IMAGINING THE POOR:
THE DISCOURSE THAT DIRECTS WESTERN INTERVENTION IN AFRICA AND ITS IMPACT ON THE CONDITION OF AMERICAN POVERTY
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Thank You,
Bradford
Introduction

Field Report

Sometime around two o’clock in the afternoon I heard my host brother Aklam stirring in his half of the two-room mud structure we shared. Figuring his rise meant it was time to head to the fields for an afternoon of cultivation I rolled from beneath the mosquito net that covered my mattress of re-purposed rice sacks, stitched together and stuffed with some combination of hay and cloth, onto the cement floor of my mud walled, tin roofed room. As I emerged from my room into the pristinely swept red mud courtyard of my host family’s homestead, Aklam handed me my tool for the day’s work: a sort of shovel, hoe hybrid, made from a thick stick and curved iron spades.

Leaving the homestead, we set out with our tools customarily draped over our shoulders, so that the spade rested on our backs and the stick our chests. In a five minutes walk we met the much larger team of men, similarly fashioned with their tools, and joined in their march to the field selected for work that day. Together our band of thirty, fifteen men ages 18 to 30, ten boys ages 10 to 17, and five older gentleman anywhere from 40 to 70 years old made our long hike onto a mountain side or over a mountain down into another valley to work for two to three hours, cultivating land for sorghum, corn, or yams.

This back bending work required each man to go through one row, anywhere from ten to forty yards, overturning soil, into a uniform mound, backward between his legs. The fifteen men served as an engine to the work, competitively racing through rows and then sprinting up or down the mountain past the entire group, front to back, to the next undone row.
After the day’s cultivation was complete we got back into line, positioning our now dirty spades over our now drenched, dirty shoulders, freeing our hands for ease as much as to relieve any blisters that may after formed or burst over the previous several hours, and marched however many miles hike through the mountains was necessary to return to the village.

This work, cultivation, is an economic and cultural necessity in Koudé. The sorghum, corn, and yams that come from the fields provide sustenance and currency for families and the ritual of work is an identifier of masculinity. As a visiting student with a mission to study agriculture in the village and form some sort of analysis how new crops could enter and impact the community I, from the tutelage of my professor who had spent several decades in the community, found it necessary to participate in this work ritual and essentially earn my status as a man and respectable member in the community context. Succeeding to a degree in this endeavor I was introduced to a ritual as culturally significant as the cultivation: the compensation for the work. In Koudé cultivation is scheduled on a rotating basis. Families determine cultivation by whose fields are ready or in need of being turned over and, potentially more imperative, the ability to prepare sorghum beer for the hadja: the compensation.

After cultivating and the walk back to Koudé, the band of thirty would crowd into the homestead of whichever man owned the field that was worked that day. Here we sat, a few on benches, most on elevated stone stairs against the mud walls of rooms or stone chicken coops, organized in a strict ascending order of age, so that on either side of the homestead entrance sat the oldest man and the other the youngest. In the center sat either the man at the head of the homestead, or someone he delegated, serving tub after tub of
sorghum beer, that his wife and daughters had prepared over several days of taxing work, to the men.

The hadja is critical to village culture because in addition to being a form of compensation, it serves as a meeting space. On a near nightly basis I sat and observed lively discussion by the men, at times one after another to the center of a homestead giving a passionate oration, regarding the then upcoming parliamentary elections, whose fields to work in the coming weeks, or community matters.

Through all of this what I understood was that though this place, Koudé, was seemingly devoid of material possession and daily life required an immense amount of physical effort, at the end of the day this community had a constant tradition that provided learning and joy.

This observation would be insignificant but for the fact the place is politically framed as definitive poverty: on the international scale Togo’s GDP falls to the bottom, organizations stress agendas focused on modernizing the country and region, and domestically, the northern regions of Togo are largely shut off from the same global economic opportunities as the south which creates a discourse around the northern Kabiye’s progressiveness or lack thereof. But still, in those moments at the hadja, largely influenced by my professor’s asking is this—the moment in a northern Togolese village we were experiencing—poverty, I understood that the people of Koudé, my host family, my workmates, enjoyed an enviable quality of life free from malaise.

I first interned on Capitol Hill during the summer of 2008. The experience was a surreal but expected one. I felt in place, working in Congressional offices, but for the first
time felt that I was really developing as a young man (though I was naïve, not realizing how young I really still was).

I had grown up on Capitol Hill: attended daycare at the House of Representatives Daycare Center; had my first water days as a toddler splashing in the fountains of the several parks surrounding the Capitol building; had endless visits to my mom’s office running up and down the marble hallways of the Cannon, Longworth, and Rayburn House office buildings; and spent hours with my dad on some evenings after elementary school on his construction projects in the Capitol building. I knew the insides and out of this building and people in it including staffers, custodians, cafeteria employees, police officers, and some representatives. The building and culture of Capitol Hill felt like a home and family to me. Still now, an eager 13 year old, I felt an extra weight on my shoulders. Working on the Hill was different from simply being there. I was building my own reputation, wanting to be known as myself, and not simply the son of my parents.

My favorite responsibility that summer was providing tours of the Capitol for visiting constituents and special guests. Most of the time my tour group consisted of families or senior business people, who were impressed by my historical knowledge of the building and hospitality. However, I largely assumed this was due to their excitement of visiting Washington for the first time or being kind to a young intern.

Towards the end of my internship I was assigned to lead a tour for a group of seventeen and eighteen year olds. I was anxious at the thought of presenting to a group of older students, who I assumed would consistently attempt to trick me with questions or ignore me once they learned my age. I studied more for this tour than any of the others, hoping to prepare for the inevitable onslaught. I began the tour as always: weaving through
the office building tunnels to the main Capitol building; pointing out significant paintings displaying historical American scenes of the country’s formation and manifest destiny; remarking the opulent frescos of the Senate’s Brumidi Corridor; and detailing the magnificence of the Rotunda.

The students were fairly attentive throughout the tour but, remained fairly unimpressed. When I brought the group into Statuary Hall I made my final remarks of the tour that it was the former House Chamber, and asked if there were any questions. The students clapped but did not offer any questions. My initial thought was that I had come through unscathed and if anything they were simply indifferent to my tour.

The group chaperone raised her hand, asking me to further explain exactly what work went on in Congress. I asked her to specify what she wanted me to explain, to which she clarified she wanted me to explain the significance of the building and exactly what representatives and senators do.

I was taken aback. She was essentially asking me to give an impromptu civics class to a group of juniors in high school, all of whom were only months away from being eligible to vote. Receiving my brief explanation of Congress the students became more inquisitive, genuinely and somewhat depressingly, rather than in the sinister manner I had initially anticipated. They were curious that the Capitol Building was not simply a museum, and that there were men and women who made laws and helped decide what benefits citizens received and how the country functioned.

This experience was inherently uncomfortable for me; however, what really made it a striking blow was that the majority of the group was from neighborhoods on Capitol Hill and across the nearby Anacostia River.
They had grown up within eyesight of arguably the most powerful building in the world, but did not know its significance. They had grown up across town from me but apparently received dramatically different education and access than me. Granted, I was not naïve that I had received fortunate life chances, but I ignorantly assumed any Washingtonian, and any American adult would have a basic idea of government.

After that day at work, I rode the metro home seriously troubled. I flashed back to an experience two years earlier when a choir from Eastern High School of Northeast Washington, in a Capitol Hill Neighborhood, visited my middle school, located in Northwest Washington, and stated how they did not realize they were still in Washington. At that time I did have a vague sense that that statement evidenced visible unfair inequality between Northwest and the other quadrants of the city, and that I had a fortunate educational opportunity. However, it was not until that first intern experience that I contextualized for the first time the implications of such stark inequality: that it was a matter of inequity, of dispossession, and seemingly a threat to persons’ essence of citizenship, the ability to participate in democracy.

I was confronted by poverty working both in the cultivation fields of Koudé, Northern Togo and the congressional halls of Washington DC. In absolute terms, Togo is a poor country. The World Bank reports its GDP 156th of 194 countries, and rates it among critically impoverished countries, citing its finding that 52.5% of Togolese citizens earn less than $1.25 a day. Washington is a city of increasing inequality, following a greater trend of the United States, which has grown increasingly unequal every year since 1972. The Washington, DC metropolitan area is one of the most prosperous regions of the country

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1 Gross Domestic Product 2014.
2 “Poverty & Equity Data Togo”
with a median income of $94,537 for a family of four\textsuperscript{3}. Yet, at least 14\% of people in this same area are living in poverty\textsuperscript{4}. Presumably these poor of Washington are living on more than $1.25. That however may not be true when one considers living costs: housing, food, utilities, transportation, health, childcare, \textit{et cetera}; poor Americans may have daily expenses greater than $1.25 a day but it is uncertain whether they have that to survive on daily.

Juxtaposing these two experiences prompts an examination of the discourse of poverty, considering how the global system evaluates poverty and what the implications of this discourse are. The natural question to raise here regards which situation is worse, being poor in absolute terms or relative ones, in Koudé or Washington DC, in Togo or the United States.

**Purpose**

This thesis uncovers the sociopolitical impact of the dominant Western conception of international poverty on Western conditions of poverty. The international development and poverty alleviation apparatus, represented by Western governmental foreign affairs agencies, quasigovernmental transnational organizations like the World Bank and United Nations, and nongovernmental development organizations, has created a dominant cultural belief that poverty in a \textit{developing} country, like Togo, is inherently more severe than in Western countries, like the United States. This conception extends to notions that poor persons in developing contexts inherently suffer more those in the West, and that poor persons in developing contexts are inherently helpless and destitute while those in the West are inherently lazy.

\textsuperscript{3} United States Census Bureau.

\textsuperscript{4} (Short. 2014)
I do not intend to argue that poverty in the West is actually worse than in developing contexts, or that it does not exist in the developing world. I present that the existing definition and discourse of poverty creates a framework that strips poor persons in both contexts of their experienced realities. Ultimately, this results in ineffective policy writing, spending, and perpetuation of the issues initiatives seek to eradicate. In the US context it results in a perpetual malaise and disconnection from society. And in the Togolese context it results in a paradox of advocating for modernity while seeking to maintain the status quo. Western organizations have an idea of what is quintessentially African, and part of that for them entails what by Western standards visually appears poor.

**Personal Narrative**

Because writing on a topic in some ways considering the haves and have-nots can be deeply controversial and for understanding an anthropological, or ethnographical, work it is invaluable to understand who the writer is and through what personal lenses the world was seen to ultimately produce the work, I find it necessary to present a personal narrative, sharing who I am, and hopefully some palpable explanation of how I came to the thinking that produced this thesis.

When someone asks me where I am from, I respond Chevy Chase, Maryland. However, I usually quickly add three points: first, that I grew up on a historically Black lane, in a house built by a freed slave; second, that I was raised in a home that was equally blue collar and white collar, having a trade school educated glazier father and a J.D. government manager mother; and that at my core I'm a southerner, being that my father is from South Carolina and my mother is from New Orleans, which is my soul. When someone asks about my education, I tell them I attended Georgetown Day School (GDS) for thirteen years.
However, I quickly add that I attended GDS, a private school, for diversity (if I had attended my local public school I would have been the only Black in my class until middle school and likely never had a Black teacher other than for P.E. or music, whereas at Georgetown Day I was one of many Blacks, throughout the thirteen years, and there were Black teachers and administrators throughout the school) and more notably GDS was a school dedicated to social justice, being the first school opened integrated in Washington in 1945 and a pioneer in diversity education. Additionally, I note that my church, the 19th Street Baptist Church, played an enormous role in educating me, providing me with a strong community of elders and opportunities to solidify my self-esteem and love of my heritage.

I make these addendums to basic questions in some effort to disable others from prejudging my character because I am from Chevy Chase, or because I attended Georgetown Day and Duke University. Or I am seeking to qualify my affinity to people, predominately working class folks because that is who my family is. My parents, even in bestowing some privilege to me, have maintained a strict tradition of respect for all livelihoods, and a commitment to the adage to whom much is given, much is required.

For my mom this is rooted in Mary Johnson, Madear, my great-grandmother, who raised my mother being the matriarch of my family. Although she developed Alzheimer’s disease early on in my life, and passed away when I was 11, her presence was and continues to be immense. Madear was the long time custodian of L.B. Landry High School in New Orleans. She took immense pride in her work, keeping the school spotless through methodical upkeep, requiring a similar regimen of cleanliness of her children and grandchildren at home, mopping floors, changing curtains, et cetera. She had her grandchildren on Sundays before and after Sunday School sell popcorn balls, which
attracted the jeers of other children, but ultimately helped send my mom as well as all her siblings and cousins on to degrees and successful careers. My mom is very candid about her upbringing, believing her life would be entirely different without the love, discipline, and deep conviction in education that Madear, who only attained a fourth grade education, had. Without her she may have never left New Orleans to study journalism at the University of Iowa, law at Howard University, nor become chief of staff of the committee on education and the workforce in the House of Representatives, and ultimately chief of staff of the Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture.

My dad similarly had the inspiration of a grandparent, my great-grandfather Clarence, who for several decades was one of few licensed Black plumbers in Northern South Carolina. However, he had far less guiding structure than my mom. My dad raised himself, having a father who worked around the clock, and a mother and two siblings who lived away. I will forever be impressed by his discipline to wake up and attend middle and high school daily without anyone checking or actively caring that he go. However, observing his passion for his glazing career I can understand how his vocational program through high school motivated him to attend school daily, hoping to leave and one day return to McColl a relatively great man. He has made a great career with a portfolio including most of Washington’s governmental and museum renovations as well as some of the United States’ most notable glass buildings.

My dad’s experience is also indirectly the foundation of my perspective on Africa. When he moved to Washington, DC in the 1980s, to work and join my grandmother and his two siblings there, the barber he happened upon was Kofi Asante, a barber apprentice from McColl, South Carolina is a quiet one square mile town with a population of around 2000 citizens.
Ghana. A few years later Kofi opened his own shop, Eddie’s Hair Creations, and my dad followed him. The shop, which I have visited since my first hair cut, maintains a West Africa, specifically Rastafarian, vibe: through the personnel, five of the six barbers are from West Africa and all of them are Rastafarian, and the patronage, which is roughly a 60/40 split between Black American and West African men; and through the music played, much of which is music brought back from Accra markets and has been resold in the shop over the years. My consistent Saturday morning experience of reggae music, multilingualism, and African and American styles intermixed normalized, or equalized, Africa for me, hearing the vast variance in experience from Africans and Americans alike. I can recall several conversations when the point that Africa is more than is shown on television was made. Since first travelling to Togo an even greater affinity has grown between me and the barbers at the shop, who acknowledge and tacitly take credit for my taking in of Africa as I experience it rather than skewed by the mainstream imagery surrounding it.

