THE CLAIMED DRAVIDIAN INFLUENCES ON SOUTHERN AFRICAN SOCIETIES: SOME LINGUISTICS PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

This paper provides a reaction to and a discussion of the Hromník (1999) paper presented at the Elandsdoorn, Mpumalanga, South Africa symposium, which was also published in a journal. The paper raised thought-provoking associations of some SePedi vocabulary to the Dravidian languages in an attempt to make a connection between the spiritual practices of the two societies. While the reaction and discussion does not question the methodology employed by Hromník (1999), it critically assesses the validity of the associations between the two societies as well as the conclusions that Hromník (1999) arrives at. The paper notes that these conclusions are based on a very limited and nearly insignificant list of vocabulary items which have not been cross-checked, linguistically or historically. This paper further provides some of the procedures that could help to solicit unbiased socio-cultural data that could shed light on possible interactions between SePedi and Dravidian societies, if any. Finally, the paper calls upon linguists, historians and archaeologists to conduct focused research and analyses on this critical issue that Hromník courageously presents.

Introduction

Hromník (1999)

In an article entitled *Gitlane: Where the moon sickle strikes-on the edge of time at Elandsdoorn*, published in the *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 8(2): 1-17, Hromník (1999, p. 1) makes courageous but misguided claims which include the following: that ancient trade in the gold-producing, Bantu-populated southern Africa and the consumer-Dravidian Indian populations "shaped the

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people and the history of the BoPedi country in Mpumalanga and Northern Provinces of South Africa." This gold-producing and trade-generating area would later be referred to as BoPedi (the Land of Traders). With time, the Indo-African populations progressively became more and more Bantu, "so much so that they were no longer associated with the Indians from the contemporary caravans" (Hromník, 1999, p. 4). Hromník (1999, p. 1) claims that the residue of this interaction is reflected in the culture and religious practices of BaPedi and the Quena (Hottentots) who inhabited the area prior to the arrival of the Bantu people! For instance, the stone walls, called *lithaku*, were supposedly a product on the Indo-African interaction and indicate "the religious cosmology of ancient Dravidian India" (Hromník, 1991, p. 1). Hromník (1999, p. 1) further claims that time was a significant factor to this Indo-African community; it was regarded highly and measured accurately. Evidence to this is a Moon Sickle on a hill on the south of the Gitlane River, which was supposedly one of the horoscopic instruments used to measure the time of death of monks and aged hermits in a nearby monastery.

The article makes a number of linguistic assertions that purportedly originated with the Dravidian civilization and were borrowed into SePedi. The Dravidian traders were apparently known as *viyápári* in all the areas where they traded. In southern Africa in particular, this name changed to Baperi and, eventually, to BaPedi! This name was retained when the BaPedi "*mixed*" with the "Bantu-speaking newcomers" who were also known as Suto and Sotho! (Hromník, 1999, p. 3) The *viyápári* were the lords of the gold-producing lands of southern Africa; as 'evidenced' in the Sotho words *monghali* and *mong* and in the SeTswana words *Moò* and *Muò* (master). Further, the office designation of the *viyápári* boss is allegedly reflected in the Sotho-Pedi word *Mongatane* (Master of the Army), which Hromník (1999) claims is derived from *Monga-* + *tánai* (army in Tamil)!

Hromník (1999, p. 3) further claims that the "*mixed"* or true BaPedi adopted some of the religious practices of the ancient *viyápári* traders, as indicated by the Pedi ancestral worship as well as in the word *borapedi* (religion). The word *borapedi* is purported to be derived from *pórru*, the Tamil word for 'to praise/to worship'. And, combining *pórru* with the name Pedi gives *borapedi*, which means the 'worship or devoutness of the traders/religion of traders'! And "Attempts to derive *borapedi* from the Pedi *go rapela* 'to pray' lead to a cul-de-sac and deprive the Pedi religion of its historical and theological depth (Hromník, 1999, p. 3).

