6 Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean World

Relocating Agency from the "Center" to the "Periphery" and from the Maritime Silk Road to the Maritime Ivory Route

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Abstract
This contribution combines the picture in overland southern Africa with that emerging around the wider Indian Ocean region to amend and/or augment understandings of the nature and consequence of the region's participation in the highly complex early global trade. Traditional narratives framed within the core and periphery thinking emphasized that Asia was the center controlling the southern African periphery. A reassessment of circulatory knowledge involved in the Indian Ocean trade shows that southern Africa had a long-term active participation but had agency in selecting what to and what not to incorporate. This calls for balanced narratives that consider the overland and maritime trade from a local agency point of view to fully understand the participation and impact of southern Africa's involvement with the Maritime Silk Road routes.

Keywords: local agency, circulation, Indian Ocean, core-periphery, overlooked histories

Introduction

A significant amount of intellectual disquiet continues to bubble around the observation that knowledge about ancient African societies and their interactions with each other and with other parts of the world remains fundamentally colonialist in texture (Manyanga and Chirikure 2017; Mavhunga 2017; Mbembe 2000; Mudimbe 1998; Ndlovu 2016; Ogundiran 2016;

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Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). In southern Africa, this is a result of several factors, the most important being the unmitigated legacies of colonialism—especially a stubborn refusal to let go of colonial privileges by some archaeologists—long after the achievement of political independence (Hall 1983, 2005; Shepherd 2002). During colonialism, archaeology had no meaningful role for African scholarly participation, including theoretical and methodological development. Africans were only hired as labor in excavations or as sources of information then written up by white archaeologists (Shepherd 2003). They were never made coauthors; neither were they asked to review the published information they passed to colonial archaeologists for accuracy (Chirikure 2020a). Furthermore, different countries gained political independence at different times, and South Africa, even with its advanced economy and large settler population, was the last to finally gain independence in 1994. The continuation of colonial practice and marginalization by archaeologists continued post-1994. The situation still has not changed much, with some doubts continually cast over the abilities of highly qualified African archaeologists but rarely for their poorly qualified white counterparts. Circumspect of narratives that were produced by some colonial archaeologists under the name of scientific archaeology, Garlake (1982) argued for Africans to apply their experience and local understanding to rescue the African past from coloniality. More than a decade later, Bourdillon (1998, 61) questioned why some archaeologists even entertain illogical and pretentious reconstructions of the African past made under the name of science. The answers have everything to do with a desire to delegitimize African contributions and narratives while perpetuating colonial privilege at all costs.

Colonial privilege, including its dark side of racism, still motivates some researchers, who in the twenty-first century consider Africans—both past and present—as silage for exploitation by white archaeologists (Meskell 2011, 155). Outlandish as it sounds, colonialist knowledge holds African situations and understanding captive to interpretive models and logics drawn from Western cosmologies and ways of knowing (Chirikure et al. 2016; Lane 2011; Ndoro 2001; Ogundiran 2016). The consequence is that ancient southern Africa, especially the last two thousand years, are yet to be fully understood through African lenses, free from suffocating influences of coloniality and inappropriate logics imported from elsewhere (Bourdillon 1998; Stahl 2014).[1] This coloniality prompted Schmidt and Pikirayi (2018) to argue for resetting some archaeologically reconstructed narratives of the past two thousand

1 For the pervasive nature of the problem in African archaeology, see McIntosh 1999; Ogundiran 2016.

years of southern Africa to rid them of Western prejudices. Fundamentally, such a revision of approach and concepts (see Chirikure et al. 2017) is vital for articulating southern Africa's place in early global histories in ways that complement rather than undermine African agency and initiative.

From 500 CE onward, southern Africa was, via Indian Ocean maritime connections, intensely entangled through direct and indirect multidirectional exchange with regions of the world, including Asia and Europe (LaViolette 2008; Wood et al. 2012; Moffett and Chirikure 2016). Starting from the southwest to southeast, the circulation system coupled southern Africa with the Far East; south to north it linked southern Africa with the Middle East; and east to west it interconnected Asia and Europe. Bits and pieces of information gathered from archaeology, oral traditions, and rudimentary reports by Arab writers indicate that as mediated by local agency, southern Africa exchanged ivory, gold, iron, food, and bark cloth, among other items, in return for cloth (perhaps including silk), glass beads, and ceramics from the Indian Ocean World (Bhila 1982; Mudenge 1988; Pwiti 1991; Wood 2012). The system pooled together knowledge and resources from the interior of southern Africa and mixed them with maritime exchanges with China, India, Indonesia, Persia, and other Indian Ocean rim places (Biginagwa, Mapunda, and Ichumbaki 2021; Chirikure 2014; LaViolette and Fleisher 2005). While the identification of commodities that were exchanged is less challenging, the use and impact of those resources in both southern Africa and the Indian Ocean World still attracts controversy. The controversy flows from the speculation created by colonial narratives and core-periphery perspectives that argued that Asia, as the center, transmitted superior wealth and cultural innovations to passive recipients in the southern African margin. Indian Ocean elites, the narrative goes, introduced new preciosities such as glass beads to southern and eastern Africa, creating African elites who monopolized the distribution and redistribution of Indians Ocean World imports in the interior. This stimulated the rise of socio-political complexity and state formation in southern Africa (Huffman 1972, 2007; Pikirayi 2017). Meanwhile, African elites were supposedly happy to part with local resources to feed their conspicuous consumption, hardly translating proceeds into import substitution production (Killick 2009). The implication is that without Indian Ocean benevolence, southern Africa would have failed to develop states such as Mapela, Great Zimbabwe, Mapungubwe, and others. Unfortunately, this thinking resonates with late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century views that attribute the origins of these places and their related cultural achievements to the physical presence of external people from the Middle East (Bent 1896; Hall

and Neal 1902). The Middle East and other regions of Asia are implicated by bringing in "wealth." With such a colonialist logic, references to Mapela, Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe, for example, as indigenous appear counterintuitive (Chirikure 2020a).

