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IN INDIAN OCEAN
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TEXTILE TRADES, CONSUMER CULTURES, AND THE MATERIAL WORLDS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

An Ocean of Cloth

*Edited by Pedro Machado,
Sarah Fee, and Gwyn Campbell*



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Pedro Machado · Sarah Fee · Gwyn Campbell
Editors

Textile Trades, Consumer Cultures, and the Material Worlds of the Indian Ocean

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Over two cold grey days in November, 2012, a group of thirty scholars from around the world gathered in Montreal, Canada to consider the critical role that textiles—as perhaps no other material good—have played in driving and shaping exchange in the Indian Ocean world, in structuring material lives, influencing notions of fashion as cultural and bodily practice, and underpinning social and political structures of association between people.

The conference ‘The Textile Trades of the Indian Ocean World, From Early Times to the Present Day’ drew an extraordinarily diverse, multi-disciplinary gathering of art historians, museum curators, anthropologists, archaeologists and historians representing a rich mix of senior scholars, junior faculty and Ph.D. students. The result was a vibrant, robust and wide-ranging number of discussions that stimulated lively debate. The present volume emerged out of these exchanges and the contributors are to be thanked for producing such fine final papers.

For making possible this unique opportunity to share sources, perspectives, interpretations and theoretical concerns, we must first thank Gwyn Campbell and the Indian Ocean World Centre (IOWC), McGill University, which organized and hosted the event. Lori Callaghan, IOWC manager at the time, valiantly steered complex travel plans through Hurricane Sandy. Bringing scholars from three continents and ten countries would not have been possible without a generous Conference Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). A travel grant from the Pasold Fund

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Pedro Machado
Sarah Fee
Gwyn Campbell

CONTENTS

1	Introduction: The Ocean's Many Cloth Pathways	1
	Pedro Machado and Sarah Fee	
 Part I Regions of Production		
2	Textiles and Silver: The Indian Ocean in a Global Frame	29
	Prasannan Parthasarathi	
3	Cloth and Commerce: Understanding Indian Economic History	55
	Lakshmi Subramanian	
4	Handkerchiefs, Scarves, Sarees and Cotton Printed Fabrics: Japanese Traders and Producers and the Challenges of Global Markets	79
	Seiko Sugimoto	
5	<i>Kanga</i> Made in Japan: The Flow from the Eastern to the Western End of the Indian Ocean World	105
	Hideaki Suzuki	

- 6 **A Worn Insecurity: Textiles, Industrialization and Colonial Rule in Eritrea During the Long Twentieth Century** 133
Steven Serels

Part II Trade, Exchange and Networks of Distribution

- 7 **Distributive Networks, Sub-Regional Tastes and Ethnicity: The Trade in Chinese Textiles in Southeast Asia from the Tenth to Fourteenth Centuries CE** 159
Derek Heng
- 8 **Textile Reorientations: The Manufacture and Trade of Cottons in Java c. 1600–1850** 181
Kenneth R. Hall
- 9 **‘The Dearest Thing on the East African Coast’: The Forgotten Nineteenth-Century Trade in ‘Muscat Cloth’** 209
Sarah Fee
- 10 **Converging Trades and New Technologies: The Emergence of *Kanga* Textiles on the Swahili Coast in the Late Nineteenth Century** 253
MacKenzie Moon Ryan

Part III Cultures of Consumption

- 11 **Warp and Weft: Producing, Trading and Consuming Indian Textiles Across the Seas (First–Thirteenth Centuries CE)** 289
Himanshu Prabha Ray
- 12 **The Decline of the Malagasy Textile Industry, c. 1800–1895** 313
Gwyn Campbell

13	Contemporary Geographies of Zanzibari Fashion: Indian Ocean Trade Journeys in the Run-Up to Ramadhan Festivities	359
	Julia Verne	
14	The Fabric of the Indian Ocean World: Reflections on the Life Cycle of Cloth	385
	Jeremy Prestholdt	
	Index	397

