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Fatal Archaeology: Scaring Experiences in Field Archaeology

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Abstract

It is very rare for African archaeologists to have chances to work in different African countries in archaeological fieldworks. Such opportunities have occurred to many non-Africans due to funding resources available to them. I have had such chances under the auspices of the African Archaeology Network between 2001 and 2010. In some of the fieldworks, I experienced difficult and threatening conditions, with some being tantamount to fatality. Glimpses of those experiences are provided here. They include those of Madagascar, Comoros, Tanzania and Nigeria. Archaeologists are used to reporting about the academic part of fieldworks with rare mentioning of other aspects of archaeological experiences. In presenting about my fatal archaeology, academic aspects that led to those threatening experiences are provided, also with work results and publications. In my first time in Madagascar, my life threat was that of cholera; and in the other, it was high blood pressure caused partly by the lack of flight to catch up with my home return flight via Nairobi. This caused me to travel by a hired minibus on a long road of dangerous state in a very high blood pressure condition. In the Comoros, the problem was that of sailing across a deep sea in a time of enormous winds and waves in a small boat of only three people. In Nigeria, the problem was that of being attacked by people with machetes and spears. In Tanzania, at Mgongo in Kilwa, the problem was of a game guard shooting a hippo carelessly in a situation that he could have killed one of us.

Keywords: *Fieldwork, Stone Age, SGA-paintings/engravings, Neolithic, Early Iron Age*

Introduction

By fatal archaeology, it means those archaeological fieldworks that became perilous to my personal life and to other persons working with me. It is archaeological works in which either I, or others with me, could have died. The first incident of fatal archaeology is the 1986 fieldwork in Mgongo Kilwa in Tanzania. The second is two fieldworks in Madagascar in Tuliara and Isalo regions, in two different periods of 2002 and 2010. They are put together in this paper although being of different times because they occurred in the same country. The threatening part of this fieldwork was cholera and high blood pressure as presented below. The third fatal field was in Leja, Nigeria in 2007–8, where villagers were in an attaching mode claiming that their monuments were being vandalized. The fourth is of Moheli or Mwali in the Comoros in 2009 where we sailed with a small boat through very high tides. Other places I worked in, or visited in Africa are mentioned with no such dangerous experiences. I have a sub-title on the significance of discussing how my work in those dangerous moments contributes to African archaeology. This is followed by a conclusion and acknowledgements.

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Problem
One could wonder why I author this kind of paper. Does it not look like just personal experiences in the field? It has, however, been my knowledge that most people read archaeological reports with eagerness and happiness to know about the people of the past. They visit museums to look at remains of the past, without a glimpse of how that data was found and collected in the field. Of course, fieldwork reports are provided; but one rarely finds the fieldwork experiences of archaeologists in those reports. I wonder, for example, about the Olduvai Gorge conditions that were encountered by the Leakeys (Leakey et al., 1994) who worked tirelessly for a very long time interacting with dangerous animals and climatic conditions just to provide knowledge of how humans came about. Although I have not seen their diaries, I expect that the threatening part of their research would be seen thither. The same assumption could be made of archaeologists working on the oceanic and coastal areas like Chittick (1974) as it pertains to encountered heavy waves and storms—which have tormented me and my colleagues several times in islands and shorelines—without reporting about them anywhere. Are these experiences not part of the archaeology discipline? Maybe it is not academic to some people, but I think it is worthy to have a forum to report about them to prepare future archaeologists for unexpected hard work. My students and friends have asked me how I could author literature that covers the larger part of the continent, and from very difficult conditions. I have always answered the question in this way: it was the experience of working in many African countries, some with scary conditions, that enabled me to author or co-author such archaeological works as *The Unity of African History: 3000BC to AD 500* (Chami, 2006a); *Zanzibar and the Swahili Coast from 30000 Years Ago* (Chami, 2009); and papers about the Geographical extent of Azania (Chami 2021/68: 12–30) and the 'Advent of domestication in Eastern and Southern Africa' (Chami, forthcoming). At least a few academic issues of those scary episodes experienced while researching are presented here. The academic parts of those fatal episodes are also provided in this paper anecdotally.

Episode I: A fatal killing of a hippo in Mgongo, Kilwa, Tanzania
In 1986 I was very lucky to be employed at the University of Dar es Salaam in archaeology as a tutorial assistance. Since I had come from sociology, and had not graduated in archaeology, I was required to be trained in archaeology fieldwork, and then register for a Master's degree in archaeology at the Brown University in the USA. Professor Peter Schmidt and Mr Jonathan Karoma, who recruited me for the archaeology job, linked me to Mr Jonathan Karoma's archaeology research to be conducted at Mgongo in Kilwa area, in Southern Tanzania. They recruited one Dr David Frisen from Canada to come to Tanzania to train me. He joined us to Kilwa.

