REVIEW ARTICLES

CULTURE AND CHRONOLOGY IN AFRICAN HISTORY

Sources and methods in African history: spoken, written, unearthed. Edited by T. Falola and C. Jennings. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004. Pp. xxi + 409. ISBN 1-58046-140-9. £50.00.

Honour in African history. By John Iliffe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. xv + 404. ISBN 0-521-54685-0. £16.99.

Black experience and the empire. Edited by P. Morgan and S. Hawkins. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. xv + 416. ISBN 0-19-926029-x. £39.00.

Muslim societies in African history. By D. Robinson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pp. xx + 220. ISBN 0-521-533566-x. £10.99.

The study of African culture stands in a uneasy relationship with the study of African history. Historians work by pegging people, places, and events to a place on time's ever-lengthening yardstick. For the historical discipline, time is a structure that stands behind and lends meaning to human events. Culture, by contrast, is often claimed to be timeless, the unique inheritance of a distinct group of people. Culture builders work by short-circuiting chronology. They poach events, names, clothing styles, and other inspirational elements from the past and marshal them as a tradition to be proud of. The study of cultural history enters into a field where the partitions between past and present are being trampled by the traffic of human imagination.

There are reasons to think that the essentializing work of cultural creation has been more urgent in Africa than in other parts of the world. Until the twentieth century, the African continent's fickle rainfall and thin topsoil inhibited settled agricultural communities, while the prevalence of disease-bearing insects and (especially in eastern Africa) the absence of navigable rivers made long-distance trade expensive and difficult.[1] Africa's environments encouraged the development of diverse languages and cultures, and made larger-scale communities hard to build. Pre-colonial polity-builders therefore had to poach from the remembered or invented past, dredging through history for archetypical state-builders from which to claim inspiration, or allying themselves with the life-creating powers of blacksmiths.[2] More recently, colonial and post-colonial governments have sought to create constituencies by linking discrete groups of people with distinct cultural traditions.

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[1] The political consequences of Africa's generally fragile environment are described in J. Iliffe, *The Africans: history of a continent* (Cambridge, 1995).

[2] See Eugenia Herbert, *Iron, gender and power: rituals of transformation in African societies* (Bloomington, IN, 1993), for a study of iron-working and political theory in Africa. For an examination of how the epic of *Sundiata* inhabited the histories of several medieval west African states, see R. Austen, *In search of Sundiata: the Mande oral epic as history, literature and performance* (Bloomington, IN, 1999); and S. Belcher, *Epic traditions of Africa* (Bloomington, IN, 1999).
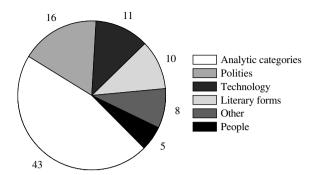
Fig. 1. Academics as detectives: books published since 1983 with titles beginning 'The invention of', classified by subject (n = 93).

In the 1920s and 1930s, colonial governments' policy of 'indirect rule' cast Africa's peoples into tribal groups, each with its own political hierarchy and legal code.[3] In the 1960s and 1970s, Tanzania, Ghana, and other African polities were built by brokers who defined particular styles of music, language, and dress as the property of a national community.[4] Africa's polity-builders have had to reduce heterodoxy, to standardize languages and traditions, and to invent histories and cultures, so to draw disparate peoples together.

Confronted with the unceasing traffic between past and present, historians have been unabashed devotees of deconstruction. At least since the publication of Hobsbawm and Ranger's edited volume *The invention of tradition* (1983), historians have worked to draw the veil from the face of contemporary cultural forms, to criticize their claims to timeless antiquity, and to render them up to historical inquiry.[5] The Library of Congress has since 1983 registered no less than ninety-three books with titles beginning with the words 'The invention of'. A number of these titles concern technologies – television, for example, or cuneiform writing.[6] And a fairly large percentage concerns the history of literary forms, of prose writing, or of journalism.[7] But the largest number of books with titles beginning 'The invention of' are about political and cultural categories. Sixteen titles concern the history of contemporary political units, showing that Israel, Somalia, the Creek Nation, Argentina, and Africa itself are creations of history, not hold-overs from the past.[8] And nearly half

[3] M. Mamdani, *Citizen and subject: contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism* (Princeton, 1996).

[4] For Tanzania, see K. Askew, *Performing the nation: Swahili music and cultural politics in Tanzania* (Chicago, 2002); and G. Maddox and J. Giblin, eds., *In search of a nation: histories of authority and dissidence in Tanzania* (London, 2006); for Ghana, see J. Allman, *The quills of the porcupine: Asante nationalism in an emergent Ghana* (Madison, WI, 1993); and J. Hess, 'Exhibiting Ghana: display, documentary, and "national art" in the Nkrumah era', *African Studies Review*, 44 (2001), pp. 59–77.

[5] E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, eds., *The invention of tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).

[6] H. Shelton, *The invention of television* (Sugar Land, TX, 1988); J. Glassner, *The invention of cuneiform: writing in Sumer*, trans. Z. Bahrani and M. Van de Mieroop (Baltimore, 2003).

[7] S. Goldhill, *The invention of prose* (Oxford, 2002); J. Chalaby, *The invention of journalism* (New York, 1998).

[8] A. Dieckhoff, *The invention of a nation: Zionist thought and the making of modern Israel*, trans. J. Derrick (New York, 2003); B. Kimmerling, *The invention and decline of Israeliness: state, society and the military*

of the books titled 'The invention of' deal with the categories of social and cultural life. 'Race', 'ethnicity', 'art', 'progress', and dozens of other terms have been shown to be creations of self-interested entrepreneurs.[9] Three books concern 'religion', including one that I edited.[10] While Africans and other peoples have been raiding history's storehouse to build cultures and fuel political imaginations, historians have cast themselves as detectives, tracing the passage of symbols and ideas between past and present.

