

Chapter 1

Towards a Definition of Transnational as a Family Construct

A Historical and Micro Perspective

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Definitions

Current literature amply demonstrates that ‘transnational’ is an imprecise and overused term. For the purpose of this study of trader families on the West African coast and their charter generations, transnational is used in two ways. Transnational families contain a primary component on the African mainland. They have family branches living and working in different countries, and those branches interact with each other and are aware of each other’s existence. They identify themselves as transnational or are identified by others as transnational. Their more successful branches travel to distant places, study abroad, speak several languages, and are open to the pan-Atlantic market of products and ideas. Multi-sitedness across national borders and group cohesion are critical components in this definition of the term.

The second definition is more complicated because it involves a self- or other-imposed identity that may transcend or reject ethnic or national membership. In the African context, this may include any prominent cultural or physiological characteristic that separates a group from the majority population, stigmatizes its members for being different, or denies them ethnic membership or even a path to membership. Inter-marriage among members within such a group increases the group’s self-identity of separateness as well as the impression among others that the group is exclusive, closed, separate and hostile.

A manifestation of these two definitions is the emergence of a creolized group with character and genetic traits that it borrows or modifies from many sources. Grey Gundaker (2000: 125) suggests that Europeans who arrived on the African coast as traders and who expected to remain and raise families there ‘made the most of similarities’ between their own systems and those of their

hosts. They either accommodated to the cultural norms of the majority population or produced a self-identified hybrid or creolized and multiethnic culture that was denied ethnic membership. To explain how some Europeans and their *métis* families were able to fuse with or accommodate to the dominant population and over time obtain membership and privilege as power-sharing newcomers, Donald Levine (1979) developed a typology that identified stages through which strangers moved to acquire either newcomer status or marginality as a stigmatized and self-identified hybrid and separate group.

Historical Background

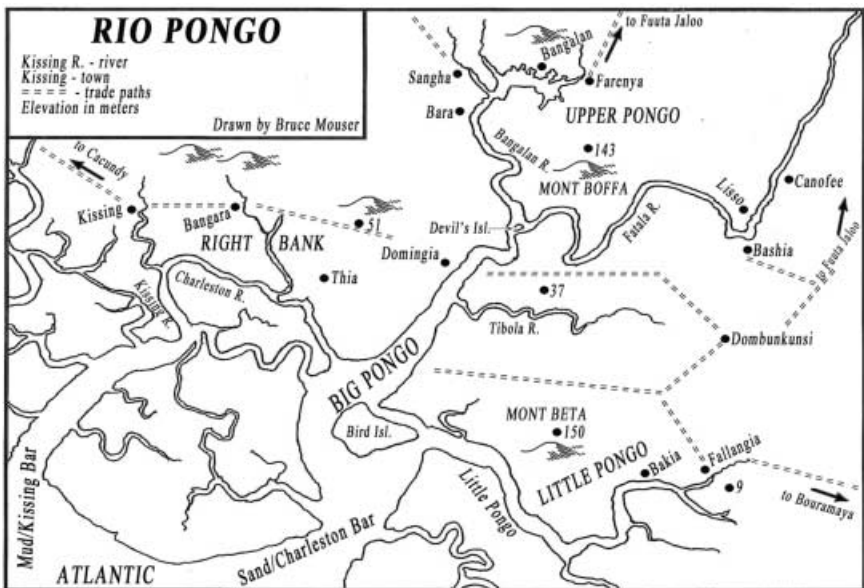
Between 1750 and 1850 (the approximate date for the ‘effective’ end of slave trading from the Rio Pongo), more than seventy American and European slave traders had settled at the Rio Pongo and remained there long enough to produce offspring that carried their surnames. They became a part of a fluid ‘African-European frontier’ or zone of interconnectedness emerging upon the coast (Coifman 1994; Hannerz 1997). Some of these traders died in their first years, succumbing to diseases, fevers and parasites of the coast, but many others survived and stayed to establish large families and create and join networks of trader families. A select number of these families or their most commercially successful branches became multi-sited, with units operating on the Nunez and Pongo Rivers and residences maintained in Liverpool, England; Charleston, South Carolina; Havana or Matanzas in Cuba; and in one case Boston, Massachusetts. In 1820, Commander Sir G. H. Collier of the Royal Navy described those in the Pongo as:

the surviving few of some hundreds of original [‘Company of Royal Adventurers’¹ [Trading to Africa], of hardy constitutions, rude habits, and little education, [who] were well calculated for the task they had undertaken; they assimilated themselves to the manners and customs of the Country, and soon became powerful as Chiefs. By marriages with the native Women they had large families, a guarantee for their respect to the customs of the Country, and a pledge for their personal continuance in it; thus consolidating their interest, and uniting their fate with that of the Country... Their children are of course mulattoes.²

Jehudi Ashmun (Gurley 1933: 347) wrote in 1827 simply that these traders had ‘allied themselves, by something, which in Africa, passes as marriage, with the most powerful native families, and are the proprietors of slaves’. More than a century later, Monsignor Raymond-René Lerouge (Congrégation du Société Esprit)³ described such an arrangement in less flattering terms, neglecting to indicate that his interpretation contained all that was necessary to establish marital legitimacy in the Pongo context:

One day, we learn that the neighbouring chief sold him one of his daughters (girls) for several spans of Guinea cloth, a few bottles of rum, [and] a few pounds of gunpowder. This woman, with great fanfare, is introduced into the stranger's bedchamber. After a few months, a child is born of this stranger's house. This is the 'mixed race', the true *métis* of the first generation: father white, mother native. A [new] species is founded.

