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Placing the Local at the Millenium: Thoughts on an African Postcolony

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This past February, I returned to the Kabre region in northern Togo where I have worked over the past 15 years to witness a (once-in-five-years) ceremony that plays a pivotal role in relations between this northern homeland and its southern diaspora. Arriving by taxi brousse in the town of Farendé on Saturday/market day – amidst an eerie pea-soup fog, the vestiges of a lingering harmattan – I deposited my bags and entered the marketplace to seek out friends. I soon found one and the two of us retired to one of the sorghum beer stalls on the market's periphery to have a drink. Ten minutes into our conversation, he tugged at my arm and said he had something important to tell me. "It's not like it used to be here," he began. "You can't just eat and drink anywhere you like. There are diseases everywhere. You never know who has prepared the beer you're drinking, or the food you want to eat. Be careful."

In the days that followed, I attempted to get my friend to elaborate on his statement – but without much success. "Were people dying more often?" I asked. "Well yes, some," he answered. But in fact few in the village had died since I'd last been there two years previously. "Was AIDS spreading?" I continued. "We think so," he replied. But only two departed southerners were known to have contracted AIDS. I soon realized that his comment, while certainly intended as a literal warning, was nevertheless also a reflection of those larger fears that people today have of unseen forces circulating in their midst – fears that have increasingly come to define the Kabre (and indeed, Togolese) cultural landscape during this post-Cold War era.

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Cut now to August 1998. At dawn on a Sunday in the coastal capital of Lomé gun shots ring out for several hours in the Quartier Aflao near the Ghanaian border. When the shooting stops, state radio announces that the government has captured eight mercenaries who had entered Togo from Ghana in an attempted coup. No one on either side was killed during the exchange – the only casualties were four civilians who were run over by military vehicles rushing to the scene – and no property was destroyed, except for the headquarters of Togo's leading opposition party – which was demolished at some point during the morning by a blast from a government tank. The next day the opposition claimed that the coup attempt had been staged by the government, a claim that many of those I spoke to in the weeks immediately after agreed was likely accurate.

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These two moments from the late 1990s – the conversation I had in the northern marketplace, and the government-staged coup attempt – need to be seen in the context of the ongoing political and economic crisis that Togo, like many West African countries, is experiencing today. Rocked by violent political protest and deep north/south conflict in the early 90s, deprived of EU funding since the "undemocratic" elections of 1993 and 1998, abandoned by development money that has fled to southern Africa and Eastern Europe, deeply criticized by the increasingly-powerful foreign embassies (for its human rights record, its failure to democratize), unable to pay the salaries of civil servants, plagued by constant teacher strikes – and the list goes on and on, the entrenched and paranoid Togolese state – run by the Mobutu-esque Gnassingbé Eyadéma, the continent's longest-standing military dictator – has been virtually emptied of all content. It is, to use Mbembe's (1992) phrase, little more than a "simulacral regime." The crisis for Eyadéma's subjects, of course, is worse still. Short of money, subject to the whims of Eyadéma's security forces, increasingly victimized by AIDS (as well as lesser diseases, for the economic crisis has meant many no longer have the money to buy medicine when they are sick), all but the Lomé elite has been hammered by the vise grip of the post-Cold War era.

This Togo at the Millenium is also one in which new agencies and agents (both visible and invisible) abound. A world of NGOs, of proliferating pentecostalism (in the region where I work there are today 25 small pentecostal churches – none of which existed a decade ago), and, needless to say, of rampant witchcraft and occult politics. The same friend who warned me to be careful of where my food and beer came from told me that AIDS, in making the cause of death more difficult to detect, has provided a new alibi for witches, thus enabling their proliferation. This has in turn led the state (in ways with which we are familiar from the work of Peter Geschiere (1997) in Cameroon) to attempt to police and curb the activities of witches. One account I was told involved the state's paying for a ritual specialist to prevent witches' planes from landing at the northern airport at Niamtougou – landings that were said to have caused several commercial plane crashes. Interestingly, this involvement of the state in occult politics was cited by a supporter of the Eyadéma regime I talked to as an example of the responsibility of the state in safeguarding the public interest.

