

Race, the World and Time: Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia (1914–1945)

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Musab Younis

Cardiff University, Wales, UK

Abstract

This article explores the role played by time in the maintenance of global racial difference with reference to the precarious sovereignties of Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia during the interwar period. It suggests that the experiences of these states, understood through the discourses which sought to both support and undermine them, point to a shift away from juridical division in global order and towards a hierarchy framed in terms of racialised temporalities. While postcolonial scholarship can help us to understand this shift, it has not fully comprehended the interpenetration of multiple forms of temporality in the service of colonial and racial ordering. For interwar intellectuals and activists committed to pan-African liberation, the desire for a new world order free from racialised stratification meant an engagement with sites of black sovereignty that was, by necessity, ambivalent and strategic in its approach to the politics of time.

Keywords

race, time, postcolonial

Résumé

Cet article explore le rôle que joue le temps dans le maintien de la différence raciale dans le monde, en se positionnant dans le cadre des souverainetés précaires d'Haïti, du Liberia et de l'Éthiopie dans l'entre-deux-guerres. Il suggère que les expériences de ces états, comprises par le biais des discours qui ont visé à la fois à les légitimer et à les discréditer, révèlent le passage d'une division juridique de l'ordre mondial à une hiérarchie établie en termes de temporalités racialisées. Bien que la recherche postcoloniale puisse nous aider à comprendre cette évolution, elle n'a pas suffi à saisir pleinement l'interpénétration de multiples formes de temporalité au service d'un ordre colonial et racial. Pour les intellectuels et les activistes de l'entre-deux-guerres dévoués à la libération panafricaine, le désir d'un nouvel ordre mondial libéré de la stratification racialisée signifiait un engagement dans les chantiers de la souveraineté noire qui était nécessairement ambivalent et stratégique dans son approche de la politique du temps.

Corresponding author:

Musab Younis, School of Law and Politics, Cardiff University, Museum Ave, Cardiff, CF10 3AX, Wales, UK.
Email: YounisM@Cardiff.ac.uk

Mots-clés

race, temps, postcolonial

Resumen

El presente artículo explora el papel que juega el tiempo en el mantenimiento de las diferencias raciales mundiales en relación con las precarias soberanías de Haití, Liberia y Etiopía durante el período de entreguerras. Se sugiere que las experiencias de estos estados, entendidas a través de los discursos que buscaron tanto apoyarlas como debilitarlas, muestran un alejamiento de la división jurídica en el orden mundial y un acercamiento hacia una jerarquía enmarcada en términos de temporalidades racializadas. Mientras que los estudios poscoloniales pueden contribuir a la comprensión de este cambio, aún no se ha esclarecido totalmente la interpenetración de múltiples formas de temporalidad que favorecen órdenes raciales y coloniales. Según los especialistas dedicados al período de entreguerras y los activistas interesados en la liberación panafricana, el anhelo de un nuevo orden mundial libre de estratificaciones racializadas significaba un compromiso con los sitios de soberanía negra que era, necesariamente, ambivalente y estratégico en su planteamiento de la política del tiempo.

Palabras clave

raza, tiempo, poscolonial

Introduction

Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia existed precariously, between the world wars, on the edges of an international order dominated by Europe. The only independent states at the League of Nations governed by people of African descent,¹ each faced an incursion that effectively vitiated its legal sovereignty. Haiti was occupied by the United States from 1915 to 1934. Ethiopia was occupied by Italy from 1936 to 1941. Liberia was placed under financial receivership, formally investigated by the League and threatened with occupation between 1929 and 1936. Peripheral to the international society which sought to extinguish them, they became central to global, and especially pan-African, anticolonialism. Many participants in anticolonial movements across Africa and the Caribbean after 1945 had been deeply affected by a political and theoretical engagement with the interwar experiences of these states. The outcomes of interwar political developments in Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia were widely seen, by both their supporters and detractors, to have major ramifications for the colonised world, especially the African continent and diaspora. It is surprising, then, that comparative studies of these states have been so rare in modern scholarship.²

1. Egypt joined the League in 1937 after the signing of the Anglo-Egyptian treaty.
2. There are significant literatures on each country, but the only substantive academic accounts which examine them together in relation to interwar black politics are Aric Putnam, *The Insistent Call: Rhetorical Moments in Black Anticolonialism, 1929–1937* (Amherst: University Massachusetts Press, 2012); Rodney A. Ross, 'Black Americans and Haiti, Liberia, the Virgin Islands, and Ethiopia, 1929-1936' (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1975). Both are centred on African American perspectives. In IR, a general neglect of these states is ameliorated by

In this article, I examine a range of interwar narratives regarding the contentious and contravened sovereignties of these states. Largely evading the realm of ‘high politics’, I focus on a selection of mostly vernacular texts, especially newspapers, on both sides of the colonial/anticolonial divide. Notwithstanding their obvious differences, these texts implicitly shared a view that the experiences of Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia were fundamentally about race and its role in the world. If we take that idea seriously, I suggest, it can help us to deepen our understanding of two concurrent processes that are rarely discussed together: on the one hand, ‘the globalisation of international society’;³ on the other, ‘the raciological ordering of the world’.⁴ These processes of global transition and ordering were bound together through politicised mobilisations of time.

My argument is, in short, that a juridically decolonised international order was built upon forms of politicised temporal difference that allowed for the maintenance of global stratifications and hierarchies, especially those conceptualised, articulated and structured in terms of race. This argument seeks to make three key contributions. First, it adds critical depth to the notion of an expanding international society by pointing to the temporalising practices through which racial-colonial difference was able to continue to operate beyond the moment of its international juridical legitimation. This can help us understand how we arrived at our contemporary global order – officially equalised, yet deeply stratified in ways that reflect its colonial origins. It also suggests how it has been possible to continue to invoke race, via the language of temporal difference, without necessarily speaking its name.

Second, a view of global order that is attuned to both dominant and resistant modes of temporality points to the value of a postcolonial approach. At the same time, it helps us to expand and nuance the understanding of time which has typically been put forward within that approach. Specifically, it can help to overcome an aporetic divergence in postcolonial writing on time by illuminating the ways in which temporality, mobilised both for and against colonial-racial difference, has operated in multiple, and even apparently contradictory, ways. And finally, by using texts from black Atlantic print cultures and circuits as key sources, I aim to provide an example of international theorisation from a colonised and subaltern perspective. This builds on a now-established critique of the exclusivity of international theory with respect to its sources of both evidence and moral authority.⁵ I also hope to contribute to the rich body of scholarship

the work of Robbie Shilliam on Haiti and Ethiopia: see, most recently, Robbie Shilliam, ‘Race and Revolution at Bwa Kayiman’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 45, no. 3 (2017): 269–92. In postcolonial studies there are a number of engagements with Haiti, perhaps most prominently Kaiama L. Glover, *Haiti Unbound: A Spiralist Challenge to the Postcolonial Canon* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), but far fewer with Liberia and Ethiopia.

