

From Archaeology to Archaeologies: The 'Other' Past

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A CLASH OF IDEOLOGIES: ZIMBABWEAN ARCHAEOLOGY AT THE FRINGE

Paul Hubbard, Robert S. Burrett

Abstract

The debate regarding the origins and development of the Zimbabwe Culture dramatically shaped archaeological practice in southern Africa. Like many fringe archaeologies, the debates have advocated a state of worldwide archaeological, cultural and governmental conspiracy to keep the 'truth' hidden. The flimsiest of 'evidence' has been invoked to deny the fact that the ruins are the product of an indigenous African society. Few of the authors have been professional archaeologists or historians, but all have challenged professional findings and conclusions. This paper will identify the main actors, their ideas and their intended audience. The proponents identify themselves through established national symbols, drawn from a global context, that mean different things to different people. The agendas behind the representation and edification of some pasts and not others will be explored in a southern African context. Finally the relevance of such a debate to current archaeological practice in Zimbabwe will be evaluated.

Keywords: Great Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Controversy, race

Finally to those others, too many to enumerate, who helped us in sundry ways, I tender our thanks, not least among them those unknown correspondents of lively imagination, whose letters of advice now lie filed under the heading INSANE

(Caton-Thompson 1931,viii)

This... is typical of the propaganda of this school of thought which, while deficient of real scientific scholarship, calls itself scientific and denounces its opponents as persons without scientific qualifications

(Gayre 1972, 220)

Introduction

Zimbabwe has one of the oldest traditions of archaeological research in sub-Saharan Africa, no doubt spurred on by the presence of hundreds of apparently enigmatic stone-built structures located within its borders. These structures, known locally as *madzimbahwe*, have fired the imagination of generations of visitors and researchers alike, encouraging attempts to discover the origins, development and demise of the culture behind their creation. Unfortunately this debate, at times heated and intense, has become one of the parables of world archaeology about the use and abuse of the past in order to justify certain political, social and ethnic stances. In the modern era, this discussion has

become strictly polarised between mainstream archaeologists on the one hand, and on the other a so-called popular 'fringe'. Proponents of either side remain antagonistic and effectively incommunicative.

At the onset it is important to stress that as archaeologists, we are convinced of the autochthonous origin of the Zimbabwe Culture. In this paper, we seek to understand the factors that have conditioned interpretations and fostered the inharmonious relations between academic practitioners and those in the broader public sphere with their own theories. An understanding of this may go some way toward building bridges and formulating a genuine public archaeology, something more than the well-meaning, but in our local case rarely witnessed, practical intersection of heritage management and academic discourse.

How to define fringe? Zimbabwean Perspectives

One could begin, rather facetiously, by stating that technically archaeology is a fringe discipline in Africa, introduced as an integral part of the colonial process (cf. Robertshaw 1990; Shepherd 2002). In Africa, particularly in Zimbabwe, archaeology remains a largely academic subject, sequestered in the secure precincts of universities and museums, but viewed with great suspicion by the general public, for whom it purports to work (Pwiti 1996). We could then argue that to the people of Zimbabwe archaeology is at the 'fringe' of their daily lives, educational experiences and entertainments. Recent developments in the discipline in southern Africa are attempting to transform the subject into a more relevant, engaging and holistic discipline (e.g. Chirikure and Pwiti 2008), although there is still a long way to go; statements of 'public archaeology' are often more rhetoric than real engagement.

Archaeology, defined here as the study of the human past through analysis and interpretation of material culture, is a diverse discipline. This allows a multitude of different viewpoints and specialisations to flourish, although there is usually a commonality of approach grounded in the origins of the discipline (Bahn 1996), as well as in shared theory and practice. We refer to this as 'mainstream' archaeology. Most fringe or alternative archaeologies stress this commonality, placing themselves on, or being pushed to, the boundaries of what is seen as 'acceptable academic practice'. Who defines what is acceptable (or accepted) is another matter. In Zimbabwe, archaeologists have set the rules, placing those not supportive of their ideas, data and theories into the category of the 'other' (e.g. Caton-Thompson 1931; Garlake 1973, 1982a; Randall-MacIver 1906b; Summers 1965).

