

SPACE, POWER, AND THE POLITICS OF FIXITY: A CRITIQUE OF THE NILE AND INDIAN OCEAN AS TRANSBOUNDARY CATEGORIES

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Abstrak

Kategori konseptual Sungai Nil dan Samudra Hindia secara historis telah diperlakukan sebagai kebenaran geografis yang tetap dan tak berubah. Asumsi yang jarang dipersoalkan ini berasal dari historiografi arus utama, yang mengutamakan catatan tertulis dan pada dasarnya berorientasi Barat. Narasi dominan ini biasanya menelusuri Sungai Nil dari satu titik tertentu, seperti Mesir, dan dengan cara yang sama memprovinsialisasi India dalam wacana Samudra Hindia, sehingga secara efektif membungkam para pelaku pribumi Afrika dalam ruang interoseanik. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa historiografi semacam itu—yang berupaya memprovinsialisasi kategori geografis tertentu dan memberlakukan struktur kekuasaan hegemonik Barat atasnya—tidak memadai untuk menjelaskan dinamika kompleks ruang dan kekuasaan sebelum hegemoni Barat. Meskipun kedua ruang akuatik ini tampak tetap, keduanya memuat definisi alternatif, tertekan, atau disangkal yang tetap bertahan melalui protes epistemologis literasi dan tradisi lisan. Dengan mengonseptualisasikan ruang sebelum hegemoni Barat, studi ini menawarkan kerangka alternatif untuk memahami persoalan identitas yang sering kali didefinisikan secara sempit oleh negara modern.

kata kunci: *Hegemoni, Dominasi, Ruang, Dekolonisasi, Lintas-batas.*

Abstract

The conceptual categories of the Nile River and the Indian Ocean have historically been treated as timeless, fixed geographical truths. This rarely contested assumption stems from mainstream historiography, which privileges written records and is essentially Western in its orientation. This dominant narrative typically traces the Nile from a singular point, such as Egypt, and similarly provincializes India in the Indian Ocean discourse, effectively silencing indigenous African actors in the interoceanic space. This article argues that such historiography, which attempts to provincialize specific geographical categories and impose a hegemonic Western power structure upon them, is insufficient for explaining the complex dynamics of space and power prior to Western hegemony. Despite the apparent fixity of these two aquatic spaces, they contain alternative, suppressed, or denied definitions that persist through the epistemological protest of oral literacy and tradition. By conceptualizing space *before* Western hegemony, this study offers an alternative framework for understanding issues of identity that are often narrowly defined by the modern state.

Keywords: *Hegemony, Domination, Space, Decolonisation, Transboundary.*

Article History: Received 21 October 2025, Revised 25 October 2025, Accepted 29 October 2025, Available online 30 October 2025

Introduction

The 'Nile' River and the 'Indian' Ocean, as widely accepted geographical entities, are conventionally treated as historical continuums constructed over a *longue durée*. Though perpetually in flux, the dominant narrative expresses the reality of these water bodies as geographically determined rather than socially produced lived spaces. Mainstream historiography thus freezes them in time, yet they still contain alternative, suppressed, or denied definitions, a condition resulting from political forgetting (Ahmed, 2020:4). This essay's central claim is that the 'uncritical' and 'conventional' naturalization of Egypt and India as the primary points of entry in the study of the Nile and the Indian Ocean respectively provincializes these two spaces, presenting them as eternal, self-evident truths. Whether viewed as geographical or political spaces, their current containerization suffers from a major conceptual flaw.

My intervention is a critique on space where I argue that the Nile and the Indian Ocean are conceptual categories produced through the act of political forgetting. Drawing upon Foucault's understanding of space as metaphor (Foucault, 1980:63-77), I examine the production of power and knowledge from a spatial-temporal viewpoint. Fundamentally, this essay argues that conceptions of space as spatial, temporal, and continually contested have been ruptured by European historiography, resulting in a spatially compressed, homogenized, and hegemonized space. This perspective is representational of hegemonic power, as seen when the discovery of the Nile's source becomes a symbol of power for Egypt, or when the Indian Ocean's power reverberates from the Indian to the African coastline.