Since the Mgongo site was known to have a lot of wild dangerous animals, but was not a game reserve, Mr Karoma requested the district administrator to allow us have a game ranger with us. The guy we were given had a big gun with him. I was scared because I had not lived amidst dangerous animals before. At the camp, we slept in tents. That was also my first time in a tent. In our team were also hired

very young two boys, recruited from Kilwa Kisiwani village. It was also their first time to sleep in tents, and to be close to wild animals. Knowing that I was to fly to the USA for an archaeology Master's degree, I was ready to learn everything I was to be taught by Dr Friesen and Mr Karoma. My earliest view of threatening animals was an elephant I saw very near the tents while we were mapping the site. Dr Frisen doubted I had seen any animal, arguing that it was just my sheer fear: "There is no elephant, but your fearful reaction." He then left us and went to the scene of my seen elephant. He came back laughing, saying that there was no elephant.

On the next day, we went to an archaeological survey on a slope towards the beach on the western side of the camp. I was thrilled with my first archaeological work. At the lower part of the slope, about 200 meters, we could observe mangrove brush. In this type of archaeological walk, I was learning how to identify artefacts on the ground. I was told to develop an archaeological eye. Actually, I collected a stone object that looked like a figurine of a tortoise. I showed it to Mr Karoma. He was very happy. He told me it was a stone artefact core, known as a tortoise stone core, for producing stone tools like blades. I also had on my hand another stone I had collected in the same area, which he identified as of the Lavoulois technique, which I came to learn better about it when I was in my Master's studies at the Brown University.

As we were immersed in a discussion on stone tools, an animal noise came from a long-distance in front of us in the valley near the mangrove brush. It was a hippo, already charging towards us. The game ranger, who was just behind us on the higher side of the slope, commanded us to run. But before we could move, we heard a deafening gunshot behind us. All, in shock, we fell down. After a minute or so we got up to realize that the gunman was higher up on the slope running with his gun. Without knowing what had happened to the hippo, we started running upward towards him. Mr Karoma was really dazed, uttering words like a crazy man. "Stupid, how can this guy shoot while just behind us? He could have shot us. Where is the hippo now?" The rest of others were still in shock with no word. Mr Karoma continued, "How can a man I employed to guard us against animals run and leave us behind with a hippo?" When we reached the guy, he was at the camp. Mr Karoma was still flabbergasted. He reproached him: "You! You are more dangerous than the hippo, Pack up go away, leave us." Surprisingly, the guy picked up his items and left. I was surprised because I thought a trained game guard would have explained what happened, and why he did what he did. How could he leave us in a dangerous animal area with no guard? By the way, having been trained in the national army, I knew that it is dangerous to shoot the way the guy did. Since he was just behind us (researchers), and the animal was in front of us, the shooting could have had been fatal to us.

In the next day morning, Mr Karoma and Dr Frisen also left the camp for Kilwa town. The three of us—I and the two young men—remained at the camp, very scared and not knowing what to do. I pulled up the guts and asked the others to accompany me to the main site, and continue with the site mapping that was not yet finished, and which was not difficult for me to do. In the evening I tried to sketch the map on a

graph paper. Surprisingly, the map I made looked perfect to me. That was my first archaeological site mapping. The camp was very quiet in the evening. During the night we could hear elephants breaking trees near our tents. At dawn, we saw a leopard approaching our tent with cubs. We all fell and lay down on the floor of the tent. We could hear the cubs scratching our tent roaring. I lifted myself up to look outside through the window, and saw that their mother was at a distance away calling them back. I fell back on the floor again, and probably they left at the same time. I could hear the stomach rumblings of my colleagues, who I came to know them well as Yusuf and Mohamed. Mr Karoma and Frisen did not return that day. More animal creatures and birds approached the camp more often than they had done in the previous days. Probably it was due to their feeling that the camp had been vacated. Elephants came to the camp during that night. Having nothing left for food in the camp, we had few ground nuts for dinner, and there was no breakfast that next morning.

My colleagues advised me that we should leave the camp for Kilwa town in the next day if our guardians would not return that day. I declined because I was scared of the would-be consequences on my side since I was being trained to go to the US for studies. I thought I would be considered an irresponsible person in case the camp and the properties we came with would be destroyed by animals, or taken by thieves; and this would jeopardise the scholarship I had been granted.

