

Strange bedfellows: David Livingstone, Sekeletu, imported goods, and the 1853–1856 trans-African expedition

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This article explores the conflicting meanings of the trans-African expedition undertaken between 1853 and 1856 by colonial explorer David Livingstone, with the support of the African monarch Sekeletu, the young Kololo king. The Scottish explorer perceived the inter-continental journey as essential to establishing a trade route along which would flow imported goods from Europe to central Africa, and raw materials from the latter to the metropole. Livingstone held that such trade with its modern goods would not only have a ‘civilizing’ effect upon the Kololo but also make them abandon the slave trade and embrace capitalist values, Christianity, and modernity. But Sekeletu did not sponsor the expedition in question in order to jettison the normative order of Kololo society. To the contrary, he supported the trans-continental exploration to gain greater access to imported goods and, more importantly, used such goods to both boost his power and reinforce Kololo culture.

Keywords: David Livingstone; Sekeletu; Kololo; culture; trans-African expedition; imported goods

In his remarks on one of David Livingstone’s travelogues, James I. Macnair describes the missionary explorer’s expedition of 1853–1856 as ‘a completely individual effort’ (Livingstone 1954, 46). This view is endorsed by triumphalist academic scholarship that celebrates the accomplishments of the Scottish explorer in Africa (Tate 1938, 304–317; Jeal 1974; Northcott 1973; Shepperson 1973a, 1973b; Holmes 1993). This conclusion, shared by some historians at the centennial celebrations recently held in Zambia in honour of David Livingstone in 2013, is informed by the fact that when the missionary embarked on the trans-continental exploration, he enjoyed neither fiscal nor material backing from any scientific body or government in Europe. According to this version of events, Livingstone relied on his own trade commodities such as beads, clothes, and cloth to pay for his passage from Linyanti in central Africa to Luanda on the west coast, and to Qualimane on the east coast. It is misleading, however, to assume that the explorer exclusively depended upon his own resources to execute the expedition. His own abundant, if clumsily authored, travelogues show that the commodities David Livingstone marshalled for the first leg of his expedition to Angola in 1853 were pitifully inadequate (Livingstone 1954, 46). To execute this segment of the journey, the missionary came to rely on the sponsorship of Sekeletu, the nineteen-year-old king of the Kololo (Livingstone 1954, 64). In fact, two years later in 1855, it was Sekeletu who also wholly funded the last part of the expedition to the east coast, as, by then, the explorer’s goods had ‘all been expended’, and he was ‘entirely dependent’ on the generosity of the young African king (Livingstone 1954, 160). Indeed, Livingstone himself readily admitted

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that without the material and manpower support he received from Sekeletu, the missionary could not have undertaken the risky and costly venture (Livingstone 1954, 150). In this respect, the trans-African expedition can be described as a collaborative project (Roberts 1976). It was mutually undertaken between the missionary explorer and the African king even if their motives *vis-à-vis* the expedition were far from compatible, as we shall see.

Surprisingly, scholars of the exploits of the missionary explorer in Africa have overlooked the significant role Sekeletu played in the drama of the trans-continental journey, which catapulted David Livingstone from obscurity to international stardom (for a discussion of this material see Kalusa 2009, 57). Although the explorer himself acknowledged the importance of the human and material support he received from the African ruler, this scholarly neglect has obscured the motives and meanings the Kololo monarch attached to the expedition (Kalusa 2009). David Livingstone recorded that Sekeletu financed the project because the latter shared the missionary's vision to open up the Upper Zambezi in particular and central Africa as a whole to 'legitimate' commerce and hence to European goods, norms, and values (Livingstone 1961, 183–184; Livingstone 1959a, 1959b, 265). In his words, the African ruler and his people were as eager as he himself was to establish a trade route to the coasts in order to acquire modern goods such as clothes, guns, and wagons that 'would transform them into civilized men' (Livingstone 1959a, 1959b, 56). Seen from Livingstone's perspective, Sekeletu sponsored the 1853–1856 exploration because the Kololo ruler shared the missionary's ideals of the 'civilizing mission'.

