Times Told, Lived, and Remembered: The Multitemporality of the Present in Yaawo Oral Histories of Gendered Power in Northern Mozambique

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Abstract

This article explores how multiple gendered times are brought to bear on the present in Yaawo oral history-telling about female leaders and gendered power in a more distant past. The dominant research narratives about gender and power in Africa still often take the shape of unfolding stories of time in which the past is separated from the present. This epistemic imperative of progression also shapes the way that what is termed the 'precolonial past' (and especially oral traditions) is often approached as a separate, self-contained area of study. In this article, I turn to oral history to search for female figures of authority in a more distant past. Yet my aim is not merely to add women to the dominant (often masculinized) narratives of power. Rather, building on the idea that "temporality is gendered, and gendering is temporal" (Schèues et al. 2011), I seek to explore how the relationship between gender and temporality is constructed in oral history-telling. This approach, I argue, can help shed light on the past as well as the present, and on the gendered processes of change in women's authority and leadership. My analysis focuses on the temporal gesturing that takes place in interview situations, and on the ways that the narrators (intentionally and unintentionally) pull different kinds of gendered temporalities into action in the present. Most importantly, this analytical engagement shows the inherent instability of gendered temporality. It shows how time is continuously (re)categorized and (re)organized – and the relationship between gender and temporality continuously (re)constructed – in each present moment of history-telling. I suggest that this kind of analytical engagement can accommodate a more complex understanding of historical time and thus allow for a fuller history of gender and power. Moreover, focusing specifically on Yaawo oral history-telling, this analysis offers us a more nuanced insight into the changing gendered times in a northern Mozambican landscape.

Keywords: multitemporality; non-linear history; gendered time; oral history; women leaders

About the author

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Introduction

> Ce-Syuungudi was the principal chief at the time, before the men ascended as chiefs. She was the one who governed all Mount Yaawo, being the superior authority, she was *biibi*. (Ce-Maguuta, interview, October 19, 2018)[1]

With these words, Ce-Maguuta begins the story of the first chief, a woman called Ce-Syuungudi, who governed at Mount Yaawo in northern Mozambique in the early nineteenth century. Ce-Maguuta's story closely echoes the dynastic narrative first captured in writing by Yohanna B. Abdallah ([1919] 1973) in his book *Chiikala cha Wayao* (or 'the Yaawo of the old days'). Written in Ciyaawo, Abdallah's study draws on a combination of ethnographic data and oral histories. Abdallah conducted his study while he was working as a priest at the Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) in the territory of Sultan Ce-Kalaanje at Mount Unango (see Map 1) between 1894 and 1924. Abdallah's book is a major source on the political organization of the Yaawo, who inhabited what is now known as the province of Niassa (in northwestern Mozambique), prior to Portuguese colonization of the area. Around the mid-nineteenth century, new chiefly dynasties of territorial chiefs were emerging in Yaawo country, and in Abdallah's book Ce-Syuungudi features in the dynastic narrative of one of these chiefs. The power of these (mainly male) chiefs was largely based on their participation in the growing slave trade (see also Alpers 1969).[2] Ce-Nyaambi, the main character in Abdallah's

rendering of the narrative, became the founder of the most powerful dynastic line in Yaawo country in the nineteenth century, the Mataaka dynasty.[3] The fame of these Yaawo male leaders has been further fixed in contemporary history books, in which male leadership and a masculine shape of power has often been taken as the unquestionable norm (see, e.g., Alpers 1969; Medeiros 1997; although see also Liesegang [1990?] 2014). Seeking a fuller and more nuanced understanding of this gendered history of power,[4] this article turns its focus instead to the female leaders, about whom we know far less – yet who, according to oral historical narratives, wielded significant power in a more distant past in both the spiritual and secular sphere.

Drawing mainly on the oral history research I conducted with male and female elders between 2012 and 2022, I study how these female leaders (whom I also refer to as 'women of authority'[5]) feature in oral historical memory.[6]

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[1] All interviews were conducted together with Ciyaawo speaking co-interviewer Helena Baide and were later transcribed by my other research collaborator, Domingos Aly, who also assisted with translations from Ciyaawo to Portuguese.

[2] Between 1760 and 1880 the slave trade increased in volume in the region (Liesegang, n.d.). By the 1850s, the Yaawo were the major suppliers of slaves to the markets across the coast from Zanzibar to Quelimane.

[3] Mataaka I reigned from c. 1850 to 1879. Other territorial chiefs that I mention in this article are N'tadika of the Lugenda River Island (whose population currently lives in N'sawisi), the chiefs of Unango Mountain (Nam'paanda, Kalaanje, and Cipaango), and N'taamila of Chiconono (see map). These are all hereditary dynastic names. In the 1800s territorial chiefs (called by the title 'sultan') governed over subchiefs and their constituents. As political alliances kept shifting, the chieftaincies constituted relatively unstable political units.
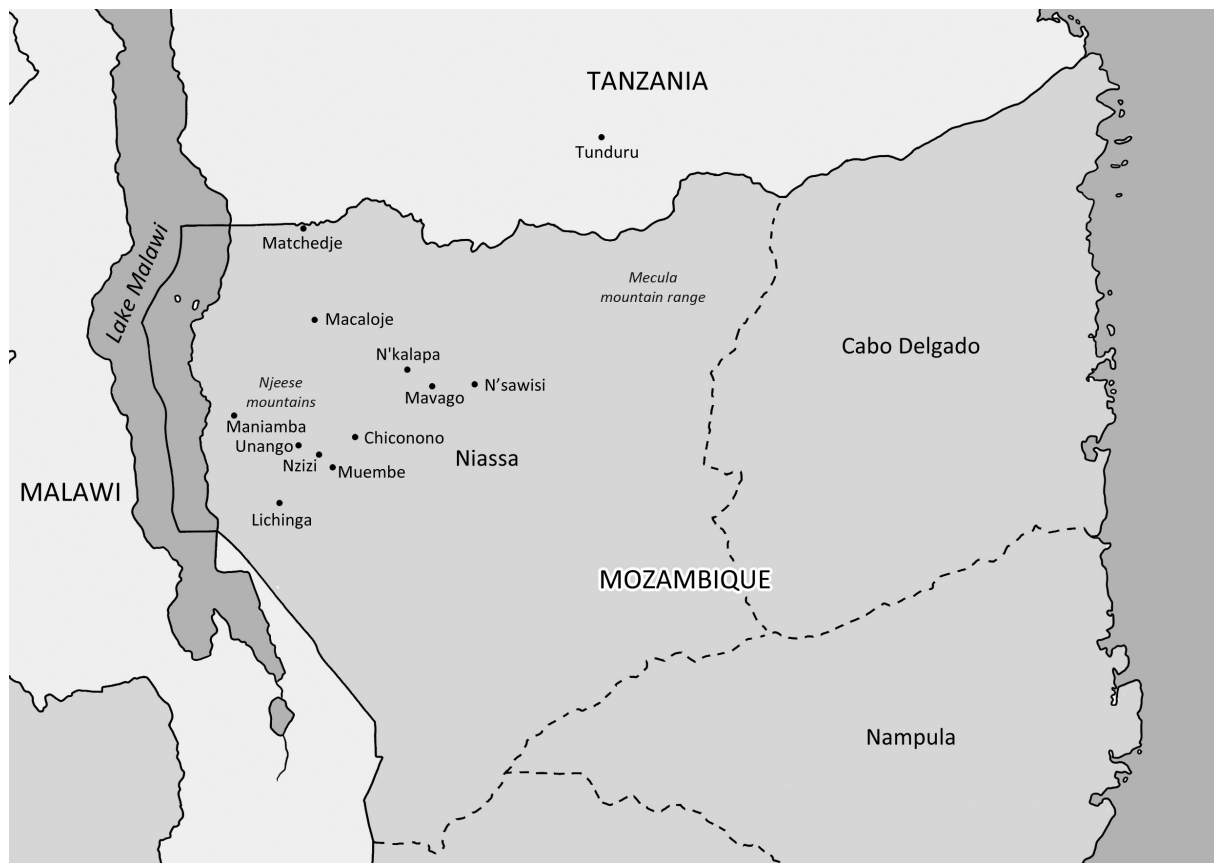
[4] In this article, I draw on the notion of power as creative (Arens and Karp 1989), not fixed within a dichotomy of dominance and submission. Bibi Bakare-Yusuf's (2004) idea of gender as one 'mode of power' intersecting many other modes also helps in analysing the multiple and changing forms of power.