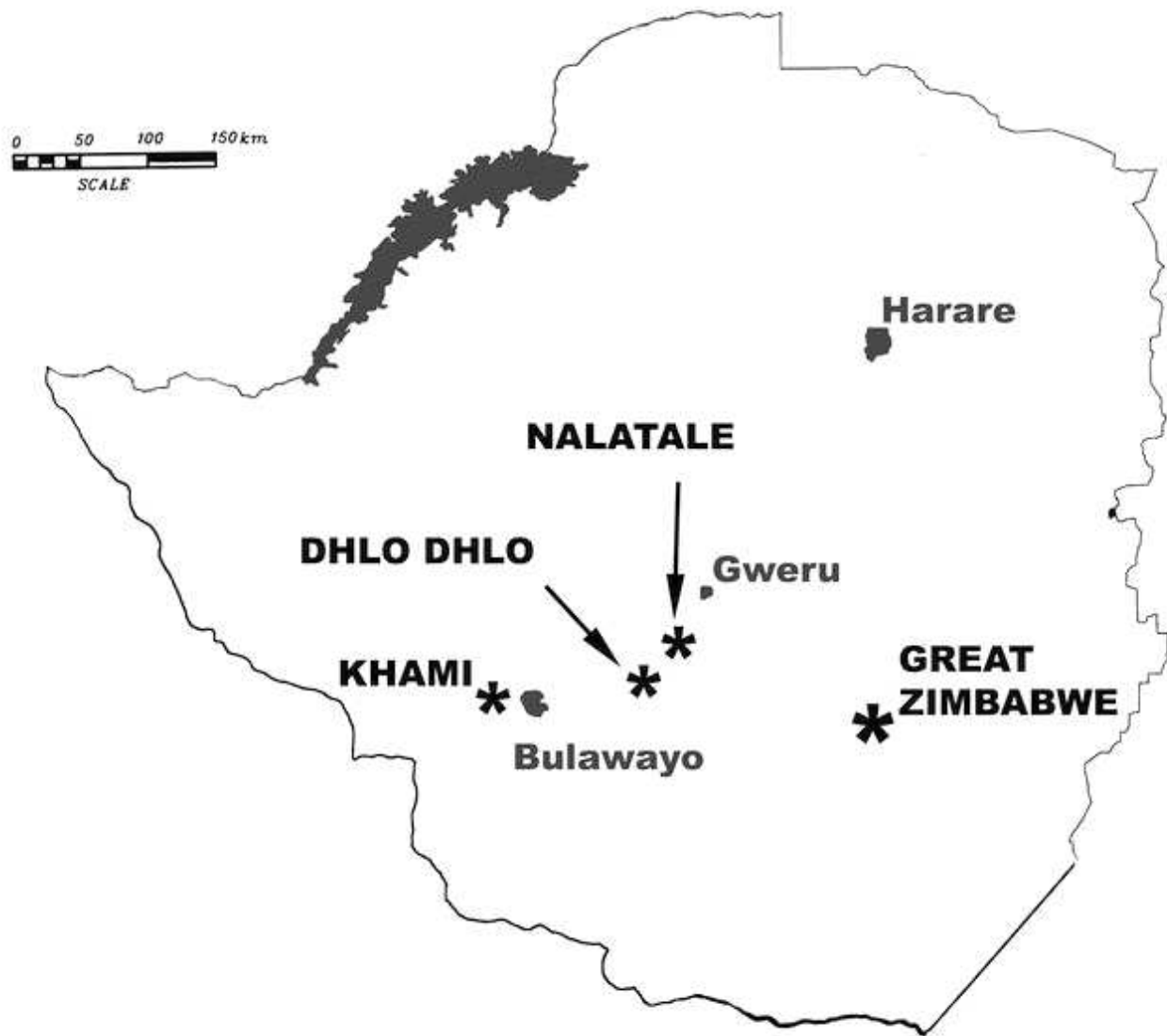


Figure 5.1: Map of Zimbabwe, indicating the location of the site of Great Zimbabwe.
Map by the authors.

We argue that the very concept of the fringe in Zimbabwean archaeology has itself changed considerably over the years, alternating between various camps anchored on their beliefs about the Zimbabwe Culture. This mirrors who controls and is the loudest in the debate, reflecting in turn changing extra-archaeological socio-political dominance. Colonisation, liberation politics, and nationalism have all played a prominent role in the changing entity that is archaeology and its fringe. In more recent times, most archaeologists would argue that the fringe has become easier to define (and thus condemn), given the racial polarisation of the discussion on Great Zimbabwe and its associated sites. We argue that while this may be true, a simple reactionary denunciation of the fringe and a refusal by academics to engage in public debate with alternative views (usually simply ignoring them), has the unwanted consequences of alienating a large portion of our audience (Holtorf 2005) thus exacerbating the gap. This

has, in part, allowed for the continued promulgation and acceptance of inaccurate ideas about the history of Zimbabwe, by successive governments and their supporters. It also misses the opportunity of self-reflection within the discipline. Mere dismissal of 'the other,' the fringe, has had the effect of obscuring and neutralising the nuances of other people's beliefs and our understanding of the construction and practice of archaeology in the country, as well as the dissemination (or lack thereof) of its results.

The Zimbabwe Culture in Zimbabwean Historiography

The Zimbabwe Tradition as a whole falls within the period commonly defined as the Iron Age, an era when the new technologies of semi-permanent residence, agro-pastoralism and metal working became dominant in the subcontinent, starting around 2000 years ago (Huffman

2007). The Zimbabwe Tradition is associated with the development of socio-cultural complexity and state formation in southern Africa. Its more prominent elite sites consist of stone-built enclosures occurring in a variety of sizes and styles, dating from the 12th to the 18th centuries CE. Over 200 such sites are known in southern Africa and of these Great Zimbabwe is the largest and most impressive. Successive studies have shown that the walls were a highly visible symbol of power and prestige for the ruling elite who lived behind them (cf. Huffman 1996; Pikirayi 2001).