The root of this flawed containerization lies in the hegemonic position of written literature within conventional historiography. This over-emphasis on text, in opposition to orality, determines what counts as 'history.' As James Scott identifies, writing is a form of power, often linked to self-proclaimed civilized societies (Scott, 2009:237). This bias is clearly articulated by Edward Taylor, who argues that "Civilisation begins with the writing... in a manner that binds together the past and the future in an unbroken chain of intellectual and moral progress" (Sseremba, 2020:95-111). By this categorization, Africa south of the Sahara, primarily identified with orality, is consequently rendered non-historical.

However, this textual inflexibility is precisely where African oral tradition offers an epistemological protest. Following Jan Vansena, if we treat African

ancient societies as essentially oral, then oral transmissions must be regarded as historical recordings (Vansena, 1981). Moreover, the non-fixed nature of a verbal record where a speaker can interrupt his testimony is highly consequential for this study. The critical question then arises: How are we to conceive of the Nile or the Indian Ocean as transboundary spaces of historiography? Can these spaces be interrupted? Can there be a starting again? Yusufu Bala Usman insists that understanding a concept's historical development is crucial to avoid becoming "conceptual prisoners" (Usman, 2006). Texts, by contrast, displace alternatives and superimpose the present over the past (Scott, 2010:233).

The transition from fluid orality to rigid textuality is visible even in African contexts. For instance, Jeppie and Diagne's study of Timbuktu demonstrates how the adoption of Islamic writing provided a new form of power, allowing Africans to record history using Arabic text (Jeppie & Diagne, 2008:19). Yet, while human life is textually structured, tradition itself as an arena of power becomes coded and read from the text. This demonstrates the critical moment of rupture: the once fluid and unstable history of Timbuktu, which Vansena notes can be interrupted and restarted, becomes fixed once written. This textual imposition redefines local concepts. Like Timbuktu, the orality of the Nile and the Indian Ocean are similarly contested by written texts.

To counter this textual hegemony, I contend that prior to Western Hegemony, the Nile River and the Indian Ocean were delimited by localized, fluid boundaries all constituting spatial boundaries determined by local power dynamics. Crucially, the limits of this socially produced power were not absolute but varied according to time, politics, and contingency. The current conceptual categories are homogenous and hegemonic because they overlook this historical fluidity. Therefore, this essay argues that the spaces they animate must be understood from the perspective of their specific modes of production, contingent within their distinct social spaces and cosmologies (Lefebvre, 1991).

I alternatively read these spaces as compendiums of human agency, contingencies, power contestations, and cosmological outlooks with fluid political formations that were dominant, implying an absence of external hegemony. Ultimately, through an interdisciplinary approach, I trace how conceptual categories travel and react to indigenous categories they seek to redefine. My efforts shall contribute to the decolonizing project of space, claiming that space as a category of analysis is always shifting and unstable. My

aim is to disrupt the notion of fixity and to discover the nature of the debate of repression that condemns African spaces to an uncritical timeless permanence.

The methodology of this research employs a qualitative-interpretive approach, primarily focused on conceptual and historiographical critique. The study aims to deconstruct rigid and hegemonic geographical categories by juxtaposing them with fluid, orality-based, pre-hegemonic understandings of space. The core research design is a Conceptual Historiography Critique, which seeks to identify and analyze how key concepts (the Nile River, the Indian Ocean, Space, Power) are constructed within dominant historical narratives, and how these constructions contribute to the political forgetting of alternative spatial conceptions. This employs a Comparative Case Study approach, focusing on two aquatic spaces: Case I (the Nile River), concentrating on the European "discovery of the source" versus African cosmology, and Case II (the Indian Ocean), focusing on the naming and centrality of India versus the marginalization of East African actors

The Making of The Nile and Its Journey to The Great Lakes

The conceptualization of the Nile River, particularly in Western historiography, is deeply rooted in a blend of mystery, political intrigue, and colonial ambition. Charles T. Beke (1860) documented a popular European belief from the sixteenth century that the King of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) held the power to prevent the Nile's flow into Egypt, demanding a massive yearly tribute for the release of its waters. Although this narrative was later disputed the mere existence of this myth of interference profoundly influenced European perceptions and justified future interventions.

