AGAINST DEVELOPMENT TIME: Idle Young Women in Kampala

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Time penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power.

—Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (1977)

However, the Ganda totally rejected the idea of "keeping time." They carried on with their lives as if there was no hour, no minute. After all, the world would be around the following day.

—Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi, *A Girl Is a Body of Water* (2020)

On a hot, humid afternoon in Bwaise, a sprawling slum on the outskirts of Kampala, Uganda's capital city, I walked with three teenage women along the banks of the sewage canals that flood the area during the rainy seasons. The breeze off the canal gave some respite from the sun, so we slackened our pace. We were headed from their mother's place, where they spent some of their days, toward "the home," a residential Catholic charity home, where they sometimes slept in the evenings. Run by a man the women referred to as Reverend Father

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and funded by a Midwestern U.S. church that claimed in promotional materials to "radically change the direction" of the lives of "girls in the sex trade," the home functioned as a vocational school. It sought to provide its eight residents with economic alternatives to sex work. Its rooms were empty of furniture except for a few single mattresses spread over the floors and the sewing machine tables upon which residents were learning various crafts. In the middle of the home's bare sitting room sat a huge, haphazard pile of black leather sandals that bore the sheen of novice cobbling.

The mountain of shoes was growing by the day because the sandals were unsellable, Reverend Father lamented when I spoke with him one afternoon. But, he reasoned, whether they or any other amateurishly produced handcrafts scattered about the home would generate any income for their makers was less important than the home's true mission, to "put the girls to work so they would not remain idle," as he put it.

Idling is a distinctly gendered accusation in Kampala. Used to describe young men, idling is associated with loitering, gambling in public, and disturbing public peace. From *oku-tayaayaya* (to idle, hang around) comes the Luganda word for "thugs," *abayaye*. Used to characterize young women, however, idling links unemployment to unsavory forms of transactional sex. For example, the "Idle and Disorderly" section of the Penal Code Act defines idling among women as, simply, "being a prostitute" (Tamale 2016, 17). To be young, female, and idle in Kampala means to be either engaging in overt forms of sex work or to appear at risk for doing so.

As it turned out, keeping poor, urban young women busy to prevent them from selling sex, or even having sex, was a major prerogative for many Ugandan policymakers, educators, and NGO officers I encountered between 2009 and 2019 as part of a project following the movement in international development to invest in adolescent girls as the silver-bullet solution to global poverty. As one officer for a multinational NGO's girl-specific microloan scheme explained, her program aimed "to make girls busy so they don't get lazy and louse around, because if they louse around they get problems. Like, if I'm lousing around, then I will think about Tom." *About Tom?* I'd pressed. Raising her eyebrows salaciously, the loan officer continued, "Tom will only want that one thing from me, so that once he gets it, he will never think of me again." The loan officer meant that if girls are bored, they will have sex.

I heard commentary about the unruly sexual appetites of idle young women in public venues as well. During a speech to an audience of two hundred government and NGO officers, for example, Uganda's commissioner of youth framed the problem in macroeconomic terms. "We cannot afford to lose 737 billion [US

$295 million] worth of productivity because of something that we can handle," he explained. "You see, some of these women in the city are not working. So they start *kaboozi* [slang for sex] early." In a gruff whisper, he continued, "*Because they are idle*! In the evening, they go to bed at 7, and so they start entertaining themselves. And as they do that, they produce many vulnerable children who litter the streets!" Hypothesizing about what goes on in the dark in places like Bwaise, the commissioner beseeched his colleagues to keep urban women busy as a matter of national economy. Without using the words "population control," he positioned young urban women at the center of a narrative in which this audience was well-versed: Uganda was on the cusp of a "demographic explosion," which, left uncontrolled, would destroy the country's economy (P. Asiimwe 2014). While centered in this narrative, young women were not the protagonists. Rather, their sexuality—left unchecked by unoccupied time—made them *an*tagonists, opposition to be overcome in Uganda's battle against its ticking "population time bomb." With more proximate forms of family planning too politicized to promote,[1] idleness became a convenient target. Whether framed in terms of temporality, as in the feeling of being in time (bored, or without an occupation), or in terms of time-passing, as in how time was spent (e.g., in romantic embrace), educators, NGO officers, and government officials spoke of idleness as sex-inducing, a problem both moral and economic.

Vocational skills-training programs like Reverend Father's appeared to offer solutions to the problem of idle young women. In a context where unemployment is the rule, small, self-run businesses were widely considered the only option for poor urban women to make money outside of sex work (or emigration), so vocational schools trained young women for feminized occupations such as sewing, hairdressing, and catering, with the vague hope that women would start their own businesses upon leaving the program. The hope was vague because it was unlikely that markets already saturated with seamstresses, salons, and food sellers, as Kampala's poor neighborhoods were, would support more women entering those fields (G. Asiimwe 2023). As it turned out, in this context of labor oversupply, whether vocational training would eventually yield incomes for trainees was beside the point. Practitioners seemed far more interested in the underlying temporal disciplines these programs offered by controlling where and how young women spent their time.

Like capitalist time-discipline that habituated factory workers to the difference between work time and leisure time (Thompson 1967), vocational training has been envisioned as working on the body and spirit through temporal discipline (Fogarty-Valenzuela 2022; Srivastava 2022). Contemporary vocational

education models originated in early industrial Britain with the mandate to make poor students useful for factory labor by ridding their bodies and minds of any propensity for idleness (Ahmed 2019). Yet, in Kampala, there were no formal jobs to absorb trained students, so policymakers and practitioners promoted vocational education toward other ends. Rather than groom young women to clock in and out on the factory floor, vocational training would attune them, in body and soul, to the busyness of small business, to the entrepreneurial tempos of constant self-improvement (Freeman 2014). In this sense, busying young women with sewing and cobbling practice would not only prevent them from sex by occupying their hours and days but it would also channel their libidinal energies into their work, and into aspirations for future work. After all, a vocation is more than a paying job. It is a calling, a "feeling of suitability for a particular occupation,"[2] marked by the direction of interests and embodied skills toward specialized forms of labor.