In as much as Sekeletu sponsored the trans-African journey, there is a grain of truth in David Livingstone's assertion that the project was a joint undertaking between them. Both men indeed agreed that the expedition was indispensable to establishing a trade route crucial to propelling the Upper Zambezi in particular into international commerce and market production. But the meanings the two men attached to the expedition and to the modern goods that would circulate along the route were hardly compatible. Driven by the awareness of the creative imagination with which colonial subjects appropriated imperial projects and ideologies to address old and new concerns (for examples of this scholarship, see Peires 1987; Rafael 1993; Harries 1994; Landau 1995; Peel 1995; Larson 1997; Maxwell 1999; Spear 1999; McKittrick 2002; Peterson 2004; Prestholdt 2007; Larson 2009; Kalusa 2007, 2014), this article examines the conflicting meanings David Livingstone and Sekeletu read into the expedition in question as well as into imported goods. To the missionary explorer, the trans-continental journey was a short step towards establishing a trade route that would not only link the middle of Africa to the east and west coasts, but also act as a catalyst of socio-economic change in the Upper Zambezi. This highway was to stimulate commercial traffic, attracting an influx of European traders, settlers, and modern goods into the area. This would in turn draw the region with its inhabitants into the orbit of 'legitimate' trade, commodity production, and free market economy. By fostering market production in African society, David Livingstone hoped to undermine the slave trade and the alleged despotic power of African rulers over their subjects. Livingstone believed that this 'civilizing' project would ultimately give way to capitalist relations in African society, easing the conversion of the Kololo to Western Christianity and modernity.

But the motives the missionary explorer ascribed to the young African ruler must not be taken at face value. Many critics of David Livingstone's travelogues, from which this article draws most its evidence, have convincingly shown that his pronouncements about Africa and African rulers were no less shaped by the commercial and ideological concerns of the Victorian publishing industry (Finkelstein 2003, 132; Bridges 1998, 67, 69, 79; Wisnicki 2013, 212) than by popular discourse on Africans in nineteenth-century Europe (Youngs 1994, Chapter 1). This discourse, to which Livingstone and other European explorers were certainly not immune, projected Africans as a child-like people who could hardly resist the allure of Western goods and technology

because of the supposed superiority of modern goods (Kalusa 2009, 118). Thus, in most of the missionary's accounts, Sekeletu emerges as an ambitious young ruler eager to do the explorer's bidding in order to gain access to European goods (see Livingstone 1860, 151–153, 161).

In view of the forces that influenced David Livingstone's pronouncements about Sekeletu, it is pertinent to question the motives he attributed to the African king. Within this context, and given that Sekeletu himself left no documented account of his dealings with the missionary, it is perhaps more informative to infer the young ruler's motives underlying his support of the trans-African expedition from the workings of his society. For, as David Finkelstein has perceptively remarked, what David Livingstone and other Europeans wrote about Africans in the nineteenth century was informed no less by metropolitan discourses on Africans than by commercial concerns (Finkelstein 2003, 132). The motives that the explorer attributed to Sekeletu must therefore not be accepted at face value.

This article distances itself from the motives the missionary ascribed to Sekeletu. It insists that the motives of the king towards the famous journey were informed by social, economic, political, and intergenerational workings of the Kololo society that undermined his authority, power, and status. Indigent when he inherited political office in 1851, and faced with unrelenting opposition to his reign from powerful, wealthy social seniors, Sekeletu saw the trans-continental expedition as a way to counteract the forces that denied him social respectability, wealth, and power (see Kalusa 2009, 64–72). It is to this end that the young monarch sponsored the expedition and welcomed the possibility of creating an international trade route. His willingness to support the expedition, with resources mostly gleaned from his followers, may thus be read as a potent strategy to make good his dispossession. Through this strategy, the Kololo sovereign hoped to access imported goods and to deploy them to elevate his social status, to expand his networks of patronage and hence to bolster his own social and political influence. But, contrary to David Livingstone's expectations, the king hoped to accomplish all these goals without fundamentally altering the normative order of his society, or culture.

David Livingstone's 'plan for the Makololo'

The obsessive zeal with which David Livingstone carried out the trans-African exploration in question may perhaps best be understood against the backdrop of the British industrial revolution of the nineteenth century and its influence upon his thought and practice. By the turn of the century, the industrial revolution, itself occasioned by the transition from feudal to capitalist modes of production, was already underway (see Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, Chapters 1–3). By 1813 when Livingstone was born in Blantyre, Scotland, the revolution had irreversibly transformed Britain's economic, political, and socio-cultural landscape. Fuelled by technological innovations that had commenced in earlier times and that continued long after his birth, the revolution had replaced domestic production with industrial production, leading to greater output goods and demand for raw materials, free labour, markets, and colonies. The industrial revolution had also not only altered relations of production through radically transforming the division of labour; it had also changed the British social structure itself by spawning new social classes. Most prominent among such classes were the industrial and agrarian bourgeoisie who controlled the means of production; the dispossessed industrial workers who, alienated from land, were ruthlessly exploited in industrial centres; and, finally, the middle class on whose fringes were the clergy and missionaries. In short, the industrial revolution, as the Comaroffs perceptively observe in *Of Revelation and Revolution*, had ushered in the new era of industrial capitalism and modernity (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, Chapters 1–3).