3. See Timothy Dunne and Christian Reus-Smit, *The Globalization of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

4. Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 6.

5. See especially Shilliam, ‘Intervention and Colonial-Modernity’; Grovogui, *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy*.

on black and African political thought, especially in relation to questions of sovereignty, race and global order.⁶

Time, Race and International Society

How has ‘race’ – a colonial-era language of global differentiation – endured in the contemporary world order? Once the preserve of scholars working in postcolonial or critical traditions, this question has now become widespread, as indicated, for example, by the recurrent references to race in the recent volume *Hierarchies in World Politics*. Few would now dispute what David A. Lake states plainly in that volume: that ‘racism in international relations persists’ despite the spread of the ‘norm of human equality’.⁷

If the English school might seem particularly well equipped to respond to this question, given the attention it has paid to the idea of ‘civilisation’⁸ as stratifying and bordering international society, it has in fact shown surprisingly little interest in race.⁹ This surprising omission may be partially traced to Gerrit Gong’s work, which argued that the ‘civilisation’ idea had, though once powerful, since become obsolete in contemporary international society.¹⁰ But that view is no longer tenable. More recent scholarship has demonstrated an enduring ‘civilising’ impulse within the international order,¹¹ and this expanded understanding of ‘civilisation’ has converged in key respects with the insights of international legal scholars on the persistence of colonial and racial difference in international law;¹² the diverse work of IR scholars on race

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6. Among many possible examples, see J. Ayodele Langley, *Ideologies of Liberation in Black Africa* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1979); Karen Salt, ‘The Language of Politics in the Literary Archive of Black Sovereignty’, *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 3, no. 2(2015): 392–9.
 7. David A. Lake, ‘Laws and Norms in the Making of International Hierarchies’, in *Hierarchies in World Politics*, ed. Aysé Zarakol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 41. For a similar statement, see also Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 124–5.
 8. Gerrit W. Gong, *The Standard of “Civilization” in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).
 9. The single exception is R.J. Vincent, ‘Race in International Relations’, *International Affairs* 58, no. 4 (1982): 658–70. Discussions of race are simply absent from most classics of English school theory, which are much more likely to invoke ‘the human race’ than race as a differentiating category. There is, for example, no reference to race (in the differentiating sense) whatsoever in Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society?: English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
 10. Gong, *The Standard of “Civilization”*, 23.
 11. See especially Edward Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society: Grotius, Colonialism and Order in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Edward Keene, ‘The Standard of ‘Civilisation’, the Expansion Thesis and the 19th-Century International Social Space’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 42, no. 3 (2014): 651–73.
 12. C.H. Alexandrowicz, *The Law of Nations in Global History*, eds. David Armitage and Jennifer Pitts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Martti

and racism;¹³ and abundant historical scholarship on the ways in which structured affinities of race shaped 19th and 20th century global history.¹⁴

With these areas of agreement, it seems an expanded understanding of race as a form of global hierarchisation might be within reach, bringing the English school (and others) closer to positions that have long been central to the postcolonial tradition.¹⁵ I want to suggest that an expanded understanding of the enduring colonial stratification within global order now needs to attend to race as a *temporal*, and not simply a spatial, process. This can help us to understand how international society ‘is still riddled with the hegemonic/hierarchical practices and inequalities of status left over from its ... founding process’, as Barry Buzan puts it.¹⁶ With reference to Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia, I will point to some of the ways in which these practices can be glimpsed at a key moment of international transition, when juridical and racial statuses clashed.

In making the case for a temporal approach to the endurance of race in global order, I am also trying to address two weaknesses in current scholarship on the politics of time. In IR, the study of time, still at a relatively early stage, has tended to focus on the uninterrogated metahistorical visions embedded within international theory.¹⁷ There has been less research into how specific international institutions, structures, regimes and hierarchies – such as race – might themselves be better understood with reference to the politics of time in international perspective.¹⁸ Meanwhile, in postcolonial scholarship, where the politics of time has long been a subject of study, a divergence has emerged between two perspectives on the meaning and implicit political implications of temporal difference.

Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law, 1870-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). B.S. Chimni, ‘Third World Approaches to International Law: A Manifesto’, *International Community Law Review* 8, no. 1 (2006): 3–27.

13. See the special issue of *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 46, no. 2 (2018), ‘Racialized Realities in World Politics’; Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam, eds., *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line* (London: Routledge, 2014); Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).
14. James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Angloworld* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
15. For example, Sanjay Seth, ed., *Postcolonial Theory and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2012); Branwen Gruffydd Jones, ‘Race in the Ontology of International Order’, *Political Studies* 56, no. 4 (2008): 907–27.
16. Buzan, *From International to World Society?* 9.
17. In particular, see Kimberly Hutchings, *Time and World Politics: Thinking the Present* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 13.
18. Exceptions include Anna M. Agathangelou and Kyle D. Killian, *Time, Temporality and Violence in International Relations: (De)Fatalizing the Present, Forging Radical Alternatives*,

To simplify: one perspective disapproves of the idea of unitary or linear time – generally associated with nationalism, with History, with the imperial will to knowledge and power – and affirms in its place some idea of temporal multiplicity, such as ‘heterotemporality’.¹⁹ This idea is associated with what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls ‘the plural ways of being human’²⁰ and with the notion of ‘diaspora time’ as opposed to ‘nationalist time’.²¹ By contrast, the second perspective sees temporal multiplicity as itself a mode of colonial rule, operating through what Johannes Fabian called an allochronic – that is, non-contemporaneous – ‘denial of coevalness’ between the supposedly modern West and pre-modern non-West. In this view, it is precisely the affirmation of heterotemporality that becomes part of the mechanism of domination, by drawing temporal boundaries between true subjects of modernity and those condemned to an endless antiquity. In a helpful and insightful discussion of this aporia in postcolonial scholarship, Stefan Helgesson has labelled these perspectives, respectively, ‘the Chakrabarty option’ and ‘the Fabian option’.²² Scholarship on race has grappled with a similar dilemma, both affirming and critiquing ‘forms of nonsynchronism’ with respect to their implications for racialised populations.²³

My analysis of Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia suggests that this aporia is not abstractly resolvable because the temporalising practices²⁴ through which difference has been maintained in global order are flexible and multiple: racial-colonial difference, for example, can be enforced by *both* linear *and* plural mobilisations of time. This is what we see in the differently-temporalised discursive delegitimisations of these three states. As a

Interventions (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2016); Andrew Hom et al., eds., *Time, Temporality and Global Politics* (n.p.: E-International Relations, 2016); Liam P.D. Stockdale, *Taming an Uncertain Future: Temporality, Sovereignty, and the Politics of Anticipatory Governance* (London; New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2015).

