

Child Trafficking or Labor Migration? A Historical Perspective from Mali's Dogon Country

In 2000, Mali's Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children, and the Family asked donors for 824 million West African Francs (CFA; \$1.7 million) to fight child trafficking in neighboring Cote d'Ivoire. The question of child trafficking quickly drew so much attention from state and privately owned media that it submerged other issues, such as AIDS or poverty. As soon as the debate was launched in Mali, child trafficking became the object of a moral condemnation so strong that few researchers have dared to examine it from a historical and sociocultural angle. Such an approach, however, can put into strong relief the disparity between the regional politics of applying formal international conventions on child labor and local ways of thinking about labor and the life cycle in rural Malian societies. In what follows, I attempt to do just that while focusing on the villages and villagers of what is commonly known as "Dogon country." As scholars have done in other contexts, I would like to bring out the double tension between the victims of trafficking (peasants and their children) and government officials—not only around the concept of child trafficking itself but also, and especially, the question that bears on the social and moral responsibility of the anonymous traffickers and the impoverished parents.¹

It is hard today to engage in debate over child trafficking in the poor countries of West Africa without referring to the various United Nations conventions on human rights, and especially the International Labor Organization's Convention 182, the "Worst Forms of Child Labor" Convention, adopted June 17, 1999. This convention is one of the new legal instruments intended to eliminate the "worst forms" of child labor in the same vein as the ILO's earlier Forced Labor Convention (1930), as well as the UN's Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery (1956).

How is trafficking in children defined in these international legal materials? According to Article 3 of the convention, the worst forms of child labor are: "all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labor, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; (b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances; (c) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties; (d) work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children."² Convention 182 does not openly give a definition of trafficking in children, nor does it offer a

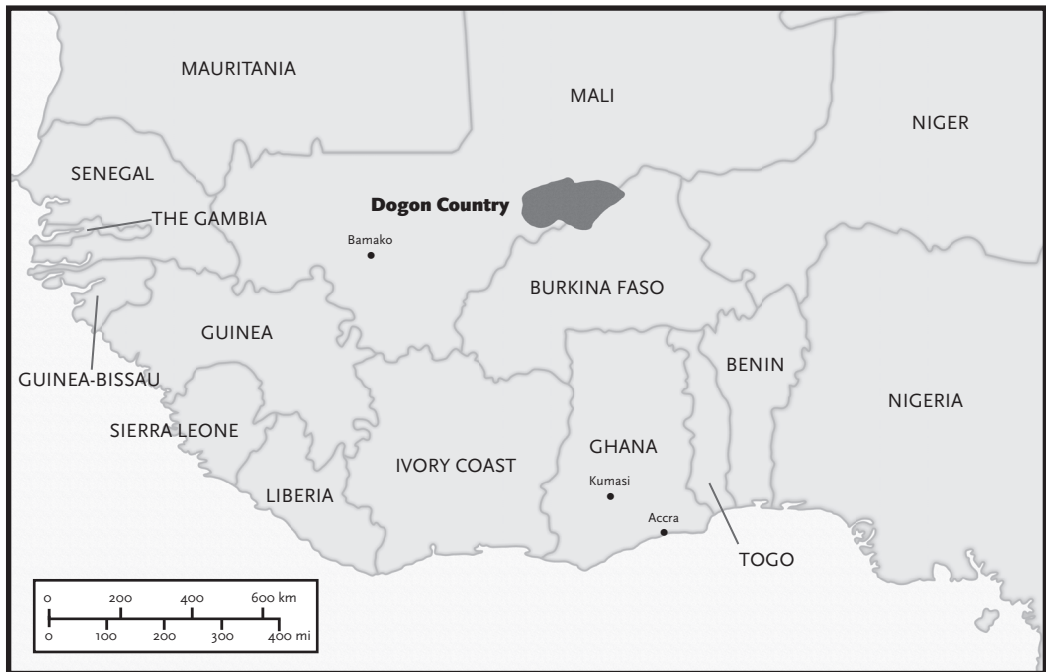


Figure 1: Map of Contemporary West Africa with Dogon Country

specific approach to this phenomenon, which is explicitly mentioned in Article 3(a): “all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children.” In addition to Convention 182, there is also the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 35 of which condemns “the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form.” If “trafficking in children” is left without explicit definition, trafficking is taken up in the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000). Its crucial article repeats the worst forms already mentioned in the two earlier conventions and in numerous other documents negotiated in international conferences.³

Whatever definition is given in each of these documents, trafficking appears as a phase—and the most odious—of the cycle of exploitation of children as well as adults, and it demands the urgent action of the international community. The phenomenon is declared to be a global one and no country is spared, whether as a source, transit point, or destination of trafficked children. The ILO estimates that more than ten million adults and children are subject to some form of forced labor, bonded labor, or commercial sexual servitude at any given time, while UNICEF estimated in 2004 that trafficking in children affected approximately 1.2 million children each year.⁴

All the signatory countries of the conventions targeting child trafficking are called upon to develop national programs aimed to eliminate it once and for all. Convention 182 specifies that these programs are intended to function in consultation with public

institutions and organizations of employers and workers, if necessary, by taking the views of other interested groups into consideration.

If this global discourse of child trafficking is produced and popularized from Geneva, here I examine how it is taken up by state officials in Mali. Is it applied mechanically or accommodated conceptually to local historical and social realities? How have the words “traffic” and “work” been translated into other languages? To what degree have concerned groups and interested parties—peasant parents of working children on the one hand and urban heads of households who are their principal employers on the other—been involved in the campaign, as called for in Convention 182, Article 3? An ethnographic and historical approach to the relationship between domestic labor and paid labor in an African postcolony may provide a way to answer these questions.

In several notes of the ILO’s International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor, Mali was targeted as one of the countries where child trafficking surpassed expectations. In fact, Mali is generally considered to present all the economic and geographic conditions favoring trafficking on a large scale. Meanwhile, Mali’s political context, characterized since 1991 by a process of peaceful democratization, favors all debates that touch on human rights. In fact, in a democratic fever, Mali even created in 1992 an ephemeral Ministry for Human Rights. Human rights are costly in a country like Mali, and people asked themselves how a Ministry for Human Rights could survive in Mali if global institutions gave it no funds.