To be sure, the founders of transnational families in the Pongo lacked sophistication and decorum, for they were engaged in the lowest of commerces – slave trading. Moreover, according to Meneses (1987: 231–33), they were operating in an environment of 'a good deal of real hostility'. They represented a threat of potential enslavement and were 'at best disliked and at worst hated' by the majority population. As a minority, they were 'freed from the usual obligation of generosity and kindness'. Some came to establish factories and become businessmen on the coast; some arrived seeking only employment in factories established by others. Nearly all arrived at the Pongo without relatives or a spouse, and they sought – as did their hosts – to remedy that deficiency as quickly as possible. Whatever their motives for remaining in the Pongo, they had to follow local custom if they intended to obtain a wife or partner. One method was to purchase a slave outright and use her as a mistress (Flezar 2009: 67; Brooks 2010: 95). But although that was permitted, it removed the river's 'land kings' (who regulated the use of land) and 'political kings' (involved in social and political interactions) from the 'wifegiving' process. It also created a problem for stigmatized offspring,



Map 1.1. Rio Pongo

who in addition to being descendants 'of the Saxon race' were also descendants of slave mothers and therefore did not have locally recognized succession and inheritance rights (Conneau 1976: 107; Thayer 1978). Partnering with a slave woman also produced difficulties in the global or pan-Atlantic context, where a person classified as a slave was ineligible to inherit property (Kennedy-Haflett 1996; Flezar 2009: 67–68).

The preferred pattern involved a marriage linked to a comprehensive understanding between parties in landlord/stranger or uncle/nephew relationships (Sarró 2009: 51–55; Diallo 1970; Mouser 1975). Marriage was advantageous to both parties: it permitted the host to tap into his stranger's market while opening his own to the guest (Ballard 2001: 6–8). As host of a European or American, a landholder, especially if he also had political authority, expected any guest to accept a contractual arrangement that stipulated, among many things economic, how a stranger might interact with the host's other subjects. These included women, who were bargaining chips to be used within patron/client relationships, whether those involved Europeans from the Atlantic or Africans from the interior.

A stranger sealed his trading contract with money or a marriage, and likely both (Conneau 1976: 107–11; Mouser 1975). Upon entering the river's commerce, protocol required the stranger to approach the local headman and ask permission to visit his town and territory (Harrell-Bond and Rijnsdorp 1976: 26; Almada 1984 [1594]). Small gifts were exchanged. After an appropriate interval, the topic of trading would be raised; now the discussion assumed a more formal character because land use was involved. Land and political headmen and even elders in secret societies would need to be consulted and compensated for the stranger's privilege to operate within a regional context (Conneau 1976: 109). Eventually an agreement was reached between hosts and guest, with obligations clearly stipulated for all parties. The money part of the arrangement included the semblance of a purchase or lease of land upon which the stranger built his trading factory. Only the buildings and improvements belonged to the trader. The contract set rents for land use and fees for wharf usage, water rights, burial duties and import and export taxes. Other provisions defined a range of allowed activities and mobility, as well as requirements (gunpowder and warriors) the guest/stranger provided his host/landlord in case the latter was attacked by an enemy or a rival family (CMS CAI/E3/99; CMS CAI/E4/127; Mouser 1996: 88–89; Mouser and Mouser 2003: 56).

These arrangements affirmed that land could not be alienated through sale, that strangers and their descendants could never become newcomers, and that the only ruling authority belonged to landlords/hosts or those holding land rights, as permitted by secret societies (Sarró 2009: 54–59). As long as the arriving stranger recognized those principles and accepted a subalternated position within the indigenous society, he could expect that his person, property and family would be

protected, that he would be governed by his own rules within his household, and that his host or hosts would not interfere in his business, unless his contract permitted it.

A disadvantage of this arrangement for the stranger was the lack of choice. The landlord, as 'wifegiver', presented his guest with a daughter or 'girl' that the stranger was obliged to accept, for to refuse would challenge the wifegiver's status and authority and identify the stranger as an intruder or outsider who had little interest in sharing his fortune with his host or hosts (Conneau 1976: 68, 107; Chauveau and Richards 2008: 519). By gifting a classificatory sister or daughter, the wifegiver also positioned a spy in the house of his stranger and produced a set of obligations something like those of an uncle/nephew relationship. The only decision falling to the 'wifetaker' was the scale of ceremony attached to the marriage. The higher the station of the wife, the more expensive would be the marriage ritual (Conneau 1976: 108; Graf 1998: 16, 35).