At its best, the 'invention of tradition' scholarship in Africa challenges absolutists' search for a pristine past by illuminating the heterodox origins of human communities. But the 'invention' paradigm brings its own absolutes to the interpretation of history. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued, the timescale of history belongs to the historian, rather than to the cultural brokers who bend chronology and poach from the past.[11] The timescale of the historian is linear and unidirectional, flowing naturally from past to present. The tyranny of chronology enables scholars to distinguish antique precedents from modern innovations, to sort the authentic from the invented, and to contrast the old with the new. Historians of modern Africa can therefore treat colonialism as an 'encounter' between two sides, measuring the novelties of colonial history against a pre-colonial baseline. But not all history can be shoehorned into a colonial/pre-colonial mould. Steven Feierman's pioneering book *Peasant intellectuals* (2000) shows how peasants, chiefs, and other brokers in the Shambaa kingdom could draw on an indigenous theory of time to advance political claims in their contemporary world.[12] North-eastern Tanzania's nineteenth-century environment was punctuated by periods of drought, disease, and famine. Learning from this episodic environmental history, Shambaa peasants thought time moved in cycles, alternating between an era of good government and an era of competitive, destructive politics. When benevolent rulers upheld social order, polities prospered: bush was chopped down, disease-bearing insects were put to flight, crops flourished, and children grew.[13] But where bad rulers failed to tame the natural world, human communities suffered. Under British colonial rule and, later, under the government of independent Tanzania, peasant intellectuals evaluated their rulers according to their capacity to make the land prosper. Shambaa culture, argues Feierman, was not simply a hand-me-down from the distant past, and neither was it an invention of cultural brokers' will. It was a forum for discourse, where

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(Berkeley, 2001); A. Ahmed, ed., *The invention of Somalia* (Lawrenceville, NJ, 1995); S. Hahn, *The invention of the Creek nation, 1670–1763* (Lincoln, NE, 2004); N. Shumway, *The invention of Argentina* (Berkeley, 1991); V. Y. Mudimbe, *The invention of Africa: gnosis, philosophy, and the order of knowledge* (Bloomington, IN, 1988).

[9] T. Lott, *The invention of race: black culture and the politics of representation* (Malden, MA, 1999); A. A. Huemer, *The invention of 'race': the Columbian turn in modern consciousness* (Lander, WY, 1998); W. Sollers, ed., *The invention of ethnicity* (New York, 1989); L. Shiner, *The invention of art: a cultural history* (Chicago, 2001); P. Bowler, *The invention of progress: the Victorians and the past* (Oxford, 1989).

[10] D. Peterson and D. Walhof, eds., *The invention of religion: rethinking belief in politics and history* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2002); T. Masuzawa, *The invention of world religions, or, How European universalism was preserved in the language of pluralism* (Chicago, 2005); C. Phillips, *The invention of religion: reason, identity and the colonialist imagination* (New York, 2000).

[11] D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference* (Princeton, 2000).

[12] S. Feierman, *Peasant intellectuals: anthropology and history in Tanzania* (Madison, WI, 2000).

[13] The links between good government and environmental management in Tanzania are also explored in J. Giblin, *The politics of environmental control in northeastern Tanzania, 1840–1940* (Philadelphia, 1992); and in G. Maddox, J. Giblin, and I. Kimambo, eds., *Custodians of the land: ecology and culture in the history of Tanzania* (London, 1996).

traders, peasants, and other brokers could conduct arguments about colonial and post-colonial politics using an antique theory of time.

This review of contemporary scholarship on African cultural history deals with four new works. Philip Morgan and Sean Hawkins's edited *Black experience and the empire* is a companion volume to the Oxford History of the British Empire. The contributors, all eminent scholars of Africa or the African diaspora, explore the tensions between the prejudiced, exclusionary politics of racism on the one hand and the more egalitarian, liberal politics of imperial citizenship on the other. David Robinson's *Muslim societies in African history* shows how African political and religious entrepreneurs have melded Islamic precedents with inherited idioms over the *longue durée*. John Iliffe's *Honour in African history* illuminates how Africans' inherited conceptions of respectability fed political philosophy, shaped gender relations, and formed religious ethics. And Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings's sprawling, uneven, but often rewarding, *Sources and methods in African history* asks how historians, when confronted with founding myths, legal records, and other artefacts of political advocacy, can tease evidence out of biased sources. The publication of these four works offers an apposite occasion to reflect on the chronology, and geography, of African history. I shall argue that, instead of sorting African history into sovereign time and colonial time, scholars might better focus on the lumpy, non-linear, overlapping chronologies that African thinkers embraced. And instead of sorting cultural property into European and African categories, we might better explore the work that African entrepreneurs did to attenuate geography and make a home for themselves in a world that was neither authentic nor invented.

The enduring preoccupation of scholars of the African diaspora has been to illuminate continuities in language, religion, and political thought between American slave communities and their African homelands. This scholarship has generated powerful insights: the analysis of the Stono Rebellion in eighteenth-century South Carolina, for example, is made richer by John Thornton's expert analysis of the Kongolese military tactics that the rebels used, while scholarly understanding of slave cultures is deepened by Gwendolyn Hall's pioneering effort to illuminate the Bambara influences on Louisiana slaves' lives.[14] This line of interpretation is now made easier by the publication of a new CD-ROM, edited by David Eltis and several other scholars.[15] Utilizing thousands of manifests from slave ships, Eltis lists the African ports where slaves embarked on their trans-Atlantic journey, and the New World ports where they disembarked. With this evidence, promises one contributor to the Falola and Jennings volume, scholars will be able to show 'how and why specific African ethnicities affected the slave cultures … at specific times' (p. 157).

The effort to ground slaves within a particular African milieu necessarily orients historical analysis in a genetic fashion. It emphasizes, that is, the vertical relationship linking New World cultural forms to their Old World antecedents, so as to celebrate slaves' success in preserving cultural property that was distinctly theirs. In his illuminating chapter on black cultural forms in the British Empire, for example, Phillip Morgan explains that a basic musical grammar, with an 'emphasis on the importance of music and dance in

[14] J. Thornton, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian movement, 1684–1706* (Cambridge, 1998); and idem, *Africa and Africans in the making of the Atlantic world, 1400–1680* (Cambridge, 1992); G. Hall, *Africans in colonial Louisiana: the development of Afro-creole culture in the eighteenth century* (Baton Rouge, 1992).

