



Africa and Its Global Connections

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A globalized world is one that is interdependent, intertwined, and interactive. To be globalized implies consciousness of the fact that—despite the superficiality of national boundaries, language, cultures, lifestyle, and racialized ways of being—we are interconnected, and our actions, whether motivated by altruism or selfishness, affect those around us and those beyond (Steger, 2013, p. 1). The story of the foods served and products used today in nearly every household in the world is a story about globalization. But when did this story of globalization begin in Africa? How did Africa become global? And what is the best strategy for teaching about globalization?

When modern humans first left Africa for other continents, they carried with them a great deal of culture. Up through about 10,000 BCE, advanced stone tool technologies were the greatest known African contributions to global culture. Most innovations in the making of stone knives and spears either first occurred in Africa and spread to Eurasia or occurred at the same time in Africa as in the rest of the Old World (Ambrose, 2010; Groucutt et al., 2015). The movement of food species into and out of Africa, even before the development of cities or metal technology, testifies to the great antiquity of economic links between Africa and the rest of the world. These

were the beginnings of what was to become a globalized world (Beaujard & Fee, 2005).

Genetic and linguistic evidence shows a constant population flow between East and Northeast Africa and the Middle East, India, and Southern Europe (Luis et al., 2004; Reed & Tishkoff, 2006). Egypt, of course, was centrally involved with many famous achievements of the ancient world, including such key “inventions” as writing, monumental architecture, kings, written laws, and bureaucracies (Dedini, 2019; Janick, 2000). Throughout Egyptian history, the vast southern watershed of the Nile routinely supplied Egypt not only with fertility-bringing floods but also with manpower—workers, entertainers, soldiers, and ruling dynasties. Much of what went south from Egypt has vanished archaeologically. One important export to the south, however, survives: Coptic Christianity with its Egyptian/Middle Eastern-inspired art, writing, and architecture (Atiya, 2023; Sharafeldean, 2019). The rock churches of Lalibela in Ethiopia bear witness to the intensity of early cultural interchange between the northern Nile Valley and parts of Sub-Saharan Africa (Derat et al., 2021).

Trade relationships between the Sub-Saharan region and the rest of the world became routine at least two thousand years ago (Curtin & Curtin, 1984, but see Magnavita & Magnavita, 2018). The Egyptians and Carthaginians conducted overland trade in the early and middle first millennium BCE. As early as the first century CE, Africa’s trade relationships with Eurasia began to be controlled by growing state

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societies and significantly contributed to two-way biological and technical transfers in the Old World. Improvements in ships and the introduction of the camel made it possible for Eurafasian merchants to trade across the Indian Ocean with East Africa and across the Sahara with West Africa. Gold, salt, ivory, hides, and spices were typical commodities in this commerce between the North and South (Magnavita, 2013).

In Northeast Africa, important urban centers, including the kingdoms of Kush and Aksum, came into being during this period. This rise in urbanism culminated during the fifth century CE with Ethiopia's colonization of South Arabia (Burstein, 2001; Sadr, 2017). In Eastern and Southern Africa, long-distance trade stimulated the growth of cities along the East African coast and in the interior, centered around the Shona kingdoms of Zimbabwe (Pikirayi, 2017). In West Africa, political entrepreneurs took advantage of the trans-Saharan caravan trade to build large, highly centralized states, including Ghana, Mali, and Songhai (Nixon, 2009; Wilson, 2012). One Sub-Saharan African group, the Almoravids of the upper Niger area, expanded their power northward beyond the desert in the twelfth century. Conquering first Morocco and then Spain, they established one of the most brilliant dynasties of the Islamic Middle Ages (Bennison, 2007; Levzion & Willis, 1979).

Given all these contributions to global history, what is the best way to teach about Africa and its international connections? First, we must ensure that students understand that globalization is the outcome of local, regional, and interregional interaction spheres. Each sphere has systems of knowledge and material, symbolic, and social value necessary for ensuring its survival. Each sphere was dynamic. To understand these complex interacting agents—people and their possessions—we must return to an inclusive analytical framework of Africa as a connected entity, not the fragmented deep history we have invented through specialized artifact-driven publications. I offer two examples of how we might approach globalization and migration in the classroom. First, when teaching about Late Holocene archaeology in East Africa, rather than separating hunter-gatherer, pastoral neolithic, and the origins of agriculture, why not adopt a narrative that explores the emergence of specialized

herding and agriculture alongside the rise of urbanism at local, regional, and extra-regional levels? What roles do elders in pastoral, agrarian, and specialized hunter communities play in manipulating their social positions to monopolize power and create strong networks? What material, symbolic, and ritual evidence should students be looking for? How were those networks of interaction sustained? Because of insufficient archaeological coverage, can we turn oral traditions and narratives that discuss how friendships and partnerships were forged and sustained through blood rituals among interacting partners to formalize long-lasting friendships and peaceful coexistence, tolerance, and sharing of the region's diverse resources? The wealth accumulated from these interaction spheres intensified the Coastal Region's social, class, and ethnic consciousness, which increasingly embraced other cultures while strengthening its local networks (Kusimba, 2017).

A second example is the Bantu migration. Although this topic has been used to discuss how a vast majority of those who speak Niger-Congo B or Bantu languages migrated from their homeland in West Africa some 3000 years ago and settled in East, Central, and Southern Africa, I have used this topic to discuss the migration histories of humankind within, out of Africa, and back to Africa. A module called Bantu (People) Migrations introduces students to push and pull factors that prompt people to migrate. It then discusses how new evidence from Ancient DNA, genetic drift, chromosomes, archaeology, languages, and linguistics have enabled us to chart migrations and movements out of the homeland from 1–2 mya to the present. These include Pleistocene movements within Africa—up and down the Nile, out from the desert—in the Sahara and the Horn. The Early Neolithic is examined as a series of expansions out of the Sahara. Other topics include the Saharan trade, the Bantu Migration, the Arab Migrations, the Boer Trek, the Mfecane, and the nineteenth-century Asian Migration to Africa.

By using this inclusive approach, students can learn and become more aware of the deep and intimate ties that all people have with Africa. This approach has successfully worked for me in reducing the unconscious bias that even the most open-minded of my students might have about Africa as a place only for people of color and not all of humanity.

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