From a socio-historical and cultural perspective, the Hromník (1999) debate is problematic, and to tackle it we need to contextualise it theoretically and methodologically as it is tantamount to

civilisational revisionism. In history, the theory of historical revisionism exists to refer to the reinterpretation of orthodox views on evidence, motivations, and decision-making processes surrounding a historical event (see MacDonald, 2004). Revisionism is essentially based on a denial that events or facts in history ever happened or took the form they took and by the people that undertook them. As such, the Hromník (1999) debate constitutes a historical negativism as it seeks to either appeal to the nobility of an ancient alien civilisation; or to attribute to alien intelligence indigenous things that happened in the past (Novick, 1988). In attempting to re-read the past, dishonest historical revisionism may use methods precluded in apposite historical discourse, such as presenting forged artefacts, monuments, socio-historical evidence and or documents as genuine. Thus revisionism creates inventive but farfetched reasons and uses them to generate distrust in genuine things, documents or facts. It also attributes conclusions to evidence and sources that report the opposite, and manipulates and deliberately misrepresenting texts in order to support the given point of view (see also, Woodward, 1989). The following sections will provide socio-historical and linguistic facts that will demonstrate the flawed analyses of Homrik (1999).

Ancient stone-walled edifices

Ancient stone-walled edifices are found in most Southern African countries. For example there are the Great Zimbabwe Ruins in Zimbabwe and the Mapungubwe Ruins in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. The question that historians are constantly ceased with is when these edifices were constructed, who constructed them, and why the culture of stone-walling suddenly stopped. Various opinions have been put forward with regards to the commencement of their construction. Huffman (1996) opines that the construction of these Southern African ruins probably started a millennium ago. However, conservative dating puts them at over 500 years old. Another opinion by Iliffe (1995) states that nothing much seems to have been constructed from around the 14th century. What remains evident is that the bold assumptions and arguments made by Hromník (1999) call for fresh debates on the origins of *all* stonewall structures in Southern Africa.

A suggestion could be made that the construction of stone-wall structures pointed to an existence of a thriving indigenous civilisation which lasted for a long time - at least for centuries. Further, because of their geographical spread, the stone walls could possibly suggest a civilized native population whose civilisation was widely practiced. A second suggestion could be that powerful populations foreign to but resident in the land could have employed native inhabitants to labor in the construction of such edifices.

Archaeology is now an accepted historical procedure used to find out the prehistory of human societies (Arlotto, 1972, p. 233). The unearthed relics help to determine the material culture, the technology and ancientness of a people who inhabited a site. However, there are many aspects of the history that archaeology cannot reveal. For example, archaeology cannot find out the language spoken by the owners of the skeletons whose bones it can analyze and date. The oral history of the people who inhabit the locations near the archaeological sites may not be of any assistance, as generations of people are typically mobile. As a result, there may often be no genealogical relationships between the current inhabitants of the land and those who inhabit the grave (Dowson & Lewis-Williams, 1994).

Our paper engages the Hromník (1999) debate from the socio-historical perspective, and uses cultural artefacts and language as the basis of analysis. The assumption made here is that anthropologically, any human interaction always has residual cultural artefacts which are reflected in the language (Batibo, 1997; Mufwene, 2006a; 2007, 2011). And we share the investigative approach of Hromník (1999) on this point. Human interaction can be found in the material culture and/or in the language where it is manifested. At the linguistic level, borrowing of foreign vocabulary is one of the evidences of such interaction. These residual cultural marks or linguistic relics provide evidence of contact between cultures. They indicate cultural and linguistic diffusions from one culture to the other and from one language to the other. The great impediment in Africa, and specifically in the southern region, is the absence of (a) functional writing system(s) that recorded history or language and that would inform on the state of things at a point of reference in the past.