Great Zimbabwe has effectively dominated the country's archaeological literature. A recent bibliography of Zimbabwean archaeology (Hubbard 2007b) revealed that of the 1920 publications on the Iron Age of Zimbabwe, 468 were on the site of Great Zimbabwe alone, compared to 272 on all the other ruins combined. The basis for this dominance in the country's historiography revolves entirely around the debate and discussion on the origins, date and function of this single site; a phenomenon often referred to as the Zimbabwe Controversy (Chanaiwa 1973). Succinctly, the debate pits those who perceive great antiquity and exotic origin against those who believe in a local derivation and a comparatively recent date (cf. M. Hall 1984; 1990; Kuklick 1991; Mahachi and Ndoro 1997; Summers 1965). The latter is today defined as mainstream archaeology but this has not always been the case.

Genesis: discovery and myth-making about the Zimbabwe Culture

From their 'discovery' in 1871 by the German explorer Karl Mauch (Burke 1969; the ruins of course were well-known to the local people) the ruins of Great Zimbabwe have captured the imagination of various writers, each espousing their own opinions. Mauch's publications elicited immediate global interest given his claim to have found the palace of the mythical Queen of Sheba, immortalised in the Bible as the consort of King Solomon. He was not the first to make this claim. He was drawing on earlier Arabic and Portuguese legends about the interior and was influenced by several well-read missionaries, primarily Reverend A. Merensky of the Berlin Missionary Society (Burke 1969; Burrett 2008; Huffman 1976). Mauch's ideas were not widely accepted by the academic establishment, yet they gained immediate and widespread popular acceptance due to skilful manipulation of the press by his sponsor, German nationalist Dr A. Petermann (Barnard 1971; Burrett 2008). The varied reactions to Mauch's reports triggered the current divided attitudes and speculative ideas about the site's history.

In 1891 the Middle Eastern antiquarian Theodore Bent arrived at Great Zimbabwe, tasked by British empire-builder Cecil John Rhodes to ascertain the identity of the builders and the age of the structures. Although he began his research with preconceived ideas about a foreign influence, Bent's initial investigations convinced him

that everything was of local origin (Braddock 1999, 39; Garlake 1973, 66). What later changed his mind (and quite possibly the course of Zimbabwean archaeology) was his examination of the soapstone Zimbabwe Birds that, to his mind resembled Phoenician sculptures rather than anything African (Bent 1896, 180-191). The influence of his sponsor can also not be discounted since Rhodes was known to prefer a foreign origin for the ruins (Brown-Lowe 2003). Bent narrowly selected a variety of artefacts and attributes from the site and, through superficial comparison to apparently 'similar' items from the Classical World, concluded that the culture was Egypto-Arabian with a distinct Phoenician influence (Bent 1896).

A significant portion of the white settler community hailed Bent's conclusions. He listened to local knowledge and heeded racially-motivated settler opinion in setting out his final conclusions. This work is still one of the most significant published on Great Zimbabwe, not only for the large amount of primary data it contains, but because it provided the very basis on which almost all of the subsequent fringe writers rest their assumptions (e.g. Brown-Lowe 2003; Bruwer 1965; R. Hall 1905, 1909; Hall and Neal 1904; Willoughby 1893). Although now defined as fringe, in his time Bent's conclusions were mainstream, given the colonial mentality that dominated the discipline and the fact that he was a 'professional'.

The first curator of Great Zimbabwe, journalist Richard N. Hall, undertook the next major excavations. He was employed by Rhodes largely because of his co-authored book on the numerous ruins of the country, a body of data collected by treasure hunters operating under the auspices of the Rhodesia Ancient Ruins Ltd (Hall and Neal 1904). Hall's duty as curator was to ensure the preservation of the buildings but he went further by removing not only vegetation, fallen stones and spoil heaps, but a large proportion of stratified archaeological deposits to the detriment of subsequent archaeological studies (Garlake 1973, 72-73). Although Hall was removed from office in 1904, his later publications played a significant part in promoting and popularising the myth that Great Zimbabwe was the product of a foreign civilisation (Hall 1905; 1909). He was a popular figure who challenged the 'professionals', thus comprehensively defining the divide between fringe and mainstream.