**Literature Review**

My work rests on the work of Edward Said, who in his book *Orientalism* argued that the West has used its power historically to define itself by framing the East, or the Orient, as its antithesis: backward, simplistic, devoid of culture, and destitute. This ability to frame, or define, came with the intersection of Europe’s rapid technological progression and more damning colonialists’ attitude of what Said refers to as dehumanized thought:

> A white middle-class Westerner believes it his human prerogative not only to manage the nonwhite world but also to own it, just because by definition “it” is not

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6 Notably this specific affinity did not grow as strongly following my first two trips to the continent, to Nigeria, Kenya, and Ethiopia. This is either a response to the barbers’, one of whom is from Togo, personal affinity to Togo, the fact I took a side trip to Accra during my second fieldwork visit, or uncertainty regarding my former trips, particularly to Kenya and Ethiopia, whether they were ‘save the world’ type or safari type programs.
quite as human as “we” are. There is no purer example than this of dehumanized thought. In a sense the limitations of Orientalism are, as I said earlier, the limitations that follow upon disregarding, essentializing, denuding the humanity of another culture, people, or geographical region. But Orientalism has taken a further step than that: it views the Orient as something whose existence is not only displaced but has remained fixed in time and place for the West. So impressive have the descriptive and textual successes of Orientalism been that entire periods of the Orient’s cultural, political, and social history are considered mere responses to the West. The West is the actor, the Orient a passive reactor. The West is the spectator, the judge and jury, of every facet of Oriental behavior. (Said 108-9)

Said’s theory suggest that the West has assumed ownership over places it deems non-Western, and through a culture of assumed superiority creates a narrative, which not only defines the non-West in an essentialized manner but also defines itself. Furthermore this narrative is continued by a web of perpetuated statements made without real qualifications, but due to consistency and the positions from which they descend, are accepted as fact. Said points to the historical practices of Orientalist linguistics and anthropology, that certain categories of peoples, languages, practices, and faiths were lesser, mere babble, backward, and empty. This unfounded, discriminatory discourse was “widely diffused” in Western culture and made the basis of scientific subject matters of the 19th century (Said 98-9).

However, we remain in this epoch of the Orientalist. Though old trends of linguistics, or philology, and anthropology which Said’s analysis focuses on have ceased, the 20th and 21st centuries have been filled with new, and equally if not more pervasive, myths of being, dictating who and what are exemplary and who and what are lesser. And still, the West reigns, while other regions of the world are categorized, not in the antiquated and bluntly racist terms of backward or lesser but more subtlety, as behind globally, underdeveloped.
In addition to considering Said’s analysis of how knowledge on the non-West is produced I have drawn on Louis Althusser’s work on ideologies’ impact on society. Althusser’s examination of ideological state apparatuses provides a lens to understanding how structural religious, educational, familial, media, and political social entities, which are in the West culturally understood as benign banal parts of life, significantly influence citizens’ ideologies and ultimate worldviews (Althusser 110-1).

Applying Althusser’s work to Said uncovers a fuller extension of Orientalism’s diffusion into quotidian networks\(^7\). In the context of this thesis, Althusser’s work provides a bridge to understanding how conceptions held in a professional development space, related to the professional academic space Said analyzes, can impact the larger society.

To consider the international development arena I have drawn on the work of James Ferguson and Erica Bornstein. Ferguson’s argument in *The anti-politics machine* uncovers the political implications of the dominant development philosophy “reducing poverty to a technical problem” through the mass production of data tables and graphs; the current dependence on numerical presentations attempts to depoliticize foreign intervening developmental practices (Ferguson 256). Because numbers are understood as apolitical they are manipulable to justify otherwise controversial ideologies. My analysis first argues that Ferguson’s argument remains accurate in the present development arena 40 years later, and second argues that nongovernmental development organizations, specifically missionary organizations, approach development by means of depoliticization despite their works political suggestiveness and implications. Bornstein’s *The Spirit of Development*

\(^7\) The notion of networks comes from Michel Foucault’s analysis that assumed *truths* or narratives are continued within networks that are said to exist within disciplinary and professional vacuums when in fact they are interconnected and building upon one another and related parameters or understood sets of rules (Foucault 23-6).
served as useful background to consider the organizational structure of religious nongovernmental development organizations.

My greatest literature intervention is putting these two frameworks—the production of knowledge and ideology framework, and the developmental critique framework—in conversation with one another, uncovering how the development arena and its actors are interpellated in the Orientalist discourse and frames a technically driven ideological poverty discourse that ultimately serves to justify inattention to Western conditions of poverty. This thesis pushes beyond the current literature unveiling how: individuals are interpellated as actors within a social framework, and how the structure of the development apparatus even interpellates non-Western development agents and firms; that Christian mission work, though offered under the guise of depoliticization, has a problematic political impact on non-Western governments; and that the image of Africa is a tool maintained by a network of apparatuses that ultimate serves to justify the neglected duty of American government to look after its least fortunate.

The West continues to employ Orientalism's antithetical framing globally and this defining of the Orient also impacts the western definition of citizenship. By using the Orient as a counter of itself, the West defines itself by selecting which of its citizens is representative. Historically, the poor have been left at the margins. By defining itself as rich in comparison to the antithetical destitute Orient, the West on the one hand pushes its own narrative on the non-Western world and on the other throws its destitute citizens under the bus.

Many books have been written considering the plight of the poor in the Western and non-Western contexts independently. However, there is a dearth of literature on how the
poor of both contexts are mutually affected by a shared framing apparatus that perpetuates their condition. This thesis begins filling this void.

**Methodology**

My thesis is a collaboration between several methods of analysis: participant observation, policy consideration, and interviewing with actors in the field. The actors, or agents, at the center of my research are the individuals and policies that make up the current framework of poverty intervention. These actors include: development officials, missionaries, and social welfare programing. Together these form a discourse that conceptualizes poverty in the US, or other Western countries, separate and less severe than the poverty of the developing world, particularly African countries. This discourse has certain implications on the people that find themselves in poverty in these two spaces, and on how those outside of poverty view the impoverished.

My participant observation has been conducted through internships and immersive educational experiences. I have worked for, and in some ways as an agent, of policy institutions that have an impact on the poverty discourse: the US Congress, an international lobbying firm in Washington DC, the US Department of State, and the diplomatic community of Togo. In each of these experiences I carefully observed those working with these institutions and what impact they have on the discourse. Additionally, I spent several months living in Koudé, Togo, a village that definitively fits the current narrative of poverty: visually antiquated and largely moneyless. And, I hold personal experience as a person living in the United States, with certain privilege, but having candid experience and affinity with the poor of the United States, having family and friends that live in conditions of poverty.
The consideration of social welfare policy builds on prior research I conducted in Fall 2014, when I critically compared two poverty reduction initiatives: one in Durham, North Carolina and the other in Pietermaritzburg South Africa. Here I similarly critically compare programs and policies in the context of poverty is addressed and engaged in the two contexts and in the process frame poverty.

Finally, I will use interviews to use candid accounts from the agents, in the earlier mentioned fields, on how they consider poverty to determine if there are patterns in their thought and how their perceptions of poverty directly link to policy outcomes and the overall framing of poverty.

The following chapters will present the conceptions of persons involved in the development field, who have actively engaged in seeking to ameliorate environments deemed as impoverished. The first chapter will present the conceptions of US government employees, as well as a representative of the World Bank, in Togo. Chapter two will present the conceptions of persons working in Christian organizations, whose work is constant and whose outreach capacity significantly influences public opinion. Chapter three will holistically consider the origins and impact of the presented conceptions in society, and argue the implications of the conceived poverty narratives. Finally, chapter four will conclude the thesis, and ultimately propose its application in future works.
CHAPTER ONE

Government, the state, international state agencies, and multistate institutions, authoritatively sits at the center of the development arena. The term development inspires thoughts of the World Bank, USAID, UN resolutions, and failing governments somewhere in the Global South. Through the apparent grassroots zeitgeist of development, the genesis of internet driven and inspired DIY development initiatives and increasing pervasiveness of small non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the continued impact of international mission organizations, government maintains a position that legitimates concerns and directs global interests. Government has the power, position, status, and money to dictate and define what crises exist and what types of development initiatives are necessary for progress. By influencing the direction of development, or stating what is necessary, government identifies what hardship conditions exist or what alleviating apparatuses are missing and therefore defines what conditions precipitate or characterize poverty.

This authority to define and direct recalls what Said argues is presumed and created expertise as well as the historical pervasiveness of European imperialism:

What Sacy, Renan, and Lane did was to place Orientalism on a scientific and rational basis...Their inauguration of Orientalism was a considerable feat. It made possible scientific terminology; it banished obscurity and instated a special form of illumination for the Orient; it established the figure of the Orientalist as central authority for the Orient; it legitimized a special kind of specifically coherent Orientalist work; it put into cultural circulation a form of discursive currency by whose presence the Orient henceforth would be spoken for: above all, the work of the inaugurators carved out a field of study and a family of ideas which in turn could form a community of scholars whose lineage, traditions, and ambitions were at once internal to the field and external enough for general prestige. The more Europe encroached upon the Orient during the nineteenth century, the more Orientalism gained in public confidence. Yet if this gain coincided with a loss in originality, we should not be entirely surprised, since its mode, from the beginning, was reconstruction and repetition...By the end of World War I Europe had colonized 85 percent of the earth...modern Orientalism...embodies a systematic discipline of accumulation. And far from this being exclusively an intellectual or theoretical
feature, it made Orientalism fatally tend towards the systematic accumulation of human beings and territories. To reconstruct a dead or lost Oriental language meant ultimately to reconstruct a dead or neglected Orient; it also mean that reconstructive precision, science, even imagination could prepare the way for what armies, administrations, and bureaucracies would later do on the ground, in the Orient. In a sense, the vindication of Orientalism was not only its intellectual or artistic successes but its later effectiveness, its usefulness, its authority. Surely it deserves serious attention on all those counts. (Said 122-3)

By creating a study of the non-West Orientalist scholars produced a conquerable curriculum, which enabled one to display sufficient knowledge to claim authority of non-Western spaces. The parity between academia and government that Said observes explains the relationship between development ideas and initiatives; developers are trained in a particular way, which compels one to perform or produce material in a certain manner, abiding to certain ideals in order to be taken seriously and advance one's own career.

Sticking to the Orientalist script is a matter of interpellation and natural psychological incentive to maintain job security. Neither the suggestion of interpellation nor the threat of job loss are presented trivially. Because Orientalist thought is diffused via academic institutions, utilized and acted out by government institutions, and unquestioningly reconstructed and repeated over and over again, not to mention it pervades the general social narrative of the non-West (i.e. how the non-West is presented and perceived en masse through film, literature, et cetera) it carries immense weight. This fact conditions one to think about the non-West as backward, needy, and war-torn unless given the rare opportunities to access advanced independent studies and travel. Still, even these opportunities, which are available through prestigious institutions Said alludes to, are framed as second-rate studies, falling outside of the dominant positions and traditions of faculties with endowed chairs, or categorized as unserious because they stand against copious technical reports of fully funded fields termed as scientific with perceived
quantifiable impact. And the pervasiveness of Orientalist thought, through its immense and constant reconstruction and repetition, means holding differing opinions opens one to criticisms, oftentimes ad hominem, questioning intelligence, allegiance, and ridicule. These conditions further explain the persistence of Orientalist thought.

Anthropologist James Ferguson offers a supplementary critique of development, explaining that development discourse makes progress and poverty technical conditions, ultimately making intervention appear commonsensical and neutral, or depoliticized. His analysis presents a persisting template that categorizes countries as less developed, and ultimately identifies poverty, by four markers: first, implied aboriginality, the space exist outside of the “modern world;” second, the population is primarily agrarian; third, the space can be defined as a unified national economy, pinned to certain commodities and sectors; and fourth, a national government exists to receive and diffuse development strategies (Ferguson 71-2). Ferguson’s analysis, which focuses on development in the Southern African country of Lesotho in the 1970s, fits the developmental method toward Togo in the 2010s, across the continent and forty years. In developmental practice and literature Togo is approached as a country: behind modernity, and stuck on tradition; eternally agrarian, with other industries being framed as secondary, informal, or non-Togolese expatriate endeavors regardless of impact, number of participating Togolese, or amount of time the expatriate has been in Togo; the national economy is assumedly defined by crop production and increasingly transshipment, asserting the impact of these sectors and discounting any other ways Togolese make money or non-monetary business practices; and government is framed as the central entity, whose character is solely responsible for Togo’s failure or progress.
Ferguson extends Said’s discussion of the persistence of development narratives, implicating the small size of the development arena and the community’s assumed expertise:

If “development” interventions look very similar from one country to the next, one reason is that they are designed and implemented by a relatively small, interlocked network of experts. Tanzania may be very different from Lesotho on the ground, but, from the point of view of a “development” agency’s head office, both may be simply “the Africa desk...” But it is not only that “development” interventions draw on a small and interlocking pool of personnel. More fundamental is the application in the most divergent empirical settings of a single, undifferentiated “development” expertise. In Zimbabwe, in 1981, I was struck to find local agricultural “development” officials eagerly awaiting the arrival and advice of a highly paid consultant who was to explain how agriculture in Zimbabwe was to be transformed. What I asked, did this consultant know about Zimbabwe’s agriculture that they, the local agricultural officers, did not? To my surprise, I was told that the individual in question knew virtually nothing about Zimbabwe, and worked mostly in India. “But,” I was assured, “he knows development.” It is precisely this expertise, free-floating and untied to any specific context, that is so easily generalized, and so easily inserted into any given situation. (Ferguson 258-9)

Again across the gulf of forty years and the continent this observation maintains applicability today to the several governmental actors in Togo this chapter will address. These actors, each with significant impact in financial, political, and social terms, are comprised of individuals with general backgrounds in development or fields appreciated as sufficient to manage development, but not Togo specifically. In discussing these individuals’ development expertise, I do not adopt Ferguson’s use of quotation marks around the word development; however, I maintain skepticism that development inherently is right or progressive. Additionally, I do not mean to imply if development agents were Togo experts they would be free from judgment; I refute the notion one can be the expert of a country, regardless of discipline or intent, believing any space is too diverse and dynamic. One can ultimately aspire to being a lifelong student of a place, knowledgeable and influential, but not definitively an expert predicting and prescribing the future as many development
experts attempt and claim to do. Western development agents makeup a network where individuals and ideas travel throughout the world reproducing similar strategies regardless of contextual human and geographic specificities.

In the context of Togo, Western governmental presence is centered in the capital city of Lomé; and its perceived authority is manifested in both official business and unofficial experiences. From a transnational governance standpoint Lomé is disproportionately crowded. For such a small country, which falls off most Western radars, absent by inferred insignificance, Togo, Lomé specifically is an international hub and has been for some time, though it is only beginning to be reframed as such. This is primarily due to its central location between the historical West African powerhouses, Ghana and Nigeria and its relative conceived safety, with the exception of ethnic conflict in the 1990s.

In addition to Western representatives, including the United States, France, the United Nations, Work Bank, Germany, and European Union, Lomé also headquartes the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its international lending and development organization the Bank for Investment and Development (EBID), and the pan-African banking conglomerate Ecobank Transnational Incorporated (ETI). Additionally, the Government of Togo, which held a seat on the United Nations Security Council from 2011 through 2013, continues to builds its brand primarily in transshipment, attracting international investment, most notably from Chinese firms and China’s Export-Import (EXIM) Bank. Still, despite the presence of this significant non-Western governmental presence, Western government carries supreme weight in the diplomatic development arena.
In official settings this dominance is evident by bestowed reverence from Togolese administrators, the capacity to draw an audience, and the casualness between Western diplomatic missions.

