting a narrative of the Yondan practice of sending children out as historically contingent and partial, this ethnography troubles the universal and moralizing rights-based construct of human trafficking as an emergent form of slavery.

The core narrative of the project follows the lives of young Yondan women as they carve out their futures in Lagos. It reveals how their everyday practices of survival and socialization act as a direct challenge to the hegemonic discourse of international human rights law. It also tracks the effects of a three year tour of duty, in which adolescent Yondan girls leave their rural homes to work in isolation as domestic servants for families of strangers in the city. I am naming this practice by its local referent, *bopi bateh onati*, which means “children take trip” in Yondan. By interrogating the lives of these purported victims of trafficking after they have finished their service—during the years when they oscillate as young adults between the nodes of Lagos, Yonda, Cotonou and the farm belt of Southwestern Nigeria—my dissertation attends to the reproduction of social relations that perpetuate Nigeria’s domestic service industry. This alternative explanation contrasts with the vague explanations of trafficking rooted in poverty and tradition circulated by development organizations in Togo and Nigeria.

While it is important to attend to the on-the-ground effects of campaigns that have been in place for twenty years in Togo and Nigeria, my overall impression is that the

human rights discourse on child trafficking in West Africa is a thing onto itself, productive of an anti-trafficking industry and diplomatic ties with Western countries, but having little impact on the so-called victims. Recognizing the dearth of studies on child labor in Africa outside of development industry reports (Grier, 2004), my aim is to inject an anthropological accounting of how and why Yondan families continue to send their children out to work for little or no pay. I base my interpretation of *bopi bateh onati* on demographer Jenna Johnson Hanks' concept of "vital conjuncture," which she defines as a zone of possibility that emerges during transformative moments in a person's life, such as birth, migration, and death.<sup>1</sup> She builds on Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* and applies it to questions around specific life events, where *habitus* is defined as a "structuring structure" where people's practices come to shape the social structures that influence their behaviors; these dynamic structures are then passed on from generation to generation. Relating *bopi bateh onati* to *habitus*, and thinking about a particular zone of possibility that opens up to adolescents once they have completed their tour of duty as unpaid domestic servants, I am focusing this dissertation on a group of Yondan teenage girls who formerly worked as housemaids and are now living in Lagos trying to make it on their own. What I propose is that the girls' visions of their futures fluctuate according to the spaces of certainty and uncertainty they come to inhabit, and that these visions contribute to the perpetuation of *bopi bateh onati* in terms of where and how they settle, with whom they marry and when they bear children, and the forms of wage labor they take up after completing their time as unpaid housemaids.

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Johnson-Hanks, "On The Limits of Life Stages in Ethnography: Toward a Theory of Vital Conjunctures," *American Anthropologist* 4, no.3 (2002): 871.

In other words, I am thinking about the way in which labor power is replaced generation after generation, using the production of the Yondan girl domestic servant as my case study. While a term like “social reproduction” frequently implies that the quality of relationships across classes (and nationalities) does not vary over time—suggesting that it would be the same for the Yondan girls of today as they was for their grandmothers—I assert that these relationships (i.e. between employer and domestic servant, *ogá* and girl migrant, Nigerian and Togolese) are dynamic and contested. Here, Paul Willis’ term “cultural production” is useful in that it speaks to practices and beliefs that are inherited or imposed upon the present generation, but also actively embraced by youth and experienced as new. Rather than a hopelessly determined fate—i.e., Yondan girls scripted to live lives of poverty and vulnerability, and Nigerian families scripted to be inherently exploitative employers—the idea of “cultural production” highlights how these relationships are actively maintained. One example is the way in which Yondans’ willingness to work for Nigerian families in exchange for wedding accoutrements provides the low-cost labor that drives the local domestic service industry.

Willis’ concept of “cultural reproduction” also connects these practices and beliefs to the capitalist mode of production by showing how features of these cultural forms, such as racism, sexism or the private sphere, become integral to Yondan subjectivity and their everyday decisions—decisions that contribute to a status quo that perpetuates a historically contingent set of class relations between Yondan migrant workers and elite Lagosian families.<sup>2</sup> Examples of Yondan “limiting forms”<sup>3</sup> include

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Willis, “Cultural Production is Different from Cultural Reproduction is Different from Social Reproduction is Different from Reproduction,” *Interchange* 12, nos. 2-3 (1981): 49.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

popular assumptions about marriage (i.e., that the three-year tour of duty is necessary to secure wedding clothes and dishes), gender (i.e., that girls are the ones to work in the domestic sphere and boys are to work in the fields with their peers), and the private sphere (i.e., that all employers fear outsiders and only intermediaries are allowed access to the girls and their salaries, thereby isolating girls from any alternative outside of flight when they find themselves in an untenable situation). Moreover, the Yondan girls' sense of inferiority and limited possibilities, which prompted them to accept domestic service over pursuing their studies in village, are further perpetuated as they care for elite children who will complete the educations that they left behind.

Following the example of a previous generation of Marxian theorists (Willis, 1977; Althusser, 1972), I also consider the influence of the school system on Yondan families' decisions to send their daughters to work.<sup>4</sup> Looking deeper into the particularities of Yondan processes of cultural production, I am also interested in the significance of *bopi bateh onati* to individual Yondans (with respect to marriage and coming-of-age); the ethics around the practice; its routinization within a post-Cold War/post-structural adjustment era of economic and political uncertainty in Togo and Nigeria; and the role of ethnic identity/sense of belonging in the migration patterns and marriage choices of young Yondan women who have recently completed their tours of duty as adolescent domestic servants.

### **Child Labor and Child Trafficking in the Literature**

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Willis. *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977; Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Education: Structure and Society*, ed. B. Cosin (New York : Penguin, 1972).

In both Bøås and Høtley's and Beverly Grier's surveys of child labor studies in Africa, they note a general dearth of studies, which is a surprising fact considering that Africa has the highest percentage of economically active children in the world (Andvig, 2001; Grier, 2004; Boas and Hotley, 2008). This oversight is so significant that Grier has dubbed African child laborers "invisible hands" to highlight how unrecognized their work is by academics and policy makers (Grier, 2006). Within the relatively sparse literature on the subject, scholars generally divide child labor in Africa into two prevailing types: labor performed for related kin (Andvig, 2001) and that which is done for non-kin (Grier, 2004), with the latter associated with greater levels of exploitation (Schilekrou, 1981; Rodgers & Standing 1981). However, Grier is quick to note that the two forms of labor are not distinct social spheres, and it is not possible to assert that one is inherently exploitative and the other is not. As an historian, Grier takes her own approach, by separating labor studies into those that focus on slavery and child pawning during the precolonial era, those that look at children's work on settler plantations during colonialism and more recent studies that largely focus on child labor exploitation in the postcolonial period. With respect to postcolonial scholarship in child labor in Africa, the majority has been dominated by reports from non-governmental organizations and inter-governmental agencies that overlook the central contribution of child workers to African economies, and largely characterize children as passive victims of exploitation (Grier, 2004; Andvig 2001). Despite these shortcomings, there have been some definitive surveys of child labor in Africa (Bass, 2004; Grier, 2004; Kielland and Tovo, 2006), as well as more focused studies looking at the lives of street children, child miners or domestic workers, for example, in specific regions, including West Africa (Bøås and



Hötley, 2008; Jacquemin, 2006; Robson, 2004; Robson, 2005). There have also been a number of studies on globalization's impact on child labor in West Africa (Manzo, 2005; Robson, 2004, 2005), and sub-Saharan Africa (Bass, 2004). While these works are comprehensive, they lack the thick descriptions and theoretical analysis that emanates from an attention to the everyday. Pamela Reynolds' extensive study of children's work in rural Zimbabwe (*Dance Civet Cat*) is an example of this kind of engagement, but no such ethnography exists for West Africa (Reynolds, 1991).

Domestic service, with its particular positioning between the public and private spheres, as well as the paradox of girls directly engaging the labor market from the privacy of households, is also an important literature topic relevant to this dissertation. Studies on domestic service are generally divided between two paradigms—the “Latin American” model where domestic service is a temporary channel towards upward mobility in the cities, and the “South Asia” model, where the typical domestic servant holds this position for life. (Adams & Dickey, 2000; Momsen, 1999; Parrenas, 2001; Rosaldes, 2001; Smith, 1973) Seminal works on domestic service by Raka Ray and Gul Ozyegin also draw connections between culture and work, presenting rich ethnographic data to support their arguments for the practice's central role in the formation of gendered subjectivities among lower class migrant women (Ozyegin, 2001; Ray, 2000). Most notable was Margo Smith's 1973 study of paid housework in Mexico, where she uniquely argued that city bound rural migrants captured some elements of upward class mobility through their work as domestic servants (Smith, 1973). This particular focus on the symbolic and structural effects of capital and the reproductive power of domestic service

resonates with my own ethnographic response to discourse on the trafficking of girls in West Africa.

In addition to human rights organizations and cultural anthropologists, development economists have also conducted child labor studies and surveys in Africa, often tracking the effects of rising market demands for child labor on informal insurance networks (J. Murdoch, 1998; S. Dessy, 2003; Akresh, 2003), as well as the effects of international development on children (Burman, 1994; Moore 2000; Ruddick 2003)).

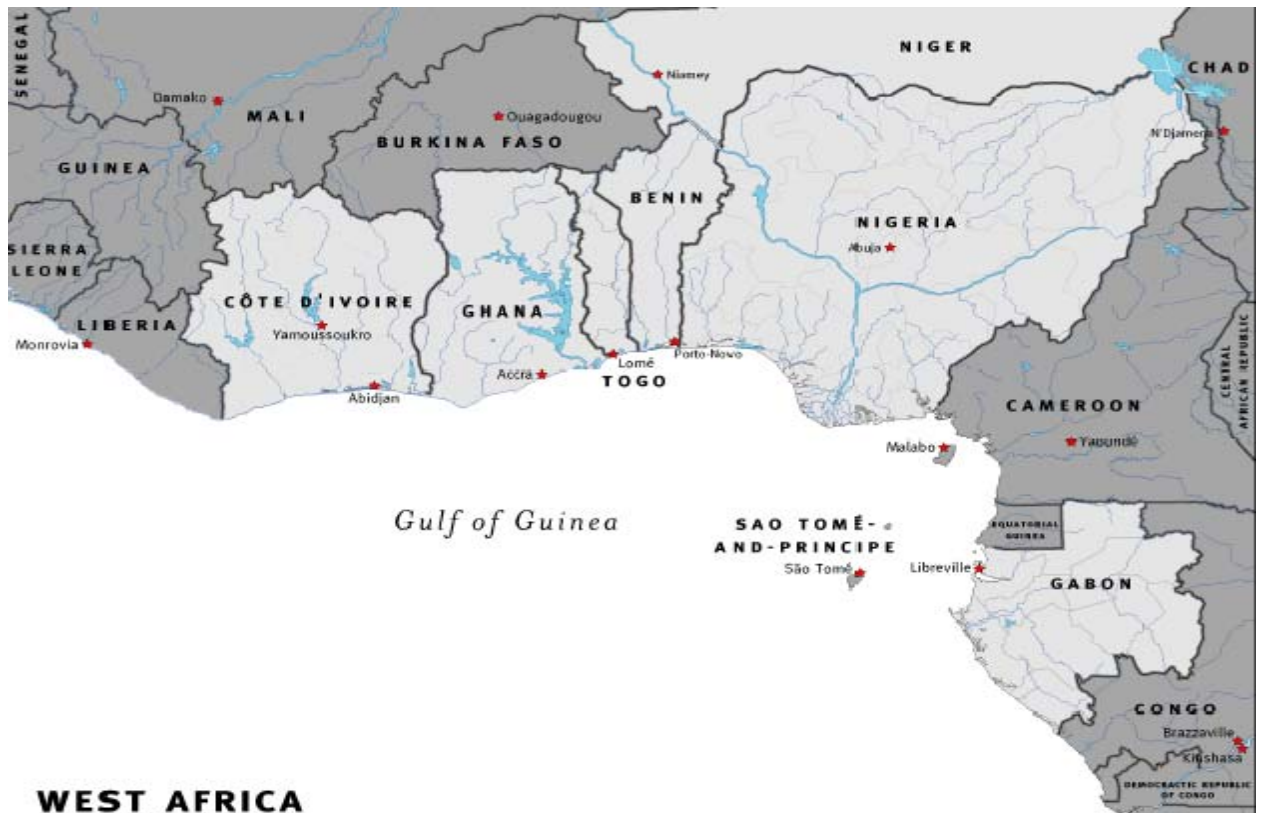
With respect to trafficking as an object of study, much of the work falls into two categories: rights-based literature that is often written within a legal framework and with an eye towards eradicating the practice (Hertzke, 2004; Aronwitz, 2009), and the work of scholar-activists within the pro-sex worker movement. The latter camp is exemplified by the work of Jo Doezema, Kamala Kempadoo and Elizabeth Bernstein, who argue that sex work should be desensationalized and entitled to the same protections as other forms of labor (Doezema, 2010; Kempadoo et al, 2005; Bernstein, 2007). Beyond those orientations are scholars attentive to the effects, both intended and unintended, of this emergent discourse on trafficking (Doezema, 2010; Warren, 2007). It is amongst these scholars and within a growing body of literature on the anthropology of human rights that I situate my own research on West African anti-child trafficking campaigns and the experiences of Togolese girl domestic servants working in the era of rights-based development.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Manzo, Kate, "Africa in the Rise of Rights-Based Development," *Geoforum* 34 (2003): 440-441.

## **Setting the Scene**

The following section presents the Yondans, from the geography of their source village in eastern Togo, to their origin myth, the story of their community's conversion to Islam, and the centrality of religion in their lives at present. I highlight these general characteristics because they reflect on the moral world from which these girls emerge and these collective understandings of Yondan-ness influence the way in which the girls craft their identities while working far from home. I also map out the important hubs of Yondan circulation in West Africa, spanning the Togolese farm town of Badou on the border with Ghana to the shanties deep in the heart of Lagos, in addition to the farm towns in southwestern Nigeria where men and boys labor for Yoruba plantation owners.



**Figure 1: Map of West Africa.**

**Yonda. A Remote Thoroughfare.**

A geographical paradox for being both remote and conveniently located, Yonda is a village of 6,000 people<sup>6</sup> that is three kilometers from a major highway across the Benin border. The village profits from this proximity to one of Benin’s largest roadways, and this fact has unfortunately contributed to its notorious reputation as a child-trafficking hub. Inside Togo, however, Yonda is a secluded enclave best known for the country roads that lead to it—some of the worst in the region. Taxi drivers often refuse passengers traveling to Yonda for fear that the rocky, rutted roads with scattered sand traps will damage their cars. In the rainy season, drivers

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<sup>6</sup> International Togo PLAN, *Rapport de Diagnostic Communautaire de Yonda* (Sokodé, Togo: Plan International Togo, 2001).



**Figure 2: Black circle indicates area of Yonda on eastern border of Togo.**

that brave the roads may find their trucks trapped in red silt, requiring passengers-cum-good-Samaritans to wade knee-deep in muddy water to collectively dislodge the vehicles. It is often said that Yonda does not have roads, just trails. This inaccessibility is a constant concern and is perceived to be the root of the community's poor economy. Without foot traffic from the outside, people report that they cannot sell their goods and that local business is reduced to little more than a bartering system among neighbors.

Despite its poor roads, Yonda was once known for its abundant natural resources, with European tourists even coming in the 1960s and '70s to see the animals that

previously populated the area, including buffalo, elephants, lions, hyenas and monkeys. Today, the dense forests of Yonda's past have been thinned to the extent that they can no longer provide habitat to the deer, antelopes, rodents and monkeys that used to abound.

Though population growth is a critical element in habitat destruction, the process of Yondan desertification is deeply rooted in Togolese history. Under French colonial rule, strict forestry policies prohibited Yondans from cutting down trees. After independence, however, the community was no longer under these restrictions, and small plots of land were cleared for housing and timber. In 1990, the pace of habitat destruction was thrown into overdrive when nationwide protests in the name of “democracy” prompted widespread destruction of old growth forests and the concomitant decimation of wild game. Lumber exploitation by European traders also contributed to the loss of Yondan forest, a process that villagers recall with quiet rage as their hallowed family groves were sold to foreign buyers for the equivalent of nickels and dimes.

Yondans younger than thirty years of age may hearken back to childhood years when meat was plentiful. Now, the majority of Yondans subsist on protein-poor starchy foods grown from soil that has become increasingly dependent on commercially produced fertilizers. Goats, sheep, chickens or guinea fowl are raised in every home, but their slaughter is usually reserved for special occasions. Major crops include corn, yams, millet, cassava and a variety of legumes, including soybeans. If a family is particularly poor, nutrient rich foods are reserved for market, and cheap, nutrient poor foods are kept for consumption. This usually winds up being *gari*, shredded cassava stripped of its starchy tapioca that is often fed to children. Likened to sawdust, such a meal does little more than sooth hunger pangs. Malnutrition is rampant in Yonda, with many babies being born below the WHO recommended birth weight of two and a half kilograms. They grow into children with swollen bellies and fragile limbs, resulting in constitutions incapable of battling a baffling array of diseases and infections.

Though Yonda is surrounded by a number of creeks, most people draw water from wells or one of two large lagoons near the village outskirts. Water is plentiful during the rainy season from April to October, but levels drop during the dry months of November through March, leading to dirty drinking water and few opportunities for bathing, exposing villagers to increased health risks.

### **Origins**

The current plight of Yonda is particularly troubling in light of its storied past. Fierce warriors, the Yondans once dominated the region, recording numerous victories in battles against neighboring villages. Yondans also violently resisted slave traders and German colonists. One Yondan elder recounts with pride a battle against the Germans that led to the death of a white soldier who remains buried in Yondan soil. In fact, it was after this battle that the Yondans were given their official name by colonial administrators. Meaning “it was them that did it” in the Yondan language, the name of the village refers to the warriors’ explanation for the white man’s death, as if to say “the Whites provoked his murder.”

In addition to the white man’s gravesite, a deep trough that runs along the village’s periphery is a feature of Yonda that locals bring to the attention of visitors. Built by captured slaves from surrounding communities, the trough was designed to protect against potential invaders. The trough has been mostly filled with earth and blanketed in corn fields, but what remains hearkens back to the community’s martial past.

One version of the origin myth of Yonda tells the story of Djaoura, a brave hunter who came from the village of Bido in Western Benin while looking for wild game.<sup>7</sup> When he arrived at the site of modern-day Yonda, he found a large elephant. With the elephant too large for one man to slay by himself, Djaoura solicited aid from the Bari, a community of nearby forest inhabitants.<sup>8</sup> After the animal's successful capture, Djaoura decided that he wanted to settle in the forest. To test the area, he went away for a year, leaving behind a black cock and a white chicken. The following year, Djaoura returned to find that the chickens had produced chicks, and this auspicious sign was proof of the site's fecundity. According to this version of the story, the unofficial name of Yonda comes from "It's long", which is supposedly what Djaoura said to his son upon arriving in Togo. However, others believe that the traditional name of Yonda refers to fearless warriors.

Regardless of the exact origins of Yonda, most Yondans identify themselves as ethnic *Anii* from Western Benin, based on the fact that the *Anii* people speak a language similar to Yondan.<sup>9</sup> Although the bulk of *Anii* reside in Benin (45,900 according to the country's 1992 census), there are still a number who live in villages on the Togolese side of the border.<sup>10</sup> The other ethnic group in Yonda is the Bari, descendants of people who lived in farmlands a few kilometers from Yonda until they were absorbed into the larger community. While they used to speak a different language, the Bari have since assimilated and now solely speak Yondan, albeit with some variations in words. The Bari

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<sup>7</sup> Another version of the village's origin myth describes the warrior Olossomare's seeking refuge in the dense teak forests of eastern Togo while fleeing a battle in Benin. He subsequently decided to settle on the land.

<sup>8</sup> The name has been changed for confidentiality. *Bari* means people in Yonda.

<sup>9</sup> In total, it is estimated that there are 59,000 Anii in Benin and Togo, with several villages sharing substantial homology in their spoken languages. Source: Raymond G. Gordon, Jr, *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed. (Dallas, Texas: SIL International, 2005). [http://www.ethnologue.com/15/show\\_language.asp?code=blo](http://www.ethnologue.com/15/show_language.asp?code=blo).

<sup>10</sup> In total, Anii population is estimated to be 45,900 people. Source: Ibid.



also see themselves as distinct from the other Yondans, with their own organizations and elected chief. In fact, it is the Bari who began sending boys to Nigeria in the late 1980s, and they remain the most powerful *ogás* of the village.<sup>11</sup> Aside from these two major groups, which comprise over 90% of the population, Koussountou, Tchamba, Ana, Ibo (of Nigeria), Fulani and Kabye ethnicities are also represented in the village.

### Religion and Mosques



**Figure 3: Central Mosque in Yonda**

Despite its relatively small size, the village of Yonda boasts eleven mosques, of which the Grand Mosque rivals those found in the regional capital of Sokodé. Each of the village's eight neighborhoods has its own mosque, but everyone gathers at the Grand Mosque for Friday afternoon prayers. Villagers are intolerant of any Yondan who does not practice Islam, and Christians who live in Yonda tend to be civil servants, such as

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<sup>11</sup> *Ogá* is a Yoruba term for a boss. In this context, it refers to the people who recruit laborers for work in Nigeria, including male *ogás* who bring boys to the Yoruba farms and female *ogás* who bring girls to work as domestic servants in the cities.

nurses or teachers; their makeshift church is located a few hundred meters beyond the village borders.

Islam was introduced by three Yondans returning from Ghana. Although it is unclear when this occurred, the Yondans I interviewed said it was sometime in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Not having mastered the Koran, they were unable to disseminate the religion until a Yoruba Islamic scholar came to the community. At the time, there was considerable resistance to Islam, particularly by the elders, who continued their animist practices.<sup>12</sup> In the late 1950s, however, a *Kotokoli* man (from Sokodé) came to Yonda and convinced the youth<sup>13</sup> to force their elders to convert. Family fetishes were pulled from people's homes and destroyed. Many feared that the ancestral spirits would retaliate, but the miraculous appearance of rainfall convinced the elders to abandon their fetishes and embrace the straight path of Islam.

In addition to its numerous mosques, Yonda also has a health clinic, two primary schools and a middle school. In the past, students were required to walk or bicycle twelve kilometers to a neighboring village for middle school. Since the commute was exhausting, most students resorted to renting rooms in the other village or abandoning their studies after primary school. In 2002, a Roman Catholic missionary from a village in the vicinity built a private middle school and added a second elementary school in Yonda. The following year, the chief blessed Yonda's first telephone line.

Despite these advances, Yonda remains far behind the other established villages in the area. As if burdened by a collective sense of shame, most Yondans are acutely

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<sup>12</sup> SIL International unpublished report, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of this study, *youth* is defined as anyone who is unmarried and over the age of adolescence, which ends at roughly sixteen years old.

aware that their homes are in disrepair, their children are unsuccessful in school, their roads are unmanageable and their markets are not profitable. The fact that people are relatively uneducated is perceived as the village's greatest problem,<sup>14</sup> highlighted by the fact that only two girls raised in Yonda have ever graduated from *lycée*.<sup>15</sup> Some believe the village should be further along the path of development, given its history as a site where Yondans vanquished less powerful neighbors during pre-colonial times; many blame their plight on Nigeria,<sup>16</sup> bad roads, video nights and poor crop yields. In an effort to jumpstart Yonda's development, some youths decided to back a former businessman from Lomé as chief during village elections in 2000, sending a clear message: they wanted change, and they believed that a savvy business man would give the village the boost it needs.

### **Yondans Outside of Yonda**

In the past seventy years, Yondans have traveled extensively throughout Ghana, southern Togo, Benin and Nigeria for wage-labor opportunities. Many never return. While this study focuses on adolescent girls living in Lagos, Yondan migration routes expand far beyond Nigeria's southern city, and include clusters in Togo's capital of Lomé, as well as Badou in western Togo (where many Yondans eventually settled after returning from working Ghanaian cocoa plantations in the 1950s). Due to the village's proximity to a major highway that leads to Benin's commercial capital of Cotonou, this city has also become a major destination for girl domestic servants outside of Lagos. The Nigerian states of Ogun and Oyo are critical sites for the Yondan adolescent boys and

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<sup>14</sup> Plan Togo community development report, March 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Equivalent of completing high school and the first year of college.

<sup>16</sup> *Nigeria* is often loosely used as a term to describe the mass exodus of child laborers from Yonda, which includes girls leaving for Benin, Gabon, etc., as well as boys seasonally migrating to southwestern Nigeria.

young men who work the plantations of Yoruba farmers. These areas are also important destinations for young Yondan brides who accompany their husbands out on the farms until childbearing begins to complicate their travel plans.

### **Cotonou Community**

Frequently, the establishment of sites such as Ogun and Oyo as nodes within the Yondan migration circuitry corresponds to historically specific economic opportunities. As mentioned above, Badou gained prominence during the Ghanaian cocoa boom of the 1940s and '50s. Affo Moumouni, the first Yondan resident of Cotonou, came in the early 1960s as an employee of the state. Yet, decades elapsed before other Yondans joined him. In the 1980s and '90s, as the weakened Togolese economy was unable to compete, girls traveled to Cotonou for job opportunities and the infamous shanties of Dedekpto were established. While I do not address Dedekpto in this dissertation, it is *as* important a site for girls coming out of unpaid domestic service as the Lagosian neighborhoods that I do profile. Like the communities in Nigeria, the Yondans of Cotonou have an elected body to adjudicate disputes within their satellite community. On the first Saturday of the month, they gather in an empty classroom of an elementary school to hold a meeting. The gathering is directed by a bureau of officers, including a president, treasurer and secretary. In attendance are permanent residents, temporary workers, and casual visitors. Many of the Yondans who have only come for a few days are the checking on the girls they have placed in homes and buying market goods for resale in Yonda. Amongst the permanent residents are many placers who assist *ogás* in matching girls with employers. Each member is expected to contribute dues to the community chest and their attendance

is recorded in a ledger. Women are excluded from the bureau but have their own president, Aunti Yara, who speaks on their behalf.<sup>17</sup> The meetings are designed to resolve disputes, communicate announcements and raise money for the biannual *fête d'Alafia*, when Yondans from all over West Africa return to the village for three days in December.

### **Lagos**

At last count (2005 census), Lagos was a city of 14 million people, that architect Rem Koolhaas has described as a place with “no streets; instead it has curbs and gates, barriers and hustlers... Even the Lagos superhighway has bus stops on it, mosques under it, markets in it, and buildingless factories throughout it.”<sup>18</sup> Yondans who brave the city may work as taxi drivers, dish washers, food vendors or domestic servants. As is the case in all major cities, living expenses in Lagos are high, and many Yondans rent rooms in cement compounds, often with strangers.

Yondans in Lagos are scattered throughout the metropolis, separated from one another by divides both physical and figurative. Paradoxically, the city's intransigent congestion—on the roads, on the sidewalks, in the bus stations, in open air markets—only widens the gulf between people. Regardless, Yondans maintain community ties by means of an association headed by an elected bureau, although meetings have been sporadic of late. A separate women's association meets regularly to discuss major issues and collect money for the festival season in December. The major sites that I visited in

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<sup>17</sup> *Aunti Yara* is a generic term for any president of a Yondan women's association. There are Aunti Yaras in Yonda, Cotonou, Lagos and Oyo state.

<sup>18</sup> Rem Koolhaas, Stefano Boeri, Sanford Kwinter, Nadia Tazi and Daniela Fabricius, *Mutations* (Lakewood, New Jersey: ACTAR-D, 2001).

Lagos included the neighborhoods of Mile 12, Monkey Village, Iyana Ipaja, Ikeja, Agégé, and Ikotun.

The Lagos women's association was comprised primarily of residents from the adjoining neighborhoods of Agégé and Ikeja and led by another Aunti Yara, who worked as a peanut vendor in Agégé. Young girls were welcome at the meetings and encouraged to contribute to the association's fund as insurance should they need help in the future. Though a few girls working in homes attended the meetings when their employers granted them permission, the bulk of the young participants came from what I am calling *girl camps*, or squatter communities of former domestic servants who are self-employed as housemaids, street vendors or laundry washers. The rooms that these girls lived in were small and overcrowded; one such room housed nine girls and two married women in their early forties.



**Figure 4: Ikeja Girl Camp**

In July of 2004, when I visited a camp located on a large abandoned lot in the Ikeja suburb of Lagos, I found a shed that housed a group of Yondans, along with a dozen other families from Togo, Benin and northern Nigeria. The lot's owner was a wealthy beverage distributor who took pity on this particular congregation of urban migrants and allowed them to live on the lot rent-free. To the left of a wrought iron entrance to the lot stood a row of old cars with a cluster of taxi drivers chattering between two vintage Mercedes Benzes. Along the southern wall were three orange cargo containers that doubled as bachelor pads, complete with DVD players and wooden bedroom sets. Two young men sat in one container, their profiles highlighted by the

fluorescent hue of a bare bulb; they were intently studying the covers of their latest DVD purchases.

The nine girls lived some fifty feet from the cargo containers; their section of the lot was notably rundown, with a metallic orange shed serving as living quarters. Mostly food vendors and laundry washers, the girls used the lot for living and working. The cooks used steel rings from old barrels to prepare their morning meals, and the washers scrubbed mounds of clothes in battered basins. Close by were their children, crawling in the mud among buckets of murky water and half-filled bowls of morning porridge that pocked the yard. Every once in a while, a goat came along to sneak a lick of *kosi*<sup>19</sup> batter as it dripped down the side of a tub.

Normally, shoes are always taken off before entering a home, but that custom was suspended in the girl's part of the lot because of the filth. At the shed's entrance was a linoleum mat with smudged strokes of dried mud from the slippery heels of dirty slippers. A torn sheet of plaid kitchen contact paper served as supplemental flooring, with patches of cold black earth emerging from breaks in the paper. Stacks of plastic plaid bags lined the room's perimeter—their rectangular shapes crushed by the hands of nine energetic teenage girls. A medley of materials covered the walls, including rusted, corrugated metal sheeting and a band of flattened cardboard boxes. Although it was dark inside, spots of light shone through the rusted sheeting, sprinkling levity into an otherwise dreary scene. At twilight, two girls brought out homemade kerosene lamps (fashioned from old cans of powered chocolate—Nestle's Milo) and a few candles. While I pulled a bag under my head to rest, someone made a joke and the room was filled with incessant laughter.

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<sup>19</sup> *Kosi* are fried bean cakes.



## **Agricultural Belt of Southwestern Nigeria**

While the bulk of this dissertation treats young girls working as domestic servants, Mazou (my research assistant) and I visited twenty farm communities in southeastern Nigeria to get a better sense of the male side of *bopi bateh onati*. Nigeria's oil boom in the 1970s led to the rapid growth of urban centers, an expansion in the transportation system and the creation of new sources of hired labor. One of the greatest sources of this new labor was francophone West Africa; the migrant workers were called the *saabe* by Yoruban plantation owners. With time, there was such a flood of workers coming from neighboring states that farm areas came to be referred to as "microcosms of West Africa"<sup>20</sup> during the growing seasons.

The *saabe* play an important role as laborers for large-scale local farmers because they are reliable laborers who work on flexible, long-term contracts for low wages.<sup>21</sup> One of my earlier field studies from 2005 followed Yondan male laborers in the southern Nigeria farm belt who fall into this category of *saabe*, focusing on small farming villages surrounding urban centers where the bulk of Yondans stayed in rented rooms while working.<sup>22</sup> A few *ogás* who had been working in Nigeria for over twenty years continued to rent their houses. While the majority of work is done for Yoruban landowners, some Yondans are beginning to rent land to cultivate as well.

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<sup>20</sup> Jane Guyer, *The African Niche Economy: Farming to Feed Ibadan 1968-88* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press for the International African Institute, 1997), 96.

<sup>21</sup> The concept of *ogá* or "crew boss" arose during the 1960s when young male laborers of the Idoma people came down from northern Nigeria to work the fields. Early in the decade was a time of great agricultural expansion in Nigeria. Migrant labor force began in 1930s with the cocoa boom. Source Jane Guyer, *The African Niche Economy*, 61.

<sup>22</sup> Additionally, I interviewed Yondans in the farm belt surrounding Abeokuta, Oyo, Iwo and Ogbomosho in order to get a sense of the larger Yondan diaspora and other ways (outside of domestic service) that Yondans migrate for work.

## Methods



**Figure 5: Research Team of Author, Mazou and Foussena (with child).**

To begin to address the question of the relationship of child labor and migration patterns in West Africa to the anti-trafficking discourse that had emerged, I conducted a three-part qualitative study while a medical student in the Joint Medical Program at UC Berkeley from the fall of 2003 until the spring of 2006. Fieldwork for the project was carried out in Togo, Benin and Nigeria and involved 205 semi-structured interviews involving more than 450 research participants. Among the interviewees were children who qualified as having been trafficked under international human rights law, with some members of their families qualifying as traffickers per the same international legal

framework. All research participants identified themselves as Yondan, and interviews were loosely structured around the themes of family, farming, travel, marriage, livelihood, and spirituality, including the practices of Islam and animism. The purpose of this initial research was to profile the everyday activities and motivations of a sending community. While I had built an impression of Yonda from my years living in the village as a Peace Corps volunteer (from 2000 until 2002), this time I returned as a researcher rather than a development worker. For the purposes of this dissertation, I am following Africa historian Beverly Grier's categorization of a child as a prepubescent boy or girl under fourteen years of age, an adolescent as a boy or girl in puberty roughly corresponding to the ages between fourteen and sixteen, and a young adult as a person over sixteen. To this last defined term, I would add that such an individual would necessarily be unmarried.<sup>23</sup>

My conclusion from this master's research was a more or less structuralist reading of kin relations and their apparent unraveling under the burgeoning pressures to make money in an era of global capitalism. I came across Yondans who had been living for many generations outside of the village who still felt a strong ethnic and linguistic affinity to the rural community, and continued to see it as their imagined referent of "home." I also interpreted this extensive kin network as a form of informal insurance for Yondans—who live precarious lives as citizens of a weakened Togolese state. I found this network to be unraveling as youths continued to leave Yonda and returned with less deference for age-graded authority and village norms. Parents often responded to these

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<sup>23</sup> Beverly Grier, "Child Labor and Africanist Scholarship," *African Studies Review* 47, no. 2 (September 2004): 4.

transgressions with neglect, abrogating their responsibilities and leaving children to fend for themselves.

Mazou was my principal research assistant throughout the project, from 2003 to 2009, initially acting as an interpreter and transcriber and subsequently conducting interviews and fieldwork on his own. Mazou was fluent in French and Yonda and also spoke Ana (a Togolese dialect related to Yoruba). In Yonda, he made a living as a DJ, haircutter and farmer. Throughout the project, Mazou was a critical interlocutor, helping me think through knotty problems and redirecting questions and aims as we went along. Another important research assistant was Fatia, who worked with Mazou and me in 2005. Fatia was from Yonda but spent most of her life in Nigeria. At the age of nine she was sent by her family to live as a domestic servant in Lagos. After years of working for no pay as a *bonne* (a common term in Togo for domestic servant), she left the domestic sphere to live on her own in the city, eventually establishing a rice stand in Abeokuta, Nigeria. Fatia believed that no girl from Yonda should repeat the life she had led as a *bonne* and she wanted to participate in the study in the hope that the project would affect positive change—particularly in changing the attitudes of Yondan parents. As an uneducated woman with years of experience in the Nigerian service industry, Fatia was able to empathize with these working girls and adolescents and provided a critical counter-perspective to my viewpoint, frequently correcting my analysis when we debriefed in the evenings. Tragically, Fatia was not immune to the banal lethality of life as a rural Togolese woman and she succumbed to the complications of AIDS in 2008.

From 2006 until 2009, I continued this research project as a doctoral student in medical anthropology. Three overarching themes framed this second phase of the project.

Firstly, I was interested in the ways in which formerly “trafficked” children assumed adult roles to navigate the marketplace and negotiate their salaries. (This theme also speaks to the process of recreating kinship networks as youth came together in these ad hoc collectives.) Secondly, recognizing how the trip to Nigeria has become a rite of passage, I wanted to know how this revision of cultural norms had affected the capacity for children to opt out of the trip. In other words, had the social expectation “to take the trip”<sup>24</sup> surpassed the capacity of any one individual—parent or child—to refuse? Thirdly, in light of the stark differences observed between the experiences of boys and girls, I sought to explore the marketplace’s capacity to shape and transform established gender roles.

A lack of access to child domestic servants of an age of concern to human rights workers led me to focus on the post-domestic servant experiences of the adolescents and young women. Given that my project points a critical lens at the anti-trafficking campaign, my reason for focusing on the adolescent/young woman’s side of the story was that their working conditions were far more problematic than that of the boys. For example, these women and girls typically worked alone in non-kin households instead of working in groups with other Yondans like the boys did; they frequently reported being cheated of their salaries, whereas the boys usually received the items promised to them as compensation for their labor (e.g., bicycles, motorcycles, generators, roofing material); and the girls’ whereabouts were largely unknown to everyone but the intermediary who recruited them. After they had completed their tours of duty as domestic servants, adolescent girls and young women worked as free agents in informal cooperatives with

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<sup>24</sup> English translation of Yondan expression for leaving the village to work in Nigeria.

other Yondans, living in various shanty neighborhoods in Lagos including Agégé, Ikeja, Monkey Village, Iyana Ipaja, Mile 12 and Ketu. My focus for the doctorate was on these satellite cooperatives.

Since no definitive study has examined the number of children migrating from Yonda, I collected statistics on attrition rates from Togolese NGOs and village elementary and secondary schools. I also visited missionaries working with the *Anii* ethnic group, as well as the Togolese national archives searching for information on the transformation of land use and colonial demands for migrant labor, in an effort to situate my study within an historical context. To get a sense of how the campaign had changed in the past five years, I then visited the Togolese anti-trafficking NGOs and bilateral aid organizations where I had previously conducted interviews in 2004. To gain a comparative perspective, I also met with representatives from Nigerian anti-trafficking groups and safe houses in Abuja and Lagos.

### **The Stakes**

With respect to the stakes of a more nuanced view on the motivations behind child labor migration practices in Togo, this study aims to inform current debates about child trafficking by adding viewpoints of children who work out of obligation but also in order to improve their economic conditions. The study questions the efficacy of using trafficking as a mode of naming violence against children in Togo; while this approach may help some children in need, too often it forecloses possibilities by funneling development dollars into anti-trafficking interventions. In so doing, the emphasis on child trafficking deflects attention and aid dollars from more insidious forces harming children,

such as a dysfunctional educational system and poor job prospects within the civil service. As much of the child labor scholarship in post-colonial Africa has been written by NGOs (see Grier, 2004), on an epistemological level this has ramifications for academic scholars who rely on development frameworks to study children's work—frameworks that are shaped by the constraints of running a non-profit organization, such as the need for funding, statistical results, publicity, etc. For historian Beverly Grier, the consequences of allowing development agencies to set the conceptual agenda is that children are not taken seriously, and their contribution to modern West African economies is overlooked. The contributions of child laborers have become even more substantive in light of economic recessions in sub-Saharan Africa since the 1970s caused by structural adjustment programs, civil wars, drought and the impact of HIV/AIDS.<sup>25</sup>

Another consequence of embracing the “trafficking” rhetoric is that depictions of child laborers are based on an uninterrogated set of assumptions about children and childhood, wherein children are passive subjects in need of protection and childhood is a fixed and universal construct. Instead, I echo Grier's call for an approach that begins with the premise that childhood is a contested construction that is structured by such limiting forms as gender, class, modes of production, etc.; and that children are social actors shaping the conditions that shape them. The assertion that children are passive victims is not only inaccurate, but it masks the ways in which children are creatively strategizing to improve their present conditions and future prospects. As Beverly Grier writes, “For

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<sup>25</sup> Grier, “Child Labor and Africanist Scholarship,” 3.

some children and adolescents, working was not the problem but the solution to a problem.”<sup>26</sup>

Not only have the adolescent girls I profile “after trafficking” recently completed *bopi bateh onati*, but they are also on the cusp of entering into Yondan parenthood, where they will be making decisions for the next generation of child laborers. By tracing their experiences, I show how *bopi bateh onati* works for the Yondans and the ways in which they arbitrate conflicts, albeit imperfectly, when the system does not. There are stories of Yondan children experiencing terrible violence and neglect under *bopi bateh onati*. And yet, in my understanding, these cases are the exception and are adjudicated by the existing customary apparatus, wherein approbation becomes a public force policing egregious acts within the system. Hence, anti-trafficking agencies working towards eradication and suggesting that all forms of children’s travel for work is violent not only discredit Yondans who embrace this practice as something they desire and are already policing, but they also dismiss the existing protective infrastructure to help children. This infrastructure includes the Yondan expatriate associations in the satellite communities where children are working, as well as the governmental agencies and NGOs that may have previously worked to help children in difficult situations but were forced to retool their priorities with the emergence of the anti-trafficking mandate.