19. Hutchings, *Time and World Politics*, 154.

20. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 241.

21. On ‘nationalist time’ see Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Yogita Goyal, *Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016) exemplifies the broader critique of historical progress. For an argument along these lines in IR, see Siba N. Grovogui, ‘Come to Africa: A Hermeneutics of Race in International Theory’, *Alternatives* 26, no. 4 (2001): 435.

22. Stefan Helgesson, ‘Radicalizing Temporal Difference: Anthropology, Postcolonial Theory, and Literary Time’, *History and Theory* 53, no. 4 (2014): 545–62; Maurice Olender, *Race and Erudition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

23. The term comes from Anthony Reed, *Freedom Time: The Poetics and Politics of Black Experimental Writing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 207, who sees it as a way of *resisting* racialised temporality. By contrast, Olender, *Race and Erudition*, xix, sees race as operating precisely *through* a nonsynchronous affixation of racialised populations with a ‘stagnation in time’.

24. My definition of this term follows John Scott, *Conceptualising the Social World: Principles of Sociological Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 134.

result, for anticolonial politics a straightforward approach to time – a choice between linearity or circularity, ‘nationalist time’ or ‘diaspora time’, heterotemporality or progress, synchronicity or nonsynchronicity – was strategically unavailable. The colonial delegitimation of Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia, on the one hand, and the anticolonial engagement with those states, on the other, shows us a route towards a more flexible and ambivalent understanding of political time in the context of colonial difference.²⁵

Haiti

Haiti had long found itself the subject of both fascination and fear in what Césaire called ‘the white world’,²⁶ having succeeded in fashioning a wholly anomalous independent existence in an international society dominated by colonial powers. But the consequences of its victory were immediately undermined in European and American writing, in part through a temporal language that saw the country, because of its ‘racial’ character, as intrinsically non-sovereign, regardless of its juridical status. Haiti’s republican modernity was eroded through the idea of racial atavism, which suggested that the country’s racial makeup had propelled it backwards in time to a pre-sovereign moment – or perhaps, at best, to a ‘halfway point between what we call the jungle and what we call civilization’, as William Faulkner’s *Absalom! Absalom!* (1938) put it.²⁷

This racial-temporal delegitimation had been in operation since Haiti’s revolution, with a long lineage especially in English, French and American writing. Haiti was, Edmund Burke wrote, simply a ‘cannibal republick’.²⁸ In 1896 the British historian, James Anthony Froude, wrote an influential work arguing that ‘[t]he Negro never rose of himself out of barbarism ... when left free, as in Liberia and Hayti, he reverts to his original barbarism’.²⁹ Madison Grant, the influential American eugenicist, also invoked Haiti as a case of where the collapse of European rule had seen the country’s inhabitants ‘revert almost to barbarism’.³⁰ But the political implications of this language were not fully realised until the interwar period. Woodrow Wilson’s invasion of Haiti on 28 July 1915 inaugurated a 19 year occupation of the republic that endured until 1934, running through

25. Rahul Rao, *Third World Protest: Between Home and the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), makes a case for the value of ambivalence in postcolonial ethics.

26. J. Michael Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Macmillan, 1997), 1; Aimé Césaire, *The Collected Poetry*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 69.

27. Quoted in Godden, ‘Absalom, Absalom!’, *Haiti and Labor History*, 686. See also Benjamin Balthaser, *Anti-Imperialist Modernism: Race and Transnational Radical Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 118–46.

28. Martin Fitzpatrick and Peter Jones, *The Reception of Edmund Burke in Europe* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 190.

29. Quoted in Marika Sherwood, *Origins of Pan-Africanism: Henry Sylvester Williams, Africa, and the African Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2010), 28.

30. Jonathan Spiro, *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant* (Burlington: University of Vermont Press, 2008), 242.

five successive US administrations.³¹ As Brenda Gayle Plummer has written, the occupation was ‘unprecedented in terms of its duration, racism ... [and] brutality’.³² The initial intervention was legally entrenched by means of a treaty whose stipulations included the financial oversight of Haiti by US officials and a punitive schedule of debt repayments. A brief peasant insurgency was defeated by late 1915. The Haitian legislature was disbanded for 12 years and a new constitution was inaugurated, for the first time permitting foreigners to own land in Haiti.³³

For the popular American journalist Lothrop Stoddard, a temporal vision of Haiti was central to conceptualising the global politics of race from an explicitly white supremacist perspective. His book *The French Revolution in San Domingo* (1914) drew on the example of Haiti to warn about the threat of weakening global white hegemony and to promote the idea that Haiti’s racial conflict represented a struggle over world-historical time – with ‘white’ time representing progress, and ‘black’ time representing civilisational regression – that had become only more pertinent since the revolution.³⁴ In *The Rising Tide of Color* (1920), Stoddard again argued that Haiti represented the ‘first real shock between the ideals of white supremacy and race-equality; a prologue to the mighty drama of our own day’.³⁵ Haiti and Liberia were examples, he wrote, of how the ‘black race has never shown real constructive power’ because the black ‘man’, ‘when left to himself, as in Haiti and Liberia, rapidly reverts to his ancestral ways’.³⁶ These tropes became common among Americans involved in the occupation of Haiti. Robert Lansing, US Secretary of State from 1915 to 1920 and a chief architect of US policy in Haiti, argued in typical fashion that: ‘The experience of Liberia and Haiti show that the African race are devoid of any capacity for political organization and lack genius for government. Unquestionably there is in them an inherent tendency to revert to savagery and to cast aside the shackles of civilization which are irksome to their physical nature’.³⁷

31. On the occupation, see especially the landmark study by Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915–1934* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1971); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Haiti and the United States: The Psychological Moment*, United States and the Americas (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992); Dash, *Haiti and the United States*; Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915–1940* (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 2001); Suzy Castor, *L’occupation américaine d’Haïti* (Port-au-Prince: Société haïtienne d’histoire, 1988). See also Léon Dénis Pamphile, *L’éducation en Haïti sous l’occupation américaine 1915–1934* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie des Antilles, 1988); Kethly Millet, *Les paysans haïtiens et l’occupation américaine d’Haïti, 1915–1930* (La Salle: Collectif Paroles, 1978).

32. Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 101.

33. Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti*, 99.

34. Theodore Lothrop Stoddard, *The French Revolution in San Domingo* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914). For a discussion, see Shannon Rose Riley, *Performing Race and Erasure: Cuba, Haiti, and US Culture, 1898–1940* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 109.

35. Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1920), 227.

36. *Ibid.*, 100–101.

37. Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti*, 62–3. Schmidt provides many more examples of such language from US soldiers and officials.

Haiti's sovereignty was, then, discursively delegitimised through the association of race with pre-sovereign atavism – a close correlative of the 'Fabian option' that I have discussed above in terms of its evident 'denial of coevalness'. But this was made more complex by the idea of regression, since it was often accepted that at one point – under French rule – Haiti had truly been 'modern', and that even after its revolution it had won international recognition of its independence. The racialised narrative about Haiti provided a discursive basis for an occupation that framed itself throughout as a civilising and modernising mission, seeking to rationalise Haiti and bring it (back) into the modern world. Black transnational engagements with interwar Haiti were also compelled to grapple with its temporality. They did so, in large part, through an emphasis on the *contemporaneity* of Haiti and, by extension, its sovereign coevalness with other states. This was often articulated alongside diverse explorations of Haitian history as constitutive of world history and therefore of modernity.

While the important engagements of C.L.R. James and Aimé Césaire with Haiti during this period are well known,³⁸ a range of less-studied newspaper writings, especially in the US and France, were also central to global black politics in relation to Haiti. Initial reactions in African American newspapers to the occupation were muted and even supportive, no doubt in part due to the pressing atmosphere of wartime censorship. But reporting quickly became more critical.³⁹ By 1920, the Harlem-based militant, Hubert Harrison, had already published in the *Negro World* a scathing indictment of what he called 'the bloody rape of the republics of Hayti and Santo Domingo ... being perpetrated by the bayonets of American sailors and marines, with the silent and shameful acquiescence of 12,000,000 American Negroes too cowardly to lift a voice in effective protest or too ignorant of political affairs to know what is taking place'. Writing under the headline 'The Cracker in the Caribbean', Harrison underlined the historicity of Haiti in order to emphasise its subjection, demanding how 'we Africans of the dispersion can let the land of L'Ouverture lie like a fallen flower beneath the feet of swine?'⁴⁰

In Paris, meanwhile, the black nationalist newspaper *La Race Nègre* insisted on the legitimacy of Haitian sovereignty by adopting a rhetorical strategy that insisted Haiti should carry out state-like functions on behalf of African peoples. Its writers suggested, for example, that Haiti come to the assistance of Ethiopia when it was invaded by Italy⁴¹

38. See for example, David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); *Ibid.*

39. For supportive articles, see 'Speaking of Haiti', *The Chicago Defender*, 4 September 1915, p. 8; C. Brown, 'Little Haiti and Her People: Conditions Are Such That The Country Could Be Made A Paradise – American Occupation Will Help', *Afro-American*, 8 April 1916, p. 4. Previous studies have emphasised the effect of the Cayes Massacre in 1929 in transforming African American attitudes to the occupation (see Putnam, *The Insistent Call*, 59–61.) But reporting on Haiti began to shift much earlier, from around 1919.

40. Quoted in Hubert H. Harrison and Jeffrey Babcock Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader* (Middletown: University Press of New England, 2008), 239.

41. Ludovic-Morin Lacombe, 'Haiti: Son Devoir Envers L'Ethiopie', *La Race Nègre*, Jan–Feb 1936, 2.

and administer a mandate over Cameroon instead of the League of Nations.⁴² This reporting on the occupation defended Haitian sovereignty partly through an insistence on Haiti's *contemporaneity* as a modern state – but one being made pre-modern, and de-industrialised, as a result of the occupation. In this way, *La Race Nègre* inverted the notion of racial regression with an alternative history: that of sovereign despoliation by external powers. 'The Haitian people have suffered too much; for too long they have been violated and robbed', wrote the Haitian activist Jean Barau in the newspaper in 1930. He pointed, in particular, to the crisis now 'paralysing the economic life of the country'.⁴³

The emphasis on Haiti's contemporaneity also, crucially, drew connections between the occupation and the struggles of those of African descent elsewhere, constructing a picture of a global racial order that saw black struggles as unified in an anticolonial present (and contributing to a powerful sense of simultaneity, which I discuss in more detail below). African American newspapers therefore emphasised the 'Southern' and 'white' dimensions to the US occupation and connected the suffering of Haitians to the travails of African Americans – pointing out, for example, that it was 'white southerners who are occupying Haiti'.⁴⁴ In March 1921, the *Crisis* published a striking open letter to President Warren G. Harding, which allied three domestic demands (the right to vote, to 'travel without insult', and an end to lynching) with 'freedom for our brothers in Haiti'.⁴⁵ The next year, the *Chicago Defender*, which had previously supported the occupation, published an article sympathetic to the Haitian delegates in Chicago who had come 'with a report of the atrocities and outrages committed by the American forces'.⁴⁶

By May 1930, the Baltimore *Afro-American* was attributing the occupation straightforwardly to 'the ancient US theory that a Negro has no rights which a white man is bound to respect'.⁴⁷ At times, the linkages between domestic and global racism which connected the struggles of Haitians and African Americans could be incisively encapsulated in official discourse. When a US senator complained at the League of Nations that 'colored countries' would be soon able to outnumber 'white' countries, mocked Liberia as a 'joke nation', and derided Haiti as a country of 'baby killers and creatures of the forest', the *Afro-American* simply reported the tirade without additional comment.⁴⁸

42. J.S. Spiegler, 'Aspects of Nationalist Thought Among French-Speaking West Africans, 1921–1939' (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1968), 237.

43. Jean Babau, 'L'impérialisme yankee en action', *La Race Nègre*, February–March 1930, 1.

44. '30,000 Blacks Occupy Rhineland: Americans Criticise French For Sending Colored Troops Into White Country; Frenchman Replies, Asks America Why Uncle Sam Sent White Troops Into The Black Republic Of Haiti', *Afro-American*, 7 May 1920, p. 1. The US Army was not desegregated until the 1940s. See Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 53–6.

45. Frederick German Detweiler, *The Negro Press in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), 146.

46. 'Haitians Say US Made Them Suffer', *The Chicago Defender*, 14 May 1921, 1. Haitian delegations continued to receive sympathetic coverage in the African American press: see 'Haitian Denounces American Invasion', *New Journal and Guide*, 4 February 1922, p. 3.

