TIME IN THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

Joseph K. Adjaye

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To the memory of my mother Adwoa Asobo, and to my daughters
Ewurafua Stacie and Maureen, joys past and present

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Time in the Black Experience

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Time in Africa and Its Diaspora: An Introduction

Joseph K. Adjaye

Time is the coordinating principle that orders human life in all societies. It occupies a central role in our individual as well as collective affairs, permeating not only feelings but also activities. It is through time that personal identities become intelligible and communicable to others. Time is also the vehicle by which the universe becomes comprehensible to us. As far back as classical times, Ovid aptly noted that time devours all things. Centuries later, J. T. Fraser observed in his introduction to the first modern major collection of essays on time, *The Voices of Time*:[1]

> Temporal experience . . . more than any other aspect of existence is all-pervasive, intimate and immediate; and life, death and time combine in a dialectical unity which is hard to comprehend but which, nevertheless, is symbolically stated in all great religions. Furthermore, time also seemed to be a constituent of all human knowledge, experience and mode of expression; an entity intimately connected with the functions of the mind; and a fundamental feature of the universe.

Yet, what is time is not always easy to define, even for historians, to whom time and space are cardinal dimensions within which history sets the actions of its actors. Because of the unity and diversity of temporal experience, time defies easy definition, even in its all-pervasiveness. Thus, the physicist, biologist, geologist, theologist, philosopher,

historian, anthropologist, psychologist, horologist, and specialists of other disciplines may all have different perceptions of the concept of time.

However, the problem with the subject of time among Black peoples in Africa and the diaspora has not been so much a matter of differing concepts among specialists of various disciplines as one of either outright denial or distortion by Western authors. Until the past three decades or so, much of the writing about Africa was done by outsiders, non-Africans who portrayed little, if any, understanding of the continent and its peoples. In consequence, their portrayals of Africa were permeated by their preconceived notions and concepts; Eurocentric hypotheses, prejudices, subjectivities, and epistemological categories became the paradigms and archetypes by which African experiences were shaped and described.[2] This is the problem that V. Y. Mudimbe (1988, p. 15) succinctly captures in his concept of "otherness" and categorizes as "epistemological ethnocentricism; namely, the belief that scientifically there is nothing to be learned from 'them' unless it is already 'ours' [that is, Western] or comes from 'us.'"

During the colonial period (about 1885–1960), uncritical and distorted observations by missionaries, travelers, and colonial administrators reinforced the Western vision of Africans as inferior people, and pseudo-justification for the inferiority of Black and darker races was found in the Hamitic myth. As late as 1963, distinguished English historian Hugh Trevor-Roper may have exposed not only his own prejudices but also those that were dominant in his time in the West when he gave the infamous and oft-cited lecture in which he described the African past as nothing more than the "unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe."[3] Africans were thought of as tribesmen who were grouped together as a nameless, undifferentiated mass euphemistically labeled natives, as vividly described by English historian Arnold Toynbee:[4]

> When we Westerners call people 'natives,' we implicitly take the cultural colour out of our perception of them. We see them as wild animals infesting the country in which we happen to come across them, as part of a local flora and fauna and not as men with passions like ourselves. So long as we think of them as 'natives' we may exterminate them or, as is more likely today, domesticate them and honestly (perhaps not altogether mistakenly) believe that we are improving the breed, but we do not begin to understand them.

Westerners indeed did not begin to understand Africa until recent decades. For long their vision was characterized by that of an outsider,

perpetuating a myth of Africa that Thomas Hodgkin described as a "Hobbesian picture . . . in which there was no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society."[5]

In the reification of the "primitive," Africans were depicted as being deficient in delineating relations of time, because time, in the "abstract mentalism" tradition of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1910, 1923, 1938), was considered a product of mental activity in which "inferior societies" were thought to be wanting. "The primitives' idea of time," Lévy-Bruhl asserted, "remains vague; and nearly all primitive languages are as deficient in methods of rendering relations of time as they are copious in expressing spatial relations." Perhaps the most profound conclusion that was to influence later generations of anthropological and philosophical discourses on time in Africa was Lévy-Bruhl's depiction of so-called primitive time as being nonlinear, in contradistinction to the "civilized time" of Westerners, a characterization that was taken as a given fact. Lévy-Bruhl stated:

> We know, however, that the primitives' minds do not represent time exactly as ours do. Primitives do not see, extending indefinitely in imagination, something like a straight line, always homogenous by nature, upon which events fall into position, a line on which foresight can arrange them in a unilinear and irreversible series, and on which they must of necessity occur one after the other. To the primitive time is not, as it is to us, a kind of intellectualized intuition, an "order of succession."[6]

The perpetuation of Africans as "primitives" was given wide currency by Georg Hegel, who went further to classify the world into historical and nonhistorical peoples, to which latter category Africans were assigned. "The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend," he claimed, because "the Negro . . . exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state." Hegel concluded that Africa "lies out of the pale of History" and added (1901, pp. 157-58):

> It is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it — that is in its northern part — belong to the Asiatic or European World. . . . What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold on the World's History.

As "unhistorical" peoples, Africans were denied a sense of historical consciousness.

For much of the first half of the twentieth century, therefore, theories and conceptions about time in Africa merely articulated popular European misconceptions and prejudices, as described above. These

may be summarized as follows: first, a denial that Africans, as "natives" and of "inferior mental capacity," were capable of conceptualizing time in the same way as people in "civilized" (Western) societies, because time conception was thought to be an "intellectualized intuition," and second, distortions, including characterizations of Africans as unhistorical and lacking a linear concept of time, even when the ability to conceptualize time was conceded to the African. Even the very categories used to analyze life, such as culture, society and time, were themselves European.[7]

Concomitant to the attribution of the undeveloped, unhistorical to the African and inability to envision events as falling in a unilinear sequence was a denial of the African's ability to associate time with change and progress. Caroline Neale (1985, p. 5) could not have expressed this problem more cogently:

> The picture of progress which fills us with confidence as children is based on dramatic contrast with a stereotype; the savages from whom we all progressed live almost like animals, with the most primitive of tools and of cultural ideas, and with virtually no sense of past or future, so that they do not ask themselves that most natural of questions for people in a literate society with its ongoing record of achievement: what can we contribute to the great March of Mankind?

THE LITERATURE

The situation remained largely unchanged until the seminal works of Edward Evans-Pritchard. In his ground-breaking study "Nuer Time Reckoning" (1939), Evans-Pritchard established that the Nuer of southern Sudan recognized a number of temporal structures or "planes of rhythm," including physical, ecological, and social, all of which were integrated into their social formation. Above all, he demonstrated that time in Africa and other precapitalist societies — and, for that matter, everywhere — is a product of culture and the environment rather than intellectual capacity.

Following this tradition, Paul Bohannan produced an equally significant study, "Concepts of Time among the Tiv of Nigeria" (1953), which demonstrated that time is the coordinating principle that integrated Tiv political and social systems as well as their myths and legends of origin. However, the works of Bohannan and Evans-Pritchard were not without limitations. The former held that Tiv conception of historical change was "quasi-historical," not historical, and the latter, in a similar fashion, contended that the Nuer were ahistorical, because their "ecological" and

"genealogical" time structures did not fit into the mold of (Western) structural time frames.

Following this pattern of locating time within the centrality of cultural structures, Thomas Beidelman (1963) concluded that time underpinned Kaguru (Tanzania) conceptions of their physical and social world and was "inextricably linked with other aspects of their ideologies and social organization," even if the Kaguru did not reckon time with the quantitative specificity of the West.

Pierre Bourdieu's study of the time among the Kabyle *fallahs* (peasants) of Algeria was cast in a mold quite similar — that temporal experiences are integrated into a complex whole. In his "The Attitudes of the Algerian Peasant toward Time" (1963), Bourdieu demonstrated that though the Kabyle did not recognize the discipline of the clock, they observed a rhythm of social life, a calendar of feasts, a cycle of pastimes, and an annual cycle of agricultural tasks that were all embodied in a single overriding system and that the Kabyles' "horizon of the past and of the future are . . . tied together in a single consciousness."

Another important study is Alexis Kagame's (1976, pp. 89–116) analysis of time, duration, and history in Bantu thought, in which he concluded that the African "view of the 'ancestral past' . . . provides a basis on which the true meaning of history may be grasped; it is not concerned with the 'past' as such, but describes present events as they occurred and sprang into being in the past."

It was, however, John Mbiti's discussions of African religions and philosophy beginning in the late 1960s that initiated detailed studies that situated time as central to African worldview. Mbiti (1990 [1969], p. 16) considered "the African concept of time as the key to our understanding of the basic religious and philosophical concepts. The concept of time may help to explain beliefs, attitudes, practices and general way of life of African peoples not just in the traditional set up but also in the modern situation." Elsewhere Mbiti (1990 [1969], p. 27) emphasized that "the traditional concept of time is intimately bound up with the entire life of the people, and our understanding of it may help to pave the way for understanding the thinking, attitude and actions of the people."

Recent studies of time (since the 1970s) in Africa and among Black communities in the diaspora may be grouped under three principal approaches: first, the anthropological/cultural history; second, the social/political history; and third, the philosophical/theological. These approaches must be considered nonexclusive and represent the principal,

rather than sole, analytical perspective, because there is considerable overlapping.

Included in the first group are Joseph Adjaye (1987), Kenneth Bilby (1990), Peter Rigby (1983), and Robert Thornton (1980), all of which are specific local studies following a principally anthropological/cultural history trajectory. I may have produced the first detailed study of the multiple time structures — the agricultural/ecological, life span, and 40-day calendar — observed by the Akan of central and southern Ghana, demonstrating how they all combine to provide an internal logic that underlies Akan society. Bilby's doctoral dissertation, "The Remaking of the Aluku: Culture, Politics, and Maroon Ethnicity in French South America" (1990), is a detailed ethnographic study of the Maroons of French Guiana and Suriname that incorporates aspects of their historical consciousness and constructions of their time orientations, though these are not the author's primary concern.

Peter Rigby's "Time and Historical Consciousness: The Case of Ilparakuyo Maasai" is a theoretical study that is grounded in a critique of "classical" anthropological approaches to time analyses and employs Ilparakuyo (Tanzania) time notions to illustrate that the apprehension of temporal categories can be understood only in the context of particular historical transformations. Also working in Tanzania, Robert Thornton examined local Iraqw texts (narratives) to analyze how the Iraqw perceived the past and, in a manner reminiscent of Eurocentered approaches, concluded that the Iraqw lacked a "historical tradition" because their "way of thinking about the past is different from our own [Western] 'historical' ways."

Within the social/political history category can be cited Keletso Atkins (1988), Ira Berlin (1980), Tom McCaskie (1980), and Ivor Wilks (1992). In her "Kafir Time: Preindustrial Temporal Concepts and Labour Discipline in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Natal," Keletso Atkins examined the work ethos and time demarcations of the Nguni Zulus of Natal, South Africa, which were based on cultural phenomena, solar and lunar computations, ecological changes, and social activities and how they were radically altered by the intrusion of a colonial wage economy. Lacking an understanding of the Nguni time concept, the colonialists contemptuously dubbed it "kafir time."

Ira Berlin argues the importance of time and space as critical factors for understanding the dynamic and complex society of slavery. In his "Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America," he shows that a careful delineation of temporal and spatial differences among the Northern non-plantation system

and the two Southern plantation systems of the Chesapeake Bay area and the Carolina and Georgia low country slave societies are essential for a full comprehension of African-American cultural transformations in the colonial era.

Tom McCaskie's "Time and the Calendar in Nineteenth Century Asante: An Exploratory Essay" (1980) and Ivor Wilks's "On Mentally Mapping Greater Asante: A Study of Time and Motion" (1992) are both specific studies that offer useful insights into the relationship between time and governmental business in a traditional African state, the former attempting a reconciliation between Asante calendrical structures and European chronological time and the latter discussing how time and space were locally conceptualized with respect to the scheduling of official meetings and travel time for envoys.

The third group, the philosophical/theological, includes authors like Kwame Gyekye (1987), John Mbiti (1990 [1969]; 1970), and Dorothy Pennington (1985), who employ a principally philosophical and/or worldview analytical framework. Mbiti's publications and their limitations have been cited above. Indeed, Gyekye provides a succinct critique of Mbiti in his brief exploration into Akan time concepts that appears in his book on Akan philosophy, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*. Penningon's "Time in African Culture" (1985) is an overview that affirms the centrality of time as a culture-binding phenomenon determined largely by worldview but suffers from generalities and inaccuracies that are attributed to all of Africa, such as claims that Africans could not fathom a sense of linear progression or of the future.

THE STUDY

Although the studies cited above are not exhaustive of publications in the field, their extremely limited number underscores the general dearth of publications on time among Black societies. If time is indeed a universal phenomenon of human experience, then the existing isolated studies are a disservice to the thousands of ethnic groups in Africa and Black communities in the diaspora. Time in Africa and its diasporan societies calls out as a subject of further inquiry in view of the paucity of publications in the field. To date there is not a single collection of studies on the subject, nor have books on time as a global phenomenon or on calendrical systems of the world included essays dealing with the Black experience. J. T. Fraser's authoritative publication, *The Voices of Time* (1981), whose subtitle, *A Cooperative Survey of Man's Views of Time as*

Expressed by the Sciences and by the Humanities, clearly gave indications of a comprehensive study, did include analyses of time from a host of disciplinary perspectives, including philosophy, religion, language, literature, music, psychology, history, physics, and horology. It also included contributions on "non-Western" societies like China and India but conspicuously omitted Africa. In a similar fashion, compilations of calendars around the world, such as Frank Parise's *The Book of Calendars* (1982), have not considered African calendrical systems (such as the Ethiopian and Egyptian) worthy of inclusion. This book is offered as a contribution to redressing this neglect, omission, and imbalance.

In addition to the relative paucity of publications on time in the Black experience, there is the need to correct the misconceptions, generalities, and vagaries that appear in some of the literature. Time in Africa and Black communities of the diaspora has to be studied and viewed as distinct products of their own environments rather than as aberrant forms of a Western norm. Thus, the need for the projection of truly internal African constructions of time notions and concepts cannot be overemphasized.

Further, monolithic constructions of time cannot be depicted for all of Africa in view of the enormous range of diversity that exists in thought and belief systems, political structures, economic systems, and language forms that undoubtedly influence and shape the development of temporal perceptions and demarcations, even though some degree of congruence may be found among some systems. Differences must be noted not only among various ethnic groups but also over time within individual societies, because time is a dynamic institution that changes with transformations in economic activities and social change. Also, it is only through local case studies such as those presented in this volume that our understanding of time as a variable phenomenon can be advanced.

The true nature in which time is experienced in each African society has to be examined and identified on its own. Does time in that particular African society manifest itself as an abstraction existing by itself, moving on its own accord in the Newtonian sense, and proceeding uninterrupted even if all activity were to stop?[8] Or, can the contrary view be held that time does not exist by itself alone, has no essence or recognition of itself, and becomes a factor to a consciousness when the consciousness becomes aware of it?[9] Should time be thought of only as measurable by the clock and fitting into an absolute calendar?

Other critical questions have to be posed. For the many African societies that are anchored in a strong tradition of mythology, is mythical

time historical time, as Jan Vansina and Hama Boubou and J. Ki-Zerbo, for example, assert?[10] How does the sense of historical consciousness vary between centralized states with long historical traditions and segmentary societies? How do changing labor demands impact on time perceptions? Is time throughout Africa only two-dimensional, with a long past, a present, and no future, as claimed by Mbiti (1990 [1969], pp. 16–17)? Also, is the Mbiti construct of "phenomenon time," that is, that time in Africa exists not in the abstract sense but only as a "composition of events," applicable to the entire continent? Are Africans incapable of conceptualizations of the future as consonant with progression?

This book is offered on the premise that time is a universal phenomenon, that all humans are time-conscious creatures, and that all societies — including those of Africa and African descent — have some time-reckoning strategies and mechanisms. It emanates from the recognition that despite the enormous diversity existing among African peoples, the slowly expanding literature on African concepts of time has helped define a construct of time for traditional African societies generally and recognizable patterns that were transferred to Maroon and other African communities in the diaspora. In so doing, not only have time-marking concepts, mechanisms, and structures been identified, but also their salient differences, conceptually and behaviorally, from those observed in the West have been noted.

This book presents ten chapters on time in various African societies and Black communities in the southern United States and the Caribbean. Time is defined and applied variously, as in its manifold manifestations, by the different authors. These include both the abstract conceptualization of time as well as the concrete realms of time, and the multiple manifestations of temporal experience covered by the contributors span a wide spectrum: cosmological and genealogical time, physical and ecological changes, social rhythm, agricultural and industrial time, historical process and consciousness, and the philosophical idea of time. As a multidisciplinary work, this is the product of systematic investigation by scholars with various disciplinary bearings, including history, linguistics, political science, anthropology, and philosophy.

Besides this introductory chapter, there are ten case studies, six on Africa and four on the diaspora. The chapters are presented as individual studies, each on its own, bonded together only by the common thread of the theme of time rather than by a commonality of approach. Yet, it becomes apparent that they fall into two clusters: chapters 2 through 5, and 8, 9, and 11 focus on the relationships between indigenous time-reckoning systems, culture, and history, and chapters 6, 7, and 10 center

on the relationships between time, labor, and work discipline. The two major themes complement each other in the sense that the first explores traditional culture with respect to time while the second examines the demands of "modernity" on time. Further, the chapters fall naturally into subsets of complementary chapters: Fu-Kiau's and Kokole's on Bantu groups from Zaire into Uganda; Adjaye's and Koné's on Ghana, Mali, and other West African groups; the Suriname/French Guiana and Jamaican chapters on Maroon communities in the Caribbean; and the three by Atkins, Mazrui and Mphande, and Sobel on transformations brought about by capitalist and/or colonial labor clock discipline. The interconnecting thread is the continuity of temporal experience, from Africa to the Americas and inside Africa in terms of the survival of traditional time concepts even in coexistence, in some areas, with Western time "sense."

Following this introduction, K. K. Bunseki Fu-Kiau discusses in Chapter 2 the indigenous Bantu-Kongo concept of time that is not only embedded in their cosmology but also transmitted only through special initiatory schools that represented centers of higher learning in the past. The author reveals the ancient Kongo teachings about time, distinguishing among a number of realms of time, including cosmic, vital, natural, and social, that function simultaneously and in an interlocking fashion. At the apex is "cosmic time," a perpetual, ongoing time-flow that began with the creation of the universe and continues in an unending time path. It overarches all subcycles of time, and within its flow are distinct phases or stages along which all creations, developments, and systems pass under the supreme creative force of Kalunga.

However, as Fu-Kiau demonstrates, the flow of time is comprehensible only through concrete events or "dams" of time that serve as demarcations. Time is cyclical, and, thus, not only did the creation of the celestial bodies pass through a four-stage cycle, but also the "vital time" of living beings, the "natural time" that determines seasonal and ecological changes, and all other realms of time undergo this four-step cycle. The conceptualization of time has direct social relevance for Kongo residential patterns, market days, and other social arenas. Fu-Kiau also discusses the Kongo concept of the past, the present, and the future.

In Chapter 3, Omari Kokole investigates the interconnectedness between language and concepts of time across three large ethnolinguistic groups in Africa — Kiswahili, Lingala, and Luganda — in "Time, Language and the Oral Tradition: An African Perspective." Utilizing a large body of linguistic evidence, Kokole illustrates the coexistence of concepts of, and attitudes toward, time derived from a triple source: the

indigenous African heritage, which, disinclined toward the minutiae of time, often made no sharp distinctions among the past, the present, and the future; the Islamic sources, which helped to introduce minute categories of time; and the Western influence, one of the consequences of the colonial experience.

Kokole concludes that perhaps one of the most resilient aspects of indigenous African culture is attitude to time, which is grounded in Africa's elder tradition, agricultural economies, and culture of human names, for neither Islam nor the West, despite centuries of contact, has succeeded in supplanting those traditional attitudes to time.

Joseph K. Adjaye's "Time, Identity, and Historical Consciousness in Akan" (Chapter 4) proceeds from the background of a critique of Eurocentered anthropological and philosophical discourses on time concepts in Africa to discuss the various time-marking and calendrical structures observed by the Akan of central and southern Ghana. Adjaye demonstrates that the traditional calendars are essentially agricultural or economic systems derived by reference to recurring, predictable climatological phenomena, while the parallel 40-day monthly cycles are ritually based calendars insofar as they mark out patterns of days set aside for the performance of various rituals of state. Adjaye also illustrates that there is a link between personal identity and conceptions of temporal order.

In contrast to John Mbiti's (1990 [1969]) two-dimensional model of time with a past and a present but lacking a future, Adjaye argues that time in Akan society manifests itself not only at all three levels but also as both an abstraction and a concrete reality. He further discusses the Akan sense of historical time and chronology, demonstrating that notions of time are linked with ideas of historical process. He concludes by emphasizing the interdependency of time, person, and history and the importance of each seemingly discrete time structure as an interconnected component of an overarching edifice that provides the internal, definable logic and ethos of Akan society.

Kassim Koné's discussion in Chapter 5 of the ways in which the Bamana/Mandinka and Dogon of Mali define and conceptualize time is situated against the background of a critique of Western anthropological characterizations of African time in terms of religious, ecological, and ritual time. He emphasizes that although religion, ecology, and rituals are important in marking the passage of time among Africans, they have a more important significance in their social, cultural, economic, and political contexts. Thus, time must be studied and understood in its context.

Koné emphasizes that past, present, and future events and activities are situated in time as well as context. The fact that events sometimes serve as temporal orientation does not mean that the times when they occur are ritual or religious times to which people are bound. Similarly, the historical past and genealogies are conceptualized within the contexts of space, place, totemic affiliation, and family names rather than exact chronology, a major divide between Western historiography and African conceptions of the past.

Alamin Mazrui and Lupenga Mphande examine in Chapter 6, "Time and Labor in Colonial Africa: The Case of Kenya and Malawi," the destruction of a precapitalist conception of time through the imposition of a European capitalist time and discuss the methods employed and African reactions. The authors demonstrate how the traditional work culture in Kenya and Malawi, which was more oriented to the past than to the future, was supplanted by a new capitalist culture of organizing and utilizing labor and time with a strong futuristic orientation.

Clashes inevitably occurred between the two systems, between African organic time and Western mechanical time. Western concepts of labor as stemming from individually "negotiated" contracts were at variance with African collective demands imposed by illness in the family, marriage, death, and other social obligations. When Africans refused to work willingly, a system of forced labor was instituted. Mazrui and Mphande argue that to resist the colonial transformation of the Africans' collective social being and the punitive and coercive measures employed by the state to establish the capitalist system, Africans resorted to work desertions, labor strikes, and military confrontations as well as covert forms of industrial protest like petty thievery, feigning illness, and tampering with work implements.

Keletso Atkins's essay in Chapter 7, "'Kafir Time': Preindustrial Temporal Concepts and Labor Discipline in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Natal," bears some parallels to that of Mazrui and Mphande. Atkins demonstrates how the preindustrial work ethos and time demarcations of the northern Nguni Zulus of Natal, South Africa, which were traditionally based on agricultural cycles, lunar computations of monthly periods, ecological changes, and social activities, were radically altered by the intrusion of a wage economy, a capitalist labor clock discipline, and the colonial state in the nineteenth century.

Differences between the Zulu concept of the year as an agricultural season of six months and the Western calendrical 12-month year; differing notions of the length of the working day; clashes between the industrial demands of sugar manufacture that entailed night work and

indigenous conventions that proscribed night work; the web of a novel chronological complex involving daily work regimens; seven-day work cycles and meal time controls that the urban worker found himself caught in all presented opposing temporal references to which the demands of conformity repeatedly entailed conflicts. Legislation and wage inducements represented two of the approaches employed to deal with these issues as the Nguni worker was compelled to respond to the shifts in his temporal consciousness.

Kenneth Bilby's "Time and History among a Maroon People: The Aluku" (Chapter 8) examines how the Aluku Maroons of Suriname and Guyana regard time and their place in it. He dispels the myth that Maroon societies are frozen in time or that they are timeless replicas of African tribal life in the Americas and critiques structural-functionalist paradigms that traditional African societies and their "New World" re-creations were devoid of historical consciousness because their sense of time derived primarily from the repetitive rhythms of nature and the regularities of social life.

Bilby demonstrates that the Aluku language is replete with words depicting categories of duration as well as relations of repetition, and even though some of the terminologies represent creolized forms of European words, they embody categories of thought often different from those conveyed by their European entyma. He also discusses the various Aluku temporal demarcations and their basic calendrical system, which is linked to either their horticultural economy or recurring ecological changes. Yet, the Aluku have no ceremonial calendar.

As Bilby shows, the Aluku perceive time in a linear, "progressive" way, although they may not quantify and measure time so as to fashion precise chronological reckoning. As a people who are acutely aware of themselves as products of a unique history, the Aluku conceptualize time as a chain linking past events through the present to the future and view events as sequentially or causally related to each other.

In "Jamaican Maroons: Time and Historical Identity" (Chapter 9), Joseph K. Adjaye delves into the issue of Jamaican Maroon identity construction and development over time. In a chapter that complements Bilby's on the Aluku Maroons, the author demonstrates that the Jamaican Maroons forged a unique identity of themselves and proceeds to examine the symbols by which this identity was maintained, for example, initiation, naming, leadership, and warfare.

Adjaye argues that identity construction and bestowal were not frozen in time. On the contrary, they were constantly formulated and reformulated, defined and redefined. Therefore, the symbols by which this

identity was sustained and assured transtemporally themselves underwent changes. Concurrently, major temporal demarcations such as treaties between the Maroons and the colonial governments profoundly transformed the very character of Maroon identity transepochally. Thus, Jamaican marronage was nonstatic and mutable. However, through it all, it was time that served as the overarching vehicle that defined and transformed Maroon identity through history.

In Chapter 10, Mechal Sobel draws heavily on eyewitness accounts, contemporary narratives, and autobiographies to document time use and work habits among African-American slaves in eighteenth and early nineteenth century Virginia and the Carolinas, as well as changes that occurred over time in conceptions of time and attitudes to work. Newly arrived slaves, unused to mechanical timepieces, retained African time values, in contrast to second-generation African-Americans, like Nat Turner, who exhibited mixed attitudes between African time concepts and Western clock specificity. To most slave owners, however, time was to be redeemed and used productively.

Slave owners also expected their Christian slaves to share their attitudes not only to Christianity but also to time and work. Yet, some Southern Blacks did not absorb the Protestant work ethic and saw the work that whites set them as punishment. Whites interpreted this attitude as chronic laziness, which they were determined to root out through persistent punishments. Over time, however, as Sobel shows, a shared environment, interaction, and a joint calendar led to the interpenetration of time and work values between Black and white, traditional and modern, and some confluence in temporal perceptions developed as a result.

In the final chapter, "Time in the African Diaspora: The Gullah Experience," Joseph Holloway examines African continuities in the concept of time among the Gullah of the Sea Islands of South Carolina, drawing parallels between Gullah temporal systems and those of their African ancestors.

Citing interviews with informants, Holloway demonstrates that with the Gullah, as with many African societies, time is grounded in the oral tradition through the collective memory of the people. Time is episodic and associated with memorable events like the visit of President Abraham Lincoln, the "Big Gun Shoot" (that is, the Civil War), the hurricane of 1893, and the storm of 1911. Time is also seen by the Gullah to be cyclical in an unbroken circle from birth through adulthood to death and back to birth. At another level, the Gullah conceptualize time in association with the forces of nature, with lunar and solar eclipses, and tidal waves. Holloway sees the Gullah concept of time as

Afrocentric and in tune with the rhythms of nature. A direct Africanism, it perceives the universe holistically and multidimensionally.

Although the chapters are presented as individual studies, some common conclusions come to the fore, reinforcing some universally identical traits in the Black experience of time. Time throughout the Black experience has provided the fundamental beat to which the rhythm of that experience has responded. Though experienced in multiple manifestations in differing environments, time is fundamentally determined by economic and cultural forces, which, because of their dynamic, complex, and mutable nature, render time itself mutative. Indeed, the opposing views held by the contributors on Mbiti's concept of the future (or the lack of it) — some in support and others in disagreement — illustrate the fact that despite the existence of some common temporal concepts, there is no single "African" sense of time.

Other general conclusions can be drawn. The chapters on time and culture affirm resilience and continuity in African traditions inasmuch as those on time and labor confirm that differences between Western and African conceptions of time do not emanate from a North-South distinction as a capitalist versus precapitalist distinction.[11] Above all, the chapters throughout confirm the continuity of temporal (as other cultural) experiences among Africans from precolonial times through the colonial period in Africa and across continents to the slave era in the Americas. Indeed, Holloway's study confirms the continuum in African temporal experience from cosmic times, as represented in the Kongo example, through slavery to the present day, as evidenceed by the Gullah.

Ten case studies on a subject as vast as time and covering the expansive Black experience from the home continent across the Atlantic cannot be considered anything but limited. Many more questions have to be posed and answered through continuing scholarly investigations than are covered in this small collection. One possible line of inquiry for the future is to further pursue current African-American temporal attitudes toward work as well as social time. However, our purpose has been not to provide a comprehensive study, which is undoubtedly beyond the scope of this single volume, but to contribute to expanding our knowledge and understanding of time and to stimulate and provoke thought and further inquiry on the subject. It is in this hope that this book is presented.

NOTES

1. J. T. Fraser, ed. *The Voices of Time*, 2nd ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1981), p. xviii.

2. For futher discussion, see, for example, Jan Vansina, "Knowledge and Perceptions of the African Past," in *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa?*, eds. B. Jewsiewicki and D. Newbury (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1986), pp. 31–32.

3. Broadcast lecture reprinted in *The Listener*, London, November 28, 1963, p. 871.

4. Cited in Caroline Neale, *Writing Independent History: African Historiography, 1960–1980* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1985), p. 6.

5. Thomas Hodgkin, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa* (London: Mueller, 1956), pp. 174–75.

6. For further discussion, see Peter Rigby, "Time and Historical Consciousness: The Case of Ilparakuyo Maasai," in *Comparative Study of Society and History* 25 (1983), pp. 428–56.

7. For further discussion, see W. MacGaffey, "Epistemological Ethnocentricism in African Studies," in *African Historiographies: What History for which Africa?*, eds. B. Jewsiewicki and D. Newbury (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1986), pp. 42–48.

8. For a discussion of time as an absolute, true, and mathematical phenomenon that flows equably without relation to anything external, see Isaac Newton, *Mathematical Principles* (Berkeley: University of California, 1934).

9. See, for example, Louis Reitmeister, *A Philosophy of Time* (New York: Citadel, 1962), p. 28.

10. Jan Vansina, *The Children of Woot: A History of the Kuba Peoples* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 18–22; Hama Boubou and J. Ki-Zerbo, "The Place of History in African Society," in *General History of Africa: I* (Paris: UNESCO, 1980), pp. 65–76.

11. E. P. Thompson argues that it was the industrial revolution in Europe that changed temporal attitudes to work. See E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present* 38 (1967), pp. 56–97.

2

Ntangu-Tandu-Kolo: The Bantu-Kongo Concept of Time

K. K. Bunseki Fu-Kiau

This chapter discusses the indigenous time concepts of the Kongo of West Central Africa. "Kongo" refers to a cultural, linguistic, and historical group of people that is descended from a larger body of Bantu-speaking communities who migrated south from the Benue-Cross river region of present-day Nigeria into the equatorial forest of West Central Africa and beyond. Dating back to the second millennium B.C., waves of migratory Bantu communities slowly pressed south, a process by which the majority of Africans living in the entire region south of the equator came to speak one or another of the 400 related Bantu languages. Within a few centuries, early Iron Age settlements of Bantu speakers were established throughout the region. It was this shared past of common origins and history and millennia of interrelationship that gave rise to the affinity in cultural traditions, belief systems, and time concepts among the Kongo and other Bantu groups.

The modern era of Kongo history dates to the thirteenth century, when new settlers began to fortify their ethnic-based political institutions in the southern Congo river basin (in present-day Angola) under the collective leadership of chiefs (*mfumu*) who were elected from the ranks of the wise elders (*bakulu*). From these small chiefdoms, larger and more powerful centralized state systems with well-established political institutions (*sikudukusulu*) were established. One of the largest and most powerful of these states was Kongo, which expanded from its Angolan base to the

area of modern Zaire and the Congo Republic. Other Bantu kingdoms that were created in the Congo river region included Bemba, Lunda, Lulua, and Kuba.

By far, the most successful of the Bantu states of West Central Africa was Kongo, which developed a highly advanced iron technology, agrarian culture, complex trade systems, and elaborate political institutions well before the arrival of the first Europeans in the region in the late fifteenth century. The high level of material culture attained by the Kongo state by the sixteenth century has been commented upon in both oral chronicles and documentary evidence. In the view of one commentator, "in terms of natural resources [Western Europe was] poorer and in terms of its economic development at the time, in many respects more backward than advanced" (Baran 1961, p. 138).

However, the glory of the Kongo state did not last long after the European arrival, which signalled the beginning of its decline and ultimate demise. With the European entry almost simultaneously into the Americas and the establishment there of slave-based plantation systems, the fate of Kongo and that of the "New World" became intertwined for the next several centuries. Kongo, along with the other states of West Central Africa, became the region in all of Africa where Europeans obtained the most slaves that were transported across the Atlantic to labor on American plantations during the 3.5 centuries of slave trading from the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. Also, it was Portuguese slave raiding activities that, more than any single factor, accounted for the destabilization and eventual fall of Kongo, politically and economically.

At the same time, European missionary activities, under the guise of civilizing the Kongo people, were slowly increasing European penetration of the region. Ultimately, by the late nineteenth century, European desire to obtain the riches of the Congo basin (for example, gold, ivory, rubber) to serve the needs of their industrial expansion, the potential of the river as a commercial highway, and the victimization of the region (as, indeed, the rest of the continent) as a pawn in European power politics all culminated in the colonization of the Kongo basin. Out of the territory once covered by the old Kongo state, three colonial states were carved out and controlled by the Portuguese, Belgians, and French from the 1880s until independence in the 1960s and 1970s, when the colonial territories became the modern nations of Angola, Zaire, and the Congo Republic, respectively.

Even though the Kongo people (Bakongo, sing. Mukongo) are now split by three different national boundaries, they share common social,

artistic, economic, and spiritual traditions as descendants of the historic state and speak a common Kikongo language.[1] Kongo culture, history, and politics have been the subject of innumerable works by writers both inside and outside Africa, but very few have been concerned with the subject of time, and those that have done so have focused on time in what I would describe as the everyday, "mundane" sense of the word, that is, the concepts of time generally known to the uninitiated, the *biyîn-ga*. This is the comprehension of time that is shared at mealtimes, the market place, a wedding, and a dance. It is also the genre of time that is embodied in conceptualizations of events of the recent and colonial past or in the planning of future activities (in terms of days, weeks, or years).

In this respect, several works come to mind. One is Jan Vansina's *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (1990), in which he discusses time concept awareness (or the lack of it) in Western literature dealing with the history of Africa. "To evaluate the position of the data, as pre-colonial or colonial," writes the author, "one needs to know the local date of colonial conquest and the time collapse since then" (Vansina 1990, p. 21). Unfortunately, although this concept of time has some utility, it could also be a wall in terms of evaluating certain events or developments on the time line of African history. If a colonial or precolonial document written in, let us say, 1600 mentions the existence of the *Lèmba Institution* for the first time, should we conclude that this institution popped out of nowhere at the date the document was written, even if that particular institution may have existed for hundreds of years before? Such approaches to conceptions of the African past have obvious limitations unless there is corroborating evidence from other sources.

Earlier, in *The Children of Woot: A History of the Kuba Peoples* (1978), Vansina introduced a brief, two-page exploration into Kuba conceptions of time. He mentioned that the Kuba of Zaire could date events with regard to abandoned village sites and referred to market days for the week but concluded that they had limited time concepts: "it seems unlikely that a count of days was often outside the market context" (p. 20). In any case, it will be apparent in this chapter that my concern with time is from a completely different perspective.

Two other studies on time are worthy of note: John Mbiti's *African Religions and Philosophy* (1990 [1969]) and A. Kagame's "The Empirical Apperception of Time and the Time Consciousness of History in Bantu Thought" (1976). However, both are general studies on Bantu concepts of time rather than Kongo specific and moreover, like Vansina's, adopt an approach different from mine.

In contrast to the "mundane" aspects of time mentioned above, the concern of this chapter is the realms of time that come from the "esoteric" world of the Kongo, the world of the *bangânga*, the masters, the initiated ones. The vehicles through which such knowledge was disseminated were the initiation schools, the centers of higher learning, which were forbidden to outsiders. Thus, knowledge of their teachings was inaccessible to Europeans and all foreigners. Because of their nature, these institutions of higher learning were ultimately suppressed by the colonial powers, and their teachings went underground. Fortunately, I was privileged to have been initiated into one of them, and at the feet of the masters, I learned, in a period of ten years, what is expressed in this essay about the Kongo concept of time. Other references are based on my personal work and experience with Kongo culture, of which I am a member by blood as well as academic interest.

The Kongo concept of time described here is deeply rooted in our worldview, our cosmology, which was the core base of the curricula of all institutions of higher learning. Its centrality in our knowledge system stems from the fact that time lies at the core of our understanding of not only the universe and its processes (*dingo-dingo*) of creation, transformation, and functioning, but also of life itself and its functioning. It is through time that both nature and man become comprehensible to us. Time validates and provides truths to our existence.

This chapter discusses cosmic, natural, vital, and social time among the Bakongo. It will also examine the Kongo concept of the past, the present, and the future. It will be demonstrated that first, time is cyclical, and all creations, institutions, and systems undergo a four-stage cyclical process, and that second, this four-step process of time has social relevance for the Bakongo.

THE BANTU-KONGO CONCEPT OF TIME

Time, for the Kongo, is a cyclical "thing." It has no beginning and no end. Thanks to *dunga* (events), the concept of time is understood and can be understandable. These *dunga*, be they natural or artificial, biological or ideological, material or immaterial, constitute what is known as *n'kama mia ntangu* in Kikongo, that is, the "dams of time."[2] It is these dams of time that make possible both the concept and the divisions of time among the Bantu-Kongo. Thus, time is both abstract and concrete. At the abstract level, time has no beginning or end. It exists on its own and flows by itself, on its own accord. Yet, at the concrete level, it is *dunga* (events) that make time perceptible, providing the unending flow of time

with specific "dams," events, or periods of time.

It is virtually impossible to grasp the Bantu-Kongo concept of time discussed here without understanding certain key words that express and embody terminologies of time in Kongo culture, the base of this work. Each of these words must be clearly understood in order to understand the concept they describe.

There are three key words in the Kikongo language that translate the term "time." The first and most commonly used is *ntangu*. The term *ntangu* finds its root in the word *tanga* — to count, put in order, accumulate, go into steps, go back and forth. This same verb translates as to read or to dance, as with one's own *ntanga* (feet/legs). It is from this root that the term *matanga* (sing. *tanga*), an exuberant dance ceremony accompanied by many musical instruments, is derived. This ceremony is held in connection with the final funeral rites of a community leader. It is interesting to note that the names of the Latin American dance the tango and the Cuban dance the *matanza* are directly derived from the Kongo festival dance of *matanga*. "Tango," in fact, is a derivative of the singular form, *tanga*, while *matanza* is the plural form of *matanga*.

The second key word used by the Kongo people to translate "time" is *tandu*, from the root verb *tanda*, to mark or to set on line, to cast. The third key word used to translate time is *Kolo*. This last term is linked to the verb *kola*, which expresses a state of being, a level of strength at a given period of time. The concept of "hour" is expressed by the words *lo*, *lokula*, and *ndo*. The following examples will help illustrate the various contexts in which terminologies refering to time are used in Kikongo:

Nkia ntangu kizidi?	What time did s/he come?
Ntangu ka yazayakana ko	The time was not known.
Ntangu yampasi	Hard (difficult) time.
Tekila tandu kieto	Before our time.
Mu tandu kina	In that time (period).
Mu kolo kiaki	In this time (era).
Kukondolo nkama miantangu, kwena kolo ka ko	Where there are no "dams of time," there is no time.

Although it is apparent that some of the terminologies are interchangeable, each one has its own specific, expressive, and semantic meaning to the Kikongo speaker, because such meanings are grounded in Bantu culture. This grounding needs to be understood in order to grasp the time concept among the people of this specific Bantu cultural

area. It must be understood if one is to have a proper comprehension of the ways the Bakongo conceptualize time, for all too often African cultural, religious, and philosophical systems are poorly understood in the Western literature on Africa because of a lack of understanding of key linguistic concepts.

The Bakongo recognize four realms of time: cosmic, natural, vital, and social time.

Cosmic Time (*Tandu Kiayalangana*)

In their worldview, the Bantu-Kongo call *tandu kiayalangana* or *tandu kia luyalungunu* "cosmic time," the unlimited and ongoing formation process of *dunga* (events) throughout the universe (*luyalungunu*) through the power and energy of Kalunga, the supreme force (Fu-Kiau, 1969; 1991). In other words, cosmic time represents the actual, ongoing, active time line of *kalunga* energy and its "dams" (*n'kama*) or new creations throughout the universe through the instrumentality of Kalunga's power, the agent of change and creation:

> After the appearance of the *Muntu* (human being), on the planet Earth, *Kalunga* energy achieved its highest plan for Earth to continue elsewhere, beyond the *M'bangu a zulu* (ceiling of sky), to set fire (*Lunga tiya*) in the emptiness of *Mbungi a luyalungunu* (the universe cavity) and overrun it for the formation of new worlds.[3]

To become fully alive, these new worlds, too, will be subject to the four cardinal stages of the Kongo cosmogram, as will be shown below.

Each body (world, planet) in the universe has its own cosmic time, its own formation process. However, the Bantu-Kongo ancient school of initiation taught that every cosmic time process encompasses four great steps, to which everything in life is subject, systems included. The Bantu cosmology teaches that to complete its formation process or *dingo-dingo*, a planet must go through these four stages or "dams of times" (*n'kama mia ntangu*), namely, *musoni* time, *kala* time, *tukula* time, and *luvemba* time.

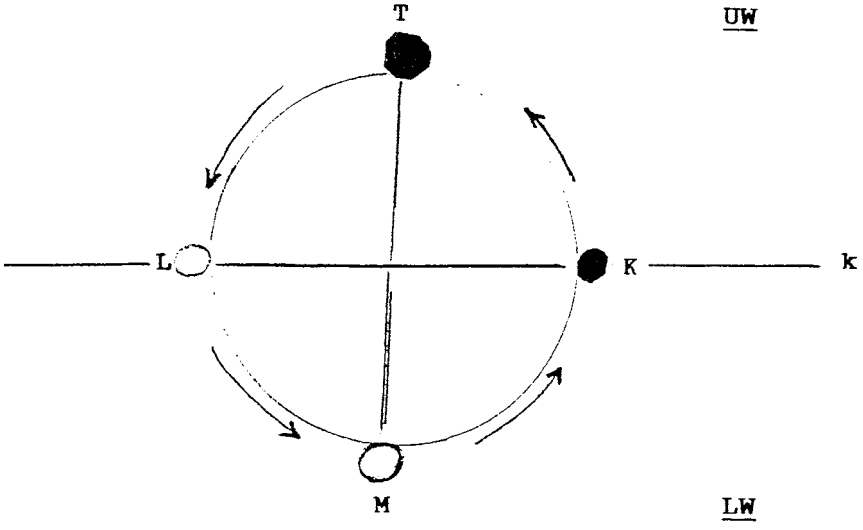
Musoni *Time* (Tandu kia musoni)

Musoni time is the beginning of all time. Kongo mythological tradition refers to this period as *Tandu kia Luku Lwalamba Kalunga* (literally, "the period of *Kalunga's* cooking"), the boiling era of magmatic matter (Fu-Kiau 1969, pp. 17–27). This is the period during which the void (*luyalungunu*) was filled with matters in fusion. This was the beginning

of *kele-kele dia dingo-dingo dia ntangu ye moyo*, "the sparkle of the ongoing process of time and life" throughout the universe; it is the collision of collisions (the big bang). This stage of *Musoni* time became the symbol of all beginnings and the first step in all Kongo teaching of higher learning (Figure 2.1). It occupies the first position in the Kongo cosmogram (*dikenga dia Kongo*). During this period, after its complete cooling process, the earth, our planet, became a physical reality. *Musoni*, yellow, is the symbolic color of this era, the first great dam of time (*n'kama wantete wangudi wa ntangu*).

Recognition is given to the importance of *Musoni* time not only as the cornerstone of the Kongo cosmogram but also as the seed, the beginning

FIGURE 2.1
Cosmological Time: The Formation and Transformation of the Planet Earth



M: *Musoni* Time (first stage, corresponding to the "big bang" era).
K: *Kala* Time (second stage, era when biological life in its microscopic form became a reality).
T: *Tukula* Time (third stage, era when animals occurred on planet earth).
L: *Luvemba* Time (fourth stage, era when *Maghûngu*, ancestor of the human race, occurred on planet earth).
UW: Upper World, the physical world.
LW: Lower World, the spiritual world, abode of the ancestors.
k: Kalunga, the balancing plan-line of all energies.

point of all developmemt in Kongo society. The Mukongo would say, for example, that when a seed is put in the ground, the action is being rooted in the *Musoni* position. Similarly, when an idea is being formed or developed in somebody's mind or when a Mukongo couple plans for a family, they begin at the *Musoni* stage. This is the hour of *n'dingu-a-nsi* (the depth of night, midnight). It is the position at which the universal living "energies" (male and female) unite inside the womb and become "*ma*" (matter).

Kala *Time* (Tandu kia Kala)

Kala time is the second stage in the formation process of planets and their transformation (Figure 2.1). After the completion of Earth's "cooling" came the *Kala* time stage (*Tandu kia Kala*). During this era the Earth witnessed great changes. Life in its lowest form — microscopic "beings" (*zio*), algae — began to exist/be (*kala*) during this period. The soil was moist, and water could be found everywhere. Black is the symbolic color of this era, the second great dam of time (*n'kama wanzole wangudi wa ntangu*). At this *kala* stage, the world saw the sun rising from the depth of the universe, the spiritual world or ancestors' world (the lower world), to the physical world (the upper world), bringing not only light but also hope, joy, and creative energy into the world.

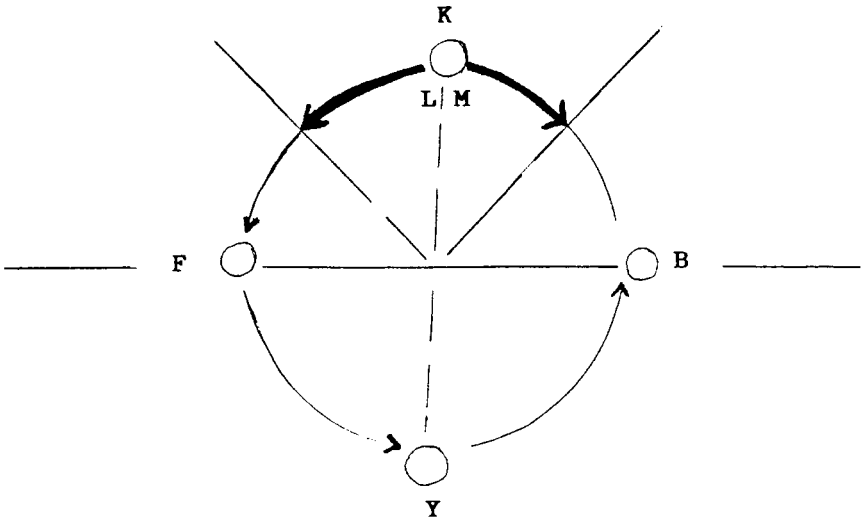
Again, the conceptualization of the *Kala* cosmic time has direct social relevance. The *Kala* position is seen as the position at which all biological beings come into being (*mu kala*). It is the position of all births. It is for this reason that the birth of child (*mwana*) in Bantu-Kongo society is conceived of in the same way one sees the sun rising in the upper world: "the birth of a child is perceived as the rising of a living sun in the upper world (*ku nseke*), the physical world or the world of the living community" (Fu-Kiau 1991, p. 8).

Tukula *Time* (Tandu kia Tukula)

Tukula time is the third stage in the formation process of planets (worlds) and their transformation that followed the *Kala* era. During this period of cosmic time, our planet matured (*Kula*). Life that occurred under the previous *Kala* era has now matured and prospered. Animals also occurred at one point during this *tukula* era. This stage occupies the third position in the Kongo cosmogram, *dikenga* (Figure 2.1). The symbolic color of this era, the third great dam of time, is red, which symbolizes growth/maturity (*tukula* literally means "let us grow/mature").

Tukula incorporates the "V" zone (Figure 2.2), the most critical zone in the success of all biological beings, especially human beings. It

FIGURE 2.2
Main Stages of Vital Time



Y: *Yakwa*: Conception stage (corresponds to *musoni* position of cosmic time).
B: *Butwa*: Birth stage (corresponds to *kala* position of cosmic time).
K: *Kula*: Growth, maturity, and power stage.
F: *Fwa*: Death stage, point of transformation and change.
LM: *Lubata lwa Mpângulu*: zone of highest level of creativity, symbolized by "V."

represents the point of the highest level of creativity. Nations whose leadership is unaware of the kind of role the "V" plays in human creative power are doomed to fail politically, economically, and socially. Inside this zone, people, nations, organizations, systems, and institutions should learn to stand tall and face the challenges that confront them. One reason many people, especially in their prime, are failing today is their inability to recognize and utilize the creative force of the "V" zone.

Luvemba *Time* (Tandu kia Luvemba)

This is the fourth stage and last period or era that a planet undergoes to complete its formation process and transformation, and it follows *tukula* time. According to the Bantu-Kongo school of higher learning,

during this era, *Maghûngu*[4] occurred on the planet. *Maghûngu* was an androgynous being, complete by "x-self." This mythological being was "two-in-one," male and female. Through continuous search for rituals, *Maghûngu* was split into two separated beings: *Lumbu* and *Muzita* (female and male). At this point the planet earth became a living whole, complete by itself. *Lumbu* and *Muzita*, to maintain their oneness as they were in *Maghûngu*, decided to remain together in life (married). They became wife and husband (*n'kento ye bakala*) (Fu-Kiau 1969, pp. 17–27). With this new beginning of life of togetherness, the circle of cosmic time was completed (Figure 2.1) and a new stage of time began — vital time.