During the segment of my fieldwork as an intern in the political and economic affairs section at the US Embassy in Lomé I often represented the Embassy at conferences, presentations, and meetings in town. These events were often conducted and attended by the same pool of individuals so after a few weeks attendees became familiar. However, when I first arrived, I was unrecognizable. At events without handlers to meet attendees at the carport, where it would immediately be evident I was a representative from the American Embassy due to my arrival in a large SUV with diplomatic plates, I walked into events amongst the crowd without preferential treatment (See fig. 1). However, upon checking in and introducing myself as an American Embassy representative I was methodically whisked to the front of the room, at times having to refuse space on events' daises. At once I transcended from average attendee to expert. Thinking critically about this rise in status, nationality was the transformative variable, as other potential influencing variables such as age, race, and dress were controlled for in most of these event settings. I was noticeably younger than most in the room, conventionally disadvantaged me, as a Black American my personal appearance matched the crowd, and suit and tie were the common dress.

In most instances receiving preferential status seemed to reflect a strategy of obsequiousness as much as perceived expertise on event topics. Even if event hosts understood the arrogation of my expertise they acted to attain my approval, ensuring my ability to observe from the most impressive vantage points possible. This reflected the
apparent belief and knowledge that whatever a representative of a Western mission observes will be reported and that reporting dictates the flow of money.

Official diplomatic events hosted by Western missions are also sites of assumed superiority, as they draw the largest and most eager attending crowds, similarly carrying perceived implications. When a Western mission, particularly the Americans or French, host a diplomatic event, whether it be a soirée, welcoming reception for a visiting dignitary, or conferences, invitees show up and generally on time. One reason for these events’ great popularity is their sheer opulence. Events hosted at diplomatic residences, which in themselves are awesome displays, often have extensive decorations, live music performances, food from the most esteemed restaurants in town, and open bars. The scenery mixed with the novelty and abundance of resources, relative to non-Western events which sometimes do serve quality but seemingly pedestrian meals, like food from the city’s premier restaurants and freely flowing alcohol make the events look and feel like Hollywood events, rationalizing invitees’ eagerness to attend (See fig. 2). However, merely noting events’ great opulence and even invitees strategy to attract potential Western investment misses the culture of attendees following the Ovidian adage: they come to see and be seen. Amongst Togolese civil, business, and government society being invited to Western diplomatic events carries social weight, almost indicating that one is a serious player, with position to be potentially partnered with, respected, or at least left alone. And, Western missions utilize this behavior in efforts to influence business, partnerships, and policy. An example of this is the US Embassy in the summer of 2015 inviting LGBTQ civil society leaders to their annual Fourth of July soirée, arguably the grandest of diplomatic events. During that summer the Togolese government was overhauling its legal code. And
the United States was interested in taking a law effectively outlawing homosexuality off the books, though it had never been enforced. The LGBTQ civil society leaders being invited and attending the Fourth of July event publically displayed the United States’ position on the matter and implicitly stated the leaders’ equally perceived status amongst others in civil society.

Social eminence is also observed in official settings in relations between Western missions. These groups interact in a far more informal manner between one another than in relations with Togolese representatives, or even other non-Western diplomatic officials. Amongst Western missions there is a more equal structure of interaction versus the palpably hierarchical structure of relations with non-Western groups. This is primarily a reflection of the fact the relations between Western missions are not built on conditions of giving and receiving money. However, it goes beyond this as Western agents from the various Western organizations relative casualness is also bred from apparent unity, as if there is an understanding that as Westerners in Togo they play on the same team, working to mutually position one another in the development and future of Togo. Aside from common interests, this casualness may be inferred as reflecting similar training, as Western diplomatic corps, particularly the French, are representative of prestigiously educated individuals. While this may explain certain ideals around development and Africa, it discounts the presence of Togolese and other non-Western officials in Lomé who received advanced degrees from Western universities, most often in France and the United States. Togolese President Faure Gnassingbé holds degrees from the Paris Dauphine University and George Washington University, in Paris and Washington, DC, respectively. And even with similar educations, often being more prestigious than those of Western
counterparts, being held by other non-Western officials in Lomé their merits largely go unrecognized or are conflated as evidence of nepotistic or cronyist African kinship and bribery.

A more likely explanation outside the Western missions’ mutual interests is that as Westerners in Togo the individuals’ professional and private lives more often overlap. Lomé development agents as individuals interact through proximity, structurally, through the few locations in the city their employing governments provide housing and schooling, and coincidently, by consuming the luxury supermarkets and restaurants or clubs predominated by expatriates.

Presenting this point I hope to avoid the banal and inchoate trope of critiquing the lifestyle of those in the diplomatic community, and suggesting that development apparatus deceptiveness is evident by Western agents’ luxurious lifestyle amongst conditions of squalor they claim to fix. Doing so unjustly, and significant for this thesis, inaccurately fails to divorce the role of the Western development agents from the humanity of the private individuals who embody the role. It is important to note that before conducting my participant observation in Lomé’s diplomatic community I had similar prejudices toward diplomats. During my first field visit to Togo, when I was centered in the Northern village of Koudé, I briefly visited Lomé’s La Caisse neighborhood, essentially a gated community, which houses: a pizzeria; a grocery store carrying Western brands; the exclusive British School of Lomé, one of a few along with the French and American schools; the homes of President Faure Gnassingbé, top Togolese government officials, most American diplomats, other diplomatic officials, and business executives. These homes are shielded by walls and generally individually protected by guardsmen 24/7, adding to their mysteriousness, and
senses of exclusivity and protection from external interaction. Behind the walls one discovers homes, most with professionally manicured lawns, some with swimming pools, Wi-Fi Internet connections, and cable TV, all luxuries anywhere let alone in Togo (See fig. 3). One Western development agent, who lives in this community, reflected:

One thing that comes to mind, coming into an environment where it’s just so clear that you are in the upper class, especially for me coming from a middle-class background in America, it was a bit strange at first to see such a distinct difference in the way that people live, from everything from the houses the size of the house to the neighborhood the access to certain things to certain grocery stores, having a car here...being in sort of this upper class, ex-pat sort of class most people have staff, Togolese household staff—and it’s still a bit strange for me coming again from more of a middle-class background in the US where we never had, you know, or I never personally either growing up or as an adult had any sort of household domestic help, always responsible for cleaning my own house and doing my own laundry—the salary kind of norms were very shocking to me at first...you sort of learn I think after living in this environment for a few months that that’s just the relative norm and that there’s sort of two major, two very different, mindsets or I guess ways of living in the same environment from everything from going out to eat which I sort of assume that a quote unquote poor Togolese does not you know go out to a restaurant very often to eat if ever maybe for special occasion that seems to be a very big—expenditure here or expense, you know there’s also different levels of restaurants. There are some more marquee type places that are maybe less expensive from what maybe your typical expat place might be.

With these amenities and its location roughly a mile from the US Embassy I prejudged diplomats as individuals who consciously sheltered themselves from what they identify as hardships of living in Togo, a developing, African country, as a Togolese and did not care to engage common citizens or the environment outside home and work. Furthermore, I judged that this had policy implications, negatively impacting the efficacy of development as these officials failed to learn contextual Togolese specificities.

After working alongside diplomats and living in La Caisse, and the neighboring equally exclusive Cité Millennium neighborhood, I learned Western diplomats engage their surroundings, which is partly a romanticized notion of obligatory exploratory habits
abroad that the common trope perpetuates, as much as they would if still living in Washington or Paris. For the development agent as an individual, going from home to work back to home each day, without immersing oneself in local culture is more a reflection of having an exacting job that tires one like any other job and family life to tend to do than self seclusion.

I came to understand this one day while riding to a meeting downtown with one of the locally employed staffers from the political and economic section. As we passed popular bars, clubs, and restaurants, some with predominantly Togolese patrons others with more of a mixed crowd and a few almost exclusively expatriate, I mentioned which ones I frequented with friends on the weekend. She remarked consistently, saying she had never visited or had not visited in many years, regardless of the demographics of the location’s patronage. She was now too busy with work and family. Anything different could not be justly demanded from the Westerners who served as development agents with spouses and children as well. That being said, these individuals tend to be the outgoing adventurous type, and when they had the opportunity to explored their surroundings. Examples of this are two great experiences I shared with colleagues on weekends their families were on vacation back in the States: one being a weekend road trip to Ouidah, Benin; and the other, a shared night with friends out in Lomé first drinking at a Togolese bar then dancing at my favorite Togolese jazz club.

Some may read this and critique that during my participant observation I went native, becoming too close to the diplomatic community, and am now defending it, or follow the Marxian tradition and argue that the familial stresses and lifestyles of individual government employees is insignificant because they principally represent their larger
organization, framing everything they do. By introducing the image of Western government agents as individuals I am presenting the significant nuance that these individuals can be interpellated within an orientalizing structure without being fully indoctrinated; they personally do not inherently maintain and exude orientalist behavior of assumed superiority, as some criticisms of development suggest, as much as the Western government agent role and its corresponding responsibilities produce certain orientalist trends.

In addition to the way a Western government agent is perceived by Togolese civil, business, and government society, the consequential hierarchal relationship this brings, and the affinity among Western missions, the duties of the role impacts the production of the Western governmental development apparatus. The primary duty of these agents is to report Togolese affairs, responding to inquiries and initiatives sent throughout the world from supervising offices in Washington or Paris. These reports, cables, are published amongst hundreds of others, daily. Ultimately they are used to generate larger reports, appropriate funds, and develop more inquiries for future reports. There is a never-ending network of texts being shared around the world amongst a few thousand people, as Ferguson said, “a relatively small, interlocked network of experts” (Ferguson 258).

The endless nature of the work, coupled with quick, hard deadlines stimulates concise, technical reports, quickly citing figures as necessary from huge World Bank data collections or from Togolese media deemed creditable. The only other citable resources are formerly published cables, which is a reflection of meriting the perceived expertise of colleagues at other diplomatic posts and hesitation to publish anything that may raise eyebrows.
This is similar to academic writing, where one is expected to draw upon peer-reviewed materials, deemed as scholarly. The diplomatic corps, as a small network, places significant emphasis on reputation, influencing agents to make original claims very hesitantly, instead searching for similar claims to reference, make a claim gradually over the course of several cables, or not share it. This behavior evidences that although Western government agents are primarily responsible for reporting affairs on the ground, they are limited to doing so by a certain script, facing potential ridicule or questioning otherwise. As Said notes the continuing reconstruction and reproduction of ideas within the same network works to create a certain protocol or suggested scientific way of operating that ultimately limits potential outcomes (Said 122).

Further more, this responsibility to report, coupled with the supporting network and great money tied to the Western governmental development apparatus, relative to a country like Togo's national budget further coerces Togolese parties to essentially forfeit their capacity to define themselves, at the mercy of agents whose own capacity to report is limited by social professional pressure. Said would state this condition makes the non-West a space spoken for (Said 122). And Ferguson would expound that the Western governmental culture of Orientalism and reporting incites agents to categorize non-Western conditions as poverty, and reduce the category of poverty to a “technical problem,” in the Togolese setting marking poverty in reports as: the number of children with distended bellies; the number of girls enrolled in school; rates of disease; et cetera (Ferguson 256). Still, they both stop short of the current observable trend of the Western governmental apparatus in Togo.
The network of reporting duties has become so vast that meeting development goals requires Togolese civil society and government groups to report figures themselves, in the form of proposals for investment, that are then evaluated by Western agents and used to report to Washington. This creates a paradigm, where Togolese actors are producing reports that follow orientalist protocol in order to receive funding. Therefore even if, and when, Western personnel change or are not providing standardized development packages, standardized ideas are maintained, as Togolese actors learn what types of proposals are deemed acceptable and all move to produce almost all the same proposals, as if developed from a template.

This evidence of the depth of impact of orientalist thinking, even interpellating Togolese actors to produce a damning self narrative, exemplifies the discourse of the Western governmental development apparatus, which positions some, namely Western governments and institutions, as helpful and self-sufficient, and others, non-Western particularly African institutions and governments, as incapable and helpless. Presenting the framework of Western status and the role of being a Western government agent in Lomé sets the stage for understanding the significance and weight of how Western government agents frame the West versus Togo and how this ultimately influences how the condition of poverty in the United States, or another Western country, versus in Togo can be conceived differently.

In Togo, America is like a dream. The thought that hardship, poorness, and definitely poverty exist there is unthinkable. This is influenced by the strong social brand of the US, presented by its celebrities and political figures. Additionally, it is greatly influenced by knowledge of Togolese family members who have moved to Silver Spring, Maryland, the
Twin Cities, Minnesota, or Dallas, Texas and the remittances they send. The largest image of the US outside of familial ties is as the principal among the group of nations and international institutions meant to develop Togo. This statement is not meant to suggest that US development efforts in Togo are ubiquitous, or dependably successful. However, US discourse is visible through interaction, or lack thereof, most notably throughout the country by Peace Corps, and in Lomé by the distantly observed lifestyle of diplomats already mentioned in this chapter. And it is seen in the fortresses that are the US Embassy, Chief of Mission Residence⁸, and Peace Corps headquarters; the United States is only second to the government of Togo in quantity of land owned in Lomé. These imposing American structures and the relatively wealthy individuals who work at them reinforce the perception of America as a dream in Togo.

The community of Americans in Togo is predominantly white, and predominantly middle to upper-middle class. They are not the celebrities or figures, presented as American representatives abroad on billboards, movies, radios, and televisions; however, their level of relative comfort, or financial ability, fits the Togolese’s imagined narrative of the United States being a land of inherently greater personal wealth, and therefore better. It is important to note relative financial ability, or wealth, can be reflected by occurrences that are seemingly minute or related to a Westerner’s job in Togo more than one’s personal means. This notion is illustrated by the reflection of a Peace Corps worker stationed in a central Togolese village:

When I walk into my village they see that I have white skin. They see that I have a laptop in my house. They see that I can afford to leave my village to travel to Sokodé or to Lomé or I just came home from vacation in the US. They see those things and they’re made aware of what they don’t have that I do. And that for me is probably

⁸ The Residence of the United States Ambassador to Togo
the hardest thing about my service is that I’m introducing this alternate form of thinking to them. Because before I showed up they had no idea what was going on in the outside world. All they knew were the stories about the yovos\(^9\) or the anasaras\(^{10}\), the foreigners like me who have white skin, that are apparently rich but they had never met one themselves and then I show up in this village, trying to work with them and—they see me with—I bought a dog—I have a bicycle, to get back and forth between villages or whatever, and most people don’t have that luxury. I can afford to take a moto, taxi-moto. I can’t drive but I hire somebody to drive me around if I need to go some place most people have to walk to the market. I have nice sandals and they wear flip-flops.

This excerpt represents the spectrum of relative personal wealth perceived in the village: from one’s footwear and ability to take a moto to market, to owning a laptop computer and being able to travel to the US. Wearing sandals opposed to flip-flops and jumping on a moto to market are relatively minor, in monetary terms, but significant differences that a Westerner’s presence can impose in Togo. Sandals in the American context are typically pedestrian and accessible and a moto ride averages around fifty cents to a dollar. In village, and to an extent in Lomé, where money is primarily saved these can be evaluated as attainable, but minor luxuries. They represent the financial capacity to have shoes without holes and the leisure travel to and from market or town without the effort of walking or the discomfort of sharing a stuffed taxicab.