In this vision, vocational training would "temporalize" (Munn 1992, 104) young women to what I call *development time*, a specific rhythm of capitalist worker-citizenship that rewards busyness as evidence of productivity while deferring capacity to understand productivity's ends, or whether material conditions have improved. Development time is related to what critics have long observed—that development, oriented toward a "singular modernity yet to come," is an anticipatory regime (Scherz 2013, 625; see also Adams, Murphy, and Clarke 2009; Ferguson 1994, 2006; Green 2012; Smith 2008). Development's anticipatory temporalities, whether macroeconomic or "apocalyptic" (Ferguson 2006, 191), render the near future, such as the years following graduation from vocational training, "a kind of hiatus, whose intelligibility is explicitly in abeyance" (Guyer 2007, 414). Development time offers a way to think about the temporalization of anticipatory regimes in the body, in the present, as rhythms of consistent production and constant restraint—a form of submission and control "assessed at the level of our every move" (Deleuze 1992). At Reverend Father's home, for example, residents appeared to have been properly attuned to development time because they had produced a mountain of sandals. That the sandals were unsellable was a dilemma for the future; the women had been kept busy enough in the meantime.

However, as I will argue, amid institutions and ideologies dedicated to their busyness, teenage women in Kampala still made plenty of time to idle—or, as they might say, to "lounge," to take their time. As they meandered along Bwaise's drainage canals, gossiped at the sewing tables, arranged romantic liaisons from their mobile phones, and danced along to the music videos streaming nonstop

from their televisions, they passed their time in alternating and spontaneous rhythms, some ticking with puckish potential and others marked by delicious languor. Crucially, these women did not and would not describe themselves as idlers, particularly given the term's negative connotations just described. But I repurpose—revalue—the term here to juxtapose the often leisurely, always changing rhythms of teenage women's everyday lives with the development projects that spoke about and sought to intervene upon their time.

In what follows, I interpret young Bwaise women's various temporal practices, gathered here under the banner of "idling," *against* development time—both in contrast and averse to it. I pay attention to the slowed, unpredictable rhythms of everyday life in Bwaise to bring the anticipatory crescendos of development time into relief. I also suggest that idling does more than expose development time's "cruel optimism" (Berlant 2011); it rejects it. To be sure, idling in Bwaise was neither organized nor directed toward specific ends, such as slowing down the vocational school's manufacturing line. Nor did Bwaise teenagers name their ways of passing and being in time as tactical efforts to resist. They did, however, give the impression that moving too quickly, too constantly, and too consistently violated appropriate rhythms for urban life. This temporal sensibility I came to appreciate only very slowly, over roughly fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork spent passing my days with a group of six young women in Bwaise—between 2012 and 2013, and then during return visits in 2015, 2017, and 2019. Once appreciated, I came to see idling both in contrast to development time and refusing its very premise—in this case, that young women should busy themselves and wait.

AGAINST: Juxtaposition, Opposition, Calibration

Juxtaposition is an analytic device central to the anthropological literature on time, which has typically used the slowness of local temporalities to bring the rapid and unabating rhythms of global capitalism into relief (see Bear 2016). Much of this literature has concentrated on people marginalized by political economic change who felt left behind, inert, or "stuck" (e.g., Hansen 2005; Mains 2007, 2012; Weiss 2009). According to this literature, young people coming of age in the globalization era proved especially vulnerable to feeling out-of-time because of the ways their developmental trajectory intersected with broader historical transformation (Cole and Durham 2007; Johnson-Hanks 2002); they experienced disjuncture in the "chronosystem" (Bronfenbrenner 1979). For young men in particular, economic restructuring had made employment and

marriage—adulthood—"elusive" (Durham and Solway 2017). Across the global south, globalization's "looming temporal order" (Sharma 2022, 45) was manifest in expectations that young men only become real men with waged incomes, and thus their time valuable only when remunerated. Later studies in this vein, still focused on the temporal malaise of young men, turned to the opportunities for solidarity-building, strategizing, and critical consciousness "passing" and "killing" time opened (Jeffrey 2010; Masquelier 2019; Ralph 2008). These studies interpreted young men's temporal practices across a spectrum of responses, from coping mechanism to mischievous agency to trenchant political critique of the temporal order that had delivered them their surfeit of time.[3]

This latter approach articulates with anthropological thinking on time that foregrounds "heterochrony," or the presence of contradictory or conflicting temporal frameworks in the same social setting (Bear 2014; Sharma 2014, 2022). Katherine Mason (2020, 860–61), for example, has shown how in rapidly urbanizing China "the drive toward individualism and self-cultivation" among the middle classes, which "packs private time full of productive activities," was "tempered by socialist and interpersonal expectations of slow togetherness." Mason argues that tempering constituted a labor of "temporal balancing," for which women, who guard and distribute their children's time, became especially responsible. Likewise, Hanna Garth (2019, 802–3) has argued that in contrast to the everyday hustle of survival characteristic of life under contemporary Cuban socialism, "commitments to relaxation" during Carnivale celebrations "are ways of upholding a particular set of temporal values . . . [they are] a political orientation and a way of insisting on what is valued and what must be maintained in the future." With attention to heterochrony, we see that people do not necessarily speed up to accommodate dominant temporal orders, nor do they always feel left behind for not doing so. Instead, they "balance," or calibrate, how they feel about and move through time—their temporalities.