However, before entering into a discussion of vital time, a point of clarification needs to be made concerning the way Kongo cosmological teachings explain the barrenness of some celestial bodies. As explained above, the planet Earth became fully alive only because it timely completed its cycle of going through all four cosmological stages outlined in Figure 2.1. Thus, the explanation given for the celestial bodies that are barren today, such as the moon and Mars, is twofold: they did not complete the four great stages of the cosmological wheel that would have concluded their formation and transformation process and, therefore, remain in the "cooling stage"; or they were targets of a catastrophic outer "big bang" collision that destroyed completely or aborted their creation and transformation processes while Kalunga, the creative energy, continues in outer space with its work of setting the universe afire, expanding it, and creating new worlds (planets).

Vital Time (*Ntangu a zingu/moyo*)

Like cosmic time, the vital time of life, *ntangu a moyo*, is cyclical. It begins at a point and ends at that same point to close the cycle, and then, by undergoing transformation, a new cycle begins. The length or span of this time period depends on the particular nature and living power of the "being," concept, or system involved (Fu-Kiau 1991, p. 45). All living things, concepts, and systems undergo this temporal cycle. Thus, vital time can be seen as biological time when it relates to life and its creative energy (reproduction). Its beginning point, that is, its *musoni*, is called *kenko dia ngyakulu*, the point of conception.

According to Kongo teaching, nothing exists that does not follow the steps of the cyclical Kongo cosmogram. People, animals, inventions, social systems, and so on are conceived (*yakwa/yindulwa*) and live

through a kind of pregnancy (Stage 1), are born (*butwa*) (Stage 2), mature (*kula*) (Stage 3), and die (*fwa*) at the collision stage in order to undergo change (Stage 4).

The span of vital time depends on the amount of energy generated by the "subject" involved. It is vital time (*ntangu anzingila*) and its living energy that determine in human beings, animals, insects, snakes, fish, plants, fungus, and so on their longevity. When the living energy of this time is diminished, living "things" weaken, their death velocity increases, and their life span shortens. They perish in order to change and begin a new cycle.

The Bantu-Kongo concept of death is very clear. Dying is not the end: "*tufwanga mu soba*" — we die in order to undergo change (Fu-Kiau 1969). Dying is not only a process but also a "dam of time." As a dam of time, it has its own landmark on the time line path, and as a process, it permits life to flow and regenerate (*dikitisa*) its power/energy (*ngolo*) to create a new state of being or undergo transformation capable of rejoining the body of the universal "body-energy." The living energy that existed before becoming a living matter at conception is then freed again.

Natural Time (*Ntangu yasemuka*)

Natural time, *ntangu yasemuka*, also called *ntangu yamena*, is the time that controls earthly things, their movement, growth, blooming, mating, and nesting. It is the time that determines seasonal changes and brings rejuvenation or dullness to life. Through its motion, natural time brings the four natural seasons to life:

1. *Nsungi a mvula*, the rainy season, is fundamentally a season of cleansing, vitality, and growth. It is the season in which the sky looks down while the earth raises its arms. In the colder parts of the world, it corresponds to the winter season.
2. *Nsungi a sivu*, the cold season, is a time when nature reduces its heavy breathing, a process that reduces not only its temperature but also its high, ascending power so as to feed the vegetable realm.
3. *Nsungi a lakumuka* is a period corresponding to the fall season in the West, a time when trees lose their foliage, hence, its name *lakumuka* (fall). In some parts of the world, this season is almost unnoticed because few trees undergo the "fall" process (*dingo-dingo dia lakumuna/kula*). It is the time for nature to

renew the nutrients in the ground and prepare itself for a new cycle.

4. *Nsungi a mbangala* is a season that corresponds to summer (*nsungi a mbangala*), a period of great movements and activities everywhere. It is the time when the vegetable realm rediscovers its green blanket; in other words, it is the time when nature's green cover or bush dries up, that is, dies to yield to new cover.

Like the others, natural time is also subject to the living principle behind the Kongo cosmogram. Each of its seasons corresponds to a specific stage on the cosmogram.

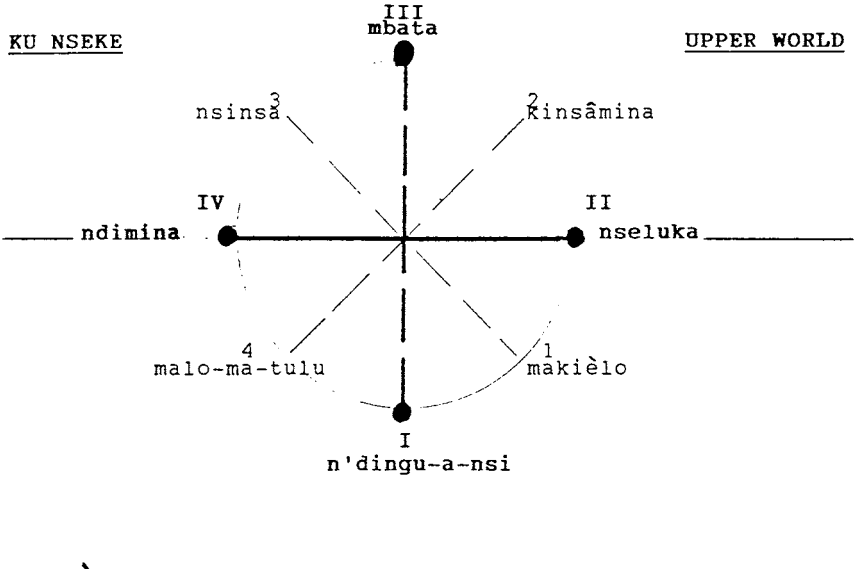
Social Time (*Ntangu amvukanana*)

Social time is the time devoted to all activities of living beings. The application of social time here, however, will be limited to human beings and Bantu people, in particular, the Bakongo. It is the time when a *Muntu* (human being) is involved in a particular activity, whether it is purely social (talking, marrying a community sister, dancing), economical (working, trading), political (enstooling a leader, conflict resolution), educational (initiating new leaders), philosophical (telling proverbs, palavering), or historical (listening to a *masamuna*, the griot).

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF TEMPORAL CONCEPTS

As with all other arenas of time, social time, in all its divisions, is itself subject to *dikenga*, the cosmogramic altar, and to its main steps of life, namely, *musoni* (step 1), the *kala* (step 2), the *tukula* (step 3), and the *luvemba* (step 4). Thus, the Kongo week was traditionally only four weekdays corresponding to the four Kongo markets of *Bukonso/Konzo*, *Mpika*, *Nkoyi*, and *Nkenge/Nsona*. Similarly, the day is divided into four principal hours/time periods (*lo bianene/biangudi*) — *n'dingu-a-nsi* (midnight), *nseluka* (sunrise, that is, about 6:00 A.M.), *mbata* (noon), and *ndimina* (sunset) — and four "in-between" hours (*lo biandwèlo*)— *makièlo* ("the opening of the morning," that is, 3–4 A.M.), *kinsâmina* (between sunrise and noon), *nsinsa* (between noon and sunset), and *malo-ma-tulu* (between sunset and midnight).[5] Each hour or time period is itself subject to the ruling principle of the Kongo cosmogram, as shown in Figure 2.3.

FIGURE 2.3
Kongo Hourly Time Segmentation System



I, II, III, IV: *Lo biangudi* (principal hours)
1, 2, 3, 4: *Lo binadwèlo* (in-between or "small" hours)

Further, in response to the cosmological ruling principle, a typical Kongo village usually has four entrances (*mafula*), with the residences of the following four key individuals or groups located near those entrances: *Nganga* (initiated masters), *mfumu* (generally political leaders), *ngwa-nkazi* (uncle, the tier of both positive and negative knots in the community),[6] and *Mase* (fathers, protective power). Likewise, learning processes typically are performed at four levels, each one taking place under the specific name of its corresponding stage on the *dikenga* (the cosmogramic wheel) as well as under the color representing that stage (yellow, black, red, or white).

TIME IN KONGO THOUGHT

"Dams of time" represent temporal demarcations that vary from minutes to hours and days, depending on the context. Thus, when a Mukongo says, "We had funerals last month," he is talking about days, not hours. If he says, "I will stop at my grandmother's house," it is clear he is talking about hours (for example, of chatting, laughing, learning), not days or minutes.

The question may be asked at this point of what it means to live with time. Among the Bakongo, as with all Bantu people, to speak of time is to speak of its *n'kama* or dams (births, wars, marriages, funerals, hunting, food gathering, and so on). It is to talk, discuss, and relate events biologically, ideologically, politically, socially, culturally, philosophically, and economically. Time is sensed, felt, conceived, and understood only through these *n'kama ye dunga bia ntangu* (dams and events of time) occurring on the path of a time line that is sequentially visible only in our mind (*ntona*). Working with "dams of time" and not controlling them is, therefore, life and time. These dams come and go because they are in the cyclical *dingo-dingo* of time.

Where there is no *mambu* (issues, conflicts, problems), time is not moving: there is no *moyo* (life) as such. Only when events (*dunga*) take place can "things" move and the time line path clear itself. A new cycle of time goes in motion until another collision stops it for a new beginning, a new motion of time to start. This begins in time and witnesses the marking of its dams and events, a process that can also decrease or increase our own healing power.[7]

Being in time and with time, that is, responding to the occurrence of its dams, is at once an energy-regenerating process and a healing one, a mental walk on the cosmic path of *dikenga*. It also means marking (*tanda*) and experiencing the dams of time on the perpetual time line, especially when "standing vertically" (*telama lwimba-nganga*) on its four main demarcation points: *musoni*, *kala*, *tukula*, and *luvemba*. These are the points of great collisions, not only in the planetary transformation process, but also in the biological life of individuals, a process that is necessary for change (*nsobolo*) to occur.

Many studies on Africa have attempted to label the African world as inactive, nonchalant, that is, a world without an awareness of time. However, I know no one can survive in Africa without an awareness of time. Time, as shown here in the four-stage temporal process, orders virtually every aspect of Kongo life. To fish and succeed, one must know the right time. To till the land and seed it for excellent harvest, one must

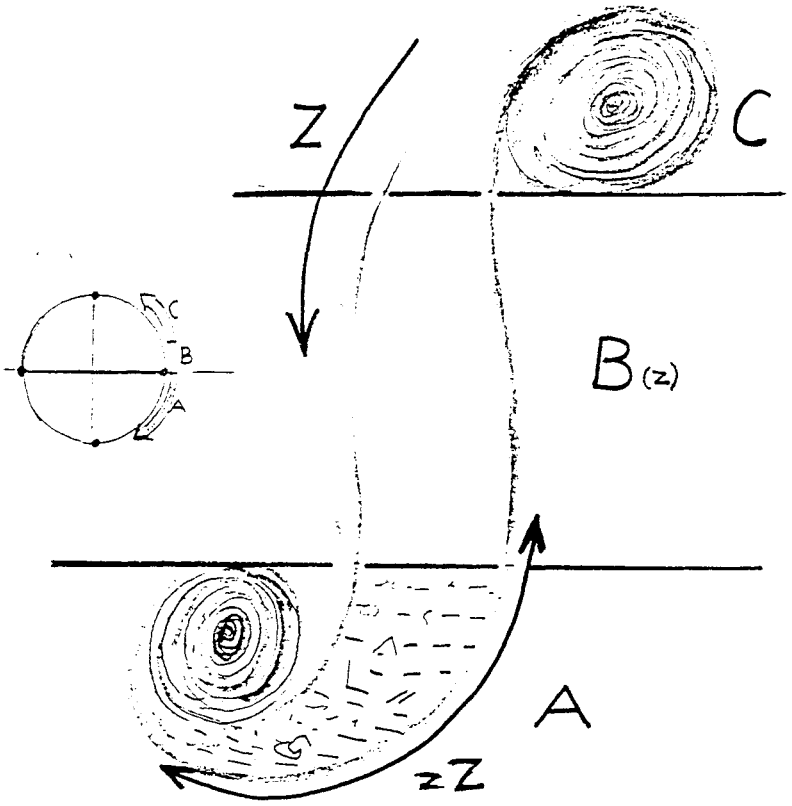
know when to start the work. One must know when to venture inside forests and avoid mosquitoes and snake bites. All this would be impossible without the knowledge and understanding of the concept of time.

For the Bantu people, there is no such thing as being "late" (unless they happen to have been educated outside Africa). One must learn to be patient. "*Mvula kasukina mu matuti, n'kaku*" — "If the rain does not reach the ground (earth)," say the Kongo, "there must be a barrier." An understanding of these barriers (*n'kaku*) is central to the very understanding of the concept of time and its function among the Bantu people, because time itself is worthless, but its dams are not (*Ka ntangu kibeni ko kansi n'kama miandi mivwidi lukumu*). "Being late" is only a way of responding to other aspects of *n'kama mia ntangu* that were not foreseen at the time a "fixed" point in time on the conventional time line was decided. One can flow with time from one dam of time (fixed duty) to another only if there is no unforeseen collision (event/*dunga*) between the two, such as a child hanging over a bridge by his stuck foot. Otherwise, one has to deal *first* with this new "in-between" dam (*nkambakani*) or collision.

Living in time is being able to deal at once with the known and unknown dams of time as they occur throughout *dingo-dingo dia ntangu* (process of time). It also involves comprehending the interrelation between the past, the present, and the future. It is being able to *zinga ye zingumuna luzingu lwa ntangu*, roll and unroll the scroll of time, that is, to understand and interpret the present (time zone B) by unrolling and reviewing the historical part of the scroll that contains the accumulated experience of learning (time zone A) and to position oneself to predict the future (*the past of tomorrow*) by rolling or revealing the hidden part of the scroll upon which *n'kama miampa mia ntangu* (new dams of time) are to be imprinted by man or nature (time zone C), as shown in Figure 2.4.

This figure embodies the Bantu concept of the past, the present, and the future of time. Time is conceived as a scroll (*luzingu*) that requires double actions by the individual, who says "I am in the present time" (*Mono ngiena mu tandu kiaki*) in order to understand it: *zinga ye zingumuna luzingu lwa ntangu* (roll and unroll the scroll of time). Through *zinga ye zingumuna* (rolling and unrolling), the past goes and returns to us in the present time; by *zingumuna* (unrolling) we discover the future, the past of tomorrow. We say by *zingumuna* (Z), the scroll of time, the future comes to us. By *zinga ye zingumuna* (Zz), which are daily processes of life, man can bring to himself, in the present time, the best and the worst of both the past and the future. In other words, to live

FIGURE 2.4
Luzingu: Time Scroll — "Time, Like Life, Is a Scroll"



A: Scroll time zone that contains past dams of time, accessible to *mûntu* (man) through *Zinga* (z) and *zingumuna* (Z), the rolling and unrolling process that unfolds the past.

B: Scroll time zone in the making, that is, today's time, the present. This is the *bèto* (us) or *tându kieto* (our time) phase.

C: Scroll time zone to be unfolded (naturally or artificially) by time, that is, the future that comes to us through the *zingumuna* (unrolling) process.

(*zinga*) and be (*kala*) in time is to be able to move freely back and forth on the scroll of time, that is, living constantly in the past (segment A), in the present, the future past (segment B), while unfolding the hidden unknown (segment C), the future present.

Time is the moving of the conscious energy (*ngolo zasikama*) within the biological matter/body (*ma/nitu*) on the path of both self and the universal cosmic wheel of life and social systems (*dikenga dia zingu/ moyo ye fu*). Therefore, to be in time is not only to go through but also to experience life by stepping on *n'kama mia ntangu* (dams of time). It is to be in tune with the flow of living energy, sharing its melody.

N'zungi	Traveler
N'zungi [a] nzila	Merely a traveler on the [cosmic] path
N'zungi	Traveler
N'zungi [a] nzila	Merely a traveler on the [cosmic] path
Banganga ban'e	And the initiated ones
E-e-e.[8]	They are the same.

The above song of the initiatory school of Lèmba, one of the four main schools of higher learning that existed in the Kongo kingdom, is philosophically captured in a sophisticated way in the Kikongo aphorism, *Ma'kwenda! Ma'kwiza* — "what goes on (now), will come back (later)" — what flows in a cyclical motion will remain in the motion. Time is cyclical, and so is life and all its ramifications that make change possible through the process of marking "the dams of time."

CONCLUSION

The Bantu-Kongo time concept discussed here may appear to be a completely new "thing," not only to lay readers of African thought and philosophy but also to those who labor for life and in those fields. The reason could be, among others, to paraphrase what a U.S. scholar pointed out, lack of understanding of African cosmologies. Time, for the Bakongo, can be discussed from all aspects of life because each one is an event-creating agent on the time line.

The following conclusions may be drawn about the Bantu-Kongo concept of time:

1. Time is an ongoing cosmological "thing," and as such, cosmologically speaking, time is the duration between the completion of the formation process of the first planet and its transformations and the completion of the formation process of the last planet and its transformations into the four great steps of the Kongo cosmogram. A planet will remain "naked" without life until these stages are completed.

2. Time is an ongoing biological "thing," and as such, biologically speaking, time is the life span between the conception of the first pregnancy (of *Lumbu* and *Muzita*, the first couple in Kongo mythology) and the conception of the last pregnancy to occur on the "biological rope" of the human race. Each living species has its own biological life span on the time line path.
3. Time is an ongoing social "thing," and as such, socially speaking, time is the duration between the point of occurrence of the first social event (*dunga*) on our planet and the point of its last occurrence.
4. Time is an ongoing natural "thing," and as such, naturally speaking, time is the duration between the point at which nature (*m'belo*, *nsemokono*) became fully alive and able to sustain biological life and the point at which it will be unable to perform such a function. This will be the greatest collision in the history of the planet Earth on its time line path. Time is in and around us because we, as parts of the universe, are parts of time. We are time because we are *n'kama mia ntangu*, the dams of time.

NOTES

1. A good discussion of Kikongo language literature can be found in "Mbelolo ya Mpiku, Introduction à la littérature Kikôngo," *Research in African Literatures* 3 (1972): 117–61.

2. For a further discussion, see K. K. B. Fu-Kiau, "Makuku Matatu: Les Fondements Culturels Kôngo," unpublished manuscript, p. 400.

3. K. K. B. Fu-Kiau, *Africa: The Upside-Down Sailing Ship* (New York: Carlton Press, in press), p. 35.

4. Also know variously as Mahûngu, Malûngu, and Mavûngu.

5. The subject is discussed at length in K. K. B Fu-Kiau, "Makuku Matatu," pp. 83–91.

6. The *ngwa-nkazi* (uncle) is the agent of both positive and negative forces in the society. He has access to power and leadership and can bless people; on the other hand, he has the "energy" to curse, punish, and cause death.

7. For further discussion, see K. K. Bunseki Fu-Kiau, *Self-Healing Power and Therapy* (New York: Vantage Press, 1991), pp. 93–99.

8. This poetic song of the Lèmba initiation school is composed in the highly sophisticated language of the masters and cannot be rendered literally in the English language. The translation provided conveys the essence of the song. A further discussion can be found in K. K. Bunseki Fu-Kiau, *N'kongo ye Nza Yakun 'zungidila/Le Mukongo et le Monde qui l'Entourait* (Kinshasa: ONRD, 1969), pp. 26–30.

3

Time, Language, and the Oral Tradition: An African Perspective

Omari H. Kokole

Most cultures have some concept of time, although the way they deal with time may differ fundamentally. One possible way of beginning to understand how any particular culture handles time is to examine linguistic evidence. In other words, how does a particular language or languages reflect the temporal categories and attittdes of a given society and culture?

We will concern ourselves with Africa's oral tradition, Africa's elder tradition, agricultural economies, and culture of human names, among other things, and show how they all relate to the phenomenon of time from an African perspective.

In this chapter, we investigate the interconnections between language and concepts of time (however defined) across three large ethnolinguistic groups in Africa. The three indigenous African languages that lie at the heart of this analysis are Kiswahili, Lingala, and Luganda. These three idioms are spoken over a large area.

We hope to separate indigenous concepts of time from those that came as a result of foreign influences. Behind it all will be our thesis that Africa has been changing with time and that these changes are in part reflected by how concepts of, and attitudes to, time have evolved and changed.

Time has become
My husband's master
It is my husband's husband.
My husband runs from place to place
Like a small boy,
He rushes without dignity...
I do not know
How to keep the white man's time.
My mother taught me
The way of the Acoli....
When the baby cries
Let him suck milk
From the breast.
There is no fixed time
For breast feeding.
When the baby cries....
Give him milk....
Children in our homestead
Do not sleep at fixed times:
When sleep comes
Into their head
They sleep,
When sleep leaves their head
They wake up.
When a child is dirty
Give him a wash,
You do not first look at the sun!....
In the wisdom of the Acoli
Time is not stupidly split up
Into seconds and minutes,
It does not flow
Like beer in a pot
That is sucked
Until it is finished...
It does not get finished...
Like vegetables in the dish.[1]

The late Ugandan poet Okot p'Bitek was ethnically Acholi (sometimes spelled Acoli). The Acholi live in both Uganda and the Sudan. Much of the material p'Bitek used in his long poem *Song of Lawino*, from which our long opening quote comes, is drawn from Acholi folklore and culture. However, in the section we have lifted from *Song of Lawino* concerning Acholi attitudes to time, clearly, Lawino was not

merely expressing that which was unique to the Acholi people and culture in relation to time. Almost everything that is articulated regarding Acholi attitudes to time is, as we hope to demonstrate in this chapter, equally applicable to many African cultural and ethnic groups known to the author personally and to some of the fellow Africans he has consulted in the course of preparing this piece.[2]

The Acholi belong to the Lwo family of indigenous African ethnic groups. The Lwo people are spread across at least six countries in eastern and central Africa — a wide geographical distribution. Together with a variety of other ethnic groups, the Acholi comprise the Nilotes of eastern Africa. In this particular chapter we have not drawn from Nilotic cultures and heritages like the Acholi about which the author knows less. Rather, we examine three Bantu languages and cultures about which the author knows more. In particular, we examine three Bantu languages and what they reveal about indigenous African concepts of, and attitudes to, time. The three languages are the following:

Kiswahili — Kiswahili is a Bantu language deeply influenced by Islamic and other non-African cultures but still indisputably African in essence and structure in spite of the many lexical stimuli from elsewhere. In terms of diffusion, Kiswahili is basically an eastern African language, although it extends sufficiently deep into central Africa to encompass countries like Rwanda, Burundi, and even the territorially massive Zaire. In all, Kiswahili is spoken and understood, to varying degrees, in approximately ten African countries in eastern and central Africa. Kiswahili is also the most international indigenous language that Africa has ever produced. No other homegrown idiom from Africa is utilized on the international airwaves or taught and studied outside Africa more than Kiswahili.[3]

Lingala — Lingala is one of Africa's most impressive lingua francas. Its heartland is the Republic of Zaire, but Lingala is also widely spoken and understood in many countries surrounding Zaire, including Angola, Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, and Gabon. Lingala is also spoken in varying degrees in the southeastern part of the Central African Republic, the "deep south" of the Sudan, and northwestern Uganda.[4]

Like Kiswahili, Lingala spread in the modern period partly as a result of commercial (or trade) and military activity in the relevant parts of Africa. Also like Kiswahili, Lingala is not the native tongue of a particular ethnic group; rather, many peoples from a bewilderingly wide range of ethnic groups speak Lingala as a second or third language, although now, younger Africans, deruralized and, to some extent, detribalized,

domiciled for the most part in the capital city of Zaire, Kinshasa, are growing up as native speakers of Lingala.[5]

Luganda — Luganda is the least internationalized of our three Bantu languages. It is the native tongue of the heartland ethnic group of the modern republic of Uganda — the Baganda. It is from these people that the whole of Uganda derives its name, just as Zaire was once called the Congo, after one of its largest ethnic groups, the Bakongo. Unlike Kiswahili and Lingala, Luganda is, therefore, an ethnic language, with the bulk of its speakers preponderantly Baganda in terms of ethnic identification. Also, unlike Kiswahili and Lingala, Luganda has not really spread across national frontiers.

In addition to belonging to the same family of African languages — the Bantu group — there is evidence to suggest that all three indigenous languages have borrowed many words from Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Hindi, and probably several other non-African languages.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF ORAL CULTURE

First, until fairly recently (the past 100 years or so), cultures of the oral tradition were cultures of oral history. The Baganda, for example, were ruled by kings (kabaka) for half a millennium. However, with the exception of the last four kings of a total of 35, none of their subjects knew the precise years of the reign of each kabaka. Generally, the oral tradition was uninterested in precise dates of great events or precise periodization of great trends merely for the sake of time-keeping.

Second, for primarily oral cultures, there is little meaning in reckoning seconds, minutes, or even hours or in coining indigenous terms for them because, generally, no elaborate system of numbers or numeracy existed. On the contrary, it made far better sense, for example, to deal with time by referring to broad age-grades (babies, children, young adults, the old and elders) than by counting the exact number of years representing one's age.

Third, the oral cultures valued experience and the concrete, and as a consequence, these cultures had a firm elder tradition in which the elders were respected because they had lived for so long and had gone through a long life. The elder tradition valued and respected old age and associated it with wisdom.

Fourth, oral cultures are on balance perhaps more past oriented than future oriented (not the same thing as past consciousness versus future consciousness). Because the history of the community was often passed

from one generation to the next by word of mouth, this tended to strengthen factual memories.

Finally, being small, intimate, and face-to-face communities that valued extended family relationships and related ties, oral cultures generally developed a strong genealogical memory. Genealogical memory is also sensitive to ancestor veneration, although few could count their ancestral figures past five or six generations backward.

ON THE CONCEPT OF TIME

None of the three Bantu languages seems to have an explicit indigenous term for *time* in the abstract as understood in Western culture. For example, the Luganda word *budde* can mean "time," but it also means "weather" as well as "occasion" and "climate."[6] It is conceivable that before the Western intrusion, the Luganda term *budde* did refer to time but not in the abstract Eurocentric sense. Rather, in this culture, time was related to concrete events, and the seasons were often equated with months and, indeed, even years. In Kiswahili the term *wakati* means both "duration" and "time" but is borrowed from Arabic. Synonyms for *wakati* in Kiswahili are *muda* and *majira*. However, *majira* does also mean "season," "climate," and any long period of time.[7] Similarly, *muda* may mean any time period but, unlike *majira*, is borrowed from Arabic.

However, the three languages seem to have clear and indigenous terms to refer to larger (rather than smaller) units of time to designate month, year, and, even, decade. For example, in Kiswahili the indigenous terms *mwezi* (which also means "moon"), *mwaka* (also meaning "many days") and *mwongo* refer to "month," "year," and "decade," respectively.[8] Similarly, Luganda utilizes both *mwezi* and *mwaka* in exactly the same manner as Kiswahili. It is unclear which of the two Bantu languages influenced the other in this regard, but generally, the direction of influences has tended to be for Kiswahili to impact upon Luganda. As in Kiswahili, in Luganda, *mwezi* means both "month" and "moon" just as *mwaka* means both "year" and "season." That *mwezi* means both "month" and "moon" is related to the concept of a lunar month found across much of Africa, including the areas where our three languages are spoken.

The *mwaka* (year) seems to be the largest unit of time in many indigenous African cultures prior to alien influences. It is a category widely associated with a duration of 12 months but not limited to that period. For example, the Kiswahili word *mwakani* may mean "in a year's time" or "within the year" or "next year" or "some day in the future." The term

can also suggest an indefinite future — contradicting Mbiti's contention that traditionally, Africans had no conception of the future.

The Lingala appellation of "year" is *mbula*, which also means "rain" and, therefore, seems to validate Paul Mbuya Akoko's point that for Africans, traditionally, time was psychological or experiential rather than mechanical, more related to concrete events than a mere abstract and mathematical calculation.[9] In Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976), Kunta Kinte's age and that of several other characters is told in terms of "numbers of rains." Kunta Kinte was supposed to have been born in the village of Juffure in Senegambia. This suggests that the culture of reckoning time in relation to major rains or rainy seasons may have been rather widely used in precolonial Africa. However, one major problem with the calendar of rains is, what happens to time when the rain does not come? What happens to time when there is a drought? One possibility is to resort to the calendar of the months (or moons), because although the rains might or might not come, the moon is pretty regular in its comings and goings.

However, correlating time, for example, to rainy seasons in Bantu cultures that traditionally were of the oral tradition and basically agriculturally based suggests that for these cultures, specific, abstract time and mathematically precise calculations of time in terms of seconds, minutes, and hours was not only cumbersome and unwieldy but also of little socioeconomic significance. The same explanation is behind why these cultures do not possess an indigenous abstract term for time in the occidental sense. Time was inseparable from life itself, and tearing it from the latter for discrete scrutiny and analysis did not make much sense.

Luganda surpasses the other two languages in having indigenous names for the 12 months in a year, although in the modern period, these terms are not in popular or common usage. In Luganda there exist: *Gatonnya* (January), *Mukutulansanja* (February) *Mukulukusabitungotungo* (March), *Mugulansigo* (April), *Muzigo* (May), *Ssebaaseka* (June), *Kasambula* (July), *Mwaka* [*sic*] *musajja/Muwakanya* (August), *Mutunda* (September), *Kafuumuulampawu* (October), *Museenene* (November), and *Ntenvu* (December).[10] The written sources available do not provide the precise etymologies for all these 12 Luganda words to denote the months of the year. However, generally, they seem to be names that refer to the elements or natural phenomena — rains, the rivalry between rain and sun, the weather, flora and fauna, or the economic activities of the society. For example, *gatonnya* seems to be derived from the verb *tonnya* (rain, drizzle, drip, leak, ooze, and so on).

The system of dividing the year into 12 parts may not be indigenous to the Baganda, but the Baganda originated their own terms to designate those 12 large units of time. Unfortunately, currently, these are not widely used. By contrast, neither Kiswahili nor Lingala has indigenous terms to refer to the months. In Kiswahili, it is the English words for the months that have been borrowed and duly Swahilized. They are: *Januari* (also, *Mwezi wa kwanza*), *Februari* (also, *Mwezi wa pili*), *Machi* (also, *Mwezi wa tatu*), *Aprili* (also, *Mwezi wa nne*), *Mei* (also, *Mwezi wa tano*), *Juni* (also, *Mwezi wa sita*), *Julai* (also, *Mwezi wa saba*), *Agosti* (also, *Mwezi wa nane*), *Septemba* (also, *Mwezi wa tisa*), *Oktoba* (also, *Mwezi wa kumi*), *Novemba* (also, *Mwezi wa kumi na moja*), and *Desemba* (also, *Mwezi wa kumi na mbili*).[11]

It would, therefore, seem that prior to the Western impact, Swahili speakers did not divide the year into 12 more or less equal parts. The synonyms for the 12 months indicated above in parentheses simply describe the various months as the first month, second month, and so on. However, in the more deeply Islamized parts of Africa, including the coast of East Africa where Swahili culture originated, the Islamic calendar has been utilized in reference to the months in the year.

The native speakers of Kiswahili, the Waswahili, are preponderantly Muslim by faith and have a calendar of their own based on the Islamic calendar.[12] It seems that the Swahili calendar originates from the very birth of their language and culture.

Unlike the Gregorian calendar of the Western world, which is based on the solar year, the Swahili and Islamic calendars are based on the lunar year of 12 lunar months. Of the 12 months in the Swahili culture, only three bear Islamic names. These months, which do not correspond with the months of the Islamic calendar proper, in serial sequence are:

Rajabu: The seventh month of the Islamic calendar (tenth in the Swahili calendar), the month the Prophet Muhammad is believed to have in a single day traveled to Jerusalem; Swahili boys born in this month are often given the first name *Rajabu*. In the Swahili calendar, *Rajabu* is the tenth month (not the seventh, as in the Islamic).

Shabani (or *Shaabani*): The penultimate month of the Swahili calendar, sometimes referred to as *Mwezi wa Mlisho* (the month of feasting). Many Muslim males born during that month carry that name, *Shabani*, in Swahili culture.

Ramadhani: The last month of the Swahili calendar (but the ninth month in Islam), the time during which Muslims fast for 30

days. For the Waswahili, *Ramadhan* concludes the year (the twelfth month), but for the Islamic calendar itself, *Ramadhan* is the ninth month. Again, many Muslim males, especially those born in this month, bear the name *Ramadhani.*

These three months are the most sacred in Islam. This fact has probably influenced the retention of their Arabic original names, albeit duly Swahilized in spelling and pronunciation.

The other nine months in the Swahili calendar bear purely Bantu names. Each of them includes the term *Mfunguo* (*Mfungo*), a word that is probably linked to breaking the fast.[13] After all, in Kiswahili, to break the fast is *kufungua.*

For the Waswahili the first month of the year is the month following the month of the Ramadhan fast. The months are then named serially, *mfunguo mosi* (the first), *mfunguo pili* (the second), and so on.

Lingala has neither originated its own words for the months nor, for the most part, borrowed from Western languages. Rather, Lingala has descriptive phrases to designate months. For example, in Lingala, the month of January is called *Sànzà Ya Yambo* or *Sànzà Ya Libosò* (that is, the first month), February, *Sànzà ya Mìbalè* (the second month), and so on. Sometimes Lingala speakers use Lingalaized variations of the Western terms for the 12 months, for example, *Yanwàli* (January), *Febwali* (February). This nomenclature betrays the relatively recent Western introduction of the Christian calendar. The colonial legacy persists.

MINOR CATEGORIES OF TIME

Although Kiswahili, Lingala, and Luganda seem to possess some categories, borrowed or indigenous, to denote the larger units of time (for example, month, year, and, even, decade), the three Bantu languages have not found the need to develop vocabulary for the smaller units of time (for example, second, minute, hour). This disinterest in the minutiae of time is probably what the late Okot p'Bitek must have had in mind when he made his character Lawino say to her culturally Westernized (or alienated from Acholi culture) husband, Ocol:

> Listen
> My husband
> In the wisdom of the Acoli
> Time is not stupidly split up
> Into seconds and minutes.[14]

In Kiswahili, Lingala, and Luganda, the smaller units of time are mainly borrowed from either Arabic or European languages. For these cultures, the minor categories of time in themselves are neither significant nor sociologically meaningful. On the contrary, that something once happened was more important than precisely when it happened in terms of seconds, minutes, hours, or even a specific date in any month. For example, in one "Congo" pop love song, the composer tells his sweetheart that he had loved her for a long time, "*uta ntango ya Lumumba*," meaning since Lumumba's days in the early 1960s. That Patrice Lumumba was the first prime minister of the newly decolonized Congo (now Zaire) is more important than the fact either that his rule was so brief and ended in 1961 or that Zaire was decolonized in 1960. On the contrary, that Lumumba's reign and the genesis of a particular romantic relationship coincided as events composed time for this African singer. For all these reasons, what Ian Cunnison (1951, p. 30) said of the Lunda people inhabiting the Luapula valley in Zaire and Zambia seems to be of much wider validity across Africa: "Time for its own sake is of little significance. A period of time is not characterized by, for instance slave raids, but the slave raids themselves are the ultimate meaning and definition of what Europeans would call a period of time."

In the case of Kiswahili, the terms for "second," "minute," and "hour" are *nukta*, *dakika*, and *saa*, respectively, all of Arabic derivation. A synonym for *nukta* in Kiswahili is *sekunde* (a Swahilization of the English word "second"). The Swahili words *nukta*, *dakika*, and *saa* do carry the same meaning in the Arabic original as in Kiswahili, albeit pronounced in a more Arabized manner and spelled perhaps differently in the Arabic alphabet. Of the three terms, *nukta* in Arabic is a little ambiguous because it does also mean "point," the smallest point, for example, in addition to the temporal second. What this suggests is that in Kiswahili, as in Luganda and Lingala, the words to denote the small units of time are exogenously derived, as is attested to by the loan words from Arabic, English, or French. As will be indicated presently, this contrasts sharply with indigenous terms like *mwezi* or *sanza* (for "month") or *mwaka*, *mbula*, or *mobu* (for "year"), which deal with larger units of time and which remain indisputably of indigenous roots.

Lingala does *not* seem to have an indigenous term for "second." It uses *minuti* to refer to "minute," although it has an indigenous term *mangwanda* to refer to the same unit of time, though it is not often used. When it comes to the hour, Lingala uses *ngonga*, a borrowed term that also means "bell" (as in "gong" in English and French) as well as "time"

and "hour." For example, in Lingala the question "What time is it?" is rendered as "*Nogongaboni*?" It is conceivable that the introduction by the Belgians of the culture of the clock, especially of the bells that tolled periodically, on the hour or the half hour, at churches and other public buildings, resulted in the utilization of the term *ngonga* ("bell") to refer to time in general. A synonym for *ngonga* is *ntango*, a word that seems to be indigenous and that may mean "moment," "duration," "instant," "when," and "hour" and "time." Hardly ever used in current Lingala is an older synonym, *ndembe*.

As for the word *ngonga*, this helps to put aside Sunday in much of Christianized Africa. On the Christian Sabbath, formal work was not to be done. True, unlike Judaism, which made it a sin to work on the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday), Christianity made rest on Sunday only semicompulsory. Nonetheless, it was on Sundays that the church gongs (or bells) melodiously chimed, calling believers to prayer. It was also on Sundays that men, women, and children put on their "Sunday best" and proceeded to worship in church and often later socialized with friends and relatives.[15] Lingala culture chose a word derived from the gong that reminded Africans of their assignation with the God of Christianity to refer to time more generally.

Luganda seems to have borrowed its categories for smaller units of time from Arabic, not directly from that Semitic language, but indirectly, through Kiswahili. Thus, in Luganda, "minute" and "hour" are *ddakika* and *ssaawa*, respectively, slight variations of the Kiswahili *dakika* and *saa*. The question "What time is it?" is rendered as: "*Ssawa mmeka?*" Lacking in Luganda is a term for "second."

That in all three Bantu languages, the word(s) for "hour" also mean(s) "time" validates an earlier point made concerning the lack of a definite, unambiguous term in indigenous African languages to refer to time in the Western sense. What is more, in all three languages, the word(s) for "wristwatch" and/or "clock" is the same as the word for "time" and "hour."

THE SEVEN-DAY WEEK

Fascinating from a variety of vantage points in Kiswahili is the rather unusual concept of *juma*. This is usually used to refer to the seven-day week. The concept of *juma* seems to be based on the Islamic sabbath (*Ijumaa*). In other words, from the single Muslim day of weekly public prayer — Friday (*Ijumaa*) — was derived the term for the whole week. Lingala betrays a similar, if not identical, tendency — the use of a

special day in the week to refer to the entire week (not necessarily Friday in the case of Lingala).

Yet, both twentieth century Kiswahili and Luganda prefer to use the borrowed term *wiki* (or *wiiki*, in the case of Luganda) to refer to the week. The impact of the European influence, especially as it tried to organize and control the life and labor of the natives, has endured long after the colonial rule came to an end.

Regarding the Swahili term *juma*, the language later gets complicated because on its own, the word *juma* means week. However, *juma tatu* means the third day of the Swahili week, which is Monday in Kiswahili. Prima facie, one would have expected *jumatatu* to mean third week; it does not.

In Kiswahili the week begins on Saturday (*Jumamosi*) and ends on Friday (*Ijumaa*). Boys born on Fridays are named *Juma*, while girls are named either *Mwajuma* or *Mwanajuma*. This system is derived from the Islamic culture and calendar. Thus, in Kiswahili the seven days of the week are sequentially as follows: *Jumamosi* (Saturday), *Jumapili* (Sunday), *Jumatatu* (Monday), *Jumanne* (Tuesday), *Jumatano* (Wednesday), *Alhamisi* (also spelled *Alkhamisi*) (Thursday), and *Ijumaa* (Friday) (note how the last two days are derived directly from Arabic). The words *mosi*, *pili*, *tatu*, *nne*, and *tano* simply mean "first," "second," "third," "fourth," and "fifth," respectively. In reality, however, most Kiswahili speakers do not begin their work or week on Saturdays as their language would suggest; rather, Monday is often the first day of work for the week.

In Zaire, however, speakers of Kiswahili, mainly in the eastern part of the country, sometimes use an alternative vocabulary with the week beginning on Monday (the first day of work). The tendency is to describe the days of the week as follows: *Siku ya kazi ya kwanza* (the first day of work; Monday), *Siku ya kazi ya pili* (the second day of work; Tuesday), *Siku ya kazi ya tatu* (the third day of work; Wednesday), *Siku ya kazi ya nne* (the fourth day of work; Thursday), *Siku ya kazi ya tano* (the fifth day of work; Friday), *Siku ya poso* (the food ration day; Saturday), *Siku ya Mungu* (God's day; Sunday).

From this point of view, Luganda does seem to possess a vocabulary for the week that is closer to the work habits of at least the formal sector of the economy. Thus, in Luganda, some of the seven days of the week are called, or rather are described, as the *Olwokusooka* ("first day," Monday); *Olwokubiri* ("the second day," Tuesday), and so on.

Luganda does not seem to have a term of its own to refer to Sunday. The English word "Sunday" is precisely what Luganda speakers use to

refer to the day. In addition, many male Baganda babies born on that day are given the first name of Sunday.

Of the three Bantu languages that concern us here, it is Lingala that most clearly relates the days of the week to work (or labor). Thus, Monday is called or, rather, described as "the first day of work," in Lingala, *mokolo mwa* (or *ya*) *mosàlà moko*. It is a longish, cumbersome category for dealing with any single day of the week, but it is historically revealing, a point we shall return to presently.

The correlation of the week to labor is said to have originated during the forced labor regime of the Belgian Congo in the late nineteenth century. Thus, the workweek begins on Monday and ends on Friday. Saturday continues to be referred to in Lingala as *mokolo mwa poso* (or simply *[m]poso*), the day on which the European master distributed food rations to the African soldiers and forced laborers (*poso*, derived from Kiswahili *posho*, meaning "food rations"). As Charles Gilman (1979, p. 106) once put it, "The Swahili word posho *rations* has been extended in both L [Lingala] and Z S [Zairean Swahili] to mean Saturday, the day the soldier got his rations, or a week, the period between the distribution of rations. Sunday became *mokolo mwa Eynga*, God's day, that is, a day of rest in the tradition of the Christian sabbath." Thus African labor was being regulated and controlled partly in reference to the Christian calendar, a legacy that has endured to the present day.

It was the Europeans, including the Belgians, who introduced to Africa what Ali Mazrui has termed the "time theory of value."[17] Under this new dispensation, work was assessed in terms of time; wages were calculated by the hour. Soon both employee and employer became supremely aware of "hours" per day and days per week of work for pay.

BETWEEN DAY AND NIGHT

In all our three Bantu languages under investigation, the day itself, as a 24-hour period, was divided into two major, roughly equal, components — daylight time and night. In all three languages, the daylight time of approximately 12 hours was often associated with the sun or, rather, with sunlight. In Kiswahili it is *mchana*, in Lingala it is *moi*, and in Luganda it is *musana*. Except in Kiswahili, in which the term for the sun is *jua* (a term that also means "to know, be enlightened"), in the other two languages the word for the sun as well as the word for daylight (or sunlight) time are identical — *moi* in Lingala and *musana* in Luganda. A Luganda synonym for *musana* is *njuba*.[18] However, the phrase *enjuba y'eggi* refers to the "essence" of an egg, that is, its yolk. In the same

vein, the expression *kusuula njuba* means to work extremely hard, to work all day till dark, or to be a compulsive hard worker. This expression would suggest a time consciousness that related time to work in indigenous Ganda culture.

There is also a sense in which the sun serves as the collective clock of many Africans. This is what Lawino is alluding to when she says:

> When a child is dirty
> Give him a wash,
> *You do not first look at the sun*![19] [my emphasis]

The tendency to look at the sun as if one were looking at one's wristwatch or a clock is widespread in the areas where our three languages are spoken in Africa and even beyond. Generally, sunrise in the east, anticipated by the cockerel's early crows, represented the beginning of the day; midday was roughly when the "sun was above one's head;" and the end of the day was represented by the disappearance of the sun to the west.

Closely related to the use of the location of the sun as a kind of chronometer were the meal times in the three cultures. Whether or not Africa invented the "First Supper," as Ali A. Mazrui has claimed, there are basically three meals in Swahili, Luganda, and Lingala that correspond with morning, midday and evening.[20]

TABLE 3.1
Meal Times

Kiswahili	*Luganda*	*Lingala*
Breakfast		
Chakula Cha Asubuhi (or *Kifungua Kinywa*) (food or meal of the morning)	*Ekyenkya* (of the morning)	Ti (a borrowing of the tea)
Lunch		
Chakula Cha Mchana (food or meal of the day)	*Ekyemisana* (of the day)	*Kolia ya midi* (eating at noon)
Supper/dinner		
Chakula Cha Jioni (food or meal of the evening)	*Ekyeggulo* (or *Ekyekiro*)	*Kolia ya Mpokwa* (eating in the evening)

Time, therefore, is in part correlated with a social institution that converted a biological need (food) to an opportunity for familial or social congregation and sharing at fairly predictable intervals every day. Those with whom one ate were relatives or considered as such. The rhetorical and hostile question in Luganda "*Twalyanga nammwe*?" ("Did my folks use to eat together with yours?") has equivalents in other African cultures. Its hostility aside, it does point to the sociological significance of shared meals. Those who wanted to distance themselves from others for whatever reason find it effective to use the above-mentioned question.

As for nighttime, often associated with darkness or lack of daylight or sunlight, this was *usiku* in Kiswahili, *butù* in Lingala, and *kiro* in Luganda. However, in Luganda, in which the plural for *kiro* is *biro*, the latter term mostly means "era," "period," or "times." Thus, for example, in Luganda the phrase "*mu biro bya Amin*" means "in the [Idi] Amin days." It is a curious Kiganda way of using the plural for night.

However, the use of events to periodize time, as in "Idi Amin's years," is a widespread characteristic of cultures that are primarily oral. These are essentially cultures of oral history. Traditionally, the Baganda, for example, comprised a centralized political community headed by a king (*kabaka*). The monarchy in Buganda lasted some 500 years until Milton Obote, with the support of the Uganda army under the then-Colonel Idi Amin's command, finally abolished it in 1966. Their thirty-fifth and last king was Mutesa II ("King Freddie").[21] None of the Baganda prior to the colonial era knew the exact years of the reigns of their 35 kings over those five centuries, but these five centuries could be, and were, broadly subdivided temporally with the help of the names of the relevant kings and their reigns, for example, Kabaka Suna, Kabaka Mutesa I, Kabaka Mwanga, Kabaka Daudi Chwa.[22] The Luganda phrase *mu mirembe gya Suna* literally means "during Kabaka Suna's reign."

Wars, famines, and other extraordinary events were also widely used to periodize time. For example, *mu mirembe gye ntalo ze ddiini* literally means during "the era of the religious wars," a reference to the time when wars based on religion (Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam) were fought in Buganda toward the very end of the nineteenth century. One of the most severe famines in Buganda's history occurred in the early part of the twentieth century. That period is referred to as *mu kyekya ggwe omuwadde akatebe*, literally meaning "you are the one who gave him/her a seat under these times," a reference to a host who was hospitable enough to encourage a guest to stay long enough to partake in a scarce meal (a situation in which family members would trade blame about who encouraged the hungry guest to stay).

In all three languages, day and night were further subdivided into yet-smaller units of time. For all these languages, the morning commences not at midnight as in Western culture but with the rising of the sun, that is, at dawn. The first hour of the day, therefore, coincides with the first hour of sunlight, either 6:00 A.M. to 7:00 A.M. or 7:00 A.M. to 8:00 A.M. As a distinguished student of Kiswahili has put it:

> The way in which the passing of time is accounted differs from one culture to another. Whereas in Anglo-American culture the first hour of the day (1 a. m.) is the first hour after midnight, in Swahili the first hour of the day occurs one hour after the sunrise. One o'clock in Swahili is thus seven o'clock (7 a. m.) according to the English way of reckoning time.
>
> There are two quick tricks to help you convert English time to Swahili time. Looking at your watch face, you may read the hour diagonally opposite to that toward which the hour hand is pointing, thus four-fifty becomes ten-fifty. Alternatively, you may simply add six hours to the English time, thus two o'clock in the afternoon (English) becomes eight o'clock (Swahili).[23]

Given the equatorial location of the general area where the three languages are spoken, night and day invariably lasted approximately 12 hours each.

Thus, in the parts of Africa under discussion it is not at all uncommon to run into someone whose personal wristwatch might indicate, say 7:00 A.M., but if asked in Kiswahili or Lingala or Luganda "What time is it?," the reply would be "It is 1 o'clock" (or the first hour of the morning). However, if the same question were posed in a European language, the answer elicited would be radically different; it would be 7:00 A.M. Here, then, would be a situation where time varies with the language one happens to speak. What is 7:00 A.M. in French, English, or Portuguese would be 1:00 A.M. in Kiswahili or Lingala or Luganda. Africans with watches and clocks set them to reflect the Western division of the day and, yet, read the same digits to reflect a vastly different, indigenous conception of time and of what constitutes the 24-hour period of a day.

THE TWO AND FOUR SEASONS

Generally, our three Bantu cultures deal with mainly two seasons, the rainy season and the dry season. These, therefore, are cultures of two seasons. However, in the case of Kiswahili, it seems there are four identifiable seasons in all (light rains, heavy rains, hot, and cold seasons). The word for "season" is *majira* in Kiswahili, *ntango* in Lingala, and

biro in Luganda. Thus, the two seasons (rainy and dry) are *ntango ya mbula* and *ntango ya elanga* in Lingala and *biseera bye nkuba* and *biseera byo musana* in Luganda. In Kiswahili the four identifiable seasons are *masika*, the season of heavy rains; *vuli*, the season of light rains; *kiangazi*, the hot season; and *kipupwe*, the cold season in East Africa (roughly between June and August). Girls born during the rainy season are given the name *Masika*. The subculture of naming humans in relation to categories of time is not unique to Africans but fairly well-represented among them.

PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Traditionally, our three cultures under investigation did not make a sharp distinction among past, present, and future. Indeed, the indigenous subculture of ancestor veneration did not permit the past to be completely forgotten. The dead ancestors remained part of the present and could even influence the future, as well as the present. The past, the present, and the future were inextricably intertwined in a cyclical relationship. Traditionally, however, it was the future that was often least clear and least understood.