I refused to leave the camp claiming to the others that Mr Karoma and Dr Frisen would come back that day. My colleagues did not believe me: they took their items and left. After some time, I got scared to stay alone in the camp, and followed them. I found them inclining to a shrub crying. They told me they wanted to leave but were scared of my life. They begged me earnestly that I go with them. I made a decision that we could not leave all field equipment and artefacts that had been collected in the survey and in some excavations unguarded. Therefore, I advised them that we would better go and get advice from the District Officer whom I saw Mr Karoma talking with when we came to Kilwa. It was a long-distance journey through a forest and a deep-sea channel. When we reached Kilwa, the District Officer was aware that Mr Karoma had gone to Dar es Salaam for the burial of a relative. He did not know when he was going to come back. Also, he did not know of the whereabouts of Dr Friesen. I requested him to provide me with people and a dhow to go and collect all the materials we left at the camp and bring them to be protected somewhere in Kilwa until Mr Karoma returned. He sympathized with us, and agreed. I was very tired in the evening. I was given lunch and a place to sleep; and a flight to Dar es Salaam the next day. Prof. Peter Schmidt was very pleased with my actions in that early time of my archaeology career. He wrote a letter of appreciation to the University of Dar es Salaam administration, with a copy to me. I came to learn years after I came from America that Mr Karoma did return to Kilwa, but I have never seen the published field results of that work. My Kilwa colleagues went home that last day. Many years after my PhD studies I came to discover that they came to be employed as Kilwa World Heritage site custodians. We have been good friends since then, and they came to help me in my archaeology fieldworks in Kilwa Island (Chami, 2006b).

Episode II: Trips of Madagascar

The first one

I was invited to a fieldwork in Madagascar in 2002, which was to be conducted at the Tuliara coast of south-west Madagascar (Map 1), towards the delta of the Unilahy River (Rasolondainy, 2012: Map 1). Professor Chantal Radimilahy was the director of the project. The survey work identified several archaeological sites, particularly some caves which I thought, by my East African experience, were of archaeological potential; and so, needed to be excavated to get data on ancient settlements. A Stone Age site with large stone tools like hand axes and scrapers was also found on a river valley along a stream of water, near a small town with a Catholic church, a few kilometres south of Tuliara town. That site and the caves were not seriously considered archaeological sites by my hosts. However, Professor Radimilahy informed me a year later that one cave was excavated after I had left the county, and quarts microliths—which were not then believed to be stone artefacts—were recovered.

It should be noted at this juncture that in those years it was not accepted that Madagascar had been settled by Stone Age people, or people from Africa (Verin, 1986). Radimilahy et al. (2015) have discussed in detail doubts that existed in those years on possible Africans and Stone Age ancient settlers in Madagascar before recent discoveries of the Stone Age site of Aja Cave, dating to 2000 BC (Dewar et al., 2013; Dewar, 2014). With that discovery—and others elsewhere slightly mentioned by Radimilahy—there is now a comprehending that the islands of the Mozambican Chanel, Madagascar and the Comoros had been settled from the Stone Age period; and by people from Africa (Chami 2011, 2017; Rasolondrainy, 2012; Wright, 2018). My work and that of my colleagues on those islands may have ignited a change of the mind of many scholars who had thought that ancient people had not sailed to settle on the islands of the Eastern coast of Africa (Chami, 2009; Sinclair et al., 2006; Wright, 2018). It will be noted below that the work of my MA student, Rasolondrainy (ibid.), did initiate researches of that kind in Madagascar. He was the first to declare the existence of the Neolithic Nderit Stone Age people in Madagascar. As it is reported by Radimilahy (ibid.), it was also the beginning of the study of rock art in that country.

Back to the scary matter of this trip. One of the major problems I faced in this fieldwork was of sanitation. People of Madagascar, particularly in villages that we worked in, have a taboo of not defecating in toilets. It is a tradition for people to excrete anywhere on a farm or in a bush. This taboo made me very concerned for it is unsafe health-wise. I had experienced this unhealthy tradition elsewhere on the coast of East Africa, at Kwale Island, where people defecate on the shoreline, like in other coastal parts of East Africa. As a result, many of us suffered from cholera from our fieldworks on the island (Chami & Msemwa, 1997). I easily understood this tradition because built toilets in most parts of the poor world are few, if any at all. I hope my colleagues in Madagascar will not be offended by reporting this taboo here. Hygiene-wise, it was dangerous to me.

For an anthropological reason, it should be stated here that, for Madagascans, it is improper to build toilets because, according to my personal enquiries from the people, toilets are a colonial introduction against peoples' will. It is in this manner people do not move with modern world requirements that one should use toilets. As it was theorized by the kulturess school of anthropology, cultural changes are rare because traditions are difficult to change (Harris, 1968: 377–79). I had to accept the norm and behave as everyone else did, with the consequence noted below. I was lucky to survive until I returned to Antananarivo, the capital city, for my flight via Moroni to Dar es Salaam.