Historical comparative philology

In the past two hundred years, linguists have endeavored to systematically make reconstructions of languages whose history and ancient records are available through such disciplines as philology. Historical comparative philology, which has been adapted in comparative historical linguistic, has emerged as one of the scientific methods used to develop theories of language genealogy, typology and history (Arlotto, 1972). This can be summarized as a procedure where comparative vocabularies of existing or written languages are analyzed to determine their genealogical relationships. The method has been used profitably for Indo-European languages, such as Sanskrit, Persian, Latin, Greek, Germanic, etc., and has produced dates of up to five millennia (Arlotto, 1972). Where there are no written records, spatial and typological comparisons of vocabularies

and grammar were used to determine genealogical relationships between languages (Doke, 1954; Guthrie, 1967-1971; Batibo, 1997). This procedure was used to determine the classification of Niger-Congo, Benue-Congo, Congo-Zambezi-Limpopo languages, advisedly called Bantu languages. For Southern Africa languages, Doke (1954) provides a comprehensive study which has been fruitfully used by Guthrie (1967-71), and Köhler (1981) for Khoesan languages. Accordingly, the account of origins and relationships of these languages is now considered settled.

As a science, linguistics responds to the social science methods, and its experimentation operates on social processes rather than on controlled laboratory conditions. It is generally accepted that there is an intrinsic link between language and culture (Ndoleriire, 2004) - language is instrumental in communication; language is a thought-conveyor; language is the medium used for expression, and culture is embedded in language. Since the prehistory era, and even in the historical times, nothing has changed this necessary symbiosis between language and culture. The existence of one mutually depends on the other. We may hasten to state that it is possible, though rarely, that two communities belonging to different language families can share the same material culture. For instance, on cattle raring, both the Nama and the Southern Zambezi-Limpopo Black communities share commonalities (Iliffe, 1995).

Language as a social mark of history

Besides oral history and archaeology, the other scientific procedure to derive the history of a people is to study the vocabulary of their language. This can be done either from an internal, dialectological comparison or from an external, inter-ethnic or linguistic, comparison (Arlotto, 1972). For instance, to check the history of wine among communities in a certain region, a list of all wine related words, concepts and techniques in the dialects of a language and between languages in that region and even beyond would be drawn. The assumption is that languages would retain names or concepts that are related to the cultural practice of handling wine. Coming to Southern Africa, to tell whether the culture of the cow was brought to Southern Africa by the Khoe or the Black Zambezi-Limpopo people, a comparative list, such as the one in Table 1, would be compiled.

Table 1: Comparative table of the word for cow in the languages of Southern Africa

Nama	Nguni	Sotho-Tswana	Shona	English
goms	nkomo	kgomo	ng'ombe/n'ombe	cow

The superficial resemblances will then have to be checked against a long list covering many cultural domains before conclusions could be drawn.

Batibo (1997, pp. 4-5) defines cultural vocabulary as "the lexical stock that a linguistic community develops or adopts through its many cultural experiences after interacting with its physical environment, social milieu and supernatural world." This implies that nothing in the experiences of humanity will miss being marked lexically. Socio-historical linguistics focuses on the study of vocabulary in an attempt to understand the interaction between human language and other areas of human culture or behaviour (Arlotto, 1972, p.1). The common historical culture derived from the common vocabulary has, therefore, been used to determine and justify things that could be genetically and historically problematic.

We now tackle the question of the origins of stone-walls in Southern African from a critical perspective, hoping that the facts will shed light into these ancient monuments that we should treasure as ours, because they in truth are indigenous to our region.

The handling of indigenous terms in "Where the Moon Sickle Strikes"

Table 2 presents the vocabulary list that appears in Hromník (1999).