Idling in Bwaise was, similarly, a commitment to rhythms that allowed for sociality, spontaneity, rest, and care. In this commitment, young Bwaise women refused—that is, responded creatively and critically to—development time. Oppositional or subversive temporal practices have become most visible to ethnographers when they are overtly organized "tactics," sometimes even helpfully named as such by one's interlocutors. Political efforts classically understood as foot-dragging have served as clear evidence that time is "an arena of creative action open to even the most historically disenfranchised groups" (Ahmann 2018, 165). But similar opportunities for creative action can emerge not just

from "time" but through temporality, even as these may prove more difficult to discern (and more dependent on ethnographic interpretation). Just as contestations over time involve who controls it, temporalities, Sarah Sharma (2014, 9) notes, "exist in a grid of temporal power relations." Temporalities, she explains, are "like continually broken clocks, they must be reset again and again. They are expected to recalibrate and fit into a larger temporal order" (Sharma 2014, 8). Note the phrase "expected to." Herein lie opportunities for creative, subversive action—for refusal—practiced in and through the temporal dimensions of subjectivity, perceptible in the movement of the body.

RHYTHMS OF REFUSAL

In framing idling as a temporal form of "refusal," I draw from formulations of the concept in Indigenous and Black feminist anthropology by Audra Simpson (2007, 2014, 2016), Savannah Shange (2019), Deborah Thomas (2024), and others. According to these theorists, refusal offers a way to "deliberate anew" about political struggle by foregrounding how ongoing coloniality and racism shape the material and ideological conditions that determine what people can be asked, or what they can say, or what they feel is worth articulating (Thomas 2024, 95). From this perspective, refusals happen amid forces that seek to capture, contain, discipline, and extract, forces whose claims to sovereignty may appear so total they cannot be spoken back to (that is, resisted), but the speaker doesn't care anyway (Simpson 2014). Refusals say no, but they might sometimes look like saying nothing (Weiss 2016), or like saying whatever one has already anticipated they are supposed to say (Povinelli 2002), or even like saying yes. Variously articulated, refusals draw theoretical attention to the mundane, to "the unexceptional, the indeterminate, the fugitive, and the fleetingly provocative" (Thomas 2024, 95). Refusals are critical, but they are also creative, social and affiliative, generative, willful, and hopeful (McGranahan 2016, 322–23); they are commentary on "distributions of power, of effective and affective possibility . . . but also a push on what should be" (Simpson 2016, 326).

My argument that idling is a temporal mode of refusal turns on the notion that temporal discipline is a key means through which sovereignty reaches the subject, a fundamental tenet of the theory of biopower, and the reason why this essay opens with an epigraph about time being the mechanism through which power "penetrates" the body. Scaling from body to population, Pierre Bourdieu (1990, 75) puts the idea plainly (if lengthily): "Social disciplines take the form of temporal disciplines and the whole social order imposes itself at the deepest level

of the bodily dispositions through a particular way of regulating the use of time, the temporal distribution of collective and individual activities and the appropriate rhythm with which to perform them." In other words, governance operates by conditioning how bodies are disposed—made willing—to use time.

Bodies became disposed to capitalist forms of time-use, as E. P. Thompson argued long ago, through technologies like clocks and shift schedules, which were reinforced by religio-moral education that framed workers' poverty as evidence of their lack of time-discipline. These logics took on racist overtones as they traveled alongside colonialism. As Anne McClintock (1995, 252) has written, "It is scarcely possible to read any travel account, settler memoir, or ethnographic document without coming across a chorus of complaints about the sloth, idleness, indolence or torpor of the natives, who, the colonists claimed, preferred scheming and fighting, lazing and wanton lasciviousness to industry." Now, under neoliberalism, capitalist expectations for time-management are figured as racialized personality shortcomings and targeted for "soft skills" trainings set to impart a "wide range of 'cultural' attributes, including deportment, body etiquette, tonality, speech, and English language ability" (Srivastava 2022, 479; see also Desai 2020; Mankekar and Gupta 2019).

But not all bodies become "disposed" to dominant ideologies about their time, which scholars have long appreciated as subversion. Three examples: Frantz Fanon (1963), first, lauded the temporal practices of Black department store workers as "microresistances" to the managerial surveillance they were subjected to on shop floors. These workers took extended sick leave, expressed boredom while on the job, and arrived late or not at all (also see Browne 2015, 3–7). Second, in economic reform–era China, Lisa Rofel (1999) has shown how, through movement, women workers skirted silk factories' attempts to discipline their time. These women visited one another at each other's workstations, violating the individuating efficiency standards their managers sought to enforce. As Rofel (1999, 268) writes, "subversions resided in the very sinews of the bodies of the youngest generation, in their gestures and movements around the shop floor. . . . Their bodily movements did not mimic new standards of rationality. They did not work quickly enough." Finally, Shange (2019) has theorized minutes stolen from class as the refusal of a sanctimoniously progressive Bay Area high school and its racist polices toward students. Shange describes how, when Black students slacked off in the hallways, teachers and administrators lamented their delinquency as evidence they had taken steps toward futures the school was working hard to coach them to avoid. "In an institution geared toward 'winning'

progressive reforms," Shange (2019, 90) writes, "idleness delegitimizes the game itself." In Shange's reading, idling allowed students to refuse the school's attempts to shape them by declining to recognize its power over their time. Idling gave those students time for their own projects instead, for their own visions for how things should be.