Academics united: the controversy takes shape

It was the heated debate between Richard Hall and a British archaeologist, David Randall-MacIver that initiated the 'Zimbabwe Controversy' (Summers 1971, 230). The British Association for the Advancement of Science and the Rhodes Trust sent Randall-MacIver to Rhodesia to investigate the stone ruins of the country and prepare a report for the 1905 meeting of the Association (Randall-MacIver 1906b). 'As the first trained archaeologist to visit the ruins, Randall-MacIver came to

southern Africa prepared to ridicule the amateur methods of his predecessors, and to lament the damage they and others had done in ignorance' (Kuklick 1991, 144). Peter Garlake (1973, 78) claims that it was Randall-MacIver's results that effectively polarised opinion on Great Zimbabwe creating settler disdain for the 'overseas expert'. More than this, we would argue that it was his often high-handed attitude towards the white Settlers, as exemplified in Kuklick's above quote, which hardened public opinion against ideas of a local origin for the culture. As he said in an address to the Geographical Society, 'it is... entirely an archaeological question' (Randall-MacIver 1906a, 325), thereby dismissing out of hand all alternative, speculative ideas without engaging with the pseudo-facts. The 'others', who did not agree with him, were marginalised. It became a clash between personalities and national identities rather than a quest to study this fascinating precolonial civilisation.

Why was it so important to local Rhodesian settler society that a foreign civilisation be responsible for the ruins' origin? It is generally agreed that ideas about European racial superiority and the need to justify the (re)colonisation of the country were important factors (Garlake 1973; 1982a; Mahachi and Ndoro 1997; Shepherd 2002). The Europeans and South Africans (who were to become Rhodesians) had to claim a precedent in the form of some ancestral antiquity for their right to occupy the African territories south of the Zambezi and assigning a foreign authorship for the ruins seemed a perfect solution. Randall-MacIver's conclusions that the ruins were actually the product of the ancestors of the local Shona people directly threatened one of the central tenets of the formative settler psyche that considered that 'their natives' were incapable of such achievements. Thus the fringe was set up against mainstream academia.

Hall's (1909) swan song on the Zimbabwe Culture, *Prehistoric Rhodesia*, is largely a point-by-point rebuttal of Randall-MacIver's (1906b) conclusions. A convoluted and aggressive book, it offered little new archaeological or historical evidence. It has been described as 'a moral tale justifying the establishment of white settler society in southern Africa... a tale consistent with the settler belief that Africans had no clear title to land either by virtue of long occupation or capacity to use natural resources productively' (Kuklick 1991, 146). Hall's work set the tone for all future discussion, or more correctly lack of discussion, between the academic establishment (usually perceived of as under the influence of foreign, liberal tendencies) and the Rhodesian Settlers, who had their own ideas about the site and culture. Hall's combative stance brought a great deal of unnecessary emotion to the argument, dividing the debate into a sharply defined 'them and us' scenario.

Hall's (1909) book was possibly the first, certainly the most well read, publication to explicitly state that black people could not have constructed the buildings due to their alleged racial inferiority (Hall 1909, 10-14). 'Since

Hall's time [racial theories] have continued to be used often to prejudice and negate any contrary archaeological evidence' (Garlake 1973, 79). Race has been the one common factor that unifies a century of what we now call the fringe literature on Great Zimbabwe.

Cries of the right: overt racist ideas and Rhodesian politics

The 'winds of change' that blew across Africa in the 1960s, toppling colonial governments, were strongly resisted in the south of the continent. This was due mainly to the presence of large white Settler populations unwilling to relinquish their political control as well as the lack of any unified opposition (Martin and Johnson 1981). Martin Hall (1990, 65-67) has mapped the change in the Rhodesian State's attitude from promoting a 'partnership' between races and creation of a black middle class to increasing resistance against the growing demands of Black Nationalists (cf. Keatley 1963). The Rhodesian Front, a hard-core white nationalist party, won the limited franchise (white only) elections in 1962, later breaking from Britain in 1965 with the so-called Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI). This launched Rhodesia into a 15-year crisis, the latter part characterised by a bitter civil war that ended with independence in 1980.

The publications considered in this section are all overtly political in nature by virtue of their aims and conclusions. Inspired largely as a reaction to the Pan-Africanist independence rhetoric of the time, these Rhodesian, fringe publications sought to actively portray Great Zimbabwe and associated sites as the product of some lost civilisation later destroyed by rampaging African tribes or through the 'weaknesses' brought about by miscegenation. Such books are still being produced (e.g. Brown-Lowe 2003) and they serve more as a moral tale about the 'decline' of white occupation and identity rather than any serious attempt at historical enquiry.

Dedicated to the then-Rhodesian Prime Minister, Ian D. Smith, A.J. Bruwer's (1965) book is a curious mishmash of archaeological fact and fantasy. He drew widely from separate, completely un-associated cultures from across the world, in an attempt to prove that Great Zimbabwe was built by the Phoenicians as part of their struggle with the Greeks over the control of the Mediterranean. Like many fringe writers, Bruwer is dismissive of the aims and methods of academic archaeology: 'I am writing this book not because I am an archaeologist; it is bad enough to be an economist. Anybody, qualified or unqualified, can set up as either the one or the other and nobody seems to be any the wiser for it' (Bruwer 1965, xvii). Bruwer is clearly anti-academia and is explicit in defending his racist departure from orthodoxy. He revels in being on the fringe. This must have been a particularly attractive stance to his readership given that the book appeared in the same year as UDI, a time when white Rhodesians were feeling persecuted and rejected by the outside world due to the imposition of sanctions and loud

denunciations of UDI. His whole book is an attack on what he characterises as a largely foreign-based scholarship on the Zimbabwe Culture and reflects the widespread feelings of this time.