[5] Using this term, I follow Rosário (2015). Buijs (2002) and Rodrigues (2017) use the term 'female leader' and Day (2012) 'women of influence'.

[6] Altogether, I have interviewed about 120 male and female elders (belonging to over 20 different Yaawo chiefly families), mainly in the rural districts of Sanga, Majune, Mavago, and Muembe. I made initial contact with some of these elders during my earlier research on the gendered history of the liberation struggle (see Katto 2019); my interviewees also pointed me towards new contacts. I interviewed not just male and female leaders of the old ruling families but also other elders recognized in the communities as knowledgeable about the deeper past.

Map 1: Northern Niassa, Mozambique. Map by Noora Katto.

In the broader research literature on southeastern Africa, female leaders are often construed as exceptional, and their role and power is not fully recognized. Eugenia Rodrigues (2017) argues that while there has been much focus on what have been called 'queen-mothers' in West African scholarship, in Eastern Africa far less attention has been given to women's political authority in precolonial societies, though more recent research has started to address this gap. This newer research seems even to suggest that female rulership might not have been so uncommon in a more distant past (see Askew 1999; Buijs 2007; Rodrigues 2017; Bonate 2019). In the case of early Yaawo history, much of our knowledge builds on the reports and writings of missionaries and travellers and the studies of colonial-era anthropologists (e.g. MacDonald 1882; Mitchell 1956). These male writers tend to largely ignore questions of women's power; and even when women are mentioned (which is not often), their authority is not recognized or explored. Thus they paint a picture of secular and spiritual power held firmly in the hands of the male chiefs. However, oral historical sources, as I explore in this article, suggest that this was not the case. Here, I understand oral history in a broad sense, also encompassing oral historical narratives (in the past more commonly referred to as 'oral traditions') that have been passed down through generations of tellers. Moreover, in Yaawo oral history these narratives are not tightly fixed in form or learned through formal apprenticeships; rather, everyone I interviewed spoke of having learned these historical narratives through conversations with their elders.

At the same time, the aim of this article is not merely to add women to dominant (often masculinized) narratives of power. Rather, the article – building on the idea that "temporality

is gendered, and gendering is temporal" (Schèues et al. 2011, 8) – seeks to explore how the relationship between gender and temporality is continuously (re)constructed in oral history-telling. Drawing on feminist phenomenology, this entails looking at both how "gender show[s] itself in relation to time" and how "time show[s] itself in relation to gender" (Schèues et al. 2011, 8). This approach, I argue, can help shed light on the past as well as the present and on the gendered processes of change. In this article, I study how diverse gendered times echo in the historical present in northern Mozambique. The starting point is that each present – instead of being "singular and fleeting", i.e. flowing in one direction – is multitemporal (Dinshaw et al. 2007, 185; see also, e.g. Holtorf 2002; Olsen 2010). I draw here on Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood's (2010) analysis of the multiple temporalities of artwork. Each artefact, as they show, is an index of their times; from the 'now' moment (in which we view them), they point to many different times. In my analysis, I focus on the temporal gesturing that takes place in the 'now' moment of the interview situations, and on how in oral history conversations narrators pull different kinds of gendered temporalities into action. Michel Serres usefully schematizes time as "a kind of crumpling, a multiple, foldable diversity" (as opposed to the linear version of time that can be neatly measured) (Serres and Latour 1995, 59). It is this depth and multiplicity, or what Matthew S. Champion (2019) calls 'fullness of time', that I attempt to capture analytically. This does not mean collapsing the present into the past, but interrogating their relationship and looking at the multiplicity of gendered times in present space-time.

This article thus seeks alternatives to the linear conceptualizations of time that still underpin much writing on African women and gender history. The dominating model of historical explanation shaping interpretations of African gendered pasts (and presents) builds on a concept of time that is tied to chronology.

This temporal model is most clearly implicated in contemporary periodization, which divides time into the precolonial, the colonial, and the post-colonial. In the resulting historical narratives, time flows as "a series of 'chapters'" in an unfolding story (Lucas 2005, 50; see also Hirsch and Stewart 2005). As feminist gender historians argue, traditional schemas of periodization tie gendered history to linear narratives of social change (see e.g. Kelly-Gadol 1984; Jordanova 2006; Shepard and Walker 2008; Browne 2014). While many historians of Africa have critically written against this progressive chronology (e.g. Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe 1993; Cooper 2000; Ellis 2002), it still implicitly underlines much of the literature on African women and gender history. Through this history writing, women's historical experiences become fixed within teleological narratives in which the past is distanced from the present along a linear path. What is more, this temporal model reasons from within a colonial framework (see also Ajayi 1968; Rosário 2021). This epistemic imperative of progression also shapes the way in which what is termed the 'precolonial past' and especially oral traditions are usually approached as a separate, self-contained area of study, and not brought to bear on the present. In this article, I suggest that examining the multiple gendered times of the present can accommodate a more complex understanding of historical time and thus offer alternative ways of thinking about gender and change in African history.

This article consists of three sections. In the first section, I look at how narrators evoke the distant times in narratives about the first female chiefs. My analysis focuses on the fantastical narrative of Ce-M'bajila (told by Ce-Kadeweele) and the war that determined the current gendered order of the world. Telling the story of 'the first female chief' and her loss of power, it draws on a core narrative of Yaawo oral history. In the second section, I explore how the name 'Ce-M'bajila' also gestures to a famous historical figure of the more recent past, the female Sultan Ce-N'tadika III,

a colonial era chief. She was also the one who welcomed fighters of the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) to N'tadika territory when the war of independence against Portuguese colonial rule began in the region in 1965. I study the life of this Ce-M'bajila as remembered by my interviewees, but I also examine the afterlife of her name – a name that these days has no known successor. In the third section, I turn to focus on the women who in present times carry names inherited from their great female ancestors. This section explores how histories of power are transmitted and brought to bear on the present through these names. As I argue, this transmission of historical knowledge – involving the passing on of sacred rituals – is also bodily. I ask what the discontinuation of these names means for gendered power but also for historical understanding. Finally, I discuss how an analysis of the multiple temporalities of the present might help us towards a fuller understanding of gender in African history.