Admittedly, indigenous populations are not entirely ignored in colonialist and core-periphery narratives, but they are primarily viewed as subordinate exporters of resources such as gold and recipients of "superior objects" from the Asian or Indian Ocean World center. This Asia-centric construction of African history perpetuates "top-down" models of historical change, privileging objects from an imagined core that became an imagined source of change in the periphery (Feuchtwang and Rowlands 2020; Lightfoot and Martinez 1995; Wolf 1982). Worse still, the narratives rely on the macro picture. That is, a limited micro scale resolution is used to consider the frictions and interfaces prompted by the uptake of objects from other worlds within coastal and hinterland southern Africa. This omission is material because objects are spatially and temporally fluid, allowing them to create and permeate boundaries, establish categories, and seep through the same as they travel in and out of communities, space, and time from the coast to the interior and vice versa (Lightfoot and Martinez 1995; Prestdholdt 2008; Stahl 2002; Vis 2018).

What outcomes emerge, though, if the interactions between southern Africa and the Indian Ocean World, and by extension the Maritime Silk Route (MSR), are considered first from the inside (Africa side) and then from the outside (Indian Ocean World)? To answer the question, this chapter recasts early global histories and entanglements between southern Africa and the Indian Ocean rim from Africa-centered positions. It shows that local perceptions of wealth and prestige, definitions of imports (including those from within southern Africa), and locations of boundaries are totally at variance with colonialist and core-periphery logics. Furthermore, the contribution of African exotics to cultural change is overlooked. Within southern Africa, the coastal–hinterland interaction included in-between communities, prompting the strategic deployment of indigenous (African World) and Indian Ocean World objects by southern Africans to strengthen, not undermine, their preexisting hierarchies of social orders, prestige, and influence. In the process, worlds and boundaries were maintained, created, or re-created. Therefore, the consequences of these interactions were multisided, opportunistic, and everchanging. Conceptualized from a southern African perspective, the Maritime Ivory Route (to take one popular commodity in the exchange) then becomes a local alternative to phenomena labeled the MSR in Eurasian-centric narratives.

Definitions of Concepts: Exotics, Luxury, Value, Boundaries, Etc.

This section defines some of the fundamental concepts used in this chapter as some of them were traditionally understood from Euro-American perspectives that are not compatible with indigenous African meanings and contexts. Often, colonial archaeology and its neo-colonial residues apply templates drawn from elsewhere (Ogundiran 2016) to explain historical change in a region as diverse as southern Africa (Mbembe 2000). This distorted meanings and denied Africans historical initiative (Ndlovu 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). It remains uncontested that to date Africans, especially those working on the last two thousand years of the southern African past have never really been given a chance to speak for themselves, using local ways of knowing and cosmologies, even after the achievement of political independence (Ndoro 2001). They are expected to listen to Euro-American archaeologists, especially those who worked in the colony, follow models set by the colony and the neo-colony, even if their inappropriateness is well known (Bourdillon 1998; Lane 2011; McIntosh 1999). This motivates a reversal of that capture through concept revision (Chirikure et al. 2017).

Concerning concepts, the name exotics—defined and understood as imports, alien or foreign objects—has traditionally been applied to commodities from the Indian Ocean World and not to objects from southern Africa. And yet, with a size exceeding 6.8 million square kilometers (roughly the size of Australia), southern Africa is characterized by diversity and hosted communities that were variously organized as cities, states, and other options. Communities were separated by distance and boundaries, including the physical and sociocultural. Iron gongs and copper ingots made in Central Africa but found about two thousand kilometers south at Great Zimbabwe (Swan 2007) were considered exotics in the receiving community. They were imports originating in a foreign or distant place. By comparison, a distance of twelve-hundred kilometers separates London from Vienna, while objects from France, a territory separated from England by a mere thirty-four-kilometer-wide channel at Dover, are regarded as imports (Chirikure 2020a). This contrasting situation strongly implicates colonialism and negative ideas about (southern) Africa. Necessarily, discussions of foreign objects or imports ought to include those acquired through trade, exchange, or gifts from other African communities in different geographies and territories. Therefore, in this chapter a distinction will be made between Indian Ocean World and African World exotics.