Theophilus Conneau, a French trader who worked at a factory in the upper Pongo in the 1830s, claimed that his Euro-African employer maintained a seraglio of more than thirty wives and mistresses, some of whom made themselves available to strangers visiting the river (Conneau 1976: 64). Nearly two and a half centuries earlier, André Álvares de Almada (1594) reported that a visiting stranger in the Pongo was asked to pick one female from his host's harem and leave the rest of his host's wives alone for the duration of his visit. In effect this was an attempt to minimize negative consequences and *métis* children that might result from contact with a person with less desirable racial traits (Goffman 1963; Kivel 2002: 122–23; Johnson 2005: 33). And children did result: others reported that there always were 'masterless' and free *métis* eager to attach themselves to a patron (Thayer 1981b: 15, 20; Mouser and Mouser 2003: 27, 82, 86). Still another variant involved companionship as a benefit a trader provided to those Europeans who took jobs in his factory. Conneau reported that he received wages of one slave per month, meals from the kitchens of his employer's wives and 'a private establishment with the accessories not necessary to mention' (Conneau 1976: 66).

Whatever the form of marriage or union, children inevitably appeared. These were the *métis* of the charter generation. When a trader succeeded financially, other of his hosts noticed the advantages of proximity and gifted daughters of their own to seal arrangements with this successful stranger. Family size could quickly become large, depending on how many wives the guest received and particular rules governing child-rearing and breastfeeding. Benjamin Curtis Sr. at Kissing, for instance, was reported to have produced more than fifty children during the twenty-three years he lived in the Pongo (Foreign Office 1830: 8:848). This first generation of mixed European and African children – the Euro-Africans – was perhaps least problematic, except those fathered by strangers who died during the first rainy season. Their mothers were African, and some may have been 'royals' or the free daughters of headmen and landholders. If wives were Susu, who were

patrilineal and patrilocal, they would look to their husband's lineage to find their 'refuge' when catastrophe struck, but since in these cases there typically was no lineage belonging to such a husband, a wife could appeal only to her father, to a fictive lineage composed of non-Africans similar to her husband, or to the factory operator (Conneau 1976: 67–68; Harrell-Bond and Rijnsorp 1976: 7–9; Thayer 1981a: 41–42; Thayer 1983: 119; McLachlan 1999: 15).

As in most cultures, first-generation children grew up in houses kept by their mothers (Harrell-Bond and Rijnsorp 1976: 21–22). Their close kinship cousins were those belonging to their mother's side, for in this instance their fathers' relatives were absent. The identity of siblings, cousins, uncles, aunts and relations became complicated by definitions that were imprecise and set by proximity and local practice. They spoke the language(s) of their mother(s) on the playground and that of their father in the marketplace, especially when dealing with Europeans. Some from the more commercially successful branches of trader families attended European schools (at Freetown, London, Liverpool, Havana, Matanzas, Charleston or – when the Pongo began to slip into a French sphere of influence after 1850 – Gorée or Saint Louis in Senegal), and they obtained self-identified membership in those worlds or were stigmatized by others as belonging to those less desirable worlds. Their principal playmates were the sons and daughters of other traders, for it was with them that they shared the most time, proximity and characteristics. Those of the first generations were light-skinned and carried European features. They had stakes in three civilizations: that of their fathers, that of their mothers and the civilization of the *métis*. In 1821, for instance, Brian O'Beirne of Freetown described William Lawrence of Domingia, who was at least a third-generation Euro-African descendent, as 'a person dressed in Nankeen Jacket and Trowsers and who, although nearly as dark as many around him, had the features of a good looking European' (O'Beirne 1979: 224–25).

Many strangers died during the first rainy season. If children and a wife were left behind, the mother might take their offspring to her father's compound, or she might seek an alliance or marital relationship with another trader. That happened with Phenda, who married John Fraser at the Îles de Los in 1799 (Schafer 1999). Another possibility was to continue her former husband's enterprise, with the considerable help of friends or kin (Thayer 1983). Any widow might avail herself of this option, but there had to be a male protector (husband's brother or son) to whom she was ultimately responsible, at least nominally. She might acquire 'Big Man' status and command respect and authority, but only so long as she was able to maintain discipline within her husband's extended family, of which she might be the senior or most respected member (Thayer 1979: 63–64). That happened with the widow of John Ormond Sr., who remained a powerful voice within Ormond family interests in the upper Pongo for nearly two decades after her husband's death until her son John Ormond Jr. returned from London to reclaim his father's position in river commerce (Conneau 1976).