Ce-Kadeweele and the story of the first female chief

> Now it was in that time that the power of you woman collapsed, so that you were not more powerful [than men], and your power passed to these [men]. (N'suusa Kadeweele, interview, July 16, 2019)

It is with these words that N'suusa Kadeweele (respectfully known as Ce-Kadeweele), a male elder in Chiconono, frames the narrative that he is about to tell us. Helena and I interviewed Ce-Kadeweele in his home in the village of Chief Ce-N'taamila in Chiconono in 2018 and 2019. Helena, a war veteran of the Mozambican liberation struggle (1964–1974), and a maternal granddaughter of N'taamila II, played a crucial role in helping me to navigate these research relationships and interview

encounters. A previous year we had interviewed the current Chief N'taamila together with his counsellor. This time people directed us to Ce-Kadeweele, who – when we met him – proudly claimed that even the President of Mozambique had heard him speak on Yaawo history. In 2018, we approached Ce-Kadeweele asking for *mbidi sya kalakaala* ('old time tales').[7] Our first interview with him took the form of a long story-telling session in which one story followed another in an even yet nonlinear flow.[8] He told us stories about the old chiefs; Ngoni wars; the raiding wars between Yaawo chiefs; how the Yaawo sought refuge in the mountains in times of crises; and, for instance, how when the first whites arrived people mistook them for spirits. Yet as all the main characters of these stories appeared to be men, during our second interview, in 2019, I asked Ce-Kadeweele specifically about his knowledge of female leaders of the more distant past.

Responding to our question, Ce-Kadeweele claimed that in the past there were female chiefs but that he only knew the name of one of them – Ce-M'bajila. As Ce-Kadeweele recounts, Ce-M'bajila was the first chief, and "her orders were supreme". She governed in the area of N'sawisi. Proud

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[7] *Mbidi ya kalakaala* refers to historical narratives, and they usually tell about chiefs. *Ngaani* is sometimes used interchangeably with *mbidi*. Abdallah ([1919] 1973) uses *ngaani*; yet it seems that at present *ngaani* more often refers to more informal stories heard from grandparents about life and customs in the old days. Other types of story-telling include, for instance, *cindano* (pl. *yindano*) and *adiisi adiisi*. *Yindano* are songs that tell stories and also include explanations by the performer, while *adiisi adiisi* are riddles.

[8] This kind of flow of stories was usual in first interviews with narrators. Often narrators were happy to hear that we would come again the following year; this, they argued, would allow them to prepare more stories. These interview encounters, of course, are very different from the settings in which these stories used to be told in the past. In present times, story-telling sessions are a rare occurrence; as our interviewees argued, the younger generations consider their knowledge antiquated.

of her position, she boasted that there could be no one above her, after all, the "man comes from the woman's belly". It is at this point that Ce-Kadeweele offers the framing words of the narrative (see above), which make it clear that this will be a story about women's downfall from power. He goes on to narrate how, at the time, there were men who could not accept being governed by a woman, and they rebelled against her power. This is when Ce-M'bajila challenged the men to war. She said, "If you say that I cannot rule, I cannot be ruler, then we are going to war." This war was to take place in a marshland called *Nayilaanga.*

> CE-KADEWEELE: And the meeting place was in Nayilaanga. Now you, your people . . . your female companions, when you get there, you take beads. Do you understand? But the men they take bows and arrows there, they take knives, they take machetes on the day of going to meet with whom? You who boast about your power as ruler. Some carry firearms –
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> HELENA: It is to kill me.
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> CE-KADEWEELE: Yes. Others with bows . . . And all this done by whom? Those men . . . with the objective of going to meet that woman. 'That woman can't carve a bow, she can't forge arrows' . . . So when you got here –
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> HELENA: Here in Nayilaanga –
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> CE-KADEWEELE: Here with the other women . . . you said: 'Now . . . beads. Prepare bead necklaces.' And they were preparing bead necklaces . . . preparing bead necklaces. Covering from here . . . to here. Covering from here . . . to here. When it was completed, just like an army of soldiers. Right? You coming behind, on the appointed day to go there to Nayilaanga.

> We wielding firearms, bows . . .
> 'Woman giving orders about something, no . . . Man, yes!'

I was thrilled when Ce-Kadeweele first named Ce-M'bajila as a female chief of the distant past. While some records exist of female chiefs, their names and stories have largely disappeared from living memory. Yet when Kadeweele's story continued I became bewildered and finally I could not help feeling somewhat disappointed; this seemed more like a mythic tale and not the kind of 'historical narrative' I was expecting.

It was only gradually – and through a close contextualized study (for which Karin Barber's work provided important analytical tools) – that I started to make sense of the historical value of Ce-Kadeweele's story. As Barber (2007, 14) suggests, we need to look at how a text such as this is "set up *as* a text" to understand its historical meaning.[9] Ce-Kadeweele begins his narrative the way that dynastic narratives usually start.[10] It is not unlike the beginning of Ce-Maguuta's narrative about Ce-Syuungudi (see beginning of introduction). Yet Ce-Kadeweele quickly breaks with the narrative conventions of this genre by using the 'you' form of address to its protagonist. Instead of putting the narrative into the third person to create distance between speaker and listener, he uses second-person discourse to draw the listener (here, specifically Helena, as the culturally competent participant) into a dialogic engagement. This creates a sense of immediacy in which the mythic place of Nayilaanga also becomes 'here'. Kadeweele employs a popular performance genre that requires the listener to play

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[9] In this paragraph my analysis draws much from Barber (2007, 71, 137).

[10] The term 'dynastic narrative' does not exist in Ciyaawo. Rather, the term *mbidi* is commonly used; e.g. *mbidi ja Mataaka*. *Mbidi* also refers to 'fame' (*lumbidi*), and these narratives focus especially on telling the story of the founder of the dynasty, and that person's rise to fame.

an active role in the constitution of the text.[11] It is through a kind of role play, in which Helena – appropriating the position of 'you' and assuming the part of Ce-M'bajila – that the narrative unfolds. Helena's small endorsements help keep the narrative flowing, and the way she effortlessly assumes this position speaks of her familiarity with this performance genre. The narrator alternates between the speaking positions of a participant in the story, 'we' (the men), and an unidentified observer using third-person discourse to describe the events as they unfold, mostly in the present tense. While the story is seemingly about a historical figure Ce-M'bajila, positioning her 'I' in oppositional relation to the male 'we', she (and her 'I') is made to stand for all women – and the story becomes one of historical change on a grander scale.

Ce-Kadeweele is an oral artist and historian; with skill, he draws on different story-telling traditions to construct a compelling narrative.[12] Yet what is the historical significance of his tale? His story of Ce-M'bajila includes many mythical aspects that cannot be taken literally, and many of the details are no doubt his own creative inventions. What catches my attention is that the tale draws on and expands a common narrative in Yaawo oral historical tradition, which is that of the first female chief and her loss of power. Joseph C. Miller (1980, 6–8, 51) calls the inherited, older part of a narrative the 'core narrative' (or 'cliché'), which, according to him, is a "de-

liberate and purposeful simplification", often short, dramatic or striking, which also makes it memorable. According to Miller, it is in the core narrative that the history lies. Drawing on Barber (2007, 71), we might further understand the core narrative as text that has become fixed through transmission over an extended period of time, as it has been copied, repeated, and recreated. In Ce-Kadeweele's narrative, this core narrative has been inserted into a new dialogic performance mode and a new interpretative frame. Ce-Kadeweele is at once both composer and interpreter, navigating (what Barber [2007, 93] calls) "a whole field of verbal resources" and cultural knowledge to construct this narrative.[13]

As Ce-Kadeweele continues his narrative, Ce-M'bajila went to war with the male chief. Since women had no bows, arrows, or spears, Ce-M'bajila decided that beads would be the women's weapon. So the women went to war singing and dancing, and in the end the men decided that they did not want to kill the women but to marry them. This marked the end of women's chiefly authority, as Ce-Kadeweele narrates:

> CE-KADEWEELE: It was then that the order was instituted: 'You will not govern. Because you know how to carve a bow? You don't know how to carve! Who carves the bow is me.' Who said that? The one who said you as a woman can't govern. Now, for you to accept, you accepted saying: 'Yes, am I able to carve a bow? I can't carve. Am I able to forge a knife? I cannot forge.' So you conformed from then on. It was the time that what started? What I told you was that it was then that the name of the N'taamila dynasty started. 'Call that leader. Now here, let him start choosing the woman he likes – who is beautiful!' Since

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[11] Chimombo ([1988] 2020) writes of how, in oral performance, the narrator and audience "form a ritual field" in which they "become inseparable". This ritual field takes different shape in popular story-telling, as opposed to performances of dynastic narratives. In the latter, the narrator takes a more authoritative stance, the audience is not addressed directly, and interruptions are not condoned.

