Special Issue on Global History, East Africa and The Classical Traditions

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Global History, East Africa and the Classical Traditions

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Edited by Carla Bocchetti (IFRA)
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Carla Bocchetti

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Scholars who work in global history have spent a lot of time clarifying what global history means. Advances in global history provide an opportunity to deconstruct imperial epistemologies founded in/inspired by the ‘classical’ example. The recent book by McNeil and Riello deals with the historical development of the ancient Classical world. Although the recent book by McNeil and Riello deals with the historical development of the ancient Classical world, no a single article in their collected editions devoted to these phenomena.

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The purpose of this volume is to instigate a new dialogue involving studies of 'global history', Africa and the Classics, as so far the Classics have been left out from recent contributions that are rarely seen together in a publication related to Classical history. The volume encompasses a list of topics and case studies that illustrate the hybridity of the Classical past, the collapse of the model of the Classics as 'universal history'. As such, the volume encompasses a list of topics and case studies that illustrate the hybridity of the Classical past, the collapse of the model of the Classics as 'universal history'.

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Global History, Geography and the Classics

Carla Bocchetti

“He [The Roman Masai] had great poise and dignity and seems to be very intelligent.”

(Ernest Hemingway, The Green Hills of Africa).

The purpose of this volume is to instigate a new dialogue involving studies of ‘global history’, Africa and the Classics, as so far the Classics have been left out from recent advances in global history. The aim is to expose Classics to contemporary preoccupations about the use of the past in global history, whereby Classics begins to lose the privileged position it has enjoyed within European imperial culture. Africa has been chosen as the case study to illustrate not only the hybridity of the Classical past, but also the collapse of the model of the Classics as ‘universal history’. As such, the volume encompasses a list of contributions that are rarely seen together in a publication related to Classical history. The relativisation of Classical history, no longer conceived of as the epitome of civilization, provides an opportunity to deconstruct imperial epistemologies founded in/inspired by the ancient Classical world.

Scholars who work in global history have spent a lot of time clarifying what global history is not. It is not world history, or universal history, it is not national history, nor simply comparative history. So, what is global history? In recent work by Gerritsen and Riello focusing on global history, predominance is given to artifacts as a new way to narrate history through objects: “the way in which artifacts came to be powerful tools for the creation of global connections”. They further argue that “the global turn transformed the way in which historians studied objects. They began to see the connected histories that led to the circulation of objects throughout the various parts of the world”. In spite of their emphasis on the circulation of objects and their consumption, neither Classical ruins, nor ruins in general, have constituted part of Gerritsen and Riello’s investigations, and there is no a single article in their collected editions devoted to these phenomena.

Although the recent book by McNeil and Riello deals with the historical development of the idea of ‘luxury’ including Antiquity, their approach lacks an emphasis on the global connections of the Classical world as reformulated through European imperialism, and the broader epistemological positions these underwrote.

1 This volume is related to the project « Globafrica » Reconnecter l’Afrique: l’Afrique subsaharienne et le monde avant l’impérialisme européen. ANR – USR 3336  http://globafrica.hypotheses.org. I want to thank colleagues and friends that supported this work at different stages: Dr. Marie Emmanuelle Pommerolle, Dr. Sylvain Racaud, Dr. Christian Thibon, Emma Park, David Kay and the team at UN Volunteers.
This special issue of *Les Cahiers d'Afrique de l'Est* aims towards remodeling a ‘globalised Classicalism’ as a form of material culture within global history studies, and to ask how these guiding themes might open up new questions regarding Classical Antiquity, Africa and the ‘modern’. In order to do so, it is necessary to revisit some traditional views of the Classics and frame them within a global historical perspective. In this regard, the approach of this volume works with two main themes:

1. Global history reevaluates the way in which historians deal with the past. In this sense it represents a challenge for Classics to instigate a dialogue with other disciplines to which it is not normally related.

2. Global history works with the preconception that movement in space forms the bases for connectivity and consumption patterns, yet to date geography has not been placed at the center of global historical studies.

The volume aims, firstly, to contribute to an opening up of a space for Classics in global history, considering Classical ruins as a globally relevant form of material culture, and secondly, to explore the way in which Classical Antiquity has been universally consumed not just as a European commodity, but as a hybrid global product, and finally, to address the role of Africa in contesting the supremacy of Classics as universal history.

**Ruins and Imperial Identities**

I would like to offer some suggestions as to how global historical approaches can open up new questions regarding Antiquity and the place of Africa’ in genealogies of ‘the modern’. As this volume hopes to show, global historical approaches suggest new avenues of exploration that transcend a Eurocentric reading of the Classics as the pillar of universal history, and which might therefore transcend some of the limitations of earlier approaches, mainly those which privileged time (history) over space (geography)\(^9\) (see Carla Bocchetti, this volume).

By Classical Antiquity I mean both the physical remains of the ancient Graeco-Roman world and also subsequent discourses concerning these remains; a rhetorical construction that draws a direct line between a limited reading of Classical Antiquity and the foundation of the Western world. I will develop the idea of Classics as a global product in order to show that ruins, together with geography, allow new ways of reading the past; reevaluating the privileged position that Classics have played in European history. First, however, let me begin by exploring how Classical Antiquity became linked to notions of European superiority.

Since the 18th century, Classical Antiquity has been reserved for Europe; the cornerstone of an elite education in imperial identity.

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This education took many forms. Consider, for example, the Romantic movement, exemplified by Goethe and Winckelmann9, which considered the nobility and simplicity of ancient Greek art a model of artistic perfection. Or Grand Tour travelers, like Byron and other Englishmen, who moved through Classical lands in order to complete their self-education by visiting ancient ruins. Or the French scholar Volney, who drew a direct line between past and present; linking the political organization of Classical Athens to the European political states of the 18th century. As these examples suggest, 18th century European intellectuals drew on the cultural formations of Antiquity to consolidate emergent notions of European cultural hegemony. By the 19th century, intellectuals were drawing on the cultural legacy of Antiquity to bolster an emergent discourse of European superiority which legitimized the mission of empire. In doing so, Victorians reframed the unfolding of history, claiming a direct lineage from the glories, cultures and politics of ancient Greece to 19th century European states. Through this process, ancient Greece was framed as the progenitor of 18th-19th century white European ‘civilization’. This is the period when major collections of Greek and Roman art were begun, and the beginning of the foundation of large national museums in Europe. As such, the ruins of Classical Antiquity formed (and continues to form) an integral part of the foundational stories of the modern West.

**Classical Antiquity as a Global Commodity**

Global history pays a great deal of attention to spatial relationships and horizontal connections, and therefore geography, and the social networks these create, can explain much more about the world in which we live today than history alone. On the other hand, the emphasis global history places on material culture supports an interpretation of ruins and antiquities as trade commodities of empire (like cotton for instance)10, and therefore that objects from the Greek and Roman past have played a decisive part in the construction of the idea that there is a cultural predisposition that made Europe and North America richer and better and the rest of the world (the ‘Great Divergence’) (see Riello, this volume).

During the 18th and 19th centuries, fragments of antiquities, as well of copies of arches, columns, pediments and other monuments, emerged as symbols of democracy and civility. By the 19th century, the so-called economic exceptionality of Britain’s industrial revolution was accompanied by the selective use of the materials of Classical Antiquity. In other words, throughout the period of ‘the long 18th century’ ruins were transformed into global commodities: symbols of western hegemony and superiority erected and consumed around the globe.

In this way, the objects of the Classical past were transformed into a discourse of genuine European product. As the archeological record of Classical Antiquity was reframed as the model of the modern, so Classics became the reference for understanding other peoples’ pasts. In the field of archeology, for example, archaeological zones around the world were explained in reference to Classical Antiquity.

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Places with no Classical heritage were considered barbaric, as spaces at the periphery of civilization, or even inauthentic when original Classical references were found outside Europe. In other words, the Classical, as a discourse based on material foundations, can in part be defined by its exclusionary impulse.

As the foregoing suggests, global history provides tools that can help us move between the hybridity of the Classical world itself and the global nature (and subsequent critique) of the imperial Western epistemologies which drew on both physical and imagined Classical material. In what follows, I explore how global historical approaches, which understand historical processes as a series of relations, might open up new avenues of inquiry. If the world viewed through the lens of global history is made flat, then horizontal and geographical models become especially relevant for the understanding of these connections. In this way, global history can offer a revision of traditional epistemological approaches to Classical Antiquity, in which Greece becomes just another place in the Mediterranean world, rather than the ideal topos of Western exceptionalism. This reframing is in line with several important questions: How might the past be re-enacted if we break the dialectic of center-periphery? How might a multi-centric reading of the past challenge our notions of history, displacing as they do questions of origin? How might the introduction of geography to historical analyses challenge some well-known historical preconceptions? And what other pasts might become visible as Classical Antiquity is backgrounded and, subsequently, Europe itself is provincialised?

With these questions in mind we will explore the classical past as a hybrid global product. Despite a common academic emphasis on mobility and diaspora, movement and space are often deployed as metaphors rather than categories of analysis in their own right. It is through this ambivalence that global history has something novel to offer, which brings us to divergence theories. While Classical Antiquity was used to shore up nationally-founded imperial identities, the divergence debate has challenged historians to think outside their national boundaries and to consider histories of relationality that predate European industrialization, therefore confronting the legitimisation of the use of the Greek and Roman past as universal history.

As noted by critics, divergence theory creates asymmetries in how we narrate history. According to Schaub, asymmetry is defined as the differential between diverse societies in their capacity to be influential one another. Central to academic studies of Africa conducted along these lines is a mode of analysis that emphasizes how Africans saw themselves in the world, as opposed to the categories that empire imposed upon them.

Working with some of these insights, global historians have redefined the ancient Mediterranean as a space of cross-cultural connections. In the peripheries, if we follow the vertical model imposed by the historical discourse, Classical Antiquity plays the ambivalent

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role of both status quo and subversive element. This means that the past is performed and perceived in a variety of forms when it loses its tight connections to the center\textsuperscript{12}.

Classical ruins play a part in global history as a distinctive form of material culture, for example in informing the national discourses of independent nations. To what extent we can say that ruins are global objects? The modern Greeks have reevaluated their Classical past, and in this process archaeological ruins have played a decisive role in revising colonialism and shaping modernity\textsuperscript{13}. However, these ruins (and their models/replicas) have also travelled, influencing global encounters and establishing dialogues with local histories, even if as a mode of erasure. In other words, the landscape of ruins - fragments and broken objects of the Classical world - has formed a critical part of how modernity has been defined and constructed\textsuperscript{14}.

Classical ruins are also the subject of consumption, reproduction and forgery, a taste for which developed together with imperial culture. Seizing the past was a means of conferring authority and prestige upon the practitioners of the imperial project. Although objects can open up the history of private lives, the interior of houses and everyday practices, they also reveal transnational patterns of contacts and perceptions of remote lands. Classical ruins are appropriated by nation states and therefore they bring a collective symbolism to society in terms of national enterprises\textsuperscript{15}.

Classical ruins, travelling as objects of collection, have also played a key role in the formation of museums. However, ruins transcend the private aspects of collecting, as most archaeological sites are available to public eyes. Although the Parthenon and other monumentally impressive archaeological sites have often been used to tell the stories of those in privileged positions, Classical ruins can also be employed to tell the stories of common people or peripheries. As with Chinese porcelain or cotton, Classical ruins as a form of material culture can reveal both private and public lives, trans-oceanic connections, designs, taste, collecting and consumption, and as self-contained objects they communicated, and indeed fashioned, the identities of the people who owned, used and viewed them.


\textsuperscript{13} See the concept of ruination in Ann L. Stoler, \textit{Imperial Debris: on Ruins and Ruination} (Duke University Press, 2013), p.195 where the idea of ruins in general are explained as embers of empire attached to conflict, political domination and destruction.

\textsuperscript{14} Yannis Hamilakis, \textit{The Nation and its Ruins: Antiquity, Archaeology, and National Imagination in Greece} (Oxford University Press, 2009).

In this respect, global history opens up not just the matter of reclaiming Classical discourses for the world outside of Europe, but also demands a scholarly awareness that the ancient past of Greece and Rome, reconfigured as universal history, was integral to the cultural vehicle of empire.

The so-called ‘Greek miracle’, together with the perceived exceptionality of European culture, has to be continuously revisited in the light of contact and influence from other cultures; Classical Antiquity should be seen as just another example of cultural hybridity in a world of filled with spatial modes of connection.

In order to address the issues and themes outlined above, the contributions to this volume have been divided into three parts: 1) Classics and Africa; 2) Global History and Geography; and, 3) Visual Culture and Africa.

**Section 1. Classics and Africa**
The publication of the book *African Athena* in 2011 raised questions about the idea of the nation, national identity and belonging. In particular, using the lens of postcolonial studies, it called for a revisionist view of the role of Africa in the construction of Western modernity, and directed attention to how paths of migration and diaspora have been entangled within the social construction of transnational relationships. These questions also form the basis of global history studies.

*African Athena* was inspired by Martin Bernal’s *Black Athena*. Published in 1987, Bernal’s polemic work drew attention to the exclusion of African and Asiatic influences from academic approaches to Classical civilization. If Africa has long been seen as a historical entity only in its relation to European empires, *African Athena* placed Africa in the center of formations of the ‘modern’. There is a strong critique of the way in which Africa had previously been set in dialogue with the discourse of Classicism, but there is an even greater emphasis on the absence of that dialogue. *African Athena* queried the implications of the West’s underestimation of African contributions to Classical culture, and thus generated a critique of the Eurocentric construction of Classical history.

While *African Athena* has done an admirable job of documenting through literary sources the influence of Africans living in the diaspora and their role in shaping modernity, it left a gap in relation to material culture that global history can fill through the study of archaeological sites, ruins and antiquities.

The first section of this volume makes manifest that through global historical studies, Africa becomes a stronger player in its dialogue with Antiquity. The paper by Vasunia - “Ethiopia and India: Fusion and Confusion in British Orientalism” - demonstrates how colonial views of ‘the Orient’ were grounded in references to Greece and Rome, as well as targeting the elusiveness of remote geographical locations within imperial projects. The early colonial confusion of India and Ethiopia is shown to extend back to Antiquity. “Ethiopia” seems to be a name used to denote any region in the far South, mostly “India” but also any other
The publication of the book African Athena in 2011 raised questions about the idea of the Oriental 'Orient' and its relation to Africa. It called for a revisionist view of the role of Africa in the construction of Western modernity, and directed attention to how paths of migration and diaspora have been entangled within it. The so-called 'Greek miracle', together with the perceived exceptionality of European culture, has to be continuously revisited in the light of contact and influence from other cultures; Classical Antiquity should be seen as just another example of cultural hybridity.

If Ethiopia and India were conflated during the pre-colonial and colonial periods, Africa as a wider entity was largely reinvented through Classical myths. Theories of Africa after colonisation were articulated through the use of Greek myth, or else its explicit rejection. This is the subject which Orrells addresses in his article – “V.Y. Mudimbe and the Myth of Oedipus”. For Orrells, the notion that Oedipus’s story is universal exemplifies the history of Eurocentric thought, which continually and imperialistically applied its own logic and categorisations onto colonial subjects. Orrells argues that the myth of Oedipus has been used in African philosophy as a foundational story for the ‘murder’ of the colonial ‘father’, and explains that V.Y. Mudimbe considers Oedipus to have become an important metaphor for trying to articulate the nature of the relationship between the civilized and the savage, and by extension the foundation of the state. He also argues that at the base of Mudimbe’s work there lies a preoccupation with how valid it is to study Africa using Western methodologies, and that colonialism itself has therefore produced a dangerous oedipal relationship between the coloniser and the colonised.

Section 2. Global History and Geography

Section Two deals with theories of global history, and the importance of placing geography at the center of global historical investigations. All three articles in this section draw attention to how Classical discourse (and practice) was foundational to many phenomena of European imperialism, from industrialisation to cartography. However, they also subvert such perspectives by showing how these same material phenomena (cotton/maps) can actually be used to open up wider global histories which disrupt Classically-inspired European triumphalist narratives and methods of control. In this regard, history and geography unite to suggest new interpretations of the use of the Classical past; both what it occludes and what it can thus signpost for renewed scholarly attention.

In his contribution to this volume, Riello challenges the idea of European exceptionality and narratives of triumphalism, explaining how contacts between Europe and other places, mainly India, enabled the cotton-based industrial revolution in Europe. In this way he addresses a central question of global history: “why did Europe get richer that the rest of the world?” For Riello, it was a long term process spanning over two centuries, in which Europe acquired local knowledge from others.
Geography and the dynamics of space come into play as the bases of Riello’s investigation, in how space plays a part in patterns of contact, consumption and technology transfer. Although his research focuses on cotton, his methodology addresses (explicitly or implicitly) many other issues, for instance the question of how global history can challenge our ideas of the past, especially those tied to European triumphalist history, i.e. Graeco-Roman Antiquity. As Riello explains, the new global system created by cotton also brought other artifacts at the base of consumption patterns into imperial culture. Many items commonly included in global trade, such as tea, sugar and tobacco from the plantations, as well as Chinese porcelain, folding screens, pineapples and other exotic luxury items, travelled alongside a passion for Classical ruins, whereby the material culture of the past – whether original or reproduced (as with pottery, statues, columns and other architectural items) was circulated throughout vast areas of the world and consumed in many remote geographical locations. Contemporary approaches to studying geography open up new ways to respond to old issues, reconsidering notions of triumphalist European history in which space became tamed through the process of mapping, which subsequently influenced Western cultural notions of what Africa is. In this respect, geography and cartography offer valuable epistemological approaches to global history.

Bocchetti’s article studies the depiction of Africa in Early Modern European maps in order to create an awareness of the importance of ‘place and space’ within global historical investigations which extends beyond the frame of the nation-state. By comparing Arab and European maps and manuals to African conceptions of space, Bocchetti revaluates the view of Africa as an unknown and dark continent circulating in early Modern Europe. She argues that despite the absence of Swahili written records and drawn maps, their knowledge must have informed the geographical corpus of other communities, playing a substantial role within the written culture and cartographic tradition of the wider Indian Ocean world. The article focuses on discussing cartography as a means of ordering unknown worlds and thus coming to control them, but subverts this role by looking at what knowledge (and its ‘indigenous’ sources) underlay such strategies. The interplay between Arab and European maps in expansionist projects also makes us reconsider the ways in which Classically-inspired perspectives have incorporated these two traditions.

Pollard’s article is an account of Southeast Tanzanian ports and landings as recounted in 19th century European maps, with an aim to demonstrating how these littoral areas are in need of increased archaeological investigation. Landscape modification in terms of coral causeways seems particularly interesting, as does the evidence that smaller sites (as opposed to large well-known stonetowns such as Kilwa) were of crucial importance to early European shipping, for example for taking on fresh water. European cartography stemmed from a Classical epistemological background and was a key tool of European domination leading to colonialism, yet these particular charts subvert such a narrative by demonstrating the wide range of relatively small-scale Swahili sites which European sailors were actively dependent upon in order to successfully ply these coastal routes. They also highlight the materiality/morphology of the coastline which shaped these interactions and which now beckons us to return to the study of such physical features in an effort to place the academic
emphasis back on the Swahili’s own experiences of their littoral/maritime environments.

Section 3. Visual Culture and Africa
The popularity of collecting marked the era of British colonial enterprise by projecting imperial identities onto foreign objects. Most of the objects were placed beyond local histories or origins, becoming key components of colonial language and practices16.

In the case of Greek antiquities, ancient Greece was constructed as an idealized place remote from the modern Greek nation from which these antiquities were sourced, and so Classical Antiquity became an abstract construction of no inherent location. It was rhetorically constructed as the idealized origin point of Western culture17, as epitomised by the European Neoclassical style of art and architecture; believed to encapsulate good taste and erudition, an example of ‘virtue and enlightenment’.

The four papers that comprise this section address Classical influences in the colonies, creating a dialogue with other influences stemming from cultures in East Africa, Afro-Cuba, South Asia and the wider Indian Ocean world.

The article by Niell entangles the worship of ceiba trees by the African-American community of colonial Cuba with the Neoclassical buildings of the island, especially El Templete; a building erected to replace a large ceiba tree and commemorate the foundation of Cuba as a Spanish colony. Niell’s arguments concerning historiography and the 19th century re-imagining of Havana’s past informs his discussion of subaltern voices as co-opted within dominant narratives, in this case in the context of slavery. He further points out that the importance of the ceiba tree as a source of ‘achê’ is already a re-figuration of landscape through West African memories. His discussion of El Templete thus creates a sense of place in a politically turbulent time for the colonial authorities themselves in regards to their relations with the Spanish Crown, and a complex subaltern landscape comprising many different cultural expressions, albeit within a greatly unequal social and political context.

Kaufmann’s article refers to the curation of the exhibition “Patterns of Contact: Designs from the Indian Ocean world” at the Iziko South African National Gallery upon the occasion of Cape Town being selected as the 2014 World Design Capital. As a curator with an interest in early colonial history and archaeology, Kaufmann created an opportunity to showcase some of the lesser known objects held by the Museum and place them in dialogue with objects from other local collections. This made it possible for visitors to view historic works of art, rare maps, furniture, porcelain, silver, textiles and marine relics which had never been exhibited together before. Most of the objects displayed derive from European-driven collecting efforts, whilst the exhibition’s section on cotton in particular relates to European consumption of ‘the Other’s’ designs and knowledge (see also Riello, this volume).

The article also tackles the construction of new cosmopolitan histories that subvert older Euro-centric narratives and material assemblages, and indeed the foundation of institutions to house (and regulate access to) them. This exhibition has helped to re-assess such institutions by bringing together objects that wouldn’t normally be displayed together, with the explicit aim of depicting the complex, globally connected, and sometimes uncomfortable histories, that comprise modern Cape Town.

Longair discusses the use of Neoclassical architecture in the early colonial urban landscapes of Zanzibar and Nairobi. Her research is informed by migration and influence from around the Indian Ocean and the dialogue established through the use of Sarracenic architecture for British colonial buildings. She focuses on the figure of John Sinclair, a British administrator-architect in East Africa from the early 1900s. Longair’s intent is to illuminate the many competitive factors which contributed to the deciding of the formal style for colonial buildings, which related not only to European traditions but also to influences from India and the Arabic world.

Omenya’s article studies the migration of South Asians into Kisumu in the interior of Kenya. He explores the visual culture of South-South relations, and his focus on trade renders objects as active agents in the creation of social relations and the modification of the urban landscape. The activities of objects and shops are thus enrolled in the projection of public identities within Kisumu, where South Asian merchants first settled in 1905. These merchants greatly transformed the consumer habits of local inhabitants through the introduction of such exotic wares as clothes, blankets, oil, salt, sugar and tea. Furthermore, the Neoclassical ex-colonial buildings that South Asian migrants have occupied tells a story of the members of a colonially-privileged economic class who have physically surrounded themselves with the architectural fabric of the old political order, in an interesting example of the lasting continuity of Classically-inspired expressions of social hierarchy in a post-colonial context. Overall, Omenya’s article can be seen as a reaction against the homogenization of identity within discourses of ideology and power, and works toward establishing less fixed means of interpreting cross-cultural encounters.

**Conclusion**

Classical forms, whether in themselves as collected objects or as reconfigured styles (e.g. Neoclassicism), have travelled across the world through a series of global engagements, of which European imperialism has been the most notable. This engages with Riello and Gerritsen’s discussion of the physical movement of goods/objects and how their meanings (and in some cases physical forms) have undergone revision en route. This special edition of *Les Cahiers d’Afrique de l’Est* aims to point out that Classical remains/motifs can be seen as mutable cultural objects whose trajectories have been deeply imbricated with specific social encounters. Classical remains have had a huge influence on Western thinking, epistemologies, and indeed ontologies of contact, exchange and power. The Classical foundation of Western thought has been ‘hybridised’ not only through changes in the West but also the global circulations through which it has travelled.

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Section 1

Africa and the Classics
in the shaping of the confusion. But Thomas and Prester John are epiphenomenal to the
Thomas and, much later, of the legendary Prester John (Presbyter Johannes) play their part
and India in another way since the alleged trajectories of the apostle known as Doubting
of the same community of nations. Christianity matters to the discussion about Ethiopia
who inhabit regions so disparate as East Africa and South Asia can be reckoned as part
Adam, or perhaps to Noah, as Genesis shows most powerfully; it accounts for how peoples
Orientalists. The Bible offers a genealogy in which all human nations can be traced back to
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What is striking about the association in a figure such as Jones, however, is that he wrote in
indeed heavily textual: but sea-trade between north-east Africa and India begins in the
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mythologizing there was scarcely any direct or unmediated contact between Europe and
belonging first and foremost though to literary history, for during much of the time of
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Can the Ethiopian change his skinne? or the leopard his spots?
Jeremiah 13.23, in the King James Version (1611)

Frank M. Snowden, (1970)

Ethiopia and India: Fusion and Confusion in British Orientalism

Phiroze Vasunia

Can the Ethiopian change his skinne? or the leopard his spots?
Jeremiah 13:23, in the King James Version (1611)

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Jeremiah 13:23, in the Bishops’ Bible (1568)

I once encountered in Sicily an interesting parallel to the ancient confusion between Indians and Ethiopians, between east and south. A colleague and I had spent some pleasant moments with the local custodian of an archaeological site. Finally the Sicilian’s curiosity prompted him to inquire of me “Are you Chinese?”

The ancient confusion between Ethiopia and India persists into the late European Enlightenment. Instances of the confusion can be found in the writings of distinguished Orientalists such as William Jones and also of a number of other Europeans now less well known and less highly regarded. The durability of the confusion is remarkable and has met with various explanations, political, cultural, and epistemological. “It is a persistence belonging first and foremost though to literary history, for during much of the time of mythologizing there was scarcely any direct or unmediated contact between Europe and either place, and knowledge was text-based”¹. That is true and untrue. The persistence is indeed heavily textual: but sea-trade between north-east Africa and India begins in the Hellenistic period and would have been impossible on a literalist reading of the confusion. What is striking about the association in a figure such as Jones, however, is that he wrote in the late eighteenth century, by which time European knowledge of Ethiopia and its location had increased dramatically since antiquity, and that he lived in India, which had its own long history of contact with Ethiopia. Literary history is important, but it cannot by itself explain the tenacious hold that the confusion had over poets, travellers, historians, and scholars into the eighteenth century and indeed beyond. We shall need to look to other factors such as the Bible, race, and the power of the Greco-Roman tradition in order to understand why the spell lasts for as long as it does and why it comes to be broken.

In the late eighteenth century, biblical ethnology and ideas about the Orient and race come together to reaffirm a conflation that goes back some two millennia. These ideas and ethnologies will not survive the nineteenth century but still exert an influence for the early Orientalists. The Bible offers a genealogy in which all human nations can be traced back to Adam, or perhaps to Noah, as Genesis shows most powerfully; it accounts for how peoples who inhabit regions so disparate as East Africa and South Asia can be reckoned as part of the same community of nations. Christianity matters to the discussion about Ethiopia and India in another way since the alleged trajectories of the apostle known as Doubting Thomas and, much later, of the legendary Prester John (Presbyter Johannes) play their part in the shaping of the confusion. But Thomas and Prester John are epiphenomenal to the confusion and not the cause of it, and the confusion long antedates them.

There is also, in this era of the Enlightenment, a fluidity about the categories of race and the Orient that allows for the easy passage between Ethiopia and India, between African and Indian, or between the black and, as one ancient writer would have it, the black but not “intensely” black. The black and the Oriental cannot be cleanly separated from each other and the two categories tend to overlap in several texts. These factors overlay the analyses of intellectuals such as Jones and give the confusion a particularly modern inflexion in addition to the charge that it draws from antiquity.

The confusion is, as I suggested, not the result solely of mistaken geography or incorrect science, since empirical precision and first-hand observation do not always succeed in clearing it up. For some centuries, accurate knowledge about Ethiopia stands in contrast to claims about the whereabouts of the region, its original inhabitants, and their customs. Lorenz auf der Maur notes that the African Association is founded in 1788, the first slave narrative in English, by Olaudah Equiano, appears in 1789, and James Bruce’s long account of his travels appears in 1790. Maur’s implication is that Europe’s relationship to Ethiopia undergoes a major shift in these years, but it is difficult to see evidence for the shift even in Jones’ late work. Perhaps these developments were not known to Jones, who died in Calcutta in 1794, though they were probably known to Francis Wilford, another Briton in India to whom we shall return. At another level, the chronological marker is less significant than we might think, for the confusion between Ethiopia and India continues into the nineteenth century, despite major developments in the historical and geographical sciences. Ancient contact and migration between Ethiopia and India preoccupy some writers even into the twentieth century. The confusion satisfied longstanding theories about India and Ethiopia, the dark-complexioned foreigner, and the promise of the exotic; it was seen to pose little or no threat to the authority of the Bible. For these and other reasons, it was lodged deep in the heart of epistemological frameworks in the Enlightenment and its appeal has never entirely gone away.

The Orientalists: William Jones
Let us begin our discussion with the traces of this confusion in the Third Anniversary Discourse, “on the Hindus”, which was delivered in Calcutta, on 2nd February 1786, by William Jones. Jones was a British judge at a time when the region of Bengal was under the rule of the East India Company: he said that one of his main areas of attention was India, “not because I find reason to believe it the true centre of population or of knowledge, but, because it is the country, which we now inhabit, and from which we may best survey the regions around us”. The discourse is most often celebrated for its presentation of what would come to be known as the theory of Indo-European languages, but other parts of the discourse, less familiar than the passage about Indo-European, are nonetheless revealing about Jones’ method and interests; they show him engaging with contemporaries such as

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Jacob Bryant, the author of *A new system, or, An analysis of ancient mythology* (1774–76), and with early modern frameworks for historical and religious study.

Jones observes that, since India’s old history is clouded by fable, he is compelled to turn to four “media” to satisfy his desire to learn more about the country. He describes these four media as: languages and letters; philosophy and religion; sculpture and architecture; and lastly, the written records of the sciences and the arts. Of these four, the third group is the most directly relevant to our analysis of Ethiopia and India.

The remains of architecture and sculpture in India, which I mention here as mere monuments of antiquity, not as specimens of ancient art, seem to prove an early connection between this country and Africa: the pyramids of Egypt, the colossal statues described by PAUSANIAS and others, the sphinx, and the HERMES Canis, which last bears a great resemblance to the Varahāvatār, or the incarnation of VISHNU in the form of a Boar, indicate the style and mythology of the same indefatigable workmen, who formed the vast excavations of Cānārah, the various temples and images of BUDDHA, and the idols, which are continually dug up at Gayā, or in its vicinity. The letters on many of those monuments appear, as I have before intimated, partly of Indian, and partly of Abyssinian or Ethiopic, origin; and all these indubitable facts may induce no ill-grounded opinion, that Ethiopia and Hindustān were peopled or colonized by the same extraordinary race; in confirmation of which, it may be added, that the mountaineers of Bengal and Bahār can hardly be distinguished in some of their features, particularly their lips and noses, from the modern Abyssinians, whom the Arabs call the children of Cūśh: and the ancient Hindus, according to STRABO, differed in nothing from the Africans, but in the straitness and smoothness of their hair, while that of the others was crisp or woolly; a difference proceeding chiefly, if not entirely, from the respective humidity or dryness of their atmospheres: hence the people who received the first light of the rising sun, according to the limited knowledge of the ancients, are said by APULEIUS to be the Ari and Ethiopians, by which he clearly meant certain nations of India; where we frequently see figures of BUDDHA with curled hair apparently designed for a representation of it in its natural state.5

(Jones 1807: 3.40–42)

In this passage, Jones contradicts the implications of the Indo-European hypothesis that he outlined earlier in the same discourse. Perhaps the contradiction is unsurprising since the implications of the Indo-European theory have yet to be developed with any rigour or in detail. Jones sees numerous associations and connections in this discourse that others, and even he himself, would later revise or reject. Jones also undercuts his theory in other places in this discourse: he appears to include Egypt in the grouping of Indo-European cultures, for example, and ends by hinting at putative similarities between Indians, Chinese, Japanese, and Peruvians, among other peoples. In showing a degree of incoherence, at least from our perspective, about the Indo-European hypothesis, Jones connects India and Africa on architectural, linguistic, and racial lines, and these striking correlations call for some comment.

5 The *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd edn., s.v. “Abyssinian”, points out that Abyssinia is “the former European name of the country in north-eastern Africa now called Ethiopia”. Further: “The Ethiopian Empire was founded in 1270, when its ruling dynasty was formed from an Ethiopic people now usually referred to as Habesha in English (compare Geez ከባስቻ, Amharic ከቡታ; > Arabic ḥabaš; > Arabic ḥabaṣa (collective noun), ḥabaša (singular noun) . . . The Empire ended in 1974, and the place name Abyssinia, which was never official, is now only used historically. Early modern names for the country in European languages are derived more directly from the name of the Habesha.” The post-classical Latin forms “Abyssina” or “Abassina” are attested in 1577 or earlier; the place name “Abyssinia” and its variants appear in English materials from the second half of the seventeenth century. Given the theme of this article, it is worth noting with the *OED*, lastly, that “the first cat known to have been described as Abyssinian was apparently brought back from India by an army officer and exhibited at a cat show in London in 1872.”
The linguistic and racial affinities, in particular, are relevant to the putative connections that Jones draws between India and Ethiopia. Earlier in the discourse, Jones stated briefly that “the inscriptions at Canárah . . . seem to be compounded of Nágarí and Ethiopick letters, which bear a close relation to each other, both in the mode of writing from the left hand, and in the singular manner of connecting the vowels with the consonants”6. Jones now reiterates the similarity in letters and uses the affinity to claim that Ethiopia and India “were peopled or colonized by the same extraordinary race”. This claims he validates by pointing to alleged racial similarities between Abyssinians and people who live on mountains in Bengal and Bihar. Jones seeks, notably, confirmation of the Indo-Ethiopic connection in ancient Greek and Latin authors such as Strabo and Apuleius—the recourse to antiquity is significant, as we shall see later.

Jones returns to the linguistic connections in subsequent discourses and again he groups the Ethiopians and Egyptians with the Indians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans. In the Eighth Anniversary Discourse, delivered in Calcutta on 24th February 1791, Jones says that “the written Abyssinian language, which we call Ethiopick” is not just related to Arabic, Hebrew, and “Chaldean”, but also uses characters that are similar to those found in Indian languages7. The Ethiopian letters resemble the letters of the Devanagari script, according to Jones, and “had at first a similar form”8. He goes on to argue that the Ethiopians and the Egyptians were originally one people and these in turn were the same as the original Indians9. Again in this discourse, Jones shows an awareness that Ethiopians and Indians were confused in Greek and Roman antiquity; he postulates that the ancient Greeks referred both to the “southern nations of Africk” and to the people of India as Indians and that they used Indian and Ethiopian “as convertible terms”10. Jones has no hesitation in arguing that Ethiopians and Indians were one and the same people in the distant past, and it seems to him that the ancient practice bolsters his case for the primal unity of the nations.

The Bible and Ethnology
How should we understand Jones’ remarks about the connection between Ethiopia and India? Thomas Trautmann has shown that one framework in which we can place Jones’ writings is ethnological. Trautmann refers to the framework as a “Mosaic” ethnology since its “frame is supplied by the story of the descent of Noah in the book of Genesis, attributed to Moses, in the Bible”11. The ethnological framework, which in its various versions proved to be extremely influential among European thinkers well into the Enlightenment and beyond, gained its specificity from the genealogies mentioned in the Bible and especially in Genesis.

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6 Ibid, pp.35-36.
7 Ibid, p.166.
8 Ibid.
According to chapter 10 of Genesis, Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and these in turn had further offspring: Ham is said to have Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan as his sons, for example, and Cush in turn was the father of Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, Sabteka, and Nimrod. Jones is unable to shake off the influence of the Mosaic ethnology on his thinking, and he attempts to reconcile his own observations with biblical ethnology as he perceives it.

In taking over the ethnologies of the Bible, Jones followed in the wake of Isaac Newton’s *The chronology of ancient kingdoms amended* (1728) and, especially, Bryant’s *Analysis of ancient mythology*, which were revisions of older conceptions of biblical ethnology. As Trautmann has argued, Jones does not unilaterally accept the reasoning given by Newton and Bryant, nor does he quite follow their methodologies; Jones does, however, agree with many of their conclusions. His main exposition comes in the Ninth Anniversary Discourse, “On the Origin and Families of Nations”, delivered in Calcutta on 23rd February 1792, though much of the thinking that went into this paper evidently informed the earlier discourses. Following his reading of the Mosaic ethnology, Jones divides up the peoples of the world into three groups, which, in his view, originally came out of Iran. These three groups he calls the Indian, the Arabian, and the Tartar. The Indian group is descended from Ham, the Arabian from Shem, and the Tartar from Japheth. The Indian group consists of Indians, Persians, Romans, Greeks, Goths, “the old Egyptians or Ethiopians”, and probably Chinese and Japanese. The Arabian group consists of Jews, Arabs, Assyrians, people who spoke Syriac, and Abyssinians. The Tartars differed from the other two groups, dispersed far and wide, and are harder to reconstruct but include the “Sclavonians”. Jones’ innovation, following Bryant, lies in claiming that the Greeks, Romans, Indians, Persians, Egyptians, and Ethiopians all are descended from Ham, whereas previous commentators placed the Greeks and Romans in a line from Japheth and not from Ham; his other innovation is to emphasize the importance of Indians and Persians in the group descended from Ham.

Jones’ further remarks on the descendants of Ham and their relationships are revealing. He writes that the biblical figures Cush, Misr, and Raamah have counterparts in Sanskrit narratives. The biblical Cush or Cus (son of Ham) is parallel to Kusa, the son of Rama; the biblical Misr or Mizraim (also a son of Ham) is parallel to the familiar Indian name Mishra; and the biblical Raamah (son of Cush) is parallel to Rama. Jones seeks to support these arguments by discerning other similarities between early books of the Bible and Sanskrit texts and says that versions of the biblical flood, the Tower of Babel, and the scattering of peoples and nations can also be found in the Puranas, among other texts. He tells us further, in the Ninth Discourse, that the descendants of Ham invented letters, identified heavenly bodies such as stars and planets, and calculated the Indian period of 432,000 years.

These peoples dispersed over land and sea: the tribes of Misr, Cush, and Rama settled in India and Africa, while some of this family passed through Egypt, Phoenicia, and Phrygia.
into Italy and Greece, some moved into Scandinavia, some into Kashgar and Eighur, Khata and Khotan, and others indeed into Mexico and Peru, where literature and mythology similar to those found in Egypt and India have been discovered\textsuperscript{14}.

Of these connections and dispersions, it is significant that Jones groups the names of Cush, Misr, and Rama together and posits a relatively close connection between the peoples associated with the three. To twenty-first century critics, the connection seems implausible, not least because it unites language families that modern linguists keep apart, namely, the Afro-Asiatic (which encompasses Egyptian and Ethiopian languages) and the Indo-European (which includes Sanskrit). But Jones and other contemporaries were open to the possibility that Egypt, Ethiopia, and India were somehow linked to each other in antiquity and devoted a considerable amount of energy to establishing such a link. There was no inconsistency to them in seeing a nation so culturally and geographically remote as India mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. They believed the Bible had an explanatory value that was historical and ethnographic as well as religious and they supposed that texts from distant cultures appeared to corroborate the apparent affiliations made by the Hebrew scriptures.

As the triad of names indicates, moreover, Egypt (Mizraim in Hebrew, Misr in Arabic) obsessed the Indian Orientalists no less than Ethiopia, perhaps even more than Ethiopia, and several writers sought to show that the ancient Indians derived their learning from Egypt or, vice-versa, that the Indians transmitted their lore to the Egyptians. But Egypt and Ethiopia implied different histories to these writers, and Ethiopia was a less stable category than Egypt in geographic and perhaps ethnologic terms. Well before Jones’ presented his discourses to the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, Nathaniel Brassey Halhed composed a \textit{Grammar of the Bengal Language} (1778) in which he held out the prospect of an historic exchange between Egypt and India. Halhed knew of an Indian raja who owned Sanskrit manuscripts “which give an account of a communication formerly subsisting between India and Egypt; wherein the Egyptians are constantly described as disciples, not as instructors, and as seeking that liberal education and those sciences in Hindostan, which none of their own countrymen had sufficient knowledge to impart. The few passages which are extant in the antient Greek authors respecting the Brancmans at the same time that they receive a fresh light from this relation, very strongly corroborate its authenticity”\textsuperscript{15}. A few years later, James Burnett (Lord Monboddo) proclaimed that Sanskrit and Greek were dialects of the ancient Egyptian language, which Osiris had conveyed to India and which was the oldest language in the world\textsuperscript{16}. Ethiopia was thus part of a group that included Egypt and India, and while it did not have the lure of hieroglyphs and pyramids, Ethiopia, like Egypt, had an antiquity and a biblical pedigree that made it an attractive part of the fantasies of the Indian Orientalists.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, p.203. 
\textsuperscript{15} Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, \textit{A Grammar of the Bengal Language} (Printed at Hoogly in Bengal, 1778), p.V. 
The Orientalists: Francis Wilford

The triangulation of India, Egypt, and Ethiopia was given an elaborate and colourful explication by Francis Wilford (who was born in 1751 or 1761 and died in 1822), a man known to Jones and “an eccentric subaltern in the army of Orientalism”17.

Thanks to the analyses of Chris Bayly, Nigel Leask, and Trautmann, we are well informed about Wilford’s activities and the reception of his speculations18. Wilford served as an assistant to the Surveyor-General in India from 1786 to 1790 when he drafted military maps in Bihar. He retired from the army in 1794 and settled in Benares, where he was Secretary to the Committee of the Sanskrit College. He married Khanum Bibi Sahib, an Indian woman, with whom he had daughters who married into the ranks of the East India Company. Wilford seemed to have a knack for obtaining and discovering Sanskrit manuscripts, which he passed on to Orientalists. “He employed a large staff of Pandit copyists and translators and had become ‘brahminised’ according to a later reformist Hindu traveller”, and he was himself the unfortunate victim of a deception practised on him by his head pandit19.