[15] D. Eltis, D. Richardson, S. Behrendt, and H. Klein, *The trans-Atlantic slave trade: a database on CD-ROM* (Cambridge, 1999).

everyday life and the role of rhythm and percussion in musical style, survived the middle passage' (p. 103). While reinterpretations surely occurred, writes Morgan, innovators were guided by 'deep level aesthetic principles drawn from different African musical traditions'. The search for African survivals similarly guides Childs's analysis of eighteenth-century Cuba's *cabildos*, in the volume edited by Falola and Jennings. *Cabildos* were voluntary societies incorporating slaves and free people. They had their own political hierarchies, with kings, queen mothers, and ministers, and with a bureaucracy to oversee the association's finances. They were most often organized around an ethnic solidarity: by the end of the eighteenth century, there was, for example, a flourishing Lucumi *cabildo* for Yoruba slaves. Childs argues that *cabildos* were really Old World institutions, modified in a New World setting (p. 123). The Lucumi *cabildo* was in Childs's view a descendant of Yorubaland's mutual aid societies. By recreating inherited institutions in the diaspora, the *cabildos* 'produced a sacred space for ethnic solidarity in a society increasing divided along racial lines between slavery and freedom' (p. 119).

In its focus on the African origins of slaves' cultures, the genetic line of interpretation obscures slaves' experimental, heterodox work of cultural creation. Slaves did not stand in a lineal relationship to an already established African culture. They were also working horizontally, trying on new cultural forms, weaving novelties out of inherited strands of cultural practice, so as to position themselves in a challenging new world. The horizontal dimension of slaves' cultural work is most clearly seen in Russell Lohse's interesting contribution to *Sources and methods in African history*. Lohse's case study is eighteenth-century Costa Rica, where the data from the Eltis CD-ROM shows a high degree of ethnic homogeneity among arriving slaves. But evidence drawn from courts records reveals a more complicated reality. In one case, the slave 'Maria', who had been identified as a member of the Ana *casta* by shipping clerks, used the court as a venue to re-label herself as a member of the Popo *casta*. Ana was the name that slavers gave to a small subgroup of what later came to be known as the Yoruba people. By contrast, Popo was a broader category, compassing a large percentage of Costa Rica's slave population. By naming herself Popo, Maria was claiming a place for herself in a larger community. Slaves like Maria were looking for ways to widen their networks, looking also for leverage and social capital.

By orienting scholarly interpretation toward the vertical relationship between the Old World and the New, the genetic approach straitjackets our understanding of slaves' cultural work. A second consequence of this angle of vision is to make Africa – as the Old World – look like a storehouse from which the continent's far-flung children could draw. The past-ness of Africa in slaves' experience invites scholars to see African culture as temporally and intellectually fixed, an inheritance to be passed on. Some diaspora studies scholars have challenged this view by highlighting the dynamic relationship between western Africa's diverse peoples and other residents of the 'black Atlantic'. J. Lorand Matory's new *Black Atlantic religion* (2005) argues that Afro-Brazilian *Candomblé* was shaped by an ongoing cultural dialogue among the peoples of the Atlantic fringe, fuelled by transatlantic commerce and travel involving Africans and their Brazilian descendants.[16] Matory further argues that *Candomblé* practitioners' concern with the authenticity of their ritual was itself an historical artefact, inherited from late nineteenth-century Yoruba elites' efforts to defend their institutions against British racism. For Matory as for other revisionist

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[16] J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic religion: tradition, transnationalism, and matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, 2005); see also idem, 'The "cult of nations" and the ritualization of their purity', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100 (2001), pp. 171–214.

historians of the African diaspora, African cultures were contemporaries of New World cultures, not their forebears.[17]

Historians of colonial Africa are, like scholars of the African diaspora, inclined to distinguish the authentic from the corrupted, the archetype from the derivative. Because the greater bulk of the continent was colonized within a twenty-year span in the late nineteenth century, Africa's historical trajectory can be settled easily into 'pre-colonial' and 'colonial' time. Pre-colonial time, as Kwame Appiah shows in his contribution to the Morgan and Hawkins volume, is very often represented as pristine, unsullied by outside influence.[18] Thus, when Wole Soyinka seeks to take Africa for granted in his novels, he evokes African traditional religions, and treats Christianity and Islam as outside imports. Chinua Achebe's archetypal novel, *Things fall apart* (1958), likewise valorizes pre-colonial Igbo culture, contrasting the order and respectability of village politics with the corrupt, uncaring colonial government.[19]

The moulding of history into pre-colonial and colonial time makes it possible to see African cultures and societies, at the moment of conquest, as representatives of a long, endogenous political tradition. With the pre-colonial past in view, historians can frame the cultural and political history of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Africa as an encounter between two sides. Sandra Greene's *Sacred sites and the colonial encounter* (2002) explores how the landscaping of colonialism reworked Anlo people's conceptions of space.[20] Sean Hawkins's *Writing and colonialism in northern Ghana: the encounter between the LoDagaa and 'the world on paper'* (2002) illuminates how colonial courts and British anthropology reduced the negotiable LoDagaa 'world of experience' to a set of rules on paper.[21] John and Jean Comaroff's foundational *Of revelation and revolution* (1991) conceives of the 'missionary encounter' in southern Africa as 'a two sided historical process'.[22] After introductory chapters on British missionaries' *mentalité* and on Tswana cultural practice, the Comaroffs explore 'the initial meeting of two worlds, one imperial and expansive, the other local and defensive'.[23] The encounter framework lends drama and coherence to historical writing about Africa. It makes it possible to compare the old era of cultural and political independence with the new era of foreign government. 'Why would Africans participate in a system of alien rule that robbed them of their sovereignty, promoted racial discrimination, and subjected them to the unmitigated forces of foreign economic exploitation?' asks Timothy Parsons in his contribution to the volume edited by Morgan and Hawkins (p. 257). Parsons's answer is that colonial officials needed only to induce a small handful of Africans to participate directly in the colonial system. But the question presumes

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[17] See, for example, D. Brown, *Santería enthroned* (Chicago, 2003); S. Palmié, 'Against syncretism: Africanizing and Cubanizing discourses in North American *orisa*-worship', in R. Fardon, ed., *Counterworks: managing the diversity of culture* (London, 1995); and Palmié, 'The cultural work of Yoruba globalization', in T. Falola, ed., *Christianity and social change in Africa* (Durham, NC, 2005).