[12] Chimombo ([1988] 2020), focusing on the Malawian (mainly Nyanja and Chewa but also Yaawo) context, discusses the fluidity of verbal arts and how narrators sometimes bend genres into each other. One might even interpret this as "genre express[ing] rebellion" (Jaji and Saint 2017).

[13] See also Chimombo ([1988] 2020).

he always stayed seated. It was then
that he came to choose the one he
likes, be it two, be it three. Now in
the past these leaders could have
twelve women –

HELENA: Eh-eeh!

CE-KADEWEELE: All for a single
man.

Ce-Kadeweele uses the temporal marker 'in
the time before the chiefs that we know' to
situate his story. Nwando Achebe (2005, 8)
– working on female authority in twentieth
century Northern Igboland – emphasizes the
importance of closer analytical attention in
our research to African terms of periodization
(see also Schoenbrun 2020, 26). In the oral
history accounts, time was organized using
(often overlapping) temporal schemas, such
as 'the time of the chiefs/the first chiefs', 'the
time of slave-raiding' (or *kuswaamba vaandu*,
'capturing people'), 'the time when the Yaawo
were living in the mountains', 'the time of the
Ngoni wars' (*pa ndaavi ngoondo ja Masitu /
Makwaangwala*), and 'the time of the German
war' (World War I). In this system of periodi-
zation, 'the time before the chiefs we know'
refers to a deeper historical time prior to the
emergence of the mid-nineteenth century
chieftaincies. Yet it is also set apart from the
mythical time of 'the very first people'.[14]
Thus, it is not a Yaawo equivalent of 'once
upon a time', but the story is set firmly within
what Elizabeth Tonkin (1992) calls 'ordinary
time'. Ce-Kadeweele situates his story in
the time before the birth of the Ce-N'taamila
chieftaincy. As oral historical tradition tells us,
it was one of Ce-Syuungudi's daughters that
gave birth to the first Ce-N'taamila.

Joseph Miller (1980, 41) writes about
'the absent past', the time before the current

regime. According to him, the historical tradi-
tions referring to this time "may become highly
structured and most mythical in their phras-
ing". Yet as Tonkin (1992, 8) writes, some-
times these seemingly "unrealistic ways of
representing the past" can be shown to "encode
history, that is, they register actual happenings
or significant changes". Here at the core of
the narrative is the first female chief and her
fall from power, which is at the heart of many
Yaawo dynastic narratives (most famously,
those of Ce-Syuungudi and Ce-Ngulupe). The
story of Ce-Syuungudi, as it features in the
origin narrative of the Mataaka dynasty, also
tells of men's rebellion against the power of
women. Abdallah recorded a version of this
narrative around the turn of the twentieth cen-
tury, and Ce-Maguuta told his version in 2018.
According to both narratives, Ce-Syuungudi
was the first chief that ruled in the Yaawo
country at Likopolwe. But two young men
born to her daughters felt jealous; they did not
want to live in a country governed by a woman.
Moreover, when they moved away, they
changed their clan name; they were no longer
to be called people of Syuungudi but Nkadi.[15]
Another 'first female chief', Ce-Ngulupe,
features in the oral historical narratives of the
Nam'paanda, Cipaango, and Kalaanje chief-
taincies at Unango (see Katto 2023). A more
male-centred narrative of these breakages and
the instability of the Yaawo villages has been
recounted in colonial-era studies, most notably
in James C. Mitchell's (1956) *The Yao Village*.
As he writes, in the 1940s in his area of study
in southern Nyasaland, these breakages were
caused by men having arguments with other
men of their matrilineage and moving away
with their 'female dependents' to establish a

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[14] For instance, the story of the sacred *n'solo* tree belongs
to a time before the world and the time we know came
into being. Jan Bender Shetler (2007, 29) very insight-
fully writes about how mythic time might be conceptu-
alized as "geographical time" thus coding "almost im-
perceptible changes".

[15] The clan of Aci-Syuungudi (not only Aci-Nkali) is
remembered by Peirone's (1967, 40) interviewees. In
another version of the narratives, Ce-Syuungudi and
Ce-Nkadi were sister and brother. Ce-Syuungudi was
the superior authority, and the brother got angry be-
cause the sister had more authority, and he moved to
live in another place (Lutweesi) (Assumane N'taula and
Chimanje Amido, interview, July 10, 1981).

new village (Mitchell [1951]1959, 318). The differences in the gendered construction of these narratives speak both of changing times and of the gendered lenses of the western male observers.

Following Miller (1980, 36), change that might have been very gradual and slow can be presented in oral historical narratives as "abrupt, dichotomous transformations", "sudden steps" even "magical". The 'core narrative' is more easily remembered when gradual processes become told as dramatic shifts in personalized narratives (Miller 1980, 34). It is notable that the only first-person quote attributed to Ce-M'bajila testifies to her admitting her weakness in military power: "Yes, am I able to carve a bow? I can't carve. Am I able to forge a knife? I cannot forge." The quotation creates the powerful effect of us being witnesses to Ce-M'bajila's admittance of weakness in relation to men. Ce-M'bajila is left with only the power of 'sexual seduction' to fight the men; but while this puts a stop to the war, it leads to women's loss of chiefly authority and power in relation to men.[16] The Gĩkũyũ in Kenya also have a legend about how women once held a superior position in society, but then the men revolted, and this is how the women lost their power to men (see Kenyatta 1938, 6–7). Christine Saidi (2010) interprets the Gĩkũyũ narrative as encoding change from a distant matrilineal past to a patrilineal time.[17] Similarly, one can understand the Yaawo narrative as registering a slow process of change from a time when political power was not male-gendered. Over time women's political power lessened. The production and distribution of iron – which was largely a male affair, as Ce-Kadeweele's narrative also shows – is

an obvious example of a gendered structural change in society that helped increase men's power over women.