47. 'Get Out of Haiti', *Afro-American*, 26 July 1930, p. 6.

48. 'More Colored Nations Than White Ones', *Afro-American*, 30 May 1919, p. 1.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia's occupation began soon after Haiti's ended.⁴⁹ When border skirmishes, provoked by Italy, erupted at Wal-Wal in December 1934, Ethiopia appealed to the League of Nations for assistance. But Britain and France, then concerned with the threat of German rearmament, showed little interest. A secret British report in June 1935, which was procured by the Italian government, found scant reason to defend Ethiopian sovereignty.⁵⁰ And the agreements signed between Mussolini and the French foreign minister, Pierre Laval, in January 1935, included a surreptitious recognition of Italian primacy in Ethiopia.⁵¹ The long-planned Italian invasion finally came on 3 October 1935, without a declaration of war. Ethiopia was incorporated into the short-lived Africa Orientale Italiana from 1936 to 1941.

If Haiti was imagined in atavistic terms as having 'regressed' after the end of French rule, Ethiopia during the Italian invasion was the subject of a temporal discourse that represented the country in settler-colonial terms, as an ancient but dying civilisation which was being catapulted into the modern world through an act of violent colonial replenishment. Though this language was distinctly Fascist in its focus on modernisation, speed, power and will, it also drew extensively upon the 'extinction discourse' which had long accompanied settler colonial projects.⁵² A deep sympathy for the future Italy wished to build in Ethiopia was expressed in books and articles written by non-Italians across the 'White Atlantic'.⁵³ This writing represents another temporal approach to racialised sovereignty that was, in important ways, quite at odds with that which was mobilised against Haiti.

Consider the work of William Watts Chaplin. An American war correspondent who arrived in Ethiopia on a ship carrying Blackshirts and the Italian general Pietro Badoglio, Chaplin's reporting began with a paean to Italian modernisation in Eritrea, where 'the

49. There is a vast literature on the Italo-Ethiopian War and its international ramifications. For an overview, see Zara Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark: European International History 1933–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), chap. 2, 62–99; Bruce Strang, *Collision of Empires: Italy's Invasion of Ethiopia and Its International Impact* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

50. Brice Harris, *The United States and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), 10.

51. Robert Mallett, *Mussolini in Ethiopia, 1919–1935* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 27; Strang, *Collision of Empires*. On (unmet) hopes for a pan-coloured alliance against Italy, see J. Calvitt Clarke III, 'An Alliance of the "Colored" Peoples: Ethiopia and Japan', in *Collision of Empires: Italy's Invasion of Ethiopia and Its International Impact*, ed. Bruce Strang (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

52. Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

53. There is an absence of scholarly literature on the 'White Atlantic', but there are tantalising references to it in Charles W. Mills, 'Unwriting and Unwhitening the World', in *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line*, eds. Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam (London: Routledge, 2014), 210; and Robert Stam and Ella Shohat, *Race in Translation: Culture Wars Around the Postcolonial Atlantic* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), xv.

roads grow visibly' in a stunning feat of engineering.⁵⁴ Chaplin fêted 'the civilizing influence of Mussolini's men'.⁵⁵ 'Determined whites', he explained, were 'spreading the gospel of cleanliness and health and justice by peaceful argument where possible, by force of arms where that is considered necessary'. Ethiopians were 'savage blacks'⁵⁶ and 'wild creatures',⁵⁷ while Italian colonisers 'remind one of America's early settlers who went about their daily tasks with a rifle ever at hand lest the redskins suddenly descend on them'.⁵⁸ Ethiopian music, meanwhile, was reminiscent of 'the swan song of savagery, the death rattle of barbarism' in the face of 'the white man's civilization'.⁵⁹

Chaplin was scarcely alone in imagining that Italy's invasion, genocidal ambitions and attempted settlement of Ethiopia (as well as of Libya) heralded an alternative future of renewed settlerism, in which 'lesser races' would be swept aside by more powerful ones. Recent scholarship has shown how Italian colonisation in Africa became an explicit model for the future-oriented policy of the Third Reich in Eastern Europe, with high-ranking Nazi officials closely studying Italian interwar colonialism in Africa, an expansionist policy which they saw as 'the quintessence of fascist modernity'.⁶⁰ Neither was Chaplin alone in seeing similarities between Italy's occupation of Ethiopia and the history of the US. The New York correspondent of *Il Corriere della Sera* argued forcefully that the US was likely to support Italy, given the North American power's extensive experience with 'the primitive psychology of the colored race'.⁶¹

It was in reaction to this discursive as well as material assault on Ethiopian sovereignty that Italy's invasion on 3 October 1935, was met with an unparalleled counter-mobilisation across the African continent and diaspora.⁶² For black writers across the world, the destruction of Ethiopia's sovereignty elicited a temporally polyvalent anti-colonial discourse. One set of engagements confronted directly the language of Fascist-settlerist modernism, undermining the linearity and profanity of that discourse with a language saturated with religious symbolism, circularity and historicity. This is

54. W.W. Chaplin, *Blood and Ink: An Italo-Ethiopian War Diary* (New York: Telegraph Press, 1936), 29.

55. *Ibid.*, 39.

56. *Ibid.*, 47.

57. *Ibid.*, 51.

58. *Ibid.*, 35.

59. *Ibid.*, 106.

60. Patrick Bernhard, 'Hitler's Africa in the East: Italian Colonialism as a Model for German Planning in Eastern Europe', *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, no. 1 (2016): 2–3.