“If not today’s ‘Black Athena’,” Bayly writes, “he would certainly have recognised ‘Asian Athena’”20. Wilford’s first major statement on the connection between north-east Africa and India appeared in volume 3 of the Asiatick Researches under the heading “On Egypt and other Countries, Adjacent to the Ca`li´ River, or Nile of Ethiopia, from the Ancient Books of the Hindus”. Wilford draws loosely on the Puranas but arrives at an understanding of them that differs markedly from the conceptions of his contemporaries and of later scholars. A large part of the work is based on etymological connections and linguistic analysis that many would find far-fetched, implausible, or bizarre. A small group of writers did adopt Wilford’s interpretation of the relationship between Africa and India, however, and his essays “exerted a powerful influence on early nineteenth-century antiquarians and Romantic poets like S. T. Coleridge, Robert Southey, Tom Moore, and Percy Shelley”21. The details and implications of his work are worth considering at least briefly.

Wilford presents his long article in the Asiatick Researches as an exercise in comparative geography, but the work is as much about allusion and etymology as it is about geography. We may summarize part of it in the following way. The Puranas relate that Satyavrata, who survived a great deluge, had three sons, Sharma, Charma, and Jyapeti. Satyavrata curses his son Charma since the latter laughs at the old man when he becomes accidentally drunk on a strong liquor of fermented rice. As a result of his father’s curse, Charma becomes a slave to the slaves of his brothers22. The children of his brother Sharma come to a settlement on

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19 Bayly, Orientalists, Informants, and Critics in Benares, p.103.
21 Leask, Francis Wilford and the Colonial Construction of Hindu Geography, p.205.
the banks of the river Nila, or Cali, in Egypt, where after acts of pious devotion they build a pyramid and then seek refuge in the mountains.

The descendants of Sharma can be found in the mountains of north India and Ethiopia. The pyramid, or Padma-Mandir, is probably in the town known to the Greeks as Byblos in Egypt. The source of the Nila lies in the land of Sharma, a land also known by its name Sharma-Sthan, and it includes Ethiopia along with parts of Abyssinia and Azan.

Since Sharma laughed at his drunk father, according to Wilford, he was given the name Hasyasila (the “Laugher”) and his descendants are called Hasyasilas and even Habashis23. (Wilford has in mind the Arabic word “Habashi”, from which derives the Indo-Persian term “Habshi”, which denotes Ethiopians, Abyssinians, or East Africans generally.) The Hasyasilas are the same as the Cutila-césas or they are a branch of the Cutila-césas who settled on the banks of the Nile and were expelled from Egypt and dispersed over African deserts. The Gaitulis, who are also mentioned in classical authors, are the descendants of the Cutilas. The Cutila-césas lived originally in Bengal. “They were black, and had curled hair, like the Egyptians in the time of Herodotus: but at present there are no such negroes in India, except in the Andaman Islands . . .”24. Wilford adds, “It is certain, that very ancient statues of Gods in India have crisp hair, and the features of negroes . . . I have seen many idols on which the woolly appearance of the hair was so well represented as to preclude all doubt”25. These statues were made by the Cutila-césas when they enjoyed power in India.

Wilford is deeply interested in the racial connection between Indians and black Africans; he disagrees with the Brahmans who consider that these statues of gods were created by Buddhists and points to the “thick lips and flat noses of those ancient images”26. He is convinced that “a race of negroes” ruled in India at some early stage in history and observes that mountaineers in his own time “still have some resemblance to negroes in their countenance and hair, which is curled, and has a tendency to wool”27. Though they have changed through intermarriage with others who may be black and have straight hair. Wilford also comments on the Syama-muchas, another group that migrated from India in ancient times. These have black faces and straight hair, like the Hindus who live on the plains, and in his view are “the straight-haired Ethiops of the ancients, and their king, surnamed Mahasyama, or the Great Black, was probably the king ARABUS, mentioned by the Greek mythologists”28. For Wilford, the racial evidence indisputably points to a close kinship between the Ethiopian and Indian peoples.

Another of Wilford’s claims is that the Sanskrit word Cusha-dwipa (the conventional modern transliteration is Kushadvipa) is an ancient name for Ethiopia, the land of Cush. As Wilford correctly observes, the Puranas divide the world into seven dwipas or concentric

23 Ibid, p.331.
25 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
Wilford is deeply interested in the racial connection between Indians and black Africans; the plains, and in his view are “the straight-haired Ethiops of the ancients, and their king, in ancient times. These have black faces and straight hair, like the Hindus who live on the banks of the Nile and were expelled from Egypt and dispersed over African countries.”

Wilford also comments on the Syama-muchas, another group that migrated from India to Ethiopia. Hasyasilas (the “Laugher”) and his descendants are called Hasyasilas and even Habashis. Since Charma laughed at his drunk father, according to Wilford, he was given the name meaning “Habshi”, which denotes Ethiopians, Abyssinians, or East Africans generally. The term “Habshi” is derived from the conventional Sanskrit word “Hasya-sila”, which denotes any large city or a boundary or line of separation. Further, Herodotus’ views about the progenitor of a great Indian family: some say that it grew on the valmica, or hill formed by white ants, round the body of CUSHA himself; or of CAUSHICA, his son, who was performing his tapasya, or act of austere devotion; but the story of the ant-hill is by others told of the first Hindu poet thence named VA’LMI’CA.

(Wilford 1792: 302)

In this account, Cusha-dwipa without is formed by settlers from Cusha-dwipa within, and the standard explanation from grass is given a twist so that it becomes subordinate to what is here Wilford’s main claim, the reference to Abyssinia and Ethiopia in the Puranas.

Wilford uses the term Sancha-dwip probably to refer to Egypt, but to him Egypt also has other names in the Sanskrit books including Misra-sthan, Misra, and Misrena. Brahma himself bears the title Misreswara. The Arabic word Misr, for Egypt, is derived from the Sanskrit, but the Hindus now appear to have forgotten the origin of the word and use it to denote any large city or a boundary or line of separation. Further, Herodotus’ views about the Delta and the formation of Egypt are paralleled in the Puranas, which give their own account of the geological changes that are said to have resulted in the silting of the Delta and the creation of the country. In Wilford’s view, lastly, the Sanskrit texts also refer to various Egyptian cities such as Thebes and Memphis and to Lake Moeris.

Wilford argues his case with even greater complexity and determination than these extracts suggest, but, rather than go deeper into his hypotheses, let us turn to the remarks that Jones makes in grudging defence of Wilford’s article. Here, as before, Jones also evinces the desire “to assimilate the cultural heterogeneity of India into the metanarratives of European universal history and geography.” Jones’ words are printed immediately after Wilford’s article in the same volume of the Asiatick Researches. He translates two Sanskrit passages that Wilford quotes and that are ostensibly from the Puranas: the first, in Jones’ view, “is a little poem, in the form of the hymns ascribed to ORPHEUS, in praise of the Nile, which all the Brâhmens allow to be a sacred river in Cusha-dwip, and which we may confidently pronounce to be the Nile.”

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26 Ibid, p.337.  
28 Leask, Francis Wilford and the Colonial construction of Hindu Geography, p.205.  
29 Wilford, “On Egypt, and Other Countries Adjacent to the Cu’li’ River”, p.463.
The second passage is said to come from the Padma Purana and is about Satyavarman or Satyvrata, the father of Sharma, Charma, and Jyapeti. Jones compares the passage to “the Mosaic relation of the same adventure” and approves the identification of Satyvrata “with the NOAH of Scripture”33. Jones concludes by agreeing with Wilford on many points, including the notion that the ancient Indians had knowledge of Egypt and the Nile34.

Wilford had relied on Pandit Vidyananda to supply him with many of his Sanskrit materials, but the pandit turned out to be an unreliable source since he faked many of the manuscripts and made alterations to existing texts; the pandit was possessed of a skill so accomplished that he composed some 12,000 new verses in one instance35. Wilford acknowledges the problems with his source in volume 8 of the Asiatick Researches but does not quite retract the entirety of his arguments about Egypt and Ethiopia. The passages provided by the pandit contained “much truth”, Wilford notes, and the learned reader should not be in doubt that the overall conclusions he draws in that article are correct. The story of Noah and his three sons may well be a fabrication and may not occur verbatim in the Puranas: but Wilford goes on to say that the story occurs “in less explicit terms” in the Puranas and so should not be discounted in its entirety36. Even though the pandit inserted the name of Egypt into many Sanskrit manuscripts, the overall weight of the myths and legends quoted by the pandit and by Wilford was proof to him of the connections and affinities that existed between Africa and India in antiquity. Wilford thus holds on to the basic outlines of his arguments about Egypt and Ethiopia and indeed goes on to argue that Hindus in ancient India worshipped the British Isles.

Bayly makes the point that rather than think of Wilford or Jones as naive, we should recall their attitudes to antiquity and the Bible. Men such as Wilford “felt that almost everything was once known by the Ancients and that Humanity’s common store of knowledge was implanted by Providence at the beginning of time, before the Flood fragmented its pristine unity”37. What is clear is that while men such as Wilford gave the impression that they were interested in validating the Bible, they were able to use the Bible in order to justify their enquiries into Hinduism, Mughal India, and Indian history and argue that their work was relevant to the study of Christianity. They were emphatically not like the British evangelicals and missionaries of the nineteenth century who sought to convert Indians to Christianity and who were disdainful of Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism. They consulted local experts in Hindu, Islamic, and other scriptures and listened to them at great length. For these Orientalists, the Bible was deployed to promote scholarly enquiry into the Sanskrit and Indo-Persian traditions of South Asia and not, at least not explicitly, as a textual justification for the superiority of Christianity.

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33 Ibid, p.466.
34 Ibid, p.467.
37 Bayly, Orientalists, Informants, and Critics in Benares, p.106.
Race, Slavery, and the Bible

In this context, the fraught relationship between the Hebrew Bible and black slavery is worth mentioning. The major text on this point is Genesis, here in the King James Version, with the spelling modernized:

And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard. And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without.

And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father’s nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.

Genesis 9.20–25

The passage from Genesis does not refer to Ham or his descendants as black but it is nonetheless a text invoked frequently in the modern period to justify black slavery. The roots of this usage go back to antiquity. Between the second and fourth centuries CE, Jewish authors begin to think of Ham as black; by the sixth or seventh century, the view was becoming entrenched that Ham, the ancestor of black Africans, was cursed with slavery. By the early modern period, a number of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish sources took the view that the slavery of black Africans could be explained through the curse that Noah put on Ham and his descendants. As John Weemes wrote, in 1627, “. . . this curse to be a servant was laid, first upon a disobedient sonne Cham, and wee see to this day, that the Moores, Chams posteritie, are sold like slaves yet.” In the late eighteenth century, when Jones and Wilford were writing, the association between the curse of Ham and black slavery would have been familiar to most European men of letters and certainly to figures who were versed in biblical interpretation and ethnology.

Race, slavery, and the Bible had intersected in powerful ways long before Jones and Wilford arrived in South Asia and would have shaped the contexts in which they investigated Indian culture and history. Jones, for one, seems to have adopted a somewhat inconsistent attitude toward slavery. Before he went to Calcutta, Jones “condemned the African slave trade with a passion that impressed Wilberforce”, and yet in Calcutta he was prepared to defend domestic slavery and appeared to think of household slaves as domestic servants. He seems to accept the impositions of the British Empire and the practice of slavery in colonial Bengal, despite the vehemence of his earlier stance. Perhaps, he is drawing a distinction between the trade in African slaves and the established customs of domestic slavery in India? “I have slaves, whom I rescued from death or misery, but consider them as other servants, and shall certainly tell them so, when they are old enough to comprehend the difference of the terms.”

In condemning the trade in African slaves, he seems to be upholding the rights of black Africans to be free; in himself keeping Indian slaves, he seems to be denying Indians the right to be free. This attitude undercuts the racial and historical connections he discerns between Africans and Indians; it is seemingly at odds with his belief that Indian culture is highly accomplished and civilized. It may be that what he finds abhorrent about African slavery is its viciousness, violence, and brutality, which he may not perceive regularly in the “domestic” slavery he accepts in Calcutta.

In condoning slavery in India, he may feel that he is accepting a custom that has been prevalent in Indian society long before the arrival of the British. If he is guilty of moral and political compromises, his overall position on the subject is complicated: for all his prevarications, as Michael Franklin observes, “Jones had been instrumental in the abolition of the Bengal slave trade almost two decades before the 1807 act outlawed the trade throughout the British Empire”\textsuperscript{42}. Jones’ stance toward race and, in particular, the race of Indians is shaped by inherited attitudes and colonialism but also coloured by his desire to understand the history of the people among whom he lives and works.

When Jones and Wilford comment on the racial affinities between Ethiopians and Indians, they frequently draw attention to the shared blackness of the two peoples. The racial distinction between Indians and Ethiopians is, thus, regularly blurred, challenged, or even discarded in the writings of these authors. One way of interpreting the idea of a racial continuum that unites Ethiopians and Indians is to say that the separation between “Oriental” and “black” is not easy to make in the eighteenth century. Felicity Nussbaum notes that “representations of people of colour in the eighteenth century mutate through the spectrum of tawny, sallow, olive, mulatto, sooty, and ebony—of East Indian, West Indian, American Indian, Pacific Islander, and North and sub-Saharan African, all of whom are at times designated in British (if not American) parlance as ‘black’”\textsuperscript{43}.

We may, with Nussbaum, point to the turbaned Moor as the example of a literary character whose exact complexion varies according to author and genre and who has the ability to slip in and out of a vast zone of exoticism that stretches from North Africa through the Middle East and up to India. Orientalism and racial theories thus join together to conjure up a fluid idea of the Moor who is as much at home in North India as in North Africa: “For the Renaissance and much of the eighteenth century, the Moorish prince, often turbaned, who is fixed in rank but subject to enslavement, represents a kind of swing figure between sexualities, skin colours, and sometimes religions”\textsuperscript{44}.

The Ethiopians and Indians of Jones and Wilford seem in many instances to conform to this idea of a generalized black who is also Oriental or generalized Oriental who is also black.

\textsuperscript{42} Franklin, \textit{Orientalist Jones}, p.300.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., pp.146–47.
While the idea that Indians are “black” is rife in European literature of many periods including the eighteenth century, English authors also comment on Indians who desire not to be called “black” or “negro” themselves. Of the area around Madras and the Coromandel Coast, Edward Ives writes, in the eighteenth century, “The natives on this coast are black but of different shades. Both men and women have long shining black hair, which has not the least tendency to wool like that of the Guinea Negroes. You cannot affront them more, than to call them by the name of negro, as they conceive it implies an idea of slavery”45.

We cannot tell, from such accounts, how or whether the Europeans and Indians overcame linguistic, cultural, and historical barriers and discussed racial matters or slavery. These are complex narratives in which Europeans who comment on the complexions of natives say that the natives themselves are given to racial hierarchies. What Ives implies is that Indians are sensitive to racial issues and are wary of being compared to black African slaves, many of whom had come from Ethiopia.

**Ethiopians in India**

Behind the claims that the British Orientalists make about Ethiopia and India lies, in fact, the deep history of contact between Ethiopia and India. According to one source, William Jones himself conversed with an Ethiopian who was his guest in India46. Abu Rumi, an Ethiopian and a translator of the Bible, travelled via Syria and Persia to India and stayed in Jones’ house in Calcutta for a while; he then went on to Mocha before he returned back to Ethiopia. Whether Abu Rumi and Jones discussed Jones’ theories about the similarities between Ethiopian and Indian culture is anyone’s guess. Abu Rumi is one of a large number of Ethiopians who came to India, however, and the history of Ethiopians in India extends back centuries before Jones. Ethiopians were brought to India, often forcibly, before and after the British East India Company established itself in the area47. Ethiopians were known to Indians variously as Habshis, Sidis, and kaffirs: Habshi, from *Habash*, the Arabic for “Abyssinia”; Sidi, probably from the Arabic *Saiyid* or “master”; and kaffir, from the word for “non-believer”. That these names were sometimes applied indiscriminately to Africans and not solely to Ethiopians should not detract from the significance of the large numbers of Ethiopians who were taken to India over centuries. (In India, today, “the word *habshi* is often heard applied in a pejorative sense to an Indian of dark skin, and also frequently to a man of Gargantuan appetite”48.

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Ibn Battuta comments on the presence of Habshis across many parts of India during his travels in the region in the fourteenth century. By the end of that century, significant numbers of Habshis are attested in Gujarat by historical sources, and soon after they are attested in Bengal and the Deccan as well. “The flow of Habshi slaves into India continues through the Mughal period, and the names of individual Habshis occur frequently throughout the Mughal histories”49. The historian known as Haji ad-Dabir, who completed his history of Gujarat in Arabic by about 1605, comments on the numbers of Abyssinians in the region in the fifteenth century. “He claims that they were as good as Arabs in everything except descent, but were often disliked by ordinary Indians, who were sometimes incited to murder them”50. Among Habshis who attained high rank are Atish Habshi, governor of Bihar and then the Deccan, and Dilawar Khan, another governor of the Deccan. In Gujarat, they served as soldiers and sailors, “and their descendants are still recognized as a separate Muslim community”.

The Orientalists’ fascination with race and skin colour can also be found in Indians’ accounts of Ethiopians in India. These observations on the race of Ethiopian slaves and soldiers are of a very different tenor from what we find in the Orientalists and their concern with languages and civilizations. They vary considerably. The Mughals’ remarks about the race and colour of Ethiopian slaves contrast with western Deccan attitudes toward them. According to Richard M. Eaton, “dominant sections of the Mughal ruling class cultivated a posture of racial arrogance, a strong sense of pedigree, and a sense of hereditary aristocracy not found in the Deccan”51. In his memoir, the Mughal emperor Jahangir, who ruled from 1605 to 1627, refers to one of his enemies, Malik Ambar, a Habshi, as “black-faced”, “of dark fate”, and “the black-fated one”, while his soldiers are “the rebels of black-fortune”52. The Deccan sultanates, however, were home to mixed communities, including populations of Ethiopians, Iranians, Central Asians, Arabs, Marathas, and an old Deccani nobility that traced its ancestry back to Indo-Turkish populations. “This motley collection of communities contrasted with the more homogenous ruling class of Mughal north India, which throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries received continuous infusions of blue-blooded Persian-speaking immigrants—mainly Iranians or Persianized Turks—from nearby Iran and Central Asia”53.

A number of historians and other writers remark on the skill, bravery, and strength of the Ethiopians who served in the armies of native rulers. One of Jahangir’s own historians writes in laudatory terms of Malik Ambar on the news of Ambar’s death: “In warfare, in command, in sound judgement, and in administration, he had no rival or equal . . . History records no other instance of an Abyssinian slave arriving at such eminence”54.

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49Burton-Page, “Habshi.” In Encyclopaedia of Islam.
52Ibid., p.127.
53Ibid., p.122.
In the sixteenth century, Joam de Castro says that enslaved Ethiopians who serve as soldiers in India were “strong and valiant to such a degree that there was a proverb throughout India that good soldiers or *ascalés*, or servants, must be Abyssinian”\(^{55}\). These soldiers are “so well regarded in Bengal, Cambaia, Ballagate and other places that all those who command the armies or have a rank there are taken from this race”\(^{56}\). Near the end of the eighteenth century, J. H. Grose writes that Indian Muslims liked to have “Abyssinian” slaves, whom he supposed came from an area of Ethiopia that bordered on “Negroeland, in the heart of Africa”\(^{57}\). “Nothing can be imagined more smooth or glossy, and perfectly black than their skin, in which they far surpass the negroes on the coast of Guinea, and, generally speaking, have not anything of their thick lips, though otherwise as woolly haired as they. This species of slaves is, however, highly valued for their courage, fidelity, and shrewdness; in which they so far excel, as often to rise to posts of great trust and honor, and are made governors of places”\(^{58}\). Writers such as Grose and Kindersley show an eye for race and colour; they are also interested in assessing the “character” of the natives, their reputations for valour, their rank and station in society, and the attitudes of diverse natives to each other. Their writings may well be classified as ethnographic, at least in part, but the ethnography they practise is not related to the Bible or its genealogical elaboration.

It seems slightly odd that the Orientalists have little to say about the dense history of Ethiopians and other Africans in India or, what begins at a slightly later date, the history of South Asians in Ethiopia, when they write about the origins of races. Perhaps the intervening years between antiquity and the present were of little or no relevance to their theories. Other European commentators who spent any length of time in India were struck by the racial diversity of the area. At any rate, the wide diversity of races in India did not stop the British Orientalists from arriving at bold conclusions about race and racial origins in relation to India; rather, the Orientalists seem to have been spurred on to devise theories by the complexity of what they encountered in the Indian subcontinent. Jones seems to be saying that on the basis of perceived racial characteristics Ethiopians and Indians were once the same people, Wilford to be claiming that Ethiopians originated from black Indians. Do they, therefore, imply that all Indians were originally black or merely some of them? If only some were black, then why was there an original mixture of black and non-black Indians and from where did this mixed group come: from a Caucasian homeland or somewhere else? If all were originally black, then how and why did so many Indians become non-black by the eighteenth century: was the diversity of race in South Asia the result of later intermarriage with outsiders or some other mechanism? Even in their own terms, the racial theories of Jones and Wilford raise more questions than they answer.

\(^{55}\) Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Diaspora to India*, p.200.

\(^{56}\) Ibid.


\(^{58}\) Ibid. pp.149-50.
It is worth remembering, nevertheless, that Jones and Wilford, and especially the former, would shape the views of numerous other thinkers in the nineteenth century, when scientific racism would be elaborated at great length.

**Antiquity and Modernity**

In order to understand how and why Orientalists such as William Jones were able to connect Ethiopia and India, it will help us to look at the ancient texts. Jones and Wilford were steeped in the texts of antiquity, especially Greek and Latin but also Hebrew. From this perspective, the name “Kush” or “Cush” (the latter is the Latinate spelling) is worth lingering over for a little longer: “Cush” is imprecise in the Hebrew Bible and remains imprecise when it is translated into “Ethiopia” by Greek and Latin authors. In the Bible, Cush or Cushite refers arguably to Nubia, south of Egypt, and the people who lived there, but the terms may denote the area and people on the south-west Arabian side of the Red Sea and at times seem to refer to Babylon or even Israel. When Jeremiah 13.23 says “Can the Cushite change his skin?”, we are not exactly certain who or where the Cushite is, though most scholars take the name to refer vaguely to Nubians. The ancient Greek Bible renders the place name Cush as “Aithiopia” and the Latin Vulgate as “Aethiopia”. The word “Cush” itself does not seem to appear in classical Greek or Latin authors. There are two exceptions: Genesis 10.6–8, a passage discussed above, where the Septuagint retains Ἐχοῦς to refer to the son of Ham and his family, and Judith 7.18, where the Septuagint uses Ἐχοῦς seemingly to refer to a village near Bethulia. English translations of the Bible generally follow the Greek and Latin authors, and the King James Bible, among other English versions, translates Cush into Ethiopia. (The situation is different in German. Martin Luther uses Mohr and Mohrenland in his translations from 1522 to 154559. As a result of the transfer into Greek and Latin, and then also into English, Cush becomes identified with Ethiopia in many European traditions.

The Greek and Latin translation of Cush into Ethiopia does not help the term gain in specificity and, in many respects, confuses the referent even further. The relevant entry in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* begins with the observation that “Ethiopia was a name applied by the Greeks to any region in the far south (but north of the equator)”. Its borders were never really defined with real clarity in Greek or Roman antiquity. It is immensely significant, for our purposes, that Ethiopia and India are confused with each other from a very early date in Greco-Roman antiquity, that some ancient authors use “Ethiopia” when they appear to modern readers to be indicating India, that some use “India” when they appear to mean Ethiopia, and that some, despite the use of the proper noun, mean a place in neither Africa nor South Asia in any conventional sense. The referent for “Ethiopia” seems to move about from Africa, to Arabia, to India, and to places in between, depending on the author or text in question60.


Scholars such as E. A. Schwanbeck, U. P. Arora, Klaus Karttunen, and Pierre Schneider have shown how all-pervasive the confusion remains in ancient sources: it extends to most genres and even to epigraphic texts61.

As Schneider demonstrates in his massive inventory, the confusion encompasses areas that we would think of as geography, ethnography, anthropology, myth, history, zoology, botany, and mineralogy. It also persists for centuries into late antiquity and beyond, in Christian and non-Christian authors. In late antique and Byzantine times, authors use the terms India maior and India minor, “Greater India” and “Lesser India”: the former sometimes refers to the regions of Ethiopia, Arabia, and South Asia together, the latter to South Asia alone, but the names are also used inconsistently and ambiguously. The two Indias were occasionally also called India interior or ulterior and India exterior or citerior. By about 600 CE, pseudo-Abdias write of three Indias, a tripartite characterization that would later assume the names India prima, secunda, and tertia62. The confusion also exists in Syriac writings, including the Syriac translation of the Bible, and in targumic and medieval Jewish literature63. The medieval accounts of Prester John belong to this history of confusion, as writers and travellers move his realm from India to an area south of Egypt. That there is a confusion is grasped, finally, by Renaissance humanists such as Hiob Ludolf (Job Ludolphus), but not investigated in detail until Schwanbeck in the middle of the nineteenth century, well after Orientalists such as Jones and Wilford write their works.

In fact, Jones and Wilford, whether deliberately or not, whether directly or indirectly, are responding to explicit claims that reach back to Greek antiquity. Speculation about the race and origins of Indians and Ethiopians occurs as early as Herodotus, who observes that Indians are “all black-skinned, like the Ethiopians”. He adds: “Their semen, too, which they ejaculate into the women, is not white like other men’s, but black like their skin, and resembles in this respect that of the Ethiopians” (3.101). In the next century, Aristotle corrects him on the colour of the Ethiopians’ semen and affirms that all semen is white but, significantly, says nothing about Herodotus’ other comments (History of Animals 2.2.736a). Numerous authors remark on the blackness of Ethiopians and Indians alike and attempt to discern variations, shades of blackness, and other differences in snub-noses and hair. Strabo, to whom Jones refers in the quotation above, says that southern Indians resemble Ethiopians (northern Indians resemble Egyptians) but their faces and hair are not similar;

63 Goldenberg, The Curse of Ham, p.211.
later, he adds that Indians are not intensely dark since they live in a humid region and they
do not have woolly hair (Geography 15.1.13). Arrian makes a similar point about the
complexion, woolly hair, and snub-nosed appearance of southern Indians (Indica 6.9).

Even the idea that the Ethiopians were originally Indians and migrated to Africa finds
an echo in the Greek and Latin texts. According to one character in Philostratus’ Life of
Apollonius of Tyana, an admittedly colourful narrative of the third century, the Ethiopians
lived in India and migrated to their current area of habitation only later (3.2).

The conflation between the biblical Hebrew and the classical Greek and Latin materials
reaches some kind of head already in the Etymologies of Isidore of Seville, who died in
636, and who wrote, “Ethiopians are so called after a son of Ham named Cush, from whom
they have their origin. In Hebrew, Cush means ‘Ethiopian’. This nation, which formerly
emigrated from the region of the river Indus, settled next to Egypt between the Nile and the
Ocean, in the south very close to the sun. There are three tribes of Ethiopians: Hesperians,
Garamantes, and Indians” (9.2.127–28). In this text, the Ethiopians both have emigrated
from the Indus valley region to Africa and also have a tribe known as “Indians”. For Isidore,
moreover, and as with the Orientalists, the dispersion of peoples is the result of the history
narrated in the Bible: the Fall, the flood, and the Tower of Babel. One can trace human
history backward to Adam and Noah or forward through the descendants of Ham, Shem,
and Japheth and their offspring to the diverse peoples of the world. In other words, the
Mosaic ethnology of the Bible is evident in early writers such as Isidore.

A couple of points, raised especially by Schneider, also explain the hold of the ancient
confusion on later thinkers, into the Renaissance, when European knowledge of Ethiopia
and India begins to increase exponentially. In the first place, the confusion between Ethiopia
and India is not necessarily the result of a lack of geographical information. As we know, the
association continues long after the Greeks and East Africans learned about the monsoons
and weather patterns in the Indian Ocean in the reign of Ptolemy VIII and long after the
start of trade between the Red Sea regions and the coasts of South India. The confusion is
rooted deeply and cannot be shaken off easily, for a variety of reasons having to do with
the conception of the world, spatial symmetries, the influence of literary traditions, and
the persistence of old stereotypes; it as much a mode of thinking and a symbolic logic
as a mistaken grasp of geographical realities. Secondly, the Ethiopians and Indians, in
Schneider’s analysis, form an ancient “ethnic community” of dark-complexioned people:
the Ethiopians and Indians are bracketed together because they are perceived to share skin
colour and because of the capacious understanding of an oikoumene in which black men
in far flung places belong to one and the same group. Once the centripetal force of this
“community” takes hold, Ethiopia and India become harder and harder to disentangle in the
ethnologic and literary imagination of Greco-Roman authors.

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64 Jones also quotes from Apuleius in the passage above. Modern editors emend the Latin text at Metamorphoses 11.5 to
which Jones appears to be referring; they read Aethiopes atrique (“the two Ethiopias”) instead of Aethiopes Arieque (“the
Ārī and Ethiopians” in Jones and “the Arians and Ethiopians” in other translations).
One of the notable features of the linkage is that it even continues long after observers come to think of Ethiopia as largely Christian and India as largely Hindu or largely Hindu and Muslim. The religious discrepancy is either explained away with further hypotheses or ignored altogether and scarcely affects the weight of the tradition.

Against the evidence from the Greek and Latin traditions, it is important to set down here that one of the names that ancient Ethiopians use for their own nation is ‘Ityopya, which appears regularly from the fourth century CE. Aksumite writers were the first to use this Greco-Latin term to refer to their territories in the Horn of Africa. The word is doubtless an adaptation of the Greek Aithiops (Aiθiōς), a name that the standard Greek-English Lexicon explains as “properly, Burnt-face, i.e. Ethiopian, negro”. What seems remarkable is that the court at Aksum, whose elites were versed in Greek literature, adopts this expression “despite the fact that among Ethiopians themselves the skin does not stand out as either “burnt” or “black,” but appears wholly unexceptional”65. As Daniel Selden remarks, “one can only be Aithiops from the perspective of the pale Other”66. Selden also makes the important point that when Ethiopian writers mention their skin, they refer to it as ‘addāmāwi, “of Adam’s [i.e., human] color”, a pun on “earth-toned” and “pleasant, agreeable, beautiful, fair”67. The Aksumites seem to have knowingly taken over the Greco-Latin name and to have inserted themselves strategically into the histories of the Greeks and Romans, Jews and Christians.

**Conclusion**

Orientalists such as William Jones and Francis Wilford made bold claims about Ethiopia and India, but their seemingly wild speculations built on beliefs or values held for centuries. The kinds of theories they proposed were not unusual in the late eighteenth century and were remarkably influential in the nineteenth century. Cultural contacts and exchanges of the kind they espoused were obsessions that went back to Renaissance humanists and further beyond to the ancient world. It was, moreover, pretty common for colonial administrators to seek out points of contact with world-historical figures or geographies known to them from classical Greco-Roman or Western sources. Alexander the Great was the foremost figure of this type, and, as Hegel noted, he provided a crucial fulcrum around which the histories of East and West, India and Europe, could be calibrated68. It was Jones himself who made the case for identifying Sandracottus of the Greek and Latin authors with Chandragupta Maurya and who thus offered another opportunity for conjoining the histories of ancient Greece and India. At first glance, Ethiopia and India appear to offer another kind of connection to observers based in Europe, a connection not of West and East, but perhaps of South and East, of north-east Africa and southern Asia. The connection, which is ostensibly racial, linguistic, and scriptural, offers a chance of thinking about non-European cultures.

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66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
But it would be disingenuous to suppose that the proponents of the connection bypassed Greece, Rome, the Bible, or Europe and achieved a symbiosis between African and Asian cultures. The sovereign gaze was anchored firmly in a biblical, Greco-Roman, or European location, even or especially when the observers were resident in colonial Bengal.

An arresting feature of the confusion is that it seems to contradict a major development in linguistics by linking together the Indo-European and the Afro-Asiatic language families. But in the late eighteenth century, the Indo-European theory had not yet been worked out in detail, even by Jones, to whom it is credited, and older theories about the origin and dispersal of language still exerted a formidable hold⁶⁹.

Once the Indo-European theory was elaborated, the yoking together of Ethiopia and India was harder to achieve, and indeed we see fewer and fewer serious attempts to tie the two cultures together after the middle of the nineteenth century. Another way of framing the problem of language is to say that race and nation are closely linked in the second half of the eighteenth century. The association between Ethiopia and India can be realized in the minds of Jones and Wilford, but it is notably accompanied by remarks about racial affinities between Ethiopians and some Indians. The racial connection is still used to justify an affinity between Ethiopians and Indians in the first half of the nineteenth century as the Indo-European hypothesis begins to take hold and, with it, the idea that Indo-European and Afro-Asiatic are distinct language groups. The joining of Ethiopia and India fades away, though not completely, by the end of the nineteenth century, by which point race and language are linked together in very different ways from how they were in the late eighteenth century.

Behind the claims and fantastic arguments of the Orientalists, there also appears a glimpse of Enlightenment universalism, the notion that peoples were formerly the same and were united by a common origin going back millennia. In the European Enlightenment, the conception was biblical, but not only biblical, and historians, philosophers, and travellers sought to devise a cosmopolitan framework in order to establish a set of values shared by all humankind. The Orientalists’ idea that Ethiopians and Indians were once the same people goes back to antiquity but draws an added potency from this Enlightenment context. Enlightenment conceptions of universalism are, however, qualified by notions of the nation and nationalism, which begin to develop and spread by the late eighteenth century. It is in the context of Romantic nationalism that we may understand why particular languages and traits are ascribed to Ethiopians and Indians. The Orientalists are thus writing on the cusp of a declining Enlightenment universalism and an emerging Romantic nationalism, but are not wholly subsumed in either phenomenon. In this context, the Orientalists breathe new life into the old confusion about Ethiopia and India.

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Global History, East Africa and the Classical Traditions.


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Martin Bernal, 1785-1985, Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization: Volume 1: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece...

Martin Bernal's volume appeared in 1987, argued for the disinterment of the historical roots of classical...EuroAmerican conceptualizations of history, tradition, and modernity. However, actually provided at the same time the context for a profound questioning of...

The transatlantic African diaspora on which Western imperialism and colonialism depended, beyond the boundaries of Greco-Roman civilisation. Primitive beginnings, an ascent to classical apogee, and then decline and fall. And Sub-period Europeans with a meta-narrative for the history of the world in general: one of colonialist projects. The Greco-Roman world furnished early-modern and Enlightenment...

texts provided modern European powers with models and alibis for their imperialist and...minds underpinned the very development of Western modernity. Greek and Roman...African diaspora, that of the transatlantic transportation of African slaves, whose bodies very ancient African and Asian diasporas, scholarly attention was turned to a more recent...

about ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern migration into ancient Greece. Instead of these nineteenth-century scholarship has found more supporters...

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Greece in Afroasiatic civilization. Ancient Egypt and the Near East were, as ancient Greek...

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J. Berlinerblau, African Athena: New Agendas...

Black Athena: Controversy and the Responsibilities of American Intellectuals...Heresy in the University: The...

V. Y. Mudimbe and the Myth of Oedipus...Daniel Orrells...trilogy to valiantly reverse this...
Oedipus from Europe to Africa

Martin Bernal’s *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* whose first volume appeared in 1987¹, argued for the disinterment of the historical roots of classical Greece in Afroasiatic civilization. Ancient Egypt and the Near East were, as ancient Greek writers themselves knew, so Bernal contended, the parents of the so-called Greek miracle. It was only in the long nineteenth century that this truth came to be questioned as racist and anti-Semitic European and North American scholars started to deny this fact and started positing a myth in its place, which argued that ancient Greece had been invaded from the Caucasian north very early in its history, and it was this incursion which formed the basis for the development of ancient Greek culture. By the end of the nineteenth century, as Bernal showed, this myth had become avowedly racial: the northern invaders were Aryans. It was Bernal’s purpose in the course of the *Black Athena* trilogy to valiantly reverse this historiographical trend. And Bernal’s history of the ancient Mediterranean aroused much attention in African, European and especially American universities. Much ink has been spilt about his account. But whilst it has been very difficult to write a detailed history of the cultural influences of ancient Egypt and Phoenicia on ancient Greece, Bernal’s history of nineteenth-century scholarship has found more supporters².

In 2008, a conference at the University of Warwick in the UK sought to move the arguments beyond those who lionized or demonized Bernal’s work³. That’s to say then, the participants at this event and the resulting edited volume did not want to discuss the stories about ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern migration into ancient Greece. Instead of these very ancient African and Asian diasporas, scholarly attention was turned to a more recent African diaspora, that of the transatlantic transportation of African slaves, whose bodies and minds underpinned the very development of Western modernity. Greek and Roman texts provided modern European powers with models and alibis for their imperialist and colonialist projects. The Greco-Roman world furnished early-modern and Enlightenment-period Europeans with a meta-narrative for the history of the world in general: one of primitive beginnings, an ascent to classical apogee, and then decline and fall. And Sub-Saharan Africa, in these ancient texts, was repeatedly figured as a wild, monstrous place beyond the boundaries of Greco-Roman civilisation.

The transatlantic African diaspora on which Western imperialism and colonialism depended, however, actually provided at the same time the context for a profound questioning of Euro-American conceptualizations of history, tradition, and modernity.

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Ironically, it was the very historical occurrence of the modern transatlantic African diaspora that generated a huge and continued contestation over the meaning and legacy of the Greco-Roman tradition. It was this mass dislocation and relocation that brought Africans and their descendants into contact with Greek and Latin texts. African and diasporic African engagement with classical culture, together with the specificity of the experiences of certain modern diasporic intellectuals, ensured that European imperialist constructions of the past, present, and future would not go uncontested. Bernal’s account of a fabricated intellectual history that had erased interactions between Europe and Africa from the dawn of time was certainly not the first revisionist intervention into the self-serving meta-narratives of the Western world. The Warwick conference and then the resulting book excavated the prehistory of *Black Athena*. It explored the ways in which the intellectual history that resulted from the modern African diaspora had always been profoundly concerned with the relations between Africa and the classical Mediterranean. It demonstrates that no modern understanding of the classical tradition could have existed without certain conceptualizations of Africa, and how at the same time modern reifications of Africa were often made possible through reference to an ancient past.

This article focuses on one African intellectual who was brought into contact with ancient Greece and Rome because of the colonial situation, an African intellectual who made the Greek and Roman classics his own, following on from this long history of black-Atlantic thinkers since the 1600s who have questioned the Euro-American receptions of antiquity which justified slavery and colonialism in the Americas and Africa. Valentin-Yves Mudimbe was born in what was the Belgian Congo and was first schooled in a Swahili-speaking context. At just ten years of age, he then departed the family home to join a Benedictine seminary in Kakanda and then later in Mweria near Lubumbashi where he learnt to read classical Greek and Latin and ancient Christian texts. The supposedly civilising Greek and Roman classics were central to the colonized subject’s education in various African colonies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Having given up on entering the priesthood, he enrolled as an undergraduate at the University of Lovanium (in Kinshasa) shortly after independence in 1960. After graduating in 1966 with a degree majoring in romance philology, Mudimbe went to study sociology and applied linguistics as a graduate student in France and then in Belgium, where he was awarded his doctorate in 1970, after completing a philological study on the evolution of the word ‘air’ in ancient Greek, Latin, and French.  

Very soon afterwards, Mudimbe was appointed a senior Congolese (and from 1972) Zairean academic occupying important positions at the National University of Zaire, in Kinshasa and then Lubumbashi.

He found himself, at a relatively young age, in politically influential and sensitive posts under Mobutu’s increasingly oppressive regime.

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The 1960s were, of course, marked by continual political instability in the region. Mudimbe’s early published work reflects this volatile situation, as he concentrated his attention on the concept of the African nation and its relationship to European ideas. But whilst other Zaïrean academics were understandably under pressure to produce panegyrics about Mobutu’s new nation, Mudimbe eventually departed Zaïre in 1979 in self-imposed exile where he embarked on a highly successful academic career at a string of American universities.

This article examines the evolution of a problem which has been at the heart of Mudimbe’s work since the 1970s to the present. His writing demonstrates a continual interest in the relationship between colonialist knowledge systems and anti- and post-colonial thought. This is a central theme in The Invention of Africa, Mudimbe’s most well-known book, where he explores the anti- and post-colonial attempts at finding genuinely African methodologies and languages for comprehending African reality. But whilst Mudimbe uncovers a genealogy of African thought in the middle of the twentieth century which ‘marks a break with the ideology inherent in the [colonial] anthropologist’s techniques of describing African Weltanschauungen’, he also repeatedly shows how a ‘Western methodological grid is a requirement for reading and revealing’ the supposed ‘truth’ about Africa. A central concern for African philosophers, Mudimbe explains, has been to engage with this knotty issue. The Rwandan philosopher Alexis Kagame is symptomatic of this problem. Indeed Kagame appears repeatedly in Mudimbe’s writings. Kagame is, of course, well known for his use of the Greek philosopher Aristotle in his analyses of Bantu linguistics. And Kagame has received a lot of criticism over the last thirty years for what has become termed ‘ethnosophistry’ by figures like Paulin Hountondji. In D.A. Masolo’s words, Kagame’s whole structural analysis of Bantu languages is merely ‘his own invention’. In his book Tales of Faith, Mudimbe remembers his friend Kagame as a visiting professor at the National University of Zaïre in 1973 when Mudimbe was Dean of Humanities there. He saw Kagame:

‘… convert entire annual classes of students to a “nationalist” view of African history and philology’. I told him I feared that such a perspective, by generously glossing over the epistemological preconditions of the murder of the Father, ran the risk of further perverting the discipline of the social science in Africa, already so encumbered by a priori ideological assumptions of “colonial science”. His response was surprising to me in its simplicity: “obsession is also a path to the truth”.

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3 Ibid. p. 152.
Global History, East Africa and the Classical Traditions.