The extents of these relative advantages are fully visible. Comparatively the displays of relative wealth at the other end of the spectrum, the possession of a laptop and means to travel to the United States for vacation, are both less attainable and dangerously more ambiguous. When an American is observed in Togo with these means, class is indiscernible; it is not presented to the Togolese individual that this American is primarily representative of a small class of Americans and even some of the means that they apparently have are

\(^{9,10}\) Mina and Hausa words for White boys (for whites in general)
more reflective of the organization the individual is employed by than the individual alone. One sees that all Americans have laptops, rather than the fact laptops, and personal computers in general, remain a luxury in the United States as well, primarily possessed by those with means for luxury or education. One assumes all Americans can afford to travel to and from Togo at will, rather than the fact Peace Corps, or the State Department, or a University is financing the travel, which otherwise is restrictively expensive for the American individual in most cases as well. I have observed such assumptions among Togolese often, failing to explain how atypical my fortune of attending a major university and that university having the means to finance my travel to Togo is. The notion that a poor Togolese person has a great likelihood of traveling an equal or greater distance away from home than a poor American person falls on deaf unbelieving ears.

The firm Togolese belief in the financial power of individual Americans quickly transfers to language of national capacity or relative advancement, as development work is predominantly technically focused, as is the language agents use to justify their intervention. The strongest trend that emerged among interviewed Western government development agents was that they are primarily technicians. They follow Ferguson’s critique of the development apparatus in Lesotho reducing poverty to a technical problem (Ferguson 256).

This technical approach presumes the legitimacy to place American conditions of poverty above, or deniable, in comparison to Togolese Poverty. While studying global poverty in university and working with development agents in the field it became blatantly obvious that persons are trained and do fundamentally believe poverty in the United States, or another Western country, is inherently different than poverty in Togo, or another
developing particularly African country, the basis of this thesis. Even when individuals acknowledge poverty in the United States and invoke that poverty is relative, they maintain that the two contextual poverties are different.

The concept of relative poverty inherently posits that the severity of one’s poverty can be judged by status in society, and that this state can be objectively compared between contexts. This mental framing can be effective in forming quick comparisons within states and countries. Comparisons become more dubious when applied to international contexts, and are almost futile when these international contexts fall outside of the West. Decreasing comparing efficacy as the contextual range grows results from the comparisons being based on Western ideals. Relativity presumes Western capitalism’s economic assumptions are the only quantifiable, or appreciable, social standards. Any community lifestyles that fall out of these norms is discounted as inappreciable subsistence living, or demeaningly categorized as characteristic of an informal economy. Such behavior represents the inability, and or the indifference to invest the time necessary, to comprehend these largely impecunious communities. However, the banality of this categorization, along with the shear power of the West, constrains developing communities to such judgment. And it frames the United States, and other Western countries, as inherently above or incomparable to countries like Togo.

This practice became most apparent when asking Western government officials to compare poverty in the United States to poverty in Togo. Universally, they quickly responded suggesting, in a manner as if to be politically correct, while poverty existed in the United States relatively conditions in Togo are inherently worst:

Poverty here in Togo is different from poverty in America—you know, people below the poverty line in Togo are well worse off than people below the poverty line in
America...Statistically it’s not even close. Togo—per capita income is somewhere between five and six hundred dollars a year—that is largely, that’s not representative of kind of a broad, I mean most people would agree it’s, that largely represents, you know, people in the urban areas making about a thousand dollars or so a year and people in the rural areas making very very little, close to zero. I think, you know, you probably can, your experience in some of the rural areas there's times when there's just literally no money changing hands at all—it's an exchange of services and sometimes that doesn’t get captured in our data but I would say that you know access to basic goods the ability to provide, you know, food, shelter, clean water—you kind of just the inability to afford those things and—and kind of the inability to reach—based on, you know, income, family income, you know, the certain standards to just meet basic needs like feeding your family or—you know, without outside help, living in your own home or your own kind of, having control of your own lodging situation not being, you know, what we’d probably call marginally or precariously housed or without housing all together—these are things that—that I think go into a definition of poverty and I think—here in Togo the largely, you know, the safety net—it doesn’t, the government safety net as we know it in the United States, doesn’t really exist—In the same form if at all—and so communities are left to kind of pick up the slack and oftentimes, you know, so there’s kind of a communitarian—view of things and so you have kind of poor, somewhat less poor villagers taking care of their poorer neighbors and cousins and family members and so—I think poverty can kind of, like I said I think it’s relative—and I think compared to the United States I think—the things that we that even people living in poverty in the United States expect from their, for their lives are different than what people living in poverty in Togo can expect for their lives and from their neighbors and from their government—and so I think I think that just generally has to do with who is stepping up to fill that need. And I think in the United States it’s largely the social network which the government and to some extent some of our charities have created. You know, here, you know, you have some NGOs that fill the void but a lot of times it is the local community so like I said you have somewhat less poor villagers taking care of other much poorer people in their community so it changes kind of the contract I think that exist—between societies and the people that make up those societies.

The analysis of this government official captures three essences of comparing the two contexts. First, it affirmatively states Togo’s positions below the United States. The adamance, with which this perspective is shared, suggesting people are “well worse off” and that comparatively conditions are “not even close,” speaks to the banality within the development community and Western sentiments in general. For a Western agent, or individual, the notion that a person living in a developing country like Togo could be commensurately happy or satisfied is unfathomable. The images of children with distended
bellies, crying women wearing cloth, and dead bodies in wartorn streets or rural fields are too entrenched in the Western psyche of Africa to believe otherwise (I will discuss these influences further in Chapter 3). While in absolute monetary, infrastructural, terms the United States does have more than Togo, this is conflated to more ambiguous metrics such as mental capacity or honesty of bureaucrats. This is readily apparent in the fetishization of graphs and tables, produced to show African governments’ incapacity and, or incompetence. One Westerner during our interview presented me with a packet of such reports, stating:

“I brought down the UN Human Development Index Report for Togo and I think that—I don’t know to what extent it is utilized in various aid programs but I think that the different factors that it considers are a really really good example of what it means to be impoverished—I think that political rights and civil liberties and health expenditures and immunization rates and all of the things that go into the UNHDI are really critical to what it means to be impoverished what it means to feel like you’re impoverished. I think that there are 177 countries on the list so not all countries but a sizable majority of the world’s countries. So officially they say that you can’t really compare them year to year but last year Togo was 166th and this year it is 162nd and so that is cause for some celebration. The United States is fifth—and when I want to explain to people the differences between the United States and Togo this is a really helpful talking point that on the UN Human Development Index the United States is fifth and Togo is 162nd and there is a vast gulf between the lived experience that happens in those two countries.

Additionally this matter-of-factness extends to presumptions that certain lifestyles are antiquated, backwards, and adverse to growth. Koudé, the northern Togolese village which first welcomed me in the summer of 2013, is a community that meets the development community’s confused fascination with places where there is assumedly “just literally no money changing hands at all.” While this statement is an exaggeration, failing to account for the sometimes vast networks of remittances that can extend to southern plantations, Lomé, other regional countries, and even the West, the greater analytical failure is the second false assumption made by development officials: the notion that low
money flow correlates to an inherent incapacity to provide one necessities. Western government data discounts the communal “exchange of services,” scientifically\(^{11}\) and politically suggesting the basic needs of “food, shelter, water.” They fail to capture the local exchanges like the hadja, the scene, which I opened the thesis with, where men are compensated by one another for work in the field with beer wives and daughters have prepared. They fail to capture the extraordinary pooling of monies and resources necessary to participate in initiation ceremonies like Waa.

The second essence of comparing the two contexts is that some Western officials comprehend and state the limitations of development models. However, they continue to rely on them, claiming they are sufficient to make broad analyses of conditions of poverty (Ferguson 40-1).

The third essence of comparing the two contexts that emerged in the Western government agent interviews was the embellished invocation of social welfare programs in the United States, referred to as the “safety net.” The typical invocation of the US safety net suggested that the United States’ various programs designed to assist poor citizens are sufficient in lifting persons out of poverty. This lie is essential to the positioning of the United States as an exemplary models for developing governments, enabling the Wests to prescribe measures and forward its ideals as necessary for progress. The idea of the American safety net being fully sufficient, or even capable, of addressing the United States expanding poverty crisis denies the failures of the US government, equal to developing countries, and places undo blame on poor American individuals. Rather than accept the incapacity of the present social programs the culture of blaming individuals for their own

\(^{11}\) Scientific, as in justified through data, rather than suggesting it is factual.
conditions of poverty as the result of squandered potential or moral inferiority is produced. Furthermore, in the developing context it discounts the strength of the community networks that provide for social needs, disparagingly characterizing them as traditional.

Additionally, the invocation of the American safety net further extends the notion of relative poverty. By placing personal blame on poor American individuals and discounting Togolese social networks of assistance development agents also fell into a trend of hypothesizing in which context poverty is more severe. As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this thesis is not to raise such an argument; and I only present it here to present the trend among Western development agents. Among development agents a pattern emerged that suggested relatively the experience of being poor in the United States was better than being poor in Togo (i.e. the American governmental safety net is more effective and provides a better quality of life than the Togolese social network). An example of this is one official’s comment:

I think being here has taught me that so much of what is important is invisible. You know in the United States when you’re driving down a paved road that has street lights and you all stop at a stop light and if you see an accident an ambulance arrives and takes them to the hospital and they immediately receive medical care and are given bandages and so forth. We don’t think about how extraordinary that is and those things just aren’t here. One of the projects that I’m currently working on is getting a third fire truck for the country of Togo because the entire country has two. And—I think the average American doesn’t know to be grateful that ambulances exist. And doesn’t spend a lot of time thinking about how extraordinary it is that we have a 911 system and that you can call it and that police or fire trucks or ambulances will promptly arrive wherever you are. There, the safety net is a lot larger in America than people give it credit for I think.

This excerpt is particularly pertinent to me as I directly witnessed its relevance during my most recent fieldwork visit. On a day without scheduled interviews I arranged for a good
friend to show me TP3\textsuperscript{12}, the epicenter of Togo’s marketplaces, an open-air marketplace in the port district where individual entrepreneurs unload cargo trailers they have filled to capacity with miscellaneous goods from European, Asian, and sometimes American ports. One can find anything here from cutlery sets to motorcycles, from athletic equipment to flat screen televisions and knockoff and older genuine gaming systems. When passing through the acres of neatly rowed diverse product, with each salesperson beckoning interests, my friend quipped how this was Africa’s role in the green revolution, giving many of these products second lives. Shoppers include: other entrepreneurs who will buy product at TP3 en masse and then sell it in the downtown Lomé marketplace, on the street, or fill their own cargo trucks to take to inland cities like Atakpamé, Sokodé, and Kara; restaurateurs and supermarket managers who come looking to purchase professional-grade refrigerators and other supplies conveniently; and wealthier Togolese hoping to buy electronics or maybe furniture at a lesser price than stores downtown.

While sitting at a stoplight on the way back to town a boy, of 13 or 14, stepped off the median to sell something to a taxi driver. Just as his second foot descended to the road way a moto-taxi struck him head on. At once the boy’s body slumped to the ground, falling beneath the motorcycle whose momentum disabled its driver from stopping. The scene transpired so rapidly but time seemed to be silently standing still, everyone focused on the developing situation. It was the type of violent image that cannot be unseen, the potential sudden witnessing of a life ending. As the traffic light turned green, my friend and I saw the boy sitting up, with several persons tending to him, just holding his head. Though relieved he was alive, I was still shaken by the gravity of the situation, recalling the words of

\textsuperscript{12} Pronounced in French—t p trois
Western government agent in the previous day that a 911 emergency service system as the West knows it simply does not exist in Togo. If the boy had needed serious medical attention at once, there could be none; he would simply be at the whims of fate, dying or being permanently impaired. This reality of the permanence of freak accidents in Togolese life is visible in the number of individuals one can encounter in the city or village with disfigurements, and the accompanying stories. Essentially persons can break bones be unable to receive medical attention and the bone will naturally reset incorrectly. In the US emergency systems do exist enabling one to save a limb or even life. However, for many Americans they exist only in a theoretical sense.

One is taught 911 can be called to assist in an emergency but may know that in her or his area emergency services will not arrive for 30 plus minutes, undermining their usefulness or even existence. Or one may refrain from calling 911 fearing the high costs of ambulance care for the individual. Sensationalist views of the American safety net will opine that Medicaid covers emergency costs for poor Americans; however, this fails to acknowledge many potential and technical Medicaid recipients are unaware, or uninformed, of such services but are very much aware of the financial burden emergency medical services bring, dragging one into poverty if he or she was already near its baseline. The reality is that there are many places in the United States where this boy would have been equally unfortunate to have an accident.

Still this infrastructurally induced fragility of life juxtaposed with the entrepreneurial vigor of TP3, and full Togolese marketplace culture, raises interesting dissent to the certainty to which the Western government agents declare a poor existence in the United States is better than one in Togo. Whereas persons are infrastructurally
enabled to live in the US context, there is a 911 to theoretically depend on, relative avenues to entrepreneurial endeavors to cover where state programs like education or ‘formal economy’ jobs may have failed do not exist or are harshly criminalized, leading to deeper conditions of poverty. Similarly selling legal, marketable goods independently gets one penalized, harassed, and can even get one legally killed. Suspending judgment from the distribution and use of illicit narcotics, which its perpetuation too stems from similar economic despair entrepreneurial endeavor and the fact licit goods also illegal to sell independently, too gets one killed, or imprisoned for several years and forever marred. If the US structure of poverty reduction, assistance and policing policy, were applied in Togo it seems there would be a disciplining effect. Where the state provides potentially uplifting solutions, it also bans independent solutions. Where there were once innumerable choices, there is now only one—following direction, even when the state’s strategies are insufficient. In the Togolese contexts individuals have the capacity to take their lives into their own hands. Where the absence of infrastructure fails to preserve life, placing it in the hands of fate, it too provides life with dignity, versus the presence of infrastructure preserving life to only suffer another day.

**Summary**

This chapter considered the current trends of Western governmental development work and its impact on Togo. Introducing the work of James Ferguson on historical Western development in Lesotho set a foundation to understand how Said’s understanding of Orientalism diffuses into the diplomatic development community and produces a tightly knit culture, which is constrained by entrenched discursive ideals of non-Western lifestyles.

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13 Reference to Eric Garner’s killing by police officers while selling individual cigarettes (commonly referred to as “loosies”) on the street in Staten Island, New York 2014
and professional insecurity. Though Ferguson’s work is now several decades old insight into the diplomatic community in Lomé Togo displays how this culture continues to shape development work today. Additionally, it presents how the positioning of the Western governmental development structure in a developing structure equally corresponds to the social interactions between Westerners and Africans. Furthermore, it extends to considering how this culture now influences the work of African development agents and organizations. And, the chapter closes by considering how this culture of development produces a discourse suggesting how poverty in the United States and Togo is different, justifying intervention.

In the next chapter we will consider how this discourse similarly influences the Western Missionary community in Togo, and reinforces Western governments’ positioning over the ‘undeveloped country.’
Figure 1: One of the diplomatic vehicles used for whisking through town to meetings and events. Their great size and constantly pristine whiteness, compared to other vehicles on the roads of Lomé make them stand out in addition to their blue diplomatic...
Figure 2: Scenes from diplomatic events in Lomé
Figure 3: At Top: My home in Koudé. At Bottom: My home in La Caisse Neighborhood, Lomé
CHAPTER TWO

Christian missionaries and Christian faith based humanitarian organizations are omnipresent actors in the development world. While travelling abroad missionaries seem to always be around during connections to the continent through Paris or Addis Ababa. The groups are oftentimes fairly identifiable: often clothed in matching t-shirts or peppered with preteen white girls with their hair in corn rolls. In the United States many churches have formed partnerships with churches abroad in the developing world or begun consistent mission trips to various locales. These partnerships and trips are so abundant, particularly in larger churches, often non-denominational or evangelical, that mission work abroad seems as much a rites of passage as one’s baptism or first communion.

