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AP Associated Press



Exploited Children Stories

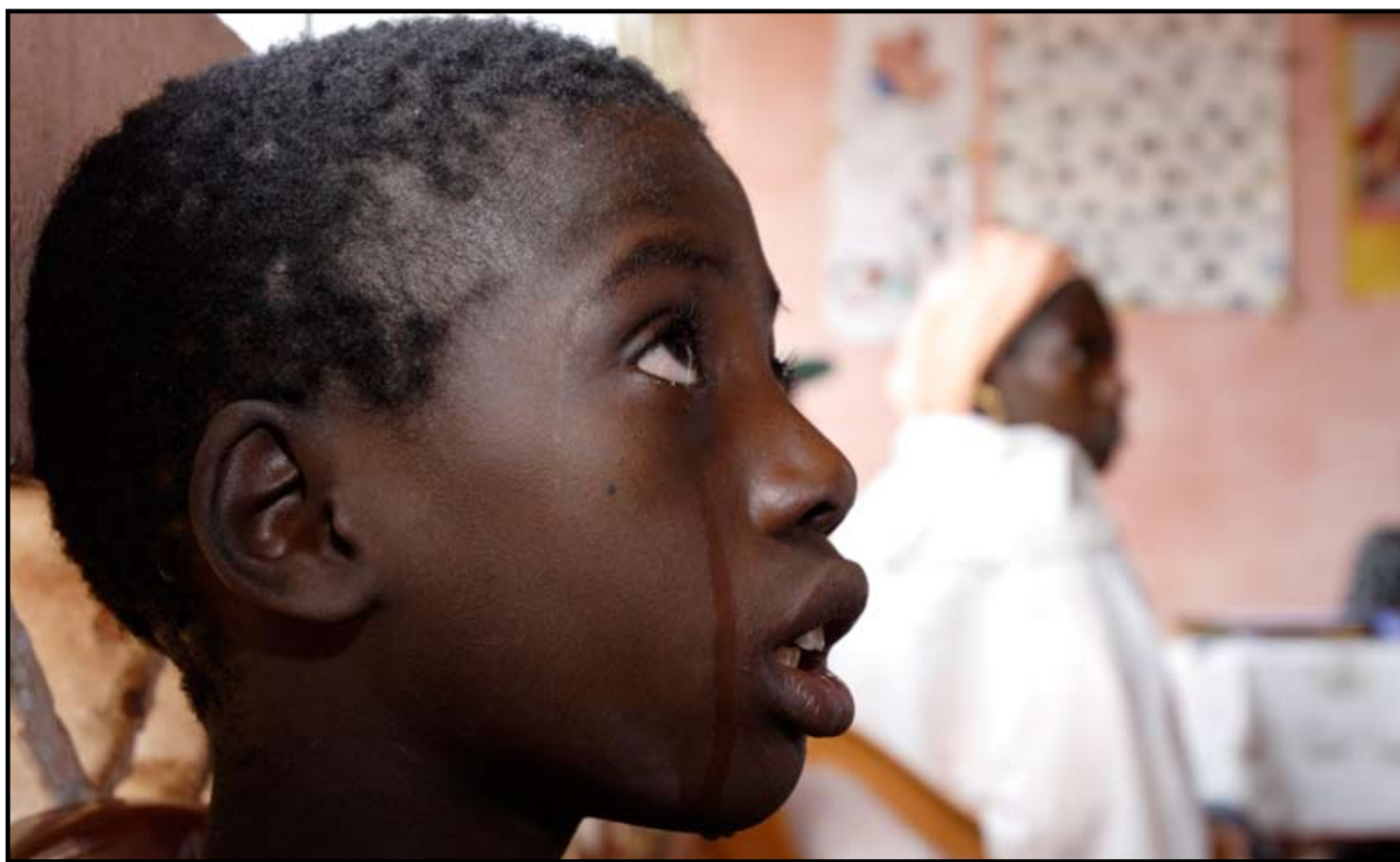
By RUKMINI CALLIMACHI

PULITZER PRIZE ENTRY: INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS REPORTING



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Rebecca Blackwell • AP

Coli, a former religious student who fled the Quranic teacher that forced him to beg on the streets of Dakar, Senegal, can't stop his tears after being reunited with his mother at a temporary shelter in Gabu, Guinea-Bissau.

April 20, 2008

Boy flees Islamic school that makes beggars of African kids

By RUKMINI CALLIMACHI • Associated Press Writer

DAKAR, Senegal (AP)

EDITOR'S NOTE: In West and Central Africa, the children of the poor are commodities, often traded like cows or donkeys by adults who value their labor. Hundreds of thousands are put to work every year, some as young as 2. In this story, The Associated Press exposes Islamic schools that use the false promise of a free education to lure children into a life of begging.

On the day he decided to run away, 9-year-old Coli awoke on a filthy mat.

Like a pup, he lay curled against the cold, pressed between dozens of other children sleeping head-to-

toe on the concrete floor. His T-shirt was damp with the dew that seeped through the thin walls. The older boys had yanked away the square of cloth he used to protect himself from the draft. He shivered.

It was still dark as he set

out for the mouth of a freeway with the other boys, a tribe of 7-, 8- and 9-year-old beggars.

Coli padded barefoot between the stopped cars, his head reaching only halfway up the windows. His scrawny body disappeared under a ragged

Begging for Islam



Rebecca Blackwell/AP

Religious students forced to beg for their Quranic teacher ask for change and food from cars stuck in traffic on the outskirts of Dakar, Senegal

T-shirt that grazed his knees. He held up an empty tomato paste can as his begging bowl.

There are 1.2 million Colis in the world today, children trafficked to work for the benefit of others. Those who lure them into servitude make \$15 billion annually, according to the International Labor Organization.

It's big business in Senegal. In the capital of Dakar alone, at least 7,600 child beggars work the streets, according to a study released in February by the ILO, the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Bank. The children collect an average of 300 African francs a day, just 72 cents, reaping their keepers \$2 million a year.

Most of the boys – 90 percent, the study found – are sent out to beg under the cover of Islam, placing the problem at the complicated intersection of greed and tradition. For among the cruelest facts of Coli's life is that he was not stolen from his family. He was

brought to Dakar with their blessing to learn Islam's holy book.

In the name of religion, Coli spent two hours a day memorizing verses from the Quran and over nine hours begging to pad the pockets of the man he called his teacher.