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I want in this paper to situate modes of thinking about place, locality, identity, and globalization within this historical conjuncture, and within the cultural imaginaries that such a conjuncture elicits. But first, some history, and some observations about the sorts of localizations, and local-global articulations, that such a history has elicited among Kabre, the northern Togolese people among whom I have worked.

In a recent book (Piot 1999), I attempted to theorize "remoteness" in this area of West Africa – along some of the lines pioneered by Anna Tsing in her extraordingary book *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen* (1993). I thus sought to show that Kabre – and the Voltaic region of West Africa more generally, a region long celebrated by anthropologists as a site of resistant tradition – has long been intertwined with the global. Moreover, I aimed to show that those seemingly primordial features of African kinship and cosmological systems analyzed by an earlier generation of anthropologists (Fortes,

Goody, Griaule) are better analyzed as "modernities" – as features forged during the long encounter with Europe over the last 300 years, thus owing their meaning and shape to that encounter as much as to anything "indigenous."

The imbrication of global with local in northern Togo goes right back to the very origins of Kabre culture. Located 400 km from the coast, the savanna region where Kabre live was part of the hinterland for, and on the cusp between, two of the great slaving complexes in West Africa – Ashanti and Dahomey. By the mid-eighteenth century, those kingdoms looked to this hinterland zone for the majority of their slaves. Indeed, it was from this area that many – perhaps as many as one million – of the slaves came during the period 1700 to 1850 when the Atlantic trade was at its height. Needless to say, slave raiding (as well as other slaving practices, such as sale and tribute) produced massive dislocations and movements of people into and out of various polities in the area and beyond – the flight of many into refuge areas; the incorporation of others into expanding states; and, of course, the dispatching of hundreds of thousands south into the Atlantic system.

The mountainous area Kabre inhabit today became a refuge area during this time, drawing tens of thousands of those fleeing slave raiders. Packed into the hills in densely-populated settlements, these fugitives found ways of defending and feeding themselves amidst challenging terrain – and, with end of the slave trade (c. 1850), of developing highly complex social and productive systems. Note, then, that Kabre culture's "origins" during the slave trade era, and amidst those raids and wars that defined that period, place it firmly within what Gilroy (1993) has characterized as one of modernity's defining moments. Note, too, that mobility rather than fixity, translocality rather than rootedness, and heterogeneity of population rather than homogeneity, were hallmarks of Kabre right from the start.

Fifty years after the end of the slave trade, and following a period of cultural and productive efflorescence, Europeans – first Germans and then French – began colonizing northern Togo. This was a time of concerted social engineering – of the establishing of indirect rule, of taxation, and of villagization (all policies under which the village came to be defined as producer of surplus wealth, and the relationship between colonial state and local population as fiscal in nature). The fixing of village (and ethnic) boundaries, however, was also accompanied by the continual movement and circulation of Kabre beyond their borders. Early on (c. 1910), when the Germans discovered that cash crops would not produce well in the arid north, they sought to turn the northern territories into a labor reserve, and began recruiting groups like Kabre as workers – both to build the colony's roads and railroads in the south and to work in mines and plantations. (Taxation, as throughout much of colonial Africa, was the method used to coerce people to seek work beyond their borders – for taxes had to be paid in colonial currency, which could only be secured at these sites of colonial production.)

As Meillassoux (1981) has pointed out for other areas of West Africa, it was also colonial policy in Togo to leave the home communities of migrating workers largely intact, so that those communities, and not the colonial government, would bear the costs of social reproduction. The Germans (and later the French) evolved a system that required Kabre to leave their communities for short periods of time (a few months at most, more typically several weeks) before returning home – to produce food, bear children, care for the elderly, and bury their dead. In this colonial policy of migration-

and-return, then – a policy whose sole aim was the cheap reproduction of labor – lay the roots of Kabre "tradition" (they are still today known as the most "traditional" of Togolese peoples) and of their attachment to a northern homeland. This tradition and this homeland have long served the interests of a southern colonial-capitalist sector, and indeed owe their existence in large part to their intimate and ongoing connection to that sector.