While traveling, I have spoken to members of mission groups, primarily out of curiosity about their projects, discovering who they are, what they know, and in some degree having affinity to Americans abroad. Common themes of these conversations have included: groups travelling to build a school or a church, something brick and mortar in order to give a presentation upon returning home; bringing Bibles and school supplies to a sister church; accompanying a pastor who had been invited to preach; or visiting a sister church who collections are taken for from time to time to see the progress of projects. Volunteers returning to the United States often share the common reflection that they were touched by the immense fervor and welcome that they observed and received from their sister church members. When they speak about the various settings they speak of the continent in very broad terms, framing Africa euphemistically as some sort of pure or fertile place for Christianity, due to sister church members’ apparent sense of a simplified life and gratefulness despite presumed neediness.
Although missionaries are essentially laymen in terms of development, few even having the common background of governmental or many secular nongovernmental actors in the field, they have significant impact on development, and by relaying their experiences to friends and family back home, on the way Westerners imagine Africa. This is primarily due to churches and religious organizations’ great sizes, and the missionary ethos’ inherent grass root nature, suggesting all can and should serve. Despite lacking as concentrated mainstream development training, which is not necessarily indicative of program efficacy in the field, Christian organizations have major impact.

Still, by analyzing Western missionaries’ presence in the development field, the missionary mode of operation is in some ways the ultimate form of the presumed capacity to manage the non-West that Said discusses. Unlike diplomatic or governmental actors, who rests on fields of knowledge as described in the former chapter, training in a specific fashion to understand and manage the non-West in a particular manner, the missionary enters the non-Western space even without classical training, believing faith in a particular theology, as a certain definite truth, is sufficient to manage the non-West. In this discourse everything can be explained, and rectified or overcome through the Christian Bible.

In addition to Said, in considering missionaries I have drawn on Erica Bornstein’s understanding of the structure of religious NGOs, who in her book *The Spirit of Development* examines two of the largest Christian development organizations World Vision and Christian Care in Zimbabwe and works through many of the same trends I have seen in the field.

Bornstein presents a missionary NGO protocol and theology:

There was a practical aspect to conflating Christianity with development according to the logic of World Vision and Christian Care. If one established economic infrastructure without a spiritual basis, there was a danger of it falling apart, especially if household heads did not have a Christian background. If, for example, they spent all the money
earned through development on drinking beer, or to acquire another wife (very un-Christian activities), development would not move forward. Here, non-Christian beliefs were seen as interfering with the progress of development, much as Weber considered non-Protestant cultures less suited for capitalist endeavor…When World Vision went into an area where people were polygamous they did not castigate people. Instead, they talked to them in such a way that they could see the “benefits of Christian development…” Instead of providing access to Christianity through preaching or publishing Bibles, World Vision employees introduced Christianity through a style of life encompassing material and religious ideals embodied in development. (Bornstein 51-2)

Bornstein’s unpacking of missionary strategies signifies three points. First, Christian humanitarian organizations frame development interventions as religious acts. While Christian efforts do not produce unique material products, besides perhaps the building of churches and donation of bibles, they assertively differ by claiming the development they bring is a result of spiritual growth. Bornstein refers to this strategy as lifestyle evangelism: the linking of development interventions to Christian scripture and adherence to an implied Christian code of conduct. In the field this translates to missionaries relying heavily on Christian scripture either to convey God’s providence at the outset of a project, God’s testing of the prophets and Jesus during slow periods, God’s grace and mercy at the success of a project, and God’s disapproving wrath at the failure of a project.

This last conveyance highlights Bornstein’s second point, that the strategy of Christian missionaries hinges on their being definite poles of Christian and un-Christian behavior. This follows the template of Orientalism, and ultimately stems from it. By creating a dichotomy between Christian and un-Christian or the evangelized and the unreached, and candidly linking associated behaviors to aid, or success, and wrath and failure, the missionary strategy is too tacitly suggesting that un-Christian behaviors are backward or savage. This fits as missionaries are historically the foundation of Orientalist thinking; missionaries were often the first Westerners in non-Western spaces, in the 19th Century often dedicating their lives to chronicling
the peoples surrounding them. Not all missionaries were orientalist themselves. However, their original, fantastical notes on the African, Asian, and American worlds gave copious notes to the historical armchair anthropologists and philologists, who imagined the Orient and diffused the imagery to the West.

Bornstein’s third point highlights that Christian mission is dynamic, having transitioned from its historical form of chronicling surroundings for a lifetime and converting those who had not yet heard the Gospel. She notes that missionaries are not focused on converting non-believers, as much as suggesting what Christian faith can do for them. Although this is seemingly implied conversion, it notes a significant shift from a quid pro quo strategy of coerced conversion or candid indoctrination. This shift is likely a response to: changing times, increasing competition in the nongovernmental development field; and the abundance of faith in these locales, as much related to the pervasiveness of Christianity in many locales due to the historical work of former long-term missionaries as to belief in Islam and local traditional spirits. The change of conversion methods begins to breakdown some of the prejudices one can hold towards mission work or Evangelism, as Bornstein notes: “As a secular (or as I would sometimes explain, cultural) Jew, I was suspicious of evangelism; I assumed it to be coercive” (Bornstein 27).

Like Bornstein I too, even as a Christian, and specifically a Southern Baptist, was somewhat dubious and prejudice towards mission work. However, similarly, following my work with the group I concluded Western mission work is undergoing a fundamental shift. The movement, which was originally based on theories of racial superiority, is now justified by assumed political superiority: a belief that developing countries’ governments are illegitimate. Although the implied eradication of racism is more likely a depoliticizing inversion—neutralizing historical imagery of the white savior over the disgusting savage to the white savior
over the needy. With this change in justification comes a change in function. Volunteer missionaries are now primarily concerned with worshipping with fellow Christians in developing countries, rather than their traditional focus on converting indigenous peoples. Career missionaries, like secular nongovernmental and governmental development agents are primarily focused on ‘developing’ the non-Western space.

Togo is a predominately Christian space, and overall an incredibly religious place. Along most streets in Lomé one finds innumerable churches and even vendors’ shops, most commonly barbershops and hairdressers, named after a bible scripture, Jesus, a prophet, or a bible story (See Fig. 4). These signs are also ubiquitous along the seven to eight hour road trip north to the city of Kara. Togolese Muslims are also a visible population. In certain Lomé neighborhoods one can hears calls to prayer several times a day, and see sidewalks full of persons praying; nor is it uncommon for restaurants to have designated prayer areas with mats provided. During Ramadan some streets are even almost impassable due to the number of persons praying, and a notable electronic billboard downtown is lit for a week, displaying Ramadan Mubarak, this echoes the placement of a nativity display in Lomé’s main traffic circle during the Christmas holiday season through January. Additionally, in the marketplace, moneychangers are almost exclusively older Muslim men. On Sundays in the city loud speakers blare church services, choirs singing and ministers preaching, as well as recorded gospel songs. In Koudé, my host village of a few dozen families, church service religiously takes place Sunday morning in a small mud building, with one minister, two or three men serving as deacons, around ten children squished onto a bench together, and a choir of about 20 women; my Peace Corps friends tell me this is a typical village scene (See Fig. 5). Even in the social music scene religion is present. One of the biggest club songs during my summer 2015 fieldwork in Lomé was
entitled Adonai\textsuperscript{14}, by a Ghanaian rapper talking about God’s mercy and influence on his life, and included chorus “everybody say hallelujah, hallelujah;” and in clubs with live music, where Rastafarians travelling between Ghana and the Togolese city of Kpalimé are the predominate musicians, at least a few religious songs are performed regularly.

One explanation for the overall religiosity of the Togolese context, and specifically the success and appeal of Christianity, is the foundation of continuing local spiritual beliefs. The strongest, facilitating, links between local spirituality and Christianity are the beliefs that first, there are definite good spirits and definite evil spirits operating in the world, and second, one can become consumed by a spirit, good or evil. In the Togolese setting this belief system may translate to individuals being deemed witches, if they are believed to be channeling evil forces, or as wise persons or healers, if they are believed to have some positive higher knowledge or ability to channel health and goodness. To Western sensibilities these categorizations seem foreign, if not downright backwards and even frightening. However, with only a little time and suspended judgment, one will find this belief system is hardly different from Western forms of Christianity, particularly in the United States.

Much Christian rhetoric is centered on a platform of certain behaviors and desires being either Godly or worldly: good or evil. This categorizing of behaviors and desires can often extend to categorizations of individuals, suggesting that in the West there is also a belief one can be inhabited by a spirit which is directing the Godly or worldly behaviors or desires. Although it may be anachronistic for one in the Western context to deem an individual a witch, it is necessary to remember this once was a common religious castigation, the categorization of individuals is reflected in language inside and outside the church: saying one is good-spirited or

\textsuperscript{14} Adonai (Remix) by Sarkodie ft. Castro
wicked; suggesting that the devil’s got a hold of somebody when decisions deemed bad are made; or that one can or needs to shake the devil off when struggling with behaviors or desires deemed bad.

Amidst such religiosity and proximity to similar beliefs, if not the roots of certain traditions, it is very understandable for a visitor to take on similar fervor. When in Koudé I regularly attended church service and quickly found myself quite excited worshipping in place seemingly so far removed from home. These feelings can largely be explained by the desire expressed by Duke University student missionaries I studied in a former project, who travelled to Costa Rica, to worship with fellow Christians abroad, creating a feeling of cosmopolitan Christianity. Frankly, it feels good to connect with another individual simply over shared faith; it is relative to the trope of travel documentaries that music is a universal language that can powerfully bring people together. In Koudé my excitement over this cosmopolitan Christianity was reflected in being asked to read scripture, sing, and even preach by the small congregation and willingly, though nervously, accepting.

This gesture seems common. There is a collective sense of awe continued when Christians from different parts of the world discover they know the same hymns or hold certain scriptures in similar high esteem. Visiting a church as a Westerner to the non-West or vice versa garners a certain sense of awe, almost as if the visiting individual or group is physical proof of the same God’s existence in different parts of the world. In these contexts Christianity is more culturally significant than being a vestige of colonialism and takes on its own unique forms.

Studying career missionaries in Togo, I found they depart from mere attraction to cosmopolitan Christianity suggested by ordinary volunteer missionaries due to the political
significance they hold. Although in brief interaction they hold the same goals as student missionaries I formerly studied, in terms of shifting away from a primary mission to convert non-Western non-believers, their mission goes past the initial stage of presuming neediness in fellow Christians of developing countries to working to implement social programs. As noted earlier in the chapter, Christian missionary organizations are significant actors in the development field. Career missionaries in their programming institute certain protocols that validate certain lifestyles and sometimes discount the faith of Christians from developing countries, suggesting that they may have been reached by Christianity but are still lacking full understanding of the Bible or of faith that only Westerners can provide through training (Bornstein 52). I interpret this as a matter of discomfort with the proximity between local spirituality and Christianity and keeping positioning over locals—people must go through the Westerners, as they have the true form of religion; Togolese can become elders in the Church but only by being taught by missionaries and a visiting missionary is still the biggest thing around.

I came upon Western career missionaries in Togo through a friend, who hosted a weekly ex-patriot Bible study group. The atmosphere was warm with families sharing a potluck dinner, and children moving about freely suggesting their content and familiarity with the space and its participants. I ate with the group and carried out my interviews in a small playroom off the living room that my friend generously provided, announcing to the group that I was a former US Embassy intern now working on a thesis, a brief description of the topic, and that anyone interested in speaking with me should feel free to do so. I received three interviews at the home and made arrangements for another later in the
week. After sitting for the ending of the group's opening devotion of singing to Christian anthems posted on YouTube I had to run out to another prearranged interview.

During the interviews, a few trends emerged: first, Western mission work's political significance conceptually delegitimizes developing country's governments, which reinforces the perception of what is phrased as abstract poverty; and second, there is a collective theology of a social reading of the Gospel, tinged with certain hardline convictions, that guides mission work.

When asked to define poverty, the Western missionaries described a space: lacking material possessions, suggestively critical to determining one's poverty; definitely outside of the Western world; and, similar to the government employees of the previous chapter they noted developing state government’s apparent incapacity as a factor of poverty.

Lacking material resources, later specified as shoes or more than one or two pairs of clothes, was a common point, presented as a matter of fact:

I suppose at it’s [poverty's] most basic—I’d say it’s a lack of material resources compared to other people in society, but actually it’s much more than that in that it’s partly about a lack of need but it’s also—the way that you are subsequently judged and stigmatized in every way that you try to engage with people in society because of that one parameter around lack of resources so it tends to also—color the way that people are able to engage with other people. Yeah so, it’s this sort of combination of being about a lack of resources but actually having ramifications that are much more.

This attention to material resources implies poverty is primarily a financial condition. Even when the informant qualifies poverty having a social element, it is in relation to one’s social engagement largely determined by one’s material possessions relative to others.

Interestingly, though unsurprisingly, when asked for further detail on poverty, and how it is manifested, this idea of relative poverty took on a decisive categorical tone. Uniformly, poverty was suggested as being more indicative, or more likely in a non-Western space.
When asked to imagine an individual in poverty, who the individual was and what was the individual’s environment, one career missionary responded:

I think probably someone in poverty—would be somebody from a developing nation rather than from Western nation so I would think of someone probably in Asia or Africa. And maybe, I kind of find it hard to think of a person but I’d probably think more of a family unit that was in poverty so I would probably think of a mother, female led family unit I would probably think of people that had a fairly simple life style so in terms of what they would have I would think that they possibly wouldn’t even have a dwelling in which to live or maybe they would have some very basic dwelling and probably they would have limited access to services in the country that they live in so they wouldn’t necessarily be health provisioned or education provisioned—I think fair to think of somebody and it’d be kind of hand to mouth living so they would work to eat rather than to really sort of invest for the future.

From the outset the missionary identifies location, being outside the Western space. Africa and Asia are presented as obvious answers to the question. Recalling the several interviews, for the missionaries, as for the various governmental organization officials, this sense of obviousness was also expressed, not necessarily in a derisive or flippant manner, but in a rehearsed manner. This uniformity, and apparent familiarity with common sources of knowledge, further evidence Christian mission organizations great proximity to secular, governmental agencies, and the pervasiveness of the developmental poverty narrative, disseminated by the technical documents referred to in the previous chapter. One career missionaries response stands to offer a differing account of why poverty for a missionary is imagined the way it is:

I’ve been here for a long time in West Africa for twelve, thirteen years now. So as far as my immediate reaction would be someone in African village, probably a child—wearing no shoes and very—few clothes, you know, very a pair of shorts or a dress or something like that but—but in that context of a village at the end of the road that street, you know—maybe forestry [sic] or desertey [sic] but those are the people that I encounter and I’m ultimately who are our primary focus really certainly the most challenging to reach in our work.
This point argues that the reality of the work, being focused in many rural and desolate places, as well as the long-term nature of a missionary’s career abroad shapes the way poverty is viewed. Still, considering the language, and the work, critically one find’s that the proximity to other development agent’s remains in that, though career missionaries may interact with their subjects in a different way, most similar to Peace Corps volunteers in many respects, and they are often longer term than other Western governmental agents, they continue to view their worksites through the same lens as other development agents.