Kagame’s desire to reify and know Bantu culture led him to teach students to understand African history within a ‘nationalist’ and potentially dangerous framework. Mudimbe is careful to remind his readers that Kagame was one of the most vocal critics of - in Mudimbe’s words - ‘the fratricidal conflict between the Tutsis and the Hutus’\textsuperscript{11}. And yet Kagame’s linguistic research also had an avowedly political objective, to which Mudimbe is referring here. Kagame was born into an aristocratic family of court historians, a tradition which he continued in his own histories of Rwanda, where he argued that the country should return to the pre-colonial constitutional monarchy, which he depicted as a harmonious society organized along feudalist lines \textsuperscript{12}. But just as the question of the relationship between African realities and representations of Africa was to plague Kagame’s linguistic-philosophical project, so the reception of his historical work also reflected this very issue. His vision became a highly influential image of Rwanda, especially due to his friend, the colonial Belgian anthropologist and art historian, Jacques Macquet, who transcribed this aristocratic representation of pre-colonial Rwanda into ethnographic language. After 1994, the Rwandan Patriotic Front consolidated its victory by advocating Kagame’s and Macquet’s image of precolonial Rwandan culture. But as Johan Pottier has examined, this representation greatly simplified and idealized the historical record and was used ‘to intellectually justify a system of leadership by Tutsi minority rule’\textsuperscript{13}. The applications, to which Kagame’s scholarship has been put, demonstrate the impact of inventions of Africa on peoples’ lives.

In that passage, Mudimbe respectfully reminds his readers that Kagame’s work became a tool for colonalist anthropologists like Macquet, whose writings helped create an image of Rwanda with tragic consequences. Kagame’s ‘African history and philology’ encouraged an essentialising perspective, which might have caused concern to colonial authorities but also replicated ‘ideological assumptions of “colonial science”’ - as Mudimbe puts it - about the notion of the nation. Kagame’s engagement with ancient Greek philosophy was to have a seminal impact on his historical scholarship, which in turn contributed to the reification of cultural and political identity in colonial and postcolonial Rwanda. When Kagame murders the colonial father, he ‘gloss[es] over the epistemological preconditions of the murder of the Father’.

That is, the act of parricide reminds Mudimbe of the ancient Greek story of Oedipus – of the son who kills his father only to replace and replicate that paternal figure, Oedipus who sets himself up as King of Thebes the person who will rid the city of the plague, only to find that he himself is its cause rather than the saviour of the city.

Mudimbe’s allusion to Oedipus was not simply rhetorical but reflected what he has viewed as the difficult and entangled oedipal relationship between the colonial legacy and the postcolonial African intellectual.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, p.136.
\textsuperscript{13} J. Pottier, Re-imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Disinformation in the Late Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.111.
That is to say, can the anti- and postcolonial African philosopher only be like Kagame and merely replace the colonial-classical father he has ousted? Mudimbe repeatedly returns to the question of Oedipus in his writings and this essay will to spotlight three moments in his career between 1973 and 2011. Indeed the question of origins has a special meaning in Sophocles’ play Oedipus the King, where the eponymous hero is engaged in a quest to find out where he comes from and who he is. And Mudimbe’s engagement with the myth of Oedipus offers us a nuanced way for thinking about the relationship between colonial discourse and postcolonial critique – that is for thinking about from where postcolonial African philosophy might emerge.

Before turning to Mudimbe himself, then, let us turn back to examine how Mudimbe’s interest in Oedipus arises out of a longer history of German and French thinkers, for whom Oedipus had become an important metaphor in trying to articulate the nature of the relationship between the civilised and the savage. Hegel read Oedipus’ solution to the riddle of the Sphinx as a myth through which ‘humanity in general is summoned to self-knowledge’14. German philosophers looked back to Oedipus and saw a founding father of philosophy. And it was the triumph of the Greek Oedipus over the Sphinx from Egypt, a land of contradiction, which fascinated Hegel. Oedipus’ dialogue with the Sphinx performs the historical encounter between Egyptian blindness and Greek insight. Freud’s Oedipus similarly reflected contemporary discourses of race, empire and colonialism. So, just as Hegel had contrasted Greek and Egyptian, so Freud’s mapping of the psyche in terms of the unconscious, the preconscious and the conscious reflected contemporary imperialist archaeology and anthropology which were building an archive of so-called ‘primitive cultures’. For Freud, the neurotic and the child would have a demonstrable mental kinship with the so-called primitive “savage”. And Freud’s Totem and Taboo captured the twentieth-century anthropological imagination, so that Claude Lévi-Strauss could argue that the Oedipus story was a paradigmatic myth to explain how myths around the world explore the relationship between nature and culture. Oedipus, then, moves from being the figure of the exemplary philosopher with Hegel to exemplifying subjectivity with Freud to holding the truth about human systems of mythology with Lévi-Strauss. Oedipus could be seen as an exemplary figure in the history of the European colonialist thought: he is the Greek philosopher who conquers the Egyptian other and it is his story which explains everyone else’s.

The notion that Oedipus’ story is universal exemplifies the history of Eurocentric thought which has continually and imperialistically applied its own logic and categories onto its colonial subjects. If Oedipus’ story has become such a powerful explanatory paradigm for the universal emergence of the thinking subject from nature into culture (via Hegel, Freud and Lévi-Strauss), then what has been Mudimbe’s response to this European myth of development and progress? How applicable is it to Mudimbe’s Africa?15

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15 For the important of Oedipus as an exemplary figure in the history of European thought, see M. Leonard, Tragic Modernities (Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 2015).
**Herodotean Historiography**

We begin in the early ‘70s, when a young Mudimbe was engaged in writing textbooks for his students as well as more theoretical works on the emancipation of the African academy from old colonial structures. In 1973, Mudimbe published a set of essays written in French called *L’Autre Face du Royaume*, about the possibilities of transforming the bases upon which the human sciences were researched and taught in Africa. One of the pieces in this volume called ‘Herodote, Le Menteur’, or ‘Herodotus the Liar’, took ancient Greece as its subject. So what was a book about contemporary African academic practice doing having a chapter about the ancient Greek historian? The essay opens with a discussion of Michel Foucault’s then recently published book *The Order of Things*, which included an examination of the ethnocentric biases of psychoanalysis and ethnology. And Mudimbe picks out the issue of the ‘universal Oedipus thesis’, as he calls it, which has helped European scholars to argue that “‘primitive societies are’”, as Mudimbe puts it, “a more or less faithful reflection of early humanity”. Whilst he does not mention him by name in this essay, Mudimbe’s problem with the exportation of the Oedipus complex to the colonies would have clearly reminded his readers of Frantz Fanon’s much better known critique of psychoanalysis. Indeed Fanon had argued back in 1961 in *The Wretched of the Earth* that colonialism itself produces a dangerous oedipal relationship between the colonizer and the colonized:

“The look that the native turns on the settler’s town is a look of lust, a look of envy; it expresses his dreams of possession—all manner of possession: to sit at the settler’s table, to sleep in the settler’s bed, with his wife if possible. The colonized man is an envious man. And this the settler knows very well; when their glances meet he ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive ‘They want to take our place.’ It is true, for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler’s place”.

‘Setting himself up in the settler’s place’: instead of the justification that colonialism educated the native so that he might one day become just like the colonizer, Fanon’s punning language describes the colonized subject’s desire to overthrow the colonial father in revenge. In *L’Odeur du père* (*The Smell of the Father*), published in 1982, Mudimbe would continue to advocate the toppling of the European legacy, in order to ‘dēbloquer une pensée africaine authentique’, by citing Fanon: ‘The body of History does not determine any single action of mine. I am my own foundation’. Mudimbe’s language here and in ‘Herodotus the Liar’ also evokes Jean-Paul Sartre’s call to the politically oppressed and colonized to take responsibility for their own fates in an effort to exercise their individual authenticity and freedom. Like Fanon, Sartre too was critical of the universalization of Oedipus and the object of his critique was Claude Lévi-Strauss’ co-opting of Oedipus for anthropological studies of ‘primitive societies’.

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‘Sartre was’, as Christopher Johnson puts it, ‘an intransigent partisan of Third World emancipation’, and ‘he saw this emancipation in socialist-progressive terms, as necessarily involving the eventual integration of traditional societies into the mainstream of world history’. Instead of using the Oedipus story to understand where humanity has come from, that is, instead of using it as an anthropological theory to produce ‘a more or less faithful’-historical-'reflection of early humanity’, Mudimbe in ‘Herodotus the Liar’ was interested in trying to unearth the origins of the Oedipus thesis – that is, the origins of the West’s ethnocentrism. Informed by the anti-colonial critiques of Foucault, Fanon and Sartre, then, Mudimbe also has no confidence in the historical paradigm of primitive/civilized which the Oedipus thesis installs. And so he suggests that Greek historical discourse might have provided modern western intellectuals with an ethnocentric model for their own historical writing. To pursue this argument, Mudimbe turns back to Greco-Roman antiquity to uncover the origins of western ethnocentrism. It is Mudimbe’s contention that ancient historians also wrote from an ethnocentric perspective. He focuses on the reception of Herodotus in later Greek historians. We learn that Plutarch on the one hand branded him a liar because he was cruel about Plutarch’s homeland Boeotia, whereas Dionysius of Halicarnassus admired Herodotus because both came from the same city. But Mudimbe goes on:

‘Beyond the criticism and praise they reserve for Herodotus, Plutarch and Dionysius of Halicarnassus share a common exigency … [The good historian must] ‘offer an image of oneself and of one’s homeland that is as pleasing as possible, if necessary by sullying one’s enemies, but also by endeavouring, as much as possible and within the constraints of certain rules, to adhere to the truth as best as one can. This means that there are voluntary imprecisions or “lies” in the work of Herodotus; and the perspective of Plutarch the Boeotian, wounded by his love for his people and his pride in his homeland, is just as distortional as that of Dionysius of Halicarnassus and his passionate admiration for the work of his compatriot’.

Writing history in ancient Greek was knowing how to write about one’s own home in the right way. One’s home had to appear ‘as pleasing as possible’ in the narrative, whilst at the same time keeping as close to the truth as possible. As Mudimbe sees it, then, a tension emerges in Greek historical writing as it negotiates the relationship between serving one’s home and serving the truth. Herodotus might have been a liar, but Plutarch was also invested in historical discourse speaking well about his own homeland.

Just as the universalization of the Oedipus thesis reflects a western ethnocentric perspective, so the classical Greek historians, who in Mudimbe’s reading wrote at least in part for the glory of their home, turn out to be ethnocentrically biased. Mudimbe’s essay then turns to nineteenth-century French history-writing, arguing that French colonial-era historians were profoundly marked by the idea that a historian should speak well about one’s homeland. The history of Western historiography has been, then, a history of ethnocentric nationalism.

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And under the influence of Western history-writing the colonial powers installed a ‘universal Oedipus thesis’, a historical paradigm, which imprisoned Africans living in an unchanging primitive present in contrast to the European narrative of development and progress. We might say that ‘Herodotus the Liar’ offered a historical background for Fanon’s diagnosis of the oedipal situation in the colonies.21

As has already been mentioned, L’Autre Face du Royaume, the book in which ‘Herodotus the Liar’ appeared, sought to provide, as the title suggests, another side to the kingdom, a different sort of language in the contemporary African academy. Research in the social sciences in Africa had to be conducted, as Mudimbe put it elsewhere in his book, ‘by remaining authentically ourselves’. And the allusion to Mobutu’s policy of Authenticité can clearly be heard. Mudimbe, a young but senior academic in the newly named country of Zaire, was encouraging his readers to be suspicious about what he calls ‘the credibility of Western readings that concern us’: far from being straightforwardly reliable, authoritative and objective, Western historical discourse has been marked by ethnocentrism and nationalism for some two thousand years. But this superiority complex emerges, Mudimbe’s essay argues, out of a sense of inferiority about the foreigner. Mudimbe’s essay, then, was also to act as a warning to Zaireans attempting to construct their own ‘authentic’ history under the Mobutu regime. And so Mudimbe shouldn’t be seen as a mere puppet of the Zairean president. In the conclusion to the essay, Mudimbe asks, ‘But what of my reading? Was it truly neutral?’ Plutarch had branded Herodotus a liar, but was Mudimbe finally able to tell the truth? Whilst Mudimbe doesn’t answer his own question, he draws attention to his own complicated subject position, thereby posing his own African authenticity as an issue. His critique of the universalization of western historical paradigms in support of a different language for African academics was only possible because of his own colonial-era classical education. Mudimbe conceptualises the complexity of his position in Mobutu’s Zaire in terms of his position in relation to the classical tradition, in that his essay begins with a trenchant critique of that tradition, but ends on a self-questioning note as he ponders his own relationship with it.

Central African Mythology

From a position of more security and privilege in the United States, Mudimbe was able to comment more openly about the relationship between the colonial-classical legacy and his position as a postcolonial African intellectual. This brings us to the second moment in Mudimbe’s career, 1991, the date of the publication of his book Parables and Fables: Exegesis, Textuality, and Politics in Central Africa, where he knowingly describes himself as ‘completely francophonized, submitted to Greco-Roman values and Christian norms’22. The opening chapters of this book examine the African theologians whose work impacted on the young Mudimbe in the ‘50s and ‘60s. The focus is on the adaptation theology of figures such as Vincent Mulago, who attempted to adapt Roman Catholicism to local central African religious customs and practices.

22 Mudimbe, Parables and Fables, p.94.
In Mudimbe’s account, these rebellious attempts to dethrone the colonial father were entangled in an oedipal relationship. Mulago makes use of intellectual disciplines that he challenges – in Mudimbe’s words, ‘anthropology, history, and philosophy - as auxiliaries of the new enterprise but does not directly interrogate their incapacity to unveil the reality of traditional beliefs’.

And so it’s very surprising, then, to see Mudimbe going on in Parables and Fables to look at central African traditional belief systems in terms influenced by Lévi-Strauss’ interpretation of the Oedipus myth. The French anthropologist’s reading of the tale is long and intricate but in its essence Oedipus was a symbol for the progression from nature into culture, from the primitive to the civilised. Oedipus’ triumph over the Sphinx born of the earth signified man’s intellectual triumph over nature. As already mentioned, Sartre had found fault with Lévi-Strauss because his analysis of myth seemed to concretise the relationship between the savage and the cooked – a criticism which was aimed at Lévi-Strauss by other anthropologists such as Johannes Fabian. But Lévi-Strauss, as Mudimbe discusses, was concerned to show how every system of mythology worldwide examined the relationship between nature and culture, thereby showing the similarities between belief systems in economically over- and underdeveloped locations around the globe. Sartre’s other critique was perhaps more damning, however. For Sartre, Lévi-Strauss overemphasised the structural: individuals were forced to understand their identities according to age-old mythological systems which supposedly framed their place in world. But in the Preface to Parables and Fables, Mudimbe argues that Lévi-Strauss should not be seen as negligent of the issue of individual political agency. Lévi-Strauss, for Mudimbe, can be viewed himself as an individual enacting his political agency in order to make an intervention in colonialist anthropology. Lévi-Strauss with Mudimbe comes to look like a Sartre or a Fanon exercising his authenticity.

In Chapter 3 of Parables and Fables, called ‘What is the Real Thing?’, Mudimbe examines foundation stories of the Luba state, stories which represent more or less elaborate variations on a basic narrative. Mary Nooter Roberts provides a helpful summary:

‘Mbidi Kiluwe, a good-looking hunter appears from the east and brings a new political order to the people who are currently being ruled by the drunken king Nkongolo Mwamba. Mbidi Kiluwe has sex with one of Nkongolo’s sisters and their union produces a son called Kalala Ilunga, who goes on to become a heroic warrior like his father. Nkongolo, however, does not like his nephew, and after a long battle with his maternal uncle, Kalala defeats the drunken king, helped by a visionary called Mijibu wa Kalenga, and takes the throne, to institute a sacred kingship. In the oral and written records of royal lineage, all subsequent Luba kings are said to descend from Kalala Ilunga’.

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22 Ibid, p. 53.
25 See further discussion in P-P. Fraiture, V.Y. Mudimbe: Undisciplined Africanism.
Mudimbe sees the story in clear Lévi-Straussian terms:

‘The opposition between Nkongolo and Mbidi, or the primitive and the civilized, recites a historical succession and a major paradigm: the origin of history is linked to the foundation of the State. Both witness to the same binary opposition that the myth emphasizes: the possibility of a history means the invention of a refused space and its figures, those of a primitive, which are whisked away in the name of civilization. The meaning of this invention of a pre-history makes itself explicit in the rejection of an original sin. In this confrontation with its own past, a civilized society establishes itself as a cultured space opposed to the untamed nature and its aberrations’ (Mudimbe (1991: 83)).

But Mudimbe goes beyond this analysis. He is interested in the multiple versions of the foundation tale. He hones in on one in which the name of Kalala’s father is withheld. Mudimbe pauses to question the purpose of the withholding of the name. Other versions talk of the competitive relationship between Kalala and his uncle Nkongolo. ‘A question mark is subtly preserved in the mystery of the name of Kalala’s father’, Mudimbe notes. The different versions seem to equivocate over whether Kalala was the product of an exogamous or incestuous union. Mudimbe asks: ‘does this mean that Oedipus is the unthought or simply the hidden in the mysterious figure of the king?’ The myth lends itself to more than one interpretation. Just as much as ‘these stories distinguish the primitive from the civilized’, Mudimbe continues, so they can also symbolise the persistence of the incestuous forbidden. The variation of these stories suggests a complicated and highly sophisticated debate in Luba story-telling culture about the history of the foundation of the state.

Back in the 1970s, Mudimbe was highly critical of the ‘universal Oedipus thesis’, reflecting the voices of Fanon, Sartre, Foucault and Mulago, all seeking to topple the colonial father. But we also saw that Mudimbe was already aware of the complexities of the relationship between African and European structures of thought - about what the postcolonial African reader might get from those classical texts that were so valorised by the colonial powers. In contrast to Fanon’s and Sartre’s readings of the Oedipus complex, now in Parables and Fables Mudimbe is interested in examining the persistence of the past in the African present.

Mudimbe thus offers a different way for conceptualising the relations between precolonial, colonial and postcolonial, in that he is interested in the continuing significance of these foundation stories for central African communities in the ‘80s and ‘90s. And the persistence of the significance of these old, precolonial stories bespeaks a concern to talk about and debate the founding of the state after independence in the postcolonial period, a time when Mudimbe’s homeland had acquired three different names, and then a fourth in 1997. In response to the Sartrean critique that had argued that Lévi-Strauss consigned ‘third-world’ cultures to a mythical past, a Lévi-Straussian reading of mythology, Mudimbe contends, can be an enactment one’s political agency as a postcolonial African intellectual.

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28 Mudimbe, Parables and Fables, p.75.
29 Ibid. p. 77.
30 Ibid. p, 81.
Ancient Libya between History and Myth

Parables and Fables came out when the Black Athena debates with which we opened were unfolding. Bernal sought to invert the relationship between Greece and Africa. From an ancient Greek myth as an explanatory tool for understanding the origins of Africa to Africa becoming the origins of ancient Greece and therefore the history of the European tradition: the stakes were certainly high. But Bernal’s investment in being able to write a truthful ancient history was problematic in Mudimbe’s eyes. For accounts of the impact of ancient Egypt on Greece Bernal relied on the writer Herodotus. But whilst Herodotus might have been interested in Egypt, when he discusses Africa beyond the Egyptian north, he populates Libya with monsters and multi-headed men. Such a writer, Mudimbe contends, can hardly be trusted. And so we arrive at our third and final moment, 2011, when Mudimbe published his essay based on his talk at the African Athena conference at Warwick in England. In this piece called ‘In the House of Libya’, Mudimbe turns to Greek mythology to argue that the Greek cultural imagination had a love-hate relationship with a Libyan mother figure, the progenitor of civilisation but also the wild origins of man. Again we see Mudimbe turning to Lévi-Strauss. Rather than looking to write a history of Africa in the ancient Mediterranean, Mudimbe attempts to uncover the historical roots of Western racist ambivalence towards Africa in ancient Greek myth.

Libya, Mudimbe uncovers, oscillated between possessing two starkly opposing meanings in Greek mythology. Let us very briefly remind ourselves of the background story: Io, impregnated by Zeus, gives birth to Epaphus, king of Egypt, who then fathers Libya. Poseidon impregnates Libya, who then gives birth to twins, Belus and Agenor. Libya’s grandchildren are Aegyptus, king of Egypt, who drives out his brother Danaus, who eventually becomes ruler of Argos. Another grandson is Cadmus, who is founder of Thebes in Greece, and Europa is Libya’s granddaughter. Mudimbe sees Libya as a ‘maternal symbol’, who also ‘instantiates strife around the Mediterranean basin’ as her grandchildren become rulers of competing parts of the Mediterranean world. Libya ‘typifies a sign of the giver of life, and its inherent danger. At the junction of water and land, generation and rebirth, she actuates a crucial thematic of endless perils and recommencements’.

Whereas in ‘Herodotus in Liar’ in 1973, Mudimbe was highly critical of the universality of the Oedipus complex, he revised his position in his 1991 essay ‘What is the Real Thing?’ He then adjusted it again in 2011 to argue that Herodotus’s Histories along with Diodorus Siculus’s Universal Library and Apollodorus’s Library can all be read through a Lévi-Straussian framework, except this time, it is the Greeks’ love-hate relationship with the African mother figure that is at stake rather than the Luba relationship with the Oedipal father. In 1973, Mudimbe argued that Western historiography exemplified by ancient Greek and nineteenth-century French scholarship was tainted by ethnocentrism and nationalism, with the Oedipus complex providing the prime example of European thinking.

In 1991, Mudimbe wanted to show that the Lévi-Straussian interpretation of the Oedipus story could be applicable to societies both European and African, both capitalist and pre-capitalist, both pre- and post-colonial. And then in 2011, Mudimbe contends that in a whole history of ancient writers both Greek and Roman, a Lévi-Straussian oedipal concern about the relationship between Greek culture and Libyan ‘Mother Nature’ persisted.

Thinking about the history of Mudimbe’s engagement with Greek historiography and the Oedipus complex offers us a nuanced perspective into the history of Mudimbe’s negotiation with the history of colonial and postcolonial inventions of Africa. We have examined Mudimbe’s strong critique in the 1970s of the ethnocentrism of the Oedipus complex, which he traces back to ancient ethnocentric bias. And yet we saw that whilst Mudimbe was happy to brand the European tradition from Herodotus onwards as a lie, he was not sure of the truth he was meant to tell as an authentic African intellectual in postcolonial Zaire. In the early 1990s, once based in the US, Mudimbe was able to look back at that early postcolonial period and examine his classical-Christian education more openly. He is critical of adaptation theology’s attempts to overthrow the colonial father’s logic, and yet his continued suspicions about the possibilities of writing a truthful and objective history of Africa to replace the European lies lead him in Parables and Fables to develop an interest in the possible applications of Lévi-Strauss’s mode of reading myth. He thereby provided subsequent Africanists with a sophisticated model for conceptualizing the relationship between precolonial stories of origins and the postcolonial polity. Finally, the Lévi-Straussian structure in Mudimbe’s thinking has become so powerful that it framed his intervention in the Black Athena debates. Mudimbe replaced Bernal’s ‘Revised Ancient Model’ with a model bequeathed by Lévi-Strauss, in an attempt to argue that behind the Hellenocentric accounts of origins produced by ancient Greek writers lay a concern about the relationship with an African mother.

But Mudimbe’s 2011 turn away from a historical contextualization of how Greek mythography was produced comes at a risk. His Lévi-Straussian reading of Greek myth has radically dispensed with a historical context for the production of those myths, which is tantamount to arguing that there is a (single?) truth to a Greek myth, just as Martin Bernal had done.

Mudimbe joins an illustrious line of thinkers who have looked to antiquity to see what they want to see in the story of Oedipus, a story of huge explanatory power. We began by looking at the example of Alexis Kagame’s attempt to overthrow the colonial father only to risk replacing him. Some might view Mudimbe as falling into the same trap. But we might also see it in a different way: ‘In the House of Libya’ does not testify to Mudimbe’s thraldom to Lévi-Straussian anthropology but his concern to show the origins of the West’s love-hate relationship with Africa, an idyllic mother figure and political breakdown and strife. As with his essay ‘What is the Real Thing?’, Mudimbe yet again demonstrates the connections and relationships between precolonial, colonial and postcolonial inventions of Africa. And like ‘Herodotus the Liar’, he shows how far back Western ethnocentrism stretches and how that oedipal past might continue to recur and persist in the present.
In showing the exemplarity of the Oedipus myth for understanding the history of the invention of the African continent, we might indeed venture to say that Mudimbe is exemplary in his willingness and responsibility to wrestle with the intricate intellectual history through which he has lived. Thinking about Mudimbe’s engagement with the Oedipus myth allows us to disinter the complexities of Mudimbe’s intellectual filiations: brought up hearing the old Luba stories, then educated in the Greek and Roman classics and theology at a Benedictine Seminary and then in colonial Belgium, and yet at the same time nourished on different models of anti-colonial thought in Fanon, Sartre, Foucault and Mulago, whilst also being profoundly informed by Lévi-Strauss. Mudimbe’s relationships with these paternal figures of intellectual authority cannot be reduced to an image of oedipal parricide. Instead Mudimbe has grown out of several very different intellectual traditions, never forgetting his multiple pasts in continually creative and imaginative attempts to transform what these figures might mean for the postcolonial African philosopher.
Bibliography


Section 2
Global History and Geography
I wish to turn first to the issue of industrialization to reassess the role played by cotton. According to Sven Beckert, in his book "Empire of Cotton: A Global History of the Cotton Textile Economy" (2015), cotton was not just a commodity with a global appeal or a product that drew on global networks of labour, commerce, and knowledge. Unlike other commodities such as cod or salt, cotton came to transform the global economy: it reshaped the relationship between different areas of the world, transformed productive processes, created new systems of capital and labour, and significantly innovated technologies. Beckert argues that sometime after 1750 Europe experienced a sudden and radical economic transformation. Students sometimes seem to ignore this aspect of industrialization of Europe. 

Cotton came to reshape the relationship between different areas of the world, transformed productive processes, created new systems of capital and labour, and significantly innovated technologies. Beckert argues that sometime after 1750 Europe experienced a sudden and radical economic transformation. Students sometimes seem to ignore this aspect of industrialization of Europe. 

The recent growth of Asia into the world's leading textile manufacturer is not a new phenomenon. We are told that under the pressure of increasing globalisation, it is Asia – India, China, Japan and Europe where they were craved as exotic fashionable goods. One late eighteenth-century European woman could produce as much yarn as 300 women in India. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, India, China and Turkey in particular – that is the new world manufacturing powerhouse. However, the raw material for cotton textiles came from Asia. 

Historians have argued that cotton and cotton textiles were not just commodities with a global appeal or products that drew on global networks of labour, commerce, and knowledge. Cotton came to reshape the relationship between different areas of the world, transformed productive processes, created new systems of capital and labour, and significantly innovated technologies. Beckert argues that sometime after 1750 Europe experienced a sudden and radical economic transformation. Students sometimes seem to ignore this aspect of industrialization of Europe. 

Therefore, I wish to turn first to the issue of industrialization to reassess the role played by cotton. According to Sven Beckert, in his book "Empire of Cotton: A Global History of the Cotton Textile Economy" (2015), cotton was not just a commodity with a global appeal or a product that drew on global networks of labour, commerce, and knowledge. Unlike other commodities such as cod or salt, cotton came to transform the global economy: it reshaped the relationship between different areas of the world, transformed productive processes, created new systems of capital and labour, and significantly innovated technologies. 

Among the results of this network were two volumes, both published in 2009. Giorgio Riello and Prasannan Parthasarathi, eds., "How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Sven Beckert, "Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World" (London: Vintage, 2015). My book developed over the years through the activities of a network coordinated by Patrick O'Brien at the London School of Economics and entitled The Global Economic History Network project (GEHN) funded by the Leverhulme Trust: http://www2.lse.ac.uk/economicHistory/Research/GEHN/
Note - Cotton and the Great Divergence: The Asian Fibre that made Europe Rich

Giorgio Riello

Today the world textile and garment trade amounts to a staggering 425 billion US$ in value. We are told that under the pressure of increasing globalisation, it is Asia – India, China and Turkey in particular – that is the new world manufacturing powerhouse. However the recent growth of Asia into the world’s leading textile manufacturer is not a new phenomenon. Until the industrial revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, both India and China were leading economic areas and their skills in cotton textile manufacturing were far superior to those of Europe. Asia manufactured great quantities of colourful printed and painted cottons that were sold across the Indian Ocean and reached faraway places such as Japan and Europe where they were craved as exotic fashionable goods.

Historians have argued that this ensured for Asia – and in particular India – widespread prosperity, as well as high rates of economic growth and technological development, but that sometime after 1750 Europe experienced a sudden and radical economic transformation: the continent industrialised. Mechanisation was first experienced in the textile sector. The spinning machine allowed one late eighteenth-century European woman to produce as much yarn as 300 women in India. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, India, China and the Ottoman Empire switched from being world producers to being buyers of European cotton textiles, a position that they retained for the following two centuries.

My book Cotton (2013) and Sven Beckert’s Empire of Cotton (2015) have argued that unlike other commodities such as cod or salt, cotton came to transform the global economy: with differing emphases, both books claim that cotton and cotton textiles were not just commodities with a global appeal or products that drew on global networks of labour, materials and knowledge.¹ Cotton came to reshape the relationship between different areas of the world, transformed productive processes, created new systems of capital and labour and significantly innovated technologies.

Notwithstanding the simplicity of this narrative and the global role that cotton and cotton textiles had over centuries, most historians are far more familiar with the role of cotton in the process of industrialization of Europe. Students sometimes seem to ignore that cotton was not a fibre grown in Europe and that Lancashire did not have cotton plantations.

I wish to turn first to the issue of industrialization to reassess the role played by cotton textiles. My argument is that the story of cotton should be interpreted as one of economic

development broadly defined. In particular, cotton textiles can help us to explain the gap between richer and poor parts of the globe a topic that is closely linked to the issue of economic divergence that has dominated debates in global history in the last decade. However, in my work on cotton textiles I have also attempted to de-emphasise the disruptive nature of divergence as conceptualized by Kenneth Pomeranz and his followers (and indeed critics) to emphasise instead continuities across time.  

In essence this means a re-assessment of the meaning of the British industrial revolution (and European industrialization), something that in my work is not seen as a sudden and deep transformation of manufacturing (the adoption of new technologies and the high economic growth that this ensued) but more a process of economic and socio-cultural transformation that was as reliant on factors endogenous to Europe as it was on external stimuli.

Cotton and the Industrial Revolution

Let me start therefore by considering a traditional narrative that posits that Europe (and Britain in particular) became rich (developed and industrialised) because of an industrial revolution based on cotton. Eric Hobsbawn was eloquent and forceful in equal measure when he said “Whoever says Industrial Revolution, says cotton”.  

Indeed this is the message reiterated in dozens of economic history textbooks. But the association between cotton and industrialisation is not new and has not been created by historians. Nineteenth-century commentators already posited it as a truism and their explanation was accepted in places as far away from Britain as Japan (Figure 1).

This image is part of several dozen such prints produced in the 1870s and mostly deals with the subject of the relationship between Japan and the West. With the opening of Japan’s borders in the 1860s, a wave of ‘Occidentalism’ gripped the country as Japanese people wanted to know more about the West. Prints were produced on a varied range of topics that include Thomas Carlyle, the modernity of the United States, and the exoticism of European dress, among the many. The caption says the Englishman represented in the image “struggled with making a machine to spin a cotton yarn for several years, which made his family impoverished.

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Let me start therefore by considering a traditional narrative that posits that Europe (and Cotton and the Industrial Revolution) transformation of manufacturing (the adoption of new technologies and the high economic growth that this ensued) but more a process of economic and socio-cultural transformation by historians. Nineteenth-century commentators already posited it as a truism and their explanation was accepted in places as far away from Britain as Japan (Figure 1).

However, in my work on cotton textiles I have also attempted to de-emphasise the economic divergence that has dominated debates in global history in the last decade. This image is part of several dozen such prints produced in the 1870s and mostly deals with the subject of the relationship between Japan and the West. With the opening of Japan’s borders in the 1860s, a wave of ‘Occidentalism’ gripped the country as Japanese people wanted to know more about the West. Prints were produced on a varied range of topics by historians. Nineteenth-century commentators already posited it as a truism and their explanation was accepted in places as far away from Britain as Japan (Figure 1).

Seeing him wasting money without success, driven by the anger, his wife broke a scale model. Arkwright got so mad at her that he kicked her out of the house. After that event, he successfully invented the machine and made fortunes on it."

The scene represents the famous inventor sending his wife to her parents as she deliberately broke his machine. The main character of such a story was none other than Sir Richard Arkwright, the inventor of the waterframe, the first mechanical spinning machine patented in 1769 in England. The machine was actually much bigger than represented in the print, and the story goes that it was not the wife to destroy it, but that there was fear in the 1770s that a mob might want to destroy it as it put out of work hundreds of workers, mostly female spinners.

4 国（いきりす）の阿克来（あくらい）へ紡機（もめんいをよくるしかけ）/を造るに数年心を苦しめ
家貧くなりけるを其妻其功な/くして徒に財を費すを憤り難 形を打碎きければ阿克来（あくらい）怒
What is surprising is that power of the figure of the ‘heroic inventor’ allows the story to be transposed for an audience at the other side of Eurasia. It is also adapted to fit a familial context of conjugal disharmony, a situation that would have resonated better in a nation not yet industrialised than an image representing factories and the English working class. This amusing image is also a reminder that the story of cotton is one that has long been set in the eighteenth century, heavily reliant on technological innovation and application, and above all, that it is a narrative that is quintessentially English. All of this seems at odds with the fact that cotton textile manufacturing had been a major sector of many economies across the world for the best part of half a millennium before Arkwright invented his celebrated machine. How is one to tell the long story of the economic engagement with cotton textile production without narrating it as the prequel to the industrial revolution or as a cavalcade across the centuries towards the ineluctable capitalist development of textile production?

**Cotton and its Long History**

Although cotton cultivation and its transformation into cloth was already a developed sector before the Common Era, it was around year 1000 CE that cotton textile production developed into a large-scale economic sector in several areas of the Afro-Eurasian landmass. During the period from the eleventh to the sixteenth century the production and trade of cotton textiles achieved global relevance and several regions of South Asia gained international domination with their production. Cottons were traded by Indian and other merchants and were eagerly purchased by consumers who appreciated their colours, design and material properties. One can see a process of ‘globalisation’ of cotton textiles that is not just important *per se*, but also significant in supporting the intensification of global trade and cultural encounters especially in the period between 1400 and 1800. By the European later middle ages, Indian cotton textiles were a common item of apparel and furnishing in many regions within the Indian Ocean and beyond, from Southeast Asia to West Africa, Japan, and Europe. Eventually the use of cotton textiles became commonplace across the Atlantic both in Latin and North America (Figure 2). The trade of finished goods (yarn but more commonly cloth) coincided also with the spread of cotton cultivation and associated technologies (for cleaning cotton and spinning it). Many areas of the world became producers of cottons in their own right.

Yet whilst several areas of the world – most notably Eastern China, parts of Southeast Asia, West Africa and the Ottoman Empire – produced cotton textiles, it was India that excelled globally in their production.

I call this a period of the ‘The First Cotton Revolution’. In this period India was the core of a global system that was only loosely coordinated by the Subcontinent. Whilst enjoying the competitive advantage provided by the high quality of local production, most

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of the areas with which India interacted engaged in their own right in the cultivation of raw cotton, its processing and manufacturing into cloth. Together they formed a system of competition as well as symbiosis. Trade was structured through networks of Asian intermediaries and consumers were keen to mix local and exotic commodities, the latter being often customised in accordance with tastes and local meanings attributed to cloth. Cotton textiles were central to the articulation of a global system structuring itself mostly through ‘nodes’ of trade.

India indeed emerged as a core area but its position was over time weakened by processes of osmosis dominated by what I call a ‘centrifugal’ logic: resources, technologies and commodities tended to diffuse across the system described. This was the case from at least three points of view.

First, in terms of materials: cotton cultivation spread from India across Asia to form other poles of production and trade with which India interacted. It was around year 1000 CE when cotton became a successful crop in China, the Middle East and Africa. Second, such a process was limited not just by environmental constraints but also by the capacity of the receiving areas to learn and put into practice techniques and technologies that transformed cotton from a botanical rarity into a raw material for a flourishing industry. The spread of spinning and weaving technologies across most of Asia and Africa - and to a certain extent also Europe – meant the development of a new economic sector and changes to both the agrarian and manufacturing economies of Eurasia. Finally, products also diffused across
space. Indian cottons were appreciated for their visual and tactile properties and ensured for India a central role in global trade. However the ‘diffusion of artefacts’ was one also based on inspiration and copying, with the design and aesthetics of Indian cloth being appropriated and reinterpreted in different areas of Afro-Eurasia.

**Cotton and Divergence**

My own concerns have been to understand how cotton was central to the creation of a ‘new global system’ increasingly presided over by Europe, not Asia. As previously said, this is a story that has been normally narrated in terms of the industrialisation of Europe. However, I argue that technological development was just one among the many factors explaining this transition. My research underlines the importance of raw materials, markets for products and consumers’ preferences as well.

This agenda has been influenced by a ‘hot topic’ in global history: the differing economic trajectories of Asia and Europe over the past five hundred years (Figure 3). These figures come from one of Angus Maddison’s pioneering attempts at quantifying GDP in different parts of the world and in different eras. As such they should be viewed with caution due to the lack of reliable data. However, they provide an explanation for a couple of important topics that have dominated the global economic history agenda over the past two decades. First, the concept of divergence as proposed by Ken Pomeranz in his eponymous book published in 2000 in which he argued that the two extremes of the Eurasian landmass ‘diverged’ economically sometimes, he says, after 1750, producing a gap that widened between the ‘rich’ and the ‘poor’ parts of the world between the mid eighteenth century and the second half of the twentieth century.

The second topic of debate is about ‘convergence’. This is not part of the agenda of history but belongs to the debate on globalisation. Essentially it deals with the narrowing of the gap, its eventual closure and inversion. This is explained by the rise of China and India once again, cheap manufacturing, and in particular textile and clothing and other consumer goods seems to be central to this narrative.

Behind this curve lies one of the most complex problems in recent economic history. There is a certain amount of disagreement over the chronology and intensity of these processes, in particular whether Europe was already more developed than China or India in c. 1500. There is also a big debate on what is going to happen next: whether the US will remain an economic and political hegemonic; and whether China will be able to reshape the global system, in particular the system of production, something that has not yet happened. Yet, one has not to forget the necessity to explain the ‘in between’. No one will deny the fact that today Europeans are on average fourteen times richer than ten generations ago. Not just that, but we are also globally ten times more numerous (in Europe possibly five-six times more numerous than three centuries ago). The wealth of the world has multiplied exponentially over the past three centuries, something that had not happened since the invention of agriculture. However this increase of wealth has not been equally distributed.
Global History, East Africa and the Classical Traditions.

Figure 3. Comparative levels of China / Western Europe GDP per Capita, 1400-2050
(in 1990 dollars; log. scale).

Today’s poor countries are much poorer compared to the rich countries than three centuries ago. In this sense, divergence is the correct expression to identify the fact that part of the world has moved to a higher plateau of prosperity. This we can confidently say has been until recently the Western World with its antipodean offshoots of Australian and the West in the East: Japan.

Why has this happened? Over the last century explanations ranged between two poles: that of the ‘Exceptionalism of the West’ and the idea that it all happened because of ‘contingencies’ (incidents of history). There is a gradient of ‘agency’ in the process of divergence on the part of the West. Exceptionalism tends to emphasise that Europe had something special that no-one else had (a special culture or religion – Weber; a special technological creativity – Landes; a special political ability to conquer – Jones, etc.). Contingencies are lucky coincidences. Europe had good and cheap reserves of coal, as noted by Pomeranz, and there has also been a more recent emphasis on Europe’s good institutions.8

One should note that today exceptionalism is out of fashion and politically incorrect. Our ‘great inventor’ as portrayed in the 1870s Japanese print is therefore equally out of fashion as it implied that Europe had inventive minds (or more generally a culture of invention) that other cultures did not have.

In my work I claim that there was nothing distinctive about Europe that made it more likely to become the rich, rather than the poor part of the world. However, I emphasise the fact that it was Europe’s relations with other parts of the world that started a long process of change: Europeans launched into both exploration and the understanding of the world beyond their continent that brought about both intentional and unintentional outcomes. I call this a process of ‘learning’ (a rather unfortunate label I later realised), meaning that Europe had to acquire knowledge of cotton textiles in terms of production, trade and consumption, as well as in understanding the potential of the fibre.

This was a long process. Starting from having little familiarity of the cotton fibre and the use of cotton textiles, the European chartered companies provided useful knowledge in order to engage with a complex variety of cotton fabrics that they purchased in India: Europeans had to learn how to successfully trade and market such fabrics. This was a necessary - although not sufficient - condition for Europe’s eventual engagement in the production of such products at home and their trade within the Atlantic Ocean. But learning involved consumers as well as traders. Unlike much of the literature, I argue that consumers in Europe (and elsewhere for that matter) did not seize the opportunity to purchase novel fabrics such as cotton textiles. Quite the opposite, they had to be convinced about the appeal of cotton. Cultural historians have alerted economic historians to the importance of consumption. Indeed the history of consumption has been over the past couple of decades an arena of wide-ranging research that has led some historians to claim the existence of a consumer revolution to counterbalance the more production-led industrial revolution. Economic historians have done their best – and failed - to consider consumption as an endogenous variable.

Both cultural, social and indeed economic history seem to agree on the dynamism brought about by changes in patterns of consumption in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, something that I dispute in the case of cotton textiles. It took the best part of a century for cotton to become fully integrated into the consuming patterns of Europeans – a process that had to be aided by the East India companies through trial-and-error and that was opposed by strong textile lobbies, especially those protecting the interests of wool and silk textile producers.

My analysis gives a great deal of space to consumers whom I see as the ultimate arbiters of production. The consumption of calicoes and chintzes became important not just in Europe. Atlantic markets provided an entirely new space for these Asian fabrics and their European

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9 This argument was originally presented in The Indian Apprenticeship: the Trade of Indian Textiles and the Making of European Cottons. In Riello and Roy, eds., How India Clothed the World, pp. 307–46.
imitations in which to thrive. Cotton textiles changed the dress of African consumers and slaves in the Americas. They allowed the development of new production centres in places such as Manchester in England and Rouen in France whose production of cheap copies of Indian cloths was nearly totally sold to African and American consumers.