The December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011 issue of *The Economist* led with the story of Africa’s rising success, with six of the ten fastest-growing economies in the past decade coming from the African continent, and Africa countries growing more rapidly overall for eight

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 13.



of the past ten years than those in East Asia, including Japan. The article concluded by that sub-Saharan Africa would be better off with fairer trade agreements than more financial gifts: “Western governments should open up to trade rather than just dish out aid.”<sup>27</sup> While the article acknowledged the many problems preventing growth in Africa, it intimated a shifting of geo-political terrain as stability comes to the continent, suggesting that countries in Africa may no longer be the last bastion for well-meaning humanitarians seeking to “save the world.”<sup>28</sup> In a similar vein, the trafficking rhetoric thrives off of the assumption that all cases of children traveling to work are violations in need of eradication. How these children manage difficult conditions, and the ways in which their communities regulate their own practices, are dismissed—even though greater attention to these points would allow for a more organic cooperation between aid agencies and those in need of assistance. As it stands, children are at risk of being taken from their worksites and detained in safe houses, and their relatives are at risk of being arrested as traffickers—with at least four Yondan men having been arrested crossing the Nigerian border in the past ten years. In addition, progressive forms of collaboration between aid organizations and self-actualizing communities capable of making sound decisions for their families based on considerations of present opportunities are stymied. Once the Togolese educational system becomes a viable option for rural families to invest resources in, parents will likely shift their strategies from sending children to Nigeria to sending children to school. (This is already occurring; ten years ago, Yondan families would only send a fraction of their children to school, but now, as a result of the state’s waiver of many public school fees, families are enrolling all their children, at least

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<sup>27</sup> “Africa Rising,” *The Economist*, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011, 15.

<sup>28</sup> “Save the World.” Save the World. Accessed January 8, 2012. <http://www.savetheworld.com>.

through the elementary years.). Human rights campaigns that come to educate families that “trafficking” is wrong and that parents should send their children to school are preaching to the choir. By criminalizing the practice, human rights groups not only push labor migration underground and make conditions more difficult for traveling children, but they also drive a wedge between rural communities and urban-based development workers.

### **Outline of Chapters**

The general arc of this dissertation tracks the parallel logics of the human rights anti-trafficking campaign and the Yondan child labor migration practice of *bopi bateh onati*, focusing on the period of time “after trafficking,” when adolescent girls have finished their tours of duty as unpaid domestic servants and begin working on their own in the city. My focus on the time “after trafficking,” when the girls have performed their necessary rites, but have yet to commit to marriage is a “socially structured zone of possibility”<sup>29</sup> that reflects on the deeper structures shaping Yondan labor migration practices.

To address these issues, Chapter Two delves deeper into the mechanics of *bopi bateh onati*, and includes an overview of the historical progression and present system of Yondans sending their children off to work. I discuss the certainty and unambiguous nature of *bopi bateh onati* as a “total social fact”<sup>30</sup> that has come to be ritualized and routinized within otherwise ambiguous and uncertain spaces of Togolese rural life, where

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<sup>29</sup> Johnson-Hanks, “On the Limits of Life Stages in Ethnography,” 871.

<sup>30</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (1922, repr. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge Classics, 2002), 100.

an education does not offer any assurance of a livelihood, and the high costs of farming make subsistence agriculture a risky option.

Chapter Three details the human rights construction of child trafficking. In this chapter, I trace the birth of trafficking discourse in general, incorporating the debate between neo-abolitionists and third-wave feminists as pro-sex worker anti-anti trafficking advocates. I also discuss the paucity of views that deviate from these analyses. I then turn to international agreements specific to child labor protection in Togo in the contemporary era of “rights-based development,”<sup>31</sup> and examine how this rights framework fails children in a country ravaged by years of uneven development.

In Chapter Four I compare Togo and Nigeria’s trafficking campaigns and argue that Nigeria’s criminal justice approach to trafficking (as compared to Togo’s non-criminalizing child-centered approach) reinforces the country’s diplomatic ties with the United States and has the effect of creating an image of Nigeria as a strong state with quantifiable anti-trafficking practices. This finding speaks to the way in which anti-trafficking campaigns are a thing unto themselves, influenced by interests unrelated to efforts to improve conditions for child workers; this finding also explains why organizations on the ground may misread the motivations and strategies of rural communities sending out child laborers.

Chapter Five describes the ways in which Yondan identity is formed through the pursuit of the good life via *bopi bateh onati* and the ways in which Yondan society organizes itself to support *bopi bateh onati*. Tracing Yondan notions of the good life also

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<sup>31</sup> Kate Manzo, “Africa in the Rise of Rights-Based Development,” 437.

brings up prevailing values around travel and the possibilities that travel opens up and forecloses upon. This chapter also allows me to construct the Yondan moral world, showing how it differs from the moral indexes of the human rights community, and how this incommensurability stems from different hierarchies of needs between urban elite development agents and rural migrant workers.

Chapter Six offers an alternative explanation for why people send their children from Togo into Nigeria. Rather than explain parents' motivations for sending their children to work as domestic servants as an escape from poverty (as per the human rights discourse) or a rite of passage into adulthood (as described by informants), I argue that labor migration is rooted in a future-oriented strategy of survival by both parents and children in an age of economic decline. Instead of a means of gaining short-term profits, the practice delivers on a newer imaginary of the future for post-Cold War Togolese, where the most common strategy for success is to leave the country. To track this more recent sensibility, this chapter presents the cultural styles of Togolese girls living in Lagos, and categorizes them as the cosmopolitanist and the localist. These styles of living are emblematic of different orientations towards the future with respect to investments in city or local relationships. While all three explanations touch on some aspects of the girls' experiences, the human rights and folk explanations rely on objectified and ahistorical representations of these traveling children as trafficking cases in the former and loyal daughters in the latter. In contrast, the explanation I offer is rooted in the particularity of the girls' present moment of working as domestic servants during the first decade of the new millennium and speaks to the way in which they are creatively engaged in forming their identities, reputations and livelihoods. As a result, it allows

them to inhabit more malleable roles than that of victim of violent exploitation or subject of a “wealth-in-people”<sup>32</sup> tradition, as suggested by the other two frameworks.

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<sup>32</sup> “Wealth in people” is a term originally introduced by S. Miers and I. Kopytoff (eds.) in *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison: 1977) to describe the particular form of wealth accumulation in Africa as derived from controlling the labor of others, be it during the slave trade or through kin relations, as compared to capital accumulation under Western models of capitalism. See Jane Guyer, “Wealth in People, Wealth in Things: Introduction,” *Journal of African History* 36 (1995): 91.

## Chapter Two: The Mechanics of *Bopi Bateh Onati* and A Few Words on Uncertainty

In *The Gift*, Marcel Mauss introduces his concept of the total social fact which he defined as that which brings together all of society and its institutions—economic, political, religious, etc.<sup>33</sup> ”The Gift is a total social fact because it ... concentrates attention on social relationships and because it constitutes those relations.”<sup>34</sup> While scholars have criticized Mauss for the vagueness of total social fact as that which “the whole society is—as it were—present in condensed form,”<sup>35</sup> it remains a productive concept for thinking through practices that influence numerous realms of a society. In the case of *bopi bateh onati*, those realms include the political and economic aspects of Yonda, in addition to the very make up of Yondan ethnicity and family. Through a detailed description of the history of *bopi bateh onati* and the mechanics of its present day form, this chapter shows how—as a ritualized practice that touches on all aspects of Yondan social life— it qualifies as a total social fact. Not only does *bopi bateh onati* reinforce the seamless connection and co-constitutiveness of the Togolese village of Yonda with the major hubs in West Africa, but it also operates as a form of certainty in a terrain of increasing uncertainty and vulnerability that characterizes postcolonial West Africa.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, 19.

<sup>34</sup> Karen Margaret Sykes, *Arguing with Anthropology: An Introduction to Critical Theories of the Gift* (London: Routledge, 2005), 63.

<sup>35</sup> Wendy James and N.J. Allen, “Marcel Mauss: A Centenary Tribute,” (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1998), 152.

<sup>36</sup> For a further discussion of uncertainty and Africa, see Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Achille Mbembe, *On The Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California University Press, 2001); Abdou Maliqalim Simone, *For the City Yet to Come* (London: Zed Books, 2005).

In this way, reading *bopi bateh onati* as a “total service” akin to Mauss’ Polynesian potlatch sheds light on its holistic influence. Not only does it shape marriage practices, but it touches on the distribution of Yondans of all ages in the West African region. Moreover, *bopi bateh onati* lends a cosmopolitan village character to Yonda, while at the same time perpetuating its underdevelopment. Each Yondan woman can claim to be city-savvy having cultivated a certain level of practical knowledge during their years of service. And these urban sites have a presence in the village, as Nigerian souvenirs such as religious texts, Yoruba garb, generators and cables seamlessly integrate into the Yondan landscape. Even beauty is tied to the city. As this teenage boy living in Yonda explained: “Boys prefer girls who have traveled... because they dress well and are really pretty with their hairstyles. Those girls who have not traveled are not as pretty. They do not wear pants or perfume. [Those who have not left] want to go as well to buy their beauty and that is why they leave.”<sup>37</sup>

In addition, another element of this “total service” is that the ritualized trip to Nigeria is accompanied with an ethos of escapism, as the imaginary of a world outside and beyond the plights of village life offers solutions to unwanted pregnancies, forced marriages, family strife, school failures, etc. And it is a practice that extends well beyond adolescence, as women in their sixties have gone to Nigeria to work as domestic servants and earn quick cash to provide for themselves in their later years, a practice that speaks to

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<sup>37</sup> Interview 61, July 11, 2004.

the vulnerabilities of aging in rural Africa, as Lisa Cliggett so elegantly illustrated for elderly women in Zambia.<sup>38</sup>

In the second section of the chapter, I describe the costs of *bopi bateh onati*, in terms of separated families, breached contracts, interrupted schooling and agricultural labor scarcity for the elderly parents and young children left behind. Yet, rather than undermine the fixity of *bopi bateh onati*, these casualties reinforce the dominance of this practice that persists unabated amongst lives otherwise rife with instability and uncertainty.

### **Mandate to Marry**

There appears to have been a shift in marriage practices over the past few generations, where according to village elders, parents of the past were expected to pay for their children's weddings and mothers gifted clothes to their daughters. Now, youth pay for their ceremonies, and this is the overarching logic offered for why girls would accept working as domestic servants for three years without a salary—to secure the clothes and dishes they will need to marry. This common explanation shifts the logic of the practice from one that is market driven to one framed as a rite of passage into adulthood. The framing also calls into question human rights claims that this is a form of modern slavery, where the symbolic compensation of gaining entry into adulthood warrants the costs involved in obtaining them.

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<sup>38</sup> Lisa Cliggett, *Grains from Grass: Aging, Gender and Famine in Rural Africa* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2005).



To afford the expense they now shoulder, the girls leave for work and their *ogás* are expected to buy them these items at the end of their service. Rather than viewing this as slavery, Yondans read the practice as a means to marry, as this thirty-five year old mother of five explains:

The trip is more for the girl than the parents. She has to go out and earn for her wedding. It's no longer up to the mother to struggle to provide for her daughter because the girl has already come back with her dishes and clothes.

In the past, for a girl to marry, she had to have a lot of dishes and clothes, and her parents would help her a lot. But now, the girls only have a few clothes and dishes and that's enough for the wedding. Before, weddings were better than they are today.

If a girl does not take the trip, it is because her parents are able to give her the necessary items for her wedding. Otherwise, there is not a girl who will not travel out. You just cannot marry with nothing to show.

And for those who forgo "the trip," they will have trouble finding a husband, as the speaker continues to explain:

In the past, the boys' families were always in charge of the wedding, not the girls themselves. Before, girls would travel to get the clothes and dishes that they would need when they began their married life in the home of their in-laws... Now, the kids have to do everything for their weddings, which is why they travel out of the village so much. As far as I'm concerned, girls travel out to find money for their weddings.

### **Overview of the Circuit: From Home to City and Back Again**

Although both boys and girls leave Yonda to work (primarily) in Nigeria, this summary of *bopi bateh onati* focuses on the movement of adolescent girls into Nigeria, Benin and Ivory Coast to work as live-in domestic servants.

Despite the covert nature of moving Yondan girl laborers from the village to the city, the practice has evolved into a complex network of actors that troubles the notion of

an “informal economy”<sup>39</sup> as it is highly formalized with established norms commanding an extensive network of people required to ensure the placement of the girls and employer satisfaction. The trip out typically begins when a girl is between twelve and sixteen years old and her mother approaches a neighboring *ogá* about taking her to the city. As mentioned above, the trip is ostensibly for girls to secure their wedding clothes and dishes, returning after a three year “tour of duty” to reconnect with boyfriends or begin dating fellow male returnees (coming from Nigerian farms or peri-urban schools in Togo), with the expectation that an engagement will be forthcoming. The *ogás*, who shuttle between rural and urban sectors for their market trades, then decide whether or not to take the girl with her on the next market trip. Once they arrive in the marketplace most *ogás* rely on placers to find employers interested in domestic servants.<sup>40</sup> placers can be Yondan taxi drivers, shopkeepers, laundry washers, and others who live and work in the cities. Since they are familiar with the city, they connect *ogás* with potential employers. Sometimes the placer accompanies the *ogá* and girl to the employer’s home, but more often the interaction is restricted to offering the names and locations of potential employers. Placers also are given the responsibility of collecting a girl’s monthly salary if the *ogá* is unable or is out of town. However, the *ogá* always maintains absolute control over the girls’ profits. In return, the placers are paid in kind by the *ogá*.

In the homes, the girls live with the employer, or patronne, and her family. No formal contract is signed between employer and *ogá*, and it is understood that the employer pays the *ogá* when she comes to visit—not the girl. Generally the work

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<sup>39</sup>Jonathan Morduch "Between the Market and State: Can Informal Insurance Patch the Safety Net? Development Discussion Paper No. 621," *Harvard Institute for International Development*, 1998

<sup>40</sup> Some *ogás* interact directly with employers in the market and do not need a placer.

contracts are for one to three years, although parents hold an implicit trust (or hope) that the *ogá* will switch job sites if their daughters are mistreated. In general, girls take advantage of the biannual festival in Yonda, the *fête d'Alafia*, to quit their jobs, return to the village and then leave again for a new assignment. Most girls do not stay with one employer for longer than two or three years, although some renew their contracts for longer periods of time.

From the home where they are placed, girls can return to the village, start another domestic service tour, join a girl camp, or flee to the streets. Girl camps are settings where domestic servants have joined with other Yondan girls to rent a room in the city. In total, we spent time with Yondan girls in eleven different sites, spending time with an estimated sixty-five Yondans<sup>41</sup>—although there were many others from different ethnic groups who lived amongst them. Deep in the slums of Lagos and Cotonou, these girls stayed in one room shacks that housed from seven to twelve people. Since the rooms were too small to accommodate everyone comfortably, many girls relied on their boyfriends to provide periodic refuge from the crowded conditions. Mile 12 was the main girl camp site we profiled and it is the focus of the final chapter.

Lastly, there are the committee members of the Yondan expatriate communities. Ostensibly designed to support Yondans who are living and working in the various locations throughout West Africa, the committee's greatest function is to raise money and organize the trips back to Yonda for *fête d'Alafia*. Some, particularly those with more senior leadership, also act as regulatory bodies that judge on cases of conflicts amongst

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<sup>41</sup> This is data from fieldwork during Phase Three in the summer of 2005 and a pilot project that we conducted in the summer of 2007.

Yondans. This also included disputes amongst *ogás* and the parents of girls, with a relative of the parents frequently representing them during “hearings.”

The following section introduces the categories of persons involved in *bopi bateh onati* and emphasizes their roles within and motivations for participating in the practice.

### **The Actors**

“In the Koran, it is said, ‘if you leave your children to make many voyages they will be well cultivated.’”<sup>42</sup>

### **Parents in Yonda**

Girls’ parents initiate the process of labor out-migration. Largely poor and uneducated, they subsist on food grown from their farms. To pay for their needs, a portion of the harvest is reserved for sale at the local markets. However, the sporadic traffic to this reclusive community limits their economy to little more than glorified bartering among friends, neighbors and relatives. A woman who sells tomatoes will use her profits to buy kerosene and onions from the same women who bought her tomatoes. Those who choose to grow cash crops, such as cotton or cashews, frequently lose money at the end of a growing season. Many Yondan fathers were cotton farmers, but abandoned their fields after netting meager profits once the state cotton cooperative dropped their buying price per bale. This was particularly the case in 2001 and 2002, when world cotton prices fell to the lowest point in thirty years.<sup>43</sup> Thus, compared to coffee, cotton is a less reliable cash crop and the constant price fluctuations may account for sociologist

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<sup>42</sup> Interview 84. July 24, 2004. Seventy year-old man.

<sup>43</sup> “Recent Economic Trends in Africa and Prospects for 2004,” *United Nations Economic Commission for Africa*, Accessed September 15, 2004.  
<http://209.85.173.104/search?q=cache:5xRAAYmF5RsJ:www.unece.org/era2004/chap1.pdf>.

Marie France-Lange's observation that the cotton producing regions in northern Togo (such as Yonda) rely more on child labor compared to their southern neighbors with cocoa and coffee plantations.<sup>44</sup>

In addition, generations of slash and burn agriculture have led Yonda to its present state of environmental disrepair as a deforested and impoverished earth comes to produce less with greater amounts of fertilizer. Thus, as costs rise and production falls, farmers continue to lose money:

This year, I did not make any money because I sold my soybeans at 10,000 CFA and I got nothing for my corn... Nothing, because I grew one hectare of corn and a quarter hectare of soy... For the corn, I only got seven and a half sacs. Normally, there should be at least twenty sacs per hectare. But I got seven and a half sacs and that was with fertilizer. If I do not make at least fifteen sacs, that would mean that the fertilizer cost me more than I made. The earth is no longer producing and we cannot make a living.<sup>45</sup>

Mothers who sell food items in the market are often faced with the same futile equation, where cumulated costs are greater than profit. One seller of vegetable oil lamented that her business always loses money, but she continues for want of a better occupation. Another woman, Lalitou, a vendor of rice for the middle school students, described her small plot of land that she cultivates to guarantee food for herself and her children. While the patriarchs are supposed to distribute grains to their wives, the fulfillment of this obligation varies from man to man. As a result, women are not only responsible for paying for sauce ingredients (salt, chili pepper, oil, tomato paste, bouillon), but ultimately for all the food their children need. Most Yondan women secure their food through a market trade and supplementing it with their small plots of land. Yet,

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<sup>44</sup> Marie France Lange, "The Demand for Labour within the Household: Child Labour in Togo," in *The Exploited Child*, ed. Bernard Schlemmer (London: Zed Books, 2000).

<sup>45</sup> Interview 35. June 28, 2004. Thirty-seven year-old man.

their sons are first and foremost beholden to labor their fathers' fields.<sup>46</sup> This season, Lalitou is particularly concerned because her sons have not been available to help her prepare her field for the rainy season and she cannot afford to pay day laborers.

These unfavorable calculations are the banal realities for Yondans trying to make a living through a rural enterprise. Aside from cashews, which again are vulnerable to the vagaries of arbitrary pricing, there are few crops that yield a profit. And although the more conscientious and educated villagers are able to achieve modest gains, most are convinced that to stay in Yonda means to accept a life of impoverishment and dependency.

### **Girls in Yonda**

Girls in Yonda find themselves navigating men's attention at the time their "breasts begin to push out."<sup>47</sup> Whether this attention is welcome or not, some use this "specialness" to fulfill neglected needs, such as paying for school fees and clothing. At times, parents will refuse to provide certain necessities with the expectation that their daughters will find boyfriends to support them. Such an attitude is reflected in this excerpt from an interview with a young mother:

Interviewer: Is a girl obligated to spend the night at a boy's house?

Awa: Yes, because he will help her.

Interviewer: How?

Awa: If I got sick, he would be the one to treat me [pay for my medications]—particularly if I was loyal to him. Everything that the girl asks for, the boy will do,

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<sup>46</sup> Sara Berry, *Fathers Work for their Sons: Accumulation, Mobility, and Class Formation in an Extended Yoruba Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>47</sup> Common Yondan expression to describe the time when girls begin puberty.

like if she asks for a uniform<sup>48</sup> to make with her friends—like for a wedding—he will buy it. Even if the girl lies and says that she has a headache, he'll give her money to treat it.<sup>49</sup>

By the time she marries, typically around the ages of eighteen to twenty-five, the girl (and indirectly her parents) will have transferred most of her financial responsibilities to the fiancé.

Some see this shifting of the burden as a driving motivation for parents to pressure their girls into early engagements. Pressures begin far before marriage when Yondans are young pupils. To pay for school, male students can earn quick cash as weekend laborers, whereas female students do not have that option. The assumption is that girls will satisfy their needs with their boyfriends' favors. As one teenager explained, "Boys need money more because they have to pay for their girlfriends."<sup>50</sup> The other major factors pushing the girls out of village are the hostile environment in the local schools and the romantic mystique that is built around life outside of the village.

Although ages within a grade level are not uniform and there are twelve or thirteen year old girls just beginning to learn their A,B,C's alongside six and seven year old children, in general, the last year of primary school is when girls enter adolescence. This is a period of vulnerability for the girls, as they begin to receive unsolicited advances from men, most notably by their teachers. Eighteen year old Latifa recounted the numerous teachers who lowered her grades because she refused their requests for sexual favors. Other girls have similar stories. In fact, sexual harassment by teachers has

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<sup>48</sup> During the festival season, it is common for people to get *Uniforms*, which are matching, tailored outfits.

<sup>49</sup> Interview 3. June 5, 2004. Twenty-four year old woman.

<sup>50</sup> Interview 100, June 30, 2004. Twenty-eight year old man.

become such a problem that NGOs have begun campaigns to train teachers on appropriate classroom behavior. While the consequences of a teacher engaging in sexual relations with his/her student are immediate dismissal or transfer to another institution, the practice remains widespread in Togo.<sup>51</sup>

Girls from Yonda also struggle with competing sentiments of fear and desire with respect to the trip. While leaving home for an unknown destination to work for strangers is a frightening endeavor, there is a mystique of adventure and sophistication that surrounds the journey. As older sisters and neighbors recount life in “Cotonou,”<sup>52</sup> their stories of dynamic cities dripping with opulence and opportunity brew envy in the wide-eyed village girls who gather to listen. Although they also speak of loneliness and struggle in other contexts, their expensive accoutrements belie any tales of hardship. Even girls of seven or eight years will romanticize about their older siblings’ lives in the cities. As Joumai, a seven year old tomato vendor says: “In Cotonou, there is good food—everything you could want to eat, you can eat there... they even have the red one [coca-cola]. When the girls return from Cotonou they are more mature and dress nicely, they are more beautiful than us who stay in Yonda...and I’ll be more beautiful when I come back... My friends say that if they had sisters [like me] out there, they would try to leave, too.”<sup>53</sup>

There is tremendous trepidation amongst the girls about leaving their families for the trip, with some girls, such as Salifa, who had just learned of her parents’ decision to

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<sup>51</sup> “Togolese NGOs protest sexual harassment of women,” *PANAPRESS Agency* (Lomé, Togo: November 26, 2001). <http://www.diaistode.org/Nouvelles/usnews219.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Since Cotonou is the most popular site for girls, I am using the term to refer to all the worksites, including Accra, Abidjan, Lagos and Libreville.

<sup>53</sup> Interview 86. July 26, 2004, in Yonda. Twelve year-old girl.



take her out of school and send her to work in Cotonou. As she told Mazou, she resented that her parents were sending her to work and ruining her chances to better herself in school. Yet, adolescent girls do not have the authority to vocalize their concerns, and few would refuse their parents' request to go. Sending girls to work now spans more than three generations as mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers all have experienced work as young domestic servants in the city. It is an unquestioned norm that precludes protest. The only element of uncertainty is the day of departure. As if it were a practice that almost supersedes individual agency where *bopi bateh onati* operates at the level of society sui generis. Some girls are in school while they wait for the day, with their capacity to focus on studies overshadowed by the real lessons of managing a family, making money and preparing for marriage –which begins with the trip that will procure the clothes and dishes a Yondan girl will need to marry. For other girls, dropping out of school or failing a grade level are the precipitating factors. When a parent finally makes the decision, it can come with little warning or explanation. As one girl described: “[My father said to me,] ‘Tomorrow or the next day, you are to go with Auntie Warama. She is taking you to Cotonou and in three years you will return.’”<sup>54</sup>

### **The *Ogás***

The *ogás* are the principal facilitators of the migration process for girls and young women. As market women who circulate between the village and the city to trade their goods they were well-positioned to transit girls from Yonda to wealthy households in cities. Although they perpetuate the practice, they are not immune to its negative effects.

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<sup>54</sup> Interview 37. June 29, 2004, in Yonda. Thirteen year old girl.

Like the girls they transit, all *ogás* were adolescence domestic servants in the past. Now they run modestly successful small business and amass towering columns of kitchenware and soap as material symbols of their growing wealth. To start their businesses, they use the girls' monthly salaries as capital. A common example is to use the money to buy Tupperware in the city and then resell it for a profit in the local markets upcountry. This is why *ogás* are ideally situated to bring girls into the city, but also why they must rely on the placers from the Yondan expatriate community. Despite the importance of the girls' salaries for their enterprises, *ogás* claim that they do not actively solicit girls. Rather, desperate mothers seeking employment for their daughters will approach a neighboring market lady—an *ogá*. Some Yondan traders will refuse the request to avoid the hassle. Others accept because of a desire to make money and help their neighbors who seek solace from neglectful husbands and hungry children.

Before the girls leave, the parents informally agree to pay the *ogá* three to six months of the girls' salary and reimburse any transportation costs. However, *ogás* frequently take advances on the salaries to invest in their market businesses and make false promises to return the money. Almost every narrative of domestic service for the young girls included a statement about being cheated from salaries by their *ogás*. The general rules of engagement are as follows: the girl works for three years as a domestic servant; the *ogá* collects her monthly salary; parents receive small kickbacks after the initial months of service, and sporadically thereafter; the girl returns to Yonda with dishes and clothes. In short, the village parents receive a small portion of the profits, their daughter prepares for her wedding day, and the *ogá* keeps the rest. And, as I will discuss in a subsequent chapter on Yondan ethics around the practice, the intolerable act is if an

*ogá* does not provide clothes and dishes at the end of a girl's service. This is when the *ogá* is perceived to have overstepped the bounds of what is begrudgingly accepted by the girl and her parents. Even the fact that the *ogá* will inflate the cost of the girls clothes and dishes when presenting them to the family is assumed and accepted. However, the fact that their salaries are taken and the girl articulates that she has been cheated may speak to the recent influence of children's rights discourse.

Another expectation is that the *ogás* will regularly check on the girls at their worksites. However, this frequently does not happen. Some come after a few months, some come after a year, and others send a friend to collect the checks. Regardless, it is in the *ogá's* interest to visit the girls she is responsible for frequently because some employers develop considerable debts and begin to accuse their servant of stealing or breaking property to avoid payments. From the girls' perspective, the visits are an occasion to inform the *ogás* of problems. Thus, when the *ogás* renege on their obligations to check up, the girls are denied this protection and sole interface with their kin back home. Distant parents are forced to rely on the *ogás* biased reporting on their daughters' well-being, and the girls must rely on the *ogás*' sense of moral responsibility to regularly checkup and maintain open communication with families back in Yonda. Unfortunately, girls are frequently neglected as *ogás* are reluctant to spend the money to travel back and forth for regular visits. In addition, since the girls' salaries are used to prop up the *ogás*' market business, *ogás* will frequently seek advances of six months or more—thereby gaining a lump sum of cash to buy merchandise and precluding the need for monthly visits. Twenty-two year old Lafissou is one example of the ways in which children get forgotten in these distant worksites.

Lafissou's paternal aunt adopted her when she was still a crawling baby. She grew up in Yonda until the age of eight or nine, at which point the co-wife of her adoptive mother placed her with a *Fon* family in Cotonou. The mother, who hired Lafissou, sold motorcycle parts in a stall located in the heart of the city. Lafissou worked for almost seven years with this family, largely tending to children that were barely younger than her. "All I knew growing up was *le bonnage* [domestic service]." She described how the *Fon* woman frequently beat her with a wooden mallet and would chastise her for the slightest mistakes. Lafissou's *ogá* also neglected her by failing to check up on her during those six years and six months. Towards the last year of her service, Lafissou could no longer endure the abuse and during one of the *ogá's* rare visits, she expressed her desire to escape the beatings and return to her mother in Yonda. Instead of helping, the *ogá* informed Lafissou's employer that she wanted to escape. Later that night, Lafissou was severely beaten for telling "lies" and trying to flee from her duties.

After the incident, Lafissou was forbidden from leaving the house and her employer told the *ogá* that Lafissou had been transferred to a relative living in Porto Novo. At the time, Lafissou was working with another Yondan girl and they came up with a plan to escape. The friend told their employer that she had a dream that her father had died back in village and that she needed to return to Yonda. Lafissou sent a message to her biological parents via the girl that she was being abused and the *ogá* was neglecting her. "I told [my friend] that my parents should care about me, even if they don't have a need for me. I have a need for them." Once the girl arrived in Yonda, she informed Lafissou's biological parents of her situation. Her biological parents then asked the *ogá* to bring Lafissou back home. The *ogá* traveled to Cotonou, but never went to visit Lafissou. She came back and lied to Lafissou's parents, saying that the employer wanted to keep Lafissou for another six months. Refusing to accept the excuse, Lafissou's biological mother traveled to Cotonou and found the employer selling motor parts. She confronted her, but the vendor feigned ignorance and called the police to accuse the mother of trying to steal her house girl. Somehow, Lafissou was able to arrange with her mother to meet at a rented room in Cotonou, and a few days later Lafissou fled the house with her belongings to take a car up to Yonda with her mother.

This dramatic narrative of escape culminated in Lafissou's homecoming: "I was so happy to come back. I was proud because I finally felt liberated from my suffering. I just wanted to live with my biological parents, but I couldn't. Since I wasn't as close with them as I was to my adoptive family, I ended up staying with them [the adoptive family]. I didn't really have any friends because so much time had passed and I couldn't even really speak [Yondan]." Linguistically, she could not claim to be Yondan because she grew up speaking *Fon* in Cotonou, but emotionally Yonda was a sanctuary from her abusive working conditions—despite the fact that her Yondan family was complicit in her suffering. The "real" mother who raised her was also the one who sent her into servitude; and the biological parents who liberated her had been too absent to claim her as a daughter. Her stay in Yonda was also short lived. Soon after her

homecoming, she returned to Cotonou, initially greeting her former employer—who pretended to not know who she was—before finding work with another family.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Placers<sup>56</sup>**

Most *ogás*' knowledge of the cities is limited to a small zone that surrounds the markets. Although they once worked in the cities, they were confined to their employers' homes. Their unfamiliarity with the city forces *ogás* to rely on placers. As noted, placers are Yonda expatriates who live and work in the cities, often as taxi drivers, food vendors and laundry washers and connect potential employers and supplying *ogás*. As the middleman's middleman, they stand on a privileged perch—they are privy to the system, but absolved of any responsibility. The placers claim that they enable the system to continue, but the *ogás* hold ultimate authority over the girls “because they brought them from the village,”<sup>57</sup> and presumably have the ultimate responsibility to their parents. Placers know where the girls are working, but they are not at liberty to visit them without the *ogá's* permission. Their role is solely for guidance to the *ogá*, for which they are informally compensated.

Some placers also participate in the committees of Yonda expatriates now living abroad. Located in Cotonou and throughout southwestern Nigeria, these committees allow Yondans to gather and support each other. Ideally, the committees convene year-round, but most only begin to meet eight months before the biannual reunion festival in Yonda. Although the ultimate purpose is to raise money for transportation to the village,

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<sup>55</sup> Interview. March 14, 2009, in Yonda. Twenty-two year old married woman.

<sup>56</sup> My term.

<sup>57</sup> Interview June 19, 2005, in Cotonou, Benin. Forty year-old Yondan taxi-driver.

members take advantage of this time to address other concerns and resolve conflicts or disputes. However, none of the committees extend their assistance to Yondan housemaids working in the surrounding neighborhoods. Members with whom I talked stated that they were unaware of the girls' whereabouts and lacked the authority to intervene—only the *ogá* could approach the employer. Although this was biased by the fact that many people, particularly in Cotonou, thought we were conducting an investigation and did not feel comfortable leading us to girls' worksites.

### **The Employers**<sup>58</sup>

Most employers who hire domestic help come from the upper echelons of society—wives of wealthy businessmen, professionals and elite socialites. Working-class market ladies, however, also hire young girls as assistants. Seeking cheap labor and living in congested cities like Lagos with notorious reputations for danger, most employers were apprehensive of strangers and distrustful of the domestic workers they employ. As one woman in Lagos explained to me, she fears that her housemaid may bring thieves, and she, like many other families in the city, had experiences with arm robbers coming into her house and holding her and her children up at gunpoint. Some are fearful that these young women will exploit their access and bring people into the home. Others I spoke with were also fearful that “*le bonne*,” or domestic servant, would tempt their husbands out of fidelity. Despite the pervasive distrust, the need for domestic help overrode these apprehensions. To find a *bonne*,<sup>59</sup> an employer may ask a neighbor or relative, or else go directly to the market and approach *ogás* bringing workers from the

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<sup>58</sup> Since I was only able to interview one employer, this section is based on the girls' impressions of their employers.

<sup>59</sup> Francophone term for a domestic worker.

rural areas of Benin, Togo and eastern Nigeria. Once the terms have been agreed upon between the *ogá* and employer, the girl is then placed in the home. It is usually assumed that an *ogá* will take a young housemaid's salary because such children are considered too young and irresponsible to guard their money. This conventional wisdom was confirmed by Lalitou, a freelance housemaid in Cotonou, who regretted that her older sister (and former *ogá*) no longer guarded her money because now she just wastes it on food, make-up and the latest fashions.

Employers spoke of the difficulty of keeping “good” servants and often make a considerable effort to retain hard-working housemaids. Trust and control were dominant concerns and the employers we spoke with particularly feared housemaids who have boyfriends, refuse to work, or stole. Such an observation was corroborated by other women who had previously worked as domestic servants. Communication is also a problem for employers, as most housemaids are uneducated and did not speak the employers' language. Yet, despite these complaints, employers hold considerable power over the girls and the *ogás*. They are the most feared and revered players in the system, and everyone, including *ogás*, girls, placers and parents, take care not to upset them. Even placers with access approach their clients' homes with trepidation. They fear an upset employer will refuse payments and might even physically abuse the girls. Thus, the girls' safety was the primary reason most placers gave for not checking up on them.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> This brings up an interesting theme. The employers are from a different ethnic group and unaware of all the conflicts and protocols that go on with the girls' families, the *ogá*, the Yondan community, etc with respect to her placement. Since the Yondans are fearful of the power of the employers (in terms of their wealth and legitimacy as “citizens” of the city, as well as their potential to abuse the girls) they would not intervene on the girls' behalf and risk angering the employer. Instead, the employer only know of the girl through her and the *ogá*, despite the fact proximity of a whole web of kin.

The actual prevalence of abuse within the homes is difficult to assess because the girls' worksites are so private. No one besides the *ogá* is allowed access to the girls at the behest of the employers who have security as a major concern and who perceive it as high risk for a foreign girl to work in their homes. Many are fearful and charged with the circulation of stories about house girls connected to networks of armed robbers, exploiting the open access they enjoy as embedded housemaids. Some of this is fueled by the popular films that frequently follow sensationalized storylines of housemaids run amok, but of this fear is rooted in the very real insecurity Lagosians endure as a dysfunctional police system and rampant gangs of armed youth have led to unprecedented numbers of home invasions in recent years.<sup>61</sup> It is a state of enclave infrastructure where urban residents are left to their own devices to secure the basic services of electricity, water, paved roads and most notably security. And it is in this context that norms of maintaining a fortified home and heightened vigilance take root.

Once the girls are released from these confined spaces, they return home and many recount the neglect and abuse they endured abroad. While some had positive experiences of integrating into their employers' homes like another family member, the majority of girls reported being treated like servants. Since most domestic servants are generally confined to these homes and unable to negotiate with their employers, many would run away when they wanted to leave. Ideally, the *ogá* should be paid in full by the employer when the girl has finished her unwritten "contract." But for those who escape without notice, their families and *ogá* lose their rights to payments. Quitting without notice is relatively common among the girls, with some stating that they run away even

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<sup>61</sup> Smart E. Out, "Armed Robbery and Armed Robbers in Contemporary Nigeria: The Social Learning and Model Revisited," *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory* 3, no. 2 (December 2010): 439.



when they are happy with their employers. In fact, the girls' reputation for running away is the reason some parents offered for refusing to sign work contracts; that they do not want to be financially bound to the seemingly irresponsible behavior of their daughters.

### **Boyfriends**

Men, young and old, play an important role in the lives of young domestic workers, particularly when the housemaids flee their worksites and become free agents in the city. Being in the city with little or no money and fearful of returning to their former employers, these young women rely on city boyfriends to provide a financial crutch. Whether renting a room or squatting in an abandoned lot, the rooms are too small to accommodate seven to twelve girls, and boyfriends provide a necessary escape. At these "girl camps," where ex-domestic servants have formed cooperatives, young men often come to visit. Receiving suitors in the city is particularly problematic because these men are frequently not Yondan and any marriages or children that may come from these liaisons would keep the girls from returning to Togo. (HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases are also a concern, but that was not expressed during the interviews.)

### **Friends**

Aside from the occasional village meeting, most girls working as domestic servants rarely get the chance to see other girls from Yonda unless they are sent out on an errand. It is during these brief outings that many girls reconnect with other Yondans.

Fearful of getting into trouble, these passing encounters function mainly as checkups, and girls who frequent the same markets know the most about each other's whereabouts and well-being. Such encounters provide a transient interface between the confined worker and her distant kin in Yonda.

Contact with Yondans is better once a girl flees or her *ogá* releases her from any obligations to the employer. If she does not return to the village, she can stay in town and join a girl camp, which, as noted, is an improvised community of Yondan girls who pool their money to rent rooms together. As one adult woman explained: she came to the city “to make money” just like everybody else. Unless they act egregiously, like spending three nights with a boyfriend, she says nothing. “That’s their life and this is mine.”<sup>62</sup>

### **The Underlying Engines**

In addition to the critical actors who operationalize the labor system, and the “mandate to marry” that rationalizes the justification for accepting a modest set of clothes and dishes in exchange for three years of domestic service, there are powerful regional political and economic forces driving the practice. These include a shifting regional political and economic climate, including the Togolese government’s divestment from its educational system beginning in the mid-1980s when over 100,000 children (around 20% of the total student population) were forced out of the educational system in compliance with the “austerity measures” of structural adjustment programs<sup>63</sup>—programs that the Togolese government was required to accept in order to secure an IMF/World Bank loan

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<sup>62</sup> Interview July 2, 2005 in Ikeja, Lagos. Woman in her mid-forties.

<sup>63</sup> In 2000, for example, only 25% of the 16,000 students taking qualifying exams (for all three levels) passed. Morton and Michelle Spearing Hagen, "Togo—Stalled Democratic Transition," (London, England: Centre for Democracy and Development, 2000).

to pay off its foreign debt.<sup>64</sup> Another major factor was Nigeria's booming economy following the spike in world oil prices in the 1970s. In addition, the increased demand for young domestic servants shifted the norms of age-graded familial hierarchies as children out-competed their parents for jobs and cash incomes.

In fact, the labor system is so banal that it has become a rite of passage for village youth and parallels a process that Aihwa Ong describes (following Leys) as a "peasantization of wage employment," where small farm holding families send their children to perform wage labor in the cities to supplement their agricultural production.<sup>65</sup> In Yonda, the process is heavily gendered, with women often deciding to send their daughters to work as domestic servants to buttress their effectively sole responsibility to feed their children. (This is particularly the case for large, polygamous relationships, where each wife of a man is responsible for the sustenance of her set of children.) In addition, Yondan fathers frequently cannot afford their growing charge—particularly when their daughters will eventually marry out and take up residence and filial responsibilities with another family. Labor economist Jens Andvig supports this gendering of financial responsibility: "The father has the ... simpler option of reducing the costs by walking out on his family. Even if he does not walk out, the ease with which he could do it has given him a strong bargaining position in the family. Now even most of the financial costs of raising the children will often be paid by the mother."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> See Marie France Lange, "Espaces Scolaires en Afrique Francophonie," *Ethnologie Française* 37, (2007).

<sup>65</sup> Aihwa Ong, "Global Industries and Malay Peasants in Peninsular Malaysia," in *Women, Men and the International Division of Labor*, eds. June Nash and Maria Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, (New York: SUNY Press, 1983): 433.

<sup>66</sup> Andvig, "Child Labour in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Exploration," 335.

Under the pressures of ritual, necessity and potential abandonment, “children take trip” offers a way out, while opening up new conditions for exploitation. Adding to the mounting uncertainty of Yondan livelihood is the competing chaos of the village public school, which offers an example par excellence of the grotesque state-based power displays (a la Mbembe’s *commandement*) that encourage Yondans to leave for Nigeria.

Despite the commanding Yondan mandate to marry, most youth rarely mention marriage obligations as their motivation for traveling. Rather, they speak of adventure, material gain and a desire “to become beautiful.” Such a sentiment speaks back to Achille Mbembe’s African modernity, a state-of-being that encompasses the “twin projects of emancipation and assimilation... [with] an endless interrogation of the possibility, for the African subject, of achieving a balance between his/her total identification with ‘traditional’ ... African life, and his/her merging with, and subsequent loss in, modernity.”<sup>67</sup> Here, the themes of self-determination and familial obligation come to the fore, with scholars like Lisa Cliggett stating that altruism towards non-productive kin are fulfilled when times are good and youth can work towards protecting their future aged selves by maintaining their relationships with their elders and reproducing this “tradition” of care. Yet, this is not always the case as her ethnography of elder neglect during the famine years in rural Zambia illustrates. In addition, young Yondans are working through their own desires to marry Yondan and return to the village fold or try to make it on their own as a free agent in the city. Thus, what the trip starts out as a vehicle towards marriage rites and what it becomes speaks to the tensions inherent in the maturing girls understanding of self and community, where its predictable consistency takes on different

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<sup>67</sup> Achille Mbembe. *On The Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001): 12.

forms and meanings as it is implemented within fields of uncertainty and endemic crisis. What is the meaning of the trip: is it for marriage rites and a fulfillment of the elders' expectations or is it the necessary "escape" from boredom and the agrarian lifestyle that brings kids to Nigeria? Or is the latter a way of justifying or tolerating the former?