By the 1920s, and as reprisal for losing World War I, Germany was forced to cede "Togoland" to France and Britain, who divided it in half. The British half was incorporated into the Gold Coast, while the French half became independent (and was renamed "Togo"). Under the French, Kabre (who are conveniently described in documents of the time period as "over-populated") were once again recruited to the colonial project of road and railroad building. And, in a move that would dramatically affect their culture for the long term, some Kabre were forcibly relocated to a large uninhabited area of southern Togo – uninhabited because it had been a buffer zone during the slave wars between the coastal kingdoms and the peoples of the savanna. Once resident in this virgin territory, however, Kabre rapidly discovered that the soils there were more fertile and easier to work than were the rocky soils of the mountains in the north. They also found that they were able to produce cash crops (coffee, cotton, and cocoa) at considerable profit to themselves. By the mid-1930s Kabre began migrating into this zone on their own, opening up scores of new communities – seventy by the mid-1950s – along a 200-km stretch of the national highway between Sokodé and Atakpamé. This migration continues to the present day, with more than 200,000 Kabre currently living and farming in this region, as compared to120,000 in the north.

In spite of this northern exodus, and despite the long-term residence of many Kabre in the south, however, southern Kabre remained intimately tied to the homeland in the north. They returned throughout the colonial period, and continue to return today – a steady stream of people filling the trucks and taxis that ply the national highway between north and south – not only to visit family and friends but also to initiate their children, to sacrifice to spirits and ancestors, and to attend funerals. Further, it is obligatory that all Kabre – even second- and third-generation southerners – return to their "homes" in the north at death, to be buried there and join the ranks of the ancestors. Note, then, how this localization – this attachment to place – is effected via tradition, for Kabre ceremonies of initiation and death are ways in which not only identity but also locality is produced (cf. Appadurai 1997). Note, too, that it is spirits and ancestral souls who stay put in the north – and thus define homeland/locality – while people come and go.

Kabre culture is thus constituted as much as anything else by the constant shuffle of people and commodities between its two zones. These zones define complementary and interdependent spaces – the one a homeland associated with ritual, the other a frontier associated with money-making – and create a set of dynamics and sensibilities – comings and goings, pushes and pulls, longings, imaginings, ambivalences, and contestations – that lie at the heart of whatever it means to be Kabre. This is a "traveling culture" in Clifford's (1997) sense of that term, in which identities are enacted at the interstices, and amidst the jostle, of these contradictory forces.

The inescapable hybridity of this world – of structures of feeling and a sense of locality which is as much the product of colonial design as of local cosmology – extends beyond the diasporic landscape itself into virtually every aspect of Kabre life. To give

two small examples: The high ridge where the family tombs are located in the northern Kabre community where I have lived is often referred to as "au Canada." This because it is where people go to be buried and not heard from again – like the local chief's son, a star student who attended business school in Canada, and was rarely heard from again – "as if dead," local sentiment had it. Of course, the implied commentary is two-way and double-edged: not only is a local place identified with/colonized by an image of a faraway (global) place but also a wayward son is chastised in the process.

The second example involves the way in which the global – here, the European – is appropriated into the heart of Kabre cosmology. Thus, the world of the witch – an everyday figure in the Kabre imaginary – is inseparably associated with European technologies: Witches are said to fly airplanes and drive cars, and they convene at night in markets in large urban/colonial spaces to consume their victims. For Kabre, however, such borrowings are not surprising: Powerful persons, they say, appropriate technologies of power. Such examples of cultural metissage could be multiplied endlessly.

It would be a mistake, however, to see such appropriations more generally as disempowering – as a type of capitulation or surrender (to the modern, the European) – or to regard them as examples of the global colonizing the local. Not only do those Kabre I know see culture as additive and labile, ever-changing and improvisational, but also they refuse to see their culture as antithetical to modernity. Indeed, and in spite of appearances, they welcome and appropriate many things Western – tin roofs for their houses, Western clothes and medicine, radios and cars, a moneyed economy, certain forms of Christianity – and relish the spectacle of a (Kabre) president of the country who flies from community to community in his helicopter to attend the wrestling matches of male initiates. Cultural mixing here, as elsewhere in Africa (Amselle 1990; Comaroff and Comaroff 1993), is seen not so much as a loss of culture as an addition to it. Moreover, as scholars of the transnational have repeatedly found elsewhere (Thomas 1991, Hannerz 1996; Appadurai 1997; Comaroff and Comaroff 1997), things appropriated from the outside are forever refigured and resignified in locally meaningful ways. Rather than seeing local appetites for things European as a type of colonization, I prefer to see them as creative appropriations – as "cannibalizations" (Jewsiewicki 1997: 103) of the cultural inventory of the West.