Table 2: Terms and their significance in Hromník 1999

Term	**Hromník 1999 explanation**	**Our comment**
litaku	ancient stone structure	Corruption of *lerako* – stone enclosure.
Quena	Hottentots	Corruption of *Khoena* – plural of Khoe, from *khoe* (person).
monghali	master	Corruption of *Monggadi* – great master – from *mong* (owner) and *-gadi* (great) - proto -**kadi*. See its use in *Kgalagadi* (great dry land).
moò / muò	master	Casalis corruption of mõ (*mong*).
borapedi	prayerfulness, piety	State of prayerfulness – from verb *rapela* - pray
mongatane	master of army	*Mongatane* – primary meaning is wearer of neck copper decorations; it has no derivational relationship with *mong*.
magahlano	meeting	North-Sotho – *mogahlano* or *mokgatlhano* (meeting), from Sotho-Tswana verb *rakana*; also *tlhakana* – pro Zambezi-Limpopo -**sangana* (mix)
Gitlane	strike	Corruption of Sotho-Tswana *kitla* (beat thoroughly, pound).
bodulanosi	cave monastery	State of solitude, staying alone – *dula* (stay, dwell) and *nosi* (alone) – proto -**dula*, -**si* (alone).
kgenetha	smite down	Also *kgemetha* (chop down into pieces).

soma	offering	Sotho-Tswana verb –*shoma* (give to an elder a prized item).

Note: We could not verify *chan, suri* (Hromník, 1999, p. 6).

The Hromník (1999) analytical perspective has nothing fundamentally wrong in its methodology. However, it is misguiding in its handling of native terminology and its reliance on orthographies that 1) were obsolete or flawed because they were used by people who had no mastery of the indigenous languages; and 2) whose derivational morphology and phonology were not cross-checked, even where literature abounds (Guthrie, 1967, p.71). Let us take, for instance, the use of the Portuguese *Quena*, the common historical and modern rendition for the word would be *Khoena* - which is the plural of *Khoe,* a branch of Khoesan people of Southern Africa. The term *Kung* also lacks refinement, since the *Saõ* (which is a *Khoe* word for wanderers and foragers) and Khoe languages speakers would pronounce it as *!Kung* (Kolher, 1991). Indeed, a foreigner may not easily pick the subtle auditory effects and the phonetics of the word. Additionally, the claim that *Kung* is better than San is, simply, arbitrary, since it is made in a vacuum! Hromník (1999) might have plausibly made this claim because the term was used widely at a certain period in time. Further, the derivation and use of BaPedi needs clarification. BaPedi are a Sotho-Tswana group, and issue from the Benue-Congo African people (Doke, 1954; Guthrie, 1967, p. 71). Any similitude with *viyápári*, as Hromník (1999) claims, is far-fetched at best, and an accident in truth. The main problem leading to such unfortunate claims is that Hromník (1999) was dealing with a limited vocabulary list used in a rather imposed context, rather than one sourced from a truly indigenous context.

For the current discussion, the following considerations would be in order:

a) If the stone-walls were constructed by foreign or exotic peoples, there should be social evidence of the remants.
b) There should be linguistic evidence - some non-indigenous words describing the stone-walls and the materials used.
c) There should even be some cultural evidence and technological peculiarities discovered in the sites that suggest foreign involvement.
d) Archaeologists could be reporting on graves containing non-African skeletons.
e) There should be population miscegenation. Consider, for instance, that even in the height of the Kaffir enslavement by Arabs and Europeans, hybrid populations were produced

(Iliffe, 1996, p.125). Except for the Khoisan traces among the Zambezi- Limpopo peoples, there is none other prior to the coming of the Europeans in the Sub-Continent.

f) On the aspect of the philosophy of life, Africans in Southern Africa are still traditionally animists - humanity is construed within the natural framework and the cosmos - the ancestors take a central hierarchical place in existence even as God the Almighty is acknowledged. They are the intermediaries between the Almighty and the human world. This animism is pervading and is found even among the Khoesan, the great painters of the rocks.