This in turn allowed for technological experimentation, not in spinning as classic narratives of industrialisation suggest, but in the printing and painting of cloth. Some serious attempts to replicate processes of production of Indian cotton textiles especially in printing and dyeing led to the creation of a thriving cotton printing industry in Europe a century before Arkwright’s introduction of new spinning technologies.¹⁰

The process of learning involved however also the procurement of the raw material. Unable to cultivate it at home, Europeans drew from the experience of sugar and set up a new form of agrarian unit outside the borders of the European continent: the slave plantation. In this case the relationship between cotton and other commodities (sugar but also coffee, cocoa, indigo etc.) is of fundamental importance (Figure 4). Once again, the plantation economy was not the ultimate goal of European endeavour but emerged over time as a viable solution to the scarcity of raw cotton that had plagued European textile manufacturing since the middle ages.

In explaining what Europeans had to learn, I made the conscious choice of ‘going backward’, that is to say starting with the final commodity – what the European wanted and encountered as traders in the Asian Ocean – and finish with raw cotton. It was over a period of a couple of centuries that Europeans merchants and entrepreneurs came to master a system that replaced different parts of a global commodity chain. Merchants started by importing finished cloth and then trained consumers to appreciate it; then manufacturers started printing on imported white cloth (as this allowed designs and colours better suited to local European customers) and in doing so learned the finishing stages. Then they started thinking about producing their own cloth, first by getting hold of raw materials and eventually also by finding a way to spin and weave such cloth.

This process of ‘learning’ was protracted. It has nothing of the triumphal narrative of European ascendancy. In fact Europeans were late-comers and failed miserably several times. Unlike narratives of divergence that claim the economic success of Europe to be attributable to one factor, I see Europe’s economic transformation as the layering of different factors that include direct access to Indian calicoes and chintzes; the ability to integrate these fabrics into European patterns of consumption; the capacity to sell them outside Europe (Atlantic markets) and the slow acceptance of cotton that made it possible for Europe to engage with this new commodity and material, eventually making it part of its own economy and patterns of consumption.

Cotton and Industrialisation Revised

Why didn’t Europe become yet another area among the many world areas in which cotton spinning and weaving were carried out? How did this process of ‘learning’ mature into the structuring of something quite new in Europe? My response here whilst acknowledging the role of technology, pays attention to other factors as well. Unlike other world areas, the European system did not cultivate its own raw cotton. Climate simply did not allow that. The commodity chain had to be geographically broken as all raw materials had to be imported from another continent. If there is something unique about the story of cotton, it is not Arkwright’s machine, but the fact that for the first time in human history a very large sector of a nation’s (indeed a continent’s) economy came to be totally reliant on materials from another continent. This was the beginning of what Alfred Crosby calls ‘ecologic imperialism’. I am not saying that cotton was free or that it was manna from heaven. Cotton for the first time disconnected the agrarian and the manufacturing economies. It allowed an expansion of the manufacturing economies of European countries on a scale that would have been either impossible or disastrous if resources were to be found only internally in England or Europe.

This is a tricky argument from a historical point of view that can only be proven through counterfactual methodologies. In my book I consider an industrial revolution in England
and in Europe with no cotton – therefore with the same quantity of cloth made of wool or linen. The result is that there would have not been any industrial revolution as we know it. Essentially the elasticity of supply of a vegetable fibre was far superior to an animal fibre like wool or to another vegetable but labour-intensive fibre as flax was. Even more interesting is to imagine a world in which all the cotton was produced by peasants (or slaves) in Europe, something that I claim would have changed European agrarian organisation beyond recognition. Such a counterfactual history might appear somewhat laughable but in reality one might say that the harsh European climate avoided a path of economic development that would have been less conducive and surely less ‘revolutionary’ than what happened.

I claim that the revolutionary nature and modernity of cotton was in the fibre. Yet, any sensible economic historian could point out that at the end of the day machines made the difference. One data might be sufficient to highlight this point: in the fifty years between 1780 and 1830 the production cost of a yard of calico cloth fell by 83 percent. Cotton textile production increased tenfold between 1770 and 1790 and tenfold again in the following dozen years. Economic historians see this incredible growth as the result of the application of new technologies, something that is hard to dismiss and an opinion I do not contend with. Yet as to why British and later European producers embraced machinery is hard to explain. My explanation is that technological innovation was sought after but that there was no overall plan or even understanding that it might lead to massive increases in productivity. If there was really an overall rationale in increasing productivity, why not look for technological innovation in woollen production – the major European textile sector? Why instead focus on a small – and one might say insignificant – sector such as cotton manufacturing?

My view of technological development follows a different explanation, put forward by my colleague Maxine Berg. She claims that the quality of products was key both for governments and entrepreneurs as competitiveness was a function of excellence in manufacturing. The interpretation is that technologies were sought after in order to produce a product that was as good as the Indian imported cloth.

In this sense the story of the rise of cotton manufacturing in Europe as a whole was not set within its own borders. The terms of the debate on how best – and even more importantly, if it was desirable – to develop cotton textile production in Europe were explicitly ‘global’. For example, the textile producers and traders of Rouen – France’s leading cotton centre in the mid eighteenth century – wrote a frank report underlining the weaknesses of the country’s cotton industry compared to its Indian competitors.

This image from Chambon (Figure 5), to be found later in the eighteenth century in the Encyclopedie, supports the argument that many contemporaries saw human capital, not technological innovation, as the solution to compete with India. This is why in 1784 the French government under the coordination of the intendant du commerce Jacques-Marie-Jerome Michau de Montaran, organised for fifty skilled artisans from the Coromandel coast to relocate to France. They arrived in Thieux (a couple of miles from present-day Charles de Gaulle Airport) in October 1785.
The project was aimed at training local apprentices in the practices of spinning and weaving adopted by the Indian workmen. Results were disastrous, to say the least. The sickly and insubordinate Indians managed to produce cloth worth 12,000 livres against a cost of 41,000 livres spent to support them. None of the apprentices completed their term and the Indian artisans were sent back to the Coromandel at the end of 1787. This is a nice vignette but it also tells us there was no pre-established rationale towards increasing productivity and that even if increased productivity was sought after, technology might not have been seen as the solution.

**Conclusion: A New Global System**

How did the world that cotton created look like once cotton textile manufacturing became the most important sector of Western economies? Sven Beckert, in his recent book, sees it as a capitalist world dominated by force (violence and exploitation) and power (especially of the US as the prime producer of raw cotton). My work is more interested in understanding the world of manufacturing and consumers. Whilst not denying the evils of slavery and the profits of raw cotton production, my interest is in understanding how and why cotton textiles continued to be such prized commodities worldwide.

In the same way in which calicoes and chintzes were continuously changed, adapted and modified during the centuries to respond to consumer demand and fashion, so the industrial cottons produced in the mills of Lancashire had to be ‘reinvented’ in order to be successful global commodities. This was done materially and by selling at low prices. But here the more nuanced forms of cultural power are also important. Imperialism imposed new cultural models that in turn heavily influenced sartorial models: this is part of a history of what we might call the ‘globalisation of western attire and consumption’.

In my book I claim that the West reshaped not just production and trade but also the logic of the system. It created a global system of trade, consumption and manufacturing that I see as ‘centripetal’ in nature, one based on the capacity of the centre to attract resources and profits towards its productive and commercial core, rather than a ‘centrifugal’ one based instead on processes of diffusion of resources, technologies, knowledge and sharing of profits and the emergence of several industries around the world.

The new system was one of competition and exclusivity, rather than cooperation and symbiosis; it was based on direct connections – often coordinated by the rising European financial centres – rather than loose areas of exchange based on dynamics nodes. But most of all it was a system whose prosperity was based on forms of intense global exploitation of natural resources and markets. And in this sense formal or informal colonialism might be seen as the political face of this.

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of natural resources and markets. And in this sense formal or informal colonialism might of all it was a system whose prosperity was based on forms of intense global exploitation financial centres – rather than loose areas of exchange based on dynamics nodes. But most symbiosis; it was based on direct connections – often coordinated by the rising European The new system was one of competition and exclusivity, rather than cooperation and profits and the emergence of several industries around the world. instead on processes of diffusion of resources, technologies, knowledge and sharing of see as ‘centripetal’ in nature, one based on the capacity of the centre to attract resources and of the system. It created a global system of trade, consumption and manufacturing that I In my book I claim that the West reshaped not just production and trade but also the logic what we might call the ‘globalisation of western attire and consumption’. more nuanced forms of cultural power are also important. Imperialism imposed new global commodities. This was done materially and by selling at low prices. But here the cottons produced in the mills of Lancashire had to be ‘reinvented’ in order to be successful modified during the centuries to respond to consumer demand and fashion, so the industrial In the same way in which calicoes and chintzes were continuously changed, adapted and textiles continued to be such prized commodities worldwide. the profits of raw cotton production, my interest is in understanding how and why cotton the world of manufacturing and consumers. Whilst not denying the evils of slavery and the US as the prime producer of raw cotton). My work is more interested in understanding a capitalist world dominated by force (violence and exploitation) and power (especially of Sven Beckert, in his recent book, sees it as the most important sector of Western economies? How did the world that cotton created look like once cotton textile manufacturing became Conclusion: A New Global System

Figure 5. ‘Coton’, plate IX from M. Chambon, Le commerce de l’Amérique par Marseille (Avignon, 1764). Spinning was portrayed as an activity based on skills, thus visualising the gesture of a hand next to a machine for reeling. Private collection.
Bibliography


Performing Geography in Global History¹

Carla Bocchetti

Global history is an innovative approach which permits the integration of research on under-studied subjects, and places, without being attached to the history of Europe. Global history, therefore, challenges the privileged position of European history within the larger discipline of historiography – it is a critique of Eurocentrism. There have recently been several workshops at different institutions to identify the type of research questions that a global perspective can best address. These conferences have included “Writing the History of the Global” The British Academy Conference 2009 held in London; “Global History: New field and new questions” organised by the French Institute for Research in Africa held in Nairobi in 2013; and “Connections and Disconnections in the History and Cultures of Eastern Africa” organised by the British Institute in East Africa and the University of Warwick in Nairobi 2015.

Many suggestions about what constitutes global history research and practice have emerged from these and other similar conferences. Some of the suggestions about what global historians should focus on include transnational history², imperial history³, comparative history⁴, economic history⁵, divergence⁶; commodities and material culture⁷; mobility, migration, communication⁸; ocean history ⁹; multilingualism, the circulation of texts and knowledge ¹⁰; contagion, ecology and the environment ¹¹; connected histories ¹², and biographies crossing borders¹³.

However, in spite of the boom, little emphasis has been put on geographical understandings as an important element of enquiry into global history. Not only is geography a crucial way of understanding new human relations beyond nations, but the narrative of space can tell a different story from one rooted in theological chronologies. This paper aims to understand the depiction of Africa in the early modern maps and geographical accounts of the Swahili,

¹ This research was written at different institutions: the library of Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, the French School at Rome, Nairobi National Archives and IFRA. I want to thank Stephanie Buttol and Henry Mitchell for their support. Field work was conducted at Manda Island, Lamu, Mombasa, Malindi and Zanzibar. An earlier version of this paper was delivered at NYU Abu Dhabi.
³ Frederick Cooper and Jane Burbank, Empires in World History (Princeton, 2009).
¹⁰ Globafrica Project. IFRA-IFAS/ CNRS
¹¹ Ibid.
Arabs and Portuguese trading along the East African coast from a global perspective; my purpose is to create an awareness about the role that spatial relations (space and place) have in studying different connections beyond the frame of the nation. Maps and geographical accounts (navigation manuals, charts and genealogical surveys) took part in the creation of a sense of self and projected particular identities on vast areas - and thus interact with numerous questions that lie at the base of global history.

**Global History and Geography**

By emphasizing a global perspective, this new sub-discipline of history asserts that historians cannot continue to focus primarily on nations and nationalism, but must go beyond borders. Traditionally, the history of nations has been the dominant historiographical model, and most scholars working in history departments focus on the history of the particular country in which they are based. Global history’s focus, however, is not the study of nations. Instead, it examines the interconnections between places, people and objects in transit, spatial representations, and communication. Thus, geographical references are of genuine interest to global historians, not just as a narrow frame of investigation but as a subject of interrogation. Although geography is implicit in all scholarship within global history, it has yet to be at the centre of global historical enquiries. More recent trends in cultural geography - a discipline which also aims at embracing marginalized perspectives - have similarly drawn on the work of Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Michel Foucault, Carl Sauer, postcolonial studies scholars and feminists who have critiqued the concept of geographical determinism. Following Foucault’s lead, cultural geographers have reached a consensus that it is space, more than time, which influences contemporary preoccupations, and I contend that global history must undertake a similar decisive turn towards focusing on projections and performances of space and place.

Another issue with the overemphasis on nationalistic framings in historiographical research is that, with the exception of the British Empire as a modern nation-empire, nations are largely a product of the 19th century. Before this, other forms of states or empires existed which included territories attached to one another by other political structures; the Hapsburg and Bourbon empires offer models of differential governance in which territories and ethnicities were attached through non-national liaisons.

Arguably, the British Empire’s longer history of nationalistic perspective has unduly influenced the entire discipline of history because of the centrality of British history within

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20 Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis,1994).
21 Foucault, "Space, Knowledge, and Power", p. 70.
the field. Global history, however, opens up the possibility to study other connections which are not necessarily contingent upon Europe or empire. Examining the role of geographical discourses and map making in relation to East Africa and its place in the Indian Ocean world is one way of exploring such connections. The Indian Ocean, over which the British Empire did not hold much control (even in the 19th century), yields rich possibilities for exploring global encounters outside of a Eurocentric framework. My research on geographical accounts, particularly those written records circulating the Indian Ocean - navigation manuals, maps, charts and genealogical accounts - demonstrates global history’s potential to articulate geography and space within a discourse not only of local identity, but also an identity which is fashionable within wider communities overseas.

Many global historians have so far been focused on the circulation of material objects transported by transoceanic trade, but a focus on maps reveals broader issues than an assessment of the discrete circulation of objects or economic relations. In contrast, maps explore political and cultural phenomena relevant to larger areas of the world, and offer a chance to break with convention by finding connections between objects and archives that have been left out of main stream historical conversations. By studying the relationships between geographical places that have previously been studied separately, we can learn about how modern identities were transferred to larger areas, and the extent to which modern identities were built upon projecting oneself as belonging to a wider community overseas. In my work I apply global history as a research methodology to study maps in conjunction with dynamics of space, in order to create a new story about encounters in the context of East Africa’s presence in the Indian Ocean world. By comparing the maps and manuals of Arabs and Europeans to African conceptions of space, my research complicates understandings about the role spatiality plays in the shaping of contemporary identities and the transgression of borders.

Geographical records of the Swahili have come down to us mainly through oral tradition, but assumptions about the region’s lack of written culture are being undermined by new research into East Africa’s written records. Delmas and Penn have recently given importance to the role of writing in global encounters or contexts; and with Schaub’s concept of ‘asymmetries’, destabilizing the legitimacy of certain cultures and sources, we can make new comparisons. Comparing societies that possess written records and made maps with those that have been studied largely within the framework of oral tradition it is possible to examine performances of space and place that are usually overlooked in the academic canon. This emphasis on the enduring legacies of cultural asymmetries informs my research into the disparate representations of East African space in early modern maps.

The coherence of the Indian Ocean world has been demonstrated through patterns of

23 See Jasanoff, Edge of Empire, esp. Chapter 3.
migration, cultural synthesis and the religious dominance of Islam\(^\text{27}\); the cycles of monsoons, ports, ships and sailors, and the widespread distribution of certain products from particular areas\(^\text{28}\). And yet for Chaudhuri, Africa remains irrelevant. He asserts that the Indian Ocean world includes four ‘civilizational identities’: Islamic, Chinese, Sanskrit Indian and Southeast Asian, and excludes Africa from this pantheon stating “indigenous African communities appear to have been structured by a historical logic separate and independent from the rest of the Indian Ocean”\(^\text{29}\). Despite considerable evidence of Indian Ocean trade with the Swahili Coast, East Africa has been largely neglected in writings on the Indian Ocean world.

The tendency to exclude Africa however is now changing. Ray and Alpers very much problematize the absence of Africa in Indian Ocean studies stating that “maritime communities were points of contact to many different cultures and ideas”\(^\text{30}\). And Sugata Bosé’s study of the Indian Ocean offers a full account of the East African Coast\(^\text{31}\). A special issue of the journal Africa has also been dedicated to the subject, as well as an edition of the Journal of African History\(^\text{32}\). Through the use of an oceanic metaphor, Braudel has demonstrated that people from across oceanic spaces have determined the destiny of seas, and not the other way around: “Mediterranean civilization spread far beyond its shores in great waves that are balanced by continual returns”\(^\text{33}\). Maps highlight the existence of a written culture that circulated throughout the Indian Ocean, and encompassed the Swahili Coast within it. The Indian Ocean therefore should be considered as an interregional arena unified by trade and migration, but also written culture and transmission of knowledge.

The purpose of this paper is to make evident the importance of geography for global history, to explore the way in which geographical information taken from local sources was used to project a European and Arab sense of self onto global encounters, and contrast these projections with the ways in which Africans considered their place and sense of belonging in the world, far removed from the ways in which they have been represented in European and Arab geographical maps and accounts. It also re-examines the power of maps as part of written culture and as fashionable objects dictating a new world order. Based on information collected at the level of local experience, and transformed into a global object, maps created an incoherent, asymmetric narrative in which only few could project themselves into the world.

**East Africa in Early Modern European Maps**

I consider maps as texts - textual commodities travelling on ships - that tell stories about global encounters. Not only do they contain routes for sailors and navigational instructions, but also they hold stories which have symbolic and allegorical meanings, and tell us a great


\(^{29}\) Chaudhuri, *Asia before Europe* p.36.


deal about the society which produced and consumed them.34

During the 15th century, map publishing was mainly concentrated in south and central Europe.35 But by the middle of the 16th century, leadership of the industry had moved to the Low Countries, with Amsterdam and Antwerp leading map making and map consumption. In these cities, cartographers reached a masterly level in the technique of engraving, with the Dutch explorations to the East Indies (VOC) at the end of the 16th century further catalysing the development of map making in the Netherlands.36 Much of the geographical information gathered from these explorations was kept secretly.37 But some information was disseminated from navigational charts and increased the demand for maps both as technical items to help navigation, and as fashionable objects - collected and displayed both in the public sphere of government buildings and in the private sphere of home interior decoration. For instance in Italy and the Netherlands there was a fashion of hanging world maps (mappamundi) on the walls for decoration.

Maps were practical objects which primarily served an administrative purpose, but they have also been examined as expressions of imperial expansion, domination and appropriation, and examples of power, knowledge and possession.39 Early European maps affected space, and cannot be considered passive objects or neutral artifacts. They offered a way in which Europe became connected in the collective mind, for they portrayed an area locked together into relational patterns.

However, as social products, maps also conceptualized space within the relations, fantasies, ideas, religious tendencies, fears and ideological values of the society that produced and used them. They conserved established views and misconceptions of the world. For Simon Schama, maps from societies characterised by maritime expansion and mercantilism were a product of the encounter between fresh historical experience, ideological frameworks and the constraints of geography.40 In this respect maps fell well short of exercising control over territories and people. Much of the way in which Africa was depicted in these early maps was a consequence of myths about Africa as ‘the dark continent’.

But if we are to think of these maps as texts, as speaking objects, then we need a way of reading those stories. Early modern European maps of Africa encapsulated a framework of a particular society and also constituted ideas about the self and the world. In other words, these depictions tell us far more about Europe and colonization than they do about Africa.

37 Kees Zandvliet, Mapping for Money: Maps, Plans and Topographic Painting and their role in Dutch overseas expansion during the 16th and 17th centuries (Batavian Lion International, 1998).
38 Genevieve Carlton, Wordly Consumers: The Demands for Maps in Renaissance Italy (The University of Chicago press, 2015); Catherine Delano Smith and Roger J.P. Kain, English Maps: A History (University of Toronto Press, 1999).
For the Portuguese, the Indian Ocean itself was the imperial domain. They were interested in the monopolization of trade, the control of coastlines and coastal trade routes, and applied taxation to ships crossing the Indian Ocean waters. They were not making inland incursions and laying the foundations of cities. The control of the sea was their real empire. The Portuguese made maps of routes (charts) in the 15th century, called Portolanos, depicting sites along the coast following the periplous tradition. The periplous tradition goes back to antiquity, when the narratives of itinerary journeys that have survived in the documentary record must have been accompanied by charts which are now lost. An early example is The Periplous of the Erythraean Sea written in the first century AD in which the coast of Africa is included. The periplous is a journey along the coast which mentions the principal geographical features of the territories in a linear sequence. It shows how to go from one point to another highlighting the prominent geographical features, such as rivers, mountains and towns. Due to the portolano, the coast was fairly well known for Europeans after the 15th century, but the interior of Africa remained a complete blank, in spite of the fact that there were numerous caravan routes, pilgrimages and merchants belonging to a non-European tradition of travelers with a considerable knowledge of the African interior.

Ptolemaic space, classical myths, and biblical references were all important components of the intellectual context which framed these European conceptions and served as the basis for European understandings of the unknown. Yet at the same time, the Renaissance provided the intellectual tools necessary to achieve the liberation from antiquity. The imperial boundaries that Europeans put into classics, as well as to biblical references, were thus an exercise of power and exclusion. Imperial identities and the maps transmitting them were simultaneously shaped by the use, and abuse, of the classical and biblical repertoire.

Africa was considered a dark place on European maps for centuries. Although geographical information of Africa goes back to Herodotus, and the Romans had contact with Africa and India at an early date, the map of Ptolemy was the established paradigm through which to understand Africa from late antiquity to the beginning of the 16th century (Figure 1).

In Ptolemy’s map the interior of Africa was unknown and its geographical features were mainly associated with the river Nile: the Nile was sourced from the Mountains of the Moon, which were located south of the Equator. From these mountains different streams flowed towards two lakes situated symmetrically on the same latitude. These two lakes were the sources of two big streams which at some point in the North converged and formed the course of the Nile. At the start of the 16th century, the Ptolemaic outline was

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44 Carlton, Worldly Consumers.
replaced by one reflecting contemporary experience of travelling, like the Martellus Map of 1507 and the Cantino Planisphere of 1502. By the time of the Gasdaldi map of Africa 1564 there were no Mountains of the Moon and, following Barros’ cosmological notions, the two lakes were replaced by one large lake from which flowed the most important rivers of the continent. With exploration, details of the seaboard were gradually added.

The interior however remained a vacuum in which the space was filled with African animals and mythical figures. The Monoculi in the map of Sebastian Münster (1554) in which inhabitants of the African continent are represented by a Cyclops, is a good example to illustrate the barbaric notions circulating about Africa in early modern maps (Figure 2).

Actions of exploitation and expropriation were legitimised through depiction of others from below as monsters, as has been well explained by Linebaugh and Rediker, who examined recurring images of the Greek hero Hercules (identified with colonial progress) in his battle against the Hydra (the many headed monster representing those at the bottom of colonial infrastructure). These early maps of Africa did not make use of the totality of the geographical information collected by exploration. The interior of Africa remained unknown for many decades, even centuries. Even with new discoveries, partly because

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Fig. 1. Map of Ptolemy.

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geographical routes and information were kept in secret, maps promoted the mentalities of the mapmakers and the society that consumed them - which remained fixed to the classical mythological paradigm. Blaeu, who was the official cartographer of the VOC, was unable to use new geographical information from the discoveries. For example his map of Africa c.1664 is highly decorated with vignettes of cities, forts and landscapes; the borders depict inhabitants from different regions, the ocean space is decorated with sailing ships, flying fish and mermaids; yet the interior of Africa maintain the presence of wild beasts (Figure 3).

Although this type of map added new information about places and names regarding the islands of Mauritius and Madagascar (following the discoveries of Dutch exploration), the mythical Mountains of the Moon still are depicted, even if they are not the source of the Nile. Other earlier maps, such as the Lopes-Pigafetta (1591) do show a great improvement on the interior of Africa, but for Zandvliet, Blaeu’s work perfectly illustrates how a VOC chart was turned into a commercial atlas map. At the end of the 16th century scientific

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69 Adrien Delmas, From Traveling to History: An outline of the VOC writing system during the 17th century. In Written Culture in a Colonial Context, p.112.

knowledge started to come to the fore, and maps began to separate from a now unsustainable, mythological background. In the map of Herman Moll (1732) the vacuum spaces of the interior of Africa were filled not with animals or monsters but by two inscriptions, one reads: “Ethiopia is wholly unknown to Europeans”. Nevertheless the cartouche of the map keeps the traditional allegories of Africa as a seated woman half naked holding an ivory tusk, and there are references to African animals denoting uncivilization together with civilized forces represented by a horseman hunting an ostrich (Figure 4).

Concurrently, the querelle between ancient and moderns, taken up by some scholars to challenge the status of antiquity, set up the idea that men from the age of discoveries were much better than the ancients. These views are best expressed in the epic poem Os Luciadas, of Luis de Camões (1776) which celebrated Vasco de Gama’s exploration of the Indian Ocean. Maps continued to portray the European self for public consumption within the boundaries of social and ideological references that went back to narratives from antiquity, showing the enduring legacy of traditional attitudes in the face of modern developments.

51 Let Fame with wonder name the Greek no more, / What lands he saw, what toils at sea he bore;/ Nor more the Trojan's wandering voyage boast,/What storms he braved on many a perilous coast: No more let Rome exult in Trajan's name,/Nor Eastern conquests Ammon's pride proclaim; A nobler hero's deeds demand my lays/Than e'er adorned the song of ancient days,/Illustrious GAMA, whom the waves obeyed,/And whose dread sword the fate of empire swayed.
But they simultaneously started to reflect an increasingly proximate, material engagement with the world they were representing as informants and explorers surveyed inland. These maps were images in the process of becoming².

With trade and exploration before the Europeans, the geographical knowledge of the interior of Africa was obtained mainly by the information given to the Europeans by caravan guides, nomads, travelers, merchants or pilgrims. These routes were dominated by the gold trade from the mines in Ghana, Mali and Zimbabwe to places on the coast like Sofala, Kilwa, Mombasa or Malindi. These routes connected Angola on the Atlantic Ocean, to port cities in East Africa, where there was also trading of iron, seeds, ivory, spices, labour, books and manuscripts.

Although maps are said to have been tools of power and control, European maps of East Africa show a fragmented view of the world perceived through the kernel of European ideas and misconceptions, built mainly upon classical and biblical references. Early maps tell us far more about Europeans themselves than about the people or places they pretended to portray - the mapping of the Indian Ocean, and Africa in particular, was one of the main ways European imperialists fashioned themselves through geography. Nonetheless, they also speak to the limits of European colonialism and commerce; and point to Arabs and Africans – beyond the sailing ships and coastal forts - as the dominant disseminators of geographical knowledge about the African interior.

**Geographical Tradition in East Africa**

Although Swahili maps have not survived in the historical record, a great amount of geographical information of Swahili geography exists in different manifestations, and can be tangentially accessed and approached through diverse forms: from the Arabic books on navigation, to social performance of space, poetry and song, and as we will see below genealogical accounts can be considered geographical documents too. The echoes of the Swahili’s local geographical knowledge of the coast, both at a practical and theoretical level, are loudest in the dialectically-informed Arabic written geographical records and
maps which were circulating in the Indian Ocean\textsuperscript{53}.

There are still some doubts as to whether or not Arab maps were “geometrically drawn” like the Portuguese \textit{portolanos}\textsuperscript{54}, but navigational literature in the form of practical advice for navigators and pilot guides certainly existed; charts of the Indian Ocean are mentioned by Marco Polo\textsuperscript{55} and Vasco de Gama\textsuperscript{56}, and there are also earlier examples of drawn maps of Piri Re’is (1513) and Al-Idrisi (1154).

Arabic knowledge of navigating the Indian Ocean including the East African coast has mainly come down to us through the work of Ibn Mājīd\textsuperscript{57} (1421), a sailor from Oman and author of numerous geographical works, who is best-known for the controversy over whether or not he was the pilot of Vasco de Gama. In the Kitāb, Ibn Mājīd refers to the sailing season from India to East Africa (Zanj), Madagascar and Zanzibar mentioning numerous ports along the way\textsuperscript{58}. Arabic classical geography relied on Ptolemaic geographic understandings, just as Europeans did. But Ibn Mājīd’s work is an outstanding example of a tradition of navigational literature used as practical advice for pilot guides circulating the coast of the Indian Ocean which broke with Ptolemy’s geography. Also notable is his use of the compass and the wind rose: a method of using starts risings and settings for directional purpose. Although no map of Ibn Mājīd has survived, we must understand his work as being part of an Arab tradition of geographical maps which were accompanied by a textual description. While maps themselves have been lost, logbooks, or pilot guides, written in verse as part of a \textit{mnemotechnique} process (easy to memorize) intended to didactically pass information from one generation to the next, have endured in the historical record.

Furthermore, although there is little work done by Western scholars on Omani geographic corpus associated with its empire\textsuperscript{59}, we should not conceive the Arabic geographical corpus as a compact unique enterprise, but as the result of collected different traditions around the Indian Ocean in which are put together knowledge from disparate different sources in which Ibn Mājīd is one of the examples par excellence. For instance, Egyptians were sending missions to the East African coast as early as 1500 BC - there is evidence in a relief that portrays the fleet of Queen Hatshepsut\textsuperscript{60} being sent down to the Red Sea to reopen trade with the East African Coast.

\textsuperscript{53} Michael Horton and John Middletown, \textit{The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society} (Blackwell, 2000), on the \textit{periplous of the Erythrean Sea} and the \textit{Geography of Ptolemy} see p.31-37.


\textsuperscript{55} Thomas Suarez, \textit{Early Mapping of Southeast Asia: The Epic Story of Seafarers} (Periplous Edition LTD. Singapore, 1999).

\textsuperscript{56} De Barros I, \textit{Asia: Década I. 1552. bk.4 ch.6}.


The Omani and other powers of the Gulf had been active in East African coasts since the 9th century. Although the Arabic geographical tradition has been at the margin of the studies of European geographic tradition, nevertheless Swahili geographical knowledge must have played an active role concerning geographical information, as the Swahili were the product of a fusion of cultures, (a porous and fluid identity as explained by Vernet), they must have shared information of navigating the East African coast to Arabs, Portuguese and other groups around the Indian Ocean. In spite of that, the Swahili contribution is silent from the Arabic corpus, (as it is from the European corpus), we may be facing a way in which Arabs are exercising another form of otherness, reflecting the overlapping of imperial projects on commanding sea routes.

How much did Swahili geography influence the Arab tradition on geographical knowledge? Rather than endogenously produced, as we mentioned earlier, we should consider the possibility that Arab navigational manuals were the product of a long tradition of shared knowledge, built upon the different geographical approaches of local people living within the Indian Ocean shores. In that way it is possible to explore the contribution of Swahili geographical knowledge to the geographical information that remains accessible for us about the East African Coast.

In fact, Ibn-Khaldun gives a glimpse of the multiple agents involved in the Arab navigation enterprises: “When the Arab empire was established, and grew predominant, men of different professions offered their service to them. They employed boatmen and sailors, who helped them to improve their nautical knowledge and activities. Experts in navigation were produced amongst them.”

The Swahili certainly had considerable navigational expertise of their own. From Masʻūdī (c. 896–956) we learn that each sea had separate sailors and experts, and that the African Sea (Abyssinian sea) and Barbara (Mozambique channel) were very difficult to navigate: “sailors says this is a mad sea…When they reach the waves of the sea and go with currents, which rock them high and low they sing the following verse during their work on the ship: “Barbara and Jafoni – And this mad storm / Jafoni and Barbara –And its waves as you see”. A well-known illustration from a Mesopotamian manuscript al-Hariri’s Maqamat (MS Arabe 5847 fo.119) dated AD 1237 now at the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, also shows a wooden boat with two masts, and the oculi at each end of the craft, resembling the Lamu mtepe, with what seems to be a Swahili crew (Figure 5).

The Swahili had first hand experience of oversea sailing. As Vernet has shown Swahili...
elites were involved in long distance voyages to the Arabian and Southern Arabian seas during the period of the first European expansion. They were aware of the main trading networks, markets and maritime routes of the Indian Ocean as whole, owned big ships and were partners in large oceanic enterprises, taking advantage of the multiple agents involved in trading on the African coast. They were also on board ships as pilots, free sailors, merchants or pilgrims.

Further, from the Pate Chronicles we know of Swahili having knowledge of the monsoon season, shipwrecks and tides\textsuperscript{68}, and records of military expansions refer to geographical information\textsuperscript{69}. For Ibn Mājīd, experts on navigation are learned men who had to have access to books on geography, astronomy, latitude, longitude, and the shape of the stars\textsuperscript{70}. Similarly, although much emphasis has been placed on African oral traditions, there is evidence uncovered at the Timbuktu Library to argue that written tradition existed alongside this\textsuperscript{71} and was connected to library production in East Africa at Siyu\textsuperscript{72}. These newly-revealed literary traditions indicate that chart and maps must have been circulated among merchants and traders alongside cosmological treatises which were associated with their geographical conceptions of the world (Figure 6). These relationships with distant places were also part of social dynamics in which people built their sense of cosmopolitanism.

![Manuscript al-Hariri's Maqamat (MS Arabe 5847 fo.119) dated AD 1237](image)

**Fig. 5.** Manuscript al-Hariri's Maqamat (MS Arabe 5847 fo.119) dated AD 1237

\textsuperscript{68} Marina Tolmacheva, *The Paté Chronicles*, edited and translated by Marina Tolmacheva (Michigan University Press, 1993). pp.19 n.20 and p.21,301,303,308-310,314,318,320 (MS 358 of the Dar es Salaam University)

\textsuperscript{69} “Sultan ‘Umar bin Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Sulayman gained great power (and) conquered the towns of the Swahili (coast) – Ozi, Malindi, Kiwayu, Kitao; Miya and Imidhi and Watamu – until he reached Kirimba. He gained possession of all the towns from Pate to Kirimba,” (*The Pate Chronicles* p.299) See also Utendi wa Fumo Liyongo for geographical references.


\textsuperscript{71} Shamil Jeppie, Making Book History in Timbuktu. In *The Book in Africa: Critical Debates*, ed. by Caroline Davies and David Johnson (Hampshire, 2015), see Ch.4.

Although we can only speculate that geographical knowledge in form of books and charts was also circulating on the Swahili shores, we certainly know from recent archaeological work, that the Swahili had knowledge of nautical engineering, as can be seen in Kilwa’s causeways, as well as command of nautical warfare\textsuperscript{73}.

As we possess only the Arabic written sources it is difficult to assess the asymmetric communication process and the dialectic with other agents from India, Yemen, Iran, Oman and China\textsuperscript{74}. And if we can consider Arab navigational manuals as collections of shared knowledge built upon different geographical understandings of the local people living around the Indian Ocean shores, then the Swahili’s geographical nautical system was itself the product of a two-way conversation, in which Arabs influenced Swahili and Swahili influenced Arabs with their own views of place and space, local geographical information for sailing and particular landmarks of coastal features. But we certainly do know that the Swahili coast was a point of contact between local African, Arabic and other cultures, and it is unlikely that this was a hegemonic, one-way engagement.

Although Swahili maps do not remain, we have access to songs and poetry in which the Swahili project themselves across the Indian Ocean world. For instance, there is a

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\item \textsuperscript{74}Simplification of the Swahili culture is expressed in Carl Velten, \textit{Desturi za Wasuaheli & Sitten und Gebräuche der Suaheli} (Göttingen, 1903), p.335, 338. However, James de Vere Allen refers to a wider influence in terms of “Indian Ocean Culture” and current bibliography reevaluates the previous simplification of Swahili culture.
\end{itemize}
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considerable sense of place and of cosmo-politani-anism expressed in the Swahili Sailor’s Song, which lists places to which the Swahili consider to be related, these includes southern Arabia, islands south of Oman, and the Comoros: “Let’s go to Iran as well, and Ras al-Khaima/Basra, Hadd and Sawkira/ Bandar Abbas on the Fars Coast”75. Similarly the Swahili also fashioned themselves through geographical references in which they expressed the complex nature of their identity: East African and Asian locales are placed next to each other in spite of the geographical distance between them, Goa is mentioned next to Lamu and Pemba, and a reference to Maskat is preceded by Siyu and followed by Bombay76. Crafted doors from Lamu may also inform of local places projected into far away arenas. Even more interesting are perhaps the geographical references made in daily life practices and sensual and nostalgic scenarios (see the poem *Inkishafi*)77 which is another example where geography fashions identity.

**Performing Space and Written Culture**

The two entangled, but dissonant geographic traditions of the Portuguese and Arabs – both drawing on Ptolomeaic understandings of the world, but separated by contrasting conceptions and contact with the Swahili – are directly comparable through the two versions of the Kilwa Chronicles (one Persian, one Portuguese) that survive to this day (Figure 7).

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foundational story associated to trade and port cities. But, they can also be regarded as examples of geographical accounts or social maps, for genealogies map space, creating links between East Africa and the wider Indian Ocean world.

Though genealogies are often associated with myth and do not represent an authentic historical account, as social practices of performing space, they play an important role in placing a group of people in connection to others establishing links between people in distant places. Genealogical records transmitted information and ideas of authority and prestige and in the particular case of Swahili, they are related to the construction of a urban identity of stone towns, the establishment of a thalasocracy as opposed to pastoral life. Part of a broader pattern of book production on the East Africa coast – with some examples of Swahili writing existing, the Chronicles were not written or composed by foreigners for foreigners, but are a link to the Swahili world. They are an example of the Swahili themselves reconstructing their own mythical ancestry and urban connections to the far shores of the Indian Ocean.

The two remaining versions of the Kilwa Chronicles (the Persian and Portuguese versions) are different and present omissions, gaps and censures regarding the succession of kings. These may have occurred for different reasons: diverse fonts of transmission, emphasis in certain kings associated to political purpose, addition or the erasure of dynasties. As geographical documents, the genealogies recorded in the Chronicles replicate the Omani tradition of geographical records that were actively antagonistic - Ibn Mājid’s writings indeed are an example of a geographical corpus generated through Omani imperial expansion, which competed with the Shirazi genealogies as documents of identity and location with the liaisons of the Indian Ocean.

The written description that accompanied the pictorial representation of maps is a kind of document that can be studied in association to genealogical and geographical accounts, and it belongs to the context of written culture, associated to map making in the shores of the Indian Ocean world.

78 For a critique to genealogy; museum and society see Beth Lord: Foucault museum. www2.le.ac.uk/museum studies, p.8.
80 James de Vere Allen, “Siyu in the 18th and 19th Centuries,” Transafrican Journal of History Vol. 8 (1979):11-35; Rider Samson, “The Swahili Manuscript Culture,” Manuscript Culture Newsletter 4 (2011):68-77. Howard Brown, “The Development and Decline of a Swahili Town,” PhD thesis UMI /BIEA, 1987. Lyndon Harries, "Siyu the chief seat of old Swahili learning”. In Swahili Poetry (Oxford, 1962). In p.6 refers to the process of writing and fabricating ink in Siyu: “The conventional description of the copyist writing material survived in the prelude to some of the poems long after the copyist had adopted more modern materials for writing. It seems plain that the copyists lined their paper by the use of a board around which was wrapped a silken cord so that parallel ridges could be impressed on the paper. Mica-sand was sprinkled on the writing to dry it. Black ink was made from rice, burned and then ground to power, mixed in water with a little gum, lemon juice and some lamp black. Red ink was made from cinnabar or native Mercuric oxide and was prepared locally from the mzingufuri or mzinjifi plant (Ar. Zinjafr) Bixa Orellana. Coloured title pieces adorned some of the manuscripts, but generally of rather inferior design and execution. The section of a line or rhyme endings were usually divided or marked by stops. (sw kituo/zituo, or kikomo/zikomo) though in some manuscripts there is no division at the medial rhyme and a space takes the place of the marked stops, which were shaped by inverted hearts and often lubricated. As with Arabic off course, the Swahili Arabic script is written, and the manuscripts paginated, from right to left”. Howard Brown, “Siyu: Town of Craftmen,” Azania Vol 23 (1988):101-113, esp. 110-112. Hichens W, Al- Inkishafi, p.122.
Conclusion
According to Gassmann\textsuperscript{82} and Cooper\textsuperscript{83} race, empire and identity as categories of analysis are dissolving. Global history focusing on space offers new categories to understand mobility, change and crossing borders, focusing on non-fixed identities beyond national limits.

Maps inform of movement of people as well as objects, and are partially the result of histories of consumption as well as fashioning of people projecting themselves into larger areas of the world. In the case of East Africa, Europeans and Arabic maps of Africa were actively disengaged and resisted by the Swahili at the same time that their geographical knowledge was been erased and incorporated into a new geographical corpus. Global history and the geographical ‘turn’ support history from below, and the inclusion of maps and the geographical discourse bear the possibility of opening up new readings of inclusion.

\textsuperscript{83} Cooper, \textit{Africa in the World}.
Bibliography


This paper examines the historic sea charts and sailing directions to interpret maritime travel and so aid archaeological survey and excavation in ports around Kilwa in South East Tanzania (Figure 1). Surviving reliable charts for this region largely post-date 1750, but the relative stability of coastal morphology, weather systems, and sailing technology prior to the age of steam in the latter part of the 19th century, ensure that they provide an insight into the harbours and routes followed by sailors in earlier times, including the heyday of the East African stone towns in the first part of the second millennium.

Figure 1: The East African coast showing monsoon winds of the Western Indian Ocean (E. Pollard).
Interpreting Medieval to Post-Medieval Seafaring in South East Tanzania Using 18th- to 20th-Century Charts and Sailing Directions

Edward Pollard

Introduction
This paper examines the historic sea charts and sailing directions to interpret maritime travel and so aid archaeological survey and excavation in ports around Kilwa in South East Tanzania (Figure 1). Surviving reliable charts for this region largely post-date 1750, but the relative stability of coastal morphology, weather systems, and sailing technology prior to the age of steam in the latter part of the 19th century, ensure that they provide an insight into the harbours and routes followed by sailors in earlier times, including the heyday of the East African stone towns in the first part of the second millennium.

