

## 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.

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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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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,<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

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 Adebaniwi 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 re-tested 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).<sup>6</sup> 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.

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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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

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?