But it is not only political conditions that make Mali a privileged site of debate and action around child trafficking. One must also consider the economic, demographic, and historical context. In 2006, the country’s population was over 12 million, with a 2.2 percent annual growth rate and an average population density of 7.9 inhabitants per square mile. About 73 percent of Mali’s citizens live in rural settings and nearly 50 percent are under fifteen years old. With a gross national product per capita of \$268, Mali is among the poorest countries in the world, according to the 2009 report of the UN Development Program—in which Mali is ranked 178th of the 182 surveyed nations.⁵

For these reasons, Mali has been a country with high emigration to its neighbors for several decades. The point is not to simply dismiss concern for child trafficking as paternalistic but to enrich, as Lawrence Cohen has argued, the contextual sensitivity to the situation of those who engage in the stigmatized activity. Economic indigency will not disappear because of moral or legal norms, and the relative risks and benefits of “trafficking”—including the question of available alternatives—must always be kept in view, as a considerable literature on the phenomenon suggests.⁶

But there is also a crucial perspective on trafficking afforded by an approach combining ethnography and history. For demographic and historical reasons, there is no way to separate a discussion of the worst forms of child labor from the history of rural migration patterns. Only a few years ago, demographers were deeply concerned with the migration of the peasantry to towns, but a concern with child trafficking has taken the place of this focus. Currently, it is estimated that, within three to five decades, 60 to 70 percent of Africans will live in urban settings. The question becomes what sort of city they will have. As Gunnar Myrdal observed in 1972, “Urbanization

is thus more a reaction *against* the lack of vigorous economic growth than a response to rising levels of income per head. Indeed, much of it is due to factors inhibiting economic development, such as civil wars, instability, and crop failures, as well as to excessive rates of population growth.⁷⁷ In Mali this development grows only more obvious each year, with the declining production of cotton and cereals. In the villages, hunger is not a memory but a cyclical familiarity. The movement of young peasants to the urban centers observed for forty years in the countries of the Great Lakes region as well as in those of West Africa is mostly evidence of rural poverty, insecurity, civil wars, political instability, and excessive demographic growth, though it is also linked to initiation and ritual.⁸

Indeed, the movement of young Africans has reached Europe, in spite of physical and legal barriers erected against them. In fact, the debate about child trafficking is also inseparable from the problem of the rights of immigrant and undocumented workers, both on the African continent as well as in Europe and the United States. All so-called irregular migration, whether major or minor, is likely to be understood as the product of a network of traffickers based on the Mediterranean coasts and with far-flung connections to the countries of the Sahel (Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal, in particular). This justifies, in part, the hardening of measures of expulsion and imprisonment of “irregular” migrants and the relentless pursuit of those who smuggle them. Mali appears to the European Union as the country where both migrants and smugglers are most prominent. The recent creation of the Migration Information and Management Center (Centre d’Informations et de Gestion des Migrants, CIGEM), based in Bamako but funded by the EU, attests to this fact. The connection between the fear of an invasion of workers from poor countries and the problem of child trafficking (or trafficking in general) is obvious. It is one reason, among others, for the financing by wealthy countries of numerous social scientific studies that focus on the connection between trafficking and migration, on the premise that traffickers exploit the difficult conditions in which both child and adult migrants find themselves in their search for work.

In keeping with such initiatives, the Ministry for the Protection of Women, Children, and Families developed a national plan for 2001–2020 to combat several forms of child trafficking. For the execution of this plan, the government created an administrative and institutional framework which involved several ministries and civil society groups.⁹ Each ministry and NGO was charged, according to its specialization, with responsibility for one form of traffic in children. For example, the Ministry of Labor and Education addresses “children’s labor.” The Ministry of Youth was directed to take charge of the criminal aspects of the traffic in children. The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Communities supervises questions related to the circulation and safety of children. On June 23, 2000, a national committee was formed and instructed to examine and evaluate the national plan of action for the survival of children. To this committee, alongside ministry officials, NGO representatives and development partners were appointed. In addition to the various ministries, for example, a national NGO, the Malian Coalition for Children’s Rights (COMADE), had a seat.

What if such international inquiries and their national reflections were to take

account of the voices of migrants or children along the way? What version of the facts would they give? In their very zeal to aid them, a complex of the state and certain NGOs and associations has literally substituted itself for these poor child migrants and their parents. To be specific, let us take the case of Dogon country, which according to official documents of the Service du développement social et de l'économie solidaire is one of the zones most disposed to child trafficking.¹⁰ The ethnography of the rural exodus from the Dogon country, together with the history of labor organization in the colonial era, provides critical perspectives.

Ethnography and History as Windows on Child Trafficking

First, we must clearly define the object at the center of our analysis: until what age is one a child, and what is it that we mean by the phrase “child trafficking”? UNICEF experts consider anyone under eighteen years of age to be a child. And Mali's National Ministry for the Promotion of Children and the Family gives the following definition of “child trafficking”:

Child trafficking is defined as any act involving the recruitment, transport, transfer (fencing), or sale of children within national boundaries or abroad. Child trafficking has multiple results: sexual exploitation, adoption, labor, criminal activities, begging, armed conflict, sports, marriage, and organ trafficking.¹¹

Civil servants and NGO workers have drawn donors' attention to the social and ethical aspects of the problem, arguing that child trafficking is a “new form of slavery” and should be banned. The regions of Sikasso and Segou and the Dogon country have been cited as zones disposed toward child trafficking. The Bamana, Senoufo, and Dogon ethnicities are often cited as being affected by trafficking. Nongovernmental organizations, government administrators, and law enforcement agencies hold forums to discuss solutions to this scourge; a few peasants are invited to these conferences as well.¹²

The Dogon country, according to the ministry's findings, is the zone where child trafficking is the most intense. The *cercles* of Bankass, Koro, Douentza, and Bandiagara supply “bargain children” to the Cote d'Ivoire, Sikasso, Bamako, and Mecca, in Saudi Arabia. According to the British consulate in Mali,¹³ a documentary on child trafficking in Dogon country that was shown in the UK sparked the indignation of Malians living in London. Some of them swore that Mali's Dogon are not capable of such atrocities, particularly in relation to their own children.

Indeed, to submit to donors a report titled “Child Trafficking in Dogon Country” is to suggest that Dogon peasants take part in this traffic in one way or another. In any case, this was the example presented to the British public. But does a system of recruitment, transport, transfer, and the sale of children from the Dogon country to other Malian cities or to the Cote d'Ivoire really exist? If so, do Dogon peasants play a role in this trade? There is not a single piece of historical evidence to support the argument that parents are involved in the sale of their children. The inadequacies of official definitions of child labor in local contexts result in part from the fact that in Malian villages there is no distinction between domestic labor and the type of labor performed for wages in towns and cities, as Chanrasekhar demonstrates with reference

to child labor in India.¹⁴ That being the case, why wouldn't a child who works in the village do the same in town, or elsewhere?

Examining the question of child trafficking from an historical and anthropological perspective, while drawing on the testimony of migrants and on colonial archives, allows one to avoid making the same analytical errors as those who herald the return of barbarism in Africa. We should interrogate both the colonial past and the present of migration, while scrutinizing the relationship between the cities and the countryside. In order to do so, I base my analysis on material collected between 2001 and 2003 among migrants from Dogon country in Ghana and in the vast irrigated zone known as the Office du Niger, among migrants who have returned to Dogon country after a sojourn in the cities of the West African subregion, and among those who have never left the village. To the question "How did you come to sell your children?" peasants gave the following response:

No, there is no traffic in children at Bankass. It's the NGOs who say that there is a traffic and that they are going to help us to fight it. What we've known since the "time of the Whites" [colonization] is the rural exodus, or the migration of the youth. If there is a traffic in children, it is in the country where our children go, and not here [*chez nous*].