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAMM	Antananarivo Annual and Madagascar Magazine
ANOM	Archives Nationales d'Outre Mer
BEFEO	Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient
CIF	Cost, Insurance, Freight
CSS	Chūgai Shōgyō Shimpō
ECAI	Ente per il Cotone dell'Africa Italiana
EIC	East India Company
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
GHQ	General Headquarters
HS	Hōchi Shimbun
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOWC	Indian Ocean World Centre
JCEA	Japan Cotton Exporters Association
KKS	Kokumin Shimbun
KS	Kōbe Shimbun
MAE	Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (Paris)
MS	Mainichi Shimbun
NAK	British National Archives, Kew
NASPPE	National Agency for the Supervision and Privatization of Public Enterprises
OAS	Ōsaka Asahi Shimbun
OMS	Ōsaka Jiji Shimpō
PEM	Peabody Essex Museum
SCCE	Società per la Coltivazione del Cotone nell'Eritrea
SHY FY	SHY Fanyi
SHY ZG	Songhuiyao jigao (1236), Zhiguan
SIA	Società Imprese Africane

SOAS/LMS-MIL	SOAS/LMS Archives, Madagascar: Incoming Letters
SPS	Sudan Plantation Syndicate
SS	Songshi (1345)
SSHRC	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
UAE	United Arab Emirates
USNA	United States National Archives, Washington, DC
VOC	Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie)
WXTK	Ma Duanlin: Wenxian tongkao

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 2.1	The Portuguese landing in Nagasaki. Attrib. Kanō Naizen, Japan, c. 1600. From a pair of six-panel screens: ink, colour, gold, and gold leaf on paper (Private collection)	33
Fig. 2.2	Cotton and cloth prices in Cairo, 1687–1797	36
Fig. 2.3	Value of chintz exports (millions of rupees) from Machilipatnam (South India) to Iran, 1812–1836	44
Fig. 4.1	Calendar distributed to customers, based on a Japanese woodblock print. Kawamata Silk Refining Co. Ltd., ca. 1910. Ukiyo-e, hand-print with woodblock on paper, 375 mm × 250 mm. (With permission and courtesy of Silk Museum, Narita collection, no number)	83
Fig. 4.2	Handkerchief for North American markets, Narita Co. Ltd., ca. 1924–1926. Silk printed with engraved woodblocks (<i>tonton-nassen</i>), 215 mm × 210 mm. (With permission and courtesy of Silk Museum, Narita collection No. 128)	84
Fig. 4.3	The specialized production system of handkerchiefs and scarves based on historic kimono production system. (Research center of the economy of Kanagawa 1981a: 2)	85
Fig. 4.4	Embroidered handkerchief for the Egyptian souvenir market, Narita Co. Ltd., ca. the end of the 1920s. Embroidered silk, 220 mm × 193 mm. (With permission and courtesy of Silk Museum, Narita collection No. 225)	89
Fig. 4.5	Quantities and varieties of Japan's exported fabrics in 1937 (unit: 1,000 yen; based on the statistics of Futami ed. 1958: 13–19)	90