Luxury is another useful concept, often solely associated with goods from the Indian Ocean World such as glass beads. Generally, economists define

luxury goods as those enjoyed by people with high levels of wealth. The application of this concept to a precapitalist economy may be inappropriate. However, their status as luxury goods change; they may become necessities or normal goods as time passes and as consumer income, taste, and demand transforms. Archaeological evidence attests to the presence of internal African luxury commodities such as ivory, metals, and, among others, bark cloth that were circulated in southern and Central Africa. Therefore, luxury is not only associated with the Indian Ocean World but also with African World commodities. Luxury is closely related to value or the worth of resources and objects derived from them. Value is however situational and in ancient Africa—the worth of objects was often determined on a per transaction basis (Guyer 2004). All objects—regardless of categories such as luxury or ordinary—can store value and can be exchanged for similar or different objects of more or less value, depending on need (Stahl 2015). Based on context, cattle, land, metals, and salt, among others, were stores of value—possessing them was like "having money in the bank" in that they could be exchanged for other things when the need arose. Cattle could multiply with time, giving more value to the owner. Not surprisingly, these African objects performed the role of a "currency"—a form in which goods were exchanged to satiate individual or collective needs. Because of its sheer size, southern Africa had multiple, everchanging physical, social, and economic boundaries. Indian Ocean World interactions with a region involved relationships with a heterogenous entity. This also makes it inappropriate to single out a single place such as Chibuene, Mapungubwe, or Great Zimbabwe as representing a region larger than Australia. The coloniality inherent in such thinking and the continued marginalization and misapplication of African thoughts by some in southern Africa motivates a recentering of historical change, from being externally pivoted to one where the region had agency in determining how it interacted with the wider Indian Ocean World, including the MSR.

The First Millennium CE Economy in Southern Africa

Traditionally, the history of interactions and interchanges of ideas and objects between southern Africa and the wider Indian Ocean World has not paid adequate attention to the local economy in the former before and after entanglement with the latter. The oversight is fundamental because it fueled the production of skewed histories that undermine local agency by creating the impression that southern Africa only started societally transformative production and circulation with the advent of linkages

with the Indian Ocean trade and the MSR. Generally, archaeological studies of southern Africa bifurcate indigenous populations into farmers and hunter-gatherers (Mitchell 2002; Phillipson 2005; Pwiti 1996; Schoeman 2020). Farmers migrated southward from Central Africa, making a distinctive type of pottery, cultivating crops, and making metal while living in permanent homesteads. By comparison, hunter-gathers are assumed to represent continuities from the Later Stone Age and were ideologically different from the farmers. Regardless of the differences, Wilmsen (1989) exposed a long history of multidirectional interactions between farmers and hunter-gatherers, showing a deep entanglement beyond what labels allow.

Before and after farmers, there was a vibrant and diverse economy in existence in southern Africa. Hunter-gatherers exchanged beads made from ostrich eggshells, seashells, game meat, animal skins, and, among other objects, the pigment specularite (Fe_2O_3) over long distances (Mazel 1989; Mitchell 1996; Wilmsen 1982). Between 400 and 1000 CE, farmers were established in parts of southern Africa and had a working economy. Details are sketchy, but exchanges involved, among other items, grains, cattle, ores, and metals (Pwiti 1991). This exchange was multidirectional and connected areas in the region—from north to south of the Zambezi River, from north to south of the Limpopo River, and from the Indian Ocean into the interior. In current-day South Africa, the KwaZulu-Natal region was linked with communities on the highveld, thus connecting coastal with highland communities (Maggs 1994; Mazel 1989). In what is now modern-day Botswana, trade in cattle was highly developed, as it was in other parts of the region (Denbow 1984; see also Garlake 1978). Commodities that were exchanged were regarded not as autochthonous but as alien by the receiving communities (Mitchell 1996). However, the economy involved both farmers and hunter-gatherers, which shows interdependence (Forssman 2020; Hall and Smith 2000). Evidence from archaeological sites in the Thukela Basin of South Africa includes that farmers exchanged beads made from ostrich eggshells with hunter-gatherers and with copper producers based far from the coastal areas (Maggs 1994; Mitchell 1996). Wilmsen (1989) made similar observations about Botswana: the economy involved everyone—farmers and hunter-gatherers—over short and long distances. Suggestions too are that by the close of the first millennium CE, communities in Botswana were linked to those in current-day Democratic Republic of the Congo with long and deeply established internal African connections (Rademakers et al. 2019; Stephens et al. 2020). Ivory was used, traded, and exchanged in the region from 600 CE onward, before the intensification of trade with the Indian Ocean World (Denbow, Klehm, and Dussubieux 2015; Reid and

Segobye 2000). Large-scale evidence for local ivory production and use was recovered from coastal sites in KwaZulu-Natal, proving the established nature of the craft for internal consumption (Coutu et al. 2016).

Salt is another resource whose production and distribution connected multiple communities in southern Africa over short and long distances (Beach 1974; Denbow, Klehm, and Dussubieux 2015; Reid and Segobye 2000). Antonites (2016) discusses salt production and circulation in the lowveld of South Africa in the late first and early second millennium CE. The salt was produced by small groups of people, who then circulated in other areas. Beach (1974) also highlighted an intricate historical trade in salt (seventeenth to nineteenth centuries) based in current-day southeastern Zimbabwe and adjacent areas. The salt was exchanged for goats, chickens, iron objects, and other commodities. Traders often visited salt production areas where exchanges took place, and the surplus accumulated as wealth for the salt producers. In addition, the famed Njanja iron smelters exploited the Hwedza ores in Zimbabwe, and the iron spread to regions as far as two hundred to three hundred kilometers away (Chirikure 2006; MacKenzie 1975). The smelters established a hierarchical confederacy sustained by surplus from the trade and exchange. Phalaborwa and Musina were active sites in southern Africa for copper and iron production and their trade (Mathoho et al. 2016; Moffett 2017; Thondhlana 2013). The surplus was generated within and outside social formations such as state-level society (Chirikure 2018). A number of southern African archaeological sites, such as Great Zimbabwe, Danamombe, and Thulamela, have yielded iron gong artifacts assumed to have been produced in Central Africa. Copper was another commodity that was produced in Central Africa and circulated as far south as Great Zimbabwe (Swan 2007). Tin, too, was a metal that was exchanged in regions to the north and south of the Limpopo River (Grant 1999). This supports the observation by Coquery-Vidrovitch (1969) that these regions could circulate everyday and precious objects without intercontinental trade. Indeed, as Herbert (1984) highlighted, copper was a local luxury (see also Nikis and Livingstone-Smith 2017; Rademakers et al. 2019), as was cattle, and the inventory of African luxuries was large. Depending on where these resources were sourced within the region, they were defined as imports or exotics (Mitchell 1996). During the period between 500 and 800 CE, evidence exists that there were only limited exchanges involving objects from the Indian Ocean World. This highlights the skewed nature of historical narratives that assume that foreign and luxury objects are only from the Indian Ocean World while undermining the commonsense view that local people consumed local luxuries, such as the ivory bangles