This kind of NGO discourse, so common since the 1980s in regard to Africa, takes place in the context of the changing focus of development projects: genital mutilation, organ trafficking, child labor, the rights of women and children, national solidarity programs, and so on.¹⁵

One could deduce from the definition of "child trafficking" that if a boy or a girl younger than eighteen moves to a new setting more or less distant from his or her birth village, this is the effect of trafficking.¹⁶ But at eighteen years old, is one really a child in a Malian village? This false definition of the "predicament" means that *talibés*, or students in Qur'anic schools, are suddenly designated as victims of trafficking.¹⁷ Are the peasants who entrust their children to Qur'anic schoolteachers unaware of the fact that they will be exposed to misery, deprivation, exploitation, and the dishonesty of the teachers?

Leaving aside the *talibés*, the young beggars, and the children used by adult beggars, seasonal or permanent migration is practiced by young men of fourteen to thirty years of age and by girls or young women thirteen to eighteen years old.¹⁸ They themselves decide to leave. A peasant would have a hard time forbidding his son or daughter to take part in what is considered to be a village tradition. Many family heads do not even know the destinations their children have chosen. They may have sought to dissuade them by telling them that they are leaving for regions where their predecessors were shamelessly exploited, and from which they returned poorer than when they left, but the young people leave all the same. Their parents have no power over them. One fine day, they simply leave, without informing anyone at all. Sometimes as many as twenty young people leave a village on the same day. How then can one talk about a traffic in children in the zone of departure? In fact, many peasants were shocked to hear allegations that they were involved in the sale of their children

to “labor merchants.” According to the peasants, the very idea is an insult manufactured by certain NGOs in search of funding.

In fact, the first problem one confronts in attempting to analyze the question of the trafficking of Malian children is the absence of trustworthy statistics that distinguish between children who have arrived in the city voluntarily and those who have actually been sold. Studies carried out in Dogon country, in Sikasso, and in the Cote d’Ivoire were done so quickly—in order to start the flow of funding to oppose the traffic—that their reliability is suspect. The Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children, and the Family estimates that as many as 15,000 Malian children are illegally exploited in the Cote d’Ivoire. These children come from the most impoverished regions, in terms of economic and educational infrastructure. In 2001, of 523 repatriated children, 128 were from the region of Mopti, including 92 children from Bankass, in Dogon country.¹⁹ Thus “trafficking” becomes a survival strategy for poor rural families.

The idea of “child trafficking,” as defined above, limits the discussion to the most easily visible aspect of the problem of the migration of young people. This aspect of migration is not specific to Mali or to any other African country. Indeed, certain forms of suffering—death in the course of the voyage, illegal detention, forced labor, torture, discrimination, prostitution, criminality, the absence of liberties and legal protections—are at the heart of the discussion on globalization and migration in Southeast Asia during the period of the “economic miracle.”²⁰ The same is true in West Africa, where young people with a burning desire to leave for the city to work in order to meet their personal needs and those of their families fall into traps laid by unscrupulous employers and their criminal intermediaries.

Consider the situation of those minors in urban centers who are dubbed “apprentices.” Although they are not considered child laborers by the various organizations fighting that scourge, they are legion in all family businesses, ranging from auto repair, construction, and commerce to masonry, garment work, soap manufacture, carpentry, urban and intercity transport. A 1962 law outlining a Code of Labor in the Republic of Mali attempted to govern the conditions of the apprenticeship contract. Article 4 of the law states:

The contract of apprenticeship is one through which a person, called the master, undertakes to give or have given to another person, called the apprentice, a methodical, progressive, and complete professional training. Through this contract the apprentice is obligated, in exchange, to follow the direction that he receives and to fulfill the tasks that are accorded him as an apprentice.²¹

It is worth noting what the law says about the age of the prospective apprentice. Article 5 states that “no apprentice can be contracted unless he is at least 14 years old.” And Article 21 covers the case of children younger than fourteen, which is to say minors, in specifying that “a contract of labor concluded with a minor is not valid unless it has been approved in writing by his father (or the person exercising paternal authority) and unless the minor has no school obligations.”

By mentioning the word “minor” the law takes account of a social reality that Mali—lacking universal education—has no means to forbid or condemn. The legis-

lators of 1962 knew that children began apprenticeships between four and seven years of age. Today, hundreds of “working toddlers” can be seen in all the workshops of Bamako. Further, the law stipulates that the contracts must be written in French. In practice, there is no contract. The parents of the minors, often destitute, are quite simply pleased to see their children learn a trade that will allow them to fill their bellies. Many children who wander the streets do not even have this opportunity. Of what contract can one speak when neither the master nor the parents of the child knows how to read and write? The law fixes a trial period of three months and the apprenticeship itself at four years. Here too, the facts show that the apprentices remain with their masters or leave them behind depending on whether or not they feel able to get along without or if they simply feel fed up. On the whole, the law defends, for better and worse, the interests of both minor and non-minor youth. But in everyday practice of apprenticeship in the large cities of Mali, the only clause of the apprenticeship contract is the mood of the master.

Just as children in the poor neighborhoods of what are now postcolonial urban centers had the possibility of entering into an apprenticeship between four and fourteen years of age, those who lived in certain rural areas in the era before independence migrated to those same centers as soon as they had the strength to travel. What do the colonial archives and existing ethnographies tell us about their cases? And how do their elders talk about “child trafficking”?

A New Name for an Old Practice

Both the tales of migrants and colonial-era reports speak of the nature and the consequences of the exploitation of young migrants looking for work. Former migrants warn young candidates for migration of the dangers to which they would expose themselves. Peasants are well aware that to migrate is to go at one’s own risk, and many local songs depict the dangers of quitting the birth village. In Dogon country, the peasants have developed distinct concepts of what today is called “child trafficking” and of its elimination, for which the ministry has asked for more than 800 million CFA.

1. In Dogon, *bara gunu*—literally “gather and place”—designates the manner in which migrants en route to workplaces are contacted by recruiters in trucks. They are offered work and an attractive salary. Once the verbal contract is established, the migrants are transported by truck to a state of slavery in cocoa or coffee fields, from which many are eventually liberated or escape on their own.

2. *Bara goonu*—literally “gather and take away”—designates the opposite process, the practice of taking migrants away from their employers and bringing them back home. Over the last several years in Dogon country, villages or associations of villages have organized the research and repatriation of their young emigrants.²² During the colonial period, it was the migrants themselves who worked together to organize the return of their peers who were being held in a state of slavery in the receiving countries.²³

We will see below, in addition to the stories of migrants themselves, how the British colonial administration in the Gold Coast confronted two types of exploitation

of migrants and children, which they termed “illegal recruitment” and “juvenile employment.” But let us begin with the testimonies of the migrants.

