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**Unraveling the Kinship Network: Child Labor and Migration in Togo**

by

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Professor Judith Justice

Professor Elizabeth Colson

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This thesis is dedicated to Mazou Alessoun for his unwavering commitment and critical contributions to this study.



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*An African child blesses his family's past as well as their future. He comes into this world as a gift from God and a direct link with his ancestors. As he grows, he comes to see himself as one twig on a vast tree. His parents, brothers and sisters are the closest supporting limbs, but aunts, uncles and cousins twine together almost as closely. All are rooted in the spirit of dead forebears, buried in the village. While he grows up in the village, as most Africans still do, the family order shapes his relationship with the world.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Seymour Whitaker, *How Can Africa Survive?* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1988).



## Introduction

### **Parade of the Ogás**

On December 1, 2001, as a Peace Corps volunteer living in a medium-sized village in eastern Togo, I organized a small festival to mark World Aids Day. My principal assignment as a health educator was to live in this community for two years and “raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and the need for health education.”<sup>2</sup> This particular village, located three kilometers from the border with Benin, sent a large number of its children to work in neighboring countries as domestic servants, agricultural laborers and market assistants. Recognizing that this village of Yonda<sup>3</sup> had a “child trafficking” problem, I decided to invite a woman from Plan Togo, a development NGO based in the regional capital of Sokodé (70km from Yonda), to speak about the dangers and consequences of child labor exploitation.

On the morning of the event, the community’s folkloric troupe circled through Yonda’s various neighborhoods to publicize the day and encourage people to attend. First came the elders, a group of eight men draped in caftans, who reliably attended all community events. They arrived on time and took their front-row seats while carefully reserving the center chair for the chief. Villagers gradually trickled in and gathered under the giant *Neem* tree in the Yonda’s central square. With the invited guests growing impatient, I begged the drummers to make one more round to bring out an acceptable crowd. Eventually, a sizeable crowd assembled under the Neem tree: women (mainly in their thirties and older), a few men, a large group of teenage students

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<sup>2</sup> From Peace Corps health extension Volunteer mission statement. ([www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov))

<sup>3</sup> Village name has been changed for confidentiality. *Yonda* is pidgin English for “yonder” or “far away”.



and a line of young children with dusty knees and curious eyes, waiting expectantly for the promised puppet theater troupe. The whole process took time and despite the general air of excitement about the puppet dancers, the village elders were already yawning and checking their watches for the one o'clock call to prayer.

Once the speaker from Plan had finished her talk on child-trafficking, members of the community were invited to express their opinions. Out of the crowd came Nadia, one of the most educated women in Yonda. Nadia took the microphone and explained that the reason parents traffic their children was because the village has nothing to offer. "Maybe if we weren't so poor, that wouldn't be the case, but since we are, this is what we do." In response, the crowd burst into applause. A man followed Nadia to the microphone, and with a somber tone said, "Look around you. All that is good in this village is by the grace of Nigeria... the cement houses, the tin roofs... all because of Nigeria." Again the crowd applauded, with shouts of "Amen" punctuating the roar of cheers. A few others spoke, echoing the same sentiment, when the crowd's cacophony was interrupted by the call to prayer bellowing from a loudspeaker perched on the Grand Mosque's minaret. Without hesitation or explanation, the village elders got up from their seats and headed directly to the mosque, effectively ending the morning's festivities.

As the crowd dispersed, a Togolese midwife from the central hospital in Sokodé turned to me and confessed that she'd never been to a village where people were actually proud of their child trafficking practices.

The community's unique attitude was highlighted a few days later during the annual parade of the *ogás*. *Ogá* is a Yoruba word for "chief". In Yonda, it refers to the

intermediaries who bring the children to their worksites in Nigeria, Cotonou and Lagos.<sup>4</sup> Though *ogás* can be male or female, this annual parade only concerns the men. Unlike World Aids Day, this event required no special publicity and the crowd was double the size of the assembly under the Neem tree. On the day of the *ogás'* parade, a select group of villagers were dancing, singing and drumming in anticipation of the *ogá's* arrival. Once the *ogás* had finished dressing in Yoruban garb and gold-tinted wristbands, the dancers quickly dispersed to join the expansive crowd of villagers who eagerly awaited the arrival of the grand guests of honor. The *ogás* made their entrance to the central square with bounding steps and wide smiles. Unlike the lengthy speeches of government officials, these revered *ogás* said very little. Rather, the sheer grandeur of their presence spoke volumes about the abundant wealth of Nigeria.

### **Human Rights Watch's Report**

In April 2003, Human Rights Watch published a report, *Borderline Slavery*, that focused on child trafficking in Togo. In the report, Yonda was described as a village that engaged in the trafficking of child laborers. During two months of fieldwork, researchers interviewed ninety children (72 of whom were trafficked according to the UN Trafficking Protocol<sup>5</sup>), government officials, NGO workers, parents and village residents.

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<sup>4</sup> Sites are described from the Yondan perspective. For example, when people speak of "Nigeria", they are referring to the agricultural belt in southwestern Nigeria. This region includes the major cities of Abeokuta, Oyo, Ilorin, Ibadan and Ogbomosho, as well as the surrounding towns and farming villages. "Lagos" and "Cotonou" refer to the major commercial centers of Nigeria and Benin, respectively.

<sup>5</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". Based on ILO C182. Article 4. Jonathan Cohen, "Borderline Slavery," (Human Rights Watch, 2003).

The report concluded that Togolese citizens engaged in the annual trade in human beings throughout West Africa trafficked “hundreds of children,”<sup>6</sup> leaving them vulnerable to “ruthless exploitation,”<sup>7</sup> physical abuse, HIV infection and death by illness or exhaustion.<sup>8</sup> Such labor practices were in clear violation of the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 182 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. As the Togolese government had ratified both conventions, failure of the state to adequately address child trafficking violated international law.

While the Human Rights Watch report accurately documented the experiences of many child laborers and spoke to the moral imperative to end exploitative practices that may stunt child development, it did not provide adequate explanations for *why* the practice continued. The report cited poverty, rising demands for cheap manual labor, improved transportation and traditional migration practices as driving forces behind child trafficking, but its portrayal of the “actors” as perpetrators or victims on one side or the other of a moral compass based on Western definitions of childhood, abuse and human rights, oversimplified, I believe, a complex issue. Traffickers were neatly characterized as criminal opportunists, children as innocent victims and parents as naïve or desperate collaborators; however the realities of child trafficking are messy, and resist separation into Manichean terms of good and evil.

Measured against my personal experience living in Yonda, the Human Rights Watch report raised more questions than answers. In an attempt to explain why certain communities embrace child trafficking and others abstain from it, the report described such non-economic factors as a breakdown of the family, ethnic affinities, migration

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 3.



traditions and village proximity to international borders. This begins to tell the story of why the practice flourishes in spite of seemingly minimal monetary gain for the families or children. However, the report did not address to the agency of these young laborers, many of whom leave voluntarily or even escape in defiance of their parents. By portraying parents as naïve or heartless, the report also overlooked a large number of parents who, despite an awareness of the dangers and meager monetary returns, believe that they are acting in their child's best interest when they send them away.

The *Ogás' Parade* and Nadia's comments suggested that the practice has a larger meaning for the community and Yondan culture than recognized by the Human Rights Watch report. Were these *ogás* heroes or criminals? Did the Yondans see the practice as exploitative, and does this standard fluctuate with changing economic conditions? What were the Yondan definitions of child abuse and neglect? Were there consequences when these norms were breached? Having witnessed the vast majority of Yondan children leaving for Nigeria, Cotonou or Lagos while I was a volunteer, I found it difficult to imagine that the entire community was naïve, misguided or heartlessly profiting off the younger generation for short-term personal gain.

The purpose of my study then is to delve deeper into the phenomenon of "child trafficking" as it is described by the *Borderline Slavery* report. As a case study of the Yondan community, this project uses ethnography to enrich and perhaps challenge the current human rights discourse by exploring the social and historical context of one village's child labor practices.

## Description of Yonda, the Village of Study

### **Yonda. A Remote Thoroughfare.**

A geographical paradox, Yonda is a village of 6,000 people<sup>9</sup> that is both conveniently located and extraordinarily remote. Three kilometers from the border, the village profits from its proximity to one of Benin's major roadways, a fact that has unfortunately contributed to its notorious reputation for being a child trafficking hub. Inside Togo, however, Yonda is a secluded enclave best known for its roads--some of the worst in the region. Taxi drivers refuse passengers traveling to Yonda for fear that the rocky, cavernous roads with scattered sand traps will damage their cars. In the rainy season, drivers that brave the roads may find their trucks trapped in ruddy silt until passengers-cum-good-Samaritans, knee-deep in muddy water, collectively dislodge the vehicles. It is often said that Yonda does not have roads, just trails. Such inaccessibility is a constant concern and perceived to be the root of the community's poor economy. Without foot traffic from the outside, people say they cannot sell their goods and local business is little more than a bartering system among neighbors.

Despite the poor roads, Yonda was once known for its abundant natural resources, with European tourists even coming in the sixties and seventies to see the animals that previously populated the area, including buffalo, elephants, lions, hyenas and monkeys. The dense forests of Yonda's past no longer provide habitat for the deer, antelopes, rodents and monkeys that used to abound.

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<sup>9</sup> International Togo PLAN, "Rapport De Diagnostic Communautaire De Yonda," (Sokodé, Togo: Plan International Togo, 2001).

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 slaughter of wild game. Lumber exploitation by European traders also contributed to the loss of Yondan forest, a process 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 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 resulting in newborns with low birth weight and children with 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 two large lagoons near the village outskirts. In the rainy season, from April to October, water is plentiful. During the dry months of November through March, water levels drop, leading to dirty drinking water and few opportunities for bathing, exposing the villagers to increased health risks.

### **Origins**

The present plight of Yonda is particularly troubling in light of its glorious past. Fierce warriors, the Yondans once dominated the region with numerous victories in battles against neighboring villages. They also violently resisted slave traders and European colonists. One Yondan elder recounts with pride a battle against the colonists which led to the death of a white soldier, still 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. Now the remains, mostly filled with earth and blanketed in corn fields, hark back to the community’s combative past.

One version of the origin myth<sup>10</sup> 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. 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<sup>11</sup>, a community of nearby forest inhabitants. 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, the majority identify themselves as Anii from Western Benin.<sup>12</sup> Although the bulk of Anii reside in Benin (33,600 according to the country's 1992 census), there are still a number who live in villages on the Togolese side of the border.<sup>13</sup> The other ethnic group in the village is the Bari, people who formerly lived in farm lands a few kilometers from Yonda until they were absorbed into the larger community. However, the Bari still maintain a distinct ethnic identity, with their own organizations and elected chief. In fact, it is the Bari who began sending boys to Nigeria and they remain the most powerful *ogás* of the village.

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<sup>10</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>11</sup> The name has been changed for confidentiality. *Bari* means people in Yonda.

<sup>12</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*, Fifteenth edition ed. (Dallas, Texas: SIL International, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> In total, Anii population is estimated to be 45,900 people. Source: *Ibid*.

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.

### **Religion and Mosques**

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 quarters have their own mosque, but everyone gathers at the Grand Mosque for the Friday afternoon prayer. The villagers are intolerant of any Yondan who does not practice Islam, and the Christians who live in Yonda tend to be civil servants, such as nurses or teachers. They worship in a makeshift church 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. Not having mastered the Koran, they were unable to disseminate the religion until a Yoruban Islamic scholar came into the community. At the time there was considerable resistance to Islam, particularly by the elders, who continued their animist practices.<sup>14</sup> In the late fifties, however, a Kotokoli (from Sokodé) came to Yonda and convinced the youth<sup>15</sup> to force their elders to convert. All of the 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.

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<sup>14</sup> SIL International unpublished report, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> "Youth" is generally defined as anyone who is unmarried, excluding small children.

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 12 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. But in 2002, a Roman Catholic missionary from another village in the vicinity built a private middle school and added a second elementary school in Yonda. The following year, the chief blessed the 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 aware that their homes are in disrepair, their children are unsuccessful in school, their roads are unmanageable and their markets are not profitable. *Descolarization* is perceived as the village's greatest problem<sup>16</sup>, highlighted by the fact that only two girls raised in Yonda have ever graduated from *lycée*<sup>17</sup>. Some believe the village should be further along the path of development, given its glorious past; they blame their plight on "Nigeria,"<sup>18</sup> bad roads, video nights and poor crop yields. In an effort to jumpstart Yonda's development, the youth decided to back a former businessman from Lomé as chief during village elections in 2000. Literally stepping over to their candidate's side of the main soccer field, these young men of Yonda sent a clear message: they wanted change, and they believed a savvy business man would give the village the boost it needs.

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<sup>16</sup> Plan Togo community development report, March 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Equivalent of completing high school and the first year of college.

<sup>18</sup> "Nigeria" is often loosely used 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.

## Site Studies: Yondans Outside of Yonda

### *“Dedekpto, Cent Francs”*

Cotonou is infamous in Yonda as the place girls go to become domestic servants. A city of two million people, Cotonou lies less than eight hours from Yonda by bus and is cheaper to reach than Lomé.<sup>19</sup> Cotonou is a popular destination for Yondans, so much so that direct taxis leave for the city every four days from the village center. Girls say they go to Cotonou because it is close to Yonda, they can make more money there than in Lomé because the economy is stronger, the population is larger and more jobs are available. The Fon dominate in Cotonou and are the largest ethnic group in Benin, making up 40% of the total population,<sup>20</sup> although immigrants from all over West Africa have settled there.

*Dedekpto* is a neighborhood in the heart of the Yondan community of Cotonou, Benin and is notoriously known as “*Dedekpto, Cent Francs*” because of the large number of prostitutes that live and work in the neighborhood. It used to be popular among Yondans in 2000 when long rows of bamboo shacks dominated the landscape and large numbers of “freelance” domestic servants would rent rooms together. However, many other Togolese from villages surrounding Yonda also lived in *Dedekpto*, making this hidden shantytown younger and largely feminine microcosms of their source communities.

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<sup>19</sup> If travelers walk across the border into Benin and catch a taxi it is less expensive.

<sup>20</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica, “Benin,” (Encyclopædia Britannica Online., 2006.).



Dedekpto's unpaved roads, like most of the city's main streets, consists of sand and rock. Unfortunately, such non-absorptive silica, combined with a poor drainage system, leads to thousands of stagnant water pools that plague the city with flooding and mosquito infestations during the rainy season. Regardless, such inconveniences have yet to deter Yondan girls from coming and crowding into unforgiving bamboo boxes, covered with plastic tarps and cardboard. Recent development has changed the neighborhood, and most of the shacks have been destroyed by flooding and developers, forcing most Yondans back to their employers' homes or else to the village for marriage.<sup>21</sup> There are many other Yondans in neighborhoods scattered throughout the city, particularly those who are settled with families; they manage to remain cohesive with organized associations, elected bureaus and regular monthly meetings. Yet *Dedekpto* remains the heart of the community.

On the first Saturday of the month, Yondans gather in the classroom of an empty school to hold their community meeting. The gathering is directed by an elected bureau of officers, including a president, treasurer and secretary. 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,<sup>22</sup> who speaks on their behalf. The meetings are designed to resolve disputes, communicate announcements and raise money for the biannual festival d'Alafia, when people from all over West Africa return to the village for three days in December.

Many of the meeting attendees were also *placers* who assisted *ogás* in matching girls with employers. Each of these *placers* knew where their respective girl had been placed, but refused to divulge that information, often stating that "girls do not come to Cotonou anymore. You should try Lagos."<sup>23</sup> (Paraphrased) Only one woman agreed to let us visit three girls who were working in an exclusive beachfront neighborhood. The girls lived in an enormous white-tiled mansion and each one was assigned to "one wing of the house" (Paraphrased). Before we met the girls, we were obliged to wait on the street for forty minutes before the employer granted permission for them to

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with resident, June 16, 2005.

<sup>22</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>23</sup> Fieldnotes from Cotonou, June 19, 2005.

emerge from the house. Eventually, they were granted thirty minutes with us, but the interaction held consequences for the *oga* who brought us to the site. As we were walking away from the mansion, her cell phone rang. It was the employer's husband who called to chastise her for bringing strangers to the home.

## Lagos

At last count (2005 census), Lagos was a city of 14 million people that the architect Rem Koolhaas describes 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>24</sup> The Yondans who brave the city work as taxi drivers, dish washers, food vendors and domestic servants. As in all major cities, living expenses in Lagos are high, and many Yondans rent rooms in cement compounds, often with strangers.

As in Cotonou, people 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 with 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 women's association is made primarily of residents from two adjoining neighborhoods of *Agégé* and *Ikeja*. Young girls are welcome at the meetings and are encouraged to contribute to the association's fund to ensure that the group will come to their aid if problems arise. Though a few “bound” girls attend the meetings when their

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<sup>24</sup> Stefano Boeri Rem Koolhaas, Sanford Kwinter, Nadia Tazi, Daniela Fabricius, *Mutations* (Barcelona: ACTAR, 2001).

employers grant them permission, the bulk of the young participants are from “girl camps,” squatter communities of former *bonnes* who are self-employed as housemaids, street vendors or laundry washers. The rooms that the girls live in are small and overcrowded, with one camp housing nine girls and two married women in their early forties.

When I visited one particular camp in July, located on a large abandoned lot in the Ikeja suburb of Lagos, I found a shed that housed a group of Yondans (nine girls and two married women), 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 without paying him rent. At 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 Benz automobiles. 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 room, 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 broken basins. Close by were their children, crawling in the mud amongst 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>25</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 generalized 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 abuse at 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 (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.

### **Agricultural Belt of Southwestern Nigeria**

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

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<sup>25</sup> *Kosi* are fried bean cakes.

such a flood of workers coming from neighboring states that farm areas became “microcosms of West Africa”<sup>26</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>27</sup> One study followed the Yondan (*saabe*) laborers in the southern Nigeria farm belt, focusing on small farming villages surrounding urban centers, where the bulk of Yondans stayed in rented rooms while working. A few ogas 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.

I included the farm lands surrounding Abeokuta, Oyo, Iwo and Ogbomosho as part of this study, particularly to track the experience of the Yondan boys who became agricultural laborers.

### **Study Design and Methods**

In this project, I aim to tell the story of “child trafficking” from the village perspective. Though the causes of “trafficking” are often explained in human rights reports<sup>28</sup> by pointing out factors such as a breakdown in family structure or longstanding traditions of migration, these explanations are presented without the

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<sup>26</sup> Guyer, Jane, *African Niche Economy*, p.96.

<sup>27</sup> The concept of *oga* 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. Guyer, Jane, *Niche*, 61.

<sup>28</sup> ILO-IPEC, “Combating Trafficking in Children for Labour Exploitation in West and Central Africa,” (2001), Mike Kaye, “The Migration Trafficking Nexus,” (London: Anti-Slavery International, 2003), Human Rights Watch, “Borderline Slavery: Child Trafficking in Togo,” in *Source: 15(8 (A)): pp. 1-84; April, 2003*.

contextualization necessary to comprehend the motivations of families, children, “traffickers” or communities that support such practices. Rather, readers are left with a disjointed understanding of a complex situation involving multiple actors and locations amidst a changing social and political climate. With the intent to adequately contextualize the phenomenon of child trafficking, I decided to return to the village of Yonda, where I hoped to understand trafficking from the point of view of the traffickers, the trafficked and the disinterested observers. My goal was to build a definition of “trafficking” from the ground up.

The perspective I had passively developed over my two years as a Yondan resident unquestionably shaped my impressions of human rights reporting of child trafficking. I was influenced by my previous experiences and wanted to refute or confirm my assumptions through qualitative research. Phase One, from May until August 2004, was designed to profile the village of Yonda with a systematic and critical approach. The purpose of this initial phase was build an understanding of a *sending* community in order to lay the foundation for an inquiry into child labor migration and exploitation.

Before leaving for Togo, I met with Jonathan Cohen, the author of the *Borderline Slavery* in New York City. During the meeting, we discussed the report and areas for further research. Mr. Cohen then gave me a comprehensive contact list of organizations working against child-trafficking in Togo. In an effort to understand the issue from a human rights and policy perspective, I contacted twelve representatives of ten NGOs in Lomé. They all agreed to meet with me and speak about their respective missions, activities, and general impressions of anti-child trafficking initiatives in Togo.

These informational interviews were conducted in French. The interviews were designed to equip me with a human rights and policy perspective on child trafficking before I visited the study site.