In Kiswahili, the word for the past is *zamani*, a word of Arabic derivation (from *zaman*). However, the word for "now" in Kiswahili is the indigenous African *sasa* (a Bantu word). John Mbiti (1990) has given the (wrong) impression that the term *zamani* can only mean the past. In reality the word can also mean "time," "moment," and "epoch." It is perfectly all right to say in impeccable Kiswahili *zamani za sasa* (these days, currently) as it is to say *zamani za kale* (a long time ago, in antiquity).[24]

Kiswahili does seem to be uneasy with the concept of the future. This seems to validate John Mbiti's point that precolonial Africa did not possess a concept of the future in the Western linear sense. Mbiti (1990, pp. 288–89) believes strongly that it was "Modern change [which] has imported into Africa a future dimension of time." Mbiti himself considers this "the most dynamic and dangerous discovery of the African people in the Twentieth Century." There are a number of terms or phrases in Kiswahili used to denote the future, none of them neat or easy to handle: *usoni* ("ahead"), *siku za mbeleni* ("the days ahead"), *mustakbali* (an Arabic term, "what is facing you" or "that facing you"), *siku zijazo* ("the coming days"). Kiswahili also has terms for tomorrow, *kesho*, and for the day after tomorrow, *kesho kutwa*.

In Lingala, the term for "past" is *kala*, while the present is *sikawa* (or *sika oyo*); both terms are of Bantu origin or indigenous to Africa. For the future, Lingala utilizes *ntango ekoya* ("coming moment" or "moment yet to come"). Sometimes this is rendered as *mikolo ekoya* ("the forthcoming days").

In Luganda, the term for "past" is *dda*, while the term for "present" is *kati* (or *kaakati*), both of them indigenous Bantu terms. For the future, Luganda also uses *dda* (that is, the same term for "past" but with a future verb or future tense). The seeming equation of the past with the future would suggest a cyclical conception of time. The past does come back as the future. Indeed, in both Luganda and Lingala the term for both "yesterday" and "tomorrow" are the same, *dda* and *lobi*, respectively.

The question that arises is how does the listener or, indeed, the speaker him/herself distinguish between the two? Actually, quite simply, by the tense of the verb in any sentence. The words *lobi* and *jjo* mean "yesterday" or "tomorrow," depending on whether the verb in the sentence is in the past or future tense. For example, in Lingala, *Nayaka Kotala yo lobi* means "I came to see you yesterday," while *nakoya kotala yo lobi* means "I will come to see you tomorrow."[25] Comparable illustrations can be provided in Luganda. What is more, in Lingala, both the day before yesterday and the day after tomorrow are denoted by the same word, *ndelé*. It is as if the past has not really been left behind and as if the future is itself a reincarnation of the past. In a way, this cyclical conception of time is quite compatible with the ancestor veneration that is central to the belief system of many Black Africans.

In Kiswahili, "yesterday" is *jana*, while "today" is *leo*. "Tomorrow" is *kesho*, which can be used metaphorically to refer to the immediate future or distant future as well as to later times.[26] However, *kesho* may also mean the Day of Judgment (*siku ya kiama*), as understood in the three Semitic religions, Islam included. In a sense, this day of reckoning would represent the end of time, the end of history. The concept of the "Day of Judgment," which can also be referred to as *Ahera* as well as *Kesho* in Kiswahili, seems to be Islamic rather than indigenous in its origins. It is arguable that this concept in the deeply Islamized Swahili culture represents a time consciousness of a finite world. Time is finite and so is the universe itself.

In Luganda, the word for "today" is *leero*, while the word for both "yesterday" and "tomorrow" is the same, *jjo*. Both terms are Bantu in origin. Similarly, in Lingala, the word for "today" is *lelo*, while the word for both "yesterday" and "tomorrow" is the same, *lobi*. Again, the terms *lelo* and *lobi* are Bantu in derivation. Cultures that do not distinguish

between yesterday and tomorrow or between the past and the future are likely to be less encumbered by self-imposed time constraints than those that do. The so-called African casualness and lax attitudes toward time may not be unique to the continent but have deep cultural roots, nonetheless. These attitudes to time run counter to the tendencies of the industrial societies of the North, where time is the "husband," in Lawino's sense.[27]

CONCLUSION

Time is a complex phenomenon that has intrigued many thinkers and one to which various cultures have related in different ways. In the Black experience, especially in the African case, concepts of, and attitudes toward, time have come primarily from three sources. The first source is the indigenous heritage that often made no sharp distinction between the past, the present, and the future (yesterday, today, and tomorrow). This heritage is uninterested in the minutia of time. The second great source is Islamic and is perhaps the oldest alien cultural influence on Africans in this domain. It helped to introduce minute categories of time to much of Africa. Third, and much more recent, is the Western influence, one of the consequences of the colonial experience. In this chapter we have utilized linguistic evidence to illustrate the coexistence of these three influences in three major African languages — Kiswahili, Lingala, and Luganda. In the modern sector of the economies of most African societies, the Western temporal impact perhaps dominates the other two. However, privately, and in a variety of other ways, the Western concepts of and attitudes to time have yet to take root in Africa. In areas where Islam has made an impact, it is possible to detect that influence; Kiswahili being an "Afro-Islamic" language is an ideal case study for that purpose. Underneath the Western and the Islamic influences, however, lies the indigenous culture with its refusal to separate time too neatly between past, present, and future, as well as its lack of microscopic divisions of time into seconds, minutes, and even hours. Perhaps one of the most resilient aspects of indigenous African culture is precisely attitudes to time. Neither Islam nor the West, despite several centuries of contact, has succeeded in transforming those attitudes to time. There are only a few Africans who are as punctual as Lawino's husband or as consistent as Okot p'Bitek portrays him.[28]

NOTES

1. Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino* (London: Heinemann, 1984 [1966]), p. 1.

2. These fellow Africans include Sam Ebow Quianoo, a Ghanaian, Ali A. Mazrui and Mohamed Hyder, Kenyans; and Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, a Nigerian. Non-Africans I have consulted include Parviz T. Morewedge, a Muslim Iranian-American, andTthomas Uthup, a Christian from India, currently a graduate student in political science at the State University of New York at Binghamton.

3. Ali A. Mazrui and Pio Zirimu, "The Secularization of an Afro-Islamic Language: Church, State and Market-place in the Spread of Kiswahili," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 1 (1990): 24–53.

4. Eyamba G. Bokamba, *Ekolongonelo Ya Lingala: An Introductory Course* (Urbana: University of Illinois Department of Linguistics, 1981), pp. 1, 3.

5. See, for example, John D. Odhner, *English-Lingala Manual* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1980), p. x.

6. See John D. Murphy, *Luganda-English Dictionary* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1972), p. 31.

7. See *Kamusi Ya Kiswahili Sanifu* (Dar es Salaam and Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 149; *A Standard English-Swahili Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 571.

8. In the Kiswahili of eastern Zaire, the word *mwezi* is reserved exclusively for use to mean "month." The moon is called *mbalamwezi*. I am indebted to my Zairean colleague and friend Ruzima C. Sebuharara for kindly drawing my attention to this distinction.

9. Antony S. Oseghare, "A Commentary on Two Sages," in ed. Odera Oruka, *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1990) p. 158.

10. Murphy, *Luganda-English Dictionary*, p. 402.

11. See *Kamusi Ya Kiswahili*, pp. 3, 9, 43, 55, 89, 92, 93, 147, 164, 217, 222, 251.

12. The Swahili calendar is based on the Islamic calendar, and the Swahili lunar months are determined according to Islamic rules (the sighting of the new moon with the naked eye, subject to confirmation by the Kadhi or Chief Kadhi). The main difference is that the Swahili have different names for nine of the months and regard the holiest month, *Ramadhan*, as the last month of the year. Similarly, the Waswahili (or Swahili) regard the holiest day of the week (Friday) as its concluding day, whereas the Arabs regard Friday as the *sixth* day of the week. Saturday is *As Sabt* to the Arabs, *Jumamosi* to the Waswahili. I am greatly indebted to Ali A. Mazrui for enlightening me on these matters.

13. Ali A. Mazrui, himself a Mswahili, provides an alternative explanation for the etymology of *Mfunguo*. He believes it is "linked to the opening and closing of the moon (from crescent to crescent)" (personal communication, 9 January 1993). I am skeptical of this particular interpretation, however.

14. p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino*, p. 97.

15. Ian Cunnison, *History of the Luapula: An Essay on the Historical Notions of a Central African Tribe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1951), p. 33.

16. Murphy, *Luganda-English Dictionary*, pp. 64, 513.

17. Ali A. Mazrui, "From Sun-Worship to Time-Worship: Towards a Solar Theory of History," (Unpublished paper), p. 7.

18. Murphy, *Luganda-English Dictionary*, p. 417.
19. p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino*, p. 1.
20. Ali A. Mazrui makes this claim in his television series *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* and book of the same title accompanying the series (London and Boston: BBC Publications and Little, Brown, 1986).
21. See The Kabaka of Buganda, *Desecration of My Kingdom* (London: Constable, 1967), p. 30.
22. The monarchy in Buganda was restored under President Yoweri Musevini in 1993.
23. Sharifa Zawawi, *Kiswahili Kwa Kitendo: Volume One, Learn Our Kiswahili* (Trenton, N.J.: Red Sea Press, 1989), pp. 73–74.
24. See A. Kagame, "The Empirical Apperception of Time and the Time Consciousness of History in Bantu Thought," in *Cultures and Time*, ed. L. Gardet (Paris: UNESCO, 1976), p. 107.
25. Bokamba, *Ekolongonelo Ya Lingala*, p. 66.
26. See *Kamusi Ya Kiswahili Sanifu*, p. 106.
27. p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino*, p. 1.
28. Ibid.

4

Time, Identity, and Historical Consciousness in Akan

Joseph K. Adjaye

For a long time, anthropological and philosophical discourses about time concepts in precapitalist societies were dominated by a tradition established largely by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1910, 1923, 1938), which was flawed on several counts: first, the subject peoples were investigated from the perspective of "other cultures"; second, time-reckoning concepts were examined as an entity separate from, rather than encompassing, the entire cultural sphere; and third, time perception was viewed principally as a product of mental activity. In consequence, theories were constructed about "primitive time" in contrast to the "civilized time" of the authors' Western culture areas. Lévy-Bruhl (1923, pp. 123–24) claimed that "primitives" lacked the capacity to see that events fell "in a unilinear and irreversible series" and concluded that "to the primitive time is not, as it is to us [Westerners], a kind of intellectualized intuition, an order of succession." These views were born out of a theory of "primitive mentality," a theory that was fueled by late nineteenth and early twentieth century racist ideas of African inferiority, notably Hegel's

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(1900, p. 99) characterization of the African as "unhistorical, underdeveloped."

It was not until the seminal works of Edward Evans-Pritchard (1939, 1940) on the Nuer (Sudan) and Paul Bohannan (1953) on the Tiv (Nigeria) that the concept of time in precapitalist societies such as those of Africa was viewed as a product of culture and the environment rather than intellectual capacity. Yet, even as both scholars rightly confirmed that time concepts were integrated into the social systems of the Nuer and Tiv, they contended that the subjects of their studies lacked historical consciousness because their conception of historical change did not fit into that of the West. In an equally significant study of time in an African society, Thomas Beidelman (1963) demonstrated that time underlay the Kaguru (Tanzania) conceptions of their physical and social world, even if they lacked the precise time-reckoning of the West.

However, it was not until John Mbiti (1990 [1969]) that a detailed theory situating time as central to African worldview was expounded. Time, Mbiti argued, is "the key to our understanding of the basic religious and philosophical concepts. The concept of time may help explain beliefs, attitudes, practices and general way of life of African peoples not only in the traditional set up but also in the modern situation. . . . The traditional concept of time is intimately bound up with the entire life of the people, and our understanding of it may help to pave the way for understanding the thinking, attitude and actions of the people" (1990, pp. 16, 27). Yet, some of the observations that Mbiti made about time are either inaccurate or, at best, applicable to only the Kikamba and Kikuyu peoples of East Africa rather than to the continent as a whole as he claimed, a subject to which we shall return in greater detail later.

GOALS

This chapter takes its premise from the recognition that the Akan, like all traditional African societies, have their time-marking concepts and analyzes the strategies, mechanisms, and multiple calendrical systems observed by the Akan. It will demonstrate that Akan time-marking structures are bound up with the ways in which they conceptualize time and that definitions of personhood ultimately characterize perceptions of time. A point of departure of this study from most others is that it then proceeds to situate the time notions of the Akan within their ideas of historical process. It will conclude that the multiple temporal demarcations and structures of the Akan overarch and underpin an internal order that

is embedded in formulations of their culture — their social, religious, and economic systems.

THE AKAN

"Akan" is an ethnographic and linguistic term used to refer to a cluster of culturally homogenous groups living in central and southern Ghana and parts of the adjoining eastern Cote d'Ivoire. The Akan constitute two broad subcategories: the inland Asante, Bono, Akyem, Akwapem, and Kwawu, who speak the Twi, and the coastal Fante, who speak a dialect of the same name. The Akan dialects are, for the most part, mutually intelligible. Most of these ethnic groups constituted autonomous political systems in the precolonial period. Unlike other Ghanaian ethnic groups, which are principally patrilineal, the Akan are distinguished by matrilineal descent systems.[1] The views expressed in this chapter are limited to those shared by the Akan (Twi-Fante) groups of Ghana as represented in their traditional culture.

Studies of Akan time perceptions and calendrical systems have been limited despite the fact that the existence of institutions and mechanisms for time-reckoning have been noted in the literature on the history and ethnography of the Akan for nearly two centuries. Beyond early sparse references by Rattray (1923) and Danquah (1968), a full-length monograph on the subject did not appear until Deborah Fink's "Time and Space Measurements of the Bono of Ghana" (1974); however, the author's primary concern was with the applicability of Bono terminologies for measuring volume, weight, and time to formal education, rather than with time-marking systems. P. F. Bartle's brief five-page paper, "Forty Days: The Akan Calendar" (1978), was an exploratory essay into a single calendrical framework, the 40-day (*adaduanan*) cycle. Its treatment is consequently restrictive and limited to the 40-day calendrical structure. Similarly, Tom McCaskie's "Time and the Calendar in Nineteenth-Century Asante: An Exploratory Essay" (1980) and Ivor Wilks' "On Mentally Mapping Greater Asante: A Study of Time and Motion" (1992) are concerned primarily with a specific aspect of time: the scheduling of diplomatic and other governmental business in Asante. In consequence, my earlier article "Time, the Calendar, and History among the Akan of Ghana" (1987), upon which this chapter is based, remains the only publication that provides a detailed study of the multiple time structures and calendrical systems observed by the Akan.

TIME IN AKAN THINKING

The Akan use the term *bere* (Twi) or *mber* (Fante) to denote time. The conceptualization of *bere/mber*, however, has many manifestations, which include the specific time (of an event, for instance), a period, a season, and an epoch. The concept of time as a nonspecific notion also exists, as in the popular Akan proverbs *bere di adannan* ("time changes") and *bere dane bibiara* ("time changes everything"). Time, to the Akan, then, is both a concrete reality and an abstraction.

Time Spans

I have detailed elsewhere (1987) the broad outlines of the time spans recognized by the Akan, ranging from the day through the week and month to the year. Traditionally, the smallest countable unit of time was the day (*eda* or *nda*), for even though the time measurements of *donhwere* (hour) and *sima* (minute) are in use among some Akan, time-reckoning by the hour or minute is based on the clock and, therefore, derives from Western influences. Therefore, the Akan do not conceive of the day as a precise 24-hour entity with fixed beginning and ending points. Indeed, the Akan only recognize general periods of time within the course of the day, such as midnight (*esuom*), dawn (*ahamadakye*), morning (*anopa*), afternoon (*awia*), evening (*anwunmmere*), and night (*anadwo*), rather than specific points in time. Should the need for reference to more specific periods of time arise, the Akan recognize different (though not necessarily exclusive) segments during the morning, afternoon, and night. Thus, *anopa* (morning) may be subdivided into *anopa-hema-hema* (predawn), *anopa-hema* (dawn), and *anopa* (morning) itself; *awiabere* (afternoon time) into *awiagyinae* (approximately 12:00 noon to 1:00 P.M., when the sun is overhead), *awia-kete* ("in the heat of the sun," about 2:00 to 3:00 P.M.), which overlaps with *mfretubere* (about 3:00 P.M., a time associated with the blowing of strong winds); and *anadwo* (night) into three phases of *anadwo-dasuo baako* (one), *mmienu* (two), and *mmiensa* (three).[2] These, as can be seen, are relative segments of the day rather than specific points in time, for the rhythm of Akan culture made clocklike time-markings irrelevant.

However, the absence of linguistic equivalents for specific points of time during the day does not imply limitations in the Akan language or Akan thinking, as some Western scholars have claimed. Time is fundamentally a cultural, environmental, and economic phenomenon, not a mental activity. The Akan farmer begins his preparations for the

workday at the break of dawn, which, to him, beckons each new day. His working day, for all practical purposes, is equated with daytime. Thus, it is immaterial to him whether he begins to ready himself for his working day at 5:00 or 5:30 A.M.; his farm work can be performed only during daylight. However, a fact he recognizes, but which might not be easily discernible to the Western observer at first, is that in a country like Ghana, which is just above the equator and has almost equal daylight and darkness times, dawn comes at a fairly regular time each day.

It is this quality of time as an approximate duration that gives rise to the Akan temporal orientation of relational time as opposed to absolute time. Therefore, Akan time notions (like those of other traditional African states) may be seen as qualitative, as opposed to those of technological societies, which are quantitative.

Another element of the relational quality of time is found in the application of the "before-after" syndrome in making time references, a device that is common throughout Africa. Two events are used in direct association with each other as time indicators. A number of events or occurrences of two types, either natural phenomena (for example, earthquakes, solar eclipses, droughts) or memorable human events (for example, the death of a great king, a major war, the visit of a world dignitary, a major political change), may be employed as time indicators. Thus, one might hear a statement to this effect: "My first child was born after king X died," the death of king X being used as a time referent. At the national level, examples of such events that are commonly used for time reference include *eko kese* (the big war, that is, World War II), *fawohodie* ([Ghana's] independence, that is, March 1957), the solar eclipse (of 1947), and the return from exile of Asante king Prempe I (that is, 1924). At the ethnic level, local histories abound with many appropriate examples. The common feature of all these events is that they are considered so extraordinary or unusual that they remain indelible in people's minds, and therefore, easy reference can be made to them as time indicators.

The Akan observe a seven-day week known as *dapen*. However, many Akan often refer to the week as *nnawotwe* (literally meaning "eight days") because weekly (and monthly) cycles are traditionally counted inclusively, the week, thus, being counted as eight days from Monday to Monday or Tuesday to Tuesday without a fixed initial point.

Day Names, Identity, and Time

The first name that an Akan child often acquires is a name that is based on the day of the week on which he or she is born. This is known

as *kra din* ("day name"). There are two corresponding sets of day names for males and females for each day of the week (Table 4.1).

The Akan believe that every weekday has its own controlling or influencing spirit force (*kra*), which gives its name to that particular day. Thus, *Kwasiada* (Sunday) actually means Kwasi's day (*da*), *Edwoada* (Monday) Edwo's day (*da*), *Ebenada* (Tuesday), Ebena's day, and so forth. Each spirit force has its own appellation and attributes that are associated with those appellations, and by inference it is believed that those attributes or behavioral characteristics are transferable to persons bearing the particular day name. The appellation for someone born on Sunday, for instance, is "Bodua," meaning, literally, the "tail of an animal." Therefore, a Sunday-born person is said to have the attribute of a "protector" in the sense that an animal uses its tail for protecting itself (Table 4.2). The implications of this naming system for personal identity and time consciousness are significant: the time (that is, day of the week) on which a person is born not only determines a part of his/her name but also influences his/her personality and characteristics. Underlying the presumption of transference of attributes from a past person to the present bearer of the day name is the notion of transposition of an attribute from a time past to the present, a renaissance or reenactment of sorts, though not in exact recurrence.

By-Names, Praise Names, and Identity

In addition to day names (*kra din*) and proper names (*din pa*), most Akan have one or more sets of additional names, most of which have

TABLE 4.1
Asante Day Names

Day		*Day Name*	
English	*Twi*	*Male*	*Female*
Sunday	Kwasiada	Kwasi	Akosua
Monday	Edwoada	Kwadwo	Adwoa
Tuesday	Ebenada	Kwabena	Abenaa
Wednesday	Wukuada	Kwaku	Akua
Thursday	Yawoada	Yaw	Yaa
Friday	Efiada	Kofi	Afua
Saturday	Memeneda	Kwame	Amma

TABLE 4.2
Day Names and Their Attributes

Day Name	*Weekday*	*Appellation*	*Meaning*	*Attribute*
Kwasi	Sunday-born	Bodua	Tail (of an animal)	Protector
Kwadwo	Monday-born	Okoto	The one who kneels	Suppliant, calm, unassuming
Kwabena	Tuesday-born	Ogyam	Good fellow	Compassionate
Kwaku	Wednesday-born	Ntonni	One who buys for others	Advocate, hero
Yaw	Thursday-born	Preko	Eager for war	Aggressive, courageous
Kofi	Friday-born	Okyin	Wanderer	Adventurer
Kwame	Saturday-born	Atoapem Oteanankaduro	Ever-ready shooter Has antidote for serpents	Valiant Problem solver

Source: Information derived from J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion* (London: Cass, 1968), pp. 47–48, and Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

temporal or historical significance. These may be categorized into *mmrane* (appellations or praise names) and *abodin* (by-names). Praise names/appellations are gnomic expressions depicting the accomplishments of the bearer of the name, though the actual deeds may be attributable to a person of the name who long ago achieved that time-honored historic distinction that the name embodies. As an example, the by-name for Mensa is Aborampa, which means that any person bearing the name Mensa may also be called Aborampa. The two names may be used interchangeably or together. The praise name/appellation for Mensa/Aborampa is Osa Mensa, meaning "Mensa the warrior," and as a warrior, his attribute is that of ruthlessness or wickedness (*abor*); indeed, Aborampa is derived from the noun *abor* and the verb *pa* in its negative root form *mpa* (does not lack), thus, the saying Aborampa, "*abor mpa ne tir mu*" ("one who [whose head] does not lack ruthlessness").

Day names, praise names, appellations, and by-names must be seen as part of the cultural apparatus by which the Akan perceive and define

personhood and personality. Further, aspects of Akan names, such as appellations, go beyond person definition to characterize perceptions of time, because in seeking to transfer attributes and historic accomplishments of someone who lived long ago to the current bearer of that name, those characteristics are transposed from the past to the present and, in a sense, detemporized.

Life Span, Identity, and Time

Just as at the community level the calendar revolves around times for the performance of key activities like planting, harvesting, and annual festivals (as will be shown), so key stages of life mark a person's life calendar. These key stages may be identified as birth/naming, puberty/initiation, marriage/procreation, and death. Recognition is given to the passing of each stage through considerable rituals that mark the occasion, and each stage also serves as a time referent.

The life span calendrical framework is based on two assumptions: first, that there is an internal rhythm or clock in a person's life that is punctuated by definite stages or events, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death, and second, that most people not only pass through these stages of life but also experience them at approximately the same ages. Thus, a person is considered to reach puberty at about 13, and a woman (in traditional or rural settings) marries at about 16 or soon thereafter. Therefore, a person might be able to give some indication of his age by saying, for instance, that he was just experiencing puberty at the time of Ghana's independence (1957), that is, he was born around 1944. This system of dating has been used extensively during census enumerations in preliterate rural communities.

Further, the rituals associated with birth, naming, puberty, and marriage have an added function of defining identity. They not only integrate the individuals into the larger community but also locate them among their consociate groups. The naming ceremony, which is performed one week after birth, marks the formal transition and initiation of the newly born to the world of the living and, therefore, welcomes the child, as it were, into his/her community. Before then, it is as if the child's existence had not yet been formally recognized. The act itself of the father naming the child after someone dead or alive whom he admires at once locates the child in a chain that links him/her to the past, the present, and the future. The child is expected to grow up in the image of the person after whom he/she is named and share that person's identity, and instances are actually known of close physical, personality, and

attitudinal resemblances between individuals and the persons after whom they are named.

The rituals of birth, naming, puberty, and marriage locate individuals into the world of their contemporaries with whom they share a community of time. Thus, these key stages of life contemporize persons.[3] Finally, death rituals emphasize the temporality and finality of life on the one hand and, on the other, mark the deceased's transition to the detemporized abode of the ancestors.

THE AKAN CALENDAR

The Akan recognize time frames of months and years. That the name for the month in Akan is either *obosom* or *osram*, both of which mean the moon, is suggestive of a practice that may have had its origins in a lunar month. Indeed, extant evidence indicates that pregnant women in some areas counted the passage of full moons to determine the age of their pregnancies. However, the traditional notion of the month to the Akan was not a fixed cycle of 30 or 31 days with terminal points, as is shown in Table 4.3.

The most fundamental calendrical system of the Akan is what, following Evans-Pritchard (1939), may be categorized as an ecological calendar. It is a system based on changes in climate and weather and the human responses to them. The calendrical framework is composed of a succession of largely agricultural tasks, which are determined by the appropriate climatological factors for performing them, such as rainfall and sunshine. Thus, among the predominantly farming Asante, planting usually starts in March in anticipation of the rains in the period that corresponds to April, which is called *Oforisuo* or *Ofresuo*, literally meaning "calling for rain." The rains continue into June, which is the wettest month. By July, the farmer's hands are said to be so "heavy" owing to the continuous task of clearing the growth of weeds that have been induced by the rains that that month is known as *Kutawonsa*, that is, "hold your [heavy] hands." The pattern of agricultural tasks continues with harvesting and storage in the period that corresponds to August, which is known as *Osanaa* (literally "storehouse") and replanting in September, which takes its name after dew (*Ebo*), a time of light moisture in the form of dew (Tables 4.3 and 4.4).

The calendrical structures depicted in Tables 4.3 and 4.4 are clearly economic or occupational systems based predominantly on farm-related activities.

TABLE 4.3
The Asante Calendar

Asante	*Julian Equivalent*	*Meaning/Significance*
Opepon	January	Derived from *ope* (drought) and *pon* (great) and refers to the dry harmattan winds experienced at this time of the year.
Ogyefue	February	Derived from *ogye* (to desire, demand, require) and *afuo* (farm). Farmers are enduring the long, dry season, and the one thing they desire most is a farm.
Obenem	March	Meaning unclear. Possibly derived from *abe* (palm fruits) and *nem* (to ripen) and, thus, associated with period of ripening of fruits.
Oforisuo/ Ofresuo	April	Literally meaning "calling for rain"; derived from *ofre* (he calls) and *suo* (rain); this is the beginning of the rainy season.
Okotonima	May	Probably derived from *kotodwe* (knees) and *nima* (small) in the sense that heavy farm work has made knees weary and they seem inadequate (small).
Ayewohomumo	June	Both *ayewoho* and *mumo* (possibly derived from *mmobo*) mean pitiable, sorrowful, a reference to the incessant rains that drench the farmer and make him an object of pity.
Kutawonsa	July	*Kutawonsa* literally means "hold your hand." The constant work of clearing the weeds that have been induced by heavy rains has made the farmer's hands heavy and sore.
Osanaa	August	*Sanaa* means "storehouse" or "treasury." This is the peak of the harvest season, when food is stored.
Ebo	September	*Ebo* means "fog." The foggy, misty weather with dew associated with this time of the year is suitable for replanting.
Ahineme	October	Meaning lost.
Obubuo	November	*Bubu* means "to harvest." This is the end of the harvest season.
Openima	December	*Ope* (dry season), *nima* (small, immature); therefore, "small" dry season, as opposed to *Opepon.*

Source: Compiled by the author.

TABLE 4.4
The Fante Calendar

Fante	*Julian Equivalent*	*Meaning/Significance*
Sanda	January	Sanda is derived from *san* (to mark it/take note of) and *da* (day, that is, the day of the new year), therefore, an exhortation to remind yourself that this is the beginning of the new year.
Kwarkwar	February	Because of the dryness of the season, trees are bare (*akokwar*).
Ebow	March	*Ebow* means "fog," "mist," or "dew," a reference to the time when dew falls; the beginning of the period of moisture and, therefore, the planting season.
Ebobira	April	*Ebobira* refers to the ending of the dew period, a time of heavy farm activity.
Esusow-Akatseaba	May	*Esusow* is the rainy season and *akatseaba* means "little," "small"; therefore, the "minor" rainy season, the beginning of the rainy season.
Obiradzi	June	New crops are just beginning to be harvested and are not plentiful, and because rituals formally marking the new crop season have not been performed, people are banned from eating them. Those who do so then eat them surreptitiously (*wobira dzi*).
Ayewoho	July	The harvesting of crops is in full swing. Those who neglected to cultivate crops are now sorry (*woaye hon ho*).
Dzifuu	August	Food, both fresh crops and fish, is so plentiful that one can afford to eat gluttonously (*dzifuu*).
Fankwa	September	Time for gleaning. The main harvesting is over. What is left over may be taken (*fa no*) as gratis (*kwa*).
Obese	October	If harvesting is not completed by now, what is left might rot (*obesee*).
Oberefew	November	[The farmer can look] beautiful (*few*) as a result of his toil (*bre/bere*); the time when the farmer reaps the rewards of his effort.
Mumu	December	*Mumu* means "dull"; it is the beginning of the harmattan season and the weather is cloudy and, therefore, "dull."

Source: Compiled by the author.

Within this ecological/agricultural framework, no fixed dates were established to mark the beginning or end of each monthly period, because those changes that marked the passing of the periods were based on people's observation of natural phenomena. Its origins might lie first, in the farmers' systematic observation and study over time of nature's dominant influences over their farm-related activities, and second, in the recognition of the need for people to come together for the performance of mutual, cooperative tasks such as tilling, planting, and harvesting. Appropriate times for such tasks had to be recognized by reference to some recurring, defined, and, above all, predictable climatological phenomena.

The 40-Day Cycles

In addition to the agricultural calendar discussed above, all Akan groups observe a parallel annual calendar that is composed of nine 40-day cycles known as *adaduanan* (literally "40 days"). Within each 40-day period — actually counted inclusively as 42 days or alternatively reckoned through the concurrent counting of a 6-day cycle with a 7-day week — there are two identical sub-cycles of 20 or 21 days within which definite patterns of days set aside for specific rituals are designated. The initial and terminal points of the 40-day cycles are constituted by consecutive major ritual days such as the Asante *Akwasidae*, which are days of propitiation of ancestral spirits. The calendrical system marks out, within each 20-day subcycle, the pattern of days for the performance of various rituals of state. Because its primary function is related to the calculation of ritual days, this is essentially a ritual calendar. The beginning point of this annual cycle is a major festival celebrated by respective Akan groups such as the Odwira, Yam, or other harvest festivals. Because they are harvest celebrations, they are observed anytime between July and October. In fact, because the dates for the celebration of these annual festivals are calculated according to the 40-day cycles, their timing could fall anytime in a 3-month span (much like the Muslim Ramadan but unlike the Christian fixed feast of Christmas).

The *Adaduanan* temporal structure has a durational rather than quantitative quality. It is not used to measure the rate at which time passes or the amount of time that has passed since the occurrence of an event. However, the cycles have a calendrical quality in that they are employed to determine ritual days, that is, holidays, and those that are nonritual and, thus, have cultural and calendrical relevance.

The Yam, Odwira, Afahye, Bakatue, and other harvest-like festivals of the various Akan groups all share identical characteristics and significance: first, they are connected with first fruits (Fante *afahye* is derived from *afa*, festival, and *hye*, to fix or appoint a time); second, harvests are times for the celebration of festivities marking the new year and, providing, as they do, a propitious starting point for the year, mark the initiation of the perpetual cycle of birth, death, and rebirth; and third, they are occasions for propitiating the deities and ancestors and thanking them for their protection and bountifulness in the just-concluded year.[4]

"Good Days" and "Bad Days"

In the Asante calendrical framework, as determined by the *adaduanan* monthly cycles, certain days are marked out as "bad days" (*da bone*) as opposed to "good days" (*da pa*). Such so-called bad days are in reality ceremonial days that are set aside for the performance of certain rituals associated with dead kings, ancestors, or certain traditional offices. They may be grouped into major ceremonial days and minor or "nonsignificant" ceremonial days. The major ceremonial days are regarded as unpropitious or inauspicious, and much in the manner of "holidays of obligation," no work or major affairs of state may be performed on these days, though no such prohibition applies to the "nonsignificant" ceremonial days. Table 4.5 illustrates the pattern of ceremonial and nonceremonial days within one 40-day cycle from the Akwasidae of November 8 to December 20, 1992. As can be seen, besides the Akwasidae itself, there are only four other major ceremonial days, that is, *da bone* days prohibiting work or official business (November 23 and December 2, 11, and 15) within a 40-day monthly cycle. Thus, at five major ceremonial days per each 40-day month, the total number of such days in a year of nine months is 45.

TABLE 4.5
The Asante *Adaduanan* (40-Day) Calendar:
November 8 –December 20, 1991

		Designation	*Relevance*
Obubuo (November)			
8	Kwasiada	Akwasidae	Biggest ceremonial day
9	Dwoada	Adaedwoada	Minor ceremonial day
10	Beneda		
11	Wukuada	Fokuo	Minor ceremonial day
12	Yawoada		
13	Fiada	Adwedaefiada	Minor ceremonial day
14	Memeneda		
16	Kwasiada		
17	Beneda	Fobena	Minor ceremonial day
18	Wukuada		
19	Yawoada		
20	Fiada		
21	Memeneda		
22	Kwasiada		
23	Dwoada	Fodwoo	Major ceremonial day
24	Beneda		
25	Wukuada		
26	Yawoada		
27	Fiada	Fidampan	Minor ceremonial day
28	Memeneda		
29	Kwasiada	Fokwasie	Minor ceremonial day
30	Dwoada		
Openima (December)			
1	Beneda	Dapaa	Minor ceremonial day
2	Wukuada	Wukudapaakuo	Major ceremonial day
3	Yawoada		
4	Fiada	Monofie	Minor ceremonial day
5	Memeneda	Fomemene	Minor ceremonial day
6	Kwasiada		
7	Dwoada	Nkyidwoo	Minor ceremonial day
8	Beneda		
9	Wukuada		
10	Yawoada		
11	Fiada	Fofie	Major ceremonial day
12	Memeneda		
13	Kwasiada		
14	Dwoada		
15	Beneda	Kwabena	Major ceremonial day
16	Wukuada	Monokuo	Minor ceremonial day

Table 4.5, continued

		Designation	*Relevance*
Openima (December), continued			
17	Yawoada	Foyawoo	Minor ceremonial day
18	Fiada	Nwonafie	Minor ceremonial day
19	Memeneda	Dapaa	Minor ceremonial day
20	Kwasiada	Akwasidae	Biggest ceremonial day

Source: Information on designations of ceremonial days was extacted from Asante Asranna (calendar), 1992, prepared by Kofi Appiagyei of Kumasi, Ghana. Assistance in interpreting ceremonial days was provided by Kwame Osei-Wusu, formerly cultural coordinator, University of Science and Technology, Kumasi.

HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

John Mbiti's works on time in Africa have been probably cited as much as those of any modern scholar. Unfortunately, a number of his conclusions about time in Africa, which he says are based on his study of some East African societies, are generalizations that do not apply to the Akan. In contrast to Mbiti's (1990, p. 17) view that "the future is virtually absent," I have pointed out (1987, p. 85), for example, that "the future exists in Akan time perceptions." In a more detailed critique, Kwame Gyekye (1987, pp. 170–75) also cogently argued that not only does the future exist in Akan thinking but also it is associated with change and progress.

Because of the currency that Mbiti's views on time enjoy, they would be recaptured here *in extenso* as the springboard for this discussion on historical consciousness. In a manner somewhat reminiscent of the old Lévy-Bruhl school, Mbiti (1990 [1969], pp. 16–17) asserted that time in Africa is two-dimensional, nonlinear, and devoid of the future: "According to traditional concepts, time is a two-dimensional phenomenon, with a long *past*, a *present* and virtually *no future*. The linear concept of time in western thought . . . is practically foreign to African thinking." Mbiti's premise for his two-dimensional theory of time is derived from his observation that time is a nonreality for Africans. To him, there is no concept of time except in the context of "a composition of events." He emphasizes that "time has to be created or produced" and, therefore, "has to be experienced in order to make sense or to become real." He concludes (1990 [1969], p. 19): "The future is virtually absent because events which lie in it have not taken place, they have not been realized and cannot, therefore, constitute time. . . . Since what is the

future has not been experienced, it does not make sense; it cannot, therefore, constitute part of time, and people do not know how to think about it."

The Akan concept of time is at variance with the Mbiti model in many respects. As has been noted above, time in Akan thinking is both an abstraction and a concrete reality. The Akan possess the notion of time in the abstract as in the conception of time flying by itself, on its own accord. Indeed, in common Akan imagery, time is compared with a flying bird. Simultaneously, however, the conception of time as a concrete, objective reality also exists among the Akan. Time in this respect is seen as an objectivity that changes and is mutable, thus, the popular Akan maxim *bere di adannan* ("time changes"). Several other Akan proverbs affirm the mutability of time. Witness, for example, *me bere beba* ("my time will come") or its variant *akyer akyer biara wo ne mber* ("everything has its day [time], no matter how long it might take"). The Akan, therefore, view events not as composing time in the Mbiti interpretation but, on the one hand, as constituting time of themselves, a concrete awareness of time that is, on the other hand, conceptualized as falling within the linear, irreversible plane of time. It is for this reason that the Akan word *bere* (Twi) or *mber* (Fante) represents both planes of time realization, the concrete and the abstract.

Further, time in Akan thinking is a three-dimensional phenomenon; the past, the present, and the future all exist. The Akan view of time past and events that have occurred (within time) is synonymous with history. Indeed, the Akan word for "history" is *abakosem*, literally meaning "past events," that is, events that have occurred and are in the domain of the past. Within this realm of the past, the Akan demarcate three phases of *firi tete* (remote past), *kane no* (the past, that is, "middle past"), and *nansa yi* (recent past). *Firi tete* (meaning "from the beginning") refers to the period of the beginning of time as seen by the Akan. This phase represents a long span of time that ranges from (a) the cosmological period of the creation of the universe as seen by the particular Akan group through the periods of (b) the group's origins and (c) its protohistoric period to include sometimes (d) its early history. Periods (a) and (b) correspond to the mythological era and (c) and (d), the early historic period.

Kane no (literally meaning "at first") refers to an unspecified past that encompasses the recent and a fairly distant past. It may range from only a decade or two ago to a century or so, sometimes the depth of the period envisaged depending on the age of the speaker and the extent of his/her knowledge of the past. *Nansa yi* literally means "three days ago,"

but, again, is often loosely applied to the recent past in the sense of nowadays or lately.

The *firi tete* phase is seen as going as far back as the beginning point of the particular Akan group, which, though lacking the specificity of the Gregorian zero point, is nonetheless viewed as marking the group's initial point. The depth to which the group's origins are projected infuses it with a sense of antiquity. There is a consciousness of the group's history as moving forward from this beginning point along a sort of historical chart toward a future. Thus, Akan, like all societies, has its own theory of historical time.

The past constitutes simultaneously both planes of the abstract, fluid time flow and the concrete succession of events that punctuate it. In the long span of time represented by the *firi tete* phase, mathematical time reckoning has little or no use. The depth of time associated with a specific past occurrence and the consciousness it arouses as an historical event are based not on precise dates but on sequential time and the relational occurrence of events. Each event that is employed as a time referent within this past realm is seen as possessing an episodic quality with a specific periodicity, and though it may have occurred in the distant past, it remains vividly present in the Akan "national" consciousness. A chain or succession of events within a specific phase constitutes a distinct historical epoch.

Despite the lack of Western time specificity in the conceptualization of the Akan past, there is an overwhelming awareness of the importance of the past. The Akan are deeply aware that they are anchored in their past, the past providing, as it does, their origins, traditions, languages, and values.[5] It is out of recognition of the importance of the past and those who have given birth to it that the Akan revere their ancestors. In the seemingly perpetual libations and invocations to ancestors that are performed — whether in ceremonies associated with the life cycle of the individual or that of the state or in connection with special events — the ancestors are recalled from the past to a share a presence with the living, as if time were immobilized. Thus, the invocations not only locate individuals in the past, the present, and the future but also become vehicles for historical recall, interpretations, and reappraisals.

The Akan states, like other centralized political systems, had an awareness of the motivating force of the past and the political usefulness of history. A prime example of this came into play when Asante's existence as a state was threatened by the British toward the end of the nineteenth century.[6] With the monarchy exiled to the distant Indian Ocean island of the Seychelles and the future of the

state uncertain, the Asante king Prempe I committed to writing for the first time the history of his nation.[7] In doing so, Prempe evidently looked back on a national past, saw history as an instrument of national liberation, and discovered a national history to provide justification for the future. He, thus, drew on the power of historical consciousness to re-create the nation out of the past.[8] In this respect, then, it mattered little if Prempe's memory of Asante's past at times lagged behind reality.[9]

In Akan temporal attitudes toward the past and present, sometimes parts of the former phase are seen as merging into an enormous present. Thus, individuals and, in particular, Akan leaders sometimes speak of the past in the universal present, making the accomplishments of past heroes their own and, in a way, contemporizing past events. Throughout the nineteenth century, for example, English officials seemed at a loss when Asante kings repeatedly spoke of the events and achievements of their predecessors as if they were accomplishments of their own reigns.[10]

The Future

It has been observed above that, contrary to Mbiti's assertion that the future is virtually absent in African time perceptions, it does exist in Akan thought. Indeed, as with the past, the Akan conceptualize the future at both the immediate and distant levels and at the actual and abstract dimensions, and this is borne out by the Twi/Fante language. Christaller's authoritative *Grammar of the Asante and Fante Language* (1964, p. 59) recognizes the existence of two future time frames (tenses) as follows: the "first Future," which "marks action in the time to come" and the "second Future, or Fut. [-ure] proximate," which "marks action in the next future" or "the next time." The first future, then, denotes an unspecified time to come, as in the Twi *daakye* or *da bi* ("some day [in the future]"). Further, the concept of eternity exists and is represented by expressions like *afeboo* ("forever"), *daa* (literally "everyday" but meaning "forever"), and *beresanten*. The last expression literally means "time in succession or an (unending) row," thus, eternity. Moreover, *beresanten* conveys the idea of time moving forward in a linear, unbroken line. The future proximate is formed by prefixing *rebe* to the verb root and may be qualified by specifying the actual time that the future event is expected to occur, such as next week, a month from today, a year hence.

In Akan thinking, (future) time is also associated with change, process, and progress. Gyekye succinctly argued (1987, pp. 170–71): "The Akan thinkers consider time as a concrete reality, associated with change and growth . . . and hence with change and transformation. To experience time, then, is to experience concrete change, growth, generation, and passing away of specific things." It may be added that underlying the various phases of time is an awareness of historical change and progression that overarched and linked them.

Linear versus Cyclical Time

Akan time perceptions are at one and the same time linear and cyclical. In the long continuum from protohistoric times through the present to the future, there is a linear view of an unbroken chain linking all phases. The Akan is as firmly and surely rooted in his/her past as he/she is linked to the future. The vanishing present is anchored backward to a determining past and forward to a moldable future. The sense of what is historic is visualized not just in terms of a past event but also in terms of an unfolding present development that is viewed with future times in mind. Historical consciousness is, therefore, experienced not just in the remembrance of things past but also in seeing present developments vis-à-vis the future. Therefore, historical consciousness interfaces with all three dimensions of time; for instance, the ability to recognize the epochal quality of an event that is happening now must be linked to the recognition of its significance in the eyes of future generations.

Yet, it is clear that the Akan do not see this linear perception of history as conflicting with the view of time as being cyclical from the present to the future and back to the present, which becomes the past of tomorrow. There is not only an awareness of the contribution of the ancestors in times past toward the growth and well-being of the present group but also a realization of the duty to preserve the present for future times. As an Akan proverb goes, "What the ancestors left behind after eating, we have." People look to the past to secure their individual future and the future of their descendants. There is a sense of temporality implicit in people's ephemerality, an awareness of the weight that the heroic lives of the ancestors, directly or indirectly, bears upon them and the consciousness of the potential impact that their own actions may have on the lives of those yet to be born. This realization is embedded in an awareness that people have of their place in an unending stream of metaphysical order.

Chronology

I have discussed extensively elsewhere the Akan use of various mechanisms and devices to establish chronology.[11] These include drum music, stool histories, libations, oaths, and funeral dirges.[12] A common feature is that such historical events must be so important as to serve as "landmarks in the traditional history,"[13] and they range in time frame from the group's creation period all the way to its recent history.

Chronological time, to the Akan, then, is a homogenous continuum comprising events, each of which has a definite place in that continuous sequence. The assumption is that a particular event occurred at a given time for reasons bound up with that moment and in relation to the flow of a succession of events in which it has a place. History, indeed, can be seen in some respects as a process in chronological time.

AKAN TIME AND THE WEST

It has been shown that in Akan thinking, time is perceived of in two planes, the abstract and the concrete. In everyday realities, however, there is more conscious perception of the concrete character of time than the abstract. For this reason, Akan time notions share a common characteristic with those of many other African societies in that they are more qualitative than quantitative. Akan calendrical systems like the *adaduanan* cycles categorize time not so much for purposes of counting and adding them up as to characterize them in terms of designated times for specific activities. In such calendrical systems, time is not consumed, it is nonaccumulative. The systems are not devices for telling people what time it is, like the Western mechanical clock. However, it cannot be said of the Akan, as Mbiti says of Africans in general, that they do not consciously ponder time. A popular Fante saying, *mber reko* ("time is moving"), clearly recognizes that time can move on its own accord, that there is a sense of the irrecoverability of the passage of time. Mbiti may, therefore, have overstated the qualitative element in African time notions when he asserted (1990 [1969], p. 16) that "time is *simply* a composition of events which have occurred, those which are taking place now and those which are inevitably or immediately to occur."

However, there is no doubt that the Akan do not share the West's obsession with time. Akan traditional attitudes to time are often identical to those that the late Ugandan poet Okot p'Bitek poignantly depicted of his character Lawino, who defiantly proclaimed:[14]

I do not know
How to keep the white man's time.
My mother taught me
The way of the Acoli. . . .
When the baby cries
Let him suck milk
From the breast.
There is no fixed time
For breast feeding. . . .

However, it is abundantly clear that Akan calendrical notions are not principally a product of mental activity in the Lévy-Bruhl characterization. Surely, if it was the advent of industrialization that changed Western notions of time to clock consciousness, then it can be stated that time-marking strategies were determined by economic necessities in Europe, as they were in the Akan areas of Ghana because undoubtedly, the Akan calendrical notions embedded in agricultural cycles were essentially dictated by the demands of a precapitalist political economy.

CONCLUSION

It has been shown that the Akan employ multiple temporal structures that range from agricultural cycles and the life span calendrical framework to 40-day cycles and that they often operate concurrently. It has also been shown that there is a link between personal identity and conceptions of temporal order and that notions of time are linked with ideas of historical process. Indeed, there is an interdependency of conceptions of time, person, and history, with the multiple modes of experiencing time reinforcing each other.

Each temporal structure manifests itself on the one hand as a discrete, specific unit of periodicity and on the other as an interconnected component of a sequenced, holistic system, an overarching edifice that provides the internal, definable logic and ethos of Akan society. In the final analysis, time is essentially a cultural phenomenon, and calendrical structures function as cultural mechanisms for demarcating temporal units.

NOTES

1. The literature on the ethonography and history of the Akan is quite extensive. See, for example, Willie Abraham, *The Mind of Africa* (Chicago, University of

Chicago Press, 1962); Kufi Antubam, *Ghana's Heritage of Culture* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1963); Eric Ayisi, *An Introduction to the Study of African Culture* (London: Heinemann, 1979); Kofi Busia, "The Ashanti of the Gold Coast," in *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples*, ed. D. Forde (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954); Fortes, "Kinship and marriage among the Ashanti" in *African Worlds*, ed. D. Forde; A.A.Y. Kyerematen, *Panoply of Ghana* (London: Longmans, 1964); R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923); and I. Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of a Political Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

On dictionaries and grammars, see C. A. Akrofi, *Twi Kasa Mmra* (London: Longmans 1960 [1937]); F. L. Bartels and J. A. Annobil, *Mfantse Nkasafua Dwumadzi: A Fante Grammar of Function* (Cape Coast, Ghana: Methodist Book Depot, 1967 [1946]; and J. G. Christaller, *A Grammar of the Asante and Fante Language* (Ridgewood, N.J.: Gregg, 1964 [1875].

2. Fink (1974) observed that the Bono of Tekyiman makes reference to particular times of the day by association to the principal activity performed at those times. This may be compared with the cattle-herding Ankore of Uganda, who reckon time in terms of specfic cattle-related activities (Mbiti 1990 [1969], pp. 19–20).

3. For further discussion of the temporal relevance of contemporaries and consociates, see A. Schultz, *The Problem of Social Reality* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1962), and Clifford Geertz, *Person, Time, and Conduct in Bali: An Essay in Cultural Analysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

4. A brief introduction to the principal festivals of Ghana can be found in A. A. Opoku, *Festivals of Ghana* (Accra: Ghana Publishing, 1970).

5. Contrast with "Negroes are not anchored in their past" (H. Green, "Temporal Attitudes in Four Negro Subcultures," in *Voices of Time*, ed. J. T. Fraser [New York: Braziller, 1966]), p. 407.

6. The subject is discussed at length in Joseph K. Adjaye, *Diplomacy and Diplomats in Nineteenth Century Asante* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984).

7. For further discussion, see Joseph K. Adjaye, "Asantehene Agyeman Prempe I, Asante History, and the Historian," *History in Africa* 17 (1990): 1–29. It should also be noted that Asantehene Osei Bonsu (1800–23) had taken measures to synchronize the Islamic, Christian, and indigenous calendars to facilitate the scheduling of governmental business.

8. On the role of historical consciousness in political action, the reader may be referred to Theodor Schieder, "Historical Consciousness in Political Action," *History and Theory* 17 (1978): 1–18.