The dawn of the 1700s marked Africa as a crucial theatre for European geographical expeditions, driven largely by the persistent mystery surrounding the Nile's source. Explorers such as James Bruce, Sir Samuel Baker, Richard Burton, and John Hannington Speke dedicated themselves to this quest. Situating this relentless European inquest, and especially the British involvement, within a broader political and historical context reveals a twofold objective. Firstly, it was a power prerogative. Attaining the position of the "first seer", the one who definitively located the source would substantially elevate their political and epistemological standing within Europe. Secondly, this finding was intended as a disguised form of cartography that would justify the eventual colonialism of what they deemed "new ideal lands" worthy of British intervention and control. Both objectives were achieved with profound success.

Contemporary historical critiques highlight the shallow reading of the Nile's geography. Erlich and Gershoni challenge historians who unjustifiably link the Nile exclusively to the Middle East and the land of Islam while relegating its critical Southern section. They note that while historians of Sudan often connect it to Egypt, Islam, and Africa, Ethiopian relations have been neglected, despite the Ethiopians' own historical claim to the river.

However, a closer reading reveals that Erlich and Gershoni themselves commit a similar error by minimizing the role of Uganda, focusing instead on the conventional triad of Sudan, Ethiopia, and Egypt. This raises a crucial methodological question for any study of the river: Is the primary concern the progressive flow of the river, or the Nile as a bounded unit of analysis?

Studies of the Nile have been intrinsically problematic because a spatial, bounded category representative of a water territory in Egypt has traveled and planted itself all the way into the Great Lakes region. This conceptual expansion prompts the question: Can the Nile be considered a strong concept that unilaterally transforms all the spaces it comes into contact with? It is paradoxical that, while the river is said to glide from Uganda to Egypt, its power is derived not from its birth in the south, but from its flow in Egypt. Did the people of Sudan, Ethiopia, and the Great Lakes region automatically assume an identity defined by a river 'born' in Egypt? The central tension here is whether the source of the river is more significant than the river's cosmological and social meaning along its entire course.

Before the certain discovery of the source, conventional historical knowledge consistently upheld the primacy of the northern perspective. E. A. Wallis Budge (1905:336) recalled that Herodotus reported an ancient Egyptian claim that the Nile's source lay at Shellal, south of Aswan. Furthermore, an ancient Egyptian King, facing famine, dispatched a messenger to the governor of Elephantine, imploring him for information regarding the Nile's source and the god presiding over it, promising to worship this deity in exchange for bountiful harvests (Wallis Budge, 1905:338). This demonstrates the deep cosmological importance of the source within Egyptian culture.

Even early European efforts, though initially fruitless, reinforced the centrality of the Nile. James Bruce (1790), detailing his own failed attempt, documented the rich history of previous quests by figures like Alexander the Great, Emperor Nero, and two Jesuits (1790:612-633). These efforts, regardless

of their immediate success, highlight the immense cosmological and political significance the Nile's source held for the people of Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan.

The British intervention in this question, therefore, was warranted. A share in the find meant a share in the power. The question of the source, while seemingly historical, was imbued with a new kind of colonial power. It became a question of identity and, critically, a question of fixity animated by historiographical Hegemony. This hegemonic quest blurred the understanding of space before Western influence, effectively annihilating the socio-political and cosmological imprints represented by the Nile across different regions. The core analytical question, therefore, shifts: How exactly was the Nile conceived before Western Hegemony imposed a fixed, singular category upon it?