Interviews with Yondan residents required a more gradual recruitment process. Two years had passed since my time as a volunteer and now I was returning as a researcher. Though most of the village had been informed of my arrival by the chief, the first few days involved my reintegration into the community. Social protocol dictated that I remain at home and receive visitors for the first two days, after which I began to interact informally with old friends and acquaintances. Mohammed was the project's principal interpreter and research assistant. He was fluent in French and Yonda and also spoke Ana (related to Yoruba) because he attended a high school in an Ana-speaking district. In Yonda, he made a living as a DJ, haircutter and farmer.

He had also been chosen by the chief to be the community representative for Care International's anti-child trafficking campaign.<sup>29</sup> As a result of this previous affiliation, there were some community members who were suspicious of his motivations and thus reluctant to be interviewed. This conflict of interest may have been a limitation in the process as interviewees would be less likely to be open if they feared that Mohammed might report them to the authorities. Despite the fact that we thoroughly explained Mohammed's separation from Care International's campaign, his association may have concerned some participants, although only a few people made comments to that effect. In fact, he was initially chosen to be the representative because he was educated and no one else wanted the position. This anti-trafficking campaign

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<sup>29</sup> Care International, *Combat: Combating Child Trafficking in Togo through Education* (<http://www.care.org/careswork/projects/TGO028.asp>, 2005 [cited March 14, 2006]).

was generally perceived as another local NGO activity and had little impact on the community.

Since he was the most capable and willing person for the position I contacted him by telephone from Berkeley, California to ask him to join the project. Having known him well for many years, I felt he was perfect for the job: educated, hardworking and well-liked by the community. When I proposed the study to Mohammed, he readily agreed to take the position.

Before we could begin field interviews, we announced the project at a village meeting. The chief called the meeting three days after my arrival. I gave details about the objectives and logistics of the study and then invited people who were interested in the project to approach myself or Mohammed to enroll. Despite efforts to be as unambiguous as possible, most people who came did not seem to understand my motivation for returning to Yonda or reasons for conducting the study. In order to recruit participants, it was clear that I needed to take a different approach.

Mohamed and I decided to tour the village and speak to residents individually. Most of the people who approached us did so because they were generally curious about my return, not because they wanted to enroll in the study. As it was our intention to interview a representative sample from the community, Mohammad and I intentionally toured each of Yonda's eight neighborhoods. This strategy worked well. People from all sectors of the community, including elders and religious leaders, parents and students, participated.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The fact that no one refused our request could reflect a limitation in this recruitment method as it could suggest the interviewees felt obligated to participate. As a result, I was left to intuit their discomfort and cut interviews short if the participant was uneasy.



Interviews were semi-structured, using a guideline based on my prior experiences in the village, a review of the literature and data from the informational interviews with Togolese NGOs. The interview prompts were loosely structured around a short list of major themes: family, farming, money and market, travel, marriage, traditions, children, and spirituality, including Islam and sorcery. Since my time as a Peace Corps volunteer primarily involved working with French-speaking Yondan youth groups and health clinic staff, my Yondan language skills did not allow me to conduct interviews with those who did not speak French. Fortunately for me, Mohammed, fluent in Yondan, was a skillful interpreter. After obtaining oral consent, my initial question was always, “What did you do today?” From there, the major themes were touched upon as appropriate. All sessions were audio recorded and then transcribed by Mohammed and three other high school students from Yonda. Before beginning the process, each transcriber signed a contract stating that they would maintain confidentiality. To further protect participant privacy, they were not given interview transcripts of any family members or personal acquaintances. The interviews were translated from Yonda into French and then transcribed by hand into notebooks. There were not back-translated into Yondan.

Once we started the interviews, our recruitment criteria also changed. Initially, the plan was to speak with as many people as possible. Our only requirement was that they come from Yonda. People closest to Mohammed were the first to be interviewed because they were the most familiar. Throughout the study, Mohammed and I held regular debriefing and brainstorming sessions to review the emerging data and focus on different aspects of the interview script as the fieldwork evolved. We also shifted our

recruitment strategy to follow up on specific themes and draw out a greater breadth of experience. In one case, all major members of a household were interviewed to obtain a more in-depth perspective of one family's experience in Yonda. We also experimented with different research styles. In particular, I was curious to see if the quality of testimony changed when Mohammed interviewed people alone. In general, girls were the most reluctant to talk, despite their expressed interest in being interviewed. For this reason, I worked with a young female interpreter for three interviews I conducted with school girls.

Analysis began when I returned to Berkeley, and due to budget constraints, all of the transcripts were analyzed by hand. First, I reviewed the transcripts for general impressions and then grouped the impressions into major themes. The themes were then assigned a color code and labeled as they appeared in the transcripts. Some of the themes that emerged from this initial analysis dealt with rifts between parents and their children, particularly for people living in intractable poverty. For example, "Shifting burdens" was a common theme and describes the way in which parents abrogate their familial responsibilities and leave children to fend for themselves. Another theme that came out during this initial analysis touched upon the institution of child fostering in Yonda and its connection to present-day labor and migration practices. The importance of marriage, religion and filial relationships in the daily lives of Yondans also emerged as dominant themes from the Phase One data.

## **Phase Two**

Although the first phase of the study covered a large cross-section of the

Yondan community, clearly there was an important segment of the population that was absent: those living and working abroad. In particular, the perspectives of men and women who transit children throughout West Africa was missing. An occasion to meet with many of these Yondans came during the biannual village festival of *Alafia*, in which Yondans from all over West Africa and Europe gather for three days of singing, dancing and public discussion. Phase Two of the study was designed to take advantage of *Alafia* to incorporate the voices of these distant Yondans. Fieldwork was conducted for three and a half weeks from December 2004 to January 2005.

All recruitment and interviews were conducted in Yondan. Once again I approached potential research participants to join the study. However, we were more sensitive to the delicate nature of the interviews because our participants were adults who brought child laborers to Nigeria or Cotonou for a profit. These “intermediaries” were also less familiar with the research project and generally more suspicious.

Interviews were semi-structured and focused on the logistics of travel and conditions for workers in Nigeria and Cotonou. In total, 15 men, 13 women and 10 girls were interviewed. In addition, I trained Mohammed as a research assistant and he conducted a series of 11 focused interviews with young mothers about future plans for their baby girls. The primary purpose of Phase Two was to draw out the perspectives of the *ogás* and the children they transport. Secondly, we wanted to learn about the specific workings of the labor migration network and understand why young Yondan girls are more likely to be sent away from home to work. Unlike Phase One interviews, Phase Two interviews were far more focused on the issues of labor and migration.

### Phase Three

Fieldwork for the first two parts of the study was conducted in the village of Yonda, yet the project encompassed a Yondan community that extended far beyond the confines of this remote Togolese village. The first two phases laid down the history of changing values and labor practices and suggested that children, especially girls, laboring abroad were not being looked after by adult Yondans living and working in their vicinity. I designed Phase Three to explore the Yondan kinship networks of southwestern Nigeria, Lagos and Cotonou. A secondary aim was to visit child laborers at their worksites to assess their living and working conditions.

I targeted two study groups for Phase Three--female domestic workers in the urban centers of Benin and Nigeria and male farm workers in rural southwestern Nigeria. Girls, however, were the primary focus of this project because their situation was perceived to be the most troubling to Yondans<sup>31</sup>. Due to the project's logistics, however, we spent a considerable amount of time in southwestern Nigeria.

The research team for Phase Three consisted of myself, Mohammed and Fatia. Fatia was from Yonda but had spent most of her life in Nigeria. At the age of nine she was sent by her family to work as a domestic servant in Lagos. After years of living as a *bonne*<sup>32</sup> for no pay, she became a freelance domestic servant and then sold rice in Abeokuta, Nigeria. I first met Fatia in Yonda in 2002, when, after twenty years in Nigeria, she returned to the village for her father's funeral. Unable to leave her widowed mother behind, she decided to settle in Yonda and marry. In her early thirties, she was considerably older than most brides, who generally wed by twenty one or

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<sup>31</sup> Unlike the male *ogás*, female *ogás* were often accused of stealing from families. Unprompted, mothers and girls would describe being "cheated" by their *ogás*, which was not the case with the men.

<sup>32</sup> Domestic servant.

twenty-two. Fatia's interview was one of the last of Phase One, yet her honest and knowledgeable account of life in Nigeria stood out among the other testimonies. While waiting for customers at her rice stand in Yonda, she spent long hours recounting her previous experiences. Fatia believed that no girl from Yonda should repeat the life she had led as a *bonne* in Nigeria. She wanted to be part of the study because she hoped it would effect change in the village. When I returned to Yonda for Phase Two, I asked Fatia if she would be willing to guide Mohammed and me to the Yondan communities in Benin and Nigeria. After we secured approval from Fatia's husband, Fatia agreed to assist on the project.

This phase of the study occurred over a period of six weeks in June and July 2005. First, I verified preliminary data from Phases One and Two through a series of community-wide meetings in Yonda. Returning to the village was also an opportunity for me to gather additional information about Yondan friends and family living abroad. Since the village is divided into eight distinct neighborhoods, Mohammed and I invited two neighborhoods per meeting for a total of four sessions. Average attendance was 42 persons, although the second meeting was attended exclusively by men, and the third was exclusively attended by women. During the meetings, we announced major themes and solicited reactions. Once we had obtained consent from the group, all sessions were tape recorded. During these initial community meetings, I learned that people generally perceived my observations from Phases One and Two to be accurate and they were supportive of my plans to write about their experiences. The theme of men and women abrogating responsibility to their laboring children also emerged during these feedback sessions and laid the groundwork for the subsequent field research in Benin and Nigeria.

An ancillary purpose of my visit to Yonda was to meet with Mohammed, Fatia and their families to ensure everyone was comfortable with their roles in the study. Interviews were primarily conducted in Yondan, with translation of the general ideas from the interviews into French.

In order to reach the young women and girls, we conducted semi-structured interviews in Cotonou, Lagos and Abeokuta. We gained entry into these communities through Fati's contacts. In addition, each region had a committee of elected Yondan representatives, and we were obliged to ask permission from these committees before proceeding with the interviews. Before beginning interviews, we attended community meetings in four of the five study regions.

Chain sampling was used to meet and request interviews with others who were living in the area. At each point, we requested permission to speak with domestic laborers at their work sites. Despite the large number of requests (over 37 people in total), only one woman who matched girls with potential employers acknowledged that she knew of domestic workers; she allowed us to speak with three of them in a wealthy suburb of Cotonou.

Since the primary aim of Phase Three was to obtain an overall picture of the Yondan diaspora abroad, the bulk of data collection consisted of field notes and summaries of taped interviews. This allowed us to sample a larger number of people and locations.

STUDY PARTICIPANTS					
	Date	Location	Number	Participant	Method
Phase One	June - Aug 2004	Yonda	105	Yonda Residents	Semi-structured Interviews*
	May 2004	Lomé	12	NGO workers	Information Interviews (semi-structured)
Phase Two	Dec 2004- Jan 2005	Yonda	37	<i>Ogás, Bonnes, Weitao</i> <sup>33</sup>	Semi-structured Interviews*
	Dec 2004	Yonda	12	series	Focused mini-interviews
Phase Three	June 2005	Yonda	4	Yonda Residents	Focus groups/Community meetings (Average 42 participants) <sup>34</sup>
	July 2005	Southwestern Nigeria	17	Farm laborers (Primarily Yondan)	Site visits including informal interviewing
	June-July 2005	Cotonou, Lagos, Nigeria <sup>35</sup>	60	Yondans living abroad	Semi-structured interviews.* Tape-recorded and summarized.
* 152 interviews were coded and analyzed from the three phases. In total, 484 people contributed information to the study.					

<sup>33</sup> Interviews with weitaos were abbreviated, targeted sessions designed to answer the question, "What are your plans for your young daughters?"

<sup>34</sup> Morning, June 13, 2006: 60 people, men & women in attendance. Afternoon, June 13, 2006: 20 people, men only. June 14, 2006: 23 people, women only. June 15, 2006: 65 people including 38 men, 27 women.

<sup>35</sup> Sites in Nigeria included Lagos, Abeokuta, Oyo, Iwo and Ogbomoso.

<b>PHASE THREE: SITES &amp; METHODS</b>			
<b>Date (2005)</b>	<b>Site</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Research Method</b>
June 17-21	Cotonou	12	Semi-structured interviews
		1	Community meeting/focus group (34 participants)
June 21-25, July 12-14	Lagos	19	Semi-structured interviews
June 25-July 3	Abeokuta and environs	17	Semi-structured interviews
		1	Community Mtg (20 participants)
		5	Farm visits
July 3 – 12	Iwo, Oyo, Ogbomosho and environs	12	Semi-structured interviews
		12	Farm visits
		1	Community Mtg (34 participants)

### **Study Limitations**

During the first phase of the study, I recruited participants through chain sampling, beginning with friends or acquaintances of myself or Mohammed, the interpreter. As a result, participant selection may reflect some bias. We were obliged to use chain sampling because our initial efforts to recruit participants through a village-wide meeting were thwarted by local leaders who neglected to notify the majority of the community about the information session. This exclusion also led to confusion among Yondan residents regarding the project's scope and purpose. As a result, we approached potential participants individually to explain the project. Certain groups of people were not approached due to the logistical challenge of door-to-door recruitment. Regardless, we managed to include residents from all eight neighborhoods.



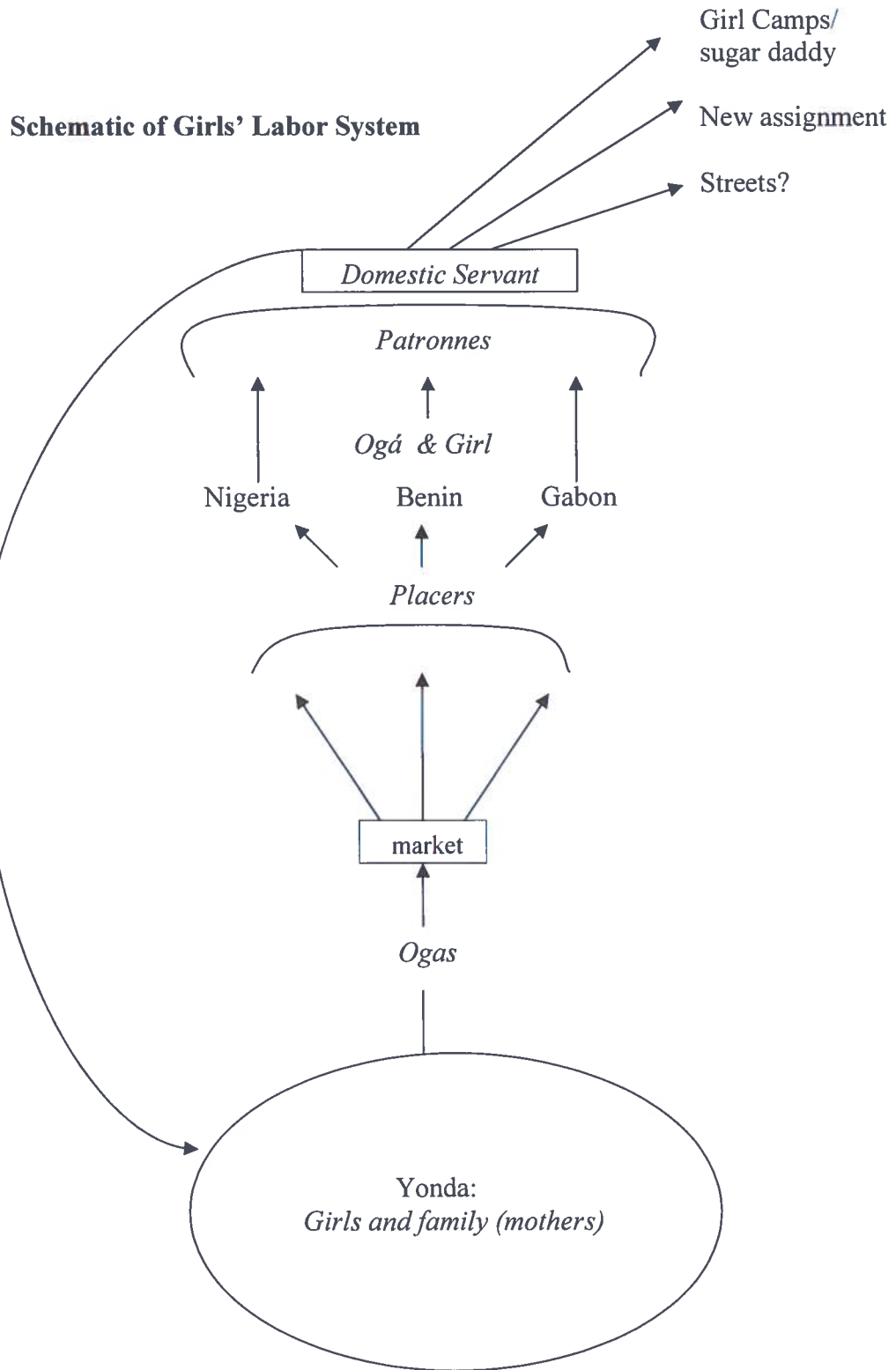
Social protocol was also a limiting factor, particularly since the Yondan elite expected that we would prioritize their participation over others. This was particularly problematic during the third phase when each organizing committee of Yondan expatriates obliged us to meet with the president of their association before interviewing other community members. Often, we were invited to speak only with the most high-ranking *ogás*, a limitation that skewed my perceptions of the migrant communities. For example, the “rookie” *ogás* that key informants say bring young boys to Nigeria were inaccessible to the research team because the communities expected that we would speak with the most established *ogás* first. Frequently, it was only by happenstance that we spoke with the younger workers.

Language barriers were also a major limitation of the study. My reliance on an interpreter resulted in frequent interruptions by Mohammed and myself during the interviews and an overall inability to appreciate nuances of meaning from the transcripts. This was particularly problematic for this study because the uneducated girls who work as domestic servants are unable to speak French. As a result, I was separated by language from the most critical research population.

Trust was also a problem, particularly during the third phase, because people did not know me personally and we were only able to make short visits (three to five days) at each study site. The fact that Mohammed had formerly worked on an anti-child trafficking campaign was also problematic because some people may have feared incrimination. However, aside from one woman in southern Nigeria, there was no mention of this concern, and we communicated to each participant their right to discontinue the interview at any time during the consent process.

Finally, since the project is a case study of one village in Togo, the findings may not be generalizable to the diversity of communities within the region. In the future, quantitative data in the form of surveys and government statistics might offset some of these limitations, as would a comparative study exploring the child labor practices of another rural community. Clearly, quantitative data might not illuminate the nuances that I was trying to assess in the study, but might offer a snapshot of the scope of the practice, including numbers of migrants, income levels, etc., provided that participants were open in their responses.

**FINDINGS**



## Girls: Moving Through the System

The diagram above illustrates the complex network of players involved in the practice of sending girls to work as domestics in the major West African cities. The trip out begins in the village, when a mother asks a neighboring *ogá* to find work for her daughter in the city. The *ogás*, who generally shuttle between rural and urban sectors for their market trades, transit girls to the cities and manage their funds. Once they arrive in the marketplace, *ogás* rely on *placers* to find employers interested in domestic servants.<sup>36</sup> Placers are 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 the marketplace. Placers also are given the responsibility of collecting a girl's monthly salary if the *ogá* is unable. 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. There is no formal contract signed between employer and *ogá* and it is understood that the employer pays the *ogá* during her monthly visits--not the girl. Generally, the work contracts are for one to three years, although parents expect the *ogás* to switch job sites if their daughters are being mistreated. Oftentimes, girls will 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.

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<sup>36</sup> Some *ogás* interact directly with employers in the market and do not need a placer.

From the home where they are placed, girls can return to the village, start another domestic service tour, join a “girl camp,” or flee into the streets. Girl camps are homes where domestic servants have joined with other Yondan girls to rent a room in the city. Deep in the slums of Lagos and Cotonou, these one room shacks will often house seven to twelve girls. Since the rooms are too small to accommodate twelve comfortably, most girls rely on sugar daddies to provide periodic refuge from the crowding.

### **The Girls’ Labor System**

*“In the Koran, it is said, ‘if you leave your children to make many voyages they will be well cultivated.’”<sup>37</sup>*

Many different people are involved in the process of placing a Yondan girl in an urban home. The following descriptions of the major players in the system were crafted from an analysis of field notes and interviews.