Some of these children found themselves further isolated by colour, physical features and European first names. Their hue stigmatized them as European by locals and as African by traders. The Rev. Peter Hartwig, who lived in Freetown and Sumbuya from 1804 to 1815, described the dilemma encountered by a widowed mother of *métis* children, suggesting that she 'is often so circumstanced [and her children so stigmatized] that she is forced to leave them [offspring] at the factory' (Mouser and Mouser 2003: 86). Inevitably, some of these children found attachment and employment with European traders or with others of mixed race, such as the Luso-Africans. Almada (1594) wrote simply that 'if one [child] happens to be begotten by a white, he [the host] gives it to the father who takes it away'.

The above description of marriage practice and kinship, however, relates only to newly arriving strangers. Not all strangers arrived at the same time or even during the same decades. Documentation of arriving traders is best for the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first two decades of the nineteenth. In that thirty-year span it is first possible to observe the characteristics of a separate transnational community of traders and families moving through stages of acceptance or denial. Of the two families sampled in this study, one founder arrived in the Rio Pongo in the mid-1760s and the other in the first decade of the 1800s. In that forty-year span, the evidence suggests that founders, unless they came as employees of factors, conformed to the pattern of mandatory marriage linked to landlord/stranger agreements. Only in the second and following generations did the issue of creole identity appear, a consequence of increasing numbers of Euro-African descendants who claimed membership in trader families, who were identified as 'mulattoes' by missionaries operating schools in the river and as persons lacking ethnically assigned rights by locals, and had reached different levels of assimilation or acculturation with the host society.

The problem of self-identity was less acute among elite branches of trader families that owned and operated factories, prodigiously intermarried and obtained education in religious and foreign schools. This group also travelled abroad, maintained pan-Atlantic residences and held economic influence and resources unimagined by local political and land kings. Being transnational granted this elite group a degree of independence from local customs and rituals, but it was obtained at a price. This included a 'formal' subordinate relationship with hosts and an understanding that descendants neither might nor could ever aspire to authority, even though they often exercised as much relative power as did hosts, or more.

The level of education attained and travels undertaken by *métis* family members were important variables influencing the growth of their transnational or hybrid identity in a world characterized by 'zones where cultures meet' (Hannerz 1997: 3). In the 1780s, British companies operating from Bance Island in Sierra Leone and at the Îles de Los had sent upwards of seventy sons and daughters of headmen and traders to Liverpool, expecting them 'to learn Sense and get a good Head'⁴ and to return to the African coast as agents of Atlantic and European

commerce (Graf 1998: 15; Brooks 2003: 298). Among those attending school in Liverpool from the Pongo were John Holman Jr., Emmanuel Gomez and William Jellorum Fernandez. Elizabeth Cleveland of Banana Islands at Sierra Leone, whose brother John also had studied in Liverpool, migrated to Charleston. There, with money from her brother, she purchased a plantation and opened a school for African youths (Koger 2006: 54; Montgomery 2007). John Ormond Jr. lived in London for more than a decade before being impressed for five years into the British navy, during which time he travelled in the Mediterranean and among the Caribbean islands. In 1799, Governor Zachary Macaulay took twenty-one children – five of them from the Pongo – to London, where they attended a school at Clapham Common (Mouser 2004: 96–99). When the British established a colony at Sierra Leone, traders from the Pongo and Nunez sent children to board there for their education.

Opportunities for travel and education abroad for *métis* from the Pongo continued in the nineteenth century. Jellorum Harrison of Fallangia spent several years in Edinburgh, Scotland, where he helped Henry Brunton produce the first Susu grammar and dictionary (Brunton 1802) before travelling through Central Asia for more than a decade, after which he travelled in the Americas (Hair 1962). In 1812, James Fraser was attending school in Charleston, South Carolina, while his sister Margaret was living with the Powell family in Liverpool. Traders sent children to schools to study Spanish in Matanzas and Havana in Cuba, as Spanish-speaking slave markets then dominated the trade in the Americas. In 1817, a French captain visited the Pongo, recruiting students to a newly opened school for African youths in the West Indies; one headman sent two of his sons (Mouser 2000). These lengthy encounters with other cultures inclined family members who experienced them to adopt a flexible notion of citizenship (Ong 1999) which, while widening their world view, may also have narrowed their recognition of their own membership in any group.

Between 1808 and 1817, the presence in the Pongo itself of schools founded by missionaries and teachers of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) had a major, immediate impact upon trader families' transition to a separate and hybrid status. These schools created a 'social [and physical] space' (Drotbohm 2009: 133; Góis 2005: 265–66) in which another type of membership might develop and accelerated changes already occurring among elite groups of traders' children. In Butscher's list of fifty-two children attending the CMS's Bashia School in 1811, for instance, thirty-six were described as mulattoes and forty-four carried European surnames.⁵ Thirty were males. Ages ranged from 5 to 18, although eighteen students in 1811 were among the group aged 12 to 16 (CMS CAI/E2/103). When schools began in 1808, missionaries required students to use only the Susu language, but in 1809 they changed to English instruction, largely at the insistence of traders, who were paying tuition and expected schools to provide a foundation useful in Atlantic commerce.

