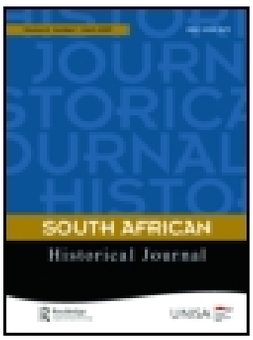

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Continuing Conversations at the Frontier

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Abstract

Researchers involved or interested in the 500 Year Initiative (FYI) gathered at the University of Cape Town in June 2008 to explore how different disciplines engaged in historical studies may better communicate and collaborate within and between each other. Appropriately titled 'Continuing Conversations at the Frontier', participants in this conference challenged themselves to cross the theoretical and methodological borders separating archaeology, history, geography, anthropology and linguistics, in order to understand how and under what influence modern southern African identities have taken shape over the past 500 years. These conversations made it clear that new insights are not only reliant on new data, but that it is equally important to expose our methodologies and processes of gaining understanding. In addition to confronting disciplinary boundaries and methods, social and spatial frontiers were key loci for discussion, although it became apparent that historians and archaeologists have approached frontiers in different ways. We briefly explore the roots of these approaches.

Keywords: 500 Year Initiative; archaeology; boundaries; frontiers; history; interdisciplinary research; methodology; pre-colonial southern Africa

In June 2008, researchers involved or interested in the 500 Year Initiative (FYI) gathered at the University of Cape Town to explore how different disciplines engaged in historical studies may better communicate and collaborate within and between each other. Appropriately titled 'Continuing Conversations at the Frontier', participants in this conference challenged themselves to cross the theoretical and methodological borders separating archaeology, history, geography, anthropology and linguistics, in order to understand how and under what influence modern southern African identities have taken shape over the past 500 years. In doing so, FYI researchers are challenging and extending current perceptions about this understudied period in southern Africa's pre-colonial and colonial past, and in particular, the form of, and interactions along, southern Africa's expanding internal and colonial frontiers.

Stemming from the first FYI conference at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2006 and the subsequent proceedings, six key areas of ongoing research were identified for

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inter-disciplinary collaboration and were further pursued at the 2008 conference: 1) Bokoni and the Pedi polity in Mpumalanga; (2) Northern Nguni of KwaZulu-Natal; (3) Northern Frontier of Limpopo Province; (4) Tswana political centralisation in the Rustenburg and Zeerust areas; (5) Mission stations; and (6) translating archival documents. By combining documentary, material and oral evidence, FYI researchers are constructing frameworks for understanding societal responses that potentially have material consequences and leave material imprints. The crossing of academic borders by these researchers has broadened the scale of knowledge from that of internal community dynamics to the recognition that articulation between these areas shaped and re-shaped southern African societies during the last 500 years. For instance, it is likely that events in the northern Nguni research areas had profound impacts on BoKoni and the Pedi polity, as well as the Northern Frontier and the Rustenburg area. It is at these intersections that new insights into the last 500 years are being found, because academic frontiers, similar to social frontiers, can be places of intense interaction, fluidity, invention and debate.[1]

South African Frontiers

Whilst confronting disciplinary boundaries and methods, social and spatial frontiers were key loci for discussion at the Cape Town conference. Historians and archaeologists have approached frontiers in markedly different ways. We outline the frontier historiography with the purpose of providing a background/context to current debates/directions within the FYI community. [2]

The significance of the frontier in the South African past has a long and controversial history. For our present purposes, we will sketch the broad outlines of frontier historiography rather than engage in a detailed discussion. Both the 'Afrikaner' and 'liberal' historiographies have placed much stock in the significance of the 'frontier' in the origins of modern South Africa. Informed by F.J. Turner's notion of the 'frontier' as the contact between two inherently unequally and binary opposites, the 'Afrikaner' historiography sought the origins of a national identity while 'liberals' searched for the origins of racism. While it was through heroic struggles (with indigenous groups) at the frontiers that Afrikaner identity emerged, isolation from civilisation resulted in the development of racist ideas unsuited to modern times.[3]

The frontier tradition and the historiographies that ascribed historical significance to it came under challenge from radical approaches in the 1970s. Martin Legassick in particular dismissed the significance of the frontier in explaining the history of modern South Africa. Legassick suggested that 'frontier zones' were products of their settler parent societies to which they remained linked through ideology, material culture and trade. But he rightly insisted that frontiers were zones of interactions of different peoples, modes of production and change. However, although violence was present, colour consciousness was not as rigid as had been claimed by 'liberal' historians. Frontier in this sense came to mean a lot more than contact between European settlers and African communities. The frontier or 'frontier-type' relations extended to meetings and interactions far into the past prior to European colonisation, and would influence new frontiers and