### **Parents**

Girls’ parents initiate the process. Generally poor and uneducated, they subsist on food grown from their farms. To pay for their material 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. For example, the 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

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<sup>37</sup> Interview 84, p.1.

of a growing season. Many cotton farmers, for example, abandoned their fields after netting meager profits once the state cotton cooperative dropped their buying price per bale. Compared to coffee, cotton is a less reliable cash crop and the constant price fluctuations may account for sociologist Marie France-Lange's observation that the cotton producing regions in northern Togo rely more on child labor compared to their southern neighbors with cocoa and coffee plantations.<sup>38</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 produces less with greater amounts of fertilizer. Costs rise, production falls, and 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 can not make a living.<sup>39</sup>*

Women 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 said her business always loses money, but she continues for want of a better occupation. Although the more conscientious and educated villagers are able to achieve modest gains, most are convinced that Yonda is not the place to make money.

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<sup>38</sup> Marie France Lange, "The Demand for Labour within the Household: Child Labour in Togo," in *The Exploited Child*, ed. Bernard Schlemmer (London, U.K.: Zed Books, 2000).

<sup>39</sup> Interview 35, p. 6.

## Girls

Young, relatively obedient and with an air of innocence, girls in Yonda find themselves navigating men's attention at the time their "breasts begin to push out."<sup>40</sup> Whether this attention is welcome or not, it is the card they have been dealt and are forced to play. Some use this "specialness" to fulfill neglected needs, such as 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. And by the time she marries, most financial responsibilities have already been transferred to her fiancé.

Since teenage girls are believed to have a sexual energy capable of winning favors from smitten boys and men, families may take advantage of this time by cutting off support to encourage their daughters to find it elsewhere. Some see this shifting of the burden as a driving motivation for parents to pressure their girls into early engagements. To pay for school, male students can earn quick cash as weekend laborers, whereas female students are socially excluded from making money through manual farm labor. 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>41</sup> In school, girls are also subject to unsolicited advances by their teachers. Latifa, an attractive girl of eighteen years, recounted the numerous teachers who lowered her grades because she refused their advances.

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<sup>40</sup> Common Yondan expression to describe the time when girls begin puberty.

<sup>41</sup> Interview 100, p.8.

Pressures also come from outside the community. As older sisters and neighbors talk of life in “Cotonou,”<sup>42</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 hardship, their expensive clothes and make-up belie any tales of misery. Regardless, most Yondan girls would never refuse their parents’ request to take the trip. Rather, the “trip” is inevitable, as it was for their mothers, their grandmothers and their great-grandmothers. The only element of uncertainty is the day of departure. Although most girls are in school while they wait for the day, their studies are low priority because the real lessons of managing a family, making money and preparing for marriage will only begin with the trip. When the decision is made, parents give little warning. As one girl described her parents’ explanation: “[They said] ‘Tomorrow or the next day, you are to go with Auntie Warama. She’s taking you to Cotonou, and in three years you will return.’”<sup>43</sup>

### **The *Ogás*.**

As illustrated in the diagram, the *ogás* are the principal facilitators of the migration process for girls and young women. As I have noted, *ogás* are market women who circulate between the village and the city to trade their goods and transit girls from Yonda to wealthy households in cities as far as Libreville, Gabon. And although they perpetuate the practice, they are not immune to its effects. Like the girls they transit, all *ogás* spent their adolescence as urban domestic servants. Now, with families to support, they run this modestly successful small business and amass towering columns of

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<sup>42</sup> Since Cotonou is the most popular site for girls, the term is often used to refer to all the worksites, including Accra, Abidjan, Lagos and Libreville.

<sup>43</sup> Interview 37, p.42.



kitchenware and soap to display their growing wealth. Yet, despite the profits, *ogás* say that they do not actively solicit girls. Rather, desperate mothers seeking employment for their daughters will approach a neighboring market lady. 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. Naturally, the money is never returned. The story is always the same, with every girl being "cheated" of her salary. 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 three 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* pockets the rest.

Each month, *ogas* are supposed to visit the girls to check on their well-being and collect their salaries. Unfortunately, this often does not happen. Some come after a few months, some come after a year, and others send a friend to collect the checks. However, it is in the *ogá's* interest to frequently visit "her girls" because some employers develop considerable debts and begin to accuse their servant of stealing or breaking property to avoid the payments. From the girls' perspective, the visits are an occasion to inform the *ogás* of any problems. Yet, when the *ogás* renege on their obligations to check up on their *village* clients' daughters, the girls are denied this

protection. Unfortunately, distant parents are forced to rely on the *ogás* biased reporting on their daughters' well-being. Meanwhile, the girls remain trapped in the houses.

### **The Placers**

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 hand 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 procured them from the village."<sup>44</sup> 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, for which they are informally compensated by the *Ogá*.

Placers also comprise 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, 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

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with Yondan taxi-driver, Cotonou, Benin, June 19, 2005.

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. It is difficult to believe that they are entirely ignorant of the plight of these young workers.

### **The Employers<sup>45</sup>**

Most employers who hire domestic help come from the upper echelons of society- wives, busy professionals and *elite socialites*. At the working-class level, market ladies also hire young girls as assistants. Seeking cheap labor and living in crime-ridden communities, most employers are apprehensive of strangers and distrustful of the domestic workers they employ because they believe these young women may bring thieves into the home or tempt their husbands out of fidelity. To find a *bonne*<sup>46</sup>, or domestic servant, an employer may ask a neighbor or relative, or else go directly to the market and approach *ogás* bringing workers from the rural areas of Benin, Togo and northern Nigeria. Once the terms have been agreed upon between the *ogá* and employer, the girl is then placed in the home. It is almost always assumed that an *oga* will take a young housemaid's salary because children are too young and irresponsible to guard money. This idea was confirmed by Lalitou, a freelance housemaid in Cotonou, who regretted that her older sister (and former *oga*) no longer guarded her money because she now just wastes it on food and new clothes.

Employers seem to have difficulty keeping good servants and often make a considerable effort to retain hard-working housemaids. Trust and control are dominant concerns and the one employer we spoke with said that employers feared housemaids

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<sup>45</sup> Since I was only able to interview one employer, this section is based on the girls' impressions of their employers.

<sup>46</sup> Francophone term for a domestic worker.

who have boyfriends, refuse to work or steal. 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 do not speak the same language. Yet, despite their complaints, employers are at the peak of the power tree. 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. This is the reason placers give for not visiting the girls.

The prevalence of abuse within the homes is difficult to assess because the girls' worksites are so private. However, many of the girls spoke of physical and verbal abuse after returning home, as well as neglect. A few had positive experiences in their employers' homes where they were considered like another family member, but the vast majority were treated like servants. In general, girls were only allowed to leave the worksites when authorized by their employers, and typically this was to run errands. On rare occasions their employers would grant them permission to visit neighboring relatives or attend a Yondan meeting in the city.

Since most domestic servants are generally confined to their worksites and unable to negotiate with their employers, many will run away when they are ready to leave. Ideally, the *ogá* will 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 when they are happy with their

employers. In fact, the girls' reputation for running away is the reason some parents state for refusing to sign work contracts. They say 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 "sugar daddies" 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. For those suitors who are not Yondan, unwanted pregnancy is especially a concern because village parents fear the child would force their daughters to marry into a family in Nigeria or Benin. (Naturally, HIV and other STDs are also a concern, but that was not expressed during the interviews, nor did my questions pursue this topic.)

### **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, despite the inevitable anger of an employer, that many girls reconnect with other girls. Fearful of getting into trouble, these passing

encounters function mainly as “check ups,” and girls who frequent the same markets will 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.

Contact with Yondans is better once a girl flees or is “freed” from the employer’s home. 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 buy food and rent rooms together. Like a scene from Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, these girls are separated from their parents and solely accountable for their actions. There may even be an adult living amongst them, but these women are not maternal and rarely interfere with the girls’ affairs. As one 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>47</sup>

### **The city**

The city itself plays a powerful role in the system. Although Lagos may seem like the exception, with its sprawling population of over 14 million “bumper-to-bumper traffic [and] international reputation for crime,”<sup>48</sup> the ethos equally applies to other West African cities, such as Cotonou, Ibadan and Abidjan. Possessing a “culture of congestion” and intimidation, cities facilitate the entrapment of these housemaids. Despite their unhappiness, fear prevents some girls from fleeing their employers. For

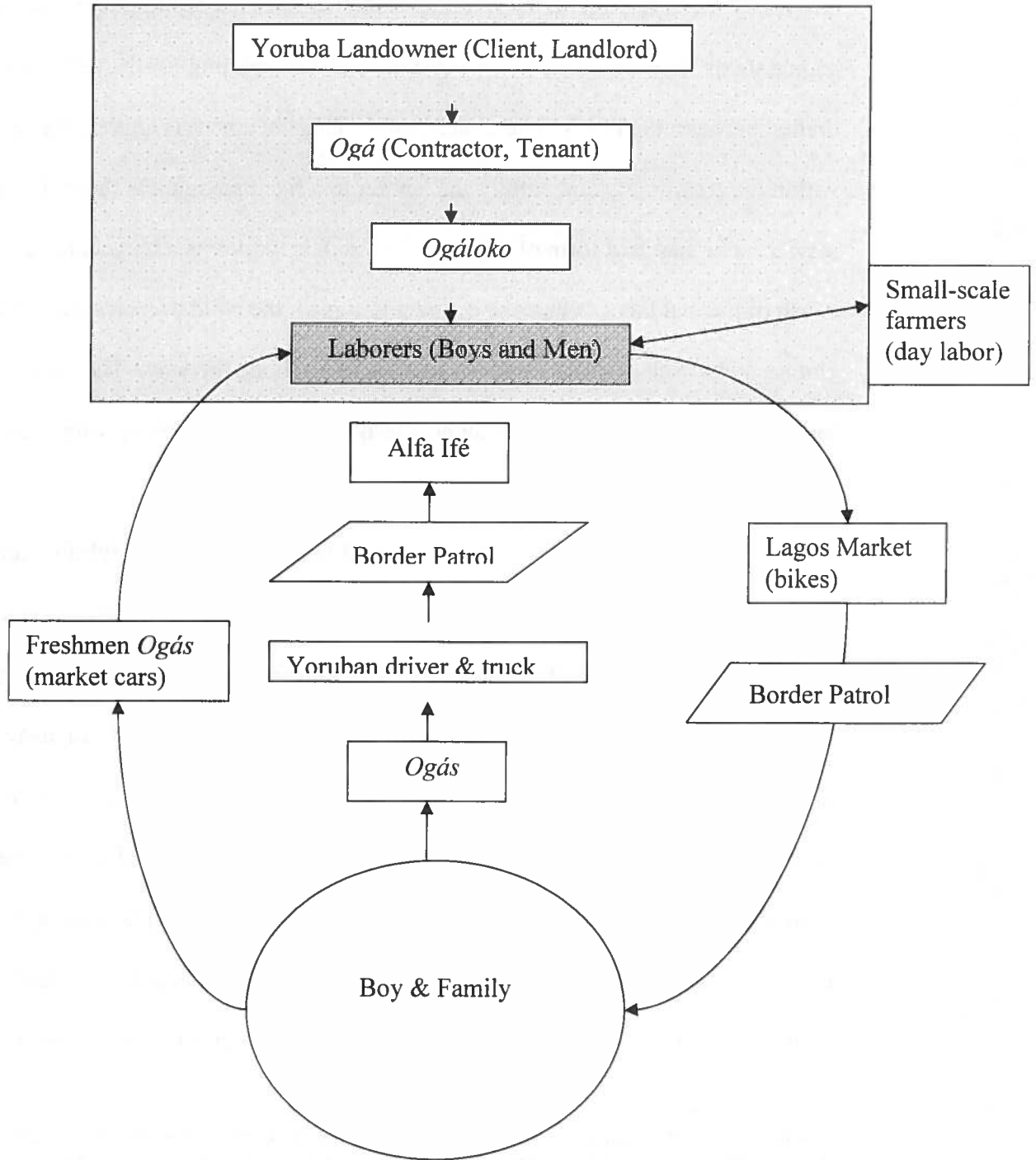
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<sup>47</sup> Interview with a women in Ikeja, a suburb of Lagos Nigeria, July 2, 2005.

<sup>48</sup> “Nigeria”, *West Africa*, Lonely Planet Publications, 2003, <http://www1.iwon.com/travel/travelguide/attractions/0,20310,africa-486,00.html>

employers, fear of intruders prompts them to refuse visits from workers' friends and family. For parents, fear of crime and confusion may preclude them from visiting their children in the city. Thus fear, real or imagined, creates barriers within the network and the blocked access bestows unchecked control to the gatekeepers of the circuit.

### Description of the Boys' Labor System





## Boys: Moving Through the System

For a variety of reasons, including poverty, boredom and interpersonal conflict, a boy may travel to Nigeria for work. If his father does not tell him to leave, then the choice stems from the child's own volition. Before departing for the trip, a contract is drafted between the boy's father and his *ogá*. This document is universally recognized within the community and entitles the laborer to a fixed payment at the end of his service. The standard form of payment for a rookie worker is a bicycle for a season's worth of manual labor. Once the contract is signed, the child prepares a small bag of clothes and a sack of dried shredded cassava to eat along the way. The child is then instructed to cross the Benin border at a designated time and link up with a large truck carrying other young laborers bound for Nigeria.

The initial leg of the journey through Benin is relatively straightforward, but the driver still takes precautions to avoid major roadways and daytime travel. Since the journey is complicated and requires careful negotiation, *ogás* generally hire Yoruba drivers to man the trucks. In addition to piloting the vehicle across tortuous terrain, drivers also are expected to negotiate with border guards, particularly at the frontier between Benin and Nigeria. Most will try to avoid contact by looking for pores in the border, but vigilant patrols will impede their passage. When stopped, the agents order the youngest workers to descend from the truck and the *ogá* is heavily "taxed" for each underage child.<sup>4950</sup> Established *ogás* prefer to avoid the expense and refuse to bring

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<sup>49</sup> In July 2003, the Nigerian government passed the *Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act, 2003*. However, enforcement is poor. The *ogás* are "taxed" in the sense that they must bribe the border patrols for each child. The price is such to dissuade established *ogás* from bringing young children. See U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report: Nigeria*.

<sup>50</sup> The minimum working age in Togo is fourteen years old according to the state's labor codes. See *Code du Travail*, Ordonnance No. 16, (May 8, 1974), Article 114. See also *Projet de Code de l'Enfant*, Article 298.

underage workers to Nigeria. But there are others who are too desperate to decline.

Young, “rookie” *ogás*, have catapulted themselves from peon to crew boss by mastering a little Yoruba and making Nigerian contacts, but they lack the reputation to compete with established *ogás*.<sup>51</sup> For this reason, they can not choose their best laborers for their work groups.

In general, *ogás* described the ideal age of a worker to be old enough to perform arduous manual labor, but young enough to accept low wages. All of the boy laborers that I visited in Nigeria were older than sixteen years, but they also worked for established *ogás*. Some Yondans said that rookie *ogás* take boys who are younger than twelve years old, but I could not substantiate these claims because I did not have access to this sector of the Yondan labor system. However, it appears that boys generally take the “trip” at an older age than the girls since their labor requires greater physical strength and they have more authority to refuse their fathers’ demands to leave for Nigeria. The average age for children to leave for work appears to be between twelve and sixteen years old, although a significant minority—particularly girls—will leave as young as nine years old.

Rookie *ogás* are also more likely to withhold payments from the truck drivers who transport their workers from Yonda. If the driver is still unpaid upon arrival in Nigeria, he will leave the workers at a designated location--Alfa Iwo’s home. Alfa Iwo was a Yondan scholar of the Koran who moved to Iwo, Nigeria thirty-five years ago to establish a religious school. While living in Iwo, he became the point person to welcome Yondans migrant laborers coming to work in the state. As an impartial arbitrator between Yondan laborers and their Yoruba employers, he became critical to

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<sup>51</sup> Interview 122.

the labor circuit. When he “retired” twenty-years ago, he passed the title of “Alfa Iwo” to another Yondan scholar. “Alfa Iwo the Second” still holds the position and his house serves as a detention center for laborers until the driver is paid. The laborers are then released to their *ogá* and brought to a number of small rural communities within the Nigerian farm belt. To maximize productivity, the *ogá* then divides his crew into small groups of three to six laborers and each group is assigned an *ogáloko*, or team leader. Although the crew generally lives together in a rented home<sup>52</sup>, each group is assigned to a different farm. Work begins before sunrise as boys emerge from their *ogá*'s rented home to leave for the fields. Their work season runs from late February until early-December, at which point the *ogá* and his workers are paid. Work often finishes months before, and everyone must wait for the Yoruban landowner to sell his crops. While waiting, many apprentices will opt to work as day laborers for local small-scale farmers. When payday finally comes around, the more seasoned workers will request cash payments and then travel separately to the markets in Lagos. Since the younger workers are too naïve to navigate through Lagos, they must rely on their *ogá* to buy the bikes for them.

Once the boys receive their bicycles or motorcycles,<sup>53</sup> they return to Yonda independently. The arduous bicycle journey averages four days and as they travel, they navigate difficult terrain, dangerous bandits and corrupt border agents looking to siphon off their profits.

### **Players in the System**

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<sup>52</sup> Except for a few well-established *ogás*, most are required to rent their homes from a local villager.

<sup>53</sup> Many boys said they no longer want bicycles and are willing to pool their wages to buy a motorcycle.

## Boys

“First and foremost, the boys don’t listen to anyone.” These were one man’s initial thoughts when asked to describe boys in Yonda.<sup>54</sup> He then said that boys naturally follow their fathers’ wishes when they are young and their needs are satisfied. But, once the father ceases to provide, his son will refuse his commands to work the family fields and start looking for wage labor. Although boys are defiant, the speaker continued, they still pay partial deference to their fathers because “all children fear their father’s *baton*<sup>55</sup> ...even if it doesn’t work very well.”<sup>56</sup>

For fathers, their children’s most important duty is to respect the teachings of Islam. This obligation is instilled at a young age and a child’s religious fervency is generally cultivated by his fathers’ insistence. To reinforce these beliefs, some parents prefer to send their sons to *Koranic* school over the state’s public schools. Although the choice may not lead to employment, it will prepare young boys for paradise and life beyond the material world.

The second expectation is that sons toil in their fathers’ farms as much as possible—an obligation that directly conflicts with their studies. Before a middle school was built in 2001, the situation was far worse because boys studying in outside villages were unable to fulfill their filial duties. Now, students can live in Yonda, but their contributions to household production are still insufficient because fathers and

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<sup>54</sup> Telephone interview, February 4, 2006.

<sup>55</sup> The baton is a stick that adults use to corporally punish their children. However, in this quote, the speaker implies verbal and physical force.

<sup>56</sup> He gave the example of his own brother who chose to leave for Nigeria and wait until his father’s death rather than endure his incessant urgings to work the fields. “Without pay, my brother decided that it was better to work in Nigeria rather than deal with father.”

disgruntled teachers, who also demand field work from the boys, are both competing for this scarce labor resource.<sup>57</sup>

At the age of fifteen or sixteen, a father formally initiates a boy's independence when he hands him the keys to a private room. Such an act essentially gives the child license to "*faire la jeunesse*,"<sup>58</sup> which frequently involves late-night visits from sweethearts. Why parents would give their sons rooms that encourage premarital sex is not clear. Perhaps it is to find a wife. Yet in practice, youth are most influenced by their peers and only begin to consider marriage once their friends start taking wives. However, this newfound freedom has implications for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV. Although I do not have statistics on the prevalence in Yonda, from my experience working in the health clinic for two years, a large number of the girls seeking prenatal consultations were also being treated for STDs.

In addition to choosing their own wives, boys are also navigating the school system alone. Most parents value education, but their involvement wanes as they cease paying for tuition and fees. Only those children with a personal drive to succeed will continue. Restless, with a passing appreciation for education, many others will opt for Nigeria. To leave, some defy their fathers' wishes, whereas others depart at their behest.

### **Fathers<sup>59</sup>**

In Yonda, two types of fathers send their sons to Nigeria: the young and the old. Both send their sons to tap into the riches of Nigeria, but they differ slightly in their

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<sup>57</sup> The Togolese government is frequently remiss in paying its civil servants, including public school teachers. As a result, some see free manual labor from their students as fair compensation for their denied wages and a chance to supplement their petty incomes.

<sup>58</sup> This practice is in sharp contrast to the girls, who stay with their mothers until marriage.

<sup>59</sup> The boys' mothers are not mentioned because they do not have decision-making authority over their sons and do not take part in the process.

motivations. The elders use the money for comfort and the younger fathers use it for social advancement.