### **Tensions within *Bopi Bateh Onati***

Uncertainty is a common theme in the literature on postcolonial Africa, particularly as contemporary scholars of Africa write about the failures of development to deliver progress and better futures.<sup>68</sup> Brian Larkin characterizes this uncertainty in Nigeria as "marked by the erosion of accepted paths of progress and the recognition of a constant fight against the insecurity of everyday life."<sup>69</sup> In *Signal and Noise*, he cites the root causes of this precarious existence to the erosion of state economies (particularly the civil service and infrastructure projects), the rise of informal market networks, the presence of religious movements and ethnic conflicts, and the disruptive nature of "fast capitalism."<sup>70</sup> Larkin continues to say that it was through former state salaries that African subjects were transformed into citizens, but that during mid 1980s, when many African states were coerced into downsizing their public spending through World Bank implemented structural adjustment programs, employment began to shift from the public sector to the private sector. And with this shift came increasing risk and uncertainty.<sup>71</sup>

Beyond economics, uncertainty also touches upon the extraordinary, with respect to the

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<sup>68</sup> See James Ferguson. *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Cliggett, Lisa, Elizabeth Colson, Rodrick Hay, Thayer Scudder and Jon Unruh, "Chronic Uncertainty and Momentary Opportunity: A half century of adaptation among Zambia's Gwembe Tonga," *Human Ecology* 35, no.1 (December, 2006): 19-31

<sup>69</sup> Larkin, Brian, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008): 170.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 179.

early and unexpected deaths of rural Africans, as well as the everyday unpredictability of life.<sup>72</sup> Achille Mbembe speaks of this uncertainty and ambiguity at the level of identity formation when he writes that “the postcolonial subject has had to learn to continuously bargain and improvise. Faced with this... the postcolonial ‘subject’ mobilizes not just a single ‘identity,’ but several fluid ‘identities’... in order to achieve maximum instrumentality and efficacy.”<sup>73</sup> For the young women of Yonda, this split in identities tracks the lines of being “home” in Yonda, “free” in the city, loyal in their marriages, and increasingly self-reliant. For example, Mazou asked a recently wed young Latifa how someone comes to leave their husband—“Do you follow the advice of friends or a parent?” Latifa, who notably was not with her husband and instead was staying with friends in Lagos replied, “It’s only you living alone in that family. Only you know what you endure in the home. Do we need to follow the advice of anyone but ourselves?”<sup>74</sup> At which point an unmarried friend added that she wished that she had some guidance from to know how she should navigate her marriage, family and work prospects, but she has to make these decisions alone.

Yet, this balancing act frequently leads to inter-generational strife amongst the Yondans, as children struggle with the familial obligations and their own entitlement to self-determination. Such an analysis is akin to the “counter-school movement” of Paul Willis’ *Learning to Labor*, where working-class kids from Birmingham perpetuate their subordination through their very acts of resistance.<sup>75</sup> The same can be said for Yondan

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<sup>72</sup> Jennifer Johnson-Hanks, “When the Future Decides,” *Current Anthropology* 46, no.3 (June 2005): 364.

<sup>73</sup> Werbner, Richard, “Multiple Identities, Plural Arenas,” in *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*, eds. Richard Werbner and Terrance Ranger (London: Zed Books, 1996):1.

<sup>74</sup> Interview February 2, 2009 in Agégé, Lagos.

<sup>75</sup> Willis, *Learning to Labor*, 1977.

youth, who increasingly eschew their parents' plans, be it to stay in school or return from Nigeria after a few years. As they pursue more individualistic interests, these teenagers and young adults can opt to remain in the cities and have children with non-Yondans or return to the village and marry Yondan. Either way, their acts of resistance help maintain *bopi bateh onati*. For the girls who opt out of return and settle in the city, they become a critical node for Yondans passing through Lagos, Ibadan, Cotonou, etc. For those who return to Yonda and marry, they reproduce the doxa around marriage, as well as the next generation of girls for the domestic service industry.

### **An Undercurrent of Ambivalence**

Thus, on both a material and psychological level, Africans of the contemporary moment are navigating extremes of uncertainty in all aspects of their lives.<sup>76</sup> It is within this context that *bopi bateh onati* operates. And I would argue that this ritualized practice lends a sense of predictability to this climate of uncertainty. Ironically, it is through the process of navigating plural identities and shifting sites of belonging and home as the girls travel through *bopi bateh onati*, that they come to reproduce the system for the next generation.

What is telling about *bopi bateh onati* is that it persists not only within a climate of uncertainty, but despite the suffering it inflicts. It is pervasive and predictable, and with respect to its dependable reproduction of Yondan laborers, the system can be read as orderly. Yet, underlying its efficiency are layers of ambiguity and ambivalence, particularly for those left behind.

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<sup>76</sup> Johnson-Hanks, "When the Future Decides," 364.

I am suffering a lot in the village and my father does not do anything for me, he doesn't even come to visit. Just yesterday, I started to cry as these ideas came into my head. At least I should find someone to help me write a letter to my parents [in Nigeria]. I say to myself, even if my mother could not help me, I could do everything myself. And then I think—no, I am too young, I can't do everything to prepare for the future. Normally, there should be someone like my parents to guide me into my future. There is only my grandfather who just sees me as someone to work in his fields.<sup>77</sup>

Of the numerous interviews Mazou, my project interpreter, and I conducted throughout the project, this teenage boy was one of the most forthright about his feelings of frustration and anger towards his parents. In this particular quote, he describes the angst of being left behind and caught in a place of uncertainty. Even his speech is torn between competing understandings of childhood and parental guidance. It is the voice of an ambiguous identity, even for a child who has never left the village to know an outside world or what he is missing. Part of his lament is being denied the promise of Nigeria as his parents emigrated out of Yonda long ago, but left him to care for an aging grandfather. Not only is his identity contested, but his moral direction is lost. He expects his grandfather to guide him, but finds a man who treats him like a pair of hands.

While frequently instigating the trip out, parents are also left behind and some openly expressed sadness at their children's departure. I witnessed this firsthand as a Peace Corps volunteer when my host sister was sent to Gabon to work as a domestic servant. The day Mariama left with her "Aunti," I could tell something was different even before Kamarou, Abdou's eldest son, had explained what happened. When I walked into the compound after a weekend trip, I noticed that the children who normally are engaged in a constant state of chattering play were quietly sitting together. Fatima, Mariama's

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<sup>77</sup> Interview July 24, 2004 in Yonda. Thirteen year old boy.



mother, was beside the water cistern, monotonously pounding palm nuts in a small wooden mortar. When she looked up, I saw that her eyes were red and swollen. Having grown accustomed to the banality of death in Yonda, I had assumed that someone died. Yet, rather than a public event filled with the wails of women or the din of Yondans offering condolences to the bereaved, the only people present were Fatima and the children. Fatima exercised her loss in private and with reservation, as if shedding tears would be excessive—and perhaps in anticipation of what people would say: “Everybody does it.” “It was time.” “If she hadn’t left, she would have gotten pregnant by her boyfriend. You’re already taking care of two babies since Fousseña died.” “You’ll get through it.” “She’ll be fine.” “She’ll come back fat and rich! You’ll see.”

While geographically absent, these distant adolescents remain in the forefront of the minds of many Yondans. A particularly harrowing example was of Awa, a mother of six who lost two of her daughters to *bopi bateh onati*. And the regulatory committee that was set up in Abeokuta to mediate conflicts among Yondans was largely ineffective, a fact that led to a walk out when the woman who lost Awa’s daughter was put on trial.

According to meeting attendees, the region of Abeokuta has the largest number of Yondans in Nigeria. Every month, they come together to raise money for the *fête d’Alafia* and to resolve any problems of sickness or misfortune in the community. To open this particular meeting, the president began by reading a letter. It was a letter sent by the parents of a lost girl in Nigeria. The daughter had been taken to Nigeria by an *ogá* from Yonda. Now, her parents accused the *ogá*’s husband of harboring the girl and gave him two weeks to bring her back. When the president finished reading the letter, the room was full of rumbling voices as the audience exchanged reactions.

Silence was restored as the accused began to speak. He gave no defense and repeated his requests for support. The elderly father of the accused also took the floor and asked for forgiveness on behalf of his son. A young man from behind the crowd came forward, called him a liar and urged the committee to

refuse support. “If the *ogá* couple had truly lost this girl, the youth continued, then the husband would have solicited help earlier. Instead, his wife placed her in a far off province because of a greedy search for an employer willing to advance a year’s worth of salary.” (Paraphrased) Later, one of the women from the audience agreed with the youth’s assessment that the couple was lying and said they kept the girl captive in this house so she could work off their debt. In disgust, all of the young men suddenly got up, turned and walked out of the meeting.

According to Fossena, a close friend of the mother, the girl’s parents had lost their first daughter years before. Like the second, she was sent to Nigeria to work as a *bonne* “when her breasts were just beginning to form.” Unable to find her after many years, they were convinced she was dead and held a funeral in her honor. Just recently, a Yondan woman discovered the first daughter in Abeokuta, Nigeria. She was married to a Yoruba man and had three children. When news of her whereabouts returned to Yonda, the mother decided to visit Abeokuta to see her daughter and grandchildren. The reunion occurred in the same month that the committee held their meeting for the second daughter.

The parents’ absence from the meeting, both physically and figuratively, was overlooked by the attendees. Throughout the session, people spoke more of the accused and his poor character than of the girl. The committee refused to help because he was not a regular attendee and didn’t pay his monthly dues—not necessarily due to his immorality. Many of the youth had personal gripes against him, which likely prompted the sudden walk out. In the end, no plan was made to find the girl.<sup>78</sup>

As an outsider to the affair, I was left with far more questions than conclusions.

Why were the parents absent from the meeting? Why did the committee postpone searching for the girl? Were the parents negligent to send another daughter after they lost the first or forced to take a second chance? When I asked this question of Mazou, my principal research assistant, he responded by saying, “This is what people do in Yonda. Really, sometimes I’m amazed at the questions you ask!” As if to say, I haven’t learned much after six months of fieldwork.

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<sup>78</sup> Fieldnote, July 1, 2005.

Regardless of individual justifications, the incident highlights the lack of access and monitoring for domestic servants, and the insignificant role parents play in their children's fate abroad. Four years later, we ended up interviewing Awa in Yonda.

Awa: What happened was that my brother-in-law's wife took my daughter to Nigeria. My oldest daughter—I already lost her over there. So, one day, I was told that someone saw her. So, I went to look for my eldest daughter in Lagos. [When I found her], I asked her to return to village with me.

Mazou: What was her name?

Awa: Her name is Magala. She said she didn't have the money for the trip. I was still happy to find her. So I said to her, "Your younger sister is here working. I can get money from her so that we can leave together." The younger daughter was working in Abeokuta. So we went to Abeokuta to get the money to be able to travel back to Yonda. When we arrived in Abeokuta, my brother-in-law's wife told me that she placed her really far away in the state of Ondo. I was scared for my daughter to be so far away and was completely stunned. I was really scared for my girl. So, I brought Magala back to Lagos and then I found someone to bring me to Ibadan, to the placer's house.

Mazou: Who was the placer?

Awa: It's my brother-in-law's wife. The one who took my daughter from village.

Mazou: Isn't she in Abeokuta?

Awa: No that's another woman who told me about my girl—that she had been placed in Ondo. When we arrived in Ibadan, the placer was not home. I met her husband and when I asked where my daughter was, he said, "Your daughter left for Europe." I was shocked. Europe?! My daughter has left for Europe?! Why didn't you tell me before you brought her to Europe? Then I asked him who knew about this? And he said, no one. So I started to cry and he said that I wanted to see my daughter right now. And I knew that he was lying. When I was in the middle of yelling the wife came back home. And she said, "I can't lie to you. Your daughter is lost." When she said that, I started to cry, with my hands on my head. I couldn't even speak. A lot of Yoruba came out to try to calm me down. And the woman who traveled with me started telling the couple how they were evil people, since no one should ever take a girl and lose her. You know, I really suffered with this situation. Every day I would cry in front of their house. I couldn't eat, I was so upset. Then they brought me back here. And I couldn't eat. Only once per day. At night. I got so skinny and so dirty. One day I went to Iwo (in Lagos) to Abou's house, the mason's son's house. He's the husband to my daughter. Then Abou brought me to someone who prays for people. And he gave me some rituals to perform. I did it in Abeokuta and then I left for Oyo. The day I

arrived in Oyo, I heard that my daughter has appeared in Lagos. It was a woman who had come from Yonda and she had heard that my daughter was in Lagos. I first found Sadia, the daughter of Adjara. Well, before I found Sadia, I found a bunch of *Kotokoli* women who sold porridge and I asked about Sadia. At first they said that they didn't know who she was. Then one of them said, "This woman has come from far away. Now why won't you tell her?" And so they told me. She was really close by, with a bunch of other Yondans. I told them that I heard that my daughter Ati was here."

Mazou: Which neighborhood was it where you found the Yondans?

Awa: It was Oshodi, Oh, what do you call the neighborhood?

Mazou: Mile 12?

Awa: Was it Mile 12? Yes, maybe it was Mile 12. It was at Adama's house, the mother to Afirouwa.

Mazou: Then it was Ikeja.

Awa: Yes!! Ikeja. Then Sadia brought me to where Ati worked and I met her patronne. The patronne told me that Ati had come to find work. That she explained to her new boss that she had come from Ondo, where she had fled because her *ogá* had taken an advance and placed her really far away and then completely forgot about her. So, Ati told her story but the woman didn't want to believe her. She said it is the girls who do whatever they want who flee a worksite. But Ati insisted that she had to stay and the woman finally agreed to let her work for her. She was a *Kotokoli* woman. She said that the only reason she took her in was because she believed her story, and that Ati would work for her long enough to be able to travel back to Yonda with clothes and dishes. So, I finally found my girl! I went back to Abeokuta to thank the folks who helped me and they told me the terrible couple had gotten the man who accompanied me locked up. They made up an argument that I had stolen the girl from the house. So, I returned to Ondo with my daughter and went to the jail cell to see the man. When we arrived, the police officer apprehended Ati and asked her who brought her to Lagos. She insisted that she fled on her own because she felt oppressed at her employer's house. The police officer kept hitting her, thinking that would make her talk. I couldn't take it anymore to see my girl hurt and I started yelling at the officer. That night, we both slept in the jail cell. In the morning, the police officer said it was lucky that I found my daughter and he let us go.<sup>79</sup>

Before she found out that her first daughter was still alive, Awa and her family held a funeral for her. When she finally reunited with her in Nigeria, she found her married to a Yoruba man with five children. The second daughter who was lost also

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<sup>79</sup> Interview March 16, 2009 in Yonda. Forty-five year old woman.

married a Yoruba man, and while Awa wishes that she would return for a visit to Yonda, she refuses. At first she said it was due to the lack of funds, but now she just outright refuses to come back. "I don't give away my girls anymore. I won't give them away anymore! I say that I don't give anymore! If my child must travel, it is not for someone to take her. Be it a man or a woman. It's better if she travel herself when she's bigger."<sup>80</sup>

Awa's statement is surprising because she does not deny the trip, even after all that she had suffered by sending her girls away. To the point that she will never get them back as they both married Yoruba men and have established themselves in Nigeria. But in the end, she says, "If my child must travel, then..." Thus, even in the most trying circumstances and for lack of better alternatives, *bopi bateh onati* persists. When generally asked about the practice, most Yondans gave *la pauvreté* as their reason for sending children to work. This may seem illogical for farming families where child labor is essential to household productivity,<sup>81</sup> but many mothers asserted that the benefits of their daughters' work at home paled in comparison to their earnings as domestic servants.<sup>82</sup> Yet, this simple calculation was inconsistent with the common knowledge that *ogás* rarely shared profits with the girls or their families, and every returnee had a story about being cheated. One reason for the contradictory explanations is that girls are not only perceived as a potential source of income, but their presence at home is frequently seen as a financial burden, particularly since the majority of girls are enrolled in school. While most parents expect their children to contribute to school fees once they reach their

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Pamela Reynolds, *Dance Civet Cat: Child Labour in the Zambezi Valley* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1991).

<sup>82</sup> Different from boys, girls leave their families when they marry. As a result, many said that their parents were less likely to invest financially in their futures.

early teens, this task is easier for boys who can work locally as manual laborers. With few opportunities, the girls travel to the cities during school vacations to earn money or find boyfriends to pay for them. And once they reach puberty, the girls are vulnerable to unplanned pregnancies, which further threaten families with an additional charge.

## Conclusion

In this age of uncertainty that characterizes post-Cold War Togo, *bopi bateh onati* is a queer source of brutal predictability that introduces hardened resilience into the lives of young Yondans. As constituent of “an African modernity,”<sup>83</sup> the Yondan city-girl is both person and commodity, torn between familial expectations and her absorption into the political economy of domestic service. In the process of leaving and arriving, uncertainty reenters the girls’ spheres of existence as they come to face contingencies, disappointments, oppressors and benefactors which cultivates the multiple roles Yondan girls come to know in their switch between city and country, daughter and *bonne*.

But this story is not just about the young girls in the city. It is also about the practices and experiences of an entire community and how struggles for livelihood in a postcolonial context produce a complex labor system that is both effective and problematic. Within this system, arbitrary displays of power and “an intrinsic ... regime of impunity”<sup>84</sup> prevail, leaving little room for order and so-called fairness, spanning the levels of top-government officials, including the Eyadema dynasty, to the quarrels

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<sup>83</sup> Michael Hanchard, “Afro Modernity: Temporality, Politics and the African Diaspora,” *Public Culture* 11, no.1 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) 245-268.

<sup>84</sup> Jonathan Cohen, *Borderline Slavery*, Human Rights Watch, 20003.  
<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/04/01/borderline-slavery>.

between victimized parents and children, and the untouchable *ogás*. Like their more prestigious counterparts in the national assembly, these small time authority figures enjoy an exceptionalism born out of a rapacious colonial system and an equally aggressive unregulated labor market. It is also a story about the category of African youth and a reluctance to speak of them as either victims or embodiments of African futures.

As both constitutive members and fugitives of their scripted fates, Yondan adolescents are ambivalent about their obligations and choices. And in a similar way that it ILO representative Michael Bonnet's essentializing representation of Third World children as modern slaves—as “the workers of tomorrow, born of the child labor of today ... are ready for anything, open to any sort of work ... and all sorts of exploitation”<sup>85</sup> — it is also inaccurate to portray *bopi bateh onati* as a mammoth vehicle of control where Yondans have no escape from their scripted fates. However, suggesting that the children or their parents are entirely in control overlooks the fact that the community continues to reproduce legions of dissatisfied workers within a landscape of stark disparities of power. Here, Achille Mbembe's insights into the “aesthetics of vulgarity” are particularly apropos: “The public affirmation of the ‘postcolonized subject’ is not necessarily found in acts of ‘opposition’ or ‘resistance’: to rampant abuses of power in the intimate private spheres and by the state....” Instead, what defines the postcolonial subject is the ability to “engage in baroque practices fundamentally ambiguous, fluid, and modifiable even where there are clear, written, and precise rules.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Michel Bonnet, “Introduction: Child Labour in the Light of Bonded Labour” in *The Exploited Child*, ed. Bernard Schlemmer (London: Zed Books, 2003): 1-18.

<sup>86</sup> Mbembe, *On The Postcolony*, 129.

## Chapter Three: The Construction of Trafficking

### Introduction: Naming Violence

A useful starting point for a discussion on the discourse around trafficking is anthropologist Kay Warren's question about the consequences of making various forms of violence visible, where the trope of trafficking put in motion a set of international norms for "an emerging arena of transnational concern."<sup>87</sup> In the case of Togolese child migrant laborers, I ask, "Is 'trafficking' the best way to name their experiences of violence and exploitation? What are the consequences of circumscribing their experiences in this way?"

For the girls, do trafficking laws protect them from those employers who physically abuse them and those *ogás* who place them in homes in foreign cities, only to neglect them and take their salaries without reimbursing them for their years of labor? Or do the laws only drive the practice further into the domestic sphere, where girls continue to work behind closed doors but within a context of fear as parents, *ogás*, employers and the girls themselves take precautions to evade the anti-trafficking task forces emblazoned by international human rights groups to use the full force of the law to stop them? In the case of the Togolese development community, does the international attention garnered by the country's presumed trafficking problem funnel money back into an industry devastated by the pull out of USAID (The United States Agency for International Development) in 1993? Or do the mandates tied to trafficking dollars force local agencies

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<sup>87</sup> Kay Warren, "The 2000 UN Human Trafficking Protocol: Rights, Enforcement, Vulnerabilities," in *The Practice of Human Rights*, eds. Mark Goodale and Sally Merry Engle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 245.



to forgo their rich knowledge of the terrain and the needs of Togolese children in order to satisfy the expectations of foreign humanitarians bent on eradicating modern day slavery, with West African populations from the Slave Coast serving an easy target for arguments that 19<sup>th</sup> century slave practices have reappeared?

In the following chapter, I begin to address these questions through a discursive exploration of the history behind the global anti-trafficking campaign and an explanation for its largely criminalizing approach towards trafficking eradication. I also show how child trafficking gets conceptually conflated with terms like “modern day slavery” and “sex trafficking,” and reflect on the consequences of these inaccuracies for protecting Togolese children’s rights.

With respect to the practice of naming violence, Jacqueline Berman interrogates what “sex trafficking” names with respect to the campaign in Eastern Europe, which was intended to describe contemporary violence against women, but came to conflate post-socialist forms of gendered labor migration with the illegal movement of prostitutes across borders. Berman found that the criminalization of sex work through the trope of trafficking was an act of statecraft that “reiterate[d] the privileged place of the state in international relations.” Writing during the era of post-1989 European integration, Berman notes that this state performance came at a time of economic instability and increased anxiety over immigration; the anti-trafficking campaign was reflective of the states’ efforts to reassert their sovereignty.

In the *History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault illustrated the polysemous nature of the discourse around sex, noting that there is not one discourse on sex, but multiple

discourses linked to multiple institutions.<sup>88</sup> The same can be said about discourses around trafficking in Togo, where the question becomes, “What exactly are we talking about?” Violence? Labor exploitation? Migration? Sex work? In West Africa, the question is complicated by the fact that violence and exploitation of children articulate with more benign ways that children work in this post-oil boom, post-Cold War economy.

In particular, how is trafficking reflective of a particular development climate in Togo? And how is it reflective of the ways in which childhood and violence are widely understood in Togo? What does it mean to name this violence through the legal norms of international human rights—a discourse that Wendy Brown writes operates off of the assumption of a self-actualized and “ontologically autonomous” subject?<sup>89</sup>

Historian Benjamin Lawrance has looked at different ways of naming violence in his work on the Ghanaian development community’s approach to child labor exploitation prior to the arrival of the trafficking discourse. In “From Child Labor Problem to Child Trafficking Crisis” (Lawrance, 2010), he describes the way in which attempts by the State and development community in Ghana in the 1990s to protect children from labor exploitation was transformed into a national campaign against child trafficking by the early 2000s. He argues that the campaign largely fails to stop “trafficking” because of its narrow legislative focus and reliance on an economic explanation for people’s motivation to send their children into risky labor situations—explanations that ignore autochthonous perspectives on their practices. Lawrance’s work in Ghana draws attention to the difference between an anti-child labor campaign and an anti-trafficking campaign. It also

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<sup>88</sup>Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 33-34.

<sup>89</sup>Wendy Brown, “Suffering the Paradox of Rights,” in ed. Wendy Brown and Janet Halley, *Left Legalism/ Left Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 431.

raises the question, what does it mean for Togolese girls experiencing abuse or neglect as domestic servants in Nigeria that the development community no longer sees them as child laborers, but now categorizes them as trafficking victims? Does the quality of rights and what they index in terms of state and non-state responses differ in the two approaches? Have anti-trafficking dollars weakened the NGO community, as we find in Ghana and Nigeria, or bolstered them?<sup>90</sup>

This chapter considers these questions by addressing the practice of naming violence against Togolese children through the trope of trafficking—which I interpret as a moral rule that draws on specific West African institutions and interests in its making and circulation. I address the birth and life of trafficking through a history of the politics behind the drafting of two foundational documents—the United Nations’ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children; and the U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). The Togolese development community use these documents to name violence against children, I then draw upon Jo Doezema’s concept of the “myth of trafficking” to think about the ideologies underpinning the Protocol and TVPA’s creation, and how these ideologies infuse Togo’s national campaign, as reflected in the recommendations of a highly influential Human Rights Watch report published in 2003.

In the second half of the chapter, I address contestations over the terms “child” and “labor” through a different set of international development documents, the 1990 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and International Labor Organization’s

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<sup>90</sup> Benjamin Lawrance, “From Child Labor ‘Problem’ to Human Trafficking ‘Crisis’: Child Advocacy and Anti-Trafficking Legislation in Ghana,” *International Labor and Working Class History*, no. 78 (Fall 2010): 63-88.

Convention on Worst Forms of Child Labor (C182). As exemplars of this era of rights based development, these agreements reflect the limitations of human rights to protect children's interests, where revisionist neoliberal policies undermine state authority while simultaneously placing blame on these weakened national governments.

### **Article 3: A Contest of Wills**

The contemporary schism in the dominant discourse around trafficking between the neo-abolitionist seeking to abolish modern day slavery and the pro-sex worker lobbyists seeking better working conditions for sex workers is encapsulated in the well documented political wrangling that went into the drafting of Article 3 of the UN Optional Protocol on Trafficking.<sup>91</sup> Article 3 is a key part of the Protocol because it is here that trafficking is defined. And as Kay Warren notes, it is also in Article 3 that the “interplay of the key terms in the protocol—consent, coercion, and vulnerability—and their liberal and moralized heritage” emerge.<sup>92</sup> Here, the debate and imperfect consensus process is most evident, as the definition is vague with a “piling on of issues,”<sup>93</sup> that Warren writes is reflective of the drafting process within the United Nations, where scores of different countries and interests must find a common ground.<sup>94</sup>

As background, the UN Protocol to Suppress, Prevent and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (otherwise known as the Trafficking Protocol) falls under the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime. This convention was held over eleven sessions from January 1999 until October 2000 at the UN Center for

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<sup>91</sup> Kempadoo et al, *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered* (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), xiii.

<sup>92</sup> Warren, “The 2000 UN Human Trafficking Protocol,” 263.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 250.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

International Crime Prevention, also known as the Crimes Commission, in Vienna. In addition to the Trafficking Protocol, the Commission was concurrently negotiating two other protocols: the Arms Protocol related to the smuggling of weapons and the Smuggling Protocol, related to the smuggling of migrants.<sup>95</sup>

With respect to the Trafficking Protocol, debate during the negotiations largely centered on the question of prostitution and whether it was possible for a woman to consent to sex work. According to scholars writing on the politics of the Protocol, how one positioned oneself vis-à-vis prostitution exemplified the major factions of the anti-trafficking campaign, with one side self-identified as the “neo-abolitionists” and the other representing the pro-sex worker lobby.<sup>96</sup> The neo-abolitionists consisted of conservative Christian groups and first-wave secular feminists. These “strange bedfellows” formed an unlikely alliance resting on their shared ideology that all forms of sex work were inherently exploitative towards women; therefore, consent was not an option.<sup>97</sup> Kay Warren notes how, for the neo-abolitionists, it is the prohibition of prostitution that is the key issue, not the movement of victims across borders.<sup>98</sup> The other side consisted of pro-sex worker rights groups that called for an interrogation into the specific working conditions of sex workers, stating that not all sex work was coercive. Instead, the focus should be on labor rights and labor protections, rather than criminalization and the

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<sup>95</sup> Doezema, *Discourse Masters*, 113.

<sup>96</sup> Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 2010; Warren, “The 2000 UN Trafficking Protocol,” 2007; and Melissa Ditmore, “Trafficking in Lives: How Ideology Shapes Policy,” in *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered* (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2005):111.

<sup>97</sup> Warren, “The 2000 UN Trafficking Protocol,” 259.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

prohibition of prostitution. This side represented the more “human rights” centered faction.<sup>99</sup>

I should state at the outset that the bulk of the narratives of the Protocol’s drafting were written by advocates intimately involved in one side or the other of the debate, with Elizabeth Bernstein, Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema all having worked with sex worker rights groups, either prior to becoming scholars or in the process of doing their fieldwork. While Allen Hertzke confines his work to the academy, his account of the rise of Christian human rights with the global campaign against trafficking is an account biased towards the neo-abolitionist approach. As he writes in *Freeing God’s Children*: “The stewardship responsibility of American religionists is suggested by a study showing that the advanced nations of the world have the means to end the global scourge of slavery, which engulfs as many as 27 million people. For those of us who believe that all people are made in the image of God—that they share such inherent dignity—this cause is nothing less than divine mandate.”<sup>100</sup>

The ideological schism is recapitulated in the grouping of NGOs that were involved in the drafting of the Palermo Protocol: the Human Rights Caucus on the side of the sex workers’ lobby and the Human Rights Network on the side of the neo-abolitionists.<sup>101</sup> The eleven NGOs operating under the Caucus included the International Human Rights Law Group (IHRLG) and the Global Alliance against Traffic in Women (GAATW), which was a product of a Thai sex workers’ rights group and the Dutch

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>100</sup> Allen Hertzke, *Freeing God’s Children*, 346. The statistic he quotes of 27 million slaves worldwide comes from Kevin Bales’ *Disposable People*.

<sup>101</sup> Warren, “The 2000 UN Human Trafficking Protocol,” 258.

Foundation against Trafficking in Women (STV). STV was established in the 1980s and was a leading organization in promoting the human rights/victim centered approach to fighting trafficking.<sup>102</sup> It is credited with being the first NGO to identify trafficking in persons (in this case, the movement and exploitation of prostitutes from Eastern Europe into the Netherlands) and to create programs to protect them.

The opposing bloc of abolitionists fell under the Human Rights Network, which combined far-right politicians and conservative lobbyist groups with secular feminists. This group was spearheaded by the Coalition against Trafficking in Women (CATW), with its founder Kathleen Barry, who was resolute in her stance that consent is not possible when it comes to prostitution. As she writes, ““Sex work” language has been adopted out of despair, not because these women promote prostitution but because it seems impossible to conceive of any other way to treat prostitute women with dignity and respect than through normalizing their exploitation.”<sup>103</sup>

### **The Human Rights Caucus (HRC)**

A key figure on the other side of the debate was the founder of the Human Rights Caucus, Ann Jordan, who was a human rights lawyer and director of IHRLG. The Law Group also had an alliance with the Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP), and Jordan invited members of the NSWP to work with the Caucus in lobbying against the neo-abolitionist position during the Protocol negotiations. Both Jo Doezema and Melissa Ditmore, who write about their firsthand accounts participating in the UN forums to draft

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<sup>102</sup> Warren, “The 2000 UN Human Trafficking Protocol,” 260; Georgina Vaz Cabral, *La Traite des Etres Humains*, (Paris : La Découverte, 2006).

<sup>103</sup> Kathleen Barry, as quoted by Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 135.

Article 3, were members of NSWP. The Caucus' stance during the debate was that sex work was voluntary and should be considered like any other trade, and that the phrases "especially women and children," or equating all forms of prostitution with "sexual exploitation" should be struck from the Protocol because it infantilized women and stripped them of their agency. In addition, they advocated for equating prostitution with other forms of labor exploitation in the definition of trafficking, rather than make it an exception.

As an example of the additional layers of political maneuvering during the negotiations, both the Philippines and the United States were important targets of the Caucus' lobbying effort. Initially, the Philippines was sympathetic to the Caucus' position and favored their position of protecting human rights (as compared to criminalizing traffickers) and striking prostitution from the definition of sexual exploitation. However, in the following year of negotiations, CATW began to heavily lobby the Philippines and had one of their representatives join their delegation. The Philippines quickly reversed their position, Doezeema writes, out of fear of being labeled a country that favored legalizing prostitution.<sup>104</sup> As a result, the first draft of the protocol that they presented to the Crimes Commission was similar to the one presented by the United States. The Philippines becomes intent on a child-specific anti-trafficking law and they mirrored the United States' move to emphasize women and children as a cadre of vulnerability in need of protection. The U.S. also included phrases on sexual exploitation that maintained an image of being tough on prostitution while cognizant of the need to build consensus with countries like the Netherlands and Germany, where prostitution was

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<sup>104</sup> Doezeema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 125.



legal. For this reason, they chose to keep the term “sexual exploitation,” which was intentionally vague to encompass a myriad of acts in the definition of trafficking, including prostitution, but not specific to it.

### **The Question of Consent**

Doezema writes how the Protocol’s debate around consent demonstrated how the ideology around the early 20<sup>th</sup> century campaign against white slavery dominated the discourse at the Commission. As mentioned above, consent was central to the abolitionists because they believed that women could not consent to sex for money. It was also key to the Caucus’ stance that the only category of persons in need of special protection were children, defined as under the age of eighteen. In addition, the Caucus pushed for more porous boundaries, arguing that a criminalizing approach, in the form of increased patrols, deportations and state seizures of detained sex workers’ travel documents, was a greater affront to their human rights than their work as prostitutes. However, like the neo-abolitionists, they believed that traffickers (i.e. those who engage in coercion and deception of all kinds of migrant laborers) should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

Defining sex trafficking in this way implies that girls come into adulthood through their capacity to consent to sex. Yet, the discussion about consenting to sex is never an issue for men, on the other hand. Thus, even by engaging in the debate around consent, the sex worker lobby is condoning a passive female configuration. As Doezema writes, “Children can never consent to sex, adult women can sometimes consent to sex, adult men never need to say no to heterosexual sex. Men become adult through sexual

desire, women through sexual receptiveness. The consent standard so inscribes the duality of active male and passive female sexuality, it is hard to believe that feminists continue to advocate it with such force. Even more astounding is the centrality of the consent standard for sex workers rights advocates.”<sup>105</sup> The implicit passivity of women’s presence within the Protocol is further reinforced in consideration of the Smuggling Protocol, a gender neutral document speaking to undocumented migrants who actively cross border illegally. In contrast to the female/child victims of the Trafficking Protocol, the knowing agents of the Smuggling Protocol were implicitly male.<sup>106</sup> Doezema goes on to fault the supposedly feminist Caucus for putting prostitution back into the discussion and allowing “sex work” to fall out of the drafting process. Thus, like the abolitionists, the conversation re-centers around prostitution—both forced and voluntary. The return of the “whore” as Doezema writes is proof that the myth around white slavery, with its fin de siècle campaign promoting an ideology of protected innocents, still holds sway in the policy formations around present day trafficking.

While Ann Jordan invited NSWP to actively participate in the Protocol’s drafting, NSWP ultimately pulls support from both sides of the debate because of the issue with consent and the way in which the Caucus attempted to shore up the legitimacy of the “human rights” side by denying the voice and identity of the sex workers. As Doezema writes, “We could be there, as long as we did not appear to be sex workers.”<sup>107</sup> By couching the issue through liberal human rights ideals of consent and freedom, Doezema writes that the issue becomes one of “‘voluntary prostitution as work’ versus ‘forced

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>106</sup> Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 126; Ditmore, “Trafficking in Lives,” 109.

<sup>107</sup> Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 153.

prostitution as violence”, which can turn into an issue of forced versus voluntary work, with the former in need of rescue by a human rights apparatus. Ultimately, the Caucus fails to persuade the delegates to completely strip the terms “especially women and children” and “sexual exploitation” from the final draft that was enacted on December 25, 2003.<sup>108</sup> In addition, the Caucus pushed for victims to be able to testify against their traffickers. Ironically, this act of empowerment becomes a troubling mandate for asylum seekers, as Christiana Giordano writes, with respect to Nigerian trafficking victims seeking asylum in Italy.<sup>109</sup>

Thus, while the neo-abolitionists deny consent and the pro-sex worker lobby embraced consent and voluntarism within prostitution, NSWP and Doezema call for a different stance, since the discussion of consent is bound within a liberal feminist tradition. Kay Warren, who also wrote extensively on the politics behind the Protocol, explains:

What troubles sex work activists is the unintended consequence of this language, especially with the renewed international politicization of trafficking. From their point of view, the contrast between ‘free workers’ and ‘forced workers’ can easily slip into a distinction between free workers who need rights and forced workers who need rescue. Suddenly liberalism is transformed into another variant of neo-abolitionism.”<sup>110</sup>

Here, the key tension is with the different strands of feminism at play in the trafficking debate, the radical first-wave anti-patriarchy feminism of the neo-abolitionists and the liberation model of the sex-worker rights’ campaign.

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<sup>108</sup> Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 261; Ditmore, “Trafficking in Lives: How Ideology Shapes Policy,” 111.

<sup>109</sup> See Christiana Giordano, “Practices of Translation and the Making of Subjectivity in Italy,” *American Ethnologist* 35, no.4 (2008):588-606.

<sup>110</sup> Warren, “The 2000 UN Trafficking Protocol,” 262.

## **“The Good News about Injustice is that God is Against It”<sup>111</sup> : The Evangelical Turn and the Creation of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act**

If the drafting of the United Nations Protocol was dominated by the debate between the neo-abolitionists and the sex workers’ rights lobby, the creation of the US Trafficking Victims’ Protection Act (TVPA) was an example of neo-abolitionists in the comfort of their own home. Here, a harmonious collaboration amongst radical feminists, evangelical Christians and politicians from across the political spectrum led Congress to pass the TVPA, a piece of legislation that calls for a zero-tolerance and criminalizing approach to trafficking eradication. In *Freeing God’s Children*, Allen Hertzke carefully documents this unusual collaboration, and notes that the U.S. involvement in the global anti-trafficking campaign, as well as the U.S. passage of the International Religious Freedom Act in 1998, are the two seminal examples of the faith-based turn towards international humanitarianism. Hertzke presents a problematic anti-trafficking campaign prior to the faith-based involvement due to existing NGOs being too soft on prostitution and sexual exploitation: “The response to this grotesque trade by some international NGOs and AIDS prevention programs [had] not included attempting to set the victims free. Instead, young girls have been treated as ‘sex workers,’ given ‘assertiveness and self-esteem’ training, encouraged to develop ‘solidarity’ with each other and better relations with their pimps, and taught how to ‘negotiate’ condom use with foreign customers. Astonishingly, some of these programs were funded or promoted by agencies of the U.S. government, a practice that began in the Clinton administration but lingered

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<sup>111</sup> Gary Haugen, founder and president of the Christian-based International Justice Mission. As quoted in Gary Haugen, *Good News about Injustice* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999).

into 2003, when activists calling themselves the ‘New Abolitionists’ against slavery finally quashed it.”<sup>112</sup> (Emphasis in original)

Hertzke goes on to discuss the evangelical involvement in American’s human rights “leadership” through the passage of the TVPA by Congress in October 2000.<sup>113</sup> Two key figures catalyzing the legislation were Laura Lederer, a secular feminist activist who was a lawyer and co-founder of “Take Back the Night.” In the 1990s she also established the Protection Project in the mid-1990s to document global trafficking routes and anti-trafficking efforts by countries around the world. The other person was Gary Haugen, an evangelical and former Department of Justice lawyer, who was inspired by his work on the genocide in Rwanda to “reclaim the vocabulary of justice for the evangelical community.”<sup>114</sup> His mission was to help “victims of oppression” through the founding of International Justice Mission (IJM) in 1997.<sup>115</sup> While IJM’s mandate is broader than solely addressing trafficking, his work became central to pushing forward the anti-trafficking campaign within the United States. Haugen’s personal transformation into an anti-trafficking celebrity came when he led a highly publicized brothel raid in Asia, cutting the padlock himself to free thirty-seven sex workers, including a number of young girls. To this day, he keeps the padlock on his desk as a reminder of his continued need to struggle for freedom. Jessica Neuwirth, who formerly worked for Amnesty International, was also a key figure in the lead up to the TVPA. She was disturbed by the

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<sup>112</sup> Hertzke, *Freeing God’s Children*, 316.

<sup>113</sup> In 2002, Donna Hughes spoke before Congress about the dangers of sex-work projects that promoted prostitution, and named organizations such as Doctors Without Borders as one of the offending groups. Following her testimony, the US State Department began withholding US Agency for International Development (USAID) funds from organizations deemed to promote prostitution, which included many working on a harm reduction model to promote better working conditions for sex workers, including the prevention HIV infection, etc.; Ditmore, “Trafficking in Lives,” 118

<sup>114</sup> Hertzke, *Freeing God’s Children*, 319.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

apologetic nature the human rights community towards female genital mutilation and sex trafficking and started Equality Now to demand tougher responses to acts of violence against women. Political strategist Michael Horowitz, who was an advisor under Ronald Reagan and directly involved in the drafting of the International Religious Freedom Act (IFRA), declared that trafficking was the human rights issue of “our time.” He gave the alliance the political muscle it needed to gain access to Washington power brokers, and also advised Lederer to enlist the star power of Gloria Steinem to secure the feminist block.<sup>116</sup>

One of the biggest obstacles to their lobby was their sentiment that the U.S. State Department was overly sympathetic to the pro-prostitution movement and would not support a law that had “teeth” to it.<sup>117</sup> The solution was to publicly denounce State Department officials as being pro-prostitution, which Laura Lederer did in 1999. She identified Ann Jordan of the International Human Rights Law Group (IHRLG) – who was also part of the Human Rights Caucus involved in the Palermo Protocol—as the main culprit in influencing officials to be “pro-choice.”<sup>118</sup> Congress eventually passes the TVPA in October 2000 based on a joint sponsored bill from Democrat Paul Wellstone and Republican Sam Brownback. However, the neo-abolitionist alliance was frustrated by the law’s poor implementation and worked hard to reform the State Department’s response so its enforcement would match the zero-tolerance tone of the law itself. For example, neo-abolitionist activists found that the first two years of the *Trafficking in Persons* (TIP) report were ineffective because the State Department would not condemn

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 396.

countries they believed had rampant trafficking problems. In addition, they activists objected to the State Department's funding of organizations that took a harm reduction approach to sex work. "By the summer of 2002 activists were increasingly pointed in their criticism, referring to the Bush administration's enforcement of the Trafficking Act as 'comic mishandling,' ... there was serious talk among evangelicals about the need to embarrass their president to get action. Horowitz was incredulous that the administration would allow itself to become vulnerable to 60 Minutes-type exposés about government grantees that 'teach seven-year-old girls how to get their customers to wear condoms and to use techniques that make sexual penetration less painful.'"<sup>119</sup>

Doezema reads the collaboration between radical feminists and conservative politicians to be based on a series of "nimble juxtapositions"<sup>120</sup> where "organized crime is equated to terrorism; is equated to trafficking." She sites Ernst Laclau's "chains of equivalences" to explain how these juxtapositions work.<sup>121</sup> Instead of meanings that correspond to a fixed ideology, these connections act as "free-floating signifiers," and their meaning becomes fixed through the "mode of their hegemonic articulation."<sup>122</sup> In chains of equivalence, concepts are inherently interchangeable. Thus, with the articulation of one term, an entire sequence is evoked.<sup>123</sup>

This slippage of associations becomes the ideological force driving the trafficking discourse, which takes different turns depending on the side of the debate. For the pro-sex workers, trafficking is equated with Bush era conservatism and puritanical wars against

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<sup>119</sup> Hertzke, "Freeing God's Children," 331.