It was getting dark. Coli had less than half the 72 cents he was told to bring back. He was afraid. He knew what happened to children who failed to meet their daily quotas.

They were stripped and doused in cold water. The older boys picked them up like hammocks by their ankles and wrists. Then the teacher whipped them with an electrical cord until the cord ate their skin.

Coli's head hurt with hunger. He could already feel the slice of the wire on his back.

He slipped away, losing himself in a tide of honking cars. He had 20 cents in his tomato can.

Three years ago, a man wearing a skullcap came to Coli's village in the neighboring country of Guinea-Bissau and asked for him.

Coli's parents immediately addressed the man as "Serigne," a term of respect for Muslim leaders on Africa's western coast. Many poor villagers believe that giving a Muslim holy man a child to educate will gain an entire family entrance to paradise.

Since the 11th century, families have sent their sons to study at the Quranic schools that flourished on Africa's western seaboard with the rise of Islam. It is forbidden to charge for an Islamic education, so the students, known as talibe, studied for free with their marabouts, or spiritual teachers. In return, the children worked in the marabout's fields.

The droughts of the late 1970s and '80s forced many schools to move to cities, where their income began to

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Nowadays, Quranic instructors net as many children as they can to increase their daily take



Rebecca Blackwell • AP

Religious students forced to beg for their Quranic teacher, walk through the courtyard of the shelter "Empire des Enfants" (Children's Empire) in Dakar, Senegal

revolve around begging. Today, children continue to flock to the cities, as food and work in villages run short.

Not all Quranic boarding schools force their students to beg. But for the most part, what was once an esteemed form of education has degenerated into child trafficking. Nowadays, Quranic instructors net as many children as they can to increase their daily take.

"If you do the math, you'll find that these people are earning more than a government functionary," said Souleymane Bachir Diagne, an Islamic scholar at Columbia University. "It's why the phenomenon is so hard to eradicate."

Middle men trawl for children as far afield as the dunes of Mauritania and the grass-covered huts of Mali. It's become a booming, regional trade that ensnares children as

young as 2, who don't know the name of their village or how to return home.

One of the largest clusters of Quranic schools lies in the poor, sand-enveloped neighborhoods on either side of the freeway leading into Dakar.

This is where Coli's marabout squats in a half-finished house whose floor stirs with flies. Amadu Buwaro sleeps on a mattress covered in white linens. The 30 children in his care sleep in another room with dirty blankets on the floor. It smells rotten and wet, like a soaked rag.

Buwaro is a thin man in his 30s who wears a pressed olive robe and digital watch. The children wear T-shirts black with filth. He expects them to beg to pay the rent, because there are no fields here to till.

But their earnings far exceed his rent of \$50. If the

boys meet their quotas, they bring in around \$650 a month in a nation where the average person earns \$150.

Buwaro expects the children to suffer to learn the Quran, just as he did at the hands of his teacher.

So when Coli failed to return, Buwaro was furious. He flipped open his flashy silver cell phone and called another marabout who kept a blue planner with names of runaway boys. The list stretched down the page. He added Coli's name.

His tomato can tucked under one arm, Coli jumped on the back of a bus, holding on to the swinging rear door. He was hundreds of miles from the village where he grew up speaking Peuhl, a language not commonly heard in Dakar.

He could not ask the Senegalese for help. So he got directions in Peuhl from other

Begging for Islam

Three days later, he ran away again. When he arrived at the shelter, he said: “I want to go home to my mom.”

child beggars, who like him were trafficked here from the zone of green savannah just outside Senegal.

Coli made his way to a neighborhood where he had heard of a place that gave free food to children like him.

“Do you know where you come from?” asked the kind-faced woman at Empire des Enfants. The shelter’s capacity is 30 children, but it usually houses at least 50.

Coli knew the name of his mother, but not how to reach her. He knew the name of the region where he was born, but not his village. “My mother is black,” he said. “I’m sure I’ll recognize her.”

The shelter worker told Coli what to do if his marabout came. We will protect you, she said. If he tries to grab you, scream.

Days went by. Maybe weeks.

Then Coli’s marabout arrived.

In 2005, Senegal made it a crime punishable by five years in prison to force a child to beg. But the same law makes an exception for children begging for religious reasons. Few dare to cross marabouts for fear of supernatural retaliation.

Coli’s marabout entered the shelter flanked by a column of religious leaders in cascading robes that tumbled onto the ground. One of them stabbed his finger at the clouds and yelled out, “The sky will fall down on you if you don’t hand over our children.”

The shelter is used to such threats. But this time the marabouts had discovered the center’s legal paperwork was not complete. They threatened to close the shelter if it did not hand over 11 boys.

To save more than 40



Rebecca Blackwell • AP

Coli peeks from under the hood of his sweater at the airport in Dakar, Senegal as he waits for the flight that will take him and 12 other former child beggars home to Guinea-Bissau.

others, the shelter handed over the 11. Coli was on the list.

Back at the school, they beat the 9-year-old until he thought he was going to faint. At night, they dragged him off the floor, doused him in water and beat him again.

Three days later, he ran away again. When he arrived at the shelter, he said: “I want to go home to my mom.”

To find Coli’s mother, aid workers broadcast his name on the radio in Guinea-Bissau. The names of over a dozen children also from Guinea-Bissau played in a continuous loop, like sonic homing pigeons trying to find their target.

No response. Some boys worried their parents might be dead.

“I’m sure my mother is still alive,” Coli reasoned. “When I left her she was well, so why wouldn’t she be well now?” Underneath his bright eyes is another worry. Will she be angry that he disobeyed his teacher?

Over the past two years, the International Organization

for Migration has returned over 600 child beggars to their homes. Several had been hit by cars. Some had scars on their backs. One 10-year-old was so hungry he ate out of the trash. Soon after he returned home, he vomited worms and died.

Almost all the boys had begged on behalf of Quranic instructors in Senegal.

“Cultural habits have been manipulated for the sake of exploitation,” said the IOM’s Laurent de Boeck, deputy regional representative for West and Central Africa.

Two months went by before a shelter worker pulled Coli aside. His parents were alive.

The 13 boys from Guinea-Bissau pile into a bus. Coli screams with glee as it takes off for the airport.

“Is this Guinea-Bissau?” one of them asks as they descend onto the cracked runway and enter the small airport of the nation’s capital. “Senegal looks better,” says another.