Inspired by these studies, I too locate refusals in young Bwaise women's everyday movements, in their wanderings and "the very sinews" of their bodies. As I see it, as young women ambled on the banks of Kampala's sewage canals, languidly observing their surroundings, they were twenty-first century *flâneuses*, their relaxed temperaments imbued with the same ludic potential Walter Benjamin (2002) celebrated in the young men who strolled nineteenth-century Parisian arcades and whose reverie he saw as a response to the homogenizing speeds of industrialization. More, as young Bwaise women sat at the sewing machines, they took time to gossip and dance to music videos. They switched between training tasks, domestic labor, and personal leisure often, and unpredictably. These temporal practices marked their orientation toward a relaxed, unruly temporality, and thus their refusal to be "recalibrated" or "temporalized" by development time, despite its resource-laden pull.

Or most of their refusals. Aisha, a pseudonym for one young woman I knew from Bwaise, actually seemed to have started to embody the rhythms of development time in the years I came to know her, years during which she also became increasingly ingratiated with a large, internationally funded, girl-focused NGO. Her ingratiation involved all-expense-paid travel around Uganda and abroad, eventually to both South and North America, where she spoke about the importance of investing in Ugandan girls. Not only were all expenses paid, but Aisha received hefty transport stipends that allowed her to contribute substantially to her household. Aisha's sister brought her recent up-speeds to my attention one day as we walked together along a busy road. Despite my great terror that one of us could be hit by an errant vehicle, I had become used to walking together in a horizontal line, wrists crossed behind the back, a formation that allowed us to chat about whatever was going on, or whatever we saw along the way. That day, Aisha had taken to walking in front of the group, first by a foot or two, then by a few more paces. But I only noticed this, and thus Aisha's recalibration, because her sister laughed, in rebuke, when Aisha, seemingly exasperated with our leisurely pace, turned around, marched back, and grabbed us by the arms to move along. "This one," her sister shrugged Aisha off, "ever since she started with [that NGO] . . . ." Her voice trailed, but I understood that she attributed Aisha's hurriedness

to her newfound position as an NGO spokeswoman. Later, as she described her new appreciation for speed, Aisha informed me that she had "even started drinking coffee" as part of her regular activities as an NGO representative.

That Aisha exhibited signs of temporalization to development time is the exception that proves the rule, however. Aisha's sister and friends shunned her haste, even as they associated it with a source of substantial income. In their reproach of Aisha's suggestion that *they* speed up, they refused her invitation to recalibrate to development time, insisting instead on the languorous pace that allowed for sociality, observation, and deliberation. They would not speed up, even as they too were busy navigating Uganda's NGO economy for access to the resources they needed to support themselves and their families.

DEVELOPING GIRLS: Industry and Ideology

Uganda has been the world's "development darling" since President Yoweri Museveni, who took power in 1986, embraced internationally funded NGOs in what is widely considered the world's most effective response to HIV/AIDS (Parikh 2016). In the 2010s, international donors contributed substantially to Uganda's national budget (more than 30 percent in 2013; see Findley et al. 2017), had authority in government decision-making, offered basically the only form of stable employment to educated-elite citizens, and had greatly subsumed responsibility for the provision of health, education, and other social services. In Bwaise, NGO logos adorned T-shirts, building structures, signposts, and vehicles, making development's economic presence known in the fabrics of its urban infrastructure.

Aisha and the other young women I knew in Bwaise, who ranged in age between sixteen and twenty-two, were involved with several different development-funded vocational training programs, sometimes concurrently. In fact, I'd initially met them through a vocational training program funded by the national subsidiary of a multinational NGO, whose billion-dollar campaign to empower adolescent girls was the focus of my first research project. They had finished the O-levels, the ten years of schooling the government requires families to pay for, and neither wanted nor could afford to attend the last two years of secondary school, university, or formal technical training colleges. In the absence of affordable postsecondary education, privately funded vocational training programs for young women began rapidly expanding in Kampala in the early 2010s. In 2008, Uganda's Parliament passed the Business, Technical, Vocational Education and Training Act, which allocated funds for "Skilling Uganda," a plan to build vocational training institutions and strengthen existing ones. Launched by the

Ministry of Education and Sports in 2011, the plan projected spending $870 million over nine fiscal years. Government "re-skilling" programs were organized around hairdressing, carpentry, sewing, and shoemaking. Because these labor markets were unlikely to sustain new entrants, the Museveni administration also launched public advocacy campaigns encouraging young people to become "job makers, not job seekers" and partnered with banks, internationally funded NGOs, and UN agencies to create funds promoting entrepreneurialism. For example, the Youth-to-Youth Fund, instituted by the UN Joint Program on Population, distributed $360,000 to thirty-five girls' vocational schools to promote entrepreneurship among young women (G. Asiimwe 2023).

Bwaise-based vocational training programs for girls, including Reverend Father's charity home, received operating money from the Youth-to-Youth Fund and other nationally registered organizations dedicated to various causes, from Catholicism to family planning. These programs were run by men in their thirties and forties, who, I learned from interviews, had originally founded their organizations with other missions, such as HIV-prevention, evangelical ministry, and motorcycle repair. They had been approached by "big-big NGOs," as one director explained, meaning the national subsidiaries of major multinational NGOs like Save the Children and Plan International, to attend workshops on girls' self-esteem and empowerment, after which they received two-year funding contracts and switched their organizations' focus to providing young women with vocation, that is, to occupying them.