In December 1927, while visiting the market in San (Mali), the French administrator, or *commandant du cercle*, met a Bobo peasant named Kabai Kamaté who was speaking English. Asked where he had learned the language, Kamaté responded that he had spent eighteen months in the Gold Coast as a sawyer. According to Kamaté, there were many Mossi in the Gold Coast, as well as many Ivoirians. He added that when he and his companions had crossed the British border in the district of Pô, Haute-Volta (contemporary Burkina Faso), several Africans argued over the newly arrived migrants, competing to offer them work. There were no Europeans among these recruiters, according to Kamaté, but they had all been sent by British merchants.²⁴ Migrants from Dogon country confirmed that at the time, the ethnicities that accepted to work in the bush (*en brousse*)—the Mossi, the Dogomba, the Frafra—were victims of local recruiters in the Gold Coast.²⁵ Recruited en route, these migrants worked on the plantations for a year without pay. Such was the case of this peasant, shamelessly exploited in 1937 in Sikasso, southern Mali, by a producer of cola nuts:

It was the taxes that wore us down. My parents were dead. My uncle was the village chief of Yugo. I left the village to look for [money to pay] the taxes. First I worked in Banjugu, where I weeded for two months. With the money I earned, I went to Mopti on foot. There a man offered me work in his field of cola nuts in Sikasso. I was with a Mossi. We worked all year long, and the man paid us. [But] we found out that, in the end, the man killed his employees. One night the Mossi and I fled. I wound up in Abengoro in Cote d’Ivoire, where I worked for six months in the cocoa fields, then I arrived in Gold Coast in 1939.²⁶

In the Gold Coast, the *hogon* of the Dogon colony in Kumasi recruited on behalf of the rich Ashanti planters. The migrants interviewed were unanimous in their depiction of the role of this man in the exploitation of immigrants who lodged with him.²⁷ At the time, the Dogon, the Peul, the Bambara, and others all passed through him. He was the personal friend of the *asantehene*, the king of the Ashanti, and of other local chiefs.

Who was this *hogon* recruiter? A native of the village of Quilègu (*cercle* of Bandiagara), he was born around 1890. He arrived on foot in Ouagadougou in 1906, and in Gold Coast in 1908. He worked in the yam fields in Atibobo, which at the time was a little village seven kilometers from Kumasi. Several years later, he left to work in the mines at Bantakou. The future *hogon* left the mines of Bantakou for those of Samé-Prestea, then at Obuasi. Once he had accumulated a small sum of money, he returned to Kumasi, where he took up work as a tailor. He became so wealthy that he owned a *boubou* with golden stitching. He had four wives: one was Hausa, one Gonja, one Dogon, and one Peul. He was the father of seventeen children, four of whom were girls. Today he has 113 descendants.

According to the *hogon*’s second wife, the vast majority of migrants lodged with her spouse before continuing on for Accra, Obusai, Takoradi, Samé-Prestea, N’Suta, or Takwa-Aboss. The migrants were given his address before leaving Dogon country.

On their way to Kumasi, some migrants, exhausted and without resources, boarded cars operating on the system of “pay on arrival.”²⁸ The *hogon* would pay the drivers and often give some pocket money to the migrants. The migrants in transit were often so numerous that they slept in the vestibule of his compound or in shelters built to accommodate them. The Peul, the Songhay, and the Hausa entrusted their livestock to his care. In sum, he was an important broker, but none of this was free, as the migrants learned when they found themselves forced to work in the bush outside Kumasi. According to certain migrants, the wealth of the *hogon* came from the “sale” of many migrants to rich Ashanti planters. How did they steer the migrants away from the mines and toward the plantations?

The Host-Recruiter of Migrants

A migrant named Pérou, who arrived in Kumasi with eleven compatriots, recounts how their host made them leave for work in the Ashanti bush:

When he arrived at his home, he told us that there was no work in the town of Kumasi. He proposed that we go into the bush, and we accepted his proposition. He asked a Zerma to bring us to the worksite. It was contract labor. The enterprise, run by some Whites, was building a road between Bogsaye and Awonso. We worked for four days. We weren't given anything to eat. We stopped working. We gave the tools back to the Whites who refused to pay us for the work we had done. From there, we left on foot for Dugon, where we stayed for three days with a Mossi from Nangadourou (*cercle* of Koro). While we were with the Mossi, the Zerma joined us. He asked us to go back to work because he had paid our host for the labor. We told him that not one of us was his son [i.e., we did not owe him obedience], and that if he insisted we were going to beat him to death. It was his business, to sell migrants to the highest bidder.

Between the twelve migrants and their host (the *hogon*), there was an intermediary, the recruiter, a Zerma from Niger. It was he who sought labor for a private enterprise. At the time, all the recruiters sought out the *doyens* of the different ethnic groups of migrants, because it was they who housed the migrants. These *doyens* were generally chiefs, recognized by the colonial and local authorities. The recruiters generally worked for private enterprises, notably the Lebanese and the Italians, as well as for the Ashanti planters. The employers paid the recruiters and treated the migrants like slaves. The latter sought their salvation in flight.

Take the case of a Dogon man named Guindo, who arrived at the home of his host with three comrades. The day after their arrival, the host asked them to go into the Ashanti bush. They said no. He asked them to leave his house if they did not want to work for the Ashanti. “It was always like that,” said Guindo. “You agree to work for his Ashanti friends or you leave his house.” Another man recounted how his host had chased him and his friends from his house when they refused to work for the Ashanti.

One night, we slept at the home of our host, whom everyone called the *hogon* of the Dogon. He sold the Dogon to the Ashanti. It was during the Second World

War, and work on the gold mines was hard to find. He proposed that we work for the Ashanti. I told him, "First I should visit my brother who works at Obusai." He told me, "Did you come here to work or to visit your brother?" I replied, "My brother needs to know where to find me in the Gold Coast." A few minutes later, he brought some Ashanti, who failed to convince us [to come and work]. He told us to leave his house. I went to sit outside. He came and chased me away, saying that this was still his place. I said no. He wanted to beat me. At five o'clock in the morning, we bought something to eat and we left for Obusai. He told us that we would be eaten by hyenas.

Arjuma Din, who arrived in Accra in 1963, lodged with the chief. Thanks to the "joking cousin" ties that bound them, he allowed himself to tell the *hogon*, "In Dogon country, the people know that you sell people to the Ashanti." The *hogon* replied, "So! My name is so ruined back home? All the bad things that I do in Ghana are known in Dogon country? In that case, I'll mend my ways, I won't do any more wrong to the Dogon who come here." The *hogon*, according to the migrants, gave a certain amount of money to the Ashanti chief every year. One day, the Dogon got hold of one of the secret letters he had written to the chief. In this letter, he described his friendship with the head chief of Kumasi and with those of the provinces, and the different ways in which he could help them find workers.

Migrants Snared by Drivers on the Road South to the Gold Coast

In addition to those recruited by their hosts, many migrants fell into the hands of driver-kidnappers, who promised them a faster and less tiring voyage but led them literally into slavery in the cocoa and coffee fields. Consider the case of Seydou Amasongo Dolo and four of his peers who left Sangha, their village, in 1939.