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The postcolonial era until 1990, and indeed the early post-Cold War era of the early 1990s as well, saw, if anything, an intensification of those processes of attachment to place and identity that defined the colonial. Thus Kabre continued to migrate south into the diaspora in search of money/wealth, while nevertheless returning to their communities of origin in the north, especially on ceremonial occasions – and especially at death, when their souls are returned to their ancestral homesteads in the north. Moreover, during the volatile early-90s period of "democratization" – a period of extreme ethnic conflict between northerners and southerners – attachments to ethnicity and place of origin intensified. As Geschiere and Nyamnjoh (2000) have recently argued for Cameroon, such attachments – and in Cameroon a primordialist obsession with "autochthony" – are directly related to the increasing importance of elections, and thus to a major signifier of 1990s globalization. In Togo, and in direct response to the conflicts

brought on by the call for elections, the early 1990s saw a dramatic hardening of ethnic lines, increasing ethnic violence on the streets of Lomé (the capital), and the return of tens of thousands of southerners to the north. The Kabre town of Kara, the northern regional capital, for instance, is today twice the size it was in 1990. And throughout the mountain communities where I work, southern Kabre, some of whom hadn't been seen in the north in years, were suddenly making annual trips back to their natal villages – and in many cases reclaiming land and building houses there. Here, as in Cameroon, the reclamation of place/autochthony was a direct outcome of ethnicity conflicts brought on by the specter of democratization and new world order politics.

These precolonial, colonial, and early postcolonial-era Kabre attachments to place/homeland – forged initially as refuge from slave raiders, then as place-of-return in colonial era work projects, and recently as refuge once again (though now from a new type of global predator) – have recently begun to shift, and are doing so, I would like to suggest, in response to those forces that are set loose in the more fluid and less predictable landscape of the post-Cold War era. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue in their new book *Empire* (2000), the new world order manifests itself today no longer through the fixities of the colonial (and, I would add, early postcolonial eras[1]), nor through the modernist imaginaries that accompanied them. Thus, the metropolitan institutions – of family, clinic, prison, educational system, and nation-state – that came to define modernism are today everywhere in disarray, as are the fixed boundaries and territories of the colonial/modernist era, and those centers of power and clear chains of authority that defined relations between colonizer and colonized.

In place of those technologies of power that defined the old order, Hardt and Negri suggest, new lines of authority and mechanisms of command are emerging that are less fixed, less clearly extractive (though no less exploitative), and less dependent on the old center-periphery (and nation-based) structures. These new flexible networks of power "undulate" snake-like (Deleuze 1991) across the decentered, deterritorialized space of the new world order through modulating networks of control. Thus, power today in a place like Togo – and throughout much of Africa – is no longer wielded by a metropolitan colonial country – or through those postcolonial leaders who often did little more than continue the project of the colonial state – but rather through those horizontally-linked signature institutions of the new world order: the IMF and the World Bank, the NGOs, Amnesty and Human Rights Watch, the global health organizations (like Medecins Sans Frontieres), the new transnational Christian development organizations (like World Vision) – and by and through the new regional structures that have recently come into prominence (GATT, NAFTA, the EU, the OAU, etc.).

There is much to criticize, of course, in such a totalizing (and indeed functionalist, teleological) account. But I also feel that it nevertheless offers a powerful description of some of the shifts that are occurring throughout much of the world today – and certainly those taking place on the ragged edges of Empire in a country like Togo. I want to focus here on some of the shifts I see occurring around Kabre attachments to place and identity

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[1] It is only today (in the late 1990s), for instance, in Togo and throughout French West Africa, that the century-long colonial/neo-colonial relationship with France is being dismantled.

– and to think these shifts through those taking place globally, and through the Togolese political and economic crisis brought on by those shifts.

If the early 1990s witnessed a resurgence of autochthony claims and primordialist attachments to place, the late 1990s have begun to see a reversal of these trends. Thus, identities that were fixed now seem more mutable, attachments to place are becoming destabilized, and identity/place correspondences and regimes of power are being unsettled and are giving way to technologies of performance. That such contradictory trends might be occurring simultaneously should not be surprising: moments of transition are often rife with contradiction.