Evidence suggesting the pre-hegemonic fluidity of the Nile's concept can be found even in indigenous texts, although often read through a biased colonial lens. It would be assumed that the *Kebra Nagast*, a highly influential Ethiopian text, would extensively mention the 'Nile'. However, a close reading of the translated text reveals the concept 'Nile' appears only about four times, primarily in the introduction (Budge, 1922). What is commonly assumed to be the 'river Nile' in the *Kebra Nagast* is instead referred to as the River "Takkazi of the land of Mesr (Egypt)" (Budge, 1922, p. 87). No other river of the magnitude of the Nile is mentioned.

Beke's (1860) historical analysis provides crucial explanations for the concepts of "river" and "Takkazi." He challenged the popular notion that the river in Ethiopia was the Blue Nile, asserting it was simply the 'blue river.' His detailed historical work indicates that up until the eleventh century, the Takkazye (as described in the *Kebra Negast*) was regarded as the upper course of the Nile by Northern Abyssinian Christians (Beke, 1860:105). This changed when the surrounding plains fell under the occupation of Mohammedan people, leading to the *Bahr-el-Azrok* (Blue River) being regarded as the 'Nile' in place of the Takkazye (Beke, 1860:106).

Crucially, Beke notes that "Takkazye" was not a proper name but an appellative signifying "river" in the Geez or ancient Ethiopic language, simply designating their native stream (Beke, 1860:87). Furthermore, he notes that until the mid-sixteenth century, Abyssinians did not recognize their native river as the Nile, even while the Portuguese in Eastern Africa had already conferred the name 'Nile' upon it (Beke, 1860:116).

Beke's reading is paramount as it clearly demonstrates the temporality of concepts in space before Western hegemony. The concept of the river was not stable; it was determined by the dominant power, which itself was not absolute but constantly shifting. Beke meticulously detailed the historical shifts:

"It has been shown that, whatever may have been the opinion of geographers in the time of the Ptolemies and Caesars, the 'Takkazy'e,' or 'river' of Northern Abyssinia was, from the fourth until the end of the eleventh century of the Christian era, if not later, known as the Nile or 'river' of Egypt... The Takkazy'e not only ceased to be regarded as the Nile, but had even to cede to the Goang (Gwangwe) the title of the upper course of the Astaboras or Atbara; whilst the Astapus or Blue River came to be regarded as the Nile, though with no greater claims, in a geographical point of view, than the Astaboras or 'Takkazy'e,' itself" (Beke, 1860:105).

This passage strongly supports the thesis that the "Nile" was a fluid signifier whose meaning and geographical extent were determined by local political and religious shifts, long before the ultimate imposition of a singular, Western-defined category. James Bruce himself, though a proponent of the inquest, inadvertently supported this view in 1790:

"It is not to be wondered, that, in the long course the Nile makes from its source to the sea, it should have acquired a different name in every territory, where a different language was spoken; but there is one thing remarkable, that though the name in sound and letters is really different, yet the signification is the same..."

He noted that among the Agows, the river was called *Gzeir*, *Geefa*, and *Seir*, with the first name signifying 'God,' and was also called *Abba*, or 'Father' (Bruce, 1790:654-655). Bruce suggested a single river, but one marked by profound ruptures in territories with specific names and cosmological understandings.

Ultimately, the combined attempts of ancient cosmologists, local historians, and early explorers demonstrate that the Nile was not a fixed category. It changed with discourses of power, meaning, and cosmological importance. The necessary conceptual shift is to investigate the river from the perspective of the local dominant powers, because there was never a single, unified hegemony over it. This stands in stark opposition to the subsequent Western imposition of a fixed, homogenous category that silenced the complex and multi-faceted history of the Nile's identity.

The Travel of The Concept Continued

The enduring mystery surrounding the source of the Nile had long captivated the Western imagination. Despite early claims, such as the Portuguese assertion of discovering the Blue Nile's source in Abyssinia in 1615, the true source remained elusive until the mid-19th century (Johnston, 1903:51). Dr. Charles T. Beke (1847) of the Royal Geographical Society, citing the ancient Roman saying "*Nili querere caput*" noted that this achievement had remained obscure even in his time.