The Stone Structures in Sotho-Tswana languages

Sotho-Tswana people call any stone structure without roofing *lorako*. This term may be related to *lesaka* which is a cattle enclosure. In Batibo (1997, p. 15), it would appear that the concept that has come to be *le-saka*, and also *mo-raka*, may be derived from Eastern Sudanic languages which refer to a cattle pen as *–tanga*. The concept *lorako* generally applies to a wider enclosure hedging a homestead or a *kgotla* (an indigenous public meeting place or court). In the comparative list of Southern Africa languages, *lorako* corresponds to *uthango* in Nguni, as indeed they share phonological correspondences/characteristics that can be readily reconstructed. In Shona languages there is *-gota*, *-kuta* or *-guta* that translates *kgotla* in Sotho-Tswana, and the conceptual link is derivable (Huffman, 1996, pp. 17-62). It is, therefore, arguable that the stonewall concept has a history of indigenous use, at least from what lexical studies of existing languages can afford us.

The Hromník (1999) advent indicates the rather overdue need to prepare broad representative vocabulary lists and analyze them phonologically and semantically. For instance, to put words according to their functional domain or relationship in this discussion, we could proceed as follows:

a) What is a stone structure called?
b) What is a stone hut called?
c) What is a stone-walled cattle enclosure called?
d) What is a stone structure on the hill called?
e) What is a stone brick called; that is, a stone curved for building?
f) What are stone curving tools called?
g) What is a stone with a metal (iron, gold, etc.) ore called, or what do you call a metal ore?
h) What do you call a stone fortification?
i) What do you call a builder of stone structures?
j) What do you call a place where stones for building are collected?

k) What do you call a stone where metals are bitten into shape (that is used as an anvil)?
l) What do you call a stone used to hammer metal?
m) What is a grinding stone called - the flat big wide one?
n) What is the grinder called?
o) What do you call a chair curved in the stone/rock?
p) What do you call a hill, mountain, or rocky natural outcrop?
q) What are precious stones - non-metallic called?
r) What is the word for a metallic worker, iron smith, ore smelter?
s) What do you call a place where you work ore or metal?
t) What are the words for furnace, the blower, the charcoal, etc.?

Note that, where the artefacts exist, not all languages will give the words that correspond to the question. The investigation of other similar or related concepts allows one to capture a general cultural functionality of the stone. If the vocabulary derived is elaborate, then the next task would be to examine it phonologically and semantically and conclude on, for instance, its association with Zambezi-Limpopo languages. The absence of any exotic terms on these critical concepts would lead to the conclusion that there were no exotic civilisations during the construction of the stone-walls, and that the engineering, technology and knowledge behind the stone-walls is truly indigenous.

Furthermore, Huffman (1996) makes a reference to sites and successive occupation of the sites by different ethnic groups. Interestingly, his determination of the ethnography of stone-walls structures of the people of the Zambezi-Limpopo clearly points to indigenous civilisation. This is crucial because it is based on archaeological and historical interpretations of the artifacts, the architecture and the decorations associated with the stone structures. It is our assumption that if there was ever an exotic influence of any importance, the residuals of this would have been detected in the artefacts, the architecture and the decorations associated with the stone structures. The exotic and supposedly higher culture could have even left some inscriptions in the lands of the illiterate Zambezi-Limpopo communities. For instance, in Loubser and Lourens (1994, pp. 83-18) there are various depictions of rock-paintings that not only suggest that they were drawn by the San; their art also integrated aspects of life from ethnic communities that were/are not San, such as horses, cows, and different paraphernalia and apparels. A human society can never be isolated, whether despised by or despising the other (Iliffe, 1995). Cultural and technological diffusions that characterize their social contacts and interactions always remain.