In these schools students boarded together for extended periods, forming lasting friendships. The schools reinforced the European view that whites were superior to blacks and that *métis* children were a mongrel race, thus adding to their stigma. They were separated from siblings and relatives who remained in family compounds. If they remained in school long enough, their world view became at least partly that held by missionaries, their role models. That world view could expand to encompass pan-Atlantic commerce and business techniques, travel to foreign places (especially following the introduction of regular packet services), study of foreign languages and use of foreign manufactures (Coifman 1994; Mouser 2009). Many if not most converted to Christianity, which further separated them from their indigenous relatives and from family members born to less successful branches. Many of them married classmates, resulting in an intermarried generation with the CMS and the Anglican Church as their social and cultural base. Some married in the 'country fashion' and without church sanction, but others fulfilled both requirements (CMS CAI/E4/19).

The CMS schools also provided a foundation for an attitude of study, integration and separation that carried over to schools abroad, whether located in Freetown, London, Liverpool, Matanzas, Havana or Charleston. Among these venues, the Freetown connection was the closest and most available, and the creole identity emerging there, while separate and different in origin from that occurring in the Pongo, further reinforced the transnational status of mixed-race children relative to children in the Pongo's majority population. It also tied them more closely to mixed-race children in the diaspora.

Peter Mark (1999), in his essay on the evolution of Luso-African identity, noted that cultural markers that produced a separate identity within charter generations eroded over time as succeeding generations intermarried with indigenous groups, indigenous peoples changed to meet challenges arriving from the Atlantic, and strangers lost physical traits that had separated them from the majority population. That certainly occurred, but unfortunately the surviving record of the charter generations in the Pongo tells us only about their most successful or noteworthy members, offering almost nothing about those that lacked notoriety. Nor does the record provide details about the impact of travel, education and broadening world view or 'ethnic shifts' (Keese 2010: 191) upon sons and daughters of African headmen who also attended schools and participated in the Atlantic Exchange. That impact was likely considerable, especially if they continued to intermarry with families descended from American and European traders. Data shows that indigenous leaders were able to shift ethnic identity depending upon circumstance by situationally using a language or dialect, a personal name, or a cultural pattern ('badge' or 'label') as a cultural marker to designate group membership (Moerman 1965; Mouser 2002).

Fortunately, priests and teachers associated with the mission of the Spiritan (Holy Ghost) Fathers (Archives Générales du Congrégation du Saint-Esprit) in

the 1930s and 1940s kept records that contain elaborate genealogies of more than twenty influential families in the Pongo, nine of which were founded by slave traders who had arrived on the coast by the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁶ The mission's records also provide details about educational opportunities made available to both headmen and traders during the French colonial period, which produced another 'social space' that further reduced differences between leadership groups within the Pongo.

Unfortunately, no sophisticated attempt has been made to correlate genealogical data collected by the Spiritan Fathers and data found in letters and reports sent to London by CMS missionaries. Records are, however, sufficient to confirm that elite branches of trader families and those of river headmen intermarried, and that they continued to play prominent roles in Pongo commerce and society into the twenty-first century. For example, Raymond-Marie Tchidimbo (Tchidimbo 1987: 22), Roman Catholic Archbishop of Conakry from 1961 to 1979 and a Spiritan Father who died on 15 August 2011, was able to trace his American ancestry through his mother, whom he identified as a *métis*, to Benjamin Curtis, who arrived in the Pongo from Boston in 1794. Through the Curtis family, Tchidimbo also traced his descent to the Pongo's royal Kati family, with which Curtis had intermarried. Using information from Tchidimbo's autobiography, data from CMS records and reports found in the Archives Générales du Sénégal, Coifman (1994) produced an important but incomplete genealogy of Archbishop Tchidimbo that details the fusion of Curtis and Kati political interests in the Pongo and the critical role played by the Curtis family into the late twentieth century. In her concluding sentence, Coifman (1994: 289) noted that 'when Raymond-Marie Tchidimbo returned home [from abroad] in 1952, he was met at Conakry by a tribe of kin and relations, Christian and Muslim, of Curtis, Katty, Turpin, Fernandez, Litburn [Lightbourn], Wilkinson and Tchidimbo', with at least five of those dating their origins to the eighteenth century.

At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, the number of transnational families who counted their residences in the Rio Pongo as primary, and whose charter generations either maintained residences in America or sent their children to America or abroad for education, was significant. Two examples – the Holman and Fraser families – with primary branches in the Rio Pongo are used here to illustrate the transnational nature of these new families. Both were multi-sited, with links in Africa, America and England. Both engaged in the slave trade and operated plantations on both sides of the Atlantic.

Holman Family

John Holman Sr. was from London, where his brothers were innkeepers and a pewterer but also investors in his African commerce.⁷ By 1768, Holman was already established in the Pongo and Dembia river trades, with commercial ties to

London-based traders at Bance Island in Sierra Leone and to Liverpool interests at the nearby Îles de Los (Hancock 1995: 177–220). Holman also maintained close commercial ties with the most important slave merchants in Charleston, South Carolina (Koger 1995: 110–11).

