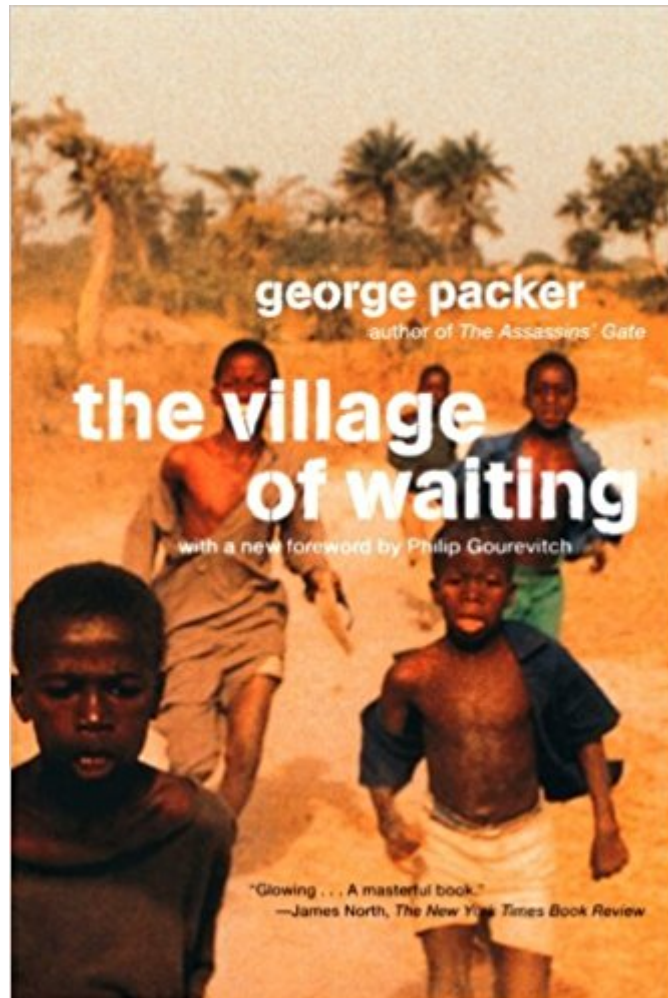




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# The Village Of Waiting



## Synopsis

Now restored to print with a new Foreword by Philip Gourevitch and an Afterword by the author, this book is a frank, moving, and vivid account of contemporary life in West Africa. Stationed as a Peace Corps instructor in the village of LaviÃ© (the name means "wait a little more") in tiny and underdeveloped Togo, Packer reveals his own schooling at the hands of an unforgettable array of townspeople--peasants, chiefs, charlatans, children, market women, cripples, crazies, and those who, having lost or given up much of their traditional identity and fastened their hopes on "development," find themselves trapped between the familiar repetitions of rural life and the chafing monotony of waiting for change.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In 1982-83, Packer worked for the Peace Corps as an English teacher in the village of Lavie in Togo, West Africa, and here recounts his occasionally comic, more often poignant, and frequently tragic experiences in sharp, descriptive prose. He does not romanticize Africa or Africans, but writes with an honest sense of realism and the perspective of an outsider who nevertheless cares very deeply for his subject: "The struggle to stay afloat took on endless variations in Togo. And the white foreigner who'd come on an enlightened mission, and once there managed to keep his eyes open, quickly lost his bearings in the face of it." A great deal of his passion and frustration is directed at an educational system that is impoverished, archaic and based in equal parts on rote and beatings. For Packer, Togo's educational system is a symbol of its present condition, the enduring product of a colonial legacy that has fostered both a chronic national economic crisis and a deep sense of

