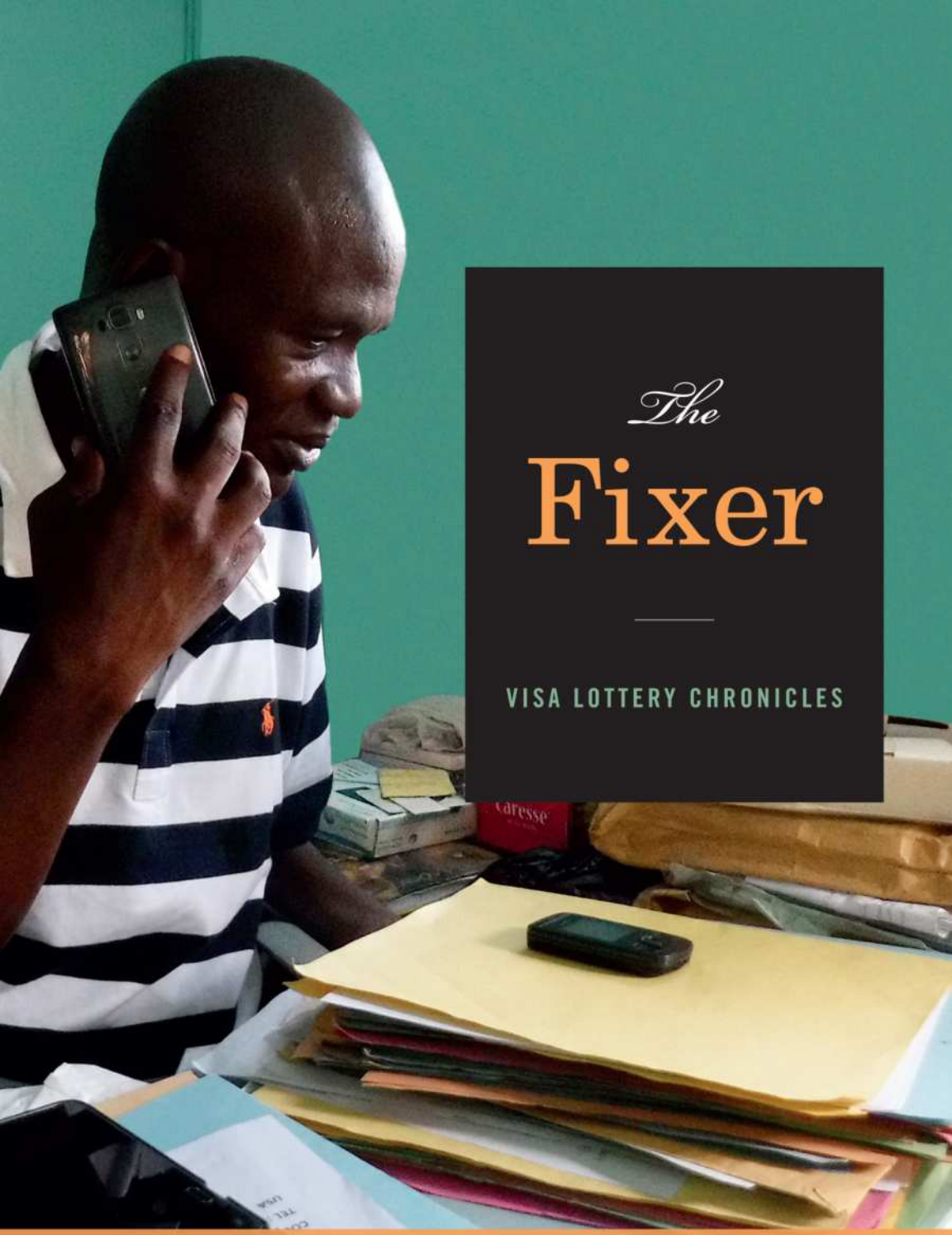

The Fixer

VISA LOTTERY CHRONICLES

Charles Piot *with* **Kodjo Nicolas Batema**

The Fixer

A THEORY IN FORMS BOOK

Series Editors *Nancy Rose Hunt and Achille Mbembe*

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Charles Piot *with* Kodjo Nicolas Batema

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To Srinivas,
from whom I learned so much
and whom I miss every day

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CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Business of Dreams

His office is a hole-in-the-wall on a sandy street in a ragged neighborhood of Lomé. His seesaw limp, from a road accident during a business trip to northern Togo, defines his gait—"a risk of the trade," he calls it. But his face bristles with intensity and warmth, and his imposing intellect trumps all. Inside that hole-in-the-wall—his "bureau," he calls it—Kodjo operates a global business that would make a venture capitalist proud.

His métier is helping compatriots get visas to live and work in the US by applying for the Diversity Visa (DV) Lottery. This visa system, created by Congress in the mid-1990s (and made infamous by President Donald Trump in January 2018), is available to those from underrepresented countries and annually distributes fifty thousand visas to winners selected in a May raffle from up to 20 million applicants worldwide. More than 100,000 Togolese, sometimes up to a million, apply each year because they feel life at home is no longer tenable and the US, as a civil servant recently told me, is

"le pays de nos rêves" (the country of our dreams). Kodjo's business is premised on that precarious condition and the fantasy of a dreamy elsewhere.

Clients drift in and out of his office all day—seeking advice about their documents, soliciting help in financing their global ventures, discussing strategy for the embassy interview. Since many are operating what the State Department considers a ruse—they marry to get the visa, not for love, but need to convince the embassy otherwise—Kodjo's work is also affective. He has to convince clients to inhabit an assumed identity with conviction and unblinkingly perform marital attachment during the embassy interview.

A young couple enters and the woman informs Kodjo that she's been sleeping with her confirmation number under her pillow at night. "I'm sure we won this time. I can feel it," she exudes. She leaves for the "cyber" next door, her partner in tow, to log on to the State Department website to see whether or not they've been selected this year. Thirty minutes later, they return, the woman in tears. "I was certain we'd won this time, I saw it in my prayers." Her partner is more sanguine, shrugging and adding, "There's always next year." Trademark Togolese hopefulness in the face of crushing defeat.

Throughout the day, TV-5, live from Paris and captured by satellite, chatters on a flat screen on the wall beside Kodjo's desk. He follows French news and talk shows with a passion, especially the debates, the hardball-style back-and-forth about politics and contemporary issues.

A boyhood friend of Kodjo's, just in from Germany, shakes hands all around. "When will your container arrive?" someone asks. "I didn't send one this time," Mawuli replies. "Go back to Germany then. What good are you here?" When the laughter subsides, Mawuli is quick with the comeback—repartee is the currency of the street—"The next one will be a double container, and you'll be eating your words—and left out of the spoils."[1] Like many expats, Mawuli wishes he could return to Togo for good—he left for Germany ten years ago and misses the food, the camaraderie, the language—but how to make a living in Togo? By what means would he support his family? He contents himself for now with an annual month-long visit.

Another couple greets Kodjo in Ewe, asking to see him in private. When they finish, they file out quietly, seeming anxious. "They have their embassy interview tomorrow, and they had a few last-minute questions," Kodjo says. So many young couples, all in their early twenties. This because Kodjo primarily signs up university students—to meet the State Department requirement that successful DV applicants have a high school diploma (or

a job on the US Labor Department's "Jobs Needed" list, which is virtually impossible for Togolese).

A poignant irony of Kodjo's trade is that while most of his clients get visas, he himself has repeatedly failed. He's applied for the lottery every year since the mid-1990s without being chosen, and he's married three female winners but each time something has gone awry during the embassy interview. His own failure, however, has produced dramatic business success. While apprenticing his first wife in a trade that was accepted by the State Department and grooming her for the embassy interview, he learned the ins and outs of the visa lottery system—not only how to fill out the required documents but also the art of self-presentation—and began to offer advice to lottery winners. As his reputation grew he decided to enter the business, first enlisting people for the lottery (now over a thousand a year), then shepherding the winners' files through the process. Having lived the fantasy himself, he was the perfect impresario, and today he is Lomé's gold standard among visa lottery brokers.

BY WORLD BANK STANDARDS, Togo is one of the poorest countries in the world, located at the heart of the world's poorest region. As much as 65 percent of the country remains in agriculture, which is sustainable dur-

ing normal years but is all too vulnerable to poor rains and drought. Aside from a small but wealthy political elite, the rest of the country subsists on the informal or parallel economy, hustling to make ends meet by selling on the streets soap, matches, single cigarettes, used car parts, and a dizzying array of small food items. These ambulant vendors turn over the tiniest of margins, at best hoping for a small profit by the end of each day.

Salaried workers are only mildly better off. An acquaintance, a recent graduate of Lomé's national university, makes $120 a month as a personnel and accounting officer at a medical clinic. While his wage is considered passing, his work is constantly sand-bagged by superiors who pocket most of the earnings from each medical procedure they perform, leaving the clinic in the red—and this anxious accountant grasping for air. They cover their tracks by accusing *him* of having pocketed the missing money, a tactic that has so discouraged him that he's desperately been looking elsewhere for work but, months later, still hasn't found any.

Consider the pay scale of those fortunate enough to make a wage in Lomé. A low-level day laborer—a security guard or chauffeur—makes 25,000–30,000 CFA francs ($50–60) a month.[2] A starting salary for a civil servant (who works in one of the ministries or in the small private sector or for an NGO) is 65,000 CFA francs ($130) per month. If all goes well—if he or she continues to climb, doesn't alienate people, and can stick it out for two decades—that same civil servant may top out at 230,000 CFA francs ($460) a month. Now consider the differences between Togo and the US: in the States, a scrub worker making minimum wage takes home in a single week what a midcareer Togolese civil servant makes in a month. No wonder many are tempted to dip into public monies—or to leave for greener pastures elsewhere.

People's sense of living precariously in Togo is not only economic. Five decades of single-family rule—whose raison d'être seems little other than pocketing the nation's meager resources for personal use—has deflated the hopes of all but those who profit therefrom. Reminders of this small but wealthy political elite are visible everywhere—in the expensive cars they drive, in the "villas" they build on the outskirts of Lomé. Every election gives momentary hope—that things might change, that the ruling party may finally be voted out—but when the status quo is restored (often due to massive fraud), disappointment and loss of hope set in all over again.

It is this precarious existence—loss of hope in the economy and in

politics—that leads people to want to leave and to apply for the DV lottery. How, especially for young men, to achieve social adulthood at home—an adulthood predicated on having a job, on being able to marry and provide for a family? As one put it, "If I can't even afford *la dot* [the marriage gifts], how will I ever take care of a family?" For young women, because of the dearth of men their age with means, they often look for an older man, usually married, who will provide for them. This of course removes them from or delays their entry into the matrimonial market. In short, how to achieve, on both sides of the gender divide, one's social projects at home?

The visa lottery phenomenon is at once a response to the unending moment of crisis, providing an exit—and a reason why so many want to leave—while also mirroring all that typifies the moment itself: the identity plays and confidence tricks that the crisis brings into being.

ON THE STREETS OF LOMÉ, he's called a *traiteur*, someone who "treats" files. In Ghana they refer to brokers like Kodjo as "connection men." The US embassy calls him a "fixer."

While his business (getting US visas for Togolese) may be unusual, he's nevertheless paradigmatic of a certain West African savoir faire in this postcolonial moment—of someone who can hustle, who has connections, who can obtain documents for any need, who can get done whatever has to get done in order to get by and make a living, and do it all quickly (Alpes 2016). Being in the business of fulfilling people's fantasies of travel, of course, gives him additional cachet on the street.

Much of Kodjo's work involves registering people for the DV through the online system, then helping winners meet the deadlines leading up to the embassy interview. The rub in the system is the cost: $330 for the embassy interview in 2017 (until 2012, it was $819), $220 for the medical exam, $200 to obtain the necessary documents (birth certificate, passport, high school transcript, criminal record), another $1,000 for the plane ticket. And this for only one person. If married with children, it's $2,000 per family member—with all this (except airfare) in hand before the interview and before an applicant knows whether he or she will get the visa.

If winners are not able to raise the money on their own—and few Togolese are, even salaried civil servants—they often choose to exploit a loophole in the DV system that allows winners to add a spouse after they've ap-

plied (but before the interview) by arranging a marriage with someone with means who is willing to bankroll the couple's interview costs and plane ticket, as well as Kodjo's service fee.

The embassy of course looks down on such marriages—which seem expedient, not "real"—and spends time during the visa interview trying to ferret out real from fake. In 2005, sensing that an inordinate amount of gaming was going on—adding to winners' files spouses and sometimes children who were not real—the consulate created a "fraud unit," hiring two Togolese to assist the consuls in deciding whether marriages were legitimate by combing the city's neighborhoods and marriage registers. These fraud officers made a habit of showing up at an applicant's apartment after hours, insisting on a supplementary meeting at a neighborhood drinking hole, or dropping by a workplace to interrogate the applicant's *patron*.

Because it is often fixers like Kodjo who arrange these marriages—with those with means in the diaspora who want to bring over a sister or a wife, or with wealthy *douaniers* (customs agents) or government ministers who want to send a son or daughter to the States—the embassy doesn't look kindly on them. Indeed, consuls often view fixers as the root of the problem, pushing others to engage in what they deem fraudulent activity for their own profit. Twice the US embassy has gone after Kodjo, the first time getting the police to raid his office and confiscate his files, the second sending him to prison in Ouagadougou for three months.

THIS BOOK EXPLORES the cat-and-mouse game between street and embassy, situating it within the post–Cold War conjuncture of ongoing crisis, of an eviscerated though still dictatorial state, of the emptiness of citizenship under such conditions, of a sprawling transnational diaspora and the desires and longings it creates, of informationalism and its new technologies, of surveillance regimes and their travails.

My account focuses on this repartee at the border not only to illustrate the savvy of the street in the face of embassy gatekeeping but also to interrogate the awkward, culturally saturated (and, needless to say, highly unequal) nature of the encounter between visa seeker and border agent. In this rarefied embassy space, consuls make decisions about individual lives (and national futures) by applying cultural norms—about identity, about marriages "real" and "fake," about affect and honesty—that are often at odds with local categories and stray wide of their mandate. If you were dishonest

on your application or during the embassy interview, you will be found unworthy of a visa. If your dossier claims a spouse or child who is not yours, your chances are similarly slim. If you look away when responding to a consul query or fumble a question about the color of the curtains in your bedroom or the side of the bed you sleep on (when such parsing of the mattress may not be normative in your social world), you are also likely to be denied. To wit, judgments about moral personhood—especially whether you are a truth-teller, whatever that might mean—often supersede all others in deciding individual and collective futures.

These border games are symptomatic of our times, not only in West Africa but beyond as well (De Genova and Peutz 2010; Feldman and Ticktin 2010; Alpes 2011, 2016; Fassin 2011; Freeman 2011; Ticktin 2011; Cole and Groes 2016; Kleist and Thorson 2017). Their antics condense the experience of millions of migrant-refugees today whose lives are devoted to getting documents (a visa or residency permit, a "blue" passport) that will enable them to travel to and reside in destination countries to which they are fleeing or have fled after enduring often-Herculean ordeals to get there. By most accounts, the plight and travail of the refugee-migrant today is *the* political issue of our time.

PARSING AFRICAN MIGRATION

The photographs rivet the imagination—streams of migrants crossing the Sahara, refugees wandering the European countryside, wooden boats transporting human sardines across the turbulent Mediterranean, African bodies washed up on European and North African shores. While such images in today's leading newspapers distort—because they are partial and overly dramatic—our understanding of the larger migrant-refugee story,[3] they nevertheless index some of the enormity and tragic urgency of the phenomenon. Consider these astonishing figures: Up to 300,000 West and Central Africans have crossed the Mediterranean each year since 2000, with 30,000 deaths along the way, most at sea.[4] During the same period, African migrants have spent €16 billion trying to get to Europe, while EU countries have spent €20 billion on border control and deportations. Now compare the number of West Africans leaving today to those 12 million who departed the continent during the Atlantic slave trade: today's yearly departures are three times those of any year during the Atlantic slave trade and when projected forward would surpass in 50 years that trade's 350-year total.[5]

The canvas on which this contemporary human drama is written is vast. Villages and towns throughout West Africa are now tied to destination cities in Europe and the US (and increasingly East Asia), with cell phone, social media, Skype, and remittance traffic between these termini swelling by the week. Entire commercial and infrastructural networks, towns even, have emerged in the Sahara, across North Africa, and in southern Europe to serve the needs of those in transit, while tens of thousands remain stranded along the way (for want of money, because they found a job worth keeping, because they retreated when faced with a death march into the desert). It is not surprising that new security regimes have transformed the coasts of southern Europe, with border control outsourced to African countries, thereby extending European frontiers into North and West Africa. Today the world's largest desert, vast areas of North Africa and the Mediterranean, and indeed much of Europe have been forever changed by this massive movement of population—what Stephen Smith (2018) refers to as Africa's "Scramble for Europe" and Achille Mbembe (2017, 6), in a different register, the "Becoming Black of the world."

The US is a preferred destination for many in West Africa because its economy remains robust and its racism is, according to some, less pronounced than Europe's, but it is less accessible. East Asia and Eastern Europe, too, are desirable destinations. A young Togolese man I know, smitten with migration fever, first had designs on China (a friend got him a business visa, but it took my acquaintance so long to raise the money for his ticket that when he arrived at China's doorstep he was told his visa had just expired). Then he met a German woman who promised to bring him to Europe, but their romance fell through. Next Canada, an opportunity to farm, which never panned out. Then Romania, a degree in nursing. Along the way, he traveled to Mali to tempt the Sahara but, after listening to the stories, decided against it. Finally, back in Lomé, a terrible accident that crushed one of his hands and left him with a serious bone infection enabled him to get a medical visa to the US. "The happiest day of my life," he announced. Departure at any cost, it would seem. This imagined itinerary is far from exceptional among today's West African youth, not only demonstrating the manner in which the world is now inserted into local fantasy and aspiration but also evidencing an irrepressible energy of spirit for travel and exile.

Scholarship, much of it by anthropologists, has rushed to document this pressing human story.[6] There is cutting edge research on each link in the migration chain—on the precariousness of life in West Africa and the fan-

tasy of an elsewhere, on transit zones and the high-risk journey between home and metropole, on the fraught lives of migrants and refugees at their points of destination, on those who return home to West Africa as deportees or (occasionally) of their own volition.[7] There is also brilliant scholarly work on borders and border control, deportation regimes, and biometric or "algorithmic" citizenship and the profiling it enables; on the "paradox" that while more want to migrate than ever before—for many in West and Central Africa migration has become a necessity and an inevitability—fewer are able; on the manner in which sovereignty and (im)mobility have become entangled and co-constitutive in a post-9/11 world; on the way in which security has replaced freedom as core metropolitan value; on the temporalities of migrant experience; on the existential migrant; on the entanglement of money and attachment—and the remaking of kinship and culture—across borders.[8]

My own contribution to this burgeoning list focuses on a quirky and idiosyncratic aspect of the immigration puzzle—the US DV Lottery—which nevertheless offers a special vantage from the margins while sharing many features with migrant-refugee experience more broadly: migrant desire in the face of precarity at home, migrant savvy in crossing borders despite ever more aggressive measures to keep them out, the disappointments (and pleasures) of migrant-refugee experience abroad. Moreover, my work on the DV provides a close-up portrait of the figure of the intermediary—the visa broker, the "connection man," the "fixer"—who lies at the heart of much of the West African migration story today (Alpes 2016; Goodman 2016; Lucht 2017; Richter 2018). It also offers a sustained look at those border games and performances that enable potential migrants to get by embassy gatekeepers and obtain visas (Ticktin 2006; Obadare and Adebanwi 2010; Cabot 2013; Alpes 2016; Drotbohm 2017), often by assuming identities not their own—a type of "passing" with a long genealogy in Atlantic African worlds (Davidson 2006). Finally, this research, rare among those who work on migration (but see Lucht 2011; J. Cole 2014a; Alpes 2016; Besteman 2016; Faranak 2016; Feldman-Savelsberg 2016; Kleinman 2016), encompasses the antipodes of this transnational story. I have followed clients of Kodjo's from Lomé to Newark, Raleigh, Omaha, and Moline, and I have learned things about back home, and vice versa, that I would not have known otherwise.

The DV program[9] was conceived by Congress in the late 1980s in an attempt to redress unintended consequences of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. It became law as part of an omnibus immigration bill in 1990 and was implemented in its present form in 1995. The DV's history, and that of the 1965 Act, is one of unforeseen outcomes (Law 2002) and unexpected appropriations—a history in which postcolonial theorists would find delight and recognize an instance of metropolitan intention being diverted by Global South interest, twice over.[10]

The landmark 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act sought to move away from race, ethnicity, and national origin as criteria in determining eligibility to migrate to the US, criteria that favored Western European immigrants while discriminating against and even barring from immigration those from non-European, especially Asian, countries (Goodman 2016, 4, 26). In place of national origins, the 1965 Act substituted a seven-category preference system, with family reunification and work skills as the most salient criteria (Jacob 1992, 302; Hethmon 2003, 391; Law 2002, 4; Goodman 2016, 26). Thus aspiring immigrants with family members already in the US,[11] or with work skills that did not take jobs from US workers, were eligible to petition for immigrant status.

Unforeseen by the authors of the 1965 Act, who assumed that the reforms would continue to favor immigrants of Western European origin, the new immigration law led to an explosion of Asian and Latin American applicants, primarily Chinese and Mexican, who more easily fit the criteria of family reunification and employment preference than those from other regions. By 1975, immigrants from Asia and Latin America accounted for two-thirds of all new arrivals in the US—over 500,000 a year (Law 2002, 5; Goodman 2016, 36).[12]

Among those disadvantaged by the 1965 Act were Western Europeans, especially Irish—one of the early "seed immigrant" populations in the US (Law 2002, 13). While many Irish attempted to migrate to the US during the 1980s because of worsening economic conditions at home, they were unable to because they had only distant relatives in the States and few had the work skills to qualify through the employment option.[13] However, sweet serendipity, there was at that time a felicitous convergence between immigrant desire and Congressional will, thanks to the presence of a critical mass of powerful, Irish-descended members of Congress—among them Ted Ken-

nedy, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Tip O'Neill, Brian Donnelly, and Bruce Morrison.[14] These Congressional titans and policy entrepreneurs (Law 2002) rallied to the cause of their compatriots by proposing that a "diversity" category be added to the 1990 Immigration Act in order to accommodate those countries that had been "adversely affected" by the 1965 reforms and were now "under-represented" in immigrant flows to the US (Jacob 1992, 299; Law 2002, 9–14; Hethmon 2003, 388–89; Goodman 2016, 27–80).

Of course, it would have been scandalous to create an immigration category for the members of a single nationality alone—although during the transitional phase of the diversity program (1990–1994) 40 percent of the slots *were* set aside for the Irish (Law 2002, 18; Newton 2005, 1053)—so the architects of the DV pitched their tent more broadly to include other underrepresented countries. To do so, they generated a formula that divides the world into six regions, allotting more visas to low-admission areas such as Europe and Africa, and fewer visas to high-admission ones such as Asia and Latin America (Newton 2005, 1054–55), while excluding those countries with already high immigrant flows to the US (Law 2002, 18–19; Hethmon 2003, 390).[15] Those who have written about this period in the history of the DV have suggested, surely correctly, that the entire system—the invention of the diversity category, its global reach, the formula for determining eligible countries, the seeming neutrality of the formula's application—was an alibi for the creation of an immigration portal for the Irish and represented US pork-barrel politics at its purest (Jacob 1992; Law 2002, 13–14; Miller 2017).[16]

Many of the DV's enduring features were established at the moment of its inception: the requirement that a successful winner have a high school diploma or two years of work experience in a trade on the Labor Department's list of needed jobs, the annual capping of diversity visas at fifty thousand, the removal of countries from the eligible list after they had been granted fifty thousand visas over a five-year period, the lottery concept for selecting applicants.

This latter is one of the more intriguing and enigmatic features of the DV phenomenon, and one that lends it global mystique and popular cachet (Goodman 2016, 275–96). But whence this idea? Why a lottery, a game of chance, for selecting future citizens? Both Anna Law (personal communication, May 2017) and Carly Goodman (2016, 214) suggest that the lottery idea resulted from expediency and compromise during Congressional deliberations over how to administer the DV. A points system was favored early on for selecting applicants—whereby those who applied would accumulate

points for English fluency, for underrepresented country status, for educational level, and so on—but the designers of the DV were unable to agree on which points (especially whether to include English fluency, which would seem to work *against* the DV's aim of diversifying the immigrant pool) and thus settled on the lottery idea as the easiest and least expensive way to run the system. Goodman (2016, 214) also points out that during the 1980s and before (recall the military draft of the 1960s) lotteries were viewed by policy makers as an acceptable and fair way to distribute public goods.

All of this is no doubt true, but I would hasten to add that whatever pragmatic and instrumental reasons led to the selection of the lottery concept, it also resonated with the culture and economy of the time both at home and abroad—of state lotteries, market bonanzas, casinos—"casino capitalism," the Comaroffs (2000) have called it. Moreover, such cultural surfeit gives the DV a semimystical appeal and source of allure around the world (Goodman 2016, 275–96).

Listen to some of Goodman's interlocutors. A Ghanaian DV winner: "America is the only country that has given that opportunity. In the whole world it is only America that is open" (Goodman 2016, 275); an Algerian: "America, I swear to God, it's the best" (168); a Francophone African blogger: "[the DV program is] the planet's most popular game of chance" (24); an Irish applicant: "It's like the lottery; you buy one scratch card, then two, then three" (168); the editor-in-chief of Nigeria's *The Week*: "The US Visa Lottery has come to enjoy something close to religious followership in our abundantly blessed country. So irresistible is its lure that even directors-general in the government service are said to be secret worshippers on its altar" (207); another Ghanaian: "winning the lottery is actually like somebody going to heaven" (295).

Despite the sustained efforts of the Irish interest group in Congress to create a diversity allowance that would benefit their compatriots and increase European migration to the US—make no mistake, this was a "diversity" category invented for white Europeans—its implementation led to an utterly different outcome. When the new law was enacted, only a small number of Irish applied (a mere 963 received diversity visas in 1996, 359 in 1997, and 318 in 1998),[17] a trend that remains true today (only 36 Irish received diversity visas in 2016).[18] But if the Irish turned their backs on a gift horse, Africans rushed to take their place and quickly became the DV's primary beneficiaries. Since 1995 Africa has received more diversity visas than any other region.[19] Thus, in a story of cascading ironies, a system that was

created for one group went unused by it, while another that had been included only as an afterthought in order to make the program seem neutral (Goodman 2016, 195) has embraced and appropriated it. Moreover, another somersault: if the DV's progenitors' stated aim of diversifying the population was a sham, that goal has now been vindicated—but in a way that was unthinkable to the diversity lottery's authors.

While the visa lottery retains enormous popularity around the world—10 to 20 million people apply each year[20]—its piece of the US immigration pie remains small. The 50,000 diversity visas issued annually represent only 6 to 8 percent of the overall immigrant pool, whereas more than 600,000 visas are issued for family reunification, over 80 percent of the total.[21] Why family reunification on the basis of blood kinship and marriage—"U.S. immigration policy is essentially nepotistic," claims immigration attorney Michael Hethmon (2003, 396)—trumps diversity or work skill is astonishing. Such a policy preference would seem to cut against core American values.

Further, given the small number of DVs issued each year—to say nothing of the fact that Africans have long been discriminated against by US immigration law (Jacob 1992, 305, 333; Newton 2005) and remain underrepresented in the US population,[22] and that the visa lottery generates enormous goodwill and has become an effective form of public diplomacy and global soft power (Goodman 2016, 22)—it is surprising that the DV Lottery has met such opposition in Congress. From the beginning there have been attempts, mostly Republican, to eliminate it, with reasons ranging from concerns about security to worry that trafficking networks might profit from the DV Lottery to fraud among visa lottery applicants.[23] No doubt, too, but not articulated as such, are anxieties about the future of a country that is transitioning from white majority to minority, and the role played by a visa program in furthering that trend.[24]

A final twist to the saga of the DV, however, and a possible silver lining for its advocates and beneficiaries. Despite being on the Congressional chopping block from its inception (Goodman 2016, 298–312), the DV has miraculously survived—not because it has had a strong constituency making its case but because Congress has been facing more pressing issues and because that body has been unable to agree on a new immigration bill over the past decade (Goodman 2016, 297–320). In short, it is Congress's inability or failure to act that has kept the DV in business for a now more than 20-year run.

But the immigration lottery's fortuitous survival may be entering a new era. In 2013 the DV Lottery found an unexpected political voice. West Afri-

can DV winners living in Washington, DC, mounted a campaign to save the lottery, which gained the attention and support of the Congressional Black Caucus and the NAACP, both of which spoke out against its elimination. They also found a troubadour, a Cameroonian-American hip-hop musician who recorded a song in support of the DV Lottery: "[The United States is] where dreams turn into reality / because of the DV lottery / the only reason we escaped poverty / was because of the green card lottery / to take away hope for our future, it would be robbery / so please reinstate the DV lottery" (Goodman 2016, 314–15).

It is too soon to tell, of course, but were this African campaign to be successful, consider one last sweet irony: those abject outsiders—those for whom the DV Lottery was never intended and those long cast aside by US immigration policy—are now insiders with a say in the making of the laws of the land, a small becoming Africa of America. Perhaps an appropriate denouement to one of the stranger sagas in US immigration history. And a further lesson in postcoloniality.

Several touchstone themes run throughout and frame this work.

INGENUITY

This is an ethnography of a modern-day trickster, a tale of West African savvy and ingenuity. The trickster in West African folklore is someone (often a small animal or insect—a hare, a spider) who lives by his wits and cunning, outfoxing those who are stronger and more powerful. In folktale after folktale the trickster (Anansi the spider among the Ashanti of Ghana, for example) gets the better of superiors (chiefs or deities) (Rattray 1930; Courlander 1975; Pelton 1980; Tekpetey 2006; Donkor 2008, 2013), and in Caribbean colonial contexts such as Jamaica and Trinidad (where these stories traveled during the Atlantic slave trade), of slave masters and colonial authorities (Gates 1988; van Duin 2007; Marshall 2012).

If the theme of the trickster is an old one in scholarship on West Africa, especially in anthropology (Rattray 1930; Herskovits and Herskovits 1956), it nevertheless acquires new meaning at the borders of the nation at the start of the twenty-first century, in a moment of increased precariousness at home and Fortress Europe abroad. Today it is embassy officials who are the new sovereigns, deciding who will travel and who must remain behind—who has a future and who does not, who will live and who die (Agamben 1998; Schmitt 2006). The control of mobility, Achille Mbembe (2016) suggests, is

the very definition of sovereignty today. And it is trickster-fixers like Kodjo who possess the wherewithal—the magic—to make a visa appear and make travel possible. I see the encounter at the embassy as paradigmatic and the fixer-hustler as *the* figure of our time in the West African present (cf. Shipley 2015, 1).

At the same time, lest we be tempted to romanticize this contemporary Robin Hood, it is worth remembering that the trickster has always been an ambivalent figure in West African allegory, deconstructing authority, on the one hand, while pursuing his own self-interest and ravenous appetites (both culinary and sexual), on the other (Shipley 2015, 20). While Kodjo may be serving the common good—"to help Togolese live a better life abroad," as he puts it—he is also in it to make money (and acquire a visa of his own). And sometimes his own desires get in the way of the best interests of his clients.

INCARCERATION

If this is an account of Togolese street savvy, it is also one about social death, the emptiness of citizenship, and global abjection in the contemporary moment (Ferguson 1999; Makhulu, Buggenhagen, and Jackson 2010; Piot 2010; Vigh 2016). Were Togolese able to make a living at home, were political elites to stop diverting the nation's resources toward personal ends—were the nation flourishing—few would look to leave. In the 1970s and 1980s, those who left to get their degrees in France and the US returned home when they were finished with school (because they could get jobs as civil servants). Today, that is no longer the case: the state was eviscerated during the 1990s and is a shadow of its former self (Piot 2010), and all who leave today look to stay. According to one of the consuls in Lomé who was tracking student visas to the US, of the more than one thousand that were issued to Togolese students during the period 2000–2010, few had since returned.

At the same time that conditions at home compel most to want to leave, it becomes harder and harder to get the papers to do so. Getting a visa to the US requires either that you marry an American citizen, get a student or tourist visa (the latter by offering proof that you'll return—a job at home and a hefty bank account), or win the lottery. The conditions for entering Europe are similar, with a strong emphasis on family reunification (Cole and Groes 2016), albeit there is no visa lottery, and long odds remain the order of the day. This means that few Togolese, and West Africans more generally, can ever hope to travel legally and that, today more than ever, they

remain confined within the borders of the nation/region/continent. This enclaving of entire populations—a population-level politics in which "Togolese," "Ghanaians," "Nigerians," "West Africans," "Africans" are barred from exiting the space of the nation-state/continent—is a biopolitics in the purest sense (Agamben 1998; Foucault 2010), complementing and enhancing the political-economic exclusion of Africa in the age of globalization (Castells 1996; Hardt and Negri 2001; Stiglitz 2003; Easterly 2006; Sachs 2006; Moyo 2010).

Add the new biometrics to biopolitical reason and you have a fetid mix. With the creation of the post-9/11 biometric databases, which register an individual's fingerprints, retinas, and DNA (all unique to the individual), a vast warehousing of individual identities is under way that facilitates and enables new forms of border control. Among other deployments of the database, state authorities are now able to control, monitor, and punish in ways that were inconceivable before. To give a small example, the Lomé consul who used the State Department database to track how many Togolese with student visas had returned (and found that hardly any had) responded to this finding by denying many who applied for student visas that year, most of whom had already been admitted to universities in the US.

This same consul told me about a 2005 DV winner who had divorced her visa spouse after arriving in the States and had returned to Lomé six years later to petition the embassy to allow her to bring a second husband to the US. Before meeting with her, the consul had consulted the database, where he was able to track this woman's movements upon her arrival in the US, and discovered that she and her husband had gone separate ways after arriving at JFK International Airport. He took this as evidence that theirs was not a real marriage—that they had married just for the visa—and worried that the petitioner was engaged in more of the same now, perhaps marrying a second time also for money, thus engaging in a type of marital commerce.

His reasoning struck me as suspect on several counts and in ways that I shared with him. Why assume that a couple going separate ways and living apart indicates that their marriage is not real? That's one reading, of course, but Togolese spouses often live apart, at home and in the US. It all depends on where they can find shelter and income. In this case one would want to know whether the receiving party in the States had the means to care for both at the same time. If not, one of them might look elsewhere. Another alternative: that the two—legitimately married—had divorced in the meantime or decided to split up when they got to the US. Of all the pos-

sible interpretations, why would the consul assume that his (more cynical) reading was the most likely?[25] Finally, I suggested to him that it didn't seem right to second-guess a decision made by a colleague years earlier during a face-to-face interview on the basis of information gathered from a database about the petitioner's behavior after the interview.

I never discovered the outcome of the case (whether the consul let this petitioner take her new husband to the States or not), but I came away from his telling not only confirmed in the view that cultural assumptions inform consular judgment when adjudicating the futures, and indeed the life and death, of Togolese visa petitioners—a theme that runs throughout this book—but also braced by the realization that consular decision making today might be turned over to a database. And that decisions made earlier can be reassessed through subsequent behaviors via a system that tracks residence patterns, banking history, school records. Put otherwise, that a person's real motives might become visible or known through behaviors collected later in time then stored in an information bank, but whose meaning, it should be clear, can never be transparent: living apart does not mean to Togolese what it might to Americans, attempting to bring a second spouse doesn't imply a commerce in spouses, and so on. And more to my point: biometrics and databases are the order of the day and might now be used to determine a couple's authenticity—and thus the granting/not-granting of a visa and the future of would-be citizens.

LAUGHTER

Those stories told on the street about applicant travails in navigating the DV Lottery are often riotously funny. When a "wife's" pregnancy (to her real husband) unexpectedly benefits a faux couple during the interview, or a couple successfully whispers all-important information in the corridor between waiting and interrogation rooms that clinches their case, or Kodjo discovers a novel way of authenticating a marriage by having a couple play a video of their "honeymoon" instead of presenting the more common wedding photos, or when one of the embassy's fraud officers is stumped when making the rounds of a neighborhood—all these circulate on the street as humorous beyond belief.[26] But why such laughter—and why laughter at all—amidst precarity and hardship, and indeed alongside the visa lottery's more tragic stories, of which there are many?

I draw inspiration from several recent scholarly attempts to theorize

laughter amidst precarious life. In *Improvising Medicine* (2012), historian Julie Livingston writes movingly about a cancer ward in Malawi in which terminal patients share humor about their condition. She suggests that patients' laughter performs and constitutes sociality, connecting people to one another amidst precarious (terminal) health. In *Laughter Out of Place* (2013), anthropologist Donna Goldstein explores the role of humor in a Rio favela where, "despite the fact that I was caught up in a community where life was all too clearly hard, everywhere I turned I seemed to hear laughter" (2). She theorizes such laughter as a "shared oppositional aesthetic" (6)—a weapon of the weak, an aggressive act of insubordination (7)—forged within a context of power inequalities. Favela residents' "only weapons of resistance are their fierce wits and sharp tongues," she insists (14). In his much-cited articles on the African postcolony, critical theorist Achille Mbembe (1992a, 1992b) insightfully points out that West African postcolonial subjects greet dictatorial rule with utter cynicism and raucous laughter. Here humor is a political act—laughing at the dictator, finding pleasure in making fun of his phallus, his anus, his excrement.[27]

Each of these readings applies with laser-like accuracy to the Togolese context: finding friendship amidst precarity, seeking pleasure amidst pain, attempting to soften misfortune's bite.[28] Moreover, Togolese experience irresistible delight in laughing at power—recall here allegories of the trickster—an impulse born of years of repressive political rule and the cynicism such rule breeds.[29] Might not laughter be that one thing—neither property, body, respect—that power can never take away? Laughter as fugitive desire, that which forever eludes capture.

I am also interested in whether we anthropologists can write and theorize laughter and precarity together. It seems harder and harder to do so in an academic discipline whose mission seems ever more that of bearing witness to the misfortune of others—"suffering slot" anthropology, Joel Robbins (2013) has called this disciplinary imperative (see also Ortner 2016). How, then, within such a disciplinary imaginary to locate laughter, and what to make of the sort of humor that makes fun of the weak and infirm? I understand the liberal sentiment and am deeply moved by accounts of suffering by Biehl (2005), Das (2007, 2014), and others, but I also want to take my cue from my interlocutors, who live precarity and suffering in a way that few academics ever will and yet fill their lives with laughter. It seems something precious, a gift, this ability of the illiberal imagination to hold these two together, to laugh in the face of precarity and suffering.[30]

But laughter in the visa lottery context is also constitutive. The DV Lottery seems to be laughter's invention, just as laughter is the Lottery's pretext. The two are inseparable, as if laughter is directing the lottery rather than the other way around, with laughter's intimate relationship to the DV Lottery constituting the DV for Togolese itself and promoting its popularity and spread.

SECRETS

This text is also about the sharing—writing about, making public—of trade secrets. In publishing stories from the street about how to commit what US consuls consider fraud (because arranged couples falsify the date of their nuptials to avoid suspicion that theirs is a marriage of convenience), am I not betraying confidences that could harm future visa seekers? Might not my account become an embassy manual for detecting the strategies that Togolese applicant-winners use to deceive consuls? And were my account to circulate widely, might it not inform, in ways that could harm West Africans, Congressional debates about whether to continue the DV Lottery? In short, what is the ethical demand on the scholar-researcher in such an instance: speak or remain silent?

This issue—how to remain faithful to one's ethnographic material while protecting one's subjects—is a long-standing one in my home discipline (American Anthropological Association 2004) and has preoccupied me since the beginning of this project. Indeed, when I have presented this material to university audiences, some have been uneasy with my public airing of these secrets. Moreover, I am concerned not only with the larger issue of whether to publish but also, if the answer is affirmative, how to go about writing about specific cases and individuals who might be punished, even deported, if discovered.

When I have asked African friends and scholars—Achille Mbembe and Francis Nyamnjoh, among others—they've unhesitatingly responded "publish." They insist that the story of Kodjo, of his savvy and ingenuity, needs to be told, especially if contextualized within the constraints and possibilities of the current historical moment. And they're skeptical that flat-footed embassy officials would have the wherewithal to keep pace with West African street savvy.

When I put the question to Kodjo, he gave a series of thoughtful responses, also insisting that I publish. First, he said, the embassy already

knows what the street is up to—manufacturing documents, arranging marriages and falsifying the dates on marriage certificates, inventing job titles. These tactics have been public knowledge at the consulate in Lomé since at least 2005, and nothing new would be revealed by publishing this material. Second, the street is constantly coming up with new tactics and remains one step ahead of the consuls. "What you write about in this book will be ancient history by the time it is published. If the consuls were to use these stories, they would be looking in all the wrong places. By focusing on certain strategies, they will be blind to others, which only works to my advantage."[31] Third, he reminded me of a point that I had brought up during earlier conversations with him: that the DV Lottery will likely be eliminated from US immigration policy before the book sees the light of day, making the entire question moot. As mentioned, each year Republicans in Congress move to end the visa lottery—they worry that it opens the door to potential jihadists—and it will almost certainly be eliminated when a new immigration bill is enacted. Finally, Kodjo insisted, "Isn't your aim in writing this book to criticize the decisions made in the embassy as much as to reveal the secrets of the street? It is mainly for that reason that I hope you will publish this book."

For all these reasons, though still not without worry, I decided to proceed—while nevertheless disguising and anonymizing cases and actors. Thus not only are real names not used but also the years in which particular cases were adjudicated have often been falsified.

Moreover, I have been careful to disguise identities on both sides of the divide, on the street and in the embassy. Despite the imbalance of power—it is hard to imagine a consul being harmed by my account—I thought it important and judicious to protect the identity of consuls as much as that of people on the street. Several generations of US consuls over a period of ten years have been generous in sharing their knowledge about the DV Lottery with me, some inordinately so, and it would be unseemly to criticize them too openly. They are caught up in a system not of their own making in which they are simply carrying out their mandate to apply the laws of the land to those applying for visas. My critique is of the system, not so much of those implementing it.

I faced a parallel ethical issue more related to fieldwork than to writing: How to respond to actors on both sides—both Kodjo and the consuls—who wanted to know, and sometimes asked for, information about the other? When consuls found out I was collaborating with a fixer—and it is impor-

tant to be clear here: each side knew I was conducting interviews with those on the other side of the divide—they sometimes asked me how he operated, recruited clients, or raised money. Moreover, I often had information about ongoing cases that the consuls could have benefited from. On the flip side, I sometimes had information about consuls whom Kodjo asked about—who was the consul and who the vice? (He profiles consuls and likes to know the chain of command, especially when things go awry for one of his clients.) Which of the two consuls spoke decent French and which didn't? (So he could prep clients in how to behave if the consul's comprehension seems not up to speed during the interview.) Were they married to an African? (Something he feels makes them more sympathetic.) One time he asked if I knew (I didn't) whether a particular consul who had a history of making out-of-the-box decisions was on vacation—information that Kodjo could take advantage of by sending a client couple to interview while that consul was away.

While my sympathies were more with the street than with the embassy, and I would have been more tempted to pass information to Kodjo than to the consulate, I decided early on to build a firewall between the two sides and not pass information either way. Not only did the idea of being a conduit for intelligence about the other make me feel uncomfortable—neither side would have approved my passing information to the other—but also it would make me into a principal player in the story I was telling (because I would be influencing the outcomes of cases I was writing about). A recent, more reflexive anthropology has quite rightly critiqued the fiction of objectivism—of researcher neutrality—in the social sciences (Marcus and Fischer 1986; Geertz 1989), but there are also limits to that critique, and this instance would seem to provide an example of such a limit.