In addition to the similar imagining of poverty and promotion of the non-West as more representative of poverty, this mutual viewpoint is evident in the language used to describe various elements of the imagined impoverished space, namely the remark of certain lifestyles being “simple” or dwellings being “basic.” Noting these examples is not meant to be nitpicking, nor suggesting the career missionaries being intentionally chauvinistic in any manner. However, it is important to note the impact of these words in implicitly creating an Orientalizing paradigm suggesting that an impoverished environment is: one which is simple versus complex; where housing is basic or nonexistent versus advanced, adequate; and present in the non-West versus the West, inherently suggest superiority in the Western setting. Additionally, such defining of spaces is related to the orientalists’ presumed expertise and capacity to create truths, as will be expounded further in the next chapter.

And, the career missionary description maintains the trends to justify intervention, termed as development or assistance, by delegitimizing the non-Western state. By stating that the imagined impoverished individual is likely without “health” and “education” provisions, the missionary is stating that the condition of poverty is a reflection of the developing country’s incapacity. Again, the purpose of noting this characterization of the
developing state is not to defend the developing government, as is customary in some development critiques and Africanist literatures. However, it is meant to note the inequitable paradigm this sort of characterization sets in terms of assessing poverty reduction initiatives globally, and specifically for the purpose of this thesis, between the United States and Togo. Whereas the missionary’s comments identify the Togolese government as a facilitator of poverty, by implicitly setting poverty primarily in the Togolese, or developing setting, versus the Western, or US one the statement is also implicitly stating that Western governments sufficiently meet all their citizens’ needs, and if poverty is present it is less likely a result of government incapacity.

This conception of political delegitimization as a motivation for serving as a missionary is indicative of my findings from the first time I studied missionaries by integrating myself, as a Duke University Chapel Scholar, into a House Course conducted at Duke University called “How We Do Mission,” which was an experiential learning course in which Chapel Scholars studied theories on Christian service, Costa Rican history, and participated in a week long service project in Southern Costa Rica with the group Costa Rican Mission Projects (CRMP).

CRMP and the students effectively justified their service by defining their beneficiaries as fellow Christians who are victims of the Costa Rican government’s lack of resources, and positioning themselves as agents able to supply those lacking resources. The focus of CRMP and the students’ focus on the Christian community of Costa Rica follows Didier Fassin’s theory that all humanitarian aid is specifically directed following victimization by those in power. Fassin argues victimization takes place to justify actions to service those in need by those positioned to offer aid; it determines who needs to be saved and what they are being saved from (Fassin 512).
CRMP, by placing their own ideology upon the conception of Costa Rica unjustly delegitimizes the Costa Rican government, suggesting that it is unable to provide for its citizens.

As noted earlier in the chapter, in her ethnography of World Vision and Christian Care Zimbabwe, Erica Bornstein identified an apparent collective theology within her subject group (Bornstein 51-2). This too follows my former work with missionaries from Duke University. The Nazareth Manifesto by former Dean of Duke Chapel Sam Wells was an early text assigned in the course. In the manifesto Wells presents three styles of engagement of Christians performing mission: working for the needy; working with the needy; and being with the needy.

Working for is to simply do things on behalf of other people. Wells explains:

When you see someone leave the grocery store with a huge pile of shopping bags, it’s the most natural thing in the world to say “Here, let me get those for you.” You’re then working for that person by carrying their bags to their car. If it’s a simple task with a short time-span, there’s every chance it’ll end with a heartfelt “Thank you!” and a reciprocal “You’re welcome: have a great day.” This is what we might call the conventional model of engagement. (Wells 4)

Wells goes on to explain working for relagates the needy to inhabiting a space of inferiority, assuming the needy are unable to help themselves and must be pitied. To Wells this style of engagement creates a strict benefactor beneficiary relationship.

Working with the needy suggests that the needy are empowered to fix their own issues and their benefactors merely provide support by providing any necessary frameworks or leverage. Wells likens working with to the structure of many Western urban food kitchen projects:

To take a familiar example, there are a number of institutions in our major cities where a homeless person can find an evening meal. The conventional model, working for, suggests what the homeless person needs is an evening meal. But simply providing an evening meal reinforces the person in their poverty, and leaves them hungry again tomorrow…The empowerment model, working with, is not content until the homeless
person not only sets the menu but does the cooking themselves. On this view community kitchens exist not to produce meals but to empower people, and the director of the kitchen should change every few years as a new homeless person comes through the ranks to take over the reins. Before long the question of why people continue to go hungry should bring all kinds of people, business leaders, city managers, and welfare advisers around the table with homeless people to empower homeless people to resolve their own problems at the table of power. Working with is essentially about realizing that a social problem is everyone’s problem, and about everyone getting to feel the sense of satisfaction at resolving that problem that in the conventional model only the professional person gets. (Wells 5)

Being with reverses the benefactor beneficiary structure, suggesting that the needy enable Christian volunteers to find humility and vulnerability within themselves. Wells explains the being with style of engagement removes one’s desire to fix a situation and replaces it with a desire to fully empathize with those in need by immersing oneself into poverty.

Being with adds an extra dimension. It means experiencing in one’s own body some of the fragility of relationships and self-esteem and general well-being that are at the heart of poverty. It means having the patience not to search around for the light switch, but to sit side by side for a time in the darkness. (Wells 5)

Interviewing the Western career missionaries in Togo it was suggested there is a certain “social reading of the Gospel” that served as a sort of collective guiding theology of the mission community. This guiding theology, the core of the mission organizations as development firms, offers insight into career missionaries’ underlying perspectives and motivations.

The social reading of the Gospel was presented as a worldview closely relative to the development arena in general rather than uniquely Christian mission organizations:

Well, I mean the first—line, the first point in our mission is that we’re inspired by the teaching of Christ—and we aim to follow the teachings of Christ—and I have a very social reading of the Gospel, which I suspect a very disproportionate number of people who are development workers have—so I definitely feel compelled by my faith to—address—inequity, injustice, around me and poverty is probably the single biggest cause of suffering of God’s people. Much of which I think is engineered and manufactured by systematic processes of greed, you know, and injustice—So personally, I’m inspired by my faith because I think that’s we’re taught to do as
Christians—and I know that CBM very clearly does in all of its history and its literature was founded by a pastor who went from Germany to Iran and Iraq initially to set up schools for blind children and for children with other disabilities. So it’s very central to what we do—I, CBM, as an organization definitely doesn’t only employ Christians and people do not have to have profession of faith to belong to CBM or to be employed—They know they’re joining a Christian organization and they have to say that they are aligned to the vision and principles of the organization so there is no one who is hostile to Christianity—but I have to say—I’m very conscious of, I’m saying very openly to you, but I’m inspired by the teachings of Christ to work against poverty—but I have a lot of friends who work in development who aren’t Christians and I think that there is clearly a social conscience that I probably also share outside of my faith that drives me towards doing this type of work because, you know, most of my political views and worldview is very similar to other people who work in my sector, great majority of whom aren’t Christian, you know, so—Christianity definitely inspires what we do—you know, but one of our vision statements is around teaching the followings of Christ but we also have—professionalism and open communication and other things that would be coming much more from a secular perspective as well, yeah.

This suggested guiding theology reflects an emphasis on the work of Jesus Christ primarily being work primarily benefitting the poor and those who were ostracized by society, and an implied emphasis on the duty of Christianity to follow, or continue this work of Christ, over the Great Commission meant explicitly to bring others into the faith.

Another career missionary’s furthering of guiding principles extended this notion of mission being an act of doing God’s work, saying:

Well the worldview—causes me to see it as having a spiritual source—that, initially, creation was perfect but then it was disobedience that brought in the corruption but that ultimately in the end all will be made new. So—everything that entails as far as in between those two events, of the corruption and the new heaven and the new earth, there’s hope for incremental—flourishing as the new heaven and the new earth. We get glimpses of what is to come in the future.

Together, these accounts suggest the guiding motivation of career missionary’s is one of continuing what is considered the work of Christ. This provides insight on how Christian mission organizations at large enable most persons to volunteer for any period of time or become a career missionary, regardless of background. Christian missionaries apparently fulfill their desires and felt duty to assist and continue Christ’s work. With this underlying
motivation it seems there is little immediate difference between the short-term missionary, who one might run into while travelling, or the career missionary, and reaffirms the earlier allusion that the vast practice of missionary service is like a sort of rite of passage. This notion of doing God's work at face value seems to neutralize the work of Christian mission organizations, distinguishing it from the secular and governmental development field. However, in reflecting on the rest of the chapter, one can see the great significance of Christian missionaries in the development arena, and regardless of their underlying motivations their continued inclusion in the orientalist tradition.

**Summary**

This chapter considered the current trends of Christian missionary work and its impact on the development field. By introducing the work of Erica Bornstein on Christian mission organizations in Zimbabwe and my former work on Duke University student missionaries (visiting Costa Rica) as a supplement to Said a framework was set which suggests: the goals of missionary work have changed over time; and that missionaries, like governmental agents of the last chapter, justify their work by delegitimizing developing governments. Through this framework we were able to find that in the Togolese context though mission has transitioned from its former candid conversion ends, its work remains approximate to that of government institutions in outcome and more notably technique, by setting a hierarchy of expertise (even discounting Togo's religious practices), implicitly setting an orientalist paradigm, and ultimately undermining the capacity of the developing government.

In the next chapter we will revisit these trends, and consider them alongside those of chapter one, to consider their implications on influencing conceptions of poverty and
how this impacts policy trends. In addition to drawing the work of the aforementioned authors, principally Said, the next chapter will also engage the work of Louis Althusser considering ideological state apparatuses’ political impact.
Figure 4: A typical hairdresser sign, invoking God and scripture.
Figure 5: A collage of images of the Koudé church. Clockwise: The church is the building to the right; pastor and two deacons sitting in church; children of the church; woman walking down to give church offering.
CHAPTER THREE

Poverty being different in the United States and Togo, West and ‘developing world,’ is not a self-evident truth. It is a learned opinion that only appears self-evident. The self-evidence of the United States being exceptional and inherently more capable than any country, but obviously a developing one like Togo, is learned. One may question how something so seemingly fundamental could be learned, particularly when most people do not consider conceptions of poverty, few enter into conversation regarding how the United States compares to African countries, and hardly anyone has explicitly discussed how poverty in the United States and Togo, or any African country, are relative. Still if asked to weigh-in on these discussions most Americans would have no problem or hesitation declaratively asserting a uniformed self-evident truth suggesting the United States’ superiority.

Such learned opinions are formed insidiously, repetitively over time from various discernibly unrelated sources, increasing the opinions’ presumed legitimacy. To an extent this suggestion insinuates citizens have suspended capacity to form opinions, which will lead some to incorrectly predict this is an introduction to a chapter on propaganda as historically understood by Westerners’ cultural memories of the Holocaust and Soviet Union. However, this chapter only insinuates citizens’ suspended judgment as much as all individuals’ world views are sculpted by their environment, and while it avoids discussing government propaganda as understood by most it does present political implications produced by similarly discursive culturally influential tools.
Chapters one and two presented that the development community, governmental and missionary, conceptualize poverty in the United States and Togo, the West and Africa differently. Utilizing Edward Said’s *Orientalism* as a foundation trends emerged elucidating how development agents produce their legitimacy, justifying their intervention through the discursive intersections of historical political might, money, and race. Now, with chapter three, it is necessary to consider the cultural influences that underpin conceptual differences of poverty in the two contexts and their sociopolitical implications. While Said’s analysis frames the overall picture of orientalism and how it is produced by power structures, it is necessary to go further and identify the tools used to implement these processes.

The development/poverty discourse presented in chapters one and two is bred out of the culturally learned image of ‘Africa.’ In American society for all issues there are two sides, government and culture, which together form the environment which influence what is understood as true. Government represents the state, which in the United States despite consistent opinion polls suggesting citizens’ dissatisfaction maintains a culturally significant position as the presumed central guiding entity, legitimate and the supreme knowledge authority. Culture is made up of the social structures that form ethos, identity, and imagination (*i.e.* worldview). These are the social groups and firms that Americans subscribe to religiously or by some identifying trust: churches, universities, media, *et cetera*; Louis Althusser calls these Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). Generally for domestic issues these two sides keep one another in check, with government maintaining a higher position as much due to holding the authority of the state as being a mediator
between the various ISAs\textsuperscript{15}. This checking derives from the power some ISAs carry and their inclination to address domestic issues, which are seen to more directly impact or encroach upon them.

For imagining the alien party greater uniformity exist. ISAs have equal information to the foreign space and government has no need to invest its time in checking ISAs as non-threatening foreign developments rarely carry political repercussions. Africa is the greatest alien with the smallest voice in the ideological space. African immigrant communities do not have the same historical presence as various European ethnic groups (Irish, Italians, Polish, \textit{et cetera}) and have been politically received less uniquely compared to the Asian and Latino communities. This can be explained by demographic history and American racial political history. African immigrants while notably present today in a small handful of cities, did not migrate in droves like the other immigrant communities in America overtime and today present in most places, or like the African immigrant communities in some European countries. And, as Blacks, they are essentially made to lump in with Caribbean immigrant communities, and Black communities at large despite massive variance and fairly regular disengagement. As a diffuse political community and the fact Americans are less likely to travel to an African country, and form fantastical memories around it, as they are a European or even Asian country the image ISAs can paint of Africa goes almost entirely unchecked.

In development the most influential ISAs are the dominant media and university ideologies. While the Church is in general an ISA, and a significant one to Althusser, whose analysis signifies it as the original ISA only being usurped by the School in modern times

\textsuperscript{15} Subscription to faiths and ideologies are generally mutually exclusives whereas the majority of individuals from most these groups subscribe to the government.
which possesses “the totality of the children in the capitalist social formation, eight hours a day for five or six days out of seven” (Althusser 119). Althusser’s perspective may apply in general considering on one hand the maintained significance of the church socio-politically but on the other hand its decreasing visible prominence today as a neutral fact of life, in an increasingly secularized national culture. However, it does not fit the apparatus surrounding how Americans conceive poverty in Africa and the United States. Development, particularly in Africa, is a remaining site where the Church actually parallels the State (*i.e.* in the African development arena the Church actually transcends from Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) to State Apparatus (SA)). My positioning of chapter two on missionaries, next to chapter one on governmental agents, reflects this parity; both act with equal autonomy and authority in the African developmental space. Furthermore this is reflected by an intentional governmental political fact, considering the privatizing contracted nature of development and diplomacy:

> Privatization also means we citizens have allowed private interest groups to influence whole regions of foreign policy—again without much accountability or responsibility—for their own purposes rather than for the good of the nation as a whole. I once heard a senior State Department diplomat sum this situation up neatly, if a bit oversimply [sic]; “We have given Latin America to the Miami Cubans, turned over Middle East policy to the Israeli lobby, given the Caribbean to the congressional Black Caucus, let big business dominate China policy, and given Africa to charitable and religious NGOs.” (Wiarda 10)

Therefore, as an acting State apparatus in the development space the Church is ultimately a manifestation of influential cultural conceptions, which are culturally mediated by the dominant media and university ideologies. For clarity I will continue to refer to the dominant influential media and university ideologies as simply the media and university. This is not to undermine the presence of dissenting alternative media and university
ideologies, by way of which this thesis exists. However, it is to adequately draw attention to the problematic imbalance of power that allows a uniform imagining of Africa to emerge.