1 H.K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004); I. Kopytoff, *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

2 For our present limited purposes, our reading of this literature is very broad and schematic.

3 For a brief historiography on the frontier, see N. Penn, *The Forgotten Frontier: Colonists and Khoisan on the Cape's Northern Frontier in the 18th Century* (Cape Town and Athens, Ohio: David Philip and Ohio University Press, 2005). This section on historiography draws largely from this source.

interactions with Europeans. Similarly, 'frontier' interactions with Europeans were processes experienced continuously over many parts of southern Africa and did not close until the colonial state took over in the late nineteenth century and later. In contrast to the image of a triumphant march of white settlers and 'civilisation', this view stressed a more complex process of interactions in which neither side achieved overall dominance.[4]

Regardless of approach, the 'frontier' *par excellence* was the eastern Cape between the late eighteenth and late nineteenth centuries. Nigel Penn's major concern was to correct this bias and focus on what he considered the 'original' frontier, northern South Africa.[5] Stressing the differences between the two regions, Penn argued that the eastern frontier opened later and closed almost immediately, whereas the northern opened earlier but did not close in different parts until the nineteenth century. Penn insisted that as long as the 'frontier' was considered significant, the 'forgotten' northern frontier deserves priority. Rather than impose a singular experience, Penn suggested: 'It is possible that an "open" frontier situation, as existed in the northern frontier zone for so long, will be seen as being more typical South African scenario after all.'[6]

In many respects, Penn's approach drew from revisionist frameworks of interactions of difference between modes of production, people and change. Penn, however, allowed that the open frontier was the more common experience, rather than the closed one. It is in this open frontier that Maanda Mulaudzi found Penn's work an invitation to broaden the understanding of the more complex histories of other regions.[7]

Also taking on Penn's challenge to expand perceptions of the frontier in southern Africa, four FYI pilot projects focus on the three northern provinces of South Africa. Of these, the northern Limpopo province or 'The Northern Frontier' – strangely, in spite of its historical and strategic importance – has remained truly and utterly forgotten. FYI projects situated in this frontier have expanded on the initial theoretical framework of Roger Wagner.[8] Although dismissive of the many untested assumptions about 'the influences and tendencies of "the frontier"', Wagner nonetheless insisted on the importance of the Zoutpansberg in the 'frontier'. Informed by the work of Legassick, Wagner drew attention to the 'dynamics of a hunting frontier' and its ambiguous status in the 'frontier' tradition. In spite of the significance attached to 'frontier' in both 'Afrikaner' and 'liberal' historiographies, Wagner provided some reasons for the neglect of the north. While resisting the temptation to advance an 'alternative general theory of the nature and effects of the European frontier in southern Africa', Wagner still insisted that in any serious assessment, the northern frontier of the South African Republic (ZAR) in the period between 1848 and 1867 was potentially significant in at least two respects. He stressed the links between the Zoutpansberg and its 'parent societies' in the more settled and older colonies and concluded that it was part of the same general process. At the same time, he indicated that the end of this 'frontier' represented an important resurgence of African communities in the ZAR.

4 M. Legassick, 'The Frontier Tradition in South African Historiography', in S. Marks and A. Atmore, eds, *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa* (London: Longman, 1980), 44–79.

5 Penn, *The Forgotten Frontier*, 12–13.

6 *Ibid.*

7 M. Mulaudzi, 'U Shuma Bulasi: Agrarian Transformation in the Zoutpansberg District' (PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, 2000).

8 R. Wagner, 'Zoutpansberg: The Dynamics of a Hunting Frontier, 1848–67', in Marks and Atmore, *Economy and Society*, 316–318.

Wagner demonstrated the dynamics of a hunting frontier and the particular 'pattern of frontier relations' that evolved, and their consequences for all involved. In particular, he showed how, in spite of their gun and horse monopoly, 'the presence of the Boer colony in this world for over twenty years depended upon the acquiescence, and even collaboration, of African neighbours'. This included multiple points of interaction with African communities that did not accord with views that emphasise stark contrasts between 'racialised' groups. Moreover, and typical of an 'open' frontier without a single dominant authority, African communities experienced the colony as 'a raiding state'. From this perspective, the settler community was not isolated, nor did it represent a divine plan.