61. Quoted in Harris, *The United States and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis*, 45.

62. See Spiegler, 'Aspects of Nationalist Thought Among French-Speaking West Africans, 1921–1939', 265; S.K.B. Asante, *Pan-African Protest: West Africa and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1934–1941* (London: Longman, 1977), 45; Barbara Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance* (London: Routledge, 1999), 222–6; David Featherstone, 'Black Internationalism, Subaltern Cosmopolitanism, and the Spatial Politics of Antifascism', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103, no. 6 (2013): 1412; Joseph E. Harris, *African-American Reactions to War in Ethiopia, 1936–1941* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994); Kwame Nkrumah, *The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1959), 22.

especially evident in much of the poetry about the war written by African American poets, such as J. Harvey L. Baxter's *Sonnets to the Ethiopians and Other Poems* (1936).⁶³

But not all writing by black authors on Ethiopia evoked circular and transcendent temporalities. Another set of arguments saw Italy's invasion as collapsing the façade of interwar international society, revealing a global order still ordered by violence and race. This view was connected to a widespread and deep cynicism about the prospects of solidarity between Europe and Africa. It also contributed to a reconceptualisation of the political affinities of Africans and African-descended peoples – in West Africa, the Caribbean, Britain, France, and the US – as standing alongside the other subjects of a European-dominated racial order by virtue of their shared experience of such domination, thereby facilitating pan-Africanism, nationalism and a strong proto-Third Worldism. As Robbie Shilliam has put it, many came to see their defence of 'Ethiopia's sovereignty as part of their own liberation struggle against ... [the] global colonial order'.⁶⁴

This writing was especially evident across West Africa, where, as S.K.B. Asante's exceptional study *Pan-African Protest* has shown, the invasion was 'among the main influences in the awakening of racial and political consciousness', a turning point at which 'unequivocal demands for self-determination began to be made and signs of militancy began to appear'.⁶⁵ Criticisms of the colonial regime became markedly more hostile. The West African press 'underwent a great transformation, becoming less parochial and more pan-African in content', with a decisive impact on the direction of West African politics after the Second World War.⁶⁶ These pan-West African and pan-African affinities fuelled by the invasion often carried with them expressions of global anticolonial *simultaneity*: a necessary response to a discursive assault on Ethiopia that was both future- and past-oriented. While the work of Benedict Anderson has popularised the idea that experiences of simultaneity generated by newspapers and novels are specifically nationalist in orientation,⁶⁷ the responses to Ethiopia's plight indicate a far more complex and multi-layered outcome of a technologically-invoked sense of *now*.

A striking illustration can be found in an address to the League of Nations by a Haitian general, Alfred Auguste Nemours, which was published in the Paris-based journal *Africa*. Insisting that that '[t]he era of colonial wars is over, in Africa just as in America, just as the period of the exploitation of one race by another is also over',⁶⁸ Nemours lambasted the widespread acquiescence to Italy's invasion as evidence of systemic – but nevertheless fundamentally anachronistic – racism. In place of a Fascist future he invoked an alternative history and teleology, oriented around the Haitian and French Revolutions. And he

63. Jon Woodson, *Anthems, Sonnets, and Chants: Recovering the African American Poetry of the 1930s* (Columbus: Ohio State Press, 2011), 167.

64. Shilliam, 'Intervention and Colonial-Modernity', 1137.

65. Asante, *Pan-African Protest*, 53, 172, 190.

66. *Ibid.*, 53.

67. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

68. 'Après [sic] 35 ans de luttes contre l'oppression coloniale', *Africa*, 1 December 1935, 2.

described a powerful sense of anticolonial simultaneity, enabled by communicative technologies, which brought together the dispersed victims of the racial order in solidarity with Ethiopia. '[S]peaking in the name of the Blacks of Haiti', he said, 'I know that all the millions of Blacks and men of colour, scattered throughout the world, are observing a minute's silence to listen to me attentively'.⁶⁹

Other black writers similarly described this proto-Third Worldist sense of *now*,⁷⁰ also embedded in counter-readings of global history and utopian projections for a 'coloured' future. An essay on the crisis by W.E.B. Du Bois argued that '[t]he black world' knew that the invasion was 'the last great effort of white Europe to secure the subjection of black men'. But Italy's victory, he warned, would be 'costly' because 'the whole colored world' – 'all that vast mass of men who have felt the oppression and insults, the slavery and exploitation of white folk, will say: "I told you so!"'⁷¹ Joel Augustus Rogers, the prominent Jamaican historian, expressed a related view in his influential pamphlet *The Real Facts About Ethiopia* (1936). This framed the Ethiopian crisis as the latest instance in a long saga of European domination over the rest of the world, while envisioning the imminent end of that era as a result of anticolonial activity: 'The avalanche is on its way, and it will not stop until the last vestiges of the brutal and debasing color-line imposed on the world by the white race shall have been shattered into irretrievable fragments'.⁷²

Liberia

Unlike Haiti or Ethiopia, Liberia did not experience direct occupation during the interwar period. But its sovereignty came under severe strain in other ways. The only republic on the African continent, its governing class, which was mostly descended from African American settlers, had for many decades engaged in hostilities with the indigenous groups of the 'interior', who formed a large majority of the country's overall population. After enduring constant financial pressure since its independence in 1847, Liberia's rulers had eventually turned to the export of indigenous labour, agreeing to supply contract workers to the Spanish cocoa plantations on the island of Fernando Po. The poor treatment of these labourers made this agreement increasingly unpopular with Liberians during the 1920s and it was terminated in 1927 (though workers continued to be supplied privately to the island).

That year, accusations by Liberian politician Thomas Faulkner that these labourers had been enslaved for the financial benefit of a network of government officials received international attention. A Committee of the League of Nations was convened to investigate the allegations. Its report found that slavery as classically understood did not exist in Liberia, but that the shipment of workers to Fernando Po, as well as to Gabon, was

69. Ibid.

70. In this context, see Aric Putnam, 'Ethiopia Is Now: J.A. Rogers and the Rhetoric of Black Anticolonialism during the Great Depression', *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 10, no. 3 (2007): 419–44. Postcolonial scholars have often highlighted the sense of *now* invoked by anticolonial temporalities. See Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 8.

71. W.E.B. Du Bois, 'Inter-Racial Implications of the Ethiopian Crisis: A Negro View', *Foreign Affairs* 14, no. 1 (1935): 88.

72. J.A. Rogers, *The Real Facts About Ethiopia* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1982), 3.

carried out ‘under conditions of criminal compulsion scarcely distinguishable from slave-raiding and slave-trading’. Liberia was already subject to an American financial receivership; the League investigation involved serious consideration of turning the country into a territory administered under the League of Nations mandate system. It was only in 1935, when President Barclay signed a new agreement with American financial interests, that the crisis was finally averted.⁷³