Fig. 4.6	Sample fabric of a scarf for export to West Africa, with feather pattern, in imitation of batik printing. Sanwa Trading Company, ca. 1957. Synthetic fabric, 35 inches × 35 inches. (With permission and courtesy of Industrial Technique Promotion Center, Economic Affairs Bureau of Yokohama City No. 11762)	94
Fig. 4.7	Sample fabric of a scarf for export to Mombasa, Kenya, with imagery of Queen Elizabeth and her children. Sanyo Sangyo Co. Ltd., ca. 1957. Silk Satin. Half of a square 29 inches × 29 inches. (With permission and courtesy of Industrial Technique Promotion Center, Economic Affairs Bureau of Yokohama City No. 4649c)	95
Fig. 4.8	Gross volume of exported scarves for African markets classified by materials (based on the statistics of the Industrial Guild of Japanese Scarves for Export 1989: pp. 145–155)	96
Fig. 4.9	Gross volume of exported scarves for Middle East markets classified by materials (based on the statistics of the Industrial Guild of Japanese Scarves for Export 1989: pp. 145–155)	97
Fig. 4.10	Printed wrapper for African market, with fish and flower motifs. Cotton printed and dyed with the ‘Green Wax’ printing technique, 1098 mm × 1610 mm. (With permission and courtesy of the Kyoto Institute of Technology Museum and Archive, Daido-Maruta Collection No. AN.5680-356)	98
Fig. 4.11	Photo made for a poster advertising Japanese synthetic sarees featuring the actress Rekha. Teijin Co. Ltd., ca. 1970s. (Collection of the author)	101
Fig. 5.1	Total exports of Japanese cotton products, in 1000 yards, 1930–1931 (based on statistics provided in <i>Kōbe Yūshi Nippō</i> , 17 January 1932)	115
Fig. 5.2	East African share in total exports of Japanese cotton products, 1926–1939 (based on statistics provided in <i>Nihon menshifu yusyutu kumiai</i> 1957)	116
Fig. 8.1	Thirteenth-century stone carving from Candi Jago East Java. The textile held by a societal elite serves as the focal point (Photograph by the author)	185
Fig. 8.2	<i>Kain panjang batik</i> (long cloth with batik embellishment), product of the Yogyakarta court of central Java, c. 2004, presented as a gift to the author. (Photograph by the author)	186

Fig. 8.3	<i>Cap</i> , or brass hand-stamps used for printing textile designs in contemporary Java and Bali (Photograph by the author)	199
Fig. 8.4	Agencies and the flow of raw materials, tools, labour and finished products in seventeenth- to nineteenth-century Javanese textile production	202
Fig. 9.1	Man's hand-woven turban, collected in Muscat by Joest before 1899. Machine- and hand-spun cotton with silk yellow stripes, checked blue, white and black centre, with two colours of interlocking wefts, 120 × 308 cm. The piece is missing one of its red borders, which has been digitally reconstructed here to show how the full cloth would have appeared. Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum, Cologne 10732 (photograph © Rheinisches Bildarchiv)	215
Fig. 9.2	Portrait of Ahmad ibn Na'aman, 1840, by Edward Ludlow Mooney. Painted on the occasion of Na'aman's visit to New York aboard the <i>Sultanah</i> . Peabody Essex Museum M4473, gift of Mrs. William P. McMullan, 1918 (©Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA. Photography by Jeffrey D. Dykes)	219
Fig. 9.3	One panel of the <i>debwani</i> striping pattern, from the collections of Henry M. Stanley. Cotton, 525 × 66 cm. Object i.d. HO.1954.72.194, collection RMCA Tervuren (photograph J.-M.Vandyck. © RMCA Tervuren)	228
Fig. 9.4	One panel of the <i>sahari</i> striping pattern, from the collections of Henry M. Stanley. Cotton, 485 × 65 cm. Object i.d. HO.1954.72.196, collection RMCA Tervuren (photograph J.-M.Vandyck. © RMCA Tervuren)	229
Fig. 9.5	One panel of the <i>subaya</i> striping pattern, industrially woven in the Netherlands for the eastern African market, collected in Zanzibar before 1895. Note the small centre field and wide, multiple red bands at the two ends. Cotton, 456 × 74 cm. Object i.d. MAF8901, Courtesy of the Grassi Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (photograph: Christel Treumer)	230
Fig. 9.6	One panel of the <i>barawaji</i> striping pattern, hand-woven in Oman for the east African market, collected in Muscat in 1895. Cotton, silk (yellow and red stripes), tapestry joined weft. (12153 © Musée d'Histoire Naturelle de Lille)	232
Fig. 9.7	An Arab weaver near Mombasa using the narrow loom to add an end band to a colourful Muscat cloth, c.1890 (photograph J. Sturtz, from <i>Land und Leute in</i>	