In explaining the existence of slavery and an indenture system in the Zoutpansberg, Jan Boeyens has similarly stressed the frontier characteristics of this region. He follows Hermann Giliomee in describing the Zoutpansberg as a 'typical "open" frontier' where 'two or more ethnic communities co-exist with conflicting claims to the land'. In this frontier, 'no authority is recognised as legitimate or is able to exercise undisputed control over the area', nor are they able to yield coercive power and 'to realise aims forcibly in the face of opposition from others'.[9]

Although Boeyens shows, as does Wagner, the same interlocking relations between the settlers and the various groups in the frontier, he nonetheless appears to suggest that alliances were useful only if they were formed with single or centralised states. Evidence, however, abounds that alliances occurred between communities of varying sizes, such as with the Buys family, João Albasini, Tsonga communities, and some Vhavenda groups at various times. Similar complex alliances also characterised other frontiers in the South African interior, such as in Mpumalanga and Swaziland.[10] Engagement with these frontiers[11] by FYI researchers suggests the need for a shift in focus to include alliances regardless of the scale of political organisation involved, as well as exploring the possible benefits the various participants thought they would derive from them. We would also suggest that the complex histories of specific groups and peoples require more attention within the context of the early phase of the 'frontier'.

Archaeologists have a shorter history of engagement with the frontier. Theoretically informed approaches to frontiers only come to the fore in the 1980s. Until then, much of southern African archaeology focused on understanding the internal dynamics of communities.[12] A growing

9 J.C.A. Boeyens, 'The Indenture System and Slavery in Zoutpansberg', in E.A. Eldredge and F. Morton, eds, *Slavery in South Africa: Captive Labor on the Dutch Frontier* (Boulder, Colorado and Pietermaritzburg: Westview Press and University of Natal Press, 1994), 192.

10 See, for example, P. Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us: The Pedi Polity, the Boers and the British in the Nineteenth Century Transvaal* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983); P. Bonner, *Kings, Commoners and Concessionaires: The Evolution and Dissolution of the Nineteenth-Century Swazi State* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983).

11 See, for example, Mulaudzi, 'U Shuma Bulasi'; A.B. Esterhuysen, 'Ceramic Alliances: Pottery and the History of the Kekana Ndebele in the Old Transvaal', in N. Swanepoel, A. Esterhuysen and P. Bonner, eds, *Five Hundred Years Rediscovered: Southern African Precedents and Prospects* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008), 197–216.

12 See, for example, J.E. Parkington, 'Seasonal Mobility in the Late Stone Age', *African Studies*, 31 (1972), 113–243; C.G. Sampson, *The Stone Age Archaeology of Southern Africa* (New York: Academics Press, 1974); T.M.O'C. Maggs, *Iron Age Communities of the Southern Highveld* (Pietermaritzburg: Council of the Natal Museum, 1976); L. Wadley, 'Subsistence Strategies in the Transvaal Stone Age: A Preliminary Model', in M. Hall, G. Avery, D.M. Avery, M. Wilson and A.J.B. Humphreys, eds, *Frontiers: Southern African Archaeology Today* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports [BAR] International Series 207, 1984), 207–214; T.N. Huffman, 'Iron Age Settlement Patterns and the Origins of Class Distinction in Southern Africa', Advances in World Archaeology, 5 (1986), 291–338; L. Wadley, *Later Stone Age Hunters and Gatherers of the Southern Transvaal: Social and Ecological Interpretation* (Oxford: BAR International Series, 1987); T.N. Huffman, 'Ceramics,

understanding of the importance of context, however, led to the realisation that interaction was an important component in shaping southern Africa society. This new insight manifested in the seminal conference 'Frontiers in Southern African Archaeology', and subsequent conference proceedings.[13] The Frontiers conference signalled a marked shift in the study of pre-colonial and colonial hunter-gatherer and farmer communities. This more complex approach guided the work of scholars such as John Parkington, Andy Smith, Carmel Schrire, Ed Wilmsen and James Dendow, all of whom played a leading role in the Kalahari revisionist debate.[14] The theoretical concerns that informed the conference were central to the work of historical archaeologists in the Cape, who predominantly explored the impact of the colonial frontier on indigenous communities.[15]