The elder fathers, or *bobahs*, are typically subsistence farmers with four wives and twenty or more children who traveled in their youth and have since “retired” in the village. The younger fathers restrict their homes to two wives and generally have less children. (However, family size is difficult to pinpoint because it is constantly in flux with wives leaving, men remarrying and couples conceiving children out of wedlock.)

The younger fathers spent a number of years working in Nigeria as laborers and have been called back by their families to care for elderly relatives, particularly their *bobahs*. By staying behind, these men forgo opportunities for advancement while their siblings continue to work abroad. Some then use their sons’ labor to extend back into Nigeria to amass personal wealth and support their growing families. The elder fathers also use the profits to improve their standards of living, which include repairing their homes with cement and aluminum sheeting, commuting to the fields with bicycles and paying for medical expenses. The difference is that the elder fathers have less to prove.

Born under the fist of colonialism, the elders of Yonda were raised in a time when the village was fundamentally different and materialism was overshadowed by fears in sorcery and loyalty to lineage. Although they pretend to forget, many elders remember Yondan customs prior to the community’s Islamic conversion fifty years ago and their lives under French colonialism.

Although they lose out on material gain, the younger fathers earn status by staying close to their elders and learning their ancestor’s secrets. When *bobah* dies, it is expected that the “village son” will assume the position as head of the family.

Traditionally, the system of inheritance is based on a hierarchy of age. But since the majority of Yondans build their lives abroad and refuse to return during their peak earning years, the son who stays behind, regardless of age, becomes the next *bobah*.

Both young and old fathers are generally illiterate and have not experienced the benefits of education. As a result, they are unlikely to discourage their sons from leaving for Nigeria because they built their livelihoods on farming and migrant labor. Both groups of fathers also remark that their children are increasingly difficult to control-- a troubling confession since devoted children are their only form of security in old age.<sup>60</sup> Inevitably, children will leave or be sent out to make money. All that fathers can hope for before this departure is that they leave with a strong commitment to discipline, filial respect and prayer.

### *Ogás*

Becoming an *ogá* is a career option available to young Yondan men, particularly for those who have opted out of school. They start as “apprentices,” a term used to describe laborers, and then graduate to *ogálokos*, who are akin to the work group’s first violin. Faster and stronger than the others, *ogálokos* lead the team, set its pace and act as liaisons between *ogás* and apprentices.

To encourage the apprentices to work, some *ogás* will give pep-talks to remind the workers of why they came to Nigeria. Yelling and chastising the workers is also common, particularly those who refuse to work. “We have to do the education that

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<sup>60</sup> The concept of “informal insurance” as a safety net has been described by other scholars, as well. See 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). See Erdmute. Alber, “Grandparents as Foster-Parents: Transformations in Foster Relations between Grandparents and Grandchildren in Northern Benin,” *Grandparents and grandchildren* 74, no. 1 (2004). See Parfait and David Shapiro Eloundou-Enyegue, “Are African Families Becoming Overextended?” (Princeton University).

their fathers failed to do. Every morning, we have to force the boys to get up and go to the fields. And the unruly ones will say, 'Even my papa didn't nag me like this.' Then you're forced to apologize to the apprentice and remind him why he came to Nigeria."<sup>61</sup>

Although there were few instances of boys who were hit by their *ogás*, the majority were disciplined through verbal threats and commands.

In addition to keeping their workers productive, *ogás* are responsible for their health and must guarantee that everyone is paid at the end of the season. To gain these managerial skills, older *ogás* believe the process takes years of experience as stipulated in the traditional system of career advancement. Younger apprentices, however, prefer to bypass these steps because they believe the only requirement is a basic mastery of the Yoruban language. "There isn't any diploma—it is all based on one's desire."<sup>62</sup>

Because the practice is so prevalent, labor regulations and standards of practice are well established, creating a road-map for less experienced *ogás*.

Everyone who wants to be an *ogá* begins as an apprentice. Ideally, the apprentice should be young—but not too young. When workers are young, they are easier to control, but they are also weaker and less productive. In the past, children were forced to work beyond their means because every worker was paid the same wage and consequently forced to contribute equally. Now, younger workers are given easier tasks and paid less.

The pay scale was modified when the association of Yondan *ogás* of Nigeria decided a few years ago that change was necessary. The association believed that forcing children to work alongside adult laborers was wrong and established the pro-

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<sup>61</sup> Interview 109, p.3.

<sup>62</sup> Interview 122, p.26.



rated pay scale to suit different capacities. While the motivations for changing the system are unclear, the amendment was accepted by the community and has become the standard of practice.

For Yondans, creating an association gives them greater bargaining power against their Yoruban hosts. Living and working on foreign soil, they are disadvantaged and any blunder can prompt a landowner to expel them from the community. Cautious diplomats, the more established *ogás* have learned to take this role seriously and strive to maintain friendly relations with their clients and landlords.<sup>63</sup>

To break through the glass ceiling, some *Ogás* are beginning to rent farm land and work for themselves, but they continue to take precautions with their Yoruba neighbors. Fears of jealousy prompt some *ogás* to scatter their rented fields to prevent Yondan neighbors from learning of their *saabe*<sup>64</sup> tenant's prosperity. And all *ogás* continue to send laborers to their Yoruban clients. Although working for a Yoruba is less profitable than working independently, *ogás* continue to appease the Yoruba landowners to maintain positive working relations.

### **Yoruba Landowners**

The Yoruba are the largest and most prominent ethnic group in the "farm belt" of Southern Nigeria, and their harvests feed a large percentage of the regional and urban populations. Working throughout the year, they profit during harvest season when crops are transported to state capitals and cities for sale. Nigerian food prices are in

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<sup>63</sup> Most Yondans pay rent for their accommodations in the Yoruban villages. There are a few who have been working with the Yoruba for over twenty-five years and do not pay.

<sup>64</sup> Saabe is the term for francophone West African migrant laborers. See "The Oil Boom" in Jane I. Guyer, *The African Niche Economy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997).

constant flux and it is difficult to predict profits from year to year<sup>65</sup>. As a result, the plantation owners take risks when they hire *saabe* laborers. Such an explanation is often given when the Yoruba fail to pay. Although the Yondans will protest, they are powerless against the landowners, who rest at the top of the power chain and can manipulate the local law enforcement to rule in their favor. Many of the *ogás* interviewed mentioned that the Yoruba will create problems when it is time to pay, such as instigating a quarrel. One *ogá* illustrated this point with a story:

*It is practically six years to the day that one of my apprentices left to the fields to harvest gumbo. Along the way, he met a Yoruban woman who said she needed some gumbo, so the youth told her to follow him into the fields. Me—I was back at the house when I learned about the incident because the boy was brought to me all beat up and bruised—they even continued to hit him while telling me that he had raped their woman. In the end, it was to provoke us and we were all forced to flee the village while still in our contracts.”<sup>66</sup>*

Although the Yondans generally sought justice through the local police force, many disputes were still regulated at the village level. Unfortunately, community arbitrators naturally favor their fellow Yoruba.

### **Alfa Iwo**

As mentioned above, Alfa Iwo is a title given to the Yondan point person who acts as a beacon for travelers to Nigeria. For the past twenty years, the present Alfa Iwo has run a *Koranic* school, although he recently decided to stop accepting new pupils. In exchange for schooling, Alfa Iwo’s students were expected to labor in his fields. This arrangement is called apprentice-fostering because the boys come to learn about the Koran and are expected to contribute to household chores and farm work in exchange. Such an arrangement is not to be confused with the systematized transport of laborers

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Interview 122, p.22.

from Yonda to southwestern Nigeria, because these children are also called “apprentices.” Semi-retired, Alfa Iwo still acts as a non-partisan and trustworthy go-between for the Yoruba and Yonda. His duties include guarding funds during disputes, housing workers *en route* to their field sites and facilitating meetings between conflicting *ogás* and drivers.<sup>67</sup> However, during his interview, Alfa Iwo expressed frustration with the process, particularly with the advent of rookie *ogás*. He said these young *ogás* are not civil businessmen and their frequent mishaps put Alfa Iwo in an awkward position as he attempts to defend “hoodlum” Yondans before his longstanding Yoruba clients.

### **Yoruba Truck Drivers**

*Ogás* hire Yoruban truck drivers to transport their apprentices from Yonda to Nigeria. The drivers are responsible for a 300 kilometer trip that should only require one day of traveling, but often takes a week or more to complete. To avoid border patrols, drivers will force five tons of steel filled with passengers through a circuit of backcountry roads. Such cumbersome tactics invariably end in mechanical failure and delay.<sup>68</sup> Once the trucks finally arrive in Nigeria,<sup>69</sup> the boys are met by their respective *ogás* who bring them to villages scattered throughout the southwestern region. Unpaid drivers will refuse to release the workers until their *ogá* pays. In the interim, the workers are detained at Alfa Iwo’s home.

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<sup>67</sup> Alternatively, workers may be detained at the driver’s home until the *ogá* arrives with the money.

<sup>68</sup> Human Rights Watch reports 50-250 children can be transported in these trucks. *Borderline Slavery*, Human Rights Watch, April 2003.

<sup>69</sup> Oyo is the major distribution point, although trucks travel to other major cities in Oyo, Kwara and Ogun states.

### Major Themes

*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>70</sup>*

The three phases of fieldwork suggest a process of progressive social change that has ushered in the community's present migrant labor practices, where survival is self-directed and children are being left to fend for themselves. The tradition of fosterage lies at the foundation of many children's experiences and frequently takes a form similar to "trafficking"—only distinguished by its connection to kinship. Social values are becoming increasingly materialistic as people struggle to thrive in a country crippled by economic stagnation. And while Yondan farmers fall short of satisfying their growing families' needs, many have abrogated their responsibilities rather than confront the enormity of their intractable situations. As they recede into the periphery, their desperate wives then turn to their adolescent daughters' work in the cities for money.

Gender differences are striking within the system because boys follow a formal set of rules and girls are forced to operate in a nebulous system of broken promises and secret agreements. Enticed by the financial freedoms of wage labor, many boys voluntarily leave Yonda to work in Nigeria:

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<sup>70</sup> Interview 82, p.16.

*"My father wants me to work from Saturday to Thursday with only Friday for rest. I think that it is too tiring and I do not want a break only on Friday. Especially when I think about the fact that my father never sent me to school or apprenticeship, I just say to myself, 'He did not do anything for me, so I can not work the fields everyday for him.' That is why I occasionally refuse to work for him and I go out looking for wage labor."*<sup>71</sup>

As children transform into breadwinners, their central contributions push parental assistance and authority to the periphery. For girls, this translates into greater uncertainty and isolation. Cast from the shelter of a protective kinship network, they are left alone to navigate the cunning chaos of informal markets rife with exploitation and abuse.

Although the study explores the experiences of all children, Yondan girls are emphasized in the following sections because their vulnerability warrants greater focus and their labor system more closely parallels "trafficking" as defined by Human Rights Watch.

### **Fostering**

The following section traces the longstanding Yondan practice of sending children to distant relatives. Whether the biological parents sent their child to relieve the burdens of a large family or to aid an ailing grandmother, the function of fostering is to strengthen the ties of scattered kin. In reality, however, the system for girls can be strikingly similar to trafficking, with the greatest distinguishing factor being fostering's connection to kinship. With such a high prevalence of fostering in Yonda, questions arise about its relationship to "trafficking." Do procedures and social guidelines for fostering differ from sending children to work as wage-earners in Nigeria or Cotonou?

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p.14.

Does the same decision-making process take place? Are the incentives different? Does fostering within the kinship network act as a conduit for “service fosterage,” where young girls are sent to work as domestic servants in the city.

In Yonda, the process of fostering is often initiated by an elder relative and most requests start early. Some young mothers even recalled being informally solicited by relatives in the birthing clinic. Joyful and proud, the women would gather around the new woman’s bedside and begin to query about her baby. For some, the requests are oblique, taking the form of jokes about the need to carry a baby on their back or to have a little daughter to assuage their loneliness.

Children are eligible for fostering once they can “walk and talk,”<sup>72</sup> or as the cultural anthropologist Esther Goody describes as an “age of sense” around five or six years old.<sup>73</sup> In many ways, it is important that the child build solid ties with his/her biological family before leaving. Once it has been decided that a child will be fostered, the transition is gradual if the foster family lives in Yonda. It took over a week for one mother to transfer her daughter, who spent days with her foster family and nights with her biological mother until she eventually acclimated to the new family.<sup>74</sup> Sometimes, however, the process is abrupt. One *weita* was forced to leave suddenly for Nigeria with her husband. “It was the day that we traveled for Nigeria that my little girl went to her [foster] “mother’s” house. She was sleeping the night when I brought her over and

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<sup>72</sup> Interview 145.

<sup>73</sup> Esther N Goody, *Parenthood and Social Reproduction. Fostering and Occupational Roles in West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>74</sup> Interview 140, p.3.

then we left. [During the journey] I wondered what would happen when she awoke to no longer find me.”<sup>75</sup>

Despite the fact that fostering can be a vehicle for upward mobility, the *weitaos* interview series<sup>76</sup> revealed that foster children are generally disadvantaged and less likely to be sent to school or treated well. As one thirteen-year-old boy explains:

*I can not say for sure why my father did not send me to school, but I think it is because I am not his real son—I am the son of his daughter--so he is actually my grandfather. I have been with him for three years already and I see how he sends his own children to school... I always ask him to send me to school, but he never does. He says he wants me to help him with farm work and that school is for his real children. Sometimes, when I am on the road to his farm, I think about this and it makes me turn around and go back home... When I get back, my father always asks me why I am not in the fields and I say that I am not feeling well. Since I always say this, he has stopped believing me--even when I am truly sick. So, now he doesn't even buy me medicines and I have to buy them myself.*<sup>77</sup>

A few children did have better experiences with their new families, such as a girl whose “foster mother treated [her] far better than [her] own,”<sup>78</sup> but the majority were denied resources and expected to live as domestic helpers: “I was not sent to school because my only job was to help my foster mother in her work.”<sup>79</sup>

Apart from kinship ties, some girls are specifically sent to assist a female relative in need, such as an aunt with a newborn or a grandmother in declining health. This “modified mother-daughter model,” as Goody describes, is common in Yonda and can be advantageous for both sending and receiving families. One young mother said

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<sup>75</sup> Interview 152, p.74.

<sup>76</sup> *Weitaos* is Yondan for young mother. These eleven interviews with *weitaos* were focused on one question, “What are your plans for your baby daughter?”

<sup>77</sup> Interview 82, p.15.

<sup>78</sup> Interview 148, p.62.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, p.63.

she gave her first daughter away when she remarried and could not care for her elderly mother:

*If [my girl] is there, my mother can send her out on errands. She can ask her to do this or that and then relax. When I lived there, I fetched water, swept the house and washed the family's clothes. Now that I'm leaving, my mother will be obliged to do all this work herself.”<sup>80</sup>*

In other instances, children become the arms, legs and eyes of their grandparents. Thirteen-year-old Aicha spent the last five years carrying for her grandmother and she could not go to school because: “there isn't anyone else to look after *Nah*<sup>81</sup>. She's really old and can't work. If I went to school, who would care for her? ... I have to stay home.... as she often says, if I wasn't around, she'd already be dead. I am the only one to care for her.”<sup>82</sup>

Some believe fostering is advantageous because children are taught the critical lessons of discipline and hardship at a younger age . The common Yondan expressions, “suffering never killed anyone” and “children need to know heartache early”<sup>83</sup> speak to this perception, as does the following quote:

*I think it's good to foster children because it strengthens the ties between the families. A fostered child familiarizes himself with suffering much faster [than a child who stays at home]. Maybe in being with her parents, a child is spoiled and loses part of her education. A child will be more respectful of someone who is not his parents.<sup>84</sup>*

Although suffering is deemed necessary preparation for the inevitable adversities of rural life, the line between “tough love” and abuse becomes blurred as

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<sup>80</sup> Interview 153, p.78.

<sup>81</sup> “Grandma” in Yonda.

<sup>82</sup> Interview 98, p. 72.

<sup>83</sup> Interview 100, p 35.

<sup>84</sup> Interview 138, p. 1.



children experience violence and neglect. Assana's story of her Aunt Temanétou illustrates such a case:

*When [Assana] went to Nigeria, she was just a young child. One day, Assana went out of the house, and when she returned, Aunt Temanétou hit her with the same whip that she always has. This time, the marks left scars on Assana's back and that wasn't all... Aunt Temanétou then took ground up chili peppers and rubbed them in Assana's eyes and in her vagina to punish her. Thank God that my mother and I arrived on the same day. I saw my little sister who was suffering from such pain, this girl of seven years. That day we all cried together: my mother, my sister and me. We were in Ibadan, but despite this, my mother still left her at the house and we returned to Lagos. It was only when we arrived in the village that my mother condemned my father and demanded that they send for Assana. Aunt Tamanétou was both nice and cruel. She did everything for the child: clothing, food, etc. But at the same time, she would beat her without pity, and the day that she returned the girl, she took back all of the clothes that she had bought for her.<sup>85</sup>*

The anthropologist Caroline Bledsoe writes extensively on this thin line between “struggle” and “mistreatment,” where the former implies a practice that is beneficial to the child. Assana's perception of Aunt Tamanetou as both “nice and cruel” speaks to Bledsoe's belief that such maltreatment “stems from the dynamics of [a community] as a whole,” not just the individuals.<sup>86</sup> Like her father, Assana is accepting of Aunt Tamanetou's abuse because her behavior is generally accepted by the community at large and parents, due to intimidation or desire to foster their children, will generally not speak out against the caretaker. Although the Togolese constitution includes provisions to protect children's rights, there is no state presence within the domestic realm.

As a result, most parents are on their own to decide the risks and benefits of sending their child to live within a distant household. For some mothers, the risks do not warrant the practice and they refuse to give up their children. Yet, despite the best

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<sup>85</sup> Interview 139, p. 6-7.

<sup>86</sup> Caroline. Bledsoe, "'No Success without Struggle': Social Mobility and Hardship for Foster Children in Sierra Leone," *Man* 25, no. 1 (1990), 85.

intentions, it can be difficult to resist their persistent demands of relatives, particularly those with authority. For example, for one young mother, the pressure was so great that she was fearful a barren sister-in-law would use witchcraft to get her child:

*We sent our daughter to my husband's older sister. She did not have any children since she had married. When she returned from Niger, she asked for my first daughter, but another had already asked first... When I gave birth to another girl, she came again to ask. I was obliged to give into her request because she could not have children... [But] I don't know the heart of this woman. She could be a witch and I would not know... and I see that she is already bad. We refused her our child and she started to insult us and say whatever she wanted. So I gave her our daughter, otherwise my girl might die if the woman gets jealous [and curses her].<sup>87</sup>*

The accusation that this mother's sister-in-law would resort to such extreme measures to procure her daughter speaks to the high demand for foster servants.

Despite the strong desire by childless or elderly women to take in foster children, as the population increases, the system will be unable to absorb all the children that parents want to send out. As a result, these children become a financial burden on the family and "excess" children are consequently sent into the labor market.<sup>88</sup>

Based on the anthropologist Esther Goody's categories from her seminal work, *Parenthood and Social Reproduction*, we find evidence of four different patterns of child-fostering in Yonda, including: "modified father-son or mother-daughter model," "kinship fosterage," "service fosterage" and "apprentice fosterage."

As mentioned earlier, in the "modified mother-daughter" model girls are sent to assist female relatives in need, such as an aunt with a newborn or an ailing grandmother. Families will often wait until a child "has sense" before sending him/her off, an age that

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<sup>87</sup> Interview 155, p.81.

<sup>88</sup> Jens Chr. Andvig, "Child Labour in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Exploration.," *Forum for Development Studies*, no. No. 2 (1998), 338.

Goody estimates to be around six or seven years old.<sup>89</sup> Since biological parents want to solidify ties with their daughters before they are fostered, they intentionally keep them close to the home when they are young.<sup>90</sup> Goody's observation is confirmed by a father who said that he only allowed his daughter to stay in Gabon for three years. "More than that and she may find a husband and never return."<sup>91</sup> In general, girls will work an average of three years before returning to Yonda for marriage. One girl had worked without respite for ten years with a family that treated her like "a second daughter," but her experience was rare.