The rise of industrial capitalism in Britain gave birth to a new moral economy, new values, and new ideological discourses that profoundly influenced David Livingstone's beliefs and

attitudes towards Africa and its inhabitants, and shaped his mission to Africa. Like other advocates of capitalism, the Scottish missionary not only saw its goods as possessing a magnetism that would be irresistible to Africans, but he also celebrated such capitalist ideals as individualism and self-improvement. He exhorted free market enterprise, wage labour, private property, and commerce as potent symbols of socio-economic advancement. Even though capitalism itself was by no means uncontested in Europe itself, Livingstone equally perceived its organization of labour, technology, science, and socio-economic values as the key to human civilization (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). Conversely, he saw the absence in Africa of capitalism with its relations of production, division of labour, free labour, market production, and Christianity as the root of the continent's backwardness. Predictably, he regarded himself as an agent of the capitalist system, or more accurately, a faithful bearer of its values and norms to the 'Dark Continent'.

As David Livingstone's own private journals vividly show, it was the values associated with British capitalism that informed his 'plan for the Makololo' (Livingstone 1960, 142–143), and in turn his trans-African journey. The explorer unveiled the plan at a well-attended meeting with Sekeletu and his subordinate chiefs at Linyanti in the Upper Zambezi in late 1853. The plan was influenced by the explorer's own understanding of the workings of the Kololo society. David Livingstone formulated the plan after spending several months at Linyanti in the early 1850s when he tried in vain to create a mission station in the Upper Zambezi. During that time, the Christian explorer observed that the local demand for European goods was elastic, with the Kololo eagerly buying such European commodities as beads, guns and, most importantly, clothes from Ovimbundu traders from Angola (Livingstone 1940, 234, 1961, 183). Livingstone, however, lamented that his hosts acquired these imported goods through selling slaves whom they captured from their subjects: the Lozi, Tonga, Ila, and Toka-Leya – that is, the people the Kololo had conquered when they invaded the region in the late 1830s and early 1840s. The missionary held that what fuelled the slave raids was that the Kololo and their victims were not yet incorporated into the so-called 'legitimate' trade system. To Livingstone, this situation no less fed interethnic conflicts than buttressed the dictatorial tendencies that he believed were widespread in Africa as a whole. To him, this situation enabled the conquerors of the Upper Zambezi in particular to fetter their victims in abject poverty and untold misery (Livingstone 1857, 199, 1940, 155).

The Scottish missionary doctor held that once implemented in the Upper Zambezi, his 'plan for the Makololo' would effectively emancipate slaves (Livingstone 1960, 142–143). Rather than trade in humans, the Kololo and other Africans would exchange raw materials for British imports. He identified ivory, ostrich feathers, and beeswax, all apparently abundant in Sekeletu's domain, as the natural commodities the Kololo would purchase from their subjects and export to Europe in return for imported goods (Livingstone 1857, 1963, 276). David Livingstone held that 'legitimate' commerce with British Christian entrepreneurs and between the Kololo and their subjects could usher in an era of mutual economic dependence between African ethnic groups, transform them into producers of raw materials for British industries as well as importers of manufactured goods and thus obviate inter-ethnic conflicts (Livingstone 1961, 177). Simply put, the Kololo, as active participants in such international commerce, would abandon trading in humans thereby ending the misery of their victims.

On the other hand, British merchants and settlers operating in the Upper Zambezi could not only profit from trading with Africans in local commodities, but in addition to securing British interests in the area, they would also drive out from the area Arab traders who were now actively trading in slaves and spreading Islam there. British colonists could further frustrate the imperial and economic designs on the region of the Portuguese in Angola and of the Boers in South Africa who, too, had already begun to penetrate central Africa (Livingstone 1961, 250). David

Livingstone, therefore, perceived British traders and settlers in central Africa to be the vanguard of geopolitical interests of the rapidly expanding British Empire. Together with missionaries, they would help in planting on African soil such modern industrial ideals as non-enslaved labour, private property, literacy, and Christianity. As purveyors of industrial values, they were also poised to play a leading role in undermining 'evil' African practices, including polygamy, the consumption of alcohol, the authoritarianism of local rulers, and, above all, 'the sullen isolation of heathenism' (Livingstone 1961, 301). In this manner, British colonists could carve out space for extending the Christian empire into the heart of Africa.

But David Livingstone's blueprint was not restricted to promoting Western values, redirecting the energy of the Kololo towards exporting natural products alone, or converting them to Christianity alone. Taking advantage of the affinity of the Kololo to improve local breeds of livestock (Livingstone 1963, 56), the explorer further saw his plan as a means to lure them into production of cash crops to feed the growing industries in Britain with raw materials (Livingstone 1961, 183). He identified coffee, tobacco, cotton, and sugar, whose demand at home had literally become an imperial obsession by the nineteenth century, as the most suitable crops the Kololo could grow on a large scale (McMartin 1973, 96–103). To this end, Livingstone introduced seeds of coffee and of other crops in the Upper Zambezi after his return from Angola in 1855 (Livingstone 1963, 141). He further tried to encourage the locals to grow sugar cane on an industrial scale through advising Sekeletu to purchase from England a sugar mill for processing cane locally (McMartin 1973, 98–99). Only a generation removed from the rise of commercial agriculture and its devastating impact on subsistence farming in Britain, David Livingstone believed that cash cropping would recreate in the middle of Africa a class of wealthy peasants eager to engage in market production, employ free labour, and import industrial goods from Britain. This could transform them into exporters of cash crops and importers of manufactured goods, with Kololo warriors-cum-commodity producers now paying wages to their former subjects.