9. The suggestion has been made that in Asante's case, history may in fact have been manipulated to establish a consensual basis of authority; see, for example, Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 86.

10. Adjaye, *Diplomacy and Diplomats*, p. 228.

11. Joseph K. Adjaye, "Time, the Calendar, and History among the Akan of Ghana," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 15 (1987): 86–88.

12. A good source of music as historical source material is J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *Funeral Dirges of the Akan People* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969 [1955]).

13. Kwame Daaku, "History in the Oral Tradition of the Akan," in *Folklore and Traditional History*, ed. R. M. Dorson (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), p. 46.

14. Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino* (London: Heinemann, 1984 [1966]), p. 68.

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5

Time and Culture among the Bamana/Mandinka and Dogon of Mali

Kassim Koné

At a frontier of anthropology is the understanding of the concept of time as people define, live, internalize, and transmit it from generation to generation. The way non-Westerners, particularly, conceptualize, define, express, act upon, or live in time remains a major challenge for the social sciences, because although anthropology and ethnography have made giant steps in their studies of other realms of human endeavor, a concrete concept of time among any of anthropology's subjects seems tentative or elusory. Perhaps anthropologists should think more thoroughly of their own backgrounds, noting the polysemy of time and its socioideological implications at home before making naive assumptions about how others view it.

In much anthropological literature on non-Western concepts of time, religion, ritual, and ecology seem to play dominant roles. In most cases, time is seen as acting upon those who live in it; people are portrayed as passive with respect to time. The way non-Westernized people observe events and activities throughout the year tends to be viewed in the context of their inability to grasp time in an abstract way.

Although religion and ritual may be important aspects of time among Africans, the practical and critical roles that they play as ideological

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tools in the planning of social, political, and economic events are more important considerations that are often overlooked. Ecology also serves to define and identify time, but there is no such thing as ecological time. What E. E. Evans-Pritchard, for instance, defines as and means by "ecological time" in his discussion of the Nuer is actually an occupational time that is dictated by changes in the ecology of the environment or influenced by the degree of freedom of space in Nuerland. To Evans-Pritchard, the Nuer calendar is a relation between a cycle of activities and a conceptual cycle that cannot fall apart because "the conceptual cycle is dependent on the cycle of activities from which it derives its meaning and function" (Evans-Pritchard 1940, p. 100). Such a view is inaccurate because it implies that once the activities change (due to a dramatic change in the environmental cycle), the meaning and function of the conceptual cycle will also change, because the underlying premise is that the Nuer are passively acted upon by time.

This chapter will explore different ways in which two Malian groups, the Bamana (of the Mandinka/Mande/Malinke cluster), among whom I was born and raised, and the Dogon, define and conceptualize time. Where possible, comparative illustrations will be drawn from other West African people who share common linguistics and cultural backgrounds with the Bamana and Dogon. These constructs of time will be presented against a critique of Western anthropological characterizations of African time in terms of religious, ecological, and ritual cycles. It will be demonstrated that although religion, ecology, and rituals are important in marking the passage of time among Africans such as the Bamana and Dogon, they have a more important significance in the social, cultural, economic, and political arenas. The Bamana and Dogon ways of conceptualizing history and genealogy, for example, depend more on contexts like space and place rather than on chronology (that is, exact dates and successions in the Western tradition), a major divide between Western historiography and African accounts of the past.

WESTERN DEFINITIONS OF AFRICAN TIME

Jean Piaget's (1970) distinction between "empirical" time (passive observation of sequences of events) and "rational" time (intellectual grasping of time conceptually) seems to capture the essence of many Western definitions of time among nondeveloped cultures. Deriving from such characterizations, Africans are depicted as lacking not only in abstract conceptualizations of time but also, in consequence, the ability to conceptualize time except in relation to events.

In this respect, Evans-Pritchard (1940) saw Nuer time as simply "an order of events of outstanding significance" and concluded that the Nuer do not experience

> The same feeling of fighting against time or of having to coordinate activities with an abstract passage of time, because their points of reference are the activities themselves which are generally of leisurely character. Events follow a logical order, but they are not controlled by an abstract system, there being no autonomous points of reference to which activities have to conform with precision. (pp. 103, 105)

In the same vein, Jean Comaroff, writing of a South African people, the Tswana, reports that time is not an abstract entity, a resource that can fall apart from activities and events. For her, Tswana time is not a resource that can be exploited, because work itself does not have the abstract quality and value of the West. Rather, time among these people is seen as the "duration inherent in social practice as it acted upon the passage of seasons" (Comaroff 1985, p. 66).

Although seeking to define an African construct of time, John Mbiti was nonetheless influenced by the Western tradition in his conceptualizations of time in Africa. In his *African Religions and Philosophy* (1990 [1969], p. 17) he states that for African peoples,

> Time is simply a composition of events which occurred, those which are taking place now and those which are immediately to occur. What has not taken place or what has no likelihood of an immediate occurrence falls in the category of "No/time." What is certain to occur, or what falls within the rhythm of natural phenomena, is in the category of inevitable or potential time.

What is present and what is past fall in the category he calls "actual time."

Characteristic of the Western anthropological tradition relating to descriptions of time in Africa, Mbiti categorizes future time as "no time" because events in it are yet to occur. What he defines as "no/time" is in reality what is considered "future time" in the West. The difference is just that "future time" is not faced in Africa in the same way as it is in the West. In Western philosophy, people have the capacity or potential to determine the future, whereas in many examples of African thought, only God or the gods are ascribed the ability to determine the future. Divinations represent one medium by which Africans attempt to influence the future.

From these definitions, it is clear that Westerners judge "African time" as different from (and inferior to) Western time in that the latter is abstract, ordered, and rational, while the former is merely passive. All over Africa, people from the same groups are described as acting in unison with a homogenous sentiment about time, passive in relation to changes in weather, the prescription of a religious society, a ritual, without any notion of time in the abstract. However, Western anthropological literature has so far failed to step back and consider what it is that makes Africans appear to them as "passive" with regard to time, because Africans do not share Western priorities with respect to time in the sense that "time is money" and, therefore, has to be domesticated and used as a means of reaching individualized ends.

TIME AND CONTEXT

Cultural factors and constituents are among the important and, yet, oft-neglected frames of reference relevant to temporal orientations that Irving Hallowell (1955, pp. 152–54) brings up in his study of different cultures. Other tools of temporal orientation in preliterate societies include market days or cycles, sacred days occurring at regular intervals, the appearance of certain animals at regular seasons of the year, and even the calendar of scents, as among the Andamanese (of the Bay of Bengal), which constitutes their method of marking the different periods of the year by means of odoriferous flowers in bloom. Yet, it should be recognized that even for literate societies where people go by the watch and written calendars, the occurrence of natural phenomena such as squirrels starting to collect nuts for their cold season food reserves, snow in the winter, and physical discomforts such as sneezing due to the presence of pollen in the atmosphere all constitute indications for people that winter or spring or summer has arrived.

Pierre Bourdieu (1963) describes nature and divinity as the main agents acting upon the lives of Kabyle peasants of Algeria. For them, life is a rhythm determined by the divisions of the ritual calendar, which exhibits a whole mystical system built about a cluster of contrasts between complementary principles. The dry season (spring and summer) and wet season (autumn and winter), night and day, and light and shadow are opposing notions defining the calendar of agricultural labor and crafts and the underlying principle of the division of labor between the sexes. Humans must submit to the passage of time scanned in the rhythm of nature. It is so for Bourdieu because where he comes from, people have learned to do work that is unaffected by the passage of seasons and

by the rise and fall of the sun. The material conditions available to the Kabyle peasant will determine the Kabyle vision of time.

One of the major clashes between African and Western cultures originates from the encounter of two radically different conceptions of time. From a Western point of view, African time can be said to be one that is socialized. This is probably due to the Western regimentation of time, space, and place. This regimentation favors the alienation of other people's space, place, and time by private individuals. Yet, the individual in Western society is given the illusion of having freedom of time, space, and place once he/she is able to conquer it by maximizing profits with increased production in a given time unit. This is so even when the capacity to project into the future, the sustained race against time, and the accumulation of wealth are detrimental to social life. The regimentation of time in the West is one of the consequences of industrialization and modernization. Therefore, Westerners' description of nonindustrialized peoples' perception and use of time is a description of state rather than one of behavior.

In Africa, the land tenure systems, social history, ethnic variation, and gender and class distinctions in the division of labor may lead to the inference that time is ritualized. However, rituals are often institutionalized tools of social and political control or balance. People operating at the upper levels of a stratified society may try to legitimize their positions and the existing social and economic orders through rituals and other religious practices. The way time is conceived and its application to the social arena serve to create a social and economic balance. Thus, time has to be placed within its social context.

One example of the social construction of time is the *Kòmò* farming ritual of the Bamana, which involves the blessing of seeds before the farming season. During this ceremony, the *Kòmò* secret society blesses seeds and land through a ritual of offering sacrifices to religious deities that represent various farming activities. Because initiates and noninitiates alike benefit from the *Kòmò* ritual, every family must provide the *Kòmò* association fees in millet or other sacrifices for the ritual. The ritual is based on the *Kòmò* society's knowledge of the universe and weather patterns, and the whole society benefits from it. Above all, however, the *Kòmò* is first and foremost a tool for social and political control by the society's leaders. Its primary significance, therefore, lies in its role in the social construction of time rather than as a ritual that sets in motion the farming season, as seen by the West.

Another illustration can be found in the Dogon *Sigi* celebration (the re-creation of the world every 60 years). During the ceremony, new *Sigi*

initiates are taught the ritual *sigi so* (*Sigi* language) that allows *Sigi* dignitaries, the *olubaru*, to impart knowledge about the history of the creation of the Dogon and the meaning of life and death (Griaule and Dieterlen 1991 [1965], p. 19). Training in mystic languages occurs in other Bamana initiations into secret societies. As in the case of the *Kòmò*, the implications of this ritual are mostly social and political — the acquisition of control over the initiates and neophytes.

The same observations can be made about the seedtime rituals of the Tswana of southern Africa. According to I. Schapera (1985, p. 17), "the chief's ability to make and dispense the seedtime was a function of his innate capacity to bring by ritual means, the annual rains that were essential perquisite of arable success." Thus, in the Tswana king bestowing the seedtime to his people, Comaroff (1985, p. 66) supports the idea that he not only sets in motion the official calendar but also accomplishes a vital political duty of his office.

Although the *Kòmò* farming ritual and the Tswana king seedtime ritual are important in marking off the beginning of important times, they should not be taken as ritual time by which people are summoned to action. People observe the so-called ritual times because these times are doxic and because people see in them the potential for benefit. Even if the Kòmò, Dogon, and Tswana rituals described above were to disappear, their people would still know when to farm, because it is not the rituals that tell them when to farm, as the West believes.

Various priorities produce various ways of acting upon time. Africans are not passive with respect to time, because they make many pragmatic choices, especially in periods of crisis. In years when there is a significant delay in the rainfall pattern, people grow crops that do not take long or require much rain to grow and cattle herders make novel decisions concerning the grazing and drinking patterns of their animals.

Historical cases in which ritual time proved incongruent with human actions appeared with the socioeconomic and religious changes that arose with the incursions of Islamic, Christian, and Western culture in Africa. "Ritual time," then, instead of dying, sometimes coexisted with other religious and modern time systems. For example, whether or not people are Muslim in Mali, they are aware of Muslim prayer times. In Mali, as in many other parts of Africa, there are mixed systems of time-reckoning: Islamic time overlays Bamana time, and French imported time overlays Islamic time. Whatever temporal structure people apply, they understand that the other systems impinge on their own.

It is not the time people are born to but the time that they live with that determines the way they conceive, express, and live time. In some

languages, time is translated into activity, and the regularity/reproduction of such an activity ends up giving its name to the time (for example, time of the day, day of the week, a given period of the year). In some cases in Africa, for example, among the Kisi of Liberia, the names of villages stand for the names of their market days. Thus, the name of village *A* stands for its market day, which will be called *A* and which will stand for the name of a day of the week within a given area. Seven villages will then stand for seven market days and constitute a week. Days of the week, and weeks, therefore, differ, depending on which part of Kisiland one happens to be in.

Among the Dogon, the week consists of five days. In the Dogon country around Sanga, markets, because of their social and economic importance, serve for temporal orientation and bear the names of the villages where they take place (Paulme 1988, p. 298). Sanga, Ibi, Bamani, and two other villages, for instance, constitute a weekly system in which "every Sanga" or "last Sanga" or "next Sanga" corresponds to expressions like "every Monday," "last Monday," or "next Monday," respectively. Here, the week is then a cycle of market days named after villages that constitute a time cycle. In Bamana, the term used for "week" denotes the period between two market days; thus, *dogokun* means "week," although it literally is "market-edge."

For the Karambe subgroup of the Dogon, the week (*dyugu*) lasts five days (*baya*): *iye* (today), *yugo* (tomorrow, next farming season, next year depending on the context), *yugo dene* (the day after tomorrow), *bay nay* (the fourth day), and *bay no* (the fifth day), which is the day for rest or for private work (Bouju 1984, pp. 9, 11, 126). Griaule and Dieterlen (1991 [1965], p. 23) refer to this last day as *dambay* (forbidden day), meaning that no work should be done in ritual fields that day. It is possible that before the influence of Islam, the Bamana week was also organized as a five-day cycle, because five days of the week are still considered family farm workdays while Monday and Friday (Islamic holidays) are days for rest and work on private farms. Thus, as before, it is socioeconomic considerations that influence conceptions of temporal cycles.

In African cultures, an awareness of the passage of European months has not displaced the practical use of a very elaborate lunar system that determines the cycle of events and activities. The period between two new moons stands for a month. For the Bamana, the term *kalo* means both "moon" and "month." Along with the Dogon, the Bamana graphically represent the movement of stars and, especially, of the sun around the earth. The Bamana measure these movements with a cylindrical granary called *waati jate jiginyè* ("time-computing granary"). The

projection of shades produced by this granary helps determine the dates of the solstices and equinoxes. The Bamana year consists of 360 days, based on the division of the year into four 90-day periods. For the Dogon, the year is made up of 13 months of 28 days each (364 days), alternatively divided into 12 months of 30 days each. The Dogon week is made up of five days.

Denise Paulme (1988, p. 137) provides further evidence of Dogon calendrical mechanisms. In the village of Guinadia, she reports the use of a type of calendar called *taña bo* ("stick with notches"), with 12 vertical notches along which the head of family moves a string every month. The use of pebbles is also a common means of temporal orientation, especially among younger Bamana children. For example, by keeping 12 pebbles in a spot and throwing away one of them at the sight of every new moon or by adding pebbles to one another, children can temporally orient themselves. The addition or subtraction of pebbles indicates which month of the year has arrived and, therefore, provides the individual with a temporal reference within the annual cycle.

THE ECOLOGICAL CYCLE

The so-called ecological/agricultural cycle does not necessarily depend on the cycle of activities or events as depicted by Evans-Pritchard (1939, 1940) and others. Rather, in many cases, it is the cyclical activity and events that are the consequences of the conceptual cycle. In the sample of West African languages and cultures presented below, different conceptions of time related to the environment among the Bamana/Mandinka (Mali), Hausa (Niger/Nigeria), Fulfulde/Poular (Mali/Mauritania), and Songhay/Zerma (Mali/Niger) are explored. The goal is to establish the relationship between the conceptual cycle that constitutes the passage of seasons and the cyclical activities and events that ensue and establish whether the conceptual cycle derives its meaning and function from the cycle of activities and events. Because there are only two major seasons in the Sahel region of West Africa (the dry season, which is cold and then hot, and the wet season), they will constitute the major ecological reference point of this survey (Table 5.1).

With none of these words used to refer to the different seasons of the year do we find a relation between the meaning of the cycles and the activities occurring at those times. In most cases where words used to refer to the cycles of the seasons of the year carry any other meaning, these are related to either the weather during that season or an event known empirically to occur during that season. For example, in both

TABLE 5.1
Seasons in Selected West African Linguistic/Ethnic Groups

Linguistic/ Ethnic Group	*Dry Season*	*Cold*	*Hot*	*Wet Season*
Baana./ Mandinka	*tilema* (sunny)	*fonènè* (cold)	*funteni* (hot)	*samiya* (rainy season)
Dogon (Ono Ogo)	*nam bana* (sunny season)	*nam bana*	*nam bana*	*jinèga* (rainy season)
Poular	*ceedu* (S)*	*dabbunde* (S)	*ceedu* (S)	*ndungu* (S)
Fulfulde	*ceedo* (S)	*jangòl* (S)	*ceedu* (S)	*ndungu* (S)
Songhay	*jamda* (malaria season)	*hargo* (cold)	*kòrno* (hot)	*kediya* (S)
		jiya (S)	*lahula* (harmattan)	
Zerma	*jamda* (malaria season)	*hargo* (cold)	*kòrno* (cold)	*kediya* (S)
Hausa Niger	*fari* (S)	*sanyi* (cold)	*rani* (drought)	*damena* (S)
Hausa Nigeria	*rani* (drought)	*sanyi* (cold)	*zafi* (heat)	*damena* (S)
			gumi (perspiration)	

*(S) means that the word refers to the season but has no meaning that refers to the environment or a given activity during this season.

Source: Amadou Ba, Zahara Maiga-Kone, Hamidou D. Boukary, and Mustapha Ahmad provided assistance with terminologies/concepts relating to the Poular, Songhay/ Zerma, Hausa/Niger, and Hausa/Nigeria, respectively. Information on the Dogon is from Jacky Bouju, *Graine de l'homme, enfant du mil* (Paris: Société de'Ethnographie, 1984).

Songhay and Zerma the word *jamda*, which refers to malaria, designates the whole season, whereas the malaria period occurs just at the end of the rainy season when there is stagnant water that promotes the breeding of mosquitoes. Although the Bamana and the Fulfulde/Poular do not call this period a season because it is relatively short, they refer to it as *kawlè tile* and *hangè kawlè*, meaning in both cases *kawlè*, "sun." Although the word "sun" is used in Bamana/Mandinka to refer to time, life span, or a period covering the reign of a king, in *kawlè tile* the word "sun" refers to the actual heat at the end of the rainy season when there is much humidity and many malaria cases. Similarly, the words for "wind" (*harmattan*) and "perspiration" are used to refer to seasons because these are events occurring in the environment or with the human body during these seasons.

The Dogon-Karambe refer to the end of the dry season as *bado* ("father's arrival") or *doguro do* ("time of arrival"), while the period November-December, the early dry season, is called *bago* ("father's leaving") (Bouju 1984, p. 125). The "father's arrival" announces the arrival of the rains, the "birth" of plants and life; "father's departure" announces dryness and death, the two major forces defining Dogon cosmos. Life cycles, seasonal cycles, and generational cycles reflect the ascending or descending influence of two contrasting forces of nature, wet and dry, life and death, one waxing and the other waning (DeMott 1982, p. 151).

In all these languages, the expressions used for seasons are used for temporal orientation the same way "winter" and "spring" are in English. They are empirically known to be the best time for given activities, but these activities are determined by the people living in these environments. For example, if we take the case among the agricultural Bamana, the year is mostly seen as falling into two major cycles: *tilema* (*tile*, "sun"; *tilema*, "sunny season") and *samiya* (*san*, "sky"; *sanji*, "sky water"; *samiya*, "rainy season"). It is worthy of note that the word for "year," *san*, is derived from *sanji*, because a person's age is reckoned in terms of the number of rainy seasons he/she has lived through. Although all Bamana recognize *samiya* as the rainy season, its occurrence does not necessarily determine their behavior, because they can bring dramatic changes into their livelihood (such as a change of occupation or migration) without changing their perception of *samiya* as the best *sènè-kè-waati* ("farming season").

The way the Fulani/Poular use their time with the passage of seasons in Mali and Mauritania further indicates that people are not bound to any ecological time but, rather, that they make pragmatic choices with the

passage of the seasons. These pastoral groups undergo a kind of seasonal migration known as transhumance — the movement of pastoralists and herds in search of pasture and water. This activity vividly illustrates the use of time and space for reasons arising from individual and common interest rather than from the ecology per se, although in Mali the movement occurs outward (that is, away from their homesteads) at the beginning of the rainy season, whereas it is inward (that is, toward home) in Mauritania. This use of space in relation to time has been affected by modern induced governmental measures intended to help pastoralists become sedentary and practice intensive rather than extensive breeding. It has also been affected by years of drought but has survived where people have had enough herds to sustain their livelihood. The survival of this nomadic behavior even in periods of natural constraints is due to the perception of freedom of time through space, which allows the people to escape governmental controls like tax collection and price controls.

The Poular herders of Mauritania go on transhumance during the dry season. This movement, referred to as *Ujol* or *Ujgol*, occurs every year and is not considered a ritual in the sense that there is no fixed destination. The move is primarily in search of grazing land, rather than water sources. The Poular remain with their herds around regular places of settlement until the end of the rainy season, when the cows are allowed in the fields for what is called *nya-in-gal* ("eating of the stalks"). This clearly indicates that there will be no *nya-in-gal* where there is no farming. Where there are no farms, the *Ujol* transhumance starts right after the rainy season; where there are farms, it starts after the farm forages are exhausted. The *Ujol* ends with the *deminarè*, (the spread of the "smell"), that is, the onset of the rains. It is then that the herders begin their move toward their homesteads, and this move can be precipitated by *deminarè urdi* (better "smell" of the rains).

The Fulani of the Macina region of Mali have different transhumance patterns. Their traditional system involved entire families moving either back and forth or in a circular pattern until it was reformed by the theocratic administration of Sekou Ahmadou in the first half of the nineteenth century. Sekou Ahmadou institutionalized a rational system of utilizing the Niger river delta (Granier 1980, p. 40) by which, right before the flood, herds go north of the river at the level of the town of Diafarabe. This system was intended to prevent clashes between farmers and herders and to provide enough grazing lands around the river when herds came back from the Sahel. The timing of the movement is in essence a "ritual" because it occurs every year at the same period

whether or not there is a change in the rainfall pattern. However, the timing is also rational because it reduces the tension between two socioprofessional groups and makes the herders' tasks easy (when the grazing lands in the north are exhausted and the lakes dry up) by providing new pastures close to the river and to the homesteads. Known as *deggal* ("crossing of the river"), the ritual is observed by all the Fulani around the Niger delta and is the occasion for them to compose songs about their cows and the anticipation of the time to be spent in the Sahel. One of these songs is the following:

Yeew so neddo ana yaha Saahel	To go on transhumance
Wanaa booya ana sa'oo	One spends a lot of time in inconsistency
Booya ana sappoo	One spends a lot of time in indecisiveness
Booya ana sartoo	One spends a lot of time in setting dates
Booya ana sabbitoo	One spends a lot of time pondering
Faa yoga fena wiya sakkaama	To the point that some people report
Toon, misiide juulataake...	That they have been advised against it...
Seeda daanetee	One sleeps a little
Sella waaletee	One sleeps in the open
Semmbe yaartee	Everything is settled by sheer strength
Seeda woobetee	One drinks a little
Selo seeketee	One is confronted with grass[2]

This Fulani song illustrates some of their perceptions and concerns about time in open space during transhumance. Going on transhumance is not an activity of leisurely character. Freedom of space does not always mean freedom for the individual, who is far from the comfort of home and is exposed to all kinds of danger and hardships. The movement is anticipated with tension and coordinated to serve social and economic functions. The *deggal* (crossing of the Niger) is made more for social than environmental reasons, because specializations in labor tend to create social interdependency. The Bamana, Sarakhole, and Dogon farmers of the delta put their cattle in the care of the Fulani during this time, which they spend tending their farms.

Like the Fulani, the Nuer of Evans-Pritchard (1940) experience the need to move because their life depends on seeking pasturage for their cattle. Their timepiece is not the cattle clock; it is the needs of their cattle (and ultimately their own) that determine their perception of time, the same way that clocks tell factory workers when to work and when to stop working. Cattle time, harvesting time, weeding time, and similar terms should not be removed from their contexts and their significance.

The Bamana, for instance, are not cattle herders, but they call the time around 9:00 A.M. *misi-bɔ̀-tile* ("cow move-out time") in all seasons. This time expression is used even by those who do not have a single cow to refer to that time of the day. To understand the deep contextual meaning of time is a step toward understanding the concept of time lived and experienced by a given people. Most so-called environmental, religious, or ritual times have some wisdom behind them. For example, the term *misi-bɔ̀-tile* was used originally to refer to the actual departure of the cattle to the pasture after the dew, which hurts their hoofs and makes them sick, has dried out.

RITUALS AND TIME

Although some Western analyses have attempted to perceive rituals as autonomous, rituals are not set apart from time and space; they are not self-sufficient. Rituals are dramatizations of life events. Like life, they are characterized by crises. They stimulate critical moments and prepare neophytes to gain control of their lives.

Sigi occupies the highest position in the Dogon ritual order and generates the whole social order. The *Sigi* festival is an expiatory ceremony during which men are initiated (as pointed out above) into a secret language. The ceremony has a major significance: it is an occasion for the young to appease their ancestors. The appearance of a red gleam in the east that old men talk about signals the celebration of the *Sigi* and has led observers to link the *Sigi* with the cycle of the Sirius star. (Beaudoin 1984, p. 57). The timing of the *Sigi* in an exact 60-year cycle is reported to be done through various indigenous African ways of time accounting. According to Beaudoin, initiated elders of the village of Yougo Dogorou meet once every two years in the "cave of the masks" to share the millet beer. At every encounter, the elders leave a cowry shell, and the thirtieth cowry shell announces the arrival of a new *Sigi* celebration.

The *Sigi* celebration is linked to the gravitation of Sirius B around Sirius A, which occurs every 60 years. The fact that "the act of circumcision, to the Dogon, symbolizes the orbit of Sirius B around Sirius A " (Temple 1976, p. 260) is one more indication of the strong relationship between Dogon cosmological and temporal principles and everyday social life. Thus, to the Dogon and even to the Bamana, who do not have any elaborate ceremonies relating to the Siriuses, circumcision is still in many families (including mine) linked to the way the big Sirius (*sigi dolo* [Bamana Mandinka], *sigi tolo* [Dogon]) shines at dawn. Circumcisions may be postponed if by midsummer Sirius does not shine

according to expectations. This always allows two to three years between the initiations of successive age group sets.

Jean Rouch, relying on his own research as well as on earlier work done by Griaule, concluded that not only is the 60-year interval very precise but also it corresponds to the life span of the mystic Dogon ancestor. Rouch verified that the Dogon tie a knot on a rope each five days that constitute their week, and that by doing so, they are able to celebrate the *Sigi* with precision. By his calculations, the last *Sigi* celebrations occurred in the years 1787, 1847, 1907, and 1967.[3]

Rituals like *Sigi* that occur within precise temporal cycles are privileged modes of transmission of knowledge among the Dogon. Other such rituals, including the *bado* festival of the elders occurring in the spring, the *bulu* festival of sowing during the summer solstice, the *bago* harvest festival in the fall, and the *gogo* in the winter, are occasions for the younger men to complete their initiation acts and receive knowledge from their father, grandfather, or head of family (*ginna bana*) (Beaudoin 1984, p. 67). Different corresponding festivals take place among the Bamana at these times. The *Ntomo* and *Janko* are initiatory rites for young boys and girls, respectively, which start after the harvest, but the events themselves occur during the spring. Part of the *Kòmò*'s functions include young men's initiation into farming rituals.

The timing of rituals with respect to both the time of the year and the people involved are contextualized and meaningful. The seasons and the age of people to be initiated are carefully planned so that they become meaningful spatially and temporally to those who undergo these initiations. Traditional knowledge is timely transmitted not only among initiatory societies but also among craft confraternities and artisan corporations during workshops that are genuine centers of traditional training. Knowledge is at its best when it is within us, as Tierno Bokar aptly stated, adding,

> Writing is one thing and knowledge is another. Writing is the photography of knowledge, but it is not knowledge itself. Knowledge is a light within human beings. It is the legacy of all what ancestors have been able to learn and that they have transmitted to us in germ the same way the baobab tree is potentially in its grain.[4]

GENEALOGICAL TIME

In this section, Bamana and Dogon ways of interpreting history and genealogy are discussed. The goal is to demonstrate that Bamana and Dogon reckoning of history and genealogy depends more on context

(like space and place) than on precise chronology in the Western tradition, a conceptual difference between Western historiography and African time notions.

Bamana and Dogon genealogical times rely on orality. In both societies, and especially among the Bamana, there is an elaborate system favored by the presence of the *Jèli* (the genealogical bard). History is told by the *Jèli*, who is the oral historian of all people whose ancestry is linked to the Mande, including the Dogon. The *Jèliw* (plural for *Jèli*), by their birthright, are trained from childhood to become genealogists, historians, bards, marriage brokers, settlers of disputes, and entertainers. They represent the collective memory of the living and the ancestors; they are a living library for the Mande people, reminding their contemporaries of stories of their shared past. By relating to ancestral words (*kuma kòròlu* or *kuma korenu*), the *Jeliw* remind people of what is expected of them. The ancestral words constitute an ideological yardstick by which each individual can measure his or her moral personhood (*mògòya, morgoye*) (Jackson 1982, pp. 7, 15–17).

In Mande epics *(maanaw),* people trace their ancestral history through the names of their common ancestors in which each *jamu* ("family name") is represented by its own *fasa* ("praise line"). A *maana* is, therefore, history interwoven with the interactions of ancestral characters, totemic times, animals, plants, or place myths. These interactions include wars, reconciliations, intermarriages, and other types of alliances such as *sanakunya* ("joking relationship"), *sigi-nyògònya* ("settle-mutuality"), and *furu-nyòngònya* ("marriage-mutuality"), each with its own historical contexts. An alliance is sealed under a species of tree, an animal is incidentally involved in saving the life of an ancestral figure, or a major event takes place in a given spot — and they all find their way in the genealogical story. Kinship and other types of relationships (totemism, joking relationship) become putative after centuries of interpretation but are, nonetheless, acted out in quotidian life. Implied here is the way in which stories concerned with the past become translated into spatial order in present time. Talking about the past is principally a matter of talking about social and political relations in space. (Thornton 1980, p. 154).

Genealogical memory among the Dogon as well as the Bamana is one that is based more on a spatial character than on a dynastic one. Genealogical time overlaps genealogical space, and the latter is the best remembered, because it is much easier to remember places where ancestors inhabited than their names or even the names of different generational lineage heads. The ancestor of reference of the clan may not have

an identity but is represented by a vague term of reference that is geographically oriented, such as "grandfather from the west." Although the stages of Mande migration are precise, the migrants remain uniformly in the general category of *lebe* ("land") ancestors (Bouju 1984, p. 38). This is because in Mande, we relate to space by talking about events (evidence), while Westerners refer to events by mentioning time (abstract). One thing common to us all is the construction in space of values dear to us. In the West this is done with man-made memorials in stone, concrete, or metal, whereas in non-Western places, memorials constitute natural things (trees, animal species, geological formations).

Further, lineage is a social dimension that is perceptible in its spatial dimension (Bouju 1984, p. 39). Thus, genealogical history is usually a family matter; the researcher will be sent back and forth from elder to elder or would have to gather all the spatial and temporal elders at the same place (which may be impossible) in order that many important details are not skipped or overlooked. Structural time (measured by age set or through a lineage system) becomes problematic as the number of generations swells. Among some Bamana of the Beledugu, Mali, the recitation of the chronology of the chiefs of the village and the number of years each spent as chief is part of the ceremonies for the enthronement of the new chief, and this is possible through the collective memory of the people involved.

Because memory fails and insignificant historical figures are purposefully, unconsciously, or ideologically suppressed, genealogical time among these people continues to be poorly understood in Western historiography, which has tended to construct African history in terms of Western preoccupations with exact chronology, recorded history, dominant figures, royal succession, centralized states, and international relations.

On the contrary, chronology is not the major concern of African narrators.

> In African narratives, the past is lived again like present experience, out of time in some way, there often seems to be a chaos that bothers Western minds . . . with which we are absolutely at ease. We evolve in it, like fish in a sea where all water molecules mingle to form a living whole. The individual is inseparable from his/her lineage, which continues to live through him/her and of which he/she is an extension. That's why people are honored by their family names rather than by their first names because they are not isolated individuals but a group of people including the ancestors. (Ba 1991, pp. 14, 17).

Epics and other forms of story telling are some of the human strategies in coping with past, present, and future occurrences of crises. Different strategies of this type built over the course of centuries have allowed Mande people across their present national borders in West Africa to relate to one another as relatives of some sort. Thus, without worrying much about chronology, which constitutes the greatest divide between written and oral history, the Mande people created relationships based on legends or actual occurrences that brought them closer than they are in modern days.

History is not pure truth but a system of belief. The truth of oral history is not relevant, because oral history gives sense to the life of those who do not need to be told exact facts of their past but need a system that explains their present. In Mande, we do not expect the genealogical bards to provide us with proofs or dates; we expect them to give a sense to our lives. We do not question our mythical relationship with an animal, plant, or object — our *tana* in Bamana or *binu* in Dogon — as long as it keeps us together as a people. In Bamana and Dogon genealogical history and epics, time is an important phenomenon, but temporal sequences are meaningful only when seen within their spatial contexts and dimensions rather than from the perspective of Western chronological exactitude.

CONCLUSION

It has been demonstrated that the concept of time among the Bamana and Dogon must be studied and understood in its context. Past, present, and future events and activities mark the passage of time, but they are situated in time as well as in context. The fact that events sometimes serve as temporal orientation does not mean that the times when they occur are ritual or religious times to which people are bound. Religion and ritual sanction the passage of time for reasons that must be understood in their social, cultural, political, and economic contexts. Similarly, the historical past and genealogies are conceptualized within contexts of space, place, totemic affiliation, and family names, rather than exact chronology, as in the West.

NOTES

1. Nathaniel Samba, personal communication, April 1992.

2. This song was collected by and published in Moussa Sow and Temore Tioulenta, "Literature Mailenne: Au carrefour de l'oral et de l'ecrit," in *Les*

Écrivains Noirs Américains et l'Afrique, Notre Librarie 75–76 (1984): 70 (translation mine).

3. Cited in Gerard Beaudoin, *Les Dogons du Mali* (Paris: Colin, 1984), p. 65.

4. Tierno Bokar, quoted in Amadou Hampate Ba, *Amkoullel, L'enfant Peul: Memoires* (Artes: Actes Sud., 1991), p. 197.

6

Time and Labor in Colonial Africa: The Case of Kenya and Malawi

Alamin Mazrui and Lupenga Mphande

Colonialism has sometimes been seen as a stage in the development of capitalism on a global scale. There is a sense in which capitalism constituted the very essence of colonial expansion, and the logic of colonialism itself, as a political system, was primarily predicated upon the mission of sowing seeds of capitalist expansion in otherwise precapitalist, often agrarian societies. Despite all its debilitating effects, colonialism, in Marxist literature in particular, has sometimes been regarded as a necessary phase in the evolution of the south from a precapitalist to a "more superior" capitalist mode of production.

For capitalism to take root, however, a proletariat, a pool of people who owned nothing but their labor, needed to be created. The scholarship on colonialism in Africa usually recognizes a two-stage process in the creation of an African wage labor force. The first stage involves the destruction of the African land tenure system and mass expropriation of communal land. This gave rise to a growing body of the landless, people alienated from their primary means of production. The second stage was to get the Africans to accept the capitalist notion of "labor as a commodity" and to pressure them to sell it to the new owners of the means of production, the colonial class. Forced labor, various forms of taxation,

We are highly indebted to Silvia Federici for some of the key ideas contained in this chapter.

and the general commoditization of life were all used to mobilize African labor in the service of capitalism. All these are aspects of African labor that have received quite extensive coverage in various historical treatises on colonial Africa.[1]

Less recognized, perhaps, was the colonial need to "regiment" African labor, to canalize it into a disciplined routine for maximum productivity. Colonial authorities were wont to regard African labor as lacking in commitment to regularity and the discipline that necessarily goes with it. According to Lord William Hailey, African societies "had their own systems of economic organization, the obligations of which were well recognized; but the discipline of regular labour, which involved compliance with the orders of employers who had no traditional authority, was unfamiliar to Africans" (1957, p. 1358). Without this colonially defined discipline and regularity, African labor was deemed unlikely to attain a level of efficiency that would make capitalism truly triumphant on African soil. The concern, therefore, was not only to reduce African labor to the service of capitalism, but also (and more importantly, perhaps) to regularize and maximize its exploitation for capitalist profit. The motive force here was, of course, what Karl Marx called the "labor theory of value" in which time plays a central role: the value of a commodity is seen in terms of the labor time put into its production.[2] However, for capitalist productivity to be truly successful, the amount of labor expended in the production of a particular commodity must not fall below a certain standard within a given block of time, and it is in this respect that colonialism became particularly concerned about the "undisciplined" and irregular nature of African labor.

Colonialism had, in fact, succeeded in creating an African labor pool. It had also succeeded in putting that pool to work in the service of capitalist production. However, how does it ensure a level of discipline in African labor that would be in accord with the interests of capitalism? In this chapter, we propose that the pursuit of this colonial objective essentially involved the destruction of the precapitalist conception of time, in which labor responded to the rhythm of nature, and the inculcation of the capitalist conception of time, in which the body was now required to respond to the tick of the clock. Legislation was passed to criminalize certain aspects of African behavior that seemed to interfere with the transformation of the African into a clock-controlled automaton.

The position taken here, then, is that the Marxist proposition that culture is but a superstructure on an economic base may be valid only after a particular mode of production has taken root. Prior to this, there is an entire phase that may in fact be dominated by a "cultural war." The

introduction of a new mode of production, either through internal revolution or through external imposition, is often accompanied by antagonistic forces of cultural reorientation and cultural resistance. The eventual supersession of a mode of production to a hegemonic status may, in fact, depend in no small way on the extent to which certain cultural norms and values have been transformed into a mold that would support the economic structures, patterns, and processes. It is against this backdrop, then, that we suggest in this chapter that the triumph of capitalism in Africa depended, to some degree, on the success of the colonial machinery to combat certain fundamental aspects of African cultures, with the universe of time being one such aspect.

These transformative attempts of the African worker were perhaps most apparent in countries concentrated in eastern and southern Africa that experienced some degree of British settler colonialism. Most of the societies in this general area were quasicommunal and agrarian in economic orientation prior to the inception of colonial rule. As a result of the colonial experience, mining did succeed in replacing agriculture as the mainstay of the economy of some African countries, like Zambia, and in terms of effect, mining economies can be said to have had a greater impact in conditioning the African worker to the capitalist frame of time than have agrarian economies. Greater rigidity and greater supervision at the place of work in mining economies necessarily led to the African mine worker being more conditioned by the capitalist clock than his compatriot in the agricultural sector. However, whether interested in mining or in agriculture, the objective of the colonial capitalist in settler economies was the same: to instill in the African a new culture of work and labor based on the capitalist frame of time. Furthermore, it was during the early phase of the colonial encounter, the phase of attempted establishment of an African labor system, that struggles to conquer the African "social body" were most fierce. Because of these considerations, the scope of this chapter is limited to British settler economies within the first couple of decades of colonialism, with examples drawn mainly from Kenya and Malawi.

TIME AND WORK IN PRECOLONIAL, PRECAPITALIST AFRICA

Bearing in mind the geographical scope of this essay, certain general tendencies should be observed with regard to the relationship between time and work in the precolonial period. These include the following.

Time Was Organic

Time was organic in the sense that the creation of the time frame within which human activities could be conducted was largely the reserve of nature itself. Sunrise and sunset, wet seasons and dry seasons, long rains and short rains, and so forth are some of the forces of nature that combined to establish the rhythm of work and expenditure of labor in these precapitalist societies. The differentiation of the time frame established by natural phenomena, then, was determined by the particular work to be done. The workday was not eight hours (between 8:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M., for example) but the succession of agricultural or pastoral tasks and their relationship to one another.

Within the limits of this time frame, people took as much time as they needed. Although hard work was valued, freedom from work was an equally important objective. Pleasurable public activities that, in the Eurocentric view, may be seen as idleness and time-wasting were important goals to be pursued.

From this conception of time, then, we can draw two important conclusions:

1. Time in the Kenyan and Malawian societies under study was largely not abstract. It could not be objectified or abstracted from phenomena of nature, activities of work and pleasure, and events of history. The social conditions of the precapitalist societies, then, were essentially antithetical to the commoditization of time for the exploitation of human labor.
2. Man was not a slave of time. The idea of time as a linear object that could be gained, saved, or lost was alien to the relational universe of these societies.

Time Was Not Immutable

Because time was not created by man, it was subject to innumerable external and supernatural forces that rendered it unpredictable. Gods, spirits, and magical forces all participated in explaining the workings of the universe. This worldview that the power to generate events extends beyond the human community has often been negatively interpreted in Western scholarship as constituting a fatalistic attitude. However, as Ethel Albert indicates:

> Far from teaching men to sit back and do nothing (as is often believed), fatalism teaches dignity in the face of adversity and humility in the event of prosperity. . . . Ingenuity is needed to devise ways to appeal to the courses of events, and appeals are phrased in ways to please or to move the higher power (1970, p. 106).

The mutability of time by extrahuman forces, therefore, meant that it was futile to attempt to reduce man to a routinized cog in the wheel of material production. Whether or not to work, when to work, how much labor time was to be expended into a particular work activity, and so forth were not issues of man-made routine and temporal regularity, but ones that were determined by external forces beyond the powers of the human community.

Emphasis on Time

There was generally less emphasis placed on the "future" than on the present and the past. These societies were essentially nonfuturistic in orientation. Part of the explanation derives from two points made above. First, precisely because time becomes real only when experienced in terms of concrete activities and events, the future can, at best, constitute potential rather than real time. As John Mbiti observes: "The linear concept of time in Western thought, with an indefinite past, present, and infinite future is practically foreign to African thinking. The future is virtually absent because events which lie in it have not taken place, they have not been realized, and cannot, therefore, constitute time" (1990 [1969], pp. 21–22). If in the capitalist West, man is always moving "forward" toward the future, in precapitalist Africa, the future is said to be moving "backward" to become real, to become the living present, to become the omnipresent past. Second, the mutability of time is likely to affect the future to a greater extent than the present and the past. The past and the present, therefore, are seen as more solid, less amenable to changes by supernatural forces than is the future.[3]

However, precapitalist African societies were also less futuristic, because they were more oriented toward the past. In fact, their past was inextricably connected with their present. In particular, the dead continued to live and to affect the lives and activities of the living. The past is, thus, immortalized, and even "potential time," the "future," is ultimately subsumed under the immortal past as it moves "backward." Again, according to Mbiti:

In some cases it is definitely said that the spirits of the departed are imperishable. It seems as if the living dead move on beyond the horizon of human memory, and merge into the group of spirits, some of which were once human beings and others of which have other origins. Perhaps we could describe these concepts as indicating a belief in some form of immortality. (1970, p. 265)

A system of organization and utilization of labor and time in terms of long-term planning for the future could hardly be expected to emerge under these conditions that lacked a strong futuristic orientation. To some colonial writers, this relative orientation to the past rather than the future is the very factor that accounts for the nonindustrious "character" of the African and the supposedly inherent underdevelopment of African societies in contrast to European societies. As H. L. Duff argues:

Nothing could more forcibly illustrate the difference between extremes of racial character than the picture thus conjured up — the European engineer forcing with incredible toil his broad and certain way, stemming rivers, draining marshes, shattering tons of earth and rock; and on the other hand the [African] savage, careless of everything but the present, seeking only the readiest path, and content to let a pebble baulk him rather than stoop to lift it. (1969 [1903], p. 293)[4]

In colonial eyes, therefore, without putting a premium on the future, the African was eternally doomed to socioeconomic inertia.

Time Was a Collective Experience

This essentially follows from the quasicommunal nature of these precolonial African societies, and the organization of one's time was determined primarily by collective concerns and only secondarily by individual considerations. One might even ask whether time was at all of any essence outside the collective that we call "community."

To recapitulate, then, when European colonists first set foot in Africa, they encountered many societies in which work and labor were organized around a concept of time that was a creation of natural forces and subject to change by supernatural forces, at the free disposal of human society and disinclined to a futuristic and individualistic ideology. All these were tendencies that were essentially in contradiction to the colonial mission of exploiting African labor for the establishment and advancement of capitalism on African soil. At the outset, therefore, African labor was caught in a struggle between the organic time frame

of precapitalist Africa and the mechanical time of capitalist Europe. It is to this dialectic that we must now turn.

THE COLONIAL ENCOUNTER

Colonialism came to Africa guided by two fundamental principles of capitalism. The first one was the Marxist notion of labor theory of value, or, more relevant for our purposes, what Ali Mazrui more aptly describes as the time theory of value in which "work was measured by time; wages were computed by the hour" (1991, p. 7). This is the principle that the value of a commodity is predicated upon the labor time expended in its production. Corollary to this is the idea that profit is partly determined by labor input within a given stretch of time: the higher the amount of labor expended in the production process within an hour, for example, the higher the potential profits accruing to commodities produced within that hour. This explains the capitalist need to maximize the exploitation of labor within a given time limit. The labor theory of value operated, of course, within a more basic conceptual frame in which time is "freed" from the barriers of nature in such a way that the working day, for example, could be extended beyond the limits set by the sun, the seasonal cycle, and even the body itself.

The second principle is that of the mechanical theory of the body. After labor had been transformed into a commodity, the body became no more than a receptacle of labor power, the primary work machine that served as a means of production. This capitalist principle derived essentially from mechanical philosophy, in which the body was considered to be an automaton and only the presence of language and thought differentiated humans from beasts and machines.

In Europe itself it was the Cartesian brand of mechanical philosophy that had come to reign supreme. Descartes' doctrine had, first, denied that human behavior is influenced by external forces (like the stars) and, second, considered the will to be free of bodily conditioning, thus, rendering it capable of operating infinitely on the command of the body itself. It further drew a dichotomy between mind and body, with the mind being supreme in a hierarchical relationship with the body.[5] This supremacy of the mind implied that the will could, in principle, control the needs, reactions, and reflexes of the body, imposing a regular order on its vital function. In Cartesian philosophy, therefore, the mind empowered the will to activate the body machine, forcing it to work according to external specifications of time and space.

In the colonial context, however, the African was regarded as being essentially mindless. The colonial perception of the African personality was, thus, more akin to Hobbesian than to Cartesian mechanical philosophy. In Hobbes' views, the mechanization of the individual is complete, and not only does it extend to corporeal processes, but also the entire structure of the personality is seen in purely reactive and mechanical terms. In Hobbesian doctrine, therefore, the function of command of the body is completely externalized and assigned to the authority of the state.[6] Only the colonial state, in this instance, could activate the body-machine and get it to work according to capitalist specifications of time and space.

Of course, neither Descartes nor Hobbes can be said to have developed their philosophies to rationalize the place of the body in capitalist society, but one cannot fail to notice the important contribution these ideas on human nature may have made to the emerging capitalist science of work. For example, Hugh S. Scott, after describing African workers as mindless people who can be conditioned like beasts, goes on to express a typically Hobbesian position in the following words: "If any hold that men are not created so dense and unambitious as has been represented [of the African] let him look nearer home in our merchant service. The able-bodied seaman goes to sea all his life, but he never gets any nearer navigating the ship — and he is a white man" (1894, pp. 321–22). To describe the body in material and mechanical terms void of any intrinsic teleology was to make comprehensible the possibility of subordinating it to a capitalist work process that relies on routinized and predictable forms of behavior. In both Cartesian and Hobbesian philosophies, the attributes of the body were essentially redefined to make it extremely responsive to the needs of capitalist work discipline, to the capitalist work clock.

The affinity between the colonial view of the African as mindless and the Hobbesian notion of complete mechanization of the person had a lot to do with the embryonic stage of capitalism on the African continent. In Marxist political economy, capitalism is said to transform labor into a commodity, thereby alienating the workers who must submit their activity to an external order. The worker's body, thus, appears to him/her as a property that he/she can dispose of by consigning it to the use of another person. The result is a sense of dislocation from the body, which becomes objectified and reduced to a separate element with which the person ceases to be immediately identified.

However, this image of the worker freely alienating his/her labor is true only after capitalism has achieved a hegemonic status in society. It

is then that we can see the workers confronting their bodies as so much capital for sale to the highest bidder within the parameters of capitalist discipline.

The colonial situation in Africa, however, especially its early phase, was radically different. This was essentially a period of attempted transition to capitalism, a period of major struggles to establish a labor system in the service of capitalism. Not only had the proletariat not been alienated, it had not even been created, and the African conditions were not in the least favorable to the establishment of a capitalist system of labor. To mobilize African labor into a capitalist framework, therefore, was seen to require the full force of the coercive machinery of the colonial state against the African body.

Indeed, the colonial capitalist discovered quite early that the "liberation" of labor power was not in itself sufficient to force the African proletariat to accept waged labor. The expropriated peasant did not peacefully agree to work for a wage. As the *Official Handbook of Tanganyika* observed, "all the tribes are capable of maintaining themselves without working for wages, and object to doing so. Hence the establishment of great estates demanding large supplies of labor must, if continued, lead to perpetual discord and trouble" (quoted by Lugard 1929, p. 397, n. 1). Indeed, many opted for outright crime rather than submit to the dictates of colonial capitalism. With regard to Kenya, for example, the local press from about 1910 to 1914 is full of reports of cattle stealing from European farmers and petty theft in Nairobi. The response of the colonial class was the institution of a true reign of terror: intensification of criminal penalties for failure to be employed — the so-called vagrancy laws, which were intended to bind the proletariat to work — and for failure to pay taxes.

However, colonial violence was not confined to the repression of transgressions. It aimed at a radical transformation of the African being, attempting to eradicate in the emergent African proletariat those faculties and forms of behavior not reducible to the new work discipline. Indeed, an entire new category of crimes, the so-called labor offenses, was created under the colonial penal code. Commenting on the situation in Kenya, for example, Raymond Buell observed that the colonial machinery

> For adjusting the relations of European employers to native wage earners, created a new category of "crimes" unknown to native law and involving no moral turpitude, according to European standards. . . . The Kenya prisons became crowded with native

offenders against these minor [labor] regulations huddled indiscriminately with hardened criminals. (1928, p. 358)

The African body then had to be reconditioned, so to speak, to be less and less responsive to the rhythms of nature and the social collective and more and more to the tick of the capitalist clock.