In Antananarivo, I was put in a hotel. I had dinner in a nearby restaurant. I was not feeling well by then: I felt tired with some headache. I went back to sleep early. As I lay in bed, I thought about the nice songs sung by the Madagascan field team in a dusty room at the Catholic Church where we stayed in the last days of the fieldwork. As I was thinking about all that, I started to feel a serious stomach-ache, which was followed by dizziness, and a more serious headache. A few minutes later I started to have diarrhoea, and felt body weakness. Failing to get out of bed properly, I staggered out to the hotel's Reception. The receptionist managed to call Chantal. In half an hour Chantal came rushing and took me to a nearby hospital. After some check-ups, I was told it was cholera; with the doctor adding: "You can die if not treated properly now." I was given an injection and tablets to continue with the treatment, and asked to stay in bed all the time, and drink a lot of water. I managed to wake up in the morning and was taken by Chantal to the airport. I was quite feeble, still with diarrhoea. At the airport, Chantal was laughing at me in a teasing manner. I remember her saying to me: "You will not dare come to Madagascar again!" I reached Moroni before noon, and I asked the taxi driver to rush me to a hotel I knew by an East African Swahili name, *Mwafaka*. I was still weak and suffering from the diarrhoea. I stayed in the hotel the whole day sleeping. It was in the next day afternoon I was to fly to Dar es Salaam. On that day afternoon, I felt better and ready to fly back to Dar es Salaam. I was still scared, the words that the doctor told me still reverberating in my ears: "You can die…"

The second trip to Madagascar

I was invited again to Madagascar in 2009, seven years since I was first invited to Madagascan for research in 2002. In 2009, Tanambelo Rasolondrainy (now better known as Nado) who was a former member of the Tuliara research team, and had come to be my Master's degree student in Dar es Salaam, invited me to work with him in Madagascar. The Department of Archaeology and Heritage in which Nado was registered assigned me the task of supervising him for his Master's degree. Consequently, I was obliged to visit Nado in his fieldwork in Madagascar after his official invitation to guide him in a daunting fieldwork of the first kind in Madagascar. In his research proposal submitted to the University of Dar es Salaam, he reported having discovered a rock shelter with rock paintings of Schematic, Geometric and Amorphous (SGA) type in Isalo, in south-west of Madagascar. In my publications on similar sites in the west Lake Region of Tanzania, I had termed

this kind of phenomenon as SGA (Chami, 2006a), a cultural aspect that had been attributed to the Stone Age and Early Iron Age people in the larger region of Sub-Saharan Africa (Willcox 1984). We were all excited that we were going to establish the first site of the ancient connection between Africa and Madagascar.

This was a problem I had grappled with for some time then (Chami 2009, 2006a; Chami & Kwekason, 2003). Here, a former student of mine from Madagascar joined me in that struggle. Despite Professor Radimilahy's fearful note above that I would never go to Madagascar again, here I had compulsive reasons to return there again: I had not only to supervise a student for a degree, but also to supervise in an area of my recent great interest.

I was received at the airport in Antananarivo by Professor Radimilahy, who informed me that Nado was already in the field waiting for me. I was taken back inside the airport to fly to Tuliara, where Nado would be waiting for me. With relief I found Nado waiting for me, and I immediately informed him that Chantal had told me that she could not get me a return ticket from Tuliara. This was the straightjacket! When we went to the plane's company office, we were informed that all flights were full for about a month! Nado advised that we proceed to the fieldwork in Isalo, which was about 100km south of Tuliara, and check again with the office when I was ready to fly back in about a week's time. I already felt a throbbing headache, probably due to my blood pressure rising up. I carried a few high blood pressure tablets; but many antibiotics for possible cholera.

We reached Isalo in the evening. It was a small town with no hotels. Nado had arranged with the monarchy of the region that I stay in his house for the night. It was so hot that at midnight I was assisted to take the mattress out of the room for some fresh air outside, which I did not get either. The next day we had to walk several kilometres to the site of Ampamaisiky, across the Sakamarekely river system (Rasolondrainy, 2013). Across the stream were typical southern Madagascan villages with simple roundhouses of mud, wattle and grass. The most interesting aspect to me in this anthropological view was the smallest huts in the settlements. I inquired about them and was told that these were for girls who had entered puberty. These girls are allowed to invite men of their choice to sleep with them. Babies of that intercourse are given to the girls' parents to take care of, while the girls continue with their sexual affairs. The girls will only move to their own compounds when they get a man ready to marry them. I recognized, for the first time of my anthropological learning, what was of matrilineal societies (Harris, 1968).