It is clear, then, that the missionary's blueprint was a multi-faceted socio-economic and political project designed as much to end the slave trade as to transform the Kololo into consumers of manufactured goods. If successfully implemented, the project was to spawn an influx of British colonists and their goods into the Upper Zambezi. By trading with the British in imported goods and engaging in market production, the Kololo would be more firmly drawn into the unfolding world capitalist system. Their involvement in commercial production would champion wage labour and private property and make them abandon the slave trade, figuratively closing what David Livingstone described as 'the bitter fountain of African misery' (Livingstone 1961, 257–258). The eradication of the slave trade and servile labour would give way to capitalist relations of production in the Upper Zambezi and fundamentally alter the division of labour and social relations in the Kololo society. In short, then, the advent of industrial capitalism to the Upper Zambezi would remake local ways of seeing and being. This, Livingstone hoped, would ultimately end the absolute economic and political domination the supposedly despotic ruling elite wielded over their followers and the conquered. In this way, the conquerors and the conquered would be propelled into the age of Western modernity (Kalusa 2009, 56–57).

The success of this plan, of course, hinged upon opening a trans-African trade route linking central Africa to the west and east coasts. Along the envisaged highway could flow manufactured goods from Europe to the Upper Zambezi and raw materials in the reverse direction. It is to this end that in 1853 the explorer requested Sekeletu to sponsor the expedition from Linyanti in the Buluzi Plain to Luanda, Angola and, three years later, to the east coast, a request the king warmly endorsed. This was despite the opposition Sekeletu faced from some of his sub-chiefs or *indunas*, who feared that 'legitimate' trade and the proposed route to Angola would undermine commerce in slaves on which their own wealth and power depended (Livingstone 1963, 64). Dismissing

such objections, Sekeletu supplied the explorer with a royal canoe, ivory for paying for his passage to Angola, four oxen as ration, and 27 young men. Among the men were two young Kololo chiefs who served as the expedition's guides (Livingstone 1963, 64–65).

In 1855, the monarch, too, outfitted the second leg of the expedition to Quelimane, Mozambique to complete the trans-African journey. Apart from providing the explorer with 114 porters and two new experienced guides, Sekeletu also personally accompanied David Livingstone as far as close to the Victoria Falls. Sekwebu, one of the guides and someone whom the explorer came to regard as a man of prudence and good judgement, became his interpreter and proved invaluable to the successful completion of the journey (Livingstone 1963, 64–65). Having earlier travelled extensively in the Lower Zambezi area as a slave of the Ndebele, Sekwebu possessed knowledge of the dialects spoken in the territories that the explorer traversed en-route to the east African coast. Without Sekwebu's involvement, it is difficult to see how David Livingstone would have executed the second leg of the expedition.

Sekeletu's quest 'to become great'

Given the enthusiasm and generosity with which Sekeletu funded the trans-African journey, it is tempting to endorse the view that the Kololo king shared David Livingstone's motives towards the project. Indeed, at the risk of repetition, the missionary insisted that Sekeletu funded the exploration in order 'to accomplish an object [i.e. establish the trans-continental route] as much desired by the [king] and his people as by me' (Livingstone 1963, 64). David Livingstone popularized this notion in the numerous speeches he made before the British parliament, the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, the Royal Geographical Society, and many other bodies, when he returned home as a national hero after the expedition. Yet a close reading of his own accounts reveals that Sekeletu's motives *vis-à-vis* the 1853–1856 expedition scarcely meshed with those of the explorer. This is notwithstanding that both men saw the trans-African journey as a prerequisite to creating the proposed international trade route. This observation is hardly surprising. For, if the Scottish explorer's motives in undertaking the trans-African exploration were influenced by the transformations engendered by industrial capitalism in Britain, the meanings that the Kololo ruler infused into the expedition were motivated by the workings of his own society rather than those Livingstone ascribed to him.