The most common references among all the Western developers I interviewed, and unfailingly among the Americans, were the television commercial campaigns of the NGOs Christian Children’s Fund (now know as ChildFund International) and Save the Children throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Uniformly these commercials present an image of children, often with a distended belly, maybe crying standing amidst a field of trash or in front of a mud house, or of a woman wearing cloth around her waist or on her head with containers stacked above. Every American interviewed recounted this image, just as any American who has owned a television over the past twenty years probably could as well. This vivid, repetitive, ubiquitous video imagery created a frankness born from common experience. Often most interviewees would use the colloquial ‘you know’ when describing poverty—as if to say we have all seen the videos; we all know what it is like over here (in Africa). While some of the Westerners come to see a fuller image of African life after living in Togo and see that some images of the commercials conflate certain cultural norms, like the wearing of cloth by preference rather than by lack of choice. Still, the vast majority of Westerners never form such a view disabling those who do from sharing otherwise, similar to the discussion in chapter one on the constraints of diplomatic reporting.

Television news media also makes up this image and therefore the positioning of Africa. For coverage Africa remains in the antiquated framing of the ‘Third World:’ in news terms where domestic (American) news was first, the Soviet Union was second, and third were all other countries perceived as too politically insignificant to be primary actors of the Cold War conflict but were important and potential sites of allegiance. Today media
maintains Africa in this tertiary position: domestic (American) news being first, international news largely as related to a cultural understanding of Islam and terrorism or Global finance crises, and Africa (the whole continent) maybe if enough people die in an episode of violence or if there is a hysterical health risk (to the West) like the Ebola outbreak of 2014. When Africa is presented to the Western public the disseminated image only confirms that which they already believe: images of chaos, starvation, and death. Understanding media as a business sector this presentation makes sense; few news agencies have permanent bureaus, or correspondents even, on the continent. Those that do have historically based them in Cairo, maybe Nairobi, and maybe Johannesburg or Cape Town, relying on shared sources from elsewhere on the continent if stories develop elsewhere further compounding the uniformity of news presented and imagery received (Wiarda 105-6). Despite the economic sense of the news presentation the political ramifications cannot be overstated as video, television and Internet, news are Americans’ primary information source. And though media has transformed in the last few decades from being the cut and dry neutral source it once was, to where its polarization is now common discussion, it is still respected as presenting accurate truthful knowledge. And with such uniformity Africa’s image from media is set in stone.

The dominant university ideology operates similarly to the media on Africa, placing it in a tertiary position, really only seconding and bolstering the commonly available narrative. In fact, these two apparatuses are often intertwined. University professors, ‘scholars,’ are frequently featured guest analyst on topics, with a platform to present broad, often spontaneous, speculations regarding the implications of developing stories. This behavior was most prevalent during the Arab Spring of 2011, when it seemed each major
news network had its own trusted camp of university professors presenting varying theories on what the events would mean for the West and the Middle East. While discussion on such topics is beneficial, it can also be dangerous if done within an ideological vacuum. Networks primarily invite scholars who support their ideologies, using them as markers to legitimize opinions. Viewers receive different analyses depending upon which channel they watch. The issue is that without a broad presentation viewers are blind to the inherent ideological nature of scholarship, and submit to the authority of what is presented.

On the subjects of Africa and development the dominant university ideology forwards the common narrative, failing to challenge assumptions and promote original thinking. This academic cultural reality is based at the intersection: of adamant scholarly hubris and thought, shadows of traditional racism, and natural enthusiastic trusting youth malleability.

Africa is an uncommon subject on the university campus. Courses focusing on African affairs are typically located in disciplines that are socially discounted, if not downright stigmatized, as simplistic and ‘easy.’ In the present American zeitgeist STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) are emphasized as hard, strong, and valid fields, largely defined by their market value. This social and market influence is so prevalent that even some traditional humanities disciplines are transforming to more technical approaches to highlight their quantitative attributes as more scientific than their qualitative ones, and raise their social status; or moreover they will maintain the qualitative but demand its presentation in a formulated technical manner, as if equations making up a proof. Policy and political science studies are two of these increasingly
technical humanities that in turn carry some social and market status. Neither invests much effort in studying Africa. Yet as two of the highest regarded humanities, perhaps only economics parallels or surpasses, their opinion on Africa can be received as authoritative. These two disciplines propel the dominant image of Africa from the university ISA.

Most often when these disciplines present Africa, primarily in the context of international affairs, it is as an afterthought. The guiding thoughts to their teaching is that Africa is a relatively politically insignificant space, citing its dearth of hegemonic powers, and that the continent is devoid of history prior to the Cold War, insomuch as it was a place to be acted upon rather than to act. Neorealism and Neoliberalism “unabashedly” claim Africa has “no place in their systemic analysis” other than the normative expectations to reproduce “Western economic, political and cultural ideals” on the continent (Dunn 2-3). With these ideals in the one or two class periods African affairs are considered a professor in most cases, who has never visited the continent or even entered into critical discussion on it, declaratively confirms whatever story is currently in the news whether it be an election, famine in country x, Ebola, or Chinese development, providing students with the image of Africa as nothing more than a site of corruption, disease, famine, and war. Dissension from the normative view is discounted as speculation, an example of a fluke, or even reduced to ad hominem derisions suggesting opposing points are youthful exaggeration or stem from some sort of Pan African tendencies.

This derision ought to be expected, and is indicative of the university as an ISA. Dissent, however slight and justified, is opposition to an authoritatively positioned party. Although the university is framed to progress thought, the traditionally understood hierarchical relationship between professor and student hampers it. While the relationship
may allow the student to suggestively deepen a professors thinking, rarely does it allow for any suggestion that the student knows more or the professor is simply incorrect. Such dissension challenges the traditional structure of the university and its authority; therefore it is checked by derision, exclusion, and evaluation, presenting the capacity and reality of the university’s repressive power similar to the State though different, inverse (Althusser 110-2).

Aside from Africa candidly being framed as significantly politically inferior to the West, this message can also be asserted by Africa’s total absence and again enforced by sniped derision if confronted. Interestingly similar to Said’s historic analysis of linguistics significantly influencing Orientalism, the resulting tradition of the study of language remains in the present context a site of violence against the non-West. Western language studies designate an authoritative epicenter linked to a definitive manner of learning, suggesting there is a right or true way of speaking. It assumes idiomatic legitimacy, naturalness by nativity. For English, the United States’ or United Kingdom’s English; for French France’s French; for Spanish, Spain’s Spanish.

Certainly the several mentioned countries and languages are historically linked, the country’s political domination leading to the languages diffusion into the world. However, the dominant university stance hides the great populations of individuals speaking these languages outside of these countries and often times in a different manner than the European origin; for instance, the majority of French speakers live in Africa.\(^{16}\) This approach is potentially justifiable if the framed objective is to study in a historical, scientifically categorizing, linguistic manner. However, university language frames its

\(^{16}\)“La langue française dans le monde 2014”
objective as preparing students to be global citizens. To this end the approach suggest that the manner of speaking historically European languages outside of Europe is incorrect and ineffective in making one a model global citizen. The point that one style must be chosen to efficiently teach a broad student body is understandable; however, the absence of noting the legitimacy of variations and promoting an assumed truth, instills an astonishing level of hubris in the learned individual who will go as far to criticize the style of native-born speakers of the Global South. Discounting language, discounts society and political status as communication, governance, commerce, all aspects of life are conducted and exist through the manner of speech.

The dominant university ideology’s perpetuation of the Africa narrative is rounded out by the impressionability of students. As noted earlier traditionally a hierarchical relationship exists between professor and student in the university, one bestowing knowledge, the other receiving, respectively. Generally this relationship is hierarchically structured to a fault that the flow of knowledge is rigid, strictly bestow and receive, rather than the looser mentor and engage. In addition to a strong cultural tradition, this hierarchy is strengthened by the professor’s markers of knowledge that make it seemingly unthinkable to form any question of authority: age, degrees, career history, and potential network. The study of Africa suffers from yet another impediment to breaking the narrative, as the American university student is far less likely to have travelled to Africa than to Europe or any foreign country at all, disabling first-hand experience one small avenue to potentially rebutting a professor.

With such a dominant uniform image of Africa from media, and then compounded by the authority of the university, students become indoctrinated into the narrative. The
consequence of this that many of those who take on advance study and are made experts on ‘developing’ Africa enter the field constrained by stagnant previously failed ideas, failing to progress development as much as the development sector and its intervention claim to do.

An interview with a top World Bank official in Togo exemplified this reality of the media and university ISA’s influence and implications:

Yes. I’m not Togolese, but I’m an African from Central Africa. So I’ve lived with people who are very very poor people. And sometimes they don’t even seem to understand they are poor. So—we go sometimes and discuss with them to find out what they consume or that they have access to electricity, good sanitation systems, all these things. But they don’t show that they consume 1.25 dollars per day they are poor. It’s just some sort of a very very complicated issue. Because you live with poor people—they are happy. And so that leads to the question: why should a poor person be happy? Sometimes we find them happy or happier. A person is happier than the person who maybe lives with ten dollars per day. So it’s something that is difficult to to measure. So I think saying a person who lives less than 1.25 dollars per day. Something which is unacceptable is accepted. Than we also have the monetization of poverty which whatever you use. But certainly when you see a person who doesn’t have access to basic facilities it’s easy to conclude that they person is poor, you understand that. You see what is interesting about it is when you go to a specific village, you see the type of latrines people use. They are horrible. Maybe if you use a type of latrine within the next two days you will fall sick. But he uses it for ten years, twenty years and doesn’t fall sick because his system is already used to it. So it’s something that is complicated. The type of food which he eats, if you eat you will fall sick. The type of water he drinks, that drinking water you cannot drink it. It’d be disastrous for you. So that’s why sometimes it’s a bit too difficult to—to talk about poverty because the, what the poor man does to survive, you cannot do. What he consumes, everyday, maybe you cannot consume because his system, I mean biological system is already completely different from yours.

The development agent presents a sensational image, which peaks with the damning assertion that a Westerner will surely fall victim if any aspect of the African, Togolese lifestyle is engaged. Any African existence actually becomes framed as a disease. What emerged from the interview was that in large parts this narrative is a learned myth. The development agent, who was largely alluding to life in Northern Togo which is fantastically framed even by Southern Togolese in a similar manner to Americans’ fantastical imagining
of Appalachian and Cajun communities, calmed down the sensational language upon learning that my first experience in Togo was in the north in a tiny village like he was alluding to. The agent proceeded to show me pictures of homes and schools in village, saying little but pointing to them and looking at me as if to proclaim the existence of ‘poverty,’ hardship through the visual. Upon learning I had lived in mud house the agent turned to statistics of the Bank’s intervention in Togo, following Ferguson’s analysis presented in chapter one.\footnote{See Ferguson 40-1}

I had lived with the people: slept in their homes, ate their food, drunk their water, worked in their fields, and survived, seemingly breaking the narrative at least for me the individual. The reality of ‘surviving’ these factors for even a day speaks to the nothingness and subjectivity of the framework that justifies Western intervention and positions Togo, Africa, the imagined undeveloped space, below the United States, the West, the developed space. It would be problematic to argue there is no disease or causes for public health intervention in Togo or other African countries. What must be argued is that the suggested, \textit{imagined and believed}, prevalence of disease in Africa, to the point most imagine one becomes spontaneously at risk for developing a slew of diseases the moment the airspace is even breached, is false. The narrative the development agent’s comment presents does not explain or even suggest the specific instances when water becomes dangerous because stagnant and or near waste; it suggest all African water is contaminated by nature of being African water. Similarly with the narrative the development agent does not explain or even suggest the primarily political nature and rareness of mass malnutrition and famine. Most damning the narrative deceitfully fails to address the fact that falling ill from foreign water
and food is a result of different countries having different microbiology; never is it presented that African similarly fall ill to the food and water when visiting the United States or Europe; it is always the African aggressor on the vulnerable Westerner; even in the presentation of biological scientific fact there is no cultural relativism.

These subjective myths lead to the justification of the West over the non-West largely from a position of life appearing visibly different therefore it is different and worse. However, more nuanced there are domestic implications to this framing. Westerners are stifled by this narrative, placated by the false security of being Western in comparison to the frightening image of Africa. They are made comfortable, even in destitution, through fear of everything foreign: life, clothing, housing, music, language, water, food. This cultural fear predicated myth is so pervasive that it is commonplace in America to hear one state, ‘well I could be in Africa,’ or scold ‘there are African children starving’ as a means to psychologically minimize the gravity of felt hardship or self-proclaim one’s fortune in being an American and living in the United States.

Once again, the objective of this thesis is not to determine whether the experience of poverty in Togo or the United States is more severe, worse. As stated before such an objective could only be approached by merely forwarding subjective opinions, no matter how many supporting ‘scientific’ and ‘statistical’ models exists; all these models are based on a specifically understood right or efficient scheme. The purpose of this thesis is to reveal the impact of the singular American cultural depiction of Africa and the discourse of development on Western society and African development. In the case of the United States, poor Americans are removed from the national identity, which justifies government’s failure to meet their needs, and the United States, Western, government is undeservingly
legitimized and positioned over African governments like Togo. This thesis is more concerned with American poverty and politics than it is Togolese. Although the traditional ethnographic portion of the thesis, in chapters one and two, are set in Togo its underlying significance is unveiling how the developmental narrative impacts the United States context.

What is revealed is that Africa, as an imagined space, is a used as a tool to validate the West. The impact of this is huge: one, it created the order of thought that suggests the world is divided into two spheres, the ‘developed’ and the ‘undeveloped,’ and created an entire sector of business around it, development; and two, it has transformed the relationship between government and citizenry in the West. Stating poverty is definitively African, and conflating environmental differences to backwardness and need for assistance, forwards the notion that poverty in the United States is nonexistent or is the fault of individuals’ personal failure or backwardness. The political implication of this is that today the Western, American government becomes largely irresponsible for addressing US poverty, and it receives undue accolades suggesting its altruism when domestic poverty policy is haphazardly developed, opposed to fulfilling its duty to remedy systematic failures. Additionally, the cultural understanding of where poverty exists and where ‘development’ is needed has recalibrated the social contract between citizens. Mediating the notion of poverty to the public, making it a technically, quantitatively, identified problem, leads citizens to almost triage their empathy, placing emphasis on those abroad particularly in an imagined African space like Togo, whereas empathy should be unconditional.¹⁸,¹⁹

¹⁸ Make note to Azoulay
This empathy triaging creates a sort of relief paradigm for those desiring assistance in the African, Togolese, and Western, American, contexts.