This oral text pulls together multiple times into the 'now' moment of the interview situation. It gestures to the distant times of the people who lived long ago on the mountains, riverbanks, and plains of this southeast African landscape. At the same time, it draws on the narrator's own genealogy and life and the memories and stories of his contemporaries (which he has heard and fixed in memory over the course of his life). Telling old inherited narratives in the present is not a question of relaying an unchanged message from the past (see also, e.g., Assmann 1997). At the 'core' of Ce-Kadeweele's narrative is the figure of the first female chief who ruled supreme. It is a common trope in Yaawo oral history; following Jan Bender Shetler (2007, 70), we can understand her character as representing "the genealogical prototype of the kinship system". Ce-Kadeweele embeds her figure within a fantastical narrative about a war between men and women that women subsequently lost. The story of the first female chief's fall from power (while presented in oral historical narratives as abrupt) encodes a change that must have been slow and gradual. Ce-Kadeweele's framing words to the narrative also point to him – and the other narrators before him, whose voices he echoes – trying to make sense of the difference between a time in which, according to oral tradition, a woman could rule supreme, and his own lived time in which, as he perceives, men have power to command over women. This reflexive commentary (as Barber [2007, 206] calls it) importantly also shows the narrator negotiating his sense of being a historical subject in time. The narrative that surrounds the 'core' fills the gap between what, according to inherited knowledge and old narratives, once existed and the narrator's own experience and understanding of the current gendered structure of the world (see also Miller 1980). The narrative is thus novel in its composition; yet it is also old in the sense that

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[16] Another interpretation that would appear to go against the author's intentions is that of a naked protest in which mature women use their naked bodies to collectively shame men into behaving, especially in circumstances of war and violence (see, e.g., Ebila and Tripp 2017).

[17] The foundational myth of the Ganda also appears to refer to the importance of matrilineal relations in the past (see Stephens 2009).

it borrows from the resources of an extensive oral historical archive.

Gendered temporality, in this sense, is thus renegotiated in each historical present. Ce-Kadeweele himself says he picked up the stories he told us from his grandmother, saving them in his memory as he grew up. Ce-Kadeweele was born in the area of Chiconono, married a granddaughter of Ce-N'taamila, and claimed he had never lived anywhere else, although in his youth he had travelled widely; crossing the great Zambezi River, he had visited faraway places, such as Doondo (in Sofala) and even the province of Gaza, mostly on foot, to sell tobacco and work in the mines. These were common ways of making money to pay taxes in colonial times. Later, he had lived through the ten-year liberation struggle (1964–1974), as well as the civil war (1978–1992), though his experiences of these recent wars were not spoken about in the interviews. Yet there is no doubt that the more recent times and gender concepts of the post-independence political regime also shape Ce-Kadeweele's narrative and understanding of the 'downfall' of women. I will return to this later. Before that, we explore how his narrative also draws on the fame of a colonial era female sultan.

The life and afterlife of a female sultan

> HELENA: In the past, there were many female chiefs, but nowadays I see the opposite, we have few female chiefs, why?
>
> CE-MAGUUTA: We also are seeing that in the past there were many female chiefs but these days, it doesn't happen. That started in the time of that war of liberating the country. Even in the zone of N'tadika ['Metarika' in Portuguese] there was Aku-Ndeembe, who

answered as chief. Chief Ce-what's-her-name . . .

> HELENA: Who did you say? In N'tadika, who existed?
>
> CE-MAGUUTA: There was a woman there who answered as Chief N'tadika, Ce-M'bajila. Ce-M'bajila was a sultan. When N'tadika abandoned [Mozambique and left] for Tanzania, she was the one who secured the territory. With the end of the war, that name was extinguished, it is no longer heard. Now we don't know why, and only those *acibiibi* [plural form of *biibi*] were left, but in the past they existed.

(Ce-Maguuta, interview, July 26, 2019)

After hearing Ce-Kadeweele's narrative, I first assumed the name Ce-M'bajila to be one of his creative inventions. But then we started stumbling upon her name in other interviews. Ce-Maguuta (as the excerpt above shows) brings up the name in Mavago. When my co-interviewer Helena – voicing our observation that it seems that in the past there were more female chiefs than what we see in the present – asks for Ce-Maguuta's thoughts on the possible reasons for this, Ce-Maguuta mentions Ce-M'bajila as a female leader that existed in the past in the N'tadika chieftaincy. Her name was also, surprisingly, brought up in an interview in Muembe. A group of male elders in Muembe recalled that in "the region of Ce-M'bajila" there existed a chieftaincy that was led by a woman. The elders said they had heard her name, but that they were unable to tell her story. Ce-Salaanje (who is in his 90s) recounts:

> When the first Ce-M'bajila died, they looked for someone to replace him and they couldn't find a man capable of succeeding the name, so they came for the woman and said

you are Ce-M'bajila. And she governed, she even came a few times here to this administrative post, to this administrative post here she came, but a woman. (Ce-Salaanje, group interview, July 18, 2019)

In his account (which draws on a mixture of extended recollections and personal memory), Ce-Salaanje also expresses his remembered surprise that this chief was indeed a woman.

It was the current Ce-N'tadika VII who offered a more extensive account of Ce-M'bajila's life as ruler.[18] According to him, Ce-M'bajila became Ce-N'tadika III after Ce-N'tadika II (a man called Ce-Sayiidi) was ousted from the position by the population. Here, Portuguese sources also provide some insight into the history of the N'tadika chieftaincy. Ce-N'tadika I was the first Yaawo chief to welcome the Portuguese in his territory (this was at the time when other Yaawo sultans were still offering strong military resistance). A vassalage agreement was signed between the Portuguese Crown and Ce-N'tadika in 1885. In 1888, when the agreement was ratified, Ce-Sayiidi was part of the delegation who, together with the chief's uncle, went to Ibo to sign on behalf of Ce-N'tadika I (*Termos de vassallagem* 1890, 37–38). After the first N'tadika died in 1903, following matrilineal rules of succession, a sister's son, Manguesa, was first chosen by the chiefly council as heir, but then a revolt against the Portuguese led by Manguesa and Kuiassira (brother of the late N'tadika) led the Portuguese to side with the appointment of their ally Ce-Sayiidi (son of the late N'tadika) as Ce-N'tadika II (Vilhena 1905).[19]

Not being the rightful heir was probably part of the reason that the population disputed the power of Ce-N'tadika II. Moreover, according to Ce-N'tadika VII, he was considered a "dictator". As Ce-N'tadika narrates: "It happened that he did not govern well there on the *Ciluumba* (referring to a big island on the Lugenda river), so he was removed, and this woman took over." Ultimately, Ce-M'bajila ascended as sultan. The Portuguese colonial-era anthropologist Manuel Gama Amaral ([1968] 1990, 138) also mentions Ce-M'bajila (or 'Rainha Mbanjila'), but he clearly refuses to accept that Ce-M'bajila could exercise the same power as a male chief; as he argues, people do not like seeing women in positions of authority. However, this view is contradicted by Ce-N'tadika VII, who claims that Ce-M'bajila ruled well. Moreover, according to him, she welcomed fighters of the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) to N'tadika territory when the armed struggle against Portuguese colonial rule began in the mid-1960s (see also Pelembe 2012). This is how Yakaya Mapulume (Ce-N'tadika VII) tells of Ce-M'bajila:

> CE-N'TADIKA: She died after the war ended –
>
> HELENA: When the war of the Portuguese ended –
>
> CE-N'TADIKA: Because it was like this, a bit of a mistake was made [earlier in the narrative]: That Ce-Sayiidi N'tuundu that we mentioned, after the leader there on the Island [N'tadika I] had died, so this one was sworn in. Now when they saw that he was evil, full of fury, he was deposed, and a woman entered. In this case, this woman was the third chief. That woman her grave is on this side, there where we have swept when we have gone to ask(/pray) for the precious stones [= to ask for success in their mining

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[18] Yakaya Mapulume, Ce-N'tadika VII, passed away December 12, 2020.