[18] See also Kwame Appiah, *In my father's house: Africa in the philosophy of culture* (New York, 1993).

[19] C. Achebe, *Things fall apart* (New York, 1958). For a study of African novelists' dealings with history, see E. Coundouriotis, *Claiming history: colonialism, ethnography, and the novel* (New York, 1999).

[20] S. Greene, *Sacred sites and the colonial encounter: a history of meaning and memory in Ghana* (Bloomington, IN, 2002).

[21] S. Hawkins, *Writing and colonialism in northern Ghana: the encounter between the LoDagaa and 'the world on paper'* (Toronto, 2002).

[22] J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of revelation and revolution: Christianity, colonialism and consciousness in South Africa*, I (Chicago, 1991), p. 54.   [23] Ibid., p. 171.

that there was a moment of choice, a point of departure, where Africans left their pre-colonial sovereignty behind and accepted colonial rule.

But when did pre-colonial African history happen? Where is the baseline against which the novelties of the colonial era can be measured? The chronology of conquest varied widely across the continent: the Portuguese *prazos* along the Zambezi river were over 150 years old when, in the late 1890s, Ganda mercenaries brought Bunyoro into the British protectorate of Uganda.[24] And formal conquest was in many places preceded by centuries of cultural and economic exchange, a dialogue that exposed Africans to 'an indiscriminate, eclectic barrage of new ideas, practices, and technologies', as Tom McCaskie puts it in the volume edited by Morgan and Hawkins (p. 181). Laura Mitchell's illuminating essay in *Sources and methods in African history* shows that, on the Cedarburg frontier in eighteenth-century south-western Africa, supposedly pre-historic Khoisan were, in fact, living side by side with white settlers, competing for access to water and land. These same Khoisan communities had, at least since the seventeenth century, been active partici-pants in Atlantic commerce, producing primary commodities and finished products for the world market.[25] In south-western Africa, as in other parts of the continent, a traditional African economy is hard to find.

Neither was African intellectual life sealed off from the wider world. In south-eastern Africa, Christian ideas were, in the early nineteenth century, crossing the colonial frontier and shaping Africans' political thought. Jeff Peires's research on the Xhosa cattle killing of 1856–7 shows how that disastrous movement drew on Christian ideas about the oncoming millennium, fusing an already existing teleology with Christian eschatology.[26] Islamic ideas likewise shaped Africans' intellectual and political traditions. In eighteenth- and nine-teenth-century Yorubaland, Islamic critics inspired *Ifa* diviners to focus their theology on a high God, whom they called *Olodumare*. As John Peel has shown, traditional religion in Yorubaland was a terrain of constant questioning, where Islamic and, later, Christian ideas formed and were formed by Yoruba thought.[27] David Robinson's excellent new textbook *Muslim societies in African history* documents the interplay between Islamic thought and African political imagination on a wider scale. Polity-builders used Islamic archetypes to castigate opponents, elevate centralizing authority, and constitute communities. In early nineteenth-century Hausaland, the charismatic leader, Usman dan Fodio, and his fol-lowers were forced to leave the city of Gobir. Dan Fodio likened his outward journey to Mohammed's *hijra* to Medina, the marker of a new era in history. The past of Hausaland he called *Jahiliyya*, the 'time of confusion'. Dan Fodio was bending chronology, claiming a history that had occurred hundreds of years before, in a faraway place. Religious en-trepreneurs in late nineteenth-century Sudan were likewise lifting characters from an Islamic past. In 1881, Muhammad Ahmad named himself *Mahdi*, the savior who would usher in a new era in history. 'Know that the followers of the apostles before us and of our

[24] A. Isaacman and B. Isaacman, *Slavery and beyond: the making of men and Chikunda ethnic identities in the unstable world of south-central Africa, 1750–1920* (Portsmouth, NH, 2004); S. Doyle, *Crisis and decline in Bunyoro: population and environment in western Uganda, 1860–1955* (London, 2006).

[25] E. Wilmsen, 'For trinkets such as beads: a revalorization of Khoisan labor in colonial southern Africa', in Falola and Jennings, eds., *Sources and methods*; see also idem, *Land filled with flies: a political economy of the Kalahari* (Chicago, 1989).

[26] J. Peires, *The dead will arise: Nongquawuse and the great Xhosa cattle killing movement of 1856–57* (Bloomington, IN, 1989).

[27] J. Peel, *Religious encounter and the making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington, IN, 2000).

Prophet Muhammad were the weak and the ignorant and the nomads', he wrote to the Egyptian colonial authorities in Khartoum (p. 174). Neither the *Mahdi* nor Usman dan Fodio were living in a parochial pre-colonial world. Their history was heterotemporal, with more than one time frame at play.

Pre-colonial African history cannot support the intellectual and rhetorical work that historians of the colonial encounter ask it to perform. Intellectual, economic, and political life in the nineteenth century was cosmopolitan and inventive, not static and parochial. Seeing this history as 'pre-colonial' flattens our understanding of this complicated past. And, moreover, the notion of pre-colonial history distorts Africans' understandings of their own time, imposing a chronology drawn from political history on to a heterotemporal world. Africans in the nineteenth century were living in expectation of a coming millennium, or re-enacting events drawn from Islamic hagiography. There was no singular encounter between European and African societies; rather, there were multiple engagements and overlapping chronologies.