Liberia faced a chronopolitical assault similar in some ways to that which was levelled at Haiti. The idea that race had propelled these states atavistically backwards in time to a pre-sovereign condition was used in both cases to justify intervention. Given Liberia’s peculiar situation, however, there was far more of a focus on the West African republic as *parodying* a form of sovereignty that existed properly elsewhere: acting it out without achieving it, in particular by failing to achieve ‘civilisation’, and therefore making a mockery of the institution itself. This led to a language framed, unusually, in terms of comparative simultaneity. For Henry Fenwick Reeve, who published *The Black Republic* in 1923, Liberia’s rulers had failed ‘to keep in line with the great civilizing efforts of other Governments on the west coast of Africa’;⁷⁴ ‘the spirit of pomposity runs through the entire warp and woof of their civic life’; they were simply ‘incapable of civilized government’.⁷⁵ ‘The Great Powers’, he warned, ‘have no use for a second “Haiti,” or San Domingo on the Continent of Africa, however pure its aspirations may be in theory’.⁷⁶ Liberia’s supporters in Africa recognised the power of this discourse. The country’s ‘detractors’ believed that as a ‘Negro Republic’, it ‘could be nothing but a caricature of self-government’, complained the *Sierra Leone Weekly News* in 1928.⁷⁷ Even the pan-African pioneer Martin Delaney had once described the country as a ‘parody’ and ‘a poor miserable mockery – a burlesque on a government’.⁷⁸

While the pan-African view on Liberia became more supportive,⁷⁹ with limited exceptions the European and American commentators on interwar Liberia continued to

73. Raymond Leslie Buell, *The Native Problem in Africa* (New York: Macmillan, 1928), 819–52; George William Brown, *The Economic History of Liberia* (Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, Inc., 1941), 174–208; I.K. Sundiata, *Black Scandal: America and the Liberian Labor Crisis, 1929–1936* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1980); Yekutiel Gershoni, *Black Colonialism: The Americo-Liberian Scramble for the Hinterland* (Boulder: Westview, 1985); Cuthbert Christy, ‘Pawning of Human Beings in Liberia’, *Journal of the Royal African Society* 30, no. 119 (1931): 169–74. For the House of Lords debate following the publication of the report, see *Hansard*, HL Deb, 16 March 1932, vol. 83: c913.

74. Henry Fenwick Reeve, *The Black Republic, Liberia: Its Political and Social Conditions To-Day* (London: H.F. & G. Witherby, 1923), 9.

75. *Ibid.*, 46.

76. *Ibid.*, 178.

77. ‘The Rising Star of Liberia’, *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, 9 June 1928.

78. Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 35. Delaney reversed his position by 1859, ‘making friendly overtures towards the Liberians’. *Ibid.*

79. On Liberia’s role in pan-Africanism, see Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*; Joseph E. Harris, *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1993); Sundiata, *Black Scandal*; Dennis C. Hickey, ‘Positive Perspectives on Independent Africa: Ethiopia, Liberia, and the American Popular Press, 1920–1935’, *Africana Journal*

employ this language of parody and ersatz.⁸⁰ Sidney de la Rue, an American financial administrator who was posted to Liberia, wrote that while there existed there ‘a semblance of the form of government brought from America ... [i]t is probable that there never was a plan of government less suited to the psychology of the tribesmen than the one under which Liberia has laboured’.⁸¹ The examples of Liberia and Haiti were cited by British colonial administrators, both during the interwar period and after the Second World War, to warn against the consequences of decolonisation in West Africa.⁸² And in the House of Lords in 1934, Liberia was described in the following words: ‘Almost from the very start there has been trouble and no real progress in civilisation has been made. There is a pretentious imitation of American political institutions, but beyond that it hardly goes ... the position of the country to-day is wholly deplorable’.⁸³

This was a decidedly *synchronous* conception of Liberia’s place in global time, which compared the country to other, ‘real’, states, in order to demonstrate its fundamental incomparability with them. True, it represented a linear and evolutionary vision of state-building and progress. But that vision of history was invoked precisely in order to point to Liberia’s failure to really achieve statehood. Far from being denied, coevalness was weaponised in the context of a vision of competitive state-building in which sovereignty was sapped from those who failed to keep up. This was a colonial-racial temporality that did not assign Liberia an allochronic ‘stagnation in time’⁸⁴ (the Fabian idea of being trapped in another historical epoch) but a stagnation in the *present*, attributed to inescapable racial limitations.

How did black writers respond? Countering the idea that Liberia was parodying sovereignty – a kind of delegitimising contemporaneity – many of them insisted on the possibility and the necessity of Liberia ‘succeeding’ as a sovereign African state. This view, which pitched Liberia forwards into the future, led to rhetorical support for violent state-building processes within the country: from Henry Sylvester Williams, the pioneering pan-Africanist; from W.E.B. Du Bois; and from Nnamdi Azikiwe, whose argued in 1934 that ‘[t]he pacification of the bellicose tribes [in Liberia] is an achievement that cannot be minimized’.⁸⁵ But if echoes of ‘subaltern realism’⁸⁶ can be heard here, it is important to recognise their context. While privately critical of Liberia’s

17 (1998): 257–70; Imanuel Geiss, *Pan-African Movement: History of Pan-Africanism in America, Europe and Africa* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1975); Santosh Saha, ‘The Romance of Nationhood: An Investigation of the Attitudes of Educated Africans toward Liberia, 1847–1980’ (PhD diss., Kent State University, 1993).

80. One key exception was Buell, *The Native Problem in Africa*.

81. Sidney De La Rue, *The Land of the Pepper Bird* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1930), 209.

82. Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*, 265; James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 216.

83. HL Deb, 25 April 1934, vol 91: cc724–5.

84. Olender, *Race and Erudition*, xix.

85. Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Liberia in World Politics* (Westport: Negro Universities Press, 1970), 221.

86. Mohammed Ayoob, ‘Inequality and Theorizing in International Relations: The Case for Subaltern Realism’, *International Studies Review* 4, no. 3 (2002): 27–48.

government, these figures insisted that the racially-motivated origins and implications of the attacks on the country necessitated a public and strategic defence of its sovereignty. George Padmore, who was famously at loggerheads with his superiors at the Comintern over Liberia, wrote privately in 1934 that 'Liberia has her faults, but since white politicians are no better than black ones, it is our duty to save the "black baby from the white wolves"'.⁸⁷ Du Bois had similarly argued the previous year that while 'Liberia is not faultless' its 'chief crime is to be black and poor in a rich, white world; and in precisely that portion of the world where color is ruthlessly exploited as a foundation for American and European wealth'.⁸⁸

Virtually every mention of Liberia in the interwar West African press made a point along these lines. A regular columnist in the *Sierra Leone Weekly News* argued that Liberia's travails reflected 'a general agreement among the white races to keep the black races down; the same spirit which, in the Mediaeval times, unified the nations of Europe into one vast brotherhood of Christendom against non-Christian nations' and which 'still exists in these modern days in the new guise of a confederacy of the white races of the world – Whitedom against Blackdom'. Liberia, he explained regretfully, 'has suffered from a great delusion all these years of her existence. She has put nationhood before racehood. So long as she was humoured and tolerated as a "Sovereign State" by the Great Powers, she felt highly flattered and cared not a rush what befell the rest of the Race'.⁸⁹ But the country had now realised the impossibility of 'nationhood' in a world that continued to be ordered by race.