In the "kinship fosterage" model, a child is sent to live with their extended family. Parents usually send their daughters to wealthier relatives, oftentimes in the city, to prepare for the harsh realities of life and to solidify familial ties. Such kinship ties act as critical forms of insurance for poor families during times of financial crisis.<sup>92</sup>

"Apprentice fosterage" applies to those children who are sent to learn a trade or receive religious training. In Yonda, all examples of "apprentice fostering" were with boys and mainly for religious school. For example, the religious leader *Alpha Iwo* had been fostering Yondan pupils for over twenty years in Nigeria. The students came to his school to learn the Koran and in exchange he gained free labor for his fields.<sup>93</sup>

The last of Goody's categories for Yonda is "service fosterage," in which children are sent to work for wages in the cities. In the case of Yonda, service fostering takes the form of urban housemaids. Young girls ostensibly learn about the city

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<sup>89</sup> Goody, *Parenthood and Social Reproduction. Fostering and Occupational Roles in West Africa.*

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Conversation with 'Sami Abdul', December 2004.

<sup>92</sup> Richard Akresh, "Risk, Network Quality and Family Structure: Child Fostering Decisions in Burkina Faso" (Yale University, 2003).

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Alpha Iwo, July 2005.

through domestic service, which opens the doors to a better life. Through domestic service, they learn about “city ways” and hopefully will live a better life than their parents. This form of fostering should not be mistaken for “apprentice fostering,”<sup>94</sup> as mentioned earlier to describe Alfa Iwo’s students, because these girls are confined to their employer’s homes and do not learn about business and trade. Instead, they gain exposure to the cities, strategies for survival and language skills. In “service fosterage,” girls are working outside the kinship network with few opportunities for personal development, protection or profit. Their experiences are akin to “trafficking” as described in the human rights discourse . Of all the forms of fostering, it is the most problematic and the central point of analysis for this study.

#### **Increased Needs: Western Influences and Village Life**

*When the whites came, they brought a different way of life. Everything changed and we were obliged to spend money. That’s why the whites told us not to have many children, and we agreed because life is so expensive... In the past, when we did not have a hospital, women with difficult labors were given herb water to drink and then delivered the baby with ease. That’s how we treated the older generation before the whites came and brought a way of life that makes us spend money.<sup>95</sup>*

Many of the interviews with parents and elders revolved around the evolution of needs and increased dependence on material goods. When asked, people recounted the stepwise introduction of various manufactured items, including Tupperware, cubed sugar, tomato paste, and aluminum sheeting. Such imported aspects of material culture are not unique to Yonda, but speak to the larger process of globalization in which

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<sup>94</sup> Goody, *Parenthood and Social Reproduction. Fostering and Occupational Roles in West Africa.*

<sup>95</sup> According to one prominent elder in the village the introduction of goods into the village has been a relatively slow process that some attribute to colonialism. . Interview 46b, p. 4-5.

geographical barriers are broken down as generations of Africans are becoming more dependent on western lifestyles.<sup>96</sup>

One item that has radically changed Yondan life is the bicycle. Although decades have passed since it was introduced into the village, one elderly gentleman started his interview by describing the dramatic rise in bicycle prices and their accessibility. Koumai, a revered *ogá*, said that his desire for a bicycle first prompted him to leave for Nigeria in the early 70s.

The motorcycle has since replaced the bicycle as the youth's status symbol and is the aspiration of most working boys. During the festival season in Yonda, returning youth take over the village, tearing up the roads with their newly acquired motorbikes and causing an annual cluster of accidents with their reckless driving. The *moto's* allure also prompts boys to abandon school each year. When they compare, model for model, their brothers' brand new *dubais*<sup>97</sup> to the run-down *motos* of their unpaid public school teachers, Nigeria is clearly the better choice.<sup>98</sup>

While the boys gain clout from their motorcycles, they must turn them over to their fathers out of obligation before returning to Nigeria. Most fathers then sell the motor bikes and keep the profits for themselves. In the early eighties, boys would return with cash (*naira*) for their fathers, but following Nigeria's mid-1990s fiscal crisis and subsequent currency devaluation,<sup>99</sup> Yondans began to bring back bicycles and radios to sell for French-backed CFA. Presumably, this was when Yonda began its

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<sup>96</sup> Lai Olurode, "Gender, Globalisation and Marginalization in Africa," *Africa Development* 28, no. 3 & 4 (2003).

<sup>97</sup> A Motorcycle model from China, introduced into Togo ~2003.

<sup>98</sup> In Togo, 80% of formal jobs are in the civil service. See Marie France Lange, *L'ecole Au Togo. Processus De Scolarisation Et Institution De L'ecole En Afrique* (Paris: Karthala, 1998).

<sup>99</sup> Jane I. Guyer, LaRay Denzer and Adigun Agbaje, *Money Struggles and City Life* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Bookbuilders, 2003), xxxvii.

present form of “trafficking” in which a system was established to transport child laborers to various worksites in Nigeria and Cotonou in exchange for set reimbursements, as described in the Human Rights Watch report, with *ogás* bringing children in trucks and reimbursing their labor with bicycles and radios.

Construction material, such as cement and aluminum sheeting, is also highly prized in Yonda. Improved housing construction began in the late 1950’s when Affo Mohammed came back from Ghana with designs for rectangular houses with aluminum roofs.<sup>100</sup> People began to look at their round, mud-brick homes with disdain and chose to mimic Affo’s style. Since then, any household without a tin roof is considered poor and sons are often sent to Nigeria for aluminum sheeting.

*The houses made of cement are all the work of ogás – only five are not. And in the past, before I had even been to Nigeria, we had to re-roof our straw houses every dry season because there was no aluminum sheeting. But today, Nigeria has changed all of that.*<sup>101</sup>

Today, it is generally perceived that Nigeria is the village’s salvation. As two men testify: “Look around us, see how my house is covered with metal. That is by the grace of my sons and the grace of Nigeria”<sup>102</sup>... “It is because of the *ogás* that Yonda has known any evolution.”<sup>103</sup>

After building a home, the other great desire (and expense) for Yondan fathers is the *hajj* to Mecca. Any respectable elder has been to Mecca, earning the venerable title *El Hadji* and sealing their social rank in the community. Returning pilgrims are unmistakable as they tour the village in the *Deputé’s* white Mercedes Benz and wave at the crowds of adoring villagers. When the parade is over, however, these lauded

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<sup>100</sup> Interview 52.

<sup>101</sup> Interview 122, p. 30.

<sup>102</sup> Interview 38, p. 45.

<sup>103</sup> Interview 122, p. 29.

pilgrims return to homes that lack wells, latrines or adequate food supplies—a fact that reveals a preference to spend limited funds on trips to Saudi Arabia.

With the rising demand for material goods and *hadjs* comes a need for cash. The subsistence farmers of Yonda are unable to earn such money on their own, particularly since cotton prices have dropped. Abandoning cotton, farmers now look to cashews for profit. Unfortunately, it takes five to ten years for cashew orchards to bear fruit and few other options exist. To satisfy their needs, many fathers send their sons to Nigeria.

*No matter what I cultivate, it is rare that I am able to nourish my family compared to those who leave for Nigeria and earn a lot of money. My son is over there and every day he earns money. Me, I am in the village to farm. Maybe today I will be told that my father-in-law or mother-in-law is sick. They will ask me for help, and even if I do not have any money, I will be obliged to help my in laws. This is what slows the development of our village... And when my son told me that he wanted to go to Nigeria, I figured since my fields do not offer enough nutrition and we do not make enough to sell, he may be able to earn a lot more in Nigeria. This is why I gave him permission to leave.<sup>104</sup>*

After nine months they return to expectant fathers who have chosen the largess of Nigeria over their sons' contributions to household subsistence. Although some of these boys may have left on their own volition, hoping to earn money for themselves, they still must respect the established power structure and give the bulk of their earnings to their fathers.

Yet, fathers are not the only Yondans seeking cash. Youth also want money to improve their social status among peers and equate wealth with materialism rather than

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<sup>104</sup> Interview 33, p.8-9.

the traditional values of lineage, physical strength and fertility. As a result, many older boys leave on their own.<sup>105</sup> As a village historian explains:

*I would say it was because of that civilization [materialism, monotheistic religions, etc] that things have changed a lot. For example, in the past, we didn't dress like we do today... A youth didn't have the right to dress nicely from morning until night. If you did, you were considered lazy. One should always be dirty and wear field rags with holes in the seat... then, when the elders saw you, they'll say that he is a hard worker and should marry my daughter.<sup>106</sup>*

Today's youth return from Nigeria in bright, clean clothes with price tags still attached. Knockoff brands like *Abbibas* and *Sean Jean* abound and every stylish teenager has a brand new pair of *dubais*<sup>107</sup>, preferably matching those of his closest friend. For teenagers, "rags" are socially unacceptable and stylish clothing intimates wealth and prestige. Many girls who return from the big city have higher expectations for village boys and see taking a Yondan husband as a recipe for hardship. As a result, parents fear that girls will refuse to marry locally once they have had a taste of city life and place a time limit on their daughters' domestic service: "Longer than three years, and there is a risk she will marry in the city." (Paraphrased)<sup>108</sup>

Beauty is also tied closely with urban life and young boys described their ideal mate as a girl from the city: "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>109</sup> Joumai, a young tomato

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<sup>105</sup> It appears that the youngest boys of eleven or twelve years old leave at their fathers' behest and the older boys of sixteen or seventeen years are mature enough to leave on their own volition. However, this trend is difficult to generalize because interviewees did not describe the boys' ages.

<sup>106</sup> Interview 47, p.96.

<sup>107</sup> *Dubai* is the name of a plastic soccer sandal that was introduced into Togo in 2003. It is called *dubai* because it came out in Togo at the time of the Chinese motorcycle of the same name.

<sup>108</sup> Interview 89.

<sup>109</sup> Interview 61b, p.2.



vendor, said her friends were prettier when they returned from Cotonou. Such a belief was reinforced by Joumai's mother who advised that she, "Go, go away and work so that you can become beautiful, too."<sup>110</sup>

Yet, life in the city is a double-edged sword for Yondan girls. Returning city-savvy and more attractive, they also gain reputations for being bacchanal profiteers stripped of their innocence. Surprisingly, such wily reputations do not affect their marriage prospects.

Like the market ladies who transit them, girls introduce new commercial products when they return from the city. Exposure to the material world also trickles in through the television. Twenty years ago, the *Deputé* brought up the first set from Lomé. Now, television is an important past-time and some savvy residents have capitalized on its import. Taio is one such Yondan:<sup>111</sup>

### *Taio and His Video Nights*

Taio is the village's audio-visual guru and he has been running video nights at the home of the *Deputé* for over ten years. Each night starts before sundown when Taio begins to set up the theater. The process takes far longer for Taio because he is severely handicapped. At three years old, the polio virus invaded his body and left him with twisted lower limbs that dangle limply under the brawn of an adult-sized torso. Despite the disability, Taio transforms the dusty yard into a simple amphitheater every weekday and a dance hall on the weekends. At thirty-five, he also runs a radio repair business, manages a telephone business, sells gasoline, rents out audio equipment, and when time permits, weaves nylon cartop carriers for the local market cars.

Tonight is Thursday and Taio is preparing a video showing. To make the most of every liter of gasoline used to power the television and DVD player, he plays music while setting up. Accompanying the music are around thirty young children who come every afternoon to dance and play while the entertainment is free. Although the boys' stuttering feet create a huge cloud of dust, Taio pays no heed and continues with the preparations, gripping lines of

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<sup>110</sup> Interview 43, p.24.

<sup>111</sup> Field notes, July 2, 2004

electrical wire in his mouth as he drags his body along. Once everything is in place, the front doors are locked and Taio positions himself before a narrow passage to collect the 25CFA entrance fee from eager moviegoers.

To reach every household in Yonda, Taio plays thirty minutes of music videos at maximum volume from two man-sized speakers before beginning the movie. Such aggressive publicity is what keeps the Deputy's house the most popular among the village's five video clubs.

Most of Taio's films are in Yoruba, churned out from the prodigious Nigerian video industry. A favorite is the "Mr. Ibo" series, which follows the urban misadventures of a hapless country bumpkin and his mischievous midget sidekick.<sup>112</sup> Other favorites are pirated versions of Hollywood blockbusters dubbed in French or English and Ivorian music videos. For the musicians, popular storylines include: A rich man and his friends cruise in a Mercedes Benz and sing to the camera as they are surrounded by an entourage of buxom women. Another common scene is a group of women dancing beside the poolside of an expensive hotel with handheld camera work zooming in and out of their generous body parts. Although Taio has tried many other films, these lineups are guaranteed moneymakers.

Those who cannot afford the entrance fee stand outside the "theater". Left to loiter on the other side of the mud brick wall, they are either boys who have come to steal peeks through the Deputy's gate or teenage lovers engaged in quiet conversations. Market ladies also are gathered outside in static clusters under the glare of a single bare bulb. They come to sell bread, boiled peanuts or cigarettes to the village nightcrawlers.

Taio's nightly video showings have brought the outside world to Yonda and exposed people to Western material culture through films depicting "extremes of fortune... lived by a tiny fraction of the population and further than ever beyond the reach of the average viewer."<sup>113</sup> Such fantasy worlds that celebrate the "scramble for wealth"<sup>114</sup> and individual advancement will invariably shape the values of the countless village youth who come out to watch them every weeknight.

Before television became a part of the community, elders said that much of their leisure time was spent telling stories, riddles and fables. Oral histories of Yonda's warring past were passed down from generation to generation as father and son toiled

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<sup>112</sup> These actors have been described by a Nigerian colleague as the "superstars of Nigerian cinema".

<sup>113</sup> Jonathan Haynes, "Devaluation and the Video Boom: Economics and Thematics," in *Money Struggles and City Life*, ed. Jane I. Guyer, et al. (Ibadan, Nigeria: Bookbuilders, 2003), 212.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

side by side in the fields. But some say these moments are dwindling as young men spend their laboring years in Nigeria. “When they return to the village, youth are more occupied with finding spouses or meeting friends than listening to their elders’ stories from the past,” one ten-year old girl explained, “We don’t have time to sit around with our parents and listen to their fables and stories.”<sup>115</sup>

Whether true or not, people say that the video has replaced the storyteller. “Times have changed” is the frequent cry from elders. Yet in response, one teenager said, “I think that my papa does not know the world of today. He is always saying that times have changed and yet he acts the same way as he did in the past. He holds on to his old ideas... Since the elders are always saying that the world has changed, they should also change their ways and leave us to live in our own times.”<sup>116</sup>

### Mandate To Marry

In past generations, parents paid for their children’s weddings and mothers gifted clothes to their daughters. Now, youth pay for their own ceremonies. To afford the expense, they are forced to leave for work, and many cite weddings as the primary reason girls leave for the cities:

*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.*<sup>117</sup>

*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.*<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Interview 88, p.49.

<sup>116</sup> Interview 82, p.12.

<sup>117</sup> Interview 10, p.79.

<sup>118</sup> Interview 99b, p.12.

*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 can not marry with nothing to show.*<sup>119</sup>

The first speaker also suggested that those who forgo “the trip” will have trouble finding a husband:

*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>120</sup>

This mandate to marry is one reason why girls continue to leave for domestic service despite the inevitability that *ogás* will siphon off the bulk of their salaries. In fact, whether parents condone or condemn the practice is inconsequential, as individuals are generally powerless before this fierce social protocol. Even Mariama, a particularly strong-willed woman, said the trip was impossible to avoid. Now in her early thirties, she had lived and worked in Nigeria from the age of nine and comes back to Yonda with memories of an adolescence rife with grueling labor and abuse. Yet, when presented with the hypothetical situation of an adolescence free from “the trip,” she said, “I would like to accept, but when I was old enough, I would have to go because I could never marry without my clothes and dishes.”<sup>121</sup>

Like girls, boys are also under pressure to find cash for their weddings. In addition to the increased burden of the ceremony, they are expected to shoulder greater responsibilities in marriage. But nowadays, even having a girlfriend requires money, and although the financial burden is markedly scaled down in a village like Yonda,

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<sup>119</sup> Interview 188, p.30-31.

<sup>120</sup> Interview 10, p.77-78.

<sup>121</sup> Interview 99b, p.12.

teenage boys are still expected to pay small favors for their girlfriends. Yet, after marriage, many men begin to pull away as their financial obligations escalate.

Aboubakar, an apprentice in his mid-twenties, knew what marriage entailed and was suspicious of his father's persistent encouragement to find a wife. As he describes in the following quote, he anticipated that his father would withdraw financial support once he married:

*There are many reasons for us to go to Nigeria... Now, we must marry early because our fathers pressure us to find wives quickly, saying "you see your friend has married—so should you." He will keep on pestering you until you marry and then leave you all the responsibilities [for a family]. Having already married, if you go to Nigeria, you can't buy anything. Rather, all the money has to come back. And once the money's done, you leave again. That's why, big or small, everyone goes to Nigeria. (Paraphrased)<sup>122</sup>*

The practice of children working abroad to fulfill marriage requirements is so prevalent that the "trip" has become a rite of passage. Although some elderly women also worked as young domestic servants in Ghana, they labored for different reasons. Already married, these early *bonnes*, or housemaids, worked in the daytime and returned to their families at night. In contrast to today's girls, the money they earned was for their family and not their wedding day.<sup>123</sup>

Despite the mandate to marry, most youth rarely mention marriage obligations as their motivation for traveling. Rather, they say adventure, material gain and a desire "to become beautiful" have drawn them out.

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<sup>122</sup> Mohammed interview series 3, p.40.

<sup>123</sup> Interview 121.

## Shifting Responsibilities & Changing Family Structures

### Gifts from God

*“My parents have lots of children because they don’t know which one will be rich ... and they think they can get rich without putting in the work to support them... Like a gift of God.”*<sup>124</sup>

Part of the reason young children are frequently neglected by Western standards stems from the common belief among parents that children are “gifts from God.” A couple may conceive more children than they can afford and “wait and see” for one of them to become successful. For example, most children, including girls, are enrolled in the first year of public school. Yet, as the years progress, children are left to continue with little or no support from their parents. Those who excel can continue. Those who struggle, are encouraged to abandon their studies if they have not already chosen to quit. “Why waste time with school?”--better to work in Nigeria or join an apprenticeship.<sup>125</sup>

Yet, there are some children who want to stay in school despite the obstacles. In a rare glimpse into the raw emotions of a teenage girl, Warama openly displayed her anger at being told to abandon her studies for Cotonou:

*I am overwhelmed by what my parents have told me. They don’t want me to continue my class—especially my father. I think he doesn’t like girls, because he only looks after his sons. It really started after my friend Sirika returned from Cotonou. When she was in Cotonou, she sent back 10,000CFA to her father and 7,000CFA to her mother. Since my father learned of this, he stopped giving me money for breakfast. He wants me to go to Cotonou. He told me one day, “Since you were born, you haven’t done anything for me. Look at what your friend Sirika has done.” These words shocked me. When I talked to my mother, I found that she was with my father. And she is the one who takes care of me and sends me to school. When I ask for money, he says, “You are already big enough to find breakfast on your own instead of asking your parents.” They think I must necessarily have a boyfriend who gives to me. My mother said after the CEPD exams [elementary exit exams], I will leave for Cotonou, regardless of the result. If I insist on continuing, I will have to pay for everything and find*

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<sup>124</sup> Interview 100, p.20-21.

<sup>125</sup> Interview 69, p.7.

*my own breakfast. My father disgusts me. It's hard to say whether he brought me into this world.*<sup>126</sup>

### The Burdens

*Girls are a burden for their fathers ... who try to give them away as soon as possible. When a daughter starts dating a boy, the father thinks that he no longer has to feed her because the boyfriend will take care of her.*<sup>127</sup>

Not only do traveling girls earn money for their mothers, but their absence relieves a burden. Such an idea may seem counter-intuitive, particularly in farming families where child labor has historically been essential to household productivity.<sup>128</sup> Girls contribute to the domicile and generally work longer hours than boys,<sup>129</sup> but interviews suggest that families still perceive them as financial burdens<sup>130</sup> in comparison to their potential earning power as domestic servants. Regardless of the motivation,<sup>131</sup> parents readily send their unmarried daughters to the cities once they drop out of school, and the decision is frequently expected:

*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>132</sup>

Since city girls earn wages, albeit small, those few who want to stay in Yonda are expected to be financially independent from their families. The ensuing financial

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<sup>126</sup> Testimony at Yara, April 26, 2005.

<sup>127</sup> Interview 100, p.19.

<sup>128</sup> Pamela Reynolds, "Dance Civet Cat: Child Labour in the Zambezi Valley.," (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1991).

<sup>129</sup> See Akresh, "Risk, Network Quality and Family Structure: Child Fostering Decisions in Burkina Faso", Andvig, "Child Labour in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Exploration.", Reynolds, "Dance Civet Cat: Child Labour in the Zambezi Valley."