This inquest, however, was framed within a racialized and hierarchical worldview. Sir Harry Johnston (1905), an active participant in the colonial project, explicitly asserted that only the White Caucasian race had historically cared for geographical inquiry. He dismissively claimed, "Only the Caucasian... had worried about the Nile problem," while asserting that "The Mongol of Asia and America, the Negro of Papua and Africa had never cared to ascertain whence rivers flowed and whither, what lands lay beyond the ocean or the snow-peaks" (Johnston, 1905:317).

This philosophy, which categorized non-Europeans as fundamentally uninterested in geography, was a product of deep-seated colonial prejudice. As Anthony Pagden (1982) discerned, most non-Europeans and nearly all non-Christians were classified as 'barbarians' (pp. 13-14). Johnston's perception fails to acknowledge the violent colonial context. European powers like Britain, Spain, and Portugal were violent conquerors seeking territories assumed to be uninhabited, or occupied by those deemed uncivilized and thus lacking ownership rights (Williams, 1990, p. 128).

Specifically regarding Egypt, the driving force was highly material. The Nile was understood as a natural irrigation channel crucial for securing a constant flow of water for agriculture, particularly the burgeoning cotton industry (Tvedt, 2004). As the ancient Egyptians had long grasped, and the British realized, whoever controlled the river controlled Egypt. The imperative, therefore, was to locate its ultimate source before any competitor, thus securing paramount British economic and political interests.

The definitive push to locate the source was mounted by the British and Indian Governments, which funded the voyage of Richard Burton and John Hannington Speke (Speke, 1863). Upon stumbling upon Lake Tanganyika, Burton initially claimed its discovery and asserted it was the Nile's source

(Burton & Speke, 1858–1859), while Speke speculated that he had found the legendary Mountains of the Moon (Johnston, 1905:119).

Speke, discreetly disputing Burton's claims, and capitalizing on Burton's infirmity, set out alone (Johnston, 1905:123). On August 3, 1858, Speke claimed victory, declaring: "I saw that old father Nile without any doubt rises in the Victoria N'yanza, and, as I had foretold, that lake is the great source of the holy river which cradled the first expounder of our religious belief" (Speke, 1863:467).

This initial discovery did not go unchallenged. Burton insisted that Tanganyika, not Victoria Nyanza, was the true source, dismissing Speke's finding as merely a collection of swamps (Johnston, 1905:231). The contested nature of the find prompted a second expedition. Speke, accompanied by Grant, set off again. Traversing Buganda under Mutesa, he confirmed his earlier claim, standing on July 17, 1862, beside the cataract where the river leaped from the reservoir. He named this outlet the "Ripon Falls" (Garstin, 1909:117).

Sir Roderick Impey Murchison (1863), President of the Royal Society of Geography, celebrated Speke and Grant for solving the "problem of the ages," asserting they had traversed a region previously unknown to "civilised man" (p. clxxiv). Garstin (1909:117) concluded, "The problem was solved at last, and his name was rendered imperishable"

The essential point here is the language of 'discovery' and 'solution.' For the natives living around the now-named Nile, there was no problem to solve, and nothing to discover. The river was already part of their mystical experience, their cosmological outlook, and their political formation. The European 'discovery' was, in essence, an epistemological imposition that simultaneously created a 'Nile Problem' for the natives as a problem of conceptual displacement and political subjugation that remains unresolved.

Speke's own accounts provide a crucial, albeit overlooked, clue regarding the existing indigenous conception of the water body. He recounted being steered by King Mutesa's people to an island occupied by the Mgussa, or Neptune of the N'yanza who communicated the "secrets of the deep to the king of Uganda." Speke noted, "In another sense, he might be said to be the presiding priest of the source of the mighty Nile, and as such was, of course, an interesting person for me to meet" (Speke, 1863:394).

