

Time among the Kalingas: An Account of a People in the North Luzon Highlands, Philippines

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S U M M A R Y

Kalinga concepts of time are distinct in several ways from concepts of time in Western cultures. Rather than noting how Kalingas define time, this article focuses on how Kalingas experience and measure time, noting that they use both linear and circular concepts. Using both concepts allows Kalingas to integrate historical change while maintaining an adherence to their indigenous customs. Knowledge of these differences may prove helpful in understanding how human beings deal with a known past, a changing present, and an unknown future.

A R T I C L E I N F O

Keywords

Linear and Circular Time, measure of time, kalingas, ecology

How to refer to this article

Dr. Robert Lawless, Time among the Kalingas: An Account of a People in the North Luzon Highlands, Philippines, 2008, omertaa, journal for applied anthropology, <http://www.omertaa.org/archive/omertaa0042.pdf>

Introduction

“All times are not the same.”

(Bluedorn 2002:3)

Peter J. King, the poet and humanist philosopher at Pembroke College, Oxford, recently wrote, “The many differences between the ways time is understood in different cultures, as well as the ways in which such differences might affect those cultures, can be divided into three main areas: what time is, how time is experienced, and how it is measured--the metaphysics of time, the perception of time, and the metric of time” (2006:2196).

Since the best philosophers and physicists have had little success in defining time, I will not waste time with such a discussion except to report that the best Kalinga philosophers would not bother wasting their time discussing such definitions with me.

I'll quickly leave this issue with a quotation from David Park: "There is something futile about the question What is time?--and something futile about answers to it. 'Time' is a word. We ought to use it wisely, but still it means what we decide it means" (1980:98). In addition, many peoples do not have an abstract word for time, including, for example, the Ainu (Ohnuki-Tierney 1973:285), Hopi (Whorf 1856:57-64), Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1939:208), Sioux (Hall 1959:25) Tiv (Bohannan 1953:257), and, indeed, the Kalingas (cf. Magannon 1984:237).

I want instead to discuss how the Kalingas in the Philippines experience time, that is, their perception of it, and how they measure time, that is, their metric of it. Such work with a relatively little known people in the mountains of insular Southeast Asia is generally thought to fall within the province of anthropology. However, Staffan Burenstam Linder, the Norwegian economist who authored the well-received *The Harried Leisure Class*, wrote, "We can only regret that the mapping of different cultures' conceptions of time is not, to judge by the literature, taken as a very important task of anthropological research" (1970:18). We do, nevertheless, have on hand quite a number of anthropological works dealing with time in various cultures. Perhaps the best known are the two classic articles by two British-trained anthropologists working in Africa, that is, E. E. Evans-Pritchard's 1939 "Nuer Time-Reckoning" and Paul Bohannan 1953 "Concepts of Time Among the Tiv of Nigeria."

The measure of time is itself, indeed, problematic. Bohannan states, "Tiv indicate but do not measure time" (Bohannan 1953:257). Instead, among the Tiv "the most common method of time indication during the day is to point to the position in the sky which the sun will occupy at the time under consideration. There are, however, several parts of the day which have names, which may be used with or without the pointing gesture" (Bohannan 1953:252). And among the Nuer "a common way of indicating the time of day of future or past events is by pointing with an outstretched arm to the place which the sun then occupied, or will occupy" (Evans-Pritchard 1939:205). And in Ngermetengel, a small Palauan fishing village, time systems, as is common among island peoples, depend heavily on the moon and tides (Klee 1976). In contrast, according to an anthropologist who has done pioneering studies of the cross-cultural use of time and space, "Americans think of time as a road or a ribbon stretching into the future, along which one progresses" (Hall 1959:19).