<sup>130</sup> Different from boys, girls leave their families when they marry. As a result, many said they were less likely to invest in their futures.

<sup>131</sup> Interview 146, p.51.

<sup>132</sup> Interview 128, p.38-39.

pressures convince most girls to leave. Even the youngest girls of seven or eight years will romanticize about their older siblings' lives in the cities. Again, Joumai the 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>133</sup>

### Sugar Daddies

One consequence of the rising costs of living is that parents are shifting financial responsibilities to their children. In the case of education, most parents expect their children to make contributions to school fees once they reach their early teens—a task that is far easier for boys than girls because girls are not allowed to work as day laborers. With few opportunities, they are obliged to work in the cities during school vacations or find boyfriends to pay for them. Caught in a *catch-22*, girls are often encouraged by their families to have "sugar daddies," but disrespected as a result.

Whereas most girls passively accept the double-standard, a few have chosen to capitalize on their "advantage." As Awa, a middle school student, describes:

*Awa: If I need something, [my boyfriend] will buy it for me. For example, if my mother asks me for money, I tell him and he will give me money for her. One day, a woman arrived in Yonda, and I tricked my boyfriend into believing that this was my mother. I made sure that my friends knew as well so that my secret wouldn't get out. Alas, I presented this woman that I didn't know [to him] and my man gave me money for her.*

*Interviewer: How much was it?*

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<sup>133</sup> Interview 86, p.93.



*Awa: 6500 Naira [equivalent to 32,000 cfa]. Once the boy likes you, he can't resist to give you what you demand... The woman wanted to refuse the money, but I gave it to her as a gift; ... and explained that this time was my turn to take money from my boyfriend.<sup>134</sup>*

Yet, this advantage often turns into an obligation:

*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, like if she asks for a uniform<sup>135</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>136</sup>*

Although most girls are encouraged to have a sugar daddy, only few succeed because village boys cannot afford the responsibility. Consequently, girls are left to fulfill their social obligations alone or move to the cities to find *real* sugar daddies.

### 'Useless Men'<sup>137</sup> & Bound Mothers

*Woman: It is rare that my husband will give me 100 francs if I ask. It's up to us [the women] to hustle to buy condiments for sauce or find money for the mill. That man will only give us cassava roots and the rest is up to us.*

*Interviewer: Is this only in your household?*

*Woman: Certain husbands give. Yet for the most part, they don't give anything. Some just give a little for the mill, others for sauce.<sup>138</sup> In our house, this husband never gives anything... just cassava.*

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<sup>134</sup> Interview 1, p.9.

<sup>135</sup> During the festival season, it is common for people to get *Uniforms*, which are matching, tailored outfits.

<sup>136</sup> Interview 3, p.22.

<sup>137</sup> Term from Andrea Cornwall's "Wayward Women and Useless Men: Contest and Change in Gender Relations in Ado-Odo, S.W. Nigeria", in *Wicked Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*, Hodson, Dorthy and Sheryl McGurdy, Hienemann, 2001.

<sup>138</sup> "Sauce" is essential to every Togolese meal and is served with a starch, such as ground cornmeal or pounded yam.

*Interviewer: Do you ask him?*

*Woman: We ask! Usually he just says, there isn't anything. And since he doesn't give anything, I have to do everything to prepare the food...I can't have my children starve! It's rare that he will give when I ask him. And the day that he gives, it's only 100 francs. You see what I mean, Mohammed? What's a 100 francs going to buy?<sup>139</sup>*

As men spoke of the near impossibility of making money as a rural farmer, women described these same men as 'useless' husbands who abrogated their responsibilities. The labor economist Jens Andvig writes when describing the ways in which a poor family may offset its unsustainable expenses, "The father has the even 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>140</sup> With pressures from both sides, couples often bickered over resources. Yet, while fathers accepted their lot with defeat, mothers said they were unable to give up. Amina, a 38-year-old mother of eleven, typifies the necessary commitment of mothers:

Known as *Beerah*<sup>141</sup> by everyone in her family, Amina was given a nickname that is ironically fitting for this four-foot ten-inch woman who holds the strength of a bear in her diminutive frame. With a round, juvenile form and beaming smile, she appears far younger than her near forty years, despite an outstretched belly from ten pregnancies and a face that has lived through countless personal tragedies.

Everyday, she is occupied by a battery of tasks, which include fetching wood, fetching water, cooking meals, sweeping courtyards, grooming children, doing laundry and working the fields. Like clockwork, she begins her day an hour before sunrise and goes until seven in the evening, at which point she collapses onto her wooden foot-stool, grasps her swollen fists and calloused hands and gazes up at the stars for a moment of quiet tranquility before retiring to bed.

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<sup>139</sup> Interview 77, p.15.

<sup>140</sup> Page 335, Andvig, "Child Labour in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Exploration."

<sup>141</sup> Beerah means "big sister" in Yondan.

Five years ago, *Beerah's* co-wife and best friend Fakia died in child birth. They had been pregnant together and had planned to raise their two sons side by side. For Amina, Fakia's death meant that she had effectively given birth to twins, for she immediately adopted her dear friend's child as her own. Although she is not alone, *Beerah's* strength of character and role as first wife have sealed her fate—she is matriarch and keeper of eleven small children. Too busy for jealousy or erratic emotions, she takes joy and laughter as it comes and otherwise pushes through the daily toil without a complaint.

This is Amina at the surface, but her interview revealed another side. In her session, she confessed that raising eleven children was an arduous task she never expected. *Beerah* worked for five years as a housemaid in Nigeria and then returned to Yonda to marry. As a teenager, she imagined her family would be small. "In our time, girls didn't think about having children before marriage. No, it wasn't that way. It was only after she married that the girl would know—*really*--that her call was to have children."<sup>142</sup> She had hoped for far less, but was blessed with eleven children. Quickly, she accepted her destiny and now approaches her *job* with resolute commitment. Retirement will never come for this ideal Yondan mother and wife. After her children are married, there will be grandchildren and her work will continue until death.

Although *Beerah* is exceptional, women in Yonda are not at liberty to negotiate their workloads. They are bound to continue their lives of labor or their children will not survive. Consequently, many women believe that the phenomenon of shifting burdens begins with the men. They claim that their husbands have opted out of their familial roles and left the women to fend for themselves. Now, these mothers turn to their teenage daughters. As Kafaya explains:

*It's rare that my husband will give me 100CFA if I ask. It's up to us, [the women] to buy condiments for the sauce, to grind the grains [at the mill]—others may give, but only for sauce. My husband, he only gives us cassava and the rest is up to me.*<sup>143</sup> *Isn't this earlier as well?*

Kafaya's situation was unavoidable because she lacked the authority to challenge her husband's desire for a large family. Like the vast majority of Yondans, Kafaya belongs to a polygynous household. In addition to having more children, men in polygamous relationships often favor certain wives, leading to jealousy and

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<sup>142</sup> Interview 69, p.4.

<sup>143</sup> Interview 33, p. 47.

discontent among subfamilies.<sup>144</sup> In Kafaya's case, her husband could not provide for his family and each wife was responsible for her set of children. Yondan men are subsistence farmers and their capacity to support others depends on the vagaries of low crop yields and negligible profits. Although many fathers struggle for their children, they are not bound by the same social and biological obligations as the wives. According to one mother, women in the market are able to make more money than their farming husbands. As a result, they take on greater responsibilities:

*If a child does not go to school, it is because of money... For the most part, women send their children to school in our community and if a woman is tired, she will tell her child, "You should drop out, just drop out!". She never went to school and she is alone supporting all these children. ... In Yonda, most husbands are farmers and their harvest comes after a year. When they finally sell their crops, maybe it is not enough to keep their children in school. So, it is up to the woman to run all over to support the children. We, we fight for our kids far more than our husbands. That is why everything comes back to us and weighs on us.*<sup>145</sup>

Children also corroborate their mothers' claims of neglect:<sup>146</sup>

*Interviewer: Which parent takes care of the children?*

*Mother: Here, I would say it's the mother. I say this because fathers don't care if a child eats or not. Each time he'll say to the child, "Go see your mother." It's the mother who manages to give a little breakfast and clothe her child. Even if a child gets sick, it's the mother who cares for her.*<sup>147</sup>

*My mother is the one who will decide whether I stay in school or go to Cotonou, not my father. Does he pay my school fees? No! So if I leave and then return, it is my mother who must take care of me.*<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Each wife and her respective children.

<sup>145</sup> Interview 128, p.52-53.

<sup>146</sup> Kayamala interview, June 14, 2005.

<sup>147</sup> Interview 99, p. 93.

<sup>148</sup> Interview 97, p.43.

Yet, despite the women's burden, men still maintain decision-making authority and ownership over their children. Women are seen as the property of their husbands and have little authority over their families.<sup>149</sup>

*Interviewer: Will your girls go to school?*

*Mother: I do not know. It is for my husband to decide with his family if they will be fostered. He thinks that these are his children and he alone decides. So, it is up to him to decide what works best, if the children will go to school or not. I really do not care.<sup>150</sup>*

### Taking Risks

Desperate, Yondan mothers send their young daughters to work. In contrast to the lump-sum profits boys bring back to their fathers, mothers receive small kickbacks from their daughters' *ogás* when they sporadically return to Yonda. When questioned about the senselessness of sending daughters to work for crooked *ogás*, mothers said they had no other choice because their husbands had figuratively walked out of the family,<sup>151</sup> and their daughters' small profits justified the practice.<sup>152</sup>

*As soon as you do not have enough money to take care of your child, you will tell her, "Leave, leave and go learn a new language."<sup>153</sup> But really, if you had enough money, would you ever tell your child to go learn a new language? Never! But now, even if someone is rich—since we are all accustomed to it—that person will say, "go learn a new language."<sup>154</sup>*

In the face of abject poverty, everything becomes an obstacle and couples who favor education may still decide to invest their limited funds on other endeavors. Some

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<sup>149</sup> Women have legal rights under the constitution, but these laws are not enforced. See Republic of Togo National Constitution, amended 1992.

<sup>150</sup> Interview 155, p. 83.

<sup>151</sup> Parampa Meeting, June 23, 2005.

<sup>152</sup> However, it is difficult to assess how much money girls earn for their mothers because the kickbacks that do come are given secretly without their husbands' knowledge.

<sup>153</sup> Implies going into domestic service for a new household where girls are obliged to learn the language of their employers.

<sup>154</sup> Interview 128, p.54.

even see education as a poor decision: "After kids go through school, they never get a job. It is not worth it for my child to make the same mistake."<sup>155</sup> For poor families, children grow up so slowly and yield returns over such a long a period that some may liken them to a bad investment,<sup>156</sup> particularly when the struggling Togolese economy offers few job opportunities to its educated citizens.<sup>157</sup>

Women may also actively discourage their daughters from schooling, an occupation that precludes early wage-earning opportunities:

*Coming from the mama's side, one time that her girl fails school, she'll say to her daughter, "Ah, my girl, we can't continue to buy you school supplies and a uniform just so you'll fail. Better that you leave for Cotonou or Nigeria to buy clothes and dishes and prepare for your wedding." Mothers don't see school as good for their child's education, that's why they do this. And the kids don't respect their parents. But, even still, it is clear that girls respect their mothers more than their fathers. Yet, they still get pregnant with abandon. I think it the mother's fault because she could talk to her daughter about sexuality and menstruation, but she doesn't. She leaves her kids to run around and it always ends up in pregnancy."*<sup>158</sup>

To help their mothers, these working daughters leave their homes at a young age and their absence is physically and spiritually taxing to the women they leave behind.

Usually, the biological mother is forced to work harder to compensate:

*Nowadays, we continue to give our children up for fostering. For example, I have an uncle whose wife had six children—and only one girl. Despite the fact that this was her only daughter, she gave her up for fostering. Now she suffers because she does not have help at home. And the child does not even go to school.*<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Interview 146, p.51.

<sup>156</sup> Andvig, "Child Labour in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Exploration.", *Forum for Development Studies*, No. 2 (1998), 337.

<sup>157</sup> Yves Marguerat, "Population, Migrations, Urbanisation Au Togo Et En Afrique Noire: Articles Et Documents (1981-1993)." in *Source: Lome: Presses de l'UB [etc.], 1994; 300 p, ill; 24 cm, Patrimoines; no. 2 (Togo).*

<sup>158</sup> Interview 65, p.74.

<sup>159</sup> Interview 125, p.6.

In addition to the extra work, losing a child to “the trip” is emotionally painful. Although the practice is common and routine, mothers openly expressed sadness at their children’s departure and their absence is present in the minds of families. Yet, while it may seem like a sacrifice for mothers, the alternative is often worse.

Only one woman who participated in the study had refused to send her children abroad. Despite her husband’s negligence, she managed to send them all to school by saving her profits from selling soap and cigarettes. Perceived as a strange anomaly, she often gets contemptuous reactions from her neighbors, such as “Oh, you just don’t like money,” or “You just like to suffer.” As she explains:

*When I send my children to school, certain women think that I do not like money and that is why I send all my kids to school. Other neighbors say that I like to suffer and that is why I refuse to send my children away to work for me. Here, most women think that their children will succeed without school... I just think about before, when everyone went to Ghana and they earn a lot of money. But after a while, Ghana started to spoil and folks started up with Nigeria. Today, the word Nigeria means wealth. But there will come a time when Nigeria will spoil, too. When that happens, my children will not be able to find work. That is why I want them to go to school. Even if they can just read, they will be able to read letters for other people and at least make 100CFA... Even if a child who goes to school does not get a function, they will be able to manage just the same. That is why I put away 100CFA everyday. I want to save at least 20,000CFA for the beginning of the next school year.<sup>160</sup>*

Unlike the woman quoted above, most parents are willing to take risks and send their children away. Once they take the risk, their children are vulnerable to anything.

An incident in Abeokuta, Nigeria, aptly illustrates this point:

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 fete 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.

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<sup>160</sup> Interview72, p.35.

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."<sup>161</sup> 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 Yoruban 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.

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 Mohammed, 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>161</sup> Fieldnotes, 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.

### Undermined Authority

*Before, children listened to their parents and they were only there to help them. Today, kids don't respect their parents so the parents just leave them alone. That's why we leave it to the children to fend for themselves.<sup>162</sup>*

While absent parents become increasingly disconnected from their teenage laborers, their dutiful children gain greater authority within the family. Although most sons labor for their fathers' benefit, their privileged position as breadwinners allows them to follow or defy commands. Played out as an internal struggle, such changing power dynamics came up between Abdul and his father:

Abdul was a teenager when his mother *Na* fell ill. To pay for her bills, he decided to drop out of middle school and work in Nigeria. As social protocol dictated, he gave his father his bicycle and radio after a season of labor and assumed the proceeds would help *Na*. But Ali's father sold the items and "wasted" the profits on himself, forcing Abdul to return for a second trip.

After his second year in Nigeria, Abdul wanted to return to school, but his father stopped him. He expected that his father would pay for his tuition after he spent a summer working his fields in Benin. However, months passed and his father always neglected Abdul's wishes. Frustrated and disillusioned, Abdul finally confronted him.

*Before he left for prayer, I stopped my father and said, 'Papa, it has been well over two months since I have been here with you—almost three months--and when you go back to Yonda, do you see my friends at school?' He replied, 'Yes, they are going to school'. I then said, 'When they go to school and you see that I am here, how come you have never asked why I no longer study?' My father said he thought I was disgusted with school and that's why he never asked. ... 'It's not true [I said], the real reason is that you do not want me to continue.' And when he returned to Yonda, I went too. I took my bicycle and*

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<sup>162</sup> Interview 87, p.24.

*left [to find my] brother who was going to Nigeria and followed him back that same day.<sup>163</sup>*

Although Abdul never asked permission to leave for Nigeria, he continued to furnish his proceeds to his father. Three times he gave up his bicycle, but refused on the fourth return. Instead, he sold his bicycle and gave the money to *Na*. Had Nigeria never existed, Abdul would not be in a position to defy his father. He finally did so with

extraordinary reluctance. Such conflict is emblematic of many young breadwinners:

*Normally, a child must have the courage to evolve and maybe God will give him a function in the future. Today, people notice that children in Yonda don't respect their parents and their hearts are cold. It is those who respect their parents who have the courage to continue school... these respectful children finish primary school, middle school and go onto high school.<sup>164</sup> ... The professors do their best to at least give them something to learn, but these [other] children have hard hearts—that's why they don't evolve.<sup>165</sup>*

This father introduces the idea that respectful students are successful in school and suggests that good manners is an inherent quality in some children. Those with “hard hearts” are unchangeable and destined to fail. Not only does he rely on fatalism to decide the future of children, but he emphasizes the centrality of “respect” to a child’s care and success. Like Abdul, Yondan children are acutely aware of this centrality of respect and generally display deference to their parents. However, when pushed beyond their limits, as was the case with Abdul, children now have the license to defy authority figures.

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<sup>163</sup> Interview 89, p.25.

<sup>164</sup> Attending high school still holds great social status within the village, particularly since a small minority of Yondans continue onto higher education. For example, only two girls who were raised in Yonda ever attended university.

<sup>165</sup> Interview 45, p.36.

For many children, respect for elders is now tied to money and the meager offerings of fathers cannot compete with the abundance of Nigeria. In the following quotes, an *ogá* and an elder describe how “the trip” trumps parents:

*[As a good parent] you send your child to school to learn well. One day, the child comes home and asks, “Papa, give me 100CFA. They told us to bring 100CFA to school. When the child asks you for this, you cry, “I don’t have 100CFA!” Tomorrow it is like that. The day after tomorrow it is like that. Always the same thing. When the child goes out, he sees his friends with bicycles and this is what makes some of them leave for Nigeria.<sup>166</sup>*

*I sent my child to school and he did up to CP2 (equivalent of 1<sup>st</sup> grade in the States) and then dropped out. I tried everything so that he would return to school, but he refused. He didn’t have the desire to be in school and said that he would cultivate the earth like me. Naturally, he’d then go out to the fields with me, but he refused to farm as well, so I just left him.... He would loiter around the village with nothing to do. He didn’t go to school. We went on like that for a while until some folks from the village came to me and told me that my child wants to run away to Nigeria. It was in the night and I immediately got up and left for the truck station and asked him why he wanted to go to Nigeria. He said he wanted to go like the others. I told him that he should come down so we could discuss things and make a program and I brought him back to the house. We were just sitting there, the two of us, and I asked him what he wanted to do. He told me that he wants to buy a bicycle. Then he went out and found his Oga, the man who wants to take him to Nigeria. I told the Oga that my son was small and the Oga told me that he could earn his keep. I turned to my son and asked him if he really wants to go and he said, “Yes.” Then I told him to go and he left.”<sup>167</sup>*

The interaction that this farmer recounts about his son’s departure for Nigeria reveals disjointed power dynamics between a father and son. It seems odd that a boy of eight or nine years would make decisions about his schooling. Yet, from the interviews, many of the parents seemed to have transferred this authority to their children. Either they do not appreciate its value or perceive formal education as a luxury for the rich and leave their persistent children to navigate the system on their own. In the case of this father, he may have “told him to go [to Nigeria],” but clearly his son made the decision.

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<sup>166</sup> Interview 128, p.35.

<sup>167</sup> Interview 33, p.8.

As they lose control over their children some parents abrogate responsibility and then blame children for their actions:

*Here in Yonda there is nothing to do and we are obliged to send our girls away. See those little girls there [she points to four children from three to five years old], they will eventually end up in Cotonou. It is said that children should be at least seventeen before traveling, and that is good because children of eight or ten years should not be allowed to leave. But our girls do not listen to us. That is why we send them away so they can learn about suffering.<sup>168</sup>*

### **Duty versus Self-Determination**

Familial duty is a cardinal quality in Yonda and children are trained to be obedient and respectful of their elders. As Roukaiyah, the seven-year old student explains, she fears adults because they hit children. When addressed by an adult, she warns, "You should keep quiet, with your eyes down and only respond when asked."<sup>169</sup>

Like Roukaiyah, most of the girls interviewed expressed a natural inclination to obey their parents and follow instructions, and all said they would go to "Cotonou" if asked. Boys were more willing to defy their fathers and often left voluntarily, but they still paid deference to the traditional power structure--albeit with limitations.

As the labor economist Jans Andvig writes, many impoverished children take personal responsibility for alleviating their parents' hardship.<sup>170</sup> Yet, how this duty influences "the trip" depends on the situation. For Aicha, the girl who was the "eyes and legs" of her grandmother, her obligations kept her in the village. Yet, for others, their duty pushes them to travel. As one girl recounts the experience of her friend: "She didn't want to go to Cotonou, but when she saw the suffering of her parents, she

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<sup>168</sup> Interview 77, p.27.