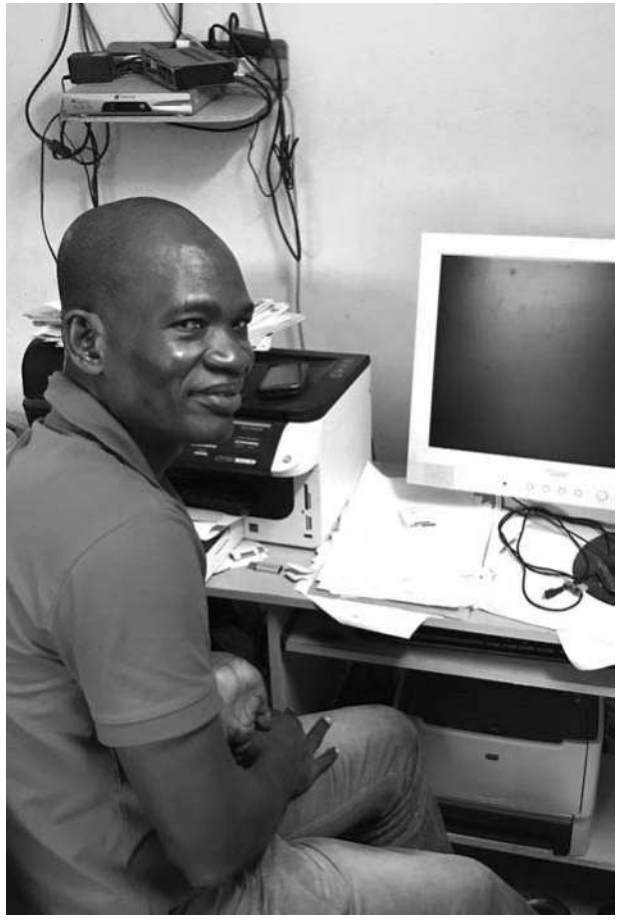
Nevertheless, on a few occasions the firewall came down and the divide between the two sides—and between the social scientist and his data—became blurred. In 2011 (date falsified), Kodjo started sending couples to Cotonou (the capital of Benin, the country just east of Togo) to interview because he felt that the consuls in Lomé were cracking down on "pop-up" marriages—a term they coined to describe cases in which spouses were added to an unmarried applicant's file after he or she had been selected. A few of Kodjo's Cotonou couples made it through, but then something unprecedented occurred. An employee at the Cotonou consulate contacted a client after his final interview, which had ended with the consul congratulating him and taking his passport (indicating that he had decided to grant

the visa), to say that he could guarantee the visa if the client paid an additional $1,000.

When Kodjo was first informed of this, he immediately assumed it was the work of Beninois working at the consulate, trying to extort money from winners (who had already paid over $1,000 for the interview fee, the cost of the medical exam, and the price of translating the documents). Kodjo contacted a traiteur friend in Cotonou who confirmed his guess. When he shared this information with me, I was appalled and decided to contact the Cotonou consulate, letting them know that there was an extortion racket at their portal. I received a one-line email back from the consul: "These are serious charges, please put us in touch with the complainant." I responded by sending the name of Kodjo's client but then heard no more. I learned from Kodjo a month later—also subsequently confirmed by the consul in Lomé—that the embassy had conducted a successful sting operation and sacked everyone involved.

I don't know whether I was right to step outside my analyst-only role here, but there seemed something outrageous about salaried embassy employees extorting money from penniless lottery winners who had raised the already steep fee for the interview and successfully jumped through all the hoops of the interview. I felt compelled to do what little I could.[32]

I influenced visa lottery practice—and what I write about—in a small way in at least one other instance. In the back-and-forth between Kodjo and me about all things DV—we meet daily when I am in Lomé, often at a small neighborhood bar, Kodjo sipping his drink of choice (always a Coke), me a Guinness—I sometimes try to understand better the logic of his practice by asking why he doesn't do things differently. One day while discussing the financial obligations Kodjo enters into when arranging marriages for client-winners, and knowing that pop-ups set off alarm bells at the embassy, I asked why he didn't forgo such marriages altogether and instead finance unmarried winners himself? Unlike arranging pop-ups, this would be entirely legal (with Kodjo effectively becoming a banker, making loans to clients rather than helping them falsify marriage documents), and he could send winners solo for the embassy interview, thereby avoiding consular suspicion and being virtually assured they would get the visa. Another benefit would be that he would no longer have to spend so much time and energy finding spouse-financiers for his winners. His answer to my query—predictably—was that once clients were on the other side of the Atlantic, he had no way of guaranteeing the debt would be repaid.



A few years later he announced—again in our familiar spot, accompanied by a Coke and a Guinness—that he had figured out a way to make my suggestion work. He had a Togolese friend in the US who would split winners' expenses with him—Kodjo covering the medical exam and embassy interview, and the friend purchasing the plane ticket, putting the winner up in the States upon arrival, then finding them a job. The friend's close involvement with these new arrivals would serve as Kodjo's guarantee that he would get his return.[33] As of this writing, the system seems to be working, with Kodjo receiving monthly installments from those he's bankrolled, with these payments deposited into a States-side bank account, from which he makes withdrawals with an ATM card his friend provided.

How best to write the narrative of the DV and its brief history in Togo? Should I organize the story thematically or chronologically? After all, the visa lottery involves a set of practices that has changed significantly over time—with the introduction of new technologies and application protocols at the embassy, with the street's adapting to the new requirements and its search for novel sources of funding—thus suggesting the evolving history of the DV Lottery in Togo as an organizing device. Another sequential framing, which I have sometimes used when presenting this material during talks, would be to follow the journey of Togolese lottery winners from start to terminus, from precarious homeland to the land of their dreams, while focusing on the Rubicon between—the search for financing and the challenge of the embassy interview. A third rubric, and the one I have chosen, is to proceed thematically, while nevertheless not losing sight of the two chronological story lines.

Chapter 1, "Border Practice," gives an overview of the DV Lottery and of Kodjo's practice of signing up and funding applicants. The second chapter focuses on the applicant interview at the consulate. This cagey encounter between consul and visa applicant—during which consuls try to decide whether an applicant's identity is what they claim it is, whether a marriage is "real," whether the winner is indeed a mechanic specializing in computerized vehicles—commands Kodjo's close attention and is the heart and soul of his practice. He spends weeks preparing clients for the interview before anxiously awaiting the outcome—always unpredictable—of the drama unfolding inside the embassy. Focusing on the interview also enables me to begin to track consular reason in deciding the "visa-worthiness" of those who come before them.

Chapter 3, "Kinship by Other Means," examines the often unexpected twists and turns that visa lottery marriages and identity substitutions take and explores the new social and relational forms that the DV Lottery brings into being. It is perhaps not surprising that arranged marriages can become real, with the DV Lottery providing the occasion for a long-term relationship. In also focusing on the differences between Togolese and US conceptions of family, this chapter opens a space for critique of State Department categories, calling into question consular attempts to adjudicate real from fake.

Chapter 4, "Trading Futures," examines the economics of this system with a global spread—how the State Department sets fees, how Kodjo raises money for clients, how debt and credit lubricate the trans-Atlantic networks that bind clients to Kodjo and their sponsors. This chapter also describes the rumors that feed street-side views of the consuls and consular views of the street—storytelling that affects DV financing. The chapter ends by considering one of the DV Lottery's most interesting and peculiar features—that acquiring a visa to the US is based on a game of chance, a raffle that decides the fate of winners from among up to 20 million applicants worldwide.

The next three chapters focus on the embassy. Chapter 5, "Embassy Indiscretions," tracks the often subjective decision making that consuls engage in, as seen through Kodjo's eyes. He has a jurist's mind and a strong interest in seeing that the rules are followed, and he is eagle-eyed about violations of DV protocol. Chapters 6 and 7 follow two events that show the consuls moving beyond the walls of the embassy in pursuit of fraud and fixers. The first was a six-month sit-in at the gates of the embassy in Lomé by those who had been denied visas—on arbitrary grounds, they felt—during the years 2005–2007. Their protest followed a turbulent period at the consulate, when it was staffed by two consuls who felt that a majority of those who came for the visa interview were fraudsters and turned most away. Among other things, the protest engendered extravagant rumoring on both sides—among the protestors about embassy intent and in the embassy about protestor motive—and led to a fascinating blurring of the boundary between embassy and street. The second event involved the embassy's imprisonment of Kodjo for three months in Burkina Faso, where he had gone to meet with Burkinabé clients. One of his winners went to the consulate with a query, which triggered an embassy sting operation and then a complaint filed with local police. The complaint proved groundless—embassy personnel didn't even show up when the case went before a jury of judges—providing another example of embassy overreach.

The book's penultimate chapter follows DV Lottery winners in the US, asking what has become of their fantasy now that they are on the other side, in "le pays de nos rêves." Sadly, these are often stories of disappointment and nostalgic longing for home. The final chapter describes conversations I had with Kodjo in February 2018, a month after Trump's sneering remarks about the DV and his promise to strike it from US immigration policy. In this short coda, Kodjo reflects not only on Trump's bombast but also on difficult issues

at the heart of this book: the risks involved in publishing DV secrets, Kodjo's role in facilitating an exodus of Togolese to a country where they may never feel at home, the question of trust—is it possible to have confidence in anyone anywhere anymore?—in a world of ubiquitous fakes and fraud. Needless to say, the issue of who-can-I-trust is one with global reach today, not just the possession of a small West African country.

While theory informs *The Fixer* and references to theory are scattered throughout the text and its footnotes, I wanted to write a book in which citational practice did not overwhelm the stories of the DV Lottery. I thus aim as much as possible to let the stories speak for themselves. Put otherwise, I wanted the ethnography—these stories from the street—to stand as their own (vernacular) theorizing, their own theory from the South (Comaroff and Comaroff 2011; Obarrio 2012).

1

Border Practice

In addition to inaugurating a time of political and economic uncertainty and turbulence—a time of scrambled hopes, unsettled sovereignty, increasing privation—the decades after the Cold War (1990–2010) in West Africa produced proliferating cultures of duplicity and identity fraud (Apter 1999, 2005; Hibou 1999; Smith 2007). Nigerian 419—the now (in)famous system of internet fraud whereby an overseas client is duped by the promise of sharing vast oil (or other) profits in return for sheltering money in a personal bank account, a transaction that demands that the client pay processing fees and transfer an account number which, needless to say, is quickly emptied (Apter 1999, 2005; Smith 2001, 2007)—is but one example of the sort of confidence trick that has become ever more common in the current conjuncture. The Cameroonian *feyman* (Malaquais 2001a, 2001b; Nyamnjoh 2006; Ndjio 2006, 2008), a con artist peddling counterfeit money and shady business deals, is another. But focusing on these more spectacular examples of

dissimulation and identity manipulation obscures the pervasive, quotidian nature of similar practices throughout the subregion (Smith 2007).

In Togo today, counterfeits and copies are so common in the stores and on the streets of Lomé, a city in which the hustle economy is a way of life, that one can never be sure whether an object one has purchased is "real" or not: a real or a fake Nokia phone, a real or an imitation piece of designer clothing, a new or a used car part.[1] When buying gasoline, you had better make sure the meter on the pump has been reset to zero. Otherwise the vendor will charge the full amount and skim the difference. When taking your car or motorcycle to a mechanic for servicing, you never know whether an oil change means new or old oil, whether new break shoes mean old ones at a "new" price, what other parts might have been traded out while the mechanic was working on your car or moto, whether a part removed this time will be sold back to you the next. Asking for a receipt, you imagine, might provide some sort of verification—until you realize that all receipts are easily falsified. "When I need work done on my car," a Togolese academic told me, "I never leave the vehicle unattended, even if it means waiting all day at the shop. And I always accompany the mechanic to the parts store, making sure to pay for everything myself."

In a nuanced analysis of Lomé's famous cloth market, Nina Sylvanus (2016) describes the bewildering array of "upstart brands, knockoffs, counterfeits, and copies" (22), and copies of copies of copies, that flood the market. There are imitations (many of them Chinese) of high-end Dutch Wax prints that are labelled "real Dutch," "genuine Dutch," and "Made In Holland" (144). Some are considered "authentic copies," valued because they conceal their true character when worn, whereas others are fake copies (those that do not). "The question of what is real," Sylvanus insists, "is not one we should be asking" (18). While inhabiting a world of "semiotic uncertainty" (144), consumers nevertheless adapt quickly to the new categories and learn to navigate their ambiguities.[2]

Hoping to avoid the risks of purchasing a "Chinese" (pirated) phone on the street,[3] I decided to get one at the Nokia store instead. When a friend heard this, she scoffed at my willingness to trust the brand, commenting simply that "you never know whether a Nokia is a Nokia or not." "Even at the Nokia store?" I asked. "Especially at that store," she shot back.

This same person purchased ten bags of cement for a masonry job at a boutique she owned, only to discover, when told by the mason that she needed to buy more, that he had appropriated four for himself. Another ac-

quaintance, a carpenter I have known since childhood and someone otherwise honest to a fault, told me that he and his co-workers routinely plunder every worksite. "At the end of the day, we take materials home with us—a piece of lumber, some cement, maybe a tool. We get paid almost nothing, so this is how we make it worthwhile." At Togo's two universities, passing grades reflect monetary gifts (or sexual favors) to teachers as much as performance in the classroom, and medical treatment at Lomé's clinics and hospitals often depends on whether nurses and doctors have been "thanked" along the way. In an instance of skimming of a different stripe, the sons of a penniless man I know agreed to foot his medical bills but insisted that they accompany him to the pharmacy for fear that if he went alone he would skimp on the meds and pocket the money. "Imagine," one of the sons remarked, "that he would try to turn his sickness into a market, and, even worse, that he would seek profit from the money of his children."

One of these same sons helped his mother buy a female sheep from a man who lived in her neighborhood. They thought the offer a good deal because the ewe was pregnant and the man's asking price was only slightly above the cost of a single sheep. A week after the purchase, the animal died and, in cutting it open, they found its belly full of plastic bags—bags, they surmised, that the man had fed it to create an appearance that would inflate the price.

In a widely publicized moment in fall 2010, one that deserves a place on any "can-you-top-this" list, a soccer team claiming to be the Togolese national team played an international match in Bahrain, a match won by the host country 3–0. Authorities back home learned of the match when Bahrain complained that the Togolese team had not put up a strong effort and seemed winded by halftime. After an investigation, the chairman of Togo's soccer federation declared that the players were "completely fake. We have not sent any team of footballers to Bahrain. The players are not known to us."[4] Upon further inquiry, it was discovered that a former coach saw an opportunity to profit from an oil-rich country eager to promote its soccer team (and willing to foot the bill for the match) and recruited players off the street, outfitting them with jerseys from the national team. Upon hearing of this episode, Kodjo commented wryly, "I think we have taken 419 [the art of the scam] to a new level—to one that even Nigerians and Ghanaians would be proud of."

But wait, there is recent breaking news from Ghana: A "fake" US embassy has been discovered by authorities in Accra—an "embassy" that has

been issuing real US (and Schengen, Indian, and South African) visas for ten years.[5] According to the published story, the sham embassy, a run-down two-story building with an American flag out front and a portrait of Barack Obama inside, was staffed by English-speaking Turkish citizens (presumably because they could "pass" as US consular officials more easily than Ghanaians). The embassy advertised its services in neighboring countries, including Togo, and put up non-nationals in nearby hotels. Their visas sold for $6,000 apiece. How they got away with it for so long, and how they had access to real visas, is still unknown. (This entanglement of fake-real, a Togolese acquaintance and former fraud officer at the embassy in Lomé pointed out, goes beyond an imposter embassy staging itself as real. It must also have involved traffic between the two "embassies," he insisted. "A Ghanaian working at the US Embassy cannot issue [steal] visas, only a consul can. This means the Americans were involved.")

Then, another bizarre twist to this strangest of stories: In late 2017, an article appeared in the *Guardian* claiming that the story of the fake embassy was a fake story, that no such embassy ever existed, and that the account had been manufactured by . . . the American embassy (Yeebo 2017).

It is tempting to read this culture of duplicity, in both its spectacular and its mundane iterations, as a "culture of corruption," as Daniel Smith (2007) calls it in his prescient analysis of political corruption and everyday fraud in Nigeria[6]—as moral failure, as violation of the principle of "trust" on which modern nation-states and bourgeois economies rely in order to function (Giddens 1990). After all, this view of Africans—as morally degraded, as uncivilized, as unfit for the modern world—is one to which Euro-Americans have long held. Is this not the latest proof that such continues to be the case? Or less judgmentally, we might see this culture of duplicity as the unsurprising consequence of inhabiting an island of privation amidst a more affluent global, a global that has passed Africa by. In such a telling, the confidence trick might be the only means available to separate self from starvation.

Perhaps true—at least the deprivationist, if not the racist, view—but these are bourgeois categories of analysis that rely on the very distinctions they aim to critique (between real/fake, authentic/inauthentic). They are not categories shared by my Togolese interlocutors, for whom distinctions between authentic and inauthentic (real and fake) are not meaningful, and for whom pragmatics—the search for livelihood in a world of limited means—trumps all.[7] I will say more about this later.

It bears reiterating that Africa is far from exceptional. In their recent

book, *The Truth About Crime: Sovereignty, Knowledge, Social Order* (2016), Jean and John Comaroff suggest that imposture and deception, a blurring of the lines between legal and illegal, and between criminal economy and legitimate business, have today become a generalized global condition, in the metropole as well as the Global South. The Comaroffs claim we live in a world of the imposter and con artist, a world in which the line between person-as-authentic and person-as-artifice, the "subject and its double," is vanishing (126), and in which "self-making-by-faking" is rampant (xvii)—Trump redux!—with identity comprising "copies all the way down" (see also Nakassis 2013). They attribute such blurring and cultures of dissimulation in general to transformations in global capitalism over the past twenty-five years, with its uneven liberalization, deregulation, and deterritorialization of the economy, keeping capital on the move in search of legally lax, relatively undocumented, untaxed shelters (31).

LOTO VISA

The "loto visa," as it is referred to in Lomé, shares affinities with Lomé everyday practices and their resonance throughout the larger subregion. It is an act of conjuring, an attempt to generate something of value (an identity, a proxy citizenship) out of nothing, or better, to profit from someone else's good fortune by turning one visa into two. When I first heard about the DV Lottery from Kodjo in the early 2000s, at a time when he had just married a female selectee in the hope of acquiring a visa for himself, I was struck by his ingenuity in attempting to game the system and by the inventions and sleights of hand of visa lottery culture more broadly. Kodjo and his fellow fixers—an honor-among-thieves confrèrie—are not only clever strategists, psychologists, and financiers but also adept at matching local desire to DV protocols. And they are masterful in perpetuating the fantasy and dream of an elsewhere and keeping hope alive, without which the lottery buzz all goes away. But the devil is in the details, to which I now turn.

Once someone has been selected in the May lottery, and before they go for the obligatory interview at the US Embassy in Lomé,[8] they often attempt to add "dependents" to their dossier. Sometimes these are legitimate relatives but often not. (Indeed, they are typically a spouse or a family member of Togolese already in the diaspora, who can more easily afford the quid pro quo: payment of the visa winner's embassy interview fee and purchase of their plane ticket to the US.) Because US immigration rules only permit

the visa winner to be accompanied by a spouse and children, the winner must then "marry" his sponsor's wife (or sister, or cousin) and "adopt" any children before the interview, then present proof that they are indeed the winner's dependents. This in turn requires producing a file of documents—marriage papers, wedding photos, birth certificates, high school diplomas, passports. One somewhat atypical but nevertheless revealing example of the gymnastics called into being by these arrangements: The wife of a friend of mine arrived in the US as the "wife" of the best friend of her brother (a "husband" she then divorced before marrying my friend). The previous year, the brother and his friend had both received political asylum and entered into a "sister-exchange" arrangement, whereby each would "marry" the other's sister and pay her way to the States. As part of the agreement, my friend's wife's "husband" spent over $2,500 returning to Togo to take wedding photos with his best friend's sister, which she then presented at the embassy as proof that she was married to him. Moreover, this "husband" could not fly to Lomé itself for fear that his asylum status might be jeopardized if US authorities discovered that he had been back in Togo. Instead he flew to Accra, took a bus to the border—where they only check passports of non–West Africans—and crossed into Togo on foot.

Another area of play/invention: A lottery winner must either possess a high school diploma (the French baccalaureate) or have two years of job expertise in a profession that is on the US Department of Labor job list. In the early 2000s, those without the baccalaureate who did not already fit the job profile were quickly "apprenticed" into the appropriate trades (and papers backdating the apprenticeship and subsequent work experience were manufactured). The US consular official who was conducting interviews of visa lottery winners in summer 2003 told me that as soon as tailoring was put on the list "everyone in Togo became a tailor!" And when "peintre en bâtiment" (house painter) made the list in 2006, the consul's office was flooded with applications of those claiming to be painters.[9]

A cottage industry of visa lottery entrepreneurs has grown up around these practices—those who help others with the online visa registration, those who know whom to bribe to get false marriage or adoption or job papers, those who arrange the taking of marriage photos, and especially those like Kodjo who serve as brokers between those in the diaspora and those at home. Kodjo signed up over twelve hundred people for the lottery in fall 2005. He wrote me just after the new online registration season had opened in November to say that he was leaving for northern Togo to en-

list what he hoped would be several hundred applicants. In the north ("an untouched territory," he called it), he visited local high schools, where he sought permission from the school principal to speak with those students in their last year, because most in "terminale" are single (more easily enabling dependents to be added to the winners' files) and because they sit for the baccalaureate in July (with success ensuring an easier passage through the embassy interview). An innovation here in repertoire: unlike other visa lottery brokers, Kodjo does not charge any of his enlistees to help them register; he takes their photo and fills out the online form for them, all free. In return he retains the right to "treat" their file. If they win, he will add "dependents" (and make money for doing so).[10] He's quite level-headed about all of this, saying that he simply plays the odds—his own lottery within the visa lottery. "If only 1 percent of my applicants are selected, I can live for an entire year."

The embassy is of course fully aware that all of this gaming is going on and has developed a set of tests to attempt to detect real from sham winners and especially real from fake spouses. Thus a common embassy strategy is to interview spouses separately, asking about the habits and desires of the other: "What's your husband's favorite food?" "What did you eat yesterday?" "Who got up first this morning, you or your husband?" "What color underwear were you wearing?" "Does your baby sleep in a crib or in bed with you?" "As a law student, what area of the law is your husband pursuing?" The embassy also knows of course that as soon as they ask a particular question it will circulate to those who are next in line for interviews. (Indeed, Kodjo has a file of all the questions asked of interviewees over the past several years, which he shares with friends and clients who are prepping for the embassy interview.) Thus, a hide-and-seek game develops between embassy and street, with the embassy trying to stay one step ahead by springing new questions and those about to go for interviews making sure they know as soon as new questions appear. In 2006, an interviewee's doctor's report—it is mandatory to have a physical exam before the interview—noted that there was a scar on one of his legs. The consular official conducting the interview asked his "wife" which leg, and when she guessed incorrectly, they failed the interview. The next day, all on the street knew why they had failed and had begun to explore the intimacies of their visa-spouses' bodies. During an applicant's embassy interview in January 2006, the consul challenged the woman she was interviewing by telling her that she didn't believe the man who had accompanied her was her husband—and that she would

give the applicant a visa while denying him. Without hesitating, the woman responded that he was indeed her husband (though in fact he was not) and that if he was not granted a visa, she would refuse hers. This seemed proof enough for the consular official, and both were granted visas. Kodjo's commentary: it takes this type of "courage" to pass the interview.

As one telling sign of the importance the DV Lottery has assumed in the cultural life of Lomé today, I have heard repeatedly from Togolese that the consular official who conducts the visa interviews at the embassy is far better known than the ambassador. "We don't even know who the ambassador is," a friend said. "But Mme. Johnson, we know her well. She's a celebrity here. We study her every move—for she's the one who will decide whether we have a life beyond Togo or not." The same consular official told me that one day she was playing golf with the ambassador when a car stopped on a busy road nearby. The driver jumped out and ran across the golf course to greet her ("I have always wanted to meet you," she reported him saying), while entirely ignoring the ambassador. Before taking leave, he asked whether she knew yet when the next DV enrollment period would begin.

KODJO REDUX

His large head would suggest a frame to match, but the body is slight and the debts to injuries large. A twice-broken leg from a road accident in a minibus that went off the road during a trip north to visit clients has left a noticeable limp, and the risks of the trade etched into his body. An untreated injury after a childhood fall left one arm withered and his relationship to his father forever soured. But his physical deficits enabled mental gifts to flourish. He was a star student who passed his baccalaureate on the first try, and he would have gone to university, but his miserly father claimed he didn't have the means to support him.

Instead he ended up with a clutch of childhood friends, rough street-smart types who had grown up hustling for a living in the alleys of Lomé. When I first met them in the early 2000s, they were importing used tires and cars from Europe through Lomé's jungle of a port, recruiting soccer players for the professional leagues in Europe and the Middle East, exporting exotic snakes and reptiles to the US and Japan, manufacturing documents on demand, setting up recycling ventures for the Chinese—and always in and out of trouble (and sometimes prison), busted deals and an-

gry partners all around. All these ventures relied on vast knowledge of the networks and patronage systems that govern the city and port. Kodjo gave them his brains and they taught him the city.

Like almost everyone else in Lomé in the 1990s, Kodjo was caught up in the fantasy of travel à l'étranger, seeing going abroad as the only chance to move ahead and reap riches. Three brothers had already left for Germany at a time when visas were easy to come by, and although Kodjo made a trip there (with an NGO that was pushing a new technique for raising poultry), he set his sights on the US instead. His fantasy was nurtured by the sudden intoxicating appearance of the visa lottery in the mid-1990s. "Playing a game to get US citizenship! What could be more interesting!" he commented at the time.

Signing up for the DV Lottery each year became a passion, even though his number was never called. "Those who want it too much never seem to win," he commented ruefully in 2017, "while those selected seem to have barely given the United States a second thought." When the female friend for whom he applied was chosen in 2002, he thought his luck had turned. He married her before the interview, hoping her tailcoats would deliver his coveted visa. But when she failed the interview (see chapter 3), he sank into a dark space.

An uncle in Illinois, sensing Kodjo's deep hurt, sent him some money as a lifeline, which Kodjo used to establish a neighborhood phone center. And then a dramatic turnaround, a failure into success story: Despite his personal disaster—or because of it: in failing to get a visa, he had learned volumes about the DV—friends and neighbors selected in the lottery began asking his advice (about the various deadlines, about prepping for the interview) and he quickly became known as a lottery wizard. A year later he decided to go into the business. The transition from the hustle of the street to the DV Lottery was an easy one, and it gave him advantage as he could draw on all the networks and skills of the former in attending to the latter. Treating documents, sweet-talking (and gifting) judges, nurturing a list of sympathetic officers of the law were all tools of the trade at the port and translated well to the DV Lottery.

It seemed the perfect calling.

Kodjo's number of enlistees jumped dramatically between 2001 and 2010, from a few dozen, to several hundred, to eight hundred, to twelve hundred. This sharp increase was both because his reputation had grown with experience—he had now successfully shepherded many applicants through the maze of interviews and medical exams, through the local market in false papers and fictional identities, and through the complex financing that must be put together to pay for interviews and exams and plane tickets (financing that is far beyond the means of most Togolese)—*and* because Kodjo waived the up-front fees that other lottery entrepreneurs charged (1,500 CFA francs, or $3) to help someone register. (It is important to note that when registration went online in the mid-2000s, it required applicants to submit a digital photograph. Most Togolese who play thus seek the help of an internet-savvy visa broker or go to one of the many cybercafés in Lomé that, during the October sign-up period, offer help in completing the application and in taking applicants' photos.)

Kodjo's success at this time was also enhanced by his pioneering forays into the north, into this "untouched territory." And there his ethnicity was a factor. Although Kodjo himself grew up in Lomé and is in many ways more "southern" than northern, he spent childhood summers in the Kabiyé north where his father was born. (It is common practice for parents to send their children back to their natal villages during summer holidays "to teach them how to work.") Thus it was through some of Kodjo's childhood connections, as well as those of his family, that he was able to get his foot in the door of local schools (a childhood summer playmate was now a principal at one of the northern lycées), something that would be difficult for a non-Kabiyé. Note, too, the effect of Kodjo's recruitment practices: children in remote Togolese villages are now applying for the lottery and dreaming of US green cards—a fantasy made all the more real whenever one of Kodjo's northern clients is chosen in the lottery.

In 2006, six of Kodjo's enlistees were selected in the Kentucky raffle. Because he signed them up free of charge, he "owned" each of their dossiers and was free to add "dependents" to them—a spouse (and sometimes children). It was these dependents ("beneficiaries," Kodjo calls them), or more typically their brothers or spouses in the diaspora, who paid the cost of the embassy interview; the cost of a plane ticket to the US; the cost of apprenticing the winner into a trade; the cost of obtaining marriage papers, mar-

riage photos, new identity papers, passports; and the cost of having Kodjo broker the entire affair. In another Kodjo innovation, however, the winners themselves were asked to pay for the medical examination ($220) that all must undergo before the embassy interview. Kodjo's reasoning here is that the winner must have some additional incentive to perform at peak level during the interview, and having them spend their own money beforehand is the best way to ensure that.

If a particular broker does not want to do the work of shepherding an applicant through this maze, he can sell their dossier to another fixer or directly to a sponsor. One such case I followed in 2010 had a price tag of $3,000, though in the end it fetched $2,000—and that just for access to the winner's dossier. The price was this high, I was told, because the person already had her baccalaureate and was seen as a sure winner. Thus categories/ranks of winners, from "certain" to "high risk," affect pricing outcomes.

This system is filled with stories of monumental, even tragic, loss. I know some who, unable to find a financier, and without friends or relatives in the diaspora to help pay the cost of the embassy interview, raised their own money locally by selling land or their family home, or by borrowing from family members what for many amounts to a lifetime's savings, only to fail the interview. Indeed, in fall 2006, after a particularly difficult interview season during which only a few were granted visas, several hundred lottery winners staged a protest in a local park, demanding that the embassy return

the interview fee to those who were denied. The consulate eventually capitulated in part and began returning the interview fee for a denied winner's spouse (but not the fees for the winners themselves). Still not satisfied, these same protestors began a daily sit-in at the entrance to the embassy in April 2008, which lasted six months until early October when the embassy asked Togolese security forces to remove the protestors (see chapter 6).

Price structure within this popular economy is the result of an ongoing dialectic between conventionalized practice and innovation. Practices among entrepreneurs become standardized, only to be partially unsettled by improvising individuals like Kodjo, who waived the entry fee for applicants, and who began requiring winners to cover some of the costs of pre-interview expenses. But such improvisations quickly circulate and affect the practices of other entrepreneurs before becoming standardized—before new innovations in turn unsettle them once again. These pricing mechanisms are generated "from below," not only beyond the purview of the state but also only partially driven by principles of supply and demand.

All told, the financing for one of these cases costs between $5,000 and $10,000 (depending on the initial cost of access and the number of dependents added to a dossier). With up to 1,500 Togolese going for embassy interviews each year (among as many as 3,000 selectees),[11] up to $15 million is spent annually on this system—a not-insignificant sum for a small West African country in the midst of a prolonged economic crisis. Indeed, this system might be read as a partial solution to Togo's development impasse, for it serves as a remittance magnet, drawing back home millions of dollars annually from the diaspora. Moreover, it has a significant spillover effect, redistributing monies along networks of kin and friends and supporting entire cottage industries of document fabricators, photographers, those apprenticing winners into trades, doctors administering the medical exams, and the fixers themselves.

This popular economy also informs, and is informed by, other informal economy practices around it. Lomé today is nothing if not a crowded intersection of thousands of informal economy ventures. Everyone, it seems, is hustling and jostling for position within the limited means of the post–Cold War moment. Moreover, the players overlap in many of these groups, with information about pricing, credit, and debt (and the latest innovations) circulating among them. Money and credit, too, move between these circles, with a broken deal here drawing on potential future earnings there. I have spent hours trying to follow the baroque and bewildering movements of

money and debt from venture to venture and party to party in this hustle economy, and I always come away feeling I have never fully gotten to the bottom of the system of exchange and debt that is being transacted.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF Togolese in the US visa lottery is a textbook illustration of the sort of cultural-economic practice that Jane Guyer (2004) suggests has characterized "Atlantic African" economic history for centuries, and that Bayart (1989, 2000) refers to as "extraversion," the process whereby Africans appropriate various outsides to enhance their own economic and political fortunes. Guyer argues that the domain of the economic in Africa has long been situated at the intersection of various crossroads and within a transcultural space between the local and that which lay beyond: the slave trade, the colonial, and now, a differently globalized postcolonial. It has also straddled the material and the performative, the impersonal and personal, the formal and informal. Atlantic African economies are hybrid, improvisational border practices engaged in the ongoing negotiation and invention of registers of value and personal distinction, practices and negotiations that mediate and are mediated by an ongoing state of crisis. Under conditions of perpetual turbulence, economic actors seek their gain by strategically accessing those multiple scales of value that are in play in such borderland spaces.

Loto visa is such a border practice: inventive and entrepreneurial, generating its own scales of value and pricing, producing material advantage for its protagonists, generating far-reaching networks of debt and clientage. It is also a form of extraversion, albeit extraversion with a difference, for the aim of DV applicants is to capture an exit visa—to leave—in order to enhance self and family at home.[12] Ironically, emigration as extraversion.

This phenomenon also needs to be thought in terms of the "performative" (Guyer 2004). As an event that collects stories around it, that feeds a collective fantasy, and that produces reputations and markers of distinction, it is as much cultural performance as economic practice. Moreover, its dramatic growth and popularity among Togolese depends on the multiple talents of fixers (or performers) like Kodjo. Not only must they be internet savvy and have impeccable interpersonal skills (for example, counseling people how to treat one another as "spouses," calming those who may be short of cash or who squandered their money because they failed the medical exam or the embassy interview), they also must be able to broker deals

with people all over Lomé and draw on networks throughout the diaspora. As well, they need to know the ins and outs of the lottery system and US immigration law.

A bizarre case presented itself in summer 2005, in which a Togolese national in Minneapolis, who had sponsored one of Kodjo's winners in return for the latter's marriage to his wife and adoption of his son, sued the winner for child support. (The Minneapolis man had remarried his wife after she arrived in the States but had not yet readopted his son, and he felt that the winner, still the son's legal father, should pay to help support him.) Kodjo, because he had brokered the original deal between the two men, was contacted in Lomé by both sides to help resolve the dispute that ensued. He thus had to take a crash course in Minnesota family law and then weigh in as mediator, though he was of course outraged at the hubris of the sponsor bringing the suit. The case was finally resolved and the child support claim withdrawn when the winner threatened to go public with the illegalities surrounding how the wife's and child's visas were obtained. "All in a day's work," Kodjo concluded with a smile when recounting his tale.

SUTURED TO THE POPULAR

According to a consular official I interviewed at the US Embassy in the mid-2000s, there were more green card lottery visa applications per capita in Togo that year than from any other African country, and Togo had ten times as many applicants as Benin, the similarly sized country next door—numbers that have held steady since.[13] An embassy employee told me at the time that 1 million Togolese (of 6 million total) had applied for the lottery that year. That figure is certainly exaggerated, but the statement nevertheless captures something of the cachet that this event holds for many Togolese—and of the popularity of the loto visa more generally in the cultural life of the nation.

During the DV sign-up period each October, Lomé's internet cafés are draped with banners announcing the lottery, and these hubs become a frenzy of activity. These *cybers* promise help in filling out the online application, and their visibility and prominence throughout the city serves to recruit new applicants—many have told me that they first learned about the lottery through these cybercafé publicity campaigns—as much as to service those already in the know. (An aside: The same cybers are filled throughout the year with Nigerians engaged in 419 internet scams; it is not unusual

for them to take over an entire cyber from opening to closing. During the DV sign-up period, however, 419 is prohibited throughout Lomé's cybercafés, with large signs on doors and windows announcing the ban, one hustle displacing another.)

Another reason for the DV Lottery's popularity in Lomé during the late 2000s was the presence of a much-admired US consul. Her cachet derived from the fact that she routinely gave television and radio interviews about the DV, explaining the conditions applicants needed to fulfill to be eligible for the embassy interview, warning them not to engage in infelicities, and because she spoke fluent French and had a nice sense of humor. Her interviews became cultural events. Drivers would pull over to listen, and those who missed out would tune in to *radio trottoir* (sidewalk radio) or chase down those who had heard the interview. In the days following, people attempted to parse her words, searching for tips and hidden messages. A minor celebrity, her first name—Melanie—was sung throughout the city.

The churches, too, have been responsible for amplifying the profile of the DV in Lomé. Entire congregations devote prayers to lottery success during the sign-up period in October and just before lottery results are announced in May. Praying for DV success is an easy stretch for members of Lomé's proliferating prosperity churches, where praying for material reward is consti-

tutive and routine, and where acquiring a cell phone, a motorcycle, now a visa, become signs of God's benediction.[14]

In an instance that brings tears of laughter to those who hear it, a notorious philanderer whose wife was selected in the lottery suddenly found religion and began to follow the straight and narrow in ways that left friends astonished. Apparently the man's infidelities were such common knowledge that his wife's pastor once corrected her when she referred to his "three" girlfriends by saying that he knew of at least six. But this born-again Christian took so seriously the prospect of getting a visa to the US—and of being on the right side of the Holy Spirit in achieving that end—that he abandoned all his paramours, returned home every night for dinner with his family, and became a model member of his church. As if in confirmation of his renewed commitment, this couple's case number—in the high 50s (57,000) and thus normally out of range for an interview[15]—was called for the first time since the lottery had been instituted, and, divine justice, he and his wife received visas.

If participation in the DV motivates church attendance—and the reverse, church attendance stimulates interest in the DV—so too does the visa lottery incite religious devotion among non-Christians. One selectee I know returned to his family's village to consult with diviners and sacrifice animals. Another hedged his bets and did both, stepping up church attendance while also seeking support from village deities. In a world in which the participation of invisible beings is as important to worldly success as mundane human action—in which a lottery selectee's careful preparation for the embassy interview is seen as a necessary though not sufficient condition for success—most DV winners seek to supplement their due diligence with mystical intercession.

If religion has partnered with the DV Lottery, so too has the state, with government functionaries participating in and promoting the visa lottery both as public officials and as private citizens. Many high-end functionaries—ministers, judges, customs agents—hope to send their children to the US or Europe and some tempt the DV in order to do so. Thus, among the well-heeled, Kodjo counts a minister as client, for whom he has married three children to lottery winners, with all receiving visas.

But state actors participate in visa lottery practice in other ways as well. Until recently, a judge at the local préfecture—now it's the mayor—presided over the marriages Kodjo arranged and backdated marriage licenses—needless to say, for a fee. He then entered the marriage in the registry at the ap-

propriate (backdated) place, thus making it difficult for one of the consulate's fraud officers to verify an applicant's documents and detect whether the marriage was recent. This judge also participated in the photo shoot of the wedding party on the steps of the courtroom, an event whose aim was to produce the pictures consuls often demand at the interview in order to verify the authenticity of the union.

Moreover, Togolese courts regard the behavior of fixers like Kodjo as perfectly legal, and if called on to adjudicate a dispute with one of his clients, the courts consider his signed contracts much like any other contract: as presumptive consensual agreements between parties for services rendered. His clients sign two contracts, the first when they enlist, conveying Kodjo's right to "treat" their file,[16] the second at the time of the embassy interview, promising repayment of money borrowed (for the interview and plane ticket). If they renege on either, Kodjo will take them (or a family member) to court, where his record is immaculate. Of course, such endorsement by the law also has a normalizing effect, sanctioning loto visa within the larger culture.

In short, it is not just fixers and their clients but an entire nation and its citizens—civil servants, pastors, the proprietors of internet cafés, judges, document translators, street hustlers, local media—who seem to be positively captured by the lottery phenomenon and actively participate in the reproduction of the DV Lottery's luminous profile within Togolese cultural imaginaries.

WHY TOGO?

Why do so many more apply from Togo than from neighboring countries Benin and Burkina Faso? Certainly, as those to whom I have put the question typically respond, Togolese enthusiasm for the lottery is due to the ongoing political and economic crisis in their country, a crisis exacerbated by the continuation of the dictatorship beyond the end of the Cold War. This political climate, combined with the privation brought on by structural adjustment and the withdrawal of EU funding during the mid-2000s, has created a near universal desire on the part of Togolese to leave their country for what they imagine are greener pastures in Europe and the US. Moreover, things are worse in Togo, they add, than in those other countries because of the election fraud that has characterized the post–Cold war period (as opposed to the more open elections—and surprising electoral outcomes—that

have characterized those two countries' recent political histories). When Kodjo returned from a trip to Burkina Faso (to explore the possibility of expanding his business to that country), he reported that life in Ouagadougou was infinitely better than that in Lomé. "The roads are all paved, the street lights work, and when it rains the water runs off in an orderly manner into large cement ditches beside the road. Lomé is years behind."

While political-economic factors may condition a longing for exile and help explain the higher incidence of visa lottery participation than in neighboring countries, they nevertheless do not fully account for the extraordinary popularity or the specificities of the lottery phenomenon in Togo. This popularity also needs to be thought in terms of the fact that DV practice in Togo, like cultural practice elsewhere (Baudrillard 1996; Weiss 2009), has taken on a life of its own and produced its own excess. "These things start small and spread through the streets and, when successful, get taken up by others," Kodjo said. "Then they grow and grow, and if some are successful, others follow. And, you know, each country has its own thing. With Nigerians it's 419; with Togolese it's loto visa. And now, we might say that Ghana has begun to specialize in *faux ambassades* [fake embassies]."

2

The Interview

The embassy interview is an applicant's moment of truth—when the consul decides whether to give the visa and when, if they imagine the slightest deception, they will put the applicant through the paces. The challenge for consuls is that they have little to draw on in accessing the truth about a candidate's identity beyond the documents in hand and the affect of the person standing before them. When a consul suspects malfeasance, they resort to trick questions and knowledge tests, the answers to which will decide whether an applicant receives their coveted papers.

The interview takes place at a window at the embassy, a separation wall between consul and applicant whose camera and fingerprinter capture the applicant's biometric features. With other hopefuls waiting in the wings, and the vice-consul chattering away with another would-be traveler at the adjacent window, and the futures of everyone in the room hanging in the balance, this is a space of considerable anticipation and anxiety. The words spoken here—their sincerity, their believability—mark the difference be-

tween an imagined life of abundance abroad and one of unending precarity at home.

SELF-FASHIONING

It should not be surprising that Kodjo spends a significant amount of time and energy grooming clients for the interview. Indeed, prepping clients beforehand has become something of a trademark, and many who are not his own applicants also find their way to his office, recommended by others. He coaches them not only about interview protocols—where to present their money and documents when they arrive at the embassy, what questions to expect from the consul—but also about interview demeanor and affect.

Kodjo typically begins by giving a client couple a week to study a list of questions the consuls might ask during the interview (to test their truthfulness): When were you born? When was your wife born? Where did you and she first meet? How many siblings does she have? Their names and professions? What marriage gifts did you give your wife and her family? Her favorite food? When did you get the baccalaureate? Kodjo then calls the couple to his office and drills them, staging a mock interview, taking one aside and peppering them with questions, then the other—all in an attempt to simulate the embassy interview.

After making sure they have mastered the standard questions, he counsels them in self-presentation and interview affect. Possessing an air of confidence and certainty about one's responses is important, but he insists they shouldn't respond too quickly or self-assuredly to each question. Otherwise the consul might imagine they've been coached. Some spontaneity is always good, even some hedging. When both members of a couple were asked separately how many people came to their wedding, the wife responded 150, while the husband paused and said "over 100," Kodjo thought the latter an ideal response. Because the husband was in the ballpark and perfect agreement between the two might have aroused suspicion, his hesitation, even the small inconsistency in answers, lent credibility.

Responses in the negative—"I don't know"—should be avoided at all cost. They undermine believability, and it's better to hedge and attempt an answer, even if it's slightly off. A seamstress client replied "no" when the consul asked whether she could embroider a baby truss, and she later failed the interview. Kodjo was certain that her negative (albeit honest) response was a key to her failure—because it raised doubt about her claim that she

was indeed a seamstress (in this case, she *was*). He also felt it likely that his client knew more about baby trusses than a US consul and, if pressed, could get away with fudging it.

On some topics Kodjo offers more substantive advice. At a pre-interview prep session I attended in summer 2012, he quizzed the "husband" on what marriage gifts he had given at their *fiancailles* (engagement). When the young man began with the money gift for the parents-in-law (50,000 CFA francs [$100]), Kodjo responded that he should open with the more important (and pricier) gifts for the bride—the Wax and Super Wax African print cloth, the head wraps and purses and shoes and underwear, the soft drinks and alcohol—and only later mention the (less important) monetary gift for the parents-in-law. Disappointed not only with this response but also with the entire interview, Kodjo then added that he had more work to do—that he "didn't yet have a passing grade."