Just as nobody has successfully defined time, nobody directly translates time into some sort of pristine reality. It is obvious that the experience of time is articulated in

metaphors. To empathize with the time metaphor of another culture, one must engage in a form of mental gymnastics, and one need not necessarily go to non-Western culture for this exercise. One of the more exotic metaphors of time is explicated by the medievalist Paul C. Bauschatz in a 1982 book titled *The Well and the Tree: World and Time in Early Germanic Culture*. Bauschatz did an enormous amount of research with archaeological findings and Germanic myths, such as eighth-century Beowulf, and found the metaphor of a bottle. The past was structured and contained in the bottle, and the non-past, that is, the present and the future, was composed of events that swirled chaotically around the bottle until sucked in the bottle and thus becoming part of the past. The Kalingas have a different metaphor, as I will soon reveal.

Ethnographic Background

Celebrated in the popular literature largely for their headhunting, the Kalingas live in the North Luzon Highlands (sometimes called the Cordillera Central), a rugged and sharply dissected block of mountains averaging about 65 kilometers wide between 120 degrees and 122 degrees longitude and stretching north from approximately 16 degrees north latitude for about 320 kilometers. Located in the north-central section of these highlands, Kalinga territory extends perhaps 70 kilometers northwest-southeast and 60 kilometers northeast-southwest around the 17 degrees north latitude mark where the peaks reach about 2470 meters.

Dean C. Worcester, the first American administrator in the North Luzon Highlands after the United States occupied the Philippines around beginning of the 20th century, described Kalingas in the language of the times as "a fine lot of headhunting savages, physically magnificently developed, mentally acute, but naturally very wild" (1914:579; for more information, see Barton 1949; Billiet and Lambrecht 1970; Lawless 1993).

With a population of approximately 72,500 (at the time of my ethnographic present) Kalinga villages consist of a crowded cluster of huts situated among majestic peaks, plunging waterfalls, and awesomely terraced mountainsides. Grown both in permanent irrigated terraces and in swiddens, rice is the staple and is supplemented by a variety of tubers, legumes, and vegetables. Animal protein comes mainly from domesticated pigs and water buffaloes. Kalingas, along with most other peoples in mountainous Southeast Asia, do not have strong leadership or territorial organizations. Households and, indeed, individuals

are largely autonomous. Nobody can order others around; in fact, parents rarely give direct orders to their children. Whatever needs to be decided on a village or deme basis is done through discussion and consensus.

At the time of my fieldwork in the mid-1970s Kalingas were still largely uncontaminated by modern influences. A few years before my fieldwork Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf visited the more acculturated Kalinga areas, and-comparing them with South Asian hill peoples, especially the Naga Hills people--he was deeply impressed with the widespread and strongly held traditional beliefs and behaviors of Kalingas (1970:193-194).

The Perception and Experience of Time

Many people in industrial countries use the metaphor of a universal time line in discussing their experience of time. Every event can be imagined as occurring between two points on this line, using the common phrase "at this point in time". No event is broader than a point. Since a point does not occupy space, time does not occupy space. The Kalingas perceive and experience time not as a straight line but as a pool in which one wades. Since the pool occupies space, time and space are thought of as one thing. If Kalingas are having a "bad time," the water in the pool is thick and they move slowly and with difficulty. If Kalingas are having a "good time," the water in the pool is thin and they move rapidly and with ease. If they are in a bad time, they will recall bad things from their past. If they are in a good time, they will recall good things from their past. The metaphor is neither particularly linear nor cyclical, though Alfred Gell has argued against a contrast between cyclical and linear time (1992). Although the Kalinga metaphor focuses singularly on the present, Kalingas recognize the alpha and omega of time and the stages of a personal life. And, "further, the Kalinga recognize two types of movement: one cyclical and an inherent characteristic of nature to which they assume an adaptive attitude; another one which is linear and characteristic of human social development to which the Kalinga take an attitude of open improvisation" (Magannon 1984:240).