What Speke recorded was a mere fraction of the complex cosmology animating Lake Victoria and its connecting rivers. The political formations of the

Great Lakes region possessed intricate structural systems determined by these cosmological outlooks. The concept of the Nile, as conceived by the natives, still contained alternative, denied, and suppressed definitions that challenged the eventual Western fixity.

For the Basoga people, the river, particularly the falls, was a sacred residence for a host of powerful spirits. Among the most venerated were the princely spirits Nabamba and Budhagali, who were often combined into a single entity, akin to the Christian conception of the Holy Trinity (Gonza, 2002, p. 10). This spirit was believed to be the son of the ancestral couple of the Busoga, Kintu and Nambi (Gonza, 2002:114). The legend asserted that at the time of his birth, the spirit Nabamba Budhagali transformed into the water of the Nile River, and was capable of taking on multiple animate and inanimate forms (Gonza, 2002:149).

These spirits were intrinsically tied to the Busoga clan systems, influencing politics through spirit mediums (*Muswezi*) who were self-selected by the spirits, not by cultural leaders. The initiation of these mediums was presided over by a conclave of clan representatives, the *Baswezi* Budhagali (Gonza, 2002:149).

The European 'discovery' fundamentally displaced this intricate, living conception. The concepts of Budhagali and Nabamba, which defined the water space through social, religious, and political mechanisms for centuries, were violently replaced by the singular, homogenized, and static category of the 'Nile', aided by Western epistemology, historiography, and hegemonic power.

The British interest in the Nile quest quickly transcended the personal ambitions of explorers like Speke and Grant. Having occupied Egypt, and recognizing that Egypt's existence hinged on the Nile, direct control over the river was deemed essential to safeguard British economic and political interests. The protection of the Nile became synonymous with the subjugation of the Egyptians.

In this context, the "discovery" of the Nile was not a geographical achievement but a spatial conceptual displacement and a triumph of Western historiography. While Speke's efforts are lauded in Western accounts, his trail was animated by stories already known to natives and Arabs. The journey of the concept 'Nile' demonstrates that prior to the British intervention, it was a contested and fluid category, continually defined and redefined by local power dynamics across various spaces.

The hegemonic historiography produced by the British served to freeze this fluid category and carry its meaning all the way to the Great Lakes region. The successful consummation of these voyages, orchestrated under the watchful eyes of the Royal Geographical Society, was necessary for producing the maps that would guide colonial conquest. Rivers and lakes were strategically important as both markers of territory and means of transportation for the new conquerors. The replacement of local cosmologies with the fixed category of the Nile was the definitive step in this spatial conquest, condemning the rich, multi-faceted history of the water body to an uncritical timeless permanence.

The Indian Ocean

The economic and historical identity of the Indian Ocean realm has been a subject of intense debate, particularly concerning the nature of its connectivity prior to European imperial dominance. K. N. Chaudhuri (1985), in his seminal work, questioned whether the Indian Ocean, with its vast cultural diversity, shared a common destiny similar to the Christian-aligned Turkish Mediterranean. Chaudhuri took the path of long-distance trade, arguing that commerce across geographical and cultural watersheds broke conceptual barriers and addressed questions of identity. He posited that before the Portuguese arrival in 1498, no single political power sought to control Asian sea-lanes. Both Chaudhuri and Sugata Bose agreed that while the Mediterranean was centralized by a world capitalist system, the unifying cohesion of the Indian Ocean rim was only dissolved much later by the establishment of European political and economic domination (Bose, 2006:). Chaudhuri explicitly noted that the ocean and its various seas were "not dominated by any particular nations or empires" (Chaudhuri, 1985:14), suggesting a space defined by dominance without hegemony.