Though Senegal is among the world’s poorest nations, it’s

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“You sent your kids to hell,” the judge says.

visibly more developed than Guinea-Bissau, listed 160th out of 177 countries on the U.N.’s human development index. The capital they left had streets clogged with taxis and flashy 4-by-4s. The buildings were tall. The capital they returned to has squat, low buildings and crumbling colonial villas.

“I’m not sure I like it,” Coli confides.

As the bus leaves the capital, they pass villages of cone-shaped huts and fields where boys herd bulls. They sing songs, clapping their hands. As they pull into the shelter where their parents were told to expect them, the boys fall silent.

Timidly, they file off the bus. A few of the 12- and 13-year-olds recognize their families. They approach them respectfully, shaking hands.

Coli’s mother is not there.

A judge tells the parents they will be jailed if they send their children away to beg again. They have to sign a statement promising to protect their boys from traffickers. Most are illiterate, so they leave a thumbprint in blue ink next to their names.

“You sent your kids to hell,” the judge says. “You can’t say that because you are poor you’re going to allow your kids to be abused.”

His booming voice ricochets off the cracked walls of the building. The parents stare straight ahead.

But the conditions that made these families send their children to hell still persist.

Many of the villages do not have enough food. Few have schools. In one, the schoolhouse is a bamboo enclosure that doubles as an animal corral. “We haven’t had classes here in over a year,” an

elderly man says as he ducks into the classroom and skirts a pile of bull manure.

The aid group pays for school fees and supplies. But the stipend cannot cover the economic worth of a child. Some of the children returned in previous months now work as bricklayers and goatherds. Others have already been sent back to the marabouts by their parents. The idea of child trafficking as a crime is so new in the region that no African language has a word for it, experts say.

With each passing day, more parents and relatives come, but not Coli’s.

On the third day, the shelter pays for another radio address.

By the fourth, half the 13 children are gone.

The others become increasingly agitated. Maybe the radio is broken, Coli muses. His wet eyes fill with the invisible color of worry.

Early on the fifth morning, a woman in a pressed peach robe walks up to the shelter.

Coli rushes outside. He stands a few feet away as tears topple down his cheeks. She covers her face with her veil

and weeps.

The two sit side-by-side in plastic chairs. Coli’s mother looks at her feet. Her family is poor, she says, and she wanted Coli to get an education. It took her several days to reach the shelter because she didn’t have \$2 for the bus fare.

For more than an hour, Coli cries. Tears run down either side of his cheeks, forming two watery garlands. They meet at his chin and plop down on his collar bone, pooling above his shirt.

She stands up and wipes his chin. They leave, crossing the dusty boulevard.

Her arm reaches around his shoulder and the long sleeve of her robe falls around the little boy. It hides him from the remaining children, who silently watch Coli go home.

EPILOGUE:

Soon after Coli left, his marabout traveled to Guinea-Bissau. He angrily demanded to know why Coli had run away.

Ashamed, Coli’s father promised to make up for the boy’s bad behavior.

He is sending the marabout two more sons.

April 20, 2008

Begging for Islam-Research

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The account of Coli’s experience with the Islamic school is based largely on interviews with the boy himself. Much of the account was confirmed in multiple interviews with rescue workers, Coli’s mother, his brother and his former marabout. To report on Coli’s rescue and return home, an AP reporter and photographer visited the school and the shelter, accompanied Coli on the trip to Guinea-Bissau, and waited with him until his mother arrived.

AUGUST 11, 2008



Rebecca Blackwell • AP

Mohammed Keita, 15, of Mali, checks mined earth for the presence of gold particles at a mine near the village of Tenkoto, Senegal.

Thousands of children working in African gold mines

AP INVESTIGATION: Gold mined by African children finds its way into luxury goods

By RUKMINI CALLIMACHI AND BRADLEY KLAPPER • Associated Press Writers

TENKOTO, Senegal (AP)

EDITOR'S NOTE: In West and Central Africa, children of the poor are commodities, often traded like cows or donkeys by adults who value their labor. This story on child gold miners is the second in an occasional series on the exploitation of African children. Each story is intended to stand on its own.

A reef of gold buried beneath this vast, parched grassland arcs across some of the world's poorest countries. Where the ore is rich, industrial mines carve it out. Where it's not, the poor sift the earth.

These hardscrabble miners

include many thousands of children. They work long hours at often dangerous jobs in hundreds of primitive mines scattered through the West African bush. Some are as young as 4 years old.

In a yearlong investigation, The Associated Press visited six of these bush mines

Toiling for Gold

The recruiter led the three boys on a weeklong walk of over 100 miles.

in three West African countries and interviewed more than 150 child miners. AP journalists watched as child-mined gold was bought by itinerant traders. And, through interviews and customs documents, The AP tracked gold from these mines on a 3,000-mile journey to Mali's capital city and then on to Switzerland, where it enters the world market.

Most bush mines are little more than holes in the ground, but there are thousands of them in Africa, South America and Asia. Together, they produce a fifth of the world's gold, according to United Nations reports. And wherever you find bush mines, these reports and mine experts say, you also find child labor.

If you wear a gold ring on your finger, write with a gold-tipped fountain pen or have gold in your investment portfolio, chances are good your life is connected to these children.

One of them is Saliou Diallo. He's 12 years old and less than 4 feet tall.

Saliou and his friends, Hassane Diallo, 12 (no relation), and Momodou Ba, 13, dropped out of school about three years ago when the village's only teacher left. They were living in mud huts with their families in Guinea, and went to work in their fathers' fields.

Last year, as the price of gold hit a 26-year high, a thin stranger approached. The boys



Rebecca Blackwell • AP

Saliou Diallo watches a gold buyer use a blow torch to vaporize mercury from the pea-sized lump of gold Saliou has brought to sell for his boss.

say he offered to take them to a place across the border in Senegal, where money hid inside the ground.

The spike in gold prices over the past seven years has lured increasing numbers of poor people, including child recruits, to bush mines. The United Nations labor agency estimates there are now 100,000 to 250,000 child gold miners in West Africa alone.

Saliou and his friends say the recruiter promised them \$2 a day. It sounded like a lot of money to children who had none.

In a region where 4-year-olds haul water and tend goats, boys of Saliou's age are expected to earn money for their families. Senegal prohibits anyone under 18 from doing hazardous work, and mining is among the most hazardous of jobs. However, the laws are seldom enforced.

Saliou packed his clothes, hoisted the bundle on top of his head and slipped away before daybreak. The recruiter led the three boys on a weeklong walk of over 100

miles. The straps of their plastic sandals dug into their heels until their feet swelled.