According to Evans-Pritchard, "No Nuer has any idea of his age in terms of years, but only in terms of physical appearance and of status.... After puberty the main changes in status are for men the passing from boyhood to manhood and for both sexes marriage and the birth of a first child" (1939:211). Similarly the Kalingas experience time through their life cycle not in terms of years--Kalingas traditionally don't name a year in which they were born or cel-

brate birthdays--but in terms of physical and emotional development. Years themselves "are distinguished from one another not so much by their sequential passing but by reference to events, natural or human, associated with them" (Magannon 1984:237). Indeed, the "pool" does not contain a calendar. They do, however, have four stages of life. Infancy lasts from birth until children are able to reason and, as one Kalinga informant put it, argue with their parents. Then the "infant" becomes a "child." One remains a child until marriage and is then an "adult". In practice becoming an adult occurs in two sub-stages: marriage and having children. Since adoption is easily accomplished, a childless couple is extremely rare. I did, however, come across a man who was not married and had never been married; indeed, a rarity among the Kalingas. For the most part he was identified as a child and treated as a child; his opinions were often not taken seriously by adults. The fourth and final stage is that of an "elder." Kalingas become elders when all their children are married.

The Kalinga experience of time varies at these various stages in line with most modern work on the perception of time. The perception of time changes with the age of the person experiencing it. In general time moves faster as we grow older. One never hears a young child complaining, "The day went by so fast; I didn't get anything done." Kalinga children have mentioned to me that each crop season seems enormously long, while Kalinga elders have complained to me that the crop seasons have gotten shorter. The literature on the personal perception of time points out that for three-year-olds, one year is one third of their entire life, an overwhelmingly long time. For sixty-year-olds it is only 1/60th, an insignificant length of time.

In everyone's actual experience of the universal time line not all units are equal, not all years, months, days are the same length. Times flies when one is enjoying oneself and time drags when one is not. In our discussions of time Kalinga elders often mentioned to me that they remember units in their past as longer if the units were packed with events--even though when they experienced them time flew. More than a century ago the U.S. psychologist Williams James stated this condition quite clearly when he wrote, "In general, a time filled with varied and interesting experiences seems short in passing, but long as we look back. On the other hand a tract of time empty of experiences seems long in passing, but in retrospect short" (1890:624).

Since the primary metaphor for time is a pool and not a universal time line, Kalingas are not interested in correlating different logical series, and they find it difficult to

conceive of any importance in interdigitating events that vary in time, space, and properties. For example, Kalinga mothers found it difficult to compare their children by noting who crawled first or spoke first even among their own children who might be several years of age apart. They only wanted to report that this infant became a child, that is, began speaking, at its own early age, and that infant became a child at its own late age.

The perception of time also varied according to the dominant folk model in various parts of Kalinga territory. I was told, for example, that Kalingas in the upstream areas were lazy and wasteful and that Kalingas in the downstream areas were workaholics. Actually the upstream areas are sparsely populated and heavily forested, while the downstream areas are densely populated and seriously deforested (for details, see Lawless 1979). Kalingas in the upstream areas obtain more food from hunting and gathering and swidden cultivation than those in downstream areas who depend largely on domesticated animals and intensive agriculture. On my first visit to a village in the upstream area I was welcomed with words to this effect: "It's good you've come up here; here you can relax and get in some hunting. Those people downstream don't know how to live; they're workaholics."

As Burenstam Linder pointed out, "Economic growth entails a general increase in the scarcity of time" (1970:4). And one becomes aware of time only when it is scarce. Kalingas in the downstream areas talked more about time than those in the upstream areas. I found it difficult, in fact, to engage upstream Kalingas in conversations about time, while downstream Kalingas were quite anxious to talk about time, usually complaining about a lack of enough of it.