Holman had several wives in the Pongo, none of whom were identified as free persons. His principal wife, Elizabeth, was listed in official documents as a ‘slave’ who bore him at least five children (John II, Samuel, Esther, Elizabeth and Margaret). By another wife he had sons Richard and William. Yet another wife bore him a son known in the Nunez trade as John Coleman. No other children or wives were reported in documents. John Sr. sent John II to study in Liverpool, but by 1785 John II, Samuel and their half-brother William were already operating trading enterprises of their own in the Rio Pongo.

Holman remained active in the Rio Pongo until 1790, when he moved his wife Elizabeth, their children and their slaves to South Carolina. In 1783 an insurrection of slaves and subalterns had broken out in the state of Moria, less than a hundred kilometres south-east of the Pongo, encouraging slave rebellions throughout the region (Mouser 2007: 27–41). Holman, then the second wealthiest trader in Pongo commerce, began to look abroad, where he might better protect his investments and his family, and in 1787 he travelled to Charleston, where he arranged to purchase Blessing Plantation (Koger 1995: 111). Three years later he left the Pongo with his family and slaves, and after a brief detour to Savannah, Georgia, he established his family at Blessing Plantation in 1791.⁸

Much is known about the Holman family, partly because inheritance problems after Holman’s death soon after his arrival in South Carolina produced records that contained particulars about the family’s investments in both Africa and America. British documents also detailed the family’s activities in the Rio Pongo. William Holman and his family had remained in the Pongo, taking possession of John Sr.’s interests at Bashia in the upper Pongo and continuing to ship slaves to the Charleston market in the following years (Corry 1807: 92; Knutsford 1900: 126; Afzelius 1967: 105–9). In his last will and testament, John Sr. freed his wife Elizabeth and assigned management of his property in South Carolina to his sons John II and Samuel.

Within three generations, John Sr.’s descendants had become models of transnational families – and of the tensions that occurred within these families. John II, who had studied in Liverpool, moved his family and slaves to South Carolina in 1790. Following the death of his father in 1791, he purchased a plantation near Blessing Plantation where he used his and his father’s slaves, who would have comprised a large slave workforce numbering nearly a hundred. He also travelled often to the Pongo, as he still had economic interests in Africa and there were still enormous profits to be obtained in the slave trade. Eventually, having grown dissatisfied with his life in South Carolina and the type of hybrid, segregated African American society that had developed there, he returned to the

Rio Pongo, though he meanwhile continued to operate a plantation in South Carolina under the management of his brother Samuel. Koger (1995: 116–17) described John II as ‘probably the first and only African-born entrepreneur who resided in Africa as an absentee planter in the New World’. He married a ‘mulatto’ woman from ‘America’ who bore him at least four children (Margaret, Betsy, Elizabeth and John III). All his children attended CMS schools established in the Rio Pongo between 1808 and 1817. His brother Samuel remained in South Carolina and married a ‘free person of colour’ from Charleston. Both Elizabeth and Margaret married Collins brothers, described as ‘persons of colour’ and owners of rice growing plantations. Esther also remained in South Carolina and married James Anderson, whose uncle, Richard Oswald, had operated factories in the Rio Pongo in the mid-eighteenth century (Koger 2006: 119–24).⁹ Essentially the American branch assumed characteristics that were American and married within the Euro-African group, although the latter was located in South Carolina rather than in the Pongo.

The African branch of the family, or at least the one descended from John II, identified itself as more African than the branch located in South Carolina, likely a response to the types of creolization that had occurred in both places. John II was particularly disappointed that Samuel and his sisters had devoted little attention to his property in South Carolina, which he lost through their mismanagement. In 1816 his daughter Margaret married Jellorum Harrison, who had lived in Scotland and Central Asia and visited America (Hair 1962: 45–47). Harrison later served as a catechist at Bashia School, where Margaret was a student. Harrison’s uncle was William Fernandez, headman at Bouramaya, who had studied in Liverpool in his youth (CMS CAI/E5/18 and CAI/E4/100). Harrison also was a cousin to John Ormond Jr. (a trader at Bangalan who travelled often to Havana), to Elizabeth Lightbourn (a trader at Farenya whose husband’s brother was a lawyer in Charleston) and to Richard Wilkinson of Fallangia on the Little Pongo. Wilkinson, who had studied as a catechist in London in 1815 and 1816, spoke Baga, Susu, Fula, English and a bit of Portuguese. In 1821, Wilkinson sailed to Baltimore, Maryland, to purchase trade goods for the Pongo market and, while there, became an official interpreter for the U.S. government in a case involving slaves who had accidentally illegally entered the United States as crewmen on board a trading vessel (Mouser 2000). Margaret’s sister Betsy married William Lawrence, who was fluent in English, Portuguese, Baga, Susu and Fula, and who was well enough respected in Freetown to purchase property there in the late 1820s. Both sisters’ marriages were performed as church ceremonies, but Betsy and William Lawrence were also wedded in the ‘country fashion’, indicating a fusion of European and African customs. Like his father, John III studied in Liverpool.