The boys heard the mine before they saw it, the sound of hammers pounding rocks into dust. The tall grass had been cut away. In its place rose hundreds of cone-shaped huts with roofs of brown grass. Tenkoto, once a pinprick on the landscape, had swelled into a mining village of 10,000. The AP found the boys there, living in huts

where they slept squeezed between adults on bare mattresses.

Each night before falling asleep, Saliou struggles to remember a verse from the Quran. He doesn't know what the words mean, but he had been told they would protect him.

Six miles from the village, men and teenage boys, some as young as 14, clamber down mine shafts 30 to 50 meters deep. The shafts are as narrow as manholes. Younger teens yank the rocks up with a pulley.

Saliou's boss buys bags of dirt from these men. The men have already combed it for gold, but usually a few crumbs remain. Boys like Saliou and his friends take turns at different jobs to coax the crumbs out.

They steer wheelbarrows of dirt over rutted paths. They pound the dirt with wooden posts for hours until it is as fine as flour. They wash the dirt in a large sieve-like box. Then they squat next

Toiling for Gold

Just handling mercury is treacherous; breathing its fumes is worse.

to a plastic tub, pour mercury into their bare hands, and rub it into the mud like a woman scrubbing laundry on rocks.

Mercury attracts gold like a magnet. But it also attacks the brain and can cause tremors, speech impediments, retardation, kidney damage and blindness.

Saliou's tub of dirt yields a silvery ball the size of an M&M. He hands it to his boss, who lifts up his shades to eye it. The man heats the ball over a charcoal fire to make the mercury evaporate, leaving behind a fleck of gold.

Just handling mercury is treacherous; breathing its fumes is worse. The children don't know that. They crowd for a glimpse of the gold as its silvery husk slowly vaporizes.

At mealtime, Saliou rinses his hands in water from a muddy pool where the mercury run-off was dumped. He scoops a mouthful of rice and licks his hand clean.

Evenings, Saliou's boss weaves his way between huts where women boil cabbage and nurse sweaty babies. The speck of gold the boys squeezed from the dirt is in the pocket of his jeans.

A gold merchant waits in a dark shack, his metal scales propped on a wooden table.

The buyers of bush gold are distinguishable from the miners by their tidy clothes and scales. Each one offers the same price for 1 gram of gold – roughly \$19. (There are 31 grams in a troy ounce,



Rebecca Blackwell • AP

Momodou Ba, from Guinea, pours liquid mercury into his hand as he prepares to use it to extract gold particles.

the standard weight used to measure gold.)

The buyers lend the miners money to purchase tools and bags of untreated dirt. In return, they get first crack at the gold. Saliou's boss says he is loyal to a merchant named Yacouba Doumbia, who gave him his startup capital.

Doumbia says it takes him more than a month to collect nearly 1 kilogram (about 32 ounces) of gold. He hides it in pockets sewn into his clothes.

The gold leaves at dawn on the back of a motorcycle. It travels four days through the grasslands to Bamako, the capital of Mali. Couriers say the journey is dangerous. Some carry guns. They take back roads, never the highway.

The motorcycles pour into the city from hundreds of bush mines along the crooked spine of the gold reef. There the

gold funnels into five squalid offices near a central square.

Bush buyers like Doumbia say they are nearly all loyal to one of five Bamako gold barons: Fantamadi Traore, Fabou Traore, Sadou Diallo, Boubacar Camara and El Haj Moussa Diaby, whose business is now handled by his son, Fode Diaby.

Doumbia gets his buying money and his motorcycle from Fantamadi Traore. They come from the same dusty Malian village, which means they are as good as family.

Traore says he has recruited over 70 buyers, most from his village. They have

blanketed Tenkoto.

"All the gold that leaves our village is headed to Mali to this one man," says Bambo Cissokho, the village chief of Tenkoto.

Traore's buyers pull into his muddy alleyway in Bamako and hand over the gold, sealed like spices in Ziploc bags. The weight of the gold and the name of each buyer is marked on a Post-It note. Then gold from various buyers is melted together in an outdoor furnace and poured into a mold to form an uneven bar.

The AP watched buyers take the Post-It notes upstairs to Traore's office, where dirty curtains cover the windows. There the 50-year-old bearded man chews kola nuts while a TV flashes the price of gold on the world market.

Toiling for Gold



Rebecca Blackwell • AP

Massire Sijnate, 16, descends into a gold mine shaft where he will sit about 30 meters (90 feet) deep, ensuring that the rope used for hauling up sacks of mined earth doesn't catch on the narrow shaft walls.

Traore's men pay the buyers from a safe stacked with West African francs and U.S. dollars. The price for gold from Tenkoto is \$22.40 a gram – about \$3.40 more than the buyers paid the miners. A courier making a typical delivery of one kilogram receives \$22,400, of which \$3,400 is profit.

The buyers head back to the mine with their hidden pockets full of cash to buy

more gold. The pattern is repeated over and over at bush mines where children work all over West Africa.

Children travel from mine to mine, moving with the gold. Six months after Saliou and his friends arrived in Tenkoto, their boss decided the mine was nearly played out. So he and the boys walked for more than a week, crossed the Senegal border, and arrived at another mine in

Hamdalaye, Mali. There, the gold the boys mine is sold to a different buyer. The gold then makes the same journey by motorcycle to Bamako, this time to another of the five main traders, Sadou Diallo.

The traders, in turn, send the uneven gold bars by courier across Bamako's clogged roads to a wretched orange building. Inside, the couriers head for Room 207.

The walls are stained with

Toiling for Gold

Asked about child labor, Ba got testy. “We don’t live in the bush, so we have nothing to do with child labor,”

handprints, the hallway smells faintly of urine, and drapes dark with dirt block out the light. The filth obscures the fact that millions of dollars course through the office of Abou Ba.

In Mali and Senegal, there are hundreds of itinerant gold buyers and five major gold traders. But there is only one man with the paperwork, money and connections to make a business of exporting bush gold to Europe. An AP review of five years of Malian customs documents confirms that only Ba regularly takes bush gold out of the country.

All five traders said they sell all their gold to Ba, also known as Bah.

“He has the means to take it out. We don’t,” said Fabou Traore, who sells roughly 80 kilograms (about 2,570 ounces) of gold to Ba per month.

“For a long time, he’s worked with the white people,” said Sadou Diallo, who showed a recent receipt from Ba for \$194,000 worth of gold.