<sup>120</sup> Doezeema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 130.

<sup>121</sup> See Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, London and New York: Verso, 1990).

<sup>122</sup> Zizek (1994) as quoted by Doezeema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 12.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 130-131.

women's bodies and choice. This fear was reinforced through the campaign by Senator Jesse Helms and the CATW to couch the Clinton administration as pro-prostitution for their sympathy with the Caucus' call for greater human rights protections for sex workers and the need for the Trafficking Protocol to address all forms of labor.<sup>124</sup> In the case of the neo-abolitionist stance, trafficking is aligned with terrorism, sex slavery-cum- white slave trade, and global capital's voracious demand for "disposable people."<sup>125</sup>

Elizabeth Bernstein has also written on the TVPA and the unlikely alliance of feminists and evangelicals. For Bernstein, the reasons behind the coalition went beyond the moral imperative to abolish "modern day slavery," or a shared view on gender and sexuality, as critics have asserted.<sup>126</sup> Instead, Bernstein couches the perspectives of figures like Haugen and Lederer to be reflective of an emergent paradigm of social justice by the state Bernstein names "carceral feminism" and "militarized humanitarianism."<sup>127</sup> Carceral refers to the push by these feminists towards a criminalization model to prosecute traffickers, as well as the prosecution of "bad men's" predatory desires. Here, Bernstein writes that feminists shift from fighting violent patriarchy inside the home to fighting women's enslavement by the global sex industry; an industry run by criminal networks gaining traction with globalization.<sup>128</sup> In addition, Bernstein tracks the shift in the U.S. evangelical movement from focusing on abortion issues (i.e. sexually improper women) to a focus on sexually predacious men. Both groups are turning away from direct

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<sup>124</sup> Although it is interesting how Christian coalitions are interpreted as a force against the corporate interests that influence American foreign policy. (See Hertzke, *Freeing God's Children*, 341); Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 128.

<sup>125</sup> Kevin Bales, *Disposable People*, 1999.

<sup>126</sup> See Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 2010; Kempadoo et al, *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered*, 2005.

<sup>127</sup> Elizabeth Bernstein, "Militarized Humanitarianism meets Carceral Feminism," *Signs* 36, no.1(2010):45.

<sup>128</sup> Hertzke, *Freeing God's Children*, 317; Delila Amir and Karen Becks, "Introduction," *Trafficking and the Global Sex Industry*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), xi-xviii.



engagement with the gender politics of the family and toward a focus on sexual violence in the public sphere, and through these shifts come an embrace of neoliberal consumer politics and a militarized state apparatus.<sup>129</sup>

In a previous article, Bernstein writes that the alliance is reflective of a turn towards increasingly market-based and punitive solutions to present day social problems.<sup>130</sup> This is in contrast to an earlier wave of feminism, particularly Marxist feminists, who called for a redistributive model of justice. Bernstein faults both liberals and conservatives for their support of “carceral politics” and an expansion of the criminalization model to all domains of trafficking.<sup>131</sup> She also notes how the two groups have shifted their political commitments towards the center, with secular liberals and radical feminists calling for incarceration and Christian conservatives moving away from domestic issues, like abortion and gay marriage, towards international humanitarianism.<sup>132</sup>

Bernstein also notes an absolute shift in the political discourse around trafficking, where the reservations voiced by pro-sex worker rights groups like NSWP are no longer acceptable. In addition, free market capitalism is serving as a boon for evangelical groups, where the carceral model is gaining hold in countries where the views championed by the religious right are weak, but the welfare state is under attack and therefore vulnerable to these ideological interventions.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Bernstein, “Militarized Humanitarianism,” 67.

<sup>130</sup> Elizabeth Bernstein, “The Sexual Politics of the ‘New Abolitionism,’” *Differences* 18, no. 3 (2007).

<sup>131</sup> Bernstein, “Militarized Humanitarianism,” 46-47.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

## Behind Closed Doors: Revelations on the “Myth”<sup>134</sup> of Trafficking

In *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, Jo Doezema uses the concept of myth to answer a series of questions: “Why, in the present day, is this particular feminist issue is so high on the international political agenda?”; “Why has it been so difficult to come to a consensus about the definition of trafficking?”; and, “Why have false assumptions (like child trafficking is an outgrowth of traditional practices of fostering) and fabricated statistics circulated without interrogation or correction?” (For example, in a study done by Ronald Weitzer, he found that “there are no reliable statistics on the magnitude of trafficking.”<sup>135</sup>) For Doezema, the reason it was so difficult for stakeholders to agree is that they had intensely different ideological positions regarding race, the state, “women’s sexuality and the gendered meaning of consent.”<sup>136</sup> She uses the idea of myth to move from an epistemological approach to trafficking (does it exist? If so, to what extent?) to a sociological one (what is the function of trafficking discourse and what lays behind the concern with trafficking?)<sup>137</sup> Doezema does not deny trafficking exists, which is why she is careful to disassociate myth with falsity, an inference she sees as “an exercise in revisionism of the most reprehensible sort” for those who have been victims of the crimes encapsulated by trafficking.<sup>138</sup> Instead, myth for Doezema is a narrative with ideological undertones. In the case of the debate between neo-abolitionists and sex worker rights

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<sup>134</sup> Doezema quotes Grittner’s use of myth to mean, “As an uncritically accepted collective belief, a myth can help explain the world and juridical institutions and actions... When it is repeated in similar form from generation to generation, a myth discourse a moral content, carrying its own meaning, secreting its own values. The power of myth lies in the totality of explanation. Rough edges of experience can be rounded off. Looked at structurally, a cultural myth is a discourse, ‘a set of narrative formulas that acquire through specifiable historical action a significant ideological charge’.” (Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 32).

<sup>135</sup> Weitzer, Ronald, “The Social Construction of Sex Trafficking: Ideology and Institutionalization of a Moral Crusade,” *Politics and Society* 35, no. 3 (2007): 447-75.

<sup>136</sup> Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 170.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

organizations, any discussion about the truth or falsity of trafficking only furthered their ideological divisions; revealing the performative nature of myth that “is not regulated according to a regime of truth and falsehood, but by its sheer power to move.”<sup>139</sup>

Doezema draws off of philosopher Ernst Laclau to write how ideology lacks a clear center, and thus is able to serve as a necessary illusion for society as a whole. Rather than distort truth, as Marx’s false consciousness would assert, Laclau’s post-modern version of ideology gives the illusion that truth every existed in the first place. “It is because there is no center, no ultimate truth, that ideology is necessary.”<sup>140</sup> This is significant, because Doezema believes that better statistics will not uncover the truth about trafficking. Such truth is impossible to achieve because trafficking is not true or false, but rather a forum for inscribing differing ideological positions. As she writes, “the concept of myth offers a useful starting point for an analysis of trafficking [because] it moves us beyond an empirical focus to an examination of why and how certain groups in society, including feminists [and evangelical Christians], are so invested in the myth.”<sup>141</sup> For Doezema, this myth is a recapitulation of the myth around white slavery that, like trafficking, was of feminist concern before it got on national and international agendas. The narratives about innocent girls being forced into sex slavery that were popular during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century campaign against white slavery have been resurrected through the campaign against trafficking. Like many other scholars, Doezema links the “moral panic” around trafficking to the dominant discourse of white slavery.<sup>142</sup> “An understanding of

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>142</sup> See Weitzer, “The Social Construction of Sex Trafficking”; Mary Ann Irwin, *White Slavery: As Metaphor Anatomy of a Moral Panic* (Vancouver: Commercial Sex Information Services, 1999); Jacqueline Berman, “(Un)Popular

the ways in which myth is informed by ideology can help us understand not only the reasons for the appearance of the white slave in history, but also the reappearance of her mythical successor, the trafficking victim.”<sup>143</sup>

Anthropologist John Fredericks also talks about the myth of trafficking, but he takes it as a “typifying narrative” that erases the complexity of social issues. Similarly, Doezema sees the myth as doing something. Its functions include reifying consent and acting as a platform for the inscription of social activists’ demands, while accommodating a sundry of different ideologies (e.g. radical feminism and evangelical Christianity.) Trafficking is performative of reality, such as the way in which the figure of a victim of sex trafficking emerges through the reification of consent. Per Doezema, the discourse suggests that women can never truly consent to sex because gendered norms inscribe women to the role of passive receiver and men to the role of active, desirous agents. “Attempts to define trafficking in Vienna, to decide which situations constituted ‘real’ trafficking, moved round the fulcrum of consent—just as for anti-white slavery campaigners, consent was the dividing line that distinguished between ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ white slavery. Either all migration for prostitution was to be considered trafficking, because choice to engage in sex work was considered impossible; or trafficking was deemed to occur only in those cases in which possible consent was seen as absent: whether consent was deemed possible or impossible, present or absent, it was the standard by which the actual situations of migrating sex workers (and others) came to be determined.”

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Strangers and Crises (Un)Bounded: Discourses of Sex-Trafficking, the European Political Community and the Panicked State of the Modern State,” *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no.1 (2003): 37-86.

<sup>143</sup> Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 31.

In short, Doezema's myth involves the manifestations of compassionate concern for an idealized victim of trafficking found in United Nations documents, NGO reports, media news stories, etc, as well as the activities necessary to produce these expressions of concern. Why this concern and why now? For one, trafficking gains a lot more traction during the Bush administration, where it comes to be equated with slavery, organized crime and terrorism. Per Laclau, it is hegemonic articulations that fix meaning to particular ideologies. Thus, it is power, rather than truth, that defines trafficking. In addition, Doezema's myth also functions as a metaphor for larger concerns about social upheaval. During the campaigns against white slavery, there were concerns about shifts in the role of women and their sexuality within the context of increasing urbanization and mass global migration. During the Protocol conference in Vienna, Doezema notes how "trafficking in women" encompassed a similar list of concerns over social dislocations, where "negotiations showed trafficking operating in a like metaphorical function, as the arena in which shifting ideas around sexuality, the role of women and ideas of labor and citizenship were contested."<sup>144</sup>

As my own research shows, examples of the idealized trafficking victim—the ultimate innocent thumb sucking child forced to work seven days a week from morning until night for an abusive employer was a relative rarity amongst the scores of Yondans we interviewed and profiled. While there is no question that abuse and neglect occurred, this had to do more with the riskiness of traveling to the city and working for strangers than the fact that these girls were being intentionally exploited or sold as "slaves." Many Yondans judged this risk worth taking, particularly before fees were eliminated from

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 172.

rural public schools. Instead, a far more prevalent scenario was parents sending their adolescent daughters to work as domestics for middle class urban families, as uneven development created stark class divisions across borders and between rural and urban zones. Rather than Pied Piper-like profiteers duping these girls to work—as Kate Manzo would assert—the girls largely opted into *bopi bateh onati* because they, along with their parents, deemed that school was not worth the sacrifice of time and money, and it was better to work than to stay home waiting for something.<sup>145</sup> Adolescents and parents also used Nigeria to solve interpersonal conflicts around issues like unwanted pregnancies, forced marriage and sexual harassment in school—sometimes more so than to fulfill basic needs for food and medicines.

John Frederick writes that his myth as “typifying narrative” erases any complexities of a social issue, witting them down to essentialized trope of “morals, heroism, and emotionality” presented as fact.<sup>146</sup> This myth also resists change when new information presents itself or the context changes, although it is easily persuaded by political agendas and prejudices, as we saw with the TVPA’s drafting. Many of the alternative voices adding to the debate on trafficking do so by looking at the forces shaping the discourse and its effect over time.<sup>147</sup>

In Frederick’s account of the trafficking of Nepali girls into India, he shows how the narrative has changed from the late 1980s to present day. The original myth for Nepal

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<sup>145</sup> For a discussion on the politics of waiting, see Craig Jeffrey, *Timepass: Youth, Class and the Politics of Waiting in India* (Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 2010).

<sup>146</sup> John Frederick, “The Myth of Nepal-to-India Sex Trafficking,” in Kempadoo et al, *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered*, 128.

<sup>147</sup> See Warren, “The 2000 UN Trafficking Protocol,” 2007; Bernstein, “Militarized Humanitarianism meets Carceral Feminism,” 2010; Jyoti Sanghera, “Unpacking the Trafficking Discourse,” in ed. Kamala Kempadoo, Jyoti Sanghera and Bandana Pattanaik, *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered* (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2005).

echoed his presentation of “Gita,” an adolescent Nepali girl from a rural area who was drugged by a strange man when she went to buy her mother oil and was offered a Pepsi-Cola by the stranger. When she awakes, she finds herself in a filthy brothel in the city where a sinister madam tells her that she is to start turning tricks with male clients, many who are HIV positive and believe sleeping with virgins will cure them of their disease. When she refuses, she is raped by a gang of thugs twenty times a day for a week until she is beat into submission and begins her tenure as a sex worker. She is the ultimate innocent, as are her parents, who are unaware of her venture into sexual servitude. Now, we find a different figure of a trafficking victim. As NGOs understanding of the practice changed over the decade that the Nepali campaign has been in force, they have shifted the way in which they present the Gita narrative. For example, with respect to recruitment, the original myth only had traffickers from out of town because the government did not want to insinuate that any of their constituents may be involved in trafficking. “In the past severe years, however, the myth has accommodated the reality of local citizens and returned sex workers being recruiters for the traffickers.”<sup>148</sup>

He concludes that much of the myth will remain as it helps raise funds for the anti-trafficking campaign, as well as presents doable interventions, like brothel raids by police task forces as compared to getting rid of the root causes of poverty, etc.<sup>149</sup> This rendering of trafficking into a form that is intervention friendly is akin to Ferguson’s account in *Anti-Politics Machine* where the development community insisted that Lesotho’s economic problems were rooted in poor agricultural techniques instead of the

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<sup>148</sup> Frederick, “The Myth of Nepal-to-India Sex Trafficking,” 132.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

far more daunting political problem of unfair working conditions for the country's migrant workforce toiling in South African Mines.<sup>150</sup>

### **From Emancipation to Human Rights: The Veil of Humanitarianism**

No paradox of contemporary politics is filled with a more poignant irony than the discrepancy between the efforts of well-meaning idealists who stubbornly insist on regarding as 'inalienable' those human rights, which are enjoyed only by citizens of the most prosperous and civilized countries, and the situation of the rightless themselves. –Hannah Arendt<sup>151</sup>

In the following section, I discuss human rights documents specific to children and labor, as well as the rights based development paradigm impacting the way in which African countries like Togo implement their trafficking campaigns. I begin with the writings of Africanist Kate Manzo, who reads trafficking less as an ideology than another form of exploitation, akin to slavery but different. Writing specifically to the issue of child labor exploitation in West Africa, Manzo is not critical of the trafficking discourse in the same way as Doezema and Frederick, and notes that international law and the development community have conflated slavery with trafficking. For Manzo, what traffickers exploit is traditional practices (child fostering) and situations of poverty within a wider context of uneven development.”<sup>152</sup> She brings in uneven development as a specific explanation for poverty's link to trafficking. “Uneven development” refers to the way in which globalization has benefited industrialized countries over less developed countries, as well as creating greater class divisions within countries, thus associated with both spatial and social inequalities. Drawing off of dependency theory, it is the way in

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<sup>150</sup> See James Ferguson, *Anti-Politics Machine* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

<sup>151</sup> Arendt, Hannah, “The Perplexities of the Rights of Man,” *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), 279.

<sup>152</sup> Kate Manzo, “Exploiting West Africa's Children: Trafficking, Slavery and Uneven Development,” *Area* 37, no. 4 (2005): 394.



which some countries become progressively more developed at the expense of others.<sup>153</sup>

Like Doezema, she agrees that the solution to weak statistics on trafficking is not to seek better survey methods. Instead, the numbers problem has to do with inconsistencies in the way in which “children” and “trafficking” are defined.<sup>154</sup>

For Manzo, the problem is a contestation over the terms “child” and “trafficking.” If older adolescents (aged 15 to 18 years old) were excluded from the definition of children, for example, than the statistics would be considerably lower. Similarly, per Manzo, there is the conceptual differentiation between slavery and trafficking, where both acts focus on labor and force, but trafficking is a means towards slavery that involves movement.<sup>155</sup> Thus, it is difficult to get reliable statistics because, per international law, there are inherent contradictions in the terms for child, slavery and trafficking. She concludes by saying that the old narrative of children and families being forced into slave-like conditions is inaccurate. Rather, it is uneven development and the hope for better horizons elsewhere that lures people into trafficking, and they later discover that these promises were false promises.

### **A Child. At what age?**

As Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Carolyn Sargent write in *Small Wars*, bringing a child into the world is a political act that touches on class divisions, as well as “cultural notions of personhood, morality, social order and disorder.”<sup>156</sup> In the case of Yondan girls working in Nigeria, their lives could not be more political—they are at the heart of international attention over trafficking, at the same time that they serve as a crucial

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<sup>153</sup> Manzo, “Africa in the Rise of Rights-Based Development,” 440-441.

<sup>154</sup> On the careless use of statistics, see Cabral, *La Traite des Etres Humains*, 6; Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 6-8; Kempadoo, *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered*, xix.

<sup>155</sup> Manzo, “Exploiting West Africa’s Children,” 396.

<sup>156</sup> Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Carolyn Sargent, *Small Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 2.

resource for their families dependently waiting for them back in Yonda. They are also in the process of becoming Togolese citizens and West African wage labor migrants, largely shaped by their formative years working as domestic servants. Much of this dissertation portrays the lives of older adolescent girls who have been formed by their experience of working as domestic servants at a young age. They are “youth” because they are unmarried, yet their biological ages ranged from 15-25 years old—in this respect, they were more adult than child.<sup>157</sup> Yet, they all had stories of being sent through *bopi bateh onati* as young adolescents, around the ages of twelve to sixteen. In rare cases, some girls left at eight or nine years of age. If they were this young, they were working with a relative. If they ended up working for strangers, it was due to the negligence of the foster parent, whose actions the larger Yondan community judged abusive and unacceptable.

Thus, the relevant age bracket for my discussion of trafficking is the beginning years of puberty for a girl. This is the grey zone when a girl is no longer of dependent child status and not yet a child-bearing woman. She may also have had a few years of schooling. Since parents typically expect their daughter to prioritize domestic chores over studies, by this age, a girl is likely to begin failing classes and opinions start forming that she does not have the “head” for school. It also starts to solidify in parents’ minds that they should no longer be providing for their daughter, that she is not going to make it in school, and that she may be at risk for pregnancy—particularly if she has started dating. If she did get pregnant, her parents would have to take in the baby; then they would have two mouths to feed.

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<sup>157</sup> Manzo, “Exploiting West Africa’s Children,” 395.

Study constraints precluded us from interviewing many pre-teen working girls who were confined to their employers' homes. In addition, their peers did not want to take us to visit them for fear that the girls would get in trouble or lose their jobs. However, I can say that the majority of Yondan females started working as pre-teens from what they reported in their narratives. I belabor the point about age because it brings us to a discussion about how rights based development constructs childhood, child trafficking and consent.

In a prior era, a person under eighteen may have had the right to accept work across borders and not be considered a victim of trafficking. As Kate Manzo writes, 1990 was the year of children's rights with the United Nations' General Assembly's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). And while Article 1 of the CRC defines a child as any person under the age of eighteen, it qualifies that this is variable if "under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier."<sup>158</sup> However, by the time the UN Trafficking Protocol is passed in 2000, that caveat is removed and the age of a child is fixed as under eighteen, despite the critiques that this standardized definition does not acknowledge cultural differences and agency of adolescent workers, or the contested and "nonsynchronous" way in which adulthood is achieved.<sup>159</sup> Prior to fixing the age of adulthood, the international community had a more flexible take on childhood with the International Labor Organization (ILO)'s Minimum Age Convention (C138) held in 1973. Article 2 of the Convention defines the universal minimum working age for children to be 15 years; however it also gives a range of 12-18

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<sup>158</sup> Manzo, "Exploiting West Africa's Children," 395.

<sup>159</sup> Elsbeth Robson, "Children at Work in Rural Northern Nigeria," *Journal of Rural Studies* 20 (2004): 193-210; K Moore, "Supporting Children in the Working Lives: Obstacles and Opportunities within the International Policy Context," *Journal of International Development* 12,(2000): 531-48.; Johnson-Hanks, "On the Limits of Life Stages in Ethnography," 865.

years as also acceptable based on a set of three variables. These are the age at which a child completes compulsory schooling, the type of work the child is doing and the level of development for the country in which the child is working. For example, a twelve-year-old child living in a country with an “insufficiently developed” economy or educational system would be allowed to do benign, “light work.” Per C138, any work that impairs the health, safety or morals of a “young” person is unacceptable.<sup>160</sup>

However, the Minimum Age Convention (C138) is not often cited in human rights reports on child trafficking. Instead, the far more relevant document is the 1999 ILO’s Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, which recognizes the older adolescent category of 15-18 to be less problematic for child labor. Drawing off of the worst forms of labor from C138, ILO C182 also includes slavery and slave-like practices, such as trafficking. In the same year, the ILO established the International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC), as an agency to eradicate the forms for labor outlined in C182, including slavery, trafficking, and child prostitution. Yet, as Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Carolyn Sargent note, with children’s entitlements to rights also come with responsibilities. “Since, in neoliberal political terms, individual rights must always be accompanied by responsibilities, the rights-bearing child must also be held accountable for his or her actions.”<sup>161</sup> How do we make sense of this with respect to child trafficking responses in West Africa?

### **Rights-Based Development**

An earlier article by Manzo contextualizes Togo and Nigeria’s anti-trafficking campaign as part of a larger wave of rights based development (RBD) that began after the

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<sup>160</sup> Manzo, “Exploiting West Africa’s Children,” 395.

<sup>161</sup> Scheper-Hughes and Sargent, *Small Wars*, 13.

Cold War and continues on to the present day. In her article, Manzo traces the climate within the United Nations, as well as broader political context that ushered in the rights based development era. RBD emerged during a period of “revisionist neo-liberalism” when international development agencies like the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) began reflecting on their failures and respond to the critiques over neoliberal policies, such as the structural adjustment programs (SAP) that were implemented across Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980s. Thus, if the 1980s was the period of structural adjustment, the 1990s ushered in the age of individual and human rights.<sup>162</sup> Critics blamed SAP for the widespread poverty and political decay, but Manzo notes how the World Bank’s own rhetoric places blame for the “undue stress on the poor” on the failure of undisciplined and ineffective states to implement economic reforms, rather than inherent inequities within the capitalist world system.<sup>163</sup>

With respect to the implementation of anti-trafficking legislation in sub-Saharan Africa, Benjamin Lawrance and Ruby Andrew write about the dramatic about-face countries have made to implement laws against traffickers. “From 2000 to 2010, and predating the inception of the USDOS TIP reports, approximately fifty entirely new individual labor laws, anti-trafficking statutes, or significant amendments have been passed by African legislatures.”<sup>164</sup> They track the trends amongst the trafficking laws and found that they fell into three general categories: those that have a “blanket” approach to legislating all forms of trafficking, those that are centered specifically on “child” trafficking, and those that have opted out of creating specific trafficking laws in favor of

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 442-443.

<sup>164</sup> Benjamin Lawrance and Ruby Andrew, “A “Neo-Abolitionist Trend” in Sub-Saharan Africa?” *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* 9, no. 2 (2011): 629.

using existing laws to regulate abuses against children. They note that the “blanket” approach is closely aligned with a neo-abolitionist agenda that is “gripping” African governance of child labor and migration. He sees the passage of blanket laws as part of a legislative trend, where most countries are moving towards this all-encompassing approach, and those countries like Togo and Benin that have limited their laws to child trafficking are in a “transitory” phase, and likely will adopt a blanket law. In the case of the neo-abolitionist legislative trend, they find a greater collaboration across state and non-state agencies, along with greater “diplomatic, economic and social pressures,” where the state’s laws address an emergent understanding of slavery and trafficking.<sup>165</sup> Lawrance and Andrew’s study was also significant for its historical review of abolitionist interventions by African governments that long predates the present campaign, noting that recent anti-trafficking laws have more to do with this shared history across the continent than to a neo-imperialist pressure by the United States.

In “Redeeming the Human through Human Rights,” Talal Asad writes about the paradox of rights, in which human rights deal with universal, borderless human beings as individuals (“human rights, including moral rules that bind humans universally, are intrinsic to all person irrespective of their ‘cultural’ makeup,” and yet, the practice of human rights “has no meaning independent of the judicial institutions that belong to individual nation-states [and]... to the individual’s civil status as a political subject.”<sup>166</sup> Considering the hegemony of trafficking as the rights violation to name the violence against Togolese migrant children, and the relationship between universal rights and

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 628-629.

<sup>166</sup> Talal Asad, “Redeeming the Human Through Human Rights,” *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 129.

nation-bound judicial systems, the final section of this chapter considers the limitations of using trafficking to protect Togo's young nationals.

Beyond the state's recognition, there is also the question of the rhetoric's effect on the intended's subjectivity, which is to say, in what ways has the regional anti-trafficking campaign impacted the Yondan practice of labor migration? And in what ways has this "incitement to discourse" around trafficking prompted an incitement by the girls themselves—if not to discuss their labor conditions as trafficking, then at least to talk, debate and think more critically about *bopi bateh onati*.<sup>167</sup>

### **Togo as Case Study: Blaming the State, Pushing for Education**

In April 2003, Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a report, *Borderline Slavery* that focused on child trafficking in Togo. In the report, residents of Yonda were said to have engaged in the trafficking of child laborers. During two months of fieldwork, the HRW researchers interviewed ninety children (seventy-two were trafficked according to the UN Trafficking Protocol<sup>168</sup>), government officials, NGO workers, parents and village residents.

The report concluded that Togolese citizens trafficked "hundreds of children"<sup>169</sup> throughout West Africa, sending girls to work as domestic servants and boys to Nigeria's southwestern farm belt to labor on large-scale plantations. The author, Jonathan Cohen,

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<sup>167</sup> Here, I am distinguishing "trafficking" from the local referent, *bopi bateh onati*, which is an autochthonous practice of labor migration that is intergenerational and has continuity with labor patterns that preceded "trafficking" and is not well encapsulated by the ahistorical and universalist formation indexed by trafficking

<sup>168</sup> The report defines child trafficking as the "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of a child for purposes of sexual or labor exploitation, forced labor or slavery," which is based on ILO C182, Article 4. Cohen, *Borderline Slavery*, 1.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

continued that the practice left them vulnerable to “ruthless exploitation,”<sup>170</sup> physical abuse, HIV infection and death by illness or exhaustion.<sup>171</sup> As such, it was in clear violation of the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 182 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Since the Togolese government had ratified both conventions, failure of the state to adequately address child trafficking violated international law.

The report cited poverty, rising demands for cheap manual labor, improved transportation and traditional migration practices as driving forces behind child trafficking. In an attempt to explain why certain communities embrace child trafficking and others abstain; the 2003 Human Rights Watch report described such non-economic factors as a breakdown of the family, ethnic affinities, migration traditions and village proximity to international borders. (As an aside, Neil Howard, an anthropologist working on the anti-trafficking campaign in Benin notes how connections between traditional practices, like fosterage, and trafficking have never been substantiated empirically, although they are widely cited as fact.)<sup>172</sup> Following the dominant trafficking narrative championed by neo-abolitionists, the report characterized traffickers as criminal opportunists, children as innocent victims and parents as naïve or desperate collaborators.

Almost all of the recommendations to end trafficking were addressed to West African nation-states and specifically to the government of Togo, despite the fact that the bulk of the outreach programs and educational campaigns were being run by non-state actors, like Care International and Plan Togo. When NGOs were mentioned, it was in the

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>172</sup> Howard, Neil, “Child Placement is Child Trafficking?” *Anthropology Today* 27, no.4 (December 2011): 5.



context of recommendations to outside funders and the United Nations to provide them with greater support.<sup>173</sup> The HRW report was hugely influential in Togo. Throughout my interviews in 2004 and 2009 with human rights workers, they mentioned how the publishing of the report was a turning point in the national campaign because drew international attention to Togo's presumed trafficking problem and revitalized funding for anti-trafficking programs at all levels, including initiatives by the Togolese government, local and international NGOs and inter-governmental agencies.

Advocates for a universal standard of human rights agree that child labor is a barrier to education, which is generally accepted as the principal means for personal and societal development.<sup>174</sup> The "education or bust" position of western development agencies assumes that the state will provide an educational system for its citizens, and NGO workers often express frustration in the rural community's lack of enthusiasm for schooling. However, the government of Togo also admitted to lacking the resources to realize the report's recommendations, although Suzanne Aho, the country's Minister of Social Affairs, said that they could revisit their Children's Code to make it tougher on trafficking.<sup>175</sup>

In light of these obvious barriers to the principle that increased matriculation will alleviate suffering and stem trafficking, we are left with a human rights campaign that does not speak to the needs of the people and proposes solutions that the Yondans generally recognize as ideal but unfeasible. As human rights claimants in Togo, Yondans have theoretical entitlements but lack the basic criteria of citizenship or political inclusion

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<sup>173</sup> Cohen, *Borderline Slavery*, 46-50.

<sup>174</sup> Preamble, International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention on Worst Forms of Child Labor, 1990.

<sup>175</sup> "For A Price of a Bike," *Plan Togo* (Lomé, Togo, 2005):14.

to realize them. In fact, when they are offered a basic right, such as access to primary education, many responded in line with the industry's prescriptions, highlighting the structural factors shaping their decisions.

### **Rights Failing the Yondans**

After more than a decade of media attention to the plight of Togo's "trafficked" children and funding for Togolese anti-trafficking programs by international donors, including the US Department of State, I would argue that the rights-based initiatives have not been effective largely because they ignore local understandings of the motivations behind migration, as Lawrance and Andrew found for Ghana. Recognizing this disconnect, this section speaks to the failure of human rights initiatives intended to uplift excluded populations. For most Yondan children, the main contact they have with the national anti-trafficking campaign are the quarterly visits from regional representative of the Ministry for Social Affairs or the occasional NGO worker who comes to pass out T-shirts with motivational slogans and lecture the village about the dangers of trafficking. The school system has also been a venue for educational campaigns, with a portion of the curriculum being devoted to child trafficking (including the 2004 national baccalauréat examination which included a passage on trafficking). For the youngest students, NGOs also handed out booklets with the U.N. Declaration of the Rights of the Child printed on the inside cover for ten-year-old children to read, color and bring home to their parents.

Although there is no single definition of rights in our contemporary global "rights-based" era, the Yondan case is emblematic of one way in which this rhetoric is

employed.<sup>176</sup> The majority of Yondan residents carry out their daily lives with little cognizance of their rights. And the scant contact they may have is attenuated because the messages are frequently not well translated into local languages and presupposes a level of abstraction that renders it meaningless to most outside of elite circles.<sup>177</sup> In effect, the Yondans are surrounded by a rights-based era without actually living it. This does not mean that they do not hold norms and values that bring to bear some form of rights, but it is to say that these norms fall outside of a legal and practical framework. As Harri Englund writes, “Freedom, democracy and human rights as universal and abstract values... [led to a] preoccupation with abstraction that both fosters elitism and undermines substantive democratization.”<sup>178</sup>

While the concept of human rights came out of the “natural rights” discourse of the Enlightenment, the historian Richard Dagger notes how the two ideologies convey entirely different messages, with “natural rights typically proceeding from the idea of self-possession, from a property in oneself that must be defended against others; and human rights...rest[ing] on some conception of a ... being with needs and interests that must be met ...to live a fully human life. Thus the “rights against others” of the natural rights theorists tend to become the “claims upon others” of the human rights theorists.”<sup>179</sup>

A central aspect of exercising human rights is the capacity to make claims when those rights are violated. With the Yondan child laborers, there has been no instance of a child making a claim against his or her offender, particularly since many did not

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<sup>176</sup> See Richard Dagger, “Rights” in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, eds. T. Ball and James Farr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 293; Richard Wilson, “Introduction” in *Human Rights, Culture and Context*, ed. Richard Wilson (London: Pluto Press, 1997): 10.

<sup>177</sup> Englund, Harri, *Prisoners of Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 48.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>179</sup> Dagger, “Rights,” 305.

understand or appreciate the protections and some community members found the doctrines to be an affront to their livelihoods. When families made claims on behalf of their children, they did so within the customary domain, with the village chief or diasporic regulatory committees adjudicating between families and *ogás*, many of whom are close relatives. The few instances when Yondans sought resolution through the state judicial system, they were predictably disappointed. (Such as the case when a teacher accused of raping a seven year old girl in Yonda was liberated because the victim's family could not afford to pay for his detention, which included providing three meals a day.)

In addition, human rights are bound in a legal apparatus, and citizenship is frequently a requirement for claimants to exercise their rights. For non-citizens, which Yondan children effectively are in Nigeria, their rights of citizenship require that basic needs are met,<sup>180</sup> and yet one cannot secure these rights without a political presence. Such a tautological trap is recapitulated in the Declaration of Human Rights, in which the state must recognize “the human,” and yet such an entity only comes with the endowment of human rights.<sup>181</sup> In 1966, Hannah Arendt wrote that rights protections were tied to national citizenship, and just being human was not enough.<sup>182</sup> Even when the language of rights attempted to avoid dependence on statehood, as we find in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights call for the recognition of the “human family,” Talal Asad notes that the subsequent passages are quick to return to the state as “the universal

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<sup>180</sup> Cass Sunstein, “Social and Economic Rights: Lessons from South Africa,” *Public Law and Legal Theory Working Paper*, no.12, (2001).

<sup>181</sup> Talal Asad, “What Do Human Rights Do?” *Theory and Event* 4, no. 4 (2000):13.

<sup>182</sup> Arendt, “The Perplexities of the Rights of Man,” 272.

character of the rights-bearing person is made the responsibility of sovereign states, each of which has jurisdiction over a limited group within the human family.”<sup>183</sup>

John Locke’s writings on natural law may also shed light on the Yondan child laborers present lot and the ways in which the rights community has failed to protect them. In his *Second Treatise on Government*, Locke describes his “law of nature,” in which God as the creator has endowed every human being with universal entitlements to struggle for his/her survival, and by definition, the necessary means to such survival, i.e. “life, liberty, health and property.”<sup>184</sup> When unequal wealth accumulation threatens this law and civil unrest follows, an unbiased “legitimate central government” is called in to protect these unalienable rights. How does the “legitimate central government” operate in the context of Togo? Here, the government—particularly under the years of Eyadema’s dictatorship—precluded the possibility of a Western perception of rights. As Manzo notes, the right based development era weakened the state. Thus, while human rights groups push for children to return to school, the Togolese government and regional markets encourage the maintenance of a cheap labor supply. Togolese children are being taught doctrines of human rights and promised legal entitlements with no forum to exercise these rights. And if they were to act on these entitlements, as peripheral subjects in an empty landscape bereft of political recognition, they would only be posturing citizenship.

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<sup>183</sup> Asad, “What Do Human Rights Do?” 13.

<sup>184</sup> When Dagger writes that we should “develop our powers so that we may contribute to the common good,” he echoes T.H. Marshall and Amartya Sen’s writings on the bare minimum required to achieve gentleman-ness or freedom. See Dagger, “Rights,” 303.

In our present “age of rights,”<sup>185</sup> some authors have raised concerns that this intangible rhetoric will ultimately replace practical thinking.<sup>186</sup> Such a substitution would be particularly damaging in our present day as the globalizing diversity of migration and labor practices require diagnostic tools that are situational and contextual. According to Jeremy Bentham, rights were not natural, but rather conventional, and enjoyed by those who “are subject to a legal system.”<sup>187</sup> Here, law and government are the guarantors of rights, but they restrict the capacity of marginalized populations to realize these rights. The Togolese state asks villagers to hold multiple allegiances to a plurality of legal institutions, subjecting Yondans to international, national and local forms of governance.<sup>188</sup> As rights-bearing subjects, they are now asked to govern and discipline themselves based on vague and abstract notions of liberalism.

## **Conclusion**

For Doezema, the trafficking myth can be an emancipatory means to name violence and effect social change in the lives of vulnerable populations. As she writes, “The myth of trafficking, particularly when it is used by feminists, both abolitionist and ‘liberal’, to express concerns about actually existing injustices, including the continued prevalence of violence against women, restrictions on women’s mobility, and the inequities between developed and developing countries.”<sup>189</sup>

In a similar vein, the anti-child trafficking campaign is an attempt to address the “actual” injustices occurring in Togo. Yet, we find that the political economy of

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<sup>185</sup> Dagger, “Rights,” 301.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>188</sup> Wilson, “Introduction,” 11.

<sup>189</sup> Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 173.

development does not allow for this “emancipatory social change” through an emphasis on trafficking, in which scarce development dollars are funneled into anti-trafficking agencies’ coffers and elite circles. This is particularly the case since trafficking has become one of the few sources for development money after USAID pulled out in 1994, as well as the European Union (EU), although the EU has since returned in 2004. As mentioned in a later chapter, one of the larger anti-trafficking projects to reform the school system ended in failure as funds were progressively siphoned off through corruption. While many NGOs continue their work through a child centered approach, they do so through the language of trafficking. Where there have been concrete interventions, such as increased border patrols on Nigeria, this has negatively impacted children and made the practice go further underground. (Although four Yondan men who were trying to bring underage workers across the border were imprisoned since laws were passed.) In fact, it has been through indirect reforms, such as the state’s implementation of free primary education that Yondans have reduced the number of young children they send out to work.

The disconnect between the campaign and the on-the-ground realities of Yondan lives illustrates the ways in which human rights portrayals of Togolese youth standardized the Togolese case of labor exploitation to align with a hegemonic narrative of “disposable people” involved in a deterritorialized practice of modern slavery. In this respect, there is a dialectic between the global anti-trafficking discourse and the national and local contexts in which they operate, creating a specific humanitarian practice with its own history, meaning and politics—albeit one that operates within a moral world

deeply informed by transnational debates and activist demands far from the shores of Lomé.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Gretchen Soderlund, "Running from the Rescuers: New U.S. Crusades Against Sex Trafficking and the Rhetoric of Abolition," *Feminist Formations* 17, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 67.



## **Chapter Four: Ranking States: Tracking the ‘State Effect’ in West African Anti-Trafficking Campaigns**

The previous chapter spoke to the international human rights agreements, including their history and ideological underpinnings within an era of rights based development and increasing anxiety over uneven development. This next chapter details the way in which Togo and Nigeria have drafted their own pieces of legislation. While the previous chapter touched on the ways the rights campaign has failed Togolese children, here I write about the campaign’s achievements in creating a “state effect” that impacts diplomatic relations more than the migrant work force. Thirty years after human trafficking reemerged as an international policy agenda and a decade after the United Nations’ Palermo Protocols defined trafficking as a crime, a surge in reports of trafficking in West Africa has given rise to an anti-trafficking industry. Well into this global “war against trafficking,” the debate continues amongst policy makers and scholars about best practices for the campaign.<sup>191</sup> Through the lens of two West Africa anti-trafficking umbrella organizations, Réseau de Lutte Contre la Traite des Enfants au Togo (RELUTET) and the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and Other Related Matters (NAPTIP), this chapter presents a comparative analysis of the national campaigns of Togo and Nigeria, focusing on their efforts to eradicate child trafficking.<sup>192</sup> The chapter argues that their respective approaches reflect a constellation

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<sup>191</sup> Dorthee Gimba, “War Against Human Trafficking: The Journey So Far,” in *Policing Nigeria in the 21st Century*, ed. Solomon E. Arase and Iheanyi P.O. Iwuofor (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books Limited, 2007), 249; *NAPTIP News*, no.1 (2005); “Doctors at War Against Trafficking,” <http://doctorsatwar.org>.

<sup>192</sup> While Nigeria’s campaign addresses both internal and external trafficking issues, Togo’s campaign focuses on child labor exploitation within Togo and into the surrounding countries. Throughout the chapter paper, the term “trafficking”

of local, regional, and global factors, specific to each nation, including pre-existing security apparatuses, power relations with donor governments, and the individual actions of influential political figures. As an abstraction, the techniques of governance involved in anti-trafficking practice contribute to a particular rendering of the state that is distinct from “the material world of society” akin to a process Timothy Mitchell describes as the “state effect.”<sup>193</sup> In the case of anti-trafficking, that effect influences international relations and development aid because the U.S. State Department—which spearheads the global campaign—ranks one hundred and seventy-four countries based on their compliance with the “minimum standards” set forth in the Trafficking Victims Protections Act (TVPA) passed by Congress in 2000.