recovered at multiple sites in the region, including in Mosu, Kaitshaa and KwaGandaganda (Coutu et al. 2016; Reid and Segobye 2000).

In summary, and although requiring more work, it is clear that in the first and second millennium CE, southern Africa had a complex economy that involved both farmers and hunter-gatherers. The commodities traded included specularite (used as pigment), iron ores, beads made from ostrich eggshells, cattle, goats, chickens, grains, and perhaps labor. Some European observers describe objects used as currency, such as cattle, iron hoes, and copper ingots, among many others, because they were mediums of exchange (Bhila 1982; Mudenge 1988). The exchanges created surpluses that were used in locally mediated ways. Concurrent with the intensification of this regional trade was also an increase in the size of settlements by the late first millennium CE. The economies could sustain these growing populations, and they were diversified to buffer against risk. The power of these local and regional economies must not be underestimated. Indeed, Coquery-Vidrovitch (1969) showed that without foreign objects from the Indian Ocean World, long-distance trade and regional economies produced surplus that created indigenous-birthed inequality and state formation in Central Africa. This ability of local and regional exchanges to stimulate historical change in Africa is rarely factored into colonialist and core-periphery models that privilege the Indian Ocean World. Furthermore, as Wilmsen (1989) has continually showed, farmers and hunter-gatherers were involved together in complex social, economic and political systems. The next section presents a synopsis of the evidence of interactions between southern Africa and the Indian Ocean World. Thereafter, a synthesis and discussion will be proffered to articulate Africa-centered perspectives on southern Africa's engagement with the Maritime Ivory Route versus the MSR (if we are to adopt different terminology).

Southern Africa–Indian Ocean World Interactions and Exchanges: The Evidence

What is the earliest known evidence of interconnections between southern Africa and the Indian Ocean World? Available evidence suggests that since deep time, the interior of southern Africa had an active network with the coast. Exchanges of objects increased in frequency over time (Mitchell 1996); and in the first few centuries of the first millennium, evidence shows that some farmers trekked southward from East Africa following the coast (Maggs 1994; Phillipson 2005). With the understanding that the coast is

part of southern Africa, this section discusses exchanges between the region and the wider Indian Ocean World, including India, China, and other parts of Asia. So far, there is no evidence of local production of glass in southern Africa, thus glass beads represent some of the earliest evidence of interactions between southern Africa and the Indian Ocean World (Mudenge 1988; Pwiti 1991, 2005; Wood 2012). The earliest known beads—Chibuene series—were found at the coast and in a few places in the interior (Denbow, Klehm, and Dussubieux 2015; Wood et al. 2012). These beads were followed by types known as Zhizo, K2/Mapungubwe, Zimbabwe, and Khami, with European beads becoming prevalent only from the nineteenth century onward (Koleini et al. 2017; Robertshaw et al. 2010; Wood 2012). In southern Africa, Indian Ocean World beads were melted to produce new and bigger beads known as Garden Rollers. These have been recovered from numerous sites, including, among others, in K2 in the Limpopo Valley, Great Zimbabwe, Kaitsaa in Botswana, and Zambia. To date, the highest number of Garden Rollers comes from Period II levels (early second millennium CE) in Great Zimbabwe. This shows that the agency and technology to rework objects from another region into new forms with new meanings was pervasive in the region. While scholars rarely pay attention to pyrotechnology, the Danamombe ruins (1450–1820 CE) (Machiridza 2020) yielded evidence of remelting glass beads, which shows continuity in this practice.

Ceramics are another category of remains from the Indian Ocean World found at the coast and in the interior of southern Africa. These include stoneware, celadon pottery, and porcelain (Pikirayi 2017). The earliest appear to be ceramics from the Middle East recovered from sites such as Chibuene in Mozambique. Most of the ceramics were found in interior sites by antiquarians, and at a time when standards of excavations and ethics were different from those of the present. A free-for-all atmosphere by early colonialists means that it is difficult to make an accurate count of the total numbers of ceramics recovered. Garlake (1968) attempted to count the fragments of Indian Ocean World ceramics recovered from late first millennium and second millennium CE sites in southern Africa, and he concluded that although the range covered long temporal and spatial spans, the numbers were very low. For its size, Great Zimbabwe yielded less than 100 fragments of porcelain. Factoring in new discoveries made to date, the numbers do not exceed 130 (Chirikure 2020a). The Mapungubwe site yielded only two fragments of celadon. Other sites such as Khami produced imported ceramic fragments but also in considerably small numbers (Mukwende et al. 2018). The only sites that included imported ceramic fragments in the thousands are in the Portuguese trading sites in northern Zimbabwe, such

as Dambarare (Garlake 1968). Fragments of Islamic frit ware were also found at Great Zimbabwe, along with pieces of Islamic glass. There is an eclectic assortment of objects recovered from the Renders Ruin at Great Zimbabwe, including, among many other objects, a bronze bell, a lamp holder, and a jade teapot that Garlake (1973) interpreted as gifts brought by a trader to open the path for trade and exchange. On a temporal scale, the number of Indian Ocean World ceramics and objects remained very low until the Portuguese trading settlements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The reason why the frequency is so low has to do with lack of local interest and not that the ceramics were rarities with high values. This is because they were recovered in high numbers at the coast and from Portuguese trading settlements in the interior but not in African settlements showing differences in tastes, values, and interests (Chirikure 2014).