- Deutsch-Ost Afrika*, by J. Sturtz and J. Wangemann. Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn, 1890. Courtesy of the Winteron Collection of East African Photographs, Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University) 233
- Fig. 9.8 Swahili man of Lamu wearing striped turban and waist sash, likely of Muscat cloth. Lithograph based on daguerreotype by Charles Guillain, c. 1847. From Charles Guillain, *Documents sur l'Histoire, La Géographie et le Commerce de l'Afrique Orientale*, Paris: Bertrand, 1856–57 234
- Fig. 9.9 Three young Swahili women wearing printed shoulder cloths, and striped cloth, probably hand-woven in Muscat, as turbans (photograph by Edouard Foa, ca. 1886–1897. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (93.R.114)) 236
- Fig. 9.10 Sakalava woman of northwestern Madagascar wearing a wrapper of Omani pattern, probably the *debwani*, as a shoulder cloth, over her print dress (postcard, ca. 1910. Collection of the author) 241
- Fig. 9.11 Group of Nyamwezi men gathered around a smith, c. 1900. The seated man with crossed arms and the man holding a vessel wear *sahari* as wrappers, the two men on the right wear *kikoy* under their white tunics (*kanju*) (courtesy of the Moravian Archives, Herrnhut) 244
- Fig. 10.1 Young woman on *left* wears indigo piece-dyed cloth (*kaniki*), young woman in *centre* wears 'handkerchief-print' yardage (*leso ya kushona*), and young man on *right* wears garments tailored from unbleached cloth (*merikani*). The Humphrey Winterton Collection of East African Photographs, Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University. (Photographer unknown, late nineteenth century, Zanzibar) 257
- Fig. 10.2 Swatch of indigo piece-dyed cloth (*kaniki*). Located in *LKM 274 Stalen voor Afrika Slendangs Etc. 1884–1900* sample book, *Leidsche Katoenmaatschappij* or Leiden Cotton Company. Vlisco Museum, Helmond, The Netherlands. (Photograph by MacKenzie Moon Ryan) 258
- Fig. 10.3 Printed handkerchief (*leso*), sold to east Africa. Note Arabic-script Swahili text. Located in *Vlisco Slendangs 1886* sample book. Vlisco Museum, Helmond, The Netherlands. (Photograph by MacKenzie Moon Ryan) 266

- Fig. 10.4 Flanking women wear stitched ‘handkerchief-print’ yardage (*leso ya kushona*). The Humphrey Winterton Collection of East African Photographs, Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University. (Photographer unknown, late nineteenth century, Zanzibar) 267
- Fig. 10.5 Woman wearing ‘handkerchief-print’ yardage (*leso ya kushona*) with budding paisley corners and striped borders around her torso. Captioned ‘*Geputzte Negerin*’, the photograph is reproduced in Karl Wilhelm Schmidt, *Sansibar: Ein ostafrikanisches Culturbild* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1888), p. 83. (Image courtesy of the University of Minnesota Libraries) 272
- Fig. 10.6 Three women seated wearing wrapped *kanga*; central woman wears *kanga* with the budding paisley and striped border design. The Humphrey Winterton Collection of East African Photographs, Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University. (Photographer unknown, likely taken in about 1890, Zanzibar) 273
- Fig. 10.7 *Kanga* swatch with budding paisley and striped border design, in pink-white-and-rose colourway, hand-dated 1 October 1887. Located in *Vlisco Slendangs 1886* sample book. Vlisco Museum, Helmond, The Netherlands. (Photograph by James Ryan) 274
- Fig. 10.8 Woman wearing ‘handkerchief-print’ yardage (*leso ya kushona*) around torso and *kanga* draped across her shoulders. (A. C. Gomes photograph, ca. 1890, Zanzibar. Courtesy of The Humphrey Winterton Collection of East African Photographs, Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University) 275
- Fig. 12.1 Tamatave: estimated value of British cotton piece imports, 1836–1864 (\$000s) 329
- Fig. 12.2 Tamatave: estimated value of British and American cotton piece imports, 1866–1895 (\$000s) 333
- Fig. 12.3 Madagascar: price of cotton sheetings and shirtings for available years, 1884–1894 (\$ per 1000 yards) 335
- Fig. 12.4 Rafaralahy, Merina governor of Foulepointe, c.1820. Frontispiece in William Ellis, *History of Madagascar* (Fisher, Sons & Co., 1838), vol. 1 347