Interaction between newcomers and earlier occupants, however, was not restricted to the colonial frontier, or between southern African hunter-gatherers and farmers. It formed part of a wider process in Africa, described by Igor Kopytoff as the 'African frontier'. For Kopytoff, frontiers were the norm in sub-Saharan Africa and 'African societies over the centuries, would move, reform, disappear, break-up into pieces; the pieces would reassemble and new distinct areas would form; and the channels between them would expand, contract and shift'.[16] These frontiers were places where people could construct desirable social orders. Simon Hall and Ben Smith, in their study of the changing interaction between hunter-gatherers and farmers in the Limpopo basin,[17] were the first to combine Kopytoff's model of the frontier with interaction studies. This approach was later followed by a number of University of the Witwatersrand graduate students.[18]

Settlements and Late Iron Age Migrations', *African Archaeological Review*, 7 (1989), 155–182; T.M.O'C. Maggs, 'Neglected Rock Art: The Rock Engravings of Agriculturist Communities in South Africa', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 50 (1995), 132–142; L. Wadley, 'Changes in the Social Relations of Precolonial Hunter-Gatherers after Agro-Pastoralist Contact: An Example from the Magaliesburg, South Africa', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology,* 15 (1996), 205–217; A. Mazel, 'People Making History: The Last Ten Thousand Years of Hunter-Gatherer Communities in the Thukela Basin' (PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 1988).

13 Hall *et al., Frontiers*.

14 See, for example, J.R. Denbow, 'Congo to Kalahari: Data and Hypotheses about the Political Economy of the Western Stream of the Early Iron Age', *African Archaeological Review*, 8 (1990), 139–175; E.N. Wilmsen and J.R. Denbow, 'Paradigmatic History of San-speaking Peoples and Current Attempts at Revision', *Current Anthropology*, 31, 5 (1990), 489–524; A.B. Smith, 'Ethnohistory and Archaeology of the Ju/'hoansi Bushmen', *African Study Monographs*, Suppl. 26 (2001), 15–25; A. Barnard, *Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); C. Schrire, 'The Archaeological Identity of Hunters and Herders at the Cape over the last 2000 Years: A Critique', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 47 (1992), 62–64; K. Sadr, 'Kalahari Archaeology and the Bushman Debate', *Current Anthropology*, 38 (1998), 104–112.

15 M. Hall, 'At the Frontier: Some Arguments against Hunter-Gatherer and Farming Modes of Production in Southern Africa', in T. Ingold, D. Riches and I. Woodburn, eds, *Hunters and Gatherers: History, Evolution and Social Change* (Oxford: Berg, 1988), 137–147; C. Schrire, 'The Historical Archaeology of the Impact of Colonialism in 17th Century South Africa', Antiquity, 62 (1988), 214–225; C. Schrire, *Digging through Darkness: Chronicles of an Archaeologist* (Richmond: Indiana University Press, 1995).

16 Kopytoff, *The African Frontier*, 12.

17 S. Hall and B.W. Smith, 'Empowering Places: Rock Shelters and Ritual Control in Farmer-Forager Interactions in the Northern Province', *South African Archaeological Society Goodwin Series 8* (Cape Town: South African Archaeological Society, 2000), 30–46.

18 B.L. van Doornum, 'Changing Places, Spaces and Identity in the Shashe-Limpopo Region of Limpopo Province, South Africa' (PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2005); B.L. van Doornum, 'Tshisiku Shelter and the Shashe-Limpopo Confluence Area Hunter-Gatherer Sequence', *Southern African Humanities*, 19 (2007), 17–67; B.L. van Doornum, 'Sheltered from Change: Hunter-Gatherer Occupation of Balerno Main Shelter, Shashe-Limpopo Confluence Area, South Africa', *Southern African Humanities*, 20 (2008), 249–284; J. Smith, 'Climate Change and Agropastoral Sustainability in the Shashe/Limpopo River Basin from AD 900' (PhD the-

J.A. Calabrese, for instance, extended the African frontier model to the interaction between different farming communities.[19]

The processes that underlay Kopytoff's model are based on historic data from a number of locations in Africa where communities from different origins interacted to shape a new society. This provides the theoretical basis for the FYI projects which aim to identify past regional linkages. These connections leave traces in material culture, which are potent indicators of connections between regions, whether trade and/or exchange based. Therefore, objects are witnesses to the past, containing information about their history of production, distribution and consumption. The derived information is in many ways not recoverable through historical texts. The most obvious indicators of linkages are objects, for example ceramics and metal, made in one place but recovered from another region. Through material analyses of archaeological material important provenance information is obtained, which is critical in reconstructing past technologies as well as trade and exchange relationships. The recovery of high zinc brasses in one region of northern Zimbabwe revealed that metal used in production was also imported into southern Africa. This discovery is contrary to popular beliefs that the region only exported metal.