In Dogon country, during the rainy season, we farmed. During the dry season, some of the young people went to Segu, others to Bamako. We chose Mopti. From Mopti, we left for Bobo-Dioulasso, where we sold meat. Our clients were mostly Songhay. Sometimes they bought, sometimes they did not. The money we earned was not enough to pay for the transport to Kumasi. We decided to walk. We only walked at night, and we rested during the day because in those days, people were sold. In spite of our precautions, a Peul sold us to an Ashanti. This Peul was in a truck with an Ashanti driver. He said that he was going to drive us to the home of the *hogon* of Kumasi and that he would be reimbursed by the *hogon*. So we climbed aboard. After less than an hour, we arrived at a village, of which I don't know the name. The Peul told us to get down, because we had arrived. The driver told us, "You are at my father's house and you are going to work for him." We said, "But that's not what we agreed on." They said, "That's the way it is," and they began to beat us. The driver asked the villagers who would like to buy some people. There was an Ashanti Muslim in the village who said he needed workers. He gave some money to the driver and led us to his house. When night fell, we fled. They caught us and beat us all the way back to the village. A Peul wrote down our names and said that if we fled, they would find us. The Muslim fast [Ramadan] was near, and the family head had bought a ram, which I

took care of because I was the only Muslim in the group. The others worked in the fields. For two months, they worked under the cocoa trees. The meals were poor. Three days before Ramadan, in the middle of the night, I woke my comrades and said, "Let's run away." We took to the road, walking only at night, and hiding in the forest during the day. We walked for a month before arriving at Kumasi.

At Bolgatanga in northern Ghana, a group of six migrants met a driver. He promised that for six shillings he would drive them to Kumasi. Outside Kumasi, the driver told them that the fare they had agreed to pay was insufficient, and that he could not free them. He brought them to a little village and the migrants were made to work in the fields. They were divided into two groups of three in order to prevent them from escaping. Each group worked in two fields some distance from the other. After two weeks of work, one of the groups rejoined the other, and they deserted. "We only walked at night because in the day, they might catch us," said Aly Temi, the oldest of the group.

The practice of "traffic" as it appears clearly in the tales of migrants was a widespread system of exploitation during the colonial period. Labor inspectors regularly mentioned the magnitude of the problem in their reports. The fact that certain legislative measures were taken to put an end to illegal recruitment and child labor demonstrates that the exploitation of migrant laborers preoccupied the colonial authorities who were concerned before the 1940s about the lack of laborers for the development of the colonies. What were those measures and what effects did they have?

Colonial Measures of Fighting Illegal Recruitment and Child Labor

Illegal Recruitment: Colonial reports on the problem of illegal recruitment are derived from the observations of labor inspectors and border police. The Gold Coast government's annual report for 1938–39 contains a clear description:

The recruitment of labor is at present carried out in a haphazard manner by messengers working without official authorization. This naturally leads to many irregularities, both laborers and employers being unscrupulously deceived and cheated; there have also been instances of exploitation of the capitation fee by a recruiter who has arranged for the laborers to leave work as soon as he has received payment.²⁹

It is clear from this excerpt that the trade in laborers did not necessarily profit employers. They were often its victims. One of the standard reports is that of R. J. Dickinson, chief inspector of labor in the Gold Coast. Dickinson insisted on the magnitude and the consequences of this form of recruitment. On the occasion of his tour of inspection in the Northern Territories in 1938, he indicated that in addition to the local people, several hundred migrants from the French colonies were the victims of unscrupulous drivers who worked for rich planters in the region of Kumasi. He wrote, "Recruiting in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast is illegal but is surreptitiously and illegally carried on by lorry drivers and other Africans for Africans."³⁰

The Northern Territories were, in effect, a lucrative zone for drivers looking for

migrant workers. It was there that migrants, coming from Soudan Français (Mali), first began to feel fatigued and to run out of food supplies. They often looked for work in towns like Bolgatanga, Tamale, Bole, and Wa, in order to earn enough money to continue their travels. Patrick Harries describes the example of Mozambican emigrants, who fell into the hands of recruiters on the way to the mines of South Africa: “Perhaps the majority of migrants, encountered a recruiter on their way south to whom they contracted themselves in exchange for food, clothing, shelter, and protection. Still others, discouraged by their suffering, turned around and went home.”³¹

The concern of the British colonial administration to combat the recruitment of Africans by Africans was not inspired by some kind of philanthropy but by its desire to monopolize the supply of workers coming from the Northern Territories and from the neighboring French colonies. For example, the colonial administration authorized the mining companies to use the chiefs of migrant communities, like the chief of the Mossi of Kumasi, to recruit workers.³² The following passage from a colonial document testifies to this practice:

The bearer Dowduah is chief of the Moshi [Mossi] in Coomassie [Kumasi] and has been engaged by the Chamber of Mines to recruit Moshi boys in Ashanti for work on the Mines. As the Mines are very short of any Labour any assistance which can be given will be appreciated. Dowduah has been given a letter from the Chamber of Mines clearly stating the terms under which he is to recruit. This chief recruited labour for the Mines some time ago but complained that he was unjustly treated by the particular mine for which he was working.³³

The Gold Coast Labor Department had asked the mining companies to negotiate with the French administration the authorization to recruit workers in the Cote d’Ivoire, in the hinterland (contemporary Mali and Burkina Faso), and in the French part of Togo. The French governor general in Dakar refused this request, noting that the French colonies had problems finding workers for their own projects.³⁴ The French administration vainly attempted to prevent its subjects from leaving for the Gold Coast or the Gambia, but they used back roads and indirect routes to reach those zones, where wages were higher. In spite of French opposition, the authorities of the Gold Coast encouraged mining companies to recruit in French territory. They set four conditions for recruitment that the mining companies were to respect in French territory: (1) Mining companies should be prepared to pay head money or other reasonable arrangement proposed by the French government. (2) If agreed to, the mining companies must send recruiting agents to collect recruits under the supervision of the local French administrators. (3) The recruiting agents would take with them metal discs on which were stamped the name of the mining company for which the native was recruited and the identification number of the native. (4) On leaving the province, the mines’ agents would provide the local administrators with a list giving the names and the disc number of the natives enlisted, and the locality of enlistment.

The British mining companies were authorized to recruit in the Northern Territories, in addition to the French possessions.³⁵ The Labor Department had proposed

that the recruitment of Africans be systematically controlled as it was in the British colonies of southern Africa. The labor inspectors of the period had suggested strict rules in order to protect both workers and employers, as the following passage attests:

If organized recruiting proves to be really required, it certainly needs regulation. I therefore recommend the introduction of rules strictly controlling the recruitment of labor; the business should be confined to properly authorized and reputable agents who have deposited an appreciable sum as a guarantee of their compliance with regulations. Such men should be required to furnish evidence of adequate arrangements for the care and supervision of their recruits when travelling. The introduction of such a system would go far to facilitate medical inspection and if associated with the contact, should eliminate the existing danger of misrepresentation of conditions; furthermore, the right to repatriation with provision for journey could be secured. The introduction of such methods would be a novelty in West Africa but it would constitute a great advance upon the existing situation where the travelling labourers suffer great hardships, possibly even dying of starvation by the roadside, while constantly running the risk of being deceived and exploited by unscrupulous touts. Some such improvement is in fact essential for the benefit of all concerned.³⁶

Mr. Browne, labor advisor to the secretary of state for the colonies, had undertaken a study at the request of the chief inspector of labor, Mr. Dickinson, so that concrete measures could be taken to regulate the laboring conditions of migrants working for African employers. Browne concluded that a written contract, titled "Labor Contract between Natives," was necessary to defend the interests of employees. He proposed that these contracts be written out by village literates known as "letter writers" and approved by district commissioners.³⁷ The letter writers were public scribes in the countryside. They produced labor contracts between local employers and migrants. Their role was important insofar as they could write a contract in such a way that it served the interests of either the employer or the employee. But, most often, illiterate migrants were the victims of the pens of these scribes who worked on behalf of the wealthy plantation owners.