In practice, occupying young Bwaise women was a matter of both temporary surveillance and lifelong reform. The gates surrounding the modest compound housing Reverend Father's vocational school, for example, created an "enclosure" (Sojoyner 2016) envisioned to both protect and prevent young women from trouble that lay beyond. Within the gates, whether they sat diligently at the sewing machines or lounged outside under the shade of the mango tree, gossiping over sticky fruits, young women could be imagined as constantly and consistently occupied, kept busy for the hours, days, weeks, and months of the most productive periods of their reproductive lives. Whenever Reverend Father dropped by, he could collect evidence of young women's busyness in unsellable sandals and ill-tailored garments, while his funders could measure his busyness—running the school was his business—by looking through his assiduously kept attendance registers. Funders used these registers to count the number of girls the funds they distributed had impacted, reporting these numbers to *their* funders.

This funding and accountability system emerged following the paradigmatic shift to "sustainable development," a global funding-chain model that originated with Uganda's AIDS response and had taken full hold throughout the international development industry by the 2010s (Scherz 2014; see also Ferguson 2015). Under sustainable development, international donors no longer distribute funds directly to beneficiaries. Instead, they fund nationally registered organizations, including large NGOs and government ministries, alongside their own national subsidiary offices. Nationally registered organizations fund smaller agencies such as the vocational training programs I encountered in Bwaise, which are registered with elected district officials as "community-based organizations." Proponents of sustainable development see the model as ensuring the longevity of external interventions. As Festus Kahiigwa of the Ugandan National NGO Forum, an NGO that monitors other NGOs, explained, "International NGOs have that character, they go into 'partnerships' . . . . They make it so that at the end of your intervention, they sustain it. It's development from below." The industry's shift from charity to sustainability meant that its interventions were now simultaneously short-lived and required to be long-lasting (see Whyte 2020).

Targeting girls and young women for intervention appeared to meet both criteria—the intervention was short-lived, necessary only during adolescence, and it had potentially enduring effects. At least this was the claim of the coalition of World Bank economists, UN agencies, corporate foundations, multinational NGOs, and celebrity journalists who helped redirect billions of aid dollars toward "girls in development" in the 2010s (Switzer, Desai, and Bent 2023). To make the case for girl-specific aid investments, advocates drew from long-standing demographic findings that correlated maternal education with reduced fertility rates (see Bledsoe et al. 1999; LeVine 1980). In an article widely cited as the clarion call for the girls-in-development movement, the former World Bank Chief Economist Lawrence Summers (1992, 132) wrote, "An educated mother is more likely to have fewer, healthier children and can insist on the development of all of her children, ensuring . . . that the next generation of girls, as well as of boys, will be educated and healthy." Summers projected economic transformations for the far-distant future in the Malthusian returns of better quality of life shared among reduced populations (Murphy 2017). Like the speech given by Uganda's commissioner of youth quoted in the opening of this essay, Summers invoked a catastrophic "chronotope" (Bakhtin 1981), emplotting young women in the "population time bomb" story—as the source of the explosion. Flashy donor marketing campaigns picked up this narrative with slogans such as "the clock is ticking" (Nike Foundation) and "tomorrow will be too late" (Plan International).

The girls-in-development movement declared that the need for girls' education was both urgent and timestamped.

In the absence of state-funded opportunities for formal education, internationally funded vocational training programs became a way to deliver the years of maternal schooling demographers had correlated with fertility reduction. Moreover, vocational training promised its own time-bound but enduring intervention, at least in theory: once a student has been sufficiently trained, they take up a life-long vocation (Lave and Wenger 1991). But Ugandan development actors faced a different task than preparing young women for employment, particularly in a context where jobs simply did not exist. Instead, they, like the commissioner of youth, discussed the need to cultivate "productivity" within young women as a sustaining sense of self-worth, and a belief in their potential to increase their self-worth. As Reverend Father explained, drawing from transnationally circulating scripts about girls' empowerment and self-esteem (Moore 2016), his beneficiaries needed "counsel about their life, about having dreams, about their futures, because they have to live after this. This house is temporary." He continued, "They have to respect and love their work on top of self-esteem, because unless you have a belief in yourself, you can't move out and be productive." In Reverend Father's description, productivity was a matter of self-estimation, future-orientation, and aspiration.

The term *productivity* came up regularly in development-related discussions of adolescent girls in Kampala, including during the commissioner of youth's speech and at every vocational school in Bwaise I visited. The term proved multivalent. In addition to implying future-orientation and self-esteem, *productivity* could also signal any time-occupying action, hopefully but not necessarily income-generating, that was not sex. Consider this example from another Bwaise program, which operated out of a repurposed shipping container branded with a major multinational NGO's logo: In its promotional materials, the organization claimed to be rehabilitating one hundred former sex workers with vocational training. I had visited the organization a few times, and the number seemed high to me. When I questioned the men directing the organization about it, they responded,

> So when they say one hundred, they may not all be engaged in sexual work, but some of them are exposed (to sex work in the area), and they are not doing anything productive. . . She is not in school and has nothing to practice and she is exposed. It becomes very difficult (and) the numbers of these girls multiply. . . At the end of the day, if you want to rescue them, you have to include them in the program.

Claiming that proximity to "sex work," meaning sex exchanged for a price negotiated beforehand, made otherwise unoccupied women "at-risk" for it, these men planned to contain the risk of young women's unruly sexuality by providing something "productive" "to practice," that is, they would habituate them to vocation in the sense of both skilled trade and personal mission.