Kodjo also counsels clients about what to wear to the interview. They should dress to their station: if university students, dress like students, the young man in slacks and a collared shirt, the woman in skirt and blouse or *complet* (three-piece African print), this latter his preference; professionals (schoolteachers, accountants) are instructed to dress as they would at work. But a dress code warning: because most of Kodjo's winners are male, with the woman's family financing the operation, she is usually of higher social standing and has more expensive clothes. Thus she needs to "dress down" for the interview, not wear high-end Wax that would betray their class difference and immediately tip off a Togolese interviewer. Another dead giveaway would be for the girl to pay the interview fee when they arrive at the embassy. It may be her money, but if the boy is the selectee, he's the presumed financier—and when in public, Togolese men pay for women, not the other way around.

Apparently not all interviewees have learned the secrets of self-fashioning. One of the consuls regaled me with stories she had heard of applicants that were so wide of the mark as to lose all credibility. Some spouses she had interviewed were from different ethnic groups and spoke no language in common. Some had dates on their application that didn't match those they'd given during the interview. Another had resided outside the country during the date of the couple's "wedding" in Lomé. Another was married to someone long deceased—though she tried to claim that he had died after she had registered for the lottery. Another couple showed the consul honeymoon photos with the Rocky Mountains in the background (claiming this was

where they spent time on their getaway), photos the consul could tell right away had been shot in a studio in Lomé or Cotonou.

Kodjo counsels couples to spend as much time together as possible before the interview. The better they know each other, the better they'll likely perform, both when presenting as a married couple and when responding to surprise questions about the other. But he also warns that they should resist any romantic involvement. "This is a business relationship first and foremost. Falling for each other might only complicate things [especially if it doesn't work out] and put all at risk."

When I stopped by his office in August 2010, he was with a female client who had come to complain that her visa spouse had been making unwanted advances. Things were now so strained between them that she had locked him out of her hotel room in Ouagadougou—the capital of Burkina Faso, where they had gone for the interview—and made him sit alone at the back of the bus on the twenty-four-hour trip back to Lomé. "The tension in the relationship could ruin things for them," Kodjo said. "It will make the embassy interview much more difficult. Consuls follow their instincts about visa applicants as much as their answers to questions. It will be apparent right away that this couple doesn't get along, which could prejudice the entire case."

In chasing down dance partners—matching winners to financiers' family members—Kodjo must also be mindful of body type and age. In a case in the late 2000s he had difficulty finding a match for a short male client and had to settle for a woman who was six inches taller. Not ideal, because Togolese frown on such mismatches—if anything, the male should be taller—but in this case the couple made it through. Togolese husbands are also expected to be older than their wives. A woman who is even a year or two older than her husband might set off alarm bells at the embassy—especially with Togolese staff.

Another example of the cultural common sense Kodjo must draw on in prepping couples for the interview: Few Togolese would marry if the man was not already employed. Thus Kodjo must invent a work identity for married clients, especially if they are university students. "If it was the US consul alone doing the interview, I wouldn't have to always think in Togolese terms, and my job would be so much easier," Kodjo offered. "There's so much about Togolese culture the consuls don't know. But since a Togolese interviewer will question my clients first, I have to always think as a Togolese."[1]

The cultural savvy Kodjo brings to his métier—the fact that he understands that cultural training is crucial to the task ahead: that couples need to be aware of dress code, marital dos and don'ts, the hierarchies of value in a system of marriage gifts—are something else that sets him apart from others. He has a keen anthropological sensibility, when it comes to not only Togolese but also US culture, and he delights in discovering differences between the two—which is no doubt one of the reasons I felt drawn to him from the beginning.

When I arrived an hour late for a session with him one afternoon, he chastised that I'd "become Togolese" before riffing on the euphemisms his compatriots use to buffer their habitual tardiness—"Je suis en chemin" (I'm on my way), "J'arrives" (I'm arriving), "Je suis proche" (I'm nearby), "Je suis devant le portail" (I'm at the front door [of your house])—all of which really mean to expect them sometime in the next few hours.

I witnessed a nice touch at a pre-embassy interview session at Kodjo's office in summer 2011. In discussing the soon-to-be-interviewing couple's wedding bands—for Kodjo, an obligatory purchase—the boy asked whether it would be worthwhile to have their names—("Sophie-Bruno")—engraved on the inside of the rings. Kodjo had never thought of that before but found it to be a brilliant idea. It was unlikely that the consul would ask to see their rings, he said, "but you never know. And if a consul did, it's the sort of unexpected gesture that could clinch an interview and ensure a successful outcome."

NOVELTY AS AUTHENTICITY

Kodjo is constantly on the lookout for, and indeed finds considerable pleasure in discovering, what he refers to as *nouveautées* (novelties). In 2006, when a friend returned to the States for a few weeks, he gave him money to purchase a digital camera for taking client photos for the online application—but he insisted the camera also have video capability. "Why video?" I asked. "Because the consuls like things that are new and different. They get tired of seeing the same wedding photos every time—the ones on the court or church steps, the photos from the party afterward, the honeymoon pictures. Because they've seen these many times before and are so similar from one couple to the next, the consuls will easily begin to doubt a couple's authenticity. But imagine a couple showing up with a video of their wedding or their honeymoon. No one's ever done that before, and I know the consul will fall for it."

Here, I realized, was not only a perceptive assessment of consul psychology, and one that was surely correct, but also an astute albeit counterintuitive insight into the way in which the category "authenticity" operates in this domain: namely, that the authentic (a true marriage, a real couple) might be known by its divergence from the norm, by its difference or uniqueness; thus, paradoxically, that novelty itself could be seen as authenticating, as sign of the real. But consider: authenticity for Euro-Americans is often figured—in culture, in art (Steiner 1994)—as synonymous with that which is old and culturally normative, not with the new and different. Not so for love, it seems. Real love is measured, at least in this instance, by its uniqueness and deviation from the norm.

Kodjo brings the same insight—the assumption that redundancy suggests in-authenticity, and its flip side, that an original (love) might be identified through its divergence from the norm—to the "first romance" stories he crafts for married couples heading to the embassy interview. Couples are often asked where they first met (and implicitly took a liking to one another). To prepare them for this question, but also to gain deeper familiarity with his clients, Kodjo asks them to narrate their life stories, and then suggests a first-encounter narrative. "If you leave it to them," he said,

> most will say they met on the beach in Lomé at one of the Sunday happenings. But that answer is too common and predictable. Since she's heard it so many times before, the consul will be suspicious or she'll quickly lose interest. I want my clients to hold the consul's attention, to have her imagine this couple falling in love, so that they become real for her. One way is to offer a story the consul's never heard before. All the better if it comes from what really happened to one of them, as their telling will make it more believable.

FIRST LOVE

"Here's one I came up with the other day for a couple going for the interview. When I was listening to the girl's life story, I asked how she met her first boyfriend. She said she was fifteen when he started coming to the house to tutor her older sister. They began flirting and eventually became sweethearts. I thought 'perfect'—this is how you will say you and your husband met. It's a fresh story, surely one the consul's never heard before."

And another first-encounter scenario, a more carefully hatched one—

deliberately located outside Lomé because the boy was from the north and the girl from the south[2]: "The couple was riding together in a *quinze places* [a fifteen-seat minivan], returning to Lomé from Kpalimé [two hours north, near the border with Ghana]. The bus broke down and everyone got out, waiting for a mechanic to arrive. Sitting by the side of the road, this couple began talking and struck up a friendship. When they returned to Lomé, they exchanged phone numbers and began seeing each other."

And another, this one derived from the girl's everyday life: "She sold *sotabi* [distilled palm wine] in the market for her mother on Sundays. One day, a handsome boy walked by and ordered a drink. He returned the next week and they flirted. Soon they were seeing each other and eventually got married."

While unique, the stories must be fully believable: "natural" and "quotidian," Kodjo opined. The advantage of drawing on real life experience is not only that the telling will be more credible but also that if the consul suddenly decides to veer into uncharted territory—to ask about selling palm wine in the market—the girl will be able to respond with ease.

Kodjo offered an intriguing observation about the Lomé consul in charge in 2016: this consul also liked to ask a couple where they first met—but when both parties were standing before him, not after separating them. Kodjo's interpretation: the consul's query was not so much instrumental (helping him decide whether the couple was being truthful by seeing whether they gave the same answers) as anthropological (he was curious about Togolese cultural life and took the opportunity to learn more). A perception on Kodjo's part that was both charming and tactical.

In 2015 things tightened up at the embassy in Lomé, and Kodjo decided to send a few of his couples to interview in Abidjan. Each interview began with the consul asking why they were living in Cote d'Ivoire, a question Kodjo had anticipated. Applying first principles—that differences matter—he invented a slightly different arrival narrative for each. One woman said her husband had come to live with family there, and that she had followed him after passing her exams back in Lomé. Another couple had been invited by the husband's aunt. A third moved there just before the April presidential elections in Togo to escape the violence that elections often bring, and now, living back in postelection Lomé, had returned to Abidjan for the interview because that was where they had first applied.

LE BARBU

Kodjo also warns couples about the Togolese man, *le barbu* (the bearded one), who works in the embassy's fraud unit and conducts preliminary interviews, during which, in the case of a pop-up, he attempts to detect real from fake couples. He's "very smart," one of Kodjo's clients commented, "and he'll try to rattle you. He likes to get up and pace around the room, then he leaves and returns to say that your wife told him something different—just to see how you'll react. Since he's Togolese, he knows all our secrets. *Il est dur* [he's a tough one]."[3]

Kodjo was particularly upset at the way an inept client fell into the trap of le barbu in summer 2009, despite prior warnings. At one point during the interview, the hirsute interrogator left the room, then returned and told the young man that he had just spoken to his wife and that she had revealed that theirs was not a real marriage. The bearded one offered the boy an out, however: if he told the truth, he would give him the visa, while denying his "wife" because he, not she, was the lottery winner—at which point the boy promptly spilled the beans. When they went before the consul she confronted the two of them with their different stories—the wife had not in fact said theirs was a fake marriage, insisting under intense pressure that it was real—and the boy realized he'd been had. This client showed up in tears at Kodjo's office two days later, saying he wanted to bring charges against the bearded one for "lying and entrapment." But Kodjo had little sympathy. He felt that he had warned the client in advance of precisely this mode of hard-nosed interrogation and told him he had no one to blame but himself.

The bearded one was also known for asking an interviewee to describe the apartment where he and his wife live—the placement of furniture, the color of the curtains, the brand of the television or electric fan—and mid-interview to ask whether they have the keys so that they might do a site visit. Anticipating such, Kodjo moves his couples into a room or apartment—often that of a family member—a month before the interview. He makes sure the furniture conforms to that of newlyweds with limited means and hangs family and honeymoon photos of the couple on the walls. He also tours the neighborhood to alert neighbors that someone from the embassy might show up to ask questions about the couple.

On one such occasion—though this after, not during, the interview—the other member of the fraud unit, a young Togolese woman, tried to visit the apartment of an interviewing couple, but she arrived just after a heavy rain

and her small car was unable to traverse a mini-lake in front of the house. A neighborhood resident reported that she returned an hour later in one of the embassy's four-wheel-drive vehicles. This time she was able to navigate the water and, once on the other side, toured the neighborhood, where she received confirmation from residents that the couple had long-standing residence. They got their visas.[4]

Another house visit didn't go so well for a couple. Entering the courtyard of the apartment complex where the winner and her husband claimed they were living, the embassy's fraud officer greeted a woman tending a charcoal fire and asked where they might find the husband of the one she was with—to which the surprised woman responded that the girl "wasn't married." Visa denied.[5]

THE RIGHT TO CITIZENSHIP

As final encouragement before they go for the interview, Kodjo tells his clients that, having been selected in the lottery, they have a right to their visa and to US citizenship, and that no one can take it away. If they stand strong and show courage, they will get their visas.

A fascinating moment for me occurred at such a pre-interview pep talk in June 2011. Kodjo finished by telling the couple that they, not the consul, held the "truth" about their case. The embassy knew nothing about them, he said, except what was written on their forms and what they would say during the interview. "The entire case is in your hands." This view that the world they constructed and performed in words constituted the truth about their world—that no external proof existed, nothing outside of or beyond the documents, that all was relative to that which they performed in words and affect—struck me as flawless in its logic and fully in step with postcolonial West African times, and as representing sage advice for the challenge ahead.

This moment also helped make sense of a puzzling statement by Kodjo several years earlier. In 2005, when the embassy sensed, perhaps for the first time, that there was hustling going on around the lottery, the ambassador went on Togolese television to warn against visa fraud and to say that going forward the consulate would assume that all who came for the DV interview were lying and fabricating identities, and that the burden was on the interviewee to prove that they weren't. Despite my own astonishment at this presumption—that an interviewee might be considered a fraudster until proven innocent—Kodjo was positively pleased with the ambassador's

statement, saying that it confirmed what he had assumed about the process all along and played to his strength: namely, that it was the responsibility of those being interviewed to present all the right "proof-of" papers—high school diploma, marriage certificate, papers of professional affiliation, and so on—and that if they did they would be granted visas. Thus, too, that the consulate would have to catch the couple in a lie or an inconsistency for them to be denied. In which case, it is up to Kodjo to prepare an airtight case, for which he is famous: to present a married couple with a perfectly believable and consistent story and documents to match. "If that's their charge, I should win every time," he added.

LOCAL INTELLIGENCE

Kodjo has eyes and ears all over Lomé. The judge who marries his clients lets him know when one of the consulate's fraud officers shows up to check winners' marriages in the court registry. Residents he puts on notice in the neighborhoods where his clients "live" also inform him if someone from the embassy shows up to ask questions. (The report of the consulate's fraud officer trading her small car for the embassy's all-terrain vehicle came from a neighborhood resident.) His own clients, and those of other visa brokers, are in and out of his office all day long, and DV chatter is constant. Other fixers get in touch when they have tips to pass on or when seeking advice. The anthropologist who interviews people inside the embassy is also a potential source of information. As mentioned earlier, Kodjo once asked whether I knew when a particularly difficult consul was going on vacation, so that he could send clients to interview when the more visa-friendly vice-consul was minding the shop. There's also the Lomé rumor mill, which is constantly pumping out information about the lottery.

Most of Kodjo's most important intel comes from interrogating clients after the embassy interview. When they leave the embassy they typically go directly to his office for a debriefing. Which consul interviewed you—a man or woman? young or old? What did they ask? How did you respond? Were they aggressive or nice? How was their French? Did you meet with the bearded one? What did they tell you at the end of the interview? All this is not only for his own edification but also to calm their nerves and help them read the signs, for he is able to tell better than they whether it was a normal interview or whether there were flash points—and whether they might expect the visa.

A couple fresh from the interview who came by his office in 2011 assumed they'd failed because the form handed to them at the end of the interview said, "This office regrets to inform you that it is unable to issue a visa to you because you have been found ineligible to receive a visa under the following section(s) of the Immigration and Nationality Act." Certainly a reasonable inference on their part. But Kodjo assured them that was the form given to all interviewees and that the phrasing simply meant that the embassy had to check further the couple's documents before proceeding. (They received their visas.)

Kodjo is sometimes also called on to correct misinformation given by the embassy to clients. In 2013 a man who had declared his wife and children on the application but went solo for the interview received his visa. He was admonished by the consul that if he wanted visas for the rest of the family, he would have to bring them to the consulate by August 30—only a few weeks later—and pay their interview fees. Distraught over how he might find so much money in such a short time, he consulted Kodjo, who immediately recognized that the embassy was in error, that the date was actually the end of September, not August. This additional month gave the man enough of a window to raise the necessary cash. But note that Kodjo is here performing embassy business—and apparently knows the rules better than some of his embassy counterparts.

CONSULAR TEMPORALITIES

Kodjo pays special attention to two consular cycles. One is that of the interview season at the embassy, which runs from October to October. After being selected in the May lottery (for applications submitted the previous October), winners with low case numbers begin interviewing in October. The interview period remains open for a full year, moving through those with low case numbers first, then on to those with higher numbers, before closing at the end of the following September.

Kodjo feels it matters when a couple interviews because their chances are high at the beginning and the end but more challenging in the middle. With a low case number (in the first five thousand), a couple can interview early (November–April) and is likely to get through, even a pop-up. At the end of the consular year—in August–September—chances are also good because end-of-the-year backlog (and a State Department rule that all lottery visas must be issued by the last day of September) means that dossiers tend not to

receive the same level of scrutiny as those scheduled for May–August. He may ask them to defer until early September, especially when he has a couple he's unsure of (one that isn't too sharp, one he thinks might buckle under consular scrutiny), in the hopes of sneaking them through.

While this strategy—waiting until September—worked for him for several years, things turned in 2013. Cases that piled up at the end went untreated and applicants were never called to fetch their passports. After waiting several months, these applicants returned to retrieve their passports and were greeted at the embassy with a simple, crushing "je suis désolé" (I'm sorry), without further explanation. But then things changed back again in 2014, with all cases vetted by the end of October, which Kodjo attributed to the arrival of a new set of consuls.

The other periodicity is that of the two-year rotation of individual consuls as they move through their posting, and the way in which they change over time as they grow into and out of their jobs. "Consuls are often more sympathetic at the start of their terms, giving out many visas," Kodjo claims. "Then they get harder, and some, like Brown and Decker, become mean because they think all are trying to scam them. When that happens few will get their visas, whether they're legitimate or not. But there are exceptions; Maria Espinoza was consistent all the way through, and so was Mr. Ball." "So you'd rather send someone early in a consul's term?" I asked. "Yes, that's the best time."

Kodjo pays acute attention to this consular ebb and flow, sometimes adapting cases midstream. In summer 2011 he had several interviews scheduled for Cotonou, but things tightened up there, and his intel suggested that the consul was at the end of his term. Kodjo quickly asked clients to request a transfer of their files to Lomé, giving as the reason that they had moved back home. He'd never done this before mid-case, but both times the strategy worked.

IMPROVISING STRATEGY

A string of Kodjo's cases in the late 2000s presented new challenges and required special attention. This because more and more winners were bringing pop-up partners to the interview, and the consulate was cracking down on marriages it assumed were fraudulent.

With this tightening at the embassy, Kodjo decided that instead of sending both spouses for the interview, he would try the winner alone—not only

to reduce the chance of detection presented by interviewing one spouse in isolation from the other but also to break the monotony of the parade of couples before the consul. This went against embassy rules, however, which mandated that all those listed on the application (winner, spouse, children) must present themselves at the embassy on the day of the interview.[6] The excuse Kodjo invented for his client was that his sponsor in the States had fallen on hard times and could only host a single person; Kodjo hoped that a sympathetic consul might make an exception. The consul took the bait but nevertheless asked whether the applicant could provide proof of his claim—for which Kodjo produced an email, appropriately backdated, from the States-side host stating that he was unable to care for the interviewee's wife right now. The consul considered this adequate and awarded him the visa. (Within a few hours, word was out on the street that Kodjo's client had succeeded in going through solo, with calls pouring in asking what was his "secret.")

While successful, this small triumph, this go-it-alone strategy, also opened a new set of challenges. Most critically, Kodjo had to convince a financier in the States—who had already paid a significant sum of money, including Kodjo's service fee—that it was in their interest to forgo a visa for their family member for the short-term and to trust that the winner would later put in the request to bring that family member over. Further, they had to think ahead to what might be asked of them at the time of the request (two to three years down the road). Surely the consul would request all the same proof-of-marriage documentation and any other evidence that might prove their relationship was real. Kodjo thus instructed the young man who went through solo to send periodically from the US emails to his "wife" with affectionate messages: "*Chérie* I've arrived . . . I miss you terribly," "I think of you every day and want you by my side. I am looking for work so that I can buy you a plane ticket." The winner also sent money to his wife via Western Union, with instructions to archive all receipts—a move that Kodjo thought would constitute particularly strong proof that their marriage was real.

Again, the tactic worked. After two years, the husband petitioned the embassy and his wife was granted a visa. Even Kodjo was surprised at the rapidity with which she acquired hers and thought it might have been influenced by the fact that the man had filed his request after enlisting in the US Army.

While the strategy of sending a spouse solo worked for Kodjo that time, it proved more troublesome in a second case in 2008, one in which he also

thought it wiser to send only the man for the interview (but further complicated by the fact that he thought the girl was not quick on her feet and would have a hard time handling trick questions at the interview, even in easier times). The States-side financier was distrustful from the start, suspecting that Kodjo might be trying to hustle them by selling the file she'd already purchased to another. (Her worry was not entirely baseless, as Lomé's sidewalk radio that summer was filled with rumors of just such sale and resale. Indeed, as described in more detail in chapter 4, Kodjo himself had detected several false winners' letters.) After several trans-Atlantic phone calls, the financier remained unconvinced and wanted Kodjo to speak further with "family members" in Lomé. Kodjo agreed and three men showed up at his office one afternoon, "brothers" of the young woman, to discuss their sister's case. After two hours Kodjo seemed to win them over, and they told him he seemed to have their sister's best interests in mind and that sending his client alone for the interview made the most sense. Just then, a friend of Kodjo's walked in and recognized one of the visitors as an undercover officer—at which point the latter admitted that he had been hired by the family to investigate whether Kodjo was trying to scam them. In leaving, he reiterated that he hadn't detected any wrongdoing on Kodjo's part.[7]

Despite this small triumph for Kodjo, the financier in the States nevertheless forced Kodjo's hand and insisted that both husband and wife (winner and beneficiary) go for the interview together; she was able to get her way because it was her money financing the interview. Needless to say, they failed. When I saw him the next day, Kodjo felt particularly badly for the winner, who, he said, had a right to his visa and was only denied because of the imprudent actions of another.

During 2007–2008 Kodjo had to attend to an additional change to embassy protocol. Because of the high rate of perceived marriage fraud, the consulate announced that it was closing the window on adding a spouse to a dossier after the initial application. Kodjo knew this went against DV rules and against the spirit of American ideas about marriage—that you might fall in love and marry at any time—but he adjusted to this change by continuing to add spouses after the initial application and backdating their marriages to the small window between the original application and receipt of the letter from the State Department announcing their selection. Again he was successful, and all of his clients went through that year.

To draw out a theme that has been implicit, culture is in play throughout the interview process, informing perceptions on both sides and crucially influencing those decisions made by consuls about applicants. This is true not only in the more obvious sense that consuls need to familiarize themselves with unfamiliar cultural practices and situations—Togolese marriage protocols and gifting practices, West African school and workplace habits—but also in more subtle ways.

One of the Lomé consuls told me it took her several months to realize that when a Togolese woman responded to a question by avoiding eye contact, it didn't mean she was hiding something but instead that she was looking away out of respect. This consul also said it took time on the job to learn that one of the State Department's stock questions used to root out fraudsters (posed first to one spouse, then the other)—"What side of the bed do you sleep on?"—made little sense to Togolese. They don't divide the bed the same way every night as do (many) middle-class Americans.

Another commonly asked question that doesn't translate: "What is your spouse's favorite color?" Togolese generally don't have a favorite color. When I've asked friends in Lomé, they say they appreciate many colors, and they would likely respond to such a question with whatever color they are wearing that day. ("Today, I have a smart red outfit on and my preferred color is red; yesterday, I wore a blue shirt that I also like . . .")

But culture informs consular practice in another way as well—a cultural goes-without-saying, largely inchoate and unacknowledged, that lies at the heart of consular reason and is decisive in determining visa outcomes: whether one has been honest or truthful on the application. Before conducting this research I would not have identified not lying as a core American value alongside the usual suspects—individualism, autonomy, self-reliance, freedom, work ethic, innovation, entrepreneurialism. But now, at least in the context of determining future citizenship at the consulates, truth-telling seems to me as important as, if not more important than, other cardinal values. And more important than whether a candidate fulfills the qualifications satisfying specific work or educational criteria decided upon by Congress when it established the DV Lottery.

To wit, during the visa lottery process, if you lie about your identity on the application, you're out. If you lie during the interview, you're out. If you

falsify a document, you're out. If you answer a question differently than your spouse—the presumption being that you're lying about your relationship—you're out. And if you fibbed once, it's assumed you'll do it again: One lie and you're out. No second chances, no citizenship.

I asked one of the consuls whether a couple I know who tried to game the DV Lottery one year (with both husband and wife applying under a false identity) but then applied the following year as themselves—a true case, described in more detail in chapter 3—could be forgiven for their prior indiscretion? "That would be hard, I don't think so," he replied.

"But why?" I pressed. "They're a real couple, legitimately married for many years, and only assumed the identity of another the first time because they thought that would be their one chance at a visa. Little did they know that the wife would be selected the following year." "If they lied the first time," he replied, "you imagine that they could be lying again. It's hard to ever again trust someone after they've lied to you." (So whether you can trust someone [not to lie] is now the index to becoming a citizen? And what of all those US tax evaders? What of Donald Trump?)

But what if we think of lying less as moral failing and more as practical reason? Namely, that people might deploy untruths about themselves for pragmatic reasons: to be able to pay the interview fee, because they want to make a better life for their family, because they know that acquiring a visa might be the difference between life and death. Such is life today in the postcolony, with bare survival constantly in question.[8]

Note, too, that for Togolese, telling small lies or diversionary tales is often a way of protecting oneself and one's secrets. When a Togolese friend traveled to the US to visit family, she told no one about her trip except her husband and children—none of her close friends, no one at work—only mentioning to her fellow employees the day before leaving that she "would be away for a while." One of Kodjo's winners made him swear that he would not tell the winner's brother, who lived around the corner from Kodjo's office and stopped in daily, that he had been selected in the lottery, cooking up an elaborate ruse as to why he was spending so much time in Kodjo's office.

When I have asked Togolese why they feel compelled to conceal, to protect secrets, they've responded that they're worried about jealousy and spiritual attack, that they don't want others to imperil their journey. Among other things, this sensibility strikes me as a way of carefully marshalling

one's energies for the trip ahead, of cultivating one's preparedness and avoiding having to spend energy on the pettiness and jealousy of others. But all this requires the telling of partial truths.

A Togolese friend likes to chastise me for revealing things about myself or others that she considers best left unsaid. "You Americans reveal too much," she says. "When you tell others too much about yourself, it usually comes back to harm you." Togolese are masters of indirection, of circumlocution, the feint, the small lie. They answer potentially invasive questions with "I don't know," "They didn't tell me," "I'm going somewhere," as a way of safeguarding secrets and protecting self.

Indeed, I would venture to say that the value Americans place on truth-telling is matched by the value Togolese place on its opposite: artful deception. But if speaking indirectly is discursive norm among Togolese, how to judge the moral fiber of someone during an interview when, for US consuls, its opposite—transparency/honesty—is of paramount value?

My point here is not that consuls should check all of their cultural baggage at the door and open up the DV Lottery to every confidence trick and identity fabricator. As someone born and bred in the US, I understand all too well that deep cultural wellspring from whence their marching orders come. Just scratch the surface of the national psyche: not only is not telling a lie one of the ten commandments, but this verity also gets recited, mantra-like, as if the moral core of two of our most famous presidents, George "I cannot tell a lie" Washington and "Honest Abe" Lincoln.

But we do need to understand that when Togolese visa lottery applicants invent false identities, or engage in faux marriages, or tell small lies at the interview, it is not out of some great moral failing. It is often for the most pragmatic of reasons—to pay the bills, to feed a family, to conjure a future out of a precarious present—*but also perhaps because they want US citizenship too much*. Moreover, many have told me that once on the other side—under different circumstances, when they are able to put bread on the table—they will ruthlessly follow the laws of the land if for no other reason than that they know they have to safeguard their cherished papers and avoid deportation at all cost.

Do we really want citizenship tests to rely more on truth-telling than on someone's job readiness, or their work ethic, or on those other core values that animate the American spirit? I know someone who's as smart as they come, the most creative of entrepreneurs, an innovator by nature, rule-

respecting in the extreme—in short, possessing all the qualities of Americanness pure. But because Kodjo helps Togolese seek a better life abroad, and occasionally to falsify their papers in order to do so, he'll never get the visa or the citizenship that he covets more than anything else. Something in this picture doesn't quite add up.

3

Kinship by Other Means

When I visited Kodjo on a steamy day in July 2010, he was vexed by the case of a young couple going for their second embassy interview. The wife had been pregnant—to her real, not her fictive, spouse—when they went for the first interview (to present their documents), and a sympathetic consul told them she hoped the verification process went quickly so that they might arrive in the States before their baby was born, thereby avoiding having to pay an additional fee for the baby's visa. But months went by before they were called for the second interview, and the woman gave birth in the interim. Kodjo's worry now was that the embassy might demand a DNA test before giving a visa to the baby, thus threatening to uncover their ruse.

Given the risks, the sponsor in the States (the husband's sister) thought it best for the couple to leave the baby at home for the second interview, hoping the consul wouldn't remember their earlier meeting. But Kodjo worried that an alert consul with a good memory might wonder why they hadn't brought the infant to the interview, given the large upside of getting a visa

for the infant right away. Waiting to apply not only would mean that mother and child would be separated for several years but also would certainly set the couple up for a DNA test down the road, the results of which would reveal that the child and its mother's visa spouse were unrelated, also potentially reopening the entire case. In the end Kodjo convinced the couple that the risk of taking the baby was less than leaving it behind—as he put it, since they had "opened the door [of pregnancy] they couldn't turn back now."

In prepping the couple for the interview, Kodjo insisted on one thing: they must present themselves at the window in front of the consul with the "father" holding the baby and that they pass it back and forth during the interview (but, he also instructed, not *too* often). The strategy worked like a charm. The consul was friendly from the start and appeared positively taken with the infant, even leaving her perch behind the window to hold it in her arms. After a few minutes of light conversation—and no hint of a DNA test—she granted visas to all three.

Kodjo drew an important lesson from this case and stumbled into a new strategy. While he was initially upset at the couple for getting pregnant without telling him, because of the complications and risks the pregnancy introduced, he now realized that a woman's bulging stomach or a baby in arms might have a powerful legitimating effect. There seemed something incontrovertible and real about a mother with a child or its father showing it affection. Here the baby seemed to stand in for the words spoken during the interview itself. Instead of earnest, believable responses to the consul's questions or proof-of-marriage photos constituting a couple's authenticity, the pregnancy alone seemed to do that work, with few words necessary.

AN ADDITIONAL DILEMMA presented itself during the run-up to the pregnant couple's second interview: since the mother had already given birth, which father's name should be put on the baby's birth certificate—the birth or the fictive father's? Kodjo insisted that for the interview it had to be the latter (but he also suggested that the parents obtain a second birth certificate showing the birth father's name so that it would be easy for the child to later reclaim his natal identity). Still, the fictive father (the lottery winner) worried about giving his name to another's son—as did Kodjo after the case he had been involved in two years earlier in Minnesota (in which the child's biological father tried to claim child support from the lottery father—see chapter 1). With no other guarantees in sight, Kodjo and his client had to

rely on the couple's word that they were "devout Christians" and would not take advantage of the winner.

"Here's another interesting detail," Kodjo added in further parsing the case:

> After arriving in the US, the woman will divorce her visa spouse before returning to Lomé to remarry her husband and apply for a visa for him and an older daughter of theirs. However, since the consulate's registry has her married to another man without [a] daughter, she won't be able to claim their daughter as hers. Instead, her husband will say she's a daughter from a previous marriage and will have to generate the appropriate papers—a birth certificate with another "wife's" name on it and a letter from that imaginary wife allowing him to take "their" daughter to the US.

Kodjo concluded: "It's also likely that the consul will ask for a DNA test [to ensure that the daughter is indeed the second husband's child] but the man will be up to the challenge."

Kodjo loves working his way through these details—*suis bien* (follow carefully), he's fond of saying—as he leads you down a Moroccan alley of legal twists and turns, his mind quickly seizing on the essentials of a situation and anticipating the afterlife of decisions made at the time. (His agility of thought and capacious memory makes this something of an ideal calling. Had destiny treated him differently, he surely would have had a brilliant career as a courtroom litigator.)

Notice in this case how culture and the law—US immigration and jurisprudential categories, American notions of biological kinship—reconfigure categories of relatedness and belonging at every step, and how this couple must calibrate their future together and their identities according to its logic and through the gaze of its purveyors. Not only must the wife marry a stranger, but she and her husband must divorce and then remarry, give another man's name to their infant (before changing it back), claim their daughter as his but not hers, and create for the husband a fictitious former wife—all the while spending years apart before reuniting as a family.

In this chapter I follow the cases of several visa lottery couples, exploring the ways in which situational kinship creates new desires and family forms. Located in the interstices between known practice and imagined category, visa lottery kinship is at once reiterative and innovative, drawing on everyday patterns while also refiguring them—kinship-with-a-difference (Der-

rida 1982; Gates 1988), as it were. Moreover, DV kinship is "performative" in the fullest Butlerian (1989, 2011) sense, often bringing into being and making real that which it enacts.

FAUX REAL?

Note that visa lottery couples (faux couples) go through a (real) marriage ceremony at the courthouse, before a judge and witnesses.[1] After exchanging vows and rings, they take pictures with family and friends on the courthouse steps, often following this up with "honeymoon" photos on the beach or at the swimming pool of the five-star Hotel Sarakawa. In prepping for the embassy interview they imagine themselves sweethearts—falling for each other the first time they met, honeymooning together—and become versed in the affective and bodily intimacies of the other (favorite foods and colors, everyday habits, body scars), as if lovers of long standing. As well, they often live together for at least a month before the embassy interview—in case the consulate's fraud unit calls for an impromptu home visit—and again for several months after arriving in the United States while awaiting their green cards.

Given the intensity of this performed conjugality, it should not be surprising that some visa couples fall in love, or better put—since that phrase betrays cultural bias—end up staying together and having children. While Kodjo warns his clients to avoid any romantic involvement until after they get the visa, some can't resist and throw caution to the wind before the interview itself. Others wait until they have the visa before indulging their desires. More commonly, desirous couples hold off until they're in the States—with enough distance between themselves and spouses or lovers at home—before deepening the relationship.

I have met couples who've fallen for each other at each of these stages: before the interview, after the interview, after arriving in the States. The last is the most common, not only because distance conceals but also because of the shared intimacy of being together in a faraway place. Regardless of prior commitments, if attracted to one another, if their social indicators (age, class, ethnicity) line up, if the man has paid the interview fee and plane ticket (but usually not the other way around), the couple might well decide to remain together.

But DV romance isn't always so neat. One married winner who began an affair with his lottery wife before the interview never told his (real) wife he'd been selected, let alone that he was sleeping with the other woman. The plot

thickened when his wife found the money for the embassy interview (sent from the States by the man's sister) in her husband's belongings and—not knowing what it was for, though clearly without qualms—replaced several $100 bills with counterfeits. The fake bills were discovered when the man tried to convert them to CFA francs on the black market (luckily not at the embassy itself) before the interview. He suspected his wife but couldn't accuse her because he'd never announced his planned departure for the States or that another woman was paying his way.

Another of Kodjo's winners who also began a liaison with his lottery spouse carelessly left his papers on the table at home, with the other woman listed as his wife. When his (real) wife found the papers, she imagined this other was trying to steal her husband and went to the embassy to rat them out. Needless to say, the husband paid the price twice over—he was denied the visa and lost his spouse.

And another, this one messier still. A Togolese man already in the US wanted to bring over his fiancée and purchased the dossier of a male winner. The winner and the beneficiary got married, went for the embassy interview, and received their visas. Along the way, however, they fell for each other and the fiancée became pregnant. When the cuckold discovered their liaison—after their arrival in the States, after he'd paid all fees and purchased both plane tickets—he became enraged and threatened his fiancée and her child. He failed to harm them but vowed that he would make things miserable for them for the rest of their lives.

In a case with a different twist, two friends—one married with three children, the other engaged to be married—won as a married couple. (Two friends sometimes apply together as a lark, never imagining they'll be selected.) Because they filed together, their "marriage" normally wouldn't get flagged by the embassy computer as a pop-up, and because the primary applicant had the baccalaureate, their case promised to sail through the vetting and interview process. All they needed were appropriately backdated marriage papers, easily obtained from a judge at the prefecture. But entanglements at home intervened. The man's wife (who didn't know her husband had been selected, nor that he had applied with another woman) had already accused him, apparently wrongly, of having an interest in this female friend. Moreover, the man was a pastor, who would now have to set Christian principles aside to engage in a second (polygamous) union. For her part, the woman was hesitant to go through a marriage ceremony with a man who was not her fiancé.

Because of these complications, the couple decided not to proceed. But a friend sent them to Kodjo, who recognized a sure thing and urged them to stay the course, insisting that this was the chance of a lifetime, that their visas were virtually guaranteed, and that all would be forgiven at home when the man's wife and children (and the woman's fiancé) were on the other side of the Atlantic. Not surprisingly, Kodjo won out but he insisted the couple tell no one of their good fortune, especially the man's wife, until after they received their visas. He worried that if the wife found out, she would go to the embassy and spoil the case. Kodjo also eased the woman's disquiet about marrying her friend by getting the judge to let them sign the marriage papers without appearing in court. A marriage on paper alone, without its embodied performance before a judge, apparently felt less like a real marriage to her (and no doubt sent a message to her friend, the young pastor, in case he had other designs).

Oddly, on the day of the interview, they had a close call. Despite the fact that their marriage had been declared on the original application and shouldn't have aroused the least suspicion that theirs wasn't a true marriage, they were nevertheless separated and each was asked a series of questions about the other. When the woman was asked the name of her husband's best friend (a question they had practiced with Kodjo), she drew a blank and blurted out the first name that came into her head, "Emmanuel." Fortunately, when the couple traded places, passing one another in the hallway, she was able to whisper "Emmanuel" loud enough for her husband to hear but not so loud that it would attract consular suspicion. The husband of course had little clue what this name might mean—until the consul sprang the question on him fifteen minutes later. He gave the right answer and they received their visas.[2]

Kodjo himself is not un-implicated in such conjugal acrobatics. He has married three of his clients but they each failed at the embassy interview, so now he is trying to send his (real) wife to the States as the spouse of one of his winners (where, once on the other side, she will divorce the winner, remarry Kodjo, and bring him to the US). But given all these infidelities—these real marriages that dissolve, these faux marriages that become real—shouldn't he be worried about marrying his wife to another? "You ought to be," a friend cajoled in his office one afternoon. "Your wife is a beautiful woman. If given the chance, I'd jump into bed with her in a flash. When she and her lottery husband are far away in the US, you don't think that man, and perhaps your wife as well, will be tempted?" "I've thought about that

already," Kodjo fought back, "and will send my wife to live with one of my friends, perhaps even with *l'Americain,* not with her visa spouse. But the lottery is risky business, and that's a risk I'm willing to take."

BRIDEWEALTH, AS IT WERE

If performing conjugality can produce conjugality, it is also the case that conventional conjugal entitlements may seep into DV practice. Thus some financing "husbands" see the visa payment as a type of bridewealth that entitles them to marital rights. In one instance one of Kodjo's States-side clients expected his visa spouse—the one he'd financed—to cook for him and share his bed. Another case, of a man who paid the woman's fees and her plane ticket, then felt entitled after their arrival in the States, had an unusual twist. The woman refused the man's advances while keeping the door open, insisting that if he wanted to become her husband, he would have to return to Lomé to ask her parents for her hand and present them with the appropriate gifts. Only then would she consider capitulating to his desires.

"Certainly, why wouldn't it?" Kodjo responded to my query as to whether conventional conjugal entitlements seep into DV practice. "The man is investing in the woman's future. This is what a woman looks for in a husband, someone who will provide for her." The following day he added, "As confirmation that it is a type of *dot* [bridewealth], think about this: all the arranged marriages that become real are when the boy is financing. If the girl is paying for the boy, it's unlikely they'll continue as a couple. Girls don't pay la dot."

But consider the upshot: among other things, the visa lottery is a marriage-generating institution, enabling Togolese to meet one another and fashion futures together. When I put it to Kodjo in this way, he laughed and said, "Yes, of course the lottery can be the occasion for marriage. But what's the difference between meeting your future wife at the beach, at the shopping mall, or through the lottery?"

IDENTITY EXCHANGE

An extravagant case of improvisational kinship—what the consul who described it to me referred to as "identity theft"—came to the embassy's attention in 2010. A lottery winner had put his wife's name on his application but couldn't afford the interview fee or plane ticket and found a female financier

in the US who needed papers and was willing to assume his wife's identity in return for paying his costs. The gambit worked: the woman returned to Lomé, obtained a birth certificate and passport in the wife's name, passed the embassy interview, and after returning to the States, finally received her green card. Of necessity she kept using the name of the man's real wife because all of her papers were in that woman's name, and at one point she returned to Lomé to renew her passport, again in the other woman's name. A few weeks later the man's real wife applied for a passport and was turned down because, she was told, she already had a passport that had been "recently renewed." Confused and angry—she had no idea her husband had sold her name to another woman—she filed a complaint with the Ministry of Justice, which traced the passport and contacted the embassy. Upon completing its investigation, the State Department began deportation proceedings against the other woman.

An even more byzantine case of DV identity substitution—a man taking on the identity of his deceased cousin and his wife marrying the dead man, what anthropologists are fond of calling "ghost marriage" (Evans-Pritchard 1951)—came to a sad denouement in 2008. A man who had been selected in the lottery died before he was able to go for the interview. Not wanting to let a golden opportunity slip by, the deceased's cousin decided to step into the dead man's shoes and go for the interview in his name. He thus applied for a passport in the cousin's name (while using his own photo) and married his wife to the deceased man. There was a delay at the passport office, however, with rumors circulating that Togolese authorities were tightening up on passport fraud, and he and his wife decided not to retrieve theirs, thus forgoing the embassy interview.

As luck would have it, the wife was selected in the lottery the following year—this time as herself. Because she had the baccalaureate and had listed her husband and children on the application, theirs should have been an open-and-shut case. But at the interview the consul asked if she'd ever applied before—she had chosen to leave blank the section of the application where they ask you to declare any previous spouses—and she replied no (preferring, she said later, to risk that the consul hadn't noticed she'd applied the year before as the spouse of another rather than having to account for why she had married two men in the same year). But the consul had run a photo-recognition test, which checks an applicant's picture against all others in the system, and held up the one she'd used on her application the previous year, asking whether it was her photo. She admitted it was and,

caught in a lie, was denied the visa. Sad, not only because she and her husband were fully legitimate and their application met all the requirements but also because, sensing a sure thing, they had borrowed over $3,000—a lifetime's savings for most Togolese—to pay for the medical exam and embassy interview for themselves and their three children.

HOW OTHER IS THIS?

While stretching relatedness into novel terrain, visa lottery kinship is nevertheless cut from the same cloth as everyday Togolese kinship. Improvisational pragmatics, the privileging of interest over love (or biology), assuming fictive identities, document tampering—all these are the stuff of kinship as known and practiced, and all have the same goal: satisfying concrete needs, both material and social, by whatever means possible. This is why few Togolese I have spoken to find what Kodjo does odd or suspect, and why even high-ranking state officials are his clients.

In July 2012 a schoolteacher from northern Togo told me he had just married his fiancée but registered their marriage in a shadow registry at the *préfecture*—where, he said, they have "two marriage registries, one real, the other false"—because he didn't want her father to find out that they were married.[3] Her father, a local politician, was opposed to the marriage because my acquaintance was Christian, not Muslim, and because he couldn't stomach the idea of his daughter marrying "the son of his enemy." (The father had been a lifelong political opponent of Togo's dictator Gnassingbé Eyadéma, who hailed from the same ethnic group as my friend.) By registering the marriage in the shadow account—a real marriage in a fake registry is what, a "real-fake"?—my friend was attempting to ensure that the young woman's well-connected father wouldn't be able to discover their clandestine union and spoil their plans for a future together.

But most Togolese have stories like this—of document manipulation, of assuming the identity of another, of turning relatedness upside down to meet needs, of counterfeits and shadow accounts all around. In the northern community where I have conducted research for many years, villagers recently gamed a Danish nongovernmental organization that was sponsoring girls to attend school—though only one per family—by sending second and third daughters to live with relatives or friends (where those relatives claimed the daughters as their own). In the same village a man I know has three birth certificates for each of his children—one from when

they were born, another from when a schoolteacher urged him to take four years off their ages (so they wouldn't be disadvantaged when looking for jobs), and a third from when he discovered that the teacher had taken his money and run (never registering them and leaving the family with fake certificates)—which he now had to replace with real ones (albeit with their ages falsified).

These are everyday realities in this post-colony, in city and village alike, and it is in this sense that I mean that visa lottery practice is of a piece with, rather than a departure from, quotidian kinship. Togolese inhabit a world that is "allegorical" (Clifford 1986), in which every conversation, every encounter, every relationship has hidden meanings, and in which little is as it seems. Nothing is self-evident, and "transparency"—that keyword of the international community and the consulate—finds little place in people's everyday lexicons or lives.