Describing a trio of archaeological personalities he met during his researches, Bruwer (1965, xviii) claims the 'politico-archaeologist' is directly responsible for the 'myth' of local origins for the ruins and he sets himself the task of revealing the actual 'truth' about the ancient culture. Like most fringe authors, he dismisses most of the archaeological data as irrelevant to the question of its origins, although unlike other writers he does appear to have read most of the contemporary literature. One reviewer justifiably claimed, 'The author espouses the cause of a Phoenician origin for Zimbabwe and pleads his case with flamboyant allusion, and classic polemic. [The book] is a magnificent parody on archaeological research. The only trouble is that the author takes himself seriously' (Fagan 1970, 321). In common with other writers discussed in this section, Bruwer places himself on the fringe of archaeological consensus in order to score political points with his target audience; in this case, the majority of white Rhodesian society. The fact that scholars did not publicly contest Bruwer's conclusions, instead preferring to limit their discussion to academic arenas, resulted in such fringe claims enjoying wide public support.

By the 1970s, the issue of the authorship of Great Zimbabwe had become increasingly politicised. In part this was due to the intensification of the civil war that led the government to increase its suppression of conflicting points of view in order to maintain its tenuous control over the population (Martin and Johnson 1981; Moorcroft 1980). Archaeology was not immune. 'Scientific and scholarly enquiry were taken hostage as the diffusionist myths and hypotheses were mobilised in the ideological and psychological armoury of white supremacy' (Swanson 2001, 304). Other than the direct censorship of displays and guidebooks (cf. Frederikse 1982, 10-12; Garlake 1982a; but see Cooke 1974 for a denial), this ideology manifested itself most clearly in the form of *The Origin of the Zimbabwean Civilisation* by Lord Robert Gayre of Gayre (1972), a sustained polemic against the idea that local blacks could have been responsible for the Zimbabwe Culture. Gayre had seemingly impressive academic credentials having trained as an archaeologist and anthropologist and having acquired professorial status before writing his book. Yet he attacked the most basic tenets of archaeology, more especially radiocarbon dating and interpretation of stratigraphy, dismissing all such evidence. Like Bruwer, Gayre presents most professional archaeologists of his 'Bantu school' as self-important and under-informed; '[o]ne good thing these distortions may have achieved, as the true facts of Zimbabwe come to be recognised, is the dethronement of the pundits who too frequently in our times have arrogantly dominated the scene' (Gayre 1972, 221). Again, the common thread is the need to challenge the supposed arrogance of the

academic establishment, as well as to provide historical moral support for current politics.

Due to the intense government interest in the archaeology of the Zimbabwe Culture, local archaeologists began to retreat into the burgeoning scientific esotericism that was to be the hallmark of the 'New Archaeology' (Johnson 1999), compared to the emphasis on culture history that largely characterised studies before the 1950s. As Roger Summers (1965, 37) neatly summarised it, 'the issue is... between antiquarianism, based on the library and the cabinet of curiosities, and scientific archaeology, based on field studies and the laboratory; between the amateur and the professional'. Summers and other local and international authors stressed the primacy of science in most of their publications on Great Zimbabwe, trying and failing to reconcile the opposing camps. Archaeological data was sanitised, in part by the overuse of jargon and sterile nomenclature (e.g. Robinson 1961).

Additionally, many professional archaeologists in Rhodesia often chose to omit or downplay controversial information within publications aimed at the general public, rather than become enmeshed in ugly public debates (e.g. Cooke 1971; Huffman 1976). In Rhodesia and now Zimbabwe – and this is a loose characterisation – the mainstream has been propounded and supported by those working for State institutions, namely the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe, and more recently the University of Zimbabwe. It was no easy path for archaeologists working on the Iron Age in the 1970s as the majority of popular white opinion was against them. Most archaeologists active at the time have been taken to task for alienating the general population (ironically both black and white) from contributing their ideas and feelings through presenting archaeology as an unnecessarily complicated and dry discipline (Garlake 1982a). It would have been difficult to buck the trend, as it were, for fear of losing one's job or even worse being deported from the country – as happened to Peter Garlake in the early 1970s.

One of the latest additions to racist fringe literature is by journalist and former Rhodesian radio personality Robin Brown-Lowe (2003). Written during a time of great political and social upheaval in post-independent Zimbabwe, the book is an unwelcome return to the 'antiquarian pastiche' (Wheeler 1973, 7) of the nineteenth century. 'The audience for the book may safely be assumed to be the white Rhodesians scattered about the world as shown by the frequent digressions into more recent Pioneer history and the pandering to extrinsic origins ideas that were a hallmark of the Smith minority government' (Hubbard 2007a). Brown-Lowe (2003, vii-xv) states that he has liberal views about the 'natives' of the country but in the interests of an imagined 'Truth' he cannot believe that the local populations had anything to do with the genesis and development of Great Zimbabwe.