We arrived at the site and found tents and other requirements for camping ready. My previous unhappy experience in the first rip to Madagascar resurfaced when I was informed that there was a taboo against building and using toilets. Nado informed me that I could relieve myself anywhere. It was hot, and I discovered my urine had changed to purplish-red. This had happened some years back when I was at an island in northern Mozambique for an African archaeology meeting, and when I flew back

to Dar-es Salaam I was informed by a doctor that it was due to high blood pressure. So, when I noticed this, I took a blood pressure tablet I had with me; but I started feeling uneasy. I felt better later in the evening when Nado started to play music with his guitar, and we all danced. The next day morning we climbed a steep escarpment to the top of the Impasimaiky hill, where the rock shelter with the rock paintings is located. On the way, we conducted some archaeological surveys. We collected several small potsherds and little microliths. No cultural tradition was established. The shelter with paintings has been a ritualistic place because the Isalo people have been conducting burial activities there. In this shelter was entered their last deceased king, whose tomb has a built-stone structure to cover him.

The paintings on the wall (Figure 1) were a phenomenon to me. The images were similar to those I had seen in other parts of Africa that I had visited: Namibia (Wilcox, 1984); Namorutunga, Kenya (Lynch & Robbins, 1977); and elsewhere in Tanzania (Chami, 2006, 2008a). After the Isalo work, I travelled with Nado and other students to Namorutunga (Map 1) for a comparative work on the SGA phenomenon. The red and black paintings are dated elsewhere in Africa to the early farming and Neolithic period (Willcox, 1984; Chami, 2006). The appearance of the images of humped cattle became very interesting to me because they are also found in other parts of Eastern Africa as an indication of early domestication, probably of the Neolithic period; and now testified in Madagascar (Rasolongrainy, 2013). In the survey work on the site, we found Late Stone Age stone artefacts. After I had left Madagascar, Nado also recovered this kind of stone tools from excavations. He also recovered cuneiform pottery of Nderit Neolithic tradition that was similar to that of the rest of East Africa (Barthelme, 1985; Rasolondrainy, 2013; Chami, 2006b) (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Observe long-honed and humped cattle of Isalo rock paintings
(Author's photo)

Figure 2: Observe Nderiti pottery of Isalo with cuneiform decoration
(Author's photo)

After my advices, I left Nado to continue with research. When I missed the plane ticket at Tuliara, I advised Nado to book me on a bus to Antananarivo in the morning the next day. He came back with information that there was no bus to Antananarivo. I asked him to look for a taxi that I could afford to hire. I had only one day left to catch my plane to Nairobi. Nado came up with a reply that he had obtained a minibus with conditions that I pay USD300 and allow other passengers to board the bus. I was to travel about 700km of road to Antananarivo. There was no guarantee that I would arrive on time to catch the plane to Nairobi due to police jams on the road that would be checking for criminals, and also a possible car breakdown. I had the money, and so I decided to risk rather than die at Tuliara. I was in a fatal condition. That evening, Nado also informed me that Chantal had travelled to Japan, so there was no one in Antananarivo to attend me.

After the doctors had informed Nado that I was in a fatal blood pressure condition, I took my blood pressure medicines before going to bed. I was awake by 5am. Surprisingly, I was feeling well. I was a fighting man. Nado came to collect me to the bus by that time. As he put me on the minibus, I could see he was scared as he wished me all the best. I did drop teas as I hugged him for goodbye. As the dawn light rose up, I could recognize that we were climbing an escarpment of the western coast of the island, probably a marine terrace. By 10am someone, with very poor English, was touching me on the back. It was a female voice noting that we were passing through a mineral area. I could see worked landscapes, probably

mining areas. By noon I was informed that we were at a Madagascan plateau. The area was like a savanna with grasses. I must have fallen asleep after this view, as it was about 2pm when I realized that we were descending from the plateau. I was told in French that we were to have lunch in the next town. I did not hear the name of the town. However, it sounded like *Ihosy*. We were led to a restaurant, and there I recognized a girl whom I saw in our fieldwork. She was the one who was giving me some information on the way. She informed me in French and English that Nado had asked her to take care of me. I hugged her and shed tears as I became less scared. Surprisingly, up to that point I had been fine with no headache. My urine, however, was still purplish-red. I took a tablet.