But is it only Togolese or West Africans who traffic in nontransparent or compromised identities these days? Are we not living in a global age when moving between real and fake (assuming for the moment those categories have stable meaning) broadly defines social personhood, and in which the boundary between the two is forever blurred (Comaroff and Comaroff 2016)? As mentioned in chapter 1, product piracy is virtually synonymous with global capitalism today—how to verify whether your Nokia is real or not, whether your North Face jacket is a knockoff, whether you were taken for a ride when you bought a piece of designer clothing? Then, too, Americans cheat on their taxes and their spouses with such regularity that noncheaters are today the exception. American university students plagiarize essays (by purchasing them on the internet) and cheat on exams at alarmingly high rates. Wall street investors—well, we all know what they did in 2008, with their shadow accounts, their swindling of clients, and their complicity in allowing the biggest Ponzi scheme of all time to flourish in the belly of the beast, nearly bringing the global financial system to its knees.

Nor is it any accident, and indeed I see it as symptomatic, that American pop culture is positively obsessed with conspiracy theory. Many of the most-watched television shows of the past fifteen years (*Alias*, *24*, *Homeland*, *The Wire*, *House of Cards*, to name but a few) are dripping with conspiracy thinking, driven by the message that things are not as they seem and that dark forces lurk behind every event. Americans too, I would insist, inhabit allegorical worlds.

Moreover, more to the point of this chapter, when allegorical thinking

subtends daily experience, how do we decide the difference between real and fake? A real might be a fake, whereas a fake can become real. And the cross-breeding and blurring between the two seems to multiply all the time—now we have real-fakes (in the marriage registry) and fake-reals (among the letters sent to winners by the State Department), and many shadings in between.

AGONISTIC KINSHIP, LOTTERY STYLE

A case that is dripping with recognizably West African kinship attachments and antagonisms (Geschiere 2013) preoccupied Kodjo in early 2012. A couple he had sent to Cotonou (in order to avoid the consuls in Lomé) returned with visas in hand to wait for the financier—the woman's fiancé, a Togolese in the US Army—to purchase their plane tickets. The woman decided to stay with her fiancé's uncle but quickly fell out with him when she sided with the uncle's wife in a nasty dispute the latter was having over one of her husband's dalliances with another woman. Things got so bad that the uncle refused to let his nephew's fiancée leave for the States, telling the nephew to hold off on purchasing the plane tickets and instructing Kodjo to keep both passports under lock and key until the nephew returned to Lomé to help resolve the dispute. In addition to feeling wounded and to worries about witchcraft—unresolved disputes can quickly turn occult—the uncle claimed he had an obligation to his nephew to reveal his future wife's true colors, lest the nephew blame him later for not having been warned.

Kodjo was drawn in to the dispute both by the nephew (who wanted to make sure his fiancée arrived in the States before her visa expired, six months from its date of issue) and by the uncle (who refused to let her leave until the nephew returned home). He bounced back and forth between the two for weeks, ringing up international phone charges, attempting to calm the one while prodding the other. His commitment, he claimed, was not only to the uncle and the nephew but also to the young man on the sideline—Kodjo's principal client in this case, the lottery selectee, who stood to lose all because of a family dispute beyond his control. Eventually the nephew flew back to Lomé to meet with his uncle, and after an all-day palaver with family notables (at which Kodjo was called on as a witness), he was able to leave for the States with his fiancée.

Interestingly, Kodjo held most of the cards throughout the dispute—the passports were in his possession, and he knew what the uncle did not: that

the nephew had already purchased the plane tickets. Thus he could have given the visa couple their passports and been done with it. But he played his hand carefully because he didn't want to alienate either side. The uncle was a moneyed, well-connected customs officer—someone Kodjo might need to call on down the road—while the nephew was a potential source of future clients (financiers) in the States.

Note once again how Kodjo is forever involved in much more than just recruiting applicants and preparing couples for the interview. He plays a cameo, even at times a central, role in the soap opera lives of his clients. But all this extracurricular activity—participating in family disputes, counseling couples, helping to sort out clients' lives after they arrive in the US—is time-consuming and was never part of the visa broker's job description.

Another case of fraught kinship, of intrafamilial debt and coercion, this one from Ghana in the early 2000s. After being selected in the DV, a man added to his dossier his wife and children, as well as his niece (the daughter of an older brother).[4] They all got their visas and settled in Philadelphia. There, his niece began dating an undocumented Ghanaian man with whom she eventually had two children. When, at this boyfriend's urging, they decided to get married (so that he could get papers), the uncle and the family back home refused, saying that she was obliged to return the debt to the uncle by paying him back in kind, like for like, by marrying the son of a friend back home, whom she would then bring to the States. She and her boyfriend attempted to buy her way out of the debt, but the family refused, insisting that the obligation was not fungible. She capitulated, returned to Ghana, and married the young man in question. In the meantime, however, the boyfriend grew tired of waiting for his papers and took up with another woman. "What about their relationship and the children they have together?" I asked the Ghanaian woman narrating the story. "Is he willing to abandon all that?" She laughed and said, "you know African men."

THE MATERIAL IN THIS chapter suggests an interesting history of anthropology question. Why was the study of kinship such a core feature—indeed *the* core feature, the primary object of study (Wiegman 2012)—of the discipline throughout the twentieth century, whereas today, apart from a recent small renaissance in "new kinship studies,"[5] it has virtually disappeared from the discipline's portfolio of required topics and areas of exper-

tise? I cannot treat the "why" question here—it has a long and interesting response—but I do wish to underscore what this material suggests we take seriously: that kinship in the world has not gone away, that it remains at the center of social life everywhere, that it is forever reinventing itself in new and unexpected ways, and that it demands that we pay attention to its new iterations in today's late-modern world (Franklin and McKinnon 2001; Carsten 2004; McKinnon and Cannell 2013). Whether the study of queer kinship (Weston 1991; Hayden 1995; Edelman 2004; Boellstorff 2005; Munoz 2009) or assisted technologies (Thompson 2001; Inhorn and Birenbaum-Carmeli 2008; Franklin 2013) in the metropole, or of the familial entanglements of migrants and migration around the world today (Freeman 2011; Lucht 2011; Coe 2014; Cole 2014a, 2014b; Besteman 2016; Cole and Groes 2016; Feldman-Savelsberg 2016; Miraftab 2016; Richter 2018), kinship remains at the center of social life everywhere and deserves close scholarly attention.

I grew up on the cusp between pre– and post–*Writing Culture*, between kinship-at-the-center and post-kinship, moments in anthropology, entering graduate school and going to the field in the early 1980s, then getting my first job at the end of that decade. While change and paradigm critique were already in the air at that time—Marx, Wallerstein, feminism, and Derrida were everyday fare in my grad classes—certain verities of the discipline remained unchallenged, especially the call to study in a village *elsewhere*. It was critique of the Orientalist divide and of the anthropological scale of analysis (the bounded village)—pillars of the *Writing Culture* moment—that had their most profound impact on me. After defending my dissertation, about a village in northern Togo, I rewrote it from beginning to end in order to think the village beyond its borders and to see its connections to the modern and the global, a shift in scale that has carried through all my work since (Piot 1999, 2010). It is ironic, then, that in this project on Togolese participation in the US visa lottery—a project set in transnational space, driven by global fantasies, organized by post-9/11 biometrics and big data, implicating the anthropologist in blurred-boundary complicities—I also find myself returning to the oldest of village-study topics, that of kinship and the intimacies of everyday social relations. Of course it's kinship-with-a-difference, and with a different set of theoretical touchstones, but kinship all the same and in some of its classic guises. *Plus ça change . . .*

DNA testing became the new embassy fix in the mid-2000s, promising a surefire (transparent) way of catching those trying to add the children of others to their dossiers. Despite the apparent certainties DNA testing provided, however, surprises and unintended consequences remained in store for both sides, providing yet another example of the difficulty of closing loopholes to eliminate fraud and of using the latest science to do so.

The embassy was especially likely to ask for a DNA test if children were not declared on the original application but then popped up after selection. If they *were* declared, the consul would assume they were the couple's own (biological) children. But of course such is not always the case. In Togo and throughout much of the subregion, fostering is common and children circulate between households all the time (both within and between villages and cities). A man's "children" are those living with him, those he is feeding—only some of whom might be biological offspring. Children might come to him through siblings or relatives, or through marriage: his wife's children by a prior spouse or lover, if living with him, can become his children. Moreover, if his wife gives birth to a child by someone other than her husband—a lover, even a rapist—after marriage, that child belongs to her husband not to the biological father. In short, it is unlikely that all or even most Togolese children claimed as such will conform to American definitions—definitions that lie behind the DNA test—or that those entering the names of the children of others are doing so dishonestly.[6]

While the consulate's romance with DNA made it harder than before to add nonbiological children after selection, Kodjo, always parsing fine differences, found a small window that he felt would give him room to maneuver. He wondered whether small children added to a dossier—infants who had been born since the time of application, namely children under two years old (recall that it can take two years from the date of application to the time of the interview)—might get through without being called for a DNA test. He guessed right and was successful in the two cases he tried in 2010–2011. Both were children of others but because they were in possession of fictive birth certificates, passed as the children of winners.

Moreover, he toyed with the idea that some wealthy nonapplicant who wanted US citizenship for their infant might try such a strategy and bankroll a couple. While unlikely—who would care for the child in the States?—it's not entirely far-fetched. A recent fad among well-off Togolese women (wives

of ministers, members of the political elite) has been to get pregnant, acquire a tourist visa to the United States, then give birth on American soil (with the child automatically acquiring US citizenship).

But jumping on the DNA bandwagon had a surprise in store for the embassy: a DNA mismatch might reveal not so much a child who was not a couple's or a fake marriage as a marital infidelity. In December 2014 the consulate was pulled in to just such a case. When a Togolese couple in the US applied to bring over their three children, the consulate asked them to get DNA tests. Positive matches with both parents were found for only two of the children; the third was positive for the mother alone. When informed of the results, the couple, apparently distraught and quarrelling, pleaded with the consul in a string of emails not to tell their families in Lomé, where the children were staying. The irony in this instance was that, because the wife had US citizenship, she could have applied on her own to bring over all three. But of course had she attempted to do so, her husband would have discovered her secret. This case had a happy ending, however, as the consulate, in a generous gesture, allowed the woman to apply again to bring over the three children—this time on her own.

CONSULAR KINSHIP

As should be apparent, cultural specificities attend the definition of the kinship unit, the "family," that lies at the heart of the DV system. Those who are selected in the lottery and go for the interview must conform to Euro-American definitions of family: a husband-wife pair and their biological children. As suggested above, however, the Togolese definition of family is far more generous, consisting not only of a man and his wife or wives but also all those children, biological or not, that a conjugal unit takes care of and feeds.

Because they are calling the shots and offering citizenship as a gift, it is of course within the State Department's rights to set definitions as they wish. But in so doing, in insisting on American kinship norms, they create all sorts of problems and suspicions for themselves. Namely, when anomalies appear—as when applicants add the names of siblings' children or friends' children to their dossier—the consulate often suspects Togolese of trying to hustle them (of deliberately lying or engaging in fraud), when in fact they may just be playing by local rules, caught up in different cultural understandings of family (Cole and Thomas 2009).

The cultural bias that interests me even more, however—as it lies at the heart of consular worry about the fraud that surrounds the entire system—is the one that tries to differentiate a real from an arranged or "fake" marriage. In the normative American view (Schneider 1968), romance, not interest, defines the conjugal unit. But how—in any marriage, anywhere—to discover whether interest or love is operating (Chernoff 2003, 2005; Cole and Thomas 2009)? And how is a consul going to pass such judgment after a ten-minute interview?

One index the consulate relies on is whether the couple declared themselves as such when they initially applied. In such a case the consuls assume it was a legitimate ("real") marriage, rarely doubting its authenticity or subjecting the couple to cross-examination. But recall the case of the two friends (one already married, the other engaged) playing together as a lark, with both names on the original application. Or what if a couple whose marriage *was* arranged appears on the original application, influenced by the heavy imprint of their families, as many Togolese marriages still are today? Because declared early in the process, the embassy assumes it's a legitimate marriage and the couple will pass through.

Or what if—one can imagine many alternatives here—one member of a long-standing amorous (though unmarried) couple plays and wins. Should the winner be allowed to marry her lover and add him to the application before the interview, claiming that the occasion of winning the lottery (with its promise of future earnings) enabled them to get married? Presumably, following American cultural categories, this couple should qualify. But such couples are often rejected because the spouse was a pop-up, and it is assumed that they are trying to game the system.

On the flip side, a couple that marries with the express purpose of getting US green cards is considered illegitimate. Here "interest" rather than "love" is thought to define their relationship. For Togolese, however, all marriages are "interested." "A woman marries a man with money, someone who can care for her," Kodjo said one day. "A man marries a woman who will bear him children. Romance and the love you Americans imagine as the center of a marriage is not as important for us. Sure, if this couple also likes one another, all the better. But what's most important are these interests of money and children. How is a loto visa marriage any different?"

When I pressed Kodjo on the point, he turned the question around and asked how "un-interested" European marriages are? "Don't you too marry for money or class or beauty? How many rich Americans marry poor Ameri-

cans? How many white Americans marry black Americans? Not many. Few just marry as such—for love alone."

"And what about," I continued, "the consular charge that the difference is that DV marriages are expedient, too interest-driven, that people are marrying just to get the visa and then divorce?" "Well, as you know," he responded, "some lottery unions end up in marriage. But I know that many American marriages based on love end quickly as well. So I'm not sure that the length of time that a couple remains married should be determining."

"So there is no such thing as a *faux mariage*?" I asked. "I never use that term," he said. "For me, all marriages are *arrangé et interessé*."

KODJO'S THREE WIVES

If he has been successful in helping others get visas, Kodjo has experienced nothing but failure in trying to secure one for himself. Three times he has married a client-applicant, and twice proceeded to the embassy interview, only to be turned away and see his chance for a green card slip through his fingers.

The first of his three wives was an eighteen-year-old who became tongue-tied when she found herself face-to-face with the consul. After entering her in the 2001 raffle, Kodjo was thrilled when she was selected, and he immediately married her and apprenticed her into batik-making, a trade on that year's job list. He then raised the money for the medical exam and interview, and spent weeks preparing her for the consul's questions—plying her with information about her trade, about their marriage and honeymoon, about when and where they met and fell in love. On the day of the interview, however, her nerves got the best of her. Standing before the glass window that separates applicant from consul, straining with her own broken French to understand the equally imperfect French of the official before her, struggling to keep straight the information Kodjo had stuffed into her about their marriage and her profession, she froze up and failed to answer easy question after easy question: "When were you married?" "What is the name of your employer?" "How long have you been making batik?" Kodjo sat on the bench behind her, jumping out of his skin, but as the trailing spouse, he could do nothing but remain muzzled and mute.

Two years later, aiming to enhance his chances, Kodjo signed up only female applicants. When the results were announced, he emailed me to say that this time he had a sure winner: a woman in her early thirties (a few

years younger than he) who was cool and unflappable. But disappointment awaited him again. At the medical exam before the interview, the doctor discovered that his wife had a rare heart condition—"gros coeur" (enlarged heart)—that prevented her from going for the interview.

Kodjo's third marriage was to a 2006 lottery selectee, also an applicant of his, who was studying at the University of Lomé (thus someone who already had the baccalaureate and presented a less complicated pathway through the interview process). Hoping to avoid the consuls in Lomé who had turned away most of those interviewed that year, Kodjo decided to test the waters in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso (to the north of Togo). He made a short reconnaissance trip there to inquire at the embassy whether Togolese could present for the interview in Ouaga instead of Lomé; he was told that, with the appropriate residency and employment papers, they could. Such documentation proved easy to come by: A childhood friend working in Ouagadougou agreed to let Kodjo and his wife list his residence as theirs and provided documentation that his wife was employed as a secretary at his business. For a small fee, Kodjo was able to obtain backdated residency papers at Ouaga's central police station.

When called to interview, Kodjo and his wife made the long bus journey to Ouagadougou and turned in their documents at the embassy. They were told that the consulate would verify everything and be back in touch, but that because such confirmation involved contacting offices in Lomé, it could take several weeks. Not wanting to spend that much time waiting in Ouagadougou, but nevertheless needing to maintain the pretense that they lived there, Kodjo purchased a local cell number and routed it through his Togolese phone before returning to Lomé. Two months later the consulate called and asked them to come for their interview the following day. Because that would be impossible (it was a twenty-four hour bus ride from Lomé), Kodjo told the consular secretary that his wife's company had sent her "en mission" and that she would not be back until the weekend. This seemed convincing and the interview was scheduled for the following Tuesday.

The interview itself seemed to go well. Even Kodjo, ever the taskmaster, was impressed with his "wife's" calm and her ability to finesse the questions put to her—about her work, about their marriage, about life in Ouagadougou. After thirty minutes the consul appeared satisfied and asked for their passports, telling them to return two days later to retrieve their visas. In parting, she urged them to work on their English before their departure for the US.

When they returned to the embassy, however, the secretary told them the consul had more questions for them and asked that they return the following week. After an anxiety-filled weekend—trying to imagine what weakness had been detected in their file and boning up on local geography and politics and the details of their marital history—Kodjo and his wife returned to the embassy. This time the consul turned directly to Kodjo and asked whether he had been married before. (On the application form, they ask you to list any prior marriages and not wanting to arouse suspicion, while also assuming that the embassy purged its records at the end of each year, Kodjo had left that section blank. When I first heard him advance the theory that the embassy did not keep records beyond a year, I told him I was skeptical a US embassy with its big computers would do such a thing. But he insisted that his hypothesis had been confirmed by the experience of clients who had received visas on their second try, without listing prior spouses.)

When Kodjo answered the consul's question by saying that this was his only marriage, she said she had record of a prior one. He responded that indeed he *had* been married before but that it was a "customary" union without a marriage certificate. The consul then asked for that wife's name, thus putting Kodjo in a quandary: which of the two prior wives' names did she have in her computer, the eighteen-year-old who froze up during the interview five years earlier or the one who failed the medical exam two years ago? Still assuming that the embassy periodically purges its files and that it was more likely that they would have kept their records from two than five years ago, he wrote down the name of his second wife, the one with the heart condition, and passed it to the consul. She said that was not the name they had on file, to which Kodjo said that he had been married one other time as well but that that wife had died. The consul asked for her name and, when he wrote down that of the eighteen-year-old, she acknowledged that was the correct name, but asked if he had a death certificate. He said he did but it was in Lomé. At this point, credibility strained to the breaking point, the consul said she was sorry but that she was unable to give them visas.

But consider: In having to choose between his two prior DV wives, Kodjo had a 50 percent chance of answering correctly—and of likely being granted the visa. Moreover, his decision to give the name of his second rather than first wife made perfect sense given his experience-tested (though in the end flawed) assumption that the embassy did not keep records in perpetuity. But why did the embassy have the name of the first wife and not the second? Apparently, because she was eliminated after the medical exam and

before the interview, the name of the second never found its way into the embassy's computer.

While Kodjo was unsuccessful—there were just too many balls in the air—notice how he was nevertheless able to provide believable answers to each consular challenge. This is a lesson he drills into clients before they go for the interview—and why he insists that, if the documents are carefully prepared and a client provides credible answers to consular questions, it should be impossible for the embassy to present proof that a client is not telling the truth. There are no facts in and of themselves, only interpretations—"I did this because, I did that because." An applicant who is quick on her feet and clever at spin should triumph every time.

By the late 2000s, chastened by these failures but still upbeat about his chances—"the next time, it will work, I am sure," he told me after the third setback—Kodjo had come up with a new strategy. He would marry his then-fiancée—his *real* fiancée—to one of his client-winners. "When they pass the interview," he said, "I'll send her to the US to get her green card. Then she'll divorce her husband and return to Lomé. We'll get married and leave for the US together." "But this could take years," I countered. "Are you prepared to wait that long?" "I've been waiting fifteen years already. I can easily wait a few more," he said matter-of-factly.

4

Trading Futures

The visa lottery has spawned its own microeconomy—a cottage industry of brokers and intermediaries (document manufacturers, translators, cyber jockeys, couriers), a sprawling network of credit and debt, a scrum of scam artists, a matrimonial market (with innovations in marriage gifts/bridewealth), a futures market, finance across an ocean, even debt bondage. This petty economy remains sensitive to changes in visa policy at the embassy—to fluctuations in the interview fee and the introduction of new technologies to monitor applicants (online registration, biometric identification, and tracking). It is also shot through with rumor and suspicion—rumors of wealth-making and occult practice at the embassy, consular suspicion about fraud and fixers on the street, conspiracy thinking about the embassy's biometric enumerators, rumors that have agency and affect economic praxis.

While the DV economy's chain of debt and thousand small deals, its spread of brokers, its fraudsters and scammers, mimics everyday practice in

Lomé's informal sector, it also contributes novelties all its own. Its ways of accessing liquidity and leveraging money are innovations that lend distinction to and provoke others to imagine similar modes of capture. Its operation in the shadows of the state, at once untaxed and autonomous while still leveraging protection, also incites envy. Kodjo, constantly in search of an edge, has made his mark on this economy with inventions and risk-taking that would make a finance capitalist proud. An odd but interesting side of this visa quest is that it's premised as a lottery, a game of chance and numbers—casino citizenship, as it were.

PRIME MOVER

The fees that applicants pay for the embassy interview are the fulcrum around which this street economy turns—fees whose magnitude is such that winners are made to wander far afield to raise the cash. If the interview fee weren't so high, most would be able to find their due locally, through family and friends, and there would be no fraud, no fixers, no trans-Atlantic finance, no debt bondage. It bears repeating: it is the hefty interview fee that primes the pump in this economy.

When US Congress created the DV Lottery, it insisted that it be self-sustaining. In thus setting up a "pay-as-you-go" system—as they call it at the State Department—it was decided that lottery selectees would foot the bill, paying at the time of the embassy interview. To calculate overall costs, it hired an accounting firm to run the figures: the price of the online system that processes up to 20 million applicants each year, the expense of staffing the embassies with additional consuls for the interviews, the cost of hiring ancillary employees (fraud units) to chase down those trying to game the system. The grand total is divided by the number of lottery selectees, up to 100,000 each year. Using these metrics, the interview fee for DV 2011 was set at $819 per person, over five times the cost of a tourist visa.

Among the surprises in this way of distributing cost, in addition to the high price of the interview, are the jumps in fee from year to year: from $437 in 2004, to $755 in 2006, to $819 in 2010 and 2011, before dropping to $330 in 2012. In principle such increases reflect cost-of-living fluctuations—annual increases in State Department expenditure on the DV Lottery. But it's hard to imagine that cost of living alone might account for the leaps that marked the early 2000s, from $437 to $819. Perhaps the State Department's accounting firm was playing catch-up for earlier miscalculations (in the

process, however, taxing this year's applicants for prior shortfalls or the mistakes of others)? Moreover, despite its being welcome news for applicants, how to explain that the interview fee dropped $489 in just one year? Either the State Department was overcharging before (as people on the street assumed) or costs dropped precipitously because of the conversion to online/paperless (as a state official suggested during an interview in 2012). But that much in one year? It's also possible that the drop was influenced by the realization that the interview fee itself was producing distortions in the system. If true, however, DV pricing is determined by more than a self-sustaining rationale.

Note, too, that pay-as-you-go not only outsources the financing of the system to the applicants themselves—a textbook neoliberal gesture—but also covers costs by homogenizing the global, charging the same fee for winners in Togo as those in France and Norway.[1] It is not difficult to draw the conclusion that the "fraud" in the visa lottery system—those backdated marriages of convenience that Togolese and other West African winners engage in to acquire money for the interview—is produced by choices made by Congress and the State Department in determining fee structure.

CHAINS OF DEBT

Consider again these figures. According to the World Bank, Togolese per capita income is $600 a year,[2] with most living on less. A DV selectee flying alone in 2008–2011 had to raise at least $2,500, and a family of four, $10,000: $819 per person for the interview, $220 for the medical exam, more than $100 to acquire and translate the required documents (birth certificate, passport, high school diploma, criminal record), another $1,000+ for the plane ticket. 99 percent of Togolese, even salaried members of the professional class, don't have that kind of money sitting around in bank accounts or under mattresses.

Initially, winners might look to borrow from friends or family. But unless they have a father or uncle who is a *douanier* (customs agent) or a ranking member of the ruling party, or a mother who is a *Nana Benz* (cloth merchant), they are unlikely to be able to access more than a few hundred dollars. Beyond those in the political class, Lomé families just don't have enough liquidity to bankroll this swell of expenses. And nickel-and-diming it—$30 here, $50 there, $25 elsewhere—not only doesn't get you very far but also locks you into a trail of debt. Beyond family and friends, one's chances

of accessing lines of credit are slim. No Togolese bank will loan this amount to someone without a salary.

Some look to their churches, where small lending pools are available for members in need. One churchgoer I know convinced his fellow believers that, once on the other side, he would pay them back with interest, and he was granted a loan of $1,000. But he failed the interview and, five years later, still had not reimbursed the debt. Another stalwart dipped into a church fund he was safeguarding to borrow $3,000, also imagining a quick repayment, but he too failed the interview and has been ducking shame ever since. A couple with two children sold their house to finance the embassy interview—a house in which they had invested a lifetime's savings—only to fail the interview.

It is little wonder that Togolese seek to finance the interview and plane ticket by whatever means possible, with the market in marriage a strong temptation. From 2005 on, this became the option of choice—often the only option—for many winners.

WIN-WIN

The brilliance of Kodjo's scheme, what differentiates him from others on the street, is that his clients (those he enrolls who are selected in the lottery) never pay a penny. He takes their photos and fills out the online application free of charge. If they're selected, he finds a sponsor who pays their expenses—the embassy interview fee, the medical exam, the plane ticket, his service fee—in return for marrying a sibling, niece, or friend of the sponsor, then adding her to their dossier.[3] But the other party—the beneficiary and their sponsor—get what they want as well: a green card and eventual US citizenship at bargain-basement cost and in no time at all.

Despite this win-win, there can be sticking points along the way. When things tighten up and become unpredictable at the embassy, and judgment calls have to be made—Send the couple or only the winner to the interview? Send an infant whose father is not interviewing or leave the infant at home?—who calls the shots, Kodjo or the one paying the bills? Kodjo knows the system, studies it daily, has a strong track record and impeccable judgment. But the one spending the money often feels entitled, and in a climate where mistrust reigns supreme, they may suspect Kodjo is trying to take advantage of them. After all, he takes his money up front, so what's to stop him from no longer caring about their family member (and thus not

properly prepping her for the embassy interview) or even from selling the file to another? This latter worry was what motivated the family of a Togolese financier in the US, mentioned in chapter 2, to send undercover agents to Kodjo's office after he had decided it was best for their daughter to stay home during the embassy interview and apply for her visa two years later.

Kodjo tries to manage risk and avoid conflict by building a set of checks into each phase of the process. If a beneficiary becomes prickly or recalcitrant, or inappropriately romances a winner, Kodjo can threaten to send the winner solo for the interview. If a winner becomes complacent in preparing for the interview (because they have a free ride), Kodjo reminds them of all they stand to lose and as mentioned earlier, introduced the novelty of having winners pay for the medical exam ($220) in order to motivate them "to perform at peak level." Perhaps the riskiest moment is after a successful interview, when the beneficiary might be tempted to flee with visa in hand before purchasing the winner's plane ticket. To prevent such, Kodjo insists that the winner bring the two passports to his office as soon as the embassy returns them. (They release both passports to the primary applicant [the winner], never to the trailing spouse [the beneficiary].) He then places them in a safe until the beneficiary has purchased the plane tickets.

And what of Kodjo himself—what checks might there be against him simply taking the money and running? Or not going to the mat for his clients after taking his cut—not adequately preparing a couple for the interview, not fighting for their success? Or, another client fear, selling a winner's file to another *after* he has received his service fee? The answer shouldn't be surprising: Kodjo can be trusted—to deliver a winner, not to sell the file to another—because he inhabits a Bourdieuian (1984) world where distinction and reputation reign supreme. If he disappeared with the money or grew complacent in prepping clients for the interview, it would destroy his reputation in a profession where rumor and image are coin of the realm.

Kodjo has thus constructed a seamless jigsaw, a watertight system of checks and balances in which any party, including himself, who would try to take advantage of the other will be discouraged from doing so, and in which all parties are winners. He can walk you through step by step, showing how one "interest" serves to check or trump another at each step along the way. These are his terms: "Ecoutes, *l'intérêt* du gagnant est d'assurer son billet d'avion; *l'intérêt* du bénéficiare est de fuir avec son visa avant d'avoir acheté le billet; mais si le bénéficiare essaies de tricher le gagnant, il va perdre—il n'aura pas son passeport et il ne peut pas voyager."[4] Moreover,

both parties have an interest in staying on good terms with Kodjo, as they may need his help on the other side—in finding a place to stay, in mediating a dispute, even in locating employment. Note here, because it's a theme that runs through this chapter, that it's Kodjo's own mistrust of others—his assumption that anyone might try to hustle him or a client at any step along the way—that has produced this tidy system of checks and balances.

TRADING FUTURES

As mentioned in chapter 1, dossiers have standard values on the street, with the price of winners' dossiers varying according to profile. There are thus differences in price between male and female winners, between those with and without the baccalaureate, and between those with jobs on the list and those without. These differences are the result of market forces; there is large demand for, and short supply of, the files of female winners, for example, so they fetch a higher price in the dossier market. But pricing is also influenced by the varying ability of those in the diaspora (or those in high places) to pay. Convention and innovation thus jockey with one another, driving prices up and down. In 2006—the first time I followed such transactions—the cost of a winner's dossier fell from $3,000 to $2,000; this outcome was the result of negotiation between those in the diaspora (with their varying means to pay such an entrance fee) and the needs of brokers in Lomé (needs driven by familial and network commitments as much as by any prior standardized pricing structure). Another dossier drew a price tag of $3,500 because the young man already had his baccalaureate and was seen as a sure winner, and the broker held the line when those in the diaspora tried to lower the price. A third, a woman with her diploma, was higher still ($4,000) because fewer women sign up for the lottery and are in greater demand.

Pricing is also influenced by changes in State Department policy—not only increases or decreases in the interview fee but also attempts to tighten the screws on fraud. When the pricing structure that had become standardized on the street between 2003 and 2006 came unhinged in 2007—with winner upon winner turned away at the interview[5]—fewer began applying, and many who were selected decided to go solo for the interview. Even though his record of getting visas for pop-up couples remained intact during these years, the larger climate dictated that Kodjo had to rethink his system of financing.

He thus experimented with having the financier pay half the service fee up front, completing payment when the visa was in hand—a notable change because Kodjo had always received his entire fee in advance before beginning to treat the file, and he kept the money whether the case succeeded or not. He also capitulated to client requests to reduce his fees, with his own take dipping by as much as 50 percent. And a third wrinkle: in 2010, to gain competitive advantage with financiers, he transferred some of the fee to the winner, while permitting deferral of payment until after they arrived in the States.

In 2012 he went a step further, pursuing an option he had toyed with for several years: front winners the money himself (for the interview and plane ticket) and allow them to reimburse him from the other side. Again, this represented a significant departure from—and indeed marked something of an epochal change in—existing practice, effectively turning Kodjo into a lending institution and eliminating the need for him to arrange marriages in order to pay the fees. But it also entailed significant risk. If the client, now in the US, decided not to pay, how to recoup his money? To guard against that possibility, Kodjo devised two strategies: having the winner's family in Lomé sign a contract of indemnity (which enables him to take them to court for nonpayment), and sending winners to live with a friend in the US who finds them lodging and work, while ensuring they pay Kodjo back. (This States-side collaborator of course received a quid pro quo—Kodjo's help in setting up a business back home and a cut of his proceeds.)

I asked one of the consuls how such a practice—turning fixers into banks—would sit with the embassy. "It's fully legal," she responded, "but against the spirit of the DV. The DV shouldn't be a money-making venture, with others profiting off the good fortune of someone who's been selected." But how else to find the money to pay the interview fee and plane ticket (to say nothing of the fact that most applicant-winners need help in filling out the requisite forms)? Moreover, what's the difference between such borrowing and what Americans do whenever they buy a house or go on vacation? Why should Lomé be any different?

Another option Kodjo attempted in 2013: arrange a marriage for a winner but send them alone to the interview, letting the trailing spouse petition the embassy for a visa several years later. He reasoned that if the applicant gave the consul a credible excuse for why their spouse had not come to the interview—sickness or penury, say—a sympathetic consul might grant the visa anyway (thereby also avoiding the interrogation drama that might

catch the couple in a lie). This strategy worked with two of his couples that year. Another variant: have a winner who's been funded by a US financier get married *after* a successful interview, then notify Kentucky (where visa lottery applications are filed), not the embassy in Lomé, before the winner leaves for the States. In the one such case a fixer friend of Kodjo's tried in 2013, the strategy worked. However, both options depend on finding a financier willing to front the money then wait several years for their loved one to arrive, while also taking the risk that their visa request might be turned down at the embassy.

Then, a bigger step for Kodjo, in 2011–2012: a small change in DV registration protocol—providing winners' confirmation numbers online at the time of application instead of by mail after selection[6]—left Kodjo without any winners, and he was forced to enter the market in dossiers for the first time, purchasing winners' files from other brokers. (He had previously refused to buy or sell dossiers, preferring to play with files of his own.) But this meant paying out before recouping, and because he had to share proceeds with the one who had signed up the winner, making significantly less profit than before. He paid 1 million CFA francs ($2,000) for one file, selling it to a sponsor in the diaspora for 1.5 million, thus netting half of what the other broker made (and a third of his usual take) while still doing all the work and taking all the risks. The same year he paid 900,000 CFA francs for another file, selling it for 1.3 million, and paid 600,000 CFA francs for a third, selling it for 1 million. I asked him why he didn't just take the year off, since he has savings in the bank? "It's not only about the money. I need to keep my name in circulation. The time I spent in prison in Ouagadougou [chapter 7] was a disaster for me. Everyone wanted to know where I was. You have to remain in the game or clients will look elsewhere."

Trading on futures—playing to sell, buying to play—is a turbulent and risky practice. It means not only that purchasers like Kodjo acquire a dossier not knowing whether they can sell it to someone in the diaspora—and taking a sizeable hit if they can't—but also it opens them to the risk of buying a file that might have already been sold to another. Now that notification is entirely online, what's to prevent a devious fixer from selling the same confirmation number to Kodjo and another, or two others, at the same time? To protect himself, Kodjo meets and vets a winner before purchasing their file, both to get a feel for whether they might interview well at the embassy and to alert them to the possibility that their file might also have been sold

to another and to let him know right away if someone else shows up wanting to treat their file.

Trading in dossiers like this suggests that the DV Lottery has become something of a futures market, with all its attendant hedging. Still, it differs from risk-taking in financial markets in one important respect: Kodjo feels that once he has a strong file in hand, he can overcome risk and guarantee a favorable outcome—game the future—by doing what he does best, presenting a watertight case at the embassy.

FEEDING FRENZY

This market in visas brought other risks as well. In 2007, apparently for the first time, a Lomé fixer began issuing fake winners' letters to clients on State Department stationery ("you have been selected in the 2009 DV"), then selling the dossiers to other fixers or to Togolese in the diaspora. After receiving his transaction fees, this faux fixer vanished, leaving those he had victimized to slowly realize (in the end, confirmed by email communication with the office in Kentucky that processes applications) that they had been had. But notice the recursiveness—fraud within fraud—that this practice represents and also the distinctions that emerge for players around the category "fraud" itself. Thus Kodjo found this practice reprehensible—a type of inauthentic fraud—in contrast with those practices (more genuine fakes) he was engaged in ("in helping Togolese achieve a better life abroad"). Notice, too, the way in which such a practice has generated new procedures and safeguards in loto visa culture. At the time, Kodjo began to be consulted by other fixers' clients who sought to verify the authenticity of the State Department letter announcing their selection and (in summer 2008) discovered two counterfeits by noticing slight misspellings and incongruities in the "official" letter. He was handsomely rewarded by those near-dupes he had saved from disastrous debt.

As mentioned earlier, a spectacular attempt to prey on visa lottery selectees, and another example of the recursive nature of DV fraud, surfaced at the US Embassy in Cotonou in spring 2011. Beninois working inside the embassy's consular unit began secretly charging winners an additional $1,000 (over and above the interview fee), phoning them after they had passed the interview to let them know that if they paid this additional sum they would be guaranteed the visa. Playing off the uncertainty that accompanies the

interview and the waiting period that follows (while the candidate's documents are being verified and consuls are weighing the merits of each case), these fraudsters had access to a vulnerable, easily exploited population. After months of fleecing winners, complaints made it through to the consul, leapfrogging the consulate's email inbox and the phone lines staffed by these employees, and an embassy sting operation led to their sacking.

Another attempt to extract profit from selectees, though sums far smaller than those in Benin, occurred in Ghana in 2007. When the US Embassy began mandating that selectees sign up for interviews online, entrepreneurs quickly materialized to book the interview slots, then auctioned them off at internet cafés to the highest bidders.

Kodjo found both of these adventures in profiteering unseemly. "It's one thing to arrange a marriage when you have no other source of income—and when you are hurting no one else in the process—but quite another to prey upon winners like this." Moreover, he differentiated these two escapades from the practice of a Togolese employee at the consulate in Lomé in the early 2000s who took money from winners in return for special treatment. (This man was rumored to have made a fortune—and built a *maison à étage* [two-story house] in Lomé, a sign of distinction—before being discovered and forced out.) For Kodjo, the difference between what this embassy employee in Lomé had been doing and the circle in Cotonou was that the latter made successful interviewees pay against their will, whereas the former profited because the winners themselves asked for help. Kodjo compared the Lomé practice to someone seeking added advantage by making a special offering at church or visiting a spirit shrine—thus supplicating this embassy employee as they would the deities.

Unseemly profiteering can originate from the other side of the Atlantic as well. In 2009 US media reported on a scheme through which Togolese lottery winners were being trafficked into a hair braiding salon in Newark (Ryan 2009). The owner of the salon had financed interview fees and plane tickets for female winners in return for labor under lock and key at her salon—confinement in extremis. One of the sequestered beauticians eventually escaped and contacted local authorities, who arrested the owner and liberated the staff.

Kodjo had two female clients who were similarly ensnared by debt bondage, albeit unbeknownst to him at the time. Both had been financed by a Beninois woman who ran a hair salon in St. Louis, where she kept them under surveillance night and day until one was able to get free and call Kodjo

in Lomé. He contacted the salon owner's brother—the "husband" of one of the imprisoned women, he who had financed her in return for his spot on her dossier—and was able to arrange their release.

The feeding frenzy that surrounds this system—the cascade of entrepreneurs that materialize to profit from the good fortunes of winners, insinuating themselves into every crack, attempting to parse and turn each small margin into another opportunity—is not limited to Togolese alone.[7] A French physician selected by the embassy in Lomé to carry out the mandatory physical exam charged a fee ($220) that was more than five times that in Cotonou ($40) for the same exam and ten times that in Ouagadougou ($20). Moreover, this highway robbery was accompanied by a surveillance regime of Foucauldian proportions: this female doctor (who was famous for telling clients to arrive at 7:00 a.m. then not seeing them until late in the afternoon) made her (mostly male) patients strip and subjected their bodies to intense scrutiny—recall the scar on the upper leg that she flagged for a consul (chapter 1)—and their medical histories to withering critique. In one instance of the latter she asked about the health of the winner's parents, and when told that the selectee's father had diabetes and was treating it with Chinese medicine, lectured him on the inadvisability of such a treatment regimen; the winner felt that if he and his father didn't follow her advice he would be denied his visa. Another lottery winner was discovered during the medical exam to have two abscessed teeth and was told by this doctor (who doubles as a dentist?) that she wouldn't sign off on the winner's health form until she had the teeth removed—which she did, for a small Lomé fortune ($200).

Moreover, most in Lomé are convinced that the embassy itself makes money off the system, that the visa lottery is a money-making racket for the State Department. "They invite us to sign up for free, then charge winners a large sum—and fail many who go for the interview, while keeping their money," I heard again and again on the street. While the official story in Washington, DC, is that the DV Lottery is a break-even system—with the high interview fee mandated by the staffing and administering needs of a lottery with up to 20 million global applicants—an embassy insider told me that the embassy in Lomé was flush with money during the years 2004–2008 (and generously supporting ancillary projects around the city) and they were certain that the surplus had come from DV applicants' fees.

The vast majority of Togolese who apply for the lottery are male, and thus so too are the majority of winners. This is because men typically look to migrate before women—male migrants have long dominated migration histories throughout the subregion—and because more men than women attend university (a preferred recruiting ground for DV brokers because students there possess the baccalaureate). An additional reason for this gender skewing is the DV requirement that applicants submit a facial photo with their application. According to Kodjo, women are hesitant to let a stranger take their photo (when he sets up shop on the quad at the university) because they worry their pictures might be used as *porno*—an anxiety informed not only by a long history of Europeans photographing West African women for nefarious reasons but also by contemporary internet use in Lomé, where cybercafés are full of male teens watching porn of naked women, whose faces have often been photoshopped onto the bodies of others.

This gender bias has several consequences. One is that because more men than women are selected in the DV, the price tag for a woman's dossier is higher: 1.5 million CFA francs ($3,000) as opposed to 1 million ($2,000) for men. This means, too, that Kodjo often treats women with kid gloves, tolerating behavior in a female winner—recalcitrance, tardiness for an appointment at his office[8]—that he wouldn't in a male. Women also become the special focus of Kodjo's attention in another way. Because their dossiers are in higher demand (and draw a higher price) than men's, he seeks ways of enlisting more women, and in 2012 he discovered a successful strategy: getting a female student to sign up women at the university (in return for 200 CFA francs per enlistee). Female students will trust another woman more than a man to take their pictures, and that year his number of female enlistees swelled to several hundred. In 2014 he tried a different inducement by hiring a female friend to sign up female applicants in return for a motorcycle for every five hundred she enrolled. Kodjo's calculation: "If my yield remains the same as in past years, I'll get five winners from these five hundred, files which I can sell to a financier for 1,500,000 CFA francs each, for a total of 7,500,000 CFA francs [$15,000]. A motorcycle only costs $800 to $1,000. That's a good investment for me."

Another outcome of this gender imbalance—the fact that men are more often lottery selectees—is that the financiers of arranged DV marriages are typically female (or family members of a female beneficiary). This means

that the wife in a DV marriage often has more money and higher class standing than the husband. But such asymmetries can also mean gender trouble in a context where men normally pay bridewealth and leverage culinary and sexual favors in return. In one such case of Kodjo's, mentioned earlier, a male beneficiary tried to make sexual advances before the embassy interview and was upset when his "wife"—she who had paid the interview fees—rebuffed him. They were staying in a hotel in Ouagadougou (where they had traveled to deposit their papers at the consulate), and she locked him out of her room, then made him sit at the back of the bus on the trip back to Lomé. Upon arrival she went to Kodjo's office to complain and to ask for help in dealing with her partner's unwanted advances.

TEMPORALITIES OF DEBT

If economies are debt machines—organized by debt, lubricated by debt, sometimes poisoned by debt (Graeber 2011)—this one is no different, with cycles and periodicities all its own. Kinship theorists and economic anthropologists have long insisted that debts establish relationships just as relationships can be drawn on to redeem debt (Mauss 1967; Lévi-Strauss 1969; Gregory 1982; Strathern 1988; Damon 1990). But indebtedness can also generate its own excess or surplus, a set of spillover effects and unintended consequences that take on a life of their own.

Debt informs the relationship between Kodjo and winners (his clients), between Kodjo and beneficiaries, between winners and their families (and spouses), and between financiers and those they are financing, albeit each in different ways, with different relational and temporal consequences.

As already mentioned, it was Kodjo's innovation (within the larger world of Lomé visa brokers) to eliminate the financial obligation between broker and applicant—signing them up free and then, when they're selected, insisting that the financier, not the winner, pay Kodjo's service fee (as well as purchase the plane ticket and pay the embassy interview fee). While the financial side of his relationship to clients is thus free of debt, winners nevertheless remain beholden to him for arranging their futures, an indebtedness that translates as strong loyalty when conflicts arise with financiers, or as future business when the winner is on the other side of the Atlantic and sends other clients Kodjo's way. One of Kodjo's winners, now with her head above water in Chicago, has financed the visa quests of three family members, marrying each to a Kodjo DV selectee.

