

A Critical Reading of Piot's Nostalgia for the Future: Scenes of Neoliberal Dreams and Spectres of Deterritorialized Sovereigns in Togo

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“Be not afeared: the isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and
hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,
That, if I then had wak’d after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open and show
Riches
Ready to drop upon me; then, when I wak’d
I cried to dream again.”
The Tempest, Act III, Scene II, 147-155.

The dictator, Eyadema, is dead. Though the last performance still goes on in whispers of rumour about the state of his corpse (Piot 2010, 41). Eyadema’s persona, cultivated through performances of emergencies (Piot 2010, 23) and elaborate “strategies of control” (25), fled his material body (51). This was in many ways Togo’s initiation into post-cold war life, which like the body of Eyadema, Togolese society was itself laid bare (Piot 2010, 12). The tales of Eyadema and the history of the political life of Cold War era Togo reads like a Shakespearean play, Piot himself points this out (2010, 22). But the next scene is no less Shakespearean, with the mysterious forces from outside the borders of Togo flitting in and out of scene, calling the Togolese to rupture from the past, and to dreams of self-development, and prosperity (Piot 2010, 71). With the diffusion of power of the influx of global actors like Pentecostal churches and their rejection of tribal beliefs, NGOs, and the visa lottery a control society is realised (Piot 2010, 16). All these forces coalesce in the formation of a control society as they all become appendages of “governance without government” (Piot 2010, 8), control and amorphous sovereignty predicated on neo-liberal dreams of prosperity, self-development and independence through rupture from old selves, tradition, and poor quality of life (Piot 2010, 57). Each plays a part in the overall diffusion of power and the instilling of values *within* individuals as tools of control, or the “free

floating control” (Deleuze 1992, 4) of deterritorialization and rupture from community and tradition (Piot 2010, 57). This is done through the education of NGOs, spiritual reformation of churches, and escape routes of lottery. In the Togolese control society, in which seen and unseen forces act, and call people to neoliberal dreams (Piot 2010, 79), the only reality other than the material conditions of neglect are the Togolese person’s ability to sever ties with the past and reach for dreams of an independent self (139), a global self (94), a heightened self (72) – a neoliberal self.

Scene I: The Messengers of Personal Transformation.

The Pentecostal churches serve as catalysts of the Togolese control society in that they are organizations originating without Togo and which, through the gathering of Togolese to themselves religiously, call each individual to a deterritorialized identity and one severed from the witchcraft of traditional village life through the force of affect (Piot 2010, 68). The moral forces of the Pentecostal church shape imaginations of dreams of self-realization (Piot 2010, 33) and new life characterised by prosperity (71). This represents their diffused and indirect authority characteristic of control societies, but also the neoliberal underpinnings of prosperity and individualism stirred into the soulful narratives of salvation (Piot 2010, 55). This is seen in the upholding of “believers...to be hardworking, honest, frugal, sexually chaste, abstemious and...to see evidence of their faith as success within the new economy” (Piot 2010, 55). This demonstrates not only the merging of beliefs with capital and prosperity, but in doing so exert sovereignty in subliminal ways (Piot 2010, 73). Through the Pentecostal churches power over the biopolitical landscape of Togo, it is clear how they operate as powerful forces of amorphous, but no less domineering, sovereignty that alienates tradition and ushers in a new conception of self and citizenship that is cut off from tradition and heritage, and which evokes dreams of

“personal transformation” (Piot 2010, 72) and rupturing the connection between individual and community, akin to the eschatological rupture of all time (66). The Pentecostal Churches in this way are messengers of the neoliberal divinity, calling people out of darkness of traditional spiritual practices and into prosperity (Piot 2010, 104).

I tie into this dynamic that of the proliferation of witchcraft considering the rise of Pentecostal presence, particularly in the villages (Piot 2010, 97). This rise in witchcraft, though linked to traditional lifeworlds of the Togolese, morphed into something else with the shifts of post-Cold War Togo (Piot 2010, 127). With the increased marginalization and surveillance of witchcraft awareness of it was heightened and it too has shifted as a result (Piot 2010, 129). These traditional practices became “saturated with postmodern sensibilities and commodity logics and modes of exchange...” (Piot 2010, 127), clearly envisioning itself in neoliberal ways. But also, the rise and increase in witchcraft cases contribute to the overall sense of diffused power, with the threat of witches striking, lingering, and fleeing, people and places wantonly (Piot 2010, 127). These dynamics between the Pentecostal Churches and witchcraft demonstrate not just individually how they play a role in the Togolese control society as proponents of neoliberal influence and the sense of an untraceable sovereign that gives and takes away at will but show how the influence of supranational forces do not simply unseat tradition but cause unpredictable hybridizations (Piot 2010, 126).