The framing of 'pre-colonial' African history has to be seen as a political and analytic strategy. For African thinkers did find pre-colonial history useful as a way of manufacturing moral and rhetorical capital. In north-western Tanganyika, organizers of the Haya Union were in the 1950s plying the British government and the United Nations with petitions about their sovereign past. Haya women were eastern Africa's premier prostitutes, travelling to the faraway cities of Nairobi and Dar es Salaam to ply their trade. Union organizers, all of them men, thought Haya prostitutes shamed their people: they 'tremendously lowered the prestige of their country-folks before the eyes of other tribespeople … and have always caused frictions between families … by seducing other men's wives to follow suit in their dirty career', wrote one unionist.[28] In a series of petitions to the United Nations and other authorities, they argued that there was no prostitution in pre-colonial Buhaya. Its source 'is attached to the coming of Europeans and, in particular, the British Rule'.[29] European men had lured unsuspecting Haya women to towns, where they were dazzled by riches and fancy clothing and laid down their virtue. The Union men argued that British government would be the end of Haya society. 'Yes, we now begin to feel that Partition of Africa and all its bad effects in Africa (and one of its effects in prostitution) which were unknown to us before its advent', they wrote. 'Prostitution, we now realize, introduced foreign rule and foreign policy which did not fit in with African ideas of life.' Haya thinkers were reifying their own past, contrasting colonial with pre-colonial social order. As Diana Jeater shows in her contribution to *Black experience and the empire*, the Unionists' obsession with women's sexual conduct was a hallmark of the mid-twentieth-century African middle class more generally. In different parts of the continent, African men were renovating supposedly customary rules about sexual relations in order to rein in independent women. The Unionists' history lessons helped them cast recalcitrant prostitutes as unpatriotic destroyers of Haya commonwealth. But their account of the past was also a way of getting leverage over British officials. By identifying an endogenous history free from prostitution, Haya memoirists were inviting the British to rectify the trouble they had caused.

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[28] Secretary Haya Union to governor, 26 Jan. 1952, Tanzania National Archives, Mwanza branch, Acc. 1 V 2/15. The history of prostitution in north-western Tanzania is discussed in B. Larsson, *Conversion to greater freedom? The church and social change in north-western Tanzania under colonial rule* (Uppsala, 1991); and L. White, *The comforts of home: prostitution in colonial Nairobi* (Chicago, 1990).
[29] Haya Union to secretary of state for the colonies, 12 Aug. 1951, Tanzania National Archives, Mwanza branch, Acc. 1 A 9/4.

In Haya territory and elsewhere in colonial Africa, entrepreneurs were burnishing their pre-colonial history, contrasting African virtue with colonial degradation, and generating political capital. But there was a contrary line of political representation available to African activists in the British Empire. In both the New and the Old World, entrepreneurs cast themselves as loyal citizens of empire, and as protagonists in the advance of liberal enlightenment. Anti-slavery activists were among the first to envision an empire defined not by race but by shared allegiance to the crown. As Christopher Brown shows in his contribution to *Black experience and the empire*, abolitionist Maurice Morgann proposed in the 1770s that the British government should each year purchase several dozen boys and girls from western Africa's slaving forts. They would be instructed in English and settled in the new colonies in Florida, there to found colonies for liberated slaves. In Morgann's liberal vision, Africans were allies of the crown, rather than planters' private property. By their labour, offered in exchange for a wage, they would uphold the British economy. As Brown argues, this vision – of an imperial citizenry joined by a shared political allegiance – drove nineteenth-century abolitionism, and also fuelled the political vision of rebellious slaves. When the slave trade was abolished in 1807, slaves seized the opportunity to present themselves as loyal and deserving subjects. In Barbados in 1816 and in Jamaica in 1832 rebellious slaves described their resistance as an attempt to assist the crown in its work (p. 134). Their rhetoric invited the imperial centre to live up to its promises, to rectify the injustices of local planters, and to advance Britain's civilizing project.

Liberal political philosophy proved to be impossible to patent. In the Caribbean, in British Africa, and in Britain itself subjects could make claims on government by contrasting local injustice with enlightened ideals. 'We, as natives and loyal subjects of the British empire, hold too high an opinion of Anglo-Saxon chivalry to believe other than that African and Oriental wrongs have but to be made manifest in order that they might be righted', wrote the Egyptian intellectual Druse Mohammed in 1912 (quoted in *Black experience*, p. 352). Mohammed's London-based newspaper advertised the wrongs of colonial government in order to spur a horrified British public into action. This same strategy fuelled the politics of creole elites in Cape Colony, as Vivian Bickford-Smith shows in his engaging contribution to the Morgan and Hawkins volume. Creoles made a show of their enthusiasm for the British crown: at the Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 1897, one group of Muslims represented the year 1837 as slavery, and the year 1897 as freedom. Like the members of the Haya Union, creoles emphasized the differences between the past and the present. But where Unionists blamed colonial government for destroying pre-colonial moral virtue, liberal creoles credited the British for putting backwardness and injustice to flight. Their task was to convince doubting officials that they, too, could be counted as agents of civilizing progress.

Colonial subjects' liberalism was made more urgent when confronted with the injustices of local government. By the 1920s, British officials had all but abandoned the notion that Africans could be made into citizens of the empire. The philosophy of 'indirect rule', first worked out in the conquered territories to the east of the Cape and later applied across Anglophone Africa, held that Africans naturally belonged to small-scale, traditional, autocratic polities. Officials created, or propped up, tribal authorities, giving Shona, Gikuyu, Luo, and other chiefs powers they had never before enjoyed.[30] Liberal education

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[30] See the essays collected in L. Vail, ed., *The creation of tribalism in southern Africa* (Berkeley, CA, 1989); and Mamdani, *Citizen and subject*.

was sharply curtailed, as pedagogical theory held that Africans should conform their ambitions to a parochial, rural future. Swahili and other African *linguae francae* took the place of English in school syllabi, as government sought to fence African intellectual life off from the currents of international discourse.[31] And in labour theory, as Frederick Cooper argues in *Black experience and the empire*, British employers emphasized the immutable difference between African and European workers' needs, so as legitimately to pay Africans low wages.