Material analyses of pottery, metal, beads and domestic animal bones also can unlock vital information on regional interaction and resource procurement, utilisation and manufacture. For example, chemical analyses of local pottery from Smelterskop, a large pre-colonial tin-smelting village situated in Rooiberg about 100 kilometres from Rustenburg, has revealed that while some pottery was made locally, others were made far away from Smelterskop.[20] This could indicate the movement of people from different areas into and out of Smelterskop, but also revealed possible trade and exchange relationships. Similarly, Simon Hall and Mike Grant documented the existence of ceramics from different areas at Mabotse in the Waterberg.[21] Metal objects hold similar clues: for example, copper ingots, known as the *lerale* and *musuku*, are found in the northern frontier and Mpumalanga. They were used as currency in trade and exchange relationships, and originated from places such as Phalaborwa and Musina. Their presence in areas where copper was not being produced indicates trade and exchange relationships in the past.

Clearly it would be a folly to exclude written texts from material culture studies. They narrate well-resolved details, which cannot be recovered archaeologically. For example, historical accounts allude to the existence of trade in 'white iron' – perhaps tin – in northern South Africa

sis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2006); A.B. Esterhuysen, 'Let the Ancestors Speak: An Archaeological Excavation and Re-Evaluation of Events Prior and Pertaining to the 1854 Siege Mugombane, Limpopo Province, South Africa' (PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2006); M.H. Schoeman, 'Clouding Power? Rain-Control, Space, Landscapes and Ideology in Shashe-Limpopo State Formation' (PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2006); M.H. Schoeman, 'Imagining Rain-Places: Rain-Control and Changing Ritual Landscapes in the Shashe-Limpopo Confluence Area, South Africa', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 61, 184 (2006), 152–165.

19 J.A. Calabrese, 'Interregional Interaction in Southern Africa: Zhizo and Leopard's Kopje Relations in Northern South Africa, Southwestern Zimbabwe, and Eastern Botswana, AD 1000 to 1200', *African Archaeological Review*, 17, 4 (2000), 183–210; J.A. Calabrese, 'Ethnicity, Class, and Polity: The Emergence of Social and Political Complexity in the Shashi-Limpopo Valley of Southern Africa, AD 900 to 1300' (PhD thesis. University of the Witwatersrand, 2005).

20 S. Chirikure, R.B. Heimann and D. Killick, 'The Technology of Tin Smelting in the Rooiberg Valley, Limpopo Province, South Africa, ca. 1650–1850 CE', *Journal of Archaeological Science*, forthcoming.

21 S. Hall and M. Grant, 'Indigenous Ceramic Production in the Context of the Colonial Frontier in the Transvaal, South Africa', in P. Vincenzini, ed., *Proceedings of the 8th CIMTEC: The Ceramics Cultural Heritage* (Techna srl: Faenza, 1995), 465–473.

and adjacent areas of Botswana.[22] These accounts help to trace networks that could in turn be tested archaeologically.

This example underscores the need for objects and texts to be treated as complimentary and not as ends in themselves. Indeed, the FYI has sought to use this approach to demonstrate cross-regional contacts. A number of papers at the 'Continuing Conversations on the Frontier' conference argued for a new engagement with frontiers, through the combined use of archaeology, the archive, oral histories and vernacular manuscripts. It was repeatedly argued at the conference that this approach could result in a productive engagement between historians and archaeologists that in turn could shape a new methodology that would deepen the understanding of archaeological sites and historical texts, thus bringing to life pre-colonial African society and shedding light on identity, social relationships and technologies.

In her article that follows, Shelona Klatzow explores such interaction on the frontier in the Free State. Her study expands the focus of hunter-gatherer/farmer frontier studies to the colonial period. Through this, she contributes to a new understanding of the range of complex social and political processes between hunter-gatherers and Bantu-speaking farmers in the eastern Free State during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Her new insights were gained through a combination of the archaeological material from De Hoop cave, which includes lithics, Sotho-speaking farmer ceramics, colonial artefacts and botanical remains, with historical sources to suggest that the hunter-gatherers and farmers continually renegotiated their relationships during the early 1800s. Relationships ranged from clientship to merged communities of San and Sotho-speakers. These long-term relationships also ensured that the San allowed Sotho farmers to use the cave as a refuge. But these relationships were ended by the advancing colonial frontier and, as in many other areas in South Africa, the Platberg people lost their independence and land after 1869 in compliance with the Treaty of Aliwal North.