Figure 1: The East African coast showing monsoon winds of the Western Indian Ocean (E. Pollard).
In the late 18th century, French sea charts appear at places of their particular national interest, including Zanzibar and Kilwa. These are the first clearly recognisable large scale maps of areas along the coast. Previous European maps often included imaginative elements, or a high degree of generalisation, so it is difficult to determine their accuracy: such are represented by *Civitates orbis terrarium* first published in Cologne in 1572; André Thevet’s *l’Isle de Quiloa* (1586); the similar Jacques-Nicolas Bellin’s *Plan de l’isle et ville de Quiloa*; and John Green and Thomas Astley’s ‘The Island and City of Quiloa’ in ‘A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels’ (1746) (Figure 2). Otherwise, their scale was too small to be of value: such would include William Hacke’s *A description of the sea coasts …* (c. 1690) (Figure 3). The French charts appear to have been made by slave traders who needed slaves for plantations on the Ile de France (Mauritius) and Bourbon (Reunion), and to assure food supply in time of war by the import of millet from Africa. UK Admiralty Charts for East African coast begin in early 19th century with a standardisation including tides, depths in feet, compass rose with true directions and magnetic variation, five-fathom line and ebb and flow directional arrows.

Figure 2: André Thevet’s *l’Isle de Quiloa* (1586) (left) refers to Good Sand (*Bonne Sande*) in an anchorage off the Town of Kilwa (*Ville de Quiloa*). The *Temple* on the mainland may be Songo Mnara. Some features could be identifiable from archaeological survey, but the presence of hills and European-style housing on the island shows this map has imaginative elements. Furthermore, the place-name *Ville de Mangalo*, which was a settlement located c. 90km south of Kilwa, shows the scale to be inaccurate as the island of Kilwa is only c.7km long. Jacques-Nicolas Bellin’s *Plan de l’isle et ville de Quiloa* (1746) (right) shows the proximity of the island to the mainland, but no attempt is made to show a harbour and the main settlement is depicted as covering most on the island whereas in reality it was concentrated in the north-west.

(Source: gallica.bnf.fr).

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The charts are considered important from an archaeological perspective in developing a better understanding of sailing procedures, navigation aids and hazards, and designation of safe anchorages. Those strictly maritime concerns may then be associated with on-shore development, as well as suggesting potential sites for off-shore archaeological research in the vicinity of anchorages, or the near-shore approaches to those harbours.

In this study some integration is attempted between the published materials and maritime archaeological survey work conducted by the author on this stretch of the Tanzanian coast. The sequence of charts and maps for the present Tanzanian coast were obtained from the UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO) in Taunton, British Library, National Archives in Kew, online Gallica Archive and British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA) archive in Nairobi. In addition to Admiralty Charts, UKHO produced pilots for the East African coast that described the coastline and its dangers, anchorages and sailing directions.
The Historical Context

The charts and sailing directions must be seen in the context of the political economy of this southern section of the Swahili coast. Historically, the most important port in present-day south-east Tanzania was Kilwa, but it was only one of a number of formerly thriving ports, that developed extensive maritime trading links north to the Arabian Peninsula and east to India and China and sustained stone towns from the early 2nd millennium AD (Figure 1). The general wind patterns allow the NE monsoon to carry sailing vessels south during the months of November to March, whereas the SE monsoon takes vessels back northwards from May to October. Trade consisted essentially of exchange of raw materials (metals including gold, mangrove and other timbers, ivory) and slaves from the interior of Africa, for finished goods (particularly ceramics, textiles, glass and beads). While the earliest historical references to sea travel are found in classical writings (Periplus Maris Erythrai and Geographia), Muslim travellers and scholars throw light on the mediaeval period. Freeman-Grenville compiled a collection of many writings, including Abu al-Fida (1273-1331), who produced an historical and geographical work that included mention of Malindi and Mombasa; the Moroccan traveller Ibn Battuta who visited Kilwa in early 14th century. European commentaries on Kilwa followed during the 16th to 19th centuries, the earliest from captains, travellers and historians associated with the Portuguese presence in the Indian Ocean, for instance Vasco da Gama (1502); the German Hans Mayr, who travelled with Dom Francisco D’Almeida (1505); Duarte Barbosa, a factor at Cananor (c.1517-18); and the historian João de Barros (1552).

The importance of the trade in the south, and thus of Kilwa, apparently grew significantly from the late 12th century. Ibn al-Mujawir, writing in 1232/33, referred to Kilwa as an important stage on the route to al-Qumr (Madagascar). Archaeological support is provided by Chittick’s excavations that identified an increase in wealth in Kilwa in late 12th to 13th century with the appearance of stone buildings, copper working and spindle whorls. He considered that Kilwa may have been an intermediate port en route between Aden and Sofala in modern Mozambique. Control of Sofala was important as the port through which gold from the Zimbabwe plateau was channelled into the world trading system. According to the Kilwa Chronicle, Kilwa took over the gold trade at Sofala from Mogadishu in the 12th century, but it was not until the late 13th to 14th century that it secured a virtual monopoly.

Increased commerce and wealth was reflected in extension of the Great Mosque, and the palace and emporium of Husuni Kubwa and a profusion of small-scale hinterland

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settlements probably acting as agricultural and marine resource suppliers for the town. Francisco D’Almeida’s fleet entered the harbour of Kilwa in July 1505 and described many boats as large as a 50-ton caravel and other smaller ones.

Kilwa became powerful enough to dominate and subjugate neighbouring settlements including Mafia, perhaps by the 12th century (Figure 4). Six centuries later, the 18th-century French surgeon and slave trader, Morice, claimed that Kilwa’s northern boundary was from an archipelago of small islands to the north and south of the mouth of Dar es Salaam Harbour to Tungi Bay to the south of Cape d’Algado in northern modern Mozambique, though by Morice’s time the Mafia archipelago formed an independent republic. Morice who was also a surgeon bought a piece of Kilwa in exchange for four thousand piasters and negotiated a treaty with the sultan that gave him a monopoly privilege on the export of slaves signed in 1776. Morice reported that the sultan controlled Mozambique, Angoche and Sofala prior to the Portuguese taking of Kilwa island in 1505.

After the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 Britain started to suppress it in Africa and to develop trade there, which meant more accurate charts were essential. In 1821, Captain William Fitzwilliam Owen (1774 –1857) was chosen to survey the east coast from the Cape of Good Hope to Cape Guardafui at the northeastern tip of Somalia. The African Pilots produced during the 19th century to accompany the charts were compiled by Royal Navy officer Algernon Frederick Rous de Horsey (1827 - 1922). Between 1874 and 1875 the HMS Nassau under Lieutenant Commander Francis John Gray conducted surveys to the south of Kilwa but Gray died having succumbed to a fever off Port Natal on 12 December. Another east coast of Africa survey was done by William James Lloyd Wharton (1843–1905) who captained HMS Fawn from 1876 to 1880.

Navigating the Coast
The ships that sustained such a geographically extensive trade were obliged to navigate a potentially dangerous reef-lined coast over considerable distances. The modest speed of sail and the vicissitudes of the winds placed requirements for re-provisioning of foodstuffs, and particularly water, en route, while boats might also need to make intermediate landfall to effect repairs for any damage incurred on passage.

Thus calls might be expected at convenient harbours and ports away from the main trading

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14 Blake, The Sea Chart, p.62.
city of Kilwa as ships sailed south towards Mozambique, Madagascar and the Comoros Islands, or north towards Mombasa, Malindi and the Middle East. These calls would be largely incidental, although minor trading might also have taken place during such a visit, while smaller vessels would be expected to have conducted purely local trading.

This paper looks at different scale ports from Kiswere through the principal centre of Kilwa to Mafia (Figure 4) detailing the historical descriptions of supplies available, sailing instructions for passage and anchorage safety, and chart availability. The ports have all been visited by the author so that archaeological field material can be integrated with the published data. As the UK Hydrological Office sailing directions are organised from south to north, this account follows that format in navigating from Kiswere Harbour to Mafia Island.
Kiswereal Harbour is an inlet incorporating several settlements including Kiswere Village in the south-western corner of the harbour. Here ‘the harbour is a small fresh water stream, up which a boat can go at half tide to the village of Kiswere, where a few supplies, such as goats, fowls, eggs, &c., may be obtained, but there are no cattle or sheep’\(^{15}\) (Figure 5).

A 2012 survey by the author at Kiswere recorded the supplies available including four square stone wells probably dating from 13\(^{th}\) to 15\(^{th}\) century given their similarity to dated wells at Kilwa. The wells, although used by the villagers, were reported to be salty today though fresher water can be obtained from a spring inland. Pottery was recorded in the river and test pits in the village revealed artefacts dating from the 7\(^{th}\) to 20\(^{th}\) century, including a Chinese stoneware jar suggesting the site participated in the medieval Indian Ocean trade, albeit possibly indirectly.

Other artefacts included fish bone, slag and shellfish indicating further maritime activity that indicates a coastal settlement at this location either in late medieval or early post medieval period. Fishing is also evidenced from the stakes limiting fish trap fences on the wide sandy foreshore of the Admiralty Chart.

De Horsey\(^{16}\) defined the outer limits of Kiswere Harbour to lie ‘between Ras Berikiti (Harbour Rocks) on the north, and Ras Bobare on the south.’ In Kiswere Harbour either the north or south shore can be chosen for anchorage according to which of the north-east or south-west monsoon prevails, but the south side (near Kiswere Village) tends to be the calmer in both monsoons while the ground there is mud compared with the sandy north shore near Mtumbu\(^{17}\). ‘The anchorage off the village of Mtumbo [Mtumbu] is only fit for a very small vessel to approach at high water, as the bar across the entrance of the inlet has only 6 feet on it at low water springs’\(^{18}\). This would be enough at high tide (springs rise 12ft) for local vessels as the draft of the largest traditional cargo carrying vessel known as mtepe is 1.7 to 3.0m (5.5 to 10ft).

Water supplies on this north shore were not described very favourably. ‘There are wells of water at the village of Mtumbo but it is brackish and unfit for use by Europeans’\(^{19}\). The settlement of Mtumbu is later than Kiswere village dating to 19\(^{th}\)- to early 20\(^{th}\)-century.

Its landing place is approached via a cut through the mangroves, and ruins of a house overlook the river mouth. Local knowledge informed that downstairs provided accommodation, but the upstairs was a mosque. Surrounding features included a well, a possible cistern, and graves. Blue and white pottery, glass, local pot, and coloured porcelain lay on the foreshore immediately seaward of the building, as well as an eroding quay, drain and another well.


\(^{16}\) Ibid, p.269.


\(^{19}\) Ibid.
probably associated with the settlement opposite (Figure 7). The place name Waarabu Weusi, which means ‘Black Arabs’, is a modern coconut plantation on the opposite side of the river north of where the ferry leaves: this was probably associated with the settlement opposite (Figure 7).

(Figure 6). The place name Waarabu Weusi, which means ‘Black Arabs’, is a modern coconut plantation on the opposite side of the river north of where the ferry leaves: this was probably associated with the settlement opposite (Figure 7).

Figure 5: Fishing stakes marking out fish trap fences at the mouth of the Mto Kiswere where Kiswere Village lies (Gray, 1874). (Source: UKHO. NOT TO BE USED FOR NAVIGATION.)

Figure 6: Quayside at Mtumbu (E. Pollard) (left); Well at Mtumbu (E. Pollard) (right).
The geology of the coast from Kiswere to Kilwa consists of raised coral limestone with conglomerates and sandstones landward. There is a coral limestone fringing reef along this coast from Lindi to Kilwa (a distance of about 120km) which provides a potential danger to shipping, but that danger is ameliorated by the distinctive maritime feature of a series of intertidal reef coral and sand causeways, islets and platforms that approach the reef and allow a sheltered environment for the growth of mangroves. These features both help to make conspicuous the off-shore landscape and mark the entrance to the harbour of Kilwa as well as harbours further south to Lindi. They are described in 19th century sailing directions as islets used for navigational purposes including Ras Fughio, the north point of Kiswere bay: ‘the reef here closes within a cable of the point, and then with several islands on it skirts the coast at a distance of 3 to 1½ cables south of Ras Berikiti.’ ‘From Ras Fughio ... the coast trends nearly in a straight line, with sandy beaches and small off-lying mangrove islets on the reef, to Ras Mombi, the southern point of Roango bay’.

On leaving Kiswere bay, causeways are encountered 200m to the north of Mitimiru, a 13th to 15th century stone house consisting of two rectangular rooms in an area of baobabs, from where they extend to Kissongo. Kissongo lies on the north-eastern approaches to Kiswere Harbour. It is in an area of good farmland and includes the Kisimakissongo Caves, which

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22 Ibid, p.270.
provide a source of water. The nearby Tung’ande I Cave is a site of late 12th- to 15th-century pottery. Further north at Majumbe, Roanga, a 15th-century mosque, stone house and three tombs have been recorded. De Horsey described ‘Roango bay (as) a shallow indentation of the coast ... There is no anchorage for ships, but a narrow boat channel having 3 feet at low water, leads through the reef to a creek at the centre of the bay, which creek affords shelter to dhows. There is a small village on the sandy beach in the south-west corner of the bay, unapproachable by boats except at high water. A few fowls may be obtained.’ Morgan recorded several more limestone caves/wells between Kiswere and Pande. It is possible that Roanga may have been another stop for supplies, but only for small vessels.

Travelling north from Roango, vessels are on the approach to Kilwa. Kilwa itself consists of several islands in a bay, the largest being Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara. The deep harbours are Kilwa Kisiwani Harbour, which lies between Kilwa Kisiwani and the present day administrative centre of Kilwa Masoko; and Sangarungu Harbour, which is between Kilwa Kisiwani and landward of Songo Mnara (Figure 8). The first entrance to Sangarungu Harbour is at the southern end of Songo Mnara where there are passages for small boats through the mangroves though these are only accessible at high tide (Figure 9).

‘From Ras Ngumbe Sukani to Mto Porwe, the coast consists of a mangrove swamp with several small creeks which, according to native information, join a larger one leading to port Kilwa... Mto Porwe, which separates the south end of Songo Manara island from the main, is only a boat channel available at high tide and smooth water, and communicates with Mkurulengamunyu [Pawi] creek the southern arm of Sangarungu harbour.’

If the Mto Porwe pass is too shallow, the vessel must enter Sangarungu Harbour to the north of Sangarungu Island, which is connected to Songo Mnara by a tidal mangrove swamp. Causeways are mentioned again approaching as the channel into harbour has ‘reef on both sides dry at low tides, and off Songo Manara island are some mangrove bushes close to the edge of the reef and distance three-quarters of a mile E. by N. of Ras Sangarungu, which can always be seen.’ ‘During the southerly monsoon this port and Keelwa should be made well from the southward. Coast along the land from the southward, keeping 1½ to 2 miles from the shore, and after rounding Kivoga island at about that distance to avoid the reef which extends nearly a mile to the south-eastward of it, bring Fishery point WNW and steer for it until Pagoda point (or the Direction Rocks, which are always visible) bears S.W. by W., then steer West, and when Morice island [Sanje ya Kati] bears S.W. by S. haul a point or so more to the southward and anchor as convenient in 9 to 11 fathoms, about midway between Pactolus shoal and the south shore of Keelwa island, with Pagoda point bearing

E.S.E.”\(^{28}\). The placename Direction Rocks are evidence that the causeways and platforms are used for navigation (Figure 10).

![Figure 8: Kilwa Ria (E. Pollard).](image)

![Figure 9: Mto Pawi and Porwe Pass at southern end of Songo Mnara (Wharton, 1903).](image)

Sangarungu Harbour includes Port Pactolus, to the north of Sanje ya Kati, which ‘is surrounded by mangroves, encumbered by many reefs, with violent tidal streams, and the swell reaches far into the interior, so that a vessel having to go some distance in for a secure berth, renders it inconvenient.’ ‘The part of the harbour between Songa Manara and Sanji-ya-Kati – Owen’s Port Nisus – is very deep and it is not until the latter island is brought north that any convenient anchorage will be found’.29

The sailing directions here show that Port Nisus is the better part of Sangarungu Harbour and this prime location is reflected in the presence of stone towns of Songo Mnara, Sanga, Sanje ya Kati and Sanje ya Majoma surrounding this harbour. The same anchorage is also shown between Songo Mnara and Island Morice (Sanje ya Kati) on Morice’s chart (Figure 11).

The stone town of Songo Mnara is named after the tower or ‘pagoda’, another navigational feature for boats reaching this port.30 Eighteenth-century French charts show the pagoda at the northern promontory of Songo Mnara. The French charts (Figure 11) kept at the Bodleian Institute in Oxford are presumably the original maps by Morice unless edited by another surveyor soon after his time there. The map on the online Gallica archive, which is in English, is probably an English copy of those maps (Figure 12). On the French maps, a Pagoda is shown at the north end of Songo Mnara. The Pagoda has become noticeably thinner on the second French map and, on the English map, the Pagoda is shown as a tower. The tower may be the more correct image as pillar tombs are found along the coast and

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the Mbaraki Pillar at Mombasa is used for navigation\textsuperscript{31}. By the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the Admiralty Charts reported: ‘\textit{Pagoda Point, the northern extremity of Songa Manara island ... a tower formerly stood here, but it has fallen}’\textsuperscript{32}.

Intertidal survey revealed that the reef coral causeway had been modified to form a landing place at Chani at the northern entrance to Sangarungu Harbour\textsuperscript{33}. This is marked most clearly from the small islet north of Watiro Island leading to the low water mark (Figure 10). Furthermore, two passages are also shown through the mangroves on the southern side of the harbour entrance. One is on Sangarungu Island, where there is a fishing port today. The other is further south between the cliff and the mangroves and leads to the landing place of the stone town of Songo Mnara. Here there is a medieval mosque in the intertidal zone and a reef coral walkway, similar in construction to the causeways, from the mosque

\textsuperscript{31} Pollard, “Safeguarding Swahili Trade in the 14th and 15th Centuries.”
\textsuperscript{32} A.F.R. De Horsey, \textit{The African Pilot for the South and East Coasts of Africa from the Cape of Good Hope to Cape Guardafui}, p.181.
\textsuperscript{33} Pollard, Safeguarding Swahili Trade in the 14th and 15th Centuries.
to another (funeral) mosque on the west coast of Songo Mnara. However, the site is abandoned today, and the landing place overgrown, so the chart shows how the port was approached in earlier times. On the northeast coast of Kilwa Kisiwani the causeways are very straight suggesting human modification. They reach up to 250m in length, and 9.5m in width, and terminate with platforms up to 65m wide: they mark the entrance to Kilwa Kisiwani Harbour. In this area, Mvinje Island, a natural limestone islet, probably formerly used as a store for reef coral on the Kilwa Kisiwani east coast, is shown on the French versions of Morice’s charts only.

The French charts clearly show some islets near the white sand and a line of trees on the Rukyira promontory, which is the northern side of the eastern entrance to Kilwa Kisiwani Harbour. ‘Mwamba Rukyira is a large tongue of reef stretching off Ras Matuso in an easterly direction for 3½ miles. Its outer edge is very steep and sea always breaks on it; the northern end terminates in a point from which Ras Matuso bears SW distant for 4 miles. The reef is all dry at springs, and has many small mangrove bushes and sand heads on its eastern part, one of the latter, a mile south of the north extreme, is seldom covered’.

36 Pollard, The Archaeology of the Tanzanian Coastal Landscapes.
A modern navigational tower and fishing station is sited on Lukila Island on the northern entrance to Kilwa Kisiwani Harbour. Pollard\textsuperscript{38} noted human modification of the island: navigation is improved by the high light reflectance from the reef coral, while some trees make it visible from a considerable distance.

To enter Kilwa Kisiwani Harbour ‘steer along the south-eastern edge of Rukyira reef at a distance of a few cables, when … the old castle will be seen, dirty white and appearing like a white cliff in a mirage, closely backed by many trees of thick foliage which overtop it. When the castle is seen, steer for it until the bush on the edge of the reef south of Ras Matuso is clear of the latter, when the southern extremity of white sand in Mso Bay should be clearly seen with some yellow cliffs just to the left\textsuperscript{39}. The channel may be said to commence south of Ras Matuso where the southern portion of Rukiyira reef – Ukyera of former charts – dries off for nearly 1½ miles, with a steep rocky edge. Close to this edge and south of Ras Matuso is a large bush of mangrove, which is conspicuous on approaching from the eastward\textsuperscript{40}. This mangrove shows the causeways and platforms marking the way into the harbour, and the sailing directions refer to this side as the best way to enter the harbour.

On Kilwa Kisiwani a ‘large baobab tree stands on an open park – like elevated space, 45 feet above sea, half a mile east of the castle, and marks the observation spot … The word Fawn is cut in the tree in letters large enough to be seen from the Balazi spit, and the tree is one of the marks for entering the harbour\textsuperscript{41} (Figure 13). Within the harbour, Castle Islet is clearly seen on all three of Morice’s charts, but to the WNW of Kilwa Kisiwani instead of its location to the NW. In relation to where Morice has placed Castle Islet, the anchorage for Kilwa Kisiwani Port is correctly shown. ‘Kilwa Kisiwani Harbour is the lower portion of a large estuary ...(and) is generally deep, but off the castle there is ample anchorage for many vessels in 9 to 15 fathoms, completely protected by the projecting points of reef from the heavy swell that almost invariably beats on the outer shore, and is open to the sea breeze\textsuperscript{42}. ‘The channel separating Kilwa island from the main is at the northern end very shallow and at low tides fordable; here is a ferry communicating with the island. There is another ferry from the village to a break in the mangroves north of Ras Rongozi\textsuperscript{43}. The tidal flats that almost link Kilwa Kisiwani to the mainland to the west are shown on one of the French and the English versions of Morice’s chart (Figures 11-12).

Another French chart from 1775 is roughly contemporaneous with Morice’s map though the outline of Kilwa Kisiwani is more accurate (Figure 14). It does not show the tower of Songo Mnara, possibly indicating it has fallen by this date. The chart refers to Morice Island as the Isle aux Cabrito? (isle of roast goat kid), so it does not appear to have been based on any previous map. It pays close attention to the entrance to Kilwa Kisiwani and Sangarungu Harbour calling them Passe du Nord and Passe de Sud respectively.

\textsuperscript{38} Pollard, Safeguarding Swahili Trade in the 14th and 15th Centuries.
\textsuperscript{39} De Horsey, The Africa Pilot Part III, p.276.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, p.274.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, p.273.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, p.275.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, p.275.
Pierre Brulier (burnt rock) is presumably a reference to lime-making; it lies above the same small islets marked on Morice’s maps. These may be causeways and platforms where lime is collected for burning along with the islets on Point de Sud (Kivurugu Isle on later maps) on Songo Mnara. La Carcasse is marked opposite Pierre Brulier and would appear to be a shipwreck on the foreshore.

The anchorage at the main village is shown correctly on the northwest side of the island with Castle Islet called Isle des Mangles (Mangrove Isle). The importance of water to the seafarers is again highlighted in that they are shown as fontaines on the chart in the village.

To the north of Kilwa is the Mafia archipelago, which extends between Ras Matuso and Ras Pembamnazi (Figure 14). Joseph Crassons de Medeuil, a French slaving captain who was twice a Kilwa in the late 1770s, complained that the islands and reefs between Mafia and Kilwa are not marked on maps. There is a mass of islands which occupy a space of more than 10 leagues, notably the island of Songo Songo which is thickly populated. The largest island in this archipelago is Mafia itself while, of the islands south of Mafia, the largest are Songo Songo and Njove. On the exposed eastern coasts of the islands, the limestone forms wave-cut platforms, wave-cut notch cliffs and fringing reefs, though the western side of islands and the mainland opposite is sandier probably helped by sediments from the Rufiji Delta. Previously, Crassons de Medeuil is reported to have bargained for slaves and food supplies at Songo Songo in 1754.

As noted, Songo Songo lies on the sea route between Kilwa and Mafia: ‘Fungu Jewe is a large reef 3 miles north of Fungu Amana, leaving a deep and clear channel between,
which is the main passage for vessels into Kilwa Kivinje\textsuperscript{46} (Figure 15). ‘The main passage into Kilwa Kivinje is formed by Fanjove, Luala, and Jewe reefs on the north, and the Mwanamkaya and Amana on the south’. Fanjove is recorded as covered with tall trees and can be seen from 14 miles to the east on a clear day. Steering to Kilwa Kivinje from the east a vessel should pass 4 to 5 miles south of Fanjove until the breakers are seen giving them a berth of at least ½ mile\textsuperscript{47}. Kilwa Kivinje, 25km north of Kilwa Kisiwani, was the main port in the Kilwa area in 19\textsuperscript{th} century during Omani and German rule of this coast. Fanjove is known as Njove today: its importance to navigation encouraged the German colonial power built a lighthouse there in 1894 (Figure 16). Boats can land at high and low tide on the sand spit orientated west from the limestone island, and it is an important fishing port today including for tortoise and whale as evidenced from the bones recorded in the archaeological survey.

Archaeological survey in 2004 revealed no water on Njove, while the lighthouse has cisterns built into it to catch rainwater. However, Songo Songo has more supplies both in the past and now. ‘Songa Songa \ldots stands on a broad reef \ldots surrounded by extensive shallow water on all sides but the north-western, where Pumbavu a small sandy islet with a few scattered trees on it, is connected to the mainland by a neck of sand half a mile long. \ldots Songa Songa has a village near its eastern shore, and wells with tolerably good water in the coral nearby in its centre, which are difficult to access and best approached from its western side. Bullocks and goats are bred on the island\textsuperscript{48}. The wells are called Panga Kubwa and Panga Kidogo.

These are limestone caves or sinkholes in the centre of the island, and are the water source for the island. They are important enough to be recorded as wells on Admiralty Charts (Wharton, 1904) (Figure 17). Survey and excavation at Panga Kubwa revealed late 1\textsuperscript{st} millennium to 20\textsuperscript{th} century mostly water pot both local imported from the Middle East, India and the Far East. The cave is surrounded by baobab trees and bee hives. A high level of breakage would be expected when lowering and raising water pots in and out of the cave, as steps down into the cave were not built until the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

Pumbavu is shown as very close to the channel in Owen’s survey\textsuperscript{49} and again where marked as ‘sandy neck’ in Wharton (1876) (Figure 15). It is marked with an anchorage beside it on a German chart from 1886 (Figure 18). Survey of Pumbavu showed a grassy islet with bushes and trees attached to Songo Songo by a tidal tombolo formed on bedrock of shelly sandstone and limestone (Figure 19). Pieces of pot have concreted to this rock indicating that it was used as a landing place, though the pot here is too eroded to date. It is a steep beach at high and low tide on the seaward point of the islet and fishermen walk along the tombolo to unload the boats that pass here. There are a few pieces of unidentified pot on the tombolo.

\textsuperscript{46} De Horsey, \textit{The Africa Pilot Part III}, p.280.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, pp.280-1
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid, p.281.
\textsuperscript{49} Owen, \textit{Sheet IX: The East Coast of Africa}. Surveyed 1824 by Captain A.T.E. Vidal and the officers of the HMS Barracouta and Albatros under the orders of Captain W.F.W Owen. Chart 662. 1828.
Further north, Mafia is the largest of a group of islands opposite the Rufiji Delta (Figure 4). Ras Kisimani, the western point of Mafia Island ... is steep-to with deep water off it. There is no reef off the point itself ... Tolerably good water was obtained for the dhows, by digging holes in the sand on the northern side of the point ... ‘Boydu [Bwejuu] Island is opposite Ras Kisimani, and in the centre of the channel between Mafia Island and the mainland ...
covered with tall casuarinas\(^{50}\) (Figure 20). ‘The western channel of the Mafia Channel is marred by a shoal at its southern end, and which is difficult to be seen, and it is besides somewhat tortuous. The eastern channel, or that by Ras Kisimani, is however straight, with a minimum breadth of half a mile, and depth of 5 fathoms, and the current runs nearly in line of the channel’\(^{51}\). ‘Kissomang Point, the western extreme of Monfia ... is a favourite resort of slave dhows for water and supplies when trading between Keelwa and Zanzibar. The population in the vicinity of Kissomang Point appeared to be considerable, and turned out armed in such large numbers on the approach of our boats, after the seizure of a slave dhow, that the officer did not consider it prudent to land’\(^{52}\).

Figure 15: Songo Songo (Songa Songa), Njove (Fanjove) and Fungu Jewi (Gungwera) shown by Owen (1828) (left) and Wharton (1876) (right). (Source: UKHO. NOT TO BE USED FOR NAVIGATION.)

Figure 16: Njove Island showing the landing place and lighthouse (left) with gothic inscription Fnljovi? 1894 on lighthouse (right). Scale shows 0.35m.

\(^{50}\) De Horsey, *The Africa Pilot Part III*, p.291.

\(^{51}\) Ibid, p.281.

\(^{52}\) A.F.R. De Horsey, *The African Pilot for the South and East Coasts of Africa from the Cape of Good Hope to Cape Guardafui*, p.188.
The west-orientated sand spit archaeological site of Kisimani Mafia, at Ras Kisimani (interprets as the headland of the wells) is similar to Pumbavu Islet on Songo Songo in that it could be used during both monsoons. Kisimani's territory traditionally stretched to Bwejuu, an island 6km west in the Mafia Channel. Kisimani and Bwejuu would have controlled access to the approaches to Kilwa further south as boats would have to pass very close to avoid going around the more dangerous east coast of Mafia. Neville Chittick's excavations on Mafia Kisimani revealed an important 13th- to 16th-century settlement with three mosques and three wells covering 4ha situated about 1km from the tip of the cape and cut off from Mafia Island by a mangrove swamp. Chittick said Kilwa's control of Mafia likely resulted in the foundation of Kisimani Mafia probably in the 13th century.

Trading evidence from Kisimani includes southern Asian ceramics, glass, Kilwa-type coins and a coin from one of the Chola rulers of South India. A well belonging to one of the mosques yielded good water and the place name Kisimani is developed from the Swahili word *kisima* meaning well, which indicates the importance of the site for passing boats to obtain water. ARDA found it necessary to remark that the well blocks are cut on the curve and constitute very fine masonry, further indicating the importance of the site and especially the well.

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\textsuperscript{53}Freeman-Grenville, \textit{The East African Coast}, p.299.
These sand spit landing places are ports of call for supplies such as water, but also boat repair for vessels approaching Kilwa. To the north of Mafia, these islands include Kwale, Koma, Bongoyo and Zanzibar. Bongoyo to the north of Dar es Salaam Harbour, probably acted as a landing place and anchorage for medieval settlements at Msasani and Kunduchi. Large dressed blocks on the foreshore just below the sandstone spit are evidence of boats landing here (Figure 21). They may have been cargo for building, ballast or used as anchors.

**Discussion**

The nautical charts starting in 18th century have the potential to direct archaeological surveys to features such as landing places, ferry crossings, settlement buildings, fish trap fences and navigation towers. The earliest charts of use in this regard are French dating from 18th-century: they show anchorages, entrances to harbours and the associated ports. The 19th- to early 20th-century Admiralty charts are particularly useful for understanding the coastal morphology prior to field investigation, and for providing base maps for coastal survey.
The charts help identify how vessels previously sailed the coast around Kilwa, and indicate where they landed. Important anchorages, including Kilwa Kisiwani Port, are shown from 18th-century charts. In Kiswere Harbour either the north or south shore can be chosen for anchorage according to which monsoon prevails, but the south side (near Kiswere Village) is preferred compared to the Mtumbu side. This preference is reflected in the long history of occupation at Kiswere Village (dating from late 1st millennium AD) compared to Mtumbu (dating from 19th century).

The French charts and sailing directions show that Port Nisus is the most convenient anchorage in Sangarungu Harbour at Kilwa, and this prime location is reflected in the presence of stone towns surrounding this part of the harbour. The Admiralty charts and intertidal survey reveal how the ports were approached previously in that the reef coral causeway had been modified to form a landing place at Chani at the northern entrance to Sangarungu Harbour, and the landing place of the stone town of Songo Mnara is shown as a passage through the mangroves, although it is overgrown today.

The sailing directions discuss the navigation features as well as dangers to shipping on route to Kilwa. Njove is recorded as covered with tall trees and this marking of the island is reinforced when the German colonial power built a lighthouse in 1894. Bwejuu Island, opposite Kisimani Mafia, is covered with tall casuarinas. The distinctive intertidal reef coral and sand causeways, islets and platforms, often marked by mangroves, show the entrances to harbours. They are described in 19th-century sailing directions at the northern entrance to Kiswere Harbour, the southern entrance to Roango Bay, and approaching Sangarungu and Kilwa Kiswere Harbours. Furthermore, the Portuguese and Omani castle, or Geriza, and a large baobab tree in Kilwa Kisiwani Harbour are seen clearly by vessels entering the harbour and are used for navigation along with the white sand and cliff features. Complementing the causeways, the stone town of Songo Mnara displays a tower as a navigational feature for boats approaching the port. These navigational features are all shown on 18th-century French charts.

Boat channels for dhows are recorded at Roango Bay and Mto Porwe, the intertidal southern entrance to Sangarungu Harbour. The former has not been visited by the author and the latter has been difficult to archaeologically survey due to the distance that has to be walked, after arriving by boat at Mwanikiwamba, from main survey bases on Songo Mnara, Kilwa Masoko and Kilwa Kisiwani. Furthermore, the depth of mud approaching Mwanikiwamba, and to the south towards Mto Porwe from the landward creek side, makes intertidal survey very difficult. The furthest point reached south are the cliffs at the southern end of Songo Mnara, where there are small landing places with pottery dated to 11th to 13th century. To the south of the cliffs the intertidal area of wave-cut limestone platform seaward, and mangrove swamp on mud and silt landward, remain to be archaeologically surveyed. This includes the boat channels used by some dhows at high tide approaching Kilwa.

Place-names derived both from charts and archaeological survey might also determine areas of previous occupation. For example, Waarabu Weusi near Mtumbu refers to an area
of Arab settlement, or Swahili who claim descent from Arabia. Some clue as to the purpose of the Mto Porwe entrance to Sangarungu Harbour may lie in one of the place names, Mkurulengamanunyu, for the landward creek in that lenga can mean ‘keep quiet’ or ‘not get in touch’, suggesting this was a secret entrance to Kilwa perhaps during Portuguese embargoes on Kilwa. This is reinforced in that this passage is not shown on the French maps (Figures 9, 11-12).

Water was a particular priority for vessels and the most important ports have wells nearby, either inside caves or stone-built wells. Here vessels would have stopped for supplies, possible repair of their boats as well as perhaps some minor trading. The maps and sailing directions reveal a series of possible stopovers or ports of call for trading ships to obtain food, water and effect repairs along the east African coast. To the north of Kilwa, these are often sand spits on islands where boats can land at high or low tide, including Pumbavu on Songo Songo and Kisimani Mafia. There is evidence to the south of Kilwa as well as Kiswere Village in Kiswere Harbour which has a navigable fresh-water stream, stone wells and food supplies. Conversely, water supplies at Mtumbu are poor, but it still became important in the 19th century perhaps in connection with the slave trade. The northern approach to Kiswere Harbour includes the 13th- to 15th-century settlement of Mitimiru, and a series of caves used as sources of water are found between Kiswere and Pande. Roanga has a 15th-century mosque, a stone house, and three tombs have been recorded: boats in the 19th century were able to stop there for supplies from the village.

The 1775 French chart refers to Morice Island as the Isle of Goats suggesting supplies there, while Pierre Brulier (burnt rock) is presumably a reference to lime-making, lime being a resource that was traded along the coast. The importance of water to the seafarers is again highlighted in that wells are shown on the chart in Kilwa Kisiwani Port. Furthermore, areas to be entered only if necessary are also marked such as Baye des Cousins (Bay of Mosquitoes).

Conclusion
The descriptions of the coast provided by 18th- and 19th-century sailors and chart-makers with particular regard to navigational features, port approaches, possible dangers, favoured anchorages, and availability of supplies, are all of interest in their own right. However, they also provide a valuable indication of potential sites for maritime archaeological research, for instance dive sites in the vicinity of anchorages, or routes to those anchorages, in view of the possible foundering of vessels or jettisoning of ballast and damaged goods. They also point to locations away from the main trading and political centre of Kilwa which were visited by ships on passage for the purpose of re-provisioning or for more localised trade. Such sites provide the possibility of both on-shore artefactual evidence, as well as materials in the inter-tidal and sub-tidal zones. The archaeological work already conducted in the inter-tidal and immediate coastal areas at many of the sites noted in the charts and records confirm settlement and economic activity in the medieval period. Nonetheless, not all areas have been reached, while only cursory examination has been undertaken of the potentially revealing sub-tidal zone in the many anchorages surrounding Kilwa Kisiwani,
the central focus of the medieval sultanate, and the likely repository of significant insights into its history.

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_____ *Sheet IX: The East Coast of Africa.* Surveyed 1824 by Captain A.T.E. Vidal and the officers of the HMS Barracouta and Albatros under the orders of Captain W.F.W Owen. Chart 662, 1828.


Wharton, W.J.L. *Sheet IX: Kilwa Point to Zanzibar Channel.* Surveyed 1874 by Commander W.J.L. Wharton and the officers of the HMS Shearwater. Chart 662, 1876.

_____ *Kilwa Kisiwani.* Surveyed 1877 by Commander W.J.L. Wharton and the officers of the HMS Fawn. Soundings from German Government chart of 1903. Chart 661, 1903.

_____ *Channels between Kilwa Point (Ras Tikwiri) and North Mafia Channel.* Based on Wharton on HMS Shearwater and Fawn (1875-76) and German Government Charts of the Rufiji Delta. 1916. German chart (Hoffman) 1886. Chart 1032.

Global History, East Africa and the Classical Traditions.

Section 3

Africa and Visual Culture
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On March 19, 1828, Havana, Cuba inaugurated a civic memorial for the east side of the city's Plaza de Armas. The event climaxed a three-day festival officially designated to honor the founding of the city and the name-day of Spain's Queen Maria Josepha, wife of his Majesty Ferdinand VII (r. 1813-29, 1833). The work commemorated the site of a symbolic ceiba tree, under which the Spanish conquistadors established Havana in the sixteenth century according to eighteenth-century sources. The colonial press corroborated this narrative and hailed the memorial as “the ultimate proof of [the city's] refined loyalty and of its never contradicted patriotism.”

Cuban military engineer José María de la Torre designed a classicizing building, known as El Templete, to house three history paintings visually narrating the foundation story of the site (Figure 1). French expatriate artist Jean-Baptiste Vermay (c. 1786-1833), a former student in Paris of Jacques-Louis David, painted the three works for the building's small interior space. The press affirmed that this exquisite work of fine art indicated Havana's ascendancy as a modern city, of its elevation to “the rank of the most cultured towns of Europe.”

Figure 1. Antonio María de la Torre. El Templete. 1827-8. Havana, Cuba. Photograph © Paul Niell.

1 “la última prueba de su lealtad y de su patriotismo nunca desmentido, ” Diario de la Habana, 16, Mar. 1828, p. 1.
2 “al rango de los pueblos más cultos de Europa, ” see “Alguna cosa más sobre el nuevo monumento erigido en la plaza de Armas, ” Diario de la Habana, 27, Mar. 1828, p. 1.
On March 19, 1828, Havana, Cuba inaugurated a civic memorial for the east side of the city’s Plaza de Armas. The event climaxed a three-day festival officially designated to honor the founding of the city and the name-day of Spain’s Queen Maria Josepha, wife of his Majesty Ferdinand VII (r. 1813-29, 1833). The work commemorated the site of a symbolic ceiba tree, under which the Spanish conquistadors established Havana in the sixteenth century according to eighteenth-century sources. The colonial press corroborated this narrative and hailed the memorial as “the ultimate proof of [the city’s] refined loyalty and of its never contradicted patriotism.”

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Figure 1. Antonio María de la Torre. El Templete. 1827-8. Havana, Cuba. Photograph © Paul Niell.

Scholars on Cuban art and cultural history have viewed El Templete primarily in terms of style, as the inaugural work of neoclassicism on the island. Yet, one area that could use further development is the symbolic and narrative complexity of this work in a late colonial social setting. El Templete synthesized diverse international and local forms, creating an expression that constructed multiple narratives about the Spanish empire, the island’s population, and Cuba’s colonial situation in the early nineteenth century and in an effort to maintain power and control. To deal with such imperial-local tensions and multiple meanings, the work can be considered a complex, multi-vocal narrative construction and as such related to Mikhail Bhahktin’s notion of dialogism. Multiple voices, including those of African slaves and their Creole descendants, coalesced in a work intended to narrate the historiography and social order of the late colonial city on its main public plaza.

As such, El Templete underscores the persistent importance of the plaza in defining the colonial body politic in the nineteenth century as well as a dialectics of colonial urban space. This essay contends with this multiplicity of meaning and draws attention to the African elements at work in this colonial monument, while outlining the mechanisms used to reinforce hegemony over populations of African descent.

**Re-inventing a Civic Tradition**

Designers positioned El Templete on the east side of Havana’s Plaza de Armas, an urban space reconstructed by Bourbon administrators in the late eighteenth century in response to the British occupation of the island in 1762. The Captain General Marqués de la Torre had ordered the plaza’s transformation in 1771, according to the 2:3 (width: length) ratio in the Spanish Laws of the Indies. The Bourbons reasserted imperial order with the addition of the Palace of the Second-in-Command, 1771-76 and the Palace of the Captain General, 1776-91, which met at right angles along the north and west sides respectively (Figure 2).

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Fifty years later, El Templete joined the Bourbon palaces on the plaza, erected for the eastern side on the alleged site of the city’s foundation. Eighteenth-century Cuban historians situated this town-founding event under a tropical ceiba tree, in situ allegedly when the Spanish conquistadors arrived in the early sixteenth century. Historian José Martín Félix de Arrate (1701–65) wrote:

Until the year 1753, a robust and leafy ceiba was conserved [in the Plaza de Armas] which, according to tradition, at the time of the colonization of Havana the first mass and cabildo were celebrated under its shadow, news that the...governor of this plaza, tried to preserve for posterity, by arranging to erect on the same site a memorial stone to preserve this memory.9

When the tree compromised the fortification wall in 1753, the captain general ordered it removed and replaced by a memorial in 1754. This work, a stone pillar with curvilinear volutes emulating the tree’s buttressed trunk, accompanied three ceibas planted to flank the pillar on three sides.10 This attempt to monumentalize the tree suggests that the ceiba existed as a publically acknowledged symbol of the city associated with place and history.

9 “Hasta el año de 1753 se conservaba en ella robusto y frondosa la ceiba en que, según tradición, al tiempo de poblarse la Habana se celebró bajo su sombra la primera misa y cabildo, noticia que pretendió perpetuar a la posteridad el Mariscal de Campo D. Francisco Cagigal de la Vega, gobernador de esta plaza, que dispuso levantar en el mismo sitio un pardon de piedra que conserve esta memoria.” José Martín Félix de Arrate, Llave del Nuevo Mundo: antemural de las Indias Occidentales (La Habana: Cubana de la UNESCO, 1964), pp.77-78.