In this vision, vocational training in Bwaise would transform idle young women into something like self-sustaining entrepreneurs capable of ever-increasingly improving upon their skills, their selves, and their fortunes through the techniques of self-management (Cruikshank 1996; Rose 1990). Entrepreneurial temporalities are all-encompassing. They depend on an autonomous and continuously self-improving subject "who negotiates, chooses, and succeeds in the array of education and retraining that forms the new 'lifelong learning' and the 'multiple career trajectories' that have replaced the linear hierarchies . . . of the old economy" (Walkerdine 2003, 240; quoted in Freeman 2007, 26). In other words, an entrepreneur's time is always unfolding in the service of self-betterment, so that even while waiting for their turn at the sewing machines, young women could and should be working to better themselves, as their selves are their businesses. By cultivating the entrepreneurial spirit, vocational training would prevent both *moments* of risky promiscuity by occupying everyday time and *lifetimes* of risky promiscuity by redirecting sexual energies toward ongoing projects of self-improvement. Inhabited by the entrepreneurial spirt—consistent and constant, forward moving and always improving—idle young women would recalibrate, that is, they would be temporalized to development time. They would be too "productive" to have too many babies too soon, and too busy to assess whether the busyness made any material difference.

Busyness can be deceptive, however. As I describe next, even as young Bwaise women produced evidence of busyness in cobbled shoes and tailored garments, seeming symbols of their attunement to development's entrepreneurial temporalities, they passed their time at their own pace. They idled, taking time for their own ends instead.

FINDING TIME IN BUSY BWAISE

Despite hearing about the dangers of idling from Ugandan educators and NGO officers, it took some time for me to realize that most of my fieldwork in Bwaise could be characterized as having been spent doing just that. "To grasp a rhythm," Henri Lefebvre (2004, 37) writes in *Rhythmanalysis*, "it is necessary to have been *grasped* by it; one must *let oneself go*, give oneself over, abandon oneself

to its duration." Apprehending a tempo is to develop an impression, felt as much as seen or heard. My impression of idling grew slowly, steadily. When I began visiting Aisha, her sister, and other young women in Bwaise regularly, the goals of my research were confusing at first, for all of us. As I had met these women under the auspices of an NGO, they fully understood me as an NGO officer and interacted with me accordingly: on more than one occasion in the first weeks of our time together, they asked me if I was "ready to take their stories," a sure sign of their familiarity with the narrative genres NGO researchers work in, if not the "research-fatigue" I had heard NGO officers ascribe to their neighbors. For my part, hurried as I was to collect their "real" stories by my dissertation's looming deadline, most inquiries I raised directly about their romantic lives, their sexual health, or their goals for the future were rebuffed. So, I changed tack, and over the following year, through my lengthy visits to their homes and their lengthy visits to my apartment, through long conversations, drawn-out card games, dozens if not hundreds of hours of music video consumption, and winding strolls around town, our relationships deepened. Over time, these teenagers slowly revealed to me how they lived their lives by allowing me to join them as they passed their days, no longer serving me powdered juice on a tray as if I were a distinguished NGO visitor but allowing me to help peel bananas, tend children, and scribble in my notebook.

It took me many months to learn to get to Deema's mother's place in Bwaise from the main road, even as I diligently followed as she led me behind the gas station, past a small mosque and a rubbish pile just as large, and through a series of *muzigos*, densely packed one-room dwellings with high cement barriers designed to help block their interiors from seasonal flooding. Bwaise is both proximate to Kampala's city center and cut off from it, as much by its jammed roundabout as by the sordid stereotypes many Kampala citizens hold (Wyrod 2016). Friends from other suburbs of Kampala, some no better off financially than Bwaise residents, initially warned me against working there. As one older man put it, "That place, I think of dirtiness, thieves, drugs."

There was a final stream of wastewater to jump over before reaching Deema's place that ran past the home of an older woman, Jajja, who sold herbs and tobacco to the women who worked in the brothels nearby. These women often gathered around the entrance to Jajja's door, taking all afternoon to smoke from long tobacco pipes and chat in hushed tones. Many people—sometimes as many as six adults and twice as many children—lived and worked in the several *muzigos* at Deema's place, the main room of which contained deep-set chairs

covered in crocheted doilies, sets of bunk beds hidden behind hanging sheets, and a number of sewing machines and ironing boards. Deema's mother and older brother ran a business selling pleated girls' uniform skirts to South Sudanese traders at Kampala's downtown market, and Deema, along with her sisters and brothers, and any friends who might happen to stop by, contributed to the family enterprise by ironing pleats and sewing rings of black rickrack into the skirts. The uniform-skirt business was the main but not the only income stream for the family. Every out-of-school adult found ways to help cover the family's recurring expenses, which included food, rent, water, electricity, clothing, and, by far the costliest, school fees for younger family members (Moore et al. 2023). Of all members in the household, Deema and her sister, Fatimah, were able to make the most significant individual contributions from their earnings as stipend-paid participants in various NGO workshops, which they were invited to attend by the directors of the vocational training programs in which they were enrolled.

At Deema's place, she and the others worked throughout their days, but they did so at their own pace. Much of the day was spent reclining onto the sofa chairs or lying on straw mats rolled over the cement floor and singing along to music videos. Esther, though, who had only recently come from the village to stay with her cousins, rarely sat still for long. Humming along to the television, she worked through un-ironed piles of faux-silk skirts, dropping her finished pieces from one pile into another. Deema would occasionally climb over the door's high barrier to remove clothes drying on a line tied between the *muzigos* or to check on the lunch, typically fried maize meal, she was cooking on the charcoal stove outside. If a particularly popular song came on, Deema would abandon whatever task was in front of her to gyrate to the beat of the music, enjoining anyone nearby to dance along with her. Fatimah, senior to Deema by nineteen months, seemed to lounge the most, though she too would sit at an ironing board for periods of time to help pleat skirts. Occasionally, she and Immaculate, a friend from secondary school, would disappear together into the beds behind the hanging sheet, their intimacies sometimes audible enough for Deema to crack a joke. Alma, a boisterous neighbor, would drop by in the mornings to pleat a single skirt, eat some of whatever was available, and, inevitably, get everyone laughing with her reports from the neighborhood. She came in the mornings, Deema wryly remarked, because she was lazy and refused to cook at home. Esther, on the other hand, was regularly teased for working too hard, which, according to the others' accusations, betrayed her unfamiliarity with the cooled tempos of urban life.