Disciplinary Challenges

New insights are not only reliant on new data. Hence, it is equally important to expose our methodologies and processes of gaining understanding. This is seen in Ann Stahl's article, where she explores the metaphorical routes and roots of archaeological research and examines the core challenges facing archaeologists – writing historical narratives that also attend to cultural practices and processes. Particularly profitable for Stahl is Paul Gilroy's concept of route work, which she contrasts with the past we study – the root. She argues that accounts are enriched when scholars engage with the past (root) as well as processes (routes) through which the past was made known. This route work and methodological reflection open the way for dialogue across disciplinary and intellectual boundaries. The route, however, also is part of the root, because historical knowledge is as much about the past as it is about how we come to know.

Stahl points out that in post-colonial Africa interdisciplinary research was central in transcending the limitations of documentary history. In the late twentieth century, a new set of epistemological premises started to influence interdisciplinary research. Central was that history is not a stable entity. Consequently, research explored the making of objects, history and society

22 S. Hall, D. Miller, M. Anderson and J. Boeyens, 'An Exploratory Study of Copper and Iron Production at Marothodi, an Early 19th Century Tswana Town, Rustenburg District, South Africa', *Journal of African Archaeology*, 4 (2006), 3–35.

as well as their re-making through writing. The same challenges face FYI, and can be addressed through analytical and methodological shifts. Foremost is refiguring analytical metaphors, for these open new ways of thinking.

The need to incorporate a reflexive consideration of context and process in history writing is echoed in John Wright's article. Wright argues that the understanding of the making of history in colonial societies has been incomplete because of the failure to grapple with the making of histories in pre-colonial societies. He advocates a methodological shift that would make it possible to gain insights into history making in pre-colonial societies. In the new methodology, documents are not just used to find 'data' about the past spoken (Stahl's root work), but they are also employed to gather information about the significance of information for individual narrators (Stahl's route work).

These insights are possible because Wright views oral histories as dynamic and fluid constructs of historical knowledge based on 'often conflicting commentaries' from a range of people in society. This is reflected in the colonial texts he examines. These contain information on how writers in the colonial period constituted histories and pre-colonial societies as well as how societies constructed histories. Some of this information is encoded in the nature of the texts and how circumstances of their production shaped their meanings.

Conclusion: Exploring the Boundaries between Texts and Objects at the Frontiers

In southern Africa, disciplinary practices created boundaries, but current conversations are fashioning an interstitial space, where interdisciplinary research is generating new insights into the past. In this respect, these are the first tentative conversations. Beginning with the use of analytical metaphors and the call for a greater conversation between the pre-colonial, colonial and the contemporary should open opportunities for collaborative work across the disciplines.

As the FYI matures, it will enlarge its geographical coverage by including other parts of southern Africa. So far, the emphasis has been mainly on South Africa. As such, there is need to encourage scholars from countries such as Zambia, Mozambique and Namibia to join the group and thus expand our frontier(s), and recognise influences and interactions beyond the South African borders. In addition to increasing the geographic reach of the conversation and the 'frontier', we should draw on other successful projects, such as Stahl's West African research programmes.

Locating events in time is also an important aspect of the FYI. Often, it is assumed that events that took place in the last five hundred years are easy to date. Here the opposite is true. From an archaeological context, radiocarbon dating – the main dating method – cannot be reliably applied to the last 500 years. Consequently, FYI is exploring alternative dating methods such as luminescence dating and the use of historically dateable imports. These methods are being used to date key sites and to develop a well-resolved chronology for the period stretching from 1500 to about 1900. These 'scientific' sequences can then engage with the historical chronologies, obtained through techniques such as genealogies, to date events. This, however, is not uncomplicated either, and historians and archaeologists must consider ways of addressing problems such as telescoping that can bedevil the utility of text and oral traditions as dating mechanisms.

Furthermore, for the conversation to be an enriching dialogue, we need more familiarity with the language of the respective disciplines. With the insights we draw from such an approach, we will be able to pose new questions or look at old ones from different perspectives. It is important

for historians to unlearn habits whereby archaeology is useful mainly as a source to corroborate what we already know. Nor can archaeologists be content simply to use some favoured terms and concepts in history or anthropology. As we continue our conservation about the frontiers, we need to explore and cross boundaries between archaeologists and historians as well as those between texts and objects, and thereby demonstrate co-operation between us as researchers of the past. Doing so will lead to a more dynamic understanding of the past.

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