Kodjo's relationship with financiers has also been debt-free (although this is changing—see below). He insists on full payment of his service fee up front, before beginning the interview and coaching process. This because he's all too aware of the pitfalls of long-term debt in a world of limited means and entangled relations: the promise of payment, deferral upon deferral, heartfelt assurances that next time payment will be delivered, a delivery that never materializes. But he occasionally makes exceptions, especially if there exists a clear future return. One of Kodjo's clients, a government minister, only paid $400, supplementing Kodjo's due with gasoline and sacks of food. While these in-kind payments didn't fully balance the scales, Kodjo benefited from the relationship in other ways, even getting a cousin hired to a low-level civil service post thanks to this official's intervention. Moreover, indebtedness with a civil servant can translate into protection were Kodjo to get into a tight spot with the police or the embassy. Another financier in the US paid part but not all of her due but promised she'd finance a future winner at full price. While always preferring up-front payment, Kodjo doesn't altogether mind debts like these, as debt forgiveness can translate into favors and future clients.

Kodjo's desire to remain debt-free in his relationships with applicants and financiers has recently undergone transformation. In response to the difficulties of getting pop-up couples through the embassy interview, he's begun sending winners with the baccalaureate solo and paying the interview fee and plane ticket himself, waiting for reimbursement until the winner has begun working in the US. This new arrangement not only engages Kodjo in long-term debt but also is risky: How to ensure repayment when an ocean separates a client from Kodjo the banker? Moreover, the prolonged and uncertain nature of debt in these cases generates more engaged and complex forms of interaction with clients' families—among other things, enlisting family members in Lomé in binding contracts. Here, debt is always more than just a monetary relation. It ensnares Kodjo in relationships beyond the contract, inserting him into the everyday lives of clients.

As with winners, so with financiers. With things tightening at the embassy (because of consular suspicion of adding spouses) and with potential financiers hesitant to invest in risky endeavors, Kodjo had to come up with more creative financing. He thus began to accommodate those who agreed to pay part but not all up front, waiting to see whether the visa came through before completing payment. If it never materializes, as increasingly

happens these days, he can be out significant sums. In 2014 he was owed over 5 million CFA francs ($10,000)—a vast sum for most Togolese.

To wit, that which Kodjo has so carefully tried to escape has reeled him back in. His outrageous desire to remain debt-free in a social world defined by debt, and the way in which he put together an entire system of payment to avoid debt, has vanished with changes at the embassy.

With financiers paying winners' fees, winners' relationships with their families and loved ones back home remain debt-free in principle, but they too can be interpolated by short- and long-cycle debt. While winners' visa debts are usually insignificant—though they can accumulate many small debts to numerous others along the way while "preparing their trips"—they often barter one partner for another, then wait years for the return. Namely, winners who arrange DV marriages typically leave a spouse or fiancé behind, whom they plan to (re)marry and bring to the US in some indefinite future.

I don't know where Togolese sensibilities of time and debt originate—whether in the long temporalities of local bridewealth systems (where marriage debts can last generations) or in the patience demanded of those living in precarious postcolonial times—but I find extraordinary the length of time and the calm with which people are prepared to await their due (a visa for a loved one, in this instance). "How long are your clients willing to wait?" I asked Kodjo. "Five years is nothing. Many wait longer," he responded matter-of-factly.

Meanwhile entire lives are lived in the interstices. A wife back home hears that her husband is sleeping with his visa spouse and has an affair of her own, falling pregnant in the process. A man in the States pays to bring over his fiancée by marrying her to a lottery winner. The winner and the fiancée fall for each other and have a child while waiting for their visas. Stories about the time of waiting—of affairs and angry partners—are legion on both sides of the Atlantic.

TECHNOLOGY AND ITS DOUBLES

The history of the DV system has seen a steady diet of changes in the application process, driven both by applicants' attempts to game it and by transformations in State Department technology. In the early years, the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, applicants applied by mail, sending a short application with name, contact information, and marital status to a State Department

address in Williamsburg, Kentucky. With few rules in place and little consular awareness that those on the street might be trying to game the system, many applied multiple times using the same name, and some winners sold their identities to others. In those days—information technology prehistory, we might call it—the data banks weren't yet up to speed and many who stuffed the box or swapped identities got through.

In 2000 the State Department formalized a once-annual application policy, also mandating that applicants send a photo with their application. Those on the street attempting to game the system countered by sending in the same photo with different names, or the reverse, the same name with multiple photos.

The application process went electronic in 2004, and applicants were now required to apply online and include a digital photo. The new format not only saved time and money for those processing applications at the State Department but also allowed them to better track applicants and reduce identity fraud. In addition to facial recognition, other biometric measures—fingerprinting and DNA analysis (especially for children added to a dossier)—became mandatory. But the street, always exploring the back alleys, had tricks up its sleeve. Some applicants changed their appearance—wearing wigs or adding braids, shaving hair or changing hair color—and applied multiple times. While some were caught by photo recognition, which checks an applicant's face (the quadrant around the eyes) against all others in the system, others got through.[9] Moreover, while I have never heard of anyone trying plastic surgery (though I wouldn't entirely put it past an enterprising individual), I was in Ghana when they first started asking for fingerprints at the embassy interview as a way to root out those who had purchased others' names; I was told that Ghanaians were filing the tips of their fingers to eliminate traces of prior selves. "The Americans think they're so clever," a Ghanaian friend commented with a smile, "But we Ghanaians are even smarter."

By 2011, not only the application itself but also notification of selection was fully online, with applicants receiving confirmation numbers when they applied, numbers that gave them access to a State Department website where (six months later) they verified whether they'd been chosen.[10] (Until 2011, application was online but notification was still by mail.) While rendering the application process more efficient, this latest innovation also opened new opportunities for clever fixers. Thus the new system (with confirmation number going to the email address entered on the form) only

helps Kodjo, because in registering applicants he is the one who retains confirmation numbers (which were formerly mailed to winners). Online notification also helps those buying dossiers in the futures market by eliminating the possibility of being taken in by a fake winner's letter, as with those 2008 cases penned on fake State Department letterhead.[11]

One of the lessons of this short history of technology and the DV is that it is hard to imagine a moment when State Department science will be able to eliminate all fraud—to ferret out all fakes, to close every loophole, to prevent human manipulation. Each innovation creates its shadow or double, opening new doors for those trying to game the system. Indeed, for enterprising fixers like Kodjo, advances in technology have in some ways made life easier.

It is a Euro-American article of faith—our hope and fantasy—that technology can deliver us from human error and give us a world of certainty and transparency, in this case a positive identification of an applicant in the visa lottery (cf. Cohen 2017). Thus digitization, photosensitivity analysis, fingerprinting, and DNA testing have all been introduced to the DV system in the past few years to try to eliminate identity fraud. But while each new intervention closes some loopholes, it opens other opportunities. Moreover, the "evidence" that technology reveals is always open to human interpretation: a DNA mismatch between parent and child might reveal a marital infidelity rather than an attempt to game the system; a failure to mention a spouse on the application might be because an earlier marriage was "customary," not civil; a winner's name-photo mismatch might have been an honest mistake rather than a deliberate attempt to cheat.[12] Moreover, as long as winners are allowed to add spouses and children after being selected, a vast field of play remains for intermediaries like Kodjo.

While partial to the narrative that celebrates this small triumph of human agency over technology—of the impossibility/difficulty of technology's complete capture of the human imagination—I nevertheless don't want to ignore or belittle the role that technology and documents now play in the everyday lives of applicants and the ways in which identities are thought anew according to technology's contours (Latour 2005; Riles 2006; Bennett 2010; Ticktin 2011; Hull 2012; Navaro 2012). The fingerprint, the digital photo, the DNA test, the identity document, the role of number in fixing and confirming identity—each put pressure on older forms of representing selfhood and subjectivity.

For one, identity in a biometric moment is thinned down, reduced to

the fingerprint and the facial feature, rather than relying on iterative performance and the full range of contextual-relational signifiers (Butler 1989, 2011). This identity is then converted to a number, both in the data banks and on ID cards: I am now number, a unique ID. Moreover, in the relay or transfer between fingerprint and information then back again, identity is reconcretized (and externalized) in the ID card, the birth certificate, the passport. It is no stretch to say that identity today resides in the documents, and thus, too, is always routed through the state and its apparatuses, through state-issued identity cards and the protocols and hoops individuals jump through to obtain their cards (Riles 2006; Hull 2012; Breckenridge 2005, 2010, 2014).

To be sure, there were colonial era precedents (identity cards and passbooks, which were often fingerprint-based) to the new identity documents. But the latest biometric version of the identity document, with its warehousing of all numbers (identities) in a virtual databank, goes far beyond those, rendering identity into the most impersonal of registers and opening new horizons of surveillance in tracking citizens and, here, visa recipients.

At the same time, people now see themselves through the lens of these documents. While forever suspicious of potential misuse, Togolese are also captured by the new technologies, seeing them as signs of the modern and taking pride in these badges of modernity. Those with passports show them to others with pride. And those who've traveled, those with visas in their passports, are considered the most fortunate of individuals.

Finally, the play between technology and fraud—between embassy and street—provides a small, albeit striking, illustration of the Hardt and Negri (2001, 2005) maxim that power is reactive and global change—here, technological innovation—is driven from below. Thus, the DV system is constantly amended to deal with cases of perceived fraud; we might say that it is the street itself, fixers like Kodjo and their clients, who have produced the system as it exists today. The original mail-in photo requirement, the subsequent digital photo, the fingerprinting, the *preuves-de-mariage*—these were all developed (as technologies of identification and detection) in response to perceived DV fraud. When I asked one of the consuls in Lomé whether this might not be the case—that the street was directing things—he agreed. As did Kodjo: "Mais, bien sur, ils nous suivent!" (But of course, it is they who follow us.)

Conspiracy thinking saturates the DV field on both sides, on the street and in the embassy.[13] As mentioned, many on the street, especially those denied visas after the interview, believe that the visa lottery is a money-making scheme for the US government and the free online registration a trap, luring people in only to steal their money later. Others point to the high cost of the embassy interview compared with that for other visas (the interview for a tourist visa costs only $150). Moreover, why does it cost over $200 for the medical exam in Lomé, while it is far less in Cotonou and Ouagadougou? From a State Department perspective, the interview fee seems justified as a way to finance pay-as-you-go, whereas the medical charges are beyond their control, driven by the local market in doctors' fees. Fair enough; these make a certain amount of sense. All the same, as mentioned, I was stopped in my tracks a few years ago—and forced to acknowledge the divinatory powers of the street—when an embassy insider told me that the consulate was flush with money, funding ancillary projects all over Lomé, and that the surplus had come from DV coffers.

Another rumor on the pavement in 2008 was that the consul doing the interviews not only was pocketing income from the interviews but also had occult powers and was exchanging interviewees' souls for money. A tough cookie who failed many at the interview stage, her identity as a witch was confirmed for those on the street when several applicants she had interviewed were hospitalized—with one dying of a heart attack—after failing to get their visas.

Conspiratorial readings also accompanied a computer snafu that ensnared the DV Lottery in 2011, the first year that results were announced online. Two weeks after winners' names were posted, the State Department nullified the results, claiming that a programming error had caused the computer to select winners from among only those who had applied during the first two days of the thirty-day enrollment period, and announced that corrected results would be posted in two months.[14] But this "programmer error" was spun differently on the street. A fixer friend of Kodjo's was eloquent in convincing a crowd of listeners at his bureau, the courtyard of his house in a Lomé suburb where I had stopped in one afternoon, that the official story was a cover-up. What really happened, he insisted, was that "a clever Nigerian" had hacked the system and been discovered, and that Washington preferred to blame a programmer than admit that its comput-

ers had been compromised—a reading that brought laughter and nods of understanding from everyone in the courtyard.

This impulse toward the allegorical, what Eve Sedgwick (2003) calls "paranoid," reading—never taking events for what they appear to be—confirms once again that in Lomé things are rarely as they seem, and that human agency, not chance (an unintended mistake by a programmer), is thought to lie behind every event.[15] This fixer's spin on the computer glitch also evidences the widespread Togolese belief that all systems are manipulable, that even the State Department's computers and its database can be had.

The consulate's biometric system, its database of applicants' photographs and fingerprints, also incites the imagination and slides into other streams of suspicion that course through the streets of Lomé. The city is rife with rumors about the Togolese state's attempt to create national ID cards and phone companies' mandates to register all cell numbers (both fads across the continent over the past few years), and many are worried about what it means that a government or a phone company can now database and track them. When Togocel, Togo's main mobile company, called for all numbers to be registered in 2012 (while threatening to cut off those that weren't), Lomé was awash in worry about what this meant and who would have access to the numbers. Charismatic Christians expressed similar anxieties in a different idiom, reading the contemporary proliferation of numbers, codes, and information—the numbers entering databases and appearing on identity cards—as recognizable signs of the end, of the mark of the beast that will appear on the foreheads of Satan's followers (Revelation 13:18). A pastor in a charismatic church I attended in 2012 told his congregants that he had heard that in Japan today personal identity numbers are being inserted into peoples' forearms, a revelation that drew gasps from a congregation already on board with the idea that the end was at hand and that a database run by distant and unknown agents was the devil's business.

It is not only the equation of identity with number that unnerves people and threatens to reduce an otherwise fluid and elastic sense of identity to fixity; so too does the opportunity it provides embassies and others to track and manipulate citizens in ways beyond their control. Not surprisingly, the US embassy's big database and the ten-digit confirmation numbers it distributes to applicants feed into these conspiratorial imaginings.[16] Thus some winners decide not to go for the embassy interview for fear of adding their fingerprints to the database. Others may share that fear but imagine they can manipulate it to their advantage.

Not only must we take these rumors from the street seriously—as sociologically meaningful, as revealing gaps in official narratives (White 2000; West and Sanders 2003), and as evincing anxiety about a world in which numbers are becoming destiny (Nelson 2015)—but it also bears reminding that conspiratorial thinking is not a one-way street. Biometrics and the vast databasing of populations has preoccupied the United States since 9/11—"our national trauma," an official from Homeland Security called it at a conference on migration I attended in 2012—a country dripping with anxiety about terrorists out to destroy the national patrimony, about illegal aliens and fraudsters trying to gain access to that which is not rightfully theirs. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, not only the government but also a large slice of the American public seems drawn to a friend-or-foe view of the world today, as evidenced by the popularity of television shows like *24* and *Homeland*. Paranoia—fear and worry about an alien other—has become something of a US national obsession.

A final instance of conspiracy thinking on the side of the consulate. It's a standard view among consuls in Lomé and DV officials at the State Department that visa brokers like Kodjo—"fixers"—are responsible for much of the fraud in the visa lottery system. Namely, they believe these fixers push naïve and unqualified selectees to pursue visas that they will never get (because they don't satisfy the requirements of a diploma or a job), or more worrisome, that they arrange fraudulent marriages for selectees, all so that they can take their cut. "We're offering citizenship as a gift, letting applicants sign up for the lottery for free," one of the consuls in Lomé told me. "What we want is someone who applies on their own, who seeks their own funding, who comes to the embassy interview on their own. What we don't need are others stepping in to make money off the system. That wasn't its intent."

I find this consular worry around the figure of the fixer telling, coming as it does from those reared in a society in which it is virtually impossible to do anything without an intermediary. When an American goes to court, applies for a mortgage, or prepares their taxes, they rely on experts—intermediaries who help them navigate the complexities of the law, of financing, of the tax system. Much of what Togolese fixers do for clients is exactly what such intermediaries do: fill out forms, make digital photos conform to a specified pixel size, help clients navigate an English-language internet, translate documents, coach them to face a hostile questioner at the consulate (not unlike the way in which a courtroom lawyer coaches her clients).[17]

They also arrange financing for winners—considered "fraudulent" under US law (if a fake marriage is involved)—but this only because the cost of the embassy interview is beyond the means of most Togolese. Again, is not the latter—the enormously high cost of the embassy interview—the real outrage in the system?

I suspect there's something else going on in this demonizing gesture, that the fixer becomes a proxy for the frustrations and fears of otherwise well-meaning civil servants caught up in a system that makes them uneasy (and that they often come to resent), because it calls on them to determine destinies (of people they often feel empathy for) through snap (often intuitive and arbitrary) judgments using flawed methods. This consular unease or anxiety perhaps also accounts for why biometrics and the big new database has such appeal, for it offers apparent verisimilitude in a sea of uncertainty—and why some consuls I have known seem to find satisfaction in describing database "triumphs" (when an applicant and apparent fraudster is found out through photo recognition or DNA testing as having falsified a form).

Now return to the encounter between applicant and consul: on the one side, an applicant who thinks the consul wants to steal his money (and perhaps his soul) and who assumes that his interlocutor thinks he's lying about his identity; on the other, a consul who distrusts the person before him (because his default position is that he or she is a fraudster) and who filters the world through a giant database, an information system haunted by post–Cold War conspiracy thinking. What rules of verisimilitude, we might ask, apply to this social encounter, this house of mirrors, this Petri dish of paranoia?

CASINO CITIZENSHIP

I remain intrigued with the fact that, in creating the DV Lottery, Congress chose to select its diverse future citizenry through a game of chance. The idea that one might pick citizens—or, from the other side, that one might acquire US citizenship—through the use of a lottery seems somehow un-American, steeped as we are in the belief that one's station in life is achieved through merit and hard work.[18] It seems that, as discussed earlier, when Congress decided to introduce the criterion of diversity into US immigration policy, thus supplementing family reunification and employment need as guiding principles, they settled on the lottery idea as the fairest, most

impartial way of selecting winners. How otherwise—by what criteria—to pick those who would fill the diversity slot?

But consider the consequences: the fates of 20 million people around the world each year are determined by chance and statistics, by a complex, multistep allocation formula that distributes visas by region and country, and that recalibrates the figures each year on the basis of the number of visas granted in a given country during the previous five years (Law 2002; Hethmon 2003, 390; Newton 2005, 1054–55).

This statistical rendering of citizenship and futurity—with computers and demographics deciding global migrant and nation-state futures, with random selection (choice via the lottery) seen as being more "fair"—is symptomatic of the age we live in. It also indexes a biopolitical endgame in which human agency and decision-making about global futures is vacated, given over instead to the category "population" as statistically or randomly defined (Foucault 2010).

On the applicant side, at least in Togo, lottery luck is never just that. Randomness or pure arbitrariness doesn't exist as a cultural category. Things happen for a reason, dictated by either human or invisible forces. One of the ways in which DV applicants try to control or tame chance—one's chance in being selected, one's chance in passing the embassy interview—is through

prayer and supplication, which is why visits to church and diviners increase during the sign-up period and right before results are announced. And why some sleep with confirmation numbers under pillows at night. And why some renounce sinful ways (adulterous affairs) and begin living on the right side. And why theories proliferate about how to game the numbers when enlisting—for some, playing on the first day of the sign-up period, for others, on the last.

Kodjo, more American than Togolese, it would seem, doesn't side with his compatriots here. He's studied the numbers of his winners every which way to see whether a pattern or bias emerges—Are names being selected more often from the beginning of the alphabet or from the end? Is there a bias toward early or middle or late players? Is there a bias in favor of those applying from the US?—but he hasn't found one. He simply smiles in the face of his compatriots' insistence that nothing is random, that there's a hidden secret to success in the DV Lottery. But after twenty years of applying for the DV without success, in a small concession to the idea that there may be something more than pure randomness at play, he now has someone else apply for him each year, hoping that Lady Luck might finally be on his side.

5

Embassy Indiscretions

> There is something authentically Nigerian about being humiliated in foreign embassies when you want to get a visa . . . . I will never forget this old man ahead of me in line once. He must have been in his 70s, spoke bad English and this official was shouting at him. "You are a liar, you're a liar. Security, get him out of here." And I thought: you don't have to do this. At least leave him with his dignity. — CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE (2010, 42)

Serving as a consul in Lomé during these times cannot be easy, especially when the caseload involves interviewing thousands who have been selected in the DV Lottery—at its peak in the mid-2000s Togo had up to three thousand annual selectees—many of whom added spouses after being selected. For consuls, the supplemental spouse—the "pop-up"—is the fly in the ointment (whereas for Togolese, adding a spouse is often the only way to pay the interview fee and plane ticket). While such marriages are fully legal, contracted in front of an elected authority, and clearly permitted by the designers of the DV Lottery, the marriage papers are often backdated to avoid consular suspicion that theirs is nothing more than a marriage of convenience. Because such backdating is considered fraudulent under US law, the embassy pays an inordinate amount of attention to such cases, and most consuls assume that most pop-ups are fakes. Indeed, it has become something of an embassy fixation to root out such marriages—and those fixers who arrange them.

Whatever position you take on these marriages—and, to repeat, mine is that it is not Togolese but the US State Department that is responsible (because they set the interview fee out of reach of most Togolese)—Congress left the door open to add a spouse after being selected. Moreover, some pop-ups are real, with couples falling for one another after one has been selected or because one was selected. That is, some long-standing fiancés who couldn't marry before (because they lacked the means) decide to marry after one has been chosen in the lottery ("now that my partner has a secure future, we can get married"). The presence of such multiple motivations for getting married after being selected should give one pause in assuming that pop-ups are necessarily fraudulent.

But more, as argued in chapter 3, even if one suspects a marriage of convenience—a marriage contracted for the express purpose of getting a visa—how to sort out the difference between real and fake during a short interview, and how to prove that fraud might have been committed? If the documents are in order—and they should be if a couple is vigilant (or an experienced fixer is overseeing the case)—and if a couple is able to respond to consular questions about their relationship (which they should, if well-coached), it can be difficult to determine whether a couple might be simply performing marital attachment for the interview.

Imagine yourself a consul, with a young DV couple before you. All the documents line up: the selectee's baccalaureate is confirmed, the marriage papers are legitimate (with a marriage date after the principal applicant was selected), the medical exam indicates a clean slate, both parties have recently issued passports. How, in such an instance, to decide whether a couple is real? Through the interview of course—a face-to-face that now becomes decisive. But under persistent questioning, at what point does a consul decide a couple might be faking it? Perhaps when they start to waffle on their answers, or when the responses of one spouse don't neatly correspond to those of the other. But wait: Aren't we assuming perfect memory here? Who among us would be able to answer all those questions with ease—what we did on our honeymoon; the names, jobs, and whereabouts of our spouse's siblings; the color of the curtains in our bedroom; the make of the electric fan or television in the living room?

A telling example of the flawed nature of this process—and the misadventures of some in the Lomé consulate—was recounted to me by a friend who worked at the embassy. Her Togolese brother-in-law was selected in the visa lottery in the early 2000s, passed the interview, and went to the States.

Five years later he petitioned to bring over his wife of twenty-five years (whom he had not declared when he first applied). After fumbling several questions about their marriage (about events that had occurred many years earlier) and giving answers that didn't closely match those of her husband, the wife failed the interview and was denied the visa. But she was fortunate to have an American relative and embassy employee who knew the consul and told him that she had known this woman for many years and that she was indeed married to her brother-in-law. Based on this new information, the consul reopened the file and gave the woman a visa.

But of course it was only because of this personal connection—something that few other lottery applicants have the benefit of—that this couple succeeded. How many others have failed who similarly fumbled answers they should have known? Moreover, this influence of the personal is, ironically, that quality for which consuls often reproach Togolese. "Ours is a system of merit," one consul told me. "Theirs is one based on personal connections. Togolese are constantly weighing in with 'I know this person, you need to give them a visa.' But I want someone to come before me with nothing but their documents. No chatter from family and friends. If the documents are legitimate, and the applicant answers my questions in a convincing way, I'll give them a visa. Outside interference means personal bias and contaminates the process for me."

Why, I've often wondered, wouldn't the personal constitute a welcome additional source of information about someone—someone you only get a glimpse and superficial sense of from the documents and the rapid interview? Surely more information, rather than less, makes for better decision making. If, after factoring all the evidence, the case still seems weak, it shouldn't be hard to make a negative decision, but now one that emerges from a more robust archive of evidence.

BECAUSE OF THE proliferation of pop-up marriages in the mid-2000s and the difficulty of deciding which couples might be marrying simply for convenience, the embassy in Lomé resorted to extraordinary measures. Consuls became overzealous and began overreaching, in some cases making decisions that were at the very least irresponsible and directly against DV rules. They also established the secret fraud unit, which was staffed by two Togolese who sought to verify information in an applicant's file by venturing into the neighborhoods and workplaces of DV applicants.[1] These private

eyes, perhaps too eager to please, also overstepped their mandate, inventing modes of investigation and interrogation and engaging in actions that were coercive and unethical.

All of the following—a veritable rogues' list of unethical, sometimes abusive, embassy practices—were described to me by Kodjo.[2] To be sure, he is not an impartial observer. Still, he has a surprisingly positive, even appreciative, view of the Lomé consuls. He understands and respects the fact that they are given a set of rules and guidelines to follow, which they are simply trying to apply to the best of their ability and which they often follow with reason and due diligence. Indeed, Kodjo could not carry out his practice if he didn't assume as much, in that he attempts to fastidiously work within DV guidelines and needs assume the presence of a reasonable consul on the other end who is devilishly devoted to applying the rules of the lottery.

Case in point: When the protestors were lined up outside the embassy in 2008, claiming they had been unreasonably denied visas and, among other things, asking the embassy to reimburse the money they had spent for the interview, Kodjo supported them in spirit, imagining that many had indeed been wrongly denied. But he also asserted that they had not read the fine print of the visa application, which states that the embassy will not reimburse an applicant if the visa is denied. In that the first principle of their protest was legally groundless, he told me, he was not supportive of their actions.[3]

Because Kodjo's charge is to work within the parameters of the DV system to present an immaculate file of client documents, he knows those parameters—those rules and guidelines—as well as or better than anyone, and he is keenly sensitive to instances in which the consulate is in violation. In one small though striking example mentioned above, Kodjo caught the consuls providing false information to applicants: that they had until the start of September to get a final document to the consulate. Kodjo knew better—the date was the *end* of September—and told his client to return to the embassy to ask whether the date the consul had given wasn't incorrect. He was right, of course. In such cases of consuls failing to live up to their own guidelines, alarm bells go off and Kodjo's temperature rises.

The first time I saw him actively worked up about embassy indiscretion was during the disastrous two-year run (2005–2007) of a pair of Lomé consuls, Ian Decker and John Brown, who realized, perhaps for the first time in Togolese consular circles, that adding spouses and children after selection (in order to pay the interview fee) had become common practice. Indeed,

searches for those who would finance the entire package of a DV winner became such public knowledge in Lomé at the time that a local radio station began running ads that offered financing to winners in return for adding spouses and children to their dossiers.

Chastened by this new knowledge, Decker and Brown began rejecting almost all who came before them, regardless of the merits of their cases. On one day alone they refused visas to thirty-seven of forty DV interviewees, dismissing case after case with barely a glance at the files. (According to Kodjo, who tracks such things, of the thirty-seven couples who were refused, at least ten were legitimate—couples who had been married for years, and with winners in possession of the baccalaureate or a job on the list. Moreover, of the three couples who received their visas on that inauspicious day, two had contracted marriages of convenience, revealing yet again the arbitrary way in which consular decision making can occur.) But this one day was far from exceptional. It became the norm under this consular regime and eventually led to a prolonged protest outside the embassy (chapter 6).

These two consuls also began requiring that all family members listed on the application come to the interview, and that each pay the full interview fee ($755 at the time). A family of five thus had to assemble $3,775 for the interview (after having already paid $1,000 for the medical exams and more than $500 for their documents, while anticipating spending another $5,000 on plane tickets). But Kodjo pointed out that this mandate that all on the application need come to the interview was squarely against DV Lottery rules (and not coincidentally may have been one reason the embassy was flush with money at the time). The DV Lottery stipulates that you must declare all family members (spouses and children) on the application, not that all need appear with the principal applicant for the interview. If means are lacking, all but the applicant can stay home and later petition the embassy for a visa, even after the applicant is in the US. But in 2006, those who didn't bring all family members to interview were systematically turned away. And many of those who did bring them were denied—and found themselves consumed by debt.

I have never heard Kodjo use the word "racist" before, but he did when describing these consuls. They had a deep, visceral hatred of Africans, he insisted. Otherwise, how could they behave with such scorn toward those Togolese who came before them?

This moment inaugurated an anxious and cynical era at the consulate. The next consul, Joan Peoples—Thatcher-like, super smart but steely—

established the secret fraud unit that was staffed by two Togolese, a man and a woman. They became the eyes and ears of the consulate throughout the city. It was they who tried to sniff out real from fake, either before the interview (by making the rounds of homes and workplaces in Lomé), during the first-stage interview at the embassy, or after the interview, when they sometimes insisted on meeting the principals somewhere in town. Moreover, it was often these two Togolese embassy employees who now de facto decided many of the cases on the basis of their investigations and rendered verdicts that the consuls simply rubber-stamped at the second interview. Such outsourcing of consular decision making, Kodjo insisted, was surely against State Department intent.

Thus, it was these two embassy employees—some on the street referred to them as "race traitors"—who went to the courthouse to see whether marriages had been registered, or who visited a couple's home address to ask whether they really lived there. During the preliminary interview, they often played the role of prison interrogator, separating couples and questioning each separately, often testing their mettle by making up stories about what the other had told them, bullying the interviewees into admitting that they were not telling the truth, trying any means possible to get spouses to contradict one another. One such tactic, mentioned previously: "Your wife said yours was a fake marriage. If you confirm what she said and tell me the truth, I'll give *you* the visa but not her." Taking the bait, the young man acknowledged that theirs was not a "vrai mariage" (real marriage), and both were promptly denied visas.

The more senior member of the fraud unit, the large, bearded man whose physique and brusque demeanor struck fear in many applicants—he was given the moniker the "bearded one"—was also known for continuing the interview after the interview, meeting applicants in bars or on the street after they'd interviewed at the embassy to see whether he could get them to admit that they'd falsified their documents (or as Kodjo insisted, to extract bribes or sexual favors in return for the visa). Again, on such occasions he liked to promise the applicant the visa if they told the truth, a promise that usually went unfulfilled. At the end of the day, however, instinct as much as evidence drove his decisions about the veracity of applicants. "I developed a feeling [*impression* was the French word he used] about whether they were telling me the truth or not," he admitted. "Could you be sure?" I pressed. "No, of course not. They rarely admitted it, but I felt I knew nonetheless whether or not they were lying." Surely he was often right, but not always.

Once I was in a bar with Kodjo in the quartier of Bè when the bearded one entered with a couple in tow. I greeted him and introduced Kodjo—adversaries who had never met—and after he and the couple retired to a table in the corner, Kodjo leaned over and said, "Tell me that couple isn't interviewing for the visa—and that he's not going to extract a bribe from them in return for a favorable outcome?" I was skeptical; I imagined this burly embassy employee, yes, as a fierce and even ruthless interrogator, but also as personally honest and unable to be bribed. (I had gotten to know him through a mutual friend and had come to like and respect him, while nevertheless finding him frustratingly unforthcoming in revealing information about his work at the consulate.) "Don't be so naïve," Kodjo countered. "He's Togolese. No Togolese would ever turn down a chance to make extra money like this. It's widely known that he's building a large house on the outskirts of Lomé. Where do you think he finds the money for something like that? Not from his salary alone." I was intrigued with this surprising turn but also wondered whether Kodjo was not using the opportunity to disavow an adversary who had outwitted and denied several of his clients.

A few months later this fraud unit employee, in a sadly ironic moment, was suddenly fired by the embassy. He who had been responsible for sniffing out and turning away dozens, probably hundreds, of couples—and for helping to purge the circle of thieves at the embassy in Cotonou who were extorting additional monies from applicants after the interview—was himself caught with his hands in the till and summarily dismissed. His first posting with the consular unit in 2005 had been at the cash register, where thousands of dollars flowed through his hands each day. According to a State Department audit conducted in 2012,[4] over $30,000 went missing from the register during the two-year period when the bearded one had been tending it.

When, in August 2012, the consul and the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM; the person just under the ambassador in the chain of command) confronted him about his indiscretion in a darkened room with an overhead projector flashing figures from seven years earlier, he denied taking such a large sum, but imagining that some honesty would impress his American interlocutors, confessed that small amounts of change may have ended up in his pockets. (He later told me that he was completely flummoxed by the encounter. When the consul and the DCM had asked to see him, he thought they wanted him to share notes about a talk on fraud that he was to give at an upcoming State Department retreat in Johannesburg. When he walked in to the darkened room, however, he realized they had a different agenda

and lost his bearings. "How could I possibly remember the details of transactions from specific days seven years earlier? It was a set-up, and more the work of the DCM than the consul, with whom I had warm relations." Once he had confessed—but was his confession real or performed?—they made him sign a note admitting his wrongdoing and dismissed him from his job.)

Sadly, even a year after being sacked, this otherwise fiercely loyal embassy employee still assumed the consulate would hire him back—as is common practice in Togo when a government official is caught with hands in the till. Indeed, even after spending time in jail for pocketing state monies, Togolese officials typically get their jobs back. When I saw the bearded one two years later, he had finally given up hope that the embassy would rehire him.[5]

The other fraud officer, a woman named Celestine, was less visible to those on the outside—both fixers and winners—because she spent more time making the rounds in Lomé and less time conducting interrogations during the interview. She was typically the one who checked marriages in the register at the prefecture and visited the homes and workplaces of applicant-winners (to make sure they indeed lived and worked there). She was also known for calling people out of the blue before the interview and springing questions on them: "What's the name of your mother-in-law? Give me her number so that I can call her." "You said you were a university student. Are you there now? I'm close to the university and would like to stop by to say hello." "Where is your workplace? Give me the number of your 'patron.'"

After such telephone encounters, she would often report back to the consul that the couple couldn't be trusted, meaning certain failure. This was novel terrain and invented practice—and clearly against DV Lottery rules. "Telephone interviews," Kodjo insisted, "have never been grounds for dismissing a couple"—a point consuls would surely agree with as well.

Celestine's methods were also sloppy, according to Kodjo. In 2012 he married two separate pop-up couples in Tsévié, a small town thirty-five kilometers north of Lomé, with their marriages entered on the same page in the official register. One received the visa while the other did not; the latter was told that there was no record of their marriage. Kodjo returned to Tsévié to double-check the register and found the name of his client right next to the one who had received her visa. The denied couple sent an appeal to the embassy, but never heard back.

CONSULS, TOO, WERE engaging in questionable practices throughout, some derived from the State Department's flawed tool kit, others from their own attempts to freelance, yet others a result of overwork or sloppiness—to say nothing about the inevitable arbitrariness of decision making that follows from a short interview.

The State Department's list of questions, those posed by consuls or fraud unit employees to couples who are isolated from one another—questions that are stand-ins for more direct knowledge about marital histories—have always struck me as trick gestures that measure little more than how mentally agile a couple is. (Recognizing this, Kodjo subjects potential clients, especially the financing party, to a lengthy interview before taking them on, during which he tries to gauge their mental acuity and whether they might be able to withstand fierce interrogation by a member of the fraud unit or a consul.)

As previously mentioned, many of these questions are culturally biased and operate at some distance from local categories. One such question, posed to spouses to see whether both answer similarly: "What side of the bed do you sleep on?" While middle-class American couples may sleep on the same side every night—indeed, my wife and I do so not only at home but also when travelling—Togolese do not. "Whoever goes to bed first sleeps against the wall," I heard again and again when questioning Togolese friends about their sleep protocols after hearing from Kodjo that this was a stock interview question. "Unless the bed is near the door," some added, "in which case the husband sleeps on the outside, to protect against danger." But how should a couple reply to a question that makes no sense to them? And will hesitating when responding—or guessing the opposite of what your partner said—mean that you won't get the visa?

As indexed earlier, one consul told me that during the early months of her tenure she experienced a similar lost-in-translation moment. When interviewing women, she became suspicious when they looked away from her while answering questions—suspicious because Americans tend to look an inquisitor in the eyes, especially when (as during a DV interview) one's truthfulness is in question. But for Togolese, politeness dictates that women look away, never looking at a superior—here, an embassy officer—in the eyes. Imagine how many couples were turned away because of such cultural misunderstanding.

Another question posed by one consul: "When was the last time you had sex with your husband?" (cf. Obadare and Adebanwi 2010, 43). But what if

a culture dictates that one not discuss sex in public? Would hesitating to answer the question lead to a denial of the visa? And are all questions fair game, even ones about a couple's sex life? (Why not continue down that road: What position is your favorite, man on top, or woman? Do you and your partner have oral sex? How often?)

In Abidjan in June 2015—Kodjo sent a string of Togolese couples there because the consuls in Côte d'Ivoire seemed less concerned with pop-ups—a consul asked a female winner with the baccalaureate what were her best subjects in school. "History and geography," she replied. "And which of those two was your favorite?" "History," she said. "What period?" "World War II—the 1940s." The consul then asked, "When they created the United Nations, what were the five permanent members of the UN Security Council?" She correctly answered the US, France, and China, but then drew a blank and blurted out "Côte d'Ivoire." "Sorry, I can't give you the visa," he concluded.

What? Someone with the baccalaureate (which is easily confirmed at the Ministry of Education and is a document that can't be falsified) getting retested on knowledge they were taught in school a few years earlier and then denied because they answered a question about it incorrectly? Is the visa process now also testing for school smarts—or more accurately, retention of facts learned in school about esoteric subjects? It would be hard to find a clearer example of consular overreach than this.

Surprisingly, when I discussed this case with Kodjo a year later—at the time of the decision, he was miffed and upset—he came to the consul's defense. He said that consuls are often behind in their work and may not have time to double-check all the documents in front of them. Rather than make an applicant wait weeks for official confirmation to arrive, they sometimes look for other means to test whether an applicant's documents are legitimate. He then offered the example of another client of his, a freshly minted high school graduate who had been interviewed in Lomé two years earlier and was asked by the consul to demonstrate his scientific knowledge by diagramming a DNA sequence. He was able to do so—thus providing confirmation that he had the high school diploma—and received the visa.

"As for my client in Abidjan," Kodjo continued dismissively (he's never had sympathy for those who are dimwitted during the interview), "she passed the baccalaureate only two years before her interview, and she was unable to recall who was on the UN Security Council? The consul was right to fail her."

Kodjo also took the consul's side in a second case that didn't succeed in Abidjan in 2015—but only later, after learning the details of what had occurred during the couple's medical exam. A client of his applied for an interview extension because his passport wasn't yet ready, and the consul granted it. But when he showed up on the new date, the consul said the time for his interview had passed, at which point the applicant showed the consul the email he had received confirming the extension (which Kodjo had insisted he print out and take to the interview). "I'm sorry, but your time has expired," the consul repeated. "I can't give you the visa."

At the time, Kodjo was beside himself. "These are mistakes that no consul should make. How could a US consul be so careless—and with the evidence right in front of him that it was *he* who granted the extension?" But a year later, with new knowledge, Kodjo changed his tune. He had discovered from a conversation with his client that during the medical exam, his "wife" was asked by the doctor—after she had removed her clothes—if he could invite her husband in. Unthinkingly, she replied "no," which the doctor duly noted in the report sent to the consul. When, just before the interview, the consul read the physician's report, he must have realized they were not a real couple—why, otherwise, would the wife have been worried about her husband seeing her naked?—and decided to deny them without further explanation. "He too was right," Kodjo concluded.

"But it's not a doctor's duty to decide whether a couple is married or not," I protested. "His job is to decide whether a couple is healthy." "You're right," Kodjo said. "But I have little patience with that sort of client stupidity. With such knowledge before him, the consul was right to refuse them the visa." Kodjo has high standards for his clients, and if they are not up to the challenge, he is quick to blame them, not the consulate.

But when the consuls are out of bounds, his critique can be withering. In 2014 a consul in Lomé began asking interviewees what struck Kodjo as an utterly inappropriate, even illegal, question: "From whom did you get money to pay the interview fee?" If the applicant responded, "My wife's brother in the United States" (suggesting a marriage of convenience), or "the one who signed me up for the lottery" (possibly a fixer), they were immediately disqualified. But they were also denied if they said "a friend." (A better answer, Kodjo now coaches his clients, is to say that some of the money came from a member of the family, the rest from a friend.)

But what possible relevance could this question have in determining whether someone selected in the visa lottery is eligible for citizenship? Is

borrowing money for the interview from someone a consul deems suspect now a criterion for denying entry to the US? Of course not. More damning, what if the consul was wrong—that the interviewee *did* borrow from someone in the US, but not someone associated with an arranged marriage? Or from a wealthy "friend" in Lomé? Or even from a fixer, now acting—fully legally—as a loan shark? This is yet another instance of a consul going rogue, of rules being made up on the fly, by those who should know better, and it indicates once again not only the embassy's obsession with arranged marriages and fixers but also the way in which that preoccupation can produce clouded judgment in cases that appear one way but might be another.

A final example of embassy indiscretion. During the same period, consulate employees began misplacing (or deliberately neglecting?) files in the Lomé office. After the interview, several of Kodjo's clients (and those of *traiteur* friends of his) were told to leave their passports with the consulate while their files were undergoing final review—a sign that receipt of the visa was imminent—and that the embassy would contact them when the review was complete. Months went by without notification, with the September deadline passing (meaning the applicants were no longer eligible for visas).[6] When the applicants returned to the embassy to inquire about their cases, they were told simply, "Je suis désolé," without further explanation.

How to account for such injudiciousness? A deliberate attempt to deny people the consuls were suspicious of but without saying so directly (as with the consul in Abidjan)? Simple carelessness? Overwork or inadequate staffing at the consulate? Probably the latter, as I know that one of the consuls at this time had to leave before the end of her term and was not replaced for many months, leaving a vacuum at the consulate. Still, inadvertently punishing lottery winners for sins not their own, thus making them miss an opportunity for a US visa because of inadequate staffing, is cruel punishment indeed. Such inattentiveness, Kodjo claims, became the new norm at the embassy during this period, although when I asked him in 2016 whether that was still the case, he said no, that they were now processing end-of-the-year files on time. But there also seemed something more endemic, on the order of system collapse or breakdown, at the heart of the process. A product of having to adjudicate too many cases, with not enough staff, with too little local knowledge and too little applicant information, all within hard deadlines.

Finally, it has always been surprising to me that the embassy gives only the most general reason for rejection of a visa and that there are no grounds

for appeal. Consuls are making arbitrary and clearly mistaken decisions every day in West African embassies (and no doubt beyond as well), but those who have been wronged have no recourse. When people are trying to escape precarious lives at home (and have already been selected in the DV Lottery), you would think that more rather than less due process would be the order of the day.

Let me repeat what I said at the beginning of this chapter: This is not easy work, and not all consuls engage in such unwelcome practices. I know of instances where consuls have advised applicants not to proceed to the interview because they knew they wouldn't qualify—either they didn't have the high school diploma or a job on the list—and wanted to spare them their money. (Although such advice to applicants can backfire, as I am told it did in Ghana in 2010, with those who were turned away accusing the embassy of prejudice against them.) As mentioned above, another consul I know gave a second chance to a visa lottery couple already residing in the US who petitioned to bring over their three children (who had remained behind in Lomé). Their petition was denied when a DNA test revealed that the woman was parent to all three but the man to only two. While the consul could not grant visas to any of the children (because, in claiming that all three were the offspring of both parents, the parents' petition contained false information), he nevertheless encouraged the mother to reapply on her own, adding that he would then approve visas for all three.

A third example of consular kindness that I heard about occurred when a visa lottery applicant also applied for a student visa, listing his wife on the DV application but not on the student application because someone on the street told him he was more likely to get the student visa if he applied as a *célibataire* (single). When he was chosen in the visa lottery and went for the interview, accompanied by his wife, the consul discovered (during a computer search) that he had applied for a student visa as a single and asked why he had given false information on that form, to which he answered that he had followed the advice of someone on the street, but now regretted it. The consul found that to be an "honest" mistake and gave him (and his wife) visas.

Most of the consuls I have met—all those who have staffed the offices in Lomé since the early 2000s—have seemed decent and well-meaning, some exceptionally so. Many are politically liberal and incline toward the street,

favoring the underdog or little guy, and thus would be favorably disposed toward those who come before them seeking a DV. Some I have known claim they are especially fond of Togolese and would like to see more of them in the States. One told me that when she returned to Washington, she intended to visit those she had given visas to who were living nearby—in Silver Spring, Maryland, a Togolese landing point in the US—to see how they were doing.

But the work consuls are asked to do in administering the DV Lottery also sometimes turns them into people they'd rather not be—especially when they're called on to decide whether applicants are committing fraud.[7] They become moralizing gatekeepers, passing judgment about applicants with complicated life histories embedded in a social world the consuls know little about. And of course their "cannot-tell-a-lie" culture—American culture—hobbles them in attempting to adequately draw conclusions from the lives they are litigating. It would all be so much easier if they didn't have to imagine that their interviewees might be committing marriage fraud, or if they were able to tell themselves that they were engaging in such marriages for a justifiable reason (because the State Department sets the fees too high).