British officials' distrust for African cosmopolitans reached an apotheosis in Kenya, where the Mau Mau movement of the 1950s was seen as proof that the African *mentalité* was ill-suited to modernization. 'The failure of the Kikuyu to adjust themselves fully to the needs of sudden change … [was] the primary [cause] and [origin] of Mau Mau', wrote the government's official historian.[32] From 1953, tens of thousands of Gikuyu people were detained in camps, there to be screened by chiefs and rehabilitated as decent citizens. Detention camps were inhumane, brutal places, where local commandants' thirst for retribution often overcame government's reformist agenda.[33] But for African detainees, the camps were also platforms where novel political postures could be tried out. At several camps detainees ran classes in English language, history, and civics. Their educational energy fuelled their political advocacy. In dozens of handwritten English-language petitions spirited out of camps, detainees maintained a running commentary on the injustices they had experienced. In April 1957, petitioners from Embakasi camp gave the commissioner of prisons a primer in British jurisprudence. Titling their letter 'Structures of British laws in prisons', they described how the commandant was torturing them by shoving sticks into their rectums. 'We have been declaring that the time is now ripe for HM Government to think how the Africans should be governed, and we are not fed up with British Laws at all', they wrote. 'But we really pray for well instructed Government officials who understand the Queen's Government Laws [better] than such impervious to reason people as Mr. Bathman.'[34] The 'Black Africans in Manyani detention camp' likewise sought to hold detention camp officers to high standards. 'The actions and the treatments which are going on in Detention Camps mostly in Manyani are completely out of orders and laws of Queen Elizabeth the II', they wrote in a petition to the governor.[35] Even cuisine was a matter of legal consequence. 'The food which we eat here is not according to the British law and order', wrote the 'Black People of Kenya in Manyani detention camp' in 1957. 'Is it British law when they have got the captives not to get enough food?'[36] Detainees were contrasting universal British ideals with the injustices perpetrated by untutored camp officials.

[31] As argued in D. Peterson, 'Language work and colonial politics: the making of standard Swahili and "school Kikuyu"', in K. Oslund and D. Hoyt, eds., *The politics of language study* (Baltimore, MD, 2006).

[32] F. D. Corfield, *Historical survey of the origins and growth of Mau Mau* (Nairobi, 1960), p. ii. For British attitudes toward Mau Mau, see J. Lonsdale, 'Mau Maus of the mind: making Mau Mau and remaking Kenya', *Journal of African History*, 31 (1990), pp. 393–421.

[33] C. Elkins, *Britain's gulag: the brutal end of empire in Kenya* (London, 2005).

[34] 'Embakasi Convicts' to commissioner of prisons, 6 Apr. 1957, Kenya National Archives JZ 7/4.

[35] 'Black Africans in Manyani Detention Camp' to governor, 9 Mar. 1957, Kenya National Archives JZ 7/4.

[36] 'The black people of Kenya in Manyani Detention Camps' to governor, n.d. [but Jan. 1957], Kenya National Archives JZ 7/4.

Petitioners were aided in their argument about jurisprudence by the lessons of abolition. In May 1957, 150 years after the British parliament had abolished the Atlantic slave trade, detainees at Sanjusi camp complained about the manual labour they were forced to perform. 'Now we have learnt that instead of being detained, the government has turned us to be slaves', they wrote, 'for we are employed in the same work as African slaves were employed in America.'[37] In a September 1954 petition, detainee John Gitiri addressed himself to the secretary of state for the colonies, with copies to Clement Attlee, parliamentarians Fenner Brockway and James Griffiths, and Jawaralal Nehru. He complained that Africans were held in camps for six months without charge. 'We have known that the Kenya Government wants to make us its slaves', he wrote. 'Would you please enquire this to the British Government of our Queen Elizabeth II to help all people … not to be made Kenya slaves.'[38] By their petitions, addressed primarily to a liberal audience in the British metropole, detainees worked to get leverage over local officialdom. They worked, that is, to create a network of advocacy that stretched beyond Kenya colony, and brought outside authorities down on camp commandants' heads. British officialdom sought to mould African intellectual and political life to a parochial tribal sphere, but African entrepreneurs were actively casting themselves as British citizens, and bringing colonial injustices home to England.

In the historiography of modern Europe, the colonies are usually seen to be 'out there', geographically and politically distinguishable from Europe itself. And Africa's own historians are likewise inclined to view colonialism as a foreign imposition. It is this model of empire – as the government of one people over another – that makes it possible for scholars and activists to sort African history into pre-colonial and colonial time, to contrast African traditions with modern innovations, and to distinguish between the authentic and the corrupted. But Mau Mau detainees and other African cosmopolitans would not be bound by a bifurcated imperial geography. They were not, that is, speaking as natives of faraway places. They were attenuating geography, making themselves contemporaries of European confreres. Empires, as historian Frederick Cooper has argued, were moral spaces, where arguments could be made that certain forms of behaviour were an offence to the imperial conscience. In a pioneering series of books and articles, Cooper had shown how workers in French and British Africa used European philosophies of citizenship to claim benefits from their employers.[39] During the agitation leading up to the passage of a 1952 *code du travail*, for example, west African labour unionists calibrated their demands for family benefits and wage increases to French standards, arguing that they should receive 'equal pay for equal work'. Their claims resonated with the tenor of post-war French political rhetoric, which gave African *évolués* limited rights as citizens of the French Union. The French empire, argues Cooper, was not simply a space where one people governed over another. It was a forum where claims could be made, cross-racial alliances could be marshalled, and injustices could be confronted. In company with other recent scholarship on the 'tensions of empire', Cooper's work illuminates the lines of political and

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[37] Detainees, Sanjusi Island Detention Camp, to Tom Mboya, 7 May 1957, Kenya National Archives JZ 7/4.

[38] John Gitiri to secretary of state for the colonies, 5 Sept. 1954, Kenya National Archives JZ 7/4.