The whole remaining hours to dusk I realized that we were crossing some agricultural landscape, probably on the eastern side of the plateau. Before I fell asleep, I remember to have been observing beautiful green rice terraces, similar to those of South Asia I once saw in the Philippines and Eastern India. I then thought of the Madagascan cultural relationship with South Asia. Sometime, probably at midnight, I came out of sleep, and realized that we were going through a big town with lights. Again, it was the girl who woke me up and mentioned a word like *tana*. I came to realize later in the morning that she meant we were near the capital Antananarivo. I checked my watch. It was 5am. I fell asleep again, but not much, as I observed a concentration of people, as well as built houses, suggesting that we were near Antananarivo. I felt tired and hungry. We had no dinner. There also had been no any scaring episodes Nado had suggested would happen on the road. The minibus was driven to a place I knew: the National Museum of Madagascar. I was taken to a room and asked to quickly wash and take breakfast. I looked for my ticket to Nairobi. I had only one hour to the airport. Another car was brought to take me to the airport. I checked in at the airport, bidding goodbye to everyone with some tears. They were such good people who took care of my life. While on the plane, I congratulated myself for the good archaeological work I had assisted my friend, and student, to do for Madagascar, and for the western Indian Ocean seaboard. I realized that I was safe. What happened to the delaying traffic check-ups that I was scared of at Tuliara? Could they have occurred when I was fast asleep? As I am authoring this paper, I now realize that my work with Chantal and Nado triggered several archaeological works in Madagascar and the Comoros, particularly on the Stone Age, and in the ancient time as noted above (Wright, 2018a; Radimilahy et al., 2012).

Episode III: Sailing in the Comoros

In 2009 I took Master's students of the Archaeology Department of the University of Dar es Salaam for international fieldwork in the Comoros to excavate a site of Ivoini, on the northeast coast of Ngazija. I had found this site in some years earlier (Chami, Tabibu & Abdouroihamane, 2009). It has SGA engravings on tombs, some of which surprisingly looked un-Islamic (Figure 3). So, I came back with MA students to solve the enigma of why, an island with medieval Islamic sites, has some tombs that could be Islamic but with SGA signs that date thousands of years earlier? I thought some tombs should be excavated, and the results be published (Chami, 2013).

Figure 3: SGA signs from Ivoini, Comoros. See similar ancient signs in Lake Victoria site (Chami 2006a: 83, Plate 1, bottom right)

Other scholars have also found non-Islamic burials of pre-Islam on Mayotte Island of the Comoros (White, 2008b). Our carbon-14 dating results did also produce dates of 1100 CE, which is quite early for Islam in some parts of this coast of East Africa (Horton & Chami, 2018). In a nutshell, my opinion came to be that probably African non-Islamic people continued to survive for a long time, and continued to use traditional SGA script already known on the islands as indicated in Madagascar (above). Ibn Batutta reported of such die-hard people in Kilwa, still fighting against Islam in the 1330s (Gibb, 1939).

My fatal archaeological work came after this Ivoini fieldwork, and it is related to the same Ivoini work. One of my tasks in this fieldwork was to assist a Comorian Master's student, Mr Bacar Mzee, to visit a Stone Age site we had discovered earlier on the island of Moheli (Chami, Radimilahy & Tabibou, 2009), and decide on his MA research and dissertation. The best and simple way to go to the Mwali/Moheli Island from Ngazija was to fly. However, we found that planes were fully booked for the whole of the following week. We had only five days left before our flight to Dar es Salaam. So, I was advised that the only other option was to go by a vehicle to the Male fishing port on the southern coast of Ngazija, and then hire a motorboat there to sail to the Mwali Island. Also, I was warned that it was perilous. We agreed with Mzee that there were no other means. We left in the morning by a hired car. We were at Male by 11am in the morning. The navigator warned us again on the hazards ahead of us. He said it was windy, and hence the presence of large waves against a small boat of three people. He

said it was going to take four to five hours to cross the channel of about 88 kilometres. I got scared, but I remembered having boasted before that I was a coastal archaeologist. How could I be scared of deep-sea waters today?

We started well, with me sitting at a middle bench. Mzee was at the front deck, and the navigator was behind controlling the engine. In the beginning, wave flashes made us quiet for some minutes. It was at the mid of the journey, about two hours or so, when we could see some image of Mwali island across the channel. We were now on very huge waves I had not seen before despite my long experience in sea waters. I recognized that I had not been in such a deep ocean with such a small vessel before. As I was pondering about all these waves, a very big enormous one hit us. Our vessel was taken high up in the sky. Abruptly it sunk down with the rest of my team, and I was left hanging in the air alone. I made the biggest cry of my life. I thought I was going to perish in that deep-sea water. The navigator worked hard to manoeuvre the vessel so that I fall back in it rather than sink in the deep sea. I was lucky that he got me back in the vessels, but in tatters. I fell in the vessel like a piece of wood. Alas, we were about to sink. The navigator pulled me and made me sit adjacent to him, asking me to hold onto him for all the rest of the time. I had lost control and had pains in my waist, back and legs. He asked Mzee to move from the front to the middle part of the boat, telling him, in their language, that he had to be careful. Waves continued to torment us and the sailing speed was decreased. I was relieved when we started to see the whole island of Mwali more cleanly now, probably at about 4pm in the evening. We landed at 5pm. We were soaked and tired. I was feeling pain everywhere now. But I laughed loudly when I got out of the vessel. Mzee hugged me. It was really perilous. We went to look for a hotel near the beach, the only one I knew.