Child Labor: In the colonial era, the ban on the labor of children younger than fourteen years of age was not as important as that on illegal recruitment, which caused considerable damage to the colonial economy. Nonetheless, in the Gold Coast, children between fourteen and eighteen years of age were only authorized to carry out "light" labor. British colonial legislation stipulated that

the employment of children below the age of fourteen in industrial undertakings is prohibited under section 58 of the Master and Servant Ordinance: [if] juveniles between the ages of 14 and 18 are, however, engaged for lighter tasks, such as grass-cutting, sweeping, etc., there appears to be little cause for criticism.³⁸

Such a measure had been foreseen by the French administration in Soudan as well:

No one may be hired, as an employee or as a worker, if he is not at least sixteen years of age and recognized as physically capable, after an in-depth exam, of

accomplishing the job or the task for which he has been hired. Any native who wishes to be hired must, if he has not reached the age of ten full years and in case of hiring outside of the colony of origin, obtain the prior consent of his family. The nature of the work to be provided shall be expressly stipulated in the contract. The employer shall not have the right, in course of the contract, to give to the employee or worker a job other than that stipulated in the contract without mutual assent.³⁹

In Soudan, this measure was particularly aimed at private enterprises, which exploited, without scruples, the labor of children for want of adult laborers who had left for the neighboring colonies. The migration of young people was so intense that it provoked a chronic deficit in labor throughout the colonial period. The development of the colony was seriously affected by the lack of labor. According to information gathered by colonial administrators, the annual contingent of Soudanese leaving for Senegal or the Gambia came from the *cercles* of Nara, Nioro, Bamako, Kita, Bafoulabé, Satadougou, and Bougouni. They numbered in the tens of thousands, of which as many as half left for the peanut fields of Senegal. After carrying out studies in these *cercles* in 1927, the Bureau Politique gave the following numbers of migrants: Gambia, 18,000; Gold Coast, 2,120; Nigeria, 100. On the other hand, the Syndicat des Intérêts du Sénégal estimated that 50,000 to 60,000 Soudanese stopped in Senegal en route for the Gambia.⁴⁰

To slow this exodus of laborers towards Senegal, the Gambia, and the Gold Coast, the French administration drew the attention of local notables to the poor treatment that Soudanese migrants endured in the neighboring British possessions, a tactic which provoked the Gold Coast. The celebrated intervention of Deputy Gratien Candance during the first session of the French Chamber of Deputies on January 31, 1930, angered the British authorities. According to the French deputy, once in the Gold Coast, migrants from the French territories were mistreated, beaten, and incorporated into forced labor. The same problem was invoked at the International Conference on Labor at Geneva in June 1930.⁴¹ Following orders from London, the chief commissioner of the Northern Territories reacted. According to him, the large numbers of French subjects who entered the Gold Coast every year contradicted these accusations. He provided the following figures on migration to the Gold Coast, which show the contrast between the number of migrants who were British subjects originating in the Northern Territories and those who were came from French West Africa (Upper Volta, Soudan, Togo, Benin, Niger, among others):⁴²

Table 1: Interwar Migration to the Gold Coast

<i>Financial Year</i>	<i>Northern Territories (British subjects)</i>	<i>French West Africans</i>	<i>Total</i>
1929–30	55,205	81,019	136,224
1928–29	69,846	68,283	138,129
1927–28	55,862	110,527	166,389
1926–27	8,986	48,396	57,382
1925–26	8,722	31,384	40,106
Totals	198,261	339,609	537,870

From this table, the commissioner concluded: "From the above it is obvious the alleged ill-treatment does not take place, otherwise it is very unlikely that such large numbers of people would run the risk of being so ill-treated if such practices existed."⁴³

In a nearly identical contemporary context, when in 2000 Bamako proclaimed that Malian children were being sold and exploited like livestock on Ivoirian plantations, the Ivoirian authorities expressed their indignation and protested to Mali. The images of these children broadcast around the world pushed some advocates of the rights of children to propose an embargo on Ivoirian exports. Ivoirian leaders replied that no one was forced to work in Cote d'Ivoire. According to them, Malian children came of their own accord, and no Ivoirian went to "buy" them.

If the rhetorical, and perhaps historical, parallels are strong, the question that arises at this point in the analysis is whether or not the colonial measures really functioned? Neither the tales of migrants nor the colonial reports suggest any positive results. There are perhaps three reasons for this: (1) The massive character of the migration from the two impoverished zones of the Sahel to Senegambia or the Gold Coast; (2) The varied nature of the labor, from plantations directed by Europeans or Levantins to agricultural production for the local landowners. Did the colonial administration have the means to control the working conditions of migrants in the fields? No. The migrants circulated without identity cards and had no idea what a labor contract was. The community of origin was their only possible protection; (3) The dangerous nature of the voyage: young peasants usually traveled without the provisions necessary for the long trip. This served the interests of the shady recruiters because they were dealing with poor and hungry migrants who would leap at the first chance to work.

Conclusion

The principal conclusion that can be drawn from this analysis is that what is presented, trumpets blaring, as a new disaster called "child trafficking" is as old as migration itself. The anthropology of labor in Africa clearly demonstrates a distinction between genders, social classes, and ages. In traditional Dogon society, once a young man is circumcised he must engage in all the same activities (work in fields and gardens, commerce, home construction, and so on) as any adult. Yet the age of circumcision varies between twelve and fifteen years, and is sometimes younger. Who has the right to determine what kind of work this young male peasant can or is authorized to perform when he migrates aiming to sell his labor? No form of labor can be wholly understood outside the social system in which it takes place. In a recent article, I analyzed how Dogon migrants, enlisted to work in Ghana's mines or in the construction of Mali's Markala dam between 1920 and 1960, developed a definition of colonial labor at odds with that of Marxist intellectuals, who have condemned it in all its forms.⁴⁴ I argued that the local classification of village activities had ramifications on that of the colonial world. The young migrants entered the world of colonial labor with their own social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. In work as in social interaction, those who have more power are tempted to abuse it.⁴⁵ Many young people have been victims of such abuses of power, a shameful exploitation from the colonial

era to the present day. Instead of seeking to obstruct the migration of young people, wouldn't it be better to enact a law assuring them a fair salary and humane treatment?

The contemporary history of the Sahel thus clearly shows that, in every decade, the link between patterns of rural migration and the prospects of urban labor reinforce each other. If "rights" are not guaranteed in villages, peasants (of any age) will seek them (at any price) in the cities. In Mali over the last ten years mine labor has provoked a rush of rural youth to the mines. A recent investigation by the ILO into the mines of Kéniéba and Bougouni documented a strong presence of young women and men. The ILO organized a forum in December 2009 on gender and labor in order to inform the public—relatives, NGOs, employers, management, children, and political leaders—of the dangers of the worst forms of child labor in Mali's mines and pits. According to a study from the National Agency for Statistics and Computing, three million Malian children between the ages of five and seventeen engage in some economic activity which compromises their education or health.