10 Roberto Segre, La Plaza de Armas, pp.20-23.
The addition of another tree monument in 1828 reveals concerns for civic reform. A municipal act of 1819 records the Havana’s cabildo’s assessment that the ceiba tree pillar had been suffering from neglect. Members of the cabildo envisioned a new memorial to enclose the vertical monument with a palisade fence. Upon completion, this second memorial incorporated the older baroque pillar and modified its historical associations. Mixtilinear moldings in the cornice of the 1828 monument paralleled the baroque aesthetics of the earlier work and thus reveal a local translation of international neoclassicism. Hence, as the colonial press positioned El Templete within a framework of tastefulness, compelling the reader to regard the multiple stylistic tendencies in the monument as similarly tasteful.

For the monument’s architectural form, designers appropriated the model and cultural authority of the freestanding Greco-Roman temple (Figure 3). In the portico, de la Torre appropriated a mixture of elements taken from the Tuscan and Roman Doric orders, which could have been found in the treatises of Roman architect Vitruvius and Italian Renaissance architect and theorist Andrea Palladio. Vitruvius and Palladio had been translated into Spanish editions in the late eighteenth century and used at Madrid’s Royal Academy of San Fernando, which opened in 1752. In Havana, members of the Patriotic Society owned such treatises and made them quasi-public through the Society library, which opened in the 1790s.


11 “February 5, 1819, se dio cuenta de un informe del Sr. Francisco Filomeno sobre la Petición hecha por el Sr. Bonifacio García, cuyos originales están unidos al acta y copiado dicho informe dice así,” in the notes of Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, La Biblioteca del Museo de la Ciudad de La Habana.
12 See Renovacion, Crisis, Continuismo: La Real Academia de San Fernando en 1792 (Madrid: Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, 1992).
Spanish regidor Francisco Rodríguez Cabrera provides a lucid account of El Templete in the *Diario* of March 16, 1828, informing us of the original positioning of the Vermay paintings. Inside the memorial, on the northern wall, “The First Cabildo,” completed c. 1827, depicts the Spanish conquistadors holding the first town council meeting of Havana under the ceiba tree (Figure 4). Vermay positions a figure of the Spaniard Diego Velázquez, who led the conquest of Cuba, in a central location beneath the tree. Standing before the trunk of the ceiba, Velázquez motions to a group of Spanish men to his left who converse over town plans, royal orders, and/or maps. Life-sized, naturalistic figures, and realistic spatial illusion engaged nineteenth-century audiences in an attempt to involve the colonial community in public education.

To the right of the “First Cabildo,” against the eastern interior wall, the viewer encounters the much larger, “Inauguration of El Templete,” completed c. 1828-9 (Figures 5-6). Vermay based this massive scene compositionally on Jacques-Louis David’s monumental canvas for Napoleon, “The Coronation of the Emperor and Empress,” 1805-7, oil on canvas, which Vermay exhibited alongside in the Parisian Salon of 1808. The inauguration scene contains portraits of Spanish officialdom, senior clergy, members of the Bourbon public, and other civic elites. The image moves the observer from a contemplation of sixteenth-century events depicted in a relatively low light, to a much brighter scene of the nineteenth-century plaza, thus juxtaposing past and present.

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The Cagigal pillar, one of the Bourbon palaces, and the sixteenth-century Castillo are clearly visible in the background, as communocentric references to local architectural features. In the center of the painting and the represented crowd stands the figure of Captain General Francisco Dionisio Vives (r. 1824-32), among members of his family including his young daughters.

Figure 5. Detail: Captain General Francisco Dionisio Vives. Jean-Baptiste Vermay. The Inauguration of El Templete. 1828. Oil on canvas. Photograph © Paul Niell. Permission of the OHCH.

Further to the right, Bishop Espada presides over the mass on an elevated platform, close to El Templete, among the city’s ecclesiastical authorities. Having removed his miter and dressed in pontifical vestments, the bishop smites the monument with incense and thus narrates the contribution of religious as well as secular authority to public works. Espada’s actions create a directional line that guides the viewer’s eye to the right towards Vermay’s scene, “The First Mass,” c. 1827 (Figure 7). Situated on the southern interior wall, this work mirrors “The First Cabildo” on the wall opposite in form, iconography, and composition. An image of the ceiba tree again provides a setting for a group scene, echoing the prestigious trabeated architecture of El Templete in its post and lintel configuration. A priest, identified by the colonial press as Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas, stands on axis with the ceiba’s trunk and parallels the clerical presence of Bishop Espada in the previous scene of the inauguration, thus providing him with a civic ancestor and thereby elevating his status.16

16 Bartolomé de las Casas (1484-1566) was the sixteenth-century Spanish Dominican priest known for his advocacy on behalf of Native Americans to King Charles V. See Bartolomé de las Casas, Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies (London: Penguin, 1999). Las Casas was included as an indispensable actor in eighteenth-century Cuban historiography. See Arrate, Llave del Nuevo Mundo, 22 among others; Pedro Agustín Morell de Santa Cruz, Historia de la isla y catedral de Cuba (Havana: Imprenta “Cuba intelectua,” 1929); and Antonio José Valdés, Historia de la isla de Cuba, y en especial de La Habana (La Habana: Comisión Nacional Cubana de la UNESCO, 1964).
In response to the actions of the priest, the Spanish figures kneel and venerate the altar in foreshortened positions. The conquistador Diego Velázquez reappears, and this time, shepherds a group of Amerindians into the Christian faith. The indigenous figures in this painting mirror the Native woman and child in the bottom left of “The First Cabildo” on the opposite wall. Taken together, the three paintings form an allegory of civilization over barbarism, positing the Amerindians on the flank of this almost continuous line of Spanish and Creole figures between the three works.

The Afro-Cuban Sacred Ceiba

One of the most important, yet under studied aspects of such Cuban and Caribbean civic works as El Templete are the subaltern cultural landscapes of which they partake and attempt to reconfigure. I contend that enslaved Africans, their Creole descendants, and *libertos* (free people of African descent) co-constructed the Cuban colonial landscape producing transcultural spaces of social significance. We can suppose that disparate audiences could have made quite different meanings of the 1828 monument on the plaza, if we consider the importance of the ceiba tree as the central symbol and referent at its heart. The ceiba functioned ritually and symbolically in alternate, yet entangled colonial cultural landscapes for African American populations in Cuba, a reality documented both during and after Spanish colonial rule in Cuba. Scottish botanist James Macfadyen (1800–1850), a member of the Linnaean society of London, recorded the reception of ceiba trees by individuals of African descent on the neighboring island of Jamaica in the early nineteenth century:
Perhaps no tree in the world has a more lofty and imposing appearance….Even the untutored children of Africa are so struck with the majesty of its appearance that they designate it the God-tree, and account it sacrilege to injure it with the axe; so that, not infrequently, not even fear of punishment will induce them to cut it down. Even in a state of decay, it is an object of their superstitious fears: they regard it as consecrated to evil spirits, whose favour they seek to conciliate by offerings placed at its base.17

This colonial-era observation from the European scientist mirrors twentieth-century findings in Cuba. The ethnographic work of Cuban-born Lydia Cabrera (1899-1991) suggested that twentieth-century practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions revered the ceiba tree as the “iroko,” a West African tree god.18 Santeros and santeras, Santería priests and priestesses reported to Cabrera that they considered the planting of a ceiba to be a potent religious act. They always asked permission from the gods before crossing its shadow, refused to cut the tree down for fear of offending powerful spirits, and frequently conducted rituals at the tree’s base by leaving offerings. These twentieth-century observations form a continuum with the nineteenth-century reports of Macfadyen in neighboring Jamaica.

The connective thread of these beliefs is the notion of what Afro-Cubans call aché (known to the West African Yoruba as asé), a spiritual matrix that binds all matter on earth. The ceiba tree is believed to be a powerful source of aché in Cuba and to sometimes be inhabited by intermediary deities known as orichas. Patterns of African American tree veneration in Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, and Brazil (all former sites of plantation slavery) suggests a pan-Diasporic transcultural process by which American landscapes, particularly certain trees, were interpreted through West African memory and recast to meet the spiritual needs of incoming slaves and their Creole descendants.19 Havana’s Bishop Espada in the early nineteenth century recorded various aspects of African religious practice in detail in his pastoral visit of Cuba in 1804 suggesting the inflection of Catholic orthodoxy with African significations.20 Local authorities could have known of the ceiba tree’s significance for populations of African descent, especially given increased surveillance under Bourbon administrators. Viewed in this light, El Templete becomes a much more complex multivocal sign, recasting the ceiba in visual terms of religious orthodoxy and official high culture before multiple audiences who made different meanings of the tree and its relation to other signifying elements.


Sugar, Slavery, and Public Representation

If the presence of the ceiba tree in the monument, real and represented, served to integrate populations of African descent, the three history paintings inside worked to identify ideal social niches for whites and blacks. Jean-Baptiste Vermay renders only two members of Cuba’s extensive African and Afro-Cuban population in the fictive space of the large inauguration painting. These include a morena (African female), who kneels with a group of white women in the bottom left corner of the great canvas, and a pardo (mixed race – African and European male), a member of the local militia, standing next to Captain General Vives. One of the white women turns and gives the morena a harsh glance and motions with her right hand, as though to demonstrate appropriate behavior at the event (Figure 8). The monument thus legitimates master-slave relationships by framing this paternalistic vignette by classicism and within history painting, providing a nineteenth-century link to the civilizing theme established in the scenes of Amerindian conversion in the first mass and cabildo paintings.

Figure 8. Detail: Afro-Cuban Woman. Jean-Baptiste Vermay. The Inauguration of El Templete. 1828. Oil on canvas. Havana, Cuba. Photograph © Paul Niell. Permission of the OHCH.

These images also allude to social issues of race and marriage, shaped by the Real Pragmática de Matrimonios of 1776 and the enforcement of marriage policy in Cuba by the Church and State. Verena Martinez-Alier, Marriage, Class and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society, second edition (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1989).
In the center of the painting, the figure of the pardo militiaman stands in military uniform near Captain General Vives (Figure 9). The upright posture of the pardo echoes that of the colonial governor and thus embodies the discipline of the colored militias and the subservient nature of Cuba’s militarized black population. Thus, the Vermay paintings visually interceded in what whites perceived as the Africanization of the island. The demand for slave labor for sugar production combined with the Spanish system of coartación (slave self-purchase) dramatically increased the number of people of African descent in Cuba in the early nineteenth century. The census figures of 1827 on confirmed this demographic change as they revealed, to the deep concern of elite whites, that the African/Afro-Cuban population had eclipsed the whites.


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24 For “Western” Cuba, the area including Havana, the Cuban census of 1827 gave the following figures: Whites (Male: 89,526; Female: 75,532), Free Colored (Male: 21,235; Female: 24,829), Slaves (Male: 125,888; Female: 72,027), Total: 408,537. See Ibid, p.133.
The rise of the African population triggered white concerns about racial mixing. The dependency of the Cuban elite on a family’s *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) to maintain social standing likewise became a serious concern of the Church and State on the island.\(^{25}\) While Church officials allowed mixed marriages among the races out of spite for “concubinage,” the Spanish State sought to prevent such unions, as they tended to enrage the nobility and destabilize social order. There were also the fears of slave insurrection. The Aponte conspiracy of 1812 exposed both slaves and “free people-of-color,” including former militiamen, as being involved in plots against the State and the Creole oligarchy.\(^{26}\)

The location of Vermay’s figures of African descent in the inauguration painting combined with the overarching and interconnected themes of Divine Providence and “enlightened” natural order, visualized and naturalized social boundaries in an increasingly heterogeneous and contentious colonial society. Social ordering had been the primary theme of the eighteenth-century *casta* painting genre in colonial New Spain.\(^{27}\) Yet, while site of display is relatively unknown for much of the *casta* series, *El Templete* provides us with a concrete urban setting in which viewers regarded images of race within an allegory of civilization over barbarism in the context of a town founding myth.

**Classicism, Buen Gusto, and the Public**

The authorization of dominance over populations of African descent through the visual arts is an aspect that needs more research in Cuban and Caribbean studies. We have some insight on how communities of buen gusto (good taste) and the elite proprietors of the fine arts shaped such communities through printed media. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Havana launched a variety of regular publications informing an elite group of subscribers on economic, political, social, and cultural developments on the island, within the Spanish empire, and abroad.

Captain General Luis de la Casas\(^{28}\) inaugurated a bi-weekly in the 1790s, the *Papel Periódico de La Habana*, Havana’s first colonial newspaper. By the late 1820s, the city incorporated the daily known as the *Diario de La Habana*.\(^ {29}\) The Havana elite, composed of Creoles (island-born individuals of Hispanic descent) as well as Peninsulars (individuals born in Spain), exerted influence over these publications through local associations. In 1792, twenty-seven Cuban *hacendados* (landowners) chartered the Economic Society of the Friends of the Country of Havana, also known as the Patriotic Society.

The organization allowed a certain degree of Creole agency in Spanish policy-making and used the colonial press to educate subscribers on “useful” improvements and to propagate the organization’s annual activities and achievements through occasional *Memorias* or society

\(^{25}\) Martinez-Alier, *Marriage, Class and Colour.*

\(^{26}\) Childs, *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion.*


\(^{28}\) As an administrative unit, Cuba was a captaincy general, governed by a senior Spanish official known as a captain general.

reports.\textsuperscript{30} In \textit{memorias}, \textit{papeles}, and \textit{diarios}, frequent discourses appear, instructing the reader about the criteria for fine art and for living with buen gusto.\textsuperscript{31}

The early nineteenth-century elite of Havana considered buen gusto a form of aesthetic discernment, which translated into a form of social power tied to both knowledge and perception. The \textit{Papel Periódico} shaped aesthetic expectations by publishing poetry read and discussed at \textit{tertulias}, or literary gatherings, designed to elevate attendees to the “rank of good taste.”\textsuperscript{32} Articles appear on refined social behavior and revised habits, instructing readers on “the modern taste.”\textsuperscript{33} When El Templete was inaugurated, the \textit{Diario de La Habana} praised the work for its tastefulness and for its distance from \textit{el género gótico} (the gothic sort), a vague reference to baroque and hispano-mudéjar styles.\textsuperscript{34}

In the \textit{Diario}, El Templete emulated \textit{los templos antiguos} (the old temples) by its beauty, decency, solidity, exactitude, and perfection.\textsuperscript{35} The \textit{Diario} assured its readers that the paintings within the monument would educate future generations on the city’s foundational moments with “taste, propriety, and erudition.”\textsuperscript{36} This appraisal of classicism within the framework of 1820’s tastefulness in Havana had evolved from early discourses informed by late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century transformations. Bishop Juan José Díaz de Espada y Landa, an important patron of reformed aesthetics in Havana was born in Spain’s Basque country in 1756 and educated at the progressive University of Salamanca.\textsuperscript{37} He arrived to Havana in 1802 and funded various projects, including the 1806 General Cemetery of the city, a work incorporating severe classical vocabularies and rigorously conceived geometric space.

\textsuperscript{38} Espada also mandated that baroque altarpieces in the city’s cathedral be replaced by classicizing substitutes with freestanding classical revival columns, gilded urns, and


\textsuperscript{31} The Royal Economic (or Patriotic) Society of the Friends of the Country of Havana published \textit{Memorias de la Real Sociedad Económica de La Habana} intermittently, including the years 1817 and 1827-28. For a close account of the Society’s activities and publications, see Izaskun Álvarez Cuartero, \textit{Memorias de la Ilustración: las Sociedades Económicas de Amigos del País en Cuba (1783-1832)} (Madrid: Real Sociedad Bascongada de los Amigos del País, 2000).

\textsuperscript{32} “el rango del buen gusto,” \textit{Papel Periódico de La Habana}, 28 Sept., 1800.

\textsuperscript{33} “el gusto moderno,” \textit{Papel Periódico de La Habana}, 15 Feb., 1801.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Diario de la Habana}, 16 Mar., 1828.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.


unbroken pediments. The promotion of classicism came also from the Patriotic Society of Havana, which petitioned for an academy of drawing as early as the 1790s. In 1818, Spanish Intendente and Patriotic Society Director Alejandro Ramírez founded the “Academy of Drawing and Painting of San Alejandro” in Havana and appointed French expatriate artist Jean-Baptiste Vermay to serve as the school’s director. Ten years later, Vermay executed the history paintings for El Templete, a work paid for largely by Bishop Espada. Thus the commission of the work in 1828 fulfilled the representational desires, artistic ambitions, and social hegemony of an associated group of Spanish and Creole individuals that made connections between classicism and buen gusto.

A Spectacle of Cuban Loyalty and the Commemoration of Local Ancestry

According to the press, El Templete served to teach the history of the city in the interest of reform. Designed, built, and decorated during some of the most politically turbulent years for imperial Spain, El Templete reinforced a sense of place, but one with ambiguous and debatable geo-political boundaries. The Spanish empire’s loss of political control in the hemisphere due to the independence wars of the mainland in the 1820s made Cuba one of Spain’s last remaining colonial possessions in the Americas by 1828. Indeed, El Templete’s inauguration came at roughly the same moment when Peninsulars were being expelled from Mexico.

To construct an image of imperial power, stability, and imperial solidarity, the Spanish Captain General Vives utilized the plaza, the monument, and various visual tools to stage the inauguration of El Templete as a testament to Cuban loyalty. From March 18-20, 1828, the governor ordered the plaza cleared of carriages for the ceremony. Authorities compelled private residents with houses on the plaza to adorn their balconies and windows with decorative curtains. Stages and platforms were constructed along with triumphal arches, paintings, and plaques bearing text and image. The imperial rhetoric surrounding the inauguration conditioned public readings of the monument’s imagery. Seeing Vives, for example, at the center of the inauguration painting as the island’s governor recalls the image of the island’s first governor, Velázquez, in the painting of the first cabildo. The seemingly identical wooden staff, held by each figure, further encourages this connection.

The providential overtones of the sixteenth-century scenes made this Spanish rulership of the island seem divinely ordained. Articles in the colonial press situated El Templete within a contemporary narrative of independence war. The press vehemently disowned the rebellious colonials of the mainland as:

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39 For Espada’s architectural transformations of the cathedral, see Weiss, La arquitectura colonial cubana, 345.
40 Álvarez Cuartero, Memorias de la Ilustración, p.128.
41 For sources on the Academy of San Alejandro in Havana, see Corporación Nacional del Turismo, La pintura colonial en Cuba: exposición en el capítulo nacional, marzo 4 a abril 4 de 1950 (Havana, 1950); Pérez Cisnero, Características de la evolución de la pintura en Cuba; Rigol, Apuntes sobre la pintura y el grabado en Cuba; de Juan, Pintura y grabado coloniales cubanos.
43 Descriptions of the festivities are given in the Diario de la Habana, 16 Mar. 1828 and in Mariano Gómez, El Primer Centenario del Templo, pp.14-21.
those denaturalized children of our country, that instead of offering worthy monuments as this of virtue and enlightenment, launch themselves into the arena, insulting those to whom they owe their civilization and their glory.\textsuperscript{44}

The anti-revolutionary rhetoric in the \textit{Diario} cast imperial solidarity as the product of reason and a political disposition worthy of classicism, while Spain counted only Cuba and Puerto Rico among its American possessions by 1828. El Templete’s inauguration not only sensationalized Cuban loyalty, but also fictionalized Spain’s ability to rule in the hemisphere.

Amidst the pro-Spanish signifiers and performances surrounding the memorial, however, imperial references coexisted, if tensely, with symbols of things Cuban. A sense of Cuban place and identity grew amongst the seventeenth and eighteenth-century elite, as a connection to the land and local history. In 1820, English traveler Robert Jameson described the situation:

In Cuba...the Hacendados, or great proprietors, are, almost generally, natives of the island; their ancestors were born there; it is their country, in the full sense of the word, in which they live and in which they hope to die. The circumstance of there being twenty-nine resident nobility, many of whom never saw Spain, will show how much more domiciliated the proprietary is here than in our islands.\textsuperscript{45}

Historian Dolores González- Ripoll Navarro has argued that as sugar production was expanded in Cuba in the early nineteenth century, the Creole and Peninsular elite created a colonial public sphere generated by a shared interest in education, readership of the colonial press, membership in civic associations, and the patronage and consumption of fine and decorative arts.\textsuperscript{46} These developments generated not only a sense of Cuban place, but also a will to inscribe place into the narrative of classicism and Spanish national antiquity.

Robert Jameson’s observation about the link between Cuban hacendados and their ancestors by virtue of birthplace recalls the Spanish conquistadors. While Creole elites claimed direct descent from the early Spanish conquerors to acquire prestigious titles, the Bourbons had stripped Havana’s cabildo, dominated by Creoles since early colonial times, of the right to distribute public lands among local residents in 1729.\textsuperscript{47} If read in a different way, perhaps by the same audience, El Templete’s suggestion of the conquistadors’ natural right to rule validated not Spanish imperial authority, but Creole entitlement to land and independent self-action. Such slippages in late colonial signification complicate imperial and local readings of this monument and were embedded in the negotiations of late colonial identities in Havana.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} Robert Francis Jameson, \textit{Letters from the Havana, during the year 1820 containing an account of the present state of the island of Cuba, and observations on the slave trade} (London: Printed for John Miller, 1821), p.8.
\textsuperscript{46} González-Ripoll Navarro, \textit{Cuba}.
\textsuperscript{47} Pérez, Jr., \textit{Cuba}, p.52.
Inventing a Cuban Antiquity

While El Templete carried a mix of imperial-local significations, some writers have claimed that political subversion guided the work. Fernando Ortiz, a scholar of Afro-Cuban culture, argued that Bishop Espada used the monument as a subversive statement. Ortiz posits that in his advocacy of Spanish constitutionalism, Espada resented Spanish King Ferdinand VII’s abolition of the Constitution of 1812 in 1823 and reinstatement of absolutist rule. Thus, the bishop, in his patronage of El Templete, sought to reference the Tree of Guernica in Spain’s Basque region and a similar classicizing structure that had been erected in its honor in 1826. The Basque tree became a site where Castilian royalty in medieval and early modern times met to swear an oath to respect Basque fueros (regional liberties). Ortiz saw this gesture as an effort on the part of the bishop to send a message to the Spanish state to likewise respect Cuban regional liberties. This interpretive possibility adds yet another layer to El Templete’s complexity as well as the need to consider the impact of revolutionary-era “Tree of Liberty” imagery, which was symbolic of natural rights in North American, French, and Haitian contexts.

While the Diario de La Habana suggested that El Templete evoked an antiquity comparable to that of the Aztec and the Inca, the indigenous population of Cuba left no stone architecture as a reminder of a heroic past. Thus monumentalizing the foundational ceiba tree could have served as a substitute for an antiquity that Cuba did not seem to have in comparison to New Spain or Peru. The combination of tree and temple in Havana, a trope of human inventive capacity in the work of French theorist Marc-Antoine Laugier, lent a deeper sense of cultural authenticity to the theme of town founding and Cuban agency, elevating Havana to the rank of European cities.

If Cuba’s history could be located in the island’s pre-Hispanic past, then Verma’s inclusion of Indian figures in the paintings of the first mass and cabildo merit evaluation in connection with the construction of Cuban antiquity. Eighteenth-century Cuban historians José Martín Félix de Arrate (1701-65) and Ignacio de Urrutia y Montoya (1735-95) examined the Indian figure in Cuba’s history. In Arrate’s Llave del Nuevo Mundo, the author recounts the indigenous origins of the island’s name, Cubanacán, along with the nature of Cuba’s pre-Hispanic inhabitants. On the character of the Indians of Cuba, Arrate writes, “they were of peaceful, docile, and bashful nature, very reverent with the superiors, [and] of

48 See Fernando Ortiz, “Bibliografía,” in Archivos del folklóre cubano. July-September, Havana, 1928 and Fernando Ortiz, La hija cubana del Iluminismo (Havana: Molina y Compañía, 1943). This theory has been sustained in Robert Segre, La Plaza de Armas de la Habana and Eduardo Torres-Cuevas, El Obispo Espada: Papeles (Havana: Imagen Contemporánea, 2002).
49 For the liberty tree in transatlantic context, see Alfred F. Young, Liberty Tree: Ordinary People and the American Revolution (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006).
51 Laugier identified a “primitive hut,” a primordial structure composed of trees first encountered by the Greeks, who imitated the example to produce the first architecture. The idea of the “primitive hut” thus reinforced Laugier argument and that of other eighteenth-century theorists that architecture should derive directly from the principles of nature. See Marc-Antoine Laugier, Essai sur l’architecture (Farnborough: Gregg Press, [1755] 1966). For the Indian figure in late nineteenth-century Mexican painting in relationship to notions of cultural authenticity and nationhood, see Stacie G. Widdifield, Resurrecting the Past: The Embodiment of the Authentic and the Figure of the Indian. In The Embodiment of the National in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1996), pp.78-121.
great ability and aptitude in the instructions of the faith.” Arrate co-opted discourses about the Indian from New Spain, drawing on such Spanish chroniclers and eighteenth-century writers as Antonio Solís, Antonio de Herrera, and Bernal Díaz del Castillo. He uses Juan de Torquemada’s Monarquía Indiana (1615) to give account of the first state of the world and barbaric peoples who conducted blood sacrifices. Arrate assures the reader, nevertheless, that the Indians of Cuba did not practice such diabolical rituals, instead living in “beautiful indolence.” Cuban historian Ignacio de Urrutia y Montoya’s Teatro histórico, published in 1789, also gave account of the Indians of Cuba. Urrutia had been educated in both New Spain and Havana and cites some of the same authors as Arrate, including Herrera and Torquemada, along with Gil González and José de Acosta. Urrutia likewise wrote of Cuba’s peaceful Indians, but focused considerable attention on their origins, citing Gregorio García’s Origen de los indios del Nuevo Mundo of 1607. He writes that the Indians of Cuba knew of a universal flood, that they possessed “principles of the true religion.” Historian Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra has argued that such eighteenth-century histories by Creole patriots can be viewed as a deliberate attempt to humanize the Indians of the Americas by suggesting that they were part of the biblical story of Genesis and thus easily converted to Christianity. If Indians were human, that is, descended from Adam and Eve, it validated Cuban history in the face of European spite for the idea of American civilization.

Locating the significance of El Templete as either a Spanish imperial or Cuban subversive statement creates a reductionist, binary understanding of the monument and this use of late colonial classicism. Rather local and extra-local forms and significations functioned together, co-opting the past to serve multiple representational needs in the present. African associations with sacred trees inflected the colonial cultural landscape of the Americas in ways that seem to condition the choice of representational elements in the official arts of colonial Cuba, even monuments on the central plaza. While the use of the plaza to visualize public history through a monument served as a gesture to democratized civic belonging, the work simultaneously circumscribed buen gusto as the possession of the white elite. Nevertheless, the competing claims to Cuba’s colonial landscape, given the multiple populations, including the Africans and their Creole descendants that composed it over time engendered a negotiated and contested notion of Cuban place as attached to sites of civic memory.

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52 Arrate, Llave del Nuevo Mundo, p.18.
54 Ignacio de Urrutia y Montoya, Teatro histórico, jurídico y político militar de la isla Fernandina de Cuba y principalmente de su capital la Habana (Havana: Publicación de la Comisión Nacional Cubana de la Unesco, 1963), p.90.
55 Ibid.
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Patterns of Contact

With an emphasis on design,
Patterns of Contact - Designs from the Indian Ocean World: A Curator’s View

Carol Kaufmann

Background

“Patterns of Contact: Designs from the Indian Ocean World” held in 2014 at Iziko Museum, Cape Town, presented a rare and exciting opportunity for public and private collections to showcase rare objects depicting the visual culture of the early colony of south east Africa and how it was influenced by its contact with the Indian Ocean world. This was done through the exhibits and background stories of works of art, rare maps, ceramic and porcelain objects, silks, cotton textiles, highly-prized pieces of furniture and cabinets. As a curator with an interest in the early colonial history and archaeology of the region of South- East Africa, and since Cape Town was selected as the World Design Capital in 2014, I welcomed this call to showcase some of our lesser known treasures within a new context.

The exhibition included unique artefacts from later Iron Age sites along the Limpopo Valley and further afield, representing the extensive interactions between Indian Ocean populations and southern Africa. These artefacts were provided by the Iziko Collections, the Cecil John Rhodes private collection housed in the Groote Schuur Estate Museum and the Collections of Parliament, all located in Cape Town. In addition, Dutch style oil and landscape paintings from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were on display from the Michaelis Collection at the Iziko Town House Museum.

The exhibition focused pertinently on the roots of design in South Africa resulting from the pre-colonial contacts with East Asia by way of the Arabian Peninsula and the Mediterranean World. At the same time, the exhibit was made current by including twenty-first century work of contemporary artists and designers, including the continuous screening of two short films – The Dutch Postal Stones of Madagascar (Tetteroo Media) and Standfast (Fort Rixon).

With an emphasis on design, Patterns of Contact exhibited the visual culture of descendant Cape populations highlighting the link between the origins of Cape Town’s cosmopolitan community and the long history of contact with the Indian Ocean World, primarily through the mercantile operations of European Colonial powers.

The Old and New Worlds came to know each other through voyages of discovery that began in the late 1500’s. With the formation of the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie or the VOC) in 1602, regular trading voyages to India and Batavia (modern Jakarta in Indonesia) commenced around the Cape of Good Hope. By 1652, a new vibrant and brutal cosmopolitan society had emerged that would greatly affect the southern tip of Africa, namely Cape Town.¹

A Chinese Map
Located adjacent to the introductory panel, was an imposing silk-painted hanging map carefully installed against an ox-blood red background. The significant aspect of this early map was the depiction of Africa by fourteenth century Chinese cartographers. The spectacular copy of the original was presented by the Government of China to the Parliament of South Africa on the occasion of Nelson Mandela’s inauguration as the first democratically elected president in 1994 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Installation view of Chinese Map.

The *Da Ming Hun Yi Tu, the Amalgamated Map of the Great Ming Empire*, by an unknown cartographer is dated circa 1389. The original map, from which this unique copy has been made, is housed in the First Historical Archive of China in Beijing and it is a derivative of an even earlier map dated 1320, which is no longer in existence. As an illustration of the Chinese Ming Empire (1368-1644), it is arguably the oldest world map in existence that accurately reflects the shape of the African continent. Given the vintage of the map, features such as the Nile River and the southern African escarpment are surprisingly recognizable. A great lake can be seen covering almost half of the continent’s land mass leading researchers to suggest that this view may have been based on an Arab legend that “further south from the Sahara Desert is a great lake, far greater than the Caspian Sea”. We now know that Lake Victoria is the largest African lake and is in fact only a fifth of the size of the Caspian Sea.

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2 The map is almost three metres high and more than three metres long.
Art and Islam at the Cape

The exhibition included an extremely rare prayer book in Arabic script known as the *quitab*, although it reads as phonetic Afrikaans, the new *Cape Creole* language. Wooden sandals, silken textiles, Malaysian and Cape silver and a set of Iznik-like patterned enamelled jugs inscribed in Kufic script are a reminder of the rich contribution of skilled artisans and their descendants, during the two centuries of migration.

The contrasting images of two mosques, a small mid-20th century landscape, *Mosque and houses* (n.d.) by Florence Zerffi (1882-1962), and a contemporary photograph of a richly staged view of a figure inside a mosque, *Untitled Portrait IV, Halaal Art* (2009) by brothers Hasan and Husain Essop (b.1985), are evidence of the well established presence of Islam at the Cape.

Above a brass bound Indonesian made VOC sea chest, and against an ox-blood wall was an oil portrait framed by fragments of an ornate Zanzibar door, entitled *The Golden Shawl (Portrait of Sheik Rashid 1945)* painted by South Africa’s most acclaimed artist, Irma Stern (1894-1966) while visiting Zanzibar in 1945 (Figure 2). At the time, she was unable to travel to her usual destination of Europe because as a German Jewess she was fearful of Nazi persecution. Being restless and bored with colonial life in Cape Town, she turned to East Africa for adventure and inspiration. Her lifelong fascination with Islamic art and culture had developed from her introduction to the so-called Cape “Malay” population of Cape Town, descendants of enslaved people and free blacks from South Asia.

Figure 2. Installation view with Batavian VOC sea chest, Cape made stinkwood chair (18thC) and portraits of Arab subjects in Zanzibar frames by Irma Stern (1895-1967).
Ceramics and Porcelain

In a small cabinet adjacent to the Chinese Map, shards of imported Asian ceramics, and strings of tiny colourful glass trade beads manufactured over a thousand years ago attest to southern Africa’s early participation in the global economy. Imported wares from the Mediterranean world and East Asia excavated from later Iron Age archaeological sites (AD 1200 – AD 1700) in the Limpopo Valley and Great Zimbabwe are believed to have been introduced by Omani Arab merchants active along the Swahili and Mozambique Coast in the late tenth century. Very small quantities of fine oriental ceramics occur in archaeological sites in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. The inference is that ceramic items were more likely to have been gifts to African chiefs as tokens of goodwill for bilateral trade.

However, the glass beads found in profusion at these sites were highly sought-after as prestige objects. They have been identified as originating from Egypt (Fustat), Persia, India and China and were likely exchanged for African products such as ivory, animal skins, salt, slaves and metals, including gold. At Mapungubwe, pale turquoise beads were crushed, heated and moulded in clay forms to make unique, larger beads. These distinctively shaped beads are the famous so–called “garden roller beads” of Mapungubwe.

For exhibition purposes, Chinese and Japanese export porcelain were presented in a glazed eighteenth century Cape baroque style armoire, manufactured purposefully for the living rooms (voorkamers) of wealthy citizens. VOC monogrammed porcelain is still prized today. At the centre of each dish is the monogram of the VOC or Dutch East India Company. Such dishes were ordered by the VOC from 1668 to the early 18th century and were for the exclusive use of company officials in Batavia, on board VOC ships and in Dutch settlements throughout Asia, and also the Cape.

Export porcelain was one of the most commonly traded commodities during the VOC period and was frequently used as ballast to weigh down the merchant ships passing around the Cape of Good Hope. All of the export porcelain on the exhibit was selected from the extensive Iziko Social History Collections (Figure 3).
The first time the Dutch saw porcelain in any significant quantities was in the form of booty captured from rival Portuguese trading vessels. The porcelain from the Portuguese ships (*carracs*) was of a type produced for export in Jingdezhen under the emperor Wanli who ruled from 1573 to 1619. It became known as *kraakporselein* since *kraak* was the Dutch word for the Portuguese *carracs*.

Chinese *kraakporselein* became popular and attracted an eager buying public. It was harder, thinner and more lustrous than the locally produced tin-glazed earthenware and stoneware, and also more decorative and colourful. Deep blue decorations were distributed over a pure white background. The introduction of porcelain, furthermore, came at a time when a growing wealthy middle class could afford, and wanted, a certain measure of luxury, thus ensuring a market for the porcelain despite its expense. *Kraak* style dishes and bowls featured prominently in Dutch still-life paintings, lending an exotic flavour to renditions of tables laden with luscious fruits and other treasured objects.
Textiles - Cotton and Dyes

Textiles were significant trade items and much in demand at the Cape during the period of Dutch government at the Cape (1652-1795). Indian cloth was key to this trade and the Dutch were quick to enter the lucrative market. Indian textiles were vastly used in the Asian exchange system to barter for spices from the eastern Indonesian islands of the Moluccas, ensuring a steady supply of prized condiments to the markets of India, West Asia, China and Europe.\(^5\)

Merchant ships on the return trip to Europe were obliged to break their journey at the bustling Cape port which developed into an important centre for the distribution of textiles. From eighteenth and nineteenth century household inventories, which were deposited in the Cape Archives, it appears that a thriving trade in textiles existed informally amongst residents of the settlement who used their front rooms (voorkamers) from which to conduct business.\(^6\) There are some examples of trade textiles from both the Dutch and British East India Company in the Iziko Social History Collection and the Costume Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Contemporary examples of hand loomed, indigo-dyed cotton fabrics, and patterned hand printed chintz made using eighteen century designs, artisanal techniques and block printing were obtained from India and loaned especially for the exhibition\(^7\) (Figure 4). The deep and versatile blue dye extracted from the Indigo plant native to India was in plentiful supply when competing European traders and fortune hunters raced to the Indian Ocean in the 1600’s.


\(^6\) The Cape Archives are a rich source of the domestic inventories of deceased estates, a legacy of the meticulous record keeping that was strictly enforced by the VOC administration. Further information was supplied by Dominic Touwen at a young designer’s panel discussion on 1 November 2014, at ISANG.

\(^7\) Kindly loaned by Dominic Touwen Textiles.
Indigo cultivation spread rapidly to Africa and the Americas accompanied by abusive labour practices that were required to sustain extremely large scale export cultivation. The lucrative textile market in Europe fuelled both the Atlantic and African slave trades, ironically creating a further market for both indigo and cotton as clothing for un-free classes working on the plantations and enterprises of the colonisers.

Maritime archaeologists at Iziko Museums have recently retrieved indigo cakes packed for export in woven rattan baskets, from the cargo of a homeward bound Dutch East India merchant ship wrecked along the South African Coast, providing tangible evidence of the trade in dye stuffs from Asia to Europe.

After 1600, when the rich resources of the Indian Ocean regions were more easily accessible to Europe and the colonised world, the new textiles and dye pigments became lucrative trading commodities. Access to blues, reds and yellows and their possibilities for secondary colours such as green and black, revolutionised fashion and costume in Europe and the New World. Cotton fabrics produced in India and Southeast Asia, absorbed the new, bright dye colours easily in contrast to the dull heavy linen and wool textiles in current use in Europe. The properties of cotton as a cheap, light and cool fabric combined with Indian, Chinese and Southeast Asian weaving techniques and designs transformed European and American tastes, fashions and markets up until the late 19th century. Colourful, affordable printed or embroidered cotton textiles became accessible to all classes and indeed democratised fashion.

The iconic tree-of-life design featured prominently as the focal motif of spectacular patterned, vividly coloured Indian cotton cloths known as palampores. The design was so popular with the European market that it was also replicated in silk embroidery on large scale textiles, an example being in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston collection. Intricately painted and mordant-dyed, palampores were manufactured on the Coramandel Coast of India for the export market during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Patterns were usually very complex and elaborate, depicting a wide variety of plants, flowers, and animals, including peacocks, elephants, and horses. Because a palampore was hand-created, each design is unique. They became highly valued and were used as prestigious coverings and drapes for tester beds.

Only the wealthiest classes could afford to buy such luxurious and expensive imported fabrics, therefore, the few examples that survive are often quite rare. Highly valued in the textile trade, palampores were primarily exported to Europe and to the Dutch colony at Batavia and what was then called Ceylon. However, to date, nothing similar has come to light at the Cape although it is possible they were used by high-ranking VOC officials here.

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8 Jaco Boshoff, Iziko Maritime Archaeology Department. Personal communication, 11 July 2014.
9 Elna Phipps, Global Colours; Dyes and Dye Trade. In Amelia Peck, Interwoven Globe, p. 120.
11 Surviving examples are to be found museum collections in Europe, USA and Great Britain.


Furniture

A selection of fine early colonial furniture showing Indian and Southeast Asian influences and timbers was selected from the Iziko Collections and loaned from the Groote Schuur Estate Collection. This included an early Indonesian VOC period ebony and rattan church chair with rich carving, a camphorwood VOC sea chest with brass escutcheons, an ivory inlaid document chest, a sandal wood cabinet on a stand with ornate brass fittings, circa 1700, a table casket in ebony and ivory, a Cape-made toletjie (spindle) chair in Cape yellowwood, a magnificent late 18th century armoire in Cape stinkwood, satinwood and East-Asian woods, a Cape-made glazed cabinet for displaying a suite of Chinaware and finally, Roccoco and Baroque style table and chair in stinkwood combined with Indian Ocean island timbers (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Unknown maker, Church chair; Ebony and rattan cane.Batavia 17th-18th Century. On loan from the Groote Schuur Collection.
Wood around the early Cape settlement was in short supply and had to be imported from as early as 1657. Across the Indian Ocean from countries like India, Batavia, Mauritius and Ceylon, came wood types such as teak, djati, amboyna, padouk, rosewood, sandalwood, satinwood and ebony while oak and pine were imported from Europe.\(^{12}\) The limited supply resulted in craftsmen using what they could get their hands on and this may have resulted in the striking combination of indigenous stinkwood and yellow wood with the exotic wood types. This feature became a distinctive quality of Cape furniture\(^ {13}\). There is evidence that Asian craftsmen were working as carpenters and were involved in furniture making at the Cape\(^ {14}\). Determining the skills and origins of specific Asian carpenters has proved to be rather difficult and exactly what influence they had on furniture production is thus uncertain\(^ {15}\).

**Origin of Some of the Exhibited Items**

Over 3,000 wrecks are recorded along the southern African coast and 300 wrecks alone, took place in Table Bay. Dangerous maritime conditions were a major risk to the success of colonial trading expeditions.\(^ {16}\) The Chinese export ceramics on show in the exhibition cabinet relating to the theme of maritime trade were excavated from two East Indian ship wrecks off the Cape Coast – the *Oosterland* and *Brederode*.

The former, built in Middleburg, Holland in 1685 was wrecked between Robben Island and Paarden Eiland in a storm in May 1697. The vessel had brought French Huguenots to the Cape of Good Hope on a previous voyage in 1688. However, nine years later on her return from Indonesia, she was wrecked in a storm. The richly-laden cargo included textiles, indigo, tropical woods, nuts, coconut shells, earthenware, porcelain and spices. The *Oosterland* was the first wreck to be archaeologically salvaged off Africa.\(^ {17}\)

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\(^{15}\) Nigel Worden, Ethnic diversity at the VOC Cape, In T. M. Eliëns, *Domestic Interiors*, p.137

Bibliography


Zanzibar was a British Protectorate for over seventy years, during which time many large-scale building projects were completed yet only rarely was a wholly classical style used. This is in some respects surprising: classical elements have long been recognised internationally as symbolic of state power. A rich and burgeoning body of scholarship explores the diverse ways in which colonial governments and architects employed the classical style across the British Empire, paying careful attention to local and imperial influences upon building design. The use of the classical is of course not limited to imperial governments: as Carla Bocchetti has noted, neoclassicism is ‘a global product’ that can offer ‘a legitimizing language to construct identity based on ideas of progress and cosmopolitanism’. Yet in early colonial Zanzibar (1890–1925 for the purposes of this essay), its use was the exception rather than the rule – the Post Office building (completed 1907) most explicitly using classical forms.