Sugata Bose (2006) framed the ocean as an interregional arena of political, economic, and cultural interaction, theorizing that its social space was conceptualized within webs of interconnections and flexible internal boundaries. However, Bose also made significant claims that warrant critical reflection, particularly his assertion that "India was the fulcrum of the ocean around which all other areas swung", thereby granting Indian experiences primary importance.

The historiographical debate, however, overlooks a fundamental issue: the very act of naming the water body the "Indian" Ocean. I argue that this name is a symptom of political power, projecting a historical bias from the Indian side.

Even the category "India" itself is historically homogenous and hegemonic. Manan Ahmed (2020) insists that the birth of 'India' as a hegemony was catalyzed by the practice of political forgetting and the 'loss of Hindustan'. While Chaudhuri posits dominance without hegemony, the Ocean's naming suggests a conceptual imperialism rooted in the prominence of the subcontinent.

Furthermore, framing colonialism as a mere 'rupture' of the Indian Ocean world (Bose, 2006:215) fails to acknowledge the heterogeneity and localized power dynamics of the maritime regions before European arrival. I contend that these regions maintained distinct physical, cognitive, and socially enforced spatial boundaries, whose contours were determined by local power. The limits of the "Indian Ocean" were fluctuating, varying according to time, politics, and contingency

Crucially, in this historiographical conversation, there is a perennial absence of the indigenous African voice. African actors are consistently relegated to the background, and their activities are often silenced or reduced solely to the context of the slave trade.

I argue that the "Indian Ocean as an interregional arena," as conceptualized by Bose, remains hegemonic in nature. By making India the fulcrum and the mandatory point of entry for studying oceanic space, Bose's framework effectively provincializes India and inadvertently silences other contributors. The concept of long-distance trade, much like globalization, operates through a core-periphery structure, creating specific actors (traders, empires) and marginalizing others (local producers, laborers).

Prior to the arrival of European empires, regional sultanates and potentates in the Western Indian Ocean reached out across the sea to realize their political ambitions (Bishara, 2017:5). Ousted political actors from Oman, for instance, established influence along the East African coast, leveraging local tribes and controlling the flow of commodities like ivory and slaves from the interior (Bishara, 2017:5).

However, the visibility of local African tribes was limited to their capacity to exchange commodities. The emerging political elites mediated between the outward flows of East African goods and the inward streams of textiles from South Asia (Bishara, 2017:5). The position of indigenous Africans was predominantly confined to hard labor: slaves on clove plantations, hunters salvaging tusks, and laborers subjected to tasks that relegated them to the position of natural laborers (Bishara, 2017:44).

The historical conceptualization of the Indian must be critically re-evaluated. If the concept of space is to serve as an inclusive category of analysis, it must move beyond viewing Africa as merely a source of raw materials or labor for the *fulcrum* and acknowledge the complex, autonomous spatial and political configurations that existed on the African side of the Ocean prior to the imposition of both Asian-centric and Western-centric hegemonies.

Conclusion

Can space be decolonized? This question necessitates a deep understanding of power and the pervasive manifestation of hegemony that envelops space. The Nile and the Indian Ocean, as dominant transnational units of analysis, function both hegemonically and homogenizingly. They blur the micro-histories and regions that do not identify with their imposed notions of space, simultaneously annihilating local spatial understandings.

For instance, the hegemonic concept of the Nile, driven by Egyptian interests and Western projects, now dominates modern discussions on dam construction in Uganda. This perspective reduces the dams to mere electricity-generating entities, annihilating local cosmological conceptions in favor of the modern transnational Nile construct. Similarly, the Indian Ocean or the category of long-distance trade creates micro-categories of people who are often reduced to sub-human identities (such as forced laborers or slaves).

These categories are the end products of a Western historiography that privileges text and fixity. Therefore, the decolonization of space mandates the use of epistemological alternatives such as orality and critical methodologies, like those proposed by Yusufu Bala Usman, to challenge these uncritical 'truths.' Failure to adopt this decolonial framework means that we will remain conceptual captives of categories that inherently oppress and silence local histories and cosmologies.

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