[19] N'tadika's case demonstrates how the Portuguese were beginning to influence the politics of succession so that chiefs more willing to work together with them would be installed. On changes that Portuguese colonialism brought to Yaawo chieftaincies and chiefly power, see also Katto (2023).

activities]. That's why we started from there, because that one we couldn't pray to because he had been removed. So when the end of the war came again, they continued to put that same –

HELENA: That same Ce-Sayiidi N'tuundu!

CE-N'TADIKA: Yes, at that time that woman had already died. This one wasn't *biibi*, she was *biibi* because she was a woman, but she was Chief N'tadika, a woman who had been crowned –

HELENA: She was chief –

CE-N'TADIKA: So she was the third.

(Ce-N'tadika and Biibi A-Yiindi Issa, interview, July 23, 2019).

Biibi is a term of respect used for women of authority; yet as the account above makes clear, while Ce-M'bajiila can be referred to as *biibi* because she was a woman in a position of authority, her actual title was 'chief' (in Ciyaawo, *mweenye*). Importantly, the accounts by both Ce-Maguuta and Ce-N'tadika point to historical change in gendered authority. In the past, according to them, there were female chiefs, while nowadays only *acibiibi* exist. Their narratives, moreover, speak of the difference that exists between these two figures of female authority. In many narratives the change between chief and *biibi* is described as abrupt. Some even claim that when the female chief lost her power, she immediately assumed the position of *biibi*. Here, as I suggest, it is again better to understand this as a gradual process of change. While as chief she held spiritual-political power, as *biibi* her authority was mainly ascribed to the spiritual domain and her position became one of co-rulership with the male chief. Amaral's study (while it focuses very little on women) also points to the kind of role that the *biibi* (or the female

angaanga 'grandparent') played alongside the male chief in the 1940s. Still, Amaral argues that at the time her position was symbolic; she did not rule the matrilineage, but the men held the real positions of power. Yet he writes that it was the *biibi* that prepared the flour for the *mbopeesi* and suggested the invocation of the ancestors; she remembered the *sadaka* and many other things in the social life especially of the female population.

Even though she is long dead, Ce-N'tadika's narrative speaks about Ce-M'bajila's continued importance and relevance in the lives of her matrilineal descendants. Later in the interview, Ce-N'tadika sheds further light on the significance of the continued remembering and telling of these historical narratives. As he explains:

A person in life always . . . This thing of history, the time you are telling it – you should know that I'm also going to start as I heard from my elders, the same way. They were also informed by their elders, and [like that] going into more remote times. Isn't that the character of history! It is not just these white people, we also had history – sitting down with our children and telling them: 'We came from that region, our parents were so-and-so, there were this many of us there where we left.' In Ciyaawo we say transmit the history to the children, so they don't get lost. In the old days, they said not to get lost, because it was the time of the raids (*ndaavi ja yiswaamba*).

Ce-N'tadika's account brings diverse times together. He juxtaposes the present moment of history-telling ('the time you are telling it') with the past moments in which he himself heard his elders tell these narratives, but also those history-telling moments of more distant pasts. In his discussion of 'historicity', the phenomenologist David Carr (2014, 17)

argues that "we exist historically by virtue of our participation in communities that predate and outlive our individual lives." Historicity, understood as the "human perception of being-in-time" (Geană 2005, 349; see also Lambek 2016), is an idea that also comes across in Ce-N'tadika's account. The sharing and learning of history is important as it serves the purpose of positioning the individual in social time. In a more distant past, as Ce-N'tadika explains, the passing on of history and a sense of social identity to children was even more important, as it was the time of the raids. Men, women, and children were captured from their homes; some were sold to slave caravans, others incorporated into new matrilineages. Captured people also received new names. One could thus get lost on two levels: As some interviewees explained, the abductors used drugs and various tricks (like walking in circles) to ensure that the abducted person lost their sense of direction and thus could not escape, as they were unable to find their way home. (Similar tactics were used in the liberation struggle.) Yet there was another more serious way of getting lost. The captured person (*cikapoolo*) lost their social identity as a member of the matrilineage of their ancestors.

History, for Ce-N'tadika, is closely tied to remembering one's ancestors. While, in historical narratives, the ancestors inhabit a distant past (*ndaavi ya kalakaala*), in the communal ceremonies they are called upon to intervene in the present. Ancestors are both historical figures and contemporaries (see also Goedefroit and Lombard 2007; Lambek 2016). As our interviewees described, in communal ceremonies, the names of the dead ancestors are called, thus invoking their spirits. In the past, when the great Yaawo chiefs performed communal ceremonies to protect the people on their territory, they called on the spirits of the great chiefs of their matrilineages, who had ruled before them, to come to their aid. Through the offering of the sacred flour in the *mbopeesi* ceremony, they asked for the well-being of their population and protection from

ills, such as war, dangerous animals, and sickness, as well as rains for their crops to yield well. In the interview, Ce-N'tadika describes the performance of a smaller ceremony at the grave of N'tadika III (Ce-M'bajila) to ask for protection and good fortune when going mining for precious stones in the N'sawisi bush. The spirits of the dead ancestor have the power to influence the lives of their living kin. Yet it is only through the remembering of their descendants (through the *mbopeesi* ceremony) that their connection to the present is maintained. In another interview in 2014, we caught Ce-N'tadika in a mood of longing for the Island of his ancestors. He expressed deep sadness, arguing that his history is incomplete, as the graves of his ancestors are on that island in the Lugenda River;[20] yet the government has not allowed him to return there since the liberation struggle.

Names play an important function in Yaawo social memory. They are, as Barber (2007, 135) writes, "the vehicle of survival beyond death". I suggest that it is not insignificant that the name 'Ce-M'bajila' was chosen by Ce-Kadeweele as the protagonist of his narrative. Yet while names are the mnemonic kernels of historical narratives, this means not that a name only has one story, one historical meaning. Many (sometimes even contradictory) stories circulate about their histories (or the ways the names were established and gained fame). By attributing the name Ce-M'bajila to the first female chief of his narrative, the life and fame of a colonial-era female sultan becomes intertwined with a legend of female leadership in a more distant past. The accounts by Ce-Maguuta and Ce-Salaanje suggest that it is her distinctiveness that influences the memorability of the name Ce-M'bajila. These narrators might never personally have crossed paths with Ce-M'bajila, but their narratives

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[20] While the story for our narrator starts at the island in the Lugenda, according to Medeiros (1997, 92), N'tadika only moved to the island some time after 1866, apparently fleeing the Ngoni raids.

point to the spread of her fame beyond her own territory and also – through these narrators – beyond her own lived time. In the late colonial period, female rulers existed, but they were not the norm. It is also on this fame that Ce-Kadeweele (perhaps unconsciously) draws when linking Ce-M'bajila's name to the legend of the first female ruler. The next section explores both the diminishing of the power of these female leaders in more recent times and the ways that this power continues to be remembered by the women who carry or lay claim to these inherited names.