My best elderly informant, a gentleman named Ko-om (Kalingas traditionally have only one name), who was from a downstream area and was widely regarded as a man of great wisdom, once explained to me how Kalingas control the future. Since we don't know what is going to happen in the future, all thinking about the future is speculation. Not only is such thinking speculation, but actually envisioning the future means that what we imagine will happen is certain not to happen--because we cannot accurately predict the future. Ko-om said that whenever the mind of a Kalinga wanders into thoughts about the future, especially if these thoughts dwell on positive outcomes, individual Kalingas quickly and consciously banished those thoughts and instead concentrated on the present, on the task at hand; thinking about positive events in the future would insure that those events would never take place.

Ko-om also said that the younger Kalingas had been contaminated by information from the outside world and did not practice these "future cleansing" techniques. I was able to obtain a verification of Ko-om's interpretation from only one other person, a celebrated elderly shaman named Ad-damay, who lived in another village distant from Ko-om's home.

The Measure and Metric of Time

Despite the fact that the metaphor for time is a pool, Kalingas certainly have a concept of history. They do talk about how the present is different from the past. A people with a close attachment to the environment, they often complained about the unpredictability of the contemporary weather. In the past, according to many Kalingas, the temperature and the rains came when they were expected. Now, according to these same Kalingas, they do not know how to treat their crops, when to harvest the crops, and when to plant because the weather is not cooperative. The most common specific complaint is that it is now generally warmer and wetter than in the past.

According to the Kalinga version of history, the world was created about 14 generations ago, and this beginning can be found in their myths of origin, one of which I collected from Ad-damay. Typically the myth began by describing a set of proto-Kalingas who displaced the original hunters and gatherers of the North Luzon Highlands, often call Negritos from the Spanish misinterpretation of them as little Africans but better known in the anthropological literature as the Agta. Widespread throughout the mountains of insular and continental Southeast Asia, these foraging populations have been constantly displaced by the expanding and agricultural Malayan-type peoples.

According to the origin myth, in these prehistoric days the deities participated considerably in the affairs of those on earth, and the high Kalinga god Kabunyan became upset at the excessive headhunting of the proto-Kalingas and asked them to clean up the mess of blood and heads in their villages. The people refused and Kabunyan made a great flood to punish them. Only two people survived the waters. One was a shaman who hung onto a tall, uprooted tree that was too long to be sucked into the hole of the whirlpool created by the draining of the flood water. The other had escaped into a part of the supernatural cosmos. The two met afterwards, married, and their descendants are the present-day Kalingas (for details, see Lawless 1990).

The history of the Kalingas after this prehistoric beginning is limited to their notions of happenings from contacts with outsiders. American civil government in the Philippines was established in 1902, and in 1907 Kalinga Subprovince was

created. Kalingas still remembers the first lieutenant governor of Kalinga Subprovince Walter Franklin Hale by his indigenous name Sapao. The word sapao, in fact, has become a term in Kalinga used to mean the past, usually the beginning of the American time--such as timpon sapao, that is, "during Sapao's time" (cf. Magannon 1984:239).

As elsewhere in the Philippines, the years from 1941 through 1945 are remembered by the Kalingas as the Japanese time or simply wartime and as very difficult years. In Kalinga territory the Japanese had small military units in four villages where they extracted rice and livestock from the people and paid back with arbitrary cruelties. American carpet bombing in 1945 destroyed several towns in the North Luzon Highlands, and General Tomoyuki Yamashita's troops retreated from Manila right through the middle of Kalinga territory, creating havoc in their wake.

Beginning in the mid-1970s the Kalingas were brought into sudden, direct, and brutal contact with the Philippine nation-state as a result of the attempts of the government of Ferdinand Marcos to build four major dams on the Chico River in the North Luzon Highlands, two of them in Kalinga territory. In April 1980 a squad of the Philippine Army gunned down an outspoken Kalinga opponent of the dams. In June 1984 more than 3,000 government troops launched a major military assault on the Kalingas, including indiscriminate bombing and strafing of villages. People were raped and tortured. The World Bank dissociated itself from the projects, and the government of Marcos fell, and Corazon Aquino, installed as president in February 1986, "permanently postponed" work on the dams.