The phenomenon is obviously shocking but neither parents nor their children should be judged too hastily. Rights proclaimed but never assured obligate children to risk their lives and parents to make sacrifices which would be unthinkable in rich nations. In impoverished countries, the stakes are high. The question is how much the victims of "trafficking" (children and their parents) will profit from their labor.

The reaction of both Dogon peasants and the Cote d'Ivoire demonstrates the poor definition of "traffic" insofar as the cultural and economic conditions of migration, social life, and labor of young people have not been sufficiently analyzed in the preliminary reports of the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children, and the Family.

In the Office du Niger irrigated zone, some peasants attribute the collapse of labor to the "anti-child labor" campaigns of various NGOs. These are thought to have insisted that it is prohibited to "force children to work" (i.e., exploit them). "Since that time, young people think that they can sleep. Earlier, there were groups of young people (15–20 persons) to perform collective labor but now that no longer exists," exclaimed indignantly one old peasant from the village of Kokry.⁴⁶

Without an in-depth study of the parameters of the phenomenon, abolition of "child trafficking" will be in vain. For example, nearly all of the so-called victims of the traffic return to the city after their forced repatriation to their villages of origin. That means that these young people, in spite of their difficult living conditions in the urban centers, have never been the object of trafficking. As we have seen for the Gold Coast, children, objects of trafficking, organize to free themselves and do not take the risk of following the same routes again. Procedures of repatriation or the patrolling of frontiers in order to justify the funds allotted from abroad will have negative effects on young people and their parents.⁴⁷ Parents will not understand why a fourteen-year-old child does not have the right to work in the city just as he works in the village. The measures will be perceived, with good reason, as unjust and arbitrary. They will be bypassed as quickly as possible.

How can one slow the exodus of young people in a country where the economic conditions of the vast majority of the population depend on the caprices of the rain? The introduction of structural adjustment since the 1980s, and the macro-economic environment in which the Sahelian states exist, exclude any solution to the problem

of the youth over the long term. In the colonial period, it was the labor crisis that led to illegal recruitment and exploitation of young people. Today it is the extreme poverty of the countryside.

NOTES

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1. Christine J. Walley, "Searching for 'Voices': Feminism, Anthropology, and the Global Debate over Female Genital Operations," *Cultural Anthropology* 12, no. 3 (August 1997): 405–38.
2. Convention Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (International Labor Organization Convention 182) (1999).
3. Trafficking is defined as "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation."
4. *Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children, in Africa* (Paris: UNESCO, 2004).
5. United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report 2009* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 170.
6. See Lawrence Cohen, "Where It Hurts: Indian Material for an Ethics of Organ Transplantation," *Daedalus* 128, no. 4 (Fall 1999): 135–65. See also, for example, Wendy Chapkis, "Trafficking, Migration and the Law: Protecting Innocents, Punishing Immigrants," *Gender and Society* 17, no. 6 (December 2003): 923–37; Jo Doezema, "Forced to Choose: Beyond the Voluntary v. Forced Prostitution Dichotomy," in *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*, ed. Jo Doezema and Kamala Kempadoo (New York: Routledge, 1998), 34–50; Françoise Guillemaut, "Trafics et migrations de femmes: Une hypocrisie au service des pays riches," *Hommes et Migrations* 1248 (March–April 2004): 75–87; Jim Hathaway, "The Human Rights Quagmire of Human Trafficking," *Virginia Journal of International Law* 49, no. 1 (2008): 1–59; Dina F. Haynes, "Exploitation Nation: The Thin and Gray Legal Lines between Trafficked Persons and Abused Migrant Laborers," *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics and Public Policy* 33, no. 1 (2009): 1–71; Kamala Kempadoo, "Victims and Agents of Crime: The New Crusade against Trafficking, in *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender and the Prison-Industrial Complex*, ed. Julia Sudbury (New York: Routledge, 2005), 35–56.
7. Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations*, 3 vols. (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1968), 1: 471.
8. Isaie Dougnon, "Les Ghana boys et le prestige de l'habit européen au Pays Dogon (1920–1960)," in *Regards sur les Dogon du Mali*, ed. R. M. A. Bedaux and J. D. Van Der Waals (Leiden: Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, 2003), 55–58.
9. See *Le trafic des enfants au Mali: Analyse des conditions juridiques et du cadre administratif* (Bamako, 2001), posted at http://www.esclavagemoderne.org/img_doc/trafic_enfants_mali_nodate (last accessed September 24, 2010).
10. Service du développement social et de l'économie solidaire, *Exposé sur les résultats du suivi des enfants rapatriés du Cercle de Bankass* (Bamako, 2002).

11. See *Le Trafic transfrontalier d'enfants* (Bamako, 2002), report of the preliminary inquiry of the Ministry for the Protection of Women, Children, and Families for the regions of Sikasso, Segou, Mopti, and Timbuktu, June 2000.

12. The first seminar on child trafficking in Dogon country was held in Bankass, the *cercle* most affected by the problem, March 14–16, 2002. It was financed by the embassy of Great Britain in Mali. Peasants from all the rural communes of Bankass took part. Behind the scenes, the representatives of the commune of Wangaro affirmed that they had been asked to come and state that the girls of their village had been enslaved in Mecca, and that this trade in girls was organized by people from Wangaro whose wealthy employers are in Mecca.

13. According to the consul, the fight against child trafficking in Dogon country is the primary activity of the new embassy of Great Britain, which opened its doors in 2001.

14. C. P. Chandrasekhar, "The Economic Consequences of the Abolition of Child Labor: An Indian Case Study," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 24, no. 3 (1997): 137–79.

15. On this point, see Richard Shweder, *Why Do Men Barbecue? Recipes for Cultural Psychology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003). Shweder criticizes what he calls "the return of cultural developmental thinking." A number of the projects that have multiplied since 1990 in the African countries considered to be "good students in democracy" have been conceived in this perspective. These projects, in order to win financing, are obliged to present Africa as a continent that is behind the times, wild, and dangerous for its inhabitants.

16. The incoherence of the discourse on child trafficking is apparent in the fact that the NGOs, the police, and the government all affirm that the sellers or "traffickers" are difficult to identify. If such is the case, how can one prove that a traffic in Dogon children toward Malian or Ivoirian towns really exists?

17. On the migration of *talibés* to Senegambia, see François Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants: Soninké Labor Diasporas, 1848–1960* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997), 247. During the workshop on child trafficking in Bankass (in the region of Mopti), the representative of Save the Children showed a photograph of a group of eight Tellem girls who had been intercepted by the local authorities. (The Tellem were the first inhabitants of the Dogon plateau. Since the arrival of the Dogon around the fifteenth century, they have settled on the plain bordering Mossi country and Burkina Faso.) According to the representative, these girls had been sold. We asked what had happened to the seller. "He fled," he declared. This story is doubtful, since the migration of Tellem girls to Ouagadougou—most often by foot—is as significant and common as that of their Dogon peers to Bamako or other Malian towns.

18. This has been the case since the colonial period, as Georges Balandier emphasized. According to Balandier, the labor market of the Congolese city of Brazzaville was composed of young people: 86 percent of the migrants registered between 1945 and 1951 were adolescents and young people between ten and thirty years old. See Balandier, *Sociologie des Brazzavilles Noires* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1955), 32–35.