<sup>169</sup> Interview 95, p.88.

<sup>170</sup> Andvig, "Child Labour in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Exploration."

agreed to go....Parents don't force girls to leave. But in her case, she left because of them."<sup>171</sup>

This strong sense of duty extends into adulthood. The majority of working adults who seem to be loitering their lives away in Yonda are there because of their elderly parents. Daily, the village mason would describe his glorious past traveling "up and down" Togo as a construction worker, and Aziz, one of the market car drivers, frequently reminisced of his days as a truck driver in Burkina Faso. Madou, a highly educated barber, is forced to stay in Yonda and care for his father despite his potential. All of these men are trained and have considerable earning power, yet they spend their days loitering in front of Taio's telephone cabin because they have been chosen to watch over their aging fathers. Once their fathers have passed, each has a plan to leave Yonda.

Yet, an obligation to duty is waning as children gain more choice. In the past, a girl married at her parent's behest. Now, they choose their own husbands (although some families continue to arrange marriages). Girls were traditionally unaware that they had been married until after the ceremony. For this reason, they were given a week after their weddings to hide in their husbands' quarters and mourn the sudden loss of their youth and freedom. Although brides still wait a week before emerging from their new homes, their public displays of grief are merely symbolic.

Yet, with this newfound freedom come unsolicited responsibilities:

*Today, now that a girl chooses her husband for herself, if she has a problem in the house and she goes to her parents, they will say that she should figure it out over there because she chose her husband and that's what she wanted.*<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> The apprentice of Warama also tells of being sent to Yonda at age 7 to care for a sick grandmother. Interview 143. p.4-9.

<sup>172</sup> Interview 79.

If they are not ready for marriage, girls may also refuse to return from their trips or do so reluctantly at the absolute insistence of their parents. During their interviews, these defiant girls expressed an entitlement to personal development, such as schooling or vocational training, that they believed their parents had denied them. Such strong voices of personal conviction reflected a reality that defied their ostensibly obedient roles of dutiful daughters.

Taking “the trip” translates into an eagerness for self-determination and independence for most youth. Girls emulate their friends who return from Cotonou resplendent in new clothes and make-up and boys want motorcycles and money to spend as they wish. Adolescence has become a time of freedom that children must earn by working “the trip” when they are nine, ten and eleven years old.<sup>173</sup>

As survival strategies shift from a focus on the collective to a focus on the individual, children are forced to choose between their parents’ expectations and their own desires for personal development. Through defiance, children risk disownment by their parents and thereby display their willingness to navigate the marketplace alone. Now that they are able to earn money through “the trip,” the modern Yondan child is caught at the crossroads between filial duty and self-determination.

### **Kinship Beyond Yonda**

Within the past seventy years, Yondans have traveled extensively throughout Ghana, southern Togo, Benin and Nigeria for wage-labor. As they migrate, a large number never return. In the last phase of the study, we visited Yondan migrant communities in Cotonou, Benin and Nigeria and sought to understand the village

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<sup>173</sup> Interview from girl in Dedekpto, June 18, 2005.

community in exile.<sup>174</sup> How did they function? Were they well organized? Did they extend their support to Yondan girls who lived and worked in their vicinities?

In general, Yondan satellite communities are located in Badou, Lomé, Cotonou, Lagos and the Nigerian states of Ogun and Oyo. Each site's history is linked to the economic opportunities at the time. Badou, a village five kilometers from the western border of Togo, gained its Yondan community during the Ghanaian cocoa boom of the forties and fifties when families migrated to work in the plantations.

Affo Moumouni, the first Yondan resident of Cotonou, came in the early sixties as an employee of the state. However, after his arrival, decades elapsed before other Yondans joined him. In the eighties and nineties, as the weakened Togolese economy was unable to compete, girls traveled to Cotonou for job opportunities, and the infamous shanties of Dedekpto were established. This seedy side street still has a reputation in the village for housing Yondan prostitutes even though large-scale development projects have torn down most of the bamboo shacks and residents have been forced to scatter.

### Cotonou Community

Although scattered throughout Cotonou, Yondans still make an effort to regularly convene. When asked about the general cohesiveness of the Cotonou community, Yondans said that they did not look after each other like their counterparts

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<sup>174</sup> Once the project was over and I returned to Lagos, Mohammed (the interpreter) continued to meet with Yondans as he traveled in Nigeria. When he reached Ibadan, he came across a large group of girls who were being held together in a home while their *oga* looked for placements. Some were looking to relocate from previous worksites where they described being physically abused. Mohammed said he was surprised how open people were to speak of their experiences once they learned that I had left and the "investigation" was over. Such a finding suggests a possible limitation to the study.

in Nigeria. "After all, we have all come here to make money."<sup>175</sup> In terms of the girls, many said they knew of their locations but refused to divulge any more information. Some even denied their existence and tried to deflect our inquiry with the common response: "Girls do not come to Cotonou anymore. You should try Lagos."  
(Paraphrased)<sup>176</sup>

### Lagos Community

The traffic and great separations between neighborhoods kept the Yondan community of Lagos disjointed and unorganized. One resident, Tonko, had taken on the responsibility of welcoming Yondans who came into the city. He said that Yondans generally do not visit each other because the time and money necessary to travel is prohibitive. With multiple motorcycles, yellow buses and hours of time, we managed to meet a few other Yondans while visiting Lagos. In general, the residents echoed Tonko's viewpoint. Yet, despite the scale of the city, not all Yondans were scattered. The densest gatherings were in the "girl camps" of *Ikeja* and *Agégé*, where young girls lived together in settlements similar to the shanties of *Dedekpto*. There was also a formal women's monthly meeting run by Lagos' *Aunti Yara*<sup>177</sup>, a peanut vendor living in *Agege*. The women encouraged girls to attend the meetings, but then criticized them for socializing during the sessions and never contributing to their community chest.

### Abeokuta Community

Compared to Lagos, the Yondan community of Abeokuta, 79 kilometers north of Lagos, was much more organized. Perhaps this is due to the longevity of Yondan

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<sup>175</sup> Interview with woman in Ikeja, Lagos, June 24, 2005.

<sup>176</sup> Fieldnotes from Cotonou, June 19, 2005.

<sup>177</sup> "Aunti Yara" is the title given to the president of the women's association of Yonda.



residents of Abeokuta who had lived longer in their city and were more committed to their associations than their counterparts in Lagos. In addition to the urban residents, farming families would travel from distant villages for each monthly meeting. At the meeting we attended, the major agenda item was the issue of a lost girl who was mentioned in a previous section. We also asked meeting participants about other working girls and their responses were like those of Cotonou and Lagos: “There are not many girls coming to Abeokuta, anymore. You are more likely to find them in Lagos or Cotonou.” (Paraphrased) <sup>178</sup>

During the weeklong stay in Abeokuta, we visited farm groups in the surrounding villages and learned of a few girls living with foster parents. We also visited a town thirty-five kilometers north of Abeokuta and came across a woman who had left Yonda many years earlier to work as a housemaid in Nigeria. She stayed to marry a Yoruban man and now sells donuts in the local markets. Well-dressed and obese, she has the means to afford a housemaid and employs a Yondan girl for help in the market. During her interview, she spoke to the difficulties of controlling girls because they were unruly, lazy and untrustworthy by nature. She believed the ideal age for a servant was early adolescence because they are strong enough to work, but not old enough to seduce an employer’s husband.

My impression from the employer’s testimony, the lost girl incident and our interviews with residents is that girls continue to be transited to Abeokuta for work. Yet, people were reluctant to speak about the girls and outright refused to bring visitors to their worksites because they said they lacked the authority—only the absent *ogás* were allowed to bring guests.

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<sup>178</sup> Field notes, June 30, 2005.

### Northern Communities

Before heading to the north city of Ogbomosho, we stopped in Oyo state and were told about a community meeting that had taken place the week prior. The meeting was attended by the major male *ogas* of the region and they discussed problems they were having with their respective workers. Girls were rarely mentioned during these meetings, but as our key informant explained, this region of Nigeria was dominated by farm laborers and girls' issues are rarely a concern.

In Ogbomosho, we attended the final community meeting. Like Abeokuta's association, this group was well organized, but there were few women or girls who participated in the session. There were a few teenage girls who attended and they all worked as hired housemaids, but they had more freedom and flexibility than the girls of other cities. However, we happened upon one *bonne* who was not free to leave her employer of four years because her parents refused to release her. She said she could not stay and was planning to escape to her friend's house in a neighboring village.

### Lack of Oversight

My overall impression after visiting these outlying communities was that many girls were trapped in these homes and the well-organized satellite communities of Yondans were not monitoring their safety. Regardless of the location, none of the groups felt any personal responsibility to monitor their kin working as domestic servants. Throughout the six weeks, I only managed to meet five girls who were

working in-house. Yet, the tension that permeated each encounter gave the impression that these girls were being constantly watched. Starting with the initial encounters in Cotonou, each person we encountered throughout the trip reinforced the claim that access to bound Yondan housemaids was next to impossible. There was only one woman who allowed us to visit three girls she had placed in a home in Cotonou:

The girls lived in an enormous white-tiled mansion in an exclusive beachfront neighborhood of Cotonou and each one was assigned to “a separate wing of the house” (Paraphrased). Their employer was a wealthy importer of European cars, but the girls were solely responsible to care for his two wives—two servants were hired for each wife. The family was devoutly religious and in their strict interpretation of Islam, the wives could not leave the house without an approved male escort.

As visitors, we were obliged to wait on the street for forty minutes before the wives granted the girls permission to visit with us for thirty minutes. During the interview, we sat on cement bricks in the street and listened to the girls talk about their experiences. They said the house was large and each girl was given a separate room with her own television. The workload was easy and the house was filled with servants, but they did not like their situations because they were confined to the home and not treated like human beings. At the end of the half hour, a security guard motioned for the girls to return. The encounter was over for us, but the *oga* who brought us to the site was in trouble. As we walked away from the mansion, her cell phone rang. It was the employers’ husband calling to chastise her for bringing strangers to the home. As we looked for a taxi to return to *Dedekpto*, she was obliged to head straight to the husband’s office to beg his forgiveness.<sup>179</sup>

Lack of authority and self-interest prevent most Yondans from becoming involved, but a few men in Cotonou believed that something had to be done to monitor the girls. These young committee members believed that the *ogas* were negligent, the parents were greedy and the girls were suffering. One chauffeur even wrote to the chief proposing the creation of a regulatory committee to follow the girls coming to Cotonou. The letter was sent a year ago and remains unanswered.

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<sup>179</sup> Notes from interview with three girls in Cotonou, June 19, 2005.

## Discussion

Regional economic forces have penetrated the homes of Yondan families, turning prepubescent children into breadwinners and fathers, formerly the decision-makers, into peripheral figureheads with attenuated authority. The desire for money is not new, but the way in which Western capitalism has compromised the traditions of fostering, marriage and kinship reflects its profound power to influence Yondan society. Emerging themes from this study demonstrate how this quest for profit has scattered family units and distorted social structures: fostering has turned into “trafficking,” interdependency between family members has weakened and social networks have dissolved under the primacy of individualism.

Recognizing the turmoil in their lives, the ill-fated reality is that whether a Yondan child leaves to work by choice or at her parent’s behest is ultimately inconsequential to her experience abroad. As long as present labor conditions persist, this practice will not change. Although a ban on child laborers is ideal, as the economist Sylvain Dessy writes, such efforts are counterproductive in countries with ineffective law enforcement.<sup>180</sup> Rather than reduce the number of child laborers, the increased enforcement will drive up their wages and lead to a greater supply. As a result, any effort to stop the “criminal opportunists” will be in vain if the larger structural forces that keep them employed are not addressed concurrently.

The Human Rights Watch report portrayed children as hapless victims of an insidious forced labor system rife with insatiable middlemen and naïve enablers. In contrast, this study shows that they are the unfortunate participants of a market that has

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<sup>180</sup> Dessy, Sylvain E. and Stephane Pallage Dessy, "A Theory of the Worst Forms of Child Labor," *The Economic Journal* 115 (2005).

uprooted the lives of all its citizens, regardless of age. By depicting children as passive sufferers with no voice in the process, the report follows a tradition of human rights discourse that “denies [a child’s] agency in the creation and negotiation of value.”<sup>181</sup> The perception is further reinforced in international law and universal declarations of human rights that dismiss any talk of a child agency as irrelevant until the individual reaches eighteen years of age.<sup>182</sup> In addition, such “standards of civilization”<sup>183</sup> championed by human rights organizations conflict with the beliefs of many African communities that men and the old retain the legal rights to the labor of more subordinate family members, i.e., women and children. In contrast to western models of child rearing, most children in West African rural societies are expected to provide for their parents.<sup>184</sup>

Although the Human Rights Watch report rightly identified the larger factors driving the practice and called upon “Togo and its neighbors [to] confront the social and political factors that allow such inhumanity to be inflicted upon children”, it overlooked the complex interplay between struggling families and the societies in which they live. If the definition of “worst forms” of child labor includes “forced and compulsory labor” that is “harmful to the health, safety or morals of [a] child,”<sup>185</sup> then many Yondan experiences depicted in this study would qualify by this description. But the

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<sup>181</sup> Nieuwenhuys, Olga, “The Paradox of Child Labor and Anthropology”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, volume 25, p. 237. 1996.

<sup>182</sup> United Nations, “The Convention on the Rights of the Child,” in *Reprinted in 25+ Human Rights Documents*, ed. Columbia University Center for the Study of Human Rights (New York City: Columbia University, 1990).

<sup>183</sup> Jack Donnelly, “Human Rights: A New Standard of Civilization?”, *International Affairs*, 74, 1 (1998) 1-24.

<sup>184</sup> Bart Rwezaura, “Competing ‘Images’ of Childhood in the Social and Legal Systems of Contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa,” *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family* 12 (1998).

<sup>185</sup> International Labor Organization, “Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention No. 182” (Geneva, Switzerland, June 17 1999). Articles 311, 12, 460.

anthropologist Richard Wilson believes that such literal and legalistic definitions are incomplete in their depictions of abusive acts. In general, he writes, human right reporting ignores the “social space” of these violations and dehumanize the people they aim to protect through technical language and stripped-down objectivity. While rights-based discourse effectively influences government policy by using the “language of the modern nation-state,” particularly with respect to civil and political rights, such representations are devoid of local subjectivities and do not address the larger global processes that reproduce such atrocities.<sup>186</sup>

This project does not condone the three to four years of indentured servitude inflicted on Yondan children, nor does it take a “depravity relative” position that impoverished populations are absolved of social responsibilities. Yet, in communities with few options for survival, morality, like childhood, becomes a luxury, and a dialogue about villains and victims become irrelevant when today’s oppressed children will become tomorrow’s generation of *ogas*.

The anthropologist Olga Nieuwenhuys goes further when she writes that western perceptions of childhood, as a pristine time of dependence and passivity, are naïve and dangerous. By refusing to acknowledge children’s decision-making role in migration or their critical contribution to family survival, these human rights groups are criminalizing their survival strategies and preventing the development of essential labor protections: “This denial of their capacity to legitimately act upon their environment by undertaking valuable work makes children altogether dependent upon entitlements guaranteed by the state. Yet we must question the state’s role—as the evidence on

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<sup>186</sup> Richard A. Wilson, “Representing Human Rights Violations: Social Contexts and Subjectivities,” in *Human Rights: Culture and Context* (Pluto Press, 1997).

growing child poverty caused by cuts in social spending has illuminated—in carrying out its mission.”<sup>187</sup>

Instead, the moral imperative to protect African childhoods must be considered within the context of their present realities and recognize that children’s opportunities for play and personal development oscillate with their more immediate needs for subsistence. Rather than passive victims, many Yondan children have taken on the onus of their family’s plight through work and their precious window of freedom comes during adolescence, after they have learned the basics of survival and put in their requisite labor duties.

Like the Nigerian child breadwinners described by the Nigerian scholars Isamah and Okunola, Yondan youth from impoverished families shoulder greater responsibilities for their families’ well-being as they out-compete their parents for work. Children are preferred in the labor market because they are inexpensive, flexible and easier to control and their malleability gives them an advantage over their parents.<sup>188</sup> As the primary providers of cash, their labor contributions take on greater import in the family. Unfortunately, this reality is ignored by the Togolese government, which officially bans all labor by children under the age of fifteen, but does not enforce its laws.<sup>189</sup> To address the State’s failure to stop child labor exploitation, the Human Rights Watch report recommends that the government join other African states to establish a regional anti-trafficking taskforce and improve efforts to prosecute traffickers. The report also calls for an extension of educational and vocational

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<sup>187</sup> Olga. Nieuwenhuys, "Paradox of Child Labor and Anthropology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25 (1996).

<sup>188</sup> Bernard Schlemmer, *The Exploited Child*, trans. Philip Dresner (London: Zed Books, 2000).

<sup>189</sup> Cohen, "Borderline Slavery.", Human Rights Watch, April 2003.

opportunities to children and the adoption of labor regulations to ensure that they are afforded some protections, including a minimum age of employment, entitlement to compensation and freedom from occupational hazards specific to children, such as corporal punishment and neglect.<sup>190</sup> Such daily realities are what separate the Human Rights Watch report from the village perspective. Although both approaches acknowledge the existence of an underclass of young laborers living far from their kin who are exposed to exploitation and abuse, frameworks for understanding this process differ. These discrepancies are best understood within the realms of education, children's agency and women's rights.

For example, describing parents' motivations to send their children to work, the Human Rights Watch report mentions that "poverty is a 'major and ubiquitous' causal factor behind child trafficking."<sup>191</sup> However, *how* this poverty is experienced by the village community is not explored. 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>192</sup> However, Yondans understand the utility of education in an entirely different context because their lives have been colored by a history of colonial schooling and their present-day experiences with a failed system. For most, education is a luxury that does not result in better lives or employment. Yet, the "education or bust" position of western development agencies assumes that the state will provide an educational system for its citizens, which is not often the case. For example, despite its statutory "guarantee of free primary

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>192</sup> Preamble, ILO Convention on Worst Forms of Child Labor, 1990.



education,”<sup>193</sup> Togo has one of the highest failure rates in the world<sup>194</sup> and the country’s capacity to expel large numbers of children was proven in the first four years of the 1980s when over 100,000 children (around 20% of the total student population) were forced out of the educational system due to the “austerity measures” of structural adjustment programs<sup>195</sup>.

Certain humanitarian NGOs have recognized the difficulties in the Togolese educational system and have proposed initiatives like “Project COMBAT” to fight “child trafficking” through education.<sup>196</sup> The COMBAT project specifically proposed to improve the school system and pay for universal primary care education so that it would be inexpensive to keep children in their villages. To support this idea, the U.S. Department of Labor donated two million dollars in 2003 to get the project started.<sup>197</sup> Unfortunately, the initiative did not succeed. Although the reasons behind its failure are multi-faceted, one project participant believes it was due to poor management and corruption.<sup>198</sup>

Clearly, there is agreement between development agencies and village residents that the problems in the education system facilitate child labor migration. From an economic perspective, the costs of sending a child to school become prohibitive when

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<sup>193</sup> In reality, Togolese must pay for their tuition, which costs from 4,000CFA to 13,000CFA per year. Lange, M. F. (2003). *Inégalités de genre et éducation au Togo. 2003/2004 EFA Monitoring Report*, UNESCO: 1-25.

<sup>194</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>195</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: Austin N. and Rasidi A. Okunola Isamah, "Family Life under Economic Adjustment: The Rise of Child Breadwinners," in *Money Struggles and City Life*, ed. Jane I. Guyer, LaRay Denzer and Adigun Agbaje (Ibadan: OLUBEN Printers, 2003), Claude Meillassoux, "The Economy and Child Labour: An Overview," in *The Exploited Child*, ed. Bernard Schlemmer (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

<sup>196</sup> Care International, *Combat: Combating Child Trafficking in Togo through Education* ([cited]..

<sup>197</sup> Cohen, "Borderline Slavery.", Human Rights Watch, April 2003.