Still on the issue of social contacts and their imprint on cultural practices and art, it is important to see how some of the relics could be marked in the language. For instance the Zambezi-Limpopo languages have *guta* (Shona, Rozvi), *gota* ([xota] - Venda), which translate into *kgotla* in Sotho-Tswana, referring to an enclosed public place where a chief meets the public or where community matters are heard (Huffman, 1996, pp. 17–62). In another example, even though Huffman (1996, pp. l-29) rules out the crocodile symbolism among the Sotho-Tswana and limits it to the Venda and Shona only, it is our well-considered suspicion that the name of *Bakwena* (people of the crocodile), who consider themselves the seniors among the Sotho-Tswana, took it from the Shona-Venda symbolism of *Ngwena/ Ngwenya* (crocodile). Indeed among the BaKalanga, people who have *Ngwena* as their totem are *Nkadzasha* (noble)*;* plural *Hadzasha* (the noble ones).

Determining a history from a culture-marked vocabulary as Hromník (1999) does should, therefore, undergo the rigor of all the social science methods to obviate fanciful opinions and conclusions that are not factual. By carefully proven methods of isolating cultural vocabularies, ethnolinguists have been able to develop a finite list that could be validly applied to many languages to determine their genetic relationship. This list contains carefully selected environmental, social, economic, and cultural domains where concepts that exist should be passed on to generations with little attrition (Batibo, 1997, pp. 5-9; Arlotto, 1992, pp. 38-39). That way, it is easier to determine if a concept or a vocabulary item is indigenous to a particular community, or was borrowed into that community.

Finally, can we say that the Hromník (1999) argument is flawed? From the foregoing arguments, the answer we wish to advance is that for (southern) Africa, it most likely is. The use of oral history's limited vocabulary is not likely to be viable. If we say the *Khoena* were the first ones to interact with the Dravidians, why is it that there is not much borrowing from the Dravidian languages into the *Khoena* languages? How is it that Indian languages still have peculiar vocabulary features from 5000 years old Sanskrit, an Indo-European language, when *only two* words, *suri* and *chan*, are claimed to have been borrowed into *Khoena* during the more recent supposed occupation? Are the *Khoena* ignoramuses with short memories that they could have lost all that the Dravidian civilisation bequeathed them? Or, is it because these Southern African ethnic communities lacked writing systems? Since some were able to make artistic pictures on rocks, how is it that depictions of an encounter with a Dravidian civilisation are not seen?

Furthermore, the symbolism and the analysis that comes out of Hromník (1999) is, for all intends and purposes, astounding, remarkable and truly shocking. We do not see justifiable linkages between the indigenous SePedi mythology, spirituality and what Hromník (1999) presents as the Dravidian religiosity and spirituality. Clearly, the Hromník (1999) representation is premised on revisionist history, and should at best be taken as an eccentric historical piece. The pyramids of ancient Egypt, the historic mausoleums of Timbuktu and the Great Zimbabwe ruins are enough evidence that indicate that even in ancient times Africa had prominent civilisations. And because of these civilisations traders from other continents engaged with Africa commercially.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to demonstrate that the claimed Dravidian influences on Southern African societies were flawed, both culturally and linguistically. The influence of the Dravidian religious practices on that of BaPedi as purported in Hromník (1999) is difficult to see; there are no objective linguistic and cultural linkages. Hromník's handling of selective vocabulary items is difficult and coincidental at best. For instance, what is common between Setswana *pula* and French *pluie*, for rain? What is common between Shona *dombo* and Hungarians' *dombo* for hill? What relationship does the Zulu word *indlu* have with the Eskimo word *igloo* for a house? Lexical coincidences are rife in the languages of the world, and it is ill advised to make conclusions on superficial resemblances. In this particular case, the courageousness and superficiality demonstrated by Hromník (1999) actualized the risk of violating the humanity of Black Africans. The brutality and egregiousness of these assumptions is the hidden view that a civilisation cannot emerge among the societies of Southern Africa without exotic technological and economic prompts. We are only very new in such a debate, but the Hromník (1999) publication though very speculative, is a poke into the way we should look into similar questions, here and elsewhere. It nevertheless is tempting to qualify the publication as chimerical; a nightmarish product not worth any serious scientific, historical or scholarly consideration.

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