19. See Service du développement social et l'économie solidaire, *Exposé*.

20. For further detail, see Sidney Jones, *Making Money Off Migrants: The Indonesian Exodus to Malaysia* (Hong Kong: Asia 2000/CAPSTRANS, 2000). Jones emphasizes both legal and illegal recruitment procedures, with particular attention to the responsibility of states in the region in the exploitation of migrants.

21. Law 62-67, August 9, 1962, Title II-Des relations de travail, Chapter 1-De l'apprentissage, Section 1-Des conditions de fonds et de forme du contrat de l'apprentissage.

22. Yada Kassogu  has produced a very interesting study on local methods of preventing girls from emigrating, as well as of bringing home those who have already left. See Kassogu , “Exode rural: Impacts des mesures prises par les villageois afin d’attenuer le taux migratoire des filles et/ou femmes du cercle de Bandiagara” (M.A. thesis, Universit  de Bamako, 2003). These strategies are in fact measures of desperation that attack the symptoms rather than the disease, for want of means to address the root causes of the malady.

23. Isaie Dougnon, “Peasant Migration and Labor Codification in the Colonial Era: Emigrants from Dogon Country in the Gold Coast 1910–1950,” in *Globalization and Its Discontents, Revisited*, ed. Jomo K.S and Khoo Khay Jin (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2003), 73–83.

24. Affaires  conomiques, main d’oeuvre: Enqu tes sur la migration par cercle—migration et emigration, 1923–1925. S48, Fonds R cents, ANM.

25. In response to a request for authorization to recruit 2,000 men, Governor Arnaud of Haute Volta wrote to the governor of the Cote d’Ivoire in 1927 that “a new industry is born of this situation: the traffic in laborers hired by intermediaries, transported by truck to the Cote d’Ivoire and turned over to the highest bidder for a bonus. The commerce in cashew wood has revived to a certain degree the abolished trade in ‘pieces of ebony’ [*bois d’eb ne*, a metaphor for black slaves].” See Hubert Lacardelle, *Les Exodes de migration de Haute Cote d’Ivoire en Gold Coast, 1919–1947* (Ouagadougou: Centre Volta que de la Recherche Scientifique, 1947), 4.

26. This and other testimonies cited are from my ethnographic research.

27. The term *hogon* designates the chief or the king. In Dogon country, the oldest man in the village is the *hogon*. His power is more religious than political or economic. See Denise Paulme, *L’organisation sociale des Dogon* (Paris: Domat-Montchrestien, 1940).

28. “Pay on arrival” is the system by which a passenger negotiates with a transporter to pay his fare on arriving at his destination. The migrant, not having any money, relies on a relative with whom he will stay. This “relative” is often the doyen of the community of migrants in the host country.

29. Report on the Labor Department for 1938–39, PAT 22–1, Archives of Tamale, Ghana.

30. R. J. Dickinson, Chief Inspector of Labor, “Report on Labor Conditions in the Gold Coast” (July 1938), document not classified, Archives of Accra, Ghana.

31. See Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, ca. 1860–1910* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1994), 28–34. See also Robert Vicat Turell, *Capital and Labor on the Kimberley Diamond Fields, 1871–1890* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 24, who describes how labor migration was controlled by certain local kings in southern and central Africa who took a cut of the money that should have been paid to workers. Agents from the mines recruited under their supervision.

32. The report published by Lacardelle indicates that in 1930 the *commandant de cercle* de Koudougou in Haute-Volta asserted that there were recruiters of French nationality who undertook an active propaganda to incite people from the *cercle* to go to the Gold Coast. According to the report, an inquiry had established that a “labor exchange” in Kumasi organized the recruitment of Volta ques (Burkinabe), their shipment to Kumasi, their lodging in a designated ward, and finally their dispatch to the plantations or the mines. This exchange was officially protected and placed under the direction of two *Nabas* (one Mossi and the other Gourounsi), who were appointed by the British authorities. See Lacardelle, *Les Exodes*, 7–9.

33. Acting Secretary for Mines, Mines Department, Tarquah, July 22, 1922. *Labor for Mines*, document not classified, Kumasi Archives, Ghana.

34. See letter of the Governor General, Dakar, September 9, 1920, Labor for Mines, AGR 1/17/3, Kumasi Archives, Ghana.
35. "Labor for Mines" (minutes of interview between H. E. and Mr. Cogill, Secretary of Mines, at Coomasie on April 30, 1920), document not classified, Kumasi archives, Ghana.
36. Ibid.
37. St. J. Orde Browne, Labor Advisor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, "Labor Conditions in West Africa," in *Convention concerning Regulation of Certain Special Systems of Recruiting Workers*, reported by R. J. Dickinson: Annual Report of the Labor Department, 1939, document not classified, Accra Archives, Ghana.
38. Gold Coast Annual Report, 1938–39, document not classified, Accra Archives, Ghana.
39. Main d'Oeuvre, consultations, Conseils des notables, Enquêtes diverses, Cercle de Koutiala, 1923. S50 FR, ANM.
40. Chef du Bureau des Affaires Administratives, Note pour M. l'Inspecteur des Affaires Administratives, contrôleur de la production, d'après enquête faite dans les Cercles en 1928, in Main d'oeuvre, divers, 1928–1938, S4 FR, ANM.
41. International Labor Office, *Conférence internationale du travail: Quatorzième session*, 2 vols. in 3 (Geneva, 1930), esp. the report of the Commission on Forced Labor in the Colonies.
42. Note that the Northern Territories of today's Ghana held an administrative status in the colonial period distinct from both the Gold Coast Colony proper, in southern Ghana, and the former kingdom of Ashanti, to the north of it. Thus these numbers represent the number of migrants from northern to southern Ghana.
43. See "Ill Treatment of Forced Labor," Labor Conditions in West Africa, Annual Report of the Labor Department, May 1930, document not classified, Kumasi Archives, Ghana.
44. Isaie Dougnon, "Migration for 'White Man's Work': An Empirical Rebuttal to Marxist Theory," *African Identities*, 7, no. 3 (August 2009): 353–71.
45. See Everett C. Hughes, *Men and Their Work* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1958), and Gerd Spittler, *Founders of the Anthropology of Work: German Social Scientists of the 19th and Early 20th Centuries and the First Ethnographers* (Münster: LTI Verlag, 2008).
46. Cited in Dougnon and Coulibaly, "Institutional Architecture and Pro-poor Growth in the Office du Niger: Responses from Farmer Organizations," Research Programme Consortium on Improving Institutions for Pro-Poor Growth Discussion Paper 13, posted online at <http://www.ippg.org.uk/papers/dp13.pdf> (last accessed September 24, 2010).
47. Among these illusory and ineffective measures one can note decree No. 01–534/P. RM of November 1, 2001, which mandates the institution of a travel permit serving as an exit authorization for children up to eighteen years old. This travel permit is only valid for three months. It is delivered by the Ministry of Security and Civil Protection, whose agents are authorized to send back to the village any child under nineteen years of age traveling without it.