Although the category of trafficking encompasses numerous variations, this chapter draws on data specific to the campaign against child trafficking in Togo and between Togo and Nigeria.<sup>194</sup> While trafficking itself is a regional issue, with Togolese laborers migrating into Nigeria as field workers (boys) and domestic servants (girls), these two countries offer two distinct modes of intervention. In addition to information from legal documents, newsletters and pamphlets, my analysis was based on forty-two interviews carried out in 2004 and 2009, focusing on the testimonies of representatives from anti-trafficking NGOs, government agencies and safe-houses.<sup>195</sup>

I found that Nigeria’s anti-trafficking campaign is centralized, taking on a law-enforcement approach, with mandated reporting of all NGOs to NAPTIP—a federally

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refers to “child trafficking,” and specially the illegal movement of child laborers to work as domestic servants, agricultural field laborers and—in the case of Nigerian girls traveling to Italy—as sex workers.

<sup>193</sup> Timothy Mitchell, “Society, Economy and the State Effect,” in *Anthropology of the State*, ed. Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 181.

<sup>194</sup> Throughout the paper, the use of the term “trafficking” will refer specifically to “child trafficking” as defined in the United Nations *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*.

<sup>195</sup> Additional evidence comes from newspaper articles and NGO pamphlets and newsletters.

legislated “multi dimensional crime fighting agency.”<sup>196</sup> In contrast, Togo’s approach is centered on child development and harm reduction, with NGOs working towards prevention through long-term strategies, such as improved schooling opportunities and vocational training for would-be trafficked children. RELUTET, the Togolese equivalent network of anti-trafficking groups, is not mandated to coordinate with the government. Instead, their mission is to promote the “development of children” by overseeing NGO efforts to fight “efficiently” against child slavery using strategies that do not aggressively pursue criminal convictions.

These two intervention models also speak to qualities specific to “child trafficking” as a human rights violation. In contrast to other human rights issues, such as the right to clean water or housing, child trafficking overtly encompasses both development interests and the criminal justice system. One strategy of deterrence seeks to improve the educational system and job opportunities to discourage out-migration, whereas another uses the strong arm of the law to apprehend and prosecute traffickers. The latter—a criminalizing approach—scrutinizes the legality of migration practices per international law and addresses impunity with an expanded enforcement apparatus, while also relying on statistics (which critics largely debunk as inaccurate) and sensationalized discourse to communicate the urgency of the epidemic.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> NAPTIP’s official Web site, “Legal and Prosecution Department,” [http://naptip.gov.ng/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=6&Itemid=44](http://naptip.gov.ng/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6&Itemid=44).

<sup>197</sup> Gail Kligman and Stephanie Limoncelli, “Trafficking Women after Socialism,” *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society* 12, no.1 (2005): 118-140; Doezema, Jo, “Loose Women or Lost Women?” *Gender Issues* 18, no.1 (2000): 23-50; Jacqueline Berman, “(Un)Popular Strangers and Crises (Un)Bounded: Discourses of Sex-Trafficking, the European Political Community and the Panicked State of the Modern State,” *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no.1 (2003): 37; Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, “Criminal Obsessions, After Foucault: Postcoloniality, Policing and the Metaphysics of Disorder,” in *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony*, ed. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 273-299.

As the object of intervention in a U.S. led global campaign against child trafficking, these micropractices of ritual and migration link to larger processes of state-making. How this is accomplished, in part, stems from the effect of modern techniques of “arrangement, representation, and control” that contribute to a strong, concrete state abstracted from civil society.<sup>198</sup> As Timothy Mitchell argues, to truly understand the state one must abandon notions of a structured institution and look for the “powerful, metaphysical effect of practices arising from internally erected distinctions in both state and society.”<sup>199</sup> Rather than abandon the state, as a generation of political scientists did in the 1970s, Mitchell suggests we shift our gaze towards the “techniques of organization and articulation” that create this rendering of the state.<sup>200</sup> Drawing on Michel Foucault, Mitchell also emphasizes the importance of attending to the “side effects” of the “effect”.<sup>201</sup> He believes that the impact of unintended consequences warrants interrogation, regardless of the success or failure of various initiatives.

### **Different Approaches to Child Trafficking Eradication**

This chapter focuses on the criminalization of trafficking as it relates to the “state effect,” and many of the calls for this approach have come from donor governments or private humanitarian organizations promoting a law enforcement paradigm.<sup>202</sup> As mentioned in Chapter Two, the “bible” of the global campaign is the United Nations 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially

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<sup>198</sup> John Bendix, B. Ollman, B. Sparrow, T. Mitchell, “Going Beyond the State?” *The American Political Science Review* 86, no. 4 (Dec 1992): 1020.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 1007.

<sup>200</sup> Timothy Mitchell, “The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics,” *The American Political Science Review* 85, no.1, (March 1991): 77-96. See also Mitchell’s account of political scientists “abandoning the state” in “Society, Economy and the State Effect,” 171.

<sup>201</sup> Timothy Mitchell, “Society, Economy and the State Effect,” 177.

<sup>202</sup> Elizabeth Bruch, “Models Wanted: The Search for an Effective Response to Human Trafficking,” *Stanford Journal of International Law* 40, no.1. (2004): 6.

Women and Children—the first of several conventions known as the Palermo Protocol—which takes the criminalization of trafficking as its central strategy of deterrence.<sup>203</sup> However, a few months prior to the passage of the UN protocol, the United States Congress passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA), which also uses a criminal justice framework. Despite being a domestic law, the TVPA has global reach by allowing the U.S. President to impose sanctions on non-compliant countries—a move that has drawn criticism for promoting U.S. specific priorities under the pretense of U.N. sanctioned international norms of justice.<sup>204</sup> NGOs and human rights groups, such as Free the Slaves and Human Rights Watch, also emphasize the one-to-one relationship between the “cultures of impunity” of weak states and the unmitigated rise in human trafficking, echoing the Department of Justice’s stance that deterrence will only be successful through zero-tolerance laws and “aggressive enforcement efforts by the United States and its global partners.”<sup>205</sup> This approach has also sparked considerable amount of controversy, with academics raising concerns about the efficacy of criminalization and the unintended consequences of policies that privilege a standardized human rights protocol over local knowledge and practice.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Janie Chuang, “The United States as Global Sheriff: Using Unilateral Sanctions to Combat Human Trafficking,” *Michigan Journal of International Law* 27, (2006): 437-494.

<sup>205</sup> Sahara Group, “Best Practices on Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Trafficking Women and Girls,” <http://saharagroup.org.np/uploads/resources/files/20081109235105.pdf>; Cynthia Shepherd Torg, “Human Trafficking Enforcement in the United States,” *Tulane Journal of International and Comparative Law* 14 (2006)504; Kevin Bales, *Free the Slaves*, December 1, 2009. <http://www.freetheslaves.net/Page.aspx?pid=330>.

<sup>206</sup> Anne Gallagher, “Human Rights and Human Trafficking in Thailand: A Shadow TIP Report,” in *Trafficking and the Global Sex Industry*, eds. Karen Beeks and Delia Amir (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006); Berman, “Unpopular Strangers,” 37. See Stacey Leigh Pigg on commensurability. Stacey Leigh Pigg, “Languages of Sex and AIDS in Nepal: Notes on the Social Production of Commensurability,” *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no.4 (2001):481-541.

In contrast to criminalization, a child-centered approach against trafficking privileges the well-being of children over punishing traffickers.<sup>207</sup> While many argue that national campaigns can and should strike a balance between the two strategies, Togo and Nigeria's campaigns tend towards one or the other camp. The humanitarian approach, as practiced in Togo, focuses on protecting childhoods through village level dialogues about the pitfalls of rural flight, improved access to education, and victims' social reintegration. It also recognizes underlying motivations on the part of victims who "choose" to leave.

Many Togolese children work in Nigeria to earn the clothes and dishes they will need for marriage. While human rights groups describe an exchange of three years of service for wedding gifts as modern-day slavery, a child-centered approach contextualizes this exchange as a form of socialization emerging from longstanding fostering practices and a desire to reinforce kinship ties. Rights groups have largely debunked the socialization argument as inappropriate cultural relativism since minors, regardless of their intentions, cannot consent to exploitation.<sup>208</sup> While the practice of sending adolescent children outside the home to work remains deeply embedded in ritual, it has become increasingly motivated by profit and less bound by kinship obligations. Instead, adolescents enter the West African labor market with shifting conceptions of familial belonging and a desire for self-determination.<sup>209</sup> Rather than focus on the pursuit of traffickers, a humanitarian response addresses the root causes of trafficking by addressing the "second generation" social, economic and cultural human rights. In

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<sup>207</sup> This approach is commonly referred to as the "human rights" approach, which can cause confusion since all approaches operate in the name of human rights. For more on the "human rights" approach, see Chuang, Janie, "The United States as Global Sheriff," 447; Alexandra Amiel, "Integrating a Human Rights Perspective," *Buffalo Human Rights Law Review* 5 (2006): 5-6; Niki Adams, "Anti-Trafficking Legislation: Protection or Deportation?" *Feminist Review* 73 (2003): 135-139.

<sup>208</sup> Cohen, *Borderline Slavery*, 2003.

<sup>209</sup> Liza Buchbinder, "Unraveling the Kinship Network: Child Labor and Migration in Togo," (master's thesis, University of California, Berkeley), 2006.

practice, this involves preventative measures that substitute trafficking children for work with other incentives, such as vocational training or improved educational opportunities.<sup>210</sup>

This approach has also sparked a considerable amount of controversy. Legal scholars tied to government agencies tend towards a zero-tolerance enforcement approach, whereas anthropologists like Jacqueline Berman and Anne Gallagher write that strategies emphasizing enforcement tend to reinforce state sovereignties at the expense of victims, and frequently conflate complex free-market migration practices with violent crimes against women and children.<sup>211</sup> Development economists Sylvain Dessy and Stephane Pallage also caution against the law enforcement approach to combat child trafficking. While they support an outright ban in theory, they see eradication efforts as counterproductive in countries with corrupt or ineffective policing mechanisms.<sup>212</sup> Rather than reducing the number of child laborers, the increased enforcement efforts drive up profits and supply. In addition, harassment and extortion by authorities only exacerbates victims' suffering without addressing the larger structural forces that keep traffickers employed.

To begin to understand the specific constellation of factors driving one approach over another and the way in which their respective techniques contribute to different

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<sup>210</sup> Alexandra Amiel, "Integrating a Human Rights Perspective," 41.

<sup>211</sup> For articles advocating a law enforcement approach, see: Cynthia Shepherd Torg, "Human Trafficking Enforcement in the United States," (2006); Angela Giampolo, "Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2005: The Latest Weapon in the Fight against Human Trafficking," *Temple Political and Civil Rights Law Review* 16, no. 1 (Fall 2006): 195-224; Sidel, Mark, "Richard B. Lillich Memorial Lecture: New Directions in the Struggle Against Human Trafficking," *Journal of Transnational Law and Policy* 17, no.2 (Spring 2008): 187-216.; Sara K. Andrews, "U.S. Domestic Prosecution of the American International Sex Tourist: Efforts to Protect Children from Sexual Exploitation," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 94, no.2 (2004): 415-454. Writings that advocate a non-criminalizing approach include: Anne Gallagher, "Human Rights and Human Trafficking in Thailand: A Shadow TIP Report,"; Jacqueline Berman, "(Un)Popular Strangers," 37-86.

<sup>212</sup> Sylvain E. Dessy and Stephane Pallage, "A Theory of the Worst Forms of Child Labor," *The Economic Journal* 115 (2005): 68-87; Sylvain E. Dessy, F. Mbiekop and Stephane Pallage, "The Economics of Child Trafficking," <http://ideas.repec.org/p/lvl/lacicr/0509.html>., CIRPEE, Working Paper 0509 (2005).

representation of the state, the following presents an overview of Nigeria and Togo's anti-trafficking campaigns—from origin to present-day practice.

### **Nigeria's Anti-Trafficking Campaign**

The origin of Nigeria's law enforcement approach to child trafficking began before the passage of the 2003 anti-trafficking legislation. In the mid-1980s, a growing trend of Edo State girls traveling to Italy to work as prostitutes caught the attention of Italian immigration officials and Nigerian development NGOs. Bisi Olateeru Olagbegi, the executive director of The Women's Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON), a grassroots organization focusing on women's rights, was involved early in the process and remembers the families' jubilation when their daughters left for Italy. "In the beginning, parents were happy that their daughters were leaving... everyone thought it was a good thing."<sup>213</sup> Yet, pressure from Italian immigration authorities to stem the influx of Nigerian sex workers and rising international awareness of child trafficking as a human rights violation shifted the climate. During a 1997 pan-African conference in Uganda, the Italy issue emerged as a new priority for the Nigerian human rights community and delegates designated the practice "trafficking"—a finding that was later confirmed by a 2001 UNICEF publication that reported 20,000 Nigerian girls had been trafficked to Italy.<sup>214</sup> The first major step in the formation of Nigeria's campaign came with the government's ratification of the United Nations anti-trafficking protocol in Palermo, Italy on June 28, 2001.<sup>215</sup> Amina Titi Atiku Abubakar's, the wife of Nigeria's then vice

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<sup>213</sup> Bisi Olateeru Olagbegi (Coordinator, Women's Consortium of Nigeria), interview by the author, Lagos, Nigeria, February, 2009.

<sup>214</sup> UNICEF, "Children's and Women's Rights in Nigeria: A Wake-Up Call," Situation Assessment and Analyses, 2001.

<sup>215</sup> *UN Transnational Organized Crime Protocol to Prevent and Suppress Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*, Millennium Assembly of the UN General Assembly, New York, November 2000.



president Atiku Abubakar, was there as the founder of Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF). She came as a leading anti-trafficking activist with influential political connections and WOTCLEF was chosen at the conference to draft West Africa's first nation-wide anti-trafficking legislation.

As a central figure of the anti-trafficking community, Amina Titi Atiku Abubakar's story provides an important backdrop to the particularities of Nigeria's campaign. Before becoming Nigeria's second lady, Mrs. Abubakar was working as a lecturer at Kaduna Polytechnic in the Department of Catering and Hotel Management. She noticed that many of her female students would drop out of school to travel to Italy. Initially, she assumed it was for religious pilgrimages to Rome, until she traveled to Italy and witnessed the number of Nigerians working as prostitutes. As she explains in her interview for NAPTIP's quarterly newsletter:

Before I left Rome, I had a covenant with God that if one day, I am given the opportunity to help these victims who are the future mothers of the nation, I will not hesitate to do it. It happened that as soon as my husband was sworn in as the Vice President in 1999, I remembered the covenant I had with God and I said to myself, time has come for me to liberate these victims from the traffickers' bondage. I could no longer fold my hands and allow these children to wallow in bondage. The passion I had for these victims motivated me to start the fight.<sup>216</sup> Mirroring the trope of human rights as religious salvation,<sup>217</sup> Abubakar continued her personal crusade by galvanizing support amongst the nation's political elite.

Abubakar's efforts culminated on August 8, 2003, when the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act was signed into law by President Olusegun Obasanjo.<sup>218</sup> With its enactment came the establishment of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and Other Related Matters

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<sup>216</sup> "I am Proud of NAPTIP's Successes," *NAPTIP News*, (December 05- March 06, 2009): 13.

<sup>217</sup> Talal Asad, "What do Human Rights Do?" 2000.

<sup>218</sup> The National Assembly has subsequently amended the law following a series of public hearings in 2005.

(NAPTIP)—a nationally legislated “multi dimensional crime fighting agency.”<sup>219</sup> The law was dubbed the “WOTCLEF law” in recognition of Madame Atiku Abubakar’s organization and its role in drafting the legislation. Also in attendance was Mrs. Carol Ndaguba, the former director of Nigeria’s public prosecution division, who President Obasanjo named as NAPTIP’s first executive secretary.

### **NAPTIP in Practice**

Since NAPTIP’s inauguration, it has undergone significant changes. In particular, recommendations from a 2005 USAID assessment of Nigeria’s anti-trafficking campaign set the tenor for the agency’s present operations.<sup>220</sup> The report focused on NAPTIP and highlighted particular areas of weakness, including poor infrastructure, inadequate resources for its computerized monitoring systems, and lack of coordination with the Nigerian Police Force and Immigration Services department.<sup>221</sup> In addition, it faulted the federal government’s decision to place NAPTIP under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior instead of the Ministry of Justice, where it would be better positioned to coordinate with the existing law enforcement agencies. More importantly, the report emphasized that improvements in the agency’s police work and criminal investigations took precedence over all other pursuits, including prevention.

Subsequent to the USAID assessment, NAPTIP has become Nigeria’s ultimate anti-trafficking authority and all other organizations, including WOTCLEF, fall under its jurisdiction. The primary groups funding NAPTIP include UNICEF, the United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime, the International Organization for Migration, the British High

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<sup>219</sup> NAPTIP website, [http://naptip.gov.ng/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=6&Itemid=44](http://naptip.gov.ng/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6&Itemid=44).

<sup>220</sup> USAID, “Anti-Trafficking Technical Assistance: Nigeria Anti-Trafficking Assessment,” April 11-27, 2005.

<sup>221</sup> Nigeria’s National Monitoring System uses Italian software called “SIDDA 2000” that was designed for the country’s anti-mafia bureau, however the USAID report found that NAPTIP lacked the training to use the program effectively.

Commission, U.S. Agency for International Development, the American Bar Association, and the French and Swiss embassies. While providing critical financial support, these bilateral aid organizations are careful to follow NAPTIP's lead and limit their engagement to consultancy. In one respect, this facilitates better cooperation amongst the various stakeholders and ensures that development guests do not step on the toes of NAPTIP's authority. On the other hand, this unspoken requirement that all associations register has frustrated local Nigerian NGO workers who feel stifled by NAPTIP's heavy handed regulations.<sup>222</sup>

In addition to coordinating the activities of non-governmental and bilateral aid organizations, NAPTIP also oversees all law enforcement agencies that police trafficking, including the national anti-trafficking task force, the border patrols, the local police, and NAPTIP's own investigation and monitoring department. There had formerly been competition amongst the various agencies for possession of captured traffickers. However, a 2003 restructuring of reporting procedures across the departments has kept officers consistently cooperative in transferring traffickers to NAPTIP.

As an example of how Nigeria's anti-trafficking efforts build on existing infrastructure, NAPTIP's centralization operates through established tracks to coordinate all trafficking related law enforcement. Those established tracks take the form of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), an extensive police apparatus that Dorthea Gimba of the federal anti-trafficking task force notes, is "the principal law enforcement organization in the country [and] naturally positioned to intervene in issues of human trafficking."<sup>223</sup> The NPF has over 320,000 police and the former president Obasanjo promised to increase it

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<sup>222</sup> Personal interview with NGO worker who requested to remain anonymous. February 15, 2009.

<sup>223</sup> Dorthea Gimba, "War Against Human Trafficking: The Journey So Far," 251.

by 40,000 personnel per year for five years.<sup>224</sup> The national police was established in the late nineteenth century to protect British commercial interests before undergoing a series of consolidations to form the federal Nigerian Police Force in 1930.<sup>225</sup> This merging of NAPTIP with an existing enforcement infrastructure contrasts with Togo, where the anti-trafficking campaign has yet to significantly tap into its country's military complex.

NAPTIP's mission is to "stamp out human trafficking and to liberate and uplift the vulnerable, especially women and children, from dehumanizing and exploitative employment and usage."<sup>226</sup> To accomplish its goal of eradication, the agency follows a multi-pronged approach with an emphasis on crime fighting. Echoing the U.S. State Department's model of the "Three P's" of prevention, prosecution and protection; NAPTIP organizes its efforts around the "Four P's" of prevention, public enlightenment, prosecution, and partnership.<sup>227</sup> While purporting to strike a balance between victim-centered and criminal justice approaches, thirteen of NAPTIP's fourteen responsibilities per the 2003 act are law enforcement measures.

### **The Face of NAPTIP**

The practices accompanying a criminalization approach also facilitate ideological effects that create a diplomatic platform for relationship building at a "global" level. To begin with, the federal government constructed a large complex in the center of Abuja—the country's "seat of power"—to house the NAPTIP headquarters with fully-equipped meeting rooms for teleconferencing with partnering institutions. In line with USAID's

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<sup>224</sup> S.G. Ehindero, "President Obasanjo's Reform Initiatives for the Nigeria Police," in *Policing Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2007): xxiii.

<sup>225</sup> Tekena N. Tamuno, *The Police in Modern Nigeria, 1861-1965: Origins, Development, and Role* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970).

<sup>226</sup> NAPTIP Web site, "Mission Statement," <http://naptip.gov.ng>.

<sup>227</sup> "NAPTIP is Now a Model for other Countries," *NAPTIP News* 1, no. 4, 2007.

recommendation for increased international cooperation, NAPTIP has also taken actions that communicate the federal government's political will, including signing memorandums of understanding with regional and international "stakeholders", training anti-trafficking taskforces in Europe and Africa, and drafting numerous protocols for large-scale, stadium sized public enlightenment events.

Many of NAPTIP's activities focus on diplomacy, and the agency has successfully established relationships with law enforcement organizations from Chad to the Netherlands. Nigeria's specific strategy of criminalization further facilitates these diplomatic gestures since the micropractices of "crime fighting" (workshops, joint police trainings, interregional memorandums of understanding, and surveillance networks) demand a transcontinental network. Carol Ndaguba embodied this diplomatic role with actions that mirrored a secretary of state. During her five year tenure at the agency's helm, she was photographed attending state dinners, hosting international summits, speaking at interregional conferences, and accepting awards for her role as a maverick in the fight against trafficking.<sup>228</sup>

NAPTIP's infrastructure also consists of safe-houses in Abuja and Lagos.<sup>229</sup> In contrast to the criminal justice aspect of the law, the safe-houses represent the law's softer side, which mandates the protection of trafficking victims, especially women and children. Residents' experiences are often publicized as a reminder of the campaign's targeted beneficiaries and statistics on the number of "saved" children indicate the agency's impact on trafficking. NAPTIP acquires these children through sting operations,

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<sup>228</sup> As a criminal investigative unit, NAPTIP also promotes its success as a "model for other countries" by training police units in Western Europe and inspiring other African countries, such as Malawi and Ghana, to set up similar agencies.

<sup>229</sup> The US government invested \$1 million towards the establishment of a Lagos safe house. (See USAID's "Nigeria Anti-Trafficking Assessment" report, 2005.

hotline calls, and referrals from collaborating police officers. Yet, this non-specific dragnet catches numerous other children who are not victims of trafficking. Instead, many suffer from parental neglect, abuse, and abandonment.<sup>230</sup> And others are just unfortunate qualifiers.

Of the six children that I interviewed at NAPTIP's Abuja safe-house, four were girls from the ages of sixteen to nearly eighteen. All the girls had come from the same village in Togo and had traveled to Nigeria with their "uncle," an unrelated man from the village, who had placed them in separate homes to work as domestic servants. One month previously, NAPTIP's special investigative unit conducted a sting operation, arresting the uncle and placing the girls in the Abuja safe-house for rehabilitation. All four wanted to return to their employers. The eldest, Marie, was worried because she had received a one-year advance from her employer and still owed four months of work. Another said she was wasting time learning to bead necklaces instead of earning money. Like Marie, her only request of me was to convince NAPTIP to liberate them. An eleven year old boy was less anxious to leave, still waiting for his mother to arrive. He came to NAPTIP when a woman found him wandering the streets of Abuja after sneaking into a market car 480 kilometers away in Port Harcourt. He said he ran away from his uncle's home in search of his mother, who had remarried after the boy's father died.<sup>231</sup>

WOTCLEF also operates a safe-house in Abuja in collaboration with NAPTIP, and it was there that I came across my first clear cut case of trafficking. Of the seven girls that I interviewed, Mariama's story was the most harrowing. She was fourteen years old,

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<sup>230</sup> As Godwin Morka of the NAPTIP Lagos office said, non-trafficking related cases of child neglect were the principle reason people called into the hotline.

<sup>231</sup> NAPTIP safe-house, interviews by the author, Abuja, Nigeria, February 18, 2009.

and with unusual eloquence, she recounted the horrific details of her uncle bringing her from Togo to hawk water sachets in the streets of Libreville. Over a four year period, he subjected her to repeated physical abuse and neglect, forcing her to sleep in the streets and scavenge for food in trash heaps. When she returned, he would frequently tie her down and beat her with kitchen pots for failing to bring back enough money. Upon remarking at her courage to speak out, Mariama said that many journalists for television and radio have interviewed her in the past. When I returned to the NAPTIP headquarters, I then noticed that her face was burned on CDs and posters. And a quick search on the Internet revealed that Reuters, IRIN News, the BBC and Nigeria's Punch newspaper had all profiled Mariama under different pseudonyms.<sup>232</sup>

While Mariama's case represents an unmistakable example of child trafficking and the abuse it entails, it also reveals the way in which publicists use narratives of suffering to further legitimize campaign efforts and to disseminate in newsletters, newspapers and television spots an image of the safe-house child as indisputable victim of trafficking. As a sanctuary for many and a holding cell for others, the safe-house encompasses much that is murky about the category of trafficking in practice, as a number of forces, including a non-specific legal net and a robust publicity industry, work to essentialize a diversity of scenarios under a single narrative.

### **Togo's Anti-Trafficking Campaign**

In the case of Togo, the country's anti-trafficking efforts follow a child-centered and ostensibly NGO-driven campaign, with the government's involvement largely

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<sup>232</sup> See Musikilu Mojeed, "Inside the Nigerian Transnational Human Trafficking Industry," October 16, 2008. <http://www.punchng.com/Articl.aspx?theartic=Art200810152335195>; "Nigeria: Stepping Up the Fight Against Child-Trafficking," December 10, 2007. <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/IRIN/32f5539bc2e5332251dfc7c92ea38611>; Andrew Walker, "Trafficked Children Tell Their Stories," BBC News, February 5, 2008. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7226411.stm>.

limited to the drafting of legislation—in collaboration with UNICEF and the International Labor Organization (ILO)—and sanctioning the efforts of “civil society.”<sup>233</sup> The idea that Togo could be a source of trafficked children began with a World Association for Orphans-Afrique (WAO Afrique) exploratory survey of thirty people in 1997. “*Le Trafic des Enfants au Togo*” concluded that Togolese were trafficking young girls, some as young as seven years old, to Nigeria, Ghana, and Gabon to work as domestic servants.<sup>234</sup> While the data were not generalizable because of the small sample size, the report introduced the concept of “trafficking” to the Togolese development lexicon. Unlike Nigeria, where the campaign gained momentum through the personal quest of a politician’s wife, Togo’s initiative came about from international pressure. In particular, there were a series of widely publicized trafficking incidents in the late 1990s and early 2000s that added evidence to Togo’s fledgling humanitarian crisis—most notably when the Nigeria-registered ship, the *MV Etireno*, lay stranded off the coast of Benin and it was assumed to be carrying hundreds of Togolese children headed towards Gabon.<sup>235</sup> Cléophas Mally of *WAO Afrique* recalls contacting the prime minister at the time: “There was that boat off the shore of Benin and there were Togolese children in there. . . and I wrote to the prime minister and said there was this was a problem and [asked] what will the government do to help these children?”<sup>236</sup> Soon after, the attention from a 2003 Human Rights Watch report opened the flood gates for the subsequent workshops, public

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<sup>233</sup> United States Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, 2001. See *Global Shadows* for a discussion of the problematic and artificial distinction between the “state” and “civil society” in much of the contemporary literature on Africa.

<sup>234</sup> WAO Afrique, “*Le Trafic des Enfants au Togo —Etude Prospective à Lomé, Vogan et Cotonou*,” September 1997.

<sup>235</sup> BBC News, “The Slave Children,” October 5, 2001.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/correspondent/1519144.stm>.

<sup>236</sup> Cleophas Mally, *WAO L’Afrique*, interview by author. Lomé, Togo, March 2004.



enlightenment events and legislation that have come to characterize Togo's anti-trafficking campaign.

Until 2005, Togo had no anti-trafficking law and used its Children's Code to pursue traffickers.<sup>237</sup> Despite concerted international pressure, the National Assembly was slow to pass a law. Outside observers attributed the stalemate to corruption and political wrangling.<sup>238</sup> As Essodina Abalo of the ILO explained in 2004, "At the root of the solution is the state. . . Unfortunately, they don't have the means to tackle the problem, nor is it the Togolese government's priority. . . It is a question of politics." Cléophas Mally echoed this frustration, stating that the National Assembly was willing to support anti-drug laws, but not one on trafficking. He stated that "one of the biggest problems is that the government turns a blind eye to the problem."<sup>239</sup>

The Togolese government's reluctance to pass a law, poor record of prosecutions and general dependence on international NGOs and bilateral agencies gave them a reputation for being lax on trafficking.<sup>240</sup> Year after year, the U.S. State Department published this sentiment in its Trafficking in Persons report, stating that the government did not meet the "minimum standards" necessary to eradicate trafficking per the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA).<sup>241</sup> While the report acknowledged the government's "significant efforts" to support the campaign, the latest publication seemed to scramble for evidence. For example, in the section on Togo's prevention measures, the report described President Faure Gnassingbé's presence in a "day-long program to

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<sup>237</sup> United States Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, 2005.

<sup>238</sup> Cleophas Mally, *WAO L'Afrique*, interview by author. Lomé, Togo, March 2004. Essodina Abalo, *International Labor Organization*, interview by author, Lomé, Togo, March 2004.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*; US State Department *Trafficking In Persons Report*, 2004; Jonathan Cohen, *Borderline Slavery*, 2003.

<sup>240</sup> Cleophas Mally, *WAO L'Afrique* interview, 2004.

<sup>241</sup> "Minimum standards" is a term from the U.S. State Department's annual *Trafficking in Persons* rankings and is critiqued for its vagueness by Janie Chuang in "United States as Global Sheriff," 349.

promote the government's anti-trafficking strategy" as a central example of his work towards addressing trafficking.<sup>242</sup>

Despite the government's "minimal" but "significant" efforts, Togo continues to run a robust campaign through the country's small circle of anti-trafficking NGOs that fall under the coordination of RELUTET. RELUTET is an umbrella organization whose history began at a 2002 conference in Grand Bassam, Ivory Coast, where delegates called for the creation of a central coordinating body for the campaign. At the time, there was stifling competition amongst the local agencies, and RELUTET began actively coordinating the forty-four member agencies' anti-trafficking efforts and presiding over a monthly assembly. During these meetings, delegates determined the general mission of the campaign. Major institutional players in attendance included Terre des Hommes, Plan Togo, Care International, representatives from the Ministry of Social Affairs, as well as a long list of small NGOs that arose during Togo's era of "democracy."<sup>243</sup>

RELUTET's strategy "to support the development of the child" reflects a consensus among its forty-four members and the country's overarching approach that advocates child protection while acknowledging the pressures on impoverished families.<sup>244</sup> In action, this translates into programs that emphasize public enlightenment, victim rights and improving the overall environment of the child, including better funding for education, micro-credit for parents and public health measures to quell the

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<sup>242</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, 2009.

<sup>243</sup> CIVICUS, "Etude Diagnostic de la Société Civile Togolaise," Lomé, Togo. 2006. [http://74.125.155.132/scholar?q=cache:ld-dSn4DI38J:scholar.google.com/+togo+\"relative+au+trafic+d'enfants\"&hl=fr&as\\_sdt=2000](http://74.125.155.132/scholar?q=cache:ld-dSn4DI38J:scholar.google.com/+togo+\).

<sup>244</sup> In addition to public education through awareness raising campaigns, the members of RELUTET also "fight trafficking" through educational reform, as in the case of Plan Togo's matching of individual donors to sponsored children to pay for school fees, etc. [http://www.relutet.org/fr/reseau-lutte-traite-enfants-togo-page-libre.php?id\\_page=2](http://www.relutet.org/fr/reseau-lutte-traite-enfants-togo-page-libre.php?id_page=2).

motivations behind trafficking. In general, civil society groups champion this approach, whereas criminal-justice measures are relegated to the central government.

The mission statements of the individual organizations reflect a similar sentiment. For example, Plan Togo is one of the most entrenched agencies working on trafficking in Togo's Central Region, which is arguably an epicenter for child labor migrants leaving for Nigeria. Plan does not collaborate with the police. Instead, its motto is "Promoting Child Rights to End Child Poverty." Terre des Hommes is also a well-entrenched and central player in the campaign. It runs the largest rehabilitation center for trafficked children, the Oasis Center, and uses the Convention on the Rights of the Child as its conceptual framework. Care International has been working in Togo since 1986 and the U.S. Embassy chose it to manage one of the largest anti-child trafficking grants in the country. Care's mission is to end child trafficking by "improving education and social support."<sup>245</sup> Thus, instead of a strong alliance or subordination to law enforcement, the Togolese NGOs universally focus on poverty alleviation.

The child-centered approach is also in line with the political economy of the campaign, where the central government and civil society groups lack the resources necessary to adopt a prosecutorial approach. Following the "austerity measures" of four World Bank structural adjustment programs adopted by President Eyadéma, Togo experienced a long period of underdevelopment and institutional collapse.<sup>246</sup> In addition,

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<sup>245</sup> Plan International website, <http://plan-international.org/where-we-work>; *Terre des Hommes* website, <http://www.terredeshommes.org/index.php?lang=en&page=abo>; Care International website, <http://www.careinternational.org.uk/11064/togo/care-in-togo.html>.

<sup>246</sup> This phenomenon has been predicted by child labor models and seconded by these authors, who directly attribute it to economic adjustments in the mid-1980s. See Kathryn Nwajiaku, "The National Conferences in Benin and Togo Revisited," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 32, no. 3 (September, 1994): 429-447; N. Austin and Rasidi A. Okunola Isamah, "Family Life under Economic Adjustment: The Rise of the Child Breadwinners," in *Money Struggles and City Life*, ed. Jane I. Guyer, LaRay Denzer and Adigun Agbaje (Ibadan: OLUBEN Printers, 2003); Claude

the repressive silencing of pro-democracy demonstrations in the early 1990s led to an exodus of foreign aid and an expansion of “civil society” organizations. Much of RELUTET consists of “mom and pop” NGOs—small scale operations started by a handful of schoolmates to work in a specific region of the country. For example, only twenty-four of RELUTET’s forty-four members have access to a vehicle and only sixteen have Internet connection.<sup>247</sup> In a climate with few paid civil service jobs for educated Togolese, employment as a salaried development worker is lucrative. And unless these sociologies land a coveted job with an international NGO, the alternative is to establish a local NGO and apply for grants from European or American “buyers.”<sup>248</sup>

The U.S. government remains the biggest “buyer” of anti-trafficking interventions despite its decline in aid to Togo. The United States, like many other western governments, had a greater diplomatic presence in Togo prior to widespread protests against the president in 1991. In line with the wave of pro-democracy social movements following the fall of the Berlin Wall, opposition factions in Togo began pressuring for multi-party representation in the Assemblée Nationale. This was the first challenge to President Gnassingbé Eyadéma’s authority since he seized power in 1967. Despite what seemed like significant gains in the 1991 Sovereign National Conference, the state military forces retaliated against the dissidents and their interim prime minister, Kokou Koffigoh.<sup>249</sup> Eyadéma’s display of brutal repression lead to a general closure of most international development bureaus, including the United States Agency for International

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Meillassoux, "The Economy and Child Labour: An Overview," in *The Exploited Child*, ed. Bernard Schlemmer (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

<sup>247</sup> Bonavita, Aurélie, “Etude Diagnostique du Travail en Réseau dans la Lutte Contre la Traite des Enfants au Togo,” RELUTET, (June-September, 2007) : 22.

<sup>248</sup> Le “buyer” is the term used in Togo to describe development aid grantors.

<sup>249</sup> Kohnert, Dirk, “Togo’s Thorny Transition Misguided Aid,” GIGA Institute of African Affairs (Hamburg, Germany), October 8, 2007): 6.

Development (USAID) and the European Union (EU)—although the EU’s sanction was attenuated by France’s rather open secret of support for the pro-Western president.<sup>250</sup>

Today, the U.S.’s development presence in Togo is the U.S. Embassy’s Ambassador Self Help Fund, the Peace Corps, and sporadic grants from the Department of Defense or the Department of Labor.

The United States’ most recent anti-trafficking project is a five million dollar grant from the Department of Labor to be administered by the International Labor Organization (ILO). Entitled “*Projet Rêve*”, the program is designed to focus more on prevention and awareness than the expansion of law enforcement measures. The project is still in its early stages and it is difficult to assess its impact on the out-migration of Togolese child laborers. As a point of comparison, the U.S. Department of Labor initiated a similar program in 2001 with a two million dollar grant for *Projet COMBAT*. The aim of the project was to “combat” trafficking through education with school tuition grants and teacher trainings that emphasized how unprofessional behaviors impacted student performance, including: corporal punishment, verbal abuse, poor time management, unkempt classrooms, public drunkenness, etc. In addition, the anti-trafficking “awareness raising” component targeted information sessions to students, as well as the general village population.<sup>251</sup> The U.S. embassy chose Care International to distribute the funds for COMBAT.<sup>252</sup> In turn, Care chose the local NGO AHUEFA to set up trafficking committees and community liaisons to organize events and household surveys in the Central Region. Unfortunately, mismanagement lead to broken promises as funds were

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<sup>250</sup> As a concrete example of the impact, the NGO Care International, which was a major recipient of USAID funds, went from 120 employees in early 1990s to 17 employees in 2009.

<sup>251</sup> Care International, *Projet COMBAT: Combattre le Trafic des Enfants Grâce à L’Education*, 2001.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

siphoned off with no money left to pay children's school fees or the liaisons.<sup>253</sup> Instead of universal coverage, rural parents only received partial tuition for a select number of students. While *Projet COMBAT* is a telling case of the United States' support for a humanitarian approach in Togo, it also illustrates the challenges for local actors—and a small embassy staff—to implement program agendas coming from Washington D.C.

Despite Togo's child-centered approach, the U.S. State Department's annual *Trafficking in Persons* Report focuses on the Togolese government's rather limited criminalizing efforts. This includes providing details of the Ministry of Security's training of thirty police officers and mentioning that UNICEF's anti-trafficking hotline is staffed by government employees.<sup>254</sup> The report's recommendations also continue to pressure the government to establish a National Committee to Combat Trafficking, which would be the Togolese equivalent to NAPTIP. However, the National Assembly has yet to allocate funds despite five years of pressure.

### **Trafficking, Power and the State**

While Togo and Nigeria have unique factors contributing to their campaigns, their anti-trafficking laws share a legal definition that captures a range of conceptual frameworks, including human rights, criminal justice, labor migration and development. The United Nations' Optional Protocol on People Trafficking, in particular, has garnered criticism for its ambiguity that leaves critical aspects of trafficking undefined and for its emphasis on law enforcement with little reference to a rights-based approach.<sup>255</sup> Yet, this

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<sup>253</sup> Mahassou Alessoun, Former anti-trafficking village liaison for AHEUFA, interview by author, Tchamba, Togo, March 19, 2009; Philippe Yodo, Director of Care International Togo, interview by author, Lomé, Togo, April, 1, 2009.

<sup>254</sup> US Dept of State, *TIP* report, 2009.

<sup>255</sup> Ann Jordan, "Human Rights or Wrongs? The Struggle for a Rights-Based Response to Trafficking in Human Beings," *Gender and Development* 10, no.1, March 2002: 28-37; Kara Abramson, "Beyond Consent: Toward Safeguarding Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations Trafficking Protocol," *Harvard International Law*

broadly interpreted protocol and the subsequent country-specific laws have authorized a cascade of enforcement practices in the name of trafficked children's rights. Different theorists have proposed reasons for the adoption of one approach over another.

Vanessa Munro, for example, conducted a five country survey of anti-trafficking initiatives and found that the differences were shaped by each government's respective understandings of "trafficking" as it related to the criminalization of prostitution.<sup>256</sup> In countries where prostitution is illegal, such as Australia and Italy, Munro found a strong arm prosecutorial approach tied to long prison sentences. In the Netherlands, where prostitution is legal, she found a "humanitarian impulse," with a particular emphasis on housing and reintegration assistance to victims.<sup>257</sup> In another study, Ann Jordan suggests that many governments adopt a criminalizing approach because they are uninformed about the causes of trafficking or the ways to effectively use a "rights-based" approach. In addition, Jordan writes, the Palermo Protocol heavily emphasizes a law enforcement approach.<sup>258</sup>

Nigeria's reasons for criminalizing trafficking are different. As mentioned earlier, a particular constellation of factors influenced the government's response to the protocol, including global determinations, such as the emergence of trafficking as a donor country priority, and more situated elements specific to Nigeria. The functions of NAPTIP reflect this assemblage that reaches beyond structural considerations, such as the country's extensive police apparatus, or the influence of local actors like Madame Abubakar. For

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*Journal* 44, no.2, Summer 2003. 473-502; Liz Kelly, "The Wrong Debate: Reflections on Why Force is Not the Key Issue with Respect to Trafficking in Women for Sexual Exploitation," *Feminist Review* 73 (2003: 135-139); Kay Warren, "The 2000 U.N. Human Trafficking Protocol: rights, enforcement, vulnerabilities," in *The Practice of Human Rights*, ed. Mark Goodale and Sally Engle Merry, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 262.

<sup>256</sup> Vanessa Munro, "Stopping Traffic? A Comparative Study of Responses to the Trafficking in Women for Prostitution," *British Journal of Criminology* 46, (2006): 318-333.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>258</sup> Ann Jordan, "Human Rights or Wrongs?": 28-37.

example, the country's oil boom in the 1970s prompted a massive demand for agricultural and domestic workers, with the subsequent unregulated influx of foreign nationals leading to increased policing and border patrols.<sup>259</sup> These enforcement measures contributed to a representation of the Nigerian state as strong, sovereign, and the protector of "rule of law" through legitimate force.<sup>260</sup> In contrast to Togo, where their anti-trafficking law has had less impact on a NGO-driven, child-centered approach, Nigeria's law has transformed its campaign. Not only did the law establish NAPTIP, it also allowed the judicial system to prosecute traffickers, and these prosecutions serve as a critical assessment indicator of the campaign.