“There is no choice,” said Fantamadi Traore.

Taking gold out of Mali is expensive. Government monitors assay the gold and charge \$11 per kilogram, and a 6 percent tax is added at the airport. From the bush to the world market, an ounce of pure gold increases in price by about \$380, a margin that strains each middleman along the route.

In an interview, Ba acknowledged that all his gold comes from bush mines, including from the Tenkoto and Hamdalaye mines where The AP saw Saliou and many other children working.



Rebecca Blackwell • AP

A gold bar rests on a pricing sheet in the offices of gold exporter Abou Ba.

Asked about child labor, Ba got testy. “We don’t live in the bush, so we have nothing to do with child labor,” the 50-year-old trader said, the comment translated from his native French. He has never visited the mines, he added. “We just buy gold.”

Ba told the AP that nearly all of the gold he buys is exported to Switzerland. Later, one of his Swiss customers presented a written statement from Ba saying he sells 90 percent of his gold to buyers in other West African countries. Mali customs logs, however, have no record of such exports. When the AP sought clarification, Ba, stood by his original statement.

“We do not work with any African country,” he wrote. “All of our merchandise is sold in Switzerland.”

Since at least 2003, Ba and his associates have carried bush gold in suitcases and packages to Geneva on commercial flights from the Bamako airport, usually making the trip several times a month.

Mali customs logs show he normally takes three to five

kilograms at a time – worth as much as \$86,000 to \$143,000 at today’s prices.

“I can assure you that what he declares is only a fraction of what is going out,” said inspector Bassirou Keita at the Mali Department of Deeds and Surveying, which oversees tax revenue from mining. “If I am wrong, you can cut off my head and put it on a platter.”

In response, Ba wrote: “I make my declarations. I pay my taxes.”

The Mali customs records say that between January 2003 and March 2008, Ba exported over 800 kilograms of gold (more than 2,140 troy pounds) to Switzerland. That’s roughly the weight of a Volkswagen bug and worth up to \$22 million at today’s prices, depending on purity.

In Geneva, Ba said, he drops off the gold bars at a Swiss customs counter inside the international airport.

Once in Switzerland, Ba’s gold enters the nebulous world of Swiss banking and precious metals trading, where secrecy is enshrined in both tradition and law. Swiss customs records, like its banking

Toiling for Gold

transactions, are confidential.

But customs records in Mali show that since 2003, 96 percent of Ba's exports have been purchased by two small Geneva companies. Decafin SA bought nearly one-fifth of it, worth up to \$4 million at today's prices. The rest, worth up to \$18 million, was bought by Monetary Institute, run by former Decafin executive Judah Leon Morali.

"I am just a little guy," Morali said. "I buy some grams, some kilos, from here and there." Everyone buys from Ba, he said, and if other company names don't appear it's because some transactions are unrecorded.

Morali said he visited Ba's office in Bamako and "never saw a child working." However, he acknowledged, "I've never been to these mines."

If they employ children, he asked, where are the written work contracts? Primitive bush mines, of course, do not have work contracts.

"There's no work contract with any children? Voila!" Morali said, dismissing the matter.

Decafin, the second importer, is a family business located on Geneva's exclusive rue du Rhone. Marc Arazi, its principal officer, first denied buying from Ba. But later, one of the company's attorneys, Marc Oederlin, said Decafin's business relationship with Ba is undeniable and that Arazi acknowledges it.

The lawyer said Decafin is concerned about child labor but has no legal responsibility to investigate how the gold it imports is mined. He added that Decafin trusts Ba and is certain his gold is not the product of child labor.



Rukmini Callimachi • AP

Tenen Sacko, 11, pauses while panning for gold, at the Kansogolenfa mine in the Fatoya region of Guinea.

Earlier this year, Decafin unsuccessfully sued The AP in Switzerland to prevent its name from being published in this story, claiming it would unfairly damage the company's reputation. In court papers, Decafin claimed its gold could not be mined by children in Senegal and Mali, where the AP had observed child gold miners, because Ba gets it from northern Guinea. Arazi visited the area in 2005, Decafin said, and if he had

seen underage workers he would not have done business with Ba.

The reef of gold stretches 70 miles through northern Guinea. There, hundreds of bush mines cluster around the towns of Siguiri and Kankan.

A United Nations mining expert who inspected the region a few months after Arazi's visit estimated that 10 percent to 20 percent of its thousands of mine workers were children. The report also

Toiling for Gold

documented fatal collapses of poorly constructed mine shafts, nonexistent sanitation and extreme poverty.

An AP reporter who visited in April saw hundreds of child miners. The ore is richer here, so the children do not extract the gold with mercury. Instead, they stand in muddy pits under a blistering sun and pan it from the mud.

Many are girls who begin as apprentice panners as young as 4 and become full-time workers by age 10. Teenage boys work the shafts, descending with flashlights tied around their necks to hack ore from the rock. Lancei Conde, the regional administrator of Kankan, said children work at all the bush mines in Guinea.

An army of gold buyers stalk the Guinea mines. Most are loyal to one of three major traders – Abdoulaye Nabe, El Haj Oumar Berete, and the Kante brothers (Sakia and Sekouba) who operate out of the towns of Siguiri, Kankan and Kouroussa.

The traders told The AP that they sell some of their gold to a dealer in the Guinea capital of Conakry, but pack most of it into cars or motorcycles bound for Ba's office in Bamako. They prefer to deal with Ba, the traders said, because he pays promptly in U.S. dollars.

Sakia Kante displayed a receipt from Ba, dated April 5, for 7,544 grams (241 ounces) of gold, for which Ba paid nearly \$200,000.

The Swiss importers, Monetary and Decafin, said they turn the gold they buy from Ba over to Swiss smelters.

According to industry experts, smelters melt gold

from all over the world together in large vats to mold standard bars or strips. So the gold mined by children is mixed in with the rest of the batch.

The smelters credit Decafin and Monetary with the quantity of gold they supply. The two importers are paid when the bars and strips are sold through Swiss banks.

Decafin's gold goes to one of the world's largest smelters, Valcambi SA, according to Olivia Berger, a lawyer for the importer. The gold is then sold through the Swiss banking

The trail of gold that begins in Saliou's mercury-tainted hands ends with bullion in bank vaults and with necklaces, rings and bracelets sold by jewelry retailers all over the world.

giant, UBS AG, she said.