The next day I took Mzee to the Stone Age site at Hoani village, which the African Archaeology Network team had discovered in the previous years as said earlier. I also showed him some man-made volcanic stone tools. His academic problem was to establish whether these were real stone tools, and of what period. After some survey, we returned to the hotel to rest and get strength for the sailing back to Male in the next day. On the next day, we left early about 8: 30am. We were informed that the sea was calm. Truly, the demon had gone away. We reached Male about noon, and took off to Moroni, where we had lunch, and then taken to confirm our flight tickets to Dar es Salaam for the next day. Unfortunately, the site of Hoani was not excavated because Mzee did not pass his Master's class exams to be allowed to conduct fieldwork.

Episode IV: The Nigerian machetes and spears attack
I went to Nigeria several times between 2003 and 2008. In the first time, I was with Professor Gilbert Pwiti of Zimbabwe on a mission to examine the site of Old Oyo, which had first been earmarked for research of the African Archaeology Network in Nigeria (Sowunmi et al., 2004). The next visit was to the Lejja site at Nsuka (Map 1), to participate in the excavations of the Early Iron Age site, which came to be dated between 400 BCE to 200 CE (Eze-Uzomaka, 2009; Chami et al., 2011). This is one of the earliest dates of iron smelting in sub-Sahara Africa. Professor Bertram

Mapunda of the University of Dar es Salaam accompanied me once for his expertise in iron technology. The site has many impressive furnaces with roundish masses of slags (Figure 4). Some slag masses are of layers or concentric rings, suggesting that the liquid slag was taped to form such masses (Figure 5). Such technology was also reported from the Lake Victoria region with the same dates by Schmit (1978).

Figure 4: Several arranged ancient furnaces at Lejja
(Author's photo)

Figure 5: A slag mass of concentric rings from Amaovoko, Lejja
(Author's photo).

Many roundish masses of slags were arranged as seats in the ancient palace for people to sit on during meetings or other occasions as done today by the local people of Lejja (Figure 6). It is not certain when the arrangement of slags at Lejja was first done, but it is conjectured by the local people that it was like that in ancient times because their ancestors found them thus. The palace area is also marked by conical pinnacles, which were probably used for astronomical cultural activities (Opata, 2008; Urama, 2008). The lowest levels of Amaovoko trenches were also found to have some potsherds with bevels and flutes like those of the Early Iron Age Urewe tradition in East Africa (Soper, 1971). However, some were flared, which is not an attribute of the Urewe. Some shards, particularly those flared, were also of reddish smooth fabric, probably imported to the area.

Figure 6: Masses of slags arranged as seats in front of the palace at Lejja
(Prof. Pamela Eze-Uzomaka taking photo)

During our work on the site, there was a time of skirmishes when some angry local warriors came quarrelling angrily with Professor Eze-Uzomaka, our host at the University of Nsukka, that their shrine was being vandalized. Prof Mapunda and I, who were the invited specialists from the University of Dar es Salaam, kept silent in case we were targeted as the foreigners doing the alleged vandalism. There was no real fight as the Nsukka staff members working with us managed to quell the local skirmish. Fortunately, some of the Nsukka staff members were from the same village. They had assured us that they had a permit from the local leaders to excavate the site. The real fatal skirmish occurred another day when I requested my Nsukka colleagues to take me to a nearby known cave/rock shelter for archaeological examination. I was expecting to discover the Stone Age or a Neolithic site predating the Early Iron Age tradition of Nsukka.

The site I was taken to is about 5–10km to the north of Nsukka, at a sloping landscape. We packed the vehicle on the left side of a steep road, and continued on foot to the left side -- just about 10m -- to a rocky escarpment that had the rock shelter. I was disappointed that the rock shelter was small, and had evidence of water leaking from the roof. This kind of rock shelter would not have been good for human settlement because of its wetness. Moreover, even if humans could have had settled there during dry periods, soil accumulation for creating cultural layers could not persist due to leakages in the wet periods. A few modern potsherds were on the floor. As I was kneeling looking at the potsherds to establish their period, we heard a loud aggressive noise from the road where we had parked the vehicle. Also, there were noises of the hitting of metal objects from a very close range to us. I heard words like “Kill them!” We got out of the shelter, and walked towards the vehicle. I was scared. Men with machetes and spears were already near us. My hosts started to quarrel with them in the Igbo language. The quarrel involved the raising up of machetes and spears ready to hit us. The vehicle was already being hit with those instruments. I was really scared. One of my hosts told me that the armed guys were questioning about the permission that allowed us to enter their sacred shrine. When I thought about a massacre that was about to occur, a lady in a very neat dressing came and pulled one of the noisy guys aside. They talked for a while. One of my contact persons, the young Opata of the University of Nsukka, went to shake hands with the lady; and the skirmish was over. We were allowed to leave the place safely. I was informed that the lady was a member of that village, and also a staff of the Nsukka University. I was told not to worry as such skirmishes are common in Nigeria, although they could sometimes be fatal if not properly handled in the way the lady had done.

