

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 back-dated 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 non-cheaters 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; Mirafteb 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 intéressé*.”

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.