A conclusion one might draw from these misadventures—these fraught encounters between consulate and street—would be that implementing the DV Lottery is hopelessly compromised and that this entire branch of US Immigration Services ought to be eliminated. That is not my position, however. I believe the DV is a luminous and courageous idea, offering underrepresented populations around the world access to the US—or, more properly, global access. And it's a gift for Africans, who have been historically discriminated against by US immigration policy. The DV provides one of the few ways for those from the continent to get visas to the US, and its elimination would only mean further prejudice against this long-neglected region.[8]

How, then, to reimagine a DV Lottery without its current travails? I'm a cultural anthropologist, not a policy analyst—anthropologists are less practiced at prescribing than describing—but were I to try on the hat of my public policy colleagues, I would suggest a few simple changes to the DV system that might make a difference. One would be to eliminate the globally homogeneous pay scale for the embassy interview, whereby everyone everywhere—Togolese, Norwegians, Bangladeshis—pay the same amount when presenting themselves at the embassy. Surely a graduated pay scale

makes more sense, with those from poorer countries paying less and those from richer ones, more. If the interview fee for the DV at the consulate in Lomé was the same as or lower than that for a tourist visa ($150), many would no longer add pop-up spouses as a way to finance their journeys.

Another quick fix would be to ban pop-up marriages altogether, closing the loophole that allows winners to add spouses after being selected, with only those spouses (and children) who are listed on the application allowed to audition for the visa. This would end the arranged marriage market in a day. A slightly different version of an outright pop-up ban, suggested to me by one of the Lomé consuls, would be to continue to allow pop-ups but only give visas to the principal applicant at the time of the interview, allowing the trailing spouse to petition the embassy later, after the principal has resided in the US for several years. It is likely, this consul reasoned, that time would put pressure on an arranged marriage and would give the consulate more evidence in deciding which marriages were real and which not. To which one might add the chilling effect that having to wait so long would have on finding potential financiers—those who have to pay the full freight now while waiting several years to receive their due.

It is striking how much energy and creativity embassy personnel expend on trying to root out fraudsters—isolating and trick-interrogating pop-up couples, generating lists of bizarre (and sometimes invasive) questions to try to catch them in a lie, sending embassy employees into neighborhoods and workplaces on sleuthing missions. Why not instead spend that energy designing a system that avoids the problem of marriage acrobatics altogether?

6

Protest

The desultory period of 2006–2008 at the consulate led to a protest by those denied visas after the interview. Over five hundred women and men sat at the embassy entrance—dressed in red, to show their "wounds"—for six months in 2008, rain or shine, until Togolese security forces were called in to remove them. Still they persisted, continuing to gather a few blocks from the embassy compound. Ten years later they were still convening once a week.

This episode brought contradictions and misunderstandings to the fore and demonstrated the inability (or unwillingness) of either side to understand the other. The embassy believed the complaints of the demonstrators to be groundless but nevertheless used the sit-in as an opportunity to, as the ambassador put it, "teach Togolese a lesson in democracy" by allowing them to sit. Little did the embassy know at the time that the protestors had such staying power—they assumed a few weeks, maybe a month or two—and growing tired of the daily assembly, had the protestors removed. So much for democracy.

The protestors too were plagued by misconception. They imagined an empathetic embassy that would review their files and give visas to those who were deserving. They also claimed to have reliable information that the embassy had chartered an airplane to take them to the States. When they mentioned this to me, I didn't have the heart to tell them I thought that was unlikely.

Most tellingly, the protest revealed State Department officials to be unable to manage the fallout from years of arbitrary decision making—and of a process handed them by Congress that was flawed from the beginning.[1]

THE PROTESTORS' PRINCIPAL complaint was unsurprising: that their cases had been rejected on arbitrary grounds and without stated reason. At the end of the interview, they were often left with little other than the consul's perfunctory "je suis désolé" (I'm sorry) in place of any written or verbal explanation of why their case had been denied. One protestor told me, "I'm a house painter but was denied when painters were on the [Labor Department] list. A friend of mine, also a house painter, received his visa at that time. They only asked me two questions and then dismissed my case. How could they have decided I was not deserving while my friend was?" "Did you add a [pop-up] spouse?" I asked. "No, I'm not married and went alone."

Another, a woman whose case turned tragic, was denied on what she too felt were arbitrary grounds. When told that she wouldn't receive her visa, she had an anxiety attack ("elle a piqué une crise"), collapsed, and was hospitalized. She died a week later.

To be sure, some of the protestors did not have grounds for complaint. From the beginning of the lottery in the 1990s, many winners have gone for the interview when they didn't satisfy State Department criteria (a job on the list, a high school diploma). But many of those protesting felt they did fulfill the criteria and were still turned away, mainly by the two consuls who went rogue in the years 2005–2007. Moreover, to invest so much time, money, and aspiration, only to have their cases dismissed with the wave of a hand, and without recourse to an appeal, violated their sense of fair play.

Protestor complaints went beyond the feeling that their individual cases had not received the attention they deserved. They also questioned the high cost of the medical exam and embassy interview—almost $1,000 per applicant—and wondered why they weren't given their money back when they failed the interview. Moreover, they wanted the embassy to refund

money taken as a result of the implementation of an ad hoc policy that was clearly in violation of State Department rules: the insistence of the two consuls working the window in Lomé at the time that a winner had to bring all of his or her family members to the interview, with full fees paid for each—amounting, for some, to over $3,000. How, I heard again and again, can a country that is supposed to be "the world's number one democracy"—namely, one that follows rules—behave like this?

It is perhaps unsurprising that the protestors (and beyond, those on the street) concluded that the DV was a money-making scheme for the US government—one that lured Togolese in with the offer of US citizenship, then took their money and denied them visas. Neither was it altogether unreasonable that one of the consuls at that time, Joan Peoples, was widely assumed to have occult powers: Had she not exchanged for money the soul of the applicant who died after the interview?

As mentioned, an interesting sidebar for me was that Kodjo was not sympathetic with the protestors on procedural grounds. They had no right to file complaint, he said, because they hadn't read the fine print of the DV application, which states that the consulate will not return an interviewee's money if they fail the interview and that the consul does not have to provide a reason for denying the visa. When I pressed him, asking whether he didn't, however, agree with the spirit of the protest and think that these rules should be changed, he acknowledged that they should. "But," he added, "you don't change laws through a sit-in, you change them through legislation." A jurist pure.

I SAT WITH THE protestors many times, and they always struck me as nice and reasonable to a fault, also with a compelling sense of procedure and propriety. Dressed in red jerseys, they arrived on foot or *Zed* (motorcycle taxi) from all over the city, occupying their station in front of the embassy by 8:00 a.m. to make themselves visible to embassy personnel as they arrived for work. It was an impromptu, rag-tag assembly, most of them unacquainted with one another before being brought together by the protest. Once united by common cause and foe, however, many became friends—an amity that endured beyond the space of the sit-in and the time of the protest. Some even married and had children.

This small society-in-the-making also brought into being new collective identities and redefined daily rhythms. They became known throughout

the city as "those in red," and they established a website where they called themselves "*Le Collectif des Personnes Opprimées par l'Ambassade des Etats-Unis au Togo dans le Cadre de la Loterie Visa*" (The Collective of People Oppressed by the Embassy of the United States in Togo in the Case of the Visa Lottery). A Pentecostal pastor led prayers three times a day, with all rising to their feet, pressing in upon this prophet in their midst. "Jesus, hear the pleas of these congregants; please open the eyes and ears of those in the embassy; please give us the visas to which we are entitled . . . ." At these moments, the effervescence in the air was palpable, an electricity that bred hope.

Throughout their six months in front of the embassy, the protestors maintained an almost militaristic sense of propriety and order. While they made the space of occupation their own—spreading out their mats on the ground, sitting and chatting, napping, reading, playing cards, eating food brought from home—they were careful to restore all to its prior state at the end of each day's occupation, picking up trash and removing rocks they had used to hold their mats in place. This politesse seemed to be an attempt to plead their case through their behavior; they did not want their actions to become a diverting source of critique.

A hundred yards from this vibrant community sat the gated embassy, with its hidden cameras and moat-like double-fence entrance. Cookie-cutter

identical to US embassies across the continent, it is—words fail me here—an architectural monstrosity, a stack of squares and rectangles, seemingly cribbed from a Cold War Soviet architectural manual. First built in the early 2000s, these Fortress America embassies dot the continent today—the State Department's response to the 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, and the unfortunate public face of an anxious superpower.

And such a pity in Lomé's case, as this block fortress replaced a graceful old colonial building located near the *Grand Marché* in the commercial center of the city. Until the embassy's flight to the suburbs in the early 2000s, the residences of expat embassy personnel were scattered throughout the city, permitting lives that were more integrated with the bustle of the street than those of their counterparts today. Now most live in a gated community five minutes from the new embassy. Certainly an easier to-and-fro—and with an embassy building that is more readily defensible—but a shame that gates and separation walls now define the everyday lives of embassy personnel.

Seated before this mass of giant Legos, with its surveillance cameras recording all comings and goings—one Togolese embassy employee was fired from her job when she was caught on camera consorting with the protestors—the five-hundred-strong kept imagining that the consul or the ambas-

sador would come meet with them, but no one ever did. I asked the consul at the time, Joan Peoples, why they were unwilling to have a sit-down with the protestors. She said, in her typically forthright fashion, that she wanted to but that the ambassador had advised against it because he was worried the protestors might turn violent.

I found this an odd claim that went against all I had come to know about these gentle souls. They were polite to a fault, orderly, sweet—"violent" is the last descriptor I would choose to characterize them—and I wondered whether it was generic embassy worry about the potential violence of the Other, or whether embassy staff had acquired specific knowledge, or even just rumors, about a lurking violence at the embassy gates. When I asked Peoples, she said the protestors were seen (with the embassy's cameras?) collecting rocks in their place of protest.

I asked Koffi Agba, the leader of the protest, about this charge and he was aghast, insisting that, "Those rocks are to hold our mats down, so that they won't blow away in the wind!" Sad here the misunderstandings that were in play: the protestors gathering rocks to pin their mats to the ground, with the embassy reading their actions as evidence of a putative violence against embassy personnel. And indeed, if the embassy was truly interested in dialogue but worried about violence, why not stage the encounter somewhere else than the protest ground, even inside the embassy gates themselves?

Another strange current was circulating in the embassy at the time. One of the consuls I spoke with insisted there was an outside agitator, a Togolese national residing in the US, who was bankrolling the protest—paying the protestors to protest. This view of the sit-in as a money-making scheme, of protestors in it for financial profit rather than to insist on their rights, suggested that embassy staff saw in the protest another identity play or sleight of hand—a fake protest, as it were. It is easy to see how seductive such an idea might have been to a consulate preoccupied with Togolese deception and fraud. But a protest like this that was all staged, a front for money-making? Now it was the Americans whose imaginations seemed to be getting the best of them.

Moreover, why the need to seek out unorthodox theories about why the protestors were protesting, instead of simply assuming they felt they had legitimate complaints, that they'd been treated poorly by previous consuls and wanted an accounting? As the quote from Chimamanda Adichie (2010) at the start of the last chapter reminds us, many West Africans share a history of being treated shabbily—condescended to, demeaned—when seek-

ing visas at Western consulates. These rag-tag protestors insisted on the same.

As for the outside agitator—according to the leader of the protest, a supporter in the US *was* taking their cause to the US media and members of Congress—why assume that his motives were suspect? Perhaps he wanted to show solidarity with their cause, or support a family member who had a beef with the consulate.[2] But even if his motives were more perverse—and presumably outside interests often subtend events like this—it would suggest a shocking lack of protestor agency to imagine that their cause was largely driven by instrumentalities beyond. The protestors' staying power alone—the fact that they sat, day after day, for several years, and that at this writing, ten years later, they are still sitting once a week—puts the lie to that assumption.

DESPITE THE FRUSTRATIONS of not being able to meet with embassy personnel—of their protest being met with silence—the protestors' hopefulness and patience remained, and (remarkably, to me) they held to the belief that the embassy would eventually do them right.

Here, rumors fed hope. In addition to the speculation that the embassy had chartered an airplane to take them to the States, they held fast to the idea that a similar protest in Cameroon (also of long duration) had ended in success.[3] My presence, too—that a US professor would be interested in their cause—seemed to reassure them, and they added a photo of me sitting with them to their webpage.

They were especially savvy in carrying their cause beyond the embassy and waged a media campaign, drawing attention to their protest in local TV and print venues. Short articles about those "dressed in red" continued to roll out in local newspapers for the duration of the sit-in. The protestors also pressed their case with the Ministry of the Interior and Security, getting an audience with the minister himself, to whom they detailed their complaints and asked for intercession at the embassy.

Most interestingly, perhaps, they contracted with one of the top law firms in Lomé to press their case in the US. Because of the extraordinary nature of the claim—of charges brought against the Department of State by a group of protestors in Lomé—the firm took the case pro bono. They eventually decided that sending a letter directly to then–Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made more sense than bringing suit in US court. Such a petition—

Martial Akakpo et Associés

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Lomé, June 22, 2011

N/Réf. 1333/11/MASA/JYD

AFF: Group of Loto Visa Victims
vs. American Embassy in Togo

U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Her Excellency, Ms. Secretary of State,

We are writing to call your attention on a situation involving the United States of America and which has become quite a national drama here in Togo and regarding which a last hope of solution is placed on the person dedicated to human rights that you have always been in your public life.

The ISSUE

This situation is related to the case of people who placed their hope in the American Loto Visa system and followed the procedure through to the end with huge indebtedness for some of them but seem to have been fouled around at the very last moment. For memory, I put a particular stress on the fact that if the fees of a normal visa issuance is about one hundred (100. 00) $US, most of the 410 persons on behalf of whom this letter is written were assured of their successful completion of the various steps and led to pay the maximum amount of **seven hundred and fifty five (755. 00) $US** (not including the other fees) before finding themselves completely trapped when they were told at the very last moment that for various arguments that will be exposed later, they were refused the issuance of the visa for the USA.

jumping jurisdictions and sovereignties, appealing directly to the highest extraterritorial authority rather than to local tribunals—is reminiscent of those extraordinary colonial-era pleas from disenfranchised colonial subjects to the Queen of England (Pels and Salemink 2000).[4]

The six-month protest at the gates of the embassy came to an unceremonious end, with the embassy—exhausted from the daily embarrassment? unsure how long the protest would last? anticipating the arrival of a visiting dignitary?—deciding that the protestors should be removed and calling in Togolese security forces to do the dirty work. When the protestors refused to move, they were gassed and scattered. The next day they set up shop one hundred meters away but were chased from there as well. A week later they settled a kilometer away, where they continued—into summer 2018—to gather once a week. Although their ranks were diminished and despite long odds, they remained upbeat in their optimism.

THERE SEEMED SOMETHING transcendent about the spirit—the hopefulness, the humility, the persistence—of these gentle protestors, a spirit that rendered the embassy's treatment of them—its unwillingness to meet, its order to remove—all the more unseemly. These reversals of the standard dualisms—an embassy, rather than a street, that resorts to violence; an embassy guided by rumor rather than reason; an embassy committed to democracy that pulls the rug from under democratic protest; an embassy that comes to resemble nefarious occult power (exchanging money for human life)—were exacerbated over the course of the protest and became a source of ongoing commentary on the street and a troubling side story.

To wit, how does the street, associated in the popular imagination with the qualities of the mob (passion, un-democracy, rumor, violence) become an exemplary figure, and the embassy, associated with reason, restraint, democracy, devolve into its opposite? This reversal, this switching of sides—an embassy that becomes street-like, a street that becomes ambassadorial—was surely a product of the larger cultural-ideological work under way inside the embassy at the time. Namely, of an embassy seduced by the latest iteration of what Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1991, 2003) refers to as "savage slot" thinking—seeing Togolese as fakers and scammers unduly influenced by agents provocateurs and fixers—and of a savvy street all too conscious of the fact that its image was available for all to see and judge. In the embassy's

reading of the street as mob-like, it opened itself to mimetic behavior, responding to like with like, itself becoming the mob.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that the protestors sat in not only because they felt violated by embassy policy but also because once they had been selected as winners in the lottery, they felt entitled. It was small interests (consuls behaving unprofessionally), they felt, that got in the way of what was their due, and they remained steadfast in their belief that if the embassy wouldn't listen, surely another authority like Hillary Clinton would. A democracy of spirit in the purest sense.

Again, the larger Togolese context—of a country sutured to ongoing political crisis and economic precariousness—is cardinal. It is the crisis-without-end that has produced a desiring machine that pushes youth to want to leave for what they imagine will be a better life elsewhere. With their feet and through a protest like this, they insisted that they have a right to the world—to global access and travel—like others elsewhere.[5] This buoyant hubris was luminously on display in the small island of red outside the embassy for six months. Sadly, their airplane never materialized and this time they came up empty.

7

Prison

Always looking for new markets, Kodjo decided to test the waters in Burkina Faso. Burkinabé were not playing the lottery at anywhere near the rates of Togolese, and he assumed it was simply because they were unaware of the opportunity.[1] He thus sent a colleague to Ouagadougou, Burkina's capital, in October 2008 on an exploratory mission. This partner set up shop on the quad at the university and signed up two thousand students in four days.

When Petit returned to Lomé, he and Kodjo spent a week entering the students' data into the online system, using Kodjo's postal address in Lomé. (At that time winners were still notified by mail, not, as today, through a website.) By early June 2009 Kodjo had received notification letters from the State Department for thirty-one winners—his largest yield ever.

To alert these winners of their selection—something he always does in person—Kodjo and Petit traveled to Ouagadougou in mid-June and asked whether I wanted to go along. Naturally, I jumped at the opportunity.

AS IF PRESAGING THINGS to come, the twenty-four-hour bus ride from Lomé to Ouaga was like a bad dream. The air conditioning promised by the bus company was *en panne* (in need of repair), so we drove the whole way with the doors wide open to keep the air circulating, but a syrupy tropical air washed over us like a hot, wet blanket. Across roads that had lost much of their pavement and returned to dirt, the driver drove like someone possessed—weaving to avoid large potholes, passing cars and trucks without a clear line of vision, jumping onto the shoulder when that seemed expedient—and more than once appeared to be headed into the bush. Nigerian videos played nonstop on an overhead monitor, at ear-shattering volume. After dark I kept falling in and out of sleep, only to wake to see another monstrosity on the screen—snakes coming out of a woman's vagina, another Pentecostal pastor exposed for conniving with witches. At 6:00 a.m. we arrived at Cinkassé, the legendary border town known for its contraband and shady characters, but there we had to wait until noon to complete the formalities. Finally, midafternoon, we flounced into Ouagadougou, all nerves frayed.

The three of us found a modest hotel near the university—Hotel Zamdogo, "House of Deception"—not knowing at the time that its name also spoke of things to come. After dinner—grilled lamb and bottled beer (or Coke, in Kodjo's case) is all we had for two days, as none of us were fond of the local sauces—we set up shop at a small *maquis* (bar) near the hotel where Petit began calling the winners, telling them he had good news and asking them to meet. They came over the next two days, a parade of neatly groomed twenty-year-olds, all but one male, with Kodjo sharing the news that they had been selected in the DV Lottery. He showed them the State Department notification letter before reciting the "conditions" they needed to fulfill to go for the embassy interview (take a medical exam; ensure they were HIV negative;[2] be in possession of a birth certificate, national ID card, or passport; provide proof of the baccalaureate). If they had the means to pay the interview fee and plane ticket themselves, they could settle with him and walk with their file. But if they were unable to pay on their own, he would look for financing—by trying to arrange a marriage with a Togolese woman.[3] Their interviews, he told them, would be in Lomé (because the beneficiary calls the shots), but with their trips paid for by the woman's family. "A tourist opportunity," Kodjo called it, "to visit somewhere you've never been."

It was striking how polite they all were, appreciative of this gift from the sky and apparently eager to follow Kodjo's advice. He won them over with

his straightforward, reasonable manner and of course, with the master idea behind his system—the promise that they wouldn't pay a penny—and they seemed to have confidence in him right away.

RIPOSTE

Except for one, who was testy from the beginning. When Petit first called to invite him to meet, he asked who we were and why he should trust us, before pressing to know what this "good news" was. Kodjo never reveals the secret on the phone, always insisting that he meet the winner in person before explaining more in order to ensure the identity of the voice on the other end. This cantankerous one eventually agreed to come to the hotel, arriving after dark on a bicycle and he immediately picked up where he left off on the phone.

"Who are you and why should I believe you? I'm not inclined to trust anyone from Togo. What scam are you offering?" he began.

"Why would I come all this way from Lomé to meet with you, risking the dangers of the road, while paying for the bus and this hotel with my own money? Have I asked you for anything?" Kodjo shot back.

"That's the only good thing I can say about you so far, but I'm sure there's a surprise coming."

"I've rarely seen such impoliteness. Who are you, *l'enfant de Blaise*?" Kodjo continued. (Blaise Campaore was the long-standing President of Burkina Faso. The children of West African dictators, like Togo's Gnassingbé Eyadéma and Burkina Faso's Campaore, are widely considered by those on the street as the most spoiled of youth, getting away with whatever they want. Needless to say, to be called a "child of Gnass" or "child of Blaise" is a below-the-belt taunt.)

Kodjo then asked his opponent for an apology. "I've come here on my own, with good news for you, news that will change your life, and you've responded with nothing but impoliteness. We won't proceed until you've apologized for the insult."

The other rose to the occasion and challenged Kodjo on what exactly he meant by the word "insult." "Is it an insult to be suspicious of someone you've never met before? Tell me, what does this word 'insult' mean anyway?" After much back-and-forth, he then wanted to parse the meaning of the term "impolite."

At this point, Petit intervened and said he didn't like the way this was

going and that Kodjo should give him his State Department letter and let him go. But Kodjo would have none of it. "This is the most interesting conversation we've had all day. I know he'll come around." Clearly, this adversary touched a soft spot in Kodjo, his competitiveness and love of a good argument, while also evincing his supreme self-confidence, even arrogance.

Kodjo then switched tacks, retracting his insistence that his debating partner apologize first, offering instead to let him read the letter from the State Department, while nevertheless adding another dig, "I assure you, child of Blaise, that you'll apologize before we're through."

Kodjo handed him the letter and let him read it without interruption. As his English was not strong, it took him half an hour to get through the one-page letter. Upon finishing, he looked up and said, "I've never had a desire to get this visa, or to visit the United States. This means nothing to me."

Kodjo was clearly caught off guard. He'd never met a potential client who wouldn't jump at the opportunity to acquire a visa to the US. The fact that most wanted to leave had always been an article of faith—a goes-without-saying—of his business. But he recovered quickly and said calmly, "Well if that's your attitude, there's no point in us going any further. I'll give you your letter and let you handle your file on your own. If you'd rather live in poverty here than have a better life abroad, that's your right." At that, the young man got on his bicycle and pedaled away into the thick night air, and we returned to the bar for one more interview.

After ordering our beer and Coke, Petit received a text message from the combative one, letting us know he'd "arrived home safely." (This is common West African protocol when returning home from a visit but seemed odd coming from someone who had been so hostile.) Kodjo, however, was mildly reassured by this gesture. "He's starting to rethink his position," he suggested. Then another text: "I'll go the American Embassy tomorrow to see if what you told me about being selected in this lottery is true." This seemed to reassure Kodjo even more. "Very good. They'll confirm that he was selected, and he'll realize that all that we told him was correct. I know he'll be back soon."

I wasn't so sure. It wasn't only his nasty edge but also the distant look in his eyes. I told Kodjo and Petit that I thought the first message (that he'd "arrived home safely") was sarcastic, another riposte, and that I worried about the second one as well, that it threatened to bring the embassy into the fray. But Kodjo held to his more upbeat view.

Earlier in the day I had received a call from a student of mine who was in Togo for the summer to carry out a service learning project. He had fallen and hurt his head, and he needed to be taken to Lomé for additional tests, so I left by bus early the next morning. Kodjo said that he and Petit would follow two days later, after finishing the rest of their interviews. When they didn't arrive on the day promised, or the day after, I called the hotel to find out whether they had checked out, and I was told that they had done so four days earlier, the day I had departed, but that they had left some belongings behind and had not yet returned to retrieve them.

Unsettled by this news, I got in touch with a brother of Kodjo's who contacted a family friend in Ouagadougou and asked him to make the rounds of hospitals and police stations. This friend, Tontovi, called back the following day to say there was no trace of either. I began to imagine the worst—and I had a nightmare that evening about the one with eyes glazed over.

The next day, Kodjo's brother, who worked for the German and Togolese soccer federations and had connections in high places, suggested we go to the office of a friend of his, a colonel in the Togolese army. This military doctor had access to the Interpol list and said he'd see what he could find. He disappeared into a back room and soon returned with a positive hit. Kodjo and Petit had been detained by Burkinabé police following a complaint by the US Embassy and were being kept at the *police judiciaire*, a holding station where they keep suspects while carrying out an investigation. At least they were alive.

Tontovi suggested I return to Ouaga to see whether I might be able to convince the embassy to withdraw their complaint against Kodjo and Petit. He thought that I, as an American and a friend of Kodjo's, might have some clout. I was skeptical but thought it worth a try, and I flew back to Ouaga a few days later—thankfully, a shorter (and safer) trip than by bus, if also pricier. Tontovi picked me up at the airport in a beat-up Honda Civic and filled me in on what he'd been able to find out about the case. He said that the officer in charge of the investigation seemed to be sympathetic and that I should meet with him. He also repeated his insistence that I go to the embassy. Then, a disappointment: he told me that he had to leave the next day on a three-month business trip to Congo (he sold air conditioning units for a Chinese company) but would give me the name of a female friend, a cloth

merchant who did business in Lomé, assuring me that she was trustworthy and might be of help as I was making the rounds.

The next morning I went directly to the embassy. I knew that Joan Peoples (the former consul in Lomé) had been transferred to Ouaga, and I asked to see her. She received me right away, but I quickly realized that although she was no longer consul (she was now a political officer), she was surely behind Kodjo's detention. With her usual directness, she responded to my opening—that I'd come to see her about someone from Togo who had been detained by police after an embassy complaint—with, "Yes, of course I know who you're talking about. He's a protestor from Lomé who followed me here, and I'm determined to stop him in his tracks. We're going to cut off the head of the snake before he contaminates the Burkina market as well."

I wasn't quite sure what I was expecting from her or how to engage the conversation. I sensed early on that it was unlikely that I might have any sway in getting Kodjo released, as Tontovi had hoped. The best tack seemed to be to draw her into a discussion about Kodjo's business and his reason for coming to Ouaga, in the hopes of at least unsettling some of her assumptions.

I began by telling her that the person they had taken in was Kodjo—she and I had discussed him the previous year in Lomé, and she'd read an article I'd written about him—and that I had accompanied him to Burkina to sit in on his interviews. I then let her know that Kodjo was not one of the Lomé protestors, and indeed that he had had a principled objection to the protest. (She seemed surprised.) Moreover, when she opined that he had come to Ouaga to profit from DV applicants, I insisted that he never took money from client-winners, and that those in Ouaga had paid nothing at all. (More surprise.)

I also made a point of telling her that Kodjo was transitioning from a system of arranging marriages in order to finance winners—a practice the embassy considers fraudulent—to one in which he finances winners himself, letting them pay him back later. "He's become like a bank, then?" "Yes." "Well, we want applicants who play on their own, not with the help of a fixer who's trying to profit from them. Making profits off this system was not the point of the DV."

I soon realized that she was fully settled in her views and would likely do all she could to punish Kodjo. After an hour she had to go to a meeting,

and we parted ways amicably—or so I thought. Little did I know that she would soon come after me.

That afternoon, I went to the police station where Kodjo and Petit were being held and was able to meet with the investigating officer, a Monsieur Kaboré—mid-fifties, graying, with a gentle air. He was surprised to see me, saying that I was one of the missing pieces in his investigation and that he hadn't expected me to appear unannounced at his office. He'd heard from the students he had interviewed that a *blanc* (white person)—though one they described as "French," not American—was present when Kodjo and Petit met with them, but none knew who I was.

Through my conversations with Kaboré I was able to begin piecing together what had happened, though I had to wait until Kodjo was released three months later to fill in important gaps. On the morning after their boxing match, Kodjo's aggressor had indeed delivered on his promise to go to the embassy. When the consul heard his story—that someone from Togo had come to town to help Burkinabé obtain US visas—they set up a sting operation, sending the complainant back to the hotel with an embassy employee, a Burkinabé, staging himself as the "brother" of the winner. This brother said he was a merchant on his way to Dubai—thus, someone of means—and wanted to purchase his brother's file from Kodjo before leaving that evening. Kodjo refused the offer, saying he didn't sell files. But the other insisted and asked how much it would cost. Finally, after much badgering, and to be rid of him, Kodjo jokingly responded "500,000 CFA" ($1,000)—at which point the brother stepped outside and returned with two undercover officers who had been waiting in the wings. They immediately took Kodjo and Petit into custody.

Consider here the set of activities the embassy is now engaged in: a stealth operation on the street, replete with phony dramatis personae (a "brother" on his way to Dubai), in which the embassy attempts to get Kodjo to fabricate a lie so that they can bust him. Surely when Congress set up the DV Lottery they did not intend for US consulates abroad to become involved in sting ventures and pantomimes on the street like this.

ENVELOPE

Officer Kaboré had been tasked with investigating the case, then reporting to the judiciary, where the file and the two accused would be transferred upon completion of his report. At the time I met with him he had

already finished speaking with many of Kodjo's student-winners (presumably identifying them from the files taken from Kodjo's hotel room), and with the complainant. Kaboré told me early on that he hadn't discovered any wrongdoing on Kodjo's part—all whom he had interviewed said Kodjo hadn't taken any money from them, and that most were grateful for the opportunity to interview for a visa—and that he didn't understand what all the fuss was about at the embassy. He also admitted that the complainant was a "bizarre" person, and a poor choice for the embassy to hang their case on.

The second time I went to see Kaboré—during which he deposed me—he called for Kodjo to be brought to his office (presumably to try to gauge the nature of our relationship). We greeted each other warmly and fell into light conversation. Kodjo seemed in good spirits, claiming the quarters were fine and the food adequate, and he remained confident that the investigation would go his way and that they would soon be released.

At one point during the conversation Kaboré stunned us both by saying that before the investigation he knew little about the DV, but now that he understood it better, he was thinking of going into the business. He already had a computer, and he could buy a digital camera (for taking applicant photos). Then, turning to Kodjo, he added, "Perhaps you'd be willing to give me advice when needed?"[4] Another reversal here, with affinities to a film noir script: the investigator of the crime discovering during the course of his investigation that it's a crime he himself wants to commit.

On my last day in Ouagadougou, I took Kaboré to lunch. I asked whether he thought Kodjo would be released when his report was finished. He said it would all depend on the timing. The report would go to the judiciary and if the justices had a light schedule that day, they could hear the case right away. But it would also depend on whether the embassy could show up then or not.

"If the case cannot be heard right away," he continued, "the two of them will go to jail while awaiting a court date." With images forming of Kodjo in a cell of street-hardened criminals in a country not his own—to say nothing of his slender build and pronounced limp—I told Kaboré that, given the nature of his report, I sincerely hoped that wouldn't happen and that he would do all he could to bring this to a quick end. I then did something I'd never done before. I pulled an "envelope" from my pocket and handed it to him. This had been Tontovi's suggestion, that such a gesture was necessary and could speed the case along, ensuring a favorable outcome. In handing him this bribe, I felt oddly ill at ease—why I'm not sure, as I've greased the

palms of Togolese traffic police and village chiefs for years, though never with such a hefty sum—and I left quickly.

THE EMBASSY AND THE ANTHROPOLOGIST

Once back in Lomé, I stayed in touch with Kaboré. I called him once a week for an update, and he was always gracious, letting me know how his investigation was going. There had been a delay in finishing the report, as he hadn't been able to interview a few students and he wanted to make sure that he talked to all of them before filing. He had let on during one of our conversations in Ouaga that "what complicates everything in this case is that it was the American Embassy that brought complaint. We have to respect [read: are fearful of] the embassies and need to make sure that we've done our work." But he assured me the report would go to the judiciary within a few weeks and that Kodjo's case was still strong.

On the day the report was finished and Kodjo and Petit were transferred to the courthouse, I received a surprise phone call from Kodjo. He and Petit were in a police vehicle on their way to the courthouse and were briefly remitted their phones, but only for the duration of the ride between the two venues. Kodjo told me that a US Embassy official—he thought maybe the head of security, likely the regional security officer—had come to question him twice while he was at Kaboré's. Each time, he asked whether I hadn't paid for Kodjo's trip to Ouagadougou—to which Kodjo answered no. (In fact, Kodjo had bought *my* bus ticket—because he was the one who went to the station to reserve seats—and when I tried to pay him back, he had refused!) On the second occasion, this embassy official said that if Kodjo said that I *had* paid his way, they would let him go. He again answered in the negative.

Later, I asked Kodjo whether he wasn't tempted to say "yes" so he could avoid going to jail. He wasted no time in answering that he doesn't lie about things that aren't true, but that even had he wanted to, he would never trust anyone from the embassy to remain true to their word. "They would have sent me to prison anyway." After all, he had ample experience of embassy fraud officers lying to his clients, then double-crossing them.

But a stunning commentary, this: US Embassy officials trying to get someone to manufacture an untruth. Not only another embassy indiscretion but also a further example of the embassy becoming the street—and the reverse, the street behaving as one might expect the embassy should, with principle and integrity. All actors in this melodrama are, it seems,

drawn into the vortex of the West African street—fixer, embassy personnel, police investigator, anthropologist.

But why would the embassy care about an anthropology professor writing a book about the visa lottery? It remains a mystery, and I can only hazard a guess. It's clear that Peoples was responsible; I heard from a friend in Lomé that she wrote the embassy at the time of my visit to Ouaga to see whether she could get a copy of the article I had written about Kodjo.[5] Either she was worried about what I would write about the embassy or she had become so preoccupied with fixers and fraud that she would go to any end, even breaking the law, to punish those connected to them. Or perhaps a combination of the two?

PHONE CALL

When their van arrived at the courthouse, Kodjo and Petit were told their case wouldn't be heard that day and that they were being transferred to Ouagadougou's central prison, MACO,[6] while awaiting their hearing. They spent the first night in *Le Grand Bâtiment* (the Large Building), a square, multistory cement structure filled with every criminal type. Upon entering, they were stripped and searched, and they spent the night on a hallway floor in their underwear.

The next day Kodjo was able to bribe their way into the building next door, "QA," which he'd heard about from cellmates at Kaboré's—in exchange for his digital camera and a small amount of cash. QA ironically references Ouagadougou's upscale neighborhood, *le Quartier Administratif*, where expats and civil servants work and live. Hardly posh prison digs, QA was nevertheless safer and more comfortable than Le Grand Bâtiment. The inmates were mostly white-collar criminals—government officials caught with their hands in the till, Lebanese businessmen involved in shady deals, a French pensioner accused of pedophilia, arms smugglers. In QA, everyone was given a straw mat and mosquito net, and their own space on the floor, and for another bribe a TV in a central room could be turned on. It's possible that Kaboré had some influence in getting Kodjo into QA—that the envelope worked in this instance. Why otherwise the special treatment for two confidence men from a neighboring country?

Without family nearby to prepare food for them, Kodjo and Petit used their remaining money to buy food—cornmeal, rice, beans, sauce ingredients—that Petit prepared for them each day. Then one day, a strange visit and ad-

dition to their menu: Officer Kaboré showed up with rice and sauce from his home village, rice, he said, that might bring them good fortune.[7] Petit refused to eat it—he didn't trust Kaboré and worried that the food was poisoned or had been baptized by a malevolent spirit—but Kodjo ate it and appreciated the spirit of the offering. The gesture of someone guilty (because he had taken money but delivered nothing), or an opening gift in anticipation of future business together?

Despite the fact that Kaboré's investigation had turned up nothing, weeks passed without any movement in the case. Kodjo's brother and I got in touch with Tontovi in Congo, and he suggested we hire a lawyer to prod the court and prepare the case. Hiring a lawyer was clearly good advice, but it was three months before the case went to court.

In the interim I experienced another bizarre moment. The episode in Burkina seemed filled with them: our accidental choice of a hotel whose name presaged all that we were about to experience, an embassy sting operation, Kaboré's admission that he wanted to go into the business, the envelope, Peoples's attempt to bust me by blackmailing Kodjo. At 9:00 p.m. one night in Lomé, I received a call from Tontovi's friend who had been helping us with the case. She said she was in a bar in Ouagadougou with one of the judges assigned to the case, and that he could influence the outcome and bring the case to a rapid conclusion. She then passed the phone to the judge so that we could greet, before taking it back and asking how much I could pay to move things along. Not knowing how to respond—and feeling even stranger than when I had given the envelope to Kaboré—I blurted out 200,000 CFA francs ($400). She conferred with the judge and said that wasn't enough. I asked what might be enough, and she said it was up to me to propose another figure. Feeling entirely out of sorts (I had no idea what an acceptable figure might be, and I wondered why she hadn't called earlier to let me know about her meeting with the judge), I offered 500,000 CFA francs ($1,000), but that still wasn't enough. I told her that was the highest I could go, that I was a "teacher" and didn't have large sums to spend. "Donc, désolé. Bonne soirée" (Too bad then. Good evening), she snipped.

But even had the "judge" accepted, could I trust her? Despite the fact that she had come recommended by Tontovi and had seemed to be sympathetic throughout—she had indeed helped at various points when I was making the rounds in Ouaga, had befriended Kaboré (who, she assured, was on our side), and had visited Kodjo at Kaboré's and in prison—what proof was

there that she was really in a bar in Ouagadougou? With a judge rather than a friend? And what if I sent the money and nothing happened?

EMBASSY NO-SHOW

Thanks to the lawyer's prodding, the hearing finally took place—albeit a full three months after Kodjo and Petit had been transferred to the central prison. Before a panel of judges, Kodjo was asked to explain what the DV Lottery was, what his role in it was, and why he had left Lomé to come to Ouagadougou to carry out this business.

When he was finished, one of the judges stated that he saw little that was wrong with what Kodjo was doing—trying to make a better life for West Africans abroad—and congratulated him for having discovered such an interesting and unusual business.[8] Another asked whether he was extorting money from winners (apparently, the embassy's chief complaint). This led to a lengthy explanation from Kodjo about how his winners are funded (by those in the diaspora) and where his service fees come from (also the diaspora); in short, he gave a mini-lecture about his business model. When the judges realized he doesn't take money from winners, one expressed surprise that the embassy had brought complaint at all. Finally, a female judge asked why he wanted to marry his Burkina male winners to Togolese women rather than local ones. "Are Burkina girls not good enough for you?" He reassured her that it had nothing to do with the attributes of local women, but instead was because he didn't know any Burkinabé in the US from among whom he could recruit financiers, but he added that he would welcome any suggestions.

Petit was asked only a single question, which he flubbed badly. "Why are you doing business in Burkina?" a judge asked. "Because Burkina is a poor country and we came to help out." This elicited a quick rejoinder from an offended judge: "And Togo's not poor?" They were slapped with two more weeks in prison.

I regret that I couldn't be there for the October hearing—I had returned to the States in August for the start of classes—but judging from the alacrity and nonadversarial nature of the proceedings, there is no doubt that many of Kodjo's cardinal qualities were on display, the same ones that endear him to clients: his strong French, his ability to answer questions head-on, his conviction in what he's doing. Again, had fate treated him differently, his

oratorical skills would have made him a special courtroom lawyer. No small irony, then, that in this setting all of these gifts were on display, though he spoke from the other side of the bench.

Remarkably, on the day of the hearing, after bringing complaint and letting two innocents stew in a Ouagadougou jail for three months, the embassy never showed up. Or perhaps that was their intent all along?

AFTERLIFE

When Kodjo and Petit returned to Lomé, they were embraced by family and friends with all the pomp of returning veterans. Extracting themselves from a sticky situation in a foreign country and surviving three months in a West African jail, even if in quarters that were better than some, was no small feat.

At the same time, Kodjo was urged by family members to get out of the business. His mother and brother worried about the embassy's pursuit of him, and the fact that he had been engaged in arranging marriages that the Americans considered fraudulent. He may have come away relatively unscathed on this occasion, but what about the next time?

Kodjo's own view was more sanguine. When I returned to Lomé in December 2009, he told me that it was hard for him to imagine finding anything else that would fire his imagination like the visa lottery. Treating DV dossiers had become a passion, and is clearly something he's good at. Besides, he felt that he had always been engaged in behavior that was fully defensible, helping West Africans seek a better life abroad.

The one concession he was willing to make was to stop doing business in Burkina. Unlike in Togo, where he knows many in high places—ministers, military officials, police officers—he isn't protected there. But with regrets, for his yield of successful applications from Burkina was uncommonly high and suggested a large emerging market.

Sadly, both for his Burkina winners and himself, the successful applications continued to pour in while he was in jail. The thirty-one in his possession when he left for Burkina swelled to over fifty by late August. Moreover, after he returned to Lomé, he continued to receive calls from many of the winners he had met in Ouagadougou, asking for his help. (Most had no acquaintances in the US—the Burkina consulate required that winners list the address of someone in the States who will house them while they're settling in—nor were they able to fund themselves.) He told them simply that

he was no longer in the business, turned his back, and walked away. "A giant waste of time," he said matter-of-factly, appearing not so much angry—he understood the embassy's position and the risks of the trade—as upset at a lost opportunity. Still, leaving all those untreated files on the table—"pure gold," a friend of Kodjo's called them—was one of the hardest things he'd ever done.

In the end, a small silver lining, a good-news finale to an otherwise forgettable episode. Petit had deposited his own visa request—for himself and his "wife," a client he had married after she was selected in the raffle—at the embassy in Cotonou before he left for Burkina. He assumed a computer search at the consulate would pick up his arrest in Ouagadougou and kill the file. Still, not knowing, he hurried to the embassy in Cotonou as soon as he and Kodjo returned to Lomé and was astonished to find that their visas were waiting for them. Worried that word from Ouagadougou would arrive soon, he purchased plane tickets and left for Boston within days, where he's been driving a cab ever since. And in another reproach to embassy common sense, he has two children with, and remains happily married to, his visa spouse.

8

America, Here We Come

In the 1990s a chant became popular in Ghanaian schoolyards: "America, here we come." More aspirational than attainable, the slogan captured a popular fantasy of escape. But what of life on the other side, the afterlife of the fantasy, when the fantasy becomes reality? How have these Togolese DV pioneers managed in the tumult of the twenty-first-century American Dream—and now in Trump's America?

Despite long odds in making the request, I was hoping to get a short-term visa for Kodjo—a tourist visa—so that we could make the rounds of clients of his in the US. I asked a consul I knew whether he would consider it. He had read an article I wrote about Kodjo, and despite knowing his history, still said maybe. In the end, however, Kodjo was denied because a headstrong client had reported him to the embassy a week before the interview, claiming malfeasance. Bad luck once again.

With Kodjo out as my guide, I contacted a friend of his, a lottery selectee I had hosted for six months after his arrival in the States in 2003. Jeannot

knew many of Kodjo's winners and agreed to stand in for him, also seeing it as a way to meet compatriots and extend his networks. He arranged visits to Newark; Omaha; and Moline, Illinois. I also visited Togolese lottery winners in Silver Spring, Maryland; Washington, DC; Raleigh; and Phoenix. Far from exhaustive, the following portraits nevertheless offer a sketch of DV winners' lives in the US—lives suspended between disparate worlds and between the upbeat fantasy of the US and its hard-edged reality.

THE COUPLE'S APARTMENT was in a stucco-pink rental complex, $600 a month, Walmart-walls, identical units glued together. The June heat in Phoenix was searing, 113 degrees Fahrenheit that day, while a window air conditioning unit clang-clanged in the back room, lowering the temperature inside to the high 90s, maybe. Kosi's wife and two young children were sitting on the carpet in the living room eating *fufu* with a green leaf sauce and red palm oil, the type Togolese fight over. They invited me to join their small feast, a necessary gesture, but I declined—also obligatory—adding that I would be in Lomé in two days, where I would have my fill of Togolese food. It was the little boy's birthday, and when they were finished eating, his parents feted him in properly American style, with a store-bought cake with candles and a verse of "Happy Birthday." I gave the boy a $5 bill, then added, "Bonne arrivée aux Etats-Unis!" (Welcome to the US!).