The overall preference for an eclectic style of building reflects the nature of British colonial rule in Zanzibar. With reference to precedents in India and elsewhere in Africa, this essay will discuss the use of the classical in the early colonial urban landscape. Architecture in East Africa is a vital source through which to understand the particular nature of colonial entanglement in the region. As Demissie writes, ‘colonial architecture and urbanism played pivotal roles in shaping the spatial and social structures of African cities during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’. This article will discuss how the use of particular forms and styles, or indeed the rejection of them, offers new perspectives of global connections in the British East African territories. Buildings constructed within the British Empire need to be understood within the longer history of British architecture from which they have often been excluded. But they are also important material evidence for historians when tracing imperial networks and influences. Chronologically, East Africa’s incorporation into empire and its rapid development, influenced by political and architectural models from earlier imperial expansion, make this region particularly significant.

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1 My thanks to Carla Bocchetti, the anonymous readers and colleagues at IFRA for their constructive comments in developing this article. It draws on archival research undertaken in 2009–12 supported by a small grant from the British Institute of East Africa and a doctoral studentship from the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council.


In order to analyse the implications and use of classical architecture in East Africa, this article focuses upon the buildings of John Sinclair, the administrator-architect who from the early 1900s to 1923 designed the majority of Zanzibar’s government buildings and several private projects, leaving an unmistakeable and enduring influence on Zanzibar’s townscape. Sinclair’s work is most notable for the development of his own version of an eclectic ‘Saracenic’ style, deemed appropriate for Zanzibar. Popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, eclecticism in the empire allowed references to be made to pre-colonial building traditions, creating a sense of continuity with local tradition and rulers of the past. Sinclair’s most celebrated and prominent buildings – the British Residency (completed 1903, then known as the Regency building) and the Peace Memorial Museum (opened 1925) – incorporate numerous local and international stylistic references. In contrast, the final building he worked on for East Africa, completed after he resigned as a British Resident in Zanzibar in 1923, was the McMillan Library in Nairobi in a purely classical style.

This article argues that we should not see this as Sinclair’s ‘progression’ towards a classical form, but rather use his buildings to illuminate the many competing factors which impinged upon the decisions made by architects in the colonies, determined by environment, urban space and ideas about local peoples, as well as formal stylistic concerns. Attention to the compromises and contingencies inherent in colonial architecture in tropical regions also allows us to move beyond Orientalist readings of such buildings. Recent scholarship on neoclassicism in the Indian Ocean region signals new developments in the ways in which use of this global style during the colonial era is being re-evaluate. The language of colonial architecture is ungrammatical to many architectural purists yet acts as a revealing historical source. As Mordaunt-Crook reminds us, by the early twentieth century the dilemma for architects was which, of the many styles available, was appropriate for each function to create the correct cultural and political associations.

Alongside these aspects of style and association in architecture, it is worth noting that fundamental elements of architectural history, such as tracing influences and flows of information and knowledge beyond local, regional or national boundaries, also underpin global history. Moves have been made by Ching, Jarzombek and Prakash with their major volume A Global History of Architecture to address the confluence of architectural

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history and global history. This work proposes not simply to expand the range of cultural architectural traditions which are commonly studied to reflect a global vision, but also to highlight connections beyond the local and to study how information and ideas travelled. Central to their project is the recognition that every local study is embedded within a range of cultural networks and political and economic forces which influence the outcome of building projects. By tracing the webs of influence upon architects and the impact they attempted to make with their designs, this article demonstrates how productive architectural evidence can be for global history.

A further factor of interest, which comes to light in these case studies, is how scholars deal with the ‘amateur’ in the colonial world. Depending on the size of the territory, colonial officers were expected to undertake a wide variety of tasks. Some did these willingly as hobbies and pastimes (such as collecting natural history or botanical specimens), but others were expected as part of their official duties to work in areas in which they had no qualifications or basic training. Such was the reality of working in small colonial territories. Isolation from the metropole could have several effects: lack of communication or experience of modern developments; responses to local and regional influences; and maintenance of values which might be considered outmoded in the imperial centre. Sinclair is a fascinating example in this respect. He undertook a few years of architectural training in London but would have been, by his own admission, unlikely to rise to a stellar position in the architectural profession in London. Yet he was given free reign and authority over design in Zanzibar for the first quarter of the twentieth century.

When analysing the works of unqualified architects such as Sinclair, we must therefore remain mindful of the fact that his motivations might be more instinctive than theoretical or structural. Until the 1920s when a professional architect, P. W. Harris, was employed in the Public Works Department, Sinclair’s voice in architectural matters was authoritative. Being ‘qualified’ to undertake the role therefore depended upon the network in which he operated. In the East African arena, Sinclair’s initial architectural training in the London offices of a major architect was sufficient to make him at times the best-qualified person in the region. Garth Myers13 highlights the significance of subsequent ‘amateur’ figures, such as Eric Dutton and Ajit Singh Hoogan, the latter of whom ultimately gained his qualifications, and both of whom worked across East Africa, including Zanzibar and Nairobi.

Hoogan in particular was a highly accomplished designer who effectively blended local, regional and global styles in a coherent architectural vision. While Sinclair’s buildings may lack the elegance of Hoogan’s work, they were influential. For example, Dutton invited Sinclair back to Zanzibar in 1946 to assist with designs for the new Mnazi Mmoja

14 Ibid, p. xi.
16 Ibid, p. 26
hospital and the new town hall in Ng’ambo. As Chief Secretary from 1942–52, Dutton wielded great influence over the urban development of Zanzibar as Sinclair had in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Here I seek to shed light on these early British architectural endeavours in colonial East Africa through an analysis of Sinclair’s eclecticism and selective use of classicism.

Tantalisingly, Sinclair’s memoirs (now in the Royal Commonwealth Society Library in Cambridge) include few references to the motivations for his building designs. This article therefore focuses upon the buildings themselves and upon newspaper accounts and government papers, where available, which refer to these edifices. Rather than give full, detailed architectural and historical examinations of individual buildings (although each merits attention), it takes the extant buildings of a single architect and supporting written material to consider the way in an international architectural style, such as the classical, was put to use in the new East African colonial territories. As a study of global history, it will discuss how different overlapping networks conveyed architectural influences and ideas between regions, and connected individuals and communities within colonial East Africa.

The classical in the Colonial World
During the mid- to late-nineteenth century, lively debates took place in Victorian architectural circles around the possible forms for new buildings in the expanding British Empire. The burgeoning demands of imperial rule required not only government facilities and law courts but also railway termini, post offices, churches and schools. In the first half of the nineteenth century, classical was the preferred style, in particular for official residences, establishing the British alongside the great Greek and Roman empires of antiquity, and the architectural elements themselves embodying ideas about order, authority and proportion. Thomas Metcalf’s ground-breaking *Imperial Gothic: Religious Architecture and High Anglican Culture in the British Empire, C. 1840-70* demonstrated the ideological and practical reasons behind the development of Neo-Saracenic architecture in India, a style which fused local and international influences, which some believed more appropriate for British rule over an Indian population. Metcalf makes clear, however, that there was no linear movement towards a hybrid Neo-Saracenic style away from the classical. Classical styles in the empire in fact enjoyed a significant revival in the early twentieth century, through the works of Herbert Baker and Edwin Lutyens. Similarly, in London, inconsistency in the development of a national or imperial style ensured that the Gothic revival, embraced in Augustus Pugin’s Houses of Parliament, was not universally supported. By 1900, Whitehall largely consisted of a series of classical government buildings. For certain particular types of building, however, Gothic revival styles prevailed. Through an empire-wide study of ecclesiastical architecture, Bremner explores how the Gothic was used within the expansion of the Anglican Church, paying

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16 Longair, *Cracks in the Dome*, p. 106
close attention to the local circumstances which governed the eventual form of individual churches within a global religious network.

The preference for classical architecture for European governments is rooted in the basic principles and virtues of this style – in particular that of proportion and order as well as its association with the ancient civilisations and empires of Greece and Rome. The orders of architecture, as outlined by Vitruvius and taken up and reinvigorated by Palladio in the sixteenth century, comprising series of elements with particular proportions and characteristics, had by the nineteenth century clear associations with the authority of ‘civilised’ nations supported by state power. Bremner uses the debates surrounding the construction of London’s Foreign and India Office to move beyond a simple ‘classical versus Gothic’ debate to demonstrate how closely architecture was influenced by ideas about British identity, ‘national/imperial self-perception’ and ‘the expression of national prestige’ in the mid-nineteenth century. These debates centred on the ‘appropriateness’ of style which is of particular concern when transposed to the varied territories of empire. Implicit in this was the comparison between the British Empire and those of Greece and Rome – an association forged in the classroom through classical education, a key influence upon many of Britain’s leading and influential politicians and intellectuals.

Such debates were then played out across the empire with varying responses to indigenous architecture, the environment, the type of imperial governance, and cultural and racial perceptions of inhabitants. Classical forms, for example, were eagerly taken up in the American colonies and the West Indies, where what became known as ‘American Colonial’ made clear reference to Palladian villas on the mainland of the Veneto and embedded an image of settler power and, critically, land ownership. The use of the classical across the European empires created a global architectural language understood by the many mobile people who lived across imperial territories. These intra-imperial communities did not just consist of European administrators, soldiers and sailors, but also indentured labourers, merchants, convicts and settlers. They too brought associations from elsewhere, and in the case of convicts and labourers, might well have actually constructed the buildings. As was clear in India, however, other styles and forms circulated. The convergence of the classical and other architectural styles in Zanzibar in the early twentieth century demonstrates how far local circumstances and networks determined the choice of style (for other examples in the informal empire.

Sinclair’s Training and Early Work in Mombasa
John Sinclair arrived in East Africa in the 1890s as an auditor for the Uganda Railway. Previously he had trained to be an architect, first in a practice near his home on the Isle of

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16 Bremner, *Imperial Gothic* pp.703-705. The chronology in particular is important for Bremner here: the mid-nineteenth century has at times been considered by historians as an ‘anti-imperialist’ age in contrast with the more jingoistic sentiments evident in the latter decades of the century.


20 Crinson, *Empire Building*. 

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Wight, and then in the offices of John Loughborough Pearson, a revered late-nineteenth
century London-based architect. Pearson was known to be a champion of the Gothic
revival and much of this work was ecclesiastical, most famously in the design for Truro
Cathedral. According to his memoirs, Sinclair enjoyed his work as a trainee architect, and
recorded his interest in the work of Richard Norman Shaw, an architect renowned for his
eclectic style of design. By 1900, eclecticism, in spite of its critics, was a widely recognised
style which fused elements from different forms and styles. The skill of Shaw and others
adopting this approach lay in cohering these elements in an accomplished and elegant
manner, as opposed to creating an architectural jumble. Sinclair, enthused by these modern
architects but ‘having little hope of emulating Sir Christopher Wren’, decided to take a job
in the newly established Audit Office for the Uganda Railway.

On his arrival in Mombasa, the local authorities soon discovered Sinclair had some
architectural training. He designed various plain buildings for the new law courts but more
influential in the development of his eclectic architectural style was his involvement in
the design for Mombasa Cathedral. Although the extent of Sinclair’s contribution to the
design cannot be precisely determined from available sources, the incorporation of narrow
trifoliate arches in groups of three, the narrowing rows of arches on ascending registers
on the transepts, and the crenellations were arrangements and features which he would
continue to use. His assessment in his memoirs was brief but revealing – he hoped it would
be ‘sufficiently Arabesque’ and not be out of place in ‘an old Arab town’. This somewhat
loose use of the term Arabesque (purely as an adjective related to the Arab community
rather than the more specific reference to the flowing lines present in Islamic art and
architecture) nonetheless is a clear indication that Sinclair viewed Swahili coast architecture
as predominantly Arabian in style. He blended a Christian cathedral with a large dome into
the citiescape through ornamentation, crenellations – visible on the many Arab palaces in
Mombasa – and details such as polylobed arches. Sinclair’s personal experience with the
world beyond Europe was at this point confined to his journey to Mombasa via the Suez
Canal. However, it is possible that he came into contact with the work of Owen Jones and
other ‘manuals’ of international styles, as well as the debates in The Builder and the Journal
of the Royal Institute of British Architects about which forms of architecture were suitable
in India and other colonies. Sinclair’s direct experience of the Arab world was formed
during his residence in East Africa, a cultural contact zone between Arabia, south Asia and
the African continent for millennia.

Sinclair’s Zanzibar Buildings
Sinclair took up the position of Vice Consul in Zanzibar in 1899. Within a few years, the
First Minister (and Regent during the minority of Sultan Ali bin Hamud), Alexander Rogers
commissioned him to build a magnificent new palace (Figures 1 and 2). This was the first

23 Longair, Cracks in the Dome, pp. 72-76.
26 Crinson, Empire Building, p.4 has discussed how British architects in the Near East had limited direct experience but
their ideas about ‘the East’ were formed in the imagination.
occasion on which Sinclair was given the freedom to develop his own architectural style. Although highly eclectic, he incorporated a greater range of classical features here than in any of his later ‘Saracenic’ buildings. Its function is critical to its design. Zanzibar had become a British Protectorate in 1890, with the Sultan’s Government led by a British First Minister and with other Europeans in leading positions. The British Agent and Consul General dominated foreign affairs and was answerable to the Foreign Office in London. This form of ‘dual government’ had functioned well during the 1890s when General Sir William Lloyd Mathews – long-term resident in the service of the Sultan since the 1870s – had acted as First Minister. Mathews’s death in 1900 and, soon after, the death of Sultan Hamud led to the appointment of Rogers and the commencement of the regency of the young Sultan. A new era of government therefore began. Rogers chose to usher in his appointment with the commission of his residence – the first major ceremonial building to be constructed since Sultan Barghash’s Beit al-Ajaib (House of Wonders) in the 1870s and 80s. It represented an opportunity for Sinclair to define a new architectural identity for the British Protectorate. In a society led by an Arab ruling minority, an elite which included Europeans and South Asians, and a majority Swahili population, there were a range of potential influences and audiences. British responses to Zanzibar’s architecture, inspired by the assessment of Richard Burton in the 1850s, in general lamented how regular its buildings were compared to typical ‘eastern cities’. As Burton wrote:

A Puritanical plainness characterized the scene – cathedrals without the graceful minarets of Jeddah, mosques without the cloisters of Cairo, turrets without the domes and monuments of Syria; and the straight sky-line was unrelieved except by a few straggling palms (Burton 1872, 32).

The Ibathi sect of Islam, to which most of its inhabitants adhered, advocated austere mosque design. The palaces of Arab merchants on Zanzibar’s seafront likewise lacked ornamentation. Sultan Barghash’s Beit al-Ajaib, built in the 1870s–80s, with its Indian-inspired verandahs and high clock tower broke with tradition in this respect. As British Resident in the late 1910s, Frederick Pearce wrote,

Built as it is on a low promontory, jutting out into the bluest of seas, it has every advantage of site. But alas! One looks in vain for the domes and minarets and clustered pinnacles which an eastern city should possess.

These prevailing ideas about the existing cultural heritage informed the British vision for Zanzibar town, and the resultant buildings can be viewed as an attempt to enhance the ‘eastern’ quality of the townscape.

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27 This design was heavily influenced by Sultan Barghash’s exile in India before becoming Sultan in 1870. It is important to note that Indian architects and builders were influential in diversifying Zanzibar’s architecture in the nineteenth century.


While Sinclair does not record communications with Rogers about stylistic preferences for the building in his memoirs, it is likely that details of the commission may be found in the Secretariat files of the Zanzibar National Archives. From the evidence accessible for this article, it is perhaps significant that Rogers had served on the East African coast at Lamu where he inhabited a former Arab palace. Photographs reveal he had a large collection of local furniture, including several viti vya enzi (Swahili chairs of power) and Indian black-wood furniture. He arranged his substantial collection of ceramics in a typically Swahili local format, in what Prita Meier has described as Swahili ‘logics of display’. It is possible therefore that Rogers, who had been born in India and spent his career around the Indian Ocean rim with only his schooling taking place in England, expressed his preference for a palace that reflected local prestigious buildings.

Arguably, for an administrator with fewer connections to the Indian Ocean and East Africa, the commission for a British ceremonial building might have taken a purely classical style; but the combination of Rogers as an Indian Ocean careerist and Sinclair with his recent experience in Mombasa and professed admiration of eclecticism in architecture, may have determined the final design which drew on a wide variety of local influences.

The plan of the building incorporates two long façades – the eastern side facing the garden and the drive along which guests would arrive, and the western side with a seaward aspect. From images in Rogers’s album it is clear that the eastward front lawn of the palace was regularly used for receptions and parties; it therefore acted as a backdrop to the very regular ceremony that was a feature of Zanzibar’s colonial society (Figure 1). While features were drawn from various traditions, the symmetry and proportions of this frontage are classical. Sinclair used polylobed arches rhythmically in the central part of the façade, including the first-floor balcony. An Ionic colonnade around the entrance supports this arched balcony. This created a formal and convenient reception area using the more elegant of the orders, but one which does not compete with the more ornamental first floor. The whole is surmounted by crenellations typical of Swahili and Arab architecture along the East African coast. Windows across the side wings have no decorative treatment.

The western, seaward side of the building is also symmetrical but becomes more Picturesque in its composition, with the inclusion of a turret reminiscent of a British castle at the southern end (Figure 2). A Tuscan colonnade supports a first floor verandah, which in its central treatment has a classical balustrade and an Indian-style canopied pergola.

Photographs of the interior indicate that on the ground floor, Ionic columns were used structurally in combination with a stairwell decorated with pierced geometric patterns. Throughout, therefore, these stylistic features were entirely blended – employing classical forms for structural reasons. Verandahs were practical for creating spaces with breeze and airflow, which had become a norm in the colonial tropics worldwide. Given the verandah’s associations with colonial India and patchwork application of references to Zanzibar and the Arab world, the classical here was the element of the building that represented British influence. The town-facing east façade, with its classical composition and symmetry and incorporation of polylobed arches simultaneously gives a sense of authority and response to the locality. The westward façade, towards the sea, is more Picturesque. One of the criticisms levelled by proponents of the Gothic revival was that classicism had stifled the development of architecture and created a monotonous sequence of porticoed structures. Laying aside any judgements about Sinclair’s adeptness as an architect, the design was certainly novel and original.

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32 Longair, *Cracks in the Dome*, p. 46.
33 This style of arch had precedents in stepped structural arches in local mosques (Abdul Sheriff, *Verandahs of Power*, p. 66) and more recently on the minaret of the Indian-inspired Hujjatul Islam mosque (completed 1894). Muslim elite women observed receptions on the lawn from this balcony while respecting purdah restrictions.
Fig 3. Northern wing of the Post Office in Zanzibar, completed 1907, designed by John Sinclair.

Rogers’s residence was inaugurated in 1903. Four years later, Sinclair’s second major design for Zanzibar was opened – the Post Office building (Figures 3). As noted earlier, there was a tradition in Britain for municipal buildings to be constructed in the classical style. In the case of the new Post Office for Zanzibar, Sinclair had a constricted urban site, unlike the open space which allowed him greater freedom for the Regent’s residence. The Post Office was to be built in the heart of Zanzibar town, on a pre-existing, awkward, sloping corner site nestled amongst Arab and Indian palaces. Sinclair chose to use classical features for this building but further demonstrated his freedom to experiment and incorporate structures more suitable for the environment, such as verandahs. Once again he created an idiosyncratic version that did not conform to general rules. Although it lies on a slope, the street frontage is broadly symmetrical in a tripartite classical composition with an ogee-domed turret at the lower end, adding a Picturesque element (Figure 3). In the centre, a curved Ionic colonnade and a first-floor balcony flank a central feature with plainer wings on either side. On each wing, Ionic half columns and pilasters separate a series of arched windows at ground level. The first floor of each wing has an arched window with two rectangular ones on either side, all with shutters. As in India and the Caribbean, the addition of shutters to classical forms instantly has the effect of creating a ‘tropical classicism’. The façade is decorated at roof level with a curvaceous parapet wall and ball finials. In the central archway, Sinclair rejected the conventional hierarchy of the orders, by placing plain Tuscan pilasters above double Ionic columns. The verandah itself has a pitched roof with very slender wooden Ionic square piers.
When originally constructed, the stonework was left exposed and unpainted (although now it is whitewashed). The traditional building material in Zanzibar is a mortar made from coral – therefore this conspicuous stonework (rusticated at ground level) was a novelty in Zanzibar and created a sense of solidity and strength. Although Sinclair employed classical features more consistently on this building, he applied them in such a way as to diverge wildly from the established conventions of classical architecture. On nearing its completion, the Zanzibar Gazette of 1907 described it simply as ‘an additional piece of architecture’. Later in the same paragraph, the writer described extensively and admiringly the new house of prayer for the Ismaili Jamat Khana: ‘without exception the finest building in Zanzibar’ with its ‘massive stone pillars and exquisitely carved capitals’ (Zanzibar Gazette, 24 April 1907:2). Unlike the Post Office, which received only passing notice, Sinclair’s later ‘Saracenic’ buildings for the new law courts were described in detail in the Gazette and drew admiring commentary (Zanzibar Gazette, 6 May 1908:3). The author of these articles is likely to have been Dr Alfred Henry Spurrier, Medical Officer and editor of the Gazette. He was regarded locally as an authority on scientific and cultural matters, later becoming the first curator of Zanzibar’s new museum in the early 1920s. Although the opinions expressed in the Gazette are partial and subjective, Spurrier was an influential and respected figure. His lack of interest in the Post Office building perhaps reflected wider opinions.

After the Post Office, Sinclair continued to experiment but rarely explicitly engaged with the classical style. Over the next twenty years, his designs included forms such as the Moorish horseshoe arch, blending superficially ‘Islamic’ styles with those with a longer history on the coast. His design for the National Bank of India again incorporated a classical balustrade, on the back wall. As Dean Sinclair notes, this was the same as on the Post Office, adding ‘a measure of architectural cohesiveness to Sinclair’s work’. This was the only classical feature on the Bank of India, which combined ogee arches and a hexagonal turret replete with arrowslits. Sinclair’s individual patrons, who included the Sultan and a wealthy Indian merchant Mohamedbhai Sheikh Hoosenbhai, indicate that the local elite admired his works. Not all shared his vision, however. The designs of P. W. Harris, the Government Architect employed in the 1920s, reflected a plainer ‘Arab’ style, about which he published an article on its origins in Zanzibar. Harris was forced to redesign elements of Sinclair’s final and most monumental building – the Peace Memorial Museum – after it collapsed during construction. Harris’s article in the Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects indicates that he did not share Sinclair’s enthusiasm for eclecticism in architecture.

It is worth briefly mentioning the Peace Memorial Museum, as museums, like other municipal structures, were in the early nineteenth century built in Britain in classical

For an image of the original stonework, see: https://www.flickr.com/photos/nationalarchives/5404881721/in/album-72157625849814041/ accessed 1 November 2015.


Longair, Cracks in the Dome, p. 92-95.
form, associating them with the earliest institutions in the Greek world for the study of the
muses and with the fundamental purpose of the museum: to order and classify objects and
cultures. Smirke’s British Museum (completed 1852) established a model, and museums were
built in classical form across Britain and the United States. The British Museum
(Natural History) was one of the first to move away from the classical form in the 1870s
although its quasi-Romanesque style, creating a ‘cathedral of science’, was the subject
of much debate.\textsuperscript{38} The role of the museum in the colony, however, could be interpreted
differently. It is notable that in India museums were regarded as exceptionally suited to
an Indo-Saracenic architectural style.\textsuperscript{39} The British architects of the National Gallery of
Art in Chennai (1906) and the Prince of Wales Museum in Mumbai (1914) both created
Indo-Saracenic designs, responding to the belief that this style was deemed appropriate
for colonial educational institutions. In keeping with the early twentieth-century revival of
the classical in India, the Victoria Memorial in Kolkata – a project driven forward by Lord
Curzon – was ‘the first major classically styled monument in India in half a century’.\textsuperscript{40}
In Zanzibar, however, Sinclair executed a fully eclectic design which met the long-held desire
by the British for greater animation of the cityscape, with its striking imposing dome and
ornamentation largely inspired by Byzantine, Arabian and Indian Islamic architecture. The
collapse and redesign, reducing its height significantly, reminds us of the compromises
involved in such projects. In the event, Sinclair’s ambitious and grandiose scheme created
a fascinating and unusual building, but one which, with its hexagonal design, was not
ideally suited for a museum. The global history which the museum would display – that
of an Indian Ocean archipelago with historic links to South Asia, Arabia and Africa – was
reflected within this design, in spite of the alterations imposed by the building process.

\textbf{Sinclair in Nairobi}

The final building to be considered here is the commission that Sinclair received from Lucie
McMillan, widow of Sir William Northrup McMillan, for a new library in Nairobi to be
built in his memory (Figure 4). This serves as an illuminating contrast with Sinclair’s work
in Zanzibar when considering the varied way in which these urban spaces had developed
under colonial rule. The differences were vast. Nairobi was a city rapidly developed from
a camp set up to build the Uganda Railway to a colonial capital within less than three
decades. Responding to the demands of building the railway, infrastructure quickly grew
up. Although space seemed apparently limitless in this area of the East African highlands,
the marshy and undulating land imposed limitations. A fire in the 1900s led to the rebuilding
of much of the growing town.\textsuperscript{41} A formal town plan was not commissioned until 1926, but
by that stage the town had developed on a grid plan with the various communities – British,
Indian and Kenyan – living in segregated communities (ibid). An article in the \textit{East African

\textsuperscript{38} Susan Sheets-Pyenson, \textit{Cathedrals of Science: The Development of Colonial Natural History Museums During the Late Nineteenth Century} (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988).
\textsuperscript{40} Metcalf, \textit{An Imperial Vision}, p.96
Standard bemoaned the inconsistency of style in Nairobi, noting that it had been described ‘not without adequate justification, as “a builder’s back yard”’ (East African Standard, March 31, 1928, 11).

This writer reaffirmed the importance of architecture as a means for engendering ‘proper civic pride’ but warned that the scope of possibilities in Kenya demanded caution by local government in spending public funds ‘on ornate architecture’. It is clear from various commissions (including that of Herbert Baker to be discussed below) that movements in the late 1920s hoped to rationalise the cityscape and give a sense of uniformity.

American by birth, William Northrup McMillan was an early settler in the then British East Africa Protectorate, arriving in the mid-1900s with large sums of inherited wealth, a physically huge man with a reputedly forceful character. He became a significant landowner and member of Kenyan society, and was elected in 1920 to join the first Legislative Council. After his death in 1925, Lady McMillan offered to build a library in his memory. The East African Standard of 9 July 1927 explained the problems that Lady McMillan encountered with the Municipal Authorities about the location of the library she wished to erect (KNA, BN/1/43:2). She had the support of the Town Council and was ready ‘to erect a handsome building at once’ (ibid). Finally, in December 1927 the Governor in Council approved the plan.
The Acting Commissioner for Lands made clear to the Colonial Secretary in London that Lady McMillan wished to restrict the library to Europeans only (KNA, BN/1/43:10). Discussions over this matter were discussed in earnest at a Finance Committee meeting related in the East African Standard of 24 May 1928 (KNA, BN/1/43 : 44). Lady McMillan agreed to pay for all costs except for the ongoing salary of a librarian and repairs to the building. Councillor De Souza objected to this use of municipal funding as only one part of the community would be permitted to use the building, while all sections contributed to these funds. In spite of explaining that he would have objected similarly had this been an Indian library, De Souza was accused of inciting racial tensions and his objections were defeated. The library finally opened in June 1931. It was given responsibility for distribution of books to public rural libraries across Kenya, which the East African Standard was at pains to explain was a scheme ‘to benefit the whole colony’ (KNA, BN/1/43:82).

Sinclair’s memoirs do not, once again, include many details of this commission. He records that whilst on his second hunting safari early in his career in 1897, his party pitched tents on Ol Donyo Sabuk, a mountain in Thika, in central Kenya. The McMillans are both buried on the side of this mountain near their former home, known as McMillan Castle, built c. 1905. Sinclair recalled that this land ‘was long afterwards bought by Sir Northrup Macmillan [sic], in whose memory, the Macmillan [sic] Memorial Library with the designing of which I had a good deal to do in 1924, was erected by his widow’. It is likely that this is an error of memory as McMillan died in 1925. Later in his memoirs, Sinclair described his activities on his return to England in 1923 after resigning as British Resident of Zanzibar. He reported being busy until 1926, with ‘sporting activities, making gardens and tennis courts, designing houses and making plans for the Macmillan Memorial Library at Nairobi’. In the memoir narrative, Sinclair’s attention shifted at this point to the decision of him and his wife to visit Tangier for the winter months and eventually to move there permanently in 1930. On the opening of the library in 1931, the East African Standard reported the speech delivered by Lord Delamere, one of McMillan’s fellow early settlers. In his oration, Delamere credited the architects Messrs. Rand Overy and Blackburn but noted that: ‘We and they were fortunate in receiving the assistance and suggestions of Mr. J. H. Sinclair, C.M.G., the late Resident of Zanzibar whose artistic architectural works are well known to all East Africans’ (East African Standard, 20 June 1931:30). It is possible, therefore, that he was influential in the early stages but that the Nairobi firm took over the construction and finished the project.

Sinclair had seen the development of Nairobi since the early 1900s. During a visit in 1904, friends there tried to persuade him to buy land in the growing town. His decision to decline this suggestion caused him to note ruefully: ‘I could not take the risk and so missed the opportunity of becoming a millionaire’. Over the years in his various posts in Zanzibar he witnessed the town’s rapid growth and, as one with architectural training, observed the dominant use of neo-classical styles in its new buildings. The new Governor, Sir Edward

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62 Senex Africana, p. 50.
63 Ibid, p. 130.
64 Ibid
Grigg, invited Herbert Baker to design the new Government House in Nairobi, and regional government buildings and schools across Kenya. In the early twentieth century, Baker was one of the most influential architects of empire, with major public buildings in South Africa and India. Metcalf credits Baker with reinvigorating the classical for the twentieth century empire, expressing ‘ideals of law, order, and government that were in no way intended for South Africa alone’. Baker was insistent, however, that the classical be adapted to the environment and respond to local cultural heritage. Jan Hoogterp, with whom he had worked with South Africa, led the Kenyan projects, working within and developing Baker’s classical idiom. It is worth noting that that Eric Dutton was at this time Grigg’s personal secretary, and worked closely with Baker on the Nairobi Government House project. Later, as Chief Secretary in Zanzibar (1942–52), he and Ajit Singh Hoogan became the dominant architectural voices in Zanzibar and both brought their experiences from across East Africa to bear upon new developments for the urban landscape.

Sinclair was likely to be more familiar with architecture within the British Empire than directly of emerging trends in Britain itself. In the early 1920s, Sinclair worked alongside Henry Vaughan Lanchester, then in Zanzibar to create a new town plan for the city. Lanchester was an experienced architect who had been closely involved with Edwin Lutyens’s plan for New Delhi but also with the long-term construction of the Maharaja of Jodhpur’s new palace. It is likely that Lanchester and Sinclair discussed architectural matters, particularly as Lanchester assisted with re-designing the Peace Memorial Museum after its collapse (ZNA, AB 41: Despatch from Resident to High Commissioner, 22 February 1923). Sinclair was therefore exposed both to the ‘new colonial classicism’ of New Delhi, which may have influenced his work for Nairobi.

The new library design maintains the classical style, in keeping with Baker’s new Government House, which opened in 1928 and with Hoogterp’s new Coryndon Memorial Museum, which opened in 1930. It was constructed of Nairobi bluestone according to architect Musau Kimeu, an excellent local building material. In a U-shaped plan, the library consists of a two-storey main block with single-storey wings extending back at either side. This simple formal plan is well-suited to a library, representing a significant contrast with Sinclair’s decision to use a hexagonal design for the museum in Zanzibar. Its façade comprises a central Doric portico with double columns at each end, without a pediment. The name of the building is carved into the frieze and the whole is surmounted by a balustrade. Notable features which give the façade a less austere impression are its inwardly-curved corners, resembling those on the upper stories of Baker’s contemporaneous

44 Myers, *Verandahs of Power*, pp. 48-49.
45 Ibid.

According to Rupi Mangat, “Slow death of Library that McMillan built”, this stone is still in good condition, unlike the interior which is reportedly badly in need of repair.
Bank of England. Like that building in London, the corners have banded rustication up to roof level. Another unusual inclusion is the balcony above the entrance within the portico, which perhaps provides some airflow to the first floor. Steps lead up to the library with two large lion sculptures on each side, instilling a sense of grandeur and perhaps also referring to McMillan’s enthusiasm for game-hunting.

Although including some original features, such as the balcony within the portico, Sinclair’s embrace of the classical form suggests he was not indiscriminately wedded to the eclectic style for which he was renowned in Zanzibar.

**Concluding Remarks**

Unlike Zanzibar, Nairobi was a new colonial city – constructed out of a railway camp during the construction of the Uganda Railway. It was from its inception a global city – home to Kenyans, European settlers and Indian indentured labourers. From the typically haphazard buildings of its early years, the classical came to dominate, and buildings in this style benefited from heightened architectural expertise through the influence of Baker and Hoofterp. The McMillan library was therefore part of this movement of refinement, rationalisation and ordering of the city.

In considering the classical as ‘global’, the references for the British and Indian communities were imperial – as much to India and South Africa as to Britain, and even more distantly Greece and Rome. By way of symbolising the complex nature of Nairobi’s urban space, the Jamia Mosque – one of the most monumental in Nairobi – is located next door, on an angle towards Mecca. This magnificent building disrupts the grid structure of the city and demonstrates the range of global influences which impinge upon the cityscape.

There was an alternative vision of the global produced by Sinclair in early colonial Zanzibar, one which reflected its historic links to societies around the Indian Ocean. Sinclair took the pre-existing architecture into account as well as the limitations imposed by the complex, labyrinthine city-plan and the climate. In this historically multicultural city, Sinclair used the classical rarely but freely, reflecting his authority – in spite of his limited training – over the British architectural vision with the liberty to experiment, as he did with the Post Office. I have used the extant buildings of a single administrator-architect to illuminate forms of architectural engagement by the British in East Africa – in particular in their response to the pre-existing hybrid landscape in Zanzibar, upon which Sinclair made the first significant British marks. His selective deployment of the classical, that most typical of British imperial styles, serves to demonstrate how the diversity of East Africa and the colonies’ distinctive global connections demanded myriad responses from British architects.

Global History, East Africa and the Classical Traditions.


Introduction
The idea of globalization and global history is not a recent phenomenon. As early as the first century, East African Coast had already started witnessing the emergence of traders from Asia especially the Chinese who brought porcelain and other trade items along the coast of East Africa. Towards the end of the 18th Century and the beginning of the 19th Century, globalization took a new dimension due to imperialism and colonialism. These two processes opened up the world and more so East Africa to the rest of the world. The Africans were thus exposed to new forms of religion and their economy was opened up to the international market system and economy. These activities as well as slave trade laid the foundation upon which global history was to be written. In Kenya for instance, the colonial administration’s ‘encouragement’ of trade was undertaken within a broad economic policy framework which assigned the different races in Kenya and fractions of merchant capital specific roles. Occupying the highest rank on the commercial ladder were European importers and exporters. Asians occupied a middle position while Africans formed the lowest chain in the marketing system. The colonial government also employed indirect and direct compulsion to ‘encourage’ trade. For instance, in addition to raising revenue, the imposition of the hut tax early in 1902, was also intended to induce Africans to grow and sell surplus produce if they were to be able to meet the tax obligation.1 In such situations, Africans were compelled to engage in exchange of goods in Kisumu, Ndere, Yala and Kendu Bay with the Asians so as to raise money to pay for their tax.

The Indian Question in Kenya in general, was a creation of colonialism. Herzig2 observes that during the last decades, the Asians in Kenya have passed through several stages of migration, which can be taken exemplarily for different approaches. During the early years, they were a typical labour diaspora due to the indentured workers. With the increase of passenger migration, they established themselves as middleman minority or a trading diaspora. Later, with increasing globalization, the Kenya Asians became a transnational community in addition to the diaspora. Older forms have not disappeared but decreased while new forms have emerged. This means that still some parts of the Kenya Asians represent the typical type of petty trader with family members and relatives as unpaid labourers. Due to the impacts of globalization, transnational activities like travel or communication have increased after Kenya received her independence. Therefore, some Kenyan Asians started to live a transnational life- however, not all.

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And in contrast to other transnational communities, the East African Asians are connected not only with their place of origin but also with Europe and North America. The concept of Indian diaspora and Asians is thus used interchangeably to help in the reconstruction of the global history of Afro-Asian relations in Kenya’s Kisumu district, of Kenya’s Nyanza province. The fundamental questions in this paper are: what are the Afro-Asian socio-economic contestations in Kisumu district, how did the Asians influence the urban landscape of Kisumu and what are the levels of Afro-Asian interaction in Kisumu district. The major theme in this paper is the issue of race and globalization and how the two have both influenced the urban landscape and relations between Asians and African in Kisumu district of Nyanza province.

The Indian diaspora in Kenya is a microcosm of India and no other diaspora has such a global spread and diversity. Though they have multiple diversities, all of them have identity of being ethnic Indians. The origins of the modern Asian population of East Africa can be traced back to roughly the middle of the nineteenth century, although there has been a historical commercial connection between East African coast and the western seaboard of India since about the second century A.D. Early contacts between Indian traders and East Africa that go back over centuries were however sporadic. But, the major influx of Indians in East Africa came with colonization when they were brought in as indentured labourers to build the railway from Mombasa at the coast to Uganda.

It should be noted that the Asian community, being a conglomerate of many diverse communities, languages, religions and customs is not a monolithic community with a cohesive leadership. The internal character of the Kenyan Asian community was such that the many religious divisions meant that there was no dominant leader or authoritative institution that could speak for everyone.

Indian settlement in Kenya generally and in Kisumu district of Nyanza province was a colonial venture to entrench colonial administration and capitalism into the interior parts of Nyanza. This was achieved, first by the construction of the Kenya-Uganda railway, which was completed in 1901. Kisumu, by then was administratively in Uganda as per the colonial boundaries. In Nyanza province, Asian settlement followed a pattern of a settlement scheme, which was sanctioned by the colonial government which saw the establishment of the first authorized and formal Asian settlement scheme in Kibos and later on in the Nyando valley within Kisumu district.

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Upon the terminal of the railway at the lakeshore of Kisumu, there were two types of shelter, which provided for both public and domestic architecture. These were tents and sheet iron buildings that were introduced by the Uganda railways and the Colonial Administration and used for all manner of functions. The architecture derived from manipulations, the sheet iron as walls and roofs was gradually eliminated in Kisumu with the special development conditions attached to the leases of alienated Crown Land from around 1930. Some of those sheet iron business and residential premises have survived into the postcolonial period up to date.\(^\text{14}\)

The Second World War slowed down the growth of Kisumu, resulting in a tremendous demand for Asian housing, business premises and factory sites. The greater demand was in the Asian sector because at the time urban real estate investments were essentially an economic relationship between Kisumu’s Europeans and Asians and excluded Africans. Most significant for Kisumu was the opening of the National Bank of India branch office in Kisumu in April 1913\(^\text{15}\) (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. A picture of bank of India established in Kisumu as early as 1913. Source: ismailmail.files.wordpress.](image)


\(^{15}\) Anyumba, *Kisumu Town*. 
Asian Influence in Kisumu’s Built Form

The advent of British rule in India brought to an end traditional state patronage of architecture. The impact of European aesthetics would result in a new synthesis and meaning in architecture. This new architectural form; classical and Gothic motifs en vogue in London was fostered by the (Indian) state. Later at the beginning of the 20th C indigenous traditions were mixed with foreign ones. Thus in the diaspora Hindu of Kisumu, we see a culture with a lengthy history of articulated aesthetics sensibilities concordant with his culture.

The built form and environments of Kisumu were divisible into three distinct physical morphologies; the old town, the peri-urban areas and rural Kisumu. The built form, the environment and its associated landscapes are a summation of the impacts of the Asiatic and colonial culture on the urban structure of Kisumu. The old town was conceived of as the exclusive preserve of the British. However, a co-occupant of the old town was an assortment of ‘intervening group’s who were segregated from the British from the onset. The Asian community, who formed the largest of the group left an oriental imprint on the environment of Kisumu.

The landscape has been one of two successive ‘Indian bazaars’, Islamic and Khoja mosques, a variety of temples (Figure 2), the ubiquitous shop cum residence, multifamily tenements, engineering workshops, schools, hostels, hospitals, cemeteries and a crematorium. Covering a large and continuous area of Kisumu, this ‘Asian zone’ in town was segregated on the basis of specific Indian communities.

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17 Anyumba, *Kisumu Town*, p.5.
Different sections of Kisumu’s urban structures reflected different urban morphologies, which in turn were made up of distinctive architectural styles. These designs were traceable from an earlier pre-railway, colonial period or of the more recent international style. Architecture akin to that of pre-colonial period could be found in rural Kisumu (Figure 3), and in parts of the inner peri-urban Kisumu. The shop cum residence of Asians was copied by Africans in the peri-urban and rural areas in Kisumu and in many small towns in Kenya. The ‘environment aesthetics’ related well to the visual impact of built forms and the environment.\textsuperscript{18}

![Fig 3: An Indian House in the Rural Village in Kisumu](Source: Picture taken by Gordon Omenya)

**Early Forms of Afro-Asian Socio-Economic Relations**

The idea of globalization and global history is not a recent phenomenon. As early as the first century, East African Coast had already started witnessing the emergence of traders from Asia especially the Chinese who brought porcelain and other trade items along the coast of East Africa. Towards the end of the 18\textsuperscript{th} Century and the beginning of the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century, globalization took a new dimension due to imperialism and colonialism. These two processes opened up the world and more so East Africa to the rest of the world. The Africans were thus exposed to new forms of religion and their economy was opened up to the international market system and economy. These activities as well as slave trade laid the foundation upon which global history was to be written. In Kenya for instance, the colonial administration’s ‘encouragement’ of trade was undertaken within a broad economic policy framework which assigned the different races in Kenya and fractions of merchant capital specific roles. Occupying the highest rank on the commercial ladder were European importers and exporters. Asians occupied a middle position while Africans formed the lowest chain in the marketing system.