Cloth is yet another category of Indian Ocean World objects imported into southern Africa. Because it is perishable, not much is known about the types of cloth, and while it is tempting to speculate that silk would have been included, there are no descriptions of the names and types of cloth locally known as *machira* in historical records (Mudenge 1988). The speculation gets some support from the fact that Chinese objects were also found in Great Zimbabwe and other sites; however, southern Africa had its own cloth-making industry, as shown by the recovery of spindle whorls in places where commoners or elites lived (Antonites 2019; Ruwitah 1999. There are also finished metals objects that were traded between the Indian Ocean World and the African interior. The Chibuene site yielded some finished objects, and ongoing studies of crucibles excavated by Paul Sinclair are pointing toward a well-developed craft production system based on working copper in the first millennium CE. Furthermore, Indian Ocean World bronze, brass, and iron objects were recovered from the interior of South Africa that date from the late first millennium into the second millennium CE (Bandama et al. 2016; LaViolette 2008; Miller 2002). The intensification of trade and exchange with the Indian Ocean World saw an increased presence of seashells into the interior of Africa. The types are varied and include cowry shells and conus species (Moffett, Hall, and Chirikure 2020).

An interesting but poorly studied topic relates to the routes and mechanisms by which people, objects, and information traveled between hinterland and coastal southern Africa. Evidence at the coast, such as at the Chibuene site, suggests the existence of trading entrepôts in first millennium CE. The intensification of trade and exchange with the Islamic World saw the shift of activities from earlier entrepôts like Chibuene to Sofala in Mozambique

and other places (Pikirayi 2017; Wood et al. 2012). The limited available data and the large swathes of territory that remain archaeologically unexplored make it difficult to reconstruct the routes through which commodities, ideas, and people flowed from the interior into the coast and vice versa. There are several possible theories, however, and the first is that traders would have followed long-established routes used by hinterland and coastal communities (Mitchell 1996). The second is that communities at the coast or in the interior would have exchanged commodities with the nearest communities, resulting in a relay from the interior into the coast and vice versa (Chirikure 2017). A third theory is that traders followed rivers to the coast and back, making major rivers such as the Zambezi, Pungwe, Save, and Limpopo vital parts of their routes. Trade and exchange would have followed communities and areas where resources and their production took place, so the routes must have been multidirectional and branched into settlements and areas of resource production. While comprehensive data is still missing, we do know that the distribution of Indian Ocean exotics in the interior is variegated. For example, Chibuene glass beads were recovered in current-day Botswana and at the coast, but not in other in-between places. Rather than a quixotic existence of routes, as suggested by Western and Westphalian notions of command, multidirectional traffic is attested by the wide dispersal of Indian Ocean World exotics in multiple southern African areas (Chirikure 2018).

The quantities of objects from the Indian Ocean World appear to increase in frequency in the interior after the second millennium CE, although Swahili settlement sites on the coast of East Africa have yielded evidence of a stronger presence of imported Near and Far East ceramics. This indicates a higher level of imports than in the interior (Chirikure 2014; LaViolette 2008). This begs the question: What was the role of Indian Ocean World exotics in African communities in the interior? Evidence suggests it was context dependent. First, some exotics were given local names; for example, glass beads became *zvuma* (plural) and cloth became *machira* (plural). Glass beads were used as decorative items, attached to items of dress, used on accessories related to spiritual and religious activities, as well as in more private activities such as sex (Moffett and Chirikure 2016). Zvuma applied to beads made from ostrich eggshells as well as other types of beads. Cloth was used to make wearables for both the rich and the poor. Depending on local material culture, items from the Indian Ocean World sometimes functioned as social and gender status symbols (Norman 2015; Stahl 2015) but sometimes as mundane objects. Given that everyone could access Indian Ocean exotics, it was the wearer who made objects significant and prestigious. For example, a brass bangle

won by the king was more symbolic than a bangle of the same type and shape worn by a commoner (Moffett and Chirikure 2016). Therefore, always associating glass beads with luxury, prestige, and high status without any context may be inaccurate (Chirikure 2014). Equally misleading is the idea that Indian Ocean World imports such as glass beads were also currency and therefore were the only stores of value. This is because iron, copper, ivory, and salt were used as mediums of exchange, and thus as currency with value (Chirikure 2020b). The nature of the economy was such that goods were bartered for other goods. It should be noted here that value and luxury were not reserved categories for Indian Ocean World objects but also applied to African World resources in the interior.