I had been curious to meet this couple who decided to settle in the Southwest sight unseen and far from family—an unusual choice for Togolese in the diaspora, who tend to gravitate toward friends or relatives in the East or Midwest, nodes of familiarity. But after two wintry months in Silver Spring—a large Togolese gathering place in the DC area—they followed a friend's advice and bought plane tickets to Arizona, where, they were told, jobs were easy to come by for those with papers. They preferred 100 degrees in the Phoenix summer to the cold of winter elsewhere.

A misadventure had brought us together. Friends of Kodjo's, they asked him to send food from Lomé with a recent lottery winner who was soon to arrive in North Carolina. For Kodjo it was a way to make some extra money—cashing in a client's unused luggage allowance—while also consolidating a friendship that might yield business down the road. When the suitcase arrived—packed with dried leaves and spices, locust bean paste, baobab nuts, small dried fish, medicinal roots—Kodjo asked whether I would send it to the couple in Phoenix. But Greyhound misplaced the suit-

case and it never arrived. (How the famous bus line could have lost such a suitcase was a mystery to us all, and to this couple, a shock to their sense that "in America, things work.") Two months later, visiting Phoenix for a family event and carrying Greyhound's $100 check for lost luggage—this skimpy reimbursement another punch in the face—I decided to deliver my apologies in person and check in on this adventurous couple.

As advertised, they had quickly found work in Phoenix: the man loading luggage at the airport, his wife working as a nurse's aide. Both thirty-somethings, they had attended university before the man opened a string of cybercafés in Lomé, from which he still draws a small income. These advantages were perhaps why they were more willing than others to strike out on their own. But their case also provoked a query: If they were not the precarious subjects of the Lomé street, why did they decide to leave for parts unknown? "You had a good life there, surrounded by family and friends," I prodded. "Why would you leave all that behind?" "Who in Lomé wouldn't depart for the US if they were chosen in this lottery?" the man responded. "It's an opportunity to have an even better life, especially for our children. It's a chance to realize our dreams."

His words join those of others across the subregion, from Côte d'Ivoire to Cameroon, that the "bush" beyond—and today, especially, "whiteman kontri" (Nyamnjoh and Page 2002)—was where wealth and adventure were to be had, and that this constituted an irresistible allure. Indeed, travel and mobility—mobility as an end, Geschiere (2016) has called it—seems written into the cultural DNA of West Africans. Youth in remote villages where I have worked in northern Togo describe their annual escape to work on farms in Nigeria—sneaking off in the middle of the night, against their parents' and teachers' wishes, risking much in crossing two borders into a country where they are unable to speak any of the languages, but insisting on the experience nonetheless—as motivated by the pursuit of travel and "adventure." They go to make money, of course, but when I have asked them whether they would stay if they received the same take-home pay as they get in Nigeria, most said that they would still leave. "Why?" "L'aventure."[1]

Another arresting example of the allure of the beyond involved a local big man, the director of a school, whom I met in northern Togo in 2015. He paid me a surprise visit in July of that year to say that he and his wife had been selected in the DV Lottery and had just successfully passed the embassy interview. He wanted to show off his visa but swore me to secrecy: "You know Togolese. They will be jealous and try to disrupt my trip. Other

With the school director in Washington, DC, November 2017.

than my wife, not a single person knows, not even my children." "Will you tell them before you leave?" I asked. "Only the night before, and only my children."

After congratulating him and discussing what might be in store for him on the other side, I gently suggested he might want to take a leave from his work while trying out life in the US, in case he decided that he had made the wrong decision. I couldn't shake the thought of this man of stature, widely respected locally and invited to all the important events, cleaning toilets and scrubbing floors in a US suburb. But he would have none of it. It was unthinkable that his life in whiteman kontri might be worse off than it was in Togo, that his dream might end in disappointment and downward mobility. (I visited the former school director in 2017 in Washington, DC. He was working two jobs, one as an all-night cashier at CVS, the other as a security guard at a museum. "When do you sleep?" I asked. "I don't," he said ruefully. "But I need to make the most of this opportunity.")

When the small Phoenix family and I had had our fill of birthday cake, and with the heat still pulsing through the walls, Kosi said he had to leave for work. In parting he asked me to greet Kodjo in Lomé, then sang his praises, saying how useful he had been in helping them prepare their dossier for the embassy interview. I told him this was a constant client refrain, but I

added how ironic it was that they had received visas while he was unable to. "It all depends on your destiny. Perhaps it was not his destiny to have been chosen in that lottery."

THE APARTMENT IN MOLINE could have been in Phoenix—or Omaha or Raleigh. Modular box units stacked next to one another on the outskirts of town, outskirts that seemed more the center than the periphery. If Midwestern kitsch on the outside, theirs was West African modern inside, the living room furnished in that interior aesthetic that is common from Abidjan to Lagos: wooden cabinets against the walls; somber overstuffed couch and fauteuils; long, gaudy draperies; a picture of Jesus on the wall. The centerpiece of this tableau was a large flat-screen TV, the latest model, glued to the wall, always on—soccer, African MTV, Africa News. "Televisions are not too expensive," Jeannot said. "That's the first thing you buy as soon as your paycheck allows. It shows you have arrived, that your dream is real. It also offers lessons about your new country and helps you learn English."

We entered through the kitchen, where two roiling stewpots were sending slightly acrid aromas into the air, goat meat in one, *gboma* sauce in the other. Jeannot asked if he could taste the sauce, responding to his sampling with a big smile. As we entered the living room, a Nigerian band was playing hipster on the wide screen.

Our host, a large man with powerful hands and a gentle demeanor—"Le Doyen" (the Mayor, the Elder), Jeannot called him, because of his size and bearing—has been in the US for twelve years. He came to Moline when he first arrived, then left for Raleigh for two years (where he met Jeannot), before returning to Moline. "Life is calmer and cheaper here. I can save more to send home." Calm seemed to me an understatement. The wide boulevards that cut through the Moline suburb were mostly empty, with those few vehicles in circulation moving at a glacial—rural Americana—pace past the familiar convenience stores. A pace and a calm, however, that must be reassuring to new immigrants, slowing down the everyday to something more graspable.

We speak in French, as Le Doyen is more comfortable in that language than in his still-broken English. But he and Jeannot switch often to their native Ewe, leaving me behind, a transition that enlivens the repertoire and brings animated gestures to the conversation.

This gentle giant has a wife and four children in Lomé, and a second wife

here in Moline, a middle-aged Togolese woman with a soft smile, whom he met at the Tyson meat plant. They have a three-year-old daughter—cute as a button, plastic beads braided into her hair—who ran laps around the living room as we chatted. His second wife's eighteen-year-old daughter had just arrived from Lomé, getting a visa through the family reunification option. However, when the Mayor himself applied to bring over the children from his first marriage, he was turned down, he said, because he hadn't declared them on his DV application over a decade ago.[2]

All the inventions and cross-hatchings of kinship back home reemerge in this far-flung diasporic outpost. Of mixed families and juggled marriages, of relatedness conceived broadly, of alliances of convenience, of risks and fraught attachments. These improvised arrangements can be particularly difficult for women—those who come on their own or those who follow spouses already here. The latter have to adjust, with little warning or preparation, to a foreign land where they lack cultural and linguistic accountancy, and they often retreat to living "between four walls," as Jeannot put it, with some even developing "psychosis." The wife of one man we visited in Newark never came out of the bedroom to greet us—unusual for Togolese, but a state she had been in, her husband told us, since she arrived in the States six months earlier. One of the consuls in Lomé told me that mental illness was common among those diasporics requesting visa renewal—those who had come back to Lomé for treatment, before seeking to return to the US—and assumed they had succumbed to the anxieties and pressures of lives lived in between.

Those women who come on their own or through arranged marriages struggle as well, especially in finding partners. Most middle-aged Togolese men in the US are married and the younger ones have girlfriends back home. Moreover, the older these women get, the harder it is to find someone in Togo—not the case for men in a culture where a husband is expected to be older, even by a decade or more.

An attractive twenty-seven-year-old DV winner we met in Omaha works at a furniture outlet assembling tables and chairs—"you're a carpenter," I teased, a job women never perform back home, to which she responded that she had to lie about her work to her mother, who would never approve. She is adrift, worried about getting older and still without husband. Jeannot asked whether she couldn't find someone here in Omaha, "with all these eligible bachelors," pointing at two handsome new arrivals sitting across the room. "I don't want to play the field," she responded. "None of these younger men

are serious. They will sleep with you, but they all have girlfriends back home they plan to marry. I'm not interested in something temporary." "Why don't you look for someone at home then?" I asked. "It's true the husbands will line up when they learn that you have papers. But in that case they're only marrying the visa. Most of those marriages end up in trouble."

Confirming this picture of marital apocalypse, though now from the other side of the gender divide, a man we met in Omaha had returned to Lomé to find a wife, but their marriage was fraught from the beginning. She was above him in class—he had applied for the DV Lottery as a welder under the job option, while she had the baccalaureate and had attended university for several years. The mismatch between their interests and desires should have been apparent from the start, but she was seduced by the visa. Despite giving birth to two children after she arrived in Omaha, fight led to fight and she eventually moved out. "He won't be able to find another partner," Jeannot mused. "He has children by one woman. What other woman would want to marry him? His interests would be divided between the two wives and their children, which can lead to unending strife, even spiritual attack."

These stories suggest a broader crisis in social reproduction or at the very least a strong challenge to established norms in such diasporic communities. Surely not surprising, as diasporas simultaneously reproduce and unsettle long-standing assumptions (Clifford 1988; S. Hall 1990; Gilroy 1993)—"repetition with a difference," Gates (1988) has called it—but a sad stew to be in for those who imagined their lives would now be lived on the mountaintop.

THE EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD who had just arrived from Lomé, the daughter of Le Doyen's second wife, served us food and drink—Guinness and fufu with goat meat and gboma sauce. She had an airy presence, gliding in and out with dishes, polite to a fault, as is customary when Togolese host strangers. I asked the Mayor about his and his wife's work at the Tyson plant, where seven hundred Togolese are employed (alongside an equal number of Mexicans, Vietnamese, and Congolese)—the new American Midwest, a "global heartland" (Miraftab 2016) filled with recent immigrants, certainly not Trump's America.

He detailed factory life with precision, even pride. After ten years working at Tyson, his salary was a decent $20 an hour. He had spent time in every department and now had supervisory duties. Entering one door in the

morning, he said, are 3,500 head of cattle, which exit another door in the evening as store-ready meat. Once admitted, the cows are dropped by a pistol to the head, then decapitated and immediately jerked, hind legs first, into the air by a metal harness to drain the blood. In a second room they are skinned and boned before being sent to the freezers where Le Doyen and his wife work. There, excess fat is removed and the meat is sliced into consumer-ready cuts and packaged, before being conveyed out the other door into refrigerated trucks for delivery to retailers. It's a process in which every part of the animal is used, he said—meat, blood, hide, bones, even feces (this latter for use in fertilizer).

The work is hard and nonstop, meat on a belt—"you have to work fast, as the product keeps coming; you get only two breaks in ten hours; if you miss a beat, you'll be let go." "Have any Togolese been fired since you've been here?" "None. We've traveled too far and given up too much to not make the most of it."

I didn't hear any *Fast Food Nation*–like (Schlosser 2002) complaints of horrific work conditions and hyper-exploitation. To the contrary, those I spoke with seemed thankful to have a job that, at $12 an hour starting (with a dollar added each year), pays their bills and allows them to send money home, and enables them to earn as much in a day as entry-level civil servants back home make in a month. As full-time workers, they have health insurance with premiums of $12 a week, and they are often able to work overtime. (When Jeannot and I arrived in Moline on a Friday afternoon, we were unable to meet anyone until the next day because they were all working end-of-the-week time-and-a-half shifts and didn't get off until the early hours of the morning. At that point—1:00, 2:00, 3:00 a.m.—they all started returning Jeannot's calls.)

Of course, as Miraftab (2016) insightfully points out in her book on Beardstown—a meatpacking twin two hours from Moline, though one specializing in pork, not beef—the life of these workers is made possible, and financially sustainable, because the task of social reproduction, especially the care and cost of raising children, is often left to those back home. Only 30 percent of Togolese in her study had brought their children over, leaving childcare to those in Lomé. Such outsourcing, and the global inequalities it relies on, not only enables workers to get by on less but also creates workplace compliance: Togolese are willing and even grateful to work for minimum wage under difficult conditions because it is more than they can make back home.

There is of course an important labor story here, which I can only hint at. These new immigrants—"laboring nomads," Mbembe (2017, 3) has called them—have in many ways taken the place of the national proletariat. They rush to gobble up jobs that many in the white working class find below their pay scale (Miraftab 2016), before moving on when the pickings are better elsewhere. Are we not witnessing a new relationship between capital and labor in the making, not only a more compliant, albeit mobile, labor force—its mobility enabled by the presence of Togolese diasporic nodes across the country—but also an ethnically constituted one, with implications for worker solidarity and recruitment?

In thinking these new parameters, I am also intrigued by the idea that this hi-tech assembly line slaughter and vivisection is located within shouting distance of the Chicago stockyards of yore, the ones made infamous by Upton Sinclair ([1906] 2001)—stockyards that were also dependent on new immigrant labor. Is their difference—the apparently more humane working conditions today—dictated by technology in its contemporary iteration? Or by the social movements that Upton, and more recently Schlosser, begot? Or both, with the former resolving the crisis of the latter?

When I asked whether there were any workplace complaints, Le Doyen said that at the end of 2016 there was bitterness because the December bonuses they had become accustomed to were withdrawn, and each worker instead received a discount voucher to buy chicken—needless to say, Tyson chicken—at one of the local stores. They protested this cynical action by throwing their chickens on the steps of the manager's office. While the powers-that-be didn't appreciate the gesture, there were no apparent repercussions.

If work at Tyson Foods dominates the employment scene for Togolese in Moline, others we met worked at the furniture outlet, some in fast food, and several at Walmart; two drove eighteen-wheel trucks long distance. For Jeannot, the latter two were wonders of nature, examples of the sort of entrepreneurialism it takes, he insists, for Togolese to get ahead in the US. Both Kotokoli, a Muslim ethnicity in Togo's center that dominates long-distance bus and minivan travel, they first began working at Tyson; while there they saved their money and acquired commercial drivers' licenses on the side. After a year of driving for a trucking company and maintaining flawless records—the key to success, Jeannot insisted, in a business where 80 percent of drivers have accidents during the first year—they received a bank loan to buy their own truck. Now they hire themselves out, relaying one another,

each clocking seventy hours a week. The one we spent time with—in another of those cookie-cutter rental units with an immense TV dominating the living room—is only four years in and now makes $100,000 a year, and he is building a house back home. "A big success story," Jeannot concluded. "If only they were all like that. You have to take risks to be successful here. Otherwise you'll be locked into low-paying jobs forever."

Note that these Togolese pioneers rarely end up working in professions for which they qualified under the DV employment option. Indeed, I have never met a DV winner working in a job for which he or she was chosen for the visa. Nor do those who qualified with a high school diploma end up with work that is commensurate with their level of education. Most, including some I know who were bankers, teachers, or school principals back home, work in the US packing meat, sorting luggage at the airport, cleaning toilets in hotels, flipping burgers at McDonald's. A sad, even tragic, example of downward mobility and another instance of a DV system at odds with itself.

THE SMALL PENTECOSTAL church in Omaha was jumping. Behind a nondescript storefront, a beefy man in a blinding red suit and tie was leading prayers and songs, accompanied by three female vocalists with honeyed voices, each with palms raised skyward. Two electric guitars, drums, and a keyboard kept pace behind. The man's voice boomed, hitting all the right notes with operatic range and fullness, and the two hundred strong, many dressed in their finest Wax outfits, rose as one to exult in the presence of the Holy Spirit. It felt like Lomé.

Omaha is as flat as Moline, straight lines as far as the eye can see. Affectionately referred to by Togolese as "Togo-ville" or "Petit Togo," it has become a popular destination for Togolese in the diaspora. Its celebrity status owes to the fact that in the early 2000s it was easy to gain admission to one of the local universities, and the embassy in Lomé was acquiescent in granting student visas. Hundreds of Togolese applied and settled in Omaha (with many never even setting foot on campus because they lacked the means to pay for tuition). Instead they found jobs and eventually regularized their status by applying for political asylum, easy to get at the time because of the political impasse in Lomé. Once a node like this emerges, later arrivals follow—Kodjo now sends several DV selectees there each year—and Omaha is today a Grand Central on the Togolese map of the US.

As we took our seats, Jeannot leaned over and said that the man in the

electric suit, who was now pogo-sticking around the stage, had served as best man at his brother's wedding in Newark the year before, but that before entering the church that morning he had had no idea that the man now resided in Omaha. Such circulation between diasporic hubs is common as recent arrivals search for jobs and marital partners—and for conviviality. Perhaps this latter especially. It is not surprising that Togolese communities in the US reproduce all the same conflicts and antagonisms as those back home, of damaging gossip and occult worry, of marital indiscretion and betrayal, of ethnic rivalry and politics. (An acquaintance visiting the US on a tourist visa in 2016 spent a month making the rounds of Togolese friends along the East Coast and throughout the Midwest and told me he was surprised to find that Togolese ethnic politics, with its fierce north-south rivalry, seemed even more acrimonious in the US than back home. Indeed, Togolese politics—where one stands on the north-south divide—was often the first and last topic of conversation during Jeannot's and my visits with Togolese in the diaspora.[3])

The church seemed a refuge and sanctuary, the heartbeat of a community in an otherwise mechanical to-and-fro between home and work, a place to take the edge off difficult lives. A man Jeannot and I had met the day before said that life in the States for him was mostly "monotone." "We go from home to work and back again, and have little else in our lives. Unlike

you who are born here," gesturing at me, "we don't know where to go for enjoyment. All your centers of entertainment are American and we don't find them so interesting. And going out to eat, as you like to do, is expensive and comes with food we don't much like. Except for our football match on Saturday afternoon and church on Sunday, we usually just stay home."

The pastor was from Burkina Faso, a soft-spoken man with a direct but gentle gaze, the inverse twin of our boom box soloist. He commanded respect, I was told, because he spoke honestly in conveying God's word. He was a prophet, "a true man of God." He had come to the States, he told me after the service, on a student visa. After he got his degree, he went into the ministry, and today makes enough doing God's work to support his family.

Jeannot said later that it's better to have someone like him who is *not* Togolese as pastor—a pattern I had noticed in Lomé churches as well, where pastors often come from Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, or Burkina Faso. "If he comes from elsewhere, the pastor shares little 'interest' with those in his congregation and he can administer to everyone equally. The outsider may also have spiritual powers we're not already familiar with that he can add to our own repertoire." Echoes here of the Stranger-King, the non-autochthone who becomes local sovereign (because he might be a less partial adjudicator), a popular political-theological motif throughout West Africa (Fortes 1945; Heusch 1982; Kraemer [1987] 1993) and beyond (Hocart 1927; Sahlins 1981, 2008; Dumézil 1988).

When the three-hour service was over, a dozen people stopped to greet me and Jeannot, and I seized the moment to conduct impromptu interviews, asking how they ended up in Omaha, where they worked, how long they had been here. Unlike in Moline, no single magnet enterprise like the Tyson meat plant drew in Togolese. Some did work in meatpacking but many worked elsewhere, in furniture factories, in fast food, as security guards, for a company called First Data that manufactures credit cards. And several had joined the US military, a vocation increasingly popular with Togolese men.[4] Its pay and benefits are big pulls, as is the prestige. Like driving long-distance trucks, the military is a profession that enables Togolese to leapfrog low-paying, low-status jobs that become destiny for many.[5]

The work profile of a friend of Kodjo's and Jeannot's in Omaha, who spent four years in the military and has placed several of Kodjo's clients in the army, expands the job resumes of Togolese in the US. He is a States-side version of the West African fixer, helping new arrivals get settled, finding lodging and work for them, helping them to obtain drivers' licenses and

A selfie with Jeannot.

identity cards. He and Kodjo have a small patronage society—you help me, I'll help you—that enables Kodjo to find placements in the States for clients (while feeding them into the Omaha big man's network and sphere of influence) and to recoup potential losses back home from clients who renege. When an Omaha lottery winner of Kodjo's who was delinquent in reimbursing him decided to return to Lomé for a visit, his Omaha partner alerted him to her imminent arrival. The well-connected Kodjo notified a security agent at the airport, who confiscated her passport and told her he would not return it until she had settled her debt. The gambit worked: she quickly paid Kodjo, received her passport, and left for Omaha. Kodjo's return gift to his business partner: he married a male winner to the Omaha man's younger sister in order to bring her to the States.

One of the more charming moments Jeannot and I spent in Omaha was with three male clients of Kodjo's, all in their early twenties, all recent arrivals from northern Togo: one four months in, another two months, the third only a few weeks. We met them on a Saturday afternoon at their apartment—still bare bones, no furniture except mattresses on the floor and a cheap table in the kitchen—and took them to McDonald's, their first time ever. Wide-eyed and full of anticipation—they had all dressed in handsome shirts, as if for church—they were nevertheless not shy in criticizing the food. "Not to

my taste," said the most recent arrival as he picked at a chicken burger, "and not very filling." A satisfying meal for Togolese consists of a melon-sized corn-, sorghum-, or yam-based starch accompanied by a succulent sauce that lines the stomach and announces when you've had your fill.

Our conversation ranged from first impressions—despite the unsatisfying meal at McDonald's, they were flush with first romance, imagining the world at their feet—to Jeannot playing the old-timer, offering advice about the hazards of Togolese experience in the States and how to get ahead. He was especially critical of compatriots who risked nothing, remaining for years in the same low-paying jobs they took when they first arrived, and worse, insulting those who take chances trying to get ahead (because their success will mean that others fall back in the prestige hierarchy), invoking the image of crabs in a barrel. His advice to these newbies: work for a year or two to pay off debts back home, take English classes at night, then pursue a degree at a local community college. "Doors will open for you. This is a country of entrepreneurs. If you have an adventurous spirit, you'll succeed. But you need credentials as well. Go to school and don't delay in acquiring English competency."

He offered himself as an example of risk-taking that had led to advantage. When he first moved to Raleigh, he borrowed money for a down pay-

ment to purchase a foreclosed house sold through HUD, and covered the mortgage with the small salaries he and his wife made cleaning rental cars for AVIS and doing assembly line work at a computer factory. After a year, the value of the house had increased 30 percent, and he took out a second mortgage, which provided him with enough cash to add a HUD-foreclosed apartment to his holdings. Today, he uses the rent from the apartment to cover the mortgage on the house. Meanwhile, the apartment's value has increased threefold. Jeannot also attended night school so that he could get his draftsman's license, then landed a job that paid him $50,000 a year. "All of my Togolese friends advised against purchasing this house and discouraged me from going to school. Now they're envious."

Indeed, although many of his ventures have ended in failure, Jeannot's reputation as a risk-taker is legendary and his job itinerary dizzying. When he first arrived in the States, he spent a year in Newark working at the airport before finding employment alongside other Togolese at a fish factory. After moving to North Carolina, he cleaned rental vehicles, delivered pizzas and newspapers, sold jeans at local flea markets, raised collector pythons in his basement, drove for Amazon home delivery, worked at the computer plant and as a draftsman, and auditioned as a truck driver.

He then set his sights farther afield and began importing Chinese aluminum to Ghana, heavy vehicles obtained at rural auctions in the US to Lomé, hair braids made in Korea and Kenya to the US[6]—each time breaking even but never realizing the large returns he hoped for. He also hatched a scheme with an American company to chemically compact dirt roads, giving them longer life, and conducted a successful trial run at the Ministry of Public Works in Lomé. After promising to give Jeannot a contract, the Minister instead slipped the idea to a younger brother in California and awarded that brother the contract. "This is what we face when we attempt to return home—and this is why Togo is still so far behind," Jeannot said with contempt.

In spring 2017 he purchased seven hundred refrigerator "returns" from an online clearing house, Liquidated.com, at bargain-basement cost and shipped them to Lomé in three large containers. He sold them in an open-air market on the outskirts of Lomé, making a $200 profit per unit ($140,000 total). At the same time, he shipped twenty-five late-model cars he had acquired at fire-sale prices through online auctions—body-damaged "accident" vehicles that had been repossessed by insurance companies but whose engines were still immaculate. Instead of having the bodywork done in the

States, which would have been exorbitant, he waited until the wrecks arrived in Lomé, then contracted the repair work out for a fraction of the cost ($200 each), and made a $6,000 profit per vehicle.

Kodjo drifts in and out of our conversation with the three new arrivals. They were all plucked midair by his latest recruitment strategy through which a photographer at the university takes their photos and gathers their personal information for the lottery at the same time that he takes pictures for student IDs at fall registration. Despite the mana-from-on-high nature of the appointment and the apprehension that DV selectees often experience when they are called on to substitute one set of futures for another, they were ever grateful to Kodjo for the opportunity and for services rendered along the way. "He bought our tickets, he told us what to expect at the embassy interview, and he introduced us to our sponsor in Omaha."

"The embassy in Lomé should give Kodjo an award," Jeannot interjected. "Look at the work he does for them. They've created an immigration system but he's the one who spreads the word and signs people up. It's a scheme to diversify the US population but he's the only one who diversifies the pool of Togolese applicants by signing up northerners; otherwise, only southerners would apply. He helps applicants and winners fill out their documents and pay their pre-departure immigrant fee. He buys their plane tickets. Then he helps them find jobs and a place to stay in the States."

There's an important truth in what Jeannot says. What kind of modern state, especially a powerful and wealthy one like the United States, would create a system for immigrants then abandon them to their own devices, expecting the immigrants to put themselves through the paces and foot the entire bill? Why do we treat legal migrants different from refugees, for whom the state finds housing and work, and provides financial support for eight months?[7] Why this insidious distinction between refugee and migrant?

DESPITE THE FACT that all DV winners have papers, Trump's election cut into them like a sharp knife. The transition from Obama—not only the first black president but also the first "African" US president—to the white supremacist Trump was unthinkable, against all that they thought the US stood for. "Is the country really racist like that?" several commented. "Does he really hate all immigrants? We thought this was an immigrant nation, one that welcomed people from all over the world. Was that not the spirit of the visa lottery?"

The moment was so toxic for Togolese in the US that they worried their papers would no longer be respected. In Moline and Raleigh, I met DV green card holders who had returned to Lomé for the 2016–2017 holidays, but fearing the worst, hurried back to the States before Trump's inauguration at the end of January. Others, also in possession of a green card, sacrificed long-planned trips home because they thought they might not be allowed back in. One of Kodjo's winners in northern Togo decided to forego the embassy interview, saying that she heard rumors that Trump was against the DV Lottery and she didn't want to throw her money away.

The panic among the African immigrant community in the US was palpable, a type of "terrorism" in its own right. One I spoke to said, "It's Trump who is the terrorist. He imagines his policies will keep bad people out, but he's the one who is creating more terror in this country than any outsider."

All those I spoke to know, and often live cheek-by-jowl with, immigrants without papers or those waiting for papers, suspended between one status and another. The Trump era has driven them into a state of fear and paranoia, adding a new, even more debilitating "psychosis" to their emotional patina. They now live lives largely cloistered and clandestine; they're often afraid to go out in public, afraid to drive cars lest they be stopped by the police, afraid to take public transportation—especially airplanes, as they worry that the TSA, now repurposed from fighting terrorism to fingering undocumented immigrants, might identify and deport them. Criminalized, they live as outlaws, a status that governs every intimacy of their daily lives.

Moreover, the consequences of Trump-ism go beyond documentation and its travails. For many, the elimination or reduction of Medicaid would be a catastrophic health event. Most of those in the Togolese immigrant community, including those *with* documents, are unable to purchase their own health insurance, do not work for companies that insure their employees, or both, and they rely on Medicaid, especially for their children. "Some of our children will go untreated and may die because of this policy," Jeannot said.

I asked several of those we met during our sojourns whether they had experienced racism in the US. Surprisingly perhaps, most said that they had not and often felt more at odds with African Americans than white Americans.[8] At the same time, some admitted to mild workplace discrimination, mainly others being promoted ahead of them, which they thought might be because of their race. Here, it is important to keep in mind that for West Africans back home race is not a go-to category. Ethnicity and gender are

categories that divide, but not race—and how could it, in a society that is, as Togolese say, "monochrome"?[9] But their lack of racial consciousness is also surely because Togolese—and probably most immigrants to the US—keep their heads down, work hard, pay their bills, and stay out of trouble. "We've come too far and given up too much to risk anything here."

Their great fear today, however, is that under Trump the US has turned a new page, with anti-immigrant racism and the murk of US race politics the new order of the day—and their new lot.

MY FIRST TRIP WITH Jeannot was to Newark to visit Togolese he lived with when he first landed in the States. It was a Saturday afternoon and we drove from the airport to a verdant park downtown, a luminous green in the midst of the concrete-and-steel city, reminding me of the small epiphany I always experienced in St. Louis as a child when I entered Busch Memorial Stadium from the street to witness anew that baseball temple's manicured green. Several hundred DV winners and their families had gathered for the weekly soccer match. The men played while their wives and children watched and gossiped. Bodies floated across the turf, touch and run, the younger, fitter ones showing their agility, the older ones conceding their age. As with the church in Omaha, this gathering seemed soulful and restorative, an oasis at the end of a long week's Saharan travails.

For Jeannot it was a homecoming of sorts. He greeted old friends warmly amid much teasing about receding hairlines and protruding stomachs, and he waxed nostalgic as we drove around familiar streets, pointing out old haunts, including the large three-story brick building—*La Grande Maison*—where he had lived with other Togolese when he first arrived. It was a semi-communal space, six rooms parsed among eighteen recent arrivals, all sharing a common kitchen and often eating together. His joy at visiting old stomping grounds and reconnecting with friends, however, was tempered by the recognition that he had made the right choice in moving on and by the salient reminder that he had been criticized by many of these same friends for dreaming big and trying to rise above his station.

Jeannot's strong impression was that, ten years later, little had changed. Many were still working in the fish factory and at the airport,[10] still making minimum wage, forever scrambling to make ends meet. When the US economy was strong in the early 2000s, they were able to save more, especially those working at the airport, where tips boosted their take-home pay,

and several began to build houses back home. But 2008 changed all that and today they barely get by, with many Lomé "projects" stalled midstream.

The sad plight of those in Newark spoke truth to Jeannot's claim that if you don't attempt to break out of the immigrant enclave by taking risks, you will likely remain stuck for years, perhaps the rest of your working life. As Francophone West Africans, Togolese lack the linguistic and cultural literacy to climb the job hierarchy and often remain slotted into minimum-wage jobs, struggling to both pay the bills and send money home. Moreover, they rue their downward mobility; many left professional jobs in Togo and now find themselves cleaning toilets in hotels and rental cars at airports.

Of those we met in Newark, there were two notable success stories. One, Jeannot's younger brother, who arrived with skills as a welder, joined the union and landed a job reinforcing the undersides of New York City bridges, hanging from the buttresses. Dangerous work, and with a short lifespan (an imposed ceiling of forty years of age), he nevertheless made a handsome $45 an hour (and double that on weekends). With his earnings he was able to buy a house on a quiet suburban street and fill it with upscale furniture and the largest TV screen I had seen in any of the homes we visited. (It should not be surprising that this fantasy machine everywhere comes to mark West African immigrants' arrival in the land of their dreams. Is it not Hollywood and American TV that conquered the world with its imaginary—its modern fantasies replacing the old ceremonial verities—and created precedent for something like the allure of the DV Lottery?)

As his children scampered up and down the stairs to the second floor and his wife offered an ivory mound of fufu with fish sauce, he talked about the good fortune he had had in finding work while nevertheless remaining mindful of the risks of a job in which you are suspended by a harness all day hundreds of feet above water and pavement. His sanguine view of life in the US was buttressed by several untoward experiences he had had in trying to build a house back home, instances of massive betrayal by family members. He first sent money to a younger brother to buy land for his house, only to later discover that the plot had also been sold to two others. (Such stories of double and triple sale—of land with "many authors," as Jeannot put it—are famous in Lomé today, but he didn't know whether he'd been taken by a stranger or a sibling, adding salt to his wounds.) He tried again, now sending money to two siblings, imagining that one might serve as a check against the other. They notified him when they had purchased the land and again when they began house construction. Then, during an unannounced visit

to Lomé, he discovered that it was all a sham, that no such land or house existed and that they were each building their own houses—with his money.

Stories of duplicity back home are fabled and circulate widely in the diaspora. One particularly grievous instance involved a young woman's attempt to avoid untrustworthy family members by sending money to her pastor instead. After paying for the land and approving blueprints for the house, she was regularly informed by the pastor about the progress being made on house construction. Five years later, she returned to Lomé to behold her dream house, only to discover that she'd been had by this man of the cloth—that no land or house existed in her name and that he denied ever having been sent money to build such a house. "Even pastors can 419 you," she announced ruefully.[11]

In each Togolese entrepôt Jeannot and I visited—Newark, Omaha, Moline, Raleigh—building a house back home was everyone's gold standard. This cultural project, which Togolese refer to as "avoir un projet au pays" (having a project back home), captures the imaginations of not only Togolese but also diasporic West Africans more broadly. All the large coastal cities—Accra, Lagos, Cotonou, Abidjan, Lomé—are bursting with houses and neighborhoods under construction, bankrolled by those in the diaspora—houses that often take years to complete because bank loans for house building are hard to come by and cash in hand is a requisite.[12] These retirement homes thus inch up, first an enclosure, then a foundation, then a few cement walls, then a completed first story, sometimes a second story, with years, even decades, going by before they are finished. The esteem these concrete signifiers possess owes to their double message: on the one hand, materializing emigrant desire to return home, and on the other, indexing apparent success abroad to those left behind.

The other luminous success was that of another Kotokoli, the Togolese ethnicity famous for producing long-distance drivers. He drove large trucks from New York to California for five years before sending for his family and buying a house in Newark. He retired from truck driving after his eighteen-wheeler went off the road in the Colorado mountains in winter—during which, he told me, he saw his life pass before his eyes as he shouted prayers to Allah—and he now works as a dispatcher at the airport. We met him there on a Sunday morning and chatted curb-side between taxi arrivals, dodging luggage and passengers jack-knifing in and out of cabs. His English skills were strong and he was clearly good at his work. He too was upbeat about life in the US, claiming that he had accomplished his dream: "There

are opportunities here that we don't have back home; I grew up in poverty and know what it means to struggle." And rare among Togolese I have encountered in the States, he had little desire to return home.

A STORY STARTED TO form as we made the rounds. Despite some clear successes—the welder and the truck driver in Newark, the pair of drivers in Moline, the army enlistees in Omaha and Fayetteville, Jeannot—and despite the fact that all I met are making a living and sending money home, disappointment and pathos, and a sense of sacrifice and deferral, thread the narratives of Togolese in the US. With rare exception, those I spoke to said they would return home tomorrow if they could only make a living. They miss the food, the laughter and the language that add melody to the streets and markets, and of course, despite the betrayals, their family and friends. Personal attachments in Togo are thick, perhaps thicker than elsewhere (and certainly more so than in the US), and they miss that density of relationship and the command of repertoire that accompany it: the protocols, the obligations, the hierarchies of respect.

A friend told me that as soon as he arrives back in Lomé, "I feel at ease—within minutes." In the States, he said, he is anxious all the time and never fully in his skin. Five years out, now working as a teacher—and thus with advantages many Togolese emigrants lack—he has his mind set on returning home when he retires and is now working hard toward that future by saving monthly toward building a house where he and his family will live.

"Aux Etats-Unis, je gagne, mais je ne vis pas" (In the US, I make a living but I don't have a life) was an expression I heard more than once. Or the same sentiment in a different idiom: that life for Togolese in the US is not much more than a mechanical back-and-forth between home and work, with little to sweeten the hardship. Indeed, Jeannot, for all his apparent success and adventurism, said he will never feel fully at home in the US and aims to return to Togo with his family in the next five years. I saw his wife a few years ago in Lomé—she had returned for the December holidays—and she seemed the happiest person alive. On the day of her departure to the States, tears rained down her cheeks. "I don't want to leave," she whispered. But of course she had to.

A puzzle for me in parsing the logic of these longings and deferrals is that those in the diaspora are unable to speak their unhappiness back

home, or more, to suggest that others might want to reconsider before leaving. I was told again and again: If they spoke the truth, who would believe them? Those in Lomé see the money returning each month and the houses going up. They watch television nightly, imagining the filmic version of life in Europe and the US as normative and available to all. "If you try to tell them that life there is not the way they dream it, they won't believe you and they will wonder what you're hiding from them. As a consequence, the truth of our lives in the United States remains a secret to everyone back home."

By this telling, it is those at home as much as or more than those who have departed who keep the dream alive—the fantasy that in the US money falls from trees. They insist on the upbeat version of life in the diaspora and refuse the dystopic one. Is it not because those on the street in Lomé, more than those in the diaspora, need the fantasy of an elsewhere—a place and a time of salvation—that the visa lottery offers in order to endure precarious lives? In a double gesture, they project desire onto compatriots who have escaped while also giving voice to their plight at home. But I read this not so much as a politics of denial or false consciousness as an attempt to keep center stage their own exclusion from the global. The DV Lottery may not be the invention of the Togolese street, but it could have been, as it congeals and condenses all the desires of that street—for a different and better future, for a life after precarity, for a place in the world (Ferguson 1999, 2002, 2006; Makhulu, Buggenhagen, and Jackson 2010).

Moreover, a second deception that further serves notice to the impossibility of unmasking the first: when those in the diaspora return for short visits, they perform success, often dramatically so. They rent flashy cars, stay in upscale apartments, bankroll nights on the town with friends, and bestow lavish gifts on family members. These are the same minimum-wage workers Jeannot and I met in Newark and Moline and Omaha, those who otherwise struggle to make ends meet. Adding privation to penury, they curtail desires in the US in order to put on a "show" when they return, as if they were astonishing success stories.

There is of course something deeply compensatory or psychoanalytic about this hustle, this staging of success after years of waiting and deferral, this face-saving pleasure-for-an-instant that stands in for an incommodious life. But before dismissing too quickly this performance as another example of self-delusion, we ought to recognize that it not only offers consolation for a life of hardship abroad and provides a reprieve from the heaviness of heart

that attends daily life in the US; it also is a way of keeping hope alive, for themselves and the larger collectivity. These are dreams to live by.

When I have asked Togolese in the diaspora whether it has all been worth it and whether they would do it again, many respond stoically but without complaint by saying they didn't have a choice. "It was our destiny to be chosen by this lottery, and there's no going back." They then often add, "We do it for our children. In Togo, parents have a single hope for their children, that they will lead better lives than their parents. We know that our children will live the dream that we are unable to."

And indeed many of these children *will* succeed in the US. The children of DV winners acquire cultural literacy and English fluency from the start, and many become high achievers in school, often getting into the best colleges, because Togolese parents know discipline and they insist that their children achieve in school: "We've come too far to not succeed."

A silver lining perhaps, but also, in the end, one more deferral—not for me, for my children—for those who have given up so much to live out a brilliant, if fraught and inchoate, fantasy.

9

Lomé 2018

I returned to Lomé for a short visit in February 2018. It was *harmattan* season, when the Sahara blows hot air and dust down to the coast, turning the tropics into a desert: blistering days and chilly nights, haze everywhere, the sun a smudge in the sky. Like Trump's election on America, the harmattan left a pall hanging over West Africa, bleeding into Trump's latest outrage—his shithole countries comment and his insistence that he would end the DV Lottery.

Kodjo and I met at our usual spot, a bar called "After Beach," named as if for us in its evocation of an impossible fantasy—of drinks after sunning on the beach, or of life in the US after being selected in the lottery. Small wooden tables covered in gaudy contact paper teetered on a concrete slab, with potted baby palms serving as separators. Underpaid waitresses shuffled dispiritedly among the wobbly rectangles, the smallest tip bringing cheer to their lives. The busy street outside reverberated with the beep-beep of motorcycle taxis. This tinsel set was our salon, our laboratory, a space

where we sliced and diced the DV, and one that had listened in on a vast archive of visa lottery stories over the years.

Kodjo greeted me warmly, an infectious smile filling his chiseled face. He turned the conversation straight to Trump, wanting to know what Americans thought of his presidency and his blustery rebukes of the DV. "What is the chance the visa lottery will survive this time—not good, I assume, since the president of the United States is calling for its end?" I sounded a more optimistic note, reminding him that the DV Lottery has been under siege since its inception and that Congress will have to find the will to agree on a new immigration bill in its entirety before the DV is eliminated, something it has been unable to do since the early 2000s—and a tall order in the current conjuncture.

"I don't understand why he's against the lottery. It sends a good message to the world and helps to diversify the US population, which is one of your values, no? But I agree with Trump in his criticism of family reunification. Why should an immigrant be able to bring over all his family members? His wife and children, yes, but why his parents and siblings?" Another fetching instance, it seemed, of Kodjo's ability to separate passion from intellect, his dislike of Trump from a reasonable argument.

As for Trump's presidency, I assured him it would only last one term, that the opposition had risen in the US as never before. "What I find unseemly is that he says things no president should ever say," Kodjo interjected. "Take his comment about shithole countries. We all know it's true that African countries are poor, but his choice of words is insulting. Presidents should be diplomats to the world, not vomiting words that do harm to others. To have someone like this as the leader of the world's most powerful country is unthinkable." I added that, ill-chosen words aside, the flaw in Trump's reasoning about the DV—which assumes that desperate immigrant origins produce undesirable and undeserving citizens (or worse, criminals and terrorists)—is that immigrants from West African countries are precisely the ones the US should be recruiting, because their precarious origins make them exemplary worker-citizens after they arrive in the US.

I switched the conversation to Togolese politics. Out-of-nowhere street protests had rocked this small country in August 2017, with protestors demanding that the current president, Faure Gnassingbé, resign.[1] While agreeing with the spirit of the protests, and indeed feeling that Faure should have left after his second term, Kodjo reverted to constitutional arguments, insisting that you cannot void the law, which currently sets no term limit for presidents. "These issues can't be decided on the streets," he said. Recall here his surprising view of the protest outside the embassy in 2008, that it was predicated on the false premise that the consulate might be able to revisit visa denials or return interview fees to those who were unsuccessful. If the protestors had carefully read the State Department website, Kodjo insisted, they would have realized that they had no grounds for protest.

But he worries that his country, long peaceful, might descend into violence this time. Not only a large majority at home but also over 2 million Togolese in the diaspora are agitated as never before, with rumors circulating that weapons are being stockpiled outside Togo's borders. One of the consuls told me that the number of Togolese DV applications spiked dramatically in fall 2017,[2] clearly a response to the current political impasse and

another index of the close tie between the DV Lottery and the loss of hope, in this case political as much as economic.

I asked about his 2017 cases. He had ten selectees, of whom eight received visas before two failed. The financiers of the two who went down stubbornly insisted, against Kodjo's counsel, that the winner they were financing (Kodjo's client) add the beneficiary (their loved one) to their dossier before going for the interview. But as pop-ups, both couples were quickly identified and rejected by the consuls. "There was nothing I could do, as it was their money that was financing my client, so they were able to call the shots. And I was caught off-guard and failed to protest as strongly as I should have because one of my eight winners added a spouse after being selected—and went through."

"But here's a case that will interest you," he continued, with a gleam in his eye:

> One of my winners changed phone numbers after she applied, and when she was selected I didn't know how to reach her. I called a cousin of mine who works for Togocel [the phone company] and asked her to give me the last two numbers this person had called before she stopped using the old number. One came up empty—the person had no idea who I was asking about—but the second said he knew her and would bring her to me. Apparently seeing a chance for profit-making, he brought someone else in her place! I sensed right away that she wasn't the person I had signed up and that they were trying to play me—which became obvious when I looked at her identity documents.
>
> Miraculously, the real winner called me a week later to give me her new number. Still cautious—what if this was another imposter?—I asked to meet and told her to bring all of her identity documents. Happily, they lined up, and today she's on her way to the States.

The words fell from his mouth well-chosen and clean-edged, like dough from a cookie cutter. He loves the details of these cases—their twists and turns, their surprises—and like a Raymond Chandler detective, he adores the chase. Note, too, the reversal: the fixer is here serving as identity gatekeeper and fraud legislator, a task normally reserved for the embassy's fraud unit.

I asked Kodjo how his system of reimbursement was working, whether those singles he had financed who were now in the States were repaying him. "Not as they promised! Now they all want to buy cars and have put

off paying me back. Imagine those three boys you visited in Omaha, they haven't been in the US for a year and they all have their own cars." "But they all work at the same meat-packing plant," I interrupted. "Why do they all need cars—can't they share?" "They say they work different hours and it's easier on everyone if they each have their own. But you know why they really want their own cars? *Pour faire le show!*" (To put on a show!).