The first target of the colonial capitalist offensive was the notion that nature organizes its own frame of time for work that establishes a balance for the exercise of freedom from want and freedom from work. However, a concept of time that admitted freedom from work as one of its essential objectives was seen as antithetical to capitalist principles. Within capitalist ideology, freedom from work was no more than a cheap apology for an idleness that was inherent in the African. If need be, therefore, the Africans must be forced to work; they must be taught to appreciate the capitalist idea that there is dignity in work irrespective of its purpose in society and who benefits from it. Even in the most humiliating instances of colonial labor coercion, the Africans were still expected to appreciate the dignity of work. Punitive measures against any resistance to forced labor, therefore, were supposedly intended to teach Africans that the "idleness" they had inherited from their "primitive" societies was a violation of their very humanity and that work was the basis for a more human social order.

Forced labor was in fact seen as part of the civilizing mission. "Idleness" supposedly demonstrated that Africans were still not far off in development from their nonhuman primate cousins, and only value for work would allow them to take the leap into full human status. One of the most vivid expressions of this philosophy is found in the colonial emblem that Sir Harry H. Johnson designed for British Central Africa (later limited to Malawi) depicting two African males holding implements of labor and described by the motto "Light in Darkness." Indeed, to some colonial settlers, instilling value for work was more crucial to civilizing Africans than their conversion to Christianity. According to the notorious colonial settler of Kenya, Ewert Grogan, for example, "a good sound system of compulsory labour would do more to raise the native in five years than in all the millions that have been sunk in missionary efforts for the last fifty years. Work was the keynote to the betterment of the African" (1900, p. xxiv). Grogan, thus, felt justified to unilaterally institute public corporal punishment against Africans who violated the forced labor "contract."

Ironically, in Kenya, the colonial settlers were initially opposed to the notion of labor as a commodity on the "willing seller, willing buyer"

principle of capitalism. They were in favor of compulsory labor whenever Africans refused to work at will. Settlers often criticized their own colonial government for advocating the "free" flow of voluntary labor. In the words of Lord Delamere,

> If colonial officials go into Kikuyu country and tell the natives that they have no obligation to work, they interpret it as the wish of the government that they are not to do so. . . . We have got to come to legalized methods and force the native to work; I hope that we may rely on the government to meet the case. (quoted by Buell 1928, p. 330)

Some colonial settlers were of the opinion that "making the negro work" was the very essence of colonialism (Lugard 1929, p. 391 n. 2).

A system of labor that was voluntary was even deemed unfair to the colonial settlers by some advocates of settler interests. Protesting against the 1907 labor rules imposed by the colonial office of administration of Kenya, some settlers lamented that

> It is grossly unfair to invite the settler to this country, as has been done, to give him land under conditions which force him to work, and at the same time do away with the foundation on which the whole enterprise and hope is based, namely, cheap labor, whilst the native is allowed to retain large tracts of land on which he can remain in idleness. (Buell 1928, p. 330)

In essence, the colonial administration agreed with the settlers that the internalization of a work ethic, the demise of the "culture of idleness," was essential to the sociocultural development of the African. Colonial administrators felt compelled to reassure the settlers that, in principle, there was no difference between them in their mission to get Africans to use their time in work rather than in idleness. In 1917 the governor of Kenya, Sir Conway Belfield, attempted to reassure the settlers by proclaiming in the Legislative Assembly: "I am prepared to state definitely that we desire to make of the native a useful citizen and that we consider the best means of doing so is to induce him to work for a period of his life for the European" (Buell 1928, p. 332). Clarifying his government labor policy in 1920, an acting governor of Kenya is supposed to have said that in fact the policy "has the object of preventing the inevitable deterioration of the native races which would occur if the government were tacitly to acquiesce in their remaining in the Reserves . . . in a state of idleness and apathy" (Buell 1928, p. 336). Lugard also reported that the reasons given in the Blue Book for the active recruitment of African labor in East Africa did not appear to be limited to

government necessity but also included the desirability of training natives to work so as not to live in idleness and vice (1929, p. 411).

Where the colonial administration and colonial settlers sometimes parted ways was on the question of approach. The settlers insisted that compulsory labor was the only means to achieve the end of elevating the African from degrading idleness, from a natural propensity to waste precious time. Many colonial administrators, on the other hand, felt that involuntary labor was bound to undermine the very concept of work as a process of cultural growth and individual self-realization. Therefore, in 1925 the British secretary of state, for example, argued that,

> In the case of natives such as those of Kenya, in whom it is desired to encourage habits of industry, I fear that the result of any widespread association of work with the sense of oppression caused by resort to the compulsory system may outweigh any educative influence which might otherwise be effected by inducing the natives to offer their labour upon terms sufficiently attractive to them. (Buell 1928, p. 372)

The notion of work as having a civilizing value received further support from the Christian missionary enterprise. There is no doubt that most missionaries were opposed to the draconian punitive measures taken by colonial settlers against Africans who resisted labor coercion. Nonetheless, they, too, believed that work, even if it was for its own sake, was a fundamental biblical tenet that needed to be inculcated in the African mind. Commenting on the attitude of the missionary, for example, Part 1 of the *Report of the Native Commission, 1912–1913*, presents the position of Reverend C. Johnston in the following terms: "His idea with regard to improving the supply of labour was to preach the dignity of work; being a missionary he believed in preaching the Gospel which advocated work" (1913, p. 31).

Likewise, in 1912, a colonial commission that consisted largely of Roman Catholic priests is reported to have said that, "it is necessary to impose labour on the blacks in order to secure the modification of their mentality, and to bring them to realize their duty as civilized men do" (Lugard 1929, pp. 412–13, n. 2).

In the final analysis, then, the emergent African proletariat was constantly reminded that neither the God of Christianity nor the God of colonialism, that is, capitalism, created time with freedom from work in mind; that the primary activity that differentiated the human world from the world of other animals was not language, as Descartes argued, but work. Without the benefit of the work ethic, it was argued, the African would degenerate into savagery. As Samuel Baker stated, "The

African . . . would assuredly relapse into an idle and savage state, unless specially governed and forced by industry" (1962, p. 211). The very development of Africans, then, was seen in terms of their success to shift away from the precapitalist nature-based theory of time to a labor-based theory of time. Despite the tremendous cruelty in bringing about this change, such a shift was ultimately deemed both humane and Christian.

In terms of the labor needs of capitalism, however, it was not enough that Africans change in their belief that time was ultimately a product of nature. They also had to be forced to abandon the idea that supernatural forces had anything at all to do with the destiny of time. The idea that time was mutable, that supernatural forces can, in fact, intervene to make today different from yesterday, for example, rendered it particularly difficult to subject Africans to the capitalist discipline of routinized work on a monthly basis.

At this early stage, seldom did African workers have a contractual, monthly commitment to their jobs; on the contrary, they were usually in a state of readiness to depart abruptly, even if it meant being on the wrong side of the law and losing one's benefits. For this reason, Africans often preferred jobs that paid by the day so that they would not lose their benefits in the event of a necessity to leave work on short notice. The colonial settlers, on the other hand, disapproved of daily payment of wages, arguing that it not only accorded Africans the freedom to desert but also provided them with opportunities to engage in drinking and "sensuousness" on a daily basis.

Indeed, "sensuousness" itself became a major aim of war against the African body by both colonial settlers and missionaries. Drinking and dancing into the night was seen as demonic, as a victory of the "low instincts" of the body (for example, promiscuousness, sensuousness, idleness) over the forces of reason (that is, self-control, sense of social duty to work for the colonial settler). Missionaries preached against African sensuousness, colonial administrators legislated against it, and chiefs were empowered to prevent and punish it. Behind all this lay the logic that sensuousness leads to a dissipation of vital energies that should be conserved for tomorrow in the interest of capitalist production.

Again, therefore, an essentially capitalist agenda was masked by a civilizing mission informed by a Cartesian philosophy of the body that sought to help Africans to subordinate their presumed base, animal instincts to supposedly higher faculties of humans. The colonial struggle to institute monthly wages had nothing to do with the supposedly noble mission of preventing the daily exercise of sensuousness and promiscu-

ity on the part of Africans. Rather, it was prompted by the capitalist need to divest the African body of all its life, to kill the social body and subject its physical remains to full and eternal commitment to capitalist production.

The clash in the concepts of time here revolved around the idea not only of a regular monthly work schedule but also of regular daily pay. If today need not be like yesterday, there was no reason to commit oneself to an arrangement that assumes a priori that daily wages must be of a fixed rate. Supposing forces beyond us intervene to make tomorrow a particularly lucrative day for the capitalist employer: What reason is there for the African worker not to earn more? Supposing family or community needs are greater today than they were yesterday: Why should the African workers not demand more for their labor? It is in this connection that S. Olivier says of the African worker: "Half a dollar may be worth one day's work to him, a second half dollar may be worth a second day's work, but a third half dollar will not be worth a third day's work. A third day's work may seem to him to be worth two dollars" (1910, pp. 82–83).

In essence, the supernatural conception of time that posed the problem of routinizing the African worker was seen as subversive to the very organization of the capitalist labor process. If the emergent African proletariat is rooted in the belief that there are lucky and unlucky times, days when it is all right to work and others on which ancestors demand full attention, periods in which labor has some free will and others in which a community has to be cleansed before labor can be productive, how can the colonial entrepreneur hope to impose a regular pattern at the place of work and in the work process itself? From a capitalist vantage point, therefore, the organization of labor was crucially dependent upon the African worker accepting that time was, in fact, regular, immutable, and removed from the realm of the supernatural.

It is against this background that we can understand the relentless colonial struggle against "magic and witchcraft." The missionaries went on an immediate ideological warpath against the "demonic forces" of darkness and superstition, threatening those who dared to engage in it with the terror of hellfire and excommunication from the Christian community. The colonial administration threw its full weight behind the church by concrete legislation that meted out some of the stiffest penalties against those practicing "magic and witchcraft." With a stroke of a pen, colonialism, thus, proceeded to criminalize an entire worldview of a people in an attempt to set capitalism in regular motion on African soil. Lacking the ideological hegemony necessary to neutralize such

practices that undermined efforts to regularize social behavior, therefore, colonialism could only respond with the coercive and punitive might of the state.

Some of the worst victims of colonial attitudes toward "magic and witchcraft" and legislation against it were those who saw in these occult forces the possibility of organized resistance against forced labor and forced work routines. Women were particularly vulnerable in this regard, because many African societies considered women the custodians of supernatural powers. A good example is that of Me Katilili, the woman who, between 1912 and 1914, organized the Giriama people on the coast of Kenya against the system of labor that the British colonial government was attempting to establish and impose on the people. Me Katilili, depicted as a witch and sorcerer, became a prime target of colonial persecution and was eventually forcibly exiled from her own homeland. An even harsher fate befell Charwe of Zimbabwe, a medium of Ambuya Nehanda, who was captured and hanged for leading the resistance against forced labor and European domination in general.

The colonial capitalist offensive, however, was by no means limited to the idea that time was a product of nature under the potential influence of pervasive supernatural forces. It also extended to the notion that time was a collective experience. From the point of view of the colonial employer, there were simply too many absences from work and job desertions on account of family or community demands. Some of these demands were personal and had to do with the material needs of the community or family: clearing new ground, planting, harvesting, building homes. Others had to do with specific occurrences within a family: illness, death, marriage, birth, naming, all of which often required a person's presence at a council meeting. Oftentimes, "individual" human transgression against the world of ancestors and spirits required collective effort at purification to avert impending disaster against the community as a whole. To the African worker, these were compelling reasons to be away from work, and they reflected not a lack of commitment to the job but the principle that "one's time" was first and foremost a "collective property" of the community.

However, African workers quickly came to learn that the colonial employer would not understand these reasons. As a result, many resorted to advancing reasons that they thought the European employers would appreciate, but not being particularly good liars, their stories often lacked credibility. Out of such encounters, racial stereotypes, thus, grew that lying was as African as honesty was European. In the words of Duff:

> The very worst feature of the natives is beyond all doubt their untruthfulness. For countless generations falsehood has been practiced among them, not as many vices are practiced, shamefacedly and under the ban of public opinion, but with general toleration and even approval. . . . Between the white lie and the black are countless intermediate shades, at one or other of which we probably draw the line, but which the savage does not attempt to distinguish. In accepting one, he accepts all; he practices all; he reduces the practice to a system. (1969 [1903], pp. 248–49)[7]

Also, just as corporal punishment was recommended by Ewert Grogan for violations of the "contract," the whip was now upheld by Lord Cranworth as the most effective, if unpleasant, remedy for lying. Regarding the Kikuyu people of Kenya as inherently deceitful and devoid of all sense of honor, Cranworth (1912) prescribed flogging of the posterior end as "the best and kindest preventative and cure for lying." Many African workers, therefore, suffered in a variety of cruel and demeaning ways for their failure to make time their own, as individuals, and commit it 100 percent to their employment. Whipping, denial of benefits, termination of service, and other measures were all used to coerce the African worker to subordinate collective demands on his/her time to individual needs.

Nowhere was this attempt to break up communal bonds more concerted and more pervasive than in the system of taxation. Taxation was intended not only to force Africans to work,[8] to bind them to their place of work with chains of gold, but also to individualize them. Taxes were assessed on an individual basis, their payment was considered to be the obligation of the individual, and people were singled out and punished as individuals for failure to pay them. Even those who had no time to seek employment to raise the required amount of money for colonial taxes discovered that the community could not bail them out when in trouble. They had to suffer as individuals for "tax violations." The system of taxation, therefore, served as an immense source of pressure toward individualization, toward forcing Africans to increasingly think of organizing time around individual needs rather than around collective concerns. It is in this respect that Lugard (1929, p. 233) suggested that the "tax may thus in a sense be regarded as a means of promoting the recognition of *individual* responsibility" (our italics).

The colonial institution of the village chief was particularly instrumental in attempts to weaken community bonds and commitments. Being a member of the community, the chief could pursue individuals right to their homes to make tax demands, dispossess individuals of their possessions, like goats and cattle, in lieu of monetary tax payments, and

arrest individuals as punishment for failure to meet their tax "obligations." The phase of tax assessment was deemed particularly important in establishing a link between Africans, as individuals, and the colonial administration. Again, Lugard captured the equation in the following terms: "The task of [tax] assessment promotes an intimate touch between the British staff and the native officials who assist in it on the one hand, and the inhabitants of remote and almost inaccessible villages on the other hand, who but for this assessment might have remained unknown" (1929, p. 233).

In addition, the chief was empowered by the colonial government to exercise control over collective activities. People were prevented from meeting freely over collective concerns without the permission of the chief. Under such circumstances, the expansion of collective consciousness and the exercise of collective will were being increasingly undermined by the institution of the chief. Many settler colonies had chiefs' acts, which vested immense powers of control, monitoring, arrest, and punishment in the institution of the chief, powers that violated fundamental human rights of association, conscience, and choice. Between the labor "contract," the system of taxation, and the institution of the chief, therefore, a program of atomization of individual African communities was put into effect using some of the most inhuman methods and measures.

Here too, then, the colonial efforts were directed at reducing the African body into Descartes' automaton, a physical entity devoid of any life that could provide it with a social glue of bonding with other similar entities. Like parts of a machine, African workers could form a chain only at the place of work and for purposes of capitalist production. After work, the chain was supposed to be broken into its individual pieces, to be reconstituted yet again the following day of work. Individualization, in other words, entailed objectification of labor, of the African body. In this way, African workers were being "oriented" to think of their bodies as nothing more than the physical expression of labor, which they could rent out, as individuals, to employers of labor for a "negotiable" amount of time and remuneration. Again, therefore, the Cartesian notion of the body and the Hobbesian prescriptions for molding it combined to put the capitalist labor system on the African map.

As a variety of coercive measures were being deployed against the "lower instincts" of the "undisciplined" African body, however, the African worker was also being canalized into the culture of capitalist acquisitiveness and consumerism. The colonial capitalist agenda included systematic attempts to whet African appetites for all sorts of goods,

whether truly necessary or not, ranging from sugar to radio sets, from clothes to bicycles.[9] The objective was not only to create market conditions for successful commodity production but also to orient the African mind toward the future as a way of promoting a more committed labor force. The capitalist rationale was that an African who had successfully been brought into the consumerist fold, who sought to acquire a bicycle, for example, and who was, therefore, more future oriented was likely to make a more committed and regular worker than one who had not. In other words, a futuristic orientation that would aid the development of a stable labor system was expected to emerge quite organically from the African population once the spirit of consumerism and acquisition had sufficiently permeated its cultural ethos.

To recapitulate, then, the central challenge that faced colonial capitalism in its early phases in many African societies was the establishment of a work relation based on the "voluntary" sale of one's labor power, with the clock as the model of social behavior. This process required the complete conquest of the social body and its reorientation from a precapitalist to a capitalist time frame. That humans have control over the management and organization of time, that time is a linear phenomenon, that time is money, and that, like money, it can be lost if one is too oriented toward the past and gained if one is oriented toward the future — all these were conceptual principles of time that were crucial in the establishment of a capitalist labor system in Africa. Also, in the majority of cases, blood and torture were necessary to instill a memory of these new rules of human time relations and breed an animal whose behavior would be regular, uniform, and calculable, all in an attempt to maximize the exploitation of labor within a given work schedule. As Ali Mazrui points out in Program Four, "Tools of Exploitation," of his film series "The Africans" (1986),

> When the white man first arrived in this part of Africa it wasn't the natives that needed to be civilized. It was the white man. The west had condemned the Arab slave trade, but followed it with their own barbarism. Workers who didn't produce enough were sometimes mutilated as an example to others.

The degree of colonial violence used to establish a capitalist system of labor relations demonstrates the intensity of African resistance against the transformation of their collective social being. Part of the resistance was overt and took the form of "labor desertions," labor strikes, and even military confrontations. In many cases, however, the resistance also assumed more covert forms. Many of the instances of

petty thievery, carelessness, negligence, and lying about which European employers were wont to complain in connection with African relations to wage employment could, in fact, be considered forms of individualized industrial protest.

Many of these hidden forms of resistance were, in fact, a kind of "go-slow" strike: if the capitalist employer used coercive measures to maximize African input into a day's work, the African worker used covert methods to minimize that input. Some of these covert strategies included feigning illness to justify a sluggish rate of work, deliberate tampering with instruments of work to render them nonfunctional, lies to explain delays, and so forth. Partly for these reasons, the colonial employers of labor sometimes suggested that the African worker be paid by piecework rather than by time.

Typical of repressive regimes in populist garbs, however, colonialists refused to acknowledge that these clearly subversive, though covert, activities of African laborers were, in fact, a form of resistance. They chose, rather, to interpret some of them as a product of some lack of resolve on the part of African workers to uplift themselves from their pet vice of idleness. To get the African to do even a moderate amount of a day's work, therefore, was seen as an impossibility without close European supervision. Protesting against the increase in payment for African labor and produce, for example, the editorial in the January 1896 issue of *The Central Africa Planter*, Nyasaland's sole newspaper at the time, presented the following argument:

> The European, even if he engages an [African] overseer, has to maintain a sharp and constant supervision unless he is to be cheated at every turn by both overseer and gang and a common cause of wonder is the amount of trouble and ingenuity the native will take to shirk work — an amount which if applied to the execution of his work would repay him a thousand percent. The net result of the rise in wages and prices, therefore, is disappointing. Instead of inducing the majority to engage in constant employment it gives them a method of more easily supplying their wants and then returning to the much loved idleness of their villages. (Withers 1949, p. 19)

Other colonialists saw in this "deviant" work behavior of Africans further evidence of their inherent dishonesty. "The native," argued the head of the Church of Scotland Mission at Mlanje, Nyasaland, "had absolutely no idea of the necessity of speaking truth as truth. . . . He had to be taught that he was not paid because his name was on a roll book but for the work he did; when he learned that an honest day's work would receive an honest day's pay he would have learned much"

(Withers 1949, pp. 19–20). In his view, then, Africans "cheated" at the place of work not as a way of minimizing the exploitation of their labor but because they were naturally dishonest as a "race."

Others still decided to invoke the notion of mental and biological deficiency. Intrigued by certain aspects of African behavior, Duff observed:

> A native servant laying a table for dinner, and being honestly anxious to humor his master by having everything as it should be, according to the peculiar whims of white men, will yet deliberately put down a center-piece several inches out of its proper place. A native gardener, equally conscientious, will hoe what should be a straight border in a series of zigzags. (1969 [1903], p. 283)

It did not at all occur to Duff that this "bizarre" behavior could have been prompted by a desire to object to being forced to work for a European. To Duff, in his characteristically racist conclusions, all this merely convinced him that the African had a complete lack of "the prehensile eye" (1969 [1903], p. 238).

Elsewhere Duff comes closest, though indirectly, to acknowledging that some aspects of African conduct were, in fact, a form of protest against Europeans. However, even in this case, Duff's intention was merely to highlight a prevalent European stereotype of Africans as being "tribally bound" in their allegiances. Duff observes:

> Where all the servants belong to the same tribe, it is notorious that thefts of master's property are peculiarly frequent and peculiarly difficult to trace, for it is then quite hopeless to expect anyone of the offenders to give evidence against any other. Their steadfastness in this respect is most remarkable. Neither threats nor persuasion will move them. . . . I have scarcely ever succeeded in inducing natives to bear witness against one of their own tribe, and particularly of their own neighborhood or village, for any offense committed against a strange native or European, although an offense against his own community would be voluntarily reported by his fellows, who would rejoice to see him severely punished. (1969 [1903], pp. 241–42)

If stealing from Europeans involved no moral concerns as far as African workers were concerned and if they even sought to protect each other after stealing from Europeans, it was only because, in this context, the act had acquired a political substance. Cheating, lying, stealing, and so forth in African relationships with European employers ceased to be moral issues and acquired, instead, a political context. They became, in effect, covert forms of protest against the colonial labor system.

These forms of protest, precisely because they were hidden and not easily detectable as violations, led to the emergence of a colonial ideological offensive of "the lazy African." Frustrated at their inability to find the African worker in violation of the labor "agreements" in these instances of covert protest, the claim of the African's inherent laziness provided justification for greater coercion and more violence against the African worker. Prescribing flogging against the "lazy Kenyan male nigger," for example, a poem entitled "Jack Nigger" that appeared in the July 30, 1918 issue of the colonial magazine *The Leader of British East Africa* ran as follows:

> Jack Nigger you're as cute's can be
> Five beans to you make ten
> You drink and scrounge and sleep and laze
> And laze, scrounge and drink again!
> Your bibis do domestic jobs
> They sow and plough and reap
> And mend your pants and mind the kids
> While you lie fast asleep.
> In fact they live for you alone
> You gay and lazy dog
> They make and fetch your pombe and
> They feed you like a hog.

Evident from the above poem, and from other colonial sources, is the use of the ideology of laziness and idleness as a colonial offensive against the African male specifically. This may have been prompted, in part, by the European gender bias with regard to physical labor. The European conception of the time was that nondomestic manual work and the responsibility of bread earning fell into the male sphere of the social division of labor. Europeans in colonial Africa, therefore, could not come to terms with African women being at the center of production. Colonial literature is replete with sympathetic descriptions of the African woman as the beast of burden and statements of condemnation against the supposedly inherent lethargy of the African male.[10] Thus, the African male became the target of colonial derision precisely because it was his labor that was being sought above all by colonial capitalism.[11] The ideological offensive of the colonizer was intended to generate a reversal of values whereby men, rather than women, would be at the center of production, and, in general, it seems that these antimen sentiments were most pronounced precisely when labor shortage was most acute.

However, how do we explain this preference for men over women in the colonial quest for African labor? Because most colonial employers were agreed that the African woman was the more industrious one, why not make her the prime target of labor recruitment for colonial capitalist production? Part of the rationale was that, once freed from precapitalist material and conceptual "confines," male labor was more regulatable than female labor precisely because it was considered less subject to the rhythms of nature. If some natural forces determined the time frame for Africans in general, the situation of the African woman, specifically, was rendered more complex by other natural and social forces like pregnancy, childbirth, and the rearing of children. Female labor was, thus, seen as having a greater potential for being irregular than male labor, and because the regularity of labor was itself crucial to the consolidation of capitalism, a male gender bias continued to form labor policies throughout the colonial period.

CONCLUSION

The development of capitalism in its early phase in Africa points to a colonial ideology of the African body that is reminiscent of the mechanical philosophy of Descartes and Hobbes, that saw the African body as essentially decadent — sensuous, immoral, mechanical, lazy, irrational, and superstitious. As Richard Burton said of the African, "He is inferior to the active minded and objective . . . Europeans. He partakes largely of the worst characteristics of the lower Oriental types — stagnation of mind, indolence of the body, moral deficiency, superstition, and childish passion" (1961, p. 326). This ideology then sought to rationalize the universe of an emergent capitalism in Africa, promoting a complement of methods, ranging from spiritual to physical, from legislative to manipulative, intended to redirect African responses to time from a precapitalist to a capitalist orientation. Body-time relations, then, lay at the heart of the colonial violence, especially in settler economies, that led to the formation of labor power in Africa.

There was a clash between the more natural incentives of a precapitalist concept of time that oriented the African toward a particular relationship with work and labor and the less natural incentives of the capitalist clock that were being imposed on the unwilling populations of the African continent in an attempt to reorient them toward a different culture of work and labor. British colonialism in the settler regions of Africa was partly a declaration of war against the African body in its relationship with time and work that, in essence, was not dissimilar to

the war that was successfully waged against the English preproletariat a couple of centuries earlier.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Bill Freund, *The African Worker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); I. M. Ivanov, *Agrarian Reform and Hired Labour in Africa* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979); A. T. Nzula, et al. *Forced Labor in Colonial Africa* (London: Zed, 1979); R. Sandbrook and R. Cohen, eds., *The Development of an African Working Class* (London: Longman, 1975); and John Sender and Sheila Smith, *The Development of Capitalism in Africa* (New York: Methuen, 1986).

2. Karl Marx, 1906, pp. 197–331.

3. Compare with H. L. Duff, *Nyasaland Under the Foreign Office* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969 [1903]), p. 224: The African "has no links with the past. In a certain sense he may truly be said to have no past. He has evolved for himself nothing lasting, nothing elaborate in any domain."

4. Although accusing Africans of idleness, some colonial writers were also quick to observe their remarkable capacity to endure toil. Commenting on his experiences in Nyasaland (present-day Malawi), for example, Duff (1969 [1903], pp. 205–6) remarks that the "capacity for endurance among natives is very great. A tenga-tenga, or porter, literally thinks nothing of walking 30 miles or more between sunrise and sunset, with a load of 60 pounds on his head, and will, if necessary, continue to travel at a rate of from 20 to 25 miles per diem for weeks on end."

5. See Rene Descartes, *Treaties of Man* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972).

6. See B. Gert, ed., *Man and Citizen: Thomas Hobbes* (Garden City, N.Y.: Academic Press, 1972).

7. Despite the African's supposedly natural propensity to lie, Duff did not consider the African as having mastered the art of lying. He remarks: "A clever lie he is not. His fables are rudely constructed and violate probability too much" (1969 [1903], p. 250).

8. In fact, taxation was merely an indirect strategy of forced labor: see, for example, Ali A. Mazrui, "The Africans," London, BBC broadcast, 1986, p. 232 and Raymond L. Buell, *The Native Problem in Africa*, vol. 1 (New York: MacMillan, 1928), p. 331.

9. For further discussion, see, for example, F. D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London: Blackwood, 1929), p. 238.

10. In the *East African Standard* of June 6, 1925, for example, Francis Scott is reported to have said of Kenyan males that the "native in the reserve farms his woman rather than his land. In other words, his farming is done through his woman, and he himself hardly knows what work is. For work is not his custom." Lugard also quotes colonial official Mr. Chamberlain as saying that "the native . . . should be made to work, because he had for so long forced his women to work in order that he might live in idleness" (1929, p. 234).

11. See, for example, Lugard, *The Dual Mandate*, pp. 400–401.

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7

"Kafir Time": Preindustrial Temporal Concepts and Labor Discipline in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Natal

Keletso E. Atkins

Apart from a very few exceptions, South African labor history presents an angle of vision that only allows us to see how external factors — ecological disasters or social controls (devised by capital and the colonial state) — drove labor into the market or, alternatively, how the absence of such factors permitted a temporary escape from wage employment. Most students of the period attribute the self-direction and relative freedom of Natal's African population to the availability of land, which ensured an independent subsistence, as well as to the inability of the small settler community to agree on an effective "native labor policy." Important as these economic and political factors were, such explanations fall short of assessing the rich cultural nuances surrounding the problem, a failing that can only distort our efforts to comprehend the substance of Black proletarianization.

What is really remarkable is how precious little we know about the preindustrial African (in this case, northern Nguni) work ethic, about the ways in which such an "inner compulsion" or ethos shaped the African response to the wage economy, determined work choices, and affected job behavior. A key place in which we might begin to correct this

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deficiency is by probing more deeply into the changes we can identify in the temporal consciousness of African workers.

As in E. P. Thompson's (1967) article on the temporal reorientation of the English working class, so this chapter seeks to examine basic cultural phenomena ordering and coordinating the daily activities of Natal Zulus; it aims to explore changes in time perceptions — the shift from peasant to industrial time — as they were experienced by these northern Nguni speakers on coming into contact with a society undergoing early stages of capitalist growth; and it concretely demonstrates how Christianity aided the transitional process. This analysis, however, must be understood in the context of a settler-based colonial regime, in which the master and servant represented totally different social worlds and operated from systems of logic that mutually eluded comprehension. The friction caused by this state of affairs was considerable and may be seen as one of the potent factors blocking Natal's advancement along industrial lines.

NGUNI TEMPORAL PERCEPTIONS

Natal was declared a British colony in 1843. Gradually, labor-intensive sugar production and shipping came to form the major industries in the economy. Although scarcity of manpower was a dominant problem throughout the colonial period, it is noteworthy that initially, labor was touted as one of the colony's chief assets; a view shaped as much by the overwhelming numbers of Africans in the district as by the fact that the indigenous population had from the outset demonstrated their value as peasant producers and, even more significantly, had displayed a willingness to engage in rural and urban wage employment. Thus, one of the phenomena that needs to be explained is why the early reports of reliable, diligent workers were by the mid-1850s almost uniformly supplanted with accounts of incorrigible contract breakers who refused to work fully the year round. The concurrent development of Africans insisting on selling their labor for the briefest terms — that is, by the day (or some fraction of that time unit) — was critical in both shaping and reinforcing negative attitudes held by whites of African workers. The matter of concern to us here, however, is not so much to set out the combined causes that made it possible for Africans to sustain this behavior as to discover the factors that produced it in the first place. Therefore, the arguments alluded to above are not strictly relevant to our present theme.

To properly interpret the African response to capital's demands on their labor, archival and ethnographic sources on northern Nguni society have been analyzed for pertinent material regarding internalized, entrenched everyday values, especially temporal constraints, not easily assimilable to the new economic needs of the colony. On these issues, direct African testimony for the period is sketchy, at best, and for this reason, settlers' descriptions of local labor have been used. Although this latter body of evidence is largely negative, it was, nonetheless, found, when checked against the other data, that these records often reflected concrete and surprisingly detailed information about the attitudes of black laborers. Taken together, our sources have enabled us to work up a profile of the peasant worker and to broaden our understanding of Black/white colonial labor relations. We begin this discussion with comments made in 1846 by the planter, "H.W.L." His remarks are important because they put the problem into immediate perspective.

> I am not one of those, who, when they arrive in a settlement, because they see a number of blacks infer that they have a right to the labour of those persons, and that if they will not work for them they are set down as lazy scoundrels. But I am one of those who maintain that *if a number of Kaffers come voluntarily and offer their service, and accept service at a given rate of money wages, and for a specified time, that I have a right to the services of those persons, until the time expires.* [emphasis added][1]

Time was at the nexus of the "Kafir labor problem." No sooner was a work agreement made than confusion arose from the disparate notions of the white employer and his African employee regarding the computation of time. Otherwise said, the record of persistent desertions from service was in very many instances related to the fact that the terms of master-servant contracts, which were based on European units of measure, did not accord with the African mode of temporal reckoning.

Like most preindustrial people, the Zulu used the moon and stars to keep track of time. The season of cultivation was announced by the *isiLimela*, the star cluster called the Pleiades. Early star gazers observed also that the evening star, *isiCelankobe*, appeared when men were asking for boiled maize, their evening meal, and that *iNdosa* rose before the morning star, *iKwezi*, when night was advanced.[2]

Inyanga, the word for "moon," was also the name by which the Zulu called their "moon period" or lunar month. They computed time by the phases of the moon, and the annual cycle was divided into 13 "moons,"[3] each associated with ecological changes and social activities that represented time indicators for holidays and seasons. For example, *uNowaba*

was the new grass moon, the month in which the land took on a rich, dark green hue; *uMasingana*, the moon of the new season's food, was the time of the annual rites of the first fruits; and during *uNtlaba*, the red flower of the aloe came forth, hence "moon of the aloes."

The circuit of the *inyanga* was about 28 days. *Inyanga file* (the "moon is dead"), that is, the interlunary period, "the moonless day when everyone paid respect to the darkness," was traditionally observed as an unlucky or sacred day of abstinence from work and pleasure seeking.[4] "We had no Sundays in Zululand," recalled Mpatshana ka Sodondo, "what we went by was the waning of the moon."[5] When the new moon made her appearance, important undertakings were commenced with confidence of success.

Coming as they did from a culture that had adopted and adapted precision instruments and other convenient methods of time-keeping (watches, clocks, solar calendars, and so on), the last-named containing time units (months) of irregular and capricious lengths — 28, 29, 30, 31 days) whites contemptuously referred to the lunar reckonings as the "Kafir month." The complications arising from the two systems of time notations were enormous, as this agitated correspondence from "C.P.," dated (and this is the pivotal clue) 29 October 1846, attests. "This afternoon, because I would not pay a *kafir whose month is up on the last day of the month, I was abused like a thief.* He shook his stick at me, and was so violent that if I could have got assistance, I would have sent him to the trunk (gaol)" [emphasis added].[6] The following observations made in 1855 by the missionary Alfred Rivett carry more evidentiary weight:

> The month of service (their wages are paid monthly) begins with the new moon, but often before it is quite completed, they will come to their master, asking for their money, and although the month is not ended they will declare it is by an appeal to the fact that the moon "*inyanga file*" is dead. *They cannot understand there being more than 28 days in a month. It is impossible to make them believe there are 31.* [emphasis added][7]

Confusion surrounding this issue led to notable incidents such as the 1858 strike among Kafir mail carriers. This involved ten men who had been hired for six months (from 2 July to 2 January) to carry mail between Durban and Maritzburg. Evidently, "by some process of their own," the postmen "arrived at the conclusion that their engagement expired on the 28th December." The situation was made all the worse because of the strikers' stubborn insistence on their "unwritten and ignorant system of computing time in opposition to the statements of the

Postmaster and the interpreter." To ensure the incident would have no imitators, severe punishments rather than fines and light jail sentences were recommended.[8]

What stands forth most clearly is that resorting to summary punishments (including such draconian measures as floggings and extended stretches in the gaol) to discipline preindustrial workers around the question of time had the effect of driving labor from the market. Yet, employers seemed astonishingly slow to learn lessons from this and were slower still in taking constructive steps to rectify what would prove to be a long-standing problem. Years later, in 1894, a colonist was prompted to suggest that provision be made for "the boys in town [for] a lecturer or teacher who would, say, once a week, impart free instructions on the European method of computation of time." This perceptive individual pointed out that

> If it could be explained to them that they are not engaged by the lunar month, it would save much difficulty. . . . *At present in very many cases, either the master or mistress must give way to the ignorance of the monthly servant, or the native thinks he has been cheated of his time. . . . Many a score of good, hardworking boys found themselves landed in the gaol in consequence of disagreements with their employers, caused in the first instance by their inability to reckon their own time, and then the case is frequently aggravated by the employer being unable to explain matters in the native language.* [emphasis added][9]

Several details arising from this passage merit attention. First, it makes clear the attitude of workers regarding efforts to impose a system foreign to their basic pattern of thought — it was viewed as an attempt to cheat them of their time; second, to mollify servants, employers had to either submit to indigenous usages or risk the former's precipitate withdrawal from the market; third, another point made explicit was the quality of labor — "Many a score of good, hardworking boys" — alienated from wage employment in consequence of such disputes; and finally, there was recognition that mutual inability to communicate needs was a major factor aggravating master-servant relations.

C. W. Posselt's prefatory comments in his Zulu-English phrase book published in 1850 (p. 13) "to facilitate intercourse with the natives" catch the blatant mood of cultural chauvinism prevailing in the settlement. Posselt's conviction was that "mistresses and masters [did] not want to know the barbaric dialect of their servants beyond the small circle of subjects which [had] an immediate reference to the kind of labour wherein natives were employed." The sentiments evoked by these words

no doubt helped perpetuate a general contempt for Zulu culture. Particularly noticeable was the almost total ignorance of Zulu and the indifference to acquiring it exhibited by the emigrants. Settlers deigned only to acquire a hybrid version (Fanagalo) of the language. Rarely was the effort made to learn proper Zulu so as to obtain a clear sense of Zulu terms and phrases. The word *inyanga*, for instance, was translated to conform with European time units; it was not seen as expressive of the lunar seasonal phenomena of the Zulu *inyanga*. Yet, such deliberate perversions or mistranslations led to the most serious consequences, as Carl Faye, an interpreter in the Native Affairs Department, cautioned (1923, p. 52):

> It is not advisable, when interpreting, to give the name of an English calendar month as the equivalent of a Zulu month; the two do not begin together, nor do they end together, and besides the Zulu name is expressive in a way peculiar all to itself: then again the seasons themselves are not always identically the same each year, and a mistake in interpreting may have a very important bearing on some question or other and lead to serious consequences. *It is advisable therefore to give the original Zulu name given by a Native, and if the meaning of it be required, to ask the Native himself for it and then give it up in that way.* [emphasis added]

Problems also arose owing to the absence of a concept in Zulu to denote our "year." Bryant tells us that Europeans "quite mistakenly" assumed the term *uNyaka* or *umNyaka* signified "year." However, to the traditional Zulu, the word had quite another meaning. Their annual cycle was divided into two seasons, both of which had approximately six "moons" — *uNyaka*, the rainy or field work season, and *ubuSika*, the dry or winter season. The two were entirely separate and distinct.[10]

Two things seem fairly evident: first, it was no accident that the word denoting the time of greatest activity and importance in the Zulu work schedule was redefined to correspond with the Western calendar; second, few individuals were better suited to systematically undertake corruption of the language than were missionaries, who pioneered publishing works in the vernacular, including Zulu phrase books, dictionaries, and grammars.

Religion is a vehicle for disseminating culture, and in carrying forth their civilizing mission, the "soldiers of Christianity" sought, among other things, to inculcate industry, the moral of steady work. "Our natives will not be anything," the missionary Charles Kilbon observed (1884, p. 15.4), "if they do not feel the propriety and necessity of forming habits of industry and frugality, as their easy going ways do not

furnish favourable soil for the Gospel." Thus, we early find individuals such as Henry Callaway resolving "to make the Kafirs around [his mission station] feel as much as possible the value of time, labour and skill."[11] With this plainly being a directed objective, it must have seemed entirely appropriate to stretch the bounds of the preindustrial *uNyaka* to incorporate the notion of a more stable, continuous duration of labor.

How did this exercise in cultural engineering work itself out in practice? Consider a work seeker being told by a settler-farmer, *Ngiya kukutola umnyaka wonke.*[12] Such verbal contracts in fact were constantly entered into if found mutually agreeable. A translation of the arrangement, however, reveals the rub: "I will hire you for the whole year (twelve 'moons')," was the farmer's version of the contract, but (and this is an important "but") to the traditional Zulu, the above sentence, loosely rendered, translates, "I will hire you for the whole of the field work season (six 'moons')." This explanation makes more meaningful the following statement (1868) by the magistrate of Alexandra: "The period of six months continues here to be the maximum term of service, and it seems as if the kafir was [*sic*] unable to [perceive] the idea of a longer unbroken term of exertion."[13]

In other words, often masters and servants would be at cross-purposes without being aware of it. However, sensible employers requiring a year-round workforce managed to avoid labor difficulties by adopting the relay method. This involved a private arrangement between a colonist and the head of a homestead, the latter agreeing to provide a continuous, circulating supply of labor.

RESPONSES TO IMPOSITION OF CAPITALIST LABOR

A further point of serious contention was the length of the working day. The crisis was most noticeable in commercial agriculture, where "Kafir time" had a profoundly adverse effect on the development of sugar plantations.

Aside from the daily passage of the sun (*ilanga*) across the sky and the natural rotation of the seasons, the fundamental tempo and rhythms of life are dictated by, Edward Hall argues (1984, pp. 3–4), a foundation of unspoken assumptions (primary level culture) accepted as unquestioned reality and controlling everything we do. Hall's very fascinating discussion of this "other dimension of time" leads us to a wider consideration of northern Nguni cosmography.

Zulu society provides an apt setting for this kind of analysis because their universe was filled with frightening phenomena over which they exercised little control. Intensely real and universally prevalent among the people was the belief in unseen and evil influences. They were habitually occupied with fear of being attacked by *abathakathi* (witches or "evil doers") who went about at dead of night accompanied by familiars, causing sickness and death. To avoid meeting these dreaded objects, the Zulu conducted their affairs in the safe light of day and refrained from going abroad at night, which, we are told, was a great consolation to the small settler community that lived among them.[14]

Along with sinister spirits, natural hazards in the physical environment posed added constraints on traditional societies. In times past, to secure immunity from fever, the Zulu retired to their huts before sundown, emerging in the morning when the dew was off the grass.[15] This adaptive response most probably originated in regions where malaria was endemic. Force of habit and continued belief in the efficacy of the custom may account for its eventual spread outside Zululand. However, notwithstanding similar preventive strategies, homesteads in the more tropical colonial districts continued to suffer from sicknesses thought to be environmentally related.

It is important to appreciate some of this background because it helps us greatly to understand how the conventions or protective measures taken to deal with these natural and superhuman forces may have operated outside the traditional context and may have ultimately come to interfere with the industrial work regime on commercial sugar estates. Starting in 1849, the whole coastline of Natal was taken up in cane production. The plantation economy during its formative years was essentially a decentralized system that incorporated two productive processes within the ownership of one unit. One operation was agricultural, based on the cultivation and harvesting of cane; the other was industrial, involving the crushing of cane and the boiling and treatment of juice in the mill.[16]

Observations made by the successful planter Edmund Morewood raise an important point about the availability of local labor. Except at "crop-time," Morewood asserts, the cultivation of sugar required very little hard labor, and then, as it happened, the best time for taking off the crop fell in the slack season (*ubuSika*) of the Zulu calendar, when hands were most plentiful. Another point well worth noting is that, insofar as the agricultural side of the operations was concerned, no substantial readjustments were required in the temporal bearing or the labor rhythms of the workforce. Difficulty arose around the industrial aspects

of the plantation, which introduced a time routine that ran counter to indigenous conventions. These different interpretations of work time were critical, because the pressing concern of Natal planters and other early employers of African labor was not, as commonly assumed, "will the Kafirs work?"; rather, the big question was "can Africans be persuaded to submit to an extension of work 'hours' beyond their customary active work day?"

It seems few cane growers understood the rationale behind the peasant notion of a "fair day's work"; yet, most agreed that the African's diurnal pattern of "late" rising and "early" retirement had a ruinous effect on the nascent industry. Roberts Babbs, proprietor of the Umlass Plantation and an individual reputedly possessing "extraordinary skill in managing kafirs," provides invaluable details regarding the peasants' disinclination to discard their traditional chronology.

> It is generally known that the Kafir looks to the sun's course to regulate his hours of labour; that "puma langa" with him, commences about an hour after sunrise, and that "shuna langa" begins with the same time before sunset. It is difficult either to induce or compel him to work either before or after those periods of the day, which have received his arbitrary definition of sunrise and sunset.[17]

Essentially the difficulty was this: the value of time fluctuated as the cycle of sugar production passed from summer to winter season. In summer, there were sufficient working hours (14 hours of daylight) to perform routine operations such as weeding. All the heavy work, however, came at one time of the year, in winter, with the harvesting and crushing. Once the cane was cut, it was important to convey it to the mill as rapidly as possible and then carry out the crushing immediately. Neglect at this stage could ruin the quality of the sugar. At the height of the manufacturing process, from June through September, when the bulk of the crop would be attempted to be secured, the average of the sun's course was 10.5 hours. Allowing the peasant's definition of a workday (between sunrise and sunset) meant the loss of two precious daylight hours. According to Babbs, ten hours of "good efficient labor without including meal times" were needed to perform only "a moderate day's work"; were laborers left to persist in their habits a day's work could not be performed and a great amount of produce would be jeopardized, if not spoiled. Nor, he contended, was it unreasonable to demand ten working hours per day, because in Mauritious, 14 and 15 hours were not infrequent, and similar working hours were customary in the West Indies.[18]

Sobering lessons were drawn from the experience of the Springfield Estate. Writing of the problems plaguing that new operation, the *Natal Mercury* reported that:

> The proprietors have secured for the present a sufficient number of Kafirs for *day work; but it is essential to the perfect success of sugar manufacture that the operations during the season, should proceed night and day, without interruptions*; and for this purpose, it will be absolutely necessary to obtain labour of a more settled and suitable character. *The aversion of our natives to night work, and to any work in cold weather, as well as their peculiar social habits will for a lengthened period render it impossible to rely on their labour alone.* [emphasis added][19]

Three months later, in September 1855, the *Natal Mercury*'s lead article announced "The Springfield Sugar Mill [had] been closed for more than a fortnight for want of labour."[20] Babbs, in offering a counterview of Springfield's misfortunes and the problems confronting commercial farming in general, emphasized strongly that "want of labour" was not the only or the most important factor hampering tropical agriculture. That the industry was undercapitalized (that is, unable to purchase up-to-date machinery, for example) and that it lacked the necessary organizational and managerial skills to cope with the cultural idiosyncrasies of the workforce were potent elements in its early failures.[21]

Mention should be made of the sugar plantations' attempts to impose an industrial discipline by apportioning piecework. As early as 1852, hiring by the job rather than for stated periods of service was recommended for cane cultivation. The chief argument employed for advocating such an arrangement was that parties undertaking tasks worked more satisfactorily and got through much more in less time than the usual day labor. "It was no uncommon sight," recorded the Inanda magistrate, "to see the labourers under this system returning from the fields by noon, or shortly after, having completed their tasks for the day."[22] Despite such efforts to increase efficiency and attract labor onto the market, however, the response of Natal Africans was negligible.

The preceding discussion shows most clearly how crucial the struggle over time was for sugar plantations, where the time between removing and manufacturing the crop was very short and the sheer drudgery of the tasks put an enormous strain on workers. However, what also needs to be kept in view is that an independent workforce was incompatible with sugar, a crop almost invariably associated with repressive labor systems. This is why it became imperative for Natal cane growers to introduce, beginning in 1860, indentured laborers from India.

URBAN INDUSTRIAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN TEMPORAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The situation developed somewhat differently in the urban areas. This should not, however, be taken to mean that migrant workers completely discarded their temporal identity or that no traces of it survived in the town milieu. Even in the major European centers Africans "succeeded in their usual stolid fashion of establishing the custom of a day's work as between 'sun up' and 'sun down.'" Wrote Russell (1850, pp. 128–29): "Our initial difficulties in regulating their hours of labour have not yet been overcome, notwithstanding a half a century of experience acquired in prisons, garrisons, railways and mining camps." Throughout this period the "Kafir month" also continued to be problematic, forcing government belatedly to seek a legislative remedy. Therefore, for the purpose of Act 40 of 1894, the Master and Native Servant Law, a new calendar was devised wherein the 12 months were officially given an equal number of units of 30 days.[23] The reform, however, had only a limited impact on the diminution of time disputes. What was essentially at issue was the question of cultural conversion.

Several town mission schools had by 1862 informally included in their curricula matters of common knowledge and scientific explanations of natural phenomena. At Lewis Grout's mission, formal examinations in basic astronomy were conducted, and, as already noted, Callaway had determined "to teach the value of time, labour and skill."[24] However, the conversion process was slow. Partly owing to the migratory nature of the workforce and partly because, as Hall (1984, p. 7) explains,

> One of the principal characteristics of PL [primary level culture] is that it is particularly resistant to manipulative attempts to change it from the outside. . . . Unlike the law or religious or political dogma, these rules cannot be changed by fiat, nor can they be imposed on others against their will, because they are already internalized.

As a rule, then, Natal employers learned either to give way to traditional usages such as the lunar month or to do without local labor altogether.

One should not infer from this that the reaction of town workers to the new set of temporal boundaries was uniform. Attitudes varied from period to period and from one group to another. Hence, in centers like Durban and Maritzburg, it is possible to discern, at one and the same time, strenuous resistance and quite remarkable adaptive responses.

On coming to town, the fluctuating workforce found itself caught in (to borrow Le Goff's [1980, p. 48] phrase) "a chronological net," a complex fabric of merchant time, church time, leisure time controls, and so on. Along with new work routines, for example, came the regimentation of organic functions: monthly workers were obliged to alter their meal patterns to authorized intervals of breakfast, lunch, and supper, a practice contrary to the traditional custom of eating twice a day, that is, around 11:00 A.M. and 6:00 P.M. or dusk. Yet, they did not readily yield to these efforts by management to coordinate job schedules. Strong attachment continued to be shown for the custom of taking meals in common. Laborers steadfastly opposed attempts to rate mealtimes, refusing to eat until all their work mates assembled "to share in the pot."[24]

Mornings in Zululand were ushered in by the rising of the *iKwezi* star, around 4:00 A.M., but it was the music of beasts, birds, and insects that engaged the immediate attention, for the singing or calling was kept up the whole 24 hours constituting a day by various animals in turn, as their time for performing came round. From the habits of the *umngcelu* bird (plural *imingcelu*), one of the earliest to chatter in the morning, derived the expression *ngiya 'uvuka imingcelu ingakakhali* ("I shall be up before the *imingcelu* begin to chirp," that is, very early). *Umngcelu*, in fact, refers to any very early bird (Colensa 1967, p. 385). Zulu folktales turned the singing and calling of birds into language. Thus, the large black owl, called *uMandubulu*, was said to say, *Vuka, vuka, sekusile*, "Get up, get up, it has dawned." About the same time, the *INkovana* owl would be heard to say, *woza, woza, woza ngikubone*, "Come, come, come that I may see you." And, at Zulu homesteads, the common cock entered the vocal competition, shouting, *Woza la! Si lapha!* "Come over here! This is where we are!" The first cockcrow announced the small hours of the night; the second crowing saluted the dawn.[25]

Man-made signals replaced this natural performance and aided town workers in determining their temporal bearings. Though public clock time was established at Durban in 1860,[26] it is valid to say that many years would pass before the migrant population developed clock consciousness. Rather, devices of a more utilitarian character, the most familiar being the "time bell," regulated work and various aspects of nineteenth century urban life.