History in a grandmother's *mbopeesi* basket

> But now I . . . what I saw with these eyes of mine here in N'kalapa, right here . . . What I can say is that this grandmother Ce-Biiba – the way she stayed alone with her *mbopeesi*; she put *mbopeesi* and then lived in peace. When she emigrated from Masyaale, she was with her companions. Then her companions abandoned her, saying: 'Ah, the land is not fertile around here, the vegetation only consists of *yiinjiisi* [a type of tree of small stature]; we will leave.' And they left for . . . Kwi-Kulambeembe, to go live there. Ce-Biiba then said: 'No, not me, I'll live right here.' And she went on living. (Fátima Mussa, group interview, July 25, 2019)

We start the interview with Fátima Mussa, a female elder in N'kalapa, by asking her about the stories she remembers hearing from her elders about the more distant times. Fátima tells us the story of her grandmother Ce-Biiba's *mbopeesi*. Yet Fátima does not tell the story as something belonging to the past; instead, she immediately ties the ancestral time of her grandmother to her own lived time

and autobiographical memory, as she begins her narrative: "But now I . . . what I saw with my own eyes…" This, as I suggest, is how she claims narrative authority in an interview situation in which her 'brother', the current chief, is also present. As Fátima tells us, Ce-Biiba, her grandmother, was the first chief in the area of N'kalapa. When Ce-Biiba arrived, the place was void of people; even some of her own family fled because they thought that the place lacked fertile soil for farming. However, when Ce-Biiba was lamenting on how she would manage to live alone, spirits came to her in a dream and told her that she should go to Chief Mataaka (the big territorial chief; according to Fátima, this was Machemba [1912–1948]) to get *mbopeesi*. As the spirits told her, this is how she would get people to come and live with her. So Ce-Biiba went to Mataaka and brought the *mbopeesi* to N'kalapa; and it was through offering this *mboopesi* that the land became livable. As Fátima continues:

> So, from then on, grandmother started putting *mbopeesi*, and she was answered, yes. And there were many wild animals around here! There were elephants, kudos and more. As soon as she put *mbopeesi*, they all disappeared. Those people we saw come one by one, one by one, in the end they filled up the place. So those who said that 'the soils here have no fertility, only *yiinjiisi*' – we saw them coming en masse. They were welcomed: 'Come here, I am still right here. You, my sisters, you will not suffer while I am here.' And they came here again. And so we lived, everyone here.

These are events that Fátima could not have witnessed with her own eyes. Rather, the narrative represents extended recollections that have become fixed as a text in the process of transmission from one generation to the next.

This narrative carries personal significance for Fátima, and maybe that is why she frames it as if witnessed by her. According to Fátima, she was supposed to inherit her grandmother's name when her grandmother died and thus also assume her grandmother's social position and authority.[21] Mitchell (1956) called this 'positional succession', arguing that taking on a new name signifies social rebirth. However, Fátima's family disputed her succession, and the name 'Ce-Biiba' went to Fátima's younger sister (more specifically, the daughter of her mother's younger sister). As Fátima narrates, "This happened after my grandmother died, it was a big argument." Still, even if her grandmother's name had passed to another, Fátima argues (contrary to what other members of her family say) that her grandmother's *mbopeesi* passed to her. As she describes:

> So now that we are living, that *mbopeesi* of hers this grandmother left with me, yes. She left it with me saying: 'My daughter, living with people, one needs to respect them. Living with people, one cannot argue with them, no, because of this basket (*kaselo*).' And I secured that basket and I'm in charge of it.

Fátima insists that since her grandmother left her basket – the symbol of the spiritual power of *mbopeesi* – with her before she died, no one in the family can take it away from her.

The figures of the father and father's brother play a surprisingly important yet controversial role in Fátima Mussa's story. In the first instance of the story, when Ce-Biiba and her people separated from Chief Maangolowe (Ce-Biiba's father's brother) to migrate to N'kalapa, Fátima claims that Ce-Biiba would sometimes call for him when she was performing the *mbopeesi* ceremony.[22] Ce-Biiba would

lead the ceremony while Chief Maangolowe assisted. However, later, when, for unexplained reasons, Chief Ce-Maangolowe moved to live in N'kalapa, he assumed superior authority over her. It was at this time that, following matrilineal rules of succession, he appointed Ce-Suula (his sister and the 'mother', e.g. maternal aunt, of the current chief) as the *biibi* in his chieftaincy. This is how the authority of Ce-Biiba's aunt rose above her own. Still, Ce-Biiba's name was supposed to pass to Fátima. But when Ce-Biiba died, the family argued over succession. According to Fátima, it was her father who, fearing for her safety, in the end "prohibited her" from assuming the position (Fátima Mussa, group interview, July 2, 2022). Thus, the story also speaks of the rise of the father's authority over daughters, the lessening of women's chiefly authority, and the strengthening of patriarchal masculinity.

In some areas in northern Niassa the tradition of female chiefs continued until the first half of the twentieth century, possibly even until the start of the liberation war. Some interviewees saw the liberation struggle led by Frelimo as marking a crucial change. This is the view that Ce-Maangolowe (the current chief), who also participated in the interview, takes in his response to our question on his interpretation as to why there were more female chiefs in the past than these days. As the interview conversation between Helena and him goes:

> HELENA: Now she's saying, right, in the old days there were female chiefs, now, nowadays women are not sworn in as chiefs because,

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[21] Ce-Biiba died in 1962 (Sadiiki Mussa Matoosa, interview, July 9, 2022).

[22] While Fátima refers to him as Ce-Biiba's 'father', another narrative account told by Fátima's brother (and maternal grandson of Ce-Biiba), speaks of it be-

ing the father's brother from whom Ce-Biiba and her group separated (Sadiiki Mussa Matoosa, interview; also Ce-Maangolowe, interview, July 2, 2022). According to this narrative, Ce-Biiba's father (the then Chief Ce-Maangolowe) died, and the throne passed on to his brother. However, there was conflict between the family of the deceased chief and the new one (possibly due to fear that the children of the old chief would dispute his succession), and as a result Ce-Biiba's group moved to live in another place.

what's the reason for that, why women, why have things turned that way, keeping women away from power, what is happening? In the past they had a certain position of power!

CE-MAANGOLOWE: Alright, it's possible I can answer. This was spoiled in the time the war came, because it destroyed the villages. There was the village of Wusiinjidi [those of the Ce-Siinjidi dynasty], there was the village of Wubulayimu [those of the Ce-Bulayimu dynasty], these and other villages were under female leadership. The same in the chieftaincy of Ce-Madinganile, but the war destroyed that. So when the war ended the new power didn't take an interest in these traditional authorities, everything fell apart and *circulos* came in their place, is it not?

My question takes a slightly different shape in Helena's translation and reformulation. Drawing from her own life experience (including her experience as a former Frelimo combatant), she incorporates into her question a sense of her displeasure about the apparent absence of female power in the present ("why have things turned that way, keeping women away from power"). Ce-Maangolowe, in turn, links this lessening of female power quite unexpectedly to the liberation struggle. In the past there were female chiefs in the area, in addition to Ce-Bulayimu and Ce-Boodi, and he now also names Ce-Sumiini and Ce-Siinjidi. Yet, in Ce-Maangolowe's interpretation, this changed during the war, as Frelimo introduced a new political-administrative structure in the areas under its control. It started organizing the people into *circulos* and *localidades* and created new gendered structures and positions of power, such as that of the (male) 'chairman'. And after the war the territory was no longer divided into the lands of Ce-Mataaka and Ce-Maangolowe, but the areas came to be called the districts of Mavago and N'kalapa, and this is how the female chiefs disappeared. After independence, the new Frelimo state, adopting a Marxist-Leninist ideology, began a fight against tradition and traditional authorities, arguing that the birth of the nation required the death of the 'tribe' (Machel 1981, 35). For 25 years, no chiefs officially existed. Later, with the change of political paradigm and the introduction of multi-party democracy, the Frelimo-led state went back on its policy. This is when the search for chiefs began, as Ce-Maangolowe describes:

CE-MAANGOLOWE: That's why it started to appear again … even we survived because it was already known that, here, it belongs to the Maangolowe dynasty. There, he is from the Mataaka dynasty. But when they arrived, they changed everything saying that it's not Mataaka there, and they called it Mavago. This isn't Maangolowe, it's N'kalapa. This is what destroyed the female leadership (*wubiibi*) (...) This is what spoiled it for the women's leadership, not to stand out, but only the male leadership to reappear because we were very well known.