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The 1998 presidential election in Togo – in which Eyadéma, a Kabre from the north who has been in power since the late 1960s, ran against a southerner, Gilchrist Olympio, whose father had removed from power and killed by Eyadéma in 1967 – provides a telling example of those contradictions that define the present moment. On the one hand, essentialized ethnic identities – and ties to places of origin – became all important in this deeply contested election. Thus the candidates attempted to mobilize symbols of local attachment and proclaimed their commitment to communities of origin. The post-Cold War electoral landscape would appear to demand – and indeed produce – such essentialist thinking: add up the numbers in the home region/s, call in the votes, and win the election. At the same time, however, things are rarely so simple. Olympio had been in exile in Ghana since his father was killed over 30 years ago, and many of his attempts to claim attachment to place rung hollow. In the end, he simply ran against Eyadéma as a "southerner" – in the most generalized of senses. Eyadéma, too, however, had difficulty playing the origins/place card. Ever since he survived a plane crash in the mid-1970s – an event, not surprisingly, which incited stories of his invincibility and magical powers – he has been engaged in attempts to re-work – to morph – his identity. Thus, soon after the plane crash he began to claim that Gu, the vodu deity of iron, had protected him during the crash, and he started returning each year to the site of the crash, dressed in white, to sacrifice all-white animals – the color demanded by Gu. Note that this appropriation is of a southern deity, while Eyadéma is from the non-vodu practicing north. Moreover, around the same time he began to reinvent his origins, not only giving confusing and contradictory accounts of his childhood (and parentage) in the north, but also drawing on the symbolism of the plane falling from the sky to suggest his own heavenly – and, through identification with Gu, a southern rather than a northern – pedigree. Of course, such claims of polychthony – of multiple origins – are a powerful technology of power. The election, then, put Eyadéma in a bind. Needing to reassert his ties to the north, he had nevertheless also had a long history of attempting to claim constituences – and origins – in the south, and indeed in the end claimed to represent all Togolese (as against "Gilchrist," he claimed, who represented only southern interests and aimed to divide Togolese from one another).

If the candidates' own attempts to claim autochthony and purity of origin were thus destabilized, so too were the identities of their constituencies. When one of Eyadéma's ministers confiscated all the ballots the day after the election (and counted them himself, proclaiming Eyadéma the victor with 54% of the vote – just enough to

avoid a runoff), he defended his actions by claiming that tens of thousands of Ghanaians had crossed the border right before the election – paid for by the opposition – to vote for Olympio. So, too, were there "irregularities," as the EU's election monitors referred to them, in the north. Moreover, because both candidates and constituencies attempted to reduce the election to the simple binarism of north vs. south, new (ethnic) identifications were forged – of (in the north) "Moba" and "Lamba" referring to themselves as "Kabre," and (in the south) "Yoruba" and "Kotokoli" (a northern group) referring to themselves as "Ewe." In the end, claims of autochthony, place and identity became unstable and mutable – and their invocation was revealed as purely instrumental. Moreover, in that the government voided the results of the election, all such claims were ultimately shown to be altogether beside the point.

Those Togolese I know – both Kabre and non-Kabre – make a clear connection between the ethnic violence in their lives today and the imposition of elections in the early 1990s by the Western embassies and human rights organizations. Indeed the term "democracy" has come to signify violence and the general disarray they feel has gripped their lives today. "Democracy," one person told me, "means that those who have lived side by side begin to kill each other, and that prisoners are let out of jail, and that everything is in disorder." Ironically, given the liberationist zeal of those who promote democracy and human rights, this seems to many a greater form of colonization than anything that went before.

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The staged coup attempt I mentioned in the beginning of this paper occurred two months after the 1998 election. It provides for me a cipher for much that I have come to understand about Togolese politics during the post-Cold War era. Thus, it neatly demonstrates the way in which Eyadéma attempts to handle his critics on both flanks – that is, those at home and those in the international community – as well as providing a paradigmatic example of the way in which performance and event have come to dominate the Togolese political scene (and are replacing older place/identity constellations).