- Fig. 12.5 “*Rainitompomerasy and Raizananana Christian officer and his wife*”, c. 1860. Photograph by William Ellis.
Courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum 348
- Fig. 13.1 Advertising new flights to Dubai, evoking historical
imaginaries (Photograph by author, 2008) 362

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	World's leading clothing and textile exporters (billions of US Dollars), 2012	49
Table 9.1	Cloths of probable Omani origin imported into eastern Africa in the nineteenth century (listed alphabetically)	224
Table 12.1	The Ambohimalaza cotton goods syndicate, 1885–1890	337
Table 12.2	Estimated growth of imperial Merina Army, 1820–1852	339

LIST OF MAPS

Map 1.1	The Indian Ocean	21
Map 1.2	Eastern Africa and Arabian Peninsula	22
Map 1.3	Madagascar	23
Map 1.4	South Asia	24
Map 1.5	Southeast and East Asia	25

Introduction: The Ocean's Many Cloth Pathways

Pedro Machado and Sarah Fee

Nearly thirty years ago, a collection of essays by eminent scholars reminded readers what had nearly been forgotten after centuries of industrialization: that arguably, more than any other type of material object, cloth has been central to the human experience.¹ From pieces of cotton sheeting dyed with indigo to fabric produced from raffia and finely woven silk textiles, cloths have served myriad commercial, symbolic, representational and cultural purposes throughout all regions of the world. Textiles have been central to the production and reproduction of a wide range of social, cultural and political practices.

¹Annette Weiner and Jane Schneider eds. *Cloth and Human Experience* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).

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These observations hold true not only for individual communities or societies, but also on translocal and transregional scales, reaching over great distances and waterways, across the basins of the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Merchants, producers, settlers, state officials, rulers and consumers have utilized cloth as currency to facilitate commercial exchange, created new or reinforced pre-existing adornment practices, supported patronage structures through their diffusion, elaborated ritualistic practices, and forged identities by displaying and wearing cloth in distinctive styles and fashions. Cloth was thus critical in enabling and animating the diverse commercial and cultural terrains of these oceans and their surrounding lands, being traded and consumed not only in local contexts, but also traversing great distances to reach markets throughout Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia. People wore, displayed, collected and used cloth in bodily practices to reflect status and wealth, and therefore to claim a place in the material worlds in which they found themselves.

Of the world's great ocean basins, it was in areas bordering the Indian Ocean that cloth in the broadest variety and types of finish was most widely produced, exchanged and consumed over the greatest length of time. This vast oceanic space connects over 100,000 km of coastline running the length of eastern Africa, the underside of the Arabian peninsula, tracing the shores of Pakistan, India and Southeast Asia and its thousands of offshore islands, further drawing in the waters of the Red Sea, the Gulf and the China Sea (Map 1.1). From early times, monsoon winds, religion, paper technologies, trade and conflicts encouraged the movements of people, products, and ideas around these waters, deep into the hinterlands of their shores and beyond. Our focus on the Indian Ocean in this book reflects a commitment to furthering the challenge (already well under way) to conventional geographies mapped around either national frameworks or Area Studies divisions. The Indian Ocean has increasingly drawn scholars into excavations of its polyvalent strands of interconnectivity produced historically by the wide-ranging and temporally deep movements of goods, people, ideas and texts. They have been compelled by the possibilities of this "complicating" sea to destabilize spatial scales, undermine "existing templates of transnational history" and thereby identify alternative interpretations of globalization as a multicentric and multilayered process whose valences were not determined by a Euro-American Atlantic

centre.² Much of this work has tended to focus, however, on the western reaches of the Indian Ocean, and the circulations and mobilities of intertwined social geographies linking eastern Africa, the Red Sea, the Arabian Peninsula, the Gulf and India, inadvertently eliding the broader currents of connection that stretched across this oceanic space. For instance, these currents brought Kampala in Uganda into relation with Osaka in Japan through the production, distribution and consumption of *kanga* cloths, as discussed in Chap. 5 in this volume by Hideaki Suzuki. Broadening our analytical lenses beyond any sub-oceanic region avoids the danger of geographic segmentation and allows for a more capacious perspective that captures otherwise occluded intra-oceanic histories.