Brown-Lowe is of the opinion that an 'alien influence' is clearly visible in the architecture and building styles at Great Zimbabwe. He argues that certain structures, such as the sinuously curved doorways, were built for aesthetic purposes only; this was supposedly a trait the local Shona were only able to develop with outside influence. He subtly reinforces this idea with reference to the art school of Frank McEwen and the evolution of contemporary Shona sculpture in a manner that completely fails to understand the development of this art form. Brown-Lowe attributes authorship to the Lemba community of southern Africa. This privileged, supposedly alien-influenced artistic class is identified on the basis of their supposedly uncharacteristic dietary preferences and a limited number of cultural traits (Brown-Lowe 2003, 227-246). This conclusion, first proposed by von Sicard (1952), was revived by Mullan (1969), later partially endorsed by Gayre (1972) and advocated today by Tudor Parfitt (2008) and Richard Wade (2009), respectively Professor of Modern Jewish Studies at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and a freelance astronomer of dubious credentials. It seems that if one (of the racist school) has to accept a partial local origin it is always *another* minority group with supposed racial superiority, the result of interbreeding with external parties. In the case of the Lemba this would probably be European, Arab or Asian but certainly they could not be defined as pure African.

Clearly these authors have difficulty in accepting the evidence; both with the African nationalist politicians as well as academics whom they often claim have worked hand in hand with these politicians to hide an alleged exotic truth. For example, Brown-Lowe presents himself as a persecuted seeker of the 'real' story behind the ruins, claiming a conspiracy amongst liberals who do not understand the 'real Africa' and its history. We hope to have shown how such publications mirror political events.

Kooky or crazy? Alternative scenarios in recent times

In addition to the racist perspectives, other fringe groups exist. While some authors have dismissed them as premeditated political attempts to deny or obscure the truth (e.g. Hall and Borland 1982; Phillipson 1986; Pikirayi 2001), we argue there is a little more to it. We need to avoid tarring all fringe works with the same political brush. These authors are not necessarily denying an African origin, but are often seeking to explore alternatives to the official narrative. Sadly they are rarely engaged by academics and their somewhat irregular conjectures have gone unchallenged. Consequently, they often attract popular interest, as people have not been offered an alternative view with the same level of broad appeal, but from a more staid (and thus academic?) angle. Called the 'New Revisionism' (Pikirayi 2001, 23), these fringe publications are often attempts to relate the Zimbabwe Culture to the larger global picture articulating their own personal interests. Facts are

distorted not because of explicit racism but in order to fit outlandish associations with issues of language, architecture, religion and trade taken out of context as evidence of long-lost civilisations.

Focusing on supposed linguistic evidence but using a variety of sources in many languages, Cyril Hromnik's (1981) conclusions echo those of the German anthropologist Leo Frobenius (1931). The latter, who worked in Southern Africa in the late 1920s, believed in some mythical community, Erythräa, that was said to be of Asian origin that had effectively colonised southern Africa (Frobenius 1931). The crux of Hromnik's (1981) more recent argument is that metalworking and the building of the impressive stone structures of the Zimbabwe Tradition were not of local origin but were introduced and sustained by specialists who came from Asia long before the arrival of the 'Negroid Bantu'. The 'Negroid Bantu became unintended beneficiaries of the technological progress brought to Africa by Indians. They appear to have been drawn into the Iron Age... because their services were needed for the successful functioning of the metal-based industrial enterprise of the Indians' (Hromnik 1981, 86). Hromnik not only dismisses any chance of African input, but argues for social, moral and economic decline once the creators left or disappeared (Hromnik 1981, 22, 131-5). A large part of his book is devoted to attacking 'Africanist' archaeology, claiming that the mainstream interpretations are shaky, based on misguided associations and error and that what was suggested was inspired by current African nationalist and liberation ideology rather than supposed hard data (Hromnik 1981, 18-19). In his work the African is present, but in the background there is a hidden, foreign force that provided the stimulus. Hromnik's work is 'racism soft,' while the narrative is disjointed and eclectic, while it is written with the flair of an accomplished journalist.

An architect, Wilfrid Mallows (1984), discounted any chance of structuralist and symbolic meaning to the ruins, choosing instead to concentrate on his own idiosyncratic code, behind its design. He concluded that Great Zimbabwe was both a treasure house and an entrepôt prison for the slave trade. Smaller ruins around the country, despite only superficial similarities, had the same function although they were subordinate to Great Zimbabwe. Said to be ruled by Asians, Mallows argues that this foreign culture collapsed when a change in the international trading system brought about a greater inter-Asian focus, as well as a slave revolt and the impact of massive environmental degradation. Not surprisingly, Mallows's concerns mirror the major global political issues of the 1980s. His book is mostly free from overt racial prejudice, although, as Hromnik (1986, 99) put it, his ideas and conclusions are 'buried in a story that is almost ridiculous', drawing unfounded conclusions from a mélange of data.