The Kololo society over which Sekeletu came to preside in the 1850s was founded two decades earlier in the Upper Zambezi by his predecessor and father Sebitwane, after the latter fled from South Africa due to the political turbulence unleashed by the Mfecane conflagrations of the 1820s (see <http://www.barotseland.com/history3.htm>; Cobbing 1988, 490–494; Omer-Cooper 1993, 273–276). As shown at length elsewhere, the Kololo kingdom that emerged in the upper Zambezi was a militaristic state in which power, land and wealth were rigidly monopolized by time-tested warlords at the expense of young men and social juniors who had taken no part in battle (Kalusa 2009, 60–62). As Livingstone himself insightfully noted, Kololo youths were excluded from owning cattle unless they proved their valour in battle. This, the social commentator added, frequently spawned intergenerational conflicts, pitting Kololo elders against young men (Livingstone 1860; Kalusa 2009, 65).

In spite of his royalty, Sekeletu did not escape from the unequal distribution of wealth between the elders and the youth, nor from the social tensions this situation generated. By 1851 when he ascended the throne, the young ruler had not taken part in battle and therefore possessed no cattle – in a society where livestock defined the power and influence of cattle barons, warlords, and elders (Kalusa 2009, 65). It is no surprise, then, that from the inception of Sekeletu's reign, his grip on power was at best tenuous (Kalusa 2009, 67, 69). Without cattle, he lacked the means

to create an elaborate network of patronage by which he, like cattle barons and successful warlords, could cement his authority, power, or influence.

The economic deprivation of the monarch was sealed in 1851 when he lost his cattle inheritance to his father's nephew Mpepe, a powerful warlord and cattle baron to whom Sebitwane had entrusted the cattle when Sekeletu was still a minor (Livingstone 1960, 181–184, 210–211, 232–233). If Livingstone's observations are accurate, Mpepe consequently became the richest noble in the kingdom after the death of Sebitwane in that year. Perhaps emboldened by his wealth, the cattle baron, who regarded himself as the more rightful heir to the Kololo throne, refused to surrender the inheritance to Sekeletu on the grounds that 'eating is pleasant to everyone', i.e., wealth was coveted by everyone (Livingstone 1960, 181–183). The missionary, who seems to have disliked the warlord for raiding slaves, noted that, apart from loaning some of the stolen beasts to his relatives to enlarge his own network of patronage, and thus his power, Mpepe sold the rest of the animals to Angolan slave traders in exchange for guns, cloth, and other goods. He also began to plot to overthrow the monarch with the connivance of Silva Porto, a wealthy Portuguese merchant from Angola. To secure from his accomplice military assistance and a canon to carry out the coup, the warlord illegally ceded part of Sekeletu's territory to Silva Porto (Livingstone 1960, 181–183). Mpepe's unbecoming behaviour confirmed the dispossession of the king.

Robbed of cattle, the teenage ruler wallowed in poverty. Since livestock was the local currency of *lobola* or bride-wealth, the impecunious monarch was unable to pay bride-price for five wives, as Sekeletu had once dreamed (Kalusa 2009, 66–67). Cattle-poor, he was compelled to settle for only two of his late father's widows, the third widow shunning his advances (Kalusa 2009, 66). In a society where the number of a man's wives marked his masculinity and respectability, Sekeletu's failure to secure marriage contracts threw a long shadow on his virility and hence desire to gain culturally sanctioned respect. More ominously, without cattle and impoverished, he could hardly emulate wealthy elders like Mpepe who used livestock to forge networks of political loyalty that signified their power, their prestige, and their social influence.

It is unsurprising, therefore, that when Sekeletu first met David Livingstone in the early 1850s, the Kololo ruler was anxious to engage in battle not just to demonstrate his bravery, as the missionary would have us believe, but to procure resources with which he could marry more wives, attract more followers, and thus, in his own words, 'become great' (Livingstone 1960, 233). David Livingstone, who scarcely appreciated the importance of polygamy in African society, held that Sekeletu's eagerness to engage in battle was a means by which the young ruler sought to obtain cattle to pay bride-price for many wives. But it is more plausible that Sekeletu was also anxious to undercut Angolan merchants who hitherto dominated trade in the Upper Zambezi and sold their merchandise at inflated prices. And the king equally wanted to undermine the economic operations of merchants of Arab and Boer extraction who, too, sold goods in the upper Zambezi at exorbitant prices – i.e. traders whom David Livingstone wanted to banish from central Africa for both economic and geopolitical reasons.

David Livingstone's insistence that Sekeletu was eager to engage in battle to demonstrate bravery ignored that the young monarch's strained economic situation had a telling impact on his social standing and ability to exercise power and influence. Contrary to scholarship that portrays inheritance of property in pre-colonial Africa as a flexible process in which youths acquired wealth and power from social seniors more or less effortlessly (for a study that questions this view, see McKittrick 2002, Chapter 3), the Kololo society, in which wealth was the monopoly of battle-tested soldiers and other social seniors, prevented the young ruler from creating networks of power essential to lubricating his authority and status. This was compounded by the fact that, in this militaristic society, the transfer of resources from social seniors to social juniors was a highly contested affair, rather than automatic. Indeed, evidence indicates that cattle-rich Kololo elders seldom bequeathed livestock to cadets, since their control over beasts conferred upon

them leverage to control the labour of younger people (Kalusa 2009, 65). It is, therefore, unsurprising that the youth among the Kololo, including young royals, were generally dispossessed.