(…)

HELENA: Now, when you started to survey the traditional leaderships again, were the women chiefs restored to their positions?

CE-MAANGOLOWE: Yes, they were not reappointed because this restoration of traditional authority was due to the lamentation of the people, so only the men were reappointed. Those who could be considered as a female ruler have

now been handed over to us to be *mabiibi*. In this way, whoever could be the female ruler no longer exists.

Ce-Maangolowe's words bring forth a complicated history of gendered power. The way he speaks of the growing fame of male leaders in comparison to female rulers points to the masculinization of power. The gendered construction of the Mozambican national narrative (as promoted by Frelimo) has further contributed to the idea that political power more naturally belongs to men. After all, the nationalist discourse constructed 'women' as a category distinct from 'men' and 'oppressed by men' and the colonial order. According to Frelimo, women's liberation came through their participation in the liberation struggle (see Casimiro 2001; Sheldon 2002; Arnfred 2011; Katto 2019). These gendered ideas of power have shaped the historical understanding of the generation born after independence. As a primary school teacher in Muembe explains:

> Because for a woman to go to war, it started in the liberation struggle, when they participated in war. In the old days, women never went to fight, they stayed at home. They, men, went to war to fight against other villages. But later they discovered, but no, women can also go to war. The woman was almost equal with man. If this had happened in the past, women also could have become chiefs. (. . .) This all started through the colonial war where the woman became a woman emancipated in the war. One of them is here Helena Baide! She fought! But the idea that a woman could be in front and lead an entire population that idea didn't exist [in the past]. (Group of youths, interview, August 5, 2019)

This young man spoke in a conversational interview that we held with a group of Frelimo youths, all born after independence, three men and two women.[23] While they recalled the names of some past *acibiibi* and described the role they had once played in the communal ceremonies, in their accounts women's spiritual role is separated from their political one. Moreover, none of the participants knew of any stories of female chiefs in the past. As they argued, this time of 'the wars of the chiefs' (or, the wars of capturing people) required military leadership and women had not yet proven themselves capable. In their historical understanding, the liberation war marked a rite of passage into political leadership for women. After all, in Frelimo discourse, it signalled the start of a new gendered time. Yet in contemporary Mozambique (as at any historical moment), "other modes of historicity" (Lambek 2016, 323) exist alongside each other and, as the interview excerpts also show, people negotiate between these multiple temporalities as they make sense of their own historical subjectivity.

These days the names and histories of female leaders have a more limited circulation and their fame a more restricted reach. Stefan Hanß (2019, 284) astutely writes that "[t]he politics of doing and undoing temporality, the stories we do and do not tell about past times, produce history." The elders I interviewed lamented that the youth do not want to hear stories about the past and consider their knowledge to be antiquated. In the distant time of slave raiding, the elders were the voice of authority regarding the past; in the liberation struggle the authority became Frelimo. Frelimo's discourse marked a new "regime of historicity" (Hartog 2015), a new authoritative ordering of temporality. This is

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[23] They belong to the Mozambican Youth Organization (*Organização da Juventude Moçambicana*, OJM), which is a Frelimo party organization and the oldest youth organization in Mozambique. It is also the most active youth organization in the rural areas. The members of the organization are between the ages of 18 and 35. Many are farmers, some are students, and others are teachers in local primary and secondary schools.

also tied to how the use to which people put history changes. At a certain time in the past, one important purpose of history-telling was that of not losing one's social identity as a member of a matriclan. In another time, the time of Frelimo, the 'nation' was introduced as a new community of belonging. Moreover, in the early days of independence, these two communities of belonging were proclaimed as incompatible and in opposition to each other. In the socialist period, according to the state, the remembering of the history of one's matriclan only served a negative purpose. Later, people in Niassa were told that they could go back to publicly remembering their matrilineal ancestors and the old histories of power. Yet as Maangolowe's account shows, much had changed in between. While the fame of the great male chiefs was still strong in memory – due to a longer history of the masculinization of power but also the people's more recent experiences of war, in which value was given to military power and military masculinity – much had been forgotten about a past in which female leadership also existed.

Yet knowledge about the past is not only transmitted through oral historical narratives.[24] Ce-N'tadika, for instance, spoke of how historical narratives are remembered (at least in current times) more by men, as the women are more occupied with following the various life cycle rituals, such as initiation ceremonies and funerals. At the same time, the preserving and transmitting of genealogical knowledge – in which elderly women, the female heads of the matrilineages, play a central role – is integral to oral historical memory and understanding (see also Shetler 2015).[25] Sometimes female leaders of the past were completely 'forgotten' in the history-telling of the male elders; yet interviewing female elders of the same matrilineage, we learned that many women continued

to remember (even if not in narrative historical detail). As Ce-Biiba's story also shows us, the remembering of the names and histories of women of authority is tied to the domain of spiritual power and thus to ritual performances and bodily memory.[26] It is within this domain that these names still have continuity; they are not part of public histories but are called upon in family *mbopeesi* ceremonies.

Towards a fuller history of gendered temporalities

Our historical narratives about gender and power still often take the shape of unfolding stories of time in which the past is separated from the present. In this article, I have explored how such linear conceptualizations of time are disrupted in Yaawo oral history-telling about female leaders and gendered power in the past. Focusing on how temporality is done in the 'now' moment of history-telling, in my analysis I have studied the temporal gesturing that takes place in the interview situations, and the ways in which the narrators pull different kinds of gendered temporalities into action in the present (e.g. through the use of different kinds of discourse, stories, tropes, and concepts). Some of this work is very deliberate and the speakers no doubt have a sense of the 'fullness' of time; at the same time, the speakers also bend temporality in less conscious ways. In this article, I have been interested in both levels. On the one hand, I have studied the active creative work that narrators do in communicating the past, in categorizing and organizing time, in defining time and gender, and in positioning themselves in time as gendered historical subjects. On the other hand, drawing on Barber (2007), I have explored how, by looking more closely at how these oral narratives are set up as texts (how narrators draw on different verbal resources and fields of cultural knowledge to construct their

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[24] See, e.g., Gengenbach's (2010) work in patrilineal southern Mozambique.

[25] Many of our male narrators spoke about having learnt about history from their mothers and grandmothers.

[26] On embodied remembering and listening, see also Katto, forthcoming.

narratives), we can also search for histories beyond the narrators' lived times and deliberate actions and find traces of much deeper times. I argue that analysing these narratives is thus not about "locat[ing] where the history may lie", as Miller (1980, 20) claims. Rather, these narratives are fully historical, bringing a number of different historical temporalities into play. Most importantly, this analytical engagement reveals the inherent instability of gendered temporality. In this article I have shown how time is continuously (re)categorized and (re)organized – and the relationship between gender and temporality continuously (re)constructed – in each present moment of history-telling. This kind of analytical engagement accommodates a more complex understanding of historical time and thus allows for a fuller history of gender and power. In the specific case of this article, it gives us a more nuanced insight into the changing gendered times in a southeastern African landscape.

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