Valcambi chief executive Michael Mesaric said his company would not want to "service or even accept gold from a mine where children work." UBS spokeswoman Rebeca Garcia declined to say much about Decafin, citing Swiss banking secrecy laws. However, in its lawsuit against The AP, Decafin said its metal account was closed by UBS as a result of The AP's inquiries.

The smelter for the other importer, Monetary, is unclear. Morali, Monetary's founder, said he used to send his gold to Metalor

Technologies SA, a large refiner and precious metals dealer, but switched last year to another smelter that he declined to identify.

"You want to understand the gold trail?" Morali asked. "It comes from Africa and it arrives in the Swiss banks. That's all you need to know."

Metalor denied it had done any business with Monetary. But Metalor acknowledged it did import bush gold directly from Ba in 1999 and 2000, according to Nawal Ait-Hocine, head of Metalor's legal and compliance division. She did not say why it stopped. Mali customs records show Ba also supplied gold to Metalor in 2003, but Ait-Hocine said she could find no record of it.

Metalor conducts "extensive due diligence" to make sure its gold comes from legitimate sources, Ait-Hocine said, but "a company can never be 100 percent sure."

The trail of gold that begins in Saliou's mercury-tainted hands ends with bullion in bank vaults and with necklaces, rings and bracelets sold by jewelry retailers all over the world.

Precisely which products contain child-mined gold, no one can say for sure. Unlike a diamond, gold does not keep its identity on its tortuous journey from mine to market. It passes through 10 or more hands. And when it is melted, usually several times, and mixed with gold from other sources, its address is effectively erased.

Jewelers and retailers that buy gold through UBS include Compagnie Financiere Richemont SA, the firm that makes Montblanc pens, Piaget's luxury watches and the jewelry of Cartier and Van

Toiling for Gold

Cleef & Arpels. Gold processed by Metalor has been used by these brands as well as in discount jewelry sold at Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and luxury jewelry sold by Tiffany & Co.

These companies expressed concern about child labor and frustration that they can't certify their products are free of it. Because bush mines, where child labor is ubiquitous, supply a fifth of the world's gold, the companies realize their supply lines may well be compromised.

"I can't overemphasize how complex this problem is," said Michael Kowalski, Tiffany's chairman. "There is a desire to deal with this. But the question is how?"

Tiffany joined with other jewelers and mining companies in 2005 to create the Council for Responsible Jewellery Practices, which forbids child mining. Major refiners, including Metalor, have signed on, as has Cartier. But to date, the council has found no way to enforce compliance.

"Home Depot can track every 2-by-4 to its forest of origin," said economist Michael Conroy, who has written a book on industry supply chains. "You can track every bag of coffee, every diamond to a specific diamond field. But for gold there's nothing."

After six months of work, Saliou is paid \$40. He was promised \$2 a day, which would come to \$360. But his boss deducts money for tea, rice and rent, and Saliou doesn't know how much these things cost.

"If I have one wish, it's that I might someday have a little bit of money," he says.

"Sometimes I dream that one day I'll own something made of gold."

He and the other children scour the ground for mud spilled by the adults. It has already been processed for gold once, but they wash it and pour mercury over it again, hoping to find some gold they don't have to give their boss.

They find a flake. It weighs 0.2 grams. They will get \$1.95 each.

The boys spend their money on packets of paracetamol, a painkiller sold

After six months of work, Saliou is paid \$40. He was promised \$2 a day, which would come to \$360. But his boss deducts money for tea, rice and rent,...

at the village market. They pop the drug after 10-hour work days to ease the ache in their backs and chests.

The dirt floors of their huts are littered with pill wrappers.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is based on interviews with the children, their employers, the merchants who buy their gold and numerous experts, conducted over 11 months in Senegal, Mali, Guinea and Switzerland.

The AP first met Saliou at the Tenkoto mine in Senegal in September, where a reporter spent a week watching him and other 12- and 13-year-old boys use mercury to treat gold. Details of his journey to the mine were culled from multiple

interviews with Saliou, his friends and the adults who accompanied them. Scenes and quotes were observed by the reporter.

The AP returned to the mine in October and followed Saliou's boss and the children on a three-day journey, first by bus and then by foot, to another mine across the Malian border. In Mali, the AP spent several days watching Saliou and his 13-year-old friend work at the new mine. At both mines, the reporter observed as the children's boss sold the gold to a local merchant. On several occasions, she was also present when the children sold the gold to the merchants themselves.

In April, the reporter visited five remote mines in northern Guinea and interviewed dozens of children working there, as well as their parents and employers. Through interviews with the merchants, the AP tracked the sale of the gold from the mines in Senegal, Mali and Guinea to Abou Ba in Bamako. The reporter interviewed Ba by telephone, by questions sent via fax and in a sit-down interview at his office in Bamako. Customs records supported his statements that nearly all his gold is exported to two Swiss import firms. Officials at the firms answered questions by phone, by email and in person.

The AP also conducted interviews with refineries, banks, jewelers and retailers that may be receiving the gold. From Africa and Europe, it spoke with gold experts, industry watchdogs, government authorities and United Nations officials.

December 29, 2008

Child maids now being exported to US

By RUKMINI CALLIMACHI • Associated Press Writer

IRVINE, Calif. (AP)



Ric Francis • AP

The house where Shyima Hall was forced to work as an unpaid maid in Irvine, Calif.

Late at night, the neighbors saw a little girl at the kitchen sink of the house next door.

They watched through their window as the child rinsed plates under the open faucet. She wasn't much taller than the counter and the soapy water swallowed her slender arms. To put the

dishes away, she climbed on a chair.

But she was not the daughter of the couple next door doing chores. She was their maid.

Shyima was 10 when a wealthy Egyptian couple brought her from a poor village in northern Egypt to work in their California home. She awoke before

dawn and often worked past midnight to iron their clothes, mop the marble floors and dust the family's crystal. She earned \$45 a month working up to 20 hours a day. She had no breaks during the day and no days off.

The trafficking of children for domestic labor in the U.S. is an extension

The Slave Next Door



Amr Nabil • AP

Salwa Mahmoud, 53, holds a photo of her daughter Shyima. Shyima was 9 when she started working as a servant for an Egyptian family and was later taken by the same family to California where she endured 20 hour work days inside their posh home.

of an illegal but common practice in Africa. Families in remote villages send their daughters to work in cities for extra money and the opportunity to escape a dead-end life. Some girls work for free on the understanding that they will at least be better fed in the home of their employer.