"True local time" was first recognized in 1854 when the mayor semi-officially commenced the practice of hoisting a flag on his tall flagstaff at five minutes before nine every morning and lowering it at nine in the evening; however, burgesses questioning the accuracy of the time flag

led to its being given up. Under alternative arrangements, the Corporation undertook to ring St. Paul's cathedral bell every morning, "precisely at nine o'clock solar time"; the bell began to chime at the hour and continued for two minutes.[27]

The practice of Maritzburg, the administrative center of the colony and headquarters of the miliary, was to discharge a cannon at eight o'clock every morning — the hour when all African servants and laborers were expected to be at their work. Presently, the hour of gunfire was altered to nine but, as local lore has it, workers experienced difficulty phasing their "inner timing mechanisms" with the new starting hour of labor. Bertram Mitford (1881) recounted the familiar tale:

> He still persisted in sticking to the old hour, and from sheer force of habit would go to his master for his daily task. The "baas," however, would put him off: "Don't bother me now, come by-and-by when the gun fires!" "What does he say?" would be the enquiry of an expectant group when their spokesman returned. "He says 'come-by-and-by'." Directly the expected detonation was heard nearly every native throughout the city would exclaim "Haow! Ubain-bai!," and betake himself to his work. The expression stuck and forthwith the gun became ubain-bai! among the native population of Natal, extending thence to Zululand.

From Russell's (1899, p. 495) historical ruminations, one learns further that "all good niggers were supposed to go to their respective places when the camp bugles recalled the military to their quarters at 9 pm."

Decisive progress toward an industrial regimen came with the imposition of the seven-day work/rest rhythm, a custom transmitted throughout a large part of the world by Christianity. Africans coming into contact with missionaries were first taught the Fourth Commandment. Sabbath observances made it incumbent upon mistresses and masters to teach such useful notions as the "week," the "weekend," and the proper time sequence of "workdays" (euphemistically termed "weekdays"), for which there were no words in Zulu. Hence, Monday came to be appropriately known to servants as "the turning out to work-day" (*umSombuluko*); Tuesday, as "work day the second" (*umSombuluko wesibili* or *Olwesibili*); and so on until Saturday, which became "the filling up or completing day" (*umGqibelo*). Sunday or "church day" was *iSonto*, the name by which the "week" was also known.[28]

Influences of the weekly rhythm ran shallowest in remote country districts. Employed labor on small white farms often took advantage of the Sunday proscription to earn a few additional pence working on land occupied by Indians. One group of Sabbath-breakers, reproved for not

keeping the Lord's day, summed up their sentiments with the query: "Why did not the Lord command the monkeys to keep holy the Sabbath and not on that day to rob our gardens?"[29]

The reverse of this could be seen in the towns, where the growing experience was toward an outward conformity to these new points of temporal references. There are, of course, notable reasons for this. The urban centers presented simulating environments, challenged traditional assumptions, and fostered change. However, perhaps of even more permanent significance was the complex nature of the urban economy and the conditions of urban labor. To generalize broadly, a number of practical advantages were to be gained in recognizing the established work-week pattern, the public holidays, and other structured time intervals encountered during their town sojourn. All of this and more is indicated by the fact that at least by 1872, and perhaps well before that date, segments of the cities' black laboring population were perceiving time in discrete market as well as noneconomic terms, namely, regular work time, overtime, and leisure time.

People in the urban areas were encouraged to explore a variety of choices. In this connection it is noteworthy that not a few young men could be found who had learned to "mark time" spent on chores so as to attend, with master's permission or at their own insistence, the one hour of school each evening in the week. At Maritzburg, St. Mary's seven o'clock bell tolled the start of classes, and a "native" service was generally held twice on Sunday — one in the afternoon at three o'clock and the other in the evening at seven.[30] Attendance, however, fluctuated very considerably owing to various causes, a leading one being the migratory character of the workforce, which was a bar to early mission churches having any real lasting influence.

Observance of traditional holidays regularly interrupted the flow of labor, and natural rhythms continued to have an impact on work patterns and social customs. The "moon of the new season's fruits" (*uMasingana*) was widely celebrated among Natal Zulus. Although this annual festival officially opened the season of Lent, the actual abundance of foodstuffs came with the gathering in of the ripe grain from the fields, about March and April. Therefore, the common practice during the first four months of the year was for large numbers of Africans to withdraw to their kraals to help with their harvest and eat green mealies. This practice lessened the amount of labor in the towns and threw extra work on those who remained.

Before the advent of electricity for general consumption, seasonal differences in the duration of daylight affected the length of the workday

and other areas of social life. Missionaries frequently remarked that school attendance fell off with the brightening of days in summer, when the general practice of householders was to put off their tea an hour or more to take a walk or engage in some outdoor occupation while the daylight continued, a custom that kept servants on the job until eight or nine o'clock. With the return of the colder season, school attendance increased.[31]

Another factor directly contributing to irregular trends in colonial commerce was the weather. Labor demands at Durban and Maritzburg, for example, fluctuated with the overberg trade. Year after year, prior to the coming of the railways, trade with the interior during the winter came practically to a standstill. Drought, frost, and grass fires destroyed the pasturage, making it impossible to work the oxen along the dusty roads. Moreover, the business of the merchant middleman was subject to the accidents of wagon transport often caused by heavy rains that rendered roads impassable, preventing delivery of goods into the towns. Notwithstanding the erratic nature of these occupations, we are told, in slack spells "time was by no means frittered away." One wholesale firm managed to maintain discipline by occupying "boys" with the job of "wheeling sand from the billowy heaps in Smith Street to fill up the hollow at the back of the store."[32]

Port employment was especially at the mercy of the seasons. Violent winter gales caused numerous wrecks on Durban's back beach, and frequently, vessels were left riding at anchor in the roadstead because shifting bars and sandbanks blocked the entrance to the harbor. However, a busy day at Port Natal usually commenced at 7:00 A.M. and ended at 5:00 or 6:00 P.M. From the 1880s, and with improved shipping facilities, the industry grew more labor-intensive. During periods of increased trade, operations proceeded around the clock and on Sundays. By 1895, tiers of electric globes illuminated the wharves and permitted workers to carry on with their tasks after dark.[33] Such conditions, not unexpectedly, gave rise to labor unrest. That dissatisfaction is vividly seen in the rich record of industrial protest among dock hands, of which time disputes were a major grievance. More than anything else, the sources convey that it was through the process of defining this and other concerns central to their daily existence and in the course of struggling around these issues, Africans gained not only a new time sense but also a greater understanding of their role in the workplace. Specifically, the disputes to which we allude were centered on demands for both the "weekend" and Sabbath rest days.

A usage that crystallized into town custom was the Saturday half holiday. It came to flourish in full favor at Durban in 1856, when wholesale merchants agreed they would close their places of business at two o'clock on Saturday afternoon.[34] Subsequently, the hour was pushed back to one o'clock. With the early cessation of weekend business activities came the separate social timing of organized entertainment. For example, the whole of Maritzburg — men, women, and children, black and white — turned out for the great weekly festival conducted by the military band in front of Government House; similar Saturday concerts were offered by Durban's Volunteer Band on the Market Square.[35] African workers also made use of the leisure period tending to personal needs or simply relaxing in the company of friends. Of course, it would become a source of provocation when deprived of this, their "rightful season of rest." "Togt" men, that is, the day laborers who were heavily employed on the wharves and who frequently were compelled to work through the weekends, including on Sundays, raised the loudest protest. From 1881 onward, it is common to come upon references such as the following:

> Employers of Kafir labour experience great inconvenience frequently on account of togt natives refusing to work after certain hours. They seem to be impressed with the idea that they ought not to work after one o'clock on Saturday, six o'clock during the remainder of the week, and not on Sundays at all. Masters are placed at a great disadvantage by the refusal of togt natives to work at these specified times.[36]

Because the laws regulating daily workers did not state what number of hours constituted a day's work — especially with regard to Saturday, how much laborers were entitled to be paid for Sunday work, and so on — strike action around these questions was significant. Although generally conducted on a small scale, several major strikes did occur during this period, such as in 1895 when "about 200 natives, led by one over 6 ft. high, in the employ of the Union Co., . . . marched in a body on Saturday afternoon to the residence of Mr. T. S. Alston, the Company's Durban Agent," demanding overtime pay.[37] Four years later, nine Africans appealed against the magistrate's ruling that forced them to work after one o'clock. A higher court, deciding for the appellants, concluded that as the "Togt Regulations" were silent with regard to the hours of Saturday labor, daily workers were entitled to follow town custom.[38] Clearly, this was an important victory for labor — employers were not obliged to pay Black workers for half holiday overtime.

One remaining observation must be added to the arguments and illustrations presented here, but, first, it is helpful to recall how the Zulu were

deterred by fear of the *abathakathi* from participating in labor and other affairs after sunset. Consistent with this aversion was their resistance to night work on sugar estates. It is, therefore, intriguing, given the imposing magnitude of this belief, that unlike their custom-abiding rural counterparts, town workers appear to have overcome their terror of the powers loosed in the night. What special set of circumstances or modifying influences justified the risks implied in breaching this proscription? How did urban laborers reinterpret the ancient norms to suit their altered behavior?

Two broad categories of nighttime engagements were recognized in the municipalities — those that were considered socially permissible and those that were characterized as antisocial. Subsumed under the former was night shift job work made necessary to accommodate periods of increased shipping at the Point. Large monetary inducements tempted servants, monthly employed and working daily, to hire out nightly on the docks. From these efforts by Blacks to maximize their earnings, we get complaints from masters that "some of their boys after working in town till 5 o'clock went to the Point and worked till 9 o'clock or 10 o'clock, receiving something like 4 or 5s for the night and, thus, instead of having a full blown native in the morning they had a half dead one."[38]

In other respects, the enlargement of the day to encompass late night activities constituted a problem of growing proportion. Whereas an early Durbanite could write that initially curfews were unnecessary, for "as a rule superstition and custom operated favourably in restraining Africans from being abroad after dark,"[39] before the opening of the 1860s, the migrant population had summoned the courage to engage not only in "legitimate" but also in "questionable" nocturnal pursuits. Recurring throughout the documentation, decade after decade, are reports of loiterers and vagrants who nightly roamed about the towns' residential areas and suburbs. The one huge irony in all this is that the conditions creating this situation were largely of the towns' own making.

Beyond the wages earned for their day's exertion, jobbers could expect no support for their day-to-day sustenance or upkeep. Masters were neither legally committed to the extra expense of supplying rations nor bound to provide shelter. Also, in the early decades of the colonial period, except for the modest efforts of mission churches, there were no eating facilities to speak of, no public rest houses or other accommodations where, say, for a small sum, Africans could refresh themselves and find a hot meal. This was an extraordinary situation for a people accustomed to the aid of *ubuntu* ("hospitality"), the social quality of neighborliness that made a *muntu* ("a human being"). Yet, these were the

dismal facts of town existence. To satisfy the basic human requirements, day workers were forced to deviate from custom and to modify their ideology in a way that allowed them to retain familiar institutions while adjusting to a starkly new experience.

We do not as yet possess direct African testimony regarding these matters for this period, but it may quite possibly be, as Philip Mayer (1971, pp. 160, 163–64) found much later in his East London study, that migrants rationalized away ancient fears with the explanation that the evil power of witches was largely associated with the community at home, that in the European centers they were safe from the witch's pursuit.

Whatever the combination of circumstances that "let loose" these men upon the towns, the municipal response was to pass legislation that, in effect, attempted to colonize the workers' leisure time. The 9 o'clock curfew bell sounded in Maritzburg officially for the first time in 1871; three years later, similar measures were instituted at Durban.

SUMMARY

This chapter attempts to understand in substantive terms the nature of Black proletarianization in Natal, South Africa. This is undertaken by moving beyond arid explanations of outside agencies to focus on some of the underlying cultural premises that ordered the day-to-day activities of northern Nguni communities. This chapter examines their temporal perceptions, exploring within the colonial context the shift from peasant to industrial time and showing the central role that mission churches played in the transition process.

Two important disclosures emerge as a result of this study. First, it conclusively demonstrates the existence of a rich history of nineteenth-century African labor action (until now, the overwhelming assumption among historians has been that no such activity existed), much of which was related to the struggle over the definition of time. Second, it presents a more balanced picture of the migrant worker. One finds groups of laborers who continued to adhere to old attachments, while others adapted in a rather remarkable fashion to the condition of the industrial workplace. Most striking of all is that both were capable of dictating the terms of labor, whether they involved demands for the lunar month or the half holiday and Sabbath rest day.

NOTES

1. "Labour," *Natal Witness*, 11 December 1846.
2. Henry Callaway, *The Religious System of the AmaZulu* (Cape Town: Struik, 1970), p. 397; A. T. Bryant, *The Zulu People as They Were before the White Man Came* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1949), pp. 251–52.
3. David Leslie, *Among the Zulu and the AmaTongas* (New York: Negro Universities, 1969), pp. 394–96; Bryant, *Zulu People*, pp. 254–56; Eileen Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1949), p. 412.
4. Bryant, *Zulu People*, pp. 254–56; Callaway, *Religious System*, pp. 393–99; R.C.A. Samuelson, *Long, Long Ago* (Durban: Knox, 1929), p. 304.
5. Testimony of Mpatshana ka Sodondo, in C. Webb and J. Wright, eds., *The James Stuart Archives* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal, 1982 [1976]), pp. 111, 301.
6. "Contracts with Native Labourers," *Natal Witness* (Pietermaritzburg), 6 November 1846.
7. Alfred Rivett, *Ten Years' Church Work in Natal* (London: Jarrold, 1890), p. 22.
8. "Strike among the Kafir Mail Carriers," *Natal Mercury* (Durban), 14 January 1858.
9. "Monthly Native Servants," *Natal Mercury*, 25 April 1896.
10. Bryant, *The Zulu People*, pp. 249–51.
11. Extracts from the journal of Reverend Dr. Henry Callaway, *Mission Field*, London: United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1 October 1859, p. 37.
12. J. L. Dohne translates *umNyaka* as "Literally — a space of year; = civil year, a period of a year"; J. L. Dohne, *Zulu-Kafir Dictionary* (Cape Town: Pike, 1857), p. 251.
13. Secretary for Native Affairs, Natal, File 1/3/18. Annual Report for the County of Alexandra, 14 January 1868.
14. Alex-Ivar Berglund, *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism* (Uppsala: Swedish Institute for Missionary Research, 1976), pp. 276–78, 286, 364; Thomas B. Jenkinson, *AmaZulu: The Zulus, Their Past History, Manners, Customs, and Language* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), p. 30.
15. Walter Ludlow, *Zululand and Cetewayo* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1882), p. 99.
16. Edmund Morewood, "A Description of the Farm Compensation," in *The Natalians*, ed. Alan Hattersley (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1940), pp. 89–91.
17. "Mr. Babbs's Letter," "Monthly Native Servants," *Natal Mercury*, 5 October 1855, 13 June 1856.
18. "Labour," "Monthly Native Servants," 13 June 1856.
19. "A Visit to Springfield," *Monthly Native Servant*, 27 June 1855.
20. Lead Article, "Monthly Native Servants," 21 September 1855.
21. "The Labour Question," "Monthly Native Servants," 5 October 1855.
22. *Blue Book for the Colony of Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: Government Printer, 1880), section JJ, p. 101.
23. Robert L. Hutchins, ed., *Statutes of Natal, 1845–1899*, II (Pietermaritzburg: Davis and Sons, 1901).

24. George Russell, *The History of Old Durban and Reminiscences of an Emigrant of 1850* (Durban: Davis, 1899), p. 130.

25. Samuelson, *Long, Long Ago*, pp. 45–46, 413-19.

26. Russell, *The History of Old Durban*, p. 495

27. "Uniformity of Time," *Monthly Native Servant*, 17 March 1853; Russell, *The History of Old Durban*, p. 436.

28. Bryant, *The Zulu People*, p. 256.

29. Methodist Missionary Society, University of London, School for Oriental and African Studies, File 317; extracts from the journal of Reverend Joseph Jackson, 7 January 1861.

30. United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, London, Walter Baugh to E. Hawkins, 8 May 1859.

31. Ibid., 10 October 1860.

32. Russell, *The History of Old Durban*, pp. 128–29.

33. J. Forsyth Ingram, *The Colony of Natal* (London: J. Casnton, 1895), p. 91; John McIntyre, "From Settlement to City," in *Durban Past and Present*, ed. Allister Macmillan (Durban: William Brown, 1936 [1930]), p. 51.

34. Russell, *The History of Old Durban*, p. 286.

35. *Life at Natal a Hundred Years Ago, by a Lady* (Cape Town: Struik, 1972), pp. 78, 127.

36. *Natal Advertiser* (Durban), 9 May 1893.

37. "Labour Demands," "Monthly Native Servants," 26 November 1895.

38. "Native Labour: Employers Taking Action," "Monthly Native Servants," 11 July 1902.

39. Russell, *The History of Old Durban*, p. 495.

8

Time and History among a Maroon People: The Aluku

Kenneth M. Bilby

> There is a reciprocal relation between time and history. For, just as our idea of history is based on that of time, so time as we conceive it is a consequence of our history.
>
> — G. J. Whitrow[1]

In the past few decades, scholarship on the Black experience in the Americas has done much to dispel old myths. Our knowledge of the many ways in which Africans and their descendants resisted bondage continues to grow. Marronage, or flight from slavery, occurred throughout the Western hemisphere, in many cases leading to the founding of autonomous communities in remote areas on the margins of plantation zones. In only a handful of countries, however, did these Afro-American societies, founded by rebel slaves, survive into the twentieth century as distinct communities.[2]

The largest and least acculturated of the Maroon groups existing today are those descended from slaves who escaped from Surinamese coastal plantations during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and joined together to form new societies in the rain forests of the Guianese interior. After a period of protracted warfare, several of these groups signed treaties of peace with the Dutch colonial government. Today there are six Guianese Maroon "tribes" or ethnic groups: the Saramaka, Ndjuka, Matawai, Paramaka, and Kwinti — all of whom live in Suriname — and

the Aluku (also known as "Boni"), the majority of whom live on the French side of the Maroni River, which forms the border between Suriname and French Guiana.[3]

The Guianese Maroon peoples (also known as "Bush Negroes") have long been characterized as "tribal societies," because they are divided into corporate matrilineages and/or clans and practice subsistence economies based on shifting cultivation, hunting, and fishing. However, this "tribal" designation had other connotations as well. For one thing, the sociocultural systems developed by the Maroons' ancestors in the relative isolation of the forest — their material culture, religion, arts, dress, and social and political organization, which drew heavily upon African cultural principles — were easily misinterpreted to fit Western images of "primitiveness" and "Africanness." In keeping with such images, Maroons, like their "tribal" counterparts on the other side of the ocean, were often depicted as if their societies were frozen in time.

A corollary to the idea that their African ancestors had been little influenced by plantation society before escaping into the forest was the notion that they had taken advantage of their newfound freedom to recreate a "little Africa" in the South American wilderness, a timeless replica of "African tribal life" as it had once existed on another continent. For many years, the prevailing view among Western anthropologists, particularly after the triumph of structural-functionalist paradigms, was that most "traditional" African societies derived their sense of time primarily from the repetitive rhythms of nature and the regularities of social life and, thus, were devoid of historical consciousness. To the extent that they had succeeded in transferring a timeless "African" type of social structure to a new continent intact, the Guiana Maroons, presumably, could not be endowed with much of a sense of the past.

Even such an historically minded anthropologist as Melville Herskovits managed on occasion (1934, p. xii) to convey the impression that his Suriname Maroon contemporaries were, if not out of time, then of another time: "The importance of the Bush Negroes for the student of Negro cultures . . . is that they live and think today as did their ancestors who established themselves in this bush." Anthropologists have not been alone in thinking in such terms. Two more recent North American visitors to Suriname, writing of their voyage of personal discovery, also found themselves lifting the Maroons out of time, freezing them, as it were, in another era. Summing up their journey, they expressed the hope that their essay "has given readers the experience of stepping back in time with us, visiting the only blacks in this hemisphere who have

remained so close to the African ways of their ancestors who first stepped off the slave ships some three hundred years ago."[4]

It is the aim of this chapter to steer away from such imaginary feats of time travel and to examine the question of how Maroons themselves — particularly those known as the Aluku — regard time and their place in it.[5]

VARIETIES OF CULTURAL TIME: TWO PRIMARY MODES

A recurrent theme that crops up in anthropological writings about time is the opposition between "cyclical" and "linear" conceptions of time. Certain societies, particularly those categorized as "non-Western," "preliterate," "nonliterate," or "primitive" (as well as "archaic" European ones), are often assumed to have lacked the "linear" sense of time prevailing in modern industrial and postindustrial societies. Without the benefit of writing or the complex mechanical devices that make possible abstract chronological time measurement and the synchronization and control of large-scale labor forces, such societies, it is thought, could not have developed a truly linear sense of history embracing past, present, and future. In these societies, where time was presumably reckoned and marked largely with reference to ecological and social patterns — the alternation between night and day, the unchanging trajectories of the celestial bodies, the repeating seasons (to which agricultural practices were closely linked), the daily round, and the regular observance of ceremonial rites — consciousness was indelibly stamped with a "cyclical" sense of time.[6] Only in "Western civilization," according to this view, did a linear sense of time, and with it historical consciousness, come to predominate. With conquest and colonization, this sense of time and history then spread to other parts of the world.

After scanning a sampling of cross-cultural literature, one student of time summed up this opposition as follows: "Linear time is one of the possible forms of social time which has prevailed, as the sole system of calculation, in the European cultural region only."[7] A critic of contemporary society, following a similar line of thought, recently came to the curious conclusion that the first glimmerings of historical consciousness, as we know it, appeared with "the rise of the Jewish state in 2000 B.C.":

> The Jews helped create the concept of history, thus ushering in one of the greatest advances in human consciousness since the beginning of time. . . . The Jews weakened the cyclical time frame of eternal return with the introduction of the linear time frame

of history. In so doing, they began the process of separating human consciousness and culture from the periodicities of the natural world.[8]

Even as most of Europe inherited this "Judeo-Christian time sense," there remained large numbers of people in the twentieth century — among them, those often categorized as "primitives" — who, if their ethnographers are to be trusted, never acquired a linear sense of time. Evans-Pritchard's (1940) elegant discussion of time reckoning among the Nuer — probably the most frequently quoted piece of ethnographic description in writings comparing "primitive" and other perceptions of time — leaves little doubt as to the cyclical and static nature of time as they perceive it. For the Nuer, time is both ecological and social, a function of natural rhythms and social activities. Viewed from a broader perspective, time is a reflection of social structure. "Beyond the annual cycle, time-reckoning is a conceptualization of the social structure, and the points of reference are a projection into the past of actual relations between groups of persons." Nuer time, thus, is ahistorical. It is "not a continuum, but is a constant structural relationship between two points, the first and last persons in a line of agnatic descent." Like the lineages and age-sets that constitute Nuer social structure, "the Nuer time dimension is shallow" (1940, p. 108).[9]

Whatever the degree of accuracy of this portrayal, with its emphasis on cycles and stasis, there is little or no justification for generalizing from it to other lineage-based African societies, which range from small-scale horticultural peoples to complex states. Nor does it shed much light on perceptions of time among the Aluku Maroons, although they, too, are organized into a system of relatively stable descent groups of limited genealogical depth and practice a horticultural economy linked to cyclical seasonal variations.[10]

INDICATORS OF TIME CONSCIOUSNESS AMONG THE ALUKU

Like English speakers, and unlike many other societies, the Aluku possess a noun denoting the general concept of indefinite, continuous duration. This word, *ten*, similar in meaning to English "time," is in fact derived from the latter. It can refer both to abstract time and to specific periods or moments. Like its English equivalent, it sometimes occurs in expressions that make it seem as if it had an independent existence of its own. Utterances such as the following, for example, are by no means uncommon among the Aluku: *ten e gwe* ("time is moving along"); *i mu*

abi fulu ten fu du a sani de ("you've got to have a lot of time in order to do that"); *i e poli mi ten* ("you're wasting my time"); *ten no de* ("there's not enough time" [literally, "there's no time"]); or *ten de ete* ("there's still time"). One may speak of time as having a length, as being "short" (*a ten satu*) or "long" (*a ten langa*). The best way to render the English expression "a while" in Aluku is with the common idiomatic form *wan pisi ten* (literally, "a piece" or "segment" of time). Although there does exist a word, *safisafi*, that could be glossed as "slowly," the most common way of expressing this concept in Aluku is with the phrase *anga ten* (literally, "with time"). Another word derived from English *time* is *te*, which, depending on context, can mean either "when" or "until." The expression *fu te go* can be translated as either "continually" or "forever." Unlike its English etymon, Aluku *ten* has an exclusively durational sense, while "time" in the sense of a recurring action, event, or occasion is expressed with the words *toon*, *leisi*, *boo*, or *pasi*, as in *omen toon (leisi/boo/pasi) a du en*? ("how many times did she do it?"). The Aluku language, thus, contains a clear conceptual distinction between relations of duration and relations of repetition, embodied in *ten* versus *toon*. The more abstract terms in the Aluku vocabulary of time — such as *bifo* ("before"), *nou* or *noya* ("now"), *baka* ("after"), and *baka ten* ("afterwards," "later") — are concerned with sequential relations between unique events, relations belonging to the durational realm of *ten*. However, there are many other terms corresponding to concrete, recurring natural phenomena, such as *dei* ("day"), *neti* ("night"), *mun* ("lunar month"), or *yali* ("year").

It is easy to see from these examples that much of the Aluku lexicon of time, like its more general vocabulary, is derived from Indo-European languages and, especially, from English. The following list of time-related words illustrates this even more clearly: *yuu* ("time," "moment," from Dutch *uur* ["hour"]); *wiki* ("week," from either English or Dutch *week*); *mamanten* ("morning," from *morning time*); *bakadina* and *sapaten* (both meaning "afternoon," from *back* + *dinner* and from *supper time*, respectively); *eside* ("yesterday," from *yesterday*); *tide* ("today," from *today*); *tamaa* ("tomorrow," from *tomorrow*). The terms *bifo*, *nou*, *dei*, *neti*, and *mun* (mentioned in the above paragraph) are all obviously derived from English, while *yali* is derived from Dutch *jaar* ("year").

Nonetheless, one should be careful not to make the assumption that these Aluku words and their European etyma encompass the same semantic fields. For instance, except for the minority of younger Aluku who have learned to tell time with clocks and watches, the term *yuu*, though derived from the Dutch word meaning "hour," never designates

a definite length of time, and certainly not an hour. Unlike Dutch *uur*, it is used to refer either to a particular moment coinciding with a specific event (regardless of its duration) or to an indefinite period of time associated with an ongoing condition (sometimes being combined with the word *ten*, as in *a yuu ten de*, meaning "at that time"). As is true of other creole languages, the meanings of many of the European-derived items in the Aluku lexicon, including those tied to temporal phenomena, have been thoroughly transformed by the process of creolization. The evidence suggests that as often as not, Africans learning new languages in the New World used borrowed items of vocabulary to embody their own categories of thought.[11] There are, thus, no grounds for assuming that Aluku concepts of time are derived from the cultures or languages of the Europeans their African ancestors encountered on the slave plantations of coastal Suriname more than two centuries ago.

CYCLES IN ALUKU LIFE

Although the Aluku have no difficulty thinking of time as a kind of continuum, they are not strangers to cyclical concepts of time. The smallest units of repetitive time are *dei* ("day") and *neti* ("night"), which are, of course, defined by the rising and setting of the sun (although *dei* can also refer to the entire period from one dawn to the next). With the exception of solar and lunar cycles, the Aluku make scant use of astronomical phenomena in reckoning time. In fact, so far as I was able to determine, they have names in their language for only three celestial objects or configurations other than the sun and moon: *dei sitali* (the "day star," Venus), *sebitaa* (the Pleiades), and *ontiman* ("the hunter," a constellation composed of the three stars that Europeans know as "Orion's belt"). *Dei sitali* is thought of as a harbinger of dawn and is sometimes used (like cockcrow) as a marker for starting predawn (*musude*) preparations of various kinds. On the other hand, *sebitaa*, as we shall see in a moment, is thought to be associated with certain seasonal fluctuations.

The Aluku calendar reflects the natural seasonal cycle to which their horticultural economy is closely tied. In the Guianese interior, the year is divided into two primary seasons, the dry season (*dee ten*), generally beginning during July and ending in October or November, and the rainy season (*alen ten*), spanning the rest of the year; there is, however, a "short dry season" (*pikin dee ten*) in the middle of the rainy season, usually lasting a month or more and peaking in March. The reckoning of seasonal time is of great importance, for a number of reasons.

The slash-and-burn horticulture practiced by the Aluku is closely keyed to seasonal changes. Cutting of the forest must begin toward the close of the rainy season or soon after, to allow time enough for thorough drying out and burning. Inadequate burning results in a great deal of onerous additional labor, because clearing then has to be finished by hand. Moreover, if one miscalculates and does not complete burning before the onset of the coming rains, then the garden will remain uncultivable for the rest of the year. To complicate matters, transitions between seasons are not entirely predictable, varying slightly in length from year to year, and the margin of error permitted cultivators is relatively small.

The traditional Aluku calendar is linked to several important environmental cues, which help cultivators position themselves within the cycle of seasons. The 12 "months" (*mun*) recognized by the Aluku are based on lunations rather than on the solar months of Western calendars. They are as follows:

1. *Wan-Mun-Fu-Baka-Yali* ("First-Month-after-New-Year's")
2. *Tu-Mun-Fu-Baka-Yali* ("Second-Month-after-New-Year's")
3. *Pikin-Dee-Ten* ("Small-Dry-Season")
4. *Sebitaa* ("Pleiades")
5. *Diikoniki* (no translation available)
6. *Sibi-Busi* ("Sweeps-the-Forest")
7. *Tan-Fuu-Wata* ("Still-High-Water")
8. *Aiti-Mun* ("Eighth-Month")
9. *Neigi-Mun* ("Ninth-Month")
10. *Tini-Mun* ("Tenth-Month")
11. *Elufu-Mun* ("Eleventh-Month")
12. *Twalufu-Mun* ("Twelfth-Month")

Four of the five months that have distinct names (as opposed to mere ordinal designations) refer to concrete natural phenomena with which they are supposed to coincide. The third month, *Pikin-Dee-Ten* ("Small-Dry-Season"), is self-explanatory. The next month, *Sebitaa*, roughly corresponding to April, is named after the constellation the Pleiades, which the Aluku say should be on the verge of the horizon at this time. (I was unable to locate any Aluku who knew the meaning of *Diikoniki*, the name of the fifth month.) *Sibi-Busi* ("Sweeps-the-Forest") is a reference to the final heavy showers that are said to sweep over the forest floor toward the end of the rainy season. *Tan-Fuu-Wata* ("Still-High-Water") alludes to the transitional time when the rains begin to slacken

but the level of the river (which fluctuates greatly over the year) remains high. These named months serve as natural signposts, ushering in the time when the critical horticultural tasks outlined above must be planned and undertaken. There is one other month that, although unnamed, carries an explicit association with a recurring natural phenomenon. This is *Neigi-Mun*, which is often characterized as *te gwana meki* ("when iguanas lay their eggs").[12] This ecologically marked month and the one that follows, *Tini-Mun* (known as the time "when iguana eggs hatch"), alert cultivators to the approach of the rainy season and remind them that this may be the last chance to complete the necessary preparations.

After gardens have been cleared and burned, planting may begin. Various crops are planted, tended, and harvested at different points in the annual cycle — another way in which horticultural demands impose a certain cyclical regularity upon economic life. Not only horticulture but also certain other basic economic activities, such as fishing and gathering, are intimately tied to recurring ecological changes. For instance, during the height of the dry season, when the water level is at its lowest, parties go out to add a vegetal intoxicant called *neko* to portions of the main river, fishing with their hands for *waawaa* (*Hypostomus* sp.) or with bows and arrows for *koomata* (*Prochilodus* sp.), major sources of protein. When the rainy season comes and the water rises, the focus shifts to the abundance of *koomata* then to be found in the small creeks that feed the main river. The several varieties of palm trees, both cultivated and wild, that furnish an important contribution to the Aluku diet bear fruit seasonally as well.

To keep track of the passing moons, the Aluku traditionally do not count days, and there is no notion of a standard number of days a month should have. Although they have a seven-day week, derived in part from the Surinamese plantation regime from which their ancestors escaped (and later modified to fit the demands of coastal wage work), the week has no connection with the horticultural cycle. Weeks are not counted, and months are not thought of as having a set number of weeks. In making horticultural decisions, attention is directed, rather, to observable lunar phases. The waning of the moon is particularly significant as a marker separating old and new months, and there is a special idiom in Aluku used to describe this phase (*a mun e nyan sapa*), the original meaning of which appears to have been lost. When the moon "dies" (*dede*) — when it is no longer visible — that month is considered to have ended. Only when the new moon appears in the sky do people acknowledge the arrival of another month.

This system of calendrical reckoning requires a certain degree of flexibility when applied over extended periods. The one Aluku ceremonial event that is linked to calendrical time — the annual celebration of the New Year, known as *Yali* — is always made to coincide with the January 1 celebrations that take place in coastal French Guiana and in neighboring Suriname. Because the lunations observed by the Aluku (unlike the adjusted months of the Western calendar) do not correspond precisely to the solar year, they eventually fall out of step with both the cycle of seasons and the Western calendar. Not surprisingly, some older Aluku state that in the past, before the French calendar was brought to their territory, there was sometimes a lack of consensus about exactly which moon was currently in the sky, particularly as the new year approached.

Writing of the Saramaka Maroons of Suriname, Richard Price (1984, p. 66) argues persuasively that their calendar, which has 12 months and is very similar to the Aluku one, once consisted of only five seasonally marked lunar months, that is, the five moons used to order horticultural activities. In this system, moons took on significance only when horticulturally relevant seasonal changes began to occur. With these first changes, the moon currently in the sky would be defined and labeled accordingly, and the succession of moons thereafter would be used by cultivators to gauge their progress in the horticultural cycle. Conversely, little attention would be paid to lunations during the rest of the year, when the critical points in the annual cycle were past. Price surmises that later attempts to match this rather loose system of calendrical reckoning to the 12 months of the Western calendar led to the creation of several new "months" (whose names, tellingly, indicated numerical order rather than alluding to seasonal events). This inevitably brought intercalation problems, and the Saramaka today continue to resolve the discrepancies between the two systems through negotiation and occasional readjustment of their calendar (sometimes "repeating" a month, as necessary).[13] Much the same process seems to have shaped the modern Aluku calendar, and similar problems of intercalation arise whenever those who stick to the traditional system find themselves falling out of step with the "official" calendar that governs French administrative activities. Nonetheless, cultivators continue to rely upon those moons that coincide with (and are named after) important seasonal changes as a rough index of their position within the annual horticultural cycle. Toward the end of the year, once the most important moons are past, the Aluku calendar is automatically brought back into line with the Western one with the arrival of the January 1 festivities.

In spite of recent modifications stemming from contact with the coastal society, Aluku calendrical reckoning clearly remains closely tied to the ecological and horticultural cycles upon which domestic production depends. In this respect at least, time in the Aluku experience may be said to have an important cyclical component.

The question remains: to what extent does this cyclical component pervade Aluku life more generally? As we earlier saw, the Aluku vocabulary of time lends little support to the idea that perceptions of time in this society are unable to escape the bonds of cyclical thought. It is true that the subsistence process is geared to a cycle of seasons that relentlessly repeats itself year after year, but whether the Aluku sense of time is fundamentally determined by recurring natural phenomena or cycles of production is certainly open to question.

A society's temporal orientation is usually reflected in, and, in turn, informed by, religious concepts and ritual practice. Among the Aluku we find little evidence of religious activities that occur with cyclical regularity. There is no ceremonial calendar to speak of; rites that recur on a regular, predictable basis are few and far between. The closest thing to a fixed calendrical ceremonial observance is the loosely organized annual celebration known as *Yali*, which involves feasting, intervillage visiting, and formal prayers and offerings to the ancestors for their role in helping the living safely "cross over" from one year to the next.[14] Whereas *Yali* once lasted eight days, it is now limited to only one or two, beginning on January 1, in conjunction with the coastal celebrations (though the festive spirit lingers in the air for some days thereafter). Although *Yali* is a relatively important event, it pales in comparison to the other major Aluku rites, such as *booko dei* and *puu baaka*, to which we shall return in a moment. There is also Christmas Day, known as *Bedaki*, which is a minor occasion for merrymaking; it, too, is keyed to the coastal calendar but, unlike *Yali*, is almost totally lacking in religious significance.

These two events practically exhaust the gamut of fixed, recurring ceremonies in Aluku. There are, however, a few other tenuous links between horticultural activities and recurring religious observances. For example, the main fertility deity, Ma Goon, is honored every few years with a *papa gadu* ceremony (a dance for the snake gods she oversees) at her shrine in the village of Agoode. Although these rites are sometimes planned to coincide with *Yali*, they are often held several months earlier, just before cultivators begin clearing their gardens. The only other examples of temporally fixed religious observances are those associated with *kina dei* (literally, "taboo days"), particular "rest days" on which

horticultural labor is proscribed. There is only one *kina dei* in Aluku that is near-universally observed: Friday (*Feeda*, a word that may represent a convergence of either the Dutch *Vrijdag* or the Akan *Fiada*, both meaning "Friday"). This is the day on which the ancestral founding hero Tata Boni and some of the other ancestors are said to have escaped into the forest. *Feeda* also has a special association with Tata Odun, the most important Aluku deity, who is believed to have traveled from Africa along with the ancestors and to have guided them safely upriver during their flight from the coastal slave plantations. Divination with Odun's oracles is ideally (though not exclusively) undertaken on Fridays. While it is permissible to engage in *bakaa wooko* ("labor for coastal people/outsiders") on this day, one must not work the land, build boats, cut firewood, pound cassava or rice, or do anything else that "shakes the ground." It is interesting to note, once again, the possible Akan connection, because farm work and major activities are prohibited on the Akan ceremonial day of *Awukudae*, which is celebrated on Wednesdays (*Wukuada*, that is, "*Wuku*'s day").

Ma Goon, who bestows fertility over the entire Aluku territory, is also said to have her own *kina dei*. Although horticultural labor was once strictly prohibited on Ma Goon's day, this injunction is seldom observed nowadays, and there is even some disagreement as to which day it is (some claiming Wednesday [*Dii Dei Wooko*], and others, Saturday [*Sata*]). There is also a large number of more specific *kina dei* tied to various localized *goon gadu*, minor earth deities that are scattered over the Aluku territory, each of which guards over its own small section of land.[15] Cultivators generally make offerings only to their own local *goon gadu*, each of which has its own *kina dei*, paying little attention to those in other areas. Thus, two cultivators with adjoining horticultural camps (*kampu*) may pray to different *goon gadu* and observe different *kina dei*. It is easy to see that this aspect of the religious system does little to help synchronize Aluku society as a whole with the seasonal fluctuations that govern patterns of cultivation. If anything, it has the opposite effect, fragmenting that portion of ceremonial life directly tied to horticultural production into a series of local, semiprivate observances divorced from natural cycles.

In fact, it can be said that the cosmological landscape as a whole contains few hints of cyclical regularity, aside from the isolated instances briefly described above. Indeed, the major rites of Aluku life contrast strikingly with these few examples and imply a conception of time that one could hardly describe as "cyclical."

The most important rites in Aluku life — those associated with death — are unattached to the calendar and occur at unpredictable intervals.[16]

It is apparent to even a casual observer that much of what occurs during these ceremonies and the periods leading up to them is highly patterned and predictable. Throughout the period following a death, much emphasis is placed on the performance of a number of set ritual routines, which are supposed to be adhered to down to the most minute details. By means of these activities, which are spread out over a year or more, the deceased is eased from the world of the living into that of the deceased ancestors.

For the purposes of this discussion, what makes these funeral ceremonies particularly interesting is that they are divorced from the natural cycles described above and occur at irregular intervals. Equally importantly, they are triggered by unique events (individual deaths) and are concerned largely with determining and addressing their unique causes through divination. In summary, these ceremonies provide a forum for the ongoing negotiation and interpretation of the present in terms of the remembered past and, in the process, help to situate unique events within a broader causal framework extending back into this past.

EVENTFUL TIME, EVENTFUL HISTORY

The evidence thus far presented would seem to suggest that the Aluku, though possessing cyclical concepts of time, live in a social world in which time is progressive and event-centered. Religious life and cosmology are focused more on unique and irreversible series of occurrences — what we might call "historical events" — than on recurring regularities. The question may then be raised: do the Aluku possess a truly linear concept of time and thus "genuine" historical consciousness in the Western sense?

Richard Price's work with the Saramaka Maroons of neighboring Suriname, which spans more than two decades, leaves little doubt as to the presence of historical thought among this closely related people. As among the Aluku, "Saramaka ritual was (and remains today) event-triggered, rather than calendrically regulated. That is, rites were performed when misfortunes or other unusual events required divination, which, in turn, prescribed particular rites," he emphasizes (1990a, p. 322). Elsewhere (1992, p. 11) he states that given their event-centered religious life, it is not surprising that "Saramakas display a strongly linear, causal sense of history" and provides this detailed description of Saramaka historical consciousness (1990a, p. 286):

Saramakas have from the first been specially attuned to living *in* history, both sharply aware that their own lives have been affected by the actions of others in the past and conscious of their own accountability toward their descendants. Likewise, their physical world, within which time unfolds, has always been highly particularized and personalized. To a remarkable degree, events are catalogued, recorded, and remembered through their associations with particular sites; geography in Saramaka becomes a major repository of historical traditions.

Anthropologists who have worked with other Surinamese Maroon societies all seem to concur on this point. H.U.E. Thoden van Velzen and W. van Wetering, ethnographers of the Ndjuka Maroons, write (1988, p. vii) that "all Ndjukas in a sense are historians: they feel that the past is important for an understanding of the present." Of the Matawai Maroons, Edward Green (1974, p. 42) states that "Matawais have a keen sense of history — that is, of the importance of past events." For the Paramaka Maroons, on the other hand, knowledge of history, according to John Lenoir (1973, pp. 59–60), "is a currency of prestige." The Aluku are no exception, according to Thomas Price (1970, p. 64), who affirms that they have a "strong sense of ethnohistory."

My own work leads me to similar conclusions: that the Aluku are well-endowed with historical consciousness and think about time essentially in a linear (or at least "progressive") way. Although they do not quantify and measure time so as to fashion abstract chronologies, they are, nonetheless, acutely aware of being situated in historical time. For them, social time is a sequence of significant events embracing past and present and presupposing a future.

It is often thought that more or less precise measurement — the ability to pinpoint specific occurrences with reference to evenly distributed points on an abstract scale — is a prerequisite for linear concepts of time. This assumption is questionable. A progressive sense of history, I would contend, requires only social memory (which in any society, literate or not, is always selective and interpretive) and a conceptual emphasis on irreversible causal linkages.[17] The absolute ordering of recorded events with reference to standardized systems of time-keeping, as in the Western historiographic tradition, is but one manifestation of linear concepts, not a necessary precondition for them. Aluku systems of divination entail a notion of linear time, in which past and present (and presumably future) events are causally linked. This is particularly true of divinations involving *kunu*, the "avenging spirits" that afflict every Aluku clan and leave a long trail of illnesses and misfortunes in their wake. Yet, people in this society do not need to know, for example, the

exact "time" (such as a "date" or a "year") that a *kunu* first appeared or made subsequent attacks. At most, they may find it convenient to associate certain highlights of a *kunu* account with other socially relevant events or periods, such as "the time when Ma Akuba was pregnant with Ba Kofi." This lack of precision does not make the concept of time inherent in *kunu* ideology any less "progressive."

As this example indicates, events within recent memory are sometimes temporally situated with reference to specific contemporaneous events or periods. A man, for instance, once offered to me the information that a particular tremor of the earth occurred during his grandmother's time. Similarly, several people informed me that the splitting off of a certain clan segment and its move to another village took place about the same time that a particular tree was planted. To take yet another example, I was told that the formal withdrawal of the rule of clan exogamy that once applied to members of the Dipelu clan went into effect during the era of a particular chief. (Indeed, the terms of past *gaanman*, or paramount chiefs, are often used to locate important events in time). The farther back in time one goes, however, the fewer the events and details remembered and the less certain the knowledge of the relative order in which they and other events occurred. Nevertheless, all events — even the immense reservoir of bygone occurrences that have presumably been forgotten and forever lost to human memory — are conceptualized as having occupied unique historical moments located at a greater or lesser distance from the present. These moments never recur. Time so conceived is like a chain — an imperfect continuum — connecting past, present, and future events. If this continuum — or rather, collective knowledge of its constituent events — contains many more gaps than known linkages (as is also true of Western "linear history"), it is nonetheless a kind of continuum. The Aluku case shows that time need not be absolutely fixed and "objectively" recorded and measured nor need it be absolutely continuous in order to be conceptualized as "linear," "progressive," and "irreversible."[18]

Nor is historical consciousness necessarily dependent upon exact chronological reckoning. Like other Maroons, the Aluku display a profound awareness of being the products of a unique history. It matters little that those who pass this history on cannot say exactly when — how many years or centuries ago — the events they describe occurred, nor does it matter that there are tremendous gaps in knowledge about the indeterminate stretches of time separating significant events. What matters is that these events are believed actually to have happened (and are seen as being sequentially and causally related to other remembered

events) and that they continue to resonate with the present. They belong to the same "real" world as those who recount them, only to an earlier time.

Aluku oral traditions clearly display historical consciousness.[19] Their narratives about the past are not temporally flat and certainly cannot be considered timeless mythic constructions.[20] Like the following text, which recounts a series of events that took place some two centuries ago, they tend to move forward in time, evincing a clear linear progression.

When they [the Aluku ancestors] first left the coast, they came on foot. When they came to the Galibi area, they saw the Indians. They beat the Indians, and took their boats. Then they crossed over to the French side. That's why you see the Aluku have remained Frenchmen.

They continued, kept on going, kept on going, until they made a village. You know the place they call Bonidoo? They made a village there. They had made other ones, on the way, before they arrived there. But they stayed there a long time. They were there until, finally, they said, "let's leave again, they'll come after us." When they left there, they came to the place they call Salua. Have you heard of the place they call Lokaloka, in the Paramaka territory? The Aluku called it "Salua" — a creek there, on the French side. They made a big village there, all of the clans together. Then they left again, and came to Ampoma . . . there's a rapids there that they call Ampoma, after you've passed the Paramaka area. They made a village there that they called Poku Tabiki. When they left there, they made another village at Gaan Daai. We call this place Pampu Goon. Gaan Daai is a rapids. They made another village there. When they cleared the place at Gaan Daai, they planted pumpkins. Then they made a village there. They planted pumpkins. They had brought seeds with them. Then the pumpkins matured. That's why they called it Pampu Goon ["Pumpkin Field"], because the pumpkins grew abundantly. So they were staying there.

They left for Ndjuka, to go fight with Pambu [the Ndjuka paramount chief]. A *bakaa*, a Dutch white man, had come. He had gone to the Ndjuka, to make peace again, saying that they wouldn't fight any more. Everything [among the Aluku] was finished. That's why they had come back [to fight the Ndjuka]. I shouldn't have told you these things! [That is, because they're secret.] But we're into it already.

So, Boni [a great warrior and founding hero] was staying there. He would take those of his men that he knew would do things. Then he would go to fight the Ndjuka. The *bakaa* had gone to make peace [with the Ndjuka]. So the Ndjuka had salt, they had kerosene, they had machetes, they had everything. Because they had already made peace. Then, when they were at Poku Tabiki, while they were moving, the Aluku didn't have anything at all any more. They came upriver. So they were there, fighting, fighting, killing Ndjukas, killing Ndjukas, killing Ndjukas, taking their food, taking their machetes, their axes, various things, until, finally, they left. Then they went upriver, near Maripasoula. Then they left again, and went to another river they call Gaan Maawina. They made more villages there. I don't know the village names. The one I

know, they called Boon Konde. I don't know the other ones, because there were many groups. Then the Ndjuka came to meet them there. They fought. Because they [the Aluku] had earlier gone to fight with them. They [Ndjuka] went there many times to fight against them. The Ndjuka really came! They fought. Then there was another one of my Dipelu ancestors [that is, a member of the Dipelu clan], who was called Akese. He was the one who turned around the fight. He turned around the fight. He killed all the Ndjukas, until only seven were left to go back downriver. They had come in three big boats. They were sitting two-by-two, and the boats were completely full. He kept killing them until they turned back and went downriver. When they got to the area around Maripasoula, he came and cornered them again. He fought with them again, until only three were left. There were only three left, who found their way back to Ndjuka. That's how the story goes.[21]

Several of the characters, place names, and events mentioned in this text also appear in eighteenth-century Dutch colonial documents preserved in archives in Paramaribo and the Netherlands. The latter part of the text deals with events — conflicts between the Aluku and the Dutch-allied Ndjuka — that can be pinpointed to the early 1790s.[22] Interestingly enough, the archival documents that describe the same period, consisting mostly of Dutch colonial correspondence and military journals, agree in many respects with the Aluku oral account presented above, although the order of events sometimes differs slightly.

If anything, time in the above narrative might be likened to a river, flowing perpetually in one direction, never to reverse its course — a metaphor which, ironically, has often been used to evoke Western linear concepts of time. However, the reference here is not entirely metaphorical, for the narrator traces the flight and progressive trek of the Aluku ancestors, village by village, up a literal river, the upper reaches of which their descendants still inhabit. Until a few decades ago, this river (and its immediate environs) was the only world most Aluku knew. Inscribed in its linear geography is a temporal and cosmological order and orientation inextricably bound up with the historical process of ethnogenesis through which the Aluku emerged as a people. It is in this sense that the Aluku case would seem to bear out G. J. Whitrow's (1988, p. 186) assertion that "time as we conceive it is a consequence of our history."