History, then, as understood by Kalingas, is connected directly to their experience with impinging outside influence and is distinct from their measurement of time from the folk perspective of their oral literature. As argued by Shelly Errington, history implies an abstraction and requires a temporal point of view. The historian views events in the past from the present and reveals a significance that the actors could not have known. The present, then, becomes the point from which to arrange and assess the relevance of past events. In contrast, oral literature is performative and mimetic with no real distance between the events and the listener (1979:239-240).

In the Kalinga folk model of time the primary division of the year is into two seasons, the dry season from approximately February through about April and the wet season from about May through approximately January (I am not cluttering this piece with the Kalinga words for these expres-

sions; for almost all the ethnographic terms, see Magannon 1984). Traditionally Kalingas depended on the physical characteristics of land and climatic conditions, as well as the growth of rice, to measure the timing for agricultural work. No concept of the week existed, and days were not named (cf. Magannon 1984:237). Twelve or 13 traditional months were named (cf. Magannon 1972:36-40), though the names varied from region to region, and often the same name was used for entirely different months in different regions. Currently most Kalingas use the months of the Gregorian calendar, though they sometimes seem unsure about the exact day on which a month changes. Days are not kept track of closely, and there is still little use for the week as a unit. The elasticity of indigenous calendars is cogently illustrated by Charles Ramble (2002:80-81).

The measurement of time on the most personal level is connected in the upstream areas with notions of the appropriate time for hunting and gathering, which is in the early morning hours by the first light. Kalinga men, who traditionally were the hunters, note the following seven stages of the day: (1) early morning or first urination (which by my analytic model, that is, my watch, was from about 2:00 to 3:00 a.m.), (2) first crowing of the roosters (around 4:00 to 5:00 a.m.), which wakes up the women, (3) the sound of the pounding of rice in pestle and mortar (done exclusively by women around 5:00 to 5:30 a.m.), which acts as the alarm for the men to wake up, (4) the first sunlight over the horizon (the timing of which varies widely due to the mountainous terrain), (5) the first visible long shadows (at which time the men should be on the hunt), (6) no shadows (noon and time to end the hunt to go home), and (7) the sun setting in the west. The Kalinga anthropologist Esteban T. Magannon, whose research was done in a downstream part of Kalinga territory, where the work day extends into the afternoon in intensive agriculture and very little time is spent hunting and gathering, counted ten divisions of the day "measured by the relative position and relative intensity of the sun's heat" (1972:41) and seven divisions of the night (1972:41-42). These differences illustrate the fact that the measurement of time becomes more precise the more time is perceived as scarce.

Conclusions

Indigenous ways of experiencing time and indigenous systems for measuring time are tenacious. Although ideas about time from industrialized societies are certainly making inroads throughout the indigenous areas of the North Luzon Highlands, Kalingas maintain their original metaphors and their metrics. The Kalinga maintenance of

traditional concepts of time may have distinct advantages in terms of their ecological relationships. An anthropologist who studied a fishing village in the Republic of Palau in the Western Pacific concluded that the replacement of traditional time systems with modern ones results in “deterioration of ...the awareness of nature’s dynamic cyclic rhythms and interrelationships [and] will lead to further deterioration of the environment” (Klee 1976:246).

Kalinga concepts of time closely fit their subsistence needs, integrating historical change, from the hunting and gathering strategies still followed in the forested areas to the swidden cultivation carried out in the intermediate areas and to the terraced, intensive, fixed-field rice agriculture practiced in the densely populated areas. Kalinga concepts of time also complement their rituals and life-cycle ceremonies, requiring that these customs be observed but not requiring a rigid time for their observance.

Indeed, time itself does not exist; it is the creation of human beings, evolving out of the present, giving structure to the past and hope to the future. Whether the order we perceive is actually there or just a figment of our creation is unknowable, but the genius of the Kalingas in interpreting the past, acting in the present, and attempting to manipulate the future is well worth knowing.

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