The custom has led to the spread of trafficking, as well-to-do Africans accustomed to employing children immigrate to the U.S. Around one-third of the estimated 10,000 forced laborers in the United States are servants trapped behind the curtains of suburban homes, according to a study by the National Human Rights Center at the University of California

at Berkeley and Free the Slaves, a nonprofit group. No one can say how many are children, especially since their work can so easily be masked as chores.

Once behind the walls of gated communities like this one, these children never go to school. Unbeknownst to their neighbors, they live as modern-day slaves, just like Shyima, whose story is pieced together through court records, police transcripts and interviews.

“I’d look down and see her at 10, 11 – even 12 – at night,” said Shyima’s neighbor at the time, Tina Font. “She’d be doing the dishes. We didn’t put two and two together.”

Shyima cried when she found out she was going

to America in 2000. Her father, a bricklayer, had fallen ill a few years earlier, so her mother found a maid recruiter, signed a contract effectively leasing her daughter to the couple for 10 years and told Shyima to be strong.

For a year, Shyima, 9, worked in the Cairo apartment owned by Amal Motelib and Nasser Ibrahim. Every month, Shyima’s mother came to pick up her salary.

Tens of thousands of children in Africa, some as young as 3, are recruited every year to work as domestic servants. They are on call 24 hours a day and are often beaten if they make a mistake. Children are in demand because they

The Slave Next Door

They called her “shaghala,” or servant. Their five children called her “stupid.”

earn less than adults and are less likely to complain. In just one city – Casablanca – a 2001 survey by the Moroccan government found more than 15,000 girls under 15 working as maids.

The U.S. State Department found that over the past year, children have been trafficked to work as servants in at least 33 of Africa’s 53 countries. Children from at least 10 African countries were sent as maids to the U.S. and Europe. But the problem is so well hidden that authorities – including the U.N., Interpol and the State Department – have no idea how many child maids now work in the West.

“In most homes, these girls are not allowed to use so much as the same spoon as the rest of the family,” said Hany Helal, the Cairo-based director of the Egyptian Organization for Child Rights.

By the time the Ibrahims decided to leave, Shyima’s family had taken several loans from them for medical bills. The Ibrahims said they could only be repaid by sending Shyima to work for them in the U.S. A friend posed as her father, and the U.S. embassy in Cairo issued her a six-month tourist visa.

She arrived at Los Angeles International Airport on Aug. 3, 2000, according to court documents. The family brought her back to their spacious five-bedroom, two-story home, decorated in the style of a Tuscan villa with a fountain of two angels spouting water through a conch. She was told to sleep



Ric Francis • AP

The windowless garage where Shyima Hall lived.

in the garage.

It had no windows and was neither heated nor air-conditioned. Soon after she arrived, the garage’s only light bulb went out. The Ibrahims didn’t replace it. From then on, Shyima lived in the dark.

“Nothing was ever clean enough for her. She would come in and say, ‘This is dirty,’ or ‘You didn’t do this right,’ or ‘You ruined the food,’” said Shyima.

She was told to call them Madame Amal and Hajj Nasser, terms of respect. They called her “shaghala,” or servant. Their five children called her “stupid.”

While the family slept, she ironed the school outfits of the Ibrahims’ 5-year-old twin sons. She woke them,

combed their hair, dressed them and made them breakfast. Then she ironed clothes and fixed breakfast for the three girls, including Heba, who at 10 was the same age as the family’s servant.

Neither Ibrahim nor his wife worked, and they slept late. When they awoke, they yelled for her to make tea.

While they ate breakfast watching TV, she cleaned the palatial house. She vacuumed each bedroom, made the beds, dusted the shelves, wiped the windows, washed the dishes and did the laundry.

Her employers were not satisfied, she said. “Nothing was ever clean enough for her. She would come in and say, ‘This is dirty,’ or ‘You didn’t do this right,’ or ‘You ruined the food,’” said Shyima.

She started wetting her bed. Her sheets stank. So did her oversized T-shirt and the other hand-me-downs she wore.

While doing the family’s

The Slave Next Door



Ric Francis • AP

Shyima Hall, 19, discusses her domestic enslavement Tuesday, Sept. 16, 2008, in Beaumont, Calif.

laundry, she slipped her own clothes into the load. Madame slapped her. “She told me my clothes were dirtier than theirs. That I wasn’t allowed to clean mine there,” she said.

She washed her clothes in a bucket in the garage. She hung them to dry outside, next to the trash cans.

When the couple went out, she waited until she heard the car pull away and then she sat down. She sat with her back straight because she was afraid her clothes would dirty the upholstery.

It never occurred to her to run away.

“I thought this was normal,” she said.

If you could fly the

garage where Shyima slept 7,000 miles to the sandy alleyway where her Egyptian family now lives, it would pass for the best home in the neighborhood.

The garage’s walls are made of concrete instead of hand-patted bricks. Its roof doesn’t leak. Its door shuts all the way. Shyima’s mother and her 10 brothers and sisters live in a two-bedroom house with uneven walls and a flaking ceiling. None of them have ever had a bed to themselves, much less a whole room. At night, bodies cover the sagging couches.

Shown a snapshot of the windowless garage, Shyima’s mother in the coastal town of Agami made a clucking sound of

approval.

“It’s much cleaner than where many people here sleep,” said Helal, the child rights advocate. He explains that Shyima’s treatment in the Ibrahim home is considered normal – even good – by Egyptian standards.

Even though many child maids are physically abused, child labor is rarely prosecuted because the work isn’t considered strenuous. Many employers even see themselves as benefactors.

“There is a sense that children should work to help their family, but also that they are being given an opportunity,” said Mark Lagon, the director of the U.S. State Department’s Office to Monitor and

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Combat Trafficking in Persons.

That's especially the case for well-off families who transport their child servants to Western countries.

In 2006, a U.S. district court in Michigan sentenced a Cameroonian man to 17 years in prison for bringing a 14-year-old girl from his country to work as his unpaid maid. That same year, a Moroccan couple was sentenced to home confinement for forcing their 12-year-old Moroccan niece to work grueling hours caring for their baby.

In Germantown, Md., a Nigerian couple used their daughter's passport to bring in a 14-year-old Nigerian girl as their maid. She worked for them for five years before escaping in 2001. In Germany, France, the Netherlands and England, African immigrants have been arrested for forcing children from their home countries to work as their servants.