I sensed as much—about the cachet of the car for the new immigrant—when I had visited Omaha. The young woman who worked at the furniture company—the one who was detained at the Lomé airport because of a delinquent payment to Kodjo—had just bought a 2015 Toyota Camry and preened when she showed it to Jeannot and me. Owning your own car was another marker—alongside the large flat-screen TV—that the dream was real and the effort had been worth it.

I HAVE A SWEDISH ancestor who came to the United States during the nineteenth century as a stowaway on a boat—an illegal immigrant, whose son (my grandfather) nevertheless went on to great achievements. A best friend's daughter recently married her British boyfriend because his US papers were about to expire. Her niece did the same with her Spanish boyfriend. Neither was sure they would stay in the relationship, but they were willing to get papers for their partners by any means possible—and creating fake-real marriages seemed the most expedient way. When I recently gave a talk about the visa lottery at an Ivy League university, the first comment after my presentation came from an eminent scholar who said the only reason he and his wife ever got married was because a judge in California told them there were large tax advantages to tying the knot, and that he would gladly put them through the paces.

My guess is that many US families have such histories, such skeletons in the closet—of illegal entry, of marriages of convenience, of doing whatever it takes to get family and friends a piece of the pie—if indeed they're skeletons at all. They seem more norm than exception—aren't we all illegal (cf. Nail 2015)?—with nonstandard immigration a common thread and driving force throughout the nation's history. But more to the point, how are these arrangements different from what West African lottery selectees are doing in trying to get to the US and make a better life for their families?

AT OUR SECOND MEETING, again at our favorite drinking hole, Kodjo dropped a bombshell: he'd recently discovered that his best friend and long-standing DV partner had been stealing winning files from him. He was alerted to this deception at his doorstep when another associate, the photographer at the university who helps him sign up clients, told him that selectees of his reported that someone other than Kodjo was treating their files—a discovery that didn't sit well with them.

Kodjo assumed the teenager he had hired to help enter client applications in the online DV system during the October sign-up period was involved because he was the only one with access to Kodjo's dossiers and confirmation numbers. When confronted, the young man spilled the beans, saying that Kodjo's partner had asked that he divert winning files to him after the May drawing in return for a cut of the spoils.

My question to Kodjo was not only why his best friend might betray him like this—his answer: poverty can push you to do extraordinary and unseemly things—but also how do you continue to do business with anyone, especially trusted friends, after such massive deception? To wit, who can you trust if not your best friend, and how do you inhabit a world in which you may no longer be able to trust anyone? Needless to say, a question with global reach today (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2016).

"C'est une belle question!" (It's a nice question!), he responded. "This experience really disoriented me. I couldn't sleep for weeks. How could my best friend and closest business partner, someone I had grown up with, someone with whom I had always shared everything, do this to me? For years, he had come to me for advice, which I offered freely. And I gave him extra files when he was short."

"Will you ever be friends with him again?" I asked. "That will be hard," he said sadly.

But then the punchline: "You have a choice whether to trust people or not. I can't imagine living every day and doing business with others while trusting no one. This would take the pleasure out of life. So I continue to trust, while nevertheless taking precautions. You know how I have set up my business with lottery winners and their financiers, with all those checks against malfeasance. I must now do the same with partners and friends."

This high-road response—that despite massive betrayal by the closest of friends he would nevertheless continue to trust others—was not only characteristically disarming but also revealed a thoughtful, even existential Kodjo. Was this not the believer's leap of faith, the Kierkegaardian gamble

to hold fast to belief in a skeptical universe, here transposed onto a world of ubiquitous fakes and fraud?

On the day I left Lomé, I asked one more time: "Are you sure you want to publish this material?" "We fixers all have different practices, and mine are changing all the time," he repeated. "Now that I'm mostly financing clients myself, none of what you report in this book will be true anymore. By the time it's published, I'll be on to something new—as will others in Lomé." Forever the shape-shifting trickster.

When I arrived in Lomé, I had given Kodjo this book's chapter about Togolese DV winners in the US, and I asked what he thought. He liked it, he said, as it rang true to what he had heard from returnees about life in the States. "But what about your role in continuing to recruit and send DV winners," I asked, "when many are unhappy and wish they could return home? How to justify your business in the face of that awareness?" "Yes, I've thought often about that," he replied.

> But I'm not the one who created the dream of the US. That fantasy comes from the street and is produced by the desperation of Togolese today. Were I to tell a winner not to go, she would never believe me and would wonder about my motives in suggesting that. Don't forget that, despite their unhappiness, these emigrants send money home

each month and support entire families in Lomé—which gives them a status they would otherwise never have. They are important people today because they live and work in the US. And remember their children, who will now have a better life than they would have had in Togo. As a traiteur, I do little more than help Togolese realize what they already desire and what they have already chosen.

In parting, I asked what he would do if Trump got his way and the lottery was eliminated? Another surprise: "I'll become a farmer. My brother just purchased some land near Kpalimé where I'll cultivate corn and maybe yams. You know how I've always loved to farm." "But won't you miss the lottery?" I asked. "Bien sur, mais c'est par default." (Of course, but I won't have a choice).

"And, don't forget, I just married my wife to one of my winners. When they pass the interview, I'll send her to the States, where she'll open a braiding salon. With the money she earns, she'll return frequently to Lomé to visit. With time, she'll divorce her visa spouse and remarry me. I know I will be in your country one day."

His answer joined those that had been gathering in the air above the small bar, then floated up to mingle with the dust of the harmattan, before heading out into the Atlantic.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Expat returnees often send a shipping container of goods to sell—used cars, refrigerators, electronic and computer equipment, even tractors and bulldozers—and gift some of the profits to family and friends.

2. Exchange rates throughout are calculated at $1 = 500 XOF CFA francs. Early during my research on this project, the dollar dipped to 400 CFA francs, while later it rose above 600 CFA francs. I split the difference here.

3. In much of the scholarly and human rights literature "refugees" are those fleeing political persecution or armed conflict, whereas "migrants" take flight for nonpolitical reasons, largely economic ("UNHCR Viewpoint: 'Refugee' or 'Migrant'—Which Is Right?" UNHCR website, July 11, 2016, accessed August 24, 2018, http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2016/7/55df0e556/unhcr-viewpoint-refugee-migrant-right.html). For many in the human rights/UNHCR community, the distinction between the two is important to maintain because international law guarantees refugees (those fleeing politics or conflict), but not migrants, a safe haven; they worry that collapsing the distinction will deprive refugees of their rights. Much of the anthropological literature, however, blurs the distinction between refugee and migrant, insisting that the categories themselves are unstable, that it can be difficult to distinguish among those in flight, that the binarism falsely privileges politics over economics, and that dividing the two forecloses the rights of economic migrants in destination countries. I share this critical perspective and use the two terms interchangeably throughout.

4. On the money trail, see The Migrants' Files website (http://www.themigrantsfiles.com/). On crossings and the number of dead, see Albahari, *Crimes of Peace*, 2015, 105; The Migrants' Files website (http://www.themigrantsfiles.com/); Operation Portal, "Refugee Situations: Mediterranean Situation," accessed August 24, 2018, http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean; and Eurostat, "Asylum Quarterly Report," data extracted June 15, 2018, accessed August 24, 2018, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_quarterly_report.

5. David Eltis, director, "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database," Hutchins Center for African & African American Research, accessed October 26, 2108, http://

dubois.fas.harvard.edu/research-projects/projects/trans-atlantic-slave-trade-database; "Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database," Emory University, accessed October 26, 2018, http://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates.

6. There is also a rapidly expanding archive of documentary and semidocumentary films, among them *Those Who Feel the Fire Burning* (2014), *Becky's Journey* (2014), *Mediterranea* (2015), *The Longest Run* (2015), *Chasing Asylum* (2016), *Fire at Sea* (*Fuocoammare*) (2016), *Those Who Jump* (*Les Sauteurs*) (2016).

7. On precarity and fantasy, see Nyamnjoh and Page, "Whiteman Kontri and the Enduring Allure of Modernity among Cameroonian Youth," 2002; Nyamnjoh, "Cameroonian Bushfalling," 2011; Lucht, *Darkness before Daybreak*, 2011; Alpes, *Bushfalling,* 2011; Alpes, *Brokering High-Risk Migration and Illegality in West Africa*, 2016; Gaibazzi, "God's Time Is the Best," 2012; Gaibazzi, *Bush Bound*, 2015; Graw, "On the Cause of Migration," 2012; Cole and Groes, *Affective Circuits*, 2016; Vigh, "Life's Trampoline," 2016; Hannaford *Marriage Without Borders,* 2017; Hernández-Carretero, "Hope and Uncertainty in Senegalese Migration to Spain," 2017; Vammen, "Sticking to God," 2017. On zones of transit see Andersson, *Illegality, Inc.*, 2014; Lucht, "Pusher Stories," 2013; Lucht, "Death of a Gin Salesman," 2017; Simonson, "Migration to Europe from the Horn of Africa," 2016; Richter, *Gaps in a Bordered World,* 2018. On life in the metropole see Lucht, *Darkness before Daybreak*, 2011; Bass, *African Immigrant Families in Another France*, 2014; J. Cole, "The Télèphone Malgache," 2014a; Besteman, *Making Refuge*, 2016; Kleinman, "From Little Brother to Big Somebody," 2016; Mbodj-Pouye, "Fixed Abodes," 2016; Miraftab, *Global Heartland*, 2016; Hannaford, *Marriage Without Borders,* 2017. On deportation see Maher, "Becoming Refoulé," 2016; Lucht, "Death of a Gin Salesman," 2017.

8. On border control and deportation regimes see De Genova and Peutz, *The Deportation Regime*, 2010; Andersson, *Illegality, Inc.*, 2014; Albahari, *Crimes of Peace*, 2015; Lucht, "Pusher Stories," 2013. On biometrics see Breckenridge, "The Biometric State," 2005, "The World's First Biometric Money," 2010, *Biometric State,* 2014; Aikens, "Capturing Racism in Germany," 2016; Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Truth About Crime*, 2016. On the migration paradox see Graw and Schielke, *The Global Horizon*, 2012, 12; Alpes, *Brokering High-Risk Migration and Illegality in West Africa,* 2017, 3; Kleist, "Introduction," 2017a, 1–6. On sovereignty see De Genova and Peutz, *The Deportation Regime*, 2010; Mbembe, "At the Edge of the World," 2000; Mbembe, "Borders," 2016; Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 2017; Drotbohm, "How to Extract Hope from Papers?," 2017. On temporality see Kleist, "Introduction," 2017a; Zuluaga, "Errance and Elsewheres Among Africans," 2015. On everyday existentialism see Jackson, "Afterword," 2012; Jackson, *The Wherewithal of Life*, 2013; Cole and Groes, *Affective Circuits*, 2016. On kinship at the interstices see J. Cole, "The Télèphone Malgache," 2014a; J. Cole, "Working Mis/Understandings," 2014b; Coe, *The Scattered Family*, 2014; Cole and Groes, *Affective Circuits*, 2016; Kleinman, "From Little Brother to Big Somebody," 2016; Hannaford, *Marriage Without Borders,* 2017.

9. Throughout the text, I refer to the Diversity Visa Lottery by the shorthand DV—a favorite moniker of consuls and visa lottery scholars.

10. I draw on scholarly work on the history of the DV Lottery, mostly from a legal

and policy perspective; see Jacob, "Diversity Visas," 1992; Law, "The Diversity Visa Lottery," 2002; Hethmon, "Diversity, Mass Immigration, and National Security After 9/11," 2003; Newton, "Injecting Diversity into U.S. Immigration Policy," 2005; Obadare and Adebanwi, "The Visa God," 2010; Logan and Thomas, "The U.S. Diversity Visa Programme and the Transfer of Skills from Africa," 2011; Wasem, "Diversity Immigrant Visa Lottery Issues," 2012; Stoltzfus, *The "Other" Illegals,* 2016. I have also profited from Carly Goodman's (2016) masterful PhD thesis, by far the most thorough, comprehensive, and sympathetic account of the DV Lottery's strange history and afterlife.

11. "Family" was broadly defined to include not only spouses and children but also siblings and parents (Law, "The Diversity Visa Lottery," 2002, 17; Goodman, *Global Game of Chance*, 2016, 32).

12. These patterns have continued. By 2001, 20 percent of all legal immigrants to the US each year came from Mexico and over 40 percent came from just five countries: Mexico, China, India, the Philippines, and Vietnam (Hethmon, "Diversity, Mass Immigration, and National Security After 9/11," 2003, 395). The dramatic increase in immigrants from these countries is due to what sociologists and policy analysts refer to as "chain migration," whereby legal immigrants can petition to bring family members over through the 1965 Act's family reunification allowance (395–96).

13. With permanent migration closed to them, many applied for and received tourist visas, then overstayed. By the late 1980s tens of thousands of illegal Irish were living in the US, hoping to regularize their status (Law, "The Diversity Visa Lottery," 2002, 8–9; Hethmon, "Diversity, Mass Immigration, and National Security After 9/11," 2003, 389; Goodman, *Global Game of Chance*, 2016, 26–80).

14. Kennedy was the chair of the Senate Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Affairs, Tip O'Neill was the speaker of the house, Brian Donnelly was the author of the NP-5 diversity visa program (a precursor to the DV), Bruce Morrison was the chair of the House Subcommittee on Immigration, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan remained a vocal and passionate supporter throughout (Jacob, "Diversity Visas," 1992, 306–8; Law, "The Diversity Visa Lottery," 2002, 14–16).

15. At the time these included China, Taiwan, India, Mexico, Vietnam, Columbia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Korea, Great Britain, Guyana, and the Philippines (Law, "The Diversity Visa Lottery," 2002, 19).

16. Among the many ironies in play with the passage of the 1990 Act was the fact that the diversity idea reintroduced the criterion of national origins in determining eligibility to migrate—a criterion that had been swept away by the 1965 reforms (Law, "The Diversity Visa Lottery," 2002, 14, 16). It is nevertheless important to note that those nations that received the majority of diversity visas were from low-admission countries and regions, not from those Western European ones that had been the target of the 1965 reforms.

17. The reasons are several: many Irish had received visas during the transitional period, the economy and job situation back home had improved, and the creation of the EU meant that more jobs were now available closer to home (Law, "The Diversity Visa Lottery," 2002, 22–23).

18. Miller, "Diversity Visa Lottery, Criticized After New York Terrorist Attack Was Invented to Help the Irish " 2017; "Diversity Visa Program Statistics," U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, accessed October 26, 2018, https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/immigrate/diversity-visa/diversity-visa-program-statistics.html.

19. Over the past ten years there has been a surge in diversity immigrants from Eastern Europe—Albania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Macedonia, Moldova, Russia—and that region now receives the second largest number of diversity visas each year. "Diversity Visa Program Statistics," U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, accessed October 26, 2018, https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/immigrate/diversity-visa/diversity-visa-program-statistics.html/.

20. In 2015, the most recent year for which published figures are available, there were 14,418,063 total, of which 9,399,747 were "entrants" (lottery applicants) and 5,018,316 were "derivatives" (family members who were declared on the application). "Diversity Visa Program Statistics," U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, accessed October 26, 2018, https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/diversity-visa-program-entry/diversity-visa-program-statistics.html/.

21. "Diversity Visa Program Statistics," U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, accessed October 26, 2018, https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/diversity-visa-program-entry/diversity-visa-program-statistics.html/.

22. The 61,000 visas issued to Africans in 2016 represent only 10 percent of that year's overall immigrant pool, whereas Asia received 130,000 (21 percent) and Latin America, 260,000 (42 percent). "Immigrant Visas Issued by Issuing Office," U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, accessed October 26, 2018, https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/Statistics/AnnualReports/FY2017AnnualReport/FY17AnnualReport-TableXV.pdf.

23. Republicans in Congress worry that the backgrounds of DV applicants are not adequately vetted and cite the case of an Egyptian immigrant who entered as the spouse of a DV winner in 1994, then killed two people at LAX in 2002 in an incident that authorities labelled "terrorist" (Wasem, "Diversity Immigrant Visa Lottery Issues," 2011, 10; Goodman, *Global Game of Chance*, 2016, 304). In a well-publicized 2009 case, a Togolese couple who ran a hair braiding salon in New Jersey was intercepted by authorities for operating a trafficking ring that poached on the DV, paying visa winners' interview fees and plane tickets in return for work in their salon under servile conditions (Ryan, "East Orange Man Admits Helping Run Human Trafficking Ring for Hair Salon," 2009).

I fail to see merit in these worries. The suggestion of a causal link between the DV and three lone events that have occurred over the past twenty-five years (the incident at LAX and one in New York City, and the trafficking of DV winners into a braiding salon in New Jersey) is incoherent. Miscreants come from every sector and are touched by a thousand influences, and statistics show that immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than nonimmigrants (Pérez-Pena, "Contrary to Trump's Claims, Immigrants are Less Likely to Commit Crimes," 2017). If anything, eliminating the DV Lottery is likely to create more enemies of the state.

24. These worries reemerged in spades after the New York City truck attack that killed eight pedestrians and bicyclists in November 2017—by a man from Uzbekistan who came to the US after being selected in the 2010 DV Lottery. Trump immediately called on Congress to end the visa lottery, claiming that its selectees are "picked from a bin" from countries that are the "worst of the worst" and that immigration should be based on merit rather than a game of chance. Needless to say, Trump knows little about the workings of the visa lottery and had most his facts wrong (Bilgin, "It Is Called Hope!" 2017; Goodman, "The Visa Lottery Wins America Goodwill," 2017; Goodman and Piot, "The Diversity Visa Lottery Doesn't Make Us Less Safe," 2017; Machi, "Has Luck Run Out For the US Green Card Lottery?" 2017; Makhmudov, "We Need the Diversity Visa Lottery," 2017; Pérez-Pena, "Contrary to Trump's Claims, Immigrants are Less Likely to Commit Crimes," 2017).

25. And another challenge to his reasoning: even if the first one *was* a marriage of convenience, it is unlikely that the second one would be as well. In the Togolese scheme of things, when marrying to get a visa, the first marriage gets you to the US while the second enables you to bring your loved one. When I sought confirmation from Kodjo, he agreed, then added, "maybe Ghanaians or Nigerians would be in it for the commerce, but not Togolese!"

26. Moreover, it is not only stories of local savvy, of getting by on a consul or their assistant, that evoke laughter. Laughter can also be directed at the misfortune of others—at the stupidity of lottery selectees who blow the embassy interview when they should have known better. Laughing at those less fortunate (someone who is disabled, a childless couple) is not uncommon in other domains of everyday Togolese life. This is not the laughter of the liberal imaginary, which pulls back in shame from laughing at the weak or infirm, at those who deserve pity instead of mockery. Rather, as I read it, it is the laughter of those who inhabit a cultural imaginary that blames victims for their own misfortune, thus attempting to discipline them into proper behavior.

27. When in January 2018 Trump referred to African countries as "shitholes," West Africans in the diaspora began addressing one another as shitholes—turning the offending comment into a joke! But here a joke that retains Trump as referent and remains a biting critique.

28. Needless to say, Togolese laughter at DV stories—stories of getting by but also those more tragic—is not unique to the visa lottery. The streets of Lomé are filled with humor and clever repartee; this is always astonishing to me, as there are few places on earth that are as poor and needy (see also Goldstein, *Laughter Out of Place*, 2013, 2).

29. A more sustained analysis of the role of laughter in the DV would require exploring its use in particular social contexts: Who says what, to whom, when? Who is laughing, who is being laughed at, who is laughing with whom?

30. Laura Bohannan, writing under the pseudonym Elenore Smith Bowen, wrote brilliantly about these issues—especially laughter and death—in *Return to Laughter* (1964) many years ago.

31. Which raises an interesting question: Might Kodjo not also be using *me* to

further his own ends? Only telling me old strategies, imagining that the consuls will read my account and react accordingly?

32. Note that these extortionists' behavior was different from what fixers like Kodjo are engaged in—charging clients up front a fee for services rendered toward acquiring a visa. Note, too, that the bipolar geometry of consulate and street shifted in this case: Kodjo and the consuls were on the same side, with a fixer helping them to bust Beninois embassy personnel. This is but one example of the way in which the line between the embassy and the street can get muddied (see chapters 5–7).

33. Kodjo also makes the client's family in Lomé sign a contract, indemnifying them if their son or daughter does not reimburse their debt.

CHAPTER 1. BORDER PRACTICE

1. Of course, this is the rule everywhere today. My daughter in the US recently purchased a North Face jacket on eBay, which she soon discovered—after taking it to a North Face store to inquire about a flaw in its design—was a knockoff. My university's president, during a recent trip to China, received the gift of a brand-name tie from state officials; when he tried to exchange it at a tie shop at the airport for another more suitable to his taste, he discovered it was a copy. Needless to say, the con artist and fraudster have a long—indeed venerable—history in the United States (Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 2003 [1857]; Balleisen, *Fraud*, 2017).

2. Interrogating the nature of the copy and the category of the real also lies at the heart of Sasha Newell's (2012) brilliant ethnography of street culture in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Youth fashion in Abidjan, Newell tells us, is mimetic through and through. When Ivorian youth imitate American hip-hop style—baggy pants, jeans, basketball jerseys, gold chains (11)—they call it "bluffing," and they feel no shame in copying or seeming derivative. The aim is rather to see who can imitate the best—"faire le show"—at 100% (1). It is thus through artifice that Abidjan youth realize authentic personhood, if indeed we can call it that. "If the bluff is explicitly a bluff and yet remains a positive and constructive act, we are no longer in the realm of the poser but rather of the performer" (20), a realm in which mimesis rather than originality is the point of performance. Hence, the oxymoronic aim of the *bluffeur*: to produce an original copy.

3. Pirated products in Lomé today are widely referred to as "Chinese" regardless of their provenance. This attribution is in no small measure because those Sanya (Chinese) motorcycles that came on the market a decade ago, underselling Yamahas and Hondas by a third, became nightmare machines within two years, demanding constant repair.

4. Associated Press, "Official: Togo Team Was Imposter," ESPN.com, September 14, 2010, accessed August 27, 2018, http://espn.go.com/espn/print?id=5572079&type=HeadlineNews/.

5. "Fake US Embassy in Ghana Shut Down after 10 Years Issuing Visas," *Guardian*, December 4, 2016, accessed August 27, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world

/2016/dec/04/fake-us-embassy-in-ghana-shut-down-after-ten-years-issuing-visas?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other/.

6. The term "corruption" in Nigerian popular discourse, Smith tells us (2007, 5), refers not only to bribes at the airport and in government offices but also to 419 internet fraud, rigged elections, the diabolical abuse of power, cheating in school, deceiving a lover, and selling fake medicines. All are often lumped under the moniker "419," an all-encompassing signifier that refers to any practice that relies on "dissimulation, illusion or some other manipulation of the truth to facilitate gain or advantage" (20).

7. Steven Pierce (2016) provides a compelling cultural history and alternative reading of corruption practices in northern Nigeria, situating them within local economies of gift giving and systems of political patronage over the past century. In a slightly different, though still historical, vein, Samuel Daly (unpublished manuscript, "Sworn on the Gun," October 19, 2018) suggests that 419 and identity fraud in Nigeria today have their origins in the Biafran War in the 1960s, when concealing one's identity often meant the difference between life and death. These works help de-essentialize West African fraud, rooting it in real historical and political-economic exigencies. On fraud and West Africa more broadly, see Olivier de Sardan, "A Moral Economy of Corruption in Africa?" 1999; Apter, "IRB = 419," 1999; Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, 2005; Malaquais, "Arts de feyre au Caméroun," 2001a; Malaquais, "Anatomie d'une arnaque," 2001b; Hasty, "The Pleasures of Corruption," 2005; Roitman, *Fiscal Disobedience*, 2005; Roitman, "The Ethics of Illegality in the Chad Basin," 2006; Ndjio, *Feymania*, 2006; Ndjio, "Cameroonian *Feymen* and Nigerian '419' Scammers," 2008; Shipley, "Comedians, Pastors and the Miraculous Agency of Charisma in Ghana," 2009; Shipley, *Trickster Theatre*, 2015; Chalfin, *Neoliberal Frontiers*, 2010.

8. Over the years, the dates of registry and drawing have changed. They used to be November–December for sign-up and June–July for drawing; now the sign-up is in October and the drawing in May.

The first interviews for May selectees—those with low case numbers (1–1,000)—occur in October and continue until the end of the following September. The window for interviews is thus five to sixteen months after selection.

9. Today, it is harder than in the early 2000s for Togolese to qualify for jobs on the list. Many of the occupations for which they qualified earlier—house painter, welder, tailor, car mechanic—are no longer on the list and have been replaced by those for which few Togolese fit the bill: computer programmer, car mechanic able to work on computerized vehicles, and so on.

10. Those he enlists sign a contract giving Kodjo the right to reimbursement for services rendered. If they are selected and have the means to pay—to cover the embassy interview fee, the cost of the medical exam, the plane ticket—they can pay his service fee and walk with their file. If, as occurs more often, they are unable to pay, he arranges financing for them, typically by seeking someone of means in the diaspora who wants to bring over a loved one (a spouse or family member) and is willing to foot the bill. The quid pro quo is that the winner must marry the financier's loved one.

11. The low incidence of winners who actually go for the embassy interview—only 1,500 of 3,000—is largely due to the high cost of the interview fee, the medical exam, and the plane ticket. If a winner is unable to draw on family or friends in the diaspora for help, it is unlikely that he or she alone will be able to afford these finances. As well, those winners who fail the medical exam (e.g., because of an extreme medical condition) are barred from obtaining a visa (and thus from going for the embassy interview).

12. The goal, for most, is to send remittances to family and eventually build a house back home (see chapter 8).

13. Only the number of winners, and not those of applicants, were published at that time. In the 2005 DV Lottery, 2,857 Togolese were selected, while only 233 Beninois were chosen—numbers that reflect the size of the applicant pool. In the same year, 53 were chosen from Niger, 76 from Burkina Faso, 321 from Cote d'Ivoire, 1,540 from Cameroon, 3,618 from Kenya, and 3,974 from Ghana ("Diversity Visa Lottery 2005 (DV-2005) Results," U.S. Department of State, Archive, accessed October 26, 2018, https://2001–2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2004/34602.htm). In 2006, 2,138 Togolese were selected, while 328 were chosen from Benin, 164 from Burkina Faso, 374 from Cote d'Ivoire, 1,639 from Cameroon, 2,867 from Kenya, and 3,880 from Ghana ("Diversity Visa Lottery 2006 (DV-2006) Results," U.S. Immigration Law Blog by Ashwin Sharma," accessed October 26, 2018, https://ashwinsharma.com/2006/03/15/diversity-visa-lottery-2006-dv-2006-results/). In 2007, 1,592 Togolese were chosen; 218 were selected from Benin, 95 from Burkina Faso, 308 from Cote d'Ivoire, 1,461 from Cameroon, 2,337 from Kenya, and 3,088 from Ghana ("Diversity Visa Lottery 2007 (DV-2007) Results," U.S. Department of State, Archive, accessed October 26, 2018, https://2001–2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2006/69146.htm). More recently (2011–2015), Togo's yield has diminished slightly (in 2015 it had 1,824 selectees), but its per capita yield has remained the highest on the continent ("Diversity Visa Program Statistics," U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, accessed October 26, 2018, https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/immigrate/diversity-visa/diversity-visa-program-statistics.html). Note that the lottery drawing takes place six months after the completion of online registration, with the embassy interview occurring up to sixteen months after the drawing. Thus, those in the 2007 DV pool applied in fall 2005, were chosen by lottery in late spring 2006, and went for the embassy interview in 2007.

14. See Obadare and Adebanwi, "The Visa God," 2010, on religion and visa-seeking in Nigeria.

15. While the State Department notifies up to 100,000 people worldwide that their names have been drawn, it only has 50,000 visas to give out each year and proceeds down the list of those selected from top (low case number) to bottom (high case number) until the quota has been filled. The department typically taps no more than 60,000–70,000 for the interview.

16. If they prefer to treat it themselves—to fill out the documents, to prepare for the embassy interview, to raise the funds on their own—they can buy their way out by paying Kodjo's service fee.

CHAPTER 2. THE INTERVIEW

1. This was especially true between 2008 and 2012, when Togolese fraud unit employees were involved in the first stage of questioning applicants at the embassy. Since then their role has diminished, perhaps because of the sacking of one of the Togolese fraud officers who was caught with his hand in the till (see chapter 5).

2. As the south has become saturated with DV brokers, Kodjo has increasingly turned to the Kabiyé north to find his client base. But his financiers—and thus his clients' marriage partners—remain overwhelmingly southern (Ewe). The interethnic unions that result present their own narrative challenges, because they must pass muster with those Togolese at the embassy who conduct the preliminary interviews, and thus with those who have intimate knowledge of interethnic relations in Togo.

3. He was a fixture at the consulate for seven years—and the one at the embassy Kodjo and his clients feared most. Then suddenly he was sacked (see chapter 5).

4. I had the sense that Kodjo recounted this incident to me in such detail not only to chest-thump about a visa triumph but also, and especially, to let me know how effective his local intelligence is. Why otherwise the details of the puddle of water and the two vehicles, which he has recounted each time he has told me this story?

5. It's a stroke of genius that in sniffing out fake couples the embassy uses locals to inform on locals, a practice that continues a long history of colonial information-gathering that drew on local knowledge passed along by local translators, native authorities, and native civil servants.

6. This was not a generalized DV rule followed in all the embassies, but rather the preference of the consuls working in Lomé at the time, who posted a sign at the embassy to that effect.

7. Kodjo has a history of winning over state authorities (see chapter 7).

8. But also in the US. Many Americans tell "white lies"—when hiding adult things from children, when faux-flattering colleagues' work, when concealing affairs from spouses, when cheating on tax returns. They do it, like Togolese, to protect themselves and preserve relationships. But tellingly, these quotidian and ubiquitous small lies don't challenge our ability to function in society or to cultivate relationships of trust. Nor do they call into question our citizenship.

CHAPTER 3. KINSHIP BY OTHER MEANS

1. Before 2014, civil marriages were enacted in front of a judge at the préfecture. Since then they have been performed at the mayor's office, with the mayor himself doing the honors.

2. Despite spending a lot of time with this couple, Kodjo charged no fees because they were friends of a friend. Since their arrival in the States, however, they have returned the favor by sending him two clients, indicating the reciprocities that operate within and beyond the business transaction.

3. The false registry is a shadow list that enables people like my friend to conceal real marriages from prying eyes while maintaining their authenticity.

4. This was a time when adding family members to one's file after being selected didn't arouse suspicion at the consulate.

5. See, among others, Franklin and McKinnon, *Relative Values*, 2001; Carsten, *After Kinship*, 2004; McKinnon and Cannell, *Vital Relations*, 2013.

6. Of course, some do try to sneak the children of others onto the dossier (like the Ghanaian uncle mentioned earlier). But most such cases of which I am aware are of children already residing with them—children who are socially, if not biologically, their own, thus children who are considered "family."

CHAPTER 4. TRADING FUTURES

1. Of course pay-as-you-go could have been set up differently. Not all applicants pay—indeed online application is free to all—nor (to me, a more reasonable option) do those who have already received their visas foot the entire bill for pay-as-you-go. Those who pay for the system are those selected in the lottery; and they must pay before they go for the interview, where many fail.

2. "Togo," World Bank Data, accessed October 26, 2018, http://data.worldbank.org/country/togo/.

3. This free ride, combined with the fact that Kodjo signed them up to begin with, often translates as gratitude and strong loyalty to Kodjo (rather than to, say, the beneficiary who financed them), a commitment he can count on if disputes arise between the two sides or if the embassy puts pressure on a winner to reveal their fixer's identity. This latter—asking winners or selectees to reveal the identities of those who arranged financing for them—has become common practice at the embassy in recent years, clearly an attempt to make trouble for fixers.

4. "Listen, the interest of the winner is to ensure that he gets his plane ticket, while that of the beneficiary is to flee with his visa before buying the winner's ticket; but if the beneficiary tries to trick the winner, he'll lose out—he won't get his passport and will be unable to travel."

5. The two consuls in Lomé from 2005 to 2007 began—often arbitrarily—denying many of those who came for a visa (see chapter 5), which had a chilling effect on the street. Add to this the protest of those dressed in red at the gates of the embassy (chapter 6)—a visible warning to all to beware of the consulate/DV system.

6. He didn't discover the change until late in the registration period, as it was buried deep in the fine print of the online instructions, all in English, and he had registered hundreds of applicants without acquiring their confirmation numbers (which are needed to log on to the State Department website to find out whether the applicant has been selected). Working nonstop during the last two days of the sign-up period, he tried a clever gambit, re-registering those he'd already signed up, but with slightly different names: Jean Jean Abala instead of Jean Abala, Fi Fifi Kourakoma instead of Fifi Kourakoma. However, none of the ones he registered like this were selected. Just bad luck, or found out by the computer?

7. Nor, of course, is it specific to the DV Lottery. Lomé's informal economy is filled

with those who attempt to profit from every margin, turning each transaction into another opportunity (cf. Guyer, *Marginal Gains*, 2004).

8. Kodjo tries to drill punctuality into his clients, feeling that it's a good lesson for the embassy interview.

9. In principle photo recognition and fingerprinting should provide unique and objectively verifiable identity markers. But both remain flawed, sometimes yielding false positives (Kaye, "Questioning a Courtroom Proof of the Uniqueness of Fingerprints," 2003; S. Cole, "Is Fingerprint Identification Valid?," 2006; Jain, Flynn, and Ross, *Handbook of Biometrics*, 2008; Breckenridge, *Biometric State*, 2014).

10. However, an oddity: after being selected, you still mail in your vitals (current address, marital status) along with your signature to Kentucky. But why is this phase not also online? Consuls I've asked haven't known the answer.

11. However, as mentioned above, Kodjo pointed out that someone selling a winner's file could conceivably sell it to more than one person—giving the confirmation number to each to allow them to verify the winner's status—then disappear after receiving his money, leaving multiple purchasers to fight it out. To prevent this, Kodjo insists on meeting with the winner, imagining that once he has a relationship with them, they will alert him if they find out that another has also been entrusted with their file.

12. Kodjo of course understands this all too well, and he coaches clients in alternative (believable, nonfraudulent) explanations for each scenario.

13. I draw here on work in anthropology and beyond about conspiracy: Marcus, *Paranoia Within Reason*, 1999; O'Donnell, *Latent Destinies*, 2000; Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 2003; West and Sanders, *Transparency and Conspiracy*, 2003; Comaroff and Comaroff, "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction," 1999; Comaroff and Comaroff, "Millennial Capitalism," 2000; Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Truth About Crime*, 2016; Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers*, 2006; Orr, *Panic Diaries*, 2006; among others.

14. Those whose names were selected in May, but not again in July, were understandably upset. Many were already in the States, where they had been applying for papers for years, and filed a lawsuit against the State Department (Preston, "State Department Error Dashes Hope of Thousands Seeking to Live in U.S.," 2011).

15. I use the term *paranoid* in a neutral way, not in the lay or clinical sense of "delusional" or "irrational," but rather as indexing a belief that surface appearances and first perceptions are not to be trusted, that dots remain to be connected.

16. A parallel numbers game plays itself out daily in Lomé and converges with local speculations about the DV Lottery. The national lottery (LONATO) is played regularly by a majority of the capital's residents (over 80 percent, I'm told), and winning eight-digit numbers are announced at the end of each week. Serious players spend much of their time studying past winning numbers (published in weekly newspapers), scanning license plate numbers on the streets, even consulting their dreams for clues about winning numbers.

17. Indeed, I myself have tried to register friends for the DV Lottery and find the system anything but easy and straightforward. It not only assumes computer literacy

that few Togolese possess—in entering a website with passcodes, for example—but also requires that you submit a digital photo adjusted to the right pixel size. I have spent frustrating hours trying to help Togolese friends in the States size their photos, only to give up and send them to Kodjo in Lomé for help.

18. It is of course important to keep in mind that while chance plays a role during the initial stage of the DV process, merit—an advanced degree or a job on the list—determines whether a random selectee gets a visa.

CHAPTER 5. EMBASSY INDISCRETIONS

Epigraph Note: Adichie's (2010) short stories are filled with poignant sketches of Nigerian DV Lottery winners.

1. Several consuls I spoke with during the late 2000s were surprised I knew about this unit and said they could not discuss it with me. Nor would they allow me to interview the Togolese members of the unit. However, I met one of them by chance, and he became a valuable interlocutor (see below). Then, in an about-face in February 2018, I met a consul who was incredibly helpful and open with information about the DV Lottery, and he arranged an hour-long interview with the lead fraud investigator, who was also very forthcoming.

2. Ironically, perhaps, the street has been more forthcoming with me than the embassy—ironic because the street, one might imagine, has more to lose than the embassy through a published account of their practices. I'm not sure what the State Department fears, but some consuls have insisted that "Washington" or "the Ambassador" won't permit interviews with embassy officials. Regrettably so, as hearing more from the consuls would surely have rendered my account less biased toward the street.

3. See chapter 6 for a description of the protest and a longer list of protestor complaints.

4. Seven years—between offense and audit—is a long time! According to the consul tasked with confronting him with his indiscretions, State Department accounting was this far behind because they had been tied up in Iraq, then had several other, higher-profile embassies to attend to. Only years later were they getting to smaller backwater embassies like Togo's.

5. After his sacking he spent four years searching for employment in vain, with his family of seven living on his wife's small salary, before one day—poetic justice or, as he claimed, divine intervention—he received a letter in the mail from Canadian Immigration saying that he and his family had qualified for residency permits.

6. If the embassy hasn't issued the visa by September 30, State Department rules are that it cannot be issued. But note that Kodjo has recently witnessed several cases where the deadline passed but the visa was issued anyway—and backdated. Another example of consular discretion, this time working to the advantage of applicants.

7. I am thinking here especially of the infamous duo, Decker and Brown, who staffed the consular section from 2005 to 2007.

8. To say nothing of the fact that most of those from the continent who migrate to

the US become model citizens—hard-working, honest, with children who do well in school and often get into the best universities (see chapter 8).

CHAPTER 6. PROTEST

1. To repeat, the tyranny of the DV for Togolese selectees lies in its user-pays model, accompanied by the stipulation that fees are homogeneous throughout the world. This makes the DV interview unaffordable for most. Were the interview fee similar to that for the tourist visa ($150), few would need to marry in order to raise the cash.

2. I myself gave the protestors small amounts of money (10,000 CFA francs = $20) on several occasions as acknowledgment for allowing me to sit with them. Does that mean my financial contribution might be used to call into question their (or my) motives?

3. I was unable to verify whether such a protest had actually occurred.

4. John Thornton (*Kingdom of Kongo*, 1983) mentions a similar plea on the part of the King of Kongo to the King of Portugal in the seventeenth century, and Bruce Hall (*A History of Race in Muslim Africa*, 2014) mentions a petition to Charles De Gaulle in the 1950s from the people of the Niger Bend.

5. And note, as index of the times, that this was a time when no other protests occurred in Lomé—none against the vilified state, for example, only this one at the steps of the US embassy, demanding exit visas.

CHAPTER 7. PRISON

1. He knew this from studying the online figures the State Department releases each year, tallying DV selectees by country. During the mid-2000s, one hundred to two hundred winners were selected from Burkina each year, whereas two thousand to three thousand were selected annually from Togo.

2. This was a requirement at the time, but it has since been dropped.

3. He would have preferred to marry them to other Burkinabé, but he knew no one from Burkina and so would be unable to find local financiers and spouses.

4. Kodjo told me later that on one other occasion, when the two of them were alone in his office, Kaboré repeated his desire to become a fixer and asked Kodjo to walk him through the steps of signing people up, financing them, and preparing them for the interview. But they were never in touch after Kodjo's return to Togo—Kodjo had lost his taste for all things Burkina—and it's unlikely that Kaboré would have been able to learn the arts of DV fixing on his own.

5. Presumably to see whether I might have been a party to any wrongdoing. Odd, though, because she had emailed me a tracked version (with her own commentary) of the same article the previous year.

6. *Maison d'Arrêt Central de Ouagadougou* (the Central Prison of Ouagadougou).

7. Kaboré also told them that if they were interested, he knew a *charlatan* (ritual specialist) who might be able to help them by invoking a *fétish* (benevolent spirit) for them. Kodjo, who doesn't put much stock in such things, declined politely.

8. This positive reaction from West African authorities has been a constant throughout Kodjo's career as a *traiteur*.

CHAPTER 8. AMERICA, HERE WE COME

1. Referring to migration as "adventure" is widespread throughout the societies of West and Central Africa (Nyamnjoh and Page, "Whiteman Kontri and the Enduring Allure of Modernity among Cameroonian Youth," 2002; Alpes, *Bushfalling*, 2011; Alpes, *Brokering High-Risk Migration and Illegality in West Africa*, 2016; Gaibazzi, "'God's Time Is the Best,'" 2012; Gaibazzi, *Bush Bound*, 2015; Kleinman, "From Little Brother to Big Somebody," 2016).

2. Needless to say, issues with papers—how to fit complex Togolese marital and domestic arrangements into the letter of US law—preoccupy many of those Jeannot and I met during our tour.

3. Kabiyé, a minority ethnic group from northern Togo, has been in power since the 1960s, with the much larger southern Ewe ethnicity waiting in the wings. The time of democratization in the 1990s—the "troubles," as it is referred to in the north—was an especially difficult period in ethnic relations, with open hostility and violence the norm (Piot, *Remotely Global*, 1999; Piot, *Nostalgia for the Future*, 2010). The tensions from this power constellation persist in the diaspora, where southerners outnumber northerners.

4. One Togolese enlistee I met in Fayetteville, North Carolina, served four years in Afghanistan and Iraq before retiring to a small house he had purchased with his military salary. When I visited his family in 2016, he seemed to be the happiest man on earth and felt he had realized his immigrant dream. In spring 2017 I tried to reconnect with him but heard from his wife that he had reenlisted and been deployed to Mali to work for AFRICOM, the continent-wide US antiterror (and humanitarian) mission in Africa.

5. I was surprised to find that there were no braiding salons in the Togolese communities we visited. "The salons are mostly in the larger cities—Chicago, St. Louis, New York," Jeannot insisted. "In those places, many Togolese women work in salons and also as nurses in hospitals and nursing homes."

6. To facilitate his international travel during these ventures, he purchased yearlong unlimited tickets on Delta that enabled him to visit China, Korea, and Kenya, and to return to Togo several times each year.

7. "Refugees," Office of Refugee Resettlement, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, last reviewed January 28, 2016, accessed October 27, 2018, http://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/refugees/; "Refugee Cash Assistance," Economic Services Administration, Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, accessed October 27, 2018, https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/refugee-cash-assistance/.

8. The divide between immigrants and autochthones—often, those competing for jobs—is a long-standing one among US minorities. Among other works, see McClain et al., "Racial Distancing in a Southern City," 2006; Baker, "Racism, Risk, and

the New Color of Dirty Jobs," 2009; Gomberg-Munoz, *Labor and Legality*, 2010; Matory, *Stigma and Culture*, 2015; Flynn, Warren, Wong, and Holmberg, *The Hidden Rules of Race*, 2017; Rothstein, *The Color of the Law*, 2017.

9. As Jemima Pierre suggests in *The Predicament of Blackness* (2012), enlarging the frame of analysis, to include encompassing colonial and postcolonial formations, brings race back in, in that the relationship between Europe and Africa has always been raced. But this more abstract racism, while powerful and determining, is not one born of everyday experience with real others and has not produced a local racial imaginary.

10. With almost thirty Togolese employed at the airport—in handling baggage, collecting carts in the parking lot, working curb-side—Jeannot suggested that "it's Togolese who run Newark airport!"

11. The number 419 is the provision in the Nigerian legal code that outlaws advanced fee fraud schemes. This numerical signifier is used throughout West Africa today to refer to corruption or deceit of all kinds.

12. This new tradition draws on a much older (colonial and early postcolonial era) one of West Africans migrating to cities but building houses back in their natal villages.

CHAPTER 9. LOMÉ 2018

1. Faure is three years into his third five-year term, following his father's thirty-eight years in office, leaving a single family in power for over five decades.

2. A 30 percent increase: 186,608 applied in 2016, whereas 268,194 applied in 2017. The embassy's consul at the time generously chased down these figures for me, as they were not yet publicly available.

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INDEX

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