Models based on core periphery and that are Asia-centric argue that Indian Ocean World exotics were luxuries whose distribution generated surpluses then monopolized by elites (Denbow, Klehm, and Dussubieux 2015; Huffman 2007; Pikirayi 2017). Yet Beach (1974) has shown that local exchange included local luxuries that also generated surplus that added to social and economic hierarchies (see also Coquery-Vidrovitch 1969). More importantly, frameworks centered on the Indian Ocean World rarely define "surplus" and "luxury" or offer adequate measures of such variables. According to Morehart and De Lucia (2015), surplus refers to goods that exceed functional needs of different social units. While no universal definition of surplus may be possible, is it appropriate to label the MSR items recovered from Great Zimbabwe, such as a whole Chinese jade teapot (n: 1), Near (n: 2) and Far Eastern ceramics (n: less than 130) as surplus and as wealth (Chirikure 2020b)? It is difficult to envisage the objects as politically charged commodities that defined and reinforced systems of social rank in which the political economy operated (Brumfiel and Earle 1987). While such imports might have been gifts from traders that then became possessions of the high-ranking giftees (Weiner 1985), lesser-order settlements, and nonelite (commoner) homesteads also had variable amounts of exotic goods. This demonstrates that imports should neither always be equated with surplus wealth (Moffett and Chirikure 2016) nor always be associated with the elite. A quantitative comparison of the frequency of glass beads at commoner and elite sites in the Shashi-Limpopo Valley failed to find significant differences (Wood 2012). Outside of burial contexts, the number of glass beads recovered from sites that archaeologists classified as belonging to common people were quantitatively comparable to those from places interpreted as belonging to elites.

Inland–coastal interactions in southern Africa were multidirectional and involved a large array of imports from the Indian Ocean and African Worlds. However, an unmitigated tendency to value the role of such exotics

using Anglo-American, colonial, and Western value systems undermined African imports and luxuries in historical narratives. Hinterland-coastal exchanges were comprised of social networks informed largely by resource availability and needs in different areas. This created complicated networks of circulation that were nonlinear and multidirectional. The way in which Indian Ocean World exotics were incorporated locally cut across traditional exotic–luxury and indigenous–mundane boundaries. The social biography of beads (whatever their name was in areas of production) from producer regions such as India involved crossing into a southern Africa cultural space (Chirikure 2014). This shows that boundaries were permeable but also conditioned by existing cultural logics (Lightfoot and Martinez 1995). The name of cloth too did not reference its foreign source; it was simply machira, which did not distinguish it from cloth made from local fibers. This localization of alien material culture coming from faraway places shows that the meaning and value systems were locally centered, and this applied to exotic objects and resources acquired from great distances that circulated all over southern Africa (Chirikure 2020b; Mitchell 1996). The entangled nature of values and the use of southern African objects and Indian Ocean materials invites a fresh discussion from a nuanced position based on this local agency. This is the focus of the next section.

Southern Africa–Indian Ocean Circulations: From the Maritime Silk Road to the Maritime Ivory Route

Connections between southern Africa and the Indian Ocean World have long attracted interest in archaeological studies, in both colonial and post-colonial times. The interest, however, was dominated by models that were colonially inclined and core-periphery centered. These models allocated more agency and social and economic powers to Indian Ocean World items and their imagined status as preciosities than to local commodities and objects (Caton-Thompson 1931; Denbow, Klehm, and Dussubieux 2015; Huffman 2007; Pikirayi 2017). Consequently, Indian Ocean trade and the MSR are traditionally considered more vital in terms of their transformative power than the localized or long-distance trade and exchange involving foreign and local objects from within southern Africa. The implication of such a viewpoint is that luxury, prestige, wealth, and transformative value were associated only with Indian Ocean products. Such a narrative is an artifact of the colonial origins of southern African archaeology, which set up the refractory Eurasian-centric scholarly trajectory. The evolution of the

archaeology of interaction between the Indian Ocean World and southern Africa shows that Indian Ocean World imports were traditionally implicated in the rise, flourish, and decline of states such as Great Zimbabwe. This belief was initiated by antiquarians and expanded by successive generations of archaeologists. For example, Bent (1896) and Hall and Neal (1902) used exotics as evidence that Great Zimbabwe was not built by locals, while Randall-MacIver (1906) and Caton-Thompson (1931) argued that the imports played a prominent role in the emergence of Great Zimbabwe. This argument, dressed in Western prejudice, was propagated by cohorts of colonial archaeologists, including those who continued to work in postcolonial times. It is only of late that writing African history from the point of Africa to understand global exchange became imperative (Manyanga and Chirikure 2017; Ndoro 2001).

A desire to write overlooked histories and highlight local African agency is often misunderstood as taking Africa out of global history. Some scholars abuse the peer-review platform to label attempts to restore agency to African communities as political, nationalist, and tribal. The desire to perpetuate colonial privilege remains strong, which is why it is vital that we recast global history by acknowledging African people as powerful and thinking agents who contributed to world history from their own perspective and in their own way (Feuchtwang and Rowlands 2020; Wolf 1982). Obviously, this is not the subordinate, passive status that colonial and core-periphery models have long used. The process of writing global history by building on local perspectives highlights essential issues. For example, people do not trade only for profit, gain, or surplus; they do so also to fulfill social obligations and to build (or rebuild) social relations (Mauss 1925). There is no need to impose a presentist, capitalist logic onto precapitalist societies, in which everything is seen as motivated by profit, wealth, and or conspicuous consumption. Another prejudicial omission from traditional and colonial interpretations relates to the role of local and regional resources as luxury and wealth, and how they contributed to the economic history of southern Africa over the past two thousand years. Furthermore, exotics are imported not only as luxury or elite objects; they can be necessities or for mundane use. This motivates new histories aimed at correcting these salient but overlooked points.