In several of these cases, the employers argued that they took the children with the parents' permission. The Cameroonian girl's mother flew to Detroit to testify in court against her daughter, saying the girl was ungrateful for the good life her employers had provided her.

Shyima's mother, Salwa Mahmoud, said her father believed she would have better opportunities in America.

"I didn't want her to travel but our family's condition dictated that she had to go," explained Mahmoud, a squat, round-

faced woman with calloused hands and feet. She is missing two front teeth because she couldn't afford a dentist.

"If she had stayed here in Egypt, she would have been ordinary," said Awatef, Shyima's older sister. "Just like us."

On April 3, 2002, an anonymous caller phoned the California Department of Social Services to report that a young girl was living inside the garage of 28 Pacific Grove.

A few days later, Nasser

The Cameroonian girl's mother flew to Detroit to testify in court against her daughter, saying the girl was ungrateful for the good life her employers had provided her.

Ibrahim opened the door to a detective from the Irvine Police Department. Asked if any children lived there beside his own, he first said no, then yes – "a distant relative." He said he had "not yet" enrolled her in school. She did "chores – just like the other kids," according to the police transcript.

Shyima was upstairs cleaning when Ibrahim came to get her. "He told me that I was not allowed to say anything," said Shyima. "That if I said anything I would never see my parents

again."

When police searched the house, they turned up several home videos showing Shyima at work. They seized the contract signed by Shyima's illiterate parents.

Asked by police if anyone other than his immediate family lived in the house, Eid, one of the twins, said: "Hummm ... Yeah ... Her name is Shyima," according to the transcript. "She uh ... She works – she works for us at the house, like, she cleans up the dishes and stuff like that."

Twelve-year-old Heba got flustered: "Yeah. She's uh – my – uh – How do I say this? Uh ... My dad's ... Oh, wait, like ... She's like my cousin, but – She's my dad's daughter's friend. Oops! The other way. Okay, I'm confused."

Heba eventually admitted that Shyima had lived with the family for three years in Egypt and in California.

The police put Shyima in a squad car. They noted her hands were red and caked with dead, hard-looking skin.

For months Shyima lied to investigators, saying what the Ibrahims had told her to say.

She went without sleep for days at a stretch. She was put on four different types of medication. She moved from foster home to foster home. Her mood swings alarmed her guardians. In school for the first time, she struggled to learn to read.

Investigators arranged for her to speak to her parents. She told them she

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felt like a “nobody” working for the Ibrahims and wanted to come home. Her father yelled at her.

“They kept telling me that they’re good people,” Shyima recounted in a recent interview. “That it’s my fault. That because of what I did my mom was going to have a heart attack.”

Three years ago, she broke off contact with her family. Since then she has refused to speak Arabic. She can no longer communicate in her mother tongue.

During the 2006 trial, the Ibrahims described Shyima as part of their family. They included proof of a trip she took with the family to Disneyland. Shyima’s lawyer pointed out that the 10-year-old wasn’t allowed on the rides – she was there to carry the bags.

The couple’s lawyers collected photographs of the home where Shyima grew up, including close-ups of the feces-stained squat toilet and of Shyima’s sisters washing clothes in a bucket.

In her final plea, Madame Amal told the judge it would be unfair to separate her from her children. Enraged, Shyima, then 17, told the court she hadn’t seen her family in years.

“Where was their loving when it came to me? Wasn’t I a human being too? I felt like I was nothing when I was with them,” she sobbed.

The couple pleaded guilty to all charges, including forced labor and slavery. They were ordered to pay \$76,000, the amount Shyima would have earned at the minimum wage. The

sentence: Three years in federal prison for Ibrahim, 22 months for his wife, and then deportation for both. Their lawyers declined to comment for this story.

“I don’t think that there is any other term you could use than modern-day slavery,” said Bob Schoch, the special agent in charge for Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Los Angeles, in describing Shyima’s situation.

Shyima was adopted last year by Chuck and Jenny Hall of Beaumont,

“Where was their loving when it came to me? Wasn’t I a human being too? I felt like I was nothing when I was with them,” she sobbed.

Calif. The family lives near Disneyland, where they have taken her a half-dozen times. She graduated from high school this summer after retaking her exit exam and hopes to become a police officer.

Shyima, now 19, has a list of assigned chores. She wears purple eyeshadow, has a boyfriend and frequently updates her profile on MySpace. Her hands are neatly manicured.

But in her closet, she keeps a box of pictures of her parents and her brothers and sisters. “I don’t look at them because it makes me cry,” she said. “How could

they? They’re my parents.”

When her father died last year, her family had no way of reaching her.

EPILOGUE: On a recent afternoon in Cairo, Madame Amal walked into the lobby of her apartment complex wearing designer sunglasses and a chic scarf.

After nearly two years in a prison cell in California, she’s living once more in the spacious apartment where Shyima first worked as her maid. The apartment is adorned in the style of a Louis XIV palace, with ornately carved settees, gold-leaf vases and life-sized portraits of her and her husband.

She did not agree to be interviewed for this story.

Before the door closed behind her, a little girl slipped in carrying grocery bags. She wore a shabby T-shirt. Her small feet slapped the floor in loose flip-flops. Her eyes were trained on the ground.

She looked to be around 9 years old.

EDITOR’S NOTE: *This story is based on interviews in Los Angeles, Irvine and Beaumont, Calif., and in Cairo and Agami, Egypt, in September and October. In addition to interviews with Shyima, her mother and nine of her brothers and sisters, the AP also interviewed her neighbors in Irvine, law enforcement officials and the lawyer who prosecuted her case. Quotes and scenes were observed by the reporter or described by Shyima and confirmed in police transcripts and court records.*



Rukmini Callimachi

Born: June 25, 1973, Bucharest, Romania.

Rukmini Callimachi began reporting out of Dakar, Senegal, as one of the West African correspondents for The Associated Press in late 2006.

Before that, she spent a year in New Orleans documenting the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. She joined the AP in Portland, Ore., in 2003. She began her journalism career as a freelancer in New Delhi, India.

Her reporting has won the Sidney Hillman Newspaper Award, the Templeton Religion Story of the Year award and two Associated Press Managing Editors' awards.

Born in Bucharest, Romania, Callimachi graduated with honors from Dartmouth College and completed her master's in linguistics at Exeter College, Oxford. Her poetry has been published in more than 20 journals, including *The American Scholar*. In 2000, she co-led the Royal Geographical Society of London's expedition to Tibet.