Beyond his economic woes, Sekeletu further faced relentless opposition to his reign – not least from Mpepe. This opposition partly stemmed from the manner in which the former assumed political office. Prior to the death of Sekeletu's father Sebitwane in the early 1850s, the latter had appointed his daughter Mamochisane as his successor (Livingstone 1960, 28–29, 1963, 53–54, 1857). Less than a year after taking office, she, according to David Livingstone, abdicated in favour of Sekeletu, reportedly because she preferred raising her children to attending to the more demanding affairs of state (Livingstone 1963, 54). But Sekeletu was her half-brother. Some wealthy and influential Kololo royals, therefore, dismissed her successor's claim to the throne as illegitimate, more so because his mother was an ex-slave who had married a minor noble before she became Sebitwane's wife (Kalusa 2009, 66). Others even doubted whether Sekeletu was a biological son of Sebitwane. Long after the young king ascended the Kololo throne, both camps remained resolutely united in their opposition to his rule and inflexibly determined to unseat him.

Given his impoverishment, the stiff opposition he faced to his leadership, and the constant military threat that the Ndebele posed to Kololo hegemony in the Upper Zambezi (Livingstone 1961), it is no surprise that Sekeletu was eager to finance the 1853–1856 expedition. The African ruler understood that the expedition was vital to establishing a trade route which was indispensable for opening the area to international commerce. Through that commerce, Sekeletu could gain access to European goods and guns, thereby making good his dispossession and bolstering his military and social power. For these reasons, he shared David Livingstone's desire to promote commodity production in the Upper Zambezi (McMartin 1973, 100). Lastly, both men may have also agreed that the trade route would be pivotal to keeping Boers, Arabs, and Angolan slave traders out of central Africa as a whole. But, as demonstrated later, the meanings and uses the African king read into the proposed trade route and imported commodities hardly conformed to those of the missionary explorer.

If David Livingstone believed that Sekeletu would use the envisaged route to champion free enterprise, private property, capitalist production, and social relations, he was soon disillusioned. For no sooner did the explorer return from Angola in 1855 with a favourable report on the prices of ivory offered there than the ambitious young king imposed a stiff trade monopoly over ivory, the most important payment for imported goods. Under this economic decree, which the missionary found too stringent in comparison to related legislation in adjacent areas, all the ivory now became state property (Livingstone and Livingstone 2001, 211, 215–216). Henceforth, and in spite of Livingstone's remonstrations and elders' indignation, both tusks of each elephant killed in the kingdom were to be surrendered to the king, whereas before the decree, each elephant hunter retained one tusk (Kalusa 2009, 72). Nor was Sekeletu averse to deploying force to extract from the conquered ivory for export, a practice that Livingstone, who wanted to champion peace and free commerce in Africa, vehemently opposed (Livingstone 1963, 296).

It is noteworthy that after 1853, Sekeletu increasingly used the trail the explorer had blazed to the west coast to export natural products to Angola in exchange for European goods. Yet he also enacted a decree outlawing the export of slaves, a law whose rigid enforcement by Sekeletu practically barred the elders from using the same trail to export to or import goods from the west coast (See Kalusa 2009, 74–77). This decree expectedly earned the monarch profuse accolades from a delighted Livingstone. But as the legislation mandated Sekeletu to forcibly intercept and free slaves who had been exported illegally by Kololo elders, it was no minor assault upon their most important source of wealth and power. This legislation, coupled with the decree over ivory, enabled the young king to monopolize access to manufactured goods just as elders dominated ownership of cattle, land, and slaves. While the trade monopoly strengthened Sekeletu's

access to foreign goods, it simultaneously eroded the capacity of his social seniors to acquire such goods and/or to use them to augment their wealth, their authority, and their power.