The fraudulent outcome of the June election was followed by a series of strikes and marches organized by the main opposition party (with the marches often ending in front of the American Embassy, which, unlike the French Embassy, had allied itself with the anti-Eyadéma forces). Both acts of protest were notable for the way in which Eyadéma's government parried with and effectively undermined the tactics of the opposition. Thus, each time a strike – "ville morte" (lit. dead city) – was announced, the government cleverly called for a national holiday. As a result, no one ever knew how widespread was the opposition to Eyadéma.

After the coup attempt in mid-August, however, and following two months of vigorous opposition activity, the streets were amazingly quiescent. And while people I spoke to readily acknowledged that the government might have staged it all, many also felt that the event itself had succeeded in, as one put it, "finishing the opposition." But how could this be? A coup attempt staged by the government to discredit the opposition achieving its end despite widespread consensus that it might have been staged? One part of the answer is quite straightforward: the coup attempt – whether staged by the

government or not – showed that the military, always the backbone of Eyadéma's power, remained firmly behind him. The unrest of the early 1990s had been marked by defections. When this didn't occur in August of 1998, they knew that the opposition's chances of success were slim at best.

But equally important to the apparent "success" of this event was its value as spectacle. Eyadéma's power has long been tied to spectacle – to making himself, the state and the military "visible" to his subjects. The coup attempt and its "suppression" was another in a long string of staged spectacles – extraordinary government construction projects, the performance of "animation" for visiting dignitaries, the omni-present military at checkpoints throughout Lomé, the daily high-speed motorcade from the presidential palace to the military camp, the annual pilgrimmage to the site of the Sarakawa plane crash, Eyadéma's (and the entire cabinet's) annual (televised) trek to the north to witness the wrestling matches of Kabre initiates, and, most recently, the OAU summit in Lomé – which was marked by extravagant spending and at the end of which, remarkably to his critics, Eyadéma was named OAU president.

Just after the coup attempt, I had several conversations with an official from the American Embassy in Lomé whose job it was to report weekly to the State Department on the Togolese political scene. On the morning after the coup attempt, this official and a counterpart from the German Embassy – both strong critics of the current regime – had been taken to the border by a Togolese government official to examine the site where the invasion had occurred. They were shown a section of cut barbed wire fence and jeep tracks leading up to the spot from the Ghanaian side – the tracks, they were told, of the vehicle used by the mercenaries. Since the government would not let these officials speak to the imprisoned mercenaries, this was the extent of the "evidence" they had that there had been a coup attempt. When I asked the American official what he thought had "really" happened – whether the government had staged the coup attempt or not – he simply shrugged his shoulders. "It's impossible to tell. Both sides claim the other was responsible, but other than those tire marks in the sand there's no evidence that would permit anyone to decide. I don't know in this country anymore where the truth lies. Look at this," he said handing me a flyer that had been circulating in the streets. Unsigned, it claimed to have been written by someone who had been recruited by the opposition to impersonate a soldier and trash the house of a member of the opposition party. The opposition party claimed, of course, that it was a government fabrication. "But these things work on the streets," he said. "They affect people. Eyadéma's very clever at winning the battle for public opinion."

Of course the various techniques and strategies deployed by Eyadéma are ways that enable him to evade his enemies both within and without and remain in power. They at once enable him to discipline subjects at home while at the same time evading the disciplinary tactics of the agents and agencies of the new world order. But they do more as well. At a time of ongoing crisis, when there are no resources at all, when there is literally nothing for the state to do other than preserve itself in power, when the state has been emptied of all content, these spectral phantasms are ways in which the state can manufacture and invent itself. The staged coup attempt said nothing so much as – "We are still here and in power."

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I return now to northern Togo and to the terrain I described in the beginning of this paper as one in which new forces, both seen and unseen, are afoot. The changes to this landscape – and to peoples' sense of identification with it – over the last 10 years are striking. As the economy has continued to stagnate, as the markets have dried up as a source of surplus income (this due directly to the 1994 World Bank–mandated devaluation of the French West African currency, the CFA), as migrant sons working for the government are no longer able to return remittances to the north (for they themselves go months without receiving a paycheck), and as the aid-starved state is no longer able to rebuild infrastructure or provide services to localities, the northern communities have been denied all those sources of external income to which they have long been accustomed. As a result, to and fro movements within the diaspora – from a wealth-producing south to a ritual homeland – have been dramatically disrupted. Southern attendance at the ceremony I returned to see last February, for instance, was at an all-time low. Remittances to the north have virtually stopped. And for the first time ever, I heard elders in southern diaspora communities claim that they would not be surprised if their children stopped returning to the north to be buried. The new globalism, and all the changes it has wrought in this postcolony, is clearly beginning to unsettle Kabre senses of place.