Two other books deserve mention in this section. The first, arrestingly called *Psychic Episodes of Great*

Zimbabwe (Clarkson-Fletcher 1941), describes a set of séances held in the ruins by the author, during which he claims to have contacted the spirits of the original builders and other descendants. Written with dramatic and romantic flair and ‘under the impetus of psychic influence,’ (Clarkson-Fletcher 1941, vi), the author relates the rise and decline of the civilisation in much the same vein as Haggard’s classic *Elissa and the Doom of Zimbabwe* (1900). Clarkson-Fletcher’s tale concludes that the Phoenicians built Great Zimbabwe to control the gold trade. But it was a sad, lonely colonial existence and the Phoenicians committed mass suicide rather than integrate with the local tribes. Not surprisingly, this book has been ignored and has failed to gain mainstream and even fringe attention, although it has been cited by Richard Ganter (2003) as factual proof that the Phoenicians once lived in southern Africa.

Ganter (2003) resurrects the ideas of Richard Swan (1896) and sees the builders of Great Zimbabwe as northerners who worshipped the stars. He firmly identifies these foreigners as the Phoenicians, linking to the Zimbabwe Culture the Biblical stories of a trading journey made by the Phoenicians in alliance with Solomon that came back with several tons of gold and exotic trade goods. Ganter, however, goes a step further and argues for a permanent international trading network established by these intrepid explorers who, while travelling, supposedly created a series of structures to align themselves with their northern homeland. Great Zimbabwe was one of these ‘base stations’, as were the pyramids at Giza, the statues on Easter Island and the temples at Angkor Wat. Ganter uses a complex web of addition and multiplication of various alleged degrees and measurements of significance to produce his supposed evidence of connections and relationships across the globe. The archaeologically known cultures and societies from these various locations are dismissed as mere accidentals, fairly recent intruders who lived on top of the ‘ancient’ sites.

Many of these alternative publications have received widespread public attention but were almost universally ridiculed in academic reviews (e.g. Hall and Borland 1982; Ownby 1981; Phillipson 1986). This reflects the ensuing deep divide in southern African public archaeology. There is almost no direct communication between mainstream professional archaeologists and the fringe authors. The public impression is that academics are unsure of themselves and at the same time withholding something. Unfortunately the failure by regional archaeologists to adequately inform the wider public about their research and findings has contributed directly to the continued resurgences of fringe publications on Great Zimbabwe and archaeology in general. The scholarly community has failed to constructively engage with the fringe, so the public grasps at what information it can get, however improbable.

A new ideology: archaeological research in post independence Zimbabwe

With the Independence in 1980, Zimbabweanist academics hoped that a new era had dawned that would provide a relevant and useful history to the people of the new nation (cf. Garlake 1982a; 1982b; Ushewokunze 1982). This was short-lived optimism. Rhodesian-styled fringe literature has continued to capture the attention of many, sometimes across earlier ethnic divides, but more importantly we have witnessed the emergence of a new Pan-Africanist fringe. A pivotal point was the appointment of the first black curator of Great Zimbabwe, Ken Mufuka. At the time of his appointment, he was Associate Professor of African and Western Civilisation at Lander College, South Carolina. Still a controversial figure to some, Mufuka’s views have changed with time, but we wish to refer to his 1984 contribution to the literature on Great Zimbabwe and the considerable debate that it generated. As a publication, it has to be examined in the context of the euphoria of independence, as well as in terms of his personal motivations.

Fontein (2006, 125-128) describes the ensuing furore in detail, noting that along with Garlake, Mufuka can be classed as the first of the nationalist and revisionist historians of the post-independence era, albeit at opposite ends of the spectrum. Both of their guidebooks for the site appeared roughly at the same time (Garlake 1982b; Mufuka 1983); yet each employed very different sources and came to different conclusions about the life and times of the inhabitants. Both authors rejected negative colonial stereotypes about the site, stressing its African origins to promote pride in Zimbabwe’s past. However, unlike Garlake, Mufuka privileged sketchy oral traditions that he collected from the area, while at the same time embellishing statements that buttressed his romantic and Africanist vision of the past; a veritable paradise lost divorced from all ills that were after all surely only the product of white colonisation! (cf. Beach 1984). The result was a poetic and idealistic story that clearly reflected the socialist mantra espoused by the government of the time.

Unfortunately Mufuka’s book, the epitome of post-independence fringe literature, became the ‘gospel’ at the site (Garlake in Fontein 2006, 127), overshadowing academic works. In a review of the book, Garlake (1984, 123) described it as a great threat to ‘scientific’ research, an ‘atavistic fantasy, grotesque in its exaggerations, [that] entirely replaces reason and logic and if Mufuka has his way, will bring to an end 78 years of scholarly research, albeit always at hazard to other forms of racism’. One should instead consider the context of Mufuka’s book. It was an overt African attempt to contest ‘the progressive alienation of the general population’ (Garlake 1982a, 14) and provided the first home-grown thesis on what had become the country’s most enduring symbol of national unity and pride. This is hinted as much in the introduction to Garlake’s (1982b)

book, in which the then Minister of Home Affairs stated that Zimbabweans need to 'take Great Zimbabwe back from the foreign tourist, settler and expert and restore it to our people - to put them first' (Ushewokunze 1982, 4). This sentiment has become increasingly expressed in Zimbabwe as the new socio-political elite sought to redefine the past to bolster their own place in that past and to legitimise their current activities. It is a phenomenon that Terence Ranger (2004) has described as 'Patriotic History' when referring to the Zimbabwe version of nationalist history.