In teasing Esther for her unstopping labor, the others indicated that they found the consistency of her work ethic provincial, as if it evoked the well-worn trope of the good African woman toiling tirelessly in village fields (Kyomuhendo and McIntosh 2006; Musisi 1992). In associating Esther's hurried work with the village and their slower, more sporadically attuned labor with the city, they articulated that they understood differences between rural and urban habitus in terms of consistency, predictability, and speed. Working—or walking—too slowly was cause for insult, however, as was the case with their neighbor Alma, whom they teased for being lazy, or when they accused one another of "moving like a princess," meaning too slowly, marking the desirable middle ground for urban bodily rhythms as leisurely, but not too much so.

Having cooled my own need to dig, and dig quickly, into these women's lives and hopes for the future, my days passed in ethnographic repose—"sitting" rather than "doing," "its focus on the present, rather than on social engineering of a particular future" (Pigg 2013, 132). From this position, I came to understand "idling" as emanating through gestures and movements, in and through space, as willful command over one's time. Locking up the *muzigo* door or school gates behind them, for example, young Bwaise women came and went whenever they saw fit. As they "journeyed" (*okutambula*), as they described, they took time to chat with their neighbors, to comment on the two inches a toddler had grown, and to exchange amorous glances with young men making chapattis at roadside stands. Their idle pacing never failed to delay their on-clock-time arrival to the sewing machines at Reverend Father's home, a concern of his to which they paid little heed. Once there, their days continued as they had back at Deema's mother's place. They washed floors and prepared meals. They chatted. They took turns at the sewing machines, ran errands. But there was no task so pressing it could not be cast aside should one's paramour arrive at the gates, or if a friend stopped by with gossip, or if a particularly spicy music video came on, demanding a dance.

IDLING AS REFUSAL

As this portrait of unhurried everyday life conveys, even as young Bwaise women delivered evidence of productivity in uniform skirts, cooked lunches, and cobbled shoes, they were not easily or entirely available for temporalization in the consistent, hurried, self-improving rhythms promoted by girls' vocational training programs and their funders, and their funders' funders. Idling made time for other things instead—for rest and relaxation, for teasing and criticality, and for physical and emotional intimacy among and between women, all measured in

sporadic and unpredictable bursts alongside or instead of displays of productivity. As Deema, Aisha, and their friends gossiped at the sewing machines and over long walks, for example, they established social networks through which affective and material resources flowed (Cole and Groes 2016; Elyachar 2010). Long after days spent chatting under the shady trees of Reverend Father's home, Deema paid for the expensive hospital stay of another former resident when she became ill with malaria. When Immaculate developed a romance with an older man, she bought Aisha a fancy new phone. She also had her lover sponsor several all-paid trips to the beaches of Lake Victoria, a practice of sugar daddy-resource redistribution university-educated women in Kampala refer to as "housing" (Bocast 2023).

Idling also made time for explicit critiques of development. On several occasions, when Deema grew tired of pleating skirts, she jumped to her feet and began shouting, pointing two fingers into the air in an oratory style common to evangelical street preachers, and delivered both broad critiques of international aid and more personal attacks on various vocational school directors, such as Reverend Father, for taking too much of donors' money for their own use. Deema and her sister Fatimah particularly enjoyed retelling the story of one of their sewing teachers losing her mobile phone in the pit latrine. They reviled this particular teacher for tattling to Reverend Father on their extracurricular activities. Documenting similar narrative practices in Detroit, Aimee Meredith Cox (2015, 127) has argued that telling and retelling stories allowed young Black women to "simultaneously critique and reimagine the present, and to propose possibilities for protest and play in the future." Likewise in Bwaise, idle storytelling gave rise to critical deliberation and strategizing, as Deema and her friends debated how to navigate the lecherous advances of certain vocational school directors while maintaining access to the resources those development middlemen guarded.

As young Bwaise women took time from the development projects that promised them future incomes, and from the development donors who promised them better lives for children they had yet to conceive, they refused to be captivated by those promises nor ensnared by the gendered time-disciplines those promises authorized. They would not become so intoxicated by busyness as to forget their immediate needs or be blinded to their current surrounds. Instead, they took time to slow down, socialize, strategize, and criticize. Idling, they refused to wait for outcomes. They took what they could in the meantime, leaving the impression that they didn't take development, its promises, or its vilifying narratives seriously anyway.

CONCLUSION

It is worth noting again that the young women I knew in Bwaise never claimed that they were using time tactically, to "resist." They never expressed intentions to challenge the development projects that described them as idle, and therefore as moral and economic threats, by passing their time too slowly, too unpredictably, too much at their own pace. Nor would they, given the material, social, and demographic conditions of their relationship with development. In the time I knew them, they had come to depend on their continued participation in vocational training programs for access to resources of various kinds, including space to spend their days and evenings, money paid to attend NGO meetings, and connections to larger, better funded development organizations with larger, better funded opportunities. Their development dependencies were delicate, woven through social relations, and thus carefully tended (Ferguson 2013). They were also temporary. Aisha, Deema, and the others would only be girls—and thus their idleness only threatening enough to merit intervention—for a handful of years. Practicalities aside, to presume that young women's temporal practices only mattered as critique if voiced as such would be to "grasp for intent and outcomes," to paraphrase Simpson (2016, 326); it would both demand access to interiority and predetermine the form "engagements" with domination can take.