Interestingly, the Holman name largely disappeared in South Carolina, where it was subsumed into the Collins and Anderson families. Still, Koger (1995: 127) was able to write in 1995 that ‘the colored rice planters of Charleston and

Georgetown counties can be traced to the Holman family'. The Holman name is also rare in later Pongo history, whereas the names Lawrence, Wilkinson and Harrison featured prominently into the twentieth century.

Fraser Family

John Fraser, born in Scotland in 1769, entered Pongo commerce as a slave trader before 1799, lived in the river region until 1807 and remained active there until his death in 1813. He married Phenda, the widow of a prominent British trader who had operated a successful Liverpool-linked factory at the Îles de Los. Fraser established his principal centres of commerce in the Pongo at Bangara, Bashia and Bangalan (*Valley Sunday Star-Monitor-Herald* [Brownsville, Texas], 9, 16 and 23 January 1938). Between 1799 and 1807, he and Phenda, described in marriage documents as a free person and no doubt the heir to her previous husband's investments in the river trade, had five children. When South Carolina reopened the slave trade in 1803, Fraser expanded his commercial enterprise by establishing an office in Charleston, moving there along with a large number of people from the Pongo. He left Phenda and his three youngest children at Bashia, where the children would attend school and Phenda would manage his and her considerable economic interests (CMS CAI/E4/19; Schafer 1999: 1–2).

By 1812, Phenda had moved the centre of her operations in the Pongo to the Bangalan branch of the river. Son James was sent to Charleston and enrolled in school there (Koger 2006). Daughter Margaret was taken to Liverpool at age four to live with Thomas Powell, who maintained additional residences in Charleston and the Îles de Los (Schafer 1999: 4). When the slave trade became illegal for British and American citizens in 1808, Fraser moved his Charleston-based operations to East Florida, which was then still a Spanish colony. He died there in 1813 in a shipwreck. His holdings in the Pongo, until the time of his death, were administered by his wife Phenda and by Zebulon Miller, George Cooke, Samuel Gale (all Americans) and Samuel Samo (a Dutch subject).

Fraser's holdings and his last will and testament reveal much about the operation of this family. The value of his Florida plantations alone stood at USD 56,744 in 1813 (USD 780,000 at 2010 purchasing power). In a lawsuit against the British government for damages to his property caused by a British squadron raid directed against American traders in the Bangalan branch of the Pongo in 1812, Fraser claimed that the British, assuming he was an American citizen, had destroyed property worth USD 40,000. His daughters Mary Ann, Eleanor and Elizabeth, who in 1813 were students at the CMS school at Bashia, were subsequently sent to England and France for training (*Valley Sunday Star-Monitor-Herald*, 9, 16 and 23 January 1938; Schafer 1999: 4–6).

According to Fraser's will, his children would inherit only upon reaching the age of twenty-one. That Fraser freed Phenda (who was already free) in his will

also complicated the distribution of his property, for persons identified as slave in Spanish Florida could not be freed in a will or inherit property. Executors paid the educational expenses of Fraser's children in Europe, but legal challenges and court and legal costs attached to administration of his estate multiplied (Schafer 1999: 6). Elizabeth and Mary Ann, who by 1826 had returned to the Pongo and married William Skelton Jr. and Thomas Gaffery Curtis of Kissing, appointed their husbands to negotiate distribution of their inheritances. Their husbands turned for assistance to Styles Lightbourn in the upper Pongo, whose brother was a Charleston attorney. The final settlement was not reached for yet another quarter century, when Elizabeth (now the only living heir) received USD 33,000 (USD 955,000 in 2009 dollars) (Schafer 1999: 3). In 1851, Elizabeth and her husband were then principal traders at Victoria, located in the lower Nunez River (Coifman 2000: 501–2).

Conclusions

A study of these two families suggests that several constructs had developed within the first, founding generations. In each case, the founder came to the coast as a stranger without a lineage to provide protection to himself or the wife he acquired when he settled there. The common cultural marker was the marriage of a lineage-less stranger to a local woman who was either a free person or a person of slave background. The kinship model – that of the dominant Susu group – was patrilineal and patrilocal. In this arrangement, widowed or abandoned wives could appeal only to their father's family for support, though widows also had the option of marrying another stranger (Butscher 2000 [1815]: 10). A widow might otherwise obtain 'Big Man' status either through her children or through property or the control of property she or her children may have inherited.

But there also was a construct that was new, at least to a degree. Marriage alliances were common, whether involving indigenous unions or only strangers. Characteristics among the charter generations of strangers ('mulatto' features, Western dress, religious observance, language use, first names and surnames, education, occupation, travel, location, mobility), however, were commonly held attributes that stigmatized and marginalized them, and also encouraged family alliances among elite branches and development of a self-identified hybrid culture, similar to the 'creolization' described by Knörr (2010: 733). The most successful and best travelled branches of these families intermarried prodigiously and produced an expatriate/hybrid community that, to a degree, was outside the bounds of uncle/nephew obligations.