[39] F. Cooper, *Decolonization and African society: the labor question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996); idem, *Colonialism in question: theory, knowledge, history* (Berkeley, 2005); F. Cooper and L. Stoler, eds., *Tensions of empire: colonial cultures in a bourgeois world* (Berkeley, 1997); and F. Cooper, 'African workers and imperial designs', in Morgan and Hawkins, eds., *Black experience*.

religious thought that bound Africans and Europeans together.[40] By focusing on mission-ary organizations, reading clubs, labour unions, and other non-governmental sodalities that bridged colony and metropole, this new scholarship shows that not all culture could be classified as either European or native.

But Cooper's pioneering studies of international political culture ignore the vernacular-language discourses that Africans and other colonized people carried on within their own intellectual traditions. The detainees at Manyani camp in Kenya colony were not only composing English-language petitions for British liberals' review. They were also writing vernacular-language tracts, rethinking archaic customs, and refurbishing Gikuyu social order for a changing world. Publisher Gakaara wa Wanjau was detained by the Kenya government in 1952. While held at a series of camps on the Indian Ocean coast, Wanjau conducted ethnographic interviews with other detainees, asking about the customs of the clans to which they belonged. For Wanjau, the detention camps were a valuable research opportunity. 'One person whose clan is Anjiru may come from Nyeri [district], another from Kiambu or Murang'a [districts], and they happen to meet in detention camp', he said in an interview. 'They would enquire from each other, "which is your clan?" If you come from the same clan you are brothers.'[41] The manuscript that Wanjau wrote while in detention, titled *Mĩhĩrĩga ya Aagĩkũyũ* (Clans of the Gikuyu People), was published on his release from detention in 1960. It is the first ethnographic text to specify, in intimate detail, the manners, taboos, work habits, and histories of each of Gikuyuland's 'nine full' clans. Wanjau and his fellow detainees must have spent long hours determining, for example, that 'Ambui women are quarrelsome but restrict the quarrel from spreading outside their home', while 'Aicakamuyu men are neither good at dancing nor at decorating themselves. If their daughters are divorced they always accept them back.'[42] Even as they cast them-selves as Englishmen, even as they claimed for themselves the rights and privileges of the British citizenry, Gikuyu detainees were also clarifying the basic institutions of their own social order.

The culture that detainees created was more than a hand-me-down from pre-colonial times. Culture in detention camps arose *in media res*, as Wanjau and other detainees dis-covered aspects of their social lives that they had never before known. This cultural work was not merely a supplement to the political work they performed in the English-language petitions they addressed to the British liberal conscience. Gikuyu advocates, like other African entrepreneurs, were not only actors on an international stage. Mau Mau petition-writers were also desperately searching for ways to rebuild their families, chasten their wives, and uphold their reputations. They felt the 'tensions of empire' very acutely. Detainees were practising ethnography in order to create institutions of social cohesion, creating grounds for fellowship among themselves, and giving heedless youth and aban-doned wives standards to follow. By lending Gikuyu clans a specificity they had never before had, detainees were putting their own houses in order.

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[40] The scholarship I have in mind here includes G. Viswanathan, *Outside the fold: conversion, modernity, and belief* (Princeton, 1998); P. van der Veer, *Imperial encounters: religion and modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton, 2001); V. Rafael, *Contracting colonialism: translation and Christian conversion in Tagalog society under early Spanish rule* (Durham, NC, 1993); and I. Hofmeyr, *The portable Bunyan: a transnational history of* The Pilgrim's Progress (Princeton, 2004).
[41] Gakaara wa Wanjau, quoted in C. Elkins and J. Lonsdale, 'Memories of Mau Mau in Kenya: lessons for nation and neighbours', typescript.
[42] G. wa Wanjau, *Mĩhĩrĩga ya Aagĩkũyũ* (Karatina, 1960), pp. 48, 70.

Cooper's pioneering scholarship helps us see how African entrepreneurs made a home for themselves in Europe. But we need also to see how innovators worked, at the same time, to refurbish their own intellectual traditions, to shore up their reputations, in order to command respect in their homes. John Iliffe's *Honour in African history* offers guidance on how a multi-dimensional study of African cultural history might proceed. Iliffe argues that the quest for honour motivated African political and social behaviour over the *longue durée*. He defines honour as the respect that men and women work to earn from their peers, distinguishing 'vertical' honour, the homage that commoners owe to those of greater rank than themselves, from 'horizontal' honour, the respect that people earn from their peers by virtue of their behaviour. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, elites in hierarchical societies like Yorubaland and Buganda proved their honourable status by accumulating wealth and followers. Householders in more egalitarian 'stateless' societies had to build up their reputations by hand, establishing prosperous homesteads and defending their reputations against other people's slurs. Colonialism challenged Africans' conceptions of honour by introducing new criteria by which respectability could be judged. Older social hierarchies were undermined first by colonial governments' aversion to slavery, which limited wealthy men's ability to accumulate clients, and also by wage labour, which gave young men the means to contract marriages without elders' approval. And Christianity and Islam introduced new standards of conduct, emphasizing the values of probity and loyalty over the older stress on rank.

But Iliffe does not conceive of colonial conquest as a definitive break in Africa's intellectual and cultural history. He argues that African conceptions of honour were absorbed into other ethics, into world religions, or into reformulated conceptions of political honour (p. 227). Ganda chiefs, for example, proved adept at using colonial institutions to defend their reputations. Prime Minister Apollo Kagwa once marshalled seventy-nine witnesses to trounce a critic who accused him of stealing his land (p. 211). Contemporary leaders likewise work to guard their reputations. Iliffe argues that post-colonial rulers' love for display, and their penchant for military ceremony, is shaped by an older ethic that equated effective leadership with personal heroism (chapter 18). Labour migrants in southern Africa likewise borrowed from the style and language of heroic warfare. The first generations of migrants marched to Kimberley or Johannesburg with military songs on their lips, promising to raid the cash economy for guns, cattle, and blankets.[43] And today, Africans' dealings with the AIDS epidemic are structured by older conceptions of dignity. Africa suffered so dramatically from AIDS, argues Iliffe, because Africans' conceptions of honour conflicted with sound medical practice.[44] Men and women were in most places reluctant to use condoms because safe sex was an insult to one's partner.