Scene II: Outposts of Development

The Pentecostal churches were one such force in the shaping of the neoliberal control society in Togo, which not only rejected the traditional spiritualism of the Togolese, but in doing so called people away from communal identities to individual self-realization and betterment through new identities as Christians and hopes of prosperity (Piot 2010, 104). The entering of

NGOs was another force severing the tie between the individual and the larger, traditional structure of Togolese society in terms of village and kin through self-improvement initiatives (Piot 2010, 139). NGOs in this way function as outposts of development (Piot 2010, 133), disseminating neoliberal ideals of progress and regulating programs of self-improvement in much the same way as the churches except through secular frameworks like education (135). An example of this is the Danish organization, *BORNEfonden*, which upholds the betterment of the individual through education (Piot 2010, 139). This program entailed the sponsorship of Togolese children by Scandinavian families, with Togolese parents writing to Scandinavian families as though they themselves are surrogate parents (Piot 2010, 141). This example demonstrates the neoliberal agenda implicit in NGOs operations as outposts of development, upholding the idea that “the development of the community depends on the development of the individual” (Piot 2010, 139).

Through this deterritorialization its role in the development of a control society is revealed, in that ‘aid’ is focused the mental improvement the individual, shaping people into neoliberal subjects at the expense of kinship and community connections (Piot 2010, 142). The personal, the individual’s ability to “develop” themselves, is not only valued more highly than the material needs of the community (Piot 2010, 135), but the individual is more important than the communal in a control society (Piot 2010, 161). This is another way the individual is severed from history, tradition, and kinship, and imagined as independent (Piot 2010, 139). This neoliberal dream of individual development, “driven by distant international agendas” (Piot 2010, 135), enforces a reliance on organizations rather than community (142), forges familial ties with strangers overseas (141), and demonstrates how the deterritorialization of control society not only makes power harder to distinguish but fundamentally “reshuffles” (135) pre-existing

“social forms” (135). Much like the Pentecostal Churches, NGOs usurp “family and state” and replace it with themselves (Piot 2010, 142).

Scene III: The Gatekeepers to the Future.

Dreams of a new self through personal “development” (Piot 2010, 141) and “transformation” (72), promised by the churches and the NGOs, create an escape of a kind through the promise a new future self (77). The Visa Lottery, similarly, envisions escape and betterment of the individual by transcending the bordered Togo (Piot 2010, 78). It is easier for foreign forces to enter than it is for Togolese locals to exit, and thus the visa lottery not only represents escaping the physical territory of the nation but becomes representative of neoliberal dreams (Piot 2010, 79). As such the visa lottery system is a site of both great control over access to this fantastical dream of opportunity offered by immigration but also becomes a site of creativity to play the odds (Piot 2010, 80). The visa lottery thus represents control society through deterritorialization and rupturing of ties to family and community but also in dreaming of a yet unrealized future beyond the current realities (Piot 2010, 77).

Deterritorialization is made manifest in the visa lottery in that there is an abandonment of time and space, an abandonment of history and legacy for a new start elsewhere – usually America and Europe (Piot 2010, 94). But it is more than this; oftentimes in gaming the system, Togolese locals construct bonds with Togolese expats already overseas (Piot 2010, 79). This leads to a breaking down of kinship locally and forges kinship connections that would have never existed otherwise (Piot 2010, 95). But also, in faking these attachments with people elsewhere there is a claim being made to a new place, the place where their future is envisioned (Piot 2010, 77). This shows an important imaginative aspect in which the individual must not only envision and believe in this dream but has to be invested enough to disrupt pre-existing ties

and to mold new identities (Piot 2010, 78). This attests the neoliberal nature at play with the deterritorialized individual imagines itself as a global self (Piot 2010, 94) in place of a communal and local attachment (78). Thus showing how the visa lottery acts as a symbolic and tangible throughfare between the past and the future, with the individual being the one who must believe the dream and make it possible be it through “luck” (Piot 2010, 92) or entrepreneurial means (80).

Conclusion: Entry and Exit

While the dictatorship of Eyadema was corrupt and violent in its own ways, Togolese society still had an idea of where sovereign power was held, and to whom communities were beholden to (Piot 2010, 29). With the “emptying” of state authority and services (Piot 2010, 43) following Eyadema’s death, the end of the cold war, and the ripple effects of 9/11 (48), a control society took shape in which power was horizontal (49), and the landscape of reform and control became defined by the ability to influence minds and souls of people themselves (8). This is part of a control society in that authority is manifest horizontally through individual imagination, rather than exchange and communal allegiances (Piot 2010, 9). But it also a neoliberal dream that is inculcated in the individual’s imagination, offering prosperity (Piot 2010, 72), independence (139), and global citizenship (94). The individual is the territory to be controlled and the source of all social development in this neoliberal control society. This is the nature of “governance without government” (Piot 2010, 8).

Works Cited

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