personal inferiority among many of the Africans whom he met. The author presents a full view of Togolese customs and society, exploring such topics as work, medical care, marriage and sex, politics, drought and tourists. He is at his best when he writes about people, including himself, because he treats them not as simple characters or types, but as complex personalities, revealing their histories and psychologies with great sympathy and care. Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Peace Corps volunteer Packer evokes both sympathy and amusement, while pointing out the dilemmas of contemporary African society in this tale of his experiences as an English teacher in a southern Togolese village in the early 1980s. He observes the political charades, the stalled development, and the resigned indifference of villagers, and also stands back for a wry look at himself in situations he could hardly have imagined as an undergraduate at Yale. He draws portraits of a few Togolese who are poignantly caught in a cultural and economic limbo, and in the end finds himself in a kind of psychic limbo. Recommended. Janet Stanley, Smithsonian Inst. Lib., Washington, D.C. Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Before you read my review you should know that I was a PCV in the 70's en Cote d'Ivoire and had a great experience. Also, during my time in West Africa I traveled to Togo which I found to be a real interesting place, thus my comments may seem a bit bias. I loved this book for all the wrong reasons. Poor George Packer did just about everything possible to assure that his Peace Corps experience would be a real "train wreck". I give him credit for even writing a book like this. I would recommend this book to anyone considering joining the Peace Corps as a guide for what not to do. I will not spoil the book for potential readers by picking apart his missteps. I am somewhat surprised that he was ever allowed to join up in the first place. As you read this book have some fun trying to figure out at what point Packer is going to 'pack it in' and under what circumstances. Sadly, from my own observations of other Peace Corps Volunteers, George's story is more common than one might think.

I have been a fan of the writing of journalist George Packer, notably his reporting for The New Yorker and his book of reporting on the Iraq War, *The Assassin's Gate*. When I heard that he wrote a Peace Corps memoir, *The Village Of Waiting* (1988), about his experiences in the West African country of Togo I was interested to read his perspective about it. Already his reporting and narrative

story telling was strong. The reader learns a lot about the country, community, and the exasperation of Africa from the perspective of a white westerner. It was a powerful experience in the pre-internet days and it was a testament to his resolve that he lasted over a year-he did not complete his assignment, he failed to return for his last six months after taking a trip to Europe. Similarly another Peace Corps inspired book from another writer I liked, *Chasing The Sea* by Tom Bissell in Uzbekistan, also was ultimately about a failed Peace Corps stint where he basically had a nervous breakdown and was inspired to go back and find closure in the country. This is a different book from that one, but in the Afterword by the author we learn about how the country and the people he met there continued to be a significant part of his life as he returned to report there and help the friends that he made there over time. These experiences were exasperating and soul crushing in the recounting of struggles and set backs these people encountered over the years. In that sense the last part calls to mind Paul Theroux's exasperation with Africa in his last foray into the country that defeats him and sends him home packing before he planned to go home in *Last Train To Zona Verde*. There's also a Foreword by Philip Gourevitch, another reporter and writer about Africa that I respect. I found this to be a powerful first person account full of detailed descriptions of life in Africa in the early 80s from the point of view of an idealistic Peace Corps volunteer.

I fully understood what George Packer went through as a PCV in Togo as I am a former Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) as well! He wrote very well. It seemed Africa will continue to have the same problems so long as their leaders show no or very little interest to work for the betterment of their country and their people. But I like reading his experience in Togo as well as his accounts on travels to other countries. I like his writing style. As an outsider, he was very astute in his observation on the country and the people he associated with, including his students, colleagues, neighbors and friends he made in Togo.

If you want to read a heart-rending story that outlines the very differing lives of children living in poverty, you'll enjoy this book. It is well written and portrays a vivid and realistic picture of what life is like for children who must scramble around for life's necessities. Have your Kleenex handy, though.

This book is incredible. It's at once funny and poignant. Its descriptions of Togo are spot on - Packer paints a vividly realistic portrait of his experiences in that country. He's also honest about himself and his reactions - he paints himself and his reactions to his surroundings in an unvarnished light. This touching account of his experiences makes for very rewarding reading.

Another good Peace Corps book that is well written and gives you a much better idea of the problems and challenges of third world nations than any newspaper article ever will

If you want to cast moral judgement on George Packer, don't read this book. If you want to read the best Peace Corps book ever written, at least about life in Africa, then pick up this book. I lived in Guinea in the mid-90s, while Packer was in Togo in the early 80s. Yet I felt like he was describing my own village, my own frustrations, my own thoughts and feelings (save the prostitute). This was the book that convinced me not to write a book about my own experience. He did it, only better.

This book was a very good read. The feelings the author struggles with resonate with me. I also very much appreciated that he did not sugar coat his experience. Few PC volunteers (or expats more generally) admit to these things, and it's good someone put them in (well-written, well thought out) words.

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