CONCLUSION

Like other Surinamese Maroon societies, the Aluku had their origins in the context of, and in opposition to, a system of plantation slavery

created by a European colonial power. The Surinamese plantations, as focal points of capitalist production in a Dutch colony, clearly were shaped by Western temporal logic. When confronted with the apparent linearity of Aluku concepts of time and history, one might, therefore, be tempted to discount them as mere derivative concepts — essentially Western notions —molded by the European-dominated world to which the Aluku have belonged since their inception. Yet, the Alukus' ancestors opted to withdraw from this world early on, allowing them to develop their society apart, in the relative isolation of the forest. As a result, until very recently, and to a large extent even now, the Aluku — by virtue of their small scale, their economy, material culture, and social and political organization — clearly fit the criteria according to which Westerners have typically categorized others as "primitives."

In a sense, what we have here is a sort of limiting case indicating that even in technologically simple, small-scale societies, concepts of time and history need not be entirely, or even primarily, dependent on natural rhythms, human ecology, social structure, or technological capability. In coming to this conclusion, I do not mean to call into question the general validity of drawing distinctions, as many anthropologists have done, between the dominant time concepts in complex, literate, and industrialized societies and those predominating in other kinds of societies. However, in doing so, one must be careful to avoid making these distinctions too sharp or absolute. Furthermore, one should exercise caution in extrapolating from these distinctions to more general conclusions about cognitive differences. The hasty denial of valued modes of thought such as "historical consciousness" to large segments of humanity (or the narrow definition of such consciousness in such a way that these others are automatically excluded) comes dangerously close to reproducing the colonial fiction that has long relegated the colonized "other" to the realm of the "historyless."

Three centuries ago, the society, language, and cultural identity known today as "Aluku" quite simply did not exist. Although their culture owes a great deal to Africa, it was in the Guianese forests that the Aluku emerged, rather abruptly, as a people. It is highly significant that, unlike most peoples, the Aluku have a clear idea of a series of specific historical events that constituted their beginnings as a society. They continue to define themselves with reference to the watershed period during which these events took place.[23] Implicit in their ethnic identity, thus, is a time span stretching from the first days on the coastal plantations to the present. Also implicit in this identity is an awareness of discontinuity and irreversible change over time — discontinuity because the first days

were preceded by a time, before the ancestors arrived in Suriname, when the Aluku as such did not exist, and irreversible change because the Aluku ancestors forged a new common culture through a process of creolization or acculturation that, in the early days at least, resulted in clear cultural differences across generations. (An apparent reference to this historical process survives in the Aluku word *kioo*, derived from the word *creole*, which is still used to refer to members of the younger generation.) It would be hard to reconcile a predominantly cyclical view of time with the irreversible series of changes this process of creolization implies.

It is clear that Aluku concepts of time and history have been fundamentally shaped by historical experience. It is much less clear how much these concepts might owe to abstract cultural principles brought to Suriname from Africa by the Aluku ancestors. Many fundamental aspects of cosmology and religious practice in this society — the ancestral presence, the use of divination, and the particular forms it takes — are obviously African-derived. The ideas about causality embodied in Aluku systems of divination undoubtedly have African antecedents, and the kinds of complex linkages between events that they entail would seem to be fully compatible with the Aluku conceptualization of historical time as a chain of unique occurrences linking the present with an ultimate past. However, the question of the degree to which African concepts of time have survived in Afro-Surinamese (or other Afro-American) cultures along with other aspects of cosmology is an extremely complex one, which cannot be answered without further research.

In any case, the present investigation suggests that the Aluku, in their temporal orientation as in other spheres, share much with other African-Americans. Throughout the New World, when people of African descent look back, they are faced with a unique sort of historical watershed, a temporal "ceiling," a clear and abrupt "beginning" of a kind that no other Americans share. Cataclysmic dislocation, forced transportation to a new continent, and enslavement combine to form a well-defined initial point of reference against which subsequent events and the present can be viewed and interpreted. The fundamental question of ethnic identity itself turns upon this pivotal point of reference, which makes it possible to emphasize either the "before" or the "after" — historical and cultural links with Africa on the one hand or the creative construction of new social and cultural forms in the Americas on the other. This dual identification presupposes a strong sense of history in which the present is always counterposed to a receding dividing point in time. It is a sense of

history that the Aluku, who are among the most culturally African of all African-Americans, would seem in their own unique way to exemplify.

NOTES

1. G. J. Whitrow, *Time in History: Views of Time from Prehistory to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 186.

2. Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies: Rebel Communities in the Americas* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990 [1973]).

3. This study is based on 33 months of fieldwork among the Aluku Maroons in French Guiana, carried out between 1983 and 1987. This research was funded by the Fulbright-Hays fellowship program, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, and the National Science Foundation, whose support I gratefully acknowledge.

4. S. Allen Counter and David L. Evans, *I Sought My Brother: An Afro-American Reunion* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), p. 276. On this question, see J. Fabian, *Time and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

5. The Aluku, numbering roughly 2,000 individuals, are divided into seven primary clans, most of which are localized in individual villages on the Lawa River, which forms part of the border between French Guiana and Suriname, and on the lower reaches of the Maroni River to the north. For further background, see Kenneth Bilby, "The Remaking of the Aluku: Culture, Politics, and Maroon Ethnicity in French South America." Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1990.

6. See, for instance, Edmund Leach, "Primitive Time-Reckoning," in *A History of Technology*, vol. 1, eds. Charles Singer, E. J. Holmyard, and A. R. Hall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954), p. 112; Jack Goody, "Time: Social Organization," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David L. Sills (New York: Macmillan, 1968), vol. 16, p. 39; Jack Goody, *The Interface between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

7. A. J. Gurevich, "Time as a Problem of Cultural History," in *Cultures and Time*, ed. L. Gardet (Paris: UNESCO, 1976), p. 234.

8. Jeremy Rifkin, *Time Wars: The Primary Conflict in Human History* (New York: Holt, 1987), pp. 125–26.

9. For similar assessments of "primitive" temporal orientations, see M. Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945). Contrast with Clifford Geertz, *Person, Time, and Conduct in Bali: An Essay in Cultural Analysis* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973 [1966]).

10. For a detailed description of Aluku social and economic organization, see Jean Hurault, *Les Noirs Réfugiés Boni de la Guyane Française* (Dakar: IFAN, 1961) and Bilby, "Remaking of the Aluku," pp. 141–221.

11. See Sidney Mintz, and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon, 1992).

12. See Richard Price, "To Everything a Season: The Development of Saramaka Calendric Reckoning," *Oso* 3 (1984): 67.

13. Ibid., pp. 66–68.

14. *Yali* is described at some length in Hurault, *Les Noirs*, pp. 263–65.

15. See Ibid., pp. 260–61.

16. For a detailed description of the *booko dei* and *puu baaka* funeral ceremonies, see Ibid., pp. 159–90.

17. An interesting recent case study showing just how large a part selection and interpretation play in Western historiography is Greg Dening, *History's Anthropology: The Death of William Gooch* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1988).

18. See, for example, P. Bourdieu, "The Attitude of the Algerian Peasant toward Time," in *Mediterranean Countrymen: Essays in the Social Anthropology of the Mediterranean*, ed. J. Pitt-Rivers (Paris: Mouton, 1963), p. 60; Dale Eickelman, "Time in a Complex Society: A Moroccan Example," *Ethnology* 16 (1977): 46.

19. For examinations of a few specific Aluku oral historical traditions, see de Groot, "Boni's Hoofd"; Kenneth Bilby, "Divided Loyalties: Local Politics and the Play of States among the Aluku," *New West Indian Guide* 63 (1989): 143–73; and Wim Hoogbergen, "Aluku," *New West Indian Guide* 63 (1989): 175–98.

20. Studies continue to appear showing that "mythic consciousness" and "historical consciousness" are not as easily distinguishable as was once thought and that the myths of "tribal" or peasant societies may contain valuable and accurate historical information at a number of levels, both literal and metaphorical; see, for example, Daniel Schoepf, "Le Japu Faiseur de Perles: Un Mythe des Indiens Wayana-Aparai du Bresil," *Bulletin Annuel* (Musee d'Ethnographie de la Ville de Geneve) 19 (1976): 55–82; Kenneth Bilby, "The Treacherous Feast: A Jamaican Maroon Historical Myth," *Bijdragen tot de Taol-Land-en Volkenkunde* 140 (1984): 1–31; Kenneth Bilby, "'Two Sister Pikini': A Historical Tradition of Dual Ethnogenesis in Eastern Jamaica," *Caribbean Quarterly* 3–4 (1984): 10–25; and Jonathan D. Hill, ed., *Rethinking History and Myth: Indigenous South American Perspectives on the Past* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1988).

21. Extract from an Aluku narrative tape-recorded in the village of Komontibo, French Guiana, January 6, 1986. The translation is mine. The text has been edited slighlty in an attempt to make it read more smoothly, but the basic progression of events has been maintained.

22. See Wim Hoogbergen, *De Boni-Oorlogen 1757–1860 (The Boni-Maroon Wars in Suriname)* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), pp. 316–69.

23. As Jack Goody points out, "The use of a base point represents a partial disengagement from cyclical concepts: years now pass irretrievably, never to return; time accumulates and no longer just ebbs and flows." See Goody, "Time: Social Organization," p. 31.

9

Jamaican Maroons: Time and Historical Identity

Joseph K. Adjaye

The history of slavery in the Americas is replete with the story of Maroons or Maroon societies: individuals or groups who escaped from the horrors of slavery to establish their own independent communities. "Marronage," therefore, meant flight from slavery, and the runaways created communities that varied from tiny bands that soon disappeared in history to large, powerful, and more permanent centralized societies.[1] Although two types of marronage can be generally identified — *petit marronage*, that is, temporary escape or truancy, usually to visit the city or relatives, and the large-scale, more permanent type — use of the word "Maroon" in this chapter will be confined to the latter variety.

Marronage was at the core a reaction to slavery, and, therefore, Maroon societies were as ubiquitous as the institution of slavery itself was throughout the Americas. Their widespread existence has been well documented.[2] Known variously as *palenques* or *cumbes* in the Spanish territories, *quilombos* or *mocambos* in Brazil, and "Bush Negroes" in Guyana, Maroon societies were established across the length and breadth of the "New World" from Brazil across the Caribbean to the American South and from the Bahamas to Mexico. However, nowhere was the Maroon experiment in the creation of independent, self-sustaining societies as viable and successful as alternatives to slave systems as it was in Suriname and Jamaica, where some communities have survived to the present.

The recorded history of marronage in Jamaica is almost simultaneous with the very beginnings of the Spanish occupation of the island under Juan d'Esquivel in 1509. In the next several centuries, the landscape of the country came to be punctuated by the establishment of a number of Maroon towns until after emancipation (1834), when the raison d'être of marronage, flight from servitude, disappeared.

This chapter is not intended to retell the historical development of the Maroons, for which several good sources exist.[3] However, a brief synopsis of the history of Jamaican Maroons is essential for an understanding of Maroon identity, which is a product of its history and development over time.

The Spanish colony of Jamaica was poorly governed until the British invasion of 1655, which provided the occasion for the first large-scale flight of African slaves (soon to be known as Maroons). A large body of them, numbering over 150, retreated into the mountains of Clarendon under Lubolo (also known as Juan Lubolo or Juan de Bola), who emerged as the first Maroon leader. The tradition of resistance to the colonial and slave regimes and of incessant guerilla warfare was set, right from the beginning. Another formidable Maroon group that escaped was the Karmahaly band, headed by Juan de Serras. Throughout the second half of the seventeenth century, revolt after revolt resulted in marronage. In 1673, for example, a large number of slaves were reported to have escaped from Lobby's plantation to the central and western mountains. In 1685, another major rebellion resulted in the flight of 150 slaves from the Widow Grey and other plantations. Five years later, over 400 more from Mr. Suton's plantations rebelled, killed some whites, and escaped.[4] This was the group led by Cudjoe that became the core of the Cockpit Maroons. The defiance presented by the indomitable Maroon Cudjoe became so unbearable that the government imported "Mosquito" Indians as reinforcements.

Slave revolts provided the initial source of marronage that led to the creation of the first set of Maroon towns. Thereafter, a second source became increasingly important — internally generated Maroons. Known generally as "creoles," these were second-generation Maroons born in the woods.

The demography of Jamaican Maroon settlements fell into two clusters: the leeward or western towns and the windward or eastern towns. In the seventeenth century, the most important of the leewards were Accompong (in St. Elizabeth's parish) and Cudjoe's Town (in St. James), while the windwards were composed of Nanny's Town and close-by Guy's Town (both in Portland). "Nanny's Town" sometimes

referred to a cluster of three villages, namely, Nanny's Town itself, Molly's Town, and Diana's Town. However, it was a characteristic of the changing demography of Jamaican Maroons that their communities underwent transformations with time, with new towns developing and some old ones disappearing. Further, splinter groups sometimes emerged. Cudjoe's Town was renamed Trelawny Town, after Governor Edward Trelawny (1738–51). Subsequently, a splinter group dispersed to found Scotts Hall in St. Mary's. Following defeats suffered by Nanny's Town in the 1730s, its people dispersed to establish New Nanny Town (later to be renamed Moore Town in the 1760s in honor of Henry Moore, who acted as lieutenant governor, 1756–61, in the absence of a governor) and Crawford Town some 20 miles away.

By the first decade of the eighteenth century, a desperate government had had to place a bounty on the head of every Maroon. It was not until 1734 that the Maroons suffered their first major setback as their stronghold of Nanny's Town in the eastern Blue Mountains was destroyed, forcing the settlers to relocate. At last, expediency led the government to sue for peace, signing separate treaties with the leeward and windward Maroons, who were led, respectively, by Cudjoe and Quao, in 1739.[5] The treaties called for a cessation of hostilities, guaranteed the Maroons their liberty, and granted land to each group. In return, Maroon leaders were to be placed under the supervision of resident white superintendents, who acted as watchdogs over their activities, and above all, Maroons undertook to assist in the apprehension and return of future runaways.

It will be argued below that the 1739 treaties radically transformed Maroon relationships with their erstwhile colonial enemies and, above all, their very identity. In the decades that followed, the authority of Maroon leaders was gradually whittled away by successive legislation, even though there is evidence that many of the restrictive laws were ignored. Nevertheless, in the posttreaties period, the Maroons grew increasingly restless under the new restrictions, and at the same time, a great deal of ill will developed between them and the slaves, to whom they had now become antagonistic. With growing complaints of unfair treatment at the hands of colonial officials and increasing land pressure as their communities grew, Maroon distrust mounted. Finally, in 1795, the last straw came when two Maroons who were accused of stealing two pigs were punished by public whipping, an action that the authorities permitted to be carried out by slaves. The deep sense of humiliation suffered by the Maroons led directly to the Trelawny War of that year. Following the war, the government took the unusual step of exiling the

Trelawnies, first to Nova Scotia (Canada), and ultimately to Sierra Leone, West Africa, in an action that has been generally regarded as undeserved betrayal.

Trelawny Town was reduced to a ghost town following the deportation, but Accompong, Moore Town, Charles Town, and Scotts Hall continue to this day. However, although these towns remain Maroon communities to the present, neither the towns nor their Maroon inhabitants look any different in many respects from those of other Jamaican villages even though the towns may elect their colonels, maintain some vestiges of local autonomy, and keep alive Maroon heritage and traditions.

Central to the perpetuation of "Maroonness" as a distinct identity through time is the question of land, a subject on which Maroons and the government continue, to this day, to hold divergent interpretations. To the government, the treaty rights that bestowed lands on the Maroons were legal documents that are revocable, for which reason the government now holds the position that Maroon lands are subject to taxation like any other individually held land. To the Maroons, however, the lands were granted to them and their ancestors in perpetuity, and their rights to them cannot be abrogated without undermining their time-honored group identity,[6] a theme to which we shall return later.

THE LITERATURE

The historiographical tradition of Jamaica and its Maroon communities suffers some commonalities with those of other colonial societies: they inevitably begin with colonial sources — official records and accounts written by colonialists, which are largely biased. Thus, although Edward Long (1774), Bryan Edwards (1793), and Robert C. Dallas (1803), for instance, present us with the first documentary histories of Jamaica, their accounts of the Maroons were written from the perspective of the very interests the authors represented and were, therefore, generally prejudicial to the Maroons, who were antagonistic to the colonial government. Edward Long, in fact, was a planter historian; Bryan Edwards virtually reproduced Long in large sections; and Jamaican-born Englishman Robert Dallas derived considerable information from white ex-soldiers who had fought in the Maroon wars in the government militias. All three authors portrayed the ethnocentric biases of their planter generations, although Dallas did so to a lesser extent than the other two.

However, writing as late as 1965, A. E. Furness exhibited pro-planter sympathies and stereotypes that would have been more characteristic of

the writings of the eighteenth century than of the late twentieth century. Relying on archival records prepared by the Earl of Balcarres, governor during the Trelawny War of 1795, he described the Maroons as "gangs of depraved and skulking outlaws" and savages.

Another genre of Maroon literature consists of a large corpus of popular and folkloric publications that often show fascination with the romantic past. Many of these works, the products of Jamaicans, extol the heroic struggles of Maroon leaders and their followers for freedom and self-respect. Carey Robinson's *Fight for Freedom* (1987), for instance, honors "the fight for freedom of the indomitable victims of slavery who, during 200 years, resisted and died to keep the spirit of individual liberty alive."[7]

Modern historiographical studies of Jamaican Maroons date to Orlando Patterson's 1970 article on the first Maroon War, which was the first noteworthy analytical work based on systematic investigation. However, it was Richard Price's groundbreaking volume *Maroon Societies: Rebel Communities in the Americas* (1973a) that stimulated the vigorous historical and anthropological investigation of the Maroon experience in Jamaica as well as other Maroon societies throughout the Americas of modern times. Today, in pursuance of this tradition, Maroon studies have come a long way from colonial accounts of troublesome rebels, narratives of Maroon warfare, and ethnographic descriptions of archaic societies to contemporary studies centered on Maroon resistance to slavery. In the latter respect, Mavis C. Campbell's *The Maroons of Jamaica, 1655–1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration & Betrayal* (1988) provides the most comprehensive history of Jamaican Maroons up to the deportation of the Trelawnies following the war of 1795.

Yet, notwithstanding Campbell's detailed analysis of the origins of Jamaican Maroon communities, the development of their history until 1796, and their external relations with the colonial governments, as well as Barbara Kopytoff's studies (1973, 1976, 1979),[8] our knowledge and understanding of Maroon internal organization is still incomplete. In his introduction to his *Maroon Societies* (1973a, p. 16), Richard Price lamented that the "internal organization of maroon societies has received relatively little scholarly attention." Today, our knowledge of aspects of Maroon internal organization such as leadership and economic systems has undoubtedly expanded. Yet, questions of Maroon identity and consciousness, and the processes by which they were constructed and redefined remain considerably elusive and our knowledge of the subject consequently superficial.

MAROON IDENTITY

This chapter transcends existing works on Jamaican Maroon history and ethnography to delve into questions of Maroon identity construction and development over time. It argues that Jamaican Maroons forged a distinctive identity for themselves and proceeds to analyze the nature of this identity and the symbols by which it was maintained. The cornerstone of the thesis is the postulation that the unique character of Jamaican Maroon identity was a product of spatiotemporal factors and, consequently, that time was a critical variable in the transformations and reformulations of this identity.

This is, therefore, a study of identity-history and identity-society within time. Our task is to unfold and decode Maroon identity in the context of historical change and social reality. Our premise derives from the perennial question, How do we define an individual, a group? It seeks to resolve the question of self-definition, and it emanates from the axiom that throughout history, people have always attempted to define themselves individually and collectively. Interrelated is the issue of Maroon consciousness, both of themselves and of them by the rest of colonial Jamaican society.

In a study of this type, we inevitably recognize some limitations in the extent to which conclusions can be drawn from the sources: delving into the minds of actors long gone, inferring motives from actions separated by long time spans, and depending on sources that include documentary material and official accounts written from a perspective that was hostile to Maroon aspirations. Further limitations arise from the thick cloud of secrecy that shrouded Maroon activities and often precluded the disclosure of detailed information. Nevertheless, we believe that the data provide adequate grounds upon which some formulations can be drawn that are not too tentative about the development and transformations of Maroon identity and that would help to expand our understanding and awareness of the subject.

Identity theories ultimately derive from Erickson's initial formulations of ego identity in the postwar 1940s[9] as a nation of immigrants began to ask themselves the key question of what it means to be an American. Since the 1950s, "identity" has been articulated and accepted as both a technical term and a folk category.

Although "identity" has many strands, concern will be shown in this chapter for the personal, group, and social categorizations of the term. However, the three categories of identity operate as interrelated, congruous variables, rather than exclusive. In the theoretical tradition of

Talcott Parsons and Henri Tajfel,[10] use of the term "identity" shall be in the context of the Maroons' self-definition, both in relation to the rest of Jamaican society and in terms of their membership of and participation in their social group. In particular, "identity" will be viewed as a social reality, a social production that was continuously constructed and sustained within the spatiotemporal experience of the Maroons. Indeed, in the formulation of Jamaican Maroon identity, personal and social forms, that is, self and society, were mutually constitutive.

Space

Throughout Maroon history, space was a critical factor that shaped and defined their existence. In escaping from the rigid confines of the plantation system, Maroons were determined to reshape their existence within new geographical boundaries. Of prime consideration in the selection of new sites everywhere was inaccessibility to the colonial world. In Jamaica, both the Cockpit mountain ranges (leeward) and the Blue Mountain ranges (windward), carved out of precipitous towers that are intersected by numerous hills, ravines, and caves and covered by dense bush, provided ideal inaccessible environments. As they learned to overcome such hostile terrains, transforming them from inhospitable to arable lands and coping with and adapting to their harshness, the Maroons fashioned life styles and personalities that were uniquely conditioned by their environments.

The demographic profile of Maroon settlements was carefully constructed to provide maximum defense. Each settlement consisted of concentric circles of communities, with the inner and higher circles affording sanctuaries and the outer circles providing buffers. In some cases, the only access to a Maroon settlement might be along a narrow uphill path that could be ascended only in single file, thereby making the approachers easy prey to Maroon attacks.[11]

The Maroons who created settlements in the Blue Mountain ranges to some extent considered themselves autochthonous, because the area was previously uninhabited. Thus, later attempts by whites to establish plantations in the proximity of their territories were viewed as infringements on their domains. In general, however, the fear of attacks, forays, and reprisals by the colonial militias forced Maroons into a constant state of alertness and preparedness to defend their towns, which, together with the overall need for survival, underlay the unique identity of being a Maroon.

The inaccessibility of Maroon environments has generally been commented upon in the literature. What has not received attention — and an important idea within the thrust of this discussion — is the fact that the Maroon relationship to their environment was nonstatic. Maroon existence sometimes necessitated mobility, both within the perimeters of their territories and outmigration to found new towns when faced by external threats or attacks. Space also influenced Maroon existence in another respect that involved a higher degree of permanence rather than mobility. A prime example was in 1738–39, when the colonial government entered into separate treaties with the leeward and windward Maroons and, as part of the agreements, both groups received large tracks of land. It will be argued below that the treaties (and the land grant) were vital spatiotemporal instruments that completely transformed Maroon identity because they accorded the Maroons land security, acknowledged their autonomy, and guaranteed them safety from attacks.

The Construction of Maroon Identity

Maroon existence was predicated on successful defiance of the slave regime, not in going with the flow of slavocracy. From the beginning, it was a threatened identity.[12] The challenges of turning the forbidding inhospitability of the mountain geography into an ally and the very perpetuation of their existence in the face of seemingly insurmountable human and physical odds required the appropriation of and commitment to a set of social symbols that ultimately helped in forging a unique identity. The dominant symbols are here identified as initiation, naming, leadership, and warfare. These symbols acted not only as interactive, coping, and adaptive systems but also as the integrative tools that coalesced Maroons of plural origins into individuals and groups with a distinctive identity.

It is further contended that Maroon consciousness of themselves as a unique group distinct and separate from colonial white society and slave systems also emanated from their awareness of their selfsameness and existential continuity, toward which end these symbols were vigorously applied. Erikson's theory, first developed in connection with ego identity (1946, p. 23), is quite germane to the Maroon experience: "The *awareness* of the fact that there is a *selfsameness* and *continuity* to the ego's synthesizing methods and that these methods are effective in *safeguarding* the *sameness* and *continuity* of one's meaning for others" [my emphasis].

Initiation

The first primary symbol in the construction of Maroon identity was initiation. All Maroon newcomers went through rigid processes of initiation that involved the taking of a sacred oath, which served several purposes. First, it was a commitment to Maroon goals and objectives and dedication to a life of fighting the enemy; second, it bound the initiates to an inviolable secrecy that precluded the disclosure of vital information about Maroon organization even if the Maroon was captured; third, it pledged the newcomer to obedience and loyalty to Maroon leaders and chiefs. Barbara Kopytoff (1976, p. 44) categorized the initiation as a two-stage process of ritual acceptance and sociological/psychological adjustment to Maroon life. Further , it should be emphasized that it was the initiation/oath ritual that constituted the symbolic transformation of a runaway slave into a Maroon and initiated the newcomer into the paradigmatic experience of becoming a Maroon. Thus, it was this ritual that gave the initiate the new identity of a Maroon.

So vital was the oath-taking to acceptance as and conversion into a Maroon that it is reported that those who refused to take it were executed. To avoid desertion, the initiates were brought into the Maroon community through detours that were designed to prevent them from tracing their way back. Typically, too, initiates served probationary or apprenticeship periods and were relegated to subservient positions as they underwent the rigid processes of incorporation into "marronage." The extended period of socialization and education into Maroon norms and life style that ensued involved, throughout, the development of core cultural realities. Meanings of initiation and other symbols were grasped and applied through processes of learned interpretations.

Naming

A second primary tool in identity construction was the adoption of traditional African names. It had been a common practice in the process of orienting newly arrived slaves from Africa to plantation life for planters to strip them of their traditional names and assign them new, Western, meaningless names, thereby divesting them of their most important badge of African identity. Now, in Maroon communities, this practice was reversed as Maroon offspring and leaders readopted traditional names as part of African cultural retention and re-creation and, above all, identity construction.

Unlike today, when families are eroding in Western societies and personal names no longer carry the same symbolic weight that they carry in

traditional societies, African ancestral names gave Maroons a mark of authenticity and identification that reinforced the rupture from slavocracy and reunification, even if only symbolically, with Africa. It is, therefore, in this connection that the proliferation of Akan day names like Cudjoe (Kojo), Quao (Kwaw), and Cuffee (Kofi),[13] as well as African proper names, must be understood. Yet, it is worthy of note that time itself influenced name adoption among the Maroons. In contrast to the early period of the Maroon experience, when African names predominated, by the time of the Trelawny War (1895) in the late eighteenth century, Maroons and, strikingly, even their leaders had shifted to adopting Anglo-Saxon names, often names of prominent whites in the society, evidence of increasing creolization, as will be further shown.

Survival, Resistance, and Warfare

The maintenance and perpetuation of Maroon existence were predicated on survival, which is the cornerstone of all identity. Descartes could not have expressed it better when he stated that the reason we survive is that we have a conscious experience.[14] Because identity is based on survival, it is time and future oriented; it is driven by a vision for the continuation of life from a present time to the future. There are, therefore, connections between the life you are leading presently and the life you might live later. The Maroons indisputably became experts in the art of survival, and initiation, naming, worldview, warfare, and other identity symbols were utilized as critical tools for survival. Maroon survival required physical continuity. It involved objective time and space. In this respect, therefore, the Maroon Treaties and the land question became instruments in the maintenance of spatiotemporal continuity.

Maroon consciousness and identity were further defined by resistance. As a people, Maroons were characterized by a determination to resist to death the destruction of their independent identity, one that set them apart from planter societies. Resistance embodied their values and aspirations, and independence was their raison d'être. In the characterization of one scholar (Campbell 1988, p. 2), the Maroons can be described as the first Americans because of their love for freedom. Carey Robinson titled his history of the Maroons *Fight for Freedom* (1987) and, as observed above, dedicated it to the "indomitable victims of slavery who, during 2000 years, resisted and died to keep the spirit of individual liberty alive." Elsewhere (1987, p. 27), he defined the Jamaican Maroon as "one whose spirit could not be broken by man. The word had overtones of determined independence and danger."

Throughout their existence until the 1738–39 treaties, Maroon survival and resistance were a source of perennial trouble for the colonial government. Indeed, shortly after the British occupation of Jamaica, the government acknowledged that the Maroons were like "thorns and pricks in our sides."[15] Maroon attacks against plantations and their continued presence as a separate, distinct community caused so much trepidation among the colonialists that the Maroons were the persistent subject of successive assembly meetings, official correspondence to headquarters in London, and governors' memoranda.

To deal with the Maroon menace, troubled colonial governments employed a myriad of measures. These included desultory sorties by militia and volunteers against Maroons; laws empowering citizens, with or without offers of prizes and rewards, to capture Maroons, dead or alive; and attacks with trained hound dogs. Indirect measures were also applied, including cutting off Maroon access to market towns where they could obtain ammunition and essential goods and land reforms, such as encouraging white settlement on fallow land so as to discourage Maroon settlements on uninhabited land. Invariably, these mechanisms proved ineffectual, as the Maroons remained resolute in their resistance to colonial slave society; Maroon identity was born, bred, and sustained by the determination and fortitude to survive against all odds.

Another powerful instrument in the shaping of Maroon identity was warfare. Maroon life style was highly militaristic and considerably influenced, especially in the pretreaty period, by warfare. Indeed, the African warrior tradition was embodied in the very essence of being a Maroon: "The Maroon community was conceived in a time of crisis. It was born and grew up in strife and its virtues were the virtues of the warrior: strength, courage, endurance, skill in the practice of war and in the use of weapons."[16] Maroon warriors underwent complex ritual preparations that included the wearing of amulets that they believed made them bulletproof.

Everywhere Maroons acquired the reputation of being dreaded fighters with consummate military skills. They were adept in the use of deception and ploys and had the ability to lull whites into a false sense of security when it was needed to buy time until the Maroons gained the advantage. Their military strategies included the use of white hostages as pawns for bargaining purposes. However, above all, the Maroon military stratagem par excellence was guerilla warfare. In the seemingly impenetrable Blue Ridge and Cockpit mountains of Jamaica, the Maroons became supreme tacticians in the strategies associated with guerilla warfare, superbly mastering the advantages of space, that is, the

local geography. Thus, they adroitly turned the forbidding inhospitability of geography into a military ally for purposes of defense and concealment, using leaves, trees, and rocks for camouflage or cover and the natural environment to lay booby traps and disguise paths to their towns. Dallas' (1803, vol. I, pp. 49–50) graphic description of one such disguised path typifies the Maroons' remarkable deployment of geography for security purposes:

> This passage contracted itself into a defile of nearly half a mile long, and so narrow that only one man could pass along it at a time. Had it been entered by a line of men, it would not have been difficult for the Maroons from the heights to have blocked them up in the front and in the rear, by rolling down large rocks at both ends, and afterwards to have crushed them to death by the same means. . . . The entrance was impregnable, the continuation of the line of smaller cockpits rendered the rear inaccessible, and Nature had secured the flanks of her own fortification.

Integral to Maroon military strategies was the maintenance of an intricate and powerful network of espionage. So effective was the system that no sooner was a decision taken at council to send out a party against the Maroons than word reached them. It is a powerful commentary on the efficacy of the Maroon intelligence network that Dallas (1803, vol. I, p. 34) observed that their leader "Cudjoe was always apprized in time of the parties that were fitted out, and knowing the routes they must necessarily take, prepared his ambushes accordingly."

There is little doubt about Maroon military prowess, one which even colonial historians like Dallas could not fail to concede. Commenting on one of many unsuccessful campaigns fought by the colonial government against the Maroons in the early decades of the eighteenth century, he acknowledged that "the officers who served in this campaign will allow that the events of it, and the tactics opposed to them, if not so grand as those that fill the Grecian and Roman pages of history, were at least as singular and embarrassing." He went on (1803, vol. I, pp. 122–23) to bemoan the fact that the "Negroes defied the choicest troops of one of the greatest nations in the world, kept an extensive country in alarm."

Leadership

A further symbol in the construction of Maroon identity was leadership. In the precarious existence of marronage, a strong leadership served as a vital tool not only in integrating Maroons of different African ethnicities into a unified community but also in forging the resolute identity that came to define Maroon personality. Even though the

evidence that could help in the development of complete profiles for Maroon leaders like Cudjoe, Nanny, Quao, Accompong, and Lubolo is still fragmentary, our knowledge of the nature and character of the institution of Maroon leadership is much more complete.

Maroon leadership, until the nineteenth century, was concentrated among the descendants of one ethnic group described variously as Akan or Cromantees, who came from the Gold Coast, now Ghana.[17] The reasons for this trend were quite obvious. The Akan were distinguishable from other Africans as the most aggressive and skilled militarily. In the opinion of Governor Christopher Codrington, they were "born Heroes."[18] Patterson (1969 [1967]) has illustrated that most of the slave rebellions from 1760 to 1831 were led by the Akan. Slave traders and planters alike regarded them as not only strong but also bellicose and were often torn between admiration of their superior strength and apprehension of their fierceness. In the words of Bryan Edwards (1873, vol. II, pp. 58–59), the Akan were "distinguished from all other blacks by their firmness both of body and mind; a ferociousness of disposition . . . or what an ancient Roman would have deemed an elevation of soul which prompts them to enterprises of difficulty and danger." Thus, the Akan were not the kind of people who would accept slavery timidly. On the contrary, they were considered so dangerous and troublesome that the British attempted to prohibit their importation. It was this tradition of bravery imbued in the Akan that both underlay their steadfast defiance of slavery and fashioned the strong character of Maroon leadership.

As has been pointed out above, the demography of Maroon settlements fell into two configurations: the western, leeward cluster of towns located in the Cockpit and the windward, eastern collection of towns situated in the Blue Mountain ranges. Although the nature of leadership in both sections shared some common qualities, the political structures varied considerably. In the eighteenth century, for example, Cudjoe established a centralized political system over the entire Cockpit region, fusing Maroons from different ethnic backgrounds into a hegemonic whole. In the process, he created an authoritarian rule, but one that, nonetheless, gave permanence and stability to Cudjoe's (later Trelawny) Town and Accompong for nearly half a century. In contrast, the eastern Maroons had no single dominant figure comparable to Cudjoe. The eastern towns were led by individual leaders under a confederacy-type system in which there was considerable intergroup cooperation. Even though the most enduring and preeminent position was held by Nanny, she does not appear to have been a political leader, because the records indicate that there was a headman in Nanny's Town contemporaneous with Nanny

herself. Nanny appears to have been the consummate Obeah woman who lay in the background and, as a supernatural technician, specialized in ritual and spiritual functions.

Yet, whether in the case of Cudjoe, who headed a centralized political system, or that of the fragmented political entities of the east, Maroon leadership everywhere had a strong military imprint. The priorities that ordered Maroon society were those that were driven by the demands of military defense of their towns and raids on planter communities. The state of continuous warfare influenced the institution of authority as well as their internal political and social organization. Leadership embodied the qualities that were enshrined in Maroon tradition — courage, militarism, indomitable will — the qualities that came to define marronage at large.

Identity Symbols and Time

Initiation, naming, warfare, leadership, and the other symbols discussed above served, first, as the organizational links between individuals and the larger social structure and, second, as the building blocks in the dynamics of Maroon community building. They constituted the institutional identities that linked individuals to mediating social structures, providing motivational schema for action, shared experiences, heritage bonding, ethnic solidarity, and a sense of community. This was a process in cultural engineering, and in the process, the uniquely human experience of a Maroon was constructed.

Yet, Maroon identity construction and bestowal was not frozen in time. Cultural engineering was one in which the symbols of identity were continually formulated and reformulated, defined and redefined. Thus, marronage was nonstatic. The social action that constituted the a priori reality of Maroon experience was characterized by adaptive fluidity and cultural change, even within the parameters of marronage. Thus, over time, Maroon names shifted from traditional Akan types to Western names, the society became increasingly creolized, the character of leadership was gradually transformed, and the military nature and basis of society were progressively diffused, especially after the 1739 treaties.

MAROON HISTORICAL EPOCHS

In the long span of Maroon history from the early sixteenth century to the present day, several temporal demarcations stand out as important watersheds. These may be identified as the British occupation of

Jamaica in 1655, the treaties of 1739, the Trelawny War of 1795, and the Maroons Allotment Act of 1842. These events served not only as landmark occurrences in those years but also as pivotal developments that transformed the very character of Maroon identity from those times forward.

The British occupation of Jamaica in 1655 led to the first mass exodus of African slaves into the mountainous interior and, thus, has been viewed as marking the beginning of Jamaican Maroon history. The next temporal epoch of consequence began in 1739. On March 1 and June 23 of that year, the colonial government of Jamaica signed with the leeward and windward Maroons, respectively, treaties that have since become anchors in Maroon history.[19] Although the agreements were entered into with Cudjoe and Quao, they were considered to be binding on all Maroons of the west and east, respectively. The terms were identical: they called for a cessation of hostilities between the government of Jamaica and the Maroons, gave both groups of Maroons grants of land (1,500 acres of the Cockpit area for the leewards and an unspecified size of land for the windwards), and enjoined the Maroons to assist in the apprehension of future escapees from slavery.

The terms of the treaties have been a subject of much controversy, especially the clause that bound the Maroons to return future runaway slaves. However, it can be argued that the treaties were in a sense alliances of convenience on a quid pro quo basis whereby Maroon societies were assured their freedom and promised their territorial integrity in return for their offer of cooperation in the apprehension of future runaways. Besides, the idea of the government entering into conciliatory agreements with Maroons was not without precedent, because earlier in 1662, the government had signed a charter with Lubolo by which the Maroon leader was granted 30 acres of land and internal freedom in return for a promise to end hostilities.

Irrespective of questions that may be raised regarding the judgment of a group that was avowed to resisting slavery now entering into an agreement to surrender future fugitives, there is no denying the impact of the treaty as a temporal demarcation that profoundly transformed Maroon identity from the time of its conclusion in 1739 to the present day. It had a major impact in solidifying Maroon identity. The one single provision that was most crucial to the crystallization of the Maroons as a distinct group was the granting of land. To Cudjoe and his followers, for instance, article three of the leeward treaty granted them lands that they "shall enjoy and possess for themselves and Posterity for ever." It was this formal designation of land grants, Kopytoff (1973, pp. 116–17, 157)

observed, that provided "an anchor for their corporate identity" and "conferred on them corporate identities that allowed them to survive as separate and privileged groups rather than be absorbed into the free population of Jamaica." The land grant, thus, served as the instrument par excellence that transformed the status of Maroon polities into semiautonomous entities and formally sanctioned their internal, political quasi-independence and independent identity.

There was a further significance of the treaties as a turning point. By ensuring Maroon existence, the treaties gave them a greater sense of economic security than before, guaranteeing them open access to the markets and towns for the sale of their farm products and the purchase of arms. The posttreaty period was marked by an expansion in commercial activities, especially in the manufacture and sale of iron works like knives and machetes, tobacco processing, wood products, and the preparation and sale of a spicy, barbecued or dried delicacy known as "jerked pork."

Moreover, the posttreaty era in Maroon history was also characterized by transformations in the very composition and complexion of Maroon populations. Maroon societies from then on became increasingly creolized, because, with the drastic curtailment in newcomers joining them, they now came to rely on natural population growth through procreation. Creolization also found expression in increasing exposure to and contact with white society and even selective emulation of aspects of white culture, including dress and names. Isolation now gave way to increasing contact with the outside world.

Yet, one should not be led to conclude, as does Kopytoff (1976, p. 40), that "the treaties of 1739 froze the membership of the Maroon communities and closed them forever." This would be an exaggeration, because Maroon communities were not entirely closed after 1739 and new escapees did not altogether stop entering them until after emancipation nearly a century later. On the contrary, as I have pointed out above, the treaties opened the way for increasing contact with white society.

Indeed, one conspicuous mark of transformation involving increasing contact with whites was the appointment of resident European superintendents for all Maroon towns as a condition of the treaty. The imposition of these superintendents, who were to assume juridical powers in settling disputes as direct representatives of the Crown, severely transformed the nature and powers of traditional authority and undercut the authority of Maroon chiefs. It was an indication of both the transformation in the position of headmen and increasing anglicization in Maroon

societies that Maroon headmen henceforth came to be titled "captains" or "colonels."

To the extent that the treaties gave Maroon societies security in perpetuity while at the same time limiting their growth and power, they were a double-edged sword. Maroon communities from that time on entered a new phase in which their status was somewhat ambiguous, neither completely autonomous nor fully integrated into Jamaican society, independent in some respects and, yet, dependent on the Crown.

Nonetheless, Maroon perception of the treaties and the lands that were conferred therewith is that they constituted the very pillars of their history; to them, the treaties are inviolable and sacrosanct. This view stems largely from a reenactment of an old African ritual that was performed to seal the treaties. According to both documentary and orally transmitted information, blood was drawn from both Maroon and white leaders and then mixed with rum, which they drank. This act, therefore, gave to the Maroon representatives and their descendants to this day the belief that the agreement was a "blood treaty." Joseph Williams, in *The Maroons of Jamaica* (1938, p. 389), vividly recounted this ritual as it was narrated to him by Colonel Rowe of Accompong:

> Each white man cut his hand and held it over a basin and let the blood drain into the basin. Accompong and his officers did the same. Rum was poured on top and all shaken up together, and each party then drank the blood and rum, that there should be no more wars between the Maroons and the English.

To underscore their significance as a focal point in Maroon history, the 1739 treaties have been deeply entrenched in Maroon mythology to the extent that they are perceived as marking the origins, rather than the transformation, of their history. Maroons today refer to their ancestors who fought in the wars that immediately led to the treaties as "first-time Maroons." Thus, credit for the beginning of Maroon history is wrongly given to the heroes of the treaty period rather than to their progenitors, who had led the early escapes from the plantations. This is evidently a case of selective memory retention and manipulation of tradition, which is not unique to the Maroons but which clearly underlines the importance that is attached to the treaties as a cardinal instrument in the construction of Maroon historical consciousness.[20]

The Maroons considered the treaties to be sacred charters to the extent that any attempt by the government later to reinterpret, amend, or abrogate them was considered an infringement upon their sacred 1rights, as we shall see. Meanwhile, the encroachments on Maroon

political power that came in the wake of the 1739 treaties — particularly the imposition of white superintendents, who were responsible for the administration of justice and were accountable directly to the Crown — were slowly leading to tensions in Maroon-government relations. The definite rupture came inevitably with the Trelawny War of 1795. The *casus belli*, as has been pointed out above, was a case involving two Maroons who, after being convicted of killing a hog belonging to a white, were publicly flogged. The affront and humiliation that Maroons of Trelawny felt led them directly to revolt. The government responded by taking over the town. In the ensuing peace treaty, the Trelawny Maroons were promised not to be deported. Yet, the government soon turned around and exiled nearly 600 of them. The government action created a deep and permanent sense of distrust among all Maroon communities, one that was reinforced by later government attempts to undo the 1739 treaties. Meanwhile, too, Accompong's decision to fight on the side of the colonial government in the 1795 war symptomized the erosion that was slowly occurring in Maroon unity following the 1739 treaties. Thus, 1795 constituted another significant temporal phase in the process of Maroon historical development.

The final temporal demarcation of great consequence to all Maroons during the colonial era occurred in 1842 with the promulgation of the Maroons Land Allotment Act. The act sought to nullify the 1739 treaties by vesting Maroon communal lands in the Crown, to be reallocated and held individually and subjected to taxation. Further, it asserted that Maroons were to be treated as any other subjects of the Crown, to be "entitled to and enjoy all the rights, privileges, and immunities of British subjects, as fully and completely as the same are enjoyed by any of her Majesty's subjects."[21]

Veiled under the purported aim of elevating Maroons to the same level as ordinary citizens, the real intent of the act was simply to break up Maroon lands, the very basis of their existence and identity. Maroons were not interested in the offer of free citizenry; surely, that was something they did not need a law to enjoy, if they wanted to. The truth is that with emancipation a decade earlier, the utility of the Maroons as allies to the government in the apprehension of fugitive slaves suddenly ended. Expectedly, attempts to apportion Maroon communal lands into individual plots were met with opposition at several Maroon towns when government surveyors appeared to survey and apportion lands. Incidents occurred at Accompong in 1868 and again between 1901 and 1905. Disputes and conflicts over Maroon lands repeatedly resurfaced in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. As late as 1959, Scotts Hall Maroons

insisted that they should be exempted from land taxes because of the 1739 treaties. Government attempts in postindependent Jamaica to resolve the land question have not been entirely successful. To this day, Maroons continue to regard the treaties and the lands that the treaties bestowed on them as their sacred heritage, the very essence and embodiment of their identity as a distinct group. They also believe that this unique and separate identity cannot be eradicated despite the transformations that it has undergone over time. In fact, many Maroons today claim that they are unaware of the 1842 act, another illustration of selective retention in the formulation of historical consciousness.

CONCLUSION

Human beings are either defined or seek to define themselves through the symbols and meanings available to them in their historical time. To the Maroons of Jamaica, geography, initiation, naming, warfare, leadership, and other symbols were the vehicles that defined their experience, provided an internal logic to their existence, and shaped their identity.

It was an identity that emanated from a rejection of servitude, was formulated in a tradition of resistance, and was crystallized in the creation of the unique group of people known to us as Jamaican Maroons. The essence of Jamaican marronage came to embody a marked feeling of distinctiveness that set them apart from the rest of Jamaican society and a sense of superiority. Throughout, Maroons were aware of their reality as having been carved out of their time and place in history.

Yet, this identity was itself dynamic. The symbols by which it was sustained and assured transtemporally underwent changes. The names that were adopted, the nature of the institution of Maroon leadership, the role of warfare and resistance, and the like, all underwent transformations over time. Concurrently, major temporal demarcations such as the 1739 treaties, the 1795 Trelawny War, and the 1842 Land Allotment Act profoundly transformed this identity transepochally. Thus, the meaning of Jamaican marronage itself was mutable. Through it all, however, it was time that served as the overarching vehicle that defined and transformed Maroon identity through history.

NOTES

1. The English word "Maroon" and its French equivalent "marron" are derived from the Spanish "cimarron," which initially referred to domestic cattle that had run

wild into the mountains. The term was later applied to Indians who fled from Spanish slavery. By the 1530s the term was used to refer to African runaway slaves.

2. See, for example, Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies: Rebel Communities in the Americas* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973a) and Vera Rubin and Arthur Tuden, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantation Societies* (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1977), pp. 389–480.

3. See, for example, Mavis Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica, 1655–1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration & Betrayal* (Granby, Mass.: Bergin & Garvey, 1988); Carey Robinson, *The Fighting Maroons of Jamaica* (Kingston: Collins and Sangster, 1969); and Barbara Kopytoff, "The Maroons of Jamaica: An Ethnohistorical Study of Incomplete Polities, 1655–1905," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1973.

4. For a detailed description of slave revolts, see Orlando Patterson, "Slavery and Slave Revolt: A Socio-Historical Analysis of the First Maroon War 1655–1740," *Social and Economic Studies* 19 (1970): 289–325.

5. The date of the treaties is sometimes given as 1738–39. The explanation lies in the fact that before 1752, the legal year began on March 25. Thus, the two dates signal the old English year and the European (continental) year, which began on January 1.

6. For further discussion, see Barbara Kopytoff, "Colonial Treaty as a Sacred Charter of the Jamaican Maroons," *Ethnohistory* 26 (1979): 45–64.

7. Also see Robinson, *The Fighting Maroons.*

8. Also see Carl Campbell, "Missionaries and Maroons: Conflict and Resistance in Accompong, Charles Town and Moore Town (Jamaica) 1837–1838," *Jamaican Historical Review* 14 (1984): 42–58.

9. See, for example, Erik Erikson, "Ego Development and Historical Change," *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 2 (1946): 359–96; Erik Erikson, "The Problem of Ego Identity," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 4 (1956): 56–121; and Erik Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle: Selected Papers by Erik H. Erikson.* Vol. 1: *Psychological Issues* (New York: International Universities Press, 1959). A good source on ethnic identity is Nathan Glazer, and Daniel Moynihan, eds., *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975).

10. See, for example, Talcott Parsons, "The Position of Identity in the General Theory of Action," in *The Self in Social Interaction*, eds. Chad Gordon and Kenneth Gergen (New York: Wiley, 1968), pp. 11–23; and Henri Tajfel, *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

11. See, for example, Robert Dallas, *The History of the Maroons*, 2 vols. (London: Longman & Rees, 1803), vol. 1, pp. 49–50.

12. For further discussion of this theory, see G. M. Breakwell, ed., *Threatened Identities* (New York: Wiley, 1983).

13. Edward Long, *History of Jamaica* (London: Lowndes, 1774), vol. 2, p. 427, provides a table of day names, both male and female, given to Maroon children. It can be seen that beyond the anglicized spellings, they bear close parallels with their Akan derivatives, except in the adoption of *ba* suffixes/diminutive forms to denote female names.

14. See, for instance, Rene Descartes, "Reply to the Fifth Set of Objections," in *Philosophical Works of Descartes*, eds. E. Haldane and G. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), vol. 2.

15. John Thurloe, *A Collection of the State Papers* (London: no publisher, 1742), vol. 4, p. 605.

16. Robinson, *The Fighting Maroons*, p. 63.

17. The Akan are composed of a cluster of culturally homogeneous groups speaking mutually intelligible dialects that inhabit central and southern Ghana. The largest of these groups are the Asante (Ashanti) and Fante. Kromantse (Cromantee) represents both a subgroup of the Fante and one of the major slave exporting ports. In the primary sources, "Cromantee" is used interchangeably with "Akan" to represent people not only from that group but also from the larger Akan area (and possibly its hinterland as well) who were taken out of the country from that port town.