This community enjoyed liberties and opportunities that others more closely tied to traditional patterns did not have. Its members needed to follow some rules to remain influential and protected within the Rio Pongo context, as the dominant indigenous group recognized and stigmatized them as persons having less

desirable characteristics and separate origins with their own customs and rules. The stigma attached to these families, however, was different from that attached to the creole community of Sierra Leone. All Pongo-based families mentioned in this study trace their origins to the slave trade and to landlord/stranger relationships that involved wifegiving and wifetaking.

These examples suggest that accommodation and acculturation did occur, but only to a degree in the early generations. That changed significantly once the 'social space' changed during the French period that began in the 1850s. The basic notion of patrilineal descent was like that practised in the West, except that the wife lost claims upon her father's lineage. What mattered most was 'free' status, which defined who could inherit and claim authority within an extended family.

Sir George Collier suggested in 1820 that large family size guaranteed respect for the customs of the country. That may indeed have occurred, but our knowledge of the size of a family is limited to records kept by its elite members who found it worthwhile to do so, or to outside resources that identify certain persons meriting inclusion in reports. The emergence of large families – especially those connected through marriage alliances – and of the mobility and transnational connections evidenced in the charter generations of the Holman and Fraser families, reduced their compliance with customs that challenged their own economic and social interests. Meanwhile, with the passage of time and intermarriage outside the trader alliances, especially during the French period, their ties to local kinship groups and to obligations linked to traditional uncle/nephew relationships increased rather than decreased, as was so for the Curtis family of Archbishop Tchidimbo. Their mobility and access to wealth, education and colonial authorities who established agencies on the river further strengthened their own influence relative to traditional authority and custom.

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Notes

1. The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading to Africa was the original name of the Royal African Company.
2. 'Second Annual Report upon the Settlements on the Coast of Africa, by Commodore Sir G.R. Collier, 16th September 1820' (Foreign Office 1830: 8:847–48). Surnames of

traders in the Pongo before 1840 include: Andrews, Anthony, Bearing, Botefere, Brodie, Brody, Dunbar, Bull, Carr, Cockleshell, Coffin, Cook, Cooke, Cooper, Conneau, Cummings, Curtis, Dickson, Dunbar, East, Ellis, Faber, Fist, Fraser, Gaffrey, Gale, Gardner, Garrett, Gilton, Gomez, Gray, Grey, Griggs, Harrison, Hickson, Holman, Irving, Irwin, Jeffrys, Johnson, Josiffe, Lancaster, Lawrence, Lightbourn, Lorial, Maguire, Miller, Misingan, Nelson, Nevel, Ormond, Pearce, Pendleton, Perry, Peters, Quail, Rhodes, Richards, Richardson, Samo, Skelton, Sparratt, Spearce, Sterne, Talboard, Tavel, Thomas, Tillinghast, Tool, Tryon, Varing, Welsh, White, Wilkinson, Wilson, Wood.

3. R. Lerouge, 'Quand la Guinée s'appelait "Rivières du Sud" (Miettes d'histoire),' *Archives Générales Congrégation du Saint-Esprit*, Boite 269, A-I, page 28. This is an unpublished typescript. Lerouge had few kind words for the founders of families, describing them as arrived 'as poor as Job' (32). He also described the first generation of *métis* children as 'the first degeneration' (32).
4. Quoted in Great Britain, Privy Council, 'Report of the Lords of the Committee of Council...relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations, 1789' (enclosed letter, John Matthews, James Penny and Robert Norris to John Tarleton, 16 April 1788).
5. Caulker, Cummings, Curtis, Jeffrys, Lancaster, Lawrence, Quail, Rhode, Wilkinson, Anthony, Botefere, Cockleshell, Fraser, Garrett, Gilton, Hickson and Peters.
6. I am greatly indebted to V.B. Coifman (University of Minnesota), G.E. Brooks (Indiana University) and R. Sarrò Maluquer (Oxford University), who made their photocopies of genealogical material from the Archives Générales, Congregation du Saint-Esprit, Chevilly-Larue, available for this research.
7. I am indebted to R. Chaney of Lyndonville, New York, for crucial information about the Holman family. His wife is a descendant of John Holman through the Collins family of South Carolina. Chaney relished the process of discovery, and we communicated often about his findings. He was an enthusiastic researcher but a reluctant writer. In 2008, I asked his permission to use his findings for a summary of Holman activities in the United States, and Chaney supplied me with several documents that he considered most helpful. We were at that stage of collaboration when I learned of his death in 2009. His papers relating to the Holman family were not kept following his death.
8. Petition of John Holman to the Speaker and Members of the South Carolina House of Representatives, 13 January 1791, Records of the General Assembly, #123, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.
9. There is some disagreement whether this James Anderson was the same as the person identified by Koger.

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