A critical reassessment of the available evidence shows that when the Indian Ocean World trade bloomed, southern Africa was already involved in diversified and multilayered internal trade that involved ordinary objects such as salt, honey, animal skins, cloth, iron, copper and beads made from ostrich eggshells. Hunter-gatherers and farmers were interconnected, as were farmers with each other in different areas of the region (Antonites 2016; Beach 1974; Maggs 1994; Mazel 1989; Mitchell 1996; Pwiti 1991; Reid

and Segobye 2000; Wilmsen 1989). The trade and exchange systems involved everyday items, preciosities, and luxuries (Bhila 1982). Various distribution mechanisms were in operation, including itinerancy; that is, people traveling from village to village and area to area moving resources such as salt. In other circumstances, communities exchanged resources with nearby communities. Contra colonialist and core-periphery narratives, southern African exchanges of ordinary and luxury objects improved the social, economic, and political standing of producers, distributors, and consumers alike. Those with the skills, talent, and knowledge to work with these raw resources gained prestige, wealth, and political advantages (Guyer and Belinga 1995). This system evolved in complex ways and was in existence millennia before European colonialism (Moffett and Chirikure 2016; Mitchell 1996; Mudenge 1988).

When long-distance trade with the Indian Ocean World began around 500 CE or shortly thereafter, it tracked with existing networks (Mitchell 1996). As Maggs (1994) has shown, inhabitants of coastal and interior southern Africa had specialized economies by the mid-first millennium CE. New and existing objects were circulated and easily fit into cultural logics and understandings (Chirikure 2014). For example, imports of cloth from the Indian Ocean World were vital in the interior, even though it already had bark cloth (Mudenge 1988). Or while copper and its alloys were imported from the Indian Ocean World, southern Africa already had copper. The exchange in glass beads followed a long trajectory that had been established by shell and other types of beads (Mitchell 1996). Glass beads added colors that resonated with established cultural practices (Chirikure 2014). Other objects, however, such as celadon pottery, porcelain, Islamic fritware pottery, and glass have generally not been found in abundance at sites.

Little is known about the mechanics of distribution involved in Indian Ocean World exotics moving from South Africa's coast into its interior. It is logical to assume that imports fit into existing distribution networks of circulation from the coast into the interior and further inland. Communities between the coast and the interior often acted as intermediaries. For example, Tsonga (parts of Mozambique, northeastern South Africa, and Southeastern Zimbabwe) traders circulated products from the interior to the coast and back (Bandama 2013). Clearly, a long network of overland circulation fed into the MSR and Maritime Ivory Route and vice versa. The waters connected people on opposite shores, near and far.

As mentioned earlier, since colonial times, investigations into reconstructing circulation systems for objects from the Indian Ocean World have concentrated on the impact of Indian Ocean items on the receiving

communities of southern Africa. These studies assumed every import was a luxury with perceived benefits to elites, not ordinary people. The reality is that Indian Ocean World items such as glass beads were associated with everyone, commoners and elites alike. This rebuts the argument—which goes as far back as Randall-MacIver (1906) and Caton-Thompson (1931)—that exotics from the Indian Ocean World represented a new form of storable surplus wealth that traditional local options such as cattle could not achieve (Huffman 1972, 2007). The wealth gained from monopolizing exotics was allegedly converted into political power, thereby stimulating the emergence of Indigenous states such as Mapungubwe. This thinking is partly a leftover from colonial archaeology and anthropology that took away agency from locals and locally produced goods, and it is fraught with omissions and contradictions. For example, the African long-distance internal exchange of copper between southern Africa and Central Africa was supposedly needed for state formation and development of social ranks and hierarchies (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1969; Nikis and Livingstone-Smith 2017). A logical question then becomes, given that trade involved the same groups of people (that is, Bantu, San, and a mixture of both), why did intra-African long-distance trade and other factors stimulate the development of hierarchies and class distinction in Central but not southern Africa? As argued earlier, exchange with the Indian Ocean World came at a time when southern Africa was undergoing fundamental transformations and development of social hierarchies and class distinction. Indian Ocean World imports were simply additives but not primary drivers of transformative processes. Furthermore, the definition of wealth and luxury in capitalist and colonial terms is different, so the assumption that all Indian Ocean World exotics were luxuries is not accurate. Honey, for example, was a luxury in some southern African contexts yet widely exchanged in the region (Wilmsen 1989). Given these challenges with existing frameworks, it is vital to rewrite the trade history of southern Africa by factoring in the contributions of both everyday local and luxury items when discussing Indian Ocean World imports in order to produce a balanced history.

Equally, the application of core-periphery thinking has hindered an understanding of wealth and luxury in local value systems (Killick 2009). Asia and the wider Indian Ocean World is generally considered as the center of distributed finished objects to the southern African periphery, which in turn supplied raw materials such as gold. Thus, these objects, including those distributed as part of the MSR, are assumed to be politically charged, which supposedly explains the rise of an indigenous elite in the south African interior. Asia and the wider Indian Ocean World are also credited with

introducing knowledge of gold, tin, bronze, and brass working to southern Africa in the early second millennium CE (Miller 2002). However, not only is the timing of innovations such as the advent of gold production poorly dated but also the mechanics of the introduction are not clear. Current evidence suggests that by around 1000 CE, gold was being worked in states such as Great Zimbabwe, and by 1200 CE it was worked in several other places (Bandama et al. 2016). The first location where gold was used—either at the coast or interior—is not known, and perhaps it will never be known. Nevertheless, it makes sense that information and knowledge exchange occurred in multiple forms. Archaeological knowledge tracks discoveries, which raise vital questions. In this case, what did southern Africa get in exchange for iron, ivory, and other resources before the introduction of gold around 1000 CE? Why did gold come afterward? Could it be that its adoption was gradual and only become evident after 1000 CE? These unanswered questions require new research into the possibility that gold, tin, and bronze exchanges were already occurring by about 800 CE, or a few centuries after the inception of Indian Ocean World trade (around 500CE).