18. Public Record Office, London, C.O. 140/17: Codrington to Council of Trade and Plantations, December 30, 1701.

19. Copies of the complete texts of the treaties can be found in several sources, including the Public Record Office, London, C.O. 137/23 and 137/56: encl. in Trelawny to Board of Trade, March 30, 1739, and Trelawny to Newcastle, March 5, 1738/9; and the National Library of Jamaica (Institute of Jamaica), JAJ 3, pp. 457–58. Among the more accessible secondary sources for the treaties is Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica*, pp. 126–28, 135–37.

20. In some instances, lands that were allocated to Maroons in subsequent treaties are even thought to have been part of the 1739 treaties.

21. See, for instance, Public Record Office, London, C.O. 140/134: Maroons Land Allotment Act, 1842.

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10

Early African-American Attitudes toward Time and Work

Mechal Sobel

Brought from Benin to Virginia in 1757 at age 12, Olaudah Equiano (Gustavas Vassa) exhibited a very prescient awareness of the controlling function of time and clocks. On arrival, he was given the task of fanning his master while he was asleep in his bedroom. "I indulged myself a great deal in looking about the room, which to me appeared very fine and curious. The first object that engaged my attention was a watch hung on the chimney, and was going. I was quite surprised at the noise it made, and was afraid it would tell the gentleman anything I might do amiss."[1] Time use *was* to be at the heart of the owners' criticism of slaves. They did want them to change their perception of time and work.

Some slaves did alter their time sense radically, especially those in urban situations and those receiving Western education. (Equiano himself developed a quasi-Puritan view.) Newly arrived Africans, "outlandish" people, retained clearly African time values. Sandy, who ran away from Thomas Wilson in 1768, indicated he was a new arrival by telling the sheriff that he had made "two crops for his master" and that he had been a runaway for "two moons." Two slaves picked up in 1754 in Surry County "say they have been Ten Moons from home."[2]

This chapter is extracted from Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth Century Virginia* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987).

Nat Turner, a second generation American, talked about time in a mixed fashion (1971 [1831], pp. 310–15). He attacked a slave owner's house "about two hours in the night," and he met with others "just before day," but he did refer to some events by clock time, as when he joined his friends for dinner "about three o'clock."

The group of Africans known as the *Amistad* rebels (who took over the slave ship bringing them from Africa) exhibited enormous culture change in the period they were out of Africa, and their changing time sense can be viewed as proof of this. When KA-LE wrote to John Quincy Adams (their defender) in January of 1841, about halfway through their experience, he noted "Mendi people have been in America 17 moons." By the time they were sent back to Africa, after more education and exposure to Western culture, his companion, Cinque, wrote from aboard ship, one day before their Sierra Leone landing, "I very glad. Two years gone." Moons had become years, at the same time as many Western values had been superficially absorbed.[3]

The major educational thrust of those dealing with the *Amistad* rebels, as well as that of most white educators working with Blacks, was to bring them to Christianity. However, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Westerners still thought of *all* their values as Christian, and bringing someone to their faith essentially meant making them "Western." Eighteenth century slave owners expected Christian slaves to share their attitudes to time and work as well as to Christ.

Another *Amistad* captive confirms that this approach was operative in the 1840s. In a very interesting summary of what he had learned about the "Great God" in America, Banna lists: "He want all men to be good and love him he sent his son into the world to save us from going down to held [*sic*], [and] *all men have some work to do*."[4]

Most Southern Blacks did not absorb this Protestant ethic. Françoise DeChastellux (1963, 2, pp. 435–40) recognized that they saw the work that whites set them to as punishment, not as redemptive. They would have preferred to spend their time in other ways. Benjamin Franklin printed relevant slave "wisdom," which, he notes, was widely repeated (1970, 8, p. 606): "Boccarorra (meaning the White men) make de black man workee, make de Horse workee, make de Ox workee, make ebery ting workee; only de Hog. He, de hog, no workee; he eat, he drink, he walk about, he go to sleep when he please, he libb like a Gentleman." Although this comment makes its point about the similarity of white gentlemen and pigs, nevertheless, the Black, too, wanted to eat, drink, sleep, and walk about "when he please," but slaves were constrained to do what their owners pleased, and this led to constant conflict.

All through the slave period, visitors commented on the slowness of the slaves. Whites waited for everything — meals and horses and carriages and completed tasks. Ebenezer Hazard (Shelley 1954, p. 414), writing from Jamestown in June 1777, noted: "Lodged at Taylor's, where the People speak very civilly, but the white People are too proud to do any Thing for a Traveller, & the Blacks so lazy, & slow in their Motions that he would have less Trouble in doing what he wanted done than in getting them to do it."

Landon Carter was determined to root out "the Lazyness of our [Black] People" in a systematic fashion through consistent and continued punishments. When "severe" whippings "day by day" did not increase his threshers' productivity, Carter came to recognize that they were working to some norm, but he was sure that outside agitators stimulated their work action: "They hear others don't thresh so much and the farmer from Mr. Wormeley's, I am certain, when he comes up is always inculcating this injury to me so that I must send the wrench he comes after up to Bull Run, for I see I shall do nothing here if he has opportunity of stealing up." Carter recognized that a white involved in a sexual relationship with a Black was likely to have a social relationship as well. He discouraged the contact on this ground and continued to punish for laziness "by every method not barbarous that I can devise."[5]

Both Carter and Washington, like many other owners, selected slave overseers and entrusted them with management and responsibility. Both men came to feel they had made a mistake in their judgment, Carter expressing a sense of betrayal, as he came to see the very men he had chosen as "cursed villains." Their use of time as well as their work habits were at issue. For example, the carpenters (with their sons) had worked for a month on a tobacco house roof and had not finished. The crew, under a Black overseer, began work well but slowed down radically. Carter intended to replace the Black overseer but recognized that this was not the solution to a far-more-basic problem: "I find it almost impossible to make a negro do his work well. No orders can engage it, no encouragement persuade it, nor no Punishment oblige it."[6]

John Smyth, observing Virginia slaves in the 1780s, felt great sympathy for them, recognizing "the hardness of their fate, the severity of their labor, and the unkindness, ignominy, and often barbarity of their treatment," but he also suggested that they were "extremely addicted" to sleep and often slept when set to work. In fact, Smyth tells a wonderful tale "on himself," about how Richmond, his black servant, was instructed to bring his canoe to the opposite side of the peninsula while Smyth was proceeding to that spot overland. When Smyth arrived, the canoe

was not in sight. Assuming he would meet Richmond on the way, Smyth walked along the almost impassable shore, calling his name. Many hours later, Smyth arrived "with my cloaths torn, my flesh lacerated and bleeding with briars and thorns, stung all over by poisonous insects, suffocated with thirst and heat, and fainting under fatigue" only to find Richmond "fast asleep in the canoe, exactly in the same spot where I had left him in the morning." Richmond proceeded to tell Smyth a tall, self-deprecating tale that so amused the white man, he forgave the black his "crime":

> Kay massa (says he), you just leave me, me sit here, great fish jump up into de canoe; here he be, massa, fine fish, massa; me den very grad; den me sit very still, until another great fish jump into de canoe; but me fall asleep, massa, and no wake till you come; now, massa, me know me deserve flogging, cause if great fish did jump into de canoe, he see me asleep, den he jump out again, and I no catch him; so, massa, me willing now take good flogging.[7]

Smyth seemed to forgive Richmond both because he was won over by his humor and because he believed an African could not be held guilty for sleeping instead of working. Richmond, in telling his tale, had worked at turning the difficult situation around and had succeeded.

Although often "addicted to sleep" in the daytime, Blacks were quite active in the night. "Nigger day-time" was the strange "contrary" term for slaves' nighttime, as a white contemporary explained, used because Blacks were "at leisure" at night.[8] As early as 1688, Governor Nicholson of Maryland noted that the slaves' "common practice on Saturday nights and Sundays, and on 2 or 3 days in Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide is to go and see one another tho' at 30 or 40 miles distance. I have, several times both in Virginia and here met negros, both single and 6 or 7 in company in the night time."[9] All through the slave period, this night traveling and celebration was noted, and patrols were, in part, created to control it. It remained, however, a widely followed pattern, and wherever possible, Blacks met together after work. They made time for hunting, dancing, and religious meetings, using the nights for their own purposes.

Nights were also traditional times for celebrations in Africa. In eighteenth century Gambia, for example, Blacks "danced to drums and also to the balafeu, all through the night and sometimes for as long as twenty-four hours."[10] Nighttime might well be dangerous time, when it was believed (in both Africa and America) that spirits were more likely to be encountered, but it could be used for celebration as well.[11]

Smyth (1784, 1, pp. 119, 121) has left us a detailed eyewitness report from the Virginia of the 1780s of nighttime activities very similar to those in Gambia. After work, he notes, a slave

> Instead of retiring to rest, as might naturally be concluded he would be glad to, he generally sets out from home, and walks six or seven miles in the night, be the weather ever so sultry, to a negroe dance, in which he performs with astonishing agility, and the most vigorous exertions, keeping time and cadence, most exactly, with the music of a banjor (a large hollow instrument with three strings), and a quaqua (somewhat resembling a drum), until he exhausts himself.

A rare eighteenth century autobiography of a slave, that of "Old Dick," who was living on Spencer Ball's plantation, Pohoke, in Fairfax County, was recorded by an English tutor, John Davis, who came to work this plantation in the 1790s. This document, which seems to be in Dick's words, gives us unusual insights into an eighteenth century Virginia slave's sense of time and place. "I was born at a plantation on the *Rappahannoc* River," Dick remembers. "It was the pulling of corn time, when 'Squire *Musgrove* was Governor of Virginia."[12] Here Dick, an American, who was, as we shall see, "acculturated," indicates a very African attitude toward the calendar. His birthday was remembered in its relation both to the agricultural year and to an event of significance, but no exact date was known.

This African pattern was common among Black Americans; nevertheless, many Blacks later blamed whites for "stealing" their birth dates as well as their birthrights. Frederick Douglass bitterly noted, "I do not remember to have ever met a slave who could tell of his birthday. They seldom come nearer to it than planting-time, harvest-time, cherry-time, spring-time, or fall-time." Douglass, seeing the white hold on the calendar as a white power ploy, was certain that owners wanted "to keep their slaves thus ignorant."[13]

It was true that whites held this knowledge. Slave births were property records and carefully kept. Most owners had ledgers for all their property, and in case after case, these record books opened with listings of equine holdings. These horses were listed with their male and female progenitors carefully recorded. Generally, the pages directly following listed slave births, and here, in most cases, only mothers were recorded. It was true that a slave woman's offspring belonged to the owner of the mother's body. Thus, if a slave woman's ownership was disputed, it was very important to know *her* children. If she were dower property, it was also essential. Recording of fathers was more common in the eighteenth

century, but even in the nineteenth century, some owners did record fathers and some white families did include the slave births in their family Bibles. However, the norm was a ledger in which other property was listed as well and in which only Black mothers were recorded.[14] There was, without question, much more than ownership involved in the owners' listing of mothers only. Slave marriage was often not respected and/or not truly recognized. The white record made a "fact" of this psychological and legal nonrecognition.

It is also true, as suggested, that Blacks did not generally know their birth dates by the whites' calendar. Charles Davenport, who was "about 100" when the Works Progress Administration (WPA) interviewer asked his age, answered uncertainly: "Nobody knows my birthday, 'cause all my white folks is gone."[15] Most former slaves interviewed could not answer with "white accuracy." Israel Jefferson, when questioned in 1873, knew he was born "December 25 — Christmas day in the morning." This was no doubt correct and was probably part of family lore, recounted each Christmas. However, Jefferson was much more vague about the year, and in this case, given Thomas Jefferson's careful records, we can know what Israel Jefferson himself did not. Israel uncertainly suggested: "The year, I suppose, was 1797." Thomas Jefferson listed his birth as December 1800, and we can assume this was accurate.[16]

Birth dates were not important for slaves in the eighteenth century; they were not indentured servants with a time to serve. What did it matter if a man was born in 1797 or 1800? In Africa, people did not reckon time in years, nor did they count their ages with any discrete numbers. Appearance, experience, and status were noted, although age-groups or -sets could establish a rough chronology. Crawling, walking, puberty, marriage, and the birth of a first child were significant markers in an individual's life. A man might say, "The Europeans came after I was circumcised, but before I married," and his social group would know approximately what time he was talking about.[17]

In America, as in Africa, Blacks found events that had stories and, therefore, meanings attached to them worth remembering. Dick must have been told he was born at the "pulling of corn time" by his parents. Dick's parents were African, as he proudly recounted (taking the occasion to disparage mulattoes), "My father and mother both came over from *Guinea*," but he, too, remembered an inaccurate birth record — "Squire *Musgrove* was Governor of *Virginia*."[18] Not having his owner's records, it is impossible to know with accuracy his birth date. The tutor, John Davis, thought Dick was in his sixties in the 1790s. His

autobiography informs us he had already had many experiences and was a skilled worker and looking for a wife when the Revolutionary War began. He may have been born anytime between 1730 and 1750. No governor in the period, in fact, no governor of colonial Virginia, was called Musgrove. Did Gooch or Dinwiddie or Fauquier have a nickname or a plantation that had led Dick to call him "Squire Musgrove"? There were Musgroves in the colonial South, but none was a governor of Virginia. Dick remembered his owner's and his sons' names and other details of his life with seeming accuracy; perhaps a Musgrove was a local official.

Use of appropriate agricultural crops as the markers of a year's clock was, as we have noted, African, and it remained the usage of Afro-Americans. Samuel Scomp, a runaway who traveled to Philadelphia, reported he came "in water melon and peach time." "Never thought about keeping dates," said a former slave. Remembering the white calendar and "reading" or "counting" clocks were not Afro-American traditions, although, clearly, those who sought to "make it" in the white world, such as Frederick Douglass, recognized that white time perception was a key. After the Civil War, many Blacks in Virginia, when asked their ages for records and in interviews, responded that the whites had burned the Bibles to deny them this knowledge. Although whites may have done this out of anger or spite, clearly, it had not been Blacks' custom to remember such years and dates. White "ownership" of former slaves' birth dates seemed to become a symbol of what whites had stolen.[19]

Life cycle changes and significant events were remembered by Blacks: "When the War broke out I had three little children." "I was a great big girl . . . when the war ceased." "I was a young black man when the stars fell; and you know that was a long time ago."[20] A remarkable late nineteenth century Bible quilt made by Harriet Powers, born a slave in Georgia in 1837, records, along with biblical cataclysms and promises of redemption, the "dark day of May 19, 1780," the "falling of the stars on Nov. 13, 1833," and "cold Thursday, the 10th of February, 1895," when animals and people froze to death.[21] Powers' quilt provides evidence that oral history kept these dates alive. Powers could not read, but she knew of that "dark day" in 1780 and associated it with seven stars and a trumpet, New Testament symbols of Judgment Day. No doubt she had heard about it in sermons and/or stories.

Many whites, too, believed an eclipse to be a sign of the darkness to come. On May 29, 1778, the *Virginia Gazette* had warned of a coming eclipse of the sun. It was expected that "the darkness will be so great for

near four minutes that the stars may be seen in the heavens, which will appear as they do in midnight." The notice was given so "that the ignorant may not be alarmed, and suppose it some dreadful omen, instead of what it really is."

Many Blacks had come to accept the Christian vision of time future insofar as it involved a cataclysmic end of time. Concern with time future in general, both personal and collective, began to change as Blacks became Christians. In the process of having Christian visions, they believed they had come to see and know the future and, therefore, accepted its existence in a new way. However, in part, a heavenly future was assimilated into old understandings: heaven was where forefathers, out of the past, waited for good Christians to come home — the past remained important time.

If we return to Dick's narrative to analyze his concern with time, we find that he certainly focused on the past, but as a prolegomenon to the present: "When I was old enough to work, I was put to look after the horses, and, when a boy, I would not have turned my back against the best negur at catching or backing the most vicious beast that ever grazed in the pasture."[22] Parallelling the preindustrial pattern in Europe, there was a proper time, when he was "old enough," that he was put to work. It was not at a "fixed" age, not at 5 or 7 or 13. He apparently took great pride in his work and claimed great skill at a dangerous task. His abilities were recognized in that he was assigned to be his young master's groom. Tom Sutherland, the young master, was, in Dick's terms, "a trimmer." He changed Dick's life and his values. He introduced him to hard drinking, violent "wenching" among the Black "Queens," and "he made me to learn to play the Banger." While the Black slave played, the white master danced a "Congo Minuet," outperforming everyone else.

There is ample evidence that many slaves' life cycles were parallel. As young children, they felt "free." Old "enough," they were put to work and might well begin with pride in accomplishment and a sense of mastery. Youth often found them rebellious, breaking both Black and white norms and suffering for it by sale — providing owners with a good excuse for selling those whose sale would least upset family structure and childbirth patterns. Harsh life experience matured them, and although some found their sense of self by opposing masters and slave breakers (as did Frederick Douglass), some were "broken" in spirit or "adjusted fully" to the demands of harsh slave masters. Many, however, found a middle way, a mature acceptance of life's harsh reality that gave them some pride in accomplishment and some self-respect. When they reached old age, they might well achieve a new stature in their own, and

in other Blacks' and whites' estimation, and this new position changed their attitude and their possibilities in regard to work. As Dick said of his own expertise, "I ought to know these things; I served my time to it."[23]

Landon Carter has left us with very detailed pictures of several of his slaves, and the life of Jack Lubber, one of the Black people with whom he was intensely involved, in some ways paralleled Dick's later development. Lubber had probably been born on a Carter estate. At any rate, he had spent many years on Carter's plantations, and Carter had been directly involved with him. In the early phases of his life, his pattern was very different from Dick's. Lubber was one of the slaves Carter had trusted and mistrusted. He had selected him as an overseer and then had been certain that he had lied, stolen, and allowed the other slaves to evade their "responsibilities." While Lubber was an overseer, Carter wrote, "Jack Lubber is a most lazy as well as stupid old fellow grown." He is "too easy with those people and too deceitful and careless himself."[24] When Jack Lubber was "retired," with but limited tasks assigned him in a fruit orchard, Carter's view of him altered radically.

> I walkt out this evening to see how my very old and honest Slave Jack Lubber did to support life in his Extreme age; and I found him prudently working amongst his melon vines, both to divert the hours and indeed to keep nature stirring that indigestions might not hurry him off with great pain. I took notice of his Pea Vines a good store and askt him why he had not got them hilled; his answer was the Prudence of Experience, Master, they have not got age enough and it will hurt too young things to Coat them too closely with earth.[25]

In their joint old age, Carter was ready to listen to Lubber and found both his use of time and his advice prudent.

Aged slaves were widely regarded as "fellow creatures" by white people, inasmuch as respecting them was not seen as dangerous to the master-slave system.[26] In fact, respecting them served the owner's interests, as they were often held responsible for order and stability in the slave community. Moreover, they often seemed to share the owner's attitude toward time and work. Charles Dabney's slaves assumed such shared values when, in 1769, they sent the oldest slave to air their grievances with their owner. They believed "a complaint from him would be listened to."[27] They, as their African parents, respected age and believed their owner would. Indeed, in the English tradition from which Charles Dabney's family came, it was expected that "the old were to rule," although given the radical social change underway in England and the widespread disdain for those over 60, the reality fell far short of the old

ideal.[28] In Virginia, Blacks reinforced old values in regard to time, work, and respect for the elderly.

In Eugene Genovese's (1974, pp. 285–324) brilliant evaluation of slave values, he emphasizes that Afro-Americans held a "rural, prebourgeois and especially preindustrial" work ethic. It is important to recognize that most Southern eighteenth-century Anglo-Americans also held a "rural, prebourgeois and especially preindustrial" work ethic that paralleled the Black ethic in many respects. Interaction between whites and Blacks led to the interpenetration of these value systems and to the strengthening of both.

Most Blacks and most whites came to Virginia with what looked like "lazy" attitudes to work. They were generally slow workers who valued changes in the working pattern and holidays. Their "clocks" were work clocks, with both the day and the year tied to agriculture and not to a mechanical timepiece. Certain times had positive or negative valence for both peoples, and taboos and other traditions governed their use of time. Byrd's servant Sam, for example, would not work on Christmas or Holy Innocent's Day, as they were not "fortunate" days to labor, and Byrd accepted this.[29]

Africans, as did Englishmen, widely respected the holders of wealth and expected them to be free from manual labor and to spend their time pleasurably. Both Englishmen and Africans also accepted status differentiation in society and the existence of "unfree" laborers. English indentured servants were not too far different from Igbo "pawns" who had sold themselves into servitude in order to gain funds, usually for bride-wealth. Both could expect their servile status to extend for a limited number of years, and in fact, only the English indentured servant could be sold from owner to owner.[30]

Many of both peoples had been dependent laborers in their home countries; most had not been independent entrepreneurs. Africans had known slavery; certainly, some had been slaves in Africa, and others, slave owners. They may well have influenced whites' understanding of just what slave's and master's behavior should be. When Philip Fithian, tutor on Robert Carter's plantation, saw a slave prostrate himself on the ground before his master, he was not mimicking any English servant. "The humble posture in which the old Fellow placed himself before he began moved me. We were sitting in the passage, he sat himself down on the Floor clasp'd his Hands together, with his face directly to Mr. Carter, & then he began his Narration."[31] Although this body language disappeared, the attitude it expressed may have, in part, been retained.

Blacks and whites shared a history of servile service and of mixed respect for and antagonism to masters, and yet, they often expressed pleasure in accomplishment. It is important to recognize that in both Africa and England, the servile laborer might have had an ambivalent attitude toward his work. Both Africans and the English generally viewed physical labor as the "curse" of the poor, and in both societies, it was widely felt that one should try to achieve a position in which such work did not have to be done. However, in both Africa and England, there were other attitudes. Olaudah Equiano (1969 [1784], p. 14), writing of Benin in the early eighteenth century, claimed "we are all habituated to labor from our earliest years. Everyone contributes something to the common stock; and as we are unacquainted with idleness, we have no beggars." However, although everyone should do something, not every moment of time was to be used for productive labor.

Many of the elite slave owners had a divergent view of time and work. Their values were close to those of both the Anglican and the Puritan elite in England: Time was to be redeemed. Every moment was to be used productively. These people were free to choose how they would spend their own time, and many chose to use it to see that their unfree laborers were gainfully occupied. They, therefore, spent much of their own time with Blacks, trying to influence them and being influenced by them.

In Virginia, the perception of time by Blacks and whites of all classes changed. Over the course of the eighteenth century, some Virginians, including some slaves, obtained watches or clocks, but well over 90 percent of the population never had mechanical timepieces, and it is very likely that many of those who did regarded them as status symbols more than as mechanical regulators of their days. On the contrary, there is evidence that whites "slided over" into Black (and earlier English) attitudes toward time and work.

Members of the elite often found that their wives and children did not share their preoccupation with redeeming time. In 1710, Lucy Byrd, first wife of William Byrd II, had a dream that warned her of the implications of her changing values. A mother wisdom figure came to her and told her "the seasons were changed and time inverted" and that "several calamities would follow that confusion." Lucy may not have been aware that she herself was mixing African and English, traditional and modern perceptions of time and work, but her husband did accuse her of not living up to "proper" norms, or being negligent and disorganized, and of not "improving" her time as he sought to improve his own.[32]

Byrd himself had a compulsion to fill every minute with recordable activity. He had a day plan (if not a life plan) that he imposed on each and every day. The African sense of time influenced him in that he felt he had to fight it every day of his life. When Byrd wrote his autobiography, he suggested that he was torn by an inner "civil war" between laziness and diligence, between "inclinations and principles."[33] This conflict can be seen as one between the African values he had absorbed from the Blacks around him in his Virginia childhood and the Anglican values he had learned as a young man in England. At his English boarding school, Felsted, Byrd may well have sung a morning hymn like that sung daily at Winchester:

> Thy precious time misspent, redeem,
> Each present day thy last esteem;
> Improve thy talent with due care,
> For the great day thyself prepare.[34]

At home in Virginia, Byrd was like a king with Black bondsmen and bondswomen serving him, making it more difficult and leaving him at times more anxious to redeem his own time.

Jefferson, born a year before Byrd died, was raised by acculturated slaves and sent to the Virginia College of William and Mary. He did not face an inner civil war, but he had a fixation on time, perhaps a reaction to the already well-established Southern slow time. He tried to force those around him to share his concern, and he did not limit his outreach to his own family. The University of Virginia, his final work of love, was dominated by another Jefferson great clock, mounted on the library's rotunda and attached to a massive bell to sound the hours. Jefferson requested that it be loud enough to be heard for two miles around. He intended the university to train the elite of Virginia in the proper use of time. Ironically, this clock became the chief target of young university sharpshooters, the sons of the elite, who valued their skills with arms over Jefferson's concern with time.[35] They, as most Southerners, came to share an old Anglo-African attitude that appreciated slow or "cool" movement and pleasurable activity.[36]

This is not to suggest that Black and white attitudes toward time were originally or became exactly the same. There were significant similarities and the possibility of confluence, but there were also significant differences. In an extraordinary interesting analysis of data from Middlesex County, Darrett and Anita Rutman and Charles Wetherell found that there were seasonal patterns to the begetting of children and that Blacks

and whites differed in this area.[37] White births rose in January and February, peaked in March, and dropped significantly to a low in June, whereas Black births peaked in May and remained high in June. What this difference means is not clear: apparently some "inner" clock remained different and was probably tied to old English and African patterns. It is fascinating that these differences continued in a new intercultural context.

Although some private patterns of behavior clearly were different, the timing of celebrations was increasingly similar. Harvest festivals, Easter, and, particularly, Christmas became joint periods of communal celebration. At Christmas, slaves were generally given a real break from work and often traveled great distances to see families and to celebrate in communal groups. Blacks and whites, who might share English Christmas puddings and drinks, also celebrated separately but at the same time.[38] For both, the Christmas period increasingly became a time for weddings. A joint calendar and a shared attitude toward movement and pleasure led Blacks and whites to share certain practices and understandings.

The shared Christian awakenings of the eighteenth century affected both Black and white attitudes toward time, giving Blacks a new Christian past and the expectation of a new future through Christian visions and giving whites a new appreciation of ecstatic experiences that took them out of time, making salvation rather than redemption of time of paramount importance. Blacks in the South came to believe that if a figure in a dream moved quickly, it was a sign he or she was in hell, and if slowly, heaven was home.[39] Virginians, white and Black, moving slowly, were at home.

NOTES

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4. Ibid., emphasis added.

5. L. Carter, *The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752–1778*, ed. Jack Greene, 2. vols. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1965),

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13. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, ed. Benjamin Quarles (New York: American Library, 1968 [1960]), p. 23.

14. See, for example, Paul Carrington, "Account Book, 1776–1859," "Croom-Hatcher-Dement Family Bible Records, 1742–1893," all at Virginia Historical Society.

15. Norman Yetman, *Life under the "Peculiar Institution": Selections from the Slave Narrative Collection* (New York: Holt, 1970), p. 71.

16. Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, p. 481; Edwin M. Betts, ed., *Thomas Jefferson's Farm Book* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1976 [1953]), p. 139.

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18. Davis, *Travels*, p. 413.

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20. Ibid., pp. 80, 113, 161.

21. Marie J. Adams, "The Harriet Powers Pictorial Quilts," in *Afro-American Folk Art and Crafts*, ed. William R. Ferris (Boston, Mass.: Hall, 1983); Maude Wahlman and John Scully, "Aesthetic Principles in Afro-American Quilts," in *Afro-American Folk Art and Crafts*, ed. William R. Ferris (Boston, Mass.: Hall, 1983), pp. 67–68, 79–98; John M. Vlach, *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts* (Cleveland, Ohio: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978), pp. 43–67.

22. Davis, *Travels*, p. 413.

23. Ibid., p. 405.

24. Carter, *Diary*, May 14, 1766; May 23, 1766.

25. Ibid., June 12, 1771.

26. Orra Langhorne (1841–1904), in Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, p. 487.

27. James Blair to Charles Dabney, April 1, 1769, reprinted in Michael Mullin, ed., *American Negro Slavery: A Documentary History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1976), p. 71.

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30. On Igbo "pawns," see Victor Uchendu, "Slaves and Society in Igboland," in *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, eds. Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1977), p. 130.

31. Hunter D. Farish, ed., *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian, 1773–1774: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion* (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., 1943), July 3, 1774. See Melville Herskovits, "What Has Africa Given America?" in his *The New World Negro: Selected Papers in Afro-American Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), pp. 168–74, for a discussion of African influence on polite behavior in the South.

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33. Byrd, "Inamorato L'Oiseaux" or "Enamored Bird," in *Diary, 1739–1741*, pp. 276–82.

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11

Time in the African Diaspora: The Gullah Experience

Joseph E. Holloway

The ancient Egyptians developed one of the oldest forms of writing in the world to record events. This form of writing is known as hieroglyphics, based on a combination of pictures and sound symbols. The desire to extend agricultural land and control irrigation projects led to the development of mathematics, astronomy, geometry, and arithmetic. The division of the circle into 360 degrees contributed to modern time measurement. The Egyptians studied the sun, the moon, and the stars in order to understand the seasons and calculate the timing of when the Nile would flood. In doing so, they developed the world's first annual 12-month calendar of 365 days.

Time is a concept that found form out of the need of human beings to control and order things in a series of sequences that could be both measured and recorded for future generations. The ancient Egyptians were the first to develop a solar and, later, a lunar calendar based on 364.5 days. This calendar allowed them to record events, that is, knowledge of the past, handed down to generations yet unborn. Time reference became

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important for societies to mark the seasons by periods of recurrent temperatures, rainfalls, vegetation, and the time for the planting of crops.

In time, calendars combined both circular and linear patterns into a single system of understanding time based on days, months, seasons, years, and events. Time in the African sense is no mere abstraction that has taken form in a linear progression; rather, time remained circular and episodic, told and retold, based on great events that occurred in a living historical past. This circular pattern of time is realized in such natural phenomena as birth, aging, and death; African time continues after death, because time is circular and not linear. Ancestors could be reborn back into the community of the living, or they could simply dwell in the world of ancestral spirits. For Africans, time is both sacred and profane, dividing the human world into sacred and nonsacred time, the temporal and the eternal. This concept of time differs from the European in that with the latter, time is linear and life ends with death. The difference is that in the West, human life and time are measured with a beginning and an end, whereas Africans see time as a continual phenomenon with no real separation of the human world from that of the spirits.

Natural and human phenomena relate Afrocentric measurement of time. Afrocentered time is holistic and in tune with the rhythms of nature. Based on African time, it uses the seasons, the moon, and the tides, rather than the clock and the calendar, to measure time. For African-Americans, time takes on a social perspective; it is employed as a marker to designate the occurrence of an event. In short, Afrocentered time perceives the universe holistically and multidimensionally, a system in which people can attune themselves simultaneously to multiple stimuli rather than assume a sequence of linear, routinized orientation toward their existence.[1]

Africans who were brought to North America continued to apply African patterns and concepts of time. This chapter will examine African continuities in the concept of time among the Gullah of the Sea Islands. The Gullah concept of time draws a direct parAllel with the African concept of time and manifests this continual link with their African ancestors.

Recent research into the Gullah people's concept of time has unveiled important data about their history. The oral tradition is a crucial element of African culture, a means of retaining and passing on history from one generation to the next. The Gullah have preserved this ancient tradition intact. For instance, the way they record time in the world of the sacred and the profane is a direct carryover from the African oral tradition. The

Gullah oral tradition is demonstrated by an African community that lived on the island of St. Helena off the coast of South Carolina.

For instance, their oral tradition documents a tidal wave and hurricane that occurred in 1893. This event, which was otherwise unrecorded, was retained by the Gullah oral tradition, which still passes history on from generation to generation through the collective memory of their griots. Sam Doyle recalled that there was an African community on the island of St. Helena prior to the storm and hurricane of 1893. Nowhere in the written history does this community of Africans appear, because around 1893, there existed little recognizable cultural difference between the African and Gullah communities on St. Helena. In other words, the planters made no distinction between the Gullah and this community of unacculturated Africans. However, the Gullahs did make a distinction between themselves and "them Africans," which was cultural. Because the Gullah left no written records, this history was recorded only in their oral tradition, as we examine a little later in this chapter.

The Gullah (as they are called by others) are direct descendants of Africans coming mostly from the ethnic groups of West Africa and the Bantu of Central Africa. The word "Gullah" itself is believed to be a shortened form or corruption of *N'gola* (Angola). They speak their own language, called "Gullah" or "Sea Island creole." Today, creole is spoken along the coast of northern Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina, in the West Indies, and along the coastal regions of Central and West Africa. Recent analyses of various New World creoles as well as West African and Kongo pidgin dialects show a common structural base and underlying similarities in grammar and idiom. There is no difference in the linguistic structure of Sea Island creole and that spoken in the Caribbean and Africa. African slaves arriving in the New World had generally learned some English creole before landing in South Carolina.

Gullah and Geeche appear to be variant names given to the language on geographical grounds. For example, in South Carolina, people from Georgia are referred to as "Geeches," and in Georgia, South Carolinians are called "Gullahs." In South Carolina, a "Gullah" is one who speaks nonstandard English, and in the *South Carolinian Gazette*, "bad English" was used in reference to someone who spoke the Gullah dialect.

Americans of African descent in the South Carolina Sea Islands share another major cultural trait that can be directly linked to their African ancestors — their concept of time. Because the majority of Africans coming into South Carolina came from both West and Central Africa, examples of time perception are taken from these areas. However, this

concept is shared by the entire African continent and within the African diaspora in the New World. In other words, many people of color seem to have a common cultural perception of time.

In the Sea Islands, as in Africa, time is episodic and is associated with the forces of nature, the seasons, lunar and solar cycles, and so on.[2] From this viewpoint, events are used as dates and are recalled chronologically. Also, common climatic factors, particularly the hot, humid Carolina summers, have reinforced the general pace and style of life.

A precise time or date is irrelevant, because history is remembered in terms of major events. According to John Mbiti, time in African societies is referenced by major episodic events: wars, eclipses, or reigns of former kings, such as Shany O Munsukhan, Khen Musu, and Chaka; they are used as markers to recall and record time and history in the oral tradition.[3] In Luba history, for example, the great eclipse of 1620 constitutes a major event that will be remembered throughout time, recalled forever by the griots, in the collective memory of that people. Thus, time is reckoned and recorded in terms of events and distance between events. This same process of recording history is found in Liberia, where the "great darkness" of 1919 marked a major event. One informant recalled that during the eclipse, "the whole element get dark, and the people could not see."[4] In Nigeria, birth dates and major incidents are referenced by such historical events. Eclipses, epidemics, and even World War II (called "Hitler") were all used as reference points for local events.[5]

A Kloao (Kru, Liberian) sailor was interviewed in Grand Cess, where he was asked when he first started working on ships. For a historical time reference, he used the eclipse of 1919: "Long time . . . 1919. Yes, when the sun and the moon they first came out and meet. The great Dark, the whole world."[6] In another interview, a Krahn soldier identified the time when the Liberian government first took over their territory. He remembered, "We were living in our home area when the Liberian government came there a long time ago and took over. The time when they took over was only a few years before 1919, the year that the eclipse occurred. It was after 1919 that the government came to Gbazon and made it a headquarter."[7]

History in the Sea Islands is essentially African in nature. As one informant related, "mine history is what I know and what I had been told."[8] In the African context, history is recorded and retold from generation to generation. In the Sea Islands, history is oral and is recalled in reference to the time of day: morning, that is, "day clean" (which is a Tshiluba idiom carried over into Gullah from Kutoka Kulu, meaning

clean sky), midday, and "fus night." Among the Gullah, the future, the present, and the past are related to natural cycles such as planting, harvesting, day, and night. Time is not static but is cyclical and moves with nature, not apart from it. Reinforcing this cyclical concept of time in nature, Maggie Smalls, a midwife trained to time the contractions of women in labor, relied on the physical signs of nature for a time reference. An infallible source was the tide. "Babies are only born on the flood tide," and regardless of the statement of the pregnant woman, she made no attempts to deliver a child if the tide was not in flood stage. She objected to the various instruments used by doctors to deliver children because they are unnatural and more children are lost this way than by nature. "Women get her [*sic*] baby by nature, I let the baby come by nature." Being at one with the environment and nature, she utilized the tides as a timing device.[9]

Gullah oral tradition recorded a visit by President Lincoln to Frogmore in 1863. The old people still claim that they can identify the very site and oak tree where President Lincoln spoke.[10] One informant, Sam Doyle, told me that "Pablo Rivers was mine great grandfather and he told us that Lincoln came and spoke on the Island where Highway 21 is located today before he was inducted into the army. I know dis because he told me. He was a soldier in the Civil War — a corporal. He was recruited from the Island here. He told us the story of Lincoln." In the Congo, "truth" is what has been transmitted by the ancestors as having really happened.[11] This has not been verified in the historical literature. According to Edith Dabbs, President Lincoln had issued an official proclamation for the first time to the thousands of ex-slaves gathered to hear it on a platform under an immense live oak tree.[12] Thomas Wenthworth Higginson, commander of the Black Regiment in the Sea Island, wrote that he received the president's Second Message of Emancipation and he read it to the men.[13]

Obviously, either this oral testimony became corrupted in time or the event was misunderstood by the ancestor. In this case, Pablo Rivers, who heard Lincoln's message being read, apparently made no clear separation between Lincoln and his words. The testimony was correct in that Lincoln's message was heard, recorded, and passed on to future generations. In other words, the process of oral transmission remained African in nature in that Lincoln's words were as representative as the man. The fact that Rivers did not hear Lincoln personally was irrelevant. The words were Lincoln's, and that was recorded. Who said them was not important. A good example of how this process works in the African

context is found in an interview with a Vai (Liberian) man in regard to the transmission of the history of Borkeza. According to him, they

> Told my father, and he told me. . . . So our people, our old-old people, they talked about Borkeza, and we heard it. Even at the time of the war with the Gola that people talk about, I was too small to remember anything, when the old people talked about it, we listened and that's how I know about it today.[14]

The tidal wave and hurricane that hit St. Helena Island in 1893 has been mentioned above. It caused great devastation, destroying crops and livestock and killing over 2,000 persons.[15] It was, thus, a major event and has become part of the living history of the Gullahs. The velocity of the wind prevented them from taking refuge on the limbs of the trees, and in the darkness of night they drowned and were never seen again.[16] Ben Mack, the oldest man on the island at 105, died recently, but before he died, he captured the event in a song, recounting all the things that were destroyed by the storm.[17]

Remembered in relationship to the storm of 1911 was an African, turniplike vegetable, called *tania* by the local people, which disappeared after this storm.

> We had an old fashioned thing that came from Africa called *tania* . . . . It had elephant ear-like leaf and on the bottom was something like turnip. . . . It came from Africa mine ma ma used to grow it. . . . This crop vanished after the 1911 storm. Everything vanished and it don't grow no more.[18]

In the Georgia Sea Islands, the people were also familiar with *tania*. One informant interviewed in regard to African-born Gullahs remembered that he (the African) "ate funny kine uh food. Roas wile locus an mushruhm an *tanyan* root. It lak elephant-eah and tase like Irish potatuh."[19] In identifying this African root plant we know that *tania* is a root plant that appears to be indigenous to Central Africa. There are two known varieties, one called old coco-yam (*Colocasia antiquorum*), known as *tania* in Central Africa, *eddo* in the West Indies, and *kookoo* in Ghana and in Nigeria. Coco-yam (*tania*) probably originated in the Kongo basin as one of the indigenous foodstuffs. The earliest citation in reference to *tania* on the African continent was made by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century.[20] The other variety is called coco-yam *taniz* (*Xanthosoma sagitifolium*).[21]

The Gullah also calculate and recount their ages in a manner similar to that of their African ancestors. Age was not numerically calculated

but was recorded in relationship to episodic events, such as the "Big Gun Shoot." The "Big Gun Shoot" was "de fust gun what shoot on Hilton Head endurin' de Civil War." When the census was being taken in 1932, the Gullahs replied to inquiries about how old they were as follows: "Well, Ma'am I can't rightly tel, but I tell you dis when gun shoot." This meant she was born during the Civil War. Another replied, "When gun shoot I bin so leetle I tink it bin tunder. I bin jest big 'nuf to tie de cow out." Another ex-slave remembered that "I birth de berry day gun shoot." "I bin a grown [w]oman wid chillum." Another ex-slave admitted that "Dey nebber did told me ma age Ma'am, but when gun shoot I ben a leetle boy in shirt tail." They remembered the "Big Gun Shoot" days and recorded their ages from this important event in their lives.[22]

Eva L. Ver Dier, taking the census among the Gullah in 1932, noted that "the coastal Negro does not date time by Anno Domini, but from events of great excitement or danger. Instead of 'gun shoot' days the younger ones reckon from the 1886 earthquake and still younger ones from the 1893 storm when over three thousands of them lost their lives in the storm."[23]

Maggie Smalls, a Gullah woman, recalled that her mother said that she was Grebo, and another recalled an African community that lived on the Wallace plantation located about five miles from what is now the Penn Center.[24] In St. Helena, some of "the old people remembered whast their parents and grandparents told them and in their turn hand down the experience of the race. . . . Oh, yes'm, he can remember hearing about the landing of those 'African people' there at Lonesome Hill. Many died, and many ran away, and I spec dey ran back to Africa."[25] Whether this was a group of Africans who came after the 1850s to the islands or an isolated group of Africans that never acculturated into the general population is not known. Some say they were brought to Georgia by the illegal slave ship the *Wanderer*, and Gullah history would seem to support this. Bernice Brooks, whose great-grandfather, born in Africa, transmitted to her his capture and transport to America, tells that he did not remain a slave for long, evidently escaping soon after arriving. He died in 1932 and was at least 90, which meant that he was born about 1842. He remembered being on deck with longhorn cattle from the Senegambia and that it was very hot when he arrived (probably during the summer). Africans were smuggled in frequently with cattle or other legitimate cargo. Brooks goes further to tell that he never did learn how to speak standard English and talked with a strong Gullah accent. In America, he was employed as a "house boy" and never really worked the field. He fished all the time and drank strong coffee. He was

probably from the coast (or a river area) and was familiar with fishing.[26] Given his age at the time of his arrival and at his death, it is more than likely that he was smuggled on the *Wanderer*. Being too young to work the fields might explain why he was in service as a "house boy." However, the fact that he was Mande and employed as a house servant was no accident in that the Mande were preferred over other Africans for house service duties in America. The fact that longhorn cattle were being exported from West Africa requires additional examination. It is also known that cattle egrets came with the cattle from West Africa, but whether they were consciously imported to North America or whether they followed the cattle on their own is not known. Today, cattle egrets are found in West Africa and the southern portion of the United States, where they now follow tractors instead of cattle.

The slaves who were smuggled into the South Carolina and Georgia coastal areas on a regular basis contributed to a strong African presence. Slave traders continued to unload their cargoes of slaves directly from Africa into the Sea Islands until the middle of the nineteenth century. The last ship recorded to have landed a cargo of Africans in the Sea Islands was the *Wanderer*, which came to Jekyll Island in Georgia with 420 Africans in 1858. They were unloaded on the Dubignon plantation, and about half of them were taken to the Butler and Tillman plantations near Hanburg in Edgefield County, South Carolina. Although the majority of the Africans were later scattered throughout the South, a large number remained in South Carolina and Georgia, living within a 2- to 30-mile radius from where they originally landed.[27]

Emory Campbell on Hilton Head Island recalled that his great-aunt told him how these illegal Africans were unloaded in covered wagons so as to conceal the smugglers' activities from the authorities.[28] As late as 1862, Laura Towne noticed that one woman from Gabriel Eddings' plantation had been brought from Africa; her face was tattooed, and she was of more "vigorous stock" than the others.[29]

It is quite clear that this African community has existed since slavery and against all odds and has preserved an African cultural heritage reflected in their burial custom, cosmology, basketry, handicraft, and folklore. Although the local Black population was still very much "African" in their cultural identity in 1893, they tended to refer to the people on the Wallace plantation as the real Africans. "Dem people dat can give you more history dey all gon' now. Dem people on the Wallace Plantation dey were Africans and I know dis to be true. Dey were the

people dat know all about Africa and African tings. Dey all 'gon now dey were wiped out when de storm of 1893 came."[30]

The fact that the inhabitants of the Wallace plantation were the only group identified as "Africans" on St. Helena by the local people suggests that Wallace was in the illegal smuggling business. This suggestion is substantiated by the State Statute, which revealed that L. R. Wallace on February 19, 1829, incurred penalties for slave trading.[31] During the Civil War, when the white planters fled the Sea Islands before the invading Union troops, the slaves who lived on the plantation refused to relinquish it, having nowhere else to go. It was then that the Sea Island Blacks began to cultivate the land for themselves. Hundreds more joined the Union Army as part of the First South Carolina Volunteers. On January 16, 1865, General William Tecumseh Sherman issued his famous military decree, Special Field Order No. 15, which set aside "the islands from Charleston South [and] the abandoned rice fields along the rivers for thirty miles back from the sea"[32] for the freed slaves, who received an average of ten acres of farm land each. Those Africans who remained on the Wallace plantation also gave the community a very strong postwar African presence prior to the devastation of the hurricane of 1893.

Today, these old plantation locations are used to measure time and distance. For example, "I am going to Tombee" translates location, time, and measurement of distance. One informant related that "when I tell my wife that I am going to Wallace Plantation she knows that I will be gone for forty minutes because it takes twenty minutes there and twenty minutes back by automobile."[33] The local population still identifies the area according to the old plantation location. Throughout the Carolinas and Georgia, 50 plantations are used to reference the distance and the time it would take to arrive from a given point and location. The locations of the old plantations are used as reference points that reflect location, time, and distance. The plantations include Corner's plantation, Coffin plantation (Thomas Aston Coffin), Fuller (Robert) plantation, Oak plantation, 66 Acres, Eustis plantation, Hazel Farm, Wallace plantation, Tombee (Tom B. Chaplin), Jenkins' Croof, Cedar Grove Cuffie, Pine Grove, Mary Jenkins, Daniel Jenkins, William Jenkins, (Gabriel) Caspers, Edding Point (Joseph D. Eddings), Hope's (Joseph J. Pope), Edgar Fripp, Oliver Fripp plantation, John Fripp, Tom Fripp, and Ann Fripp, to name a few.

Thus, the concept of time in the Sea Islands is a direct Africanism that is characteristic of African and "Third World" societies. Oral history is how Africans for centuries have kept their culture intact, because few

societies in Africa south of the Sahara developed their own script as did the Vai (Liberia) in the early nineteenth century. This tradition, characteristic of preliterate societies, was practiced by African-Americans during the slavery period and was preserved by the oral traditions and the numerous folktales, folk songs, and basket weaving techniques. The Black spirituals developed from the African tradition of call-and-response, a pattern that was preserved by slaves through oral tradition until emancipation.[34] Legislation preventing Blacks from learning how to read and write reinforced the importance of oral history and actually helped to preserve it. As a result of this heritage, Black Americans today are an oral people and tend to reinforce their writing and reading skills with strong oral abilities.

Melville Herskovits noted that C.P.T. (Colored Peoples' Time) is not an inherent disrespect for punctuality. Rather, it is an approximation of time. An event scheduled to start at 8:00 P.M. will be interpreted to be scheduled between 8:00 and 10:00 P.M.[35] This practice is strongly rooted in the African concept of time referred to in Africa as "African-time." There is no abstract numbering of time, because the numbering of time was a European introduction.[36] The African attitude toward time reflects a general outlook toward life. Time is measured in terms of events. The African descendants in the New World reckon time on a similar kind of continuum.

In conclusion, the Gullah concept of time is also strongly rooted in the African concept of time and history. To the Sea Islanders, time is ecological and is measured by natural phenomena; time is also cyclical and is based on natural cycles. Major events are used as benchmarks of historic time. In a number of African societies, time is divided into four categories: ecological time, periodic time, episodic time, and eternal time. Ecological time refers to the environment, and time is recorded from natural calamities, such as crop failure due to droughts. Periodic time records events that occur at certain intervals. For example, in Nigeria, the Igbo note that the locust comes and destroys crops at four-year intervals; based on that knowledge, they record time in reference to this periodic event as history is recalled and retold in relationship to the coming of the locust at specific intervals.

Likewise, a person's age group is also determined from the nearest major event occurring when persons of that age were born. In the Sea Islands, the Gullah used to record their ages in relationship to major events such as the Civil War, the earthquake of 1886, and the great storms and hurricanes of 1893 and 1911. Eternal time is a part of nature. Eternal time is the unity of time with nature. The past, the present, and

the future are seen as part of a continuum. Eternal time never ends, because it always renews itself. It is symbolized by the rising and the setting of the sun and by the change from night to day.

The Gullah, like their African ancestors, see time as an unbroken circle. Birth, adulthood, and death complete life's circle. Death, in the African context, is not final but a new beginning. This concept is unlike the European idea of time, which is linear and has a beginning and an end; death is a final act that expresses a break with the community of the living. To the Gullah, the dead still have an impact on the living community, just as in many African ancestral cults. South Carolina's ministers continually invoke the spirits of the dead and those who have passed on because their "presence is still felt."[37] In other words, there is a recognized continuity between the community of the living and the dead, and as long as an ancestor is remembered, he or she will continue to have an impact on the community of the living.

Also, the oral transmission of one's lineage is extremely important in the Sea Islands, as it is in the African tradition. Kinship is most often established through oral transmission, as opposed to birth certificates. In short, one is expected to know his or her family lineage. Younger persons often undergo seemingly intense interrogation by island residents who might wish to know their family affiliation. This is how kinship relationships have been established, and this gives a sense of community over time.

Africanisms in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida are direct cultural links to the traditions and history of Africa. The various ethnic groups, depending on their numbers, either absorbed the less-represented groups or were assimilated by the larger culture groups, specifically the Bantu. In spite of this blending over time, distinct ethnic characteristics from each African group survived, at least to some extent; this is evidenced in the language, rituals, and crafts of the African-Americans from these regions. However, the concept of time and the oral tradition are common to all the African groups, a shared heritage that survived the Middle Passage and gave a sense of continuity and kinship to a culturally uprooted and enslaved people. Today, some 400 years after the slave trade, despite acculturation into mainstream America, the African link is still manifested in many ways in the life style and culture of the Gullah people of the Sea Islands, particularly in their concept of time.

NOTES

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