

Shifting Imaginations: The Implications of Non-Linear West African Time



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The recent “temporal turn” in historical study has opened an important and powerful avenue for further exploration. Following on to that recent emphasis, this study examines the implications of a non-linear understanding of time held by West African intellectuals in the mid-to-late 20th century as they proposed alternatives to the dominant, state-based socio-political organization demanded by European and North American powers. The resultant “sea of time” allowed them to propose forms that engaged myths and stories and both forerunners and outcomes of uniquely West African understandings of a world built around family, connected via ethnic and linguistic affinities, and considering gender and family constructs vastly different from their colonial inheritance and present in past, present, and future simultaneously. These views, infused most powerfully with a locally determined religious understanding, offer important implications beyond that specific historical moment. Imagining the world without linear causation opens avenues that allow for a more complete decolonization of thought without the burden of race, progress, industry, and capitalism. Instead, we can generate a world of closer connection dominated not by the tyranny of time’s passage and the demand for “rational” comprehension, but instead by linkage across eras, across experiences, across borders and boundaries.

Biography:

Doug Leonard is an Associate Professor of History at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado, United States. He teaches courses in world, African, colonial, intellectual, and European history and the capstone experience for students in the Honors program. He is the author of *Anthropology, Colonial Policy and the Decline of French Empire in Africa* (Bloomsbury, 2020) and numerous articles in historical, anthropological, and teaching professional journals. Dr. Leonard is hard at work on his next book project, which examines the social and political implications of the non-linear time proposed by West African intellectuals in the 20th century.