Discussion

We noted above that archaeologists are just used to present their fieldwork reports with rare mentioning of perilous occurrences that befell them in the field. Actually, archaeology fieldworks are tiresome and very boring to some non-members of that discipline who happen to be participating in the field for some interests, or as a part of their training. Mehari et al. (2014: 193) have described how fieldworks of the University of Dar es Salaam are difficult compared to those of foreigners who use ‘four-wheel vehicles’. For the University of Dar es Salaam, field travels are mainly on foot, and students walk long distances (Mehari, 2014: 193). My students in one of the field schools at Kisiju (Chami & Kessy, 1996), remarked that they had been mistaken to join the discipline; and some abandoned it immediately after getting their first degree. Students think that archaeology is too difficult and dangerous. Apart from fatal happenings like the ones noted above, there are many non-fatal aspects like unexpected tornados and storms that affect fieldworks. Also, some archaeological sites are located in areas that are very difficult to reach; and some are in long-distance remote areas, unreachable even by using ‘four-wheel vehicles’ due to poor infrastructures. I keep in remembrance a field school in Muleba, in Western Lake Victoria, where we walked about 20km daily to work at the Ruhanga rock shelter on the escarpment of Lake Victoria (Kwekason & Chami,

2003). Some of my students may also remember the long walk they endured to excavate the limestone cave of Mwanampambe in Zanzibar, from which some had their feet bleeding from sores (Chami, 2009). Probably if archaeologists had been reporting about these difficulties in the field for other people to know, students would register to study archaeology with much more knowledge and commitment. I regard these difficulties in archaeology fieldworks to be related somehow with fatal archaeology.

Probably this point has also been well presented by Posnansky when he was interviewed by Jonathan Walz (2010), when the former was teaching archaeology at a university in Ghana. He notes that it was difficult to train archaeology to students not used to difficult conditions, especially when they are put in the discipline without their own will or knowledge of the discipline. "The challenge was getting students involved, interested, and focused. Many students had been allocated the subject. Often students were from urban areas, so they were not familiar with rural ways (where we went for field study)" (ibid: 200).

Several significances of this work could also be raised at this juncture. The first is that of urging archaeologists to have a forum where they can provide information on archaeology and the difficulties of its fieldworks. This will make those forcing the youth to join archaeology to understand the impact of their decisions on the youth. This information by archaeologists—like those from Tanzania and Ghana noted above—will help understand that archaeology needs students who are really committed to join the field.

The second significance of this paper is that of showing donors how their finances in archaeology could be used to train in different African countries. The money of the Swedish Agency for research cooperation with developing countries was used to train students from different African countries in archaeology in Dar es Salaam for more than ten years. Some of the fatal fieldworks reported here—from Comoro, Madagascar, and Nigeria—were funded by that grant. More than 46 postgraduate students from Madagascar, the Comoros, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and from other African countries were a product of this donor funding. This significance becomes more relevant if it is taken as a good example of what Posnsnsky is calling for the developed world to provide funds for Africa by saying: "This is where I take my hat off to Peter Schmidt who did a wonderful job in Tanzania" (Waltz, 2010: 210).

Probably the third significance of the paper is that of also reporting of discoveries that were not easy to find without those dangers. I have cited above some publications with various discoveries that encourage research on past humans. Some of the works were done, as Posnansky puts it, in counties *du jour*. "If we want a better picture of Africa, we have to send scholars to Madagascar, Angola, Gabon, places which may be more difficult to work in because of logistics, maybe politically unstable, or may have smaller European host communities (ibid: 191).

Conclusion

Archaeology fieldworks contribute knowledge about the human past. Some of these fieldworks are done in very difficult times and places. Committed archaeologists are required for this kind of discipline. Information on what is archaeology, and the difficult times and places archaeologists go through, need to be made available to those showing interest to join the discipline, and those recruiting the youth to study archaeology. Also, funding agencies should know about this kind of archaeological problem in places like in Africa to understand how their support is used and viewed. The problem should be a forum for this kind of information to be published.

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Appendix

Map 1: Map of Africa showing presented areas