Textile Trades, Consumer Cultures, and the Material Worlds of the Indian Ocean thus endorses an expansive view of the ocean as an 'interaction-based arena' that, while connected to other oceans and seas, had an internal dynamism and historical coherence created by widespread human relationships that were themselves undergirded in significant ways by the kinds of material exchanges and histories represented by the trades and consumption of textiles discussed in this book.³ In taking such a perspective, we endorse the analytical possibilities and empirical pathways opened up by the Indian Ocean and its social and cultural geographies, from destabilizing nation-based framings of the past to unsettling continental or conventional regional boundaries. Careful to avoid reifying ocean space, the volume traces the connections created along shifting circuits of social, cultural and commercial engagement to chart cloth's many pasts among groups scattered along the coasts and interiors of an

²Suggestive recent explorations of the potential of the Indian Ocean to subvert long-established paradigms are provided, for instance, in Isabel Hofmeyr, "South Africa's Indian Ocean: Notes from Johannesburg," *History Compass* 11 no. 7 (2013): pp. 508–512 (the quote is from p. 509); idem, "Universalizing the Indian Ocean," *PMLA* 125, no. 3 (2010): pp. 721–729; Antoinette Burton, Clare Anderson, Isabel Hofmeyr, Christopher J. Lee, Nile Green and Madhavi Kale, "Sea Tracks and Trails: Indian Ocean World as Method," *History Compass*, 11, no. 7 (2013): pp. 497–535; Lindsay Bremner, "Folded Ocean: The Spatial Transformation of the Indian Ocean," *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 10, no. 1 (2013): pp. 1–28.

³Nile Green, "Rethinking the "Middle East" after the Oceanic Turn," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34, no. 3 (2014): p. 560.

array of translocal⁴ nodes within the Indian Ocean.⁵ These were enabled by dense webs of relationships and textiles that moved around the ocean along maritime routes whose contours expanded or contracted according to opportunities afforded by local and, in later periods especially, imperial shipping; the two often co-existed and complemented one another.⁶

The Indian Ocean's deserved status as the historic epicentre of textile innovation and trade is owed in large part to the area which gave the ocean its name. India—and South Asia, more broadly—occupied a privileged place in this ocean's crosscurrents as its artisans produced and supplied textiles of varying qualities and sizes to markets that stretched from insular and island Southeast Asia to the Gulf, Red Sea and the eastern African coast from the Horn of Africa down to the Mozambique Channel, Madagascar and adjacent islands. Indeed, its productive capacities and the widespread involvement and circulation of the subcontinent's maritime merchant networks resulted in Indian textiles reaching markets well beyond the Ocean, including northwestern Europe and West Africa, the eastern Mediterranean and the Americas. Among the greatest strengths of the Indian textile industry was its specialization in serving distinct and well-structured networks of long-distance trade that connected it to multiple regions, its adaptability, the qualities of the cloth—such as design and the durability of dyes, and its capacity for product differentiation. Silk and, especially, cotton cloths were produced in great quantities in distinctive manufacturing areas, with the Coromandel Coast and Gujarat accounting for the bulk of exports

⁴Our understanding of translocality as a complex, multipolar process and 'descriptive tool' is derived from Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen, "Introduction," in *Translocality: The Study of Globalising Phenomena from a Southern Perspective*, ed. Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen (Leiden: Brill, 2010): translocality "is an intermediary concept which helps to better understand and conceptualise connections beyond the local which are, however, neither necessarily global in scale nor necessarily connected to global moments." (p. 3).

⁵Here the volume departs from a similarly themed collection edited by Ruth Barnes, *Textiles in Indian Ocean Societies* (London: Routledge, 2005), that brought together essays examining textiles analytically within single political frames rather than tracing the connections across and beyond them. We note also that Jerry Bentley first warned of the danger of reifying ocean space in his discussion of ocean basins, "Sea and Ocean Basins as Frameworks of Historical Analysis," *Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (1999): pp. 215–224.