With criminality central to Nigeria's campaign, Jean and John Comaroffs' insights into the "fetishization of the law" are particularly salient. In *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony*, the Comaroffs argue that neoliberalism and its restructuring of relations of governance usher in an era of unprecedented heterodoxy and heterogeneity as migrating workers balance their polymorphous identities with a tenuous allegiance to a single nation-state. Within this climate of uncertainty, there comes a preoccupation with criminality and a reified form of law where "legal instruments *appear* to offer a ready means of commensuration" despite their apparent impotence in maintaining order.<sup>261</sup> In the case of Nigeria's criminalizing approach, "fetishization of the law" prompts the need for an extensive network of judiciaries, checkpoints, police units, and immigration

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<sup>259</sup> See history of *saabe* migration in Jane Guyer, *The African Niche Economy*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 96.

<sup>260</sup> Bendix, et al., "Limits of the State," 1008.

<sup>261</sup> Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Criminal Obsessions, After Foucault," in *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony*, ed. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006): 32. Italics in the original.



officials.<sup>262</sup> This trafficking discourse and resulting cascade of micropractices reassert the role of the state as the singular authority in the security of its population and projects an image of Nigeria's campaign as independent and state run—despite the fact that NAPTIP's daily operations, for example, are largely reliant on foreign aid.<sup>263</sup>

Although quick to caution against a simplistic distillation of Foucault's ideas, the Comaroffs propose that within this “culture of legality” there is also an inversion of Foucault's chronology of power. Instead of shift away from sovereignty towards localized, diffuse disciplinary power, we see a reversion to public displays of state-sponsored punishment—widely publicized in the mass media—in the name of upholding the “rule of law.” As the Comaroffs explain, “the drama that is so integral to policing the postcolony is evidence of a desire to condense dispersed power in order to make it visible, tangible, accountable, effective.”<sup>264</sup>

Within Nigeria's campaign, the “drama” of postcolonial policing takes on an exaggerated and macabre quality that promotes a trope of the sovereign “state” battling the formidable evils of trafficking. News articles and internet blogs describe the practice as the “worst crime against mankind,” with traffickers going into “every nook and cranny of the country [to] lure vulnerable children,”<sup>265</sup> and taking to “breeding slave children” in “baby farms.”<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> *NAPTIP News*, 2007.

<sup>263</sup> Berman, “Unpopular Strangers,” 50.

<sup>264</sup> Comaroff and Comaroff, “Criminal Obsessions,” 276.

<sup>265</sup> ECPAT International, “NAPTIP: Human Trafficking Worst Crime Against Mankind,” July 5, 2009. [http://www.ecpat.net/EI/Resource\\_newsclippings.asp?id=747](http://www.ecpat.net/EI/Resource_newsclippings.asp?id=747).

<sup>266</sup> Amanda Kloer, “Nigerian Baby Farms Breed Slaves from Slaves,” July 21, 2009.

[http://humantrafficking.change.org/blog/view/nigerian\\_baby\\_farms\\_breed\\_slaves\\_from\\_slaves](http://humantrafficking.change.org/blog/view/nigerian_baby_farms_breed_slaves_from_slaves). A photograph of baby doll heads embedded in a cabbage patch accompanied the article.



**Figure 6: Image of cabbage patch dolls that accompanied article on Nigerian baby farms**

Meanwhile, the NAPTIP website describes traffickers as protected by “voodoo men” and using “juju” shrines to further their operations,<sup>267</sup> while *NAPTIP News* satisfies public curiosity over perpetrators’ identities by providing detailed personal histories of convicted traffickers. In addition, the newsletter frequently publishes dramatic reenactments akin to children’s comics of hapless traffickers failed attempts to evade the NAPTIP dragnet.<sup>268</sup>

In *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony*, the Comaroffs make an explicit connection between these popular obsessions with law and order and the modern nation-state, as the discourse on criminalization produces particular imaginings of modern state power that “summon” the state into being. This is particularly the case when governance

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<sup>267</sup> NAPTIP website, [http://www.naptip.gov.ng/naptip/docs/babandedeindex\(2\).html](http://www.naptip.gov.ng/naptip/docs/babandedeindex(2).html).

<sup>268</sup> Isa Umar Gusau, “Nigeria: Human Traffickers Nabbed in Borno,” *All Africa.com*, January 27, 2009. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200901270459.html>.

is restricted and law enforcement becomes a vehicle to “render [the state] perceptible to the public eye, to produce both rulers and subjects who recognize its legitimacy.”<sup>269</sup> Mitchell also privileges the law’s role in “state” formation and links it to the relationship between sovereign and disciplinary modes of power, where sovereign power makes an “appearance” in the legal code, creating an “ideological screen” that masks underlying “micropowers of discipline.”<sup>270</sup> This ideological masking plays a central role in the larger political and economic ordering of society.

Within the human rights arena, the consequence of this masking is to shift the object of intervention from situated, historically specific understandings of rights to abstracted empty illusions, be it “the state,” “the law,” or “freedom.”<sup>271</sup> In *Prisoners of Freedom*, Harry Englund notes how the universalism of rights discourse deflects attention from the perpetuating structural conditions of suffering and makes the assumption that each individual possesses equal rights and responsibilities, thereby denying “real-life” power relations that perpetuate “unfreedom.”<sup>272</sup> James Ferguson observes a similar process of depoliticization with respect to development discourse on poverty in “real” nation-states versus “non-state” territories. He gives an example in his comparison of Transkei, a Bantustan in South Africa, and the “sovereign” state of Lesotho. While the two locations share comparable levels of poverty and marginalization, Lesotho’s situation is explained as a technical problem specific to Lesotho’s national economy and underexploited natural resources. In contrast, Transkei’s poverty was quickly elevated to

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<sup>269</sup> Comaroff, John and Jean Comaroff, “Criminal Obsessions, after Foucault,” 280.

<sup>270</sup> Mitchell, “Society, Economy and the State Effect,” 179.

<sup>271</sup> See Leslie Butt, “The Suffering Stranger: Medical Anthropology and International Morality.” *Medical Anthropology* 21, no.1 (2002): 1-24.

<sup>272</sup> Englund, Harri, *Prisoners of Freedom: Human Rights and the African Poor*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006):10.

a politicized critique linked to apartheid and the wider economic order of southern Africa. Thus, the development discourse specific to the Lesothian “state” succeeded in depoliticizing the country’s problems and confining responsibility to national terms.<sup>273</sup> Using Mitchell’s terms, the “state effect” effectively depoliticized Lesotho’s poverty.

With respect to anti-trafficking, the techniques of organization tied to criminalization contribute to the illusion of a sovereign state and subsume a complex migrant labor system under the depoliticized legal discourse of trafficking.

## **Conclusion**

As mentioned above, the concept of “trafficking” easily straddles the institutions of “development” and criminal justice. In a chapter entitled “Transnational Topologies of Power,” James Ferguson widens his lens back to a globalized frame of reference to explain how international agencies, particularly financial donors, can act more like policemen than benefactors.<sup>274</sup> While he was referring specifically to the era of structural adjustment, the same can be said for other reforms sought by powerful international interests. In particular, the U.S. Department of State’s role in managing trafficking interventions is coercive since qualifying for a number of U.S. aid programs is influenced by a recipient country’s ranking in the *Trafficking in Persons* (TIP) report, including the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which removes import tariffs on select goods for qualifying countries; the Millennium Challenge Corporation, which delegates \$7.4 billion for development projects in agriculture, public health and education; and the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).<sup>275</sup> The State Department

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<sup>273</sup> James Ferguson, *Global Shadows*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006): 61.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>275</sup> Anonymous U.S. Embassy representative, interview by author, March, 2009.

began publishing the TIP report in 2001, and it ranks countries based on a three tiered system, assigning a tier according to a government's compliance with U.S. anti-trafficking protocols. It then authorizes the president to impose sanctions on non-compliant "states."<sup>276</sup> The importance of the rankings does not escape the notice of anti-trafficking officials, as Carol Ndaguba explained in *NAPTIP News*: "Nigeria was recently promoted from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tier watch list to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tier list in the global rating of human trafficking in endemic nations. This promotion is important to us because it has removed us from the threat of possible sanction by the U.S. government."<sup>277</sup>

The entire TIP ranking system requires discrete, abstracted states to compare on a standardized rubric, and the "state effect" allows for this by producing flattened representations for univariate analysis. It also recapitulates regional relations between a behemoth, such as Nigeria, and the small nation-state of Togo—allowing for comparison across incomparable political economic systems. Instead of attending to the forces driving trafficking, the focus becomes a technical one of perfecting law enforcement measures, with funds poured into police trainings, border patrols, and streamlining convictions within the judicial system. Nigeria's criminalizing approach is quantifiable and contributes to a representation of the state that is favorable for assessment, although it is unclear how much trafficked children benefit.<sup>278</sup> Instead, the process may have a greater impact on shoring up diplomatic relations amongst "state" representatives involved in this internationally established human rights campaign.

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<sup>276</sup> Janie Chuang, "United States as Global Sheriff," 439.

<sup>277</sup> *Naptip News 2*: (2007)

<sup>278</sup> Sylvain E. Dessy and Stephane Pallage, "A Theory of the Worst Forms of Child Labor," 68-87; Janie Chuang, "United States as Global Sheriff," 437-494.

In contrast, the material practices of the Togolese approach do not contribute to an abstracted unit of analysis that is TIP intelligible. Instead, Togo's focus on improving children's well-being through life skills and supportive educational environments does not produce many statistics. Furthermore, its poor crime-fighting performance projects an image of a government that cannot handle its trafficking problem, thereby perpetuating a failed state status. And while Togo's response to trafficking is a small contribution to the international disfavor its ruling dynasty has cultivated through a near-half century of autocratic rule, the additional sanctions only exacerbate the population's "economic misery."<sup>279</sup> As Cléophas Mally has repeatedly stated, the Togolese political leadership lacks the will to commit funds towards anti-trafficking initiatives or support the National Commission. And yet, the U.S. government's queer mix of funding child-centered programs in Togo while sanctioning the government for its poor prosecution performance has helped shape a disfavored campaign that may be more effective in protecting children.

The following chapter moves from the national campaigns to look at the cultural logic of a so-called trafficking village using an entirely different rubric of the "good life," as an attempt to understand why families would send their children to work in conditions that the human rights industry has deemed categorically exploitative.

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<sup>279</sup> Dirk Kohnert, "Togo: Failed Elections and Misguided Aid," 30.

## Chapter Five: The Good Life

“Where do you feel more at ease, in Yonda or Nigeria?”

“Nigeria. There’s way too much suffering in Yonda.”

“Then why do you come back?”

“Because it’s my home.”<sup>280</sup>

### The Good Life

The Yonda I have known since 2000 is a community largely scattered throughout West Africa, with more Yondans living outside of Yonda than in the village. Much of their pursuit of a “good life” is similar to economic migrants worldwide, who leave their countries for better wages elsewhere.<sup>281</sup> Yet, in their search for a livelihood, there is a constant beckoning for return, with Yondans going to great lengths and expense to periodically come back to the village—the symbolic core of authentic Yondan-ness. Much of the critical literature on trafficking see the international campaign as a move against economic immigrants, where the issue is not one of organized crime gone amuck, but rather destination governments discriminating against guest workers.<sup>282</sup> My reading of the Yondan pursuit of the good life aligns with these critiques, in that I see it largely as

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<sup>280</sup> Thirty year old ogá from Yonda who has been oscillating seasonally between Oyo, Nigeria and Yonda for the past nine years.

<sup>281</sup> The good life, is related to virtue, where virtue refers to human nature to determine their goals and ambitions. These virtues are “excellences of character which enable people to move towards their goal (telos) and are an essential part of the attainment of that goal.” See Aihwa Ong and Stephen Collier eds., *Global Assemblages*, (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 37.

<sup>282</sup> For more on guest workers as “deportable labor,” see Cindy Hahamovitch, *No Man’s Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

an immigrants' story of trying to make it in Nigeria without losing one's sense of a Yondan "homeland." This everyday tension is the subject of this chapter.

The opening quote was spoken by a thirty-something *ogá* who has been oscillating between Yonda and Oyo, in southwestern Nigeria, for the past nine years. His fate was to be born in a village full of *wahala*, or suffering, and "home" for him was formed the moment he left—when Yonda became less about where he was from and more about where he returned to.<sup>283</sup> This longing for a Yondan homeland, real and imagined, is a barrier for most trying to attain the "good life" of material comfort and security through wage labor because there are few opportunities to make it in Togo relative to Nigeria's robust economy. *Bopi bateh onati* lies at the heart of this tension, as the vehicle for Yondans to leave the village fold.<sup>284</sup> As a consequence, these pre-teens—particularly the girls who work in isolation—are severed from their birth community at a formative age. The motivation behind the practice is for families to make money, but also for the young workers to secure the necessary accoutrements for marriage, thereby reproducing Yondan society. At the same time, the practice threatens the strength of Yondan commitments to a cohesive identity by exposing these young teens to non-Yondan men, opening up the possibility that they will marry and build allegiances to a different ethnicity.

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<sup>283</sup> Shelley Mallett, "Understanding Home: A Critical Review of the Literature," *The Sociological Review* 52, no 1, 27 February 2004: 62-89.

<sup>284</sup> As a reminder to the reader, *bopi bateh onati*, which literally translates as "children take the road," is a term I am using to represent the ritualized practice of sending Yondan children to work in the regional labor markets as field laborers and domestic servants to secure the necessary accoutrements for marriage.



Much has been written in diaspora studies about the impossibility of an authentic homeland.<sup>285</sup> R. Radhakrishnan also writes that this collective belief in a originating or source community is fraught with contradictions, although it is experientially real for many people.<sup>286</sup> “A secular attitude to ‘ethnic primordiality’ does not in itself get rid of primordiality,”<sup>287</sup> he said, where primordiality refers to a claim to being the originator or first settlers of a territory. Instead, the question should be why are the concepts of ethnicity and the idea of an originary homeland so salient to the human experience? “If ethnic identity is a strategic response to a shifting sense of time and place, how is it possible to have a theory of ethnic identity posited on the principle of a natural and native self? Is ethnicity nothing but, to use the familiar formula, what ethnicity does?”<sup>288</sup> Drawing off of Clifford Geertz’s constructivist reading of ethnicity, Radhakrishnan describes the way in which this passionate attachment to a homeland is related to discourses of progress, belonging and epistemology. The narrative on progress and belonging is steeped in the idea that the more primordial a people are, the more they stay together. As one moves towards more modern spaces, such as the city, there is a greater degree of alienation as complexity and progress increase. “Such a paradisaical view of ethnic belonging is of course flawed and counterfactual.... Yet, primordiality continues to operate as an effective form of history.”<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> For critical engagements with diasporic imaginings of an “authentic homeland,” see Tina Sherwell, “Imagining the Homeland: Gender and Palestinian National Discourses,” in *After Orientalism: Critical Entanglements, Productive Looks*, edited by Inge Boer, 123-146 (Netherlands: Rodopi, 2003); Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, “Nation, Migration, Globalization: Points of Contention in Diaspora Studies,” in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, edited by Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, 1-24 (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003).

<sup>286</sup> R. Radhakrishnan, “Ethnicity in the Age of Diaspora,” *Theories of Ethnicity: A Critical Appraisal* by Richard Thompson, *Transition*, No.54 (1991): 106.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 110. In a similar vein, Andrew Appiah in *In My Father’s House*, assails against the essential ethnic and national identities, such as Igbo or Ghanaian or African that efface the nuanced realities of contemporary social organization. In the case of Appiah, he writes of the dangers such groupings, particularly on racial terms as occurred in

In “Capitalism and Autochthony: The Seesaw of Mobility and Belonging,” authors Greschiere and Nyamjoh assert that rather than globalizing processes erasing borders and compressing time/space, the “open-ended” horizons that come with greater mobility lead to an embrace of autochthony and anti-immigration policies. More than just a move by the state, there is a sense that the greater flow of people is “both fascinating and frightening,” creating greater difference than homogenization. For Achille Mbembe and Abdou Maliq Simone, globalization’s influence on sentiments of belonging and celebration of origins “reflects in practice a determined struggle about access to the global.”<sup>290</sup> In a similar respect, Yondan migrants look to capitalize on shifts in regional demands for wage labor following the oil boom of the 1970s and the attendant collapse of the Togolese economy at the end of the Cold War—but there are a number of factors precluding them from calling Nigeria home.

In thinking about Yonda and the pursuit of the good life, or *ari siki*, [translated as “rich man”], I would argue that this pursuit of material well-being accompanies a desire for *g’rima*, or honor. In addition, the “we-ness” of Yonda as an ethnic minority facilitates the continual return to the village as people experience alienation, neglect and abuse while working abroad.<sup>291</sup> This is particularly the case with *bopi bateh onati*, where most Yondans begin the process of longing for home at a young and formative age when they first leave to work as children. And despite the “different kind of suffering” that occurs in Yonda, the village still holds an idealized and paradisaical character in the Yondan

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the pan-African movement. Rather than a shared identity (along race, nation, gender, sexuality, etc), Appiah calls for an intentional fragmentation of identity to evade the possibility of dominant constituencies forming cohesive political action against the group. For Appiah, identity organizing along these essentialized categories only reinforces the status quo.

<sup>290</sup> Peter Greschiere, “Autochthony and the Crisis of Citizenship,” *African Studies Review*, 2006:6.

<sup>291</sup> Richard Thompson discusses “we-ness” in his essay on “Primordial Sentiments vs. Civil Ties.

imagining.<sup>292</sup> The impossibility of paradise, particularly in rural Togo, does not preclude the symbolic weight of the village as a critical node in the Yondan quest for the good life, as Yondans periodically tag the rural homeland before heading out to pursue *ari siki*. In this respect, the fact that lands of plenty are located in proximate West African nation-states (like Nigeria, Benin, Ghana and Ivory Coast) allows for easy oscillations back and forth.

The term “good” not only refers to what is good with respect to individual happiness or flourishing, but also goodness in terms of morality and conscripted norms of behavior. In *Global Assemblages*, Collier and Lakoff render ethics as a question of “how one should live,” where “how,” “one,” and “should” are all terms in flux. As they write, “Ethical problems, in this sense, involve a certain idea of practice (‘how’), a notion of the subject of ethical reflection (‘one’), and questions of norms or values (‘should’) related to a certain form of life in a given domain of living.”<sup>293</sup>

Applying this to the Yondan context, “how” is a contested term, as staying in village and pursuing *ari siki* through the state education system and civil service is a pathway for some, whereas others don’t believe they have the luxury to wait for jobs to come after years of schooling. These latter families prefer to send their children to Cotonou or Nigeria, where the benefits are more immediate and predictable. The subject of ethical reflection is the adolescent coming of age as an object of international humanitarian concern in the era of trafficking. The “one” is also the Yondan ethnic

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<sup>292</sup> This distinction between kinds of suffering was expressed by a number of people.

<sup>293</sup> Collier and Lakoff, “On Regimes of Living,” in *Global Assemblages*, eds. Ong and Collier (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 22. Of the two valences of “ethics,” the first relates to “reasoning about and acting with respect to an understanding of the good; and second ... [involves] processes of ethical formation—that is, in the constitution of subjects, both individual and collective.” *Ibid.*, 23.

community—with its perceived trafficking culture—as the unwitting target of human rights condemnation. Not only is this a reflection on Yondan ethical practice, but also on Yondan subject formation, which is influenced by the adolescent’s experience of *bopi bateh onati* during a time when the Togolese state cannot protect its citizens working abroad, nor provide for them internally. At the same time, the Togolese anti-trafficking campaign has armed many of these youth with a disjointed consciousness of “rights” that operates within a system of governance—largely through the development community—that erratically acknowledges these rights. Work is another factor in subject formation as the girl teen is influenced by her years of living “alone” as a domestic servant in the city which contributes to her role in the reproduction of Yondan society and ethnic identity.

Thus, when thinking about the Yondan pursuit of the good life, questions of ethics come to the fore. *bopi bateh onati* lies at the center of many Yondan’s hopes for a better future; it is the object of inquiry to address these different valences of the good life. Thus, in this chapter, I attempt to address the question of “how one should live” in the context of Yondan conceptions of the good, and specifically with respect to how *bopi bateh onati* has evolved into a practice to realize the good life.<sup>294</sup> Beyond child labor, *bopi bateh onati* indexes Yondan’s strategic adaptations at a particular historical conjuncture to improve their quality of life and how this labor system impacts practices of ethnicity, specifically with respect to marriage, migration and physical reproduction.

As a systematized practice with a complex set of actors and expectations, it is also reflective and constitutive of this emergent understanding of “how one should live”

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<sup>294</sup> [How can I think of this with respect to a “regime of living,” where regime of living refers to “situated configurations of normative, technical and political elements that are brought into alignment in problematic or uncertain situations.” (GA, 31)

because it is ostensibly to secure the clothes and dishes necessary for marriage, but also as a way, for the community, to connect with outside markets and sustain a local economy that is buttressed by remittances from those working as vendors, domestic servants and field laborers abroad. While the bulk of these remittances come from adult Yondans, children's labor migration via *bopi bateh onati* is significant because it reproduces the next generation of workers to maintain these inroads into Nigeria. Why send children? Why not adults? Largely, this has to do with Yonda's push factors, which include parents' desire to eschew the charge of their adolescent children, the failures of the rural school system to keep students enrolled, and the threat of unwanted pregnancies. These push factors are changing somewhat as Togo's political climate changes. Under the new President, Faure Gnassingbe, the government has waived school fees. Yondans say this policy has led to more children enrolling at the primary level, creating a floor that bars the youngest from leaving. Instead of parents choosing a select few (largely male) children to support for school and sending the others to work abroad, now it is through each one's performance that parents decide who should stay and who will go.

Specifically, the good life for Yondans involves making money (exemplified in building a house or owning a car), remaining pious (exemplified by studying the Koran, praying five times a day, traveling to Mecca and gaining El Hadji title) and maintaining ties to Yonda (exemplified by marrying Yondan, returning for the festival of return Fête d'Alafia, or financing a building project). Based on these pillars of the good life, *bopi bateh onati* ostensibly accomplishes one goal—that of opening up the opportunity for wages to satisfy material needs—while simultaneously threatening the third pillar—marrying Yondan. Ironically, most parents send their children away to facilitate their

marriage by securing the clothes and dishes for their wedding, but after living away for a number of years, things happen. The penultimate section of this chapter reflects the way girls struggle with these dual commitments of *ari siki* and *g'rima* during the time of fieldwork from the years 2000 to 2009, which straddles the final years of President Gnassingbe Eyadema's long dictatorship and the early years of his son Faure's rise to power following Eyadema's death in 2005. Thus, this ethnography does not reflect on the reforms Faure's administration has made with respect to the Togolese education system, specifically the policy of waiving school fees.

### **The Making of the Yondan Homeland**

An important aspect of securing an honorable reputation is maintaining ties to "home." Thus, before further discussing the Yondan good life, this section addresses the ways in which Yonda as a homeland is constructed and why it carries such significance for those living in the diaspora.

Rather than erasing the lines of difference, Yondan mobility—and at younger ages—encourages many to embrace their Yondan ethnic identity. In a similar vein, Yonda as a place is formed largely through the sentimental attachments of those living and working on the outside. Examples of Yonda's fragmented cultural composition abound, yet primordial sentiments that Yondans come from a singular, originary homeland remain. For example, linguistically, there is no singular form of Yonda. Students add inflections of French; uneducated women speak in Yoruba, *Fon* or pidgin English depending on their former work experiences; and some of the oldest in the community speak Ghanaian English from working the cocoa plantations of Ghana during

the 40s and 50s.<sup>295</sup> And yet, there seems to be a strong sentiment of attachment to pure Yonda, in contradistinction to the "impoverished imitation of the originary culture" that is life in the diaspora.<sup>296</sup>

### **Designating a Language**

Pull factors, such as the exclusivity of Yondan language and their collective consciousness of being a minority ethnicity speak to the ways in which the village has become the site of "originary culture" for Yondans working throughout West Africa.<sup>297</sup> While statistics are hard to come by, the Benin census of 1992 estimated that there are 45,900 *Anii* speakers. In a more recent count done by Christian missionaries from the Summer Institute of Languages (SIL) in 2002, they reported that Togolese *Anii* speakers number 12,300.<sup>298</sup> However, this figure does not include the far larger number of *Anii* speakers in the diaspora, although it does give a sense to how small the Yondan grouping is by ethnicity (where ethnicity refers to social organization based on linguistic, national, religious, or other cultural characteristics).<sup>299</sup>

*Anii* was not always the term used to describe the language family of the Yondans and their "kin" in Benin. In fact, it was a linguistic sub-committee appointed in 1979 by the then Marxist-Leninist government of Mattieu Parakou to investigate the origins of the Ouindji-Ouindji language. The following is excerpts from the sub-committee of the Benin National Commission on Linguistics that was held in the public primary school of

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<sup>295</sup> "Clearly these movements [towards an embrace of autochthony and anti-immigration] should be seen as part and parcel of globalization processes. They are the inevitable outcome of the ambivalence evoked by globalization's open-ended horizons that are both fascinating and frightening—or, as it was formulated above, the dialectics of flow and closure." Peter Greschiere and Francis Nyamnjoh, "Capitalism and Autochthony: The Seesaw of Mobility and Belonging," 443.)

<sup>296</sup> Braziel and Mannur, *Theorizing Diaspora*, 8.

<sup>297</sup> There are also a number of Yondans living in Europe (specifically France, Germany and Italy), and the United States, but this diaspora is not the focus of this study.

<sup>298</sup> [http://www.tg.refer.org/togo\\_ct/rec/journees/lesh.htm](http://www.tg.refer.org/togo_ct/rec/journees/lesh.htm).

<sup>299</sup> R Radhakrishnan, "Ethnicity in the Time of Diaspora," 107.

Bassila, Benin, for four days in May, 1979, and consisted of delegates from the villages of Bassila and Penessoulou. While delegates from Yonda were not present at the meeting, Yondans identify themselves as *Anii* and acknowledge a shared ethnicity with the people of Bassila and Penessoulou.

Per the document, "Ouindji-Ouindji" was spoken in three villages in Togo, including Yonda, as well as in a number of villages in Benin, the largest being Bassila and Penessoulou. The first section of the document, entitled, "Of the Nationality," describes the ethnic origins of the Ouindji-Ouindji linguistic cluster, which covered a limited range in northeastern Togo and northwestern Benin. The "Ouindji-Ouindji" speakers came from all over West Africa, including the majority from Akim of Ghana; the Agni of Ivory Coast; the Bambara, Nintohe and the Traore of Mali, Upper Volta and Guinee. The Nintche and Koli descendents, respectively, of the Tem and the Kabye, who come from the east. There are also the Atariwa and Djeriwe, who originate from the Bariba."<sup>300</sup> In fact, the only proof that the *Anii* may have come from Ghana is that "the drums the *Anii* use today are originally from Ghana, thus, there is some connection."<sup>301</sup> All these ethnicities settled the area, "for different reasons and at different times" because it was a heavily forested and close to water where "they could take refuge in case of attack."<sup>302</sup> According to the oral histories of Yondan elders, there were a large amount of raids and assaults by these neighboring villages during the slave trade. The Yondans

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<sup>300</sup> Barbara Tompkins, Angela Kluge, "Sociolinguistic Survey of the Anii-Akpe Language Area," SIL publication, January 1997.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> *Sous-Commission Nationale: Anii*, Bassila, Benin, May 1979.



recount a history of military prowess during this time and identify as “fearless warriors,” which is the significance of the term “Yonda.”<sup>303</sup>

The report goes on to document how the committee unanimously rejected the term "Ouindji-Ouindji," that was given to them by a colonial administrator. "The Colon believed he needed to designate our ethnicity by the term 'Ouindji-Ouindji.' Per the history, he mistakenly believed that the Bassila and Penessoulou people had the custom of saying “Ouindji-Ouindji,” but it otherwise “has no historical value.”<sup>304</sup> In fact, they condemn the colonist for his laziness in just wanting to get the task of naming done, and choosing a poor term to capture the commonalities amongst these disparate people: "The white man heard 'wa-ndji' in Penessoulou, 'wa-be' in Kodowari and 'wa-bi' in Bassila and transformed this into "Ouindji-Ouindji" to make his task of naming easier. This was a fantasy appellation given to us by the white man, who had no interest in learning the origin of our language. But this situation does not have to endure eternally, because all the Beninois people in the Central region, particularly the inhabitants of Bassila and Penessoulou are fighting for our socio-cultural identity. For the reason, we find it necessary to rid ourselves of these names.”<sup>305</sup>

"The committee has unanimously decided that *Anii* will designate the communal populations outlined above and the language that they speak.” They chose the word “*Anii*” because it is a common term shared by the different communities living in this forested zone that spanned the Benin-Togo border. *Anii* means, “I said.” As the sub-

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<sup>303</sup> As a reminder, “Yonda” is a pseudonym.

<sup>304</sup> Barbara Thompkins and Angela Kluge, “A Sociolinguistic Survey of the Anii-Akpe Language Area,” *SIL International* (August, 2008): 26.

<sup>305</sup> *Sous-Commission Nationale: Anii*, 4.

committee explains, "For example, to say 'Je dis,' a Bassila man will say, 'Am wa *Anii*,' and a Penessoulou man will say, 'Amie wa *Anii*,' and a Bodi man will say, 'Amim kaa *Anii*.'" The one common element: *Anii*.

Echoing the ethos of the time, in which the country was governed by the Marxist-Leninist dictatorship of Mathieu Kérékou, the declaration concluded with: "Long live the *Anii* populations. Long live the national language *Anii*. In having our writing, we are ready for the Revolution. The struggle continues."

The significance of the new *Anii* language designation to the sentiment of a shared ethnicity was evident in the declaration's preamble. "To assure the development of the Popular Culture, organizing a national languages and writing for the masses is an essential factor in our development. It is [also] indispensable to create a linguistic institute in charge of removing the obstacles to using these national languages as a vehicle towards knowledge... All the nationalities are at liberty to use their language to speak, write and develop their proper culture.... Conscious of the fact that a people who lose their language is comparable to a man who loses his soul; considering that the language, oral, as much as written, plays a primordial role in the struggle for liberation ... considering that in as much as language is an effective arm to fight against political, economic and cultural alienation; the sub-committee *Anii*, that comes together in the National Seminary of Bassila the 26<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> of May, 1979, adopts the present rules, that cannot be modified except in the Seminar... The old appellation 'Ouindji-Ouindji' ceases to exist.... The populations stated speak, above all in their territory, the language *Anii*."

The Yondans see themselves, however, as the most different of all the villages under the *Anii* language grouping. A SIL survey in 2002, confirmed that the Yondans were the most distinct amongst the *Anii* speakers and their language only had 70% homology with the other versions.<sup>306</sup> In fact, there is disagreement amongst the Yondans as to whether they are *Anii* or Akpe. Barbara Thompkins and Angela Kluge, a previous team of SIL researchers, wrote in 1997 that the “ancestors of [Yonda] originated from Akpe, near Ouidah in Benin. Five chiefs reigned before the colonial era, and since then there have been seven chiefs. The [Yondan] people are aware that their history differs from that of their neighbors.”

Thompkins and Kluge’s sociolinguistic survey continues to say that the *Sous-Commission Nationale Anii* was established by the communities in Benin and is associated with literacy organizations in Benin. Although the communities in Togo were reportedly invited to participate, the commission remains an entity tied to Benin. Therefore, the elders in each Togo village were asked about their feelings concerning the choice of ‘*Anii*’ as a general language name, and whether they felt a part of that larger group. While the elders of neighboring Kouloumi believed their speech should be called *Anii* because it was the same as the variety spoken in Benin, they said that they do not frequent Benin for meetings with other *Anii* speakers because that would be a “political issue.” In contrast, the Yondan leadership were less embracing of *Anii*. “During a first visit to [Yonda] when dates for the survey work were set up, the secretary to the chief, pointed out several times that the language spoken in [Yonda] is Akpe and not *Anii*. He added that the people from [Yonda] originally came from Akpe in Benin, and he

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<sup>306</sup> Thompkins and Kluge, “Sociolinguistic Survey,” 21.

associated the name ‘*Anii*’ with the language spoken in Bassila and strictly resisted the idea that the people in Bassila should impose their name on all other communities.”<sup>307</sup>

In practice, the exclusivity of the Yondan language was palpable throughout the time I was conducting fieldwork. For example, when Mazou (my research assistant) and I would arrive at a location in Nigeria, it would only take uttering a few greeting words in Yonda to find people in the markets—any Yondan within earshot would take notice. Yondan also became the secret language for the old medical director’s children. They were Kabye, a large ethnic group in northern Togo, but were born and raised in Yonda, thereby speaking both languages fluently. Whenever the family would travel, even to the nearby town of Sokodé, they would speak to each other in Yondan, ensuring their conversations remained private

Thus, it was the exclusivity of their language that contributed to the Yondans’ shared sense that they are unique; that there are not many of them; and that they are somehow all blood related. This sense of exclusivity also influences behavior. For example, in the central village market, vendors say that they cannot make money because everyone buys off of credit and rarely repays their debts. Girls say that they are able to transgress Yondan mores and still find a marriage partner because their ethnicity is so small—there just aren’t enough women for all the men looking for Yondan wives. “We all know each other” is why male *ogás* never draft written contracts for the Yondan boys they bring over to Nigeria, while they do this for workers from other villages.

This is also the reason people say that impunity reigns because forgiveness is obliged. Gatena is an ancestral pact that Yonda has with some of the surrounding village

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 24.

communities, such as Manigri in Benin and Koloumi in Togo. It obliges Yondans to forgive any person from one of these villages or risk misfortune. Such forgiveness is also an important and penetrating value constraint amongst the Yondans themselves, where female *ogás* who perpetually deny girls' families their salaries are largely tolerated. The practice largely falls along gender lines, however, as male *ogás* assert that such impunity does not extend to the fields of Nigeria, where immoral transgressions like cheating workers of their salaries are never tolerated.

### **Citizenship**

There are other ways that Yondans cannot forget that the village is their homeland. The lack of civil protections and land tenure rights as non-citizens in the diaspora refocus the village as a sanctuary of legal inclusion. In this respect, there is an elision of national and ethnic identities, because most of the uneducated workers returning from Nigeria's farm belt or urban domestic spheres restrict their oscillations to distant worksites and the village. Thus, Yonda acts as a metonym for Togo as a whole, because this is the only Togo that most Yondans will ever know.

Malika is a Yondan girl living in Lagos who has assimilated well. She speaks Yoruba fluently and carries herself comfortably in the city. However, she is still not immune from people taking advantage of the fact that she is a Togolese in Nigeria. This reality was reinforced when she had an argument with her Hausa ex-boyfriend in Lagos, highlighting the dangers of having a casual relationship for money. "If he realizes that you're playing him and plan to leave, then he'll hit you and force you out of the neighborhood. That's what happened to me. You can even ask Foussena, she was there.

He told me that I had to leave the neighborhood and started to threaten me. It's only because of an El Hadji that the affair was resolved.<sup>308</sup> We went to the chief's house and he [the ex-boyfriend] said that I had to get out of the neighborhood, but the chief calmed us down and I was allowed to stay. I thought that was the end of the issue, but one day, [my ex-boyfriend] ran into me and started to hit me and scream at me, 'What did you say to me? What did you say to me?' He said that I was in his territory and that this wasn't Togo, so he could do whatever he wanted to me. That day, he went and took all the dishes I used to sell my rice and to this day, he still has them. Even after I went to the police, he still refuses to give me back my dishes. Later, he wanted to be my friend, but I refused." She went on to say that the incident was one of the reasons she was planning on going back to Yonda for the *fête d'Alafia*.

In this moment, as she was denied her rights as a non-Nigerian, her identity as a Togolese came into view. These same exclusions occur with respect to language—yet, the more the Yondan immigrants familiarize themselves with Yoruba, the weaker this exclusionary/ inclusionary force becomes. In Malika's case, it was the presence of law enforcement and anti-immigration agents that solidified her Togolese affiliation. Malika is also required to have an ECOWAS pass to be in Nigeria for longer than 90 days.<sup>309</sup> Like all non-Nigerian West Africans, she must register with the local authorities if she cannot prove that she has been in Nigeria for less than 90 days. Yet, the pass is an apparition reinforcing a perpetual sense on not being legitimate in Nigeria. Some of the Yondans had the passes, but most did not. In fact, when Mazou attempted to get a pass

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<sup>308</sup> El Hadji is the title given to a man who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca. "El Hadji" indexes a man in respected position of authority.

<sup>309</sup> R.I. Onwuka, "The ECOWAS Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons: A Threat To Nigerian Security," *African Affairs* 81, no. 323 (April 1982): 195.

from the local police precinct in Ikeja, the officer did not know what he was talking about. Mazou finally had to follow a Yondan in another part of Lagos who knew of a precinct that did issue the cards. But Arissou, a Yondan who has been living in Lagos for eight years, said that the card was a waste of time because the police will find any reason to extort money. Since he speaks pidgin, Yoruba and Hausa, Arissou feels he has no need for the card. His mastery of Lagosian ways suffices.

Of all the Yondans we came across, Dihanna had the least to worry about. She had been living in the Iyana Ipaja district of Lagos for twenty years and had made a full transition into life as a Yoruba bar owner, although she maintained her Togolese and Yondan connections. For Fati, the Nigerian immigration enforcement was purely was money making enterprise.<sup>310</sup> “The only reason the police would stop someone is to look for money.” She went on to explain how she was part of a delegation of Togolese expatriates who went to the Togolese embassy to complain about their treatment by the Nigerian police. They said that the Togolese government treats immigrants well, that there “Is no problem with the Yorubas living in Togo... they’re free... and the police don’t ever ask for papers.” But, in Nigeria, the police are able to spot the Togolese and they will ask for papers. If the person doesn’t have papers, then they are obliged to pay the police. After taking part in the delegation, Fati said she felt empowered to stand up to the police and to stand up for her Yondan workers. One year, the former Togolese President Eyadema came to visit Nigeria and her delegation welcomed him. During the visit, he made a speech asserting that the Togolese should feel as comfortable in Nigeria

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<sup>310</sup> See *Criminalization of the State* for more on this.

as they do in Togo. The speech emboldened her with the requisite strength for living in Lagos. “In Nigeria, you should be strong to live.”

### **Land tenure**

As Greschiere and Nyamjoh note, access to land and cemetery space are critical to questions of belonging.<sup>311</sup> This is particularly the case in Yonda, where customary entitlement to land in Togo creates a strong attachment to the village terrain. This contrasts to the Yondans’ lack of land rights to the plantations they till in Nigeria. For example, in Oyo where an *ogá* named Kamarou works, Yondans must rent from Yoruba landowners if they want to grow their own crops for sale. Yet, even renting is a risk for the Yondans, who will work a number of small plots scattered amongst the Yoruba ones to mask their work. They fear that jealous locals will expel them. As *Ogá* Kamarou explains:

Me, personally, I’m looking to leave Nigeria behind me. No work in this world is easy, but I would say that our work is more difficult still because we have to live amongst people we don’t know—people with whom we don’t know their character. And whenever you are in that situation, you always have to be tolerant. It’s also very difficult to get the employers to pay. In the past, we only worked for the Yorubas. But now, we’ve gotten the idea to split the work into two groups. One group works for the Yoruba and the other works for our fields, and if there aren’t a lot of workers, well then they just work for me. And we have learned a lot about how to work the fields, so that one day we can leave Nigeria because folks don’t want to have to work ‘til their death. A lot of *ogás* have made their fields here, in village, because they plan to come back one day. Me, I have a large field on the road to Kouloumi [near Yonda]. Mazou, you know it well. I also have a cashew orchard. If for some reason I have to leave Nigeria suddenly, I won’t be at a loss for something to do back here. It’s only money that I lack. I think that the men have learned a lot about growing from being in Nigeria and will be ready [to return]. Before, I was an employee. Now I am an employer. I work for myself.”<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> Greschiere and Nyamjoh, “Capitalism and Autochthony,” 434.

<sup>312</sup> May 7, 2005.



In response to my question about how much he rents his plots of land in Nigeria, *Ogá* Kamarou continued by saying that the man he works with is wealthy, so he only has to share a portion of his harvest with him. This year, the Yoruba landowner changed his mind and asked that *Ogá* Kamarou clear his palm orchard, instead. Despite the fact that Kamarou has been working seasonally in Nigeria since 1975, the Yoruba will never sell him farmland. In fact, Dihanna was the only Yondan we came across who owned property in Nigeria, and she lived in the city. She said she had to be convinced by a friend to buy, basically telling her to stop thinking that she was Togolese. After twenty five years in Lagos, she had become Nigerian and therefore could own property. But Fati said it took her many years to finally have the courage to buy.<sup>313</sup>

## School

Despite its statutory “guarantee of free primary education,”<sup>314</sup> Togo had one of the highest failure rates in the world in 2000.<sup>315</sup> The origin of this high failure rate, according to the sociologist Marie-France Lange, is a fear by the government of excessive numbers of educated youth graduating from university to enter a labor market bereft of jobs.<sup>316</sup> As it stands, graduates looking for jobs in the formal sector are perpetually disappointed because only 7% of the country’s workforce is “formally”

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<sup>313</sup> Awei Chinkafa [“Mrs. Rice” in Yonda] also owned property, but she inherited her Ikeja house from her deceased, Yoruba husband. Fati, in contrast, built it with her own money.