\textsuperscript{18} Anyumba, *Kisumu Town.*
The colonial government also employed indirect and direct compulsion to ‘encourage’ trade. For instance, in addition to raising revenue, the imposition of the hut tax early in 1902, was also intended to induce Africans to grow and sell surplus produce if they were to be able to meet the tax obligation. In such situations, Africans were compelled to engage in exchange of goods in Kisumu, Ndere, Yala and Kendu Bay with the Asians so as to raise money to pay for their tax.

As early as 1902, Jamal Hasham an Asian trader stationed in Kisumu, dealt in Amerikani (American) cotton, importing his own brand on which at every yard, his picture was printed. His relationship with the local people in Kisumu was so good and he was well-known for his fair dealing that he acquired the nickname ‘Bwana mzuri’ (Good man). This means that in this hybrid arrangement and plural space not everything was conflictual. There were certain things that the Africans had internalized from Asians and vice versa. So the postcolony was not just about conflicts. Atieno Odhiambo discussing Asian political ambitions in Kenya from 1905-1939 argues that it was as the trader that the Indian presence was to have it’s initial and even long term impact among the interior Africans. The Indian that most Africans knew of, was the dukawalla, the shopkeeper in the bush. But the shopkeeper was only an appendage of the Indians in the three main centres Nairobi, Kisumu and Mombasa. The Western building materials such as the popular mabati (corrugated iron sheet) which the Asians sold to the Africans would gradually replace the not permanent thatch for roofing mud walled African homes. The popular highly coloured cotton textiles known as kitenge and kanga, originally imported from Holland, and noted for their appealing Indonesian influential prints became a popular wear for the great majority of African women. The importation and distribution of the fabrics were also to be the work of Asian traders.

At first, Africans were suspicious of exotic ware, but they soon found that the clothes and blankets were warmer and less cumbersome than their traditional wares. Besides clothes and blankets, other merchandise like oil, salt, sugar, tea, basins, lamps among others were introduced to the people of Nyanza for the first time. The Asians also bought certain amounts of skins, cattle, cotton and sisal and all these products were sold to Asians by Africans who in turn distributed them in the country. What the Asian merchants brought changed the consuming habits of the local inhabitants forever. Their dressing habits began to change as they moved from the wearing of hides and skins to a dutch-manufactured kanga with deep Indonesian influence. Initially, the Nyanza people’s reception of these foreign cultures and forms of knowledge seemed ambivalent but later, they embraced them. Nevertheless, in Bhabha’s argument, cultural production is most productive when it is also most ambivalent, and indeed, the Africans fully embraced exotic wares brought by the Asians at the expense of their traditional wares.

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19 Ndege, Internal Trade in Kenya, p. 204.
25 H. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994).
Postcolonial thinking is thus not to go back to the past and discard everything European or Asian but to dismantle those values and institutions that perpetuate our marginalization. Indeed some values and institutions were positive.

In 1903, the township boundaries were gazetted and some 12,000 acres, including water, set aside for its development. The new township reverted to its original name, Kisumu, in substitution of Port Florence. At this time, there was an ‘Old Kisumu’, that consisted of two rows of Stalls on Mumias Road, north of the Gulf. It was later demolished in the twenties when new plots became available on Odera and Ogada Streets in the present day Kisumu, hence the new area acquired the name ‘New Bazaar’.

Between 1910 and 1920, Kisumu was an important commercial centre. It was a major axis where goods imported from outside British East Africa and destined for Nyanza Province could be taxed (KNA, PC/NZA/1/4, 1908/9). For the Asians, Kisumu was a depot for the distribution of imported goods throughout Nyanza Province and Eastern Uganda. It was also the place where raw materials gathered from African periodic rural markets in the hinterland by the Asians were assembled for export to places like Marseilles, Somaliland and Arabia.

These collections and distribution functions attracted more Africans to reside in the town and in the peri-urban areas. It also enhanced their relations with the Asians (KNA, PC/NZA Annual Report, 1928). Trade was on the increase and this led to the expansion of trade at various centres such as Yala, Kendu Bay and Ndere among others. However, racial segregation in towns, unequal business opportunities and taxation, import and export trade (involving both exotic and local produce) as well as colonial industries like the cotton industry, all these promoted the growth and expansion of British imperialism.

The enterprises of some of the pioneer Indian traders in the interior expanded on the foundations laid in the early years. The most notable in this respect were the achievements of Allidina Visram, who built up an extensive East African wide business network. Allidina Visram, an Indian Ismaili operated dukas (shops) in Kisumu (Figure 4) and other posts well before the Uganda Railway was completed. The pattern of commerce adopted in the interior by Visram and the other Asian traders revolved largely around the exchange of an increasing variety of imported goods such as cloth, wire, glassware and lamps for local produce of every description.

Allidina also diversified his business interests to include oil mills at Kisumu obtaining oil from sesame and copra. Various contemporary accounts describe the expansion of his duka-based enterprise in different parts of the colony such as Kisumu, Yala among other areas.

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26 Anyumba, *Kisumu Town*.
28 Obudho, *Periodic Markets*.
29 Mangat, *The Immigrant Communities*, p.475.
The Indian bazaar in Kisumu, established from the early days of the colonial period, grew in importance as a local centre of Indian trade (KNA, PC\NZA1\2, AR 1910\14). In a 1915 report, that included a reference to trade at Yala near Kisumu Simpson, the expert advisor of the Colonial Office averred:\footnote{32}{Ibid, p. 87.}

Yala is the great collecting centre for the grain and produce of the country north of the Yala River. To this station, the natives bring their baskets of grain and sell it to the Indians, who store it … until it is convenient to send it in bags or carts to Kisumu. The road between Yala and Kisumu is thronged with carts passing to and fro. Those from Yala are loaded, according to the season of the year, with sim sim, maize, beans, hides and skin and those from Kisumu with rice….

Afro-Asian relations in Nyanza Province were not centred on trade in food items alone. Many of the skilled immigrants such as Rehmat Khan, Hayer Bishan Singh in Kisumu, Abdul Kassam, among others, were to launch a variety of business enterprises as contractors, outfitters, builders and mechanics. They also helped to supplement the activities of the Indian commercial population, which also witnessed a steady expansion during this period.\footnote{33}{Omenya, The Relations Between Asian and African Communities.}

With their skills in various fields, Asian artisans imparted to Africans invaluable vocational skills in making furniture, repairing bicycle, printing magazines and books, stocking shops, crafting leather shoes and handbags and teaching so many other income-generating occupations. Through such trainings, there emerged a permanent skilled class of African artisans and technicians within the region and especially in Kisumu.
Technologies specific to Kisumu Asian and African cultural groups were distinguishable in the townships pioneer period. The fabrication of technology products of the pre-industrial Indian society was occasioned by the making of Indian carts for local transport work, which by 1913 had become an important business in Kisumu (AR 1913/14). Indian carts on their derivatives were used in virtually all aspects of transportation (Figure 5). Tied to the use of water to power flourmills was another important pre-industrial technology input i.e ‘the making of ‘gur’ the black jiggery from sugar cane.34

![Fig 5: A Picture of an Ox Drawn Cart](source: ismailmail.files.wordpress.com)

The point to note here is that Afro-Asian political interaction was not achieved during this early colonial period in Kisumu. This is because Asians were not keen on local politics. Their major concern was about settlement in white highlands and recognition of their fundamental rights by the colonial government which culminated into the Devonshire Declaration of 1923 which declared the interest Africans paramount. The Asians were also keen on trade. The issue of segregation was more prominent in the urban parts of Nyanza with Kisumu being more affected. In Kisumu, both Asians and Africans attended separate schools. During the first decade of colonialism, Afro-Asian relations in schools were non-existent because of the strong segregation policy which rendered Afro-Asian interaction and mixing impossible.35

Apart from the government and railway owned residential houses for the Asians in Kisumu, interaction between the Asians and Africans within the residential areas was also minimal. This is because the Asians stayed in isolated and well-fenced residences where Africans could not access.

35 Omenya, The Relations Between Asian and African Communities.
This fencing of Asian premises was probably a security measure to protect themselves from perceived African attacks, a kind of African protest against their presence in some of these areas. The housing situation in Nyanza and especially Kisumu during the early colonial period 1900-1918, was generally not good since the Asian residences were very crowded. The same condition applied to the Indian landies (residential plots where railway employees and their families lived). A few plots in the Indian bazaar had been taken up by the Indians and new business premises erected. Two Indian residences were in the process of construction. Several other plots which were bought by the Indian community at the sale of plots were not yet developed. This was because of the money market and the high cost of building materials (KNA, PC/NZA/1/16, Annual Report 1920-21). Afro-Asian interaction which took place in the residential areas was therefore between Africans employed by Asians in their houses and also those Africans who went to buy goods from Asian shops which served as their places of work and residence.

The Africans also developed a lot of interest in the Asian jaggery, which they bought and utilized to prepare local gin known as the Nubian gin (African brew). The preparation of Nubian gin was very common in Kibos area. In fact, some Asians also frequented the African settlement houses to take this drink. This was a sign of the emerging inter-racial relations between the Afro-Asian communities. However, this act by the Asians could be viewed as a marketing strategy of the Asian products (KNA, PC/NZA/3\15\142, 1931-50).

On the consumer side, the activities of the Kavirondo Taxpayers Welfare Association (KTWA), the first African political organization in Nyanza in the 1920s, among other things, stimulated co-operative self-help schemes, particularly in grain milling by waterpower thus competing with the Asians in the processing of local produce. The formation of KTWA thus informed the African protest and resistance to bad trade practices which emerged between the Asians and the Africans on this plural and hybrid postcolonial space of Nyanza.

Conflicts of interest between established Asian businesses and those of new African entrepreneurs also arose. This period also witnessed the expansion in African cash-crop production and the emergence of African small traders in the rural areas. Similarly by 1930s, a class of local African traders in Central and Western Kenya had emerged. Those in Nyanza were particularly opposed to both the magnitude of Asian trade in the reserves and the employment by Asians of African hawkers in trading centres there.

The Kavirondo Chamber of Commerce, an all-African economic pressure group representing the Luo and Luhya African traders, passed several resolutions seeking restrictions on the activities of Asian traders. The Chamber members even suggested separate trading centres for Asians and Africans and also condemned the Local African Council’s unpopular practice of allocating plots to Indians in the newly established trading centres against the interest of African traders and designed to keep them in their former place as growers of wimbi (finger millet) and mtama (ordinary millet). The Council was therefore requested to cease inviting Indian traders to trading centres and trade in the prescribed areas be put into
African hands.\textsuperscript{36}

Although there was trade conflict between Asians and Africans on 19 August 1938, a tall Town Clock standing in the middle of the road along the main Oginga Odinga street in Kisumu was unveiled by the then Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Kenya HE Chief Marshall Sir Robert Brooke Popham. The Town Clock (Figure 6 and 7) was built in memory of Kassim Lakha who arrived in East Africa in 1871 and died in Kampala in 1910. It was erected by his sons Mohamed, Alibhai, Hassan and Rahimtulla Kassim, as the inscription on the Town Clock reads. This change in the urban landscape would later on inform the Afro-Asian socio-economic spaces of interaction.

Fig 6: Town Clock (Saa Maduong) in Memory of Kassim Lakha

By 1945, Oginga Odinga alongside other people formed the Bondo Thrift Association which was a fore runner of the Luo Thrift and Trading Corporation (LUTATCO). This association started off by collecting money from members earmarked for business. But also members in distress could borrow from this money. Later, the association began to think concretely about trade. The committee decided to consult some advocates and the Registrar of Societies with a view to soliciting their advice and support on how to launch a trading company. However, during this consultation, the association found itself snubbed and the Asians prevailed. Of the Asian advocates in Kisumu, Odinga had this to say:

When I sought help in forming a company from Indian lawyers in Kisumu they advised a welfare society; companies would be beyond our knowledge and ability, they said. I went to kisumu to buy books on company law and settled down myself to draft our memorandum and articles of association. We were then ready to decide on a name. We called a meeting for that. Some said it should be called the Bondo Thrift and Trading Corporation. Others were in favour of calling it the Luo Corporation, others the Kenya Thrift and Trading Corporation and still others the East African Thrift and Trading Corporation.

It is, therefore, evident that trade rivalry was very rife in Kisumu. This rivalry depicted the African struggle to dismantle and challenge Asian domination in trade in Kisumu and Nyanza region as a whole.

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The government cotton planting campaign which centred at first on South Kavironondo spread to other districts. This campaign was intermeshed with the administration’s zoning policy with the province being divided into three cotton production zones each with its own production targets and seed distribution system.\(^{38}\)

The government effort to encourage cotton production in Nyanza was, therefore, a precedent to the Afro-Asian interaction in this industry. This interaction would later characterize their relations as Asians went ahead to own cotton stores and ginneries in the areas zoned by the government. These cotton stores and ginneries served as centres of Afro-Asian interaction in the villages of Ndere, and Kibos in Kisumu. Even though cotton growing in Nyanza was a colonial policy, it was facilitated by the Asians and, therefore, it is the Asians who were in direct and frequent contact with Africans in the cotton industry. Afro-Asian interaction in this industry revolved around the Asian ginneries, cotton buying and collection stores and also in their residential areas where they employed Africans as their assistants.

Afro-Asian engagement in the cotton industry did not limit their interactions in trade. The Indian trader played a very important function in the socio-economic life of Africans in Kisumu. The *duka* became a keystone in the country’s entire system of distribution, selling goods to Africans and acted as a major outlet for the African agricultural producers.\(^{39}\) In their day-to-day activities, Asian racism caused more irritation among Africans. Furedi\(^{40}\) quoting Ngugi wa Thiong’o, portrays aspects of this uneasy relationship thus:

The Indian traders were said to be very rich. They too employed some black ‘boys’ whom they treated as nothing. You could never like the Indians because their customs were funny in a bad way… the Indians were not liked and they abused women using dirty words they had learned in Swahili

Zoning of residential areas according to race did not prevent Afro-Asian interactions. In the Asian households, Asian women prepared *chapatis*, *samosa* and *bhajias* (some variants of wheat baked bread and cakes) which they sold to both Asians and Africans. Some of their dishes were incorporated into the diets of Africans.\(^{41}\)

At Jamnadas residence in Kisumu, African children would go to the compound to eat a certain fruit which was locally known as *jamna* coined from the name Jamnadas. Henceforth they would say that they were going to *kajamna* (Jamnadas place) to eat that fruit. This name has stuck with the Africans up to date.

The racial approach which we have noticed in the economic and political fields also applied to the provision of other social services. Education and even sports were organized on strict racial lines, with the Europeans always getting the best services; the Indians, the second


\(^{41}\) Seidenberg, *Mercantile Adventures*, p.102.
best and the Africans having to do with whatever was left over. 42 The racial attitudes of providing quality education were also reflected in the field of funding education.

The Political Economy and Afro-Asian Social Engagements during the Decolonization Period 1945-63

Several organizations such as the Kenya African Union, Central Nyanza Chamber of Commerce, the Ramogi African Welfare Association (RAWA), the Nyanza Soldiers Association, the Luo Union, together with numerous clan and sub-clan welfare organizations were formed to air African grievances and challenge the dominance of Asian traders in the rural areas. Even the defunct Piny Owacho (a local political organization) organization was revived. 43 These organizations represented voices of negotiation, protest and compromise on the African postcolony. They were initial avenues through which Africans wanted to take over the political and economic power of the postcolony.

The widespread resentment against Asian traders was intensified around the middle of 1948 by what was felt by Africans to be a number of particularly serious malpractices. There was a common view among Africans that Asian traders deliberately hoarded certain commodities and only sold them on the ‘black market’ for high prices. 44 Similarly, Afro-Asian trade rivalry was also witnessed in the distribution of maize for the Maize and Produce Control Board. In some cases where Africans were reliant on Asian mechanics to repair their vehicles used in the distribution, repairs were badly done or not done at all. 45 It is, therefore, evident that Asians used some forms of knowledge to undermine and dominate Africans in business.

But even though the Luo Thrift Trading Corporation Limited was a rival and counter corporation to the Asians’ dominance in trade in the Nyanza area, the directors of the company still sought some help from the Asians. The Ramogi Press, whose proprietors were members of the Luo Thrift, was relocated from Nairobi to Kisumu in the year 1949. The leaders found it necessary to construct premises for the company to avoid rental increases that would have militated against its progress.

This led to the construction of a new building named the ‘AFRIKA HOUSE’ owned by the Luo Thrift Corporation. During the opening ceremony of this house in July 1956, the managing director of the corporation, Oginga Odinga applauded the Asians who supplied materials for the construction of the house. These included M's Shamji Harji and Bro limited, M's E.A Hardwares Limited, M's Narshi Laxman Bros, M's Surat Furniture Mart,

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M’s Dean Brothers and M’s Teja Singh and Sons, (all Asians) who had been assisting considerably (KNA, PC\NZ/A\3\1\404, 1955-57). This support by Asians depicted the ambivalent nature of subjects within the postcolony. The Luo Thrift Company also built Ramogi House which they leased to an Asian for a period of two years and operated as a cosmopolitan hotel under the business name ‘Imperial Hotel’ suggesting imperial and colonial aspirations through the Asians (KNA, PC\NZ/A\4\4\47, 1950). Names such as Afrika House, Ramogi House suggest the aspirations of Africans to maintain their identity and traditional value systems which vastly differed from the Western values.

By 1960, Kisumu had changed from the status of a municipal board to a municipal council (KNA, HT/17/3 Annual Report 1960-65). Henceforth, Asian involvements were felt in the activities of the council. This is exemplified by the participation of Mr M.F Shah, Mr M.P Ondiek (Mayor of Kisumu) and the DC in the activities of the Allocations of Plots (African location) Committee. Their business was to approve African applications for plots within the town for business and residential purposes. Mr. M.F Shah even chaired some sessions of the committee meetings (KNA, DC/KSM/1/30/53 1959). Thus a compromise to work together between Asians and Africans together was emerging.

By 1962, the Municipal Council of Kisumu continued to reflect on its dealings during the year that atmosphere of inter-racial harmony, which was experienced in the preceding year. And in July of the same year, councilors Ondiek and Bashir Ud – Deen (an Asian) were re-elected as Mayor and Deputy Mayor respectively for a second term of office. In October, the council obtained added dignity by the elevation of councilors Ondiek, Bashir Ud – Deen, and M.F Shah to an aldermanic bench (members of the council). This event produced pleasurable reactions from councilors of all races (KNA, HT/17/3 AR Central Nyanza District 1962).

By 1963, the general elections were the highlight of the political year. In Nyanza Province, election results for the districts showed that in the House of representative John Odero Soi was elected for Ugenya, Luke Obok for Alego, Tom Okello Odongo for Kisumu Rural, Amir Jamal an Asian for Kisumu Town and Okuto Bala for Nyando (HT/17/3 1963 AR Central Nyanza District 1963). Jamal Amir had just been re-elected Member of Parliament for Kisumu Town. For a second time, three powerful Africans including Walter Fanuel Odeede had fallen yet again to this man in the 1963 General elections (Daily Nation 2/2/1990). This means that the interests of the voters on the postcolonial space went beyond racist concerns.

Jamal had a daunting task of convincing majority blacks to vote for him. This is because his opponents, at every political rally emphasized the point that blacks must be led by fellow black people. However, Jamal’s argument during his campaigns was different.

He questioned whether the racial issue should strike a valley between the minority Asians and blacks. To him, the two could live together in harmony. He pleaded with the African voters by telling them that, “My dear brothers, my own father came here young and innocent. I was born here. My colour, my race does not make me different. We are all
brothers. I love you all. I love Kisumu. I know no other home (Daily Nation, 2/2/1990). During his campaigns in Kisumu, he used both Kiswahili and Dholuo. Even though he knew little Dholuo, he frequently used Kiswahili and sometimes English. Were Olodhe was his interpreter in situations where he could not articulate issues properly in Dholuo (Daily Nation, 2/2/1990).

Jamal was, therefore, able to use captivating words to lure African votes thereby confirming that language is power because words construct reality. Between 1945 and 1963, Kenya was a society stratified by race. Social status was still largely determined by skin colour and racial group identification. The racially stratified social structure was particularly evident in the areas of occupation, income and education. Educational inequality formed an obvious and important indicator of the racial structure. Colonial education in Kenya was not only characterized by segregated schools, but also, as in other parts of the world where racial segregation was practiced, inherently unequal. The movement of Asians from the rural areas to Kisumu to seek education marked the period of the development of Asian hostels.

By 1958, the Aga Khan community seriously considered the issue of hostel accommodation for Asian children from remote areas of Nyanza Province because the Aga Khan Mixed Primary School only catered for the education interests of Aga Khan (Ismailia) community (AR 1958). The issue of separate and segregated school system was sustained into the independence era before the African government came up with the policy of integration in public schools. In general, the Indian community developed its own communal schools with the increasing help of the government. Nevertheless, whatever was taught in the African schools was determined by the missionaries and the government. Culturally, colonialism operated from the racist principle that barbarism pervaded Africa and there was no culture to be salvaged.

The Kisumu Asian Housing Committee catered for the interests of the Asians who were posted to Kisumu to work for the government. The Asian Housing Committee was a purely ad hoc instruments appointed by the PC to assist him in the allocation of houses. Similarly, the Kisumu European Housing Committee was established to help Europeans access good housing (KNA, PC/NZA/2/16/60, 1946-51 10/2/1947). In 1956, the Kisumu Ismailia Housing Society Limited put up sixteen flats for Asians namely, the Aga Khan flats near the new Goan school. The directors of this committee were the Patel Samaj family, whose name was given to the famous Patel flats in Kisumu (KNA, PC/NZA/3/1/404). Later, some Africans within the same economic class started living in these flats. Nevertheless, segregation policies did not permit Africans to stay with the Asians within their houses except if the Africans were jopidi (baby sitters). Any other person could not be allowed to enter these premises, not even the immediate neighbours. This made the African neighbours

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48 Omenya, The Relations Between Asian and African Communities.
to develop a negative attitude towards the Asians.\footnote{Ibid.}

Between 1961 and 1962, the Municipal Council of Kisumu started considering the ways of alleviating the Asian housing problem by negotiating for a site suitable for economy standard Asian housing. This came in handy after the Commissioner of Lands had served a quit notice to a number of families living in temporary wartime dwellings. It was thought that a number of the Asian families would be able to move into the councils’ Asian Tenant Purchase houses, which were to be completed in the near future. The council treasurer further proposed that twenty houses similar to those constructed under the existing African Tenant Purchase scheme should be built and made available on rental terms (KNA, NHC/1/152, 1961).

It is clear that housing development was directed along racial lines by the colonial government and this influenced Afro-Asian relations because it reduced interaction only to areas of economic exchange like the trading centres. Africans were given land in the peri-urban areas of Kaloleni, Shaurimoyo and Kibuyu. Asians did not move to these areas but concentrated in getting houses within the Central Business District in Kisumu. This has however changed in the recent past with Indians living in peri-urban areas like Kondele, Momboleo and Riat hills in Kisumu. Gripped with the fear of insecurity, which engulfed the entire region towards independence in 1963, there was movement of Asians from the rural areas of Ndere, Yala and Kendu Bay to Kisumu. Some also left Kisumu for Britain. However as Siddiqi 50 puts it, Africans who were genuinely upset by such developments were the poor, many of whom were employed in Asian businesses and homes. Not only would they be losing their jobs but many had also formed close bonds with their employers.

**Post-Independent Afro-Asian Engagements**

The achievement of political independence in 1963 resulted in many changes. Besides bringing vital political decisions under the control of the indigenous Africans, independence also enabled some leaders to make important economic decisions that enhanced the economic standing of the local bourgeoisie. ‘Africanization’ in particular, was one of the most emotive political slogans in the tumult before independence and President Kenyatta’s promise to the people.\footnote{J. Siddique, *Haunts of Uganda 30 years of Old Past* (Nairobi: Awaaz, 2004) p.6.} Independence did not mark the beginning of a postcolony but it constituted a mere transition from the dominant phase of colonialism to the hegemonic phase of colonialism. The politics of Africanization was simultaneously unifying and fragmenting. Mamdani\footnote{W.Ochieng, Structural and Political changes. In Ogot B. A, (ed.) *Decolonisation and Independence in Kenya 1940-93* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995) p.85.} argues that its first moment involved the dismantling of racially inherited privilege. The effect was to unify the victims of colonial racism.

The second moment turned around the question of redistribution and divided the same majority, both Asians and Africans, along racial lines that reflected the actual process of redistribution: ethnic and regional.

\footnote{M. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (London: James Curry, 1996) p.20.}
Standard notions of the cultural distinctiveness of the Asian were created and consistently applied in a manner that had had serious consequences. These colonial stereotypical representations of Indians and Africans took root in both communities and continued to order present day constructions of Indians and African identities. Bharati has summarized both Asian and African stereotypes thus:

Africans viewed Asians as sneaky, mistrustful; they stick to each other and do not mix with others, they are arrogant, they cheat in business…they are clannish, they monopolize trade within their fold, they are not trustworthy in business nor in social matters.

The Asians on their part accused Africans of being lazy, inefficient, irresponsible, dirty, awkward, primitive and incapable of doing hard work on acquiring skills. These stereotypes gradually developed and came to be regarded as universal characteristic of both Asians and Africans. So Africanization seemed to had borrowed from the pot of stereotypes. The process was to be tackled through the mechanism of legislation and licensing. The first legislation to this effect was the Trade Licencing Act of 1967. This act came into effect on 8th January 1968.

However, the exercise went into full swing in March of the same year. This act excluded non-citizens from trading in rural and non-urban areas and specified a list of goods which were to be restricted to citizen traders only. These included most basic consumer goods, such as maize, rice, sugar, textiles, soap and cement (KNA, HT/17/22 Annual Report 1968).

With the Africanization process in place, many Africans entered into business, but the sector became an active site for Afro-Asian contestation. Africanization, therefore, caused fear among the Asians and some of the Asians started closing down their businesses. This interfered with Afro-Asian economic and social relations in Kisumu.

In Kisumu specifically, the boundary of areas set aside for ‘citizens only’ were Accra Street, Otieno Oyoo Street, Joshi Avenue, Acheng’ Oneko Street and new station road. Others included Kibuye Estate, Mosque Estate, Makasembo, Shaurimoyo, Ondiek, Kaloleni, Lumumba, Nyalenda, Omino Crescent and Pembe Tatu estates surrounded by the Nairobi road, Street, Sailors Close, Karachi Road and Kakamega Road (East Africa Standard October 10, 1969). In the mid-70s, for instance in Kisumu, there were complaints regarding some Africans who secretly resold business premises to Asians. The overall image of Asians was so negative that Kisumu was referred to as the ‘Bombay of Kenya’ on account of the Indian hold on commerce (East Africa Standard August, 13 and 17 1978). In local terms, this reference was considered demeaning.

The public space in Kisumu seemed pluralistic and included both citizens and non-citizens. These were political constructs within the postcolony which gave both Asians and Africans certain identities of inclusion and exclusion. Kisumu was thus a stage on which were

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56 Ochieng, “Structural and Political changes”, p.85.
played out the wider problems of subjection and its corollary, discipline.57 In this case, Asians appeared to be the subject. But at the same time, there was evidence of a mimicry of the colonial style of rule by Africans.

The ‘Citizens only area’ was thus a space and stage where economic negotiations and contestations were fulfilled. Asians loathed the Africanization policy because it destabilized their businesses. Individual traders like Habib Okore (Asian) went back to Uganda where he operated a bakery and a dairy farm. Tahidin, the owner of Kendu ginnery sold it to Rachuonyo Cooperative Union and relocated permanently to Kisumu. It is evident again that there is shift from individual ownership of ginneries by Asians to a mass kind of ownership in terms of cooperative unions.

By 1975, another Asian industrial undertaking, the Kisumu Cotton Mills (KICOMI) came into the scene as a textile industry (Weekly Review, 21/1/1983). Contrary to the ginning factories in Ndere, Yala and Kendu Bay, this was a more advanced industry where Asians were manufacturing ready-made clothes, bed sheets, and curtains for both local and international markets. The Asian owners employed a number of African workers whom they trained on how to operate weaving machines. This was done under the supervision of the Asians.

**Political Transformations and Afro-Asian Interactions in the Kenyatta, Moi and Kibaki Eras**

Some of the political developments at the national level affected and shaped what was happening at the local level as far as Afro-Asian political relations in Nyanza Province were concerned. By 1965, Pio Gama Pinto’s critical attitude and closeness to Kenya’s first vice president Jaramogi Oginga Odinga brought him into conflict with powerful elements within the ruling party. On 24th February 1965, Pinto was shot dead in the driveway of his home.58 This occurrence sent a shocking wave to the Asians whose fear increased in urban centres and rural areas where they lived. This affected Afro-Asian political relations in these areas as Pinto’s death was perceived by Asians as racially and politically motivated.

By 1966, the radicals led by Oginga Odinga, Bildad Kaggia and Achieng’ Oneko broke away from KANU and formed the Kenya People’s Union (KPU). However, the most important point to note here is that some Asians who were close associates of Oginga Odinga such as Pranlel Sheth who resided in Kisumu were deported to India. No reasons were given for the action against these individuals, except for a statement put out by the official Kenya News Agency that59:

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The six Asians deported had shown themselves by act and speech to be disloyal towards Kenya, joining it with a warning that those who chose to take up Kenya citizenship must identify themselves with the country in all its aspects and not engage in ‘subversive activities against the state or any other activities’. The newspaper also printed a summary of a broadcast the previous day in which the official Voice of Kenya declared that the entire Asian community in Kenya today ‘stands indicted by the activities of some of its members’.

Intimidation was a feature of the postcolony in its formal disposition. It is still the practice of the postcolony in its informal dispensation. Africans were simply replicating what whites did. Thus the struggle by Odinga, Kaggia and Pinto was still the struggle for decolonization against an informal postcolony still operating under British colonial rules.

In August 1966, president Kenyatta himself took up the theme when addressing the KANU branch at Nyalii Beach Hotel in Mombasa, by sternly urging and warning the ‘immigrant communities’ to either identify themselves with the aspirations of the people of Kenya, or pack up and leave.60

These statements were not favourable in harnessing Afro-Asian relations as they showed the ambivalent nature of the state towards Asians after Independence. In fact, it heightened tension and suspicion which already existed in the run-up towards independence. Further warnings were repeated in 1967. These statements destabilized Asians already living in the rural areas of Nyanza leading to the withdrawal of many more from these places. Even though the Asians viewed these statements as racist diatribes, they also demonstrated that with the onset of independence, nothing much had changed in terms of the government structure. It is only the leadership which changed. As Fanon61 says, decolonization is quite simply the replacing of a certain ‘species’ of men by another ‘species’ of men. Such warnings laid the foundation upon which Afro-Asian hostilities were laid during the Kenyatta era. However, these warnings did not affect Asian participation in politics in Kisumu District.

By 1967, the Asians who were in politics as members of the Kisumu council were Abdul E. Dahya who was the deputy mayor, M.F Shah, and Y.J. Farjallah (KNA, DC/KSM/17/40, 1964, KNA, HT/17/19, 1967). When the 1969 elections came, Jamal Amir who had served as the Member of Parliament for Kisumu after the 1963 election never defended his parliamentary seat which fell to the first female mayor, Mrs Grace Onyango (Daily Nation, 2/2/1990). Abdul Dahya did not quit politics but was not successful in his quest to secure a civic seat in the subsequent elections. Despite some racist anti-Asian rhetoric by a section of Kenyan African politicians, physical molestation was, however, rare.62

During the Moi era, Asians continued to extend their domination not only in the retail and distributive sectors, but also in practically every aspect of the economy (Finance, May 1997:7). Their investment thrived in manufacturing and the service sector (hotels, banks, wholesale trade and construction). This was driven by local demand originating from

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60 Ibid, p.25.
the cash crop boom from African smallholdings in the 1960s to the 1980s. The Asian community reasserted themselves by investing in Nyanza and more so in Kisumu in areas such as construction, real estate and outlets including supermarkets, banks, hotels, and the manufacturing sector. Nearly all the local entrepreneurs within the town belonged to the Asian community. Apart from textiles, metal works, engineering, weaving, spinning and soap making which were of Asian interest among the first large-scale manufacturing to be established in Nyanza Province, many more Asian industrial interests continued to emerge. These companies could be classified according to the products that they produced for instance flour, bread, concrete pipes, soft drinks, mattresses, matches, soap, fishnets, sweets, shipbuilding, general engineering, fish filleting, processing and freezing. These Asian manufacturing companies supported a majority of Africans who could not get jobs in the civil service. Indeed these industrial ventures represented the Asians’ contribution towards the economy of Kisumu district.

Afro-Asian relations in the Moi era were unique in the sense that many Africans had acquired education and professional skills compared to the colonial and Kenyatta periods when most of them were employed as domestic servants and unskilled labourers. This educational background made Africans to be employed in Asian firms as professionals such as doctors, engineers, mechanics, teachers and accountants among others. Afro-Asian relations within these categories of people were, therefore, different from the Afro-Asian relations that existed between the Asian dukawallahs and the local Africans in the village. This is because the Asians recognised the professionalism of the people they employed. In most cases, relations between African professionals and their Asian employers in places such as Jalaram Hospital, United Millers Company and Kisumu Senior Academy, Southern Credit Bank among others in Kisumu, were often more or less equal since African professionals knew their rights and would always negotiate for pay commensurate to the services offered and their qualification. This period also witnessed the emergence of a new generation of Indian immigrants commonly referred to as comet or rockets.

In 1987, tension and suspicion between Asians and Africans in Kisumu went up. This tension arose over the issue of entry into Simba Club (Sikh Union). This was a ‘members only’ club owned by Asians, but was used as a checkpoint during the 1987 Safari Rally competitions. As the rallying cars started arriving at this checkpoint, the management of the club decided to allow Asians only into the club to watch the rallying cars while African entry was restricted. This was evidently an act of discrimination and a clear show of racial prejudice which offended the Africans. The result of this was the revival of conflict between Africans and Asians. It also brought into focus the question of Asian citizenship in the minds of Africans in Kisumu. This scenario of strained relations was filled with emotional undercurrents that made the area volatile.

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63 Ibid.
64 W.H.A Olima, The Land Use Planning in Provincial Towns of Kenya: A case Study of Kisumu and Eldoret Town (Dr Ing. Dissertation Degree of Dortmund University, 1993); Anyumba, Kisumu Town.
66 Omenya, The Relations Between Asian and African Communities.
67 Ibid.
By 1988, there was competition between the Africans who were selling second-hand clothes (mitumba) and the Indian cloth manufacturers who felt that this business was a threat to the textile industry Kisumu Cotton Mills (KICOMI). The mitumba business within the postcolony symbolized the nature of unequal economic life of the postcolony. Therefore, there is a struggle among different categories of people which makes this chaotic space to be negotiated through all means. Through political connections, Asians prevailed upon the government to ban the sale of second-hand clothes in Kisumu and in the entire country (The Weekly Review, 1987). This did not auger well with the local business people and caused some tension between those Asians who engaged in the textile industry and the African businessmen and women as well as the general African consumers in Kisumu who relied so much on second-hand clothes which they considered cheap as compared to the KICOMI products.

In the 1990s in Kisumu, the number of supermarkets and other businesses owned by Asians increased remarkably and these included Ebrahims, Yatin, Sai and Ukwala supermarkets. Some of these supermarkets emerged from what was initially the wholesale trade which Asians upgraded and expanded to supermarket status. Other businesses which Asians engaged in were social pubs like Monami, Club Kiboko and the film industry since they operated the Tivoli Cinema and Nyanza cinema respectively.

But it is also at these business avenues that one could clearly see the glaring economic differences between Asians and Africans. In many ways these economic disparities were a critical feature of the postcolonial space. In these places, some close Afro-Asian relations also emerged. Afro-Asian relations, therefore, depended on the trust and what one had in common with the other. If there was nothing in common to share, then one could not freely relate or interact with Asians and vice versa. These interactions were mostly at the level of business.

Similarly, there were situations when Asians entered into business relationship with Africans at a higher level. For instance in 1991, there was a joint business venture in Kisumu between Asian and African personalities like J. Nyaseme, Mr J. Shah, the late Bishop H. Okullu and the late Hon H. Omino who jointly run the Victoria Finance and Lake Credit Finance (The Weekly Review, 8/3/1991). This partnership therefore gave these organisations an ownership identity that was neither Asian nor African. Such kind of business relationships ensured growth of the business sector in Kisumu as well as enhancing Afro-Asian relations.

With their diversity in businesses, such as hardware, construction and engineering and general shops, Asians met the demands of Africans by either employing them or providing essential services to the people around the town. Asians like Teja Singh made clothes for both Asians and Africans. Others like Lal sold tea leaves to the Africans from his grocery in town.

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68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
With all these developments, anti-Asian resentment did not go missing. Local African leaders in Kisumu such as Dennis Akumu, a former trade unionist, supported anti-Asian sentiments by claiming that Asians had ‘exploited’ Africans for far too long and should thus be expelled from towns such as Kisumu where they dominated trade and commerce (The Weekly Review May 24, 1996:17/18). Most of the Africans working for Asians bought this idea and were just waiting for the moment when they would be told that Asians were leaving so that they could take over their businesses. It is from such tensions both psychic and political that a strategy of subversion emerged.70 Seemingly, such sentiments affected Afro-Asian relations in the sense that Asians developed fear which further isolated them from the Africans. As Bindra71 argues, ‘the more we are resented, the more we isolate ourselves, the more we isolate ourselves the more we are resented’. As resentment grew, Asians continued to isolate themselves from the African community into the ‘islands of safety and comfort’. This ‘island mentality’ according to Bindra72 was the community’s greatest mistake. This was because it affected their relations with Africans since they could not interact freely in social places. Such was the kind of ambivalent relations that characterised Afro-Asian interaction in Kisumu.

A number of top Asian businessmen developed some personal relationship with government personalities at the national level. Such kind of political relationship affected Afro-Asian relations at the local level in terms of business. For instance, the Hindocha, Somaia, Hayer Bishan Singh families appeared to have had powerful business connections with top officials in the government, a connection which they used to win government tenders and sometimes cover up several underhand economic deals in conjunction with government officials (The Weekly Review, 13 1996:17). Because of their closeness to the Moi regime, they were able to manipulate the provincial labour and police offices in order to safeguard and protect their business interests. This was an image which Asians could not shake off with ease.73 In the year 2000s and subsequently, Asians, with the help of Shakeel Shabir, the former Kisumu mayor and the current Member of Parliament for Kisumu Town East having won the 2007 Parliamentary election, voted for the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government which was popular in Nyanza Province. In 2013, general elections Shakeel managed to defend his seat on an ODM ticket thereby ending racism and clannism that dominated the constituency politics for decades. Within the medical circles, Asian doctors were able to dismantle the racial barrier in order to discharge their duties to Africans. But also, Africans willingly sought medical attention from Asian doctors, some of whom became family doctors for certain African families.74 But also doctor Shabir, an Asian managed to train some African women whom he employed in his clinic as midwives. A good example was a lady (deceased) popularly known as Mama Leah who later owned the Nyawita Maternity and Nursing Home in Kisumu after working for doctor Shabir for several years.75

73 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, p.89
71 S. Bindra, We are Kenya Damu (Nairobi: Awaaz, 2005) p.2.
72 Ibid, p.6
73 Ibid.
74 Omenya, The Relations Between Asian and African Communities.
75 Ibid.
Asians continued to enjoy economic dominance during the Kibaki era. More so, after the post-election violence of 2007/8 where one of the Asian supermarkets (Formatt) was looted and accidentally burnt down. Asian entrepreneurs and businessmen have come back to buy premises which were hitherto owned by Africans from central province (members of the Kikuyu community). These include the former Kimwa Grand Hotel in Kisumu part of which is now operating as a supermarket, Tumaini supermarket formerly located at a Timber yard initially owned by a kikuyu from central province. It is therefore suffice to state that interethnic political rivalry between Africans during the Kibaki era enhanced Afro-Asian relationship in Kisumu. This is evident by an emergence of Asians operating businesses in places like Kondele which was an epicentre of the post election violence in 2008. This is quite ambivalent owing to the past business rivalry between Asians and Africans. Nevertheless, a bitter rivalry was witnessed in the year 2014 when the Sikh Asian community decided to mark their centenary in Kisumu by building a sculpture within the town centre (Figure 8). A number of African residents resented about this sculpture arguing that it was a symbol of Asian continued economic dominance over Africans in Kisumu (Figure 9). Others argued that it was a symbol of an idol, which was contrary to their Christian religion. Nevertheless, these contestations are some of the things, which have shaped the landscape of Kisumu and have also characterized the postcolonial social and economic spaces in Kisumu.

![Fig 8: A Picture of a Sculpture Erected by the Sikh community To Mark their 100 Years in Kisumu Town](source: Daily Nation, 6th February, 2014.)
Conclusion
This article has given an historical account of the Afro-Asian socio-economic and political engagements in Kisumu district and how the Asian Influence and changed the urban landscape of Kisumu. It has mapped out that economic engagements revolved majorly around trade and commerce but also some limited social relations were witnessed in residential areas. Asians played a key role in imparting various skills to Africans, in car repair, construction of houses and also in the medical circles. However, conflict and contestations also arose within the economic space of Kisumu. This was a sign of a bid by Africans to assert themselves within the economic space of Kisumu. Similarly, it is also evident that the built form of Kisumu and the landscapes was majorly influenced by the Asian presence in the area. Some of the Asian classical houses and architectural designs are a living testimony to the global connection between Kisumu and the Indian-subcontinent. Their visual culture and African cultural values also permeated and were borrowed by each of the two communities. In the later years after independence, the postcolonial government with its policy of Africanisation affected Afro-Asian socio-economic relations. The Asians therefore developed strategies of survival in these uncertain situations by aligning themselves with the powers that would be depending on their circumstances. After the election of 2007 which was marred by violence, it emerged that Africans resorted to buying and leasing business premises in Kisumu that were hitherto rented out to Africans from central Kenya, a situation which demonstrates that deep rooted ethnic political rivalry allowed for interracial relations to thrive among the Luo owners of some of the properties.
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