Aeneas Chigwedere's work has always been controversial and at the edge of conventional historical sensibilities (Roberts 1999). His writings span the whole gamut of Zimbabwe's political changes (Chigwedere 1980; 1982; 1985; 1998; 2001). His earliest works are part of the broader Black Nationalist historiography that aimed at placing the history of black Africa on equal footing with that of the rest of the world (Ranger 2004). Locally trained Zimbabwean archaeologists including Mahachi and Ndoro (1997), Matenga (1998), Ndoro (2001), Pikirayi (2001), Pwiti (1997) and Sinamai (1998) ignored his earlier work in their own publications on the Zimbabwean Culture, perhaps reflecting their disdain for his unsubstantiated conclusions, repackaging of old racial philosophy with a Pan-Africanist prejudice and unusual research methodology (such as appealing to the 'spirits of the ancestors'). Ranger (2004, 224-5), however, has somewhat cynically argued that Chigwedere's influence has undergone a considerable revival in Zimbabwe with his appointment as Minister of Education which lasted until fairly recently. This allowed him to ensure that 'his' version of history became the primary discourse in the nation's schools.

Zanu-PF, one of the liberation parties that successfully fought for independence in Zimbabwe, has ruled the country almost continuously since Independence. Currently part of the schema defined as 'Patriotic History' (Ranger 2004), Chigwedere's later publications (1998; 2001) are an overt attempt to write a history that best reflects the 'aspirations' of the formerly Zanu-PF dominated Zimbabwean government. Patriotic history is a complicated phenomenon, reacting to perceived and often imagined 'threats' against Zimbabwe, or more specifically against Zanu-PF, by the West and former White Rhodesians. The government's aim was, and still is, to present a new monolithic view of history that endorsed and praised the continued rule of a Zanu-PF government at the expense of conventional history (Fontein 2006; Ranger 2004). It is thus ironic that, at the turn of the millennium, Zimbabwean history and archaeology found itself again at the fringe of yet another 'new revisionism' (Pikirayi 2001, 23) created by the State to justify contemporary socio-political prerequisites.

Conclusions

In this paper we have focussed on the so-called Zimbabwe Controversy in an attempt to understand the rationale and changing character of fringe interpretations vis-à-vis mainstream archaeology. How the terms 'mainstream' and 'fringe' are defined is subjective. **The exotic origin theories for Great Zimbabwe were 'mainstream' in the nineteenth century. Later these theories were marginalised to the fringe, but they have never disappeared. They remain a substantial part of the public's image of Great Zimbabwe, be it in white racial overtones or black nationalist reactions.** We have shown that questions of ethnic identity, nationalism and social competition can all be blamed to a fair degree for the origin and persistence of these fringe interpretations. **Also influential has been the role of populist political policy adopted by successive governments from Cecil Rhodes, to successive Rhodesian governments with varying views on racial equality to current post-independence struggles for the hearts and minds of the Zimbabwean public.** Academics have failed to become adequately engaged in these debates. Some have sided with the powers that be, but most often they have held back, uncertain of their ability to sway and educate the public and the politicians. Unfortunately several have been overtly confrontational (e.g. Randall-MacIver, Caton-Thompson and Garlake), antagonising and alienating the general public. This has usually generated an anti-academia reaction pushing some into the unquestioning acceptance of fringe interpretations.

But are the public (and politicians) entirely to blame? How much have we as archaeologists sought to popularise our works? Do we in fact publish for anyone other than our in-house peers? Is it comprehensible to the public both in writing style and accessibility? Do we engage the fringe or just ignore them, smirking behind the closed doors of our academic institutions? The old adage of ivory towers unfortunately still dominates southern African archaeology. While there have been many calls for engagement with the public – who often foot the bill for archaeological research through their taxes – these have been largely hollow and unheeded. The oft-cited excuse of being too busy with core research and teaching hides a serious failing in our discipline (cf. Hubbard 2007b).

Zimbabwean archaeology again finds itself at a crossroads. Today fringe theories and unsubstantiated conjecture are again dominating popular imagination. **For some it is harking back to old, disproven racial interpretations that cite exotic and most often European origins, for others it is the selective inclusion and exclusion of facts in order to bolster the socio-economic policies of post-independent Zimbabwe.** Now, more than ever, the discipline needs to reinvent itself, moving from its current place at the *fringe* of Zimbabwean consciousness to become an active participant in the creation of a history meaningful to the nation. This will

only come about if scholars actively engage with fringe authors, but more importantly, with the general public.

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