Iliffe helps us see the politics of West African labour unions, Mau Mau detainees, and other entrepreneurs in a wider frame. The African activists of the 1950s were not only acting on the principles of European liberalism. They were also doing cultural and social work within their own intellectual traditions. With the evidence of racial inequality in view, nationalist leaders argued that the arbitrary, unaccountable power of foreign government was an affront to Africans' honour, and to their standing as mature adults. In 1953, the British governor of Uganda unceremoniously deported Buganda's Kabaka (king) Mutesa II for refusing to accept a diminished status in a unitary Ugandan polity. A few weeks later

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[43] See D. Coplan, *In the time of cannibals: the word music of South Africa's Basotho migrants* (Chicago, 1995).
[44] Iliffe has expanded this argument in *The African AIDS epidemic: a history* (London, 2006).

the Anglican bishop was visited by a delegation calling itself the 'Uganda African ladies', comprising the wife of the prime minister, two of the king's sisters, and the wives of leading chiefs, all barefoot and wearing widows' weeds.[45] In their petition they said nothing about Mutesa's rights as a British subject. They complained that the British had insulted Mutesa's honour, and compromised the Ganda body politic. 'No person [should] ever be so ill treated or literally dragged away except that he or she were either a slave or a prisoner of war', they wrote.[46] The Uganda African Ladies reminded the bishop that he had presented Mutesa with a ring on his coronation, by which he had married the king to his people. 'That which God has joined together, let no man break asunder', the petitioners wrote. At a January 1954 meeting of the church's Mothers' Union, women complained that so long as the Kabaka was in exile, all Christian marriage was endangered.[47] The British were home-wreckers. Since the nineteenth century, Ganda politics had focused around the Kabaka: the Luganda word for 'peace' and 'quiet', *mirembe*, also refers to the 'era' of a king's reign.[48] The activists of the Kabaka crisis were drawing on old connections, in Ganda language and in political theory, between properly exercised authority, human fertility, and productive social order. They were also drawing on the lessons of the Christian marriage service, likening the Kabaka's relationship with his people to a husband's bond with his wife. They knew the king's deportation to be more than a political problem, more, that is, than a violation of the liberal code of human rights. The king's dishonour undermined the bonds of affinity that held social order together.

African history needs a chronology that treats culture as more than an inheritance from the distant past. The Ganda petitioners of 1953–5 were not living in a traditional world, handed down to them by their ancestors. Neither did they need to be taught how to do politics by European liberals. The 'Uganda African ladies', like the Shamba peasant intellectuals studied by Feierman, were dredging their own history, bringing centuries-old lessons about effective government to bear on their contemporary political problems. They were also working with colonial culture, using elements of Christian religious practice to convince British missionaries of the justice of their cause. By their political advocacy they defended the honour of their king, and of their people. The continuities in Ganda and other African political discourses were the product of creative intellectuals' work.

The cultural history of Africa is tyrannized by chronology. Scholars of the African diaspora take the past to be a font of values, a storehouse from which slaves could withdraw symbolic capital. Historians of modern Africa treat colonialism as an encounter between two sides, measuring the inventions of colonial history against a pre-colonial baseline. Both diaspora scholars and historians of the colonial encounter are motivated to identify cultural property that is distinctly African. They therefore contrast past and present, distinguishing an old era of political and intellectual sovereignty from the European order of government.

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[45] *Uganda Eyogere*, 22 Jan. 1954, Church of Uganda Provincial Archives, Kampala, File 02 Bp. 216/27.

[46] 'Uganda African Ladies' to bishop of Uganda, 16 Jan. 1954, Church of Uganda Provincial Archives 02 Bp. 219/27.

[47] J. Taylor to M. Warren, 24 Jan. 1954, Church of Uganda Provincial Archives 02 Bp. 110/9.

[48] For Ganda philosophies of kingship, see B. Ray, *Myth, ritual, and kingship in Buganda* (Oxford, 1991), and H. Hanson, *Landed obligation: the practice of power in Buganda* (Portsmouth, NH, 2003). For the politics of the 1950s, D. Apter, *The political kingdom in Uganda: a study of bureaucratic nationalism* (Princeton, NJ, 1961).

This chronology enables scholars to ask important questions about the effects of foreign rule on African life. But it distorts scholarly understanding of African cultural brokers' position. Some political entrepreneurs, like the petition-writers of the Haya Union, presented themselves as spokesmen for endangered cultures, contrasting the old order of peace and prosperity with the corruptions of colonial life. They hoped thereby to embarrass British officials, and to get leverage over official policy. Other entrepreneurs, like the creole elites of South Africa, cast themselves as agents of the civilizing mission. They took hold over liberal discourse, and thereby got a footing in their rulers' world. Colonial-era intellectuals were actively staking out a position in relation to the pre-colonial past. They were not waiting for academic historians to render judgements about the relationship between the old era and the new.

Neither would African thinkers confine themselves to the geography of empire. They did not, that is, always sort out cultural property, distinguishing modern inventions from native manufactures. Guided by the promises that European liberals made, some African advocates learned the English language and cast themselves as British subjects, at home in the metropole itself. They thereby claimed rights for themselves under colonial law. But even as they held colonial government accountable to liberal standards, African entrepreneurs were also guided by their own, indigenous theories of human rights and responsibilities. They did not need liberal philosophy to teach them how to evaluate rulers' conduct. Africans' inherited codes of honour structured the relationship between rulers and ruled, and inspired also men and women's efforts to earn the respect of their peers.

Africa's historians enter in an arena where the relationship of pre-colonial and colonial history is already being disputed, where old theories of politics motivate contemporary action, where natives make a home in the colonial metropole. Instead of lining up cultural artefacts according to their place and chronological position, we might better lay down our yardsticks and ask how African cultures make time, and take place.

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