Togolese, regardless of their social status or satisfaction of life, are convinced they would rather live in the United States. This phenomenon is notably indicated by the great enthusiastic Togolese culture around the disappearing American Visa lottery, and the immense social capital that comes with being employed at the United States Embassy in Lomé both due to association with a symbol of power and the knowledge that employees receive citizenship after years of employment (Piot forthcoming).20 This phenomenon is formed by the great flood of development organizations forwarding that every aspect of Togolese life is in need of assistance and governmentally incapable and, or illegitimate. All problems are the fault of the government of Togo and every individual is in need of assistance. Additionally, by the fact the Americans they see are celebrities in the media or fortunate Americans working in Togo, as presented in chapter one. Although this culture almost builds a palpable dearth of faith in the Togolese government it also provides a palpable sense of hope that somewhere ‘better’ exist, the United States. There is an American Dream in Togo.

Poor Americans, whose numbers are quietly and rapidly expanding, are blamed for their condition of life. Any crippling factor, unemployment, poor health, addiction, *et cetera*

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19 Marginalized: no image of the poor American—or the realities of poverty in the US. Countrymen can’t see it, nor can the world (because in addition to there being a shaming culture the conditions roots are structural and largely invisible—one cannot see policy and budgets). There will be no *Birth of a Nation* stampede of ku klux klan knightsmen nor dogs or water hoses (and even in today’s media culture this might not be enough—Occupy and Ferguson marches were not—not enough carnage to captivate. But then what will it take?

20 Also note how this is maintained by remittances of Togolese who have migrated to the United States and their shame to admit the malaise of their life in the United States, many times in relation to a more respected occupational social status in Togo.
is culturally understood as the fault of the individual. A statement from one government
development official suggests this differential empathy reflects Americans’
assumed ability to conceptualize the condition of poor Americans as consequential,
rather than systematic:

You can visualize the kid down the street you know kind of more about his situation. You
know why he needs a pair of shoes maybe you don’t sympathy for the decisions his mom
made or whatever that led to him needing or her needing a pair of shoes... with kind of more
exotic and more foreign things you’re being told ok mothers are dying do something buy this to help the mothers. You know, but in the United States we have you know if it’s like local you know in my community mothers are dying it’s like well I know her she doesn’t eat right or does it make sense—we have a lot—I don’t know for whatever reason we have, our familiarity with what’s going on in the United States we just have I think in the United States we, we really feel like anyone no matter what their situation can just pull themselves up you know, and so we have a harder time having sympathy for people. Also, you know, like we said, poverty is relative and you know someone who is impoverished let’s say and making twelve thousand dollars a year in the United States, that’s very poor obviously. Well that would be, you know, amazing income in a place like here in Togo, I mean that would be awesome to have twelve thousand dollars here I mean you wouldn’t be like eating steak every night but you’d be ok. You know and—and so I think it’s a lot easier to say look at this you know kid in India who is objectively much much poorer than anyone, anyone in the United States, right, so like it’s an easier sell. So I’m going to go with him, right? And so like, our local poor in the United States are having to compete with that and so it can make it harder. And—I think charities give the impression that essentially if not for them, and by extension, if not for the donor, in the United States, there’s nothing and there’s no one. But in the United States we know that there’s welfare and there’s food, and there’s WIC and there’s—there’s programs there’s a safety net.

This analysis points to the culturally asserted American bootstrap philosophy—the idea
that any person who works hard can achieve a comfortable lifestyle regardless of their
starting point. Additionally, it raises the common argument, establishing the implied
unequal necessity between poor Americans and poor non-Westerners, that poor Americans
are better off because poor non-Westerners can have an enviable lifestyle with the same
income, and social welfare programs are available to assist the American poor.

The bootstrap philosophy fails to acknowledge historically systematic factors of
poverty, and discounts the efforts of millions of working poor Americans suggesting they
do not work hard enough. The argument that poor Americans’ money can produce a comfortable life in the non-West fails to account for contextual cost-of-living differences. A healthy lifestyle is an expensive privilege in the United States. Nutritious food and leisure time, for exercise and rest, are luxuries, reflected by the higher costs of nutritious foods compared to unhealthy processed alternatives and the great food deserts present in economically depressed areas, urban and rural, and the psychological and physical toil of working often several, distant without convenient transportation, and insecure jobs. Poor Americans’ inelasticity in the job market is exploited; they are treated like machines and constantly reminded of their replaceability.

What is lost in the present framing of poverty is that poverty is more a political condition rather than one of economic capacity; it is a matter of how citizenship is put in peril by what one has. By being poor an American loses her or his Americaness, the accessibility to the pursuit of happiness, even the capacity to engage in the democratic process. Poor Americans lose these essential life qualities because they are unseen, marginalized, purposely left out of our American image. The United States is not imagined as the land of oppressed inner-city neighborhoods, ostracized rural and suburban trailer parks and foreclosed ghost neighborhoods, and neglected reservations that it in reality is for millions spanning age, race, and sex.

The extent of the poor’s political disenfranchisement has only recently come to garner attention. The poor are at the bottom of the political totem pole as they have no ability to finance interests groups and they live at the fringes outside of the average, middle-classed, voting citizen’s view. Socio-economic inequalities have created political inequalities in American democracy. Government is systematically less responsive to poor
citizens\textsuperscript{21}. This point is specified by observation of Congress’ measurable attitudes and habits towards policy significant to the poor, primarily increasing of the minimum wage, which consistently indicate “that the opinions of constituents in the bottom third of the income distribution” have “no discernible impact on the voting behavior of their senators” (Bartels 13). Legislating on behalf of the impoverished has been made politically altruistic.

In comparing the poverties of the two contexts the narrative that conceives poverty and development fails to consider the contexts comparative inequity. Those who study comparative policy will argue the trendiest new metric, the Gini index, addresses this; however, it misses the mark for two reasons. First, the collection of data points, which suggest the distribution of countries’ GDPs via income, is notably bare. Many countries are left without statistics, as they are too complicated to determine due to missing national data or World Bank is yet to invest the time to complete the model. And many of the statistics points that do exist are dubious for the same reasons. This is yet another example of the legitimatization of statistics despite their underdevelopment and uncertainty.\textsuperscript{22} Second, the Gini index, and its sensationalism, forwards the common incorrect suggestion that inequality and inequity are interchangeable.

While analyzing inequality presents the distribution of money earned by individuals in a country, it fails to capture the significance of the money earned in a country and what quality of life is afforded across society, considering personal income, social discrimination, access to health, and access to upward mobility. This nuanced difference between inequality and inequity is significant because theoretically a country with a Gini coefficient of zero, indicating perfect equality, can have a sociopolitical culture that discriminatively

\textsuperscript{21} (Schlozman 6-7)
\textsuperscript{22} Presented by Ferguson and chapter one.
relegates some to systematically experiencing an inferior quality of life to others, and a country with a Gini coefficient of 100, indicating perfect inequality, can have a sociopolitical culture that ensures common access and quality of life regardless of individual income. Note, this is a factor of the quality of life a country’s sociopolitical culture affords because it is more significant than government capacity, financial ability and global political prominence. A government can be the strongest in the world, but its sociopolitical culture can disable its capacity from being employed justly. And vice versa, a government can be the weakest in the world, but its sociopolitical culture can provide a common quality of life. Therefore the Gini index, as a comparative metric, is inherently limited in providing a holistic image of countries’ governments’ efficacy in meeting their duty to provide for citizens.

Government is made irresponsible despite the vivid indications that factors of American poverty have systematic economic and political roots: that poor health correlates to the economic conditions of limited leisure time, the politics of food/farming industry, the pricing and accessibility politics of various types of food, and the historical inequities that produced certain food cultures; that unemployment, and underemployment, correlate to significant shifts in industry, particularly the loss of industry, without a significant development in educational opportunities, a limited distribution of capital for entrepreneurship, and systematic cultures of discrimination; that drug abuse, alcoholism, and addiction are indicators of despair and idleness often correlated to economic conditions. With these conditions poor Americans are depressed and trapped out of the American Dream. More damning most poor Americans’ internalization of the culture faulting them and belief that they are trapped personally, and worse still generationally,
trapped outside of the American Dream is palpable. And unlike for the Togolese no ‘better’ elsewhere exist. The American brand as the best nation in the history of the world is too strong, and the avenues towards learning about and accessing foreign countries, alternatives, are largely inaccessible to the less fortunate. There is no psychological relief to the malaise of American poverty.

**Summary**

This chapter has completed the picture of the hypothesis posited in the introduction. While chapters one and two presented that the culture of the international development arena in fact creates a narrative that conceptualizes poverty in the West and Africa as different, and even incomparable, chapter three has explained how this culture is implemented by dominant Western media and university ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) and its sociopolitical implications in the Western domestic context. The conclusion readdresses the points made in chapters one through three and proposes future research related to this thesis.
CONCLUSION

Chapter one introduced the culture of Western governmental development. Through the ethnography of Western governmental development agents in Lomé Togo it became evident there in fact is a culture that conceptualizes poverty in the West and Africa as different. Additionally, chapter one provides an update to Said’s analysis of Orientalism. Although Said discussed Orientalism as stemming from an academic phenomenon, his analysis provides a foundation to understanding the governmental development space as a parallel. However, what this thesis presents that Said’s analysis missed is understanding that the institutional culture of Orientalism is perpetuated by the fact governmental Orientalism is made up within a structured society. Orientalism fails to address the individual human realities that make up the Orientalist narrative.

Chapter one enables consideration that the Western governmental developmental narrative is perpetuated by individuals existing within a structure that disables suggestion of alternative narratives without risking status and security. Said’s analysis asserts, and is widely employed as evidence of, the more sinister notion that Orientalism is perpetuated with maliciously organized intention, with every employee actively forwarding it. This fails to recognize development is an industry, attracting persons, who only seek to earn and retain a career. This does not excuse the ultimately discursive work that the sector produces but it does speak to individuals’ limitations to change it. As Ferguson notes, a small network of individuals conducts development; it is an industry. Though his analysis similar to Said forgets the human limitations of the individual Western agent, as chapter one presents, with a family, natural need for leisure, and ironically the inability to save the world if aware of the development arena’s discursiveness.
Similarly chapter two displays how the work of Western missionaries produces an analogously discursive conception of poverty in Africa versus the West as the Western governmental development area, the only difference being that missionaries suggest aid descends from God if one follows certain principles whereas government refrains from the religious tinge. The close similarity between the two sectors makes sense considering Wiarda’s offering that the development of Africa has largely been contracted out to the Church by the State, essentially becoming the State. Additionally as highlighted in chapter two, the work of Bornstein displays the missionary sector's impact, in comparison to the secular non-governmental sector, mirroring the Western governmental sector’s organization and significance. The ethnography of Western missionaries in Togo, with supplementation from the ethnography of student missionaries from Duke University, pushes Bornstein’s work further.

More significantly, chapter two presented the extensive political impact of the Western missionary sector. The significance of the Church, led by Western missionaries, conducting development is not only that it replaces the Western State’s role, but that it also delegitimizes the African State. Whereas in the Western structure the repositioning is a matter of contracting, meaning the State theoretically retains it status though it is essentially entirely hands off, in the Western-African relationship structure it is a full demotion of the State, suggesting its incapacity to provide and ultimately its illegitimacy to lead. Furthermore this delegitimizing repositioning follows the position of Orientalism that Western authority is fraudulently created and upheld. However, Said’s analysis is also pushed forward by chapter two, as it displays how the signification of the missionary sector, in African development, epitomizes Western fraudulent authority as most
missionaries do not even attire their authority with the historic Orientalist academic, development, training. Their authority exist in the mere fact of their being Western.

Chapter three elucidates this phenomenon, explaining how Western culture can produce a conception of poverty being different, and incomparable, so dominant that the Western individual can comfortably declaratively assert the differences and even feel qualified to offer solutions. As presented, Althusser’s illustration of the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) explains the power of seemingly benign social institutions to solidify ideals. Dominant media and university ideologies together, create the United States’ imagination of Africa. Additionally, Althusser’s analysis presents how even as a primarily ideological structure the ISA also employs repressive tools. Chapter three specifically addresses the repression of the university which by its stagnation on approaching African affairs solidifies the African narrative both for the student and the general public.

Ultimately, chapter three displayed how this cultural understanding of poverty being inherently different, and incomparable, in the West and Africa has political implications, instituting a shaming culture of poor Americans and an undue dangerous belief in the American Dream in Togo.

Poor Americans are not presented to the world. Systematic, generational, American poverty is not presented to the world. When the United States is imagined abroad, and predominately within the United States as well, these realities, which plague millions of Americans go unseen. Consequently, poor Americans are expunged from the United States’ brand, its understood identity. They, and the conditions that plague them, are marginalized to invisibility. And, because American poverty does not fit the narrative of how ‘abstract’ ‘African poverty’ is imagined it goes unseen.
If the presented general conception of poverty is applied to evaluating the anecdotes from the introduction, poverty is nonexistent in the United States example.23 It cannot exist. There are neither mud houses nor any long walks to cultivate crops in a field. The American poverty takes place within the United States Capitol Building and its surrounding communities, is manifested by young men and women who attended school yet still lacked basic access and understanding of the system they lived in and felt the violent weight of the visible inequity in the sight of a different unrecognizable life experience in their own city.

Through the lens of this thesis one can see the identifiable differences between Western and African contexts posited by the general poverty narrative stems from subjective considerations of a certain lifestyle. This lens breaks the suspended cultural relativism the myths of development and poverty are set upon. Employing a worldview that equally holistically compares conditions of poverty and governments’ efficacy in addressing it carries a host of benefits. In the Western context it strengthens the citizenry’s capacity to criticize government effectively, as necessary to demand of government and itself that the least fortunate in society are equitably provided for. In the context of the Global South, particularly Africa, it lessens the hypocritical hegemonic prescribing rule, and provides an avenue for the future to be created by African policymakers in African institutions, rather than as a means to capture conditional Western aid. Both contexts will benefit from cultural specific policy creation. Although expediency is inherent to political culture a greater balance can be struck between empirical findings rooted in long-term research and policy creation. Ultimately this thesis helps set a foundation towards forming

23 See pgs. 1-7
a practice of more honestly and effectively comparing poverty and governments’ capacity to address it across varying contexts.

Effectively comparing conditions of poverty will depend on holistically considering contexts’ quality of life equity. Speculatively, this includes an examination determining rates of access to contextual measures necessary towards life satisfaction across society, perhaps nutrition, upward mobility, network, healthcare, *et cetera*. The most significant aspect of forming such an effective comparative method is rooted in psychological analysis. More work must be done to determine malaise comparatively, whether one feels left out and hopeless or how rich one's familial and friendship bonds are as support towards life satisfaction.

These human considerations must stand for something, though the present STEM obsessed zeitgeist begs to differ. The mountainous production of purely numeric evaluations that identify poverty and justify intervention and the lack thereof actually remove human realities from policymaking, policy analysis, and governance. Approaching, and training, policy from the standpoint of there being set formulaic solutions suggests that human realities should somehow be forced to bend to modeled solutions, rather than models bending to human realities. This beckons the question: which is superior the ideals and numbers, or the human? The current zeitgeist dangerously esteems models to a supreme position, as if divine, ironically disparagingly criticizing human realities, and the study of them, as idealistic. Like in Said’s era, the university still stands at a critical point in framing the mind and directing social thought. This remains true even in the broad space that operates to frames the conceptualization of poverty as presented in this thesis. Reconsidering the study of social sciences with human realities at the forefront, as a means
to comprehend and benefit society, rather than to assume and prescribe ideologies, is critical to the continuation of our human freedoms globally, which includes a large Western country like the United States and a tiny African one like Togo just the same.
WORKS CITED