⁶As noted especially by Erik Gilbert, *Dhows and the Colonial Economy of Zanzibar* (Oxford, UK/Zanzibar/Athens, OH/Nairobi: James Currey/Gallery Publications/Ohio University Press/E.A.E.P., 2004).

before the sixteenth century, while Bengal, the Punjab and Sind emerged in later centuries as prominent centres with equally strong connections to global trade networks. With the majority of cotton goods in global trade originating in the Indian subcontinent before the eighteenth century, India thus emerged both as a key nodal point in the textile histories of the ocean and as an important centre in the early modern global economic and material worlds—its cloth serving in one recent assessment as “one of the agents lubricating the wheels of commerce”—that were undergirded by diverse consumer cultures and dense commercial relationships.⁷

India's long histories of textile production—especially cotton textile production—have garnered unsurprisingly much attention among scholars, from early Indian economic nationalist historians, who argued that the exigencies of British rule had resulted in the de-industrialization of the subcontinent's production, to the work of scholars such as K.N. Chaudhuri, whose dense econometric analysis and description of the East India Company's extensive trade in cotton piece goods revealed the extent of their place in its commercial economy both within and beyond the Indian Ocean. As widely traded commodities across a variety of cultural, social and political arenas, their utility enhanced by their function also as currencies of exchange and stores of value in merchant units of account, Indian cottons were arguably the most important material artefact in the economic life of Indian Ocean societies.

More recently, historians have reinvigorated the history of industrialization, long understood to be connected to the mechanization of cotton textile production, by examining the role of consumer demand and notions of fashionability and taste that were shaped by the importation of high volumes of Indian cottons into Europe over the late seventeenth century and, especially, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Questions of innovation, technology and knowledge transfer, and competition, among others, have been explored anew as scholarship has dramatically reshaped our understandings of the process and praxis of European industrialization. Influenced to no small degree by the global

⁷ Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy, “Introduction: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500–1850,” in *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500–1850*, ed. Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 10. See also Giorgio Riello and Prasannan Parthasarathi (eds.), *The Spinning World: A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

historical ‘turn’ of the past decade and a half that has urged the adoption of translocal and relational approaches to pasts once seen to be encompassed by national or regional ‘containers’, this scholarship has also reappraised the causes and paths of divergent economic development in Eurasia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Rather than being attributable to a kind of European exceptionalism defined by innate cultural variables and rationalized institutional structures, ‘divergence’ was caused by a number of historical conjunctures, reciprocities and contingencies that were themselves the products of a long process involving a variety of interactions and encounters among and between different areas of the world. The European ‘take-off’ in the production and trade of cotton textiles, as argued recently by Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy, is thus regarded increasingly as both the “result of a long, arduous and not always successful deployment of factors of production’ and the ‘putting in place of complex mechanisms of knowledge transfer, assessment of quality, fashionability, etc.”⁸ Indian cotton textiles were critical to this process and helped shape the tastes and sensibilities of a growing number of consumers whose identities were informed in new ways by adornment practices expressed through publicly visible clothing choices and reinforced through the rearrangements of domestic furnishings and sartorial imaginaries.⁹

Equally, the importance of cotton textiles—and, especially, cotton more broadly—to our understandings of the emergence of the modern world has in the past few years produced major works that have begun even to question conventional histories of capitalism. Sven Beckert’s *Empire of Cotton*, for instance, makes a compelling case for the centrality of cotton—especially American cotton—to our understandings of the origins of capitalism and, hence, to the unfolding of a global economy in which socio-economic inequalities grew amidst struggles over labour,

⁸ Riello and Roy, “Introduction”, p. 17.

⁹ See, for example, John Brewer and Roy Porter eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1994); Beverly Lemire, *Fashion’s Favourite: The Cotton Trade and Consumer in Britain, 1600–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Maxine Berg, “In Pursuit of Luxury: Global History and British Consumer Goods in the Eighteenth Century.” *Past and Present*, 182, no. 1 (2004): pp. 85–113; *idem*, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). The concept of sartorial imaginary is borrowed from Robert S. DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic: Clothing, Commerce, and the Colonization of the Atlantic World, 1650–1800* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 20.