<sup>314</sup> Up until 2008, Togolese had to pay for their tuition, which cost from 4,000CFA to 13,000CFA per year. Marie France Lange, “Inégalités de genre et éducation au Togo,” *2003/2004 EFA Monitoring Report*, (UNESCO, 2003), 1-25. Much of this research was carried out prior to the elimination of school fees. Now, certain development organizations have begun touting Togo as a “top performer” with respect to primary school enrollment. See Keith Gehring et al, “Knowledge Empowers Africa: The Benefits of Increased Investment in Africa,” *Africa Futures Brief*, no.2 (December 2011): 3. Accessed January 10, 2012, <http://www.ifs.du.edu/assets/documents/afp/Af.Futures.PolBrief2.pdf>.

<sup>315</sup> In 2000, for example, only 25% of the 16,000 students taking qualifying exams (for all three levels) passed. Morton and Michelle Spearing Hagen, “Togo—Stalled Democratic Transition,” (London, England: Centre for Democracy and Development, 2000).

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, p.78.

employed.<sup>317</sup> (Although much of this research was carried out prior to the elimination of school fees in 2008, it will take time to see the effects of the increased enrollment, which has increased by thirteen percent from 2002 to 2010. In fact, the rapid rate of primary school matriculation has prompted certain development organizations to tout Togo as a “top performer” relative to other sub-Saharan African countries.)<sup>318</sup>

Despite these shortcomings, development agencies continue to see education as the panacea for poverty. Kande, the first Yondan girl to get a high school degree, was fortuitous in that her education gave her the opportunity to travel to Germany, and her atypical experience made her an absolute believer in the power of education. Most other Yondans have mixed feelings. Elders recall how the French colonists would force their parents to send them to boarding schools far from the village. This coercive policy prompted many parents to hide their children in the forests when the colonial administrators would come to choose a select few. Presently, instead of being forced to attend, parents pay for their children’s tuition. Many Yondans expressed appreciation for lessons in French and arithmetic, because it helps their children in the market and to earn better salaries working as domestic servants for the higher paying Lebanese or Chinese families. Going to school may also lead to the civil service; although this is largely

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<sup>317</sup> Lange, M.F., «Le Refus de l’Ecole : Pouvoir d’une Société Civile Bloquée » 1987.

<sup>318</sup> See Keith Gehring et al, “Knowledge Empowers Africa: The Benefits of Increased Investment in Africa,” *Africa Futures Brief*, no.2 (December 2011): 3. Accessed January 10, 2012, <http://www.ifs.du.edu/assets/documents/afp/Af.Futures.PolBrief2.pdf>; Hadrien Bonnaud, “Primary Education is Now Free to All Children in Togo,” *UNICEF*, accessed January 10, 2012, [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/togo\\_45941.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/togo_45941.html).

perceived as an unlikely windfall, as parents annually witness their otherwise prizewinning sons perpetually fail the state's *baccalauréat* examination.<sup>319</sup>

But school is also wrought with problems, including corruption and violence in the form of corporal punishment and sexual harassment. In addition, once a Yondan is educated, they must leave the community to continue their studies as the village does not have a high school. It's generally assumed that *fonctionnaire* do not have the heart or loyalty for their kin and they look down on those who remain in Yonda. *Ogá* Mooney summarized the sentiment succinctly: « Well, there are some people who go to school... those Yondans living in Lomé. The people in village think that they don't care about them. They stay for three days [to visit] and then they're gone... Where you live [in the United States], where you were born, there may be annoyances... and there may be people who are afraid of their villages ... but me, I return. Every time, I return... I think that the people who have done a lot of schooling, they don't know how to speak with the people. They only say, you should do like this, you should do like that. That doesn't work. »

Those that stay behind, the year-round population, largely consists of retirees, children, some child-bearing women and a small number of working-aged men. Adults of working age need a reason for being in the village instead of earning money outside. Married women, if they have not followed their husbands to the farm belt in Nigeria, are living in Yonda to tend to their small children. Unmarried girls who have given birth to a child will often leave the child with a female relative after the baby has been weaned and

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<sup>319</sup> The *bacclaireat* examination is the main barrier to entry into the civil service. Also refer to Okunola's article about child breadwinners in *Money Struggles*.

return to the cities. The small handful of men who have managed to eke out a living in the village are there for two reasons. Their families have designated them to be the caretakers for an elder in the family, typically the patriarch; and as masons, school teachers, drivers and lumberjacks, their vocations allow them to make modest profits in rural Togo. The rest are elderly persons or children. Of the children, the majority is students attending one of the two elementary schools or the Catholic middle school, or else they are out of school and just waiting for the day they will travel out for work.

Despite its shortcomings, formal education still holds cache amongst the majority of Yondans, as they hold onto a hope that the political and economic climate in Togo may eventually improve and provide jobs for its educated citizens. In this respect, getting educated does not necessarily equate with more money or greater village ties, but it is a form of cultural capital that trumps these other aspects of the good life. As a Yondan living in Italy recently explained to me, “It’s all about having a car for folks in village... and the *ogás* will never be able to afford a car, only the functionaries from Lomé have cars, like Sabatou and *Le Deputé*.” He went on to say that another proof that the functionaries were more highly regarded than the grand *ogás* is that they are the ones called in to dedicate buildings and other special events in Yonda.

This informant was university educated, but the sentiment also holds for those who never stepped foot in a classroom. The following interview with Sarena, a girl who has been working in Cotonou since she was eight years old as a domestic servant,

illustrates the allure for school despite its intangible benefits.<sup>320</sup> She never went to school, but talked about a childhood friend Abiba who stayed in Yonda for school.

Mazou: What do you think about her life now?

Girl: Oh, it's good that she's continuing on in school.

Mazou: Why? Why do you think it's good?

Girl: Because now she can speak French and she can write. Me, I can't speak French... And if she does well, perhaps she'll gain a *fonction* [civil service position] and become rich.

Mazou: Do you know of a Yondan girl who went to school and gained a *fonction*?

Girl: No, but in Cotonou, there are women like that.

Sarena's story is significant because she left so young that she was caught between worlds. Most other Yondans leave through *bopi bateh onati* after they have socialized into Yondan society with respect to Islamic prayer and the language. In the case of Sarena, she spoke broken Yondan and when Mazou asked her if she prays five times a day, she said that she left Yonda too young to know how to pray. Instead, she attends mass every Sunday with the family and expressed her love for Vero, the daughter of the house. It was clear her allegiance was stronger to the Cotonou family than to her biological family in Yonda. This was an obligatory visit to Yonda and she was biding her time until she returned to her work. And while she appreciated school, she also thought that her prospects in the city were satisfactory without the education.

*Ogá* Kamarou, like Sarena, never had formal schooling and he managed to be successful as the first Yondan to construct a home off of his profits from Nigeria. Yet,

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<sup>320</sup> This girl is also significant because she had positive experience with the family she worked for. She has had good experiences with both of the families that she worked for and is back in Yonda for four days to visit her family before returning back to Cotonou. She has been with the same Christian family for the past six years.

like many others, he acknowledged the cache that came from having an education. As *Ogá* Kamarou explains:

Our brothers who are in Lomé [referring to the *fonctionnaires* talk to us all the time about the importance of education. You, Aicha [referring to me, the author, by my Yondan given name], you would tell us in this village to “Bring your children to school... bring your children to school” and we have come to understand this. Thus, we know that even if we have to continue going to Nigeria for whatever reason, there is always a difference between someone who has gone to school and someone who has not. People understand this because they think that there really is a place for education and it’s why someone, like those from the NGOs, can push a parent to send his child to school. And when someone asks to do this or that with your child, it’s because they have some interest in saying that. And that’s why the person insists even if the child is not his. It’s not just because it’s a lot of work to buy a scooter [in Nigeria] that kids have ceased to travel.”<sup>321</sup> (Implying that the reason is because they have chosen to stay and go to school.)

Perhaps the greatest proof is that *Ogá* Kamarou, the most successful and established of the grand *ogás*, sent all seven of his children to school and refused their requests to follow him to Nigeria.

### **The Cost of Return**

Many Yondans perceive the village (or “canton,” as it was recently designated) to be the epicenter of their ethnicity and the most potent location for witchcraft.<sup>322</sup> One Yondan resident in Lomé confessed to me that he does not like visiting the village for more than a few days because he fears a misfortune will befall him during his stay.

Another man explained to me that family members who stay behind in village learn many secrets related to sorcery, and for that reason they tend to be feared by relatives who have

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<sup>321</sup> Interview, March 15, 2009. Forty-seven year old man.

<sup>322</sup> *Canton* is a government designation to describe an establish community with administrative authority over a cluster of villages. Thus, the chief of Yonda, the village, became the *chef canton* when the government made the designation. Although ostensibly based on population size, it is a political decision.

traveled out. And yet, despite the dangers and costs of village life, there remains a strong drive to return home. In fact, this sense of homeland and being Yondan keeps many women from advancing or breaking through a ceiling of wages in the cities. As mentioned in Chapter Two, *fête d'Alafia*, or “*owala*” in Yonda, is the biannual festival of return that draws Yondans from all over West Africa and Europe to this origin point for three days to reconnect with family and friends and for engaged youth to marry. There is also an expectation that unattached youth will find their marriage partner during this brief period of convergence. While everyone attending *fête d'Alafia* do so to celebrate their shared Yondan-ness, each locale within the diaspora will dress in a particular uniform to highlight their differences (for example, the Yondans of Cotonou might wear red with white flowers; those from Abeokuta wear green with orange circles, etc). It is a tradition that is also practiced by all the surrounding communities both in Togo and the Benin side of the border. In the past, *fête d'Alafia* took place in December when the harvest season is over in Nigeria. More recently, there has been disagreement within the organizing committee, primarily between the *fonctionnaires* who live in Lomé and the *ogás* coming from Nigeria. *Fonctionnaires* wanted it in April, because the *harmattan* winds are too cold in December, but the *ogás* preferred December, when they have their seasonal break. Eventually, the *fonctionnaires* won, perhaps because the women in the cities also agree that the village is too cold during *harmattan*. Now, the festival is held in April with the *ogás* staging their own, smaller version in December.



**Figure 7: Author at *Fête d'Alafia* in 2000**

Aside from the few who are able to make the hajj to Mecca, *fête d'Alafia* is one of the biggest travel expenses for Yondans. Yondans working across West Africa put funds aside for months prior to returning to the village for *fête d'Alafia* for transport and to pay for gifts and their uniforms. More importantly, the women and girls put their employment at risk every time they leave the city, since employers frequently refuse to hold their jobs for the weeks, if not months, that they are gone for the festival. As a result, many Yondans take the opportunity of *fête d'Alafia* to switch employers. Whether this is work as a domestic servant, a barmaid or a field laborer, their contracts are effectively up when they visit the village. Fati, the Yondan woman who owns a bar in Lagos, said that the



reason she was able to establish herself is because she married Yoruba and stayed in Nigeria. “It’s those with the motivation to live here who can become patronnes... To become a patronne, you have to be well established and you can’t keep abandoning your commerce to go live in the village.” She was also able to build herself up to better paying positions because she stayed with the same employer for many years and established relationships to open up her own bar.

### **The Cost of Not Returning**

Regardless of the prosperity of Yondans living in the diaspora, the village site continues to hold symbolic weight as a core of belonging and for those who yearn for inclusion within the Yondan ethnic fold. The importance of maintaining a visible presence in Yonda is exemplified by the competition between the *fonctionnaire* and the *ogás* over building projects, with the community center versus library serving as evidence of this divide. The library was sponsored by Kande, the first woman from Yonda to get a high school degree. Since finishing school, she initially moved to Lomé where she met a German traveler. They married and moved to Germany. She subsequently remarried to another German man and the two now work together in a Hanover real estate firm. Her motivation for building the library was to expose Yondan children to the kinds of experiences she has had living in Europe. She believes strongly in the power of education and has been donating books and school supplies to Yonda for many years prior to the library project. She also arranged for young German volunteers to come to Yonda for a few months a year to assist the house librarians and galvanize the community to keep using the library.



**Figure 8: Library in Yonda**

*Ogás*, like Kamarou, Issa and Moukaila, who have been traveling to Nigeria for over thirty years, also have a village project. They are in the midst of constructing a community center in the same central square as the library. While Kande was able to raise Euros through charity events and holiday sales, the *ogás*' funds come from a pooling of their naira. The *ogás* also donate furniture to the chief's house where community meetings are held. But more importantly, they maintain a regular presence by returning every year during the off-season for two to three months. This level of commitment is difficult for the more distant functionaries to compete with.

Dihanna is an example of the cost for those who do not return. While she is well regarded by Yondans who come to Lagos looking for work, she does not enjoy the same level of *g'rima* as figures like Kande or *Ogá* Kamarou. She considers herself an outsider

and would not feel comfortable visiting for more than a few days, although she only hires Yondan girls and considers Awei Awona, a middle-aged Yondan woman who left her husband to work in Lagos, as her best friend. Thus, while Fati dresses like a Lagosian, has married a Yoruba man and plans to be buried in Nigeria, she continues to seek Yondan connections.

### **Circulation, The Good Life and *Bopi Bateh Onati***

Yondan parents try to regulate their children's relationships through a controlled cycling between home and away, in that they will send a daughter into domestic service to avoid a village romance and equally restrict the amount of time she spends working abroad to prevent her from marrying a man from the "outside." Malika, an unmarried girl in her mid-twenties who has been working in Nigeria since she was a pre-teen, is now due to marry a Yondan boy. She describes Nigeria as the place of *ari siki* because it's easy to make money, both as a domestic servant or market vendor, and men spend more money on their girlfriends. In her description of *konanguida*, or the Yondan word for unmarried girls being paid for sexual favors, she illustrates the tensions inherent in being in Nigeria for money, but not for marriage.<sup>323</sup>

*Konanguida* is not a sin. If a boy does not find a girl to be good, he would not be able to invite her to spend the night with him... [and] girls are obliged to spend the night because he will help her... If I am over there [referring to Lagos], and I get sick, [my boyfriend] is the one who will treat me... especially girls who stay faithful. Everything that the girl asks for, the boy should provide ... all she has to do is ask." She goes on to explain that there is a difference between the money one gains from boyfriends and the money one gets from working. "Money from working is kept separate. Girls use the money from boyfriends to buy clothes. The

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<sup>323</sup> See Janet Maia Wojcicki, "Commercial Sex Work or *Ukuphanda*? Sex-For-Money Exchange in Soweto and Hammanskraal Area, South Africa" *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 26 (2003): 339-370, 2002, for a review of the literature on transactional sex in sub-Saharan Africa.

money from working is for [wedding] dishes.” Malika confessed to *n’di m’pah* (or stealing, literally translated as “eating up the village”) from one boy, by giving him the impression that she was willing to have sex with him, only to refuse after she had taken his money. “But you cannot do that for too long. If the girl takes money for three or five months and the boy realizes that the girl only wants his money, he will call it off... We hold in our hearts for that special boyfriend, but the others are just for money.”<sup>324</sup>

As she explains, it is not every one who is looking for money through boyfriends, but there is pressure to do so.

Nigeria is really rich. A girl can spend 3000 CFA for breakfast and that money is nothing for her boyfriend. Me, I spent more than 3000 CFA in the morning and I knew that I would be spending a lot more than that before nightfall... So, when a girl pleases a boy, he will start to court her, especially if he has his sights on marriage. But it’s us, who refuse. Yondan and *Kotokoli* [ethnic group from central Togo] girls, we don’t like to marry over there—it’s only a few rare girls who do.... There are some who have married over there but for the most part, we don’t want to marry to the outside. There is Abiba who married a Zambarma, and also Djoumai. There are a few other friends who I tried to convince not to marry Zambarma men because they are very severe. I told this to Djoumai, but it became a real problem. She told this to her fiancé who called me before the brigade [community justice committee in Mile 12, Lagos] to complain that I was trying to break off their marriage. But for the most part, the Yondans don’t want to marry Lagos men. They just want to take their money. There was even a Yondan who married a Zambarma. He bought her a lot of things. One day, she emptied her husband’s room in Mile 12 and left. She took everything: the television, the video player... everything he had in the room. I think that’s why men there no longer trust Togolese women. But if I wanted, I could easily have married a Zambarma by now.

While these casual affairs bring in money for the Yondan girls, they come at a cost. The prevailing assumption in Yonda is that all girls engage in transactional sex once they have left the village, despite the fact that many parents send their daughters to prevent unwanted pregnancies from premarital sex with a schoolmate or teacher. Yet, most of the girls understand the consequences of having sex in the city. As Malika

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<sup>324</sup> Interview, April 12, 2004. Unmarried twenty-five year old woman.

explains, “If a boy starts sleeping with you, then you’re ruined. He can do anything with you.”

Are there any girls who are happy just to work and not to give themselves [to men]?

I have yet to meet such a girl. Anyone who says that she doesn’t run after boys is lying, believe me. Whether it’s in Cotonou or Nigeria, it’s a rare case. Girls copy what their friends are doing. Me, when I first left, I refused all the boys’ advances and was happy just to be working. But once I saw my friends dressing well, eating well and doing whatever they wanted, I also started to accept the boys. I lived with my Zamberma boyfriend until I returned home [to Yonda]. My friends encouraged me to go out with him. And today, I can say that it really helped me [to have this affair]... because I have lots of clothes and pagnes and there isn’t anything else that I need to buy. That’s why even married girls flee the village ... they say to themselves, there’s too much suffering here... in the beginning, the girl is happy just to be working. It’s only after a few months that she starts to have boyfriends. Folks [in Yonda] think that the girls are prostitutes. But I say ‘No.’ Sure, we satisfy the desires of some boys. But for the most part, we are just playing them for their money. I did that a lot when I was there.<sup>325</sup>

Malika’s interview highlights a prevailing view among Yondans that Nigeria is the land of *ari siki*. It also exemplifies the way in which Yondan girls carefully navigate the various categories of male companion: boyfriend, husband, sugar daddy, Yondan, Nigerian, Hausa, Yoruba, etc. and take care to control their sentiments for non-Yondan men. At the same time, Yonda is associated with poverty and provincialism, and many of these village unions are unsustainable. Like the constant threat Nigeria poses to the education of Yondan children, where students have a low tolerance for failing grades, high school fees and corporal abuse, Yondan women also have a low tolerance for the lives of impoverishment inherent in village marriages. If things do not work out, there is always Nigeria.

Again, Malika explains:

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<sup>325</sup> Interview, April 12, 2004. Unmarried twenty-five year old woman.

There are lots of women here who also leave their [Yondan] husbands, even when they are pregnant. When they arrive [back in Lagos] they find their old boyfriends who support their pregnancies. After the labor, once the child has grown a little, the girl can go back to her boyfriend. That's why life in Nigeria causes a lot of problems for the girls. Once a girl knows of the beautiful life she can have—with her boyfriend paying for everything and she's eating well—when she returns to her husband, living here [in Yonda] in poverty, she can't stay long because there is no way her husband can provide like her boyfriend back in Nigeria. That's what happened with my friend Warakie who married in Parampa [neighborhood in Yonda.] We were working together in Lagos—we were always together. If you saw her, you would see how fat and beautiful she was—always put together. When she returned to marry in Yonda, she got skinny and dirty. So, she left her husband and went back to Nigeria. She told me how much she regrets that she never married her boyfriend Tonko in Nigeria. She's already pregnant [with her Yondan husband's child] and now she needs to give birth before she can marry her Nigerian boyfriend. She's still there. I left her in Nigeria. I'd do the same. Just leave like that if I find that things aren't working with my husband. Even if my parents speak badly about me. There is so much that I have left behind [in Lagos].<sup>326</sup>

Like many other Yondans, Malika has certain aspects of the good life that she leaves behind in Lagos, and other aspects that she houses in Yonda. Satisfaction is hard to come by despite her continuous oscillations.

Yonda is significant for marriage because it is a meeting point for Yondan youth to match up and marry, but it is uncommon for both partners to stay long after the wedding. Once a woman gets pregnant, she will likely return alone to Yonda for her mother to help with the birth and aftercare; rejoining her husband once their child can walk. In this respect, marriage and physical reproduction become critical practices that shore up the village's significance for those working elsewhere, giving them reason to sacrifice resources and wages to return. Where the outside equates with making money, the inside is significant for punctuated events, such as festivals, weddings, and births.

In an interview with a group of seven Yondan girls living in Agégé, Lagos,

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

near Dihanna of Iyana Ipaja, they succinctly explained the problem of staying behind:

Rihanna: "We can earn more with market commerce [relative to farming], but the folks in Yondan like to buy and credit and don't want to pay their debts.

Liza: "Oh, I see."

Kafaya: "Voila! Now you see our situation!"

Liza: "Why would someone stay in village, then?"

Kafaya: "To each their own. There are some who stay there because they find that what they earn suffices."

Liza: "But don't people stay because a family member is sick or an elder needs their aid?"

Rihanna: "Yes, there are certain people who stay because of their children."

Adjara: "Others are used to this kind of life and not bothered by the suffering."

Nadia: There are some who stay for their children, or because of family. My sister, for example, when she married she had children very quickly. Five.

Today, her husband is in Nigeria. If she were to leave for Nigeria, with whom can she leave her children? Five kids! She has no choice but to stay.

Kafaya: That's like our sister, Amida. She had a lot of children and then her co-spouse fled, leaving her with even more children. What can she do, even if she wanted to leave?"

Mazou: And if the child stays with your mother, for example, will she suffer?

Adjara: There are different sorts of suffering. In the case of the mother, she can never really forget her child with the grandmother. You should always send money to help the grandmother with the expenses. But especially with *la marâtre*, the child always suffers.<sup>327</sup>

Liza: So, how can girls leave?

Kafaya: That depends on the family situation. If you aren't able to satisfy your hunger, are you really going to wait for someone to tell you to leave?<sup>328</sup>

One such woman, La Femme d'Idrissou, wanted to stay with her husband who is bound to Yonda as an elder caretaker, but at her parents' behest, she fled to Lagos because he could not give her a child.<sup>329</sup>

Mazou: Do you often have the habit of fleeing when you come to Nigeria?

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<sup>327</sup> In a polygamous household, *mâratre* refers to a child's relationship to his/her father's other wives, i.e. his/her non-biological mothers.

<sup>328</sup> Interview, April 3, 2009. Married twenty-seven year old woman.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

Femme d'Idrissou: Yes, I flee because my husband would never accept that I come to Nigeria. And me, I know my problems, my program, so it's up to me to flee.

Mazou: The first time you fled, was it with your child. How old was she when you brought her?

Femme d'Idrissou: Falie. She's my younger sister, not my child. She resembles me well, but she has scars on her face.

La Femme d'Idrissou continues to explain that Falie was four years old when she adopted her as a daughter. Her mother gifted Falie to her after three months of marriage because she was concerned that Femme d'Idrissou would not be able to have a child. To treat her infertility, Femme d'Idrissou went to the hospital in Sokodé and the doctors informed her that she had a venereal disease from her husband. After some time, she grew weary of the treatments and her parents continued to pressure her to leave him.

Mazou: Why did you want to change husbands?

Femme d'Idrissou: Because I couldn't have a baby and everyone thought I was sterile. My family counseled me to leave.

Mazou: And why did you stop thinking that way when you arrived in Nigeria?

Femme d'Idrissou: I don't know. When I'm here, there are lots of boys who try to date me. But when these people talk to me, I don't have any sentiment towards them. It's as if I'm talking to a woman. I have no interest in going out with them.

Mazou: Maybe it's because G-d wanted that you return to your husband and that's why you've changed your mind and don't have any interest in other men.

Femme d'Idrissou: I think to return, but every time I think about it, I'm afraid.

Mazou: Why? Why are you afraid?

Femme d'Idrissou: Because my family will think that it's my choice not to have a child. That I don't want to have a child. And they'll start insulting me. They thought the first time that I left it was to have a child. And when I returned without a child, they were upset. And this time, when I return without a child they will begin to insult me.

Mazou: Why will your family insult you? It's not your fault that you don't have a child?

Femme d'Idrissou: People think it's my fault. Because when other women have this problem with their husbands, they leave and have children with other men. So, if I don't do it, they'll either think I can't or I don't want to with another man. Especially if I return to my old husband.

Mazou: Was it like this in the past for your mothers, for example, when they couldn't have children. Would they leave for Nigeria to have another child?



Femme d'Idrissou: Yes, it has been this way since the past. The mothers of our mothers even left their homes to try their chances with another man to have children. And that's why you will see some people who are born from the same mother but not the same father.

Mazou: Would the old husband accept a woman who couldn't have a child and then had a child with another man, but wanted to return to the old husband?

Femme d'Idrissou: It depends on the husband's sentiment for his wife. If he loves her, he could accept her back. If he doesn't, he won't.

Femme d'Idrissou's story illustrates the ways in which sentimental attachments conflict with her ability to do the right thing by honoring her parents and her own desire for children. In this respect, having children within a Yondan marriage is the ideal, and in the case of Femme d'Idrissou, it is combined with her emotional attachment to her husband. As Jennifer Johnson Hanks writes in *Uncertain Honor*, having a child does not necessarily make a woman a mother—particularly when it is her first child.<sup>330</sup> The fact that Femme d'Idrissou already gave birth to a child with another man proves that she is fertile, but it does not resolve her predicament. Perhaps, in this case, her escape to Nigeria is a chance to bid her time until a solution presents itself.

Femme d'Idrissou, Malika and the girls of *Agégé* are all products of *bopi bateh onati*, in that the ritualized practice brought them into the city. Their parents sent them, not because they sought short-term profits which are largely taken by the intermediaries, but because they judged that work in the cities was a better alternative to school for securing the good life. Here, good life is prosperity as an ethnic Yondan, which entails having access to the regional labor markets while maintaining a strong connection to home. In this respect, *bopi bateh onati* is a vehicle for attaining the good life, but it is an imperfect instrument filled with contradictions in the positioning of *ari siki* and *g'rima*. It also normalizes risk-taking and abuse as parents entrust their children to intermediaries

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<sup>330</sup> Jennifer Johnson-Hanks, *Uncertain Honor*, 245.

with conflicting incentives. In addition, the structural constraints of being Togolese migrants working in private domestic spheres with no access to kin or regulatory institutions only exacerbates the girls' vulnerabilities. Yondan expatriate regulatory committees throughout Nigeria and Benin attempt to adjudicate the more egregious cases of abuse, such as *ogás* losing track of girls or refusing to return them to their parents, but these trials rarely lead to victim reparations. Most of the time, problems are mediated within the family, although this can be difficult when the *ogá* is a relative. And yet these forgotten daughters may also have the strongest calling to return home.

## Chapter Six: After Trafficking: Togolese Girls' Orientations to Life in a West African City

### Introduction

This chapter presents an alternative explanation for why parents send their children to work outside the home. In particular, I am looking at the practice of adolescent Togolese girls migrating into Nigeria to work as domestic servants, a practice falling under the legal category of trafficking per the 2000 UN Trafficking Protocol and the U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). Instead of the human rights explanation rooted in a discourse around “modern day slavery”<sup>331</sup> wherein desperate, impoverished families are effectively coerced into giving up their children to duplicitous profiteers,<sup>332</sup> or my informants’ understanding of the practice as a rite of passage into marriage, I take it as a post-Cold War strategy on behalf of families to secure better possibilities in an era in which the collective imagining of a prosperous future within Togo has been increasingly foreclosed.<sup>333</sup> This concept of Togo as a site of “non-futures” derives from Charles Piot’s *Nostalgia for the Future*, which recounts the development climate in the 1990s, as anti-Soviet interests, particularly of France and the United States, began pulling their financial backing from then President Gnassingbe Eyadema, whose loyalty they had previously sought as one of the few pro-Western figures in the region. At the same time, IMF and World Bank austerity measures and a mandate to privatize social

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<sup>331</sup> As quoted in NotForSale.org’s website, accessed January 9, 2012, <http://www.notforsalecampaign.org/news/2012/01/04/announcing-freedom-sunday-2012/>.

<sup>332</sup> For more on the “myth” of human trafficking, see Doezema’s *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 30-48; Frederick, “The Myth of Nepal-to-India Sex Trafficking,” 127-148; and Kempadoo, “Introduction,” in Kempadoo, Sanghera and Pattanaik, *Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Revisited*, xxvii.

<sup>333</sup> Charles Piot, *Nostalgia for the Future* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

services constituted a challenge to state sovereignty.<sup>334</sup> The economic crisis and the toll of living under a long and intractable dictatorship created a national culture of exile, where citizens increasingly understood that horizons for a better future lay beyond their borders.

The Togolese practice of sending children out of the country to work is a manifestation of a contemporary understanding of the future, and this shifting temporal and spatial sensibility impacts the way in which adolescents conduct themselves. This contrasts with a more universal human rights claim that poverty, vulnerability and moral depravity are the driving forces behind what is deemed trafficking, and with the folk understanding that the ritualized practice of girls traveling to the city to work is a rite of passage into adulthood, that enables them to secure the necessary clothes and dishes to marry. In the previous chapter, I explained the Yondans desire to the village as steeped in sentiments of ethnic belonging. In this chapter, I explain their desire to constantly leave as bound by material constraints, but one framed by a different understanding of the future than their independence era parents or colonial era grandparents, who came of age during a time when nationalism was a collective project, even amongst the non-elite cadres of Togolese society, albeit in “subtle and concealed forms.”<sup>335</sup>

For this chapter, I am presenting stories demonstrating three ideal figures: the cosmopolitanist, the localist and an intermediate who lies somewhere in between. The figures who inhabited these types were Yondan girls who had finished their tours of duty as domestic servants and were living in a market neighborhood in northern Lagos called

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>335</sup> Benjamin Lawrance, *Locality, Mobility and the “Nation”*: Periurban Colonialism in Togo’s Eweland 1900-1960 (Rochester, New York: Rochester University Press, 2007), 149.

Mile 12. (I refer to them as girls instead of women, not because of their age, but rather because their lives are largely in flux and they have yet to lay down roots or commit to a long-term trajectory with respect to marriage, work, geography, etc.) These girls' represent a cohort of migrant domestic servants, and my account of their experience challenges conventional understandings of the term trafficking.

Methodologically, I am looking at these girls at a particular moment in their lives that I identify as a "vital conjuncture" following cultural demographer Jennifer Johnson Hanks.<sup>336</sup> Johnson-Hanks' concept of the "vital conjuncture" speaks to a transformative moment in a person's life when the social structures shaping her behavior comes into view. "Vital" because it focuses on events related to birth, death or change in civil status (such as marriage or migration), and "conjuncture" in Pierre Bourdieu's sense of "relatively short-term conditions that manifest social structure and serve as the matrix for social action."<sup>337</sup> With respect to my research, I take the completion of *bopi bateh onati* as a vital conjuncture, when the girls have finished their (average) three-year contract as domestic servants and now must answer the question, "What next?"

Thus, this chapter focuses on the period after migration to the city when the girls had aged out of the legal category of a trafficked child (i.e. they are over eighteen years old) and found themselves having to make decisions regarding migration, work and marriage within this conjuncture of structured expectations and uncertain futures. And I suggest that this moment provides a window into the girls' (and their families') earlier motivations as scripted by prevailing Yondan norms and expectations. I argue that the

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<sup>336</sup> Johnson-Hanks, "On The Limits of Life Stages in Ethnography: Towards a Theory of Vital Conjunctures," 871.

<sup>337</sup> Johnson-Hanks, *Uncertain Honor*, 24.

post-migration conjuncture reveals two prevailing expectations that the girls were grappling with — the pressure to maintain ties to custom and kin, which includes marrying a Yondan man and secondly, the pressure to continue on the path laid out by *bopi bateh onati*, which is to capitalize on greater financial security and opportunity outside of Togo by investing in urban Nigerian sociality. Thus, by attending to the conduct of Yondan girls “post trafficking,” we get a sense of the socially structured horizons<sup>338</sup> of Yondan society influencing their behavior.

### **Togo as a Site of Non-Futurity**

Jean-Francois Bayart’s “politics of the belly” well characterizes Togo’s modern political structure, where Eyadema maintained power by developing a cult of personality and paying off his underlings by giving them civil service posts to pad their pockets with state funds.<sup>339</sup> This system trickles down to the village level, where state civil servants (such as *le pharmacien*, *l’infirmier* and the school teachers) exploit their positions of power to siphon off public funds—if accessible—for their own consumption, largely to the knowledge of the local population. These village figures act as a referent for the girls, representing the best it can get if you follow the development line and anti-trafficking rhetoric that encourages children to stay in school, stay in village, earn an apprenticeship and eventually become a success. Here, success includes becoming a teacher, a profession whose capacity to inspire is hampered by the underhanded tactics public teachers use to get by. Ambitious Yondan school children see their teachers routinely

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>339</sup> Jean-François Bayart, *State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (Longman: London, 1993). This contrasts with an earlier era of post-independence, where many people believed that possibilities for progress lay within the national boundaries. Such an ebullient faith in the future is exemplified by Yonda’s local celebrity, *Le Député*, and his memories of the collective sentiment of jubilation, celebration, and hope for a better tomorrow in a Togo governed by Togolese after the executive body severed constitutional ties with the French colonial administration on April 27, 1960.

compensate for the state's failure to pay their salaries (because someone higher up in the "politics of the belly" is eating their share) by having children to tend their fields instead of attending class; and forcing them to pay for private tutoring in order to get access to the school curriculum so they can pass their final exams. Two important authority figures at the village health clinic, *le pharmacien* and *l'infirmier*, also proved to be disappointing role models when they funneled the clinic monies into their own pockets, leaving the dispensary grossly under-stocked and rendering the people vulnerable to dying of the most preventable conditions.

In contrast to the development paradigm of progress through patience and the idea that advancement is an inevitable outcome of the linear unfolding of time, many post-Cold War Togolese have a different conception of what the future entails. Instead of developing the nation as was promoted in the era of post-independence jubilation,<sup>340</sup> the best a citizen can do for their future is get out of Togo and "fend for themselves."<sup>341</sup> In *Nostalgia for the Future*, Charles Piot further elaborates on the contemporary Togolese understanding of progress as any movement out of the country, exemplified by the US visa lottery in Lomé. Unlike other West African countries, Togo has the highest rate of lottery applicants. For example, in the 2007 lottery, 1,592 Togolese were awarded U.S. diversity visas in contrast to only 218 and 95 from neighboring Benin and Cote d'Ivoire,

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<sup>340</sup> This contrasts with an earlier era of post-independence, where many people believed that possibilities for progress lay within the national boundaries. Such an ebullient faith in the future is exemplified by Yonda's local celebrity, *Le Député*, and his memories of the collective sentiment of jubilation, celebration, and hope for a better tomorrow in a Togo governed by Togolese after the executive body severed constitutional ties with the French colonial administration on April 27, 1960.

<sup>341</sup> A Congolese mantra developed during the reign of Mobutu Sese-Seko, who embezzled over \$5 billion during his thirty-two year reign. See Michela Wrong, "Out on a Limb," *Transition*, No. 88, 2001: 4-11.

respectively. Since the visas were selected based on the size of the applicant pool, Togo's high numbers reflect the cultural cachet the lottery holds for many Togolese nationals.<sup>342</sup>

Under this exit culture that characterized Togo's post-Cold War era,<sup>343</sup> came a simultaneous weakening of the state as NGOs and evangelical Christian organizations took over the role of governance.<sup>344</sup>

Piot's work contributes to a growing body of literature in Africa studies on the question of "non-futures." Perhaps the most notable of these works is James Ferguson's *Expectations of Modernity*, that tracks the Zambian economic crisis of the 1980s where a rapid decline in the country's copper industry and IMF sponsored Structural Adjustment Program's austerity measures led to an evacuation of state entitlement programs, a dramatic rise in the cost of living and a drop in wage earning opportunities. As Ferguson follows the workers' next steps in coping with job loss and heightened levels of financial uncertainty, he broadens his focus to ask what happens when the myth of modernization is "turned upside down, shaken and shattered,"<sup>345</sup> and people in crisis are unable to make sense of their experiences and imbue them with dignity.<sup>346</sup>

The concept of progress so valiantly asserted by development policies in the post-WWII era for Third World nations to "wait, have patience, your turn will come" begins to unravel as the Copperbelt workers' waiting only leads to further decline. Not only does

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<sup>342</sup> Piot, *Nostalgia for the Future*, 77; *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>343</sup> As Piot writes, "It would not be exaggerating too much to say that everyone in Togo is trying to leave—by playing the lottery, by trying to get into European or American universities, by arranging fictitious marriages with foreigners, by joining churches that might take them abroad, by hoping to be signed by a European soccer team overseas, etc." *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>345</sup> James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 13.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.



Ferguson reconsider the temporal dimensions of modernity in his ethnography, but he also incorporates a spatial dimension into his definition with his use of the terms cosmopolitanism and localism. Again, looking to development rhetoric as his referent, Ferguson upset the conventional understanding of Africa as progressively marching towards increasing urbanization by tracking how recently laid-off mine workers ostensibly integrate “back” to their villages, yet many such workers had never lived in rural areas or were not returning to their natal villages. While cosmopolitanism and localism are conventionally associated with location, in terms of city versus rural areas, Ferguson takes it to be a practice of style and performativity that reflects people’s relationship to an imaginary of modernity, where location becomes secondary to a cultivation of cosmopolitan or local ways, as a form of “cultural style.”<sup>347</sup>

In developing his concept of “cultural style,” Ferguson draws from Judith Butler’s theory of performativity to show how difference, in this case between cosmopolitan and local styles, is not an *a priori* given, but rather produced within fields of uneven power relations. Thus, rather than consider the urban and rural as spatial locations, Ferguson takes them to be “practices that signify difference between social categories.”<sup>348</sup> And these mannerisms become important with respect to success in one context or another, as exemplified by Ferguson’s research assistant who took to drinking with old men living in pockets of Lusaka to retain his local ways and better position himself for integration back to village. In contrast, city-slickers-cum-villagers who are unable to shake their

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 95.

cosmopolitan ways will find themselves disadvantaged when they return to so called traditional and local surroundings.

Ferguson's cultural style also speaks to a performative competence that is critical for reintegration, particularly as return becomes the ultimate end point, since dependent and unproductive retirees cannot afford city living. Ferguson goes on to say that cosmopolitanism and localism are not expressive of an *a priori* identity, but rather speak to a process of becoming in the act of cultivating a particular style: "the performance of difference is one of the ways that distinctive subjects and social types are themselves constructed and made to seem natural."<sup>349</sup> Thus, donning certain types of clothing is not about adhering to a certain norm as much as possessing a social sense and capacity to successfully perform certain embodied practices. And this process "involves both deliberate self-making and structural determinations, as well as such things as unconscious motivations and desires, aesthetic preferences, and the accidents of personal history."<sup>350</sup> Thus, we find that the motivations at play in Yondan migration practices are more complex than either the Yondan or development explanations and involve material, as well as ideological factors.

For Ferguson, the localist is one who has a greater allegiance to his rural "home," visiting frequently, conforming to local custom and carrying himself in a way that indexes a strong ethnic identity. He drinks home brewed beer and adheres to a village style of dress. In contrast, the cosmopolitan's ways communicate how much he has separated from custom, eschewing localist traits and ties to home for an embrace of an

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 101.

international (largely Western dominated) mass culture.<sup>351</sup> Ferguson is careful not to essentialize these different categories by conceptualizing them as lying in a stylistic space that ranges from having an extremely cosmopolitan capacity to having an extremely localist capacity, with many falling somewhere in between. As a capacity, there is the possibility of acquiring other traits along the spectrum, although such flexibility is rare since cultivating stylistic competence is costly and difficult.<sup>352</sup>

Thus, throughout my presentation of the Yondan women and girls living in Mile 12 market, I have tried to categorize them along this spectrum of having cosmopolitan or localist competences, since these differences were striking and spoke not only to their ways of living, but also to their investment in Yonda, signified by the rite of return as scripted under *bopi bateh onati*. And it also spoke to different imaginings of where the future lay and which road secured better options.

In addition to considering the girls lives under the framing of cosmopolitanism and localism, I am interested in how the girls' imaginings of their future not only touch on their immediate roles as working, married women, but also on their more distant selves as dependent elderly women. Which is to say, considering youth as a dynamic process of gradually becoming old, what role do remittances or marrying Yondan play into ensuring kin support in old age, particularly for a society without state-sponsored social security?<sup>353</sup> Is this fear of the future keeping the girls close to the rural fold of Yonda? And for those who eschew village norms and opt to make it on their own, what happens when they can no longer afford life in the city? Can they return?

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>353</sup> On the relationship between remittances and maintaining symbolic relationships with village kin during times of uncertainty, see Cliggett, *Grains from Grass*, 156.

### ***Bopi Bateh Onati: A Means towards Marriage or a Pathway out of Togo?***

In the past, the boys' families were always in charge of the wedding, not the girls themselves. Before, girls would travel to get the clothes and dishes that they would need when they began their married life in the home of their in-laws... Now, the kids have to do everything for their weddings, which is why they travel out of the village so much. As far as I'm concerned, girls travel out to find money for their weddings.<sup>354</sup>

The sentiment in this quote by a Yondan woman in her early thirties was repeated by the bulk of my informants. Yet, I have been continually troubled by this explanation. While marriage is the ostensible reason for *bopi bateh onati*, the fact is that families rarely see any of the money that their daughters earn and even without the *ogá's* (or "trafficker") token gift of wedding clothes and dishes, families could afford their daughter's wedding expenses. Instead, the context of Togo as a place without a future puts the community's motivation in another light and explains why parents would continue to engage in this seemingly unnecessary sacrifice. Rather than the immediate gains of a daughter's salary or the financial burden it discharges (as the human rights organizations and parents assert), I argue that *bopi bateh onati* exists because it is a systematic method for getting young Yondans out of Togo. And while Yondans have engaged in regional migrations for generations, the all-encompassing nature of the practice in its present form— in which every able-bodied Yondan must take the trip— is a product of this post-Cold War culture of exile.