New goods, old customs, and social order

Without exploring Sekeletu's motives, Kabunda Kayongo, the only scholar who has written a book-length study on the rise and fall of the Kololo state, has blamed the kingdom's collapse in the mid-1860s on the king's monopolistic legislation (Kayongo 1987, Chapter 1). For our purpose, it is important to state that the king's legislation mocked David Livingstone's discourse of free enterprise, self-labour, and private ownership of property. It is not difficult to comprehend why the legislation did not neatly mesh with this discourse. Unlike the explorer who perceived free market economy with its ideals as the hallmark of public good and civilization, the monopolistic decrees enacted by Sekeletu were calculated to enable him personally to dominate long-distance trade with its goods. Apart from curbing his elders' access to imported goods and thus undermining their power and influence, this strategy enhanced his control over imported manufactured goods. It is tempting to think that Sekeletu exerted control over such objects simply to enrich himself and thus to overcome the vagaries of his dispossession. But the reality was more complex. When David Livingstone revisited the Upper Zambezi in the early 1860s, he was perplexed to find that the younger man had kept only a paltry share of the imported goods. Contrary to the spirit of capitalist accumulation, the king frequently redistributed to his dependants the bulk of imported goods that he imported from Angola (Kalusa 2009, 72). Confirming social anthropologists' observation that goods have the capacity to acquire new meanings when they cross cultural frontiers (Kopytoff 1986, 66–68; Prestholdt 2007), Sekeletu infused these imported exotic goods with new meanings. Just as cattle-rich men loaned livestock to their followers to buttress relations of patronage, so did the young king integrate exotic objects into his own network of patronage. In this way, he, like his contemporaries elsewhere in pre-colonial Namibia, hoped to create new constituents, bolster his influence, and subordinate the authority of powerful elders without upsetting the existing socio-political order of the Kololo polity (see McKittrick 2002, Chapter 3).

A cursory look at a lengthy list of goods that Sekeletu and other men asked Dr David Livingstone to buy for them in England after the expedition affirms that the monarch was more inclined to import goods consumable within the existing socio-economic and political order than those likely to upset it. Topping the list were men's clothes: shirts, trousers, coats, hats, jackets, shoes, ties, and even spectacles. Next on the list were clothes for women, a rocking chair, rifles for killing elephants, and a sugar mill (Livingstone 1963, 331–332). Clearly, Sekeletu placed a high premium on clothes and other consumer goods, the only capital goods on his list being two rifles for obtaining ivory and a mill for producing sugar.

The desire of the young monarch to acquire articles of European clothing more than capital goods does not just speak to his shifting sartorial tastes, social status, or prestige, even if Sekeletu relished attracting attention by routinely appearing in public attired in modern apparel (Kalusa 2009, 75). Light and portable, coats, jackets, shirts, and other clothes proved easy for him to integrate into local systems of distribution of resources through which the ruling elite in the Upper Zambezi and beyond created constituents and expanded royal power (see Martin 1994, 401–405; McKittrick 2002, 59–65). David Livingstone observed that Sekeletu always gave a piece of calico or some garment to everyone who visited him at Linyanti. The missionary added that the expressions of gratitude that the king received from the beneficiaries of his largess were lengthy and profuse (Livingstone 1963, 112). Given what we know about Livingstone's accounts of Sekeletu, the missionary may have exaggerated the generosity of the young ruler in an attempt to portray the teenager as a ruler who shared the explorer's vision. But there is little doubt that the clothes and other imports that Sekeletu distributed to his followers endeared them to the king,

creating and oiling relations of loyalty and consolidating existing social relations. Thus, rather than enhance social relations and the values of British industrial capitalism, as Livingstone hoped, Sekeletu deployed modern goods to consolidate pre-existing relations and to oil the wheels of political patronage.

Academic discourse that likens material objects to social beings whose biographical identities change over time provides a useful model within which to comprehend the meanings and uses Sekeletu infused into imported goods (see Kopytoff 1986, 66; Buettner 2006, 30). This discourse suggests that the ways in which people consume goods are shaped by prevailing socio-economic and political conditions, as opposed to the qualities or superiority of such objects (see Thomas 1991, Chapter 3). From this standpoint, it is not far-fetched to argue that the Kololo monarch embraced exotic objects not because of their supposed superiority or 'civilizing' potential, as David Livingstone imagined. Sekeletu appropriated modern commodities on his own terms and used them to bolster his own power and influence and to invigorate the existing indigenous order.

Beyond recognizing their utilitarian value, Sekeletu perceived in the imported goods the power to create new social relationships, to refine existing hierarchies, and, as earlier noted, to solidify relations of patronage (McKittrick 2002, Chapter 3; Kalusa 2009, 73). Through infusing European goods with such meanings, he transformed them into 'entangled objects' (see Thomas 1991, 4–5) by which he expressed his shifting social status and secured loyalty from his subjects. It is these meanings and uses that drove the high demand for English clothes and other Western objects that Livingstone so accurately observed in the Upper Zambezi (Livingstone 1857, 199). This perspective vindicates scholarship that insists that the consumption of manufactured goods is scarcely conditioned by the values their makers or advertisers etch upon them but by the social, cultural, and political circumstances within which they are appropriated or consumed (Thomas 1991, Chapter 3; Burke 1996, Chapter 1; Kalusa 2013, 161).