<sup>198</sup> Interview 100.

he or she is obliged to repeat school year after year and there is no guarantee of a job at the end. These inevitable school failures are then used by Yondan parents to decide how to distribute their resources—those who fail, leave for Nigeria and those who succeed, continue with their studies. 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>199</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" employed.<sup>200</sup>

Yet, despite these realities, it is fallacious to assume that Yondan parents do not value education. During a community development workshop, Yondan parents said that their greatest concern was the lack of education for their children and that despite the odds, more are sending their children to primary school than ever before.<sup>201</sup> Recognizing their limited funds, however, only a few will continue through schooling and these privileged students are selected through a process of elimination: some siblings will inevitably fail or abandon school and a small number of "prizewinners" will be left to continue. To support the "prize winner's" studies, his other siblings are sent to work as wage earners, village farm laborers or fostered children.<sup>202</sup>

This study and the Human Rights Watch report also recognize the state's failure to realize child labor laws, but I question the report's call for increased law enforcement. As the development economists Sylvain Dessy and Stéphane Pallage caution, stricter

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid, p.78

<sup>200</sup> Lange, M.F., «Le Refus de l'Ecole : Pouvoir d'une Societe Civile Bloquee » 1987.

<sup>201</sup> PLAN International Togo avec la communauté de "VillageB", "Rapport De Diagnostic Communautaire," (Sokodé, Togo: Plan International Togo, 2001), PLAN, "Rapport De Diagnostic Communautaire De Yonda."

<sup>202</sup> Andvig, "Child Labour in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Exploration."

laws in countries with inefficient enforcement will result in more children working because their labor will be in greater demand. The authors acknowledge that child trafficking should be stopped, but caution against implementing bans of the “worst forms” without addressing poverty reduction and “increasing the opportunity cost of child labor” by lowering the relative cost of schooling.<sup>203</sup>

Similar to Dessy and Pallage’s findings, in this study, I also discovered the consequences of ineffective policy recommendations. For example, Yondan residents believe that lobbying by anti-child trafficking organizations to increase law enforcement along the border has been successful and child laborers migrating into the country are now forced to take more circuitous and dangerous routes along back roads to evade capture.

The village and human rights perspectives also differ in the portrayal of women. Human rights reports will often portray women as pawns in the rigid hierarchy of patriarchal African societies. While it is true that women’s choices are limited by the norms of their society, I have also found in this study, that they are the most enterprising players in the system and use their only available source of labor—their daughters—to manage without their husbands. Tragically, their path to liberation is realized by perpetuating their same plight into the next generation. In fact, the most successfully liberated women of Yonda, the *ogas*, built their businesses through the girls’ salaries. The other side of women’s liberation is also found among the professional employers in the cities who escape the shackles of domesticity and

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<sup>203</sup> Sylvain E. and Stephane Pallage Dessy, "The Economics of Child Trafficking," (2003).

dependence by hiring housemaids to work for them.<sup>204</sup> The *ogas*, employers and mothers are not passive victims of circumstance, but rather “indigenous capitalists”<sup>205</sup> actively engaging with the capitalist system and exploiting the most vulnerable with unfortunate repercussions for girls.

### **Instability in the Institutions of Patriarchy, Age Hierarchy and Kinship**

Rather than the legalistic framework presented by Human Rights Watch, I propose a different rubric to understand the phenomenon of child migration in Togo. As rural communities like Yonda are touched by the encroaching pressures of globalization, they are incessantly barraged by repercussions of urbanization, population growth, fluctuating currency values and high demands for cheap labor.<sup>206</sup> Such mammoth macroeconomic forces send shockwaves throughout the communities and precipitate an unraveling of social structures along the fault lines of patriarchy, age and kinship.

Patriarchal authority is challenged through migration when women with little bargaining power defy their husbands' wishes and take to the cities or send their daughters instead. Admittedly, travel is not new for Yondan women. Just as teenage girls speak of last year's trip to Cotonou, grandmothers also tell tales of their years working in the Ghanaian cocoa plantations of the 1940s and 1950s. However, their motivations were different because currency was not as necessary for survival and their

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<sup>204</sup> Janet Henshall Momsen, *Gender, Migration and Domestic Service* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>205</sup> Polly Hill, *Studies in Rural Capitalism in West Africa* (London, England: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

<sup>206</sup> Patrice Vimard, "Modernite Et Pluralite Dans Les Families D'afrique De L'ouest," *Revue Tiers Monde* 34, no. 133 (1993).

capacity to earn wages was not as great. In addition, fledgling domestic service networks into the city could not offer women and girls easy alternatives to the rigid patriarchy of their village lives.

Whether this decision to “escape” is intentional or not, Yondan girls who are working as “freelance” domestic workers (i.e., they do not live with their employers) are now in a position to defy their parents’ demands. For example, some are refusing their parents’ wishes to marry in Yonda because they prefer to develop businesses in the cities. Since freedom comes from city-life, some even view domestic service as a vehicle towards emancipation because it provides an opportunity to break into the urban markets.

As mentioned throughout the findings section, men are also increasingly unable to control their families. And as their wives and children leave for the cities or Nigeria, the long-standing traditions of hierarchy and “wealth in people” are compromised. For elders, this authority is vital to their long term survival because they are dependent on their children’s care in old age. However, as they lose their control, this system falls apart. Perhaps it is this shifting of responsibilities that began with the men and trickled down to the children has come full circle and now the fathers are left to fend for themselves. There is already evidence that this is occurring on a large scale as elderly parents complain that they are tired but unable to retire from the fields. Working the family farm has traditionally been reserved for adult children but now their fathers’ fields lie fallow.

Changes to the kinship system are evident in the distortions to the fostering system that traditionally was used to reinforce family networks.<sup>207</sup> Now, it is used to drive children out of the village for profit. Even the voluntary associations that have developed to patch the network are unable to provide the necessary protection and support. As one married woman from a Lagos “girl camp” explains: “They have all come to make money, just like me... We have all come to make money.”<sup>208</sup>

The reluctance of *placers* to get involved with the girls is also an indication of loosening kinship ties. Even the former housemaids living in girl camps have little interest in reaching out to their fellow Yondans to fulfill the protective gap. In the past, each side benefited from the fostering and kinship system. Now, the same cannot be said as *placers* and *girl campers* have little incentive to reach out to young girls trapped behind the gated homes of their employers.

However, some Yondans in Cotonou are defying this reciprocal gains logic by proposing the creation of a watchdog committee to regularly follow up on the girls, employers and *ogas* in the city. Unfortunately, efforts to get the committee off the ground have been thwarted by village authorities with personal interests in perpetuating the practice.

In reaction to these serial shocks, the Yondan culture is also changing to instill normalcy into an otherwise intractable situation. The evolving “institution of migration”<sup>209</sup> that began with the kola trade and cocoa boom has resulted in rites-of-passage, such as the three year tours-of-duty in Cotonou or seasons of farm labor in

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<sup>207</sup> Akresh, "Risk, Network Quality and Family Structure: Child Fostering Decisions in Burkina Faso".

<sup>208</sup> Interview with woman from Ikeja, July 8, 2005.

<sup>209</sup> Christophe Z. Guilmoto, "Institutions and Migrations. Short-Term Versus Long-Term Moves in Rural West Africa," *Population Studies* 52 (1998).

Nigeria, that have become categorical stages of childhood. Such a pattern of migration brings legitimacy to processes that would otherwise be unthinkable: sending children to live with strangers for years without knowing if they will be paid or abused in order to make money for their wedding days.

### Conclusion

The labor economist Jens Andvig writes that “child employment rather than child labor” is the greatest concern in many countries where failing economies have created a glut of children working on the periphery of the informal sector for insufficient wages. Considering Togo’s present economic plight, it is unrealistic to assume that rural communities will be able to entirely eradicate the monetary contributions of their children. However, there continues to be tension between education and work as parents’ entitlement to child labor and their children’s entitlement to an education conflict. Sadly, given the country’s present economy, both sides often agree that leaving rural Togo is their best chance for advancement. This reality demands a shift in development strategies. Rather than speak of protecting children’s rights to education or to “grow up in a family environment in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding,”<sup>210</sup> we must now speak of children’s “right to work.”<sup>211</sup> Presently, there are legions of child laborers below the age of fourteen (the minimum working age as stipulated in the 1974 Togolese Labor Code)<sup>212</sup> who lack the

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<sup>210</sup> Preamble, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.

<sup>211</sup> Rwezaura, "Competing 'Images' of Childhood in the Social and Legal Systems of Contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa."

<sup>212</sup> *Code du Travail*, Ordonnance No. 16, (May 8, 1974), Article 114. See also *Projet de Code de l'Enfant*, Article 298.

capacity or freedom to advocate for themselves and are subject to severe working conditions.

To the detriment of the country as a whole, a new kind of worker is developing from these resilient child laborers who is unskilled and willing to endure substandard working conditions for substandard pay. As Michael Bonnet from the International Labor Organization writes, “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. It is here, perhaps, in this transformation of a skilled worker into a subservient jack-of-all-trades, that we should seek the greatest threat posed by child labor.”<sup>213</sup>

Although the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is noble and well-intentioned, it does not acknowledge the realities of many people’s lives. Human rights are not straightforward and their protection requires honest dialogues that break through sensationalism and morality rhetoric to identifying all the factors and parties involved in perpetrating injustice, not just those at the lowest echelons of power (i.e., impoverished parents or small-time middlemen). In many respects, we must identify the culpability of our own governments. As the moral philosopher Thomas Pogge writes, “the continuing imposition of this [unjust] global order, essentially unmodified, constitutes a massive violation of the human right to basic necessities—a violation for which the governments and electorates of the more powerful countries bear primary responsibility.”<sup>214</sup> In this sense, we must redraw the lines of what constitutes human rights violations and move past the assumption that there exists a globalized moral

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<sup>213</sup> Bonnet, Michel, “Introduction: Child Labour in the Light of Bonded Labour” in Bernard Sclimmer (ed) *The Exploited Child*, Zed Books, London. 2003.

<sup>214</sup> Thomas Pogge, “Severe Poverty as a Human Rights Violation,” (2004).



majority willing to rectify the structural inequalities that perpetuate the suffering of the very children we purport to protect.

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## Appendix A: Interview Guides

### **1. Interview Guide for Phases One and Three**

During the semi-structured interview, participants are invited to share information beyond the scripted prompt, but questions will include:

#### ***Religious Leaders/Village Elders***

Traditionally, village elders have been held in high esteem in many West African communities and often have the final say in disputes and important decisions, both for the community and the families they head. Learning how they feel about trafficking and what influence they have on the decisions of their children (“the parents”), would add another piece to the decision-making puzzle.

1. What is your impression on the practice of sending children to Nigeria or Benin to work? Do you believe that more children are being sent away now, as compared to the past?
2. Do you believe this practice is beneficial or harmful to the well-being of the village?
3. What is the effect on children? Do you think they are in any danger? Do you trust that the people who are transiting these children abroad will ensure their safety?
4. Is it better for these children to work or go to school?
5. Why do you think people send their children abroad?
6. Have children always been sent away? In the past, were they sent to other places?
7. Could you give me a brief history of Yonda? When was it founded? Where did the original settlers come from?
8. What kind of religion was practiced in Yonda before the arrival of Islam?
9. When and how did the practice of Islam arrive in Yonda?
10. Has the arrival of Islam had any impact on the willingness of parents to send their children abroad to work?
11. Are the experiences of children who work abroad threatening to their faith in Islam?
12. When children return from working abroad, are they less respectful? Do you believe they are less likely to listen to the elders?
13. Does their financial independence play a role in the “freedom” of a child to make his or her own decisions?

#### ***The parents (men and women will be interviewed separately):***

An objective of this project is to learn about parental perceptions of the financial benefits of child-labor abroad and the connection between desperate financial situations and giving in to the practice. In addition to the influence of finances, I’m interested in how differing expectations for boys and girls influence a family’s decision to send a

child away. A thought: was child trafficking practiced when these parents were children? Were they or any of their siblings trafficked?

1. What is your impression on the practice of sending children to Nigeria or Benin to work? Do you believe that more children are being sent away now, as compared to the past?
2. Do you believe this practice is beneficial or harmful to the well-being of the village?
3. What is the effect on children? Do you believe that they are in any danger? Do you trust that the people who are transiting these children abroad will ensure their safety?
4. Is it better for these children to work or go to school?
5. Why do you think people send their children abroad?
6. Are families with less means more likely to send their children away?
7. Have you ever considered sending your child abroad to work?
8. How important are children to domestic life? What are their roles in the household? While in the village, do they generate an income outside of the house?
9. At what age are most children sent abroad?
10. Where do they go?
11. For children who work abroad, do they always bring money back to their families?
12. Are parents paid for sending their children abroad? Is it different for the boys and girls?
13. How do families compensate for the labor shortage when their children travel abroad? Who takes over their household chores?
14. Are girls more important to the “running” of the household?
15. Are girls more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation by the people who transit them to their workplace abroad?
16. Do you see any alternatives to sending children away?

***Questions Specifically For Mothers:***

My motivation in focusing specifically on women in is to address the relationship between gender and child-trafficking. Women’s voices are often silenced; by focusing on them separately; I hope to elicit their stories.

17. Are girls required to work more for the household?
18. How does the importance of the girls’ contribution to household production influence the decisions of parents to send their children abroad?
19. If domestic chores are the primary responsibility of the daughter, isn’t there a greater burden than benefit in sending that child away?
20. How does this affect those who are left behind and the mother who must “pick up the slack”?
21. Are families less inclined to send their daughters away if there are no others to fill the labor gap?

22. Do girls who are sent abroad have a more difficult time finding husbands than those who stay in the village?

***Community Development Workers in the Village:***

1. What is your impression on the practice of sending children to Nigeria or Benin to work? Do you believe that more children are being sent away now, as compared to the past?
2. Is the practice different now than it was in the past? Are people sending their children away for different reasons?
3. Do you believe this practice is beneficial or harmful to the well-being of the village?
4. What is the effect on children? Do you believe that they are in any danger? Do you trust that the people who are transiting these children abroad will ensure their safety?
5. Is it better for these children to work or go to school?
6. Why do you think people send their children abroad?
7. What do you think of the NGO workers who come to Yonda to talk about child-trafficking? Are they well received by the community? Do you think they are effective?
8. Does the CVD see the practice of sending children abroad to be a problem? Have there been any efforts to address the issue?
9. What does the chief think of the practice?

***NGO Workers in Lomé (capital city of Togo)***

1. What is your impression on the practice of sending children from Yonda to Nigeria or Benin to work?
2. Do you believe this practice is beneficial or harmful to the well-being of the village?
3. What is the effect on children? Do you believe that they are in any danger?
4. Why do you think people send their children abroad?
5. What is the mission of your organization?
6. What kinds of activities is your organization engaged in to address the practice of child-labor migration?
7. What has been the state's response?
8. Is the government supportive of your efforts?
9. Is there collaboration and communication between the various organizations?
10. How long have you been working here?
11. Have you seen any improvements in the situation?

**2. Interview Guide for Phase Two**

1. Can you tell me how you got started in your profession?
2. How often do you go abroad?
3. Do you work seasonally?
4. What are the benefits and risks of your profession?
5. Tell me about the inconveniences?
6. Why have you come back to the village?



7. Why do you think children go abroad to work?
8. Do children have to work harder during certain times of the year, such as the harvest season?
9. Do you think parents send them abroad or do they leave on their own volition?
10. How old are most of the children when they leave the village to work abroad?
11. What is the difference between the types of jobs that are done by boys versus the work that is done by girls?
12. What do you think are the benefits for families and children to work abroad?
13. What are your thoughts about children who work abroad versus those who stay in the village and go to school?
14. Do people make more money if they work abroad instead of going to school or is it better to stay in school and find a job afterwards?
15. What other kinds of wage-earning activities are you engaged in?

## Appendix B: Participant Consent Forms

### **1. Adult Participants**

My name is Liza Buchbinder. I am a graduate student in the Department of Health & Medical Sciences at the University of California at Berkeley. UC Berkeley is a large public university in the United States.

I would like you to allow me to use the stories of your experience with child-labor in Yonda for a study that I am conducting on child-labor & migration. My reason for doing this project is that I want to understand why parents send their children outside of the village to work. If you agree to speak with me, I will only be asking about your thoughts and experiences for the purposes of the study. In order to accurately record your testimony, I will be taping the interview with an audio-recorder. The interview will last approximately one hour.

The risks of the research are that others may find out what you have said to me, or to the translators. I take extreme care to minimize these risks and ensure that your stories will not be repeated. I am working independently of any government or legal organization, and your name or other information will not be divulged to any outside organization, unless required by law.

There is no substantial benefit to you from the research. We hope that the research will allow other people to understand the reasons why people in Yonda send their children to work abroad, to such places as Nigeria, Cotonou and Abijain. All of the information that I obtain from your taped session will be kept confidential. I will store all tapes and notes about your interview in a locked box in my office, and all identifying information will be coded to protect your privacy. Neither your name, nor any identifying information, will be used in any reports of my research.

Your participation in this research is voluntary, which means that you don't have to talk to me if you don't want to. You are free to refuse to permit me to keep the record of what you have said. All information will be kept strictly confidential. Snacks will be provided to those who participate in the study. If resources permit, snacks may be available to those who opt not to be interviewed, but priority will be given to the research participants.

If you have any questions about the research, please feel free to ask me or stop by my house. The other copy of this form is for you to keep. If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a participant in this research project, please contact TCHAKALA Mohamed, Program Director of *Action Pour la Jeunesse D'Afrique* at BP 842, Sokodé, Togo/ Tel. 228 555 01 62/ 228 910 45 69.

## **2. Parental/Legal Guardian Consent Form**

My name is Liza Buchbinder. I am a graduate student in the Department of Health and Medical Sciences at the University of California at Berkeley. I would like to invite your child to take part in my research, which looks at what children understand and perceive about child-labor and migration.

If your child takes part in my research, s/he will be asked to take part in two interviews, each lasting about a half hour to forty-five minutes, at times and places of his/her choosing. We will ask him/her for some personal information, such as, "What is your understanding about the work that is done by children abroad?" "Why do you think children work abroad?" and questions about the role of children in the household, such as, "What kinds of chores to children do at home?" With your and your child's permission, the interview will be audio taped. I may ask to contact your child if I have any follow-up questions after our interviews. If your child participates, he/she will receive a snack to thank him/her for participating.

There are no known risks to your child from taking part in this research, and no foreseeable direct benefit to him/her either. However, it is hoped that the research will benefit others (or science) who wish to gain a better understanding of child labor practices in Togo.

All of the information that I obtain from your child during the research will be kept confidential. I will not tell anyone else, including parents and teachers, what your child tells me. I will store my notes and tape recording in a locked file. Each person I interview will have their own code number so that no one other than I will know who you are from my notes. The key to the code of names will be kept in a separate locked file. Your child's name and other identifying information about him/her will not be used in any reports of the research. After this research is completed, I may save the tape recordings and my notes for use in future research by others or myself. However, the same confidentiality guarantees given here will apply to future storage and use of the materials. Although I will keep your child's name confidential, he/she may still be identifiable to others on the tape.

Your child's participation in this research is voluntary. He/she may refuse to take part. He/she may refuse to answer any questions and may stop taking part in the study at any time. Whether or not your child chooses to take part in this research will have no bearing on his/her standing or grades at their school.

Please discuss this research and the information in this consent form with your child. If you or your child have any questions about the research, you may contact me directly.

If you or your child have any questions about your rights or treatment as a participant in this research project, please contact TCHAKALA Mohamed, Program Director of

*Action Pour la Jeunesse D'Afrique at BP 842, Sokodé, Togo/ Tel. 228 555 01 62/ 228 910 45 69.*

### **3. Children's Assent Form**

My name is Liza Buchbinder. I am a student in the Department of Health and Medical Sciences at the University of California at Berkeley. I would like to invite you to take part in my research in which I would interview you for 30-45 minutes. Depending on where you feel most comfortable, the interview can take place in your home or at the health clinic. If you do not feel comfortable with these locations, we can find another place to talk. I will be asking your opinion about the role of children in the family and what you think about children who work abroad in Nigeria and Cotounou. Some of the questions will be personal and you may stop at any time.

Your participation in the research is voluntary. You may stop taking part in the research at any time. If you decide to take part in my research, you will be asked to have an interview with me about child labor and migration.

This research has no direct benefits and no known risks to you. If you feel uncomfortable in any way, please let me know and we will stop the interview. Your parents have agreed to let us talk with you, but if you feel that you have said something that would upset your parents/legal guardians, we will stop the interview. Whether or not you agree to be part of my research will have no bearing on your standing or grades at school.

Thank you very much.

If you have any questions about the research, you may find me at SABI Ali's house. If you want to talk to someone other than me about the research you can get in touch with TCHAKALA Mohamed, Program Director of *Action Pour la Jeunesse D'Afrique at BP 842, Sokodé, Togo/ Tel. 228 555 01 62/ 228 910 45 69.*