The marginalization of local concepts of luxury and their replacement with European notions in reconstructions of southern Africa–Indian Ocean interactions are magnified by this elevated status of gold. There is no doubt that compared to exchanges that involved iron and copper, gold was a later addition (Miller 2002). However, most archaeological gold fragments have been recovered from sites that archaeologists associate with elites. Indeed, Mapungubwe became an important site because it yielded spectacular gold objects weighing a combined 2.3 kilograms from burials on the summit of the hill. Occasional gold beads were also recovered in midden deposits (rubbish dumps). The Eurocentric nature of knowledge is also clear from descriptions of the Mapungubwe gold as "crown jewels." This biased and Euro-American centric language prompts yet further questions. Why bury crown jewels with an individual? Were these personal possessions that became inalienable possessions? Were not objects associated with power to be handed from one leader to the next, such as knobkerries (a stick with a knob at the top) and ceremonial axes (Mudenge 1988)? Hall and Neal (1902) provide an inventory showing significant amounts of gold recovered from a large number of other sites besides Mapungubwe, some of which chronologically overlap with Mapungubwe. This gold weighed several kilograms and was in some cases more than that recovered from Mapungubwe, but it was stolen by treasure hunters and lost forever from scholars. Understood in this way, discussions of Mapungubwe gold by most archaeologists lack a regional and historical context and therefore appear to be opportunistic. Some elite sites have

yielded significant amounts of gold, but the history of looting precludes us from performing a systematic comparison of the quantities of gold from looted and unlooted sites (Hall and Neal 1902). In terms of value systems, Herbert (1984) made the interesting observation that copper was more valuable than gold. Even after start of exchanges with the Islamic and other Indian Ocean Worlds, copper continued to be more valuable than gold. That is why copper was traded, either directly or indirectly, over long distances. If the locals valued copper more highly than gold, why do we attach more significance to places that yielded some gold remains as compared with more copper? This has to do with the colonial and Eurocentric values attached to gold by some archaeologists. And colonies—such as what became Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)—were established on the basis of perceived wealth in gold. Colonial archaeologists, including those who continue to work in the postcolony, carry on with the trope. Copper was currency, but so was iron and salt, among other items. Clearly, the interactions between southern Africa and the Indian Ocean World must be framed in less biased ways to show the history of the people of South Africa more accurately (Wolf 1982).

Conclusion

Conceptually, the major problem is that the history of interaction and interchange of ideas within southern Africa and between inland southern Africa and the Indian Ocean World has been narrated from the outside looking in. The implication so far is that in the interactions and interchanges of ideas, inland communities were happy to part with their gold and ivory in return for glass beads and imported ceramics, and that coastal communities were keen to act as conduits for inbound and outbound flows of commodities. These colonialist views and embedded core-periphery thinking promoted insular models of sociocultural transformation that treat southern Africa as a homogenous and passive recipient of core innovations. Considered from inside, however, there is a great deal of agency, diversity of practices, and initiative involved. Africans had their own sense of luxury, understandings of exchange, and boundaries between the everyday and the specialized. The biased nature of traditional scholarship is that David Livingstone reported that glass beads were used as currency. Archaeologists then interpretated that they were stores of value, or "money in the bank," not matched by local goods (Denbow, Klehm, and Dussubieux 2015; Huffman 2007). However, countless European observers noted that iron (MacKenzie 1975), copper (Stayt 2018), salt (Bhila 1982), and cattle were also used as currency and

thus were "money in the bank." There is no logical reason to sustain an argument that privileges glass beads over many other local stores of value.

The most important question then becomes: Who is best served by continuing the existing colonialist knowledge that marginalizes African communities? The knowledge is colonialist-based because it uses local ethnographies and oral traditions to produce narratives that oppress local initiatives under the pretense of adherence to superior models and dubious scientific methodologies (Beach 1998). As noted earlier in this chapter, it is important to clarify that Africans were not involved with the archaeological research that formed and crystallized the biases of Euro-Americans throughout the colonial period. When Africans finally joined the research, they followed a path that was already set, mimicking the colonialist orientation and biased nature of core-periphery perspectives. It was only later, after the huge chasm between lived experience and these models became evident, that the need to produce restorative histories was magnified. Applying local history in a locally grounded framework to build global history is vital because it gives attention to overlooked areas. This is also important for another reason: concepts such as the MSR produce Sinocentric histories, which simply relocates an imagined core from one region of the world to another. Rather, multiple resources, ideas, and people were involved in interactions within Africa and around the Indian Ocean World. To highlight silenced histories and to magnify the legacies of colonial and racist structures of power in their ongoing and evolving forms, it is vital to write the history of southern Africa's interaction with the Indian Ocean from the inside. Reversing the perspective directs more attention to African contributions and places Africans in the center as active participants interacting with those on the other shore. Their interactions ought to be named differently to highlight their diversity of and to emphasize overlooked histories. The Maritime Silk Road then becomes the Maritime Ivory Route with Africa being actively involved and dynamically contributing to historical change.

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