At the same time, these absences have been filled by a host of new international agents and agencies – most notably NGOs and pentecostal churches. I focus here on the NGO. On my two most recent trips to the north of Togo (last February and in summer 1998) I have been struck especially by how rapidly people have adapted to the world of the NGO. Thus, they have quickly acquired a sophisticated understanding – and developed a vernacular ethnography – of the contrasts between various NGOs. I was repeatedly told, for example, about the differences between American NGOs (which they found less to their liking because they tended to set more conditions on the individual/community, to require specific forms of entrepreneurial/profit-generating activity, and to mandate the need for measurable returns) and European ones, and within Europe, about the differences between northern European NGOs (their favorites) and those from southern Europe. Kabre have also developed complex strategies for attracting NGOs to their communities. The most interesting (and apparently effective) involved – borrowing a page from Eyadéma's book – a type of performance. Thus, to gain the attention of an NGO that has just moved into the area, a community will invite them to a meeting, serve them food and beer, perhaps call out the musicians – and outline their needs. Moreover, in a departure from anything I saw in the 1980s – where chiefs and elders always represented the community to the outside world – this staging – of 'need' and 'gratitude' – was usually directed by young, educated men and women from the community. The entire event thus savvily presents to the (typically) European/American NGO head a seductive image of, on the one hand, an Africa committed to preserving the best of its "traditions" (sociality, etiquette, musicality), while, on the other, an Africa embracing the modern (through its educated youth). When such events are successful, Kabre boastfully claim that they have "captured" an NGO, a term resonant with the performative seductions of initiates/fiances. And, as with Eyadéma, one has the sense that the mere act of "capturing," of staging the successful performance, is as much the

point as accessing whatever (usually) insignificant material returns find their way to the individual/community.

But just as importantly, the NGO is neither place-based nor place-reifying. For one, it disrupts and disorganizes traditional hierarchies and the places that those hierarchies organize. Thus, as indicated above, NGO-ization has opened up a space of opportunity and maneuver for youth, whose education is favored by those who run the NGO. But by displacing elders from control of the only, if still meager, resources trickling in, the NGO has set loose demons that people I know are only now beginning to come to terms with. This, I think, is in part what my friend had in mind with his oblique reference to new forces circulating in their midst. But just as importantly, while certain projects are "community-based," most are not. They target specific individuals and draw them out of the community – to their clinics and training sessions – or enter the community to address a particularized need –for water, for fuel, for fertilizers – before withdrawing again.

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When I was in northern Togo last February, people spoke daily about a large troop of baboons that appeared just before the November harvest to ravage their fields. I was shown fields that had been meticulously tended for months but from which the owner had been unable to harvest a single grain – because the monkeys had eaten everything. All attempts to kill or chase away the monkeys had failed (including enlisting the help of rifle-toting soldiers). The monkeys had such exceptional vision, I was told, that they could see people coming from a half mile away and would quickly take flight. Moreover, the threat of these predators was seen as so serious that many who had spent their entire lives in the north spoke of leaving for the south – and, indeed, a letter I received last month from a friend said that several recently have.

On the night before I left, a local hunter managed to kill two of the monkeys – by tracking them to a stand of trees where they slept at night in the distant plain. The next morning he came to ask if I would take a picture of him with his prey before I left – and before he skinned and cooked them. I did, of course, but what I remember most about the occasion was that he and others who were present kept remarking – and asking me, with smiles that were at once wry and telling, whether I agreed – that the monkeys' faces resembled those of "whites." A neat inversion of Euroamerican representations of Africans, I thought at the time, but also, and more tellingly perhaps, a trope that aptly captures the fears that people have of those new world order forces circulating in their midst at the start of the new Millenium.

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