Refusal provides another way to think with the practices of those on the underside of power. Refusal attends to the indirect and inexplicit, the subtle, the often messy and sometimes wavering ways in which people live with and through injustice, dispossession, and suffering. *Ethnographic* refusals often appear as explicit withholdings. When reading of refusal, we, the readers, know the ethnographer knows something because they tell us they will not tell us, and in that telling of not telling we glean something vital about how limited it was to have wanted to know. Inspired by this approach, I have taken a slightly different tack in this article, one that bridges more current theories of refusal with older, now not-so-current theories of resistance. Thinking from the juxtapositional stance invited by "refusal"—refusal of what?—I have used a blurred set of temporal practices to suggest a noncompliant stance toward development time, the suggestion itself a "diagnosis" in the way Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) encouraged us to think of resistances as pointing to the dominating forces toward which they were directed. In this case, development time crystalized as a mechanism of power, of compliance and constraint, only because what had impressed on me as unhurried, unpredictable ways of being in time simultaneously revealed that development time's expected forms of temporal discipline were just that: expected. Not total. Maneuverable.

This last point contains a lesson for all of us who live in development time, which is anyone living according to twenty-first-century productivity standards—likely most readers of this essay. In the United States in particular, we live with what Kathi Weeks (2011, 11) calls "work values," wherein work is "widely understood as an individual moral practice and collective ethical obligation" (see also Weber 1958). Work—even and especially academic work—is tied to self-growth, dignity, pleasure (Chen, Khúc, and Kim 2023; Shore and Wright 2015; Rutherford 2025). To be temporalized to American work values means that it feels good to feel busy, efficient, and fast, and not good to be bored, unsystematic, and slow, unless of course that boredom is time-bound and serves to redeliver you and your body to more productive rhythms once you are back to work. It also means that productivity can feel so good that it—and making sure to measure it—can blind us to its wastes, like the unsellable black sandals piling up in Bwaise. But stronger attunement to the non-inevitability of productivity's temporal disciplines might help generate some opportunities for maneuver, especially moves that attend to the relational, the restive, and the restful.

ABSTRACT

This article brings the temporal practices of poor young women in Kampala, Uganda's capital city, into dialogue with development discourses that authorized intervening in their lives by occupying their time. First, I offer the concept of development time to characterize a specific rhythm of worker-citizenship that rewards busyness as evidence of productivity while deferring capacity to understand productivity's ends, or whether material conditions have improved. In the 2010s, keeping young women busy had become a major prerogative for the development industry, which advocated for girls' vocational schooling as a strategy for controlling population growth. In Uganda, where there existed no opportunity for employment in the vocations for which young women were being trained, practitioners described their work as preventing young women from "idling." Second, I repurpose idling to propose that young Kampala women passed their time in ways that refused development's temporal disciplines. [temporality; time; refusal; development; gender; youth; Africa]

EBIFUNZE EBIRI MU KIWANDIIKO KINO

Ekiwandiiko kino kyetegeregeza engeri abawala abankuseere gyebatambuzaamu obulamu mu kibuga kya Uganda ekikulu Kampala, era n'engeri gyeboogeraganyaamu n'ebitongole by'enkulaakulana okusobola okubayingiza mu budde ne mu nkola zaabyo. Okusookera ddala, nkozesezza omulamwa "Obudde mu kukulaakulana" okusobola okunnyonnyola omulaka ku miganyulo egiva mu kubeera n'ekyokukola buli kadde, ng'akabonero akalaga enkulaakulana n'okutegeera okugenda mu maaso, era n'okubaawo ebirabwaako ebyenkukunala. Mu myaka gya 2010, okufuula abawala okuba n'ebyokukola buli budde kyafuukira ddala ddembe lyabwe mu by'enkulaakulana, naddala mu kubateerawo emisomo gy'ebyemikono ng'ekiyamba mu kukendeeza

ku bungi bw'abantu. Mu Uganda awali ebbula ly'emirimu eri abawala abamaze okutendekebwa mu by'emikono, ababiddukanya bagamba nti kino kiyamba abawala okwewala obwa ngalobunani. Ekyokubiri; nze ekya 'ngalobunani' nkikyusaamu nga ndaga abawala mu Kampala bwe bakozesaamu obudde bwabwe nga bawakanya enkozesa y'obudde eya bannankulakuulana. [obudde; okuwakanya; enkulaakulana; ekikula ky'abantu; abavubuka; ssemazinga wa Africa]

NOTES

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1. For more on the family-planning debates, see Hodgson and Watkins 1997.
2. According to the Oxford English Dictionary.
3. Women are discernibly absent from this literature. Studies that do consider "timepass" and "waithood" among women do not see criticality in the same forms of slowness that make men's temporal practices intelligible as responding to the speeds of capitalism. Rather, women's "willful" embrace of "waithood," or delayed adulthood, becomes evidence of individual agency, limited to the unfolding of a single woman's life course (Eisenstein 2021). Or, as Lucy Dubochet (2023, 283) describes with delightful irony, poor Delhi women strategically mobilized discourses about idleness to disguise how busy and politically active they had actually been. As she writes, "As they claim to do nothing while working or getting involved in informal politics or service delivery, their behaviors quietly defy the limits of their condition." The women Dubochet describes claimed to be idle, but in her observations of the rhythms of their everyday movements, they were anything but.

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