This points to another view on Liberia: one which embraced the synchronous contemporaneity with which Liberia was condemned, but subverted it by revealing the tragic web of global relationality that kept Liberia weak and impoverished. Such writing was often ambivalent about the possibility of competitive state-building in the context of a radically uneven world. In an article published in August 1931, for example, the *Sierra Leone Weekly News* looked at Liberia in relation to the 'white civilised nations of the world' and pointed to 'the tragedy of the situation' through which Liberia had become part of 'the grand chain of what is known as the Comity of Nations', but only in a position of structural weakness due to its 'poverty', thereby finding itself 'a link in the chain of international force of world-wide development'.⁹⁰ The adoption of the tragic mode here conveyed a strongly structuralist tone.

The most sustained and complex writing on Liberia from this perspective came from George W. Brown, an African American scholar, in his book *The Economic History of Liberia* (1941). Brown's economic history was at once a rigorous account of Liberia's economy in historical perspective and a contemplation of the tragic nature of Liberia's

87. Jonathan Derrick, *Africa's Agitators: Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918–1939* (London: Hurst, 2008), 300.

88. Quoted in Cedric Robinson, 'DuBois and Black Sovereignty: The Case of Liberia', *Race & Class* 32, no. 2 (1990): 43.

89. 'Rambling Talks', *SLWN AQ Give title in full*, 9 September 1931.

90. 'The Black Republic of Liberia and the White Civilised Nations of the World', *SLWN AQ Give title in full*, 29 August 1931.

relationship with a Western-dominated and racialised global order.⁹¹ He suggested that the country's interwar predicament had to be placed within the context of its essentially tragic historical political economy, which had made of Liberia's rulers a *comprador* elite: 'Puppets or pawns in the big game of international finance, they serve as little more than clerks or tellers who pass on to the foreign brokers the contributions from the mass of virile Africans, retaining for themselves little more than is adequate and necessary for sustenance'.⁹² With the occupation of Ethiopia, Liberia was now the 'last of the Black Governments in the Black Country'.⁹³ Surrounded by hostile 'white powers', it 'could not stand for an hour against the embittered might of the mechanized war machines of any world power'.⁹⁴

Conclusion

Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia were unavoidably modern states between 1914 and 1945. But their juridical sovereignties were rebuffed by a language that connected 'race' with diverse – and always unfavourable – forms of political time: regression, parody, extinction, failure. This experience can, I think, shed light on the evolution of race as a regime of global classification. On the one hand, powerful states during the 1920s and 1930s drew extensively on the ordering capacity of race as a concept and language. This can be observed, for example, in the entrenchment of racial categories within the immigration policies of the core industrial states. At the same time, however, these states, and the broader order in which they operated, were forced to grapple with the diminishing ability of race to command scientific prestige and hegemony. Out of that contradiction emerged our current global order, whose promises of formal juridical equality are contradicted by its enduringly deep fractures and vertiginous stratifications.

The interwar struggles of these three states reveal the persistence of race in international society not as a flaw in an otherwise progressive evolution, to be ironed out through the passage of time, but as a keystone around which the 'liberal order' was able to span its most recent and most expansive structure after the dissolution of the colonial empires. If race in the United States 'came into its own with slavery's abolition',⁹⁵ as Patrick Wolfe convincingly argued, then on the international level we might see race as coming into its own with colonialism's abolition, chronopolitically working to hierarchise juridical equality.

In this view, we can understand 'the globalisation of international society' as proceeding on a two-track temporality, on the one hand opening the door to a global synchrony of functionally undifferentiated political forms, but on the other adopting a stratification in political time which assigned various states (and their populations), by virtue of their 'racial' makeup, statuses of 'not-yet', stasis, regression, vanishing, or contemporaneous

91. Brown, *The Economic History of Liberia*, 65. The book was referred to by A.G. Hopkins 32 years later, in A.G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London: Longman, 1973), 2, as a 'neglected study' notable for its 'careful research'.

92. Brown, *The Economic History of Liberia*, 230.

93. *Ibid.*, 225.

94. *Ibid.*, 214.

95. Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London: Verso, 2015), 133.

parody and failure – extensions of colonial temporalities, but transposed onto a new political order. It does not require much further elaboration to show how these representations are still at work in academic as well as popular discourses. As Siba N. Grovogui argued some time ago, these often ‘remain grounded in subtle notions of “race” and their relations to progress and modernization’ and therefore ‘provide a basis for the exclusion of nonwhites from the essential decision-making fora of the moral order’.⁹⁶

Denials of coevalness *and* temporal relativisms are ubiquitous in our contemporary order. Their combination and flexibility warn us against any easy temporal fixes: as Kalpana Wilson has recently shown in a study of NGO post-development discourse, even the most apparently well-meaning assaults on History can find themselves re-articulating the language of racialising differentiation.⁹⁷ My analysis of the interwar period has focused on three states (and some interpretations of their experiences), but it would be limiting to see this temporal politics as operating only on the level of states. In contemporary bordering and deportation regimes, for example, we find ‘surplus’ and racialised populations subject to multiple forms of differentiated time, including what has been called an ‘enforced orientation to the present’.⁹⁸ No single description of time can account for the many ways in which race is lived today.

If literary texts have previously been championed as offering a ‘heterochronic’⁹⁹ alternative to postcolonialism’s temporal contradictions, perhaps we should consider broadening the definition of ‘literary’. Political texts of anticolonial print circuits, such as the black newspapers published in New York, Baltimore, Freetown and Paris, also display forms of heterochronicity in place of temporal rigidity. The *Black Atlantic* newspaper archives of the 1920s and 1930s offer us a wealth of thinking about sovereignty, race, nationalism and global order. They show that black engagements with nationalism were often complex and ambivalent, defending sovereignty not as an end in itself, but in the service of a vision of pan-African and Third World liberation which necessitated a critical and strategic engagement with actually-existing forms of political organisation.

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96. Grovogui, ‘Come to Africa’, 427.

97. Kalpana Wilson, ‘Worlds Beyond the Political? Post-Development Approaches in Practices of Transnational Solidarity Activism’, *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 12 (2017): 2684–702.

98. Nicholas P. De Genova, ‘Migrant “Illegality” and Deportability in Everyday Life’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 427.

99. For a ‘heterochronic’ view of postcolonial literature, see Helgesson, ‘Radicalizing Temporal Difference’.