### **The Study Site: Mile 12 Market, aka the Slums of Ajelogo**

The four lanes of traffic of Ikorodu Road divided the market into northern and southern sides. Mile 12 was a major destination for trucks coming from the northern farm

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<sup>354</sup> Interview, Jun 14, 2001 in Yonda, Togo. Seventy year old woman.

belt with food crops for sale in the city. Ikorodu Road also served as a boundary splitting up the two sides of Mile 12 for the Yondans. On the southern side were the older, more maternal Yondans, who worked in the more established food stands situated in officially recognized concrete structures. For these women, such as Fati, Awa and Fulandi, the people of Mile 12 were part of a landscape they had to navigate as they cut quietly and quickly through the mayhem to perform their daily duties. Despite the legitimacy of their worksites, their concrete stalls served as a dam to hold back an expanse of makeshift shacks in torturous small alleys guided by lines of open sewage tracked with splintered planks where people engaged in more illicit enterprises—including brothels and fight clubs. These back alleys were so small that pedestrians walked single file, waiting patiently as oncoming traffic vied for the same planks to cross the slick mud that courses through the Mile 12's labyrinthine southeastern side. Awa worked on this side, preparing sauce for patrons of a local brothel.

Crossing the road, we came across another Mile 12 boundary. This one was a twenty-foot tall concrete wall, one-brick thick, which served as a membrane containing another expanse, the billowing biomass and frenetic energy of the main produce section; as a series of concrete stands were filled with hundreds of baskets of onions, dried cassava, dried chilies, tomatoes, grains, legumes, and so on. It was like any other market I had visited in West Africa— but ten times the size. The access point to the northern side was a gate that was wide enough to allow eighteen-wheeler trucks from the North to deliver their crops for distribution to Lagos' ten-million consumers.<sup>355</sup> And as I turned the

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<sup>355</sup> Population estimate for 2011 per CIA factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>.

corner through the gate, my gaze opened up to the full scale of the market which expanded along the horizon. Like Dorothy's encounter with Oz, I half expected to see across this vista of rolling hills a horde of magical creatures. Only, this site was not of verdant hills, but mounds of garbage, corroded tin roofs, splintered lean-tos and concrete stairs that led to nowhere as half-finished, abandoned residences were a reminder of the futility of the quest for permanence. It is here that the cosmopolitan Yondans who rested on more tenuous moral ground resided. They were younger, unmarried and more influenced by their peers—and the south side was a welcome hideout from the knowing eyes of their aunties across the road.

Thus, despite its dilapidation and crime, Mile 12 served as a reliable place of refuge for Yondan girls living in Lagos. Unlike the more established neighborhoods where Yondans settle, the dynamic and chaotic makeup of Mile 12 allowed new arrivals unlimited access to lodging, work opportunities and hideaways from nosy Yondan visitors.

Yet, as of March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010, Mile 12 no longer exists. On that day, in compliance with Governor Babatunde Fashola's "megacities" revitalization plan, the entire market was bulldozed to the ground by municipal workers. Newspapers and comments on the internet called the act of destruction "long overdue" for a market that was "host to prostitutes, hired assassins, and other criminal-minded characters."<sup>356</sup> Unfortunately, while ostensibly in the interest of the majority of Lagosians, the demolition spelled disaster for the thousands of people carving out a livelihood in Mile 12. And the dispersal

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<sup>356</sup> Awoyinfa, Samuel, "Pains and Agonies Trail Ajelogo/Aanimodo Demolition," *The Punch*, Published March 28, 2010. <http://www.punchng.com/Articl.aspx?theartic=Art201003283475484>.

also meant that my research assistant and I could no longer track the Yondans we had been profiling since 2007.



**Figure 9: Image of demolished neighborhood near Ketu, just north of Mile 12**

### **The Production of Yonda's Mile 12**

Operating from French sociologist Henri Lefebvre's mantra that "space does not exist in itself; it is produced,"<sup>357</sup> it is important to consider the processes of Mile 12's production and to present the market not just as a physical location, but also a social world that is experienced, perceived and represented.

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<sup>357</sup> Henri Lefebvre and Kanishka Goonewardena, *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 28.

Lefebvre's "spatial practice" applied to the Mile 12 Yondans includes the way in which the girls inhabit the market and how they circulate (or limit their circulation) within its muddy alleyways, concrete rooms, market stands, and lagoons. However, Lefebvre writes that the production of space is a triad that includes "spaces of representation" and "representational space." These elements are intertwined with spatial practices in an inseparable dialectic. Thus, the way in which Yondans perceive the space—its criminality, capacity for freedom from gossiping village authority figures, and location in a foreign country— influences how they move through it.

There is also the market's reputation back in Yonda and how the villager's describe it that influences how the Mile 12 localists who plan to return to the village navigate the space versus those who have cut off ties. Mile 12 has a reputation for being a site of freedom for youth wanting to *faire la jeunesse* in terms of dating, watching the latest movies, dance clubs, late-night partying, experimenting with recreational drugs, etc., as well as its capacity to offer endless work opportunities. On the flip side, it also has a reputation for being a safe haven for prostitutes, drug dealers and illegal housing, serving as the set point for a Yondan imagining about the worst it can get in terms of the cosmopolitan forces that can transform relatively sheltered girls into wily and impure youths.

For those willing to eschew village norms, they are unlimited in their movement, but for those committed to their lives back in village, they confine themselves largely to their worksites for fear that a fellow Yondan will spot them and tarnish their reputations back home.



## **Yondan Perceptions of Nigeria**

From inside Yonda, Mile 12 is lumped in with the other city sites, from Cotonou to Libreville, as a place of debauchery and moral abandon where innocent girls are corrupted, and most will say they worked in other neighborhoods, like *Agégé* or *Ikeja*, rather than admit to spending time in Mile 12. Yet, the drive to send girls overrides the costs of lost innocence. Parents readily send their unmarried daughters to the cities once they drop out of school, and the decision is frequently expected, as expressed by this teenage girl in Yonda:

My grandmother told me to go... And when she said it, I was so happy because I was not doing anything [in Yonda]. I would see my friends leave and they would return to find me still at home. When they came back, they would bring things that I did not have. So, when she talked about Nigeria, I was happy and did not hesitate to leave.<sup>358</sup>

## **Village Judgment of Representations from the Diaspora**

Like all these spaces of symbolic depravity for the Yondan community, there is a spectrum of players, from those who engage in many of the behaviors deemed depraved to the virtuous representatives of village morality in the city. It is here that the freedom one enjoys to do what you want and be who you want falls away upon returning to Yonda, where all eyes are watching and the forces of social control, including sorcery, are strongest. It is a place where the stakes matter with respect to one's reputation. Out in the satellite communities, lifestyle is less restricted. Back home, things change.

For example, when I returned to Yonda the following year, I was overjoyed to reunite with Awa and Fati who had subsequently rejoined their husbands. I assumed we would talk freely and reminisce about our time together in Mile 12, but I encountered

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<sup>358</sup> Interview, July 19, 2004 in Yonda. Seventeen year old girl.

markedly different women. Instead of the free-flowing openness of their Mile 12 personas, they were reserved and closed-lipped. At first eager to talk about our time in Lagos, I quickly came to understand that their tongues were tied once they crossed into Togo. In one respect, the variability of these spaces of control explained why there was a constant need for Yondan women to move from one zone to another. Obviously, money matters were a huge driver of Yondan movement, but the repose from social constrictions also played a role. While there was a constant drive to return to the Yondan homeland, the restrictive nature of village life made it unsustainable for long periods of time—particularly for young women struggling with familial obligations, financial security and a drive for self-determination.



**Figure 10: Image of Ikodoru Road from overpass that bridges the northern and southern sides of Mile 12 market.**

**Mile 12**

Mile 12 is also a generative site to think through questions of shifting conceptions of the future and uncertainty because it houses a spectrum of Yondan woman with various interests in the market as a place to live and work. While Mile 12 is infamous, it also carries a mystique of possibilities for younger Yondans anticipating their first trip out. And for those committed to their Mile 12 friends and lovers, it allowed them to forestall marriage and village norms by remaining in the market; because, despite its poor reputation, the market offered financial security with abundant work opportunities for uneducated rural migrants. This contrasts with Yonda, where residents teeter on starvation when unexpected crop failures, brush fires or increased seed prices overwhelm their delicately balanced food stores. This vulnerability is exacerbated by the fact that some of the most able-bodied workers (i.e. the community's sons and daughters) are working in Nigeria.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> See Watts, Michael and H G Bohle, "The Space of Vulnerability: The Causal Structure of Hunger and Famine," *Progress in Human Geography* 17, no. 1 (1993): 43-67.

## Circulation as a Cosmopolitan or Localist



**Figure 11: Example of Cosmopolitanist style**

The first person I met from Yonda was Fati, a localist who was working on the southern side in an established bar right on Ikorodu Road. Her job was to prepare rice twice daily in a Hausa boxing arena behind the bar. Her friend, Awa (also a localist), worked in front of a brothel on the southeastern side of the market, close to Fati's bar, but she lived with Mina further up the road. While both these women worked in highly disreputable locations, they were calculated in their movements and quickly returned to less compromised spaces when their shifts were finished, typically resting in Fati's bar or

a courtyard nearby. Even though Awa was renting space from Mina, she never socialized with Mina or her friends; presumably for fear that another Yondan would think she had fallen in with the wrong crowd. Instead, Awa and Fati spent their non-working hours exclusively together.

Fati's small stature and disarming smile lend her an air of "goodness" and moral uprightness in the otherwise promiscuous world of Mile 12. During her short tenure in the city, Fati has discovered lost Yondans and acted as a go-between for many wishing to relay money and information back to the village. Most of the time we were together, she would recount the various transgressions of the cosmopolitans, building up a repertoire of stories to feed the rumors back in village, which naturally justified the cosmopolitanists' distance from Fati and Awa's meddling gazes.

Many other localists I came across in Cotonou or Lagos would turn a blind eye to the debauchery of the teenage girls who had come to *faire la jeunesse* in the city, adopting a stance that "They got theirs and I got mine." Fati did not take this position and frequently cast an unfavorable glance at the girls who openly flaunted their transgressions of Yondan moral codes, by wearing sexually-suggestive clothing, smoking cannabis and socializing with petty criminals. Such performed behaviors, created an effective line between the different Yondan clusters. Fati would stay at the bar and spend time with Awa and Fulandi over breaks; and the others would keep to their side of the road.

In contrast, cosmopolitanists had more comfort and range of motion in the market. They would spend their days lounging in front of Mina's room, or watching videos at friends' places or in the movie houses scattered throughout the market. Sarena was the



youngest cosmopolitanist, and while she technically lived with Mina, she spent most of her time with her *Kotokoli* boyfriend deep in the northwestern side of the market. Embedded amongst them was a localist named Wife of Seven Seven who was also living on the northern side of the market.



**Figure 12: Wife of Seven Seven at her stand.**

Wife of Seven Seven was the wife of an elderly chauffeur in Yondan and she was immune to the debauchery or disrepute of her surroundings because of her age—she was somewhere in her early 50s—and the fact that she always wore a double-layered wrap

skirt, worn-out T-shirt and tattered hair wrap, carrying herself as if she recently arrived from the countryside. Her job was to prepare sauce for a food stand that was located in front of a massive field of garbage. (See attached photo.) Wife of Seven Seven slept in a nearby room of her employer and was paid to prepare two pots of sauce—one in the morning and another in the late afternoon. Occasionally, late night revelers hungry after hours of dancing would wake her up in the middle of the night to prepare an additional pot of sauce with rice. Although her employer did not compensate her for these extra meals, Wife of Seven Seven was generally content with her pay and workload. In this respect, her compensation offset the physical and moral dilapidation of her surroundings. While she inhabited the space of the northern side, she— like many other localists— was less invested in the sentimental attachments that produced Mile 12 as a place than her cosmopolitan counterparts. Her relationship to Mile 12 as a symbolic terrain of depravity and opportunity guided her spatial practice and limited her circulation to the bar and her sleeping quarters.

### **The “Cultural Style” of the Cosmopolitan**

The cosmopolitanists generally had a leisurely way about them that spoke to a cultural style cultivated by years of living in Mile 12 that gave them a true comfort in their surroundings. Many of the days Mazou, my research assistant, and I spent at Mina or Adjara’s houses were watching the girls engaged in half-planned and half-executed intentions with an arbitrary yet regular rhythm. Mina would start a thought or think to go on an errand and then forget. Or she would just watch something drop on the floor and then note its location but make no motion to pick it up, or start to make the motion to pick it up and then think better of it. Frequently, the girls were napping when we arrived—

anytime of day. Or, they would be slowly eating rice and beans, or a piece of fruit, with a half interested intention, as if the food miraculously made it to their mouths.

Unlike the new, disoriented arrivals to the city from the village, the cosmopolitanists conveyed absolute comfort in the midst of the mega-city's most notorious market. In fact, their hyper relaxed states of being were almost defiant affronts to the frenetic energy surrounding them.

Always gracious, the girls would frequently say that they needed to do something like get change for N500 or buy some sugar, but they rarely came back. Sometimes, they would not even leave our field of view, as when Sarena was with a friend and said, "We're going to go pick something up." They then proceeded to walk a few feet, sat back down on a concrete ledge and started talking again. While it is clear that their tactics were intended to carve out some privacy, it also seemed that they occasionally forgot what they were doing, almost in mid motion. Mazou and I were initially convinced that they did not want us around, but the more time we spent at Mile 12, the more it seemed to be part of the daily mannerisms of living— a successful performance under demanding circumstances of cosmopolitan cultural style.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Ferguson, *Expectations*, 96.



## Fati and Awa – The Localists



**Figure 13: An example of localist style.**

While Fati was physically in Mile 12, her mind was on her newly-wedded husband back in Yonda and her children working in Nigeria’s southwestern farm belt. While she spent the bulk of her time in the village, it was not the years logged that marked her as a localist as much as her intentions for being in the city—to make quick money to resolve a marital issue back in Yonda—and her resolution to maintain her local ways while working in Lagos.

Fati's problems began when her perpetual positive attitude and bright smile—that made her very popular in Yonda—garnered the jealousy of her sister-in-law Warama. She was particularly well-liked by the young men in her husband's family, so much so that Warama's own son admitted to preferring Fati over his mother. Not only was she talkative and friendly, but she often gave men free rice when they came by to visit her stand. Fati maintained her own field and often would get free labor, and she never had to pay the transport for her market wares—the drivers were happy to oblige her. Yet all this affection angered Warama.

Even though Warama was the first to marry into the family, as the wife of the first son, she did not enjoy Fati's seniority or popularity and was convinced that Fati was cheating on her husband to curry such favor with the others. Soon, Warama started spreading rumors. Fati responded by notifying the village chief, Adama, and her parents. At the time, she was pregnant and Warama said that the child was not Aboubakar's, but that of another man. To verify whether this was true, Warama's husband (Fati's senior brother-in-law) declared that Fati would suffer a difficult birth if the child was not her husband's.

Saturday was market day in Kaboli, a village fifteen kilometers from Yonda, and Fati was waiting for the Yondan bush taxi when she started having labor contractions. As frequently occurs, the other market ladies were slow to load their wares and the car did not return to Yonda until late into the night. When she got back home, everyone was already asleep. She also wanted to sleep, but was having “so much pain in my belly, I could not sleep.” She lay in bed and started to have the urge to go to the bathroom. On

her way to the latrine, she gave birth to her youngest daughter, Salamia. Everyone gathered around when Mina was born and the elder of the family declared that the accusation of Fati's infidelity must be false since her labor was so easy. As news spread about Fati's problems with her sister-in-law and the false rumor, the youth gave her even more attention—which incensed Warama.

That same year, Warama's husband died. In order to keep her in the family, Aboubakar decided to marry her. He told his first wife, Azia, of his plans, but he did not consult Fati. Others came to tell her, including Warama's son. "I was shocked. I said to the boy, this must be a joke. That it was impossible. But he told me that it was true." The rumors of the impending marriage continued to spread, but Aboubakar still kept it from her. "I said to Azia that I will leave if he marries this woman. I would only stay if he doesn't go ahead with the marriage." Fati's husband then went to the *boba* of the family (patriarch) and told him of Fati's concerns. *Boba* went to Fati's parents to warn them that Fati should calm down and accept the arrangement or else leave the family.

The date of the intended marriage came and passed with no ceremony and Fati assumed that Aboubakar had called it off, but that was not the case. Instead, on the same day, he called her into *Boba's* room. Beginning with a prayer to Allah, it took him ten minutes before he finally told her of his intentions. The ever-outspoken Fati responded that this was obvious and she, like the entire village, has known for a long time. She was visibly upset, but *Boba* told her to forgive them and welcome Warama back into the family. "But I refused to change my mind."

A few weeks later she heard “Ami, Ami, Ami” coming out of her husband’s rooms as scores of well-wishers came to congratulate him on the marriage. Fati immediately went to her room, packed her things and headed towards her parents’ house. The next morning, he knocked on her door to wake her up for morning prayers, but Fati was no longer there. She ultimately stayed seven months with her parents. Every day during those seven months, Azia would come to ask that Fati return to the house and help resolve the problems that had arisen since Aboubakar brought Warama home, but Fati refused. Finally, her parents convinced her to go back to him. “But I felt uneasy and humiliated in the house. I was humiliated that my husband was stronger than me and one morning, I was praying and I saw everything that was happening in front of my eyes. I started crying and decided that I had to leave and travel.” At first her husband refused, but then he realized that she may not return if he does not grant her permission, so he drove her to the bus station.

Since coming to Mile 12, Fati learned that Azia fell sick back in Yonda. At first she thought it was a trick to try to get her to come back, but she came to believe it was true and planned to return after two months for Ramadan. In the meantime, she wanted to visit her children who were working in the farms in Oyo (five hours north of Lagos). Since her split with Aboubakar, she wanted to see if they still love her like they love their father. “It is up to them to give all the earnings from the youngest child to me. This year, when I went to visit them, they said that he Adjingbe told them not to give me any money. And they always give money to their father. For the past three years, the eldest has given everything to him. If they don’t give me some money, then I’m going back to Lagos. It’s not that I need the money—I can make it on my own—it’s just to test them.”

Fati's small stature and disarming smile lent her an air of "goodness" and moral uprightness in the otherwise anything-goes world of Mile 12. Beyond discovering lost Yondans and acting as a go-between for many wishing to relay money and information to rural kin, Fati also took it upon herself to meddle in the lives of some of the Yondan girls she deemed salvageable. Most of the time we were together, she would recount the various transgressions of the cosmopolitans, building up a repertoire of stories to feed the rumors back in village. For folks like Sarena and Mina, they understandably tried to keep their distance from the knowing gaze of Fati and Awa.

### **Mina – The Grand Dame of the Mile 12 Lifers**

If Fati was a localist par excellence, than Mina represented the other extreme. Of all the cosmopolitanists living in Mile 12, Mina was the grand dame of the group, having lived in the market the longest. In a sense, she was the most permanently urbanized in that she invested heavily in her rented room, spent much of her money on clothes and friends, and had stronger obligations to relationships in the city than to her family back home. She openly defied village norms in front of gossiping visitors, effectively forgoing her relations in Yonda for a deeper engagement with her friends in Lagos. Her time horizon for leaving was also indeterminate, in contrast to Fati and Awa who already had their return date set.

Mina had previously worked as a domestic servant in Ghana and was a core figure of the Yondas living in Mile 12. In addition, she was the closest to aging out of her fertile years and thereby committing a grave taboo by failing to bear children. She also had no plans to leave the market. When asked what she will do if the government tears down her

room, Mina said she would consider her next move once the demolition trucks arrive at her doorstep.

Mina was in her late thirties/early forties and has long-maintained a rice stand in the alleyway diagonally across from her room, and supplements her rice sales by trading textiles from Benin. Mina's naturally pale skin has become thin and reddened from applying lightening creams, and these creams lent a mottled, bruised look to her legs. Between her eyebrows was a small tattoo of a blue hook. With round cheeks, soft shoulders and arched eyebrows Mina conveyed congeniality, but she was hardened by her years in the market, and had an aloof, guarded manner that availed her of far more protection than the flimsy padlock on her splintered front door. Aside from a late afternoon session selling rice, Mina spent most of her days sitting on the well-positioned concrete ledge in front of her house—where she would speak in *Kotokoli*, Hausa, Yoruba or Yondan depending on her companion.

It was assumed by the girls that Mina had no children, no husband and no plans of getting married. Unlike the others who feared self-incrimination, Mina's disregard of Mazou and me had more to do with genuine indifference than any concerns about our ability to cause harm. She had no reason to hide from us, nor any reason to engage us. As the oldest of her friends, Mina did not answer to anyone. While we were welcome to visit, her non-verbal cues suggested we keep things superficial. My request for a formal interview was naturally declined with a chuckle and knowing smile. Instead, we learned about Mina from snippets she would share during our visits and second-hand stories from her friends.

Roukaiyah was Mina's closest companion and the two reserved *Kotokoli* for their exclusive conversations. Unlike Mina, Roukaiyah was small in stature and dark skinned. Despite the wrapped skirt she wore daily, her gruff mannerisms indexed an unusual masculinity. When she sat, she sat with her legs wide apart and her feet firmly on the ground. It was generally assumed by the localists that Roukaiyah and Mina's deep, raspy voices came from their daily cannabis cigarettes. With few chances of winning the favors of suitors, Mina and Roukaiyah enjoyed their own company more than the attention of men, and seemed less concerned than the others about finding a suitable husband.

### **Hibou in the Middle**

Hibou was positioned differently among the Mile 12 Yondans because she lay somewhere in between the lifers and the temporary workers who sought to dissociate themselves with the market scene. Like Fati and Awa, the two Yondan "localists," Hibou planned to leave Mile 12, although this sentiment was regularly tabled the more she became embroiled in Lagos life. Unlike Mina, Hibou spent a considerable time in the village as a student in the primary school before she "abandoned the bench" to work as a *bonne* in Cotonou. For Fati, Hibou's latent innocence was redeemable if they could only get her back to village—a noble plot that never succeeded.

Like Sarena, the youngest of the Mile 12 Yondans, Hibou was financially dependent on her boyfriend. Over our months of visiting the market, we never once saw Hibou working—although she claimed to sell *koko* (corn porridge) during the day and cigarettes, candies and biscuits at night. Hibou said that she started smoking because she wanted to *faire la jeunesse* in Lagos like the rest of the girls. Fati found out about Hibou

smoking when she happened to stop by Mina's house unannounced. Fati said she would tell Hibou's mother if she did not stop smoking. Initially, Hibou acted defiantly as if she didn't care, but once Fati convinced her that she was serious, Hibou backed down. Regardless of her efforts, Hibou continued to smoke, but made a point of hiding it from Fati.

Despite Fati's threats and motherly chastising of Hibou's deviant ways, there was a mutual appreciation between the two of them, which was why Fati chose Hibou to rehabilitate over other candidates. Yet, her intentions were in vain. Two years later, Hibou was still living at Mina's house and was six months pregnant with the child of her new Hausa boyfriend. Her gruff manners had softened since pregnancy, and while she was unable to keep up with the latest fashion trends, she still managed to coif her hair regularly.

While pregnant, Hibou did not attempt to work and spent most of her days eating and resting or socializing with Mina and Sarena. When we arrived one day, Hibou was with Sarena, complaining that she needed to get new clothes because her shirts were too tight for her growing belly. Sarena said that it was not up to her boyfriend to get her clothes. Instead, Hibou should pay for them herself, in response to which Hibou looked at Sarena as if she were crazy and said that an expectant mother should not pay for a thing, asserting that her boyfriend should be paying because he got her pregnant. Sarena then asked Hibou if she plans to marry him and Hibou retorted, "Do you plan to marry your boyfriend?"—to which they both started laughing at the ridiculousness of the thought. Hibou then said it all did not matter because she was not planning on being with "this



guy.” Instead, she will go back to village and marry a man she has already picked out after the baby is born. The Hausa guy was not her true love, he just got her pregnant.

### **Adjara and the Goiter**

Hibou’s second roommate—the first being Mina—was Adjara, who represented a “good” lifer. While she also engaged in Mile 12’s debauchery, at twenty-eight, Adjara was an ambitious and conscientious self-made yogurt hawker. She lived a few rooms down from Mina’s crew in the same row of converted concrete storage units. And like Mina, Adjara held a one-year advance on the room that she shared with two *Kotokoli* girls and Hibou.



**Figure 14: Adjara cleaning bottles after day of selling yogurt drinks.**

Adjara traveled outside of Yonda through the *bopi bateh onati* route at a young age to work for a *Fon* family in Cotonou. There, the family treated her as a servant and socialized her to be obsequious—she ate meals alone, was punished if she did not work fast enough and was banned from visiting friends or relatives. She returned to Yonda after fulfilling her three year unwritten contract with two *pagne complets* (fabric sets) and a stack of cooking pots.<sup>361</sup> She also started dating a Yondan boy working in Nigeria’s southwestern farm belt, and committed to marry him in an engagement ceremony. Her mother then sent her back to Cotonou to work for another family. No longer a young teenager, Adjara eventually graduated out of in-house unpaid work by developing contacts with other freelance Yondans, perfecting a fluency in *Fon* and cultivating a savvy for the city.<sup>362</sup> Thus began Adjara’s voluntary oscillations between Yonda and the city.

Somewhere during the journey from here to there, she came across a photograph that shifted her life trajectory. On the bus back to Cotonou, while looking at pictures from the last *fête d’Alafia*, Adjara noticed a slight bulge at the base of her neck; she was developing a goiter. This moment of revelation prompted a mission to stem its growth, and this mission has kept her from marrying. “I would like it to disappear completely so that my neck retains its form. This is my only preoccupation right now. I’m ashamed to go out with my friends. Even to a party. It’s as if everyone is looking at my neck. Just last week I was supposed to go to Ikeja—no it was Ikotun—for a baptism. I was all dressed and ready to go. But in the end, I refused to leave the house.”<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> *Pagnes* are meter-long swaths of fabric that come in sets of three and are tailored into outfits.

<sup>362</sup> *Fon* is the language of the *Fon*, a major ethnic group in southeastern Benin.

<sup>363</sup> Interview, March 2, 2010, in Lagos.

Adjara's earnings from hawking yogurt allowed her to rent a room where she reluctantly boarded four girls for free, in addition to paying for her regular goiter treatments.<sup>364</sup> Recently, she fell in love with a Hausa man and got pregnant after two months of dating. He was excited for the child and planned to marry Adjara after the birth. "Even his father called me on the telephone and told me to take good care of the baby." But Adjara lost the child and the man will not forgive her. "I don't know what came over me... I was tired and couldn't eat like before. And since then, the guy never stops talking about me in public." I asked if the problems with her Hausa boyfriend were not related to her goiter treatments. "Yes, that was part of it too, because he will probably marry another after me. And with time, my goiter will grow even bigger. And once we start fighting, the other wife will insult me. And my husband will stop loving me as the goiter develops.... But now I've ruined everything."

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<sup>364</sup> The nurse representing western medicine works within the Mile 12 neighborhood paying house visits. It is unclear what her credentials are, but she is much "nicer" and more accessible than the staff at the state-run health clinic.



**Figure 15: Adjara receiving goiter treatments from neighborhood healer.**

Yet, if all else fails, she could always marry a Yondan. Even the fiancé she left behind in the village would take her back if she traveled to Abuja and begged his older sister for forgiveness for leaving him to work in Lagos. There is a level of assurance when it comes to Yondan men who practice polygamy. Quite simply, Adjara said, “There just aren’t enough of us.” Although she wanted to stay and marry in Lagos, she assumed—once she’s cured her goiter—that she would return to Yonda.

Caught in an entanglement of “an emergent world of expressive desire”<sup>365</sup> Adjara was exemplary of a new kind of Yondan youth, where her capacity to live in the city and earn independently gives her license to eschew the prevailing norms of marriage. Like all

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<sup>365</sup> Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality and Public Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 1.

the Yondan girls who came to the city, Adjara's point of entry was as a *bonne*—or trafficked child per human rights parlance. As we track the driving forces of romance and fear, we find her tacking amongst the Yondan “boy” she should marry, the Hausa “man” she wants to marry and her fears of disfigurement that preclude her from marrying anyone.

### **What Intermediate Figures tell us about Futures, Desire & *Bopi Bateh Onati***

Like Hibou, Adjara repeatedly made plans to return to Yonda, but had yet to follow through after eight years. Unlike the cosmopolitanist who is satisfied to visit Yonda briefly, or the localist, who views the city as a short term means to an end back in village, these girls fall in between. They are in the city, but perpetually long for home. And yet, they largely stay put because their ties in the city are greater than their obligations to Yonda. Perhaps an unexpected happening, such as a death in the family or the birth of a dependent child will draw them back. Returning to vital conjunctures, we could say that this is a juxtaposition of Adjara and Hibou's long term plans and the power of a punctuated time,<sup>366</sup> that Jane Guyer writes is the way in which many people have come to experience the “near future.” In this new temporal sensibility, time is punctuated, rather than gradually unfolding. It consists “of fateful moments and turning points,” where events resonate more with people's experience of time than sequences or cycles.<sup>367</sup>

In the case of Togo, Charles Piot sees this switch from the “linear time of the dictatorship (with its modernist teleologies and steady sources of income) and the continuous time of the ancestors” to a more event-driven sensibility, and is exemplified in

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<sup>366</sup> Jane Guyer, “Prophecy and the Near Future,” *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 3 (2007): 409.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, 416.

the way in which NGOs operate in the country, unexpectedly opening up one month and then closing down just as quickly, with capital following their mercurial footsteps.<sup>368</sup>

This is particularly evident in the way in which unexpected mishaps occur within the Yondan “spaces of vulnerability” that make up their everyday. There is also a hopping that occurs with respect to migration practices, where Yondan youth are inclined to pick up and move to the next hub, be it Mile 12, the village or another node along the route of circulations. Guyer’s piece, like Ferguson’s *Expectations for Modernity*, asserts that the dominant paradigm of Cold War development policy gave way to a new temporal framing, where planning is taken over by a tolerance for the vagaries of the immediate and a faith that the future will provide.<sup>369</sup> Thus, time in the present day speaks to the difference between anticipated and contingent futures, where the horizons of hope that shape an individual’s behavior are limited by material constraints and the vagaries of unexpected events.

Thus, while Hibou may ostensibly desire to return to the village, she finds the lack of opportunities and slower pace of life stifling. And yet, a sick parent may force her to return long enough for a village wedding, thereby converging her actions with her stated desire to marry Yondan. Alternatively, she could further develop her relationship with the father of her unborn child, and further entrench herself in a life far from Yonda. The conjuncture reveals the central contradiction for ambitious young women: *bopi bateh onati*’s promise of marriage and its attendant security is broken when the girl returns and

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<sup>368</sup> Charles Piot, *Nostalgia*, 164.

<sup>369</sup> As background, the shift in “temporal sensibility” that Guyer tracks relates to the African context with respect to a development paradigm that dominated the way in which public sentiment understood post-independence futures as a time of careful, reasoned planning towards a progressive end-goal. In contrast, the impact of the World Bank’s neoliberal policy of structural adjustment emphasized short and long-sightedness at the expense of the near-future, which had been characterized by making reasoned interventions based on real-time conditions.

realizes the difficulties of making money as a *weita*, or young village wife. This vision of the future is exemplified by Adjara's constant forestalling of her trip back to Yonda for fear that she will forever be trapped in a miserable marriage with a shameful goiter if it is not cured while her life is still on her terms.

Disappointment comes to the fore as expectations of completion and security in marriage do not materialize, and the Yondan *weita* begins the next stage as an oscillator between potentials— the village and the city. Like the “localists” in this story, the cosmopolitanists had also initially returned after their tours as domestic servants, but they refused marriage and evaded disappointment by returning to the city. Subsequent to their flight, many cosmopolitanists, like Hibou and Adjara, have come to desire the principles of normalcy and inclusion that comes with a Yondan marriage.

Thus, these intermediate figures represent an emergent form of the future, one that is constantly deferred as their sentimental attachment to home conflicts with the unsustainable nature of village life for ambitious young women. Due to the precariousness of their present circumstances, it is the events unfolding in a structure of expectations that will ultimately determine where the girls will live out their later years. And the outcomes of these various responses to vital conjunctures have consequences for the reproduction of *bopi bateh onati*. For the cosmopolitanists, their urban settlements function as a node for Yondans circulating through the migration network, where they provide temporary housing to visitors and information on work opportunities. More importantly, they perpetuate the mystique and allure of the city for Yondans back home, and the promise of a better life in Nigeria. For those who ultimately return, they

reproduce the expectations around *bopi bateh onati* by fulfilling their obligations to marry and by bringing up the next generation of working girls.



## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

As every good synthesis begins with a summary, this conclusion begins with an overview of the chapters, keeping in mind the question of naming violence through the discourse of trafficking.

Focusing on the transnational concern about Togolese children being trafficked throughout West Africa, I began the dissertation with a description of *bopi bateh onati*, the local referent for the Yondan practice of sending children to work as domestic servants and field laborers in Nigeria, as well as other countries in the region. Drawing largely on the findings from my master's research, this first chapter on the mechanics of *bopi bateh onati* showed the ways in which Yondans understood their motivations for sending adolescent children to work to be about marriage rites. In this respect, what seemed like slavery to an outside observer (because the girls are typically not paid for their service, except with clothes and dishes), was preserved as a worthwhile cost to fulfill the marriage rite. *Weitao* is the label for a young, married woman, and it is with this title that a woman begins to wear a veil, further reinforcing her shift in status. It is the first label given to a woman (later labels include *beerah*, which is a more seasoned mother, or *nah*, for a grandmother) and it not given to a woman who has a child but is not married. I mention the concept of *weitao* to emphasize the importance of childbirth in marriage to Yondan concepts of adulthood. This drive towards marriage through taking the trip is so pervasive in Yonda that it is akin to Mauss' total social fact, as I illustrated in chapter two, as it draws on all aspects of Yondan life, including kinship, marriage, economic livelihood, and ethnic identity. It also is one of the means of expanding the

village borders to urban and rural hubs throughout West Africa. My motivation in presenting the transnational network with descriptions of the numerous personnel involved in recruiting, moving and placing Yondan adolescent workers was to unpack the mechanics of *bopi bateh onati*. Careful not to give the impression that this is a perfect system created to cope with conditions of precarious uncertainty, it was important to write about the ways in which *bopi bateh onati* inflicts pain, with respect to incidents of child abuse and neglect, as well as the hardship on the parents who fear for their children's safety and long for their return.

The “Mechanics of *Bopi Bateh Onati*” chapter provided the grist to my argument for a different discourse on trafficking, or as Doezema would say, a “reinscription of [the] myth”<sup>370</sup> of trafficking.

The following chapter began by framing the trafficking discourse as a way of naming violence against children in Togo and raises questions about what is foreclosed with this specific articulation. I outline trafficking's contemporary history as an emergent human rights issue that initially came out of a feminist push to abolish prostitution and mushroomed into a political debate between pro-sex worker lobbyists and the neo-abolitionists (a conglomerate of secular feminist, evangelical Christian and anti-immigration organizations). Even though I am working on child trafficking, the definition of trafficking and its attendant country-specific anti-trafficking laws came out of the 2000 UN Palermo Protocol. The protocol was dominated by the question of sex-trafficking and its drafting largely shaped by the tense negotiations between these two groups. In this

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<sup>370</sup> Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 170.

way, the history of how the construction of “trafficking of women” gets conflated as “trafficking in persons” is relevant to the structuring of West African campaigns against child trafficking. In this chapter, I showed how the lobbyists for the Protocol are the bodies behind the document, and the phrases “especially women and children” and “sexual exploitation” are the souvenirs of this passionate ideological debate between the neo-abolitionists and the pro-victim human rights advocates coming out of the sex workers’ movement. In the end, the criminalizing, anti-immigrant approach that advocated for stricter border patrols, brothel raids and deportations won out and became the dominant driver shaping anti-trafficking policy. The second half of the chapter addresses the specifics of child trafficking in Togo. I drew on the work of Kate Manzo to describe the rights based development climate in which these documents operate, and the ways in which this emphasis on rights deflected attention from the consequences of uneven development, including the precarious political and economic climate in which *bopi bateh onati* operates. While this is a common critique, it holds particular relevance to this discussion because of the ways in which the anti-trafficking campaign is largely run by non-state actors, like NGOs, but the blame falls largely on the weakened state. This chapter concludes with a reflection on the ways in which Togolese adolescents interface with the rights discourse and how the rights based approach has failed to protect them.

The next chapter looked at the specifics of the Togolese and Nigerian anti-child trafficking campaigns. Based on a series of NGO interviews carried out in 2004 and 2009, the chapter presented two countries with distinct models of intervention. Nigeria’s anti-trafficking campaign was centralized, taking on a law-enforcement approach, with

mandated reporting of all NGOs to the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and Other Related Matters (NAPTIP)—a nationally legislated “multi-dimensional crime fighting agency.” In contrast, Togo’s approach is centered on child development and harm reduction, with NGOs working towards prevention through long-term strategies, such as improved schooling opportunities and vocational training for would-be trafficked children. RELUTET, the Togolese equivalent network of anti-trafficking groups, did not have a mandate to coordinate with the government. Rather than the apprehension and prosecution of traffickers, the network’s mission was to promote the “development of children” and to fight “efficiently” against child slavery.

Representative of larger national campaigns, these two umbrella organizations spoke to varying strategies of intervention in the large-scale movement of child laborers from a source country like Togo, into a destination country, such as Nigeria. Like passing ships in the night, the actions of the NGOs frequently failed to intersect with a spatialized practice of socialization in which Togolese children came into adulthood through their labor. While their labor had become increasingly motivated by profit and less bound by kinship obligations, it remained deeply embedded in a particular cultural practice where adolescents work through shifting conceptions of belonging and self-determination as they worked towards the money they needed for marriage. In light of this disconnect, the differing strategies of the Togolese and Nigerian agencies spoke less to the on-the-ground realities of laboring children and more to the local power dynamics within the human rights community and between “source” and “destination” countries. In addition, their respective methods differ in levels of compliance to international norms and donor

country mandate's, such as the U.S. foreign policy priority to prosecute traffickers, resulting in significantly different development-oriented investments.

In the penultimate chapter, I attempted to address the meaning behind Yondan practices of child labor migration through the trope of the good life, framing *bopi bateh onati* as a means towards realizing Yondan conceptions of the good life. In writing this chapter, I realized that there were two overarching values motivating Yondan circulations, that being *ari siki* (material well-being), and *g'rima* (honor). And while scholars have written about the ways in which ethnicity has been formed by urbanization,<sup>371</sup> economic hardship<sup>372</sup> and as a means towards making claims against the state,<sup>373</sup> in the case of Yonda, ethnicity was produced through their pursuit of the good life. The chapter highlighted the ways in which imaginaries of “home” were constructed through the peripatetic lives Yondans lead. I also discussed the ways in which school acted as a push factor for *bopi bateh onati*, instead of the panacea that the development industry assumed. Thus, instead of the pursuit of human rights or education, Yondans strive for a good life consisting of *g'rima* and *ari siki*, where the relationship around honor, rights and education became a key entre into thinking about the disconnect between trafficking and *bopi bateh onati*. While both these terms are intended to describe Yondan labor practices, *bopi bateh onati* reflects the prevailing values specific to this community, including the desire for *g'rima* and *ari siki*, rather than deferring to flattened

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<sup>371</sup> Abner Cohen, *Urban Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>372</sup> Jose Itzigsohn and Carlos Dore-Cabral, “Competing Identities? Race, Ethnicity and Panethnicity among Dominicans in the United States,” *Sociological Forum* 15, no.2 (2000).

<sup>373</sup> Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

formulations of poverty, traditional practices of fostering and Western materialism to explain the origins of child labor exploitation.

The final chapter provided an alternative explanation for *bopi bateh onati* and spoke to the way in which “The need to survive does not...swallow up the need to imagine.”<sup>374</sup> Rather than explain parents’ motivations for sending their children to work as an escape from poverty (per the human rights discourse) or as rite of passage into adulthood (as Yondans would assert), I argue that it is rooted in a future oriented strategy of survival in an age of decline after the Cold War, when the Togolese state is weakened and people increasingly look outside the nation to secure their futures. While West Africans have a long history of economic migration, what is different is the temporal sensibility of post Cold War Togolese, where hope for a better future no longer resides within the borders of Togo. As a result, people shift their strategies for personal prosperity by investing in different relationships. I illustrated this shift through the presentation of Yondan figures representing these differing conceptions of the future, with the localists holding onto traditional kin relations and state-based institutions, such as schooling and the civil service, whereas the cosmopolitanists were more likely to eschew these Togo bound trajectories for more emergent relationships coming out of the city. Yet, the very ambitions that made cosmopolitanists unfit for village life are in fact instilled in the village itself in that *bopi bateh onati* is the vehicle for Yondans to leave Yonda. Thus, instead of a means towards short term profits, the practice delivers on a different imaginary of the future for post-Cold War Togolese, where the most common strategy for success is to leave the country.

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<sup>374</sup> Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, 250.

The purpose of painstakingly presenting the Yondan perspective on *bopi bateh onati* as a means towards securing a better life for themselves and their children is to counter the dominant human rights discourse that couches these indigenous practices as acts of abuse, exploitation and neglect encapsulated within the definition of trafficking. *Bopi bateh onati* is one Yondan vehicle towards self-making for rural families who have calculated the risks and benefits of their limited options and decided to try their luck with travel instead of the educational system—a choice that comes with its own set of costs and sacrifice. However, the outright condemnation of this intentional and grassroots solution to the intractable impoverishment of possibilities effaces the nuance of children’s experiences as laborers. The blanket condemnation of children’s work and children movement through the trope of trafficking also sets up humanitarian organizations for failure as their initiatives misalign with the aspirations of those they wish to protect.

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