If Sekeletu deployed modern goods in culturally familiar or familiarized ways, he similarly dismissed Livingstone's manoeuvres to convert him to Christianity and to persuade him to abandon polygamy and beer-drinking. At a meeting between the two men in early 1853, the king willingly granted the missionary evangelist permission to preach the gospel to children and even to interested Kololo royals. Sekeletu later even escorted the explorer to look for a suitable site for building a mission station in the kingdom (Livingstone 1857, 247–248). But, to the disappointment of the evangelist, the potentate made it clear from the onset that 'he did not wish to learn the Book [i.e. convert to Christianity], as it might make him change his heart and [thus] make him content with only one wife, like [the Tswana king] Sechele' (Livingstone 1857, 248). David Livingstone's efforts to dissuade Sekeletu and his subjects from consuming alcohol equally fell on the deaf ears of the sovereign. After preaching for several months against the alcohol consumption at Linyanti in the early 1850s, the pastor still observed that Sekeletu and his subordinate chiefs spent each day 'guzzling the nasty drink called boyalwa [*bojalwa*]', or beer. He disapprovingly added that such beer parties were marked by 'a continuous roar of chaffing, railery [sic], badinage and laughing' (Livingstone 1963, 300).

David Livingstone's protracted campaign against polygamy and alcohol consumption among the Kololo was part of his wider crusade to reconstruct the African socio-cultural ecology in the image of bourgeois conceptions of the nuclear family, leisure time, discipline, and sobriety. But his campaign proved to be a failure. For to the Kololo king and his people, polygamy was not just a symbol of honour; it was also an important instrument by which the Kololo ruling elite cemented ties of political allegiance between themselves and other royals. Sekeletu's father had in fact earlier successfully unified his people and their subjects by judiciously marrying daughters of defeated chiefs in the Upper Zambezi (Caplan 1970, Chapter 1). Similarly, the consumption of alcohol performed useful social functions. Unlike in nineteenth-century Britain where drinking had become a purely leisure activity, in the Kololo society it was an occasion for more than

merry-making, a point that the explorer himself conceded. Sekeletu's beer parties provided space for settling disputes, expressing political allegiance to the monarch, and venting of sentiments or tensions that may have otherwise remained simmering under the surface (see Ambler 1990, 300; Akyeampong 1996a, Chapter 3, 1996b, 215–216; Korieh 2003, 111). Like polygamy, local drinking was a way of knitting the society together, not disrupting it. This observation may not have been lost on Sekeletu, eager as he was to bolster and exercise his influence over the Kololo society.

It is easy, then, to see why the efforts of the Scottish cultural crusader to convince the African leader to outlaw polygamy and the imbibing of alcohol fell on barren soil. More importantly, Sekeletu selectively appropriated the crusader's 'civilising discourse' and was not averse to infusing modern goods into local customs and practices. Just as the king used manufactured goods in a manner that recalled elders' deployment of cattle to attract followers, he also frequently turned up at beer parties, succession ceremonies, and other public spaces fully clad in European attire, drawing more public attention to himself than to the evangelist's sermons. As far as Sekeletu was concerned, pre-existing customs that Livingstone so much vilified were, to borrow David Gordon's memorable phrase, 'to be part of the quotidian experience of modernity' (Gordon 2012, 3; Geschiere 1997; Ellis and ter Haar 2004).

In conclusion, David Livingstone was a creation of the British industrial revolution, who regarded himself as a conveyor of its values and ideals to Africa. He was convinced that such characteristics of industrial capitalism as commerce, market production, waged labour, and private property were embodiments of the common good. They could, therefore, be universally exported to and embraced by people on the periphery of the rapidly expanding British Empire, irrespective of local culture and practices. To the missionary explorer, the spread of industrial capitalism with its values was the key to ending the slave trade, turning non-Western societies into producers of raw materials for British industries, and converting such societies into consumers of manufactured goods.

Sekeletu's sponsorship of David Livingstone's well-known trans-African expedition of 1853–1856, was scarcely the result of the explorer's hegemonic agenda or vision. As demonstrated in this article, Livingstone was convinced that the Kololo king supported the exploration because he seemed to embrace the explorer's 'civilising mission', the fulfilment of which depended on creating a trade route that would bring British colonists and goods into the heart of Africa. But Sekeletu sponsored the trans-continental expedition for reasons that David Livingstone hardly fathomed. While the latter saw the expedition and British goods as instruments for propagating Western civilization in Africa, the former perceived in them an opportunity to reverse the socio-economic and political plight thrust upon him by the workings of his society. In the imported objects, Sekeletu particularly discerned the ability to uplift his social status, to create new relationships, and finally, to challenge the unequal distribution of wealth and power that conventionally weighed in favour of Kololo social seniors and elders. Moreover, he appropriated imported goods without discarding polygamy, beer consumption, or other local cultural practices. Contrary to David Livingstone's expectations, the African ruler embedded modern goods into pre-existing cultural practices. Thus, the Kololo ruler apprehended the discourse of modernity on his own terms, rather than those dictated by the Scottish adventurer.

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